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Masked faces. Verdi, *Uncle Tom* and the unification of Italy

Axel Körner
University College London

Abstract

This article explores Italian images of America during the Risorgimento and the time of Italy's unification. At the centre of this investigation are two remarkably painful theatrical representations of life in the New World: Verdi's 1859 opera *Un ballo in maschera*, set in seventeenth-century Boston; and Rota's 1852 ballet *Bianchi e neri*, based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's epic novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Often performed together during the same evening, both works presented Italians with an extremely disturbing image of America, a negation of Italy's own cultural values. The article reads these theatrical representations of America within a wider context of Italian debates on the United States. Italians did not always look at life in America as a political, social or constitutional model; and if in the eyes of many Italians the United States became an epitome of modernity later in the nineteenth century, they did not necessarily identify with the particular model of modernity America stood for. The article argues that historians have tended to overlook some of the complexities of Italy's image of America.

Keywords

Risorgimento, Italian unification, New World, United States, opera, ballet, Verdi, Harriet Beecher Stowe, slavery.

When Ferdinand I, on his accession to the Austrian throne in 1835, issued an imperial rescript granting Italian political prisoners a commutation of their sentences on the condition that they agreed to be deported to America, some accepted the offer but others preferred to serve out their sentence, despite being held at one of the Empire's most terrible prisons, in Brno (Rossi 1954, 13; Sioli 2004, 141). Giuseppe Mazzini had a strong dislike for the United States, its federal constitution and the alleged materialism of its people (Rossi 1954, 5). Garibaldi left us with only few references to his time in New York, but his experience of living in the United States was not very positive (Garibaldi 1888, 264; White Mario 1884, 364 ff.; Riall 2007, 107; Scirocco 2007, 192–193).

This article explores Italian images of and attitudes towards the United States during the period of Italy's unification. At the centre of this investigation are two extremely popular and highly influential theatrical representations of life in the

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New World which left an important mark on Italian views of the United States during the later Risorgimento: Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Un ballo in maschera* of 1859; and Giuseppe Rota's 1852 ballet *Bianchi e neri*, based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's epic novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Theatre played a crucial role in defining Italy as *Kulturnation*, and its repertoire represents the rare example of a medium that travelled the entire peninsula across political and regional boundaries, from north to south and to the islands, from the great opera houses in Milan, Turin and Naples to countless municipal theatres in smaller cities.[1] Through travelling companies, performances on the occasion of markets and fairs, or cheap tickets for the *loggione* on the upper balconies of the theatres, performances reached an audience that went well beyond the social elites who owned or rented private boxes. Municipal bands and barrel-organ players carried tunes out of the theatres and into the *piazza*. Newspapers and specialized periodicals brought news from the nation's finest theatres, but also from its more modest venues, to every corner of the peninsula.

Italian composers, choreographers and librettists were fascinated by the New World.[2] The American genre included works by famous composers, like Donizetti's rarely performed cantata *Cristoforo Colombo o sia la scoperta dell'America* or Alberto Franchetti's successful opera *Cristoforo Colombo*; but many of these works are today forgotten (Maione and Seller 2005; Heck 1992; Polzonetti 2011). Although enlightened philosophers such as the Abbé Raynal were fully aware of the fact that the exploration of the New World was intrinsically linked to the dehumanizing brutality of the transatlantic slave trade, most of these works contrasted the humanism of western civilization with the absence of civilization found in the New World (Davis 1988, 14 ff.).[3] However, in the 1850s a number of important stage works seemed to have turned this scheme around, presenting Italians with an image of America as a barbarous country, the negation of Italy's own cultural values.

Theatrical representations of America have to be read within a context of wider Italian debates on the United States (Körner 2012). Italians did not always look on America as a political, social or constitutional model; and if in the eyes of many the United States became an epitome of modernity later in the nineteenth century, they did not necessarily identify with the particular model of modernity America stood for. As Paola Gemme (2005) has argued, the idea of the United States as a model for Italians was at least partly an American projection. Over-impressed by the 'voting with their feet' argument (Friedman 2007), some historians have tended to overlook the complexities of Italians' relationship to America; or they ignored the extent to which the meaning of certain texts about the New World changed according to the historical context in which they were read.

