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Paolo Bosisio has always been, for me, a colleague in the university. One of the most brilliant: philologist, theatre historian, but also a great organizer of culture. When he suddenly retired - eight years ahead of time - without forewarning anyone, not even me (although I had always been academically close to him) I felt bad about it, I felt a little betrayed. But above all I did not understand why he opted for such a radical and unusual choice. In Italy, in fact, university professors are the only social category that would never want to retire. Once (not many years ago, I would say until the end of the Eighties, if I remember correctly), thanks to a late-feudal privilege, now defunct, they were able to remain at the University even a good bit after the age of seventy: if Alzheimer does not make me rave, even up to 77, thanks to some lucky bureaucratic connection to the sumptuous prerogatives of the magistrates, certainly the real caste in Italy, second only to politicians. So - I asked myself - why did Paolo Bosisio have all this desire to leave? It took me some time to understand that the main reason (I am not saying the only one) was the possibility of devoting more time to the stage direction of operas. In truth I had already been a spectator of some performances directed by him, years before, in Ivrea, where he - in

one of his many parallel lives – ran the artistic direction of Teatro Giacosa: but I did not understand (because I did not know) that it was a true, devastating passion, like everything that is rooted in the tenacious memory of our childhood.

For Bosisio, the opera theatre was a return to origins: when, from the age of six, he began to be a habitual spectator of opera, following his melomaniac grandmother on his father's side, owning a box at La Scala.

To be honest, his grandmother did not understand much about theatre, having grown up in a world where stage directing simply did not exist. She was interested in music and above all in orchestra conducting. She knew all the operas by heart, although not being a musician. For such a reason she chose from the beginning a box, number 3, first order on the right-hand side, near the proscenium, overlooking the wind and harps section of the orchestra. The two harpists were less than two meters from grandmother and grandchild. The direct sight from the box was the conductor (then still called “concertatore”, although the profession of stage director was beginning to make its way in those years). In fact, to be able to see two thirds of the stage (the rest inevitably remaining covered from view) it was necessary to twist the neck and lean a little. But grandma said it didn't matter. Of course, the grandmother had her own ideas, and she was tough. After enjoying a performance directed by Luca Ronconi, she explained to her nephew: “that communist did not understand anything about opera”!

Obviously the creative vocation does not forget but rather builds on the previous professional career as professor and scholar of theatre history, so that the first feature that always characterizes Bosisio's artistic work is the wisdom of a cultural and historical-social reconstruction of the opera in question. So - just to exemplify within the range of Paolo's creations - staging *La Traviata* in 2009 (Teatro Coccia – Novara), he entitled his director's note “*La Traviata*: a social drama. For the audience of opera houses, always a little traditionalist, Verdi's masterpiece is, as you know, essentially the tragedy of Violetta, a woman “sola e abbandonata”, who sacrifices herself for heartfelt reasons and generously performs the extreme gesture: she renounces her own happiness, sacrificing herself to the advantage of her beloved's sister, the young girl described by Germont-father as “pura siccome un angelo”, in order to be the perfect counterpart of the “traviata” Violetta. But things are not like that at all, as everyone who has read *La Dame aux camélias* by Alexandre Dumas' son knows (at least Verdi's inspirational drama, if not also the eponymous semi-autobiographical novel, from which the French author himself derived his drama). The story of a high-class prostitute, connected to the upper-class milieu, with whom a young man of a good family falls in love, risking his own financial ruin. His father, however, convinces the woman to break off the relationship, except that she dies in the end of tuberculosis, but her not-to-be father-in-law “generously” leads his son to her deathbed. The redeemed sinner dies, not before making her ex-lover promise that he will marry a good and honest woman. The romantic and pathetic accents are not able to conceal that the French bourgeoisie's heart beats on the left, exactly where the inside pocket for the wallet is. Of course, Verdi moves within a society that is much less secular and modern than the French one, and therefore he must camouflage, attenuate, moralize (or at least pretend to moralize).

