

**Emancipating *Madame Butterfly*:**  
Intention and Process in Adapting and  
Queering a Text

---

Volume 1 of 1

by

***Nick Bamford, M.A. (Oxon.)***

*Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a*

Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Media and Communication

**Bournemouth University**

February 2016



*This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with its author and due acknowledgement must always be made of the use of any material contained in, or derived from, this thesis.*



**Nick Bamford**

**Emancipating *Madame Butterfly*:**  
Intention and Process in Adapting and Queering a Text

***Abstract:***

I have long had an interest in reworking iconic love stories from the romantic world of opera into contemporary, gay contexts, with the intention of demonstrating the similarities as well as the differences between homosexual and heterosexual relationships. I have not been satisfied with my attempts thus far, and so, as I adapt the story made famous by Puccini in *Madama Butterfly*, I want to readdress and to improve my practice to ensure that the resulting screenplay speaks authentically to a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience whilst still echoing its forebear.

Using this creative practice, this PhD extends into the process of adaptation Dallas J. Baker's (2011) concept of 'queered practice-led research'. It begins with an historical case-study of the genealogy of the story that became *Madama Butterfly* and its descendants, looking for the intentions of the creators of each version. Through this process I seek to identify the essence of the story – its 'genetic identity' in terms of both theme and plot – from which I will create my new version. Crucially, the thesis is written from my perspective as a practitioner, and maintains focus on my intention in embarking on the adaptation project.

The thesis continues with reflection on my practice in writing the adapted screenplay, exploring the effect of the changes I have made, the most significant being making the central relationship homosexual. It examines how that queering process fundamentally alters the story in far more respects than simply the gender and sexuality of the central characters, and suggests that it liberates the story. In conclusion it reflects on how my research has informed my practice, and my practice my research, and assesses how the additional freedoms afforded by queering the story have liberated it, and have enhanced my practice as a screenwriter.



**Accompanying Documents:**

***BANGKOK BUTTERFLY***

a screenplay

by

**Nick Bamford**

After 'Madame Butterfly' by John Luther Long, David  
Belasco & Giacomo Puccini/Giuseppe Giacosa/Luigi Illica





## Acknowledgements

This PhD was prompted by my previous work writing contemporary gay adaptations, for both stage and screen, of iconic love stories, as discussed in the Introduction.

I am indebted to my supervisors, Dr. Craig Batty, Dr. Chris Pullen and Dr. Helen Jacey, whose support and feedback on both script and thesis have been invaluable, and also to Dr. Shaun Kimber for his help and advice as Examiner on my Transfer panel.

To my partner, Richard Stevens I offer heartfelt thanks for his very helpful feedback on two drafts of the script as well as his forbearance during the five years I have been working on this.

### **Author's Declaration:**

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program.

### **Formative work for this PhD was presented at:**

**JMComm**, Phuket, Thailand.

29<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

in a paper entitled: **From *Madame Butterfly* to *Miss Saigon*: Uses and abuses of a story.**

Paper published in Conference Proceedings.

and at:

**Cross-Cultural Communication Conference**, Bangkok, Thailand.

28<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

in a paper entitled: **East is East and West is West - a literary and historical view from the perspective of *Madame Butterfly***

Paper published in Conference Proceedings.

# Contents:

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1
- The Writing Project	3
- The PhD Project	4
- The Thesis	7
- The Research Questions	8
<b>CHAPTER 1: Approach and Methodology</b>	11
- The Adaptation Debate	11
- Research-led Practice and Practice-led Research	16
<b>CHAPTER 2: Investigating the Old</b>	23
- <i>Madame Chysanthème</i> . Pierre Loti. 1887	25
- Japonisme	27
- <i>Madame Chysanthème</i> . André Messager. 1893.	27
- <i>Le Cahier Rose de Madame Chrysanthème</i> . Félix Régamey. 1893	29
- <i>Madame Butterfly</i> . John Luther Long. 1898.	30
- <i>Madame Butterfly</i> . David Belasco. 1900.	35
- <i>Madama Butterfly</i> . Giacomo Puccini, Giuseppe Giacosa, Luigi Illica. 1904	39
- <i>Miss Saigon</i> – Alain Boublil, Richard Maltby Jr. & Claude-Michel Schönberg. 1989	44
- <i>Madame Butterfly</i> . Directed by Sidney Olcott. 1915	50
- <i>Madame Butterfly</i> . Directed by Marion Gering. 1932	52
- <i>M. Butterfly</i> . D.H.Hwang. 1988	55
- <i>M. Butterfly</i> . Directed by David Cronenberg. 1993	59

- <i>Cho Cho</i> . Writer: Shinichi Ichikawa. 2011	60
- Principal Observations and Conclusions	62
- Identifying the Essence of <i>Madame Butterfly</i>	63
<b>CHAPTER 3: The Queering Process</b>	67
- <i>Swan Lake</i> . Tchaikovsky. Directed by Matthew Bourne. 1995	69
- <i>Fucking Men</i> . Joe diPietro. 2009	71
- <i>Maurice</i> . E.M Forster. 1971. <i>Lady Chatterley's Lover</i> . D.H Lawrence. 1928.	75
- <i>Don Giovanni – The Opera</i> . Richard Crichton-Brauen. 2012	77
<b>CHAPTER 4: Creating the New</b>	79
- Romance and Subversion	79
- First Decisions	81
- The Moral Context	82
- Characters	84
<b>CHAPTER 4: Writing and Rewriting</b>	93
- First Drafts	93
- The Balance of Power	94
- The Romance	97
- Responses and Revisions	102
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	115
<b>REFERENCES</b>	125
<b>APPENDICES:</b>	
- 1 Extract from <i>Love and War</i>	133
- 2 Email interview with Richard Maltby Jr.	143

- 3 Initial Character Breakdowns and Step Outline	153
- 4 <i>Bangkok Boy</i> Scenes 21-22	167
- 5 <i>Bangkok Butterfly</i> Scenes 21-22	173
- 6 <i>Bangkok Butterfly</i> – Pitch & Treatment	177



# INTRODUCTION

In his book *The Celluloid Closet* Vito Russo argues: “It is an old stereotype that homosexuality has to do only with sex while heterosexuality is multi-faceted and embraces love and romance.” (1987:p.132). And in the film of the same name, made by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman in 1995, writer Harvey Fierstein<sup>1</sup> identifies representational problems for LGBT people when engaging with stories in any medium: “All the reading I was given to do in school was always heterosexual, every movie I saw was heterosexual. And I had to do this translation – I had to translate it to my life rather than seeing my life.” (1995).

My experience, growing up in the same era, was the same as Fierstein’s, and I have always recognised Russo’s stereotype. As a gay dramatic writer I have always wanted the freedom Fierstein now enjoys in his work: “you can take it and translate it for your own life. It’s very nice. But at last I don’t have to do the translating, you do.” (1995). I also wanted, and still want to demonstrate that homosexual love affairs, as presented in drama, can be as profound, as romantic, indeed as tragic as heterosexual ones, whilst recognising that they tend to operate in quite different ways. The other crucial aspect for me, as both writer and consumer of drama, is that any tragedy in stories I write does not stem from the simple fact of the character or characters’ gay identity which, as Russo makes clear, has all too often been the case in the cinema. In his 1994 exploration of gay theatre, *Acting Gay*, Clum suggests that the same was true on the stage until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

To achieve this ambition in my writing practice, a possibility suggested itself - I could write homosexual versions of existing heterosexual stories. This would be a process of adaptation, of taking one story and making it into another which relates to it, but is not the same. Sanders says:

“Texts feed off each other and create other texts, and other critical studies; literature creates other literature. Part of the sheer pleasure of the reading experience must be the tension between the familiar and the new, and the recognition both of similarity and difference.”  
(2006:p.14)

It is precisely both the similarity and the difference between gay and straight affairs that I wished to demonstrate, by offering a new version of a familiar story.

Sanders explores the differences between adaptation and what she terms 'appropriation', by which she means where material in the form of characters and plot elements is taken from an earlier work and refashioned into something new without precisely following the original story - it might, for example, be some kind of 'prequel' or sequel. And she suggests what it is that gives adaptations a particular attraction over original stories:

"It is this inherent sense of play, produced in part by the activation of our informed sense of similarity and difference between the texts being invoked, and the connected interplay of expectation and surprise, that for me lies at the heart of the experience of adaptation and appropriation." (ibid:p.25)

So when reading or seeing my new version of a story, I hope the viewer will both remember the version they know and recognise it in my work whilst at the same time being engaged and surprised when mine goes in a new direction. Hutcheon makes a similar observation: "Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change" (2013:p.20); adaptations offer "the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise" (ibid.). Whilst, in order to achieve one of the ambitions in my practice, I could simply have created new love stories in which the fact of the lovers being homosexual was not the issue, if I took existing heterosexual love stories and 'queered' them I could additionally draw attention both to the similarities – the 'ritual' – and the differences – the 'surprise'. In this way I could offer observations about gay and straight sexual and romantic behaviour in general – the similarities and differences in the way people meet and embark on affairs, in their hopes and expectations within those affairs, and the rules by which they operate. And so I embarked on a project on which I continue to work, and that Pearce and Wisker might describe as 'romantic subversion':

"Romantic subversion is not .... simply a question of retelling the same story with different players, or a different plot, or in a different context but of more radically disassociating the psychic foundations of desire from the cultural ones *in such a way that the operation of the orthodoxy is exposed and challenged.*" (1998:p.1)

The orthodoxy whose operation I am seeking to expose and challenge is the heteronormative model which pervades literature, as I will discuss. Using adaptation as my method, I looked not just for love stories, but, in accord with Russo's (1987) comments, grand, romantic stories which have become iconic

and timeless. Lyric opera, with its requirement for passion and high emotion, proved a good source of these. To offer the context in which this PhD was conceived I will offer a brief history of this project so far.

## **The Writing Project**

My first adaptation was a stage play, *Rough Trade*, relocating Dumas' *La Dame Aux Camellias* (1852) – on which Verdi's *La Traviata* (1853) was based – to the 1980s, and transforming the character of Marguerite/Violetta into a rent boy. As a modern version of the 19<sup>th</sup> century story of a courtesan doomed to die of tuberculosis, the AIDS epidemic, which was ravaging the gay male community at the time, provided a very apposite substitute for the fatal illness, with the added relevance that the young man has contracted the disease precisely because of his prostitution, and therefore his promiscuity (not just his homosexuality). Transplanting the story gave it a new contemporary relevance. Indeed, in *Acting Gay* (1992), John Clum uses Dumas' story as a paradigm for all the AIDS drama which was being written at that time. My version was called *Rough Trade* and was produced in Bristol in 1988 at the floating fringe theatre, the Thekla. This was unsophisticated writing, poorly produced and directed, but I believe the concept was a good one. The parallel was clear, appropriate and contemporary.

Some years later I wrote *Love and War*, taking Merimée's *Carmen* (1846) which became Bizet's highly popular opera of the same name (1875), and setting it in a military context, exploring the violence intrinsic to the story, and its close relationship with male sexual arousal. I transformed the character of Carmen into an openly gay soldier, Carl, who seduces the dangerously violent repressed homosexual Joe (Don Jose) before going off with a boy band rock star, Eddie (Escamillo). Written as a screenplay, while the script remains unproduced, it was described by a BBC reader<sup>2</sup> as "great material for mainstream drama" and convinced me of the validity of the premise, even if the execution fell short.

These first two scripts were not successful, partly because of my lack of experience as a playwright and adapter. Hutcheon describes an adaptation as "a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing" (2013:p.20). Looking back at these



attempts and the feedback they received, I see that I failed to achieve that delicate balance between fidelity to the old and originality and credibility in the new - I failed to create a palimpsest - something completely new out of the old. I was so keen to echo the work I was adapting that what I wrote was too slavish to the structure of the previous text. I worked from the outside in, rather than the inside out. Batty reports, in the context of a thematic approach to script development:

“My many experiences suggest that when developing a screenplay, many writers leap straight into plotting: what happens next; what would an audience like to see; in the case of a text-to-screen adaptation, what does the source material need to be visualised as? Although plot-focussed questions are clearly relevant to script development, as an initial preoccupation I believe they take the writer out of the project rather than into it.” (2013:p.4)

I believe this is exactly what I did - rather than identifying the themes and premises of the originals, finding contemporary gay equivalents and then letting the story emerge from those with a life of its own, I tended to work through the original plots scene by scene, creating my new version of each. And so I ended up with what were effectively gay imitations of the originals - re-dressings of their predecessors in all-male, homosexual clothes. My derivations were, I think, too derivative. As an example, Appendix 1 is the closing scenes of *Love and War* in which Joe pleads in vain with Carl not to leave him before stabbing him to death while Eddie performs in a nearby venue to his adoring fans (I have omitted the intercut scenes which resolve a subplot I introduced). Although I believe the transformation of the characters and the contemporary voices offer some authenticity, the main driver behind the scene was the desire to replicate the end of the opera *Carmen* where Don José pleads similarly with Carmen before killing her whilst Escamillo triumphs nearby in the bullring. The scene derives from the original plot rather than the new characters.

## **The PhD Project**

As I made the decision to embark on a third adaptation - a contemporary gay version of the story made famous by composer Giacomo Puccini and his librettists Giacosa and Illica in the opera *Madama Butterfly* (1904) - the

shortcomings of my earlier adaptations demonstrated to me the need to develop and improve my adaptation practice, and that is what prompted this research project. I decided to investigate the motivations, the approaches taken and the methods used by previous adapters of the story to inform my new version in terms both of the story and characters and of the way in which I adapted it. I hoped this would enable me to create a story as powerful and iconic as the original, yet with a separate identity which fulfils my intentions. This investigation is part of the subject of the thesis which, together with the screenplay, entitled *Bangkok Butterfly*, comprises this PhD.

I decided once again to write for the screen both because that naturalistic medium could more readily show the different culture so central to the story than could sets and costumes on a stage, and because it could potentially reach a wider audience. The thesis additionally makes use of reflective practice to offer an account of how I have negotiated the difficulties and challenges met in the adaptation process in general, and the process of making it gay – or ‘queering’ it (and there’s an important difference between the two which I will discuss) - in particular. My intention is both to avoid what I perceive as shortcomings in my previous work and to offer a new understanding of this process and what it entails.

*Madame Butterfly* is equally as iconic a story as *La Dame aux Camellias* and *Carmen*, and has been followed by probably as many different versions as those two. Furthermore it deals with a kind of 19<sup>th</sup> century sex tourism, as well as a relationship between an older man and a girl who would now, at least in the UK, be under the age of sexual consent. Both of these issues have clear resonances in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in both straight and gay contexts, with the latter adding some additional layers as well as difficulties, which I will identify. As a 21<sup>st</sup> century destination for sex tourism, with its thriving sex industry, both gay and straight, the location of Bangkok immediately suggested itself.

Hutcheon observes: “Perhaps one way to think about unsuccessful adaptations is not in terms of infidelity to a prior text, but in terms of the lack of creativity and skill to make the text one’s own, and thus autonomous” (2013: p.20). I believe my first two attempts at adaptation both demonstrated this failing. In response I have, this time, used research to underpin the creation of a new story which remains in *essence* the same as its heterosexual model, while the context and

detail have their own life and authenticity. Sanders says: “it is usually at the point of infidelity that most creative acts of adaptation or appropriation take place” (2006: p.20). If this is where my previous scripts were lacking, then here was a way to give life to my new one.

The question of what motivates an adapter, and therefore what motivates me, is also key. Hutcheon suggests:

“In the act of adapting, choices are made based on many factors....including genre or medium conventions, political engagement, and personal as well as public history. These decisions are made in a creative as well as an interpretive context that is ideological, social, historical, cultural, personal and aesthetic.” (2013: p.108)

In common with most writers, of original work or adaptations, I feel that I have something to say – an intention in the work I have created. The context of my choices and decisions comprises all the elements Hutcheon suggests. It is informed by my own personal experiences as well as by its new social context. It is also informed by the very significant remediation from stage opera to screen drama. Additionally, as Sanders suggests: “political and ethical commitment shapes a writer’s, director’s or performer’s decision to re-interpret” (2006: p.2). There is a clear political commitment in my desire to ‘make good’ the representational shortfall in gay drama I have identified.

However, I do not want simply to create political treatises. My earlier attempts, being, as I have suggested, rather slavish copies of the originals, were perhaps too predictable and therefore dull, tending simply to make the stories gay rather than recognising the more profound changes required to ‘queer’ them. And so they did not explore as thoroughly as they might have how gay relationships, although as profound and as complex as straight ones, tend to be intrinsically and dynamically different. And this was an important part of my intention. Sociological studies by Steven Seidman (2004) as well as Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001) have explored this in detail and, in developing my screenplay, I was informed by their findings as well as by my own experiences. As a screenwriter my purpose was to create a story that is engaging and entertaining, thematically as well as in terms of character, and that works in the medium for which I am writing, a medium that makes very different demands from those of

the opera I am adapting, in terms particularly of naturalism and psychological realism. The script had to have veracity in its new gay context but at the same time it had to engage a general audience, not only if it is to succeed commercially but also to avoid the risk of ‘preaching to the converted’, with no-one in the audience “doing the translating” as Fierstein would have them (1995).

## **The Thesis**

As I developed my new version of the story, I drew on the experiences, perceived and reported, of those who created, recreated and revisited the *Madame Butterfly* story before me, with their extra-ordinary variety of agendas and approaches. This research, which preceded my practice of writing the script, suggested ideas as to why my predecessors might have made the changes that they did, and so informed how I might adapt the story. Looking at each text, and the context of its genesis, I was interested to find out what considerations suggested or necessitated changes, and how these might be understood as part of adaptation practice. These considerations include the medium of delivery – i.e. story, stage play, opera, film, musical; social culture at the time of writing; social culture and perceptions in the country of writing; the target audience and commercial considerations; and sometimes a political, or moral agenda. All of these are intrinsic to the different thematic intentions of the writers, and so I seek to identify those as well. At the same time, given that my practice of writing the adaptation presented me with challenges which echoed those faced by my predecessors, that practice in itself offered an insight into their experience. In that sense my practice also led my research.

As a creative practice PhD, the intentions behind this project are to inform both my own, and others’ adaptation practice. While my research is also informed by the theoretical debate to date on adaptation, I write as a practitioner, and for practitioners as much as for scholars.

## The Research Questions

The questions my PhD asks are therefore as follows:

- By analysing the various works that have both prompted and emerged from the story of *Madame Butterfly*, how might a screenwriter understand adaptation as a creative practice which moves stories between different audiences and delivery media with the potential to contribute to societal and cultural debates?

Then, within this overarching research question, specifically:

- When the principal adaptation practice is queering, what effects does that have on the story? Does that process suggest or necessitate different considerations, particularly in terms of the potential audience, and can it inform adaptation practice in general?

As part of the PhD I offer a final pre-production draft of the screenplay, to be read, ideally, between Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, as an integral part of the research process in that it puts to practical use the results of my research into the source material and adaptation techniques, particularly in the context of queering the story.

The thesis consists of five Chapters, and a Conclusion. In order to give the theoretical context for my research, define its scope and describe the specific methodology I have used in this PhD, I offer a complete chapter on this - Chapter 1 - with a brief précis of the adaptation debate to date, and an explanation of that methodology, which echoes Baker's 'Queered Practice-led Research' (2013). Chapter 2 offers the adaptation history of the *Madame Butterfly* story, focussing on the previous adapters' apparent motivations and intentions in adapting the story, and in the changes they made. This revealed, amongst other things, the importance to all previous adapters of their target audiences. Chapter 3 examines the process of queering a text in the light of Queer Theory and of previous examples, while Chapter 4 reflectively analyses my approach to my adaptation. Chapter 5 examines the development process, along with my revisions in the light of responses to early drafts, which served as a preview of the potential responses of my target audience.

Hutcheon, Sanders and many others have sought to define the essence of good adaptation, challenging the criterion of fidelity to the original, as I discuss in Chapter 1. I believe that an adaptation should be like an offspring of a text – sharing genes with its parent, or parents, but ultimately being its own person and living its own life. Those genes are the themes, the characters and the basic elements of the plot. The lineage is not always direct and there is often more than one parent to a new version, or offspring – as we will see in several descendants of *Madame Butterfly*. But I will suggest that a paternity test of my completed version against its ancestors, comparing themes, characters and plot, would prove positive.

I will also reflect on my research, and suggest that it has informed and enriched the adaptation process. Looking back to the shortcomings I have identified in my earlier scripts, I will suggest that intensive research on what Genette (1997: [182] p.ix) terms the ‘hypotexts’ has, by giving me an overview of all the previous versions, enabled me to become so well acquainted with the genetic identity and genealogy of the story as to free me to build more creatively, knowing that my foundations are secure. The quantity of material, and of detail did not obstruct my creative freedom. Additionally I will suggest that the very fact that I am queering the story, because of the far-reaching effects of that process, has liberated me further, and further enabled me to ensure that my version has a life of its own. In short, I will demonstrate that learning from my practice, as well as that of my predecessors, has enabled me better to execute my intention to write stories that present authentic homosexual experiences, in an emancipated context, that will engage audiences, whatever their sexuality, in their world and their themes.

---

<sup>1</sup> Harvey Fierstein is an actor & writer best known for *Torch Song Trilogy* (1981) which he wrote and also starred in, winning a Tony award for his performance. He dramatic writing also the books for the musicals *La Cage aux Folles* (1983) and *Kinky Boots* (2013) winning Tony awards for both.

<sup>2</sup> This was in a letter dated 29<sup>th</sup> June 2005, in response to my speculative submission of the script to BBC Writersroom.



## CHAPTER 1: Approach and Methodology

In this chapter I will outline how my research and practice contribute a new perspective to the adaptation debate, with a particular focus on adaptations where the sexuality of a relationship is changed – where the story is ‘queered’. And with reference to previous work in a similar field I will seek to define the methodology I have used in that research.

### The Adaptation Debate

Although the main focus of my research is specifically on the queering process, to give it context, let me offer a very brief précis of my reading in the debate so far around adaptation in general and the adapter’s purpose and responsibilities to his or her source material. This has been lengthy, and, for the most part, conducted by theorists. My perspective is that of a practitioner, and, while it clearly overlaps, there are significant differences.

