

# Madame Butterfly: From Farce to Flight

著者	TIEDEMANN Mark
journal or publication title	The Journal of Nagasaki University of Foreign Studies
number	24
page range	43-55
year	2020-12-30
URL	<a href="http://id.nii.ac.jp/1165/00000771/">http://id.nii.ac.jp/1165/00000771/</a>



*The Journal of  
Nagasaki University of Foreign Studies  
No. 24 2020*

***Madame Butterfly: From Farce to Flight***

Mark Tiedemann

マダムバタフライ：茶番劇から飛行へ

マーク ティーダマン

長崎外大論叢

第24号  
(別冊)

長崎外国語大学  
2020年12月

## *Madame Butterfly: From Farce to Flight*

Mark Tiedemann

マダムバタフライ：茶番劇から飛行へ

マーク ティーダマン

### Abstract

*Madame Butterfly* continues to be one of the most popular opera performances in the world. Puccini's brilliant music is mostly to credit for its success, but the composer also got his version of the narrative right. The story of the lecherous foreign sailor and the trusting girl he leaves behind went through several versions by several authors, but none of these were satisfactory. This paper will look at the versions of the story to see what was problematic with them, how they built upon each other, and why the version in the opera still speaks to audiences after more than a hundred years.

### 概要

マダム・バタフライは今もなお世界で最も人気のあるオペラ公演の1つであり続けている。プッチーニの素晴らしい音楽が最もその成功に功績があるが、作曲家は彼の物語の解釈においても正しさを得ている。好色な外国人船乗りと彼を信じていたが置き去りにされた少女の物語は、何人かの著者によっていくつかの解釈がなされたが、これらはどれも満足いくものではなかった。この論文では物語の様々な解釈を概観し、何が問題であったか、それぞれがどのように構築され、なぜオペラ版の解釈が100年以上経っても聴衆に影響を与えているのかについて述べている。

### Keywords

Madame Butterfly, Giacomo Puccini, John Luther Long, Pierre Loti

### Introduction

At the age of 116, Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly* remains one of the most prevalent items in the opera canon. That is not to say that *Madame Butterfly* (the English title) is not also surrounded by plenty of controversy, which is mostly centered around issues of cultural appropriation: in the use of cultural stereotypes and in the way performances get cast (Nussbaum). Yet in spite of these concerns, its appeal continues, and it is "ranked number one on Opera America's list of the 20 most-performed operas" (Opera Education), and sixth in performance frequency among all opera performances in the U.S. and Europe during 2009-14 (Nussbaum). In some respects, it is easy to see why it is so popular. The work is an opera, so the most important aspect is the music, and Puccini is adept at moving us from gentle tiptoes to soaring tragedy. However, the music tells a narrative just as

the narrative is inspired by the music. *Madame Butterfly* is the story of a young girl who sacrifices everything for love, and its pathetic portrayal continues to engage audiences.

The story Puccini used was the culmination of several works which seem to have been incorporating and revising aspects of previous versions while adding ideas of their own. Working backward, the story of the opera was based on the one-act stage play of the same name by David Belasco, which was itself based on the short story by John Luther Long. Long's story seems to be based on, or more accurately influenced by, a travel narrative novel *Madame Chrysantheme* by Pierre Loti. Between Loti and Long's stories there was a pair of additional works that are not so well recognized, but which seem to have added some texture to the fabric of the narrative. However, unlike the opera, which has survived well into the twenty-first century, it is very difficult for modern audiences to experience the stories by Loti, Long and Belasco, and they were doomed to oblivion, for various reasons, if it were not for the success of the opera. We can say that the story was rescued from its sources by Puccini along with his librettists Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa (the team to be referred to as Puccini). What allowed the opera to become so successful was the development of the story, the attenuation of the tone, the clarity of the message.

