

## The Entanglement of Religion, Lust, and Power and Some Neglected Classical Sources in Puccini's *Tosca*

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*Roma, ne l'aer tuo lancio l'anima altera volante:  
accogli, o Roma, e avvolgi l'anima mia di luce  
e tu da i sette colli protendi, o Roma, le braccia  
a l'amor che diffuso splende per l'aure chete*

G. Carducci, *Roma*<sup>1</sup>.

Notwithstanding its actual and precise Roman setting<sup>2</sup>, *Tosca* (both in Sardou's<sup>3</sup> and Puccini's versions<sup>4</sup>) does not present any direct

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<sup>2</sup> In recent times this has been proved by Andrea Anderman's interesting production staged in the exact places and exact times described in the libretto (full credits at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0105625/>), regarding which see LASTER 1998. The German director A. Kluge defines *Tosca* as one of the most compact and effective operas: KLUGE 2012, p. 383. Moreover, the story is clearly in accordance with the famous Aristotelian canons, for the events develop within 24 hours in the same place.

<sup>3</sup> *La Tosca. Drame en cinq actes et six tableaux*, premiered at Theatre Porte St. Martin in Paris on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1887, text reprinted in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 1, Paris 1934. In spite of the terrific success enjoyed during his life, modern critical studies on Sardou are lacking. The gap has been filled by DUCREY 2007 and MOINDROT 2010.

reference to Ancient Rome or to classic models. There are only two – explicit and conventional – hints at classical antiquity, the first one sees a parallel between the darkness of present times and the Rome of the Borgias and of the Neros, and the other one in which Tosca's courage in murdering the 'tyrant' Scarpia is praised by Cavaradossi as similar to that of "ancient Roman heroines"<sup>5</sup>. Giacosa and Illica's successful and definitely improved abridged operatic libretto<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Affinities and differences between the two works have been recently outlined and discussed by BURTON 1995, pp. 36 ff.; BURTON 1996; VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998; CARNER 1985 has nowadays acquired the status of a classic; see also CSAMPAI – HOLLAND 1987; and, more recently, BURTON – VANDIVER NICASSIO – ZIINO 2005; the important chapter "*Tosca*: Roma tra fede e potere" in GIRARDI 1995, pp. 149-196 (quite useful for questions about the genesis of the work and insightful musical analysis). General studies of Puccini's life and work include CASINI 1978; BIAGI RAVENNI – GIANTURCO 1997; BUDDEN 2002; SCHICKLING 2003; BURTON 2012. Further bibliographical information is provided by FAIRTILE 1999, and by M. Girardi, in his webpage, [http://www-5.unipv.it/girardi/saggi/SP5\\_MG-RP\\_biblio.pdf](http://www-5.unipv.it/girardi/saggi/SP5_MG-RP_biblio.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Act 5, sc. 3: "Ah ! vaillante femme. Tu es bien une Romaine. Une vraie Romaine d'autrefois!". Act 3 sc. 2: "Dans cette ville, qui a conquis le monde, mais sur qui, le monde entier a pris la revanche de sa servitude... et que toutes les nations, à tour de rôle, ont assiégée et mise à sac; dans cette Rome des chrétiens et des barbares, des Nérons et des Borgias, de tous les persécuteurs et de toutes les victimes, il n'est pas, vous le savez, un vieux logis, qui n'ait son abri secret, contre le bourreau du dedans ou l'envahisseur du dehors..."; There are also references to those proscribed by Marius or to the persecuted Christians, when a few lines later, Mario offers Angelotti his villa as a refuge: "a quel esclave fugitif, à quel proscrit le Marius ou de Scylla (*sic*), à quel chrétien voué aux bêtes, ce réduit a-t-il servi d'asile?". VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998, p. 174, discussing this passage and recording Verri's *Notti romane* with the mention of the sepulchre of the Scipions, observes that it would be fascinating to think that Mario's suburban villa could be located there. That Sardou was inspired by some etchings of Piranesi is maintained by PERUSSE 1981.

<sup>6</sup> *Tosca. Melodramma in tre Atti. Musica di G. Puccini, libretto di L. Illica e G. Giacosa*, first performed at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome, on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1900. As is well known in the drastic reduction of scenes and minor characters, Giacosa and Illica (with substantial contributions from Puccini himself) obtained a much more effective and dramatic text than the original one, as already stated in a letter written by Giulio Ricordi to Puccini in October 1895, and willy-nilly acknowledged by Sardou himself (CARNER 1985, p. 49; KEEFE 2010, p. 19). Among the elements that contributed to enhancing the operatic version, which also benefits from skilled orchestration and effective directorial gestuality, one must surely include the different structuration of the spaces, which allows an effect of increased simultaneity and 'compactness' (part of Sardou's original second act set in Palazzo Farnese and staging the celebration for the supposed victory against Napoleon was transferred to

suppressed these two references, and the planned ‘inno latino’ in Act Three was –opportunistically– deleted as well<sup>7</sup>.

This almost total neglect of classical antiquity is surprising, if one considers that the Napoleonic era – as is well known, the narrated events take place on the very day of the battle of Marengo and this is mentioned twice in the libretto<sup>8</sup> – showed an extraordinary fondness for Roman traditions. The revival of Republican motifs had already begun during the French Revolution (and, in a parallel way, in the short-lived Neapolitan and Roman Republics of the years 1798-99), which soon also became endowed with a sacralization of space and symbols. Later on, and from a different perspective, the Napoleonic

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the Church in Act One; the entire Act Three, set in Cavaradossi’s suburban villa is only narrated; the blackmail scene in Act Four, set in Castel Sant’Angelo is transferred to Palazzo Farnese). A comparison between the two works and the (long and complex) genesis of the opera is provided by CARNER 1985, pp. 15 ff.; 46 ff.; SANTATO 1993, and most of all by BURTON 1995, pp. 292 ff. See also D’AMICO 2000, pp. 83-92; for the genesis of the score see BIAGI RAVENNI 2009; GRONDONA 2011; on the plot, PADUANO 1987; ALONGE 1988; more recently BUDDEN 2005; VANDIVER NICASSIO 2005a. On the two Italian authors of the libretto see NARDI 1949; MORINI 1961; BARSOTTI 1973; SERAFINI 1976; ALONGE 1998; ALONGE 2008; DORONI 1998; *Verso Tosca* 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Nuanced with neo-classical accents, this should have been part of the duet between Tosca and Mario, when they cherish their new life in Venice, after having escaped from Rome. Due to its highly rhetorical and artificial structure, however, the insertion of that passage would have weakened the entire structure and therefore its final suppression can be considered a welcome intervention: “-- Esultanti / Diffonderan pel mondo i nostri amori / Armonie di colori / ed armonie di canti / -- La patria è là dove amor ci conduce / per tutto troverem l’orme latine / e il fantasma di Roma! / -- E s’io ti veda / Memorando guardar lungi nei cieli / Gli occhi ti chiuderò con mille baci / E mille ti dirò nomi d’amore / Finché al dolce richiamo / Fatto oblioso tu risponda / Io t’amo ... / Assai più dolci musiche / Mario, il mio labbro esprime. / D’ogni diverso popolo / So le amorose rime / La mia canzone aduna / Come serto di fior, / le nenie della cuna / e gl’inni dell’amor / Risuona ogni tuo palpito / com’arpa eolia al vento / ogni pensier d’armonica / corda è soave accento. / Latin sangue gentile / Ben ti solleva il cor. / In te, qual novo aprile / Canta ed olezza Amor! ... / Amanti sognanti / Per plaghe fiorite / Le nostre due vite / Sian piene d’incanti / -- Sta la mia sorte / Nella tua sorte / E varcherem gli oceani / Sotto mai visti cieli / E saliremo i culmini / Aspri di eterni geli / M’avrai del pari a parte / Della vita e dell’arte / Ci sarà talamo / Guizzante gondola”. For further information, see GIRARDI 1995, p. 160; BIAGI RAVENNI 2009, p. 34, and, most of all, GILLIO 2005; GRONDONA 2011, p. 153.

<sup>8</sup> See FORMICA 1994 (an abridged version is published as FORMICA 2005); KLEINE AHLBRANDT 2005.

Empire itself showed particular concerns for retracing its roots in the Roman Empire<sup>9</sup>.

Together with a general reconsideration of various suggestions that emerge from the plot, this paper aims at outlining some classical reminiscences that have virtually been neglected in modern interpretations<sup>10</sup>. Whereas the actual historical characters that lay behind the figures of Floria Tosca, Baron Scarpia, Mario Cavaradossi and Angelotti were revealed by a thorough documentary analysis by Deborah Burton<sup>11</sup>, it is possible to go further and highlight other reminiscences behind the plot, which surpass the most immediate parallels already detectable in earlier or contemporary operas, such as

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<sup>9</sup> The survival of ‘Roman’ imagery during the age of the French Revolution and that of Napoleon has been perceptively investigated by CAFFIERO 2005, and previously by MARTIN 1983; RASKOLNIKOFF 1983; CHEVALLIER 1992; HUET 1999. In more general terms, see BONDANELLA 1987. The thorough analysis by VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998 is specifically concerned with *Tosca*. The same author dealt with Napoleonic Rome in another insightful book, namely VANDIVER NICASSIO 2005b.

<sup>10</sup> See the notable exception of CONATI 2005, who mentions Shakespeare and the Italian popular songs (even though I am not entirely convinced by his mention of the myth of Alcestis as a probable model).

