

The following text represents an in-depth, but partial study of the figure of Mary in opera. The author wrote this paper based on his extended knowledge of operatic music and sound academic research. In particular, the text as published here did not include the typology explaining the different forms or modes of Mary's presence or presentations in the various operas studied. The descriptive elements given by the author amply highlight the nature of Mary's presence in each operatic work.

– Fr. Johann G. Roten, S.M.

### **Opera and Mary**

*By Richard Lenar*

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Opera. The word can bring to mind a series of images - portly prima donnas, helmets with horns, and sobbing tenors. Performances can go on for hours and bring the audience to exhaustion. In most cases, the endings are tragic as a principal character dies from murder, sickness or even suicide.

Beyond these stereotypes, however, one finds with closer examination of the operatic repertoire a rather different and quite diverse world. For example, not all operas are dark and unhappy – some are comedies, while others deal with historical events, nationalistic themes or even forms of redemption. Recent operas may examine contemporary issues, such as discrimination or capital punishment.

At first glance, it may appear unlikely that the Blessed Virgin Mary can be connected with the operatic world, but in fact operas contain a wealth of references to her. The underlying reason for this presence of Mary derives from the nature of the operatic art form. A successful opera effectively combines music, text and visual arts in a multi-faceted presentation. Marian references can occur under each of those aspects - the music may be a setting of a Marian prayer or antiphon, the opera's libretto may refer to Mary in order to propel forward the dramatic action, or the scenery may contain Marian imagery or iconography. In a few cases, Mary is even a member of the opera's cast.

A wide field therefore exists of possible ways in which Mary can be present in an operatic performance. This article will look at examples of how Mary does appear and how her presence enhances the artistic effectiveness of a particular operatic work. The treatment cannot be exhaustive; nevertheless, consideration will be given both to famous operas, as well as to less well-known works. The first part of this analysis will be the identification of different ways in which Marian references occur in opera; examples will be used to illustrate each type. This classification by specific categories will then be followed by a second and more extended part which will look more closely at specific operas which refer to Mary in some way. A concluding section will attempt to trace out a Marian trajectory and its meaning through the course of operatic history.

Before beginning that analysis, a brief explanation is necessary about the definition of opera used in the present article. The boundary between various musical forms, such as opera, oratorio and vocal concert works is not always well defined. For present purposes, opera will be construed to include any work for vocalists and orchestra which tells a story. This definition

includes works which, while not specifically called opera, are worthy of consideration because of the way in which they reference Mary.

A further explanation is required concerning the methodology which will be employed in this article. In order to keep the focus on Mary, narration of the opera's story will be included only to the extent necessary in order to understand the dramatic context in which some Marian aspect arises. Similarly, analysis of the opera's music will be included only when consideration of the music itself will help to understand the meaning and function of the Marian dimension. For readers who are interested in a detailed synopsis or musical analysis, there are many standard works available; a selection of such works is included for reference purposes in the bibliography at the end of this article.

As a final preparatory note, it is worth mentioning that opera has a long history. The first examples were created around 1600 based on settings of stories from Greek mythology. By about 1800, opera had evolved into an art form which presented stories on more worldly topics and included characters from all walks of life. Marian references become more prevalent during this period, and the examples cited in this article are primarily taken from operas written during or after the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These examples are interesting not only because of their significance for the music or storyline of an opera, but also for what they indicate about the state of Marian devotion at a particular time and place.

### **Part One – Types of Marian References in Opera**

In order to understand the diversity of Marian references in opera, it is helpful to classify them according to how they function within the overall dramatic structure and storyline.

For this purpose, the following categories will be used- *exclamatory, expository, devotional, intercessory, liturgical, dramatis personae, and typological*. A brief explanation of each category will be provided here along with few illustrative examples. The selected examples are not intended to be comprehensive. The categories will be referred to extensively within the next section of this article.<sup>1</sup>

Exclamatory– Operatic characters sometimes make exclamatory statements, which are either directed to Mary or are about her in some way. Such statements are best understood within the context of the time in which the opera was written. Writers of opera librettos play on the expectations and emotions of an audience in order to increase the dramatic effect of the dialogue and stage action. Marian exclamations are useful for this purpose, because they introduce associations which reflect ways in which Mary and devotion to her is enculturated. Because of such cultural associations, Marian exclamations can also be used for purposes of characterization - -they can indicate what a particular character is like or provide insight into a character's emotional state.

Examples of Marian exclamations include:

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<sup>1</sup> Details of the libretto and storyline of the operas considered in this article are taken from various sources. For operas in the public domain, a published version of a full or vocal score in electronic format was accessed from the Petrucci Music Library at website [imslp.org](http://imslp.org). A list of these scores can be found in the Bibliography. The synopses found in Henry W. Simon, editor, *The Victor Book of the Opera* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968) and Matthew Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera* (London ; New York : Rough Guides, 2007) were also consulted. In a few cases, other sources were used; they are documented separately where relevant.

Historical and biographical information was verified by consulting articles on specific composers in *The New Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians. 25 Volumes*, edited by Stanley Sadie and John Tyrell. (London, Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001).

English translations of librettos are by the author.

- Tannhäuser's cry for Mary's protection when he is tempted by the sensuous delights of the Venusberg ("Mein Heil liegt in Maria"/"My salvation lies in Mary") (*Tannhäuser*, Act I).<sup>2</sup>
- Canio's enraged "Per la Madonna"/"by the Madonna") when he confronts his unfaithful wife and demands to know the name of her lover. (*Pagliacci*, Act I).<sup>3</sup>
- Tosca's gentle rebuke of her lover Cavaradossi's amorous advance while they are in a church sanctuary ("Innanzi la Madonna, No"/"Not before the Madonna"). (*Tosca*, Act I).<sup>4</sup>

Expository – A Marian reference can be used to set a scene or establish an atmosphere. Naturally, expository elements occur most frequently at the beginning of an act or scene. As in the case of exclamations, expository references play on an audience's expectations regarding Marian devotion.

Some examples are:

- In Act I of *Das Liebesverbot*, a group of nuns sings the *Salve Regina* in order to generate the atmosphere for a scene in a convent.<sup>5</sup>
- At the opening of *Tosca*, the escaped prisoner Angelotti looks for a key to safety which is hidden by a statue of Mary in the church sanctuary which is the setting for Act I.<sup>6</sup>
- In Act II of *The Tigers*, a statue of the Sorrowful Mother comes to life along with weeping angels in order to establish an association with mourning and grief.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Wagner, *Tannhäuser* (Leipzig: C.F. Peters, 1920; reprinted: Mineola: Dover Publications, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Ruggero Leoncavallo, *Pagliacci*. (Milan: Sonzogno, 1895; reprinted New York: Broude Brothers, 1951).

<sup>4</sup> Giacomo Puccini, *Tosca* (Milan: G. Ricordi, 1924).

<sup>5</sup> Richard Wagner, *Das Liebesverbot* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1914).

<sup>6</sup> Giacomo Puccini, *Tosca* (Milan: G. Ricordi, 1924).

<sup>7</sup> Havergal Brian, *The Tigers* (Full Score unpublished. Vocal Score published by Kranz in 1932).

Devotional – Operatic characters sometimes pray directly to Mary. Invocation of the Blessed Mother always occurs within a context of crisis and great need. The prayer itself is often a standard Marian prayer, with the *Ave Maria* and the *Salve Regina* being the most common. As in previous categories, the selected form of Marian devotion reflects the expectations of an audience in the time and place of the opera's composition.

Examples of this kind of Marian devotion are:

- In Act II of *La Forza del Destino*, the fleeing Leonora, as she arrives before the Church of Our Lady of the Angels, prays to Mary for forgiveness.<sup>8</sup>
- In Act IV of *Otello*, Desdemona, in fear of her life because of her husband's jealousy, prays the *Ave Maria*.<sup>9</sup>
- In Act II of *Jenůfa*, the title character prays the *Salve Regina* when she learns that her baby is missing.<sup>10</sup>

Intercessory/Mediatory – An opera's storyline sometimes contains a visible act of Marian intercession. Mary's intercession may or may not occur in response to a character's plea for help. The dramatic setting is always a culminating scene in which some conflict in the storyline is resolved.

Examples of Marian intercession include:

- In the concluding scene of *Tannhäuser*, the Pope's staff sprouts leaves in response to a prayer to Mary and as a sign of forgiveness.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Giuseppe Verdi. *La Forza del Destino* (Milan: G. Ricordi, 1904. Reprinted: Mineola: Dover Publications, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> Giuseppe Verdi, *Otello* (Milan: G. Ricordi, 1913; reprinted Mineola: Dover Publications, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Leoš Janáček, *Jenůfa* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1917).

<sup>11</sup> Richard Wagner, *Tannhäuser* (Leipzig: C.F. Peters, 1920; reprinted: Mineola: Dover Publications, 1984).

- At the end of *Suor Angelica*, Mary appears to reunite a despondent mother and her dead child and leads them together into heaven.<sup>12</sup>

- *Hry o Marii* (Miracles of Our Lady) includes three separate stories, each of which concludes with an act of Marian intercession in which the primary female protagonist is saved from a perilous situation.<sup>13</sup>

*Liturgical* –Some operas include presentations of liturgical celebrations. Various forms of Christianity are represented, with Catholic and Orthodox being the most common. In order to depict the liturgy in opera, artwork and stagecraft become important. Consequently, although the opera's stage directions may not refer specifically to Mary, the visual aspect naturally utilizes representations of Mary through the use of iconography, statues or other forms of Marian art. This practice is especially characteristic of operas which present liturgical celebrations in the Orthodox tradition.