### Source texts

Pierre Loti was the pen name of Louis Marie-Julien Viaud (1850-1923), a French naval officer and author of novels and short stories, mostly concerning his experiences in exotic places. Aided by his travels in his naval service, Loti wrote about his time in Istanbul and Tahiti, as well as other places, before his ship was to dock for a couple of months in the summer of 1885 in Japan in the port city of Nagasaki. The officer arranged a temporary relationship, referred to as a "marriage," to a local girl and the rental of the second floor of a house on a hillside in the town for the two to inhabit together. Loti kept a detailed diary and turned his experience into a semi-autobiographical travel log novel in 1887. "This record is the journal of a summer of my life, in which I have changed nothing, not even the dates, thinking that in our efforts to arrange matters we succeed often only in disarranging them" (Loti 4). Loti's penchant for description and his keen sense for what his readers might want to experience through his writing made the book very popular, with twenty-five editions in five years and reprints continuing for over forty years, and its translations into many languages allowing a wide distribution. Loti's story set the basis for all the subsequent stories—the location in Japan in the city of Nagasaki, and the couple's abode in a house on a hill, the visiting Western sailor, the local girl who is temporarily "wedded," and the broker who makes the union and the rental of the house possible.

Between Loti and Long's stories there appeared two other versions of the story which contributed basic elements to the development of the story. In 1893 the composer Andre Messager, with librettists Georges Hartmann and Alexandre Andre (the team to be referred to as Messager) produced *Madame Chrysantheme*, an operatic version of Loti's story. They kept to Long's basic story, his set of characters (Loti is now Pierre) and his alternating domestic and outdoor scenes. Unlike Loti, however, Messager begins to flesh out the character of the girl. Chrysantheme is now a geisha, so she

is a member of an accomplished class of artists rather than just a paid consort. In addition, there are signs that Pierre actually cares for the girl and the girl for him, thereby introducing an emotional element which is entirely lacking in either of the main characters in Loti's story. On his arrival in Nagasaki, Pierre sees Chrysanthemum performing and is immediately struck with her,

Since I must marry in this country / Like a child entrusted to my care / I would protect her!  
Really / What an amusing home we would have, we two! / Neither reproaches, nor tears, nor  
jealous words. For a wife / I would go far to find a better (1.3.144, 147-150; Hartmann/Burden 10).

Pierre also becomes jealous, a tact taken from Loti, but whereas Loti becomes jealous more of the behavior of his friend Yves toward the girl, Pierre is jealous of the girl's behavior toward his friend. In the end the two have a heartfelt parting,

PIERRE: "Farewell, little woman, / To our short lovemaking. / Let us ever remember them in  
our souls. / Farewell!" (*Chrysantheme silently abandons herself to Pierre's embrace. He starts to  
leave her, Chrysantheme tries to speak; he returns to her.*)

CHRYSANTHEME: (*effusively, in a low voice*) Not yet . . . Au Revoir! / Before you leave, come  
and kiss me tonight!

(*Pierre kisses her for the last time and tears himself from her arms*) (4.7.812-818; Burden 46)

and the story ends with Pierre at sea reading Chrysantheme's letter, "I want you to know, when you shall be far away . . . very far away from me . . . that in Japan there are loving women, women of love . . . who weep!" (Epilogue. 861-863; Burden 50).

In the same year as Messenger's opera, Felix Regamey published a book *The Pink Notebooks of Madame Chrysanthemum* in French in *La Plume* as a rebuttal to Loti's portrayal of Japan and especially of Japanese women. Regamey was a life-long enthusiast of Japanese culture and a scholar of intercultural art. Obviously upset with Loti's condescension towards the Japanese, he turned Loti's story on its head by writing from the perspective of Chrysantheme while copying Loti's technique of writing a diary, but this time it is the girl's diary. "Regamey's narrative redirects the critical appraisal away from 'the Japanese woman' and toward 'the Frenchman.'" He spins Chrysanthemum as being cultured and the naval officer as being "Crude, as a character whose racist and sexist bias against the Japanese prevented him from admiring Chrysanthemum's refinement" (Cooperstein). Regamey gives Chrysanthemum a samurai family background and a dignified air. Though she is doting and dependent, she retains her pride. She gets her back up when she realizes her abandonment, and she gets angry: "Does this miserable man think I care at all for his coins and that I am ringing them to make sure they are not counterfeit? This is the ultimate insult!" (47). Also importantly, it is Regamey who introduces suicide as an end to the story, something he characterizes as "very Japanese" (Cooperstein). In an epilogue, he adds,

The forsaken woman, wanting to end her existence, hurled herself into the sea. Around her neck she had one hundred silver coins tied up in a piece of rare silk. She was saved. The silken envelope was retrieved; it contained only little bits of paper stuck to the wet fabric—the silver had sunk to the bottom of the sea (Cooperstein).

