

***Sur la Pointe* on the Prairie: Giuseppina Morlacchi and the Urban Problem in the Frontier Melodrama**

When the frontier melodrama, *The Scouts of the Prairie, And, Red Deviltry As It Is!*, opened in Chicago in December 1872, it marked the beginning of a performance genre that would have significant impact on the American national imagination. Written by Ned Buntline (E. Z. C. Judson), the dime novel author who christened William F. Cody “Buffalo Bill,” *The Scouts of the Prairie* was the first stage play to star the famous frontiersman as himself, playing out the “real” drama of his Western adventures for spectators. *Scouts* launched a fourteen-year theatrical tradition that evolved into *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West*, the extremely successful performance spectacle that played across the US and in Europe for three decades. Scholars have long credited Cody’s *Wild West* as “the most important commercial vehicle for the fabrication and transmission of the Myth of the Frontier,” the thesis that the road to modernity was necessarily fraught with violent conflicts between “civilized” and “savage” peoples.^[1] Appearing alongside Cody in the frontier play were Buntline himself, the scout John “Texas Jack” Omohundro, and, as the American Indian princess Dove Eye and Cody’s love interest, the Italian ballerina Giuseppina Morlacchi.

The lion’s share of the existing scholarship on Cody’s performance focuses on his better-known large outdoor spectacles, sidelining the theatrical combinations that started his thespian career. More recent studies are expanding our knowledge of Cody’s stage plays, but even here, no one has questioned the incongruous casting of the famous Italian ballerina as an American Indian woman in the production that launched the western celebrity’s stage career, *The Scouts of the Prairie*.^[2] Most authors mention that the cast of *Scouts* included a well-known Italian dancer, but stop short of asking what kind of dance she did in the play, why dance might have been included, or what meanings it might have expressed. But by casting such a neutral lens on the dancing Dove Eye, scholars have failed to understand dance itself as a meaningful text in the play. As I will show, Morlacchi’s dancing in *The Scouts of the Prairie*—not only the fact that she danced, but *how*, set in context with nineteenth-century discourses on ballet, the female ballet dancer, and the city—produces a more complex reading of Morlacchi’s character and the frontier melodrama.

Born in Milan in 1836, Morlacchi was six years old when she entered the famed La Scala ballet academy, then the world’s leader in classical dance under the leadership of Carlo Blasis. With her impeccable training, Morlacchi worked with some of the most reputable choreographers in Europe, and was soon invited to join the ballet company at Her Majesty’s Theatre in London. She was engaged by artist-manager Don Juan de Pol to come to the US to appear in the 1867 *The Devil’s Auction*, one of the elaborate ballet-spectacles that became immensely popular after the success of *The Black Crook* in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Morlacchi worked as both a dancer and choreographer on the ballet-spectacle stage, until she left that genre to pursue her own choreographic career. Making its home in Boston, the Morlacchi Ballet traveled the country from 1868-1872, performing a mixed repertory drawn from European Romantic and post-Romantic ballets and American spectaculars and melodramas. Critics saw in Morlacchi’s dancing the essence of European culture transported to American stages. “She has sparked an excitement among the most cultivated of our citizens and everyone wants to see her perform,”^[3] asserted the *New York Evening Transcript*, and Boston papers concurred, “Many of the refined and cultivated people . . . whose knowledge of art has been perfected by European experiences have been the first in America to detect the genius of this danseuse.”^[4]

How interesting, then, to find Morlacchi, the embodiment of European classicism, the exemplar of cultured taste, appearing alongside the rugged western scouts, bringing European academic dance onto Buffalo Bill's (otherwise) "wild" frontier stage. It is not clear how Morlacchi found her way into the western melodrama. Her company was performing at Nixon's Opera House in Chicago in late 1872, when Buntline finally convinced Cody and Omohundro to meet him in that city for their theatrical debut. Morlacchi was a sought-after performer by theatre managers, and was known as a talented dramatic mime. Perhaps previous roles she had created for herself, including a mute Native American woman in *The Wept of Wish-ton-wish*, made her seem an especially attractive choice for the Dove Eye role. Perhaps it was Morlacchi's manager, Major John M. Burke, who met Cody a year later through the dancer and became the highly influential publicity manager who crafted much of the legendary imagery of Buffalo Bill's *Wild West*, who pointed her towards Buntline's cast. At any rate, at the end of her company's season in Chicago in late 1872, Morlacchi was engaged to join the cast of *The Scouts of the Prairie* as Dove Eye, the Indian maiden.[\[5\]](#)

Though no script survives, scholars have been able to rebuild much of the plot of *Scouts* through program scene synopses and newspaper reviews.[\[6\]](#) As the play opened, trapper Cale Durg (played by Buntline) entered the camp he shared with his ward, the "lovely white girl" Hazel Eye.[\[7\]](#) Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack (both played by themselves) stormed in "with a fiendish yell"[\[8\]](#) and a tale of their last hunt. Dove Eye ran into the scouts' camp to warn them of her tribesmen's plans to attack them, led by Wolf Slayer. Yelling war whoops, the four exited, intent on revenge.

In the next scene, Hazel Eye was captured by Wolf Slayer and his Indians, recruited by the renegade Mormon Ben, who desired her for his fiftieth wife. Durg tried to save her, but he was outnumbered, and he and Hazel Eye were tied to the stake to be burned. The Indians danced and sang a "Death Dance" around Durg, while he, unperturbed, taunted his captors. Dove Eye "dance[d] in [and] sever[ed] the bonds of Hazel Eye;" together they freed Durg, and fought the Indians.[\[9\]](#) Bill and Jack came to the rescue, vowing "Death to the Redskins," and Act I concluded with a massive slaughter of Indians, leading the *New York Times* reviewer to comment that "the unmitigated bloodshed that ends every act and almost every scene of this unique composition were so satisfactory to the public, that the management might be forgiven for hereafter assuming that the key to success must lie in the exhibition of cataracts of gore."[\[10\]](#)

In Act II, Bill declared his love for Dove Eye, and, in turn, Jack his for Hazel Eye. Their bliss was short-lived, however, as both women were again abducted by the Indians, and Durg again captured. Once again tied up (to a tree this time), Durg took the opportunity to deliver a temperance lecture, one of actor/playwright Buntline's long-time causes. Durg was shot and killed by Wolf Slayer. As Act III opened, Bill and Jack swore vengeance for their slain friend, and Dove Eye and Hazel Eye expressed their loyalty to one another. The Indians gathered for a "Scalp Dance," as a struggle between Wolf Slayer and Big Eagle, Dove Eye's father, ended in the stabbing of the latter. When Dove Eye found her father's body, she prayed to Manitou, the Indian god of revenge—perhaps another opportunity for a dance—then she and Hazel Eye returned to the camp for a final battle.[\[11\]](#) The renegades started a fire and a ferocious war ensued as the scouts and women "triumph[ed] over their enemies, with a train on the Pacific Railroad and a burning prairie in the background."[\[12\]](#) In the play's final tableau, the two couples embraced, the lights fading on the triumph of romance framed by the inevitable progression of America's western frontier.

