Cambridge Opera Journal, **13,** 1, 29–53 © 2001 Cambridge University Press

Torrefranca vs. Puccini: embodying a decadent Italy

ALEXANDRA WILSON

Abstract: Puccini reception lay at the heart of a crisis of national identity that gripped Italy between the turn of the century and the First World War. For Puccini's detractors his works were an emblem of decadence; for his supporters they provided a means for regeneration. In his vitriolic monograph, *Giacomo Puccini e l'opera internazionale* (1912), Fausto Torrefranca associated Puccini with dangerous 'others' – women, homosexuals and Jews – in order to instil fear about the 'feminisation' of Italian culture. The reception of his book shows that Torrefranca's 'extreme' views were widely shared.

Cigarette in mouth, Puccini gazes nonchalantly out of numerous turn-of-the-century press photographs. Rather than publishing portraits of a distant, tormented genius playing the piano or poring over a score, the editors of contemporary newspapers and journals preferred to select images of the composer enjoying his two most-cherished pastimes: hunting and driving fast cars. Puccini's 1903 car-crash and courage in the face of danger inspired as many column inches as his operas. But Puccini could be presented as all things to all people: not merely an emblem of the dynamic modernity of Italy's future, but a link to her glorious past.

Seeking inspiration in antiquity, critics repeatedly accorded Puccini the characteristics of an athlete, an emperor, or even a god. Edmondo De Amicis (1846–1908) was typical in describing the composer in 1900 as possessing 'the head of a Roman emperor, crowned with thick black hair' and 'the frame of an athlete'.[1] It was a mark of Puccini's status as a national icon that De Amicis should write about him in such glowing terms. The writer was famed as the author of *Cuore* (1886), a best-selling patriotic story aimed at schoolboys, extolling the virtues of honesty, courage, and loyalty, and used as a key tool in the project to promote a sense of mass national identity. In styling Puccini as 'erect and strong like one of the pillars of the celebrated cathedral of his native Lucca', De Amicis testified to the composer's

Earlier versions of this paper were read at the 11th International Conference on Nineteenth-Century Music (Royal Holloway, University of London, July 2000); the RMA Research Students' Conference (University of Huddersfield, January 2000); and at a graduate study day at Oxford University (November 1999). Grants from the Central Research Fund of the University of London and the Music Department at Royal Holloway enabled me to carry out invaluable research in Milan, Lucca, Parma and Florence. I am grateful to all those who made thought-provoking suggestions after hearing or reading earlier drafts, especially Tim Carter, Roberta Marvin, Roger Parker, Clair Rowden and Emanuele Senici. Particular thanks are due to Katharine Ellis for her unceasing encouragement and enthusiasm for the larger project of which this paper forms a part.

[1] 'I nostri operisti: Giacomo Puccini ritratto da Edmondo De Amicis', *La Prensa* (Buenos Aires, n.d.), reprinted in the Italian journal *L'Illustrazione popolare* (Milan, May 1900). Puccini's operas roused considerable interest in Argentina, where there was a large Italian population, and De Amicis may have wanted to depict an image of a glorious homeland to a nostalgic readership.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

manliness, his roots in a glorious tradition, and his music's powers of endurance.[2] Depicting him as a statue, the critic described Puccini's face as 'sculptural' and 'bronzed', bearing the mark of the health-giving Italian sun.[3] Classical and medieval images were part of critics' standard vocabulary and a key element in the contemporary nation-building process, evoking 'an idealized golden age and a heroic past that [could] serve as exemplars for collective regeneration in the present'.[4]

Collective regeneration was something that turn-of-the-century Italy needed badly. Manly descriptions of Puccini and their accompanying photographic images represented a politically charged act of confidence-boosting in an era of uncertain identity. Between the 1880s and the First World War Italian society was plagued by a mood of growing disillusionment with a state which had not lived up to the public's expectations of Unification. By the early twentieth century there was still very little sense of an identifiable nation: the north and south remained to all practical intents and purposes separate countries, with 'Italians' tending to have allegiance to regions rather than to 'Italy' and emigration statistics rising at an alarming rate.[5] Fears of internal fracture sat uncomfortably alongside claims of a homogeneous Italian identity. The *Risorgimento* might have created an ostensibly politically unified nation but it had failed to satisfy the aspirations of Massimo D'Azeglio, who famously stated: 'We have made Italy; now we must make Italians'.[6]

[2] In ascribing importance to the concept of being true to one's ancestral and regional origins, De Amicis was typical of Puccini's supporters who wished to emphasise that Puccini was the perfect patriot: at once the voice of united Italy and yet still loyal to his regional identity. Critics identified Puccini closely with the Tuscan landscape, sometimes even claiming that he was incapable of composing in any other location. (See for example 'Tom', 'Giacomo Puccini: le sue ville, le sue folaghe, le sue opere', *Tosca (supplemento straordinario alla Gazzetta Musicale ed al Palcoscenico)* [Milan, January 1900], 11–12.) The Tuscan dialect formed the basis for the standard Italian language, the promotion of which was crucial to creating a unified nation, still an unfinished project. Furthermore, Tuscany was regarded as the cradle of Italian culture, and several critics made allusion to the great Tuscan artists of the Renaissance with whom Puccini shared common blood; had he been from Calabria there might have been less enthusiasm to place such emphasis upon his ancestry.

[3] References to the Mediterranean climate were attached to Puccini from the earliest reviews of his operas to his obituaries, in an attempt to highlight the superior clarity of thought and emotional honesty which characterised Italian art and which were deemed to be lacking north of the Alps.

[4] Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London, 1991), 91.

[5] Contemporary anthropologists claimed that the Italians of the north and south were of different races. See Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia: Ascesa e declino del mito della nazione nel ventesimo secolo* (Milan, 1997), 37. The period 1896–1915 marked the high point in Italian emigration: 4.32 million left between 1896 and 1905 – almost double the figure for the previous decade – rising to a peak of 6 million in 1906–15. See R. J. B. Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World, 1860–1960* (London and New York, 1996), 115. Emigration was an issue of profound concern to the nationalists, whose desire to establish new Italian colonies was in part a project to divert poverty-stricken Italian migrants away from the riches ostensibly offered by the New World.

[6] Cited in Martin Clark, *Modern Italy: 1871–1995*, 2nd edn (London and New York, 1996), 30. Massimo D'Azeglio (1798-1866), moderate politician, painter and historical novelist, was Prime Minister of Piedmont from 1849 to 1852.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Culture could be employed fruitfully in this project to 'make Italians'. As the supremely Italian art form, opera had an important role to play in bolstering morale and creating a sense of common culture. But while at one end of the critical spectrum Puccini's supporters depicted him as a national idol, at the other his enemies vilified him as the very antithesis of *italianità*. And as we shall see, the most extreme anti-Puccini rhetoric, which was equally politicised, also hinged upon images of gender, inverting the 'manly' metaphors employed by Puccini's admirers.[7]

Torrefranca

In an age which witnessed the beginnings of the cult of celebrity and the first widespread use of photography in the mass media, Puccini's personality and physique were subject to as much scrutiny as his music. Critics intent upon 'mythologising' him made such grandiose declarations as: 'man and maestro merge in him in the most perfect harmony'.[8] Alas for Puccini, those who were less enamoured of his music also did not hesitate to make their attack personal. The project to promote Puccini as a national hero was checked in 1912 when the Turin-based academic publishing house Fratelli Bocca released a vitriolic monograph entitled *Giacomo Puccini e l'opera internazionale*.[9] Fausto Torrefranca, its twenty-nine-year-old author, made no attempt to disguise his contempt for the composer promoted by Ricordi as Verdi's successor, and widely hailed as such by the press in general since the triumph of *Manon Lescaut* in 1893. His assessment of Puccini stood in stark contrast to the idolatry of the popular musical press: 'Puccini . . . embodies, with the utmost completeness, all the decadence of current Italian music, and represents all its cynical commerciality, all its pitiful impotence and the whole triumphant vogue for internationalism'.[10] Nominating himself the only critic

[7] In contemporary discourse the nation was frequently depicted as a body, and thus it was only natural that sex, gender and physical appearance should become intimately linked to the question of what it meant to be Italian. Robert Nye comments that, at the turn of the century, 'There emerged a universal conviction that the foundation of a unified, expanding nation was a healthy and prolific populace. Most states maintained public hygiene establishments and statesmen and the public alike became accustomed to analysing symptoms of national strength or weakness from a medical perspective', Robert Nye, ed., *Sexuality* (Oxford, 1999), 113.

[8] Eugenio Checchi, 'Giacomo Puccini e la sua nuova opera', *Fanfulla della Domenica*, XXXII, 51/18 (Rome, December 1910), 1–2, 1.

[9] Fausto Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini e l'opera internazionale* (Turin, 1912). The 133 pages of Torrefranca's assault on Puccini are structured in four sections. The first ('Psicologia dell'opera pucciniana') considers the decadence of Italian opera and of Puccini's personality, while the second ('La vita artistica del Puccini e l'ambiente') is a caustic biographical profile and commentary on Puccini's works to date. The third section ('Puccini uomo di teatro'), examines Puccini's attitudes towards dramatic structure and characterisation. The final section ('Puccini musicista?') assesses Puccini's use of particular musical 'mechanisms' (such as open fifths), and the relationship between his operas and the works of Wagner and Strauss, in order to claim that 'Puccini non è musicista' (79). All translations from Torrefranca's book are my own.