Principally fuelled by the advent of the cinema and its voracious appetite for adapting the written into the performed, this debate has heard many voices. Virginia Woolf famously lamented that: “The cinema fell upon its prey with immense rapacity and to this moment largely subsists upon the body of its unfortunate victim. But the results are disastrous to both.” (1926: p.309)

Subsequent commentators have been less pessimistic about the relationship between the two. George Bluestone, in his seminal 1957 *Novels into Film*, explored the conflict between the linguistic novel and the visual film, the different audiences to which each appealed, and the issue of fidelity to the hypotext. More recently Hutcheon has reflected on the lengthy theoretical debate concerning fidelity in adaptation that “One lesson is that to be second is not to be secondary or inferior; likewise to be first is not to be originary or authoritative” (2013:p.xv). A brief glance at the works of William Shakespeare, of whose 36 plays only a handful<sup>3</sup> offer stories not borrowed from earlier sources, provides ample evidence



of that. Few would regard his source material as in any way, or in any case superior to what he made of it.

Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* is an important text for my research in that it explores in depth the nature, the triggers and the processes of adaptation, and recalls Donald Larsson's 1982 paper, *Novel into Film: Some Preliminary Reconsiderations*. The debate which prevailed at the time Larsson was writing focused on 'the intrinsic natures of the novel and the film', and he sought to move it on to explore "the perceptual differences in the relationships of reader to book and spectator to movie', adding 'we need a theory of adaptation based on an accurate history of the motivations and techniques of adaptations and an examination of how narrative forms are recoded in order to be transferred to the new medium" (1982:p.69; cited Hutcheon, 2013:p.86)

I believe that an understanding of these motivations and techniques can inform me, and any other adaptation practitioner in his or her work. As a writer I need constantly to remember what my original intention was when I embarked on a project, and, if I am adapting, how the techniques of adaptation can progress that intention. Although my research has been, to an extent, theoretical, its objective has been to make me a better practitioner. So, as Batty suggests, as I conduct my research and offer my contribution to this debate I will "talk not just *about* practice, but also *for* practice" (2014:p.3).

Hutcheon argues:

"Of course, there is a wide range of reasons why adapters might choose a particular story and then transcode it into a particular medium or genre....their aim might well be to economically and artistically supplant the prior works. They are just as likely to want to contest the aesthetic or political values of the adapted text as to pay homage. This, of course, is one of the reasons why the rhetoric of "fidelity" is less than adequate to discuss the process of adaptation." (2013:p.20)

Hutcheon's argument is amply demonstrated in the family of texts I will examine, where there has been an extra-ordinary variety of motivations behind each successive adaptation. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, some seem to have been concerned, like so many adapters, to find the universal truth contained within the story and to emphasise this by transposing it to another age or culture, while others have been emotionally attracted to some emotional or cultural aspect of it.

Others again have merely seen its commercial possibilities, while others yet again have been offended or outraged by the behaviour demonstrated, or attitudes espoused in the earlier work, and so sought to challenge that through their adaptation.

Commentators have offered several ways to categorize adaptation. Wagner specifically discussing making films of novels, suggested three modes – “transposition”, where the story is represented as faithfully as possible in the new medium; “commentary” where it is “either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect” (1975:p.223) and “analogy” which “must represent a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making *another* work or art.” (ibid:p.227. Original emphasis)

As discussed in the Introduction, Sanders (2006) has suggested ‘adaptation’ and ‘appropriation’ to define different approaches to the process of reworking stories. Hutcheon too differentiates between “(re-) interpretations and (re-) creations” (2013:p.172). While the ‘fidelity’ debate, specifically in terms of filmed novels, was still current Larsson identified three approaches used by adapters to their hypotexts:

“first a desire to “reproduce” the text, to bring the novel to the screen – what is usually called a “faithful” adaptation; second a more or less significant alteration to the work to fit the adaptor’s own artistic purposes; and finally, a conscious effort to criticize, subvert, undercut or deconstruct the novel itself, even to the point of altering it entirely.” (1982:p.74)

Importantly, these are categories offered, for the most part, by scholars and commentators, who are consumers of the texts. They are informative and enlightening, but as a practitioner of adaptation, I seek terms to help define the adapters’ *intentions*, which are of primary importance to me and to this PhD.

The intentionality debate - on the extent to which the author’s intention is the final arbiter of meaning in any given text - is therefore also highly relevant here.

W.K.Wimsatt wrote:-

“An art work is something which emerges from the private, individual, dynamic and intentionalist realm of its maker’s mind and personality; it is in a sense...made of intentions or intentionalistic material. But at the same time, in the moment it emerges, it enters a public and in a

certain sense an objective realm; it claims and gets attention from an audience; it invites and receives discussion, about its meaning and value, in an idiom of inter-subjectivity and conceptualization.” (1976:p.11-12)

From first-hand experience<sup>4</sup> I am well aware of what Wimsatt is saying, and of how possible it is for an actor, a director or a member of an audience to find meaning in a text that was never intended by its author. And that meaning might enrich the work, or it might subvert it, as, for example Johnny Speight discovered in the responses to his immortal sitcom character, Alf Garnett, whom he created to satirise the racist and reactionary attitudes he perceived in society. As Anthony Clark points out:

“It soon became clear that a part of the audience was laughing along to Alf’s rants about blacks, immigration and the welfare state. Rather than being a figure of fun, he was increasingly being seen as a voice of reason.” (Screenonline)

This is an extreme example of a section of the audience utterly subverting an author’s intention. Sanders argues that:

“the creative import of the author cannot be as easily dismissed as Roland Barthes’s or Michel Foucault’s influential theories of the ‘death of the author’ might suggest (Barthes 1988; Foucault 1979). Nevertheless the ability of these theories to destabilize the authority of the original text does enable multiple and sometimes conflicting productions of meaning.” (2006:p.3)

As a practitioner I share Sanders’ view. As I write, I have to be clear in my intention, whatever may happen to that once the words are written. This, as Barthes and Foucault suggest and Speight discovered, is beyond my control. But, in the case of a dramatic text such as my screenplay, should it come to be made into a film, actors will spend time researching my intention, or at least their character’s part in it, so it needs to be as clear as I can make it.

Therefore, to help me to define my, and other adaptation practitioners’ intentions I have used the terms ‘re-clothing’, ‘re-conception’ and ‘variation’ – with definitions not dissimilar to what Larsson (1982) suggested, but which are specifically informed by my practitioner’s perspective.

By 're-clothing' I mean when the adapter uses the existing characters, as well as, very possibly, the existing text, and simply transposes the story to a new context, time period or medium of delivery.

By 're-conception' I mean a completely new story which stands as a separate entity, a descendant perhaps, of the original. In these cases I examine to what extent authors require, or expect their audience to possess a knowledge of the source material - the hypotext - in order fully to appreciate the new version. As Hutcheon asks: "How, in short, are adaptations appreciated *as adaptations*?" (2013:p.120)

There are some adaptations, and here I use the word loosely, which fall into neither of the above categories – as suggested by Wagner's 'commentary' or Sanders' 'appropriation' categories. These are the works which are inspired by the hypotext and require at least some knowledge of it to be understood, but which do not seek to retell the story as such. Rather, they will offer some commentary, or different perspective on it. They will usually offer at least an outline of the original story, sufficient to enable an audience that does not know that work to understand this new one, but in truth many of these works cannot fully be appreciated without knowing the hypotext. These might be compared with variations on a theme in music, often sharing the convention of such pieces of stating the theme before going on to develop the different variations. Therefore, borrowing from Sanders' extensive list of terms to describe adaptation (2006:p.3), I will call these texts 'variations'.

For example, Baz Luhrman's 1996 film *Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet* is, I would suggest, a clear 're-clothing' – it tells nothing other than the Bard's story, albeit reclothed in a modern context, with all the implicit changes that brings with it. By contrast, Bernstein & Sondheim's 1957 musical *West Side Story* is a 're-conception' which requires no knowledge of the Shakespeare to be fully appreciated, albeit that an audience who knows that play will gain an additional level of appreciation and, as Hutcheon (2013) says, appreciate the adaptation as an adaptation.

Any modern dress production of *Hamlet* could be described as a 're-clothing', while Charles Marowitz' *The Marowitz Hamlet* (1970)<sup>5</sup>, and Stoppard's

*Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead* (1967)<sup>6</sup> are amongst numerous ‘variations’ on themes in Shakespeare’s iconic play. They comment on and explore the hypotext from different perspectives rather than simply retelling the story. But they are unquestionably *about* Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Peter Greenaway’s 1991 film *Prospero’s Books* similarly extemporises on the themes of *The Tempest*.

Clarifying each adapter’s intention in this way has helped me to assess what each was aiming and to evaluate what they delivered in that light.

### **Research-led Practice and Practice-led Research**

As I suggested in the Introduction, whilst my research into the history of the *Madame Butterfly* story had to precede and inform my practice in order that I would have a full grasp of my source material as well as of others’ adaptation approaches, my practice also informed that research in enabling an empathy with previous adapters. This PhD could therefore be described as combining Research-led Practice with Practice-led Research in Chapters 2 and 3, with Chapters 4 and 5 offering specifically the latter as I reflect on my practice of adapting the story. Further to that, as Smith and Dean (2009) suggest, research and practice mutually reciprocated in the development of both my script and my thesis.

Dallas J. Baker’s 2011 article *Queering Practice-Led Research: Subjectivity, performative research and the creative arts* describes his research method ‘in which the acts of researching, engaging with critical theory and producing creative artefacts are so intertwined with each other and with subjectivity that is it misleading to see them as discrete activities’ (2011:p.35). He perceives this as an alternative way of delivering creative artefacts ‘that are relevant to contemporary audiences or readerships’ (2011:p.34) to Gay and Lesbian publishing which he perceives as an industry in crisis. In this respect his intention mirrors my own, and his linking of Queer Theory and Practice-led Research offers a methodological model which informs mine in this PhD.

He begins with the suggestion that: “Research informs practice, practice leads research, research inspires practice and practice inspires research”. (2011:p.35) which echoes Smith and Dean, who suggest:

“Research...needs to be treated.. as an activity which can appear in a variety of guises across the spectrum of practice and research. It can be basic research carried out independent of creative work (although it may be subsequently applied to it); research conducted in the shaping of an artwork; or research which is the documentation, theorisation and contextualisation of an artwork – and the process of making it – by its creator.” (2009:p.3)

They also point out that “creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs” and that “the training and specialised knowledge that creative practitioners have and the processes they engage in when they are making art – can lead to specialised research insights which can then be generalised and written up as research.” (2009:p.5). They describe their research model - the ‘Iterative Cyclic Web’ - thus:

“This model combines the cycle (alternations between practice and research), the web (numerous points of entry, exit, cross-referencing and cross-transit within the practice-research cycle), and iteration (many sub-cycles in which creative practice or research processes are repeated with variation).” (2009:p.8)

It is a model which echoes my own experience as I have drawn on Adaptation Theory, Queer Theory, Genre Theory and others to inform my practice which, in its turn, has informed my understanding of these theories.

Baker’s ‘innovative’ pairing of Practice-led Research (PLR) and Queer Theory “is suggested by the primacy of gender and sexual subjectivity (or identity) to much work and practice in the creative arts” (2011:p.34). He describes it as arising from his own “creative writing that grew out of a wish to discuss, understand, express, explore and describe gender and sexual difference” (ibid.). My creative writing, and specifically my desire to adapt, has grown out of a very similar wish. Baker goes on: “Subjectivities or identities expressed or represented within texts can be seen to be connection points for creative arts consumers’ own subjectivities” (ibid.), clearly echoing Fierstein’s desire for his audience to “do the translating” expressed in *The Celluloid Closet* (1995).

Baker suggests that “In a queered PLR, the term *reflexivity* is preferable to reflection” (2011:p39, original emphasis). He quotes Matless’ definition of it as “reflection upon the conditions through which research is produced, disseminated and received” (2009:np). He points out that this process is crucial to any PLR, and echoes Butler (1990,1993):

“The practice of reflexivity can be seen to draw out the performative aspects of writing practice, the performative nature of the completed artefact as research output as well as the way that subjectivities, genders and sexualities are performatively constituted in and through discourse.” (2011:p.39)

For me this reflects the difference between my approach to this PhD as a practitioner from the approach a theorist would use. Every part of my work is performative, and affects not only the artefact produced, but also my practice and my own subjectivity.

Baker then echoes Arnold (2005) in suggesting that “Queered PLR projects would normally gather ‘data’ in three primary ways: through traditional research; through practice ..... and through reflexivity” (2011:p.39).

Again, all this relates clearly to my PLR, and the way in which I approached it. Using a methodology very similar to Baker’s, I researched the previous versions of *Madame Butterfly* to provide the context for my practice as well as the substance of my story. I then created my own version, and in this thesis I reflect on my practice as well as on the final research artefact.

Baker also quotes Haseman’s definition of research paradigms, the third being Performative Research, defined as being “Expressed in non-numeric data, but in forms of data other than words in discursive text. These include material forms of practice, of still and moving images, of music and sound, of live action and digital code” (2006:p.6). This defines my methodology, but there is an interesting difference which it is important to point out. Baker alludes to it in the preface to his 2013 collection of unproduced screenplays, discussing whether a screenplay can be described as deserving of publication if it has not been produced: “Scriptwriting is a practice. More to the point, scriptwriting is a *writing* practice that deserves scholarly attention” (2013:p.4 original emphasis). He emphasizes the practice ‘script-writing’ as opposed to ‘screenwriting’: “the term ‘script’ hopefully re-orientes the reader from approaching the text as ancillary to a staged

or screened production to understanding it as a finished creative and research work in its own terms.” (2013:p.2)

In my view - a view perhaps stemming from my professional experience which is primarily as a director, for whom the script is a starting point - my script is a description of an imagined artefact which will consist of recorded and edited performances, images and sounds. Baker would describe it as “akin to an architectural drawing - an illustration and set of instructions enabling the construction of the “true” creation that is the finished building” (ibid.). It endeavours to describe, as accurately as possible, those intended performances, images and sounds, and it uses words so to do. There are therefore two levels by which it can be judged – the performed artefact it describes, or the literary quality of the language-based description.

In accordance with Haseman’s (2006) third research paradigm, I believe my screenplay should be judged on the former – which is the viewer’s experience of the intended film, described as accurately as possible. As a screenplay it serves a different purpose from that of a novel which has only words to describe scenes, images and activities. So, for example, if a scene is set against the backdrop of a sunset, while a novel will use words, and possibly poetic language, to describe that sunset a film will use an image. If a screenwriter uses poetic language to describe that image that is not something the viewer will ever experience should the film come to be made. I believe that the screenwriter’s job, therefore, is, quite simply, accurately to evoke the response the viewer might have to that sunset.

So, while my contextual research and reflexivity must be discursive, I believe that my artefact should be seen as “a form of data other than words” (Haseman:2006:p.6), albeit it too comprises nothing other than words. In my view it is what the words describe that matters. To continue Baker’s metaphor, I believe that architecture should be judged not on scale drawings, models, or computer simulations but on the quality of the building depicted. Baker quotes Boon’s observation of how, when discussing Shakespeare, “the written play is privileged over its performance” (2008:p.30). It is all too easy to forget that the text we have of his works is no more than a handed-down blueprint for, or record of contemporary performances. Although they are often perceived as such, these scripts were never intended to be works of literature in themselves.



It is very possible, arguably probable, that the screenplay I have written will never be made into a film – the vast majority of screenplays are not – but that does not invalidate it as an artefact - an imagined film - as Baker (2013) makes entirely clear. But had I not set out with the intention of a film being made from it I would have written a novel. And should it ever be made into a film it is very clear that that film will be markedly different from my imagined film because numerous other creative minds will have been brought to bear on it.

So whilst I could have offered a film, or part of a film, as the artefact to accompany this thesis that would have informed my practice as a director as much or more than as an adapter, and it is the latter which I am seeking to address - and specifically my adaptation practice rather than my writing skills in general. Furthermore, a film would no longer be exclusively my artefact, but rather one for which I was project leader.

In preparing this thesis, like the critics, I looked at the work of others, but, crucially, I also looked at my own work. Harper points out that “the literary critic does not draw upon the vast sites of knowledge that the creative writer draws upon” (2006:p.162). In my case, as with most writers, those ‘vast sites’ include my own life experiences. This creative writing in itself therefore constitutes an important part of my research, and for both that and my thesis I used, like Baker, the technique described by Levi-Strauss (1962) as ‘bricolage’:

“Bricolage is ... a technique, a methodology and the resulting products or artefacts of that technique. In this sense, bricolage is both the way that research is undertaken and the research outputs themselves. Bricolage is both a pathway to knowledge and a contribution to knowledge.” (2011:p.40)

In his article *Creative Writing Praxis as Queer Becoming*, Baker illuminates this, articulating “how writing practice and engagement with textual artefacts (literature) can trigger an ongoing queer becoming” (2013:p.359). Following on from the contention by both Deleuze (1987) and Žižek (2003) that “the truly new can only emerge through the process of repetition” Baker uses the image of DNA: “Take as an example the replication of genes. Each time a gene replicates, based on a DNA code, there is a possibility of mutation, of change, of the emergence of something significantly new” (2013:p.361). This provides a useful metaphor for the process of adaptation that I have undertaken in this PhD. “In a

Queer becoming, the subject does not merely imitate or conform to another or external activity or mode of being. Queer becoming is a generative process, the constitution of a new subjectivity altogether.” (ibid.) In this way an adaptation repeats what has gone before but changes it into something new, as I hope my *Bangkok Butterfly* has done. Baker goes on:-

“Engagement with the notion of Queer becoming in the act of producing creative texts can lead to new understandings between subjectivity, gender and sexuality and the practice of writing itself. In addition, the creative texts arising from this (Queer) practice can demonstrate how gender and sexual subjectivity can be rewritten in ways that foreground alternative notions of sexuality, gender and subjectivity and that facilitate more open narrative trajectories. These re-writings provide opportunities for ongoing engagement in the act of Queer self-making or becoming. More to the point they replicate non-normative subjectivities and, as a kind of template or model or discursive code, encourage further replication and inevitable mutation.” (2013:p.362)

My version of *Madame Butterfly* is, I think, a clear example of what Baker describes. It is a queered version, not just in the sense that it is about a homosexual relationship, but in that it destabilises the entire heteronormative paradigm of the original story. I have expressed my intention that, as an adaptation of a heterosexual story, it should inform, and change perceptions of sexuality, sexual behaviour and sexual identity. Given that part of my research intention in this thesis, as well as in my practice, is to develop my adaptation skills, the repetition, with changes, of my previous processes should offer me a new subjectivity as well as informing future practitioners and scholars.

As already suggested, the process of writing both script and thesis has been performative, and both pulled together knowledge from a bricolage of sources which included the work of others, my own life experiences and my imagination. Therefore, like Baker’s queered PLR:

“These artefacts are envisaged as performative bricolage that explores issues of gender and sexual difference and performativity in the context of an ethics of the self or self-bricolage.” (2011:p.47)

Baker recalls Smith and Dean’s (2009) quotation of the OECD definition that defines research as “a creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humanity, culture and society and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications”

(2009:p.3, quoted Baker 2011:p.36). I suggest that this PhD constitutes research in precisely that way. Following Baker's model of Queered Practice-led Research, I believe that my analysis of intentions in adaptation undertaken by me as well as by my predecessors, has changed my own subjectivity and performance as an adapter, as has my exploration of the process of queering a text. At the same time my creative artefact offers new subjectivities to the characters in its hypotext, informed by their different sexual identities, and this of itself will, I hope, offer a new perspective on that hypotext. I offer all this as new knowledge useful to future practitioners as well as to adaptation scholars.

---

<sup>3</sup> *The Tempest, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Love's Labour's Lost, The Merry Wives of Windsor.*

<sup>4</sup> During rehearsals for my produced stage plays, *Rough Trade* (1988) and *Queer Counsel* (2004)

<sup>5</sup> Produced by the RSC in 1964

<sup>6</sup> First produced at the Edinburgh Festival fringe in 1966

## CHAPTER 2: Investigating the Old

Before spawning another offspring for the literary dynasty I intended to continue it was important to identify the essential elements, in terms of both theme and plotline, which comprise the *Madame Butterfly* story. At the same time, researching why others chose to adapt it, how they tackled the job and what they did with it informed my practice as an adapter and my responsibilities, if any, to my source text. Additionally, exploring what others had done with the story and why they might have done it indicated possible directions my version might take.

In this chapter, therefore, I will look back to the origins of the *Madame Butterfly* story which Puccini made iconic with his opera, and at some of the versions of it which have followed on stage and screen, with and without music. I will investigate what each author or adapter's intention might have been in creating each version. I will identify each as a re-clothing, a re-conception or a variation, and, in particular, seek to understand what motivated or necessitated the changes made to the story with each new version, particularly inasmuch as these informed my own practice as I adapted the story myself. There were many changes made in each case for many different reasons, to do with factors such as the medium of delivery, the intended audience and the socio-political context at the time, not least the dramatically changing East-West relationships and social sensibilities of the twentieth century. I will look at how the story was used, and, in some cases, abused by those who sought to exploit its popularity for commercial reasons, and I will focus my attention in particular on the changes that informed my queered version, which are mainly in the areas of sexual and social mores and in the differing perceptions of morality and transgression. A very important consideration for all my predecessors was what their audiences sought, expected or would tolerate, and it is clear that a story about gay prostitution and sex tourism could present a major issue for audiences, even in the liberal context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As I made clear in Chapter 1, I see the script as a potential film, and therefore a consideration of that film's potential audience was an essential part of its development.

The story of Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly*, to which few would not ascribe the status of primary text in this family, is disarmingly simple.

While stationed in Nagasaki, an American officer, B.F. Pinkerton marries a 15-year-old Japanese girl, Cio Cio San, known as Madama Butterfly, who has been forced, through poverty, to become a Geisha, and has been found for him by a marriage-broker – Goro. He declares his love for her, but has no intention of this being a permanent arrangement - he makes that clear to his friend and confidant, the American Consul, Sharpless, at the start of the opera. After a short time he returns home leaving his new wife pregnant with his son. Completely in love with him, she rejects her family and another suitor – the rich Yamadori - determined to await Pinkerton's return and convinced, despite all contrary advice, of his fidelity. She waits patiently, alone apart from her maid Suzuki and her son, Trouble, until, three years later, he does return, bringing with him his American wife, Kate, whom he has married in the meantime. Utterly shamed and despairing the girl kills herself leaving her son to the care of his father and stepmother.

