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## Madama Butterfly: The Mythology; or How Imperialism and the Patriarchy Crushed Butterfly's Wings

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*MADAMA BUTTERFLY*: THE MYTHOLOGY

or

HOW IMPERIALISM AND THE PATRIARCHY CRUSHED BUTTERFLY'S  
WINGS

by

ADRIANA V. NIEVES

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Music Performance  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

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Thesis Chair: Dr. Scott Warfield

## ABSTRACT

As a popular historic work with constant and worldwide performances, the sexist and racist narratives disseminated by Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly* causes harmful social and political ramifications. Many scholars point to this opera specifically when discussing the fetishization of Asian females, and mention the title character as the quintessential example of damaging stereotypes. Thus, I conduct a postcolonial and feminist reading of *Madama Butterfly*, through analysis of the opera's libretto, the libretto sources, and the opera's score. I unravel the Orientalist assumptions that make up the foundation of the Butterfly narrative, and trace them as they make their way into Puccini's opera. I re-read *Madama Butterfly* as a metaphor for imperialism, and its effects on the colonized psyche. I examine Lieutenant Pinkerton and Butterfly's characters with specific attention to the power dynamics of their relationship in the context of colonization. I emphasize gender, race, and class tensions evident within the white male and white female gazes on the bodies of third world women of color. I present Puccini's musical choices in the operatic score as supplementary to my postcolonial-feminist reading. Puccini's use of pentatonic scales to evoke "Oriental" sounds, as well as his appropriation of Japanese folk tunes and "The Star Spangled Banner" into the score serve to supplement my basic contentions that *Madama Butterfly* is a product of Oriental discourse and a metaphor for imperialism and its effect on the colonized psyche.

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all those generations of people that suffered and continue to suffer the effects of colonialism and imperialism, as well as negative representations in the media as a result. You deserve better.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my parents, friends, and family for their support and love; my thesis chair, Dr. Warfield, for all of his help, guidance, and encouragement; my wonderful social justice mother, Dr. Shelley Park, for enlightening me with wisdom and arming me with critical thinking; my song literature professor, Dr. Hunt, for showing me how to listen to music.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. An Introduction to Butterfly and Postcolonial Criticism.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Cultural Hegemony .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>European Subjectivity and Imperialism.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Postcolonialism.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Orientalism.....	8
The Psychology of the Colonized .....	12
<b>Feminist theory .....</b>	<b>16</b>
Liberal feminism .....	17
Radical feminism.....	18
Multicultural socialist feminism and intersectionality .....	19
<b>2. The Butterfly Narrative.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>From <i>Chrysanthème</i> to <i>Butterfly</i>: A Metamorphosis of Texts .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Japonisme.....	22
Butterfly: the Origins .....	23
The Opening of Japan.....	24
The Butterfly Formula.....	24
Madame Chrysanthème (1888) .....	25
Fetishization .....	27
“Madame Butterfly” (1898) .....	29
Madame Butterfly: A Tragedy of Japan (1900) .....	34
Madama Butterfly (1904).....	38

<b>3. Puccini Sets Japan.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Orientalism in Music .....</b>	<b>52</b>
Exoticism.....	53
Orientalism in the Butterfly score .....	55
“Puccini’s Music Box” .....	57
<b>4. Butterfly: The Myth, the Metaphor, the Motherland, and Maelstrom .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>The Myth .....</b>	<b>60</b>
Butterfly as Geisha .....	60
Butterfly as Other .....	63
<b>The Metaphor .....</b>	<b>65</b>
Capitalist Imperialism and the Motherland .....	71
<b>Butterfly as a Colonized Psyche .....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>5. Fin.....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b><i>Madama Butterfly</i> Meets the 21<sup>st</sup> Century .....</b>	<b>79</b>
The NPO Opera del Popolo and Minnano Opera Revision.....	79
The Metropolitan Opera Interpretation .....	80
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>83</b>

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: The Occident versus the Orient .....	11
Table 2: Translation of Butterfly, Act I .....	66



## List of Figures

Figure 1: Japanese National Anthem, “Kimigayo” .....	44
Figure 2: Cherry Blossom Song, “Sakura” .....	45
Figure 3: Japanese Song, "O-Edo-Nihonbushi" .....	45
Figure 4: Japanese Song, "Miyasan" .....	46
Figure 5: Japanese Prayer Melody, “Takai-Yama” .....	47
Figure 6: Japanese Folksong .....	47
Figure 7: "Echigo-Jishi" by Kineya Rokuzaemon IX .....	48
Figure 8: "Ume no haru" .....	48
Figure 9: "Kappore honen" .....	49
Figure 10: “Suiryo-Bushi” .....	49
Figure 11: Leaf Song, "Ha-Uta" .....	50
Figure 12: Workmen's Song, "Jizuki-Uta" .....	50
Figure 13: "Jizuki-Uta," mm. 17 - 18 .....	51
Figure 14: The 18 Touches, "Shiba Mo" .....	58
Figure 15: "Dovunque al Mondo" and the U.S. Navy Anthem .....	69
Figure 16: The Bonze's Theme .....	70
Figure 17: The Sword Theme .....	76

## Introduction

In the spring of 2013, I was invited to watch the open dress rehearsal of Florida Opera Theatre's production of *Madama Butterfly* by Giacomo Puccini, as a highlight of the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra's 2012 – 2013 season. At the time, I was enrolled in a Postcolonial Theory class at the University of Central Florida, taught by Dr. Shelley Park. As a voice performance student in the Department of Music in the College of Arts and Humanities, I attended the open dress rehearsal to supplement my education and to support many of my peers who were part of the production, either in *comprimario* roles or in the opera chorus.

The Orlando Philharmonic began adding operas to their season after Orlando Opera closed its doors in 2009, with the intention to keep the focus on the music. Therefore, the singers would appear on the stage *with* the orchestra. Over the last years, directors and set designers extended the apron of the stage over the orchestral pit and sometimes into the first few rows of seating, to give singers and opera choruses some more space on which to play. I had been part of a few of their productions in the past (Puccini's *La Bohème* in 2011 and Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto* in 2012), and I was thrilled to be able to watch one. *Madama Butterfly* was my first voice teacher's breakout role, as the titular character, so I had grown up hearing all about this opera, and I could not have been more excited to finally watch a live production.

What I witnessed was nothing short of shocking. I thought perhaps my shock was a side effect of wearing that semester's postcolonial lenses, but other students in attendance expressed shock and offense at the opera's libretto and certain acting choices. None had any particular experience with postcolonial theory. While the orchestra and the singers did a fine job of

performing the opera as it was written, I found myself feeling inarguably dissatisfied. Aside from the unsurprising sexism in the opera, I thought about all the things that seemed blatantly racist—the lead tenor’s lines in the very opening scene of the opera, calling his new, Japanese servants “scarecrows”; Butterfly’s entrance music coding her as *Oriental*; the “geisha” makeup appearing only as a resemblance to traditional geisha maquillage; and a single actor, making the choice to lift his cheeks into his eyes, to deliberately squint and grin painfully, reminding me of the *Y a bon banana* man we’d discussed in my postcolonial theory class. This man was a caricature, a cartoon, created by racist, imperial assumptions, hardly seen since the mid-twentieth century—and yet, there he was in his theatrical, Oriental incarnation, grinning and squinting up at me from the stage.

I wondered how much of this Orientalism was present in the original score and the libretto. How much of the performance choices could be chalked up to operatic tradition? How much of it was the responsibility of this sole cast? How much of this story was a Western construction of Japan? Was the cast or the operatic world aware of how harmful these casual racist representations of Japanese bodies can be? The questions weighed heavily on me for several months until I decided to make them the focus of a research project. This is the result of that research. I aim to analyze the opera within postcolonial and feminist theories, and to make my analysis accessible and manageable, so that anyone without knowledge of these theories or of the opera may be able to understand my analysis. I contend that *Madama Butterfly* is a relic of Orientalist discourse, a metaphor for imperialism, and what effects imperialism can have on the colonized psyche.

## 1. An Introduction to Butterfly and Postcolonial Criticism

Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* has captivated audiences for well over a century—quite the vindication for an opera whose premiere on 17 February 1904 ended in a historic fiasco at Milan's Teatro alla Scala. Puccini revised the opera a total of four times, and after so many revisions, one can hardly imagine that there could be anything more to correct in one of his most important and most performed operas. Indeed, the story of Butterfly is riveting enough to have ensured its survival these past 110 years, but the way in which it is told in each of its incarnations offers only the stilted and limited view beheld by the myopic Eurocentric Subject.<sup>1</sup> Such a narrow vision plagued not only Puccini, but also every source creator of *Madama Butterfly* up the line—a fault that has everything to do with the force of cultural hegemony and the ideologies such a force keeps in place. I contend that the opera is both product and proponent of Orientalist discourse and a metaphor for imperialism and its effects on the colonized psyche.

### Cultural Hegemony

As I will situate this opera within certain theoretical frameworks, I will introduce each of them before I begin my analysis. Before we continue, however, I must first make a point of two things: the first is cultural hegemony; and the second, European subjectivity as it relates to imperialism. Antonio Gramsci, Italian philosopher and a favorite of cultural and Marxist theorists, coined the term cultural hegemony, applying Marxist theory to hegemony's concept of geopolitical

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<sup>1</sup> See *infra*, "European Subjectivity," p. 5.

domination of one state over another. While hegemony states that one city-state may dominate another by the use of political force, cultural hegemony posits that domination may also take the form of cultural control. Gramsci concludes that, “a class is hegemonic not so much to the extent that it is able to impose a uniform conception of the world on the rest of society, but to the extent that it can articulate different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonism is neutralized.”<sup>2</sup> The idea of cultural hegemony is rooted in the structures of a ruling societal class both dominating and leading other classes “through the exercise of moral and intellectual leadership.”<sup>3</sup> Cultural hegemony works as a ruling force that diminishes the impact of any opposing forces and dilutes the opposition within the mainstream. As a part of the ruling societal class, Puccini, as well as the majority of his contemporaries, produced works that were considered inoffensive by audiences and therefore neutral in his time, but which was and remains antagonistic to those marginalized groups, which, in Gramscian terms, are the enemies of the ruling class. Thus, the portrayal of the *Madama Butterfly* narrative, as a product of the ruling ideologies of its time, ran unchecked in its embedded assumptions, creating and perpetuating to this day harmful depictions<sup>4</sup> of Japan, women from Japan, Japanese customs, and Japanese culture.

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Storey, *Cultural Theory and Pop Culture: A Reader, Third Edition* (Dorchester, Dorset: Dorset Press [1994] 2006), p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> See *infra*, “Fetishization,” p. 28.

## European Subjectivity and Imperialism

As subjectivity is a person's judgments about truth, reality, and power, the European Subject is one that establishes itself by centering on Europe *and* establishing its Other. Eurocentrism, a worldview that upholds European exceptionalism,<sup>5</sup> positions Europe as the focus of the world, and marginalizes the rest of it. A duality of sorts occurs here—a focus on one half of the world neglects the other and *creates* the Other. Gayatri Spivak speaks of Jacques Derrida's awareness of this aspect of European ethnocentrism “in the production of knowledge,”<sup>6</sup> specifically one that aids in self-justifying seventeenth-century European imperialism.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the European

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<sup>5</sup> The Free Dictionary defines exceptionalism in government, politics, and diplomacy as “an attitude to other countries, cultures, etc., based on the idea of being quite distinct from, and often superior to them in vital ways.” Date accessed 24 October 2014, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/exceptionalism>.

<sup>6</sup> Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 279.

<sup>7</sup> Reflecting on Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Spivak recounts three prejudices he found as “operating in the histories of writing which constituted a ‘symptom of the crisis of European consciousness’: the ‘theological prejudice,’ the ‘Chinese prejudice,’ and the ‘hieroglyphist prejudice.’” The first prejudice asserts the “‘actuality’” of Greek or Hebrew, as “God wrote a primordial or natural script” in Greek or Hebrew. The second prejudice refers to Chinese as a “perfect *blueprint* for philosophical writing, but it is only a blueprint,” and reduces Chinese as rational. The third claims that hieroglyphs are “too sublime to be deciphered,” redefining Egyptian script as mystical. The last two prejudices serve only to support the first, “where the center of logos is seen as the Judeo-Christian God.” Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p. 279.

Subject, as any ethnocentric Subject, establishes itself “by selectively defining an Other.”<sup>8</sup> For seventeenth-century imperialist Europe, the idea of the Other encompassed native peoples from whatever parts of the world it sought to colonize, dominate, and exploit.

The distinctions between colonialism and imperialism, while not great, are important to understand, for this thesis will further navigate these terms regarding both creation of the Butterfly narrative, and how the narrative becomes a metaphor for the circumstances in which it was created. Colonialism is the conquest of other people’s land and goods, and involves moving people to a new territory where they live as permanent settlers while maintaining a relationship with the parent nation. European capitalist colonialism requires a flow of human and natural resources between colonized and colonizer nations wherein profits always travel back to the parent nation. Imperialism is the creation and maintenance of an unequal economic, cultural, and territorial relationship between states that take the form of an empire and which base their power structures on domination and subjugation. Imperialism comes in many forms, not only the political type, in which one country governs another. Economic imperialism exists when one country wields economic power over another; military imperialism occurs when one country possesses military dominance and influence over another; and cultural imperialism, as indicated above, transpires when one country’s practices and policies enforce hegemony. Ania Loomba writes the following on the distinction between imperialism and colonialism: “Thus the imperial country is the ‘metropole’ from which power flows, and the colony or neo-colony is the place

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<sup>8</sup> B. Venkat Mani, *Cosmopolitical Claims: Turkish-German Literatures from Nadolny to Pamuk* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007), p. 60. Here, Mani quotes Derrida.

which it penetrates and controls. Imperialism can function without formal colonies ... but colonialism cannot.”<sup>9</sup>

## Postcolonialism

The three-act opera *Madama Butterfly* takes place in Nagasaki, Japan at the turn of the twentieth century and the height of Social Darwinism, a popular ideology of the 1870’s that applied the biological concept of “survival of the fittest” to struggles of political survival, such as those forms of political domination described above. As this thesis intends to situate the opera within postcolonial criticism, I must further expand this theory and its foundations. Postcolonial criticism is a response to European capitalist colonialism, and imperialism. The variances between colonialism and imperialism differ “depending on their historical mutations.”<sup>10</sup>

Postcolonialism has two connotations: 1) *after colonialism*, indicating temporality, and suggesting a period after colonialism; and 2) *against colonialism*, suggesting a moral stance against colonialism. However, these connotations caution against such simple definitions. The temporal indicator obscures, for example, internal social and racial differences, and does not address the fact that “a country may be both postcolonial (in terms of being formally independent) and neo-colonial (in the sense of remaining economically and culturally dependent) at the same time.”<sup>11</sup> Ghana president, Kwame Nkrumah, coined the term neo-colonialism in the

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<sup>9</sup> Ania Loomba. *Colonialism-Postcolonialism*. (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.7.



