

V

Vuoi morire così?

Willst du so sterben?

Do you want to die like that?

*When first they come, unrecognized, the children struggle
Against them; too brightly, too blindingly comes such for-
tune.*

*Man shies away from them; a demi-god scarcely knows to
say,*

*By name, who they are who approach him with the gifts.
But their spirit is great, their joys fill Man's heart,
And he hardly knows how to use what they bring.*

*He uses it, wastes it, and nearly makes sacred the profane,
Which he touches, so good-willed and so stupidly ••with his
blessing hand.*

*The gods put up with this while they can; but then they come
In true form, themselves, and Mankind grows used to bliss
And to the Day and to seeing the manifest gods, the face
Of them who, long since named the One and the All,
Fill so deeply the silent heart with their opulent satisfaction
And only now, and only so, satisfy all desires.*

*Thus is Man: when the Good is right there, and even a God
Cares for him with gifts, still he knows and sees it not.*

*Earlier, he has to bear what comes. But now [Man] names
what is dearest to him,*

*For that, words now – now – have to spring forth, like flow-
ers.*

“Brod und Wein,” IV

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Wigs for choristers, Portland *Aïda* production



Beijing production: Ghosts of Turandot's decapitated failed suitors



Props for Portland *Aïda* production



Portland *Aïda* production

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Bill, are you OK with the words? I'm looking over there and I need to get more out of you.

Portland Opera chorus master

In early October I had my final costume-fitting. It didn't take long to adjust the coarse trousers, tunic and hat, and the masses of ancient imperial Peking went shoeless. But the opera's insurer required performers to wear footgear offstage. I bought a pair of cheap Chinese-looking bath sandals. I didn't go out of my way to shop for that style; they were just there in the bargain bin at the all-purpose store three blocks from home. They had faux-bamboo sole-top detailing, with pink accents on the straps. My teenage daughters confiscated them as gender-inappropriate. I got my revenge, later, by wearing my makeup home to embarrass them in front of any friends of theirs who might be there. That's all been part of the long-term project to create just the right distance between the generations and the sexes. It's a serious business, so it needs the aid of comedy.

Around this time, too, I was promoted to brakeman of my platform. I think my joy at that surpassed what I had felt when I was granted tenure. If it did not when I was in Turandot, it no doubt will, as I get ever closer to the end of my life.

I do not have the musical talent and skill to be a soloist, except in very amateur performances. Neither, at least in the musical realm, do I have the temperament. That is just as important, as I learned up close from watching my brass ensemble director train first-trumpet players. I lack the absolute confidence to go for the high note, to trust both memory and practice, when there is nothing to hide be-

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hind, neither someone else's loud note, nor someone else's large body. For opera choristers, a false note is far to be preferred to a false movement. I know. Oh, do I know.

The Marx Brothers' A Night at the Opera, never far from my mind while I was in Turandot, shows us what havoc can be wreaked intentionally on and behind the operatic stage, and how hilarious that can be to the outsider. There is an entire book called Great Opera Disasters. When you think about it, though, it is puzzling why everyone enjoys movies, skits and jokes about opera disasters, and yet there is not much humor about disasters at concerts or poetry-readings or, much less, in the studio of the painter or sculptor. Further afield we do have something similar to the opera disaster: the sports blooper collection; but only the bloopers of the big-leaguers will sell. Perhaps the ridiculous opera disaster mocks the illusion that the stage attempts to create, while the concert disaster would not. Here P. D. Q. Bach and Spike Jones are the delicious exceptions that prove the general rule, though they have to work hard to do it.

That there is also humor and legend about theater disasters, though it is minor compared to the laughter and lore of opera disasters, may perhaps be because opera is more pompous than drama. Or than some drama, anyway; the qualification is occasioned by my memory of a stuffy Vienna Burgtheater production of Schiller's Maria Stuart that I attended in New York during my teens. That there is abundant humor about professors probably confirms the relation between pomposity and

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pratfalls that opera suggests. Here, too, the Marx Brothers (Horsefeathers!) drive home the point.

I had wondered whether our compact but not unmuscular Calaf would have to manage for himself the three crucial gong beats near the end of the giant Turandot Act I. He would have had to strike them while singing the demanding sextet with Timur, Liu, Ping, Pang and Pong, and would have been risking a slip of footing, perhaps, or a comically muted gong tone. Of course a percussionist in the pit, where there were a dozen or so gongs of many sizes, might instead have provided the sound while the tenor went through the motions. But that could have led to ludicrous disaster as well, of the kind that plagued Beethoven's performances at the keyboard when his hearing was deteriorating. Our guy, though, beat his own gong, just as he really kissed his Turandot in Act III, at least by what I could discern from my spot behind a wheeled staircase in the wings. It appeared that ne'er a doubt or fear crossed his mind about handling either, the gong or the kiss. Of course, anyone would like belting that gong. Whether or not he actually liked the kiss, I do now know. I'm pretty sure I know whether the diva did.

Certainly many little things can and do go wrong in the performing arts, even at those climactic moments, and yet remain unnoticed by the audience. Good musicianship can cover a multitude of miscues, fluffed entrances and even totally flubbed featured passages. Theater people readily handle similar snafus, as I know full well from my other stage identity. On the miniature stage of

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church-basement theater productions I serve as the melodrama villain and basso confondo.

