14. Fedele D'Amico, *Puccini e non Sardou*, concert program for Rome's Teatro dell'Opera (1966), 127.
15. *Editors' note:* In a libretto draft of Act I, Puccini scribbled next to these lines the following notation: "cadenza chiesa, devota e pia" [church cadence, devout and pious], found in the draft of February 1898, now housed at the New York Public Library.
16. This can be heard today on a compact disc by Arkadia.
17. Luigi Ricci, *Puccini interprete di se stesso* (Milan: Ricordi, 1954).
18. Antonino Titone, *Vissi d'arte: Puccini e il disfacimento del melodramma* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1972).
19. I once thought that this was an invented name, but it turns out that he was a French composer of Austrian origin who had been a student of Schönberg.
20. *Editors' note:* For Puccini's postpublication revisions, see Linda B. Fairtile, "Giacomo Puccini's Operatic Revisions as Manifestations of His Compositional Priorities" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1996).
21. See the unpublished letter from Puccini to Leopoldo ("Popi") Mugnone, 10 November 1899, reproduced in facsimile in 49° *Maggio Musicale Fiorentino*, concert program for Florence 1986), 68–69, alongside essays on *Tosca* by Mario Morini, Franco Serpa, and Lorenzo Ferrero.
22. Gavazzeni, "La Tosca," *Critica pucciniana*, 58, and *Quaderni pucciniani* 1 (1982): 83.

15. Who Is Tosca?

A Discussion among Modern Interpreters
Moderated by William Weaver, with Magda Olivero,
Giuseppe di Stefano, Luigi Squarzina, and
Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi, at the Teatro dell'Opera
in Rome, 17 June 2000

William Weaver: I imagine that this will be more of a conversation than a series of formal presentations. From this conversation I would like an interrogative (that is, a question) to emerge. Then, beyond having a conversation, we should try to answer this question.

In the last few years, I have been a university professor, after having plied many other trades. When I began this new and belated career, I asked a colleague of mine (who was much younger but much more expert) for advice on how to teach at a university. And he said, "I'll tell you just one thing: never ask the students a question to which you already know the answer." I would have imagined exactly the opposite, to never ask anything to which you do *not* know the answer. But I must say that I followed this advice and I learned much that was very, very fruitful and good. Therefore, I do not have a precise answer for this question—"Who is Tosca?"—and neither do I know whether or not it matters if there is a precise answer. Certainly, we will see what comes out. For our first speaker—since we have a Tosca among us—I think it is only fitting that we begin with her. I would like to ask you then, Signora, for you: who is Tosca, who was Tosca, and who will she be?

Magda Olivero: I must confess that for me it was a great mystery, so when I was asked to sing Tosca, I felt very uncomfortable. And I continued to say no [to performing the role] because I did not understand this creature who was superficially pious and yet insane with jealousy. I was not able to love her and to grasp her. And so I continued to say, "No, I do not sing Tosca." It was, in fact the last Puccini opera that I performed. I sang all the others, but not *Tosca*, which I left for last. But one day, by chance, I read a very interesting and well-written article about this young woman from the Veneto region whose name was Tosca, and it made such a persuasive impression that I began to think that perhaps I had been wrong, that perhaps she was a different sort of creature.

But despite this, I wanted to amply inform myself. And so I learned that Tosca had been a very poor small child who wandered the countryside around Verona tending goats—that is, she was a goatherd. Nearby, there was a convent of Benedictine nuns who passed by this child every morning, saying, "Poor little girl, here early every morning with her little goats!" Then, one day, they stopped and said to her, "Listen, little one, would you like to come with us in the convent?" Tosca accepted with enthusiasm, because if nothing else, she thought she would finally be able to eat well and be treated nicely.

