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4th International Scientific Conference SEC-IASR 2019,  
Galati, Romania, 7th – 8th June, 2019

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<https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc/sec-iasr2019/07>

**How to cite:** Bulancea, G., & Bulancea, E.-T. (2020). Puccini's Feminine Characters Between Duty Imperative and Love Sacrifice. In S. Marin & P. Moisesescu (vol. eds.), *Lumen Proceedings: Vol. 12. 4th International Scientific Conference SEC-IASR 2019* (pp. 59-64). Iasi, Romania: LUMEN Publishing House.

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## Puccini's Feminine Characters between Duty Imperative and Love Sacrifice

Gabriel BULANCEA<sup>1\*</sup>, Eugenia-Tatiana BULANCEA<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract*

*Author of twelve operas that he composed between 1884 and 1924, Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) will transform the feminine characters into complex characters, into the most formidable agents of artistic emotion and generators of stage action. Whether we refer to Manon Lescaut (1893), Boema (1896), Tosca (1900), Madama Butterfly (1904), La fanciulla del West (1910), Suor Angelica (1918) or Turandot (1924), the woman is almost always presented as virtuous, sweet, loving the profound, pure-hearted, capable of accepting suffering or the ultimate sacrifice. [2]*

*The main themes are love and death, and they are present in most of his operas. All the other feelings are marginalised or subordinated to love. This is one of the reasons for which his operas are also called melodramas by the exegesis, Puccini being considered one of the continuators of the line initiated by Donizetti, Bellini and Massenet. The heroine is fragile, sentimental and sensual, young and innocent, the entire drama being built around her. Love sparkles spontaneously between the protagonists of the drama, having an honest, profoundly emotional nature; it starts within a happy context and it acquires a tragic nature eventually. One of the essential features of Puccini's drama consists of a gradual accumulation of tension along the three acts in order to generate the catastrophic denouement in the final act. Thus, the first act offers us the falling in love scene, being usually marked by a love duet. The second act contains the most important sections of the drama, ending in an unpredictable event, while the third act, most often than not the shortest, brings with it a sudden denouement of the action, being based on one of the characters' lament. [6]*

**Keywords:** *Giacomo Puccini; verism; Tosca; Turandot; Charles Mauron.*

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## 1. Introduction

Attached to Romanticism and a promoter of an aesthetics that aims at renewing the topics and the musical language, Giacomo Puccini is one of the composers that stand on the border between the 19th and the 20th century who do not disregard the musical drama and do not repudiate emotion from the empire of their art. Unlike other composers who prefer to lessen its flame under the restrictions of impressionism or, on the contrary, to exaggerate it to the point it becomes either a bombastic reality overflowing into the stream of post-romanticism, or a reality disfigured into atonalism and serialism, in Puccini's case it enjoys his full attention. Without being a stranger to all these innovations, Puccini resorts to any procedure that serves his purpose: the highlighting of emotion. Proceeding admirably, he would abuse none of them. This way, in his works we will discover instances of the infinite melody or Wagnerian-type chromaticism, dissolutions of musical moments, tonal ambiguity, frequent explorations of post-romantic-type harmonic constructs in *Tosca*, the use of hexatonic and pentatonic scales, overlapping fourths in *Madame Butterfly*, as a hint to impressionism, the series in the first act of *Turandot*, parallel chords of various species, the use of some procedures that remind us of the Wagnerian leitmotif techniques etc. [4] in order to compose his works, Puccini researched Gregorian songs, oriental themes and studied the musical scores of some of his contemporary composers such as Debussy, Stravinsky, and Schönberg [1] all these portray him as a complex composer whose style evolves and becomes more and more profound from one work to another, being deeply attached to the Italian tradition but also very watchful as far as the changes appearing within the new musical sensibilities in Europe. Puccini is a composer able to synthesise the various musical languages that are employed to highlight certain literary dramas whose verisimilitude situates him at the heart of the veristic aesthetics. He is one of the composers that develop a particular sensitivity for lyrical scenes and an intuition for the dramatic effects that he exploits to the fullest in order to stir powerful and refined emotions in the heart of the audience.

## 2. Problem Statement

We shall now explore short psychocritical analyses of two of the best known works of Puccini, *Tosca* and *Turandot*. The two eponymic librettos, *Tosca* and *Turandot*, oppose the mythical narrative to a historic one, having central feminine figures, the action being focused on them. The text of *Tosca* cuts out, in an authentic manner, scenes from the composer's contemporary

period, in Rome, The Eternal City, during Napoleon's victorious battle of Marengo. The feminine character, Floria Tosca, a famous singer, defends her love with her life. The second work, *Turandot*, re-establishes the force of love as the regenerating principle, by the woman's rebirth to a new life, without leaving the sacred space, *in illo tempore*.