This is the story of a love affair and can most accurately be described as a romance. Jule Selbo describes the romance film genre as: "an adventure. A journey.....narratives focusing on wanting love, finding love, losing love or gaining love - and often takes on an examination of the notion of true love" (2015:p.92). This one ends with the death of one of the lovers by her own hand, and that, again in Selbo's definition, makes it a tragic romance: "truly tragic characters must cause their own demise" (2015:p.75). But there is another crucial element to the story. Pinkerton woos Cio Cio San in the full, and expressed knowledge that his marriage will not be a permanent arrangement. The relationship is therefore dishonest and exploitative, and this element underpins, to a greater or lesser extent, almost every version of the story which preceded and followed Puccini's, raising a moral issue, and the question of Pinkerton's guilt, as it does so.

It is therefore perhaps not surprising to discover that the original *Madame Butterfly* novella, written in 1898 by American author John Luther Long, was a moral response to a previous story.

***Madame Chrysanthème*. Pierre Loti. 1887**

*Madame Chrysanthème* was the first fictional incarnation of a story with recognisable elements of *Madame Butterfly*. It has a clear connection with what followed, and has become part of the ancestry explored and exploited throughout the later generations of the story.

Told in the first person, this story is based firmly on a true one. Jan Van Rij (2001) points out that ‘Loti’ was the nom de plume of the French naval officer Julien Viaud and the story is, to a considerable extent, autobiographical. He also points to clear evidence that Viaud’s experience was not unique, and that temporary marriages between foreigners and local girls were a long standing tradition in Nagasaki. Burke-Gaffney (2004) also points out how arrangements such as the one depicted in the story were commonplace and known as ‘Japanese Marriages’ – drawing a thin veil of respectability over what was basically prostitution. As the *Butterfly* story has cascaded down the years through many different versions, prostitution, or some kind of sexual exploitation - explicit or implicit - has never been far below the surface, as we will discover.

Loti’s story tells how, with his fellow officer, Yves, he comes up with the idea of making a temporary marriage while they are stationed in Nagasaki. Once ashore he finds a marriage broker, chooses a girl and sets up home, then enjoys himself for the duration of his stay observing and taking some part in his wife’s culture. When called back to his ship to depart for other shores he leaves his wife behind, with apparently no regrets, counting the money he has given her.

Loti’s story introduces the elements and characters which have come down through the subsequent *Madame Butterfly* stories. The idea of a visiting foreigner making a temporary marriage to a Japanese girl, exploiting Japanese law which allows a marriage to be dissolved quite simply by the husband walking out; the paper house on a hill with a view of the harbour, taken on a 999-year lease which can be ended with 1 month’s notice; a friend who encourages him – in this case Yves, who later threatens to become his rival (very different from his descendant in later versions, Sharpless, who becomes a much more moral character); a marriage broker, Mr. Kangourou (Goro in later versions), who finds the girl and

arranges everything; and of course the girl herself, O-Kiku-san, or Madame Chrysanthème who, at 18, is a little older than her literary descendants.

But for all the similarities of character and situation, in essence and in intention, this story is very different from what followed. The arrangement between Loti and the girl is a totally financial one. Though money changes hands, more or less discreetly, in many of the subsequent versions, here it is the entire motivation. It could hardly be described as a romance. Loti makes no pretence to love his 'wife', he is merely intrigued and amused by her antics. The best he can do is to move reluctantly towards a kind of affection as the story progresses: "After all, I do not positively detest this little Chrysanthème, and when there is no repugnance on either side, habit turns into a make-shift of attachment." (2005:Chapter XVI)

Even when he suspects his friend Yves of trying to supplant him in his wife's affections his concern is entirely for what constitutes acceptable behaviour. Any hint of sexual jealousy is strenuously denied:

"Never have they seemed to get on so well together, Yves and my dolly, and I might even feel anxious, were I less sure of my good brother, and if, moreover, it were not a matter of perfect indifference to me." (2005:Chapter XI)

His concern is all for appearances – that sort of thing is bad form and might put him in a bad light. Her feelings in the matter are of no consequence to either of them, and nor even are his feelings for her, which are, in any case, slight. Burke-Gaffney offers a photograph of Viaud (Loti), and describes him as "vain and self-absorbed" (2004:p.55). He suggests that the officer's less than passionate engagement with the girl was because Viaud was, in fact, homosexual. Berrong endorses this view in his analysis of all Loti's novels, and describes Madame Chrysanthème as providing "the basis for sexual ambiguity in what has become the legend of Madame Butterfly" (2003:p.121) Loti's principal literary descendant – Pinkerton – is at least in lust with his girl, though Berrong cites Mitterand's 1996 film of Puccini's opera where Pinkerton "is accompanied by a black sailor....who is remarkably intimate physically with his superior officer" and suggests an implication that 'the captain's sexuality was not as unquestionably hetero as Puccini's opera makes him out to be' (2003:p126). Whatever the reasons behind it there is clearly in Loti the seed of that heartless exploiter. Since he tells his own story it is the reader who will perceive this – and many did, as I will discuss.

## Japonisme

If the practice of ‘Japanese Marriage’ was the seed of the story which became *Madame Butterfly*, then the soil in which it was planted and thrived was Japonisme. This was the fashionable fascination with all things Japanese - art, culture, ceramics - which spread throughout Europe in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a direct consequence of the ending of the Edo period identified by van Rij (2001). As Lambourne says: “The catalyst for the phenomenon of Japonisme was the opening up of Japan to international trade in 1858.” (2005:p.7). This followed more than 200 years during which Japan “embraced a policy known as *sakoku* – ‘the secluded country’” (ibid.). Japanese artefacts were shipped west in ever-increasing quantities, and these novelties quickly became sought after. As its name implies, the fashion began in France – the term’s first use seems to have been in 1872 by French author and collector Philippe Burty – but it spread throughout Europe as well as to America and “was at its height in the 1880s” (2005:p.7). Lambourne also relates how the quote from Alexandre Dumas, fils’ play *Le Francillon* “everything is Japanese nowadays” (1887) “rapidly became a widely-used catchphrase” (2005:p.131), how the fashion was lampooned in Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Mikado* (1885), and how: “It was at first within the covers of a successful novel that the artistic cross-pollination of Japan and Europe, first on the page and later on the stage, effectively took place.” (2005:p.135) That novel was Loti’s *Madame Chysanthème*.

### ***Madame Chysanthème*. André Messager. 1893**

Six years after the publication of Loti’s novella, French composer André Messager, presumably also encouraged by Japonisme, adapted it into the first operatic version of the story. On the face of it the material is not promising – the lack of conflict is problematic, and, as suggested above, there is not much of the love which was fairly essential to such works at the time.

Hutcheon points out:

“Historically, it is melodramatic worlds and stories that have lent themselves to the form of opera and musical dramas, where music can re-inforce the stark emotional oppositions and tensions created



by the requisite generic compression (because it takes longer to sing than to speak a line).” (2013:p.15)

Melodrama is in short supply in Loti’s novella, but, as van Rij points out, Messenger took what hints there are – Loti’s suspicion of a liaison between Yves and Chrysanthème, and the discovery that she has been faithful, along with the clear failure to understand her different culture – and builds them to the level necessary to sustain a romantic opera:

“Messenger had, of course, to adapt Chrysanthème’s character to this plot and so she became a more emotional person than she is in the novel and her unhappiness about Pierre’s departure is real. One notes also the complete absence of any hint about the money paid to her. Messenger’s Chrysanthème is moved by love.” (2001:p.34)

Here, therefore, is a clear example of how adapting a story not just to the stage but to the high art of opera necessitates changes to its structure not only to offer the intensity and theatricality the medium demands but also to take account of the moral expectations of contemporary audiences. The Japanese equivalent of a working class girl who is little better than a prostitute giving voice to soaring romantic arias might well have caused outrage, and so the character of Chrysanthème herself must also be elevated<sup>7</sup>.

As we will discover, Giacomo Puccini, working in the same operatic medium, similarly felt the need to elevate the status of his Geisha, Cio Cio San, from where she had been in his source material. So both composers, along with their librettists, saw the need to change the story, not only to suit their medium, but also to suit their intended audiences whose idea of what was acceptable was, of course, vastly more limited than what is embraced today.

Messenger changed the context and the essence of the characters into two people genuinely in love, so the story became a romance. Yet, however enriched in its new attire, this remains a re-clothing of Loti. It tells the same story with the same characters’ names. He was not making any comment on the original, beyond enhancing the drama, nor setting it in a new period or location. But he did add the dimension of love, and in so doing Messenger was not only serving the needs of his medium, but also, intentionally or incidentally, commenting on his hypotext in chorus with other contemporary voices who took exception to Loti’s

chauvinism. This is demonstrated clearly when his opera ends with an aria in which Chrysanthème sings of her love:-

“You told me I was no more than a doll, a mousmé  
But if I could watch you leave with a smile on my lips  
I would like you to know when you are far away from me  
That in Japan too there are women who love... and who weep”  
(1893:Epilogue)

***Le Cahier Rose de Madame Chrysanthème.* Félix Régamey. 1893**

Others voices in the chorus, as Reed points out, were English poet and author of *The Light of Asia*, Edwin Arnold (1884. Cited Reed 2010:p.16), and Parisian artist Félix Régamey. In the same year as Messager’s opera was first performed, Régamey was sufficiently incensed by Loti’s attitude to write a satire entitled *Le Cahier Rose de Madame Chrysanthème (The Pink Notebook of Madame Chrysanthème)*, in which he creates the girl’s own diary of brief marriage to the French sailor, complete with his own, and her prefaces. Her opinion of her husband is rather lower than the man’s opinion of himself: “My friends finally called him the Perfumed Rhinoceros” (1893 – quoted Reed, 2010:p.77). His philistinism offends her. “He seems insensitive to the sight of the most charming things” (1893 – quoted Reed, 2010:p.85).

At the end of this diary the girl attempts suicide by drowning, symbolically weighing herself down with the silver coins she has earned, but she is saved, though it is not made clear how. I would categorise Régamey’s intention here as a ‘variation’ on Loti, in that it clearly indicates its source, but takes a markedly different stand to comment on the story which prompted it.

As Sanders says:

“Adaptation is frequently involved in offering commentary on a source text. This is achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the ‘original’, adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalised.” (2006:p.18-19)

Sanders specifically gives the example of Jean Rhys’ intention in writing *Wide Sargasso Sea* to give a voice to the marginalised character Bertha Mason in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*. In telling the girl’s story and suggesting her attempt

at suicide, this is exactly what Régamey's satire does. He focuses on the girl, suggesting emotional consequences to the liaison, and prefigures the next - crucial - variation, written five years later, which cemented the story's place in history.

### ***Madame Butterfly*. John Luther Long. 1898**

John Luther Long's novella - first published in *The Century*, a popular quarterly - was the first work to bear the name *Madame Butterfly* and, like Régamey, his intention was clearly to give a voice to the Japanese girl he perceives as having been exploited by Loti. Van Rij is convinced, as are many others, that the later story cannot but have been written with knowledge of *Madame Chrysanthème*, which was a best-seller at the time – “Obviously, nearly all of the elements in Long's story have been borrowed from Loti.” (2001:p.66).

Hutcheon claims:

“It is obvious that adapters must have their own personal reasons for deciding first to do an adaptation and then choosing which adapted work and what medium to do it in. They not only interpret that work but in doing so they also take a position on it.” (2013:p.92)

So what, just 10 years after Loti's story, was Long's *motivation* in writing another version of it, borrowing heavily from it in terms of story, setting, characters and detail? What position was he taking on it? Burke-Gaffney suggests he took similar offence to Régamey's at the earlier story:

“He was perhaps so frustrated with Loti's asexual relationship with Chrysanthème and the bleak circumstances of their parting that he took it upon himself to write a sequel that would serve justice to the woman while, at the same time, exposing the Frenchman's wrongdoings and establishing a conclusion that would satisfy other readers like himself.” (2004:p.73)

Burke-Gaffney also cites the description in the New York Times in 1927 of Long as “a sentimentalist, and a feminist and proud of it” (2004:p.68) and this, it seems to me, is key. Long seems primarily to be motivated by a desire to redress what he saw as the moral wrong of the earlier story. In terms of my definitions, this is something between a re-conception and a variation – it creates a new story from

the material of the old, not in a different period or culture, but in a new moral context. Unlike with Régamey, a knowledge of Loti is not essential fully to appreciate it, but, given that *Madame Chrysanthème* was a best-seller at the time, it is likely that much of the audience would have known that work, seen the connection and drawn Long's intended moral conclusions. It is therefore also, to use Wagner's (1975) nomenclature, a commentary on the morality of the earlier work.

Long chooses not to change Loti's medium – he writes another novella – but what he does change dramatically is the emphasis of Loti's story. Like Régamey, he tells the girl's story. And his awareness of Régamey is demonstrated by an oblique intertextual reference to “the story of the Pink Geisha” in his opening chapter. Long's ‘husband’ is an American naval officer, B.F. Pinkerton. He is arrogant, selfish, xenophobic and unfeeling - just as Loti's critics perceived him to be. Adelaide, Pinkerton's American wife, is also portrayed as arrogant, patronising and unfeeling. Long's outrage at their behaviour is clear.

It is interesting that he changes the nationality of the man from French to American. This might be simply because he feels more comfortable writing a character who shares his nationality, but he might also be observing the new American colonialism from a Japanese perspective, prompted by his sister who lived in Nagasaki<sup>8</sup>, and using the Frenchman's story to present a microcosmic allegory of his own country's behaviour in general. Van Rij believes the ‘unequal treaties’ signed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century between the US and Japan as they agreed trade deals might have had some bearing: “The more likely purpose was .... to shake the conscience of American readers and to raise sympathy for the victims in a kind of moral retrospect at a time that the ‘unequal treaties’ were about to be abolished.” (2001:p.74)

Loti narrates his own story and describes everything from the selfish, even solipsistic viewpoint of the foreigner husband. By contrast Pinkerton hardly appears in Long's story. He is gone by Chapter 4 (out of 15) and never reappears in person. Long's story is completely the girl's (now named Cho Cho San) story, beginning more or less where Loti's ended. It is, in effect a sequel.

Pinkerton is the unchallenged villain of Long's piece. Disapproval of his behaviour is integral to the story. There are clear warnings to him from Sayre (his friend, the descendant of Yves in Loti) on hearing of the latter's curt dismissal of his wife's relatives:-

"Sayre, with a little partisanship, explained to him that in Japan filial affection is the paramount motive, and that these "ancestors", living and dead, were his wife's sole link to such eternal life as she hoped for. He trusted Pinkerton would not forget this." (1898:Chapter II)

Sayre is clearly more sensitive to, and respectful of the local customs than his friend, even though it was he who put him up to the idea of the marriage in the first place, having previously done it himself. And the Consul, Sharpless, knows Pinkerton's reputation: "There was a saying in the navy that if anyone could forget a played game or spent bottle more quickly than Pinkerton, he had not yet been born." (1898: Chapter XI)

The moral perspective in Long is clear to see, and this must surely point to his motivation as an author. By writing the girl's story he wanted to clarify his disapproval of Loti's behaviour.

Long utilises the irony of the difference between Japanese and Western concepts of marriage and divorce, and of leasehold on property which Loti had introduced – that in Japan a husband can divorce his wife by leaving her, and end a 999-year lease at a month's notice. Both these factors have prompted Pinkerton's Japanese adventure. But he cruelly tells Cho Cho San how much harder it is to divorce in the west – involving lawyers and courts. Paradoxically she clings to the vain hope of his Western concept of marriage while he exploits her Japanese one. This is the clash of two cultures, and the mutual failure of understanding, wilful on the husband's side, wishful on the wife's. While Loti constantly fails to understand, or take any serious interest in his wife's culture, Long's Pinkerton takes an arrogant dislike to Cho Cho San's and at the same time exploits it mercilessly.

The way in which Long adds a moral compass to Loti's story is interesting, and informative. What he does is to take as a starting point Loti's descriptions of incidents, then add consequences, and those consequences represent the seeds

of the tragedy which the story has become, even though Long did not take it all the way there.

There are two very likely consequences to a man and a woman getting married. The first is, as in *Messenger*, love. In stark contrast to Loti's hint of amused, surprised affection between him and his wife, Cho Cho San has fallen head over heels for Pinkerton even though there is absolutely no evidence of him returning the compliment. However financial the original arrangement – and Loti's remains so – love has become the force governing Long's Japanese girl<sup>9</sup>. The second consequence is a child – the most tangible consequence possible and one which is permanent and life-changing for the mother. Not only does that child have a life and need to be cared for but also he will always connect Cho Cho San to her husband. He also renders her situation more desperate, both financially and in terms of her isolation.

While Loti simply describes his wife's relatives in an amused and detached way, Long's Pinkerton rejects them and forces his wife to do the same, riding roughshod over her culture and leaving her isolated – cut off from her family and totally dependent on Pinkerton - another very damaging consequence.

Having isolated Cho Cho San, Long raises the stakes again by introducing a way out for her, in the form of a new character - the alternative suitor, Yamadori. Although this character - much-travelled and, significantly, westernised - seems little more than a Japanese 'Pinkerton' in terms of his intentions towards her, he could at least restore her to her family and culture, and resolve her financial difficulties. Yet she rejects him, even teases him. She then, pathetically, tells Sharpless to inform Pinkerton that she has accepted Yamadori's offer, in the hope that jealousy will drive her husband back to her. The consequence of these actions is further exacerbation of her isolation.

Perhaps the most important consequence Long offers, which was also suggested in Régamey, is that Cho Cho San's father was a Samurai, with their concept of honour inscribed on his sword: "To die with honour when one can no longer live with honour" (1903: Ch.XV). Here lies the seed of the suicide which has subsequently become her defining act, but Long stops short of that. He pulls his heroine back from the brink, even as the blood flows from her attempt.

In the light of what followed, this is fascinating. Butterfly's suicide has become, arguably, the very icon of who she is. Yet the author who created her had her live on, with her child. Long's Cho Cho San is very different from her literary ancestor, Chrysanthème, and from her descendants. She is spirited and playful - she has a mind of her own and a real sense of fun. When Suzuki, her maid, angers her by suggesting that she should take Goro, the marriage-broker's advice and find a new husband, she demonstrates a temper unseen in other versions of the character:

“Cho Cho San dropped the baby with a reckless thud, and sprang at her again. She gripped her throat viciously, then flung her, laughing, aside.

“Speak concerning marriage once more, an' you die.” (1898: Chapter V)

This is neither Loti's pretty doll, nor Puccini's subsequent demure victim. Her treatment of the suitor Yamadori is playful and teasing, and Long actually remarks “She had an access of demureness” (1898: Chapter X) as she explains to Sharpless what her life with Pinkerton had been like, which suggests that she had been playing that role only because he wanted her to. It is perhaps this spirit which the feminist Long cannot see defeated by the callous and unfeeling Pinkertons. When Adelaide comes to collect the child she finds the house empty - Butterfly has taken him and gone away, presumably back to her life as a Geisha. Surely this outcome again hints at why Long - if a feminist, as Burke-Gaffney (2004) suggests - wrote his story. Long could not accept that this strong, playful character would kill herself, and leave her child to the care of such appalling Americans.

There is another interesting result of Long's addition of consequences to add moral compass. If his intention was to redress Loti's wrongs, in the process he created a far more dramatic story. It has conflict, absent from Loti but recognised as the essence of drama, as well as an enriched story arc. While subsequent adapters have looked back to Loti for context, events and details, the foundations of the drama were laid by Long, and it is his story, particularly since it predates the principal musical versions and is therefore essentially naturalistic, which became my primary hypotext.

***Madame Butterfly*. David Belasco. 1900**

Butterfly's executioner was one of America's most famous playwrights at the time, David Belasco, who saw the dramatic potential of Long's novella, and just two years later, in 1900, produced his stage version. Burke-Gaffney gives a clear idea of where this man was coming from: "His hallmarks were lavish sets, adventurous mechanical effects and experiments in lighting that revolutionised the appearance of the stage, made traditional footlights obsolete and brought an atmosphere of intense realism to theatrical productions." (2004:p.95). Lambourne points out: "by 1885 plentiful evidence existed for any theatrically aware impresario that virtually any show with a Japanese theme had a good chance of success." (2005:p.139). If Long was motivated by a desire to redress Loti's moral indifference, Belasco was clearly motivated by the commercial possibilities of the story.

Belasco's play is a slight piece which lacks any real depth of character<sup>10</sup>. He takes a thoroughly pragmatic approach to delivering the essence of Long's story theatrically, lifting a lot of the dialogue directly. He does introduce the new theatrical idea of the vigil as Cho Cho San awaits, in vain, the return of her husband – an idea which gave full reign to the theatrical devices he enjoyed, and which apparently lasted a full 14 minutes without any words spoken. Puccini would later develop this musically to famous effect. Belasco restructures Long's story and characters not so much to allow them to drive the plot as to meet his theatrical needs. The friend, Sayre, has gone, conflated with the Consul, Sharpless (perhaps to save hiring an additional actor) who now visits Butterfly rather than the reverse (perhaps thus saving the cost of an additional set) witnessing her offer from Yamadori.

Most importantly his Butterfly goes through with her suicide, leaving Trouble to be brought up by his father and step-mother. The play ends on a deathbed reconciliation and a melodramatic echoing of Pinkerton's promise to return when the robins nest again – "Too bad those robins didn' nes' again. (She dies)" (1928:p.32). Clearly Mrs. Pinkerton's arrival to find an empty house does not make for a dramatic final curtain, so however much Long might have been morally driven not to let Butterfly be defeated, Belasco just needed a good theatrical ending, and it is one which appealed greatly to Puccini, as we will discover.



Belasco's play is a re-clothing of Long's novella – his intention was simply to tell that same story in a theatrical context, motivated by the prospect of commercial success. But one simple, theatrically-motivated decision was to alter the entire subsequent trajectory of this story, and, arguably, corrupt it forever.

There is another, important, way in which Belasco undermines Long's intentions, and this is an early example of an issue with which every teller of this story has had to grapple, myself included. That is the question of Pinkerton's guilt. Although his actions result in Cho Cho San's death, Belasco is at pains to temper the sense of transgression. Whilst Long's Pinkerton, as we have seen, is a monster, Belasco's seems far more forgivable. He is a young man guilty of infatuation and perhaps a little thoughtlessness rather than the unashamed, arrogant user to be found in the hypotext. He writes to Sharpless: "You won't believe it, but for two weeks after I sailed, I was dotty in love with her." (1928:p.23). It is impossible to imagine Long's Pinkerton capable of any such sensitivity. This admission has the effect of making the character far more sympathetic, or, at least, less unsympathetic, so removing the moral indictment intrinsic to Long's version. As he listens to Butterfly, singing offstage as she awaits his return, Pinkerton excuses himself to Sharpless:-

"I thought when I left this house, the few tears, sobs, little polite regrets, would be over as I crossed the threshold. I started to come back for a minute, but I said to myself: "Don't do it; by this time she's ringing your gold pieces to make sure they're good"." (1928:p.28)

Belasco has clearly read Loti – the reference to the gold pieces is not in Long. He uses this throw-back to excuse Pinkerton – to make him as innocent of intentional harm as Loti saw himself to be. He is still an irredeemable coward who, unable to face Butterfly, hides, then runs from the room, leaving his American wife (whose name, for some reason, is changed to Kate) to deal with the consequences of his actions. But even here it could be argued that it his guilt which drives him away, rather than unalloyed cowardice, and he does return to show some remorse to the dying Cho Cho San. In the hypotext he makes no effort to show up at all, leaving the entire job to his wife.