The short story “Madame Butterfly” by the American lawyer John Luther Long was published in the *Century Magazine* in 1898. Among many other changes to Loti’s story, Long’s version portrays the girl’s father as a samurai and includes an unsuccessful suicide at the end. The association of Japan with samurai and suicide is as old as the eighteenth century, so whether Long added these ideas on his own, or whether he adopted them from Regamey has not yet been, and probably cannot be determined. There are also obvious similarities between Long’s story and Loti’s. Long never admitted to the connections to Loti’s story, so that Loti’s influence can only be made by conjecture. Besides the similarities in location, characters and situation outlined above, there are specific likenesses, such as the opening scene where the male character, on route from the Mediterranean to Japan, discusses the possibility of marrying a girl for the short time they will be in port (Burke-Gaffney 72).

In tone and perspective, Long’s and Loti’s stories could not be more unlike each other. Whereas Loti’s story is told entirely from the viewpoint of the foreigner, the focus of Long’s story is the perspective of the girl, now called Butterfly. Ninety percent of Long’s story focuses on her, and the two new major characters, her maidservant Suzuki and the American Consul Sharpless, become necessary devices so that Butterfly has someone to talk to in order to express her thoughts and feelings. After the setup of the situation, the marriage, the rental of the house, Pinkerton’s manipulation of Butterfly, and his promise to return, all of which occur in the first few pages, the story is entirely Butterfly’s. It can be conjectured that Long viewed his task as to pick up the story where Loti left off, and the birth of a child in such a relationship is almost to be expected.

Long’s version of the story lead directly to the subsequent stage play. David Belasco, the Bishop of Broadway, recognized the dramatic potential of the Butterfly story, especially the ending, and in 1900 created a one-act stage version. Belasco took the development of the story a step further by cutting Pinkerton almost completely out of the play. It opens with Butterfly chatting away to Suzuki as she muses on her “husband’s” return. Furthermore, the only setting is the inside of the house on the hill. The most striking innovation by Belasco for the play is the fourteen-minute wordless scene near the end as Butterfly is portrayed waiting through the night for Pinkerton’s arrival at the house, the passage of time affected by lighting and special effects, including sounds, that Belasco was famous for. The play keeps the child hidden until Butterfly suddenly pulls him out in front of the astonished Sharpless to emphasize how Pinkerton could not possibly stay away from her now, with the added attraction of there being a baby to look forward to. Belasco also has the suicide become successful, with the curtain coming down on “*She dies.*”

When the play opened in London shortly after the New York premiere, the composer Giacomo

Puccini happened to be in town for the opening of his opera *Tosca* and saw the play. He was immediately convinced that the story could be worked into a great opera. He obtained the rights to the story the next year and engaged Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giocosa to create the opera's libretto while he wrote the music.

### Problems with the source texts

Though Loti's *Madame Chrysantheme* was widely admired, it drew immediate criticism, as well (McKenzie 37-42). It was intended to entertain a general Western audience which was superficially interested in the strange and exotic culture and society of Japan, and so Loti portrays Japan that way. Actually, Loti's celebrates his complete lack of knowledge about Japan, and a reader may feel a connection to the narrator who seems to be describing things Japanese with an attitude as unadulterated as the reader's own. However, for anyone who is at all familiar with Japan, his observations can be difficult to stomach. First, for someone who had no experience of Japan, save a few days of staying in one house in one neighborhood of one city, his overgeneralizations border on the absurd:

"All respectable families of Nagasaki possess a similar net" (30).

"Like all Japanese women, Chrysantheme carries a quantity of things in her long sleeves. . . . The very smartest people in Japan blow their noses in this manner" (87).

"But one thing never varies, either in our household or in any other, neither in the north nor in the south of the Empire, and that is the dessert and the manner of eating it" (51).

There can also be issues with Loti's constant opinionating. Because Loti is faithful in rendering the linguistic situation, there was a nearly complete lack of communication between the "husband and wife," so we can see that the narrator is left to form his own interpretations, often colonial in nature (McKinzie 55). It is the plethora of these views that make the book difficult to read in our time. "For myself," I said, "I will marry at once. . . . I shall choose a little, creamy-skinned woman with black hair and cat's eyes. She must be pretty and not much bigger than a doll" (5).

