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Madam Butterfly: tragic figure of Masochism and Melancholy

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Abstract

By their textual and musical dramaturgy, operatic mises en scène offer a perfect view of the conflicts inherent in human nature. The passions of Madam Butterfly - the eponymous opera of G. Puccini - foment a tragic fate that is paradigmatic of masochism and melancholy. This remarkable opera offers avenues for figuration and identification that can help inform psychoanalysts and psychotherapists in their understanding and treatment of patients with extreme psychical organisations, where neither loss and separation nor ambivalence (which links together love and hate) can be elaborated. Having recalled the bases of the dialogue between psychoanalysis and cultural productions and introduced the story of Madam Butterfly and the figures making up the narrative, the article proposes to examine the cathectic process at work. Through the many twists and turns in her story, Madam Butterfly is seen to invest in Pinkerton, irremediably sealing her fate as a young wife. The Butterfly figure is a perfect illustration of the different forms of masochism, of passiveness and the snare of melancholy. These movements highlight the intensity of the narcissistic challenges so strongly expressed through the confrontation with the loss of the object. Butterfly cannot mobilise any form of ambivalence towards Pinkerton. Only such ambivalence would, however, in the recognition of otherness, have afforded her the means to survive the admittedly painful openness to the reality of loss. She offers and abandons herself to the one who derives pleasure from breaking her butterfly wings, stubbornly refusing to turn to any other person for succour, irremediably sealing her fate for eternity.

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Madam Butterfly: tragic figure of Masochism and Melancholy

Sai la canzone? "Ei venne alle sue porte
prese il posto di tutto
se n'andò e nulla vi lasciò,
nulla, nulla, fuor che la morte"
Madam Butterfly, Atto 2, 1904.

How runs the ditty? "Through closed gates he entered
Life and Love entered with him;
Then he went and nought was left to us
Nothing, nothing, nothing but death."
Madam Butterfly, Act 2, 1904 version, original translation.

The complexity and density of psychic life justify a plurality of contending perspectives as well as the potential for dialogue between them. In the conclusion to his well-known 33rd *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, S. Freud invites his readers to "enquire from your own experiences of life, or turn to the poets, or wait until science can give you deeper and more coherent information" (1933, p. 135). The present approach shares this conviction: works staged in opera, by virtue of their textual and musical dramaturgy, can offer a formidable insight into the conflicts inherent in human nature. The passions of *Madam Butterfly*, the eponymous opera by Giacomo Puccini, illustrate a particularly tragic fate of masochism and melancholy that merits investigation as part of a process of dialogue with clinical practice.

Our approach is not psycho-biographical. It does not seek to interpret the psychic functioning of the author by delving into his artistic productions. Rather, it involves the psychopathological and psychoanalytical analysis of a character belonging to a fiction, outside the clinic of transference usually mobilised in a procedural manner through the regularity of encounters between patient and psychoanalyst. The focus is on a work in general and a character in particular, to think out the transferential and counter-transferential movements mobilised by the rationales of masochism and melancholy that sometimes prove to be so violent. Our approach is very much in line with the work of many psychoanalysts who, starting out with Freud himself, have pursued an interest in literary and artistic works. For taking a detour through the work allows "the reader to be addressed and reached thanks to this indirect pathway, in his or her own subjectivity" (Green, 1992, p. 9).

1. Psychoanalysis, clinical practice and art

Freud showed the relevance of such an undertaking and, for example, had no hesitation in making extensive use of references from the mythological and literary field in *The Theme of the Three Caskets* (1913) to address the challenging themes of silence and death. Indeed, in his study of *Gradiva* by Jensen, he goes so far as to state that the poet and the psychoanalyst "probably draw from the same source and work upon the same object, each of us by another method. And the agreement of our results seems to guarantee that we have both worked correctly" (1907, p. 92). He rounds off his remarks by affirming that the psychoanalysts "discover the laws which the activities of this unconscious must obey, by analysing [the poet's] writings just as we find them from cases of real illness" (*ibid.*).

The diversion afforded by figuration and fiction provides an alternative way of addressing the massive movements of identification and resistance that are strongly mobilised in the transferential relationship. In *Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work*, Freud justifies his resorting to the "figure [of Richard III] created by the greatest of poets" (Shakespeare) (1916, p. 313) due to a concern not to further deploy his patients' personal details. Now we know that Freud never really shied away from depicting clinical vignettes and life stories with the didactic talent for which he is so well known. In this text, however, he discusses in particular the difficult matter of patients' resistance, the intense movements that oppose the lifting of repression, failures in the face of success through guilt, repetition compulsion, and what he was soon to call negative therapeutic reaction. Already, in *Psychopathic Characters on the Stage*, he declared that "the spectator's suffering is mitigated by the certainty that, firstly, it is someone other than himself who is acting and suffering on the stage, and, secondly, that after all it is only a game, which can threaten no damage to his personal security" (1905-1906, p. 306).

