

Turandot's Victory

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*Notte senza lumicino
gola nera d'un camino
son più chiare degli enigmi di Turandot!*

Night without a lamp,
the black flue of a chimney,
are clearer than the riddles of Turandot.

—Ping, Pang, and Pong, *Turandot*, Act I

Hai vinto tu!

You have conquered!

—Calaf to Turandot, *Turandot*, Act III

Puccini's *Turandot* might seem an unlikely source of insights for feminist theory. It is, after all, an opera composed by a rake based upon a play written by a misogynist. Yet it is the uncanny nature of great works of art that they often undermine and even transcend the prejudices of the artists who create them. Of course, this begs an important question. Is *Turandot* a great work of art? Or is it a flawed work, an imperfect masterpiece? The final transformation of its central character, Turandot, from sworn enemy of the male sex to loving spouse, has always seemed unconvincing even to the opera's greatest champions. *Turandot* is an enigma because Turandot herself is also an enigma.

What complicates matters is that we do not have before us a finished work. Puccini never completed the final scene in which Turandot's transformation takes place; one had to be constructed from his sketches, a task performed by the composer Franco Alfano. Yet even with this supplement, the opera still seems to lack closure. It is left unfinished precisely where completion would be most crucial—at the place where we would

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finally understand Turandot herself, and why she is willing to put aside her hatred and exchange it for love.

The subject of this Article, then, is the Riddle of *Turandot*, or perhaps more correctly, the Riddles of *Turandot*, for the Riddle takes many different forms. There are the riddles that Turandot proposes to the hero, Calaf. There is the riddle that Calaf offers her in return. There is the riddle of *Turandot's* ending—how Puccini would have drawn together the strands of this unfinished opera. There is the riddle of the character of Turandot, left unexplained. And finally, there is the riddle that Turandot herself symbolizes: the riddle of the Other—the questions that men and women, but especially men, pose to themselves about the other sex.

The question left unanswered in *Turandot*—one of the many Riddles of Turandot—is an account of Turandot's subjectivity or inner life—the desires and beliefs that result in her transformation from avenger to lover. And in one sense the entire opera is about this unanswered question—what this mysterious woman, Turandot, truly wants. Yet even this question poses further riddles, for it is not at all what it seems.

Turandot is one of many portraits of women composed by Puccini, a portrait to stand with his best: Manon, Mimi, Tosca, and Cio-Cio-San. Yet because *Turandot* is a portrait, it is not about a real woman, Turandot, but is only a depiction of a woman, created by a male artist—a depiction which is at the last moment left unfinished, thus revealing even more clearly its simulated character. This fact, I shall argue, is crucial to a feminist analysis of this work.¹

The question of a woman's subjectivity, or inner life, when asked alternately by a man and a woman, may have very different meanings. When asked by the female artist, it might be no more than an inquiry into her own subjectivity, and thus a pursuit of self-knowledge. However, when asked by a male artist, who may lack significant access to female subjectivity, it may be simply another version of Freud's famous question—what

1. Since I describe this Article as "feminist," I should perhaps make clear the relation of my own work to the many different versions of feminism. This Article and its analysis is "feminist" in the sense that it seeks to uncover and examine the gendered nature of discourse—in this case, an opera by Giacomo Puccini. Its method, however, is perhaps more correctly termed deconstructive. Of course, these two approaches often overlap. Much feminist work is deconstructive or is influenced by deconstruction. *E.g.*, L. Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985); *New French Feminisms* (E. Marks & I. de Courtivron ed. 1981); *Feminism/Post-Modernism* (L. Nicholson ed. 1990); *Feminism As Critique: Essays on the Politics of Gender* (S. Benhabib & D. Cornell ed. 1988). On the intersections between feminism and poststructuralism generally, see C. Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (1987); R. Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* 217-33 (1989). Conversely, some deconstructionist scholars, both male and female, have written on feminist topics. *E.g.*, J. Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (1978); Derrida, *Women in The Beehive: A Seminar with Jacques Derrida*, in *Men in Feminism* (A. Jardine & P. Smith eds. 1987); B. Johnson, *A World of Difference* (1987); J. Culler, *On Deconstruction* 46-64 (1982). Despite the overlap, there are nevertheless potential theoretical conflicts between a deconstructive approach and some forms of feminism. See Alcoff, *Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory*, 13 *Signs* 405 (1988); Showalter, *Critical Crossdressing: Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year*, in *Men in Feminism*, *supra*, at 116; Scholes, *Reading like a Man*, in *Men in Feminism*, *supra*, at 204.

does a woman want?—a question with overtones of longing, bewilderment, frustration, or even misogyny.² And if the male artist asks this question because he lacks understanding of feminine subjectivity, the answer he gives is likely to be unconvincing.³

The problem of the male artist who attempts to describe the subjectivity of women is recapitulated at a different level by the male scholar who seeks to employ feminist analysis in his own work. The male feminist scholar does not avoid the question of women's subjectivity. He must still ask himself what feminism is and what women are. And once again, this question has very different meanings when asked by men and when asked by women. This problem puts into question the very project of this Article, for even to attempt this work raises the difficult question of how men can ever successfully engage in feminist scholarship.⁴

The male feminist scholar finds himself in a double bind. If male scholars attempt to think and write as if they were women, the possibility that men lack access to significant features of feminine subjectivity suggests that their scholarship will be at best a pale imitation of feminist scholarship and at worst an unconscious parody.⁵ On the other hand, if male scholars too readily accept the claim that men and women are fundamentally different in their experiences and thought processes, they fall into the opposite trap, currently criticized as the error of "essentialism."⁶

2. Freud's remark was made to his friend, the Princess Marie Bonaparte: "The great question . . . which I have not been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is 'What does a woman want?'" The MacMillan Dictionary of Quotations 618-19 (1989); P. Gay, Freud: A Life for Our Time 501 (1988). A man's question about women's subjectivity often disguises a different question—about what women want of men, or about what men want of women. In Freud's case, for example, the question was instrumental: how women would or could fit into his theory of sexuality.

3. The problem of accurately capturing the subjectivity of women does not seem to arise so urgently for women artists, because they do have direct access to at least one form of feminine subjectivity—namely, their own. Yet at the same time the distinction between male and female artists is much too simplistic. From another perspective, a white middle class American woman might also be said to have a very different subjectivity from the Chinese princess Turandot. See the discussion of essentialism, *infra* note 6. Thus, the artist always faces a problem in describing the inner life of others who differ from her in any respect, for one can never know what is in another's mind, and all persons have different experiences shaped by differences in culture, class, and historical situatedness. Conversely, the problem of subjectivity is never totally insurmountable; because all of us are human beings living on the same planet, there is always some commonality to our thought processes and experiences. But many forms of feminist analysis depend heavily upon the assumption that men and women do not always experience the world in the same way, and that these differences in subjectivity are quite important, even if there are further and equally significant differences in subjectivity among the members of each sex.

4. Compare, e.g., C. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified* 56-57 (1987); Littleton, *Reconstructing Sexual Equality*, 75 Cal. L. Rev. 1279, 1294 n.91 (1987) (skeptical about the possibilities) with Bartlett, *Feminist Legal Methods*, 102 Harv. L. Rev. 829, 833 (1990) (arguing that men can also investigate gendered nature of law and culture).

5. See Showalter, *supra* note 1, at 122-23 (critical crossdressing may be a means of male empowerment in disguise, as well as a way of watering down the insights of feminism and making them more palatable to males).

6. The philosophical position known as "essentialism" is the claim that objects have essences that preexist language or thought and to which language and thought refer. In feminist and critical race theory, the term "essentialism" is used (generally pejoratively) to describe positions which assume that

One response would be for male scholars simply to stay out of feminist scholarship, leaving it to those who can do it "properly"—that is, to women. But this solution is equally fraught with peril. For this supposed preservation of the purity of feminist scholarship will be purchased only at the price of its ghettoization—it will be seen as simply another variety of "women's work" to be patronized or marginalized by male academics. The integration of feminism into its rightful place in the academy requires that feminist methods and insights be adopted not only by female scholars, but also by males as well. Feminist scholarship, in other words, can ultimately succeed only if it has something to teach men as well as women. Yet one can only teach a person something if that person can comprehend and use what is being taught to them.⁷

What is the way out of this quandary? How is a "male feminism" possible which assumes neither a false commonality of male and female experience or a false essentialism? I have just argued that feminism can only succeed as an academic movement if it has something to teach male scholars as well as female scholars. What feminism has to teach male scholars is the gendered nature of discourse—the way in which seemingly neutral practices of art, politics, and social life depend upon gender roles and reproduce or reinforce them.⁸ However, understanding gender roles is not an ability granted to only one sex. One can understand gender roles as a man or as a woman, even if the understanding will be different from these different perspectives. Thus, the male feminist scholar can and must, I believe, make a virtue of his own experience of gender. Even if one accepts the argument that the male scholar does not fully understand what it is like to be a woman, he does at least understand what it is like to be a man. He may therefore confront the text *in terms of his maleness*—that is, the fact that he is a male who is reading or writing, as opposed to an intellectual of no particular gender. Thus, he may also put into question the texts of other males by asking how they too, are gendered as his own are.⁹

women or blacks or other historically excluded groups have a more or less uniform experience of oppression and therefore a more or less uniform and identifiable set of concerns. For example, black feminists may argue that the experience of white and black women is very different. *See, e.g.*, Harris, *Race and Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory*, 42 *Stan. L. Rev.* 581 (1990). On the problems of essentialism generally, *see* E. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (1988). A male assumption that women's subjective experience is both uniform and uniformly different from men's is simply a different form of essentialism.

7. Thus, the ultimate success of feminism ironically depends upon not the differentiation of men's and women's subjectivity but their commonality—that is, that there is a sufficient affinity between them to allow men real understanding of and empathy with the insights of feminist scholarship.

8. *See, e.g.*, Bartlett, *supra* note 4, at 837-38.

9. *See* Showalter, *supra* note 1, at 122-23 ("The way into feminist criticism, for the male theorist, must involve a confrontation with what might be implied by reading as a man and with a questioning or surrender of paternal privileges.") I offer the caveat that this approach should not be taken too simplistically because it may create a symmetrical danger of male essentialism—the assumption that men have a uniform experience of their gender and their relations with women. The experiences of Puccini, an Italian Catholic living in the first half of the twentieth century, may be quite different

Puccini's *Turandot* provides an excellent vehicle for this method. For it is above all an opera about men's understanding of women and women's desires. It is also about how men create images of women and women's wants and needs in order to fulfill their own desires, whether this is true to women's actual subjectivity or not. And the divergence between how women see themselves, and men's need to imagine them in a particular way, is what gives this opera its special poignancy. *Turandot* is thus about how men write about women, and how this writing both serves and escapes the limitations of the male artists who produce it.

In this essay I shall argue that there is much in Puccini's *Turandot* which seems misogynist, stemming in part from the life of its composer, Giacomo Puccini, and his psychological tendencies. Nevertheless, I shall argue that, at the same time, the libretto and score make possible an interpretation of *Turandot* which subverts the misogyny of the composer and librettists who produced it. This interpretation emerges from taking seriously the maleness of this opera—that it is above all a description of a woman produced by a man.

The unresolved issue in *Turandot*—what I have termed the Riddle of Turandot—appears on its face to be a question about the character Turandot in particular and women in general, but I shall argue that it is in fact a very different question. It appears to be a question about what Turandot is like, what her needs and desires are, and why her inner life brings her to her fateful choice. So characterized, it is simply another version of Freud's famous question—"what do women want?" And this question may indeed be sexist or misogynistic, for it could be an attempt to control women by description, or failing that, to devalorize them precisely for their inability to be understood by men.¹⁰

Yet, if *Turandot* is an opera by men about women, then it is not an opera about women at all, but only about men's understanding of them. Thus, there is a version of the Riddle of Turandot, or of Freud's question, which is neither misogynist nor depends upon false claims of clinical neutrality. This version of the Riddle of Turandot is actually a riddle asked by men *about themselves*. It is less a riddle about what women truly are like than a question about how men ought to understand them. The Riddle of Turandot is the question men must pose to themselves in examining how mature, stable relationships with women are possible. Rather than an attempt to control women by description, it is an attempt to reach self-

from the experiences of an American Jew living in the latter half of the century. Feminist scholars of both sexes should be alert to the possibility that global descriptions of maleness or male attitudes, or even of patriarchy itself may be insufficiently sophisticated if they unquestioningly assume a uniformity of male experience. Nevertheless, a contemporary white American male scholar can assume at least some degree of commonality of experience with Puccini.

10. Freud himself referred to woman as "a dark continent," P. Gay, *supra* note 2, at 501, and when his friend Marie Bonaparte once observed, "Man is afraid of woman," Freud replied, "He's right!" *Id.* at 522.

control and self-description—an attempt to come to terms with the male subjectivity that is suppressed or disguised as nongendered, normal, and neutral in social and political life.