After she was in the convent for some time, the nuns realized that this child had enormous musicality and a beautiful voice as well. They hoped that in time she too would become a nun, and above all that she would sing, but always to the glory of God. Chance had it that Cimarosa[1] heard her and became enthusiastic about her. Cimarosa thought that the girl should not stay in the convent but should sing opera. So he spoke with the Benedictines, who were concerned first and foremost about Tosca's soul, so they opposed the idea. A struggle began among the nuns, who worried about Tosca's soul, and Cimarosa, who wanted to drive her toward opera. In the end, they decided to call the pontiff to arbitrate in this matter, and so they brought her to the Vatican to sing in front of the pope. When she had finished, the pope called her and said, "I let you go freely to the opera, because if you continue to sing as you

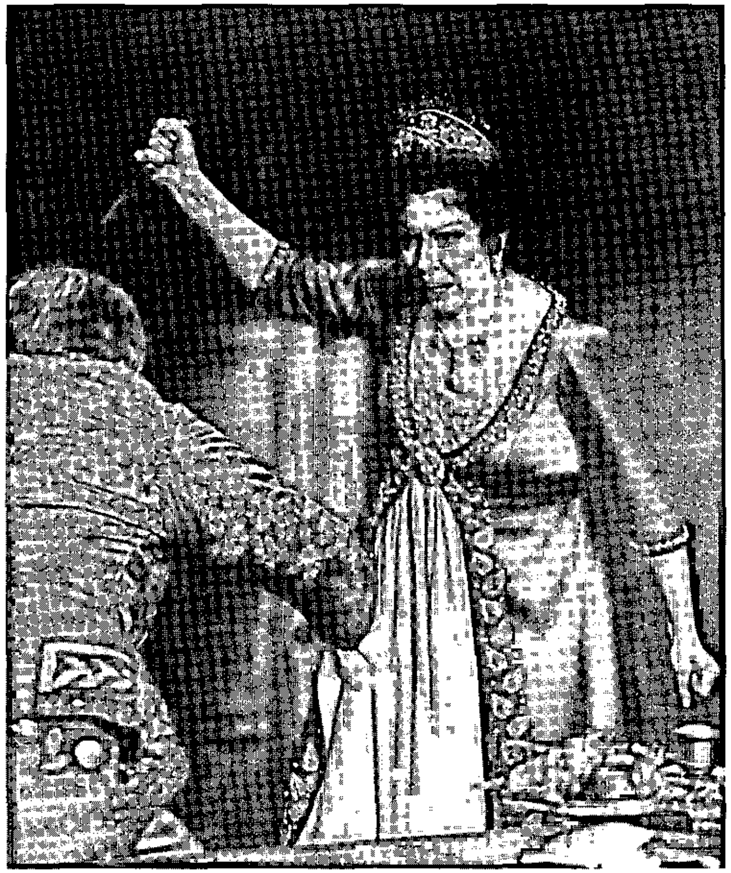

Figure 15.1. Magda Olivero as Tosca at the Metropolitan Opera, New York. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera Archives; reproduced by permission.

have sung now before me, conveying such great emotion, you will bring many beneficial tears to the eyes of your listeners, and this will be your prayer to God." And so, at sixteen years of age, she was already a celebrity. Incredible, isn't it?

And Tosca made her debut at La Scala in *Nina* by Paisiello. Then she went to Teatro San Carlo in Naples, where the queen, Maria Carolina, who was a great admirer, came to see her. Finally she went to La Fenice in Venice. She was a creature who was loved and idolized as a great singer and also as a great, beautiful woman.

After I read this, I began to understand many things about Tosca's character—and then I read even more about Cavaradossi. The real Cavaradossi, who is sitting here next to me, will talk later about him.[2] I have had the joy of performing often with him and, truly, onstage he *was* Cavaradossi, completely and in full—a creature so alive, so full of enthusiasm. Cavaradossi had known Tosca for a year before the drama begins, and he had remained in Rome just to be near her. At this point, I had done research and had begun to understand who Tosca was—and even to love her—because there was a whole ensemble of things that really fascinated me.

Then I went to Rome, to Maestro Luigi Amici, and I said to him, "Maestro, finally I can study the role of Tosca, because I know who she is and I can love her and I can even give her a soul, because I am so enthusiastic about her and like her so much." And my first *Tosca* was right in this theater, the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome, followed by many, many, many *Toscas*.