There is also a body of legend devoted to sabotage and just spirited misbehavior on the operatic or theatrical stage. Never mind The Phantom of the Opera or Michael Frayn's Noises Off, where the disruptions of the illusion are part of the script; here, rather, I mean real quarrels or screwball pranks that threaten to bring the house down, in the bad sense of that expression. Turandot has its own legend about Franco Corelli and Birgit Nilsson, who were known for competing to hold their high C longer at the climax of the "riddles" duet. While that is merely competitive upstaging, on one occasion Corelli became so jealous that he bit Nilsson on the neck.

There are also smaller delicts. During my first Aïda I asked a veteran about the rules of prank-playing, and was told that pretty much anything can go "as long as it doesn't cross the stage." So I yielded to an extremity of playfulness that shocked even myself at the time, with a madcap urge that I could not then and even now still can not explain, except by pleading early social maladjustment and fascination for the Marx Brothers. I confess most penitently that, while backstage, knowing that prop managers are very competent, I did place, onto a tray that was to go onstage with some sweets to be presented to Aïda, a package of condoms that had remained from a period of transitions in birth-control methods that followed my vasectomy. I have no idea who detected what, or when, about my Aïda prank. I trust I will learn about that in the circle of the Hereafter that is reserved for humanly fallible lovers

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of the arts and of coarse humor. As for what is detected in vasectomies, the congenial surgeon who performed that operation whiled away my time and his as the local anesthetic was setting in by telling me about a recent predecessor on the table, a person of the macho persuasion who had so feared the operation that the surgical staff had needed many minutes of earnest reassurance and persuasion before there would redescend something, or rather some things, upon which they might perform their operation.

But for my purposes here, by mishaps and disasters I mean unintended flaws in serious productions. As Turandot staging rehearsals began, both management and the representatives of the chorus union warned us officially and seriously about the injuries that can occur on stage in close quarters. While they meant mostly sprains, cuts and scrapes, singing and moving around steel-pipe towers that are themselves moving has the potential for injuries far more serious. In those deadly earnest situations it has thrice been my lot and, in recollection afterward, twice been my amusement, to see what really can go wrong and become apparent, even to the audience. As for the remaining instance, it has once been my terror at the shame that could have stained my life forever afterward, even beyond death. Aida seems my personal curse, as opposed to the universal curse of the "Scottish Play," in large part because there just has to be a real elephant on stage for the Grand March.

Aida near-disaster #1: According to Great Operatic Disasters, only one opera singer has ever actually died on-

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stage, in mid-role, and that was of a heart attack. But I once came close to dying for my art, and so did some other people, including some of my brother brass players. It was in the 1989 Portland production, when I was playing in the offstage brass choir. The elephant caught some of her trappings on a light tower and came onstage much earlier and faster than was the plan. She swerved toward the orchestra pit, using up a good portion of her allotted ten or fifteen feet of stage depth. There was ample reason to fear that the trumpets in the pit would soon be playing flatter than any other trumpet section has ever played. But then she corrected her course and trotted off the stage into the wings, right past me. Shakespeare's stage direction, "Exit, pursued by a bear," comes to mind. But during the intermission all the conductor could say as he paced bug-eyed about backstage was, over and over, "Did you see that fuckin' elephant? I've never been so scared in my fuckin' life!" ♪

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19th Century illustration of Goethe's *Egmont*



Beethoven: fragment of *Egmont* Overture

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My genre [is] poetry, poetry, affection, lovers, meat, searing and almost surprising drama, and a rocket sent up at the end.

Puccini, letter to Riccardi, 18 July 1894⁴

Since at least the time of Goethe, and in large part because of him, Germans have so much liked to contrast German depth of thought and wintry intellect to Italian summery warmth and love of living. The German attitude toward Italy mixes wistful envy with a rather self-satisfied sense of dutiful renunciation of self-indulgence in order to pursue a higher calling that cannot be achieved or even envisioned by lesser cultures. “Lesser cultures” means those lacking in Geist and superego and such, and more prone to enjoying the beautiful moment.

One wonders whether the ambivalent Goethe-Schiller relationship, both as it emerged between the two men and as it grew to near-mythic proportions in the culture, added a certain spin to German feelings about Italy. When Schiller wrote about two distinct kinds of poetic creativity, his own and Goethe’s, did he envy Goethe his apparently innate relaxed personality and also his fortune in being able to live comfortably in Weimar and go to Italy on his famous journeys? In that same Weimar, Schiller had to create an artistic space for himself, both conceptually and in the practical world of scratching for a living with his pen. In Italy, Goethe found art, society, antiquity, nature, and – at least as he tells the story – easy love. In one of his “Roman Elegies” he famously reports the conditions under which he was doing his own writing, holding in his arms his now-sleeping, far younger partner, while “tapping out on her back with his fingers the rhythm of the hexameter.”

We need to come down to earth for two cautionary notes. First, I am speaking here of cultural abstractions and generalities that extend over centuries and occupy the German cultural elite when it is on its duty-shift.

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When real, individual Italians without the proper cultural credentials have shown up in Germany, for example to fill jobs in its factories, they have not been treated with any noticeable admiration for their sunny outlook, and they have not received any plus-points for the achievements of Leonardo or Michelangelo. Second, no Italian I have encountered has been much interested in the German-Italian contrast. While Germans are at a distance, they are respected for their industriousness. But they are not – most galling though it be to the stereotypical German elitist – worshiped for it. Perhaps pitied a little. When Germans show up in Italy as an Easter-time wave of vacationers, the respect and the pity vanish and are replaced by practical mercenariness.