Thus, the Riddle of Turandot, which appears on the surface to be a question about women, is always also a question about men. For the more that men attempt to describe what women are, the more they describe themselves, either consciously or unconsciously. It follows that the question of Turandot's transformation must be reinterpreted in terms of the transformation of the central male character, Calaf, and his growth in his relationships with women. The answer to the Riddle of Turandot—a riddle asked and answered by men—lies within male conceptions of self.

Part I of this Article describes the story of *Turandot*. Part II describes the composition of *Turandot*, Puccini's difficulties in producing the final duet and transformation of Turandot, Puccini's death, and the opera's subsequent completion by Franco Alfano. Part III describes the sources of the opera and Puccini's alteration of the original story, focusing particularly on changes in his treatment of the female characters. Part IV connects the women characters in *Turandot* to Puccini's general treatment of women in his operas and his relationships with women in real life. Parts V, VI and VII offer a reinterpretation of *Turandot*, arguing that the Riddles of *Turandot* are best understood as a quest for male growth and maturity in relationships with women, which is achieved by surrendering power and control over women. This interpretation is corroborated by Puccini's own psychological difficulties with women and his final and uncompleted attempt to overcome these problems. Part VIII suggests that the underlying theme of *Turandot*, men's writing about women, has both important and troublesome aspects, for it can be a means of controlling women as well as understanding them.

I

Turandot is told as a fairy tale, which takes place in the Peking of "legendary" times. The Princess Turandot has refused to marry until a suitor of noble blood arrives who can answer the three riddles that she proposes. If the suitor fails, his head is cut off. Dozens of candidates, drawn from all over the world by tales of Turandot's beauty, have tried to solve her riddles and have failed. As Act I begins, the Prince of Persia, the latest victim, is scheduled to be executed at the rising of the moon. As a crowd gathers for the execution, a young slave girl, Liù, cries out that her old master has been knocked to the ground. He is Timur, the overthrown King of the Tartars. Timur and Liù are assisted by Prince Calaf, Timur's son, whom Timur thought dead, and whom Liù secretly loves. She explains to Prince Calaf that she has followed Timur because Calaf once smiled at her.

The crowd is eager for the execution, but when the Prince of Persia arrives, they are moved with pity, and beg the Princess for mercy. Turandot appears momentarily from on high to confirm the sentence of death. Prince Calaf is immediately overcome by her beauty. He announces that he will accept the challenge by striking a ceremonial gong three times. As he rushes forward, he is intercepted by three imperial ministers, Ping, Pang, and Pong. (These characters are masks modelled after the stock characters of the Italian *commedia dell'arte*). They attempt to persuade the Prince that his action means certain death. Liù pleads with him in an aria (*Signore, ascolta*), that if he dies, she and his father will be left alone in exile. Yet the Prince is insistent. He strikes the gong three times and calls out Turandot's name as the three ministers laugh in derision and the frenzied crowd celebrates the chance for yet another execution.

Act II takes place in the Imperial Court. Ping, Pang, and Pong reminisce about the old days before Turandot's law was in effect and complain about how much blood has been shed on her behalf. Turandot and her father, the Emperor of China, appear with great ceremony. She explains in a famous aria (*In questa Reggia*) why she has chosen to pose unsolvable riddles to her suitors. She has done so in memory of her ancestor, the princess Lo-u-Ling, who was carried off and murdered by a barbarian king. For that reason, Turandot has declared that no man will ever possess her, and the challenge of the riddles is the means by which she will enjoy her revenge on all men.

Turandot haughtily proposes the first two riddles, which the Prince easily solves. She then asks the final riddle: what is the ice that sets you afire, that enslaves you and makes you King? After some delay, the Prince discovers the answer—it is Turandot herself. The crowd rejoices, but Turandot is unwilling to obey the terms of her oath. She begs her father not to be handed over like a slave, but the Emperor insists that the law is sacred. Turandot asks the Prince if he would take her unwillingly, and he replies that he wants her burning with love. He offers her his own riddle. If she can discover his name before dawn, he will accept execution. Otherwise she must marry him.

As Act III opens, the People of Peking are terrified—Turandot has declared that the Prince's name must be discovered by dawn on pain of death. In one of Puccini's loveliest tenor arias (*Nessun dorma*), the Prince sings of how he will melt Turandot's heart and be victorious. Ping, Pang, and Pong beg the Prince to leave China—they offer him women, riches, and chances at military glory, but he refuses them all. The crowd discovers Liù and Timur, who were seen talking to the Prince. They decide to torture the two to learn the Prince's name. Liù declares that she alone knows his name. Turandot arrives and orders Liù to be tortured. Liù tells Turandot that she will die rather than reveal the name. She explains to Turandot that her strength to endure torture comes from love, and that

Turandot, too, will come to love the Prince. Liù lunges for a soldier's knife, and, seizing it, kills herself. The crowd is horrified because they believe that the spirit of a person killed unjustly will come back to haunt them—they beg Liù's spirit for forgiveness. (This is the last portion of the opera Puccini lived to finish).

As Liù's body is taken away, the Prince and Turandot are left alone on stage. The Prince declares that her iciness is a lie, tears away her veil, seizes her and kisses her. Shaken, Turandot reveals in an aria (*Del primo pianto*) that she feared the Prince because she sensed that he alone could solve the riddles. For this reason she secretly hated him and loved him. The Prince now reveals his name—he is Calaf, son of Timur. Having learned the answer to the riddle, Turandot is suddenly emboldened, and her pride returns to her. She asks Calaf to come before the people with her. Before the assembly, she tells the Emperor: "August father—I know the name of the foreigner! His name is Love!"¹¹

II

The composition of *Turandot* gave Puccini more difficulties than any of his other operas. Puccini was above all a dramatic composer, and his interest in an opera was complete, extending not only to the music, but also to the libretto, staging, and scenery. Puccini knew that he needed control over the words he set to music. Thus, he constantly complained to his librettists, not only about the overall structure of the opera, but even the specific wording of the poetry. As Puccini became more famous, he intervened more and more in the poet's craft. By the time he began *Turandot*, his two younger librettists, Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni, were no match for the acknowledged living master of Italian opera. He worried them as much as he worried himself over the smallest details of wording and stage direction.¹² Puccini even constructed his own verses to give Adami and Simoni the appropriate mood or dramatic conflict he sought, or to provide rhythmically correct models. One of these "dummy" lyrics, Liù's final speech to Turandot, was actually incorporated wholesale into the final libretto.¹³ And in many other instances Puccini demanded rewrite after rewrite until the libretto said precisely what he, Puccini, wanted it to say. Indeed, we can say of the libretto for *Turandot*, as we cannot say of many other operas, that it is as much the work of the composer as it is of the nominal librettists.¹⁴

11. G. Adami & R. Simoni, *Turandot* (W. Weaver trans. 1981), in *Turandot* 69, 109 (N. John ed. 1984) [hereinafter *Libretto*].

12. G. Marek, *Puccini: A Biography* 293 (1951).

13. Compare G. Adami & M. Carner, *Letters of Puccini* 309-310 (No. 220) (1974) [hereinafter *Letters of Puccini*] with *Libretto*, *supra* note 11, at 103.

14. G. Marek, *supra* note 12, at 306. This is perhaps the best place to make an important methodological point about this Article. The study of an opera through its libretto is often little more accurate than the study of a legal system through reading the appellate opinions of judges. For a

Puccini had high hopes for *Turandot*, which he consciously set out to make a “grand” opera, in the sense of the grand operas of Richard Wagner. The Wagnerian influence is noticeable not only in the familiar use of recurring themes or *leitmotifs* (a practice Puccini used with varying success throughout his career), but in Puccini’s plans for the final duet between Calaf and Turandot, the aria that would explain and justify her final transformation. “It must be a great duet,” Puccini wrote his librettist Adami in September of 1924, two months before his death. “These two almost superhuman beings descend through love to the level of mankind, and this love must at the end take possession of the whole stage in a great orchestral peroration.”¹⁵ It was to be a strange, yet sublime melody. In the sketches left to us Puccini wrote in the margin *Poi Tristano* (“Then Tristan”)—a reference to the famous duet and *Liebested* (love death) of Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*.¹⁶ Apparently Puccini wanted, as a supreme act of artistic mastery, to end *Turandot* with a duet of Wagnerian proportions, as thrilling in its own way as that in *Tristan*, which would at the same time tie together all of the loose ends of his story.

Puccini never lived to write that melody. After completing the first two acts and most of the third, the structure and content of the finale still eluded him. His health, endangered by a disease later diagnosed as cancer of the throat, grew steadily worse in the summer of 1924. He increasingly despaired that the work would never be completed. Around this time Puccini is said to have offered the prophecy that “[m]y opera will be given incomplete and then someone will come on the stage and say to the public: ‘At this point the composer died.’”¹⁷

On October 22, 1924, Puccini wrote Adami that he was at last satisfied with Simoni’s verses for the final duet. “I think he has done just what was needed and what I had dreamed of.”¹⁸ But the composition of the music had to be put off in favor of a trip to Brussels for an operation on his throat. “We shall see” Puccini concluded his letter, “when I get to work

recent polemic against the study of opera libretti, see P. Robinson, *A Deconstructive Postscript: Re-reading Libretti and Misreading Opera*, in *Reading Opera* (A. Groos & R. Parker ed. 1988). Much of an opera’s artistic depth cannot be conveyed except by musical experience. Moreover, Puccini’s use of recurrent themes to characterize persons and situations makes the study of his scores especially revealing and rewarding. However, given the audience towards which this essay is directed, I have chosen not to reprint portions of the score, and instead have described the musical events generally, using the opera libretto instead to make my points. Fortunately, Puccini is one of the few composers for whom this can be done with some degree of success. Because Puccini was so instinctively a dramatic composer, and because he so dominated the composition of the libretto in addition to the score, I believe that one can speak meaningfully about the interpretation of *Turandot* even though the argument is conducted primarily through the libretto. This is not to say, however, that in the best of all possible worlds, I would not prefer to sit the reader down with the score and a recording of the opera and have her experience how Puccini achieves his dramatic effects in music as well as in words.

15. Letters of Puccini, *supra* note 13, at 321 (No. 236).

16. J. Maehder, *Puccini’s “Turandot”: A Fragment*, in *Turandot*, *supra* note 11, at 35, 44.

17. M. Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography* 237 (2d ed. 1974).

18. Letters of Puccini, *supra* note 13, at 324-25 (No. 239).

again on my return from Brussels. Let us hope that I shall get over this."¹⁹

The operation was not a success. Puccini died on November 29, 1924, leaving behind a completed libretto for the third act, and thirty-six pages of sketches to set the final scene.²⁰ Puccini's family, assisted by the famous conductor Arturo Toscanini, approached Franco Alfano for the purpose of completing the opera, asking him to do the best he could to incorporate music already written. Alfano is often characterized as a mere student of Puccini,²¹ but this is mistaken. By the time he began the completion of *Turandot* he was fifty years of age and a significant composer in his own right.²² Indeed, Alfano had a definite compositional and orchestral style of his own, quite different from Puccini's. Thus, even though some of the melodies in the final scene are undoubtedly Puccini's, there is a different orchestral feeling to the conclusion of the opera.²³

Alfano made several good guesses as to Puccini's desires, but he also made decisions that while logical and aesthetically successful, are perhaps not what Puccini himself would have done.²⁴ What makes somewhat less sense dramatically, in part because Alfano had insufficient resources to work with, is the transformation of *Turandot's* character in the final duet. Here we cannot blame Alfano too much, for he had to work in great haste. Puccini himself had struggled with the musical problems of the final scene literally for years and had been unable to solve them to his satisfaction.²⁵

Puccini had played his ideas for the final duet on the piano for Toscanini at Viareggio in October 1924.²⁶ When Toscanini listened to Alfano's proposed completion, he did not like what he heard. He insisted that Alfano cut out large portions, shortening the ending even more, and ironically, deleting some of Puccini's own music in the process. As a result of these edits, portions of the libretto that Alfano had set to music were deleted as well. Toscanini was one of the most celebrated opera conductors in the world and had known Puccini for many years, but his aesthetic instincts were musical rather than dramatic. His cuts, driven primarily by musical considerations (and the desire to eliminate as much of Alfano's music as possible), made the transformation of *Turandot* even more abrupt and inexplicable. It is this version of Alfano's completion, and not the longer first version, that is generally heard today in opera houses.

19. *Id.*

20. Maehder counts twenty-three sheets of sketches, some of which were written on both sides, thus totalling thirty-six pages of sketches. J. Maehder, *supra* note 16, at 35-36.