[10] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini*, vii.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

courageous enough to stand up to the current artistic climate of vulgarity and insincerity, Torrefranca's book was a call to arms to a dissatisfied generation of young intellectuals.

Although familiar to musicologists, Torrefranca's book has not been considered in terms of its wider cultural significance. Yet to read the Puccini monograph simply for its musical observations, as most critics have done, is to neglect the social and political discourses which form a central part of its thesis. As the title indicates, the book's principal preoccupation is Puccini's 'internationalism': Puccini's music 'defames Italian culture abroad because it . . . reveals an intellectual wretchedness'.[11] But the gendered subtext which underpins Torrefranca's claim that Puccini represents the progressive 'denationalisation' of Italian music has also been ignored.[12] For Torrefranca, Puccini was anything but the epitome of masculinity and modernity; rather, he regarded him as emblematic of the most effete and decadent tendencies of the *fin de siècle*. In an age of intellectual investigation into sexuality, physiology, and psychology, he drew upon contemporary medical and anthropological discourses in order to depict Puccini as a 'feminised' composer, a label with damaging political implications. Torrefranca launched a series of insults at Puccini – weakness, sickness, intellectual incapacity, lack of originality – all of which centred on the organising notion of the composer's 'effeminacy'. As similar accusations were also attached to other 'outsider' groups, Torrefranca aspired to use gendered references in order to undermine Puccini's status as a 'national' composer. This essay situates Torrefranca's accusations within the context of flourishing *fin-de-siècle* Italian debates over gender, race and decadence, issues crucial to the contested question of 'Italianness'.[13]

Arthur Groos and Roger Parker comment that 'the book's anti-feminism is laughably extreme'.[14] By modern standards perhaps, but it was intended by Torrefranca in all seriousness. I would propose that we ought not to dismiss Torrefranca's rhetoric so swiftly, indicative as it was of deep and widely held concerns about the state of contemporary Italy. While his misogyny and imperialism may seem alien and indeed abhorrent to modern readers, the book's value as a historical document remains undiminished. Torrefranca's obituarists, writing not long after the celebrations to mark Puccini's centenary, played down the significance of the Puccini monograph within his oeuvre, some claiming that the author himself later dismissed it as an ill-judged error of youth.[15] But the book's impetuous spirit gave it a rare honesty, with the consequence that it lends a window on to a specific moment in Italian history and on to the ideals of a generation. Torrefranca was no

[11] *Ibid.*, viii.
[12] *Ibid.*, 24.
[13] A good overall survey of the intersection between debates over gender and national identity in *fin-de-siècle* Italy is Valeria P. Babini, Fernanda Muniz and Annamaria Tagliavini, *La donna delle scienze dell'uomo: Immagini del femminile nella cultura scientifica italiana di fine secolo* (Milan, 1989).
[14] Arthur Groos and Roger Parker, *Giacomo Puccini: 'La Bohème'*, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge, 1986), 131.
[15] See for example Leonardo Pinzauti, 'Memoria di Fausto Torrefranca', *L'approdo musicale, quaderni di musica* (Rome and Turin, 1966), 169.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

isolated extremist. He engaged in topical debates which crossed disciplines and geographical boundaries, and played upon the essentialist neuroses of a society in which any deviation from the 'norm' provoked panic. Thus, in order to further our understanding of how Puccini's works were evaluated in their own time, it is necessary to confront the discomfiting issues which surrounded them.

The new nationalism

Before examining Torrefranca's charges against Puccini in detail it is valuable to consider his ideological standpoint and the intellectual circles in which he moved. Torrefranca's aristocratic origins may have encouraged his opinion that art was for the delectation of the privileged few rather than for the edification or entertainment of the masses, as evidenced by his remark that opera and lieder catered for the taste of 'commoners', whereas absolute music could only be understood by an 'intellectual aristocracy'.[16] The ideal vehicle for his exaltation of high art was the *Rivista musicale italiana*, Italy's most serious musicological journal, to which he contributed numerous articles and book reviews between 1907 and the mid-1910s. But the fact that he would go on to become music critic for Enrico Corradini's far-right, nationalist newspaper the *Idea Nazionale* from 1914 to 1915 situates him within a far more militant camp than musicology, the latter tending to maintain an uninterested distance from current affairs.

Italy's decision to enter the race for colonial expansion, hitherto an issue which had preoccupied Italians less than the unification of their own country, was signalled by the signing of the Triple Alliance in 1882. Following the humiliating defeat in Abyssinia in 1896, cries for Italy to re-establish the supremacy of earlier golden ages grew even louder. By the first decade of the twentieth century a new brand of bellicose nationalism was fast gaining ground among a disillusioned and increasingly vociferous younger generation hostile to Giolitti's liberal reformist government. In 1910 a formal nationalist movement, the *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana*, was established, while the *Idea Nazionale* was founded in March of the following year as the mouthpiece of those who believed the national character to be apathetic and weak, corrupted by years of servitude to other countries.[17] Authoritarianism, imperialism, and hostility to democracy and socialism lay at the heart of the new

[16] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 12-13. The scion of a noble, patrician family of Sicilian descent, Fausto Acanfora Sansone dei duchi di Porta e dei duchi di Torrefranca was born in Monteleone Calabro (now Vibo Valentia) on 1 February 1883. After an itinerant childhood moving around Italy with his prefect father, Torrefranca settled in Turin to study engineering at the Politecnico, and was awarded his degree in 1905. A musical auto-didact, he taught music history at conservatoires and universities in Rome, Naples, Milan, and Florence, and was an ardent campaigner for the creation of music professorships, later becoming the first holder of such a post in Italy. For further biographical information on Torrefranca, see Giuseppe Ferraro and Annunziato Pugliese, ed., *Fausto Torrefranca: L'uomo, il suo tempo, la sua opera. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi Vibo Valentia, 15–17 dicembre 1983* (Vibo Valentia, 1993).

[17] The erudite literary and philosophical journals which appeared in the first decade of the twentieth century, including *Il Regno, Leonardo*, and *La Voce*, also acted as a platform for disaffected young nationalists to express their ideas.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

movement's credo. Within this context, Torrefranca's hostility towards Puccini, who was widely promoted by his patrons as 'the voice of the people', is unsurprising.

Torrefranca's use of misogynistic rhetoric as an ideological tool was equally in keeping with the spirit of the age. Manliness was central to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century concepts of nationalism. Channelling male energies into sport – a useful peacetime substitute for military pursuits – the German and English bourgeoisie manipulated gender as a means of effecting social control. While characterising southern Europeans as unable to curb their passions, they depicted their own men as strong and forceful, yet emotionally restrained.[18] To disillusioned young Italians like Torrefranca, the Anglo-German archetype of manliness had produced enviable results both on the battlefield and in the colonies and might be emulated as part of their vision of a reinvigorated Italy. Many activists held the view that war was the only way in which Italy could heal its wounded self-esteem, achieve its 'rightful' glory and, crucially, restore the 'correct' balance of power between the sexes.[19] This was the era of F. T. Marinetti's Futurist movement, whose manifesto declared: 'We want to glorify war – sole cleansing of the world – militarism, patriotism . . . and contempt for women'.[20] Encapsulating the aggressive ethos of the age, Marinetti's words signal the difficulties for the new manly nationalism of 'feminine' elements in Italian culture. A few years later, the ultra-nationalist writer Giovanni Papini would call for Italy to enter World War I as an antidote to the nation's 'emasculated' state. Drawing upon images of sexual and physical incapacity, he derided Italy as 'A great power, but the weakest of all; armed, but incapable of waging war; conservative, but spineless whenever there was a hint of threat to stability', and a country where power had been allowed to fall into the hands of 'the impotent . . . those without backbone'.[21] Torrefranca's choice of vocabulary about Puccini was strikingly similar.

Masculine women and feminine men

Giacomo Puccini e l'opera internazionale is surely one of the most unremitting character assassinations in the history of music biography. '[Puccini] is the perfect womanly musician', wrote Torrefranca.[22] Under a subheading 'Femminilità del Puccini' he took a swipe at Puccini's status as a 'real man' by noting his 'poor fecundity'.[23] Torrefranca even considered what type of woman Puccini was, proclaiming him to

[18] George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison and London, 1985), 9–13, 25, 134.

[19] See Bruno P. F. Wanrooij, *Storia del pudore: la questione sessuale in Italia, 1860-1949* (Venice, 1990), 209.

[20] F. T. Marinetti, *Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo* (1909), reprinted in Marinetti, *Teoria e Invenzione Futurista (Opere di F. T. Marinetti, II)* (Milan, 1968), 10.

[21] Giovanni Papini, 'Il nostro impegno', *Lacerba* (15 November 1914), reprinted in Roger Griffin, ed., *Fascism*, Oxford Readers (Oxford and New York, 1995), 23-24. Torrefranca would probably have known Papini personally through his involvement with the Florentine avant-garde journal *La voce*, which Papini had set up with Giuseppe Prezzolini.

[22] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 76.

