

**MODELING HEROINES FROM GIACAMO PUCCINI'S OPERAS**

**by**

**Shinobu Yoshida**

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**Doctoral Committee:**

**Associate Professor Naomi A. André, Co-Chair  
Associate Professor Jason Duane Geary, Co-Chair  
Associate Professor Mark Allan Clague  
Assistant Professor Victor Román Mendoza**

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## I. CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: PUCCINI, MUSICOLOGY, AND FEMINIST THEORY

Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924) lived during a period in which many changes were being made by and for women in western European culture. The heroines represented in Puccini’s operas often reflect the kinds of women—idealized woman, femme fatale, and the New Woman—constructed in publications and discourses during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This dissertation considers Puccini’s heroines and typology of female representations in light of contemporary cultural movements of realism and exoticism as well as social and political developments by and for women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The characters analyzed are Mimi from *La bohème* (1896), Minnie from *La fanciulla del West* (1910), and Turandot (1926). Any female character from Puccini’s operas, who has at least one aria, could have been selected and would have been suitable to work within the framework that is established here. However, these abovementioned three exhibit many traits of the types of female representations that existed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, contemporaneous to the time when the operas were composed, and thus, can serve as examples for future projects.

Scholarship on the operas of Puccini has focused on one type of female character, the so-called “Puccini heroine.” This female protagonist is said to be weak, fragile, self-

sacrificing, and usually dies tragically.<sup>1</sup> This concept of the female character has not been challenged critically and has been accepted into the popular media. For example, in the program notes for the Lyric Opera of Chicago in the 2006–07 season, the writer Roger Pines explains that Liù “is the last of the typical ‘Puccini girls’: sweetly tender-hearted like Mimi, selfless like Minnie, self-sacrificing like Butterfly.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet the “Puccini heroine” does not fully encompass the range of female characters in Puccini’s operas. Puccini’s female protagonists include characters who clearly do not fit into this category, such as Turandot, who is a murderer. To avoid marriage and dominance by a man, she kills suitors who fail to pass her challenge of answering three very difficult riddles. Another protagonist who kills men is Tosca. Not only does she kill the deceptive and manipulative Scarpia with her bare hands, but she inadvertently betrays her lover, precipitating his execution. Minnie from *La fanciulla del West*, on the other hand, does not kill anyone but threatens to do so. Moreover, she does not typify the “Puccini heroine” insofar as she is independent, both financially and personally. She even carries a pistol and has authority over the men around her.

The dominance of the “Puccini heroine” in musicological literature distorts our understanding of Puccini’s operas and, in turn, our view of Puccini as a composer. I identify three distinct character types in Puccini’s operas: the Sentimental Heroine, the Femme Fatale, and the New Woman. These groupings are based on female typologies

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<sup>1</sup> See Sandra Corse, “Mi chiamano Mimi’: The Role of Women in Puccini’s Operas,” *Opera Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1983); Claire Detels, “Puccini’s ‘Decent to the Goddess’: Feminine Archetypal Motifs from *Manon Lescaut* to *Turandot*,” in *A Yearbook in Interdisciplinary Studies in the Fine Arts* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990); William Weaver, “Puccini’s *Manon* and His Other Heroines,” in *The Puccini Companion*, ed. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini (New York: Norton, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Roger Pines, “A Taste for the Exotic: Puccini and *Turandot*,” *Lyric Opera* 2006, 27.

historically represented during Puccini's lifetime. Moreover, Puccini's heroines are dynamic and multifaceted and often cannot be fully encapsulated by a single category. Rather than uphold a limiting and false typology, I introduce a different method that accommodates the inclusion of all Puccini's heroines to analyze and understand them more fully.<sup>3</sup> This analytical process will help revise our understanding of Puccini as a composer of limited skills in creating female characters, show the stereotypical representation of women in the nineteenth century, and help modern singers and interpreters of Puccini's operas to have a fuller perspective on these heroines.

### **Musicology, Feminist Theory, and Puccini Studies**

Since the appearance of musicological studies influenced by developments in feminist theory, such as Catherine Clément's *Opera, the Undoing of Women* (1979, English translation, 1988) and Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (1991), many musicologists have reconsidered how women, including female characters, are represented in opera.<sup>4</sup> There is a wide range of lenses through which women are analyzed and interpreted in opera and opera scholarship. Scholars most often use elements such as the body and voice as the focus of their studies, while several other

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<sup>3</sup> I have limited the female protagonists to those who have at least one aria in the operas. Thus, I excluded Suzuki from *Madama Butterfly*, most female characters from *Gianni Schicchi* and *Suor Angelica*, and Lisette from *La rondine*.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Clément, *Opera, or The Undoing of Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Elizabeth Hudson, "Gilda Seduced: A Tale Untold," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4, no. 3 (1992); Ralph P. Locke, "What Are These Women Doing in Opera?," in *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, ed. Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Mary Ann Smart, "Verdi Sings Erminia Frezzolini," *Women & Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*, no. 1 (1997).



writers have explored the issue of cross-dressing.<sup>5</sup> Others, such as Carolyn Abbate in *Unsung Voice* (1991) and more recently Naomi André in *Gendered Voices* (2006), have thought deeply about voice on many different levels.<sup>6</sup> With heroines such as Lucia di Lammermoor, characterized by psychological trauma, several scholars have examined mental health. One example is Mary Anne Smart, who has written about Lucia di Lammermoor's psychological abnormality in her aria after she has killed her bridegroom.<sup>7</sup>

### *Representing Women in Puccini's Operas*

Although the discipline of musicology has accepted and incorporated feminist theory, scholars studying Puccini seem to be more reticent to include feminism in their research. Many of the recent monographs and articles on Puccini and his works have focused not on the feminist perspective but on the historical and cultural age during which the composer lived and worked. Indeed, some scholars have expressed an explicit version to analyzing opera through a feminist lens. For example, William Ashbrook and Harold Powers state in the introduction of their book *Puccini's Turandot: The End of the Great Tradition*:

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<sup>5</sup> Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith, eds., *En travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou, eds., *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Naomi André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Mary Ann Smart, "The Lost Voice of Rosine Stolz," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 6, no. 1 (1994).

<sup>7</sup> Mary Ann Smart, "The Silencing of Lucia," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4, no. 2 (1992).

That Puccini's *Turandot*—more than any of his other works—could play as relevant a role in feminist criticism as it could in social criticism is as obvious as it is irrelevant to our more limited concern with Puccini's use of such voices and such situations for musical ends. Our concern is not with *Turandot* as one among a number of socio-historical reflections of a phase or an aspect of Western culture, but simply as a work worthy of consideration in its own terms, as the last Monument in the last Golden Century of one of the world's Great Traditions of musical theater.<sup>8</sup>

That Ashbrook and Powers assert that it is possible to discuss *Turandot* independent of socio-historical considerations is telling, as if an opera, or music in general, can be seriously discussed apart from the historical context out of which it arose. *Turandot* cannot be considered to be the last opera in the Great Tradition if this Great Tradition itself is not understood in the context of historical considerations.

Others do not explicitly eschew feminist perspective, but they pursue other questions, allowing their work to speak for itself in the lack of it. In Deborah Burton's edited collection of essays by various writers, *Tosca's Prism* (2004), the articles mainly focus on the historical details regarding the period in which the opera was written and based.<sup>9</sup> Although feminist movements and women's issues were part of history, they are absent in these chapters. The chapter that comes closest in touching feminist discussion is the last one, "Who Is Tosca?: A Discussion among Modern Interpreters; Moderated by William Weaver, with Magda Olivero, Giuseppe di Stefano, Luigi Squarzina, and Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi, at the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome, 17 June 2000." Because it is "a conversation [rather] than a series of formal presentations" (that is, serious scholarship), it suggests that the informal setting lacks the deeper discussion that a formal

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<sup>8</sup> William Ashbrook and Harold Powers, *Puccini's Turandot: The End of the Great Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 11.

<sup>9</sup> Deborah Burton, Susan Vandiver Nicassio, and Agostino Ziino, eds., *Tosca's Prism: Three Moments of Western Cultural History* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004).

setting might induce.<sup>10</sup> The closest part of the conversation regarding feminist interpretation is Olivero's discussion of her understanding of Tosca's upbringing that makes the heroine the way she is: how, for example, she grew up in a convent and was trained to be a singer.

In *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism and Modernity* (2007), Alexandra Wilson contextualizes Puccini's operas in the historical period in which they were composed. Although Wilson explores several new and promising avenues of research, she does not address feminist movements that were becoming very prominent throughout Europe, and that could have had some impact on Puccini and his views on women.<sup>11</sup> Although she does discuss issues such as gender in some of her chapters, she does so without considering how they might be understood in light of feminist scholarship available today or even the feminist movements contemporary to the time in which Puccini lived.

There are however several shorter works that have seriously considered the topic of women in Puccini's operas. For example, Helen Greenwald has written a few articles on Puccini's female characters.<sup>12</sup> In "Title Character Distinction and Rhythmic

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<sup>10</sup> William Weaver et al., "Who Is Tosca?: A Discussion among Modern Interpreters; Moderated by William Weaver, with Magda Olivero, Giuseppe di Stefano, Luigi Squarzina, and Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi, at the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome, 17 June 2000," in *Tosca's Prism: Three Moments of Western Cultural History*, ed. Deborah Burton, Susan Vandiver Nicassio, and Agostino Ziino (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 281.

<sup>11</sup> Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism and Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Alexandra May Wilson, "The Puccini Problem: Nationalism, Gender and Decadence in Italian Puccini Reception, 1896-1912" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Helen Greenwald, "Title Character Distinction and Rhythmic Differentiation in Puccini's Operas," in *Giacomo Puccini: L'uomo, il musicista, il panorama europeo, Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi su Giacomo Puccini nel 70° anniversario della morte*

Differentiation in Puccini's Operas," Greenwald analyzes musical characterization of most of the female protagonists. She argues that their first appearances on stage as well as their first arias reveal essential aspects of each heroine. Her study examines each character individually and does not make a claim of an overarching conclusion to the various types of personalities of Puccini's heroines.

Most writers often discuss Puccini's heroines collectively and point out the similarities amongst them. This group of heroines has been referred to collectively as the "Puccini girl" or "Puccinian character," but it is commonly called the "Puccini heroine."<sup>13</sup> This type of a protagonist had become commonly known by the audience even during Puccini's time. In fact when Puccini's last opera, *Turandot*, premiered in 1926, contemporary critics repeatedly called Liù "the most *Puccinian character* of the opera" [emphasis added].<sup>14</sup>

With so many varied female characters in Puccini's operas, it is challenging to summarize the qualities that they share. Nevertheless, in one of the early authoritative biographies of the composer *Puccini: A Critical Biography* (1958), Mosco Carner explains the "Puccini heroine" as follows:

gentle, tender, affectionate and childlike, and they love to the point of self-sacrifice. There are those "luminous pleasing figures," that "something beautiful, attractive and gracious" of which he wrote his librettist. ... It is even possible to speak of an aura of chastity surrounding his little heroines.<sup>15</sup>

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(Lucca, 25-29 novembre 1994), ed. Gabriella Biagi Ravenni and Carolyn Gianturco (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana Editrice, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Pines, *Lyric Opera, 2006–2007*, 27. Quoted from Wilson, *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism and Modernity*, 215. Wilson provides an example from the early twentieth-century writer Pino di Valmarana, "Turandot di G. Puccini alla Scala," *Musica e scena* 3/4 (April 1926), 16–17.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from Pino di Valmarana, "Turandot di G. Puccini alla Scala," in *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Mosco Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 3rd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1958, 1992), 303.

Carner does not specify the characters who fit these descriptions, but he implies that they suit all of Puccini's heroines.

Sandra Corse, in her article "Mi chiamano Mimi: The Role of Women in Puccini's Operas," boxes the female protagonists in one category, victim of men, with two subgroups.

Puccini evidently saw women characters as belonging to one of two groups. The first consists of weak and frail creatures who are lovely in their weakness—Mimi, Butterfly, and Liù. [In] Another group are those women characters who may be strong and seemingly more self-sufficient, such as Tosca and Turandot. On closer inspection, however, we see that they have much in common with the first group: Tosca suffers from a political and religious naiveté that ensures her downfall, and Turandot also, for all her formidable political power (hers, incidentally, only because her father allows it) is naïve; it takes finally only a kiss to bring about her capitulation.<sup>16</sup>

Corse portrays the heroines negatively, describing the archetypal Puccinian female character as "weak and frail" yet "lovely in [her] weakness." She "suffers, and often is a pitiable creature whose suffering ends in her death."<sup>17</sup> Corse writes that the female character is in a romantic relationship, which is her only motivation in life or death. The women who try to undermine men's attempt to possess them "are sacrificed."<sup>18</sup> Corse asserts that in contrast to male figures who "may be motivated by political or idealistic notions, by friendship or love of their father in addition to their romantic lover interests, women never have any other interests."<sup>19</sup> With such general descriptions, Corse's

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<sup>16</sup> Corse, "Mi chiamano Mimi: The Role of Women in Puccini's Operas," 93.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.: 94.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. She continues, "In a manner typical of romantic opera the male in a pair of lovers is always dominant; in the drama he is more powerful, more active, or smarter than the woman; in the music the themes associated with the tenor rather than with the soprano tend to be predominant. Men attempt to possess, often in rather undisguisedly aggressive ways, such as Scarpia's attempted rape of Tosca or Calaph's [sic] demand for

archetypal Puccini female character could be substituted with many other nineteenth-century operatic heroines.

William Weaver writes about the “Puccini heroines” in a more neutral stance, describing them as “innocent,” “young and vulnerable.”<sup>20</sup> He points out Suor Angelica as the “Puccini heroine par excellence: young and vulnerable, victim of the cruel world, forced into a convent for having produced an illegitimate child, and yet—despite her sin—supremely innocent, even childish.”<sup>21</sup> But the most important trait of a “Puccini heroine,” among whom he includes Manon, Mimì, Butterfly, and Minnie from *La fanciulla del West*, is that the character exhibits a kind of a “melancholy,” whether it be “heartrending melancholy,” “pathetic melancholy,” or “wistful melancholy.”<sup>22</sup> Weaver explains “melancholy” as “the longing for a different existence.”<sup>23</sup> He states, “Puccini’s characters, in particular his heroines, deepened, though nearly all his heroines maintained that special, *pathetic melancholy* that is adumbrated in Manon and perfected in Mimì.”<sup>24</sup> Weaver asserts that, “Cio-Cio-San is nevertheless a ‘Puccini heroine’ first and foremost. She shares the *wistful melancholy* of her sisters Manon and Mimì, the longing for a different existence.”<sup>25</sup> About Minnie from *La fanciulla del West*, he writes, “but she also has that familiar *Puccinian yearning* (in this case, also for higher education); and when

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unconditional surrender from Turandot; women either acquiesce or resort to physical violence to resist this domination. Women often undermine the man’s attempt at possession, however, by giving themselves freely—but those who are most generous, such as Butterfly or Liù, are sacrificed. The death of a beautiful woman is the usual source of poignancy, tragedy, and audience appeal in Puccini—poignancy made sensibly elegant through unashamedly gorgeous music.”

<sup>20</sup> Weaver, “Puccini’s Manon and His Other Heroines,” 119, 114, 117.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 119, 114, 117.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* Unless noted, all the emphases, such as here, are added by the author.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 117. Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 303.

she browbeats the miners—pushovers, to a man—and wins her soon-to-be-reformed lover’s release, the two of them set off for the East... in what should be a happy ending, though it is drenched in the *composer’s typical and most heartrending melancholy*.<sup>26</sup> Although Weaver’s descriptions might be a little more enlightening, not all of Puccini’s female characters are “innocent,” “young,” “vulnerable,” or “melancholic.”

### *The Problem with the “Puccini Heroine”*

Regardless of the approach earlier scholarship has engaged the topic of the “Puccini heroine,” it privileges this group of female characters and confronts certain limitations. It creates a binary system that emphasizes the visible category—the “Puccini heroine”—and allows only for discussions that support the category. The individuality of each character and qualities are downplayed. Characters and/or traits not suitable for the category are dismissed and unacknowledged. Thus, characters that supposedly have the traits of the “Puccini heroine” are emphasized whereas those that lack them are ignored or downplayed as can be seen in articles by Corse and Detels. Even within the category of “Puccini heroine,” some heroines exhibit qualities that might disqualify them from being included in the group. For example, Butterfly is often called a “Puccini heroine,” yet threatens to kill in the second act. This behavior is often ignored by earlier writers.

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<sup>26</sup> Weaver, “Puccini’s Manon and His Other Heroines,” 118. Of the heroines from *Il trittico*, he asserts that, “Lauretta, the closest we come to a heroine in *Gianni Schicchi*, has undeniable charm but little *wistfulness*” (119). “And even Giorgetta in *Il tabarro* lacks the *pathetic melancholy* of her older sisters... she, too, has a ‘*yearning*’ aria...” (119). Weaver calls Anna from *Le villi* the “emblematic ‘Puccini heroine,’ with her aria about dear little flowers and immediate, free-floating *melancholy*...” (120). Of Magda from *La rondine*, Weaver asserts that she “sings a *typical yearning* aria...” (120). Italics added for emphasis.

The way “Puccini heroine” has been discussed in earlier scholarship rarely allows for ways of analyzing individual characters with differing and conflicting qualities. Either a character is part of the group or is not; there is no in-between.

Another problem with the way “Puccini heroine” has been used is that it has not been defined systematically. Weaver states,

the words ‘Puccini heroine’ have become a kind of abbreviation, a critical shorthand. We know what they mean, or think we do, and we use the expression because it is handy. But in reality, it is hard to paraphrase or define. It is true that in some ways most Puccini heroines resemble one another; they have certain qualities in common. And yet each is strongly characterized (often more individualized by Puccini than by sopranos who interpret them with what has become a generic Puccinian pathos).<sup>27</sup>

Because of the lack of consensus as what set of traits make up the “Puccini heroine,” its membership is complicated and varied. Who is in the group depends on who is discussing it. Carner states that Manon, Mimì, and Musetta—or “any of his heroines,”—who lack “lubricity and lasciviousness,” can belong in the group. Turandot however is an exception as she is “afflicted with such pathological traits.”<sup>28</sup> For Weaver, the “Puccini heroines” include, Manon, Suor Angelica, Fidelity (*Edgar*), Mimì, Butterfly, and Minnie (*La fanciulla del West*).<sup>29</sup> Corse’s list includes Mimì, Tosca, Butterfly, Liù, and Turandot. Below is a table of the “Puccini heroine.” Eight characters from the fourteen listed above are identified as a “Puccini heroine,” while the other six are excluded. Yet of the eight characters who are considered to be the “Puccini heroine,” only Mimì is considered by all three writers as a “Puccini heroine.”

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>28</sup> Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 303. Carner forgets to mention other exceptions: Anna (*Le villi*), when she becomes a *ville* and haunts Roberto, and Tigrana (*Edgar*), who from the start is the antagonist and the antithesis of Fidelity, the “gentle, tender” one.

<sup>29</sup> Weaver, “Puccini’s Manon and His Other Heroines.”



**Figure I-1 The “Puccini Heroine”**

Heroine Names	Carner	Corse	Weaver
Anna (1884)			
Fidelia (1889)			X
Tigrana (1889)			
Manon (1893)	X		X
Mimi (1896)	X	X	X
Musetta (1896)	X		
Tosca (1900)		X	
Butterfly (1904)		X	X
Minnie (1910)			
Magda (1917)			
Giorgetta (1918)			
Angelica (1918)			X
Lauretta (1918)			
Liù (1926)		X	X
Turandot (1926)		X	

First, this act of privileging one grouping oversimplifies the characterization of each protagonist, collapses individuality, and flattens Puccini’s characters into one-dimensional figures.

Another issue with the way earlier scholars have distorted the discussion of Puccini’s protagonists is that they have tended to select only the heroines and traits that would be appropriate for the category of the “Puccini heroine.” In this way, the categorization scheme itself distorts the analysis. Corse excludes any discussion of the characters that do not or cannot fit into the category or categories that she constructs. Corse gives no explanation for her choices, except implying that the archetypical Puccini heroines discussed are taken from his “most popular operas.”<sup>30</sup> The heroines from operas that are less performed or less familiar to opera audiences, Magda from *La rondine* and Suor Angelica, are barely mentioned, while a few—Minnie, Lauretta, Giorgetta—are

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<sup>30</sup> Corse, “Mi chiamano Mimi’: The Role of Women in Puccini’s Operas,” 94.

ignored entirely. Examining Puccini's heroines primarily on the basis of their operas' "popularity" or the "success" fails to provide a holistic analysis of Puccini's works.

Claire Detels describes her analytical parameters in her article "Puccini's 'Descent to the Goddess': Feminine Archetypal Motifs from *Manon Lescaut* to *Turandot*," "since audience appeal is a prime indication of archetypal resonance in an artwork, we will concentrate on the *most successful* works of Puccini's career, beginning with his third opera, *Manon Lescaut*."<sup>31</sup> However, Detels avoids using a binary system to discuss the female characters in Puccini's operas. She constructs three categories: "victim-woman," "martyr," and "goddess." However, she pigeonholes a character into one of three groups, not allowing an individual to occupy more than one category. Detels rightly admits that this approach can flatten out the dimensionality of each woman, who is "of striking variety and complexity," and that the heroines do not all fit neatly into the three categories.<sup>32</sup>

## **The Project**

Categories can be useful in understanding Puccini's female protagonists. However, stereotyping Puccini's characters too narrowly limits the ways they can be understood by analysts as well as audiences. Stereotyping highlights and privileges only a certain aspect of the character while downplaying or even ignoring other important traits.

In the model discussed below, all the heroines in Puccini's operas can be accommodated amongst the ways in which the three categories are presented. For the

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<sup>31</sup> Detels, "Puccini's 'Descent to the Goddess': Feminine Archetypal Motifs from *Manon Lescaut* to *Turandot*," 654.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 652.

purpose of this study, I define heroine as any female character that sings at least one aria in any Puccini opera. First I discuss the theoretical framework of performance in which my model of character type is located. Second, I identify and explain the three types of women that can be located historically during the period in which Puccini lived. Next I explicate the ways in which I use these three groupings so that all of Puccini's heroines can be analyzed in the character type model. Then I explain the methods with which I analyze the characters, including musical analysis to explain the different musical traits found in each character type.

### *Theoretical Framework: Performance*

To determine how a character would fit into particular categories, I analyze her actions (or performance) within the opera. Gender performance studies, a vibrant area of research in feminism, is a key tool here. Judith Butler argues that gender is performed.<sup>33</sup>

Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performed* in the sense *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. ... In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core....<sup>34</sup>

It is through performance that a woman is identified as a woman. This also suggests that different types of women, whether idealized or transgressive, are performed.

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<sup>33</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006, originally published in 1990).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

The idea that there are codes of proper behaviors for gender has been present for centuries in the form of courtesy and conduct books.<sup>35</sup> The popularity of such literature suggests the need to instruct women on how to behave like a proper woman as well as the female readers wanting to be instructed to act like one. Though the heyday of such literature was from 1760 to 1820, literary critic Nancy Armstrong asserts that the decrease in the number of conduct books for women indicates that by the nineteenth century the “ideal [of women] had passed into the domain of common sense.”<sup>36</sup> In the late nineteenth-century Italy, however, conduct books and etiquette books were still being published.<sup>37</sup>

Such books were popular in the United States, Great Britain, and France, and to a lesser degree, Italy. Conduct books codified gender roles and idealized women. They taught women how to behave like a proper middle class women. In one of her books *Letters to Young Ladies* (1833), conduct-book author Lydia Sigourney teaches the proper

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<sup>35</sup> The difference between courtesy books and conduct books. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, eds., *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on Literature and the History of Sexuality* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 100.

One of the most famous courtesy books was written by Castiglione. Courtesy books became very popular from the late seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries. There were more courtesy books geared towards men until around the end of the seventeenth century. However, in the eighteenth century, the number of conduct books for women outnumbered those for men. There seems to be a need for instructing women on how to behave like a proper woman.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ann Hallamore Ceasar, "Proper Behaviour: Women, the Novel, and Conduct Books in Nineteenth-Century Italy," in *With A Pen in Her Hand: Women and Writing in Italy in the Nineteenth Century and Beyond*, ed. Verina R. Jones and Anna Laura Lepschy (Leeds, UK: The Society for Italian Studies, 2000). Conduct books were still written throughout the nineteenth century. See Rev. Daniel Wise, *The Young Lady's Counsellor; or Outlines and Illustrations of the Sphere, the Duties, and the Dangers of Young Women* (New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1850?); Mrs. Eliza Farrar, *The Young Lady's Friend* (Boston: American Stationers' Co, 1837).

feminine conducts of etiquette, music, dancing and crafts. Eliza Farrar emphasizes the moral role of women in families and society. She is also to be a talented seamstress and needlewoman. The conduct books create a sense of idealization for women.

Puccini created operas and heroines during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when ideas about proper conducts for women were changing and thus policed. Puccini's heroines operated within sets of expectations of particular representations of women. That is, Puccini's heroines behave in ways that fulfill or subvert certain types of late nineteenth-century Euro-American representations of women, each type having a set of expected codes of gestures and behaviors. Thus it is relevant to seek out contemporary descriptions and arguments concerning proper conduct for women who lived during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

My three chosen categories represent the dominant traits found in Puccini's heroines: the Sentimental Heroine, the Femme Fatale, and the New Woman. These character types can be identified historically localized in contemporary discourse during the time Puccini lived, although these representations of women might have been called by different terms.

#### *Character Type One: The Sentimental Heroine*

Previous scholarship is correct in that there are similar traits that several heroines share that create the concept of the "Puccini heroine." However, rather than using the same term that is laden with history and wrought with problematic implications

mentioned above, I refer to this group as the Sentimental Heroine. My term “Sentimental Heroine” distinguishes between how earlier writers have broadly analyzed Puccini’s female protagonists and my model that simultaneously examines roles individually and collectively. Another reason I chose the word Sentimental to exemplify this category is that it can be grounded in the literature of sentimental novels.

Sentimental novels became popular in the mid seventeenth century. Although sentimental elements have been present since the Greek tragedies, what is different in the eighteenth-century literature is that it focused on sentimentalism as the *raison-d’être*. Sentimentalism touched all genres of literature—novel, essay, poetry and drama—creating “the cult of the sensibility.”<sup>38</sup> Janet Todd, a literary critic, explains this type of literature:

The sentimental work reveals a belief in the appealing and aesthetic quality of virtue, displayed in a naughty world through a vague and potent distress. This distress is rarely deserved and is somehow in the nature of things.... The distressed are natural victims, whose misery is demanded by their predicament as defenceless [sic] women, aged men, helpless infants or melancholic youths.<sup>39</sup>

Sentimental literature emphasizes the “arousal of pathos through conventional situations, stock familial characters and rhetorical devices.”<sup>40</sup> The women are conventionalized as “the chaste suffering women, happily rewarded in marriage or elevated into redemptive death.”<sup>41</sup> They suffer from circumstances outside their control, arousing pathos from readers and demanding “an emotional, even physical response.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Janet M. Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Meuthen, 1986), 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 2–3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. The sentimental fiction “prided itself more on making its readers weep and in teaching them when and how much to weep.” This genre of literature was often seen as

These heroines personify sentimentalism, a “belief in or hope of the natural goodness of humanity and manifested in a humanitarian concern for the unfortunate and helpless.”<sup>43</sup> Their primary virtues are “benevolence and compassion” because ‘sentiment’ is viewed as “a moral reflection, a rational opinion usually about the rights and wrongs of human conduct.”<sup>44</sup> These heroines serve as models to teach readers how to behave appropriately as women.

One of the most popular sentimental novels of the period was of *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, written in 1740 by Samuel Richardson (1689–1761).<sup>45</sup> The novel is told through series of letters by Pamela to her parents.<sup>46</sup> She is a virtuous young woman

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didactic tool on how a person should act, much like the instructional books common in the eighteenth century.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 7. Sentimentalism more specifically refers to the movement in philosophy, politics and art. “A ‘sentiment’ is a moral reflection, a rational opinion usually about the rights and wrongs of human conduct. ...[it] is also a thought, often an elevated one, influenced by emotion, a combining of heart with head or an emotional impulse leading to an opinion or a principle” (7). “‘sensibility’... presupposes an emotional susceptibility” (7). ‘Sensibility’ suggests “delicate emotional and physical susceptibility, it came to denote the faculty of feeling, the capacity for extremely refine emotion and a quickness to display compassion for suffering” (7). “‘Sensibility,’ an innate sensitiveness or susceptibility revealing itself in a variety of spontaneous activities such as crying, swooning, and kneeling...” (7). ‘Sentiment’ is harder to define; it is vague. It used to suggest richness in moral reflection; after Sterne’s use in *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), “it tended more often to apply to sensibility and its emotional and physical manifestations, and to indicate the heart rather than the head” (9).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 7, 19.

<sup>45</sup> Originally published in two volumes in 1740, Richardson’s *Pamela* was a tremendous hit in England and multiple editions followed quickly, demonstrating the popularity of the novel. Moreover, the novel was translated into French in 1742 and into Italian in 1744, and gained popularity throughout Europe.

<sup>46</sup> Richardson first conceived of the novel as a conduct book, a book to instruct women (and men) how to act properly in society. However, he changed the format into a novel, an attempt to teach through entertainment. *Pamela* has been adapted into Italian different kinds of works. Carlo Goldoni (1707–1793) first adapted Richardson’s novel into a play, *Pamela nubile* (1750), then into a libretto *La buona figliuola*. It was first set by Egidio Duni (1708–1775) in 1756; however, Niccolò Piccinni (1728–1800)’s version of the opera by the same name became more popular.

who suffers in the hands of her new employer, Mr. B. She had been the faithful handmaiden of the mistress of a wealthy family until the mistress passes away suddenly, making the son, Mr. B., the head of the household. Unlike his mother, Mr. B. is unscrupulous in his dealing with his servants, most of all with Pamela, towards whom he makes repeated sexual advances. She maintains her chastity yet is distressed by his ungentlemanly behavior and proclaims that his advances are unwanted. She grieves that such treatment by her employer is unmerited and that she wishes to leave. Yet she realizes that to do that would cause financial hardship to her family, to whom she sends her earnings for support. She experiences many trials, but ultimately wins the respect of Mr. B., who proposes marriage as a reward for her virtuous conducts. Pamela gains sympathy from few of the people in her life, such as Mrs. Jervis, the housekeeper, her parents, and, most importantly, the readers.

#### *Character Type Two: the Femme Fatale*

Throughout the narrative in history and literature, there have been stories of women who are said to cause the downfall of men. In the Bible, there was Jael who drove a tent peg into the head of Sisera while he was sleeping, and Delilah who cut away Samson's hair and thus of his strength allowing him to be captured and tortured by the Philistines.<sup>47</sup> The term *femme fatale* [fatal woman], however, became part of the common vocabulary in the nineteenth century. The term appeared as early as 1854 in literature and was used in

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<sup>47</sup> Judges 4:21; Judges 16:4–20.



the visual arts from the 1860s.<sup>48</sup> She could be found in artistic cultural media such as paintings and poems but also in popular cultural media such as weekly journals and satirical newsprints. By the early twentieth century, the novelty of the femme fatale was wearing off, yet her influence could be found in works of the twentieth century, especially those by Puccini.

The concept of the femme fatale intersects a complicated period in the nineteenth century, when Europe was experiencing cultural changes and challenges. One of the cultural intersections was the literary movement of realism. In realism of the nineteenth-century movement, artists expanded the realm of what can be represented in the arts. The narrative of realist novels tended to have a sense of detachment and objectivity. Because of this objective tone, writers could take up sordid matters and subjects, such as the femme fatale. Realist works were confrontational towards, as writer Pam Morris puts it, “bourgeois respectability, materialism and moral narrowness.”<sup>49</sup>

The femme fatale could further be complicated by exoticism, another fascination of nineteenth-century artists. In the visual arts and in literature, the painters and writers found their sources of the femme fatale from various distant lands and historical periods such as the Bible, mythologies, stories from the Middle Ages, and hybrid monsters like the Sphinx.<sup>50</sup> The creators “Orientalized the Orient”: they created a world in which they

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<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth K. Menon, *Evil by Design: The Creation and Marketing of the Femme Fatale* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2006), 3. Although Virginia Allen asserts that the term was an invention in the twentieth century. Virginia Allen, *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon* (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing, 1983), vii.

<sup>49</sup> Pam Morris, *Realism* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 48.

<sup>50</sup> Patrick Bade, *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women* (New York: Mayflower Books, 1979), 7–8.

desired the Orient to be rather than depicting as it was.<sup>51</sup> It was a world that was away from Europe, its culture, and values. In Gustave Flaubert's novels, he associates the Orient with "escapism of sexual fantasy" and "freedom of licentious sex."<sup>52</sup> By creating the femme fatale in a realm that is distant from nineteenth-century "reality," realist artists could depict a world "where all the most unbridled desires can be indulged and the cruellest [sic] fantasies can take concrete form."<sup>53</sup> In the nineteenth-century art, there was a link between eroticism and pain and death and a notion that sex is related to dangerous and destructive subjugation of one member to the other.<sup>54</sup>

Such a femme fatale is found in Cleopatra, a very popular subject in the nineteenth century. In visual arts, Alexandre Cabanel's painting *Cleopatra trying out poison to the condemned* (1887) shows the Queen of Egypt lounging on a tiger-skin-draped chaise. Her maidservant, semi-nude, holds a fan above her head while watching most interestedly at the actions on the left. Cleopatra is elegantly dressed except that her breasts are bare. She looks indifferently towards two men who have taken poison, one of whom holds his abdomen in anguish while the other man has died and is being carried out by two servants. Cabanel shows the calm and cool gaze of the queen as she sits comfortably in her exotic setting while she watches men die.<sup>55</sup>

Cabanel seems to have been inspired by Théophile Gautier's short story *Une nuit de Cléopâtre* (1845). Carnal knowledge of the femme fatale is in itself dangerous; yet the

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<sup>51</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 166–197.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>53</sup> Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (New York: Meridian Books, 1933, 1956), 197.