<sup>11</sup> BURTON 1993-94. According to Burton, in depicting his characters Sardou took inspiration from some actual figures, whose names he slightly modified, as in the case of Liborio Angelucci, the Roman physician and ‘liberal’ intellectual appointed as consul of the Roman Republic in 1798 (cf. DE FELICE 1961); this suggestion is already hinted at in CARNER 1985, p. 63. Similarly, Scarpia is an anagram of the nickname ‘sciarpa’, given to Baron Gerardo Curci, a general serving the Bourbons, recorded among contemporary liberal historians as a villainous, greedy and bloodthirsty counter-revolutionary; but his character also entails some features of the infamous Vincenzo Speciale, the judge who sentenced to death all those involved in the fallen Republic of 1799, some whose deeds, recorded by Vincenzo Cuoco, come very close to a handful of episodes in the drama (according to VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998, p. 118, Scarpia is instead exemplified on the Roman governor Diego Naselli, who later would have been appointed viceroy of Sicily). In Burton’s reconstruction, Cavaradossi is modelled on some actual painters like Joseph Chinard and Giuseppe Ceracchi, both of whom had Jacobin sympathies: the latter, well acquainted with Angelucci, even died in prison, after having attempted to assassinate Napoleon. Tosca has the traits of the famous singers Angelica Catalani and Celeste Coltellini (the latter’s surname hinting at the knife used to stab Scarpia). My only concern about this, otherwise excellent, inquiry is when Burton tentatively suggests that the name of Floria Tosca (whose Veronese origin might derive from the local patron, Saint Tosca) displays an oxymoron, pointing out that the Italian word “tosco” means poison. I would suggest, that, if Sardou actually took inspiration from the singer Celeste Coltellini (in whose name another oxymoron must be detected), as maintained by Burton, the reference to Tosca would be even more precise, as Coltellini was born in the Tuscan city of Leghorn.

*Il Trovatore*, *La Gioconda* or *Andrea Chénier*<sup>12</sup>, not to mention another notable characteristic of late nineteenth-century melodrama, that is the love triangle consisting of a young lady (usually of lower status) pursued by a male character of “higher status and dubious intentions, a figure of aristocratic, erotic, financial, and social power”, who rivals a younger and more honest lover<sup>13</sup>.

A key indication about the sources is provided by Sardou himself, when he had to defend himself from the charges of having plagiarized the contemporary drama *Nadjedza* written by Maurice Barrymore<sup>14</sup>: Sardou (who was not new to accusations of plagiarism) explained that he had found inspiration in nothing else but an episode which had really occurred in sixteenth-century France, namely that of the (Catholic) Contestable of Montmorency who promised to release the jailed husband of a (Protestant) woman, provided that she had sexual intercourse with him<sup>15</sup>.

Whether Sardou invented the story to justify himself or really took inspiration from it, it is nonetheless true that historical or literary antecedents for such a “crime in double violation, of sacred chastity and of promise-breach”<sup>16</sup> are almost countless. Indeed, this also appears to be a common motif in popular tales or songs from both East and West<sup>17</sup>. Among them a special place is held by the ballad

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<sup>12</sup> I wonder whether in Rossini’s *Ermione* Andromaca’s decision to marry Pirro against her will but to ensure her child’s safety can be included in the same category. The opera, however, takes a quite different direction and the finale does not present the same schema envisaged in the aforementioned stories.

<sup>13</sup> For a useful discussion see CHAMPAGNE 2015, who relies on CAWELTI 1991.

<sup>14</sup> The vicissitude is reconstructed in COHEN-STRATYNER 1988; see also MOORE COLEMAN 1965. Even before Barrymore’s attack, Sardou had been accused in 1887 by Ernest Daudet, whose drama *La Saint-Aubin* is also set on the day of the battle at Marengo and has a singer as its main character (CARNER 1985, p. 2-3).

<sup>15</sup> On plagiarism charges see DUFIEF 2007; for the present case see also ECCLES 1980.

<sup>16</sup> W. Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, Act 5, sc. 1 (see, *infra*, n. 21 and 27).

<sup>17</sup> See THOMPSON 1975, R 152, *wife rescues husband type* 316; K 1353, *woman deceived into sacrificing honor. Ruler promises to release her brother or husband but afterwards refuses to do so*; T 210, *faithfulness in marriage*; T 455,2, *woman sacrifices her honor*. For recurrence in Middle-Eastern literature and even in the *Talmud* see CORRÉ 1981, who quotes, among other examples, a proverb in Iraqi Arabic: “he has a sister who could release a condemned man”, meaning that if her brother were in prison, her beauty would be a satisfactory bribe for the official responsible; to the same scholar I owe the reference to a collection of tales compiled by the eleventh-century Jewish scholar from Kairouan entitled *The Delightful Composition after Deliverance*, in which a story deals with one Nathan de-Susitha,

about the young Cecilia and the police Captain<sup>18</sup>, which also became a source of inspiration for a short story of the German twentieth-century writer Paul Heyse<sup>19</sup>, not to mention some minor historical episodes parallel to the one referred to by Sardou<sup>20</sup>.

Indeed, the most immediate source for Sardou's plot might be retraced in William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, where the "monstrous ransom" theme<sup>21</sup> receives a definitive codification and intermingles with the theme of moderation and clemency in the controversial happy ending, thus becoming an actual and effective *speculum principis* (the "mirror" for a good ruler)<sup>22</sup>. Yet, it is very likely that Shakespeare modified an aspect already retraceable in George Whetstone's play *Promos and Cassandra* published in 1578,<sup>23</sup>

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who fell ill because of his unrequited love for a beautiful woman that was already married to an impecunious man. The opportunity for propositioning her came when the husband was imprisoned for debt and suggested that his wife should ask Nathan for a loan. The woman, however, appealed to his better feelings and succeeded in getting Nathan to repent and lend the money without expecting anything in return. Because of his overwhelming insane passion, Nathan became a true sage and a great master of virtue. Shorter versions of that story occur in the medieval French Jewish author R. Solomon b. Isaac, when commenting on the *Talmud*, tractate Sanhedrin 31b.

<sup>18</sup> This ballad is variously recorded throughout the whole of Italy: see NIGRA 1956; BRONZINI 1956, vol. 1, p. 457 f.; and, more recently, CANTALUPPI 2003; DEL GIUDICE 1995.

<sup>19</sup> *Der Kinder Sünde der Väter Fluch*, in P. Heyse, *Gesammelte Werke. Novellen, III*, vol. 6, Berlin, Herz, pp. 236-329 (I owe this reference to CARNER 1985, p. 2).

<sup>20</sup> For further elements in Italian folklore that can be connected to this story see the still excellent reconstruction provided by CROCE 1999, pp. 311 ff. Croce mentions similar episodes – having the same pattern of exemplary justice narrated in Summonte's *Historia di Napoli* – which happened at the beginning of the sixteenth century under the reign of Isabelle of Aragon (the story, however, has many legendary features and oral patterns). Analogous stories are recorded in German literature: SMITH 1972, with the mention of Melanchton's *Historiae Quaedam Recitatae inter publicas lectiones (Corpus Reformatorum 20, Braunsweig, C.A. Schwetschke 1854, p. 531.47)*, and other less known works, such as *A Life of Charles the Bold* by Renier Snoy (1467-1536); Jacques de Meyer's *Commentarii sive Annales Rerum Flandricarum Libri XVII* (Antwerpiae 1561); Pontus Heuterus' *Rerum Burgundicarum libri sex* (Antwerpiae 1584); more recently see TOMKOWIAK 2009.

<sup>21</sup> According to Mary LASCELLES' famous definition (1953, p. 7, with previous bibliography).

<sup>22</sup> On this aspect, see HOWARTH 1965; WATERS BENNETT 1966.

<sup>23</sup> Further discussion is provided by BUDD 1931; BULLOUGH 1968, pp. 399-530.

or in Giovan Battista Giraldi Cintio's *Epitia* (about 1573)<sup>24</sup>, a drama whose happy ending also envisages the question of *clementia*. In all these three works, the relationship between the prisoner and the virtuous woman is that of brother and sister, whereas earlier versions, such as that recorded in the *Philanira* by Claude Roillet of Paris<sup>25</sup>, present a more passionate love relationship, that of husband and wife, which is also preserved in Sardou's choice<sup>26</sup>. In addition, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French and English literature showed a particular fondness for the present motif, because of its prurient attraction and the multiple possibilities of articulating the two main lines of the sexual bargain and the non-fulfillment of the promise of sparing the prisoner's life: nevertheless, "popular or traditional versions can do little more than repeat the pattern; though they may amplify, they will hardly develop"<sup>27</sup>.

In addition to Medieval variations on the theme, probably inspired by the genre of morality plays, where adultery became a

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<sup>24</sup> See HORNE 1996. As is known, this tragedy had been (like many others) drawn on a story already narrated in the *Ecatommiti* (8,5); for this rewriting process and Giraldi's dramatic conceptions see MORRISON 1997. General considerations on late Renaissance tragedies are also provided by LUCAS 1984, while PIERI 1978 and HAGEN 2000, pp. 228 ff. (on the *Epitia*), emphasize the moral theme and the idea of mercy.

<sup>25</sup> BUDD 1930 also notes how Roillet deliberately ignores Aristotelian ideas on space and time unity, although largely relying on Latin authorities such as Horace and Seneca. See, more recently, MAURI 1989, p. 125-214.

<sup>26</sup> An interesting detail is provided by a poetical abridgement of the Tosca story, produced by W. Howgrave, *The Tragedy of La Tosca* (London, undated), where Tosca is depicted as the legitimate wife of Cavaradossi, not merely his lover.

<sup>27</sup> LASCELLES 1953, p. 7. For a long list of authors and works where the theme is variously presented see also the learned article by DELON 1987. Among the works where the theme recurs, Delon mentions Thomas Lupton's *Sivqila. Too good to be true*, 1580-81 (already quoted by Lascelles); Belleforest's *Histoires tragiques*; Simon Goulart's, *Histoires*; P. de Rapin-Thoyras', *Histoire d'Angleterre* (1749, X,593); John Pomfret's, *Poetical Works*; the theme is also developed by D. Hume, O. Goldsmith; Addison, in his fifth volume of the *Spectator* (Amsterdam 1721); François Xavier Pagès de Vivouze, author of a didactic poem (1780) entitled *Les passions ou la peinture du coeur humain*, where it is stated that "la beauté dans les larmes est toujours plus touchante"; Delisle de Sales, *De la philosophie de la nature* (1789, III,55); Diderot's lost or unfinished play, *Le commissarie de Kent*; M.me de Staël's *Considerations sur la Révolution Française* (1818, VI,2); one of Petrus Borel's *Contes immoraux* (Paris 1833), and, obviously, Sardou.

central issue<sup>28</sup>, an obscure episode from late antiquity has also been called into question, most of all because of the caustic reinterpretation provided by Voltaire. According to Augustine, *Sermo Domini in Monte* 1,16,50, who refers to this story when dealing with the liceity, if compelled by particular circumstances, of being unfaithful to one's own husband, at the time of Constantius, in Antioch, the local prefect Acyndinus<sup>29</sup> threatened to execute a debtor, unless he repaid his debt within the established terms. A rich man, who lusted after the prisoner's beautiful wife, offered to repay the debt provided that she spent a night with him. The woman, aware that her body was under the husband's *potestas*, replied that she was ready to consent, if her husband agreed. She then went to the rich man's house and slept with him. The man, however, deceived her and did not give her the gold he had promised, substituting it with a clod of earth. In turn, the woman appealed to the prefect and reported what she had had to suffer and the fraud of which she had been a victim. Only then Acyndinus realized his error in being too harsh with that debtor, decreeing therefore that the debt be extinguished at his own expence, the man be released and his faithful wife be granted the field from which that lump of earth had been taken.