Examples of liturgical celebrations which often utilize Marian art in the staging include:

-- The magnificent "Coronation Scene" in *Boris Godunov* presents the crowning of a Russian Tsar amidst the full pomp and splendor of the medieval Orthodox Church.<sup>14</sup>

- The Easter morning procession in *Cavalleria Rusticana* includes the singing of the *Regina Coeli*.<sup>15</sup>

- The opening scene of *Król Roger* depicts an Orthodox liturgy with the accompaniment of an impressive orchestral and choral setting of "hagios, hagios hagios" ("holy, holy holy").<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Giacomo Puccini, *Il Trittico* (Milan: G. Ricordi, 1919; reprinted Minola: Dover Publications, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Bohuslav Martinů, *Hry o Marii* (Praha : Panton, 1979).

<sup>14</sup> Modest Mussorgsky, *Boris Godunov* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1959; reprinted Mineola:Dover Publications, 1987).

<sup>15</sup> Pietro Mascagni, *Cavalleria Rusticana* (Berlin: Bote & Bock, 1920; reprinted New York: Broude Brothers, 1950).

*Dramatis personae* – In a few cases, Mary actually appears as a member of the opera's cast. The Blessed Mother may simply make a cameo appearance in the culminating scene, or she may be a principal character throughout the entire length of the storyline. Mary's presence in this manner is usually associated with her intercession.

Examples of Mary as a member of the *dramatis personae* include:

- In *La Vierge*, which dramatizes a series of events from Mary's life (Annunciation, Cana, Calvary, Assumption), Mary is depicted by the principal soprano role.<sup>17</sup>
- In *Hry o Marii* (Miracles of Our Lady), three of the stories include an important role for Mary in which she intercedes on behalf of a young woman who is in trouble.<sup>18</sup>
- In *Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher*, as Joan is about to be executed, Mary appears, comforts Joan and eventually leads the French maiden into heaven.<sup>19</sup>

*Typological/Exemplary* – While they are not specifically Marian in content, a few operatic works include a female character who displays a Marian characteristic. For example, a female character may demonstrate the ability to produce moral improvement in others. Likewise, she may exhibit the willingness to sacrifice for others in order to help them or to accomplish their salvation. In this regard, the notion of "redemption through a woman" is a recurring motif in the music dramas of Richard Wagner and the second part of this article will look at several examples from his work. Marian typology, however, can occur in other contexts as well, of which the following are some examples:

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<sup>16</sup> Karol Szymanowski, *Król Roger* (Vienna : Universal Edition, 1953).

<sup>17</sup> Jules Massenet, *La Vierge: Légende Sacrée en Quatre Scènes* (Paris: G. Hartmann Edition, 1880, reprinted Paris: Heugel, 1894).

<sup>18</sup> Bohuslav Martinů, *Hry o Marii* (Praha : Panton, 1979).

<sup>19</sup> Arthur Honegger, *Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher* ( Paris: Salabert, 1939).

- A common dramatic pattern in the late 18th and early 19th century was the "rescue opera" in which a character, at some peril to self, acts to deliver someone (usually a political prisoner) from some form of danger. The best known example of this kind of storyline is the character of Leonore in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, who disguises herself as a man in order to free her husband from prison.<sup>20</sup>

- There are numerous operatic settings of the Faust legend (based on Goethe's work) with the one by Charles Gounod being the most famous and frequently performed.<sup>21</sup> An important aspect of Goethe's conception is the notion of the eternal feminine (represented by the character of Margarete), by which aspects of an idealized female essence, such as purity and chastity, can work for the elevation of a male character.<sup>22</sup>

- The character of "The Mother" in the popular television Christmas opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors* can be interpreted in Marian terms, since she takes a personal risk in the belief that it will benefit her young son.<sup>23</sup>

## **Part Two – Operas with a Marian Reference**

Having considered the ways in which Mary can be present in opera, detailed consideration will now be given to specific operatic works. The methodology will be to group operas by composer in roughly chronological order of their composition. As stated previously, only enough details of the plot and music will be presented in order to establish the context in

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<sup>20</sup> Ludwig van Beethoven, *Fidelio* (Leipzig: C.F. Peters, 1872; reprinted Mineola: Dover Publications, 1984.)

<sup>21</sup> Charles Gounod, *Faust* (Berlin: Bote & Bock, 1869).

<sup>22</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: eine Tragödie* (Basel: B. Scwabe, 1949).

<sup>23</sup> Gian Carlo Menotti, *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (London : Chappell & Company; New York: G. Schirmer, 1952).

which Marian references occur. Those references will be classified through use of the seven categories mentioned above. After the presentation of individual operas, a concluding section will provide some analysis and reflection in an attempt to trace out a diachronic trajectory among the works under consideration

### Verdi: *La Forza del Destino*

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) was the leading composer of opera in Italy during the second half of the 19th century and his work forms a core of the present-day operatic repertoire. A fine example is *La Forza del Destino* (1862), a complex tale of forbidden love, accidental death, murder and revenge, which plays out through the course of the intersecting lives of its principal characters.<sup>24</sup> Two significant Marian references occur during Act II, after the female protagonist Leonora has decided, in typical operatic manner, to escape potential danger and an unhappy love affair by entering a convent. (Leonora believes she is partially responsible for the accidental death of her father at the hands of her lover.)

The scene begins as Leonora arrives in a rural location before the Church of Our Lady of the Angels. In the aria "Sono giunta!"/"I have arrived" she first thanks God for the safe conclusion of her flight and then prays to Mary for forgiveness. Although its theology may have reversed the roles of God and Mary, the lovely aria expresses both Leonora's anguish of soul as well as the peace which she seeks to find in religious life. At the conclusion of her prayer, Leonora hears a chorus of monks who are praying in the church and feels some comfort.

Eventually, Leonora is met by one of the monks, who agrees that she can begin a hermit's life in one of the nearby caves. Before she does so, however, Leonora must first enter the church

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<sup>24</sup> Giuseppe Verdi. *La Forza del Destino* (Milan:G. Ricordi, 1904. Reprinted: Mineola: Dover Publications, 1991).

and receive forgiveness for her sins. As the absolved Leonora leaves the church, the second Marian reference in the scene occurs. Singing a majestic hymn, the monks invoke our Lady of the Angels and ask her to protect Leonora (“La Vergine degli Angeli, mi copra del suo manto”). As the hymn develops through a series of interchanges between Leonora and the chorus of monks, the scene comes to a close.

The Marian references in Act II of *La Forza del Destino* combine both expository and devotional elements. The expository dimension arises because the invocation of Mary is used for dramatic effect as Leonora enters into religious life. At the same time, the devotional aspect is present, when the distressed Leonora turns to Mary for forgiveness. The asking of Mary for forgiveness may not be sound theologically, but it works dramatically within the context of the operas' storyline. An Italian audience of the time when the opera was written would associate Marian devotion with penitential prayer. Likewise, the reference to Our Lady of the Angels as Leonora enters a hermit's life adds an aura of purity and saintliness to one of the opera's principal characters. That aura in turn provides added poignancy to the final scene of the opera, in which Leonora is murdered by her estranged brother.

Verdi: *Otello*

*Otello* (1887) is the last of Verdi's dramatic/tragic operas.<sup>25</sup> It is distinguished from his prior work by the expanded role which is given to the orchestra, so that it becomes a virtuoso participant in the musical argument, rather than a mere provider of accompaniment. The opera, which follows to a great extent the plot of the Shakespearean play, depicts the ruler Otello's

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<sup>25</sup> Giuseppe Verdi, *Otello* (Milan: G. Ricordi, 1913; reprinted Mineola: Dover Publications, 1986).

descent from a victorious conqueror to a murderous husband who unjustly kills his wife, Desdemona, in a fit of jealous passion.

A significant Marian reference in the opera occurs during the first scene of the fourth act, after Desdemona has become aware of her husband's jealousy because of his unfounded suspicion that she has been unfaithful. The scene begins with a quiet instrumental prelude in which the music (in particular repeated notes in the lower register of the clarinets) creates a dark sense of fear. The prelude is followed by an exchange between Desdemona and one of her servants; at this point, Desdemona sings the "Willow Song" in which she expresses her desire to escape from the danger which threatens her. Her cries of "salce"/"willow" are plaintively echoed by the English horn. A loud orchestral climax mirrors Desdemona's feelings of dread, after which the Willow Song ends quietly. The repeated notes in the lower woodwinds and strings return to enhance the sense of imminent catastrophe.

The servant leaves and Desdemona kneels before an image of the Virgin Mary and begins to pray. The music changes to a mood of delicacy and sweetness. Desdemona concludes her prayer with a quiet, recitative-like *Ave Maria* and a series of invocations asking for the Holy Virgin's help. As Desdemona's prayer finishes, she falls asleep. The scene then closes with an extraordinary example of the simplest of musical means being used to communicate a change in the dramatic action onstage. A single *pianissimo* low E on the double basses announces the sinister figure of Otello as he emerges from the shadows and enters into Desdemona's room. He awakens his wife with three kisses. After an exchange between Otello and Desdemona, he strangles her in his jealous rage.

