

IMAGES OF MEIJI JAPAN ON THE WESTERN STAGE (Acts I & II)

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Overture

Ever since its opening in 1854, Japan has always been a source of fascination to the West, for historical, cultural and imaginary reasons. From a mid-Victorian “discovery” to an early-20th century Asian power, Japan has always been much interpreted but little understood. Representations of Japan first appeared in the West through its art and crafts, creating an image of refinement and culture, but soon devolved through novels and travelogues into pastiche exotic images of samurai and geisha. Nowhere was the debasement more complete than on the Western stage, where for decades, operas, musicals and plays perpetuated the simplistic images of Japan brought to life. The three greatest projections during this time were the British comic opera, *The Mikado* (1885), the real Japanese actress Sadayakko (1900–1902) and the Puccini tragic opera, *Madama Butterfly* (1906). Of these three, only the first and last have endured to perpetuate the image prevalent at the time, of the buffoon Japanese official, silly girl or tragic woman.

This paper looks at more than forty works with Japanese characters, settings or references that appeared on the Western stage during the Meiji Era (1868–1912). In the West, however, a better dividing point would be the beginning of the Great War in Europe in 1914, which coincided with the supplanting of entertainment from stage to cinema.

Although most of these works were slight entertainments, this paper seeks to retrieve them from oblivion once more, in order to show how fascinating and marketable the Japanese image was for almost 50 years. The slight relationship of most of these works to the real Japan precludes a more academic approach to their themes or artistic theory. Although many contemporary critics (Chiba, Groos, Yoshihara) have tried to put these 19th century works into a 21st century critique, the goal here is more modest—to present an overview of the operas, musicals and plays with contemporary comment or historical interpretation.

Act I, Scene 1: The Opening of Japan to the Western Imagination

The tangible purpose of Perry's mission to Japan was to conclude a treaty of friendship and trade, with the emphasis on trade. In this, the Americans were merely the wedge in opening a formerly closed market to the British and Prussian merchants waiting in China, the French in Indo-China and the Dutch in Indonesia.

With the influx of traders, seamen and diplomats, popular accounts of Japan began to appear in Europe and America. Although the pre-Perry accounts are based mostly on the naturalistic observations of the Dejima area by Kaempfer, Thunberg and van Siebold, most post-Perry accounts of the 1850s and 1860s were fragmented and impressionistic, painting Japan as a friendly paradise (Baty 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954).

It wasn't until publication of Sir Rutherford Alcock's two-volume *The Capital of the Tycoon* (1863) that the West finally got a comprehensive account of Japan's history, society and politics. Subsequent works in the 1860s to 1880s provided more details of daily life, geography, flora and fauna, tourist notes and travel routes, illustrated by engravings and later

photographs.

One of the most important of these latter works was W. E. Griffis's 600-page *The Mikado's Empire* (1876). Divided into two sections, "History" and "Daily Life," Baty praises it for its exhaustive observations, "Probably this book furnished to America and Europe the bulk of their ideas on Japan and the Japanese, beyond what they could gather from an inspection of the products of Japanese art (Baty 1953, 66).

By the late 1870s, Japan was very well traveled indeed, and a second wave of Westerners arrived, invited by the Meiji government to introduce Western ways. David Murray and Colonel William Clark set up colleges, Edward Sylvester Morse catalogued Japanese natural history from shells to houses, and Ernest Fenolosa with Okakura Kakuzo began the rediscovery of Japanese art, much of it immigrating to museums and collections abroad.

The first exposure of the West to real Japanese people occurred with the first Japanese delegation to America in 1860, a belated response to President Fillmore's offer of friendship. The entourage made a brief stop in San Francisco before sailing around South America to Washington to meet the new President Pierce. They then sailed to Philadelphia and New York, causing frenzied interest wherever they went. By the time they arrived in New York, hundreds of boats sailed out into the harbor to meet them, and hundreds of thousands lined the streets to catch a glimpse of their procession. Among them was the young poet, Walt Whitman, who immortalized the moment with a book-length poem, "The Errand-Bearers."

The second great exposure came two years later at the Japanese Court of the International Exhibition in London, where, in the absence of an official entry, former Plenipotentiary Rutherford Alcock contributed 623 pieces of his pottery, prints and bronzes that he had brought back

from his stay in Japan. The opening of the Exhibition, however, was enhanced by the arrival to London the day before of the first Japanese legation, which was able to attend the opening ceremony.

By the late 1860s, however, Japanese government recognized the value of cultural exchange and sponsored pavilions at the International Exhibition in Dublin (1865), Exposition Universelle in Paris (1867), International Exhibition in Vienna (1873), Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia (1876), and Expositions back in Paris (1876, 1878, 1889).

While Westerners coming to Japan and writing home about it provided the public with second-hand impressions, Japanese art and crafts traveling to the West gave the public first-person experiences of this mysterious culture—and the effects caused a cultural shift, giving way to the catch-all aesthetic movement called *Japonisme*.

Act I, Scene 2: **Japan in Art—*Japonisme***

The introduction of Japanese aesthetics into French art is credited to the French designer Felix Bracquemond, who found Hokusai's *manga* notebooks around 1854 and began to use Hokusai motifs in his own work. Among his circle were Manet, Degas, Cassatt and Pissarro.