The title becomes *La traviata*, that is the “corrupt woman”, i.e. the literal translation of the “fille perdue”, as the protagonist was defined in the original French novel. However, Verdi does not retreat on the substance. Bosisio rightly observes that Germont-father is the key character, the authentic protagonist of the opera. Verdi's father has a continuity of presence on stage missing from Dumas' drama (where he appears only in one of the five acts), with a psychological subtlety equally absent in the original. If the caption in the *libretto* informs us that Violetta cries, while yielding in the face of Germont-father's imposition, Verdi's music pounds where he repeats four times: “Piangi, piangi, o misera – supremo, il veggio / è il sacrificio che ora ti chieggo”, where “Piangi” is not an indicative verb at all, denoting Violetta's cry, but an imperative (none of this in Dumas). Thus far, the father has always addressed Violetta with the respectful formula - habitual in the Italian upper bourgeoisie of the time – through use of the ‘second person plural voi’, and immediately afterwards he will revert to the same formula: but at the *climax* of the call to order, of the command, he abruptly switches to the more familiar, less respectful form of address by voicing the ‘second person singular tu’, in order to shock the woman and force her to surrender. If the first première of the opera was a flop, that precisely happened because the bourgeois and aristocratic audience of that time perfectly perceived the provocative novelty of *La Traviata*, the firm criticism of the high society's habits and hypocrisy. Verdi takes note of this, and for the successful première of the following year, he is concerned to remove the opera's setting in the mid-eighteenth century, so as not to arouse allusions to contemporary reality. Here then Bosisio, in the middle of the first act, during the party that has its *climax* in the famous toast, sung by Violetta and Alfredo, has Germont-father make an entrance, who, perfectly at ease, passes among the tables, caresses some prostitutes, Violetta's younger colleagues, and exits, leaving his son to have fun...

or rather convinced that Alfredo is there to have fun and nothing more. But in the second act he completely changes his attitude and, when he shows up at the two lovers' home, he faces Violetta as a class enemy, to be defeated and eliminated.

The work - which follows one year later - on *Tosca*, staged in Ivrea in 2010, in an outdoor edition (then repeated indoors, in subsequent years, with less innovative results) is very interesting. Bosisio builds the show in the immense Piazza Ottinetti in Ivrea, flanked by the facades of anonymous buildings and, at the base of the elegant and austere arcade of an aristocratic residence, against which the stage stands. The scenic space is thus considerably enlarged. In the *finale*, the arrival directly from the square, through the audience, of the picket intended to shoot Cavaradossi was really biting. But above all, through large-scale projections and a clever acoustic exploitation of the buildings and the square, the wonderful distribution of the voices takes shape. In fact, *Tosca* is a masterpiece of Puccini's full maturity and treasures the Wagnerian lesson. However, the composer is dominated - in the voices and in the orchestra - by a lyric surge, constantly changing, alongside an extremely original displacement of the voices in the space, culminating in the invention of stereophony in the second act, when in Scarpia's office resounds the cantata performed by Tosca on the upper floor, to celebrate the supposed victory over the French. The system created by the stage director admirably serves to make the most of this peculiarity of *Tosca*. Bosisio effectively exploits the windows of the palace rooms directly overhead of the stage, by illuminating them from within for the sequence in which Scarpia from his studio, on the stage, listens to Tosca singing. She faces the sill of one of the windows, singing from there with the choristers. A philological sequence, as in the score Tosca sings offstage, upstairs. Leaning out of a window, the singers were behind and above the stage, visible from the square and therefore by the audience, who listens to the voices with the appropriate distance and with the filter of the orchestra, placed between the audience and the stage in the square. The clash of characters and the various declination of the theme of violence are amplified by the use of spaces, just as the most intense moments of song exploit the breadth of empty spaces as a sounding board. Puccini is really interested in the intertwining between political violence and sexual violence. The torture chamber (where Cavaradossi is tortured) is located in the libretto - unlike the Sardou drama from which Puccini derives his opera - next to the room where Scarpia lives, eats, works, and where he intends to rape Tosca. Scarpia easily moves between the room of pain and that of pleasure. For him, the pain (of others) is linked to (his own) pleasure. At one point Cavaradossi is taken, unconscious and bleeding, to Scarpia's room, and placed on the same sofa where Scarpia plans to possess Tosca. In the original Sardou's drama, at this point, Tosca has no hesitation: as soon as she sees Cavaradossi, she throws herself on him, wiping his bleeding face and covering him with kisses. *Tosca* by Puccini, on the other hand, "si copre il volto per non vederlo" and only after a moment "vergognosa di questa sua debolezza, si inginocchia presso di lui, baciandolo e piangendo". The sight of Cavaradossi's violated body foreshadows, in Tosca's eyes, her own body shortly destined to be equally violated, and precisely on that same sofa. Puccini captures a mysterious and profound truth, that all physical violence is nothing more than sexual violence (and this is precisely what generates Tosca's reaction of disgust at the sight of her tortured man, who urges her to cover her own eyes).