The characters in literary works, by virtue of their dramaturgy, are likely to feature imagos that authorise or condemn, charm or exclude; characters caught up in the torments that are at once theirs or those of other characters, those of the artist and ours. Literary figures are bearers of conflicts that are partly explicit and partly camouflaged, mobilising and dissimulating a variety of affects and representations. The artistic work allows daring evocations under the guise of figures that can elicit repulsion and much more subdued or disguised sentiments, all driven by an imperious internal need to say what causes suffering or gladdens the heart. Laurence Apfelbaum argues that the "analyst and the writer draw from the same sources and expose the offshoots of the unconscious, but their handling of resistance differs radically" (2006, p. 133). Indeed, the writer can seek release from the effects of censorship and repression, while the psychoanalyst takes on the full brunt of the conflict and resistances mobilised in the

transference. The latter can thus find in works of art a new perspective, opening up a more distanced treatment of conflicts. The writers of the preface for the number of the review *Libres cahiers pour la psychanalyse* devoted to Freud's text *Some character-types met with in psycho-analytic work* argue correctly that "literary examples allow from the outset for a temporary diversion from the clinical reality and above all from the cruelty of transference: greater freedom in constructing interpretations relating to the heroes - they do not put up resistance! More freedom also allowed since the destiny of these fictional characters has been traced, decided on and set out by the author, and as a result the psychoanalyst is freed from the concern to heal, freed from the need for a happy ending" (2006, p. 11). Thus, a scene – that of the opera – features another (psychic) scene and offers the spectator-psychoanalyst an alternative *topos* to think out the extreme psychological solutions mobilised by some of our patients.

Starting out from concepts of masochism and melancholy, we propose to study the function of radical psychic positions that, since they refuse the effects of any loss when the object of love is missing, can lead to sacrifice, even to that of one's own life. For Freud, the concept of masochism is based on the analytical method and the cure, but his thinking also draws inspiration from the confrontation with other disciplines, notably philosophy and especially Schopenhauer's work on its cultural and societal expressions (Grimwade, 2011). This nevertheless remains a heuristic concept that stimulates theoretical and clinical reflection on matters of loss and sexual issues (André, 2000).

2. Madam Butterfly, a powerful and dense symbol

Giacomo Puccini's *Madam Butterfly* has become one of the great operas of all time. However, the protagonist, the figure of an adolescent girl, exerting a powerful attraction on the public and a sense of identification, both idealistic and passionate, fragile and uncompromising, maligned and sacrificed on the altar of greed and craven behaviour, remains something of an exception to the canons of the genre. Puccini discovered the theme in 1900, in London, in the play by the American playwright David Belasco, *Madame Butterfly: A Tragedy of Japan*, an adaptation of the novella *Madame Butterfly* (1898) by another American author John Luther Long. This work in turn derived from the novel by French author Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887) based on a real life story in Nagasaki in 1885. Loti, then aged 35, married an eighteen years old Japanese girl, Kiku-San (Madame Chrysanthème) under a renewable one-month contract before leaving her shortly afterwards. In his novel, he already evoked the contrast between the character of the young Japanese woman, Madame Chrysanthème, a *"fantastic and charming plaything"* and that of the Westerner who has no qualms about telling her: *"I took you to amuse me"*.

While the first performance in Milan in 1904 was a total fiasco, *Madam Butterfly* is today an opera that touches the hearts of an immense audience, both by the masterful quality of its melody and by the sheer depth of its content. Madam Butterfly can be seen as a figure of love, a love that is whole, pure, true, that gives itself completely, a figure of the innocent victim of scorned passion, of loving expectation and disenchantment; but she can also be seen as a passive and submissive, candid and vulnerable female figure facing a frivolous, selfish and cowardly man (Miskimmon, 2018), or a figure of adolescence exalted and naive in the face of circumstantial love (Brèque, 1983). For other critics (Blake, 2014; Lengel, 2017; Rampell, 2016), Madam Butterfly embodies feminine submission – in the sense of "*extreme submissiveness"* (Reich, 1940). Her position can also be seen as one of alienation, serving to denounce the ravages of colonialism, but bearing witness too to another time, another place, another culture whose rites and traditions, absolutism and violence shocked Western representations: "*I'm marrying in Japanese fashion for 999 years. Except that I can free myself every month"* claims Pinkerton, who boasts cynically and unscrupulously of equating the house with his future wife, costing him just 100 yen. Later, as they wed, he adds: "*What a farce, this procession of my new relations, taken out on loan by the month!"*

Whether paradigm of the victim's position and purity of love, or a contextualised embodiment of the clash of sexes and cultures, the interpretations of the story given by the various Western male critics certainly provide fascinating insights. However, one can also offer a reading of this masterpiece backed up by psychoanalysis. The aim is to understand the psychological issues it raises in this "passion as intense as it is manifestly unjustified" and that create the drama of this "consenting, collaborating victim" (Brèque, 1983, p. 101, 103). *Madam Butterfly* provides a powerful paradigmatic illustration of the psychic dynamics of the masochistic and melancholic feminine. Although Butterfly suffers from abandonment by her object of love, condemning her to the prostitution and poverty to which her status as an orphan following her father's suicide led her, it is also clear that she takes active, tenacious, even absolute positions, with little tolerance for compromise and the responses usually associated with loss.

3. Influence and idealisation

"I am the happiest girl in Japan, in fact, the happiest in the world". Cio-Cio San is just fifteen years old. A geisha in Nagasaki under the name Madam Butterfly, she succumbs to the charm of an American naval officer, F.B. Pinkerton, who proposes to her under the rules of a terrible Japanese law then in force whereby the man can find release at any time from that bond, while the woman can only be freed if her husband leaves her: the *omiai*, dating back to the 16th century, is an arranged marriage as part of an alliance of pure convenience, first in the class of the Samourai.

"I am the happiest girl in Japan, in fact, the happiest in the world". Butterfly makes this boast with strong conviction, as she is accompanied by her friends and family, on the way to the bridal home where the wedding is to be celebrated. Rather than being *"the happiest girl in the world"* we may wish for Butterfly to just feel *"happy"*; but idealisation and exclusiveness already strongly suffuse representation and cathexis in the object, in both a massive and fragile way, already informed by suffering and death. However, shortly after this declaration, Butterfly continues: "*I have come at the call of love! I have come to the threshold of love where joy is found in life and in death!"* Early in Act 2, in the well-known aria "*Un bel di, vedremo"*, she goes on to speak of her biding her time confidently, certain that Pinkerton will one day climb back up the hill where he has left her, and she will hide *"partly for fun and partly so as not to die"*.

