



Psychopathology of Female Characters in Opera: Dido and Turandot

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Abstract. This article will take a psychopathological approach to classical opera's portrait of female figures. Two cases are selected as both female characters are involved with ample profiled elements that help people to understand the role of females being imaged and how this image has been changed through time. The article will take Turandot as an example to briefly analyze the impact and the medical influence of music on the human psyche and emotions, which is considered music therapy. It will analyze some impact of the Turandot, as a female role at the time, from a sociological feminist perspective. Music Therapy is the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program. After that, this article will also see the analysis of the character of Dido. The two female characters serve as a unity for people to understand that Western culture has a coherent narrative for females in their destiny and pursuit of happiness.

Keywords: music therapy; · children with autism; · social cognition

1 Introduction

Turandot, which was written by Italian composer Giacomo Puccini, and based on the fairy named Three Mysteries of Duranzer [1, 2]. Turandot is the last introduction of his life, it's the most influential work of Puccini. The opera was first performed by La Scala Opera House in Milan on April 25, 1926, which conducted by Toscanini. It tells the legendary stories of China as imagined by Westerners [1]. The most popular point between the East and West is the classic exotic tunes, adapted from the Chinese folk song, called Jasmine. And it's also well known for its magical character plots, the Chinese-style decorations [3, 4]. The artwork presented by Puccini was the image of the beginning of the 20th century, while for Dido and Aeneas, the female figure was inspired by Virgil, and a 17th-century perception was cast upon the heroic deed and lament for human fate.

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2 The Chinese Elements and Orientalism Icon: Jasmine

The most popular melody in Turandot, “Jasmine”, comes from Jiangsu Province, China. It is located on the eastern coast of China. Jiangsu also has a poetic nickname--Jiangnan. Because of the rainy weather. The people who live in Jiangsu are generally more delicate than the other place. For these lots reasons, the southern tune is more melodious than the northern tune in China. Jasmine is the most representative of the southern tune, the melody is reminiscent of the watery villages of the Yangtze River, with a beautiful tune and moving refreshing lyrics. As the most popular tune in the Turandot, Jasmine it is one of the few Chinese tunes known to Westerners, and can even be described as a meeting point between Chinese and Western musical cultures, most of whose knowledge of this song began with the opera Turandot. The song was first recorded during the Wanli period of the Ming Dynasty, and then during the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, there was another opera called The West Wing, about the love story of Zhang Sheng and Cui Yingying, in which there were two overlapping lines of the opera “Flower Tune”, which was the prototype of the song “Jasmine”.

In Chinese culture, jasmine is a symbol of fidelity, respect, purity, chastity, simplicity, delicacy, and charm, symbolizing love and friendship [5]. In Turandot, the beautiful melody of the same name as the jasmine flower represents the pure, beautiful, noble, and unattainable image of the woman in the role of Turandot.

For some main melody of Turandot, it is the most famous tune in the song. According to the chord direction, we can see that the melody is very coherent and builds up in layers.

And as for its reputation in China, Jasmine is known as the second national anthem of China. Not only did the elderly people over half a century hum it in their leisure time, but the youngsters also considered this song as a Chinese sentiment of their own. The Jasmine is also a mandatory song at lots of China’s gala events.

3 The Sociological Problems Reflected by the Female Characters in the Turandot Script

The story of Turandot can be divided into two parts: the first part tells the story of Prince Calaf, a Tatar prince who is reduced to a wanderer, and the second part tells the story of Calaf’s journey to China to participate in a marriage contest and eventually win the heart of Princess Turandot. Puccini chose the second part as the main object of his performance and expanded and adapted it to suit the actual needs of the opera, resulting in an opera in four acts. In Act, I, Calaf and his maid Liu arrive in China and heard Princess Turandot was ordered that if a man could guess her three riddles, she would marry him. If they guessed wrong, they would be executed. And Calaf was attracted by the princess’s beauty, decides to take the challenge. In Act II, Calaf answers Turandot’s three questions correctly, but Turandot feels remorse and refuses to marry Calaf; in Act III, Liu is executed to protect Calaf, and Calaf is devastated; in Act IV, Turandot is so moved by the two that she agrees to marry Calaf, and helps Calaf to fulfill his wish to restore his country [6].

She is both feared and desired by men, and her power is ultimately limited by the societal expectations placed upon her as a woman. As a princess of the Yuan dynasty,

her power attracted countless men to her, but the princess who want to seek true love turned many men away with just three riddles. As a princess of a kingdom, she was a golden girl with no worries about food and clothing, but in that world where men were superior to women, even if you were a noble princess, you could only be a tool for men to seize power. And this behavior was common and natural in the society of the time - they believed that women were tools to carry on the family line and that they should be uniformly subservient to men and serve them, regardless of their status. She cut off the heads of the ignorant to the three riddles showing her coldness and cruelty, which can be seen as a response to the objectification and scrutiny she experiences as a woman, and her ultimate transformation reflects how women in the 19th century forced to navigate a world that often restricted their choices and agency.