Another significant première staged by Bosisio at the Ivrea festival is Bizet's *Carmen* (2012), encouraging us to reflect on the characteristic of an opera audience, a particular audience, made up of habitués, of fans, for whom the golden rule of passion applies, "faithful over the centuries", as written in the Carabinieri's motto... On her debut in 1875, *Carmen* faced a real *fiasco* precisely because the audience was baffled by the décalage between the theatre house where the opera was performed (the Opéra-Comique, intended for musical productions with a happy ending, as prescribed by the name itself of the French institution) and a plot ending on the murder of the protagonist.

Of course this is not the only reason for failure. Even the uninhibited Parisian audience is still too patriarchal and conservative not to be shocked by the chorus of cigar makers entering the scene by smoking, and above all by the sensual strength of the gypsy Carmen, bearer of a scandalously free vision of love. Beyond her Gypsy nature, already in itself transgressive to the social mores of that time, Carmen is pleased with her gestures and strong statements, bordering on extreme license. She provokes the brigadier José, tossing a flower at him, but then she is the one who abandons him for the toreador she subsequently takes a fancy to. Quite embarrassing, the song *Près des remparts de Séville*, in which the woman imagines going to dance the seguidilla and drink manzanilla in the tavern of the friend of smugglers, and there, amid the excitement of dance and wine, she will indulge herself with everyone who will want to take her ("Qui veut m'aimer je l'aimerai. / Qui veut mon âme? ... elle est à prendre"). Of course, Bizet's masterpiece, always appreciated by men of culture (from Nietzsche to Wagner, from Brahms to Tchaikovsky), fifty years later is acclaimed everywhere and by anyone, even in the tempered "Italietta" of 1918, when the four slightly inebriated brats in Pirandello's *Gioco delle parti* drama, verge on a gang rape because they are aroused through alcohol, but especially because one of them "started singing Carmen". And how does the more transgressive Italy of 2012 react when Bosisio stages *Carmen*?