The term *Japonisme* was first used in *L'Art Francais de 1872* by Jules Claretie, but given wider use by the art critic Philippe Burty in 1876. *Ukiyoe* became popular within prominent artistic circles, influencing Van Gogh, Bonnard, Vuillard, Renoir, Monet, Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin and Klimt, among others. The flatness of perspective, bright colors, realistic subject matter and landscapes are said to have transformed the impressionist and post-impressionist movement, as well as the designs of the nascent art nouveau movement. Van Gogh owned 400 prints and tried

several times to copy some in oil. His portrait of “Le Pere Tanguy” shows six *ukiyo*e prints in the background. Critical works about this new form began appearing with James Jackson Jarves’s *A Glimpse of the Art of Japan* (1876), Rutherford Alcock’s *Art and Art Industries in Japan* (1878) and Christopher Dresser’s *Japan: Its Architecture, Art and Art Manufacture* (1882).

By the mid-1880s, *Japonisme* had reached its peak of popularity, excitement and interest. At Knightsbridge in London in 1885, a complete Japanese Village was on display, complete with 100 villagers, working and playing in five blocks of Japanese-built houses, the men selling their crafts and the young ladies selling a cup of tea for sixpence. The commercial response of *Japonisme* was the opening of Japanese boutiques in the fashionable areas of New York, London and Paris, where upper-class customers could find Japanese bric-a-brac, prints and accessories for their interiors. As Ewick states:

The earliest Japanese influences in the West were not textual because so few in the West could read the texts. The popular imagination was stirred, however, by the curios—fans, kites, combs, parasols, sword guard, porcelains, dolls, kimonos, and the like—that constituted the first Japanese cultural exports of the modern period, and by *ukiyo*e—the ‘pictures from the floating world’...Thirty-six years after Perry landed at Uraga Japan [sic 1890] had become for Europe and America a fashion more than a geography, and the manners and figures associated with it. (Ewick, “Orientalism...”)

Many of these artifacts would eventually find their way onto the stage as props, costumes and song lyrics.

Act I, Scene 3: Japan in Fiction

Although scores of travel books were written in the post-Perry decades, it took a while for novels based on Japan to come out. One of the first was probably *Sylvia Seabury or Yankees in Japan* (1866), a boy's adventure yarn by Harry Hazel, who never visited Japan. Japan scholar, Charles B. Wordell, edited the valuable series, *Japan in American Fiction*, which included *Young Americans in Japan, or the Adventures of the Jewett Family and Their Friend Oto Nambo* (1882) by Edward Greey; *A Muramasa Blade: A Story of Feudalism in Old Japan* (1887) by Louis Wertheimber; *Mito Yashiki: A Tale of Old Japan* (1889) by Arthur Collins Maclay; and *Honda the Samurai: A Story of Modern Japan* (1890) and *In the Mikado's Service* (1901) by William Elliot Griffis. The late 19th century also saw the publication of Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthemum* (1887), Lafcadio Hearn's tales of the lost Japan (1894–1905), John Luther Long's story, *Madame Butterfly* (1898), Onoto Watanna (Winnifred Eaton Babcock) and Francis Little's string of highly popular romances of the early 1900s, and a predictable number of unreadable exotic novels.

Japan also sparked the imagination of 19th century poets, including Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's ("Keramos" 1878) and Rudyard Kipling ("Buddha at Kamakura" 1892). And while Japanese influence in the fine arts and fiction would fade from influence in the 20th century, Kodama and Miner point out the lingering influence of Japanese culture in the poetry of Amy Lowell, W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Kenneth Rexroth and Gary Snyder, among others.

Act II, Scene 1: Japan on the Continental Stage

As with the recognition of *Japonisme*, the earliest attempts to put Japan on the stage were also primarily in France and Germany, predating England's *The Mikado* by more than 20 years. The first mention of a Japan-theme work was the 15-act play, *L'Ile de la Demoiselle*, by the French artist, Zacharie Astruc, performed for his literary club in 1863. The 1870s saw a variety of works, beginning with Leon de Rosny's *Le Couvent du Dragon Vert* (1871), based on the Japanese play, *Seiryuji*. The next year Camille Saint-Saens wrote an opera comique, *La Princesse Jaune* (1872). *La Belle Sainara* (1874) was a French one-act play in verse by Ernest d'Hervilly, performed the same year that the German composer Emil Jonas wrote the opera, *Die Japanese Rin* (1874). William B. Bushnach based *Koshiki* (1876) on the Japanese play, performed with music by Alexandre Lecocq. The orientalist Judith Gautier co-authored *Yamato* in 1879, based on the Japanese story of the 47 samurai, *Chushingura*. And also in 1879, Jules-Louis Olivier Metra wrote *Yedda*, a Japanese ballet. Most of these works were small-scale, written for small audiences in the popular wave of *Japonisme* (Chiba 1994, 14). While some plays were serious attempts to translate and transform classic Japanese stories to the stage, the music of the play, operas and ballet had little Japanese musical influence. This would be a perpetual characteristic of Japan on the stage throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