I wanted to explain the background—that is, why I waited so long—I did so because I did not know her. And in the end, I can say that Tosca is a living creature and she has carried her religious feelings with her away from the convent. So I understood why she was so religious, even in certain moments too tied to it, in an almost superficial way. Therefore, the question

"Who is Tosca?" for me has clarified much, and I loved it and I love her.

Giuseppe di Stefano: I would like to be exempted.

Olivero: No, that's not right. A Cavaradossi like you absolutely must hold forth.

Di Stefano: I haven't done research, but the fact that singing is based completely on the libretto, on the words that the composer and librettist make available, make it easy to say who Cavaradossi is—but that is not the question today. Through the singing, one can understand who Cavaradossi is. He is a revolutionary, courageous man who faces death as it faces him in the end: a man with a small *m.* And the verses given to him by the librettists are the most beautiful—of love. The colors of romantic affection come from Cavaradossi, a very courageous man, a priceless lover, who is a bit suffocated by Tosca's jealousy (which, however, is fairly common in women). So it is easy to speak about him.

Weaver: I would like to ask both of you, who have sung the roles with many different partners . . . [to Olivero] when you sing with a certain Cavaradossi, whether you adjust your Tosca to make her more compatible with one tenor or another. In other words, does the character change according to the other singers?

Olivero: No, the character lives her own life. She is a character who has a life that cannot be changed. It has happened to me, for example, that in Trieste I had many performances with di Stefano, after which I went directly to Florence and I changed tenors. I instinctively felt the difference between one Cavaradossi and another. Di Stefano was a Cavaradossi, a human with his love, his dedication, his enthusiasms; and with the other, I felt like a tree trunk, because there was nothing, no response. With di Stefano, I experienced that true Cavaradossi who lived his life completely and with enthusiasm, with

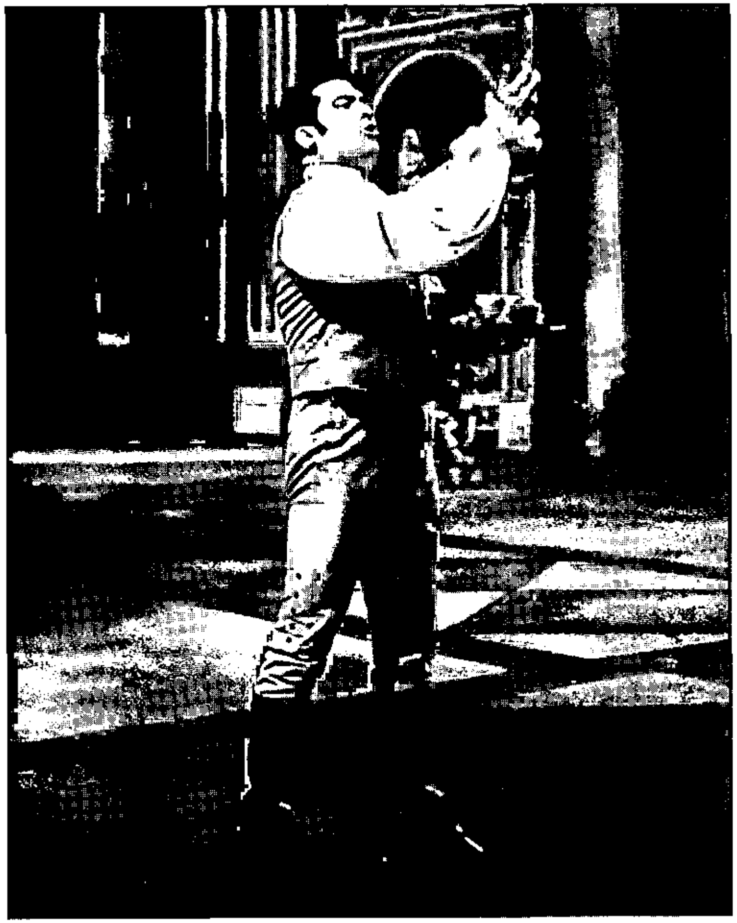

Figure 15.2. Giuseppe di Stefano as Cavaradossi at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan. Courtesy of L'Archivio Fotografico del Teatro alla Scala, Milan.

love, with his emotions; in a word, he was the character. But at a certain point, when one loves art, one loves the character and decides to give the best of oneself: remaking the other character into the image that you want to see, forgetting how the tenor of the moment may actually be.