Obviously they would always like her to be enthralling and turbulent, since her memorable *habanera* of the first act in which, moreover, the demure “Italiot” tradition translates the word “oiseau” with the poetic “augello”, discarding the too ambiguously dangerous “bird”... And what does Bosisio do, in front of so much expectation? He introduces Carmen barefoot on the stage, she alone, unlike the other cigar makers, dressed in red with a rose in her hair, but more than this he cannot do. The curse of the opera tradition does not usually allow the stage director that which is normal in dramatic theatre, to choose the cast. “Il faut faire avec”, say the French, and Bosisio makes a virtue of necessity. After all, working in a cage often stimulates creativity. The artistic product is, by definition, a complex and ambiguous structure, allowing different interpretations. The protagonist of Bosisio’s *Carmen* is a young singer with a beautiful *contralto* voice, but does not have the *physique du rôle* with erotic entrainment. Her strong personality rather releases mental energy, closer to the masculine decisiveness, if I can express myself like this. So Bosisio bends and reworks the interpretation, once again moving away from tradition. He sets a figure of very strong and determined woman (and in this staying close to tradition) though neither alluring nor seductive (in contrast to the original). In *Carmen* Bosisio essentially reads “a dramatic story of solitude”, as he writes in the director’s note, the determination to constantly oppose everything and everyone: her own coworkers, with whom there is no real solidarity, to morals, to the military code, to Zuniga, to José, ending with the bullfighter, who is well aware that he cannot represent true love and not even just an important love for the woman. Escamillo himself states that, in reply to José, showing himself to be much more aware: “Les amours de Carmen ne durent pas six mois”. Carmen’s death is for Bosisio a sort of suicide, which the woman faces knowingly, almost defiantly, because she has seen death marked in the card game. I am not completely convinced that the stage performance has always remained at the height of the director’s conception, although the end was of considerable effect: the director presents don José crouched on the ground, a piece of rope as a belt for trousers, without shoes, barefoot, like a poor wretch, whom Carmen, dressed in white, as for her wedding with death, looks down on, disdainful. Certainly fully effective is the character of Micaëla, the true female in Bosisio’s *Carmen*, fragile, sensitive, very human. In her initial confrontation with the soldiers, the director finds some movements of proper military brutality, allowing him to find Bizet’s original objection to certain values of the newly restored République (thus, however, contributing to further peeve the audience of the *première* in Paris, 1875): the soldiers who should symbolize order, on the contrary, vulgarly trying to possess the virginal Micaëla; she barely escapes from the gang of rapists in uniform; Lieutenant Zuniga who reproves Brigadier José, for having lost his head for Carmen, then in turn laying a trap for her.

The following year Bosisio faces another challenging masterpiece, beyond the line of Italian and French melodrama (to which *Carmen* rightfully belongs, despite its original destination), with Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, which debuted in 2013, in Kazakhstan. Performance worthy to be remembered, if only because it starts from a reading of its main character completely unrelated with tradition. For the director, Don Giovanni is not a true erotomaniac, attracted by feminine charm or beauty, but rather a sick man, suffering from a sort of compulsion to repeat: he feels obliged to lengthen the list of his catalog, in quantitative terms, and there is no need to distinguish among beautiful and ugly, young or old women. Bosisio seems to sense that deep in the character’s psyche there is a kind of neurosis, as in some men who repress a secret homosexual drive behind the screen of a brilliant libertine career. Hence the interesting hermeneutic reversal that suddenly gives weight back to the traditionally “supporting role” figure of the Commendatore, who unexpectedly acquires a key role: he appears as a sort of divine messenger, come down to earth in order to free poor Don Giovanni from his erotic, compulsive and inconclusive mania, and to free the universe world from that involuntary scoundrel. All this without resorting to any modification in the score (except for the final scene, suppressed by Bosisio as in most of the tradition). Besides, we know, opera is a much narrower cage than dramatic theatre: additions or rearrangements are unthinkable, cuts in theory possible, though in agreement between conductor and director, but some changes, perhaps small, though important, can be done. And here Bosisio played his cards. When Commendatore enters the scene in the first act, he holds the bared sword in his hand, but still, without orienting it either for defense or for offense: there is no rattling of sabers, and the character remains motionless to be skewered by Don Giovanni, as for a sort of planned suicide. The audience doesn’t understand. It will understand in the face of the most profound modification of the *finale*, when the Commendatore descends from the sky perched on a baroque cloud, with a white robe and a long silver wig, escorted by two angels: Don Giovanni approaches the cloud and falls to the ground, as if struck by lightning, whence the two angels gather him up and place him on the cloud, at the feet of the Commendatore. The cloud rises towards the fly loft and the Commendatore brings Don Giovanni with him. “Where? - asks Bosisio in the director’s note – In Hell or in Heaven, after all it doesn’t matter”. The only substantial change concerns the “invisible chorus” which instead of coming “from Hell”, uttering threats and words of fire, sings equally offstage on the same music, but with closed mouth, i.e. without words, while Don Giovanni ascends in the sky. They are not negligible changes, but in full respect of music and verses.