Act II, Scene 2:
The Mikado

As the Japan boom reached its peak of interest and excitement in the mid-1880s, the British master musicians of the day, Gilbert and Sullivan, turned their attention to this intriguing cultural phenomenon. Having parodied the British navy (*H. M. S. Pinafore*), the popular fad of aestheticism (*Patience*), the House of Lords (*Iolanthe*, 1882) and feminism (*Princess Ida*, 1884), Mr. Gilbert turned his satiric wit to the present popular fad of things Japanese. *The Mikado or The Town of Titipu* premiered on March 14, 1885 at D'Oyly Carte's Savoy Theatre, the ninth Gilbert and Sullivan collaboration, and became their most successful and longest-playing show (672 performances). While *Japonisme* in art was taken very seriously by artists and art critics, and Japanese themes in fiction and poetry turned to romanticism and orientalism, Yoko Chiba points out that, "The dramatic expression of *Japonisme* was an overwhelmingly comical one, satirizing and travestyng the "Japan craze." *The Mikado* set its tone" (Chiba 1992, 35).

It was overwhelmingly popular, though not for its authenticity. As the reviewer in *The Athenaeum* reported:

Mr. Gilbert has once more exhibited his facility for seizing upon a subject occupying a considerable share of public attention, and turning it to humorous account. Japanese art is extremely fashionable just at present, and the manners and customs of this strange race may be studied with advantage at Knightsbridge. But it is our home political and social life that is principally caricatured in 'The Mikado'..." ("The Mikado," *Athenaeum*)

And *The Monthly Musical Record* observed that, “Though nominally Japanese, the allusions are more or less thinly-veiled sarcastic references to our native institutions and peculiarities” (“The Mikado,” *The Monthly Musical Record* 103).

As can be seen in photographs of the original performances, the costumes were as authentic as possible. Some were made of Japanese materials found in a local fabric shop, replicas of official court costumes, and some were genuine antique Japanese kimonos. Performed by his all-British cast, Gilbert did however enlist the services of several of the Japanese down the road in Knightsbridge to teach his actors how to walk, sit, move in Japanese robes, and most of all, use their fans. And since all D’Oyly Carte productions have perpetuated the original staging, we know very well to what effect fans were used—for the Three Little Maids to hide their giggling faces, for Pooh-Bah to wave censoriously, for Ko-Ko to flick away the beheading of a guinea pig (Walbrook, Chapter X). Thus, we find this curious irony of real Japanese from their “authentic” village in Knightsbridge being parodied by the players they helped to “authenticate.”

As for the music, the critics have almost uniformly praised Sir Arthur’s score as one of his best, yet there is very little Japanese influence. One exception was the use of “Miya Sama,” a traditional Japanese military march, as the only authentic Japanese tune that Sullivan used. Even this he altered to sound less foreign to English ears, but at the same time, he used variations of the pentatonic scale in half a dozen other songs. It is no coincidence then that all the tunes used in the overture are those with this Oriental-sounding inflection, the same inflection that is also part of traditional English folk music, making the unfamiliar seem familiar (Beckerman, 306–309).

More than producing a large family of derivative offspring, the show

was so popular that by the end of 1885, in America and Europe, where copyright laws allowed pirated versions, there were in fact 150 companies and in America alone, on one night in October, there were 117 productions taking place (Mencken). Piracy and unauthorized productions were so rampant in America that Sir Arthur Sullivan gave a speech after a special performance in New York in September 24, 1885, and had the letter printed in the New York Times the following day, decrying, "... those unfortunate managers and publishers who, having no brains of their own, are content to live by-well, annexing the brain property of others...." (Sullivan...)

Despite the disclaimers that *The Mikado* is really a continuation of Gilbert's satirizations of British society, Beckerman questions this assumption, putting *The Mikado* into a more sinister post-colonial context. He argues that just naming the show *The Mikado* and making him a singing dancing comic character, it is debasing the rank, role and personage of the Emperor of Japan. In fact, 20 years later, during a state visit of Prince Fushimi Sadanaru in 1907, all performances of *The Mikado* were banned for six weeks for fear of offending the visitor's sensibilities. Citing Edward Said's late 20th century notion of Orientalism, Beckerman explains, "...even beyond the political level it is easy to see the work as a kind of primal English defense against the strange, new Japanese presence in their midst, a means to render harmless the threat of "otherness," to nullify and transform that very element which they found so fascinating....After all, the elusive, omnipotent Mikado is turned into a slightly wacky English gentleman, and the stylized geishas are transformed into schoolgirls... (Beckerman 318).

On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind that *The Mikado* was first and foremost a vehicle of popular entertainment, a commercial enterprise of Richard D'Oyly Carte, in competition with other stage forms

high and low—music hall, burletta, variety shows, melodramas, adaptations, concerts, ballets and legitimate drama. It is also insightful to note that Gilbert and Sullivan used the term “opera” for their works, although it was firmly within the rubric of “comic opera” of the day. Some music critics felt that Sir Arthur, whose knighthood was based on his more serious music, was working beneath his ability in churning out such enjoyable fare. Yet even after *The Mikado*, when his reputation could have rested, he signed a five-year contract with D’Oyly Carte, to continue his collaboration in the genre.

