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The Butterfly Effect: Creating and Recreating the Story of Madame Butterfly, on Paper and on Stage

ABSTRACT

The consequences of the partially coerced opening of Japan to the Western world in the second half of the 19th century went far beyond economic and political goals and considerations. The previously secluded land almost instantly became a source of artistic inspiration and endless fascination. *Japonisme*, the term by which the latest craze become known in France, was no passing fad. For many decades, Western artists, most of whom had never set foot in Japan, derived profound inspiration from all facets of the mysterious culture which unfolded in the period. Thus, with scant information and a lack of accurate records being available, common gossip and unfounded rumor filled in the blanks of official reports and naval tales, connecting the dots between the real and the imagined.

In this paper, I succinctly examine the story of Madame Butterfly, cutting across time, genre and borders in the works of John Luther Long, David Belasco, Giacomo Puccini and Claude-Michel Schönberg/Alain Boublil. I contextualize the selected narratives within their socio-political frameworks, but also consider the ramifications of the past and present-day adaptations from the 21st-century perspective, in the light of current struggles for (adequate) representation. Lastly, I examine the production of *Miss Saigon* (2019–22) at the Music Theatre of Łódź, Poland to compare how the staging of such a musical in a predominantly racially homogenous country affects the perception of Orientalist works. As such this section is a case study based on personal interviews conducted by the author with the producers and cast members.

Keywords: Orientalism, post-colonialism, *Madame Butterfly*, *Miss Saigon*, theatre, musical.

THE BUTTERFLY FORMULA

The tragic tale of an Asian woman and her transient relationship with a Western officer popularized at the turn of the 20th century remains one of the flagship examples of Orientalist narratives, one which has been told and retold over time. The story, which was first published in 1887 by a French novelist and naval officer Pierre Loti in the form of an autobiographical journal under the title *Madame Chrysanthème*,[1] was later revisited by an American writer and lawyer John Luther Long. His novella *Madame Butterfly* (1898) was in turn adapted for the stage by David Belasco in 1900 and subsequently became one of Puccini's greatest operas—*Madama Butterfly* (1904). Contemporary instances of the said narrative include the mega-musical *Miss Saigon* (1989) by Claude-Michel Schönberg, with lyrics by Alain Boublil and Richard Maltby Jr., and a post-colonial play *M. Butterfly* (1988) by David Henry Hwang, both of which were revived on Broadway in the mid-2010s.

The Butterfly formula is quite simple: a Western officer stationing in Asia marries a young local girl, whom he later abandons. While Loti's narrative ends with the officer's departure (and his disbelief at Chrysanthème's indifference to his leaving), the subsequent versions commencing with Long's novella bring certain plot twists to the story: Madame (and Madama) Butterfly/Miss Saigon is devastated by her husband's departure and awaits his return, rejecting marriage proposals from an influential suitor. The officer, however, remarries in the Western world and only then learns of a son that he too abandoned. He subsequently decides to bring the child with him to his homeland and leave the woman behind (again). While the reasons and intentions of the characters change, the basic framework of the plot remains.

THE FIRST AMERICAN BUTTERFLY

John Luther Long's inspirations for the novella go beyond Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème*. While—unlike Loti—Long never traveled to Asia, his sister lived in a Methodist Mission in Nagasaki between 1892 and 1897. Her recounting of a tragic tale about a Japanese geisha whose European husband abandoned her and their unborn child explains the changes Long made to

[1] According to Reed, Loti's story was also "registered by the artist Mortimer Menpes, who published an etching titled *My Lady Chrysanthemum* to illustrate his own account of his travels in Japan" in 1888 (1). The tale was then adapted for the opera under the same title by André Messager to a libretto by Georges Hartmann and Alexandre André in 1893, which, however, was a moderate success.

Loti's story, particularly the transgression from Loti's wife indifference to his leaving, happily counting the money she made on the temporary marriage, to Long's faithful Cho-Cho-San awaiting her husband's return. Also, encouraged by his Methodist-missionary sister, Long is supposed to have "wanted to shock his American readers," so that "the reader might develop some kind of moral empathy with the girls who were exploited by the custom" ("The Making").