At this point, I am obliged to admit the weakness of my aesthetic taste (which, however, is at the same time a profession of faith). I don't like operas like *Don Giovanni*, having illustrious precedents in dramatic theatre. I adore opera, but in a particular way, because it is the only place of entertainment where a Japanese baritone weighing a ton can sing in the role of the bullfighter loved by *Carmen*, or a 90 kilo-Mongolian soprano incarnate *Bohème's* Mimì, without anyone batting an eyelid; where the set elements can be made of cardboard and the costumes be unlikely, and where above all the librettos are the most bizarre in the world. Because - of course - the only thing that matters is the music. However, in this way it can happen that the librettos, precisely because they are often ragged and jagged, end up whispering secrets that normal literary texts hide with tenacious modesty in the deeper layers of writing. And this counts as a prologue to *Trovatore* ...

Staging *Il Trovatore* in 2015, in Romania, Bosisio - well knowing, after around twenty years of apprenticeship, how to seduce the audience - pens a director's note astutely entitled *A tragedy of love and a human tragedy*, in which he tells us of Leonora and Manrico, "destined to die innocent simply because of loving each other" and Azucena as "a pure woman who lives the horror of her past and the agony of her present", knowing full well that this is not the case at all. Leonora, yes, loves Manrico, but Manrico loves only his mother: and he loves her despite having guessed (from a confession, then awkwardly retracted, by Azucena herself) that she is not his real mother. Manrico is a mama's boy enchanted by the metaphysical idea of the maternal figure so as not to distinguish between the natural mother and the stepmother, provided she is a mother.