While France had opera bouffe and Prussia had Viennese operetta, America was moving toward the form that would become “musical theatre,” a form which would lend itself to the frivolous depiction of Japanese characters.

Act II, Scene 3: Japan in Trans-Atlantic Musicals

Although Willard Spenser claimed that the libretto and music to his American-Japanese comic opera, *The Little Tycoon*, were written before *The Mikado* swept over America, its reception on the New York stage in 1886 was certainly not hurt by its more popular precursor. In fact, it had a successful run in Philadelphia before a mildly long run of 104 performances and lukewarm reviews in New York. Unlike *The Mikado*, the two acts of the story take place on board an ocean steamer returning from Europe and in a sumptuous drawing room in General Knickerbocker’s elegant villa in Newport, Rhode Island. The Japanese aspect to the story is the guise that the would-be lover of the General’s daughter takes to win her. He impersonates His Royal Highness Sham, a Great Tycoon of Japan, and thus gulls the social-conscious General to accept his offer of

marriage to Violet, thus making her “the Little Tycoon” of the title. *The New York Times* review of April 5, 1886 generally disparaged the libretto, but reserved some praise for the Japanese staging business of the finale, “The Japanese scene which brings the piece to a close is simply burlesque, but it has the advantage of being funny...There is a mistaken notion abroad that this Japanese “business” was suggested by “The Mikado.” Such is not the fact, though if it were there would be no harm in it.” (“The Little Tycoon”)

The Shop Girl (1894), a musical comedy, takes place entirely in the London Royal Stores and a Fancy Bazaar in Kensington and is a rich boy/poor girl romantic musical. The only Japanese aspect here is a romantic duet sung by the Royal Store’s shopwalker and fitter, sung in the Japanese section of the store. Lyrics include:

Miggles:	I am a Jap, please notice my cap, ‘Twas copied from off a tea-caddy.
Miss Robinson:	I am so shy, a Japanese I, And he is my Japanese laddie.
Miggles:	She came to me enclosed in some tea, But I found it hard to consume her.
Miss Robinson:	This little elf I put on the shelf, This crack’d little bit of Satsuma.
Both:	Ho, ho! Jolly Japan, Ho, ho! her little man. Tokio! Tokio! Stonio brokio! We are in love on the Japanese plan.

Despite the trivialization of Japan, *The Shop Girl* was a tremendous hit, with a record-breaking 546 performances.

A year after D'Oyly Carte's first revival of *The Mikado* in 1895, Sydney Jones's wrote his Japanese "musical play" *The Geisha: The Story of a Teahouse* (1896). According to Andrew Lamb, British music historian, "George Edwardes [producer] sought to tap the constant fascination of the public for the oriental milieu that had brought such success to Gilbert and Sullivan in *The Mikado*. The formula worked yet again" (Lamb, "The Geisha"). It was instantly popular and played for two years and 760 performances, longer than *The Mikado*, was far more popular on the European continent than *The Mikado*, was more popular in Germany than any German operetta and was referred to in Anthon Chekhov's short story, "The Lady with the Little Dog." It did not hurt that a replacement for the Marquis Imari was Rutland Barrington, who was the original Pooh-Bah in *The Mikado*. Set in the Tea House of Ten Thousand Joys, *The Geisha* is a romantic story, where three couples get entangled and substituted, only to come out right in the end. Although the Japanese March in Act II is based on traditional Japanese music, the score was minimally Japanese in flavor, with additional songs added by other composers, including Lionel Monckton, James Philip and J. M. Capel. But the music was tuneful and the setting was entirely Japanese, which might account for its success. Jones's next work, *San Toy* (1899), again stayed with Oriental themes (China this time) and ran even longer than *The Geisha*.

In America, Broadway spawned a series of Japan-inspired musicals, where the more serious British "comic opera" gave way to the American "musical comedy," a form based more on loosely-themed musical numbers than libretto. *Otoyo* (1903) was part of a *Japan at Night* evening at the Madison Square Garden Roof Garden, running only during the summer. The show was a cross-cultural romance, featuring an American millionaire, a San Francisco con man, a Japanese war hero and a former ballet dancer. The orchestra was played entirely by women

wearing white uniforms.

The Sho-Gun (1904) was set in an imaginary island called Ka-choo, located between Japan and Korea. It featured characters called Hanki-Pank, Omee-Omi, Hi-Faloot, Hunni-bun and Flai-Hai, the Shogun. After the romantic loose ends are tied up, the musical ends with a rousing patriotic chorus, “The Jackie,” sung by the American sailors, shoving off the island to fight:

We were busy lads in old Manila Bay,
And at Santiago, too, we won the day.
We will fight for any gal,
Or a Panama canal,
We will even fight to pass the time away.
We observe each foreign squabble with delight.
We believe that Uncle Sam is always right.
No commodore or admiral so brave;
He’s the pride of all the fleet,
And he never knew defeat,
He’s the ruler of the salt sea wave. (Luders)

The setting of *The Sho-Gun* may have alluded to Japan’s expanding Pacific sphere of influence, but the final chorus leaves no mistake about America’s military capacity. In its Milwaukee premier, the *New York Times* reporter wrote: “‘The Shogun’ is the nearest approach to the Gilbertian style of opera the American stage has had in many years,” which may have been typical hyperbole of the day for a very lackluster show.