Two examples serve to illustrate this point. Carlo Botta's *History of the American War of Independence* has often been read as a blueprint for Italian unification, but not so much by his contemporaries as by later commentators (Dionisotti 1867, 138; Pavesio 1874, 70), writing at a time when Italian unification had already been achieved.[4] While it is true that Botta impressed

Italians with his heroic account of American military leaders, he said remarkably little about the American constitution and he was adamant that the conditions of the American Revolution could not be applied to conditions in Europe. Meanwhile, some of Botta's earlier commentators pointed to the fact that independence had not been the intended outcome of the American Revolution. An influential review in Vieusseux's *Antologia* of 1822 argued that Botta's account underestimated the extent to which the colonizers identified with the mother country and used independence as a last resort only.[5] If the War of American Independence was read in connection with the situation in Italy, the debate over the book seemed to caution readers about national independence. Moreover, it was not only progressive Europeans who took inspiration from Botta, but also reactionary political leaders, including the Russian Tsar Alexander I, who read his work for their own benefit (Botta 1877, 43). Undoubtedly Botta's work had an impact on the protagonists of the Risorgimento, but there is not enough evidence to suggest that they took his account of American events as a model for what was going to happen in Italy. If later commentators constructed such analogies, these were largely the fruit of their own teleological imagination.

Similar problems occur in debates about the role of the US constitution on the fortunes of federalist ideas in Italy. Once Vincenzo Gioberti's Neoguelphism had become obsolete thanks to the Pope's political decisions in 1848, Carlo Cattaneo represented the most important voice for a federal solution to Italy's constitutional future. He followed American affairs closely and frequently wrote about the United States (Cattaneo 1957, 1981); but his federalism referred less to America than to Switzerland and even to German traditions (Cattaneo 1972, 282; Armani 1997, 13, 28–30; Moos 2004; Gili 2001). Filippo Sabetti (2004, 346–351) has demonstrated that the main aim of Cattaneo's references to the United States was to show that there existed an alternative to the European model of the unitary state; to provide empirical evidence that society can govern itself; and to propagate a new political science with a focus on society's institutions of self-government. However, Cattaneo does not discuss the United States' federal constitution as a direct model for a future Italian federation. According to Maurizio Ridolfi (2004, 137), Cattaneo was strongly influenced by de Tocqueville's thought on American institutions; but, although Cattaneo owned volume one of *Démocratie en Amérique*, he never refers to the work directly – remarkable for a man who made much of his literary career on the basis of reviewing other people's writings (Lacaita et al. 2003, 52, 328).

Analogies between the political thought of the Risorgimento and American political institutions do not mean that the United States necessarily constituted a model for Italians. However, this is not to say that Italians did not look at the social and political developments across the Atlantic with great curiosity. Rather than constituting a model to be replicated, most Italians saw the United States as the example of another society in full social and political transformation, a test-case for the experience of modernity, like Italy. Meanwhile, they were fully

aware of the differences in historical and social conditions that set the two countries apart. Hence, interest in America had more to do with the shared experience of a change in the semantic of historical time, than with the emulation of specific political institutions and conditions. It was the interplay of difference and shared experience that attracted Italians to America. One way of articulating this interest was the experimentation with different forms of representation, the mediation of the real world through imitation or in form of play, for Schiller a crucial element in the aesthetic education of humankind. Acting, and the use of masks, is a way of coming to terms with the self in a world of change.

Verdi's opera *Un ballo in maschera*, on a libretto by Antonio Somma, and Rota's ballet *Bianchi e neri*, constitute two such examples of playing with masks. Both featured white actors with black faces and both represent powerful Italian images of America. What Verdi's *Un ballo* and Rota's *Bianchi e neri* also shared was the fact that they presented America in extremely dark colours, as a brutalized society that seemed to lack many of the attributes associated with Europe's own cultural and enlightened tradition, thus constituting a stark contrast to earlier images of the United States as a land of promise and prosperity. Both pieces played an important role in negotiating Italy's relationship with the New World at the moment of Italy's own constitution as a nation state; and they helped to prepare Italians for the upcoming Civil War in America, a war so important to them that it almost became their own war.

