METAMORPHOSIS OF A BUTTERFLY: PUCCINI AND THE MAKING OF A
POWERFUL TRAGIC HEROINE

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I was fortunate to be engaged in this study during the centennial year of Madama Butterfly. Thanks to Michael Capasso and DiCapo Opera, I was privileged to see the La Scala, Brescia, and Paris versions of the opera sequentially over a long weekend in the spring of 2004—a rare opportunity to experience the effects of Puccini’s revisions. I was also able to participate in the centennial conference on the opera sponsored by the Centro Studi Giacomo Puccini, meeting my Puccini “heroes” in the settings of Puccini’s life. Among this group, I am especially grateful to Arthur Groos for the breadth of his research on Madama Butterfly and his generosity. Julian Budden, Roger Parker, and Michele Girardi have also contributed much to my thinking. And Linda Fairtile’s guide directed me to the wealth of studies on the opera.

I am grateful to Deanna Yeo, my first Butterfly, and Young Mi Kim, the most influential for me. And finally, I thank Larry and Beebe for supporting my metamorphosis into a soprano and guiding my discoveries of Verdi and Puccini.
Abstract

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the story of Madame Butterfly has been an enduring cultural trope. Although it is not the first tale of "the soldier and the exotic," the fundamental issues of race, gender, and imperialism intertwined in Puccini's popular opera setting have stimulated its continuing representation in popular literature, theater, films, and music, in addition to more formal historical, political, social, and cultural studies.

But the 1904 opera goes far beyond facile stereotypes. Initially conceived as tableaux alternating Eastern and Western ambience and musical style, it evolved into the classical tragedy of a heroine made unforgettable through the subtly constructed score. In addition to observing the unities of time, setting, and action, Puccini embeds her tragedy in recurring musical themes depicting her basic goodness, her *hamartia* (errors in judgment), and her *anagnorisis* (moments of tragic insight).

Butterfly's faith is based on two wrong assumptions—unconditional love for a man whom she trusts and for whom she sacrifices all aspects of her previous life and culture, and her faith in that man's culture, her "American dream." The opera's most prominent musical themes, powerfully echoed at dramatic peaks, cluster about these central tragic choices. The "cosmic collusion" of fate, represented most often in authentic Japanese musical themes, challenges her faith throughout the opera.

Because Butterfly shares her *hamartia* with countless women and men throughout history, audiences are drawn deeply into empathy with her situation. But because her voice and melodic contours in Puccini's orchestral context make her powerful, she becomes an iconic tragic figure of the theater.
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Introduction

Since the late nineteenth century, the story of Madame Butterfly has been an enduring cultural trope, evoking many Euro-American orientalist clichés of the geisha’s exotic eroticism. Giacomo Puccini’s 1904 opera grew out of earlier literary and stage versions of this tale and was profoundly influential. It would be difficult to name a cultural product intersecting a greater number of human issues. Although it can be considered one of the last of “the soldier and the exotic” tales depicted in French operas at the peak of nineteenth century colonialism, its influence on subsequent literary and theatrical works has been more far-reaching than any of these predecessors. The gender, race, and imperialism issues represented in the opera give it a timeless relevance, making it (as Arthur Groos has observed) “a very protean modern myth . . . [originating] in contemporary historical circumstances, and [reflecting] fin de siècle institutions that inform artistic representations of the story as well as their reception.”

Without the opera, the “Madame Butterfly” theme would probably not have been so frequently perpetuated in the numerous subsequent literary and theatrical works centered around an Asian (or Pacific) woman exploited by a Euro-American male. Marina Heung considers the opera to be in many ways, a foundational narrative of East-West relations . . . A master text of Orientalism, central to the Western Orientalist imaginary, the figure of the geisha

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1 James Parakilis, “The Soldier and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of Racial Encounter,” Parts I and II, Opera Quarterly 10, nos. 2, 33-55, and 3, 43-69 (1994). These themes were prominent during the nineteenth century due to frequent deployment of young men to foreign areas being dominated by their countries.

(whose most notable incarnation is Cio-Cio-San) epitomizes an eroticized and subservient femininity . . . with a tantalizing mix of passive refinement and sexual mystique.\(^3\)

In addition to literary and stage works based on the story, the opera has been a popular theme in the cinema. Not only has Puccini's opera been filmed many times (a 1915 silent version starred Mary Pickford, and a 1932 version featured Cary Grant), but filmmakers have also based a large number of films on similar tragic interracial love affairs.\(^4\) Stories set during the Vietnam war, including the musical Miss Saigon, raise both old and new issues. Academic studies of the many works related to the opera (including the “mutated” drama M. Butterfly) have proliferated in the last decade.\(^5\)

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\(^3\) Marina Heung, “The Family Romance of Orientalism,” in Forming and Reforming Identity, Genders 21 (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 224-25. The term “Orientalism” was first defined by Edward Said to be “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,” and was applied retrospectively to most artistic works previously labelled as “Exotic” or “Orientalist” (see Chapter Two). Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3. The work was originally published in 1978 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), and Said continued to expand and refine his perspectives in subsequent works.

\(^4\) Gina Marchetti, Romance and the “Yellow Peril”: Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 81. Marchetti discusses seventeen mainstream fictional films and television dramas set in Japan, China, and Vietnam and produced between 1915 and 1986. She suggests that “Hollywood used Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders as signifiers of racial otherness to avoid the far more immediate racial tensions between blacks and whites or the ambivalent mixture of guilt and enduring hatred toward Native American and Hispanic. She also suggests that “Hollywood returns to the theme of miscegenation (as well as other types of taboo sexuality) for complex reasons that seem to be related to economic, social, and cultural issues that have been part of the fabric of American history since well before the birth of the motion picture industry.” 1-6.

\(^5\) Nearly every university course in women’s studies or cultural studies includes readings from works such as the Marchetti volume (above), Reina Lewis, Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity, and Representation (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); Karen Ma’s The Modern Madame Butterfly: Fantasy and Reality in Japanese Cross-Cultural Relations (Rutland, VT and Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1996); and Mari Yoshihara’s Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003). A Google search on the term “Madame Butterfly” (at the time of preparation of this study) returns over 1,100,000 “hits,” while a search on the opera title returns less than one-fourth that number.
The messages of the opera itself, however, contrast with those of its literary sources and progeny. The archetypal heroine is one of the most powerful in all opera, and the culmination of Giacomo Puccini's previous heroines. This composer had a unique desire and ability to portray women in all their complex subtleties. Focusing on female protagonists in the most popular and enduring works of his "middle" period (La Bohème, 1896; Tosca, 1900; and Madama Butterfly, 1904), he demonstrated his sensitivity to the nuances of romance and women's feelings. These operas have remained by far the most popular with the public, although their subjects and style also brought Puccini extensive criticism (see Chapter Three). Madama Butterfly blends his favorite theme of suffering heroines with the japonisme popular in his time, and represents his greatest success in depicting a classical tragic heroine, who completely dominates the opera. As the last of his middle-period, heroine-centered operas, it also brought to a close an important era of Italian sentimental, romantic operas.

The enduring success of this opera results from the continuing relevance of its subject, its archetypal characters, and its clear representation of the heroine's struggles. This study will apply the commonly accepted theory of classical tragedy to a multivalent

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7 It is significant that the title of Rubens Tedeschi's study of the history, intellectual background, and social context of operas composed between 1868 and 1924 is entitled Addio, fiorito assil (Farewell, flowery refuge), also the first line of Pinkerton's final romanza in Madama Butterfly. This opera is indeed a farewell to an era of Italian opera, as La Bohème is a nostalgic farewell to carefree youth and romance. Addio fiorito assil: il melodramma italiano da Boito al verismo, Universale economica 814 (Milan: Feltrinelli Economica, 1978).
interpretation of the music elements in *Madama Butterfly* in order to explore the effectiveness of this opera and power of its heroine.

Although the specific form and aesthetics of tragic drama have varied in each era, certain basic elements have remained constant, because they clearly reflect some of the greatest frustrations and sorrows of being human. In addition to the unities of time, setting, and action, these elements include:

1) the basic goodness of the protagonist;
2) the ultimate downfall of the protagonist through an error in judgment (*hamartia*);
3) moment(s) of tragic recognition/insight for the protagonist (*anagnorisis*); and
4) the reaction of “pity and fear” (*katharsis*) in the audience, through an identity with the suffering of the protagonist and subsequent release of emotion.

Tragedy is defined in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as “drama that treats in a serious and dignified style the sorrowful or terrible events encountered or caused by a heroic individual,” in which “the hero’s suffering . . . is far out of proportion to his flaw. An element of cosmic collusion . . . is essential to bring about the tragic catastrophe . . . an apparent weakness is often only an excess of virtue . . . the tragic hero is never passive but struggles to resolve his tragic difficulty with an obsessive dedication.”

This description fits the heroine of *Madama Butterfly*, who makes two wrong assumptions (her *hamartia* or errors in judgment). Because these particular assumptions have been made by countless women and men throughout history, she becomes an iconic tragic figure. Her “mistakes” are: 1) her unconditional love for a man whom she trusts

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9 Ibid., s.v. “hamartia.”
and for whom she sacrifices all aspects of her previous life and culture, and 2) her faith in that man's culture, her "American dream." Puccini embodies these two convictions of Butterfly in music and text from the beginning of the opera, and powerfully echoes them at the opera's dramatic peaks. The reminiscences of her love theme, and the poignance of her unwavering faith in the country represented by "The Star Spangled Banner," remind audiences of the nobility of her love and the failure of America to live up to its own dreams. Puccini also depicts Butterfly's moments of anagnorisis (tragic recognition) most distinctively in music and text.

Geoffrey and Ryan Edwards have recognized that the Verdi and Puccini works featuring strong women, especially Butterfly, effectively fulfill the basic criteria for Aristotelian classic tragedy. They assert that Madama Butterfly combines "the emotional quintessence of romanticism and the austere majesty of classical tragedy" in the culmination of all Puccini's tragic heroines. They note how much Puccini and his librettists transformed the literary sources for both La Bohème and Madama Butterfly to create these heroines.

Further, in an ironic twist, the timeless theme of the soldier and the exotic, which usually focused on a westerner's attraction to an "oriental" exotic woman, is reversed. Butterfly's fantasy is of America as a promised paradise ("the American dream"), but America fails to fulfill her dream. (This fantasy and irony are even more explicit in the derivative theatre piece, Miss Saigon). Additional ironies are implicit in the name of her lover, "Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton," and his ship, the "Abraham Lincoln." (This holds a particular contemporary resonance for Americans, due to the involvement of a ship of the same name in the Iraq war.)


Ibid, 62.
In their book, the Edwards suggest that the triumph of great tragic heroes over the vagaries of fate consists of realizing, through their bitter experiences, the true nature and potential of the human spirit in the infinite plan of the universe. They assert that Puccini’s operas are able to transform the “torment of existence into the majesty of tragic understanding, of true anagnorisis.”

The majority of theoretical works on tragedy rarely mention “heroine,” but use the term “hero,” or the neutral term “protagonist.” The role of a heroine in drama is usually not to conquer, nor to overcome obstacles, but to support the hero. Nadia Aisenberg has asserted that a new example of women heroines should be the model for all. She suggests a new cultural heroine, an “ordinary heroine,” who will epitomize the qualities more common to women which she considers vital for the survival of humanity. Thomas Butler summarizes these qualities as “relation, flexibility, compassion, mediation,” and contrasts this evolving heroine with “the fundamentally helpless, passive women of the male canon.”

The heroic qualities described by Aisenberg are displayed in the roles of opera heroines, but traditional power is also displayed in their voices. Operatic female voices, when set by sensitive composers such as Puccini, provide a message often differing from the libretti of their operas. The voices in themselves equalize women’s power with men’s.

13 Ibid, 60.


“There is something irresistibly admirable and troubling about woman’s voice in opera, something that commands our attention and our deeper involvement . . . their vocal assertiveness . . . so manifestly contain[s] the promise—or rather the threat—of women’s full equality.”

Locke also suggests that the message of these heroines is one for all people, not only women. By seeing romantic tragedies as “poetic visions of human drives and qualities . . . and the various tensions to which they give rise,” Locke asserts that “we can appreciate in opera’s women a whole range of concerns that are broadly human, though a given society could not comfortably express them through . . . men . . . and therefore male composers use women characters in opera partly as a means of searching for a way to restore emotional wholeness.”

While Puccini’s opera reflects its literary sources and the political and social realities of its time, its much-revised libretto and music create an unforgettable heroine. He was literally “the right man, in the right place, at the right time.” His personal talents and sensitivities were appropriate for an era of great changes in opera throughout Europe.


17 Ralph Locke, “What Are These Women Doing in Opera?,” 66.
His innate gifts for theater and music were shaped through his environment, mentoring, and his musical education, enabling him to infuse Italian traditions with the best of the French and German innovations. The results are seen in the enduring popularity of his operas. It is not at all surprising that *Madama Butterfly* is in the top position in American performances; American audiences probably identify more intensely with an episode involving American presence in Japan. And probably even more identity/guilt is felt for the most popular musical theater successor to the opera, *Miss Saigon*. Neither, of course, was composed by an American.

Puccini’s very successful musical style in his most popular operas presaged the musical techniques used for film soundtracks. In addition to the cinematic depiction of

18 *Madama Butterfly* stands at the top of the popularity list in America, receiving the most productions of any opera by member companies of Opera America during the ten year period from Fall 1993 through Spring 2004.

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<th>Opera</th>
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Opera International surveyed productions of a representative sample period (2-3 months) of 1994 and found the following operas to have the highest numbers of productions in a survey of 29 French cities, 26 German cities, and 16 Italian cities:

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<th>Opera</th>
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<td><em>Tosca</em> (Puccini)</td>
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<td><em>La Bohème</em> (Puccini)</td>
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<td><em>Die Zauberflöte</em> (Mozart)</td>
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<td><em>Madama Butterfly</em> (Puccini)</td>
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19 Jürgen Leukel, as well as other critics, asserts that Puccini’s musico-dramatic techniques anticipate those found in cinema. See: “Puccini’s Kinematographische Technik,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 143, nos 6-7 (June-July 1982): 24-26.
the opera and related stories mentioned above, musical selections from this and Puccini's other works are some of the most frequent classical music used in contemporary film.20 Audiences overwhelmingly respond to the sensitive depiction of relationships between men and women in his operas, and to his ability to depict their psychological subtleties in easily accessible music.

In spite of the great popularity of Puccini's operas, critics have long faulted his popularity as evidence of lack of artistic depth. These criticisms began during an era when Italy was trying to establish a strong national identity. While some critics took great pride in the *italianità* of Puccini's work, others felt it was too "feminine" and "decadent." One of his early critics, Fausto Torrefranca, claimed that, "Puccini illustrates all the decadence of present Italian music, all its cynical commercialism, all its pious impotence and the triumph of internationalism."21 Alexandra Wilson has examined the political and cultural roots of Torrefranca's great distaste for Puccini's music and devoted her dissertation to examining the broader political context of Italian Puccini reception in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.22 She concludes that concerns for a strong (masculine) Italian national identity were behind some critics' responses to Puccini's works. Later critics, including one of Puccini's most passionate advocates Mosco Carner, also found


fault with Puccini's style. Carner considers the middle-period works (those most popular with the public) to be the weakest, and suggests that these have less artistic merit than the later works. 23 And Donald Jay Grout complains that, "Puccini's music . . . often sounds better than it is." 24 Bernard Williams, a widely-read music scholar, describes Puccini's manipulative techniques as typical of successful opera in general:

[In opera] a theatrical device is made to work . . . but by securing the audience's complicity in it . . . operas do not have to have dramatic or musical depth in order to be worth seeing over and over again . . . Puccini . . . is an outstandingly popular opera composer [who] had remarkable melodic gifts and was a notable orchestrator . . . Yet his critical reputation is not as unqualified as his success, and many . . . find it hard to dismiss a distinct sense of the cynical and the manipulative about it. 25

These opinions seem to reflect be an elitist perspective, that Puccini's music cannot be of real quality if the masses respond to it. The very qualities which make his music-dramatic narrative most accessible to the public are targeted frequently for attack, in accusations of self-borrowing and manipulation. This study will look at these and other musical techniques as vehicles to establish the power of this heroine over audiences, not as manipulative ploys.

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Background Literature Survey

It is ironic that Puccini's popular operas, including the most influential of them, *Madama Butterfly*, did not attract much scholarly interest before the last decades of the twentieth century. A great expansion of Puccini studies since the 1980s has provided a foundation for a variety of further research. The introductory chapters here make use of many of these previous studies to provide a background for the musical-dramatic interpretation of the opera and its powerful heroine as classical tragedy.

Contemporary Puccini researchers are fortunate to have Linda Fairtile's comprehensive guide, which is organized by topic and includes extensive annotations, in addition to providing a chronological survey of Puccini scholarship. She notes significant resources published during 1958, the centennial year of Puccini's birth: Mosco Carner's *Puccini: a Critical Biography*, Claudio Sartori's *Puccini*, and a large collection of Puccini correspondence, *Carteggi pucciniani*, edited by Eugenio Gara. Both Cecil Hopkinson's *A Bibliography of the Works of Giacomo Puccini* delineating the many versions of each opera, and William Ashbrook's life and works volume, *The Operas of Puccini*, were published in 1968.

In 1979, Simonetta Puccini (the composer's granddaughter) and her colleagues founded the Istituto di Studi Pucciniani, which has published several *Quaderni pucciniani*. The hundredth anniversary of the 1884 premiere of *Le villi* was commemorated with an issue of *Opera Quarterly* devoted to Puccini works.

Jürgen Maehder established a Puccini Research Center in Berlin in 1983, and organized an international conference at Torre del Lago the same year *(Esotismo e colore*
locale nell'opera di Puccini), followed by another in 1984 (I libretti di Puccini e le letteratura del suo tempo), and Maehder edited the proceedings for these conferences.

Several series of opera guides, intended to provide audiences with background and musical interpretations of the operas, were produced in the 1980s and 1990s. These included the Cambridge Opera Handbooks on La Bohème, Tosca, and Turandot,26 the English National Opera series, and the L'avant-scène opéra series.

In 1996, a group of Puccini scholars (including Vergilio Bernardoni, Julian Budden, Michele Girardi, Arthur Groos, Jürgen Maehder, Roger Parker, and Harold Powers) established the Centro Studi Giacomo Puccini. The Centro maintains archives in Lucca (Puccini’s hometown in Tuscany) and a website of other resources; it also sponsors conferences. Their initial conference in 1997 provided papers for the first of planned biannual journals, Studi pucciniani 1, in 1998. The second volume, Studi pucciniani 2 (2000), includes Arthur Groos’s study of Illica’s first libretto for Madama Butterfly. The third volume, Studi pucciniani 3 (2004), is comprised of papers from a 2001 conference focused on the new formal systems emerging in Italian opera just before and during Puccini’s compositional career.

Valuable new biographical volumes have appeared in the 1990s. The comprehensive biography by Dieter Schickling summarizes primary sources and includes

an appendix with a guide to Puccini's correspondence and a detailed chronology of his life.27

Michele Girardi's life and works volume is also a major landmark.28 Building on the author's earlier survey,29 it includes the most comprehensive bibliography published up to the time of its publication. According to its preface, Laura Basini's 2000 translation of the work is updated, revised, and corrected from the original.30 Linda Fairtile praises Girardi's integration of biographical sections and musical analysis, as well as his comprehension of Puccini's musical language. She also suggests that the work sets new standards for Puccini research.31 Other reviews of this volume are equally enthusiastic. Michael Oliver considered it the most important book on Puccini's music to that time.32

Two new biographies were published in 2002—Julian Budden's long-awaited volume in the Oxford Music and Musicians series33 and Mary Jane Phillips-Matz's


biography.\textsuperscript{34} Written from different scholarly perspectives, both volumes benefit from the authors’ previous works on Verdi and, in the case of Budden, additional definitive studies of late nineteenth-century opera.\textsuperscript{35}

Two dissertations of the 1980s focused solely on \textit{Madama Butterfly}. Marco Peretti’s 1983 dissertation considered the extensive revisions to the opera.\textsuperscript{36} Kimiyo Powils-Okano’s 1986 dissertation (in German) identifies original Japanese sources of melodies used by Puccini (she is frequently cited by other writers).\textsuperscript{37}

Several important dissertations on Puccini were written during the 1990s. Helen Greenwald’s 1991 dissertation demonstrates that Puccini’s first acts “project in microcosm the musical catalogue of an entire work,” and that small details within his first acts project the macrostructure of the whole.\textsuperscript{38} She uses the first acts and one-act operas to show how Puccini solved the problems of capturing audience interest, introducing the main characters, and presenting the argument, through her chapters on beginnings, tonality, rhythm, vocal discourse, texture, time and light, and macrostructure as they pertain to the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, \textit{Puccini: A Biography} (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002)
\item \textsuperscript{35} Philip Gossett reviews the Girardi, Budden, and Phillips-Matz biographies in the \textit{New York Review of Books}, vol. 50, no. 5 (March 27, 2003), contrasting Girardi and Budden’s approaches to the musical issues in Puccini’s operas. <www.nybooks.com> Accessed July 1, 2005.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Marco Peretti, ‘\textit{Madama Butterfly’ I-IV tra variante e ricomposizione: appunti e rilievi per una realizzazione scenica e musical} (Università degli studi di Venezia, 1983).
\item \textsuperscript{37} Kimiyo Powils-Okano, \textit{Puccini’s“Madama Butterfly”} (Bonn: Verlag für Systematische Musikwissenschaft, 1986).
\item \textsuperscript{38} Helen Greenwald, \textit{Dramatic Exposition and Musical Structure in Puccini’s Operas} (Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 1991), v.
\end{itemize}
large-scale musical and dramatic organization of his works.\(^{39}\) After developing her theoretical base, she applies the discussion and methodology to Acts I and II of \textit{La Bohème}.

Following Greenwald’s model, Micheal Anders uses Puccini’s final acts and conclusions of the one-act operas in a similar way. He notes how the musical organization “sustains the dramatic motivation until the very last moment,” and how “entrances and exits [serve] as structural devices.” He also treats the important use of recurring thematic motives at the conclusions, “to recall events and evoke emotional reaction.”\(^{40}\)

In her music theory dissertation, Deborah Burton seeks to distinguish the dramatic and musical “tools” (building blocks) of opera according to function (“illustrative” or “organizational”), and to apply these tools to an analysis of \textit{Tosca}. Her method provides a wealth of ideas for analytical approaches, and classifies the important musical tools as cadences, pitch classes, consonance-dissonance polarity, counterpoint, dynamics, form, harmonic syntax, intervallic content/class, vocal tessitura, melodic direction, metabole (transition from one rhythm to the next), meter, mode, motives and primary motivic materials (and interrelationship of motives), orchestration, phrase structure, register, rhythm, scales, and tempo.\(^{41}\)

\(^{39}\) Ibid., iv.


Min Ho deals with “leitmotifs” in three Puccini operas (La bohème, Tosca, and Madama Butterfly), in her five major sections: 1) identification of the leitmotifs; 2) analysis of key, rhythm, tempo, dynamics, orchestration, and dramatic situation for each appearance of each motif (only rarely does she include text); 3) analysis of the differences in the elements detailed in #2 between the original appearances and reappearances of the leitmotifs; 4) comparison of the leitmotif technique in the three operas; and 5) analysis and comparison of Puccini’s leitmotif style with that of other opera composers. Her major conclusions are that the musical elements of a motive are usually transformed in recurrences, that use of the pentatonic in leitmotifs is unique to Madama Butterfly (although she does not address sources of the authentic Japanese themes, and omits several prominent themes); that Madama Butterfly uniquely uses two motifs simultaneously, showing Puccini’s increasing development; and that leitmotifs set the dramatic atmosphere, identify, and express characters’ emotions.42

New archival findings during the 1980s focused attention on Puccini’s extensive revision and editing of his operas, and scholars have shown increasing interest in Puccini’s revisions, of both broad and specific focus. Suzanne Scherr’s dissertation deals with revisions to Manon Lescaut.43 Linda Fairtile’s more general but comprehensive study examines the various types of post-performance revisions that Puccini made to his operas,


“in order to determine whether his creative second (and often third and fourth) thoughts reveal his personal valuations of five basic elements of operatic composition—drama (text), structure, vocal melody, tonality, and orchestration.” Her focus is Puccini’s own re-evaluation of issues in works already being performed, and she notes that his operas existed “in a continual state of flux” during his lifetime.44

Several other scholars have also been attracted to the issue of Puccini’s revisions of *Madama Butterfly* (Marco Peretti’s 1983 dissertation was mentioned above). This was the most revised of all Puccini’s operas, partly motivated by the disastrous premiere and multiple disagreements between Puccini, his librettists, and publishers. The many revisions of the libretto, music, and staging of *Madama Butterfly* had significant effect on the centrality and power of the heroine, which will be discussed in Chapter Three. The first 1904 version (from the La Scala premiere), edited by Julian Smith, was performed at Teatro La Fenice in Venice in 1982, and a conference on the revisions of the opera was held in March of that year.45

Julian Smith was adamant that removal of the most offensive cultural stereotypes (primarily based on Loti) for the Paris version weakened the opera, and he, together with a few others, has argued for the original version. He considered the original opera’s strong characters appropriate to the verismo style, and felt that softening them to satisfy


45 Michele Girardi states that no proceedings of this conference were published, but that many of the findings presented at the conference “prompted a careful re-examination” by Mosco Carner in the revision of his monograph, published posthumously in 1992. Michele Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*, 199.
Parisian sensitivities “weakened enormously” the daring treatment and unconventional structure of Puccini’s opera, in a tragic metamorphosis resulting in a typical melodrama of the time.\textsuperscript{46}

Arthur Groos writes extensively about the motivations for revisions in his paper on the changes in Pinkerton’s character, concluding that one cannot speak of a definitive version, nor of the superiority of one version over another, given that the revisions depend on dramatic decisions made at the time of origin.\textsuperscript{47}

William Ashbrook\textsuperscript{48} looks at revisions to the character of Cio-Cio-San in a parallel way to Groos’ concentration on Pinkerton. Girardi also deals extensively with the versions and uses the Paris (1907) version for his analysis. Dieter Schickling has written a conclusive study of \textit{Butterfly} revisions,\textsuperscript{49} where he tabulates the four versions published by Ricordi, citing the research of Girardi and Fairtile. He concludes, from 1995 manuscript

\textsuperscript{46} Julian Smith, “A Metamorphic Tragedy,” \textit{Journal of the Royal Musicological Association} 106 (1979/80): 111. In reviewing a 2002 performance of this original version, Robert Thicknessse, however, suggests that this version “is so anti-American that it might have earned a regime change had it continued to play. Interestingly, what annoys Europeans about Americans these days is exactly what bugged the hell out of Puccini and his librettists 100 years ago.” See: <www.timesonline.co.uk> Accessed on October 29, 2002.


discoveries, that versions are not clearly definable. He considers the opera’s history, “a work in progress,” varying with each performance, without the consistent printing of performance changes in printed scores.\(^{50}\)

The centennial of the premiere of *Madama Butterfly* stimulated both musical and cultural studies. Julian Budden, with several Italian collaborators, contributed to a volume on the iconographic and literary history of the opera.\(^{51}\) In welcoming participants to the May 2004 international conference on "*Madama Butterfly*: L’orientalismo di fine secolo, l’approccio pucciniano, la ricezione," Arthur Groos announced the pending publication of a volume on sources and documents for the opera, to include the Italian translations of the short story and play actually used by Puccini’s librettists, the libretto for an act subsequently eliminated, the complete correspondence of Puccini with his librettists during the preparation of the opera, and early musical sketches.\(^{52}\)

Living in Nagasaki from the early 1980s, Brian Burke-Gaffney has researched the contexts of the city’s historical relations with European nations, clarifying many of the vague and mythical assumptions regarding Madame Butterfly’s historical basis.\(^{53}\) An important work by Ayako Kano provides detail on the Japanese geisha, Sadayakko, whose

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 528.


\(^{53}\) Brian Burke-Gaffney, *Star-crossed: A Biography of Madame Butterfly* (Norwalk, CT: East Bridge, 2004). The author credits Arthur Groos whose “groundbreaking work on the Madame Butterfly story is one of the pillars upon which this book stands,” 1. Burke-Gaffney and Lane Earns (professor of History at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh) have co-edited *Crossroads: A Journal of Nagasaki History and Culture*, since 1993.
performance provided Puccini with dramatic and musical ideas for his opera. Kano sets the career of the geisha in the context of Japan’s attempts to modernize, as well as construct the gender identity of “Japanese woman.” Lesley Downer produced a detailed but less rigorous full-length biography of Sadayakko two years later.

Organization

The initial chapters compile and integrate previous scholarly work in determining the social and musical context in which Puccini composed this opera. He developed within a period of both major mid-nineteenth century changes in the relationship of music to text in Italian opera and increasing foreign influences. In addition, Puccini chose subjects that reflected his own personal and cultural life, particularly in terms of prevalent attitudes toward Asians and women. In Madama Butterfly, he gravitated toward a protagonist of increasing centrality and power through the early literary and theater versions of her story, a direction that continued in Puccini’s many versions of the libretto and score.

Following a summary of the central elements of Puccini’s compositional style, the interpretation will demonstrate how Puccini’s musical-dramatic construction effectively depicts classical tragedy in this opera. Description and interpretation of the prominent themes that frame, define, and challenge the heroine, together with the interactions of

54 Ayako Kano, Acting Like a Woman in Modern Japan: Theatre, Gender, and Nationalism. (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001)

these themes, will comprise the basis of discussion for each act.56 The conclusions will reflect on the power of the heroine as depicted in her musical setting—the timeless effect on diverse audiences of her tragedy and triumph.

Since personal perspective influences all musical interpretations, I will readily admit that this study reflects not only my academic background in musicology and ethnomusicology, but also my study and experience as a classical singer, and eight years of my life spent in Asia.

56 Examples are taken from the 2005 Centennial Edition of the 1907 Ricordi score, plate 110000, reflecting the revisions for the 1906 Paris staging.
Chapter One: The Development of Puccini’s Compositional Aesthetic

Giacomo Puccini came of age as an opera composer during a period of major changes in European music and opera. He integrated aesthetic influences from France and Germany into the 300-year-old Italian operatic tradition, producing works which represent its culmination. His predecessor, Verdi, greatly modified the conventional operatic forms and text/music relations in his middle works in pursuit of the more naturalistic values becoming dominant in literature. An 1871 performance of Verdi’s Aida inspired Puccini to commit his career to opera, although he had originally intended to be a church composer (following three generations of his ancestors), and had also considered becoming a symphonic composer.

Puccini developed his values for the musical theater in an unusually rich environment. He was exposed to French theater and opera, trained in a conservatory by instructors steeped in the styles of French and German music, and mentored by several successful figures in contemporary Italian opera. This background increased his interest in naturalistic text setting and dramatic orchestration. The result was a unique blend of certain French and German features in his works, which continued to foreground the distinctive Italianate vocalità, essential for the success of any Italian opera. The beneficial patronage of Puccini’s publisher, Giulio Ricordi, further supported his development. There was much competition among opera publishing houses of this time for management of successful composers. Even though Puccini’s first operas were minimally successful, Ricordi remained optimistic regarding his potential, providing financial and emotional support for the composer’s continuing growth. This support also enabled Puccini to travel
widely, with several trips to Bayreuth to experience Wagner’s greatest operas, and many visits later to Paris and London for the staging of Puccini’s own operas.¹

The enduring popularity of Puccini’s operas is related to his unique ability to unify drama and text with music. Julian Budden asserts that Puccini’s stagecraft exceeds even that of Wagner in integrating “music, words and gesture into a single scenic concept.”²

The powerful new naturalistic effects, particularly the new type of dialogue and new role of the orchestra, were the result of progressive changes in European opera beginning early in the nineteenth century.

These were, in turn, a result of political, economic, and social evolution in the various European cultures, influencing literary values, support of the arts, censorship, music publication, etc. The economic changes were particularly significant in Italy, especially in the world of music publication, and deeply affected the relationships of composers with their librettists, as well as those with singers, conductors, and stage directors.³

¹ Giulio Ricordi sent Puccini and his librettist Fontana to Bayreuth in 1888, just before the completion of his second opera. He saw Meistersinger and probably Parsifal. Schickling notes that “perhaps the trip was bound up with the future business plans of... Ricordi, who had just bought the Italian Wagner publisher, Lucca.” The publisher again sent Puccini in 1889, “with a clear purpose: to propose cuts for the Italian première of Meistersinger planned for the following winter,” and he probably saw Parsifal again. See: Dieter Schickling, “Giacomo Puccini and Richard Wagner, A Little-Known Chapter in Music History,” In Giacomo Puccini L’uomo, il musicista, il panorama europeo: Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi su Giacomo Puccini nel 70° anniversario della morte, ed. Gabriella Biagi Ravenni and Carolyn Gianturco (Lucca: LIM, 1997), 520.


³ These changed relationships were especially evident in Puccini, whose role in shaping his librettis and setting them to music was unlike that of his predecessors and peers.
The external influences affecting Puccini’s development, however, were always balanced against his innate gifts and instincts. David Kimbell suggests that it was Puccini’s “sixth sense” that attracted him to intimacy, natural surface, and the textural ambience of French lyric opera, and away from the “pomposity and rhetoric of grand opera.”

To better understand the juxtaposition of cultural environment, temperament, and training that formed Giacomo Puccini’s aesthetic values, this chapter will provide a background of the musical and operatic world of mid-nineteenth century Italy, and its increasingly significant foreign influences. It will then summarize Puccini’s personal heritage, as well as the influence of his teachers, and other significant factors in his development as an opera composer. Finally, it will briefly trace the development of his dramatic values through his first five operas, as noted by some of their critics.

The Setting

Italian musical domination of Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Bach, Handel, Mozart, and Haydn had all looked to Italian models, had faded. By the nineteenth century, Italy’s major influence in the rest of Europe was limited to opera, particularly the operas of Rossini and his immediate successors. Budden suggests that aside from opera, “Italian music drifted into a European backwater,” due to its failure to come to terms with orchestral and chamber music. Stimulated by an

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increasing sense of Italy's loss of position in musical Europe, certain intellectuals had begun to form quartet and concert societies by the mid-nineteenth century. They also promoted the inclusion of chamber and orchestral music in the curriculum of several of the conservatories, outstanding among these being the conservatory in Milan.

The most important outside influence on Italian opera at this time was French. By the 1860s and 70s, the popularity of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* and *Le Prophète* rivalled the most successful Verdi operas, weakening the previous dominance of the Rossinian/Metastasian traditions. Budden quotes Arrigo Boito's statement that once Meyerbeer's works were appreciated, they "caused Italian operas to collapse by the hundreds like the bricks of the walls of Jericho: most of Bellini's, the greater part of Donizetti, almost all Rossini's . . . and some of Verdi's." Budden also describes the "stiff, awkward gait, clogged harmonies, and over-elaborate orchestral figuration" of an 1873 Italian opera which "tried to escape from the post-Rossinian prison-house without any idea of where to go," and asserts that Verdi could not have produced his mid-career monumental works without exposure to the broader European symphonic traditions that he experienced in Paris.

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6 The popularity of Meyerbeer and Wagner operas increased the need for better and larger orchestras, and created new responsibilities and roles of conductors. See: John Rosselli, "Italy Europeanized," in *Music and Musicians in Nineteenth Century Italy* (Portland, Oregon: Amadens Press, 1991), 122-26.


Verdi was experimenting with changes in the text/music relationship, as was Meyerbeer, who was already departing from rigid text/music formulae. Anselm Gerhard notes that Meyerbeer often sent Scribe (his librettist) “detailed rhythmical and metrical schemata of numbers which the librettist then had ‘only’ to fill in with text that made some kind of sense.” (Even earlier Cherubini, Mehul, and Spontini had dominated their librettists.) Meyerbeer could overrule any doubts of his librettists because of his great success. Since the object was to overwhelm the audience with every special effect possible, “the text lost all pretension to literary merit on its own account.”

The literary status of the libretto was devalued as composers sought to approach the ideal of Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk. Rather than using text to fit classical verse meters, the focus now was on audience comprehensibility, even through use of everyday speech. This “gradually eradicated all literary and formal qualities from librettos,” resulting in their resembling journalistic prose by mid-century. After Scribe, librettists no longer bothered publishing their libretti as independent literary works, and although some continued to go on sale, “the librettist’s name on the title page grew smaller and the composer’s larger.”

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10 Ibid., 321. Wagner was of significant influence in Paris. Thus his influence on Puccini was not only direct from Puccini’s study and travel, but indirect through Wagner’s influence on French opera.

11 Ibid., 322. Roger Parker refers to the profit to be made by earlier nineteenth-century Italian music publishers and librettists in selling printed libretti for opera productions, and notes that critics of the time tended to judge these operas on the literary value of their libretti, since scores were far less easily available, even if critics had been capable of dealing with them. See: Roger Parker, “On Reading Nineteenth-Century Opera: Verdi Through the Looking-Glass,” in Reading Opera, ed. Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 29.
Gerhard notes how the more confident composers such as Verdi and Puccini became even more involved in shaping the libretto than Meyerbeer. Their involvement extended to the structure of an entire opera in a prose sketch, which then needed only to be put into verse. Puccini was an active participant in the versification as well.

The rivalry between two major Italian music publishers, Ricordi and Lucca, promoted the influence of French opera in Italy. Although Ricordi had the Verdi opera rights, Lucca was publisher for Meyerbeer, Halevy, and Gounod whose Faust was performed more in Venice than any other opera between 1870 and 1890. Another publisher, Sonzogno, obtained the rights for Italian productions of Carmen in 1879. Giulio Ricordi also wanted to acquire some of the French works.

