Henry Wikoff and the Development of Theatrical Publicity in America

A thesis submitted by Michael Lueger

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Adviser: Thomas Connolly

Abstract:

This Master's thesis examines the career of Henry Wikoff, one of the earliest figures in American theatrical history to systematically manage a nationwide publicity campaign for a star performer. Although Wikoff's involvement with other luminaries of the stage such as Edwin Forrest is considered, along with his forays into diplomacy and journalism, the primary concern is with his involvement in the ballerina Fanny Elssler's tour of the United States from 1840 to 1842. It focuses on the strategies he employed to promote her interests, as well as considering the changing context of American media of the time and the effect this change had on his efforts. Finally, it briefly examines how P.T. Barnum's far better-known efforts a decade later on behalf of the singer Jenny Lind indicated the extent to which the trends that Wikoff had only begun to grasp had changed the face of the American entertainment business.

Acknowledgements

For Danielle.

And for my parents.

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Introduction

The life and career of Henry Wikoff (1811?-1884) frequently read like implausible historical fiction, ranging over such a wide territory, touching on so many historical events, and involving so many well-known personages as to challenge credibility. He may have entitled the memoir of his earlier years *The Reminiscences of an Idler*, but the note of self-deprecation the title strikes is belied by the sheer range of his professional and personal activities, as well as the long list of acquaintances he made in the course of pursuing those activities. Indeed, the memoir often bogs down as Wikoff detours into lengthy bouts of name-dropping and recounts gossip surrounding figures who were already long since dead or mostly forgotten when the book appeared in 1880. However, Wikoff could be forgiven this indulgence: in the course of his life his friends or important connections would include Edwin Forrest, Joseph Bonaparte, Martin Van Buren and his son John, James Gordon Bennett, Jenny Lind, Napoleon III, British Foreign Secretary and sometime Prime Minister Lord Palmerston, the politician and notoriously political Civil War general Dan Sickles, Mary Todd Lincoln, Henry Irving, and Bram Stoker - not to mention a host of lesser lights prominent in their respective spheres of theatre, politics, and journalism. Most important of all for the purposes of this study was his lengthy stint as impresario during the two-year American tour of the celebrated ballerina Fanny Elssler.

It was in this last capacity that he made what is perhaps his most lasting contribution. Wikoff's political and journalistic activities are intriguing, but even at their most significant they at best constitute footnotes to the history of these fields in the middle of the nineteenth century. With the tour of Fanny Elssler, however, Wikoff earned himself a prominent place in the development of theatre publicity in America. Drawing upon his social connections and his

contacts in the American newspaper industry, Wikoff helped to create and sustain a national craze that prefigured the even more successful tour of Jenny Lind a decade later. He did so in large part by employing the resources of James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald*, one of the most important newspapers to emerge in the course of a profound shift in American mass media. This era saw an expansion of the market for news as editors launched cheaper papers, expanded their focus beyond financial markets and narrowly partisan political issues to deal with the concerns of those who did not belong to the elite, and engaged in fiery and often violent confrontations with each other that fed the public appetite for controversy. Wikoff's promotional activities on the behalf of Elssler, Forrest, and others occurred within the still-evolving context of this changing media environment, and he met with as many reverses as successes as he managed to embroil himself in intense personal controversy and even played a minor but significant role in one of the greatest tragedies in American theatre history.

Wikoff would certainly prove no stranger to controversy and scandal over the course of his life. He was probably most remembered in his time for one particular escapade in which he pursued the heiress Jane Gamble across Europe, attempting to secure her hand in what can be at best described as dubious circumstances. His efforts would ultimately lead to a denouement in which he confronted Gamble at gunpoint in a locked room as part of a spectacularly misguided attempt to gain her assent to matrimony. A sentence in a Genoese jail followed, along with the inevitable scandal. All things considered, Wikoff did relatively well out of the fiasco; it led to the writing of his most popular book, which told the story of the failed courtship from his perspective and even managed to cast him as the underdog by hinting darkly (if implausibly) that his imprisonment was the result of the British government's devious machinations against him. Unfortunately, this salacious episode obscured the accomplishments of his earlier career, which

he was already inclined to downplay as the result of his awareness that involving one's self with the theatre was unbecoming to the social status he sought.

Only one full-length biography of Wikoff exists, and it leaves much to be desired on many points for those interested less in his well-documented Italian misadventure than in his contributions to the development of theatre publicity (or, indeed, on many other points: his subsequent connection to the Lincoln White House is not even mentioned). A definitive and comprehensive new biography of this singular character would be desirable, but my aim here will be to focus only on those of his activities directly related to the theatre and the promotion of individual performers (and, to a certain extent, himself). As fascinating as I find the rest of his career, it is of secondary interest here and will only be considered insofar as it helps to round out a picture of Wikoff and provides some biographical context for his theatre-related activities. My primary aim will be to describe in specific detail the role played by Wikoff in promoting Elssler's tour and to place this event in the context of subsequent developments in American theatrical promotion, especially with regards to Jenny Lind's success in 1850. This thesis will therefore concern itself primarily with a straightforward narrative of Wikoff's involvement with the theatre, beginning with his early association with Edwin Forrest and progressing through the Elssler tour to the Astor Place Riot and later episodes such as the publication of the *Memoir of Ginevra Guerrabella*. I believe this is necessary in order to demonstrate the origin and later development of the tactics Wikoff employed from 1840 to 1842 and to attempt to grasp their full import.

In addition to laying out a comprehensive account of Wikoff's theatrical activities, I will focus more narrowly on the various media – pamphlets, magazines, and especially the penny press - through which Wikoff promoted the fortunes of his theatrical friends and acquaintances.

I will also look more closely at the relationship between Wikoff and James Gordon Bennett and consider its significance in the context of the changing nature of newspapers in antebellum America, particularly with regard to coverage and promotion of the theatre. An examination of Wikoff's own post-Elssler ventures with the *Republic* and the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* will help to round out this picture.

Finally, I will look more closely at the importance of biography in Wikoff's promotional activities. Elssler's tour was accompanied by a campaign, orchestrated by her impresario, that in large measure relied on establishing her moral credentials through the publication of details of their biography. Wikoff would once again undertake something similar to this, albeit on a much smaller scale, many years later with his brief account of the unfortunate and bizarre details of the early life of actress Genevieve Ward. In addition to dissecting the way in which Wikoff "sold" the biographies of the performers he represented, I will examine how he later used memoir and autobiography to shape public perceptions of his own life. Such considerations will briefly bring P.T. Barnum into the picture, as his career appears at many points as a sort of inverse image of Wikoff's. Barnum used and expanded upon some of Wikoff's publicity tactics in order to promote the tour of Jenny Lind, and later he too would employ autobiography in order to shape the public's perception of his own personality. Despite the fact that Wikoff and Barnum's fortunes and subsequent reputation were at disparate poles by the end of their lives, there is a striking coincidence in the timing and nature of their memoirs: both released what were probably the most scandalous and widely-read of their reminiscences in 1855, while Wikoff published an overview of his early years at the same time that Barnum was releasing successive editions of his

Struggles and Triumphs.[1] It is in this context that I will briefly consider the Gamble scandal and its repercussions for Wikoff, especially since the episode forced him to draw upon the tactics he had used to promote Elssler in order to defend himself.

Any attempt to draw an accurate portrait of Wikoff must come with a caveat. He is a difficult man to pin down, since so many of the best sources on his life and activities are to some degree suspect in their accuracy. The few scholars and writers who have considered Wikoff and his career have made varying assessments of his character, characterizing him as anything from a gallant knight-errant to a slimy and repulsive opportunist to something in between.[2] The main trouble is that much of the information on him that is available comes from material that is inherently public in nature – memoirs, newspaper articles, and various other materials generated with an eye towards publicity – and reflects the agendas of those who wrote that material. *My Courtship and Its Consequences*, Wikoff's justificatory memoir of the misadventure with Jane Gamble, is the clearest example of such contentious and unreliable material, and one cannot help letting the dubious nature of this work and the events that precipitated it somewhat color one's approach to the rest of his writings. This skepticism is fueled by the consideration that Wikoff might decline to attach his name to particular writings, or even attribute them to someone else. One of the better descriptions of Elssler's tour, ostensibly taken from letters sent by her to family members in Europe and published a year and half after she returned to Europe, was quickly revealed to have been written by Wikoff instead!

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[1] For more on the history of Barnum's continually-developing memoirs, see A.H. Saxon, *P.T. Barnum: the Legend and the Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). It is worth noting that Wikoff wrote his memoir in response to scandal, while Barnum met with scandal *as a result* of the publication of his *Life*.

[2] Allison Delarue and Ivor Guest, whose primary interest is in Fanny Elssler, are proponents of the first view, while a 2006 article in *American Literary History* that focuses on the Gamble scandal adopts the second. Duncan Crow, the only person to write a full-length (albeit somewhat incomplete) biography of Wikoff, is largely sympathetic but retains a degree of skepticism; he begins his book by stating that it was the details of the Gamble scandal that first got him interested in his subject.

However, Wikoff by no means held a monopoly on untrustworthiness; one of the most frequently-cited sources for information on his management of the Elssler tour is the collection of his correspondence published by James Gordon Bennett in the *New York Herald* in 1844. What generally goes unremarked upon is the fact that this was published as a retaliatory measure against Wikoff, who had publicly accused Bennett of extracting gifts from him and Elssler in return for favorable coverage. In addition, one must consider that Bennett was widely hated by both fellow newspaper editors and many members of New York society at large precisely because he was known for employing underhanded and sometimes downright libelous tactics against his opponents. Ultimately, I have had to follow the lead of past historians who considered these documents essentially accurate, even if dealing with them called for the proverbial grain of salt. Whenever possible, I have tried to draw upon the evidence provided by contemporaries of Wikoff and Bennett such as Barnum, Philip Hone, and William Charles Macready. Their points of view may have been no less biased, but at least by comparing the contrasting accounts of events and the differing assessments of the main players in the various controversies in which Wikoff was involved I can hope to achieve greater accuracy in my portrait of his career.

Chapter 1: Early life, 1811-1840

Appropriately enough for an often confusing and contradictory individual, the circumstances of Henry Wikoff's birth are obscure. He volunteers at the opening of *The Reminiscences of an Idler* that he was born in Philadelphia, but flat-out refuses to provide even the year of his birth, informing the reader that he has "always allowed [it] to repose in mystery" and boasting that "No one guesses within ten years of my age." Even the admission that his first departure for school occurred in July of 1823 is too much of "a rash confession," in his eyes.[3] Such a beginning is hardly auspicious for the would-be biographer.

Duncan Crow and Allison Delarue provide more helpful information. Crow asserts that Wikoff "must have been born in 1811,"[4] and Delarue points out that Henry Wikoff, Senior died on February 21, 1826, leaving his son in the care of Samuel Price Wetherill, who would remain Wikoff's guardian until his death shortly before his ward returned to the United States with Fanny Elssler in 1840. The elder Henry Wikoff appears to have been a member of the Philadelphia "bon ton," and Wetherill's apparently indulgent support throughout the son's earlier years seems to have guaranteed him a degree of financial security in addition to an ability to move in fairly elevated societal circles. All the same, a cloud hangs over the issue of his parentage, as Wikoff's mother remains unknown; it is likely that he was illegitimate.[5]

Wikoff certainly seemed to start out early and enthusiastically on earning the title of "idler", doing very little to mark him for any future distinction. He cheerfully confessed in later years that he "never strained to excel any one at school," and recalled especially clearly his futile

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[3] Henry Wikoff, *The Reminiscences of an Idler* (New York: Fords, Howard & Hulbert, 1880), 1.
[4] Duncan Crow, *Henry Wikoff, The American Chevalier* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1963), 21.
[5] Allison Delarue, *The Chevalier Henry Wikoff: Impresario, 1840* (Princeton, N.J.: Privately printed at the Princeton University Press, 1968), 13.

attempts to grasp the "stupendous enigma" of mathematics.[6] Nevertheless, when the time came to choose a college Wetherill managed to pack him off to Yale, where Wikoff promptly undertook an intensive educational regimen consisting primarily of pranks and rowdiness. In the end, he was undone by an episode in which he spent a Sunday escorting a female friend to her parents' house in the countryside, allegedly found himself trapped by a sudden storm, and failed to return to campus in time for the next morning's prayers. He was expelled from Yale and was lucky that Union College in upstate New York allowed him to complete his education.

From an early age, Wikoff, recalled, he had "three decided fancies, which have never deserted me: a newspaper, the theatre, and female society."[7] He described in detail the hold which the second of these fancies had over him throughout his life:

> My passion for the theatre was absorbing, and it is the only pastime of my youth that survives unshorn of its attraction. I hasten to the theatre now with the same zest as in my unfledged boyhood, and I derive as much delight from a performance, whether dramatic or lyric, serious or light, as I ever did. To this day I am constantly affected to tears by any moving situation on the stage; whereas in real life, strange to say, no suffering I may experience, or the sight of any, ever produces this effect. I have witnessed many piteous scenes, and have even stood on a battle-field covered with carnage; and though transfixed with horror my eyes refused their natural tribute, whilst the pathos of the stage appeals irresistibly to my emotions, and invariably subdues me. To my love of the theatre I owe a wide acquaintance and many lasting friendships with most of the leading artists, male and female, not only of my own country, but of England and France, for the last forty years.[8]

[6] Wikoff, *Reminiscences*, 4.
[7] Ibid., 12.
[8] Ibid., 8.

Wikoff's confession is striking for its candor with regards to the contrast between his deep emotional investment in the fictions portrayed on the stage versus his somewhat limited response to the ugliest sights of real life. Assuming that this self-assessment is largely accurate, it provides an intriguing peek at the core of someone who spent much of his life dealing with surfaces as he attempted to establish and maintain his place in society by projecting himself as an amiable and cultured personality, to say nothing of his efforts to establish the respectability and allure of his friends in the theatre.

One of the first and certainly the longest-lasting friendship that Wikoff made in the theatrical world was the one he maintained with the actor Edwin Forrest. Remembered as "the first star of the American stage," Forrest was also a fellow Philadelphian and a frequent guest at Samuel Wetherill's home, where Wikoff recalls meeting him while still only fourteen years old.[9] Assuming once again that Wikoff was born in 1811, Forrest would have been only five years older, but the difference must have been significant enough that it added to the aura surrounding the very young but already-rising star, and Wikoff never missed an opportunity in later years to promote his friend's career and describe his personality and talent in idealized terms.

Forrest departed the United States in August of 1834, and Wikoff attended the farewell dinner. Shortly afterwards he also made the trans-Atlantic crossing himself, and almost exactly one year after Forrest had left the shores of America he and Wikoff boarded a steamer for Hamburg. The next five months would take the two across Russia, down to Constantinople (narrowly avoiding the plague in the process), through Greece and up the Adriatic, to Vienna and from there through Germany to Paris, where the travelers finally parted company in January of 1836. The experience helped to cement their friendship, and when Forrest married Catherine Sinclair in the summer of 1837, Wikoff was the only groomsman.

[9] Ibid., 75.

Shortly after the end of his grand tour with Forrest, Wikoff set about securing something like steady work, and when Forrest appeared in London again after returning to the United States for a short time he found that his friend was now an attaché posted to the American Legation. Even more convenient for Forrest's purposes was the fact that the current manager of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane was Stephen Price, an American who had managed the Park Theatre in New York City and who would return to that position in time to initiate the plans to bring Fanny Elssler to the United States. Wikoff would later recall him as "cross-grained and arbitrary, but well-informed, good-hearted, and very hospitable;" in an assessment written much earlier, in the immediate aftermath of Price's death, an obituary in the New York *Herald* remembered him in somewhat less flattering terms.[10] After offering Forrest moral support in his endeavor to break into the London theatrical world, Wikoff surreptitiously stuck his nose in his friend's professional business to ask Price about the actor's debut, for which Forrest had chosen the role of Othello. Wikoff worried that "[i]t would arouse the prejudices of the friends of Macready and Kean to see a foreigner undertake a part which both of these favourite actors had played with great success; and as their version was pronounced quite perfect, Forrest's impersonation would be condemned if it differed, as it was sure to do, from the accepted standard."[11] William Charles Macready and Edmund Kean were, of course, two of the recent leading actors of the London stage, and their fame reached across the Atlantic. Price evidently agreed with Wikoff, for Forrest made his London debut in one of the primary melodramas in his repertoire, *The Gladiator*. Macready noted in his diary that "Mr. Forrest had quite succeeded, and that the play had been as completely damned."[12]

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[10] Ibid., 373; New York *Herald*, January 22, 1840.
[11] Wikoff, *Reminiscences*, 376.
[12] William Charles Macready, *The Diaries of William Charles Macready, 1833-1851,* ed. William Toynbee, vol. I (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 350.

In addition to suggesting the program for his friend's debut, Wikoff embarked on what would prove to be a less-than-successful attempt at managing Forrest's image in the London media; in the long run, it proved one of many contributing factors to what became a long-running dispute with tragic and far-reaching consequences. Wikoff's primary object was to make the acquaintance and gain the support of Albany Fonblanque, editor of the *Examiner*. Fonblanque and his drama critic, John Forster, were members of a circle which counted Charles Dickens and Edward Bulwer-Lytton as two of its key members. Most importantly, Macready was another core member of that circle. Wikoff seemed to sense that it was important to avoid the semblance of any rivalry between the American and English actors, and he hoped that Fonblanque would be able to restrain Forster from giving Forrest negative reviews.[13] This proved to be a miscalculation on Wikoff's part, for Forster had carte blanche to write what he wished, and despite his friend Macready's entreaties to "deal liberally and kindly by Forrest," he savaged the American in review after review.[14] Wikoff had no way of knowing that Macready had nothing but good wishes for Forrest at this time, and eventually his conviction that the actor had egged on or even directed Forster would lead to his making a small but crucial contribution to the disaster that capped the Forrest-Macready feud.

Forrest went home to America after marrying Catherine Sinclair, and for about two years Henry Wikoff does not seem to have had any personal involvement with the theatre other than being in constant attendance. However, when he found himself back in the United States for a brief time in 1838, he did manage to meet at least two other very important people. The first of these acquaintances, President Martin Van Buren, would make a limited but important

[13] Delarue, 19-20.
[14] Macready, 350.

contribution to Wikoff's success with Fanny Elssler. Wikoff's second new acquaintance would come to serve as the linchpin of his strategy to promote Elssler.

Henry Wikoff and James Gordon Bennett first met onboard the *Sirius* as it sailed for London in May, 1838. Whether or not it is entirely (or even mostly) accurate, Wikoff's remembrance of that first encounter points to the weight which Bennett carried in his position as editor of the *Herald* and foreshadows some of the difficulties which their unequal partnership later encountered. Wikoff recalled that "[s]ome one had told me the formidable editor of the *Herald*, J.G. Bennett, was [aboard], and I was only half pleased at the intelligence. He was certainly a man worth knowing … Still, there was something in him to inspire dread." Wikoff later struck up a conversation with a tall fellow passenger, and after some time he ventured:

> 'I hear the famous Bennett is on board.'
>
> 'Yes, I believe he is,' said the tall man, with a smile.
>
> 'Do you feel at all nervous about it?'
>
> 'Not in the least,' was the reply.
>
> 'Well, for my part,' I continued, 'I am not altogether comfortable on the point.'
>
> 'Why?' asked my companion.
>
> 'Because he is so given to saying sarcastic things of people.'
>
> 'That depends a good deal,' he answered, 'whether they are worth it.'
>
> 'Do you know him by sight?' I inquired.
>
> 'Very well.'
>
> 'Then do point him out if you see him on deck.'
>
> 'He is standing before you. My name is Bennett.'
>
> 'What!' I exclaimed, on recovering my breath; 'are you the man so fiercely assailed, and whose humorous sallies I have read with such delight these six months past?'
>
> '*Ecce homo*!' he retorted, greatly amused at my astonishment.

> Thus began my acquaintance with this remarkable man.[15]

Although Wikoff seemed to hit it off well with the notorious editor, he would come to learn in a few years' time that Bennett's fearsome reputation – and also some of the less-flattering gossip about his personal character - was well-earned.

The great adventure that would bring Wikoff and Bennett together again began a year and a half later, in the waning months of 1839. It was at that time that Stephen Price - now back in his position as manager of the Park Theatre – began negotiations to bring ballerina Fanny Elssler to NewYork, with an initial understanding possibly reached sometime in November, 1839.[16] The Vienna-born Elssler had reached the pinnacle of her career, with only her rival Marie Taglioni posing any serious challenge to her status as the greatest dancer in Europe. Price was apparently not the first to suggest the possibility of an American tour to Elssler, but he would be the one to succeed – partially, at least, until fate intervened – in bringing her over the Atlantic, and it would be his decision to call on Wikoff's services that would in large part determine the success of her foray to the New World.

In addition to his memoirs, Wikoff left another account of Elssler's tour and the negotiations leading up to it, which was originally published serially and later collected as "The Letters and Journal of Fanny Elssler, Written Before and After Her Operatic Campaign in the United States. Including Her Letters from New York, London, Paris, Havana, &c. &c." Obviously, given the misleading attribution of authorship, this document must be treated with caution, even allowing for the fact that historians such as Allison Delarue and Ivor Guest have stated their confidence in the fundamental accuracy of his version of events. A further problem

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[15] Wikoff, *Reminiscences*, 473-4.