Fantana (1905) was another New York musical, this one by Raymond Hubbell, set in Monterrey, California, the Nagasaki Palace

of Marquis Kioto and the Commodore's yacht returning to America. Fontana is the daughter of the American Commodore, who falls in love with a Lieutenant from the H. M. S. Pontiac. In a typical song of this era, Lt. Warren sings of his enchantment with Japanese women, interchangeable with geisha:

Pictured in Kimona ornamental
Sits a little figure oriental,
Upon a paper fan, a maiden of Japan,
Such as you see carved in ivory....
Just a little jewel of a Geisha,
But in that small Island off in Asia,
Those eyes and hair of jet are of sad coquette:
Fascinating, fickle, fancy free....
Laughing, little almond eyes,
Sitting taking tea,
Blackeyed maid of eastern skies,
Listen to my plea,
If your tiny face of tan
Is like this one on the fan,
Look no further, I'm your man... (Hubbell)

Fantana was briefly followed on Broadway by *The Mayor of Tokio* (1905), which ran for 50 performances over the Christmas holiday. Though billed as an opera in two acts, it was more of a burlesque, featuring a bevy of "geishas" doubling as "sailor ladies" and "yachting girls" and "peanuts." In the plot, a comic opera company, Kiper's Konsolidated Komiques, is in Tokyo, where it is mistaken for royalty. The mayor of Tokyo's daughter falls in love with the lead actor, but his

wealthy father arrives on his yacht to prevent a more tragic outcome (Bordman, 250).

Back in London, Howard Talbot was part of a stable of composers and lyricists on contract to various producers like Robert Courtneidge and George Edwardes, whose theatres (Gaiety, Daly's, Criterion, Adelphi, Shaftsbury) became the center for musical theatre in Edwardian London. Talbot's 1899 hit *A Chinese Honeymoon* was the first musical to break 1000 performances. He continued with other hits including the Japanese-themed *The White Chysanthemum* (1905). Set entirely in Japan, a British girl disguises herself as a Japanese girl in order to be close to her naval boyfriend who is transferred to Japan, starring the ubiquitous Rutland Barrington as the young man's admiral father.

Lionel Moncton had added some songs to Ivan Caryll's *The Shop Girl* and Sydney Jones's *The Geisha*. He combined with Howard Talbot on *The Arcadians* (1909), one of the most successful musicals of the Edwardian Era. Producer Courtneidge kept the *Arcadians* team together, including most of the actors, for the next musical in his theatre, *The Mousme* (1911). *The Mousme* was different from all other post-*Mikado* musicals in that all the characters were Japanese. Thus we have little of the convention of the Western man singing his love songs to the pretty little geisha. The main love interest, Miyo, however, is the daughter of a Japanese General and his English wife, newly arrived in Japan. Her stern father says, "Miyo has caught English ways from her English Mother, but when the time arrives she will learn Japanese ways from her Japanese Father" (*The Mousme*, Act I). This allows for the cross-cultural observations, such as the song, "Honourable Jappy Bride" and others. The story takes place as the Japanese army is about to leave to fight the Russians and includes a dramatic earthquake scene.

Manuel Klein was prolific as a Broadway composer, often writing

words and music. He contributed a song to Ivan Caryll's *The Cherry Girl* (1903) and collaborated with Jerome Kern in a string of revues at the Shubert Brothers' newly opened Winter Garden Theatre in 1911. *A Trip to Japan* (1909) was merely an exotic vehicle for the New York Hippodrome Theatre, where he was musical director. The Hippodrome was an enormous theatre given to large-scale productions. The story is about a team of Japanese who hire a circus to disguise their shipment of submarines back to Japan and included a large steamship sailing out of harbor and two waterfalls on opposite sides of the stage (Bordman 294).

Act II, Scene 4: Japan in Drama

The image of Japan on the musical stage tended toward the spectacle, with more emphasis placed on the sets and costumes than characterizations. Judging by the lyrics of the songs, the image did not get much past the giggling “three little maids from school” of *The Mikado*. Many of the stories involved Western men falling in love with Japanese maidens or mousmes, who are mistakenly identified as geisha, usually with happy endings. Sometimes, however, people went to the theatre expecting something more dramatic than spectacle and here the image does change.