It is interesting to speculate on why Verdi placed the scene of Desdemona praying the *Ave Maria* in front of an image of the Virgin Mary immediately before Desdemona's murder by

Otello. In an expository sense, Verdi employs the practice of Marian devotion to highlight the tense dramatic situation, which results from the fear and foreboding felt by Desdemona. That such a dramatic device would be used in an opera of the time indicates that the simple Marian piety demonstrated by Desdemona was a common practice within the Italian culture of the time, a practice to which operatic audiences would readily respond. This cultural importance of Marian devotion is also indicated in Otello's question to Desdemona when, just before murdering her, he asks her whether she has prayed, because he does not want her to die unprepared.

However, the dramatic sequence of prayer and murder can hardly be cited as an operatic portrayal of effective Marian intercession, since Desdemona's prayer for safety ultimately goes unanswered. Possibly Verdi had some ironic intention as well, since Desdemona is murdered shortly after praying the last line of the *Hail Mary* with its reference to the hour of death. Whatever Verdi's purpose, the use of Marian devotion certainly depicts the sweetness and innocence of Desdemona's character and therefore adds additional irony to the action when her deluded husband murders her because he mistakenly suspects her of infidelity. Thus *Otello* provides an example of how even a simple reference to Marian piety can contribute to the dramatic development and action within the plot of an opera.

Boito: *Mefistofele*

Arrigo Boito (1842-1918) is best known as the librettist for some of Verdi's later operas, but he was also a composer in his own right. His musical reputation rests exclusively on a single

work, the opera *Mefistofele* (1868).<sup>26</sup> This work, which is structured in a Prologue, four acts and an Epilogue, is based on Goethe's *Faust*. The essence of the story is that the old man Faust makes a pact with the Devil - in exchange for his soul, Faust has an opportunity to be young again. The action of the opera traces the course of Faust's adventures after he is once again a young man.

The Prologue, which is a truly unique and original operatic conception, is the primary locus for the opera's Marian content. The setting is in heaven, and from the outset the music presents three important musical motives with heavenly connotations - a brass fanfare associated with the presence of God, a chorale-like passage in the woodwinds associated with the presence of the angels, and a hymn in praise of the Lord ("Ave Signore") which is sung by the entire angelic chorus.

Boito structures his Prologue in five sections which, in an innovative idea, mirror the standard sections of the symphony. The opening section presents the scene in heaven as the angels sing their never-ending hymn in praise of the Lord. A rapid-paced instrumental scherzo follows, after which the third section, in more moderate tempo, presents the Devil's accusations and his subsequent receipt of God's permission to try to tempt Faust. The fourth section is another fast scherzo, this time involving the Cherubim as they scurry about in heaven.

The fifth section, which serves as the Prologue's finale, now begins as a song in honor of the Queen of Heaven. The three important musical motives heard in the Prologue's opening section now return, but they are given new associations which illustrate both Mary's role as a heavenly intercessor and her special relationship to the angels and the Holy Trinity. The connection between Mary and the angels is evident when the music commences with the *Salve Regina* set to the woodwind motive which was previously associated with the angels and which

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<sup>26</sup> Arrigo Boito, *Mefistofele* (Boston: Oliver Ditson & Co., 1880).

is now sung by the angels themselves. Since Boito's setting of the *Salve Regina* uses music to make such a subtle connection between Mary and the Angels one can reasonably conclude that the composer indeed wishes to portray Mary as the Queen of the Angels.

The musical discourse continues with other angels joining the *Salve Regina* song. These angels speak and sing quite quickly and are indeed very chatty. The result is rather busy music with a double texture - one group of angels sings the *Salve Regina*, while another group presents to the Queen the prayers of the faithful. Boito's use of this two-layered structure becomes an effective means of depicting Mary's role in heaven as spiritual mother and intercessor.

It is only natural that such a depiction of Mary's spiritual maternity should include the recitation of the *Ave Maria* and soon the angelic choir begins to repeat the words "Ave Maria, gratia plena." The repetition of the opening words of the *Ave Maria* emphasizes not only Mary's intercessory role, but also her great holiness, which results from the fullness of grace. The influence of recent magisterial activity is likely evident here, since Mary's holiness had been underlined in the definition of the Immaculate Conception a decade or so before the composition of the opera.<sup>27</sup>

The music now moves into the truly critical passage in this final section of the Prologue. First, "Ave Maria" is reduced to just a single word, "Ave:" The repeated "Aves" now form a truly extraordinary passage of ascending harmonies based on a sequence of minor and augmented chords. The effect is to create a sense of direction as the music grows in volume and power. After a final moment of some tension, the sequence of "Aves" reaches its goal - it is the "Ave Signore Hymn," which was heard at the opening of the *Prologue*.

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<sup>27</sup> Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (December 8, 1854) promulgated the definition of the Immaculate Conception. The opera was written in Italy, where Catholic magisterial teaching would have been influential.

The word "Ave" has thus served as a link in a musical transition which connects Mary with God and highlights her special and unique relationship with the Holy Trinity – “Ave Maria” has become “Ave Signore.” This relationship becomes even more evident in the *Prologue's* massive final peroration, when the brass fanfare associated with God's presence returns amidst the full strength of the orchestra and chorus. The *Prologue's* final section has thus connected organically, in both musical and literary terms, *Salve Regina* and *Ave Signore*. By operatic means, Boito has provided a thoroughly theological presentation of Mary's place in heaven.

If the *Prologue* is the primary Marian locus in the opera *Mefistofele*, an additional and rather amusing reference to Mary can be found at the very end of the opera. In the closing scene of the *Epilogue*, Faust is presented with an opportunity to make a definitive choice between following the Devil or the Gospel. To the Devil's dismay, Faust chooses the Gospel. As Faust lifts up the holy book and experiences redemption, the angelic choir of "Ave Signore" from the Prologue returns to celebrate Faust's deliverance and to clinch the opera's conclusion. Such a massive hymn of praise to God causes great consternation to the Devil, who complains loudly that he is unable to bear the presence of the Gospel or the singing of the heavenly choir of angels. As the devil whines, covers his ears and grovels on the ground, his affliction only gets worse - he is showered with roses. Of course roses are associated with the Blessed Mother and although there is no explicit reference to her in the opera's stage directions, one can sensibly infer that Boito used the image of a groveling Devil under a shower of roses to illustrate that the Devil's final defeat in the opera has a Marian dimension.

Wagner: *Das Liebesverbot*

Richard Wagner was a revolutionary and seminal force in music during the latter half of the 19th century. He is known primarily as a composer of operas, which he chose to call by the name of "music drama" or in German *Gesamtkunstwerk* - a total work of art. For Wagner, a music drama had to combine music, text and stagecraft in an integrated way at a level never before attempted in the operatic field. His artistic conception was supported by a highly developed technique of musical themes or *leitmotifs*, in which a musical idea was associated with a particular character, object, place, concept or emotion.

Wagner's output does not include a great deal of music which is specifically religious. In his early opera *Das Liebesverbot*, however, he did set the opening lines of the *Salve Regina*.<sup>28</sup> The opera, whose title translates to "the prohibition against love," is, uncharacteristically for Wagner, a comedy. The essence of the farcical story is that the King, in order to improve the morals of his people, allows one of his ministers to impose a ban on any activities associated with amusement or romantic love.

In accordance with a standard operatic dramatic device of the time, the development of the plot includes a scene in a convent. In order to create a proper atmosphere for that scene, Wagner has a chorus of nuns sing the *Salve Regina*. The musical texture is relaxed and bright, including the use of upper strings and woodwind in combination with bells. The appearance of the *Salve Regina* is brief and purely expository in character, but the music is effective enough, because the use of a Marian antiphon conveys a sense of the gentleness and simple piety which the operatic dramaturgy of Wagner's time typically associated with nuns and a convent.

Wagner: *Der Fliegende Holländer*

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<sup>28</sup> Richard Wagner, *Das Liebesverbot* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1914).

As mentioned previously, a recurring dramatic theme in Wagner's music dramas is the concept of redemption through a woman. An early example in embryonic form can be found in *Der Fliegende Holländer* (1842) with the female character of Senta.<sup>29</sup> Interpretation of Senta in terms of Marian typology is necessarily subjective, but in the case of *Der Fliegende Holländer*, one can identify some interesting parallels between Wagner's heroine and the Blessed Mother.

The story concerns an accursed captain ("the Dutchman") who must remain on his ship at sea because he once blasphemously invoked the Devil. After every seven years, his ship is cast ashore by a storm, but the Dutchman can only remain on land if he finds a wife who will be faithful to him. The action begins as a cycle of seven years comes to an end and the Dutchman makes landfall.

Senta, a young woman in a nearby village, is aware of the story of the Dutchman's curse and sings a ballad ("Johohohe! Johohohe!") in which she expresses her desire to save him. Eventually, with her father's blessing, she and the Dutchman are indeed betrothed. The curse appears to be broken.

In the operas climactic scene, however, as Senta and the Dutchman are preparing to depart, she is confronted by her former lover Erik, who has reason to expect her to be faithful to him. The Dutchman despairs that once again he must return alone to the sea for another seven years. But all is not lost. Senta, in a Wagnerian act of self-sacrifice, rejects Erik's advances and instead drowns herself in the sea in order to show her faithfulness to the Dutchman. Her action proves to be the Dutchman's salvation - the opera ends with the figures of the Dutchman and Senta ascending to heaven,

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<sup>29</sup> Richard Wagner, *Der Fliegende Holländer* (Berlin: Adolph Fürstner, reprinted Mineola: Dover Publications, 1988).