1962 book, *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*. Its result, he writes, “is that foreign capital is used for exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world... The struggle against neo-colonialism is aimed at preventing the financial power of the developed countries being used in such a way as to impoverish the less developed.”<sup>12</sup>

Principally, postcolonial criticism seeks to analyze, discuss, explain, react, and respond to histories of colonialism and imperialism through several methods of intellectual discourse. As these colonial and imperialist histories are so complex, postcolonialism is an intersectional academic discipline, employing Marxist critiques of capitalism, feminist critiques of patriarchy, analyses of nationalism, analyses and critiques of racism, analyses and critiques of psychoanalysis, and poststructuralist critiques of modernism. For the purposes of this thesis, I will elaborate below on those aforementioned criticisms and analyses that would most benefit the reader.

### *Orientalism*

Postcolonial criticism gained prominence with Edward Said’s 1978 book, *Orientalism*. The idea of the Orient, he argues, provides European culture with a powerful Other. He states that, “the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.”<sup>13</sup> Orientalism, having little to do with the real Orient, is not, however, a mere result of European imagination. It is “a created body of theory and practice in which, for many

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<sup>12</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism*. (New York: International Publishers, 1965), p. x.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 1-2.

generations, there has been a considerable material investment,”<sup>14</sup> such as in art, academic scholarship, literature, political writing, and common sense. Said argues that knowledge is never innocent or neutral, drawing on poststructuralist Michel Foucault’s assertion that “knowledge constructs what it purports to know... mediated by history, rather than being pure knowledge of unmediated raw truth.”<sup>15</sup> Ideological positions inform knowledge, though in the case of Orientalism, it is not simplistic.

Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions; nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the Orient; nor is it representative and expressive of some nefarious “Western” imperialist plot to hold down the “Oriental” world. It is rather a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident), but also by a whole series of ‘interests’ which ... it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, or even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world; it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies, and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about what ‘we’ do and what ‘they’ cannot do or understand as ‘we’ do).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Dale Parker, *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 255.

<sup>16</sup> *Orientalism*, p. 12.

Thus, the ideologies that distribute, inform, create, and maintain Orientalism are a direct result of ruling hegemonic forces, and not as a result of objective scholarship. In fact, no texts about the Orient are a natural depiction, but are, rather, representations. “These representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient.”<sup>17</sup> This results in an Orientalism whose system of signs function independently from its alleged references in the real world, dating to Ancient Greece. The Orient is an imagined geography created by Europe, for “it is [the West] that articulates the Orient.”<sup>18</sup>

Said claims that ideology is central to the making and maintenance of colonial societies, especially in constructing representations of “home” (here) and “over there.” Not only does Orientalism construct for Europe an Other (the Orient, and all who dwell within its imagined geography), but it also serves to maintain a broadly imperialist view of the world. Said contends that European knowledge of the “Other” is always a reflection of and maintains the West’s own self-image. For example, the table below offers a sampling—according to Said—of how Westerners imagined the East as an Other to the West’s self.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

**Table 1: The Occident versus the Orient**

<b>West – Occident – Home – Masculine</b>	<b>East – Orient – Other – Feminine</b>
Europe, rational, hardworking, kind, democratic, moral, modern, progressive, technological, individualist, the center of the world, scientific, logical, safe, civilized	Sensual, lazy, exotic, irrational, cruel, promiscuous, seductive, inscrutable, dishonest, mystical, superstitious, primitive, ruled by emotion, barbaric, static, dangerous

The binary opposition he uses to describe the Orient versus the Occident parallels discourses of gender. “Orientalist discourse finds qualities in the East that overlap with the qualities that misogynist discourse finds in the feminine.”<sup>19</sup> One could easily replace the table headings above to describe misogynistic discourse. Thus, colonialism feminizes the colonized in an attempt to masculinize itself.

The idea of the Orient effectively distinguishes it from the Occident (or the West), transforming it into an instrument of political domination. “Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient.”<sup>20</sup> This point is particularly important, especially as it applies to “knowing the Oriental” (which, incidentally, is the title of the book’s first chapter). British imperialists needed to justify their political domination over Egypt, and in the course of the nineteenth century, many theories constructed the colonial subject

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<sup>19</sup> *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies*, p. 279.

<sup>20</sup> *Orientalism*, p. 3.

as inferior to Europeans—a theory which prevailed well into the twentieth century. “There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated...”<sup>21</sup>

### *The Psychology of the Colonized*

One can also define postcolonial theory as personal experiences, which shifts histories of places and focus onto the individual. The shift of focus from locations and institutions to individuals and their subjectivities is due in part to its dependence on poststructuralist, literary, and cultural criticisms. Postcolonial criticism, can, therefore stem from personal accounts and narratives. Such is the case with Frantz Fanon. In 1952, Fanon published *Black Skin, White Masks*, in which he recounts his experience as a black, colonized, male body traveling from his colonized home of Martinique to France, the colonial motherland. Fanon applies his knowledge of psychoanalysis to these experiences and explores racism and colonialism in a way that focuses on the psychological damage caused by colonization on the colonizer and the colonized.

He begins by talking about language, and in particular how the French language was imposed on colonized subjects as superior and elite, a gateway and barrier to the majority (French, colonizer) culture, depending on whether or not one could master it. Native languages, in turn, became inferior. In Martinique, schoolchildren were taught to renounce their native Creole. Some middle -class families only used it when speaking to their servants, or did away with it entirely, seeking instead to perfect their French. Therefore, “the more the black Antillean assimilates the French language, the whiter he gets—i.e., the closer he comes to becoming a true

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

human being.”<sup>22</sup> The problem this causes is one of black colonized subjects attempting to prove themselves to whites—the colonized subjects attempting to earn the respect and acknowledgement of their colonizers as equals. The colonized subject, profoundly self-aware and possessing feelings of inferiority, can only accomplish this equality by distancing themselves from their native culture, and appropriating the culture of the colonizer for itself. For Fanon, native culture and colonizer culture equate to blackness and whiteness, respectively. Thus, the title of the book, *Black Skin, White Masks* illustrates the lengths a colonized black body will go in order to impress and prove itself to its white colonizer.

In a chapter entitled, “The So-Called Dependency of the Colonized Subject,” he challenges French psychiatrist Octave Mannoni’s claim that native peoples are content to place colonizers above them, as they suffer from a “so-called” dependency complex that becomes fulfilled once they are colonized. Mannoni asserts that the inferiority complexes of indigenous peoples antedate the arrival of white colonizers, overlooking, Fanon argues, the effects of colonization itself. Mannoni insists that inferiority complexes only occur in minority populations, and seldom do majority populations experience these. Fanon responds that, “in Martinique, there are 200 whites who consider themselves superior to 300,000 people of color. In South Africa there are two million white against almost thirteen million native people, and it has never occurred to a single black to consider himself superior to a member of the white minority.”<sup>23</sup> He correlates the feelings of inferiority experienced by the colonized (people of

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<sup>22</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. (New York: Grove Press, [1952] 2008) p.2.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

color) with the feelings of superiority enjoyed by the colonizers (white Europeans), concluding that, “It is the racist who creates his inferior.”<sup>24</sup> Faced with colonization, the oppressed and colonized subject either acquires these feelings of inferiority, or remains dependent on the colonizer. Whatever inferiority complexes the colonized subjects suffer, Fanon warns that they are not innate in native populations, but rather are a result of discrimination such subjects encounter due to the political, social, and economic power structures of colonization.

Alienated by Europeans, the black body is “othered,” no matter how successful or knowledgeable; a black body will always be marked by European society as different. Though they do not share a history of nasty enslavement, the same could be said of any race that has been pointed to out to *be* a race (as opposed to the white race which remains the default, and therefore the superior race in such a line of thinking). Certainly race-marking is epidermal, which Fanon calls an “epidermal racial schema”;<sup>25</sup> the second of his triple consciousness. I will elaborate on this point. Fanon recounts his lived experiences as a black man newly arrived in France, and describes his encounter with the white gaze as one that fixes him solely as “a black man,”<sup>26</sup> which causes him to develop a triple consciousness: he possesses the first person sense of the body as well as the third person sense of his body through the colonizer’s eyes, seeking for the colonizer’s approval—those are the first two of his consciousness. The third is the self that never receives approval, and which exists in a place of nothingness. Thus, not only is he conscious of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 93.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 92.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

himself as a subject through his own consciousness, but also as an object reflected through the gaze of the “Other.”<sup>27</sup> “The white gaze, the only valid one”<sup>28</sup> does not recognize him as a subject and reduces him into an “object among other objects.”<sup>29</sup> He is a “person but in triple,”<sup>30</sup> all at once subject and object and nothing. For Fanon, having to be divided up in that manner causes a type of schizophrenic neurosis. His sense of self—the one built up by colonialism—is effectively destroyed (fractured) by the gaze of the Other. This thesis will later discuss how Madame Butterfly experiences a similar destruction of self.

Not only does Fanon bring sociopolitics to psychology, but he also brings psychology to sociopolitics “to describe and illustrate the workings of power.”<sup>31</sup> His argument attempts to juxtapose white and black races in the context of colonization, as the white colonizer and the black colonized. The “massive psycho-existential complex”<sup>32</sup> that grips these subjects has several detrimental psychological effects. The black colonized subject thinks of themselves as white, learning from a young age to identify with the white heroes in the European children’s stories (written by white European men for white European children), and to detest the villains that are more often than not written as savage, wild, *black*. The black colonized subject turns this

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 89.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 95.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.89.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 92.

<sup>31</sup> Derek Hook. “Fanon and the psychoanalysis of racism,” *Critical psychology*. (Landsdowne, South Africa: Juta Academic Publishing, 2004), p. 115.

<sup>32</sup> *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. xvi.



villainization of blackness inwards, internalizing racism, and spending the rest of its life attempting to become white. For whites, the detrimental psychological effects of colonization are realized in the dreams of the white colonizer, who often dream of black, hostile figures—which Carl Jung might have called archetypes of the collective unconscious,<sup>33</sup> and which Fanon argues only exists as a “European [collective] unconscious.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Jung’s explanation “that the baser desires of all racial groupings are associated—in a genetically predisposed way—with blackness”<sup>35</sup> is a result of Jung’s Eurocentrism. It is important for Fanon to counter Mannoni’s and Jung’s theories of psychoanalysis; Fanon realizes that their foundations in Eurocentrism do not allow their universal application to the experiences of the colonized subject. His aim, therefore, is to build a unique theoretical framework through which to critique the psychology of the colonial experience, which this thesis will explore and apply to the Butterfly narrative.

### Feminist theory

Many aspects of feminism and postcolonial theory overlap: both focus on oppressive power structures and work to dismantle them; both possess intersectional qualities with many other

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<sup>33</sup> According to Jungian psychology, the collective unconscious refers to the idea that inherited within the cerebral matter of human beings is a universal collection of inherited knowledge and experiences buried in the unconscious mind and revealed through dreams. For more on the subject, see Carl Jung’s *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 166.

<sup>35</sup> *Critical psychology*, p. 125.

criticisms and analyses. While my thesis focuses on the postcolonial analysis, there is inevitably a feminist analysis that must occur alongside it. As I will discuss, the character of Madame Butterfly experiences oppression and tragedy at the hands of both imperialist and patriarchal forces. For this reason, I will now examine the most important points of feminist theory unaddressed and unacknowledged by mainstream feminism.

### *Liberal feminism*

At its most basic, the need for and existence of feminism acknowledges that sexism exists, sexism is bad, and feminists must actively seek change. Mainstream feminism advocates for equal pay for equal work (focusing on the gender gap in women's wages), for equal employment opportunities, for women's rights to health and safety (focusing on contraception, family planning, health screenings, violence against women, sexual assault cases, and safe spaces away from abusers), for personhood (focusing on the objectification and representation of women in advertisements and the media), and education of young girls (focusing on treating girls and boys equally in the classroom). While this work is important, it falls mostly under "liberal feminism," which is legislative, slow going, and hardly effects change in informal and casual settings. This brand of mainstream, liberal feminism buries the theoretical framework that supports it beneath more manageable and palatable ideas, especially the idea of "equality," which does nothing but argue for women's mobility within existing structures, and presupposes that the problem women face is discrimination in the public sphere.

### *Radical feminism*

Radical feminism seeks to treat the “root” of the problem, hence its name, as it comes from the Latin word “radic” meaning “root.” It argues that the problem women face is oppression from the structures of male supremacy and the patriarchy. Therefore, radical feminism does not seek equality with men as equality sets men as the standard; instead, it seeks liberation from oppression, and advocates cultural change over legislative change. Marilyn Frye argues that “in a sexist society, sex *is* relevant,”<sup>36</sup> and that therefore, sex-announcing—behaviors used to announce the world our sex—and sex-marking—the ways others mark us as male or female—are two tools that uphold such a society. This is where a heteronormative gender/sex binary binds people to behave and dress in socially constructed (acceptable) ways. She also argues that sexist oppression is perpetrated by phallists. Phallists ascribe to phallism—a concept Frye explains is parallel to humanism, in which humans are the center of the universe and animals orbit around that center to serve their needs. Thus, phallism, for Frye, is the idea that men are the center of the universe, and both animals and women orbit that center to serve their needs. The *phallist* is someone who does not see women as persons in the ethical sense. For example, one can see someone as a human without seeing them as a person. Frye makes a distinction between persons and humans here: persons are fully-fledged members of a community with all the rights pertaining to legality and morality; humans are treated humanely, as we might treat our pets. The attitude of the phallist is that he cannot take women seriously. This attitude is one with which the

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<sup>36</sup> Marilyn Frye. *The Politics of Reality* (Crown Press, 1983), p. 18.

majority of the *Madame Butterfly* creators treat their titular character, as we will explore in later chapters.

According to Frye, women are abducted, seasoned, and become complicit in their own enslavement to men's interests. They prioritize their appearance in order to *look* sexy for men, they take care of a man and his things, and compliment and acquiesce his ego. A woman's vision becomes grafted to a man's; she sets her attention on men and not other women. These behaviors, Frye claims, are a part of the arrogant eye—a narcissistic perception that views the world as either sympathetic or hostile to the perceiver. Such perception misses the needs of others, and for a woman whose vision and attention are on another person, she misses her own needs, oppressed and enslaved by the men at the center of her universe. The only solution for Frye is separatism, to liberate women from this oppression by affirming women's worth and identities outside of phallocentrism, outside of the realm of men. It is the only way to shatter the phallocratic "reality" that most men inhabit. She suggests that a part of this solution is to dissolve dichotomies—masculine-feminine, male-female, and oppressor-subordinate.