In the very few studies that give her more than a passing mention, Dove Eye is interpreted as "the ubiquitous friendly native maiden," or the "noble savage" in contrast to the "utter savage" of the warlike

Indians around her.^[13] Her character is viewed as a Pocahontas figure, giving up her people and culture for the love of the white man, Cody. A common trope on the nineteenth-century stage, the Pocahontas character served as the “most well known and irresistible symbol” of the absorption of American Indians into white culture and the expropriation of their own culture.^[14] That absorption was accomplished through the lens of gender and sexuality; as Mary Dearborn notes, “it is precisely because Pocahontas is expected to embody both aspects of the image [the noble Princess and the randy Squaw] that hers is so convenient, compelling, and ultimately intolerable a legend. . . . Her story functions as a compelling locus for American feeling toward . . . miscegenation, or sexual relations between white men and ethnic women.”^[15] As Buffalo Bill’s love interest, Dove Eye’s Indian Princess role fulfilled many of these elements in *Scouts*: the contrast of royal heritage and sexual availability; the assimilation of the forgiving, supportive Indian woman; and proof of the supremacy of white culture with the reassuring combination of Native consent and cooperation.

Although the centrality of movement in Morlacchi’s role has not been taken into account in previous scholarship, a dance analysis would reinforce this reading, particularly given the fact that at least some of her dances as Dove Eye seem to have been performed on *pointe*. One critic noted how a “few graceful steps inserted into one of the scenes reminded playgoers of [Morlacchi’s] former triumph in the ballet.”^[16] Another observed in her performance “the fawnlike bound of the antelope—if the antelope ever bounds on the points of its toes.”^[17] Joellen Meglin has shown that ballet served to symbolize “civilization triumphing over savagery” in representations of Native Americans in productions at the pre-Romantic Paris Opéra.^[18] In *Scouts*, Morlacchi’s ballet dancing would seem to have functioned similarly, the consummate European ballerina serving as the “whitening” force that mediated between civilization and savagery in Dove Eye’s character. When the Italian ballet star rose to the *pointes* of her slippers, the image signaled that Dove Eye was more civilized, closer to European culture than her tribesmen, especially in contrast to the *other* “Death” and “Scalp” dances in the play that served as signs of an “authentic” Indian culture.^[19] The incorporation of ballet into *Scouts* literally replaced a Native dance form with a European one on Dove Eye’s body, an erasure that colluded with the US government’s efforts to colonize Native lands.

Yet the “civilization” and “savagery” binary only in part explains the incongruous mixture of buckskin and pointe shoes in Morlacchi’s Dove Eye performance. Robert C. Allen has shown the way in which the female burlesque performer’s body was a site of multiple interpretations, often ambiguous and contradictory, that were related to changing gender and class roles.^[20] As I will show, the ballet dancer (or “ballet-girl,” as she was known in popular discourses, no matter her rank onstage) embodied a similar set of tensions, and Morlacchi brought this complexity with her into *The Scouts of the Prairie*: a little bit of the burlesque tradition on the frontier stage. When dance becomes an equal part of the analysis, the way in which the foreign ballerina and her dancing served as a necessarily complicated signifier for a host of socio-cultural anxieties appears, many of them conflicting, and all of them indicating the need for the stabilizing and reassuring force of the exemplary western hero, Buffalo Bill, at the end of the play. In what follows, I attempt to widen the scope on the meanings that ballet brought into this frontier melodrama by putting it in dialogue with contemporaneous discourses of ballet and the ballet dancer in the mass circulation print industry out of which *Scouts* arose.

Critics certainly found Morlacchi to be a civilizing force in the play, and a much-needed one at that. Although little venom was spared in appraisals of *Scouts* or its audience, Morlacchi was persistently set apart in the press. “Mlle Morlacchi deserves a word by herself in this wholesale slaughter,” decreed the

Boston reviewer; “In the opening piece . . . she danced exquisitely and with all her accustomed grace and skill, and the audience recognized her merit and called her before the curtain accordingly.”^[21] Penned another, “in her opening performance she gave a number of her beautiful dances as gracefully and as exquisitely [*sic*] as ever.”^[22] And one reviewer noted that that the “Indian scalping, buffalo shooting and redskin-whooping drama” appealed to the lower classes seated in the gallery, while the better class of patrons in the house preferred Morlacchi’s dancing in the curtain raiser.^[23] For critics, Morlacchi’s dancing was a welcome respite of upper-class taste in the otherwise uncouth frontier melodrama.

Such praise of Morlacchi’s dancing in *The Scouts of the Prairie* has been interpreted rather straightforwardly as evidence of her talent. But here the plot thickens. Critics’ responses to *Scouts*, and to Morlacchi’s appearance in it, are indicative of the cultural hierarchy that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century, one that Lawrence Levine has described as a “struggle to establish aesthetic standards, to separate true art from the purely vulgar.”^[24] Persistently dividing the audience and the content of *Scouts* into “high” and “low” components, the extant criticism points to the struggle over class that that was waged in theatrical life in the latter nineteenth century. And critics indeed saw *The Scouts of the Prairie* as class warfare. “To criticize this composition as a play, or analyze its plot, would be ridiculous, for it has nothing to do with art,” declared a New York writer. “It is simply a dime novel set to scenery.”^[25] While critics readily perceived ballet as a civilizing influence in *The Scouts of the Prairie*, the existing criticism cannot fully demonstrate how the mostly male, working-class audience that cheered the play would have responded to the incongruous contrast of the “best dancer in New York” playing the role of an Indian woman who shot a rifle, fought, screeched war whoops and chased the bad guys—and mixed it all with the occasional Romantic-style divertissement.^[26]

The comparison to a dime novel pointed to the fact that playwright Ned Buntline was among the highest-paid authors of the dime novel industry: cheap popular fiction mass-produced by publishing firms between the 1840s and the 1890s, predominantly for a male, white, lower class readership.^[27] Buntline’s readership was likely the same audience targeted by *The Scouts of the Prairie*; the script was created very quickly by piecing together characters from his dime novel series on Buffalo Bill (although the novelette on Dove Eye was published after the premiere of the play, which suggests she was a new character he created for the stage,)^[28] and, as a celebrity author, Buntline received top billing, along with Cody and Omohundro.