[23] *Ibid.*, 31.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

be the little seamstress rather than the aristocratic lady, 'ignorant but content to be so; poor but elegant; of easy virtue but romantic; silly but wilful; venal but concerned to keep up appearances as far as possible'.[24] In short, Puccini was Mimì. The composer's admirers considered his female characters to be among his greatest achievements, but Torrefranca considered them further evidence of the composer's effeminacy, reflecting Otto Weininger's observation that 'Those men who claim to understand women are themselves very nearly women'.[25]

Otto Weininger's misogynist tract *Geschlecht und Charakter* [Sex and Character], published shortly before his death in 1903, provides a useful frame within which to consider Torrefranca's attack on Puccini.[26] At once attracted towards and obsessively repulsed by the bisexual character which he detected to be present in all humans, and driven to suicide by his own homosexuality, Weininger initially seems an improbable character to have appealed to Italians of masculinist and nationalist inclinations. However, his antifeminism – culminating in the extreme theory that men should liberate themselves once and for all from sexually predatory women – was embraced by the flowering nationalist movement and would later endear him to the Fascists.[27] (For example, citing Weininger as an influence, Papini published an article advocating the massacre of women as the only solution to the fundamental incompatibility of the sexes.[28])

[24] *Ibid.*, 78.

[25] Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character* (London and New York, 1906), 56.

[26] Although it is difficult to find definitive proof of what Torrefranca would have read, it is possible to establish probable networks of influence and to situate him within an intellectual community via his publisher. Fratelli Bocca, founded in 1775 in Turin, the capital of academic publishing, became one of the most influential publishers of the late nineteenth century. In addition to producing titles on history and the arts, the Bocca house was a major publisher of books on science and law. Many of the key philosophical texts of the age were first introduced to Italian audiences by Bocca, notably the works of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Spencer, and Bocca also made a speciality of the burgeoning disciplines of psychology, sociology and criminology. The publishing house provided a platform for a new Italian debate over gender issues and sexuality, publishing the Italian translations of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1887) and Nordau's *Degeneration* (1896), along with the major works of Lombroso, Sighele and Mantegazza. Giuseppe Bocca, director of the company from 1890, extended the publishing house's interests to musicology, founding the *Rivista musicale italiana* in 1894 and creating a series entitled 'Biblioteca artistica' in which Wagner's prose works were introduced to an Italian audience. Having played a crucial role in the history of Italian culture and thought at the *fin de siècle*, Bocca was unwilling to abandon its positivist stance in later years, despite waning public interest. Its inability to adjust to the changing ideologies of the twentieth century led to a lengthy period of slow decline, and the company was finally declared bankrupt in 1959. See Nicola Tranfaglia and Albertina Vittoria, *Storia degli editori italiani: Dall'unità alla fine degli anni sessanta* (Rome and Bari, 2000), 213 and 328.

[27] Weininger, *Sex and Character* (see n. 25), 345–347. As Weininger regarded women as an obstacle to humanity's attaining moral, intellectual, and spiritual enlightenment, he considered the logical outcome of his scheme – the end of the human race – to be a price worth paying. He wrote, 'Every form of fecundity is loathsome, and no one who is honest with himself feels bound to provide for the continuity of the human race' (Weininger, 346).

[28] Papini, 'Il massacro delle donne', *Lacerba*, 7 (1 April 1914), 97–99. Papini was torn between lamenting the tiresome nature of executing the task and demonstrating his 'gallantry' in choosing the most humane method.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Torrefranca probably first became aware of Weininger's ideas through articles about him in the journals *Leonardo* (in 1906) and *La voce* (in 1910), to the latter of which Torrefranca occasionally contributed.[29] Even if Torrefranca had not read Weininger's book in its original German – which he is likely to have done – Weininger's thesis had been the subject of such intense debate in the circles in which Torrefranca moved that it could hardly have escaped his notice. For example, Scipio Sighele's lengthy critique of the book in *Eva moderna*, two years before its publication in Italy, demonstrates how readily pan-European ideas on fluid gender boundaries were taken up in Italy.[30] When Weininger's book was translated into Italian as *Sesso e carattere* in 1912 – almost exactly contemporaneously with Torrefranca's book and by the same publishing house – it became one of the most talked-about publications of the year.[31] A best-seller from the outset, the book went through a prodigious number of reprints, and remained influential in Italy long after its fame had faded elsewhere.[32] It is curious that the spirit of Italian society in the years immediately preceding the First World War appears to have found its ideal expression in the ideas of a young Austrian suicide case, who equated goodness, truth, and objectivity with the masculine, and crime, insanity, and subjectivity with the feminine. Italians were drawn towards Weininger's theories, probably because the book was the culmination of ideas which had been debated over the previous two decades by native writers.[33]

Weininger's ideas found an enthusiastic readership in a country whose intellectuals had led the way in investigating the boundaries of physical and behavioural 'normality'. In the late nineteenth century Cesare Lombroso and his followers had pioneered the positivist study of criminality and crowd psychology. Lombroso's *La donna delinquente*, co-authored with his son-in-law Guglielmo Ferrero, presented a statistical analysis of the facial and bodily measurements of female criminals both in order to prove links between physical traits and misconduct, and to produce a

[29] See Alberto Cavaglion, *Otto Weininger in Italia* (Rome, 1982), 29–33. The article on Weininger in *La voce* was part of an entire issue devoted to 'La questione sessuale' (2/9, 10 February 1910) which also contained discussions of the writings of Freud and Mantegazza and a lengthy bibliography of foreign books on the flourishing science of sexology. The author of the Weininger article, Giulio A. Levi, wrote approvingly, 'Weininger was truly one of the greats' (2).

[30] Scipio Sighele, *Eva moderna* (Milan, 1910), 45–57. Sighele expressed reservations about the originality of the book, but was sympathetic towards Weininger's theory that woman's desire for equality is in direct proportion to the amount of 'masculinity' in her. Where his opinion diverged from Papini's was over Weininger's proposal to suppress 'destructive' sexual relations, a concept which Sighele derided as 'preposterous'. He concluded that the rational Italian solution would be to demonstrate the hopelessness of full sexual equality and instead educate women in how to be honest wives and fertile mothers (56–57). His firm belief in women's maternal mission is exemplified by such comments as: 'For me the word of Nietzsche is gospel: woman is an enigma whose solution is called maternity' and, 'maternity is truly woman's patriotic duty' (Scipio Sighele, *Eva moderna*, VIII; Sighele, *La donna e l'amore* [Milan, 1913], 28).

[31] Otto Weininger, *Sesso e carattere* (Turin, 1912). The book, translated by G. Fenoglio, was number 59 in Bocca's prestigious 'Biblioteca di Scienze Moderne' series.

[32] See Cavaglion's introduction to a recent reissue of Otto Weininger, *Sesso e carattere* (Pordenone, 1992), VII–IX.

[33] Cavaglion, *Otto Weininger in Italia* (see n. 29), 20.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

scientific definition of the 'normal' woman.[34] Women with male physical features were not merely oddities but criminals: the female offender was thus characterised as having a large jaw and generally 'masculine aspect'.[35] In 1898 Lombroso went so far as to found a Museum of Criminal Anthropology in Turin specifically devoted to 'deviancy'.[36]

By 1912, in a climate of increasingly bellicose nationalism, fear of what Weininger referred to as the modern excess of 'sexually intermediate forms' – narrow-hipped, flat-chested women and dandified men – was approaching the realms of hysteria.[37] Thus Torrefranca was able to draw upon a set of clichés about the 'effeminate man' in order to disparage Puccini to maximum effect and to call into question his status as a national composer. Not averse to adopting a fashionably pseudo-scientific tone, he claimed that Puccini belonged to a 'cultural demi-monde': a group predominantly made up of women, but also including biological males who by rights belonged to the female sex.[38] It was not by chance that Torrefranca chose to categorise Puccini alongside Oscar Wilde.[39] Whatever Puccini's actual sexual behaviour – and there is no reason to question his reputation as a womaniser – Torrefranca knew that the merest taint of 'inversion' was sufficient to stigmatise him. Homosexuality, the very existence of which had previously been largely denied or ignored, had, thanks to the writings of contemporary psychologists and physiologists and a number of very public scandals, become an issue of topical debate. And morality was not the only thing at stake: the idea of homosexuality also carried darker political implications, as contemporary discourse linked it to secrecy, insanity, and conspiracy, all of which were thought to affect state security.[40]

Womanly weaknesses

To associate Puccini with women was to demean his talents, since women were widely believed to be incapable of any form of meaningful artistic endeavour. A

[34] Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *La donna delinquente* (Turin and Rome, 1893).

[35] Lombroso and Ferrero, *La donna delinquente*, 95–96. Their catalogue of the indicators of female criminality also incorporates a racial element, with such women apparently being characterised by thick black hair, dark eyes, a large nose and 'Mongolian features'. (70, 99, 101).

[36] Lombroso's monument to freakishness put on public display not merely the skulls of delinquents, but babies preserved in formaldehyde and – most ghoulish of all – his own pickled head following his death in 1909. Nominally intended in the spirit of advancing scientific knowledge, it is difficult to ignore the prurient aspect of a museum which housed a collection of explicit pornographic drawings and photographs of aristocratic women with whips ('La sadista di Hamburg' was a typical title), alongside photographs of hirsute 'monkey-men'. See Giorgio Colombo, *La scienza infelice: Il museo di antropologia criminale di Cesare Lombroso*, 2nd edn (Turin, 1975, 2000).

[37] Weininger, *Sex and Character* (see n. 25), 73.

[38] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 3. Torrefranca presumably employed the 'demi-monde' label in order to conjure up images of fallen women living from hand to mouth, selling themselves and their souls.

[39] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini*, 3.