The question arises whether the actions of Senta can be interpreted in a typological sense, since she exhibits the Marian attribute of sacrifice for the redemption for another. Perhaps Wagner's notion of redemption through a woman even allows one to construe the ascending figures of the Dutchman and Senta as an allegory of human redemption and the Assumption. Care must be taken here, however, since Wagner views woman as the active agent of salvation - she is Redeemer, not Co-Redemptrix. With that caveat, Marian typology is not stretched too far. If the self-sacrifice of Senta is interpreted as an allegory for the Blessed Mother's suffering and offering of her Son on Calvary.

Wagner: *Tannhäuser*

In *Tannhäuser* (1845), one finds the most explicit Marian references in all of Wagner's *oeuvre*.<sup>30</sup> The action opens with the title character, Tannhäuser, imprisoned in the Venusberg, which is the abode of the love goddess Venus and a place of constant erotic activity. The reason that Tannhäuser is imprisoned in the Venusberg is one that can only occur in a Wagner music drama - he lost a singing contest. Eventually, however, he grows tired of the sensuous delights of the Venusberg and wishes to return to the real world. He asks the goddess Venus to release him, and when she tries to tempt him to stay, he cries out to Mary for assistance ("Mein Heil liegt in Maria"/"My salvation lies in Mary.") His exclamatory cry to Mary is answered and he is transported back to reality.

The further progress of *Tannhäuser's* storyline reveals that when Tannhäuser lost the singing contest, he was separated from a woman named Elizabeth. Eventually, when another singing contest takes place, Tannhäuser has a chance to win back Elizabeth. Unfortunately for

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<sup>30</sup> Richard Wagner, *Tannhäuser* (Leipzig: C.F. Peters, 1920; reprinted: Mineola: Dover Publications, 1984).

Tannhäuser, when it is his turn, his song so strongly praises erotic love that it shocks the audience of assembled nobles and fine ladies. Because of this indiscretion, Tannhäuser is banished from the kingdom and proceeds to seek redemption and forgiveness by going to Rome to visit the Pope. Regrettably, the Pope tells him that Tannhäuser's chances of receiving absolution are less than the chance that leaves will spring forth from the Pope's staff.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth, who still loves Tannhäuser, lives in despair because she is once again separated from him. In her sadness, Elizabeth prays before an image of the Virgin Mary ("Allmächtige Jungfrau, hör mein Flehen."/"Almighty Virgin, hear my plea."). Regretful that she has not been able to atone for her own faults and those of Tannhäuser, Elizabeth asks Mary for the grace to be accepted into heaven and to obtain mercy for Tannhäuser. Elizabeth's prayer, which receives a gentle setting with modest orchestral forces in accompaniment, effectively expresses both Elizabeth's simple trust in Mary's intercession and Elizabeth's desire to sacrifice herself for the redemption of Tannhäuser.

Soon afterwards, Tannhäuser, having returned unforgiven from his Roman pilgrimage, learns that Elizabeth has indeed died. Above him, he hears a chorus sing that Elizabeth is now present in heaven. In addition, Tannhäuser learns that although he is a sinner, he is in fact blessed, because Elizabeth weeps for him and implores his salvation. Overwhelmed by Elizabeth's love for him, Tannhäuser begs her to pray for him and, in Wagnerian fashion, expires. Yet as he does so, a messenger from Rome arrives and announces that the pope's staff has indeed sprouted leaves. Tannhäuser has achieved forgiveness and salvation.

The Marian references in *Tannhäuser* include the exclamatory, devotional and typological categories. Tannhäuser's exclamatory cry to Mary for help when tempted in the Venusberg and the simple Marian devotion of Elizabeth's prayer are fine examples of operatic

characters turning to Mary for help during a time of need. At the typological level, although asking for death may seem to be an indication of weakness on Elizabeth's part, in actuality she demonstrates her Marian character, because she is willing to sacrifice herself for the redemption of another. One can even find here an image of Mary's spiritual maternity, since Elizabeth, from heaven, prays for Tannhäuser and becomes a channel of the grace through which he receives absolution and final redemption.

### Wagner: *Der Ring des Nibelungen*

The greatest example of the idea of redemption through woman is found in the cycle of music dramas called *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1869). "The Ring Cycle" or simply "The Ring," as this massive composition is called, is one of the largest musical works ever composed and took Wagner 25 years to complete. It actually consists of four music dramas and a complete performance of them runs for about 15 hours or so.

The plot of the Ring cycle is quite complex and involves gods and goddesses, giants and dwarfs, as well as Rhine maidens, Valkyries, forest birds, dragons and other characters. The story is based on Norse mythology and deals with the events surrounding the control of a ring made of gold stolen from the Rhine river. Whoever owns this ring and renounces love obtains the power to control the world. The result, of course, is a great deal of murder, intrigue and other mayhem as the main characters struggle for control of the ring.

In the world of Wagnerian music drama, what is needed is a female character through whom the world can be redeemed from the mess created by the competition for the ring. That woman is Brünnhilde. At her first appearance, she is a half god/half human figure and the leader

of the Valkyries, the winged creatures who, in Norse mythology, hover over the battlefield and carry slain warriors to their eternal reward in Valhalla. In this guise, Brünnhilde is the source of a typical operatic stereotype, since she carries a spear, wears a helmet and a brass chestplate and is enamored of all things martial. During the course of the story, however, she is transformed into an ordinary human woman and becomes a person through whom the world can be redeemed.

Musically, the story of the Ring is told through the use of Wagner's *leitmotif* technique, and musicologists have identified and named perhaps 200 such motives which occur throughout the Ring Cycle's four music dramas. At the same time, whole books have been devoted to discussion of the meaning of the Ring cycle. Consequently, for purposes of simplification, the present discussion will focus on just one *leitmotif*, in order to show how Wagner uses it to depict the Marian quality of redemption through a woman.

Towards the end of the second music drama of the Ring, *Die Walküre*, there is a scene involving Brünnhilde in which Wagner, in a blink of an eye, introduces a musical motive to accompany a prophecy of a hero who will right what is wrong with the world.<sup>31</sup> Naturally, this musical idea or *leitmotif* is referred to by musicologists as the "world redemption motive." Although the world redemption motive is first performed with the full power of a Wagnerian orchestra and singer, it goes by in a flash and does not reappear until the very end of this 15 hour musical marathon.

By the time the Ring Cycle is nearing its *denouement*, the hero (named Siegfried), who was to save the world, has been unjustly murdered.<sup>32</sup> In the climactic scene, Brünnhilde places the body of Siegfried onto a funeral pyre and sings an extended monologue referred to as "Brünnhilde's Immolation." In the later stages of this Immolation scene, the world redemption

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Wagner, *Die Walküre* (Leipzig: C.F. Peters, 1910; reprinted New York: Dover Publications, 1978).

<sup>32</sup> Richard Wagner, *Götterdämmerung* (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1876; reprinted Mineola: Dover Publications, 1982).

motive reappears and is repeated numerous times, both in the vocal line and in the orchestral texture. At length, in a truly Wagnerian act, Brünnhilde calls for her trusty horse Gräne, mounts him, and, as Wagner's massive orchestra hammers out the world redemption motive (along with many other *leitmotifs*), rides into the flames of the funeral pyre. This scene is a superb example of how Wagner is able to use the *leitmotif* technique to explain what is happening during the stage action.

As Brünnhilde enters the funeral pyre, the world itself goes up in flames as well. Even Valhalla, and the gods who live there, are consumed. Yet the world is not destroyed, but rather it is renewed, so that peace and balance are restored when the stolen gold of the ring is returned to its rightful place in the Rhine river. The very last music which is heard at the end of the 15 hours of the Ring Cycle is once again the world redemption motive, this time played gloriously by soaring violins with a sense of fulfillment, restoration, and even benediction and serenity.

To attempt an adequate interpretation of Brünnhilde's role in the Ring Cycle would be an enormous task which cannot be undertaken here. At the very least, one can say that Brünnhilde's act of self-immolation demonstrates a very Marian willingness towards self-sacrifice for the redemption of others. Significantly, however, there is development in the case of Brünnhilde in comparison to those of Senta and Elizabeth, since Brünnhilde gives her life for the entire world, while Senta and Elizabeth offer themselves for a single person.

Brünnhilde's redemptive act is performed in union with the Ring cycle's hero, Siegfried. Here one might draw an analogy with Marian co-redemption. The difficulty is that Wagner's notion of redemption through a woman really lacks the full force of the Catholic notion of co-redemption. Siegfried is not really an adequate Christ-figure, since he is intentionally a

somewhat naïve and even happy-go-lucky character. More importantly, the woman Brünnhilde makes the essential act of redemption, rather than the male character Siegfried.

Nevertheless, Brünnhilde acts out love for Siegfried, even after he at a previous stage of the story had apparently been unfaithful to her. By her act of love, she reverses the damage caused by the renunciation of love which is associated with the destructive tendencies of possession of the ring. For these reasons, Brünnhilde's act can still be interpreted as an allegory for the divine act of redemption in Christ, since that redemption likewise occurs because of unconditional love. A parallel therefore exists between Mary and Brünnhilde, since Mary, in an act of love, offered her Son on Calvary, while Brünnhilde lovingly offers Siegfried on a Wagnerian funeral pyre. In both cases, the result is the redemption of the world.

Jules Massenet: *La Vierge*

Although he is best known as a composer of operas, such as *Manon* and *Werther*, Jules Massenet (1842-1912) also wrote a series of "sacred legends." Examples include *Ève*, on the story of Adam and Eve, *La terre promise* on the story of Moses and *Marie-Magdeleine* on Mary Magdalene during the life of Jesus. These works, which are written in a readily accessible and almost popular style, apparently were produced to satisfy public demand for works on biblical topics. The content of these sacred legends provides an indication of the state of religious sentiment and devotion in France during the closing decades of the 19th century.