<sup>54</sup> Bade, *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women*, 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 28. Henk van Os, ed. *Femmes Fatales: 1860–1910* (Wommelgem, Belgium: BAI, 2002), 13, 16. Mario Praz reminds his readers that in the morning, Cleopatra would kill the man who spent a night with her. Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 204.

erotic lure to know Cleopatra is so overwhelming that men risk their lives to know her. In this representation of Cleopatra, she is not under the social structure that often punishes women who kill men. She is queen; she is justice. She seems to sidestep her crime, not only of killing a man but also betraying and lying to Mark Anthony, her official lover. She has spent a night with a foreigner, Meïamoun, for which he must pay the ultimate price of imbibing poison. Although she almost prevents him from drinking the poison, the man commits suicide just as Mark Anthony arrives. The emperor has no clue that this was a man who had spent the night with Cleopatra because she successfully lies to him by explaining that she had tried a poison on this slave in case of emergency. She escapes not only punishment from social structures but also the wrath of her lover, a patriarchal male figure.

The proliferation of the femme fatale in the arts began around the same time Euro-America's women's movement gained momentum. Jennifer Hedgecock, a literary critic, writes, "[the femme fatale's] sudden emergence signals societal hardships and anxieties especially reflected in fictional dominant male figures ruled by precarious circumstances that jeopardize their authority and power."<sup>56</sup> In England from the 1840s, middle-class women began to speak up for their rights and denounced bourgeois ideals of femininity that bound women to the domestic sphere and prevented them from entering public life. These women refused to be subordinated to men. They challenged censorship, insisted on greater sexual freedom, rejected biased divorce and poverty laws of 1857, and opposed the Contagious Disease Act of 1864.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Jennifer Hedgecock, *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008), 4–5.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

There was, however, a backlash against such activism. The representation of women shifted from the ideal domesticated, submissive wife to one that was dangerous and fatal. Hedgecock writes, “the femme fatale...is a threat to bourgeois ideology in that she threatens to destroy the structure of the family and obscure the definition assigned to domestic women. In a society ruled by patriarchal thinking, for example, many saw the Women’s Movement as a threat to British culture, in the same way that the femme fatale in Victorian literature is seen to corrupt the middle-class values.”<sup>58</sup> For such crimes, the femme fatale pays a price but not through civic legal means, rather by committing suicide or being forced into an asylum.<sup>59</sup> Mary Ann Doane, a feminist writer, suggests that the cultural attack on the femme fatale was “a desperate reassertion of control on the part of the threatened male subject.”<sup>60</sup>

On one hand, the femme fatale was a sexually available figure who could fulfill the fantasies of European men. Yet on the other hand, she is a grave threat to them and must be controlled, contained, and punished. The femme fatale is a controversial figure that many have analyzed. Virginia Allen, art historian, defines the femme fatale as an erotic woman, “who lures men into danger, destruction, even death by means of her overwhelmingly seductive charms.”<sup>61</sup> Menon, another art historian, instead, describes her as destructive, “an archetypal woman whose evil characteristics cause her to either unconsciously bring destruction or consciously seek vengeance.”<sup>62</sup> The femme fatale can be understood as a woman who has a set of traits that have been conventionalized. Such

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>60</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 2–3.

<sup>61</sup> Allen, *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon*, vii.

<sup>62</sup> Menon, *Evil by Design: The Creation and Marketing of the Femme Fatale*, 4.

traits can be described as exotic, sadistic, sexual and erotic(Hedgecock 2008)[42], violent, distant and cold, self-willed, and untamable. Not all the characters who are referred to as the femme fatale exhibit all these qualities; some maintain a few, while others display several.

### *Character Type Three: The New Woman*

In the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western culture, a different representation of woman appeared. One that was threatening, not physically threatening like the femme fatale, but socially, culturally, and even politically antithetical to the conventions of bourgeoisies. This figure was the New Woman. She was part of the answer to the woman question that was asked all over the Western world. She was the symbol of redefining woman. I use the term New Woman for the third category of character type that is found in Puccini's operas.

The term "new woman" was coined by Sarah Grand who wrote in her article, "The New Aspect of the Woman Question" (March, 1894) in *The North American Review*.<sup>63</sup> Within two months, the idea of the New Woman—now capitalized—was in various media, including journals and plays, both in support for and against this type of a woman. Ouida, penname of Marie Louise de la Ramée, wrote against this kind of representation of woman in her article "The New Woman."<sup>64</sup> *Punch*, a comic newspaper,

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<sup>63</sup> Sarah Grand, "The New Aspet of the Woman Question," *The North American Journal* 158, no. 448 (March 1894): 21.

<sup>64</sup> Ouida, "The New Woman," *The North American Journal* 158, no. 450 (May 1894).

published a satirical nursery rhyme with the same title.<sup>65</sup> Sydney Grundy, too, wrote a satirical work in response to Grand's call, *The New Woman*, a relatively successful work with 173 performances. The prolific circulation of the idea of the New Woman, not only in England but also in other countries such as the United States, France and even Italy from the mid nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries, suggests that the time was ripe to discuss the changing and complex, and often contentious, views of women.

Grand advocated for, what is now called, purity feminism.<sup>66</sup> Grand's stance resists against what had in law legitimized unequal sexual morality in the Contagious Disease Acts of the 1860s.<sup>67</sup> The Acts targeted women and sought actions against them. It was believed that prostitution was blamed for the spread of venereal disease. In one of the first acts, any woman suspected of being a prostitute could be forced to take a medical examination and if she were found with the disease, she could be locked up in a hospital for three months or longer. The Acts failed to control the spread of the disease because it

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<sup>65</sup> "The New Woman": A New Nursery Rhyme. For Child-men. There is a New Woman, and what do you think?/ She lives upon nothing but Foolscap and Ink!/ But, though Foolscap and Ink form the whole of her diet,/ This nagging New Woman can never be quiet! *Punch* 106 (May 26, 1894): 252. Reprinted in Carolyn Christensen Nelson, ed. *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, Drama of the 1890s* (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press Ltd., 2001), 153.

<sup>66</sup> The social purity movement grew out of the Contagious Disease Acts arguing against the prevalent double standard of sexual morality in the Victorian period that permitted male sexuality to be legitimized and punished female's. For more discussion on the purity movement, see Lucy Bland's *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885–1914* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995); Edward Bristow's *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain Since 1700* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977); Paul McHugh's *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980).

<sup>67</sup> The Acts was borne out of a period in which a rampant number of military men were infected with venereal disease (422 men out of 1000 were affected with the disease). For more on the Contagious Disease Acts, see Ed Cohen's *Talk on the Wilde Side* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Chapter 3; Judith Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); and Frank Mort's *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-moral Politics in England Since 1830* (London: Routledge, 1987).

only sought to check and control half of the infected population, the women, and neglected the other half, the men, who were free to re-infect anyone whom they came into contact. Grand points out in her article the double standard of men's and women's sexualities that while men's sexual license was tolerated socially and ignored legally, women were expected to be sexually pure. By turning a blind eye to their husbands, the wives too were enabling the men such activities. Moreover, some married men were infected with venereal disease due to their affairs and passed it on to their unsuspecting wives. Grand argued that marriage needed to be reformed by helping the "child man," that is, the husband, especially of his sexual activities outside the home; that is, men needed to be controlled, and that they should be held responsible for the high sexual standards just as women are subjected to.

Grand did not want to abolish marriage but to reform it, namely in the men to behave like a man. However, the New Woman was often seen to be a threat to marriage. One aspect of the threat is that she refuses to marry and instead demand sexual freedom. George Egerton, penname of Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright (1859–1945), rallied not for political or civic freedom but for sexual freedom. Her works feature women who are "fast" and sexually adventurous. However, actual supporters of "free love" were few as majority of New Women and feminists, mostly bourgeois, married, middle-class women, sought reform politically and legally not sexual freedom.

While many writers on the New Woman were married, others were not. In fact there were "surplus" of single women in England at the end of the nineteenth century. Of the 2.5 million unmarried women in England in 1891, there were 900,000 more women

than men.<sup>68</sup> Writer Blanche Alethea Crackanthorpe agreed with the conventional view that women were to marry and become mothers but reflected, “Marriage is the best profession for a woman; we all know and acknowledge it; but, for obvious reasons, all women cannot enter its strait and narrow gait.”<sup>69</sup> Since not all women can statistically marry, Crackanthorpe wrote “The Revolt of the Daughters” in favor of providing training and education for girls and women. This way, the single New Women might have employment opportunities and provide for themselves.

### *Character Type Model*

Previous scholars used a single static category and associated subcategories, while my method places three categories in a dynamic typography. I avoid a binary analysis that places characters either inside or outside a single dominant category. One category is located at each point where two lines meet, which then creates a triangle (Figure 1-1). Characters can be illustrated by mapping their traits and actions onto the diagram. Placing the character closest to the corners indicates that the character is especially prototypical. If a character demonstrates traits that qualify for only one group, the closer she would be located to that group. The further away from one point a character is located, the fewer qualities she possesses to be part of that group, allowing for each character to have gradient of the categories. The model also allows each character to occupy more than one group at a time, unlike earlier scholarship. Puccini’s characters are often multi-

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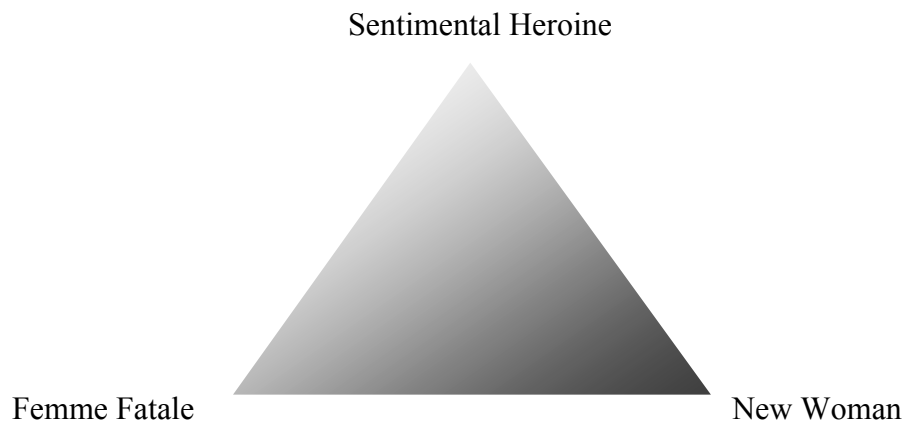
<sup>68</sup> See Martha Vicinus’s *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women* (London: Virago, 1985), 293–94.

<sup>69</sup> Blanche Alethea Crackanthorpe, “The Revolt of the Daughters,” *Nineteenth Century* 35, (1894): 23–31.



dimensional and the action of the plot can transform their characterization. Thus a character can be located at different points of the triangular spectrum depending upon the character's response to a dramatic situation. For example, Turandot begins as a *Femme Fatale* because she kills all her suitors who seek to marry her. But at the end of the opera, she no longer desires to kill her last suitor; instead, she turns into a woman who is moved by love. Turandot moves away from the *femme fatale* location and closer towards the *Sentimental Heroine*.

**Figure I-2 Model of Character Types**



### *Method*

By analyzing Puccini's heroines in the manner outlined above, this dissertation contributes to musicological inquiry in several ways. One, it provides a wider and fuller perspective on the way Puccini's female protagonists are viewed and understood. Rather than focusing on only one character type and ignoring the rest, or allowing a heroine to occupy only one type, a protagonist can be located in several groupings at the same time or at different moments in the plot. The complexity of a character can then be disclosed

and appreciated by viewing her through several lenses. Three characters are used as major case studies: Mimi from *La bohème*, Turandot, and Minnie from *La fanciulla del West*. Many scholars have focused on only one character type and chose to discuss only heroines that fit this type.

Previous writers also focus on the textual readings and gloss over the music in most instances. William Weaver generally avoids musical analysis. Detels on the other hand is addressing an interdisciplinary audience, thus her musical analysis is general but insightful. She writes,

Mimi's [sic] musical style reveals her orphanhood primarily through its inconsistencies. The sudden shifts in tempo, meter, and melodic character show her lack of individuation. . . . The unusual style of Mimi's main aria, "Si mi chiamano Mimi," vividly illustrates her character: her melody is fragmented and modulatory as she introduces herself, but she soars with incongruous passion over simple things like flowers, sunshine, and spring in the middle. The odd final line of her aria is especially revealing. Here, Mimi sums up her identity quickly and apologetically as she mumbles, within the strict boundaries of the closing tonic chord, these words: "There is nothing else to tell you; I am your neighbor who comes inopportunely to bother you."<sup>70</sup>

As described above, Detels's explanation of the music is understandable to a general audience. However, these observations are very general. I provide more specific examples and analyses of the musical characterization of individual character type: the Sentimental Heroine, Femme Fatale, and New Woman. The analyses of the heroines' arias as well as the music that describes the heroines show how each character type is portrayed musically through various methods, utilizing all the elements in music, including melody, dynamics, tempo, and instrumentations. The instrumentation of the arias of the Sentimental Heroine often highlights the lighter voices, such as flutes, oboes,

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<sup>70</sup> Detels, "Puccini's 'Decent to the Goddess': Feminine Archetypal Motifs from *Manon Lescaut* to *Turandot*," 661.

and first violins, and tends to be thinly orchestrated. The *Femme Fatale*, as portrayed in *Turandot* as an exotic one, is often characterized through dissonances, loud dynamics, and uncommon orchestral instruments. The *New Woman* is a little more challenging to generalize as the heroine, Minnie, is a complicated character who sees herself in multiple lenses. Perhaps the clearest example of demonstrating her authority over the men in the camp is at her entrance when she musically usurps what was happening just previously in the scene.

The second goal of the dissertation is to revise the view of Puccini himself as a composer. He was not a composer who could only write one kind of a heroine in his operas. In fact, there are several kinds of women in his operas. Not just any kind of women but those figures who were contemporary during his life. In this dissertation, I show that Puccini was very aware of the cultural and social currents of his day. This awareness of literary and social changes affected the way he composed his operas, his heroines, and their portrayal. The multiple types of heroines were one of the results of how contemporary cultural and social changes affected his operas. As this dissertation opens up ways of thinking about Puccini's heroines, it also explores how the composer is configured in current opera scholarship.

### *Sources*

Various materials were used for this project. There are many translations of Puccini's librettos available for the general public, such as *Opera Classics Library* *Puccini Companion: The Glorious Dozen* edited by Burton D. Fisher as well as the

collection of opera librettos printed by G. Schirmer and other publishers.<sup>71</sup> There are also word-by-word translations for performers, for example, *The Complete Puccini Libretti with International Phonetic Alphabet Transcriptions, Word for Word Translations, Including a Guide to the I.P.A., And Notes on the Italian Transcriptions* by Nico Castel.<sup>72</sup> For this project however William Weaver's excellent translations of *La bohème* and *Turandot* were consulted not only because Weaver is a scholar in Puccini studies but also because he has been awarded prizes for his translations. Norton published seven of Weaver's translations in *Seven Puccini Librettos*, but it is no longer in print.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps with the continued popularity and reproductions of Puccini's operas as well as the growth of studies in the composer's works in the United States and in Britain, Norton or other publishers will provide Weaver's translations of the librettos more easily available.

There were no critical editions available for the three operas at the time of completing this project. Neither were the manuscripts for Puccini's operas readily available, which created challenges in studying the music, especially regarding *Turandot*, an opera never completed by the composer. However, musicologist Roger Parker edited a critical edition of *Tosca* in 2004.<sup>74</sup> Publication of critical editions of all the operas by Puccini is vital to the growth of the scholarship. One of the challenges in creating critical

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<sup>71</sup> Burton D. Fisher, ed. *Opera Classics Library Puccini Companion: The Glorious Dozen* (Miami: Opera Journeys, 2004).

<sup>72</sup> Nico Castel, *The Complete Puccini Libretti with International Phonetic Alphabet Transcriptions, Word for Word Translations, Including a Guide to the I.P.A., and Notes on the Italian Transcriptions*, 2 vols. (Geneseo, NY: Leyerle, 2002).

<sup>73</sup> Giacomo Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Norton, 1981).

<sup>74</sup> ———, *Tosca*, librettists Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, edited by Roger Parker and Mercedes Viale Ferrero (1899; reprint, Milan: Ricordi, 2004).

editions is editing and deciding on how to manage and deal with the versions of each opera that Puccini revised for he reworked his operas several times before he was satisfied even after the premiere. To construct one authoritative edition for each opera would take deep knowledge of Puccini's individual work.

The full scores used for the project were either published by Ricordi or originally published by Ricordi and reprinted by Dover. Neither Dover editions of *La bohème* nor *La fanciulla del West* specify the dates of the original Ricordi publications. For *La fanciulla* it is noted that it "is an unabridged republication of an early authoritative edition."<sup>75</sup> To indicate the location of the score as discussed in the following chapters, rehearsal numbers were used, followed by another number to indicate the exact measure. For example, R12+3 means three measures after rehearsal number 12.

Another type of primary source that was consulted was correspondences by Puccini. Many of his letters have been published often in large collections and have been translated into English. For example, Giuseppe Adami edited and published a collection of Puccini's letter in *Giacomo Puccini Epistolario*, which was translated by Ena Makin as *Letters of Giacomo Puccini Mainly Connected with the Composition of His Operas*.<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately, Adami provide little contextualization for each letter, only summarizing historical situations for individual opera. Vincent Seligman also published a group of letters that the composer wrote to Seligman's mother, Sybil, a confidant and advisor to Puccini.<sup>77</sup> Vincent's father and Sybil's husband, David, translated the letters into English.

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<sup>75</sup> ———, *La fanciulla del West*, librettists Guelfo Civinini and Carlo Zangarini (n.d.; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1997), ii.

<sup>76</sup> Giuseppe Adami and Mosco Carner, eds., *Letters of Giacomo Puccini: Mainly Connected with the Composition and Production of His Operas* (London: Harrap, 1974).

<sup>77</sup> Vincent Seligman, *Puccini among Friends* (New York: Macmillan, 1938).

More recently, Annie Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis published Puccini's letters addressed to Carlo Zangarini, one of the librettists for *La fanciulla del West*, in *Puccini and The Girl: History and Reception of The Girl of the Golden West*.<sup>78</sup> They not only provide English translations of the letters and contextualize them in Puccini's life but also provide general musical analysis of the music as well as providing criticism of the opera. There are still many letters by Puccini that have yet to be translated into English, such as the collection edited by Eugenio Gara, *Carteggi pucciniani*, and by Arnaldo Marchetti, *Puccini com'era*.<sup>79</sup> English translation would allow accessibility not only to scholars but also to the general public that admires the composer's works.

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<sup>78</sup> Annie J. Randall and Rosalind Gray Davis, *Puccini and the Girl: History and Reception of the The Girl of the Golden West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>79</sup> Eugenio Gara, ed. *Carteggi Pucciniani* (Milan: Ricordi, 1958). Arnaldo Marchetti, ed. *Puccini com'era* (Milan: Edizioni Curci, 1973).

## II. CHAPTER TWO

### MIMI AS THE SENTIMENTAL HEROINE

In the first act of *La bohème* (1896), Mimì demurely arrives at Rodolfo's apartment door to ask only for her candle to be lit. However, she needs much more help from him: her failing health causes her to faint and she needs to be revived by the sprinkling of a few drops of water on her face. She needs to be refreshed from her fainting spell by a glass of wine. And she needs help in finding her apartment key, which she dropped when she fainted. Mimì's behaviors are consistent with some of the traits of the late nineteenth-century ideals of womanhood that signify the character type of the Sentimental Heroine.

The Sentimental Heroine is rooted in the nineteenth-century ideal woman constructed by conduct and courtesy books as well as eighteenth-century sentimental novels. While conduct books instruct women how to behave appropriately, novels—and by extension many operas—show characters in action, demonstrating proper behaviors. The characters are rewarded for their obedience to the teachings. Or if they transgress the teachings, they are punished in the course of compelling, instructive narratives. Taking Mimì as a case study for this chapter, I explore the implications of her actions as the Sentimental Heroine character type. I also show that the Sentimental Heroine serves to reflect an ideological construction of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the first part of the chapter, I discuss the ideology of women in the nineteenth century, which is informed by the nineteenth-century conduct books and sentimental novels. Although the novels that were labeled sentimental grew out of fashion towards the end of the eighteenth century, some sentimental elements, especially in female characters, remained in works throughout the nineteenth century.

In the second part of the chapter, I compare the Mimi of Henry Murger's novel *Scène de la vie de bohème* (1849) and Puccini's operatic Mimi. Murger's version shows not only the positive part of the heroine but also the negative due to influences from realism. Puccini's Mimi, however, is idealized and shows how the composer shapes his character to conform to the ideal of the Sentimental Heroine. The records of Puccini's views on his heroines are limited, and thus, this study interprets the available materials—including the correspondences between the composer and his librettists, the libretto, and music—to analyze the character.<sup>80</sup> I also analyze Mimi's music to show how it supports her portrayal as the Sentimental Heroine. However, there are a couple of situations in which the operatic Mimi does not act purely like a Sentimental Heroine, moving away from the model through her actions. The "punishment" for her choices reveals how the character is disciplined to conform to and help elucidate the model. Puccini himself did not specifically declare that Mimi should be the model to which women should aspire. Rather, Mimi was a character that resonated Puccini's artistic aim and that the audience would respond. The modeling is a by-product of the construction of the heroine.

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<sup>80</sup> See Chapter One for method and parameter of the dissertation project.



## **The Sentimental Heroine: Ideals of Womanhood in the Nineteenth-Century Conduct Books and Sentimental Novels**

### *Ideology of Women in the Nineteenth Century and Conduct Manuals*

Conduct and courtesy literature have been present in Europe for many centuries.

Although the usage of the terms is not strict, courtesy books or books of manners usually discuss issues of etiquette, behaviors, and morals, whereas conduct books try to educate their readers on social norms: self-help manuals. The emphases of the ideal woman changed according to both region and era, but there are several qualities that are found through the ages and areas in Western culture. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the authors of the conduct literature addressed a wide variety of female readers, whether they be Christians, working women, or women in general, but their goals for the ideal woman were similar: a woman is to be pleasant, altruistic, industrious, skilled in accomplishments such as sewing or music, economic and humble.<sup>81</sup> By the time Puccini

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<sup>81</sup> Although there are countless conduct books that were published in the nineteenth century throughout Europe, I surveyed about a dozen choosing works from countries that had close cultural ties to Italy: France, England, and the United States. Conduct books written for general female audience: Mrs. Taylor, *Practical Hints to Young Females on the Duties of a Wife, a Mother, and a Mistress of a Family* (London: Taylor and Hessay, 1818); Anonymous, *The Young Lady's Own Book: A Manual of Intellectual Improvement and Moral Deportment* (Philadelphia: Key, Mielke, and Biddle, 1832); Lydia Sigourney, *Letters to Young Ladies* (Hartford: P. Canfield, 1833); Farrar, *The Young Lady's Friend*; Margaret Elizabeth (Munson) Sangster, *Winsome Womanhood: Familiar Talks on Life and Conduct* (London: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, [1900?]). Conduct book written for female worker: L. Varenne, *Pour l'ouvrière: Education sociale de la femme; conception et direction de la vie matérielle--vie intellectuelle--vie esthétique--vie morale* (Paris: Alcide Picard et Kaan, [1903]). Conduct books written for female Christian women: Joseph Richardson, *Sermon on the Duty and Dignity of Woman* (n.p.: Hingham, Jedidiah Farmer, 1833; Delivered on April 22, 1832); Marie de Gentelle, *Appel aux jeunes femme chrétiennes* (Paris: Ch. Blériot, 1868).

was composing his operas, the ideology of women in Europe had become a cultural phenomenon.<sup>82</sup>

The ideal woman of the nineteenth-century Western culture is to be all the qualities that are pleasant and “agreeable.”<sup>83</sup> An agreeable woman “must avoid egotism.”<sup>84</sup> Whether she is interacting with her friends, employees, or servants, or someone above her station, she is to be courteous, polite, and civil.<sup>85</sup> She is to be charming, sweet, sincere, affable, and cheerful.<sup>86</sup> In her deportment, she should be serene, tender, elegant, graceful yet humble.<sup>87</sup> According to one writer, the ideal woman is to be delicate, which will allow her to be more loved, more respected, and more influential amongst her circle of acquaintances.<sup>88</sup> She is to be good with people, self-sacrificing, thoughtful, and loyal.<sup>89</sup> One writer asserts that to win and keep friends, she must be

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<sup>82</sup> For nineteenth-century living conditions, see Walter E. Houghton’s *The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957); *Victorian Women: A Documentary Account of Women’s Lives in Nineteenth-Century England, France, and the United States*, edited by Erna Olafson Hellersten, Leslie Parker Hume, and Karen M. Offen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981). In many ways, the controversial figure of the New Woman was resistance to the bourgeois conventions of the woman. See Chapter Four for discussion on the New Woman.

<sup>83</sup> Anonymous, *The Young Lady’s Own Book: A Manual of Intellectual Improvement and Moral Deportment*, 6.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Sigourney, *Letters to Young Ladies*, 48, 58.

<sup>86</sup> Sangster, *Winsome Womanhood: Familiar Talks on Life and Conduct*, 9, 24; Sigourney, *Letters to Young Ladies*, 48, 58; Richardson, *Sermon on the Duty and Dignity of Woman*, 5.

<sup>87</sup> Sangster, *Winsome Womanhood: Familiar Talks on Life and Conduct*, 10; Anonymous, *The Young Lady’s Own Book: A Manual of Intellectual Improvement and Moral Deportment*, 10; Sigourney, *Letters to Young Ladies*, 47; Taylor, *Practical Hints to Young Females on the Duties of a Wife, a Mother, and a Mistress of a Family*, 6.

<sup>88</sup> Anonymous, *The Young Lady’s Own Book: A Manual of Intellectual Improvement and Moral Deportment*, 4.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 2; Sangster, *Winsome Womanhood: Familiar Talks on Life and Conduct*, 30, 42.

unselfish and “altruistic.”<sup>90</sup> The ideal woman should be also sensible,<sup>91</sup> sober-minded, which allows her to be mindful of her self-respect and self-worth, discreet, and wise.<sup>92</sup>

The ideal woman in the nineteenth century is also frugal and dresses modestly. Most writers warn women against temptations of insensible luxurious attire,<sup>93</sup> especially those that “impair health” or “infringe on delicacy.”<sup>94</sup> The ideal woman should renounce “tawdry colours, and a *conspicuously* fashionable make,” because “showy and ill-judged [dress] always draws ridicule upon its wearer.”<sup>95</sup> Rather, she should dress neatly and modestly.<sup>96</sup> She should spend on fashion only what is necessary, and “she will avoid the uncomfortable habit of pressing on those who supply her purse, demands which are inconsistent with their finances.”<sup>97</sup> Instead of “engross[ing] too much time” on dress,<sup>98</sup> she should employ her time more usefully and she should be industrious by making herself “enterprising” and “useful.”<sup>99</sup> Around her home, she should be “hospitable” when guests arrive, taking care that she knows how to serve tea properly and that guests are comfortable.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Sangster, *Winsome Womanhood: Familiar Talks on Life and Conduct*, 39.

<sup>91</sup> Anonymous, *The Young Lady's Own Book: A Manual of Intellectual Improvement and Moral Deportment*, 9.

<sup>92</sup> Richardson, *Sermon on the Duty and Dignity of Woman*, 5, 8.

<sup>93</sup> Gentelle, *Appel aux jeunes femme chrétiennes*, 13.

<sup>94</sup> Sigourney, *Letters to Young Ladies*, 39, 44.

<sup>95</sup> Anonymous, *The Young Lady's Own Book: A Manual of Intellectual Improvement and Moral Deportment*, 191.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Sigourney, *Letters to Young Ladies*, 44.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>99</sup> Sangster, *Winsome Womanhood: Familiar Talks on Life and Conduct*, 9, 33.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

To be an ideal nineteenth-century woman, she should also be skilled in appropriate accomplishments, such as painting and cooking.<sup>101</sup> Music, writing poetry, dancing, and riding are also to be considered appropriate accomplishments.<sup>102</sup> Needlework or sewing, for “elegance and ornament, has ever been appropriate occupation for women.”<sup>103</sup> Amateur cultivation of the arts is desirable but a woman should not devote too much time. The ideal nineteenth-century woman errs when she exhibits herself too much (e.g., being on stage or the center of attention of a musical performance) because “affectation spoils all.”<sup>104</sup> One writer even encourages women be “mistresses of some attainment, either in art or science” so that they can provide for themselves should they be reduced to poverty.<sup>105</sup> Another writer, however, declares that independence is “unfeminine,” explaining:

It is contrary to nature, and therefore it offends. We do not like to see a woman affecting tremors, but still less do we like to see her acting the amazon. A really sensible woman feels her dependence. She does what she can, but she is conscious of inferiority, and therefore grateful for support. She knows she is the weaker vessel, and that it is as such that she should receive honour; and, in this view, her weakness is an attraction, not a blemish.<sup>106</sup>

For the writer above, a woman is “inferior” and the “weaker vessel”; thus, she ought to embrace these shortcomings as part of her charm. The writer further explains that dependence is expressed through gentleness, which is “the talisman of a woman.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>102</sup> Anonymous, *The Young Lady's Own Book: A Manual of Intellectual Improvement and Moral Deportment*.

<sup>103</sup> Sigourney, *Letters to Young Ladies*, 44.

<sup>104</sup> Anonymous, *The Young Lady's Own Book: A Manual of Intellectual Improvement and Moral Deportment*, 7.

<sup>105</sup> Sigourney, *Letters to Young Ladies*, 31–32.

<sup>106</sup> Anonymous, *The Young Lady's Own Book: A Manual of Intellectual Improvement and Moral Deportment*, 9.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

Although other writers do not necessarily elaborate the way on how dependence is shown through gentleness, they do agree and instruct that an ideal woman ought to be gentle.<sup>108</sup>

Conduct books had been teaching women how to be a specific kind of woman for centuries. Nancy Armstrong asserts that the decrease in the number of conduct books for women in the nineteenth century, compared to that during the heyday of conduct and courtesy literature from 1760 to 1820, indicates that by the nineteenth century, such an “ideal had passed into the domain of common sense.”<sup>109</sup>

### *Sentimental Novels*

While this project is about Puccini’s heroines that were created in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some of these characters share certain traits that sprang from ideologies of womanhood as far back as eighteenth-century sentimental novels.

Sentimental novels emerged out of the literary climate of the early eighteenth century when literature and moral philosophy intersected, and this created a way to address human nature and order of society.<sup>110</sup> There was an assumption that literary experience can influence living life and behavior, creating a strong bond between literary conventions and sound life.<sup>111</sup> Literature, especially the sentimental works, were didactic, illustrating for readers how to behave in society, interact with friends, and act properly in difficult situations. Although sentimental elements have been present since the Greek

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 4; Sangster, *Winsome Womanhood: Familiar Talks on Life and Conduct*, 9.

<sup>109</sup> Armstrong and Tennenhouse, eds., *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on Literature and the History of Sexuality*, 3. Conduct books are still present today although they are in different forms, such as articles in women’s magazine and blogs.

<sup>110</sup> Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction*, 3.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 4.

tragedies, what is different in eighteenth-century literature is that sentimentalism is its primary instructional method.<sup>112</sup> Janet Todd explains that,

The sentimental work reveals a belief in the appealing and aesthetic quality of virtue, displayed in a naughty world through a vague and potent distress. This distress is rarely deserved and is somehow in the nature of things.... The distressed are natural victims, whose misery is demanded by their predicament as defenceless [sic] women, aged men, helpless infants or melancholic youths.<sup>113</sup>

The sentimental literature appeals to the readers' feelings, teaching them to sympathize with the characters who suffer from undeserved circumstances beyond their control. Its women are conventionalized as "chaste suffering women, happily rewarded in marriage or elevated into redemptive death."<sup>114</sup> These heroines personify sentimentalism, a "belief in or hope of the natural goodness of humanity and manifested in a humanitarian concern for the unfortunate and helpless."<sup>115</sup> Through the characters' sufferings and trials, the reader is taught to sympathize with them and learn how to conduct their lives virtuously.

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<sup>112</sup> Sentimentalism, sentiment, and the like are difficult to define. Though sentiment and sensibility are often interchangeable in literary criticism, a distinction can be made in the historical use of "sentiment," which is often referenced in moral judgment of right and wrong. Sentiment novels of the early eighteenth century generally are of this genre. Todd also points out that a "sentiment" can also be an elevated thought, "influenced by emotion, a combining of heart with head or an emotional impulse leading to an opinion or a principle." "Sensibility" on the other hand came to suggest "delicate emotional and physical susceptibility, it came to denote the faculty of feeling, the capacity for extremely refined emotion and a quickness to display compassion for suffering," such as displaying crying and swooning. Although the novels of sentiment in the 1740s and 1750s value generosity and benevolence, the later works emphasize the capacity for refined feelings. By the 1770s when the idea of sentiment was becoming passé, the term "sentimentality" became a pejorative word to suggest "debased and affected feeling, an indulgence in and display of emotion for its own sake beyond the stimulus and beyond propriety." "Sentimental" came to mean the display of emotional and physical expressions, and to indicate the emotional rather than the intellectual. *Ibid.*, 7–9.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 2–3.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

One of the most popular sentimental novels of the eighteenth century is *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) by Samuel Richardson (1689–1761), who in fact first conceived of the novel as a conduct book.<sup>116</sup> However, he changed the format to a novel in an attempt to teach through entertainment. This change of form emphasizes the close ties that conduct books and sentimental novels shared in the eighteenth century. The story is about Pamela, a virtuous young woman, who suffers unmerited mistreatments from Mr. B., her employer. Through many trials, she finally wins the respect of her employer. Mr. B praises her virtuous conducts and, as a reward, he proposes marriage to the chaste and respectful woman. Pamela earns sympathy from many in her life, including Mrs. Jervis, the housekeeper, her parents, and, moreover, the novel's readers. Through Pamela's strength of character and how virtuously she managed her difficult situations, the reader learns to sympathize with her and learns how to persevere and behave properly through sufferings.