[40] Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality* (see n. 18), 11. For further reading on Italian attitudes towards homosexuality at the *fin de siècle*, see Wanrooij, 'Crisi dei generi', in *Storia del pudore* (see n. 19), 191–225.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

similar theory was appropriated for an Italian readership by Paolo Mantegazza, Italy's foremost early twentieth-century anthropologist: 'the small number of great artists among women is enough to prove their intellectual inferiority'.[41] Weininger, for example, proposed that whilst women might dabble in painting or writing, they were particularly unsuited to musical composition as they depended upon external stimuli in order to be creative, and music bore no relation to sight, sound or smell.[42] Torrefranca expressed his hostility towards women in the hitherto exclusively masculine field of criticism by arguing that 'what women do is still not much more than a 'translation' of elements of art and thought already worked out by the male brain'.[43] He therefore implied that the men he labelled as 'feminine composers' were inert empty vessels incapable of creativity without assistance from others.[44] Thus his criticism of Puccini's 'intellectual mediocrity' and 'weakness', would have been obvious to a contemporary reader as a code for 'womanliness'.[45]

Puccini's commercial success at home and abroad – regarded by his supporters as a matter of national pride – was for Torrefranca both a marker of his vulgarity and yet another indicator of his effeminacy.[46] Torrefranca's apparently positive reference to Puccini as the ultimate 'hero of fashion' was in fact highly derogatory; he observed that Puccini was like 'the woman of today . . . the type of woman eager

[41] Paolo Mantegazza, *Fisiologia della donna*, 3rd edn, 2 vols. (Milan and Rome, 1893), II, 201. Mantegazza was Professor of Physiology at the University of Florence, and appointed 'senatore del regno'. Elisabetta Mondello calls Mantegazza the most notable Italian exponent of the positivist anthropology flowering across Europe at the *fin de siècle* which attempted to analyse woman as a scientific object and led every cultural premiss back to physical origins in order to prove a link between race and culture. Mondello, *La nuova italiana: La donna nella stampa e nella cultura del ventennio* (Rome, 1987), 24.

[42] Weininger, *Sex and Character* (see n. 25), 118–119.

[43] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 4. Disdaining the modern excess of 'sexually intermediate forms', Weininger writes that the real woman, who is preoccupied only with sex, has no inclination or capacity for intellectual development and that 'a woman's demand for emancipation and her qualification for it are in direct proportion to the amount of maleness in her' (*Sex and Character*, 64).

[44] 'Woman is a receptacle. Just as she receives the embryo from man, so too does she receive her spirit and conscience from him'. (P. -J. Proudhon, *De la Justice Dans la Révolution et dans l'Eglise*, 3 vols. [Paris, 1858], III, 372.) The notion of women as passive vessels waiting to be inseminated by men in both a sexual and an intellectual sense was first proposed by Rousseau. For a fuller overview of the history of negative philosophical attitudes towards women, see Beverley Clack, ed., *Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition: A Reader* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, and London, 1999); and Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Bloomington, Ind., 1989).

[45] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 5, 31.

[46] By 1912 Puccini led a life of considerable luxury, owned several homes and was able to command extremely high fees and favourable terms for his works. In 1910 he was invited to New York to supervise the rehearsals and première of *La fanciulla del West*. As befitted a figure of international standing, the Metropolitan Opera Company paid for him and Elvira to travel to and around New York, and provided them with luxurious accommodation and expenses, in addition to a fee of 20,000 lire (Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, 'Puccini's America', in William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini, ed., *The Puccini Companion* [London and New York, 1994], 202–227, 214).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for experiment'.[47] Fashion's unceasing and inevitably exhausting drive for novelty had dangerous political implications, for nervous exhaustion was widely believed to lead to decadence.[48] More prominent and influential than ever before, fashion was considered inherently ephemeral, frivolous, and attention-seeking: a metaphor for woman herself. In the era which witnessed the development of mass advertising and in which the first great department stores opened in Europe's capital cities to cater to woman's every trivial desire, femininity became intimately associated with materialism. Not only were women exploited as a useful marketing tool, their sinuous naked bodies adorning countless art nouveau posters, but their importance as consumers was also recognised.

For Torrefranca, Puccini's 'simpering sentimental' works aroused the same sort of interest as gossip columns and fashion reports.[49] This appeal to women demoted opera to the status of a commodity. A parallel may be drawn with the French reception of Massenet, the composer considered by many contemporary critics to have provided Puccini with his strongest stylistic model. Massenet's capacity to delight women, like Puccini's, was constructed by his detractors as an indicator of his own lightweight 'femininity', as Steven Huebner notes:

> Wagnerians doubtless perceived [Massenet's] operas in the same general category as quintessentially feminine commercial products such as crinolines, fashion magazines, cheap sentimental novels – cultural artefacts not amenable to nationalist boasting about progress . . . He could not escape his image as a colossal representative of the age of nascent mass-market commercialism.[50]

Where Torrefranca commented explicitly on Puccini's 'effeminate' character, his analysis of the music hinged upon more subliminally feminine imagery. Branding Puccini's music as 'not art but artifice', he implied that it was merely decorative, its emphasis upon surface detail rather than substance marking it as decadent.[51] In contrast to the many critics who applauded Puccini for his ability to express honest, authentic feeling, which they constructed as a particularly Italian virtue, Torrefranca depicted Puccini's supposed 'passion' as an act of 'simulation'. If one wanted to put together a synthetic, composite artist, assured of success, he argued, Puccini's music

[47] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 77. Torrefranca (1) counterpoints 'the heroes whom fashion exalts and history demolishes' with historical figures of true quality and endurance who received little recognition during their lifetimes, setting Marini against Dante, Vogler or Wölfl against Beethoven. His remark about women being 'greedy for experiment' suggests disapproval of women's supposedly increased appetite for adventure in both the bedroom and the workplace. With regard to the public domain, Torrefranca might have taken heart from Weininger's belief that even female emancipation was merely a passing trend. See Weininger, *Sex and Character* (n. 25), 70.

[48] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 18.

[49] *Ibid.*, 24, 2.

[50] Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style* (Oxford, 1999), 165. Massenet's personality was also deemed to be particularly attractive to women, and contemporary reports emphasise the fact that on public appearances he was invariably surrounded by adoring female admirers (Huebner, 160).

[51] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 27. Naomi Schor considers the devalorised cultural alignment between women and detail and between detail and decadence in *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York and London, 1987).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

would contain all the requisite ingredients, but would be characterised by a 'spiritual void'.[52] He drew the reader's attention to Puccini's propensity to borrow the music of others as a marker of the composer's dishonesty. It was hardly coincidental that the composers whom he accused Puccini of crudely attempting to imitate – Massenet, Debussy and Strauss – were 'decadent' figures who had themselves, to varying degrees, also been tarred with the brush of effeminacy.

According to Torrefranca the effeminate artist was bereft of an individual 'voice', unable to leave an imprint upon the era in which he lived, instead merely subsuming cultural tendencies and reproducing them. Thus Puccini's music was, like a vain woman, 'dressed up' as something it was not ('cross-dressed' even), seeking to mislead the listener. Torrefranca wrote: 'The insincere artist is almost always a monotonous artist, a tedious composer, even if he makes the effort to dress up his mode of expression in a thousand different guises'.[53] Disguise and deceit were inextricably associated with women, whose taste for make-up was believed to indicate their dishonesty.[54] Lombroso, for example, expressed concern that prostitutes seduced men with make-up that concealed their 'virile' nature beneath an attractive feminine exterior.[55] Torrefranca deemed Puccini's sale of his operas – like the prostitute's sale of her body – both fraudulent and gender-problematic.

Puccini had been widely berated by the press – even by critics who were otherwise sympathetic towards him – for 'self-plagiarism', and especially for 'recycling' aspects of *Manon Lescaut* in *La bohème*.[56] Thus when Torrefranca disparaged Puccini for producing 'reflected' art, he was attacking him not only for imitating other composers, but for imitating himself, and narcissism was another trait constructed by contemporary society as 'feminine'.[57] Weininger wrote that men

[52] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 34.

[53] *Ibid.*, 28.

[54] Weininger wrote that 'organic untruthfulness characterises . . . all women' *Sex and Character* (see n. 25), 273. Michela De Giorgio identifies the 'moralistic nineteenth-century interpretation of make-up as falsification'. De Giorgio, *Le italiane dall'unità a oggi*, 2nd edn (Rome and Bari, 1993), 177. Even here, nationalism came into play: cosmetics were viewed with suspicion in late nineteenth-century Italy as a French import, contrary to the Italian taste for natural, virtuous beauty (De Giorgio, 174).

[55] Nancy A. Harrowitz observes: 'The idea that a certain type of woman is really a man under the surface is compounded by the fact that she sells what is specifically female sex to her male clients. That Lombroso is suggesting that she is not really female at all casts an even more onerous light on the situation. What is being sold is pure artifice, then; not female, thus not female sex, but rather a kind of androgynous, ultimately falsified and fraudulent substitution'. Harrowitz, *Antisemitism, Misogyny, and the Logic of Cultural Difference: Cesare Lombroso and Matilde Serao* (Lincoln, Nebr., and London, 1994), 34.

[56] See for example Ippolito Valetta's comments in the *Nuova Antologia*: 'it is true that there are certain harmonic and instrumental procedures from the previous work . . . that we frequently find repeated and abused in *La bohème*, such that at a number of points the listener becomes weary . . . It is difficult wholeheartedly to defend Puccini in *La bohème* against a general indictment of self-plagiarism'. (Ippolito Valetta, 'Rassegna Musicale', *Nuova Antologia*, 61/4 [15 February 1896], 755–762, 759.)