Without descending into facile wholesale cultural comparison or attempts to fit German and Italian music to each other at a high level, we can observe that Turandot is about love and about Man and Woman (or even one man and one woman), and really nothing more, though we are course free to read deeper meanings into it. (Post-moderns of the vulgar substratum would say that these are the only meanings a text or an opera can have.) To put the same difference from the opposite perspective: some other works of art are about ideas and ideals, and really nothing more, not even about sex or even love, even when they might initially appear to be so. The focus here is on just on plot or characters, but rather the chief meaning or “organizing principle” – what one of my German professors at Yale termed the “Anliegen” or “central concern” of the artist.

Unlike famous Italian operas, famous German operas and the world-class classics of German literature and of the German stage don't feature heroes who bet their lives just for a woman, for one individual, unique woman without whose love the hero does not wish to live and for whose love he will risk any test. In Der Freischütz and

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Die Meistersinger the hero has the chance to win, through a contest, his beloved, who is supposedly the one woman he wants among all others. But death is not the penalty for losing. Walter sings well enough to get the girl, but right away the action of Meistersinger goes on to celebrate the Germanness of Germans and their art; Max cheats with his devilish magic bullet, but he will get the girl anyway and suffers only a slap on the wrist for dealing with the Devil. Lohengrin might seem a difficult call here, initially. Although there is a betrothal, Wagner's disguised and unnamed knight (more about both of them later) steps forth to defend Elsa's cause, not because he loves or merely desires her and must have her for his own. And The Flying Dutchman proves the point with a direct contrast. The love of any woman will free the Dutchman; only a much lesser figure, the hunter Erik, loves a woman, as an individual woman. Perhaps Erik, like this opera itself, is a leftover from Wagner's Italianate stage.

So now, the heroes of the classical German literature that I studied in my youth: what do they die for, including those who suffer the Turandotesque fate of decapitation? (We should realize, for the sake of avoiding sensationalism, that beheading, along with hanging, was the cheapest and probably most humane method of – the etymology of the word says it all – capital punishment before electricity, cyanide, injections, and bullets fired from reliable firearms. Those methods were not truly reliable until after the conventions of execution in literature and opera had been well established.) The heroes of the core classics of German literature were willing to die for – Italian opera fans who do not know German literature: I am not making this up – ideas and ideals. (For the moment, never mind Faust; I'll get back to him shortly, and besides, the quasi-German Kierkegaard worked this out long ago, though with one small error that I'll also

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deal with later. Lastly, I have no intention of spoiling my argument by taking up the issue of Dante; Dante is enough of a problem here all by himself.)

Probably the best known classical German work where heroic will, stubbornness, and miscalculation are punished by beheading is Goethe's play *Egmont* (1788). Count Egmont, the idol of the Dutch in their struggle for independence from Spain in the Sixteenth Century, fatally underestimates the ruthlessness of the Spanish regent. The night before he is to go to the block, we see him in his cell, dreaming of his beloved Klärchen, the wholesome but not ethereal girl from the common folk. She is apotheosized into the figure of Freedom. Or rather, as Goethe's stage direction puts it, "...a shining apparition shows itself: Liberty in divine raiment... She has the features of Klärchen... She hands him a laurel wreath..." Then sound of drums. No kiss. She's gone. Egmont awakens. Soldiers come. It's curtains for Egmont. His last words to the Dutch people: "Fall joyously, in the way I give you with this example." Curtain falls, and then so does Egmont's head - offstage, as in *Turandot*, but with no original script indication of an anguished voice cut off by the ax. Easy enough to add if a director is feeling operatic.

Beethoven, whose only opera, *Fidelio* (1805), is another example of a German hero dying for ideas and ideals rather than a woman, must have considered Goethe's play amenable to something like opera, since he wrote for it his *Egmont* overture (1810), a warhorse of the classical concert stage. Schiller, who wrote a history of the Netherlands and a drama about the high-stakes politics of the Spanish Habsburg royals, also has something to say about Egmont, both the play and the man. In a review he published when Goethe's play first appeared, which was in the same year Schiller's Dutch history appeared, he finds much to praise. He does point out that

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the real Egmont led a rather prosaic personal life. Married, he was, rather than carrying on a pleasant dalliance with a girl of the common people, and at his death he left nine (or perhaps even eleven) children. Schiller remarks that Goethe changed the historical facts to show Egmont as cheerful, open, pleasure-loving, and, above all, so constituted as not to agonize about the future and the depths of life. That, however, is still a stretch from the capability of risking one's life for the love of one individual woman.

Schiller closes his review with a remark that to us must seem a quibble. But it much offended Goethe and caused a delay of ten years in the inception of the famous Goethe-Schiller friendship, which then lasted only the remaining ten years of Schiller's life. Schiller didn't like the Klärchen-apotheosis scene: it disrupted the sense of verisimilitude. He puzzles, "we're to see a dream?". And, he said, the scene weakened the audience's feeling for Klärchen as a real person instead of as the allegorical embodiment of a concept. But what pained Goethe most was that Schiller called the scene, using a mixture of Italian and German, a "Salto mortale in eine Opernwelt" / "a death-defying leap into a world of opera." Schiller wanted to do more feeling and less thinking, at least while the play was going on. The equation of over-doing the operatics with abandoning feeling for a realm of abstraction and allegory may puzzle us, until we remember that Schiller was writing before Italian Grand Opera was created. The opera of his time was indeed often allegorical in its treatment of character, and dwelled much on shallow spectacle.

Schiller's jab at Egmont should not distract us from the larger features of his own work and its later transformations at the hands, pens and batons of others. He yearned for that immediacy of feeling and simplicity of character that he saw in the person of Egmont and

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claimed to find in Goethe, in contrast to his own personality. (Goethe indulgently helped him elaborate that contrast.) And yet Schiller gave the world, or at least the German-speaking world, two sets of writings that amplify the difference between personality-types and works or traditions of art that incline toward the conceptual, general, abstract, and those personalities and works of art that live in the realm of the emotive, the individual, the immediate.