The sentimental novels such as *Clarissa* (1748) by Samuelson and *Evelina, or The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) by Frances Burney (1752–1828) flourished in the eighteenth century, but the genre itself declined in popularity in the latter part of the century.<sup>117</sup> However, heroines with sentimental qualities continued to be prominent in European literature over the next hundred years.

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<sup>116</sup> Originally published in two volumes in 1740, Richardson's *Pamela* was a tremendous hit in England and multiple editions followed quickly, demonstrating the popularity of the novel. Moreover, the novel was translated into French first in 1742 and into Italian in 1744, and gained popularity throughout Europe. *Pamela* has been adapted into different kinds of works, including those by Carlo Goldoni (1707–1793). He first adapted Richardson's novel into a play, *Pamela nubile* (1750), then into a libretto *Cecchina, ossia la buona figliuola*, which was first set to music by Egidio Duni (1708–1775) in 1756.

<sup>117</sup> Frances Burney was the daughter of the famous English music historian Charles Burney (1726–1814).

One of the famous suffering heroines in the nineteenth-century works is Marguerite Gautier from Alexandre Dumas, the younger, *La dame aux camélias* (1848), originally published as a novel. Later after it was adapted into a play (1852) that Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1904) set to music. Opera lovers know this character as Violetta from *La traviata* (1853). Despite her profession as a courtesan, she behaves like an ideal woman of the conduct books, sacrificing her own happiness to be with her lover and to save his family's honor. She cannot tell him the real reason for leaving him due to a promise she made to his father, and she is humiliated publicly when he accuses her of unfaithfulness. When the lover is finally told the truth about her situation, he feels deep shame and returns to her as she lays in bed dying from consumption. For her self-sacrifice she is rewarded in “redemptive death,” as a sentimental heroine.<sup>118</sup> This theme will be repeated in Puccini's operatic heroine Mimì. She too will exemplify a character who seems to be redeemed in death.

Around the same time that Dumas, *filis* adapted his novel into the play, another writer also adapted stories into a play, which won him critical acclaim. Henri Murger (1822–1861), and his work *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (1845–1849) became immensely popular in the mid nineteenth century.<sup>119</sup> It is no wonder that Giacomo Puccini would want to adapt the novel into an opera.

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<sup>118</sup> Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction*, 4.

<sup>119</sup> Murger published his short stories about his and his friends' bohemian life in a satirical magazine *Le corsaire* from 1845 to 1849. Théodore Barrière took an interest in Murger's stories and collaborated with the author to produce a stage work, *La vie de bohème*, in 1849. The popularity of the play convinced Murger to publish the short stories from *Le corsaire* in book form soon after, establishing his reputation as a writer.



## Differences of Murger's Mimi and Puccini's Mimì

### *Murger's Mimi and Realism*

Puccini was inspired to create his Sentimental Heroine Mimì from female characters in Henri Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème*, a novel of autobiographical sketches.

Murger's Mimi, however, is not drawn as idealistically as Puccini's. Many changes were required to turn the book into a libretto that features the Sentimental Heroine.<sup>120</sup>

One reason for the differences and changes is that Murger was working under the influence of realism, which was beginning to influence French literature in the early to mid nineteenth century. Realism will be more fully discussed in the *Femme Fatale* chapter (Chapter Three), but it suffices to say for the purposes of this chapter that realism was a nineteenth-century artistic movement whose participants felt that art should address all aspects of life, not just the ideal or the beautiful but also those that had been traditionally thought as unworthy for the arts, such as people on the margins of society like the bohemians. Realist novels tend to have an objective tone, which allow for sordid and bleak subject matters. Realist works often take a stance against the bourgeoisie.<sup>121</sup> Murger's contemporaries like Champfleury, one of his closest friends, were part of the realist movement and portrayed grim and dark aspects of the lives of lower and working

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<sup>120</sup> Part of the problem was that Murger's book is a collection of short stories rather than one cohesive narrative. Puccini and his librettists, Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, labored to construct one coherent story out of over twenty anecdotal episodes. Michele Girardi explicates the chapters from which the opera was constructed. Michele Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, trans. Laura Basini (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 106–107. Another problem was that Puccini and his librettists had to work with another version in the form of a play, which premiered in 1849 in collaboration with the dramatist Théodore Barrière (1823–1877), *La vie de Bohème*.

<sup>121</sup> Morris, *Realism*, 48.

classes in Paris.<sup>122</sup> Dumas, *fils*, too was influenced by realism and the very subject of a courtesan in his novel *La dame aux camelias* shows this. However, unlike Murger's female character (Mimi), Dumas's is drawn more idealistically and has more virtuous and sentimental traits as discussed above.

Like Dumas, Murger too was inspired to write his stories from his own life.<sup>123</sup> Unlike his realist contemporaries, on one hand, Murger's tone in *Scènes de la vie de bohème* is more optimistic and light-hearted.<sup>124</sup> On the other hand, Murger's portrayal of characters is more "realistic" in that they are portrayed in positive as well as negative lights since they are based on real people he knew living in the Paris Latin Quarter during the mid nineteenth century.<sup>125</sup> His male protagonist, Rudolphe, is modeled after the

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<sup>122</sup> Champfleury was one of Murger's friends who wrote semi-autobiographical works about the same group of people with whom they socialized. See Champfleury's *Les aventures de Mademoiselle Mariette* (Paris: Lecou, 1853), *Souvenirs et portraits de jeunesse* (Paris: Dentu, 1872); Alexandre Schanne's *Les souvenirs de Schaunard*, (Paris: Charpentier, 1887); Charles de Ricault d'Héricault's *Murger et son coin* (Paris: Trémaux, 1896).

<sup>123</sup> The novel based on Dumas's relationship with Marie Duplessis (1824–1847) which lasted from September 1844 to August 1845.

<sup>124</sup> One of the reasons for this light-hearted tone is that the stories were originally written as a serial and appeared intermittently from March 1845 to April 1849 in *Le corsaire*, a reputed gossip magazine. Robert Baldick, *The First Bohemian: The Life of Henry Murger* (London: H. Hamilton, 1961), 71. Since the audience of the magazine were largely made up of bourgeois members of society, it was imperative to sell as many copies as possible through entertaining and humorous anecdotes of bohemian, the so-called misfits of society, rather than "realistic" bleak and grisly ones. There was an interest in the bohemians by the general public. There is even some evidence that people from the bourgeoisie pretended or desired to be bohemians. Murger even wrote about a man, who far from being poor, inquired him and his friends about joining their society. Henry Murger, *La bohème: scènes de la vie de bohème*, trans. Elizabeth Ward Hugus (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1851, 1988; reprint, Dodd, Mead, New York: 1930). But for the most part, the general population seemed to have been content in keeping a safe distance from them.

<sup>125</sup> Baldick, *The First Bohemian: The Life of Henry Murger*, 87. Rodolphe's friends, Marcel, Schaunard, and Colline, are all modeled after Murger's friends from his literary and artistic circle: Champfleury, Lazare, and Tabar (Marcel); Schanne (Schaunard); and

author himself and is described realistically—for example, as balding precociously—and as a poet writer who has been working on his *chef d'oeuvre* drama, *The Avenger*, for years, and has been rejected by all the publishers in Paris.<sup>126</sup> One of the female characters with whom Rudolphe falls in love is Mimi.<sup>127</sup> At least two women influenced Murger in writing his Mimi, including Marie-Virginie Vismal and Lucile Louvet.<sup>128</sup>

Murger's Mimi is not as pure and idealized as Puccini's Mimì or even Dumas's Marguerite. Murger portrays not only the positive qualities of Mimi but also negative ones.<sup>129</sup> She is not always easy to get along with. She seems bored and ill tempered, “a suggestion of almost wild brutality which a physiologist would perhaps call a sign of a

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Jean Wallon, a theological student, and Marc Trapadoux, the man with an old greenish frockcoat (Colline).

<sup>126</sup> Murger, *La bohème: scènes de la vie de bohème*, 151.

<sup>127</sup> Mimi was a pet name Murger regularly used for his lady companions.

<sup>128</sup> Murger met Marie-Virginie Vismal, the first woman whom he loved, in 1839. She was the wife of Benoît-Vidal Fonblanc, a man twenty years her senior and a leading member of a criminal gang in Paris. Lucile Louvet was another woman Murger loved. They had first met in 1845 but only united after she had broken off with her previous lover. According to Baldick, Lucile is the woman who inspired Murger to write about in *Scène de la bohème* in “Housewarming.” Baldick, *The First Bohemian: The Life of Henry Murger*, 83. Lucile and Murger lived together for a short time, but they fought constantly. She found another lover, a soldier, and left Murger in 1847. She came to Murger again towards the end of 1847 or early 1848, but this time very ill. She was admitted to a hospital in March 1848. Through misunderstanding, Murger was told that Lucile was dead when in fact her “chambermate” had passed. When she did die, Murger was only in time to see her buried in a pauper's grave. For Murger's biography see Arthur Moss and Evalyn Marvel's *The Legend of the Latin Quarter: Henry Murger and the Birth of Bohemia* (New York: Beechhurst Press, 1946) and Robert Baldick's *The First Bohemian: The Life of Henry Murger* (London: H. Hamilton, 1961).

<sup>129</sup> Murger's Mimi is inconsistently portrayed. For example, in “The Housewarming” Mimi is eighteen and six months when Rudolph introduces her to his friends. Yet in the next installment of the story, “Mademoiselle Mimi,” she is said to be twenty-two, either when she and Rudolph met or when they parted. Murger, *La bohème: scènes de la vie de bohème*, 143, 151. Either way, her age does not fit chronologically of the ways in which Murger describes Mimi. This might be due to the fact that Murger modeled her after the several women with whom he had fallen in love and that the stories were written and published over a span of time.

deep selfishness or a great insensibility.”<sup>130</sup> She is said to be a “tempest” and had “a great failing”—the desire for riches that Rudolphe could not provide. While she was still living with Rudolphe, she began looking for another lover who could afford more expensive gifts.<sup>131</sup> She did not love Rudolphe or at least he was convinced that she never loved him. Mimi “only felt for Rudolphe that indulgent attachment which is the result of habit.”<sup>132</sup> She was not able to love because “her heart had already been spent during her first love and the other half was still filled with memories of that first lover.”<sup>133</sup> Because Mimi did not love him, she “subjected [Rudolphe] to all the stupid cruelties of a woman who doesn’t love.”<sup>134</sup> Mimi scoffed at Rudolphe when he was firm with her on insisting that she find another lover.<sup>135</sup> She is promiscuous for she “did not go in for training people,” that is, training men on romancing women.<sup>136</sup> She is much more of a coquette. After learning that Rudolphe had a new woman in his life, Mimi devised a plan to get rid of her and regain him as her lover once again. She informs the woman’s official lover that she is cheating on him; Mimi pretends to stumble into Rudolphe’s shoulder; and she forces Rudolphe to lodge her for the evening because she cannot go home due to her roommate’s circumstances.<sup>137</sup> This allows her later to work her magic to win Rudolphe back. This Mimi is not an ideal Sentimental heroine for all her negative traits.

Murger’s Mimi offered only one part of a composite heroine for Puccini’s Mimi. Puccini combined several traits from other female characters in Murger’s stories, a

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 163–165.

heroine who lacks negative qualities, who possesses mostly positive traits, and who is much more attractive, non-threatening to men, innocent, charming—in a word, Sentimental.

### *Puccini's Mimì as a Sentimental Heroine*

Puccini and his librettists constructed Mimì to have all the positive qualities of an ideal woman, or the Sentimental Heroine.<sup>138</sup> Other writers too have noticed the transformation from Murger's Mimi to the operatic Mimì. Mosco Carner calls it "romanticized almost beyond recognition."<sup>139</sup> Michele Girardi agrees that the "most radical departure" in constructing the operatic characters from Murger's work was in "transforming" Mimì.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> The scope of the research here focuses on the question of how and why Puccini modified Murger's Mimi to create his own heroine with the same name, Mimì. For further comparison of Murger's work and Puccini's opera see: Jean-Michel Brèque, "La vie de bohème selon Puccini: du pathétique avant toute chose," *L'avant-scène opera* 20 (March–April 1979): 6–11. I have also limited my research to analyzing Murger's work, the source from which Puccini constructed his opera. I have opted to preclude studying Leoncavallo's opera by the same name, since Puccini did not collaborate or discuss his opera with the composer—who was also the librettist—only mentioning in passing that he was working on the topic. Puccini was not influenced by Leoncavallo's libretto since his work was premiered about a year before Leoncavallo's. A few writers have compared Puccini's and Leoncavallo's works: Daniela Goldin, "Drammaturgia e linguaggio della *Bohème* Di Puccini," in *La Vera Fenice. Librettisti E Libretti Tra Sette E Ottocento*, 335–74. Turin: Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, 1985. Jürgen Maehder, "Immagini di Parigi. La trasformazione del romanzo *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* di Henry Murger nelle opere di Puccini e Leoncavallo," *Nuova rivista musicale italiana* 24, no. 3–4 (July–December 1990): 402–455. Jürgen Maehder, "'Quest è Mimì, gaia fioriaia': Zur Transformation der Gestalt Mimi in Puccinis und Leoncavallos *Bohème*-Opern," in *Opern un Opernfiguren: Festschrift für Joachim Herz*, Ursula and Ulrich Müller, editors, (Anif/Salzburg: Verlag Ursula Müller-Speiser, 1989): 301–320; Allan W. Atlas, "Mimi's Death: Mourning in Puccini and Leoncavallo," *Journal of Musicology* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 52–78.

<sup>139</sup> Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 356.

<sup>140</sup> Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 106–107.

Puccini collaborated with two librettists, Luigi Illica (1857–1919) and Giuseppe Giacosa (1847–1906).<sup>141</sup> Illica was a man full of inventive ideas with a keen eye for the dramatic, and he had interests in wide variety of subjects.<sup>142</sup> Illica alone could not have satisfied the demands that Puccini made, especially finer details in poetry, nor could he have withstood criticism regarding his efforts due to his high opinion of himself. Puccini needed another librettist to reel in Illica's imaginative ideas as well as to versify the prose. This was to come in the form of Giacosa.<sup>143</sup> Giacosa was a conscientious worker

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<sup>141</sup> It was common in France for two librettists to work together to write a libretto, as in the case with Barbier and Carré on *Faust* and *Contes d'Hoffmann*, and Meilhac with Halévy on *Carmen*. Mascagni too collaborated with two librettists—Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti and Guido Menasci on *Cavalleria rusticana* (1890), *I Rantzau* (1892), and *Zanetto* (1896). Puccini however was one of the first Italian composers to work with two librettists. The three went on to write two more operas, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*, both of which eventually were praised from the audience and critics to earn a lasting place in the operatic repertory. The collaboration with Illica and Giacosa and Puccini was successful, because of the mutual respect for each other despite all the disagreements and frustrations they shared during the compositional process.

<sup>142</sup> Illica was a playwright and a journalist, but he later turned his attention to mainly libretti, writing over thirty libretti, some of which were well received—*La Wally* (1892) with music by Catalani, *Cristoforo Colombo* (1892) and *Andrea Chénier* (1896) with music by Gordanò, and *Iris* (1898) with music by Mascagni. Illica was a fast worker and quick witted, but at times hard to work with because he was self-opinionated and aggressive. That the collaboration with Puccini and Illica failed after Giacosa's untimely death in 1906 is telling of the difficulties that the composer ran into with the librettist.

<sup>143</sup> Giacosa won critical acclaim for his *Dame de Challant* (1891, written for Sarah Bernhardt) and *Tristi amori* (1887, written for Eleonora Duse, one of the most prominent actress in the late nineteenth century, also an unspoken rival of Bernhardt). Until his death he was a lecturer on dramatic literature at the Milan Conservatory and the editor of *La lettura*, a respected literary periodical. By the time Giacosa was first recruited to work with Puccini on *Manon Lescaut* in 1891, he was already a well-known playwright and poet in his own right, writing thirty-two tragedies and comedies. Around the end of 1890, the publisher Giulio Ricordi first turned to Giacosa on the pretense of asking advice on the libretto of *Manon Lescaut* (whose original librettists Leoncavallo, Praga, and Olivia had quit), though he were hoping to get the playwright on board. Giacosa declined at this time and recommended another playwright, Illica, for the job. By May 1891, Puccini found Illica wanting and Ricordi had persuaded Giacosa to work on the libretto. That Ricordi recruited a man of Giacosa's caliber to collaborate on a *La bohème* for his composer suggests that the publisher was striving to improve the quality and reputation

who took his time to craft verses and brought refinement to the libretto.<sup>144</sup> Each member of the team was responsible for certain duties, and they generally worked in this way: Illica and Puccini adapted the drama; Puccini sketched the musical ideas as well as directions for poetry; Giacosa versified the prose; Puccini composed and orchestrated the music; Illica and Puccini revised the dramatic scenarios; all three revised the poetry; and Puccini revised the music.<sup>145</sup> Illica was largely responsible for pulling together one coherent story from Murger’s novel that featured unwieldy episodes of bohemian life.

**Figure II-1** *La bohème* Division of Acts

Original Divisions of <i>La bohème</i>	Final Version
Act I, i: Garret	Act I: Garret
Act I, ii: Latin Quarter	Act II: Latin Quarter
Act II: Courtyard of the House in Labruyère	Act III: Barrière d’Enfer
Act III: Barrière d’Enfer	Act IV: Garret
Act IV: Garret	

of libretti as a respected literary genre. Carner suggests that this movement was due to the recent collaboration between Verdi and Arrigo Boito on *Falstaff* as well as Wagner’s libretti for his music dramas. Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 82.

<sup>144</sup> He could not be hurried and his artistic integrity prevented him from dashing off mediocre efforts. In one of his letters to Ricordi, Giacosa writes, “I don’t possess Illica’s prodigious facility” and “I cannot go on writing if what I have already done does not satisfy me.” To Ricordi, July 28, 1893 quoted from Carner, *Puccini: A Bibliography*, 83. Puccini’s demanding requests from the librettists nearly drove them crazy. Giacosa, usually a patient and generous man, threatened three times to quit the venture. Feeling exasperated, Giacosa wrote to Ricordi, “I confess to you that I’m tired to death of this constant re-making, re-touching, adding, correcting, piecing together, extending on the one hand and reducing on the other. If it had not been for my friendship for you and because I wish Puccini well, I would at this hour free myself from my obligations with ill grace. I’ve written this blessed libretto from beginning to end *three* times and certain sections *four* times. How am I to finish at this rate? ... I swear to you that I shall never be caught again writing another libretto!” To Ricordi June 25, 1895, quoted from Carner, *Puccini: A Bibliography*, 87. However upon hearing excerpts from the first and second acts of *La bohème*, Giacosa completely changed his attitude, and stated, “Puccini has surpassed all my expectations, and I now understand the reason for his tyranny over verses and accents.” Ricordi to Puccini, June 20, 1895, quoted from Carner, *Puccini: A Bibliography*, 87.

<sup>145</sup> Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 100–101.

Although Puccini collaborated with Illica and Giacosa, Puccini was responsible for the overall vision of the libretto and the shaping of the characters, especially Mimì. Originally the opera was to have five scenes, the third of which, “Courtyard of the House in Labruyère,” is now cut.<sup>146</sup> Puccini was adamant about cutting this.<sup>147</sup> Carner praises the deletion of the act because it would have “duplicated the gay atmosphere of the ‘Latin Quarter’ act, and thus tended to tip the dramatic balance too much towards the comic.”<sup>148</sup> And the opera, as it stands, is in “perfect equilibrium: two gay and two sad acts.”<sup>149</sup> Girardi also points out that form was Puccini’s concern in excising the Cortile act.<sup>150</sup> Budden guesses that Puccini rejected the act due to “wealth of action (a common failing in Illica’s librettos) would inhibit the musical development.”<sup>151</sup>

But could it be that Puccini might have cut the act because it would have cast Mimì too similarly to Musetta, the other female character in the opera, who behaves more like a femme fatale? Musetta seems like an incorrigible femme fatale in her actions in pursuing a lifestyle that could only be supported by rich men. In this act, Musetta, who hosts a soirée at the courtyard of her apartment from which she has been evicted due to

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<sup>146</sup> What is now the first, “Garret,” and second, “Latin Quarter,” acts were originally set up as scene one and two of one single act. Act two was the “Courtyard”; act three the “Barrier d’Enfer”; and act four the “Garret.” Carner praises the excision, because this act not only would have duplicated the similar joyous atmosphere of the scene in the Latin Quarter which then would have made the story more comic rather than tragic, but because the libretto now is at “a perfect equilibrium: two gay and two sad acts.” Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 364.

<sup>147</sup> Arthur Groos and Roger Parker, *Giacomo Puccini: La bohème*, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 40.

<sup>148</sup> Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 364.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 109.

<sup>151</sup> Julian Budden, *Puccini: His Life and Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 143.



lack of payment by her now-abandoned rich lover, introduces Mimi to a group of students. One student, the rich young student Viscount Paolo, is encouraged to court Mimi and they dance throughout the night. Mimi even hides from Rodolfo during their dance. When Rodolfo finally finds the two dancing, he demands that she stop. Because Rodolfo's funds and more recently his love have been lacking, she refuses and continues to enjoy the company of her rich suitor. Rodolfo declares that their "love dies in agony" [angonizza l'amor] and they separate. Seen in this light, Mimi comes across as a coquette who chases a man who possesses a thick wallet and a fresh interest in her. Writers Arthur Groos and Andrew Parker also have noticed that this act "blurs the basic distinction between Musetta and Mimi, the lorette and grisette, the *femme fatale* [sic] and the *femme fragile*."<sup>152</sup> Mimi was to be drawn more clearly as a Sentimental Heroine.

Puccini paid attention to the smallest details regarding how Mimi would be understood as a Sentimental heroine. For example, in the last act in which Mimi dies, Puccini felt that the libretto lacked tenderness and warmth. He states,

"Will you do me the kindness and open [the libretto] at the point where they give Mimi the muff. Doesn't it seem to you rather poor at the moment of her death? Two more words, an affectionate phrase to Rodolfo, would be just enough. Perhaps I am being too subtle here, but at the moment when this girl, for whom I have worked so hard, dies I should like her to leave the world less for herself and a little more for him who loved her."<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Groos and Parker, *Giacomo Puccini: La bohème*, 150. A grisette was a term given to working French young women during the late seventeenth through the mid nineteenth centuries. They were originally known to wear cheap gray dresses and worked mainly in the garment industry as seamstresses and shop assistants. In the nineteenth century, grisettes became known as an independent woman working as a seamstress or milliner's assistant and regularly visited bohemian cultures. They would be in more committed relationships with bohemians than a prostitute but not as well supported as a mistress. A lorette was a kind of a nineteenth-century woman who kept several lovers simultaneously to maintain a secure living.

<sup>153</sup> *Epistolario di Giacomo Puccini*, edited by Adami, quoted in Carner, *Puccini*, 95.

Rather than focusing on Mimì as recipient of goodwill from Musetta, Puccini wanted Mimì to bestow blessings to Rodolfo. Mimì is to be a self-sacrificing Sentimental Heroine.

From the very moment Mimì is introduced in the opera, everything about her suggests that she is the ideal woman that all the conduct books have prescribed; she embodies a late nineteenth-century incarnation of the sentimental heroine. She is industrious and has some attainment to provide for herself: she embroiders flowers on canvas and on silk. Her accomplishment is clearly needlework, a skill that can be spent with “hours of great enjoyment...sitting cozily with [others]...in long sunny mornings...”<sup>154</sup> Mimì is thoughtful, conscientious of other people’s feelings and is courteous. She is humble, dependent on others, gentle, sweet, sympathetic, child-like, and timid. Part of what attracts Rodolfo and the audience to Mimì is that she is “beautiful...and very appealing”<sup>155</sup> Although Rodolfo first notices how sick Mimì looks, he quickly sees her beauty, stating underneath his breath, “Che bella bambina!” [What a beautiful child].<sup>156</sup> In the last act of the opera when Mimì has returned to Rodolfo’s apartment after their breakup, he calls her “Bella come un’aurora” [beautiful as a dawn].<sup>157</sup> She recognizes that her sickness has stripped her of her former beauty and that she is dying, Mimì corrects him and says, “Bella come un tramonto” [beautiful as a

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<sup>154</sup> Sangster, *Winsome Womanhood: Familiar Talks on Life and Conduct*, 49.

<sup>155</sup> Corse, “Mi chiamano Mimì: The Role of Women in Puccini’s Operas,” 93.

<sup>156</sup> Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 26, 27. Note that the same word “bambina” (or bambine for plural) is used to describe the girls in act two, likely not to refer to female babies. The boys are referred to as “ragazzi.” It could be that both genders of children are referred to in the word “ragazzi” but the feminine plural of “bambine” more likely refers to the female children.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 88, 89.

sunset].<sup>158</sup> Her seemingly undeserved death, reminiscent of Marguerite's/Violetta's, serves as teaching point for viewers on sympathizing with the innocent beautiful heroine, like those from novels with sentimental characters.

Long before her death, Mimì wins Rodolfo's heart, not through conscious effort to attract him, but through her dependence on others and her helplessness or the need she has for others to help her, like Prévost's Manon.<sup>159</sup> From the moment she arrives on the scene, she is timid and needs help from her neighbor. Mimì is unlike other operatic heroines who showcase their entrances, such as those by Musetta, who struts onto stage and everyone at the Latin Quarter gawk at her. Mimì, on the other hand, does not strut in or jump out of a coach to make her mark; instead, she hides behind a door and knocks timidly at her neighbor's door.<sup>160</sup> Even then, Rodolfo and the audience have not caught sight of her. The first words that Rodolfo and the audience hear are ones of apology and helplessness; she softly says through the closed door, "Scusi" [Excuse me].<sup>161</sup> Her theme which could also be seen as a leitmotif, played by the clarinet, is heard just before she is seen, but it too sounds timid as it begins pianissimo and grows to a more audible volume before fading out (Figure 2).<sup>162</sup> Furthermore, Mimì needs help in lighting her candle.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid. Mimì spent some with a certain Viscount Paolo while she and Rodolfo were separated. Perhaps she learned a few things from the viscount.

<sup>159</sup> Antoine François Prévost (1693-1763) wrote *Histoire du Chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* during the height of sentimentalism. The novel is volume seven of a series, *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité qui s'est retiré du monde*. This story has been set to music, including Puccini. In Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* (1893), the title character has many traits of the Sentimental heroine. While I could have chosen Manon Lescaut as a case study, I felt that Mimì would serve as a stronger example of the Sentimental heroine. Manon will be examined for a future project.

<sup>160</sup> "Bussano timidamente all'uscio." Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 24, 25.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 26, 27.

<sup>162</sup> Giacomo Puccini. *La bohème*. Librettists Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica. (New York: Dover, 1920?, 1987). The motive is elided, this time played by the violins. The

Her voice enters the stagescape before her body, literally asking for permission to appear at Rodolfo's doorway. Even when he opens his door, Mimi is so timid that she does not even want to enter his apartment.

Figure II-2: Mimi's Leitmotif



When she does enter Rodolfo's apartment, Mimi comes across as a helpless, child-like woman. She asks indirectly for help not just in lighting her candle but also her physical consumptive state. She is seized with choking and severe coughing after climbing the stairs to reach his apartment and faints momentarily because of her frail state. Rodolfo catches her just in time to set her on a chair. He further aides her in splashing water on her face to regain consciousness and gives her a little bit of wine to refresh her. He tries to lead to her the stove to warm her up although she refuses. Rodolfo even helps her look for her apartment key, which she had dropped when she fainted. In this scene, Mimi appears to need help in every way and comes across as dependent like the conduct books instruct.

This scenario of lighting of the candle and the search for the key is another example of Puccini "whitewashing," as Carner calls it,<sup>164</sup> Mimi into a Sentimental

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increase in volume of the strings could also be understood as Mimi approaching closer to Rodolfo and appearing finally on stage. That is, it could be understood as a musical representation of visually not being able to see Mimi behind the door, then she walking through the door and approaching closer to Rodolfo.

<sup>163</sup> "Di grazia, mi s'è spento il lume," "vorrebbe?" Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 26, 27.

<sup>164</sup> Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 365.

Heroine. The situation was taken from Murger's novel but not from a chapter that includes Rudolphe and Mimi rather from a chapter called "Francine's Muff" that features two characters that have never been introduced before.<sup>165</sup> Francine's candle goes out as she is climbing the stairs to her apartment. She exclaims, "Dear me, how annoying! ...Now I shall have to retrace my steps down these six flights"<sup>166</sup> The narrator of the chapter explains that because of her "lazy instinct" she did not want to go down the six flights and also her "feeling of curiosity led her to ask from the artist for a light."<sup>167</sup> Francine was annoyed that her light went out and that she was too lazy to go down the stairs to relight her candle. The libretto does not indicate the reason for which Mimi could not light her own candle but she shows no signs of feeling annoyed or lazy in this scenario. Another contrasting aspect between Mimi and Francine is that, although they both faint, they faint for different reasons. Mimi faints because she is overcome due to climbing the stairs to reach Rodolfo's apartment. She is physically weak and sick as demonstrated by her choking and coughing. Francine, on the other hand, faints due to the overwhelming tobacco smoke coming from Jacques's apartment for he was trying to escape his miserable bohemian life through smoking enough laudanum filled tobacco. Any healthy person can faint from such conditions. Furthermore, Francine does not need any help in her fainting for she falls "unconscious upon a chair."<sup>168</sup> Mimi, as it was stated earlier, is assisted by Rodolfo who catches her "just in time to support her and ease her onto a chair" [appena a tempo di sorreggerla ed adagiarla su di una sedia].<sup>169</sup> In the opera,

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<sup>165</sup> Murger, *La bohème: scènes de la vie de bohème*, 201–224.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 204–205.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>169</sup> Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 26, 27.

it is Rodolfo who finds the key and hides it from Mimì. In the novel, Jacques does not find the key but he manipulates the situation by lying to Francine that he does not have any more matches to light her candle after his candle was extinguished by the wind that blew through his apartment. Francine too plays the manipulator for she finds her key but hides it from Jacques so that they can spend more time with each other. The librettists and Puccini used these moments but wiped away the manipulations by both male and female characters. Puccini's Mimì seems much more innocent, although she knew that Rodolfo had pocketed the key.<sup>170</sup>

Mimì's timidity can be seen in her first aria, "Mi chiamano Mimì." She demurely tells Rodolfo about herself in recitative. The tempo matches Mimì's timidity with a slow marking, *andante lento* (quarter note = 40). It is as if she needs to build her confidence to speak to him before she can sing the lyrical part of the aria. The vocal dynamic also suggest that she begins to tell her story shyly. She starts softly, *piano*, and stays mostly at the same volume. Although she does crescendo a little, she quickly comes down to the quieter volume. As soon as she realizes that she might be speaking excessively to a stranger, Mimì returns back to her shy, timid self, muttering in recitative to end her self-introduction, R 39-1.

The subsequent sections of the aria also show different aspects of Mimì's personality in the various rondo-like sections, ABA'CDB' coda. In the first episode, B at R 36, Mimì reveals a simplicity that is childlike as she describes the things she likes. The slow tempo (*andante calmo*, quarter note = 54) and the light orchestration enhance its charming qualities. The melody of the first episode begins with slow quarter notes as she

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<sup>170</sup> In act four, Mimì tells him, "You found it very quickly." "Lei la trovò assai presto." Ibid., 90, 91.

begins to wander mentally towards the things that please her. The melody lingers and highlights what seem to be her favorite simple things, love and spring. The melody extends the range to the upper tessitura while adding tenuto over the notes that describe love and spring. The accompaniment too contributes to the simplicity by providing syncopated block chords played *molto piano e dolce* [very soft and sweet] by the strings. Only very occasionally do the other instruments—clarinets, horn, and harp—fill out the delicate orchestration.

**Figure II-3: Table of Sections in “Mi chiamano”**

Section/Episode	Rehearsal Number	Personality	Text
A	R 35	Shy	Sì, mi chiamano Mimi
B	R 36	Simple, child-like	Mi piaccion quelle cose
C	R 37	Lively, light-hearted	Sola mi fa il pranzo
D	R 38	Poetic	Ma quando
B'	R 38+12	Simple	Germoglia in un vaso

The second episode, C at R 37, shows a much more lively, light-hearted aspect of Mimi. This is conveyed in the tempo, which quickens to *allegretto moderato* (quarter = 144), and in the effervescent accompaniment.<sup>171</sup> The flute plays a soft but bubbly staccato arpeggio counterpoint to the melody as the cello sustains the bass part. The faster tempo enlivens the melody as Mimi tells Rodolfo that she makes meals for herself alone and confesses playfully that she sometimes skips Mass. But she feels like she must defend

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<sup>171</sup> Often in performance practice, the tempo differences between the two episodes are not diverse enough. A good example that demonstrates the difference in personality by the tempo changes can be heard by the version sung by Licia Albanese on RCA Victor Gold Seal. This production was conducted by none other than Arturo Toscanini, the conductor who collaborated with Puccini and premiered the opera in Turin 1896. The tempo marking faithfully followed due to the conductor’s close working relationship with the compose. RCA Victor Gold Seal, originally recorded February 3 and 10, 1946; New York: manufactured and distributed by BMG Music, [1991].

herself by saying that she prays often to the Lord. She is still pious even if she is playful and lighthearted.

There is another side, a romantic poetic side, to Mimì as heard in the third episode, D at R 38. The tempo slows down to *andante sostenuto molto* which allows Mimì to rhapsodize about how the first sun and the first kiss of April after the winter are hers. The melody slowly expands the vocal range through sequences and reaches the climax of the section, heightening the tessitura to spotlight the beauty of the soprano voice. The orchestra comes out in full force to enrich the harmony as flutes, clarinets and first violin double vocal line in octaves. Mimì seems to be completely in rapture of her dream.