What she does not know, or more precisely, what she cannot/will not understand or admit, what she cannot internalise, despite the advice and warnings from those around her, is that this man has no interest in a long-lasting and respectful relationship. What is more, he goes on in conceited and arrogant fashion to declare to the US Consul in Japan, Sharpless, and in stark contrast to Butterfly's exclusive clinging attentions: "*All over the world the Yankee wanders on business and pleasure, ignoring all risks. He does what he pleases wherever he goes. And he's not satisfied with life unless he can get the greatest enjoyment out of each place he visits"* before raising a toast *"to the day when in a real wedding ceremony [he] shall marry a real American wife!"* The house he is to stay in with his Japanese wife is rented for 999 years and Pinkerton congratulates himself on the flexible dimension of the contract he can terminate every month as he pleases. Similarly, he is rapturous as he gazes at the sliding panels of the house that "*come and go at will as the mood takes [him]"* and wants above all to know where the bridal bed is to be found. In Act 2, Butterfly answers the allusions to her possibly being abandoned with a combination of naivety and confidence: *"Why did he take such care to strengthen the house with locks if he didn't intend to return again? I'll tell you. To keep outside the mosquitoes, my relations and my sorrows, and inside to guard his wife jealously, to guard me, his wife, Butterfly"*.

Butterfly is clearly defenceless, helpless and passive. This is already borne out in the terrible portrayal given of her by her future husband when he compares her in secret to a "*little plaything*", *"a delicate piece of blown glass"*, "*a flower, and on my honour I've plucked this flower"*, "*a figure on a painted screen"*, who "*flutters like a butterfly and settles with such silent grace that I am seized by a wild desire to pursue her, even though I should crush her wings in doing so"*. In John Luther Long's short story (1898), Pinkerton's wife, Adelaide, on returning to Japan, unwittingly encounters Madame Butterfly and her son whom she refers to as *"plaything"*. Having understood the situation, Butterfly goes home and prepares to commit suicide but holds back and flees with her son and maid, determined to carry on living and raise her child. In David Belasco's play (1900), Butterfly herself is called a *"plaything"* by Kate. While she is tempted to make claims to being Mrs. Pinkerton and would not

be named otherwise, she finally changes her mind and gives the name *"Cho-Cho-San…, but not "plaything""*. She then commits suicide, leaving her child to the Pinkerton couple.

The image of the butterfly strikingly condenses both seduction and fragility, the powerful beauty of its attributes and its outer shell, and its extreme fragility. When the Consul Sharpless denounces the *"great sin to tear those delicate wings and perhaps break a trusting heart"*, Pinkerton replies that *"it isn't a great tragedy if I want to teach those wings to fly along the sweet path of love"*. Sharpless insists on the early age of this "*flower just bursting into bloom"*, a mere fifteen, "*the age for games"*, but Pinkerton retorts that it is also "*the age for sugared almonds"*, a perverse and faintly disguised reference to the delights of oral pleasures.

On the evening of the wedding, Butterfly pulls away from Pinkerton's embraces to share with him a terrible picture she has of the United States, the country where, apparently, when a butterfly "*is caught by a man, it is transfixed with a pin and fastened to a board"*. The anxiety relating to the first sexual intercourse with her husband and the fear of being held down and rendered completely passive intertwine here, meeting with no denial from Pinkerton: "*slender butterfly (…) I have caught you, I hold you, as you tremble. You are mine!"* What can be felt here in Butterfly's acquiescence ("*Yes, for my whole lifetime!"*) is the risk of that "masochistic trend of the ego" that Freud considered to be generally unrecognised (1924, p. 21). Butterfly's behaviour echoes A. Reich's formulations on the extreme forms of submission and narcissistic renunciation of some women in their amorous relations. In these singular feminine patterns of behaviour, masochism is a defence against abandonment: "*in the submissive woman the special ecstasy of intercourse must be viewed against the background of anxiety, despair and helplessness which are experienced when she is separated from the object of her love or when lover turns away from her"* (Reich, 1940, p. 424). Choosing Pinkerton can also be understood within the perspectives of the unconscious masochistic logic as proposed by R. Loewenstein where "*masochism may be a prerequisite or the consequence of some extreme cases of infatuation built on a model of early incestuous attachments"* (1957, p. 51).

While confident during the wedding ceremony, Butterfly submits; she stops talking as soon as Pinkerton asks her to be silent, just as she was about to compliment him, for him a matter of no consequence. All she keeps from her meagre trousseau are her "*few little feminine things"* of toiletry and devotional objects he is prepared to tolerate. The rest is discarded and she only asks for a few of the former to be kept, including the *Ottokè* (statuettes representing the souls of her ancestors that Pinkerton assumes are dolls) and, hidden in a sheath, a dagger, the one her father used to commit suicide. Butterfly goes as far as to adopt Pinkerton's religion and thus forsake the cult of her ancestors: "*To make you happy perhaps I shall be able to forget my people"*. But this last concession (where keeping the *Ottokè* testifies to the fact that it is only partial) is the sacrifice

too far. Denounced by her uncle the bonze, Butterfly has to suffer him crying out in public that she has betrayed her family and the cult of her ancestors. Butterfly's family, unconvinced from the outset of the solidity of the marital bond, arguing that Butterfly's beauty is already faded and that the Yankee will soon ask for a divorce, turns away from her and she faces mental torture; all around her, even her mother, disavow her. In the last act, Butterfly will again be caught up by her sacrilegious choice; having thought she could forget about her forebears, she is drawn in by those dead figures, by the moral principles of her country, mingling ancestors, gods, the family, the fatherland, and the paramount importance of honour and, ensuing therefrom, the imperative of suicide.