[57] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 27. An alternative translation would be the equally pejorative 'reflex art', conveying Puccini's perceived lack of critical judgement. Bram Dijkstra comments upon the 'inherent imitative tendency' attributed to women at the turn of the century. Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York and Oxford, 1986), 135.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

were so afraid of the notion of the *Doppelgänger* and of being thought 'a mere echo' that they feared mirrors, whereas women were content to receive their opinions 'ready made'.[58] Indeed, the theme of the woman contemplating her image in a mirror or pond was a favourite subject of *fin-de-siècle* painters.[59]

Torrefranca's next charge was childishness. He claimed that in a culture whose men increasingly sought to emulate the minds of small children, 'Puccini remained a baby, never reached manhood'.[60] Using infantilism as a stick with which to beat Puccini was the logical extension of Torrefranca's misogyny, for the woman–child association was deeply ingrained in the culture of the *fin de siècle*. In Italy a widespread intellectual conservatism, influenced by German theories about women's mental inferiority, amalgamated women and children as similarly ingenuous, irresponsible and simple-minded.[61] Lombroso and Ferrero provided 'scientific' justification for the subjugation of women by suggesting that their infantile and immoral tendencies could be 'neutralised by piety, maternity, want of passion, sexual coldness, by weakness and an undeveloped intelligence'.[62] As mother and child were one and the same, it would have come as no surprise to the book's readers to discover Torrefranca likening Puccini to a 'little mother' who soothes her baby to sleep with a monotonous lullaby of caresses and kisses because she cannot express herself in any more coherent manner.[63]

References to disease abound in Torrefranca's monograph: for example, he describes Puccini as 'a symptom of decadence', 'anaemic and emaciated', 'like a neurasthenic', and 'a third-rate physiological product of Italian culture'.[64] Such insults stood in marked contrast to the rhetoric of health employed by Puccini's supporters, and further undermined claims that he was a full-blooded Italian male. Torrefranca also applied metaphors of sickness to the music, observing that Puccini's themes were inert to the point of death, whilst *Tosca* represented 'the sublimity of decay'.[65] In effect Torrefranca posited Puccini's works as embodying the *malaise* of the era which produced them. Max Nordau commented in his scare-mongering best-seller *Degeneration* that 'the *fin-de-siècle* mood . . . is the impotent despair of a sick man', while Mantegazza affirmed, 'Our century feels ill; its men are

[58] Weininger, *Sex and Character* (see n. 25), 210, 262. Similarly, in *Fisiologia della donna* Mantegazza compiled a chart of relative male and female emotional traits, pairing man's 'maggior ambizione' against woman's 'maggior vanità'. *Fisiologia della donna* (see n. 41), I, 292.

[59] Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity* (see n. 57), 135. Examples include the undifferentiated women in Burne Jones's *The Mirror of Venus* (1898) and the prostitute in Manet's *Nana* (1877), while a specifically Italian (and particularly censorious) spin was put on the theme by Giovanni Segantini in *La vanità (La fonte del male)* (1897).

[60] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 3, 94. '[Puccini] è rimasto infante, non si è fatto virile': a literal translation would be 'did not attain virility'.

[61] 'In woman we find a character which is childlike and above all atavistic'; 'Woman was and is and always will be less intelligent than man; and her thoughts are generally infantile'. Mantegazza, *Fisiologia della donna* (see n. 41), I, 292, and II, 207.

[62] Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *The Female Offender* (London, 1895), 151.

[63] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 32.

[64] *Ibid.*, 25, 8, 81, 10.

[65] *Ibid.*, 89, 54.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

hypochondriacs, its women are hysterics'.[66] Both were writing in the 1890s, but it is evident from Torrefranca's words in 1912 that for all the words of reinvigoration, Italy had yet to be cured.

Contemporary readers would immediately have recognised the rhetoric of disease as feminine, the equation of masculinity with health and femininity with sickness being a common topos in late nineteenth-century European culture. In the decadent literature of the *fin de siècle*, peopled by legions of pale, consumptive heroines, women were presented as agents of disease from whom innocent men ran the risk of contamination. Italian theorists in the late nineteenth century went so far as to claim that although ill-health was abnormal for men, it represented women's natural state.[67] Tapping into fears about contamination and impurity, Torrefranca depicted male culture and thought as an ancient tree being maliciously sabotaged by women and, by extension, effeminate men:

> Now, if female culture – or at least what we have seen of it so far – is a parasite culture, it cannot but depress the sap's vitality and richness, even sucking the life from the last remaining branches. And indeed this is what happens, and in this environment the de-nourished masculine culture finds nothing better to do than to incline towards femininity and start living a parasitic existence itself.[68]

The image of women sucking sap from the strong 'trunk' of masculine culture – at once abhorrent yet titillating – reveals Torrefranca's anxieties about the existence of a female plot to enfeeble men. The metaphor of the parasite suggests that, at the same time as having to contemplate its relationship with its external neighbours, the weak Italian state was also under attack from enemies within. Torrefranca played on the association between physical anatomy and the political corpus, recalling Proudhon's vision of the French nation as a body attacked by gangrene.[69] The implication that Puccini was a parasite associated him with attempts to weaken the national moral fibre, as well as casting doubt upon his sexuality.

Puccini as 'Jew'

Charges of 'sickness' were regularly applied to 'outsider' groups such as Jews and foreigners. Again, it is profitable to turn to Otto Weininger in order to illustrate the close connection between misogynist and anti-Semitic rhetoric: 'Judaism is saturated with femininity' and 'like women, because they are nothing in themselves, [Jews] can

[66] Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (Lincoln, Nebr., and London, 1993), 3. Mantegazza, *Fisiologia della donna* (see n. 41), II, 313.
[67] Babini, Minuz, and Tagliavini, *La donne nelle scienze dell'uomo* (see n. 13), 127.
[68] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 5.
[69] 'A nation in dissolution is like a body attacked by gangrene: only the toe seems afflicted, and the surgeon cuts off the foot. Six months later the gangrene reappears in the leg and it is necessary to remove the thigh; finally it reaches the stomach and all is lost'. P. J. Proudon, *Pornocratie ou les femmes dans les temps modernes* (Paris, 1875), 258.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

become everything'.[70] Anti-Semitic stereotypes also informed Torrefranca's attack on Puccini. The fact that the composer was not Jewish was no hindrance to highlighting the 'Jewish' characteristics of his music: commercialism, vulgarity, and an unvarying and derivative style.[71] Torrefranca wrote: 'In Puccini, a truly personal quest for the new is absent'.[72] He argued that when borrowing traits from French, German, and Russian composers, Puccini 'never succeeds in enlarging upon that which he has learned from others but makes use of it to form a "cliché" of modern music, blessed by success and acclaimed by fashion'.[73] However, not only did Torrefranca chastise Puccini for the very act of attempting to imitate foreign composers, but also for the fact that the results were unconvincing. For Torrefranca, Puccini lacked the breeding or aptitude for study and thought that would equip him to understand or attain 'fluency' in foreign musical styles.[74] 'Ignorant of foreign languages', Puccini was the international composer *par excellence*, adept at creating works which were not Italian, Russian, German or French, but which had all the easy syntax and commercial advantages of Esperanto.[75] He could only 'pick at' them, lifting the crudest features of foreign music and rearranging them in ad hoc fashion.[76] The result was a music which was fragmented and dismembered, a fitting anthem for a disintegrating nation.

Torrefranca's rhetoric was highly derivative of Wagner's. He was surely familiar with that composer's 'Das Judenthum in der Musik' since the original essay, translated as 'Il Giudaismo nella musica', was published in full in the *Rivista musicale*

[70] Weininger, *Sex and Character* (see n. 25), 306, 320. It should be remembered that Weininger was himself Jewish and his attack on the Jews, like his attack on homosexuals, was to a large extent an exploration of his own self-loathing. The persistent intersection of misogyny and anti-Semitism is further demonstrated by the fact that Lombroso – also Jewish – followed *La donna delinquente* with *L'antisemitismo e le scienze moderne* (1894). His book purports to defend the Jews, but in reality attacks them, employing similar rhetoric to that used in his disparagement of women. See Harrowitz, *Antisemitism, Misogyny, and the Logic of Cultural Difference* (see n. 55), 12, 18 . For a wider European perspective on the cultural coupling of Jews and women, see Mireille Dottin-Orsini, 'La femme, le juif', *Cette femme qu'ils disent fatale* (Paris, 1993), 306–333.

[71] Torrefranca's implied disparagement of 'Jewish' traits in a non-Jewish composer gains a certain perverse logic in the context of Weiningerian thought. Weininger wrote in *Sex and Character*: 'I must, however, make clear what I mean by Judaism; I mean neither a race nor a people nor a recognised creed. I think of it as a tendency of the mind, as a psychological constitution which is possible for all mankind, but which has become actual in the most conspicuous fashion only amongst the Jews'. Quoted in Harrowitz, *Antisemitism, Misogyny and the Logic of Cultural Difference*, 70. In France Vincent d'Indy shared Torrefranca's anti-Semitism and was similarly prone to attacking non-Jewish composers for possessing 'Jewish' characteristics, which he defined as superficiality, greed and a derivative style. See Jane F. Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (New York and Oxford, 1999), 32.

[72] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 8.

[73] *Ibid.*, 8.

[74] *Ibid.*, 42.

[75] *Ibid.*, 42, 124. Puccini's biographers have played up his enthusiasm to set Sardou's *La Tosca* and Belasco's *Madame Butterfly*, despite having understood none of the dialogue when he saw the plays performed on stage. See for example Mosco Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography* (London, 1992), 135.