21. M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 487.

22. G. Marek, *supra* note 12, at 304; C. Osborne, *The Operas of Puccini: A Critical Guide* 250 (1981). Alfano had composed seven operas before he was asked to complete *Turandot* in 1925. *Id.*

23. J. Maehder, *supra* note 16, at 42-45.

24. *Id.* at 42-44; W. Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini* 225 (1985).

25. J. Maehder, *supra* note 16, at 42.

26. *Id.* at 48.

The world premiere of *Turandot* was given at the La Scala Opera House in Milan, on April 25, 1926, with Toscanini conducting. After Liù's death scene, the last music that Puccini completed, Toscanini put down his baton and halted the opera. "Here the Maestro laid down his pen," he told the audience.²⁷ The Alfano completion was not heard until the next evening's performance.

III

Puccini's opera is based upon the 1762 play *Turandot*²⁸ by Count Carlo Gozzi, one of the most important Italian playwrights of the eighteenth century. Gozzi's work displays a marked ambivalence towards women as well as a desire to dominate them, especially his strong women characters, such as Turandot and Fata Morgana. As his modern English translator, John Louis DiGaetani notes, Gozzi saw life as a battle, and particularly a "battl[e] between the sexes; males and females are natural enemies who happen to need each other desperately."²⁹ As a youth Gozzi was involved in endless disputes with his mother over the management of his father's estates, worrying constantly that she would squander their wealth and ruin his future, while she, in turn, accused him of disobedience. Eventually, after his father's death, Gozzi became involved in bitter litigation against his mother and sister over disposition of the family property. Although he had many affairs, Gozzi never married. Much of his later adult life was consumed by a disastrous love triangle between himself, the actress Teodora Ricci, and Pietro Antonio Gratarol, an ambassador.³⁰ These experiences, as well as others, contributed to or perhaps simply confirmed his strong misogynism.

When Gozzi was not feuding with his mother and sister or his rivals, he was feuding with other playwrights. In particular, he despised the tendencies towards realism and social comedy in the work of Carlo Goldoni, a contemporary Italian playwright. A conservative in artistic temperament as well as in politics, Gozzi preferred the stylized stock characters and improvisatorial acting of the traditional Italian *commedia dell'arte*, and he wrote his *fiabe*, or fables, as a means of revivifying interest in this art form. Thus, in *Turandot*, the traditional *commedia dell'arte* figures of Pantalone, Tartaglia, Brighella, and Truffaldino appear as members of the royal court. The stock figures, or "masks" of *commedia dell'arte*, were expected to have fairly set personalities and foibles that would be

27. G. Marek, *supra* note 12, at 310. Or words to that effect. Every version of the story seems to have a slightly different version of Toscanini's statement.

28. The play is sometimes also spelled *Turandotte*, which confirms that the final "t" in the play's (and the heroine's) name should be pronounced. C. Osborne, *supra* note 22, at 256 n.1; M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 456.

29. J. DiGaetani, *Carlo Gozzi* 1 (1988).

30. *Id.* at 3.

immediately recognizable to the audience. When not engaged in slapstick and physical comedy, their task is to comment ironically on the action to the audience—thus forming a sort of a combination of an ancient Greek Chorus and the Marx Brothers.³¹

Gozzi's *fiabe* have proved a rich source of inspiration for later artists. His 1761 play, *The Love For Three Oranges*, was turned into an opera by Serge Prokofiev. *The Serpent Lady* (1762) was the basis for Wagner's *Die Feen*. Friedrich Schiller translated and adapted *Turandot* for the German stage in 1802, and at least seven operas based upon Schiller's version appeared in the nineteenth century.³² Andrea Maffei made a word for word translation of Schiller's adaptation back into Italian in 1863, and it was this version, rather than the Gozzi original, that Puccini and his two librettists first consulted.³³ Finally, Schiller's *Turandot* was the basis for Frederico Busoni's two act opera *Turandot*, first performed in 1917. It might seem strange that Puccini would compose his own *Turandot* only a few years later, but Puccini had done this sort of thing before with great success. Jules Massenet had already composed *Manon* when Puccini decided to adapt *Manon Lescaut*, which would prove to be his first great operatic triumph. Ruggiero Leoncavallo, who is now best known for *I Pagliacci*, had been the first to work on an adaptation of Henry Murger's autobiographical novel *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème* for the opera.³⁴ He completed it in 1897 under the title *La Bohème*.³⁵ Puccini's version of *La Bohème*, begun later but completed earlier by some fifteen months, was so successful that Leoncavallo's version is now all but forgotten. In each case, Puccini's opera eclipsed the other composer's version in popularity. One of the reasons for his superior success was Puccini's ability to modify the plot line to increase dramatic interest and to create an effective backdrop for his natural melodic gifts.

In comparison to Puccini's opera, Gozzi's *Turandot* is light-hearted and even comical. It is presented in the form of an entertaining fairy tale. To be sure, Gozzi's perennial concern—the war between the sexes—is clearly present. But it is modified and supplemented by Gozzi's use of his characters to promote “a moral theme—the all-conquering power of true love—and to exalt the ancient virtues of courage, loyalty, fortitude in suffering, gratitude and self-sacrifice.”³⁶ Puccini's work, on the other hand, is altogether more sober. The savagery and barbarism of *Turandot*'s regime,

31. See J. Black, *Carlo Gozzi's "Turandot" and Its Transformation into Puccini's Libretto*, in *Turandot*, *supra* note 11, at 55, 56.

32. *Id.* at 57; C. Osborne, *supra* note 22, at 256. Other composers, including Carl Maria von Weber, produced incidental music for the various versions of the play. M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 458.

33. J. Black, *supra* note 31, at 55. Puccini also studied the score of his former teacher at the Milan Conservatory, Bazzini, whose 1867 opera *Turanda* was also based upon Schiller.

34. M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 74.

35. *Id.*

36. *Id.* at 461.

which Gozzi mentions in passing but hardly takes seriously, are emphasized in Puccini's opera. The opera begins with the execution of the Prince of Persia to the cheers of the bloodthirsty crowd; it ends with the torture and suicide of Liù.

Puccini made many clever changes to speed the action and intensify dramatic conflict. While Gozzi takes three acts to describe the details of Turandot's murderous regime, Puccini opens the opera with a mandarin's solemn pronouncement of the law. Puccini also transformed Gozzi's four masks into the three court officials, Ping, Pang, and Pong, in the process eliminating their distinctive personalities. Consistent with the somber character of the opera, they no longer resemble the harmless clowns of the *commedia dell'arte*. There is some humor in their dialogue, (particularly in the trio which opens Act II), but as Turandot's servants they are also cruel and malevolent on occasion. Moreover, while Gozzi's masks comment on the action in an ironic and humorous way, but in no sense intervene in the course of events, Puccini integrated his masks into the plot. For example, in the first act, Ping, Pang, and Pong attempt to dissuade Calaf from striking the gong; in the third act they identify Liù and Timur as friends of Calaf, thus setting in motion events which lead to Liù's torture and suicide.

One of the most interesting differences between Puccini's and Gozzi's *Turandot* is the character of Liù. She is a distant relation of two characters in Gozzi's version—Zelima and Adelma, who are two of Turandot's favorite slaves. Zelima is a comparatively meek and mild person, who encourages Turandot to yield to her growing feelings of love for Calaf. Her meekness is carried over to Puccini's Liù, although Liù herself is if anything even more submissive. Adelma, on the other hand, is a more vigorous character. She is a captured Tartar princess who secretly loves Calaf and hates Turandot. Like Liù, Adelma is also crucial to the resolution of the action, but in a very different way. In Gozzi's version, Adelma plots to betray the secret of Calaf's name to Turandot in the hopes that Calaf, realizing that he is as good as dead, will turn to her to rescue him. Adelma thus tricks Calaf into revealing his name, but the stratagem backfires. For when Calaf is exposed by Turandot at dawn, he seizes a dagger and attempts to kill himself. At this point Gozzi's Turandot, moved by his nobility of character, relents and agrees to marry him.

These elements of plot and character are eliminated in Puccini's libretto. While Gozzi's play devotes considerable time to Adelma's attempts to outwit Calaf, Puccini uses Turandot's torture of Liù to move the plot forward. Like Adelma, Liù loves the prince desperately, but unlike Adelma she is fiercely loyal to him, and gives her life to protect him and his father, Timur. In Puccini's version Liù, and not Calaf, seizes a dagger and kills herself, and her death provides Calaf with the opportunity to reveal his name of his own free will to Turandot.

Turandot's own character is also quite different in significant ways. Gozzi's Turandot is hardly as cold or as cruel as Puccini's incarnation. She has taken her oath for practical reasons. She wishes to avoid marriage because she knows that women always end up getting the worst of the bargain. Turandot's atavistic desire for vengeance for the crimes of men, and the story of Princess Lo-u-Ling, are all Puccini's invention. In this respect Puccini's version harks back to much earlier legends—in particular the legend of the Amazons, who overthrew a cruel male king and established the rule of women. Finally, Puccini's Turandot is considerably more ruthless—while Gozzi's Turandot resorts to stratagems to outwit Calaf, Puccini's has no scruples about torturing a helpless slave.

Aside from its generally darker character, what is most striking about Puccini's transformation of Gozzi's play is how Puccini emphasizes the mythic character of the story while simultaneously producing a greater psychological realism in its characters. Puccini's *Turandot* is an opera about power, and this theme is emphasized by placing the characters in successive extremes of power and powerlessness. The major characters in Puccini's version are either royalty or slaves. And within these divisions, they are at various points of the action either conquering or outcast, vanquished or victorious. Indeed, when Liù's sings her first words in the opera—"Il mio vecchio è caduto" ("My old master has fallen")³⁷—it is a commentary not only on Timur's jostling by the crowd but also on his fallen position. A recurrent theme of the libretto is the rise and fall of its characters, which correspond to the rising and setting of the heavenly bodies. The rise of the moon signals the death of the Prince of Persia and the confirmation of Turandot's power over men, as well as the arrival of the exiles, Calaf, Timur, and Liù. Yet it also signals the beginning of Calaf's heroic ascendancy and the end of Turandot's reign of terror. Conversely the rising of the sun has dual significance. Calaf cries "*all'alba vincerò*"—"at dawn I shall win,"³⁸ while Turandot exclaims that as the sun rises, "Turandot's sun is setting."³⁹ And even this reversal is itself soon reversed, for Calaf sees the dawn as the birth of love and the symbol of Turandot's victory.

While Puccini's alterations of Gozzi's play intensify dramatic interest, they also created a series of problems that were never solved before his death. Not surprisingly, they stem from his treatment of the two principal female characters, Turandot and Liù. Liù is Puccini's major addition to the story. Puccini obviously cared greatly about this character. She is one example of the submissive female personalities who appear with some frequency in his operas. Although her part is by no means as large as

37. Libretto, *supra* note 11, at 69.

38. *Id.* at 97.

39. *Id.* at 106.

Turandot's, Liù's arias are hardly insignificant; one of them, *Signore, ascolta*, is certainly as beautiful as anything Puccini gives Turandot to sing. Indeed, Liù's music is much more characteristically "Puccinian"—in the style of *La Bohème* and *Madame Butterfly*—than is Turandot's music.

Although Puccini apparently needed this type of character to inspire his characteristic musical style, her function changed considerably as work on the libretto progressed. Puccini wrote to Adami on November 3, 1922, "I think that Liù must be sacrificed to some sorrow, but I don't see how to do this unless we make her die under torture. And why not? Her death could help to soften the heart of the Princess."⁴⁰ To this end, Liù's final speech (whose words were written by Puccini himself) stresses that through her death, Liù will make the princess love Calaf. Yet as later drafts developed, Liù does not in fact play this role at all. Turandot appears as hard-hearted after her death as before it. Rather, Liù's death simply serves the dramatic function of foiling Turandot's plans, and preventing the discovery of Calaf's name until the final scene, when he reveals it of his own accord. Moreover, Liù's death seems to spoil the happy ending of the opera. While Calaf mourns Liù's passing in a brief arietta, within a few minutes he is back to lusting after Turandot. The relative lack of emotional effect that Liù's death has on either Calaf or Turandot makes both more unsympathetic characters. It also makes even more unconvincing Turandot's transformation from a bloodthirsty and ruthless princess into a person who accepts Calaf's love.

As for Turandot herself, the only explanation that the opera appears to offer for her transformation appears to be unmediated machismo. In his letters to Adami, Puccini suggested that Calaf's kiss should be the event that brings about Turandot's change.⁴¹ The libretto (with accompanying stage directions) gives a good indication of how the opera is usually performed. The final duet begins as the prince tears off Turandot's veil. Turandot objects, but the prince comes nearer still:

THE UNKNOWN PRINCE

Your soul is on high!
 But your body is near.
 With burning hands
 I'll clasp the golden edges
 of your spangled mantle!
 My trembling mouth
 I'll press upon you!⁴²

Turandot protests again and again, but the prince is insistent. "Your

40. Letters of Puccini, *supra* note 13, at 300 (No. 207).

41. *Id.* at 287 (No. 196).