Coming from a previously very wealthy family, Butterfly is now poor, especially since her father committed hara-kiri in response to the demand of the *mikado*, the Japanese Emperor. "*The whirlwind uproots the strongest oaktree"* is how she answers the Consul's question as to her origins, a confession transgressing a taboo that makes everyone ill at ease. Furthermore, Butterfly has always considered being a geisha to be a dishonour, finding in marrying the charming American a unique opportunity to break free from that situation. Now she is rejected by her own people, trusting Pinkerton who treats her as a mere "*little plaything"* and implores him: "*Love me, just a little, with the love of a baby, the love that is my due. Love me. We are a race accustomed to little things, to humble and quiet things, to a tenderness gentle as a caress, yet profound as the sky, as the waves of the sea".* Here we find what Settineri et al. (2019) recall in their study on the ontogenesis of the kiss: "*The meaning of the kiss could therefore be related to the possibility of providing a form of archaic gratification, from a nutritional to an affective meaning. Lovers through the contact of the lips find a symbolic nourishment, able to strengthen their intimacy and their emotional relation*" (p. 2). Pinkerton, a man and husband of great prestige in Butterfly's eyes, is invested in bestowing on her, who has lost both father and mother, sisters and friends, a total, absolute, admittedly manly and virile, but also paternal and maternal love. Marriage thus emerges as a form of masochistic contract in that it reveals a sacrificial dimension: "*the masochistic position often defined as that of a consenting and demanding victim. (…) If such a direction is to be pursued, the concept of pain and pleasure must be complemented by that of sacrifice*" (Smirnoff, 1969, p. 66). Butterfly is obedient because of her youth and naivety, but also as she fails to see the true fickleness of Pinkerton's character. Puccini wonderfully captures the deceitfulness that all can see as the tenor is called on to sing the aria at the end of the first act with an irresistibly warm and suave voice. The powerful lyricism remarkably and almost all too convincingly masks the present and future dismay and disillusionment that only Butterfly fails to anticipate.

4.The disaster of separation

When three years after his departure, despite having promised to return very soon, Pinkerton is still absent, Butterfly shows great difficulty in handling this loss that everyone around her recognises and reminds her of. Madam Butterfly, who henceforth refuses to be called so since she is Madam Pinkerton, still believes strongly in the return of her beloved. When Suzuki, her maid, tries to bring her back to her senses, she responds violently: "*Ah! Silence, or I'll kill you. Say it with me: He'll return!*" revealing hatred beneath gentleness, candour and sadness.

One day, the Consul informs her that he has received a letter from Pinkerton who, first of all, writes that "*perhaps Butterfly remembers [him] no more*", a cunning catchphrase that strengthens Butterfly's belief that Pinkerton cares about her. Whereas in fact, in cowardly fashion, Pinkerton had written to the Consul to ask him to announce to Butterfly that he would not be coming back. Butterfly interrupts the reading, fighting back against any risk of being informed, altered, changed, sullied and, in a fit of hypomaniac exaltation she flares up, putting the letter to her lips and over her heart: "*Is he well? I am the happiest woman in Japan. You're the best man in the world*".

Sharpless has grasped Butterfly's and Pinkerton's differing expectations and seeks to free the former from this intense narcissistic and melancholic relational dynamic. Tired of argument, he ends up encouraging Butterfly to accept the advances of the extremely rich Prince Yamadori who has again asked for her hand. In response, she doggedly makes fun of the Prince, ironically, sarcastically, mocking him for his threat to open his veins if she refuses him a kiss. And above all, repeatedly retorts: "*My troth is already plighted. I am still married*". When she is reminded that, under Japanese law, desertion is tantamount to divorce, she declares more than she admits: "*I don't know the law*", before denouncing that law, which in any case would not be hers, not that of her new country, the United States, where the judge, on the contrary, would intervene to protect the wife against her cynical husband. Butterfly thus proves to be a prisoner of a tradition that she strongly rejects: she recognises neither her own name, nor the law, nor the religion of her family, even though her background of poverty, shame, the death (suicide) of her father, and her life as a geisha, weigh down heavily on her. The story of Madam Butterfly powerfully illustrates the complex interplay of external, event-driven and cultural factors and intrapsychic conflicts (Giunta et al., 2019), a mixture of norms, interdicts and ideals, death and sexuality, conjugal and deviant sexuality, grandeur and decadence.

Weary of not being able to read Pinkerton's letter, as Butterfly cannot or will not entertain what he has to say to her, interrupting him constantly with naive and amorous enquiries, the Consul then lets out the awful truth: "*What would you do, Madam Butterfly, if he never returned again?*" Butterfly answers in a choked voice: "*I might do two things: go back to entertaining people with my*

singing… or else, I would prefer to die". The storm – under Puccini's powerful and masterly orchestration – leaves behind it nothing but a deathly silence. Butterfly attempts to turn the Consul out, murmuring, shaking, in a state of complete exhaustion: "*I beg you: there's no point in dwelling on it. You hurt me so much, so very, very much*", but then immediately picking herself up: "*It's nothing, it's nothing! I thought I was dying, but it passes as quickly as the clouds pass over the sea*".