Before he turned to Western tales in 1859, Buntline was well known for his mystery-of-the-city books, which unveiled the crime and poverty of the city, along with the extravagance and decadence of the rich.^[29] Alexander Saxton aligns Buntline’s turn to the West with an overall shift in dime novels after 1850 that brought the ideological dimensions of the “Free Soil hero,” particularly white egalitarianism and class mobility, into the new Western hero.^[30] I will return to Saxton’s argument at the end of this article. For now, it is worth noting that Buntline was committed to a nativist political ideology that preached anti-aristocratic egalitarianism and class mobility, and blamed urban problems onto foreign presence in the US. ^[31] As author and activist Buntline helped shape a working-class, anti-immigrant culture in opposition to the elite and foreign corruption of the industrial city.

In Buntline’s urban fiction, the city is a dangerous and unpredictable place, full of dark, secret corners in which foreign-born villains prey on working class heroes and heroines. As Shelley Streeby describes, Buntline’s urban adventures cast the city “as a feminizing space in which ‘fashion’ holds sway and distinguishes a ‘simple’ yet civilized yeoman masculinity from a ‘savage’ state that is implicitly

identified with foreign, nonwhite, or urban others.”^[32] Buntline often positioned the theatre as one of the primary sites of corruption and immorality in the city, as was the case in his 1848 *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York*.^[33] More precisely, the ballet theatre was the setting for his urban melodrama, *Rose Seymour, or The Ballet Girl's Revenge*. Written seven years before the premiere of *The Scouts of the Prairie*, this dime novel portrayed the ballet world as a den of underground crime in which wealthy and licentious immigrants preyed on poor American girls. Every time Rose, the impoverished, motherless heroine who auditions to be a ballet-girl, enters the Broadway theatre, or even dons her ballet costume, her situation quickly becomes life-threatening: she is pursued, abducted, imprisoned, lusted after, and even set aflame one night when her muslin skirt brushes the gas lights. At one point, six particularly rough male audience members, overcome by her performance, leapt onto the stage and chased her through the theatre, howling and breaking down doors in their pursuit.^[34] Published four years before he gave up urban reform literature for the Buffalo Bill dime novels that launched *Scouts*, the ballet theatre figured in Buntline's story as a handy metaphor for urban perversions; a violent place devoid of morals, where passions ran wild, appearances could not be trusted, and dangerous foreigners, “rich, handsome, and liberal,” constantly sought to destroy Rose's innate American goodness.^[35]

Buntline's characterization of the moral and social dangers of the ballet theatre was part of a much larger set of nineteenth-century discourses that viewed ballet as a foreign threat to American values. Anti-ballet rhetoric was multi-faceted: religious reformers saw it as a menace to middle-class morality, while dime novel and story paper authors, like Buntline, cast it as part of the larger threat posed to the working classes by immigration and industrialization. That is, attacks on ballet appeared in a wide variety of popular literature, directed at different segments of the population. But these genres were united in their anxiety over the increasing influence of a rapidly growing middle class after the Civil War. Persistent connections were made in popular discourses between this new “fashionable” class, European social and political decay, and the presence of ballet in the United States. The “ballet-girl” (as she was called, no matter her rank) became a site for these anxieties; as in Buntline's *Rose*, she was a trigger for multiple concerns about foreign influence, social divisions, and the dangers to American virtues within a rapidly transforming urban space. Unlike on the Opéra stage, to American audiences in 1872, ballet would not necessarily have served as an uncomplicated or even positive symbol of modern civilization.

As Barbara Barker has shown, the history of ballet in the US involved “the slow transplanting and rooting of an essentially foreign form.”^[36] Since before the turn of the nineteenth century, French and Italian troupes had been touring to America, and by the early decades, European ballerinas were appearing in the US with increasing regularity. As ballet became more popular, debates raged over the meaning of a European high art on the American stage. According to Christopher Martin, by the late 1820s debates over ballet in the US had evolved into a discourse that superimposed questions of national values and identity—indeed, the very fate of the nation—onto the theatrical representation of the female body.^[37] While some hoped that European ballet would help America develop its own high culture, detractors saw ballet as symptomatic of a decadent and degenerate European civilization. The latter is perhaps most famously expressed in Samuel Morse's vitriolic speech on French ballerina Francisque Hutin's 1827 appearance in New York, in which he decried ballet, “the PUBLIC EXPOSURE OF A NAKED FEMALE,” as “the importation of these lowest instruments of vice from the sinks of monarchical corruption.”^[38] For like-minded dissenters, the problem with ballet was that it went for the senses instead of the intellect, inappropriate for the values of the young republic. As the *Christian Register* put it:

There is nothing in Europe which so directly and effectually saps the fountains of virtue and moral sensibility. It has no fellowship with the mind. . . . It excites none of the finer sensibilities of the heart—it calls forth no moral sentiments of any kind. It is the product of a state of society worn out with luxury and indulgence and seeking excitements in the lowest order of natural propensities. . . . We should consider the establishment of the Ballet in the U. States not only as a wide dereliction from the virtues of our forefathers, but as a great moral evil—an evil more contagious and more pernicious to society than any bodily disease which has ever afflicted our country.[\[39\]](#)

In such discourses, ballet, seducing viewers with its spectacular and feminine beauty, represented the bread and circuses of the European monarchy, a threat to not only the American theatergoer's morals, but also to American political institutions.