In February 1859, Verdi's *Un ballo* was premiered at the Apollo Theatre in Rome. The opera is set in New England during the seventeenth century and deals with the love affair between the Governor of Boston, Riccardo, and Amelia, the wife of his secretary and intimate friend Renato, described in orientalizing fashion as 'a Creole'.[6] Although the relationship was never consummated, when Renato discovers Riccardo's affair with his wife, he joins a group of conspirators and assassinates the Governor at a masked ball. To political observers, as well as to followers of Europe's literary scene, the plot of *Un ballo* sounded familiar. In 1792, the Swedish King Gustaf III had been assassinated at a masked ball, a scandal that inspired the famous Eugène Scribe to write a play, in which he presented a love affair between the Swedish king and his secretary's wife as the cause for his otherwise rather obscure assassination. Scribe's play was later set to music, first as a *grand opéra* by Auber (1833), then by Vincenzo Gabussi (1841) and in 1843 by Mercadante as *Il Reggente* (on a libretto by Verdi's own former librettist Salvadore Cammarano). During the 1850s, several adaptations of Scribe's play toured European theatres.[7] But suddenly theatrical representations of regicide became more problematic. In 1858, Felice Orsini attempted to assassinate Napoléon III and the Empress on their way to the opera. While the imperial couple survived, several people were killed, and many more were wounded. The event alerted the censors to works featuring regicide. Compared with Scribe's plot, staging a murder in New England seemed more acceptable to the censors. Verdi's initial plan for an opera at Naples' San Carlo on

the assassination of Gustaf III was abolished in favour of a new opera on the assassination of a fictional Governor of Boston, to be premiered in Rome.[8]

The change of locale did not make Verdi's plot less sombre. What does Verdi's America look like? A land of opportunities, free from the manipulation of despotic rulers, governed by principles of reason? Verdi did not refer to any of this. Instead, he presents us with a tale of conspiracies, jealousy and murder. Much has been written about *Un ballo*'s rather unsettling chiaroscuro atmosphere, its modal uncertainties and the mixture of genres.[9] There is lots of mundane life in the opera, contradicting our idea of puritan New England: extramarital relationships; same-sex desire (Hexter 2002); witchcraft; and, of course, the masked ball at the end. There is nothing on which to build a future enlightened Republic. The Governor, Riccardo, is irresponsible in character, his only thought being to seduce his secretary's wife 'nell'estasi, raggiante di pallore . . . ' (I, 2). None of this fits our image of the Pilgrim Fathers; but as Emiliana Noether (1989, 82) remarked, Italy had no clear idea of who the American colonists were. What Italians knew about was the England of Charles II and that of the English Civil War: through Walter Scott, Bellini's *Puritani*, the Memoirs of the Count de Grammont (Budden 1992, 375). Therefore it does not seem altogether implausible that Italians transposed some of these ideas to the English colonies across the Atlantic. Italian critics did not consider the plot unrealistic; the Americans did, but they felt too honoured that Verdi had written an opera about them to object.[10]

Exoticism and '*tinte locali*' also contributed to *Un ballo*'s sombre image of America.[11] Renato is blind in his devotion to his master, but distrustful of his beloved and ultimately innocent wife. 'Sangue vuolsi e tu morrai' is his only reply to her pleas. His personality is shattered by profound dilemmas of human existence: Verdi's America is definitely not a pre-Adamic paradise, where everybody is content in his skin. Speaking of images of America in the literal sense, the opera's only image of landscape is the scene of the encounter between Riccardo and Amelia. The libretto refers to a 'field outside Boston', but there is nothing in the scene that evokes the idealized land of freedom and prosperity, or Botta's famous description of the bay in his aforementioned *History of the American War of Independence* (C. Botta 1809, vol. 2, 355–356). The *disposizione scenica* describes a truly gruesome setting of death and desperation. Arriving at the scene, Amelia is 'invasa da superstizioso terrore'. Another gruesome setting in the opera is the dwelling of the fortune-teller Ulrica. 'Siamo nel regno del sovranaturale', the *Gazetta Musicale di Milano* (January 12, 1862, supplement) summarizes, with the key remaining obscure for a long time. Verdi's America was not a land where one would want to live.