Not a word from Butterfly to express legitimate hatred and anger against the man who promised her the world, who vowed to come back to her when the robins made their nests, and who only wrote to her after three years of absence, through a third party, to announce the end of their affair. Her anger will be directed solely at Suzuki her maid, Sharpless the Consul and Goro the matchmaker. However, Butterfly will be in a position to assert a link that remains and that Pinkerton will be unable to dismiss (Duparc, 1989). For what he does not know is that he had made her pregnant before leaving, and, at once in triumph and despair, she then shows her child to the Consul: "*Ah! Has he forgotten me? And him? And him? Could he be forgotten? And then we'll see if he doesn't hasten over land and sea!*" Will he be able to neglect this child with blue eyes and blond curls whom she names after her own inner turmoil? For the time being his name is "*Sorrow*". Thus, if he is the child of the sacrificial mother, he is not the child of the geisha, testifying to the oscillation between the two masochistic poles in women proposed by Hélène Deutsch (1930): the "*mater dolorosa*" and "*the whore*". But the day his father returns he will be called "*Joy*", magically achieving his mother's vital narcissistic restoration.

Here Butterfly shows some cunning, knowing that Pinkerton will make the trip back for her son if not for her, and announces that she will put an end to her life rather than become a geisha again, a profession of dishonour. As the child is scoffed at by the matchmaker, as an ill-born child, cursed even, soon to be the object of mockery, Butterfly seizes a weapon and threatens to kill Goro, assuring her son that his father will soon avenge the affront: "*You will see that your avenger will take us far away, far away, to his country, he will take us far away".*

Seeing Pinkerton's vessel enter the port of Nagasaki, Butterfly, in a state of exaltation, euphoric (Winnicott, 1935), cries out loud, savouring with contempt what she thinks is her moment of revenge: "*They were all lying! All of them, all! Only I knew it, only I who love him. Just at the moment everyone was saying: weep and give up hope, my love is triumphant! My love and my faith have triumphed over everything: he has returned and he loves me! All of them glad I was deserted. The wretches will be mocked, scorned and despised!"* The night goes by as Butterfly stays up with the child and Suzuki in the house she has decorated with all the flowers from the garden, now bare and deserted, "*as dreary as in winter"* as Suzuki laments. But Butterfly argues: "*I have given my tears to the earth and it gives its flowers to me".* Having, as she puts it, "*sown April"* in her house, she stays up till dawn in an atmosphere where,

to the sound of the melody of the choir humming in the background, the hope of a nuptial reunion is replaced by the silence of death (Pontalis, 1987). For Pinkerton fails to come. Exhausted, Butterfly carries the child into the house, repeatedly murmuring, like an anxious lullaby: "*Sleep, my love, sleep on my heart. You are with God and I with my sorrow".* "*For the little one",* says her maid, "*the sun has gone out".*

As Butterfly sleeps, Pinkerton, accompanied by his new American wife and Sharpless, comes to take the child. For, as Sharpless puts it, while there is no remedy to Butterfly's pain, "*the child's future must be made secure".* However, seized with remorse, and once again proving how untrustworthy he is, Pinkerton takes flight before again seeing Butterfly, as he discovers the woman's passionate and enduring love for him. His new wife, Kate, thus remains and sees Butterfly arrive, enthusiastic at first, then rapidly distraught when faced with their mournful looks and overcome with a sense of doom ("*No, tell me nothing, nothing, for I might fall dead on the spot… He won't come any more. They have told you! Ah! She is his wife! Everything is dead for me! All is over!")* as she understands that she is not only dispossessed of her husband, but soon also of her son. "*So be it! I must obey him!"* says she to the new wife, echoing her elation when she spoke out as they approached the bridal home in the first act: "*Under the great arc of the sky, there is no woman happier than you. May you be always happy: don't be saddened by me".* But she demands one thing: that Pinkerton come himself to fetch the child. Identifying with her son, sacrificing herself for him, Butterfly knows that the father she sought and thought she had found in Pinkerton would come and protect someone other than herself.

Remaining alone in the house where she has had all the partitions closed, Butterfly takes the dagger with which her father committed suicide, bears it to her lips and reads the words engraved on it, the words her father apparently pronounced before killing himself: "*He dies with honour who can no longer live with honour".* Butterfly's melancholic identification with her father is also apparent in this rather singular *mise en scène* (Jeammet, 1986). Indeed, in the Japanese tradition, a man, to save his honour, commits *seppuku*, which entails slitting open his abdomen, the seat of thought, willpower and courage. A woman, however, is called on to cut her own throat (*jigai*) with a small dagger, often offered by her husband when wedded to symbolise the unshakeable bond that binds her to him (she is then obliged to inflict *jigai* on herself if he commits *seppuku*). Butterfly thus kills herself with her father's dagger, not with the weapon reserved for women.

She then returns to her past, to her culture, to her traditions that she had hoped she could one day be rid of. This terrible representation of herself is then revealed, counter-invested in the idealisation at the beginning of the opera, condensing self-reproach and self-injury, she becomes

a geisha again. "*I don't hide it, and I'm not ashamed of it"* as she put it to Pinkerton on their wedding day; but now he has deserted her she can only hurl that hatred she has of herself and her past: "*Ah! no, no never that! That way of life which leads to dishonour! I would face death rather than dance again! I would rather cut short my life! Ah! Death!"* One can see the extent to which this is not just a question of social downfall, but rather a reawakening of her distress over her father's suicide, the abandonment and narcissistic collapse that followed for her, soon to be exiled in her own country, disavowed by all, the living and the dead, when she thought she was capable of rejecting her roots, culture and forebears. Butterfly has known fortune, the pride of having a powerful father, close to the Emperor. However, although the reasons for his downfall are not further explained in the opera, the exalted father was rejected by the Emperor, abandoned by the one who bestows honour, recognition and legitimacy, forcing his orphan daughter to earn her living in a way she herself considered shameful.