In the furor over ballet in America that raged for most of the nineteenth century, the dance form was linked to European civilization, and the anxieties it provoked for its critics were inextricable from concerns about the fate of the republic. Some hoped that the European art would help America develop its own high culture, but ballet's dissenters saw it as a threat to the moral, social, and political fabric of the country. When foreign correspondents wrote columns home about the corruptions of Parisian society, ballet was embedded in their warnings. The Parisian ballet-girl was a representative of "the loosest class in the world": self-indulgent and reckless with her body, her money, and her health.[\[40\]](#) Behind Paris's proliferation of glittering amusements—its cafes, gardens, department stores, theatres, operas, and ballets—lay a society in decay, a darker world of courtesans and immorality. An attitude of extravagance had overtaken French culture, replacing the Revolutionary "watchwords" of "liberty, equality, [and] fraternity." While the French people mouthed these ideas, and were taught that they had a democratic government, in reality,

they have undergone a social revolution and have come to regard these words in another sense. Liberty [here] does not imply freedom of political action and opinion. On the contrary it means to be free from all concerns of government and to have license to do anything they please with themselves and their property. . . . The French notion of liberty is fulfilled [as long] as the people have the wherewithal to fill their stomachs and indulge their sensuality.[\[41\]](#)

Beneath the Parisian fashionable life lurked the ruins of revolutionary ideals. In these accounts, ballet, with its "sumptuous and exhausting lifestyle," was emblematic of the ruin to which such a life of self-indulgence would inevitably lead.[\[42\]](#) Ballet was a foreign other, a symbol of a decadent and degenerate European culture and political system, and a menace to republican values.

But if ballet's sensuality and excessive "indulgence" made it morally suspect in the antebellum US, by the mid-1860s such lavishness had become the major selling point for a new form, the ballet-spectacle. Most famously represented by the 1866 *The Black Crook* with its "bewildering forest of female legs" and "barbaric splendor," ballet-spectacles combined elements from melodrama, farce, and parody, and featured fantastical plots, spectacular special effects, and numerous grand ballets with large casts of European ballerinas.[\[43\]](#) The popularity of these productions generated an outpouring of warnings about their dangers, many of them focused on the female dancer as a site of moral and social transgression. Ballet dancers contrived "to reach men through the senses; to stir their blood with material agencies as the Maria Bonfantis and Sohlkes, and Morlacchis do. Charming exemplars they for American ladies—for the pure daughters of a proud country."[\[44\]](#) The real cause for alarm was that these amusements indicated a

growing preoccupation with pleasure as an end in itself. As a writer for the *Brooklyn Eagle* parsed, it was not the popularity of ballet per se that was the problem; it was that “the function of a ballet-girl in a modern burlesque or spectacle has nothing to do with either graceful or pantomimic action. She is hired to look pretty, and to appear in little clothing.” The worry that ballet went for the senses, rather than the mind, had long troubled its critics, particularly the religiously-oriented. But after the Civil War, ballet’s pleasurable ends increasingly pointed to larger socio-economic concerns; in particular, “the enjoyment of wealth by a class to whom labor, whether of hand or brain, is alike strange. Money which brings with it no obvious duties . . . can hardly fail to be a disastrous inheritance.”^[45] Whereas ballet triggered fears of the corrupting influences of foreign culture throughout the bulk of the nineteenth century, postwar it became central to a new domestic threat: the rise of a culture of consumption and the growth of a new bourgeois class.

William Leach has identified the decades after the Civil War as the key period in the development of a “culture of consumer capitalism,” marked by “acquisition and consumption as the means of achieving happiness, the cult of the new, the democratization of desire, and money value as the predominant measure of all value in society.”^[46] Urbanization and industrialization eroded the familial and agricultural culture that had characterized America to that point, bringing not only rapid economic and lifestyle changes, but also creating a much more fluid socioeconomic system and an expanding class of *nouveau riche* in the metropolis, variously known as the “fashionables” or the “shoddy aristocracy.” This new class had gotten their fortunes quickly, probably in a business venture, but completely lacked the “good breeding and intelligence” that suited their new social class.^[47] The shoddies were the most flagrant example of a society that worshipped money, and was “content with nothing less than . . . an ever-changing life of amusements.”^[48] Certain spaces in the city that were built to accommodate this new upper-middle class, including the park, the shopping mall, the theatre, and the ballet-spectacle—spaces, in other words, in which the fashionable life of newness, leisure, pleasure, and social display was lived—became geographical symbols of the debauchery of this new class in popular literature.^[49]

Such was the case in a new genre of urban nonfiction formed after the Civil War. These works retained the “wicked city motif” found in their dime novel antecedents, yet they purported to be true accounts of city life, even guides to urban spaces. On the surface, it seems that these urban exposés were primarily addressed to upper class concerns over the disruption posed by the shoddies to the socioeconomic order; yet their wide readership also suggests they were highly popular. Nonetheless, there was a clear relationship between the genres, as the nonfiction works carried forward the core themes of popular urban fiction, including the concern that the metropolis was generating both an aristocracy and an underclass whose degenerate lifestyles were endangering American values.^[50]

Most of these urban nonfiction works were organized around social types and/or social spaces. A repeated structural motif was the grouping of classes of women to symbolize various forms of urban vice. As Mona Domosh notes, as the primary class of consumers, women often served as targets for fears about the rise of consumer capitalism in post-Civil War discourses. The “desiring” woman became the symbol of the lack of control and tendency for excess responsible for the moral decay of the city.^[51] In the urban nonfictional exposés, certain types of women who disrupted conventional social and gender boundaries stood for the physical and moral danger of the city streets: the prostitute, the working woman, and, most importantly for my purposes, the “New York Woman.”

The New York Woman served as a metaphor for the vices of “fashionable society,” as illustrated in two

urban nonfiction books published in the 1860s: Marie Louise Hankins's *Women of New York* and George Ellington's *The Women of New York or the Underworld of the Great City*. She dressed stylishly, even extravagantly, performed an elaborate daily *toilette* to make herself beautiful, and devoted her time to shopping and going to parties, the theatre, the opera, and the ballet, all to the neglect of her children. Amongst the New York Woman's trespasses was her artifice: through dress, make-up, facial enameling, false hair, false teeth, and devices such as padded calves and ankles, she could appear to be what she was not. Such external artifice pointed to internal deceit; the New York Woman could appear respectable on the outside, but be of wicked heart. "Did we speak of the falsity of women as regards their heart and their inner life," wrote Ellington, "we would not only tire the reader, but make him lose all faith in human nature, at least as far as women are concerned."^[52] A particular dilemma was the New York Woman's ability to pass for a higher social class than the one to which she belonged.