[76] *Ibid.*, 84.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

italiana in 1897.[77] Torrefranca's attack on Puccini's desire and efforts to compose in 'foreign' styles paraphrases Wagner's theories about Jewish attempts to speak foreign languages, which he then extended to their efforts in musical composition:

> The Jew converses in the tongue of the people amongst whom he dwells from age to age, but he does this invariably after the manner of a foreigner . . . The general circumstance that a Jew speaks his modern European language only as if acquired and not as if he were native to it shuts him out from all capability of full, independent and characteristic expression of his ideas.[78]

According to Wagner, therefore, a Jew's inability to understand foreign languages properly meant that he remained perpetually incapable of expressing himself coherently. Wagner referred to Jews as using a 'confused heap . . . of words and phrases' and Jewish composers likewise making 'a confused heap of the forms and styles of all ages and masters'.[79]

Italians prided themselves upon being immune from anti-Semitism and it was a commonly held conviction in the early twentieth century that as a result of successful assimilation (and in contrast with France) there was no 'Jewish problem' in Italy. Following Unification, Jews ostensibly enjoyed complete emancipation, held prominent positions in society, and, having been resident in Italy for many centuries, were not regarded as foreigners.[80] In reality, however, Italy had a long history of characterising the Jew as an outsider, at all levels from popular fiction to highbrow literature.[81] Seeking to stoke subconscious prejudices, Torrefranca could be sure that the metaphors he employed were familiar to his readers, however blind to racial difference they might imagine themselves to be. That the analogy of the rootless Jew struck a smarting chord with contemporary Italians is illustrated by Sighele's warning against cultural internationalism: 'Races . . . which cast aside or forget their duty, which have no roots and which are not attached to memories . . . are . . . dispersed races like the Jews'.[82] Sighele had perhaps been inspired by the great patriot Mazzini, who had written: 'Without a fatherland you . . . are the bastards of humanity. Soldiers without a flag, the Israelites of nations'.[83] In an era in which Italy wanted to shout more loudly on the international stage, the charge

[77] Richard Wagner, 'Il giudaismo nella musica', *Rivista musicale italiana*, 4 (1897), 95–113. The journal reproduced the earlier version of Wagner's essay (as published in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in 1850), in response to reader demand for an Italian translation (see *Rivista musicale italiana*, 4, 95n).

[78] Richard Wagner, *Judaism in Music*, trans. Edwin Evans (London, 1910), 11–12.

[79] *Ibid.*, 29–30. Wagner's theories were, of course, far from new, and drew upon the well-established myth of the wandering Jew, which was exploited with new vehemence in the nineteenth century across Europe in order to use the Jews as scapegoats for wider cultural concerns. There is further irony in Torrefranca's disparagement of Puccini's music as unoriginal, which is mirrored in his own hotchpotch of unacknowledged literary influences.

[80] Cecil Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy* (Farnborough, Hants, 1969), 474–475.

[81] Lynn M. Gunzberg, *Strangers at Home: Jews in the Italian Literary Imagination* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford, 1992), 10.

[82] Scipio Sighele, *Il nazionalismo e i partiti politici* (Milan, 1911), 29–30.

[83] Mazzini, cited in Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia* (see n. 5), 26.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that her foremost composer was a speaker of foreign tongues, diluting Italian culture from within, suggested that, in reality, the nation had no voice of her own.

An amputated art

In much the same way that composers like Chopin were labelled by their contemporaries as 'effeminate' by virtue of the small-scale works they wrote for domestic consumption, Torrefranca drew a connection between Puccini and the 'feminine' genre in which he composed.[84] Torrefranca described opera as an incomplete art, void of true content, and the opera composer as nothing more than 'a failed musician, an incomplete artist'.[85] Once again, he could not resist the temptation to make mocking reference to Puccini's virility, calling opera the collaboration of 'two impotents', and 'an amputation': surely a barely disguised reworking of the hysterical castration imagery which haunted the painting and literature of the *fin de siècle*.[86]

For Torrefranca, Puccini's *demi-monde* heroines mirrored opera's own wantonness.[87] Here again is evidence of a selective reading of Wagner; in this instance the claim in *Opera and Drama* that Italian opera is a harlot, a degenerate woman who gives herself to lovers indiscriminately with no worthier motivation than a desire for money.[88] Attacking what most Italians considered to be a proud and glorious tradition, Torrefranca implied that it was shameful that, for centuries, an art form which he considered to be corrupt and emasculated should have represented Italy. For him the opera composer was the result of 'a degeneration of ancestral lineage' – a threat to pure Italian blood – and the public's predilection for opera indicative of a weak and submissive national character.[89] Torrefranca exploited images of hazy sexual identities to strike at the heart of a nation which associated opera closely with its sense of self. That jealous foreigners might deride Italian opera as effeminate was perhaps only to be expected, but for an *Italian* musicologist to do so was alarming indeed. In a pre-emptive strike against possible charges of disloyalty, Torrefranca argued that it was not he but those who listened to and enjoyed opera who were unpatriotic.

What did Torrefranca see as the alternative to opera's stranglehold on Italian musical life? Damning the fact that Italy was 'a nation which still does not know the history of its own music', and arguing that 'the history of Italian music is not the history of opera', Torrefranca sought to create a new national artistic aesthetic

[84] Kallberg analyses the feminine metaphors in which early critics couched their responses to Chopin's oeuvre in *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History, and Musical Genre* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1998), especially Chapter 2, 'The Harmony of the Tea Table: Gender and Ideology in the Piano Nocturne'.

[85] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 10.

[86] *Ibid.*, 9, 11. Most notably, there was a vogue for plays, operas and paintings based upon the story of John the Baptist and Salome, as exemplified by the works of Wilde, Strauss, Massenet and Moreau.

[87] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 30.

[88] Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, trans. Edwin Evans, 2 vols. (London, 1913), I, 187–188.

[89] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 6.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

through the promotion of *musica pura*.[90] He championed the careers of the contemporary composers he saw as representing the real voice of Italy (the so-called *Generazione dell'Ottanta*, including such composers as Casella and Malipiero), whilst simultaneously calling for a revival of early Italian instrumental music. Approaching his task with quasi-religious zeal, Torrefranca's endeavour to rewrite musical history was strongly nationalistic in tone and in addition to denigrating opera as the bearer of Italian culture also reveals the anti-German prejudices for which he was well known.[91] He proposed a situation whereby Italy might compensate for her inferiority to her northern neighbour in terms of military strength by attempting to usurp German cultural dominance. Along with young Italian critics and composers who had received their musical training abroad, Torrefranca was uncomfortably aware that German instrumental music occupied a position at the top of the European artistic hierarchy, a position he hoped to reclaim for Italy. Alleging that Italian composers had sown the seeds of the most highly revered music of the last 150 years – the symphonic tradition – he appropriated Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven as honorary Italians.[92] In defining the true Italian music, Torrefranca sought to substitute sonata form, characterised by 'masculine' order and logic and formulated as pure, for degenerate, impure 'feminine' opera.[93]

[90] *Ibid.*, ix, 19.

[91] Torrefranca called for 'the spiritual regeneration of musical Italy' (*Ibid.*, xi). Again, a parallel to Torrefranca's politically inspired revival of early music may be drawn with the role played by Vincent d'Indy in France. D'Indy, a member of the *Ligue de la Patrie Française*, was similarly dedicated to the notion of heritage as the well-spring of national identity and cultural regeneration, and promoted early music in his teachings at the Schola Cantorum. See Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music* (see n. 71), 30–31.

[92] 'Italy had its Beethovens, its Mozarts, its Haydns, known as Corelli and Veracini, Vivaldi and Vitali, Pasquini and Platti. And indeed Italy created the modern sonata and the Classical symphony and her musical spirit was instilled into Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven'. (Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* [see n. 9]. 15–16.) See also Fausto Torrefranca, 'La creazione della Sonata drammatica moderna rivendicata all'Italia', *Rivista musicale italiana*, 17 (1910), 309–358. Similar endeavours were taking place elsewhere in Europe. In England in 1881 the Duke of Albany had made a fund-raising speech for the Royal College of Music in which he said of 'Sumer is icumen in': 'this tiny glee, which is the germ of modern music, the direct and absolute progenitor to the oratorios of Handel, the symphonies of Beethoven, the operas of Wagner is a purely English creation, dealing with English sights and sounds – the cuckoo, the blooming meadow . . . the pastures of Berkshire'. Cited in Robert Stradling and Meirion Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance 1860–1940: Construction and Deconstruction* (London and New York, 1993), 23. I should like to thank Maria McHale for drawing my attention to this parallel between the nationalist ambitions underpinning the revival of early music in both England and Italy.

[93] The notion of sonata form as representing the triumph of the 'masculine' first subject over the 'feminine' second subject was first expressed by A. B. Marx in 1845, and was given renewed vigour in D'Indy's 1890s *Cours de composition musicale*, published in 1909. See Marcia J. Citron, 'Feminist Approaches to Musicology', in *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*, ed. Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou (Urbana and Chicago, 1994), 15–34, 19–20. Citron argues that 'the conventions and subtext of the sonata aesthetic have privileged the masculine' and that it 'stands as a symbol and product of Western patriarchal values' (Citron, 'Feminist Approaches to Musicology', 18). See also Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge, 1993), 132–145.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Male medusas

As the products of a feminised composer working in a feminised genre, it was only natural that Puccini's male characters should seem unmanly. Torrefranca portrayed them as sexually ambiguous sea-creatures:

> Des Grieux and Marcello, Rodolfo and Pinkerton belong to the world of what could be termed invertebrate men, which is also the world of neurasthenic lovers and frenzied hypochondriacs. They are the molluscs of literature, hydras and light and transparent medusas, which, suspended in the gentle water of the poetic pond which produced them, have a form which can be graceful and wandering, whilst, when they are removed from their natural environment – and artificial ponds are dried out every so often by temporary droughts or through the need to be cleaned out – they become little more than a shapeless blob of gelatine.[94]

This description is replete with *fin-de-siècle* indicators of femininity: sickness, fluidity, formlessness, and dependency.[95] Again, in characterising Puccini's men as 'invertebrates' Torrefranca creates an image not merely of metaphorical spinelessness, but of impotence.