One of the most significant differences between Italian and French operatic traditions was the lack of a spoken theater tradition in Italy—drama was primarily opera, whereas French opera librettists had often been previously trained for the classical theater. Italians criticized French libretti for their lack of bre vità, an important value of Italian melodramma. In contrast with French grand opera’s lengthy narratives, Italians compressed text to get quickly to “the vocal moment.” This made Italian libretti sometimes seem abrupt and fragmented, especially in contrast with the French. In seeking bre vità (and at times in avoiding censorship), the use of verbal clichés became common. Smith credits Edward Cone for the idea that as text became more compressed,

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12 Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera*, 324.

it “abdicated to the music,” which could expand on emotions far more freely than words (no citation of Cone source). Words actually became “signposts” for the music. The heightened importance of the music, together with greatly increased size and power of orchestras, “swamped” the remaining “jumble” of lines into the overwhelming domination of the music. 14

Smith feels that Verdi’s use of the parola scenica15 was a response to this problem, and that the words actually became “verbal translations of what the music was expressing,” assuring the secondary position of the literary component. 16 Verdi discussed his concept of the parola scenica with his Aida librettist, Antonio Ghislanzoni, expressing these thoughts on the subject.

And the verse, the line, the stanza? I don’t know what to say; but when the action demands it, I would immediately abandon rhythm, rhyme, stanza; I would make versi sciolti [unrhymed lines of variable length] in order to say neatly and clearly everything the action demands. Unfortunately, in the theater poets and composers must sometimes have the talent not to write either poetry or music. 17

Verdi had learned from French grand opera, with “its exceptional highlighting of dramatic climaxes,” the importance of such effects, which he transmitted to Italy. It

14 Ibid., 195.

15 Roger Parker defines this term as “an utterance . . . to be used at a point of culmination; a succinct verbal summary of one particular strand of the drama.” Roger Parker, “Analysis: Act I in Perspective,” in Mosco Carner, Giacomo Puccini: Tosca (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 120. Parker also suggests that, “in Puccini’s case, one has the impression that every word was a potential parola scenica.”

16 Patrick Smith, The Tenth Muse, 195.

17 Letter from Verdi to Antonio Ghislanzoni dated August 17, 1870; cited and translated by Roger Parker in “On Reading Nineteenth-Century Opera,” 300.
became his priority to impress an audience with realistic visual spectacle.\textsuperscript{18} Ghislazoni expressed this goal: “The interest of an opera . . . ought to result almost exclusively from events . . . comprehensible to the eye.”\textsuperscript{19} Budden concludes that this drastic revision of libretto style and language, rather than subject matter, is the hallmark of the verismo style, and the logical outcome of a campaign in which both Verdi and Boito had been engaged for over thirty years.\textsuperscript{20}

The influence of Wagner—the through-composition of his operas, and his concept of Gesamtkunstwerk—lies beneath many of the evolving ideas regarding libretti in both French opera and Verdi’s operas. It is Budden’s assertion, however, that the initial influence of Wagner operas in Italy was the orchestral sound, and only later the idea of organization through recurring themes. Although some composers experimented with recurring themes, they did not approach Wagner’s continuous music style because of “the constant demand of Italian singers and audiences for the finite, autonomous vocal period which no composer could afford to neglect.”\textsuperscript{21}

In discussing later nineteenth-century French influence on Italian opera, Budden shows how Massenet also moved away from French grand opera values, influencing the younger Italian composers especially in the style of his text setting.

\textsuperscript{18} Anselm Gerhard, The Urbanization of Opera, 325.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 326. Cited and translated from Antonio Ghislazoni, “Del Libretto per musica,” Giornale Capriccio, August 15, 1877.

\textsuperscript{20} Julian Budden, “A Problem of Identity,” 280.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 274-75.
the heavier accents of their own language. He was a master of the elastic vocal line whose varying pace and fluid irregularity would catch precisely the mood and character of the singer ... [here] Italian composers faced two obstacles: the heavier accents of their own language ... and the lingering reluctance of their librettists to stray outside the traditional bounds of Metastasian verse ... \(^{22}\)

The huge success of Massenet's 1877 *Le Roi de Lahore*, first in Paris, then in Milan, convinced the publisher Ricordi that he had found in the thirty-five-year old French composer a foreigner whose works could compete with those of Gounod, Meyerbeer, Thomas, and Wagner, the rights of which were owned by the Lucca publishers. He even commissioned Massenet's next opera, *Hérodiade*, and although its 1882 Italian reception in Milan was disappointing, Budden insists that it is above all to Massenet that the music of *verismo* owes its "altered gait." The melodies of Italian composers began to be set to the freer, often "swooning" rhythm, contrasting with the more regular rhythms Verdi implemented.\(^{23}\)

In 1890, the one-act opera of Pietro Mascagni, a former Milan roommate of Puccini, drastically changed the course of Italian opera. Mascagni consulted Puccini when he was planning to submit his score for *Cavalleria Rusticana* to the Sonzogno publishers' one-act competition.\(^{24}\) Although Puccini was shocked at its violent subject, he admired certain aspects of the score and asked Ricordi to look at it (thinking Ricordi might take advantage of the opportunity, as he had earlier with Puccini's first opera). But Ricordi was not at all interested; Mascagni submitted the score to the competition, and won over  

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 275.  


\(^{24}\) Puccini had submitted his first opera to this competition in 1883—see Chapter Two.
seventy-two other entries. The opera swept Italy and became known internationally, serving as a prototype of the new genre known as verismo. Although Mascagni and his contemporaries are now identified as representing the late nineteenth-century melodramatic Italian style, many extra-Italian influences, especially literary, helped to form it (see page 27). The Massenet influence, in particular, enabled these Italian composers to string “colloquial exchanges on a tissue of continuous orchestral chatter, and to work up rapid, overwhelming, emotional explosions.”

With instrumental music enjoying new prestige in Italy, from Cavalleria on each opera was expected to have an orchestral intermezzo or interlude. Although this sounded like Wagner imitation, Rosselli notes that most of these intermezzi were simple strings of tunes, while only Puccini combined and developed themes in almost symphonic structure.

25 Michele Girardi notes that “until the completion of Manon Lescaut, Puccini had a function . . . of artistic advisor to the Ricordi firm, and in this role he had the good sense to draw Ricordi’s attention to Cavalleria Rusticana before it won the Sonzogno competition . . . Ricordi lost some very good business. . . . Puccini, on the other hand, had demonstrated impartiality to his friend and colleague Mascagni, as well as a good nose for business.” Michele Girardi, Puccini: His International Art, trans. Laura Basini (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 58-59.

26 Although Puccini graciously expressed no jealousy at the time, Girardi notes that in 1895 Puccini complained that “Le Villi initiated the type today called ‘Mascagnian,’ and nobody gives me due credit.” The orchestral intermezzo, melodic doubling, and thematic peroration are mentioned as common elements. Ibid., 35. Carner notes that the symphonic intermezzo between Le Vill’s two acts “left its mark on the famous ‘Preghiera’ of Cavalleria, indeed a number of ‘Mascagnisms’ . . . turn out to have grown on Puccini’s tree.” Mosco Carner, Puccini: A Critical Biography, 3rd ed. (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1992), 336.


28 Ibid., 132.
Puccini's Heritage, Training, and Other Influences

Giacomo Puccini’s father, Michele, was a fourth-generation organist/choirmaster in Lucca, assuming his two sons would follow the family tradition. Because the boys’ father died when Giacomo was five, his mother’s brother (also from a long line of musicians) became his first music teacher. The elder son showed talent, and was sent to study at Lucca’s Istituto Musicale Pacini, where he mastered counterpoint and vocal writing, and began to study orchestral scores, including those of Verdi operas. Lucca had a rich cultural life in the 1870s, including symphonic concerts and opera. Julian Budden, however, indicates that its spoken theater was of better quality than the operas, “which relied on local second-rate artists.” French companies regularly performed stage works by Dumas père and fils, Sardou, and Alfred de Musset in Lucca. Although Puccini did not understand the language, he was a keen observer of the staging characteristics of the works.29

Exposure to these high-quality French plays probably helped shape Puccini’s values even more than the inferior operas in Lucca. However, seeing the Verdi Aida at eighteen opened him to the future possibility of writing music for the theater. Although he credits this experience with changing his life focus as a musician, he did not immediately begin writing operas, composing a mass (with orchestral sections dominating) for his diploma requirement from the Istituto.

Supported by several benefactors, Puccini went to the Milan Conservatory in 1880 at the age of twenty-two. He was unusually fortunate in the quality of instruction he

received in major European contemporary musical thought. He studied briefly with Antonio Bazzini, who was one of the few Italian musicians of the time who had lived in Paris and had toured the major European cities as a young violin virtuoso. Bazzini returned to Italy in 1864 to compose, formed his own permanent quartet, and by 1870 was Italy’s foremost exponent of instrumental music. He became a professor of composition at the Milan Conservatory in 1873, and director in 1882 (at which time Puccini began to study with the composer Ponchielli).  

Amintore Galli, a specialist in French music, advisor to the publisher Sonzogno, and one of the most important figures in music criticism at the time, taught Puccini the history and philosophy of music. Girardi notes that he was probably the leading Italian expert on Wagner’s aesthetics and musical system, and offered a uniquely balanced view on both French music and Wagner. Galli helped Puccini to understand how Wagner’s dramatic aesthetics related to harmonic technique, and this approach “allowed him to cultivate his natural propensity towards thematic reminiscence and complex chords in relation to the drama.”

Although Puccini received consistently high grades, he had poor attendance in subjects which interested him less, such as “Poetic and Dramatic Literature.” Michael Elphinstone cites a letter Puccini scrawled in his notebook: “Alas!!! Oh! Oh God!!! Help


31 Ibid., 57.

32 Michele Girardi, Puccini: His International Art, 6-7.
for Goodness’ sake!!! Enough!!! It’s too much . . . I’m going to sleep; I’m dying!!! He also wrote in a letter to his mother, “I’m here in my lesson of Dramatic Literature which bores me to tears.”

Jay Nicolaisen insists that Ponchielli, Puccini’s main composition teacher, is a necessary part of the progression from Verdi to Puccini. Ponchielli’s style reflected Verdi’s operas of the late 1860s and early 1870s, still based on the “number” (although with a diminished role of the solo aria). Ponchielli revised even his most successful mature works, as did Puccini. He was gifted in both melody and orchestration, and used reminiscence effectively. Nicolaisen describes Ponchielli’s “stunning” use of the recalling rosary theme in his 1880 revision of La Gioconda. This innovation continued to influence the next generation of Italian composers, especially Puccini, and possibly even Verdi. Ponchielli’s innovation, which earned the highest praise from the critics, is outlined by Nicolaisen:

1. A tune which has been made the musical and dramatic focus of the scene or act . . . returns in a broad orchestral statement meant to impress us once again with all the horror or poignancy of the situation as the curtain falls.

2. The tempo is slow, so that the return seems to have more than just a cadential function.

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35 Ibid., 83.

36 Ibid., 96.
3. The restatement is leisurely, in the sense that a substantial portion of the tune is repeated before cadential formulas begin.

4. The return is tied to the action and has dramatic significance.\textsuperscript{37}

Filippo Filippi, Milan’s leading critic, praised this technique in his review of \textit{La Gioconda}:

\ldots when the word, with the help of melody or of declamation, has said all it can, then the orchestra comes in to say the rest, and with a power, an efficacy, an expression that are truly marvelous. With a secret such as this, Ponchielli, the other night in the so new and terrible third act finale, made the public \ldots jump into the air.\textsuperscript{38}

Puccini learned well from his teacher. Some of the most dramatic points in \textit{La bohème}, \textit{Tosca}, and \textit{Madama Butterfly} use the same technique and produce a similar effect in audiences.

During Puccini’s conservatory days, however, young composers constantly heard Bizet and Massenet praised in the press.\textsuperscript{39} Like other conservatory students of his time, Puccini had the opportunity to see nearly all the major operas of Bizet, Gounod and Thomas at La Scala. In his letters, he mentions not only \textit{Carmen}, but also Auber’s \textit{Fra Diavolo}, and Meyerbeer’s \textit{La stella del nord}. This exposure to French opera further established Puccini’s “direct link with the French theatrical world \ldots manifest in his use of harmony and tone color,” as well as in his frequent choice of French subjects or French authors.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 96-97.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 98, cited and translated from \textit{La Perseveranza}, February 14, 1880.

\textsuperscript{39} Puccini arrived at the conservatory in November of 1880, the year of Ponchielli’s \textit{La Gioconda} success in February, but also “the year following one of Massenet’s highly feted sojourns.” See: Jay Nicolaisen, \textit{Italian Opera in Transition}, 190.

\textsuperscript{40} Michele Girardi, \textit{Puccini: His International Art}, 8.
But he composed a purely instrumental piece—the *Capriccio sinfonico*—for his 1883 graduation exercise. This was performed by a student orchestra and praised by Filippo Filippi, who described Puccini as “a decisive and very rare musical temperament, one that is specifically symphonic.”\(^{41}\) Puccini used portions of this work for the opening theme in *La Bohème*.

In summary, a number of factors strongly influenced Puccini’s development: the dramatic values of French spoken theater and the text-setting styles of French opera, the increasing importance of orchestral music to Italy and the models of its use in foreign operas, the privilege of training with instructors steeped in the aesthetics of French and German music, and mentoring by a perfectionist composition teacher who experimented with a large orchestra and the effective use of reminiscence in his operas. Each played a part in the development of Giacomo Puccini’s aesthetic values for the musical stage.

**The First Five Operas**

This section briefly discusses Puccini’s operas preceding *Madama Butterfly*, and some of their criticism, as a mirror of his evolving values. Recurring themes in this criticism presage some of the ultimate qualities and strengths of *Madama Butterfly*. Jay Nicolaisen asserts that each of Puccini’s first three operas showed major stylistic advances, and that he rapidly developed confidence in his techniques, probably faster than any other Italian composer, including Verdi.\(^{42}\)


**Le Villi**

Just after Puccini’s 1883 graduation from the Milan Conservatory, he learned of the Sonzogno competition for a one-act opera. The publisher was seeking shorter, simpler operas with faster-moving action to attract the public.\(^{43}\) Puccini’s teacher, Ponchielli, helped him obtain the services of Ferdinando Fontana, a supporter of the *scapigliatura* movement, as librettist.\(^{44}\) Fontana suggested the fantastic story of *Le villi*, which Puccini set and submitted to the competition.\(^{45}\) Although most scholars attribute Puccini’s failure to win the competition to his illegible handwriting, Girardi suggests that Giulio Ricordi knew of the work and as a friend of Ponchielli (Puccini’s teacher, and chair of the selection committee), influenced him not to choose Puccini’s work for the Sonzogno prize. That would have given Ricordi’s rival publishers first chance at the young composer and his future works.\(^{46}\)

Subsequently, a number of friends including the influential Arrigo Boito, raised funds for the performance of an expanded *Le Villi* at Milan’s Teatro del Verme in May,
Nicolaisen summarizes the unprecedented critical acclaim for a first (and student) work, which praised the harmonies, melodies, and instrumental scoring.

Filippo Filippi admired Puccini’s melodic gifts and polished workmanship, but cautioned that Puccini overdid the symphonic element. His assessment possibly influenced Verdi’s famous judgment: “It seems that the symphonic element predominates in him. [But] ... opera is opera and symphony is symphony; and I don’t think ... it’s a good idea to write a symphonic piece merely for the pleasure of making the orchestra dance.”

Budden reports that the day after the final performance, Ricordi invited Puccini and Fontana to his villa on Lake Cuomo to commission a full length opera, having bought the rights to Le Villi. The subsequent patronage and friendship of Ricordi, who felt he had discovered Verdi’s successor, was the most important result of this first opera for Puccini. The Casa Ricordi granted Puccini a monthly stipend and continued to support him even after the lengthy delay in completion of his next opera and its lack of acclaim.

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47 The orchestra included several students from the Conservatory, among them Mascagni on the double bass.


50 Ibid., 81. Cited and translated from Verdi letter to O. Arrivabene, 10 June 1884, in Annibale Alberti: *Verdi intimo* (Verona, 1981), 311-13. (No publisher given). In a subsequent work, Budden, *Puccini: His Life and Works*, reports a letter from Emanuele Muzio to Ricordi, citing a letter he’d received from Verdi. Verdi stated that Ricordi had “at last found what you’ve been looking for for thirty years, a true maestro—one Puccini who, it seems, possesses qualities out of the ordinary.” Undated letter quoted in Franco Abbiati, *Guiseppe Verdi*, 4 vols. (Milan, 1959) iv, 248.
Edgar

Fontana chose a script based on Alfred de Musset's dramatic poem, La coupe et les lèvres, for Puccini's next opera, Edgar, possibly because of its resemblance to the plot of Carmen. The composer took five years to complete this second opera. Most criticism was negative, including that of G.B. Nappi, who cited the "improbability of the episodes" and "incoherence of characters without any special personality." He also foreshadowed later criticism that Puccini catered too much to the grosser public tastes, stating that "Puccini desires those effects that were able to please the public when tastes were not yet as refined as it appears they are today." (This thread of criticism has continued to the present.) Giulio Ricordi defended his protégé, urging patience for the maturing young composer: "Edgar is the product of a composer of genius; of a genius not yet mature."

Neither Le villi nor Edgar greatly inspired Puccini's instinctive sensibilities. From Edgar on, however, Puccini insisted on control of his libretti, preferring stories already

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51 While preparing this opera, Puccini endured several personal crises: his mother had died shortly after the 1884 Le villi premiere, and his married mistress, in Lucca, Elvira Gemiani, became pregnant with his child (born the following year) and joined him in Milan, with her young daughter. The death of Ponchielli in 1886 was another stress for Puccini.

52 Jay Nicolaisen, Italian Opera in Transition, 206, 203, cited and translated from La perseveranza, 22-23 April, 1889. Nicolaisen notes progress in character realization, however, in the quality of the two arias for Fidelia and the consistent treatment she is given throughout the work. "Her music brings her to life as the prototype of Mimi, Butterfly, and Liu...[with] the gentle wistfulness that is such an important trait of the best Puccini heroines." 213-14. Nicolaisen also sees an evolution in Puccini's use of thematic recall and use of the orchestra to establish an emotional state, as well as a more advanced harmonic style, with increasing use of seventh and ninth chords, and use of the major seventh chord as a consonant harmony. 207, 214.

53 Ibid., 203, cited and translated from La gazzetta musicale di Milano, April 28, 1889.
tested on the stage in plays or previous operas. He also became extremely demanding of
his librettists in the shaping of plot and poetic detail, stating that he considered work on
the libretto “a creative act . . . as important as its musical setting . . . the basis of an opera
is the subject and its dramatic treatment.”54

*Manon Lescaut*

Puccini finally achieved local and international success with *Manon Lescaut*, based
on the Abbé Prévost story of Manon, on which Massenet had already written an opera.55
Apparently Puccini did not see Massenet’s score until the libretto for his own opera was
already well under way. Once he had seen it, however, he tried to avoid using the same
episodes, creating major problems in cohesion for his many librettists.56 There were
deeply divisive arguments among librettists and composer, and ultimately publishers
credited no author for the published libretto. This first opera for which Puccini chose the
plot and controlled the libretto became a great success in Italy. Here he could finally
apply his conservatory training, particularly the lessons of Wagner and Massenet. He was


55 Massenet’s *Manon* was not performed in Italy until after the February 1, 1893 premiere of
Puccini’s version (although Italian performances of Massenet’s *Le Roi de Lahore* began in 1878 and
*Hérodiade* in 1882).

56 Five different authors contributed to the libretto—first Leoncavallo, then Marco Praga and
Domenico Oliva, and finally Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, with Giulio Ricordi assisting and Puccini
supervising the whole operation. This final team produced the next three most successful of Puccini’s
operas.
able to set the action in symphonic musical structures and represent characters' situations, emotions, and relationships in musical themes.  

Critics who attended the 1893 Turin premiere noted that melody still dominated, in spite of the through-composed, symphonic nature of the work. Giovanni Pozza stated that

The music . . . has the . . . unfolding and the style of the great symphonists, without renouncing the expression and the interruptions required by the drama. And without renouncing . . . the “italianità” of the melody. Puccini is truly an Italian genius. His song is that of our paganism, of our artistic sensuality: it caresses us, penetrates us.

Pozza realized that Puccini had effectively utilized Wagnerian techniques within the Italian vocally-dominated idiom, so that Italian audiences could relate to the new style. This style predicted the future of Italian opera.

George Bernard Shaw noted the same qualities in his review of the 1894 London production when he commented that “In Manon Lescaut the domain of Italian opera is enlarged by an annexation of German territory.” He goes on to praise Puccini’s melodic gifts which, in addition to his other skills, gave Shaw reason to find Puccini “more like the heir of Verdi than any of his rivals.”


58 Jay Nicolaisen, Italian Opera in Transition, 238, cited and translated from Corriere della sera, February 23, 1893.

59 Ibid., 239.

La Bohème

Three highly successful collaborations with Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa (who had finalized the Manon Lescaut libretto) followed. In the first, La Bohème, Puccini’s involvement in shaping the text led to frequent arguments, with Ricordi often mediating. Giacosa, an eminent writer and poet in his own right, threatened to resign a number of times. But Puccini usually dominated because of his instinctive sense of theater. The source of the libretto was Henry Murger’s autobiographical novel of life among artists of the Latin quarter in Paris, Scènes de la vie de Bohème. Here, as previously in Manon Lescaut, Puccini extracted from somewhat loose literary sources an opera with a strong central heroine. The opera premiered at Turin’s Teatro Reggio on February 1, 1896, three years after the premiere of Manon Lescaut. Arturo Toscanini, the theatre’s new musical director, conducted. Some critics expected a work more like the tragic romance of Manon Lescaut, and found the new opera more restrained and less inventive. Others felt the opera to be “lightweight,” “to show a deplorable decline in Puccini’s abilities,” and “to have been written in haste.” But still others praised its new style, impressionistic harmony, and natural effects.

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61 Only six weeks previously, Toscanini had made musical history by conducting Wagner’s Götterdämmerung in the same theatre, which Carner suggests may have prejudiced the critics: “Having imbibed so intoxicating a potion of Wagnerian transcendentalism they must have found it hard to descend to the world of everyday realities which surround the four Bohemians and their amours, a world that was bound to strike them as insubstantial and frivolous.” Mosco Carner, Puccini: A Critical Biography, 102.


The opera achieved a triumph in Palermo the following April, and was soon famous throughout Italy. It was performed in Buenos Aires in early summer, and in Manchester, England, the following year. In 1897 it was performed in Vienna. When Puccini and Tito Ricordi (the son of Giulio) supervised rehearsals for the first French production in Paris on June 13, 1898, the reception was far more sympathetic than that in Italy. The critic Camille Bellaigue, close friend of Boito and a staunch anti-Wagnerian, was very familiar with contemporary Italian opera. His essay in the *Revue des deux mondes* indicated that he understood the reality Puccini depicted in *La Bohème*. Bellaigue sensed that the opera created through its music “multiple layers of nostalgia: for bohemian Paris; for carefree, ardent youth; and, perhaps most crucially, for the great days of Italian vocal lyricism.” But the quality Bellaigue most admired in Puccini’s work, much influenced by French literature and musical styles, was actually the *italianità* of the melody. Paris productions of Puccini operas represent a large proportion of the total productions of his works from their premieres until 1965 in the world’s major opera houses. During this period, 27% of all major world productions of Puccini operas took

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64 In Vienna, Eduard Hanslick was offended by *La Bohème*, as he had been by Italian verismo of the 1890s. He found the comic scenes “dry, tortured and tiresome,” and especially resented the domination of text over music in the “chattery dialogue,” as well as frequent tempo changes and unprepared modulations. He considered Puccini to have been “seduced by that larger pernicious force currently loose in the artistic world—realism.” Steven Schrader, “A Critic’s Nightmare,” *Opera News* 51 (1987): 20-21.

65 “The reality [the music] searches for . . . [is] concrete, palpable reality . . . This surface reality, which is to profound truth what decor or costume [. . .] are to thought or feeling, M. Puccini’s music expresses marvellously [. . .] sometimes by renouncing itself . . . [In the death of Mimi there is] a music from which music is almost absent, in which speech . . . replaces song, in which even silence has perhaps more importance and effectiveness than sound . . .” Arthur Groos and Roger Parker, *Giacomo Puccini: La Bohème*, 136. Cited and translated from *Revue des deux mondes* 148 (Paris, 1898, 470-71).
place in Paris: 30% of the world’s *La Bohème* productions, 36% of *Tosca*, and 30% of *Madama Butterfly*, showing that the French had a great affinity for Puccini’s French-influenced operas.66

*Tosca*

The source for Puccini’s next opera was yet another French work. Fontana had suggested Sardou’s play to Puccini as an operatic subject a few months after the first production of *Edgar*. At that time, Puccini hesitated to commit to such a violent subject as he worked with the more sentimental characters of *Manon Lescaut* and *La Bohème*. However, after receiving praise from both Sardou and Verdi for Illica and Giacosa’s evolving libretto, Puccini grew more enthusiastic. The adaptation of the *Tosca* text went relatively more smoothly, compared with work on the two previous operas, since its source was a play. Once again, establishing ambience mattered most to Puccini. Having successfully evoked a Paris of youth, poverty, and love, he now sought to evoke eighteenth-century Catholic Rome.

The opera succeeded with the public immediately, although critics of the premiere performance found the libretto unsuited to Puccini’s talents. Alfredo Colombani declared that the main challenge for Puccini was to “adapt the music to naked facts and swift-changing incidents and to a dialogue fragmentary, rapid and agitated.” He felt Puccini succeeded in ennobling an action which might otherwise have suggested the “most

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reprehensible vulgarity,” but that the opera still suffered from the “defects of the original drama—psychological poverty and an excess of melodramatic situations.”

London reviews were mixed, one noting that “[we were] little prepared for the revolting effects produced by musically illustrating the torture and murder scenes of Sardou’s play. . . what has music to do with a lustful man chasing a defenseless woman or the dying kicks of a murdered scoundrel?” Although Mosco Carner in his Tosca monograph balances this with descriptions of lavish praise for the London performance, it is curious that he considers a statement by a Mercure de France critic to represent Parisian press reception: “The opera is coarsely puerile, pretentious and vapid.” He also cites the Neue Freie Presse of Vienna’s criticism of “psychological discrepancies and violent contrasts.” On the positive side, Julian Budden quotes the assessment of Ippolito Valletta (who confessed to old-fashioned tastes) concerning Puccini’s use of specific stylistic devices. He found Puccini to be “talented at using successions of fourths, delayed


69 Mosco Carner, Tosca, 68.

70 Ibid., 70. It seems especially odd that Carner chose this among all French reviews since Cecil Hopkinson’s figures (see page 40 of this paper) show Tosca as the favorite Puccini opera in Paris.

71 Gustave Mahler refused to present the opera while he was director of the Vienna Hofoper, but he saw it in Poland and ridiculed it in a letter to his wife in 1903, “Needless to say, the work was another sham masterpiece. Nowadays, any cobbler orchestrates to perfection.” Carner, Giacomo Puccini: Tosca, 70.
resolution of dissonance, contrasting rhythms and syncopations, rapid and curious modulations, supple instrumental textures, and pleasing variations in sonority.”

As can be seen from the critical summaries above, by the time Puccini began his composition of *Madama Butterfly*, he had achieved much growth in plot and scenic design, realistic text setting, management of orchestral and vocal timbres, effective use of recalling themes, continuity of orchestral language, rhythmic sophistication, and expertise in harmonizing modes.

**Puccini and His Librettists**

Puccini and his librettists saw potential opera subjects from quite different perspectives. The librettists sought primarily a realistic dramatic structure, while Puccini’s musical inspiration was stimulated by the implied ambience of a subject. Roger Parker suggests that the individual settings of the operas were the most distinctive elements and that there is “an increasing tendency for each location to carry its own musical analogue.” Changes in the settings for most of Verdi’s plots are possible (*Un ballo in maschera* was transferred from Stockholm to Boston, for example) without changing the basic drama, but changing the setting of a Puccini opera would be “unthinkable” Parker suggests that this intense focus on setting derives from Puccini’s awareness of his limitations: “his musical style was not sufficiently flexible to allow complex musical

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72 Julian Budden, *Puccini*, 199. Quoted from Ippolito Valletta in *Nuova antologia*, no further information given.


74 Ibid.
distinctions between the various characters of an opera,” and sees his endless search for operatic subjects as a reflection of his “musical sterility as much as of dramatic fastidiousness.”

Once Puccini had settled on a subject, music often came to him before his librettists had prepared the texts. Frequently the poets were expected to fit words to existing music requiring not only a particular metrical pattern but also a particular vowel sequence. Patrick Smith notes that a composer could take advantage of having two librettists, playing one against the other, until he got his way.

Even though he often conceived the music first, poetic meter was important to Puccini. Verdi had generally created his musical form based on the poetic drafts, but for Puccini his musical idea determined the musical form, which in turn determined the verse meter. He was naturally inclined to create a musical image of the plot and setting, and to move progressively away from formal structures of the past.

From Puccini’s La Bohème on,

A whole system of metres which had served Italian opera for two centuries quietly dissolved. Under the influence of Luigi Illica... quinari, senari, settenari, ottonari, decasillabi and endecasillabi gave way to casually rhymed—or even unrhymed lines of irregular length referred to jokingly by Giuseppe Giacosa as ‘illicasillabi’. Indeed, Puccini was unable to handle any

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75 Ibid.

76 Ibid, 120.

77 Patrick Smith, The Tenth Muse, 292.

other form of text; a romanza in regular metre, he used to say, brought on a semi-seizure. 79

Puccini also carried the Italian melodramatic values of brevità and compression (mentioned above in regard to Verdi) as far as they could go. Carner criticizes these developments as excessive, since they compromised character delineation: “Puccini sometimes overshoots the mark. It leads him to over-compression and the suppression of dramatic and psychological details necessary for fully convincing motivation of the characters and the action.” 80 Donald Jay Grout comments on this tendency among Puccini’s generation of composers, in contrast with Verdi. Impressed with Verdi’s melodic high points, later composers tried “to write operas which should consist entirely of such melodic high points, just as the verismo composers had tried to write operas consisting entirely of melodramatic shocks.” 81

This chapter has summarized significant aspects of Puccini’s musical environment, training, and early opera composition that prepared him to create the powerful heroine in Madama Butterfly. The following chapter relates Puccini’s commitment to this story—examining his focus on heroine-centered subjects, his preferred heroine type, and his attraction to exoticism both for ambience and for increasing his musical palette.


80 Mosco Carner, Puccini: A Critical Biography, 313.

Chapter Two: Puccini's Choice of Subjects—Life and Art

When Puccini was in London to oversee the June 1900 premiere of *Tosca* at Covent Garden, the stage manager, Frank Nielson, encouraged him to attend a one-act play entitled *Madame Butterfly: A Tragedy of Japan* by David Belasco, a prominent American playwright. Although he had seen Sardou's *Tosca* while composing the opera, this was the first time experiencing a drama inspired Puccini's choice of subject. Not understanding a word, he was struck by the poignancy of the abandoned heroine's dilemma, especially the theatrical potential of her fourteen-minute silent vigil and realized that this scene a perfect example of one of his major values for the theatre: *l'evidenza della situazione*. Butterfly seemed to represent a culmination of all the gentle, suffering women of his previous operas, and he immediately applied to Belasco for rights to produce the opera, recognizing his favorite theme in the *japonisme* idiom so popular at the time, especially in London and Paris.

This chapter will examine some of the factors possibly influencing Puccini's choice of this play as a subject. Just as his compositional aesthetics were greatly affected

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2 Puccini might have been less attracted to the character if he could have understood her crude pidgin (see Chapter Three).

3 David Belasco was an innovative New York stage director. Stage lighting was his specialty (from the time that the first gas lights were available in New York), and the effect of the passing of time from dusk to dawn achieved by the lighting in Madame Butterfly's silent 14-minute vigil was considered his greatest achievement. Julian Budden, *Puccini: His Life and Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 228. Brian Burke-Gaffney notes Belasco's favorite theatrical devices, undoubtedly appealing to Puccini, as "the dramatic portrayal of a strong but vulnerable heroine, and the use of stunning stage effects to entertain a crowd." *Starcrossed*, 96.
by developments in the European musical and opera world of his times, his choices of
subject were affected by the contemporary socio-cultural world. In an effort to
understand the racial and gender issues in Madama Butterfly, and Puccini's attraction to a
subject which so interweaves them, it is appropriate to examine some of those issues in fin
de siècle Europe. A brief consideration of late nineteenth-century (and Puccini's personal)
attitudes toward women will precede summaries of the history of exoticism/orientalism in
opera, the relationship of orientalism to attitudes regarding women, and the japonisme of
Puccini's time.

Carner characterizes the fin de siècle as "an age spiritually unsettled, self-
questioning, self-divided and marked by inner contradictions about the significance of life
and art." This he attributes to the emergence of the ideas of Marx, Darwin, and Freud,
which loosened previously stable beliefs. Unstable social values resulted in a focus on
disillusionment and despair in the arts. Both the more distant and outer world, geographic
and cultural, and the inner psychological world attracted artists to symbolic
representations. Puccini's creative career coincided with the height of this period, and
we can observe his deep interest in both the inner and outer man—his personal life
experiences, as well as conditions in the wider world—in his choice of opera subjects and
the musico-dramatic style to which he set them.

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5 Ibid., 298.
Women

Puccini was not satisfied with his first two operas, for which Fontana had provided both plot and libretto. Thereafter, he became almost compulsive at choosing subjects (preferring works already staged), and controlling the evolving libretti, as well as exerting considerable influence (and making numerous revisions) in the subsequent productions. As noted in Chapter One, the final librettists (Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa) for Puccini's first successful opera, Manon Lescaut, prepared the libretti for the following three, La Bohème, Tosca, and Madama Butterfly. All three, highly successful, were based in whole or partially on French stage or literary works, and in all three Puccini succeeded in defining a strong heroine who had not existed as such in the literary sources.

From the beginning, Puccini centered his operas on women, in contrast with his predecessor, Verdi, in whose operas men outnumber women by more than two to one. In general, earlier nineteenth-century literature represents women as passive and men as heroic and more political, and Verdi's operas feature these men in their "'predatory acquisition' of political power, family inheritance, and women."6

Dependency, fear of abandonment, and suffering are often subtexts for Puccini's heroines, beginning with the first, Anna (Le villi, 1884), seen by William Weaver to be

“the emblematic Puccini heroine . . . genuinely innocent, her encounter with the reality and treachery of the real world kills her.”7 Puccini’s succeeding heroines develop this basic model, although their situations vary, each struggles valiantly to survive until “reality finds and crushes her.”8 In her first aria, Anna sings over and over Non ti scordar di me (Don’t forget me), as her lover prepares for a journey, he betrays her, and she dies of a broken heart. An equally devoted Fidelia, heroine of Edgar (1889) is also abandoned, and then killed by her rival. Women’s fear of abandonment and its implication for their survival is a theme in all Puccini’s operas, up to and including Madama Butterfly.9

Carner notes Puccini’s continuing search for stories of women who are weak and dependent, often “tarnished in one way or another, social outcast[s] of doubtful virtue,” but also “gentle, tender, affectionate and childlike” and “characterized by self-sacrifice.” Although the musical style of Puccini’s later opera La fanciulla del West (1910) differs greatly from that of his three more successful middle period operas, a statement by its heroine Minnie also reflects the earlier heroines: “I am nothing but a poor little girl,

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8 Ibid.