He manages to escape for a moment the intimidating power of possessive Azucena, who tries to prevent him from running to Leonora on the verge of becoming a nun ("No, soffrirlo non poss'io... / il tuo sangue è sangue mio!"), but when he is about to marry his Leonora, he suddenly goes all belly up in order to go and free his "mother" ("Madre infelice, corro a salvarti, / o teco almeno corro a morir!"). Put like that, it seems an irreverent and gratuitous inference of mine, but look at what Bosisio does, when the messenger comes to interrupt the wedding feast. The director places Manrico centre-stage, standing in front of the audience, ready to storm in his bombastic and a little grandiloquent "Di quella pira l'orrendo foco" (but so far nothing strange, being like that in every staging of this opera) and at the same time he confines the poor would-be bride to sitting on the marginal far right bench, a dejected and discreet spectator, however it is always better to be seated to suffer that hymn in honor of the mother-in-law. Having reached "Era già figlio prima d'amarti" the tenor finally deigns to turn his eyes to the sorrowful abandoned: he also takes a step towards her, holding out both his hands, while Leonora immediately gets up to extend hers, but she is immediately frozen by Manrico's next verse ("non può frenarmi il tuo martir") putting an end to every hope of getting married. The very good soprano Young Ju Kim (though who knows why Bosisio systematically condemns her to play roles of unjustly neglected lovers: she had already been a great Micaëla in *Carmen* and will be a very intense Liù in *Turandot*) makes a reason for that and slips to the bottom - her shoulders well up - with great dignity disappearing to the left, without uttering the expected "Non reggo a colpi tanto funesti... / Oh quanto meglio saria morir!". Because of my age I am a little lack of hearing, and therefore I could be wrong, but I think Leonora's brief bitter comment was just suppressed, as a kind of silent protest, more eloquent than any words. However, it would not be the only case of cutting. You can go to YouTube and delight yourself with several also very famous stagings of *Trovatore* (Kabaivanska, Pavarotti, etc.): Leonora's sentence is often dismissed, and it is understandable, because it is an objective slowdown in the warlike *crescendo*, becoming choral with the arrival of all the soldiers called "all'armi... all'armi" on which the sequence impressively ends. In a recent Spanish staging Leonora does not sing and disappears as well, but only to come back and seal the *finale*, giving her silent blessing to the warlike feat, by placing her sword on the shoulder of Manrico, kneeling before her. On the other hand, in a 1975 edition (where Kabaivanska and Franco Boniselli are nicely lying in the alcove, waiting for their wedding) Leonora sings her diptych, but clinging to him, with the illusion of holding him back. I mean, in short, that the new variant of Bosisio consists in focusing more coldly on Manrico's insane love for Azucena, on his chasing his own "mother not mother". Bosisio is convinced that the true protagonist of *Trovatore* is Azucena, as is understood from what he writes in the director's note: but he is one of the few to think like that (apart from Verdi himself, tempted by the idea of titling his opera precisely *Azucena*). In fact, only at first glance is *Il Trovatore* the usual story of an unhappy loving couple, pursued by the bad guy on duty. In reality, Verdi's opera opens (and ends) on a very different theme. As the curtain unfolds, the tale of a dark-tinged antecedent imposes itself, then reprised at the beginning of the second act by the famous aria "Stride la vampa": it introduces a long painful lamentation, murmured on the edge of the strings, with clarinets, oboes and bassoons, a tormented and excruciating vision of a death penalty occurred in a past that does not pass, traversing the whole melodrama, to end on a different still-frame of an execution. Azucena is a complex character, having an obsessive relationship with Manrico: she reproaches him for having moved away from her for his youthful ambition ("Ma, giovinetto, i passi tuoi / d'ambizion lo sprone / lungi traeva"), claiming at the same time - with excessive pedantry typical of a fussy accountant - that she saved his life after the battle of Pelilla ("A me, se vivi ancora, / nol dei? / Notturna,

nei pugnati campi / di Pelilla, ove spento fama / ti disse, a darti sepoltura / non mossi? / La fuggente aura vital / non iscovri? Nel seno / non t'arrestò materno affetto? / E quante cure non spesi / a risanar le tante ferite?"). Then comes a strange, enigmatic passage on which Eloi Recoing posed an insidious question (in "L'Avant- Scène Opéra", n. 60, mars 1990): was Azucena really taken prisoner, or rather, did she give herself as a hostage to the enemy for calling Manrico back to her, in order to snatch him from Leonora, as if there was an underground rivalry between the two women for the possession of the guy? Certainly Azucena's lament as prisoner is transparent: "E tu non vieni, o Manrico, / o figlio mio? / Non soccorri all'infelice / madre tua?". And Manrico, for his part, is so submissive to his "mother", that he promptly comes, leaving the jilted Leonora alone on the threshold of the wedding altar, thus reiterating that the status of son prevails in him over that of spouse. For mother and son, happily reunited, although in prison, even the pleasure of a melodious reparative dream unfolds, obviously suggested by the mother: "Ai nostri monti ritorneremo, / l'antica pace ivi godremo! / Tu canterai... sul tuo liuto, / in sonno placido io dormirò". Manrico is so transparently subjected to his mother's breast fluid that he sets off towards the scaffold, always and only thinking of the mother, addressing his last words to her ("Madre! Ah! madre, addio!"), almost indifferent towards Leonora, lying lifeless at his feet, dead for him, having committed suicide by poison in order to escape the Count of Luna's desires. No doubt, Azucena's bond with Manrico is truly ambiguous: she loves him as if he were her own son, she wants to live in fusion with him, snatching him from Leonora; though she could save him she does not, by not telling the Count of Luna that he is his brother. She tells him only at the last moment, after the beheading has taken place, shouting at him: "Egl'era tuo fratello!". Except that, immediately afterwards, she calls to the disturbing shadow of her mother: "Sei vendicata, o madre!". From "Stride la vampa", evoking the mother's execution, to Manrico's execution, to close the circle, as Azucena finally avenges her mother's death at the stake. In conclusion, a twisted and tangled story, which clashes with the great taboo of a son's murder, evoking the ghost of the bad mother, tormenting children or killing them. But also an admirable and terrifying *exemplum* of tenacious and domineering constraints, which prevent children from detaching themselves from their mother, from living their lives with another woman. It is no coincidence that Pirandello chooses *Il Trovatore* as a subtext of *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*, finding, almost by magic, in the hallucinated micro-cosmos of Verdi's opera the family horizons that tug the secret strings of his creativity: mothers having children (natural or adoptive), but no husbands; parental bonds like hell spaces where unclean longings and heinous crimes hatch.