One was “About Naïve and Sentimental Poetic Creativity” (late 1795), a lengthy essay about what Schiller saw as two basic types of personality and poetic expression. The non-specialist, including any Freudians who are left, can best understand these types as the ancestor of Freud’s distinction between the ego (Goethe) and the superego (Schiller). (The Jungians, now out of the closet again, to make room in it for the Freudians, can supply their own comparison here.)

The other writing, much more important here, was Schiller’s corpus of dramatic works. They dwell on the tension between the realities of life, especially of power relationships, and the insistence of fully-developed human beings on constructing their lives and worlds in a mature and consistent way – in other words, according to an ideal of true freedom, which can be a demanding taskmaster. Schiller gave the theme its first lasting “hit” with *Die Räuber* / *The Brigands* (1782), in which the hero not only dies for an ideal, but in order to do so also rejects the woman he has won, and even kills her, so that he can keep his oath to his fellow brigands and, eventually, deliver himself over to the power of the law. The scene where that happens is not an Egmontesque leap into operatic allegory, but the play’s histrionics and the improbable coincidences do make one wonder how Schiller could so jibe at Goethe for lack of realism.

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The cognoscenti of German classical literature and the Kenner und Liebhaber of Italian Grand Opera will here throw up their hands, asking how it could be, then, that it is Schiller's dramas, heavy on the Kantian ideas and ideals, which – including Die Räuber itself! – have yielded so many of the warhorses of Italian Grand Opera: Rossini's Guillaume Tell (1829), Donizetti's Maria Stuarda (1835), and Verdi's Don Carlos (1867), Luisa Miller (1849, from Kabale und Liebe), Imasnadieri (1847, from Die Räuber), Giovanna d'Arco (1845, from Die Jungfrau von Orléans). and part of La Forza del Destino (1861/69, from Wallenstein). We get more than a hint of an answer from works by Goethe that have been turned into operas, whether by Italians or others.

Gounod's Faust (1859) does not, at least in its text, attempt to deliver the philosophical depth of its source; instead it uses only the so-called “Gretchen-Tragödie,” the unhappy-end love-plot of the first (and much shorter) part of Faust. The “Gretchen-Tragedy” is a chunk of text that – habent sua fata libelli! – is often excerpted and turned into a reader for intermediate-level students of German. Albright has pounced on Goethe's remark, to Eckermann (25 January 1827), that Faust is “a tragedy attempting to become an opera.” With pyrotechnic, even operatic style (I mean no ill here), Albright first notes the Disney Studios' affinity for Goethe and remarks that “in a sense Goethe's Faust is less a stage piece than a prefiguration of an animated cartoon, where gravity and all physical laws are arbitrary, and it is so if you think so.” On the last page of his study Albright gets in another jab, taking “a glance at the musical future of Goethe's Faust. Of course, his chief refuge was to be the old-folks' home of the much-admired, much-despised opera of Gounod.” Albright concedes that “If Goethe's Faust is a tragedy attempting to become an opera,... the opera it is working toward is that

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written by Gounod, no other.” He then counters, “But the tragedy – that Berlioz found, and found with unique success”⁵ in his “semi-opera” La damnation de Faust (1846).

Albright’s assertion supports my own point, but the subject here is Italian opera, not French semi-opera. Boito’s Mefistofele (1868/81) makes a forthright attempt to incorporate into opera the depth that Goethe created with his written text. The wager about the enduring moment is there, as is the Devil as “the spirit that always negates.” But three of Boito’s four acts are used up by the Gretchen-episode. That leaves the fourth act, distinctly set apart from the other three, to cover Faust II, which in Goethe’s poem-play is twice as long as the entire Faust I and four times as long as the Gretchen-episode. To finish off the Faust-Mephisto action, Boito takes us back from the classical world of Faust II to Faust’s medieval study-room, where the Devil, still trying to seduce the old man, conjures up – shades of a corresponding scene near the corresponding place in Turandot! – a vision of beautiful maidens. It took this much of Mefistofele to convey the idea and the ideal, and it took quite a lot from Arrigo Boito too: a long stay in Germany and heavy study of Wagner. For all we can know it may also have helped that his mother was from north of the Alps; she was a Polish countess, and raised the children after father Boito deserted them. So Arrigo’s travel to Germany was combined with a stay with the Polish relatives. While all that did not prevent him from being able to produce librettos for Verdi, he never completed any other opera of his own. He finished only the one that has its origin at the core of German literature and folklore: Mefistofele. And, poor man, his life, or death rather, turned into a re-enactment of a part of Goethe’s Faust. He is buried in Padua, and that is precisely what Marthe, the sleazy-pathetic friend of

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Gretchen, tells Mephistopheles about her own errant husband: “Er liegt in Padua begraben.” Marthe’s pictures her husband’s final resting place as “little better than straw”; Boito at least got a statue, in the park right near the Arena Chapel with its Giotto.

Among well-known transformations of other works by Goethe into operas by composers who were not Italian, Massenet’s Werther (1892) further proves my point about who dies, or does not die, for what or whom. With a slight alteration, Puccini’s description of his “genre” fits Goethe’s youthful novel very well: “poetry, poetry, affection, lovers, (no meat, though), searing and almost surprising drama, and a suicide by pistol shot at the end.” Schiller was a better dramatic craftsman than was Goethe, who didn’t do plot very well (or, really, need to). So in Schiller’s plays there are sequences of events and collections of characters that can be extracted from the nexus of ideas and ideals and turned into spaghetti melodramas. In no case here am I denying the quality of any of these operas, or spurning the pleasure of hearing and seeing them or, much less, of performing in them.