9 In his 1988 work on Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), Lawrence Lipking sees men’s identification with abandoned women in literature as expressing their own deep fear of abandonment, which males cannot otherwise express in the contemporary world.
obscure and good for nothing.”¹⁰ Women were favorite subjects of contemporary French literary works, from which Puccini took the stories of his most popular operas.¹¹

In Paris, the fin de siècle was the “golden age” of the courtesan. Joseph Kestner notes that Massenet’s Manon analyzes the economic turmoil and power of money during the Belle Époque (1870-1910), although transposed to a setting a century earlier.¹² Prostitution flourished in Paris during this time and, as in other cultures and times, it was often the only survival choice for women dependent on males. In Europe (as in Japan at the time), women who performed in public were assumed to be prostitutes, and much art was dedicated to depicting such women.¹³

Massenet (as noted above, a model for Puccini and his generation) frequently chose the reformed courtesan as heroine, knowing how much appeal she had for the public. In addition to Manon, he expressed in music drama the sexuality of his various heroines: Hérodiade, Thérèse, Thaïs, La Navarraise, Sapho, Cendrillon, Ariane, and Cléopâtre. Martin Cooper feels this obsession with feminine sexual psychology is prominent in all work of Massenet and Puccini and in most of Richard Strauss. He


¹¹ According to Carner, Puccini’s consistency in choosing somewhat compromised women as his heroines led his friends in Torre del Lago to jokingly refer to him as il maestro cucumeggiante (the composer of harlot music). Ibid.


suggests that the audience for these operas were the subjects on which Freud and his peers developed their psychological theories.\textsuperscript{14}

As noted above, artists of this time were intrigued with the subconscious and unconscious, and some argue that artists’ own neuroses were often relieved through their creative works.\textsuperscript{15} Carner applies such theories to Puccini, in his constant focus on women, and suggests that he might not have been successful in a “more settled and serene age.”\textsuperscript{16}
The posited relations of Puccini’s music to his neuroses may include “mood and pace in restless flux, tempo rubato and tugging syncopations [which] all but destroy a firm rhythmic structure . . . a feverish excitement in fast passages and enervating languor in slow. The profusion of dynamic details and expression marks on almost every page reveal [an] almost obsessive concern to indicate the finest emotional shades.”\textsuperscript{17}

Puccini lost his father at age five, grew up with five sisters and a much younger brother, and was intensely involved with his mother. Whether his subconscious mother worship actually led to his frequent affairs with women deemed inferior by his friends, he rarely shared his artistic concerns with a woman, with the exception of Sybil Seligman in London.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 299.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 302.
It is true that Puccini was very attached to his mother, Albina, and that she was an assertive woman who aggressively promoted her son's musical career. Proud of the successful premiere of his first opera, *Le Villi* (May 31, 1884), Puccini immediately telegraphed his mother about the eighteen curtain calls. Unfortunately, Albina died soon after (July 17, 1884, at age 54), and Puccini was despondent. He wrote to his sister, Ramelde: "I am always thinking of her, and tonight I even dreamed about her... no matter what triumphs my art may bring me, I shall have little happiness without my dear mother."20

Puccini remained in Lucca and took charge of his family's affairs following his mother's death. Although most of his sisters had married (except Igina who became a nun), he felt especially responsible for his younger brother, Michele, who was also supposed to become a musician. Puccini helped him get into the Milan conservatory, but he did not do well, left without finishing, and emigrated to Argentina (as many Italians did at that time). While Michele taught music privately in Argentina, he wrote to Giacomo: "Feminine virtue here is quite incredible; the girls want husbands and the married women never give way, and so? One has to make do with some coloured girl, Indian or servant, for the sake of one's bodily health."21 Budden notes that Michele did not take his own advice, and unfortunately became involved in an affair with the wife of an influential

19 Julian Budden, *Puccini: His Life and Works*, 44.


friend. A duel followed in which the husband was wounded, and Michele had to leave
town for Rio de Janeiro, where he contracted yellow fever and died in an isolation ward in
March 1891. Again, Puccini was inconsolable.22

A letter written to Puccini shortly after the premiere of his first opera, by an
unnamed “old friend” from Milan, is also revealing of attitudes toward women among
Puccini’s peers:

> Keep clear of women, who ... are the plague of society; treat them as
> playthings, to be thrown away into a corner once you have done with them; use
> them as a physical necessity, nothing more ... Take care not to fall in love if you
> can possibly avoid doing so, since that will lead you into the grave of matrimony,
> which ... cuts short and ruins a young man’s career, especially one such as
> yours, who needs absolute freedom and independence ... 23

To provide needed income during his time in Lucca, Puccini accepted piano and
organ pupils. A former schoolmate of Puccini, Narcisco Gemignani, a Lucca grocer and
traveling wine wholesaler, belonged to a group of amateur musicians. Hearing of
Puccini’s success with *Le Villi* and his Ricordi contract, he engaged Puccini to give piano
lessons to his wife, Elvira, the mother of two young children.24 Budden describes her as
“tall, dark-eyed, full-figured” and “reasonably well educated.”25 No one is certain exactly
when Elvira left her husband (and her youngest child, a son) for Puccini. Budden
considers this a very courageous act, because she would be the main target of an ensuing

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22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 62-63. (Also from Marchetti, no. 56, 70).

2002), 49.

scandal. But he also finds her not the best sympathetic partner, neither caring for Puccini’s love of rural solitude and hunting, nor for his friends. As for sharing in his creative life, Puccini once complained to her, “you never mention the word ‘art’ without a sneer.”

Elvira had to leave Lucca when her pregnancy with Puccini’s child became obvious, and Puccini’s first librettist, Fontana, befriended the couple by finding her a place in another town (Budden notes that Fontana was also having a relationship with another man’s wife). After the birth of Puccini’s son, Tonio, Elvira stayed with Puccini’s sister, and then with her mother and the two children in Florence, while Puccini worked with Fontana in Milan to finish Edgar, his second opera.

After beginning to live with Elvira, Puccini continued to have affairs with a wide variety of women. It is interesting to note the timing of these, together with other life events, during Puccini’s opera production years. Elvira was constantly suspicious, usually with good reason, which apparently stimulated Puccini to seek more pleasures in what he called his “little gardens.”

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26 Ibid. Even a more appropriate mate, however, would probably not have prevented Puccini’s many affairs.

27 Ibid., 64. Although they remained together, the two could not marry until the death of Elvira’s husband in 1903. They married January 3, 1904, days before the Butterfly premiere.

28 The two recent biographies by Julian Budden and Mary Jane Phillips-Matz have added much detail to these affairs.

29 Julian Budden, Puccini: Life and Works, 63.
Puccini’s depiction of male characters may reflect the absence of a father figure in his life, as well as represent Puccini himself. His tenor heroes are generally weak, possibly reflecting Puccini’s own amiable, non-confrontational nature.\textsuperscript{30}

Carner feels that the immediacy and force with which Puccini’s compulsions and fantasies are reflected in his work contrast with the styles of more reflective artists with stronger mental and analytical control.\textsuperscript{31} For this reason, he suggests that Puccini’s later works show greater artistic merit than the more successful middle period, in which “the inner man acted as a retarding and inhibiting force.”\textsuperscript{32} But these later works are far less successful with the public, perhaps demonstrating that the “immediacy and force” to which his compulsions and fantasies may have driven Puccini, resonated more with his public.

Michele Girardi disagrees with Carner’s psychoanalysis of Puccini’s usual choice of subject and characterization, noting that the Viennese Carner was especially partial to Freudian theories (he was a student when Freud published his first books). In his enumeration of several of Puccini’s extramarital relationships (which “showed a predilection for singers”), he disagrees that all were with inferior women.\textsuperscript{33}

Julian Budden also feels that Carner’s theory on Puccini’s mother-fixation is shaky, as the typical nineteenth-century operatic heroines died for love, not necessarily

\begin{footnotes}
\item[30] Ibid., 306-07.
\item[31] Ibid., 310.
\item[32] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}

58
due to composers’ relationships with their mothers. He also insists that not all Puccini’s temporary affairs were with women of a lower class. “What is clear is that he, like his brother, had a strong sexual urge and a roving eye.”

Exoticism/Orientalism

Because Puccini’s Madama Butterfly has some characteristics of earlier exotic operas, it is useful to discuss roots of European interest in exotic literature and opera and to explore how this relates to other prominent themes of the nineteenth century, including the intertwining of gender issues with exoticism. Currently, Said’s term “orientalism” is generally used in looking back at these cultural products (see Introduction), and Ralph Locke suggests that it currently can refer to “European or European-derived attitudes toward any other culture.”

Derek Scott suggests that in the face of the rapid social, economic, and political changes in nineteenth-century Europe, partially brought on by industrialization, the Orient seemed “synonymous with stability and unchanging eternality.” The vague settings of previous exotic operas evolved to focus on specific far eastern areas. By the fin de siècle, use of exotic colors had become almost an obsession with composers. With greater ease of travel, some writers, painters, and even composers were able to visit foreign lands.

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34 Julian Budden, Puccini: His Life and Works, 476.


Gilles De Van reminds us, however, that exoticism actually relates to the other important trends of the later nineteenth century—historicism and realism: “branches growing from the same trunk: the will to be acquainted with the real world in all its forms.”37 Carl Dahlhaus also connects nineteenth-century realism to exoticism, “a fantasy landscape in the imagination of the opera audience, peopled with noble savages.”38

During most of opera history, musical orientalism did not utilize actual non-Western music, but a number of generic signifiers developed by Western composers to represent Western concepts about foreign areas. These were used interchangeably as markers of cultural difference, and many were not actual Eastern ethnic practices. Scott quotes Said’s *Orientalism*: “In a system of knowledge about the Orient, the Orient is less a place than a topos, a set of referents.”39

It is almost a cliché to state that the drive to portray the Orient in French and English artistic works was motivated by westerners’ needs and desires.40 Exoticism was especially popular in French opera, with musical reference primarily to the Middle East.

With the expansion of colonialism and late Romantic interest in realism, settings around


the turn of the century became much more specific. By the time of *Madama Butterfly* (1904), composers could obtain authentic Japanese and Chinese music, and, Locke notes, "the attitudes they portray, like those of European exotic art, reflect the colonialist and male-dominated outlook of Western society of the time."41

Several writers have underscored the strong connections between racial and gender "otherness." Herbert Lindenberger suggests that the focus of late nineteenth-century operas on the plight of oriental women emphasizes this connection, although he says that the depiction of suffering women in opera had begun prior to exotic settings. The mad scenes of the bel canto era, as well as the great monologues of later heroines, show "the central female figure has become the prime site upon which the audience can lavish its feelings of pity and terror," with operatic heroines featured in martyr roles from early in the nineteenth century. When exotic settings became popular, "the oriental woman thus becomes a figure for woman in general."42

Locke also comments on "the exotic mask" used to depict Europe's silenced women, "under which much that was otherwise repressed could be smuggled into the art gallery and opera house ... deflecting criticism from what is primarily an erotic ... project."43


43 Ralph Locke, "Constructing the Oriental Other," 269.
Susan McClary observes that “the thwarted desires of middle-class males sought expression in each of these fantasy lands . . . but because such men wanted to preserve the purity of their own homes, the preferred objects of taboo practices were racial or underclass Others.”44 She concludes that during this period in European history, representational constructs of the separate categories of race, ethnicity, class, and gender “show a slippage among all varieties of Others.”45

Locke also warns us to distinguish attempts at direct representation from allegory. Because opera plots are so full of archetypes, we must look at them as allegories of common human tendencies and circumstances—“abuse of power, parental interference, injuries of class and gender”—demonstrating the common human needs for “tolerance, decisiveness, and endurance in adversity.”46

In another paper, Locke suggests that what these works reveal “about the West’s uneasy relationship to the larger world—and about the West’s many internal dissymmetries: of race, religion, gender, social class—still rings hauntingly true.”47 Locke continues to remind us that interpretation of Western works with Eastern settings must maintain two perspectives in a state of creative tension: “the work’s essential westernness—its irrelevance to the East, and the East’s to it,” and “its power to reflect

44 Susan McClary, Georges Bizet: Carmen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 34.

45 Ibid.

46 Ralph Locke, “Reflections on Orientalism in Opera and Musical Theater,” Opera Quarterly 10, no. 1, 62.

47 Ralph Locke, “Constructing the Oriental Other,” 302.
and even shape, perhaps damagingly, the attitude and behavior of Westerners towards the non-Western world.\textsuperscript{48}

Lindenberger refers to Edward Said's similar suggestion for "a contrapuntal interpretation," by means of which . . . one maintains a kind of double awareness, experiencing the work at the same time one views it within the orientalist/imperialist context in which it was shaped," rather than within a politics of hostile blame.\textsuperscript{49} He goes on to observe that "behind these images of some mythical and ancient Near East there stand the sexual desires of a repressed culture that transferred these desires to a place distant and powerless enough to allow free interpretive access."\textsuperscript{50} Acknowledging that displacement of Western tensions is a part of Orientalism, we remain disturbed by the reality of the condition of women in cultures of poverty or times of war.

\textit{Japonisme}

This section will examine some of the actual historical events affecting Japan in the last half of the nineteenth century, and the resulting interest of the western world in Japanese culture. Japan was the most fascinating and mysterious Asian nation to nineteenth-century Europe because it had so long been almost totally closed to the West. Its widening opening to Western trade was initiated by an 1853-54 American expedition, commanded by Commodore Matthew Perry. Perry, who advocated the use of steamships

\textsuperscript{48} Ralph Locke, "Reflections on Orientalism," 62.


\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 189-90.
in the U.S. Navy, arrived via Africa, Singapore, and China (he was accompanied by a
Chinese interpreter and a Japanese interpreter). The anchoring of his “black ships” (coal-
burning steamships, with no sails) in Edo (later Tokyo) Bay on July 8, 1853, startled the
Japanese.51 Like European nations, America desired to establish refueling ports and
assurances of safety for personnel.

Japan had strongly attracted the attention of the West for nearly 300 years, for
both trade and religious purposes. Portuguese missionaries were so successful at
converting Japanese to Catholicism (there were at one time 300,000 in Japan), that the
national government expelled them in 1587, completely banning Christianity in 1612.
Under the Tokugawa shogunate, Japan had banned all contact with the west, executed all
entering or leaving Japan, and decreed it illegal to build ships large enough for ocean
travel. But by 1848, the Shogunate had executed commercial treaties with the United
States, Russia, Britain, France, and the Netherlands in Nagasaki, Yokohama, and
Hakodate. 52

51 Since 1983, Newport, R.I., the hometown of Matthew Perry, has celebrated an annual “Black
Ship Festival.” In 2003, the 150th anniversary of Perry’s arrival in Japan, the Massachusetts Institute of
Technology, the Consulate General of Japan in Boston, and the Newport Historical Society collaborated in
an art exhibit of “Black Ships and Samurai,” which was featured at the East-West Center in Honolulu
during December 2003. The exhibit is based on the “Visualizing Cultures” website developed by MIT
professors John W. Dower and Shigem Miyagawa. “This exhibition introduces three aspects of
Commodore Perry’s mission to Japan—the Black Ships, Encounters, and Portraits. Reproductions drawn
from numerous sources in Japan and the United States are juxtaposed for the first time to illuminate the
many dimensions of this momentous encounter.” <http://www.ellensebring.com/newport/exh_sum.html>

52 Brian Burke-Gaffney, Star-crossed: A Biography of Madame Butterfly (Norwalk, CT: East
Bridge, 2004), 25.
In contrast with the other new treaty ports, Nagasaki had long hosted foreigners on the artificial island of Deshima in its harbor. The island had been created initially to isolate the few remaining Portuguese so that the city could continue to benefit from outside trade without religious corruption of the local population. Following the complete banishment of all Portuguese, the Shogunate granted special trading permission to Buddhist Chinese and Protestant Dutch traders, to take advantage of trading opportunities without suffering further Catholic missionary influence. From 1641, the latter were the only Europeans permitted in Japan. The sexual services Nagasaki businessmen provided for the residents of this island will be further discussed in Chapter Three.53

The opening of the treaty ports resulted in the abolition of the shogunate in 1867 and the restoration of the Emperor two years later. During this new Meiji era, the capital moved to Tokyo (Edo). To gain worldwide respect, Japan adopted Western-type legal and political systems, as well as an overtly Western lifestyle. However, the country retained great pride in its highly developed cultural past, considered to be unique among colonized countries.54 The nation began to actively seek modernization, completing a railroad between Tokyo and Yokohama in 1872, installation of telephones in 1877, and establishment of a bicameral legislature (the Diet) in 1890. Japanese missions traveled


internationally to acquire Western technologies. To fund these expansions and changes, Japan needed to export, and Japanese arts and crafts were among the most available commodities. Japan participated in international trade and industry fairs, and Van Rij notes that during the last decades of the nineteenth century, every major European or American international exhibition had a large Japanese representation. These exports had significant influence on European art, literature, drama, and music.

The phenomenon of japonisme was a result of these increasing contacts with the West. Japanese art became known to Europeans and Americans mainly through exhibitions in London 1862, Paris 1867, Vienna 1873, Philadelphia 1876, Paris 1878 and 1889, Chicago 1893, and Paris again in 1900. The contacts also greatly influenced writers and the reading public, and eventually resulted in Pierre Loti's Madame Chrysantheme, John Luther Long's Madame Butterfly, and David Belasco's play, Madame Butterfly, the three literary sources of Puccini's opera (to be discussed in the following chapter).

Cecilia Segawa-Seigle notes that by 1855, the year of Loti's first visit to Japan, there was much foreign activity in the country's harbors, and Japan was eagerly imitating any aspects of Western culture seen as valuable to the country. There was great social

55 Ibid., 44.


upheaval during the next few decades, including terrorism and civil war [the largest being the Satsuma Rebellion in 1877, referred to by Long in his Butterfly story]. These unsettled times and economic downturn particularly affected the samurai and their families, and often samurai wives and daughters had no recourse but prostitution. Cecilia Segawa-Seigle says that in Tokyo alone, as many as 33,000 women became prostitutes at this time. The circumstances of Butterfly would be credible for this time, although Segawa-Seigle notes that she does not fit all the formal criteria for a geisha. 58

**Japanese-theme operas**

Puccini knew Saint-Saëns’ *La Princesse jaune* (1872), Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Mikado* (1885), André Messager’s *Madame Chrysanthème* (1893), based on the 1887 Loti novel (to be discussed in Chapter Three), and Pietro Mascagni’s *Iris* (1898) for which Luigi Illica (one of the two librettists for *Madama Butterfly*) was librettist. There are several interesting relationships among the composers of these works.

Saint-Saëns was an intimate friend of Antonio Bazzini, who was the composition teacher for both Mascagni and Puccini. His 1872 opera, *La Princesse jaune*, with libretto by Gallet, is considered the first Western musical work using a Japanese theme and the pentatonic scale. It influenced Debussy as well as Puccini.

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58 Ibid.

Messager had studied with Saint-Saëns in Paris, and the musical language of *Madame Chrysanthème* is sometimes related to that of *La Princesse Jaune*. Girardi finds that two Japanese themes used by Messager in *Madame Chrysanthème* were also used by Puccini: *Hana saku haru* (used as the postlude to Butterfly’s entrance, and for her conversion arioso, “Io seguio il mio destino”) and *Sakura*. Messager was also the conductor for the 1903 Paris production of *Tosca*, and Puccini worked closely with him at that time.

Mascagni’s *Iris* had almost no actual Japanese music, and for the most part sounded like a *Cavalleria* set in Japan, although Mascagni had attempted to imitate the sounds of Japanese instruments, both through use of Western percussion and designing Japanese-like instruments. Puccini expected to do better, commenting on *Iris*, “This opera, which contains many beautiful things and a most dazzling and colorful orchestration, has a basic flaw: an uninteresting action that peters out and bores for three acts.”

The score for Gilbert and Sullivan’s 1885 *Mikado* was in Puccini’s library, and he had met Sullivan in London in 1896. At this time he also experienced the continuing popularity in London of the pseudo-Japanese operetta. Puccini used the *Mikado*’s *Miyasama* theme in his own opera.


Orientalism attracted composers because it permitted them to expand the melodic and harmonic resources of tonality without completely leaving it. Puccini was fascinated with the new scales and sounds as a stimulus for his composition. By the time he composed Madama Butterfly, obtaining authentic Japanese music was not difficult.\textsuperscript{61}

A Japanese export with significant influence for both musical and dramatic concepts in Puccini's Madama Butterfly was Otojiro Kawakami's kabuki troupe. This group toured America and Europe between 1900 and 1902. Scott Miller has noted that during the Meiji period over three dozen Japanese performing groups toured Europe and America, but few left the deep impression of the Kawakami troupe. Combining "improvisational skill and entrepreneurial genius,"\textsuperscript{62} this group's performances were highly acculturated.\textsuperscript{63} Westerners of all social classes assumed they represented "real" Japanese people and their theater, and were especially entranced with the star, Sadayakko.\textsuperscript{64} Their performances in America and Europe greatly influenced Western expectations for an opera set in Japan. The following chapter will provide more detail on this troupe's influence on Puccini.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[62] Scott Miller, abstract of session presented at the 1997 annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, in Session 57: "Meiji Innocents Abroad: The Kawakami European Tours (1900-1902).
\item[63] Their director was seeking to learn western theater and featured his wife, Sadayakko, in Shakespearean drama as well as kabuki.
\item[64] Ayako Kano has commented that although Sadayakko was "regarded as the embodiment of the archaic and mysterious Orient by Western admirers... upon returning to Japan she switched to roles that represented the modern West to Japanese audiences." "Geisha, Actress, Mistress, Wife: Kawakami Sadayakko Reconsidered," Abstract for Session 57: "Meiji Innocents Abroad: The Kawakami European Tours (1900-1902)." Association for Asian Studies annual conference, 1997.
\end{footnotes}
Puccini’s personal life and temperament coincided with the prominent gender and culture issues in the societies of the fin de siècle, coming most clearly to a focus in his opera Madama Butterfly. More importantly, his attraction to nuanced representations of women in his stage works culminated with this opera. The opera’s evolution from literary travelogues and a play, through the somewhat crude premiere version, to the triumph of its final version will be the focus of the next section.
Chapter Three: Metamorphosis of a Powerful Heroine—Travelogue to Classic Tragedy

Not only was Europe acquiring Japanese art and lore, but (perhaps more actively) Japan was acquiring Western ways during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The literary sources of Madama Butterfly demonstrate some of the multidirectional cultural interactions of this period. As the last major nation of Asia to be opened to the West, Japan held great fascination for the European public. The importation of many Japanese works of art and cultural exhibitions, such as those at the International Expositions in Paris and the Knightsbridge Village in London, created additional interest in stories of Japan. Merchants, sailors, diplomats, missionaries, and others who traveled to Asia often kept journals in which they recorded not only their observations, but also their fantasies about what they saw, especially regarding Japanese women.

Images fulfilling visitors’ expectations of an exotic, oriental civilization were most prominent in the descriptions, and frequently mentioned were Japan’s “graceful, charming, and complaisant women.” From the frequent depictions of customs such as mixed-bathing and geisha houses, which shocked and titillated Europeans, Jean-Pierre Lehmann concludes that “exoticism inevitably conjures up images of sensuality.”1 The fact that visitors’ contacts were mainly with the lower classes of Japanese society—shopkeepers, servants, and prostitutes—also affected their impressions. From

these experiences, it seemed unimaginable that such a small remote Asian nation could be seeking to copy the West's technical and industrial development.²

At the end of the nineteenth century, the port of Nagasaki was particularly notorious, and built an industry on sexual services for foreign visitors. Burke-Gaffney documents such arrangements for the island of Dejima in Nagasaki Bay (where the Netherlands East Indies Company had a trading post) from the seventeenth century, suggesting that all the prototypes in the Butterfly story existed from that time. The girls were almost always "daughters of destitute parents sold to brothels as children." A German physician of that time reported,

The Girls are purchas'd from their Parents, when very young. The price varies in proportion to their beauty, and the number of years agreed for, which is generally . . . ten or twenty, more or less . . . great care is taken to teach them to dance, sing, play upon musical Instruments, to write Letters, and . . . to qualify them for the way of life they are oblig'd to lead.³

Burke-Gaffney also explains the absence of any ethical concerns in the willingness of Japanese entrepreneurs to market the girls. The difference between European and Japanese moral values is demonstrated in a quotation from a seventeenth-century Japanese writer, reflecting on his countrymen as well as foreigners: "No matter how superior a man, if he does not buy prostitutes, he is incomplete and tends to be uncouth."⁴

² Ibid., 10.
³ Brian Burke-Gaffney, Starcrossed, 16.
⁴ Ibid.
Henry Arthur Tilley, an Englishman, described the brothels of 1859 in great detail, but asserted that the girls “must not be judged by the same standard and measure as the fallen ones of European lands: it is their misfortune, not their fault.” Burke-Gaffney explains that the girls simply obeyed their families, acquiescing to their subservient role, in a value system based on “parental, social, and ancestral demands . . . that was the way the world worked.”

Missionaries were shocked that catering to sailors’ baser needs seemed to be the major industry of the city. To avoid disease, officers preferred more permanent arrangements with women, and from the 1858 opening of the treaty ports, “term marriages” had become common for men with long-term assignments. A westerner could negotiate a price with a go-between for a temporary marriage (including rental house) with a tea-house girl. She would return to her family or tea-house when the husband left.

An Englishman observed in 1892 that such arrangements were an expectation among both Japanese and foreign communities, and that usually (but not always) the

5 Ibid., 27.
6 Ibid., 17.
8 Pat Barr, The Deer Cry Pavillion: A Story of Westerners in Japan 1868-1905 (London: Macmillan, 1968), 185. Ms. Barr has compiled western eyewitness accounts of the period, including those of Lafcadio Hearn, Clive Holland (My Japanese Wife), Rudyard Kipling, and many others. Because temporary marriages were so common, Japanese who saw the early opera could not believe that Cio-Cio-San would not understand the arrangement from the beginning. Burke-Gaffney clarifies the euphemism of “tea-house” used “to obscure the reality of prostitution in Japan.” He also notes the common use of the “butterfly with raised wings” crest by “courtesans, geisha, and other Japanese women who did not engage in conventional marriage.” Starcrossed, 29, 25.
foreigner provided for future needs of the wife and any children when he departed. The parties to these temporary marriages signed a contract agreeing to the terms. Arthur Groos notes that under these terms, the Japanese “wife” had no legal rights to alimony, property, inheritance, or even her children. Burke-Gaffney suggests that concern for the future spiritual life of the children was one rationale for taking them from their mothers.

These arrangements were appalling to the few European women in Japan. Arriving in Japan in 1875, Clara Whitney noted the many merchants, with wives in their home countries, living with native women. She also saw a large number of neglected, “half-caste” children.

The literary sources

Puccini’s librettists took many elements from stories based on the descriptions above. The role of the heroine evolved from one literary source to the next, and the revisions to the developing libretto, as well as the post-premiere revisions to the opera, continued this evolution toward a Butterfly who was not only a central figure, but also an unusually powerful one.

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10 Brian Burke-Gaffney, Starcrossed, 82.


12 Although Puccini had been inspired by Belasco’s one-act play, delays in obtaining it in Italian translation caused his librettists to work first with Long’s story in translation, augmented by elements of Loti’s story, for atmosphere in the first act. Considerable material from all three sources is present in the
One of the most influential writers in forming Europe's concepts of exotic locales was a French naval officer, Louis Marie Julien Viaud (1850-1923), who wrote under the pen name Pierre Loti. His 1887 *Madame Chrysantheme*, set in Nagasaki, was his most popular work and was translated into several other languages, including English. Its popularity stimulated production of more stories of Japan.

Loti's realistic descriptions had great appeal for his readers, making them feel they were actually experiencing the exotic settings. In his usual scenario, a handsome European sailor has a romance with a stereotypical exotic woman—simple, primitive, dependent, helpless, and "actually craving male domination" of the god-like man. The intimate relationship with the local woman provided rare insights into local culture. These stories were immensely popular in Europe and resulted in Loti's election to the Academie française in 1891, in preference to Emile Zola.

Like Puccini, Loti was raised in a household dominated by women, and was his mother's favorite. His older brother, a naval surgeon, sent him letters from Tahiti, which

13 He spent periods from a few weeks to several years in Tahiti, Japan, Turkey, Senegal, parts of Southeast Asia, and the middle East.

14 Irene Szyliowicz, *Pierre Loti and the Oriental Woman* (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1988), 12. Szyliowicz has surveyed the most important Loti scholarship and provided one of the most detailed biographical and analytical sources on the writer.

15 Loti, as other writers of his time, lamented change and modernization in the exotic areas, particularly that in Japan.

inspired Loti's travel fantasies. Following his brother's death in the Bay of Bengal and burial at sea, Loti decided on a navy career. He subsequently spent two months in Tahiti, producing an autobiographical novel from his journals. Loti biographer Szyliowicz notes his technique was to "experience an adventure or situation, embellish it, then filter it over time to suppress its negative aspects and enhance the positive in the author's favour." His self-centeredness and prejudices are especially clear in Madame Chrysanthème.

This most popular of Loti's stories described his two-month Nagasaki relationship with a seventeen-year-old Japanese temporary bride, Ki-Hou-San. Even before his arrival, Loti made plans to acquire a Japanese wife. While his ship was anchored in Nagasaki in 1885, he "married" a geisha for the duration of his stay. The usual monthly payment (approximately twenty dollars) was negotiated with the girl's family through the matchmaker, Mr. Kangourou. During the sailor's brief absence from Nagasaki, Ki-Hou-San watches anxiously for his ship's return, decorates the house with fresh flowers, lights the lamps, and dresses in her best.

17 Ibid., 23-25.

18 Ibid., 25. She also notes that he was very likely bisexual (although he had a wife, son, and a mistress), and that the detailed descriptions of his erotic experiences served to disguise his homosexual tendencies.

19 Groos traces the name of the matchmaker in the various literary sources from the Yokohama term Gankiro for their prostitute quarter, suggesting that through transliteration it became Kangourou (in Loti's story), to Mr. Kangourou in Long's, and to Puccini's marriage broker, Goro. Arthur Groos, "Madame Butterfly: The Story," 149.

20 Pierre Loti, Madame Chrysanthème (1893), trans. Laura Ensor (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1901), 179. Burke-Gaffney notes that the main character quadrangle of Madame Butterfly (young courtesan, younger servant, foreign naval officer, and pimp) was already reported by an eighteenth century Dutch writer in the late eighteenth century in Nagasaki, and all characters were present in Loti's story. Starcrossed, 18, 36-38.
Loti dedicates his story to a Madame la Duchesse de Richelieu, apologizing that it was [not] “altogether proper; but . . . it should not sin against good taste . . . It is the diary of a summer of my life, in which I have changed nothing.” He asked her to receive it in the same spirit that you would receive . . . some grotesquely carved ivory idol, or some preposterous trifle brought back for you from this singular fatherland of all preposterousness . . . Although the most important role may appear to devolve on Madame Chrysanthe, it is very certain that the three principal personages are myself, Japan, and the effect produced on me by that country.21

The novel’s descriptions are poetic, and the book is beautifully illustrated. Although Chrysanthe’s speech is refined, Japanese women in general are described as having:

a certain vagueness, something childlike which prevails to the end of their lives. Chrysanthe is . . . melancholy. What thoughts can be running through that little brain? . . . it is a hundred to one that she has no thought whatever, and if she had, what do I care! I have chosen her to amuse me.22

Loti has a somewhat negative attitude toward Japan in general and his wife in particular. He refers to all Japanese as monkeys (the story also features M. Sucre and Madame Prune, his landlord and wife, and their fifteen-year old daughter Oyouki, Ki-Hou-San’s friend). His contempt for Japan reflects the fact that most of Europe did not take Japan very seriously, nor were most nations aware of its rapid industrial and military development. As a result, the world was surprised when Japan defeated the Russians in a major battle. Lehman cites William Schwartz:

21 Pierre Loti, Madame Chrysanthe, 5.

22 Ibid., 74. Although the story ends with Loti returning unexpectedly to find the geisha testing the coins he has given her, this scene is omitted in André Messager’s opéra comique, Madame Chrysanthe (1897). The composer and his librettists also added an epilogue in which “the lieutenant receives a pathetic letter from the forsaken geisha and is duly remorseful.” Julian Budden, Puccini: His Life and Works, 230. Burke-Gaffney has commented that the image of the geisha counting her coins is unrealistic, as money would not be paid to her. Starcrossed, 54.
The importance of Loti’s writings on Japan lies in their reiteration in exquisite language that the Japanese is a monkey... He suggests that the Japanese women have no honour, and that the race can have nothing in common intellectually with Europeans... the contempt for the Japanese expressed in Loti’s books in some measure influenced the Russians to refuse Japan’s requests and led to the war of 1904.23

John Luther Long (1861-1927), a Philadelphia lawyer and author of the 1898 *Century Magazine* story “Madame Butterfly,” borrowed elements from Loti’s novel. His story was more tragic, however, focusing on a tea house girl named Cho San. His sister, a missionary wife in Nagasaki, had described such a relationship to him.24 Loti’s French captain, Pierre, is replaced by Long’s chauvinistic American, B. F. Pinkerton. The geisha has become far more central in Long’s story, in spite of her crude pidgin (retained in the David Belasco play based on Long), with no relation to English as spoken by Japanese.25 In Long’s story, the relatives approve the wedding (and Butterfly understands the price and terms) until Pinkerton bans them from his home. They then disown the girl. When Pinkerton also forbids her homage to her ancestors, Butterfly secretly visits the Christian mission and considers converting if she has no other recourse. Although she was

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24 There has been considerable debate regarding the real-life prototype for Long’s story. Arthur Groos’ study of Nagasaki Methodist mission records suggests she was a tea-house girl known to Long’s sister; he has also identified Lieutenant Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton and his ship through American naval records. Jan van Rij disagrees, and cites several other possibilities. Burke-Gaffney concludes that in spite of Nagasaki’s featuring for tourists the former Glover house as the Butterfly house, there was not one real-life Butterfly, but many. *Starcrossed*, 191-204. In most of these real-life examples, there was no suicide and the husband did not come back for the baby.

25 The same accent is used for the Japanese heroine, “Sakura-san,” in Long’s first novel, *Miss Cherry Blossom of Tokyo* (1885), although she spent seven years in America, attended “Bryn Mawr Gakko,” and eventually married her American lover and sailed for the United States.
purchased, she loves and trusts Pinkerton, and assumes he will return to her and her child, because he provided for them in his absence. She considers herself married legally as an American, and verifies with the consul the laws governing divorce in America. When Pinkerton’s American wife (Adelaide) visits the Consulate to ask for the child, Butterfly overhears her and then attempts suicide.26 But she is saved by her maid, and they leave with the child. To Loti’s story, Long also added the characters of the consul Sharpless and Prince Yamadori.

David Belasco was attracted to the potential of Long’s short story as the setting for a one-act play, the highlight of which would be the fourteen-minute vigil. Lighting effects to simulate dusk, the starry night sky, dawn, and sunrise depicted the heroine’s all-night wait for her husband’s return from the ship.27 The play begins with Butterfly already abandoned and the mother of a child. By compressing Long’s episodes, Belasco achieves the classical unities of time, place, and action. The encounter with Pinkerton’s wife, here named Kate, is at Butterfly’s house. Belasco intensifies the tragedy with Butterfly’s successful suicide (and in fact called his play *Madame Butterfly: A Tragedy of Japan*). The poignancy of Pinkerton’s reluctant and tardy return (urged and accompanied by his


27 William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini*, 158, notes that Belasco told his biographer “when Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* was staged at the Metropolitan on 11 February 1907, ‘I loaned my models for the decor and sent over my electricians.’” In *Madama Butterfly: A Guide*, Mosco Carner describes the sets for Belasco’s play as “the creation of romantic illusions by a cunning manipulation of the lighting and of painted curtains which resulted in almost cinematic effects . . . to saturate the spectator in the atmosphere of the play before it began,” 27.
wife, the only appearance of Pinkerton in the play) further increases the tragedy.28 But the

drama of the scene is marred by Butterfly’s final line (referring to Pinkerton’s promise that
he would return when the robins nest), spoken in the pidgin given her throughout the play,
and crudely emphasizing her naivete: “Too bad those robins didn’ t nest’ again.”29

The Evolving Libretto

The preparation of the libretto was a complex process, reflecting its multiple

literary sources and the diverse perspectives of the team members who worked on it. Not

only were Illica and Giacosa involved with Puccini in a similar way to their collaboration

on La Bohème, but Giulio Ricordi played an even more prominent role than previously,
due to the many new challenges of this work. We can sense Puccini’s impatience to begin

composing in his statement that seeing the play was like “pouring gasoline on an open

fire.”30 Although Giulio Ricordi directed his New York representative to negotiate with

David Belasco for permission to set the play as an opera, the negotiations were delayed

for various reasons until almost a year after the initial request. Puccini urged Illica to

28 John Luther Long’s works and correspondence (including correspondence with David
Belasco, 1902-1919) are archived at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of
Texas at Austin. Literary works archived include “versions of Madame Butterfly and a potential sequel,
as well as a copy of Madame Glory (perhaps the original title to Madame Butterfly).” The biographical
sketch on the website cataloging archived material states, “David Belasco worked with Mr. Long to
produce a very elaborate play from this story . . . He worked on several other projects with
notes on Madame Butterfly in the 1928 play collection (David Belasco, Six Plays (Boston: Little Brown &
Company, 1928), 5, state that “There is a mistaken notion that the resultant script [Madame Butterfly]
was a collaboration.”

29 Ibid., 32.

8 (1995): 17; cited and translated from Carlo Paladini, Giacomo Puccini, ed. Marzia Paladini (Florence:
begin work on the libretto using an Italian translation of Long's story, which he provided by March 1901. At the beginning, no one was concerned about using both story and play, as dual sources had also been used for La Bohème. The story so inspired Illica that by the time a translation of the Belasco play was available, he had drafted a complete libretto based only on the story. As the draft developed, he strongly defended his story-based plan while Puccini insisted on an adoption of the play, even suggesting he take Illica to London to see it. The story and play differ in many respects. The story begins with Pinkerton’s arrival in Japan, and ends with Butterfly’s unsuccessful suicide; the play focuses on her final day of waiting and death. Because a “prologue” was needed to turn the one-act play into an opera, the story became the source of much of that material. The play was then expanded into the final acts of the opera. To develop the heroine fully, it was also necessary to expand and modify the part of Pinkerton, as he has almost no role in the play, and quite a negative role in the story. Groos has stated that the resulting “multiplicity of discourses . . . makes it difficult to isolate a particular ‘vision’ or ‘intention’.” He disagrees with the conclusion of Julian Smith, that the premiere version

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31 Arthur Groos has noted that a total of three different Italian translations were made of the story. "The Story by Long and the Play by Long and Belasco," in Madama Butterfly: Fonti e Documenti della Genesi, ed. Arthur Groos (Lucca: Centro Studi Giacomo Puccini, 2005).


represents Puccini’s original vision and intention, and that the subsequent revisions represent “a metamorphic tragedy.”

As a result of his study of archived early manuscripts, drafts, and published and unpublished correspondence, Arthur Groos has established the stages in the development of the first libretto and recently published this libretto. The fact that Illica independently prepared this draft suggests that “the commonly assumed division of labor that designated Illica as the ‘drafter’ and Giacosa as the ‘poet’ . . . is in need of revision.”