The judge in *Un ballo* describes Ulrica as being 'of the foul blood of the negroes'. While the plot is not centred on issues of racial prejudice, at the time of the opera's premiere America's racial question was much debated in Italy. At the height of *Un ballo*'s success, Giuseppina Strepponi, who recently had become Verdi's wife, passed a book from her library to a friend and Moderate member of

the Italian parliament Minghelli Vaini – a copy of Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous novel of 1852, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* – indicating that she was very much up to date with Italy's literary debate at the time.[12] But *Uncle Tom* was also related to the performance history of *Un ballo*. The opera's Roman *prima* coincided with a staging of Giuseppe Rota's ballet *Bianchi e neri*, a hugely successful adaptation of *Uncle Tom* (*L'Armonia*, February 26, 1859). *Bianchi e neri* had been premiered at La Scala in 1853, a year after the first publication of the novel in the United States and only weeks after the appearance of its first Italian translation. Soon the ballet toured the entire peninsula and became one of the greatest success stories in the history of Italian dance.[13]

La Scala had commissioned *Bianchi e neri* from one of the most celebrated stars of Italian ballet, the young dancer and choreographer Giuseppe Rota, described in the press as 'il Verdi della coreografia' (*Il Trovatore*, January 6, 1858). After its premiere in Milan, the ballet had thirty-five performances in Genoa, followed by another fifteen performances in 1857 and a further twenty-two in 1861 (Valebona 1928, 348–357).[14] In 1858, *Bianchi e neri* was on the programme in Rome, Turin and Bologna. The San Carlo gave a total of thirty-seven performances in 1862/1863, before it returned to Milan, and to Turin in 1873 and 1875, after the choreographer's death (Gatti 1964, 195, 200; Marinelli Roscioni 1988, vol. 2, 361).[15] Within a decade the ballet had been scheduled in all of Italy's major theatres. Audiences were particularly appreciative of the ballet's optical effects, involving up to 500 dancers. Rota knew how to enliven action through skilful ensemble scenes, performed by outstanding dancers, including Augusta Maywood, the first American to win a place among the top-ranking ballerinas of Europe, allegedly adding authenticity to the show.[16] Turin used the sets of Meyerbeer's *grand opéra Le Prophète*, giving us an idea of the splendour with which the ballet was staged. On that occasion the exhibition of female slaves was rather advanced, causing the police to suspend a number of ballerinas and the famous critic Francesco d'Arcais to complain about a stage resembling the 'whore of Babylon' (Basso 1976, 295; Viale Ferrero 1980, 418).

Although a rather free adaptation of *Uncle Tom*, Rota's ballet presents the dehumanizing brutality of a slave-holding society, with unfailing clarity. While touring the peninsula, *Bianchi e neri* became the starting point for a critical reassessment of life in the United States, presented in stark contrast to earlier representations of America. *Bianchi e neri*, as well as the novel itself, transformed the ways in which Italians discussed and imagined the New World. Unlike the British and the French, who had participated in debates over abolition for several decades, Italians during the mid-nineteenth century only had limited experience of colonization and the slave economy. For most Italians, slavery was an issue associated with Ancient Rome or with orientalizing images of non-European societies. As an early review of *Bianchi e neri* argued, 'slavery is a crime of remote countries, and has nothing to do with us, where before the law everybody is the same' (*La Fama del 1853. Rassegna di Scienze, Lettere, Arti, Industria e Teatri*, November 14, 1853). *L'Italia Musicale* (November 12, 1853)

spoke of 'ferocious' scenes demonstrating the 'degradation of human nature', 'the more revolting the closer they are to the truth'. In 1862, the *Gazzetta Musicale di Napoli* (December 7, 1862) wrote that Rota's work was more than a ballet: 'you could easily call it a *drama without words*'. At the height of the American Civil War, one could hardly imagine a timelier programme for a theatre. Several articles started the ballet's review by discussing the disadvantages of the American constitution. Along with general consternation over the brutality of the bloodshed, the American Civil War seemed to confirm both the impracticality of federalism and the need to control a disparate country from the centre through military force: at the time both were issues of direct concern to Italians. As Raymond Grew (1989, 121) has argued, 'a nation torn by civil war was an awkward model of federalism'.