But just as quickly as this climatic moment arrived, Mimì soon draws back into herself and seems to see the reality of her surroundings as she describes the rose budding in a pot. This begins the last episode, B' at R 38+12, a reiteration of the first episode albeit with varied orchestration. Mimì seems to run out of things to say to Rodolfo as she streams through her consciousness to mention the objects around her: leaves of the rose bud, its smell, her artificial embroidered flowers that lack fragrance. And finally, she finishes her self-introduction only because she ran out of things to tell Rodolfo and cannot think of anything more to add. This insecure state can be heard in her recitative-like passage as she tries quickly to conclude her clumsy short self-introduction, muttering, "I wouldn't know what else to tell you about me: I'm your neighbor who comes at the wrong hour to bother you."<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> "Alto di me non le saprei narrare: sono la sua vicina che la vien fuori d'ora a importunare." Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 32, 33.



Compared to Mimi's insecure introduction, Rodolfo's "Che gelida manina" displays his confidence and eloquence as a poet. The aria begins softly as Rodolfo takes Mimi's little hand into his to warm it. The violins and viola lightly accompany the voice as he speaks to her softly as not to scare her away. Unlike Mimi, Rodolfo knows what he wants to say and has much to say about himself. This confidence is translated in the louder dynamics and the ardent lyrical nature of his melody. Moreover, the form of his aria is through-composed, unlike Mimi's which is a rondo. His form suggests complexity of his thoughts as it winds through new musical passages with repeating the same materials.

Another aspect of Mimi that makes her appealing as a Sentimental Heroine is that she is described as diminutive. Just about everything she describes in the aria is small or little or quaint. She lives alone in a "little white room."<sup>173</sup> The things she likes are soft and gentle things "that have...sweet magic, which speak of love, of springtimes, ...of dreams and of chimeras."<sup>174</sup> Although not in this aria but mentioned elsewhere, the things she possesses too are small: the "little gold ring," a "prayer book," and the pink little bonnet that Rodolfo bought her in act two.<sup>175</sup> Mimi is also "diminutized" physically. Just before her cavatina begins, Rodolfo endearingly holds her "manina" [little hands].<sup>176</sup>

Her hands are not the only part of her that is diminutized, her name, Mimi, is a nickname. Her real name is Lucia yet people call her Mimi though she doesn't know why. Because Mimi's name is miniaturized, Sandra Corse calls her "slightened" (sic) and

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<sup>173</sup> "Una bianca cameretta." Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> "Che han...dolce malia, che parlano d'amor, di primavera, ....di sogni e di chimere." Ibid., 30, 31, 32, 33.

<sup>175</sup> "Cerchietto d'or," "libro di preghiere," "cuffietta rosa." Ibid., 72, 73.

<sup>176</sup> "Manina." Ibid., 30, 31.

suggests that the diminution is a sign of Mimì's lack of self-dignity.<sup>177</sup> It could further be added that the diminution of her name also reflects that she is not confident as a mature woman. This lack of confidence and maturity is suggested in the orchestration of the "Mi chiamano." Compared to "Che gelida manina," an aria by Rodolfo, who is confident about his own identity, the orchestration in "Mi chiamano Mimì" is thinner in texture. At the beginning of the aria, R 35, the strings play homophonic chords, pulsating with gentle syncopation, while the winds enrich the chords occasionally. Rarely do the instruments in this aria double the melody, rather unusual for Puccini's aria. It is as if Mimì is holding herself back because she is so shy.

Another endearing aspect of Mimì that is related to her dependence and diminutiveness is that she is likened to a child. In act two, Mimì is denied the status of a woman and labeled musically a child. Five measures before R 14, a child is heard begging his mother for a trumpet and a horse from the toy vendor. The same melody sung by the child is repeated by the oboe, just as Mimì orders a dish of custard, suggesting that she is like the child wanting the toys (Figure 4). Because Mimì is likened to a child, her sexuality as a woman is undermined. Her beauty attracts men, but she does not try to seduce men overtly, like Musetta, who sings an elaborate song to lure her old lover back to her. Mimì, on the other hand, is initially shy in act one, but she warms up to Rodolfo after a short conversation. By the end of act one, she is bold enough to suggest something "curious" might happen when Rodolfo and she return from Café Momus.<sup>178</sup> Arthur Groos and Roger Parker too argue that Mimì's sexuality is undermined by the way the librettists

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<sup>177</sup> Sandra Corse, "'Mi chiamano Mimì': The Role of Women in Puccini's Operas," *Opera Quarterly* I, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 95. Claire Detels too points out Mimì's confusion as to why people call her by that name even though she has a proper name, Lucia.

<sup>178</sup> "Curioso." Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 34, 35.

introduce her in the prose just before act one.<sup>179</sup> Illica and Giacosa translate Murger's word "femme" [woman] to "ragazza" [girl].<sup>180</sup> Like a child who cannot care for herself, Mimì too needs a caretaker like Rodolfo to provide for her.

Figure II-4: A Child's Theme R14 - 5



In an aria in act three, Mimì demonstrates a different aspect of the Sentimental heroine through her forgiving graciousness in "Donde lieta uscì." She does her best to separate with Rodolfo "without bitterness."<sup>181</sup> Although Nicholas John cynically asserts that, "[Mimì's] mood of graceful resignation is, of course, calculated to make Rodolfo's decision to separate unbearable," the accusation is false. Mimì does not try to manipulate Rodolfo but earnestly attempts to spare his feelings of remorse or guilt he might feel for not always treating her well. Mimì too is torn about saying goodbye and there seems to be a hesitation in separating with him. This struggle can be seen in the tonal ambiguity in the use of the tonic and dominant. The key signature of the aria is in D-flat major,

<sup>179</sup> These prologue-like passages are often deleted in librettos, as is, for example, one translated by William Weaver. Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Groos and Parker, *Giacomo Puccini: La bohème*, 70. Included here is the passage from beginning of act one. "...Mimì was a charming girl specially apt to appeal to Rodolfo the poet and dreamer. Aged twenty-two, she was slight and graceful. Her face reminded one of some sketch of a highborn beauty; its features had marvelous refinement.... The hot and impetuous blood of youth coursed through her veins, giving a rosy hue to her clear complexion that had the white velvety bloom of the camellia..... This frail beauty allured Rodolfo... But what wholly served to enchant him were Mimì's (sic) tiny hands, that despite her household duties, she contrived to keep whiter even than those of the Goddess of Ease." Nicholas John, ed. *La Bohème: Giacomo Puccini*, vol. Oper Guide 14 (New York: Riverrun Press, 1982), 50.

<sup>181</sup> "Senza ranor." Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 72, 73.

suggesting that this is the tonic; however, there is a strong pull towards the dominant, A flat, as a false tonic. The aria begins on the dominant as the low strings fill out an A-flat chord while the first violins reminisces on Mimi's leitmotive (Figure 5).<sup>182</sup> The voice also begins on the note A flat. The tonic is finally heard is at R26+5; however, it hardly establishes the tonality of the aria here because of its position. It comes at the end of the first phrase in a three-phrase period. Moreover, the chord is in the unstable second inversion. The next two phrases, when she cries out that she will return alone to the lonely nest to weave flowers, emphasizes the dominant, not the tonic.<sup>183</sup>

Figure II-5: Mimi's Leitmotive Played by the Violin, R 26



The tonic, D flat, is further undermined because it occurs in the middle of Mimi's thought and thus sounds incomplete. She is asking Rodolfo to gather up the few things that she left in his apartment. It is not until she finishes requesting Rodolfo to wrap up her things and hand them to the concierge that the music finally cadences on the tonic at R 28+4. Although it is a perfect authentic cadence, it is elided with another melody, one of the themes, episode B, from her first aria, "Mi chiamano," which ends on the mediant, A flat

<sup>182</sup> Girardi calls this aria the "first complete essay in reminiscence music in *La bohème*." Indeed there are several themes that recur in this passage. Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 138. He identifies four thematic materials that were presented earlier in the opera: Mimi's theme, a passage from the Latin Quarter, and two melodies from "Mi chiamano Mimi"—melody played by the flute at R 37 and the melody at R36. There is another musical material in "Donde lieta uscì" that should be pointed out is the melody played by the B-flat clarinet then by the first violins at R26+8 to 11, which is the passage heard in the first act when Mimi first has a coughing fit in Rodolfo's apartment (R25+19 to 22).

<sup>183</sup> The painful coughing theme is heard here as she laments the fact that she must return to her apartment alone.

(Figure 6). Although the rest of the tonic chord is heard, the last note of the theme lingers in the listener's ear not as the dominant of the tonic but the root of the dominant chord, here imposing itself to sound as if it were the tonic.

Figure II-6: Theme from "Mi chiamano" Episode B, R 28+4 to 5



Unlike the first part of the aria, where Mimì speaks about the future in which she will have to live alone, the second half of "Donde lieta," starting at "Ascolta, ascolta," she speaks of the past. She remembers the few things she left at Rodolfo's apartment.<sup>184</sup> While the music had been loosely in the key of D flat as she has been remembering what she had left, the key suddenly turns to A major, a tritone away. Girardi writes the shift to A major from D-flat major "suggests a sense of a hesitation, as if something is suddenly remembered."<sup>185</sup> Indeed, Mimì suddenly remembers the bonnet, which Rodolfo had bought her in act one. As she tells him that he may keep it as a symbol of their happy past love that they shared, she comes to accept that this is the end of their relationship. This acceptance can be seen and heard in the music. Throughout the aria, she had been hanging on to the dominant as if she can hang on and avoid the inescapable finality of the tonic. But as she processes the looming separation with Rodolfo, she is now ready to say goodbye to him, harmonically progressing toward the final cadence, towards the correct and appropriate tonic of D-flat major. Her words of acceptance bloom melodically as she

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<sup>184</sup> Note that after Mimì requests her little prayer book to be sent, R28–1, the flute plays a melody taken from "Mi chiamano Mimì" when she tells Rodolfo that she does not always go to Mass but prays often (act one, R37). Girardi too points out the musical phrase when Mimì asks Rodolfo to wrap up her things in an apron that it is from act one when Mimì tells Rodolfo, "Mi piaccion quelle cose." Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 133.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

recalls the happy and glorious moments of their past love. The orchestra too grows fuller and richer; the upper woodwinds, first violin, and cello double the vocal melody; the volume crescendos.

When Mimì finally has accepted the realization of their break up, she can only say “goodbye, without bitterness” [addio, senza rancor]. She had said the same words before in the aria, but this time it is different. It is final. The first time she said those words, she had not truly accepted the separation and this is shown in the music. At R27, when she declares, “Addio, senza rancor,” it seems as if the music settles onto the tonic (Figure 7). The voice is unaccompanied and the first word, “Addio,” starts on what sounds like a dominant note, followed by the strings that also play dominant-sounding chord. The final syllable, “-cor,” ends on what seems like the tonic. But this dominant-tonic relationship is local; for three measures later, the music finally arrives on a perfect authentic cadence on D-flat major. This ambiguity highlights Mimì’s mixed feelings about separating with him. She seems to deceive herself that separating with Rodolfo is the best thing for her even though she does not want to. The second time Mimì says those words, she has come to accept the finalization of their separation and the harmonic progression shows that she has accepted D flat as the tonic. The harmonic progression makes its way through the circle of fifths (E flat–A flat–D flat) to cadence on D flat as the tonic (Figure 8). This suggests that Mimì has finally accepted her breakup with Rodolfo, and like a Sentimental Heroine, she does so pleasantly and without “bitterness.”

Figure II-7 “Addio, senza rancor” R 27-2 to 4

*Lento*

Ad - di - o sen - za ran - cor... A - scolta, a - scol - ta Le po - che

ro - bea - du - na che la sciai spare - se

Db: V/V      V<sup>7</sup>/V      V (I)      ii<sup>7</sup>

V<sup>6</sup>      I

Figure II-8 “Addio, senza rancor” R 28+11 to 16

Ad - di - o, ad - dio, sen - za ran - cor...

V<sup>7</sup>/V      V<sup>7</sup>      I

## Flexible Modeling

### *Mimi Subverting the Model Sentimental Heroine*

Although Puccini and his librettists transformed Murger's Mimi into a character who is much more of an innocent and ideal woman, there are a few instances in which Mimi behaves not as the ideal Sentimental Heroine. For instance, she is not always economic regarding her attire. As soon as she and Rodolfo are together, she seems eager to purchase a new bonnet. One of the first words from her as she and Rodolfo cross the Latin Quarter in the second act are, "Andiam per la cuffietta?" [Are we going for the bonnet?] Even when she has been bought the new pink bonnet, for which Rodolfo praises her on the complementing colors of bonnet and her skin, Mimi is still hungry for more. She "look[s] regretfully towards the milliner's shop" [guardando con rimpianto verso la bottega della modista] and slyly proclaims, "Beautiful coral necklace!" [Bel vezzo di corallo!], hoping that Rodolfo would buy her the necklace as well. Even at the end of her life, Mimi still desires a luxurious item like a muff to warm her hands. Mimi has not read Sigourney's instructions to "avoid the uncomfortable habit of pressing on those who supply her purse, demands which are inconsistent with their finances."<sup>186</sup>

Another aspect of Mimi in which she subverts the Sentimental Heroine model is that she is flirtatious, although not as seductive as Musetta in act two when she sings her sexy aria, "Quando m'en vo." As it was mentioned earlier, she implied that something "curious" might happen after she and Rodolfo return from meeting his friends at Café Momus. In fact, she seems to flirt with other men besides Rodolfo. In the stage directions in act two when the two new lovers are on their way to the café, Rodolfo "suddenly,

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<sup>186</sup> Sigourney, *Letters to Young Ladies*, 44.



seeing Mimì looking, also turns, suspiciously” [a un tratto, vedendo Mimì guardare, si volge egli pure sospettoso], and asks at whom she is looking. Rather than answering him directly, she replies with a question, “Are you jealous” [sei geloso?] as if to confirm his suspicions. In act three, Rodolfo says to Marcello that Mimì “is a coquette who flirts with everyone” [è una civetta che frascheggia con tutti] and that a viscount has been courting her.<sup>187</sup> Rodolfo confesses that he’s not sincere when he further says that Mimì encourages the viscount by “wigg[ing] and bar[ing] her ankle with a promise and flattering manner...” [sgonnella e scopre la caviglia con un far promettente e lusinghier].<sup>188</sup> It sounds as if his jealousy and his suspicion have gotten the best of Rodolfo who shares his thoughts with his friends.<sup>189</sup> Yet a little earlier in act three, Mimì tells Marcello when they are alone that Rodolfo becomes suspicious by “a footstep, a word, a compliment, a flower” [un passo, un detto, un vezzo, un fior]. It could be the viscount who is sending her flowers and compliments, but it is never fully explained only hinted that Mimì is receiving favors from other men.

## **Conclusion**

Mimì serves as an example of the Sentimental Heroine. In the opera, she teaches not only the audience who watch her but also her friend Musetta to behave in ways that are exemplar. Throughout the opera, Musetta had been very different from Mimì. Musetta had been ego-centric, manipulative, and overtly seductive. For example in act two when she enters the stage, she forces everyone in Latin Quarter to look at her and to pay

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<sup>187</sup> Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 70, 71.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Although a little later, he tells Marcello that he feels responsible and tormented for Mimì’s declining health that makes him act out against the poor woman.

attention to her, her luxurious attire, and her sexy presence. She is hardly humble, modest, or economical in her attire. She seductively lures her former lover, Marcello, back in the presence of her current one, Alcindoro. Marcello, though he resists for a while, cannot help but fall into her seductive hands. Without a hint of regret, Musetta abandons Alcindoro as soon as she regains Marcello.

Yet in the last act, Mimì and her fatal illness have transformed Musetta into more of the Sentimental Heroine. She is no longer the manipulator or the one who has to be in the spotlight. It is Musetta who learns altruism. It is Musetta who had sought out Mimì to help her after she had left the viscount to be with Rodolfo. Musetta also sacrifices her expensive earrings to buy some cordial for Mimì and to pay for a doctor's visit. Musetta becomes pious as she prays for her friend. Although Mimì does not survive but "redeemed in death," she is an exemplar Sentimental Heroine by teaching Musetta as well as the audience how to behave.

### III. CHAPTER THREE

#### TURANDOT AS FEMME FATALE

In the opening scene of Puccini's last opera, *Turandot* (1926), gruesome pikes are mounted across the stage with skulls of those whom the princess has executed. The first words of the opera declare Turandot's severe decree that suitors who fail to answer her riddles will be decapitated. The people of Peking have become so accustomed to the regular execution of foreign princes that they celebrate the ritual in an orgiastic manner.<sup>190</sup> When Turandot finally appears on the imperial balcony to judge the most recently failed suitor, she appears like a vision, a goddess. She is not only physically distant from the rest of the crowd but distant emotionally. She coldly signals the execution. This dramatic entrance introduces Turandot as the character type of the femme fatale.

The figure of the femme fatale has been present in Puccini's operas from the very beginning of his career with Anna and Tigrana all the way to Turandot. Anna from Puccini's first opera, *Le villi* (1884), begins as a sentimental type, but she turns into a femme fatale figure of a willi, after she dies of a broken heart and haunts her hero until he too dies.<sup>191</sup> Tigrana from Puccini's second opera, *Edgar* (1889), is a femme fatale from the beginning of the story. She lures the hero away from his sentimental type heroine, Fidelia, to lead a prodigal life with her. Certainly Puccini did not invent the type. By the

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<sup>190</sup> Peking is called Beijing today.

<sup>191</sup> A willi is a ghost. In Italian: *la ville* [singular], *le villi* [plural].

time he was composing operas, the femme fatale was ubiquitous not only in opera but also literature and other media, including the theater and popular journals as it is shown below.

### **The Femme Fatale in the European Nineteenth-Century Arts**

The femme fatale was a controversial figure that has been not only a common subject of many artists and novelists but also much debated by critics. Virginia Allen, an art historian, explains the femme fatale as an erotic woman, “who lures men into danger, destruction, even death by means of her overwhelmingly seductive charms.”<sup>192</sup> Another art historian, Elizabeth Menon, describes her as someone destructive, “an archetypal woman whose evil characteristics cause her to either unconsciously bring destruction or consciously seek vengeance.”<sup>193</sup>

Mario Praz, a literary critic, has written an influential work on the femme fatale, *The Romantic Agony*.<sup>194</sup> He explains that, “Fatal Women,” as he calls them, “have always existed...both in mythology and in literature.”<sup>195</sup> For Praz, the femme fatale is an “arrogant and cruel female character,” “frigid, unfeeling, fatal” and “sadistic.”<sup>196</sup> But within this theme are variations.<sup>197</sup> There were the exotic femme fatales who came from places like Spain (Mérimée’s *Carmen*) and the Middle East (Gustave Flaubert’s

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<sup>192</sup> Allen, *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon*, vii.

<sup>193</sup> Menon, *Evil by Design: The Creation and Marketing of the Femme Fatale*, 4.

<sup>194</sup> Praz, *The Romantic Agony*.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 189, 195, 217.

<sup>197</sup> Praz identified other types of the femme fatale: “blood thirsty implacable idol” of Prosper Mérimée’s *Vénus d’Ille*, and half beast femme fatale of Oscar Wilde’s *Sphinx*. *Ibid.*, 228, 246–248.

Salammbô and Oscar Wilde's Salome), countries that were outside of mainstream Western Europe.<sup>198</sup> There was also a femme fatale type who was treated like an idol, such as Swinburne's Atalanta.<sup>199</sup> Femme fatale then could be understood as a woman who exhibits several traits that have been conventionalized, such as exotic, sadistic, cruel, fatal, sexual and erotic, violent, unfeeling, distant and cold, self-willed, and untamable. The figure was called by different names such as *fille d'Eve* and *Parisienne*. The term femme fatale, however, became part of the common vocabulary in the late nineteenth-century Western Europe and appeared as early as 1854 in the visual arts and 1860s in literature.<sup>200</sup>

When the femme fatale emerged into the artistic realms of the nineteenth century, it did so during a period in which many artistic and social movements intersected to make sense of the world. Realism was an important aspect of literature in the mid-nineteenth century, followed by other off shoots, such as naturalism and verismo, towards the end of the century and into the early twentieth. Exoticism also played a large role in literature as well as in visual arts. Because realism, as well as its offshoots, allows room for not only the ideal to be represented in the arts but also what used to be unworthy, the ugly, the disreputable, the femme fatale appeared more frequently starting in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>200</sup> Menon, *Evil by Design: The Creation and Marketing of the Femme Fatale*, 5. Although Virginia Allen asserts that the term was an invention in the twentieth century. Allen, *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon*, vii.

*The Femme Fatale in Literary Realism, Naturalism, and Verismo*

The rise of the femme fatale's appearance in the arts from the mid-nineteenth century coincides with the literary movement of realism. Nineteenth-century realism differs from earlier ideologies of mimesis and verisimilitude, which had been present since the ancient Greeks (especially in works associated with Aristotle and Plato), in that the artists expanded the realm of what can be represented in the arts. Nineteenth-century European artists felt that art should reflect all aspects of life and should be presented in their works, not just the ideal or the beautiful, but also that which had been traditionally thought unworthy for the arts. Erich Auerbach writes, "realism had to embrace the whole reality of contemporary civilisation, in which to be sure the bourgeoisie played a dominant role, but in which the masses were beginning to press threateningly ahead as they became ever more conscious of their own function and power. The common people in all its ramifications had to be taken into the subject matter of serious realism."<sup>201</sup> As literary critic Pam Morris points out, "realism as a literary form has been associated with an insistence that art cannot turn away from the more sordid and harsh aspects of human existence."<sup>202</sup> Thus, it is no surprise that in realism works, they feature, according to bourgeois ideals, women of questionable character, such as the femme fatale.

One of the writers considered to be a founder of realism is the French author Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), although this label was granted posthumously. He expanded the realm of novels by presenting aspects of life that have not been discussed

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<sup>201</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask, 50th Anniversary ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 497.

<sup>202</sup> Morris, *Realism*, 48.

before, depicting all aspects of French life in the nineteenth century. He is praised for “eschewing conventional plots in favour of the careful, accurate representation of everyday life.”<sup>203</sup> The actions in his novels are driven “not by adventure or improbable incident [but] by a plausible sequence of events which... leads nevertheless to crisis and transformation,” that is, there is a lack of *deus ex machina*, actions and solutions, that were prominent in works by earlier writers.<sup>204</sup> Balzac’s “Preface” to *La comédie humaine* (1829–1855) is a manifesto of such realism.<sup>205</sup> He writes,

French society would be the real author; I should only be the secretary. By drawing up an inventory of vices and virtues, by collecting the chief facts of the passions, by depicting characters, by choosing the principal incidents of social life, by composing types out of a combination of homogeneous characteristics, I might perhaps succeed in writing the history which so many historians have neglected: that of Manners. By patience and perseverance I might produce for France in the nineteenth century the book which we must all regret that Rome, Athens, Tyre, Memphis, Persia, and India have not bequeathed to us; that history of their social life....<sup>206</sup>

Balzac would be the secretary who took down the events of nineteenth-century French culture, not interjecting his opinions or judgments of the people and events of his novels, but merely presenting his observations.

*Les Chouans* (1829), one of the stories in *La comédie humaine*, was considered by Puccini as a potential source for an opera.<sup>207</sup> It is easy to see why the composer was

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<sup>203</sup> Stephen Arata, "Realism," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 172.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Morris, *Realism*, 60.

<sup>206</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Honoré de Balzac in Twenty-Five Volumes: The First Complete Translation into English*, 25 vols., vol. 1 (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier and Son, 1900), 15.

<sup>207</sup> *La comédie humaine* is multi-volume work divided into three sections: études de mœurs au XIX siècle, études philosophiques, and études analytiques. Furthermore, études de mœurs, which studies the effects of society on individuals, is divided into six sections:

attracted to this story when compared to *Tosca*. The romantic hero in *Les Chouans* is Marquis de Montauran. He is like Mario Cavaradossi from *Tosca* in that he is a political dissident, although a royalist and not a Republican. Marie de Verneuil, an aristocrat, is sent by the Republican leader to subdue and capture Montauran. However, she falls in love with and plans to marry him despite the counsel of Corentin, a vengeful detective, like Scarpia. Marie, like Tosca, believes a lie by Corentin, this time that Montauran is in love with another woman. She orders the execution of her lover only to learn too late that she had been deceived. Marie then becomes the femme fatale by executing her fiancé. The similarities between *Les Chouans* and *Tosca* might have made Puccini shy away from setting Balzac's story to music since the composer was considering it just as he was putting the finishing touches on *Tosca* in 1899.<sup>208</sup>

Naturalism is a literary movement that grew out of realism. Emile Zola (1840–1902), self-proclaimed leader of the movement, was very much influenced by Balzac, emulating his realist goals of objectively depicting life as-it-is, including the femme fatale, in nineteenth-century France. In naturalist works, like those of the realist school, the author's voice is claimed to be objective in describing the scene and people, as if s/he is looking down at the characters. However, in naturalist's works, the author incorporates

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“scène de la vie privée,” “scène de la vie de province,” “scène de la vie parisienne,” “scène de la vie politique,” “scène de la vie militaire,” and “scène de la vie de campagne.” *Les Chouans* was taken from “scène de la vie militaire.” Balzac altered the name of the novel several times, including *Le Gars*, *Les Chouans ou la Bretagne il ya trente ans*, and *Le dernier Chouan ou la Bretagne en 1800*.

<sup>208</sup> Illica must have suggested Balzac's novel to Puccini, for in a letter to the librettist, the composer writes that he has the book and will tell of his impressions after reading it. Puccini to Illica, December 8, 1899. Gara, ed. *Carteggi Pucciniani*, 183. While *Les Chouans* is a work associated with realism, Puccini's *Tosca* on the other hand has been described as part of the verismo movement. To further complicate the matter, *La Tosca*, the play on which Puccini set the opera, was influenced by naturalism. These three –isms are difficult to define and are closely related, often overlapping each other.



into her/his writings a scientific method of observation, analysis, and classification to formulate laws of human nature.<sup>209</sup> Just as scientists were studying the physiology of humans, Zola considered himself to examine the psychology and sociology of humans, exploring the minds of people and the effects of the interactions between them.

Whereas naturalism emerged in France, a similar literary movement—verismo—took hold in Italy. The term was first used in visual art as early as 1867, but was applied later to literature, mostly to the works by Giovanni Verga (1840–1922, such as his collection of short stories in *Vita dei campi* 1880, and the novel *I Malavoglia* 1881) and Luigi Capuana (1839–1915). Like naturalism, literary verismo takes an impersonal or objective tone by adopting scientific approach to describe the psychological processes and the social, cultural, and political environments in which the characters live. Verga, in his theory on verismo, asserts that it is imperative to adopt “impersonalità,” a certain distance to describe the world of the peasants and fishermen. Because verismo addresses the “questione contadina” [peasant question], the works often but not always focus on the lives of those who live in the countryside rather than in the city. The characters are commonly from the lower class, although some works feature aristocrats and bourgeoisie. The lower-class characters then can serve to address contemporary social issues in late nineteenth-century Italy. After the Unification in Italy, there were many social and cultural differences with the industrial and modern North versus the agricultural and poor

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<sup>209</sup> For more information on Zola and naturalism, see Lawson A. Carter, *Zola and the Theater* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963); Tullio Pagano, *Experimental Fiction: From Emile Zola's Naturalism to Giovanni Verga's Verism* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1999). Zola called naturalism an “experimental method,” the method of writing with objectivity and analytical details, rather than merely the subject matter with which this type of writing takes up. He explicates his view on naturalism in *Experimental Novel* (1880). Emile Zola, *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays* (New York: Haskell House, 1964).

South. The pessimistic outlook to the verist works show that there are no changes in social class for the poor even after the Unification.

### *The Femme Fatale and Exoticism*

The femme fatale was sometimes complicated further by exoticism, another fascination of many nineteenth-century artists. In the visual arts and in literature, painters and writers found their sources of the femme fatale in distant lands and a range of historical periods, including the Bible, mythologies, stories from the Middle Ages, and hybrid monsters like the Sphinx.<sup>210</sup> The creators, i.e., Europeans, “orientalized the Orient”: they created a world in which the Orient appeared as they wished it rather than depicting as it was.<sup>211</sup> The Orient was not just the Near East, like Egypt, but also the Far East: a world away from Europe, its culture, and values. By creating their femme fatale in a realm that is distant from nineteenth-century “reality,” European artists could depict a world “where all the most unbridled desires can be indulged and the cruellest [sic] fantasies can take concrete form.”<sup>212</sup> Edward Said, literary critic and philosopher, summarizes that,

[T]he Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe. Virtually no European writer who wrote on or traveled to the Orient in the period after 1800 exempted himself or herself from this quest. . . . What they looked for often—correctly, I think—was a different type of sexuality, perhaps more libertine and less guilt-ridden. . . .<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Bade, *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women*, 7–8.

<sup>211</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 166–197.

<sup>212</sup> Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 197.

<sup>213</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 190.

In nineteenth-century art, there was a link between eroticism and pain and death. Sex was depicted as dangerous and destructive subjugation of one person to the other.<sup>214</sup> Art

historian Patrick Bade writes,

The association of eroticism and pain and death and the belief that sexual relations entails a subjugation, often violent and destructive, of one partner to the other, run through much of nineteenth-century art. But in the course of the century, artists interpreted this subjugation in a new form, shifting from a sadistic to a masochistic conception of sex roles in which the woman was dominant.<sup>215</sup>

One example of an exotic femme fatale was Salome. Although she appeared infrequently in the period before the nineteenth century, Bade asserts that she was “elevated to the status of an archetype” in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>216</sup> She was based on a short Biblical passage, although she was unnamed and only referred to as the daughter of Herodias. In the Bible it was her mother who not only instigated to kill John the Baptist but also instructed her daughter to ask King Herod to give her the head of the prophet on a platter.<sup>217</sup> But in the nineteenth century, Salome took credit for this. Even though she was responsible for such a gruesome act, in visual arts for example, she was often painted erotically with elegant garb draped very provocatively over her body. In one of Gustave Moreau’s many versions of Salome, she was clothed almost fully, her torso covered by her right arm. In another version (*Salome dancing before Herod (The Tattooed Salome)* 1876), she was covered not with clothes but with tattoo-like decorations on her nude body and was draped with a shawl on her outstretched left arm. In Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer’s *Salome* (1896), she was depicted in the frame tenderly embracing and about to kiss the severed head of John the Baptist. The green tone of the

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<sup>214</sup> Bade, *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women*, 6.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>217</sup> Mark 6:17–28.

pastel picture added to the gruesome nature of the composition as well as Salome's cruelty.

Salome has been depicted in literature as well. Writers including Heinrich Heine, Gustave Flaubert, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Jules Laforgue wrote about this femme fatale. J.K. Huysmans was inspired by Moreau's Salome and included erotic descriptions of it in one of his novels *A rebour* (1884) as the male protagonist narrated the painting:

No longer was she only the dancing girl who extorts a cry of lust and concupiscence from an old man by the lascivious contortions of her body; who breaks the will, masters the mind of a King by the spectacle of her quivering bosoms, heaving belly and tossing thighs; she was now revealed in a sense as the symbolic incarnation of world-old-vice, the goddess of immortal Hysteria, the Curse of Beauty supreme above all other beauties by the cataleptic spasm that stirs her flesh and steels her muscles—a monstrous Beast of the Apocalypse, indifferent, irresponsible, insensible, poisoning, like Helen of Troy of the old Classic Fables, all who come near her, all who see her, all who touch her.<sup>218</sup>

Although Huysmans's novel described Salome as the femme fatale, arguably the most famous version of Salome was written by Oscar Wilde.<sup>219</sup> Praz asserts that Wilde deserves credit as the artist who solidified the “legend of Salome's horrible passion.”<sup>220</sup> Wilde focused on the erotic aspect of the heroine: her intense and single-minded desire for John the Baptist. From the moment she heard his voice, she was determined to see, touch, and kiss him though he recoiled from her. She did not listen to the warnings of others. She did everything she could to get her way, that is, to have John the Baptist. Her desire began innocently, wanting first to hear his voice, next to see him, then to touch his body, fourth to touch his hair, and finally to kiss his mouth. If she could not kiss him

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<sup>218</sup> J.K. Huysman, *A rebour*, quoted in Allen, *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon*, 1.

<sup>219</sup> Richard Strauss wrote a one-act opera based on Wilde's play. Puccini saw the opera and was inspired to write one based on Wilde's work too. He examined *A Floretine Tragedy* but abandoned the idea quickly.

<sup>220</sup> Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 298.

while he was alive, she would kiss his lips when he was dead. To get to John, she danced with seven veils and pleased the king, her stepfather, who promised her to give her anything she wanted, up to half his kingdom. Wilde changed from the original Biblical story in which Herodias asks for the head of the prophet. Instead, it was Salome herself who asked for his head on a silver charger.<sup>221</sup> She was only satisfied when she finally received the head of John the Baptist and kissed his lips.

Salome not only destroyed the prophet, but along the way, another man fell. A young Syrian soldier, Narraboth, who had been infatuated with her since the opening of the play, was the captain of the guard and was supposed to keep John the Baptist in the cistern by the order of Herod. Salome desired to see the prophet and flirted with the captain. He could not resist her sweet words and ordered others to bring up the prisoner. After he delivered John, Salome no longer paid attention to the soldier, who became frustrated and desperate. He killed himself because Salome no longer pretended to desire him. Thus Salome caused the deaths of two men to fulfill her whims and desires.

Yet for these deaths, Salome was punished for her crimes. The king ordered his soldiers to execute her after he saw her gloating with the head of John the Baptist. Salome, a princess, succeeded in killing John, a prophet; however, she was out-ranked by Herod, the king, who ordered her death. The message seemed to be that women who kill men were themselves to be punished and killed. In the Bible, there was no mention of Salome being killed. Yet in the nineteenth century, there seemed to be a need for such retribution. A woman must be punished if she transgressed the patriarchal order.