The following events parallel Long’s very brief treatment in the story: Pinkerton’s negotiation with a marriage broker for a wife and lease of a house for 999 years, Pinkerton’s insistence that Butterfly renounce her ancestors, her visit to the mission, the wedding, Pinkerton’s dealings with the relatives, and their disowning of Butterfly. Elements taken from Loti’s story are the arrangements with Kangourou (the matchmaker) for Pierre’s household with Chrysantheme on the hill above the harbor, the sliding partitions in the house, and the gardens and vistas of Nagasaki. Other details from Loti include the heroine’s small belongings in her large kimono sleeves, Suzuki’s evening prayers (from Madame Prune’s incessant praying in Loti’s story), and most significantly, the comparisons of the Japanese with animals, insects, and things, as well as candied flies and spiders as wedding


refreshments.\footnote{Ibid., 97} In Illica’s draft, both Pinkerton and Sharpless treat Japan, the Japanese, and the wedding arrangements as a big joke, with frequent stage directions for laughter. This includes Sharpless’s comment of “diavolo d’un Pinkerton,” which has quite a different mood and context when uttered in the final version of the opera in the painful letter-reading scene.\footnote{Arthur Groos, “Lieutenant B.F. Pinkerton,” 175.}

Puccini was fascinated by the character of Prince Yamadori in the story and play: “He has changed into a degenerate American millionaire. This change is completely to the advantage of the so-called European element that we need.”\footnote{Ibid., 185. Translated from \textit{Carteggi Pucciniani}, ed. Eugenio Gara (Milan: Ricordi, 1958), no. 247, 249} To provide this element in Act I, Illica then made his Goro a marriage broker who dresses like a European.\footnote{The three 2004 Dicapo Opera historical performances featured Yamadori in a western suit for the La Scala and Brescia production, and in flowing Japanese robes for the Paris production, gesturing with a fan in all three. Although I have seen productions with Goro in western dress, the director for the Dicapo productions did not choose this style.} Consideration was also given to using western apparel for the officials at the wedding. Groos suggests that “Such figures provide a cultural context for the more extensive and problematic assimilation of Butterfly.”\footnote{Ibid., 185.}

Suddenly, in November 1902, Puccini decided to delete the Consulate scene, which had become a separate act. This returned the libretto to something closer to its original distinct halves (first Illica’s prologue derived from the story, followed by

\begin{center}
\textbf{83}
\end{center}
Belasco’s drama). Puccini explained to Giulio Ricordi: “The consulate was a grave mistake. The drama has to run to the end without interruption, closed, efficient, terrible! With the opera in three acts, we were bound to fail ... I’m sure I can hold my audience, and not send them away dissatisfied, by doing it like this. And at the same time we would have a new type of opera.”

Illica predicted to Ricordi that as soon as Puccini played for him the music accompanying Butterfly’s presentation of her child to the consul (a triumphant transformation of the entrance love music), Ricordi’s concerns about the long uninterrupted second act would be alleviated:

When Puccini arrives and you feel your heart contracting in a breathless spasm as Butterfly rushes off, returns, and presents the child, you will understand my enthusiasm! I am sure that only then will you see how that blessed Consulate (after!) would have weighted down the whole opera! No, after the letter and the presentation of the child everything must run dramatically to the catastrophe.

This change in focus for Act II of Butterfly’s evolving tragedy challenged Puccini to depict, more than ever before, the nuances of a heroine’s character. He began to achieve this in the Act I love duet, far more complex than that for La bohème or Tosca. Once Puccini had defined this level of characterization, he could not return to his more typical series of contrasting scenes, but continued to develop Butterfly psychologically through the music during her lengthy presence on stage.

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43 Roger Parker, “At the Crossroads: Madama Butterfly and the Drama of Character,” 35.
Sources of Japanese musical materials

Puccini initially assumed that his opera would be balanced between scenes of western and Japanese ambience. Because he would therefore need a great deal of Japanese thematic material, he began an exhaustive search, vowing to surpass the efforts of his predecessors. Although Japanese-sounding orchestral timbres were important to him (he had been impressed with Mascagni’s orchestration for *Iris*), supporting the dramatic action of a believable plot with melodies of authentic Japanese folk music mattered far more. He did not choose to score for Japanese-type instruments as Mascagni had done (Puccini knew that few opera houses would have the instruments or performers for them). Rather, he produced exotic coloring with the standard orchestra, not only through his melodies and harmonies, but through the instrumentation, texture, articulation, and dynamics which support them. This enabled him more easily to combine authentic material with his own sections composed in a similar style, integrating all into a seamless whole.

When Puccini first heard Japanese music, he felt its possibilities to be somewhat limited by the narrow range of its melodies (rarely exceeding an octave), pentatonic character, regularity of duple rhythmic patterns, and the typically unharmonized style. The frequently heterophonic texture in songs accompanied by shamisen or koto (where the instrument leads and the voice follows in a slight variation of the melody) sounded strange to the western ear.

Japanese music was not as well known or accessible to Europeans as its visual arts, in spite of the participation of Japanese musicians in the Paris world expositions.
Later in the nineteenth century, however, western influences on Japanese music education led to the publication of some of the earliest volumes of Japanese music in western notation, with lists of song titles in English as well as Japanese. Some of the earliest volumes included a series of school books for music instruction, a collection of koto music, and several volumes of "popular music." \(^{43}\)

Arthur Groos has established a chronology of Puccini's search for Japanese musical materials, noting that it was easier for him to work with materials in western notation when he could obtain them. He does not agree with those who assume that Puccini's interviews with Hisako Oyama, the wife of the Japanese ambassador to Italy, represented his earliest access to Japanese music. He cites sketch materials marked "Chants japonais" found in the archives of the Accademia Filarmonica in Bologna, datable to late 1901, and says that one of them resembles the "melody of Butterfly's entrance." \(^{44}\)

But the major source of Japanese music for Puccini, Groos believes, was his attendance at Milan performances of the Kawakami kabuki troupe in April, 1902. This self-proclaimed "Imperial Japanese Theatrical Company," starring the geisha Sadayakko, had toured the United States and Europe during 1899-1900, and appeared at the 1900 World Exposition in Paris. They were in the middle of their second European tour while Puccini was working on his opera, visiting several Italian cities between March and May.

\(^{43}\) Arthur Groos, "Cho Cho San and Sadayakko," 43.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 45. This is actually the Japanese melody following Butterfly's sung entrance. It accompanies the bowing of the bride and her entourage to Pinkerton. Groos credits Mosco Carner with deriving this motif from Hana saku haru (included by Izawa Shuji in the first music books used in Japanese schools). Groos notes that although it is not clear that Puccini had access to these books, it is obvious that he was able to obtain this piece early in his compositional process.
of 1902. The leader of the group, Otojiro Kawakami, clearly wanted to learn western theater techniques when he planned the tours for the company that starred his wife, Sadayakko, and shaped the performances to appeal to European audiences in a swift-moving, made-for-Europeans version culminating in a geisha’s suicide. Japanese critics declared that he had disgraced Japan instead of introducing the authentic Kabuki. Kawakami realized that Americans preferred comedies, whereas the French preference was for tragedies, cruel and bloody. [and] made the harakiri scene more and more sanguinary.45

Jonah Salz has shown, however, that these scenes were actually resisted by Kawakami, as not being in keeping with the kabuki reforms he was trying to implement. But because the Paris performances had been contracted with Loie Fuller (American dancer, choreographer, and producer) at her theater in Paris before they left Japan, and she suggested and insisted on the gory hara-kiri in each show, Kawakami gave in.46

During the troupe’s second European tour, Puccini tried to attend several times, hoping to interview the renowned geisha star. He was finally able to see the performance in Milan, although he could not converse with Sadayakko, due to the language barrier. A letter to Illica on April 30 suggests that Puccini now had the Japanese music he had been seeking, probably as a result of attending the troupe’s performance.47 He may have transcribed some music he heard, but it is also assumed that he was able to acquire A


Collection of Japanese Popular Musics/Nippon Zokuyokushū at the theater, providing Japanese songs in western notation. (Groos notes that Puccini took four of some ten Japanese melodies in Madama Butterfly from this source, "three note for note and in the same key." Most importantly, this volume contained notation for Echigo jishi which immediately inspired Puccini to write the prelude preceding Butterfly’s entrance, using the music which he had heard just days before in Sadayakko’s virtuosic koto performance of the piece in an excerpt from Kesa Gozen.

Puccini now had music which would not only serve as the first Japanese theme in the opera, but which would permeate the drama. One of most famous pieces of koto repertory, Echigo jishi was used in the kabuki excerpt to highlight an excursion by newlywed Kesa, her husband, and mother to the country where she plays the piece under trees in full blossom. Only a few days later, Puccini used the theme for his wedding party’s entrance, also in a flowered setting. Not only is this the first authentic Japanese

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48 First published in 1891 by Iwai Nagai and Kenpachiro Kobatake (a final eighth edition was published in 1899). Ibid., 52 and 52n. Kimiyo Powils-Okano agrees that this notebook was Puccini’s source of the Japanese National Anthem, and Echigo-jishi. She adds that the editors were the conductor and assistant conductor of the military music corps in Japan. Puccini’s Madama Butterfly, 48.


50 Some of the earliest recordings were made of the spectacular 1900 Kawakami performances. The London Gramophone & Typewriter Company recorded excerpts during August 1900, recently digitalized by J. Scott Miller. See: J. Scott Miller, “Dispossessed Melodies: Recordings of the Kawakami Theater Troupe,” Monumenta Nipponica 53, no. 2 (1998): 225-35. Although the digitalized disc does not include Echigo jishi because of a break in the master, a tape recording contains parts of the original. Abraham and Hornbostel also recorded on wax cylinders and transcribed portions of Sadayakko’s performances in Berlin in 1901, including shamisen music for three dances and the koto solo for the "death scene" in Kesa. Arthur Groos, Cio-Cio-San and Sadayakko, 51-52.
music in the opera, but the juxtaposition of musical styles and textures with the preceding Western themes also highlights the theme dramatically (see following chapter). Staccato strings imitate the sounds of the koto and shamisen; the duple meter and monophonic setting also support the Japanese style. Several writers note that the timing for Puccini’s attendance at the Kawakami performances and hearing this theme was fortuitous, as he had previously been coping with trying to make Pinkerton sing “as much like an American as possible.” He then heard, saw in context, and obtained notation for the perfect Japanese theme to provide the cultural contrast he was seeking. Four days after his return from Milan, he wrote: “I’ve done the entrance of Butterfly and am pleased with it.”

The Milan performance provided Japanese music sources, but it also greatly reinforced Puccini’s plan for the suicide as climax to his tragedy. The swift-moving kabuki performance convinced him to proceed more directly to the denouement, without the interruption of the planned consulate scene, placing the whole drama in Butterfly’s house.

In early June 1902, Puccini also wrote to Gaston Knosp, then in Vietnam surveying music for the French government, to obtain information about the melodies, rhythms, and use of percussion in Japanese music. But his major need for Japanese materials had already been satisfied.

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52 Ibid., 48.
It was several months later (September 1902) that Puccini began to work with Hisako Oyama, wife of the Japanese ambassador to Italy (who lived in Rome but spent her vacations in Viareggio, as did Puccini). Kimiyo Powils-Okano documents Mrs. Oyama's presence in Italy from 1899 to 1906 through interviews with her grandson, Toshio Sawaka, who also reported that his grandmother was proficient in the koto technique of the Yamada school, and was giving koto lessons to Queen Margerita of Italy. She played koto and sang melodies for Puccini to transcribe, and also helped him obtain printed books of Japanese music and possibly recordings.53

Puccini claimed in a New York Times interview that he had acquired recordings of Japanese music from which he obtained themes used in his opera. However, Arthur Groos discovered that the thousand recordings of Japanese music Puccini had ordered from the Gramophone & Typewriter Company early in 1903 (for payment, he was composing a song) were destroyed in a shipboard fire. Although Japanese music recordings are in the Celle Puccini museum, they could not have been used as resources for the composition of Madama Butterfly, as they are dated early 1904.54

Kimiyo Powils-Okano not only cites the possible sources of the authentic themes in the opera, she also provides summaries of the folk texts associated with them by

53 Kimiyo Powils-Okano, Puccini's "Madama Butterfly," 47-49.

Japanese of her time and previous generations. Her posited sources and texts will be discussed in the following chapters together with the opera’s setting of the themes.

In spite of Puccini’s great pains to find and incorporate such authentic material, audiences have probably responded primarily to “generic exoticism markers” (mentioned by Derek Scott above) including augmented seconds and fourths, modal sequences and parallel chords, pedal notes, ostinato rhythms, and orchestration (to be discussed in the analysis chapters). It is not likely that they have recognized specific melodies, with the possible exception of “Sakura” or the “Miyasama” theme used in previous European works.

As important to Puccini’s creative process as obtaining such authentic materials was his ability to integrate them into his own idiom. Julian Smith notes that Puccini did not wish his Japanese melodies to “display themselves too prominently,” and as a result, his composed pseudo-Japanese motifs, recognized mainly by their interval patterns, could blend more easily with the real Japanese tunes. By assimilating the Japanese themes into his previously established musical language, and using them for dramatic function, he produced a cohesive music drama in which tragedy was more central than exoticism.

[Puccini] sought to put into music/dramatic form a tragedy which emphasised the dissatisfaction and difficulties that love and passion could create... His colouring of the Japanese atmosphere was delicate and extremely subtle... but

55 Michele Girardi, Puccini: His International Art, 211-13, compiles Powils-Okano’s examples (and mentions six cited by Carner and six by Juichi Miyasawa [In “Some Original Japanese Melodies in Madama Butterfly,” Giacomo Puccini nel centenario della nascita (Lucca: Lorenzetti e Natali, 1958), 137-61], while rearranging them in the order in which they appear in the opera, and comparing them with Puccini’s versions. He does not follow the order of presentation of the themes in her book, “since the association of certain ideas, although brilliant, is forced and sometimes imprecise.”
[at] the emotional peaks . . . Puccini cast exoticism to the winds . . . [in a] consistently developing, up-to-date, European musical style.\textsuperscript{56}

Because the style of most of Butterfly's sung music is in a European idiom contemporary to Puccini's time, her character seems more current and universal. The most memorable Japanese themes dramatically interrupt and challenge her hopes and dreams.

The opera’s premiere and major revisions

Puccini commonly revised libretti and music, not only prior to public performance, but after. However, the circumstances of Madama Butterfly's premiere contributed to an immediate and substantial revision of the opera before any subsequent performance, and his great love for the opera caused him to revise it more than any of his others. Puccini's three preceding operas had been highly successful, and this concerned his rival composers and their publisher; it is therefore plausible that an organized claque instigated demonstrations at the premiere. Puccini was so confident of his beloved opera that for the first time he had invited his family. Giulio Ricordi also expected great success, and to heighten expectations had kept rehearsals closed to the press and had forbidden that scores leave the theater. With this background for the opening night, the first (and last) Puccini premiere at La Scala was greeted by, “Grunts, roars, howls, laughter,

bellowing, guffaws. Ricordi immediately withdrew the opera and returned payment to the theater.

Although the post-premiere revisions significantly affected the success of the opera and the outlines of its characters, deciphering the order and complexity of the revisions themselves has proven to be extraordinarily complex. Arthur Groos describes the four different performance versions of the opera printed between its premiere in 1904 and the version currently performed, printed in 1907. William Ashbrook categorizes the major revisions after the premiere affecting the characterization of the heroine as: 1) purely musical, 2) primarily textual, 3) alteration of some bit of stage business, and 4) timing and practicality modifications. Changes made for the principal versions following the premiere are summarized below (some will be discussed in more detail in later chapters):

The original score, created for the La Scala premiere on February 17, 1904, was revised in the following major published versions:

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61 A 1996 recording, VOX Classics 4 7525, presents the original 1904 La Scala Version, with each section that was revised for Brescia and Paris (parallel Italian and English with annotations). In 2002, Naxos produced a recording of the 1904 La Scala version, recorded at Bremen in December 1997. Naxos 0008-660078-79. In April 2004, to celebrate the opera’s centennial, Dicapo Opera presented the La Scala, Brescia, and Paris versions on three subsequent nights. The presenters exhibited some preference for the Brescia (second) version.
A. For Brescia on May 28, 1904 (Second performance):

1) Division of the second act into two parts. (The librettists had urged this change prior to the premiere.)

2) Change in melodic contour for Butterfly’s entrance.\(^62\)

3) Change in melodic contour for Butterfly’s final aria, from a descending to ascending line.\(^63\)

4) Removal of a large part of the first act, including many relative scenes with extraneous action and offensive caricature—the drunken uncle, and some of Pinkerton’s insulting remarks.\(^64\)

5) Addition of Butterfly’s second act triumphant exclamation on hearing the cannon of the returning ship (“Trionfa il mio amor”).

6) Addition of a final romanza for Pinkerton, “Addio fiorito asil” (which Giacosa had already written and urged on Puccini).\(^65\)

B. For the first London performance at Covent Garden on July 10, 1905:

1) Addition of an introduction to the flower duet

2) Further reductions in Pinkerton’s mockery of the Japanese.

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\(^62\) The original line’s resemblance to a theme in Mimi’s first aria in *La bohème* had precipitated part of the hostile claque’s comments at the premiere. Because this theme (of Butterfly’s entrance) recurs frequently, in the love duet and at other dramatic peaks, these changes redefined her character and will be further discussed in the final chapter.

\(^63\) The fact that the Brescia performance featured dramatic soprano Salomea Kruscenski, noted for her performances in *Aida* and *La Gioconda*, increased the gravity of the heroine’s role as well.

\(^64\) William Ashbrook observes that Illica’s draft of Act I had almost twice as many words as the final version. The longer version continually interrupted and delayed the establishment of Butterfly’s character. *The Operas of Puccini*, 112.

\(^65\) The *romanza* not only provided a more complete tenor role, but made the character more sympathetic, thus giving more credibility to Butterfly’s love for him.
C. For the first Paris production, December 28, 1906.66

1) Further tightening of the first act, with the officials proceeding directly to the wedding following Butterfly’s revelation of her age.

2) Direct movement from the wedding toast to “Kami, O Kami,” and the subsequent entrance and curse of the Bonze.

3) Modifications of text and music of “Che tua madre” in Act II, and reduction of the role of Kate, with many of her lines given to Sharpless.67

The sets and costumes designed by Michel Jambon and Alexandre Bailly were reminiscent of earlier French exotic opera settings by this team. Carré suggested a great number of staging modifications, most (but not all) of which were approved by Puccini.68

William Ashbrook has noted that removing the nonessential local color and slapstick humor was based only partially on the fact that these episodes were racially insulting; they were also “expositional padding” that detracted from the focus on Butterfly.69 The remaining humor is based on her naivete, with more poignant effect.

66 The Paris Opera director, Albert Carré, whose wife, Marguerite, had been cast as Butterfly, urged extensive changes on Puccini. However, Dieter Schickling suggests that “the alterations made at Carré’s suggestion were far less extensive than previously assumed . . . and for the most part [are] based on cuts intended by Puccini himself earlier.” Dieter Schickling, “Puccini’s Work in Progress: The So-Called ‘Versions’ of Madama Butterfly.” Music and Letters 79, no. 4 (1998): 533.

67 Schickling has credited recent archival findings for revealing that many of the Paris changes made supposedly at Carré’s had long been considered by Puccini and his team. Ibid., 33. Arthur Groos verified the same in his works on development of the libretto.


By 1906, Ricordi had published four different piano-vocal scores, and had begun engraving the orchestral score that appeared in 1907. Groos suggests that none of these versions seems sufficiently “definitive” to exclude the others. Julian Smith argues for the inferiority of the fourth as compared with the first version, but Groos notes that many performances based on the “original” version actually contain later modifications. Smith’s 1984 production for the English National Opera generally followed the premiere version, but incorporated some of Puccini’s later cuts, attempting to differentiate between modifications which supported Puccini’s “original vision,” and those which did not. Smith argues that the Paris production compromised the original anti-colonialist intentions of the composer and librettists, in order to better appeal to middle class audiences. In contrast, Groos suggests that “the Paris version reflects unusual circumstances and compromises at a particular theater and is therefore only a chronologically final version, not a definitive one.”

Dieter Schickling applies recent discoveries to interpretation of the previously accepted “versions,” showing that many modifications were made between versions. This suggests that the opera was changing from performance to performance, and that none of the printed scores corresponds precisely to the performance to which scholarship assigns it. He considers the versions only “retrospective snapshots” of Puccini’s values at that


time, and states that “every single performance in which he was involved was obviously a new experiment for him until the very end. . . “there is thus neither a ‘final’ version nor earlier authentic versions that can be clearly separated from each other, except for the version for the very first performance.”73

Puccini’s team had long considered removal of many of the sections deleted in the Paris version—details of Japanese color, Pinkerton’s insulting remarks about Japanese people and culture, a passage in the love duet where Butterfly has heard that Pinkerton is a barbarian (restored by Puccini in a 1922 performance), as well as the reduction of Kate’s role.74

Groos effectively summarizes some of the elements in the evolution of the role of Pinkerton, as demonstrating the many considerations required in creating a fin-de-siècle hero: various literary/dramatic sources, text and music balance, and dramatic values, together with balance of vocal roles and audience expectation. Groos concludes that these factors do not permit the identification of any of the four performance versions as sufficiently “intentional” or even “definitive” to exclude the others. He concludes his discussion by stating that

the frequent assumption that among performance versions of the opera there must be an intended definitive version, derives not merely from an intentional fallacy that hovers . . . above traditional operatic scholarship, but also from a

73 Dieter Schickling, “Puccini’s ‘Work in Progress’,” 528, 535.
false analogy with the presumed finality of . . . forms of literature whose unity and autonomy are themselves being questioned in current literary theory.\textsuperscript{75}

To observe the centennial of the opera, BMG Ricordi has reprinted the piano vocal reduction of 1907 score, and that is the source of examples for this paper. Reference to the Dover full score of the same 1907 version highlights significant orchestration.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 198-199.
Chapter Four: Background for an Interpretation of Madama Butterfly

This and the following chapters will examine Puccini’s compositional techniques for Madama Butterfly and suggest how the music closely supports the elements of classic tragedy. The discussion focuses on an interpretation of the prominent themes and motives that frame, define, and challenge the heroine. The musical elements comprising each will be described, as well as their dramatic contexts.

**Contemporary Italian Opera**

While not abandoning many of the previous values of Italian opera, Puccini blended international trends into the Italian verismo style of melodrama current at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Madama Butterfly, he found a subject particularly suited to that style. Carl Dalhaus actually considers verismo a variant of exoticism. He notes that use of local color, one of the key features of nineteenth-century opera, permitted composers to “[enrich] the music without complicating the plot . . . and kept stylistic devices from becoming stale . . . without puzzling audiences by parting with tradition.”¹ In addition to coloristic effects, Italian verismo between 1890 and 1910 was characterized by: simple and logical plots; differentiation of voice types, with particular exploitation of the high registers for dramatic effect; and dramatic use of repeated rhythmic motifs (particularly ostinati and tremolo), as well as irregular rhythms and meters. Within overall tonal stability, composers scored harmonic progressions and

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orchestral build-ups, as well as recurring themes, to produce the extreme dramatic climaxes popular in these works. The orchestra carried the narrative, and a closer interaction between orchestra and voice became typical of verismo. All of these qualities play a large part in the dramatic progression of Madama Butterfly, much enhanced by the themes and motives clearly associated with the dramatic elements of classic tragedy.

While Puccini employed the musical characteristics typical of veristic melodrama, he also expanded traditional melodic and harmonic material. The resulting immediacy and accessibility for audiences in a fresh new idiom have made his operas the most enduring of his era. This chapter will examine Puccini's characteristic use of melody, motive, harmony, orchestration and vocal timbre, texture, rhythm/meter and form. The following chapters will demonstrate Puccini's application of these elements in the creation of the dramatic structure of Madama Butterfly in its own unique musical world.

Because Madama Butterfly is the only one of Puccini's operas to juxtapose Eastern with Western culture, setting a theme or motive to elements which contrast most in the two cultures' musical styles assumes major dramatic significance. In spite of

2 Adriana Guarnieri Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo: Regressive Points of View and the Artifice of Alienation,” Cambridge Opera Journal 5, no. 1 (1993): 40-41. Carl Dahlhaus notes that in terms of popular aesthetics of the time, naturalism was viewed in terms of its more brutal aspects, and that these qualities of Tosca, Madama Butterfly, and La Fanciulla del West cause Puccini to be considered among the veristi. Nineteenth Century Music, 353.

3 In Tosca, “pentatonic and whole-tone melodic material, supported by diminished, half-diminished, augmented, and whole-tone chords function in a diatonic context, with conventional cadences,” in which “a surface radicalism hides a clear, conventional functionality.” Roger Parker, “Analysis: Act I in Perspective,” in Mosco Carner, Giacomo Puccini: Tosca (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 134. This also applies to Madama Butterfly and, as can be seen below, is true of Puccini's use of form, as well as melody and harmony.
Puccini's great pains to obtain authentic Japanese folk and art music and to compose additional material in a similar style, his use of non-diatonic scales and harmonies is sometimes ambiguous; these materials were prominent in contemporary European styles, as well as frequently used to signify "other." Julian Smith has correctly observed that Puccini avoided falling into the trap of writing an exotic opera, and that his musical language in Butterfly is in a "direct line of development" from his previous operas. Smith believes that most of the actual Japanese motives used by Puccini are absorbed into his own style, with meanings not always clearly "Eastern" or "Western."

The interpretations in the following chapters will consider the combination of melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, and timbral elements, in addition to text and context, in scenes expressing Butterfly's *hamartia* and challenges. An introductory discussion of individual elements permits a closer look at their contributions to this drama. Drabkin identifies the main features of Puccini's musical language—melody and timbre—as

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4 "The use of exotic elements in Puccini's music is not owing to change, but to a deep-seated psychological relation between primitive music and exoticism on the one hand and impressionism on the other." Mosco Carner, "The Exotic Element in Puccini," *Musical Quarterly* (January, 1936): 47. Michael Saffle comments on a *Turandot* example: "Puccini presents an 'exotic' setting of a pentatonic melody consisting of seventh chords and chords with added notes, creating an effect at once reminiscent both of the Far East and of Debussy's and Fauré's vocal works. The harmonic richness of accompaniments like this, combined with the 'exotic' flavor of Puccini's melodies, brings East and West together with considerable success in this and other scenes from *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot." "'Exotic' Harmony in La Fanciulla del West and Turandot," in *Esotismo e colore locale nell' opera di Puccini: Atti del I convegno internazionale sull' opera di Giacomo Puccini*, ed. Jürgen Machder (Pisa: Giardini, 1985), 128.

challenges to its analysis. As can be seen below, these elements, together with rhythm, also happen to be some of the elements which most contrast in Western and Eastern musical styles.

Musical Elements in Puccini

Melody

Puccini’s syllabic text-setting style (much influenced by Massenet, as noted in Chapter One), as well as his often speech-like conjunct melodic shape, contribute greatly to the naturalness and believability of this opera’s scenes. Robert Lawrence describes the opening conversation in Madama Butterfly between Pinkerton and Goro as “in essence, play-acting in the style of the London-New York theater: repartee and badinage . . . in a manner nearer to the timing of spoken drama than anything that has gone before in opera . . . ‘throwing away’ certain phrases . . . bringing others forward with lightning effect.”

Against this natural conversational background, which adds much to the intimate chamber quality of the opera, disjunct melodic contours stand out dramatically, especially where they contain particularly large intervals, as in moments of Butterfly’s anagnorisis.

The usually diatonic melodies in this opera also contrast with the pentatonic and whole-tone scales used by Puccini to suggest exoticism or “other.” The unique intervals in the latter scales can also suggest threat (such as previous European associations with


the augmented fourth *diabolus in musica*). Their communication of dramatic elements to audiences is therefore not through the recognition of specific Japanese themes, but in the perception of these elements as “other” and threatening; much of this perception depends on whether and how they are harmonized (see *Harmony* and *Texture*, below).

In addition to contrasts of culture and ambience, melodic contours and direction can also be associated with gender, emotion, and power. Although some writers have briefly considered these associations, none has explored them in any depth. Because such associations are particularly prominent in *Madama Butterfly*, they can be used to interpret Butterfly’s increasing tragic power. Certain contours initially associated with the foreign males are later appropriated by Butterfly. For example, the ascending arpeggiated themes sung by the two Americans at the beginning of the opera characterize a strong masculine and imperialist character. These occur both in Pinkerton’s opening aria and the “Star Spangled Banner” strains which introduce it, as well as in the consul’s first-act theme and Pinkerton’s second aria. Later in the act, Pinkerton orders the Bonze off his property in similar, militant ascending arpeggios. But by the second act, Butterfly herself is singing

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8 Sandra Corse has compared melodic contours in Puccini’s “stronger” and “weaker” heroines. “Mi chiamano Mimi: The Role of Women in Puccini’s Operas,” *Opera Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1983): 101-15.

9 In discussing Rodolfo’s *Nei cieli bigi* theme, Julian Budden notes that the “rising major-key arpeggio is a well-known topos of youthful idealism.” *Puccini* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 158. On another occasion he says that Puccini often uses this device *per raffigurare un jeune premier* (to represent a young leading man). “La dissociazione del leitmotiv nelle opere di Puccini,” In Biagini Ravenni, Gabriella and Carolyn Gianturco, eds., *Giacomo Puccini L’uomo, il musicista, il panorama europeo*: Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi su Giacomo Puccini nel 70° anniversario della morte (Lucca: LIM, 1997), 454. Bernard Keefe comments on the “upward thrusting arpeggio which expresses Scarpia’s lust,” an upward arpeggio symbolizing Tosca’s knife thrust, culminating in a high C, and a gentled upward arpeggio of Cavaradossi “softened into a melodic caress” in “O dolce mani.” “The Music of Puccini’s Tosca,” in *Tosca*, ed. Nicholas John (London: John Calder and New York: Riverrun Press,
some of the arpeggios associated with male power. There is power, too, in octave leaps, which are the most typical intervals characterizing Butterfly’s moments of anagnorisis.

The melodic sequence ascending by whole tones in Butterfly’s entrance, steeper than the usual diatonic major, establishes a hopeful, positive association in the early part of the opera (although the “curse,” a briefer, three-note whole-tone ascent, has negative associations from its first occurrence, mostly by virtue of its dotted rhythm and minor harmonization). From Butterfly’s final return to the stage and recognition of Pinkerton’s wife, the prevalent descending whole-tone patterns denote the loss of hope.

**Motive/Theme**

Puccini’s distinctive use of recurring themes\(^\text{10}\) demonstrates his ability to build dramatic structure through the music of an act, and *Madama Butterfly* represents the highest development of this ability. Earlier nineteenth-century opera had used orchestral motives to represent characters or ideas, and the orchestra also repeated melodies previously sung. But Wagner’s use of *leitmotives* as an organizing principle for an entire opera stimulated French and Italian composers to further experimentation. Puccini was the most successful among them at systematically highlighting motives to express a singer’s thoughts, or to signal something to the audience that the singer does not yet

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\(^{10}\) Although many writers use “motive” and “theme” interchangeably, here the former will designate patterns of only a few notes, and the latter somewhat longer patterns.
know. From *Manon Lescaut* on, he incorporated recurring themes not only for their emotional recalling effect, but as a unifying and form-building technique.

Roger Parker refers to “analytical distractions engendered by the use of recurring musical themes,” and by Puccini’s unique use of them in delineating form. Parker considers the motives to be one of the greatest barriers to interpretation of Puccini’s operas, while opera notes prepared for non-specialists focus on them as structural guides for the listener. Due to the great economy of Puccini’s melodic language, the repetition of a pattern may or may not carry motivic significance. Parker suggests that the listener’s need to find such significance will determine motivic labelling.

Although melody is the most important component of Puccini’s motives, they are made up of multiple musical elements, which may be varied for dramatic effect in subsequent repetitions. Some of the elements he most commonly uses in thematic


12 “On occasions Puccini seems to disregard any previous association and employ themes as part of a purely musical structure” and “in the wealth of recurring features,” some may be merely “casual repetition of a personal cliche.” Parker, “Act I in Perspective,” 138, 142.

13 Ibid., 138. As will be seen below, there is a great prevalence of thirds (especially “oscillating” thirds) and seconds in Puccini’s motives for *Madama Butterfly*. A large number of themes in this opera can be related to these intervals, as can the augmented fourth interval and the added sixth chord. Because of the common small intervals used in the motives, Antonino Titone relates each Butterfly motive to every other, reducing them all to cells of two- and three-note segments. *Vissi d’arte: Puccini e il disfacimento del melodramma* (Milan: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, 1972). Although the interrelationships of *Madama Butterfly*’s motives are striking, the dramatic impact of a theme depends on many factors beyond just these cell materials.
statement, recurrence, and transformation are described below. Scoring and dynamics also increase motivic effectiveness. A favorite technique, used frequently in Madama Butterfly, is to introduce a motive quietly in the orchestra, only later fully revealing its meaning through context and/or sung text.

Puccini’s motives are often distinguished by “an unexpected note, harmony, or rhythmic quirk,” contributing to their memorability. Julian Budden uses the image of a prism in describing these motives in their different settings, commenting on the different meanings associated with the same motive, depending on context and scoring. This efficiency permits Puccini to achieve formal unity within a natural sequence of events.

In this study, the primary motives associated with Butterfly’s hamartia and challenges will be traced in their many contexts. Just as the elements of classic tragedy have been effective over the centuries due to their embodiment of basic human vulnerabilities, so reinforcement of the tragic elements in easily perceived musical motives has created a highly accessible opera of enduring popular appeal.

Harmony

Harmony is a significant component of the identity of a motive or theme. When pentatonic and whole-tone themes are set in unison or octaves, they most clearly carry the

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14 Budden demonstrates with the three contexts of Hana saku haru, a Japanese melody used as the postlude to Butterfly's entrance. She later transforms it into a western-style arioso, and it appears in the introductory music to the final act "shorn of its Western accessories and speeded up . . . to indicate the city’s waking." Julian Budden, “Forte e nuova, ma non facile,” in Madama Butterfly: 1904-2004, ed. Ilaria Narici (Milan: Ricordi, 2004), 27.

15 Julian Budden, Puccini, 36, 272, 478.
significance of "other." The following discussion will describe the effect of harmony on the possible multiple meanings of a motive and the typical harmonies used at moments of climax.

In Puccini's attraction to exoticism for the opportunity to expand his melodic and harmonic materials within a tonal structure, Debussy's examples provided him with models for new freedom and harmonic enrichment. His previous experience and training in French traditions made him particularly receptive to these models, and Puccini was probably more influenced by Debussy than any other composer outside France, an influence most clearly heard in Butterfly. He had been using diminished, secondary, and dominant sevenths (with much parallel chromatic "side-slippping"), as well as whole-tone scales and harmony, as early as Edgar and Manon Lescaut, actually anticipating Debussy in such techniques. Carner assumes that Russian composers probably influenced both Puccini's and Debussy's interest in whole-tone effects.

In addition to the distinctive ways in which Puccini harmonizes the prominent motives in Madama Butterfly, he uses impressionistic harmonies to provide exotic

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16 Although often used to establish an "other-worldly atmosphere," certain harmonic aspects of Impressionism are also used in Puccini's "normal" style. In delineating the four "tintas" used in Turandot, Ashbrook and Powers contrast Chinoiserie, Dissonance, and Middle Eastern tintas with the "normal Puccinian 'Romantic-diatonic' style of Manon Lescaut, La Bohème, and Tosca." This style is characterized by "traditional European tonal-harmonic base colored by piquant pseudo-modal touches produced by replacing the leading tone with the lowered seventh scale degree and by occasionally using the lowered second scale degree in the minor mode, and often featuring the so-called violinata, in which strings in three or four octaves sound a strong legato melody with wind harmonies in the background." William Ashbrook and Harold Powers, Turandot, 94.

ambience. As part of this harmonic language, Puccini frequently used the submediant and/or supertonic chords at moments of climax (temporary minor areas). A supertonic seventh chord (half-diminished in a minor key) often underlies Butterfly's high climactic pitches, and seems to be one of Puccini's favorite harmonic colors. Roger Parker mentions its "ubiquity" in late nineteenth-century Italian opera, particularly in "action" scenes.

Frequent brief modulations are also characteristic of Puccini's writing. They are often used subtly in an accompaniment, to give variety to a melody without interrupting its continuity. Sequences build intensity with repetitions at higher intervals, even more often in descriptive orchestral passages than in arias.

Some controversies on the dramatic role played by tonal areas in Verdi have carried over into Puccini studies. Following Allan Atlas's publication of an article on the dramatic significance of tonal areas in the Butterfly love duet (the meaning of which he extends to the beginning and ending of the opera), Roger Parker responded in a follow-

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18 Here we can extend the term "repatriation" used by Arthur Groos for performances of Madama Butterfly in Japan to the utilization of impressionistic techniques in representation of a Asian subject. Debussy was considerably influenced in developing his harmonic style (what came later to be known as "Impressionism") by Asian performances (especially Indonesian gamelan) at the Paris Expositions in 1889 and 1900.


20 Jay Nicolaisen, Italian Opera in Transition, 194.

21 Many Puccini scholars are also prominent Verdi scholars. These include Julian Budden, William Ashbrook, Roger Parker, and others.

up article, and Atlas commented in reply. Parker disagrees that Puccini consciously
developed a long-range tonal plan in this opera. At a 2004 conference, he suggested that
considering key areas to be “easily coded theatrical signifiers isolated from the processes
that generated them” detracts from Puccini’s more expressive musical aspects. Parker
suggests that analyzing the love duet, as well as the rest of the opera, should involve not
only tonality, but stage business, stage picture, thematic recall, etc. which present “a
multivalent surface.” Not all who use this term agree on its scope. Atlas argues that
some consider it synonymous with “ambiguity,” and disagrees with this, finding a place
within the concept of multivalence for his tonal analysis.

**Timbre—Orchestration**

Puccini’s orchestration contributes greatly to the success of his operas. Bernard
Keefe states, “I know of few composers who understood so well the emotional potential
of every instrument in the orchestra,” and that Puccini could “trigger any emotion with
just the sound of an instrument in a certain register, or in a particular lay-out of a chord.”