Belasco's Kate, too, is far more sympathetic: "It's hard, very hard, I know; but would it not be better?" (1928:p.31) than Long's Adelaide: "How very charming, how lovely you are, dear! Will you kiss me, you pretty --- plaything." (1898:

Chapter XIV). This request meets with a dignified and appropriate ‘no’ - entirely in keeping with the spirited girl who cannot in the end bequeath her child to this appalling couple.

Belasco’s motivation for this seems to chime with what we must assume to be his entire intention in creating the piece – to please his audience. Whilst Long could get his story published despite its ringing condemnation of American behaviour, Belasco needed many hundreds of Americans to pay money to come and see his play, and whilst the fashionable thirst for all things Japanese might have attracted them, they would be unlikely to appreciate the spectacle of their countryman abusing and exploiting that culture so shamelessly. He could not tell the story without some sense of Pinkerton’s guilt (though, interestingly, some 90 years later, as we shall see, Boublil and Schönberg were to do precisely that in the musical *Miss Saigon* (1989)) but he is clearly seeking to make his behaviour less distasteful.

By doing what he does, in a paradoxical way Belasco undoes any good which Long did. While Long is sympathetic to the Japanese perspective and ultimately gives Butterfly and her culture a kind of revenge over their exploiters, Belasco exploits them still further – making commercial entertainment out of an American victory over a weaker culture, perpetuating what Lambourne describes as “the axiomatic assumption of Western superiority that falling in love with a white man entailed” (2005:p.134).

What this makes clear is that if an adapter is motivated purely commercially then he is more likely to be driven by what he perceives as his audience’s expectations than by any moral commitment to the story. If Long’s motivation was to change perceptions of Loti’s behaviour, which he perceived as finding too much sympathy and acceptance, then Belasco excuses it by offering sympathy and acceptance, even though his outcome for Butterfly is far worse.

In July 1900, Giacomo Puccini, in London for the first UK performance of his *Tosca*, saw, and, despite not speaking a word of English, was moved and inspired by the London production of Belasco’s play - in particular the ending. When a member of the audience who responds only to the visual elements of what he is witnessing goes on to become an adapter, then the original author’s intention -

and in this case I mean Long's, although Belasco had already subverted that - is clearly at further risk.

In 1903, as his heroine gained fame, Long's novella was republished. He wrote a preface in the knowledge of how famous his heroine had already become, and of what was in store: "in London, Signore Puccini saw her, and when she comes back she will be a song! Sad, sad indeed, but yet a song!" (1903: Preface). What he said, or, more particularly, did not say in that preface seems to go to the heart of the adaptation question, particularly with regard to an adapter's responsibility to his or her source text.

Burke-Gaffney (2004) and van Rij (2001) both point to Long's apparent deliberate evasiveness about his sources and his motivation: "Concerning the genesis of the story I know nothing. I think no one ever does. What process of the mind produces such things? What tumult of the emotions sets them going? I do not know." (1903: Preface) As an author myself I find this statement very surprising, and I therefore share Burke-Gaffney and van Rij's view that he is being evasive. But it is important to remember that Long was writing this at the front of a book which his publishers were presumably trying to sell to capitalise on the success of the Belasco play which had followed it, and the Puccini which they knew was to come. It must surely be read in this context. I would suggest that Long was faced with a conflict of loyalties – to his publisher and bank manager on the one hand, and to his character and his feminism on the other. Long's job was, of course, to sell the book<sup>11</sup>, but did he approve of what Belasco and Puccini had done to his Cho Cho San?

"What the people have said to me about her has been almost entirely by way of question. And the most frequent of these has been whether I, too, wasn't sorry for Cho. To this I answer, with confusion, Yes. When she wept I wanted to—if I didn't; and when she smiled I think I did; but when she laughed I know I did.

For you will remember that at first she laughed oftener than she wept, and at last she wept oftener than she laughed—so one couldn't help it.

And where has she gone? I do not know. I lost sight of her, as you did, that dark night she fled with Trouble and Suzuki from the little, empty, happy house on Higashi Hill, where she was to have had a honeymoon of nine hundred and ninety-nine years!" (1903: Preface)

It is clear that he regrets the loss of her humour, and 'I lost sight of her, as you did' surely means that his character has been lost. He obviously cannot criticise those who have made his story more famous than he did, and from whose efforts he is likely to increase his income significantly, so his enigmatic evasiveness is understandable.

If Long's intention was, as I have suggested, a moral response to Loti, and a feminist treatise in defence of Japanese women, then it has, it could be argued, been entirely subverted by his subsequent adapters. Whether or not he was happy about it, Long had lost control of his creation – and since, although she had ancestors, it was he who christened her, we should grant him paternity rights. More subversion, in both directions, was to follow, demonstrating, as perhaps Long is acknowledging, that an author has no more control over a character he creates than a parent over a child who has left home. He cannot disown his child, even if he deplores what has happened to her. But that child must make her own way in the different world which she finds, must make a life for herself – just as every version of a story, mine included, must have a life of its own which is separate from that of its parents.

The version of this Japanese story, written and adapted by Americans, which was conceived by an Italian in a London theatre might have completely undermined the intentions of the original author, but it is this version which has immortalised the story and, as I have suggested, become the unchallenged primary text in its lineage. It is certainly the text which has made the story iconic, and which, as a passionate romance, prompted me to write a 'queer' version.

***Madama Butterfly*. Giacomo Puccini, Giuseppe Giacosa, Luigi Illica. 1904**

In the process of turning what had been a novella and a stage play into an opera, Puccini and his librettists, Giacosa and Illica, had, like Messager before them in his adaptation of the earlier *Madame Chrysanthème*, to tell the story through music more than through words. In so doing they fundamentally changed the course of the lineage of the story into one that is remembered primarily as a musical experience.

In his critical biography of Puccini, Mosco Carner (1992) makes much of the psychological reasons for the composer's choice of subject matter, and in particular of his treatment of his heroines, so suggesting the motivation for his adaptation of *Madame Butterfly*<sup>12</sup>. Sandra Corse sees *Butterfly* as an entirely typical Puccini heroine: "Puccini evidently saw women characters as belonging to one of two groups. The first consists of weak and frail creatures who are lovely in their weakness - Mimi, Butterfly, and Liu." (1983:p.93) Corse refers here specifically to 'heroines'. Long's and Belasco's Cho Cho Sans are feisty, spirited girls who elicit sympathy, but they are hardly heroines. Fundamentally they are still young prostitutes seeking to disguise their activities with a veneer of respectability, and to rise above that role through love and marriage. Puccini's Cio Cio San is the first with that name who could fairly be described as a heroine, with all the noble overtones that word carries. Carner observes Puccini's treatment of his heroines thus: "we are struck by the extent to which the composer sought to transmogrify his fair sinners into shining little angels; he attempts to whitewash them almost beyond recognition and surrounds them all with a halo of romantic love" (1992:p.303). Like Messenger before him, Puccini, working in the medium of opera, has had to make the story a romance. A search through Italian romantic opera for one without a love story at its heart would yield few, if any results. Carner points out that 10 out of 12 of Puccini's operas have a common theme, voiced by the Street Song Vendor in *Il Tabarro*: "Chi ha vissuto per amore, per amore si mori (Who lived for love, died for love)". (1992:p.300).

One of the most crucial changes Puccini makes to Cio Cio San, perhaps a result of responding merely to the images he saw without understanding the language, is to make her speak the same language as everyone else in the opera - Italian - and equally well. Gone is the comical Pidgin English. With that alone she is on a more equal footing with the other characters than her earlier incarnations, and immediately raised in status towards heroine. Her entrance is heralded by her girl friends wishing her happiness, and her opening words are all utterly romantic:

*"Butterfly:* Io sono la fanciulla più lieta del Giappone, anzi del mondo. Amiche, io son venuta al richiamo d'amor d'amor. Venni alle soglie ... ..dove s'accoglie il bene di chi vive e di chi muor (I am the happiest girl in Japan, even in the world. Friends, I have come to the call of love, of love, I was on the threshold.... ..where is found the glory that life or death can offer)." (1904: Act 1)

Instantly she is elevated way above those who previously bore her name, and then to that is added the soaring eloquence of her music – and there is no question that Butterfly has all the best tunes in the opera. Corse points out that while Puccini's Pinkerton belittles her as much as his predecessors had: "Pinkerton constantly emphasizes her smallness; he refers to her as "tiny little wife" ("piccina moglietrina") and describes her as having "the movements of a squirrel" ("moti di scojattolo"), and he calls her a "toy" ("giocattolo")" (1983:p.100), the music elevates her. It is hard to think of Puccini's dignified, passionate and eloquent young lady, who matures in the course of the opera from child-bride to tragic mother, as a prostitute of any kind. He has transformed Butterfly into a character almost totally removed from her literary ancestors.

I have indicated how Pinkerton's perceived degree of culpability has varied throughout the history of this story, in parallel with the various writers' moral stances and/or perceived target audiences, causing considerable controversy along the way. Perhaps because, as an Italian, Puccini was less concerned about offending Americans, his Pinkerton has gone back towards the heartless user he was in Long. He makes entirely clear at the start how he sees the forthcoming marriage:

*Sharpless* [raises his glass]: Bevo alla vostra famiglia lontana. (I drink to your family far away)

*Pinkerton* [also raises his glass] E al giorno in cui mi sposerò con vere nozze a una vera sposa... americana. (And the day I will marry, with a real ceremony, a real wife – an American) (1904: Act 1)

But Puccini still needed a love duet and it is easy to forget Pinkerton's true intentions when listening to the soaring, romantic melodies of '*Bimba dagli occhi*' which closes the first act. However, the lyrics - all too often eclipsed by the music, or not understood by non-Italian-speaking audiences (just as Puccini did not understand Belasco's words) - tell the truth. Cio Cio San gazes always upwards for her dream of love:-

*Butterfly*: Somiglio la Dea della luna, la piccola Dea della luna che scende la notte dal ponte del ciel.

(I am like the Moon's little Goddess, the little Moon-Goddess who comes down by night from her bridge in the starlit sky.) (ibid.)

Pinkerton, however romantic his language, has feet of unadulterated clay here. He seeks only to possess, and to get his new bride to bed:

*Pinkerton:* Dammi ch'io baci le tue mani care. Mia Butterfly! Come t'han ben nomata tenue farfalla...

(Give me your darling hands that I may kiss them. My Butterfly! How well they have named you, gentle butterfly..)

*Butterfly:* Dicon ch'oltre mare se cade in man dell'uom ogni farfarla da uno spillo è trafitta ed in tavola infitta!..

(They say that in your country if a butterfly is caught by man, he'll pierce its heart with a needle, and then leave it to perish! Nail it to a table)

*Pinkerton:* Un po' di vero c'è. E tu lo sai perchè? Perchè non fugga più lo t'ho ghermita... Ti serro palpitante. Sei mia.

(There is some truth in that, and can you tell me why? So that you cannot escape. See, I have caught you...I hold you as you flutter. Be mine.) (ibid.)

This apparently rhapsodic moment with its heart-rending melody encapsulates the essential cultural misunderstanding and the wilful self-deception which underpin this story. However romantic it sounds, this is not so much a love duet as a heartless seduction scene – an emotional rape. Although there is no suggestion that the sexual congress (which we know follows because of the advent of the child) is anything other than consensual, Pinkerton only achieves it by deceitfully breaking down the girl's emotional defences and penetrating her heart.

Van Rij (2001) relates the story of the famously disastrous opening night of *Madama Butterfly* at La Scala on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1904, which he ascribes partly to the character of Pinkerton: “The opera was received with laughter and hostility caused, it seems, by a combination of intrinsic weakness of the work (particularly the length of the second act and a very untraditional role for the leading tenor)” (2001:p.104).

The structural problems seem likely to have resulted from the bricolage of multiple source texts – Loti, Long and Belasco – which were drawn on by Puccini and his two librettists, with considerable disagreement amongst themselves. As Van Rij describes, numerous revisions followed addressing not only these problems, but also, as French and US productions were mooted, revisions which “would have the advantage of making the opera look better in the eyes of the American public,

with obvious commercial consequences” (2001:p.105). He points out that: “A few lines that cast a negative image of Pinkerton were cut (for example where Butterfly refers to him as a “barbarian”) as well as Butterfly’s confession that she was paid a hundred yen for her services.” (2001:p.104)

It is interesting to speculate whether this removal of the last vestiges of the financial transaction, with its attendant whiff of prostitution, was undertaken to ameliorate still further the character of Cho Cho San, or to remove any suggestion that a US naval officer would pay for sex. Either way, like his immediate predecessor, Belasco, it is clear that Puccini was, once again, guided by the needs of his medium, and the perceived sensibilities of his audience as he assembled, and then revised his work.

But whatever disputes and troubles attended its creation, this work has entered the canon as a Puccini masterpiece and has become accepted as the undisputed primary text in the descent of this story. All versions which preceded it have a life only as forebears to the opera. Whilst that work remains firmly in the repertoire of every opera house in the world, the stories written by Long and Loti have been out of print for many years. Belasco’s play has graced no stage for equally as long, and if it were to be revived it would only be as a curio dug up to illuminate its descendant. Through Puccini’s agency *Madame Butterfly* has become mythical. As Maria Degabriele writes:

“My reference to an unspecified ‘Madame Butterfly’ parallels and demonstrates the generic, or popular, use of the term that has become mythical.....One will see how the Butterfly moves and reverberates, constantly reforming the meaning and the form of the myth. Madame Butterfly circulates, moving between cultures, genres, and genders.” (1996:p.105)

It is not Puccini’s version of the story which has established it in this primary position, but the myth it has become. His story remains flawed in so many ways, particularly in terms of psychological realism. How authentic is his transformation of working girl into tragic heroine? Can an audience really believe that a woman capable of that sensitivity, that richness of imagination and profundity of feeling could be taken in by such an obvious callous user as Pinkerton?

It is unquestionably Puccini’s sublime music which has secured his work’s primacy. His intention was, it seems, very much to reclothe rather than to



reconceive. He sought to tell Belasco's story, using the same characters with the same names - the same events in the same place with the same outcome. But his achievement could also be described as a re-conception because it has converted that story into something entirely different – a musical experience instead of a literary one. It is Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, not Giacosa's or Illica's.

Given my intention in embarking on this project of offering gay versions of iconic love stories, it is the Puccini version which has defined that icon and prompted my adaptation, and so that is the one I want my audience to remember. And so, in the script, I offer intertextual verbal references, and suggest musical ones, to draw attention to it. But I also make reference to another version, also musical, which is likely to be well known to contemporary audiences.

***Miss Saigon* – Alain Boublil, Richard Maltby Jr. & Claude-Michel Schönberg.  
1989**

Puccini was inspired to begin his opera by the image of Butterfly sacrificing her life for her child. Behr & Steyn (1991) report how, in much the same way, it was an image of a mother's sacrifice that caught the eye of composer Claude-Michel Schönberg, as he and his lyricist Alain Boublil looked for a subject which could make a show to follow their hugely successful *Les Misérables* (1980). The image this time was a photograph of a Vietnamese mother handing over her child, fathered by an American GI, so that it could enjoy a better life in the USA. The image haunted him, and the parallels with *Madame Butterfly* were impossible to ignore. Their next project was born.

With earlier works my analysis of the intentions and motivations of the long-deceased writer or composer has had to be largely a matter of speculation. In the case of this version it has been possible to make enquiries directly to one of the lyricists, Richard Maltby Jr. (see Appendix 2), whom I interviewed by email for this PhD. I wanted to discover what had motivated the clear changes to the *Madame Butterfly* story which they had made. When I offered him my definitions of re-clothing and re-conception to establish the intentions of the show's creators, his reply clarifies how it developed from that first sighting by Schönberg:

“They were triggered by the photograph, and so the story developed as a new story set in Vietnam, following the trajectory of *Madame Butterfly*, and not a version of *Madame Butterfly* set in a new location. .... I would guess this is 100% a re-conception. The test would be if the story forced itself to follow the events of the source, and this plot doesn’t. When push came to shove, as it often did, the Vietnam story always prevailed.” (2012: Appendix 2: p.144)

As Maltby makes clear, the *Miss Saigon* audience needs no prior knowledge of the hypotext:

“I think the audience is fine not knowing anything about MADAME BUTTERFLY. Most Americans don’t know opera plots. Although the show was triggered by a connection to the plot of the opera/play/novel, as a practical matter those connections disappeared in the writing process rather quickly.” (2012: Appendix 2: p.139)

Although in essence the story follows that of *Madama Butterfly*, there are hugely important differences. This trigger of the photograph moves the story to Vietnam where, as Maltby suggests, a whole new environment and set of circumstances take it over. Pinkerton becomes a GI, Chris, left in Vietnam after the war and looking forward to returning home. Cho Cho San is Kim, who, like her literary ancestor, is forced into prostitution by financial need, though it is significant that Chris is her first customer. Even late 20<sup>th</sup> century audiences might perhaps have balked at an experienced prostitute as heroine. Consul Sharpless becomes John, fellow GI and contemporary to Chris – interestingly taking him back to where he started, as Loti’s friend Yves.

These two visit a Saigon club - in reality a brothel - as the end-game of the Vietnam war is played out and they await their flights home. There Kim - a new girl - catches Chris’s eye and John makes a deal with the Engineer<sup>13</sup>, who runs the club, to buy a night with her for him to cheer him up. They fall in love, but when Saigon falls and Chris is hastily evacuated by helicopter, Kim is lost in the crowd and left behind. After vain attempts to find her again from the safety of home, Chris gives up and marries an American girl, Ellen. Meanwhile Kim gives birth to their son, Tam. However, she has to confront Thuy, her intended Vietnamese husband<sup>14</sup> who threatens to kill Tam because, being mixed-race and evidence of her relationship with an American, he brings shame on the family. To defend her son’s life Kim is forced to shoot Thuy, and then has no option but to escape Vietnam with Tam, which she does with the help of the Engineer, who

sees the half-American boy as his ticket to the US. Together they make their way to Bangkok.

Meanwhile John has become involved with an organisation seeking to help the Bui Doi – the Dust of Life – as children born to American fathers and Vietnamese mothers became known. Through them he tracks down Kim and Tam and arranges a reunion in Bangkok. Chris and Ellen agree to finance Kim and her son, but in the end Kim, seeing no future for herself with Chris, sacrifices her life, as Cho Cho San did before her, so that Tam can enjoy a better life in America.

As I have suggested, the story of *Madama Butterfly* opera is thin – the plot contains little by way of event, and the characters lack psychological realism. *Miss Saigon*'s is fuller, richer and informed by extensive research into the truth of the final weeks of the Vietnam war.

There are several new directions evident in this version of the story, with attendant implications for the new characters. Kim has shed Cio Cio San's dignified and demure victimhood, as seen in the Puccini opera, and regained some of the feistiness of Long's original. One cannot imagine Puccini's heroine shooting anyone. Additionally Kim does not wait and pine with her maid in genteel penury, but is proactive in escaping Vietnam to travel to Bangkok. But then the devastated, war-torn country of Vietnam with its political upheavals as Ho Chi Minh takes control is very different from the stable, alternative Japanese society of the hypotext. The American world seems unquestionably preferable here.

But perhaps the most central and important change to the core of the story is the character of Chris and the extent of his transgression, once again illustrating the difficult issue of Pinkerton's culpability which so many adapters of this story have had to consider. Maltby claims primary responsibility for this change. He came on board after the basic structure of the work had been set down:

"The one thing remaining from the opera was that the soldier (then named Trevor) was like Pinkerton. He didn't really care about Kim. I argued that Pinkerton was always the liability in *Madame Butterfly*. He was a shit and who cared about him, or really about Cio-Cio-San for loving him? I felt we had to correct this. They had to fall in love. But how? Then I realized that when Saigon fell, and Vietnam was completely closed to foreigners, there would be no way for Chris (now

his name) to find Kim or even learn of what became of her. This was a gift from the God of plots. Chris could now really love Kim, and then be separated from her in the evacuation of the city, and thereafter even spend years trying to find her – before deciding it was hopeless, and moving on and marrying an American girl. At which time, he can learn that Kim is alive and he has a son. What a dilemma! A horror story with no villains.” (2012: Appendix 2: p.145)

So, for the reasons Maltby gives, now Chris has become the genuine hero, and this represents the most essential and fundamental difference between *Madama Butterfly* and *Miss Saigon*. In the latter the couple are torn apart not by his callousness and insensitivity but by force majeure. Arguably this makes the story more akin to *Romeo and Juliet* than *Madame Butterfly*, but yet in so many other respects - the financial origins of the relationship, the collision of Eastern and Western culture, the sacrifice of the mother to give the child a better life - it mirrors its ancestor, however much Boubil and Maltby felt free to give it a life of its own in the fertile Vietnamese soil to which it had been transplanted.

Maltby claims that, unlike Belasco and Puccini before them, they were not driven by a need to appeal to American audiences in this amelioration of the Pinkerton character. And given that America does not come out of this story well, I am inclined to believe him. The presumption of American superiority which is there in the hypotext, and, as we will discover, even more present in the Hollywood versions which followed, is subverted.