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<sup>221</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Plays of Oscar Wilde* (Ware, UK: Wordsworth Edition, 2000), 155.

Richard Strauss faithfully set Wilde's play to music in 1905, and Puccini saw the opera in May 1906 in Graz.<sup>222</sup> Of the opera he wrote, it is "the most extraordinary, terribly cacophonous thing. ... There are some very beautiful orchestral sounds, but it ends by tiring one out. It is a most gripping spectacle."<sup>223</sup> Around the same time in 1906, he too had been seriously considering setting a novel that featured an exotic femme fatale: *La femme et le pantin* (1898) by Pierre Louÿs (1879–1925).<sup>224</sup>

## **The Femme Fatale, Opera, Verismo, and Exoticism**

### *Verismo and Opera*

The term "verismo" has been appropriated into opera criticism and has been applied to works by Puccini, Leoncavallo, and Mascagni. Verismo, however, as applied opera is vastly different from its origins in literature. Writer Ray Macdonald explains that, "although many harsh and brutal elements are to be found in this school, their presence is not necessarily mandatory and there are some *verismo* works lacking in wild passions, violence, etc. But the association of this kind of element with such works has caused many to deduce that the mere presence of violence automatically makes a work *verismo*,

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<sup>222</sup> Wilde's French play premiered in 1891, in English 3 years later.

<sup>223</sup> Budden, *Puccini: His Life and Works*, 285.

<sup>224</sup> Puccini had contemplated the novel from 1903 to 1910, when he finally abandoned the idea. Louÿs's novel is similar to Merimée's novella *Carmen*. The female protagonist works at a tobacco factory, like Carmen, but becomes the mistress of a rich man. She does not give herself to him physically, since she has been brought up in a convent and holds her virginity sacred. But she tortures him psychologically, binding him like a puppet to her with sexual temptation. When he can no longer endure her mistreatment, he beats her to which she exclaims her twisted delight, awakening her erotically. The tables are then turned in which she become his puppet.

which of course is completely erroneous.”<sup>225</sup> Other writers also point out such misuses of the term as well. Eugen Voss, a musicologist, shows that “the differences between [the literature and operatic use of the term] are so glaring that one can doubt whether, and if so to what extent, it is meaningful at all to speak of *verismo* in opera, or to take this terminology at its aesthetic face value instead of using it as a quick guide for orientation.”<sup>226</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, another musicologist, too notices the differences and explains that literary *verismo* is “an Italian variant of naturalism.”<sup>227</sup> The most important aspect of naturalism for Dahlhaus is social criticism. Operatic *verismo* however adopts only the subject matters used in literature, largely ignoring social criticism.

More recently in the article, “Verismo: Origins, Corruption, and Redemption of an Operatic Term,” musicologist Andreas Giger provides a thorough history of the origins of *verismo* in visual arts and literature and how the term can be used today to identify the operas of the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>228</sup> He critiques earlier writers, claiming, “[w]ithout easy access to many of the nineteenth-century sources, however, neither [Jay] Nicolaisen nor his predecessors could have known that their concept of *verismo* was not too broad but, rather, too narrow.”<sup>229</sup> Based on his research, Giger explains three different ways in which *verismo* was used in the nineteenth century: 1) “a balance between idealism and realism, as less extreme and thus better than pure realism”; 2) the

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<sup>225</sup> Ray S. Macdonald, *Puccini: King of Verismo* (New York: Vintage Press, 1973), 7–8.

<sup>226</sup> As quoted in Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 351.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.* Dahlhaus does not define the differences between naturalism and realism, and uses these terms synonymously. His bibliography in the chapter that discuss naturalism/realism only includes one entry that is not music related, “Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert” by Ernst Troeltsch (1913).

<sup>228</sup> Andreas Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption of an Operatic Term,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 60, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*: 272.

exaggeration of realism that “banned all traces of idealism, concentrating on the misery and immoral behavior of the lowest social classes, on prostitution, crime, and deformity for the sake of introducing new subjects to those readers who had tired of the same old themes”; 3) “a style of art-historical period against idealism, classicism, and...conventional content, form, and language.” Giger argues that by applying the third way of using verismo, the term can be applied to operas that were written in the latter part of the nineteenth century: breaking away from the conventions of Romantic opera, including harmony, form, text, and subject matter. However, Giger’s redefinition of verismo becomes problematic because it would encompass any and all types or genres of opera written in the latter part of the nineteenth century, rendering the term meaningless.

Rather than trying to rehabilitate a term to apply to all operas that goes “against conventions” of Romantic opera, the term and concept of operatic verismo should be understood in context of the Italian literary movement. As mentioned above, verismo was an important part of Italian literature in the late nineteenth century. Because of the powerful verist stories that resonated with the current of the time, some operatic composers, including Mascagni, Leoncavallo, set these works to music. Puccini even considered setting a verist short story by Verga *La lupa* but ultimately decided against it. Mascagni’s *Cavalliera rusticana* (1890) and Leoncavallo’s *I pagliacci* (1892) are now considered to be primary examples of verismo operas because the sources for the libretto were based on Verga’s verist short story by the same title and, as Leoncavallo claimed, a “real” event that occurred in mid nineteenth century.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Accessed May 15, 2011.

[http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/O903808?q=pagliacci&hbutton\\_search.x=0&hbutton\\_search.y=0&hbutton\\_search=search](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/O903808?q=pagliacci&hbutton_search.x=0&hbutton_search.y=0&hbutton_search=search)



Yet both Mascagni and Leoncavallo composed operas that would hardly be called verismo. Leoncavallo wrote several operettas and Mascagni composed operas that widely varied in genre. For example, *L'amico Fritz* (1891) and *Le maschere* (1901) are comic operas while *Guglielmo Radcliff* (1895) a tragic opera, and *Si* (1919) an operetta. Neither Puccini can be classified as a verismo composer, which implies that he only wrote operas that were verist. Indeed he wrote different genres of opera, not just verismo, including operetta (*La rondine*, 1917) and comedy (*Gianni Schicchi*, 1918). Rather, these and other composers partook in a contemporary movement verismo and wrote operas that were inspired by verist works. The composers themselves should not be stereotyped as a particular type, in this case, verismo composer, since they clearly wrote other genres of operas.

### *Exoticism and Opera*

Not only was Puccini influenced by verismo and adopt some elements from it, but he also utilized exotic sources for his operas, namely for *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot*.<sup>231</sup> If the exotic is referred to cultures outside of Western Europe, then such influences have been present in operas long before Puccini's. For example, Mozart's opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782) is set in the Ottoman Empire, featuring comic stereotypes the tyrannical Turkish ruler as well as music inspired by Janissary band.

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h&source=omo\_t237&source=omo\_gmo&source=omo\_t114&search=quick&pos=1&\_st art=1#firsthit

<sup>231</sup> Puccini is rarely classified as an exotic composer in the same way that he is often referred to as a verismo composer. See Macdonald, *Puccini: King of Verismo*.

Rossini also composed an opera set in an exotic location in *L'italiana in Algeri* (1812). Verdi too wrote an exotic opera *Aida* (1871), which is set in ancient Egypt.

Many scholars have written about how the operatic works intersect exoticism.<sup>232</sup> James Parakilas discuss in his two-part article, "The Soldier and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of Racial Encounter," the similarities of the plot of several operas, including *Carmen* and *Lakmé*, and what the exotic represented to Europeans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an "escape from the regimentation of modern European life in general."<sup>233</sup> W. Anthony Sheppard writes about exoticism in stage works of various regions and time periods in *Revealing Masks: Exotic Influences and Ritualized Performance in Modernist Music Theater*.<sup>234</sup> More recently, Ralph P. Locke has published *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (2009), which critiques music and exoticism but also discuss a wide range of time periods and styles of how the exotic is manifested in musical works.

Writers in Puccini studies too have examined how the composer's works, mainly *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot*, exhibit exoticism. They tend to focus on the presence of exotic elements, such as pentatonic scales and appropriated melodies from Japan or China.<sup>235</sup> Such research has paved the way to allow for other inquires regarding exoticism

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<sup>232</sup> See also Timothy D. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>233</sup> Parakilas also attributes escape "from the emasculating existence of a soldier...: the humiliating French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870." James Parakilas, "The Soldier and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of Racial Encounter," *Opera Quarterly* 10, no. 2, 3 (1993): 42.

<sup>234</sup> W. Anthony Sheppard, *Revealing Masks: Exotic Influences and Ritualized Performance in Modernist Music Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>235</sup> See Mosco Carner, "The Exotic Element in Puccini," *The Musical Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1936); Julian Smith, "Musical Exoticism in *Madama Butterfly*," in *Esotismo e colore*

and opera. The aim in this project is not to duplicate what has already been written, though some works have been referenced, but to consider how exotic elements are used musically to construct the femme fatale in Puccini's opera, namely *Turandot*.

### **Puccini and Turandot**

Puccini was not particularly looking for an exotic subject or one that features a femme fatale for his next opera in 1920. He searched far and wide for compelling stories that would move his audience to tears. He wrote to Adami,

Put all your strength into it, all the resources of your hearts and heads, and create for me something which will make the world weep. They say that emotionalism is a sign of weakness, but I like to be weak! To the *strong*, so-called, I leave the triumphs that fade; for us those that endure!<sup>236</sup>

For Puccini, it was imperative that he find a subject that moved the hearts of audiences.

What resonated with Puccini's sensibilities was *Turandotte*, a play by Carlo Gozzi.<sup>237</sup>

The theme of the story is a common one of war of the sexes, man's desire to conquer woman, and woman's resistance towards man. The way in which the woman's heart changed from resisting the man to loving him was crucial for Puccini. This was the point

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*locale nell'opera di Puccini: Atti del primo Convegno Internazionale sull'Opera di Giacomo Puccini*, ed. Jürgen Maehder (Pisa: Giardini, 1985).

<sup>236</sup> To Adami, October, 23, 1919 in Adami and Carner, eds., *Letters of Giacomo Puccini: Mainly Connected with the Composition and Production of His Operas*, 268.

<sup>237</sup> One of Puccini's librettists Renato Simoni suggested Carlo Gozzi to Puccini in late 1919 or early 1920. "And what about Gozzi? What if we reconsidered Gozzi? A fairy-tale which would perhaps be the synthesis of his other typical fables? I don't know...something fantastic and remote, interpreted with human sentiment and presented in modern colours?" It was likely that Simoni, a Gozzi scholar, suggested *Turandotte* (1762) and not Puccini himself. Puccini was intrigued with the story and wrote to Simoni in March 1920, "I have read *Turandot*; it seems to me that it would be better not to part with this subject." Quoted in Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 244. Quoted in Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 444.

that would make “the world weep.”<sup>238</sup> Whether or not the subject was of European origin or of foreign lands was not as important as finding a story that moved the hearts of the audience. That is not to say that Puccini disregarded the setting of his operas. In fact, he paid great attention to the culture from which a subject originated to provide the most accurate kind of atmosphere that his imagination could appropriate. *Turandot* provided many opportunities for Puccini to present what seemed to be exotic in music.

Gozzi’s play inspired other playwrights and opera composers to set the tale of Turandot, some of the versions Puccini was familiar with. In fact, Puccini initially read Friedrich Schiller’s version of the play (1803), which was translated back into Italian by Andrea Maffei.<sup>239</sup> Puccini also was aware of a production of the play by Max Reinhardt in Berlin.<sup>240</sup> He acquired a few scenic materials because he was told that the *mise-en-scène* was “very curious and original.”<sup>241</sup> Several other composers have selected this topic as their operas. Puccini was aware of Carl Maria von Weber’s orchestral pieces (1809) that accompanied the production of Schiller’s play. Moreover, Antonio Bazzini, Puccini’s composition teacher from Milan conservatory, composed *La Turanda* (1867). Giuseppe Giacosa, one of Puccini’s favorite librettists, had written a play based on the legend of Turandot, *Il trionfo d’amore* (1875). Perhaps the most recent adaptation of Gozzi’s *Turandotte* was Ferruccio Busoni’s *Turandot* which premiered in 1917 in

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<sup>238</sup> Adami and Carner, eds., *Letters of Giacomo Puccini: Mainly Connected with the Composition and Production of His Operas*, 268.

<sup>239</sup> Maffei and his wife, Clara, was a friend of Giuseppe Verdi. Maffei adapted Schiller’s *Die Räuber* for which the composer wrote *I masnadieri* in 1847.

<sup>240</sup> Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 245.

<sup>241</sup> Quoted in Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 444.

Zurich.<sup>242</sup> It is unknown whether Puccini ever saw Busoni's opera, but likely that he heard about it through others.

Gozzi likely learned the legend of Turandot from *The Arabian Nights*, which was first introduced to Western Europe through a French translation by Antoine Galland at the beginning of the eighteenth century.<sup>243</sup> The origin of the story suggests that it is Persian because the word "Turan" means Turkestan in Persian. Nevertheless, the story is about a cruel Chinese virgin princess who rejects marriage suitors by setting up a trial of difficult riddles. The Venetian playwright turned this legend into a five-act tragi-comic "dramatic fable." Through basis of a fairy-tale Gozzi presented a story set in the Orient with its people as well as elements of *commedia dell'arte* in the Masks. This combination of incongruous factors allowed Puccini to invent an exotic world that would move the hearts of the audience.

#### *Turandot as Exotic Femme Fatale*

Puccini's *Turandot* is set in an imaginative world where exoticism and cruelty of the femme fatale can be intricately interwoven by setting the story in Peking, China "in legendary times," a time and place that cannot be experienced by an average European opera goer in the early twentieth century.<sup>244</sup> Because of the lack of a specific time in *Turandot*, it is not limited by factual evidence and historical accuracy as to the cruelty Princess Turandot could unleash. She unintentionally lures men but threatens to kill them

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<sup>242</sup> Busoni had begun the work as an eight-movement suite in 1904. In 1911, he adapted it as incidental music for Rheinhardt's production of the new translation of Gozzi's play by Karl Vollmoeller.

<sup>243</sup> Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 512.

<sup>244</sup> Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 399.

if they desire to marry her. She does not intend to behave erotically, but others desire her nonetheless. Her position of power—princess of China—adds value to her as a power to possess. She is dangerous and is willing to kill men. She is cold and distant, not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually. She does what she wants to do and lives by her own rules. She makes others live by her rules too. Because of this, everyone in Peking knows how dangerous and fatal she is. These horrible acts could offend the early twentieth-century bourgeois sensibility: a cruel and heartless princess who kills her male suitors, a place where shedding of blood is celebrated, and skulls of the decapitated suitors are displayed on city walls as a warning to stay away from Turandot.

Musical exoticism, as pertains to Turandot, is shown by the use of indigenous Chinese tunes.<sup>245</sup> The melody that is associated with the character of Turandot has been identified as the Chinese folk tune, “Mu-li-hua” [jasmine flower] (Figure III-1).<sup>246</sup> Girardi writes that this tune symbolizes “Turandot’s human side...often in the children’s chorus, a timbre that symbolizes Turandot’s innocence.”<sup>247</sup> The tune is sung by the children’s choir twice, but the second time, it is joined by the adult choir which hums the melody. Although Girardi does not explicate what he means by her “human side” or her “innocence,” it is hard to accept that the music represents her “human side” or “her innocence” given the context in which the tune appears initially in act one, just before the fatal judgment Turandot gives to the prince of Persia. Since Turandot pronounced fatal

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<sup>245</sup> Carner has identified several other Chinese melodies. Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 521–523. Girardi listed several more in his book. Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 450–452.

<sup>246</sup> Mosco Carner, “The Score,” in *Turandot: Giacomo Puccini*, ed. Nicholas John (New York: Riverrun Press, 1984), 19.

<sup>247</sup> Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 452.

judgments to all her suitors, she hardly could be labeled with a child-like innocence as Girardi asserts.

Figure III-1 “Mu-li-hua”



This tune is always heard in the same key of E flat, although it is set with varying orchestrations. In act one, the melody is first presented by the children’s choir, and doubled by two saxophones in E flat, as they march across the stage, R19. It is understandable that Girardi would interpret this tune as symbolizing Turandot’s innocence if presented in this form alone. However, later in the same act when Turandot walks onto the imperial balcony to judge the prince of Persia, R23+5, the melody is heard once again. The music this time is played loudly to highlight the fatal judgment on the Persian prince. The tune is now presented without voices, as inhuman, and only with instruments, which resonates like a brass fanfare. Many low brass instruments play the melody: trumpet in F, trombone, and contrabass trombone. Moreover, there are brass players on stage: at least two trumpets in C and three trombones. The woodwinds accent the melody with loud glistening ornamentations, marked *fff* and *stridente*. There is a sense of pageantry with Turandot’s entrance in this version.

The tune is presented the third time in act two, scene two, when the princess enters the imperial court to give the riddles to Calaf, R42. However, the setting is strikingly different from the original. It creates an atmosphere of grace and serenity rather

than the one of “innocence.” Many small changes contribute to this serene and gracious sound. The adult choir hums the melody, which creates not only a fuller sound, but also a richer one especially with the timbre of the lower voices. The orchestral accompaniment is also fuller, thicker, and more legato compared to the original version. The full string section is present. While the first violins glisten with high shimmery timbre, the presence of low timbre in the cello, bass viol, and the bass from the adult choir ground the sound. The tempo is only slightly slower (*andantino*, quarter note = 69, compared to quarter note = 72 in act one) but adds to the serene sound. This atmosphere is a stark contrast to what came immediately before it, the proclamation of the “atrocious” decree.<sup>248</sup>

Carner asserts that tune of “Muli-hua” is used to symbolize the “official” Turandot.<sup>249</sup> It is true that the examples above show Turandot in her “official” capacities. However, there is one instance in which the tune and Turandot are presented not in an official event. In act three when Turandot appears “at the edge of the pavilion” [sul limite del padiglione] to learn the name of the prince, R17–2.<sup>250</sup> Turandot is not presented with pageantry; instead, it seems as if she is sneaking into the scene. The key and the orchestration are different here from the previous versions. The key is G-flat major, not in E-flat major, and the tune is first presented fortissimo by the brass and then piano by the clarinet and viola. Rather than trying to interpret the tune with specific symbols, it might be more helpful to see this tune as a leitmotif for Turandot in general.

Because Turandot is exotic, that is, not Western European, she seems to be given the power to do violence. Her harsh and gruesome reign is shown visually from the

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<sup>248</sup> “Atroce.” Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 432, 433.

<sup>249</sup> Carner, “The Score,” 19.

<sup>250</sup> Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 448, 449.



beginning of the opera—long before she even speaks a word, let alone appears on stage. The first scene described in the libretto depicts a grotesque and fantastic stagescape of skulls mounted on poles. Although the audience may not understand where those skulls came from, it is later explained that they belonged to the men who were sentenced to death by Turandot. Furthermore, the walls of the “Violet City: the Imperial City” is sculpted with different mythical creatures: “monsters, unicorns, and phoenixes.”<sup>251</sup> This “Violet City,” otherwise known as Peking, was a city that many early twentieth-century Europeans had not visited —therefore, recognizably “exotic.”

Turandot’s cruelty is expressed musically in the opening scene. The opera begins with a very loud and ominous five-note motive, which has been connected to Turandot by scholars (Figure III-2). The “execution motive,” as it is referred to by Ashbrook and Powers, is followed by series of, what Budden calls, “savage bitonal barks” (See figure III-3).<sup>252</sup> The audience is confronted not only with the execution motive and the bitonal barks but also with the Mandarin’s declaration of Turandot’s severe decree. The dissonance of the bitonal chords grates against the listener’s ears. The tritone relationship between the second and third chord adds to the brutality. The execution motive, as played by the piccolo and the oboe, is heard three times over the long bitonal passage as if to prophesy the demise of the prospective suitors.

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<sup>251</sup> “Violet City” refers to the “Forbidden City” of Beijing. The city is translated to literally mean “violet forbidden city.” It was forbidden for commoners to enter this part of the city. *Ibid.*, 400–401.

<sup>252</sup> Carner asserts that the motive “stands for Turandot as the embodiment of an evil power,” and Michele Girardi as “the image of Turandot as cruel executioner of her suitors.” However, William Ashbrook and Harold Powers call it the “execution motive,” which sounds like a more appropriate label as they have shown in their work. Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 529. Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 471. William Ashbrook and Harold Powers, *Puccini's Turandot: The End of The Great Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 89; Budden, *Puccini: His Life and Works*.

Figure III-2 Five-Note Motive



Figure III-3 Bitonal Chords

Everyone in Peking knows that violence is present when Turandot reigns. The crowd and the executioner’s servants sing the ensemble piece “Gira cote” in which they sharpen the blade that decapitates the heads of those who fail to answer the princess’s riddles correctly. The piece starts softly and quickly crescendos to a forte as if the whetting wheel is beginning to turn. Once the momentum of the wheel is set, it is relentless in its pounding—the beats as played by the timpani refer to the labor that Turandot’s servants expend in beheading failed suitors. The beating of the timpani also reflects aurally and visually the gong that Calaf, the unknown prince, will be striking at the end of act one. The executioner’s servants “savagely” [selvaggio] sing, “Let the blade flash, spurt fire and blood! Work never languishes where reigns Turandot” [Che la lama

giuzzi, sprizzi fuoco e sangue! Il lavor mai non langue dove regna Turandot].<sup>253</sup> These words are sung by low voices, adding to the fierce and savage atmosphere. The text is set as staccato in the pentatonic melody, although it has a strong pull to the key of F-sharp minor, the key of execution as Ashbrook and Powers argue.<sup>254</sup>

Because Turandot's violence is synonymous with exoticism, the ensemble piece is heavily orchestrated with percussion instruments that are not commonly heard in an ordinary orchestra: triangle, tambourine, gong, glockenspiel, xylophone, bass xylophone, and celesta. Moreover, the string section also plays in a way that enhances the exotic and violent sound. They play pizzicato rather than bowing, which achieves the staccato effect but also creates a different color and timbre that accord with the harsh, drudging tone of the piece.

Turandot's threat and fatality are well known by her ministers, Ping, Pang, and Pong, who have witnessed many executions due to her decree, at least twenty-seven.<sup>255</sup> They bemoan that they are reduced to "ministers of executioners," rather than the proper Grand Chancellor, Grand Purveyor, and Grand Cook, respectively, that they are.<sup>256</sup> In "O mondo, o mondo pieno," the three enumerate the princes who have attempted and failed to conquer Turandot's riddles. Ping declares that when the Prince of Samarkand

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<sup>253</sup> Giacomo Puccini, *Turandot* (Milan: Ricordi, 2000), 27. Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 404–405.

<sup>254</sup> Ashbrook and Powers, *Puccini's Turandot: The End of The Great Tradition*, 89.

<sup>255</sup> They have counted six deaths in "the year of the rat," eight in "the year of the dog" and thirteen the current year, "the year of the tiger." "L'anno del topo furon sei...l'anno del cane furon otto...Nell'anno in corso il terribile anno della tigre, siamo già...tredicesimo." Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 424–425. The librettist seem to be confused about the order of the Chinese year. The order is: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep (or goat), monkey, rooster, dog, and pig (or boar).

<sup>256</sup> "I ministry del boia." Ibid.

requested the challenge, “she, with what joy, sent him the executioner!”<sup>257</sup> And the “bejeweled Indian Sagarika asked for love, and he was decapitated!”<sup>258</sup> The same result greeted the Burmese prince, the Prince of Kirghiz, and the Tartar prince. Because the ministers do not wish to see another man die, they warn Calaf from taking Turandot’s challenge, telling him, “They garrote you!”, “they impale you!”, “they cut your throat!”, “they skin you alive!”, “they sink hooks into you and behead you!”, and “they saw you up and disembowel you!”<sup>259</sup>

Turandot’s cruelty is proclaimed through other lands; nevertheless, many princes find her desirable and beautiful. Turandot is worth more to princes from foreign lands. These princes from all over the world might desire not only Turandot’s beauty but also the power she possesses because she is the sole heir to the throne of Peking. When a prince marries her, he would also gain the empire and reign as emperor of Peking. Many have taken the chance to gain such prizes. But as accounted by Ping, Pang, and Pong above, these princes met their doom.

The princess’s reputation for danger has been the focal point since the opening notes of the opera. However she has not been seen or heard for what seems to be an eternity in the opera. Thus, Turandot’s entrance is highly anticipated by the people in Peking as well as the audience. When she finally appears, she is presented in ways that highlight her exotic beauty and everything that is desirable about her. She does not speak a word at her initial entrance; however, her beauty is spotlighted by the moonlight, halting the action and causing everyone in Peking to look at her. The lack of speech

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<sup>257</sup> “E lei, con quale gioia, gli mandò il boia!” Ibid., 426–427.

<sup>258</sup> “L’indiano gemmato Sagarika,” “amore chiese, fu decapitato!” Ibid., 428–429.

<sup>259</sup> “Si strozza!”, “si sgozza!”, “si spella!”, “si unicina e scapitozza!”, “si sega e si sbudella!” Ibid., 410–413.

seems to heighten the anticipation, expectation, of something desirable. Perhaps the way the moon is shining on her or the way she carries herself as a princess, her aura enhances her desirability by casting mystery and intrigue that seem to cause people to be entranced. For example, when Prince Calaf hears about the death sentence for the prince of Persia and sees how young he is, Calaf pities the prince and becomes so enraged that he curses Turandot even before seeing her. Yet as soon as Calaf sees her in the moonlight, her physical features cast a spell on him, which cause him to change his mind completely. He is entranced as he stands “motionless, ecstatic, as if the unexpected vision of beauty had fatally riveted him to his destiny.”<sup>260</sup> He is so “dazzled” by Turandot that “he covers his face with his hands.”<sup>261</sup> Although he tries to dodge her spell, it is too late for he is convinced that he must possess her. He declares that “every fiber of [his] soul has a voice that cries: Turandot.”<sup>262</sup> He sings of her “divine beauty,” and he is truly bewitched with her for he sings Turandot’s theme, however, in a minor mode setting. The change of mode paints a very eerie atmosphere. It is as if Calaf is no longer in control of himself, mindlessly repeating the tune he has just heard, Figure III-4.

Figure III-4 (Ricordi, full score p.72, R23+5 to 13)



<sup>260</sup> Il Principe è tuttora immobile, estatico come se la inattesa visione di bellezza lo avesse fatalmente inchiodato al suo destino.” Ibid., 408–409.

<sup>261</sup> “Si copre il volto con le mani.” Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ogni fibra dell’anima ha una voce che grida: Turandot.” Ibid., 420–421.

Another feature that makes Turandot seem all the more enchanting and even mysterious is that she is presented as unreal or more than mortal. Allen writes that the “femme fatale is less human. She is immortal, queen, goddess, and therefore separated from ordinary men—and women—by a vast gulf.”<sup>263</sup> Turandot is indeed “proud, mysterious, idol-like.”<sup>264</sup> She is the daughter of the emperor of Peking, and when she first appears in act one, she presents herself as if she were a goddess, “from the height of the imperial balcony,” far above all her people, the noisy crowd.<sup>265</sup> It is as if she is beyond their realm. Turandot is physically separated from humans. Her physical distance is analogous to her separation spiritually, morally, and socially. Moreover, she is illuminated by “a ray of moonlight,” which makes her “seem almost incorporeal, like a vision.”<sup>266</sup> She is not seen as a human, but as a “vision,” an apparition, almost a figment of one’s imagination. There is something supernatural about her for even the “voices of the shadows” desire her and long to hear her.<sup>267</sup> Even in their death, they are still obsessed with her and call out through their spirits, “Make her speak! Make us hear her! I love her!”<sup>268</sup> Even Turandot herself thinks that she is “no human thing.”<sup>269</sup> She declares that she is the “daughter of heaven, free and pure” and that her “soul is on high.”<sup>270</sup> She reminds her father that she is “sacred,” and that she is not to be discarded to any man who merely desires her.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Allen, *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon*, 4.

<sup>264</sup> Bade, *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women*, 8.

<sup>265</sup> “Dall’alto della loggia imperiale.” Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 408–409.

<sup>266</sup> “Un raggio di luna,” “appare quasi incorporea, come una visione.” Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> “Le voci delle ombre.” Ibid., 416–417.

<sup>268</sup> “Fa’ ch’ella parli! Fa’ che l’udiamo! Io l’amo!” Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> “Cosa umana non sono.” Ibid., 456–457.

<sup>270</sup> “La figlia del cielo libera e pura,” “l’anima è lassù.” Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> “Sacra.” Ibid., 440–441.

Turandot as a femme fatale demonstrates her pride throughout the opera. When she first appears in act one, she commands a “masterful attitude” and without saying a word, her “haughty gaze makes the tumult cease magically.”<sup>272</sup> In act two, Turandot “turns her very proud eyes.... Her haughty superiority grips her again.”<sup>273</sup> When the Prince hesitates to answer her second riddle, “the Princess assumes an expression of triumph.”<sup>274</sup> Turandot tries to come across as undesirable by her behaviors.

Although many men desire Turandot, she does not intentionally seduce them unlike other femme fatales. In fact, Turandot schemes to keep the men away. She refuses to be conquered by men and threatens strongly to keep them away. She proposes a law that if a man of noble birth desires to marry her, he must answer her three riddles correctly. The penalty of failing is death by decapitation. Yet the men, irrespective of fair warning and risk, take up the challenge to try to win and marry the princess. It is her way to protect herself from unwanted suitors. Thus, she renounces all responsibility for their deaths as the edict clearly states the consequences of their failure.

Because Turandot does not intentionally seduce men, she comes across as cold and frigid. Allen points out that with the femme fatale there is a “theme of an indifferent and chilling remoteness from human feelings.”<sup>275</sup> Praz writes that she is “frigid, unfeeling, fatal, ...the man pines with passion and falls at her feet....”<sup>276</sup> Although the femme fatale is often associated with eroticism and passion, she is actually emotionally distant and cold. Turandot especially is portrayed as such. She is described by those who

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<sup>272</sup> “Il suo atteggiamento dominatore e il suo sguardo altero fanno cessare per incanto il tumulto.” Ibid., 408–409.

<sup>273</sup> “Gira gli occhi fierissimi. ...La sua altera superiorità la riprende.” Ibid., 438–439.

<sup>274</sup> “La Principessa ha un'espressione di trionfo.” Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Allen, *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon*, 4.

<sup>276</sup> Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 195.

live in Peking as “cold as [the executioner’s] sword.”<sup>277</sup> Her lack of human feelings is demonstrated in her actions of silencing the crowd and gesturing of a death sentence for the Prince of Persia.<sup>278</sup> Also during the riddle challenge in act two, scene two, Turandot “looks with very cold eyes at the Prince.”<sup>279</sup> Even when the Prince answers her riddles correctly, she “laughs a cold laugh.”<sup>280</sup>

Turandot explains the reasons why she keeps men away in her aria “In questa reggia.” Her reasons add another layer of exoticism. She declares that her ancestor Lo-u-Ling has taken refuge in her soul. Because Lo-u-Ling had been “dragged away” and killed by a foreigner, Turandot believes that her ancestor is asking her to take vengeance on “foreigners.” This might be a case in which Turandot’s motivation to hate men is exoticized given the reason based in her mythical past, spiritualizing her reasons rather than providing concrete and logical ones.

With “In questa reggia,” Turandot’s first aria, she is portrayed as an exotic, mysterious, yet authoritative princess. The first section of the aria, R44 to 46, focuses on the past—Turandot’s ancestress; whereas the second, R47 to 48, is about Turandot and her present situation.<sup>281</sup> The introduction to the first section at R43—which is in minor and functions like an opening recitative of the aria—sets a mysterious atmosphere. The slow tempo (*molto lento*, quarter note = 46) seems to suspend time and transports the

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<sup>277</sup> “Fredda come quella spada.” Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 406–407.

<sup>278</sup> “Turandot ha un gesso imperioso: è la condanna...” Ibid., 408–409.

<sup>279</sup> “Guarda con freddissimi occhi il Principe.” Ibid., 434–435.

<sup>280</sup> “Ha un freddo riso.” Ibid., 438–439.

<sup>281</sup> When Turandot tells of her ancestress, the dominant key and mode is F-sharp minor. However, when she speaks about herself in the second half of the aria, the key changes to enharmonic G flat and the mode flips to the opposite, major. This change of key and mode suggest that Lo-u-Ling is part of Turandot, that is, she “relives” [rivivi] in her. The motive in the first section is worked out in the second as melody initially presented by the violins at R47.



listener to a distant time, while the color of the accompaniment, consisting only of mainly flute, English horn, clarinet, and horn, creates a distant and mysterious atmosphere.<sup>282</sup> Turandot “solemnly” [solennemente] chants the sacred and “atrocious” [atroce] tale of her ancestress Lo-u-Ling who lived and was killed one thousand years ago.<sup>283</sup> Even after the aria proper starts at R44, when she speaks about her ancestress, Turandot sings a recitative-like melody, which makes her sound distant and detached as if she has little or no feelings about what she is saying. The harmony that lightly accompanies the voice is often an open fifth, lacking the third of the chords, which in turn creates harmonic ambiguity—neither major nor minor mode. This hollow sounds compounds a sense of mystery. The musical motive that the orchestra plays, a mordent-like figure (Figure III-5), further enhances the atmosphere of mystery. The dark colors played by the muted strings create a mysterious sound. It is dark but not heavy for the bass is missing.

Figure III-5

**Lento** ♩ = 66  
con Sordina

Violins I  
Violins II

Violas

Cellos

*p*

*p*

*p*  
con Sordina  
non div.

<sup>282</sup> This subsection functions like a recitative with its repetitive syllabic melody and static harmony.

<sup>283</sup> Puccini, *Turandot*, 250, 254.