Wagner, in his essay “Die Bestimmung der Oper” / The Destiny [or ‘Purpose’] of Opera” (1871) has said this all before, except for the part about quality and pleasure, which he furiously denies. With a polemically motivated judgment that most of us probably do not share, he dismisses the operatic adaption of Goethe and Schiller as “abuse.” Whatever. If Italian Opera somehow keeps Schiller alive beyond the borders of the German-speaking countries, as a German teacher I’m all for it. I’m even OK with the William Tell Overture living on in the Lone Ranger Theme, and with Goethe’s poem “Der Zauberlehrling / The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” still alive in Disney’s Fantasia (1940). It’s getting a little long in the tooth, though, even with some help from a Fantasia II re-release (2000) and Harry Potter.

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It is a coincidence almost too good to be true that Schiller not only produced a *Turandot* of his own (late 1801), using the same Gozzi fable as did Puccini's librettists; he also left a paper trail of his approach to the transformation. He undertook his adaptation while he was suffering from a sniffle. (Schiller smoked a lot, which annoyed Goethe much.) And he was looking for a modest project to undertake so as not to "lose time completely" as he geared up to start something more ambitious. Thus he was pleased "to have found a project that... doesn't make any major demands on me." Still, he couldn't leave well enough alone. The practical stage dramatist in him wanted to fill out Gozzi's "marionette"-like characters. The philosopher or intellectual in him wanted to give, to what he clearly considered a rather shallow tale, "a higher value," which, once again, has to do with ideas and ideals.

Schiller, in effect, writes the part of Puccini's version that, since the master had laid down his pen too early, his successors had to find a solution for: the notorious volte face where *Turandot* is transformed by Calaf's kiss. Alfano's solution (but it is based on Puccini's sketches) is to have *Turandot* confess that she had loved Calaf from the first time she saw him. It is an implausible solution, but this is opera and we needn't listen to the words anyway.

At such a point one wishes to summon for close interrogation the spirit of the composer Ferruccio Dante Michelangiolo Benvenuto Busoni (1866-1924), Puccini's near contemporary. The two Tuscans were born just a few miles apart, and they share a death-year, the one working to complete his *Doktor Faust*, the other his *Turandot*, and neither finishing.

While Puccini's significant work is almost exclusively operatic, Busoni's is all over the map of musical genres. Despite the collection of forenames that scream serious

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Italian culture, Busoni had a German mother and made his usual home on the German-speaking side of the Alps, apparently quite comfortably except for the period of the First World War, when Germany and Italy were on opposite sides. What upset him was not a conflict of national loyalties, but rather War itself; he was a confirmed pacifist, and with an almost appealing naiveté, or else an unappealing cupidity. During the war he continued to attempt to have his works performed in the houses of both Italy and the Central Powers.

The musicologists portray Busoni and his œuvre as a multidimensional collection of opposites or, conceivably, complementaries: “futurism and classical recovery, Italian vocality and German substance, Lisztian flamboyance and Mozartian calm,” as the Norton/Grove Concise Encyclopedia of Music puts it. Well before Puccini, Busoni did a Turandot, first as a suite (1905) and then as an opera (1917). He prepared his own libretto, in German, based on the Gozzi play, but he pointedly ignored Schiller’s German version and produced a piece of musical entertainment, not a German Seelendrama. Puccini himself journeyed to Zurich to attend the premiere.⁶ As if to maintain the balance of German and Italian as languages and as musical cultures, Schiller’s text then went to Italy, in Italian translation, to help Puccini get his piece underway.

Busoni also composed a Doktor Faust (1924), and the point being made here would be driven home right away had he chosen to switch to Italian from the language of Goethe, and also to skip the deeper content of Goethe’s poetic drama. But he did something almost as telling: he ignored Goethe and wrote his own version of the ancient German Faust puppet-play, of the kind I and an audience of children viewed with wonderment at a county fair in Germany just a few decades ago. (The children were probably too young to know that they would later be sub-

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jected to being taught Goethe's Faust in school, and could thus still enjoy the folk version.)

Just so no one would fail to notice that he was distancing himself from Goethe and his work, Busoni tells us the details in his prolog to the audience, using the same Knittelvers ("doggerel" or "rose are red, violets are blue") meter and rhyme-scheme that Goethe had borrowed from his folk sources and then, unbelievably, taken to such poetic heights. To be double-sure we get the point, Busoni alludes first to Don Giovanni and the Don's focus on sex, and then to "Meister Wolfgang" (meaning not Mozart, but rather Goethe), as though the giant of Weimar were a somewhat superior medieval coeval. Busoni's German libretto is not merely correct German, as one might well hope from someone of dual parentage and cosmopolitan background. He writes archaic German, the German of Luther's and Johann Faust's age, with gusto and, as far as I can tell, with the appropriate departures from the standardized German that had been created in Goethe's time, and by Goethe himself. There's nothing like having a German mother to give you German, including its full linguistic register, as your Muttersprache.

If Busoni, in his rendering of a German source into opera, did so in a less "Italian Grand Opera" way than did Rossini, and Donizetti and Verdi; and if in doing so Busoni resembles Boito, who also had familial and, by consequence, intense cultural ties north of the Alps, then we may be on to something here. Of course it's not genetic or – shades of Nazism! – "racial," much less something inherited from the maternal line. The question becomes immeasurably more complex when we consider Thomas Mann, who had a thing for both music and Italy, and who also produced a Doktor Faustus (1947) which is as idiosyncratic, and as different from Goethe's Faust, as is Busoni's, but in its own way.