In his writing, Loti displays a particular talent for closely combining praise and scorn, wonder and disdain. "And all kinds of queer little trades are carried on under the public gaze, by strangely primitive means, by workmen of the most ingenuous type" (39). "All seems in Japan but a mere semblance of grandeur. A hopeless pettiness, an irresistible effect the ludicrous, lies at the bottom of all things" (90). "Everything is uncouth, fantastical to excess, grotesquely lugubrious; everywhere we are surprised by incomprehensible conceptions, which seem the work of distorted imaginations" (39). For every impressive and fascinating thing that he finds in his surroundings, there are as many meaningless and dull aspects. In his house, for example, he admires the craftsmanship of the tiny door handles which have miniscule pictures engraved into them and comments, "to accumulate so much patient and delicate workmanship on almost imperceptible accessories, and all to produce an

effect which is absolutely nil, an effect of the most complete bareness and nudity" (21). This conflicted tone pervading the book undoubtedly reflects Loti's own internal conflicts driven by experiencing and then writing about a topic that he has neither respect for nor interest in. Back in France in 1886 Loti put together the book primarily motivated by financial motives, so he had to give Japan a noteworthy portrayal in order to captivate an audience for his book sales.

Then there is Loti's demeaning description of Japanese people, again and again referring to them as diminutive, "absurd little creatures" (27), primal, "how ugly, mean, and grotesque all these folks were" (10), and animal-like "his bristling hedgehog back" (14), "each seller squatting monkey-like" (10), "I am quite ready to admit the attractiveness of the little Japanese children; . . . but how is it that their charm vanishes so rapidly and is so quickly replaced by the elderly grimace, the smiling ugliness, the monkeyish face?" (78).

Chrysantheme is an exception, for she is melancholy. What thoughts can be running through that little brain? My knowledge of her language is still too restricted to enable me to find out. Moreover, it is a hundred to one that she has no thoughts whatsoever. And even if she had, what do I care? I have chosen her to amuse me, and I would really rather she should have one of those insignificant little thoughtless faces like all the others (29).

Finally, Loti's book has no plot, only a chronological series of events closely following his notes from his stay in Nagasaki. There is no development of character. The narrator claims in the end to be as unmoved by his time in Japan and with Butterfly as she is with him. Japan makes no lasting impression on him. Any development of the plot achieved by the interaction of the characters is nearly impossible. An element of plot you would expect to find in a story of marriage relationship is romance, but if you look for romance in *Chrysanthemum*, you will be disappointed because there is none. Loti admits as much.

It is true that a complete imbroglio, worthy of a romance, seems ever threatening to appear upon my monotonous horizon . . . Chrysantheme in love with Yves; Yves with Chrysantheme; Oyouki with me; I with no one . . . but we are in Japan, and under the narrowing and dwarfing influence of the surroundings, which turn everything into ridicule, nothing will come of it (84).

He is ambivalent about his wife: "I do not positively detest this little Chrysantheme, and when there is no repugnance on either side, habit turns into a makeshift of attachment" (44). The two "play" at marriage, living together, going out and socializing together, and sleeping together, though there is no indication that anything more than sleep, some tobacco smoking and some disturbances by mosquitos and mice, happened during the nights in the house on the hill. Their relationship is a sham. To drive home the point that Chrysantheme feels the same way, Loti inserted the improbable scene at the end where the girl uses a hammer to test the legitimacy of the coins Loti gave her (Burke-Gaffney 54).

Loti's final words to Chrysanthème put as refined a face on his condescension as possible:

Well little mousme, let us part good friends; one last kiss even, if you like. I took you to amuse me; you have not perhaps succeeded very well, but after all you have done what you could: given me your little face, your little curtseys, you little music; in short, you have been pleasant enough in your Japanese way (127).

Late eighteenth-century casual readers of Long's "Madame Butterfly" might have been initially impressed with his portrayal of Japanese people and culture, but this admiration could not endure because Long's story actually lacks authenticity, partly because he never visited Japan. It contains some cultural inaccuracies, that the Japanese generally believe in reincarnation and that a girl could become a geisha, who are professional entertainers having to undergo many years of training, before the age of 15, and a historical slip that Butterfly's father had to commit suicide because he was on Emperor's losing side in the Civil War, but the Emperor's side actually won (Burke-Gaffney 54). However, the most glaring inaccuracy, and fatal to the story's chances of remaining in the literary cannon, is the portrayal of Butterfly's way of speaking English, a kind of made-up pidgin that does not at all represent the way a Japanese person would speak English.