It happened to me one time, in another opera, that I was

asked how I could have sung with such an ugly tenor! I was surprised and said, "He was ugly?" Because in my spirit, in my way of singing, in hearing the music through the words of the libretto, through the music, I saw him as very handsome. It was a transposition that happened in me, and I was not aware whether he was handsome or ugly.

Weaver: You have sung with different Toscas. Have you had to adjust your Cavaradossi?

Di Stefano: I have had the good fortune to have always sung with the greatest singers, in this case I refer to two who are at the same level in terms of expression, in terms of physical appearance: they are beautiful and stupendous, both of them. I can only say that Magda at the Metropolitan Opera as Tosca has remained unforgettable. I was always fortunate, and worried only about the words: I forgot them. Don't make me remember disturbing thoughts! The memories are still fresh enough, despite the years that have flown away. These two Toscas were on the same level. It is a question of temperament, of color, of fire, of jealousy, of love, which they felt in a special way. Brava Magda!

Olivero: You said that because I'm here, no?

Di Stefano: Tosca is difficult enough in her music and character—complicated. But when one is talented and born to sing, one sees even one's ugly partner as handsome.

Weaver: I would like to hear from the director.

Luigi Squarzina: In 1990, when I was asked to do *Tosca,* some initial questions began to cross my mind. What is the ambience? How do I feel it? What is important? What do I think I can add of my own to make the opera say all that it must say?

The question was whether or not to stay close to historical fact, and I thought I would. Many years before, I had done the first Shakespeare in modern dress in Italy (in 1964), so it was not important to me to update this production. Also, I felt that the year 1900 was well represented, felt accurately by Puccini and his music, precisely because it was not perceived with a political agenda, and we know that 1900 was a year of turmoil both in France for Sardou and in Italy for Puccini.

The things that impressed me in *Tosca* were two: one is the existence, perhaps unique in the history of opera, of a libretto that contains three monuments, three architectural creations. It is an opera whose architecture is made of architecture: Sant'Andrea della Valle, Palazzo Farnese, and Castel Sant'Angelo are of a Rome that is substantially seventeenth-century. The second aspect was the ritual: there are three grand rites in the opera—the Te Deum in Act I, a summary trial in Act II, and an execution in Act III. Rituals can be a great force in the theater, above all when they are at loggerheads with the passions. A rite neither forgives nor concludes: it creates a passage from one state to another. Passion, on the other hand, desires either a happy ending or a heartfelt human dialectic. Puccini and the librettists extracted with skill, from the Sardou play, the rituality of these three moments, struggling against the impetus of the hearts and senses of the characters.

In Sardou's drama, which is now spoken of poorly, there was the idea of Marengo; he wanted to exploit the idea of battle first lost and then won for theatrical ends, which is notable. Sardou worked in an era of great actresses (and we have here one of the great scholars of Eleonora Duse, William Weaver). There were these figures who stood out and were divas first (not unlike the diva Tosca, which first interested Sarah Bernhardt) and opera singers second.

But that which strikes me is the famous anecdote in which Illica excised the beautiful final monologue about country and liberty and arts, which Verdi admired, but Puccini wanted removed. And Puccini did the right thing, because Cavaradossi

is better than a hero; he is an almost common man who comports himself heroically. He is not a revolutionary, not a conspirator, not even a fellow traveler. He is a man who believes in liberty and above all would not betray a friend. And that which must be everyone's politics is that which must be the civil state of man.

In this, Puccini went above and beyond many problems that could have remained ongoing. The two characters (of whom we have two great interpreters here) are likable. But Scarpia is also likable, perhaps because the bad guys are always attractive in the theater, and because without them, almost nothing would happen. A villain like Scarpia has a characteristic that is the incarnation of Decadence already present, even if we speak of Decadence in Puccini only in regard to *Turandot.* But in Scarpia the germs of the demonic hero, of the antihero are already there.