#### *Multicultural socialist feminism and intersectionality*

Intersectional approaches rely on an understanding of white privilege, class privilege, and male privilege. White privilege advantages whites at the expense of everyone else; class privilege privileges the bourgeoisie (owners of capital) at the expense of the proletariat; and male privilege privileges males at the expense of everyone else. Not only is there sex-marking and sex-announcing, but there is also race-marking and race-announcing, as well class-marking and class-announcing. Here we see some overlapping privileges and marginalizing taking place. At the center of these circles (in the most basic sense), are white, upper-class males. On the margins

are poor women of color. These are the circles of privilege used by multicultural socialist feminism to describe the macroscopic view of intersectionality. (We can add more circles of able-bodied privilege, for cisgender privilege, etc, and find ourselves working on a grid that illustrates precisely the kinds of oppression any person might encounter.)

In her critique of the mostly white, upper-middle-class feminist movement in her book, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, bell hooks claims that feminism must acknowledge that women oppress other women when they remain unaware of their white and class privileges.<sup>37</sup> Oppression is not equal. Feminism must, she says, not be educationally elitist, and have a goal that is not equality, but is the right to self-determination, not pleasure or satisfaction on the individual level. Feminism must be inclusive of women of color, of women in poverty, of non-heterosexual women, and even include men; for the problem that requires the feminist movement's work is the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy that harms even those it privileges.

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<sup>37</sup> bell hooks is the chosen pseudonym for Gloria Jean Watkins. "In 1978, bell hooks released a chapbook entitled *And There We Wept*. bell hooks had worked on this work for many years. This collection of poems was the first instance where Gloria Jean Watkins adopted the nom de plume bell hooks. This name was in honor of her grandmother. bell hooks's grandmother had been known for her wit and pithiness. The lack of capitalization serves two functions. The first function is distinguish *bell hooks* from her grandmother Bell Hooks. The second function is to indicate the importance of the text and not the biography of the author." From the European Graduate School website. Date accessed: 21 October 2014, <http://www.egs.edu/library/bell-hooks/biography/>.

## 2. The Butterfly Narrative

The first part of this chapter outlines the differences between the sources of the Butterfly story. I will unravel the Orientalist assumptions that make up the foundation of the Butterfly narrative, and trace them as they make their way into Puccini's opera. I will argue that *Madama Butterfly* is a proponent of Orientalist ideology and a product of Oriental discourse and which is, as Said says, an academic discourse that informs our material realities within which the Orient becomes a European product for Western consumption.<sup>38</sup>

### From *Chrysanthème* to *Butterfly*: A Metamorphosis of Texts

The Butterfly narrative extends its wings from Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème* (1888) through John Luther Long's short story "Madame Butterfly" (1898) and David Belasco's one-act play by the same name (1900) to Puccini's opera (1904). It is worth noting the transformation of the *Butterfly* narrative throughout these texts, and thus the popularization of the prevailing *Butterfly* story. Its immanence in the mainstream established its narrative as an authority on the Orient and initiated it into the Oriental discourse. As such, the story mythologized several of its themes: submissive Oriental females, honor, and ritual suicide. *Madama Butterfly* thus has had

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<sup>38</sup> The Orient as described by Said refers to the Indian subcontinent and the Islamic Middle East, though it has also been used to describe "colonial discourse about East Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, racial minorities in the East, and the rest of the colonized world" from Robert Dale Parker's *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies*, p. 278.

much influence on subsequent Orientalist material due to its popularity. Puccini's opera is itself a product as well as influential propaganda of Orientalism, both textually and musically, and thus lends itself to postcolonial study.

### *Japonisme*

Late-nineteenth century *japonisme*, a “great artistic and fashionable movement . . . more than a particular branch of exoticism that flourished so abundantly,”<sup>39</sup> spurred on the Butterfly narrative's positive reception. European artists, searching to move away from traditional techniques, found stimulation in Japanese art:

What attracted European artists in the newly discovered samples of Japanese pictorial art was the originality of its expression: the large, flat, colored areas; the strong contours; the abrupt cutting off of figures by the edge of the picture; the asymmetry of the representation even to the point of leaving the center empty; the strongly diagonal compositions; and the inclination to incorporate nature more as an actor than as an object as was often done in European art.<sup>40</sup>

Though *japonisme* was most relevant for painters, sculptors, and architects, it had definite influences on music as well. Exotic operas were all the rage with French composers, having been “all but monopolized by” them “since Felicién David's opera *La Perle du Brésil* (1851).”<sup>41</sup> In particular, Camille Saint-Saëns's playful 1872 opera, *La Princesse Jaune* (The Yellow Princess), uses pentatonic scales “apparently for the first time ever in European music” to represent the

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<sup>39</sup> Jan van Rij. *Madama Butterfly: Japonisme, Puccini, and the Search for the Real Cho-Cho-San* (Southbridge, Massachusetts: Stonebridge Press, 2001), p. 37.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 39.

<sup>41</sup> Michele Girardi. *Puccini: His International Art*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press [1995], 2000), p. 208.

Other.<sup>42</sup> According to van Riej, the opera has a place in history as the first Western musical work to feature a Japanese theme and use a Japanese musical technique. Though a debatable claim, the fact remains that standard musical signifiers for the Far East existed. The opera's libretto contains some lines in Japanese, and relates "common fantasies about the peaceful, happy lives of Japanese women."<sup>43</sup> I will discuss the musical language used by late-nineteenth-century composers to signify exotic and Oriental locales and characters in the next chapter.

### *Butterfly: the Origins*

In 1885, a French naval lieutenant by the name of Julien Marie Viaud arrived in the harbor of Nagasaki. Known better by his *nom de plume* Pierre Loti, he went on to novelize this account of his travels there, in his 1888 novel, *Madame Chrysanthème*. The novel is not entirely original in its plot's conception, as it owes a great deal to the common practice of arranging temporary marriages between young Japanese females and foreign dignitaries, including stationed naval personnel. Such a practice was a part of the experience of physician Dr. Franz von Siebold, a Dutch medical doctor, who arrived in Japan in the summer of 1823. Whilst there, he "married" Kusumoto Taki "according to the usual temporary arrangements,"<sup>44</sup> and had a daughter in May 1827. He wrote extensively about Japan on his return to Europe. His writings later served to inform Commodore Perry before the commodore sailed to Japan in 1857 and, on behalf of the United States government, demanded the opening of Japan for trade and foreign visitors.

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<sup>42</sup> *Madama Butterfly: Japonisme, Puccini, and the Search for the Real Cho-Cho-San*, p. 46.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Madama Butterfly: Japonisme, Puccini, and the Search for the Real Cho-Cho-San*, p. 20.



## The Opening of Japan

Japan so enchanted the nineteenth century Western public due to its centuries-long isolation from the rest of the world. Its “opening” up in the 1860’s caused instant fascination with all things Japanese. At the same time, Japan had to catch up very quickly to the industrialized nations in order to be able to defend its interests internationally. Apart from having to understand Western government, industry, and banking, Japan also needed to buy Western technologies. “Exports were necessary to earn the funds needed for buying foreign goods,” writes van Rij, and “Japanese art and craft were at the time among the most readily available commodities.”<sup>45</sup> These exports served to convince the world of Japan’s high level of respectability in order to abolish unequal treaties through “the promotion of a Japanese image that would show that, like European countries, it linked a modern present to a prestigious, traditional past of a high cultural level and thus clearly belonged to another class than the many colonialized countries of Asia and Africa.”<sup>46</sup> However, its noble past would not save Japan from encountering the myopic gaze of imperialism.

### *The Butterfly Formula*

*Madame Chrysanthème* is the earliest fictionalized account of the Butterfly narrative. Here are its very first seeds, waiting to be watered and nurtured by various other writers before blooming in the hands of Puccini’s opera. The Butterfly narrative follows a very specific formula: first there

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p. 43.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p. 46.

is the arrival of a foreign naval force in a Japanese harbor, followed closely by negotiations for a temporary “marriage” between a foreign naval officer and a young, Japanese female, here, between Loti and O-kiku-san, or Mademoiselle Chrysanthème. The foreigner invests in a small house with walls made of paper and a magnificent view of Nagasaki harbor. The foreigner knows not to take seriously his marriage, nor to form any lasting attachment to his wife. The husband leaves for a period of time, and the faithful wife holds vigil until his return. In the novel, Loti oversees repairs on his ship and is absent from his home for five days. His wife celebrates his return by lighting lamps, decorating the house, putting fresh flowers in vases, and donning her best clothes. As soon as his ship is ordered to leave, the foreign naval officer takes leave of Japan and his marriage. For Loti, whatever remorse he might have felt quickly dissipates as he discovers O-kiku-san testing his payment with a hammer, in order to verify the coins were not counterfeit. These are the basic ingredients of the Butterfly narrative; they set the scene for Orientalist fantasies to take on more life in later reincarnations. We must, however, acknowledge the marked differences between Loti’s version of these events and their subsequent transfigurations.

*Madame Chrysanthème* (1888)

Before he arrives in Nagasaki, Loti’s notions of *japonisme* affect the tone of his work. Loti is not alone in this influence—his contemporaries could not have been spared from their introduction to the cultural hegemony—though his brand of *japonisme* certainly carries some notes of derision and distaste for the peoples he encountered in Japan and their customs. For example, in describing Japanese people, he hardly recognized them as human, calling them “ugly, mean and

grotesque ... creatures.”<sup>47</sup> In fact, he adds that, “Given my projects of marriage, I began to feel singularly uneasy and disenchanted.” What he had been hoping for upon his arrival very clearly delineates his underlying prejudices, which he outlines in the following speech to his companion, Yves:

Yes—I shall choose a little yellow-skinned woman with black hair and cat’s eyes. She must be pretty. Not much bigger than a doll. You [Yves] shall have a room in our house. A little paper house, in the midst of green gardens, prettily shaded.<sup>48</sup>

Obviously the “common fantasies” of Japan that van Riej describes had pierced the naval officer’s expectations, setting him up for the disappointment he experiences when he finally sets foot in Nagasaki. Too high expectations lead easily to disappointment in any situation, but when these expectations are upheld by common fantasies disguised as common knowledge, the result is a touch of resentment for reality. He remains excited about the prospect, however, that there might be “lurking behind a paper screen, some affected cat’s-eyed little woman, whom perhaps in two or three days ... I shall marry!”<sup>49</sup> Loti very easily fashions a fantasy for himself, using race-marking language such as “yellow-skinned” and “cat’s-eyed,” creating his Other as an object to fetishize.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. I would also like to add that although the use of the word “creature” at the date in which *Madame Chrysanthème* was written, was often employed to refer to people, it is still a word which at the time, as like now, clearly demarcates that such a “creature” is peculiar to the male gaze and thus not altogether deserving of the same dignity that would be required of a white European male of particular social status.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

## Fetishization

Fetishization of the Asian woman is a place where postcolonial, critical race, and feminist theories intersect. In her article, “White Sexual Imperialism: A Theory of Asian Feminist Jurisprudence,” Sunny Woan examines the intersectionality of race and gender through Western imperialism. She claims, “the underlying cause of sexual-racial inequality between White men and non-White women is White sexual imperialism... [T]he history of Western political, military, and economic domination of developing nations compelled women of these nations into sexual submission to White men.”<sup>50</sup> When the only prerequisite for sexual attraction to an “Asian” feminine female body is her appearance as Asian, as *Oriental*, as *Other*, we consider such attraction fetishization. Such fetishization upholds sexual stereotypes and harmful depictions of Asian women that lead to hyper-sexualization (resulting in everything from mail-order brides to underreported rates of sexual violence against Asian women). The stereotype of the hyper-sexualized Asian woman presents her as one that is “small, weak, submissive and erotically alluring,”<sup>51</sup> a stereotype with which Loti was familiar at the end of the nineteenth century. Asian women are either duplicitous dragon ladies, or sexually submissive lotus babies whose sole purpose is to serve men. On the latter, Woan adds, “she not only exemplifies hyper-sexuality, but hyper-heterosexuality, male-centered and male-dominated... the perfect

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<sup>50</sup> Sunny Woan. “White Sexual Imperialism: A Theory of Asian Feminist Jurisprudence.” *Washington and Lee Journal of Civil Rights and Social Justice Law*, vol. 13 (2008), p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Julie Yuki Ralston, “Geishas, Gays and Grunts: What the Exploitation of Asian Pacific Women Reveals About Military Culture and the Legal Ban on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Service Members,” *Law and Inequality: A Journal of Theory and Practice*, vol. 16, no. 2 (Summer 1998), p. 661 – 702.

complement to the exaggerated masculinity of the white man, existing solely to serve men and be sexually consumed by them.”<sup>52</sup> Therefore, fetishization of Asian females is in line with phallocentrism, as it centers around the needs of white men.

Woan writes, “Asian Pacific women are particularly valued in a sexist society because they provide the antidote to visions of liberated career women who challenge the objectification of women.”<sup>53</sup> Bell hooks makes a distinction between the unequal oppression faced by white women and women of color. The sexuality of women of color is viewed in opposition to the sexuality of a white female, placing the white female as a norm and hyper-sexualizing women of color. However, “this strategy only serves to discipline both [white women and women of color] and maintain the supremacy of the dominant class,”<sup>54</sup> which in this case (as in most) is that of the white male. This power dynamic—between white male, white female, and Asian female—will prove especially fascinating in future reincarnations of the Butterfly narrative.<sup>55</sup>

The effects of Western imperialism remain visible today. Women of color, as a consequence of these effects, are left subordinate to white imperialist men, by whom they are objectified and fetishized. The presence of the US military base in Okinawa, Japan—an example of American military imperialism—has resulted in strained relationships between US servicemen and the Japanese population of the island due to the number of sexual assaults committed against

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<sup>52</sup> “White Sexual Imperialism: A Theory of Asian Feminist Jurisprudence,” p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> See *infra*, “4. Butterfly: the Myth, the Metaphor, the Motherland, the Maelstrom,” p. 72.