As can be seen from the overall structure and details of the story, the story is full of orientalists. Under the influence of the Silk Road and China fever, Europeans considered China a very mysterious country. Above this situation, Puccini cleverly captured the audience's curiosity and brought the Chinese elements of the opera script to the highest value, which fully aroused the audience's interest, and the opera was widely praised immediately after its release. The success of the Turandot also shows Puccini's love for Chinese culture and creative techniques.

4 The Chinese Elements in the Stage

The dramatic nature of opera places high demands on the stage environment in which it is performed. Usually, the stage set is a recreation of the work in real life and must give a sense of immersion to keep the audience engrossed in the performance, which is what is known as the opera stage.

The perception of Turandot as a machine woman places Puccini's final opera within the context of contemporary developments. By the mid-1920s, puppets, robots, and masked figures had become emblems of the avant-garde, and the crisis hostile. Turandot can be viewed as encapsulating their anxieties about the social and aesthetic.

During the 19th century, women faced significant challenges and restrictions, particularly regarding societal expectations and the male gaze. Women were expected to be modest, obedient, and submissive, and their worth was often measured by their ability to find a suitable husband. The male gaze was omnipresent, and women were often objectified and judged based on their appearance.

In the opera, Princess Turandot embodies the male gaze and societal expectations placed upon women. She is a beautiful and powerful woman who is feared and desired by men, and she uses her power to demand obedience from them. However, her psyche is also shaped by her experiences as a woman, and she carries the scars of her vulnerability and powerlessness. She refuses to marry anyone who cannot answer her riddles, and she takes pleasure in the death of those who fail, which reflects how women in the 19th century were often forced to choose between their desires and societal expectations. The Princess' fate in the storyline of "Turandot" can be seen as a reflection of the challenges faced by women in the 19th century. She is both feared and desired by men, and her power is ultimately limited by the societal expectations placed upon her as a woman. Her coldness and cruelty can be seen as a response to the objectification and scrutiny

she experiences as a woman, and her ultimate transformation reflects how women in the 19th century were forced to navigate a world that often restricted their choices and agency.

While “Turandot” may not directly reflect the psychological world of women in the 19th century, it can be analyzed in the context of women’s experiences during that period. The opera reflects how women were often objectified and judged based on their appearance and how they were forced to navigate a world that often restricted their choices and agency. The Princess’ fate can be seen as a reflection of these challenges, and her transformation reflects how women were often forced to respond to societal expectations and the male gaze.

5 Dido’s Lament

“When I’m laid in Earth” is Henry Purcell’s aria. The aria, known as Dido’s Lament, is considered beautiful and melancholy. The play is from the Baroque period, a period in Western art music that lasted from 1600 to 1750. The period was characterized by elaborate and expressive forms of art and music that went beyond operas to paintings and the architecture of buildings. The lines in the aria express Dido’s sadness and her desire to die after the love of her life, Aeneas, leaves her. The aria has been celebrated and recreated in modern platforms for its emotional depth and classical aura. The emotional range of Dido is expressed in the music composition and the vocal elements selected for the aria. Often arias are lyrical and melodic with a much structure to express and specific musical motif. In Dido’s lament, the aria expresses the character’s emotional state, which is seen as anger, despair, desperation, and sorrow. Arias are a key component of operatic performances due to the character’s ability to showcase their vocal ability and express emotions more than in other forms of opera. When I am laid on Earth expresses the sadness and resignation of Dido, which later have psychopathological implications. To convey the psychotherapy themes, the aria applies several operatic strategies and music techniques such as ground bass, lyrical melody, and dramatic structure ornamentation. Various psychological disorders can also be observed from a modern psychotherapy point of view. The main character is seen to have suffered from trauma and grief that borders on symptoms of depression due to the abandonment of her lover, Aeneas.

Ground bass in an aria is a recurring melodic pattern in the bass lines that usually provides the foundation for the rest of the aria. In Dido’s Lament, the ground bass expresses the character’s melancholy and emotional intensity [7]. The use of ground bass in the play gives the mood and tone of continuity and stability felt as one listens until the end of the piece. Various improvisations are made to the melody and the harmony, which aligns with the major theme of the piece, melancholy. The ground bass tends to have a descending chromatic progression that repeats throughout the piece. Inevitably, the repetition creates sadness and the sad sense that is expected by the audience. The sudden shift and change of melodies constantly remind us of the underlying sadness and sorrow within the main character of the play Dido. When Aeneas leaves Dido, she experiences betrayal and abandonment. From the audience’s point of view, Dido is seen to have attachment issues reflecting her urge to be around Aeneas and her inability to let him go [7]. The use of ground bass generally heightens the emotional moments felt by

Dido, starting calming and eventually cumulating in the last lines where Dido expresses her desire to lose her life. Ground bass is a dramatic and powerful element primarily used to express melancholy and emotional intensity throughout the piece.