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Seventeen years in the composing, quickly enough when compared to the sixty or so of Goethe's work, Busoni's Faust remained unfinished (unlike Mann's, which runs to 600 pages and then has a supplement, by the author, so he can tell us how his masterpiece was created – sort of like Eliot's footnotes to the Wasteland, but far more extensive). Enough of Busoni's opera is there for the piece to be performed, though extremely rarely. Reviewers of the productions may praise its loftiness of thought and musical quality, as a composition, even if they drub the actualizations on the stage. The 1999/2001 Salzburg/Met production excited such feeling in Justin Davidson, of Newsday, that he was able to ride his review of it all the way to a 2002 Pulitzer Prize for criticism, writing with loathing relish how the Met “spared no expense in stultifying the work, assiduously obscuring most of whatever qualities the score has.” Zürich did it in 2006; if Davidson wasn't there, he should have been. Amazing skills of artistic execution; my amateur performer's hat goes off, my German professor's intellect resonates, but my human heart stays cold.

Enough of Busoni's Doktor Faust exists, too, for us to see that, thirteen years before Orff and Carmina Burana (1937), he was exploiting the garishness of the cruder, folkloric level of pre-Classical, pre-Enlightenment German culture, and that he was aiming to show Faust as an embodiment of supreme human will and an autobiographical portrayal of the artist as suffering spirit-intellect. (Geist means both.) The Devil's-Pact scene is but a few lines long, the seduced, abandoned girlfriend has been seduced and abandoned before the action commences, and the only other supposedly erotic object, the Duchess of Parma, is almost as ethereal to Faust as she is to us. Whatever Busoni's Faust dies for, it is not an abstract idea or a selfless ideal. Neither, however, is it a woman. Tchaikovsky regretted that Busoni “strove...

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to be German at any price,” but that is perhaps too harsh.⁷

Heinrich von Kleist, however, not only moved on the plane of ideas and ideals but also delved without reserve into the darker and dirtier parts of the psyche and the relation of the sexes. His short life (1777-1811) was strung out on the ideas of the Age of Goethe and the ideals of a German nationalism not yet stained either by reactionary or fascist ideology, or by actual German statehood. For Kleist that pre-Bismarck-Hitler purity was no saving grace, since he had defined his public dimension and worth – in that sadly quaint term, his “sacred honor” – by what he could do to bring a German nation into being. The burning focus of his spiritual-intellectual-political passion was, quite understandably, Napoleon and France. His was not a Napoleon Complex, the clichéd delusion of grandeur, but rather an obsession with failed grandeur: the inability of a minor Prussian officer, from a proud and noble military family, to do anything, with either pen or sword, to rescue his country and people from a world-bestrident Emperor who himself had been a minor French officer, and from plebeian Corsican stock. Part of the Beethoven mystique as a Romantic Hero has been his rage at Napoleon, expressed in the removal of the dedication of the Third Symphony to the Emperor and its re-titling to the “Eroica.” But Beethoven had the eminent good sense to take shelter in his basement when Napoleon bombarded Vienna.

Kleist’s world-stage ideas and ideals had to compete for his time and soul with a sexually confused identity and an equally confused sense of purpose about how to advance in some sort of career and – Prussian aristocrats could be quite down at the heels – how to support himself: whatever happened in the realm of sacred honor, was he to find his life and fortune in being a poet, or in following the illustrious family history of Prussian

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military service? One consequence of the sad, explosive mix of ideas, ideals, aims, obsessions, and thwarted attempts to deal with practicalities was (call it what you will) a double suicide or a murder-suicide. Another was Kleist's drama Penthesilea, a macabre manual, in achingly beautiful classically-inspired German, about how not to raise a family or build a society. One wonders – documents are lacking here – what Kleist thought, or at least would have thought, about how Schiller transformed Gozzi's Turandot. The Italian's empress acts only by whim. Schiller's is a woman who demands to live in freedom, as do all of Schiller's heroes, and also Kleist's Penthesilea. More particularly, Schiller's Turandot and Kleist's Penthesilea will not live in slavery to a man. But Penthesilea – we are getting very close to Gone with the Wind and Marlene Dietrich here, and also slowly getting back to Puccini – also knows when she must follow her own affections and freely surrender herself. †

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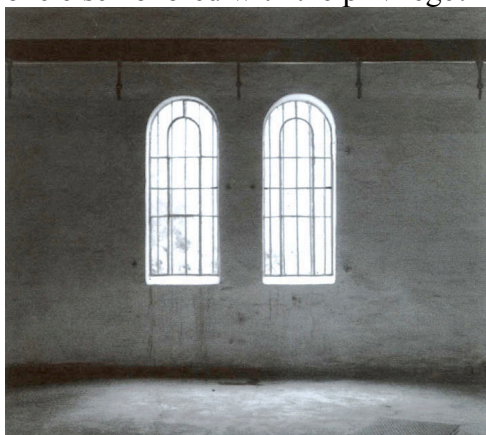
pic opposite 5c



Civilian beheads Australian POW (Len Siffleet); file AIFexecution1_lo; was the civilian a Japanese or someone else honored with the privilege?