Japanese women by US servicemen. Perhaps most infamously, in 1995, three servicemen were convicted of raping a 12-year-old Japanese girl while stationed there.<sup>56</sup> Most recently, in March 2013, two US Navy seamen were convicted of raping and robbing a woman.<sup>57</sup> These cases are merely a symptom of the oppressive structures of white supremacy, sexism, and imperialism. Loti, as well as those who drew inspiration from his story later, operate on the assumptions of white imperialist males. In fact, many scholars point to *Madama Butterfly* as the quintessential example of the stereotype that “the Asian Pacific woman is the ‘exotic erotic’ whose purpose is to serve, support, and sacrifice for the man at the center of her universe.”<sup>58</sup>

*“Madame Butterfly” (1898)*

Jonathan Luther Long brought the most lasting changes to the Butterfly narrative—the most important of which is the name Madame Butterfly. His story was a pointed response to Loti’s less-than-sympathetic portrayal of his own title character, especially considering how very terribly wrong Loti’s exploits could have gone. Long’s sister, who had lived in Japan for two years, related to him the tragic story of a Japanese geisha and a European man who had married. The man left his bride at the end of his stay in Japan, and in his absence, she discovered she was pregnant. Inspired, Long wrote the short story “Madame Butterfly,” adding tragedy to the

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<sup>56</sup> See Michael A. Lev, “3 GIs Convicted in Okinawa Rape,” *The Chicago Tribune*, 7 March 1996.  
[http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1996-03-07/news/9603070150\\_1\\_marine-pfc-okinawa-sentence](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1996-03-07/news/9603070150_1_marine-pfc-okinawa-sentence).

<sup>57</sup> See “U.S. Navy sailors convicted in Okinawa rape,” *USA Today*.  
<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/03/01/us-navy-sailors-okinawa-rape/1955873/>.

<sup>58</sup> *Geishas, Gays and Grunts*.

Butterfly narrative, and expanding on the Butterfly myth. Long's begins in much the same way as Loti's: as their ship nears Nagasaki harbor, two men on a ship talk of their plans for their stay in Japan. They are not Loti and Yves, but rather Pinkerton and Sayre. The latter persuades Pinkerton to get married while they are stationed in Japan: "There is no danger of you losing your head for anyone. The danger would probably be entirely with—the other person."<sup>59</sup> It occurs very immediately into the story and paints Pinkerton's character as selfish and domineering. This warning of danger is clear foreshadowing of the events that follow—the events upon which Puccini's librettists would soon base their opera. When they arrive in Nagasaki, Pinkerton meets with a marriage-broker and finds both a wife and a house that he leases for 999 years. He weds Cho-Cho-San, more affectionately called Madame Butterfly. While Loti was content to watch Chrysanthème with a dispassionate curiosity, Pinkerton takes a more active role in his wife's life. He replaces her relatives and her religion with himself. He asserts the contemporary American customs in the place of anything Japanese, and she imitates and defends the American customs out of love for him. In essence, Pinkerton colonizes Butterfly, and she distances herself from her native culture in search for his approval. He forms no lasting attachment to his young wife, and when the time comes for him to leave, he does so with ease. The decorated house and vigil will come later, as Cho-Cho-San waits for his return.

For the majority of the story, Long writes at length on Butterfly's blind faith in her husband, her unwillingness to be anything but happy while she waits, and her objection to any

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<sup>59</sup> Jonathan Luther Long and Onoto Watanna. "*Madame Butterfly*" and "*A Japanese Nightingale*," (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 30.

claim that his leaving was enough to merit a divorce. She rebuffs the advances and proposals of Yamadori, insisting that she is still married; for Pinkerton had assured her that in the United States, when one marries, one marries forever, and a divorce is a nasty business whose outcome requires an entire jury to decide. Her household becomes one entirely dedicated to remaining American: all who enter must speak English, abide by American customs, and pray only to the great American God. She waits for Pinkerton with such obstinacy, however, as while he was away, she had had their baby and named him Trouble.

Every Japanese baby begins with a temporary name; it may be anything, almost, for the little time. She was quite sure [Pinkerton] would like the way she had named him Trouble—meaning joy. That was his own oblique way. As for his permanent name,—he might have several others before,—that was for him to choose when he returned. And this event was to happen, according to his own words, when the robins nested again.<sup>60</sup>

She waits for the robins to nest; that is when her Pinkerton said he would return. Clearly, the robins must nest at a different time in America. She imagines she will surprise Pinkerton with their baby, and takes delight in acting out his reaction. She is particularly delighted that Trouble has “purple eyes,”<sup>61</sup> and is sure Pinkerton would be as equally enthusiastic.

Cho-Cho-San agrees with the marriage-broker Goro to meet her Japanese suitor, Yamadori, but the meeting is cut all too short when Yamadori attempts to relate to her a tragic story too similar to her own. “Though Yamadori came no more, he had brought the serpent to Madame Butterfly’s Eden,”<sup>62</sup> writes Long. Eventually, Butterfly—or Cho-Cho-San, as she is

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. p. 36.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p. 38.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 56.



called colloquially—calls upon the American consul, Mr. Sharpless. She asks him about the robins nesting in America—they must nest much later than the ones in Japan. She asks about the state of matrimony in his America, “When somebody gitting marry with ‘nother body at your America, don’ he got stay marry?”<sup>63</sup> She asks if it is true that getting a divorce requires a courthouse and a judge. He answers everything in the affirmative: “Every doubt had been resolved in her favor.”<sup>64</sup> It is not long that she returns and asks the consul to help her out with a joke she means to play on her absent husband. She asks if he could send word to Pinkerton that she has tired of waiting for him and is marrying a great and wise prince Yamadori Okyo; she will be taking their baby and all of the servants as well. She is determined that he would return then, running up the hill to their house, perhaps quite angry, but then she would come out, after laughing at him, and put everything right. Long writes on the consul’s thoughts on the matter at hand, providing an astute observation of Pinkerton’s character in the process: “that stuff about the robins sounded like one of [Pinkerton’s] infernal jokes... Unless Pinkerton had changed, he had probably not thought of [Cho-Cho-San] again—except as the prompt wife of another man.”<sup>65</sup> He resolves instead to provide her—perhaps cruelly—with some hope, stating that Lieutenant Pinkerton’s ship would soon be in Nagasaki.

Several weeks later, Butterfly spies his ship in the harbor. Bursting with happiness, she sings that her baby might receive a new name now that Pinkerton has come back—“mebby

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 58.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 59.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. pp. 65 – 66.

Joy!—Joy!”<sup>66</sup>—and she prepares her house accordingly; no expense would be spared at lighting at most a thousand lanterns, spreading chrysanthemums (a symbolic nod to Loti, no doubt) everywhere, and placing poppies in her hair to accentuate her best clothes. She stands vigil for him, waiting, but he does not appear. A few days later, Butterfly and Suzuki see Pinkerton himself on his ship, with a blonde woman on his arm. Soon after, the ship disappears from the harbor. Doubt setting in, Cho-Cho-San decides to pay another visit to the consul. While he assures her that Pinkerton only had to make a quick trip to China and would be right back, another woman arrives to see the consul. She introduces herself as the wife of Lieutenant Pinkerton, and says she must telegram him immediately the following news: “Just saw the baby and his nurse. Can’t we have him at once? He is lovely. Shall see the mother about it tomorrow. Was not at home when I was here to-day. Expect to join you Wednesday next week per [the ship] *Kioto Maru*. May I bring him along? ADELAIDE.”<sup>67</sup> Seeing Cho-Cho-San, she says to her, “How very charming—how *lovely*—you are, dear! Will you kiss me, you pretty—*plaything*!” Adelaide laughs as the woman before her timidly refuses, unaware that she is the very mother she was unable to meet earlier in the day. This is the very moment Cho-Cho-San sees herself pitted against the white American woman, and Adelaide’s imperial gaze is one that shatters Cho-Cho-San’s sense of self. Adelaide leaves, and the consul, after his “compassionate lying,” cannot seem to find anything to say. Butterfly, however, finds it in herself to surrender the last of Pinkerton’s money, a few coins, into Mr. Sharpless’s palm:

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p. 71.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p. 75.

“They are his, all that is left of his beautiful money. I shall need no more. Give them to him. I lig if you also say I sawry—no, no, *no!* glad—glad—*glad!*” She humbly sighed. “Me? I—I wish him that happiness same lig he wish for himself—an’—an’—me. *Me?* I shall be happy—mebby. Tell him I—shall be—happy.”<sup>68</sup>

Still, whether out of politeness or love, Long writes Butterfly as one who continually places Pinkerton and his happiness at the center of her universe. She returns home, to her baby and her weeping servant, Suzuki. She tells Suzuki she will finally have a long rest, but the servant catches her meaning, finding no comfort in the words of her mistress. Butterfly finds her father’s sword, the only thing of his that her relatives had permitted her to keep. Its inscription reads, “To die with Honor/When one can no longer live with Honor.”<sup>69</sup> Here we see the concept of honor begin to take shape in the Butterfly narrative. She presses the blade to her neck and as blood begins to stream from the incision, she reflects on all that Pinkerton had taught her—“how to live—nay, to make life sweet.”<sup>70</sup> Suzuki enters with the baby and bandages the wound. Suddenly, Cho-Cho-San’s consciousness shifts, and she replaces Pinkerton with her child at the center of her universe. When Adelaide returns the next morning, she finds the house empty.

*Madame Butterfly: A Tragedy of Japan (1900)*

John Luther Long does not quite provide his Madame Butterfly the dramatic and tragic fate known to those more familiar with the story in Puccini’s opera. Long’s story functions as more of a satire on the practice of temporary marriages (as well as a pointed response to Loti’s self-

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p. 76.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p. 78.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 79.

involved travelogue) than an actual tragedy. The infamous suicide comes in the one-act play

American producer David Belasco will write in 1900. The play sets the scene as the following:

The play takes place in Japan in MADAME BUTTERFLY'S little house at the foot of Higashi Hill, facing the harbor. Everything in the room is Japanese save the American locks and bolts on the doors and windows and an American flag fastened to a tobacco jar. Cherry blossoms are abloom outside, and inside. A sword rack, a shrine on which lie a sword and a pair of men's slippers, a chest of drawers on top of which is a tray containing two red poppies, rouge, powder and hair ornaments, a stand for the tobacco jar and tea, are the only pieces of furniture in the room.<sup>71</sup>

Belasco begins his transfiguration of the story after Pinkerton has left, with Butterfly waiting for his return. He drastically changes the medium of the story, bringing it from the pages of a serialized novel to the stage. Butterfly, therefore, receives many detailed instructions about how to pronounce her words, how to fold up her body on the stage, how many times to "salaam"; the result is a brighter, joyful Butterfly who is happy to dance and sing, and a commentary on her sorry state through the eyes of Mr. Sharpless, the American consul. Belasco's Sharpless shows much less kindness and pity for Butterfly's circumstance, until at lengths he begins to recognize how Pinkerton has transformed and doomed her.

The entirety of the Butterfly plot spans the whole of one act set within 24 hours. The major conflict centers around Butterfly and Yamadori, whose proposals for marriage she continually rebuffs by asking Mr. Sharpless about marriage contracts in the United States and the time of robins' nesting. Belasco includes some of the more cutting facts about Butterfly's situation from Long's original novel—the Nakodo insults Butterfly by informing her that her

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<sup>71</sup> David Belasco. *Madame Butterfly: A Tragedy*, Electronic Edition (Alexander Street Press, LLC, [1900] 2013) Date accessed: October 2013, <http://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?NADR:PL008606>.

child “was a badge of shame to his father. In his country, there are homes for such unfortunates and they never rise above the stigma of their class. They are shunned and cursed from birth.”<sup>72</sup> Butterfly threatens him with her father’s sword, and he quits the house. Not too soon, Butterfly spies his warship in the harbor, renamed *Connecticut* by Belasco. Suzuki, on orders from her mistress, immediately goes to work to dress up Butterfly in her wedding finery, and the baby, “enveloping him in an obi so wide that it almost covers the child.”<sup>73</sup> The American flag plays an important part in the production, starting decoratively inside a tobacco jar and in the baby’s hands as they await Pinkerton’s return. The flag symbolizes Butterfly’s longing for Pinkerton and the colonial motherland.<sup>74</sup>

Alas, the tragedy would not work without a fruitless vigil. Unlike Long’s Butterfly, who had to wait several weeks for Pinkerton, Belasco’s Butterfly waited only a day. Unfortunately, Butterfly has retreated upstairs to watch Pinkerton’s ship in the harbor, although Pinkerton, who has returned in the company of Mr. Sharpless, can hear her sing the very song he taught her: “I call her the Belle of Japan.”<sup>75</sup> He assesses the situation with more remorse, however, than Long’s Pinkerton (who never bothered to face her at all), noting, “Sharpless, I thought when I left this house, the few tears, sobs, little polite regrets, would be over as I crossed the threshold. I started to come back for a minute, but I said to myself: ‘Don’t do it; by this time she’s ringing your gold

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Puccini will later replace the American flag with “The Star Spangled Banner” to symbolize similar themes in the *Madama Butterfly* score. See *infra*, “The Metaphor,” p. 67.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

pieces to make sure they're good.' You know that class of Japanese girl..."<sup>76</sup> Here, Belasco references Loti's own experience with his temporary Japanese wife, adding to Long's critical response of *Madame Chrysanthème*. Clearly, both Belasco and Long found the malice in these arranged temporary marriages and exploited them in their respective *Madame Butterfly* oeuvres.

Though regretful, Pinkerton hides behind a screen when Butterfly descends the stairs to the main room, leaving all confrontations between Butterfly and the truth of her situation to Mr. Sharpless and to Pinkerton's American wife, renamed Kate. The latter is the name which Puccini's librettists, Giacosa and Illica, will hereafter acquire and establish as the name of Pinkerton's wife, proving the authority that this opera has over the Butterfly narrative. Belasco's Kate is not altogether different from Adelaide, except that, knowing exactly who Butterfly is, endeavors anyway to call her a "pretty little plaything,"<sup>77</sup> and shattering Butterfly's consciousness with a much more severe result. But Belasco endows Butterfly with a voice, and she immediately refutes this idea, replying that she is no plaything. It is Kate, also, who asks Butterfly to relinquish her child, and Butterfly gives up her last two dollars to her. The speech that she made to Sharpless in Long's story she instead makes to Kate:

MADAME BUTTERLY: They are his, all that is left of his moaneys. I shall need no more. Give them to him. I lig if you also say I sawry—no, no, *no!* glad—*glad!* I wish him that same happiness lig he wish for me . . . an' tell him . . . I shall be happy . . . mebbly. Thang him . . . Miser B.F. Pik-ker-ton for also that kindness he have been unto me . . . an' permit me to thang *you*, augustness, for that same. . . You—you mos' bes' lucky girl in these whole worl' ...<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Butterfly then instructs a weepy Kate to return in fifteen minutes for the child. Pinkerton had quit the house much earlier, unable to face the tragic consequence of his “infernally jokes,”<sup>79</sup> that of his return when the robins nest again. Unlike Long’s Butterfly, however, Belasco’s goes through with her planned suicide. She reads the inscription on her father’s sword—“to die with honor, when one can no longer live with honor”—before drawing the blade across her neck.