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25 Allan Atlas, “Multivalence, Ambiguity and Non-ambiguity: Puccini and the Polemicists.” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 118 (1993): 73-93. Currently the term “multivalence” is used in several ways. Although it initially designated the different symbolic systems of opera, each carrying meaning, it seems now to apply also to multiple possible interpretations for a single element.
He also praises Puccini's matching of orchestration to the characteristics of the voice.\textsuperscript{26}

*Madama Butterfly* is scored for three flutes (one doubling on piccolo), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones plus a bass trombone, timpani, side drum, and harp, in addition to a full string section and an assortment of special percussion. Examination of the full score reveals Puccini's mastery of all sections of the orchestra, including frequent and detailed tempo, dynamic, articulation/muting markings for strings and horns, and nuanced expressive markings.

Even more important for atmosphere in this opera than Puccini's setting of pentatonic and other modes is his scoring to imitate Japanese instruments. To create these sounds, he expanded his percussion section to include tam-tam, Japanese tam-tam, and "low tam-tam," handbell, tubular chimes, keyboard glockenspiel, and Japanese bells, in addition to bird whistles, cannon shot, and chains for sound effects. Plucked strings and muted strings and brass, as well as extensive use of double-reed woodwinds and flutes, also contribute to these effects. Such scoring for percussion, winds, and strings can reinforce the oriental implication of a pentatonic melody harmonized in unison. As can be seen in Act I, however, the same "Japanese" melody can be transformed in its cultural association when set homophonically and scored for flowing strings.

Probably the most significant timbre which Puccini scored was "the sound of silence." Complete silence is one of the most effective intensifiers of a scene, for example

\textsuperscript{26} Bernard Keefe, "The music of Puccini's *Tosca,*" 20-21.
when the consul, in Act II, asks Butterfly what she would do if her husband never returns. Percussive sounds, following this silence, are particularly effective and threatening.

Timbre—Vocal

The evolution of the types of soprano performing Butterfly corresponded with the increased dramatic weight of the role. More complex differentiation of soprano, tenor, and baritone voices evolved throughout the nineteenth century, with the development of national schools of vocal technique and pedagogy, and larger orchestras and performance venues. Paul Robinson has commented on Verdi's "creation and exploration of voice types that convey a sense of power." The traditional voice types of his time were insufficient for the characters that Verdi conceived; he needed far more volume and intensity, particularly in the new high baritone and mezzo roles that he scored. In addition to these new voice types, Verdi frequently scored more extreme tessituras (both high and low) for his tenors and sopranos than previous composers; the upper G to high C range, used in Verdi climaxes, requires greater physical effort by singers. Audiences react to the piercing sound, and to the observation of the increased physical energy required.

Robinson suggests that "Perhaps unconsciously we associate the physical strength that makes such singing possible with a more abstract manifestation of power in the realm of politics," and Verdi's males were frequently very political. In mezzos, Verdi explored aggressiveness and "tension-ridden relations between mothers and children" as well as the

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“agonies of spurned women.”  

William Ashbrook also traces the development of these more veristic voice types, beginning with Verdi's middle period operas. There was more emphasis on “dramatic vehemence,” with less on refined technique than “stentorian high notes, italicized declamation, extremes of vocal color, and a whole repertory of extramusical effects.”  

With Verdi and other versimo composers as models, Puccini expanded the depiction of dramatic and emotional subtleties through his knowledge of the expressive capabilities of women's voice types, shown most impressively in Madama Butterfly. Robinson has suggested that “the second act of Madama Butterfly does for female singers what Sigfried does for men.”

Puccini chose Rosina Storchio (1876-1945), a light lyric soprano, to be his first Butterfly. She had played Musetta in a Rome La Bohème, and also Donizetti and Weber roles. But for Brescia, Puccini chose Salomea Krusceniski, a dramatic soprano, and approved Emmy Destinn for the role in London; both women were noted for performing the roles of Aida and Gioconda.

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30 Paul Robinson, Opera and Ideas, 169.

31 Ashbrook notes that “the prominence given these two dramatic sopranos suggests that Puccini later modified his original view of Butterfly as a sort of Japanese doll and came to stress more the tragic aspects of the role. He also says that fifteen years later, Puccini agreed that Storchio’s interpretation was “too brittle, her gestures too kittenish.” Ibid., 114 and 114 n.
A tradition of casting lirico-spinto voices, both for Butterfly and for Pinkerton, has continued. Much of the Butterfly role lies quite low in tessitura, and except for the final high C in the love duet (the final high D flat at the close of the entrance is optional), high B flat is the usual climax note (as it is for the tenor). A lirico-spinto voice has a full lower register, and a rich mixed quality in the higher range, containing the overtones of what is referred to as “the singer’s formant.” Such brilliance enables the voice to cut through a heavy orchestration and establishes its dominance. Butterfly is unique in Puccini’s work in these vocal demands, with Turandot the only larger voice. Roger Parker argues that Puccini does not usually choose keys to fit any long-range tonal planning, but to accommodate the sound and ease of tenors or sopranos in specific registers. In contrast with the voice types of the bel canto period, where orchestral textures were far less dense, and legato line with fioritura provided the expressiveness, heavier voices and more dramatic effects were the norm in late nineteenth-century opera.

Voice-type differences are not absolute, however, but occur along a spectrum of relatively

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32 The high D flat as final note in Butterfly’s entrance has been printed as an option since the 1907 Paris version of the opera. The comfortable tessitura for most lirico-spinto sopranos does not include this pitch, and few roles are scored above high C for this type of voice.

33 In the operas of this period, the timbre of the vocal sound itself, and musical phrasing, become the priority, especially in the higher climactic registers, often compromising diction or verbal phrasing. This contrasts greatly with the vocal priorities in art songs and earlier opera.

34 In most Puccini tenor arias, “high B flat is the highest note which a tenor can be relied upon to sing with security while still sounding in love (as opposed to in pain or patriotic fervour).” Roger Parker, “Analysis: Act I in Perspective,” 127. The same is true, an octave higher, of the soprano voice types usually associated with the Butterfly role.
“heavier” and “lighter.” Lyric sopranos, staged in a smaller venue with reduced orchestra, are often very successful in the role.

The frequent indications of crescendo, decrescendo, and *messa di voce* in this opera also relate to voice type, requiring not only changes in dynamics, but changes in vibrato speed and timbral mix. *Portamenti* and *rubato* are major components of Puccini’s style, and as in other *verismo* operas, gasps, sobs, etc. add to the realism of the Butterfly role. Similar markers of emotion also contribute greatly to the roles of Suzuki, Sharpless, and Pinkerton—the final act remorse of the latter is far more believable through the sobs in his voice. None of these elements can be determined exactly from notation. Training in the performing traditions (which vary over time) is essential, as well as a sensitive rapport between the conductor and singers for effective dramatic realization.

**Texture**

As noted above (under Harmony), the meaning of a theme can be varied through the different textures in which it may be set. To emphasize the Japanese nature of a pentatonic theme, scoring is usually in unison or octaves.\(^{35}\) The typical octave support (usually “*violinità*”) of a homophonic-harmonized theme establishes the Puccinian “norm” (see note in Harmony section above). This is one of the most important distinctions in interpreting a motive as “Eastern” or “Western.”

\(^{35}\) An example of heterophony, a typical texture of Japanese traditional art music, occurs in the wedding scene in Act I, just after 83.
In addition, Puccini achieves natural flow in his operas by integration of arias into the surrounding musical material. Part of this integration is supported by making the beginning of the aria sound more conversational than aria-like. Carner notes that arias and duets always arise out of the situation, or conversely, that “the course of action is always so directed as to demand culmination in a lyrical effusion.” Helen Greenwald attributes the continuous flow to the fact that in Puccini, the frequent *arioso* texture functions more within the context of the larger scene or sequence of musical events, without a sharp separation from the continuous-texture conversational parts.

*Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly* contain less ensemble singing than any of the other Puccini operas, showing that their libretti follow more closely the structure of stage plays consisting mostly of dialogue. *Madama Butterfly* is comprised mostly of scenes built around the interactions of two or three people. (Note that a section termed “duet” usually consists mostly of dialogue or monologue, with infrequent *a due* singing). The most

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38 Helen Greenwald, *Dramatic Exposition and Musical Style in Puccini’s Operas* (PhD dissertation, City University of New York, 1991), 157-58. The endings of aria and duet sections are often open, with inconclusive cadences.

39 William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini*, 82.

40 See also notes on “duet” in Form section below.
frequent texture is therefore *stile misto*, the hybrid speech-like style between recitative and arioso, usually lightly scored.

Scoring for chorus can be considered both texture and timbre. In *Madama Butterfly*, Puccini uses the chorus in quite a different way than does Verdi, mostly to establish the color and context in Act I. The chorus represents the friends and relatives of Butterfly, and extensive cuts in their presentation, while considerably tightening the first act, diminished the detailed representation of Butterfly's interactions and dependence on them. In weakening these ties, as well as making Butterfly's character less Japanese, the changes also weakened the significance of her alienation and isolation following the curse of the Bonze. 41

**Rhythm/Meter**

Established European associations with certain rhythmic patterns proved useful to Puccini. A frequent device in the melodramatic operas of the verismo period was the tremolo to suggest foreboding, which Puccini frequently scores in *Madama Butterfly* (depending on implied harmony, it can have positive meaning as well). Another figure, the anapest (two or more short durations, followed by a longer one) is described by Frits Noske as "a musical figure of death," and Theodore Gentry has explored this figure as a

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symbol of death in Tosca. But this figure also happens to be a typical Japanese rhythm, and it is pervasive in Madama Butterfly, first heard in the prelude’s “Nagasaki” theme.

Meter and rhythm cannot be readily separated from other thematic elements. As in other nineteenth-century operas, rhythmic elements may be the most (or even only) distinctive signifiers of a motive. A change in rhythm or meter often marks a new section, as does a change in tonal area, texture, or harmony. Helen Greenwald has described how the typical metric signifiers of Puccini’s heroines at their entrances contrast with those of their male counterparts, as well as with metrical contexts preceding their entrances. In this opera, Butterfly rarely sings to a triple meter (although the Americans frequently do so), but in the traditional Japanese duple meter.

William Ashbrook has observed that in phrases where Puccini wants to stress the vocal melody, the vocal and orchestral rhythms coincide; at other times, vocal lines are heard against a different rhythm in the orchestra. Orchestral off-beats, under a vocal

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43 See Act I, rehearsal numbers 2 and 4.

melody, "impart a feeling of urgency," and Puccini uses syncopation and hemiola in many ways in this opera. Once again, the combination of these elements with others will determine possible interpretations.

**Form**

Puccini's forms are so clear from the smallest to largest level that they have been the focus of much scholarly attention. More importantly, they have contributed greatly to the immediate comprehensibility of his works. Helen Greenwald has expanded Carner's observation of the bipartite structure of Puccini's acts, suggesting a frequent division into comic/serious and kinetic/static sections (a pattern that is especially clear in the first act of *Madama Butterfly*). The sections of Puccini's arias and longer scenes are clearly delineated by emotional focus. Michele Girardi uses a different formal analysis technique for each opera in his 2000 volume; it is notable that his analysis of *Madama Butterfly* follows an entirely different strategy from that for *La bohème* and *Tosca*, dealing with themes rather than a typical operatic structure.

In his discussion of realism in opera, Carl Dahlhaus notes the increased importance of the duet by the time of *La Traviata*. "Dialogue . . . came to occupy the foreground as a medium of dramatic confrontation. Accordingly, the duet is the form in which realist

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47 Michele Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art*. 118
tendencies, if any, will be found . . . [It is] clear that the essential unit of the musical form is not the larger section designated by tempo but the melodic unit in which one emotion at a time is expressed."48 This concept is particularly important in Madama Butterfly.49

The Centro Studi Giacomo Puccini sponsored a 2001 conference focused on Italian operatic forms during Puccini’s compositional career, and the new formal systems emerging in the 1880s from previous traditions. Harold Powers, who promoted la solita forma (the customary form) as a basis for analysis of much of Verdi, was the keynote speaker. He suggested that in the late nineteenth century, “with the succession of dramatic events replacing the ordering of musical genres as the dominant organizing criterion,” the previous formal organizations were no longer applicable. Alternating sections of parlante were accompanied by continuous orchestral texture, and where vocal melody dominated, the orchestra was subordinate. He also noted that (as discussed in Chapter One) distinctions among verse meters and stanza designs became far less influential.50 Examining episodes in Manon Lescaut and Turandot, Powers finds no consistent solita or insolita forma, and concludes, “there is no general analytic premise


49 William Ashbrook finds this opera to contain the most extended duets in all Puccini’s works, including the first interchange between Pinkerton and the consul, the love duet, and the second act conversation between the consul and Butterfly. The Operas of Puccini, 122.

comparable to *la solita forma* that I know of to help in interpreting Puccini, let alone his contemporaries."\(^{51}\)

At the same conference, David Rosen discussed Girardi’s choice to analyze the *La bohème* scene in Act I between Rodolfo and Mimi as *la solita forma*, labelling parts as *tempo d’attacco, cantabile, tempo di mezzo,* and *cabaletta*. Rosen concludes that although the duet has some resemblances to the older form, there are far more differences. He determines that “it is unlikely that the template elucidates either Puccini’s relationship to this duet or the 1896 audience’s reception of it.”\(^{52}\)

The following discussion will examine the musical motives and themes most important to the dramatic structure of classic tragedy in *Madama Butterfly* in their introduction, recurrences, and juxtapositions. The ways in which these motives and themes build and reinforce Butterfly’s *hamartia*, as well as repeatedly challenge it, will be interpreted through their most prominent musical features, building on the contexts described above and depending principally on the specific musico-dramatic features of Puccini’s score.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 49.

\(^{52}\) David Rosen, “‘La solita forma’ in Puccini’s Operas?,” In *Studi Pucciniani* 3 (Lucca: Centro studi Giacomo Puccini, 2004), 199.
Chapter Five: *Madama Butterfly*—An Interpretation: Act I

This chapter will examine how the prominent musical motives and themes of *Madama Butterfly* closely correspond to the dramatic elements of classical tragedy and the depiction of a powerful tragic heroine. These dramatic elements include:

1. The heroine’s basic goodness, innocence, and youth
2. Her errors in judgment/*hamartia*
3. “Cosmic collusion” (fate), and her struggles against that fate.
4. Her moments of tragic recognition/*anagnorisis*

The following musical themes frame,¹ define, and challenge the heroine, in their frequent recurrences. Scenes selected for description and interpretation are those in which these themes most effectively advance the tragic action.

I. Butterfly’s *hamartia*: her confident but misplaced trust is represented by repeated themes from the following:

   A. “The Star Spangled Banner”: Butterfly’s faith in America, her “American dream.”²

   B. *Spira sul mare, sul la terra*: Butterfly’s entrance love music, representing faith in a man, her “dream of love.”

   C. *Un bel di*: Butterfly’s Act II reassertion of her faith in the American man, following her three-year wait.

II. Challenges to Butterfly’s faith (pentatonic or whole-tone themes; three from authentic Japanese sources). Labels are suggested by the context in which each theme is first heard.

   A. “Fate” (last part of *Echigo jishi*): the inexorable forces beyond Butterfly’s control, defined by her line *Ma il turbine rovescia le quercie*.

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¹ Different approaches to framing can elicit different interpretations of operatic works. Steven Huebner suggests that frame is “a construct in interpretation and criticism.” “Thematic Recall in Late Nineteenth-Century Opera,” in *Studi Pucciniani* 3 (Lucca: Centro studi Giacomo Puccini, 2004), 102.

² This theme introduces Pinkerton’s entrance aria, but is taken over in Butterfly’s thoughts following his departure.
più robuste (But the whirlwind uproots the strongest oak tree)—pentatonic, anapest rhythm.

B. “Death” (Ume no haru): a concept first associated with Butterfly’s father’s death, then his dagger and his suicide, and finally with Butterfly’s death—pentatonic, anapest rhythm.

C. “Curse”: the rejection of Butterfly by her relatives and culture precipitated by her conversion to Christianity—whole-tone, dotted rhythm, created by Puccini.

D. “Shame” (Suiryō bushi): Butterfly’s Act II description of the shame in resuming life as a geisha or beggar, and her preference for death—pentatonic, anapest rhythm.

Focusing on these major motives and themes in the most dramatic of their recurrences, the study will also describe the musical introductions for each act, which set the ambience. The distinct vocal contours of Butterfly’s moments of anagnorisis are noted, as well as their orchestral settings. Examples from the score will be designated by act (Roman numeral), rehearsal number (underlined), and number of measures before or after the rehearsal number.

Melodic contour, harmony, timbre (including articulation), rhythm, and texture are the most significant musical elements of the themes used to establish ambience and differentiate the culture, gender, and attitudes of the characters. Notable among the themes depicting the “other” culture are those authentic Japanese melodies adapted by Puccini, and those he composed in a similar style or in whole-tone frameworks. Although most of the rest of the music is in the “Puccinian Romantic-diatonic norm” (See Chapter Four, note 17), the styles overlap considerably. Puccini’s norm involves much use of expanded dominants, as well as diminished and half-diminished sevenths, functioning in a diatonic context. Because these harmonies share intervals with pentatonic and whole-tone
systems, and because Puccini blurs styles as mentioned above, clear binary cultural
oppositions are infrequent. With an initial significance established for themes in the
context or associated text of their first (or early) appearances, they subsequently recur in
the orchestra, emphasizing its Greek chorus “cinematic” function.

Although Puccini’s first impulse in this opera was to juxtapose successive scenes
of oriental and western ambience, the Japanese and whole-tone motives and themes
became far more significant dramatically as the opera evolved into a tragic character
study. They now have multiple functions. In addition to providing ambience and color,
they also represent the elements of human nature and culture which constitute Butterfly’s
fate, relentlessly pursuing her and forcing her final choice. For the most striking contrasts
of oriental with western ambience, Puccini directly juxtaposes the most clearly “other”
musical elements (including pentatonic or whole-tone melodies) with more traditional
western styles.

The continuity of Puccini’s compositional style makes it difficult to remove
specific examples from the fabric of the opera for examination. As Bernard Keefe
suggests, “Each mood prepares the way for the next . . .” Puccini assembles the melodic
components of his characteristic “mosaics” into cohesive wholes. As Carner states, “To

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3 Butterfly is continually present on stage, except for a brief period during Act III, and is the
focus of attention even when she is not on stage. This inspired the great variety and subtlety with which
Puccini imbued her role in the psychological continuity of her development.

4 Puccini modifies the style of one of the “other” themes to approach his “norm” in the dramatic
development of Butterfly and her crisis. (See Chapter Four, note 14.)

5 Bernard Keefe, “The Music of Puccini’s Tosca,” in Tosca, English National Opera Guide,
subject them to formal criticism... would be like smashing a kaleidoscope in order to see what is inside.” But for purposes of this discussion, the above motives and themes most fundamental to the opera’s dramatic structure will be examined in the context of their first occurrences, as well as in recurrences where increasingly complex orchestral textures juxtapose and layer melodies that have previously been given an identity.7

Structure of Act I

Each act of the opera has a musical introduction (although not formally designated “overture” or “prelude”)—these will be briefly described in their function of establishing the setting (and after Act I, recalling emotions). Act I of the opera is nearly as long as the following two acts combined and is constructed somewhat similarly to La Bohème and Otello—a very active, colorful first half, and much more serene and intimate second half. Scenes are not designated as such. However, to understand the parts selected for study in their dramatic context, it is appropriate to briefly outline each act. The following main sections comprise Act I:

Musical Introduction for Act I—Establishing the Setting

I. Introduction of the Americans: Presentation of Pinkerton and its frame
   Pinkerton’s frame/Butterfly’s hamartia: The “Star Spangled Banner”
   Pinkerton’s intent/Butterfly’s hamartia

II. Introduction of the Japanese bride and her friends: Presentation of Butterfly and its frame
   Japanese frame: Echigo jishi
   Butterfly’s hamartia: Entrance love music

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7 Although the outline above is thematic, motives and themes will be discussed in the order of their occurrence in the opera.
Japanese frame: *Hana saku haru*
Butterfly’s difficult life and challenges to her faith: “Fate”
Challenges to Butterfly’s faith: “Death”

III. The wedding scene
Butterfly’s conversation with Pinkerton and recurrence of “Death”
Butterfly’s conversion, further *hamartia*
Another recurrence of “Death” theme
Wedding blessing, and the “Curse” challenge to Butterfly’s faith
American patriarchy banishes Japanese patriarchy

IV. The love duet: Seduction and resistance/*hamartia* and *anagnorisis*
Introduction (*hamartia* of protection; *hamartia* of assimilation)
Part One (*hamartia* of protection; *anagnorisis* of family’s curse)
Part Two (*hamartia* of heavenly love; *anagnorisis* of love commitment leading to death)
Part Three (*hamartia* of common feelings, *anagnorisis* of curse and cruel treatment of butterflies, *hamartia* of tender love)
Part Four: Reprise of Butterfly’s entrance (together, yet far apart)

Musical Introduction for Act I—Establishing the Setting:

A rapid four-voice 2/4 fugue, based on small intervallic patterns, introduces the opera and its setting. The string sections enter in turn, with woodwind and horn chords, and flute counter-melody. The alternating impressions of minor and major in the subject presage many ambiguities to follow in the opera. The subject begins in C minor, but the accented eighth notes and dotted B-flat create a temporary E flat major feeling before the minor cadence and the following answer at the fifth. The prevalent thirds and seconds in the patterns are also found in the majority of the motives and themes to come in the opera.

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8 Kimiyo Powils-Okano compares this piece with the overture to Smetana’s *The Bartered Bride* (Carner first suggested the resemblance in *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 422), and draws many comparisons to the similarity of situation for Butterfly and Smetana’s heroine—both are being sold. *Puccini’s “Madama Butterfly”* (Bonn: Verlag für Systematische Musikwissenschaft, 1986), 85.
Although one might assume that such a distinctive, polyphonic Western form represents the West (Girardi suggests that it depicts “American efficiency”), others see Japanese imagery in the theme. Julian Budden hears it as representing “the Lilliputian world of Loti,” and asserts that its frequent recurrences in Act I are “always with Japanese associations.” Carner also hears this ambience, which to him suggests “tiny tripping feet—a quaint, fussy doll-like world.” And Julian Smith insists that compared with the opening of Puccini’s other operas, this prelude is “curiously neutral, suggesting no location and no mood.” Although the dynamics and expression markings, “fortissimo,”

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10 Julian Budden, *Puccini*, 244.


“vigoroso”/sturdy, vigorous, robust and “rividamente”/coarsely, harshly, ruggedly, roughly (used at entrance of each new section of the fugal theme), would seem to reinforce Girardi’s interpretation, perhaps the modal ambiguity (recurrences of the fugue theme feature only the initial minor section) and the grace notes suggest a possible deliberate cultural ambiguity.

As if to clarify any doubt regarding representation of Japan, the second motive in the prelude is set to an anapest rhythm, with accents on the first and final eighth note in each measure. The contrapuntal texture is replaced with homophony, as the tutti orchestra supports an inverted triadic harmony (the parallel octaves and fifths produce an exotic effect), with the addition of triangle and tamborine, and a cymbal con bacchetta di ferro (with an iron stick), English horn, trombones and trumpets. This motive is later identified with the town of Nagasaki itself, as the consul sings the town’s name to its rhythm shortly after his entrance. The motive also for the first time presents the typical Japanese anapest rhythm which recurs frequently, significantly, and ultimately tragically in the opera.

Example 5-2, Act 1, "Nagasaki" motive
The fugue motive (but not texture) returns at $2+7$, accompanied by ascending octaves of a diminished-seventh harmony, as the curtain opens. The first visual image is a Japanese house overlooking Nagasaki Harbor, the single setting for the entire opera.  

Once the setting is established through the bustling fugal introduction, the beginning of the first act introduces the leading characters, as well as others of their culture. The personalities, plans, and assumptions of the hero and heroine are divulged to the audience, who from these revelations already understand the basis for the tragedy.

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The music that introduces Pinkerton and Butterfly (and becomes part of her *hamartia*) recurs at significant points in the exposition of her character and faith, sometimes in dramatic transformation. The following discussion will situate the principal themes of the opera in the dramatic and musical contexts of their first appearances.\(^{14}\)

I. Introduction of the Americans: Presentation of Pinkerton, and its frame

This section contains an exchange between the hero and the matchmaker regarding the house to be rented, introduction of the servants, and a three-part, almost “double aria” form (*Dovunque a mondo-Amore o grillo*) followed by a duet (*Ier l’altro, il consolato*) between the hero and his countryman, the American consul.\(^ {15}\)

**Pinkerton’s frame/Butterfly’s *hamartia*: The “Star Spangled Banner”**

The opening scene introduces the hero, U. S. Navy Lieutenant Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton, and illuminates his personality and cultural values. He is negotiating with a Japanese matchmaker/salesman on a price for a temporary bride and rental home during his stay in Japan. The American consul joins the hero to encourage and caution him.

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\(^{14}\) In the following sections, brief dramatic descriptions will be followed by text (if any), a summary of musical elements in the chosen example, the musical example, and summary or transition statements.

\(^{15}\) Although some critics see this double aria as a throwback to *la solita forma* (with the first and second aria constituting the cantabile and caballeta, and the consul’s inserted question *Ed è bella la sposa?* and matchmaker’s response as the tempo di mezzo, followed by the duettino between the two Americans), David Rosen makes the case that “vestiges do not constitute the form.” David Rosen, “‘La solita forma’ in Puccini’s Operas?” in *Studi Pucciniani* 3 (Lucca: Centro studi Giacomo Puccini, 2004), 199.
From these three men, the audience learns clearly, before ever seeing the heroine, that any faith she places in a marriage to Pinkerton is doomed.

Having told the consul that he has bought the little house "for nine-hundred and ninety-nine years, with the option, each month, of annulling the contract," Pinkerton now outlines the philosophy of the roving "Yankee" who takes his pleasure wherever he finds it. The audience thereby has prior knowledge of his intent for the marriage.

A phrase of the "Star Spangled Banner" precedes Pinkerton's singing. This excerpt serves not only to introduce Pinkerton as an imperialist American, but becomes one of the components of Butterfly's hamartia or tragic misassumption—her faith in a country she believes to be more supportive of women than her own. The hopes that she has for an enduring marriage with her future husband, under the laws of his country, are not at all what he intends. Therefore the recurrences of this theme in Butterfly's later expressions of faith in him and in America poignantly remind us of her misplaced loyalty.

Dovunque al mondo lo Yankee vagabondo si gode e traffica sprezzando i rischi.
Affonda l'ancora alla ventura—finché una raffica scompiglia nave
E ormeggi, alberatura
La vita ei non appaga se non fa suo tesor i fiori d'ogni plaga
D'ogni bella gli amor!

16 Although composed in 1814, the Star Spangled Banner did not become the American national anthem until a bill was passed by Congress in 1930 and signed by President Hoover on March 3, 1931. The Army and Navy had adopted it as their official hymn in 1895 and 1904, respectively, and the army regulations of 1917 designated it as the "National Anthem of the United States," as did the Navy later the same year. P. W. Filby and Edward G. Howard, Star Spangled Books (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1972), 168.
All over the world the Yankee wanders on business and pleasure, ignoring all risks. He casts his anchor at random until a squall upsets the ship, and all its moorings and rigging. And he's not satisfied with life unless he can get the greatest enjoyment out of each place he visits, and win the heart of each girl!

Representing the imperialist aspirations of the American navy in Asia at the end of the nineteenth century, Pinkerton's perspective is the whole world, and the American's role in it, exploitative of its resources and its women. Following several recurrences of the "Nagasaki" motive (Example 5-2) at 20+3, and a tutti descending chromatic scale, there is a change of key (G minor to A-flat major), meter (2/4 to 3/4), and instrumentation (mostly strings and flutes to prominent brass) to introduce the American theme. At the ritornello (21+5), the woodwinds, strings, and horns replace the brass, with the violas carrying the melody. Some sections of the aria echo the ascending major triad arpeggios of the introductory "Star Spangled Banner." Puccini's marking for the entering tenor voice is con franchezza (with frankness, openness, freedom, sincerity). Throughout the opera, Puccini exploits the dramatic effects of juxtapositions of such major triadic music to

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17 These ascending tonic triad arpeggios are also the basis of much military signal music, including Reveille and Taps; currently the folksong "Amazing Grace," which also fits the tonic triad pattern, seems to be frequently used at military funerals. See Chapter Four, note 9.

18 This serves to increase the tragedy, as apparently Pinkerton sees nothing whatsoever wrong with his attitude and plans. Carner suggests that the introduction of more leaps in the vocal line than usual in Puccini's tenor arias "lends this aria a certain breeziness and nonchalance," Puccini: A Critical Biography, 421.
represent the West with the more static, ambiguous pentatonic and whole-tone music representing the “other” (Japanese, in this case). The ritornello (21÷5) frames the verses of the aria. It is initially played in the orchestra, but after several repetitions it is sung by the consul in warning that this evangello facile (easy creed) could result in misunderstanding and pain.19 Not only is the aria introduced by strains of the “Star Spangled Banner,” it concludes with a toast to another strain of the hymn at I, 26, sung in English first by Pinkerton, followed by the consul: “America forever!”

Example 5-3, Act I, 21. “Star Spangled Banner” introduction and Dovunque Mondo

19 Regarding the consul’s comments, Mosco Carner has suggested that “The fact that even in the only aria he is given, Pinkerton is interrupted several times by the consul who sings also the very last line, well demonstrates his lack of full tenorial status.” Ibid.
Pinkerton’s intent/Butterfly’s *hamartia*

When the consul inquires whether Pinkerton is in love or infatuated, Pinkerton sings in his second aria (also built on the arpeggiated major triad) of his fascination with Butterfly. He describes her “as light as a delicate piece of blown glass . . . [she] seems a figure on a painted screen” who “flutters like a butterfly” and notes his desire to pursue her “even though I should crush her wings in doing so.” The consul (who has not yet met Butterfly) criticizes this description of the woman as merely an exotic object, much like the fans and screens so popular in Europe. He initiates the following three-part duet with a comment on the depth of her love, which he determined from hearing her voice (but not seeing her) at the consulate. With his insistence that “that divine, sweet little voice should
not utter notes of sorrow,” Butterfly has now been described before her arrival through
the attitudes of these men. Pinkerton considers her to be a light-weight trifle, statue, or
picture-like being, while the consul perceives her goodness and innocence through the
sound of her voice.  

Something about each personality has been learned, as well as the role of each in
the dramatic interactions to come. The conclusion of the duet before Butterfly’s entrance
adds further to her *hamartia* in showing that not only does Pinkerton consider his
marriage to Butterfly temporary, but also that he fully intends to marry an American wife.

Sharpless:  
*Bevo alla vostra famiglia lontana.*

Here’s to your family far away.

Pinkerton:  
*E al giorno in cui mi sposerò*
*con vere nozze a una vera sposa americana!*

And to the day when in a real wedding
I shall marry a real American wife!

Following the consul’s toast to Pinkerton’s American family in the duet’s final
stanza, the sailor sings in octaves with the orchestra to text referring to *una vera sposa americana* (a real American wife). The climax of the final phrase at $36+5$ is Pinkerton’s
traditionally sustained high B flat on the word *sposa* (wife)—a word which summarizes the
tragedy to come, with its implication that the Japanese marriage is not a real one to

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20 This provides a clue to us that her power and personality will be revealed through the quality
of her voice.
Pinkerton). It is immediately followed by an affrettato to a cadence elided with the beginning of the pentatonic music accompanying Butterfly’s entourage and the Japanese frame for Butterfly’s appearance.

Example 5-4. I, 36. Conclusion of Pinkerton and Sharpless’ duet and elision of final cadence of duet with Echigo jishi.
II. Introduction of the Japanese bride and her friends: Presentation of Butterfly and its frame

This section reveals Butterfly’s personality and expectations through her arrival with her friends, followed by conversations that reveal some of her past life. Framed in a Japanese context by *Echigo jishi* and *Hana saku haru*, the more western, diatonic nature of her first singing establishes her idealistic hopes and dreams as those of “everywoman.” In her later singing of the Japanese framing themes, she uses the first melody to narrate her past, and transforms the second in describing her future.
Pinkerton and the consul had been singing in the Romantic-diatonic Puccinian norm, B-flat major, legato, 3/4 at a moderato tempo (quarter=104), scored for woodwinds, harp, and strings. Following the downbeat elision, punctuated by a sharp stroke on the tympani and triangle, Goro rushes in to announce the women’s approach (Second part of Example 5-4, above). His pentatonic melody is accompanied by violin tremolo fifths sul ponticello, staccato unison melody in the lower strings and bassoon, and a staccato open-fifth ostinato in the clarinets. The meter changes to 2/4, and the tempo is increased by almost half. This first authentic Japanese theme in the opera is a portion of *Echigo jishi*, heard by Puccini in the Kawakami kabuki presentation.\(^{21}\) The juxtaposition and elision of this with

\(^{21}\) The source of one of the most frequently recurring motives in the opera, *Echigo jishi* was composed by Kineya Rokuzaemon IX in 1811 as a dance suite for the kabuki theater of that period. Its popularity inspired an arrangement for koto solo. The name means “Lion of Echigo,” originally an acrobatic dance performed by little boys of Echigo wearing lion hats. They came from poor peasant families who sent their children to masters of the street artist guild to be trained in acrobatic dancing. (“*Echigo-jishi*” wurde im Jahre 1811 von Kineya Rokuzaemon IX als Tanzsuite für eines der damaligen Kabukitheater komponiert. Dieses Stück wurde so populär, daß es später als das klassische Stück japanischer Kunstmusik galt. Der Name “Echigo-jishi” bedeutet “Löwe (shishi) aus Echigo”... Bezeichnet wurde damit ursprünglich ein akrobatischer Tanz, der von den kleinen Jungen aus Echigo aufgeführt wurde. Diese Kinder trugen einen kleinen Löwenkopf als Kopfschmuck... Die Kinder stammten aus armen Bauernfamilien... und deshalb ihre Kinder an die Meister der kumi genannten Straßenkünstlergilde verkauften. Sie wurden im akrobatischen Tanz trainiert.) Powils-Okano associates Puccini’s use of the piece for the arrival of Butterfly and her geisha friends, with the fact that geishas also come from impoverished families and try to make a living as entertainers, in a similar way to the poor little boys. (Geishas stammen in der Regel aus armen oder verarmten Familien und fristen ihr Dasein, wie die “Echigo-jishi” Kinder, durch das Unterhalten der Gäste mit ihrem Tanzen.) She assumes Puccini heard this story from Mme. Oyama. Kimiyo Powils-Okano, *Puccini’s “Madama Butterfly.”* Bonn: Verlag für Systematische Musikwissenschaft, 1986, 52-53. [Although Girardi has noted the lack of correlation between the titles of the Japanese tunes and Puccini’s use of them, Michele Girardi, *Puccini*, 216, and Budden agrees, stating that “the character of the original texts bears no relation to the use Puccini makes of them,” Julian Budden, *Puccini*, 243, Powils-Okano finds many connections among the
the highly contrasting style of Pinkerton's preceding music forecasts the way in which Puccini embodies dramatic meaning in the interplay of western and Japanese motives throughout the opera—here all elements support the binary opposition. There are implications for Butterfly's hamartia and future cultural conflict in the juxtaposition of the radically different musical styles just prior to her entrance.

Butterfly's hamartia: Entrance love music

In Butterfly's vocal entrance, we see a beautiful, young and innocent woman ascending into her dream world. Her text and music demonstrate her transcendent spiritual perspective of the universe (which continues throughout the opera) as she climbs the hill, in contrast with Pinkerton's view of the wide world as his to dominate. Even more importantly, Butterfly's entrance establishes her strong faith in a love which will save her from poverty and the shameful life as a geisha. With her father's suicide, Butterfly has lost the status assured her as his daughter. She thinks that marriage to an American represents a recovery of social status. (The text of her second act aria, "Che tua madre," makes it clear that Butterfly sees geisha life as shameful.\(^2\)) She believes in the protection this marriage will offer her, in exchange for her commitment to this husband and his texts of the folk songs and Puccini's settings, as can be seen below.)

\(^2\) *E Butterfly, orribile destino, danzerà per te . . . la ghescia canterà! . . . Ah! No, no, questo mai! Questo mestier che al disonore porta! Morta! Morta! Mai più danzar!* (And Butterfly—dreadful fate—will dance for you . . . the Geisha will sing! . . . Ah! No, no, never that! That way of life which leads to dishonor! I would face death rather than dance again!)
culture. Because of the frequent recurrence of this entrance theme, we are reminded over and over of this aspect of her hamartia—belief in a man.

Like Puccini’s Mimi and Floria Tosca, Butterfly is heard before she is seen. The western nature of her entrance music signifies her willingness to accept everything western as a part of her bride’s duties, in return for protection and security. Puccini’s choice also establishes her as “everywoman,” implying that the message of her tragedy is for all.

Spira sul mare e sulla terra un primaveril soffio giocondo
Io sono la fanciulla più lieta del Giappone, anzi del mondo.
Amiche, io son venuta al richiamo d’amor! D’amor venni alle soglie
Ove s’accoglie il bene di chi vive e di chi muor!
Amiche, io son venuta al richiamo d’amor! Al richiamo d’amor,
al richiamo d’amor, son venuta al richiamo d’amor, d’amor!

Over the sea and the earth floats the joyful breath of spring.
I am the happiest girl in Japan, in fact, the happiest in the world!
My friends, I have come at the call of love! I have come to the threshold of love
Where joy is found in life and in death!
My friends, I have come at the call of love, at the call of love, at the call of love!
I have come at the call of love, love!

The last phrase of Echigo jishi is accompanied by the women’s syncopated exclamations.

Here there is again a dramatic change in musical character. The transition to the next

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23 This entrance technique also reinforces the consul’s assessment of her by her voice, and is one of several elements of the libretto possibly influenced by Delibes’ Lakmè, who also kills herself because her lover loves another.