But Torrefranca's rhetoric was not merely zoological; his mythological references reversed the classical images used by the pro-Puccini camp. The hydra was the many-headed snake killed by Hercules, whose heads grew as fast as they were cut off. More striking still is the allusion to the Medusa, the woman turned into a Gorgon with venomous snakes for hair as punishment for boasting of her beauty, who turned all those who looked upon her into stone. Frequent in contemporary iconography, the Medusa represents the ultimate *fin-de-siècle* nightmare vision of unrestrained female sexuality and evil: having appropriated male power, she is vain, and destructive towards men, but also tempting.[96] Furthermore, Torrefranca's disturbing inversion of the Classical trope creates an awkward relationship between the characters on stage and the audience. Puccini's men as 'Medusas' – at once masculine and feminine – become desirable to the male spectator, yet possess the ability to return his gaze, transfixing and unmanning him. In short, Torrefranca implies that Puccini's operas have the power to render audiences as sexually ambiguous as the characters on stage.

[94] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 30.

[95] Puccini's characters as portrayed here are more evocative of the watery women of Gustav Klimt's paintings or seductive art nouveau women mutating into plants and animals than fitting models of Italian masculinity. Of the multitudes of women in turn-of-the-century paintings who were depicted floating through air or water, Bram Dijkstra writes: 'woman's weightlessness was . . . a sign of her willing – or helpless – submission . . . she was both passive and sexual' (*Idols of Perversity* [see n. 57], 87, 90).

[96] Dijkstra states that in the *fin de siècle* the Medusa's head was widely seen as representing a monstrous 'vagina dentata', although of course not publicly acknowledged as such in polite society (*Idols of Perversity*, 310). For further reading on the symbolism of the Medusa in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Adrienne Auslander Munich, *Andromeda's Chains: Gender and Interpretation in Victorian Literature and Art* (New York, 1989), 32, and Joseph A. Kestner, *Mythology and Misogyny: The Social Discourse of Nineteenth-Century British Classical-Subject Painting* (Madison and London, 1989), 106.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Fears of a feminised culture

To appreciate fully the damaging implications of Torrefranca's depiction of a feminised Puccini it is crucial to understand both the intensity of misogynist feeling which developed in Italy in the years preceding the First World War, and its close association with nationalist ambition. As elsewhere in Europe at the turn of the century, the spectre of feminism provoked a violent backlash on the part of male commentators. The Italian women's emancipation movement began to stir in Milan in the 1880s with the founding of several organisations devoted to the cause of women's suffrage, such as Anna Maria Mozzoni's *Lega promotrice degli interessi femminili*. The socialist Anna Kuliscioff gave a speech in 1890 entitled 'Il monopolio dell'uomo' which spoke of the serious and widespread demand for emancipation which she detected among Italian women.[97] Despite the efforts of a few notable individuals such as Kuliscioff, feminist Teresa Labriola, and novelist Sibilla Aleramo, and the foundation of women's journals such as *La donna* and *La Cornelia*, the women's movement was impeded by low levels of literacy and was at first slow to develop beyond the salons of privileged gentlewomen. Liberal social commentators, such as Sighele, were prepared to countenance a certain degree of progress for women, such as improved access to education, provided that they did not abandon their 'mission' of motherhood. However, most male critics reacted to the suggestion of female emancipation with frenzy, despite Italian feminism's restraint and prudence compared to its British counterpart.

The vast number of texts on the 'woman question' published in Italy in the first years of the twentieth century challenge any notion that Italy remained immune from the pan-European debate over feminism. Italian men – and some women – were suspicious of the developments taking place abroad and hoped to quell feminism in Italy by ridiculing it as a foreign import.[98] However, around 700 titles are listed under the subject-heading 'donne' in the *Catalogo generale della libreria italiana dall'anno 1900 a tutto il 1920*, representing one of the longest entries in the inventory.[99] The titles divide into writings by feminists and works by their detractors on 'women's shortcomings', including intellectual inferiority, infantilism, degeneracy, alcoholism, criminality, and neurasthenia.

[97] De Giorgio, *Le italiane dall'unità a oggi* (see n. 54), 498. 1400 women attended the first congress of the *Consiglio nazionale delle donne italiane*, in Rome in 1908 (De Giorgio, 502). Many of the women's congresses were explicitly feminist, although by no means all. However, the upsurge of activity is significant in itself.

[98] De Giorgio, *Le italiane dall'unità a oggi*, 503. Victoria De Grazia observes, 'links to more visible, often militant movements, like those of the British suffragists, inevitably exposed Italian feminists to criticism that feminism was alien to Italian soil'. De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1992), 21.

[99] Arrigo Plinio Pagliaini (ed.), *Catalogo generale della libreria italiana dall'anno 1900 a tutto il 1920: Indice per materie A-D* (Milan, 1933), 871–877. Alongside comportment manuals, books on women's health and beauty, and the predictably large body of literature on women and Catholicism, are to be found many works on women's education and entry into the professions. Some thirty titles by authors of both sexes include the phrase 'la missione della donna' (indicating concern that women were turning away from motherhood), and a large number reflect upon contemporary social issues such as divorce and female suffrage.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Predictably, writers exploited the politics of reproduction in order to raise the Italian anti-feminist consciousness, a discourse which Torrefranca tapped into with his reference to a 'de-nourished culture'.[100] These years witnessed widespread anxiety at declining birth-rates and their consequent military implications. In Italy, as in France, fear of waning fertility intensified between the 1870s and the turn of century, and became intertwined with Darwinian-inspired anxieties about the proliferation of the weak at the expense of the élite.[101] Anti-feminism even permeated the fine arts. When Torrefranca described parasitic women in trees, he may have been recalling Giovanni Segantini's 1894 canvas *Le cattive madri*, which depicts a woman in a state of sexual ecstasy suspended in a tree, holding a dead or dying baby. Segantini presented modern women's rejection of motherhood as the selfish exercise of personal choice at the expense of duty to others; the punishment for their lustful ways was banishment to the icy mountains, where, in return for repentance, they would be reunited with the children who might have been. Here is the woman-as-nature trope gone wrong: the trees are gnarled, the background is a cold, barren wasteland, a metaphor for the subject's own sterility. It is unclear whether Segantini's censure of self-indulgence at the expense of procreation was targeted specifically at Italian women. The painting exploited pan-European anxieties, yet his depiction of women here and elsewhere seems harsh even by the standards of customarily misogynist *fin-de-siècle* art. No attempt was made to coat the women in a seductive gloss for the delectation of the viewer: they are angular, tormented, ugly, and Segantini's titles are always bluntly moralising. The painting was given official State approval by being exhibited at the second Milan Triennale, an important showcase for the latest Italian art, attended by politicians and royalty.[102]

The creation of a 'symbolic code of national femininity', centring on a quasi-religious idolisation of women, was part of the post-1861 project of cultural unification.[103] Italy had the reputation of being a fiercely matriarchal society which

[100] Torrefranca, *Giacomo Puccini* (see n. 9), 5

[101] Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women* (see n. 98), 4. De Giorgio records the fact that birth rates fell significantly among the generation of Italian women born between 1871 and 1886, with only 25 per cent producing seven or more children as opposed to 40 per cent for the previous generation (De Giorgio, *Le italiane dall'unità a oggi* (see n. 54), 353).

[102] Kate Flint, 'Blood and Milk: Painting and the State in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy', in *The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture*, ed. Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon (Cambridge, 1993), 112. Flint argues that the debate over the future of Italian art in the 1890s was inextricably bound up with deeper issues of national identity: 'the pictures, and the reactions they called forth, can be seen as symptomatic of the anxieties concerning the uncontrollable, self-willed and potentially unpredictable body of the adolescent Italian state' (123). There is a certain irony in the fact that Segantini's *Le cattive madri and Il castigo delle lussuriose*, which treats a similar theme, were inspired by a poem of 1889 entitled 'Nirvana' by none other than Luigi Illica, Puccini's librettist. See Aurora Scotti Tosini, 'Giovanni Segantini', in Jane Turner, ed., *The Dictionary of Art*, 28 (London, 1996), 354–357, 354.

[103] De Giorgio, *Le italiane dall'unità a oggi* (see n. 54), 6-7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

'made the nineteenth-century cult of motherhood into a national devotion'.[104] However, by the 1910s, a far more virulent strain of anti-feminism had developed, in which 'feminine' culture represented a significant threat to the fabric of the nation. The depraved model of womanhood presented by Torrefranca sat at odds with the Catholic view of woman as a morally civilising force which had prevailed only a few decades earlier, and is indicative of a dramatic paradigm shift in Italian culture.[105] Torrefranca's book demonstrates that the notion of Puccini's operas as national art became increasingly at odds with a culture of intensifying aggression, which opposed all remnants of what it saw as the bourgeois, effeminate *belle époque*. Just as thinkers like Weininger and Papini believed that only by annihilating women might humanity attain fulfilment, Torrefranca suggested that culture too must liberate itself from all traces of the feminine.