Dido expresses depression and suicidal thoughts. She feels intense sadness and despair due to her separation from Aeneas. She reflects on taking her own life and expressing feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and loss of interest in life related to modern-day depression and suicidal motives [8]. To express such feelings, the play uses lyrical melody and dramatic structure. These two elements go hand in hand in the piece since one complements the other. Lyrical melody expresses the profound agent threat Dido undergoes. The melody of the piece is very slow and calming. At some point, the melody becomes intense and expressive to create the mourning effect of the main character, Dido. In applying lyrical melody, the play has several descending phrases that have to be recited in a specific stepwise motion to bring out the feeling of desperation by Dido. When lines are said slowly and in descending tones, the audience feels the impact of despair. The melody expresses many emotions within the characters and shifts momentarily to showcase the various emotions, such as sadness, longing, melancholy, and despair [9]. Some phrases within the play are repeated from time to time. The repetition usually emphasizes the play's main themes, adding a sense of yearning and tension felt by the character. While melody creates musicality in the play, it also helps express Dido's feelings and emotions effectively [10]. The play's dramatic structure follows a clear narrative that gives the audience the emotional journey that Dido follows. The piece starts with a simple conversation where Dido says she wishes to erase her memory to eliminate Aeneas from her mind. The play becomes slow, and Dido thinks about her potential death since she will eventually leave the pin she feels behind. The lyrical melody at this point gets intense, and as the play progresses, the emotional intensity builds even further [10]. The story becomes complex towards the end, and so does the harmony of the play. The harmony tends to be dissonant, reinforcing the overall sense of melancholy. The two performance techniques express Dido's obsessive thinking. The elements focus on intensifying her feelings and thoughts about Aeneas. Obsessive thinking is related to an obsessive-compulsive medical disorder, a modern-day borderline personality disorder [9]. During the era of the play, the disorders were barely recognized. Still, mental health has evolved today, and more attention is paid to the disorders that characters exhibit, even in older plays such as Dido's Lament.

When the loss of one experience, one often has feelings of grief and trauma. Loss does not necessarily mean the death of a person; rather, it could imply divorce or separation. In Dido's Lament, Dido is abandoned by her lover, and she gets to experience feelings of betrayal and loss. She is forced to abandon her people, which makes her suffer from trauma while she reflects on how her life turned out to be. To express Dido's agony, the piece applies ornamentation. Ornamentation is a technique whereby various intricate aspects of plays, such as turns, appoggiaturas, and trills, are applied to add to the intensity and depth of the melody [11]. A great example of ornamentation in the play is grace notes, also called appoggiaturas. Grace notes are added to mostly create tension. The line, "Remember me, but ah! Forget my fate," uses grace notes on "me" and "fate" to add more emotional weight to the line and the overall piece. Trills are used where rapid alternations are made between adjacent notes. While grace notes create tension, trills create anger

and tension within the piece. Dido's situation is tense and causes anger, leading her to make stupid decisions, such as risking her own life. The use of ornamentation throughout the play intensifies the melody and tone of the whole play [11]. It increases the pace and voice where necessary creating the mood of unease and instability expected in such an aria. Such a powerful performance device is applied in musicals to convey deep emotions in plays. This specific piece helps the audience understand the mental state of Dido and her frequent pensive sadness. Dido reflects symptoms of depression such as desperation, hopelessness, and attachment issues which are all linked to various other psychological disorders.

6 Conclusion

Purcell uses more operatic strategies and music techniques, including text painting. Purcell applies music in his words to underscore the piece's meaning in general. The tone used in the musical is sombre, and the phrases often descend to align with the piece's themes. All the techniques mentioned work together to contribute to the mental disorders that Dido suffers from and express her character even more. In the modern day, more research and emphasis are paid to mental health and the resulting disorders. It is easy for doctors to pinpoint specific disorders after analyzing a patient's symptoms. The piece is from an older era where very little emphasis was laid on mental health. The emotional themes and the psychological issues expressed in this play can directly relate to certain modern-day mental disorders. Dido, from the play, suffers from attachment and abandonment issues. Dido's intense attachment to her lover, Aeneas, makes her lose her mind and later her condition border on depression and suicidal thoughts. Other conditions that can be picked from the play include obsessive thinking and emotion dysregulation. Dido suffers from random mood swings that alter how she behaves and interacts with others. Most of her conditions are linked to personality disorders common among people who suffer from trauma due to grief. Purcell's, Dido's Lament is a great example of the use of operative strategies to create the emotional complexity of musicals. The musical uses a wide range of techniques to express the pensive sadness that Dido has to live with. Ground bass plays a major role since it is repetitive and creates a certain sad and melancholy melody. Combined, all the operative strategies are applied to create and convey the right message and the enduring power of love that Purcell aims to express. The techniques further bring out the psychological trauma that the character is causing. The piece is a deep psychological piece that brings out the mental state of Dido. From a modern psychopathological perspective, several mental conditions can be picked and identified, giving an insight into the depths of emotions that Dido experience. Two cases are selected as both female characters are involved with ample profiled elements that help people to understand the role of females being imaged and how this image has been changed through time. The artwork presented by Puccini was the image of the beginning of the 20th century, while for Dido and Aeneas, the female figure was inspired by Virgil, and a 17th-century perception was cast upon the heroic deed and lament for human fate.

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