In fact, the often overblown opera plots clearly display glimpses of transgressive passages which, in high dramaturgy, only with extreme difficulty can be highlighted, working with high precision scalpels, capable of digging into the living flesh of the texts. The proof comes from *Turandot*, directed by Bosisio in Romania, in 2018. As soon as she opens her mouth - after an entire act in silence - Turandot declares to perceive herself as a kind of re-incarnation of the ancient princess her ancestor, defeated in war, raped and killed by the King of the Tartars. Her rejection of marriage stems from the traumatic perception that in sex there is a violent and mournful component. Not for nothing the second riddle refers to the reality of the blood (and the third undoubtedly alludes to Turandot). Through the three conundrums she reiterates what she said in her first speech: she is blocked by the obsession with blood, which is first of all virginal blood, the result of defloration. In his *Turandot*, directed at La Scala in Milan about fifteen years ago, Luca Ronconi, when the second riddle was answered, made appear on the chest of the protagonist (in that moment dressed in a light colour) a vivid stain of blood (the chest is only a dislocated place, exactly as in the prayer to the Virgin, in which the fruit of her womb refers to her belly). It is evident how Turandot's repulsion of sex hides her deep desire to be freed from that obsessive repression. Not for nothing the correct answer to the first riddle was "hope". The graph composed by the three conundrums (hope / blood / Turandot) delivers a very clear message: Turandot hopes to be freed from the nightmare of (virginal) blood. None of this - even remotely! - in Gozzi's original fairy tale, where the three riddles trivially and flatly referred to the sun, the year and the Adriatic Lion, i.e. Venice. Of course, the perverse spell of the sado-masochistic drives is all exquisitely Puccini stuff and the librettists Simoni and Adami had a hard time following the maestro in his contortions of harassed psychology. Reading their correspondence, we discover that it was precisely Puccini to impose on his librettists the turning point of Liù's suicide, designed to encourage "the princess thawing". Rather, the maestro insists that it is necessary to make her "die in torture" (which obviously refers to the murky mixture of violence and eros of *Tosca*). It is about building an epiphany for *Turandot*, who only in this way will be able to reach understanding of the mystery of eros: the language of love is the language of a more or less measured violence (in Liù in a maddeningly masochistic way). Note that the epiphany works for Calaf himself. In front of Liù's battered body, Calaf also undergoes his metamorphosis: he ceases being "insane" (as Bosisio rightly says) and becomes energetic and hard, tearing the veil from Turandot and kissing her with passion, with the positive effects we know. Dr. Freud would say that the laceration of the veil prefigures that of the hymen, and that the ruinous kiss is a mitigated form of penetration. It is true, however, that Bosisio does not seem interested in such

a track. As he declares in the director's note: for him, Puccini's opera, far from being a love story, "is the story of an irreducible clash between different and conflicting neuroses". Turandot is an "anti-phallogocratic" woman, probably "devoted to Sapphic sexual affairs or, more likely, to autoeroticism", as quite effectively explained by the structure of the cage, central scenic element conceived for her by the director. For Calaf disqualifying adjectives are wasted: insane, irresponsible, possessed, presumptuous, arrogant, neurotic... According to the director, all the humanity in Puccini's opera is solely confined into a small cone of light, within which Liù and Timur's drama is played out: they never get into real contact with the other characters, each of whom lives in his own world of light, almost locked up in a glass or color bubble, from which he is condemned never to break out.