Despite Long's assumed good intentions, his depiction of Japan is distinctively a product of Orientalist epistemology, drawing from the binary opposition between the Orient and the Occident and the powerful Other that the Orient provides (Said 1–2). According to Yoshihara, *Madame Butterfly* is "one of the quintessential Orientalist narratives" which exemplifies "the gendered dynamics of East-West relations founded upon unequal power relations" (975). These dynamics are reflected in Long's story both in the third-person narration and in the dialogue. When Pinkerton refers to his posting in Nagasaki as "banishment to the Asiatic station," Sayre, a fellow American naval officer (who was previously stationed in Japan) encourages him to marry a local "for lack of other amusement" (Long 3). Pinkerton follows the advice and "[w]ith the aid of a marriage-broker, . . . [finds] both a wife and a house in which to keep her" (Long 8).

These opening lines set the tone for the narrative and expose the underlying mechanisms of racial and sexist discrimination based on imbalanced power relations. Having been entirely excluded from the decision-making process, during which she was temporarily purchased without her knowledge or consent, Cho-Cho-San unwittingly becomes an exotic commodity and a part of the package deal that came with a house where she would be "kept" by her American husband (until he decides otherwise). Moreover, when Adelaide, Pinkerton's American wife encounters Cho-Cho-San, she exclaims with unconcealed excitement: "How very charming—how lovely—you are, dear! Will you kiss me, you pretty—plaything!" and adds lightheartedly: "I quite forgive our men for falling in love with you" (Long 142). Her reaction not only reinforces the notion that Butterfly was merely a toy (or a pleasant time-passer) for Pinkerton, but it also exposes the idea of the understated yet clear binary opposition of *us* versus *them*. While "our men" refer to all white men, "you" directed at Butterfly signifies all Japanese women. As such, Cho-Cho-San, who is both Othered and objectified, may be seen as an allegory for all temporary Japanese wives of the time.

Although Long underscores Pinkerton's cruelty and lack of empathy towards his wife, her ignorance, naivety and lack of wit are often a source of comedy in the novella: "Firs' I pray his large American God—that huge

God amighty—but tha' 's no use. He don' know me where I live" (Long 61). Then again, Pinkerton's intellect and wit are visibly underscored, particularly in opposition to his wife: "Perhaps she was logical (for she reasoned as he had taught her—she had never reasoned before)" (Long 41). Comments regarding her intellectual inferiority prevail throughout the text, producing a flagship example of Orientalist narration. The narrator recounts various instances of her failure to comprehend the reality of her situation: "She did not understand, as often she did not," and to belittle her intellectual capacity uses derogative phrases such as "her active little brain" or "her little, unused, frivolous mind" (Long 11, 42, 132).[2]

Long's portrayal of Butterfly demonstrates that Orientalism, in addition to its racialist component, is also intrinsically misogynistic, and as such demonstrates intersectional[3] multi-layered discrimination. According to Wen, "Eastern women as both the 'weaker,' feminine sex, and members of the East, naturally fall victim to the Orientalist stereotyping. They are frequently the fantasized ideal Asian woman who, submissive and vulnerable, . . . hence can be easily dominated by the masculine power of the Western man" (45). Pinkerton takes great pleasure in Cho-Cho-San's blind obedience and unyielding trustfulness, playing jokes on her naivety. First, he teaches her to call him Mr. B. F. (Benjamin Franklin) Pikkerton,[4] and then just before abandoning her, he promises to return "when the robins nested again" (Long 3), a direct reference to a popular waltz song by Frank Howard:

> When the Robins nest again,
> . . .
> Then my bonnie blue eyed lad,
> If my heart is true 'til then,
> Has promised he'll return to me,
> when the Robins nest again.

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[2] Of course, such "orientalized construction of the European"—or Western—"*other* is typical of the time and place" and *Madame Butterfly* is not a unique "traveling story" of the period to draw on the racial power imbalances and white male fantasies regarding women of color (Hutcheon 155). Prosper Mérimée's novella *Carmen* (1845) would be yet another work whose storyline is based on similar power relations, exotic fantasies, racist perceptions and misogynistic storylines, resulting from an encounter with an alien culture.