If Augustine's mild judgment about the woman's conduct and his absolutory attitude resulted to a certain extent in a charge of laxism, "Voltaire, for his part, gladly exploited the story of the Antiochian woman in his *Contes philosophiques*"<sup>30</sup>: in *Cosi-Sancta* the story is retold in order to mock Jansenism and its too rigorist attitude, for a young woman, scion of a 'Jansenist' family from Hippo

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<sup>28</sup> COX 1983 maintains that the link between Augustine and Shakespeare is represented by morality plays.

<sup>29</sup> For the historical character of Acyndinus see JONES – MARTINDALE – MORRIS 1971, I, 11; BARNES 1992, assuming that he was a Christian (p. 253); juridical aspects are outlined by KNÜTEL 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Such is the attitude displayed by Pierre Bayle in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697, s.v. *Acyndinus (Septimius)*) and by Jean Barbeyrac in his *Traité de la morale des Pères de l'Église* (1728), while others took the bishop's defence (Charles Merlin, *Réfutation des critiques de Monsieur Bayle sur Saint Augustin* [1732]; or Rémi Ceillier, *Apologie de la morale des Pères de l'Église contre les injustes accusations du sieur Jean Barbeyrac*). For this information see DELON 1987 and PARTOENS 2013, from whom we derive the quotation. WADE 1958, p. 50, suggests that *L'Ingénu* should be dated before *Cosi-Sancta*, for Voltaire became acquainted with the Acyndinus story only after reading Bayle's *Dictionnaire*; in fact, he had earlier had in mind to stress only the "Ephesian matron" (with reference to Petronius) aspects implied in the story of M.lle Saint Yves.



Regius, *Cosi-Sancta* (a speaking name that means “so devout”) is worshipped as a saint for having rescued the lives of her husband, brother and son by sleeping on one and the same day with Acyndinus; explicit mention of Augustine is made in *L’Ingénu*, when a cunning Jesuit tries to persuade the beautiful Miss Saint-Yves to accept an indecent proposal in exchange for her fiancé’s release from prison<sup>31</sup>.

While Voltaire employed the story, in accordance with his cynical disenchantment and anticlericalism, a darker atmosphere is patent when considering how the Marquis of Sade rewrote the story, in the short novel *Ernestine* and in the *120 Journées de Sodome*. It is quite probable to surmise that Sade is Sardou’s most immediate referent, not only because the two authors were both French or because their chronology is much closer in time, but also because they share a strong insistence on gruesome, not to say ‘sadistic’, aspects, with a marked penchant for torture and bloody details, counterbalanced by a deep psychological investigation usually pursued by the wicked characters against the frailest (female) ones<sup>32</sup>. Sardou’s fondness for

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<sup>31</sup> See ch. 16: “Quatrièmement, vous avez des exemples dans la sainte antiquité qui peuvent merveilleusement servir à votre conduite. Saint Augustin rapporte que sous le proconsulat de Septimius Acyndinus, en l’an 340 de notre salut, un pauvre homme ne pouvant payer à César ce qui appartenait à César, fut condamné à la mort, comme il est juste, malgré la maxime: *Où il n’y a rien le roi perd ses droits*. Il s’agissait d’une livre d’or; le condamné avait une femme en qui Dieu avait mis la beauté et la prudence. Un vieux richard promit de donner une livre d’or, et même plus, à la dame, à condition qu’il commettrait avec elle le péché immonde. La dame ne crut point faire mal en sauvant son mari. Saint Augustin approuve fort sa généreuse résignation. Il est vrai que le vieux richard la trompa, et peut-être même son mari n’en fut pas moins pendu; mais elle avait fait tout ce qui était en elle pour sauver sa vie. ... Soyez sûre, ma fille, que quand un jésuite vous cite saint Augustin, il faut que ce saint ait pleinement raison. Je ne vous conseille rien, vous êtes sage; il est à présumer que vous serez utile à votre mari. Mgr de Saint-Pouange est un honnête homme, il ne vous trompera pas; c’est tout ce que je puis vous dire; je prierai Dieu pour vous, et j’espère que tout se passera à sa plus grande gloire”. See also MERVAUD 1984; STRUNZ 2000; ROSSO 1986, pp. 185-220 (with some references to *La Tosca*, p. 216).

<sup>32</sup> See the classic inquiry by BARTHES 1971, that outlines some patterns characterizing Sade’s work, such as the continuous insistence on luxurious food and repletion, mechanical and depersonalizing repetition of various acts, which contribute to amplifying the obsession of the reader. Other classical inquiries include BATAILLE 1957; DELEUZE 1967; MCKENDRICK 1999. For further references on Sade and related literature (increased on the occasion of the bicentenary of his death) see CAMPANILE 2015. Still worth quoting is M. PRAZ’s 1999, seminal chapter 3, *All’insegna del Divin Marchese*, where the scholar deals with Sade’s influence on

exaggeration and shocking effects was well known and he showed a certain pleasure in being nicknamed the “Caligula” of the contemporary theatre<sup>33</sup>, not to mention a well-known scandal such as that of the affaire Thermidor, in the aftermath of the representation of the eponymous drama and its violent attack on Robespierre<sup>34</sup>. At the same time, one must recall that the seventeenth-century French theatre was not devoid of a certain morbid attraction for plots implying a rape, where subjects such as sex are both titillating to the audience and fraught with social, religious, and ideological stakes; such an emphasis becomes even more blatant in nineteenth-century novels and poetry, where exaggerated cruelties and sadomasochistic motifs blend with Romantic languid atmospheres or Decadent meditations on death and frailness<sup>35</sup>. On the other hand, stylistic excesses and rhetorical amplification in a climax of eroticism, torture, rape, murder and suicide match the events themselves, as stated in a famous sentence by Roland Barthes:

“the Revolution was in the highest degree one of those great occasions when truth, through the bloodshed that it costs, becomes so weighty that its expression demands the very forms of historical amplification. Revolutionary writing was the one and only grand gesture commensurate with the daily presence of the guillotine. What today seems turgid was then no more than life-size”<sup>36</sup>.

If the mainlines of the “monstrous ransom” story are not attested in Greco-Roman literature, except for the aforementioned passage in Augustine, nonetheless I am inclined to surmise that some patterns of the plot and some features of the characters were inspired by themes that had already recurred in classical literature, probably via

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nineteenth-century ‘Gothic’ literature. The importance of classical antiquity in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus im Pelz* is outlined by FORMISANO 2017.

<sup>33</sup> PICARD 2007 reports some critical judgements on Sardou’s exaggeration. Strangely enough there were also some who blamed Sardou for a supposed “lack of passion”: DETHURENS 2007. VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998, p. 25, mentions Sardou’s “Neronic instincts”, by quoting a letter written to A. Castelli in 1898 and refers to the famous allusion to Caligula, already in CARNER 1985, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> POUFFARY 2009.

<sup>35</sup> See e.g. CLARKE 1996; ECKSTEIN 2012. For an exhaustive set of nineteenth-century samples see once again PRAZ 1999.

<sup>36</sup> BARTHES 1967, p. 21.

some Renaissance or Baroque adaptations, or thanks to the resemantisation they underwent during the French Revolution<sup>37</sup>.

Such is the case with Scarpia's death, which is a patent reinterpretation of the Roman tyrannicide, usually committed by stabbing the despot<sup>38</sup>. Furthermore, the fact that here is a woman who slays her aggressor, at the climax of an already truculent and excessive tale of murder, torture and rape, was surely meant to exhibit Sarah Bernhardt's celebrated histrionic talent, especially as far as pathetic roles and provocative stage effects were concerned<sup>39</sup>. At the same time, it (possibly) functions as a reprise of the theme of the Biblical Judith, who kills Holofernes to save her fellow-countrymen<sup>40</sup>, or as a sort of reversal of the example of Lucretia committing suicide to preserve her honour after being raped by Sextus Tarquinius, who had been inflamed by her undefiled chastity<sup>41</sup>, without forgetting that this imagery of a woman stabbing a 'tyrant' was revived by the famous episode of Charlotte Corday murdering Jean Paul Marat during the Terror<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> For a parallel case see CAMPANILE 2014.

<sup>38</sup> VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998, p. 218.

<sup>39</sup> See HUMBERT-MOUGIN 2007, p. 323 on the climax that precedes Scarpia's death, and, most of all, DUBAR 2007. Tosca is unanimously regarded as Bernhardt's interpretative masterpiece. Among the enthusiastic comments, it is worth remembering that of Pierre Louÿs, who exclaimed "Ah, Sarah! Sarah! Sarah is grace, youth, divinity! I am beside myself. My god, what a woman! ... When shall I see you again, my Sarah? I tremble, I grow mad! I love you!", or that of Willa Cather, who spoke of Bernhardt's art in terms of "dissipation, a sort of Bacchic orgy" (BURTON 2012, ch. 8); see also CAZAUX 2010; GURRIERI 2001.

<sup>40</sup> BARTHES 1995; VODRET 2010; BRINE – CILETTI – LÄHNEMAN 2010; POIRIER 2016. The theme of Judith is hinted at also in a thriller story by P. Pesaresi (see *infra*, n. 69), where Tosca is portrayed as Juditha Triumphans by her lover Cavaradossi

<sup>41</sup> For classical accounts and modern transformations of the story of Lucretia (Livy, 1,57-60), which intrigued, among others, Ovid, Chaucer, Botticelli, Cranach, Titian, Shakespeare, Giraudoux and Britten, not to mention Augustine's stern criticism), see DONALDSON 1982; on particular aspects, LEE 1953; BAUMAN 1993, on juridical aspects; MOORE 1993; BRIQUEL 2007, pp. 202-241 (on political implications and the institution of the Roman Republic); WEBB 2013; GLENDINNING 2013.