*La Vierge* (1880) belongs to this group of sacred legends and falls into the *dramatis personae* category of Marian references, since a soprano soloist assumes the role of Mary

throughout the work.<sup>33</sup> The score, which calls for full orchestra, chorus and vocal soloists, depicts four episodes from the life of Mary - the Annunciation, the Wedding Feast at Cana, the Crucifixion and the Assumption.<sup>34</sup> In the opening section, which has something of the character of a *pastorale*, Mary converses with the Archangel Gabriel. Their exchange, including Mary's *fiat*, is depicted quite literally. Later, shepherds and angels join in a gentle chorus of praise to God. The Wedding Feast at Cana begins as an animated Bacchanalia, in which the full chorus with orchestra expresses the festive nature of the occasion. Mary's conversation with Jesus in John 2 is not depicted at all; instead, after a contrasting interlude devoted to a dance sequence, the chorus becomes aware that a miracle has occurred, after which the celebratory mood is resumed with a renewed vigor. Mary appears only at the end of this section, when she sings an aria expressing her fear of losing Jesus, now that his public ministry has begun.

During the crucifixion scene, Mary's role becomes a series of interjections of despair and fear as she watches the execution of her Son. Rather than a steadfast woman of faith standing next to the cross, Mary is portrayed as a somewhat fearful and groveling figure, who is terrified by what is happening around her. The final scene, dealing with the Assumption, begins with a quiet segment for strings alone called *Le Dernier Sommeil de la Vierge*. (The Last Sleep of the Virgin). The action then moves to the day after the passing of Mary.

The influence of the *Transitus* narratives can be seen here, as the apostles gather at Mary's tomb to mourn her death. Desiring to see her face one last time, they open her tomb, only to discover that it is empty. As the apostles express their wonder and joy, Mary, amidst a choir

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<sup>33</sup> Jules Massenet, *La Vierge: Légende Sacrée en Quatre Scènes* (Paris: G. Hartmann Edition, 1880, reprinted Paris: Heugel, 1894).

<sup>34</sup> Details of the storyline are based on the notes and libretto in Jules Massenet, *La Vierge: Légende Sacrée en Quatre Scènes*. With the Prague Symphony Orchestra conducted by Patrick Fournillier, the Chœurs de l'Orchestre National de Lyon conducted by Bernard Tétu. Recorded October 21, 24 and 27, 1980. Koch Schwan CD 313084 K2, 2 compacts and booklet.

of angels, makes her final appearance. In a concluding aria, she comforts the apostles from heaven, assures them that her friendship remains with them and promises that, after their sufferings are completed, they will be reunited with her in heaven. The work closes with the first line of the *Magnificat* in a *fortissimo* setting for chorus and orchestra.

*La Vierge* thus presents an admixture of biblical texts, apocryphal writings, Marian antiphons and free literary additions. The sentimentality of the libretto and the somewhat sugary quality of much of the music indicates that the work was written to fulfill popular expectations, rather than to present a theologically sound portrait of the Blessed Mother. That Mary was chosen by Massenet as a subject in his series of sacred legends certainly indicates the popularity of Marian devotion in France at the time the work was written, although the specific portrayal of Mary suggests that such devotion was perhaps characterized by a rather superficial emotionalism. In this sense, *La Vierge*, more than the other works considered in the present article, seems trapped in the social context of the time in which it was written. In fact, *La Vierge* is rarely performed today, although at least two recordings, including a video disk, are presently available. *Le dernier Sommeil de la Vierge* excerpt, however, has retained an occasional place in the concert hall.

Mascagni: *Cavalleria Rusticana*

A more sensible example of Marian devotion can be found in the frequently performed *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1890), by the Italian composer Pietro Mascagni (1863-1945).<sup>35</sup> The story of the opera, whose name means “rustic chivalry,” is set in a village of rural Sicily. The action

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<sup>3535</sup> Pietro Mascagni, *Cavalleria Rusticana* (Berlin: Bote & Bock, 1920; reprinted New York: Broude Brothers, 1950).

revolves around romantic intrigues between two peasant couples and deals with themes of infidelity, jealousy, despair and revenge.

Mascagni's opera was a sensational hit in its time, in part due to the quality of its music and libretto, and in part because the opera was written in a new style called *versimo*. *Versimo* opera uses libretti which involve characters and situations taken from the everyday life of ordinary people, instead of following the more typical practice in which libretti utilized characters such as gods, royalty and nobility or stories based on mythology, folk legends, history or literature. Audiences of the time identified with the *versimo* style, which, by using characters to whom one could easily relate, was effective at producing situations of great dramatic and emotional impact.

Of course, the Sicilian countryside of the opera's setting is immersed in the Catholic faith. This Catholic ambience is enhanced by the device of placing the action of the opera on Easter Sunday. The plot line of the opera begins by developing a love triangle, but then there is a pause as the villagers gather outside the local church for Easter morning Mass.

At this point, the strongest Marian reference in the opera emerges, as the assembled country folk begin to sing. Their choice is the *Regina Coeli*, which begins quietly in Latin. As more and more villagers gradually gather, the music grows in intensity. Eventually the language switches to an Italian text, but the subject is still an expression of joy in the Resurrection. Eventually, the hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God grows to a great climax which involves the full orchestra, vocal soloists and chorus. Afterwards, the opera's plot resumes its course towards its tragic conclusion, in which the two main male characters fight a primitive duel to the death.

Mascagni's use of the *Regina Coeli* prayer provides an effective episode of dramatic contrast within the developing plot line of *Cavalleria Rusticana*, because the *verismo* style of the opera makes it possible to make the Marian piety of the assembled churchgoers on Easter Sunday morning serve a number of dramatic purposes. First, the singing of ordinary people, which occurs in a liturgical context and expresses through Mary both Easter joy and hope in a future resurrection, serves as an effective foil to the darkness of the primary plot line. The contrast between Marian centered joy in the resurrection and baser emotions also serves as an expository function, which enhances the operas escalating sense of tragedy. In addition, the *Regina Coeli* episode, through the use of full orchestral and vocal forces, extends the musical structure of the opera in a way which provides a needed sense of the passage of time in order to allow the opera's plot line to develop. Since Marian devotion has such a central place in the opera's thoroughly Catholic setting, it seems quite appropriate that Mascagni would use the singing of the *Regina Coeli* on Easter morning in order to give his opera the necessary sense of extension and dramatic progression. Thus Mascagni gives us another instance of how Marian references can enhance the development and the effectiveness of an opera's storyline.

Leoncavallo: *Pagliacci*

Completed by the Italian composer Ruggero Leoncavallo in 1892, *Pagliacci*, with its images of clowns, bass drums and the sobbing tenor of the great aria "Vesti la giubbia", is perhaps the opera most iconic and recognizable to the general public - even to those who have never set foot in an opera house.<sup>36</sup> Like *Cavalleria Rusticana*, with which it is often paired in operatic performances, *Pagliacci* is an example of the *verismo* style. This time, the setting is a

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<sup>36</sup> Ruggero Leoncavallo, *Pagliacci*. (Milan: Sonzogno, 1895; reprinted New York: Broude Brothers, 1951).

small traveling troupe of actors (the "*pagliacci*" or "players" of the opera's title) who arrive in a local village for their next performance. The dramatic action again revolves around a classic love triangle and finds its consummation through the dramatic device of a play within a play.

The primary male character, Canio, is the head of the troupe and at first may seem to be overly suspicious of his wife Nedda. She certainly seems faithful enough when approached by another member of the troupe, the cripple Tonio, since she mocks him and rejects his amorous advances. In response, Tonio invokes the Virgin of the Assumption in order to warn Nedda that she will pay for her mockery of him ("Per la Vergin pia di mezz'agosto; Nedda: lo giuro, me la pagherai!")

Nevertheless, as the story develops, it becomes clear that there really is a basis for Canio's jealousy. Nedda is indeed having an affair with a young man named Silvio. A short time later, when Canio confronts his cheating wife, the Holy Virgin is invoked again. The enraged husband demands to know the name of his wife's lover. As he does so, he commands his wife to tell the truth by swearing by the Madonna ("Per la Madonna").

The climactic scene of the opera takes place in Act II when the troupe begins its performance. During the course of the play, Tonio's character introduces Nedda's as the "vergin devina" ("divine virgin") much to the amusement of the assembled audience of villagers. Of course, that amusement turns to horror as the play is gradually transformed into a real life drama of mounting jealousy and rage in which Canio ultimately kills both Nedda-and Silvio in a violent fit of passion.

The three Marian references in *Pagliacci* are primarily of an exclamatory character. In conformity with the *verismo* style, each of the references to Mary can be viewed as ordinary expressions in the local dialect of a traveling troupe of actors at the time in which the opera was

written. The use of these exclamatory expressions serves the purpose of characterization - the vindictiveness of Tonio, the anger of Canio or a humorous interjection to describe Nedda's character during the course of the play. *Pagliacci* therefore provides an interesting example of how everyday speech can be influenced by the practices of Marian devotion of a particular time and place.

Puccini: *La Bohème*

Like Mascagni and Leoncavallo, Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) is another example of a composer who wrote in the *verismo* style. Puccini's first major success was *La Bohème* and it has remained a staple of the operatic repertoire since its premiere in 1896.<sup>37</sup> The story concerns a group of struggling artists, among whom the poet Rodolfo is the primary male protagonist. The group is eventually joined by two female characters, Mimi, who meets Rodolfo when she comes to ask for a candle, and Musetta, who is the girlfriend of the painter Marcello.