[3] First introduced by a civil rights activist and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, and couched in critical race theory *intersectionality* serves as both a tool for observing and analyzing power disparities and as a means to address points of contact of different forms of such imbalances among certain disadvantaged groups.

[4] Although clearly intended as a joke, as no other character refers to him by this name, in the libretto of the first two versions of Puccini's opera, Pinkerton's full name is Sir Francis Blummy Pinkerton. However, Puccini reverts to Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton in his final version of the score.

In his own way, Pinkerton reveals his intentions from the start. However, Cho-Cho-San, to his great amusement, takes all his words literally (looking for robins' nests) and uncritically (waiting for his return).

However, Pinkerton is not the only character to objectify her. When the lieutenant abandons her, yet again, without Cho-Cho-San's consent or knowledge, her next marriage is being arranged by a *nakodo*. According to Long, "[t]he rule of decorum for such an occasion simply decreed that she should be blind and deaf concerning what went on" (8). Such a distorted portrayal of Japanese culture is not only sexist, but also offers a literary representation of the polarized relationship between the West and the East founded upon the antithesis of the civilized and savage (Wen 44). These binary oppositions are clearly visible in Pinkerton's attitude to Cho-Cho-San's relatives whom he refers to as "an appalling horde . . . at the wedding" as they came "with lanterns and banners" to the ceremony (Long 1). Long even dichotomizes the baby's traits into Eastern and Western characteristics: "He was as good as a Japanese baby, and as good-looking as an American one" (6).

Cho-Cho-San idolizes Pinkerton and adapts to his Western ways. First, the house they move into is partially Americanized: "Some clever Japanese artisans then made the paper walls of the pretty house eye-proof, and, with their own adaptations of American hardware, the openings cunningly lockable" (Long 1). Then, she cuts ties with her Japanese relatives and refuses to speak her native tongue: "'Listen! No one shall speak anything but United States' languages in these house! Now!'" (Long 4).

Pinkerton does not appreciate her efforts; instead, he calls her "an American refinement of a Japanese product, an American improvement in a Japanese invention," displaying his colonialist "desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Long 3; Bhabha 86). This *mimicry*, a term coined by Bhabha, occurs when "the colonized Other mimics elements of dominant, colonial identity" (Felluga 179). However, "such mimicry at once mirrors elements of colonial authority and also threatens that authority because it is always adopted with a difference" creating an "area between mimicry and mockery" which in turn, according to Bhabha, compromises the colonial authority and disrupts its mission to control the Other (Felluga 179; Bhabha 86).

Butterfly's attempts at imitating alien culture not only fail, but also underscore her Otherness, especially in terms of language: "'But tha' 's ezag' why I am not! Wha' 's use lie? It is not inside me that sawry. Me? I'm mos' bes' happy female woman in Japan mebby in that whole worl'. What you thing?" (Long 3). For Long (and later for Belasco), Butterfly's

mimicry serves as a source of comic relief. Yet while intended as funny to the 19th-century audiences, "the twenty-first-century reader must be horrified by the pseudo-pidgin-English of Butterfly, which sounds like a 1930's Hollywood script-writer's version of what was then accepted as African-American speech" ("The Making").

MADAME AND MADAMA. THE EARLY 20TH-CENTURY ADAPTATIONS

David Belasco, an actor, producer, director, and playwright, was one of the most influential personas in the history of American theatre. At the turn of the century, Belasco was operating one of the utmost lucrative and modern theaters in the world, having pioneered a variety of revolutionary lighting methods, and the latest staging capabilities. Pioneering stage naturalism, his productions were known for their meticulously detailed sets and props. While the artistic merit of Belasco's shows may be questioned, his productions, delivered with undisputable flourish, were a lavish commercial success. His 1900 adaptation of Long's story for the stage[5] was a milestone in immortalizing *Madame Butterfly*.