[16] Henry Wikoff, "Letters and Journal of Fanny Elssler," in *Fanny Elssler in America: comprising seven facsimilies of rare Americana--never before offered the public--depicting her astounding conquest of America in 1840-42, a memoir, a libretto, two verses, a penny-terrible blast, letters and journal, and an early comic strip--the sad tale of her impresario's courtship,* ed. Alison Delarue (New York: Dance Horizons, 1976), 135.

arises from Wikoff's own awareness of the disreputability of his newly-assumed role of impresario to Elssler. Even decades after the fact, he was loath to admit to much more than that he had assumed the role of a sort of knight-errant who took it upon himself to help an artist whom he greatly admired navigate the bewildering and potentially dangerous professional and social byways of a foreign and deeply unfamiliar country. Therefore, when considering the Elssler tour and attempting to determine the extent to which Wikoff directed her movements and negotiations, one must always remember that he kept himself in the background when describing matters such as Elssler's contract negotiations and may have imputed to her actions that he took largely or even completely on his own initiative. At the same time, it should go without saying that it is unacceptable to view Elssler solely as the puppet of her male companion and agent (and, probably, lover); she was used to relying on friends (both male and female) and business associates to help her manage her affairs and allow her to focus on her art, but her experience in the cutthroat world of the European theatre must have honed her assertiveness.

Whatever its exact nature, the relationship between Elssler and Wikoff began in earnest in July of 1839 when Price decided to call upon the peripatetic sometime diplomat in order to aid in the negotiations for her New York engagement. As Wikoff recalled it, the manager brusquely barged into his library and announced that he was almost bankrupt and hoping to secure Elssler for a lengthy engagement in order to stave off disaster. Wikoff retrospectively protested that he "regarded the job with repugnance" and told Price that he felt Elssler "would be as likely to embark for the moon as go to America. The one she has seen, but probably never heard of the other."[17] However, he agreed, supposedly out of a sense of obligation to Price and due to the fact that he was familiar with the Marquis de Lavalette, Elssler's current "adviser."

[17] Wikoff, *Reminiscences*, 498.

Wikoff offers two different accounts, varying significantly in the details and specific events which he chooses to include, of what followed. In the "Letters", first published at the end of 1843 and the beginning of 1844, shortly after the Elssler tour ended, he barely makes an appearance. The negotiations are conducted directly between Price, Lavelette, and Elssler, culminating in her signing an initial agreement in August.[18] In the *Reminiscences*, however, Wikoff recounts how he went in search of Lavalette shortly after the meeting with Price. He arranges a meeting for Price, Lavalette, and Elssler, at which the latter "rarely spoke, simply nodding her head as the main points were interpreted."[19] Subsequent dealings with Elssler led Wikoff to claim to discern in her "an ingenuousness very rare in the world, and still more on the stage."[20] Always keeping in mind the questions of accuracy which constantly plague anything written by Wikoff, this assessment would seem to lend more weight to the view that Elssler made the major decisions and then left many of the important details to her adviser, a role which he would soon come to occupy.

The new year brought with it a near-catastrophe. Price died in January, and his demise threw the entire project into question as Edmund Simpson, his partner and now sole manager of the Park, looked on the Elssler venture with a skeptical eye. Wikoff smoothed over this detail in the "Letters", instead having "Fanny" record that Simpson had written to her "begging me not to disappoint the hopes generally entertained of my coming," not to mention the consideration that cancellation would probably mean financial ruin for the Park.[21] Wikoff would later recall Simpson's conduct with distaste, including in the *Reminiscences* the letter which informed him of Price's death and noting that the dead man's former partner "announced his decease in much

[18] "Letters," 138.
[19] Wikoff, *Reminiscences*, 500.
[20] Ibid., 501.
[21] "Letters", 151.

the same style he would speak of his departure from town. Not an expression of regret, not a trace of emotion."[22] The letter bringing news of Price's death also registered an ambivalent tone towards Elssler's projected tour. Disheartening though this news was, Wikoff claimed that Elssler expressed a determination to carry through with the contract.

Determination alone would not prove enough to finalize the details of Elssler's appearance in New York, but it helped a great deal. April brought with it the arrival of the acclaimed comic actor Henry Placide, who arrived in England with the discouraging news from Simpson to the effect that "the financial difficulties of [the United States] have widened to such a fearful extent, that he dared not prosecute farther a theatrical speculation that might involve him seriously."[23] However, the portion of the "Letters" covering this episode states Placide's message in an intriguingly ambiguous way. "Fanny" speculates about how receiving such bad news in writing in a letter directly from Simpson would have been the final determining factor in causing her to cancel the engagement once and for all. In the event, Placide was apparently intercepted by "a friend of mine, who has all along taken the liveliest interest in my going, and who has sustained me against the most active opposition and endless variety of obstacles."[24] Given Wikoff's established authorship of these letters, the rather self-serving description of this friend leaves little doubt as to his identity. He apparently managed to intercept Placide's message from Simpson, ultimately agreeing to take on himself the role of manager to Elssler, along with the responsibility for any losses she might incur in America.

According to the *Reminiscences*, Placide did indeed bring with him such a fatal letter as "Fanny" described. That seemed to put an end to any question of her going to America within the time frame allowed her by the Opera, but at this point Wikoff managed to save the situation

[22] Wikoff, *Reminiscences*, 550.
[23] "Letters", 162.
[24] Ibid., 162-3.

not only by taking responsibility for the financial risk, as he recounted in the "Letters", but by drawing on his personal connections to convince Placide to agree to the new terms. One key player in this gambit was Harriet Grote, the gregarious wife of retiring historian George Grote. George was known for his Radical politics, and Harriet reflected this forward-thinking mentality in her adoption of Elssler, whose acknowledged supremacy in her profession was still not enough to remove the pall of disreputability imparted by that same profession. Although Grote seems to have harbored the notion that Elssler's retirement from the stage would ultimately be necessary for her to be both socially and morally rehabilitated, she took a genuine pleasure in both the dancer's skill and companionship. In fact, the relationship was close enough that Elssler chose to leave her daughter – the result of one of the illegitimate liaisons that would hound her reputation in America – with the Grotes when she sailed for New York.[25] Wikoff, too, benefited from his friendship with Grote, who offered invaluable aid in confirming the arrangements for Elssler to dance in New York. Later, she would introduce him to Jenny Lind and, less helpfully, play a role in his courtship of Jane Gamble.

With the assistance of Grote, Wikoff managed to cut a deal with Stephen Price's widow, who was conveniently in London at this time of crisis and expected to profit handsomely from Elssler's appearances at the Park. Wikoff and Grote managed to get Placide in a room with the widow Price, and despite the fact that Placide "had the greatest dread of exceeding his authority" and was sweating with nervousness, they managed to hammer out an agreement by which Simpson, Mrs. Price, and Elssler would buy out the Park's existing engagements for May and June. A *corps de ballet* would have to be scrounged up once Elssler arrived in New York, but her unquestioned talent and drawing power seemed ultimately to make that a secondary

[25] Ivor Guest, *Fanny Elssler* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1970), 124.

consideration.[26] Wikoff had to surmount one final crisis when Placide received news that Simpson had closed the Park because of its dismal fiscal state. Rushing over to Mrs. Price once more, Wikoff got her to place the theatre in his hands and give him the power to appoint a manager upon arrival.[27] The tortuous progress of these drawn-out negotiations provides quite a contrast to the brief, tidy resolution to the crisis offered in the "Letters."

Ivor Guest's biography of Fanny Elssler attributes Simpson's eventual capitulation and the mania that greeted her arrival in New York to the campaign of puffery conducted in the New York *Herald*. This is inaccurate, as the puffs did not begin appearing until the day Elssler arrived in New York. What emerges clearly from examining the course of the seemingly endless negotiations to bring Elssler across the sea is Wikoff's talent for making connections, and much of the buzz that surrounded her arrival was already in the air due to a personal campaign that Wikoff undertook long before a single line had been written for publication in the *Herald*. Taken all in all, he does not appear to have been someone with any great talent for financial dealings, and even his forays into journalism and publicity, important as they were, often demonstrated serious lapses of judgment. One thing he almost never seemed to fail at, however, was the effort to make a startlingly wide range of acquaintances (if not necessarily friends) and then draw upon those connections in such a way as to materially further his own means as well as those of his friends. In the case of Fanny Elssler, he did so with consummate zeal and skill.

Just as their connection in the fall of 1836 had given Wikoff some early experience in dealing with theatrical managers, his friendship with Forrest gave him the opportunity to test out his skill at introducing a performer to polite society. Forrest certainly did not lack for influential friends, and after his return from England men like the newspaper editors William Cullen Bryant

[26] Wikoff, *Reminiscences*, 581-2.
[27] Ibid., 588.

and William Leggett made noises about convincing him to run for political office. Still, if one is willing to believe Wikoff, the already rather well-connected Forrest at least lived up to his reputation as an unsophisticated Jacksonian when it came to his discomfort amongst the upper crust. He recounted in great detail how, when he found himself briefly back in Philadelphia in the fall of 1837, he had had to practically drag Forrest to a dinner held by prominent men of the city. As he told the tale, he showed up at the house just in time to prevent a nervous Forrest from fleeing while waiting for a servant to open the door. Forrest ultimately proved a success, and Wikoff has him enthusing on the way home that, "This is the proudest day of my life, for I have met on terms of social equality many of the conspicuous men of my native city, whose names have been familiar to me from my boyhood, and whom I never aspired to know."[28] Wikoff took credit for wrangling his skittish friend to at least one more event that fall, this time a banquet given in Forrest's honor. Regardless of how accurate such claims are, it is important to note that these occasions, occurring two full years before Wikoff would even meet Fanny Elssler, gave him a concrete example of how cultivating the higher elements of society could do immense good for a performer's reputation, especially when elements of that society tended as a general rule to look askance at the professions of actor or dancer.[29]

Following Harriet Grote's example, Wikoff set about introducing Elssler to prominent Americans living in Paris. The "Letters" recount a few scattered meetings with individual Americans in December 1839 and January 1840, but it was not until February of that year that she met the Welleses, the first of many important acquaintances whose approval would help pave her way for the conquest of the United States. Samuel Welles was a prominent American banker

[28] Ibid., 450.

[29] As a largely irrelevant but nevertheless amusing anecdote, the fall of 1837 also marked the first and only appearance of Henry Wikoff on the stage; he came to visit Forrest in his dressing room, took a wrong turn, and suddenly found himself in the role of a prominently anachronistic walking gentleman in *Coriolanus*. Ibid., 450-1.

who had taken up residence in Paris, and he and his wife Adeline maintained what "Fanny" described as a "splendid house [which] is the scene of so much elegant festivity and the resort of the first people of Paris."[30] Wikoff had struck up an acquaintance with the couple, as attested by at least one extant invitation to dine with them on the evening of April 25, 1839.[31] The Welleses had much to offer in the way of an entrée into American society, and Wikoff wasted no time in arranging for Elssler to accompany him to a dinner at their home. Elssler proved a success, and Wikoff's ghostwritten account of the evening took the liberty of asserting in Elssler's voice that she was greatly impressed by the warmth with which the Welleses received her into their home, as well as the conduct of "[s]everal American gentlemen" in attendance, "whose elegant manners satisfied me, in spite of all calumnies, that there are admirable men out of Europe."[32]

As trivial a thing as it might seem for Elssler to attend the Welleses' party, the importance of such events should not be underestimated. Her success on that evening and in subsequent meetings with other prominent Americans abroad seems to have been the major factor in generating excitement for her tour; as mentioned earlier, Bennett did not throw the weight of his publication behind Elssler until she arrived, while Simpson's efforts to get out of the contract initially drawn up by his dead partner indicate that he was making no effort to build excitement for her very uncertain debut. The diary of Philip Hone, a member of the elite group at the top of New York society known as the "Upper Ten", shows just how important such connections were for Elssler's success. His entry for May 11, 1840 notes that, "On my return from Long Island I found two letters, which were brought by Fanny Elssler, she who has set New York agog for marvellous saltatory exhibitions, and whose heels are to turn all our heads. They

[30] "Letters", 145.
[31] The invitation is in the archives of Princeton University.
[32] "Letters", 151

are from Christopher Hughes, at Stockholm, and Samuel Welles, at Paris."[33] Hone received his letters after Elssler had arrived and the *Herald* campaign had started, of course, but excitement for her debut had been building before then. Wikoff recalled a meeting with Adeline Welles at the end of March in which she informed him that Samuel, who was currently in New York, had sent letters to her noting the anticipation with which Elssler was awaited, "and that she might count on a glorious reception, which would gladden her soul and fill her pocket."[34]

Christopher Hughes, the other correspondent whom Hone mentions in his diary entry, was the American ambassador to Sweden, who apparently found himself in Paris sometime in early 1840. Although the Welleses seem to have been the ones most responsible for facilitating Wikoff's attempt to bring Elssler into the good graces of American high society, Hughes was apparently no less enthusiastic in his support for her projected tour. "Fanny", writing some years later in the "Letters", recalls a "Mr. C. H---, an American diplomatist." This Mr. H. is described in glowing terms:

> He is certainly one of the most agreeable and entertaining persons I know. He is equally remarkable for his exuberant spirits, his conversational powers, and his varied acquaintances, comprising all countries, creeds, colors, and characters: he is the life of all company, the idol of his friends, the most brilliant of talkers, and one of the worthiest of men; and he must be as well known and respected at home as he is esteemed and courted abroad. He has sent me upwards of a dozen letters to all the great men of his country.[35]

Hughes' numerous letters to correspondents across the Atlantic clearly represented a great boon for Elssler's tour. Besides the benefits it would bring him in his role as Elssler's unofficial

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[33] Philip Hone, *The Diary of Philip Hone*, ed. Bayard Tuckerman (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1910), Part II, 25.
[34] Wikoff, *Reminiscences*, 570.
[35] "Letters", 146.

manager, Wikoff's meeting with Hughes also appears to have been an immense pleasure for him on its own terms, if the hyperbole of his description of the diplomat is any indication. Hughes seems to have represented everything that Wikoff aspired to be in his life: a successful globe-trotter with an array of friends and contacts across America and Europe. In the end, Wikoff could only dream of attaining such respectability.

Hughes and the Welleses were by no means the only prominent Americans Elssler met before departing for New York, and many of the names of her newfound friends in Paris and London will be familiar to the average reader. There was Lewis Cass, former Secretary of War and current ambassador to Paris, who provided Elssler with a letter of introduction to James Watson Webb. Webb was the editor of the *Courier and Enquirer*, the most widely-read of the New York mercantile newspapers; although Wikoff would come to rely on Bennett and the powerful rising force of the penny press to promote Elssler, Webb was still an important force in the media and his good-will was a valuable asset. There was also Baron James Rothschild, who was not an American but who nevertheless sent an important letter to August Belmont, the influential representative for his interests in New York.[36] Finally, shortly before departing London Wikoff made the acquaintance of Charles Sumner, who professed himself enchanted by Elssler and whose support may partially account for the rapturous reception afforded to her by the proverbially dour Bostonians.[37]

The end result of the intensive social campaign conducted by Elssler and Wikoff was to set New York (and other major cities such as Boston) abuzz with anticipation for her arrival long before a single puff for her appeared in print. Perhaps even more importantly, it allowed individual American luminaries to get to know Elssler on a personal level, to discover the charms

[36] Wikoff, *Reminiscences*, 544.
[37] Ibid., 574.

of her personality, and to convey their positive impressions to friends back home. The importance of these personal connections should not be underestimated; as Elssler biographer Ivor Guest notes, "The social prejudice against theatrical folk was so ingrained that many people who met Fanny were astonished to discover how refined she was."[38] When it comes to the extent and influence of the anti-theatrical strain in early and mid-nineteenth century America historians may be susceptible to a degree of overemphasis, but there is no doubt that it was a very real concern for Wikoff. Elssler's tour came at a time when ballet had finally purchased a solid beachhead on American shores due to the appearance of a number of second-rate European dancers and a few prominent American ones, who had to some extent quieted the sometimes fierce opposition offered to their art on moral and more general cultural grounds.[39]

Wikoff demonstrated a keen awareness of this state of affairs, as the publicity material which he generated to promote Elssler constantly appealed to the public in terms that posited an overall national set of values and sense of taste that could not help but find a natural harmony with the skill and grace of her artistry. It was all part and parcel of selling Fanny Elssler to Americans in such a way as to dispel any whiff of disreputability, and in the specific case of the pre-tour social blitz Wikoff sought to position his charge in such a way as to identify her with the cream of society. This element of his strategy appears in a comment in the anonymously penned "Memoir of Fanny Elssler" (which appeared in the midst of her tour) noting that Elssler "had brought letters of introduction to some of the oldest and best families in New York, and this together with her great European name, gave her an *éclat* which was sure to fill her first house."[40]

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[38] Guest, 123.
[39] Christopher Martin, "Naked Females and Splay-Footed Sprawlers: Ballerinas on the Stage in Jacksonian America," *Theatre Survey* 51:1 (May 2010): 95.
[40] "Memoir of Fanny Elssler," in *Fanny Elssler in America*, 32.

Simply gaining the approbation of New York high society would not be enough. Wikoff would have to draw upon a number of resources to construct an ideal public image of Elssler in order to generate wider interest. He would have to turn her into a celebrity capable of drawing American audiences from disparate regions of the country as well as, to some extent, varying social backgrounds. In addition to associating Elssler with the morality espoused by average Americans, Wikoff would direct focus to her personal experiences and traits instead of details about her actual profession. The incidents of her life, some the product of pure invention, would form the stuff of a biographical drama, which bore some surprising correspondences to the Romantic narratives developed in a number of contemporary works of history, not least in the way both exploited patriotic sentiment and even a sense of racial kinship between the German- and English-speaking peoples.

His greatest asset in this endeavor proved to be the emerging popular press, specifically Bennett's New York *Herald*. The alliance with Bennett allowed him to sustain Elssler's two-year international tour and exemplified the large-scale publicity tactics which were arguably his most important contribution to the history of the theatre in America. As I noted earlier, some of the most intriguing sources from which one can chart the course of this relationship are inherently suspect, but even this difficulty reveals the volatile medium of which Bennett was a master.

The rise of the penny press can be dated to 1833, when Benjamin Day founded the New York *Sun*. This new publication achieved the massive success that had eluded earlier, similar attempts by other editors, including Bennett. It offered news in a physical form that was more compact than the sometimes blanket-sized broadsheets that characterized the older mercantile and partisan press. Its content, in the words of newspaper historian William Huntzicker,

acknowledged that, "Readers wanted sin, science, and sensation. Most importantly, they bought interesting stories about celebrities, ordinary folk, and fictional characters."[41] And, of course, it sold for just one penny, which was far below the price of the publications that catered to the specific interests of the business community or political parties.

Jurgen Habermas' *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* examines the development of a "public sphere", and its discourse corresponds in unexpected ways with the course of Elssler's tour, and highlighting how Wikoff's promotional tactics reflect the larger changes taking place in both the media and society at large. His analysis of the rise of the popular press is obviously relevant in general terms to Bennett's promotion of Elssler, but what is most interesting here is the connection Habermas draws from the popular press to the expansion of the wider notion of a public sphere in the wake of the French Revolution and the effect this had on the content of the new medium. Wikoff's two primary promotional tactics - introducing Elssler to the New York elite and enlisting the support of one of the most powerful penny newspapers in the country – reflect this change. On the one hand, the New York elites to whom he introduced Elssler were representative of the more constricted public sphere of the past, which had supported a press focused primarily on their narrower political and economic interests.

On the other hand, the expansion in news readership brought about by penny papers such as the *Herald* corresponded to the expanding bounds of the public sphere, and the resulting effect on newspapers altered both the form of news stories as well as their content of "sin, science and sensation." Habermas observes that, "In the end the news generally assume[d] some sort of guise and [was] made to resemble a narrative from its format down to stylistic detail (news stories); the rigorous distinction between fact and fiction [was] ever more frequently

[41] Huntzicker, *The Popular Press, 1833-1865* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999), 15-6.

abandoned."[42] Here was the "human interest" story, more or less recognizable to the modern news consumer. Such stories were supposedly easier for the average reader to consume, resulting in an emphasis on news items that required him to make less of a leap between his own everyday experience and the content of the newspaper that he read. This new relationship between newspapers and their readership made for an environment in which "the public sphere [became] the sphere for the publicizing of private biographies, so that the accidental fate of the so-called man in the street or that of systematically managed stars attain[ed] publicity."[43] Wikoff and Bennett certainly took advantage of this fundamental shift in the media, as evidenced by the emphasis that both the *Herald* and other publicity-generating materials placed on Elssler's biography and daily activities instead of the nuances of her art.