The success of Rota's ballet has to be read in the context of the Italian reception of the novel. The first translation of *Uncle Tom* appeared in the year of the original American publication, 1852, a year before the premiere of Rota's ballet (Beecher Stowe 1852). *Il Mediterraneo* in Genoa and *Il Risorgimento* serialized the novel. Within a few months various cheap editions were available in all of the peninsula's capital cities, except Rome (Wilson 1972, 329). The success of *Uncle Tom* made Beecher Stowe 'the most internationally visible American writer of her time' (Kohn et al. 2006, xi). Arguably, her novel had a more important impact on images of the United States than De Tocqueville or Fenimore Cooper. Beecher Stowe and Uncle Tom became household names, regularly referred to in Italy's illustrated magazines, academic treatises on slavery and writings on the United States.[17]

One of the reasons for Uncle Tom's popularity was the fact that Italians were able to assimilate their own fate to that of the oppressed slaves. Visiting the workshop of a Roman sculptor, Beecher Stowe was recognized and greeted with the words: 'Madam, we know what you have been to the poor slave. We ourselves are but poor slaves still in Italy; you feel for us' (as quoted in Brooks 1958, 129).[18] The comparison between American slaves and Italians in the Papal States might seem inappropriate, but an editorial in *La Nazione* (March 30, 1862) on the American Civil War drew the same comparison; and a Republican almanac, published the same year, saw no difference 'between Jews in the Papal States and Negroes in America' (*L'Amico di Casa* 1862). Beecher Stowe herself contributed to making these connections. In 1859, on her second visit to Italy, she attended the meeting of the Tuscan Assembly at which adherence to Piedmont was declared (Wright 1965, 88–89). While performances of *Bianchi e neri* during the 1860s were discussed in connection with the American Civil War, in the early 1850s the ballet was mostly read as a story about liberation, which, owing to the Risorgimento's own political agenda, mattered to Italians. For the scene of the slave rebellion the composer included four bars of the *Marseillaise*. When the audience exploded into applause, the police suspended the performance.[19]

Owing to Beecher Stowe's role in Italy, and to the impact of her novel and Rota's ballet, Italians were able to engage with the American Civil War on a very

personal and emotional basis. For many Italian commentators slavery and the Civil War left American society scattered. Writing in 1867, according to *Nuova Antologia* life in the United States 'had become extremely corrupted and violent. If this model of society and government was implemented in [Europe], it would collapse within a week' ('Rassegna politica' 1867, 840). For most Italians the United States was no longer a model to follow.

Let us now briefly return to Verdi's *Un ballo*. Like Rota's ballet, the opera became a great success – in its American version, not in the Swedish setting Verdi and Somma had originally planned. It has often been argued that the opera's American version was the product of brutal political censorship, thus contributing to the patriotic myths around Italy's *compositore nazionale*.[20] This interpretation is not unproblematic. The libretto that the Bourbon censors proposed as an alternative to Verdi's original outline of *Gustavo III* was still a plot about the assassination of a political ruler, arguably an even more political libretto, centred around the medieval conflicts between Ghibellines and Guelphs. Certainly this would have been very topical during the Risorgimento (Pauls 1996, 224). Instead, it seems that it was as much the opera's moral message, which caused concern – a story revolving around adultery and guilty love, in which the king (in the final version turned Governor) desires and assaults the wife of his best friend and dedicated servant. Censorship was rarely applied consistently in Italy and Verdi's work was frequently criticized for its political as well as its moral content (Pauls 1996, 231; Giger 1999, 233).[21] One of the demands of the Neapolitan censors was indeed for Amelia to become Renato's sister, thus removing from the plot the adulterous triangle relationship around Renato's wife. Unlike Naples, Rome did not object to the triangular love relationship, but merely insisted on moving the plot across the Atlantic. The work's alleged depiction of immorality could not be tolerated within a European setting, but it seemed to fit with their idea of a foreign American context (Giger 1999, 260; Rosen 2002, 14).