We giving up . . . *aeverything*, jus' for him, an' now he don' naever come no more! Oh, *how* that is sad! Is it not? Also, he don' even divorce us, so that we kin marry with 'nother man an' git some food. *He?* He don' even *thing* 'bout it! Not liddle bit! He forgetting us—alas! (379).

This is closer to the way Mark Twain represented Jim's speech in *Huckleberry Finn*, a book whose ubiquitous popularity is sure to have made Long aware of it:

No! W'y what has you lived on? But you got a gun. O, yes, you got a gun. Dat's good. Now you kill sumfin, en I'll make up de fire (52).

Yes. You know that one-laigged [slave] dat belongs to old Misto Brandish? Well, he sot up a bank, en say anybody dat put in a dollar would git fo' dollars mo' at de en' er de year (55).

Regemey's heroine was rescued from her drowning attempt, but in Long's version, it is Butterfly herself who thinks better of taking her own life: "They had taught her how to die, he had taught her how to live" (392), and goes away with her child. This is in its own way a satisfying ending. It creates a comic plot, in a strictly Aristotelian sense, and we have the satisfaction that Butterfly achieves a level of self-discovery and self-confidence. Such a conclusion may be effective on the printed page, but Belasco is going to realize that having the heroine simply fade away unseen instills little pathos and, so, is not dramatic enough for the stage.

As impressive the sight of Belasco's play must have been to the early century theater-goers, his rendition of the story lacks enough substance to have staying power over generations. Belasco boiled down Long's already thin characters even more. Since Pinkerton does not appear until the very end, there is little indication as to why Butterfly is so in love with Pinkerton: she just is. The psychological manipulation of the girl by her more-worldly companion is whittled down to four asides by Sharpless, two for hearing some of Pinkerton's expressions, "got a big head" and "he comes all time to make smash with me," one for recognizing the promise to return when the robins nest as a Pinkerton type of joke, and one for realizing that Pinkerton has taught her how to make a sarcastic wink.

Long had devoted most of Pinkerton's appearance in the house on the hill early in the story to describe Pinkerton's efforts to separate his new wife from her family, and replace himself for the ancient filial customs and her culture in general. "He could not understand how important this concession was to her. . . . that these 'ancestors,' living and dead, were his wife's sole link to such eternal life as she hoped for. He would provide her a new motive, then, Pinkerton said, perhaps meaning himself, and a new religion, if she must have one-himself again" (375). In Long's version, the girl that is left behind is not only separated from her family, but by way of being isolated in the house, separated from Japanese society, as well. The Lieutenant arranges for the doors to have locks by "adaptions of American hardware" in order "To keep out those who are out, and in who are in" (375), then convinces her that this was a sign of his love for her.

Long's story also emphasizes the changes in Butterfly's behavior. She not only insists on speaking nothing but "United States languages in these house," but insists that everyone else do so, too. Her choice to name the baby Trouble and to have the name changed to Joy when the father returns is described as being done "in the whimsical delight they had practiced together. . . . That was his own way" (377). Another example is her way of behaving around the house, "reclining on the immaculate mats in attitudes of artistic abandon, instead of keeping an august state, as all other Japanese mothers and babies were at this moment doing." Long makes his intent clear: "It will therefore be argued, perhaps, that she is not a typical Japanese woman. . . . He called her an American refinement of a Japanese product, an American improvement in a Japanese invention" (377).

In Long her attempted suicide becomes a vehicle for self-realization as

something within her cried out piteously, and a chance to redirect her purpose in life from her husband to her child. "He had come, and substituted himself for everything; he had gone, and left her nothing. The maid softly put the baby into the room. . . . 'Oh, pitiful Kwannon! Nothing?' The sword fell dully to the floor (392).

Belasco, in contrast, leaves out any self-reflection at the climax. In the play, when Suzuki puts the baby in front of Butterfly, "*Madame Butterfly drops the sword and takes the baby in her arms. . . . She sets the child on a mat, puts the American flag in its hand, and, picking up the sword, goes behind the screen so that the child may not see what she is about to do*" (32). We feel pity for Butterfly, but it is not

clear that she takes her life for any reason other than to alieve her own shock and disappointment, especially since her death takes place only minutes after her realization of Pinkerton's betrayal. Belasco's ending is now more dramatic, but at the same time lacks depth.