<sup>42</sup> See her classical portrait traced by MICHELET 1855; more recently, CORAZZO – MONTFORT 1994; MAZEAU 2009. It might be added that Charlotte Corday is depicted with her "holy dagger" in a poem by Frédéric Plessis, who was more or less a contemporary of Sardou: "Promise à de beaux jours dont sa vertu se prive, / Héroïne que font Plutarque et Tite-Live, / Ici vécut Charlotte avec un saint poignard; / Cette plaine, ces bois pleurèrent son départ": PLESSIS 1904, p. 360.

A reading of Scarpia as a kind of ancient ‘tyrant’ also opens new paths for retracing classical models implied in the plot – namely Senecan tragedies mediated by the Jesuit Latin theatre<sup>43</sup>, not to mention Latin historiography and oratory, where the theme recurs at greater length and is variously declined, in order to emphasize the arousal of emotions in the audience<sup>44</sup>; even the notion of sadistic pleasure seems somewhat foreshadowed in Seneca, *Epist.* 98,25, *quid enim est turpius quam captare in ipso luctu uoluptatem, immo per luctum, et inter lacrimas quoque quod iuuat quaerere?*

It seems worth remembering that Sardou, whose fondness for the historical theatre (from antique to contemporary subjects) is well known<sup>45</sup>, in his youth lived on private lessons of Latin and history, even though some exemplary episodes in Livy, Seneca, Plutarch or Tacitus would have been familiar to every cultivated man at the end of the nineteenth century<sup>46</sup>.

At the same time, Roman literature and history provide examples of dauntless women who did not hesitate to put their wealth and even their lives in jeopardy in order to rescue their husbands: if the famous example recorded in the long (although fragmentary) epitaph known as *Laudatio Turiae* was not known to Sardou, mainly because substantial parts of it were only discovered in 1898<sup>47</sup>, the

<sup>43</sup> See for example QUESTA 1999; TORINO 2007. Seminal hints had already been provided by Ettore PARATORE, for example in his collected essays (2011). See also ECKSTEIN 1999; BUSHNELL 1990; CETIN 2009-10. For reprises of Tacitus in twentieth-century literature see MALAMUD 2009.

<sup>44</sup> MANTOVANELLI 1984; MANTOVANELLI – BERNO 2011; DUNKLE 1971; LA PENNA 1979; LANCIOTTI 1982. On ancient tyranny, more in general, see DUNKLE 1967; LANZA 1977; CATENACCI 2012; VERSNEL 1990, p. 53; MORGAN 2003; TURNER – CHONG-GOSSARD – VERVAET 2010; CASANOVA-ROBIN – BOULÈGUE – LÉVY 2013; TURCHETTI 2013. Apart from rhetorical characterizations, the theme of a power that usurps the permitted limits is already in Cic., *Off.* 1,8,26; 1,14,43; 1,19,64.

<sup>45</sup> LUCET 2007. For antique, Medieval and Byzantine imagery see VICTOROFF 2007; DUCREY 2004 and 2005.

<sup>46</sup> MOULY 1931, pp. 18ff. and 71; Mouly also mentions a planned translation of Erasmus’ *Colloquia* and some critical remarks about the Jacobins, whose culture was based on reading Tacitus and Plutarch (p. 91 and 39 respectively); cf. also the collection of Greek and Roman classics mentioned as n. 619 and 620 in the *Catalogue de la Bibliothèque de Feu M. Victorien Sardou*, Paris 1909; on classical and rhetorical culture in nineteenth-century France see COMPAGNON 2007.

<sup>47</sup> On the *Laudatio Turiae* (ILS 8393, plus some other fragments edited by GORDON 1950) see MOMMSEN 1905, pp. 395-421; DURRY 1950; WISTRAND 1976; FLACH 1991; HEMELRIJK 2004; some analysis and commentaries in SORACI 2013; OSGOOD 2014; and, most of all, FRANCO 2016.

French dramatist was surely aware of similar vicissitudes recorded in literature, with the recurring pattern of a woman kneeling and pleading in front of a wicked, powerful and usually unyielding man, who, in doing so, borders on impiety insofar as neglects the religious value of a plea: a remarkable example is that of Servilia (Barea Soranus' daughter) in Tacitus, *Annals* 16,30-33, who even offers Nero some jewels in order to rescue her father, as does Tosca in the midst of Act Two. Furthermore, it is possible that Sardou took inspiration from other, more or less legendary, vicissitudes of exemplary women, with a strong emphasis on (and intertwining of) politics, violence and love<sup>48</sup>, all passages where a delict foreshadows a crucial turn in historical events: the lamentable fate of Virginia, who was killed by her father to avenge her dishonour and to overthrow the regime of the Decemvirs<sup>49</sup>; the “memorable deed” of the Galatian queen Chiomara, who, after her rape at the hands of a lascivious Roman centurion, finds the courage to instruct one of her servants to kill the seducer and succeeds in doing so<sup>50</sup>; the story of Sophonisba, who drinks a poison sent by her husband so that she cannot be prey of the Romans – an episode in which Scipio, notwithstanding his celebrated continence, ultimately achieves his scope of annihilating an enemy<sup>51</sup>.

Identifying such influences could also help in shedding light on a complex work, which, in spite of a simple structure and of shocking moments, is one of the most emotional and beloved operas and is still able to attract audiences and critics or to inspire new approaches. Yet, *Tosca* is not easy to decipher, because of its constant

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<sup>48</sup> ADAM 1994 provides an interesting analysis of most of these passages, and, while noting that the insistence on terms like *sanguis/cruor* and cognate words pertains more to poetry than to prose, he nonetheless adds that Livy shows some fondness for episodes in which the traditional patterns of Sadism appear, namely violence, sex, humiliation, etc.; see also MALISSARD 1990; SANTORO L'HOIR 2006. More specific secondary literature is cited *infra*, n. 100.

<sup>49</sup> Liv., 3,44 ff., with the remarks of MOORE 1993.

<sup>50</sup> Liv., 38,24, from where the expression *facinus memorabile* is derived. See CAMPANILE 2020, who also hints at the reprises of the story in baroque theatre.

<sup>51</sup> For this interpretation see ADAM 1994. As a further example of Livy's “sadistic attitude” the same scholar also remembers Liv., 39,42-42, a passage in which prisoners are killed during a banquet so as to satisfy and to excite the participants (some of whom are women). A reading of book four of Appian's *Civil Wars* in which episodes from the proscriptions in the aftermaths of the war between Antony and Octavian did not provide any comparable examples.

dichotomies, the first of which is the one between truths and lies, among which the simulated execution of Mario and the fake news of the Austrian victory at Marengo play an essential role. The main character herself is a singer and an actress, that is a profession where fiction and pretence become crucial, yet, according to Scarpia, part of her sex appeal lies in her status as a diva. Although Puccini (and Sardou before him) researched the ambiance and the times most scrupulously in order to ensure historical accuracy, insincerity dominates the entire plot. “The opera’s principal events are structured around a series of deceptions that intensify in dramatic power and *have* consequence over the course of the work”, surpassing the mere dialectic between truth and representation, and displaying a deliberate confusion between different plans, such as religion and stardom, passion and theatrical fiction<sup>52</sup>. At the same time it seems that behind the real patina of historical times and the attempt at constantly relating the current events of the play to history<sup>53</sup>, especially in the opera the characters function much more as a “portmanteau of cultural icons”<sup>54</sup> thanks to a conscious suppression of historical details<sup>55</sup> or to an intended alteration of likelihood, such as in the setting at Palazzo Farnese or in the case of Mario’s torture<sup>56</sup>. Throughout the entire work

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<sup>52</sup> WILSON 2007, p. 69; BURTON 1995, p. 48; PADUANO 2004. In terms of comparison, see the useful conclusions put forward by POMEROY 2006, who argues that theatre and theatre imagery are an alienating device that becomes part of Tacitus’ agenda as the spokesman of Senatorial historiography.

<sup>53</sup> VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998, p. 54 ff. deals with the erudition implied in quotations such as the mention of Jean Louis David (considered the master of Cavaradossi), or Rousseau’s *Nouvelle Héloïse* to demonstrate Cavaradossi’s political ideas. It is worth recalling that in Sardou some historical characters play a short role as well: Queen Maria Carolina of Naples (only alluded to in a brief passage in the operatic libretto: “Ma è fallace speranza... la Regina farebbe grazia ad un cadavere!”) and the composer Giovanni Paisiello, author of the cantata meant to celebrate the presumed victory of Marengo.

<sup>54</sup> VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998, p. xvii. She also outlines this ambiguity by labelling Tosca as an “historical active opera” (p. 2).

<sup>55</sup> BURTON 1995, pp. 45 ff.

<sup>56</sup> In Sardou’s drama the scene took place in Castel Sant’Angelo. For this different setting see VIALE FERRERO 2010; VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998, pp. 181 ff.; the same scholar observes that, according to the en-force laws, Mario would only have risked exile, not capital punishment. It should also be noted that Palazzo Farnese, although in possession of the Bourbons, never hosted the police quarters: thus, it is possible to surmise that Puccini modified the setting and mixed the original Act in order to create a more pompous setting. According to ALONGE 1996, this setting creates a space where languid music, sexual pleasure and groans all converge.

there is also a strong insistence on the dialectic between sacred and secular: this acts as a backbone of the story, even though the opposition between angelic and devilish elements outlined by Burton is somewhat forced or excessive<sup>57</sup>. Further dichotomies, sometimes referred to as “Manichaeic elements”, that structure the backbone of the plot are also posited in the tension between organized religion and the values of the Enlightenment embodied by Scarpia and Mario respectively, but also in Tosca’s sensuality coexisting with her sincere religious faith (which, in turn, is the direct opposite of Scarpia’s pretension), as well as in her role of a woman standing at the crossroads of politics and desire<sup>58</sup>.

From a genuinely musical perspective, one likewise also perceives a persistent alternation – namely between some aspects that border on trivial and trite features, together with the amplification of realistic patterns<sup>59</sup>, which should model “grand-guignolesque” effects in the original<sup>60</sup>, and solutions perfectly fitting in the Decadent trends<sup>61</sup> that are to be praised for their bold novelty, such as the skillful employment of *Leitmotive*, among which the most famous example is the notorious reuse of the three descending major triads (B-flat; A-flat; E) chord, culminating in a diminished fifth usually

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<sup>57</sup> BURTON 1995, pp. 49 ff.