Suzuki, the maid, then brings the child in, with the hope (or illusion) of making her change her mind. And Butterfly speaks to her son: "*You? you? My little god! May you never know that for you, for your innocent eyes, Butterfly died! So that you may go away over the sea, and when you are older, may feel no pain at your mother's renunciation. Look carefully at your mother's face, so that a trace of it will remain with you, look carefully! My love, farewell! Farewell, my little love! Go, play, play!"* Then, having blindfolded him and withdrawn from his sight, she kills herself just as Pinkerton arrives calling out her name. If her child cannot keep her alive, this is because he is the fruit of her disavowal of her ancestors, and Butterfly dies, sacrificed on the altar of man's cynicism but triumphant in her power over her son's destiny. Puccini's choice of an ending involving the sacrificial suicide of his heroine similar to that chosen by Belasco (unlike that chosen by John Luther Long, which sees her fleeing with her son) thus underlines the figure of the sacrificial mother, the essential maternal figure in the work. While Butterfly was abandoned by her own mother because she had denied her ancestors in order to embrace Pinkerton's religion and culture, she decides to abandon her son to free him from her own dishonour. Thus, combined with the failure of the paternal figure, the maternal figure further aggravates the loss of faith in the reliability of a beloved, protective and loving object. Except that Butterfly, unlike her mother, does not cast away her child, but sacrifices herself for him.

5. From feminine masochism to moral masochism

Madam Butterfly is one of the saddest of Puccini's operas and probably of all opera. It is a dramatic and violent story. Violent due to Pinkerton's conduct and shortcomings, but also because of the masochism of Butterfly who cannot give up the idealised love she has for him. Clearly, it is not just the music lover in us who resonates when listening to Butterfly's tragedy. The psychoanalyst

too is gripped by Pinkerton's violence and cowardice, Butterfly's tenacity and masochism, the discouragement, irritation and self-pity, the intransigence of ideals, the eviction of the third party and the difficulties in giving up (Fedida, 2001; Widlöcher, 1983). Just like an uncompromising Madam Butterfly, the transfer of the spectator is subject to radical psychic movements, which mobilise the links maintained with the identificatory positions of each of us, especially with the feminine in both men and women.

From the figure of the female prostitute to that of the submissive wife, Madam Butterfly calls up various figures of masochism (Lambotte, 2000). This fictional character thus offers a space to think about the masochistic movements in some of the patients we treat and for whom the mobilisation of the defensive part of female masochism in the face of Œdipal anguish is a fruitful path towards understanding (Steyn, 2009). By linking active and passive positions in the sexual lives of men and women, masochism can be an unequivocal way of dealing with arousal, even in the process of unravelling a masochism which then becomes moral (Freud, 1924). In Madam Butterfly, the course of the tragedy confirms the prevalence of a masochistic treatment of impulsive arousal, up to its extreme violence in the reversal of self-hatred and its melancholic solution.

What are the representations of the feminine called upon by this operatic figure? What are the destinies and ways of treating them that so immediately evoke passivity and masochism? Madam Butterfly waits, patiently, for the one who will not return to her, submitting to the sadism of a husband who abandons her to her fate as a forsaken wife. Masochism is enrolled here as a metapsychological model, for its heuristic value, and not as a perversion. What supports our reflection is the analysis of the construction of the phantasy of castigation, as it leads us to think about the paths of passivity, its stumbling blocks and abuses (Louët & Chabert, 2011). The movement at work in the phantasy of castigation and its conceptualisation underline the complexity of transformations, displacements, identificatory mobility and the importance of psychic bisexuality which it condenses.

6. Phantasies and masochistic economy

Let us briefly recall the trajectory conceptualised by Freud in his article *A Child is Being Beaten* (1919) by choosing to focus on phantasy in girls. It originates early in childhood and undergoes many transformations aimed at masking the underlying eroticisation of incestuous objects. In its first phase, the phantasy is conscious, anchored in the revival of memories or childhood daydreams; its content, *"my father is beating a child"*, does not have an explicit sexual nature, rather there is a clear emphasis on the idea of punishment. The author of the phantasy, who is not the beaten child, looks on at the scene. The latent content, revealed later thanks to the work of

analysis, reveals incestuous loves and a first "*my father is beating the child whom I hate"*, then a second "*my father does not love this other child, he only loves me"*. During the second phase, the phantasy is unconscious, only revealed by the reconstruction during the cure in its multiple transformations and is the fruit of remembering. The author of the phantasy joins the scene, she is the beaten child: *"I am being beaten by my father"*. The pleasure linked to suffering has an obviously masochistic character and carries a double meaning: on the one hand, it ensures the punishment of the girl for her culpable desire, and on the other hand, achieves, through regression to the sadistic anal stage, the incestuous erotic relation to the father. Guilt and eroticism are then intimately connected. The third phase, whose content is "*the father persists in the shape of a teacher or some other person in authority… the children who are being beaten are almost invariably boys"* is the source of considerable sexual arousal. The girl, identified with the boy, becomes the observer, voyeuristic, and the father is no longer the one doing the beating (Chabert, 2003).