Belasco's changes to Long's story include a few minor details such as the reduction to a single place of action. Unlike in the novella, to avoid multiple locations, and thus additional stage design and props, Butterfly does not venture out of the house in the play. The consul and Adelaide visit her at home instead. Belasco also added a vigil scene which was "[t]he most celebrated feature of this production" (Sheppard 154). Sheppard describes it as an "(allegedly) fourteen-minute nonverbal section in which lighting and music [written by William Furst] realized the passing of Butterfly's night of anticipation" (154).

Belasco's *Madame Butterfly. A Tragedy of Japan* is contained in a single act that takes place over the course of twenty-four hours. The main tension revolves around Butterfly and Yamadori, whom she repeatedly rejects. The play starts two years after Pinkerton's departure, hence the focus of the story shifts almost entirely to Butterfly. Such a representation not only underscores the emotional charge of the work, but by eradicating entirely the brief time Pinkerton spent in Nagasaki with Cho-Cho-San, he is cleansed of all his early sins, including the toxic relationship with his

[5] It remains unclear what John Luther Long's role in creating the stage adaptation of the novella was. The play incorporates many of the original lines, which implies cooperation between the two authors, and even in one copy of the script both authors are given equal credit. Jenkins, however claims that "[c]ontrary to numerous reports, Belasco wrote the stage version without Long's assistance."

Japanese wife or his comments regarding her relatives. In fact, Belasco's lieutenant is much less of a villain than his counterpart in the novella. He even admits he considered returning to Nagasaki, but reasoned that Butterfly would be "ringing . . . gold coins to make sure they're good," a clear reference to Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème* (Belasco 28). Belasco also indicates that Pinkerton, witnessing Cho-Cho-San's suicide, finally admits some responsibility as the play closes with his cry "Oh! Cho-Cho-San!" and Butterfly's last words before she dies: "Too bad those robins did'n' nes' again" (32).

Belasco's tragic ending and his de-villainizing of Pinkerton are the most significant alterations to the Madame Butterfly narrative, as they change the characters' intentions and the overall reception of the story. Although all the Orientalist tropes examined before remain (including Cho-Cho-San's pidgin English and distorted portrayals of Japanese culture), the blame for the heartbreaking story of a naïve Japanese girl is shifted towards a tragic love triangle. These changes are even more significant, as they were incorporated in the subsequent reincarnations of the Madame Butterfly narratives, first by Giacomo Puccini, and later by the creators of the musical *Miss Saigon*.

Puccini witnessed the production of Belasco's *Madame Butterfly* in London in 1900. His operatic version of the story, *Madama Butterfly*, with a libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, opened to poor reviews in 1904 at La Scala in Milan, but its revised version, which premiered the same year in Brescia, not only received critical acclaim, but was a popular success. Jenkins claims that "[t]he libretto of *Madama Butterfly* is one of those rare instances in operatic history where the text is actually an improvement over its sources. . . . Coupled with Puccini's emotionally charged musical score, *Madama Butterfly* produces an effect at once intimate and overwhelming, a haunting portrayal of the dangers of misguided love."

Puccini, in his opera, tried to convey the spirit of Japan, or in his own words, he had hoped to create "true Japan, not Iris" (qtd. in Sheppard 9). He even sought advice from Mrs. Oyama, the wife of the Japanese ambassador to Italy. Hence various music themes incorporate original Japanese melodies (including the Japanese National Anthem). However, Puccini removes the original Japanese songs from their native context, and rather than drawing parallels between their meanings and the storyline, he integrates them as he pleases. This, along with the previously discussed storyline of the Butterfly narrative, makes Puccini an incognizant perpetrator of the Orientalist discourse, carrying its weight and unfading popularity into the 21st century.

AND SUDDENLY—A SONG! BUTTERFLY'S MUSICAL REINCARANTION

Miss Saigon premiered in London's West End in 1989 and made its first Broadway appearance two years later. Claude-Michel Schönberg, the musical's composer, claims that the primary source and inspiration for the musical was a photograph he saw in 1975, that of a Vietnamese woman and her daughter taken at the Tan Son Nhut Air Base:

> What we felt for this girl and her mother has always moved us deeply. . . . This Vietnamese woman, her face frozen in pain, knew that finding the child's father marked the end of her life with her daughter and that this moment at the departure gate was the end. This silent scream is the most potent condemnation of the horror of that war—of all wars. (qtd. in "Point of Inspiration")