Through the serpentine storyline of the opera's first three acts, Mimi and Rodolfo fall in love and then are separated. As the fourth and final act moves to a conclusion, Rodolfo and Mimi have been reunited, although their reunion is an unhappy one, since Mimi lies in bed dying of the fashionable operatic illness of consumption. During the final scene, while Rodolfo and the other members of the group are gathered around Mimi, Musetta turns to Mary for help. Musetta's prayer is a lovely one - "Madonna benedetta, fate la grazia a questa poveretta che non debba morire."/ "Blessed Mother, grant grace to this poor one who does not deserve to die": and then later "E che possa guarire, Madonna santa. io sono indegna di perdono, mentre invece Mimi è un angelo del cielo"/ "Let her be healed, Holy Mary. I am not worthy of forgiveness, but Mimi

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<sup>37</sup>Giacomo Puccini, *La Bohème* (Milan: G. Ricordi, 1920).

is an angel from heaven," Unfortunately, in the operatic world, prayers often go unanswered and in this case the brokenhearted Rodolfo soon discovers that Mimi has died.

While Musetta's prayer is a beautiful instance of Marian devotion on the part of an operatic character, her action also serves a dramatic purpose. The invocation of Mary's intercession on behalf of an ailing friend was evidently an accepted form of Marian devotion in the Italy at the end of the 19th century. Audiences of the time would therefore naturally have certain expectations regarding the portrayal of Marian devotion, and *La Bohème's* final scene takes advantage of those expectations in order to create a more poignant atmosphere as Mimi dies surrounded by her friends and lover. Containing both devotional and expository aspects, Musetta's prayer is another effective example of how Marian devotion can be used to enhance an opera's effectiveness.

Puccini: *Tosca*

Another frequently performed Puccini opera, *Tosca* (1900) abounds in Marian references.<sup>38</sup> Most of these take place in the opening act, which is set in the church of Sant'Andrea della Valle in Rome. The act opens as the escaped political prisoner, Angelotti, enters the church and approaches a statue of the Madonna. He finds a key which was hidden there by his sister and thereby gains entrance into a locked area of the church where he can hide from the police authorities who are pursuing him.

As Angelotti leaves, the Sacristan enters. There is a great deal of cleaning up required, since the inside of the church is being repainted. As the Sacristan goes about his work, bells ring and he drops to his knees and prays the *Angelus* (this may in fact be the only instance

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<sup>38</sup> Giacomo Puccini, *Tosca* (Milan: G. Ricordi, 1924).

of an operatic character praying an extended segment of the *Angelus*). The Sacristan's prayer is interrupted, however when the painter, Cavaradossi, enters.

After an exchange between the Sacristan and Cavaradossi, in which the Sacristan mockingly compares the painter's work to the beautiful statue of the Madonna, the Sacristan exits and Tosca, the eponymous female protagonist of the opera, enters. She is a fiery and jealous character (she even mistakes the departing Sacristan for a female companion of Cavaradossi.) Yet she also has her gentle and pious side - although she and Cavaradossi are in love, she will not talk to him until she has prayed before the statue of the Madonna.

Later, as their conversation progresses, Cavaradossi expresses his love for Tosca, but she gently rebukes him with the phrase "Innanzi la Madonna, No"/"Not before the Madonna." A little while later, Cavaradossi is able to turn this rebuke around. As Tosca is preparing to leave, she asks Cavaradossi to forgive her jealousy and falls into his arms. With an affectionate smile he responds with the same words used by Tosca - "Innanzi la Madonna, No."

All these references to Mary - the statue of the Madonna, the praying of the *Angelus* and the gentle rebukes between the two lovers, have so far been of an exclamatory and expository character which serves the dramatic purposes of introducing the main characters and establishing the church as a sacred space. That sacredness later becomes a foil to the character of the Chief of Police and villain of the opera, Scarpia, who enters the church towards the end of the first act in pursuit of Angelotti. Scarpia may be chasing political prisoners, but he is also physically desirous of Tosca.

The opera can now draw a strong contrast between the peaceful environment of the church, as represented by the presence of the statue of the Madonna, and the cruel and violent character of Scarpia. This characterization of Scarpia reaches a high point at the very end of the

act, as a religious procession enters the church singing the *Te Deum*. Puccini's music now pursues a double course - as the setting of the *Te Deum* grows in power, Scarpia is heard on the side expressing his lust for Tosca.

Act II of *Tosca* develops around a confrontation between Scarpia and Tosca herself. The scene is Scarpia's quarters, where he has taken Cavaradossi into custody because the painter assisted Angelotti's flight. The imprisonment of Cavaradossi now becomes a means for Scarpia to fulfill his desire for Tosca. Over the course of a long exchange between Scarpia and Tosca, which includes the sounds of Cavaradossi being tortured in the basement, Scarpia offers to give the two lovers a bill of passage to freedom, if only Tosca will submit to Scarpia one time. In reply, Tosca sings the well-known aria "Vissi d'arte," in which she describes how she always has lived for art (she is in fact an opera singer) and how she has always been faithful to the Madonna. Tosca even mentions that she once left jewels for Mary on an altar.

Written in Puccini's uniquely lush and lyrical style, this beautiful aria, with its references to Tosca's devotion to the Madonna, presents Tosca as an innocent and pure young woman. However, once Tosca agrees to Scarpia's bargain and he is busy writing out the bill of passage, she secretly takes a knife. As Scarpia completes his work and approaches her with open arms to embrace her, she stabs him in the heart and he dies. This sequence of events provides another example of how Marian devotion can be used to assist in the characterization of a complex person - the gentle side of Tosca, which is evident in her reference to jewels and the Madonna, stands in sharp contrast to the fiery and jealous character which emerges in full as her lover Cavaradossi is threatened and she acts to save him by murdering Scarpia.

The final Marian reference in *Tosca* occurs in the concluding Act III when Tosca visits Cavaradossi in prison. She describes how Scarpia tried to force himself on her and mentions that

she appealed to the Madonna and the saints for help. Once again, Tosca here demonstrates her devotion to Mary. At the same time, this Marian episode serves as a dramatic foil to the final scene of the opera, when Tosca and Cavaradossi, believing that only a mock execution will now take place before they can escape to freedom, discover that Scarpia ordered a real execution after all. Once more Tosca's fiery character comes to the fore - as Cavaradossi lies dead and the police pursue her for her crime, she jumps to her death from the prison walls with the cry "O Scarpia, avanti a Dio!"/"O Scarpia, before God!"

Giacomo Puccini: *Suor Angelica*

After the success of the operas for which he is best known, *La Bohème*, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*, Puccini sought a different operatic challenge. He undertook therefore to write a trilogy of short operas, each about an hour long, so that the set could be performed in a single evening. Called *Il Trittico* and premiered in 1918, the three component operas are of contrasting character; for this purpose, Puccini eventually chose *Il Tabbaro*, *Suor Angelica* and *Gianni Schicchi*.<sup>39</sup> The first is a typical love triangle which culminates in murder, the second depicts the story of a troubled member of a female religious community, and the third is a comedy involving family members who fight amongst themselves over their inheritance. As the opera in *Il Trittico* with a specifically Marian connection, *Suor Angelica* thus stands as the middle segment in Puccini's trilogy. Placed between a tale of jealous murder and the madcap antics of greedy heirs, the story of *Suor Angelica* provides elements of both the gentleness of nuns in community and of the anguish of the opera's title character.

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<sup>39</sup> Giacomo Puccini, *Il Trittico*. (Milan: G. Ricordi, 1919; reprinted Minola: Dover Publications, 1996).

The opening section of the opera depicts the communal life of nuns and is set to music in Puccini's most saccharine style. The banter among the nuns includes several references to Mary, so it is clear that whatever the charism of their community might be, it certainly has a strong Marian foundation. The action moves gradually from community to the individual, so that the storyline ultimately centers on Sister Angelica herself and her personal history - she has joined the convent after leaving her wealthy family, because she had an illegitimate child.

The consequences of this back story involving the title character give the opera an escalating dramatic power. The crisis in the storyline is initiated when a member of Sister Angelica's family comes to visit her. At this point, the sweetness of the music of the opera's opening section is replaced with darker musical material, which only grows more ominous as the action progresses.

The visitor is in fact Sister Angelica's aunt, a Princess, who asks Angelica to renounce her claim to inheritance, because Angelica's sister is to be married. Interestingly, a Marian reference occurs when Sister Angelica responds; although she has atoned for her sin of having an illegitimate child by becoming a nun, she is not prepared to sacrifice everything to the Virgin Mary. The reason Sister Angelica is unwilling to give up her inheritance is because she is thinking of the future needs of her illegitimate son. At this point, the Princess informs Sister Angelica that her son has died.

Devastated by this news, Sister Angelica sings the aria "Senza mamma/"Without mother," and has a vision in which she hears her son asking her to join him in heaven. Overcome by her grief and her desire to see her son again, Sister Angelica takes poison. This desperate act only increases her distress, because she realizes that suicide is a mortal sin and therefore she has condemned herself to eternal separation from her son. In her dying moments, she cries out to the

Virgin Mary for help and forgiveness. As Sister Angelica expires during the opera's closing moments, Mary herself appears with Sister Angelica's son and all three of them enter into paradise together.