42. Libretto, *supra* note 11, at 105.

iciness is falsehood!" he cries.⁴³ The stage directions at this point are quite revealing:

(The Prince, in saying this, strong in the knowledge of his right and in his passion, pulls Turandot into his arms and kisses her frenziedly. Turandot—against such impetuosity—has no more resistance, no more voice, no more strength, no more will. The unbelievable contact has transfigured her. With a tone of almost childish pleading she murmurs:)

TURANDOT

What has become of me?
What a shudder. . . . Lost!

. . . .

(her eyes veiled with tears)

How did you conquer?⁴⁴

In one sense Puccini's comment that these two superhuman figures must descend to the level of humanity⁴⁵ is true in a quite unintended sense. For what Puccini appears to reenact here is nothing more than the most banal form of male sexual aggression against women socialized to passivity and sexual submission. When all of the poetic language between Calaf and Turandot is pared away, we have a familiar spectacle: A man makes a pass at a woman, and she demurs. He replies that "she really wants it," and thus takes what is "rightfully" his. The woman, overcome by the "conquering" male, protests at first, but soon submits willingly. Thus, what Puccini appears to offer us as an explanation for Turandot's great transformation is the psychology of adolescent sexuality in the laboratory of the drive-in-movie. Worse still, the libretto makes a mockery of Calaf's later comment that Turandot has won. This appears to be no victory for Turandot at all; on the contrary, it is if anything a reenactment of the original seizure of Lo-u-ling by the Tartar King. To reinterpret Turandot's capitulation as Turandot's victory seems the most vicious of misrepresentations. Finally, nothing in Turandot's character has prepared us for the fact that at a single kiss her sexual instincts will completely overcome the hatred she has harbored her entire life. Nothing, that is, unless the opera's intended message is that women who claim to hate men really love them, and that every icy Turandot is simply waiting for a sufficiently audacious Calaf to assault her sexually.

43. *Id.* at 106.

44. *Id.*

45. Letters of Puccini, *supra* note 13, at 321 (No. 236).

IV

In the standard reading of *Turandot* we witness one woman, Liù, who kills herself over a man she cannot have and who pays hardly any attention to her, regarding her as a mere slave. We witness another, Turandot, who on the surface seems frigid and therefore harder to obtain; nevertheless she melts at a single kiss, thus justifying the violence used to overcome her will. A work of art could hardly be more misogynist than this. The standard interpretation of *Turandot* is disturbing enough because of what it suggests about the appropriate relations of power and sexuality between men and woman. It becomes even more disturbing when we begin to consider the composer's own conscious and unconscious attitudes towards women and sexual love and how these attitudes are reflected in this and in his other operas.

On the surface, it might appear that Puccini was a great champion of women. Almost all of his works center around the heroine. The heroine's name appears in the title of five of his twelve operas (*Manon Lescaut*, *Tosca*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Suor Angelica*, and *Turandot*), and she is referred to directly or indirectly in the title of three others (*La Bohème*, *La Fanciulla del West*, and *La Rondine*). Most of his best music is written for the female voice.

If we look more closely, however, we will see that Puccini's fixation with women is not unambiguously positive. In most of Puccini's operas, the work centers around a female heroine whose most central trait is her strong and devoted love. But in Puccini's operas, love is tragic guilt that must be atoned for.⁴⁶ And thus, in these operas, the woman is punished for her love. In most cases she dies, thus fulfilling an equation of sexual love with death. This is a familiar theme in many literary works, but it is especially prominent in Puccini's operas. The exceptions to this rule merely confirm the composer's basic tendency. In *La Fanciulla del West*, the heroine is permitted to survive, but she must undergo considerable torment before Puccini permits a happy ending. Another exception to the rule, *La Rondine*, is often considered a watered-down version of Verdi's *La Traviata*—its weakness consists largely in the fact that the heroine does not die at the end as a proper Puccinian heroine should, but simply deserts her young lover.

The equation of love with tragic guilt in Puccini's operas is especially interesting because it generally applies only to Puccini's female characters. The chief male roles are reserved for lovers who unwittingly set in motion events which destroy the heroine (Cavaradossi in *Tosca*, Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly*), or more malignant types who seek to undo the heroine deliberately (Scarpia in *Tosca*, Sheriff Rance in *La Fanciulla*).⁴⁷ In

46. M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 272.

47. *Id.* at 272, 278.

contrast, the classic Puccinian heroine is often meek and submissive (Mimi, Cio-cio-san, Sister Angelica), accepting her punishment with little resistance. This acquiescent and masochistic style of heroine culminates in Puccini's final creation, Liù. When Calaf asks Liù who she is, she replies "I am nothing. . . a slave, my lord." And when Calaf asks further, "Why did you share such anguish?" Liù responds "[b]ecause, one day. . . in the palace, you smiled at me."⁴⁸ Liù is the most extreme example of the submissive woman who sacrifices everything for her love, and who is ultimately punished for her sacrifice. In typically Puccinian fashion, Liù reveals her forbidden love to Turandot before her death, and then begs for the punishment due her:

LIÙ

Such love—secret and unconfessed,
 so great that these tortures are
 sweetnesses for me, because I present them to my Lord . . .
 Because, remaining silent, I give him your love . . .
 I give him you, Princess, and I lose all,
 even impossible hope!

(and, addressing the guards)

Bind me! Torture me!
 Give me torments and pains . . . !
 Ah! as the supreme suffering of my love!⁴⁹

The Puccinian heroine "deserves" her punishment because of her fatal desire for erotic love, which leads to her undoing, and because, as Puccini portrays his heroines, they are always flawed in some important way. Liù, for example, is a mere slave who aspires to love a prince. In other operas the heroine has willingly cast off social conventions (Manon, Mimi, Cio-cio-san, Magda in *La Rondine*) or has become pregnant out of wedlock (Sister Angelica).⁵⁰ The subsidiary characters of Musetta in *La Bohème* and Lissette in *La Rondine* also fall into the category of flirts and women of loose morals, although here their disdain for convention is used to comic effect.⁵¹ Even Tosca, one of the few strong female characters Puccini produced before *Turandot*, is subject to fits of inappropriate jealousy and unreasoning passion that ultimately lead to her downfall.

It is not too farfetched to see Puccini's operas as sadomasochistic enterprises. In each case Puccini places his beloved victim—for whom he com-

48. Libretto, *supra* note 11, at 71.

49. *Id.* at 102-03.

50. M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 274-75.

51. *Id.*

poses the most breathtakingly beautiful music—into dramatic situations where he can slowly torture and destroy her at the hands of her male counterparts. Ironically, despite his own unconventional morals and his surface affection for his female characters, Puccini in fact applies a rigid moral code of sexual and social expectations to the object of his adoration, which serves as justification for the tragedies he inflicts on his women.⁵²

Mosco Carner gives a Freudian explanation for Puccini's treatment of his female characters.⁵³ His thesis is that Puccini, whose father died when he was five and who was raised by a strong willed mother and five sisters, was strongly bonded to his mother.⁵⁴ In order to experience sexual attraction while avoiding the incest taboo, his loves had to be degraded so that they could be distinguished from the exalted Mother. All of his loves and his heroines thus became rivals of his mother image, and because rivals, they were necessarily flawed.⁵⁵ For Carner this explains Puccini's attraction for obscure women of low status, and his inability to share his creative life with any of his lovers, including his wife, Elvira.⁵⁶ On the other hand, sexual longings for rival women would involve abandonment of the Mother, and produce another form of guilt. This guilt, in turn, was transferred from himself to his heroines, who therefore had to be punished in order to pacify the godlike Mother.⁵⁷ The degraded heroine had to be offered up as a sacrificial animal. Puccini's love for his characters thus shows the ambivalence of simultaneous love and hate, attraction and disgust.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, in the Puccinian corpus, there are two female characters who stand apart and whose dramatic function is quite different. They are the Aunt in *Suor Angelica* and Turandot herself. Carner describes both the Aunt and Turandot as "haughty, cruel, imperious, unlovable charac-

52. Interestingly, this tendency is also found in the choice of subjects that Puccini considered setting to music but ultimately rejected. One of these is Ouida's *Two Little Red Shoes*, which features a trusting woman who commits suicide because of her betrayal by a cynical man. M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 199. A second is the execution of Marie Antoinette, who although a woman of high social status, was sufficiently flawed in other ways that she would fit easily into the Puccinian mold. *Id.* at 157-58. The most interesting of the rejected libretti is *La Femme et le Pantin* (The Woman and the Puppet), which was to have been entitled *Conchita*, after its central character. The play involves a woman who is openly sexually aggressive like Carmen but in fact remains a virgin. She sexually teases the hero, making him her puppet (hence the title) until he finally rapes her and reverses the situation of dominance and submission. She now becomes his sexual slave. It is revealing that the overtly sadomasochistic themes of the opera were not what drove Puccini away from the project. Instead he felt that several of its scenes would not translate well to the operatic stage. Moreover, he was concerned with the similarities to Bizet's *Carmen*, which, unlike the work of Massenet, Busoni, and Leoncavallo, he sensed that he could not outdo in popularity. *Id.* at 153-54.

53. M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 276-79.

54. *Id.* at 273-74. See G. Marek, *supra* note 12, at 312.

55. M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 274.

56. *Id.* at 176, 274; G. Marek, *supra* note 12, at 90.

57. M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 277.

58. An ambivalence which is also suggested in Turandot's aria *Del primo pianto*, where she reveals her simultaneous love and hate for Calaf. Libretto, *supra* note 11, at 107.

ters."⁵⁹ Their major function is to drive the meek and more standard version of the Puccinian heroine to suicide. Turandot herself is somewhat more complicated than the Aunt because she eventually plays both roles—torturer and tortured. Because they are so different from the other heroines, Carner argues that they symbolize an alternative vision of woman in Puccini's unconscious—the disapproving Mother figure, who must punish overt displays of sensuality.⁶⁰ Carner thus concludes that Puccini's failure to write the final duet in *Turandot* stems from his inability to reconcile and merge his two different visions of the female—in short, his inability to produce a convincing transformation “from the cruel Mother into the loving and submissive woman.”⁶¹

Whether Carner's thesis is ultimately correct, it meshes with several facts about Puccini's relations with real women. Stanley Jackson gives a fairly blunt, but apparently fairly accurate portrait of Puccini's amours:

His attitude to women was flagrantly amoral; he once declared, “On the day when I am no longer in love, you can hold my funeral.” But his amours were rarely anything but brief, explicit and uncomplicated by deep emotion. At times of creative stress, over-anxiety or frustration he . . . had a[n] . . . intolerable need for “something fleshly, something that resembles a carnal assault, a mixture of courage and intoxication.” . . . However, he had no taste for leading actresses or aristocratic nymphomaniacs, preferring chorus girls, waitresses, and other readily available admirers whom he picked off with as little emotion as the wildfowl on Lake Massaciùccoli. . . .

His melancholia demanded relief in violent sex, slaughtering birds and driving high-powered cars at reckless speed. After a tiff with [his wife] Elvira, or even some unkind review of one of his operas, he would summon his chauffeur Ultimo and drive off angrily to Milan or Rome, but more often than not turn back for [home] once he had calmed down. He tired of women just as quickly.⁶²

The character of Puccini's wife, Elvira, also tends to bear out Carner's psychological interpretation, for she bears an interesting resemblance to several of his heroines as well as his mother. She had abandoned bourgeois respectability by leaving her husband for Puccini when she was 24.⁶³ She lived with him for twenty years, not being able to marry until her first husband's death in 1904.⁶⁴ In this sense Elvira played the role of the Puccinian object of love—the flawed woman who flouts social conven-

59. M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 377.

60. *Id.* at 377-78.

61. *Id.* at 378.

