



Eugène Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People* (1830)

A NEW ENDING FOR *TOSCA*
Quasi una fantasia

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DO YOU KNOW TOSCA?

Connaissez-vous la Tosca? In the play from which Puccini took his opera, Victorien Sardou's *La Tosca*, Tosca's lover, the painter Cavaradossi, puts this question to the revolutionary Angelotti who has just escaped from prison. Of course, Angelotti knows Tosca. Everyone knows Tosca. Floria Tosca is the most celebrated diva of her day.

Sardou wrote *La Tosca* for Sarah Bernhardt, the most celebrated actress of her day. Bernhardt opened the play in Paris in 1887 and later took it on the road. Puccini saw her in Italy and was inspired to create his own *Tosca*, which premiered in Rome in 1900. Today we know the opera and not the play. But do we really know Tosca?

The places around Rome and the revolutionary times depicted in *Tosca* are real. The event on which the *Tosca* story hinges is Napoleon's victory at Marengo on June 14, 1800. Tosca sings at Teatro Argentina, Rome's oldest and most distinguished theater. Cavaradossi paints in the Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle. Chief of Police and arch-villain Scarpia resides in the Farnese Palace. Angelotti escapes, and Tosca later jumps to her death, from the Castel Sant'Angelo. Only Tosca is fictional, although, we might say, she is real enough. There were celebrated divas like her-- independent and in control, artistically, financially, sexually.

The first thing we learn about Tosca in the opera is how jealous she is. "Hide yourself!" Cavaradossi warns Angelotti: "She is a jealous woman!" Tosca flies into a jealous rage one minute and falls into paroxysms of love the next. The Magdalen that Cavaradossi paints must have black eyes like hers ("*Ma ... falle gli occhi neri!*") and not the sky-blue eyes of the beautiful Marquise Attavanti, who comes to the church where Cavaradossi paints in order to prepare the family chapel to aid in her brother Angelotti's escape. The villainous Scarpia uses Tosca's jealousy, which he likens to a falcon, to discover Angelotti's hiding place, just as he exploits Tosca's passionate devotion to Cavaradossi to secure sexual favors in exchange for the painter's life.

The first thing we learn about Tosca in the play is how free she is.: "... this exquisite creature," Cavaradossi goes on to tell Angelotti, "had been found in the fields, completely wild, herding sheep." Raised and educated by the Benedictines of Verona, the foundling Tosca is already famous by the age of 16. The Pope himself hears her sing, then grants her permission to leave the convent before she would ordinarily be allowed to: "Go in freedom, my child, you will move every heart as you have moved my own, you will shed sweet tears; and that, too, is a way of praying to God."

“Go in freedom ...”. Even by today’s standards, Tosca is a powerfully independent woman. Flouting convention, she openly carries on with the godless Cavaradossi, a freethinker whose revolutionary pedigree has not failed to escape Scarpia’s notice.

Tosca herself is not godless. But she wears her piety lightly. In the play, she tells Cavaradossi that her confessor regards their relationship as an abomination and that, as a first step towards salvation, she is to get her lover to shave off his revolutionary moustache. The admonition is worthless: The moustache is so becoming ... she loves Cavaradossi just as he is she knows she is living in sin ... she knows she is going to hell ... as long as Cavaradossi goes there with her!

Tosca’s piety is an important element in the story. It is especially evident in the candle scene at the end of Act II (Act IV in the play). Having just stabbed Scarpia to death, Tosca is in a hurry to leave with the letter of safe passage she has wrested from his already-stiffened hand. Practically out the door, she stops and places two lighted candles on either side of the body, then removes a cross from the wall and places it on the dead man’s chest. So powerfully do these pious actions speak that they almost cancel out the furiously angry words she spews forth seconds before: “This is Tosca’s kiss! ... And killed by a woman! ... Die, damn you! Die!! Die!!! ... And before him all Rome trembled!” (*E avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma!*)

The candle scene prepares us for Tosca’s suicide at the end of the opera. “You shall pay dearly for his life,” Scarpia’s agent Spoletta tells her. “With my own!” she rejoins, after which, before jumping to her death, she cries out: *O Scarpia, avanti a Dio*, usually translated as “Oh Scarpia, we meet before God!”

Tosca kills herself in the play, too. But in quite a different spirit.

Tosca: Yes, I killed your Scarpia. Killed, killed, do you understand? With a knife to the heart, and I would plunge the knife in again and turn it. Ah! You shoot ... As for me, I cut. Yes, go! Go see what I have done to that monster ... whose cadaver assassinates still ...

Sciarrone: Wretched woman!

Spoletta: Wait! Don’t you see that in her pain she cannot think clearly and tells us what she imagines?

Sciarrone: And if she really did it?

Spoletta: She will pay too little for it with her life!

Tosca: Take it, then! So that I no longer have the horror of seeing you, the villains who do such things, the loathsome people who accept them ... the vile sun shining upon them!

Spoletta (*who has just learned that what Tosca says is true*): Ah, demon! I will send you to rejoin your lover!

Tosca: I am going, scoundrels!

(She hurls herself over the parapet into the void.)

The pious, penitent Tosca with which the opera ends stands in sharp contrast to the defiant, unrepentant Tosca at the end of the play. The slayer of the sadistic torturer and would-be rapist Scarpia also cuts down a tyrant. With *E avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma!* Tosca casts off the innocence of the *Vissi d'arte* ("I lived for art, I lived for love, never did I cause harm to a living soul ...") and throws her lot in with the people and the cause of *Libertà* for which Cavaradossi and Angelotti die.

No matter that Tosca has killed a villain. No matter that she repents. Tosca must die. The heroines in 19th-century Italian opera almost always die, or go crazy, or both. That was the dramatic convention of the day. It's what audiences wanted, or at least what they expected.

What about today? Are we still looking for powerfully independent women to be cast as victims? What about Tosca? Can we go back and re-imagine her fate?

What if, instead of jumping to her death, Tosca were to jump into a crowd of townspeople celebrating Napoleon's victory on the grounds below the *Castel*? There might well have been such a crowd on that day. And what if she were to lead those people in their fight against tyranny? Tosca united with Cavaradossi in revolutionary spirit. Tosca as Marianne, legendary symbol of the French Revolution. A mythic ending befitting a larger-than-life woman. This is what I invite you to imagine!

A word about the words and the music.

In the new ending, words and music have been pulled apart and rearranged--literally, re-composed. They have been splintered, echoed, reintroduced, redistributed, transposed, reversed and re-assigned. In and through this interweaving, the mysteriousness of art that earlier confounded the beauty of Tosca with that of the Marquise Attavanti now unites the lovers once again in revolutionary voice.

Almost all of the material I have used in adapting and reinterpreting *Tosca* for today's audiences is from the existing opera. Two important exceptions are the *Carmagnola* from Giordano's *Andrea Chénier* and "Ah, demonio!... ti manderò a raggiungere il tuo amante!," Spoletta's last words in the Italian translation of the Sardou translated above into English ("Ah, demon! I will send you to rejoin your

lover!"). My aim has been to suggest the naturalness of the ending by making it flow naturally from what comes before: what *befits* Tosca should also *fit* the opera.

Here, then, in tribute to the incomparable Giacomo Puccini and his librettists Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, and to Victorien Sardou, whose *La Tosca* was itself inspired by the divine Sarah Bernhardt, is *A New Ending for Tosca*.