This final scene, in which Sister Angelica cries out to Mary for assistance, packs a great emotional impact, which in turn makes the appearance of Mary even more effective as the culminating dramatic stroke. As a result, the concluding sequence of the opera effectively illustrates Mary's intercession and spiritual maternity in at least two ways. First of all, Mary functions as a channel of grace, through which a repentant sinner is able to receive God's forgiveness. In addition, Mary's maternal love moves her to reunite a distraught mother with her dead child, so that the two can enjoy eternity together in heaven.

Puccini's opera therefore presents Marian invocation as a natural and productive spiritual practice. Certainly, aspects of Puccini's portrayal of Marian devotion, both among the nuns and specifically in the case of Sister Angelica, reflect common perceptions of Marian spirituality and religious life in Italy at the time the opera was written. Examples are making material sacrifices for Mary and asking her for forgiveness of sins. Consequently, because of its prevalence in the culture of Puccini's day, Marian devotion becomes for him an element which is compatible with the *verismo* style, and thus in *Sour Angelica* the practice of the invocation of Mary is depicted in a thoroughly positive manner.

Janáček: *Jenůfa*

*Jenůfa* (1904), by the Czech composer Leoš Janáček (1854-1928), is yet another operatic story based on a love triangle.<sup>40</sup> The young woman Jenůfa has become pregnant by her lover Števa. They wish to get married, but Jenůfa's stepmother forbids them until Števa has been sober for a year. At the same time, Jenůfa's stepbrother Laca attempts to court her, but when she rejects his advances, he scares her face with a knife.

During Act II, Jenůfa, with the assistance of her stepmother, delivers her baby. Since Jenůfa has been disfigured, Števa is no longer willing to marry her. Likewise, Laca is discouraged when he learns about the baby. Jenůfa's stepmother decides to resolve this situation by making it possible for Jenůfa to marry. Believing that she is acting in Jenůfa's best interest, the stepmother gives Jenůfa a sleeping draft and, once Jenůfa is asleep, drowns the baby in a nearby river.

The Marian reference in the opera now occurs when Jenůfa awakes from her sleep and discovers that her baby is missing. She kneels before an image of Mary and prays the *Salve Regina*. The musical setting is gently lyrical and flowing, but at the conclusion of the prayer, when Jenůfa asks Mary to protect the baby, the music becomes violent and even dissonant. At this point, the stepmother returns and informs Jenůfa that the baby has died of a fever (the truth about the baby's fate is not revealed until the final act of the opera).

Jenůfa's invocation of Mary through the praying of the *Salve Regina* is another example of a Marian devotional act by an opera character who turns to Mary in a time of distress. Since Jenůfa's prayer goes unanswered, the invocation of Mary simply serves to increase the shock when Jenůfa learns the truth that her baby is dead. The music which accompanies the *Salve Regina* itself expresses this shock when a quiet passage suddenly becomes loud and dark. The

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<sup>40</sup> Leoš Janáček, *Jenůfa* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1917).

whole episode works dramatically and at the same time indicates something of the expectations of an early 20th century Czech audience regarding common forms of Marian devotion.

### Havergal Brian: *The Tigers*

The British composer Havergal Brian (1876-1972) is not a well-known figure, but a case certainly can be made that he is perhaps the most unjustly neglected composer of the 20th century. He is best known for his first symphony, the *Gothic*, which has the distinction of being the largest and longest Symphony ever written. Brian went on to complete a symphonic canon with the remarkable total of 32 symphonies, 27 of which were written after he was 70 years old.

Although Brian's symphonic work has received some attention in recent years, his operatic work has been almost totally neglected. In the case of *The Tigers* (1929), part of the reason for the neglect is that the manuscript of the full score, in a common occurrence for Brian, was lost for over 30 years and was only rediscovered in 1977 in the archives of a London publishing house after a reward was offered by the Havergal Brian Society. The rediscovery of the score allowed the work to be examined by musicians and musicologists for the first time and eventually the work was staged in 1983, which is to date the opera's only performance.<sup>41</sup>

The "Tigers" of the opera's title are members of a regiment of the British Army and the opera itself is a satire on military life and authority.<sup>42</sup> A significant Marian reference occurs at the end of Act II after the Tigers have participated in a mock battle. At this point, the orchestra

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<sup>41</sup> David J. Brown "The Rediscovery of *The Tigers*." Havergal Brian Society Website. [http://www.havergalbrian.org/thetigers\\_2.htm](http://www.havergalbrian.org/thetigers_2.htm).

<sup>42</sup> Details of the storyline are based on the synopsis found at John Quinn, "Review: Recording of the Month - Havergal Brian, *The Tigers*." MusicWeb International website. [http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2015/Mar/Brian\\_tigers\\_SBT31496.htm](http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2015/Mar/Brian_tigers_SBT31496.htm).

plays two purely orchestral pieces called *Gargoyles* and *Lacryma*, which serve as a sort of ballet sequence and intermezzo.

The scene is a two towered Gothic cathedral and the action concerns the cathedral's statues, which come to life at night. The first piece, as its name implies, involves the gargoyles which are the denizens of the first tower of the cathedral. The second piece, however, involves the other tower, where a statue of the Sorrowful Mother along with several weeping angels is found.

In *Lacryma*, the combination of music and the image of a weeping mother among angels expresses the emotion of sorrow in several ways. Much of the music has a restless character and in places repeated figures occur which sound like weeping. Brian makes some use of a four note motive, which is an inversion of the first four notes of the composition *Lacrymae* by the early English composer John Dowland (1563-1626). A longer, sorrowful melody also occurs within the course of the piece and returns at a later stage with some expressive power on the English horn. As the music draws to a close, the weeping angels move towards the Sorrowful Mother and receive a benediction from her.<sup>43</sup>

This essentially expository Marian reference in *The Tigers* thus occurs within an unusual instrumental interlude. Following a mock battle which spoofs military activity and authority, the music nevertheless has a serious intent in providing a telling commentary on war. To do so, Brian employs both the darkness associated with gargoyles and the weeping of the Sorrowful Mother with the angels around her. In this manner, Brian reflects on the great losses experienced by the British people during World War I and it is notable that he would turn to the Sorrowful Mother to provide an operatic representation of his nation's grief. For this reason, *Lacryma*

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<sup>43</sup> Musical analysis is based on the extended commentary at Adrian Ure, "Investigating *The Tigers* Part 13: Gothic Echoes: *Gargoyles* and *Lacryma*." Havergal Brian Society Website. [http://www.havergalbrian.org/thetigers\\_ure13.htm](http://www.havergalbrian.org/thetigers_ure13.htm).

provides an example of how a reference to Mary can be used to illustrate the deeper meaning of the operatic storyline. *The Tigers* may be a spoof on military affairs, but the references to the Sorrowful Mother in *Lacryma* indicate that there are more profound and serious waters beneath the surface of the opera's farcical action.

Bohuslav Martinů: *Hry o Marii*

*Hry o Marii*, (*The Miracles of Our Lady*), written in 1935 by the Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959), actually consists of musical settings of four plays.<sup>44</sup> Martinů selected the stories from four different religious genres: biblical parable, medieval miracle theater, folk Christmas song and fantastic legend. The individual stories (Mary appears as a character in three of them) do not necessarily follow a direct dramatic line in order to present a specific spiritual message. Instead, the stories are deliberately presented in a somewhat disjointed fashion, so that a free atmosphere is created in which the listener is required to complete the story line and is thereby drawn into the stage action.<sup>45</sup>

The opera is in two parts, each comprising a pair of separate stories.<sup>46</sup> The opening story of the first part, based on a liturgical play from the 12th century, presents the parable of The Wise and Foolish Virgins. Mary does not appear as a character in this segment and there is no miracle. This opening story serves as introduction for the rest of the work by emphasizing the future coming of Christ and the need for personal preparation. The biblical parable becomes a

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<sup>44</sup> Martinů, Bohuslav. *Hry o Marii*. Praha: Panton, 1979.

<sup>45</sup> "Hry o Marii." Czech National Theater website.

Accessed at: <http://archiv.narodni-divadlo.cz/default.aspx?jz=cs&dk=Inscenace.aspx&ic=5398&pn=254affcc-cb43-4078-86fe-c5544619cf67&sz=0&zz=OPR&fo=000..>

<sup>46</sup> Details of the literary background and storyline of the four plays in *Hry o Marii* are based on the booklet and libretto in, Bohuslav Martinů, *Hry o Marii (The Miracle of Our Lady)*, with the Prague Symphony Orchestra and the Prague Radio Chorus conducted by Jirí Bělohlávek, recorded December 11, 1982 to February 13, 1983, Supraphon 11 1802-2 632, 2 compact discs and booklet.

dramatic foil, so that in each of the following three stories a female character can be interpreted as a foolish virgin, who is saved and made wise through the miraculous intercession of Mary.

The second story, Mariken of Nimégue, is based on a 15th century Flemish miracle story. The beautiful girl Mariken leaves her grandfather and their country home to go to the market in a large town. While she is there, Mariken is led astray by the sights and sounds of the shops. She is seduced by the Devil, whom she accompanies on a journey throughout the surrounding countryside. The two of them cause many people to fall into sin.

During this segment, Mary is depicted as an advocate for sinners, who pleads with her Son to restrain the execution of His judgment on recalcitrant sinners. In the closing stages of the story, Mariken is in a small town, where she is a spectator at a masked play depicting Jesus, Mary and the Cross. As Mariken is drawn to the play, the Devil tries to lure her away. Mary intervenes by telling Mariken that even the greatest sinner who repents can be saved. Moved to repentance through Mary's intercession, Mariken falls to her knees, cries out to Christ for forgiveness and is saved.