Aftermath: critical responses

What, then, were critical reactions to Torrefranca's monograph? The response of the official Puccini machine was silence. As the biggest player in a large, commercially successful industry – towards which, moreover, Torrefranca had declared himself contemptuous – Ricordi could afford to ignore the musicologist's opinions. Critics like De Amicis (see above) who participated in the masculinist glorification of Puccini seem also to have been silent. And Puccini himself, unsurprisingly, declined to comment in public, although it is easy to imagine his feelings. His letters betray a tendency towards profound self-pity in reaction to the mildest of negative press reports; Torrefranca's comments must have been devastating. It is unimaginable that he did not write about the book to family and friends, but those letters which referred to it are not in his published correspondence. The one exception is a letter of 1915 in which a few angry allusions to Torrefranca reveal that the wounds had not healed even some years after the event.[106]

The absence of reviews of Torrefranca's book in the lightweight music periodicals which saturated the market is not surprising. As glorified listings-magazines, or as the publicity vehicles of theatrical agencies, whose level of criticism did not extend beyond reporting how many curtain-calls a performance received, theirs were not

[104] *Ibid.*, 18. The Catholic church applauded motherhood in this period, and placed special emphasis upon family values in a papal encyclical of 1880 . See De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women* (n. 98), 20. Mantegazza called woman 'the vestal virgin of morality and human idealism' (*Fisiologia della donna* [see n. 41], I, 316, 321–322).

[105] De Giorgio proposes that negative literary models imported from France may have had an influence upon Italian attitudes by the turn of the century. De Giorgio, *Le italiane dall'unità a oggi* (see n. 54), 7.

[106] In a letter dated 11 February 1915, Puccini asked Alfredo Vandini, a friend since childhood, whether he had read 'dear Torrefranca's' book, remarking that the author 'could do with a good cudgelling'. See Eugenio Gara, *Carteggi pucciniani* (Milan, 1958), 432–433.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the pages in which to discuss a monograph of this kind.[107] However, the impressive coverage which Torrefranca's book gained in serious musicological or cultural journals published in Milan, Turin, Rome, and Florence should be regarded as exceptional, particularly given the writer's youth.

The chorus of approval which greeted the book from critics such as Mario Ferraguti in *Vita musicale* and the unsigned reviewer in the *Rivista teatrale italiana* would appear to substantiate Torrefranca's claim that he was voicing an opinion which others shared but were reluctant to express.[108] The monograph attracted praise for its prose style, its incisiveness, and its 'tastily satirical' metaphors.[109] Critics who endorsed the book lingered approvingly over its most damning, and most feminising, accusations – Puccini's artificiality, insincerity, monotony, emptiness, laziness, and uniformity. The charge that Puccini was 'not a real musician' found wide support, while Ferraguti borrowed Torrefranca's metaphor of the parasite to argue that Puccini was 'a weakling', 'a woman', because he always hung off someone else's arm rather than offering his own.[110]

At the opposite end of the critical spectrum, other critics seemed to leap to Puccini's defence. However, close analysis of reviews ostensibly hostile to Torrefranca reveals a greater degree of consensus among critics on both sides than is initially apparent. Ferruccio Vecchi, writing in *Il trovatore*, ridiculed what he viewed as an exaggerated attack upon Puccini's character and Torrefranca's diatribe against opera *per se* (an issue on which even some of his supporters felt that he had overstepped the mark).[111] However, such comments were a smokescreen: he could find few concrete words of praise for opera's leading contemporary exponent. Significantly, the grandiose declarations about Italian passion and inspiration with which his review closed referred to Verdi, not to Puccini. Even reviewers who were sufficiently hostile to Torrefranca as to dismiss him as a 'pseudo-critic' and 'dilettante' conceded that nobody would attempt to exalt Puccini to the level of a

[107] In a country in which illiteracy levels remained astonishingly high outside the affluent north, sales figures for academic titles were small. Hence there was little point in the popular music periodicals reviewing a book which would never reach the average bourgeois opera-goer. One critic went so far as to remark acidly, 'the person who loves Puccini would certainly never read a book on him: they would merely go and hear his operas'. See Mario Ferraguti, 'Tra i libri musicali: *Giacomo Puccini e l'opera internazionale', Vita musicale: Giornale dell'Associazione italiana di amici della musica*, 1/6–7 (May–June 1912), 95–96, here p. 95. However, it is unlikely to have been of concern to Torrefranca that his monograph was only read by an élite, for it encompassed the crucial intelligentsia whom he wished to address.

[108] Ferraguti, 'Tra i libri musicali', 95–96; Anon., 'Fausto Torrefranca. *Giacomo Puccini e l'opera internazionale', Rivista teatrale italiana*, 5/17 (1913), 28–31.

[109] Anon., 'Fausto Torrefranca. *Giacomo Puccini e l'opera internazionale*', 31.

[110] Ferraguti, 'Tra i libri' (see n. 108), 95. Torrefranca's depiction of women, homosexuals and Jews as harbingers of social disintegration was, of course, accepted as a given.

[111] Ferruccio Vecchi, 'Il melodramma e Giacomo Puccini', *Il Trovatore*, 59/16–17 (15 July 1912), 1–2. Vecchi sarcastically depicts Torrefranca as an apostle crying to the four winds of the dangers of a musical 'Sodom and Gomorrah'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Verdi or a Wagner.[112] But Vecchi went further, implicating Puccini in the current trend towards decadence and admitting that his works were frequently far from original. Thus, a review which purported to defend Puccini effectively reinforced many of Torrefranca's accusations.

Likewise, Silvio Benco, writing in *Il mondo artistico*, made much of the fact that although he was personally indifferent to Puccini's music, he felt obliged to shield the composer from an attack of such severity.[113] However, any compliments which he hoped to pay were distinctly double-edged. He 'defended' Puccini by arguing that the composer had never expressed aspirations to great art, as was obvious from his setting of works by 'facile' and 'insincere' writers. Moreover, Benco's review accepted all of Torrefranca's basic premises: Italian music's descent from glory, the self-evident inferiority of opera to absolute music, and the noxious influence of uniform 'international' opera. Benco wrote disparagingly of music which pandered to 'men of the lower classes and women' and observed that the real artist did not concern himself with the emotional needs of 'ignorants and little women'.[114]

Even those reviews which expressed outraged claims of foul play, then, were nevertheless underpinned by an implicit groundswell of support for Torrefranca's general claims. Critics may have challenged Torrefranca over technicalities, but not one felt able to express wholehearted support for Puccini. The charge of 'effeminacy' struck a chord among reviewers: of those who did not explicitly applaud Torrefranca's assessment, several showed tacit support by reporting the accusation without comment, while others tactfully ignored a sensitive issue. Why Puccini's supporters did not refute Torrefranca by reference to the standard classical images which accompanied popular perceptions of the composer is unclear. Evidently such rhetoric was drowned out by the polemic presented in Torrefranca's book.

It is plausible that Puccini's staunchest advocates felt uneasy about exposing the defensive nature of their own rhetoric. They had attempted to pre-empt negative criticism of his works by turning potential weaknesses into strengths. But the extravagance of their rose-tinted rhetoric exposes the cracks in their claims, and the uniformity of their vocabulary has the result that their defence of Puccini does not quite ring true. Certain themes were established in the very earliest reviews of Puccini's operas, scarcely before he had had an opportunity to prove or consolidate his style, and remained astonishingly constant, suggesting that critics were approaching the works not on the operas' own terms but with an agenda far removed from

[112] Filippo Brusa, 'Una violenta aggressione a Puccini', *Musica*, 6/27 (21 July 1912), 1–2. Brusa's review responded more overtly to the book's musical analysis than was typical, and claimed that Torrefranca exposed his own weaknesses by attacking music which his derisory knowledge of harmony did not equip him to understand.

[113] Silvio Benco, 'Giacomo Puccini e un suo critico', *Il mondo artistico*, 46/36–37 (21 August 1912), 1–3. Silvio Benco (1874–1949) was one of the most cultured journalists of his age, writing on politics, history, art, theatre, and music, as well as on the works of Shakespeare, Goethe, Baudelaire, and others. He also provided libretti for the operas of Smareglia and Malipiero. See Emerico Giachery, 'Benco, Enea Silvio', in Alberto M. Ghisalberti, ed., *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 8 (Rome, 1966), 222–223.

[114] Benco, 'Giacomo Puccini', 1, 2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press

musical concerns. One might also justifiably claim that the hagiographers were not entirely convinced by their own rhetoric and that the false glitter which Puccini's detractors detected in his operas was reflected in the hollow words of his advocates.

The documents about the reception of Puccini's operas tell several stories. On one level they chronicle the critical fortunes of Italy's foremost composer, but more crucially they recount a bitter struggle to rescue a national identity. Re-reading Torrefranca with an awareness of contemporary social and political polemics reconnects both him and Puccini to their time and provides an opportunity to consider the way in which public figures' reputations are manipulated for ideological ends. Both Torrefranca and the critics at the opposite end of the spectrum dealt not with the real Puccini but with an imagined figure who occupied a space into which they might pour their aspirations and anxieties. Puccini may have been notoriously apolitical, but politics was something from which he could not escape, as opera – however 'decadent' – maintained its position at the heart of discourse about the state of the nation.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586701000295 Published online by Cambridge University Press