62. S. Jackson, *Monsieur Butterfly: The Story of Puccini* 150 (1974).

63. G. Marek, *supra* note 12, at 76; W. Margraf, *Giacomo Puccini* 33 (1977). Elvira began living with Puccini shortly after his mother's death in 1884. *Id.*

64. W. Margraf, *supra* note 63, at 33. Puccini's son Tonio was born in 1886, two years after Elvira moved in with Puccini. *Id.*

tions. Elvira was flawed in another way—she had very little understanding of Puccini's music or of his dramatic genius, and so he rarely confided in her. Nevertheless, as time passed, Elvira also came to represent Puccini's other vision of woman, for she was in many ways as strong-willed and forceful a personality as Puccini's mother. One of her most characteristic traits was severe jealousy, which proved, like Puccini's Tosca, to cause her great suffering. Puccini's lack of respect for marital fidelity gave her sufficient cause for concern, even though she always took him back.⁶⁵ As time wore on, however, her suspicions were more and more easily aroused, and her jealousy became pathological.⁶⁶ She feared rivals in every encounter Puccini had. She even took to placing camphor in Puccini's clothes in the belief that it would lessen his sexual desire, and once placed an anti-aphrodisiac in his coffee when an attractive actress visited the house.⁶⁷

Matters came to a head while Puccini was working on *La Fanciulla del West*. For several years previously, the Puccinis had employed a servant girl, Doria Manfredi, who came to work for them at the age of 16. Gentle and modest in personality, she was industrious and hardworking, and especially devoted to the composer. Five years after her arrival, in late September or early October of 1908, Elvira decided that Doria was having an affair with Puccini. Elvira embarked on a one-woman campaign to destroy her.⁶⁸ She spread wild accusations throughout the small village of Torre del Lago, hurling insults at Doria whenever she met her in the street, and attempting to have her banished from the town. Despite Puccini's protestations of innocence, Elvira's campaign continued for months. It became so fierce that eventually Doria was afraid to show herself publicly. Distraught and humiliated by her mistress's accusations, Doria took poison, but was not successful in killing herself immediately. She died after five days of agony. A subsequent autopsy revealed that she was still a virgin.⁶⁹

Doria's family brought criminal libel charges against Elvira, and she

65. Particularly revealing is a letter written from Puccini to Elvira in August 1915, when Puccini was 57 years of age. In it he attempts to defend his indiscretions at the same time that he accuses Elvira of exaggerated jealousy:

Your suspicions mislead you to the most undignified investigations. You invent women in order to give free play to your policeman's instinct. Everything appears serious, large, weighty to you while it is nothing, a mere negligible nothing. . . . You have never looked at these matters as do other women who are more reasonable—Good God! The world is full of such things. And all the artists cultivate these little gardens in order to delude themselves into thinking that they are not finished and old and torn by strife. You imagine immense affairs. In reality, it is nothing but a sport to which all men more or less dedicate a fleeting thought without, however, giving up that which is serious and sacred: that is, the family. . . .

G. Marek, *supra* note 12, at 87.

66. G. Marek, *supra* note 12, at 88-90; S. Jackson, *supra* note 62, at 173-74.

67. S. Jackson, *supra* note 62, at 174.

68. S. Jackson, *supra* note 62, at 176; G. Marek, *supra* note 12, at 248; M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 181.

69. S. Jackson, *supra* note 62, at 176-78.

was sentenced to a fine and a jail term. Rather than risk an unsuccessful appeal, Puccini arranged for a settlement with the Manfredi family to keep his wife out of prison, an arrangement which was apparently permissible under the existing law.⁷⁰ The *Affaire Doria*, as it was known, was a sensation throughout Italy and was widely reported in the press. Although Puccini eventually returned to his wife, this episode created a long estrangement between Puccini and Elvira that was not fully healed until a few years before the composer's death, during the period of his work on *Turandot*.⁷¹ Several Puccini commentators have noted the resemblance between the Doria Manfredi episode and Turandot's torture of Liù, which leads to Liù's suicide.⁷² And indeed, Puccini's final reconciliation with his wife is symbolic of the reconciliation of Calaf and Turandot, the torturer of Liù.

V

Turandot ends with a victory, but what sort of victory is it? Has Turandot merely succumbed to Calaf's charms, or to his act of violent appropriation? In that case, Calaf's *Hai vinto tu!* rings especially hollow. Were Turandot's fears about the dominance of men forgotten or abandoned? In that case her victory is no victory at all.

One of the most important elements of Puccini's version of *Turandot* is Turandot's justification of her bloody regime, given in her aria *In questa Reggia*. This differentiates Puccini's heroine significantly from her Gozzian counterpart. Gozzi's Turandot is a feminist of practical aims. She avoids marriage because she seeks "the liberty that any man has."⁷³ She has no desire to be cruel; she simply wishes to avoid submitting to the authority of a husband. For Puccini's Turandot, however, opposition to the male sex has taken on mythic proportions:

In this Palace, a thousand, thousand years ago,
A desperate cry resounded.
And that cry, through descendant and descendant,
took refuge here in my soul!

Princess Lo-u-Ling,
Sweet and serene ancestress, who reigned
in your dark silence, in pure joy,
and who defied, inflexible and sure,
bitter domination, you relive in me today!

70. *Id.* at 178-184.

71. M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 187.

72. S. Hughes, *Famous Puccini Operas* 248 (1959); M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 187-88; S. Jackson, *supra* note 62, at 184.

73. C. Gozzi, *Turandot*, in J. DiGaetani, *supra* note 29, at 62.

. . . .

Still in the time that everyone remembers,
 there was alarm and terror and the rumble of arms!
 The kingdom defeated! The kingdom defeated!
 And Lo-u-ling, my ancestress, dragged away
 by a man like you, like you, foreigner,
 there in the atrocious night,
 where her fresh voice was extinguished!

. . . .

O Princes who in long caravans
 from every part of the world
 come here to try your fate
 I avenge upon you, upon you that purity,
 that cry and that death!

No one will ever possess me!
 the horror of him who killed her
 is alive in my heart!
 No one will ever possess me!

Ah, in me is reborn the pride
 of such purity!

Stranger! Don't tempt fate!
 The riddles are three, death is one!⁷⁴

Puccini's *Turandot* presents the inversion of traditional fairy tales where the heroine waits eagerly for her prince to arrive. In the legend of Turandot, the prince, who symbolizes the entire male sex, is the source of violence, brutality, and subordination. Interestingly, several of the commentators speak of the rape of Lo-u-ling, although this word never specifically appears in Puccini's libretto.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the connections between sexuality and submission, between male love and male violence are clear enough in *In questa Reggia*. Puccini adds, as if to emphasize the point even more, the chorus's interjection that Lo-u-ling died "when the King of the Tartars unfurled his seven flags"⁷⁶—the present-day representatives of Tartar royalty being of course, Calaf and Timur. A thousand years later, the Tartar King's descendant wishes to reenact the conquering

74. Libretto, *supra* note 11, at 90-91.

75. C. Osborne, *supra* note 22, at 254; W. Ashbrook, *supra* note 24, at 254; M. Carner, *The Genesis of the Opera*, in *Turandot*, *supra* note 11, at 10. J. DiGaetani, *Puccini the Thinker* 39 (1987). The word the libretto uses is *trascinata*, or "dragged off"; this is somewhat akin to an older meaning of the word "rape"—seizure by superior force, with or without sexual intercourse.

76. Libretto, *supra* note 11, at 90.

of the Chinese Princess, both politically (for he would thus become heir to the throne of China) and sexually.

Interpreting *In questa Reggia* as a more general accusation about sexual domination of women by men makes sense of a portion of the opera which has often seemed extraneous—the opening scene of Act II, which features an extended trio between Ping, Pang, and Pong immediately preceding *In questa Reggia*. Puccini's aesthetic sense often demanded moments of repose and even comedy between more dramatic and energetic scenes. But there is more to the trio of the masks in *Turandot* than the composer's desire to allow some breathing room between the powerful Act I finale and the trial scene of Act II. From the masks' reminiscences, a clear message emerges—Turandot's obstinate refusal to marry is driving China to ruin. Ping, Pang, and Pong, who must continually prepare for both a royal wedding and a royal funeral, dream of peace for themselves and for China. But in their view this peace can come only with Turandot's sexual submission, or as they put it delicately, a "night of surrender":

No longer in China, to our good luck,
is there a woman who rejects love!
There was only one and this one
who was ice now is flame and ardor!

Princess, your empire stretches
from the Tse-Kiang to the immense Yangtze!
But there, within the soft draperies,
there is a husband who rules over you!

. . . .

Glory to the beautiful, unclad body
which now knows the mystery it was ignorant of!
Glory to the ecstasy and to love which has won,
and restores peace to China.⁷⁷

We now see *In questa Reggia* as Turandot's reply to this male vision of peace and tranquility. For her, such a peace is purchased only at the price of women's powerlessness and their submission to the violence and sexual domination of men.

Yet if *In questa Reggia* is truly significant—and the fact that it symbolizes the major difference between Puccini's and Gozzi's heroines suggests that this is so—then the finale of Puccini's opera is deficient in still another respect. For as the opera is usually performed, Puccini never gives a satisfactory answer to the accusations that Turandot raises in her famous

77. *Id.* at 87-88.

aria. He never explains why Turandot's marriage to Calaf is not simply another in an endless series of dominations of females by males. Indeed, the ripping of the veil, the forced kissing of Turandot, and her weakened reply all suggest this interpretation. Turandot's victory seems pyrrhic indeed.

The discussion so far has suggested that *Turandot* is a flawed work of art. It is flawed not only because it is incomplete, and not only because the final transformation of its central character remains unconvincing, but also because of the vision of sexual relations upon which it rests. As normally understood, *Turandot* is an anti-feminist opera, combining the misogyny of Carlo Gozzi with the sadomasochism of Giacomo Puccini. Is there nevertheless an interpretation of *Turandot* that saves it from these conclusions? Is there a way of understanding the opera that makes it truly Turandot's victory?

One thing seems clear: a successful reading of Puccini's opera must provide an answer to Turandot's argument in *In questa Reggia*. The successful interpreter must explain how one who thinks as Turandot does could ever believe in the possibility of genuine intimacy with men that would not be in reality a capitulation to unjust power. To be sure, the ending of *Turandot* suggests a message of hope—Turandot is transformed, Liù's death is not in vain—but *Turandot* does not tell us how this transformation comes about. Toscanini's edited version of Alfano's reconstruction is all the more clumsy in that it explains the transformation simply in terms of male charisma and sexual attraction. Clearly there must be something more.

The great enigma of *Turandot* is Turandot's transformation, the very portion of the opera left unfinished. Indeed, the disparity between the Turandot of *In questa Reggia* and the Turandot who sings *Il suo nome è Amor* ("His name is Love") is what the opera is most urgently about. Perhaps Prince Calaf answered Turandot's three riddles, but the person who would finish this unfinished opera must answer a fourth—the riddle that Puccini attempted to answer and died in the attempt, like all of the previous heroes who sought to conquer the icy princess. *Turandot* is thus both an incomplete work of art and a perpetual question, posing the problem of how it is possible for women who are aware of the wrongs done to women by a system of patriarchy, nevertheless to love and be loved, to transform themselves and others and move from hate and destruction towards love and fulfillment. And this, the Riddle of *Turandot*, asked by Puccini, and left unanswered, is at the same time a question about men's relationship to women—a question about how the men who live within that same system of patriarchy should relate to them. It is thus the question of men's transformation as well as women's. To attempt an answer, we must return to the issues which suffuse the entire opera—the issues of power and control.

VI

Turandot begins with a pronouncement of legal power. In contrast to Gozzi's leisurely pace (the terms of Turandot's oath are not set out in full until the third act of a five act drama) Puccini states his subject clearly at the outset. The opening words of the opera are the Mandarin's solemn statement: "*Popolo di Pekino! La legge è questa.*"—"People of Peking, this is the law."⁷⁸ The law, of course, is the oath of Turandot—the terms under which she will marry, and the penalty for failing to answer her three riddles.

Although *Turandot* begins with a statement of the law, it is not, strictly speaking, an opera about law. It is rather an opera about the power that is embodied in law. Nor is *Turandot* simply an opera about power. It is also about the *reversibility* of power—how the sources of power disempower the powerful, and how the weak are made strong by their weakness. This fundamental reversibility of power and powerlessness, strength and weakness, defines the sexual struggle between Calaf and Turandot, and the hopeless love of Liù.

The reversibility of power is mirrored in many of the libretto's governing metaphors. I have already noted the use of the rise and fall of heavenly bodies as a metaphor for both power and powerlessness in *Turandot*. This symmetry also applies to the power embodied in law. Turandot has used the law as the means of her power over men, as an instrument of dominance and revenge. Unlike Gozzi's Turandot, who shows some remorse over the unnecessary slaughter, and thus attempts to dissuade Calaf, Puccini's princess is totally without mercy. As the opera begins, she rejects the crowd's plea for the life of the Prince of Persia.

Yet Turandot's power is not truly her own, as subsequent events demonstrate. The law that protects women can just as easily be used against them. The law gives Turandot her power, but it also creates the occasion for her powerlessness. After Calaf solves the three riddles, Turandot is now bound by the very law she used to defeat her suitors. No longer empowered by law, Turandot must now turn to men—her father and eventually Calaf—for mercy. Moreover, it becomes increasingly clear that, although she has spurned men as proof of her power, Turandot's power has always depended upon men. Her royal position is due to her lineage as daughter of the Emperor of China. Only the Emperor's enforcement of her oath has given her the power of life and death. Her power over her suitors is due to their sexual desire for her, and their political desire for the throne of China. Once Turandot's riddles are solved, her power evaporates, and her dependence upon men is clearly

78. *Id.* at 69.

shown. Turandot is now a victim of her own riddles, and like all of the previous victims, she begs for mercy.