In the Sardou play, Scarpia is told by Tosca that he is a demon, to which he responds,

> Démon, soit! Comme tel, ce qui me charme, créature hautaine, c'est que tu soi à moi . . . avec rage et douleur . . . que je sente bien ton âme indigné se débattre, . . . ton corps révolté frémir de son abandon forcé à mes détestable caresses et de toute ta chair, esclave de la mienne! . . . Quelle revanche de ton mépris, quelle vengeance de tes insultes, quel raffinement de volupté, que mon plaisir soit aussi ton supplice. . . . Ah! tu me hais! . . . Moi, je te veux, et je me promets une diabolique joie de l'accouplement de mon désir et de ta haine![3] [A demon, so be it! . . . As such, that which charms me, proud creature, is that you will be mine . . . in rage and suffering, . . . that I will feel your haughty soul struggling, . . . your resisting body trembling in forced abandon to my detestable caresses, your whole flesh slave to mine! . . . What revenge for your scorn, what vengeance for your insults, what refinement in lust that my gratification will also be your torture. . . . Oh, you hate me! . . . Me, I want you, and I intend to

> get a diabolical joy from the coupling of my desire and your hatred!]

This is cut from the same cloth as the dance of the seven veils, the paintings of Moreau—it is really Decadence, bloody and voluptuous.[4]

On the other hand, in the libretto, this element was not so pronounced, because it had been synthesized. However, there are still similar touches:

Già mi struggea l'amor della diva!
Ma poc'anzi ti mirai
qual non ti vidi mai!
Quel tuo pianto era lava
ai sensi miei
e il tuo sguardo che odio
in me dardeggiava,
mie brame inferociva!
Agil qual leopardo
ti avvinghiasti all'amante.
Ah! In quell'istante
t'ho giurata mia! Mia![5]
[The love of the diva
was already consuming me!
But a little while ago I looked upon you
as I had never seen you!
That weeping of yours was lava
to my senses,
and your gaze, which darted
hatred at me,
made my desires fierce!
Agile as a leopard
you clung to your lover.

Ah! At that moment
I swore you were mine! Mine!]

And the leopard was the animal most favored by symbolist and decadent painting. I believe that in Puccini we do not go backwards, but *ahead* in sensuality and in lasciviousness in respect to Sardou. Because I believe—not as a critic, but as an Italian—there is also in the religious aspects of *Tosca* all the sensuality of the Counter-Reformation, the total abandonment of self to religion, like being possessed by God, by something that satisfies us more than belonging to any mortal man. And I believe that the crucifix, which Tosca places on Scarpia's chest, is not for redemption, but because he knew her in church. Thus, their encounter begins and ends in a church setting.

Cavaradossi, who had shown courage when he refused to denounce his friend, was instead, at the moment of his execution, desperate. And as a desperate man, he never loved life so much. But reducing this monologue of Cavaradossi's to an exploit of love and sensuality does not diminish its force in respect to liberty, patriotism, and civic sentiments. In fact, it augments them. Here all the senses are in play, all five of them named, along with the stars, the earth. It is a high point in the history of opera, of Italian opera, and of twentieth-century Italian theater.

Weaver: And now, to conclude, we have an impresario, really a Renaissance man, to tell the truth.

Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi: I thought I would talk from my own experiences, that is, how my generation saw Puccini. It has been mentioned before how Puccini was considered a musician of second rank; thus, in the musical and literary worlds of the early twentieth century, he was considered to be of a certain type. I remember, because then even I had a certain repugnance for Puccini, which has not completely passed. There are certain aspects of his drama that are not pleasant. But *Tosca* and *Suor Angelica* are two operas that I have always enjoyed—enjoyed, I would say, in tandem with the major literature figure of the time, who is Gabriele D'Annunzio.