The New York Woman was also self-indulgent. Obsessed with money and luxury, she gave into her own desires and was seemingly incapable of restraint. The urban exposés traced two possible "routes from personal indulgence to societal destruction: one path followed the course of overconsumption; the other route followed the course of sexual deviance."^[53] In the first of these, her New York Woman's extravagance led to the downfall of others around her: the men who struggled to support her resorted to illegal ways of getting money or, frustrated by her indulgences, to infidelity; or her servants found themselves buying things they could not afford in a vain attempt to keep up with her expectations of social status. "There is no influence so powerful as that of example; and when one woman steps beyond the bounds of propriety in any direction, she is sure to be followed by a dozen other weak ones," avowed Ellington, until finally, "the whole of society becomes demoralized and corrupted."^[54] In the second path to social degradation, women turned to various modes of prostitution in order to fulfill their extravagant need for goods, either in gift or payment form.

The ballet-girl was a special subtype of the New York Woman in these books. She shared the same faults: she was overindulgent, and her appearance was the result of a great deal of embellishment. "The coryphée is not one to let a chance slip that promises any pleasure," noted Ellington. "The majority of these girls need and must have excitement. Without it they could not exist. . . . Seemingly, they live but for the pleasures of the day."^[55] The ballet dancer's grace was a façade that required not only make-up and hair care, but also great physical pain. Accounts of the arduous, violent nature of ballet training were ubiquitous in mid-nineteenth century exposés. Not unlike the fashionable metropolitan woman, who would undergo foot binding to make her feet smaller for the latest footwear, the ballet dancer submitted her body to abnormal suffering in order to create her illusion of perfection. She could not be trusted either. "When 'made up' on the stage, with aid of ribbons, gauze [*sic*], false curls, a gay costume, and pearl powder and vinegar rouge," cautioned Hankins, "she will appear to be not more than sixteen, and as beautiful as an angel; but [...] by day light, in her plain clothes, she might be taken for thirty-five—perhaps forty!"^[56] Moreover, her lifestyle all too often led to sexual deviance or to her own destruction. Ellington's summation is characteristic: "Many have risen to the goal of their ambition, many have given up and returned to their former occupations, while many have sunk low into that dark abyss from which there is no resurrection, without hope and without mercy, betrayed by those who flatter but to ruin."^[57]

On the one hand, authors saw the ballet-girl as a victim of this dangerous urban world, even though her temperament made her particularly susceptible to its temptations of materialism and indulgence. This was especially true if she were American: numerous dime novels and newspaper short stories followed the adventures of good American girls, who, being forced into the ballet world (usually because they suffered

financial distress, and lacked a mother's moral guidance), had no choice but to navigate its moral and physical dangers.[\[58\]](#) As Ellington put it, American ballet-girls tended to be much more chaste, especially when compared to the "peculiar ideas of morality" of the French dancers.[\[59\]](#) But on the other hand, the ballet-girl was a symptom of a much bigger socio-economic epidemic. She personified the destruction of simple American values in the one of the city's most dangerous places: the ballet theatre.

The theatre, and especially the ballet theatre, figured prominently in this literature as one of the primary signifiers for the transforming class structure of the city under the influence of the new bourgeoisie. The ballet was one of the places the shoddies could be found flaunting their extravagance, "throw[ing] bouquets to the bare-legged dancers;" even worse, ballet was one of the disrespectable professions, along with "mineral waters" and prostitution, on which the shoddies depended for quick money.[\[60\]](#) In Hankins' tale, the ballet-girl, whom she calls Helen, came from this shoddy class, forced into dancing to keep her family from starvation when her father quickly made a fortune in some unnamed business, then just as quickly lost it. Helen's life was miserable: "with an aching heart, and a brain too often burning with the insults which she has received from those who take advantage of her exposed and unprotected situation, poor Helen Bray, like many of her sisters, comes upon the stage to dance and smile, and entertain the public world."[\[61\]](#) For these authors, ballet served as a locus for the shoddies and their transgressions in multiple ways; it was the site of their creation, existence, and also their downfall.

The ballet-girl thus functioned in mid-nineteenth century sensationalist urban literature very much in the way that Peter Buckley has noted of the prostitute. As a "fallen" woman, she served the narrative function of being authorized:

to move among the dangerous classes of the city and to recognize—where the novelist and the reader might not—the evil intentions of the fashionably dressed. Because she [was] situated in the places of social and sexual promiscuity, where the extremes of social class converge, she provoke[d] the story of the city. [She allowed] the narration of the unnarratable.[\[62\]](#)

The same might be said about the ballet-girl. In both the fictional mysteries-of-the-city and the nonfiction urban exposés, she was able to simultaneously reference the feminized hedonism of "fashionable" society, and the encroachment of European decadence on American society and values. Connoting an influence that was unavoidably "foreign" and potentially deviant, the ballet dancer ushered in the class conflicts and contradictions of the industrial city in all of its most dangerous, "unnarratable," connotations.

Alexander Saxton argues that what united the dime novel industry was the reliance on class struggle as a structural trope, across a diversity of subject matter. Most importantly for my purposes here, the Western narrative was "conceptualized in dime novels in terms of conflicts between fraternal egalitarianism on one hand and social hierarchy and deference on the other."[\[63\]](#) The widespread support for territorial expansion in the mass press was buttressed by the belief that western lands held the fix for the socio-economic problems of the city.[\[64\]](#) Following this argument, Indian killing was *de rigueur* for the western hero because western expansion held the promise of a concept of civilization not racked by class conflict, "a western expanding white republic."[\[65\]](#)

Saxton views the western hero as the progeny of the prewar Free Soil hero, the literary representative of the ideals of social mobility and white fraternity that lay at the foundation of Republican ideology. Key

characteristics of the western hero included lower-class roots, a background in Indian killing, and the ability to cross class divisions, usually by winning the favor of an upper-class woman's family and marrying her.^[66] Saxton's exemplary model of such a character is Buntline's first depiction of Cody in his 1869 *Buffalo Bill: The King of the Border Men*, the work that soon led both author and subject to their theatrical debut in *The Scouts of the Prairie*. As Bill, in Buntline's story, leaves his modest vernacular beginnings to, first, fight the Indians who work for white ruffians, and finally, marry a banker's daughter, he dramatizes American social advancement. Importantly for my purposes, romantic partnership is crucial to the western hero's liberation from class boundaries. "It is not so much that lower-class origin has been denied," explains Saxton, "but that equal access to privileges of the upper class, including acquisition of wealth and marriageability, has been triumphantly vindicated."^[67] From this perspective, one might speculate that, in the eyes of the working-class audience, as Buffalo Bill and Dove Eye embrace at the end of *The Scouts of the Prairie* against the backdrop of a speeding locomotive, symbol of the westward push of industrialization, perhaps the corruptions of a foreign, elitist culture that the Italian ballerina signified were at least as much in need of containment by the western hero than the alterity represented by the Indian Dove Eye. Not only the savagery of the Native American, but also the vices and cruelties of industrial conflict, were quelled under Cody's stabilizing hand.