The second half of the aria, R47 to 48, however, shows the authoritative side of Turandot. The tempo slows down a little to *largamente* (quarter note = 56). This broad tempo suggests Turandot's majestic presence. Whereas in the first section, she did not have control of the situation of her ancestress, but in the present, Turandot has complete rule over herself and her situation. The mysterious atmosphere painted in the first section is cleared away as heard in the mode, which is changed from minor to major. Immediately, this change seems to reveal Turandot's public persona. The presence of a lyrical melody and the major mode suggests that Turandot is sure of who she is and of the authority that she holds. The enigmatic motive that was so pervasive in the first section (the mordent-like figure) is worked out in the second half of the aria. It grows into a beautiful lyrical melody presented initially by the violins (Figure III-6). The voice highlights parts of the melody as Turandot declares that no one will ever have her ("mai nessun, m'avrà!"). Only later at R47+9 does the voice have most of the melody, but it is still fragmented due to its beginning from the middle of the phrase as well as the fermata on beat four that interrupts the melody. In this melody Turandot proclaims that no one will have her, "Mai nessun m'avrà! L'orror di chi l'uccise vivo nel cor mi sta! ...Ah, rinasce in me l'orgoglio di tanta purità!" [No one will ever possess me! ...The horror of him who killed her is alive in my heart! ...Ah, in me is reborn the pride of such purity!]<sup>284</sup> She declares her authority over her situation as she sings at the top of her range with high Bs.

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<sup>284</sup> ———, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 436, 437.

Figure III-6 Melody in the Second Half of “In questa reggia”

**Largamente** ♩ = 56 *(con energia)*

Turandot  
 mor-te! Mai nes-sun, m'a - vrà! Mai nes-sun! Nes-sun m'a-

First Violins  
*p* *cresc.* *espress.*

Turandot  
 vrà! L'or - ror di chi l'uc - ci - se vi - vo nel cor \_\_\_\_ mi sta! No, \_\_\_\_

Vln. I  
*mf* *rit. col canto* *a tempo* *divisi* *uniti* *cresc.*

**Più sostenuto**

Turandot  
 no! Mai nes-sun m'av-rà! Ah, ri - nas - ce in me l'or - go - glio di tan - ta pu - ri - tà!

Vln. I  
*mf*

The strongest example of Turandot’s assertion of power is demonstrated towards the end of her aria. Turandot proclaims in E-flat major that there are three enigmas and one death. Calaf, her suitor, countermands her and declares that there are three enigmas and one life, singing an augmented second higher in F-sharp major. Turandot reasserts her proclamation this time in A-flat major. Not only does Turandot dictate the directions of the keys, but she also is in control melodically. Calaf tries to assert his point of view in

a different key, but he can only emulate her melody. In the end, he capitulates to Turandot’s power by singing her melody and in the key of A flat that she commands (Figure III-7).

Figure III-7



Figure III-8

Rehearsal #	Section	Subsection	Key
43	Introduction		
44	A	a	f sharp
45		b	d
46		a'	f sharp
47	B	c	G flat
			D
48		d	E flat
		d'	F sharp
		d''	A flat

Although she asserts her authority with “In questa reggia,” Turandot becomes increasingly threatening in act three once the prince has answered two of the three riddles correctly. Whereas she was sitting in the throne of the royal palace at the top of the staircase, she “runs down the step,” “bends over [the Prince], and, fiercely, hammering

out the syllables, her mouth almost on his face, she asks the third riddle.”<sup>285</sup> She tries to intimidate and confound him. She fears that the prince will answer her last riddle correctly and that she will have to marry him, something she fears desperately. Yet even with all her tricks to confuse and distract the prince, he succeeds in answering her riddles correctly and approaches her to take his prize. Turandot fears that he will “profane” her, and she “steps back, distraught, frightened, desperately threatening” to keep him away.<sup>286</sup>

Turandot threatens and speaks violence against men, but the executions of such orders are often carried out by others on her behalf. However, there is one instance in which the princess acts out the violence herself. In act three, scene one, after Liù had stabbed herself with a dagger that she grabbed from a soldier, Turandot becomes enraged that she was not able to procure the secret of the prince’s secret from the slave. “With a gesture of full rage, she seizes a lash from one of the executioner’s assistants standing near her and strikes full in the face with it the soldier who allowed Liù to seize his dagger.”<sup>287</sup>

## **Flexible Modeling**

### *Turandot’s Transformation*

Turandot demonstrates through her actions and speech in the first two acts of the opera that she is a femme fatale. However, she does not remain the same. She transforms out of

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<sup>285</sup> “Corre giù dalla scala,” “ella si china su di lui, e, ferocemente, martellando le sillabe, quasi on la bocca sul viso di lui, dice il terzo enigma.” Ibid., 438–439.

<sup>286</sup> “Aretrando sconvolta, spaurita, disperatamente mimnacciosa.” Ibid., 458–459.

<sup>287</sup> “Poi con gesto pieno di collera strappa ad un aiutante del boia che le è vicino verga a percuote con essa in pieno viso il soldato che si è lasciato strappare il pugnale da Liù.” Ibid., 454–455.

the femme fatale model towards something like a Sentimental Heroine just after Liù's death. Turandot's transformation is the crux of the opera. It may not be an overstatement that Puccini likely would not have completed *Turandot* had not the title character changed from the man-hater/destroyer. Indeed, the very reason for which Puccini abandoned setting to music Pierre Louÿs's novel *La femme et le pantin* was because the heroine's character "frightened" the composer and because she was not "lovable."<sup>288</sup> Puccini always needed affinity with the main character.

The composer knew early on that Turandot's transformation is to be highlighted, to be the climax of the opera, and it was constantly on his mind. He writes to Simoni, "above all, heighten Turandot's amorous passion, which for so long has been stifled under the ashes of her great pride."<sup>289</sup> This transformation was to be spectacular and moving. Puccini writes to his other librettist, Adami, "You must draw upon all your resources of sentiment and emotion. You must move your hearers at the end—and you will know how to do that! Not much rhetoric!—and let the coming of love be as a shining meteor while the people should be in ecstasy, their taut nerves vibrating to the pervading influence like the deep-toned strings of a violoncello."<sup>290</sup> After receiving a draft of the scene, Puccini writes to Adami about how he imagined the change. "In the third [act]—I had imagined a different *dénouement*—I had thought that [Turandot's] capitulation would be more *prenante* [moving], and I should have liked her to burst into expressions of love

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<sup>288</sup> Seligman, *Puccini among Friends*, 88.

<sup>289</sup> Quoted in Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 444.

<sup>290</sup> Adami and Carner, eds., *Letters of Giacomo Puccini: Mainly Connected with the Composition and Production of His Operas*, 281.

[in front of the people of Peking]—but excessively, violently, shamelessly, like a bomb exploding.”<sup>291</sup>

Puccini wanted Turandot to transform during the duet with Calaf in the last act.

He writes to Adami around October 1921,

I think that the duet is the kernel of the whole act. ... In the duet I think that we can work up to a high pitch of emotion. And to do so I think that Calaf must *kiss* Turandot and reveal to the icy Princess how great is his love. After he has kissed her, with a kiss of some—long—seconds, he must say, “Nothing matters now. I am ready even to die,” and he whispers his name to her lips. ... The masks and perhaps the officials and slaves who were lurking behind have heard the name and shout it out. The shout is repeated and passed on, and Turandot is compromised. Then in the third act when everything is ready, with executioner, etc., as in Act I, she says (to the surprise of everyone), “His name I do not know.” In short, I think that this duet enriches the subject considerably and raises it to an emotional interest which we have not now attained. What do you think of it? Tell Simoni.<sup>292</sup>

Again on July 9, 1922, Puccini reminds Adami how to melt the princess’s heart, again during the duet. The composer wanted a few things changed from the draft he received from the librettists.

I should like the icy demeanour of Turandot to melt in the course of the duet, or, in other words, I want a love passage before they appear *coram populo* [in front of the people]—and I want them to walk together towards her father’s throne in the attitude of lovers and raise the cry of love while the crowd looks on in amazement. She says, “I do not know his name,” and he, “Love has conquered....” And the whole ends in ecstasy and jubilation and the glory of the sunlight.<sup>293</sup>

A few months later on November 3, 1922, Puccini was still unsatisfied with the libretto. He emphasized the importance of the duet.

The basis of the act must be the *duet*. Let this be as fantastic as possible, even if you should exaggerate. In the course of this *grand duet*, as the icy demeanour of Turandot gradually melts, the scene, which may be an enclosed place, changes slowly into a spacious setting enriched with every fantastic adornment of flowers

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 275. July 18, 1920, to Adami.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 288–289.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 296–297.

and marble tracery, where the crowd and the Emperor with his Court, in all the pomp of an important occasion, are waiting to welcome Turandot's cry of love.<sup>294</sup>

In the same letter, Puccini introduces the idea that Liù should die to help melt the princess's heart. "I think that Liù must be sacrificed to some sorrow, but I don't see how to do this unless we make her die under torture. And why not? Her death could help to soften the heart of the Princess."<sup>295</sup> For two more years Puccini and his librettists struggled to achieve a compelling solution to change the princess's cold heart. The text of the duet was finally completed to Puccini's satisfaction on October 22, 1924, days before he went to Brussels for treatment of his throat cancer. Puccini writes to Adami, "I think your opinion is correct that the duet is now complete. Perhaps Turandot has too much to say in that passage. We shall see—when I get to work again on my return from Brussels."<sup>296</sup>

Unlike his other operas, *Turandot* was never fully completed due to Puccini's untimely death in 1924. He composed and orchestrated the score through Liù's death in act three, scene one (through R34). The rest was left in various stages of composition.<sup>297</sup> Since the last act of the libretto was finished before Puccini began composing that section, the text shows that Turandot transforms after Calaf kisses her. The libretto describes the scene:

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 299–300.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid. One year later in November 1923 when Puccini was starting to write the music for Liù's death, he asked Adami to supply him with "some seven-syllable lines" and showed the librettist the kind he wanted. "Tu che di gel sei cinta/da tanta fiamma vinata/ l'amerai anche tu./ Prima di questa aurora,/ io chiudo stanca gli occhi/ perchè egli vinca ancora;/ io chiudo stanca gli occhi/ per non vederlo più." In fact these are the very words that are in the final version.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>297</sup> While Puccini's student Alfano made a valiant attempt in completing the opera, the differences between the composer's and student's efforts are glaringly obvious.



The prince, in saying this [No, your kiss gives me eternity], strong in the knowledge of his right and in his passion, throws Turandot back into his arms and kisses her frenziedly. Turandot—against such impetuosity—has no more resistance, no more voice, no more strength, no more will. The incredible contact has transfigured her. With a tone of almost a childish pleading she murmurs...

Turandot: What has become of me? Lost! ...  
(with her eyes veiled with tears) How did you conquer?<sup>298</sup>

Turandot is ashamed of her loss, but she begins to show signs of melting through her tears. In her last aria, “Del primo pianto,” Turandot discloses that she was already affected by the prince at the first meeting.

Of the first weeping...Ah...  
Of the first weeping...yes...  
foreigner, when you arrived,  
with anguish I felt  
the fatal shudder  
of this supreme  
illness!  
And I scorned them  
but I feared for you!  
There was in your eyes  
the light of heroes!  
There was in your eyes  
The proud certainty...  
And I hated you for that...  
And for that I loved you,  
tormented and torn  
between two equal terrors:  
to conquer you or to be conquered...  
And I am conquered...Ah! Conquered  
more than by the supreme trial  
by this fever  
that comes to me from you!<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> “Il Principe, in così dire [No, il bacio tuo mi dà l’eternità!], forte della coscienza del suo diritto e della sua passione, rovescia nelle sue braccia Turandot e freneticamente la bacia. Turandot—sotto tanto impeto—non ha più resistenza, non ha più voce, non ha più forza, non ha più volontà. Il contatto incredibile l’ha trasfigurata. Con accento di supplica quasi infantile, mormora...

Turandot: Che è mai di me? Perduta!... (con gli occhi velati di lagrime) Come vincesti?”  
Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 458, 459.

Turandot tells Calaf that she feared for his life when he was on trial. Yet she felt ambivalence towards him: she loved him but also hated him; she wanted to conquer him but also to be conquered by him. By disclosing her feelings to Calaf as well as to the audience, Turandot presents herself to be human. Calaf and the viewers can now sympathize with her. They can now be moved by the kind of transformation that Puccini seems to have insisted upon.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to know how the composer might have transformed Turandot through music since he died before completing the aria. There were musical sketches that were left by Puccini on manuscript that Franco Alfano, who was commissioned to complete *Turandot*, used to compose “Del primo pianto.” Upon listening and reading Alfano’s arrangement, it is difficult to conjecture about any sort of probable interpretation regarding this aria.

There are a couple of passages that might be worth interpreting. As shown in the score finished by Alfano, a few musical phrases reappear in the last act at a crucial moment. The princess warns Calaf that “no one will have her,” the same words she used in “In questa reggia.” The text is set with the same melody (Figure III-9). This time, the phrase is not completed by Turandot, rather by Calaf with the words, “I want you, mine” [Ti voglio mia].<sup>300</sup> A few measures later, a similar event occurs. Turandot finishes a

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<sup>299</sup> “Del primo pianto...Ah.../Del primo pianto...sì.../ straniero, quando sei giunto,/ con angoscia ho sentito/ il brivido fatale/ di questo mal/ supremo!/ Quanti ho visto morire/ per me!/ E li ho spregiati/ ma ho temuto per te!/ C’era negli occhi tuoi/ la luce degli eroi!/ C’era negli occhi tuoi/ la superba certezza.../ E t’ho odiato per quella.../ E per quella t’ho amato,/ tormentata e divisa/ fra due terrori uguali:/ vincerti o esser vinta.../ E vinta son...Ah! Vinta/ più che dall’alta prova/ da questa febbre/ che mi vien da te! Ibid., 460, 461.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 458, 459.

phrase with a descent of a ninth, and Calaf repeats the same phrase (R38+3 to 4; Figure III-9)<sup>301</sup>.

Another prominent theme returns just after this passage, the one Puccini used when Turandot warned Calaf that there are three enigmas and one death. As it will be recalled, Calaf replied to her that there are three enigmas and one life. This time he tells her that her “kiss gives [him] eternity” [il bacio tuo mi dà l’eternità], R39+9 to 10, Figure III-10). The score as finished by Alfano shows that Puccini had these musical themes in mind when “transfiguring” Turandot in the last act.<sup>302</sup> It is certainly unfortunate that we were not able to see and hear how that process might have taken place as well as to the extent to which Turandot changed from femme fatale to something closer to the Sentimental Heroine.

**Figure III-9**

Turandot *ff*  
No mai nes-sun m'av-rà! Dell' a - va lo stra - zio non si rin-no-ve - rà. Ah! no \_\_\_

The Prince  
- zo - gna! Ti vo - glio mia! Ti vo - glio mia!

**Figure III-10**

The Prince *f*  
ba - cio tuo mi dà l'e - ter - ni - tà!

<sup>301</sup> Although I have not been able to study the original manuscript for the accuracy of this passage, this setting of the melody with Calaf finishing the musical idea suggests that indeed the prince will have the princess.

<sup>302</sup> “Trasfigurata.” Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 458, 459.

## **Conclusion**

Turandot is clearly a femme fatale at the beginning of the opera, but she transforms into a different type of a woman. There are hints of Sentimental traits that were shown throughout the opera, namely in the character of Liù, whose blood was shed to protect the prince whom she loved. It is through her death that the people in Peking learn about love and sacrifice of a Sentimental Heroine. And through Calaf's love and kiss does Turandot begin to move out of the femme fatale type and into the Sentimental Heroine.

IV. CHAPTER FOUR  
MINNIE AS NEW WOMAN

In the third and final act of Puccini's opera *La fanciulla del West* (1910), the miners and the sheriff have captured and prepare to hang the bandit, Johnson, who had stolen from other gold mining camps in California. Just as they are tying a noose around his neck, Minnie, the heroine, dashes in on horseback to stop them from killing her lover. She leaps off her saddle and jumps in front of Johnson to shield him. She keeps them at bay by waving her gun and threatening to shoot if anyone tries to approach them. Yet Minnie is no stranger to the miners and the sheriff with whom she had spent years at camp. During that period she had earned their respect and even garnered authority over the men as proprietor of a saloon and as a teacher of the Academy. Minnie, however, does not succeed in saving Johnson by using her authority over the men or physical threat. Instead she redeems him by appealing to the miners' sympathies.

Minnie's actions demonstrate some traits of the third character type, the New Woman. Strong, independent, standing equal with men, the New Woman was a term 'christened' in 1894 in Sarah Grand's article "The New Aspect of the Woman Question."<sup>303</sup> Because the New Woman is pointed out as a phenomenon that began largely by the middle-class bourgeois women of England and the United States, this chapter explicates the New Woman as discussed in English and American discourses

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<sup>303</sup> Sarah Grand, "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," *The North American Journal* 158, no. 448 (March 1894).

contemporaneous to when Puccini wrote his operas (1880s–1920s), and also because *La fanciulla del West* and its heroine, Minnie, were based on an American play by the American playwright, David Belasco.<sup>304</sup> Moreover, Puccini had visited the United States in the early 1900s before composing *La fanciulla del West*. The social and cultural situations and concerns for bourgeois women in England and the United States were remarkably similar to those found in France and Italy. The latter two countries' cultures largely influenced Puccini in composing his operas. A few examples from France and Italy show the consistency of the developments and ideals of the New Woman across national borders.

Although the New Woman is broadly defined as a type recognizable throughout the arts in both the United States and Europe of the Gilded Age, within the thematic type rest variations. The New Woman has different meanings and roles for different groups of women, such as the suffragists, novelists, and feminists seeking either sexual purity or sexual parity with men. The focus of this chapter is on the traits of the New Woman that are closely related to those that Puccini's Minnie exhibited.

### **Origin of the New Woman**

The New Woman is a *fin de siècle* phenomenon. Sally Ledger, a literary critic, argues that the New Woman was part of the “cultural novelties,” such as new socialism, new imperialism, new fiction, and new journalism, that manifested itself in the last two

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<sup>304</sup> French observers from the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries remark that the New Woman was from the North or Slavic East. Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in the fin-de-siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 20–21.

decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>305</sup> But more recently, the era in which the New Woman existed has broadened and the timing of her existence has been debated among scholars. In the early twentieth century, feminists identified the New Woman in literature from the mid-nineteenth century. In 1913, a writer for *Bookman* asserts, “the New Woman has been in poetry and drama and fiction for close to sixty years,” citing Nora from Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1879) as an early model.<sup>306</sup> The New Woman continued to be discussed and debated well into the twentieth century. The late twentieth-century feminist literary historians included historical middle-class women who lived and were active in the 1880s to 1890s as the first generation New Woman, and those in 1920s to 1930s, as the second generation New Woman.<sup>307</sup>

When the term “new woman” was coined in March 1894 by Sarah Grand (1854–1943) in her article, “The New Aspect of the Woman Question,” the subject touched such a sensitive nerve at the *fin de la siècle* that the term spread like wild fire.<sup>308</sup> Within two months, the controversial idea of the New Woman—now capitalized—was pervasive, appearing in numerous media such as journals and plays. The prolific circulation of the idea of the New Woman, with the women’s movements throughout Europe and in the

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<sup>305</sup> Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>306</sup> Edna Kenton, “A Study of the Old ‘New Woman,’” *Bookman* 37(1913): 154.

<sup>307</sup> Judith Walkowitz’s *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992); Lucy Bland, “The Married Woman, the ‘New Woman’ and the Feminist: Sexual Politics of the 1890s,” in Jane Rendall (ed.), *Equal or Different: Women’s Politics, 1800–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

<sup>308</sup> Grand, “The New Aspect of the Woman Question,” 21. Most secondary works reference Grand’s article as the origin of the term New Woman. See Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*; Teresa Mangum, *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998); Nelson, ed. *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, Drama of the 1890s*.

United States gaining momentum, suggests that the time was ripe to discuss the changing, and often contentious, roles and views of women. The New Woman was controversial because she went against the grain of Victorian conventions of the image of domesticated woman.

In the early nineteenth century, spheres for men and women were separated: he for the outside and she for the inside.<sup>309</sup> The home for men represented a place where they should feel comfort and relief, because they risked their lives to work outside the home, using their skills and influence in the public realm, even engaging in politics and political discourse. The rationale behind the separation was to protect women from the harsh outside world. Women were above the sordid things of the outside that men had to deal with: they were not to work outside the home or even seek pleasures outside.<sup>310</sup> Rather than seeking “success in the world,” women were to seek “domestic happiness,” for they were in charge of the “interior,” both the privatized home and the mind.<sup>311</sup> The cultural ideal for women was to use their skills and influence in the domestic sphere, such as taking care of the children, educating them, and managing their home.

Like the femme fatale, the New Woman threatened Victorian era bourgeois conventions.<sup>312</sup> But unlike the femme fatale, the New Woman threatened politically. The New Woman rebelled against the confining conventions and sought independence or emancipation: independence to make choices for herself, whether to marry a man of her

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<sup>309</sup> For fuller discussion of Victorian bourgeois culture, see Chapter Two.

<sup>310</sup> Priscilla Robertson, *An Experience of Women: Pattern and Change in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 18.

<sup>311</sup> Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, vol. 2 vols. (New York: George F. Hopkins, 1798, 1801), 2, 296. John Lukacs, "The Bourgeois Interior," *American Scholar* 39(1970): 623.

<sup>312</sup> For the discussion of the femme fatale, see Chapter Three.



choice, or to obtain education or employment; even the freedom to go outside the home unescorted and not risk her reputation; and not be confined to the role that was expected of her: to marry and raise a family.

Many people, both men and women, debated in support and against such a type of representation of woman. Ouida, the *non de plume* of Marie Louise de la Ramée, wrote an angry article against this kind of representation of women in her 1894 article, "The New Woman."<sup>313</sup> *Punch*, a comic newspaper, published a satirical nursery rhyme with the same title.<sup>314</sup> The male playwright Sydney Grundy also wrote a satirical work in response to Grand's article, *The New Woman*, a relatively successful play with 173 performances. Soon a stereotype of the New Woman developed: a young, middle-class white woman, likely single, eschewed marriage and fashionable attire for "rational" dress, even wore masculine college ties. Educated at a woman's college, she earned her own living as a teacher or journalist, and lived independently. She smoked cigarettes, spoke in bold language, and rode a bicycle, bus, and trains. She moved about outside unescorted without the protection of a male family member. She sought freedom from and equality with men.

European middle-class women of the nineteenth century had few choices to secure their future. The most respectable choice was marriage. Because marriages in France and Italy required a dowry from the bride, family members and relatives took great interest in securing advantageous marital ties, financially and socially. They left young women few

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<sup>313</sup> Ouida, "The New Woman."

<sup>314</sup> "The New Woman": A New Nursery Rhyme. For Child-men. There is a New Woman, and what do you think?/ She lives upon nothing but Foolscap and Ink!/ But, though Foolscap and Ink form the whole of her diet,/ This nagging New Woman can never be quiet! *Punch* 106 (May 26, 1894): 252. Reprinted in Nelson, ed. *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, Drama of the 1890s*, 153.

opportunities to make choices based on feelings. A Frenchman noted in the 1860s that Italian girls from conservative families were treated similarly to the French girls of the *ancien regime*: educated at convents and let out only to marry. A young woman might be presented with her fiancé days before her wedding.<sup>315</sup> When Italian girls returned home from the convent without marriage prospects, they were watched closely. They were locked in their bedroom at night, and reading materials were censored. A young woman, as explained by Mariotti, “must feel that she is never left alone, not because she is mistrusted, but because her mother loves her too well to spare her company.” To mothers, he wrote, “keep sharp eyes out, and trust no person whatsoever where your daughter is concerned.”<sup>316</sup> In some Italian country areas, young women were not allowed to leave the house alone, always accompanied by their fathers, as mothers and brothers were not seen as enough of an escort.<sup>317</sup> In cities, girls were sent out with servants, and even brothers were thought to be unreliable.

Middle-class French girls were kept at home, rather than at the convent, to be educated in the nineteenth century. They, like Italian young women, did not have the

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<sup>315</sup> An old marchesa told of her experience in which her parents announced her marriage. When she was still in a convent, her father, mother, two aunts, and her married sister visited on Easter. Because she was in awe of how well they were dressed for Easter, she didn’t even notice an old man speaking with her father. Two days later, her mother returned and asked if she would like to come out into the world. Her mother explained that she searched for a man whose age would “counterbalance” her extreme youth. Since the young girl was preoccupied with the thoughts of jewels, theaters, and fine clothes, she hardly understood. A week later, she walked down the altar to marry the old man. The only men she had known before were her father, the priest, and the convent gardener. Mrs. G. Gretton, “*The Englishwoman in Italy: Impressions of Life in the Roman States and Sardinia during a Ten Year Residence* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1860).

<sup>316</sup> Antonio Gallenga [L. Mariotti], *Italy Past and Present*, vol. 2 (London: J. Chapman, 1848), 2: 313.

<sup>317</sup> Robertson, *An Experience of Women: Pattern and Change in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 88–89.

option to choose their spouses. In France there were no courting rituals or the opportunities for young men and women to meet and get to know each other. For many French people, love was something that developed after marriage and grew over time.<sup>318</sup>

For women in England, they at least had the choice of whom they married, that is, they believed that marriage should occur when there is love. Because the dowry system was not as stringent as those in France and Italy, Priscilla Robertson, a historian, writes that English women theoretically married for love.<sup>319</sup> The courting ritual allowed many opportunities for young people to meet and interact with their future spouses. In general, there was a higher level of trust on the part of the English parents for their children to behave with propriety towards the opposite sex. The French writer Taine was stunned when he was asked to escort a young woman home a mile away.<sup>320</sup> In 1855, Alphonse Karr, another French writer, reported that he was shocked to see some English girls shake hands with young men. It used to be that young French women would never be touched, or even heard talking or laughing out loud.<sup>321</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century in England, a man would typically propose to a woman after they had a considerable amount of interaction, including talking to her, observing her, and taking long walks. All these activities were within the bounds of propriety.<sup>322</sup> A kiss was rarely exchanged between people unengaged. One kiss often signified that they were engaged without exchanging words.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 54.

*The New Woman and Marriage*

Although the English ostensibly married for love, marriage did not always turn happily ideal. English marriage laws, however, were drawn for ideal marital situations. Unfortunately, when marriages did not go ideally, the laws were not always equitable for women. In fact, there was a double standard not just legally but socially and culturally. Sarah Grand points out in her article the double standard of men's and women's sexualities. While men's sexual license was tolerated socially and ignored legally, women were expected to be sexually pure. By turning a blind eye to their husbands, the wives enabled men in such activities. Moreover, some married men were infected with venereal disease due to their affairs and passed it to their unsuspecting wives. Grand argues that men needed to be legally and morally controlled, and that they should be held accountable to the high sexual standards that women are subjected to.<sup>324</sup>

Grand was also a novelist of some renown. Her 1893 novel, *The Heavenly Twins*, was the best-selling novel of the year in England. The heroine, Evadne Frayling, typifies the New Woman. She refuses to consummate her marriage after learning that her husband

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<sup>324</sup> Grand's stance resisted what the law legitimized—unequal sexual morality in the Contagious Disease Acts of the 1860s. The Acts were borne out of a period in which a rampant number of military men were infected with venereal disease (422 men out of 1000 were affected with the disease). The Acts targeted women and sought actions against them. Prostitution was blamed for the spread of venereal disease. In one of the first Acts, any woman suspected of being a prostitute could be forced to take a medical examination. If she were found with the disease, she could be locked up in a hospital for three months or longer. The Acts failed to control the spread of the disease because it only sought to check and control half of the infected population, the women, and neglected the other half, the men, who were free to re-infect anyone whom they came into contact. For more on the Contagious Disease Acts, see Ed Cohen's *Talk on the Wilde Side* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Chapter 3; Judith Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); and Frank Mort's *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-moral Politics in England Since 1830* (London: Routledge, 1987).

had a questionable sexual past. Grand's character champions equality in sexual morality. Grand advocated for, what is now called, purity feminism.<sup>325</sup> But not all supporters of the New Woman were in favor of purity. Instead, some demanded sexual freedom. Sydney Grundy (1848–1914) uses satire to deride the contradictory viewpoints of the New Woman in his play *The New Woman* (1894). Two female characters, though both characteristic of New Women, argue about sexual morality.

Enid:           Why should a man be allowed to commit sins—  
Victoria:       And woman not be given an opportunity?  
Enid:           Then you *want* to commit sins?  
Victoria:       I want to be allowed to do as *men* do.  
Enid:           Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself; there!  
Victoria:       I only say, I ought to be allowed.  
Enid:           And *I* say that a man, reeking with infamy, ought not to be allowed to marry a pure girl.  
Victoria:       Certainly not! *She* ought to reek with infamy as well!<sup>326</sup>

Enid represents Sarah Grand's view of the New Woman, who keeps herself sexually pure. Victoria, on the other hand, represents another aspect of the New Woman, who seeks not sexual purity, but parity.

George Egerton, the penname of Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright (1859–1945), was like the character Victoria in that she rallied for sexual freedom. Her works feature women who were “fast” and sexually adventurous. In some ways, Egerton's heroines

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<sup>325</sup> The social purity movement grew out of the Contagious Disease Acts arguing against the prevalent double standard of sexual morality in the Victorian period that permitted male sexuality to be legitimized and punished female's sexuality. For more discussion on the purity movement, see Lucy Bland's *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885–1914* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995); Edward Bristow's *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain Since 1700* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977); Paul McHugh's *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980).

<sup>326</sup> Sydney Grundy, *The New Woman*, an original comedy, in four acts (London: Chiswick Press, 1894), reprinted in *The New Woman Reader*, 310.

resemble the kind of lifestyle that the author led, a life unencumbered by traditional views of women and women's sexuality. Egerton freely expressed her sexuality. Her characters are likewise sexually active. In one of Egerton's short stories "A Cross Line," the heroine escapes her tedious married life by fantasizing erotic daydreams. Born in Australia, Egerton grew up in Ireland during her formative years. She also spent several years in Germany as a teenager.<sup>327</sup> As a young woman living in the United States, she eloped with the bigamist, Henry Higginson, and moved to Norway in 1887. She would later marry twice more, one marriage ending in divorce and the other leaving her a widow. In addition to three marriages, she had numerous affairs. Perhaps the most famous was with the Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun. Egerton was a real life representative of the sexually liberated New Woman.

Egerton wrote from a female viewpoint in favor of sexual parity with men, but there were men like Sydney Grundy and Grant Allen (1848–1899) who did the same. Grant's heroine, Herminia Barton, in *The Woman Who Did* (1895) is not as sensual as Egerton's heroines, but she refuses marriage to insist upon entering a "free union" with a man.<sup>328</sup> She becomes pregnant and goes to Italy with her lover, Alan Merrick. In Italy, she refers to herself as "Mrs. Merrick" for respectability's sake while Merrick is alive,

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<sup>327</sup> Egerton is still considered to be an under-read and under-researched author of the New Woman works. For her biography, see Margaret Diane Stetz's "George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen Nineties" (dissertation, Harvard University, 1982); Terence de Vere White's *A Leaf from the Yellow Book: The Correspondences of George Egerton* (London: Richards Press, 1958); Rosie Miles' "George Egerton Bitextuality and Cultural (Re)Production in the 1890s" in Sally Ledger (ed.), *Women Writing at the Fin de Siècle*, special edition of *Women's Writing* 3, no. 3 (1996): 243–60.

<sup>328</sup> Grant Allen, *The Woman Who Did* (London: John Lane, 1895). The author was known as an anti-feminist and he did not sympathize with the concerns of women were having at the time. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Ponnte to Lessing* (London: Virago, 1978), 185n.

but when she returns to England upon Merrick's death, she calls herself by her maiden name, "Mrs. Barton," so that she could obtain decent lodging for her and her baby. Grant presented the idea of free union as something a woman desired. It is Herminia who declares that she would not marry, explaining, "Think how easy it would be for me... to be false to my sex, a traitor to my convictions; to sell my kind for a mess of pottage... I know what marriage is... by what unholy sacrifices it is sustained and made possible... and I can't embrace it. I can't be untrue to my most sacred beliefs."<sup>329</sup>

A contemporary of Allen, feminist Margaret Oliphant, denounced such anti-marriage characters, like those in Egerton's works and Herminia, as leaders of New Women who opposed marriage. Oliphant grieved that for such a New Woman, "Faithfulness is bondage in her eyes. She is free to change her own companion if she discovers another more fit to be loved. And if one, also another no doubt, and another."<sup>330</sup> Although a woman could leave a man any time she liked, she could also be abandoned by a man. Another contemporary feminist Millicent Garrett Fawcett condemned Allen's treatment of Herminia not for the tragedies that she faced, left penniless and an outcast after Merrick dies, but that the author presented "free love" as a feminist concept. Actual supporters of "free love" were few, as the majority of New Women were mostly bourgeois, married, middle-class women feminists, who sought reform politically and legally, rather than sexually.

The New Women wanted alternatives to marriage to secure their future. While women in France and Italy argued that education and employment would allow them to

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<sup>329</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, 39.

<sup>330</sup> Margaret Oliphant, "The Anti-Marriage League," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 159 (1896): 135–49; 146, reprinted in Ledger, *The New Woman*, 12.

make their own marital choices, English women faced different issues. They already had marital choices, but in the late nineteenth century, they could not find a husband.<sup>331</sup>

### *The New Woman and Education*

At the end of the nineteenth century, there was a surplus of single women in England. There were 2.5 million unmarried women in England, out numbering the population of men by 900,000 in 1891.<sup>332</sup> One of the solutions that some suggested was that women could move overseas to marry men in the British colonies.<sup>333</sup> Writer Blanche Alethea Crackanthorpe wrote in “The Revolt of the Daughters” in favor of providing training and education for girls and women, since not all women would be able to marry. Crackanthorpe was not opposed to marriage and even agrees with the conventional view that women were to marry and become mothers. Nonetheless, she reflects, “Marriage is the best profession for a woman; we all know and acknowledge it; but, for obvious reasons, all women cannot enter its strait and narrow gait.”<sup>334</sup>

The debate about education for females has been a topic in England since the mid-nineteenth century. But when in 1867 the Parliament received a report from the Schools Inquiry Commission about the abysmal educational conditions, the government finally acknowledged its responsibilities in educating women. From the 1870s to the 1890s,

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<sup>331</sup> Robertson, *An Experience of Women: Pattern and Change in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 92.