From its inauspicious beginnings, the penny press would go on to revolutionize how the press saw itself in relation to the nation (and vice versa): it "created the independent newspaper, free of political and mercantile patronage and dependent only on its own wide audience. The wide circulation attracted advertisers and led to financial independence; the revenue, in turn, financed the technological improvements necessary to produce papers for a large readership."[44] At the same time, it perpetuated and perhaps even magnified many of the vices of American press noted by observers such as de Tocqueville. The rise in "human interest" stories in particular had a darker side to it, as evidenced by de Tocqueville's observation that "the hallmark of the American journalist is a direct and coarse attack, without any subtleties, on the passions of

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[42] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 170.
[43] Ibid., 171.
[44] James L. Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York* Herald *and the Rise of the Popular Press* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1989), 24.

his readers; he disregards principles to seize on people, following them into their private lives and laying bare their weaknesses and their vices."[45]

Bennett's *Herald*, although not the first publication to blaze a trail into the new journalistic territory, represented an advance over the *Sun* in its successful synthesis of the sort of economic and political analysis offered by the older papers with the popular appeal of the emerging ones. Bennett declared that his paper was "especially intended for the great masses of the community – the merchant, mechanic, working people." It would be the "equal of any of the high priced paper for intelligence, good taste [!], sagacity and industry, [so that] there is not a person in the city, male or female, that may not be able to say – 'well I have got a paper of my own which will tell me all about what's doing in the world – I'm busy now – but I'll put it in my pocket and read it at my leisure.'"[46] Given the prominence to which the *Herald* soon rose, Bennett achieved his goal handsomely.

Bennett's abrasive personality and lack of scruples made him plenty of enemies. Walt Whitman called him

> A reptile marking his path with slime wherever he goes, and breathing mildew at everything fresh and fragrant; a mighty ghoul, preying on rottenness and repulsive filth; a creature, hated by his nearest intimates, and bearing the consciousness thereof upon his distorted features, and upon his despicable soul; one whom good men avoid as a blot to his nature – who all despise, and whom no one blesses – *all* this is James Gordon Bennett.[47]

He was also frequently on the receiving end of the violence that often characterized newspaper editors' personal interactions: James Watson Webb, whose *Courier and Enquirer* led the still-

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[45] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J.P. Mayer (New York: HarperCollins, 1969), 185.
[46] Quoted in Crouthamel, 22.
[47] Walt Whitman, *Walt Whitman of the New York* Aurora*: Editor at Twenty-two. A Collection of Recently Discovered Writings*, ed. Joseph Jay Rubin and Charles H. Brown (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972), 115.

potent mercantile press, thrashed Bennett in public no less than three times, and other editors such as William Leggett (a close friend of Edwin Forrest's) managed to get their shots in as well.[48] Philip Hone echoed the distaste that many in the Upper Ten felt for Bennett and the penny press in general when he gleefully recorded on February 14, 1842 that, "This impudent disturber of the public peace, whose infamous paper, the 'Herald,' is more scurrilous, and of course more generally read, than any other, has been tried in the Court of Oyer and Terminer, and convicted on two indictments for a libel on the Judges Noah and Lynch, of the Court of Sessions."[49]

For his part, Wikoff recalled Bennett in a positive light, despite the nasty dispute the two carried on from approximately 1844 to 1849 (during which Wikoff sang a very different and not terribly rhapsodic tune). He

> found him [Bennett] the antipodes of what one might have expected who read the *Herald*. No levity, or jocularity, or *abandon*. In manner and conversation he was serious, practical, and full of knowledge of all kinds, yet making no parade of it. His vigorous positive mind had the effect of a tonic on my romantic temperament. He looked at things earnestly, analysed them accurately, and came to mathematical conclusions. He had a wonderful insight of mankind, generally suspected the worst, and thus sometimes fell into error.[50]

As some of the events covered in the previous chapter show, Wikoff's enthusiasm for Bennett was certainly not disinterested, as he owed many of his connections to the editor. All the same, he seems to have had a genuine admiration for Bennett's achievements, which his own

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[48] Ibid., 44.

[49] Hone, Part II, 115-6. Mordecai Manuel Noah was a frequent target of Bennett's ire; in addition to the standard sorts of abuse Bennett heaped on the judge and sometime newspaperman, Noah's status as one of the most prominent Jews in Jacksonian America elicited occasional anti-Semitic comments from both his rival Bennett and his former partner, James Watson Webb.

[50] Wikoff, *Reminiscences*, 474.

experience in journalism may have heightened. Towards the end of his life he recalled the state of American journalism before publications such as the *Sun* and the *Herald* had come along:

> The French and English papers, though tinctured with partisanship, were written with elegance and force; whereas our journals of the day were not only given up to party, but their style was careless and commonplace. I thought most of them below the culture and intellect of our country. The truth was our journalism was then little else than a mere mercantile enterprise. Advertising patronage was apparently the only object sought. News of any kind, or comments on the events of the day conveyed in vigorous language, seemed beyond the ambition or ability of the journalists of that time.[51]

Wikoff certainly understood the value of having the press on his side. In the "Letters" he published in *Fraser's*, he has "Fanny" exclaim:

> Ah, these men of the press! the terror of their craft; doubtless they are meant to secure some good end, else why do they live and prosper? The enlightened friends of art, and foes to all oppressive authority, I hear them styled, when I have sometimes murmured at their usurpation; but how impossible it is to hold power without abusing it, and how cruelly do these enemies of absolute control tyrannise over us poor *artistes*![52]

Given the importance of winning over such a dangerous tribe to the success of Elssler's tour, Wikoff was lucky to have already established a rapport with one of the most powerful of its members. Through the columns of the *Herald* – as well as in the pamphlets he had printed both during and after the tour – Wikoff sought to shape the public image of Fanny Elssler.

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[51] Ibid., 463-4.
[52] "Letters", 136.

Chapter 2: Impresario, 1840-1842

As the "Memoir of Fanny Elssler" would retrospectively note, the publicity that preceded Fanny's debut "was sure to fill her first house," and when she finally arrived in New York in May 1840, the houses proved very full indeed. Ivor Guest has carefully chronicled the details of the tour in his biography of Elssler, and I will merely note some of the highlights of the tour insofar as they elucidate Wikoff's personality and promotional strategies. The day of Elssler's arrival marked the beginning of the onslaught of coverage in the New York *Herald* which proved so important to her success and which would later prove a bone of contention between Wikoff and Bennett.

Although Elssler's standing vis-à-vis American society had risen quickly, Wikoff knew his reputation would still suffer from his association with a performer, no matter how high her esteem might rise in the social circles which counted individuals like Philip Hone amongst their members. Although he later attempted to capitalize on Elssler's success by inventing and selling her supposed "Letters", he keeps a very low profile in this account, appearing only as "Mr. W.---". *My Courtship and its Consequences*, his attempt at self-vindication in the wake of the Jane Gamble scandal, remembered the entire affair as something that had "cost me an infinite deal of notoriety, annoyance and loss. It was thought by many, at the time, who knew nothing of the circumstances, that I had engaged in the matter as a speculation."[53] Even in his *Reminiscences*, written long after both the Elssler tour and his exposure to far greater opprobrium as a result of the Gamble scandal, he refuses to admit that his participation in the whole venture was anything other than a matter of fate, in which the force of circumstances had just happened to land him in the altruistic role of advisor to a friend: "neither caution or apprehension prevented my becoming an instrument in an enterprise in which not only I had no interest, but every inducement to evade.

[53] Wikoff, *My Courtship and its Consequences* (New York: J.C. Derby, 1855), 153.

The comical part of it was that it scattered to the winds my love of privacy, to say nothing of my craving for high respectability."[54] In this version of events, only the unexpected death of Samuel Wetherill and the subsequent necessity of putting his estate in order brought Wikoff back to the United States. The truth, as Delarue has noted, was somewhat more complicated. The news of Wetherill's death on February 19 had indeed appeared in the Philadelphia press – but those notices had appeared in February of *1839*.[55] Although Wikoff might still have needed to return to Philadelphia at some point to deal with business stemming from Wetherill's death, his insistence that this was his sole motive for taking the *Great Western* across the Atlantic with Elssler rings distinctly hollow.

After her arrival on May 3, Elssler waited, finally appearing onstage at the Park for the first time nearly two weeks later on the 14th. Philip Hone noted New York society's eagerness to attend her debut, wittily observing that, "Fashion and taste and curiosity are all on tiptoe to see her on tiptoe, and the pocket of many a sober pa will be drained to furnish the means to his wife and daughters to witness her *pas*."[56] Such a high level of anticipation presented a potential problem, for there was at least a possibility of the audience being disappointed in the lofty expectations that Elssler's growing reputation and the delay in mounting her debut had built up. "Fanny" later recalled in the "Letters" how the evening's program was modified to respond to the situation; the details of the plan bear a certain resemblance to Wikoff's intervention in Forrest's London debut:

> I have been persuaded, almost against my judgment, to give the Cracovienne dance, and the Tarantule, for my *debut*, and the dance to precede the ballet. The reasons advanced for this strange overturn of things are plausible enough. The

[54] Wikoff, *Reminiscences*, 497.
[55] Delarue, 29.
[56] Hone, Part II, 26.

> extravagant expectations of my salutatory [sic] powers rising so high here, that to meet it is clearly beyond any human effort; so it is thought that my appearance in this popular dance, where the music, dress, and movement are so novel, that criticism will be disarmed, and that the probable effect will be, if not to please, at least to mystify them; so that whatever disappointment may ensue it will not be fatal, nor cut me off from a chance of recovering all in the ballet.[57]

In the event, Elssler gave a brilliant performance, and her reception was ecstatic. Hone described the evening in glowing terms:

> Many and many a night has passed since the walls of the Park have witnessed such a scene. Fanny Elssler, the bright star whose rising in our firmament has been anxiously looked for by the fashionable astronomers since its transit across the ocean was announced, shone forth in all its brilliancy this evening. Her reception was the warmest and most enthusiastic I have ever witnessed. On her first appearance, in a *pas seul* called *la Cracovienne*, which was admirably adapted to set off her fine figure to advantage, the pit rose in a mass, and the waves of the great animated ocean were capped by hundreds of white pocket-handkerchiefs. … At the falling of the curtain she was called out; the pit rose in a body and cheered her, and a shower of wreaths and bouquets from the boxes proclaimed her success complete. …
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> All the boxes were taken several days since, and in half an hour after the time proclaimed for the sale of pit tickets the house was full …[58]

Wikoff's planning had paid off – literally as well as figuratively, for he later claimed that the combined receipts had been "upwards of $20,000" for her first New York engagement alone.[59] The coming months would see a wave of "Elsslerana" ranging from miniatures of the dancer to

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[57] "Letters", 170.
[58] Hone, Part II, 28.
[59] "Memoir", 33. For what it is worth, Hone corroborates this vague estimate, recording that he understands the total profits to be "something like $24,000 … of which sum she [Elssler] puts $9,000 or $10,000 in her own pocket." Hone, Part II, 31.

"Fanny Elssler champagne" which Wikoff pronounced "devilish good" in one of the letters to Bennett which the latter published a few years later.[60] Despite this success, he continued to try and keep Elssler always in the public eye as she toured the country, in which endeavor Bennett proved an invaluable - if eventually rather fickle - ally.

Wikoff and Bennett's cooperation in the Elssler venture does not seem to have begun before the day that the *Great Western* appeared in New York harbor. Once Elssler did appear, however, the editor lavished attention on her, printing a morning extra primarily for the purpose of covering the arrival of the *Great Western* and its long-awaited passenger in particular. The article struck two paradoxical notes. On the one hand, it recounted the favors lavished on Elssler by Queen Victoria and her new husband Albert at the dancer's farewell performance in London, as well as a supposed request from the King of Prussia for her to perform at his court rather than depart for America. On the other hand, the article appealed to Americans to demonstrate how much their capacity for appreciation of an artist of Elssler's caliber surpassed that of Europe: "What a responsibility then rests upon us; the eye of Europe is turned upon us; the first accounts of her reception are looked for with the greatest interest, and jesting apart, our capability of appreciating the loftiest efforts [of] graceful art, will be determined upon by that greeting she receives from us." The readers of the *Herald* were informed that Elssler "has been animated by a double motive to see a people of whom she has heard so much, and respects so highly; and from a high sense of honor, in fulfilling a contract, that circumstances had absolved her from."[61]

The main page of the May 4, 1840 issue contained a piece by Bennett which continued in the same vein as the previous day's article. It informed the readership that "Fanny Elssler is at this moment the most brilliant and extraordinary opera dancer that Europe ever produced."

[60] New York *Herald*, April 30, 1844.
[61] Ibid., May 3, 1840.

Brought to the United States by "some romantic, some heavenly impulse," she had already amply proved that she was "full of genius, passion, simplicity, and sublimity." In their wild grief over losing the brightest light in their theatrical firmament, the French "talked of declaring war against America." She had supposedly been so eager to come in contact with American soil that, when the captain of the *Great Western* took a sounding and pulled up some dirt, "she kissed it with all the *empressement* that Columbus first kissed the shore."[62] By the next day, Bennett was reporting that she was "all the word – all the rage – all the mania – all the talk of New York," and "the whole of the first tier" of the Park had already been sold out, ten days in advance.[63]

Bennett's notice of Elssler's opening night on May 14 was rapturous but short. He promised that a longer review would not be long in coming, but such an article never seems to have been published. For a publicity campaign that centered far more on the personality and day-to-day activities of its star rather than her actual art, this proved characteristic. Indeed, the primary items of interest in reports of Elssler's performance generally seemed to be the size and nature of the house in attendance, with special attention paid to the presence of other prominent artists such as Fanny Kemble, who saw Elssler dance for the first of many times on May 18. A hint of the influence of Wikoff's high-society publicity blitz can be detected in the notice of May 21, which states that,

> THE ELSSLER appeared again last evening to a house more crowded and fashionable than any we have yet seen. It was full from pit to gallery. The proportion of splendidly dressed young ladies was greater than usual. Among the educated and accomplished female portion of society, the beauty, ease, grace, and exquisite modesty of Fanny Elssler's style of dancing, are justly appreciated and highly relished. … We never saw such a *furor* as now exists to

[62] Ibid., May 4, 1840.
[63] Ibid., May 5, 1840.

> go to the Park Theatre. To get seats for ladies, it is necessary to procure them many nights beforehand.[64]

Wikoff's initial strategy of securing letters of introduction to high society seemed vindicated in reports that Elssler was "the rage in private fashionable society, as she is in her divine art."[65]

One of Wikoff's primary objectives in influencing the *Herald*'s coverage of Elssler was to deflect attention from the lingering disrepute of her profession, in large part by conflating her public image with Americans' national self-image and purported values. This was an especially savvy move, as the recent shift in public opinion towards the ballet meant that, "Although certain critics never abandoned their attack on the ballet, in the 1830s the dialogue [had] shifted from *whether* to *how* European dancers should perform in America." "[E]thereal beauty" and the "charms of person" trumped "technical virtuosity" in both newspaper reviews of and audience reactions to performances.[66] Elssler was therefore always portrayed as impeccably chaste and moral in her personal actions, as well as being possessed of an exemplary innocence and naïveté. Wikoff also sought to cast her as both romantic heroine and celebrity; the *Herald*'s coverage of her every move at particular points of her tour drew focus to the amusing incidents (real or invented) which befell her as she made her way across the country in a manner somewhat reminiscent of the constant attention accorded by the present-day media to the quotidian movements of Hollywood celebrities. What is perhaps most striking about the *Herald*'s coverage of Elssler is how little space is devoted to scrutinizing her actual performances.

It was only fitting that Bennett should be the person Wikoff turned to in order to promote a positive image of Fanny Elssler. Turning sordid tales of crime into moral lessons was the bread and butter of the penny press, and when it came to such moralizing no one could outdo

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[64] Ibid., May 21, 1840.
[65] Ibid., May 22, 1840.
[66] Martin, 104-6.

Bennett and his *Herald*. He and the other penny editors "presented short morality plays in the form of brief news stories … Bennett saw dramatic morals in each of his brief items, and as a self-proclaimed Shakespeare, he would find them."[67] Nor did he limit himself to fashioning narratives out of such petty material alone: the incidents reported in the columns of the *Herald* and the rest of the penny press were perceived as tiny elements of a much larger narrative in the process of being written. Technological improvements, cultural developments, and the westward march of the United States' national boundaries were the larger stories behind the day's events, and newspapers were to be the record of the still-growing nation's inexorable progress. The irony, of course, was that it was some of these same newspapers that, "by supporting small, specialized constituencies of interest-oriented communities across geographical lines," would contribute to the rending of the nation and the onset of the Civil War.[68] At the time, however, the clean narrative of progress had immense appeal to journalists as well as historians, both of which professional groups could from time to time count Henry Wikoff among their number. Indeed, his preface to *Napoleon Louis Bonaparte* expresses this ideology explicitly: "the truly logical process of events is to be traced back, link by link, which connects all human progress from the first glimmerings of civilization to its present marvellous [sic] expansion."[69]

The corollary to the idea of American history as a triumphant and ongoing march forward was that such progress had a moral dimension that took pride of place. As David Levin's historiographical work on the New England historians of the mid-nineteenth century observes, the historian's "duty was based on the unusual moral purity of his country, on its unique situation

[67] Huntzicker, 168.
[68] Ibid., 172-3.
[69] Wikoff, *Napoleon Louis Bonaparte, First President of France* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1849), 19.

as the country most nearly in harmony with divine (or natural) laws."[70] Wikoff seems to have had a keen grasp of the national sense of purity expressed by historians and newspapermen alike. He certainly understood the potential obstacles that such a sensibility would present for Elssler, whose profession was still not fully respectable even in Europe. The public presentation of Elssler would therefore have to be conducted in such a way as to downplay certain aspects of her profession while portraying her personality and biography in such a way as to align her with the forces of American morality.

One of the primary ways of portraying Elssler in a wholesome manner was to draw upon Romantic notions of the "natural." As Levin notes, "The epithet 'natural' denoted a wide range of virtuous traits in the romantic histories," and in the work of American historians (as well as novelists such as James Fenimore Cooper) often "could be contrasted with the corrupt artificiality" of those personages cast as villains in the narratives they fashioned. Coming as she did from the decadent courts and opera houses of Europe, Elssler would have to be portrayed as especially "natural", possessed of an innate goodness that had allowed her to resist the temptations of the decaying Old World and had inevitably lured her to the virtues of the New. In story after story printed in the *Herald*, she is portrayed as a wide-eyed innocent – a trope which Bennett occasionally also employed to satirize his favorite targets. For example, his article of August 5, 1840, purported to give an account of "Fanny Elssler in Wall street" in which the ingenuous dancer encountered severe weather and financial corruption with charming naivete. The onset of a "terrible storm" on the night prior to her trip down to Wall Street supposedly caused her to exclaim, "This is a wonderful country … a very great country, indeed – and the lightning is very pretty also." This conflation of meteorological and national grandeur was

[70] David Levin, *History as Romantic Art: Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, and Parkman* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1959), 24-5.

contrasted with the ostensible pettiness and dishonesty of the bankers whom she met the next day. However, her presence was perceived to have an almost instantaneously beneficial effect: "In short, the business if not the bank was suspended whilst all gazed with delight on the charming creature then flitting about them. Mammon was for a few minutes without a worshipper; all deserted his shrine for that of beauty, and if the divine Fanny were to pay a daily visit to that 'den of thieves,' Wall street, as the Scripture says, we verily believe she would effect such a reformation, that we might say something in its favor."[71]

Besides continuing his promotional activities and coordinating them with Bennett, Wikoff now found himself negotiating with the swarm of theatre managers from other cities that descended on New York to engage Elssler. Often he found that the roles of publicist and manager complemented each other nicely. After engagements in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., Elssler played Baltimore, where an initially hesitant crowd soon came around and eventually went into such hysterics over her that she left the theatre one night to find that a number of the young men of the city had cut loose her carriage horses in order to pull her themselves through the cheering throngs lining the street.[72] Despite this success, Baltimore and D.C. manager Thomas Walton proved less than forthcoming when it came time to distribute the profits. A brief notice of Walton's misconduct subsequently appeared in the "Memoir".[73] Much later, in the first days of 1842, Wikoff would use similar tactics in concert with Bennett's (by this time ambivalent) support in order to embarrass Edmund Simpson and his treasurer at the Park in a dispute over a compensatory performance Elssler was obliged to give after illness prevented her from fulfilling an engagement at that theatre.

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[71] New York *Herald*, August 5, 1840.
[72] Guest, 139.
[73] "Memoir", 34.

Despite the troubles with Walton, the engagements in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore proved to be another public-relations coup for Elssler and Wikoff, particularly when she became the primary item of the week on the federal government's agenda. Once again, Wikoff drew on personal connections to boost Elssler's profile and establish her respectability. She had already been seen in the company of John Van Buren, son of the current president, at the Bowery Theatre in New York for one of Edwin Forrest's performances.[74] Now she had the opportunity to meet Martin Van Buren himself, as well as any member of Congress she might wish to see; so many attended one of her performances that the House of Representatives was unable to muster a quorum.[75]

Not everyone was immune to her charm: a story in the *Herald* that had probably been penned by Wikoff related that, while giving a speech in the House, the venerable old John Quincy Adams was told by a friend that Elssler was observing from the gallery. "Do you say that to rouse, or to intimidate me?" he asked, "we'll see," proceeding to deliver an oration that the article pronounced "one of the greatest hits of the session."[76] However, Adams does not mention this incident in his diary, and although he spent part of his seventy-third birthday watching Elssler's debut on July 11, he pronounced *La Tarentule* a "poor Ballet" and opined that "The exhibition of lascivious attitudes is the unrivaled excellence of Fanny."[77] The chasm between the *Herald*'s anecdote and Adams' true reaction serves as an excellent illustration of both the need for caution when approaching Wikoff's publicity material (to say nothing of Bennett's journalism) and the extent to which the impresario was willing to fabricate attention-getting stories to promote Elssler's tour.