### **How these problems were overcome**

If *Madame Chrysantheme* can be criticized for lacking a coherent plot and is tarnished by Loti's cultural aloofness and condescension towards Japan and especially Butterfly and all other Japanese people, Long's "Madame Butterfly," for all its other shortcomings, portrays Japan, and especially Butterfly, in a more noble light. Long can also be commended for bringing together the basic elements of the plot, the hopeful girl forsaken by a rascal foreigner, that carries through Belasco's play and eventually succeeds in Puccini's work.

The first step in creating a viable plot is characterization. Long kept the three main characters, mentioned above, but changes them in important ways. The male protagonist becomes an American naval officer named Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton, presumably to bring the story closer to home for his American audience. The girl, whose name changes from a stationary, prickly flower to a flitting, delicate insect, is given a noble background, not only of class (samurai) but also of deed (suicide for honor). Even the go-between is upgraded from a shadowy pimp to a business man concerned about, as well as profiting from, the affairs of others.

Long adds a list of characters, all of whom aid the telling of his version of the narrative which is to focus attention on Butterfly and to paint Pinkerton in an unflattering light. First, there is Butterfly's maidservant Suzuki. Although a maid serving the couple downstairs, Mademoiselle Dede (106), is briefly mentioned by Loti, Suzuki is more than just a servant; Suzuki is Butterfly's confidant, listening to her endless ramblings about Pinkerton, her baby, and her situation. Suzuki may have been Long's conglomeration of two of Loti's characters, the mistress of the house they rent, Madame Prune who lives downstairs, and her daughter Oyouki, a girl of a similar age to Butterfly. Loti describes Madame Prune as being available throughout the day to wait on the pair, from fetching a jinricksha to waiting at the bottom of their steps on all fours, and Butterfly and Oyouki become more and more inseparable companions as the story goes on (Miskow 17-18).

Another new character is the rich Yamadori who tries to court Butterfly. He dotes on her as he patiently tries to win her over. He offers to become a devoted husband and to provide her with a life of luxury, and even the chance of going to the United States, but Butterfly steadfastly rejects him. All of what Yamadori is offering her is a mirror of what Butterfly thinks Pinkerton is also offering her. In this way, Long shows that these enticements are not what motivates Butterfly's attraction to Pinkerton. Long places Butterfly's love for Pinkerton at the center of the story and sets up the climax of the story to be when Butterfly realizes her love has been betrayed.

Long also introduced a child, which provides physical evidence of the consequences of the liaison. The child also bolsters Butterfly's confidence that Pinkerton will return. In addition, the child is the catalyst on which Butterfly decides to choose life over death. The appearance of Pinkerton's

American wife, Adelyde, another invention of Long, also provides physical evidence for Butterfly that she is not married to Pinkerton. To push ahead the plot, Adelyde's interest in adopting the boy adds impetus for Butterfly's predicament to be resolved quickly, one way or the other.

The American Consul Sharpless is also Long's creation, and, similarly to Suzuki, his presence allows Butterfly to talk. Sharpless has another role, that of expressing a consciousness. The consul seems to know something of Pinkerton and his reputation and offers pieces of background about the sailor. Because he is placed in an untenable situation between the girl's fantasies and Pinkerton's rascality, his moral dilemma is a reflection of the two principal characters' misunderstandings of each other. In thoughts and asides, Sharpless moralizes, and because his sentiments come from a Western male perspective, Long makes his moral perspective clear beyond a doubt—Pinkerton is a self-centered scamp and Butterfly a naive girl manipulated to the point of delusion.

Most importantly Long places romance, at least from the girl's perspective, at the center of the story, and this becomes instrumental in establishing the dramatic viability of the story. In addition, the obvious hopelessness of Butterfly's love for and devotion to Pinkerton adds the dramatic tension that drives the story. All the people around Butterfly try to convince her that it is unlikely Pinkerton will return, the nakodo and Yamadori for their own reasons, but even the trusted Suzuki once gathers the courage to suggest that she take up Yamadori's proposal (379) as does Sharpless (388), but each time it only elicits Butterfly's ire. Butterfly is stubborn, so even the nakodo realizes "the improbability of changing the girl's point of view" (382), and when the consul explains to her that the money Pinkerton is offering her is "only in remembrance of the past," "He suddenly saw that she did not understand. He decided that she never should" (390).