The idea that American life is intrinsically superior to Japanese is implicit in Long's story because it is an American that his Cho Cho San loves. She clings to the American concept of marriage as better than the Japanese because divorce is harder, and takes pride in her American household. This is Lambourne's "axiomatic assumption of Western superiority that falling in love with a white man entailed." (2005:p.134)

However, the setting for *Miss Saigon* is the Vietnam war - perhaps the most notoriously miscalculated US military adventure of all time - and central to it is 'the American Dream' – that idealistic concept of the USA as the perfect place to live – the capitalist society where anyone can achieve anything if they put in the hard work. This is in evidence throughout the show. 'The Movie in my Mind' is sung by a Vietnamese prostitute dreaming of it. In the love duet, 'The Last Night of the World', Chris sings:

“On the other side of the earth  
There’s a place where life still has worth” (1991:Act 1)

And the Engineer yearns for it in his final production number ‘*The American Dream*’. But the effect of this song is ironic, as is Chris’s plaintive: ‘Christ, I’m an American. How could I fail to do good?’ (1991:Act 2). This demonstrates his naiveté, not his arrogance, as he realises how the damage he has done is, in a sense, a microcosm of the whole disastrous Vietnamese adventure. While the east-west misunderstanding remains central here, the exploitation has misfired spectacularly, and the chauvinism of the West is undermined. The Engineer’s satirical ‘*American Dream*’ number immediately, and cruelly, precedes Kim sacrificing her life to that her son can enjoy that dream.

In response to my question about the need for Kim to die, Maltby replies:-

When she finds Chris and realizes that there is no place for her in her child’s story, that in fact she is now the impediment to getting the future she wants for her son, her suicide is the only answer. This is much stronger than the opera suicide, and we were very proud of having made the suicide a real part of the story, not just a melodramatic climax to bring down the curtain. (2012. Appendix 2: p.140)

Maltby and Boublil claim not to have been enslaved to the theatrical master Belasco served, even though they arrived at the same conclusion. That they were still subconscious slaves to the, by now monolithic, primary text could perhaps be argued, but, in my view, they have created a much richer, and more authentic story that offers an outcome decided by their character, not her literary parents. I faced a similar dilemma when deciding the outcome of my version.

Interestingly Maltby always refers to writing a play, and perhaps this word helps to illustrate the boundary between musical and opera – a boundary which is becoming harder to define as the paradigm of a show with dialogue as well as songs is superseded by the through-sung musical favoured by Boublil and Schönberg. Ultimately it cannot be questioned that Puccini’s opera has survived because of its music. *Miss Saigon* has some great music, but its creators saw clearly that more was needed if the show was to connect with its audience. It also needed a thoroughly good book with authentic characters and situations, not to mention the well-researched Vietnamese context. And its audience would have been likely to be far better acquainted with this, thanks to TV news, than Puccini’s

could ever have been with 19<sup>th</sup> century Japan. Shönberg's music supports this story well and appropriately, but it is not the unchallenged driver that Puccini's is for *Madama Butterfly*.

Behr and Steyn sum it up thus:

“Boublil and Schönberg seized the bones of the Puccini plot and gave them a modern dress which fitted effortlessly: the grand passions of the everyday world, the sweep of Puccini fused with the naturalism of the American musical play.” (1991:p.173)

They also report Cameron Mackintosh's comment “I knew every bit of it had to be *real*” (1991:173), and that same challenge unquestionably faced me as I sought to put this story, made famous by its music, on to the screen with all the naturalism an audience for that medium expects.

The journey of the *Madame Chrysanthème/Madame Butterfly* story from novella to stage to opera, then back to musical theatre, forms an interesting parabola in terms of the demands the medium of presentation has made on its characters - their nature, their psychological realism, their social status and their outcomes. But what is common to all the versions so far discussed is the clear importance to each adapter of his target audience, and this, of course, connects directly to the medium of presentation – an opera audience does not expect the same as a play audience, or readers of a novel do. Whatever the motivations that prompted each new version, the expectations of the intended audience were evidently primary drivers of the changes each adapter made.

As a contemporary screen audience, in addition to naturalism and psychological realism, my intended audience will expect an accurate portrayal of the context. In these days of global communications, the location in which my story is set, like Vietnam for *Miss Saigon*, is well-documented and far better known than 19<sup>th</sup> century Nagasaki would have been in Puccini's time. For those who, throughout the twentieth century, preceded me in putting the story on the screen, considerations of their audience were also clearly paramount. But they did not all feel that obligation to offer an authentic location and culture in the films they made.

Some screen versions are simply films of the opera<sup>15</sup>, but I will focus on some of those which tell the story using image and/or the spoken word. These include

two early Hollywood versions – the first made in 1915 with Mary Pickford in the eponymous role, and the second dating from 1932 and starring Cary Grant and Sylvia Sydney. I will also look at the Japanese *Cho Cho* (2011), and *M. Butterfly* made by David Cronenberg in 1993 from D.H.Hwang's subversive 1989 stage play.

### ***Madame Butterfly*. Directed by Sidney Olcott. 1915**

This early screen version, with Mary Pickford in the title role, seems likely to have been conceived in the wake of the, by now famous, Puccini opera, and presumably with a purely commercial motivation since there is no evidence of a political or moral message. I would categorise it as a re-clothing, in that it tells the same story with the same character names. But the demands of its medium and of its audience were so different from those of the opera that very substantial changes had to be made. Interestingly, it credits only Long as a source, with no reference to Belasco or Puccini. Making such a film before the advent of movie sound presented director Sidney Olcott with a significant challenge. He had to deliver a story made famous as an opera in a silent medium.

Although the film credits Long, in reality his novella is scarcely more than a distant inspiration for this telling of the story entirely through images and captions. Olcott is understandably obliged to take every opportunity to make the story more visual, but the result has neither the moral depth of Long's narrative, nor the emotional power of Puccini's music. It begins with Cho Cho San and Suzuki visiting a soothsayer who warns the former of the risk of "a stranger from a foreign land – woe unto you if you take him to your heart" (1915). This is in none of the earlier versions, and it is hard to see what it adds to the story beyond another scene and character. It is followed by a comic interlude as Goro berates the soothsayer for risking ruining his business. The meeting between Cho Cho San and Pinkerton is the result of a rickshaw collision – another visual opportunity, but, perhaps more importantly, it moves the story further from the suggestion of prostitution which has always lurked under its surface. A 1915 audience might not have responded well to such a suggestion, nor taken such a heroine, or hero to its heart.

So the relationship between Pinkerton and Cho Cho San is triggered by mutual attraction, not by a financial arrangement. It is, however, made clear that an American sweetheart is already in the picture and we even see footage of the wedding in America, and of Adelaide on the steamer as she comes to Japan to visit her husband – again Olcott would appear to be seizing any opportunity for an image, and the need for the visual seems likely to have prompted an interesting change to the end of the story. In this film Cho Cho San meets Adelaide at Sharpless' office and we see her physically hand over her child – something which happens in no other version. The handover feels almost casual, hugely diminishing the importance of such an act and the immensity of her sacrifice. While this decision was perhaps driven principally by the need to present the story visually, there may be something else behind it - the American perspective which totally governs the film, which I will discuss.

The film ends with Butterfly's suicide. This, like the handing over of the child, is in contradiction to Long's story and follows Belasco's narrative, even though the latter is not credited as an author or source of inspiration. The suicide is not by Samurai sword but by drowning – again Olcott must have been driven by the need to be visual, and perhaps saw the image of a drowning as more romantic and less shocking than the brutality of a Samurai sword, or perhaps he had read Régamey, whose *Madame Chrysanthème* attempts this.

In all ways this is an utterly American film – there is no attempt to use Asian actors, nor to portray Japanese culture in anything other than the most caricatured way, with images of cross-legged family councils and much formal bowing. Sheppard (2005) reports the rumour that Olcott fell out with Mary Pickford, his star, because she refused to comply with his request to 'act Japanese', but any other attempts to get beneath the surface of that culture are hard to find. There is a blatant sense here of something which is implicit in so many versions of the story - the natural superiority of American/Western culture. If Japonisme was the fashion which triggered the story in the first place, that seems, at least, to have stemmed from a genuine interest in things Japanese, in the discovery of a culture new to the West and very different from anything seen before. What is portrayed here is a shallow caricature of that culture – no more authentic than Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* (1885), but without the explicitly comic intentions of that work. The whole film reinforces the sense of American



supremacy. Pinkerton's American wedding is shown as a much more affluent affair than the earlier, quaint, Japanese ceremony. While in America they drive around in cars, in Japan it is rickshaws.

With this assumption behind it, Butterfly's handing over of her child to parents who will clearly give him a better life seems only right and proper, and her romantic suicide becomes an appropriate tidying up at the end. There is nothing of the power of the image of a mother giving up her child which so moved Schönberg and triggered *Miss Saigon*. Hollywood uses the story that Long wrote, ostensibly in criticism of American attitudes and behaviour, to perpetuate them.

### ***Madame Butterfly*. Directed by Marion Gering. 1932**

After the advent of sound a second screen version of the story was made, starring Cary Grant and Sylvia Sydney. The setting is updated to be contemporary, though the location is still Nagasaki and the characters retain their names and backgrounds – again I would categorize it as a re-clothing.

This version acknowledges both Long and Belasco, and the musical score, composed by W. Franke Harling, borrows heavily from Puccini. Once again there can be little doubt that it was the popularity of the opera, or at least its name, which prompted the film, though, as Sheppard points out, the producers were keen to avoid that hypotext:

“Rather than making a film of Puccini's opera, ... the producers of the 1932 *Madame Butterfly* appear to have been somewhat opera-phobic. .... In fact, Paramount attempted to dissociate the film from the opera as clearly as possible in its publicity materials.” (2005:p.68-9)

Sheppard also quotes an anonymous Paramount executive who is reported as saying “there has always been some doubt as to the advisability of our attempting opera on the screen” (ibid.footnote<sup>30</sup>). But he also suggests that “Producers frequently had been interested in opera during the silent period and had used opera to raise the cultural status of the movies.” (ibid.) So it seems likely that the motivation for the production was to capitalize on the idea of the opera which would have been known, or at least known of, but to steer clear of the actual show

which might have been perceived as inaccessible - perhaps too high brow for a mass audience.

In terms of representing the exotic oriental context it is no more authentic than its 1915 predecessor, despite the studio's claim as reported by Sheppard:

“Paramount professed an ardent desire to achieve exotic veracity. Such claims, presupposing a definable and attainable ‘exotic realism’, have been made throughout Hollywood’s history and are most often spurious.” (2005:p.73)

Sheppard goes on to report how they recruited “a Japanese dancer, Michio Ito as both Technical Adviser and Dance Director” (2005:p.73), but that the ‘thirty Japanese girls’ hired for the film were in fact mostly US born, and also that a Japanese actress, Toshia Mori, was considered for the title role, but in the end rejected in favour of Sylvia Sidney in yellow-face.

Looking at the transposition of this operatic story to film 80 years ago while preparing my version for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I had to recognise that while the requirement for more naturalism than expected on the operatic stage was already there, a modern audience’s expectation of veracity will be far higher than those who went to see Hollywood films in the 1930s. The perspective of Gering’s film is, like Olcott’s in 1915, unmitigated American chauvinism of a kind which would simply not be acceptable to a modern audience. Cho Cho San is taught, and wholeheartedly embraces American customs and there is an implicit assumption that these are more civilised, and indeed that Pinkerton’s subsequent American marriage is the right and proper union. Even more than in Belasco and Puccini, Pinkerton and his American wife are rehabilitated and presented as a caring and sensitive couple. Adelaide forgives her husband’s fling with “Don’t feel so badly about it dear, it isn’t your fault” (1932), which rather begs the question of whose fault it is. *Butterfly* is able to overhear the discussion at the beginning between Goro and Pinkerton that the union is not considered binding, implying that she enters into it with her eyes open, so perhaps they are suggesting that it is hers.

In one very important respect this film alters the story in a way no other version of it does. Pinkerton never learns of his child, much less takes care of him. Before her suicide, which reverts to the Samurai sword of the hypotext, *Butterfly* hands Trouble over to his grandfather to be cared for. Sheppard points out that

this decision: “was determined not solely for dramatic reasons, but also for racist ones. Race was an issue from the early stages of the film’s production.” (2005:p.79). He reports producer Ben Schulberg’s argument that: “since the Pinkertons are presented as a nice couple in the film, it would not be fair to have the mixed-race child ‘hang over their lives as a constant reminder of the tragedy’”. (ibid.). He also quotes from Schulberg’s memo:

“It seems to us to be an unpleasant hangover on the picture after its completion to feel that the half Japanese half American child of Butterfly’s and Pinkerton’s will have to go through a miserable life in America as a social misfit.” (ibid.)

On the face of it, it seems extra-ordinary that what was considered acceptable in 1915 was unthinkable in 1932. But it is important to remember two important events which sandwiched the production of this film. Only two years previously the Hays code for film production<sup>16</sup> had been introduced which prohibited representations of miscegenation. Although this specifically referred to Caucasian/Negro relations, the offspring of this Caucasian/Oriental coupling was clearly considered too close for comfort. And while Japonisme had been fashionable at the turn of the century, American/Japanese relations had deteriorated considerably. Just nine years later came the attack on Pearl Harbour, and the often quoted 1938 remarks of an anonymous Japanese spokesman give some idea of what was now going on:

“the Americans believe they are better than us. We are unable to keep a steady relationship with them as long as they hold these opinions. ... The Americans are not complying with our demands... For these reasons our relationship is constricted, shall remain that way and will not be able to grow.” (Translated, Masakazu Nanba: 5 March 1938.)

The political backdrop was now very different from what it had been at the turn of the century when this story had first made its appearance, and it seems highly probable that this would have been an influence on Hollywood producers. While the 1932 *Madame Butterfly* film does not touch on these specifically political issues, the version of the story it presents, and the forces that moulded that version, clearly demonstrate that the American sense of supremacy was as cultural as it was political. The social and cultural realities of the time mirror themes implicit in the story being told<sup>17</sup>.

Sheppard ends his analysis of Gering's film with an assertion which I would challenge:

"The intended moral of the *Madame Butterfly* story has never been concerned with the behaviour of American men overseas. Rather the real cultural work of this perennial narrative has been to provide an exotic fantasy for the American male and a model of feminine subservience for the American woman." (2005:p.80)

Although this is undoubtedly true of many versions of the story, and is unquestionably the perception of it that prompted Hwang's subversive *M. Butterfly* (1989), the one hugely important exception is Long's novella – the first to bear the name of *Madame Butterfly*. As I suggested earlier this seems to have been written precisely to criticize the behaviour of an American man overseas.

### ***M. Butterfly*. D.H.Hwang. 1988**

It is perhaps not surprising that it was an Asian/American playwright, David Hwang, born in Los Angeles to Chinese immigrant parents, who challenged the chauvinistic cliché which the story had become in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and turned the tables in a devastating act of subversion.

The parentage of his Tony Award-winning stage play, *M. Butterfly*, is mixed. He reports that it was initially prompted by an extra-ordinary story he read in the New York Times of May 11, 1986:

"A former French diplomat and a Chinese opera singer have been sentenced to six years in jail for spying for China after a two-day trial that traced a story of clandestine love and mistaken sexual identity...Mr. Bouriscot was accused of passing information to China after he fell in love with Mr. Shi whom he believed for twenty years to be a woman." (Cited Hwang. 1989: Playwright's Notes)

Just as Peter Shaffer's *Equus* (1973), and indeed my own play *Queer Counsel* (2004) were both prompted by news stories of which only the most basic facts were known, Hwang was intrigued by this, but he adds: "I purposely refrained from further research, for I was not interested in writing docudrama. Frankly I didn't want the "truth" to interfere with my own speculations." (ibid.)

But, from his dual perspective, Hwang was readier to believe and understand how such a thing could happen:

“From my point of view, the “impossible” story of a Frenchman duped by a Chinese man masquerading as a woman always seemed perfectly explicable; given the degree of misunderstanding between men and women, and also between East and West, it seemed inevitable that a mistake of this magnitude would one day take place.” (1989:p.95)

In his 1991 paper *David Henry Hwang and the Revenge of Madame Butterfly*, Douglas Kerr echoes Degabriele’s (1996) suggestion of the mythical status of the story, arguing: “that Madame Butterfly is the most recognisable image in all of Western Opera, and one that comes freighted with meaning even for those who have never seen or heard the opera, and have the vaguest idea of the story” (1991:p.119). One such was Hwang, and in the Bouriscot case he saw the echoes of a story which he knew only by name and reputation: “I knew Butterfly only as a cultural stereotype; speaking of an Asian woman, we would say. “She’s pulling a Butterfly” which meant playing the submissive oriental number” (1989:p.95). And when Hwang listened to the opera he found few surprises: “Sure enough, when I purchased the record, I discovered it contained a wealth of sexist and racist clichés, reaffirming my faith in Western culture” (ibid.).

His view of the opera story becomes clear in a scathing parody of it in Act 1, scenes 3-5 which also serves the important function of introducing it to those in the audience who would not be acquainted with it. He then turns the story upside down, and, in a telling passage, challenges head-on the chauvinism implicit in it:

“what would you say if a blonde homecoming queen fell in love with a short Japanese businessman? He treats her cruelly, then goes home for three years, during which time she prays to his picture and turns down marriage to a young Kennedy. Then, when she learns he has remarried, she kills herself. Now, I believe you would consider this girl to be a deranged idiot, correct? But because it’s an Oriental who kills herself for a Westerner – ah – you find it beautiful.” (1989:p.17)

These words, from the mouth of a man we presume to be homosexual, prefigure the rebalancing of the relationship which is crucial to my version of the story. But Hwang’s play does not directly address the issue of homosexuality. Gallimard – Hwang’s ‘Pinkerton/Bouriscot’ - finds difficulties with the strong women with whom he is sexually involved - his wife and his mistress - and can only really fall

in love with a man dressed as a woman. Though a psychological assessment might well diagnose a closeted gay man, the play is not about that at all, but about male perceptions of women, through the prism of the East-West divide.

Gallimard is a weak, easily dominated minor French bureaucrat who meets Chinese opera-singer Song Liling after hearing her sing *Madama Butterfly*. He falls in love, like Puccini before him, with the image of the submissive, self-sacrificing Asian woman. As he observes in the opening speech of Act 2, responding to a quoted criticism of the original opera, that ““Pinkerton suffers from....being an obnoxious bounder who every man in the audience itches to kick”:...I suggest that while we men may all want to kick Pinkerton, very few of us would pass up the opportunity to *be* Pinkerton.” (1989:p.42). He then proceeds to begin an affair with Song in which he seeks to act out his Pinkerton fantasy, based entirely on the opera and quoting from it at every opportunity. He finds that while his experiences with women have always been humiliating, Song enables him to be dominant. This in turn helps him in his career. His boss, Toulon, notes that he has become this “new aggressive confident... thing” (1989:p.38). Song even provides him with a child, which he has not been able to conceive with his wife. However, since Song is a man the child is ‘borrowed’ from elsewhere. He is also a spy who is using Gallimard to get information to pass to the Chinese government, and both he and Gallimard are arrested for treason. Gallimard’s fantasy is as false as Cho Cho San’s – he is the one deceived and exploited, so it is he who, donning Butterfly’s dress, commits ritual suicide at the end.

Hwang is debunking the fantasy that men created, that Loti, Belasco and Puccini all perpetuated, and that many still cling to about women, particularly submissive Asian women: “I have often heard it said that “Oriental women make the best wives” (rarely is this heard from the mouths of Asian men, incidentally).” (1989:p.95). Song expresses this eloquently in Act two: “Only a man knows how a woman is supposed to act” (1989:p.63) and Gallimard is determined to cling to that idea and his fantasy: “Why can’t anyone understand? That in China I once loved, and was loved by, very simply the Perfect Woman.” (1989:p.76-7). Even when confronted with the naked Song in all his masculinity, and being offered a genuine, loving homosexual affair without the illusions, Gallimard refuses and decides instead to die for his fantasy. “You showed me your true self. When all

I loved was the lie. A perfect lie which you let fall to the ground – and now, it's old and soiled" (1989:p.89).

This is, of course, Hwang's clever subversion of Yamadori's offer in the hypotexts. The psychologically realistic interpretation here would be that Gallimard is steadfastly refusing to accept his true sexual identity, but, as I suggested, the play is not about that, but about the issues for which the relationship is a metaphor – that men cling to illusions about masculinity and femininity, and the power of West over East. In a very real sense Hwang was the first to 'queer' this story, and not just in that the lovers are both male, and that he inverts, and so subverts the heteronormative structure of the relationship in the hypotext. In the macrocosm too, Hwang turns all the assumptions on their heads. The perceived parallel between masculine and feminine, East and West is clearly expressed by Song at his trial:

"The West thinks of itself as masculine – big guns, big industry, big money – so the East is feminine – weak, delicate, poor.....You expect Oriental countries to submit to your guns, and you expect Oriental women to be submissive to your men. That's why you say they make the best wives .....being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man." (1989:p.83)

The only real oriental woman in the play is Comrade Chin, Song's spy-master and boss who comes across as the total opposite of the Western concept of femininity, with which Gallimard is so obsessed. "What passes for a woman in modern China" (1989:p.49) comments Song. Chin also challenges the concept of Western supremacy, directly addressing, in utterly disparaging terms, the homosexual acts between Song and Gallimard, and using them as evidence of American depravity "the place where pollution begins – the West." (1989:p.72).

Hwang's motivation for writing the play is clear, but sometimes, he believes, misperceived:

"*M. Butterfly* has sometimes been regarded as an anti-American play, a diatribe against the stereotyping of the East by the West, of women by men. Quite to the contrary, I consider it a plea to all sides to cut through our respective layers of cultural and sexual misperception, to deal with one another truthfully for our mutual good, from the common and equal ground we share as human beings." (1989:p.100)

In that regard, though it totally inverts his story, Hwang's intention in writing *M. Butterfly* might just be closer to Long's than were any of the others – Belasco, Puccini and the Hollywood films – that came between. And while he draws clearly on the source material, the theme of his play is very different.

Given that it requires a good knowledge of the hypotext, and indeed provides a précis for any audience who might arrive without that, I would categorise Hwang's play as a 'variation'. Although it was, in part, prompted by a story from a completely different source, the intention is avowedly to comment on *Madame Butterfly* and all the social, cultural and political issues which surround the myth Degabriele (1996) suggests that story has become. But it also uses the opera and its story as a framework to build the whole piece, making it a kind of 're-conception' too. Perhaps the term 'riffing', as used by Michael Cunningham when describing the relationship his 1998 novel *The Hours* has with Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (cited by Sanders: 2006:p.15), would be apposite here.

### ***M. Butterfly*. Directed by David Cronenberg. 1993**

Hwang's play is a very theatrical piece. The story is told in flashback by Gallimard as he resides in his prison cell, and the political dialectic is centre stage. Though at its heart there is a love story, that is subservient to the wider point Hwang is making. But when David Cronenberg made a film of it he was faced with a significant challenge. Like the Hollywood directors who tackled the *Madame Butterfly* story before him, and as I have attempted in his wake, Cronenberg took a fundamentally non-naturalistic work and brought it to the naturalistic medium of the screen. Hwang wrote the screenplay himself, as Denis Seguin reveals in his 1993 interview with Cronenberg: "'I liked the screenplay better than the play," says Cronenberg. "....The play is didactic, very schematic. He was making political points but that wasn't what interested me in the story or the play"' (1993).