*SUZUKI opens the door, sees the face of her mistress—backs out of the room in horror. MADAME BUTTERFLY drops to her knees as she reaches the child, and clasps it to her. A hand is thrust through the shoji and the bolt is drawn. KATE enters quickly urging the reluctant PINKERTON to follow her.*<sup>80</sup>

Belasco makes one final modification to Long’s original story; he brings Pinkerton back to witness Butterfly’s last act, “to heighten its pathos,”<sup>81</sup> whereas Long’s Pinkerton never sets eyes on Butterfly again. Pinkerton, realizing what she has done, draws her to him along with the baby, and she waves the child’s hand, which holds the American flag. The last words of the play, entirely conceived by Belasco, are Butterfly’s just before she dies and they are directed to her former husband: “Too bad those robins did’n’ nes’ again.” Famous last words, indeed.

#### *Madama Butterfly* (1904)

The story goes that Puccini saw a production of Belasco’s play in London and was so touched by its emotional complexity and drama, even though he hardly understood any English, that he immediately asked Belasco for the rights in order to make it into an opera. Whether there is any

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Mosco Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, Inc., [1958] 1969), p. 365.

truth to this legend, the story of Butterfly certainly made an impression. Belasco, despite the opera composer's enthusiasm, was not as keen to give in to Puccini's demands, and it was over a year before he signed a contract with the composer. While Puccini worked to gain the rights to the play, he sent his librettists to work on the play's source material—Long's short story, "Madame Butterfly." For this reason, Puccini and his librettists would suffer through many discrepancies in artistic vision. At first, Puccini thought the opera could be done in one act (like the play) with a prologue, then changed his mind and thought it could be done in two long acts—the first set in North America, and the second in Japan. He soon discarded that idea, however, in favor of three acts. Then suddenly, he changed his mind again; Puccini wanted to reduce it into two acts again. It is no surprise, then, that after several compromises and revisions before the debut, the result was one of too-long scenes filled with too many *comprimario* roles of little narrative consequence, and an entire act set in the American Consulate. To his publisher, Giulio Ricordi, Puccini wrote, "The Consulate was a great mistake. The action must move forward to the close without interruption, rapid, effective, terrible! In arranging the opera in three acts I was making for certain disaster."<sup>82</sup> It was in this act that Kate would have sent a telegram to Pinkerton while in earshot of Butterfly, and then called her a "pretty little plaything."

Giacosa was especially hard to convince on this point, even though Puccini reminded him of a similar situation with *La Bohème* thus: "Didn't you, on my advice, suppress the act which played in the courtyard? And that was not a bad thing after all. . . ."<sup>83</sup> The majority of his reply is

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<sup>82</sup> Giuseppe Adami, *Letters of Giacomo Puccini* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1931), p. 149

<sup>83</sup> *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, p. 126.



worth reproducing in its entirety simply as he demonstrates exquisite foresight; he addresses major concerns that would later result in the fiasco of *Butterfly*'s debut:

I am convinced—and the more I ponder it the more convinced I become—that the curtain ought to fall between the futile night vigil and Pinkerton's reappearance. The English play has no curtain there, but then the play is compressed into a single act. I can understand that it was not light-heartedly that Belasco made these sacrifices to the unity of the play because there, too, the entry of Pinkerton and Kate is bad. But if we, who had the sound idea of adding a first act, extraneous to the action, now fail to give the action sufficient development, we shall upset the equilibrium of the work and aggravate the defects of the play, to the point of rendering them intolerable. I am convinced that the result of fusing the second with the third act would be, musically, an act which would be interminable and too contrived. I am also convinced that your alterations would do away with many exquisite poetic details: I do not mean verses but poetry of an intimate, essential character. To sum up, the sketch which you brought me appears to be absurd, and I foresee (however splendid the music) a disaster with the public. And for that I will assume no responsibility whatsoever. The argument you advance about *La Bohème*, in fact, works in my favor. For you saw, once I had recognized that the suppression of an act was justified, I accepted it. But here, my artistic feeling does not agree.<sup>84</sup>

Puccini, however, believed that having a curtain at the vigil scene interrupted the flow and logic of the narrative. The composer eventually got his way, though at great cost to the success of *Madama Butterfly*'s debut. Biographer Mosco Carner is of the opinion that the failure of *Butterfly* was engineered, and had little to do with the defects in the original version of the opera. "The differences between them," writes Carner, "are not marked enough to provide the sole explanation for the flood of abuse and ridicule that was poured on the opera at its first production, where three months later, at Brescia, the revised version was received with tremendous acclaim."<sup>85</sup> He lists several reasons, including the unmet demands of an anti-Puccini

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid. pp. 126 – 127.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 133.

clique, as well as the fact that at this point in his career, Puccini was “ripe for slaughter.”<sup>86</sup>

However, the defects in the original opera warranted revision, and thus Puccini set to work after critics condemned *Madama Butterfly* a failure.

First, there was the imbalance between the lengths of the two acts, the first was nearly an hour in length, while the second totaled at an hour and a half, which he believed taxed his audience’s stamina. Against his better judgments, Puccini drew the curtain right in the middle of the intermezzo that depicts nightfall as Butterfly holds a fruitless vigil followed by daybreak. Second, were the several unnecessary elaborations of the wedding party in Act I, including Cio-Cio-San’s<sup>87</sup> drunk uncle, whose character functioned as comic relief, and a little cousin who was to behave as any child would at a wedding. Certain lines intended to demonstrate the differences between American and Japanese peoples and highlight the so-called “incompatibility of East and West”<sup>88</sup> were also cut. However, Puccini added an arietta for Pinkerton, “Addio, fiorito asil!” in Act II, Part Two (which he would have had in the original version, if only Puccini had heeded Giacosa’s advice). To compensate, Puccini cuts an entrance scene with Suzuki attending Cio-Cio-San and her son, where Cio-Cio-San also had a Japanese nursery song to sing. Lastly, Puccini erases Kate’s presence in the opera: in the original version, she was the one to ask Butterfly for her child; in the revision, her lines are taken over by Sharpless, the American

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. p. 134.

<sup>87</sup> Cio-Cio-San is the Italian phonetic spelling of Long’s English Cho-Cho-San.

<sup>88</sup> *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, p. 381.

Consul, and she appears briefly, with only a few lines to sing. In total, the emendations amount to over thirty pages of vocal score.<sup>89</sup>

About the finished libretto, New York City Opera Project wrote that *Madama Butterfly* is “one of those rare instances in operatic history where the text is actually an improvement over its sources,” citing “the finely etched depictions of its characters, its inexorable progress to denouement, and the beautiful verses and dialogue constructed by Giuseppe Giacosa” as evidence for this judgment.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, the libretto does add certain dimensions that were otherwise lacking in its previous incarnations. The Italian text may be described as drama-verse, there is a flow and logic to the action sorely missed in its ancestry, and the librettists explore with great thoroughness the infinite psychology of Butterfly from the moment she falls in love to the moment she understands her betrayal and acts upon her anguish. Despite these merits, the libretto does little to quell the immanent Orientalism from peeking through.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 381.

<sup>90</sup> Chadwick Jenkins, “New York City Opera Project: *Madama Butterfly*.” Date accessed: 10 September 2014, <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/music/NYCO/butterfly/luther.html>.

### 3. Puccini Sets Japan

Apart from the battles over the libretto, Puccini struggled to capture the essence of Japan musically as best he could. He went so far as to consult the wife of the Japanese ambassador to Italy, Mrs. Oyama, who according to Puccini's letters, sang him native songs and promised to send him more recordings of Japanese folk songs.<sup>91</sup> He met with Japanese actress Sada Jacco, who happened to be visiting Milan in 1902. "He wished to hear her speak in her native language so as to obtain an authentic impression of the timbre of a female Japanese voice, with its peculiar high twitter,"<sup>92</sup> already convinced by racial stereotypes that Japanese female voices possessed some inherent twitter that warranted a distinction from non-Japanese females. Carner writes that Puccini became obsessed in his search for those differences that would signify the Orient, collecting gramophone recordings of Japanese music, reading many books on Japanese customs, architecture, and religion, and generally submerging himself in Orientalist discourse.

Puccini's obsession with Japan might be viewed as reverent and respectful, especially if it was his intention to portray Japan as accurately as possible according to all the resources at his disposal. Indeed, his studies of native Japanese songs make quite the appearance in the opera: he

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<sup>91</sup> *Letters of Giacomo Puccini*, pp. 146–7.

<sup>92</sup> *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, p. 124.

assimilated at least seven melodies into the score, by “quoting [them] either whole or in parts and embedding [them] in impressionist harmony.”<sup>93</sup> Carner identifies these as the following:<sup>94</sup>

**Figure 1: Japanese National Anthem, “Kimigayo”**



Puccini uses the Japanese National Anthem as a theme to announce “the arrival of the Imperial Commissioner and the Marriage Registrar”<sup>95</sup> in Act I ([59])<sup>96</sup> in the horns, violins and violas for seven measures after [59], then carried by the horns for two more repetitions until [60]. Yoshiisa Oku and Akimori Hayashi composed the anthem circa 1880. Using the national anthem to convey the imperial nature of a government official illustrates Puccini’s creativity with the Japanese tunes at his disposal.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p. 367.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. The seven examples I present here are the same as those Carner identifies in *Puccini: A Critical Biography*. The names of the songs in quotations, as well as the correction in the seventh example (Figure 8), are taken from Powils-Okano work, *Puccini’s “Madama Butterfly,”* as seen in Michele Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [1995] 2000), pp. 212 – 213.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> This thesis will use the original 1907 Giovanni Ricordi, Milan edition, available in the Dover Publications republication of the *Madama Butterfly* score. I will locate the musical events by rehearsal numbers, found enclosed in brackets. Giacomo Puccini. *Madama Butterfly* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1990), p. 86. Digital copies of the score are available in the public domain at the following web address:

[http://imslp.org/wiki/Madama\\_Butterfly\\_\(Puccini,\\_Giacomo\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Madama_Butterfly_(Puccini,_Giacomo)).

**Figure 2: Cherry Blossom Song, “Sakura”**



As Butterfly empties her sleeves in Act I, to show Pinkerton all her worldly possessions, just four measures after [75],<sup>97</sup> the oboes and violins play the Cherry-Blossom Song. “Sakura” is a very popular Japanese song, performed often by a solo koto, a traditional Japanese string instrument.

**Figure 3: Japanese Song, "O-Edo-Nihonbushi"**



“O-Edo-Nihonbushi” plays in the violins at [87],<sup>98</sup> when Madame Butterfly’s friends bow to congratulate the newly married bride. She, of course, corrects them when they call her Madama Butterfly, and tells them she is now “Madama F. B. [*sic*] Pinkerton.”

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, pp. 109 – 110.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, pp. 125 – 126.

**Figure 4: Japanese Song, "Miyasan"<sup>99</sup>**



Aptly titled, “My Prince” for a theme representing Cio-Cio-San’s rejected lover Prince Yamadori, this theme appears briefly for the first time in the clarinets and bassoons in Act II, Part One, six measures after [20].<sup>100</sup> Puccini uses the first few measures at [26]<sup>101</sup> when Butterfly sings, “Goro appena B.F. Pinkerton fu in mare mi venne ad assediare con ciarle e con presenti per ridarmi ora questo or quel marito” (which translates as “as soon as B.F. Pinkerton set off to sea, Goro has come every day with sweet words and gifts, suggesting each time this or that husband”), and then elaborates on the theme, while it passes between woodwinds and strings in the orchestra. It announces Yamadori’s arrival in the horns, bassoons, and basses four measures after [28].<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> For more on “Miyasan,” see Kunio Hara, “Puccini’s Use of Japanese Melodies in *Madama Butterfly*,” Master’s Thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2003. [https://etd.ohiolink.edu/!etd.send\\_file?accession=ucin1060955367](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/!etd.send_file?accession=ucin1060955367).

<sup>100</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, p. 247.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, p. 261.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, p. 262.

**Figure 5: Japanese Prayer Melody, “Takai-Yama”**



At the opening of Act II, Part One, Suzuki prays “E Izaghi ed Izami, Sarundasico e Kami...” to this exact melody just one measure after [3].<sup>103</sup> In English, the song’s title translates to “High Mountain,” and is about cucumbers and eggplants. It was a popular, humorous work song from the end of the Edo period (1603 – 1868).

**Figure 6: Japanese Folksong**



Carner claims that the above tune is found in Act I at both [37]<sup>104</sup> (in the clarinets, bassoon, and violins), and (in the vocal line) at [44],<sup>105</sup> though he has mistaken source of the melodic quotations in the opera; what he has credited to the unnamed tune above is actually from “Echigo-Jishi,” a very popular Japanese folksong composed in 1811 by Kineya Rokuzaemon IX, who composed and played for Kabuki theater.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 210.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, pp. 61 – 62.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, pp. 76 – 78.



**Figure 7: "Echigo-Jishi" by Kineya Rokuzaemon IX**



cellos, and basses in Act I, three measures after [49],<sup>108</sup> and just before Cio-Cio-San informs Sharpless that her father is dead.

**Figure 9: "Kappore honen"**



This theme first appears in Act II, Part One six measures after [50]<sup>109</sup> in the flutes, piccolo, clarinets, trombone, violins, and cello, just as Butterfly sings, “E questo?” This theme is most associated with Butterfly’s son, Trouble. It emerges as she presents her son to Sharpless for the first time; she asks him if he thinks Pinkerton could forget his son. This tune was a street dance.

**Figure 10: “Suiryo-Bushi”**



“Suiryo-Bushi” first appears in Act II, Part One at [56]<sup>110</sup> in the woodwind and strings sections as Butterfly sings her aria, “Che tua madre.”<sup>111</sup> In English, the melody is called, “Foreboding

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<sup>108</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, p. 81.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 303 – 304.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, p. 314.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 313 – 314.

Tune,” an appropriate title considering it is the last piece of music played at the end of the opera, just after Pinkerton finds Butterfly has committed the unthinkable.

Two other Japanese melodies occur in the score, one identified as “Ha-Uta,” or “Leaf Song,” from Rudolf Dittrich’s 1894 collection,<sup>112</sup> *Nippon Gakufu: Six Japanese Songs collected and arranged for the Pianoforte*, and another, “Jizuki-Uta,” or “Workmen’s Song.”<sup>113</sup>

**Figure 11: Leaf Song, "Ha-Uta"**



This theme appears in woodwinds and strings as Butterfly shows Pinkerton her possessions in Act I at [74].<sup>114</sup> It is the second theme Puccini uses in the same scene, and he must have used it to make it sound particularly *Japanese*, in order to mark her belongings as Japanese. The melody’s title is a generic one, as it marks only the genre (Leaf Song) to which it belongs.

**Figure 12: Workmen's Song, "Jizuki-Uta"**



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<sup>112</sup> As of November 2014, public domain versions of some of the Japanese songs listed are available as portable document formats on the DaisyField website: <http://www.daisyfield.com/music/japan.htm>.