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[74] Guest, 134.
[75] Ibid., 138.
[76] New York *Herald*, August 1, 1840.
[77] John Quincy Adams, *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams: A Digital Collection* (Massachusetts Historical Society), accessed August 18, 2010, http://www.masshist.org/jqadiaries, vol. 42, p. 515.

This high point in the tour was accompanied by Bennett's puffery, which came to a head on August 1 with the publication of an article entitled "Fanny Elssler in the United States." As with the rest of the *Herald*'s Elssler coverage, this piece focused almost entirely on the profits (especially the fact that tickets had been auctioned for nearly quadruple their starting price) and acclaim that she had accrued since her arrival. The enthusiasm of the Baltimore mob was recounted in detail; "Well done, Baltimore," gushed the *Herald*, "this time her mob is no disgrace to her; instead of pulling down houses, they are building up their reputation for chivalric courtesy to a beautiful stranger." After recounting the equal enthusiasm of audiences in the capital, the article returned to the note Wikoff had sounded in his initial letter to the *Herald*:

> The wonderful delight and enthusiasm with which the divine Fanny has been received, will, we trust, cause the suicide of all those miserable, croaking wretches, both here and in Europe, who being themselves incapable of appreciating excellence or perfection in anything 'human or divine,' sneered at the hopes, and attempted to destroy the prospect of a young, artless, beautiful, and highly talented stranger – and that stranger a lady.

"As Americans we are proud of our countrymen," continued the article, "and their conduct on this occasion." "Every one" in Europe, it said, "had predicted her failure here," and their discomfiture proved that the United States could add a level of refinement that equaled or even bested Europe's to its list of national accomplishments.[78]

The initial success that met Elssler in New York, Washington, and Baltimore imparted a momentum to her tour that kept her almost constantly on the move for the next two years as she played to one packed house after another. Each city brought new and unique challenges, but the tactics she and Wikoff used to overcome them essentially replicated those they had used to launch her tour in the first place. For instance, Boston's Puritan heritage seemed to present a

[78] Ibid., August 1, 1840.

particularly unpromising prospect, but after an uncertain opening it instead offered the most enthusiastic embrace Elssler encountered in all of the cities in which she appeared. Granted, the favor of the "*haut ton*" who descended in their carriages on the Tremont Theatre was expressed as "solemn approval" instead of the wild demonstrations of affection such as she had encountered in Baltimore. All the same, the acclaim was unmistakable, and the presence of dignitaries such as Harrison Gray Otis (along with a certain "American banker in Paris" who was making a visit back home) indicated that she had gained the affection of even the highest levels of Boston society.[79]

Bennett maintained a constant drumbeat for Elssler through August and September of 1840. He printed Wikoff's lengthy dispatches from Boston, where Elssler showed her gratitude to the city by giving a final performance as a benefit for the completion of the Bunker Hill Monument. He also published information that helped to summarize and advance Elssler's pecuniary interests in a none-too-subtle way, reporting that she had made a total of $60,000, the last bit of it in "the middle of August, with the thermometer at 92 of Fahrenheit, and people fainting in the theatre."[80] When news came that she had managed to extend her American tour a little longer, Bennett opined that she had displayed notable acumen in the management of her assets and could make enough in the New World to retire comfortably. "A fig for Paris!" he crowed, "Who cares for Paris? Not Fanny Elssler."

One notable aspect of the coverage of Elssler's first appearance in Boston was the emphasis placed on her involvement with the completion of the Bunker Hill Monument. As will be seen later, Wikoff was perfectly willing to appeal to American patriotism as a motive for attending Elssler's performances, and one way to do this was to associate her with symbols of

[79] Ibid., September 11, 1840. Though not yet possessing the status of a dignitary, Ralph Waldo Emerson was also in attendance, and was quite enthusiastic about Elssler's performance.
[80] Ibid., September 1, 1840.

national prestige, most notably through her benefit performance for the monument in Boston. The *Herald* dutifully printed Wikoff's dispatches from that city, especially one published on September 30, 1840. It was comprised mainly of Elssler's official statement (dated "26 Septembre" in the "original", which was presented in translation immediately below) regarding her desire to donate to the monument, along with the reply of the president of the Bunker Hill Monument Association. Elssler's statement disclaimed that, "as a foreigner she has no right to claim of making a contribution to the fund, either in the form of money, or, if deemed more advisable, her services at the theatre." Nevertheless, it continues, "She hopes the President will do her the justice to believe that her only motive in making this offer is to show how entirely she sympathizes with those expressions of *national* feeling so widely called forth for the completion of this interesting Monument, and to manifest her deep sense of obligation to the Americans for their unparalleled generosity to her."[81]

The mention of "national feeling" bears brief consideration. The deference which Elssler displayed to American patriotism calls to mind de Tocqueville's exasperation with Americans' "grandiose opinion of their country and themselves."[82] He had, he said, observed in his travels that,

> In their relations with strangers the Americans are impatient of the slightest criticism and insatiable for praise. They are pleased by the mildest praise but seldom quite satisfied even by the most fulsome eulogy. They are at you the whole time to make you praise them, and if you do not oblige, they sing their own praises. One might suppose that, doubting their own merits, they want an

[81] Ibid., September 30, 1840.
[82] De Tocqueville, 574.

> illustration thereof constantly before their eyes. … One cannot imagine a more obnoxious or boastful form of patriotism.[83]

Whether or not de Tocqueville's criticism was entirely fair, the way in which Wikoff conducted Elssler's publicity campaign suggests that he would have perceived a substantial degree of truth in the Frenchman's observation, as well as an opportunity to further validate the public's continued patronage of her performances. The *Herald* article that greeted Elssler's arrival had ended with what sounded like a challenge to American audiences to meet the "responsibility" that Elssler's arrival placed upon them by demonstrating their "capability of appreciating the loftiest efforts of graceful art," which would "be determined upon by the greeting she receives from us." In doing so, Americans would dispel the unfair stereotypes current in Europe that had caused Elssler such fear as she contemplated the prospect of her tour. The challenge to Americans to demonstrate their refinement by supporting Elssler, which had appeared in the *Herald* on the day of her arrival, seems to be in part aimed at playing upon the fundamental sense of insecurity postulated by de Tocqueville. On the other hand, associating her in a very public way with an especially prominent new monument to American national pride offered an opportunity to provide that praise which the locals seemed to be forever seeking.

Whatever national insecurities she may have assuaged through her involvement with Bunker Hill, the fact that Elssler had triumphed even in solemn Boston seemed to confirm that she could expect large and enthusiastic crowds. With the onset of winter, she and Wikoff departed for the South to play a series of engagements from Virginia to South Carolina, after which they would strike even further south into the Caribbean. As 1840 progressed through its closing months, everything seemed to be going in their favor.

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[83] Ibid., 612.

Then, all of a sudden, Bennett turned. The December 31, 1840 issue of the *Herald* strikes a noticeably more sarcastic tone towards Elssler than the puffs which had preceded it. Reporting on her three-night engagement in Charleston, Bennett noted that, "We have not heard what she was to get for this gracious condescension, but we presume she got as much as she could. The prices of admission had been doubled – and if so, she comes in for a double dose too." Her "triumphant progress and reception throughout the United States," he continued, "far surpasses the progresses of Queen Elizabeth in England, Joan of Arc in France … Don Quixote in Spain, General Lafayette or General Jackson in the 'model republic.'" Her reputation made from the moment that elites such as Hone had called on her, she had gone on and "finished the Bunker Hill monument after it had been delayed fifteen years" as well as "condescend[ing] that the young fashionables of Baltimore should displace the horses from her carriage, and show themselves in their true character." The lesson of all this, said Bennett, was that, "We republicans can beat the world at any thing, fighting, piety, fancy, fine taste, philosophy, or folly."[84] New Year's Day brought another large feature on Elssler that possessed a lessened but still notable edge. Bennett then remained largely silent on Elssler for months while she toured the West, but in May he took the time to quote an English paper's (inaccurate) observation that "it is very unusual for a sylphide of thirty-six, who has a son of eighteen, to execute such rapture as a dancer."[85] He repeated this innuendo about Elssler's age and morals (which was admittedly not entirely off the mark, as her age was regularly underestimated in the press and she had indeed borne a child at a relatively young age) in the May 24 issue, along with some unfavorable comments from the New Orleans press. The article closed with a stinging indictment of the enthusiasm for Elssler:

[84] New York *Herald*, December 31, 1840.
[85] Ibid., May 8, 1841.

> We cannot afford to be the laughing stocks of the *dillitanti* [sic] of Europe any longer. Fanny may make as much money as her legs can bring her – but she must confine herself to her own position and to her own society, and manufacture no more supreme blockheads. It will not longer do to set up for patriot, philosopher, leader of the fashion, or setter up of the *ton*. She is a simple *danseuse*, and can be nothing else, except she should end her career as her *caste* does as a *religieuse*. … Making mountebanks is too much for our land.[86]

Bennett's surprising reversal begs for explanation. He and Wikoff seem to have had a mutually beneficial and fairly respectful professional relationship for a number of years, and they would continue to do favors for and write positive things about each other even in spite of the disruption and bitterness caused by a five-year interlude of personal and professional conflict that began in early 1844. Moreover, Fanny Elssler had probably been the single biggest arts-related story of 1840 and could therefore help support newspaper sales; besides which, a number of Bennett's rivals had or would capitalize on Elssler's ubiquity by running negative coverage of her tour, and agreeing with his legions of enemies was something he rarely did. Some of the negative coverage may have stemmed from a temporary conviction that Elssermania was beginning to go too far. For instance, there is a notable contrast in the tone adopted in the August 1, 1840 article on the Baltimore incident ("Well done, Baltimore!"), which seems to bear the stamp of Wikoff, with the December 31 article that effectively called the Baltimore mob a bunch of asses for their extravagant display of affection.

Later, in the midst of his newspaper war with Bennett, Wikoff would allege that a far baser motive had been at work in changing the powerful editor's mind about Elssler. His version of events acknowledged that news of the lavish receptions and high box office receipts with which Elssler had met in the South had rubbed Bennett the wrong way, but for different reasons

[86] Ibid., May 24, 1841.

than the editor would wish his readers to believe. He laid out the charge in a letter published in the May 2, 1844 issue of his new newspaper, *The Republic*:

> I believe there *is* 'honor among thieves;' but the editor of the '*Herald*' takes his principles from a still lower school. To prove it, what was his conduct towards Mlle. Elssler? Both he and his wife received presents and civilities from her during the season of 1840, before she left for the South. Now mark his course. Excited by the extravagant accounts of her great gains, which he always ridiculously exaggerated, he resolved deliberately to abuse her, and in a manner so shockingly infamous, that he knew she would be compelled either to fly the country, whose good opinion was everything to her, or pay him the wages of his demoniacal malice. She took the latter course, and bribed him.[87]

The validity of these charges can never be satisfactorily proven or disproven. Given the (often hostile) testimony of some of Bennett's other contemporaries, such an action might not be entirely beyond his character. At the same time, an awareness of the overall trajectory of Wikoff's life and career does not inspire total confidence in his unswerving reliability. In 1844, in the heat of the argument, Bennett would counter that he had done nothing out of self-interest with regards to Elssler, portraying his puffery partly as the result of a sense of noblesse oblige to a talented artist and partly as a means to mitigate Wikoff's constant pestering. Wikoff in turn claimed that puffing Elssler had for Bennett always been more about boosting circulation of the *Herald* than anything else; as for Bennett's ostensible concern for the dancer's success, Wikoff gave this anecdote of her reaction to the May 24, 1841 article that repeated the allegations about her age and the existence of an illegitimate child:

> The consternation and grief of Mlle. Elssler, at these monstrous and unprovoked infamies, were beyond description. It was no consolation to her to know that

[87] *The Republic*, May 2, 1844.

> these atrocious calumnies were unfounded; she felt herself degraded before the thousands who read, perhaps believed them; and she passed several days in an agony of tears and shame that defied both entreaties and remonstrances. This will probably afford a smile to the callous wretch who glories in such deeds – who is amused at the honest blush of indignant men, and exults in the suffering of shrinking women.[88]

Despite the worrying change in the *Herald*'s coverage of her tour, Elssler and her impresario found green pastures in southerly climes. Elssler and Wikoff visited Cuba for two separate and lengthy engagements, one at the beginning of 1841 and another at the start of 1842. Both engagements proved very successful, but these legs of the tour presented unique obstacles raised by practical business matters as well as cultural differences. Wikoff's account of the first Havana engagement in the "Letters" provides some intriguing insights into the process of contract negotiations, which he and Elssler obviously had to undertake in every new city in which she played. They held some of the same advantages in Havana that they had had when they first arrived in New York. "The enthusiasm of their American neighbors," observed "Fanny", "had reached and infected" the locals, despite the fact that they were as ignorant of the ballet as most New Yorkers had been when they first saw Elssler dance.[89] Elssler had one other slight advantage here as well, since part of her fame stemmed from her adaptation of Spanish folk dances to add to her repertoire. The Habaneros, who initially seemed to be "of opinion that a common set of dancers (boleros) of [Cuba] far excelled" Elssler, responded especially well when she requested their permission to perform some of her signature numbers such as the "Cachucha" and the "Jaleo de Jeres."[90] Furthermore, some of her greatest fans were also members of the colonial nobility; in contrast to the ostensibly egalitarian society of the post-

[88] Ibid.
[89] "Letters", 195-6.
[90] New York *Herald*, March 2, 1841.

Jacksonian United States, here the rigid social hierarchy was officially enshrined and more akin to the milieu with which she was familiar in Europe. Elssler, possibly acting in accordance with Wikoff's prompting, paved her way by sending letters to the Count de Penalver, who "Fanny" would recall as her "powerful patron".[91]

She and Wikoff would have need of such support, for the man who held a stranglehold on all theatrical business in the city proved a tough bargainer. Don Francisco Marti y Torrens, "autocrat of all the theatres" in Havana, balked at what Wikoff later reported as Elssler's initial terms: "1000 dollars per night, a benefit for myself, a half benefit for my *maître de ballet*, and some allowance for expenses of the three artistes I brought with me."[92] Marti supposedly retreated without a word, and a second interview – during which he disappeared again in order to find and bring back what he claimed was an interpreter – ended on the same note. Finally, Elssler's unflinching stance paid off, and the deal she signed gave her everything she had asked for. Indeed, she received a bit more: Marti, noted "Fanny", "might as well have agreed at first, and he would have escaped the half-benefit for my ballet-master".[93]

This account of the negotiations with Marti is, of course, Wikoff's version of events, written nearly three years after the fact. What is nevertheless particularly interesting about it is its portrayal of Elssler as flinty and capable of maintaining a nearly unshakeable negotiating stance. As I have taken pains to note earlier, there is a danger that in focusing on Wikoff one may unfairly deemphasize Elssler's ability to manage her own affairs. However, it is at least worthwhile to recall that Wikoff's description of the initial negotiations between Lavalette and Price for the original engagement in New York takes specific note of Elssler's general silence during the course of the meeting. This could potentially be attributed to the language barrier

[91] "Letters", 195.
[92] Ibid., 190.
[93] Ibid., 193.

present in dealing with an English-speaker, but Elssler's close relationship with Harriet Grote and her competent if stilted curtain addresses to American audiences throw this into doubt. Indeed, language would have been an even greater obstacle in Havana: Marti's inclusion of an interpreter at the second meeting may have been more of a delaying tactic than anything else, but it indicates that communication was at least difficult enough that he felt it to be a plausible excuse. Certainty is ultimately impossible, but one is tempted to attribute at least some of what Wikoff reported as Elssler's actions in the negotiation process to him instead.

After leaving Cuba for the first time in February 1841, Elssler would spend another year and a half touring across the United States and playing a second engagement in Havana before finally taking her last bow at the Park on July 1, 1842. The summer of 1841 brought signs of trouble, for in addition to Bennett's sudden turn the editor Horace Greeley, amongst others, was now openly attacking her. Rumors that Elssler and Wikoff's relationship went beyond the strictly professional flew about and continued to dog both of them even after they returned to Europe.

Luckily, at this time Bennett returned to Wikoff and Elssler's side just as abruptly as he had left. The June 14, 1841 issue of the *Herald* included a letter, supposedly from London, that ran down the latest in European theatrical news. The author of the letter conveniently found space to inform the reader that Elssler's great rival Marie Taglioni had been intriguing against her while she toured the United States; further, Mlle. Taglioni was 40 years old, which was "the experience of fifteen years over Fanny." There was "not a word of truth" in the nasty rumors regarding Elssler that were flying about. On the next page Bennett, as if by way of tacit apology, returned to a number of themes he had sounded over a year ago, when Elssler had first appeared at the Park:

> To-night the Park theatre re-epens [sic] with the first appearance of Fanny Ellsler, since her return from the South. This beautiful *danseuse* will no doubt produce a furious revival in the fortunes of the Park. We understand the whole fashionable world are again *en movement* [sic], and no wonder. The more Fanny is talked of – squibbed at, preached at, paragraphed, lectured at, cut up, slashed, scissored and sliced by the small fry of papers, the greater houses she draws, and the higher *fureur* she produces in theatricals.[94]

Perhaps still keeping his tongue slightly in his cheek, Bennett expressed the further hope that Elssler would build a great estate on the banks of the Hudson and remain in America for the rest of her life. More practically, he resumed his advocacy for Elssler's financial interests when he continued his badgering of Edmund Simpson the next day at word of the manager's decision not to hold what would certainly be a lucrative auction for tickets.

The summer of 1841 saw the appearance of an intriguing piece of publicity, the "Memoir of Fanny Elssler". Although written anonymously, this pamphlet seems to be a direct attempt on the part of either Wikoff or someone else near to Elssler to influence American perceptions of her by publicizing details, real or invented, of her biography. The actual development of her skill as a dancer gets remarkably short shrift, with much of the narrative taken up with her exemplary - and certainly fictional – offstage actions. Even when Elssler's profession is discussed, it is cast in strong moral terms. After recounting how both Fanny and her younger sister Therese were first drawn to ballet by the dazzling costumes of a neighbor who also happened to be an Opera dancer, the "Memoir" claims to "translate here *literally* an expression which fell from her lips, when speaking of her feelings on her first visit to the Opera." "When I

[94] New York *Herald*, June 14, 1841.

went in," Elssler supposedly recounted, "and the light fell over me, I thought the place was heaven, *illuminated in honor of God's victory over Satan!*"[95]

The "Memoir" goes on to assure the reader that the religious feelings the young Elssler supposedly experienced at her first trip to the Opera were reflective of the basic nobility and decency of the profession. An account of the excitement of an opening night of the ballet ends with a statement that seems to be appealing directly to an imagined set of core American values, in which the author assures the reader that, "If the Ballet succeed, all those principally concerned in it become famous, - if they were not famous before; - humble talent is elevated, and fortune, as it always should be, is the reward of merit."[96] Viewed in the contexts both of the rest of the "Memoir" and of Elssler's wider reputation, such a statement was crucial. Since so much of the rest of this particular account of Elssler's life is taken up by accounts of her encounters with some of the most powerful nobles of Europe, there always remained a danger that an American reader would associate the ballet, along with its brightest star, with the supposed cultural decadence and political authoritarianism of Europe. Elssler's preeminence as a ballerina therefore had to be ascribed to her hard work and innate goodness rather than any sort of patronage granted by a ruler or aristocrat in exchange for dishonorable favors.