<sup>58</sup> CHAMPAGNE 2015, p. 103.

<sup>59</sup> DÖHRING 1984. For a negative evaluation of *Tosca*’s musical aspects (summarized in Gustav Mahler’s famous critical judgement in a letter dated 1903) see, among others, KERMAN 1988, who in the very introductory section openly dissents from the general positive judgement and reevaluation provided by Mosco Carner; Carner, for his part, though criticizing some passages in Puccini, notes that the appreciation of a sanguine vigour in an artistic work can be perfectly compatible with aesthetic fulfillment. A detailed discussion and reevaluation of musical texture is provided at greater length by the detailed investigation of KEEFE 2010; BURTON 1995; GIRARDI 1995, who also recalls the early deep appreciation of the work on the part of cerebral composers like Arthur Schönberg and Alban Berg (in whose *Wozzeck* the dagger also plays a crucial role), and the judgement of F. D’Amico, who even considered *Tosca* as a forerunner of some Novecento masterpieces such as *Salome*, *Elektra* and *Wozzeck*. For the same kind of criticism towards Sardou see PICARD 2007, p. 282 f.

<sup>60</sup> The famous judgment on Sardou’s version expressed by G.B. Shaw, namely, “an old-fashioned, shiftless, clumsily constructed, empty-headed turnip ghost of a cheap shocker”, followed by the wish “Oh, if it had but been an opera”, is a good example of this attitude (see also DUBAR 2007, p. 292 and 300; the judgement appears in SHAW 1917, p. 300; repr. in LAWRENCE 1981, vol. 1, p. 911).

<sup>61</sup> See WEAVER 2005, pp. 289 ff.; Decadent patterns in the music find a correspondence in some passages of the libretto: SANSONE 1997.

known as *diabolus in musica* to characterize the overbearing presence of Scarpia<sup>62</sup>. This theme recurs in the very opening measure (according to a pattern that will be employed later on in Strauss' *Elektra* as well) and is repeated – with slight variations – twenty-seven times, even providing, thanks to an enharmonic exchange between A-flat and C-sharp, the realization of a major third, which is a usual pattern in sacred music (thus offering an allusion to bigotry).

One of the most successful aspects of the opera lies precisely in the metamorphosis of this character, as already suggested by many interpreters. On one hand, “Puccini did not give Scarpia the same degree of violence and frenzy as in the original”<sup>63</sup>, on the other hand, he became the key character and got a more wicked sadistic stature than in Sardou (where, however, his violence is mostly hyperbolic), thanks to the refinement of psychological skills and cunning ability, emphasized by musical structure<sup>64</sup>. This is shown, for example, in the

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<sup>62</sup> CARNER 1985, p. 346: “The essence of Scarpia – his ferocity – is caught at the opening of the opera in a musical image as astounding in its simplicity as it is graphic in suggestiveness ... It is, so to speak, musically inhuman; its evocation of a sinister and brute force derives from a harmonic progression of unconnected parallel chords based on the whole-tone scale”; BUDDEN 2002, p. 199, labels the motive as “an ideogram of villainy”; CASINI 1977, p. 528: “da un lato attribui a Scarpia soprattutto col motto di apertura (namely an elliptical sequence of tones and a tetrachord), ma anche nei motivi del secondo atto una fissità di natura melodica e armonica ... contro la quale si acutizza la variante dei motivi di Tosca e Cavaradossi”. GIRARDI 1995, p. 166, provides a detailed discussion, to which part of the present considerations are indebted. See also BURKE 2015. For other themes developed in the opera see the examples in GIRARDI 1995, p. 174 ff., who speaks of motif associations that articulate and comment the events; GENTRY 1998; PECCI 2010, according to whom the ‘Scarpia motif’ echoes some patterns of Palestrina’s *Stabat Mater* (especially in 1.46), so that bigotry is even more emphasized.

<sup>63</sup> CARNER 1985, p. 52.

<sup>64</sup> See, e.g., Tito Gobbi’s autobiographical souvenir in CARNER 1985, p. 81: “in Tosca I believe Scarpia is the key character. It is he who drives the action with almost demonic energy and expertise” (see also *infra* n. 92); CASINI 1977, p. 517: “da semplice capo della polizia, ricattato dalla regina di Napoli, quale appare nel dramma di Sardou, divenne arbitro supremo della vicenda, acquistando l’ambigua personalità del difensore incorruttibile della legge, e del corruttibile bigotto tormentato dalla concupiscenza. A tale complessità di Scarpia, molto più penetrante dell’emblematica immagine di Cavaradossi, si aggiunse la sequenza delle scene di tortura, di erotismo e di morte, nelle quali Floria Tosca è di statura pari a quella del persecutore. La morbosità scapigliata si collegava con il *décor* estetizzante: mutamenti decisivi nella struttura musicale pucciniana restavano così soddisfatti”. For other examples see VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998, pp. 117 ff. (Scarpia); 64 ff. (Cavaradossi).



famous deception of Tosca in the church by means of the fan, with an overt allusion to Jago's machinations (already in Sardou)<sup>65</sup>, or in the subtler sequence of opening and closing the windows at the very beginning of Act 2 when the cantata is played behind the scenes, in order that Mario cannot hear Tosca's voice<sup>66</sup>, which parallels the subsequent exclamation (directed to the woman) "aprite le porte che n'oda i lamenti"<sup>67</sup>; or, finally, the masterful idea of telling his cut-throats where to find the wanted Angelotti, just when Tosca is trying to convince her lover that she has kept the secret. Furthermore, the centrality of Scarpia's role is responsible, I suppose, for the unquestionable feebleness of Act Three, caused by his death and obvious absence from the stage, except for the recurrence, in some key points, of his musical theme, so as to demonstrate that his diabolical plan will be accomplished all the same<sup>68</sup>. In any case, Scarpia's mesmerizing appeal does not cease to attract further rewritings, thus providing another confirmation of Genette's famous thesis on second-degree literature<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> It might be noted that a suppressed passage in the libretto discussed by Grondona 2011, p. 31, presented Scarpia's further reflections: "Tosca! Il pittore è suo danno. Ella complice / forse? No, no – troppo è devota! Farla / complice mia piuttosto! Ella è gelosa".

<sup>66</sup> GRONDONA 2011, p. 43, suggests a parallel between this scene and the same effect in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, when Anna, Ottavio and Elvira arrive (disguised under a mask) at Don Giovanni's palace and hear a minuet that is being played when Leporello opens the door to invite them to join the feast.

<sup>67</sup> A. 2, sc. 4.

<sup>68</sup> For a similar interpretation of Act Three's intrinsic feebleness see also GRONDONA 2011, p. 143 and 146: "La mia presente disamina riguarda la fine dei melodrammi e non la conclusione dei singoli atti, verso la quale faccio un'eccezione solo per il secondo di Tosca, che – morto Scarpia – considero caso del tutto particolare". See also GIRARDI 1995, p. 163, with a perceptive comment about some similarities in *Angelo tyrant de Padoue* (Hugo's drama that inspired Ponchielli's *La Gioconda*), and 170 f. (musical analysis). CHAMPAGNE 2015, p. 102, notes: "that Tosca kills Scarpia yet ultimately fails to save Mario (or herself) is not evidence of her weakness or a suggestion that she is somehow to blame for her lover's death, let alone that her own suicide constitutes some kind of cosmic justice for her crime. For Mario would have died no matter what Tosca did. What her murder of Scarpia "accomplishes" is to remind us of the Manichean struggle between good and evil – in this instance, Tosca and Scarpia – and her suicide, the fact that life is often not fair".

<sup>69</sup> "Scarpia" possiede "un torbido *sex-appeal* che nessun "cattivo" dell'opera romantica si sognò mai di possedere" (D'AMICO 2000, p. 89). Among literary works that present a direct allusion to *Tosca* one can mention the brief cameo in Susan

One of the most successful ideas in the opera and a true innovation compared to Sardou's plot, the grand page of the *Te Deum* at the end of Act One immediately followed by another aria at the beginning of the next Act<sup>70</sup>, contributes to increasing his role and

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Sontag's fine historical novel *The Volcano Lover* (1993), where Scarpia appears approaching the female protagonist Lady Hamilton in a church in Naples; in the same year the young Italian writer Paola Capriolo published a short novel entitled *Vissi d'amore*, in which the diary supposedly written by Scarpia, in spite of enthusiastic criticism, reveals itself no more than a farfetched and clumsy series of stereotypes, unaware of any historical realm, with insistence on trivial eroticism just for the sake of titillating the reader. The Baron is also the protagonist of some thrillers written by another Italian author, Patrizia Pesaresi. Among the works that seem to have been inspired by *Tosca* one can also mention Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, where Mrs. Warlock, who has been deceived by a young anarchist, in the end kills her husband by stabbing him and then drowns herself from a boat: this suggestion, which I do not find fully persuasive, however, is put forward by STAPE – SIMMONS 2007. As for filmic transpositions, it is worth remembering Carmine Gallone's *Avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma* (1946, credits at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0038443/>), which is perhaps the first attempt at linking *Tosca* and the Nazi occupation of Rome subsequently employed in some controversial productions of the opera: cf. O'RAWE 2012. More traditional and faithful to Sardou is the film directed in 1941 by Carl Koch and Jean Renoir (with the help of a young Luchino Visconti), starring Imperio Argentina, Michel Simon and Rossano Brazzi, while Luigi Magni's *La Tosca* (1973), with Monica Vitti, Vittorio Gassman and Gigi Proietti, insists on 'Romanesque' ambiance, according to a genre favoured by the director. Further rewritings include *Tosca e le altre due* (with Franca Valeri and Adriana Asti, directed by Giorgio Ferrara in 2003), which likewise verges on comic effects (a burlesque parody *Tra-la-la Tosca or The High-Toned Soprano and the Villain Bass* was already produced immediately after the London performance of *La Tosca* in 1890 by Francis Burnand and Florian Pascal); and Lucio Dalla's contemporary opera *Tosca Amore Disperato* (2003). Interestingly enough, a passage of the opera has been employed in Marc Foster's James Bond film *Quantum of Solace* (2008), discussed by CITRON 2011. The 'monstrous ransom' motif is also differently declined in other works, such as *Vec Makropulos* (1926), one of Leo Janacek's last operas, in which the female protagonist agrees to sleep with a powerful lawyer in order to obtain an important document; *La passante du Sans Souci* (a 1982 film by Jacques Rouffio and interpreted by Romi Schneider and Michel Piccoli); a Japanese drama entitled *Meijin kurabe: Nishiki no maigoromo* (*Master Artists: The Brocade Dancing Robe*) written by San'yutei Enchō in 1893 is overtly inspired by Sardou (*San'yūtei Enchō shū*, ed. by Okitsu Kaname, vol. 10 of *Meiji bungaku zenshū*, Tokyo 1965, 336-375): see MASTRANGELO 2001 and 2002.