In his long career Verdi had to change many librettos to have them pass the censors. Later on he changed them back to the version he preferred. Verdi never did the same with *Un ballo*. As a matter of fact, he was perfectly happy with the American plot for which he wrote the score. In a letter to Somma of September 1858 (Pascolato 1913, 94) he even said that the libretto had gained by moving it to America.[22] There are several reasons why Verdi was content with the American plot. As Julian Budden (1992, 363) has argued, *Gustavo III* never was an ideal scenario, 'a plot fifty years old, already set by at least three other composers'. This was nothing to celebrate Italian unification. Moreover, throughout the Risorgimento Italians looked to America not necessarily as a model, but as a way of coming to terms with their own experience of modernity. Therefore, an American opera by Italy's *compositore nazionale* seemed very much the order of the day: it had to be popular with Italians. And it was. During its premiere the Teatro Apollo in Rome was sold out evening after evening, with Verdi frequently getting more than thirty curtain calls. Ticket prices rose to

almost unprecedented levels. Rarely was 'the public more excited', the *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* (February 25, 1859 and March 6, 1859) commented.[23]

The opera's American setting perfectly served Verdi's artistic needs. According to Michel de Certeau (1975, 9), America was often perceived as a space without history on which to project ideas. While *Gustavo* would have described a specific historical event, *Un ballo* presented no such constraints. To investigate and depict human psychology with the help of music was what interested Verdi at the time; and articulating Italians' experience of modernity was exactly that. Verdi continued to write 'historical operas', but history disappeared into the background. This had much to do with his interest in literature and drama, discussions with his librettist and translator of Schiller, Andrea Maffei. He even studied August Wilhelm Schlegel's lectures on drama. When he developed his interest in Shakespeare, he approached him in a modernist-psychological rather than historicist fashion. During his long sojourns in Paris he became fascinated with the representation of emotions, previously underdeveloped in Italian theatre (Della Seta 1993, 226; Roccatagliati 2004, 21). He started controlling details of his productions almost fanatically, in this respect not dissimilar to Wagner. Printing the *disposizioni sceniche* for his operas was part of this project. After having produced many operas on historical topics – not always with great success – Verdi was happy to adopt a fictional New England, in order to paint a psychological drama untainted by historical constraints.

What is worthwhile emphasizing when discussing the opera's positive reception is the fact that Verdi's America seems an extremely unhappy place, contrasting with the alleged positive mood of the Italian nation at the time of its unification. Here, Verdi responds to an image of America that had evolved during the years leading to the American Civil War. President-elect Abraham Lincoln saw the first staging of *Un ballo* in New York, but left the performance before the end, allegedly for fear of his assassination during the final act, to coincide with the murder of Ricardo (*New York Times*, February 21, 1861). Did anybody remember the scene when Lincoln was shot five years on? No matter what, *Un ballo* became part of the history of the American Civil War, a war, which in Lincoln's own words was indeed Mrs Beecher Stowe's war.

Italian interest in America changed dramatically in the run up to the American Civil War, and *Bianchi e neri* played an important role in this process. Coinciding with Italy's own unification and combining productions of Verdi's *Un ballo* with Rota's ballet, Italian theatres turned the performance into an American theme evening. The America they played was one of disarray, a troubled place, stained with the blood of slavery and the civil war.