The last five years of the century brought a second wave of Japan interest, perhaps brought on by the first revival of *The Mikado* in 1895. The first major drama was *Heart of Ruby* (1895), a play by Judith Gautier, which she originally wrote for the Parisian stage in 1888. Originally called *The Queen of Smiles* (La Marchande de Sourires), the name was changed when producer Augustin Daly brought her translated version to his theatre. The play came on the heels of Arthur Wing Pinero's suc-

cessful *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893), another story of a woman with a past who kills herself to remove herself from her daughter's marriage prospects, a common Victorian morality theme. The anonymous reviewer for the *New York Times* commented, "It made a beautiful show, which inevitably suggested the inimitable "Mikado" of Gilbert and Sullivan, though it was all serious, and was designed to move the spectator to pity and sympathetic tears, and not to laughter. The production used authentic costumes, weapons, household furniture and *jinriksha*, all made in Japan for the French production, and included a dance "as Japanese as you please" ("Mrs. Tanqueray in Japan"). The reviewer goes to some length to point out that although this play was set in an earlier "idealized picture of life in old Japan...not the Japan of to-day's newspapers," alluding to Japan's recent military victory over the Chinese, British society had gotten over their initial burst of *Japonisme* and could approach the play more objectively. He also noted that the opening night performance was attended by the Japanese Consul-General and a group of his colleagues.

Heart of Ruby was followed by a trio of plays in 1897, *A Japanese Girl*, *A Japanese Idyll*, *A Japanese Lamp*, followed by *The Moonlight Blossom*. The latter was reviewed favorably not as a drama, but as a pleasing entertainment: "the fantastic dresses, the dances, the picturesque and well-ordered romping of toylike children, are highly satisfying." ("Notes of the Stage Abroad")

But the real watershed year for serious Japanese drama on the stage was 1900, the year that David Belasco produced his play, *Madame Butterfly* and that the real Tokyo geisha-turned-actress, Sadayakko, arrived in New York.

Act II, Scene 4:
Three *Butterfly*s and an *Iris*

By January, 1900, the Broadway impresario David Belasco had written, directed and produced more than 30 works over a 20-year career. Stuck with a lack-luster one-act play, *Naughty Anthony*, and Blanche Bates, a rising star he was nurturing, he turned to a story, “Madame Butterfly” by John Luther Long that had appeared in *Century Magazine* two years earlier. Convinced that he could turn this into a spectacle worthy of his flamboyant reputation, he secured the rights to the story from its Philadelphia author. He wrote the play and had it performed by the beginning of March with two weeks’ rehearsal time. It ran for a mere 24 performances, before he consigned it to producer Charles Frohman and a local cast for its London premier in April.

Besides ending the play with a melodramatic suicide, which was not part of the original story, the great theatrical innovation of Belasco’s *Butterfly* was the overnight vigil, where Cho-Cho-san, Suzuki and her son Trouble wait all night for Pinkerton to return to them after she sights his ship docking in the harbor. In silence, Belasco used lighting techniques to show the passing of night and the coming of the following morning—for 14-minutes! According to reports, the audiences sat spellbound throughout and it was “hailed as the supreme artistic achievement of the current theatrical season” (Timerlake 199). For Belasco, “theatrical effectiveness took precedence over any other considerations. The play was not the thing; the production was” (Marshall 155). Even in this afterthought of a one-act play with its short run, Belasco invested it with his inventive stamp. Both the New York and London productions won positive reviews, but soon after, his *Butterfly* would fly off in a different form.

During the London production of the Belasco play, opera composer Giacomo Puccini was in town, supervising his production of *Tosca*, looking for a vehicle for his next opera. He went to see *Madame Butterfly* on opening night and was struck by its operatic potential. He immediately wrote to his manager to secure the rights for an opera. Puccini's interest in things Japanese could also have been stimulated by his contact with fellow composer, Andre *Message* at Villa d'Est ten years earlier, where both were at work, Puccini writing *Manon Lescaut* and the former writing his Japanese opera, *Madame Chrysanthemum*, based on Loti's story (Van Rij, 35).

Many people (Moses, Honey and Cole, van Rij) have described the transformation of *Madame Chrysanthemum*, the autobiographical story by the French writer, Pierre Loti, into a story by the Philadelphia patrician John Luther Long, Broadway play by David Belasco and Italian opera by Giacomo Puccini. To briefly recount Butterfly's transformation: Loti was a naval officer when his ship anchored at Nagasaki for repairs in the summer of 1885. He engaged in what was quite normal in those days—"marrying" and setting up household with a local girl, which he named Chrysanthemum, or Kiku-san. It was strictly a financial arrangement, where the girl and house outside the foreign settlement area were leased on a monthly basis.

Loti's account is very personal, with Chrysanthemum playing a supporting role to his observations about Japanese culture. He consistently degrades the Japanese as sub-normal monkeys and realizes that beyond the language barrier, his "plaything" of a wife has no thoughts in her head to communicate. The morning of his departure, he returns to find her bags packed at the door, testing the silver coins he has given her to make sure they are not false. In Loti's account, there is no love lost, maudlin parting or tragic suicide; both have gotten what they wanted.

For his 1893 opera, Messenger created more dramatic tension by highlighting Pierre's jealousy over his friend Yves's attentions to his "wife" and Chrysanthemum's fidelity.