<sup>70</sup> The letters exchanged between Puccini and the librettists (published by BIAGI RAVENNI 2009; see also BURTON 1995, Appendix C and D) attest to the long genesis of Act 2 (which Puccini jokingly labelled as 'Buddhist', alluding to Giacosa's nickname or to his slothfulness in finishing this part); one of the initial difficulties was exactly the juxtaposition of two arias sung by the same character, Scarpia, in the

personality. The *Te Deum* scene represents a tangible demonstration of how the Baron's obsessions blend with and find an amplification in the power of the Church, of which he acts as a secular arm<sup>71</sup>: the aforementioned musical theme starts here in B-flat, thus blending in the bell pitches with a liturgical colour reminiscent of Gregorian modes (B-flat and F as *finalis* and *repercussio* respectively)<sup>72</sup>. This is immediately followed at the beginning of Act Two by another aria that has unanimously been considered Scarpia's 'erotic credo'<sup>73</sup>, where the Baron states how he does not care for endearments or love mawkishness, because for him "the violent conquest has stronger relish than the soft surrender" – a passage that partly echoes some famous – and sometimes controversial – lines in Ovid's *Art of Love*

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conclusion of Act 1 and at the beginning of Act 2. If GIRARDI 1995, p. 168) states that with this insertion Puccini wanted to differentiate himself from Verdi's recently composed *Te Deum*, it is also possible to recall that a *Te Deum* had been composed by Puccini's grandfather as well (HANDT 2005); as far as the plot is concerned, a *Te Deum* is sung also at the beginning of Halévy's *La Juive*. In order to recreate with strict fidelity the prayer customarily recited in Roman churches during the procession that precedes a *Te Deum*, Puccini at first thought of the *Ecce Sacerdos magnus*, but he discarded it, because it did not match the effect he wished to recreate, namely that of an uttered murmur. The present verses have not, so far, been acknowledged as being in fact taken from the final part of the *Angelus*.

<sup>71</sup> On Puccini's ambiguity towards religion, especially in *Tosca*, see the autobiographical considerations in Don Pietro Panichelli's *Il pretino di Puccini*, Pisa 1964 (repr. 2008). Puccini asked this Domenican friar for help also in order to recreate some musical themes, namely the *Te Deum* and, most of all, the exact tone of the bells in St. Peter's Cathedral (GIRARDI 1995, p. 157 f.).

<sup>72</sup> GIRARDI 1995, p. 168.

<sup>73</sup> Since Scarpia compares himself to Jago, this aria can be easily paralleled with Jago's *Credo* in Verdi's *Otello*: CARNER 1985, p. 35; VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998, p. 185. A similar passage is to be found in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, A. 2 s. 4 (Angelo's monologue): "When I would pray and think, I think and pray / To several subjects. Heaven hath my empty words; / Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue, / Anchors on Isabel: Heaven in my mouth, / As if I did but only chew his name; / And in my heart the strong and swelling evil / Of my conception. The state whereon I studied / Is, like a good thing, being often read, / Grown sear'd and tedious; yea, my gravity, / Wherein – let no man hear me – I take pride, / Could I with boot change for an idle plume, / Which the air beats for vain. O place! O form! / How often dost thou with thy case, thy habit, / Wrench awe from fools, and tie the wiser souls / To thy false seeming! Blood, thou art blood: / Let's write good angel on the devil's horn, / 'Tis not the devil's crest".

(1, 665 ff.), without, however, the levity that characterizes the Latin antecedent<sup>74</sup>:

*Pugnabit primo fortassis, et 'improbe' dicet: / Pugnando uinci  
se tamen illa uolet... / Vim licet appelles: grata est uis ista  
puellis: / Quod iuuat, inuitae saepe dedisse uolunt. /  
Quaecumque est ueneris subita uiolata rapina, / Gaudet, et  
inprobitas muneris instar habet.*

The two aforementioned arias brilliantly elucidate all the ‘tyrannical’ features implied in this character: no more than a simple police captain, Scarpia becomes the model of a despotic persecutor governed by passions and inordinate appetites that uses the cloak of law and the furred gowns of authority to commit injustice with impunity. His hypocrisy, well outlined in the dichotomy between bigotry and lasciviousness, if not the root of political evil (like Angelo in Shakespeare)<sup>75</sup>, functions nonetheless as a central element to stress corruption and venality. This becomes clear in his third aria (“Già, mi dicon venal”), where Scarpia is now triumphant, disclosing in all its crudeness his blackmail.

As political authority and power transcend the actual historical situation and Puccini’s possible Risorgimento sympathies<sup>76</sup>, so does religion, which is elusively hinted at by Scarpia’s presence in the church of Sant’Andrea della Valle (originally in Sardou, Sant’Andrea

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<sup>74</sup> VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998, p. 208. See a reference already in Sardou, A. 2, sc. 5. It is possible to compare in a contrastive sense some verses by Giacosa (in a passage of *Partita a Scacchi* [n. 93]): “né dell’arti gentili la scienza obliai e so dal mio liuto trarre sirvente e lai; di sonanti ballate so far velo al pensiero, so raccontar d’amore al par d’ogni troviero”.

<sup>75</sup> SHUGER 2011, p. 66 deals with the conjunctions between private and public morality. See also MCGUIRE 1985, pp. 63-96.

<sup>76</sup> For this kind of reading see ARBLASTER 1992, pp. 245. ff.; GIRARDI 1995, p. 195 (and *passim*); DAVIS 2005; TOCCHINI 2019; ROSSELLI 2000 summarizes the connection between religion and power in many operas. KLUGE 2012, p. 378 and 380, nevertheless, observes that “maybe politics isn’t really unmusical, it has its own tonal register, but in opera, at least, politics is understood in such a way that it’s translated into acoustic irritations and dissonances. There’s a famous example where politics and dissonance actually coincide, the scream released under torture by the male lead, the painter, Tosca’s lover, where musicality is confronted with its end, with cacophony or noise ... I think that melodrama unfolds in the field of tension between the political sphere and the private sphere. More is at stake here than just the question of how political the private sphere really is”.

al Quirinale), which “suggests a link between his role as chief of police and papal authority”, where, “in order to maintain the melodrama Scarpia must be construed as representing the abuses of papal power, perhaps most potently captured in his claim, ‘Tosca, you make me forget God’”<sup>77</sup>; even earlier, the mention of Tosca’s confessor in the agitated dialogue between the two conspirators is meant to suggest that confessors were spies of the police; a last, though faint, allusion to the imbricate entanglements of religion and power might be also found in the lines of the *Dies Irae* intoned by Spoletta during the torture scene<sup>78</sup>. On the other hand, religious issues take an even more complex shape, which ranges from the sacristan’s comic interludes (although the *Angelus* reflects actual melodies) to Tosca’s meek but sincere acts of devotion and piety, from her offering flowers to the Madonna in the first act to the laying of the crucifix on the chest of the dead Scarpia at the conclusion of the second. In this regard, it is surely worth mentioning the opera’s most famous aria, *Vissi d’arte*, explicitly described by the composer as “prayer”, in which music has the power to redeem an otherwise simplistic libretto, and therefore to express the disheartened sorrow of the innocent victim<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> CHAMPAGNE 2015, 102. See also GIRARDI 1995, p. 103: “È così che l’azione stessa si fa simbolo, che la perversione sessuale di Scarpia si staglia come l’altra faccia del suo bigottismo ipocrita; ed entrambe sono legate all’esercizio del potere tramite lo sfondo ufficiale della cerimonia, senza il quale gli imbarazzanti propositi del barone perderebbero gran parte del loro effetto. Dietro questo finale pucciniano si avvertono i fantasmi dei Borgia e dei Carafa, e di tutti quelli che nel tempo hanno continuato la loro tradizione”. Quite perceptively PRAZ 1999 highlights how sadistic fantasies are often blurred with meditations on the sacred (with examples taken from Lewis’ *The Monk* or Flaubert’s *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*); on the same line, PECCI 2010, p. 30 f. notes some passages in Huysman’s *A Rebours* that might be usefully compared to this attitude.

<sup>78</sup> GIRARDI 1995, p. 182 and 186.

<sup>79</sup> Quite opportunely, however, CHAMPAGNE (2015), p. 104, outlines some echoes taken from both Psalm 21,1, in Italian, “Dio mio, Dio mio, perché mi hai abbandonato?” and the *Ave Maria* prayer, “nell’ora della nostra morte”. GIRARDI 1995, p. 187, perceptively notes that the beginning of the aria echoes a psalm-like melody, reinforced by the employment of the faux bourdon technique, whereas the central section in E-flat major parallels the scene in which Tosca enters the church; see also GRONDONA 2011, p. 94.

*Libido dominandi* and religion, not to mention voluptuous excitement, directly linked to male power and prestige<sup>80</sup>, thus represent a tangible expression of the “faces of power”, whose modern codification in terms of social control and in the dialectics between subject and authority provide a better understanding of the tensions implied in the opera.