<sup>113</sup> Rudolf Dittrich, *Nippon Gakufu: Six Japanese Popular Songs collected and arranged for the Pianoforte* (Leipzig, Breitkopf and Härtel, 1894).

<sup>114</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, pp. 108 – 111.

The above excerpt of “Jizuki-Uta” occurs in Act II, Part One in Butterfly’s aria, “Che tua madre,” at [55]<sup>115</sup> for eleven measures, and then again at [56]<sup>116</sup> for twelve, again in the woodwinds and strings, as well as in the opening vocal lines of the aria.

**Figure 13: "Jizuki-Uta," mm. 17 - 18**



Above is a second excerpt from the same Workmen’s Song melody, found in the vocal line of Butterfly’s aria, “Un bel dì vedremo,” in Act II, Part One just four measures before [14].<sup>117</sup> Puccini uses this excerpt again four measures after [57] in Act II, Part Two in the trumpets and trombones to punctuate Pinkerton’s cries of, “Butterfly!” at the end of the opera.

Puccini makes little, if any, equivalence between the original meanings behind these Japanese tunes and the plot of his opera, lifting them out of their original context and choosing instead to assimilate them as he wished. For this reason, the argument that Puccini worked them into the score in an attempt at authenticity falls short, and succumbs to Orientalism. The Japanese melodies work to color the score in unmistakable evocations of Japan for the audience. Puccini layers them throughout the opera, assigning many of them to characters, emotions, or psychological states of being. The sounds that are foreign to Westerners’ ears allow Westerners

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, pp. 310 – 311.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, pp. 315 – 317.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p. 234.

to construct their identities in opposition to what they are not—Foreign, Eastern, Japanese, Oriental, Other. By assimilating these tunes into the operatic score and into his own style, Puccini unwittingly becomes a producer of Orientalist discourse. He constructs his Orient and the Other with these native songs and in places creates his own Oriental effects by using standards of the Orientalist musical language.

### Orientalism in Music

We recall that Orientalism is a “corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism [is] a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”<sup>118</sup> Said argues that Orientalism flourishes through what Michel Foucault calls “discursive practice,” which includes works of music and art. These works use “cultural stereotypes—images of ‘Oriental despotism, Oriental splendor, cruelty, sensuality ... promise, terror, sublimity, idyllic pleasure, intense energy.’”<sup>119</sup> In music it exists as a product of overall exoticism, which according to Grove Music Online is defined as, “the evocation of a

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<sup>118</sup> *Orientalism*, p. 3.

<sup>119</sup> Ralph P. Lock, “Reflections on Orientalism in Opera and Musical Theatre,” in *Opera Quarterly* (Volume 10, Issue 1, 1993) p. 49.

place, people or social milieu that is (or is perceived or imagined to be) profoundly different from accepted local norms in its attitudes, customs, and morals.”<sup>120</sup>

### *Exoticism*

One finds exoticism in several operas whose composers constructed a locale's sound, though no specific elements were used to differentiate between foreign places. Europeans found the exotic in nearby Spain with Georges Bizet's *Carmen* (1875), in Romani populations as in Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* (1852), as well as the Egypt of Verdi's *Aida* (1871), the biblical subjects of Camille Saint-Saën's *Samson et Dalila* (1877), and Japan, as in Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta, *The Mikado* (1885): Bizet used Spanish flamenco rhythms and harmonies to bring a uniquely Spanish atmosphere to *Carmen*; Saint-Saën used the Hijāz mode in the Act III “Bacchanale” to signify its Otherness, geographically, culturally, and morally. In *L'Africaine* (1865), Giacomo Meyerbeer dramatized “the confrontation between the exotic and the Western World”<sup>121</sup> for the first time in opera. Léo Delibes's *Lakmé* (1883), about the doomed love between a young Indian woman and an English officer, results in a suicide for the young woman, who was unable to reconcile racial and cultural differences with the homesick officer. Indeed, even Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème* managed an opera after itself, composed by André Messager in 1902, just two years before *Butterfly* would grace the stage in Milan. Messager, as it happens, also used

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<sup>120</sup> Ralph P. Locke, “Exoticism,” Grove Music Online, (Oxford University Press, 2007 – 2014) Date accessed: 5 October 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

<sup>121</sup> Puccini: *His International Art*, p. 208.

“Sakura” (see Fig.2) and “Takai-Yama” (see Fig. 5) in his opera. Thus, the exoticism in *Madama Butterfly* is hardly surprising or exceptional.

Generally, musical exoticism calls for descriptive alterations in Western musical elements: modes and harmonies outside of the familiar major and minor scales (pentatonic, whole tone, and other gapped scales), limited elements in melody (small intervals, augmented seconds, melismatic and rhapsodic writing, oscillations around one note), unusual harmonic structures (alternation between major and minor, use of pedal notes, frequent use of parallel chords and modal sequences), bare textures (unisons, octaves, parallel fourths and fifths), repeated rhythmic patterns (ostinato basses), unusual instruments (particularly percussion, double reeds, and flute), performing technique (pizzicato, vocal portamentos, double stops), and infrequent rhythmic patterns (3+3+2).

In constructing the Orient, Puccini uses many of these techniques to signify Japan versus the West and even versus America<sup>122</sup> in his score. For example, Puccini adds Japanese bells and a Japanese tam-tam to his orchestra, features melodies in the flutes and oboes, instructs staccato articulation to invented themes (as in the bassoon and viola in Act I, four measures after [4]),<sup>123</sup> an overuse of percussion (as in the moments before her suicide beginning at three measures before [50]),<sup>124</sup> He also uses pentatonic scales liberally: The tunes “Kimigayo” (see Fig. 1), “Sakura” (see Fig. 2), “O-Edo-Nihobushi” (see Fig. 3), “Kappore honen” (Fig. 9), “Suiryo-

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<sup>122</sup> See *infra*, “The Metaphor,” p. 67.

<sup>123</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, p. 6.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, p. 465.

bushi” (Fig. 10) are anhemitonic pentatonic scales.<sup>125</sup> The “Echigo-Jishi” (see Fig. 7) has an added F-sharp, which some used to call the “Chinese scale,” according to Girardi, as it was thought to originate in China, though that has since been disproven, as the scale is rather common the world over in folk and popular music.<sup>126</sup>

### *Orientalism in the Butterfly score*

Scholar Ralph P. Locke writes extensively on the subjects of exoticism and Orientalism in music, describing many of the aforementioned operas as “works inscribed with an ideologically driven view of the East, a view now generally known as ‘Orientalism.’”<sup>127</sup> Oriental ideology absolutely drove Puccini’s vision, particularly by what Said calls imaginative geography. Said sets up a paradigm to explain this concept, arguing that there is a universal practice of “designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is ‘ours’ and an unfamiliar space beyond ‘ours’ which is ‘theirs,’” setting up an “our” land—“their” land dichotomy.<sup>128</sup> Imagining geography in this way allows the Self—in our case, the West—to *know* about the Orient in *comparison* to us.

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<sup>125</sup> A pentatonic scale is a five-note scale made up of whole-tones without a leading tone, giving it the characteristic of staticity. There are two kinds of pentatonic scales: the most common is the anhemitonic form, without semitones (for example, c-d-f-g-a-c), and the less frequent form is the hemitonic, with semitones (for example, c-e-f-g-b-c). For more, visit the Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. Date accessed: 30 September 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/450385/pentatonic-scale>.

<sup>126</sup> Puccini: *His International Art*, p. 216.

<sup>127</sup> Ralph P. Locke. “Constructing the Oriental ‘Other’: Saint-Saëns’s ‘Samson et Dalila.’” *Cambridge Opera Journal* (Vol. 3. No. 3, November 1991) p. 262.

<sup>128</sup> *Orientalism*, p. 54.



This paradigm functions to give the Western/European mind articulation, therefore, over the Orient. To represent the Orient, then, becomes a strictly Western/European project. “The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate.”<sup>129</sup> For this reason, the choices of those creators of the Orient become very important and impactful, especially for Puccini, as he uses a literal stage for such representation. For example, even though Mrs. Oyama, the wife of the Japanese Ambassador to Italy, “does not approve of the name *Yamadori*, on the ground that it is feminine and otherwise not appropriate; because in Japan they are accustomed in their plays to use names which suggest, or are suitable to, the various types and characters”<sup>130</sup> and states that “the names *Sarundapiko*, *Izaghi*, *Sganami*, etc., are all wrong,” neither Puccini or his librettists take responsibility to correct the errors in Long’s original work. Thus, when Puccini writes a letter about meeting Mrs. Oyama, details her recommended amendments to the story (as above), and ignores them, he takes authority over the Orient, not as would “a puppet master, but [as] a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>130</sup> *Letters of Giacomo Puccini*, p. 74. Mrs. Omayo may have been referring to the traditions of traditional Japanese kabuki theater.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

Everything Puccini presents is itself an archetype, an idea of an idea of the Orient, a distanced depiction of reality. Girardi estimates that his assimilations of native Japanese songs along with invented Japanese themes color 44% of the score.<sup>132</sup> I posit that Puccini used them to evoke a Japanese/Oriental/foreign/exotic/Other atmosphere for his Western audience. Scholars have looked into his score, identified the native songs he chose to include in his musical oeuvre, and yet, there still remained two melodies that had scholars stumped, until just recently when musicologist W. Anthony Sheppard paid a visit to the Morristown, New Jersey Morris Museum and discovered that within a Swiss music box lay the key to a century-long mystery.

### **“Puccini’s Music Box”**

What Sheppard found, quite by accident, was an 1877 harmoniphone, “equipped with a reed organ and able to play six Chinese tunes from a cylinder.”<sup>133</sup> He quickly recognized two melodies from Puccini’s unfinished *Turandot* (1926), and two themes in *Madama Butterfly*. “The main theme for Butterfly, a geisha, is labeled ‘She Pah Moh’ on the tune sheet,” he writes in a *New York Times* article, and after some research, two Chinese language scholars “identified the tune as ‘Shiba Mo,’ or ‘The 18 Touches,’ an erotic song often banned in China.” Sheppard posits that perhaps Puccini was aware of its meaning, and used it deliberately, purposefully, as the melody appears “prominently at the climax to Butterfly’s entrance, as she presents herself to her

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<sup>132</sup> *Puccini: His International Art*, p. 211.

<sup>133</sup> W. Anthony Sheppard, “Music Box as Muse to Puccini’s ‘Butterfly,’” *The New York Times*, 5 June 2012. Date accessed: 14 March 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/17/arts/music/puccini-opera-echoes-a-music-box-at-the-morris-museum.html>.

lustful American bridegroom, Lieutenant Pinkerton” in Act I [80]<sup>134</sup> and then again “at the climax of the Act I love duet” at [136]<sup>135</sup> just as Pinkerton and Butterfly go inside to consummate their marriage.<sup>136</sup> This theme appears in Butterfly’s vocal line, as mentioned above, and again in the woodwinds at the end of Act I. Reduced from the orchestral score, the tune appears as follows:

### Figure 14: The 18 Touches, "Shiba Mo"



About the second tune, Sheppard is less explicit, though says that is most associated with the death of Butterfly's father, which is mentioned at [49], and might be a better fit as the source for the theme currently identified as "Ume no haru" (see Fig. 7). Sheppard adds that this new, Chinese tune is also featured in *Turandot* in the Emperor's hymn, noting, "The same motif represents an exotic father in each opera."<sup>137</sup> By assimilating Chinese melodies in a score intended to represent Japan, Puccini is guilty of the most fundamental Orientalist offense: he conflates China and Japan, two very distinct and distinguished countries geographically, culturally, linguistically, historically, socially, etc., because they are both the same in that they are different *in comparison* to Puccini's Europe. Indeed, he assimilates Japanese and Chinese

<sup>134</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, pp. 115 – 120.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, pp. 206 – 207.

<sup>136</sup> "Music Box as Muse to Puccini's 'Butterfly.'" *ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

tunes into Western, Italian-style opera as one might expect a colonized body to assimilate into the colonizer's ruling culture. Sheppard writes that despite the number of Japanese folk tunes he used, Puccini "was willing to use Chinese music as well in his representations of what he termed the 'yellow race.'"<sup>138</sup> At this point, it is difficult to argue that his vision was not the least bit tinged by Orientalist ideology, Eurocentrism, and the academic, learned racism these hegemonic forces disseminated. Puccini, as creator, authority, and articulator of the Orient, produces a work representative of the East for the consumption of his Western audience.

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

#### 4. Butterfly: The Myth, the Metaphor, the Motherland, and Maelstrom

In this chapter, I explore how certain Orientalist fantasies make up the mythology of *Madama Butterfly*, how these fantasies create a metaphor for colonization, and how colonization creates and effects the colonized psyche.

##### The Myth

There is yet one pressing detail making up the Butterfly mythology that routinely goes undetected. Ever since Pierre Loti's 1888 novel, *Madame Chrysanthème*, the practice of Western men having a fake wedding and marrying geishas was relatively common practice, "an easily rescindable contract that lasted long enough to satisfy the man's sexual and emotional needs when on service far from home."<sup>139</sup> It is not the commonality of or the excuse behind this practice that went unnoticed, but the fact that Loti supposedly entered into one of these marriages with a *geisha*.

##### *Butterfly as Geisha*

Every incarnation of the Butterfly myth suggests that before marrying, Butterfly had a history as a geisha. In Long's story, Mr. Sharpless asks her in greeting, "You used to dance, did you not?"<sup>140</sup> When he asks her what she would do if Pinkerton could no longer support her, she

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<sup>139</sup> Puccini: *His International Art*, p. 209.

<sup>140</sup> "Madame Butterfly" and "A Japanese Nightingale," pp. 57, 61 – 62.

responds she might dance, and explains that she used to go out and dance so her family wouldn't starve. Belasco makes these implications even more explicit, by giving Butterfly the line, "Then I'll dance like w'en I was Geisha girl."<sup>141</sup> Such an important detail would not go without repetition in the libretto, and indeed, Butterfly says, "abbiamo fatto la gheschia sostentarci" in Act I, starting at five measures before [46];<sup>142</sup> "we danced as geishas to sustain ourselves." Vera Micznik writes, "Butterfly should either not have been a geisha, or not have committed suicide," because "in 'real life,' geisha and such behavior do not necessarily coalesce."<sup>143</sup> She also doubts that Butterfly could have been a geisha in terms of having a profession, as in every incarnation of the story, she is much too young and would have been starting an apprenticeship in the profession. (She was 18 years old in Loti; 17 in Long; and only 15 in the opera.) It also seems that the biographical model for the Butterfly narrative, as researched by Arthur Groos, was not a geisha at all, but "a tea-house girl who lived with a lover who deserted her and their baby (there is no mention of a temporary marriage)."<sup>144</sup>

Geishas belonged to a professional class of entertainers allowed to work in tea-houses which were often populated by prostitutes and courtesans. Geishas were described in the 1750's as entertainers who played the samisen and sang; they were trained professionally in song, dance,

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<sup>141</sup> *Madame Butterfly: A Tragedy*.