Long credits his story to an account he heard from his sister, a missionary wife stationed in Nagasaki in 1892–97. However true that might have been, since there must have been many such marriages to scandalize a Methodist missionary, the two stories have too much in common to deny Loti's book as Long's primary source. However there were significant innovations. 1) In Long's story, the focus is on Butterfly, with Pinkerton appearing briefly at the beginning and not at all at the end. 2) Pinkerton's American wife Adelaide is invented as the agent to shock Butterfly into the reality of her position. 3) Long creates other secondary characters—Suzuki the maid, Sharpless, the consul, Yamadori, the wealthy Japanese suitor. 4) Much of Long's story takes place through conversations, between Pinkerton and Butterfly, Butterfly and Suzuki, Butterfly and Sharpless, and it is all in a faux-dialect. Since Long had no direct experience of how Japanese woman would speak English, he created his own ideas. 5) When Butterfly realizes that Pinkerton is married and really not coming back for her, she attempts suicide with her father's samurai sword, but stops midway and decides to live. Suzuki finds her and binds the wound. When Adelaide arrives the next morning to take custody of Pinkerton's child, the house is empty. The overall innovation of Long's version is the focus from Loti's dominant Western male observing a foreign culture to the Japanese woman who is caught between the two cultures. Long's account also brings in a moralistic tone, casting Butterfly as an innocent victim of Pinkerton's callous thoughtlessness and inherent immorality.

The Belasco play confines all the action to one act. In the final scene, Sharpless and Pinkerton arrive at Butterfly's house, but Pinkerton

loses his courage and leaves it to Sharpless to explain his situation and give Butterfly some money. Kate (changed from the original Adelaide) enters looking for her husband and finally Butterfly understands her situation. When Kate offers to take the baby back to America to raise as her own, Butterfly asks her to return in 15 minutes. Then she takes her father's samurai sword and attempts to kill herself. Kate and Pinkerton belatedly rush in and Pinkerton gathers the dying Butterfly and his son in his arms. Clearly Belasco was not shy about making the story more of a tragedy than either Long or Loti, and it worked as a balance on his card with the farce. In addition, he toned down Butterfly's Japanese-English dialect. In an interview, actress Blanche Bates described the difficulty of the make-up, costume and sitting in the Japanese style that the role required, but said that she preferred playing the role of the tragic Butterfly to the farcical Nora ("Madame Butterfly").

Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, Puccini's librettists, struggled with Puccini for more than a year over the shape and emphasis of the opera. Puccini read Long's work after its translation into Italian, but found his formative inspiration watching the Belasco version on stage. Illica had worked with Pietro Mascagni several years before on his Japanese opera *Iris* (1898), and was more drawn to Long's original. The final Paris version reverted to Illica's original notions of breaking the second act after the vigil scene and all action set in Butterfly's house. In the opera version, Pinkerton emerges as a kinder person, who realizes he has made a mistake and wants to set things right. He is genuinely distressed to find her dying. His cry, "Butterfly! Butterfly! Butterfly!" are the final words of the opera as he and Sharpless burst into the room and Butterfly dies in his arms. Puccini used several Japanese songs in his score, including Kimigayo," "Sakura," "Echigo-Jishi" and "Miyasan," songs that had recently been transcribed into staff notation by Nagai and Kobatake in

1892 (“Japanese Songs...”).

Leslie Downer recounts how Puccini had heard about the authentic Japanese actress, Sadayakko, whose troupe was to pass through Italy on their European tour. He missed them in Rome but caught up with them in Milan, where he was inspired by her koto playing and stage performance:

Butterfly’s personality closely conformed to the reviewers’ response to the women whom Yakko portrayed on stage...This sweet submissive child- woman, finally driven to primitive savagery by the strength of her passion, was the ultimate Westerners’ stereotype of the Japanese female. Yakko’s stage performance enabled Puccini to give life to the bare bones of his plot. She provided him with a model for a flesh and blood Japanese woman to give reality to his imagined Madame Butterfly. (Downer 214)

Puccini’s opera had its opening in Milan in 1904 and was a disaster. Subsequent revisions prior to its Paris debut in 1906 created the masterpiece that has been performed since. Overshadowed by the opera’s enormous success, Belasco never revived his play.

Also around this same time, Pietro Mascagni’s opera, *Iris*, arrived in Philadelphia and New York. Originally premiered in Rome in November, 1898, *Iris* revived Mascagni’s reputation in the face of a series of disappointing failures after his popular *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Set in 19th century Edo, *Iris* is the young and innocent daughter of the blind *Il Cieco*. She is desired by a philandering lord, Osaka, and offered to him by his procuring friend, Kyoto. Kidnapped and transported to the Yoshiwara district, *Iris* childishly maintains her innocence, believing she has been transported to Paradise. Frustrated by her rejections, Kyoto

has her displayed in the brothel window, where she is widely admired. Unfortunately, she is discovered by her father, who publicly curses her. Distraught, she jumps to her death in the sewer below, but not before she is visited by three “egotisms” of knavery, lust and pride, symbolically representing the three men responsible for her demise. The opera ends with a “Chorus of the Sun,” which lifts Iris toward an apotheosis of “warmth, light and love.” Richard Aldrich, *New York Times* music critic, reported of the 1907 revival that:

“Iris” is one of the several operatic attempts of recent years to extract local color and musical suggestion from Japan. It has little in common, however, with the attempted naturalism of Puccini’s “Madame Butterfly.” It is a fantasy of the frankest unreality, purporting to be based on Japanese mythological motives, on certain Japanese ideas of poetry and following the psychological turnings of the Japanese mind. It would be rash for the unskilled Occidental to say whether Luigi Illica, the librettist, has or has not found an accurate expression for these things. (Aldrich)

Mascagni also made little attempt to use Japanese music, except in a few places, where he used traditional Japanese instruments like samisen and drums. Michele Girardi suggests the opera, though set in Japan, is probably closer to Wagner’s sense of spectacle and morality. He also contrasts Mascagni’s *Iris* with Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*, pointing to the clash of cultures, missing in *Iris* but present in *Butterfly*, that gives the latter its dramatic power.