In his classic theorization of power, Michel Foucault identified aspects of power, such as systems of differentiations (class, gender, sexuality) and the forms of institutionalization of power in relationships. When Foucault links power and subjectivity, he understands subjectivity as being subject to someone else’s control, or to be dependent upon another, yet, at the same time, subjectivity represents the basis of one’s own identity by means of conscious self-knowledge. In this sense, therefore, power may be conceived as dynamic and articulated because other systems of power are simultaneously present in potentially drawing alternative social alignments to change the original structure. According to the French philosopher<sup>81</sup>,

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<sup>80</sup> ALONGE 1996, who also underlines (p. 89) how the suppression of female characters potentially perceived as extortionist increases demonism and emphasizes misogynist traits. It might be useful to make a comparison with similar patterns in films, which have been analyzed by feminist theorists, like MULVEY 1975; KAPLIN 1983; and, more recently, OLSON 2009. They all see an identification of the male spectator with the main male protagonist, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. At the same time, however uncomfortable the violence in some scenes, unconsciously it appeals to the male propensity for total control over the object of their desire, the female ‘other’, reinforcing at the same time patriarchal goals by means of a confrontation with male brutality. Moreover,, the female body is conceived as providing the erotic object for the male, so that repeated masochistic scenarios effectively immobilize the female viewer. Thus, she is given only powerless, victimized figures who, far from perfect, reinforce the basic sense of worthlessness that already exists. Olson, quoting a still unpublished paper by Richard Burt, further notes that “while some version of an opposition between normal and perverse desire is inescapable, uncritically held assumptions about the normalcy of desire, both female and male, have effectively foreclosed consideration both of the loser woman and of the female desire of the loser women characters. Romance is narrated as disaster and ruin ... More specifically, these films put on display not only bloodied women as spectacles but an erotic female fantasy about dismemberment of the male body (decapitation [or paralysis]) as castration, namely, that men may be turned on by this fantasy” (p. 81).

<sup>81</sup> An interesting (although quite different) perspective on this theme is offered by VALANTASIS 1995, with reference to LUKES 1974; FOUCAULT 1980; WARTENBERG

“a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that “the other” (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up. Obviously the bringing into play of power relations does not exclude the use of violence any more than it does the obtaining of consent; no doubt the exercise of power can never do without one or the other, often both at the same time. But even though consensus and violence are the instruments or the results, they do not constitute the principle or the basic nature of power. It is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action”.

A gender dialectic that becomes imbricated with power, expressing itself in essentially sadomasochistic transactions is, however, already perceivable in Shakespeare’s text, which is considered not by chance one of the most puzzling and upsetting of the so-called ‘dark comedies’<sup>82</sup>. Like Scarpia, Angelo makes his power – and his sadistic tendencies – visible from the outset, bodying forth his sovereignty by showing the body of a transgressive subject<sup>83</sup>. Nevertheless, Isabella indeed harbours an unconscious attraction to Angelo that increases the combustiveness of their scenes together. Although the text does not overtly substantiate Isabella’s attraction, from the standpoint of performance, this is the strongest, most emotionally generative choice, the one that maximises internal conflict<sup>84</sup>.

The same ambiguity is reflected in Sardou’s drama, where a kittenish Tosca jokes flirtatiously with a womanizer Baron, who notes

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1990 and 1992. This and the following quotations are taken from FOUCAULT 1982, p. 789 and 790.

<sup>82</sup> MCCANDLESS 1997, p. 79 ff., on the revisionist treatment of the disguised ruler.

<sup>83</sup> MCCANDLESS 1997, p. 91.

<sup>84</sup> See also MCCANDLESS 1997.

her bracelet of diamonds, rubies and sapphires, which together constitute a sort of French ‘tricolor flag’ and laughingly states that he could arrest her for wearing it – “an interchange that can be seen both as an ironic foreshadowing of what is to come, and also as a playful version of deeper, more serious sexual fantasies”<sup>85</sup>. Surely both Sardou and Puccini emphasize Scarpia’s predatory male sexuality often verging on sadism, whose pleasure is fed mutually by his seduction of Tosca and his torture of Mario<sup>86</sup>, yet it is possible to presume an elusive, secret attraction to an obscure masochistic pleasure on the part of the female heroine, that has been interpreted as the emergence of the frightening wanderings of the psyche and the courageous forging out of the monsters of the unconscious<sup>87</sup>, but perhaps is also the result of a strong and fiery temperament that needs an equal opponent. Even more than the French character, the opera heroine becomes a figure of excess and symbolic overestimation, which is definitively connected with the love or the passion (in both cases a spiritual and much more a physical sense) she inspires. This is shown clearly in Act 2, which develops into a great duel between Tosca and Scarpia.

Although the libretto has the bracelet scene suppressed, only maintaining in the dialogues a switch from the formal courtesy

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<sup>85</sup> BURTON 2012, p. 225, with reference to Sardou’s Act 2 sc. 5 (and see also earlier sc. 3); ALLEGRI 2010.

<sup>86</sup> This is already foreshadowed in the lines of the concluding aria of Act 1, “A doppia mira / tendo il voler, né il capo del ribelle / è la più preziosa. Ah di quegli occhi / vittoriosi veder la fiamma / illanguidir con spasimo d’amor / fra le mie braccia, l’uno al capestro, / l’altra fra le mie braccia” (for the sadistic attitude in contemplating executions see PRAZ 1999, who mentions, among others, the case of Lady Hamilton assisting at the executions of the Republicans in Naples). GILLIO 2005, p. 185 and GRONDONA 2011, pp. 37 ff. discuss some planned lines which were eventually deleted, on the basis that “Questo Scarpia che perde tempo a descrivere se stesso è assurdo. Uno Scarpia agisce, ma non si enuncia a parole” (Giacosa’s letter to Ricordi, 14th December 1896). These lines, in fact, consisted in some mumbled reflections intermingled with slurred litanies and presented an even more explicit allusion to an imaged confrontation between Tosca and Cavaradossi, which nurtured Scarpia’s erotic phantasies. Sadistic features become even more concrete in Act Two, highlighted also by a skilled spatial setting, which is the object of ALONGE (1996)’s thorough discussion, where parallels are set up between the piece of furniture on which Mario is tortured and the divan on which Tosca lingers herself, between Scarpia’s torture chamber and Scarpia’s bedroom.

<sup>87</sup> ALONGE 1996, p. 119. CHAMPAGNE 2015, p. 111 ff. provides a different (and in my opinion less persuasive) explanation. GRONDONA 2011, p. 129 and 143 appropriately introduces the category of *Unheimlich*.



address *vous/voi*, to a more confidential singular apostrophe *tu/tu* in the dramatic episode of the confrontation between the two,<sup>88</sup> such an ambiguous, wavering relationship between the main characters is reflected in their musical treatment. Scarpia, in fact, is in sharp contrast with a weak, quasi anti-heroic, tenor character (as usual in Puccini)<sup>89</sup>: totally fulfilling the personality of Puccinian tenors, Cavaradossi's passionate sensuality reverberates on other women, so that he does not appear insensitive to feminine charms, as his portraying the Marquise Attavanti seems to suggest – a suggestion that is perhaps reinforced by the fact that the instrumental coda in 'Recondita armonia' matching the words "il mio solo pensier Tosca sei tu!" features a reprise of what has been labelled as the "Attavanti theme" (1.18,4)<sup>90</sup>. Another similar theme of the four descending notes which appears for the first time in 1.14 when Mario discloses the portrait of the Marquise Attavanti disguised as Mary Magdalene and recurs in 1.44, moreover, returns once again, just when Napoleon's victory is announced and Cavaradossi, although fainting, finds the force to stand up and intone an anti-tyrannical tirade (2.42). Quite interestingly, a striking affinity with this theme is shared also by Scarpia's "Già, mi dicon venale", where Puccini probably had in mind to suggest "Scarpia's expectation for a brief moment that he might take the place of Tosca's lover"<sup>91</sup>.

Moreover, suspended between a sort of eighteenth-century court gallantry (outlined by some passages in the score, such as the berceuse, later accompanied by the flutes in Act 1, 68.8 ff., or the 6/8 barcarolle rhythm of Act 2.25 and 45, sometimes accentuated by

<sup>88</sup> Cf. e.g. Act 4, sc. 3 (in Sardou); Act 2, sc. 5 (in Puccini).

<sup>89</sup> To the best of my knowledge the recurring pattern of a feeble tenor character (in terms of plot and features) has not been outlined so far; yet, it is possible to note that most of the tenor roles in Puccini present some intrinsic irresolution and even inadequacy: as does Johnson in *Fanciulla*, Pinkerton in *Butterfly* and even Calaf in *Turandot*.

<sup>90</sup> CARNER 1985, p. 141, who however adds that interpreting this passage in a literal sense "is an absurdity".

<sup>91</sup> Many interpreters incline to consider this motif linked with the painting itself and therefore with Cavaradossi's professional activity (GRONDONA 2011, p. 80; BUDDEN 2002, p. 214; CARNER 1985, p. 39 and 110; the quotation is taken from p. 111), although in a previous work, CARNER linked it to the Marquise Attavanti (1958, p. 353). According to ALONGE 1996, both the male protagonists represent a face of machismo, the difference lying only in the fact that Scarpia openly expresses it, whereas in Cavaradossi it remains only at a latent stage (p. 87, comparing the two arias, "Ha più forte sapore" and "Qual occhio al mondo").

certain interpreters)<sup>92</sup> and the enraged excesses of an uncontrolled passion, stressed in the libretto by the employment of zoological imagery<sup>93</sup>, Scarpia's formal, almost ritual, courtesy therefore has a

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<sup>92</sup> But also by Puccini himself (see his letter to Illica of 7.11.1896, "bene per Scarpia simpaticonizzato"). The character of Jack Rance in *Fanciulla* can be considered a similar example, although devoid of any sadistic aspect and much gentler (GIRARDI 1995, p. 301 and 313). VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998, p. 303, opportunely mentions PORTER 1990. On the same theme see also PORTER – MULVEY PORTER 1996. An interesting perspective is put forward by Ford 2012. It also seems worth quoting some passages from Tito Gobbi's personal recollection (in CARNER 1985, p. 79 ff.): "Then there is Queen Caroline (the sister of Marie Antoinette), unseen on the stage but referred to several times as a living, important element in the strands of the story. Did she have an affair with Scarpia? I am inclined to think she did. At any rate, he was a protege of hers, a Sicilian, strong, elegant, with compelling glance, and a suggestion of the colours and perfumes of the South about him. ... He is very much aware of his position as Roman Chief of Police, making a central figure of himself whenever he has a chance to do so. He should never be the stereotyped villain, but cold and authoritative, examining and enquiring, though with Tosca herself ceremonious, almost mellifluous. There are momentary changes in his attitude to Tosca, always led and dictated by the wonderfully subtle music which Puccini has given him. For instance, two startling bars in the first act are sufficient to prompt his impulsive move towards Tosca, instantly succeeded by a return to his usual suave manner as he offers her the holy water, marked by the sound of the bells. ... Act II opens with Scarpia sitting alone, the descending octaves suggesting, with their repetition, his wandering thoughts. But when he gets up and walks, the heavy chords indicate that we are indeed in the presence of the Chief of Police in his most official mood. The most dramatically telling effect, however, comes with the outburst of passion on 'Quest'ora io l'attendea...' (This is the hour I've been waiting for). One of Puccini's most tremendous moments. Preceded by the recitative which mounts to splendid high notes for the baritone range, there come the long, ascending (and fiendishly difficult) phrases which truly depict the upsurge of passion. ... I would like Floria Tosca to salute Scarpia with a polite, if cool, nod when he offers the holy water, instead of a startled turn of the head as though a toad has appeared beside her. Sometimes the refined gentleman has an outburst of rage, immediately controlled by his complex nature of bigot, satyr, sadist, courtier and hangman. He enjoys showing his different aspects, exalted and inebriated by wine and blood. The dangerous crescendo will at last overwhelm him, so that he falls to the knife of a fragile woman".