### 3. Research Questions/Aims of the research

Opera *Tosca* suggests the image of a woman in love who has jealousy crises and who needs confirmation from the adored one, the painter Mario Cavaradossi. Made in a romantic manner, the woman's portrait identifies with passionate love, she loves till death, at any risk, but also hates strongly, up to committing murder. In all three acts, she polarizes the action. She witnesses the man who she loves helping his friend, Cesare Angelotti, escape detention. This attracts the attention of the authorities, Baron Scarpia being the one organising the capture of the fugitive. As he is not found, the two lovers, Cavaradossi and Tosca, are chased, interrogated and tortured. The woman's beauty awakens Scarpia's erotic instinct especially as she is fighting to escape him. He obtains the promise that she will betray the fugitive through blackmail, promising in return that he would stop the painter's torture and organise a fake execution of Cavaradossi. Tosca asks for a letter of free passage from Scarpia, and then she kills him and runs to the rescue of her lover. To her stupefaction, the execution squad kills Cavaradossi; moreover, she herself is chased for murder and she jumps off the platform of the castle where the execution took place. Beyond the antagonism of the characters, the woman's destiny reflects her interdependency between her evolution and her lover's, being an easy victim of scheming and impulsive decisions. The denouement presents the death of the heroes, unlike *Turandot* where expectancies are met through the harmonious intertwining of their destinies.

The tragic polarizes the lyrical framework differently. In *Turandot*, the feminine character assumes a vindictive role on behalf of her ancestor, Lou-Ling, killed by male tyranny. The innocence of the beautiful princess and her premature death stir in princess Turandot's heart a bloody behaviour towards all those who aspire to marry her. The three trials, the riddles, endorse with their lives the connection between the princess and her suitor. The prince's success means her death by submission to the man whilst not finding the answer means his death by decapitation. Even if the *Unknown Prince* finds the answers to the riddles (*hope, blood, Turandot*), the princess denies the victory in the second act, thus breaking her vow. Paradoxically, instead of reclaiming the right he has won, the *Unknown Prince* raises the stake of the trials through a

new one, that of finding out his name in exchange for his own life, which is translated by finding his identity. The servant Liu, herself in love with the prince, is brought in front of the princess and she will satisfy the latter's bloody wish by not disclosing the name of the prince. Thus, the heroes' destiny is structured towards avenging an innocent death and the sacrifice of love is the ultimate reason that wakes up the imagination and scares the mortals with their destructive force. Love (de)composes as mission and challenge, an initiative journey along which the being is rebirthed beyond the old models and the dependency to the past; according to the Taoist belief, man can adhere to new ideas and ways of living, in harmony with ourselves, with the others and with the entire nature. The text displays several references to the ephemeral nature of existence, including the statement *Only Tao exists!* Through love, the hero does not avoid the temporary nature but breaks the pattern of *spirit-body* duality through his courage. He kisses Turandot at dawn and initiates her into the secret of love by mutual self-giving. In conclusion, "the myth appears as a symbolic stage where man fights his inner and outer battles on his journey towards evolution and conquering his personality." [3].

#### 4. Research Methods

In order to discover the *profound ego* behind the fabric of the librettos, one can resort to a psychocritical analysis [5], method which generates plausible explanations that link the recurrence of certain terms or verbal groups from the text (resulting from texts overlapping) to the *expression of the unconscious personality of the creative subject*.

#### 5. Findings

**Table 1.** Psychocritical analysis of *Tosca* and *Turandot*

No.	Work	Mission of the feminine character	Mission of the masculine character	Challenge	Obstacle/ Curse	How is order re-established	Denouement
1	Tosca	Love	Love fulfillment through the artistic act	Saving the friend	State authority	The ultimate sacrifice	Salvation through death
2	Turandot	Avenging an innocent death	Conquering love	Riddle contest	Fulfilling the oath	The ultimate sacrifice	Salvation through love

## 6. Discussions

The associative network structures the stake of the text around love but the myth is animated through the ideal of purity, which confers a pozitiv register to the ending, while history, under the appearance of a redeeming projection, reflects a maleficent force which places the characters in the middle of a crisis and leads them towards the terminus point of their experience. The sacrifice becomes the recurrent theme of the above-mentioned works, in *Tosca* combining with a network of Christian elements (Madonna, the cross, the basilica, the paintings etc.), while in *Turandot* the Taoist conception is reflected. The equilibrium is not re-established in *Tosca*, due to an oppressive system that survives the events.

## 7. Conclusions

Whether we talk about the myth, or we focus on history with concrete data, Giacomo Puccini's protagonists follow a romantic-type destiny, inflamed with ideals (love, justice, honour) upon which the author projects his own vision of the world understood as an experience situated at the limit between life and death.

The adventure expects one to take all the risks not to reach perfection, but to fulfil a destiny. The mythical as well as the mystical aspects are secondary when one thinks the duty that the characters consent to fulfil no matter the risks. This is why the pact with the reader does not happen in a triumph of the good, but consists of the force with which the characters fight and their resistance in face of danger

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