Wikoff's efforts to introduce Elssler to American high society was another part of the strategy of portraying her as a simple, unaffected, and morally unobjectionable artist. Those who could not discover this by calling on her in person could at least read about her nature in the columns of the *Herald* or in the "Memoir." Bennett had assured his readers that, "Every one is surprised and pleased at the simplicity, modesty, and quiet air, with which [Elssler] receives her visitors. The style, manners, and ways of her private life, are said to be fine specimens of high

[95] "Memoir", 17-8.
[96] Ibid., 21.

breeding."[97] However, by the time the "Memoir" appeared, a fundamental contradiction in Wikoff's strategy had appeared that had the potential to threaten this demure image. The elites who had been able to call on Elssler personally might show relative restraint in their public appreciation of her talents, but relying on a penny paper such as the *Herald* as his main organ of publicity meant that Wikoff was also trying to draw from a wider audience. The results could sometimes be raucous, most notably in the case of the hysteria over her carriage in Baltimore. However well such a reaction might bode for Elssler's box office receipts, such excesses threatened to trigger the sort of backlash exemplified by Bennett's own caustic comments about the incident during the period when he turned against Elssler. Whether or not it was actually written by Wikoff, the "Memoir" reflects an awareness of this danger. Recounting her tours through Europe, the "Memoir" notes that,

> In many places the enthusiasm of the populace was carried to absurd and degrading excesses. It was a common occurrence for foolish young men to unharness her horses and draw her carriage to her lodgings; - a practice which we blush to say has been imitated in one instance in this country. The wildest enthusiasm furnishes no excuse for such base servility. Mademoiselle Elssler felt herself degraded by such a despicable proceeding; and, in Baltimore, the next night, she sought her lodgings privately, and on foot.[98]

One important way to further burnish Elssler's public image was to ensure that she gave generously to charities – and that those donations were reported in the *Herald* and through other means. Elssler gave to causes ranging from the aforementioned Bunker Hill Monument to temperance societies until her departure; indeed, her final performance was a benefit for the "Catholic Half Orphan Asylum" in New York. Bennett duly announced the fact in the *Herald*,

[97] New York *Herald*, May 7, 1840.
[98] "Memoir", 22.

expressing "the sincere hope that the public will fully second her praiseworthy and charitable intentions."[99] However much such actions might be publicized, Elssler seems to have been genuinely interested in giving back some of her earnings to help the less fortunate. Still, it is worth noting that the final paragraph of the "Memoir" is devoted to a rather odd argument about the effect that Elssler's financial success will have on the poor. Elssler, the argument went, had rescued the American theatre from a shabby state that threatened to throw many members of theatrically-related professions into poverty, and "no sooner was life infused into the *heart* of the dramatic system, than the meanest extremities felt the glow." The "Memoir" continues:

> Thus if she drew from the hoards of the rich, she was the cause of relief to the wants of the poor, - and as some honest people are alarmed lest she should carry off the entire amount of our circulation, - let us ask them – who are the sufferers even if she should leave our shores with $100,000 in her pockets? surely not the poor, for they do not, or should not, contribute any thing to her gains. 'Tis the wealthy, then, who enrich this woman. We ask these cavillers whether – if the money were not given to Fanny Elssler – would it be given to the poor? No! it would remain locked up in the coffers of those who now give it, at least, a partial circulation. We would resist 'to the knife' any encroachment, on the rights or interests of the poor – for we are of their number … but we cannot perceive how the most ample support of Theatres, Actors or Actresses can, in any other way than beneficially, affect the interests of any community.[100]

Given that the "Memoir" appeared when anti-Elssler sentiment was probably at its highest, the argument presented here is striking, and worth examining closely. The "Memoir" almost seems to be arguing for viewing Elssler as a means for the redistribution of wealth, albeit through capitalistic means. Whether this paragraph constituted a response to a specific

[99] New York *Herald*, June 25, 1842.
[100] "Memoir", 36.

influential criticism is unclear, but the fact that it is given such strong emphasis at the pamphlet's conclusion suggests that such a criticism had gained at least some traction amongst the public. Some of the rhetoric of this passage raises an eyebrow: the claim of solidarity with the poor sounds unconvincing coming right after the suggestion that Elssler might clear $100,000 in the course of her tour. Nevertheless, the argument of the "Memoir" is intriguing in the way it develops the earlier contention that the ballet is an inherently good art that rewards merit and diligence. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Elssler's audience is here imagined as composed primarily of "the wealthy". The proposition is somewhat dubious, given that audiences for Elssler were large enough to sustain her through repeated engagements over two years. Nevertheless, such an association suggests that Wikoff's tactic of introducing Elssler to the Upper Ten and their ilk imparted a certain class connotation to the audiences who came to see her dance.

For all that Wikoff might seek to project a public image of Elssler that emphasized her simplicity, her strong moral sensibility, and even her solidarity with the poor, he also needed to generate a perception of her as an extraordinary individual. This, too, reflected the larger trends in history and journalism; the former tended to focus on singular personalities who had supposedly shaped the course of history almost entirely on their own, while in the latter field, "Strong personalities came to dominate mainstream and alternative newspapers."[101] De Tocqueville saw things somewhat differently, claiming that when it came to historians writing in a democracy, "Most of them attribute hardly any influence over the destinies of mankind to individuals, or over the fate of a people to the citizens. But they make great general causes responsible for the smallest particular events."[102] The latter part of this assertion certainly makes

[101] Huntzicker, 170.
[102] De Tocqueville, 493-4.

sense in light of the growing belief in Manifest Destiny and the inexorable progress which many, including Wikoff, foresaw for the United States. What de Tocqueville's statement fails to take into account is the fact that many of the most influential historians of the time still saw themselves as members of a more rarified class within the country and were therefore more prone to adopting the view he attributed to aristocratic historians, which focused on the singular and heroic individual. In the particular case of Francis Parkman, is has been asserted that he "considered himself a hero figure and transposed this novelistic image onto historical figures he studied."[103] As demonstrated earlier by Wikoff's profession of belief in progress at the outset of his laudatory biography of Napoleon III, one could emphasize both singular individuals and "great general causes" at the same time.

Wikoff certainly made a (sometime) career of championing individuals such as Elssler and Edwin Forrest, but it should be noted that with the former he focused less on portraying her as a towering personality, in large measure because to do so posed a possible conflict with contemporary attitudes towards gender. Christopher Martin notes that "Female dancers who pursued professional careers operated far outside the narrow domestic sphere male-dominated society prescribed for U.S. women," and that those who met with the greatest success in America often underwent a process of "idealization and feminization" in reviews of their performances as a function of the "defensive reaction from a male-dominated society that desired to limit representations of the strength and power of women."[104]

Despite the delicacy that her gender required, publicity materials such as the "Memoir" pointed up (and possibly invented) Elssler's singular qualities. These often manifested themselves in the course of an encounter with a famous individual, such as the King of Prussia.

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[103] Wilbur R. Jacobs, *Francis Parkman, Historian as Hero: The Formative Years* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1991), x.
[104] Martin, 105, 107.

In addition, they often involved her turning down offers of fame and fortune in Europe, with the implication that she had passed these opportunities up in order to follow her destiny in America. One such anecdote from the "Memoir" involves the beginning of Elssler's career:

> Her progress was so rapid that contrary to settled custom, she was not placed in the Corps de Ballet; and when the Directeur assigned her a station in the Corps Coryphean, she begged with modest confidence that she might be entrusted with a principal part in the Ballet. The Directeur was surprised, that a child – for she was then only twelve – should make such a request; but remembering her precocity, answered that he would try her powers. A short time elapsed and to her surprise, delight and terror, she found herself called on to rehearse the principal part in the beautiful ballet of "La Fée."[105]

Here was a perfect account, real or not, of the sort of qualities Elssler possessed that Wikoff wanted to publicize to American audiences. The Elssler of this anecdote was not only precocious, but driven to succeed in a manner that any self-made man (or one who aspired to such status) would immediately recognize and appreciate.

The Elssler depicted in Wikoff's publicity material was not only precocious, but possessed of a drive to rise to the top of her profession that seemed almost a reflection of an inevitable destiny. In the newspaper articles on which the "Memoir" seems to be based (and which are unambiguously the work of Wikoff, as attested by the letters Bennett published in 1844), the narrative continues with Elssler traveling to Naples, and then to Berlin, where "Her success … was most splendid. The royal family commanded the directors of the Opera to engage her permanently on any terms. She was offered an enormous sum, and also the settlement of a pension of $3000 per annum on her for life, if she remained there eight years. She refused this offer, solely because she was determined to be not only the dancer of Germany –

[105] "Memoir", 19.

but of the world."[106] This story, whether or not it contains a single grain of truth, nevertheless shows Elssler as an individual who seems to have been capable of fully grasping her own potential. Most intriguingly in the context of mid-nineteenth century America, it portrays her as an exceptional individual with an awareness of what could almost be called destiny, which would call her to move beyond the confines of Europe and across the Atlantic to seek her apotheosis in America.

As mentioned earlier with regards to the *Herald*'s coverage of Elssler's contribution to the completion of the Bunker Hill Monument, the notion that she had a special destiny that was bound up with the rise of the United States was a recurring theme that Wikoff used to promote her tour. This idea had been hinted at in Bennett's articles, and now it was taken up by the "Memoir". Indeed, to some degree Wikoff appears to have sought to boost her appeal by depicting her arrival on American soil as a crucial development in the cultural history of the young nation. He and Bennett would go so far as to make the idea of a connection between Elssler and the soil of the New World a literal one in the story about her kissing the dirt brought up when the *Great Western* took soundings off the American coast. This particular story was so good (and, perhaps, even somewhat true) that Wikoff would later repeat it in the "Letters and Journal" that he had published in *Fraser's Magazine*.

Elssler might have felt a "romantic enthusiasm" for America itself, but it was the continent's inhabitants that she had to impress in order to succeed. I have already considered how Wikoff attempted to play upon an underlying anxiety about how to define a still-emerging and distinctively American culture by implying that an enthusiastic reception for Elssler would somehow demonstrate Americans' refinement and ability to appreciate European art, but do so in a way that would set the nation above and apart from Europe. The "Memoir" continued on this

[106] New York *Herald*, August 14, 1840.

theme, recounting how she supposedly "had been told in Europe that the Yankees were a people who had no dancing in their souls, and that their appreciation of Terpsichorean excellence went not beyond the 'breakdowns of Virginia.'" The "Memoir" also tied the issue of American morals to their reputedly unsophisticated tastes, recounting that,

> The French papers warned her that she would receive no favor here: our notions they said were so prudish that anything like an abbreviated garment would be visited with national wrath; - and as in the Cracovienne, and some other dances … aught approaching a free use of her limbs would be a signal for the horror-stricken burghers to leave the Theatre and pass an ordinance requiring her to quit the country, under penalty of fine and imprisonment.[107]

Such passages were, of course, calculated to spur audiences to attend Elssler's performances in order to demonstrate their sophistication, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that they may to some extent also reflect Wikoff's honest fears about the financial prospects that awaited her in the United States. It is worth remembering that he would later blame his association with Elssler for tainting his reputation.

The appeal to Americans to demonstrate their civility and refinement extended not only to their theatrical tastes, but to the larger issues of the level of civilization that one could expect to encounter in the New World. In the "Letters and Journal", "Fanny" records that she had been told to expect the worst. "I am positively assured by those who have been there, that I shall never be paid, take what precaution what I may; that my dressing-room will be regularly robbed; that there is no safety in the hotels, nor redress in the law, nor justice in the land; that I shall be hissed if I dare shew my legs; and that my private life will be invaded and violated by a press that transcends in scurrility and lawlessness all example or description."[108] Coming from the pen

[107] "Memoir", 32-3.
[108] "Letters and Journal", 145.

of Wikoff, who was continually feeding details of Elssler's activities and whereabouts to Bennett, there is more than a little irony in the last fear expressed here. All the same, this passage is useful for succinctly demonstrating how Wikoff tied in the narrower cultural and moral concerns Elssler faced with far larger issues about how American law and society (or the lack thereof) was perceived abroad. Luckily, Elssler's fears had been proved groundless; in the "Letter and Journal" "Fanny" reports that, "I was greatly diverted at the crowd and bustle, and very much flattered, you may be sure, to find that my arrival was making a great sensation, even down to those matter-of-fact creatures, the custom-house officers, who treated all my parcels as sacred property, when I expected just the contrary from the much-talked-of national curiosity."[109]

Given Wikoff's later contribution to the eruption of the Astor Place Riot, which was tied up with the xenophobic sentiments of the era, his appeals to American patriotism as a means of promoting a foreign dancer may seem odd as well as disingenuous. However, there was one other very important aspect to Elssler's public image: she was Austrian, and to many Americans that was merely a synonym for "German". The *Herald* reflected the romantic associations that her ethnicity carried with it when it informed its readers that the recent arrival "is a German, and is imbued with all the romance and mysticism of her race."[110] Contemporary historians viewed the Germans as a race especially strong in their sympathy with American ideals, believing, in a sense, "that the essential libertarian gene was Teutonic."[111] The contributions of individuals such as Baron von Steuben to the Revolution were fondly remembered, while recollections of the rapacious Hessian mercenaries who had fought for the Crown in the same conflict were conveniently downplayed. Furthermore, the Germanic roots of the English language allowed

[109] Ibid., 169.
[110] New York *Herald*, May 7, 1840.
[111] Levin, 74.

this "patriotic property"[112] to be celebrated in a context farther removed from its immediate origin in Britain, about whom public sentiment remained ambivalent at best and downright hostile at worst. All the same, nativist sentiment still occasionally reared its ugly head in the course of Elssler's tour, as evidenced by a *Herald* article of August 26, 1840, which recounts the efforts of a group of German-Americans to serenade her. Mindful of earlier violent incidents and explaining that "it would be a lasting source of regret to her should any tumult or any unpleasant consequences ensue," Elssler felt compelled to decline their offer.[113]

Whatever particular national chord Wikoff might wish to strike in order to keep Elssler in the public eye, he retained throughout a particular flair for the dramatic. Somewhat surprisingly, given their home region's historic attitude towards the theatre, this too found an echo in the works of the New England historians. As Levin notes, writers such as Prescott and Parkman "gave their individual histories a dramatic structure. History was moral drama."[114] This description is also apt for the biography of Elssler promoted (and partially created) by Wikoff. He sought to cast Elssler as the heroine of a series of romantic episodes, which not coincidentally often involved her with famous European personages. Bennett's *Herald* articles would repeat some of these rumors, but it was the "Memoir" that provides the most conspicuous example of this dramatization of Elssler's life.

Perhaps one of the most persistent rumors fed by the "Memoir" was Elssler's supposed connection to the Duke of Reichstadt, son of the Emperor Napoleon. The heir to the titanic figure of the Romantic era had spent much of his short life in Vienna, dying young from consumption and becoming a martyr to those who looked back fondly upon the Napoleonic era. Rumors stretching back to the mid-1830s had it that there was a romantic connection between

[112] Ibid., 81.
[113] New York *Herald*, August 26, 1840.
[114] Levin, 20.

Elssler and the Duke, and that his love for her had caused him such distress that it had contributed to the illness that had caused his death.[115] The rumors were utter nonsense, but they were also persistent, and were incorporated into the "Memoir" when it was published in 1840. Although the Duke's tragic end was not explicitly recounted in this version, the "Memoir" did say that "the fascinations of Mademoiselle Elssler took such entire possession of his faculties, that it was said his health suffered from the effect of his passion. Under these painful circumstances our heroine resolved to withdraw herself from Vienna."[116] As a final note on this subject, it bears mention that, whether or not Wikoff was responsible for keeping the rumor about the Duke alive, any interest it generated may have been counterbalanced by the moral lesson that others drew from the Duke's fate. A pamphlet from 1841 by "Peter Pindar" (which is in fact a recycling of earlier material[117]) retells the Reichstadt story, but in this version the Duke's love for Elssler proves to be the fatal opening that the devious Metternich, the arch-conservative Austrian architect of post-Napoleonic Europe, uses to bring about the virtuous young man's downfall, and with it the hopes of the revolutionary era. Such factual liberties may be ludicrous, but they prove that the romanticization of Elssler's biography could be used against her as well as in her favor.

If doomed love characterized one of Elssler's supposed adventures amongst the rich and powerful of Europe, another tale told in the "Memoir" deals with romantic issues of a very different sort, and manages to once again place her in line with the stricter sort of morality that Wikoff seems to have feared would dominate the mindset of her potential American audiences. The anecdote is surely fictional, displaying the qualities – and believability - of a fairy tale. The story recounts how "A Crowned Head found its royal heart captured by the captivating

[115] Guest, 57-8.
[116] "Memoir", 21.
[117] Delarue, *Fanny Elssler in America*, 120.

Fanny."[118] This anonymous king proceeds to call Elssler before him, but she shrewdly perceives his dishonorable intent and manages to frustrate his designs by sending first her sister Therese and then her father, claiming ignorance as to which particular Elssler the king desires to see. Finally unable to avoid the royal summons, Elssler manages to arrange for the queen to appear at the moment of her meeting with the king, shaming him back into fidelity and earning both his praise and a costly ring, which "may be seen on her finger flashing through the theatre on any night when she dances."[119]

This miniature drama functions in a number of ways, all of them calculated to appeal to American audiences. To begin with, it reinforces a common American view that casts European royalty in a negative light and thereby counters a view, expressed by none other than Samuel B. Morse, that ballerinas were "the lowest instruments of vice from the sinks of monarchial corruption," come to infect upright Americans.[120] Moreover, in the context of the pamphlet these supposed incidents from Elssler's biography are given as the background to a narrative that sees her following her destiny to America. There is therefore an implicit and self-congratulatory contrast between the lecherous and despotic behavior of the unnamed king with the virtue found in a democratic society. Viewing the story in the context of both the pamphlet and Elssler's reputation reveals another of its functions: it counterbalances any questions about her moral character that might arise from her rumored connection with the Duke of Reichstadt. If Elssler could resist the express command of a king, it seems to imply, then there need be no fear of impropriety in her relationship with the Duke, who was a far more sympathetic figure but nevertheless still a European nobleman. As a side note, it is worth considering the fact that

[118] "Memoir", 26.
[119] Ibid., 31.
[120] Martin, 100.

stories about praise lavished on Fanny by prominent American politicians such as Van Buren or John Quincy Adams, whether true or not, conveniently sidestepped this difficulty.

The "Memoir" features one more dramatic tale that seems clearly to be both fabricated and calculated to make her more appealing to an American audience. This particular story takes on the characteristics of a temperance melodrama, which is actually somewhat apt given Elssler's support for temperance organizations during the course of her tour. One of the letters from Wikoff to Bennett that the latter published in 1844 contains the following request: "May I ask you to observe the paragraph in the Philadelphia paper about Mdlle E---, it is rather amusing, she has been elected a member of the Temperance Society here, and she has asked for a book, with the authority of the society, to make collections of her friends for the good of the cause. She has done this in Paris frequently for the poor."[121] Bennett duly printed a notice of this event in the January 14, 1842 issue of the *Herald*. As in the case of her contribution to the Bunker Hill Monument, there is no reason to suppose that Elssler was insincere in her charitable activities and support for the cause of temperance.[122] However, Wikoff would clearly miss no chance to ensure that the public knew of such activities, thereby aligning Elssler more closely with the forces of morality that he seems to have thought capable of ruining her professional prospects if sufficiently provoked.

The pro-temperance message of the story in the "Memoir" may have reflected Elssler's real-life sentiments, but the tale that it unfolds is pure fantasy. In it, Elssler happens to be walking alone through the streets of Berlin when "the low sob of a female [strikes] her ear." She investigates and finds a wretched woman whose husband's "intemperance had transformed from

[121] New York *Herald*, May 11, 1844.
[122] Wikoff was another story; the Princeton archives contain a letter to his friend Charles Hendrickson, dated May 12, 1839, which opens with him apologizing for not writing sooner and offering a nasty hangover as his excuse.

a man to a brute."[123] The woman also turns out to have a baby, and the combined effects of the recent birth and her husband's neglect has rendered the woman incapable of getting out of bed. The tension suddenly increases when the drunken husband returns; Elssler manages to hide in the shadows in the nick of time. The husband breaks a chair while attempting to sit down, and his anger turns into fury when his wife is unable to rise from her bed to find him another. At the moment he is about to strike his wife, Elssler emerges from her dark corner "and [stands] before the monster like an accusing angel."[124] The husband's shock allows Elssler to escape with the woman and baby, leaving the drunkard to die a quick and convenient death. The story ends by claiming that the mother and her child were still being supported financially by the gracious Elssler.

Unfortunately for Elssler, the glowing notices of her character that appeared in the "Memoir" and other promotional materials were not enough to quiet the hostility and moral qualms aroused by her runaway success. These reached a crescendo at the same time that her physical well-being began to noticeably deteriorate. Beginning to show the strain of the continuous traveling and performing over the summer of 1841, Elssler retired to Coney Island to rest and regain some of her strength, only to become embroiled in further scandal when respectable Philadelphians vacationing at her hotel objected to her presence on the grounds that she and Wikoff occupied adjoined rooms.[125] By December 1841 her exhaustion had become evident in her performances; Bennett opined (with apparently genuine concern, for once) that

> it is not possible that any ordinary constitution can surmount, untouched, the severe labor she has undergone during the last two years, in the midst of a hot and burning climate. … The consequence of this over-exertion is now becoming

[123] "Memoir", 23.
[124] Ibid., 24.
[125] Delarue, *Fanny Elssler in America*, 6.

> visible.- Fanny is pale and emaciated to what she was a few years ago, and unless she retires from the stage, and recruits her strength, for six months or a year, she will soon become an elegant wreck – a classic ruin.[126]

Elssler managed to rally her strength for a return to Havana, during which time, notes Guest, the fickle Marti dropped her entirely, leaving her to supposedly function as her own manager. Regardless of who exactly was doing the managing, the engagement proved successful even without Marti, and she departed Cuba after a lavish send-off from her hordes of admirers.[127]

After the reconciliation between Bennett and Elssler had been effected in the summer of 1841, the *Herald*'s coverage of her, while still frequent, fell off somewhat in terms of depth and served primarily to report on her movements. It would seem that the first year of Elssler's tour had generated enough publicity (and controversy) to maintain momentum until she was ready to leave. Indeed, Elssler's growing exhaustion in this second half of the tour probably ensured that she would avoid the public eye whenever possible rather than seek it. Bennett was nevertheless ready to supply a number of extensive and amusing anecdotes about her progress, such as a story about a one-night stand in Providence in which Edwin Forrest called off his benefit night in order to allow Elssler to perform. The ad hoc cadre of fiddlers thrown together for the event proved unable to keep up with Elssler, and her servant Charles was supposedly driven to shoo them out of the pit and assume all musical duties for the evening himself.