24 At 38+3, the basic function of the theme is to provide Japanese color. However, the women’s exclamations forecast the identity of threatening “fate” it will acquire to Butterfly’s later text.
section is carried out through four measures of an F tremolo in the violas, accompanying the women’s chorus singing in unison on F, “Oh, what a sky, what a sea!”

Example 5-5, Act I, 28+3. Transition from Japanese frame into Butterfly’s entrance love music, and instrumental introduction of Butterfly’s entrance love music.

25 Here is a positive use of the tremolo, resolving to A major, most occurrences of tremolo in this opera have negative associations.
Example 5-5 (continued)

We are again in a new musical world which previews what Butterfly will sing. The meter changes to duple, and the tempo to largo. Scoring for harp arpeggios and harmonics,
pianissimo violin and viola melody (solo instruments unmuted), tremolo viola, and pizzicato accents in the cellos and basses suggests the delicacy and refinement of Japanese art and the heroine herself, while muted violins play syncopated pitches of the ascending augmented triads. Butterfly urges the women upward, with her line Ancora un passo or via (One more step to go), as the women continue their augmented triad harmonies, repeating their exclamation over the view. Butterfly then takes over the theme introduced by the orchestra in A flat, in the new key of C major. The expression marking is sempre interno and, when Butterfly begins her text, serenamento. Butterfly's ascending sequential phrases contain the same dominant-tonic incipit as Pinkerton's, but in a clear "madrigalism," as Julian Budden describes the sequences. Each phrase resolves on a new tonic, then settles in an unresolved cadence on an augmented (whole tone) submediant triad, which then functions as a new dominant to the next tonic (ambiguity followed by resolution). The highest notes of each phrase (and succession of tonal areas) ascend sequentially by whole steps, depicting a steeper-than-usual climb in its departure from the


27 This, as well as most of the other significant recurring themes in the opera, illustrates William Drabkin's statement on the importance of harmony in Puccini's themes. "The Musical Language of La Bohème," 90.
expected major. This ascent expresses the transcendent view of the world and life which Butterfly expresses as she climbs the hill, a universal hope and faith in love.\textsuperscript{28}

Example 5-6, I, 39+4, “Spira sul mare” vocal theme of Butterfly’s entrance love music

\textsuperscript{28} Arthur Groos suggests that Butterfly’s offstage voice being heard first depersonalizes her as simply part of her surroundings, the Japanese milieu, rather than a living, breathing person. He does not consider this piece an entrance aria, and states that the emphasis in the previous scene between Pinkerton and Sharpless, “on Western male privilege, helps clarify why Butterfly does not have an entrance aria of her own.” Groos also considers the Japanese-style melody following the entrance to characterize Butterfly more than her sung entrance, as it concludes with the arrival onstage of Butterfly and her friends. “Cio-Cio San and Sadayakko,” 62, 45.
Example 5-6 (continued)
Just before the first peak on a high B flat, to the text *al richiamo d'amor, d'amor venni alle soglie* (to the call of love, to the threshold of love)\(^{29}\), there is a distinctive turn which, in addition to the first phrase of Butterfly's *Spira sul mare*, also becomes a recurring theme.

Example 5-7, I, one before 40, second entrance theme.

\(^{29}\) Puccini had previously used the idea of women responding to a "call of love" in Mimi's second act aria *Donde lieta usci al tuo grido d'amore* (As I came happily to respond to your call of love), II, 26, in *La Bohème*. This is only one of several textual correspondences with that opera.
Example 5-7 (continued)
The staging of this entrance is extremely important to the impression Butterfly makes on the audience, and therefore to her significance in the entire opera. Without caution on the part of directors, her voice seems a light obbligato buried in the orchestral and choral texture, and the audience is aware only of a blur of music and a parade of little girls with parasols, similar to that in *The Mikado*. But her entrance can be much stronger with judicious control from the conductor (Puccini has suggested “pianissimo, pianississimo, and più piano possibile” for the orchestra), placement of the women, and timing of Butterfly’s arrival on stage (several melodic “arrival points” are possible, although Puccini has designated the measure just before Butterfly’s highest note). Arrival on the phrase *Ove s’accoglie il bene di chi vive e di chi muor*! (Where joy is found in life and in death!), with the clear appearance of Butterfly’s visual and sonic self on the first high B flat, is particularly effective, and establishes her dominance and power.

Julian Smith feels that the entrance “is typical . . . of Puccini’s approach to exoticism and to his characters as human beings . . . the audience is immediately made aware of Butterfly not as a Japanese but as a human . . . emotionally she speaks the same language as girls from Rome, London, New York, or Paris.”

Rodney Milnes affirms this in even more colorful language: “the setting is to a certain extent a red herring. Butterfly could as well be Algerian and Pinkerton a Russian naval officer for all the bearing that race

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has on the action." These statements demonstrate that Butterfly's entrance establishes her as an archetypal romantic heroine.

**Japanese frame: Hana saku haru**

A Japanese-style theme completes the framing of Butterfly's entrance music. The orchestra plays a postlude partially resembling the Japanese folksong *Hana saku haru* (Blossoming Spring). There is some disagreement on the source and authenticity of this theme. Harmonized in G-flat major, the texture, instrumentation (flutes, piccolo, bells and harp, and tremolo strings), and staccato articulation of this postlude imitate Japanese instruments, to frame a Japanese bride. Although the ending seems to be progressing to a

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32 Mosco Carner assumed that this theme was from the Japanese folksong *Hana saku haru* (Blooming Spring). Kimiyó Powils-Okano cites the text of that song: "The grass fly sings, like she wishes to say, stand up and look at the beginning of this blooming spring day! How full of thoughts she interrupts the human dreams" (Die Grasmtlcke singt, als ob sie sagen will, steht auf und seht euch den Anbruch dieses blühenden Frühlings tags an! So gedankenvoll unterbricht sie die Träume der Menschen). However, she also finds it to be part of the school songs created by the Japanese government in the later nineteenth century to acquaint Japanese students with European culture. On the basis of its text, music form, and modifications to which Puccini subjects it in his opera, Powils-Okano considers the motive to be Puccini's personal composition. (Der belehrende Inhalt des Textes und die erwähnten musikalischen Eigenschaften lassen darauf schließen, daß dieses Lied zu jenen Schulliedern gehört, die vom damaligen Musikausschuß des Kulturministeriums zwecks Gewöhnung an die europäische Musik zwischen 1880 und 1901 komponiert oder arrangiert wurden. Die Regierung des Kaisers Meiji bemühte sich, die europäische Kultur einzuführen. . . . Die Melosführung des Motivs "jugendliche Butterfly" richtet sich nicht nach den japanischen Modi. Das Motiv wird dann auch variert, was bei den Zitaten japanischer Lieder nicht vorkommt. Aus diesen Gründen kann das Motiv als Puccinis Eigenkomposition betrachtet werden.). Kimiyó Powils-Okano, Puccini's "Madama Butterfly," 61-62. Arthur Groos identifies it with a sketch entitled "Vivace" found in Accademia Filarmonica archives in Bologna, and notes that while published versions of *Hana saku haru* begin similarly to Puccini's phrase, it is not definite that Puccini had access to them. He concludes that the music used in the opera is a "creative adaptation" by Puccini from the sketch. "Cio-Cio San and Sadayakko," 45, 63-65.
G-flat major cadence (and G flat is reached in the bass), the leading tone in the soprano resolves down to the submediant E flat (doubled in an inner voice tremolo). The harmony therefore gives the impression of an inverted E-flat minor chord, or incomplete tonic with no fifth but with an added sixth. The incompleteness of the cadence is interpreted by Carner as a question mark, and the same ambiguous cadence is repeated at the end of Act I (end of the love duet, following a recurrence of Butterfly’s entrance music, sung by both Butterfly and Pinkerton), and at the end of the opera.

Butterfly demonstrates her culture’s ritual as she instructs her entourage to bow to “B. F. Pinkerton.” Some critics interpret every recurrence of this cadence, at the end of the love duet and end of the opera, as a repetition of Butterfly’s basic submission to Pinkerton. Julian Budden suggests that Puccini’s framing of the western tinta entrance with the two Japanese themes “seals the blend of East and West.” What is even more clear is the “exact symmetry” between Act I and the original Act II (which became Acts II and III). Both begin with a fugue and end with the ambiguity of the added sixth chord which closes the opera.


Example 5-8, 41, "Hana saku haru" postlude to Butterfly’s entrance
Butterfly’s difficult life and challenges to her faith: “Fate”

Following the introduction of the heroine, we learn of the family tragedy that has brought her to this wedding. Her conversation with the consul reveals the story of her family’s fall from high social status (to the Echigo jishi melody, first sung by Goro preceding her entrance). The music ends with a theme that will become symbolic of fate’s continuing threat to her hopes and dreams. The text of her final phrase endows it with an implied meaning throughout the opera—the inexorable continuing threat of circumstances beyond Butterfly’s control: Ma il turbine rovescia le querce più robuste (But the
whirlwind uproots the strongest oak-tree). The theme intrudes frequently from the orchestra as a relentless *idée fixe*, continually sounding the pursuit of fate, a destiny that cannot be escaped.

*Nessuno si confessa mai nato in povertà; non c'è vagabondo
Che a sentirlo non sia di gran prosapia. Eppur conobbi la ricchezza.
Ma il turbine rovescia le querce più robuste
E abbiaì fatto la ghescia per sostentarci.*

Nobody ever confesses to having been born in poverty; there isn't a beggar Who doesn't claim to come from a noble family. Yet I have known riches. But the whirlwind uproots the strongest oak-tree. And we became geishas to support ourselves.

The augmented fourth most distinctively identifies this theme, which occurs in retrograde versions as well. Here the accented oboes, English horn, bassoons, and horns play in forte octaves with the voice, while the strings punctuate with accented half-diminished seventh (or minor triad with added sixth) chords.

35 This is an excellent example of the sort of multivalence with which Puccini's themes might be interpreted according to context, as suggested by Julian Budden in Chapter Four, note 15.

36 Goro sang only the first two lines of the melody to the text "Listen! They're coming, a lively swarm of bees! Already you can hear the female chatter, as clear as wind in the trees." He did not sing the last lines of the melody, where the girls sang off-beat "Ahs!".
Example 5-9, Act I, 45+3, Butterfly sings “Fate” theme (final phrase of *Echigo jishi*)

Challenges to Butterfly’s faith: “Death”

The final theme to challenge Butterfly’s *hamartia* introduced in this section of the opera arises as the consul asks about Butterfly’s family, and learns that she is an only child and has no sisters, only a mother. When he inquires of her father, we first hear the theme that Puccini introduces quietly, its full meaning only gradually unfolding. Although it resembles a prominent Japanese piece, *Ume no haru* (Plum blossoms in spring), there is
some controversy regarding Puccini's source. At the theme in piano and staccato lower string octaves follows Butterfly's answer, "Dead," to the consul's inquiry about her father, and is therefore associated with "Death" in its subsequent occurrences.

37 Kimiyo Powils-okano believes that Puccini used this koto piece to represent the father's exile and suicide because the plum blossom was the favorite flower of an aristocrat, Michizane, who was a famous scholar and high-ranked employee of the emperor. Due to the machinations of a political opponent, he fell into disfavor with the emperor and was banned to the island of Kyushu, where he died. Because his soul was restless, his ghost continued to seek vengeance, and temples were built to appease and honor him. (Ich vermute, daß Puccini dieses Kotosstück für das "Verbannungsmotiv" verwandte, weil sein Titel "Ume no haru" hieß. Unter Japanern ist es eine bekannte Tatsache, daß die Pflaumenblüte die Lieblingsblüte eines Adligen namens Sugawara no Michizane (845-903) war. Michizane war ein berühmter Gelehrter und zugleich ein hoher Beamter des Kaisers. Er wurde jedoch durch die Intrige seines politischen Widersachers auf Geheiß des Kaisers auf die Insel Kyushu verbannt, wo er in Unfrieden verstarb. Sein Gram und Groll waren so groß, daß die Menschen sich nach seinem Tode vor seiner unerlösten Seele und vor seiner Rache fürchteten. Man baute ihm Tempel, um seine Seele zu besänftigen, und verehrte ihn als Gottheit der Gelehrsamkeit.) Powils-Okano insists that the association between plum blossoms and Michizane's exile remains today in the memory of Japanese, and that for her as a Japanese woman, the piece has a clear connection to exile and hara kiri as a result of banning by the emperor (Butterfly's father was also banned by the emperor). She theorizes that Puccini learned of this connection from Mme. Oyama. (Die Assoziation zwischen Pflaumenblüte und Michizanes Verbannung hat sich bis heute im Gedächtnis jedes Japaners erhalten. Von diesen Zusammenhängen kann Puccini durch Frau Oyama erfahren haben. Sowohl Michizane als auch Butterflies Vater wurden vom Kaiser verbannt. Butterflies Vater mußte allerdings Harakiri begehen. Für mich als Japanerin ist die Zuordnung des "Ume no haru" zu "Verbannung" und "Hara kiri" durchaus einleuchtend.) Puccini's "Madama Butterfly," 59-60. Groos refers to the piece as "pseudo-Ume no haru," not finding it in the Collection of Japanese Koto Music (1888) to which Powils-Okano's attributes it. "Cio-Cio San and Sadayakko," 47.
Example 5-10, Act I, 49 First occurrence of "Death"
Ill. The Wedding Scene

This section in the opera consists of the arrival of the officials who will conduct the wedding, introduction of the friends and relatives of Butterfly, a conversation between Butterfly and Pinkerton where she shows him some of her things, her report of her conversion to Pinkerton's religion, the brief wedding ritual itself and following congratulations, the toasts to the couple, and the interrupting curse of the bride's uncle, a priest. Because they feature recurrence of significant motives and build the hamartia and threatening themes, only Butterfly's conversation with Pinkerton, her conversion arioso, part of the toasts, and the interrupting curse will be discussed.

Conversation with Pinkerton and recurrence of "Death" theme

The "Death" theme appears a second time just before the wedding. Butterfly has been showing Pinkerton some of her personal things, but falls silent when he questions the last wrapped item, the dagger with which her father committed hara kiri. In a monotone, Goro explains its significance, over a recurrence of the Ume no haru threatening theme in the orchestra. Preceded by two fortissimo descending augmented fourth lines (retrograde of "fate" theme, suggesting that the father's death was an example of the "whirlwind uprooting the strongest oak tree"), here the theme is associated not only with the father's death, but specifically with the dagger he used to commit hara kiri, and which Butterfly will use in a similar suicide for honor. Scoring differs from that of the first statement in that the first three notes are played only by pianissimo strings, misterioso, followed by a fortissimo accented, (briefly) minor chord adding clarinets, English horn, and bassoons, with the volume rapidly diminishing in completion of the theme.
Example 5-11, Act I, 77, second occurrence of “Death”

Butterfly’s conversion, further *hamartia*

The following arioso demonstrates Butterfly’s effort to assimilate to her husband’s culture by changing her “Japaneseness,” as exemplified in her transformation of the closing Japanese frame of her entrance.38 Preceded by a scene in which Butterfly offers to discard any of her small personal items that Pinkerton might dislike, she then reveals that she is willing to give up more than objects for Pinkerton—even her very religion and people.

*Ieri son salita tutta sola in segreto alla Missione.*
*Colla nova mia vita posso adottare nuova religione.*
*Lo zio Bonzo nol sa, nè i miei lo sanno.*

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38 Some stage directors show Butterfly in Western Victorian dress in Act II and during the Intermezzo, demonstrating her conviction of her ability to assimilate.
Yesterday, all alone and in secret, I went up to the Mission.
With my new way of life I wish to adopt a new religion.
My uncle the Bonze doesn’t know, nor do my relations.

In the introductory recitative accompanied by pianissimo woodwind chords,

Butterfly confides that her uncle, the Bonze, does not know of her visit to the Christian mission. Significantly, the lines *tutta sola in segreto alla Missione* (all alone and in secret, I went up to the mission) in the recitative text are set to a descending whole-tone pattern at \(79^+2\), forecasting the prevalence of such patterns in the final act, inverting the hopefulness of the ascending whole-tone entrance and demonstrating that her conversion will play a critical role in her fate.

Example 5-12, Act I, 79. Recitative preceding Butterfly’s “conversion” aria.
Butterfly has gone to the mission to show her willingness to convert to
Christianity.\textsuperscript{39} Her assumption that if she identifies enough with Pinkerton and his
culture, rejecting her own, he will take care of her, is a dramatic example of her \textit{hamartia}.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Io seguo il mio destino, e piena d’umiltà, al Dio del signor Pinkerton m’inchino.}
\textit{È mio destino. Nella stessa chiesetta in ginocchio con voi pregherò lo stesso Dio.}
\textit{E per farvi contento potrò forse obliar la gente mia. Amore mio!}
\end{quote}

I am following my destiny, and full of humility,
I bow before the God of Mr. Pinkerton.\textsuperscript{40}
It is my destiny. In the same little church, on my knees with you
I pray to the same God.
And to make you happy perhaps I shall be able to forget my people. My love!\textsuperscript{41}

In illustrating her conversion, she transforms the traditional Japanese song (to
which she and her entourage initially bowed to Pinkerton) into flowing western
lines—musical evidence of her submission to Pinkerton. Butterfly asserts that her destiny
now rests with her husband and his faith. As a symbol of her conversion and new cultural
allegiance, the Japanese theme is now westernized as a \textit{dolcissimo} lyric line with violins

\textsuperscript{39} In Long’s story, Pinkerton has banished all her relatives from the house, calling them an
“appalling horde,” and telling Butterfly that she’ll have to “get along without ancestors,” and that he’ll
have to serve in their place. Although she begs him and cries, “he did not try to understand [they were
her] sole links to eternal life.” John Luther Long, “Madame Butterfly,” in \textit{Madame Butterfly, Purple
Eyes, and Other Stories} (New York: Garret Press, 1969), 4-8. She then “went secretly to the church of the
missionary who served on the opposite hill, and . . . learned that she might adopt this new religion at any
time she chose, even the eleventh hour. She went out joyously; not to adopt his religion, it is true, but to
hold it in reserve if her relatives should remain obdurate.” Ibid., 8.

\textsuperscript{40} In early versions, this line was “Per me spendeste cento yen, ma vivrò con molta economia”
(You paid one hundred yen for me, but I will try to live very economically.) The change gave Butterfly
more status and emphasized her full sharing of Pinkerton’s life, including his religion.

\textsuperscript{41} In early versions, this line was \textit{E questi via!} (Away with these!), referring to the discarded
objects, rather than Butterfly throwing herself into Pinkerton’s arms in the revised version. [Carner
considers her too shy and reserved for this open declaration of love. 437]. Only with the Paris version did
Butterfly openly display her passion for Pinkerton. (This exclamation is immediately followed by \textit{Ume no
haru}, and it is a matter of interpretation whether it is discarding her ancestors’ religion or marrying
Pinkerton which is the root cause of her eventual obligatory suicide.)
and cello accompanying the voice in octaves, while the harp plays glissando arpeggios, and the flutes and clarinets triadic arpeggios, with muted cornet sustained tones (all pianissimo). The same harp arpeggios accompany this theme when it recurs after the love duet.

Example 5-13, Act I, 80. Butterfly’s “Conversion” of Hana saku haru

This “conversion” arioso is significant, for it demonstrates how easily Puccini can transform the cultural orientation of a pentatonic Japanese-style theme through harmonies, texture, and timbres. The emotional impact of the piece thereby becomes European romantic, and its singer, a European romantic heroine. Arthur Groos suggests that this piece symbolizes Butterfly far more than her entrance music (he and others state that she is not privileged with an entrance aria).
Another recurrence of “Death” theme:

In a concluding coda to the arioso, Butterfly ascends to her highest pitch, and the harmony abruptly changes to minor as she climaxes her declaration by throwing herself into Pinkerton’s arms. This musical, textual, and dramatic gesture is immediately followed by the “Death” theme in the lower strings.42 In contrast with the previous occurrence of this theme, it is set in octaves for all the brass, English horn, bassoon and horns, and all strings except violins—fortissimo, accented on each pitch, and decisio ed energico, as if to emphasize that here Butterfly has committed the gravest offense to her culture and ancestors.

Example 5-14, Act I, 6 before 82. Climax of Butterfly’s “Conversion” arioso and recurrence of “Death” theme

42 Poindexter suggests that it is “not by chance that the first affectionate gesture of Butterfly is shown to us after this allusion to religion, because love for her is the true sacred thing.” (Ce n’est donc pas par hasard si le premier geste affectif de Butterfly se précipitant dans les bras de Pinkerton, nous est montré par Puccini après cette allusion à la religion, l’amour étant pour elle un véritable sacrement.) Bruno Poindexter, “Commentaire musical et littéraire,” L’avant-scène opéra 56 (October 1983, reprinted 2003), 26. Following this with the “Death” theme, as if to punish her passion and trust, initiates a pattern which will be continued with recurrences of the “Curse” theme in the love duet.
Example 5-14 (continued)

Wedding blessing, and the "Curse" challenge to Butterfly’s faith

The wedding ceremony itself (highlighting portions of both American and Japanese national anthems) is very brief. In the original version, it is immediately followed by extensive multicultural toasts. (A striking compound meter song about sake, the Japanese rice wine, was among the more charming sections cut.) But the multiple toasts led to a focus on Butterfly’s drunken uncle Yakusidè and the antics of her naughty nephew (who grabbed sweets and then the uncle’s whisky bottle)—some of Illica’s overload of cultural detail reduced in later versions. In the early versions, this comic scene was interrupted by the sudden arrival of the Bonze. In the final revision, the Bonze’s curse dramatically interrupts the peaceful wedding song O kami, o kami.43 Although sung in unison, the entreaty to the Japanese gods to bless the newlyweds is set to a homophonic Western accompaniment. This almost hymn-like blessing of the relatives is juxtaposed with the

jagged threat of the Bonze. He appears with his attendants, cursing Butterfly for betrayal of her people and religion. Her relatives then join in the curse, increasing its impact: Butterfly has now been completely ostracized—from her past, her ancestors, and her culture.\footnote{As Bruno Poindefert expresses it, “excommunicated.” (En tout cas, elle n’a plus de passé, sa culture, de parents. Elle est excommuniée, Pinkerton est le seul être au monde qui lui reste.) “Commentaire musical et littéraire,” 30.} The abrupt change in the attitude of the relatives with their participation in this curse emphasizes the increasing isolation of the bride and her increasing dependence on her husband, for whom she has sacrificed everything.\footnote{In Belasco’s play, Butterfly makes it clear that the relatives set up this marriage, then rejected her for entering it. “Sa-ey, tha’s foanny! My people make me marry when I don’ want; now I am marry, they don’ want.” In the next section, after revealing her father’s death, she says “I get marry accoun’ my grandmother don’t got no food.” David Belasco, “Madame Butterfly: A Japanese Tragedy,” in \textit{Six Plays} (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1928), 18-19.}

The pianissimo \textit{con mollezza} (with softness/suppleness) wedding toast is interrupted at 100 by a \textit{sforzando} minor-third tremolo of violins and violas. The tempo and dynamics increase as the Bonze’s repeated cries of ‘Cio-Cio-San!,’ each punctuated by a gong stroke, are heard from the distance.\footnote{Another “error” pointed out by the artistic director of the Minnano opera was the Bonze’s use of the honorific “-san” while cursing Butterfly. <http://www.minna-no-opera.com/opera/butterfly> Accessed June 11, 2004.} The curse motive is first stated very softly, accompanying the Bonze’s distant voice (101+6), and for sixteen measures differs from all its recurrences in containing the melodic interval of an augmented second. The relatives cling to each other fearfully.
Example 5-15, Act I, 100. "The Curse" interruption of O kami, o kami
From I, 102, the curse motive is distinctive and consistent in its whole-tone melodic/harmonic material and a dotted rhythm (at some occurrences double-dotted). It recurs more frequently than any other theme in the opera, and probably with more varied interpretations. As mentioned above, Puccini's previous use of whole-tone materials was in impressionistic harmonic settings; here he exploits the possibility of expressing strong negative associations in its minor-key context. Although the Bonze never sings the curse motive (only Butterfly sings a fragment of it to the text about impaled butterfly specimens in the love duet), it recurs frequently in the orchestra to convey the threat of his curse.
American Patriarchy Banishes Japanese Patriarchy

Following the Bonze's interrogation of Butterfly on a G-minor triad, over a half-diminished seventh tremolo and the final form of the curse (above), Pinkerton responds. In probably his most impressive statement in the opera, prepared by a chromatic modulation preceded by ascending triadic triplets, Pinkerton orders the Bonze away in a powerfully heroic, arpeggiated major triad over a tremolo octave, then minor second. It is punctuated by a half-diminished seventh and followed by the “Death” theme at 108 (eliding Pinkerton’s final note), in the tutti orchestra vibratissimo. Here we can see that
Butterfly is caught between the patriarchy of her country and family and that of the occupying Americans.

Example 5.17, I, 107+2, Pinkerton's Banishment of the Bonze
This effort of Pinkerton strengthens the *hamartia* of Butterfly, who believes that in spite of her relatives’ rejection, he is her strong protector. The Bonze leaves, followed by Butterfly’s relatives (including her mother) and other guests. The interjected “Ahs” of Butterfly’s friends during her entrance have become angry “Hous” in the departing group whose cries fade away. The curse theme becomes fainter and slower, with “[the relatives’] imprecations persisting like the waves of a receding tide.” Reminiscences of the curse will continue to haunt and mark sections of the love duet.

IV. Love duet: Seduction and resistance/*Hamartia and anagnorisis*

The first act of Madama Butterfly displays Puccini’s typical two-part act structure: the first part more active, with much colorful detail and many characters, the second a more ‘static’ scene between the two principals. In this act, the second part is constituted entirely by the love duet, which is the most fully-developed duet in all of Puccini’s operas. Because the forms of the four sections following the introduction are so clear, they have received the most scholarly attention. The first and second are modified ternary forms, the third a large-scale arch form, and the final section a climactic reprise of Butterfly’s entrance music. Butterfly’s expressions are at the center of each of


48 Building on Mosco Carner’s observation, Helen Greenwald has explored this formal organization extensively in her 1991 dissertation, *Dramatic Exposition and Musical Style in Puccini’s Operas*.

the first three forms, and she introduces and dominates the final section. Although recognition of the forms alone is not sufficient for interpretation of this duet, the modified traditional forms do provide audiences with support for understanding the emotional development of the principals in the duet. Each section (except the final one) is initiated by Pinkerton, and his efforts at seduction are the basis for most of the A sections, while Butterfly expresses her anxieties and/or commitment in the B and other contrasting sections. 50

Here the nuances of each character are expressed through their vocal lines and the orchestral support. In varying textures of monologues, dialogues, and the final a due, the duet further explores the characters of Butterfly and Pinkerton and the expectations each has for the relationship. Although many elements of the duet increase Butterfly’s trusting hamartia, the themes of her challenging fears constantly interrupt, particularly when she has expressed an especially passionate declaration of commitment to Pinkerton, and sometimes result in brief moments of anagnorisis. The positioning again suggests punishment for sexuality and departure from her culture.

It is clear that the two live in completely different emotional and cultural worlds. The A section melodies reveal Pinkerton’s sexual urgency, and Butterfly’s responses alternate restraint, anxiety, and passion. Those who have commented most extensively on the love duet see Pinkerton as superficial and deceitful in his lyrical lines, feigning love to

50 Giorgio Pagannone shows that Puccini’s use of contrasting A and B sections in duets mirrors other operatic use of such contrasts in seduction scenes, citing Rigoletto and Samson and Dalila. “Puccini e la Melodia Centesca: L’effeto ‘barform’,” in Studi Pucciniani 3 (Lucca: Centro studi Giacomo Puccini, 2004), 219, n. 18.

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reach his sexual goals. Butterfly, however, is anxious to assure her security, and realizes that sex, which she hopes will be packaged in love, tenderness, and delicacy, is part of her obligation as a wife. At the same time, she fears punishment for abandoning herself to Pinkerton.

**Introduction (hamartia of protection; hamartia of assimilation)**

This section highlights Butterfly’s *hamartia* in assuming Pinkerton’s continued protection and her ability to assimilate to Western customs. In this conversational introduction, Pinkerton comforts the still-shaken Butterfly (addressing her as “*bimba*” or child), as she reacts to the curse continuing to sound softly in the strings. Here the *hamartia* reinforced in Butterfly by Pinkerton’s casting out of the Bonze is increased with this continuing evidence of his protection, which she assumes he owes her. (But his reassurance is followed at I, 112 by the “Death” theme, indicating that Pinkerton’s banishment of the Bonze has not freed Butterfly from Japanese patriarchy.) Butterfly then kisses Pinkerton’s hand in gratitude, and her naivete is demonstrated in her explanation that she has heard hand kissing is done as a sign of respect in foreign lands. Similar to her conversion arioso above, this also shows Butterfly’s *hamartia* in assuming that she can

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52 The earlier versions of the opera featured even more embarrassing instances of Butterfly’s naivete regarding American customs, making fun of the foreigner’s lack of sophistication. Arthur Groos suggests that the opera was originally conceived as a comedy to ridicule the Japanese, and especially to embarrass Butterfly. “La Commedia è Stupenda,” paper presented at *Madama Butterfly: L’orientalismo di fine secolo, l’approccio pucciniano, la ricezione, Convegno internazionale di studi, Lucca e Torre del Lago, 28-30 Maggio 2004*. In an earlier paper, he cites a letter from Illica regarding the American consulate act planned in the first version of the libretto: “one can take advantage precisely of the villa furnished in the European style for some little details to embarrass Butterfly,” quoted and translated from Eugenio Gara, ed., *Carteggi pucciniani* (Milan: Ricordi, 1958) no. 249, in “Cio-Cio-San and Sadayakko,” 58. Most of the incidents of naivete from the earlier drafts of the opera were eliminated; those remaining become much more poignant than comic.
assimilate to the customs of Pinkerton's country. As Butterfly kisses his hand, Pinkerton says,

**Pinkerton:** *Che fai? La mano...?*  
What are you doing? My hand...?

**Butterfly:** *M'han detto che laggiù fra la gente costumata*  
È questo il segno del maggior rispetto.

I've heard that there among well-mannered people  
This is a sign of the greatest respect.

Accompanied by woodwind and harp arpeggios, this turning theme recurs in the  
intermezzo between Acts II and III, as a part of Butterfly's subconscious memory. The  
oscillating thirds and seconds much resemble the lullaby/child's theme to be developed in  
Act II, as well as the initial theme of "Un bel di," also built on thirds and seconds. These  
intervals can be related to the majority of the themes in the opera, including those  
featuring the augmented fourth (often approached as a third plus second).

Example 5-18, I 113, Butterfly's naive gesture of respect to Pinkerton
Following the chanted prayers of Suzuki, a reminiscence of the ambiguous opening fugue motive reappears at 114, moving through several tonal areas before coming to rest on a dominant ninth of A (preparing the key of Pinkerton's next section).

**Part One (hamartia of protection; anagnorisis of family's curse)**

This section again highlights Butterfly's trusting *hamartia* of Pinkerton's protection in spite of her family's rejection, and a moment of *anagnorisis* in remembering the family's curse. The modified ternary form (A-A'- B-A begins with Pinkerton's 6/8 (a new meter) nocturne-like theme in A major at 116.53 Butterfly adds restrained comments

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53 Pinkerton frequently, but not invariably, sings in 3/4 or 6/8, while Butterfly more often sings in duple meters. Atlas makes much of Pinkerton's "seduction key" of A major, which Butterfly avoids,
about the quiet of the night, as the orchestral nocturnal phrases are extended in length and range through brief changes of meter, closing the first section with the comment that she is “rejected, but happy.” The theme repeats at I, 117 (A’), with interjected comments from the principals.

The B section begins a sensuous syncopated melody at I, 118, featuring flute and oboe bird-like calls. Butterfly enters the house to change into her nightdress; Pinkerton stares at the shadow of her shape against the screen and voices his increasing passion.54 The characters’ different moods and assumptions are reflected in their texts two measures before 119 (return of the A section). Butterfly sings of her shyness and blushing, while Pinkerton describes her as like a squirrel or plaything. As he sings of his feverish desire, the restatement of the A theme in the flowing tutti orchestral line is interrupted by Butterfly’s octave exclamation that she still hears the curse,55 followed by the curse theme itself sounded softly on two oboes, with syncopated chords in the rest of the woodwinds and horns.

Butterfly:  

È ancor l’irata voce mi maledice—
Butterfly, rindegata, rindegata e felce.

And still the angry voice curses me—
Butterfly, rejected; rejected, and happy.

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and to which Pinkerton constantly returns. Allan Atlas, “Crossed Stars and Crossed Tonal Areas in Puccini’s Madama Butterfly,” 19th Century Music 14, no. 2 (1990). But the key can also be seen as the most grateful for a tenor in expressing relaxed lyricism.

54 Many stagings have him impatiently smoking a cigarette at this point, watching from the bridge over which she and her attendants entered.

55 Octave exclamations will mark several of Butterfly’s later moments of anagnorisis in the opera.

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Again, she repeats her earlier statement that she is rejected, but happy. This reveals her assumption that Pinkerton will protect her, now that her family has completely renounced her—another aspect of her *hamartia*.

Example 5-19. Six before 120. First recurrence of curse theme in love duet
Part Two (hamartia of heaven; anagnorisis of commitment leading to death)

This section highlights Butterfly’s hamartia in assuming that Pinkerton’s images of love are as exalted as hers, contrasted with her anagnorisis flash of realization that commitment to Pinkerton may cause her death.

In this second ternary (A-B-A’) form beginning at 120 + 2, Pinkerton continues to comfort and admire Butterfly in the A section, addressing her as “bimba” (as she will refer to herself later at the climax of the duet) and referring to her physical features. Butterfly’s response constitutes the contrasting middle B section where, as at her entrance, she identifies herself as one with the beauty of nature, a little moon goddess crossing the “bridge of heaven.” We can here see how far apart the couple are in their assumptions of the depth of their relationship, as Butterfly continually relates human love to heavenly images.

Butterfly: Somiglio la Dea della luna, la piccola Dea della luna
Che scende la notte dal ponte del ciel.

I am like the goddess of the moon, the little goddess of the moon
Who comes down by night on the bridge of the sky.

The triplet rhythm and the descending whole-tone scale of the melodic line in Butterfly’s middle contrasting section of this form give it an archaic, other-worldly feel, increased by the A natural introduced in the accompaniment, suggesting a Phrygian mode on A. The accompaniment is provided by solo strings in octaves on the beats, with flute,

56 This imagery poignantly returns in the final act when Butterfly says that Pinkerton’s wife, Kate is now the happiest woman “under the great bridge of heaven.” See Chapter Five.

57 Section III of Long’s story is entitled, “A Moon-Goddess Truly”; here Pinkerton addresses Butterfly as “Moon Goddess,” as he explains that his attempts to prevent her relatives from disowning her were in vain.
bass clarinet, and harp harmonic filling in the harmony on the second part of the triplet.

The *affrettato* performance indication as the line crescendos over a syncopated orchestral accompaniment supports Butterfly’s triadic ascent to high A.

Example 5-20, I, 121. Butterfly’s heavenly images of herself.
The A section returns with Pinkerton's assertion that Butterfly has not yet committed her love; he imitates her earlier triplet rhythm. Butterfly's climactic response modifies the form of this closing A section. In revealing her fear that her relationship with Pinkerton might cause her death, she again ascends to high A, then descends to Pinkerton's A major key.

**Part Three (hamartia of common feelings; anagnorisis of curse and cruel treatment of butterflies; hamartia of tender love)**

This section highlights Butterfly's increased hamartia of assuming Pinkerton's feelings are as exalted as hers, when he sings part of her entrance music; a moment of anagnorisis when her dramatic commitment to him is followed immediately by a forte statement of the "Curse," her plea for tenderness, and a powerful moment of anagnorisis when she identifies with the cruel treatment of butterflies in the West.

Beginning at rehearsal number 123, this section is the longest and most complex of the duet, and can be seen as a modified arch form with six sections, A-B-C-D-B'-A'.

Butterfly is again at the center of the form, dominating the B and C sections, as well as the touching D section. In the A section, Pinkerton reassures Butterfly (123), *Stolta paura* (Don't be afraid) in 6/8. The peak of his line (123+4) is accompanied by the melodic contour of Butterfly's entrance, presaging his imminent joining with her in this theme in the final section of the duet.

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59 Michele Girardi has noted that this contour may have provided the source for Puccini's Brescia revision of the contour of Butterfly's entrance, as it already existed here in the duet, *Puccini*, 223-24, n. 35.
Approached by a two-octave glissando in the violins, Butterfly’s entrance theme here is con anima, forte, and initially slower than at her entrance. The meter is compound duple as compared with the earlier common meter, with melody carried in the higher woodwinds and violins, with the brass, and strings playing sixteenth-note harmonies. It is as if Pinkerton is turning Butterfly’s first love music to his own advantage in urging her submission.

Example 5-21, I, 123+2, Pinkerton sings to Butterfly’s love entrance theme

And his effort is successful—Butterfly then declares her commitment in the B section, again in a celestial image: *Adesso voi siete per me l’occhio del firmamento* (Now
you are to me the sun in the heavens).\textsuperscript{60} Set to a rising syncopated triadic figure in the strings (Budden relates it to the "Star Spangled Banner"),\textsuperscript{61} the section begins softly and builds with the entrance of woodwinds and then brass, in Butterfly’s strongest commitment up to now.

Example 5-22, I, 126+3, Butterfly’s commitment to Pinkerton

\textsuperscript{60} Both a dramatic and musical abruptness begin this section, due to a section cut for the Paris edition which Puccini actually restored for a 1921 performance at the Teatro Carcano in Milan. Although the duet now flows more smoothly, the excised passage showed Butterfly’s concern about the relationship in her statement that when the marriage broker suggested her marriage to Pinkerton she at first was shocked to be urged to consider “An American! A barbarian! A wasp!”