Act II, Scene 5:
The Darling of the Gods vs. A Japanese Nightingale

Belasco's *Butterfly* success encouraged him to collaborate with John Luther Long again, again on a Japanese theme story, again with Blanche Bates as the star vehicle. *The Darling of the Gods*, though set only a decade or so before the events of *Butterfly*, was a purely Japanese spectacle. Long did his normally scrupulous research to make the details realistic and Belasco added a spectacle of costumes and lighting effects that "have never been obtained before in this country or any other" ("Gossip"). There was a cast of 140 people, and all fans, kimonos, wigs, swords and other props were designed for accuracy. Yo-san alone had 24 kimonos. The play was accompanied by an orchestra of 30, including five Japanese playing traditional instrument—biwa, samisen, koto, tsudzumi and flute. *The Darling of the Gods* is the story of the conflict between Yo-san's love for the rebel Daimyo and Kara's honor as a Samurai. But the reviewers were not as impressed with the story as with the props and costumes:

"ten tableaux, and each in its way is a triumph of richly artistic light and movement and color...with long waits between them, of gorgeous costumes and gaily diversified crowds, of acrobats and tumblers, of choruses of Geisha girls from Geisha Street, and all the rest; and in the interstices of these many engrossing things, there is a story of love and suffering, compounded of strenuous emotions..."
("Du Barry")

The Darling of the Gods ran for six months that first season and opened Belasco's 1903 season as well, running almost continuously for

two years. The play opened in London in December, 1903, under the management of Sir Henry Beerbohm Tree, who claimed to be guided in his production by Mme. Sada Yacco. Tree reprised his performance of Zakkuri in his revival of 1914. Although Belasco never revived the play, in 1926, Belasco's son-in-law, Morris Gest, was signed by United Artists to produce *Darling of the Gods* as a film, starring United's star, Norma Talmadge, but the film was never made. Belasco and Long continued their collaboration with another great success, *Adrea* in 1905. Incidentally, Belasco also wrote, directed and produced *The Girl of the Golden West* later that year, which became Puccini's post-*Butterfly* inspiration.

Despite its long-running success, *The Darling of the Gods* almost never made it to opening night. A week before its scheduled opening, producers Erlanger and Klaw publicly claimed plagiarism from a work they had contracted to convert into a play, *A Japanese Nightingale*, based on the novel by Onoto Watanna (pen name for Winnifred Eaton Babcock). According to the suit, Watanna had sent two of her novels to Belasco for consideration for production. Belasco claimed that he never read either before Watanna's agent then passed them on to rival producers, Klaw and Erlanger. To counter the harassment prior to the opening of his new play, Belasco had Mrs. Babcock arrested on charges of libel, and the headline "Onoto Watanna Arrested" was a sensational headline in the *New York Herald*. Two days later, she surrendered to the court and posted \$500 bail. Meanwhile, Belasco's play went on and the suit (always more about harassment and publicity than plagiarism) was dropped two months later.

Although there are elements of the Long-Belasco play in Watanna's work, *Darling* was so much less about the plot and characters that it didn't matter in the end. As Eve Oishi remarked, "Whether or not Long or Eaton was plagiarizing from the other or simply both borrowing from

the same popular myths and formulas, the rather disturbing fact remains that Winnifred Eaton was not merely capitalizing on the western stereotypes of Asia and Asian women, she was instrumental in creating them” (xxii).

Eventually, a year later, in November, 1903, *A Japanese Nightingale* opened, adapted for the stage by William Young, a writer in the Klaw/Erlanger stable and was a distinct failure, running for only 44 performances. Sensing a failure, Watanna was not even present at the opening. Lacking in the spectacle of Belasco’s *Butterfly* or *Darling*, *Nightingale* was seen as mediocre, old-fashioned and inauthentic. Japanese poet and critic, Yone Noguchi, was sent by a newspaper to review it through Japanese eyes and refused to do so, writing to a friend, “Onoto’s play ...was a flat failure...I thought to say nothing was the only way to be kind to the play. Such a poor production!” (Birchall, 82).

(Intermission: To be continued...)

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“La Mousme” (painting)
 Vincent Van Gogh (1888)



The Mikado (operetta)
 Gilbert & Sullivan (1885)



The Geisha (musical)
 Sydney Jones (1895)



Iris (opera)
 Pietro Mascagni (1898)



Fantana (musical)
 Schmidt & Hubbell (1906)