By posing a new riddle, Calaf appears to offer Turandot the mercy that she had refused to her suitors. Yet Calaf's mercy, like Turandot's power, is problematic. If the relation of law to power is reversible, so is the relation of mercy to powerlessness. Mercy may appear to empower the weaker party. Yet at the same time, mercy may simply confirm the status of the powerful. When Turandot asks "Do you want me in your arms by force, reluctant, shuddering?"⁷⁹ Calaf replies "No, no, haughty princess! I want you all ardent with love!"⁸⁰ One might interpret this passage in several ways. One possibility is that Calaf genuinely wants a free, willing choice from Turandot, something that he will never obtain from her in her present condition. A second interpretation is, however, equally likely. Calaf's posing of a new riddle is an act of supreme audacity. Calaf is so brave, so convinced of his power, that he is quite willing to show Turandot that his first victory was no fluke—that he can defeat her again and again. Then she will know that he really is superior, and she will submit to him willingly. But in this case the submission will be due to respect for superior power. It will be as a slave submits to a master.

Thus, if law can be used both as a sword and a shield, so too can mercy. For Calaf's act of mercy might be simply another means of humiliation. To grant special favors to the weak and powerless because they are weak and powerless is not necessarily to respect them. Indeed, if the result is that the weak and powerless still lose out, the display of mercy may have simply established the stronger party's power even more definitely. It may be a way of playing at mercy, or the sharing of power, without really accomplishing this. It may be a subterfuge used to break the spirit of the other, to show them that even if they get what they ask for, they will still lose, and they will still have to submit.

After Calaf solves the third riddle, Turandot's cries to her father—"You can't give me to him like a slave girl, dying of shame."⁸¹ The comparison to slavery is highly significant. In her aria *In questa Reggia*, Turandot sings "[m]ai nessun m'avrà"—"no one shall possess me."⁸² This simultaneously connotes sexual possession as well as other forms of possession. For Turandot, to be a wife is to be possessed by a man, and hence to be a slave. The genius of Puccini's adaptation of Gozzi is the exaggeration of power relations between men and woman by the use of the opposition between the proud and powerful *principessa* and the humbled and powerless *schiaava* or slave. The clear but unacknowledged refer-

79. *Id.* at 96.

80. *Id.*

81. *Id.* at 95.

82. *Id.* at 91.

ence in Turandot's cry is to the other major female character, Liù, the slave girl, who will later die as a result of her love for Calaf.

The transformation of woman from *principessa* to *schiaava* seems to be one from power to powerlessness. Nevertheless, the opera upsets this opposition in a number of ways. The slave Liù ultimately hands Turandot her defeat through a supreme act of surrender—her suicide.⁸³ Conversely, as noted above, the Princess Turandot is the slave of her oath—she must marry the man who solves her riddles. The problematic opposition of slavery and mastery is also evidenced in Turandot's third riddle: "If it wants you free, it makes you more enslaved! If it accepts you for slave, it makes you king!"⁸⁴

The answer to this riddle, is of, course, Turandot herself. This leads naturally to yet another metaphor of power, that of naming. The identification of names, and especially unknown names, with power, is a familiar device in myth and religious lore. The religious significance of the name of the Hebrew God is well known, and indeed, as a consequence His name was never to be pronounced or written in full. The giving of a name—for example, the Angel's renaming of Jacob as Israel—can be a confirmation of the power of the named party, just as in the case of Jacob it can also be a sign that the named party has been transformed in some important way. Conversely, the name can signify a transformation which is also a source of power over the newly named party. The wife's taking of the husband's name was traditionally a confirmation of her entry into his family, and thus suggested not only a change in her status but also patriarchal power over her.

In *Turandot* itself, just as in the Grimms' fairy tale of Rumpelstiltskin, the revelation of a person's name is a source of power over the person. This is as true of Turandot as of Calaf, for Turandot's name is the answer to the third riddle, which gives Calaf his victory. However, in *Turandot*, naming is an act of transformation for both namer and named. Calaf's revelation of his name transforms him in her eyes. Turandot's own transformation is confirmed by her act of renaming Calaf. In her final words Turandot does not say that she does not know the stranger's name. Rather, she says that she does know it—it is Love.

If the recurrent metaphors of *Turandot* are metaphors of power and the reversibility of power, it is not surprising that the dramatic problem in *Turandot* is yet another variant of this theme. Both Turandot and Calaf are, paradoxically, captives of their own power. Each is enslaved by his or her own mastery. Turandot has been blessed with the ability to pose virtually unsolvable riddles, and the power to execute those who do not solve

83. This is a symmetry not found in Gozzi's play: there Adelma attempts to kill herself in despair after Turandot agrees to marry Calaf; her status as slave does not lead to a victory over her mistress. Moreover, unlike Liù, she does not succeed in killing herself.

84. Libretto, *supra* note 11, at 92.

them to her satisfaction. She uses her power to avoid submission to men. Nevertheless, Turandot's oath comprehends that she will agree to marry a man with superior power.

The theme of the powerful woman who will submit only to a more powerful man is familiar. It is found in the legend of the Amazons and in the story of Atalanta and the three golden apples. But Puccini's *Turandot* is significantly more complicated psychologically. For Puccini's princess cannot accept a more powerful lover unreservedly. This is the point of *In questa Reggia*. The subordination of women consists precisely in their submission to men of greater power. Princess Lo-u-ling was seized and murdered by such a man. If any man emerged with clearly superior power to her own, Turandot would not accept his authority willingly. Rather, she would merely feel enslaved. As she tells Calaf, "*Dell'ava lo strazio non si rinnoverà!*"—"the torment of my ancestress will not be renewed!"⁸⁵

This complexity distinguishes Turandot from the myths of the Amazons and of Atalanta, for in these tales the heroine voluntarily submits to the man who demonstrates his greater power. Turandot's abhorrence of submission to greater power places her in a double bind. A less powerful man who could not solve Turandot's riddles is unworthy of respect and therefore must be destroyed. Yet a more powerful man who could solve these riddles would simply begin the process of subordination anew. This tension in Turandot's character is present from the beginning—but it emerges clearly only when the fateful day arrives and Calaf outwits her. Turandot is thus torn between love and hatred for Calaf. This important psychological dimension of her character is made clear in her aria *Del primo pianto*—an aria, which unfortunately, is often omitted from performances of the opera:

[F]oreigner, when you arrived,
with anguish I felt
the fatal shudder of this supreme illness!
How many men have I seen turn pale,
How many men have I seen die for me!
And I scorned them
but I feared you!
You! Only you!
There was in your eyes the light of heroes!
There was in your eyes the proud certainty. . .
And I hated you for that. . .
And for that I loved you,
tormented and torn between two equal terrors:
to conquer you or to be conquered. . .⁸⁶

85. *Id.* at 105.

86. *Id.* at 107.

Calaf's dilemma of power is symmetrical to Turandot's. Calaf proves himself in the first and second acts to be as brave, audacious, and resourceful as any princess could hope for. Yet the more powerful he shows himself to be, and the more easily he outwits Turandot, the less Turandot can bring herself to accept him. Thus, even his seemingly gracious offer to undergo yet another trial is actually a confirmation of his superior power and Turandot's ultimate submission to (in her view) sexual slavery. The message that Calaf conveys, if not by his words then by his deeds, is clear: it does not matter what contest we choose, I will defeat you. And this is the precisely the message that Turandot most fears. On the other hand, Calaf dare not show weakness by failing to succeed at any trial Turandot sets for him. For example, he could not simply throw the contest by deliberately missing one of the riddles, for then he would have proved himself to be weak, and therefore unworthy of Turandot. Then she must kill him. In short, Calaf is also in a double bind—he can only prevent his death by demonstrating his superior power—the very power that will prevent Turandot from loving him unreservedly.

In the second (revised) Alfano completion, the opera does not give a satisfactory solution to this dual dilemma of power and powerlessness. Calaf's revelation of his name seems unmotivated; Turandot's change of heart even more so. Nevertheless, there is a more satisfactory interpretation which recognizes the fundamental paradoxes of *Turandot*—the powerlessness of power, and the power of powerlessness. To develop this interpretation fully, we must replace the portions of the libretto that Toscanini discarded when he required Alfano to revise his completion. These lines, which Puccini regarded as "just what was needed and what I had dreamed of,"⁸⁷ are the key to the Riddle of *Turandot*. I have placed the restored lines in italics so that the reader can compare the full libretto with the truncated text produced by Toscanini's edits:

THE UNKNOWN PRINCE
(with feverish impetuosity)

My mystery! I no longer have any! You're mine!
You who tremble if I touch you!
You who pale if I kiss you,
can destroy me if you wish!
I give you together my name and my life:
I am Calaf, son of Timur!

TURANDOT
(at this unexpected and unforeseen revelation, as though at a
stroke, her wild and proud spirit is fiercely restored to her)

I know your name! . . . Your name! . . .

87. Letters of Puccini, *supra* note 13, at 325 (No. 239).

*I am mistress of your fate . . .
 I hold your life in my hand . . .
 You have given it to me . . . It is mine . . . It is mine!
 Mine more than my throne, more than my own life!*

CALAF

(dazed in intoxicated exultation)

*Take it then! Death is also beautiful!
 Put me to death! Put me to death!*

TURANDOT

(with growing, feverish excitement)

*It is dawn! It is dawn!
 My crown-girt brow
 must no longer bow before you!
 I know your name! Ah!*

CALAF

My glory is in your embrace!

TURANDOT

Hear! The trumpets blare!

CALAF

My life is your kiss!

TURANDOT

Lo! It is the hour!
 The hour of the trial!

CALAF

I don't fear it!

TURANDOT

(drawing herself up to her full height, regally, dominating)

Calaf, come before the people with me!

CALAF

You have conquered!⁸⁸

The omitted portions of the libretto significantly change the psychological portraits of Turandot and Calaf. When Calaf proclaims to Turandot that he no longer has any mystery, he renounces his power over her. He reveals his name, thus destroying his mystery and his mastery. Significantly, although Turandot has not yet renamed him, the libretto has. Before this passage, he is known simply as "The Unknown Prince."

88. Libretto, *supra* note 11, at 107-08.

From this point on, he is called Calaf. This renaming is an important event both in the libretto and in the opera.

Equally significant is Calaf's offer of his own death. Calaf risks death three times—once in each act of the opera. In the first act, he risks his life by sounding the gong and undergoing trial. After solving the third riddle, of Turandot's name, the chorus argues for Turandot's compliance because he has risked his life for her. When she refuses, Calaf risks his life a second time, posing the riddle of his own name and thus offering Turandot a chance to even the score. When she cannot, she is defeated even more soundly. (Significantly, the instrument of her defeat is Liù, the slave girl, the symbol of masochistic femininity.) Here, in the third and final act, Calaf turns the tables yet again. He risks his life a third time. But this is not the same risk he took before. For now he does not take a risk whose outcome is within his control. He does not rely on his talents either for solving or for posing riddles. Rather, he takes a risk through *surrendering control*—by doing the opposite of what had produced success for him in the past.

The omitted lines of the libretto reveal this crucial difference. Without these verses it appears that Calaf offers Turandot his name because he already senses that he has won her. Yet this interpretation makes Turandot's final choice not her own at all. The omitted verses suggest instead that Calaf's action is a deliberate surrender of power as a sign of love. It is not simply another in a series of masterful and daring moves. By surrendering power, he makes it possible for Turandot to accept him, because he creates an important symmetry with the surrender of power he asks of Turandot.