\textsuperscript{61} Julian Budden, \textit{Puccini}, 258.
Example 5-22 (continued)

Her dramatic declaration is then interrupted by a fortissimo tremolo and repetition of the curse theme at 127. The orchestra once more threatens Butterfly for her complete commitment to the foreigner. The strongest occurrence yet of the “curse” is sounded fortissimo in the high woodwinds, horns, and trumpets, with violins playing a triadic sixteenth note descending figure over a tremolo in the violas and cellos.
Covering her ears, Butterfly quickly recovers and continues in her praise of Pinkerton’s personal characteristics in the C section—*Siete alto, forte* (You are so tall and strong) accompanied with string octaves. She concludes that she is now happy\(^{62}\) to a three-note figure, followed by a rising whole-tone figure anticipating her vision of Pinkerton’s return in her Act II aria (two measures before 128).

The central D section of the duet is Butterfly’s plea for sensitive caring and understanding, considering the cultural differences of her people.

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\(^{62}\) Because Butterfly repeats that she is happy, or rejected but happy, so frequently, it seems that she finds it difficult to convince herself of the fact.
Butterfly:  
Vogliatemi bene, un bene piccolino, Un bene da bambino,  
Quale a me si conviene. Vogliatemi bene.  
Noi siamo gente avvezza alle piccole cose umili e silenziose,  
Ad una tenerezza sfiorante e pur profonda come il ciel,  
Come l'onda del mare!  

Love me, just a little, with the love of a baby,  
That is my due. Love me.  
We are a race accustomed to little things, to humble and quiet things  
To a tenderness gentle as a caress, yet profound as the sky,  
As the wave of the sea!  

The orchestration, with muted upper strings, reflects her delicacy, as Butterfly asks Pinkerton to love her unconditionally and tenderly, as if she were a baby. Especially touching is Butterfly’s major seventh pianissimo ascent to a high A on the first syllable of “bambino” (128+ 8). However, the increasingly passionate nature of her following ascending sequences also reflects her strength. Her images from nature echo another Puccini heroine, Mimi, in her line “profond as the sky, as the wave of the sea!” in asserting the depth of feeling her small and sensitive people can express.  

With Pinkerton’s ardent reply that her name suits her loveliness, the peacefulness of the scene is interrupted with Butterfly’s sudden horror of the stories she has heard of butterflies being caught and impaled on display boards in the West.  

Pinkerton:  
Dammi ch’io baci le tue mani care.  
Mia Butterfly! Come t’han ben nomata, tenue farfalla.  

Give me your lovely hands, so that I may kiss them.  
My Butterfly! How aptly you were named, slender butterfly.  

63 This exact text “profonda come il ciel, come l’onda del mare” (profound as the sky, as the wave of the sea) is used in Mimi’s final act aria Sono andati in La Bohème as she expresses her love for Rodolfo.  

64 This illustrates that she is aware of some foreign customs.
Butterfly:  

Dicon ch'oltre mare se cade in man dell' uom,  
Ogni farfalla da uno spillo è trafitta, ed in tavola infitta!

They say that in other countries if a butterfly is caught by a man,  
She is transfixed with a pin, and fastened to a board!

The harmonic succession to which this fear is set is a return to that of Butterfly’s  
earlier commitment to Pinkerton (Adesso voi —the B section of the arch form).  
Accompanied by bass tremolo and syncopated chords, Butterfly sings a disjunct  
arpeggiated triadic line, culminating in a high B-flat, as she reports what she has heard and  
fears, in a moment approaching anagnorisis.

Example 5-24, I, 131. Butterfly’s fear of Western treatment of “butterflies”
The fear of impalement is set to the rhythm and some pitches of the "curse". The theme here is sounded fortissimo by oboes and clarinets, with horns playing syncopated chords, over string tremolos; the vocal line is marked con strazio (with torment).
Pinkerton acknowledges that such treatment of butterflies is true, but only to keep the lovely creatures. Then, to an orchestral tremolo, he says that he has caught and holds Butterfly and, over continuing tremolo, she responds in an arpeggio again ascending to high B flat, “Yes, for my whole life.” The final A section of this arch form reprises the music of its beginning. Pinkerton continues to reassure Butterfly, commenting on night as the setting for love. She repeats his theme at I, 133+8, but to a text focused on the beauty of the night and stars, as the music approaches the final section of the duet.

The above sections have revealed Pinkerton’s efforts at seduction, veiled in reassurances, as he persuades Butterfly to forget her anxieties and join him as his wife.
They have also revealed Butterfly’s continuing doubt, recurring intermittently between her expressions of love and trust. Only in the final section, where both join in a reprise of her entrance music, are Butterfly’s fears forgotten, as she assumes Pinkerton’s emotions are as idealistic as her own.

Part Four (Reprise of Butterfly’s entrance; together, yet far apart)

This section strengthens Butterfly’s *hamartia* expressed on her entrance, as Pinkerton joins her in that music. Their contrasting texts show how far apart they really are. At 134, Butterfly begins a reprise of her entrance love music, this time in C.

Although Pinkerton joins her in this theme at six before 135, the first time that the two sing at length together, it is clear that their focus is quite different. Butterfly’s text continues to reflect on the beauty of nature, and her part in the firmament, as Pinkerton continues with impatience and urgency to coax her to bed. His only referrals to nature are to the fact that it is night, they are completely alone, and no one will bother them. The orchestral accompaniment is “largamente, con calore,” slightly faster than Butterfly’s entrance, and in compound meter rather than the entrance duple meter. Most of the orchestra supports the melody in octaves, except for harp arpeggios, trombone, second bassoon, bass clarinet, and bass harmony, and viola tremolo.

**Butterfly:**

*Dolce notte! Quante stelle! Non le vidi mai si belle!*

*Trema, brilla, ogni favilla col baglior di ‘una pupilla!*

*O! Quanti occhi fissi, attenti d’ogni parte a riguardar,*

*Pei firmamenti, via pei lidi, via pel mare!*

*Quanti sguardi ride il ciel! Ah! Dolce notte!*

*Tutto estatico d’amor, ride il ciel!*

Lovely night! All those stars! I’ve never seen them so beautiful! Each little spark trembles and shines with the brightness of an eye! Oh! So many steady eyes, watching, looking from every corner,
From the heavens, over the shore and across the sea!
The sky smiles down! Lovely night!
Full of the ecstasy of love, the sky smiles down!

Pinkerton:  
Vieni, vieni! Vien sei mia!
Via l'angoscia dal tuo cor!
Ti serro palpitante.
Ah! Vieni, guarda: dorme ogni cosa!
Ah! Vien, se mia!

Come then, come! Come you are mine!
Banish all distress from your heart!
I hold you as you tremble.
Come, look: everything is asleep!
Ah, come, you are mine!

While it can be argued that the domination of Butterfly's theme in the closing
section demonstrates her power, Berg sees "the ficticious character" of Pinkerton's
singing her theme. "When the two sing the same melody, it's never the sign of true union,
but the opposite." Poindesert states that "the chasm between them is huge, even if the
music seems to unite them in an ephemeral apotheosis." Ping-hui Liao finds a similar
imitation in Turandot to be "appropriation, incorporation, and domination." It is quite
clear that Butterfly is ecstatic to have Pinkerton joining in her music. While she sings her
awe of the heavens, she assumes that he shares her sense of the coming love act as also
heavenly. She does not hear his words; she hears only his music, the language in which

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65 (Quando nel corso del brano I due cantano la stessa melodia, ciò non è mai segno di vera
unione, al contrario.) Karl Berg, Il duetto d'amore," 86.

66 (Le fossé reste profond, même si la musique les unit le temps d'une apothéose éphémère.)
Bruno Poindesert, "Commentaire musical et littéraire, 36.

67 Ping-Hui Liao, "Of Writing Words for Music Which is Already Made": Madama Butterfly,
Turandot, and Orientalism, Cultural Critique (Fall 1990), 58-59.
she expresses, as at her entrance, her *hamartia* of the power of love to save her and to bring her joy.

Example 5.26, six before 135. Pinkerton joins Butterfly in her entrance theme

At the repetition of her text line “Oh! So many steady eyes,” Butterfly continues the entrance music alone, as Pinkerton continues his repetitions of “Come, oh come,” in

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68 Butterfly’s reaction to the shimmering stars as many watching eyes seems to reinforce her discomfort at society’s intrusion into her future.
counter melody. Their contrasting texts continue to the end where Butterfly is still singing of the sky smiling down, as Pinkerton joins her musical line to the text "Oh, come, you are mine." Butterfly ends on high C, which is optional for the tenor (although most take it)

The postlude to Butterfly’s entrance, *Hana saku haru*, also concludes the duet as the couple enter the house, but as it was transformed in Butterfly’s conversion aria, "Io seguo il mio destino.” The orchestration is quite different here from the first occurrence of the theme. Although marked largo as was the first occurrence, the theme seems slower because it is set in quarter, not eighth note values. Beginning fortissimo and rapidly diminishing to piano, the high woodwinds, horns, and Japanese bells carry the melody over an F pedal in the cellos and basses, without the staccato articulation or grace notes used in the first occurrence, while the harp plays arpeggiated chords under the melody. The violins and violas support with tremolo chords. The first act ends with the same ambiguous resolution that closed Butterfly’s entrance, repeated, as if to emphasize the intent at ambiguity.
In the first act, Puccini has masterfully established the *hamartia* associated with Butterfly’s desperation to establish her personal security in becoming “an American wife.” Her *hamartia* has been challenged by threats from the world around her, and she has exhibited brief moments of realization that many of those threats are associated with her new
relationship. The remaining acts will increasingly test her hamartia, as she follows the path to her final anagnorisis.
Chapter Six. *Madama Butterfly: An Interpretation—Acts II and III*

The second and third acts of the opera are based on Belasco’s play and include much of its detail. Puccini’s highly developed theatrical skill is shown in his portrayal of the increasing threats to Butterfly’s *hamartia*—her status as a secure American wife—and her reactions in trying to preserve her own and others’ confidence in that status. The audience shares in the nuanced depiction of Butterfly’s internal psychological state, alternating between hope and despair, as she waits for Pinkerton’s return. The recurring themes of Butterfly’s *hamartia* and threats—supported by the pacing, balance, and realistic ordering of stimulus and reaction—arouse the audience’s empathy for her fluctuating emotions. As noted in Chapter Three, Puccini initially conceived this section as one act, making the audience part of Butterfly’s long wait for her husband’s return.

**Structure of Act II**

This act is set in Butterfly’s house, three years following Pinkerton’s departure, and has three main sections:

Musical Introduction for Act II—Establishing the setting

I. Effects of Pinkerton’s Three-Year Absence  
   Poverty and the old and new religion  
   Butterfly’s faith/hamartia: “Un bel di”

II. The intrusion of reality: the consul  
    Butterfly’s shock and *anagnorisis*  
    Further *hamartia*: the child  
    Butterfly’s choices

III. Renewed hope  
     Vindication  
     Preparations for Pinkerton’s return: The last flowery bower
Musical Introduction for Act II—Establishing the Setting

The second act is introduced with a fugue, as was the first, but one that is far less boisterous. Although the first intervals of the pattern and rhythmic figure are the same, and the tempo marking is almost the same, this fugue seems much slower (because it is set in eighth notes, rather than sixteenths) and less ambiguous (it traces a natural minor scale from its beginning). This is the only significant new theme in the prelude, in contrast with the two in the Act I prelude. Rather than the ascending major scale incorporated in Act I, the pattern here features descending thirds, “surrounding a pitch.”

Example 6-1, Opening fugue for Act II.

The curse theme recurs just at the curtain (II, 2), and the whole-tone ascending passage, which will be introduced in Butterfly’s vision aria, is anticipated at 2+2, with repetitions in the soprano (at 2+5) and bass (2+6).
Example 6-2. Curse theme at curtain (II, 2,) followed by whole-tone theme (2+2), both over half-diminished seventh harmonies¹

I. Effects of Pinkerton’s Three-Year Absence

Poverty and the old and new religion

Acts II and III are set in the same little house that Pinkerton and Butterfly entered at the end of Act I. Three years have passed, and the money Pinkerton left to support the two women is nearly gone. In contrast with the bustling excitement introducing the first act and its two male protagonists, and in contrast with the magical love duet closing the act, this act begins with the quiet desperation of two deserted women.² Recurrences of

¹ Although their rhythmic patterns are quite different, it may be because of the close juxtaposition of these two themes with the same interval patterns here that Girardi chooses to treat them as versions of the same theme. Example 5-25 (two before 132) makes their similarity especially clear.

² Arthur Groos has pointed out several parallels between the beginning of this act and Act I—the fugal introductions and the conversation between two people of the same gender. In the following aria in Act I, Pinkerton presents himself as a heedless sexual adventurer; the first aria in Act II shows the results of that attitude. “La Commedia è Stupenda,” paper presented at Madama Butterfly: L’orientalismo di fine secolo, l’approccio pucciniano, la ricezione, Convegno internazionale di studi, Lucca e Torre del Lago, 28-30 Maggio 2004.
important themes of Butterfly’s *hamartia* and their challenges underscore her struggle to continue to believe in her husband’s return.

The prelude leads directly into a minor chord ostinato accompanying Suzuki’s chant of her prayers to an authentic Japanese folk song, punctuating her words with a hand bell. Before Butterfly speaks, an important new theme associated with the women’s difficulties is sounded at II, 4+2 and will recur frequently in this act. The first three notes of this theme are a retrograde of the “Fate” theme (Example 5-10), the *Echigo jishi* phrase to which Butterfly sang “But the whirlwind uproots the strongest oak tree.” This theme, which Girardi calls “Destiny,” permeates the first part of the act, alternating with themes from Act I. Puccini varies both its melodic line and rhythmic pattern in recurrences, which Poindefert suggests “gives multiple faces to the tragedy of the situation.” Arising forte out of the piano syncopated D-minor chords which precede it, the theme is introduced by solo oboes (the double reed timbre associated with oriental music suggesting that it is the

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3 Kimiyo Powils-Okano identifies the song as *Takai yama* (The high mountain). Although the Japanese text is about eggplants and cucumbers, she explains that the vantage point of the song is from a high mountain looking down into a valley at blooming plants below. She assumes that Puccini used it for his prayer music because of its title, since Japanese assume the gods live in the mountains and have to be summoned down. *(Wenn Suzuki zu den japanischen Göttern betet, tut sie dies auf der Melodie eines der Popularlieder vom Ende der Edo-Zeit, des Takai yama “Hoher Berg…”) (Wenn ich) vom hohen Berg ins Tal hinunter schaue (sieh’ mal an!), haben Gurken und Auberginen ihre Hochblütezeit. . . . wurde bei Puccini offenbar wegen des hohen Berges zur Gebetsmusik. In den japanischen Mythen und nach dem Volksglauben wohnen nämlich die Götter meist auf hohen Bergen. Sie müssen beim Gebet erst heruntergebeten werden. Daher ist die Verbindung dieses Liedes mit Suzukis Gebet durchaus einleuchtend.) Puccini’s “Madama Butterfly” (Bonn: Verlag für Systematische Musikwissenschaft, 1986), 55.


destiny of the Japanese women which is at stake), which are joined by flutes, clarinets, and violas in its next occurrence. The syncopation continues, but over a harmony comprised of the theme’s pitches, which form a half-diminished seventh chord (D minor with added sixth, if read with the bass as the root), as Butterfly criticizes the Japanese gods.

Example 6-3. “Destiny” theme, II, 4+2 (retrograde of “Fate”)

Repeated several times between 5 and 7, forte, and then softer, the theme accompanies Butterfly asking Suzuki how much money remains, and Suzuki showing her how little, reminding us again of the text Butterfly sang about her family’s financial ruin, and the present threat of poverty due to Pinkerton’s desertion. With a soft recurrence of the curse theme, and fragments of the Act I opening fugue, Suzuki expresses doubts that Pinkerton will ever return, and Butterfly insists he will, arguing that he provided their rent money
and locks for the house to protect his little wife (sung to a recurrence of the love entrance music at II, 9). Here it is obvious that Butterfly is trying to preserve her *hamartia* of faith in her status as an American wife with the protection of her husband. When Suzuki asks whether Butterfly ever knew an American husband who returned, Butterfly reacts with anger in a disjunct line to a forte recurrence of the “Destiny” theme, “Oh, be quiet, or I’ll kill you.” We can see here how the tension of uncertainty is beginning to build, and how the sweet, innocent, and child-like girl of Act I has deepened and matured during the three-year abandonment, and sometimes shows moments of anger. Butterfly urges Suzuki to repeat the conviction that Pinkerton will return, and at 20 before 12, over the strains of a greatly deformed version of her entrance music, and in a descending chromatic melody, she asks Suzuki why she is crying. Because the entrance theme here is changed both harmonically and melodically, but can still be recognized, Girardi sees it as a Wagnerian gesture. In contrast with the harp arpeggios and string melody of the entrance, and the hopeful augmented triads ascending by whole tone, here the melody is a descending chromatic line (which will play an increasingly important role in the final act), over string tremolos. Butterfly then shares her vision of the day of Pinkerton’s return, through the music of this expression of *hamartia* ensuring the survival of her other themes of faith—in America, and in Pinkerton.

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6 This is the first of increasingly intense outbursts of anger from Butterfly, treated by some as evidence of increasing madness, insanity, or delusion—a drifting further and further from reality. Arthur Groos sees the influence on Puccini of Sadayakko’s “mad” scenes, and the general sentiment that oriental women are unstable. Arthur Groos, “Cio-Cio-San and Sadayakko,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 54, 1 (1999), 55.

7 Michele Girard, *Puccini: His International Art*, 231.
Example 6-4, I, 20 before 12. Deformation of Butterfly’s entrance love music.

Butterfly’s faith/hamartia: “Un bel di”

This aria, the best-known in the opera, shows the depth and detail of Butterfly’s belief in her husband’s return and becomes the final thematic component of Butterfly’s hamartia. Although the audience knows that this belief is misplaced, the aria achieves nobility in its powerful representation of human faith and hope in an ideal. The three formal sections express different aspects of Butterfly’s vision: her first sighting of the ship from a long distance, what she will do, seeing Pinkerton at the bottom of the hill beginning
his climb and calling to her, staying hidden to tease and his calling out to her, and her
assertive coda of faith.

*Un bel di vedremo levarsi un fil di fumo sul estremo confin del mare.*
*E poi la nave appare. Poi la nave bianca entra nel porto,*
*Romba il suo saluto. Vedi? Egli è venuto!*
*Io non gli scendo incontro. Io no. Mi metto là sul ciglio del colle e aspetto*
*E aspetto gran tempo e non mi pesa la lunga attesa.*

*È uscito dall' folla cittadina un uom, un picciolo punto*
*S'avvia per la collina. Chi sarà, chi sarà? E come sarà giunto.*
*Che dirà, che dirà? Chiamerà “Butterfly” dalla lontana*
*Io senza dar risposta me ne starò nascosta un po’ per celia,*
*E un po’ per non morire al primo incontro,*
*Ed egli alquanto in pena chiamerà, chiamerà: Piccina mogliettina,*
*Olezzo di verbena, I nomi che mi dava al suo venire.*

*Tutto questo avverrà, te lo prometto.*
*Tienti la tua paura, io consicura fede l'aspetto.*

One fine day we’ll see a wisp of smoke rising from the sea’s far horizon,
And then the ship will appear, then the white ship will enter the harbor.
Thundering out its salute. You see? He’s come!
I won’t go down to meet him, not I. I shall go to the top of the hill to wait.
And wait for a long time, but I won’t mind the long waiting.

Out of the city crowds a man is coming, a little speck,
Climbing up the hill. Who is it? Who is it? And when he gets here,
What will he say? He will call “Butterfly” from the distance
I without answering shall stay hidden partly for fun,
And partly so as not to die at our first meeting,
And he, a little troubled will call: Tiny, little wife,
Scent of verbena, the names he used to call me when he came here.

This will all come to pass, I promise you.
Keep your fears to yourself, I shall await him with unshakeable faith.

The musical sections of the aria mirror these changing perspectives. Reversing the
ascending sequences of Butterfly’s entrance arioso, the sequences in the A section descend
by step throughout a whole octave. Puccini previously used this procedure for Mimi’s
final aria in *La bohème*, “Sono andati.” But that aria is harmonized in minor throughout. Manon Lescaut’s second act aria, “In quelle trine morbide,” uses similar descending contours.

This aria can be interpreted as depicting Butterfly’s view of the harbor below from her hill-top house, a reversal of her exclamations over the view as she ascends during the entrance music. It also clearly demonstrates a favorite Puccinian melodic technique (exploited at I, 40 in the entrance as well), “advancing a melody by surrounding or bracketing a pitch.” Here Butterfly expresses the reality of her confidence in Pinkerton’s return, almost going into a trance in the clarity of her vision. She imagines she sees the wispy smoke from the ship first, and the pianississimo winds, violin tremolo, and harp harmonics *come da lontano* (as if from the distance) reflect this. As the orchestra and voice gradually increase dynamics and tempo, Butterfly expresses every detail of her imagined order of events—hearing the ship’s cannon, declaring her vindication in her husband’s return, and watching him come up the hill.

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8 William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini*, 57. It was previously pointed out that these “oscillating thirds” are an inversion/retrograde of the theme just before the love duet where Butterfly kisses Pinkerton’s hand, which also resembles the child’s theme to be introduced later in this act with Butterfly’s presentation of her child to Sharpless. Rather than having dramatic meaning in itself, this pattern is probably just a favorite melodic technique of Puccini.
Example 6-5, I, 12, beginning of Butterfly’s vision aria, “Un bel di”

Besides the incipit, which will frequently recur to recall her hope, another phrase which will also recur is scored to her phrase s’avvia per la collina (climbing up the hill), accompanied only by woodwinds. This whole-tone scale in octaves (four measures before 14) is here a ‘madrigalism’ of Pinkerton ascending the hill, approached from major
harmonies, with the same qualities of hope expressed by Butterfly in her entrance music to sequences ascending by whole tone.⁹

Example 6-6, “Hill-climbing theme,” 5 before 14

Following the interlude in which Butterfly describes how she will coyly hide, the oscillating thirds theme returns fortissimo, with outer parts doubled at 15, con molta passione, and the aria concludes with Butterfly’s sustained high B flat on the word aspetto (I wait) at 16 over a fortissimo tutti orchestral repetition of the theme.

⁹ This hopeful theme recurs at the end of the opera at the end of the opera, as Pinkerton finally does climb up the hill to find Butterfly dead.
The total effect of this aria is powerful, as Butterfly counters Suzuki’s doubts with her painting of the certainty of Pinkerton’s return down to the last detail. The recurrence of its themes during the actual arrival of his ship recalls her certainty in this aria.  

II. The intrusion of reality: the consul

The next scene, which culminates in Butterfly’s first major expression of anagnorisis, marks a major turning point in the opera. It is one of the most extensive and complex ever constructed by Puccini, and it is connected with the rest of the opera by recurring motives from the first act and the first scene of the second act.

Initially overjoyed to see the consul with a letter for her, Butterfly invites him into an “American home,” and complains about Goro’s promotion of new marriage candidates, especially Prince Yamadori. His arrival interrupts the consul’s attempt to give her an important message, and the comic aspects of his scene partially relieve the building tension and delay the ultimate denouement and anagnorisis. Although the “Fate” theme is heard fortissimo at 32 and 33 just after Yamadori advocates himself as her new husband, Butterfly insists that an American husband cannot divorce simply by desertion: “That is not the law of my country, the United States,” she sings, over a reminiscence of the “Star Spangled Banner” (six before 34). Her hamartia is further demonstrated in a brief comic

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10 A very different perspective on this aria will be discussed in the conclusions.

11 His theme is Miyasama (My Prince), also prominent in The Mikado, a score Puccini possessed. This theme is used for both comic and serious effects in the scene.
scene in which she role plays her impression of American judges’ protection of wives whose husbands wish to casually divorce them.\(^{12}\)

**Butterfly’s Shock**

Following the departure of Yamadori, Puccini stages a scene much resembling that between the elder Germont and Violetta in *La traviata*, his only extended baritone/soprano scene (voice types which Verdi frequently juxtaposed, particularly in father-daughter type interchanges). The consul has received a letter from Pinkerton, and tries to prepare Butterfly for its content. The music underlying their conversation forecasts the humming chorus accompanying Butterfly’s vigil at the end of the act. The simple diatonic melody is partly sung by Sharpless and Butterfly, with melody later carried by solo first violin.

Butterfly assumes from the letter’s initial ambiguous lines that it brings good news, and constantly interrupts to confirm her assumptions, delaying her moment of *anagnorisis*, and increasing tension in its anticipation. Frustrated that he cannot finish his unpleasant task, Sharpless suddenly stops, realizing that she does not understand, and curses Pinkerton.\(^{13}\) He then asks very bluntly, without accompaniment, what she would do if Pinkerton were never to return, modulating in his unaccompanied vocal line from B-flat

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\(^{12}\) Julian Budden notes that Carré wanted the brief scene cut from the Paris performance, but Ricordi insisted on retaining it. *Puccini*, 261.

\(^{13}\) In the original version, this same line *Quel diavolo d’un Pinkerton!* (What a devil, that Pinkerton!) is spoken in jest in Act I, laughing at Pinkerton’s ability to get girls anywhere.
major to an A natural minor. A string and timpani fortissimo accent on the second beat of measure 45 emphasize the following silence.

Sharpless:  

_Ebbene, che faresti, Madama Butterfly  
s'ei non dovesse tornar più mai?_

Well then, what would you do, Madama Butterfly, if he never returned again?

Example 6–7, the Consul’s shocking question, II, 5 before 46

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One notes Puccini’s sensitivity to the power of silence at this turning point in the opera.
Butterfly does not immediately respond, and when she does, her shock is evident.

Butterfly:  
*Due cose potrei far:*  
*tornar a divertir la gente col cantar...*  
*Oppur, meglio, morire.*

I might do two things:  
go back to entertaining people with my singing...  
Or else, I would prefer to die.

An ostinato of two-chord patterns then begins in clarinets and bassoons, followed by a tonic pedal in the harp and bass clarinet, as Butterfly, in a breathless chromatic response, suggests her only choices—to return to life as a geisha, or to die.

Example 6-8, Butterfly’s choices, 46.

Over the continuing threnody-like ostinato, Sharpless advises her to accept the Japanese prince, which makes Butterfly angry. She cannot understand why he, a representative of the American government, does not respect her American marriage, and she asks Suzuki to show him out, although Sharpless apologizes for being so blunt.
To string tremolos, Butterfly slowly begins to react to what the consul has told her and what she has answered. Her shock is set to an ascending, then descending five-tone, whole-tone scale. The upward direction of her entrance sequences and the hill-climbing theme of her vision aria now have been reversed, turning the subsequent path of the opera in a downward direction. As Butterfly realizes the truth of Pinkerton’s letter, her unaccompanied octave ascent and descent to the text *Ah! m’ha scordata*? (Ah! Has he forgotten me?), in an exclamation of *anagnorisis*, further marks this turning point in the opera.

**Butterfly:***

*Niente, niente! Ho creduto morir*  
*Ma passa presto come passan le nuvole sul mare*  
*Ah! M’ha scordata?*

*It’s nothing, nothing! I thought I would die  
But it’s passed already, as swiftly as clouds above the ocean.  
Ah! Has he forgotten me?*

Example 6-9, II, 4 before 49. Butterfly’s *anagnorisis/realization of the truth,*

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Butterfly’s basic *hamartia* has been faith in her secure status as an American wife, expressed in the two prominent themes of this faith, the “Star Spangled Banner” and her entrance love music. Up to this point in the act, she has gone from argument with Suzuki to expressing a powerful faith and confidence, to having her trust and vision totally shaken for the first time in the opera.

**Further hamartia: The child**

Until the turning point *anagnorisis* described above, Butterfly has not let herself consider any possibility except Pinkerton’s return. All her reasoning powers have confirmed it to her—why else would he ever have left rent money and put locks on the house for her security? She did not conceive of any need to defend her status as his wife. But she now realizes that her assumptions of his return were not enough, and therefore decides that she must make the consul aware of her greatest asset as a wife—Pinkerton’s child. This is her last hope, and she carries the boy in to a triumphant setting of the love entrance music. The relatively late appearance of the child for the first time in such a dramatic setting provides a peak in Butterfly’s *hamartia*, and a delay in the final denouement.

The whole orchestra bursts out in the theme, this time in C major (its key in the duet reprise of the theme). This is not an ethereal, impressionistic setting, but a triumphant, accented march–forte, allegro, and in 3/4 rather than its original 4/4. Winds, trumpets, and violins ornament the beginning of phrases with triplet arpeggio flourishes.
Example 6-10, Recurrence of Butterfly’s entrance love music in dramatic presentation of her child, II. 50

As she carries out her child, Butterfly questions the consul.

Butterfly:  

\[ E\text{ questo? E questo?} \]

\[ E\text{ questo egli potrà pure scordare?} \]

And this? And this?
Perhaps it too will be forgotten?

Her text is underlaid by a new Japanese theme, \textit{Kappore honen}, beginning in the orchestra at 50+6, played in octaves by the flutes, oboes, clarinets, and first violins. This theme is identified with Butterfly’s child in all its subsequent occurrences. She will sing the theme in the final act as a lullaby, and it is most heart-rendingly reprised just before Butterfly
realizes she must give up the child to Pinkerton and his new wife.\textsuperscript{15} The juxtaposition of this theme with the powerful recurrence of her love music demonstrates that producing this child has been the most important result of Butterfly’s marriage.

**Butterfly’s Choices**

Following the consul’s insulting query regarding the child’s paternity (the mother stresses his blue eyes and golden curls), Butterfly examines her choices in an aria, ostensibly directed to the child, but obviously replying to the consul’s question about what she would do. She then asks the question of herself and, for the first time in an aria, the sources of her *hamartia* are shaken.

A: \textit{Che tua madre dovrà prenderti in braccio}

\textit{Ed all pioggia e al vento andar per la città}

\textit{A guadagnarti il pane e il vestimento.}

B: \textit{Ed alle impietosite genti la man tremante stenderà}

\textit{Gridando: Udite, udite la triste mia canzon.}

\textit{A un infelice madre la carità, muovetevi a pietà.}

B': \textit{E Butterfly, orribile destino, danzerà per te,}

\textit{E come fece già, la ghescia canterà!}

\textsuperscript{15} Powils-Okano traces this song from a song from around 1874, *Toba bushe*, with an original text expressing joy at the rich rice harvest. It was danced by a priest at harvest festivities, and later performed as a somewhat vulgar dance by street artists called *Kappore* dancers (from a verb meaning “to fall madly in love”). Powils-Okano interprets Puccini’s use of it as a lullabye in comparing the joy of a good harvest to the joy of a mother in her child, the fruit of her love. The grandson of Ms. Oyama reported that his grandmother was not very happy with Puccini’s use of the vulgar *Kappore honen* as a lullabye, but Puccini didn’t pay any attention to her objection. ("*Kappore honen*" zu Anfang der Meiji-Zeit (um 1874) war es sehr populär. Sein Text drückt die Freude über die reiche Reisernte aus. Der Ursprung des Liedes war ein Volkslied, "Toba-bushi." Es wurde beim Erntefest von den Priestern getanzt. Später wurde es wegen seines komischen Tanzes auf den Straßen der Vergnügungsviertel von den Kappore-Tänzer genannten Straßenkünstlern dargebracht. Das Wort kappore soll angeblich aus dem Verb kapporeru “sich Hals über Kopf verlieben” stammen. "Kappore honen" wurde offenbar dadurch zum Wiegenlied . . . daß Puccini die Freude über die gute Ernte mit der Freude der Mutter über ihr Kind, über die Frucht ihrer Liebe, gleichsetzte . . . Der Enkel von Frau Oyama berichtete, daß seine Großmutter über Puccinis Einfall, "Kappore" als Wiegenlied einzusetzen, nicht sehr erfreut war . . . Puccini kümmerte sich jedoch nicht um ihren Einwand.) Kimiyo Powils-Okano, *Puccini’s "Madama Butterfly,"

55-56.
Transition: \( E \text{ la canzon giuliva e lieta in un singhiozzo finirà! } \)

A': \( \text{Ah! No, no, questo mai! Questo mestier che al disonore porta! Morta! Morta! Mai piu danzar! Piuttosto la mia vita vo’ troncar! Ah, morta! } \)

A: That your mother should take you in her arms
And in wind and rain should go through the city,
To earn money for bread and clothes.

B: And to the pitying people should stretch out her trembling hand,\(^{16}\)
Crying: Listen, listen to my sad song,
Charity for an unhappy mother, have mercy.

B': And Butterfly, dreadful fate, will dance for you,
And as she has done before, the geisha will sing!

Transition: And the joyous, happy song will end in a sob!

A': \( \text{Ah! No, no, never that! That way of life which leads to dishonor! Death! \text{ Rather than to dance again! I would rather cut short my life! Ah! Death!} \)

To an A-B'-A' form, the text shows Butterfly’s gradual realization of the implications for her life if her husband never returns. In the initial section, she realizes that being alone and penniless will reduce her to begging and shame, as she seeks food for her child. This section combines modal (Aeolian) and minor on A flat with chromatic sections,\(^{17}\) but many phrases can also be heard as pentatonic. With the initial melody

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\(^{16}\) The text from this point was altered between the third and Paris versions. The original text concerned the Mikado admiring Butterfly’s child, and taking him to his palace to be raised as the handsomest prince in the land (all from Long, where it is spoken to Suzuki in pidgin): \textit{Ed alle impietosite genti, ballando de’ suoi canti al suon, gridare:—Udite, udite udite la bellissima canzon delle ottocentomila divinito vestite di splendor. E passerà una fila diguerrieri coll’Imperator, cui dirò:—Sommo duce ferma I tuoi servi e sosta a riguardar quest’occhi ove la luce dal cielo azzurro onde scendesti appar. (And to the pitying people, dancing to the sound of her song, cry:—listen, listen, listen to the beautiful song of eight hundred thousand divinities robed in splendor. And a troop of soldiers will pass with the Emperor to whom I will say.—Supreme leader, halt your servants, and pause to look at those eyes where the light from the azure skies from which you descended appears.)}

\(^{17}\) The lowered leading tone minor is prevalent in Butterfly’s final aria, too, and gives a somewhat modal/archaic feel to her mature expressions.
ascending and descending five tones, the lowered third shows the sagging from the
previously optimistic ascending whole-tone melodies.

Example 6-11, II-55. Beginning of Butterfly’s lament, Che tua madre

The B section presents a new theme of challenge for Butterfly, to the text Ed alla pietosita
gente (And to the pitying people should stretch out her trembling hand). Because this
Japanese theme taken from the folksong Sutyrō bushi also closes the opera, it is worthy of
inclusion in Butterfly’s tragic challenges of fate, and her overcoming of them in her heroic
death. The theme is repeated in octaves at II, 56 in its most characteristic anapest form, to
Butterfly’s text E Butterfly, orribile destino, danzerà per te (And Butterfly, horrible
destiny, will dance for you), showing that it represents Butterfly’s potential shame if she returns to life as a beggar or geisha.¹⁸ Here, the theme is played pianissimo in octaves, un poco agitato. When it recurs at the close of the opera, in vastly different dynamics and orchestration, the theme relates to the honor of her choice of death over the shame of returning to geisha life, and can be labelled “Shame”.

Example 6-12, II, 56. Butterfly’s final threatening theme, Suiryo bushi (“Shame”)

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¹⁸ Powils-Okano says that this melody, a dance rhythm, comes from the popular song Suiryo Bushi (which she translates “sympathy”) of around 1888. One text version was translated by J.L. Long and cited in his novel. “[Joy of the encounter, sadness of the separation. Would there be only the encounter, without the separation.” According to Powils-Okano, Puccini took this poem from the novel, the music from Ms. Oyama.

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A brief transition in B major at II, 56+9, to the return of the A section is
accompanied by the child’s theme over an F-sharp pedal, and the text E la canzon giuliva
e lieta in un singhiozza finirà! (And the joyous, happy song will end in a sob!) It is during
this transition that Butterfly makes the decision that will be expressed in the return of the
aria’s first theme. There is no happiness in a return to geisha life for a mother.

A deceptive cadence leads to a D-sharp chord, which becomes the dominant for
return of the A section in B-flat natural minor at II, 57. This closing section is
accompanied by minor chords in the full orchestra with accents on the second beat of each
measure, initially piano, but increasing in volume as Butterfly’s melody does not turn to
descend but continues upward. Over a half diminished seventh chord with A-natural root
(with continuing pedal A flat in the bass), she asserts her rejection of geisha dancing to
make a living. Octave descents (the anagnorisis of her forced choice), and a final ascent
to high B-flat give emphasis to Butterfly’s determination to choose death as her only
alternative. These dramatic melodic changes were made only for the Paris version, for
which the text was also changed from the mythical Mikado tale to one of Butterfly’s
increasing misery.20

19 Mosco Carner suggests that the second beat accents suggest a sarabande, and that the whole is

20 “By replacing a renewed evocation of Japan’s mythical past with one of Butterfly’s recent
past, Puccini shows clearly that the heroine has acquired a “moralistic” Western mentality, now refusing
to return to prostitution.” Michele Girardi, Puccini, 253-54.
Example 6-13, II, 57+4, Ending of *Che tua madre*

(buttendosi a ginocchi davanti a Sharpless)

BUTTERFLY

Mesto

Mesto

Mesto

Mesto

Mesto

BUTTERFLY

rit.  a tempo

por.  tal Mortal mortal

BUTTERFLY

Mai più dan. nar!~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ Fiut.
The aria ends with a repeat of the *Suiryo bushi* theme (here expressing the honor of choosing death) in fortissimo tutti octaves at six before 58, repeated with fewer instruments pianissimo two before 58.