What clearly did interest Cronenberg was the love story which, though the political issues are still clearly present, is now centre-stage in a story which is now linear. This draws even more attention to its implausibility, giving Cronenberg an additional problem. On stage we can accept the central relationship with its perfect woman who is really a man as a metaphor for Hwang's message. It



stretches credibility, but we accept it as theatre. However, the medium of the screen requires us to believe in it literally, and that is more difficult. To use my definitions, he is re-clothing Hwang's play in that he is telling the same story with the same characters, and so the film is therefore still a 'variation' (or 'riff') on *Madame Butterfly*.

Although in some ways Cronenberg's film could be seen as a previous queered screen version of *Madame Butterfly*, in effect he has merely remediated it, and his changes were necessitated by that process. The queering was previously done by Hwang in the stage play, as discussed.

In preparing my screenplay I faced a slightly different challenge from Cronenberg's. I too wanted to create, from a theatrical and stylised hypotext, a story that is completely believable in a modern context and to a modern audience with or without knowledge of its ancestry. But my intention is a complete 're-conception', though I hope that audiences who know *Madame Butterfly* will also enjoy it as an adaptation. It will have at least one twenty-first century predecessor.

### ***Cho Cho*. Writer: Shinichi Ichikawa. 2011**

A recent screen version of the story was the Japanese television company NHK's two-part TV film which purports to tell the true story behind the opera. As Edan Corkill, writing in the Japan Times (2011), makes clear, it is as fictional as every other version. But as a Japanese version, for a Japanese audience, of the story which hitherto has been told exclusively by Westerners for Western audiences, it offers an important new perspective.

The film is bookended with a 1936 performance of the opera at which a member of the audience claims to have known the real *Cho Cho San*, and proceeds to tell her story in flashback. It is not an exploitative relationship, but one based on mutual attraction and love. And it begins well before the arrival of Pinkerton – who does not even appear until fifteen minutes into Part Two. As Corkill points out:

“In order to establish the authenticity of the relationship, the first of the new program's two 73-minute episodes ....is devoted entirely to establishing the character and motivations of Cho, prior to her marriage. It turns out that she inherited a fascination for "A-me-ri-ka" from her deceased samurai father and is desperate to study English and travel abroad.” (2011)

As I have discussed, a sense of American superiority has been present, to a greater or lesser extent, through all versions of this story, albeit challenged in *M. Butterfly*. But here it is simply Cho Cho's obsession, and her tragic flaw. It is not suggested that the superiority is real. Given the Japanese authorship and intended audience this is to be expected.

The end remains tragic. Pinkerton still leaves when his ship does, and Cho Cho, following her Samurai father's code, still kills herself because she cannot achieve her objective. As Corkill says: “Screenwriter Ichikawa and the NHK producers have tweaked the "Madame Butterfly" format significantly, but the outline remains the same” (2011). The important change is that this story is told from a Japanese perspective and so the girl is not the exploited victim, but the proud Samurai daughter. Interestingly, Pinkerton is once again rehabilitated. Corkill, interviewing the actors who play the lovers, Aio Miyazaki and Ethan Landry, reveals how:

““Franklin wasn't someone who came to Japan and just got married for the fun of it. They fell in love,” Miyazaki explained. Furthermore, Cho had to stand up to many of her compatriots in order to go through with the relationship.

"The people around her worried that she had been swindled," Miyazaki said, "but she remained committed nonetheless."

Franklin, for his part, is an honest character who appears to have got in over his head. "He's not a bad person, but he's sort of got caught up on the mystique and the beauty that was all around him," explained Ethan Landry.” (2011)

Seemingly a Japanese audience would be no keener to see a proud citizen taken in by an exploitative American than an American audience would.

This version can be seen as a re-clothing of the Long and Puccini story in that it has the same characters and the same outcome, albeit with a very different slant, and it is also set in the original period. In terms of authenticity, the contrast with the early Hollywood versions is stark – the film is aimed not only at a Japanese

audience but also a twenty-first century one with very different expectations from those of the early twentieth century in this respect. But perhaps the desire, like Hwang's, to redress the West/East, dominant/submissive assumptions, which were intrinsic to the original story, has also influenced the portrayals of the characters. These lovers are equals – the same age and equally in love. Franklin makes clear he is “not interested in Nagasaki marriage” (2011). Those audience expectations might or might not accord with historical accuracy.

Alongside the re-clothing, however, is an element of ‘variation’. In the bookends the film refers explicitly to its hypotexts. The two men are watching the Puccini opera, and one of them carries a copy of Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème*. This intertextuality directly invites the film's audience to see where the story is coming from, and if they do not know the opera or the books, surely they will be motivated to seek them out after watching the film.

## **Principal Observations and Conclusions**

From my examination of these previous adaptations of my source text in their various guises, and of how and why they came about, several observations informed my intended practice of creating a new one in a queer context.

The first was the need almost all adapters clearly seem to have felt carefully to consider their intended audiences – what they would expect, and would pay to come and see. This need is, of course, primarily a commercial one, but it also connects to the nature of the delivery medium – whether, for example, the story is delivered by dialogue, by image or by music, or by some combination of all of these.

The audience perception and judgement of, and indeed sympathy for the characters, had also to be considered. With this story the hugely variable level of perceived transgression by the Pinkerton character was of particular significance - he travels from outright villain through victim to hero. This was, unsurprisingly, a primary consideration for my version. The way that, and the extent to which an audience might identify with the central characters will be fundamental to its success or failure.

The requirement for credibility and authenticity was also a regular consideration, again varying according to medium of delivery and audience expectation. I would expect a contemporary screen audience to be less likely than a theatrical one to offer Coleridge's "suspension of disbelief" (1817), and, in the context of global communication and travel, to demand a much higher degree of authenticity than early 20<sup>th</sup> century ones did.

The moral considerations which triggered the original story were also key – and this, too, was an important consideration. My version similarly challenges social conventions and presents behaviour which is likely to be seen as reprehensible or unacceptable by some members of the mainstream audience I want to target, and I have to take responsibility for that.

### **Identifying the essence of *Madame Butterfly***

My research led me to recognise the need, before embarking on my adaptation of this story, to identify the essence - the genetic identity - from which it would grow. I see this as comprising both theme and essential plot elements.

Batty describes theme thus: "something that's painfully vague, yet we all know what it means' adding that 'theme is at the heart of all storytelling. It's what it's about.'" (2012:p.123). Duncan puts it: "What's the story *really* about? What's the big shiny *idea* underneath the story?" (2008:p.2). I identified the following themes and elements as common to most or all of the previous versions of the story I examined:

- a *romance*
- a theme of *cultural difference and misunderstanding* – broadly between West and East. This is demonstrated between two lovers, and an exploitation of that difference, whether intentional or not, follows.
- concomitant with this is the *otherness* and *exoticism* of the location.
- a *child* of the union as a concrete consequence of the relationship is an essential plot element. And the securing of that child's future is, in most versions, of paramount importance.

Two other elements are often, if not always there. These are not always explicit and/or not always explored thematically:

- prostitution, variously disguised, or some kind of payment for the sexual liaison (clear in Loti's *Mme Chrysanthème*, Long, *Miss Saigon* – played down in other versions).
- a substantial difference in the ages of the lovers (clear in Long and Puccini).

As I devised my version I considered the importance of all of the above in order to follow the genetic blueprint. But my practice demonstrated, as did, for example, Hwang's, that while character and plot might, to a greater or lesser extent, follow the hypotext, theme does not have to. As I created my version, giving it comparable characters and a parallel story to *Madame Butterfly*, it came to be *about* something entirely different.

---

<sup>7</sup> Hutcheon recalls another operatic prostitute, who had made her entrance forty years earlier, in an adaptation apparently motivated by the composer's personal life at the time:

*"La Traviata* (1853) scandalized audiences, in part because it made its courtesan heroine sympathetic – not a surprising shift, given Verdi's relationship at the time with an unmarried mother, the singer Giuseppina Strepponi." (2013:p.148)

Incidentally, here was a composer seemingly motivated to adapt Dumas' *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848) because of an emotional connection with one aspect of the story – Puccini had similar reasons for being attracted to *Madame Butterfly*.

<sup>8</sup> Van Rij (2001) asserts that Long was inspired not only by Loti, but also by a true story told him by his sister, Jennie Correll, the wife of an American missionary who had been living in Nagasaki, of a 'tea-house girl' who had been abandoned, along with her baby, by her American sailor lover who had sailed away promising to return.

<sup>9</sup> How she could possibly fall for such an appalling man is never explained. Perhaps he is very good-looking – Long never tells us, though interestingly Puccini subsequently suggests that he is not:-

“*A Cousin*: Bello non è. (He is not handsome)

*Relations and friends*: Bello non è. In verità, Bello non è.

(In truth, he is not handsome)” (1904: Act 1)

<sup>10</sup> Burke-Gaffney (2004) suggests that it was thrown together in haste to plug a gap created by the failure of another play - *Naughty Anthony* – allegedly considered too saucy for contemporary audiences. The leading lady of that piece, Blanche Bates was, apparently, ideal casting for Cho Cho San.

<sup>11</sup> Long also tries to downplay the damage his portrayal of the US Naval officer has done in his homeland: “And where is Pinkerton? At least not in the United States navy - if the savage letters I receive from his fellows are true” (1903: Preface).

<sup>12</sup> Pointing out that he lost his father when aged five and was brought up by his doting mother and five sisters, Carner describes the composer’s resultant responses to women as “a neurotic fixation which may be defined as an unresolved bondage to the mother-image” (1992:p.300). He points out that Puccini heroines are “all women tarnished in one way or another, and all social outcasts” (1992:p.303).

<sup>13</sup> The Engineer is the literary descendant of Goro, the Nakodo, but not just an East/West go-between – he is actually mixed race.

<sup>14</sup> As Behr & Steyn (1991) point out, he is a conflation of the Bonze and Yamadori in *Madama Butterfly*

<sup>15</sup> These include:

1954: Film version directed by Carmine Gallone.

1974: Film version directed by Jean-Pierre Ponnelle.

1983: TV movie directed by Brian Large

1986: TV movie directed by Derek Bailey

1995: Film version directed by Frédéric Mitterrand.

2009: Anthony Minghella’s production relayed live from the Metropolitan Opera, New York, and subsequently issued on DVD.

<sup>16</sup> The Motion Picture Production Code was called the *The Hays Code* after Will H. Hays, the President of the Motion Picture Association of America. It proscribed many things deemed inappropriate in 'Motion Pictures', mainly to do with representations of sex and crime, and including: 'Miscegenation (sex relationships between the white and black races)'.

<sup>17</sup> It was the history of these deteriorating relations which prompted David Rain's 2012 novel, *The Heat of the Sun*. Taking the story on from Butterfly's suicide, Pinkerton goes on to become a senator and U.S. Presidential candidate while mixed-race Trouble has a difficult childhood in ignorance of his origins, before going on to find his loyalties utterly torn between the two nations from which he springs as they proceed inexorably towards war. The family relations are set against the macrocosm of the developing conflict, and the climax is, inevitably, the destruction of Nagasaki - the scene of Pinkerton and Cho Cho San's relationship, and Trouble's birthplace - by atomic bomb in 1945. The novel cleverly blends fiction and fact to offer an enriching view of the *Butterfly* story in what would have been its historical context. The timeline match is extra-ordinary, with Trouble reaching middle-age and Pinkerton his 60s by the outbreak of war.

## CHAPTER 3: The Queering Process

Many of the challenges I faced when embarking on my new version of *Madame Butterfly* were broadly similar to those faced by others – in terms, for example, of transferring the story to the screen, with the naturalism and psychological realism that medium demands, and, should I wish to see my screenplay proceed into production, making it commercially viable by identifying its target audience and giving it the best chance of appealing to them.

However, given that the primary change I wanted to effect was to make the social context, as well as the two primary relationships, homosexual rather than heterosexual, it was important to discover what that process might entail and how pervasive the consequent changes to the story might be. D.H. Hwang addressed some of the relevant considerations when creating *M. Butterfly* even though his intention was different from mine, but there were others which were instrumental in shaping my version. In this chapter I will look at how previous adapters have approached a similar challenge, and, with reference to Queer Theory, how the process which has come to be called ‘queering’ goes far beyond simply changing the gender and sexual identity of the characters.

Jeffreys describes heterosexual desire as one “that is organised around eroticised dominance and submission” (1998:p.76). Sullivan summarizes it as: “the dichotomous images of the male body and the female body, of the penis and the vagina, of activity and passivity, of impenetrability and impermeability” (2010:p.129). Though gay sex can also involve penetration, and homosexual relationships can mimic the heterosexual stereotype of the dominant and the submissive, the fundamental difference is that the allocation of roles is entirely flexible. It can also be in straight relationships, of course, but there is a presumption there of the male active and the female passive as normal – indeed the terms male and female have entered the English language to describe such things as mechanical parts, meaning ‘penetrator’ and ‘penetrated’. From that follows the stereotype of the male as dominant and the female as submissive, and from these stereotypes, governing social as well as sexual roles, comes the concept of heteronormativity.

Sullivan identifies this:



“Judith Butler, and Monique Wittig argue (in slightly different ways) that heterosexuality is a complex matrix of discourses, institutions, and so on, that has become normalised in our culture, thus making particular relationships, lifestyles, and identities seem natural, historical and universal.” (2003:p.39)

The story of *Madame Butterfly* totally follows this heteronormative model, and these stereotypes even to the macrocosmic context of the dominant, masculine West and the submissive, feminine East so successfully subverted by Hwang (1989). Destabilising this structure was therefore bound to disrupt the story in profound and manifold ways.

In her seminal 1990 work *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler identified the limitations of equating gender with sex in the study of human behaviour:

“the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence gender is neither the causal result of sex, nor as seemingly fixed as sex.” (1990:p.8)

She suggests that the simple fact of a person’s male or female body does not dictate how they will behave sexually or socially, nor even how they identify in terms of gender. From that she offers the idea that behaviour traditionally considered male or female is triggered not by a person’s biological sex, but by cultural and social influences – by nurture, not nature.

Queer Theory has gone on from this to explore extensively how sexual desire and behaviour, and resulting sexual identity, are not pre-determined by biological sex but are learned from a variety of sources – the process of ‘self-bricolage’, as Foucault (1986) suggests. Sullivan summarizes this complex body of work thus: “Queer (Theory) is constructed as a sort of vague and indefinable set of practices and (political) positions that has the potential to challenge normative knowledges and identities.”(2003:p.43-4) She quotes Halperin’s attempt to define it: “Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant.”(1995:p.62) These are broad definitions but they give some indication of why ‘queering’ a story involves more than just making it gay.

Queer Theory informed my practice alongside my exploration of previous versions of the *Madame Butterfly* story, as outlined in Chapter 2, and my own sexual identity. I could also have studied the work of previous screen directors

who have offered work which could be defined as queer, such as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Derek Jarman, Todd Haynes and many others. But specifically I was interested in work which is not just queer, but which has been queered – adapted work where the sexuality of the story has been changed. These include a ballet, a play and an opera as well as the rare example of ‘unqueering’ which was D.H.Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1960) as inspired by his reading the manuscript of E.M.Forster’s *Maurice* (1971).

### ***Swan Lake*. Tchaikovsky. Directed by Matthew Bourne. 1995**

Perhaps the most celebrated example of a queered text in recent years has been Matthew Bourne’s iconoclastic 1995 production of Tchaikovsky’s ballet *Swan Lake*. The traditional story is of a prince who, under pressure from his mother to find a suitable bride, instead finds a princess by a lake in a forest who has, along with her courtiers, been transformed into a swan. He falls in love with her and is told that if he keeps his love a secret then she can escape the spell and become human again. The princess then visits him again in disguise and seduces him into breaking his promise. However, he revisits her at her lake, is forgiven and they are united, though whether that is in life or death is open to interpretation.

Central to this story is secret love and the desire for something forbidden. As such it could be seen as a metaphor for the closet gay experience, and it may not be entirely fanciful to suggest that that was what attracted the repressed homosexual Tchaikovsky to the story in the first place.

Interviewed in 2011, Matthew Bourne describes how, when watching the ballet as a boy, he had the idea of making the swans male, and that simple re-gendering opened up a whole new thematic direction for the piece:

“It made the swan, rather than being a magical princess who turns into a swan at night.. it became more about an image of something that this Prince, who lived a very restricted life – it became an image for something that he could attain to – something that he wanted to be.” (www.youtube.com)

Although Bourne, a gay man, interpreted this gay composer’s work around a central relationship between two men, as Drummond (2003) points out, he has

not just re-gendered it, and made it a gay ballet, but he has queered it. In line with Butler's (1990) theory of gendered performance, he has offered not just an alternative sexuality to the central relationship, along with observations of the gay experience, but has thrown open and subverted all the gender expectations within it:

“According to Butler, if gender is indeterminate, contingent and provisional, so too must be the category of sexual desire. And it is here that Bourne's *Swan Lake* achieves its status as a queer, rather than gay artefact.” (2003:p.250)

Drummond points out how, in the traditional interpretation, the pas-de-deux between The Prince and Odette is about him displaying her – the masculine man celebrating the feminine woman – while in Bourne's version the Prince is emulating the Swan – in a desire to become like him. There is an image here of the differences between heterosexual congress – discovering and celebrating the difference between the sexes – and homosexual, where either partner can lead proceedings by example. The other pas-de-deux - with Odile - is about seduction in the original, while in Bourne the Swan's alter ego – the Stranger – is violent and aggressive. There are overtones of sado-masochism which again stem from the fact that it is two men. In the contrast of the two dances lies the central theme of both works. As Drummond points out “The traditional *Swan Lake*....consigns women to the abiding Madonna/whore dichotomy” (2003:p.240) while “Bourne's *Swan Lake* features a spectrum of “ways of being masculine” from the passive, neurotic Prince to the strong, protective Swan, to the violent, cruel stranger.” (ibid:p.244)

There is another aspect of the story in which Bourne has found new possibilities suggested by queering it, as I have with my adaptation. With male swans Bourne is also able to explore the dual aspect of that animal's reputation. The traditional ballet offers simply their beauty and grace, but alongside that they have a reputation for vicious retaliation when under threat, and he offers this in the final act when they destroy both their leader and the Prince. As Drummond points out, in the traditional ballet gender roles are clearly defined and constrained by stereotype – the feminine swans are beautiful and graceful, the men strong and engaged in masculine pursuits such as hunting. In Bourne's they are entirely

blurred. Men and women can be strong or weak, dominant or submissive. The Stranger is sexually attractive to both men and women.

Unlike the traditional ballet, Bourne's ends tragically in the classical sense. The Prince, through seeking what he desires, achieves the opposite and destroys both himself and the object of his desire in the process. Drummond suggests that the "overriding sense of melancholy one feels at the ballet's conclusion" stems from the "indeterminacy of gender and desire" (2003:p.251) though I would suggest a more straightforward image of a man destroyed by the battle between homophobia on the one hand and the ghetto mentality of the oppressed on the other. In that it celebrates the male body as an object of sexual desire, available to men as well as to women, the ballet could be seen as a celebration of gay sexuality. But in terms of the outcome it is not. The swans behave as badly in destroying the interloper as the Royal Family do in preventing the Prince 'coming out'. But perhaps it was Bourne's intention, even as, in the 1990s, gay liberation crept forward, to demonstrate how far the British establishment still had to go.

I would argue that Bourne, in what I would categorise as a reconception of the Tchaikovsky story, albeit he uses the composer's 'text' in its entirety, has enriched his hypotext by ambiguities and conflicts which result from queering it.

**'Fucking Men'. Joe diPietro. 2009.**

Schnitzler's iconic *La Ronde*, written in 1897 and so roughly contemporary with *Madame Butterfly*, explores sexual mores across the classes in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Vienna. Jo diPietro's 2009 play is an adaptation of Schnitzler's in a contemporary gay setting, and his change of period and context exactly matches mine. As with mine the social contexts he is working between could scarcely be more different from each other – the repressed, class-conscious 19<sup>th</sup> century society where meeting social expectations is all important and homosexuality unthinkable, and the liberal, hedonistic 21<sup>st</sup> century gay community where promiscuity is the accepted norm. Yet he manages to find clear echoes of Schnitzler's characters and their conflicts in the new setting.

For some characters the transition is straightforward. The Whore becomes the Escort; the Young Wife and Husband become a married gay couple; the Poet

becomes the Playwright; the Young Gentleman becomes an over-privileged Student; the Actress becomes an Actor and the Soldier remains a Soldier. For others the change is subtler. The Count becomes a TV celebrity Journalist, thus reflecting who has the power and influence in the later period, while the Little Miss becomes a Porn Star – both being attractive youngsters discovering the sexual power of their youth and looks but trying to reconcile their opportunities for sexual experience with their desire for something more lasting.

Perhaps most interestingly, the Parlour Maid becomes someone very different - a Graduate Student - and this is an example where DiPietro has had to go to the essence of the relationships to find comparable situations and from there find his new characters. In Schnitzler the Soldier/Parlour Maid scene is about two social equals sexually attracted to each other. He just wants sex but she wants something more – she wants him to like and respect her, and is jealous of his interest in other girls.

DiPietro's meeting is similarly driven by mutual sexual attraction – a casual encounter in a gay sauna. But while Schnitzler's characters have a conversation before the sex, for DiPietro's the sex has already happened. This reflects the different practices which prevail in the different social contexts. And the other important difference also results directly from changing the sexuality. Although the Parlour Maid wants to have sex with the Soldier as much as he does with her, because she is a woman she has been taught to expect there to be some respect, some sense of a relationship beyond the physical. She does not want to feel used. Whether that is born of nature or nurture is an interesting question for a different line of sociological research, but the expectation is clear, and it is an expectation intrinsic to Cio Cio San's feelings about Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly*.

There is no such expectation in the gay encounter. For two homosexual men recreational, purely physical sex without even knowing the other man's name is not unusual. So to establish a conflict between his two characters which echoes Schnitzler's, DiPietro has to introduce the concept of something beyond the purely physical. The Soldier begins with a lengthy monologue describing the abusive and egocentric relationship he has developed with the Escort he had met in the previous scene. The Graduate Student, who has been having sexual

difficulties in his own relationship, then responds to this by challenging him with the idea of love. There is no expectation on either side that there will be an emotional element to their sexual encounter, as there is in Schnitzler, so DiPietro has to introduce it. But the scene remains one about the conflict between physical and emotional needs, and DiPietro has succeeded in maintaining the essence of the scene whilst setting it in a whole new context with very different characters.