This brings us to Calaf's kiss. The kiss is still crucial to the action, but not in the way one normally thinks. The kiss represents not conquest, but the surrender of the self to another without certainty of reward. The kiss is simultaneously erotic and transformative. But its erotic significance is of a very special nature—the kiss represents love as surrender or absorption of the self into a larger unity. Nevertheless, the kiss cannot change Turandot completely until Calaf also willingly offers a symmetrical sacrifice—his own life. The theme of love as surrender and loss of self is the more optimistic version of Puccini's recurrent equation of love and death, for death also involves, albeit more drastically, a loss of self.⁸⁹

89. This suggests an important connection between the three riddles of Turandot and the story of the three caskets in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. The correct casket—the one containing Portia's picture—bears the motto that he “[w]ho chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.” W. Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, act II, scene 6, line 16; act II, scene 9, line 20. The equation of love and death is also a recurrent thematic element in *The Merchant of Venice*, as in much of Shakespeare's other work. According to the play, if the suitor fails to choose the correct casket, the suitor must promise never to marry—a form of death in that one will have no legitimate heirs, that is, heirs who bear one's name. Although a full discussion is beyond the scope of this essay, there are many other common themes in *Turandot* and *The Merchant of Venice*, including the opposition of law and mercy. The comparison of Portia to Turandot is especially striking; although she also poses

The above interpretation suggests that the Riddle of *Turandot* is not what everyone assumes it to be—the question how and why Turandot changes. This is the wrong question to ask. The real issue in *Turandot* is not Turandot's transformation, but rather the transformation of the hero, Calaf. Turandot changes because Calaf changes. Thus, if we seek to know the source of Turandot's transformation, we must look to the transformation of the Unknown Prince. At the beginning of the opera, Calaf is heroic but volatile and impetuous. When he first hears of the execution of the Prince of Persia, he wishes to curse Turandot. Then, at a single glance at the princess, he is smitten with twin desires—the desire for Turandot, and the desire for power. He equates these two explicitly, for as he tells his father Timur, he seeks “[t]o conquer gloriously in her beauty.”⁹⁰

Calaf is supremely cocky, supremely sure of himself, and singleminded in the pursuit of his desire. In Act III he shouts to Ping, Pang, and Pong: “Should the world collapse, I want Turandot!”⁹¹ When Calaf tells Turandot that he wants her ardent with love, the chorus calls him what he in fact is: brave and bold.⁹² Yet, as noted above, this strategy is doomed to failure. If he fails, Turandot, in her pride, will show no mercy. She will merely look upon him as a weak, foolhardy individual. And if *she* fails, Calaf will have succeeded in gaining not her love but only her humiliation and self-abnegation. This is the meaning of *Del primo pianto*, which ends with Turandot's desperate words: “Don't desire a greater victory. Proud of such glory, Go. . . leave foreigner. . . with your mystery!”⁹³

If Calaf's revelation of his name at this point were simply one final audacious gamble, his character would hardly have changed. If the opera

riddles to her suitors, Portia is in many ways the inversion of Puccini's princess.

90. Libretto, *supra* note 11, at 75.

91. *Id.* at 100.

92. *Id.* at 96.

93. *Id.* at 107. The condition of Turandot at the moment of Calaf's revelation is significantly different in Puccini's and Gozzi's versions. In Puccini's *Turandot*, it seems quite clear that Turandot will lose. In Gozzi's *Turandot*, however, Calaf's name is revealed by the jealous slave Adelma, and therefore the entire contest is turned into a question of who is most crafty, Turandot or Calaf. In Gozzi's version, Turandot has never really lost, nor is she placed in the situation in which she finds herself in Puccini's version—confessing to Calaf her fears of him. Instead, Calaf tries to kill himself when his name is revealed, and Turandot, moved (for reasons quite unclear, since up to this point she has been quite unaffected by the sacrifice of her would-be lovers), allows him to live and to marry her. But this attempted suicide is a sign of weakness by Calaf, not one of strength. It looks as if Turandot is giving in to one who has already lost. To be sure, Gozzi's Turandot is impressed by his bravery, but many men before Calaf have been willing to die for Turandot. The entire scene is ultimately unconvincing.

On the other hand, Puccini's Turandot is, by the third act, reduced to utter helplessness. Turandot knows that she must submit like a slave, (as Liù would have submitted) but with this difference. Liù submits happily, because she can love knowing and accepting that she is a slave. (Indeed, this is how Liù dies, happily, knowing that she is serving Calaf). Turandot, now placed in the same situation as Liù—in and at Calaf's service—cannot submit happily. She cannot bear the idea of submission to the superior force, cunning, and strength of Calaf. Thus, Calaf's strategy has backfired, his victory is incomplete.

had ended in this fashion, we would indeed see that Calaf had learned nothing, that he had decided to gain Turandot's love by a superior force of power, or by humiliation, or by a false display of mercy. The seizure of Lo-u-ling would have been repeated, as the audacious Tartar would have again absconded with the Chinese princess. Yet Calaf's statement that "[d]eath is also beautiful"⁹⁴ shows that something very different is at stake. By asking to be put to death, Calaf is not demonstrating audacity. He is showing his acceptance of surrender and loss of control. Calaf finally forsakes the unrelenting pursuit of power. Not only does he give Turandot the power to control her own life, but also the power to control his. In other words, he offers her the possibility of domination—control of the other as well as of the self. "I hold your life in my hand," Turandot cries. "You have given it to me. . . . It is mine! Mine more than my own throne, more than my own life!"⁹⁵

Turandot accepts the second power Calaf offers—the power to control her own life—but she rejects the first. She is no longer interested in repeating the same mistakes that she believes generations of men have made before. Yet Turandot's change, her rejection of male visions of power and domination, comes about only because Calaf has made a similar renunciation. In this way he preserves and revivifies Turandot's self-worth, and returns to Turandot her characteristic pride. Calaf has thus solved Turandot's riddle by his act of surrender, evincing his transformation from the stubborn hero of Act I to the accepting lover of Act III.

In his study of the psychological meaning of fairy tales, Bruno Bettelheim remarks that the tale of solving riddles is a metaphor for mastery of difficult tasks, learning life's lessons, and gaining maturity. Symbolically, solving riddles leads to marriage and gaining the kingdom. Bettelheim sees the three riddles of *Turandot* as an example of this phenomenon:

Solving the riddle posed by a particular woman stands for the riddle of woman in general, and since marriage usually follows the right solution, it does not seem farfetched that the riddle to be solved is a sexual one: whoever, understands the secret which the other sex presents has gained his maturity. But while in the myth of Oedipus the figure whose riddle has been correctly solved destroys itself and marital tragedy follows, in fairy tales the discovery of the secret leads to the happiness of both the person who solved the riddle and the one who posed it.⁹⁶

We might carry Bettelheim's analysis a step further. In the final duet, Calaf has solved yet another riddle—the Riddle of Turandot, the Riddle

94. Libretto, *supra* note 11, at 108.

95. *Id.*

96. B. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* 128 (1976).

of Woman herself, which involves for him not simply mastery of skills but also growth and maturity. Thus, Calaf has finally learned that Turandot's love—clearly revealed in *Del primo pianto*—is not enough. She must love him willingly and happily, and this will never happen if she loves by reason of superior force or domination. Turandot must make an act of voluntary acceptance. But this requires that she also has some power over him as she agrees to the marriage. Only then does she accept Calaf, rather than submit to him, like a slave. Only then is she both different from Liù in her freedom while like Liù in her joy. And this suggests an answer to the Riddle of Turandot—Who is this Turandot, and what does she want? Turandot is Woman herself, and what women want is control over their own lives.

Yet to answer the Riddle of Turandot is also to understand the Riddle itself more clearly. For although the Riddle of Turandot appears on the surface to be merely another version of Freud's question—what do women want?—it has never wholly been a question about Turandot's—or any woman's—subjectivity. Instead, once the Riddle of Turandot is answered we can see that it has always been a question posed by men to themselves—a question about how mature relationships with women are possible. The Riddle of Turandot, once answered, is revealed as a riddle not so much about Turandot as about Calaf himself. It is the Riddle not of “what women want” but of what men should want to become in relation to them. For to answer this Riddle is to transform not the other, but the self.

VII

Before completing this reinterpretation of *Turandot*, we must consider the importance of the character of Liù. Several commentators have noted the dramatic problems produced by Liù's death. It is difficult to see how the opera can be thought to come to a satisfactory conclusion given that one of its most beloved characters dies. John Louis DiGaetani argues that the reason that Calaf does not seem to care much about Liù's death is that Puccini is making a statement about social class: he is asserting the superiority and necessary separation of the nobility from lower social groups.⁹⁷ Yet this explanation seems forced. It is hardly in keeping with the dominant themes of the opera—the continual reversals of power that each of the major characters must suffer. Nor is it consistent with the obvious attention Puccini devoted to this part. Puccini lavishes on Liù music which is, if anything, more beautiful than that given to Turandot herself. DiGaetani's suggestion also overlooks the importance of Liù as symbolic of Puccini's psychological equation of love and death, or erotic desire as

97. J. DiGaetani, *supra* note 75, at 39.

tragic guilt. Finally, Liù's death is quite moving to the people present on the stage. The masks, Ping, Pang, and Pong, abandon their sarcastic tone and express genuine sorrow. Nor are the crowd's penitent descriptions of Liù as "goodness" and "sweetness"⁹⁸ simply due to the fact that they fear that Liù will come back to haunt them later on.

Here again Bettelheim's work on fairy tales comes to our aid. Bettelheim argued that in many fairy tales, the hero or heroine is actually distributed among several characters, each of whom represents a different aspect or stage of the character. Bettelheim argues, for example, that in the story of *The Three Little Pigs*, the pigs should be regarded as one character who grows, develops, and learns from experience.⁹⁹ Thus, even though the Wolf eats the first two pigs, the eventual victory of the third and oldest pig still offers a satisfactory resolution to children. As Bettelheim argues, the child instinctively understands "that we have to shed earlier forms of existence if we wish to move onto higher ones."¹⁰⁰

Applying this insight to *Turandot*, we can see that there are really three heroines: Liù, Turandot before Liù's death and Calaf's kiss, and the Turandot who emerges after these events. Each represents different aspects of woman, and particularly, the different visions of woman in Puccini's unconscious. Liù represents the traditional self-sacrificing Puccinian heroine, while the earlier Turandot represents the avenging Mother figure. What Puccini sought in Turandot's transformation was a third vision of woman, one that would transcend the psychological conflict that occurs in almost all of his operas.

Liù's death, therefore, must be viewed as transfiguration rather than extinction. Liù dies, but she is born again, merging with the earlier character of Turandot to achieve a synthesis. There is some musical evidence of this in the score. Puccini gives both Liù and Turandot characteristic themes and melodic styles. One can see this by comparing Liù's big aria *Signore, ascolta*, with Turandot's *In questa Reggia*. Liù's music is lyrical and attractive, with a comparatively simple, pentatonic line.¹⁰¹ Turandot's music, on the other hand, is grand and impressive, but one could hardly call it pretty. It is rhetorical, declamatory music, deftly portraying the pride of the character who sings it. In the final scene with Calaf, however, Turandot's music, and in particular her aria *Del primo pianto*, is thematically different—neither like Liù's nor like the previous music given to Turandot. Unfortunately we do not have convincing musical proof of an intended transformation, because we have only Puccini's sketches for the

98. Libretto, *supra* note 11, at 104.

99. B. Bettelheim, *supra* note 96, at 44-45.

100. *Id.* at 44.

101. The pentatonic scale, as its name implies, has five notes (an example may be heard by playing the black keys on the piano). It appears both in Irish and Asian melody, and generally gives an aesthetic impression of simplicity and purity.

final scene of the opera. I would argue, however, that even if one takes into account Alfano's recomposition of the final scene, it seems clear that Puccini intended a "third style" in Turandot's final thematic material. Indeed, in my opinion the full version of Alfano's completion gains additional authority because it carries this idea forward, even if it is due in part to the accident of Alfano's different compositional technique.

It is not surprising that a composer so fascinated by women both in real life and in his operas should attempt in his final artistic achievement to resolve "the Riddle of Turandot"—of man's proper relation to woman—through the character of Turandot. This explains why the project took Puccini so many years to accomplish—for the Riddle of Woman was the major unresolved riddle of his life. Interestingly, the point at which Puccini stopped—with the final music for Liù, the last of Puccini's masochistic heroines—indicates that he had not achieved the psychological synthesis necessary to write the music, even though he had agreed to the content of the verses he would set. This failure cannot be fully blamed on the tardiness of the composition of the libretto. Puccini often composed his music before he received finished verses, and we know that he had been working on the music for the final duet literally for years.¹⁰² Rather, he was not able to achieve the final artistic synthesis in *music* before his death, even though his final letter to Adami makes clear that he understood intellectually what had to be done.

Moreover, the interpretation I have suggested, based upon the full text of the libretto—which stresses Calaf's offer of unconditional surrender to Turandot as the source of Turandot's transformation—is consistent with Carner's description of Puccini's dominant psychological tendencies. As explained above, Puccini's own "Riddle of Turandot" was a riddle about women—how to reconcile his ambivalent attitudes towards woman and achieve an understanding of woman's sexuality and hence, his own. But his psychological makeup prevented such an understanding and accommodation throughout his life, a tension that was continuous grist for his artistic mill. Puccini's identification of love and destruction required that erotic desire must be punished. Puccini thus unconsciously transferred the responsibility for his own erotic desires—and hence the punishment for his transgressions—from himself to his heroines. Thus, all of his female characters were either flawed objects of sexual attraction or unlovable agents of vengeance for sexual misbehavior. They must either be destroyers like Turandot or victims like Liù. An integration of Puccini's Mother image and other female rivals is never achieved. Thus, healthy relationships with women were not possible as long as all women had to be degraded in comparison to the image of the Mother. The ritual humiliation of the Mother image—in this case Turandot—is not an adequate solution

102. M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 487-88.

to the problem, for this simply transforms Turandot into one of Puccini's earlier heroines in a particularly unconvincing fashion.