<sup>93</sup> E.g., A. 1, sc. 9 "nel tuo cor s'annida Scarpia ... è Scarpia che scioglie a volo il falco della tua gelosia"; A. 2, sc. 1, "Tosca è un buon falco"; sc. 5, "agil qual leopardo". It may be noted, as a parallel example, that animal imagery also recurs in other works by Giacosa: see for example the poem *La partita a scacchi* (p. 31 of the Turin edition [1876]): "s'io gl'imposi il cappello, il falco mai non erra / e torna con la preda vittorioso a terra ...". For a discussion of animal imagery see RUGARLI 1999, p. 127. On the verses of Act 2, sc. 5, and their reworking see GRONDONA 2011, p. 88: "l'intero endecasillabo di gusto addirittura metastasiano – oltre che,

handful of meanings, first of all functioning as a tangible illustration of the hypocrisy that is such an important part of his character, which also serves to make “the cat-and-mouse game that he plays the more chilling”<sup>94</sup>. A key turning point might be understood in the dramatic moment in which, although having been left free to leave and (as she planned) appeal to the Queen and plead for clemency, Tosca decides to remain (2.48 ff.).

Once again, it is possible to recall Foucault’s view:

When one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others ... it includes an important element: freedom. Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. ... Consequently, there is no face-to-face confrontation of power and freedom, which are mutually exclusive (freedom disappears everywhere power is exercised), but a much more complicated interplay. In this game freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power (at the same time its precondition, since freedom must exist for power to be exerted, and also its permanent support, since without the possibility of recalcitrance, power would be equivalent to a physical determination). The relationship between power and freedom’s refusal to submit cannot, therefore, be separated. Rather than speaking of an essential freedom, it would be better to speak of an “agonism” of a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle, less of a face-to-face confrontation which paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation.

Undoubtedly Tosca’s submission is infinitely more difficult in moral terms, as it is a matter of choice, yet “some interpreters of the role as well as some opera lovers see Scarpia’s willingness to allow her to leave and his insistence that she freely choose to agree to his demands as evidence, not of sadism, but that the baron’s fascination

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ancora una volta, un classico dell’erotismo da *boulevard* – ‘all’ira, al pianto ed all’amor più viva’ viene omesso del tutto; così come dopo il settenario ‘io t’ho giurata mia!...’ si tralascia il commento autenticamente perverso ‘Mia!... ruggente di collera e d’orgoglio!...’ e ci si contenta, per concludere sull’acuto, della parola scenica: ‘mia’”.

<sup>94</sup> VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998, p. 207.

with the singer at least totters on the edge of the line between lust and love”<sup>95</sup>.

Although the idea of a power dialectic, exteriorised in terms of an agonistic clash, may help in elucidating the unexpected turn in the story, namely Tosca’s determination and her sudden resolution to stab the rapist, a further trace of her indiscernible wavering, in my view, results from a challenging and probably Freudian reading of the last line, “O Scarpia, avanti a Dio!”, pronounced by Tosca just immediately before throwing herself from the parapets of Castel Sant’Angelo, in order to avoid being arrested once her delict has been discovered. As is well known, this is a substantial modification of the original French text, which presents a far-fetched dialogue between Tosca and Scarpia’s agents, at the end of which the woman reveals that she has killed the Baron, and eventually, before throwing herself from the ramparts of the castle, replies to Spoletta who menaces to “send her re-joining her lover”, “J’y vais, canailles!”. It might also be worth recalling the fact that Puccini had originally planned to substitute such a striking conclusion with a madness scene, which, however, would have implied a weakening in the dramatic climax of the story. All this might be revealing of an unconscious and somewhat perverse bond, like the one between Donna Anna and Don Giovanni in Mozart, which has given rise to much speculation, most of all stemming from Anna’s refusal to marry Don Ottavio at the end of the opera<sup>96</sup>.

On the other hand, the finale of Act 2 and the detailed stage directions (including Tosca’s ritual of placing a crucifix and two candles near the corpse), far from being an “ironical act of musical mourning”, represents the end of a dramatic climax, emphasized by the employment of the unusual F-sharp minor scale (2.63):

Non comprende la serietà del momento chi minimizza ed anzi  
allontana con fastidio il rituale religioso dalla situazione

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<sup>95</sup> VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998, p. 210, who, however, does not seem to endorse this interpretation. The slight and ambiguous border between good and evil is perceptively noted by D’AMICO 2000. On a more general plane, an interesting analysis is provided by MCKENDRICK 1999, p. 41, who highlights the patterns of menacing violence, linked to the impossibility of escaping and the unwillingness of the threatened subject.

<sup>96</sup> For this kind of ‘psychoanalytical’ interpretation, already suggested by the German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann and by the French critic P.J. Jouve, see MILA 1988, p. 64 and 126.

drammatica: i gesti di Tosca sono devoti e non è paradossale scorgere nella loro meticolosa esecuzione il tramite d'una solidarietà quasi impossibile con la vittima. Cattolici l'uno e l'altro hanno una fede che li accomuna – e li separa, per esempio, da Cavaradossi, il quale rifiuta il sacerdote in punto di morte – tant'è vero che l'opera si conclude con una terribile promessa, «O Scarpia, avanti a Dio!»<sup>97</sup>.

On more philological ground, a final remark can be made concerning the famous lapidary 'epitaph' commenting on Scarpia's death, "e avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma", which in the Italian version sounds much more effective than in the French one ("Et c'est devant ça que tremblait toute une ville!"), thus functioning as a powerful conclusion for Act Two (four in the drama), in spite of the initial doubts about its efficacy raised by Puccini and the librettists<sup>98</sup>. Pronounced at the end of a climax of torture, attempted rape and murder, this sententious exclamation recalls very closely the beginning of Tacitus chapter 50 in the first book of the *Histories*, where the imminent arrival of Vitellius and his putting Rome to fire and sword is introduced with these words<sup>99</sup>: "*Trepidam urbem ac simul atrocitatem recentis sceleris, simul ueteres Othonis mores pauentem nouus insuper de Vitellio nuntius exterruit.*"

I wonder whether Sardou was thinking of this famous passage – a suggestion that is reinforced by the fact that Scarpia's name is Vitellio. The story has been transformed and developed so that it bears only faint traces of the original, but perhaps Sardou had also in mind some passages of Tacitus and of Suetonius, where Vitellius is represented with the traits of a 'stock tyrant', namely gluttony and self-indulgence that allow him to enjoy his lustfulness without

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<sup>97</sup> GRONDONA 2011, pp. 112 ff. and 134, in contrast to GIRARDI 1995, p. 188. See also ALLEGRI 2010, p. 51.

<sup>98</sup> VANDIVER NICASSIO 1998, p. 218; CARNER 1985, p. 151: "the man indirectly responsible for 'tutta Roma' was not Puccini but the Mayor of Parma. When Puccini visited the city, its mayor made it a point of honour to show him the sights. Coming to the monument that Maria Luisa had had erected in memory of her second husband, Count Neipperg, who had ruled Parma with a firm hand, the mayor said, 'There is a remembrance in marble of the man before whom trembled all Parma.' Struck by this pithy phrase, Puccini entered it in the libretto, changing 'whole city' into 'all Rome'". Initially the librettists thought to expunge this sentence, which conversely Puccini insisted on having modified with respect to Sardou's generic statement.

<sup>99</sup> PASCHOUD 1968.

restraint (see e.g. Suet., *Vitell.* 13; Tac., *Hist.* 2,31. 62. 71. 95 and 95.3, although Vitellius' *ignavia* and idleness are totally absent from Scarpia's characterisation); impiety (here presented as bigotry); but also a cruel voyeurism and pleasure at the sight of the dead enemy as part of his *saevitia* (2,61: the execution of the Boian rebel Mariccus; 2,70: he does not turn his gaze away from the horrible sight of so many thousands of unburied citizens on the battlefield at Bedriacum, not to mention the murdering, out of fear and hatred, of Dolabella, who had married his former wife, in 2,64). One of the most interesting passages in this sense is the extremely theatrical episode of the murder of Junius Blaesus (3,38-39), poisoned at the end of a conspiracy contrived by Vitellius' brother, where Vitellius is said to have "fed his eyes" with the spectacle of the dying man (*se puisse oculos spectata inimici morte*) – a passage which may be antiphrastically echoed in the last words Tosca addresses to him, "Parla!... Guardami!... Son Tosca! ... O Scarpia!"<sup>100</sup>.

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<sup>100</sup> The connections with the name of the cruel Roman emperor are also outlined by BURTON 1993-94, p. 70, who, however, does not go any further. For the Tacitean passages see in particular the perceptive observations put forward by KEITEL 1992, who emphasizes Tacitus' fondness for theatrical effects; on the same theme see also POMEROY 2006; LEVENE 1997. Junius Blaesus' episode is discussed by GALTIER 2001; KEITEL 2007. Further hints are provided by BAXTER 1971, who deals with the poetical imagery of death and slaughter; MILLER – JONES 1978; PERKINS 1990.

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