When Schnitzler's Parlour Maid goes on to meet the Young Gentleman the roles are changed. She is now the social inferior – the employee. As she did with the soldier, she wants the sex, but she is all too aware of the transgression and the consequences of discovery by Dr. Schueller, the expected guest, or by anyone else. She feels she ought not to have sex, because of the risks of discovery as well as because of the expectation of her as a woman wanting more than just the physical. The Young Gentleman is simply taking advantage of his superior position to gratify himself sexually, though the risks of discovery are there for him too.

It is hard for DiPietro in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to replicate the conflict of social status, but he does make the College Kid (his 'Young Gentleman') an over-privileged young man who is used to getting what he wants, and the employer/employee status is still there – the Graduate Student has been employed to coach him in English. The threat of discovery of their transgression remains – in the form of the College Kid's parents - but what DiPietro has to find is the reason why a gay man would be reluctant when offered sex with another who is clearly young and attractive, and that reason is his difficult emotional situation with his partner – set up in the previous scene. He is expecting a call from him, so he still has the Parlour Maid's guilt along with the risk of discovery. So the circumstances of the encounter are parallel, and, again, the essence of the scene. But the characters are entirely changed by the new context.

What DiPietro does in all these scenes is to take the essence of whichever aspect of sexual relationships is being explored in each of Schnitzler's scenes and find a modern gay equivalent. And though the process of queering them requires many changes, a surprising number of issues are common to both social contexts and sexualities, for example the conflict of sexual attraction with expected

behaviour and the need for a relationship to go beyond the physical and the temporary.

There is transgressivity in both periods, but the rules are different. For Schnitzler's characters sexual liaisons across class barriers and outside marriage are prohibited, whilst for DiPietro's there is only a problem, for example, when the married characters have sex outside the relationships with the same man more than once. But in the later play there is, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the additional transgression of the closeted married men – the Actor and the celebrity Journalist. DiPietro has to clarify the rules not only because an audience might not be acquainted with the gay community and its behaviour, but also because even within that community the rules can be different for different people – a result of the freedoms suggested above. Common to almost all Schnitzler's scenes is the heterosexual assumption of a man who wants sex and a woman who submits to it, more or less willingly as the case may be. For DiPietro there is an underlying assumption that all the characters, all being men, want sex, the question is simply whether or not they ought to have it. And either can initiate proceedings. The power balance is no longer the intrinsic one of strong man/weak woman, but a whole raft of different balances – of money versus looks, fame versus talent, the desire for sex versus the desire for love.

One thing this play demonstrates very clearly is how, just as a writer of science fiction or fantasy needs to establish the rules which govern the world being created, DiPietro has to set out the rules by which his characters live in order to clarify to an audience that might not be familiar with that environment, or the behaviour that is, and is not transgressive in it. When moving outside the known and accepted heteronormative paradigm, this is additional work which has to be done

What DiPietro has achieved is a modern exploration of gay sexual mores which is enriched by being an adaptation of a century-old one because he finds so much common ground even amongst all the differences. It is a reconception which works in its own context, but the enjoyment of which is enhanced by knowledge of the hypotext even though there is no intertextuality, nor any specific reference to his source material. His play stands by itself, but a knowledge of the hypotext

enables a viewer to enjoy the adaptation as an adaptation, as Hutcheon (2013) puts it, so gaining a richer experience from that knowledge.

Perhaps the most important difference between Schnitzler and DiPietro, other than the sexuality, is the decline in importance of social order, of class. Although, as I have argued, DiPietro finds comparisons, for Schnitzler's characters it is a force comparable with their sexual needs in terms of its power to drive their behaviour. It is not for DiPietro, partly because it is the 21<sup>st</sup> century not the 19<sup>th</sup>, but also because the gay community is outside social expectations, with the attendant freedoms that permits.

***Maurice*. E.M Forster. 1971. *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. D.H Lawrence. 1928.**

There is an interesting precedent to this when comparing what were arguably the two most controversial novels of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – novels reputedly linked in their genesis – E.M Forster's *Maurice* and D.H.Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In his archive of the two authors' mutual friend Edward Carpenter, Dawson claims that "Lawrence read the manuscript of *Maurice* .... and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* can be seen as a heterosexualized *Maurice*" (The Edward Carpenter Archive). This makes the latter a rare, if not unique example of an 'unqueered' story. Though Lawrence's later novel could not be described as a direct adaptation of Forster's, the links are clear to see, as Dixie King points out:

"both novels take as their theme forbidden sexuality (homosexual in the one and female in the other); in both books, the full sexual initiation of the protagonists is strongly associated with wild woods which surround or lie adjacent to old rotting mansions, which are clearly symbols of stifled sexuality; the plots in both turn on the naïve, frustrated loyalty of the protagonist to a bloodless, soulless lover (called Clive in one and Clifford in the other); and in both books, a very romantically conceived character, the gamekeeper – virile, primitive, yet wonderfully intelligent and sensitive – plays the critical role in the sexual initiation of the protagonists." (1982:p.68)

She might also have mentioned the use of Christian names for the social superior and surnames for the inferior – as well as the dramatic declarations in the final chapters to Clive and to Clifford (is the similarity of these names a co-incidence?) of the truth of the two affairs. The parallels are clear to see.



*Maurice* ends with a fantasy of the two lovers running away ‘to the greenwood’ (1960. Pub. 1971), and Forster admits to it:

“A happy ending was imperative. I shouldn’t have bothered to write otherwise. I was determined that in fiction anyway two men should fall in love and remain in it for the ever and ever that fiction allows, and in this sense Maurice and Alec still roam the greenwood.” (1972:p.218)

He reports himself Lytton Strachey’s observation “that the relationship of the two rested upon curiosity and lust and would only last six weeks” (ibid.). Lawrence’s lovers, although, with neither’s divorce yet effected, their future is uncertain, do have a more realistic possibility as man and wife on Mellors’ farm.

Maurice and Scudder could not live in society, not because they are two men – Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson had shared a flat in all those most famous of Victorian novels without the slightest hint of impropriety – but because they are from different classes. It is a curious paradox that when homosexuality was proscribed, because it was less visible, no-one made assumptions of that kind. If two men or women live together now they are assumed to be gay or Lesbian. This was clearly not the case in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but then again two people of the same sex but different social classes living together would have caused considerable concern.

Both Forster and Lawrence wanted freedom for their lovers. The paradox is that because Forster’s could never be free in a society which would imprison them for expressing their love physically he gave them the greater freedom of a fantasy life ‘in the greenwood’. Lawrence’s could be accepted in society, but their freedom would still be constrained by their new social milieu, albeit a less constricting one than Wragby Hall. As discussed above, even in the emancipated 21<sup>st</sup> century something of that difference remains in that homosexual relationships are not constrained by the socio-religious model which still governs heterosexual ones.

***Don Giovanni – The Opera. Richard Crichton-Brauen. 2012***

Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* was the inspiration for producer Richard Crichton Brauen and director Dominic Gray to collaborate on a gay version of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* which was premiered at the night-club Heaven in London in 2012. During a personal interview later that year Crichton-Brauen described to me how the promiscuity of the Don had suggested the adaptation, arguing that 1003 sexual conquests referred to in the opera was more believable in the context of a gay man in 1980s London than of a heterosexual man in 18th century Spain. In the same way that Bourne found that queering stories opened up new possibilities, so did they, and, as with other examples of queering, the power balance became more interesting and flexible because there were more possibilities. As Bourne had with the *Stranger*, they found the suggestion of sado-masochism in the affair with Alan, their Donna Anna, and the wilful self-humiliation of their Donna Elvira, re-named Eddie. Though, of course, sado-masochism is regularly played out in a heterosexual context, when both participants are male then the physical power balance is more equal and so there is a sense that the submissive partner has to be entirely consensual, which is not necessarily true when one is a woman, who will normally be physically weaker. So male/male sado-masochism seems more of a game, without the unpleasant overtones of potential rape, and thus it becomes more acceptable in what is essentially a comic piece.

Duncan Rock sang the title role in this production, having previously sung it in conventional productions for Welsh National Opera and others. He described to me the transition to the new context as relatively straightforward, finding the gay context, as Crichton-Brauen and Gray had suggested, an entirely credible one for the story. He noted that the seduction scenes felt very much more aggressive - like the Prince and the *Stranger*'s pas-de-deux in Bourne's *Swan Lake* - and more about power than sex. This is another important difference to be recognised in male/male relationships. Mozart's women are anxious to defend their virtue and their reputation, but a man defending his virtue is a comic trope, as seen, for example, in *Joseph Andrews* (1742) - Henry Fielding's comic take on Richardson's *Pamela* (1740).

In analysing all these queered stories common themes presented themselves: the flexibility in the balance of power between lovers; the suggestions of physical equality which can lead to aggression; and suggestions of sado-masochism without the unacceptable overtones which can pertain in a heterosexual context.

Each of these adapters has taken advantage of the liberation from the heteronormative model afforded by the queering process. Even *Lady Chatterly's Lover* could be described as 'queer' because the relationship, although heterosexual, falls outside the accepted norms of the period and is therefore, to use Sullivan's definition "at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant." (1995:p.62).

Given that the *Madame Butterfly* story springs entirely from the "eroticised dominance and submission" described by Jeffreys (1998: p.76), changing that can, and indeed arguably must liberate it in a similar way to these other examples. My experience of writing a queer version demonstrated just how liberating the process can be, and how it can inform and enhance the adaptation process in general.

## CHAPTER 4: Creating the New

In this chapter I will continue my Practice-led Research by exploring and reflecting on the process by which I set about creating my screenplay, drawing on numerous ‘re-clothings’ and ‘re-conceptions’ of, as well as ‘variations’ on the one hundred and twenty-year-old story of *Madame Butterfly*. My practice was also informed by the approaches and techniques used to create those and by the previously queered texts I discussed in Chapter 3. In the light of my research, as well as of my initial intentions, I will look at the specific challenges I was faced with and reflect on the decisions I made as I began to develop the story.

### Romance and Subversion

In the Chapter 2 I identified *Madame Butterfly* as a tragic romance, and so, as I reworked the story, it was also important to remember that context, as well as my queer one. According to Selbo:

“The romance genre must have a narrative that revolves around one or more love relationships. In most cases the film story explores a very deep and true love. .... To keep conflict constant in the narrative, the ability of the lovers to get together is always in question and, in most cases the lovers are kept apart as long as possible.” (2015:p.62)

My hypotext clearly fits this definition. In simpler terms Selbo defines romance as ‘finding true love’: “”The finding” refers to the adventure - the journey - and true love is the treasure that is sought or found” (2015:p.94). Cho Cho San seeks true love and believes she has found it. Selbo also refers to Linda Williams’ 1991 analysis: “She notes the difference between romance (deep desire for emotional connection) and pornography (desire for sexual stimulation).” (2015:p.99). That too is key, because, as I suggested in Chapter 2, Pinkerton’s principal desire is for sex whilst Cho Cho San’s is for love. In a gay context where, as DiPietro depicted, recreational sex is perhaps more of an accepted norm than it has traditionally been amongst straight people, this difference is an even more important driver of the story because it raises important questions about the characters’ desires and expectations in that regard.

In their 1998 essay collection, *Fatal Attractions: Rescripting Romance in Contemporary Literature and Film*, Pearce and Wisker suggest that queering romance involves at least the possibility, if not the inevitability of subverting it. They examine a number of screen reworkings of the romance genre, including *Basic Instinct* (1992), *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990). Although these are not adaptations, their definition of retelling and re-scripting echoes my definitions of re-clothing and re-conception in the context of adaptation:

“the radical potential of such reworkings - the point at which a ‘retelling’ becomes a ‘re-scripting’ lies not only in the extent to which they alter the codes and conventions of traditional romance (e.g. the sexuality of the lovers; the nature of the obstacles they face; the order in which key episodes take place), but whether or not they actively interrogate and destabilise the institutions in which those conventions have become embedded (e.g. heterosexuality, marriage, monogamy, the family or the prescription for same-race relationships).” (1998:p.1)

*Madame Butterfly* already challenges the last of these, and it could be argued that Pinkerton abandons Cho Cho San with such ease because she is of a different race. But in all other respects the story is so heteronormative that it cannot really be viewed as queer or subversive. My queered version of the story challenges most of the above conventions in that the lovers are homosexual, of different races and one is, in sexual terms at least, polygamous. As I suggested in the Introduction, Pearce and Wisker’s definition of romantic subversion seems appropriate:

“Romantic subversion is not .... simply a question of retelling the same story with different players, or a different plot, or in a different context but of more radically disassociating the psychic foundations of desire from the cultural ones *in such a way that the operation of the orthodoxy is exposed and challenged.*” (ibid:p2. Original emphasis)

Because I have queered the story, I believe I have rendered it subversive in that it exposes and challenges orthodoxies – heterosexuality, sexual monogamy and partners of similar ages as well as partners of the same race. Whilst having *Madame Butterfly* as a clear parent, like any adaptation, it was important to me that it had a life of its own in its new geographical, chronological and sexual contexts, and new medium of delivery. I do not want viewers of the film to be disadvantaged if they do not know the original story, but at the same time those

who do should be offered another level of appreciation of it as an adaptation. My whole reason for adapting an existing story rather than creating a new one, as I made clear in the Introduction, was to offer what Hutcheon describes as “the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise” (2013:p.20). And so, unlike previous re-conceptions, such as *Miss Saigon* (1989), I invite comparisons with the original through intertextuality as well as aural clues, for example in suggestions for background music. In that sense, in terms of authorial intention, I see the work as a reconception, falling somewhere between *Miss Saigon* and *M. Butterfly* (1989). The former makes no overt invitation to the audience to remember the original story and exists entirely separately, whilst the latter requires knowledge of it, and offers a précis of it in the text.

I created my story from a bricolage of influences, including, of course, the hypotext and its descendants as well as previously queered works and, crucially, own experiences and observations over forty years as an openly gay man. I intended it to be a romance, but whether or not it would be tragic, like some, but not all of its literary forebears, depended on my new characters’ decisions, and on whether I allowed them or the hypotext to determine their outcomes. As Maltby put it “The test would be if the story forced itself to follow the events of the source” (2012: Appendix 2:p.144). As I suggested in the Introduction, this is what my earlier adaptations tended to do, and it was now what I wanted to avoid.

## **First Decisions**

As I began the task of adapting *Madame Butterfly*, my first decisions, from the starting point of making the central relationship gay and the story contemporary, seemed straightforward. Looking for an Eastern, exotic destination where gay men go to buy sex in the 21<sup>st</sup> century without fully understanding, or even taking an interest in the local culture, the location of Bangkok immediately presented itself. As Tatchell points out, there is a contemporary tendency for Westerners to visit Bangkok in the mistaken belief that Thai culture is more accepting of homosexuality than European, without exploring further into the cultural differences, or acknowledging the commercial truth of the matter: “The principal reason for working in the sex industry is poverty. “There’s a lot of unemployment

and jobs usually pay very little," says Lop, a 20 year old bar boy. "It's a good job and much better than going hungry."" (1989)

There was a clear match and starting point here. Men visit Bangkok now, just as Viaud, and others in search of 'Japanese Marriages', visited Nagasaki in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. They want to enjoy sex with the locals, if necessary by paying for it, without taking any interest in, or responsibility for their culture. From this new location came my working title, *Mr. Bangkok*.

## The Moral Context

The decision to set the story in the gay sex industry of Bangkok immediately gave me a moral responsibility. Harrison quotes Schulberg's<sup>18</sup> "I believe the (writer) should be an artist-cum-sociologist. I think he should see his characters in a social perspective." (2005:p.10). As I pointed out in Chapter 2, his father, Ben Shulberg, certainly had to when he produced the 1932 film of *Madame Butterfly* in the context of the Hays code (see note<sup>15</sup>, Chapter 2) on miscegenation. Looking back to the origins of my story, Loti's amoral attitude in *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887) prompted Long's original *Madame Butterfly* story (1898) which in its turn was perceived by Hwang as "containing a wealth of sexist and racist clichés" (1989). Although Long's and Puccini's stories were not perceived as being about, or commenting on the Geisha tradition, or sex with underage girls, the sensibilities of a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience are profoundly different, and there is a paradox here. While in 19<sup>th</sup> century Japan prostitution had to be discreet and disguised as marriage, in 21<sup>st</sup> century Bangkok it is blatant, unashamed and commercial. Yet in another respect the situation is startlingly reversed, and that is the age of the Cho Cho San character - 15. This seems to have been accepted at the turn of the 20th century<sup>19</sup>, and is not generally perceived as an important theme in early versions of the story, though in the Puccini opera it is commented on by both Pinkerton and Sharpless, the latter aware of how vulnerable that makes her, and the former how attractive:

*"Butterfly:* Quindici netti, netti. [slyly] sono vecchia diggià.  
(fifteen exactly – I am already old)

*Sharpless:* Quindici anni! (fifteen!)

*Pinkerton:* Quindici anni!

*Sharpless*: L'età dei giochi... (an age for games..)

*Pinkerton*: ...e dei confetti. (.. and of sweetmeats)" (1904: Act 1)

There is no suggestion from either that it is inappropriate, much less that it might be illegal. In 1904, with homosexuality completely illegal in the UK<sup>20</sup>, and Oscar Wilde and others like him being imprisoned for consensual gay sex, to offer any kind of openly homosexual story would have been unthinkable. But in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, although the homosexuality will be more readily accepted, if I had made the boy 15, particularly with Thailand at considerable pains to crack down on its reputation for underage prostitution<sup>21</sup>, and the UK hearing numerous high-profile revelations of historic paedophilia, it would become a significant issue, with the story likely to be perceived as one about child abuse. The hypotext has rarely, if ever been seen in that light.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, previous audiences were perceived as likely to be offended by representations of American men behaving badly, or using prostitutes, especially in a foreign country. So if I present male prostitution to contemporary Western audiences, especially in the context of sex tourism, and particularly if it is seen as acceptable or unremarkable (which in contemporary Bangkok, frankly, it is) I am likely to offend at least some of their sensibilities. Back in 1998, in their study, *Night Market: Sexual Cultures and the Thai Economic Miracle*, Bishop and Robinson reveal the contradiction between the economic reality – that Bangkok is financially dependent on the sex industry – and the image presented by the Tourist Authority of Thailand. (T.A.T.) which denies its existence because it is aware of what the majority of Westerners will think of that. On my visit there in 2013 I was made aware by a colleague at Chulalongkorn University how difficult it would be to make the film I propose in the city because the T.A.T. would not allow it for precisely that reason.

I have suggested that my story is subversive romance, which, as Pearce and Wisker (1998) suggest, exposes and challenges the operation of the orthodoxy. But, as its author, if I wish to see the film produced and to avoid triggering the backlash Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème* did at this story's inception, I must consider very carefully, and take full responsibility for the moral position the story's outcome suggests and how it will be perceived by the audience at whom it is aimed.



## Characters

The next important decisions were who the characters would be in this new context, and the extent to which I would follow the hypotext in terms of matching each character. I had the choice between creating a story ‘inspired by’ *Madame Butterfly*, which might simply match the two central characters and create others as suggested by the new context, and adapting the story, which would suggest matching some or all of the other characters too. Interestingly, although Maltby was adamant that *Miss Saigon* (1989) was no more than ‘inspired by’ *Madame Butterfly*, nevertheless almost all the characters there are equivalents of those in the hypotext. Given my intention to adapt, for the reasons given above, I decided to find equivalents to the original characters, at least insofar as they would work in my version.

For some characters this was straightforward, with obvious parallels presenting themselves:

- Pinkerton became ‘Ben’. Like his literary ancestor in Nagasaki, he would be a man taking advantage of a work posting to Bangkok to explore new sexual horizons. I would make him British because it enabled me draw more on my own cultural experience. In the light of the difficulty previous adapters have all had with the level of this character’s culpability, and to avoid him becoming the obvious ‘villain’ he would have more complex intentions and motivations.
- Cho Cho San became ‘Chai’. Like her, he is afflicted by poverty and seeking a way out of his predicament. He is a teenager who has come to work in the Bangkok sex industry, though he refuses to prostitute himself, so, like Kim in *Miss Saigon* (1989) he is a newcomer. Because of the moral issue, and risk of misperception suggested above, I was careful to set him at the UK age of sexual consent – 16 (in Thailand it is 15) - and to make it clear that he wants, and instigates the sex when it happens, however inappropriate the liaison might still appear to contemporary eyes. However, like his literary ancestor, his primary need is to be loved.

- Goro, the marriage-broker, became 'Gee' who runs the boy bar where Chai works. Like his ancestor he is primarily a businessman who makes his money providing for his customers' sexual needs and desires.
- Sharpless – the wise American Consul, friend and confidant to Pinkerton, who lives in Japan and so understands the culture, became Colin – a work colleague who has lived in Thailand for some years and is married to a Thai woman. He is well acquainted with both Thai culture and the Bangkok sex industry.

Thus far the adaptation of the characters presented few problems. But when it came to the question of Pinkerton's American wife, Kate, whom in Long, Belasco and Puccini he marries after he has left Cho Cho San and returned to America, other possibilities presented themselves once the decision had been taken to make the story a gay one.

My first thought was that Ben could be married, but a closeted homosexual, taking advantage of his posting abroad to explore suppressed inclinations. Indeed I wrote the first treatment around this idea. This option did have its attractions in terms of creating an engaging story. It would offer more conflict - internal for Ben as well as with his wife - and it would offer a connection with a heterosexual audience as well as an important role for a woman. But I realised I was making an obvious decision, and, more to the point, I had forgotten my intention. I had wanted from the outset to offer a story not about people being gay, but about people who happen to be gay. This would be a 'coming-out' story, and my original intention had been to avoid that.

Whilst I was writing the script, Russell T. Davies' drama series *Cucumber* was transmitted on Channel 4, 15 years after his ground-breaking *Queer as Folk*. Speaking on Radio 4's *Front Row* Davies noted how those 15 years had transformed the landscape for gay-themed drama:

"Coming to write a drama now it is different. I think now drama doesn't have to be seen as representative, you don't have to stand up and shout, saying 'We're here!' because an awful lot of people are rolling their eyes and saying 'We know!'. You can move on from that and say 'This is a drama, like every straight drama, that's saying 'Who are we? Why do we do the things we do?'" (2015)

Davies' words reminded me emphatically of that original intention to write a story about people who were already at home in the gay world rather than trying to find their way into it.