<sup>332</sup> See Martha Vicinus’s *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women* (London: Virago, 1985), 293–94.

<sup>333</sup> For example, W. R. Greg, “Why Are Women Redundant?” *National Review* 15 (April 1862), 436.

<sup>334</sup> Blanche Alethea Crackanthorpe, “The Revolt of the Daughters,” *Nineteenth Century* 35, (1894): 23–31, reprinted in *The New Woman Reader*, 261–269.



many new schools for girls were founded that had high academic standards, examinations and trained teachers.<sup>335</sup> At the same time, opportunities for higher education became more available for middle class women. One of the first colleges for women to be opened was Queen's College (1848) in London, which was originally founded to provide training for governesses to obtain higher salaries. Some of the more famous women's colleges that were established in the nineteenth century were Girton College (1869) and Newham College (1871) both located near Cambridge, and Royal Holloway College (1879) and Westfield College (1882) both in London. By 1897, there were nine women's colleges in England with about 780 students in them.<sup>336</sup>

The New Women who ventured and attended co-educational universities faced some difficulties not only in England but also in the United States.<sup>337</sup> Often collegiate men did not appreciate the fact that women were encroaching in on their campus. The female students, "co-eds," often grouped together to walk across campus. American student M. Carey Thomas, one of the first female graduate from Cornell University, remembers one situation that happened in the late nineteenth century:

There are three hundred boys in the present Freshman class.... There is nothing disagreeable here about the men except that they collect by fifty's (sic) on the steps of different buildings and to pass between them into the lecture rooms is

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<sup>335</sup> For educating of girls, see Gillian Avery's *The Best Type of Girl: A History of Girls' Independent Schools* (London: Deutsch, 1991); Carol Dyhouse's *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981); Josephine Kamm's *Hope Deferred: Girls' Education in English History* (London: Methuen, 1965).

<sup>336</sup> Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 125.

<sup>337</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 250–254.

quite an ordeal. They stare so—usually I find myself perfectly crimson by the time I am past them.<sup>338</sup>

For Thomas, who would later become one of the presidents of Bryn Mawr College, the cost of co-education was great. She muses at the end of her senior year,

There is much that is very hard for a *lady* in a mixed university and I should not subject any girl to it unless she were determined to have it. The educational problem is a terrible one—girls' colleges are inferior and it seems impossible to get the most illustrious men to fill their chairs, and on the other hand it is a fiery ordeal to educate a lady by coeducation—it is impossible to make one who has not felt it understand the living on a volcano or on a house top—Frank Heath's story and that horrible cartoon were samples—yet it is the only way and learning *is worth it*.<sup>339</sup>

For many New Women, education was worth the emotional cost as more women entered and graduated from universities.

In Italy too, the New Women and their supporters were concerned about education for girls and women. In 1870, Salvatore Morelli, a strong supporter of women's rights, introduced a bill that would allow women to enter high schools and universities.<sup>340</sup> His bill was voted down with the excuse that there were no specific laws that excluded the women from entering. Yet in reality, most women did not or could not receive proper primary education to continue their learning.<sup>341</sup> The strongest opposition for providing secondary education came from the Catholic Church, which had a dominant presence in

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<sup>338</sup> M. Carey Thomas, in Marjorie Housepian Dobkin, *The Making of a Feminist: Early Journals and Letters of M. Carey Thomas* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1979), 103.

<sup>339</sup> Dobkin, *The Making of a Feminist*, 121.

<sup>340</sup> Robertson, *An Experience of Women: Pattern and Change in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 443.

<sup>341</sup> Italian universities officially opened their doors to women in 1876. Perry Wilson, *Women in Twentieth-Century Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 17.

the educational system.<sup>342</sup> But the new government passed a law in 1877 that provided free secular primary and secondary education for both boys and girls in all communes.<sup>343</sup>

### *The New Woman and Occupation*

With the rise of college graduates in England, the United States, and Italy, more women sought work outside of the home. At first there were few positions open to the New Women. But as the nineteenth century progressed, many occupations became more available, even those previously unheard of for women.

Teaching was considered to be appropriate for women because it was seen as an extension of the domestic sphere that included taking care of children. During the early part of the nineteenth century, as more and more English theoretical and practical books recommended educating girls at home, there was a need for governesses.<sup>344</sup> Many women from the trade class raised their social level by working in genteel families as governesses.<sup>345</sup> As more public schools opened in England in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the New Women took up positions at public institutions. Some

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid. In a survey of 1900, of the 1,429 girls' secondary schools, 1,114 were run by the Church, 299 by charities or private individuals, and 86 by the government. S Franchini, "L'istruzione femminile in Italia dopo l'Unità: percorsi di una ricerca sugli educandati pubblici di elite," *Passato e presente* 10(1986): 82.

<sup>343</sup> There were four years of primary education, and seven or eight years of secondary work that would lead to admission to university. Robertson, *An Experience of Women: Pattern and Change in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 446.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 500.

<sup>345</sup> A woman lamented the fact that a woman who might have been a decent servant was a deplorable governess. There was an over-abundance of governesses, which created the problem of lower pay. The Governesses Benevolent Association set up funds to help the impoverished governesses. But it became clear that its funds were not enough to meet the great demand. The association founded Queen's College partially to relieve retired governesses and to form a certification. Ibid., 472–473, 500.

women became headmistresses of secondary schools. Frances Mary Buss (1827–1894) started teaching at her mother's school at the age of fourteen, attended Queen's College in the evening, and founded the North London Collegiate School in 1850.<sup>346</sup> She served as the principal until her death.

One occupation that was easy for the New Women to enter was writing. They could do so in the privacy of their own home, and write inconspicuously even after marrying. The women could protect their anonymity by taking on pseudonyms, such as Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, or a masculine penname George Eliot. Some brave women became journalists, with or without a penname. Harriet Martineau (1802–1876) used her own name but was met with much ridicule and faced consternation for years as a journalist in London.<sup>347</sup>

The New Women of the late nineteenth century broke barriers and entered professions previously considered uniquely a men's domain such as medicine and law. One of the female pioneers in medicine was Elizabeth Garrett Anderson who received her degree in 1866. It was not until 1877 that the English government passed a law officially to allow women in medical schools.<sup>348</sup>

The employment situation was similar for Italian women. Teaching was open to Italian women.<sup>349</sup> The secondary teachers taught only girls, under exceptional

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 479.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 504.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 512.

<sup>349</sup> Women were teaching at universities as early as the Renaissance period. Aurelia Cimino Folliero de Luna, "Italy: A General Review," in *The Woman Question in Europe: A Series of Original Essays*, ed. Theodore Stanon (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1884).

circumstances.<sup>350</sup> By 1894, there were 37,000 women teaching in elementary school and 6,000 more in kindergarten schools.<sup>351</sup> As in England, writing was also available for Italian women. In the nineteenth century, there was an increase in the number of publications for women and by women, such journals as *La donna* and *L'Italia femminile*. Sibilla Aleramo (1876–1960) wrote one of the first Italian feminist novels, *Una donna* (1906).

There were a few women who earned medical degrees in Italy. Maria delle Donne (?–1842) graduated from the University of Bologna with a doctoral degree in 1806. She practiced both medicine and surgery and was appointed by Napoleon Bonaparte to the chair of midwifery at Bologna.<sup>352</sup> One of the first Italian women to graduate during the unified Italy from Florence University was Ernestina Paper, in 1877. She earned a degree in medicine and opened a clinic for women and children in Florence because she was not allowed to practice in hospitals.<sup>353</sup>

## **The New Woman and Puccini**

### *Puccini and the Search for “Something” New*

Puccini was a composer who was always on the look out for a good story to set to music. Usually by the time one opera premiered, Puccini already had the rights to another

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<sup>350</sup> From 1908 to 1920, female teachers were banned from teaching at mixed secondary schools. Wilson, *Women in Twentieth-Century Italy*, 22.

<sup>351</sup> Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, *Alle origini del movimento femminile in Italia: 1848–1892* (Turin: Einaudi, 1963), 124.

<sup>352</sup> Josephine Elizabeth Grey Butler, *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1869), 95.

<sup>353</sup> It was not until 1919 that women in Italy were allowed to work in public hospitals. Wilson, *Women in Twentieth-Century Italy*, 17, 21.

subject for his next opera. However, after completing *Madama Butterfly* in 1904, he had not yet found an appropriate subject. It would take him an additional three long years to settle on a work. One of the reasons for the difficulties might be that he was looking for a different kind of an opera, a different kind of a heroine. He writes to Giulio Ricordi, “We’ve had enough now of *Bohème*, *Butterfly*, and *Co.*! Even I am sick of them!”<sup>354</sup> Puccini did not want to create another Sentimental Heroine in the line of Mimì and *Butterfly*, but he was unsure about the kind of a heroine he wanted.

He was searching for that “something,” often so elusive to him.<sup>355</sup> His librettists often complained about how the composer wanted something that would solve difficult situations when they were constructing librettos. Puccini was not sure what he specifically wanted in the something, perhaps a novel idea that was different from the situation provided in the original sources. Puccini was searching for inspiration in a sea of novels, plays, and history books. His uncertainty is evidenced in the wide range of subjects he considered.

For a period, Puccini considered Medieval and mythic works. He investigated Maurice Maeterlinck’s play *Monna Vanna* (1902), which was set “in medieval Tuscany of the great *condottieri*.”<sup>356</sup> Luigi Illica, with whom Puccini had collaborated on three previous opera librettos, knew Puccini well enough to know that Maeterlinck’s work would not be appropriate for the composer. Valentino Soldani (1873–1935), a Tuscan playwright, had suggested his work *Margherita da Cortona* while Puccini was in rehearsal at La Scala for *Madama Butterfly* in 1904. The mystic atmosphere and the

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<sup>354</sup> To Ricordi February 23, 1905. Adami and Carner, eds., *Letters of Giacomo Puccini: Mainly Connected with the Composition and Production of His Operas*, 177.

<sup>355</sup> See Puccini’s letter late October 1907, p. 141 below.

<sup>356</sup> Maeterlinck (1869–1949). Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 263.

religious songs from the early thirteenth century appealed to Puccini. He was interested in it for two years but eventually abandoned it.<sup>357</sup> Puccini was also intrigued with Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831), and imagined the opening of the opera.<sup>358</sup> He writes to Illica,

A type of prologue like that in *Mefistofele*.... Notre-Dame, the dead of night..., and then, gradually, organ, chorus, children's voices (chords rather than single notes in the bells). A stupendous musical scene, new, grandiose, with a fugue à la Bach.<sup>359</sup>

There was a part of Puccini that did not want to write a grand opera but a comic one. Puccini thought about a comic play by Roberto Bracco (1861–1943).<sup>360</sup> He writes to Giacosa,

What do you say to a comic opera? We could try and find a good subject, but one that will make people really laugh. Don't you think this would provide a respite for us as well as the public? By now the graves...and the altars have become filled with dramas of death and languor.

Search in your files, in your memory, in old and brilliant comedies that you have seen, and find something that will have a special lyrical quality, worthy of musical notes and symphonic thoughts. Illica, to whom I wrote, favours Italian *opera buffa*.<sup>361</sup>

Later in the same month, Puccini writes to his other librettist, Illica, asking for comic works,

...Have you thought of anything comic? But really comic? Signor Giulio wrote to me saying that it is more difficult to find a good comic subject than a tragic one. I knew this but one must overcome the difficulties.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> He was later to set a similar subject in *Suor Angelica*.

<sup>358</sup> Girardi writes that Puccini was interested in *Le jongleur de Notre-Dame* by Victor Hugo. However, Hugo wrote *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831) and Anatole France (1844–1922) wrote *Le jongleur de Notre-Dame* (1892). In 1902, Jules Massenet set Maurice Léna's libretto *Le jongleur de Notre-Dame* based on France's story. Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 263.

<sup>359</sup> To Illica, June 7, 1904, quoted in *Ibid*.

<sup>360</sup> Unnamed in biographies.

<sup>361</sup> To Giacosa March 5, 1905, quoted in Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 159.

<sup>362</sup> To Illica March 21, 1905, quoted in *Ibid*.

Puccini would continue to search for a good comic subject which was ultimately realized in his *Gianni Schicchi* (1918).<sup>363</sup>

Puccini could have been looking not for a different kind of a heroine but a hero, a male protagonist. The composer had reconsidered Alphonse Daudet's *Tartarin de Tarascon* (1872), which features a naïve hero on an adventure to hunt lions in Algiers.<sup>364</sup> Puccini asked Illica about a satirical novel by Francisco Quevedo (1580–1645), *El Buscon ovvero Don Pablo de Segovia* (1626). Sybil Seligman, a good friend and confidant, suggested Rudyard Kipling's *The Light that Failed*, which featured a male painter who before he became blind due to a war injury painted a masterpiece.<sup>365</sup> However, the prostitute model, who had been tormented during the painting of the masterpiece, takes revenge on the painter by destroying his masterpiece. Puccini also considered *William Tell* but soon realized that he would be compared with the work by Rossini, and declared, "I should for ever be the target for the thunderbolts of all Italian critics."<sup>366</sup>

Writers Mosco Carner and Michele Girardi point out that Puccini might have been developing a social consciousness by considering works that had such messages, like the

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<sup>363</sup> To pursue this comic line in the second half of nineteenth century, see Francesco Izzo's works, including, "Comedy between Two Revolutions: *opera buffa* and the Risorgimento, 1831–1848" in *Journal of Musicology* 21, no. 1 (2004): 127–174; and *Laughter and Revolutions: Opera Buffa in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011?).

<sup>364</sup> Daudet (1840–1897).

<sup>365</sup> Kipling (1865–1936), *The Light that Failed* (1891).

<sup>366</sup> Letter to Ricordi, March 21, 1905, quoted in Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 160.



one in Maxim Gorky's work *The Raft*.<sup>367</sup> This story pointed out social injustice and misery of the working people.<sup>368</sup> Puccini also considered Octave Mirbeau's play *Les mauvais bergers* (1897) and asked his librettist Illica about it in May 1905. Illica, who knew the composer well enough that he was not a political man, writes to the publisher Ricordi in response to Puccini's request, "He sent me Mirbeau's *Les mauvais bergers*! Just think: *L'Avanti* adapted for the stage! Strikes, preachers on both sides."<sup>369</sup>

Was Puccini looking at literature with more weight, more social message or criticism because he felt the responsibilities of becoming the foremost opera composer of his generation as Carner and Girardi assert?<sup>370</sup> That is difficult to answer and may never be answered fully. Puccini, however, did have a tendency to avoid such controversial and political topics. When Puccini read *Ciampi* and *Calendimaggio* by Valentino Soldani (1874-?), he thought that the latter work was too political for his taste, declaring, "Yes, I would have liked a political background but far more simple and with the drama more developed."<sup>371</sup>

Puccini is often said to be one who follows the trend of other composers, to covet subjects that other composers have chosen.<sup>372</sup> No doubt it was a similar case when Puccini took interest in Oscar Wilde's plays after the success by Richard Strauss's setting

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<sup>367</sup> Puccini also considered Gorky's *Twenty-Six against One* and *Kan and His Son* in September 1904. Ibid., 163–164. Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 264.

<sup>368</sup> Gorky's *The Raft* is remarkably similar to Didier Gold's *La houppelande* complete with the setting on a floating boat, social injustice, and misery of the poor. Puccini reset Gold's work in his opera *Il tabarro* as the first one-act opera of *Il trittico* (1918).

<sup>369</sup> *L'Avanti* was a Socialist newspaper. Illica to Ricordi, May 1905, quoted in Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 264.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 158–159.

<sup>372</sup> A famous rivalry existed between Puccini and Leoncavallo regarding the setting of Murger's *La vie de bohème*. See Chapter Two.

of the playwright's work *Salome* (1905). Puccini declared, "It would be a counterpart to *Salome*, yet more human, more real and nearer the feelings of the *man in the street*."<sup>373</sup> Seligman obtained copies of then-unpublished plays through the executors of Wilde's works, that Puccini was able to read *The Duchess of Padua* and *A Florentine Tragedy*. He was much more intrigued with the latter and writes to his publisher that he "liked [it] very much."<sup>374</sup> But like other plays, Puccini abandoned it, writing, "Alas! The *Tragedy* of Wilde has gone the way of others."<sup>375</sup>

There were more works that Puccini considered. Giacomo Giacosa's *La dame de Challant* suited him little. Georges Rodenbach's symbolic novel, *Bruges la morte*, resulted in the same. For a short time, Puccini collaborated with Gabriele D'Annunzio, one of the foremost Italian writers of his time. However, neither his *Parisina* nor *La rosa di Cipro* succeeded in moving the composer to set them to music. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Puccini worked on another novel by a Decadent writer, Pierre Louÿs's *La femme et le pantin* (1898), renamed *Conchita* for the opera, for a while before declaring that the heroine was not a likeable character and that he could not continue.

Although Puccini bemoaned that he was tired of the kind of heroines he created in *Mimi* and *Butterfly*, he still foraged for works that showcased such characters, including William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Maxim Gorky's *Kan and His Son*, which

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<sup>373</sup> Quoted in Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 162.

<sup>374</sup> To Ricordi, November 14, 1906, quoted in *Ibid.*, 161. It is about a love triangle between a Florentine merchant (Simone), his beautiful wife (Bianca), and a nobleman (Bardi). The moral of the story is that people do not realize what they have until their eyes are opened by others who are more perceptive. At the end of the play, Simone kills Bardi in a duel. Only then does Bianca realize the passion and strength of her husband, whom she had always considered ordinary. She cries out to him, "Why did you not tell me you were so strong?" to which Simone replies, "Why did you not tell me you were so beautiful?"

<sup>375</sup> Seligman, *Puccini among Friends*, 225.

includes an affectionate and self-sacrificing slave girl, much like Liù from *Turandot*.

Puccini lamented the fact he could not decide on the type of subject he wanted to set to music.

I'm going through a period of nervousness that stops me even from sleeping, and all this through not finding what I want. At times I think about something like *La bohème*, the tragic and the sentimental mixed with the comic (and I believe that something like this should be done again); in a different way, certainly, requiring a different ambience, less sweet sentimentality—that is, less of it in quantity—and more drama of the “déchirant” type. I don't think anything medieval: however much I have read, I am never moved by it.<sup>376</sup>

In May 1906, Puccini once again picked up *Marie Antoinette* after a break of several years. This time he pondered redesigning the plot around the last days of the unfortunate queen. He was enthusiastic about it as he wrote to Seligman. He might have returned to *La donna austriaca*, as it was renamed, after completing *La fanciulla del West*. However, within a few months he again abandoned the project.

### ***La Fanciulla as a New Woman***

#### *Puccini and Belasco's The Girl of the Golden West*

Puccini continued his search for subjects when he traveled to New York in 1907. In the fall of 1906, while Puccini was in Paris to oversee the production of his latest opera, *Madama Butterfly*, he received an invitation from Heinrich Conried, the manager of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, to attend a six-week season of Puccini's operas in winter 1907. In the United States, Puccini attended other performances, including three of David Belasco's plays: *The Music Master*, *The Rose of Rancho* and

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<sup>376</sup> Letter to Vanlentino Soldani, June 28, 1904; quoted in Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 259.

*The Girl of the Golden West*. Puccini had already set one of Belasco's plays recently, *Madam Butterfly*. Like *Madam Butterfly*, *The Girl of the Golden West* was written for Blanche Bates, a renowned American actress.

Premiered on October 3, 1905, *The Girl of the Golden West* is a love story set during the California gold rush of 1849.<sup>377</sup> Belasco's heroine has some traits that are associated with the New Woman.<sup>378</sup> The Girl, as everyone calls her, lives by herself in a cabin at the top of the Cloudy Mountain.<sup>379</sup> She is financially independent and is an owner of the saloon (the Polka) in the mining camp. She realizes that as the owner of the saloon, this gives her "a sort of position round" the camp.<sup>380</sup> She is one of the very few women in the area and she is respected by all the men: the miners, the bartender, Wells Fargo agent Ashby, and the sheriff.

In an interview, Puccini stated that the heroine of *The Girl*, Minnie, is appealing, "I saw [Belasco's] *Girl of the Golden West* and found the heroine very naïve and refreshing. I find truth and sincerity in the American drama."<sup>381</sup> In private, however, Puccini was not won over by it. Besides he did not understand the dialogue as he did not speak English. Puccini writes to the publisher,

Here too I have been trying to find new subjects but there is nothing useful or, rather, complete enough. I've found some good hints in Belasco, but nothing definitive, or solid or complete.

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<sup>377</sup> See Appendix B for synopsis of Belasco's play.

<sup>378</sup> There was New Woman type in western novels and frontier dramas. See Shelley Armitage, "Rawhide Heroines: The Evolution of the Cowgirl and the Myth of America" in *The American Self*, edited by Sam B. Girgus (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981).

<sup>379</sup> Her real name is Minnie Falconer, although it is mentioned rarely. David Belasco, *The Girl of the Golden West: A Play in Four Acts* (New York: French, 1915), 77.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>381</sup> "Puccini to Sail To-Day," *New York Times*, February 28, 1907.

The atmosphere of the *Wild West* attracts me but in all the plays I have seen I found only good scenes here and there. Never a clear, simple line of development; it's all hotchpotch and sometimes in very bad taste and *vieux jeu*.<sup>382</sup>

Puccini might have had his mind full with *Conchita* and *La donna austriaca* at that point and was not open to the American play. However, a few weeks later after viewing the performance, Puccini wrote to Belasco asking about the work. He writes, "Would you be good enough to send me a copy of the play? ... I could then have it translated, study it more carefully, and write to you my further impression."<sup>383</sup> Writer Vincent Seligman explains that it was his mother, Sybil, who encouraged Puccini to settle on *The Girl*.<sup>384</sup> When Puccini received the translation of the first two acts of *The Girl*, he was excited. "I've read the first two acts of *The Girl*—I like it very much. The first act is very muddled, but it contains distinct possibilities. The second act is most beautiful; I'm anxiously awaiting the other two acts."<sup>385</sup> Puccini decided that he wanted a copy of the original manuscript because the translation was poor. Puccini thought that since Carlo Zangarini, his librettist, spoke some English as his mother was from Colorado, he could translate the original himself.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> Letter to Tito Ricordi, February 18, 1907.

<sup>383</sup> Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 174.

<sup>384</sup> Seligman, *Puccini among Friends*, 131. She also commissioned the translation of the play from English to Italian.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 139. July 14, 1907. Zangarini's English was not perfect. Vincent Seligman provided a poem the librettist wrote to Sybil, which shows some confusion. With a mile of Minnie/and a wish of mine,/ With the voice of waters/ from the lake divine,/ let, good Muse, my verse/ everywhere you go,/ bring salutes and kindness/ English So and so! Charlie Zangarini. ———, *Puccini among Friends*, 145.

### *Constructing the Libretto*

It is now possible to see the working processes between Puccini and his chief librettist of *La fanciulla del West*, Zangarini, with the publication of Puccini's letters to Zangarini in Annie Randall's book, *Puccini and the Girl* (2005).<sup>387</sup> The letters show that Puccini paid great attention to detail and expresses his keen dramatic instincts.

After reading the translation of Belasco's play, Puccini wrote to Zangarini on July 22, 1907, that though he liked the first two acts, he felt that the last two acts were "worth...very little." But the composer felt that there were a few things that could be salvaged.<sup>388</sup> Puccini already had ideas of how to change the third act to make it more dramatic. A few days earlier on July 14, 1907, he had written to Sybil of his ideas.

The third act doesn't appeal to me much! But I think it would be possible to rearrange it if one takes three things into account: the scene where he is brought on, bound—I should make the scene of his sentence and of the insults of the sheriff take place then—*no school episode*—then *she* arrives, surprised, and there is a big scene in which she pleads for his freedom—everybody being against her except Dick.<sup>389</sup> Finally the cow-boys are stirred to pity, and she bids a moving farewell to all—there is a great love duet as they move slowly away, and a scene of grief and desolation amongst the cow-boys, who remain on stage in different attitudes of depression, misery, etc., etc. But the scene must take place outside the *Polka* in a big wood, and in the background to the right there are paths leading to the mountains—the lovers go off and are lost from sight, then they are seen again in the distance embracing each other, and finally disappear—how does that strike you? In this way I mix the third and fourth acts together....<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> There are no letters from the librettists to the composer. Randall and Davis, *Puccini and the Girl: History and Reception of the The Girl of the Golden West*. In the literature prior to Randall's publication of Puccini's letters to Zangarini, there was only limited information regarding the collaboration between the two. Most writers depended on correspondences between the composer and Sybil Seligman, to whom Puccini confided many important things regarding the progress of constructing the libretto and opera. These letters were published by her son, Vincent, in *Puccini among Friends*.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>389</sup> Puccini means Nick, the bartender of the *Polka*.

<sup>390</sup> Seligman, *Puccini among Friends*, 139. In the play, the third act takes place at the *Polka* where it doubles as the "Academy" (or school) for miners.

The third and fourth acts of Belasco's plays were not as dramatic as the one Puccini envisioned. In fact the play's last act was rather anticlimactic as it was only a short tableau to show that the lovers were in the wilderness saying goodbye to California.

Furthermore, it is Puccini who imagined setting the third act in the "outdoor" rather than inside the saloon as indicated in the play. The more Puccini thought about the setting, the more he was convinced that the last act must be outside. He writes to Zangarini around August 27, 1907:

Increasingly the California-disease takes hold of me. I have copied several photographs of the most beautiful part of the forest where the highest and largest trees are, all for the scene in the third act. I am *determined* that it must be in the open air in a large clearing of a forest with colossal trees and with ten or more horses and sixty men. It will be a magnificent third act! Courage!<sup>391</sup>

Not only did Puccini invent a new setting for the last act but also its dramatic actions.

Zangarini had mentioned the manhunt, but from there Puccini came up with a scenario. In a letter to the librettist on August 29, 1907, Puccini writes,

Let us think about the third act. I see it as grandiose—in a great forest. You mentioned the manhunt to me. I have an idea. In the clearing or on the veranda which will barely be showing on the stage, why not make the headquarters (so to speak) where at the beginning (while the dialogue between the sheriff and Nick is occurring, and the second sheriff can be there too, awaiting the results of the manhunt) groups of men on horseback and on foot come together from time to time, bringing contradictory reports about the bandit's tracks, and finally a group of horsemen arrives dragging a man tied up—*it is he*. From here on do as the play indicates [but] with our changes, or rather, with yours.

It's an idea I've jotted down—questionable—cancelable—discardable. This is to say, I am not writing the gospel. You be the filter.<sup>392</sup>

Although Puccini wrote that his ideas were "cancelable—discardable," they in fact became an integral part of the action in act three.

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<sup>391</sup> Randall and Davis, *Puccini and the Girl: History and Reception of the The Girl of the Golden West*, 59.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*

Another important aspect of the last act was Minnie's entrance, which gave the collaborators some trouble. Puccini writes at the end of September,

In the third [act] Minnie's first entrance doesn't convince me. It seems to me that it is not worth the effort to have her enter and exit for the *cardsharp-ace* [sic] scene, only to return at the *critical* moment. In that case it would be better (if there were not a plethora of duets) to have her enter to sing a duet with the tenor. Doesn't it seem so to you?

Regarding the *cardsharp-ace* [sic] scene, couldn't it be done at the high point, that is, when she has arrived to defend *him*?<sup>393</sup>

Zangarini was following the play when he proposed to have Minnie enter twice. As it was laid out in the play, her entrances made sense. But as Zangarini arranged them in the libretto, Puccini was dissatisfied.<sup>394</sup> Puccini writes in late October 1907,

Don't forget our *Girl*. The more I think about her the more I fall in love with her. Think seriously about the third act. I don't find that one good yet. There's material to make something beautiful of it. But it still lacks something special, something unexpected, something not heard before.... It's lacking a "gimmick" [*trovata*] and it needs it. What will it be? Who knows? We really need to put our brains through the *wringer* and search and search and search.

Here the second-act finale will have a great effect because it is expressed with such special poetry.
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I have put this in a box because it is the "gimmick of *Butterfly*. In a different way, with a different order of ideas, we need the *Butterfly* second-act finale in *Girl* as

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 61. The cardsharp-ace scene that Puccini points out refers to the action in act one when Sid, one of the miners, cheats at poker by pulling out an extra ace. Sid is called a cardsharp in the play. Belasco, *The Girl of the Golden West: A Play in Four Acts*, 115.

<sup>394</sup> In the play, the Girl invites Sid to enter the Academy and she asks for forgiveness on his behalf. The miners tolerate Sid and let him stay. The Girl continues with the lesson but breaks down in tears when she realizes that she must leave the amiable miners. She exits the stage. When she is gone, Johnson is brought in, bound. The sheriff and the miners decide to hang him. But before they can carry out their plan, the Girl insists on entering the Academy again, which had been barred to prevent her from seeing the captured Johnson. When they could not delay any longer in permitting the Girl in, they strike a plan for Johnson to see and speak with the Girl. They exit the Academy while positioning men around the doors and windows to prevent Johnson from escaping. Just as Johnson and the Girl saying their goodbyes, the Girl realizes that it has been a set up all along. At this point, she pleads for Johnson's case.



well. Not a humming chorus, not that—you understand—but a *something* that makes people say from sheer amazement: bravo, by God! Think about it then, and take courage, dear Zangarini.<sup>395</sup>

Puccini had a difficult time trying to convey his ideas to the librettist. November 8, 1907, Puccini writes to Sybil, “I think the third act is going to be simply marvelous—if only the poet will understand me; but I am going to make every conceivable effort so as to be certain of getting what I want.”<sup>396</sup> Several months later, he was still unsatisfied with Zangarini’s work, writing March 10, 1908,

Instead of giving me the third act, you rhapsodize with a merry spirit on the usual Cremonese theatrical rigamarole!

Think, my dear friend of our work! I have in front of me the first and second. The more I read the more I find that they need *attention*—not so much for the dramatic *continuity*, as that’s all right—except for a certain lengthiness—but to my ear the *language* is not what is needed. The form also needs some reworking. Therefore don’t let yourself wander off into complacency. You must still sweat over it.<sup>397</sup>

It was around this time that Puccini began to feel frustrated with Zangarini enough to complain to others. On March 12, he writes, “I’m doing the hunt [scene] and the prelude, but Zanga is being lazy. Will the famous third act ever arrive? I’m beginning to doubt it.”<sup>398</sup> At the end of April 1908, Puccini concluded that Zangarini lacks a “sense of theater.”

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<sup>395</sup> Randall writes that in a private communication with Michele Girardi, he believes that the letter was written between October 25 and 29. However, after cross referencing Puccini’s letter to Sybil, which is also undated, Puccini writes that the dress rehearsal is on Monday and the premiere on Thursday (which is November 1). It is more likely that Puccini wrote the letter to Zangarini on the 29<sup>th</sup> (Monday) or 30<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday) after the dress rehearsal on Monday. Randall and Davis, *Puccini and the Girl: History and Reception of the The Girl of the Golden West*, 64–65. Seligman, *Puccini among Friends*, 148.

<sup>396</sup> Seligman, *Puccini among Friends*, 150.

<sup>397</sup> Randall and Davis, *Puccini and the Girl: History and Reception of the The Girl of the Golden West*, 71–72.

<sup>398</sup> Gara, ed. *Carteggi Pucciniani*, no. 543, p. 366.

Yesterday Zangarini was with me, here, all words, but nothing concrete. He brought me part of the plan for act 3—made according to my instructions, but nothing well thought out, or theatrical in expression—and I told him bluntly that it was no good because he had not *felt* it—and I'm convinced that this man has no sense of theater—not one good idea, not even the most simple, well-delineated scene.<sup>399</sup>

Because Puccini was the one who had always maintained strict control of the dramatic flow, form, and even metrical rendering of the poetry of the libretto, he could hardly have overlooked the ways in which Minnie was perceived in all her mannerism, her speech, her behaviors, and reactions. However, unlike constructing Mimì from *La bohème*, Puccini said little about how Minnie should be shaped.<sup>400</sup> If Puccini discussed how he wanted Minnie to be portrayed, he must have expressed them in person with the librettist. For the most part, Puccini wanted Zangarini to follow the play closely, complaining if he had veered too far from the original. Puccini wrote to Sybil, “The work on the libretto of *The Girl* is still proceeding; Zangarini had taken too many liberties with the original and for the greater part it hadn't come off—the characterization and language of the cowboys and Minnie were defective.”<sup>401</sup>

### *Puccini's Minnie and the New Woman*

One other musicologist who has noted the link between Minnie and the New Woman is Annie Randall.<sup>402</sup> Randall explains that it was because Minnie was likened to the New

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<sup>399</sup> Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 278.

<sup>400</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>401</sup> Seligman, *Puccini among Friends*, 151.

<sup>402</sup> In addition to its interpretive work, one of the most important aspects of Randall's book *Puccini and the Girl: History and Reception of The Girl of the Golden West* is that she published for the first time Puccini's letters to Zangarini, his librettist of *La fanciulla*

Woman that Puccini's opera failed to enter into the operatic canon or repertory.<sup>403</sup> A New Woman figure like Minnie was not common in operas at the time, though there were such models in dramas and novels. The institution of opera was—and still is—conservative and did not welcome a different kind of a heroine. Rather the expectations were for “female operatic victimhood established through such characters as Violetta, Mimi, Carmen, and Butterfly.”<sup>404</sup> Randall assesses that, “Minnie's survival, her centrality, and her portrayal as equal or superior to the male characters all seem to be at the heart of early criticism of the opera's ‘ridiculous’ premise. Writers throughout the twentieth century reiterate this sentiment and focus on the improbability of the opera's plot twists—particularly the card scene in act two and the ‘impossibility’ of Minnie herself.”<sup>405</sup> Randall points out the earlier writers' criticism of Minnie reduced to “comic” caricature descriptions. She draws similarities between Minnie and how the New Woman was caricaturized in journals and magazines at the end of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Randall argues, “Both Minnie and the New Woman pushed the boundaries of conventions governing women's activities, their place in society, and their sexuality, and both received a chilly reception in the press.”<sup>406</sup> To parry criticisms of earlier writers, Randall points out that Minnie and the premise of the opera were “ahead of its time.”<sup>407</sup>

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*del West*. Until then, most biographers have relied mainly on letters that Puccini sent to Seligman.