Although Schönberg and Alain Boublil never mention *Madame Butterfly*, the inspiration from Long and/or Puccini is evident: Kim, an orphaned seventeen-year-old South Vietnamese girl works as a prostitute in one of the Saigon bars frequented by American soldiers, where she falls in love with an American GI, Chris. Their romance is short-lived as Saigon falls shortly after their marriage ceremony, and the American soldiers are evacuated, leaving the Vietnamese civilians behind. Pregnant and alone under Ho Chi Minh's reign, Kim keeps her son, Tam, a secret. When her suitor Thuy, a Viet Minh general threatens to kill the boy, Kim shoots him and escapes to Thailand, where Chris and his new American wife, Ellen, find them. Chris and Ellen decide to leave Tam and Kim behind in Bangkok, and provide for them there. Yet again, the Asian female protagonist, who has been awaiting her husband's return, learns of his marriage by accident, when Ellen comes to see him in his hotel room in Bangkok. When Chris and Ellen come to reason with her the next day, they become the witnesses to her suicide:

CHRIS: KIM!
KIM!
What have you done Kim? Why?
KIM: THE GODS HAVE GUIDED YOU TO YOUR SON
CHRIS: Please don't die!
KIM: HOLD ME ONE MORE TIME—
HOW IN ONE NIGHT HAVE WE COME . . . SO FAR?
[Kim dies in Chris's arms]
CHRIS: No!
CURTAIN

(Schönberg et al., Finale Act Two)

The librettists, Boublil and Richard Maltby Jr., were clearly inspired by Puccini's, rather than Long's or Loti's, writings, or even Belasco's play. They draw on the characters created for the opera, crystalizing their intentions and expanding their psychological depth. Kim's demise and her progressing mental breakdown were visibly forefronted in the musical. The *nakodo*, whose role was elevated by Belasco, becomes a central figure in the musical—a pimp, rather than a matchmaker, the Engineer (a former brothel manager in Saigon) concocts a plan to reunite Kim with her former lover for his own gains. Cho-Cho-San, a naïve young girl living off her dreams of a true love that materialized in the form of Pinkerton, becomes Kim, a girl caught in an impossible love triangle, whose fantasies mix with reality. The lieutenant, now an American GI, is as much of a victim of the war as she is: "In this musical, the Pinkerton character, Chris, appears guiltless, a victim of geopolitical history just as much as the left-behind exotic woman. His futile efforts to find his lost love and the memory of the war left him with a serious case of PTSD" (Sheppard 46). Chris finds love again with Ellen, but never forgets Kim, hence he finds himself in a stalemate between the two women whom he apparently loves. Kim's ultimate sacrifice is her suicide as she refuses to live without Chris but at the same time hopes for a better future for their son. In short, the musical reincarnation of the Butterfly formula is "a white male fantasy borrowed from Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly*: sexy Asian woman falls for heroic white man; he uses, then abandons her; distraught, she kills herself" (Zia 113).

The musical, which "aimed to show the desperation and ugliness of war," is, according to Sheppard, the "most popular, controversial, and discussed version of the Madame Butterfly narrative" (384). The production has been accused of racism, sexism, and perpetuating colonialist discourse. During *Miss Saigon*'s West-End run, Jonathan Pryce wore yellowface for the role of the Engineer: "Welsh-born actor Jonathan Pryce . . . did not make a convincing Vietnamese, as the original libretto called for. This was remedied by declaring the pimp to be Eurasian, and applying heavy makeup to eye prosthetics to create an epicanthic 'slant' to Pryce's Caucasian eyes" (Zia 113). When the New York premiere was announced, the use of yellowface inspired protest and sparked outrage. Despite that, *Miss Saigon* opened on Broadway, and although great effort was made to cast a woman of color for the role of Kim, Jonathan Pryce retained his part.