When read intertextually with the narrative of the ballet-girl in popular literature, the spectre of a European "other" who gestured Eastward to the class and cultural reorganization of the metropolis emerges in *The Scouts of the Prairie*, the earliest prototype of the *Wild West* spectacles. In addition to affirming Dove Eye's civilized side, Morlacchi's ballet-dancing body pointed to social and economic worries about class, gender, and race in capitalist civilization. Several issues linger: how was Morlacchi's dancing positioned in the play, and did the relationship between text and dance ultimately embrace these various levels of meaning or attempt to resolve them somehow? How would audiences in non-urban geographical locations have perceived ballet dancing in *Scouts*? What role did the racism aimed at immigrants during the period play in Morlacchi's—and ballet's—positioning in the frontier play?^[68] These questions remain difficult to answer, given the extant textual and critical resources through which we might rebuild the way in which a high "foreign" art intersected with this dime novel drama.^[69] Such problems emerge, however, when we see the incorporation of ballet dancing, and the associations it carried, as a specific dramaturgical choice in *The Scouts of the Prairie*, one that went far, far beyond mere spectacle to gesture towards the class and cultural divisions at the heart of the question of "civilization" itself.

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[1] Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 87, 86. On the *Wild West* as American mythology, see also Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

[2] Sandra K. Sagala's monograph is the most comprehensive source on these theatrical productions: see *Buffalo Bill on Stage* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008). See also Roger A. Hall, *Performing the American Frontier, 1870-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 50-67. Neither author considers Morlacchi's dancing in the role of Dove Eye or explores the historical context of ballet in the image or the plays.

[3] Qtd. in Chris Enss, *Buffalo Gals: Women of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2006), 4.

[4] Qtd. in Barbara Barker, *Ballet or Ballyhoo: The American Careers of Marie Bonfanti, Rita Sangalli, and Giuseppina Morlacchi* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1984), 121.

[5] Morlacchi's company was in financial trouble at the time, but there is no direct evidence that she took the role in *Scouts* out of financial desperation. The year after *Scouts* premiered, Morlacchi married Omohundro. She appeared in two subsequent Cody melodramas, playing an Indian maiden in *The Scouts of the Plains* and an Irish girl in *Life on the Border*, in between which she returned to the opera house for productions of *Ahmed* and her own production of *La Bayadère*. Morlacchi and Omohundro split from Cody in 1876 to create their own western combination plays, in several of which Morlacchi played an Indian maiden role. After Omohundro died in 1880, Morlacchi retired from the stage, and spent the following years teaching ballet lessons to the mill workers in Lowell, Massachusetts, where she and Omohundro owned a home. All biographical information drawn from Barker, *Ballet or Ballyhoo*, 111-167. For John M. Burke, see Chris Dixon, "Introduction: The Mysterious Major Burke," in John M. Burke, *Buffalo Bill from Prairie to Palace*. Introduction ed. Chris Dixon. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012). Online at *Cody Studies*, <http://www.codystudies.org/?tag=john-m-burke> (accessed 5 September 2014).

[6] Early studies that mention the plot include James Monaghan, "The Stage Career of Buffalo Bill," *The Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 31, no. 4 (December 1938): 414-416; and William S.E. Coleman, "Buffalo Bill on Stage," *Players*, 47, no. 2 (1971): 80-91. Craig Francis Nieuwenhuys's unpublished dissertation is the most detailed study of *The Scouts of the Prairie*, and his attempted reconstruction of the plot the most thorough. See Nieuwenhuys, "Six-Guns on the Stage: Buffalo Bill Cody's First Celebration of the Conquest of the American Frontier" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1981), see especially 43-74 for the plot. Sagala also includes a detailed account of the narrative (*Buffalo Bill on Stage*, 21-23).

[7] *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 December 1872, 4. The role of Hazel Eye was initially played by Eloe Carfano, but the secondary sources are not clear about her identity. Barbara Barker, Morlacchi's biographer, says that Carfano was a member of Morlacchi's ballet company (Barker, *Ballet or Ballyhoo*, 153); Sandra K. Sagala describes her as a "Cuban actress" who joined the Scouts' company on tour (Sagala, *Buffalo Bill on Stage*, 27). Both could be true; as Sagala notes, the reviews are confusing, and it may be that reviewers could not always tell the two women apart. However, Barker's evidence that Carfano danced with Morlacchi in *Scouts* is based on the after-the-fact recollection of Omohundro's

brother that “both women danced on the tips of their toes” in the play (Barker, *Ballet or Ballyhoo*, 156). I have found no reviews that mention Carfano’s dancing, only Morlacchi’s.

[8] Nieuwenhuysse, “Six-Guns on the Stage,” 54. Nieuwenhuysse’s source for the following quotations regarding the plot is the *Troop C Ledger*, Buffalo Bill Historical Center. See note 9 for details about this Ledger.

[9] “The Scouts at Pike’s Opera House” (Cincinnati), Clipping, n.d n.p, William F. Cody Collection, “Stage Play Notices and Reviews 1872-1880: Black Book,” in Buffalo Bill Cody Scrapbooks 1875-1903, Manuscript 6, William F. Cody, roll 1. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, WY. This is a microfilm of the Troop C Ledger, held at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, which contains numerous newspaper clippings cut so as to fit as many as possible on a page. Most of these clippings do not include dates or page numbers, and in some the name of the publication and/or its location has been omitted as well. Hereafter: BBHC Ledger.

[10] “Amusements,” *New York Times*, 1 April 1873, 4.

[11] Barker suggests a dance may have been incorporated into Dove Eye’s prayer scene; see Barker, *Ballet or Ballyhoo*, 156.