Liù and Timur, on the contrary, drag the last moments of their unhappy and painful lives into the real light of day and night. Of the other characters, we should mention the three ministers, Ping, Pong and Pang, from Bosisio drawn as clowns: their red ears stand out on the completely white face like that of the clown therefore called "the white", the "bad" in the language of the circus. At times, however, when their behavior is closer to the human, they wear the red nose, the one that characterizes the "Augusto", the "good" clown. The Emperor, for his part, seems more of a function than a human being: motionless, with a huge headdress barely revealing his face. Always impelled on his throne, he does not move and does not walk: pure metaphor of power, power itself.

As for the set design, the director rightly focuses on a stylized key, so as to avoid the chinoiserie of papier-mache, more absurd within a fairy tale. Several graphic elements, however, as well as the costumes, recall the Far East. On the extreme sides of the stage, two huge vertical cages, similar to aviaries, suggest the idea of a repressive closure by a society strongly rooted in tyrannical power. In the one to the right, the representatives of the imperial court (the executioner and three wise men, during the scene in which they read the answer of each riddle) enter not by chance; the one on the left instead consists of the princess' favored room, alluding to her choice of sealing herself in the cage of autism and of the satisfied folding in on herself. Finally, the lighting design is very interesting, essentially two, well-defined: everything concerning the world of the court and the princess is lit by a cold, white light redolent of the moon, several times evoked in the *libretto*. Black and silver are the unrealistic colors of the court (not surprisingly they are also dominant in the three ministers' costumes). On the contrary, Liù and her father, with Calaf, are the only characters to whom a warm, realistic light is always given. They represent the true life facing the evil world of the imperial court. Over time Bosisio became increasingly attentive to the lighting dimension of his performances, and refuses the support of a light designer, preferring to deal personally with this aspect of the staging, putting to good use what he learned from Giorgio Strehler's lesson. His lighting does not seem to replicate (or explain) reality, but rather suggest it emotionally.

Some questions of a general nature at the end of this quick review. Is there a common thread running through the varied expression of Bosisio's as opera director, of his fantastic system? I would say no, but I don't feel it as a limit. In dramatic theatre the director may have his own poetics, because (if he is a valuable artist and not a simple employee of the entertainment industry) he can more or less choose the texts closer to his sensitivity, but the opera director fatally arrives the last in a project already previously defined (by the musical institution, by the artistic direction, by the conductor). The systematic consistency of a predefined interpretative key (psychoanalytic or sociological or other at will) would end up stiffening in the way as a plaster cast the creativity of an opera's staging which - unlike other genres of live entertainment - has an audience behind it, at the same time prepared and faithful with whom it is necessary to face. In a few words, opera direction is like a narrow walkway demanding a flexible approach from the artist, so as to continuously change his points of view, taking into account the variety and specificity of the operas he is going to stage. Bosisio's attitude seems to me rightly free and available, typical of someone with intelligence puts himself in the service of the opera: not slavishly, of course, that is, in the wake of the over-consolidated, and therefore repetitive, scenic tradition, but instead looking every time for a way to introduce an original angle, an unsettling gaze, however always through a simple and perspicuous language, arousing emotions (as is required by definition from the opera theatre), avoiding cerebralism and superfetation requiring the audience an ungrateful effort in decryption. Our Bosisio essentially wants his audience overwhelmed by music and verse: maybe wishing to rediscover his own experience as a young spectator accompanying his melomaniac grandmother to La Scala, from which we started (and with which we close, welding the circle of these lines).

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