<sup>142</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, pp. 78 – 79.

<sup>143</sup> Vera Micznik, "Cio-Cio-San the Geisha," from *A Vision of the Orient: Texts, Intertexts, and Contents of Madame Butterfly* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 38.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

tea-ceremony, arranging flowers and tables, and in etiquette; therefore, “engaging in sex with customers was officially prohibited.”<sup>145</sup> They were hired as hostesses and entertainers, whose duties were to keep customers happy and relaxed. Micznik adds, “examples of geisha returning to their previous life after having been married and divorced, and even having had children . . . was not regarded as dishonorable among the Japanese.” It was not unusual, however, for a geisha to accept financial patronage from wealthy clients, live as a kept woman, or even to accept sexual patronage from a client. Though I must insist on two points: 1) not every geisha had to become a prostitute; and 2) if a geisha got into a marriage it was “the exception rather than the norm.”<sup>146</sup> Though the practice of renting women by the month was a regulated aspect of the entertainment industry, those that made their services available to foreigners appeared out of a new category of entertainers called “rashamen.”<sup>147</sup> The “term marriages” they held with foreigners were legally recognized, usually occurred with naval officers, and in highly trafficked areas, such as Nagasaki, where Loti, Long, Belasco, and *Madama Butterfly* set their scenes.

Micznik concludes that “in the process of fictionalization several Oriental female character types have been collapsed together: geisha, ‘rented’ temporary wife, tea-house Oriental girl with child deserted by her foreign lover, and the Oriental woman who, betrayed by her Western husband, commits suicide to save her honor.” This patched-up pastiche of Oriental women archetypes provides the problem of several discrepant characterizations conflated into

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

one character, so as to reduce each identity into one place, and provide in the most efficient way, a most Oriental woman in the most Oriental circumstance. Thus, the Western creators of the Butterfly narrative “manipulated the historical reality of what they might have known about Japanese women to create [a] fictionalized world,” revealing “a discrepancy between the historical Japanese reality and these fictionalized interpretations.”<sup>148</sup> Butterfly’s tragic suicide and the events leading up to it—including her blind faith in Pinkerton’s return—make the plot seem rather implausible. Of course, it was Belasco who added the suicide, and so the value of melodrama certainly overwhelmed the value of historical accuracy. Nonetheless, Butterfly-the-geisha and Butterfly-committing-suicide-over-the betrayal-of-her-foreign-lover are two discrepancies in identity that have been amalgamated into one character through the machinations of Orientalism. This unwittingly creates the Butterfly mythology: Butterfly-the-geisha-committing-suicide-over-the betrayal-of-her-foreign-lover.

### **Butterfly as Other**

All versions of the Butterfly narrative in some way attempt to construct their Oriental heroine by signifying her Otherness through sex-marking and race-marking. Both Long and Belasco, for example, seem to think it important to make a point of Butterfly’s Otherness through her dialogue. By giving Butterfly a voice in broken English, these authors mark her as foreign, as *Other*, as inferior for not completely mastering the language of her colonizer. It is more difficult to use this sign of Otherness when the whole opera has been translated into Italian. Other than

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, p. 43.



the Japanese tunes in the score,<sup>149</sup> Puccini's Butterfly is notably Othered in the libretto, especially in the way other characters sex- and race-mark her. For example, while in Long and Belasco it was Adelaide/Kate that called Butterfly a "pretty little plaything," in the opera it is Pinkerton. This both objectifies ("pretty" "thing") and infantilizes ("little") Butterfly, which is another way in which the creators of the Butterfly narratively distance Butterfly from personhood.

Long and Belasco make use of a song that apparently Pinkerton had taught Butterfly. It runs thus: "Rog-a-by, bebbby, off in Japan/You jus' a picture off a fan."<sup>150</sup> Not only does Pinkerton objectify Butterfly here, but he also manages to infantilize her, and fetishize her all at once, reducing her to an image on a fan, whose function is decorative. In the opera, Pinkerton phrases it a little differently, saying she "seems to have stepped down straight down from a screen."<sup>151</sup> Though the object has changed, the sentiment has not. Throughout the opera, he constantly refers to Butterfly as a child or as having an "innocent baby face,"<sup>152</sup> in line with infantilization. However, considering that Puccini's Butterfly is the youngest of all at age fifteen, perhaps it is to remind the audience of her young age. This is especially important as it is a staged opera, and the role of Madama Butterfly requires a skillful, trained soprano, who would definitely be more than fifteen years of age.

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<sup>149</sup> See *infra*, "3. Puccini Sets Japan," p. 45.

<sup>150</sup> "Madame Butterfly" and "A Japanese Nightingale," p. 42.

<sup>151</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, Act I.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

On 14 October 1957, an article in *The Times* reported that communism had seized on *Madama Butterfly* as propaganda against colonial imperialism. A production in Bucharest dressed Pinkerton in white flannel trousers and a pipe, evoking the White Anglo-American Man of colonial ages. In fact, according to Carner, the program book included a complete Marxist analysis, describing Pinkerton's attitude as "repulsive because it is the result of an odious conception of morals,"—those of the *bourgeois*, of the United States ruling class. The program book goes on to comment, "Puccini had been a realist belonging to a movement which mirrored the hard life of the people, though, like other members of the movement, he was unable to understand the laws of class struggle in the resolution of social conflicts."<sup>153</sup> While a fine Marxist reading of the text, this also supports my argument that just as *Butterfly* is representative of the most vulnerable classes of women in Japan, Pinkerton is representative of the most powerful classes of men in America.

### The Metaphor

As I watched the love duet in Act I of the Orlando Philharmonic and Florida Opera Theatre production of *Madama Butterfly* in 2013, the supertitles translated one of *Butterfly*'s lines thus:

**Butterfly:** They say across the seas that if a butterfly falls into a man's hand/he'll pierce its heart with a needle, and then mount it to a board!<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Puccini: *A Critical Biography*, p. 381.

<sup>154</sup> Illica & Giacosa, *Madama Butterfly*, Act I. Trans. R.H. Elkin. *OperaGlass*. Stanford University. 29 March 2009. Date accessed: 15 November 2013, [http://opera.stanford.edu/Puccini/Butterfly/act1\\_a.html](http://opera.stanford.edu/Puccini/Butterfly/act1_a.html).

She says this after Pinkerton utters the words, “How well they named you, my fine, exquisite Butterfly.”<sup>155</sup> The libretto then instructs Butterfly’s face to cloud over at his speech. Her response was meant as a metaphor for her fear of Pinkerton’s selfish love, but at the time, it reminded me of writer and filmmaker’s Trinh T. Minh-ha’s sense of being caught and objectified by the colonial anthropologist who claimed to know her: “I have wondered time and again about my reading myself as I feel he reads me and my false encounter with the other in me whose non-being/being he claims to have captured, solidified and pinned to a butterfly board.”<sup>156</sup> Butterfly, too, could have felt a similar fear, as in the original Italian there is no mention of piercing the heart, and in fact, there are directions that say she is to utter the line “con strazio,” with anguish:

**Table 2: Translation of Butterfly, Act I**

Italian	English
<i>Dicon ch’oltre mare se cade in mano dell’uomo, ogni farfalle da uno spillo è trafitta ed in tavola infitta!</i>	They say across the sea, if it falls into the hand of man, each butterfly from a needle is pierced and on (a) board fixed!

At the end of her statement, shown above with a literal translation of the Italian (see Table 2), the Bonze’s theme appears in the clarinets and oboes (two measures before [132]).<sup>157</sup> Musically, this theme is tied to doom, and at this moment is both a representation of her fear of giving into Pinkerton, as well as an echo of the warnings so unceremoniously presented to her by her uncle.

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 48.

<sup>157</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, p. 193.

This theme functions here as foreshadowing for what is to come if she allows herself to be captured by the colonial anthropologist. Then Pinkerton replies that there is some truth to what she's said. "And can you tell me why?" he says, "That you may not escape."<sup>158</sup> Set by Puccini, these words sound romantic and reassuring even though they also feel rather alarming. Here is Pinkerton, as white imperial male, telling his colonized bride that he is holding her captive. To what magnitude that captivity extends, I shall discuss below as I explore how the opera functions as a metaphor for the imperialist relationship between the East and West.

What makes the opera so compelling and effective is the way in which Puccini is able to capture and convey the internal world of Cio-Cio-San in a psychological and emotional landscape that only music can express. The Act I opening fugato in the strings<sup>159</sup> is characteristic of what Girardi calls "American efficiency,"<sup>160</sup> denoting the swiftness of American business. We are introduced to the despicable Pinkerton—even Giulio Ricordi calls this character "a mean American clyster [*sic*] . . . a coward"<sup>161</sup>—and his designs to take on a temporary wife while he is stationed in Japan. Pinkerton immediately makes clear what he thinks of Japan, its customs, and people. The sliding walls of his Japanese home fascinate him, and as he speaks of his Japanese marriage to his marriage broker, he yearns at length for an American wife. He dismisses his

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<sup>158</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, Act I.

<sup>159</sup> Fifteen measures before [1] in Act I; *Madama Butterfly*, p. 1.

<sup>160</sup> *Puccini: His International Art*, p. 217.

<sup>161</sup> *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, p. 131. (By all accounts, "clyster" is used as an unflattering description, whatever the meaning of the original insult in Italian.)

Japanese servants' names—which are Orientalist in conception: “Miss Gentle Breeze of Morning/Ray-of-the-golden Sunbeam/Sweet-scented Pinetree”<sup>162</sup>—calling them “Scarecrow first ... second ... [and] third.” Thus, Pinkerton constructs ideas of Japan by contrasting it to his American “home.” Japan becomes a fantasyland, while the United States represents reality. His impressions of a 999-year-long lease (subject to monthly renewal) to a house whose walls can be rearranged to create new living spaces, inform his ideas of his life in Japan as one that is temporary, fluid, and flexible. By contrast, America—“home”—represents a stationary, fixed, and permanent reality. Within these constructions, Pinkerton cannot fathom his marriage to Butterfly as anything other than a momentary masquerade.

Puccini made great efforts to “make Mr. F.B. [*sic*] Pinkerton sing like an American.”<sup>163</sup> In Pinkerton's rousing “Dovunque al mondo,” with its lines about the Yankee traveling “the whole world over” in order to “win the best and fairest of each country,”<sup>164</sup> Puccini begins and ends the whole aria with a fanfare quotation of “The Star Spangled Banner,” which at the time was the United States Navy Anthem. At [21]<sup>165</sup> of Act I, the fanfare takes off in the brass section, employs the woodwinds in the second measure to finish the quotation, and then modulates from a major to a minor key (see Fig. 15), already signaling the doom and suffering Pinkerton will bring to Butterfly. The aria ends on an exclamatory, “America forever!” within the opening line

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<sup>162</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, Act I.

<sup>163</sup> *Letters of Giacomo Puccini*, p. 144.

<sup>164</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, Act I.

<sup>165</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, p. 36.

of the Navy anthem. Puccini uses this anthem to signify imperial America, as well as Pinkerton himself. The entire aria, coupled with Pinkerton's snobbish attitude, work together as a commentary on the American imperial point of view, and establish the power dynamic between America and Japan, East and West, Self and Other, and Pinkerton and Butterfly.

Figure 15: "Dovunque al Mondo" and the U.S. Navy Anthem

36 **21** Allegro sostenuto=con spirito  $\text{♩} = 112$

I. II. Fl. III. Ob. G. Ing. Cl. Fag. Corni. Tr. ba Tr. ni PINK. Viol.

*Star-Spangled Banner*

*senza sordina*

*senza sordina*

*minor*

*(con franchezza)*

*molto cantando ed espressivo* Do - Im

*cantando*

*p*

*Allegro sostenuto=con spirito*

Before she marries, Butterfly confesses at [79]<sup>166</sup> in the “Shiba Mo” (see Fig. 14) tune that she has adopted Pinkerton’s American religion, but that neither her friends nor relations know what she has done. It is meant to show her devotion to her bridegroom, as well as Butterfly’s awareness that her actions are questionable. In my re-reading however, the tune represents the colonized body distancing herself from her native religion and culture, and reaching out to the colonial motherland. When her angry uncle, the Bonze, interrupts the wedding party to announce that she has renounced her true religion, and thus, by association, the whole of her family, he curses her with a “Kami sarundasico!” (In Japanese, “Kami sarundasico” has no meaning, and is further evidence of the carelessness with which Puccini and his librettists constructed their Orientalist Japan.) The musical theme of the Bonze (see Fig. 16), as earlier discussed, is a clear premonition of her fate, functioning as warning, foreshadowing, and fear throughout the opera. It is also an indication of Butterfly’s isolation from the moment she is disowned by her family.

### Figure 16: The Bonze's Theme



It appears for the first time at [101] in the woodwinds and strings and gains strength and spite when played by the horns at [102].<sup>167</sup> As previously discussed, this theme appears two measures

<sup>166</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, p. 115.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, pp. 139 – 140.

before [132]<sup>168</sup> when Butterfly confesses her fear that Pinkerton might pierce her heart with a needle and pin her to a board, and Pinkerton manipulates her into believing that his intentions are honorable. The double entendre behind the librettists' words are not lost, however, as they also express Butterfly's anxiety in engaging in sexual intercourse with Pinkerton. The entire love scene that follows is one of Pinkerton conquering Butterfly, sexually; and metaphorically, it is one of the Occident conquering the Orient, Colonizer conquering the Other, and Butterfly becoming the Colonized. In fact, the scene ends with the same "Shiba Mo" tune which expresses Butterfly's decision to distance herself from her native religion, and by proxy, her family—the only ties to her Japanese roots. Thus, the colonized subject renounces her native culture and language, and lives in a constant state of reaching out to the colonial motherland, which in the opera, is symbolized by Pinkerton, the United States, and its Navy Anthem. One should note that Butterfly's reaching out to Pinkerton goes beyond her financial dependence on him—she could easily marry Yamadori if that was the basis of her longing for Pinkerton. However, her desire for Pinkerton is much more profound, for she seeks approval from her colonizer and wishes to be accepted into the colonial motherland.

### *Capitalist Imperialism and the Motherland*

While the process of colonization is quite irreducible to a cohesive list of processes, there are certain elements to colonization that many colonized peoples share. During the process of colonization, the colonized renounce their native cultures, yearn for that of the colonizer, and in

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid, p. 193



the interim, seek approval from the colonizer. At the heart of colonization and imperialism, however, is an economic incentive and investment. Capitalism, therefore, fundamentally shapes imperialism, creating a capitalist imperialism that “systematically accumulates capital through the organized exploitation of labor and penetration of overseas markets... transforming and dominating their economies, cultures, and political life.”<sup>169</sup> Pinkerton, symbolic of the West and imperialism, is the dominant party in all his interactions with Butterfly. He dominates, seduces, assuages, and conquers Butterfly, leaving her to deal with the consequences of their love affair.