Not until January of 1842 did Bennett provide Elssler with some coverage that did more than detail her latest whereabouts and earnings. Back in New York but still not feeling fully capable of performing, Elssler had missed two performances, causing both considerable disappointment and a financial pinch at the Park. When Elssler agreed to give an extra performance as compensation, someone tipped off Bennett that the playbills printed for the

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[126] New York *Herald*, December 18, 1841.
[127] Guest, 182-3.

evening featured "the announcement merely of Mlle. Elssler's appearance, without designating the actual reason, namely, on the occasion of Mr. Simpson's benefit."[128] Elssler was angry, as this gave the impression that she would be getting paid for a benefit performance she was actually undertaking for someone else's good. Volleys of "cards" followed in the pages of the *Herald* as the Park management and Elssler sought a hearing for their respective versions of events; Simpson responded that the evening was meant for the management in general rather than him specifically, while Elssler sent a second card questioning the manager's accounting for the estimated loss incurred as a result of her illness. The squabble ultimately was left unresolved as Elssler moved on to another city, but the incident serves as a particularly clear illustration of the leverage the *Herald* could give her and Wikoff, even after the tensions that had marred their relationship with Bennett. Wikoff's hand seems fairly evident in this matter, and when it is considered in the wider context of his career it seems to foreshadow a far more fateful exchange of cards in the future, an exchange in which he would be implicated and would result in tragedy.

After a second long engagement in Havana, Elssler was more than ready to return to Europe, and the *Herald* gave her farewell engagement in New York one last round of favorable publicity. "Fanny seems to possess a perpetual novelty – an everlasting freshness – which nothing can diminish," raved the article reporting on her opening night.[129] The day before she departed for England, Bennett printed one final encomium:

> The 'divine' Fanny Elssler has danced her last amongst us for some time to come, at least. She has realised $100,000 in two years, and invested the whole in American stocks. She has delighted and enraptured every body that has seen her. All regret she is leaving us – all desire that she may speedily return; and she bears with her the best wishes of all who know her, that her future career,

[128] New York *Herald*, January 3, 1842.
[129] Ibid., June 9, 1842.

> either in this or other lands, may be as perfectly fraught with unalloyed happiness as it is possible that the lot of any mortal in this life can be. Since the close of her last truly brilliant engagement at the Park, she has been spending a few days with a circle of wealthy friends in Philadelphia, and settling her various business matters. She leaves us for "merrie England" to-morrow, by the steam packet, and in parting from her, we can only say, in the language of the gifted Praed – "The joy and the dance are all over --/ Good bye to thee, Fanny, good bye![130]

Thus ended a two-year partnership that, despite a brief hiccup, had resulted in considerable benefits for everyone involved. Bennett and his penny press peers traded heavily on interest in celebrities, and by championing Elssler he had backed one of the biggest non-political celebrities in recent memory, boosting his circulation and gaining the opportunity to pose as a champion of both fine art in general and a beautiful and virtuous *artiste* in particular. Elssler had reaped thunderous and ongoing acclaim as well as piles of money. Wikoff had made his mark on the American theatrical scene.

[130] Ibid., July 15, 1842.

Chapter 3: Later Life, 1842-1884

The final tally of Elssler's tour dates and earnings is impressive. Unfortunately, the immensely successful venture had an unhappy epilogue. Sometime in late 1842, an irreparable breach ruptured the professional and personal ties between Wikoff and Elssler. Accounts of the break gave two different causes. Bennett, who seems to have tired of Wikoff and was soon embroiled in a vicious print war with his former associate, published a letter in which Wikoff referred to the spat with Elssler and chuckled that, "Fanny, the stupid, always thought I would marry her. I refused plump on arriving in London."[131] Romantic discord may have played its role, but the more plausible cause is that Elssler thought Wikoff was cheating her out of her American earnings. Ivor Guest notes that Wikoff made a sudden trip to Berlin in September 1842 when he learned that Elssler's earnings had been transferred there from the Philadelphia bank in which she had deposited them.[132] She apparently suspected that he had been skimming some of this money from her account, and although one of the letters Bennett published included an explanation from Wikoff about some apparent irregularities at the Philadelphia firm,[133] there does not seem to be any evidence that the ex-impresario engaged in any wrongdoing himself. Duncan Crow finds further circumstantial evidence to vindicate Wikoff in the fact that Elssler would later accuse the scrupulously honest George Grote of mishandling her funds; if true, this would provide further support for the view of Elssler as a talented artist with a limited acumen for the business side of her affairs.[134] Innocent or guilty, Wikoff complained to Bennett that Elssler's treatment of him was "d---d bad – nothing can be worse", and if his indignation was

[131] New York *Herald*, May 11, 1844.
[132] Guest, 188-93.
[133] New York *Herald*, May 11, 1844.
[134] Crow, 80.

indeed righteous it might help to explain his disparaging reference to her as "stupid" and the subsequent remorse he expressed for employing such harsh language in regard to her.[135]

Whatever the truth about its underlying causes, Wikoff's breach with Elssler was never repaired. However, anything this unfortunate incident might have produced in terms of flaring tempers and bitter controversy was soon dwarfed by another personal falling-out between Wikoff and Bennett. To understand the roots of this conflict, it is necessary to examine in more detail the inception of Wikoff's own foray into media ownership.

After breaking with Elssler over her financial suspicions, Wikoff's movements are somewhat indistinct. What is certain is that he wrote a number of letters throughout the course of 1843, trying to determine what exactly had gone wrong between him and Elssler. Even after their acrimonious separation, he continued to attempt to ride the wave of publicity he had helped generate for her. By the end of the year, he had written the first installment of the "Letters and Journal of Fanny Elssler," which was subsequently published in *Fraser's* beginning in December 1843 and repudiated by Elssler in a letter of February 15, 1844.[136] Evidently he decided that the response to these letters was favorable enough that he would continue to use Elssler's name to bolster his own fortunes, and when he returned to the United States soon after, he seems to have hit upon an incredibly risky but potentially very profitable strategy to get his new paper off the ground.

The paper was *The Republic*. Its price (two cents) and format alone suggested a certain indebtedness to the example set by publications like the *Sun* and the *Herald*. Wikoff briefly secured the prominent Democratic editor Duff Green, a veteran, rabidly pro-slavery editor who had put his talents and prominence to use in a semi-official capacity with the Jackson

[135] New York *Herald*, May 11, 1844.
[136] Delarue, 32.

administration.[137] An early issue prominently featured the paper's statement of purpose on its front page:

> One purpose is to establish a medium of communication between the Democratic party of the United States, and the advocate of liberal principles in Europe; to vindicate the democratic institutions of this country against erroneous opinions abroad, and counteract the intrigues and machinations of professing friends and open enemies at home. In short, "The Republic" will be a free press.

The paper would oppose the tariff, abolitionism, and a National Bank, amongst other causes. Intriguingly, the statement of purpose also made note that, "The co-operation of able contributors in England and on the Continent has been secured, and arrangements are in progress, whereby the columns of "The Republic" will be enriched with a greater variety of useful and interesting foreign correspondence, than has appeared in any other paper published in the United States."[138] The emphasis on international coverage seems quintessentially Wikoffian, recalling the passage in his *Reminiscences* where had had praised the European press; *The Republic* represented an attempt to bring some of the positive elements of that press into the format of the penny publications.

One of the major factors in *The Republic*'s brief success was its scoop of the explosion on the *USS Princeton* in February 1844 that killed the Secretary of State, Secretary of War, and the father of President John Tyler's fiancée[139]. Wikoff, however, seems to have found another, riskier, but potentially far more lucrative way to generate interest in the paper: going after James Gordon Bennett. He had already determined that there was a strong residual interest in matters pertaining to Elssler, so a peek behind the scenes of her tour to reveal some of the scandalous

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[137] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 282.
[138] *The Republic*, February 12, 1844.
[139] Fredrick Hudson, *Journalism in the United States, From 1690 to 1872* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1873), 577.

machinations that had occurred offstage would seem to guarantee even more interest and higher sales. He also undoubtedly harbored a sense of grievance against Bennett, which, regardless of how well-founded it might have been or how much serious thought Wikoff might have given it prior to establishing a rival paper, must have been an added impetus to go after the powerful editor. Most of all, attacking rivals in the newspaper trade often proved a surprisingly sound business move. Horace Greeley had started his New York *Tribune* in 1841, just in time to drum up some publicity by condemning Fanny Elssler as she prepared for a second summer at the Park.[140] Bennett and the owners of the *Sun* soon perceived a threat from the new, Whig-backed penny paper and ganged up on Greeley. To their surprise, "the rivals found that the mass market expanded to make room for all of them."[141]

Bennett was used to both personal attacks and those aimed at his paper in general. Indeed, he had faced one of his most serious challenges in 1840, when he was most fully invested in promoting the Elssler tour. On the very day of Elssler's debut, he had published a lengthy screed against Catholicism that had managed so to infuriate the Church that it allied with the virulently anti-Catholic nativists who also had grievances against Bennett. Led by Bennett's former boss and current competitor James Watson Webb of the *Courier & Enquirer*, "almost every newspaper in the city (even the sensational *Sun*) and many out-of-town papers" had united to savage the *Herald* in their columns and call for a boycott by readers and advertisers.[142] This had the potential to spell disaster not only for Bennett but possibly for Elssler and Wikoff as well. As it turned out, Bennett won a clear victory, seeing only a slight drop in circulation. Still, he moderated his tone when speaking of religious matters in the future. Having been closely

[140] Guest, 170.
[141] Huntzicker, 41.
[142] Crouthamel, 35-6.

involved with the *Herald* at this time, Wikoff would have remembered this incident very clearly, and may have hoped to incite a similar fracas in order to draw attention to *The Republic*.

Thus it was that Wikoff's editor (now John Ryan, who had already replaced Green as of mid-April 1844) began publishing letters from him containing the allegations about blackmail extorted by Bennett from Elssler. Wikoff continued in this vein for some time, expanding his allegations to include charges that while in London after Elsser's return, the Bennetts

> had repeatedly called on her, and their visits were most anxiously avoided by Mdlle. Elssler, so far as her womanish terror of this man's well-known malignity allowed; but their object was to obtain from her, boxes at the Italian Opera, and though they were selling at six and seven guineas, and for which Mlle. Elssler was obliged to make compensation, they exacted them from her every night of their stay in London. They were very anxious to associate with Mlle. Elssler, and begged her to dine with them at their hotel, but she declined pointedly the *honor*.[143]

The letter went on to make allegations regarding Bennett's attempt to be accepted into William Charles Macready's social circle. Bennett had supposedly written to his staff in New York ordering them to "puff Macready!", only to pull an about-face when the actor failed to include Bennett's name on the guest list for a party he was hosting. All these charges, claimed Wikoff, could be verified by a number of sources, particularly Bennett's bookkeeper at the time of the alleged blackmail.

Bennett responded almost immediately to Wikoff's initial attack, starting up a steady and ominous drumbeat of cryptic warnings about forthcoming revelations that would destroy his former friend's public standing. He began rummaging through his letters, preparing to publish those which had come from Wikoff, an undertaking which apparently took almost the entire

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[143] *The Republic*, April 15, 1844.

second half of April to complete. In the meantime, he began to respond to each of the charges laid out in the *Republic* letter. The allegation that he and Mrs. Bennett had tried to arrange a dinner with Elssler, for example, was untrue; there had been such an attempt, but it was Wikoff – who according to Bennett had been described at the time as "a mean man" by Elssler - who had made it and was rebuffed. The Bennetts were innocent, as well, of the charges regarding Opera tickets: Elssler had sent them without any prior request, and Wikoff had just as frequently availed himself of them. In fact, it was on one of these occasions that he had met Duff Green. Finally, Bennett answered the Macready charges with a two-column reply claiming that it was Wikoff who had pestered him for an introduction to Macready. Bennett said that he and Macready had had a pleasant but uneventful meeting, and that it was Wikoff who had become furious when he was not subsequently invited to the actor's soiree and had made mutterings about his connection with Charles Dickens, who was unpopular in America. This connection, said Bennett, was something which "might, if it were known, affect Mr. Macready's success in the United States – thus evidently suggesting an attack on that gentleman."[144]

Wikoff's next letter to the *Republic* continued to escalate the conflict. He stated that, starting in London in the summer of 1843, he had begun trying to avoid Bennett, citing the disapproval of his friends and a number of embarrassing incidents in which the editor had been involved. Wikoff's account of his first meeting with Bennett indicates that he was already aware that the newspaperman evoked visceral reactions of disgust from individuals such as Hone and Whitman. What is intriguing about this letter, if it is accurate, is the way he portrays himself as only gradually having been brought to an awareness of just how widely disliked his friend really was. He went on to dismiss as lies practically all of Bennett's disavowals. Bennett reprinted this letter in the *Herald* in order to continue his part of the cycle of accusation and counter-

[144] New York *Herald*, April 19, 1844.

accusation, and his response ended by implying that Wikoff, who "was merely a sort of excrescence on the outer edges of fashionable society, and tolerated because of his harmlessness and occasional good nature," had leeched off Elssler on her two-year tour.[145]

The sneers at Wikoff and Elssler's relationship would continue, becoming sharper and more potentially damaging to the dancer as well as the impresario in the process. Bennett claimed Elssler had complained of losing some $20,000 and implied that Wikoff was responsible. He also claimed that Wikoff had picked a fight with Elssler in order to avoid having to answer questions about either the missing money or the possibility of marriage between the two. In one of his more accurate and perceptive thrusts, he noted that, "Up to the very moment we left London, last summer, [Wikoff] pretended friendship and devotion to our interest, and it was not until after his acquaintance with Duff Green … when they began to talk and cast about for the best mode of starting a new paper in New York, that this defamation and belying … commenced."[146] A final and particularly nasty attack on the 27th made sneering reference to "the extraordinary efforts made by Chevalier Wikoff in completing and finishing the spiritual, philosophical, Platonic education of Fanny Elssler … who received the first elements of her education from a distinguished German statesman."[147] The reference was to Friedrich von Gentz, who had indeed been a "distinguished German statesman" as well as one of Elssler's earliest lovers.[148] Bennett had once again managed to deploy an old rumor against Elssler, this time with considerably more accuracy.

April 30, 1844, saw the beginning of the publication of Wikoff's old letters in the *Herald*. In the context of Wikoff and Bennett's relations, they represented a bid on the latter's behalf to

[145] Ibid., April 25, 1844.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid., April 27, 1844.
[148] Guest, 27.

embarrass his upstart rival in a very public way. As a record of the earlier publicity campaign of 1840-2, they are a gold mine – with, of course, the proviso that they represent a carefully edited and one-sided record meant to reflect favorably on Bennett. Whatever flaws they might have as a source, however, they are definitely Wikoff's, as he acknowledged their authenticity in yet another of his long and indignant letters to *The Republic*.

The Henry Wikoff who emerges in these letters is, depending on one's point of view, either a diligent promoter of both his and Elssler's interests or an insufferable nag with pretensions to gentility. Bennett managed to find enough letters to give the impression that Wikoff backstabbed acquaintances, was continually begging or borrowing money from others, and constantly wanted Bennett's time and attention for frivolous matters. However, the letters also contain no smoking gun that gives the lie to Wikoff's claims of blackmail, and some of the correspondence hardly seems to live up to the promise of scandalous revelations that accompanied its publication. What it does show unambiguously is an impresario heavily involved in the minutiae of promoting his talented charge: Wikoff writes praising Bennett's stories and suggesting new ones, details the course of contract negotiations, and requests puffs for individuals and places favorable to Elssler and attacks on those who are not.

Wikoff certainly had no lack of ideas for articles to keep alive Elsslermania. He wrote to Bennett on June 2, 1840, to describe Elssler's performance that night, praising "her execution of the rarest difficulties of her exquisite act", her "ravishing grace", and "the buoyant elasticity of her undulations through the air." Then he noted that "I have written to you only to direct your attention to this greatest endentation [sic] yet made in New York."[149] The implication seems to be that Wikoff's rather florid description was meant for possible publication. He would continue to provide material, such as a notice to Bennett on November 30, 1840 that he was planning a

[149] New York *Herald*, April 30, 1844.

"*grand* article I wish to publish before Fanny goes south," and that in the meantime he would be grateful if the *Herald* would make a mention of the fact that Elssler had recently had a locomotive named for her in Pennsylvania, news which "will be an anecdote for European circulation."[150] When the southern tour commenced, Wikoff continued requesting a friendly word in the *Herald* for Elssler's performances, as well as the hotel in Charleston at which they had stayed.

When Bennett turned on Elssler, Wikoff penned a long letter, dated June 3, 1841 from Philadelphia, that potentially points to the origin of the blackmail allegations. Coincidentally, this letter was published in the *Herald* on May 2, 1844, the very same day that another letter from Wikoff appeared in *The Republic* in which he mentioned this letter's existence and challenged Bennett: "*Let him publish this letter* along with the rest of my correspondence, written in Philadelphia, June, 1841."[151] The letter from 1841 is intriguing for a number of reasons. First, its date - coming months after Bennett had begun printing negative notices about Elssler - suggests that, while Wikoff felt the *Herald*'s support was crucial for the upcoming return engagement in New York, he was willing to put Bennett aside somewhat when he toured outside the range of the *Herald*'s strongest influence. He was constantly telling Bennett that the *Herald* was the only American newspaper widely circulated in Europe and was therefore the best way to reassure Elssler's family and friends that she was being greeted enthusiastically and treated well, but apparently the *Herald* was either hard to keep up with in the South and West or it was not so important for both Elssler's personal and publicity purposes when she wandered from the East Coast. These two possible factors were related – after all, there was no need to cultivate Bennett if audiences far from New York never read his puffs.

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[150] Ibid., May 15, 1844.
[151] *The Republic*, May 2, 1844.

Second, the letter foreshadows Wikoff's claim to have tacitly disavowed Bennett in London after the tour. He complains in the letter to be "taunted and laughed at by these d---d people, who ask, 'What do you think of your friend Bennett now?'"[152] If true, this suggests that Wikoff's alliance with Bennett was widely known, and the social stigma of associating with the hated editor would have compounded the disapproval Wikoff claimed to have suffered because of his association with Elssler. It also points up the obsequiousness of much of the letter's language, which adds a new note of pleading to the frequent flattery with which Wikoff laced his letters to Bennett. Bennett surely expected his readers to notice this, and to judge his opponent accordingly. Ironically, Wikoff's near-groveling in the letter may actually strengthen his claim to have been responding to blackmail, since obsequiousness rather than outrage would be essential in order to keep ensuring the stream of good publicity for Elssler from the *Herald*.

According to Wikoff's letter of May 2 to *The Republic*, he and Elssler had attempted to effect a reconciliation with Bennett through a series of lavish presents. "Soon after" the letter of June 3, 1841, he said,

> Mlle. Elssler arrived in New York, when she bought the silver service and jewels I have mentioned, and sent them by a party who is willing to come forward, to his house, with a note written by me, in Mlle. Elssler's name, and copied by her. They were greedily accepted by himself and his wife, and the effect was *immediate*; for on June 8th there appeared in the *Herald* a very *amiable* notice of her return to New York, and on the succeeding day, June 9th, followed a most complimentary puff, which he continued through her whole engagement at the Park, and as I said before, up to her departure from this

[152] New York *Herald*, May 15, 1844.

> country, being regularly paid for them in presents, many of which I have now forgotten.[153]

Bennett had conveniently had a son a month ago, and the gifts were apparently given as a congratulatory present in honor of the happy occasion. Bennett would cite this fact, along with a note from Elssler in which she told him she was "so strongly desirous to express to you my sincere sympathy in your happiness, at the same time praying you to accept from me this little *Souvenir*."[154] There may be a slight discrepancy here, as Wikoff makes reference to an item on the 8th and a larger piece printed on the 9th, which seems like a rather rapid response to Elssler's gift.

The elements of the Bennett-Wikoff controversy can be taken for bits of amusing but very old and ultimately irrelevant gossip. However, the newspaper war that these two men waged reveals a number of important aspects of the larger endeavor which Wikoff undertook when he (figuratively) signed on as Fanny Elssler's impresario and shadow publicist. To begin with, the business of drumming up publicity for someone such as Elssler in the world of the penny press meant that in order to tap into that medium's large potential audience, her agent would have to make some very narrow deals with some volatile individuals – or rather one particularly volatile individual, since Wikoff seems to have made the decision to bet on Bennett's wide-ranging influence alone rather than make an attempt to enlist a more broadly-based group of editors. Gaining the acceptance of New York's Upper Ten meant making Elssler visible in American society, but gaining the acceptance of someone like Bennett might well mean not-so-tacit bribery. Bennett may not have explicitly demanded such gifts as he eventually received under Elssler's name, but he ultimately never provided a satisfactory explanation for his

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[153] *The Republic*, May 2, 1844.
[154] New York *Herald*, June 9, 1841.

sudden willingness to publish deeply unfavorable opinions and gossip about a woman for whom he had had almost nothing but praise previously. He claimed to have been disgusted with some of the excesses of audiences' displays of affection for Elssler – for which he blamed Wikoff – but it cannot be denied that his sudden resumption of positive notices for her coincided exactly with his acknowledged receipt of her gifts, regardless of their purpose.