In this, his final opera, Puccini dimly sees a way out of his dilemma. The male hero, Calaf must also undergo a symbolic death as punishment for his erotic desires. Thus Calaf says, "Take it [my life], then! . . . Put me to Death! Put me to Death!"¹⁰³ In other words, Puccini has stopped transferring his aggression from himself onto his female characters and finally accepted responsibility for his erotic desires. He is finally willing to accept "punishment" by offering himself (or rather his male substitute) for sacrifice. Although the avenging woman has the right to punish him, he is nevertheless accepted and the sacrifice is refused. Through an act of acceptance by Turandot (who now represents both aspects of woman), both lovers are permitted to survive. Thus, we can see in *Turandot* a slow integration of the two images of woman in Puccini's sexual imagination, an acceptance of responsibility for his sexuality and a gradual assuaging of unconscious guilt. Most important, we begin to witness Puccini's acceptance of woman as a moral agent worthy of love and respect and whose erotic attraction does not thereby justify subjugation and degradation. It is probably more than coincidental that the period of *Turandot* also marks the final reconciliation of Puccini with his wife Elvira after years of estrangement following his sexual escapades and the Doria Manfredi affair.¹⁰⁴ And his last words were about Elvira. On his deathbed, he is said to have told his stepdaughter Fosca, "Remember that your mother is a remarkable woman."¹⁰⁵

VIII

The reinterpretation of *Turandot* I have offered subverts the misogynistic origins of Gozzi's play and Puccini's opera and uses them against themselves. It emphasizes the paradoxes of power in *Turandot*, and views the message of the opera as antimisogynist: that the Riddle of Turandot, the Riddle of Woman—which is really the riddle of men about their proper relation to women—can only be solved by giving women control over their own lives. Nevertheless, I would be loath to end this essay with so uncomplicated an answer to the Riddle of *Turandot*. Although I believe that *Turandot*, rightly understood, has a feminist message, it is not an unambiguous one. The unresolved and uncompleted aspects of *Turandot* first attracted me to this work. It would therefore not be fitting

103. Libretto, *supra* note 11, at 108.

104. M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 187. In June of 1923, he wrote Adami: "Elvira and I are here, the two *ancêtres*, like two old family portraits frowning from time to time at the cobwebs which tickle us. We sleep, we eat, we read the *Corriere*, and with four notes in the evening the old composer keeps himself alive." Letters of Puccini, *supra* note 13, at 308 (No. 218).

105. M. Carner, *supra* note 17, at 187.

to close without leaving a few loose ends, or—more appropriately—a few riddles.

The foregoing interpretation of *Turandot* has assumed that *Turandot* is about two particular women, Turandot and Liù, and, by extension, about women in general. The Riddle of *Turandot*, therefore, is a riddle asked by men about what women are, what their needs and desires are, and how men should relate to them. But from another perspective *Turandot* is not about women at all. For Turandot and Liù are merely creations produced by the minds of men—they are portraits, or writings, or signs of women, rather than women themselves. In *Turandot*, we see first Gozzi, and then Puccini, writing women: making women play certain roles, act in certain ways, say certain things to fulfill the conscious or unconscious desires of their authors. We have already noted the role that Puccini's heroines seemed to play in his psychic life—his need to return continually to the submissive but flawed heroine who must be punished and even executed for her love. And Gozzi's *Turandot* performs an equally important role in the self-justification of the playwright's misogyny. By the end of Gozzi's play, Turandot has learned that while a woman (Adelma) has attempted to betray her, the male characters have all behaved heroically and self-sacrificingly. In the final speech of the play, the customary *licenza* of the *commedia dell'arte*, in which the main character asks for the audience's applause, Gozzi places the following words in Turandot's mouth:

Calaf risked his life for love of me. A faithful minister risked death to make his lord happy and successful. Another minister, to help his king, guarded the throne for his Sovereign. A weary old man was prepared to face death to save his son. And I have seen today a lady who I thought was my greatest friend betray me. Oh God, my former hatred of the male sex is beginning to vanish, and I ask your pardon for my former cruelty. Maybe men are not so bad after all. But please, please make some sign that you accept me and my repentance.¹⁰⁶

In both Gozzi's and Puccini's *Turandot* we see women constructed by the work of art. The women that Gozzi and Puccini create justify each man's view of women. Gozzi writes his *Turandot* so that she comes to understand that her misandry is folly; the collaborators of Puccini's opera (among whom we must include Toscanini) write (or edit) *Turandot* so that she believes Calaf's victory to be her own. Thus, to write about a woman is to ascribe a particular nature to her—and by ascribing, to inscribe that nature within her.

The theme of the Woman as Sign, as representational rather than real,

106. C. Gozzi, *supra* note 73, at 106.

occurs throughout the opera. In both Gozzi's and Puccini's *Turandot*, Calaf first learns of Turandot only by representation. He knows nothing of her but her fame, and yet he falls in love with her. What then has he fallen in love with, if not a representation or a sign? In fact, in Puccini's opera, Calaf is struck by Turandot's beauty when she silently condemns the Prince of Persia to death. From a momentary glance, he is moved to offer his life. Gozzi's version, although less dramatic, is even more interesting semiotically. Here Calaf is bewitched not by the momentary sight of Turandot, but merely by her portrait, a still more distant signification of her.¹⁰⁷ In Puccini's opera, Turandot does not even sing a note until midway through the second act. Before this, she appears only once—like a vision, the stage directions tell us.¹⁰⁸ Upon seeing this vision, Calaf is stunned—he covers his face with his hands.¹⁰⁹ And when he opens them, she is gone.

One might well ask why an artist with Puccini's keen dramatic sense would delay the appearance of the major character of an opera until it is almost half over. And yet, this absence, or deferral of Turandot, is a brilliant dramatic stratagem. Although Turandot is physically absent through much of the action, her influence is nevertheless felt throughout. We might contrast this with Liù, who is on stage for virtually the entire opera, but in no way dominates the meaning of events in the way Turandot does. The power of Turandot, the effects of her reign of terror and bloodshed, are perpetually displayed on the stage. The characters sing of little else. The somber atmosphere of the first act, the execution and the cries of horror and delight that burst from the crowd, all bear the traces of her handiwork. Even the ghosts of the slain suitors sing of her. "The darkness," Calaf cries at one point, "is scented with her perfume."¹¹⁰ Even while Turandot is absent, the signs of Turandot are everywhere.

Puccini's princess is a sign of a woman created by others, whom others fear, love, dread, and worship. And at the point the opera begins, Turandot has become a prisoner of these representations. She sees herself as what the crowd believes her to be—an ethereal princess of beauty and chastity, of death and revenge. She is an unattainable prize that all desire and none can possess. "I am no human thing," she tells Calaf. "I am the daughter of Heaven, free and pure . . .!"¹¹¹ Divorced from human existence, Turandot is pure symbol—an unending series of glosses upon glosses. Indeed, when Ping, Pang, and Pong attempt to dissuade Calaf from the trial, their final argument is that "*Turandot non esiste*"¹¹²—that

107. *Id.* at 52.

108. Libretto, *supra* note 11, at 73.

109. *Id.* at 74.

110. *Id.* at 77.

111. *Id.* at 105.

112. *Id.* at 78.

Turandot does not even exist—only the Nothingness and the void into which Calaf will perish. The masks argue that Calaf does not love Turandot herself, but only a sign or symbol which stands in her place. And Turandot herself has become only a sign, a symbol, a prize to men.

From this perspective, then, *Turandot* is about men's writing of women—not only how male authors construct women characters, but how real women are constructed through a different form of writing—the writing we refer to as culture. The Princess Turandot is a symbol of the Woman as Sign, an inscription perpetually written and rewritten by the male mind, itself an inscription, inscribed by others, and so on into eternity.¹¹³

In the course of this cultural writing by men, women themselves, like Turandot, are perpetually deferred. For to write about women is both to write about (concerning) women and about (around) women. To write around the subject, like talking around the subject, is to discuss it without getting to the heart of the matter. Yet writing about (around) woman also simultaneously conveys the sense of capturing by encirclement—of restraining, or limiting women, placing them within boundaries, at the same time that it misses what women are. The inscription of woman is also circumscription. Thus, to write about women is both to miss the point and to restrain, both to falsify and to limit. To write about women is, in short, to make women into something other than they are, that is, into signifiers in the language of men.

Moreover, the history of writing—of inscription—is also the history of conscription. We normally think of conscription as the writing down of persons called to service, as one would write down the names of military recruits. Literally, however, conscription means to write with—to use a person as an instrument of writing, as one would write with a pen. If men write about women to fulfill their fantasies (and fears) about women (as Puccini did) or to justify themselves (as Gozzi did) their inscription is at the same time a conscription, a use which may simultaneously subdue and oppress.

In one sense, the problem of signification is and should be a major concern of feminist theory. The subordination of women is sometimes blamed upon the process of "objectification"—the denial of separate identity or personhood of the woman. Objectification turns the woman into a thing used for sex. Yet the process of signification may prove even more pernicious.

113. Moreover men do not merely write about women. For by writing about women, they also write about themselves. They construct what women are, what they want from them, and therefore, how they as men should relate to them. Puccini's construction of women clearly mirrored his own construction of himself as the perpetual rake and philanderer—"Monsieur Butterfly," as Stanley Jackson calls him. S. Jackson, *supra* note 62. To create the role of one sex is to assign the role of the other. We must not forget, therefore, that this writing, this creation of successive glosses, works in several directions at once. Women write about men, thus constituting both men and women, and men write about women, constituting both women and men. What *Turandot* assumes, however, is a claim of male cultural hegemony—that the dominant writers in culture are men, and therefore that their construction of men and women predominates.

scious. For while objectification denies the personhood of the self, signification is the creation of *the self* through the process of writing. To constitute the self in a particular way (as spouse or mother, as self-sacrificing, submissive, or sexually receptive) may be a much more powerful and effective means of subordination.

If Turandot represents the Woman as Sign—written and rewritten until her essence is obscured and suppressed, it would be tempting indeed to see the play's happy ending as her transformation from signifier to signified—from the representations of men to the real woman who lurks beneath. Freed from the expectations of the suitors who desire her, the ministers who obey her, and the populace who fear her, she is finally able to recover her essence, to be what she truly is and seek what she truly desires. But attractive as this conclusion is, it is undermined by the very metaphor of signification which suggests it. For this interpretation assumes what has yet to be proved—that behind the writing and rewriting of woman, beneath the glosses and glosses upon glosses, we will find a real essence of the feminine. Yet this assumption does not contemplate that we may find instead only more writing, more glosses, more signs and significations, which point to no real essence of Woman, but only back upon themselves.

The notion of Woman as Sign created or written by men undermines our confidence that by solving the riddle of *Turandot* we have said anything at all about women's true needs or identity. What we experience in *Turandot* itself is not a woman, but only a series of representations of women created by men, and representations of those representations. Thus this essay, in particular, is a writing by a man about writings by another man, Puccini, based upon writings by still another man, Gozzi, about a character described as a woman and called Turandot. And in the process of this writing, we have never begun to speak of the woman herself—whether it be Turandot, Adelma, or Liù. We have only a series of signs perpetually and continually reinterpreted by other men.

But there is an even greater difficulty. My interpretation of *Turandot* assumes that women have a real nature—that when one strips away the glosses and significations that men have inscribed upon women, there is a true essence of personhood—Woman herself, whose desires we can know and respect. And yet, if culture is writing, if both men and women are perpetually written and rewritten by culture, how do we know that what I have presented is truly Turandot's victory, and not the victory of some written entity, to whom we have assigned the name "Turandot?" The riddle of *Turandot* arises anew: Who is this Turandot, that she should think herself victorious?

The riddle of *Turandot*, or of Woman herself, seemingly answered, now poses itself again in a different form: for it is now the question of the authenticity of women's self-understanding. If the character Turandot is

happy at the opera's end, is this because she is truly happy, or simply because she is a cleverly written character from the pen of Giacomo Puccini? And if women in the real world claim to be happy or subordinated, fulfilled or frustrated, is this because their true needs and desires have been acknowledged or disregarded, or is it because they too have been carefully written and rewritten by some greater and more powerful author? The ultimate riddle of *Turandot*, and of feminist theory, is the riddle of consciousness—a riddle which must, for the moment, remain unanswered.