The manifest and latent contents of the phantasy of castigation illustrate the complexity of the ways whereby the feminine and its representations are treated, due to the links ensured by the action of repression and guilt, which mask the intensity of incestuous erotic desires. As a representative *activity*, the phantasy ensures a work of impulse based bonding. In this sense, masochism is a means of linking affect and representation, between passivity and activity, feminine and masculine, allowing a mobility of impulsive cathexis. Masochism can thus provide a psychic solution to handle the guilt attached to childhood sexual phantasies. In Madam Butterfly, female masochism is caught up in a vibrant incestuousness. The fixation on the second phase of the phantasy of castigation, which is rooted in an intense guilt attached to the force of incestuous phantasies, does not allow a move towards the third phase, and opens the way to moral masochism.

The Economic Problem in Masochism (1924)*,* that Freud wrote shortly after *A Child is Being Beaten*, opens the way to an avenue for reflection allowing certain *impasses* of masochistic solutions that struggle to maintain the impulse based connection to be grasped. Indeed, in moral masochism, the relation to the other is reduced to a narcissistic system. Abandoning, as it were, its objectal part, suffering is sought for its own sake (and not for the object as in other forms of feminine and erogenous masochism): hatred is turned against the subject herself, belittled, suffering, but drawing fierce satisfaction from that suffering. The libidinal side, apparently subtracted, continues to be alive in self-punishment; it allows vengeance to be exacted on the original objects, the state of suffering being offered as a solution to torment others. The sacrificial positions revealed by certain compulsive, even self-destructive behaviours thus testify to the underlying needs for punishment and atonement. The unconscious feeling of guilt thus finds a pathway to consciousness, the ego loudly demanding its punishment inflicted by a merciless

superego, towards which the ego remains passive, in submission. "*In certain phantasmatic organisations that preferentially affect women",* writes Chabert, "*moral masochism is rooted, in Œdipal resexualisation, to an incestuous conviction determining a major anxiety of loss of love and a hateful turning against the ego, destructive attacks aiming at the object"* (2003, p. 45). For the moral masochist, the search for suffering is thus linked to an unconscious feeling of guilt. On the scene of the cure, this can take the form of a negative therapeutic reaction, where the aim is to remain ill rather than to heal, thus resisting the treatment and the analyst's influence. The need for punishment satisfies an overwhelming sense of guilt due to excessive demands and ideals that are impossible to satisfy. On the scene of the analytical cure can be expressed the defensive part of the moral masochism mobilised at a very early age in childhood organisation and the early relations with the first objects of love. For Berliner, "*masochism (I shall speak henceforth only of the moral form) is the neurotic solution of an infantile conflict between the need for being loved on the level of oral and skin erotism and the actual experience of nonlove coming from the person whose love is needed. It is also a defensive structure against this need for love and experience of nonlove*" (1958, p. 346).

Butterfly's melancholic identifications respond to her father's death by suicide, which confronts her with the loss of a figure whose cathexis could temper her dependence on an all-powerful and threatening maternal object. In addition, the father's suicide triggers an experience of abandonment that leads to destructive movements, culminating in Butterfly's suicide. Beyond a first interpretation of Butterfly's act as an expression of her guilt, it may also be the result of a feeling of defeat borne by moral masochism and prompting passages such as may arise in some instances: "*defeat by a rejected parent or parent substitute in transference; and it is this defeat rather than guilt that is introjected and forms a character pattern for acting out"* (Berliner, *ibid.*, p. 356). The father's suicide echoes the mother's rejection at the time of her marriage to Pinkerton, doubling and repeating the experience of abandonment by the parental figures. This maternal repudiation is part of the severity of the superego and its deployment in the masochistic and melancholic configuration. The maternal figure, cruelly absent, is thus left in the shadow of the father and husband.

As spectators, one cannot but be struck by Butterfly's inability to mobilise any ambivalence towards Pinkerton, to combine love and hate in a manageable dialectic, which would nevertheless support her opening, albeit painful, to the reality of loss and the recognition of otherness. Although she threatens momentarily but bluntly to kill her maid and the matchmaker, who undermine the idealising illusion and denial in which she takes refuge, and while she sharply tells the Consul that he has nothing more to do with her when he announces Pinkerton's non-return, also cruelly mocking the lovesick condition of Prince Yamadori who comes to ask for her hand in marriage, Butterfly never appears to resent Pinkerton's attitude. Here the violence of the narcissistic logic driving her continues apace terrifyingly (Amati-Mehler, 2004). As

Chrétien et al. (2018) point out, the vagaries of narcissism are part of adolescent construction. However, for some young people, vulnerable and grandiose valences alternate in a dynamic whose pathological dimension can prove to be highly problematic. This is marked by the denial of distance, asymmetry and difference, echoing what she claims in a divided and projective way in the second act in response to the allusions made to her abandonment by Pinkerton: "*Why did he take such care to strengthen the house with locks if he didn't intend to return again? I'll tell you. To keep outside the mosquitoes, my relations and my sorrows, and inside to guard his wife jealously, to guard me, his wife, Butterfly".*

Prepared to mobilise a tenacious masochism, sustaining an endless state of expectation and maintain at all costs a bond with the object that has seduced and abandoned her, Butterfly can only stand up to him for a brief moment, when she demands and obtains from him that he come and fetch the child. However, having done so she then goes on to fall at his feet as she kills herself, simultaneously releasing the child and the father from the weight of her existence. The means to deal with the arousal offered by the masochistic solutions that had nourished her expectation then collapse, leading her to this ultimate and authentically melancholic gesture. This ultimate act testifies to the violence of the collapse of the defensive organisation, seen as a pathological formation under the meaning of what E. O'Shaughnessy suggests (1981). This is a triumph as much as a defeat of the ego, an ego which, in order to be preserved, must be sacrificed; a triumph over the object above all else, whose possession is thus assured for all eternity.