Later, "Asian Americans [took] up the issue of the play's offensive content", and "periodically protested it since" on the claim that the "production perpetuates an unwelcome view of Asians" (Zia 112; Paulson). As such, Hisama criticizes the musical for "re-presenting the complexities of the Vietnam War as merely a 'cross-cultural' love story" which "assuages the United States' guilt about the Vietnam War while also

reproducing age-old Western stereotypes about Asians and about women, already familiar from Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* . . . and Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* . . . but updating and reinforcing them for the new millennium" (18). The creators, however, rebut the criticism. "I don't think anywhere in that that we were exploiting any element of Vietnam or Bangkok for show-business reasons," Maltby, the co-lyricist and director of the American production asserts, and adds: "The biggest show-business number is 'The American Dream,' which is about America" (qtd. in Tran).

The 2014 London revival that opened on Broadway two years later "underwent revisions guided by a directorial approach to bring an authentic focus to the human cost of the Vietnam War" (Gans).[6] The good intentions yet again went sour, as the revival sparked even more criticism and initiated the *Don't Buy Miss Saigon* faction, a grassroots civic movement, which became an open-sourced critique of the musical, whose aim was to a boycott the production:

> What is especially problematic is that Miss Saigon is the longest running and most enduring pop culture representation of Vietnamese people in the Western world—and to a certain extent and by extension of racism, it presents a narrow lens through which all Asians are viewed. . . . *Miss Saigon* is . . . a big budget ode to colonialism that romanticizes war and human trafficking. (*Don't Buy*)

Ramos too criticizes the revival: "[i]n 1989 and 1991, *Miss Saigon* was seen through a different scope, being one of the few musicals, films and TV series providing representation for Asians and Asian Americans. In 2019, when there's a craving for authentic representation and inclusion, those optics are vastly different." He adds that while "[i]t's an epically tragic musical with riveting, soul-stirring music," it "is not enough to make up for its tone-deaf narrative swaddled in white guilt."

Despite the controversial storyline, once yellowface was replaced for racially and ethnically appropriate casting, many artists applauded the opportunity the musical has provided for actors of Asian origin. Lea Salonga, who won a Tony Award for her role of Kim, countered the *Don't Buy Miss Saigon* protests. She argues: "The minute that any production of that show comes up Asian actors are going to be employed. If they're equity actors, they're going to get equity weeks. It means that they get health insurance" (qtd. in Pablo). Joe Llana,

[6] Interestingly, Playbill's entry concerning the revival entitled "How This Miss Saigon Honors the Vietnamese Perspective" is gone, and instead the website now displays, quite ironically, a caption: "We couldn't find what you were looking for but THE SHOW MUST GO ON! Try looking for something else."

a Filipino-American actor, claims it was *Miss Saigon* that inspired him to pursue a career in theatre; however, he also addresses certain issues he has had with the production:

> Do I love that two of our most popular Asian characters in musical theatre are a Vietnamese pimp and a Vietnamese whore? . . . No! I remember auditioning for the London production of *Miss Saigon*, and there were some parts of me that had real issues. The Engineer is a self-hating Asian, and I hate it. I hated auditioning for that part. But those are the parts that we have. (qtd. in Tran)

Hence, what the Asian-American community appreciates most when it comes to *Miss Saigon* is the opportunity for a part in one of America's most popular art forms, simply for the lack of other prospects. Others, however, according to Sheppard, "have asked why any Asian or Asian American actor would clamor to participate in this work . . . given its plot and general representation" (Sheppard 45).

ACROSS TIME AND SPACE. *MISS SAIGON* AT THE MUSIC THEATRE OF ŁÓDŹ

Miss Saigon premiered in Poland on 9 December 2000 in the Roma Musical Theatre in Warsaw. The revived version opened on 8 June 2019 at the Music Theatre of Łódź; it was the only revival of the mega-musical outside of the West End (2014–16) in Europe until its Austrian premiere in Vienna on 3 December 2021. The apparent lack of interest in the musical by other companies may be attributed to a myriad of factors: economic (e.g., a costly license agreement, a sizeable ensemble and orchestra), cultural (ethnicity, diversity), social (reliability), historical and contextual, among others. These considerations, however, did not deter the Music Theatre of Łódź from pursuing the title, despite a rather distant historical context and an unfamiliar subject matter. What is more, neither of the Polish adaptations sparked protests or outrage; on the contrary—both received rave reviews and public acclaim.