Although Puccini was inspired directly from Belasco's play, he and his librettists went back to a format closer to Long's story by having Pinkerton appear at the beginning. As Long's (and Loti's) man does on the ship, Pinkerton outlines his crude plan, to make love to the girl and then leave her, for his time in Nagasaki, though this time it is delivered to Goro the nakodo. In addition, this plan of deliberate betrayal lands closer to the heart of the story as it is delivered at the very house that continues to be, for the waiting Butterfly, the physical symbol of Pinkerton's commitment to her.

Why does he arrange for the Consul / to look after the rent? / Tell me, quick! / Why did he take  
such care to have / the house fitted with locks / if he didn't mean to come back again?

Puccini then makes sure the dramatic tension in the story is clear from the beginning by juxtaposing the two principals' expectations. As Butterfly arrives for her wedding, she is spouting fantasies,

I am the happiest / girl in Japan, / or rather, in the whole world. / Friends, I have come / at the  
call of love . . . / I have come to the portals of love / where is gathered the happiness / of all who  
live and die,

while at the same time the lecherous Pinkerton looks on:

There's no great harm done / if I want those wings / to be spread in love's tender flight!  
With those childlike ways, / when she talks she sets my blood on fire.  
Yes, it's true, she's a flower, a flower, / and, upon my honor, I've plucked her!

This allows us to view the subsequent love scene, as they prepare for bed, from the two different perspectives, Pinkerton's anticipation of sensual enjoyment and Butterfly's anticipation of commitment:

PINKERTON: To think that this little toy / is my wife! My wife! / But she displays such grace /  
that I am consumed / by a fever / of sudden desire!  
BUTTERFLY: Love me with a little love, / a child-like love, / the kind that suits me. / Love me  
please.

Puccini reinforces this with his original entomological image:

PINKERTON: My Butterfly! / How aptly you were named, / fragile butterfly!  
BUTTERFLY: They say that overseas / if it should fall into the hands of man / a butterfly is  
stuck through / with a pin / and fixed to a board!  
PINKERTON: There's some truth to that, / and do you know why? / So that it shouldn't fly away  
again. / I've caught you . . . / Quivering, I press you to me. / You're mine.

In Puccini's opera, Butterfly speaks normally, and any issues of linguistic interpretation are ignored as they seem to be able to communicate without difficulty. Also, in the opera it is Butterfly herself who informs Pinkerton and others that she is

From a family / which at one time was quite well-to-do. . . . I have known riches. / But storms  
uproot / the sturdiest oaks . . . / and we became geishas / to support ourselves." However, she  
sows her pride, "I don't hide it, / neither do I feel hard done by. / Why do you laugh? / It's the  
way of the world.

Puccini decided to keep the dramatic effect of the successful suicide, but is careful to flesh out and clarify Butterfly's selfless motivation: It is for the sake of the child.

You? You? You? / Little idol of my heart. / My Love, my love, / flower of the lily rose. / Never  
know that, for you, / for your innocent eyes, / Butterfly is about to die . . . / so that you may go /  
away beyond the sea / without being subject to remorse / in later years / for your mother's

desertion.

Even Puccini did not get the story right for the first performance in 1904 at La Scala in Milan. In fact, it was so poorly received that the audience jeered, and Puccini himself called it “a disgrace” (Groos 668). In reworking the opera for its next performance a few months later in Brescia, Puccini cut down his rendition of the long night scene from Belasco, and shifted Pinkerton’s identity “from being an insensitive westerner to an irresponsible lover” (Groos 665). He also softened and reduced Pinkerton’s role in Act I and strengthened his remorse at the end, partly to be able to persuade tenors, who were put off by the distasteful character of Pinkerton, to take the part. These revisions put it on the right path and, after two further re-workings, producers today have three slightly different versions to work from.

Puccini was able to put together all the pieces for a dramatic blockbuster as he draws on French criticism, American cynicism, and Italian dramatic sensibility (Miskow 29). There is the spectacle of Japan, the kimonos, the hairdos, the screens; there is the melodramatic sinister characters of Pinkerton and Goro and their evil plans; there is the moralizing of Sharpless; and most importantly there is the innocent, pure-hearted girl who we know is doomed from the beginning, but who rises to a level of noble character as she commits the ultimate sacrifice of a mother for her child. It was then up to Puccini to create the music that would lift this story to the sky.