7. Melancholy and narcissistic danger

Melancholy, like masochism, is used here for its heuristic value and not as a nosographic entity, since it enables us to think of the unconscious motives underlying the refusal to lose, involving the rejection, more or less, of passive positions that are violently rejected. Freud's model is worth mentioning here: he sees the origin of melancholy as disappointment with regard to an object on which the libido is fixated. The ensuing undermining of the relationship will hinder the normal outcome of mourning usually allowed by detachment of the libido from the lost object and its displacement towards a new object replacing the first one. Such a dynamic brings to light the fragility of the cathexis, betrayed by the rapidity with which the free libido is brought back to the ego. The slowness of the process of mourning is replaced by the rapidity of the melancholic pathological phenomenon: the loss of object is transformed into a loss of ego, a narcissistic loss that sees the conflict between the ego and the object, a split between the ego - modified by identification - and the critical instance. Melancholic depression is thus marked by its narcissistic destiny and unconscious nature; the patients themselves cannot consciously grasp

what they have lost. Loss opens a bottomless abyss in the ego, which becomes impoverished as it voids itself of all cathexis. It is the confrontation with a clinical enigma that will help reveal the mainsprings of the process at work in melancholy, the self-accusations that take the extreme form of the expectation of punishment coexisting with the absence of shame attached thereto. The reason is as follows: reproaches are in fact unconsciously addressed not to the ego, but to the lost object with which the subject has identified, "*the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object"* (Freud, 1915, p. 249). Narcissistic identification with the object presides over such very different relationships, which replace the cathexis of love, avoiding the renunciation of an object that cannot be abandoned (Chabert, 2017).

Melancholy thus discovers the intensity of the narcissistic issues at stake, which are forcefully expressed in confrontation with the loss of object. One can thus distinguish between the work of mourning and that of melancholy by studying the modes of cathexis in the object, which are objectal for the former and narcissistic for the latter. In the process of melancholy, the loss of object leads to a loss of ego, in that the hatred initially directed at the object that is missing attacks the ego, identified with the lost object by introjection. Beneath the melancholic misery lurks an extraordinary omnipotence allowing (but at what a price!) the effects of loss on the ego to be denied. For if refusal is that of losing love on the part of the object, it is above all a rejection of the experience of being affected by that loss, an unbearably passive position, in that it reveals dependence on the objects of love and, in the end, on their desires. Thus melancholy offers an extreme figure for thinking about the fierce refusal of passive positions, which are nevertheless constitutive of the psychosexual organisation of both man and woman. What is refused is *being affected*, being dependent on an object whose loss cannot be consented to.

For Butterfly, loss of object and loss of ego go hand in hand. The ego that claimed the absolute happiness of being loved by this man (who is after all unknown) reveals its shadowy reverse side, the ego is judged, the ego of a woman who cannot be a Yankee's wife, who refuses to again become a geisha, and sees no path to resume life. Here we find, in exemplary fashion, the reversal of passivity into activity, which constitutes a final attempt at narcissistic triumph, in that it allows Butterfly to swap the respective places of the one who leaves and the one who loses out, the one who suffers and the one who causes suffering (Chabert, 2003). Behind Butterfly's misery lurks a fierce hatred for the object, whose murder is accomplished by means of melancholic identification. A prisoner of ideal representations of feminine purity, in contrast to her position as a geisha, Butterfly finds in the ultimate sacrifice of her life, a reconquest of that ideal. Punishment, excess, sacrifice and melancholy pave the way for a reunion with the ideals that seal her destiny.

How can we fail to see in the choice of weapon the realisation of an incestuous desire as much as its expiation in and through the reversal of hatred against oneself? Butterfly kills herself like a man, like her father, performing by this gesture a final act of love, thus rediscovering the first form of link to the object, that offered by the channels of identification. A gesture that condenses the fulfilment of incestuous desires and their punishment; by killing the geisha in her, she submits to an ideal higher authority, destiny, which hangs like a shadow over her abandoned son.

There is no third party figure between Butterfly and the identifying figure of her father, forced to sacrifice himself though suicide at the behest of the Japanese emperor, between Butterfly and her sacrificial passion for Pinkerton. Her friends who had accompanied her to her wedding abandoned her and her family disowned her. Despite the maternal presence of her devoted maid, the kindly Suzuki, Butterfly is unable to invest her inner space as a place of trial and tribulation. She attempts at all costs, up to breaking point, to maintain the frantic belief in what she sings in the first act, in Pinkerton's arms, "*alone and renounced, renounced and happy"*, then seeking every reason to live in the real presence of her lover: "*Yes, yes, we are alone… and outside the world"*. This is a moment of exceptional intensity for her, unable as she is to imagine that Pinkerton does not share the same feelings. For Butterfly, overly sensitive to loss and abandonment, cannot imagine the possibility of a separation, a difference, without experiencing it as a wrenching away (Klein, 1963).

8. Conclusion

"*Does this goddess know the words that can satisfy such burning desire?"* asks Pinkerton as he impatiently waits to embrace his young wife. "*She knows them"* Butterfly then replies. "*Perhaps she does not want to say them, for fear she might die of it, for fear she might die of it!"* To which Pinkerton retorts "*Foolish fear! Love does not kill, but gives life, and smiles with heavenly joy"*. Butterfly knew how to pronounce the words that appease man's desire, she offered herself and surrendered herself to someone who took pleasure from tearing off butterflies' wings. She had little reason to say no at the time. Once her wings were broken, there was no point seeking to help her, coming to repair what was to remain destroyed for ever. Thus it is that the laws of the unconscious that can undermine the pleasure of living are brought to the surface.

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