It seems, therefore, that the reception of Orientalist performances in a racially homogeneous society devoid of a racist colonial past and imperialist experience lacks postcolonial perspectives, such as those which resurfaced during *Miss Saigon*'s revivals in the US and England. Even at the marketing level, it is clear that the production was never a potential problem for the producers in Łódź. According to Anna Korzon-Wnukowska,[7] the

[7] All interviews in this sections were conducted by the author.

head of the theatre's marketing department, "promoting *Miss Saigon* wasn't problematic; Asians and their culture are perceived positively here, unlike, for example, Roma communities, people of Turkish origin or African-Americans." This not only shows that the issue of Orientalism or sexism was beyond the theatre's considerations; it also indicates that the means of depicting different cultures is nowhere as important for the institution as the audience's perception of a particular minority. The focus of potential concern is entirely on the white Polish audiences, who are not Othered by the Orientalist performance, and for whom "issues of religion or the approach to historical truth are much more important than racial issues," claims Korzon-Wnukowska.

Since the Łódź cast is almost entirely white, the actors wear slanted-eye makeup and wigs to portray Vietnamese characters on stage. Interestingly, in accordance with the license agreement, the lead roles "such as Kim or Thuy had to be cast with actors resembling Asians," but not necessarily of Asian origin (Korzon-Wnukowska). However, most of the interviewees agree that all-white casts in productions such as *Miss Saigon* are problematic. Maciej Pawlak, the actor and singer who plays the lead role of Chris in the production, admits: "for ethical reasons, I oppose blackface and yellowface." But Krzysztof Wawrzyniak, the assistant director of the play, claims that "*Miss Saigon* with an ethnically appropriate cast in Poland is a pipe dream" as "there are very few professional musical performers in Poland, let alone actors of color, who meet three basic criteria of the genre (singing, dancing, and acting)." "As a result," he says, "whether it comes to ethnicity or even physical traits, we must rely on costumes, wigs, and make-up." Jakub Szydłowski, the artistic director at the Music Theatre of Łódź, confirms that when it comes to mega-musicals and other well-known shows, casting concerns extend beyond racial or ethnic issues. Katarzyna Łaska, the first Polish Kim in the Warsaw production and Gigi in the Łódź revival, also mentioned the lack of qualified actors of color, but shared an entirely different perspective: "Back in 2000, we did not think about diversity standards at all. And I still consider playing an Asian no different than playing a princess, or a witch. I'm not a princess, and I'm not Asian. But I'm an actress and it is my job to become different characters on stage."

Łaska goes on to explain that the attitudes towards Orientalist narratives differ in Poland since "unlike in the USA, where black and Asian performers have been discriminated against for years, there was no slavery or colonial history here, thus yellowface and blackface are perceived differently in Poland." In fact, the argument of the lack of Polish colonial past has resurfaced across all interviews. According to Pawlak, "such performances are perceived differently in Poland than in

the so-called colonizing countries. The great majority of Poles (as well as performers and producers) are completely ignorant of this problem." Similarly, Wawrzyniak and Szydłowski believe that various ideas of cultural appropriation fluctuate according to the nation's colonial position. When it comes to the audiences' perspective, Korzon-Wnukowska asserts that the reception of the performance remains unaffected by post-colonial experiences. And since the Polish musical scene lacks actors of color, Szydłowski underscores that the only other option would be eradicating such musicals from the Polish stage: "If we don't produce ethnically sensitive musicals with white casts in Poland, we won't be able to stage them at all. There would be no *Miss Saigon*, *Aida*, or *West Side Story*, what good would that be?" he wonders.

Pawlak's perspective, on the other hand, is quite different: "I believe that, given the nearly unrestricted availability of such performances online, it would be appropriate to postpone certain musicals until ethnically appropriate cast can be found. Musicals are all about emotions, music and experience. There are plenty of performances that provide just that without the bonus of moral disgust". However, he notes that if staged, such productions should be approached with considerable care and attention to detail by presenting the world as faithfully as possible without resorting to measures considered controversial and harmful or, better yet, the producers could depart entirely from the convention imposed by the license agreement and create fantastic and abstract worlds instead: "The task of white directors and screenwriters is to capture the timelessness of the story, eradicating its racial or ethnical aspects, so that it can be told anywhere by anyone" (Pawlak).