Benito Mussolini and his mistress, executed by Italian anti-fascist partisans (Mussolini_hook.jpg)



Execution room at Plötzensee Prison, Berlin. The eight meat hooks were used for slow strangulation of opponents of the Third Reich (Ploetz01)

Kostenrechnung

in der Strafsache gegen Gustav Neubauer
wegen Wehrkraftersetzungs

St. Nr.	Gegenstand des Kostenanlasses und Hinweis auf die angewandte Vorschrift	Wert des Gegenstandes	
		in M.	in Pf.
	Gebühr für Todesstrafe..		300.—
	Postgebühren gem. § 72 GRG		2.70
	Geb. für den Rechtsanwalt Ahlsdorff, Berlin-Lichterfelde/Ost Gärtnerstr. 10a.....		81.60
	Haftkosten gem. § 72 GRG f. d. Unters. Haft v. 24.12.43 - 28.3.44 = 96 Tg. a. l. 50.....		144.—
	f. d. Strafhaft v. 29.3.44 - 8.5.44 = 40 Tg. a. l. 50.....		60.—
	Kosten d. Strafvollstreckung a) Vollstreckung des Urteils.....		159.18
	Hinzu Porto f. Übersendung d. Kostenrechnung		- 12
			786.80

Invoice for costs of execution at Plötzensee Prison, sent to the family of the victim, who were charged for the cost of the execution (300 Marks), court fees, and even 12 Pfennigs postage for sending the invoice to them

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Modernism is thus the age of self-critique...: nothing is taken for granted any longer, and it is hardly matter for wonder that the twentieth century is the age par excellence of upheaval. Art is a mirror of this cultural whole, but so is everything else... Modernism came to an end when the dilemma... between works of art and mere real objects could no longer be articulated in visual terms, and when it became imperative to quit a materialist aesthetics in favor of an aesthetics of meaning.

Danto, 69, 77

WHETHER THEY ARE CHOMSKYITES or, better, not Chomskyites, linguists who are attuned to opera and the news will notice that the words that surged around us during the brutal political and cultural disputes in the opening years of this our new century and millennium are precisely those that stand out in *Turandot*: “empire,” “torture” and – so climactic in the “la morte”-gong finale to Act I – “death.” While other operas and other art certainly do feature violence on the grand stage of history, *Turandot* is difficult to surpass in its garish, even disgusting juxtaposition of ecstasy and acute pain, of palaces and hovels, of psychopathic, dysfunctional royalty and equally psychopathic, utterly miserable masses – all of which, especially the physicality of lust-love and of torture, are conveyed in language just shy of (soft?) pornography.

What is or is not an “empire,” “culture,” or “civilization,” and whether such are, or even can, be called good or bad, is a hopelessly vexed issue in our society. What “torture” is or is not, and whether or not it has occurred in a given situation, is another contested matter. To raise the question of who does or does not have a license to discuss or decide an issue, such as war or sexuality, and whose terminology is to be adopted (“abortion” or “choice?”), is to invite and incite a controversy that so often yields nothing useful. Much the same goes for the topic of war casualties, unless one lives in an ancient Chinese Empire or the modern Nazi or Soviet empires, where the discussion, or rather

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the doctrine, is predetermined by the state. Elsewhere, especially in the democracies of Western civilization, the discussion is free and open, in principle, but in practice the deck is stacked. The citizen who addresses the subject of a present or hypothetical future war but does not announce a clear anti-war or, even better, pacifist position, cannot escape attack. For such a person to speak of casualties, and especially to approach them with numbers, is to invite accusations of callousness, while not to speak of them courts imputations of complicity in deception.

During my time in *Turandot*, the nation was conducting a semi-metaphorical “war” on terrorism and undeclared but very obvious wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. War means casualties – our own and the enemy’s, both military and civilian (not that the distinction is always possible to make). Whoever makes decisions about war and peace always considers the casualties, though that may take the form of declaring that the casualties, whether actual or hypothetical, whether the enemy’s (often) or one’s own (occasionally), are inconsequential. Short of absolute pacifism or absolute totalitarianism, a society will labor toward some degree of consensus about the price it pays for how it wants to relate to other societies, whether in peace or in war. Probably most in our own society would affirm that the more inclusive the participation in that discussion, the better. Certainly even more would agree that accuracy of casualty information is better than inaccuracy – whether one then intends to use the statistics, never of course anything less than grim, to oppose or support a war. So let us, like the people in *Turandot*, deal in the numbers that count the dead.

The casualty figures take on various forms: the numbers that are both available and reliable, the numbers that people actually know, and those that they think they know. Years ago I served as co-author of an introductory German textbook. We had to deal with WWII, of course, and

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wanted to convey its impact on both world history and on the level of personal communication (“Excuse me, is this how I get to Dachau?” “Oh, so your father was killed on the Russian front?”). Long experience strongly suggested that even students who seemed otherwise reasonably informed had wildly inaccurate notions here, insofar as they had ever thought seriously about the topic. Doubtless the movies have encouraged Americans either to overestimate the importance of American sacrifices in WWII, or else to overlook them.

To keep our learners from culturally shooting themselves in the foot in their discussions of WWII with people whose experience of it had been more immediate, we offered, in simple German, a chart that compared war casualties suffered by the various European countries and peoples, whether they were active combatants, intentional victims, or unfortunate “collateral casualties.” The chart here remains in our book’s German, because I have learned the value of the “time-bomb effect” that occurs when people wrestle with a language slowly enough that they have time to discover important cultural differences.