[12] Qtd. in Nieuwenhuysse, “Six-Guns on the Stage,” 72.

[13] Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 54; Nieuwenhuysse, “Six-Guns on the Stage,” 111.

[14] Rebecca Jaroff, “Opposing Forces: (Re)Playing Pocahontas and the Politics of Indian Removal on the Antebellum Stage,” *Comparative Drama* 40, no. 4 (Winter 2006/2007): 486.

[15] Mary V. Dearborn, *Pocahontas’s Daughters: Gender and Ethnicity in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 99.

[16] “The Scouts of the Prairie: A Lively Representation of Border Life” (Utica), BBHC Ledger, n.d., n.p.

[17] “Academy of Music” (Indianapolis), BBHC Ledger, n.d n.p.

[18] Joellen Meglin, “‘Sauvages,’ Sex Role and Semiotics: Representations of Native Americans in the French Ballet 1736-1837, Part Two: The Nineteenth Century,” *Dance Chronicle* 23, no. 3 (2000): 291.

[19] Real Native Americans were added to the cast after the premiere, where they were mixed with non-Native “extras.” Costumes, weaponry, songs, and dances included in the play all worked to signify the display of an authentic Native culture onstage. Nieuwenhuysse notes that critics had trouble seeing the difference between the Native and non-Native performers, and that, ultimately, reviewers emphasized the overall brutality of the Indians through stereotypes that reinforced government’s eradication policies. Nieuwenhuysse, “Six-Guns on the Stage,” 29, 43, 79-80, 130-31.

[20] Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of

North Carolina Press, 1991).

[21] *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 4 March 1873, issue 54, column G. The reviewer's reference to "Madmoiselle" Morlacchi points to the fact that, although predominately Italian, dancers in the ballet-spectacles were typically billed as "French" to cater to an emergent bourgeois class who saw Paris as the apex of cultural refinement, see Barker, *Ballet or Ballyhoo*, 6.

[22] Qtd. in Nieuwenhuysse, "Six-Guns on the Stage," 50.

[23] Qtd. in Sagala, *Buffalo Bill on Stage*, 64.

[24] Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 128. Also see Hall, *Performing the American Frontier*, 12-14; Sagala, *Buffalo Bill on Stage*, 16, 64.

[25] "The Scouts of the Prairie" (Niblo's Garden, New York City), BBHC Ledger, n.d n.p.

[26] BBHC Ledger, no title, n.d., n.p. Reviews note that, while the packed houses at *The Scouts of the Prairie* were predominantly male, the audience was a mixture of upper and lower class patrons. See also "From the Prairie: Buffalo Bill, Texas Jack and Ned Buntline at the Academy of Music," which describes how "men seemed to be arranged in close layers from the orchestra railing clear away up to the remotest corners of the gallery." BBHC, n.d., n.p. My account of Morlacchi's dancing in the play draws on the account of her biographer Barbara Barker, who describes that Morlacchi's choreographic style adhered to the pantomimic, dramatic style of the *ballet d'action* tradition in which she was trained.

[27] The dime novel industry included story papers, dime novels, and pamphlets like the cheap library. Michael Denning states that the continuities and repetitions between these formats justifies embracing them all under the term "dime novels," which also distinguishes this genre from publications aimed at a middle-class readership. I am following his usage of the term. See Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso, 1987), 10-12. On the composition of the dime novel audience, see Denning, *Mechanic Accents* 27-30, and also Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1990), 328.

[28] Nieuwenhuysse, "Six-Guns on the Stage," 82-83. This is not to say that Dove Eye did not have antecedents in Buntline's novels, which invites further research.

[29] Buntline's first frontier story was *Stella Delorme; or The Comanche's Dream: A Wild and Fanciful Story of Savage Chivalry*, which launched a series of Western dime novels. Nieuwenhuysse, "Six-Guns on the Stage," 82.

Buntline's oeuvre also included international adventure romances, Naval stories, and urban melodramas. For a well-developed examination of Buntline's career, see Chapter 5 of Peter Buckley, *To the Opera House: Culture and Society in New York City, 1820-1860*. (PhD diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1984).

[30] Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, 196.

[31] Buntline switched party affiliations often, but was a committed member of the nativist cause from at least 1848 to the late 1850s, a member of the Order of United Americans and their offspring, the Know-Nothing Party. He also played a leading role in the American Committee, which helped instigate the 1849 Astor Place theatre riot, an event directly related to the class oppositions grafted onto the growing division between “high” and “low” culture. Later, as a celebrity author, Buntline was recruited to campaign for the Republican Party in 1876, 1880, and 1884. Splitting with the Republican Party in 1884, when he refused to support candidate James G. Blaine, he announced himself as an Independent Republican, and then fell out of favor with the Party for his earlier affiliation with the Know-Nothings. See Jay Monaghan, *The Great Rascal: The Life and Adventures of Ned Buntline* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1952), 162-181, 192-217, 264, 272, 279-80. While it goes beyond the scope of my analysis of Morlacchi’s role in *The Scouts of the Prairie*, it also bears mention that Buntline’s nativist politics are also evident in the fact that, although the Indians in the play bear the brunt of the punishment, the real villains are the Mormon and immigrant renegades who mastermind the Indian attacks on the scouts. For a fuller account of mid-nineteenth century Republicanism than I can provide here, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); on nativism, see Dale T. Knobel, *America for the Americans: the Nativist Movement in the United States* (New York: Twayne, 1996).

[32] Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 143.

[33] For instance, the working-class heroine is threatened by the wealthy foreigner who pursues her that he will have her reputation ruined like Clara Norris (an actress of the day) “or any other of the stock company of the theatre of vice in the city.” Elsewhere, the theatre stands as a metaphor for the dark side of the city: the domain of the city prostitute is referred to as “the theatre of nightly infamy.” Ned Buntline, *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York: a story of real life* (New York, 1848), 159, 9. Electronic version available by *Sabin Americana*. Gale, Cengage Learning, <http://galenet.galegroup.com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY103135748&srchtp=a&ste=14>, (accessed 15 August 2013).

[34] Ned Buntline, *Rose Seymour, or The Ballet Girl’s Revenge, a tale of the New-York Drama* (New York: Hilton, 1865).

[35] *Ibid.*, 29.

[36] Barker, *Ballet or Ballyhoo*, 3.