While Szydłowski does not entirely concur with Pawlak, he too believes that the director "must find a method to convey the message while ensuring that his adaptation is tasteful and respectful." "If I was directing *Miss Saigon* now," he continues, "I would change the context. We don't need to pretend we're Asians, we can concentrate on the core of the story—the conflict, the war." Katarzyna Łaska similarly believes that the setting is unimportant, but to her, the focus of the musical is on the "beautiful love story, which could happen anywhere. It is a love story, not a story about the Vietnam War." Wawrzyniak also puts the message above the setting and context. According to him, "such musicals center around topics that are very important, global and timeless, and we need to look at them from different perspectives. It's the director's job to find a good angle to present the story." Curiously, these comments demonstrate a growing awareness, at least on the conceptual level, of the issue of "whitewashing," but they in no way address the sexist components of the musical.

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

From a cultural perspective, the discussed Butterfly narratives are products of their times and circumstances, and as such—proponents of the Orientalist discourse. In terms of *Madame Chrysanthème* and *Madame/Madama Butterfly*, those would be the times of colonial imperialism in which racism, sexism, and a misguided obsession with the Orient dominated the Western world. Butterfly's unique story and the timing of its productions were emblematic of America's strength in developing its own Orientalism at a time when the East-West geopolitics were rapidly changing: "[T]he Spanish-American and Filipino-American wars followed by the U.S. conquest of the Philippines, along with the Open Door Policy vis-à-vis China" (Yoshihara 975). Also, the war "between Russia and Japan aroused interest in Japanese songs, not necessarily treating on war themes, but Japanese in subject and atmosphere" which in turn may have ignited Puccini's fascination with the story (Harris 12). The turn of the twenty-first century "also witnessed an attempt . . . to offer commemorative works that retell major historical moments from an Asian American perspective" (Sheppard 401). While the perspective in *Miss Saigon* is still very much white, the musical was a direct response to the unceasing pop-cultural interest in the Vietnam War.

The initial success of all the Butterfly narratives can be partly attributed to the unique socio-political conditions and historical contexts in which they emerged. But now, in the era of the #MeToo movement, and the growing awareness of diversity standards, they are called out for preserving racial stereotypes and hierarchies, as well as perpetuating sexism and depicting an Orientalist caricature of Asian culture. The Broadway revival of *Miss Saigon* lasted less than a year having closed with poor box-office takings and less-than-flattering reviews, while the performances of the touring company met with several protests. The Polish production, on the other hand, was an award-winning, critically acclaimed box office hit that has run at full audience capacity (an average of 86% per performance) with 35,073 tickets sold over 48 shows between June 2019 and March 2022 (Rogozińska). The musical ended its run in Łódź on 23 April 2022 after fifty-three performances.

Hutcheon asserts that "adapting across cultures is not simply a matter of translating words" (149), and while other instances of the Butterfly narrative such as Belasco's play, Puccini's opera or potential rewritings may be indigenized, it must be noted that the producers of the mega-musicals which are governed by licenses need to adhere to stringent guidelines and have little leeway for change and no room for transculturation in the staging process. However, the shift in reception of Orientalist works, on the other

hand, seems inevitable. The context within which a story is received changes in time, and as Hutcheon suggests, "[a]n adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context—a time and a place, a society and a culture; it does not exist in a vacuum. Fashions, not to mention value systems, are context-dependent" (142). The gradual changes in perception of colonial works and their contemporary adaptations, ignited by critics as such as Edward Said and various social movements, resulted in open criticism of *Madame/Madama Butterfly*'s and *Miss Saigon*'s subject matter and its Orientalist, racist and sexist representations. The shift brought about postcolonial responses to the narrative (Hwang's *M. Butterfly*) and contributed to the debate on cultural appropriation and cast diversity in theaters. When such a Butterfly effect will occur and how (or whether) productions of ethnically sensitive musicals in Poland will be staged in the future remains to be seen.

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