ZAHL DER TOTEN IM ZWEITEN WELTKRIEG

Land	Mio=Million(en) Bevölkerung (1930) in Mil- lionen (Mio)	TOTE				% der Ge- samt- bevöl- kerung
		Soldaten	Zivilisten	davon Juden		
UdSSR	127,5	11 Mio	7 Mio	1,4 Mio	14	
Polen	32	800 000	5 Mio	3,2 Mio	18	
Deutschland	65	3,5 Mio	780 000	125 000	6,6	
Jugoslawien	13,9	305 000	1,2 Mio	60 000	11	
Italien	40,5	242 000	153 000	7 500	1	
Großbritannien	49	264 000	93 000	–	0,7	
Frankreich	41,8	213 000	350 000	83 000	1,3	
USA	123,6	292 000	6 000	–	0,2	

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Our primary purpose was to convey to learners of German a sense of the immense toll the war exacted from both the victims of Nazism and from the German populace itself. A secondary intent was to encourage American students to realize how little the United States had suffered in WWII, compared to any other of the major combatants. We hoped, especially, that the exceptionally low number of American civilian casualties, in relation both to American military casualties and to civilian casualties elsewhere, would provoke reflection. At the other end of the scale, aside from the Holocaust casualties, of course, are the horrific numbers of Polish Yugoslavian civilian casualties, particularly when viewed as a percentage of population. We knew that few students would be able to relate to their own society yet another aspect of WWII casualties: the deadly effects of internecine division taken to its violent extreme, an extreme never even approached in America, not even in the Civil War, which was no civil war at all in the European sense. A major portion of the Yugoslav civilian casualties came from Yugoslavs killing Yugoslavs in partisan strife, whether or not the Germans might be blamed for unleashing it. In our time the same law of unintended consequences, or at least unexpected disasters, worked itself out again in the Balkans, without any encouragement from any Nazis, but this time with at least a little palliative intervention by the Germans.

How to count the Polish casualties is also problematic, but a necessary part of teaching and learning German. Many Poles probably regarded the Jewish dead in Poland as not part of Poland's casualties; yet no doubt many of those Jewish dead had regarded themselves as Poles. Be that as it may. Somewhere in the same double-digit percentage range – remember, these are only the dead! – are the much more widely publicized figures about Soviet casualties, civilian and, especially, military, in what only a few caviled to term their “Great Patriotic War.” To those

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latter should be added the horrendous losses brought about by Stalinization even before the war, especially when one seeks to compare Hitler and Stalin to each other, or anyone else to those two. But the dominant paradigm of the Western intellectual realm has found those statistics about self-inflicted or, rather, Stalin-inflicted Soviet casualties uncomfortable, and so has largely chosen to ignore them. The same selective obliviousness can be found in our own time, on the Left as much or more as on the Right. When you think you've seen the future and you very much want to think that it works, it's best not to look too closely at the lives (and deaths) of the people who have to live out that future.

When you're seeing what may be the future, and your ideology doesn't like the way the future is going, you may also magnify relatively small numbers of casualties to claim that a war has become a "quagmire" for your own forces or an apocalyptic slaughter of "collateral" victims. One is left to wonder whether, had Saddam remained in power until his death, as many or more Iraqis would have died in the probably inevitable strife thereafter as were killed, by Americans, by other Iraqis, or by foreign terrorists, during the American occupation. In the meantime, in his declining years, Saddam would likely have killed a few hundred thousand more of his subjects, without perceptible protest, even (or especially) from the Western Left. After the fall of Saddam, but also before, Iran made noises about developing atomic weapons, but then apparently backed off from doing so. One shudders to think what would have happened had Saddam been free to engage in a nuclear arms race with Iran, with nuclear-armed Israel wondering who to take out when in order to avoid a second Holocaust.

Unless total pacifism is universally instituted, something which I think may have to wait for the Second Coming, knowledge of casualties is a necessary prerequisite to

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a necessary decision, personal or collective, about war: the gains and costs of victory, the price of losing, the moral justification of the particular war. We can also ask the same questions about past wars, if only for the not unimportant sake of gaining some insight on the present. This is the equivalent, generalized, of what the barbarian king Timur asks his son: “Vuoi morire così?” Not, however: Do you yourself want to end up dead for the sake of a love, your own, that turns out to have fatal consequences, as is the choice made individually and freely by Turandot’s decapitated previous suitors? But rather: Do we, collectively, want to incur human death for this purpose? Is doing that morally justified? If so, what is the human price to be paid? Is it all really worth it? If so, how long will who think that it was?

A college roommate of mine, who was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, nevertheless asserted – even in the face of the moral relativism of the time and place – that he was certain that each of us has some cause, conviction or value for which we would be willing to die. As I considered the question of causes and casualties, including those that might affect my own children, and as I searched for information about causes which I have opposed, for example Cuban intervention in Angola, I was astounded by how willing the endorsers of those causes were to accept heavy casualties (to others, if not directly to themselves), but disputed the moral right of others to argue the necessity of incurring casualties to support the causes in which *they* believed. Or more precisely, I was astonished and disgusted at how openly the Western defenders of leftist dictators explicitly stated that the results were worth the casualties in deaths, injuries, and even loss of rights and freedoms. What remained was the sad insight that most of us, on the Left as well as the Right, and maybe even in the Middle, are quite capable of justifying human suffering as a necessary part of the Glorious

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Heroic Struggle, when we speak of the causes we espouse, while condemning it as sure evidence that a country is in a domestic tyranny or a foreign quagmire into which it has been dragged or tricked by an Evil leader, when we oppose the cause or the leader. That insight joined an older one into the widespread failure of the American intellectual Left to appreciate its own great fortune in the land and time in which it lives, and so prosperously, and so often on salaries and grants provided by the state it contemns and condemns. ☹