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Notes

1. On the social geography of theatres in nineteenth-century Italy see Sorba (2001). On the relationship between opera and Italian national identity see Francesco de Sanctis as quoted in Stewart-Steinberg (2007, 15).
2. For American themes in ballet, see also Raimondo Fidanza's *Colombo, ossia La Scoperta del Nuovo Mondo* (Genoa, 1802; Cohen 1963, 558). See also *Colombo all'isola di Cuba*, azione mimica di mezzo carattere in Quattro parti di Antonio Monticini, represented at La Scala di Milano in the autumn of 1832 and again at the Regio in Turin in 1838: New York Public Library of the Arts (NYPL), Walter Toscanini Collection (WTC), Libretti di ballo (Ldb), no.332 and 431.
3. For the origins of this debate, see Gerbi (1973): many philosophers considered the New World unfit for civilisation because of its natural conditions (see also Roger 2004). For Italy, see Buccini (1997). On the representation of difference in colonial discourse see Bhabha (1997).
4. Also White Mario (1909, 137) made analogies, suggesting that the Milanese 1848 boycott of tobacco and the lottery was inspired by Botta. For more recent examples of historians taking this line of argument, see Buccini (1997, 174) and Fiorentino (2010, 173).
5. The review is a translation from the *North American Review*, Vol. 13, No. 32 (July 1821), 169–200. The issue does not mention an author, but according to Fiorentino (2010, 174) it was written by Edward Everett, later President of Harvard University and Secretary of State. Walker Read (1937, 7) claims the author to be F. C. Cray, 'a gentleman from Boston devoted to literary pursuits'. On the American historiographical context of Botta's work see Deconde (1983, 408).
6. The manuscript version of the libretto refers to the eighteenth century (Rosen 2002, 46).
7. Mercadante's opera *Il Reggente* (1843) transported the plot to sixteenth-century Scotland. Although Somma and Verdi translated Scribe's play into a completely new context, rumours went round that Scribe tried to oppose the representation of *Un ballo* in Paris on the basis that his rights as author had been violated through the adaptation (*Il Trovatore. Giornale Letterario, Artistico, Teatrale*, October 31, 1860).
8. For a detailed account of the different versions and negotiations with censors see Gossett (2006, 491). Not convincing: Czaika (2008). Giger (1999, 223) argues that criteria of censorship were not applied consistently. For a general overview on theatre censorship, see Davis (2009).
9. See for a detailed analysis of the debate Hudson (1997). Verdi's contemporaries noticed the use of contrasts in the opera: *Gazetta Musicale di Milano* (March 6, 1859 and January 12, 1862, supplement; Basevi 1859, 9, 12).
10. In particular the *New York Times* (Feburary 4, 1861); and the *Brooklyn Eagle* (February 20, 1861). Also *New York Times* (April 9, 1861 and October 18, 1861).
11. See, for instance, the famous critic Filippo Filippi in *Gazetta Musicale di Milano* (January 12, 1862, supplement).
12. Minghelli Vaini to Verdi, January 9, 1861, as quoted in: Cesari et al. (1913, 587).
13. Giuseppe Rota (music by Paolo Giorza), *Bianchi e neri*. Milan: Teatro alla Scala, 1853. NYPL, WTC, Ldb n.809 and 939. The ballet was also performed under the titles *La capanna di Tom* (Bologna) or *I bianchi e i negri* (Turin). For a synopsis of the novel, see

Williams (2001, 47). For a more detailed discussion of the ballet and its impact on Italian images of America, see Körner (2011).

14 The number of performances depended on the work's success. For the continuing appreciation of the audience in Genoa see *Il Trovatore* (May 21, 1856).

15 The fact that some of the smaller theatres in medium-sized cities did not stage the piece had to do with the fact that its cast of several hundred participants was too expensive for the smaller houses.

16 Maywood (New York, 1825–Lemberg/Lvov, 1876) began her career as a child prodigy in the United States, the first American to become *prima ballerina assoluta* in Europe. In Italy she founded her own touring company, complete with managers, soloists, *corps de ballet*, sets and costumes (Au 1998; Celi 1998; Clarke and Vaughan 1977, 231; Guest 1990, 23).

17 For an assessment of press reactions to the novel, see Jackson (1953) and Rossi (1959, 419). Long after the novel's first publication, the Italian press continued to write about Beecher Stowe. See, for instance, *L'Universo Illustrato* (Vol. 1, no. 23, March 1867, 303). For references to Stowe in various treaties on slavery, see Cibrario (1868, vol. 1, 326) and Bianchetti (1893, 270–271).

18 On her visit to Italy, see also Wright (1965, 87–89).

19 Note by Walter Toscanini in: NYPL, WTC, Ldb, n.809. The bibliophile, collector and ballet scholar Walter Toscanini was the son of the conductor Arturo Toscanini and husband of the famous dancer Cia Fornaroli (Eames 1957).

20 For a critique of patriotic readings, see Parker (1997a, b), Smart (2001) and Castelvecchi (2006). The literature in the field is growing.

21 On the censors' criteria in Naples, see Di Stefano (1964, 51 ff.)

22 Gossett (2006, 159) argues that Verdi accepted the Boston setting only in order 'to have the work performed at all'.

23 The conductor was Emilio Angelini. For an overview of performances see Kaufman (1990, 466).

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