The corollary to this conclusion about the importance of cultivating very specific and potentially very dangerous individuals with the means to promote one's given cause is that such a partnership, once established, did not necessarily ensure absolute control of the message. Wikoff's requests for puffs or attacks on other publications seem to have grown even more frequent *after* Elssler's gifts had patched things up with Bennett, and yet half the time it seems that the editor paid him little heed. Amongst other examples, a request for an attack on the *Sun* - which had apparently joined in the general trend toward publishing unfavorable items about Elssler in the summer of 1841 - was carried out at Wikoff's request, and in January of 1842 he was able to use the *Herald* as a means to convey Elssler's side of the contract disputes with the Park management and thereby put pressure on them for a favorable resolution. However, a lengthy encomium of Christopher Hughes was never published, and at least one letter written while Bennett had turned against Elssler featured Wikoff engaging in some undignified begging to be allowed to print his projected articles on her as advertisements. Wikoff seems not to have intended to ever get mixed up again in such an undertaking, but it is worth speculating whether his experiences with Bennett prompted him to try to establish his own newspaper, and later to buy his own magazine. His advocacy for Edwin Forrest in that magazine, as well as the private publication in 1863 of a complimentary biography of Genevieve Ward, suggests that he had

realized that any publicity activities conducted for his friends were best done through a medium that he could control much more closely than the sensational popular press.

A sort of postscript to Wikoff's experience with Bennett can be seen in P.T. Barnum's management of Jenny Lind's 1850-1 tour of the United States and Cuba. Barnum had had an adversarial relationship with Bennett since the 1830s, when the showman's perpetration of a number of high-profile hoaxes had caused the temporarily credulous editor some embarrassment. The conflict between the two would wax and wane over the years, but in 1850 Barnum seemed dead-set on receiving good notices in the *Herald.* A short letter of April 16, 1850 makes note of some of the arrangements Barnum had made vis-à-vis Lind, ending with a coy suggestion that, "If any of the above is found of *public* interest sufficient to get in tomorrow's *Herald*, I shall feel much obliged, as I wish to send it in print across the Atlantic tomorrow."[155] A letter from September of the same year that is probably addressed to *Sun* editor Moses Beach contains a sort of apology for Barnum's apparent failure to induce Lind to visit the paper's offices, as "when she found your office was *so near* the *Herald*, she backed out through *fear* of the immense crowd waiting in front of the *Herald* office."[156]

Barnum was aware of Wikoff's publicity efforts on Elssler's behalf, but whether he drew any conclusions directly from that venture is unclear. Nevertheless, letters such as these suggest a savvier understanding of the popular press and its potential to further his ends. Like Wikoff, Barnum's provision of juicy gossip about the Bennetts to the editors of the *Sun* suggests an awareness of the importance of good relations with specific editors of the penny press and the potential such relations had for blunting criticism. At the same time, the sheer range of correspondence with different publications, even the hated *Herald*, suggests that Barnum's

[155] P.T. Barnum, *Selected Letters of P.T. Barnum*, ed. A.H. Saxon (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 42.
[156] Ibid., 49.

overall approach to relations with the press was based far less on personal contacts than Wikoff's reliance on his connection to a single powerful editor. Unlike Wikoff, Barnum had owned a newspaper prior to his entry on the New York entertainment scene, and managing the press was an almost daily part of his work.

Viewed in this light, Wikoff's work appears as a sort of precursor to Barnum's far savvier media tactics. The heavy reliance on the good opinion of high society sat uneasily with the wholehearted embrace of a single penny newspaper as Elssler's champion, although both tactics may ultimately have stemmed from the importance Wikoff seemed to accord to personal relationships. By the time Barnum brought Lind to the United States in 1850, the penny press had had another decade to grow and extend its dominance, and although his dealings with individual editors were crucial, his campaign nevertheless evinces a sense of the press as a larger, more impersonal institution that required a much more broad-based approach, a factor which will be considered at the end of this thesis.

Despite the fireworks that resulted from Wikoff's confrontation with Bennett, *The Republic* lasted only a year. However, its failure was not by any means the end of Wikoff's journalistic activities. In September 1845 he scored a signal coup when he managed to talk his way into Louis Napoleon's jail cell at Ham. The future emperor had been imprisoned for launching the second of two failed attempts to overthrow the July Monarchy, and the interview Wikoff conducted gave him a valuable scoop. The series of articles that Wikoff published on Napoleon were turned into a short book, published after the revolution of 1848 and entitled *Napoleon Louis Bonaparte, First President of France*.

Many of the pieces that Wikoff penned on Napoleon first appeared in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, which he had bought from founder John L. Sullivan in the

spring of 1846. It was in the pages of this publication that Wikoff seems to have resumed his unofficial role as Edwin Forrest's promoter, despite the fact that he was abroad for much of the time that he was the owner. After a few months under Wikoff's ownership, the magazine instituted a new gossip column dealing with society doings and theatrical events in particular, and glowing encomia of Forrest's acting prowess began appearing regularly. For the most part, these were harmless puffs. However, there was one article - which can be attributed to Wikoff with a fair degree of certainty[157] and hitherto seems to have been overlooked by both his biographers and by chroniclers of the Forrest-Macready feud in general – that foreshadows the unfortunate role that its author would play in the buildup to the Astor Place Riot.

This article, entitled "American Actors in England", appeared in the September, 1846 issue. It contains in veiled form the accusation that the unseen hand that had directed attacks in the British press against Forrest belonged to none other than William Charles Macready himself, a charge which both Wikoff and Forrest would later state even more plainly and publicly. According to this account, national tensions were the ultimate origin of the feud, while the petty ambitions of a hired scribbler provided the proximate cause. Forrest's second engagement in England, which had begun in March 1845 amidst "a bitter current of national prejudice against America and Americans" because of state debt defaults and rising tensions over claims to the Oregon Territory, had ignited the "narrow jealousies and vulgar prejudices" of the "buzzing insects" that attempted to shape public opinion.[158] The foremost of these notorious insects was none other than *Examiner* critic John Forster (or "*Foster*", as the article mistakenly identified

[157] Beside the facts that he was a friend of Forrest, the owner of the *Democratic Review*, and that he would have been in England at the right time to write the article, Wikoff also had a long-standing relationship with Joseph Bonaparte, brother of Napoleon and former King of Spain. This would account for the otherwise rather superfluous aside in which the article's author mentions, "*En passant*," that the by-then-deceased Bonaparte had expressed "ardent approbation of our countryman's abilities" and compared him to the great Talma.

[158] "American Actors in England," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, September 1846, 188.

him), an individual "whose literary ability is grotesquely united to a low mind, and Jerry-Sneak disposition," and whom talented editor Albany Fonblanque was unfortunately unable or unwilling to control. This "Foster" also held "the doubtful distinction of chief of the c*laque* which lines the benches of any theatre where Mr. Macready plays, and his servile office seems to be to look after the interests, fame, and *profits* of his knowing patron." The article just barely manages to play coy about refuting the implication that Macready directed Forster's attacks, saying only that, "we know not, and care as little, but we are loth to credit the general opinion that an actor of Mr. Macready's position would condescend to engage in his service the rancorous assailant of a foreign rival."[159]

If English critics were willing to throw down the gauntlet to Forrest and his friends over national issues, Wikoff was more than willing to pick it up and attack them head-on over those same issues, in particular the class divide in English society. Critics like Forster may have turned on Forrest because of larger disputes over territory and debts, but there was another, darker force at work. "There is another class, however," the article fulminated, that Mr. Forrest has never pleased, either on or off the stage; and this, the first, *par excellence*, in the realm, her nobility." The "Republican actor" would never bow to their preference for a "soft and *boudoir* tone" onstage, and "his passion frightened, and his pathos choked them," leaving them "horrified at being thus reduced to a human level." Furthermore, Forrest "took no pains in private life to conciliate this influential class … and the indifference of the stiff-necked democrat called down upon him their Olympian frowns." Coming from Wikoff, who had bent over backwards to help both Forrest and Elssler to break into the upper circles of American society, this was more than a bit rich. At any rate, in his article he established a strong contrast between the reactions of the English aristocracy and the "intelligent and respectable middle class" to Forrest's performances,

[159] Ibid., 189.

claiming that the latter "thronged eagerly forward" to see him "and constituted an audience far more discriminating and attentive than the titled nonentities" who declined to come to the theatre out of sheer spite.[160]

As he had done with Fanny Elssler, Wikoff turned Forrest himself into an embodiment of the towering, singular figure whose promising destiny mirrored that of the United States'. However, where Elssler's gender seems to have necessitated some caution, he had no compunction about glorifying the hyper-masculine Forrest. In the same article that contains the early version of Wikoff's accusations against Macready, he refers to Forrest in terms that clearly cast him as a towering figure of his times:

> A becoming harmony exists between the public excellence and private character of our tragedian, which have combined to raise him to the exalted niche he occupies, and over which the nation has gladly allowed its name to be inscribed. This singular identity of the actor with the country which he has twice histrionically represented abroad, gives to the incidents of his career an interest even beyond their natural attraction, and involves in their consideration certain inter-national questions which ought to be approached with caution, and handled with a delicate conscientiousness.[161]

Wikoff's hostility both to England and Macready is surprising in light of the fact that he had been and would remain generally positive about English culture and society for most of his life. Considered in the context of his overall career, the article in the *Democratic Review* might seem a rather surprising reversal. Around the time that the riot at Astor Place occurred, Wikoff became involved in a farcical episode in which the British Foreign Office ostensibly hired him as an agent and gave him regular paychecks but then neglected to give him any further instructions.

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[160] Ibid., 190-1.
[161] Ibid., 187.

He would later claim that this had something to do with the Gamble scandal, and that no lesser entity than the British government was behind his imprisonment and disgrace. Even before this, however, his writings display a surprising hostility to the English aristocracy. The preface to *Napoleon Louis Bonaparte*, dated February, 1849, echoes the charges in the *Democratic Review* article from a few years earlier, lamenting "the complete ascendency of the aristocratic mind of England over the democratic mind of the United States." Furthermore, claims Wikoff, the cultural products of this "aristocratic" mindset are created with the aim of keeping that same aristocracy in power, as the entire basis of English society and political order rests on "the unscrupulous employment of plausible cant, the systematic exercise of the profoundest hypocrisy" in the service of keeping the middle and lower classes down.[162]

A combination of patriotic feeling and honest outrage at the treatment Forrest received in the London press may account for a fair amount of the rancor Wikoff directed at Britain in the years leading up to the riot. The timing of his editorials in the *Democratic Review* and his other Anglophobic writings certainly coincide well with the difficulties Forrest ran into on his second English tour. However, there was another source of national tension between America and Britain, far more personal in nature than territorial or financial disputes, and Wikoff seems to have gotten caught up in this. By the late 1840's, anti-British sentiment had lighted with special intensity on one particular Englishman: Macready's good friend Charles Dickens. This was due to the writer's unfortunate past history with the United States, which coincidentally had started at the same time that Elssler and Wikoff had been touring the country. "Boz" was himself touring America with his wife, and what he found in the young nation did not impress him. One particular incident started off well enough: a lavish ball was thrown for him at the Park Theatre in New York by the same Edmund Simpson who had proved to be a major headache for Wikoff.

[162] Wikoff, *Napoleon Louis Bonaparte*, 14-5, 18.

The event was, in the words of Philip Hone, "the greatest affair in modern times, the tallest compliment ever paid to a little man, the fullest libation ever poured on the altar of the muses."[163] There was only one problem: Simpson announced that he would mount the whole lavish production again, this time at half-price. When Dickens balked and begged off due to illness, Simpson asked for a doctor's testimony, further insulting the writer. This was only one of a string of unpleasant experiences for Dickens, and his *American Notes*, followed by the novel *Martin Chuzzlewitt*, made little attempt to spare Americans' feelings, earning the author the status of persona non grata in the United States.[164] Given their close association, Macready and Dickens felt more than a little trepidation over the possibility that the former's tour might be ruined by Americans' attitude towards the latter.

It is at this point that Wikoff's feud with Bennett reenters the picture. Bennett noted Wikoff's interest in the Forrest-Macready dispute and used the columns of the *Herald* to lay out the allegation that Forrest's friend was goading him on in order to get revenge on Macready and Dickens for snubbing him a few years earlier in London. This move represented a revival of an old (counter)charge that Bennett had first leveled at Wikoff in 1844, and the editor would elaborate on Wikoff's supposed vendetta against Macready in the weeks leading up to the Astor Place Riot. An article published on April 26, 1849 included a letter from a reader exasperated with Bennett's willingness to air Forrest's pronouncements on the feud and then continued on to claim that a perusal of the last letter that Forrest had had published indicated that it was "the notorious Wikoff" who was behind all the trouble. Bennett claimed that

> We have no doubt, indeed, that the whole of the prejudice which has been created in the mind of Mr. Forrest against Mr. Macready has been planted there

[163] Hone, Part II, 117.
[164] Nigel Cliff, *The Shakespeare Riots: Revenge, Drama, and Death in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Random House, 2007), 122.

> at an early day by the officious conversations and flagrant misrepresentations of this same meddlesome Wikoff, who is a perfect adept in the creation of difficulty among friends, and in multiplying quarrels, from which he takes care to keep himself free.[165]

Bennett continued to hammer Wikoff in the press, at one point calling him "a malicious little Iago."[166] Finally, after rowdies in the Astor Place Opera House had disrupted one of Macready's performances (and only two days before the riot itself), Bennett laid out his allegations in full. His tune changed slightly: there had indeed been something of a concerted attack on Forrest, but this was due to the members of Dickens' clique taking out their frustration over their friend's embarrassment in New York, and Forrest had happened to be in England soon after, making him a convenient target on which they could vent all their negative feelings about Americans in general. Wikoff, smarting from Macready's refusal of closer acquaintance, entered the picture at this point and "instilled into Mr. Forrest's ear the poisonous insinuations" that had started the actor on the road towards open confrontation with Macready.[167]

As always, Bennet provided a tidy narrative – and as is often the case with his narratives, not everything about it adds up. It is true that Forrest cited a letter from Wikoff as his primary evidence for a conspiracy, led by Macready, to discredit him. An intriguing additional bit of evidence arises from the infamous incident in which Forrest hissed Macready in Edinburgh on March 2, 1846, which proved to be the start of the open feud between the two. In his diary entry for that day, Macready noted that a friend "came and spoke to me, and told me that the hisser was observed and said to be a Mr. W---, who was in company with Mr. Forrest! The man writes

[165] New York *Herald*, April 26, 1849.
[166] Ibid., May 2, 1849.
[167] Ibid., May 9, 1849.

in the *Journal*, a paper, depreciating me and eulogizing Mr. F---, sent to me from this place."[168] The "Mr. W" referred to may not even be Wikoff – he would probably have been in the United States at this time, making arrangements for his ownership of the *Democratic Review*, and anyways the reference to writing for the *Journal* does not correspond to any known activity of Wikoff's unless it was an obscure letter to an editor. Macready had at any rate decided that Forrest was responsible by the next day. Nevertheless, it is entirely possible that Macready's friend had made a mistake and supposed Wikoff to have been in attendance; if so, it offers a tantalizing suggestion that Wikoff may have had a rather public reputation as a rabid champion of Forrest against opponents such as Macready and would therefore be more open to the sort of allegations that Bennett made against him. However, Macready would later take note of Bennett's allegations and scoff at them:

> Looked at paper – *New York Herald*. *One is as good as another!* An article headed with that disgusting beginning, *Forrest and Macready*. It is really too bad. In it this Bennett turns his dislike to Forrest and his vulgar aversion to me into a concentrated spite against *Wikoff*, charging on him all this Forrest's villainy, and strongly recommending the intermediation of friends to make up this "difference" (!!!) between us! Is it thus these wretches contemplate such open violation of truth, honesty, and every bond that claims respect![169]

One major flaw in Bennett's chronology that Macready did not bother to point out was the fact that John Forster's initial attacks on Forrest had occurred years before Dickens ever set foot on American soil or Wikoff had supposedly attempted to ingratiate himself with Macready.

Bennett's assessment of Wikoff as an inveterate would-be social climber is probably accurate to some degree. Wikoff might want to characterize himself as a "roving diplomatist"

[168] Macready, Vol. II, 326.
[169] Ibid., 422.

and well-connected man of the world a la Christopher Hughes, but the sheer range of the acquaintances whose names he drops in his various books paradoxically seem to throw more clearly into relief the smallness of most of his professional achievements. He ends up seeming desperate to convince the reader that he knew these famous personages far better than he really did. However, in the specific case of Bennett's account of Wikoff's truckling to Macready, one must take into account that it is rendered suspect by one very important fact: Bennett was far guiltier of the very sort of obnoxious behavior and social ambition that he attributed to Wikoff.

The editor of the *Herald* had made no end of enemies by his behavior. More germane to our concerns here is the fact that he possessed both political and social ambitions, the latter of which especially were encouraged by his wife Henrietta, whom he had married while Elssler was in the United States. P.T. Barnum, in an 1851 letter to the proprietors of rival New York penny newspaper the *Sun*, records an incident echoing the allegations that Wikoff had made against Bennett and which the editor subsequently turned against him. Barnum's relationship with Bennett was, as mentioned earlier, a sort of negative image of Wikoff's. The two were fierce enemies for much of their professional lives, with a few periods of temporary alliance (as in the case of the Lind tour) in the pursuit of mutual benefit. It should be noted that in the letter Barnum suggests that the Beaches hold on to the information it contains as potential future blackmail. The letter is nonetheless important for the light it throws on Bennett's personality and the way it may circumstantially lend support to Wikoff's allegations. The Bennetts, wrote Barnum, had been attendees at a banquet given in Havana by one Count Santavenia.

> The old Castilians have *bought* him body and soul, boots and breeches. They have made a most ruinous bargain, *whatever* the price may be that they have given, for his influence is much less than nothing. But you may now depend upon seeing the colum[n]s of the *Herald* devoted to puffing the new Captain-

> General & the old Spanish government, until the liberal and liberty party outbid the Spaniards …
>
> Mrs. Bennett had intended to have given a ball in Havana, but finding too great a prospect of a *sparse* assemblage, she gave it up and must now try and think of some other way of gaining her darling object – viz., admission to the fashionable circles of New York. This is the great desire of both Mr. & Mrs. Bennett, and their chances are about as good as they would be of entering straight into paradise …[170]

Again, in reading these excerpts one must remember to account for Barnum's deep animosity towards Bennett. Still, his description of the Bennett's activities in Havana sounds quite similar to Wikoff's allegations of his blackmailing Elssler, demanding seats for the Opera, and alternately praising and damning Macready on the basis of whether or not he received an invitation to the actor's dinner. The two accounts of Bennett's misbehavior, written years apart by two individuals whose connection to each other was tenuous at best, suggest that perhaps his attempt to turn the tables on Wikoff was indeed motivated more by a desire to cover his own tracks than anything else.

Whatever the truth of Bennett's allegations, there is no doubt that Wikoff was ultimately cited as Forrest's primary source for information on the supposed conspiracy against him. The actor published widely a letter from Wikoff, dated February 9, 1849, in which he laid out the claim that Macready had been behind Forster's attacks. Wikoff detailed his conversations with Albany Fonblanque at the *Examiner*, lamenting that the editor had "found it inconvenient to displace" his opinionated employee. The fact that Forster was "on terms of the closest intimacy with Mr. Macready" suggested two things to Wikoff's mind:

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[170] Barnum, *Selected Letters*, 56-7.

> First, That it was to win the favor of his friend and patron, Mr. Macready, that Forster did his best not only to write down his American rival, but to stir up such opposition as would militate against his (your) success in England. Secondly, That it was any time in the power of Macready, by a look or word, to arrest the foul stream of unmanly abuse that was weekly poured out upon you; for though it was not stated that Mr. Macready would not commit himself, by issuing instructions in so many words, to his friends, to assail you, yet it is clear to me, from all that was said, as it will be to any one, from the circumstances cited, that, if it had pleased Mr. Macready to relieve you from the pertinacious and brutal attacks of the most servile of his friends, that it was entirely within the scope of his known influence to do so.[171]

Wikoff had left the country the same month, and he could not have imagined the gruesome sequel to the dispute he had helped foster. Although his name does not seem to come up in close association with the riot, Forrest's was forever blackened by the events in Astor Place, and any lingering memories of the small but crucial role that Wikoff had played could certainly not have helped his already questionable reputation.

Wikoff's involvement in the Astor Place Riot marked one of his last direct engagements with a theatrically-related event, although he seems to have briefly tried to repeat his success with Elssler. Shortly after arriving in Europe in 1849, he met Jenny Lind, whom Harriet Grote had adopted in the same way she had taken Elssler under her wing. There were rumors that Wikoff was acting as P.T. Barnum's agent in negotiations to bring Lind to America.[172] In fact, Barnum had actually engaged the services of John Hall Wilton, who he recalled had been informed by Lind that "there were four persons anxious to negotiate with her for an American tour," one of whom was the "Chevalier Wyckoff [sic], a person who had conducted a successful

[171] New York *Herald*, May 10, 1849.
[172] Delarue, 38.

speculation some years previously, by visiting America in charge of the celebrated danseuse, Fanny Elssler."[173] The reference is tantalizing but ultimately somewhat difficult to further explore, as there is little other available material on this supposed attempt. Although Wikoff was ostensibly working for the British Foreign Office around this time, the fact that Lind was a friend of Grote's who was considering an American tour put her in a very similar situation to Elssler a decade previously. This and the prospect of becoming the impresario to a performer who could potentially earn as much or more than Elssler might have outweighed any concerns about the sort of social repercussions Wikoff felt he had suffered as a result of his involvement with the dancer.