This aria has as powerfully expressed Butterfly’s gradual and detailed realization of the implications of her desertion as “Un bel di” expressed her detailed anticipation of her husband’s return. The contrasting perspectives of these two major arias in this act frame the moment of *anagnorisis* between them in which she first understands the possibility that she has been deserted.
The consul is upset by Butterfly’s declaration, and prepares to leave, promising Butterfly he will inform Pinkerton of the child. When he asks the child’s name, Butterfly answers that it is *Dolore*, but when his father returns it will be changed to *Gioia*; to reinforce her conviction, the initial melody of “Un bel di” is sounded fortissimo and accented by the horn section, accompanied by tremolo in the strings (eight before 60).

**III. Renewed hope**

Progress toward the final denouement is interrupted by a series of events featuring dramatic juxtapositions and rapid change in emotions. Following the departure of the consul, a brief scene of great anger provides a frame for the following scene of equally intense positive emotions. A furious Suzuki, singing in a high register, bursts in dragging Goro—he’s been telling everyone that no one knows the father of Butterfly’s child. Over jagged and dissonant orchestral repetitions of the curse theme (previously associated with the rage of the Bonze), Butterfly threatens to kill Goro with her father’s dagger; but Suzuki restrains her, and he runs away. Bruno Poindefert links Butterfly’s progressively increasing anger and violence with her “last act of desperation—her suicide.”

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21 In addition to noting the influence Sadayakko’s “mad” scenes might have had on Puccini, Arthur Groos states that “the orientalizing reception of Sadayakko’s performances invite a reading of the opera’s imagined Japan in terms of a similar... contrast between civilized and primitive, white and yellow, male and female,” and notes that reviewers were fascinated by the “protean instability of the primitive heroine in roles ranging from doll-like beauty and childishness to raging fury.” “Cio-Cio-San and Sadayakko.” 55.

22 *(La progression dans la violence s’achèvera avec son prochain et ultime acte de désespoir: ce sera son suicide.*) Bruno Poindefert, “Commentaire musical et littéraire,” 53-54.
Vindication

Returning to her child, Butterfly reassures him of his father's return, in a new increasingly confident theme, ending with an octave ascent to high G sharp on the phrase Lontan ci porterà! (He'll take us far away!). As Butterfly sustains the pitch (the orchestra drops out), a cannon shot is heard, and Suzuki recognizes it as a ship arriving in the harbor. Immediately at $68$, the strains of “Un bel di” are heard as the women rush for a telescope, and seek to read the name and identify the flag of the arriving ship. Over a tremolo in the second violins, the cellos, first violins, and flutes play the melody with downbeat accents in harp and cellos. The dynamic is pianississimo, increasing as the full complement of woodwinds join in the theme at 2 before $69$, followed by brass sections two measures later.

Butterfly:  

Ci porterà lontano, lontan,  
Nella sua terra, lontan ci porterà!  
He will take us far away, far away,  
To his country, he will take us far away!

Suzuki:  

Il cannone del porto! Una nave da guerra . . .  
The harbor cannon! A warship . . .

Butterfly:  

Bianca . . . bianca . . il vessillo americano delle stelle . . .  
Or governa per ancorare. Reggimi la mano ch'io ne discerna il nome.  
Il nome, il nome. Eccolo: Abram Lincoln!  
Tutti han mentito! Tutti, tutti!  
Sol io lo sapevo, sol io che l'amò.  
Vedi lo scimmito tuo dubbio?  
White . . . white . . . the American flag with the stars . . .  
It's coming to anchor, Hold my hand steady,  
So I can make out the name.
The name, the name. There it is: Abraham Lincoln? They were all lying! All of them! Only I knew it, only I who love him. Now do you see how foolish it was to doubt?

Puccini has carefully led us to this climax. The vision of “Un bel di” is now carried out in reality, almost exactly as Butterfly had dreamed it. The melody supporting her previous text in the aria, Vedi? Egli è venuto! (You see, he’s come!) now underlies her shouting out the name of the ship. The “Un bel di” melody is carried by flutes, violins, and violas over harp harmonics and second violin tremolo, and being only instrumental, is intensified by scoring up a minor third from its original key of G flat.

Example 6-14, Un bel di reprise for sighting of ship, II, four before 68.

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23 Later in the third act, Suzuki will tell Pinkerton and the Consul that Butterfly has scrutinized the flag and color of every ship entering into the harbor for the last three years. There is much intertextual significance here. The ship Butterfly awaits is white (not one of Commodore Perry’s “black ships”). The stars of the American flag are conflated with the stars so prominent in the background for the love duet, as the belief in a man and his country (and the two themes that represent them) are here related. Puccini was to attach even more significance to the question “Il nome”? in his final opera Turandot.
Example 6-14 (continued)

After confirming that it is an American flag on the ship and is indeed the *Abraham Lincoln*, Butterfly sings triumphantly of her vindication against all who considered her foolish. This exclamation is set to the contour of the “Star Spangled Banner,” expanded in an arpeggio to a higher triumphant pitch.

Butterfly:

È giunto! È giunto! È giunto!
Proprio nel punto che ognun diceva: piangi e dispera.
Trionfa il mio amor! Il mio amor, la mia fe trionfa intera:
Ei torna e m’ama!

He’s come! He’s come! He’s come!
Just at the moment everyone was saying: Weep and give up hope,
My love is triumphant! My love and faith have triumphed overall:
He has returned and he loves me!
This most dramatic recurrence of the American anthem belongs to Butterfly, and was added for the second performance in Brescia. In triumphant assertion of the efficacy of her faith, Butterfly declares her victory to a thrice-repeated dominant/tonic, followed by the melody of “by the dawn’s early light,” and extending the following arpeggio to the octave dominant on m’ama (he loves me), before settling on the final tonic. The power of her fanfare-like triplets, dotted rhythms, repeated harmonic resolutions, and final arpeggiated ascent to the octave dominant surpasses any previous arpeggiated declarations of the American men. The orchestral diminution of her ascending arpeggio, over descending bass octave arpeggios, increases the impact of the climactic phrase. Adding to its power is the closing frame, a recurrence of the second theme of Butterfly’s entrance music at II, 70 (see example 5-8) sounded fff tutta forza, in tremolo with the melody carried by the violins and first trombones. This climax is supported by the conflation of two of Butterfly’s central hamartia themes: the “Star Spangled Banner” and her love entrance music—the themes of her identity as an American wife.

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24 In the premiere version of the opera, this section described how the child’s name would change from Dolore to Gioia with his father’s return.
Example 6-15, II-7 before 70. Butterfly's vindication
Preparations for Pinkerton’s return: The last flowery bower

With his keen sense of dramatic pacing, and to heighten the anticipation of the final tragedy, Puccini immediately changes the mood with a feminine, joyful flower duet, accompanying the strewing of garden flowers all over the stage. It contrasts with all previous styles in the opera (in 6/8, it is one of the few scenes in the opera where women sing to a rhythm that feels triple, and is criticized by some as below the standard of the other set pieces. But it appropriately represents the respite of false hope in a traditional nineteenth-century Italian female duet form with voices in thirds, also employed in *Lakme*. Most significantly, this piece sets the stage (literally) for Pinkerton’s final aria, preparing a scene typical in Orientalist literature and earlier operas: the flowered bower of refuge for the Western male. However, it is obvious here, as well as in the rest of the opera, that Butterfly expects something in return, and has from the beginning. She has intensely hoped, from the time she first agreed to the marriage, that her giving would be reciprocated—that providing comfort, sex, and love would be repaid with lifelong protection and loyalty. She had a modern woman’s attitude about marriage: that the caring she offers will be returned, that she and Pinkerton will take care of each other. The flower duet is her final gesture in this caring—preparing a welcoming, comfortable, fragrant bower for her returning husband.

At the close of the duet, as the stage is darkened for another evening, Suzuki prepares Butterfly and her child to meet the long-absent Pinkerton. As Butterfly dons her wedding kimono and Suzuki dresses her hair, they laugh at the sufferings of the past—the
curse of the Bonze, Goro, the pompous Yamadori. The three then settle in front of the
shoji, to watch for Pinkerton's return.25

The humming chorus repeats the melody to which the consul earlier attempted to
read Pinkerton's letter to Butterfly, providing a "Greek chorus" comment on the tragedy.
The off-stage unison voices sound almost as instruments, evoking the peaceful evening
ambience of the love duet. Except for the staccato accompaniment, there is no oriental
(pentatonic or whole-tone) association with this music. Like the wedding blessing, Kami,
O Kami, it is homophonic and diatonic, almost hymn-like in its Western effect. In
Example 6-16, the delicate texture of soft humming voices is accompanied by pizzicato
strings, flutes, and harp, all diminishing to pianississimo as the vocal line rises to high B
flat.

Example 6-16, end of Humming Chorus, final seven measures of Act II

25 Here the form of the opera underwent significant changes between its premiere and the second
performance at Brescia. As noted in Chapter Three, Puccini had been inspired by Butterfly's long silent
vigil in David Belasco's play, and wanted the same for his opera, with the final scene continuing
unbroken. In the tradition of opera of his time, he had composed an intermezzo between the scenes.
In Act II, Puccini has shown in music and text the desperate situation of Butterfly's household, and her refusal to doubt. When faced directly with the increasing evidence of her husband's desertion, the idea of death as a solution first enters her mind. Several musical/emotional peaks for Butterfly have expressed these feelings—her vision aria "Un bel di," in which she visualizes the details of her husband's return; her shock at the suggestion that she has been deserted, demonstrated in an octave exclamation anagnorisis; the triumphant presentation of her child to the consul; her gradual realization of the implications of her desertion, and consideration of death as her solution in the aria "Che tua madre;" and the recreation of her hope and hamartia in the sighting of her husband's returning ship, followed by her expressions of vindication.
Structure of Act III

The act is comprised of the following sections:

Musical Introduction for Act III, the intermezzo—Establishing the setting

I. Arrival of the Americans: Confirmation of reality
   Three perspectives
   Pinkerton’s farewell

II. Butterfly and Mrs. Pinkerton
   Butterfly’s appearance and anagnorisis
   The nobility of renunciation

III. Butterfly meets her fate
   An unfulfilled hamartia
   Final recurrence of challenges of the “Curse” and “Death”
   Butterfly’s victory
   Butterfly’s triumph over the challenge of “Shame”

Musical Introduction for Act III, the intermezzo—Establishing the Setting

The final act is framed by the first and last of the themes representing challenges to Butterfly’s faith. The act is introduced with “Fate,” which was the first challenging theme heard in the opera. The act and the opera close with “Shame,” the last challenging theme, which was introduced in the Act II aria “Che tua madre.”

As noted earlier, Puccini wanted no curtain between the first and last part of what was then the second act. In his original conception of a two-act opera, the music now introducing Act III was an intermezzo between the first and second parts of the long second act. If performed without a break between Acts II and III, the silence following the ending of the humming chorus is violently interrupted by the “Fate” theme from Echigo jishi (Example 6-17), sounded in fortissimo octaves by flutes, oboes, English horn,
bassoon, horns, and strings, with the brass and timpani sustaining a chord on the second beat. The theme is repeated piano in the strings and oboe.

The impatience of the audience in the resulting ninety-minute final act (Puccini had been warned by his librettists that this was folly) was one of the major causes of revisions for Brescia, designating the final section as Act II, Part One and Act II, Part Two. However, drawing the curtain between the parts loses the dramatic juxtaposition of the wispy final strains of the humming chorus, with the fortissimo, tutti orchestra recurrence of the “fate” theme, which now follows an intermission and introduces the prelude to the final act.

Example 6-17, “Fate” theme opening Act III (Act II, Part II)

Beginning the act with the powerful “Fate” theme reminds us that whatever is to come, Butterfly will not escape her tragic destiny. This is most appropriate as the following intermezzo section consists mostly of Butterfly’s hamartia themes, playing in her subconscious during her long vigil. They form the first section of the most extensive
orchestral passage in all Puccini’s operas. The images are of Butterfly juxtaposing her memories to reassure herself. The audience is drawn into Butterfly’s hamartia once again by the powerful climaxes scored in the recurrences of these themes.

Framing the entire vigil/hamartia section, the oscillating thirds theme to which Butterfly kissed Pinkerton’s hand just before the love duet (see Example 5-18), accompanied by parallel ninth chords, is heard beginning at III, 1, and again at one before 4. The barcarolle meter of a long 12/8 section beginning at III, 2 establishes a nautical feel, as if to suggest Pinkerton’s ship returning across the waves. The dominant pedal and a yearning feeling created by an unresolved dominant eleventh harmony at 2+4 is followed by ebb and flow of the theme, then sequences of a related theme at 3+2. These passages build tension to culminate in a fortissimo, largamente restatement of the second theme of Butterfly’s entrance music (see Example 5-7) at III, 2+6 (with brass especially prominent in this basic hamartia theme), and the music of Pinkerton’s line “My Butterfly,” from the duet (see I, 130+3) in the following measure. There is then a buildup in repetitions of this theme to another fortissimo climax at six before 4.
Example 6-18, III, 2+6, Reminiscence of Butterfly’s entrance music (See Example 5-7) in intermezzo, followed by “My Butterfly” theme

The closing hamartia hand-kissing theme then returns for six measures, and a chromatic shift to a B-flat ninth chord is followed by the Tristan-like seamen’s cries marking the beginning of the second section of the prelude. Here the music leaves the dream world of night and the subconscious (also the setting for the love duet) for the real world of day and Butterfly’s anticipation of Pinkerton’s arrival. As the lights gradually come up, a reminiscence of the vision of Pinkerton climbing the hill in “Un bel di” sounds at III, 5+4. The tempo increases and a dawn motive (somewhat resembling “Morning” from Grieg’s Peer Gynt Suite in its arpeggiated triad) is heard. A brief reminiscence of Hana saku haru (most recently associated with Butterfly’s conversion declaration) at four before III, 8 provides Puccini with a second theme for development in the closing section

26 Puccini was most impressed with Belasco’s lighting effects in the London play, with gradual depictions of nightfall and dawn.
of the introduction. The themes are treated in canon and variation, building to a fff climax at the final canon, then diminishing to a high A three measures before III, 13.

Suzuki and the child have been sleeping while Butterfly kept watch. She now for the first time puts text to the Kappore honen theme identified earlier with the child, in a lullaby ending in a pianissimo high B (optional) as they retire to her room, still hopeful that Pinkerton will be coming.

I. Arrival of the Americans: Confirmation of reality

Three perspectives

Eliding the final cadence of the lullaby, a new ostinato theme in a largo triple meter underlies the arrival of the Americans. They have come early, hoping to see Suzuki alone to negotiate for the child without directly confronting Butterfly. The music stops when Suzuki sees a woman waiting out in the garden, and Sharpless reveals that she is Pinkerton's wife, Kate. His statement is followed by fortissimo half-diminished seventh chords, as Suzuki exclaims that Butterfly's future is now hopeless. These events confirm our anticipation of the tragic outcome: Suzuki's realization forecasts that of Butterfly a short time later.

A multitext trio among Sharpless, Pinkerton, and Suzuki reveals their different simultaneous emotions. The trio builds in mostly ascending lines to a forte climax on a minor chord at III, 12 before 23, where the lines begin to descend. (This climbing and falling in the trio mirrors the descending lines that will dominate in the orchestra and vocal lines when Butterfly recognizes Kate's identity.) Another climax is reached at seven
before III, 23, and in a coda Sharpless urges Suzuki to speak with Butterfly, and Pinkerton tells the consul that he must flee.

**Pinkerton’s farewell**

As Sharpless remonstrates with Pinkerton for his errors (to his Act I warning theme), Pinkerton comments on the bitter fragrance of the flowers in the room. Acknowledging his mistake, he says he will never be free of torment, then asks the Consul to deal with Butterfly alone. His final aria, *Addio fiorito asil*, prepares his departure. 27

There is a deep significance to this final farewell to the flowered room which Butterfly and Suzuki joyfully prepared for him. 28 Butterfly has been more completely realized as a woman and a person than any of the earlier exotic “others.” She has had her own expectations of reciprocal caring from the man on whom she lavished so much care. And depiction in opera of exotic havens with no obligations for a western male will not soon be seen again. *Addio, fiorito asil* has indeed exploded this image for all time, as it has marked the ending of an era for Italian opera.

**II. Butterfly’s appearance and anagnorisis**

In this scene, Butterfly’s central *hamartia* themes of her love music and the “Star Spangled Banner” are both destroyed at the moment she recognizes Kate Pinkerton: she

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27 This aria was added for the second (Brescia) performance, as was everything between the trio and this aria. Its addition not only strengthened the score, but “fleshed out the seriously deprived role of Pinkerton, making it a bit more attractive to leading tenors,” and further delineated Pinkerton’s character. “He could not be totally crass and selfish, or Butterfly’s devotion was not plausible. If we consider his words in the love duet as she hears them, they ring of sincerity. Her version of what he said at his departure indicates that he cares and plans to return. His final aria shows that he is momentarily capable of real feeling.” William Ashbrook also points out that not only Pinkerton, but Goro and Yamadori find Butterfly’s devotion an anomaly, *The Operas of Puccini*, 113, 117.

28 The male’s fantasy refuge in a beautiful exotic landscape was the backdrop of the long era of exotic European opera and fiction in the latter part of the nineteenth century.
cannot be an American or a wife, because that role is already filled by someone else. The
musical buildup to this moment is powerful. The homophonic trio and deceptive cadence
closing Pinkerton’s aria are followed by unsettled harmony and chromatic passages.
Butterfly calls out to Suzuki just as Pinkerton departs, and Suzuki frantically tries to
prevent Butterfly’s entrance. The orchestral tremolo and ascending chromatic (opposed
to the stage instruction that Butterfly descends stairs), as well as a transformed curse
theme, build tension. Once again, Puccini only gradually develops Butterfly’s awareness
of the situation. She is at first confused, thinking Pinkerton is hiding to surprise her. Her
initial questions, beginning from thirteen before 34, and orchestral background from 35,
are in descending whole tones. After inquiring about Pinkerton, she sees the woman
standing in the garden, and immediately perceives the truth and her own resulting destiny.
Most touching, she at first begs to be told who it is, and then instinctively says non ditemi
nulla, forse potrei cadere morta nell’attimo (no, tell me nothing, for I might fall dead on
the spot). This phrase is followed by a deep, echoing note in the tam-tam and contrabass
at four before III, 35.

Following affectionate statements and then an angry outburst to Suzuki, from III,
37+6, Butterfly and the consul converse in descending chromatic intervals, and Butterfly’s
final anagnorisis is set to a descending half-step appoggiatura (at seven before 38; the
consul’s just preceding statement of perdonatele—forgive her—stands out in being a
descending minor third).

Contributing to the realism, Butterfly only gradually recognizes that her loss will
involve her child, as well as her status as an American wife. At two before III, 38, the
consul encourages Butterfly to have strength, followed immediately by the orchestra playing the child’s theme. Butterfly then sings her realization that the child will be taken from her, as Sharpless urges her to consider the best interests of the child. Her exclamation of sorrow is followed by a reminiscence of the hill-climbing theme, dotted here as the curse.

**The nobility of renunciation**

Butterfly’s recognition of her changed status is then ennobled in a brief arioso. Its dramatic content is reminiscent of Violetta’s renunciation of her true love for the sake of his sister’s marriage in *La Traviata* (which also follows a long scene with a baritone father figure). When Kate asks Butterfly whether she can forgive her, Butterfly states that under the great bridge of heaven Kate is now the happiest woman in the world, recalling the first act love duet in which she used a similar image regarding herself.

*Sotto il gran ponte del cielo non v’è donna di voi più felice.*
*Siatelo sempre; non v’attristate per me.*
*A lui lo potrò dare se lo verrà a cercare.*
*Fra mezz’ora salite la collina.*

Under the great bridge of heaven there is no woman happier than you.
May you always be happy; don’t be saddened for me.
I shall give him his son if he will come to fetch him.
Climb the hill in half an hour from now.

To the music in which she earlier envisioned Pinkerton’s ascent of the hill returning to her (not dotted here), Butterfly now agrees to give the child to Pinkerton if he comes back in half an hour. Following this theme, which is accompanied by pianissimo viola and cello, woodwinds and horns, there is a silence as Sharpless and Kate leave.
Example 6-19, III, 40, recurrence of “hill-climbing” whole-tone theme

III. Butterfly meets her fate

At III, 43, a frantic syncopated ostinato (often said to represent the pounding of Butterfly’s heart) begins in the strings, and following several rapid sequences of the hill-climbing theme, Suzuki comments in a descending chromatic melody that Butterfly is like a trapped little fly. A descending whole-tone scale (ten before 45) follows, to which Butterfly sings that there is too much light and springtime in the room, as she asks Suzuki to close up the shoji and leave.

An unfulfilled hamartia

Butterfly then kneels before a Buddha image, and over a fifth ostinato in the timpani, the most poignant recurrence of her second love entrance theme returns at III, 51.
played by the solo cello. Although the melody is identical with that in her second entrance
(see Example 5-7), and could be harmonized in D-flat major, here the open fifth ostinato
establishes the threatening atmosphere of B-flat minor.

Example 6-20, 51, final occurrence of Butterfly’s love entrance theme (minor setting)

Final recurrence of the challenges of “Curse” and “Death”

The curse theme appears one last time at 51+9, set to orchestral tremolos:

Example 6-21, final occurrence of “Curse” theme
Butterfly ceremoniously takes the knife from its sheath. After repeating its incipit twice, the cellos and double basses complete the “Death” theme at 52. Butterfly kisses the knife, and chants the words carved on it:

Con onor muore chi non può serbar vita con onore

He dies with honor who can no longer live with honor.

Example 6-22, III, 52. Final recurrence of “Death” theme, here associated with Honor

Suddenly Suzuki pushes the child into the room. Butterfly drops the sword, picks him up, and kisses him:

**Butterfly’s victory**

Butterfly’s final scene with her son is the second and highest peak of her moments of *anagnorisis* in this act. She now realizes that this child has been the most significant of all her relationships. Having long given up her dream of romantic love, Butterfly sees the meaning of her life and glory in the life she has produced, this child. He is her “flower of lilies and roses,” a “little god”—far beyond the scentless embroidered “lilies and roses”
that lonely Mimi described in her autobiographical entrance aria. Puccini here shows his evolution in conception of a woman’s depth, as Butterfly is developed far beyond Mimi.

\begin{verbatim}
Tu? Tu?
Piccolo Iddio! Amore, amore mio. Fior di giglio e di rosa.
Non saperlo mai: per te, per tuoi puri occhi, muor Butterfly!
Perchè tu possa andar di là dal mare senza che ti rimorda
Ai di maturi il materno abbandono.
\end{verbatim}

You? You?
My little god! My dearest, dearest love, flower of lilies and roses.
May you never know that for you, for your innocent eyes, Butterfly died!
So that you may go away over the sea, and may feel no pain
When you are older at your mother’s abandonment.

Many have raised the question of why Butterfly had to kill herself. The deaths of Mimi and Tosca were inevitable, but Butterfly could have lived. Although she would suffer the loss of her son, she might have remarried and had more children (as many former “rental brides” did in Nagasaki). But here we see that she has decided to die, not only for her own honor, but for the child’s sake, so that when he becomes an adult he will not suffer knowing that he abandoned a mother far across the ocean.\(^{29}\) Then begins a brief but powerful farewell.

\begin{verbatim}
O a me, sceso dal tron dell’alto Paradiso. Guarda ben fiso, fiso
Di tua madre la faccia che ten resti una traccia
Guarda ben! Amore, addio! Addio, piccolo amor!
\end{verbatim}

My child, descended to me from the throne of Paradise, look carefully
At your mother’s face, so that a trace of it will remain with you
Look carefully! My love, farewell! Farewell, my little love.

\(^{29}\) The librettists’ understanding of the religion of Japan suggested a Shinto obligation of the son to care for the mother.
The significant changes in melodic contour for this aria and Butterfly’s Act I entrance aria will be discussed in the concluding chapter. Here, the line rises triumphantly to the seventh (lowered leading tone)\(^{30}\) of the B natural minor in which it is set, seemingly in contradiction to the word *sceso* (descended). Accompanied by triumphant, rising arpeggios of triads, the archaic, modal feeling of the scale once again implies an eternal emotion.\(^{31}\) The whole-tone ascent accompanied in octaves (III, 55+3), previously identified with the return of Pinkerton, now accompanies Butterfly’s plea to her son to *guarda ben fiso, fiso* (look carefully at your mother’s face). The triumph reflected in the brilliant sustained final A on *amore* (love) as she tells her son good bye forever reflects the glory of woman in creating life, the realization of Butterfly that her most important love and most important meaning her life has had was the creation of this child. In her final *anagnorisis*, she finds a personal identity, beyond the identity prescribed by her own culture, or one to which she assimilates for a man’s culture. She wants her child to see her as a person, his mother and creator, and yet to have no remorse for her death.

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\(^{30}\) The use of this pitch here is as striking as that in the bass line for *Mo-li-hua*, the theme of the heroine in *Turandot*.

\(^{31}\) Carner regards this as the most heart-rending music of the whole work, and notes that it is in the same key as *E lucevan e stelle* in *Tosca*. Mosco Carner, *Puccini: A Biography*, 420.
Example 6-23, III-55+1, Butterfly's final aria
As Butterfly sends the child away to play, an anapest ostinato and descending chromatic
company her preparation for the actual death thrust, followed at III, 56 by the melody to
which she has just sung piccolo Iddio (little God) to her child.

**Butterfly’s triumph over the challenge of “Shame”**

The death itself is depicted tastefully but with great emotional force: At three and
four measures after III, 56, there is a cymbal crash on beat two, a sustained tympani
tremolo, followed by the tam-tam on three. During the fermata, the sound of the knife
falling to the floor is heard, in perfect rhythm. At four before III, 57, the orchestra
continues with the theme to which Butterfly sang to her child “so that you may go away
over the sea.” Whereas the orchestra echoed Cavaradossi’s final memories of Tosca at the
end of that opera, here it is not a romantic love but the power of love for a child, a unique
and divine woman’s power rarely acknowledged by men, that is celebrated in Butterfly’s
death. An arpeggiated transition leads to a high F sharp tremolo, and Pinkerton’s three
approaching cries of “Butterfly”32 are interrupted each time by the melody which

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32 Pinkerton’s final exclamations are on the fifth degree of the scale as are Rodolfo’s final cries
at the death of Mimi.
accompanied her vision of his returning up the hill, thundered out in the brass. He has failed to climb any hill or meet the challenge of commitment to this “other” woman, who has given her life fully first to him, but then to her child. The opera concludes with a full orchestra fortissimo reminiscence of Suiryo bushi, and we know that the woman who rejected dancing again as a geisha has died not only for the sake of her child, but for her own honor.

Example 6-24, III, 57+2, final occurrence of “hill-climbing” theme, with Pinkerton’s cries
Example 6-25, final occurrence of “Shame” theme (Suiryo bushi), ending on ambiguous resolution

(La porta di desideria è violeamente aperta - Pinkerton e Sharpeless si precipitano nella stanza...)

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tutta forza

corrando presso Butterfly che con debole respi indica il bambino e muore. Pinkerton al fiato noccia, mentre Sharpless prende il bimbo e lo bacia singhiozzando)

SIPARIO RAPIDO

...allegro...stentato... molto allargando
Chapter Seven: Conclusions

This study has examined the ways in which the music of *Madama Butterfly* supports the central dramatic elements of classical tragedy and the depiction of a powerful tragic heroine. The introduction places the story in its historical context, showing how the vivid representation of archetypal characters in the opera stimulated many more cultural representations. Subsequent chapters compile and integrate previous scholarly work in determining the social and musical context in which Puccini composed this opera. His development is located within a period of major mid-nineteenth century changes in Italian opera, including the relationship of music to text and increasing foreign influences. Puccini's choice of subjects reflects his own personal and cultural life, particularly in terms of prevalent attitudes toward Asians and women. Through early literary and theater versions of Butterfly's story, continuing in the many versions of the libretto and opera, a protagonist of increasing centrality and power emerges. Puccini elaborates her portrait with authentic Japanese musical material.

The final result is a heroine with more centrality and power than any of Puccini's earlier protagonists, who can be seen as the pinnacle of his achievement in creating women characters. Never before nor after did he center an opera so fully around a believable woman, nor characterize the gradual development of a woman's personality so subtly in his music. Her tragic stature increased due to revisions of the libretto (both text and staging instructions). The texts of her significant arias are full of transcendent, heavenly images (far from the crude pidgin featured in both the Long story and Belasco play). Reduction of the extraneous comic and derogatory details in Act I (many from Loti's
story), as well as the softening of Pinkerton’s character, did much to elevate the stature of Butterfly.

But the principal source of Butterfly’s power is Puccini’s score. The interpretation of Butterfly’s music has considered the association of power with tessitura and melodic direction, due to the more emotional and incisive sound of the soprano voice in the higher register.¹ Although most of her melodic lines were effective as originally written, significant alterations to the opera enhanced lines in her central arias. In Butterfly’s entrance music, frequently recurring as her hamartia, the melodic contour of the sequences was primarily downward, closely resembling a line from Mimi’s introductory aria, *Il primo bacio è mio*. Butterfly seemed almost apologetic (as did shy Mimi) by the nature of her descending line. The change to an ascending melodic line, made for the second performance at Brescia, greatly strengthened its effect. Because of its frequent recurrences, the change had a great effect on the whole opera, as can be seen in the following example.

¹ Linda Fairtile has noted that in his revisions, Puccini frequently added high notes, especially for his female characters, “in moments of stress or exultation.” She also concludes that more than other types of revisions, such vocal modifications “seem to reflect Puccini’s experience of actual performances.” *Giacomo Puccini’s Operatic Revisions*, 282, 310.
Example 7-1, Butterfly's entrance melody, La Scala, 1904 version (compare with 5-6)
The second memorable melody in Butterfly's entrance had a similar downward contour, "surrounding a pitch," as do so many other themes in this opera. Because these two themes characterize Butterfly as a person and recur so frequently, representing her *hamartia* (belief in love), the detail-level melodic changes in direction and tessitura of the vocal line acquire cumulative force in the course of performance, vastly increasing the intensity of her belief and strengthening her characterization.
Example 7-2, second theme of Butterfly's entrance melody, La Scala version (compare with Example 5-7)
The other most significant melodic change for Butterfly occurred in her final aria. Again, Puccini altered a predominantly downward line in the La Scala version (below) to an upward line, that soars to the minor seventh above the tonic (lowered leading tone) as seen in Example 6-22.

Example 7-3, Butterfly’s final aria, La Scala 1904 version (Compare with 6-22)

Although these melodic changes significantly added to Butterfly’s vocal power, some of the revisions for the 1906 Paris production diminished Butterfly’s full expression of anagnorisis as Puccini had earlier conceived it. To move the action more rapidly to the denouement, he excised two songs expressing Butterfly’s philosophical view of the change in her fortunes. The first comes after her noble statement that Pinkerton’s American wife,
Kate, is now the happiest woman under heaven. That piece, major and homophonic, can be seen as Butterfly’s relinquishment of her status as “American wife,” and precedes a return to the more modal music expressing her status as “other.” When Sharpless emotionally attempts to give Pinkerton’s money to Butterfly, she responds, “Don’t cry, sir, I am accustomed to worse things.—And yet, for all it is worth, this only confirms the fact that hopes and dreams do not give peace. No, they do not give peace.” She then rejects the money, saying, “I don’t need it,” in F-sharp natural minor, to an threnodic ostinato.

Example 7-4, Final act music wish Sharpless, La Scala version
Example 7-4 (continued)

BUTTERFLY

E poi risponda pur

tanto la certezza,

la speranza ed il sogno,
quelli no, quelli no, non dan pace...

BUTTERFLY poco rit., a tempo

poco rit. P a tempo dim.

quelli no, non dan pace.

Or se vi piace...

BUTTERFLY (cessando dare i denari a Sharpless)

rende-te...

Non me ne fa bisogno.

SHARPLESS (riflettendosi)

Oh no.
An even stronger expression of Butterfly’s *anagnorisis* is in the haunting song (which was also excised in the final version) that Butterfly sings just before she orders Suzuki out, “He entered through closed gates, he took the place of everything—he went away—and nothing was left, nothing but death.” Her melody is here in E-flat natural minor, set to pianississimo parallel fifths and octaves. In these archaic, open sounds, we see Butterfly gradually returning to the music depicting her culture, as she reflects on what has happened to her—her *hamartia* have not been fulfilled. This gives Butterfly an increased stature, as compared with someone who sees the failure of her ideals and immediately proceeds to suicide.

Example 7-5, Final act music with Suzuki in La Scala version
Because the various stories of Madame Butterfly are based both on fantasy and historical events, there are multiple perspectives from which one can interpret the opera and these related stories. As with any cultural product, these perspectives are affected by the times, as well as by the race, nationality, gender, age, and previous experiences (including musical) of the observer. A wide range of interpretations is therefore possible. One could go so far as to say that not only are the opera’s musical motives and themes multivalent, but the opera itself is multivalent.

One of the reasons for this is the combination of history and fiction on which the opera is based, and the convoluted, two-way cross-cultural influences represented. Japan itself has had mixed reactions, both criticizing culturally inaccurate aspects of the opera.
and finding glory in the operatic spotlight focused on Japan (and sometimes Japanese 
performers) throughout the world.\(^2\)

Although Nagasaki was the real site of over three centuries of “rental bride” 
enterprise, and young girls were sold by their poor families to geisha houses, one of those 
girls, Sadayakko, traveled to Europe as the wife of Otojiro Kawakami, who was seeking 
the values of Western theatre in his modified Kabuki productions. Sadayakko became the 
star, adored all over Europe.\(^3\) Arthur Groos has pointed out the considerable influence 
not only on Puccini but also on European reception of his opera from the Kawakami 
troupe performances. The expectation from a Japanese theater work was that it reflect the 
Kawakami pseudo-kabuki values, which featured “rapid and violent pantomimes 
(accommodation to audience ignorance of the Japanese language),” and gave the 
impression of leading to “the inevitable resolution in death, especially ritual suicide.” 
Groos also mentions Italian reviews of the performances noting the “barbaric, childlike 
mentality of primitive people,” and connecting this with the sensationalism of 
contemporary Italian opera.” This led to some early reviews of Butterfly’s character as 
“infantile” and “savage.”\(^4\)

\(^2\) Tamaki Miura made a reputation in Europe and America singing the role of Butterfly. In spite 
of Japanese government concern regarding the “morality” of opera performances, “Japanese singers’ 
achievements in the world of opera were highly effective symbols of Japan’s entry into the ranks of the 
Western powers” symbolizing “Japan’s legitimate position in Western civilization.” Mari Yoshihara, 

\(^3\) She subsequently performed classical European plays, including Shakespeare, and later 
advanced the training of women for the stage in Japan, as part of Japan’s efforts to westernize.

Michele Girardi emphasizes Butterfly's delusion, commenting on the “stubborn fixity” of her belief in her status as an American wife. Two recent presentations also focused on the “delusion” of Butterfly. Through study of the early forms of the libretto and correspondence between the composer and librettists, Arthur Groos has discovered Illica’s early emphasis on the comic aspects of Butterfly’s limitations as a Japanese. Much of this lies in Butterfly’s “failure to assimilate,” failure to master the social graces of a true American wife. In this concept, her tragedy is a result of her delusion that she is really married to Pinkerton. However Giacosa was seeking the “emotional intensity of a Western operatic heroine,” in the required major musical and emotional high points. Groos suggests that the result was a “dialog of tragedy and comedy,” which invests the opera with “a richness and complexity we are still learning to fathom.”

James Hepokoski considers “Un bel di” to be a lament, and also describes Butterfly’s fantasy as a delusion. He compares the aria to earlier major mode laments in opera, and describes its setting as a passacaglia ostinato. He sees Butterfly as “collapsing” from G-flat major to B-flat minor, and suggests that the vision of Pinkerton’s return has been “a recurring ostinato in her life... [that] has been caressed and recaressed as an

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5 Ibid.
amulet . . . the imagined perfect complement to that moment . . . when she ascended the hill for him.  

A comparative study of the reception history of Madama Butterfly in different times and countries would be a fascinating enterprise. Alexandra Wilson has provided insights into early Italian reception in her dissertation chapter on this opera, focusing on the “decadence” of the refined, feminine detail, and the critical conviction that the opera was “A Frame Without A Canvas” (form without substance). Mari Yoshihara has noted in her study of the opera’s performances in Japan that interpretations change with the various cultures in which the work is presented, and “involve complex operations of identity formation, artistic interpretation, and individual expression [and] often exceed the ideals and objectives of those who produce, consume, and/or try to control its flow”.

My interpretation focuses on the opera as a reflection of Butterfly’s increasing power. Its continuing popularity, and indeed its very effectiveness in the theater, relates to the score’s unerring support for the elements of classic tragedy. Rather than the last vestige of European exotic opera, Madama Butterfly represents the pinnacle of Puccini’s exploration of women. William Ashbrook characterized Puccini having “humanized

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verismo practice.”

I might expand his statement to suggest that in Madama Butterfly, Puccini humanized exoticism, expanded a localized historical event to its broader implications for all humanity. He also vastly expanded the character of the abandoned exotic woman. The resonance audiences feel with Butterfly’s character go far beyond the limited contexts of Nagasaki, Japan, and the beginning of the twentieth century. They relate to a more enduring theme—the search to understand the meaning and purpose of life’s hopes and suffering. The immediacy of Puccini’s music drama creates empathy for this character trapped in a stereotype of race and gender, with no way of achieving the dreams that have been so real to her. Although audiences know from the beginning that Butterfly is doomed and her hope tragically misplaced, the purity and nobility of her aspirations make us desperately wish that it might be otherwise. And because her soaring themes express the hopes and fears of all of us, this opera has remained one of the most popular in the world.

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