At the end of the 1960s, one could speak of these things with Edoardo Sanguineti or with Alberto Moravia. Moravia never went halfway: for him, D'Annunzio had written millions of useless words and there was no way to change his mind. He was absolutely insensitive to it, and he had worked this reductive opinion to the extreme, and it was, down deep, his greatest glory. But Moravia had established something that was, I maintain, perfectly related to that which D'Annunzio did. In fact, both had the same effect on Rome. Because Rome from 1900 to 1910 belonged to D'Annunzio and perhaps to Eleanora Duse, just as the Rome of 1950 to 1960 was Moravia's.

The true greatness of D'Annunzio, I would say, was that he represented a passionate behavior, an almost grandiose way of thinking of a society. Now, D'Annunzio was the only one who represented Rome well. He described the pleasure of the Romans, their way of being, which afterwards we also came to know, for example, through the memoirs of pianist Arthur Rubinstein, when he writes of Casati.[6] We can also find an almost analogous situation in the encounters of Sperelli at the Palazzo Barbarini.[7]

Tosca is an extraordinary document, even more extraordinary than works by D'Annunzio, in its capacity for the concision that Puccini had in respect to the writer. The score of *Tosca* also has the capacity to depict a certain behavior in full color. D'Annunzio was the only international writer that Italy had in this period, because the others were all provincial. Like him, Puccini felt the flux [of international cultural trends] and he was the only musician to notice this flux, which arrived

from Paris, from the outside world; in a certain sense, it could have even arrived from that which is only a thought.

So I turn to the question, "Who is Floria Tosca?" She is the greatest representation of that which is an actress, that is, all that we consider to be a mode of rhetorical action as absolute reality. Anyone who knows actors, who knows the artist's fundamental narcissism, would recognize in her something profoundly true; that is, she has a mix of ingenuousness on one side, and on the other, a set of experiences that are transformed into a colossal means of communication.

This opera also speaks from another point of view: that of a society that has many social strata. This is an opera of the ruling class: it develops inside a certain environment that is ignorant of events occurring outside itself. The Vittoriale [D'Annunzio's palatial home on Lake Garda] was the ugliest thing conceived in the Umbertian era, as Silvio d'Amico said, but *Tosca* was the greatest: it is the representation of the forming of a certain ruling class, of a certain way by which Italy and Rome are linked to an international movement. This then is the proof of why Puccini was an international artist,[8] not in a pejorative sense, but in that of a man who was sensitive to the style and taste that was taking shape all over.

I am of an age (and because I had very elderly parents and relatives and because they had lived in the D'Annunzian society) to have known people who believed in that sort of behavior—the grand passions, the truth of them, the necessity of aesthetic fidelity. The singular thing is that these artists probably had as powerful an influence on behavior as Wagnerism had in Germany; that is, they invented a behavior, which society then followed. Casati did what she pleased, but then the aristocracy thought it was something that all artists did. In the same way, the behavior of bourgeois society in Moravia's 1950s depends on neorealism, derived from the literature that he and his followers wrote.

Who is Tosca? This great character is the maximum representation of the life of an artist, the stirring of the artist. And here I contradict that which the historian says—that Scarpia, more than Tosca or Cavaradossi (who are almost like theatrical marionettes), is more real because he had historical precedents. But it is not so, because the three of them are all interacting in a mode of behavior in which, perhaps, the marionette is really Scarpia, behaving like Iago in order to put into motion this world of passion, this justification of passion that has no myth but which is the passion of the greats, of those that are unchained, who can permit themselves anything, to take risks or be audacious. But above all they can permit themselves the beauty of extreme elegance and extreme communication.

For this I think we have reason to rejoice. We have a reason to celebrate this city that has many rhetorics of unity, and which has given rise to both D'Annunzio and Puccini.

Weaver: I was disturbed yesterday to hear a colleague speaking so ill of Sardou, because I find myself always admiring the mastery of this writer. The wheel of taste turns, and it has turned in a certain way. But it is not only Sardou who is no longer performed: Alfieri and D'Annunzio, as well as Sardou, are not performed now. Perhaps this is for technical reasons: there are no longer actors who can recite those works convincingly, because today, with Stanislavsky and his realism, actors would rather die than make certain Baroque gestures as they did back then. Now, we call this type of performance "melodramatic" or "operatic." But in the nineteenth century, both opera and spoken drama were performed in the same manner.