### Comparative Chart

	<u>Loti</u>	<u>Messenger</u>	<u>Regamey</u>	<u>Long</u>	<u>Belasco</u>	<u>Puccini</u>	
Characters	Loti	Pierre	Loti	Pinkerton	Pinkerton	Pinkerton	
	Yves	Yves		Sayre			
	Chrysanthemum		Okane-San		Butterfly		
	Kangourou				Goro		
	M. Prune				Suzuki		
	M. Sucre						
	Oyouki						
					Sharpless		
					Baby boy	Baby girl	Baby boy
					Adelaide	Kate	
Nagasaki							
Locations	House on Diou-Djen-Dji hill	House on hill	House on hill	House on Higashi Hill	House on Higashi Hill	House on hill near Nagasaki	
	Streets			American Consulate			
	Ship			Ship			
Elements	Chrysanthemum is consort	Chrysanthemum is geisha					
		Chrysanthemum is daughter of samurai					
		Letter hinting that <u>Chrysanthemum</u> misses Pierre after his departure	Chrysanthemum is waiting woman				
	Narrator condescending and pejorative, Chrysanthemum only a prop	Mutual low-level emotional attachment	Chrysanthemum deeply in love Pierre turns cold when he is leaving	Chrysanthemum deeply in love Pinkerton sees her as plaything	Chrysanthemum deeply in love; Pinkerton does not appear until end and cannot face her	Chrysanthemum deeply in love; Pinkerton enraptured at beginning, in end cannot face her	
Viewpoints	Loti 1 <sup>st</sup> person narration, focus on own perceptions and feelings	Primary focus on Pierre, <u>but Chrysanthemum</u> role increased	Chrysanthemum 1 <sup>st</sup> person narration	3 <sup>rd</sup> person, focus on Butterfly	Almost entire focus on Butterfly	Initial focus on Pinkerton, focus on Butterfly	
Ending	Cold parting	Warm parting	Attempted suicide		Suicide		

---

**References**

- Belasco, David. *Madame Butterfly: A Tragedy of Japan*. Electronic Edition by Alexander Street Press: *Madame Butterfly*. (Columbia University Opera Project) Web. 22 July 2020.
- Burke-Gaffney, Brian. *Starcrossed: A Biography of Madame Butterfly*. Signature Books. Norwalk, CT: EastBridge, 2004.
- Cooperstein, Shana. "Putting Cultural Customs on the 'Line': Felix Regamey, Japonisme, and National Art Education." *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture*. Vol. 19, Issue 1, Spring, 2020. Web. 12 Aug 2020.
- Groos, Arthur. "Lieutenant F. B. Pinkerton: Problems in the Genesis of an Operatic Hero." *Italica* Vol. 64, No. 4, Literature & Opera, Winter, 1987, pp. 654-675.
- Hartmann, Georges and Andre Alexandre. Libretto. *Madame Chrysanthemum*. Trans. Chas. E Burden. Music by Andre Messager. New York: Charles E Burden, 1911. *Bob's Opera World Opera Libretti*. Web. 13 May 2020.
- Illica, Luigi and Giuseppe Giacosa. Libretto. *Madama Butterfly*. Trans. John Gutman. Music by Giacomo Puccini. New York: G. Schirmer, 1963.
- Long, John Luther. "Madame Butterfly." *The Century: a popular quarterly*. / Volume 55, Issue 3 (Jan 1898), pp. 374-393, accessed online at "Making of America," Cornell University Libraries.
- Loti, Pierre. *Madame Chrysanthemum—Complete*. Filiquarian Publishing, LLC.
- Miskow, Catherine. "The Chrysanthemum and the Butterfly: What, If Anything, Remains of Pierre Loti in the Madame Butterfly Narrative?" *Utah Foreign Language Review*. Vol.19, 2011.
- Madama Butterfly* Source Material: "The Evolution of *Madame Butterfly*," San Francisco Opera Education Materials.
- McKenzie, Heather. *Madame Chrysantheme as an Item of Nineteenth-Century French Japonaiserie*. Doctoral Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2004.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. "The Choice to Love." Lyric Opera of Chicago. Lyric Notes, Dec. 2019.
- Reed, Christopher. *The Chrysanthemum Papers: The Pink Notebook of Madame Chrysanthemum and Other Documents of French Japonisme*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 2010. Accessed from Catherine Miskow 2011.
- Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: The Authoritative Text*. Victor Fisher and Lin Salamo Eds. University of California Press, Berkley, 2001.
- Van Rij, Jan. *Madame Butterfly: Japonisme, Puccini and the Search for the Real Cho-Cho San*. Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2001.