Butterfly is unable to comprehend that to Pinkerton, she is a wife only on paper, and their marriage is nothing more than a business transaction. Pinkerton invests in his marriage much like a capitalist imperialist invests in other countries, by acquiring capital through the exploitation of labor and resources. Though disguised as a love affair, his purchased marriage exploits Butterfly’s body, and from her exploited body and labor, he profits; he gains a sexual relationship and, unbeknownst to him, a white-passing son. Once he learns of a son, however, Pinkerton returns to acquire the results of his investment. Butterfly, as Other/inferior/exotic/non-human, cannot be responsible for the upbringing of a half-American subject. It is Trouble’s hybridity that allows him to move between colonized subject and colonizer; thus, Trouble occupies a space of power to which his mother has no access. He can leave his mother, his mother’s land, and receive access to the colonial motherland. Trouble also represents new generations of the colonized, after contact. He will not know of a time before contact with colonizers. Butterfly, in this sense, becomes Trouble’s only tie to the past; therefore, she

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<sup>169</sup> Michael Parenti. *Against Empire* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1995), p. 3.

symbolizes both time before contact, and of first contact. In order for colonization to complete its operation, and for imperialism to have its greatest material effect, Butterfly—and thus the ties to the past before contact—must be destroyed. And destroyed she becomes.

### Butterfly as a Colonized Psyche

The absolute tragedies and atrocities that have resulted from colonization and imperialism are evident in the United States' violent history, including massive genocides of native civilizations, diaspora of several populations, slavery, segregation, political imperialism over several island commonwealths in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean, and a strong imperialist presence in the Middle East and Korea (not to mention the United States' long history of military and political imperialism). While Micznik contends that *Madama Butterfly*'s tragic ending serves “to heighten the moralizing ‘Western’ condemnation of the extreme, pitiful situation resulting for a Japanese woman from the custom of ‘renting’ wives, which would have been so foreign to Americans”<sup>170</sup> and Europeans, I argue that the tragedy of this ending also functions as a metaphor for what havoc colonization can wreak on the individual psyche of a colonized subject.

When Butterfly gives up her native religion and distances herself from her family, she believes her marriage to the Western imperial male to be one that entitles her to the privileges of his imperial power. Her yearning for him is also a longing for the colonial motherland. Pinkerton's colonization of Butterfly has crept into her psyche, as whenever she proclaims distance from Japan and attaches herself to the native country of her husband, Puccini

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<sup>170</sup> *A Vision of the Orient: Texts, Intertexts, and Contents of Madame Butterfly*, p. 44.

underscores it with quotations of “The Star Spangled Banner.” In Act II, for example, she refuses to be called Madama Butterfly, and gives the correction, “Madama Pinkerton.”<sup>171</sup> Then, when Goro the marriage broker attempts to convince Butterfly that Pinkerton has abandoned her, and that in such cases, Japanese law grants divorce, she replies, “The Japanese law is not of my country.” Goro prompts her to disclose to which country she belongs. She answers, “The United States.”<sup>172</sup> One imagines she swells with pride, appropriating her husband’s national identity, her colonizer’s origins as her own. Puccini does not disappoint, signifying this longing for and identification with the colonial motherland with another quotation of “The Star Spangled Banner” just six measures before [84] in Act II, Part One.<sup>173</sup>

We recall Fanon’s triple consciousness, which he develops as a result of colonization. He possesses the first person sense of the body, and the second that sees himself through the colonizer’s eyes, seeking for approval. The third, which finds no approval is lost in nothingness. As far as Butterfly is concerned, Pinkerton loves her, will return to her, and thus she has his approval. For this reason, she is stubbornly faithful to him, waiting three years for his return. It is not until she meets Kate (the white wife, the only valid one), and feels the full depth of betrayal that she develops that third consciousness, where “the white gaze, the only valid one,”<sup>174</sup> does not recognize her as a subject and she realizes that for Pinkerton, she was always “an object

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<sup>171</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, Act I.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, p. 273.

<sup>174</sup> *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 95.

among other objects.”<sup>175</sup> The betrayal sends her into anguish, for she realizes she never had the approval she truly desired; Pinkerton never recognized her full personhood. She lives in nothingness, unsure of subjectivity, though aware of her function as object for the colonial Other. Her sense of self—the one built up by Pinkerton—is effectively destroyed by the gaze of the colonial Other.

I want to emphasize that the colonial Other in this case is Kate Pinkerton, a woman occupying one very important space that will never be available to Butterfly—whiteness. Kate is the white wife, the only valid one, and in possession of the white gaze, the only valid one, she is also representative of the imperial West, and this privilege weighs heavier than her oppression as a woman. Butterfly understands that Kate’s destructive gaze reflects Pinkerton’s. Furthermore, the power dynamic between Butterfly (Oriental/third-world/female/colonized-object), Kate (Western/imperial world/female/colonizing-subject), and Pinkerton (Western/imperial world/male/colonizing-subject) is one that places Butterfly at odds with both her colonizers and places Pinkerton at the center. She understands the discrepancies between Pinkerton’s reality and the fantasy he created around her.

Knowing that she will never receive approval or recognition of subjectivity from her colonizer causes in Butterfly the kind of schizophrenic neurosis Fanon describes. Butterfly decides to end her life and take control of her own destruction. Puccini explores this destruction of self in the musical language of the final scene of the opera, beginning at [53] in Act II, Part

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid, p.89.

Two, with sparse orchestration and declamatory pizzicatos in the string section.<sup>176</sup> Her destruction of self reaches towards her past—to her father to whom she still has access via the sword with which he committed suicide. Earlier in Act I, an ominous musical theme played at the first mention of her father’s death (three measures after [49]).<sup>177</sup>

**Figure 17: The Sword Theme**



Some have called this particular theme the “sword theme,” after its allusion to Butterfly’s father’s suicide. It appears again after the Bonze has shamed Butterfly, and Pinkerton demands that her relatives leave his house immediately ([108]).<sup>178</sup> Its appearance as Butterfly cuts ties with her relatives, her native religion and customs, therefore, is symbolic of cutting in the manner of a sword. The sword, belonging to her father, therefore, unites themes of masculinity, family, duty, and honor. Indeed, the sword to which this theme alludes is the same sword with which Butterfly will choose to end her own life. It appears for the last time just before Butterfly reads the inscription on the blade, “Con onor muore chi non può serbar vita con onore,” or “To die with honor when one can no longer live with honor,” in the strings at [52] of Act II, Part Two following twenty-one bars of turmoil in the timpani.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, p. 469.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, p. 83.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, p. 149.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, p. 468.

With this theme announcing her words and alluding to her imminent suicide, she reaches back towards her past, unable to seek the approval she desires from her colonizer, and attempts fulfillment in her father. In both instances, Butterfly reaches towards men, as she has little agency on her own, though she does charge herself with agency in deciding her own fate. However, she has distanced herself so much from her family and her native culture, that she can only find comfort in her father's honor. Rejected by both her family and Pinkerton, by Japan and the United States, and by her native land and the colonial motherland, Butterfly cannot occupy any space of power or approval and is lost to nothingness. Unable to cope with her shattered psyche, Butterfly's last moments, filled with anguish, are of the colonized subject lost in nothingness and surrendering to it.

## 5. Fin

Three main questions prompted my research into this opera: How much Orientalism was present in the original score and the libretto? How much of this story was a Western construction of Japan? Was the operatic world aware of how harmful these casual racist representations of Japanese bodies can be? The answers led me down a path in literary and theatrical history, as I traced the sources of the Butterfly narrative, found evidence of its Orientalist nature, and was able to re-read the basic narrative as a strong metaphor for imperialism and its effects on the colonized psyche. The opera's problematic assumptions found a vessel in its intrigue, drama, and music, catapulting it to one of the most performed operas in the repertoire. Operabase, a website which has documented worldwide operatic activity since 1996, has over 355,000 performances on file, and lists *Madama Butterfly* as the third most-performed opera in the world in the last five years.<sup>180</sup> Its impact is global, and occurs again and again with every production and every performance. Thus, we cannot ignore the harmful depictions the opera has disseminated and continues to disseminate with its Orientalist mythologies. Fortunately, many leading opera houses in the last decade have taken steps to respectfully work around the problems in the Butterfly narrative.

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<sup>180</sup> *Madama Butterfly* ranks behind Puccini's *Tosca*, with his *La bohème*, Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, Bizet's *Carmen*, and Verdi's *La traviata* all tied for first place. Interestingly, *Madama Butterfly* is not in the Top 10 lists of most-performed operas for either the United States or Japan, but ranks at number four in Italy. Operabase, "Opera Statistics," *Operabase*. Date accessed: 24 November 2014, <http://operabase.com/top.cgi?lang=en>.

## *Madama Butterfly Meets the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

### *The NPO Opera del Popolo and Minnano Opera Revision*

The NPO Opera del Popolo and Minnano Opera reworked the Paris version of *Madama Butterfly* for a 2003 – 2004 opera season in Tokyo, Japan. The production was set in the Japanese language and attempted to “show the authentic Nagasaki in the Meiji era and how Japanese people contacted with foreigners at that [time].”<sup>181</sup> On the opera company’s website is a list with a number of corrections to inauthentic and offensive instances in the libretto, correcting mistakes of Japanese names and customs. For example, in the very first act of the opera, when we first meet Suzuki, she prays to the god Okunama. According to this website, “such a god did not and does not exist in Japan,”<sup>182</sup> resulting in an omission of this invented deity in their production. The company also revises certain instructions in the libretto that would have been inappropriate for the Japanese etiquette of the time. When Butterfly and her friends meet Pinkerton, for example, she instructs them to show him reverence by falling to their knees. The opera company deems such an action over-the-top, and omits it from the revision as well.

Many similar revisions occur within the opera, but by far the most interesting is the substitution of Japanese musical instruments for their Western simulations in the orchestra. The musical director of the Tokyo New City Orchestra, Maestro Akira Naito, investigated the effects Puccini intended to achieve, and carefully selected the exact “Japanese religious sound-

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<sup>181</sup> NPO Opera del Popola Website, “What were the errors of the original?” Tokyo, 2003. Date accessed: 1 November 2013, [http://www.minna-no-opera.com/eng/opera/2004\\_btt\\_gui\\_e.htm](http://www.minna-no-opera.com/eng/opera/2004_btt_gui_e.htm).

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.



instruments” to use in place of their Western imitations. In Act I, when the Bonze taunts Butterfly for renouncing her true religion, the original score calls for a *tam-tam grave*. Puccini intended this to sound like the bell of a Japanese temple. This bell also appears at the scene of Butterfly’s death. Maestro Naito thus used the recorded sound of a huge hanging bell from a Japanese temple, as it is “impossible to carry into the theater,” and played it offstage. This effort is a testament to the lengths this production went in order to carry out its mission of authenticity.

### *The Metropolitan Opera Interpretation*

On 7 March 2009, the Metropolitan Opera transmitted an HD Live production of *Madama Butterfly*, starring Patricia Racette as Cio-Cio-San and Marcello Giordani as Pinkerton, conducted by Maestro Patrick Summers. This live broadcast was of an experimental production that incorporated elements of classical Japanese theater as conceived by Academy-Award-winning filmmaker Anthony Minghella and the dancer and choreographer, Carolyn Choa. Since 2004, they had explored the parallels between Japanese theater and Western opera, “delving into the ways that each balances deliberate artifice and powerful storytelling.”<sup>183</sup> Choa introduced Minghella to a London-based puppet troupe called Blind Summit Theater. “Nick Barnes and Mark Down, the troupe’s founders, are advocates of Bunraku-style puppetry,” a traditional form of Japanese theatre, “in which the manipulators are fully visible to the audience.”<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Ellen Keel and Elena Park, “Creating a new ‘Madama Butterfly,’” from *Madama Butterfly*. DVD. The Metropolitan Opera. Sony Music Entertainment, 2011.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

Set designer Michael Levine's minimalistic designs were the perfect backgrounds for the vibrant costume debuts of Shanghai-born fashion designer Han Feng. Choa explains that all of these elements together "create a universe for the opera which is based on Japanese aesthetics . . . and then into this universe we put an Italian opera. The world of Japan is elevated out of reality, because that is how Pinkerton sees Japan."<sup>185</sup> This self-aware production not only understands the Orientalism with which Pinkerton regards Japan, but also capitalizes on it visually, making it impossible to ignore this artistic and political statement on our visions of the Orient.

### Conclusion

In closing, I do not believe that this opera exists as a work isolated from cultural hegemony, and argue that it has very real social and political ramifications. I must remark I am satisfied to know that there is some critical engagement occurring between some of the world's leading opera houses and the opera's blatant Orientalism. I know I am not alone in feeling shock and discomfort at the opera's casual dissemination of racist and sexist ideology.

*Madama Butterfly* reproduces sexist and racist narratives, offering up harmful depictions of Japanese female bodies for the consumption of the public. As previously discussed, *Madama Butterfly* is often cited as the quintessential example of the stereotype of an exotic-erotic, male-centering and male-serving Japanese female body. This stereotype creates a hyper-sexualization of young, Asian female bodies that exist solely to serve men and be sexually consumed by them. Such stereotypes only excuse the behavior of sexual predators that go so far as sexually

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

assaulting Asian females. The opera also offers an overly homogenized representation of Japan, exploiting facets of Japanese culture to the point of irreverence and gross stereotypes, which had the unfortunate consequence of encouraging an actor to grin and squint his way through his portrayal of a Japanese character. There is much work to be done, for *Madama Butterfly* is not alone in recreating harmful narratives for the public's consumption.

*Madama Butterfly* continues to appeal to audiences today for its ability to engage the pathos of spectators, while Puccini's music crafts a haunting and engrossing psychological landscape. It is a compelling story, with compelling characters, and aesthetically pleasing music in spite of its problematic defects. Truly, the opera is an astounding work, and I use the word "astounding" here to mean shocking and impactful, for the opera is definitely shocking, but also impactful on the general audience's emotions and political consciousnesses. If I were in the position of authority to demand it, then I would ask that those in the opera world begin to critically examine the oppressive narratives many operas reproduce. Perhaps, to borrow Butterfly's words, "one beautiful day, we will see"<sup>186</sup> on the horizon a responsible and transformative engagement with these historical works that will positively effect change on the cultural hegemony to which we are bound.

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<sup>186</sup> *Madama Butterfly*, Act II, Part One.

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