[37] Christopher Martin, “Naked Females and Splay-Footed Sprawlers: Ballerinas on the Stage in Jacksonian America,” *Theatre Survey* 51, no. 1 (May 2010): 95-114.

[38] Qtd. in *ibid.*, 100.

[39] *Christian Register*, 8 December 1827, 6, 49.

[40] “The Ballet-Girls of Paris,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, 22 February 1870, 6.

[41] “Foreign Correspondence,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, 9 January 1858, 2.

[42] “The Ballet-Girls of Paris,” 6.

[43] Qtd. in George Freedley, “The Black Crook and the White Fawn,” in *Chronicles of the American Dance: From the Shakers to Martha Graham*, ed. Paul Magriel (New York: Da Capo Press, 1978), 77, 70.

[44] Junius Henry Browne, “The Ballet as a Social Evil,” *Northern Monthly*, II (2 April 1868). Qtd. in Barker, *Ballet or Ballyhoo*, 18.

[45] “The Social Morality of the Day,” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, 8 June 1871, 1. Brooklyn Daily Eagle Online, <http://eagle.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/Default/Skins/BEagle/Client.asp?Skin=Beagle> (accessed 14 November 2012).

[46] William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 3.

[47] George Ellington, *The Women of New York: Or, the Under-World of the Great City: Illustrating the Life of Women of Fashion, Women of Pleasure, Actresses and Ballet Girls, Etc.* (New York: New York Book Co., 1869), 117.

[48] *Ibid.*, 24.

[49] On the construction of social spaces, including theatres, for the growing middle-class, see Mona Domosh, “The Women of New York: A Fashionable Moral Geography,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 19, no. 5 (2001): 577-579. On the way in which the rise of the ballet-spectacle intertwined with and helped promote the dominance of business-class theatrical production in the post-Civil War years, see Bruce McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 231-257 (especially 242-243 on ballet-spectacles, or “musical extravaganzas”).

[50] Stuart M. Blumin, “Explaining the New Metropolis: Perception, Depiction, and Analysis in Mid-Nineteenth Century New York City,” *Journal of Urban History* 11 (November 1984): 11. See Blumin, “Explaining the New Metropolis,” 35, for the sales of these books, which numbered in the hundreds of thousands. As Blumin noted in 1984, the postwar urban nonfiction is an understudied genre; I found little additional scholarship on this literature, with the exception of Mona Domosh’s “The Women of New York: A Fashionable Moral Geography.” Drawing on Blumin’s work, Denning notes that the relationship between these nonfictional urban exposés and mysteries-of-the-city novels is evidenced in the fact that some authors attempted to work in both genres; Denning, 228, no.8.

[51] Domosh, “The Women of New York,” 575.

[52] Ellington, *The Women of New York*, 90.

[53] Domosh, "The Women of New York," 586.

[54] Ellington, 121.

[55] *Ibid.*, 515.

[56] Marie Louise Hankins, *Women of New York* (New York: M.L. Hankins & Co., 1861), 157-58.

[57] Ellington, 514.

[58] See, for example, "The Ballet Dancer," *Brooklyn Eagle*, 20 August 1853, 1.

[59] Ellington, 513, 511.

[60] *Ibid.*, 117, 119.

[61] Hankins, *Women of New York*, 159-160.

[62] Peter Buckley, *To the Opera House: Culture and Society in New York City, 1820-1860*. (PhD diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1984), 442-443. Buckley's subject is the character of the prostitute in Ned Buntline's 1848 *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York*.

[63] Saxton, *Rise and Fall*, 330. Arguing that dime-novel thematic material often supported Republican party ideology, and that the industry maintained close ties to that party, Saxton places the western hero in popular fiction after 1850 within the lineage of the earlier "Free Soil hero," who "by transcending the limits of region and class, could bid for national spokespersonship" (187). See Saxton, 183-203; 321-347.

[64] Alexander Saxton, "Problems of Class and Race in the Origins of the Mass Circulation Press," *American Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 229-230.

[65] Alexander Saxton, "The Racial Trajectory of the Western Hero," *Amerasia* 11, no. 2 (1984): 70. Saxton locates one source of the western hero in Jacksonian democracy, in which class divisions and upper-class dominance were broken down through appeals to egalitarian ideals within white civilization and racial hostility against enemies outside of it; see 68-70. Also Saxton, *Rise and Fall*, 183-201.

[66] On the Free Soil hero, see Saxton, *Rise and Fall*, 195ff; on the western hero as the inheritor of those values, see 321-344.

[67] Saxton, *Rise and Fall*, 337-338.

[68] Matthew Frye Jacobson has documented that, with swelling immigration in the nineteenth century, "white" became no longer a singular, monolithic category, but rather plural, subject to shades and variations. Celtic, German, and Italian immigrants in particular were perceived as "savage," or racially in-between, and thus unfit for citizenship. See Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). Some criticism of the Italian dancers who brought ballet to American shores suggests that they were at times viewed through

such racist lenses, not readily seen as “white” in the public eye. For instance, in her role as Dove Eye, Morlacchi was referred to as the scouts’ “dusky-faced friend” (“The Scouts of the Prairie: A Lively Representation of Border Life” [Utica]), and as “tawny but not tawdry” [“Academy of Music” (Indianapolis), BBHC Ledger, n.d., n.p.]. And when a Omaha reviewer described Morlacchi as “a mulatto dancer,” Cody shot back that such a claim was “simply *contemptible*,” and corrected that “[her] skin is as white, and blood as pure as your own—if not purer” (qtd. in Sagala, *Buffalo Bill on Stage*, 26). The racist conflicts associated with Italian ballerinas in the nineteenth-century US warrant greater exploration.

[69] I explore the historiographic problems associated with this research more fully in Andrea Harris, “The Phantom Dancer, or, the Case of the Mysterious Toe Shoe in the Frontier Prop Closet,” in “A Tyranny of Documents: The Performing Arts Historian as Film Noir Detective,” ed. Stephen Johnson, special issue, *Performing Arts Resources* 28 (2011): 151-59.



MARTIN E. SEGAL THEATRE CENTER
PUBLICATIONS

"Sur la Pointe on the Prairie: Giuseppina Morlacchi and the Urban Problem in the Frontier Melodrama"

by Andrea Harris

ISSN 2376-4236

The Journal of American Drama and Theatre

Volume 27, Number 1 (Winter 2015)

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