The next major event in Wikoff's life was the Gamble scandal, which, as noted earlier, came to overshadow the rest of his biography. *My Courtship and its Consequences*, his version of events in the fiasco, seems to have sold rather well upon its publication in 1855. It is evident that he was able to put his early experience with writing – and sometimes fabricating – Elssler's memoirs to good use. This book represented a gambit to restore his shattered reputation in the wake of the scandal, and this time the stakes were far higher, even in comparison with the fallout after his splits with Elssler and Bennett. The crime of which he was accused and for which he served time in a Genoese prison may not have done any lasting harm to Jane Gamble, but it was nevertheless a dastardly action that threatened to bar Wikoff from polite society for the rest of his life. He recalled that, at the time of his conviction, "I thought only of the ruin of all my prospects in life that this unjust condemnation would bring upon me. I thought of the loss of my friends, whose esteem and respect were above all price. I thought of the reproach and contumely

[173] P.T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs or, Sixty Years' Recollections of P.T. Barnum, including his golden rules for money-making. Illustrated, and brought up to 1889. Written by himself.* (Buffalo, N.Y.: The Courier Company, 1889), 101.

that the ill-natured would cast upon me. These bitter reflections filled me with the deepest gloom."[174]

In his version of events, Wikoff suddenly became the same sort of injured innocent as the Elssler of his earlier works and as he would portray Genevieve Ward some years later. By contrast, women in general were characterized as fickle, dangerous creatures who enjoyed driving men to madness by throwing up an endless series of obstacles for honest suitors to surmount. Even Harriet Grote came in for censure; the unreliable nature of Wikoff's account makes it difficult to determine what her exact role in the affair was, but she seems to at least have counseled caution to Gamble, if not outright rejection of Wikoff's suit, which he attributed to the natural inclination of her gender to play havoc with suitors' sanity rather than any reasonable doubts on her part as to whether he would be a truly suitable match.

My Courtship and its Consequences ultimately turned out to be a success for Wikoff. 1855 happened to be a good year for revelatory memoirs: not only did Horace Greeley release one, but so did Barnum, who had used some of Wikoff's publicity tactics to even greater effect in promoting Jenny Lind. Barnum's admission of occasional deceit in advertising the attractions he managed led Bennett – who was himself no stranger to the business of self-promotion – to lump his book with Wikoff and Greeley's.[175] However, it is worth noting that, in Barnum's case, releasing the memoir actually did harm to his reputation, whereas Wikoff's account at least seems to have managed to muddy the waters somewhat and cast doubt on what precisely had happened between him and Gamble. In the long run, of course, Barnum's later version of his memoir, *My Struggles and Triumphs*, became a runaway bestseller, appearing in an updated

[174] Wikoff, *My Courtship and its Consequences*, 281.
[175] Caleb Crain, "The Courtship of Henry Wikoff; or, A Spinster's Apprehensions," *American Literary History*, 18, no. 4 (2006), 680.

edition almost every year towards the end of his life. Wikoff's *Reminiscences* may have done reasonably well at the time it was released, but the book is now almost completely forgotten.

There is a sad irony to Wikoff's ventures into memoir. The man who had generated so much publicity for Elssler and Forrest ended up trying to remove the same sort of taint on his reputation that he had attempted to help these performers take away from theirs. The episode with Jane Gamble, whatever its exact circumstances, certainly does not reflect well on him. However, he also seems to have attracted a considerable amount of condemnation from his association with other individuals who were condemned as much for their professions as their personalities, particularly Elssler. Bennett may have also been despised for his unsympathetic personality, but a good deal of the opprobrium that attached itself to him seems to have stemmed from the disruptive impact of his *Herald* on American media and society. Wikoff almost certainly exaggerated when he complained that his association with Bennett had tarnished his reputation, but given Bennett's social standing, it seems reasonable to suppose that there was a grain of truth to this complaint.

Wikoff followed up *My Courtship* with *The Adventures of a Roving Diplomatist*, which detailed his frustrations in dealing with the British Foreign Office, padded with some articles he had published earlier in the *Democratic Review*. He had evidently effected a reconciliation with Bennett, for his ally-turned-enemy was once again firm in his support for Wikoff, even supporting him in a push for a diplomatic appointment from President Lincoln. Despite his failure to obtain a post, Wikoff remained in the capital and managed to get introduced to and charm Mary Todd Lincoln, in whose circle of acquaintances he became a fixture. Wikoff was nearly expelled from the White House in December 1861 when he was mistakenly accused of

leaking Lincoln's State of the Union speech, but he was exonerated and continued to circulate in official Washington society until after the end of the war.[176]

From the standpoint of one strictly concerned with theatre-related activities, Wikoff's most significant activity during these years is his purported authorship of the *Memoir of Ginevra Guerrabella*, a short account of the unbelievable but true story of the early unhappy marriage of the woman who would eventually become known as the actress Genevieve Ward. Once again, he demonstrated his talent for dramatizing the personal lives of performers in order to generate publicity for them. Although Wikoff's name does not appear in the book itself, he is attributed authorship by the *Dictionary of American Biography*.[177] The narrative describes the early life and marital woes of the actress Genevieve Ward, who had acquired the name Guerrabella as the result of her ill-fated marriage to a Russian nobleman and would later revert to using her maiden name. Wikoff seems to have become acquainted with her through John Ryan, former editor for *The Republic* and thereafter (somewhat surprisingly) an employee of Bennett's.[178]

Ward provided an especially promising subject for Wikoff's style of publicity, since her biography was already so rich in dramatic incident that it required little in the way of invention. As a young and promising opera singer, she had had the misfortune to meet the Count de Guerbel, a Russian nobleman who proposed marriage. She accepted, and a ceremony was duly performed at the American consulate in Nice. Unfortunately, as the ceremony had not been performed at an Orthodox Church, the Count was not technically bound to her, and he disappeared before the family could arrange an Orthodox ceremony. Guerbel was eventually tracked down and forced to marry Ward once again thanks to pressure from the Russian government, but for obvious reasons his finally-legitimate wife had no wish to see him again.

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[176] Delarue, 47-8.
[177] Ibid., 49.
[178] Crow, 203.

This murky personal history undoubtedly affected the public's perception of Ward; it seems no coincidence that the *Memoir* came out shortly after she had returned to the United States for a series of engagements, including one in New York which was ongoing at the time of the book's publication.[179] Although anti-theatrical prejudice was less pronounced in the United States by this time, there is nevertheless a clear parallel between Ward and Elssler's respective situations: both had to make their American premieres while dealing with lingering questions about their moral character stemming from their personal histories.

As he had done with Elssler, Wikoff proceeded to dramatize Ward's life, downplaying her professional achievements and focusing instead on her disastrous marriage. In depicting her as the sinned-against heroine of this miniature drama, Wikoff idealized Ward even on the physical level, describing "her figure faultless in its symmetry, her features of the loveliest Grecian type, her countenance denoting the noblest traits of mind and character, her manner at once graceful, dignified, and affable"[180] – and all this when she was but fifteen years of age. Later in the narrative, Wikoff illustrated Ward's "noble traits of mind and character" by recounting her resistance to the (entirely honorable) advances of an anonymous Russian prince during the time she was pursuing Guerbel. Whether or not this had actually occurred, the use once again of an incident involving a principled refusal to give in to the importunities of a crowned head makes for an unmistakable connection between the *Memoir* and Wikoff's earlier publicity work for Elssler.

If he depicted Ward as a paragon of virtue, Wikoff also clearly had no compunction about fitting Guerbel into the role of the "artful and unblushing villain"[181] of the piece. The Count's behavior certainly did not make this a particularly difficult task, but Wikoff's larger aim in doing

[179] Henry Wikoff, *Memoir of Ginevra Guerrabella* (New York: T.J. Crowan, 1863), 63.
[180] Ibid., 8.
[181] Ibid., 15.

so was to use the strong moral contrast that he had established between villain and heroine to place Ward and her profession in the same morally unobjectionable light that he had once attempted to cast on Elssler. "What a lesson and what a moral!" he proclaims at the moment in the narrative when Guerbel is finally brought to heel.[182] There was a method to Wikoff's strong emphasis on the moral lesson of Ward's ordeal: just a few pages after his pious outburst, he notes that the miserable newlywed needed "to divert her mind from dwelling upon the sad disappointments of the past."[183] Ward's entry into the professional world of the opera was therefore depicted as necessary, a means of redemption for what would otherwise have been a ruined life. As with the supposed piety that underlay Elssler's first experience of the ballet, Ward's embarking on a career on the stage was shown to stem from the purest motives, in this case as a much-needed balm for a wounded innocent.

After his involvement with Genevieve Ward and the Lincoln White House, Wikoff spent most of the rest of his life in London, becoming ever more sour about the efficacy of democracy and the direction his home country was taking in the wake of the Civil War - a delicious irony, given his comments about the English aristocracy in the early days of the Forrest-Macready dispute. He did manage to find time to help his friend Dan Sickles – a prominent politician now mostly remembered for his ineffectual service as a general in the Civil War – in managing a diplomatic crisis over the capture and execution of a crew of American filibusterers headed to Cuba. For his services as an intermediary, he finally received an official title to justify the "Chevalier" which both friends and enemies had attached to his name for decades. Shortly afterwards, he allegedly met up with his old acquaintance Napoleon III and helped the deposed

[182] Ibid., 50.
[183] Ibid., 54.

emperor to smuggle some of his treasures out of France in much the same way that he had done for Joseph Bonaparte nearly forty years earlier.[184]

Before his acquisition of an official title, Wikoff had one last brush with the stage. He had apparently met the young Henry Irving at some point in the late 1860's, and when Irving took on the role of the capricious old Digby Grant in the comedy *Two Roses*, he based his interpretation of the character on Wikoff. This was something of a backhanded compliment, given that Grant is not a particularly praiseworthy or sympathetic character, but it evidently came out of a feeling of affection for the aging dandy, for Irving sent Bram Stoker around to Brighton some years later to see the aged and financially straitened Wikoff with "some grapes and other creature comforts."[185] It was in Brighton that Wikoff died, on April 28, 1884. In November of that same year, the long-since-retired Fanny Elssler passed away in her home city of Vienna.

[184] Crow, 199-200.
[185] Quoted in Crow, 200-1.

Conclusion

Whatever the truth behind Henry Wikoff's equivocations and dubious actions, there is a certain injustice to the fact that his considerable contributions to the development of American theatre publicity have been largely forgotten. By contrast, the manager of another European talent, whose arrival in America occurred exactly one decade after Elssler's, remains well-known to the average twenty-first-century reader. P.T. Barnum's role in the wildly successful tour of the Swedish singer Jenny Lind has been written about endlessly. Nevertheless, it may serve the purposes of this thesis to briefly go over this familiar ground in order to throw into clearer relief how two major factors in Wikoff's career – namely, relations with the press and the importance of biography in shaping public opinion – would reappear at one of the crowning moments of Barnum's. Comparing the publicity campaigns of Wikoff and Barnum reveals the extent to which the former was in many ways abreast or even ahead of the well-known showman in terms of how he managed to shape these factors to shape public opinion on a national scale; paradoxically, it also reveals how much more completely Barnum grasped their importance and proper management. In both campaigns lay the seeds of an American mania for celebrity which seems to still be growing exponentially with every passing year.

Barnum, of course, had already had years more experience with selling the public on remarkable personalities than Wikoff did when the latter returned to America with Elssler in 1840. Not long after the unhappy end of Elssler's tour, he would find immense success in Europe with "General Tom Thumb", whose image proliferated to a startling degree on Parisian merchandise of every description.[186] However, his tour with Lind was an undertaking on quite a different scale from anything he had previously attempted in America, and the brief mention in

[186] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 81.

his memoirs of the "successful speculation" that the "Chevalier Wyckoff" had conducted with Elssler - and which he evidently hoped to conduct with Lind – suggests that he observed the affair of the previous decade with no small amount of professional interest. When it came to be his turn to conduct a celebrated European *artiste* on a route similar to Elssler's, he demonstrated that, if he had not learned directly from the successes and failures of Wikoff's managerial stint, he nevertheless understood the basic principles which had contributed to the dancer's success as well as how to largely avoid those bumps in her road which had at times caused both her and her impresario such grief.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Barnum's decision to bring Lind over to America is his frank admission that he determined to do so based not on any direct knowledge of her skill as a singer, but rather as a result of his "estimate of her success with all classes of the American public, [and] her character for extraordinary benevolence and generosity." On the basis of these two factors, he recalled, he "felt sure that there were multitudes of individuals in America who would be prompted to attend her concerts by this feeling alone."[187] Wikoff might have whipped up a frenzy for Elssler by a similar focus on her "character" over any other consideration, but he at least had had an opportunity to assess her artistic merits beforehand, however secondary that factor might have proved to her ultimate success.

Furthermore, whereas Wikoff had relied on other Americans in Europe to build excitement for Elssler amongst an elite group of tastemakers, Barnum managed to excite a wider range of potential customers far more quickly, bringing them to share his high estimation of Lind before ever hearing a note. Her stupendously successful first concert in New York, Barnum rightfully asserted,

[187] Ibid., 105.

> was not gathered by Jenny Lind's musical genius and powers alone. She was effectually introduced to the public before they had seen or heard her. She appeared in the presence of a jury already excited to enthusiasm in her behalf. She more than met their expectations, and all the means I had adopted to prepare the way were thus abundantly justified.
>
> As a manager, I worked by setting others to work. Biographies of the Swedish Nightingale were largely circulated; "Foreign Correspondence" glorified her talents and triumphs by narratives of her benevolence; and "printer's ink" was invoked in every possible form, to put and keep Jenny Lind before the people. I am happy to say that the press generally echoed the voice of her praise from first to last.[188]

A biographer of Wikoff can only wish that his subject had been so straightforward about his own means of generating publicity.

Just as the details – often invented – of Elssler's biography were one of the crucial factors in generating sympathy for as well as interest in her success, Barnum managed the "expectations" of Lind's audience in large part by placing the story of her life in the spotlight. The program for her concerts included a biography, replete with testaments to her artistic prowess and, more importantly, her singular personality. Just as the stories in the *Herald* and other promotional materials had depicted Elssler as a precocious talent, so too was Lind a natural almost from birth, whose "first accents were almost made in music" and whose talent had been recognized at a very young age by a distinguished actress and the nobleman who ran "the musical school attached to the Royal Theater."[189] A dramatic complication arose when the fourteen-year-old Jenny lost her voice, but her perseverance in the face of this obstacle

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[188] Ibid., 111.

[189] P.T. Barnum, "From *Programme of Mademoiselle Jenny Lind's Concert*," in *The Colossal Barnum Reader: Nothing Else Like It in the Universe*, ed. James W. Cook (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 131.

supposedly paid off when she regained her voice in the very midst of an operatic performance, startling the audience with her hitherto unappreciated talent and wowing Meyerbeer himself. This triumph, noted the program, meant that "her reputation soon spread through the whole of Germany, which at present is perhaps the most musical nation on Continental Europe," and soon brought her the acclaim of "all the Courts in Germany and northern Europe," including Queen Victoria.[190] It hardly bears mentioning that these credentials strike some of the same chords that Wikoff had played in support of Elssler.

The contrast between the profiles adopted by Wikoff and Barnum in the course of their respective managerial stints presents a number of illustrative contrasts. Whereas the part-time impresario sought to keep his name out of the publicity he generated for Elssler and still ended up damaging his reputation, Barnum was more straightforward, while still managing to play somewhat coy. He had already achieved a prominence as a showman, and indeed managing his somewhat protean public persona was a crucial and lifelong element of his career, and one which he managed with a fair degree of success. There were plenty of people willing to denounce his "humbugs" and crow over some of the more noteworthy "struggles" of his career, and his decades-long feud with James Gordon Bennett did not help matters. Nevertheless, as one writer on Barnum has observed, "In reading the various versions of *Struggles*, one is struck most of all by Barnum's ingeniousness at getting so many different reporters, celebrities, and politicians to say the same thing about him: namely, that he is a symbol of the American male's potential for unlimited success."[191] At any rate, Barnum's name was easily more recognizable to the average American than Lind's before her tour began, and he was able to play skillfully on the prominence of his own personality to further aid her prospects.

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[190] Ibid., 132-3.

[191] Bluford Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman & U.S. Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 39.

His speech after the first concert indicated how he intended to use his prominence to serve the tour, as he insisted to the audience that, "Barnum is nowhere!" and that the singer herself was the real draw.[192] There was a fair amount of irony to the statement, given that Barnum's name was still better-known than Lind's and that he was standing before the audience delivering a speech about his invisibility in the whole affair. If anything, Barnum's strategy could be characterized in the terms used by his friend Sol Smith: "to make an angel of Jenny, and depreciate yourself [i.e. Barnum] in contrast."[193] However uniform the admiration for her manager's showmanship and business acumen might be, "Lind stood for everything that, in the minds of many Americans, Barnum was not: privacy, artlessness, sensibility, charity, innocence, and piety."[194] Barnum's success, in large part, lay in the fact that he had been able to skillfully manage the public profile of not one but two celebrities in a mutually supporting way.

Finally, Barnum approached press coverage of Lind's tour in a more comprehensive and skillful manner than Wikoff, who had had to rely on the untrustworthy support of a single editor, to whom he was tied – at least on his side - by personal admiration as much as any hardheaded assessment of shared mutual interest. Despite this, along with the fact that Wikoff seems to have aspired to circulate in more rarified circles than Barnum, he would probably have fundamentally agreed with the showman's attitude towards the importance of the press: "At the outset of my career I saw that everything depended upon getting the people to think, and talk, and become curious and excited over and about the 'rare spectacle.' Accordingly, posters, transparencies, advertisements, newspaper paragraphs – all calculated to extort attention – were employed, regardless of expense."[195] Furthermore, both Barnum and Wikoff understood that their personal

[192] Ibid., 44.
[193] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 124.
[194] Adams, 41.
[195] Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 38.

relationships with editors could give them leverage against recalcitrant opponents such as theatre managers or rival owners. Barnum's letter to Moses Beach of the *Sun* concerning the behavior of the Bennetts in Cuba has been cited in a previous chapter, but it is not an isolated instance: nearly a decade earlier, he was able to draw on Beach's support (as well as other editors such as Mordecai Noah) to ensure that a rival museum could not buy the collections of the institution he had just purchased and which would come to be famous under his ownership.[196] Even his running conflict with Bennett could be put on hold due to pragmatic considerations, and the fact that the editor would inevitably betray him soon afterwards helped more than it hurt. "After permitting one favorable notice in his paper," of Lind's performance, Barnum recalled, "Bennett had turned around, as usual, and had abused Jenny Lind and bitterly attacked me. I was always glad to get such notices, for they served as inexpensive advertisements to my Museum."[197]

The similarities and contrasts between Barnum and Wikoff's approaches to the promotion of their respective stars and the business of managing the press provide a useful summation of how American theatre publicity was changing in the antebellum period. Few if any performers had attained anything like Elssler's nation-wide celebrity status; Edwin Forrest was certainly prominent on a national scale, but there was no large-scale media campaign aimed at promoting him, and certainly no one was putting his name on their brand of champagne. Nevertheless, much of Wikoff's promotional activity betrayed a mindset that had not grasped or accepted the degree to which American society and its media in particular were changing. The reliance on Bennett alone to champion Elssler's cause is symptomatic of a larger aspect of Wikoff's preference for and reliance on personal connections amongst the elite. Not only did

[196] Ibid., 54.

[197] Ibid., 120. Barnum even claimed to have saved Bennett's life on the journey from Havana to New Orleans; one of his museum managers, coincidentally named Henry Bennett, was evidently somewhat disturbed and was supposedly stayed by Barnum from his intention to throw the other Bennett overboard when the editor was alone on deck.

this sit somewhat uncomfortably with Wikoff's solidly pro-Democrat politics, but it meant that his ability to shape the opinions of countless Americans was dependent on the whims of a small number of often tempestuous individuals, Bennett foremost among them. Wikoff realized that his own name did not impart nearly enough prestige to Elssler's tour, and indeed he remained at great pains throughout his life to downplay his role in managing her tour due to his lingering perception that taking such a high profile was unbecoming of the station in life to which he aspired. One cannot help but wonder if the faint disreputability of his connections with Elssler and Bennett made the Gamble scandal all the more damaging to his ability to receive solid, substantial benefits from his connections; for all his skill in charming Mary Todd Lincoln, he never managed to receive an important official position in wartime Washington.

Barnum, by contrast, understood the degree to which it was necessary to cast a broad net, allowing his own personality to share the spotlight with Lind's as a part of a broader strategy to address the public directly and on his own terms. At the same time, his cultivation of a wider range of contacts in the press meant that he could sustain the animosity of a single powerful individual like Bennett without the conflict substantially affecting his fortunes. Although Barnum had in his earlier career shown himself adept at setting up his own newspaper to serve his purposes, he was, it seems, content for the most part to use a number of friendly editors to counter the power of opponents such as the *Herald* rather than launch a valiant but doomed direct assault in the manner of Wikoff's *Republic*.

Despite the differences in their outlook that brought them such widely disparate success in dealing with the press, both Wikoff and Barnum had grasped that the United States had entered a period when a changing media would allow stars to become national celebrities on a heretofore-unknown scale. The days of American hostility to show business were long gone, and

now the descendants of dour Puritans were willing to expend substantial amounts of money and attention on performers primarily on the basis of interest in their personae rather than any especially deep knowledge of or appreciation for their art. These personae were, of course, shaped by managers who skillfully touched upon elements of the zeitgeist to cast these performers as perfectly aligned with the values of the young nation. The legacy of such a publicity strategy remains with us to this day.

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