The second part of *Hry o Marii* begins with the Nativity story. The scriptural narrative is told from a folk perspective, in which biblical material is combined with additional secular elements. For example, Mary visits a blacksmith as she searches for lodging. He tells her he has no room for her to stay, and Mary runs away when she learns that the blacksmith is forging three nails for her Son. Nevertheless, Mary later heals the crippled hands of the blacksmith's daughter, when the girl comes to visit the manger. Interestingly, in a reference to the *virginitas in partu*, the storyline mentions that Mary felt no pain in giving birth to Christ. Another secular element is introduced at the end of the story, when Mary laments that she cannot find godparents for her infant Son, while angels and shepherds sing *gloria in excelsis Deo*.

The final opera, called *Sister Paskalina*, is a legendary story which combines Moravian folk poetry with texts from the Latin liturgy. The story concerns the eponymous nun, who is tempted through a vision of a knight to leave her life in the convent and pursue a secular lover. Paskalina's struggles with this temptation are accompanied by a chorus which sings the *Ave Maria*. Nevertheless, Sister Paskalina leaves her veil and keys before a statue of Mary and departs the convent. When Paskalina is gone, the statue of Mary comes to life, puts on Paskalina's veil and picks up her keys. Mary thus replaces Paskalina in the religious community, so that no one in the convent knows that the sister has left.

Later on, Paskalina is sentenced to death for the murder of her lover. As she is tied to the stake and the flames rise around her, she cries out to Mary for help. The chorus sings excerpts from the Requiem Mass, asking forgiveness for Paskalina. Suddenly, Mary appears, disperses the flames, and returns Paskalina to the convent. As the nuns of the community surround Paskalina, Mary emerges from their midst and returns Paskalina's veil and keys to her. Marian intercession has restored Paskalina to her original status in the convent. Overcome with joy, Paskalina expires to the words *dona nobis pacem*.

The above outline of the opera's stories only hints at the Marian elements in *Hry o Marii*. The last three stories contain more references to Marian devotion and invocation than can be enumerated in the present study. The stories are permeated by a Marian atmosphere, which is enriched by the essential simplicity, accessibility and uncluttered style of the accompanying music. Musically and dramatically, Martinů employs a wide range of means of expression - church and folk singing, dance, spoken word, operatic arias, a fairground band, crowd scenes, dreamlike delusions and a concluding symphonic sequence of dramatic power - and combines

them freely to illustrate a single theme: Mary is someone who heals wounds and replaces them with joy.<sup>47</sup>

Honegger: *Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher*

Although *Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher*, completed in 1938 by the Swiss composer Arthur Honegger (1893-1955), is perhaps more properly classified as an oratorio rather than an opera, it merits inclusion because it does tell a story in which Mary appears as one of the characters.<sup>48</sup> The setting of the piece is during events at the time of Joan of Arc's trial and execution. The drama and tragedy of the scene is extended through the use of flashbacks to earlier events during Joan's life.

Two Marian references occur towards the end of the work. The first takes place during one of the final flashbacks, when Joan reminisces about May celebrations in which she participated as a child. Joan piously expresses the wish that she could be a candle on an altar to Mary.

The second and more extended Marian reference occurs as Joan is tied to the stake and the flames are rising around her. At this point, Mary appears and encourages Joan to face the flames with courage and faith. Joan initially responds to Mary with an expression of fear of death, but Mary continues to comfort Joan. In musical terms, the role of the accompanying chorus, which previously had treated Joan with a certain contempt and even mockery, is now transformed into a heavenly song of praise for Joan. The choral music accompanies Joan as she dies and is then welcomed by Mary into eternal glory.

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<sup>47</sup> Czech National Theater website.

<sup>48</sup> Arthur Honegger, *Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher* (Paris: Salabert, 1939).

*Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher* thus provides another operatic example of productive Marian intercession. Mary's purpose here is not to rescue Joan, but rather to be present with Joan as she experiences death and glorification. Likewise, Mary's appearance during the climactic moment of the work lends Joan's death with a special meaning, since through Mary's intercession Joan is welcomed into heaven as a heroine of the faith.

Poulenc: *Dialogues des Carmélites*

*Dialogues des Carmélites* (1955) by the French composer François Poulenc (1899-1963) is set during the time of the French Revolution.<sup>49</sup> The action is centered within a community of Carmelite nuns, who are persecuted for their faith by the authorities of the revolutionary government. The opera contains two significant Marian references.

The first occurs during Act II, when the nuns realize that they are about to be forced out of their convent. Poulenc chose to depict the nuns' peaceful acceptance of this eventuality by having them sing the *Ave Maria*. The setting is *a cappella* and expresses the nuns' unquestioning surrender to Providence, yet there is also a hint of an underlying current of fear - the nuns know that more than property is at stake, since they are likely to be executed for their faith.

Martyrdom is indeed the fate of most of the nuns, as becomes clear at the opera's conclusion, when the second Marian reference takes place. Most of the members of the Carmelite community are indeed condemned to death by the governmental authorities. As the nuns prepare to face execution, they begin to sing the *Salve Regina*. The musical setting is unprecedented, with a dark atmosphere and vocal lines which include grinding harmonies accompanied by the

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<sup>49</sup> François Poulenc, *Dialogues des Carmélites* (Milan: Ricordi ; Melville, N.Y.: Belwin Mills Publishing Corporation, 1959).

full strength of the orchestra. On top of this powerful musical content, the singing of the *Salve Regina* is punctuated by the sound of the guillotine as its blade falls over and over again. As the singing continues, the chorus of nuns is gradually reduced, as one by one they leave their companions to mount the scaffold and face execution.

Occurring as it does in a relatively recent opera, Poulenc's use of Marian references in *Dialogues des Carmélites* shows an unusual sympathy for Marian devotion and for members of a religious community. At a moment of crisis, when the community faces the loss of their building and property, the nuns faithfully turn to Mary and her intercession for assistance. In the final scene, the faith of the Carmelite community, expressed through the singing of the *Salve Regina*, is contrasted with the tyranny and violence of the secular government. Poulenc thus uses Marian devotion to present religious faith and religious life as a positive and superior alternative to the oppression and intolerance of the ideals of the French Revolution.

### **Conclusion**

This survey of operas with a Marian aspect has highlighted the variety of ways in which Mary appears in these musical works. The question arises whether these Marian references can be construed in some way that places them into a general pattern. A trajectory can perhaps be traced by considering the chronological distribution of Marian references in opera.

Mary's operatic presence becomes most visible at about the time of Verdi in the middle of the 19th century. That presence continues without diminution throughout the rest of the century and into the early decades of the 20th century. After the First World War, Marian references suddenly become noticeably less frequent.

Although a detailed analysis of this trajectory is beyond the scope of the present article, one can reasonably suggest that the prevalence of Marian references in opera is related to the changing culture in Europe. In the middle the 19th century, Marian devotion was popular in many parts of the culture, especially in countries important for opera, like Italy and France. At that time, the operatic form had moved away from its origins in Greek mythology. Individual operas exhibit a growing tendency to engage with characters from real life, and naturally Marian references become more common. This process reached its culmination in the *verismo* style in Italy in the 1890's with the works of Leoncavallo, Mascagni and Puccini. Unsurprisingly, these works in particular are often imbued with a particularly Catholic and Marian ambience.

As disillusionment and nihilism spread throughout European culture in the wake of the Great War and then again in the wake of the Second World War, one can observe changes in the manner of Mary's presence in opera. Marian references now take on a new meaning. For example, in Brian's *The Tigers*, the Sorrowful Mother becomes a locus for the mourning of loss of life in war. Similarly, as European culture turned away from its religious and specifically Christian foundations, it is not surprising that Marian references become less frequent and even to a certain extent countercultural. Poulenc's use of the *Salve Regina* in such extraordinary fashion at the end of *Dialogues des Carmélites* juxtaposes religious faith and particularly Marian devotion to the oppression and persecution carried out by a supposedly enlightened, modern and democratic government.

Another especially fascinating aspect of opera's Marian trajectory can be found in the works of Wagner, a composer who presents most prominently the idea of redemption through a woman. In doing so, Wagner gives the operatic repertoire its strongest examples of typological representations of Mary. The source of Wagner's work is often Norse mythology, in whose

sagas Wagner found the material which could give his works a specifically Germanic basis. An interesting point for further study is the determination of how much the notion of redemption through a woman is derived from Norse mythology and how much is a product of Wagner's personal philosophical outlook. In any event, the Marian characteristics of self-sacrifice for the redemption of others permeates Wagner's output to an extent which can be found in the work of no other operatic composer.

As a final note, this article in its present stage is not the end of the Marian operatic journey. The author continues to search the operatic repertoire for Marian references and hopes to identify many more for inclusion. As more works are found, the Marian trajectory can be explored in greater depth. Nevertheless, the works discussed above provide a representative example of the great richness and depth which references to Mary and devotion to her give to the great art form which is called opera.

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### **Notes on the Bibliography:**

1. Articles for individual composers in the *New Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians* were used to verify biographical information and dates of composition or performance.
2. The summary of storylines utilizes the synopses in *The Victor Book of the Opera* and *The Rough Guide .to Opera*.
3. Whenever possible, the author's commentary is based on the published musical scores. All scores were found in the online library at [imslp.org](http://imslp.org). This site only includes public domain material. Recorded performances were consulted in combination with the printed scores.
4. When scores were not available, the author has relied on recorded performances.
5. Compact disc recordings are included in the bibliography only when the accompanying booklet was consulted for background information or for the libretto/text used in the composition.