

Colours in madame butterfly

Business



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The opera Madama Butterfly tells the story of a Japanese girl who fell in love with and married an American sailor. After their wedding, the sailor, who is named Pinkerton, abandoned her and, later, their baby to return to America. Cruelly, he leads Madama Butterfly to believe that he will back. She faithfully awaits his return, despite the assertions of those around her that he means not to return, for she believes that only she who loves him knows that he will return. The clip is probably from the end of the movie where Pinkerton arrives after many years away. In the beginning, we witness the ladies playing a game similar to tennis. During the game, we see a man in a dark suit skulking in the bushes, apparently unnoticed by Madama. In Japan, the color black was considered to represent knowledge.

This suggests a sad truth in Madama's life; knowledge, both that she and her son are outcasts and that Pinkerton will not return, is always behind her, but she perceives hope in her situation she does not see the truth. After a short time however, Madama's maid sees the man and pulls him out of the bushes in order to berate him for spreading rumors that Madama's child is an outcast. After aiding her maid in beating the man, Madama rushes into the house to soothe her son. In the midst of a monologue directed at the child, the news arrives that the Abraham Lincoln, presumably Pinkerton's ship, has landed. Despite the dramatic events which promise to take place as a result, the scene itself is fairly simple, intriguing enough not to be boring, but apparently not notable in any way. When, however, we consider the symbolism of the colors which permeate it, the clip takes on a whole new meaning.

In the beginning, we see a decrepit garden, tinted pink, which is often associated with love. This suggests something of how Madama views the world; all the disorder and sadness of life is made beautiful to her because of her love for Pinkerton and his child. Next, we see Madama. She is wearing a purple dress with a red sash. In Japanese culture, the color purple was thought to show high virtue, while in European culture, the color purple denotes royalty. This suggests that she is too pure and high minded to even imagine Pinkerton's disloyalty, making her denial of the apparent truth beautiful and pathetic, rather than naive and idiotic.

Her red belt has an even more intriguing backstory. Japan has had the color red since ancient times, but as it could only be made from natural dyes, it faded extremely quickly. When foreigners arrived in the isolated country, they imported a bright red dye called aniline which quickly replaced all the ancient shades of red that had been used for centuries. Therefore, Madama's belt can be read as a symbol of foreigners coming to Japan and the changes wrought upon Japan's traditions, not an unfitting message for the opera.

Madama rises, allowing us to see her maid who is wearing an orange dress.

In Japan, orange was thought to denote propriety. It therefore seems reasonable that the maid should be Madama's bitterest enemy, but that is not the case. Indeed, throughout the clip, the maid is shown protecting and nurturing Madama. Propriety shelters Loyalty because perhaps that is the highest virtue of all, even when Loyalty is misplaced. This reinforces the theme that Madama is protected from the truth by her high morals. The final character is Madama's son, whom she calls her 'sorrow and her comfort.

‘ His clothes reflect this nickname perfectly. The baby is wearing a purple and white suit. As mentioned above, the color purple represents virtue, the trait which comforts Madama throughout her hardships. The white, however represents justice, the lack of which is Madama’s greatest sorrow. The visual elements of the clip enhance the narrative by providing a deeper cultural context and reflecting the values symbolized by each character, even seemingly static ones.