<sup>403</sup> Randall and Davis, *Puccini and the Girl: History and Reception of the The Girl of the Golden West*, 158–160.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.* Randall also quotes Harold Schonberg, “Don't Sneer at Puccini's Horse Opera,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1977.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>407</sup> The New Woman might not have been welcomed to the operatic community, according to Randall. But it is a curious irony that it did receive femme fatale heroines such as Salome, Elektra, and Carmen.

Perhaps, the opera might have been “ahead of its time,” but unfortunately, since its premiere in 1910, it has never been performed as often as *La bohème* or *Turandot*.<sup>408</sup> It is difficult to pinpoint the reasons for which *La fanciulla* is absent from the canon. But Randall is right in connecting Minnie with the New Woman figure at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Puccini’s Minnie exhibits many traits of a New Woman. Minnie lives independently without the protection of her family. She came from Soledad, California, and lives alone in a cabin half way up a mountain near the gold mining camp. By living in a cabin away from the camp, she isolates herself from the world and declares that she does not need the protection of the community. Instead, she prefers to be independent and protect herself. She does not need to be escorted when she leaves her cabin and ventures into the wilderness.

In act two of the opera, Minnie speaks to Johnson of the cheerful life she experiences, living alone in the mountains in “Oh, se sapeste come il vivere è allegro.”<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Randall and Davis, *Puccini and the Girl: History and Reception of the The Girl of the Golden West*, 208–215.

<sup>409</sup> “Oh, se sapeste/ come il vivere è allegro!/ Ho un piccolo polledro [puledro]/ che mi porta a galoppo/ laggiù per la campagna\*/ per prati di giunchigle,/ di garofani ardenti,/ per riviere profonde/ cui profuman le sponde/ gelsomini e vainiglie!/ Poi ritorno ai mieie pini/ ai monti della Sierra,/ così al cielo vicini/ che Iddio passando pare la sua mano v’inclini,/ lontani dalla terra/ così, che vien la voglia/ di battere alla soglia/ del cielo, per entrar!” “Oh, if you knew/how happy life is!/ I have a little colt/ that carries me on gallop/ over on the country side\*/ over fields of jonquils,/ and glowing carnations,/ by deep rivers/ whose banks smell of/ jasmine and vanilla!/ Then I return to my pine trees,/ to the Sierra mountains,/ that way I’m close to heaven,/ so that God in passing seems to/ stretch down his hand,/ far from the earth/ so that you want to/ knock on the threshold/ of heaven to enter!” \*While most the editions of the libretto in 1910 and the vocal score of the opera indicates “campagna,” the full score republished by Dover (1997) uses “montagna.” Dover explains that it has used “an early authoritative edition,” though

She lives an independent and energetic life, which allows her to explore the vast California countryside and mountains. As a New Woman, she does not need to be accompanied by an escort and can joyfully gallop alone on her little colt through the wilderness. From the first measure, the aria projects a strong and independent character. The tempo is rather quick and energetic, *allegretto mosso e giocoso* (quarter note = 138).<sup>410</sup> The vocal melody in the first half of the aria, R19 to 20+5, is energetic as if Minnie is gallivanting through the countryside. The melody skips up and down the scale as if Minnie is riding through the mountainside. The descending figures at R19+8 and 14 (Figure IV-1) sound like she is galloping through the mountainside. The dotted notes throughout this section, especially the ascending ones with crescendo markings (e.g., R19+12), give the music energy.

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unspecified. Giacomo Puccini. *La fanciulla del West*. Librettists Guelfo Civinini and Carlo Zangarini. (Toronto: Dover, 1997).

<sup>410</sup> In many recordings, the soprano tends to take the tempo too slowly. The recording by Mara Zampieri takes the aria almost at the marked tempo at quarter note equals 130. She sings it lightly, which seems to be appropriate in creating the right effect. In listening to other recordings of the aria that are slower—e.g., Renata Tebaldi at 122 or Sterber at 114—they tend to sound as if they lack energy to gallop. They sound as if they were sauntering through the countryside. Although their interpretations are artistic and beautiful, they tend to sing a bit heavy, causing to lose the effervescence of the piece. Giacomo Puccini, *La fanciulla del West*, Mara Zampieri, Placido Domingo, Lorin Maazel, Sony cd S2K 47189; Puccini, *La fanciulla del West*, Renata Tebaldi, Mario del Monaco, Franco Capuana, London cd A4388 (X5467-5469); Puccini, *La fanciulla del West*, Eleanor Steber, Mario del Monaco, Dimitri Mitropoulos, Walhall cd WLCD 0077.

Figure IV-1 R19+2 to 16

(con gaiezza)

Minnie

Oh se sa - pe - ste co - me il vi - vere è alle - gro: ho un pic - co - lo pol -  
le - dro che mi por - ta a ga - lop - po lag - giù per la mon - ta - gna, per  
pra - ti di giun - chi - glie, di ga - ro - fa - ni ar - den - ti, per ri - vie - re pro - fon - de

The orchestra also contributes to this spirited atmosphere. The constant ascending arpeggios played by the harp and the solo violin (R19; Figure IV-2) gives the aria ebullience, as if a brook is bubbling nearby. While the texture of the aria is transparent (horns, divisi violins, viola; with eighth-notes on the beat played by bassoon and cello), it is full of sparkling colors of the piccolo, flute, oboe, clarinet, harp, celesta, triangle, and solo violin that brighten the aria as if Minnie were wandering on a clear sunny day.

Figure IV-2 R19 solo violin and harp

senza Sordina

Solo Violin

First Harp

*p*

*p*

*pp*

In the second half of the aria, R20+6 to R21, Minnie tells of how, from the glorious Sierra mountains, God is reaching his hand towards her. The legato expression and the gradual ascending melodic line combine to intensify her joy and desire to “knock at the threshold of Heaven.” Moreover, the growing intensity is also demonstrated in the string section as it doubles the melody. The violin section continues to build the tension by ascending more than two octaves from the original starting point, creating a brittle tension (R20+13 to 17; Figure IV-3).

Figure IV-3 R20+13 to 17

The musical score for Figure IV-3 consists of four staves. The top two staves are for Violins I divisi, and the bottom two staves are for Violins II divisi. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. The score features a melodic line that ascends over time. Dynamics include *dim.*, *sempre dim.*, *pp*, *p*, and *cresc.*. Articulations include *pizz.* and *arco*. The score is marked with slurs and hairpins to indicate phrasing and dynamics.

With its strong sense of adventure and energy, this aria is appropriate for a New Woman like Minnie, and not for Mimì, a Sentimental Heroine. The voice is to sing it “con gaiezza” [with gaiety], which would imply that there is some vitality to the way she is telling her story—more vitality than the consumptive Mimì could ever muster. The intimacy of Mimì’s “Mi chiamano”—delicate in phrasing of short melodies, very thin in texture, miniature and fragile in context—is lacking in “Oh se sapeste.”<sup>411</sup> The sense of

<sup>411</sup> See Chapter Two for details.

vastness of the wilderness as created in the orchestration is befitting of Minnie, who seems to enjoy the great outdoors and adventure.

As a New Woman, Minnie not only lives by herself, but she also works at the Polka, a saloon in the camp. In fact she owns the saloon, an establishment that is popular with the local crowd.<sup>412</sup> She cultivated a place where the miners can relax after a hard day, eat dinner, have a drink, and meet with friends to play cards. There, the patrons can have their stomachs satiated, mind diverted as well as stimulated, and their hearts filled with friendships.

Because Minnie owns the saloon, she has a certain amount of authority. She employs one Caucasian man, bartender Nick, and two Native Americans—one male and one female, Billy and Wowkle—to help around her home. Minnie shows different sides of her personality to her employees. With Nick, Minnie is rather coy and playful. For example, when Nick tells Minnie to circulate around the saloon because her smile brings in good business, she playfully replies, “mala lingua” [bad tongue] to indicate that she is not “officially” trying to be flirtatious.<sup>413</sup> However, she is much more curt and bossy with the Native Americans, using stronger language and commands. Minnie orders Billy to marry Wowkle, who had born his child. Also when Minnie returns to the cabin from the saloon, she abruptly asks Billy if he had fixed something. As soon as she learns that he’ll do it the next day, she tells him, “Good. Leave” [Va via].<sup>414</sup> She is direct also with Wowkle, to whom Minnie declares, “Tonight, Wowkle, supper for two” [Stanotte,

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<sup>412</sup> Guelfo Civinini and Carlo Zangarini, *La fanciulla del West* (New York: Ricordi, 1910), 29.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.



Wowkle, cena per due].<sup>415</sup> Later, Minnie heartlessly orders Wowkle to go home in the blizzard so that she and her guest, Dick Johnson, can be alone. Perhaps because Wowkle and Billy are not native English speakers that Minnie uses short phrases to communicate clearly with them.<sup>416</sup> Minnie is confident in her authority even as she reflects biases of the time period with a coquettish demeanor toward Nick as a peer and a condescending treatment of her Native American servants.

Another authoritative role that Minnie plays as a New Woman is that she is a teacher. She instructs the miners in lessons that they have not yet learned even though they are likely adult men. Although Minnie says she only has thirty-dollars worth of education, she is positioned as one who is more learned, more educated, perhaps even smarter and wiser than the men in the camp. This position immediately gives her the authority over the intellectual aspects of the men in the camp. She is not just on equal terms with the men but above them. As the teacher, Minnie is the dominant figure and has power and influence over the men, who are in the submissive position and are limited in their power. For example, Minnie orders the students to behave by sitting down and taking their proper places. However, it is questionable whether the miners really learn from Minnie. When she asked Harry if he remembered who King David was, he gave a muddled and confusing answer. Also the miners barely listen to Minnie's lesson for they are easily distracted by the arrival of mail, running off to fetch their share. They seem to enjoy the idea of school as well as being near Minnie rather than actually learning.

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> Perhaps there are racial issues at play. This may be another avenue of research in the future.

Minnie likely teaches the miners to read and write; however, that is not emphasized. Instead, she is shown to teach them from the Bible. By teaching what is right and wrong, she becomes more than just a schoolteacher but also their moral guide. She has authority to influence not only the men's intellect but also their moral character.<sup>417</sup>

Minnie's dominant authority is showcased none more clearly than her entrance in act one. Just before she enters the saloon, the men had begun to brawl with each other.<sup>418</sup> Rance, the sheriff, had unintentionally provoked one of the miners, Sonora, who was quick to rant insults. The music reflects the increasing intensity of their fight. The tempo quickens (quarter note = 160) and it is also marked what kind of atmosphere the tempo should be: *allegro incisivo—vivamente mosso* [forceful allegro—lively moving]. The accented eighth notes played by the high woodwinds create a suspenseful atmosphere, as if the time is ticking away, while the horns and strings (violins and violas) forcefully belt out to double Sonora's voice as he hurls insults at Rance (R40+4; Figure IV-4). Rance warns Sonora, who had been drinking, that he does not "take notice of drunks' insults" [non curi le offese degli ubriachi!].<sup>419</sup> But Sonora continues to offend the sheriff, insisting

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<sup>417</sup> Some writers have pointed out that by Minnie reading and teaching from the Bible, she became more nun-like. Randall explains that because Puccini wanted to emphasize the redemption theme, the Bible passage was necessary. That is, it was a byproduct of the redemption theme.

<sup>418</sup> Here is another example in which Puccini heightened the drama by drawing out the fight scene especially with descriptive music. In Belasco's play, there was no fight scene. When Rance announces that he would marry the Girl, Sonora insults him. Rance replies, "You prove that!" to which Sonora says, "In what particular spot will you have it?" The stage direction provides: "...Instantly Rance's right hand creeps toward his pistol as Sonora, anticipating his movement, has reached for his weapon...." But Nick quickly breaks up the quarrel by announcing the Girl's arrival. Belasco, *The Girl of the Golden West: A Play in Four Acts*, 29.

<sup>419</sup> Civinini and Zangarini, *La fanciulla del West*, 15.

that Minnie is playing him for a fool and calling him “yellow face” [muso giallo].<sup>420</sup> The intensification of the argument is heard in the ascending scalar passages played by the high woodwinds, and just a little later also in the texture, which thickens significantly to include louder instruments, such as three trumpets and three trombones. Meanwhile, the other miners enter from the other room to the saloon and become agitated and start shouting at each other, intensifying the situation. The tension reaches the breaking point when Rance can no longer endure Sonora’s insults and cries out, “Ah, miserabile!” and Sonora takes out his revolver to shoot.<sup>421</sup> The orchestra crescendos, plays louder, and ascends in pitch. The orchestra holds a high note, octaves on D, as the timpani and cymbals crash four times. Just then Minnie enters the saloon and the mood suddenly changes. The tempo slows down to *andante vibrato* (dotted quarter note = 54) as if to halt the scene. The orchestra announces her arrival with her theme which sounds like a fanfare (R42+1 to 5; Figure IV-5). The men quickly quiet down and enthusiastically holler her name. The anger quickly dissipates. With confidence, Minnie strides across the bar to separate the quarreling men and snatches the revolver out of Sonora’s hand. Without saying a word, Minnie orders Sonora to apologize by shaking Rance’s hand. She instinctively knows who was at the cause of the diversion. She scolds the men of their misbehavior and threatens to discipline them by cancelling school. The men could only protest feebly, “It’s nothing. Minnie, just nonsense... They were only fooling” [Nulla, Minnie; sciocchezze... Si scherzava].<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> Just earlier, Sonora had called Rance “faccia di cinese” [Chinese face]. Here is another example of racial slur in the libretto.

<sup>421</sup> Civinini and Zangarini, *La fanciulla del West*, 16.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

Figure IV-4 R40+4

**Allegro incisivo - Vivamente mosso** ♩ = 160

No, fac - cia di ci - ne - - - se!

High Woodwinds

Orchestral Reduction

Violins, Violas, 2 Horns

Trumpets

Low Woodwinds,  
Brass, Strings

Cellos, Violas,  
2 Horns, Trombones

Figure IV-5 R42+1 to 5

**Andante vibrato** ♩ = 54

Violins, High Woodwinds, Bass Clarinet, Trumpets, Trombones

*fff*

*allarg.*

*tutta forza*

*a tempo*

Minnie is a New Woman in the line of Sarah Grand, supporting the institution of marriage and disapproving of sexual relations outside of marriage. She is displeased that her Native American servants had a baby out of wedlock and orders them to marry. Nina Micheltorrena, another woman mentioned in the libretto but never seen, is compared in stark contrast to Minnie. Nina, a female proprietress of “Palma,” seems to run a brothel.<sup>423</sup> When a Wells Fargo Agent Ashby asks a Pony Express rider about Nina,

<sup>423</sup> It is never clearly explained in the libretto that Nina’s place is a brothel, only implied through Minnie’s snarky description of her. In the Belasco play another business

Minnie is eager to answer for him and to share her disapproval. She describes Nina as a “phony Spaniard [who] comes from Cachuca, a siren who uses black lamp soot to give herself a languid eye.”<sup>424</sup> Minnie even tells Ashby to ask the miners about Nina, as if to say that they too know of Nina’s disrepute. Nina might be a New Woman who owns her business, but she is one who practices sexual freedom, not purity.

Minnie, on the other hand is like Sarah Grand and others, by supporting sexual purity. Being one of the few women in the mining camp, Minnie has become the object of the miners’ love and admiration. She graciously accepts their simple gifts of wild flowers, ribbons and silk handkerchief and compliments, but she keeps her distance from their romantic advances. She has never danced with a man or been kissed before, and refuses to do so with anyone whom she does not love. When Rance offers her one thousand dollars for a kiss, she brushes him away. For her, love is not for sale; love is sacred, something special. She seems to use her sexual purity as a way to assert her power and independence, unlike the femme fatale who uses sexuality to assert power and authority. It is her purity that draws the miners to her.

### *Minnie, New Woman, and Complications*

Puccini’s Minnie has many traits of the New Woman. But she is a complicated character with qualities from the Sentimental Heroine type. Her view of love is

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establishment that is mentioned is the Palmetter, a restaurant from which Minnie orders her “two charlotte rusks an’ a lemming turnover.” Belasco, *The Girl of the Golden West: A Play in Four Acts*, 56.

<sup>424</sup> “Finta spagnuola nativa di Cachuca, una siren ache fa consumo di nerofumo per farsi l’occhio languido.” Civinini and Zangarini, *La fanciulla del West*, 19.

romanticized like that of Mimì. In “Laggiù nel Soledad,” Minnie tells Rance in act one of the idealized the love that her parents shared. They ran an inn [taverna] where her father dealt cards at faro [babbo dava le carte a faraone] and her mother served food and drinks to the customers [mamma faceva da cuoca e cantiniera].<sup>425</sup> The domestic situation of her parents was ideal. Her mother was beautiful [bella] and Minnie recalls that her mother would furtively press her father’s foot underneath a table. For Minnie, this was one of the signs that they loved each other.

This romanticized notion of love suggests that Minnie would like to be a Sentimental Heroine. “Laggiù nel Soledad” is more befitting of Mimì from *La bohème* rather than a New Woman: the intimacy of the orchestration, instrumentation, delicate lines, and moments of tenderness. The orchestration is light; the bass hardly is heard. The string section (solo violin, first and second violins, viola, and cello) plays very lightly and softly. As not to sound overpowering, the first and second violin parts are further notated, *divisi*. Minnie’s aria is colored by mainly upper woodwinds (flute, oboe and clarinet), whose orchestration is reminiscent of the instrumentation in Mimì’s aria “Mi chiamano Mimì.” At R 71, the vocal line become much more lyrical and long. This is reminiscent of one section in Mimì’s aria where she declares that the first sun in April is hers (R38 in *La bohème*). While Mimì shrinks back to a hothouse flower and finishes her aria in a mumble, Minnie conclude hers confidently. This confidence could be attributed to Minnie’s tendency of exhibiting traits of the New Woman. While Minnie may not be a more complete Sentimental Heroine as Mimì might be, the American still has some traits that are Sentimental.

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 22.

One of the reasons that steers Minnie away from the New Woman is that she is modeled after Belasco's heroine, the Girl, who has some traits of the Sentimental Heroine. The playwright had written the female protagonist, the Girl, for Blanche Bates (1873–1941). Belasco writes to her about the heroine, “Your part fits you from your dear little feet up to your pretty head. It's a *bully part*, and I know you will like it. If you don't—well, you need never kiss me again! I call the play ‘The Girl of the Golden West.’ ... There are some beautiful speeches in the play—very ‘Batesque’; the lines just *crackle* and all the situations are human” (original italics).<sup>426</sup> The playwright provides a description of the Girl.

The character of the GIRL is rather complex. Her utter frankness takes away all suggestion of vice, showing her to be unsmirched, happy, careless, untouched by the life about her. Yet she has a thorough knowledge of what the men of her world generally want. She is used to flattery—knows exactly how to deal with men—is very shrewd—but quite capable of being a good friend to the camp boys.<sup>427</sup>

Belasco had written and produced several plays especially for Bates. Under his supervision, she became one of the foremost leading actresses of the time.<sup>428</sup> In fact he had launched her career, looking high and low for just the appropriate work to feature

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<sup>426</sup> Belasco to Bates in San Francisco, July 20, 1905, quoted in William Winter, *The Life of David Belasco*, vol. 2 (New York: Moffat, Yard, and Co., 1918), 194–195. Belasco uses “bully” as a term to indicate something positive and very good. He writes to the mother of Blanche Bates, “Tell your Blanche it is a *bully play*, and that the character of ‘*the girl*’ is sky-high—fits her from her head to her feet! ...I am getting together a *bully* cast for it” (original italics). Belasco to Mrs. F. M. Bates, July 13, 1905, quoted in Winter, *The Life of David Belasco*, 194.

<sup>427</sup> David Belasco, *The Girl of the Golden West: A Play in Four Acts*, French's standard library edition; (New York, N.Y., Los Angeles, Calif., S. French, Inc.: London, S. French, Ltd. ; [etc.], 1933), 8.

<sup>428</sup> Bates writes, “... I have grown from leading woman to a star under [Belasco's] management.” Quoted in Winter, *The Life of David Belasco*, 87.

her. For this occasion, he selected a new dramatization of Ouida's novel *Under Two Flags* in 1901 for Bates to play the part of "Cigarette." William Winter, contemporary biographer of Belasco, described Cigarette and Bates's performance of it.

The representative of *Cigarette* must be handsome, passionate, expeditious, magnanimous, resolute, full of resource, sparkling with energy, potent in fiery conflicts of feeling, and above all, capable of covering grief with a smile. That is the essence of her character. Blanche Bates, possessing rare personal distinction and a temperament equally attuned to the extreme moods of mirth and grief, was easily proficient in the assumption of that personality and in the pictorial and effective exposition of it.<sup>429</sup>

Winter points out that the heroine needs to have strong feelings, "passionate" and "potent in fiery conflicts of feeling," and "energy," which seem to suggest the strength in the character. However, Cigarette is one of those long-suffering, self-sacrificing protagonists, who loves a man that does not love her back, much like a Sentimental heroine. In fact, most of the plays and the roles that Belasco wrote for Bates feature a heroine who is long-suffering and self-sacrificing: *Madam Butterfly* (the title role), *The Darling of the Gods* (Princess Yo-San), and *The Fighting Hope* (Anna Granger). It is not so surprising then that even though Puccini said he was searching for "something" different, he would choose Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West*, considering Puccini's inclination to feature characters that exhibit Sentimental qualities.

## **Conclusion**

Puccini's Minnie is the best example of the New Woman from his operas. However, Minnie, like his other heroines, is complicated and cannot be trapped into one type. She is a dynamic character who moves from one type to another depending on the situation and

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid., 2–3.



the person whom she is with. Minnie has a sentimental side as it is shown in one of her arias, "Laggi nel Soledad." Yet as a New Woman, she is independent and owns a business. She even has employees who work for her. Moreover, she is respected as an authority figure by all the men around the mining camp. It seems that Puccini's desire to have his female characters be likeable, he needed something of the Sentimental Heroine. But he also broke out of those stereotypes to better round out his heroines.

## V. CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

Puccini said little about how contemporary women were behaving in society and made no comments about the women's movements that were taking place all over the world. However, the female characters in his opera behave in ways, which exemplify three prominent modes of female representation in art, literature, and in society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Sentimental Heroine represents the conventionalized and idealized view of the bourgeois, domesticated woman. The femme fatale is a dangerous and threatening female who causes the downfall of men. The New Woman rebels against the view of idealized woman, and challenges it to redefine herself as an independent, strong woman.

The three types as used in this project are not static and allow characters to move from one type to another. This flexibility was missing in the models used by earlier critics who discussed Puccini's operas. Those static models limit discussions of characters who exhibit contradictory traits. The flexible typology I use allows analysis of characters who change through the course of a plot. For example, Turandot behaves like a femme fatale throughout most of the opera. But towards the end of the story, she is transformed out of the femme fatale and into something more like a Sentimental Heroine. The flexible model also allows for characters to show different, if contradictory, traits side by side. For example, Mimi from *La bohème* largely conducts herself as a Sentimental Heroine, but

during the Christmas eve festivities, she shows another side of her personality by coveting an expensive jewelry, which seems less than an ideal Sentimental Heroine. However, Mimì returns later to behave as a Sentimental Heroine in the helpless plight of her death.

Although this model was used to analyze three heroines, Mimì, Turandot, and Minnie, it can be applied to the rest of the characters in Puccini's operas. Tosca can serve as an example of a heroine who fits into all three types at varying moments in the opera. In some ways, Tosca is a New Woman. She is a trained professional singer, who supports herself financially and lives independently. Yet she is often regarded as a femme fatale. What makes the title character Tosca fatal and dangerous is that she kills Scarpia. However, she is not a typical femme fatale, like Cleopatra and Salome who seduce their male victims before killing them. Rather Scarpia forces Tosca to become a femme fatale to his detriment. Scarpia is the one who lusts after her and schemes to arrest her lover so that he would be in a position to trap her to have his way with her. Though the bargain would be to have her and free Cavaradossi, Scarpia's plan all along was to execute the prisoner. Scarpia uses power to get sex. For Tosca, she uses sex to get power, that is, to free Cavaradossi out of prison and flee from Rome and Scarpia's corrupt rule. Scarpia forces her to become a femme fatale. She was left with no choice to escape Scarpia but to kill him.

One example that might suggest that Puccini's Tosca could be a femme fatale is that she does try to seduce Mario to spend the evening with her after her concert. Yet Tosca's seduction is towards the man with whom she has been for about a year. Mario does not see her as a dangerous woman, only very jealous, and he knows how to handle

her in those kinds of situations. The ways Tosca tries to convince Mario to spend an evening with her is through the aria “Non la sospiri la nostra casetta.” This evening is like all other previous nights. There is no hint of danger in the music.

Tosca does not see herself as a femme fatale. In fact, she seems more like a Sentimental Heroine, especially in the way Puccini and his librettists modified her. They show the interiority of Tosca unlike the one in the play. The monologue “Non la sospiri” in act one is completely an invention of Puccini and his librettists.<sup>430</sup>

In “Non la sospiri,” Tosca rhapsodizes about the idyllic location of Mario’s hidden palace, a perfect place for a romantic evening. This aria has many similar traits to the arias sung by a Sentimental Heroine, like Mimì. The instrumentation is similar to “Mi chiamano Mimì,” especially at the beginning of the aria. It is prominent with the colors of the harp and the upper woodwinds, flute, oboe, and clarinet, which often double the lyrical melody. The strings accompany delicately with simple eighth-note homophonic chords. The melody is light and lyrical with mostly step-wise movement. Even when there are leaps, they are often smoothed over by the flowing nature of the aria, R 29+5 to 6. There are moments when the melody sounds playful, one time with a grace note, at the word “fianco.” The violins play a sextuplet figure, which sounds light and playful, R29-3. There are a couple of moments in the aria that sound ardent. At the words “Al tuo fianco” [At your side] R29, an unexpected harmony appears after establishing A-flat major as a localized tonic (the aria is in D-flat major). It could be that this out-of-place chord, dominant seventh of A flat, which begins the second section of the aria, is the “mystery”

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<sup>430</sup> Likely the text of “Non la sospiri” was written by Giacosa and adjusted by Illica and Puccini as to fit the musical setting that Puccini already had in mind.

that Tosca just referred to, the “nest...of love and of mystery.”<sup>431</sup> Or the ambiguous chord is used to call attention to the fact that Tosca wants to be at Mario’s side to experience the beauty that nature has to offer. A little later at the words “Fiorite, o campi immensi” R330+2, which begin the third and final section of the aria, the accompanying chords are unexpected in the tonic of localized A-flat major. It is as if Tosca is so passionate that she can barely contain herself within the given key. After such a short burst of energy, she seems to control herself and the rest of the melody returns to the appropriate harmonic area and cadences appropriately. The most passionate expression in the aria is at R30+7 as she cries out “Piovette voluttà, volte stellate! Arde in Tosca un folle amor!” [Rain down voluptuousness, starry vaults, In Tosca a mad love burns!]. The melody reaches the highest notes of the aria, A, and is at the loudest volume, *forte*. The accompaniment explores through extended harmonic areas to express her passion, which cannot be contained in a diatonic area.

Perhaps the most mischievous part of the aria is when Tosca enunciates the words “perfidi consigli” [treacherous counsel].<sup>432</sup> The score emphasizes this by indicating “con intenzione” [with intention] over the text as well as marking each note with *tenuto* signs as well as with instruction “stentando” [struggling]. If those were not enough, the emphasis is further articulated by the strings, first violin and cello, which double the melody. In the context of the conversation between Mario and Tosca, her referral to the “perfidi consigli” means her counsel to persuade him to spend an evening with her at his villa. Yet as the plot progresses, this decision indeed proves treacherous: Tosca discovers Angelotti, and Mario act as an accomplice in aiding a fugitive. Mario is eventually

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<sup>431</sup> “Nido...d’amore e di mister.” Puccini, *Seven Puccini Librettos*, 110, 111.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, 112, 113.

executed for harboring a fugitive. When Tosca discovers that she has been deceived by Scarpia, the audience too feels her despair because she has shown herself to be a woman of feelings, a Sentimental Heroine, and not just a femme fatale.

The femme fatale, Sentimental Heroine, and the New Woman are character types specifically constructed for Puccini's operas. The flexible model can be useful to examine other composers' characters, such as Verdi and even Wagner. To create a model and character types that fit another composer's body of works, all his/her operas need to be carefully examined. After analyzing the characters, similarities then can be grouped together and classified into particular types. This method could be especially fruitful when used to analyze Richard Strauss's female characters in his operas. Some of his heroines, such as Salome and Elektra, exhibit similar traits, which may lead to intriguing research.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF OPERA TITLES AND HEROINE NAMES

**List of Operas in Chronological Order**

<b>Premiere Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Librettist(s)</b>	<b>Heroine 1</b>	<b>Heroine 2</b>
1884	<i>Le Villi</i>	Fontana	Anna	
1889	<i>Edgar</i>	Fontana	Fidelia	Tigrana
1893	<i>Manon Lescaut</i>	Leoncavallo, Praga, Oliva, Giacosa, Illica, Ricordi, Puccini	Manon Lescaut	
1896	<i>La bohème</i>	Illica, Giacosa	Mimi	Musetta
1900	<i>Tosca</i>	Illica, Giacosa	Tosca	
1904	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>	Illica, Giacosa	Madame Butterfly	Suzuki
1910	<i>La fanciulla del West</i>	Zangarini, Civinini	Minnie	(Nina Micheltorrena)
1917	<i>La rondine</i>	Adami	Magda	Lisette
1918	<i>Il trittico</i> <i>Il tabarro</i> <i>Suor Angelica</i> <i>Gianni Schicchi</i>	Adami	Giorgetta Suor Angelica Lauretta	--- (Aunt) ---
1926	<i>Turandot</i>	Adami, Simoni	Turandot	Liù

**Alphabetical Order by Title**

<b>Operas</b>	<b>Heroine 1</b>	<b>Heroine 2</b>
<i>Edgar</i>	Fidelia	Tigrana
<i>Gianni Schicchi</i>	Lauretta	
<i>Il tabarro</i>	Giorgetta	
<i>La bohème</i>	Mimi	Musetta
<i>La fanciulla del West</i>	Minnie	
<i>La rondine</i>	Magda	
<i>Le villi</i>	Anna	
<i>Madama Butterfly</i>	Butterfly	Suzuki
<i>Manon Lescaut</i>	Manon	
<i>Suor Angelica</i>	Angelica	Aunt
<i>Tosca</i>	Tosca	
<i>Turandot</i>	Turandot	Liù

**Alphabetical Order by Name**

<b>Heroines</b>	<b>Operas</b>
Angelica	<i>Suor Angelica</i>
Anna	<i>Le villi</i>
Aunt	<i>Suor Angelica</i>
Butterfly	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
Fidelia	<i>Edgar</i>
Giorgetta	<i>Il tabarro</i>
Lauretta	<i>Gianni Schicchi</i>
Liù	<i>Turandot</i>
Magda	<i>La rondine</i>
Manon	<i>Manon Lescaut</i>
Mimi	<i>La bohème</i>
Minnie	<i>La fanciulla del West</i>
Musetta	<i>La bohème</i>
Suzuki	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
Tigrana	<i>Edgar</i>
Tosca	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>
Turandot	<i>Turandot</i>



## APPENDIX B

### SYNOPSIS OF THE GIRL OF THE GOLDEN WEST BY BELASCO

The Girl is a saloon owner, catering to the male miners in the community at Cloudy Mountain. She also acts as a teacher at the Academy for the miners during the off-season. She falls in love with Johnson, a stranger from Sacramento, whom she had met months ago on her trip to Monterey. In act one (at the Polka), the Girl, the owner of the Polka saloon, is the object of everyone's affections: the miners, Wells Fargo Agent Ashby, and Sheriff Jack Rance. When a stranger from Sacramento enters the saloon, the men feel threatened until the Girl vouches for him as an acquaintance. This man, Johnson, is the very man whom the Girl met on her trip to Monterey. When the news of the bandit, who had been robbing camps nearby, might be caught, all the men leave the saloon to chase after him. Johnson, who is actually bandit Ramerrez, had come to the Polka to rob it. But after learning that the proprietor is the Girl, with whom he had fallen in love, he changes his mind and leaves without robbing the establishment. Before he leaves, the Girl invites him to drop by her cabin after the saloon closes at one in the morning. In act two (the Girl's cabin), she invites him into her cabin but quickly learns that he is the bandit that everyone is looking for. She throws him out by which time the blizzard had overtaken her mountain cabin. Johnson is shot and the Girl pulls him into her cabin and hides him in her loft. Jack Rance, the sheriff, comes to her cabin, looking for Johnson. The Girl acts offended that he is looking for Johnson at her cabin and threatens that Rance should never return to her saloon after he is through searching. They quarrel momentarily but

quickly resume their friendship. When they are about to shake hands, drops of blood land on Rance's hand, giving away Johnson's hiding place. The Girl strikes a bargain with Rance in a game of poker. If he wins, he gets the bandit and the Girl. But if she wins, she gets Johnson and Rance will walk away and not tell a soul about the deal. The Girl wins on the third hand by taking out a winning hand from her stocking. In act three (at the Polka), the Girl arrives at the saloon for the Academy. Feeling guilty for hiding the bandit, she begins to teach the miners about the Prodigal Son from the Bible. Overcome with emotions, she leaves the classroom at which time Johnson is dragged in, bound. The miners and the sheriff decide they would hang him, but Johnson asks that they not tell the Girl of his demise, letting her think that he got away. Before they can carry out their plans, the Girl finds out about the sentence. She pleads earnestly for Johnson, to which the miners relent and release him to the Girl. In act four (in the wilderness), the Girl and Johnson are in the wilderness, saying goodbye to the Sierra.

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