I think that if you asked "Who is Tosca?" of Tosca herself, she would respond à Pirandello, "I will be as you wish me to be." It is the actor, the interpreter, who determines who the character is. The fact that Tosca is an actress, a public persona, seems to me to carry the weight of interpretation. But, as Orson Welles said, "Italy is a nation of actors. The worst go on the stage."

Di Stefano: Before this conversation ends, I would like to say a few words for my friend Puccini. Speaking for singers who have had success with Puccini's melodies, I recall that Puccini, when he was dying, wrote, "melody, melody, and again melody." But we no longer speak of melody. When I sing his melodies, there is a joy that renews itself every evening—and the public cannot stay away from the theater.

NOTES

1. Domenico Cimarosa (1749–1801) was active in both Naples and Rome, where his greatest rival was Paisiello. He also lived in St. Petersburg and Vienna, where he succeeded Salieri as court Kapellmeister. Although appointed court composer in Naples, he wrote a republican hymn during the French rule, which later led to his imprisonment. In Sardou's play *La Tosca,* his role in Tosca's life is described thus: "People would come to hear [Tosca] on holidays. Cimarosa, who was sent there by a friend, decided to challenge God for her, and to have her sing opera" (Victorien Sardou, *La Tosca,* Act I, Scene iii).
2. Madame Olivero is referring to Giuseppe di Stefano, who portrayed Cavaradossi with great success around the world.
3. Victorien Sardou, *La Tosca,* Act IV, Scene iii.
4. On this topic, see Matteo Sansone, "La dimensione decadente del libretto di *Tosca,*" in Gabriella Biagi Ravenni and Carolyn Gianturco, eds., *Giacomo Puccini: l'uomo, il musicista, il panorama europeo,* Studi Musicali Toscani 4 (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1997), 111–126.
5. Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, *Tosca,* libretto, Act II.
6. Marchesa Luisa Casati (1881–1957) attained a reputation in the early twentieth century as the belle of European society.

She was a model for the greatest artists of her time, knew all the leading cultural figures, and apparently gave wonderful parties, at one of which Nijinski asked Isadora Duncan to dance. (See the Casati Archives Web site (http://www.marchesacasati.com) for more information.)

7. Andrea Sperelli is the protagonist of D'Annunzio's *Il piacere.*
8. The reference is to Fausto Torrefranca's incendiary, anti-Puccini tract *Giacomo Puccini e l'opera internazionale* (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1912).

Appendix: A Comparative Overview of the Structures of the Play and the Opera

Susan Vandiver Nicassio

CHARACTERS

Sardou's play *La Tosca*

Floria Tosca, a famous singer
Maria Carolina, Queen of Naples
Luciana, Tosca's maid
Gennarino, Mario Cavaradossi's servant (at the church)[1]
Princess Orlonia, a Roman aristocrat
A Monsignor, a Roman cleric[2]
Baron Scarpia, Regent of Roman Police, from Naples
Mario Cavaradossi, a French painter and Tosca's lover
Cesare Angelotti, escaped prisoner, former Consul of the Roman Republic
Marquis Attavanti, courtier and husband of Angelotti's sister
Eusèbe (Eusebius), sacristan at the church of Sant'Andrea des Jésuites, i.e., al Quirinale
Viscount Trévilhac, a French royalist émigré
Capréola, a noble guest at the queen's reception

Puccini's opera *Tosca*

Floria Tosca, a famous singer
Mario Cavaradossi, a painter, Tosca's lover
The Baron Scarpia, chief of police
Cesare Angelotti, an escaped political prisoner
Sacristan at the church of Sant'Andrea della Valle
Spoletta, a police agent
Sciarrone, a policeman
A jailer at the Castel Sant'Angelo
A shepherd
A cardinal, a judge, Roberti (the executioner), a clerk, an officer, a sergeant, soldiers, police spies, ladies, nobles, citizens, etc.