A pre-existing relationship had appeared in earlier versions of the story - notably the 1932 Cary Grant film, in which it served to reduce Pinkerton's culpability by suggesting that Butterfly was guilty of deluding herself. It was also there in Hwang's *M. Butterfly* (1989). But as soon as I decided to maintain my intention of making this a story about people who are already openly homosexual, then a new, and very plausible possibility presented itself - Ben could be an 'out' gay man in a sexually open relationship. This is a paradigm commonplace, even normal amongst contemporary gay relationships, as is made clear by Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan in their study of contemporary gay lifestyles, *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments*:

"Intimacies often survive the waning of sexual interest. A number of partnerships are asexual, but are seen as no less real and enduring than sexual relationships. Dan, now in his seventies, provides a good example of this. He considers his relationship with Simon to be the most important one in his life. While it is no longer a sexual relationship, it remains central to both of them. As Dan says: 'We're not lovers any more and we have separate sex lives, but he's the most important person in the world to me.'" (2001:p.122-3)

A recent survey conducted in Victoria, Australia reported that 'gay people are more likely to be in an open relationship than to stay monogamous' (Morgan: [www.gaystarnews.com](http://www.gaystarnews.com)) and it has also been my experience that Dan's voice echoes throughout today's gay community, where recreational sex with no emotional connection is commonplace and seen as entirely normal. Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan make a further interesting observation: "At an abstract level at least, the majority of men we interviewed could separate 'sex' from 'love'. But, interestingly, this is easier to put into practice for those who are in committed emotional relationships" (2001:p.144). They suggest that while unpartnered men use sex as a means of seeking a partner and commitment, those who already have that are freer to enjoy no more than the pure physicality of the sexual congress. They also suggest, echoing Blumstein and Schwartz (1983), that "in such relationships, sexual non-monogamy may be balanced by strong emotional monogamy". This describes well the difference between Ben and Chai - the former is in a relationship whilst the latter seeks one - and that, along with the

difference in their cultures and their ages (as I will discuss), is a root cause of the demise of the relationship they embark on.

The theme of open relationships is one I explored in my own, unproduced, 2009 play, *Higamus Hogamus*, in which a straight couple grappling with a relationship whose physical side is going stale attempt to imitate their gay friends' sexual openness in the face of very different social attitudes and expectations. Although there is evidence of the straight community now starting to follow this gay example, I would contend that purely recreational sex has yet to become the norm that it is in the gay community. I could therefore follow the intention I had in writing *Higamus Hogamus* and offer this as an additional aspect of *Mr. Bangkok* which would demonstrate an important difference between gay and straight sexual behaviour.

Following this idea I decided that for my Kate Pinkerton (Adelaide in Long's original story) I could have a pre-existing live-in partner. And indeed, with civil partnerships and marriage now available to same-sex couples in the UK, I could reflect the hypotext in having Ben return from his posting to cement the relationship. So Kate/Adelaide became Alex, who has been living with Ben for a number of years, and, like Kate, he is the stronger partner who deals with the situation when Ben fails to. In addition to offering a contemporary and credible context for the story, this opened up another theme to explore in the film – the workings of an open relationship, and how 'extra-marital' sex, with its attendant physical intimacy, can co-exist with the emotional intimacy of the committed, loving relationship with the long-term partner. Here was the first example of how meeting a challenge opened up a possibility to enrich my new story. Others were to follow.

One character - the child of the union - presented me with an obvious problem. As I suggested in Chapter 2, Long's introduction of Trouble to the story sowed the seeds of the tragedy it almost became in his hands, and did become in Belasco's. Hwang's solution to the problem of an offspring from a homosexual relationship had been to 'borrow' a baby to present to Gallimard. But there is no need in his play for an emotional connection with either 'parent' – it is just another part of the deception.

In this respect queering the story presented a clear challenge to my adaptation. A parent's responsibility for their offspring – and so Pinkerton's for Trouble after Butterfly's death – is a given in the heterosexual context. But there could be no unplanned offspring from Ben and Chai's relationship, and therefore no such responsibility. Without this my story might lack the emotional depth of the original, and, arguably, work against my intention to demonstrate that gay relationships are as full and complex as straight ones. Further examination of the text of Puccini's opera, as well as of other gay stories and my own life experience, revealed that beneath this difficulty lay another opportunity.

As I have already discussed, in the Puccini *Cio Cio San* is 15, and, though no actual age is given for Pinkerton, it is clear that he is substantially older. In their famous love duet, 'Bimba dagli occhi', Cio Cio San sings to Pinkerton "Vogliatemi bene, un bene piccolino, un bene da bambino (please want me, like a little one, like a child)" (1904). Although gay men tend not to have children, there is no reason why they cannot have strong paternal instincts, and there is evidence throughout history of how that can become conflated, arguably confused with homosexual desire. Greenberg (1988) describes numerous rituals from ancient Greece through to contemporary tribes in Brazil and New Guinea where sexual practices between older and younger men are considered entirely normal, and an essential part of a young man's development. In 1953, at the age of 48, Christopher Isherwood fell in love with the 18-year-old Don Bachardy, and wrote in his diary: "I feel a special kind of love for Don. I suppose I'm just another frustrated father." (2011:p.xxxvi). They went on to live together as lovers for the rest of Isherwood's life.

The love of an older man for a younger is also a theme running through literature, with an element of sexual attraction often suggested but rarely explicit. There are several examples in the Shakespeare canon – such as Antonio and Sebastian in *Twelfth Night* and Antonio and Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*. The 20<sup>th</sup> century has numerous dramatic representations of paternalistic homoerotic relationships, often implicit but unspoken, such as T.E. Lawrence with the Arab boys Daud and Farraj in David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) or Dysart and Alan in Peter Shaffer's *Equus* (1973). Where the relationship is more or less explicit, as with Mr. Dulcimer and Julian in Mordaunt Shairp's *the Green Bay Tree* (1933) it is, unsurprisingly, heavily coloured by the opprobrium of contemporary

social attitudes. When Britten made an opera of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* with lyricist Myfanwy Piper, his Aschenbach, like Mann's, is sexually obsessed with the boy Tadzio, but also feels those paternal instincts: "I might have created him. Perhaps that is why I feel a father's pleasure, a father's warmth in the contemplation of him" (1973:p.19) and it seems entirely probable that this suggestion was prompted by Britten's own well-documented homosexuality and particular interest in young men.

However, none of these works fully and openly explores this aspect of the homosexual experience, and the only major literary, cinematic or dramatic work I have found which does, even in the emancipated contemporary context, is Robin Campillo's *Eastern Boys* (2013), telling the story of a relationship between a middle-aged man and a rent boy which becomes paternal. So maintaining the age-gap of the central relationship offered the opportunity to mine a new thematic seam arising entirely from the situation that queering the story had created. It could enrich the story, not only by adding a layer to the Ben-Chai relationship but also by being a part of what was going on between Ben and Alex. While they both think they need more recreational sex to enliven their flagging relationship, what they actually need is a child to provide focus to it. Ben's paternal instincts are awakened through his relationship with Chai, as are Alex's when the boys come to the UK.

We learn nothing, from Puccini at least, of Pinkerton's subsequent relationship with Trouble, his son – it simply is not part of the story – albeit explored in a fascinating way by David Rain in *The Heat of the Sun* (2012) (see note<sup>16</sup>, Chapter 2). But here was the possibility of adding that extra dimension to my version. 'Trouble' became intrinsic to this new theme. I needed him to be a relation who has an emotional bond for Chai strong enough to dominate the latter's behaviour, and who ends up as Ben's responsibility when Chai departs – and the hypotexts all suggested that he has to depart in some way. So he must relate to him strongly too. A sibling to Chai suggested itself, with a brother being the obvious thought. He could also form a bond with Ben, so that, whatever happened to Chai at the end, he and Alex could be left with the brother - as the child they need.

In *Madama Butterfly* Trouble is three when Pinkerton returns, and he is little more than a cipher<sup>22</sup>. It is his parents' emotional responses to him that are crucial. But

firstly it would be difficult to find a convincing scenario in which a teenage boy was responsible for his three-year-old brother, and secondly I perceived it as less likely that Ben would form any kind of bond with a child of that age. However, if he were older, but still clearly a child - say 11 years old - then both problems are resolved. I gave him the same name as Kim's son in *Miss Saigon* (1989) - Tam. Furthermore he could now have a personality of his own, and a fuller relationship with Chai, which offered another equivalent in my new context. Suzuki is Cho Cho San's utterly loyal maid who remains with her throughout her three-year wait. Now a three-dimensional character, and a companion to Chai during his lonely wait, Tam could assume some of her function too.

I now had the framework for a story that would have its roots clearly in the hypotext but be enriched with other thematic material which could take it in new directions. Just as Boubil and Maltby had found that the Vietnam war setting for *Miss Saigon* (1989) gave them the solution to the question of 'Pinkerton's' culpability which had been troubling them, so my new context offered up not only solutions to problems, but also new territory to explore, and this was an invaluable lesson to help me move forward from my earlier attempts at adaptation towards Hutcheon's suggestion that "an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary." (2013:p.20). In particular the queering process was forcing me to be less derivative than I had been in my previous attempts because I was looking beyond the gender and sexual preference of my characters to the wider implications of their different behaviour and social milieu.

---

<sup>18</sup> Budd Schulberg, novelist and screenwriter: *On the Waterfront* (1954) etc, (quoted Selbo. 2015:p.xv). He was the son of Ben Schulberg who had produced the 1932 film of *Madame Butterfly* starring Cary Grant.

<sup>19</sup> The UK age of sexual consent had been raised from 13 to 16 in 1885. In Italy it would appear not to have been specified at that time (Children & Youth in History)

<sup>20</sup> It was not until 1967 that homosexual acts became legal between consenting males over 21 in private. The age was reduced to 18 in 1994, and to 16, in line with the age of heterosexual consent, in 2001. (Stonewall Youth)

<sup>21</sup> In 1996 Thailand passed the Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act. (NATLEX. 1996)

<sup>22</sup> In Anthony Minghella's 2006 production of the opera he is interestingly, and appropriately, played by a puppet.





## CHAPTER 5: Writing and Rewriting

In this chapter I will look back at how my screenplay developed through the early drafts which followed on from the preliminary decisions outlined in Chapter 4 - how the characters grew and found their voices, and how their interaction drove the new story along a route which ran parallel to the hypotext, but traversed very different territory as dictated by the new social and cultural setting, time period and sexuality. The attendant possibility of arriving at a different destination was, therefore, always there. To use a different metaphor, while *Madame Butterfly* was the tree whose fruit I planted, the new soil and location dictated the extent to which the new tree resembles its parent.

I will then reflect on responses to early drafts of my script, some of which identified issues with it, in terms of its characters and structure, and I will look at what might have caused those difficulties, and at how I sought to resolve them. Other responses gave me invaluable insight into how a mainstream audience might relate to the film, and these raised questions about how important it was to me that the film be made.

### First Drafts

My approach to writing the script, learned from previous practice, was to create a 'Step Outline' (see Appendix 3) in which I set out what I wanted to happen in each scene. This helped me to gain an overview of the structure of the story, and the way in which necessary information on character, setting and backstory would be given, and to ensure that every scene contained the necessary conflict as well as emotional, character or plot development. I see this very much as a 'planting plan' – setting out the areas in which my characters will grow - not a framework which will in any way contain them or dictate what they will do. I knew the characters must have lives of their own and make their own decisions, though I did have an idea of where those decisions might lead them. Inevitably this step outline changed as I created the first draft.

Queering the story, as I have suggested, triggered a new richness of theme and character by destabilising the heteronormative model of the original. But there

was another crucial driver for change. Like others before me, as discussed in Chapter 2, I was transcribing a story, made famous in the stylised medium of opera with its emotional intensity, to the fundamentally naturalistic medium of the screen, and by 'naturalistic' I mean "accurate external representation" as Williams (1983:p.218) offers by way of contemporary definition. I did not want heroes and villains - a callous Pinkerton and victim Cho Cho San - but characters who are rounded, multi-layered and morally ambiguous. And so another early decision was that all my characters would simply be trying to meet their needs, and to make themselves happy. They are all flawed and they hurt each other in the process, but at no point does any of them do that wilfully. In that way my story could be, as Maltby described *Miss Saigon*, "A horror story with no villains" (2012: Appendix 2 p.145). That said, I did not want to make Ben as guiltless as Chris.

### **The Balance of Power**

The power balance between the lovers, as I have suggested, was likely, if not certain to be changed from that in the hypotext by the queering process. And that balance would start from where my new characters were coming from - their backstories. So the next part of the writing process was to establish these.

If, as I have suggested, heteronormativity is the omnipotent influence on the characters of *Madame Butterfly*, the behaviour of the homosexual characters I have created, in terms of sex and forming sex-based relationships, is prompted by a number of different influences. But these influences, and the different possibilities they suggest, tend only to be available once the character has identified as homosexual. There is an important learning process which follows 'coming out'.

An inevitable result of the biological process of procreation is that the vast majority of homosexual people will grow up within a heterosexual relationship and therefore be influenced heavily by that example. As Sullivan says: "we embody the discourses that exist in our culture, our very being is constituted by them, they are a part of us, and thus we cannot simply throw them off" (2003:p.41). Gay children are likely to look at the relationship of their parents and anticipate something similar for themselves in adult life. So even when they acknowledge

their homosexuality they are likely still to assume that if and when they form a relationship it will follow that example, and whilst there is massive diversity between cultures in terms of the detail of accepted behaviour within marriage, the core, socio-religiously dictated heteronormative model of one man, one woman and monogamy pervades the great majority.

It tends to be only when gay people begin to be influenced by other, perhaps older and more experienced, gay people that they discover the different relationship paradigms that are available, and which might be more suited to their needs. In my story Chai is young and still very much expects that monogamous heteronormative model in his relationship, albeit wanting it to be with an older man - both because he has lost his real father at an early age and because he perceives such a man as offering the means of escaping Thailand for which he yearns. He comes from a very traditional peasant culture where family, and the heteronormative structure, are massively important. Ben, on the other hand, has outgrown that expectation and is living what has become, as I have suggested, a conventional gay model of the sexually open relationship. However, he lacks the insight to understand the difference in expectation between the two of them and the difficulties that will cause between them. He also lacks Chai's experience of the Bangkok sex trade – there are things the boy has learned which Ben has not. So here are the cultural differences which have always been intrinsic to this story, but they are to do not only with race and culture, but also with experience of homosexual lifestyles.

People of the same sex, whatever the differences in how they think, and whatever gender they perform, are at least likely to share an understanding of how their bodies work, how they gain sensual and sexual pleasure, and this, perforce, makes an important difference to their sexual behaviour. By contrast, misunderstandings, both physical and emotional, regularly create issues in heterosexual relationships and have generated countless heterosexual stories down the centuries. Therefore an important consideration when queering a text is the recognition that when both people in a sexual relationship are physiologically the same, the assumption of physical inequality is gone, and sexual misunderstanding is less likely. Misunderstandings and inequalities of all other kinds can, of course, still be there, but the physical, sexual dynamic is

fundamentally changed, and the reverberations of that change must pervade the entire story of the relationship, and the lives of its participants.

In all the early versions of *Madame Butterfly* the power lies unequivocally with the man, Pinkerton, and not only because he is a man but also because he is a westerner, has money and is older. With the examples before me of power balance altered by queering, one of the first essentials was to establish what it would be between the two lovers at the centre of my story. As discussed in Chapter 2, D.H.Hwang, in his *M.Butterfly* (1989), explored and subverted the cultural power balance by offering an inversion and rendering it absurd.

In my Bangkok context, Ben still has more power – he is older and has money, and the implicit dominance of Western culture over Eastern remains, mainly, again, because of money. But Chai is a young man, with similar physical strength to Ben, and he has the sexual power of his youth and good looks which are the currency of the world he inhabits. In that regard he is immensely rich and potent – sexually he can have whoever he wants. The two men's potencies, in this context, are much more evenly balanced than Pinkerton's and Cho Cho San's in 19<sup>th</sup> century Nagasaki.

As long ago as 1989, Peter Tatchell heard from Lek, a Bangkok bar boy:

""Are the bar boys exploited?" asks Lek. Answering his own question, he replies: "Foreign tourists come here, fall in love and leave broken-hearted. The boys earn a standard of living they could never otherwise enjoy. So who's exploiting who?" (1989)

I can ask that same question in my story. Who has the upper hand? In the hypotext there is never any doubt. In my version there can be – the power is more balanced, or at least it can appear to be even if the truth is that it is a microcosm of personal exploitation within the macrocosm of a system generated by a stronger economy exploiting a weaker one. The fact of both lovers being male liberates Chai to be more proactive in getting what he wants.

In all the early versions of the story Cho Cho San is a stronger personality than Pinkerton. She is steadfast and knows what she wants, and in the pre-Puccini versions she has a feistiness and spirit that actually save her life in Long's original. By contrast, Pinkerton is selfish and weak, allowing his American wife

to sort out the mess which he has made. But simply because he is male he holds the power, irrespective of the strength of his own personality.

Ben is similarly weak, whilst Chai is strong, resourceful and spirited. Although the latter's status as employee requires a degree of subservience, once the relationship becomes sexual and intimate he is, now in the role of lover, able to exercise more power. I used a clear opportunity to offer an image of the rebalancing of power as Chai seeks to get what he wants – Ben as a partner who will be accepted into his family. Chai suggests, and is granted the active sexual role instead of the passive.

It is a temporary and illusory power which is damaged profoundly by the failure of the family visit, and lost completely when Ben returns to the UK, leaving Chai once again alone and poor – indeed worse off than he had been previously. But the sexual power he used to get Ben in the first place is still available to him, albeit in a way he does not want to use it. He can make money from his body which will empower him to go and find Ben once it becomes clear to him that that is what he will have to do. Cho Cho San has no such option because as a woman, even had she had the money, travelling alone across the world in the 19<sup>th</sup> century would have been difficult if not impossible. Just as Chai can choose to be sexually active, while Cho Cho San must forever be passive, so he can be active in other aspects of his life too.

## **The Romance**

There is another aspect of the power balance which is central to the hypotext, and fundamental to the Romance genre as discussed above. That is the emotional aspect - who is truly in love?

I take the view that the attraction between two people which becomes romantic love could be described as consisting of three elements - the sexual, the emotional and the cerebral - which intertwine in all kinds of ways. In the majority of cases it would probably be true to say that this is the order in which the elements of mutual attraction present themselves as a relationship develops. Paradoxically, this is the exact reverse of the order of importance of each element

in determining the likely longevity of that relationship. So *Romeo and Juliet*, a relationship which is sexual and emotional but never gets as far as the cerebral, might well not have lasted even had their demise not been so premature. But Beatrice and Benedict's, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, probably will because it begins with the cerebral.

In the hypotext Cho Cho San is clearly very much in love with Pinkerton, while he is simply in lust with her, attracted only sexually. However, her love stems not from any deep understanding of the man - the cerebral element - but rather from her need for such a man to take care of her - and so it is an emotional fantasy. Similarly Chai falls for Ben because he appears to be exactly what he is seeking - an older, father-figure Westerner who will enable him to escape Thailand. Again it is an emotional fantasy. But employer and employee become lovers (at least in the physical sense) because of mutual sexual attraction. The device of the expensive birthday present as the thing which convinces Chai of Ben's emotional love might seem shallow – Chai merely wanting expensive things. But what this says to him is that here is the man who can take care of him, who likes him enough to spend money on him and not just to gain access to his body. In his young life he has already learned the potency of his looks in the bar where he works, and has rejected it as not able to take him where he wants to go. Ben's birthday present is an entirely new experience for him which, because it seems to imply that his emotional fantasy is coming true, leads him genuinely to love Ben inasmuch as a teenager encountering these emotions for the first time can.

Like Pinkerton, Ben is looking for recreational sex. He is aware of Bangkok's reputation for offering that, but is unprepared for the commerciality he finds, and is alienated by that. If his literary ancestor is unequivocally exploiting the sexual opportunities of Nagasaki, Ben is, arguably, exploited by a system set up to cater for his sexual needs, albeit a system which clearly exploits the poverty of the boys in it – the mutual exploitation suggested by Tatchell (1989), and that I sought to define earlier. Ben soon finds he needs not just recreational sex, but the caring, emotional love he had had from Alex at home, along with the more practical need for someone to cook his meals. His initial attraction to Chai is sexual, but Chai takes over Alex's caring role, giving him another element of power, and Ben responds with awakening paternal feelings. Chai wants to please Ben in order to achieve his ambition, and Ben sees an opportunity to empower himself by using

his money (money he shares with Alex) to please Chai in return. His reward is Chai's smiling devotion which coincides with terse communications with Alex, so he goes further towards pleasing him by offering him what he wants – a life in the UK. Although Chai initially rejects sex in quest only of his emotional fantasy, soon his sexual needs trick him into thinking he has found that. Their love is based on illusions, but then so is Pinkerton and Cho Cho San's – deceit and exploitation on his part and wishful thinking, along with misplaced loyalty, on hers. In essence the relationships are comparable, albeit arrived at by different routes.

I discussed in Chapter 2 how the level of transgression in the character of Pinkerton has varied with every version of the story. In accord with my intention that there should be no villains, Ben is not guilty of wilful exploitation – as I suggested, he finds the exploitative commercialism of the Bangkok sex trade very alienating. His fault is omission – he fails to think things through, or to shoulder responsibility. There is no transgression in Ben's seeking sex outside his relationship with Alex. That is why he accepted the trip to Bangkok in the first place. Alex expects it of him, and is enjoying at least as many, if not more encounters of his own back in the UK. The transgression comes from the shift from the purely sexual to the emotional, as symbolised by taking Chai to dinner. Buying him a present is also a transgression. Had he simply paid the boy for sex that would have been perfectly acceptable, but again the present implies an emotional connection. Both these represent paradoxical inversions of the heterosexual convention, and, like DiPietro (2009), I had to explain these new, queer rules for an audience who might not be acquainted with them.

Alex too has transgressed. His terse and sporadic contacts with Ben as he pursues his sexual exploits back in the UK demonstrate less than the caring relationship we later learn they had been sharing, and which Ben discovers he so deeply needs. So it is understandable, if not forgivable, that Ben should transfer his affections to the boy who is caring for him and making him happy at that moment. His principal transgression is his economy with the truth when it comes to explaining to Chai the nature of his relationship with Alex. This is prompted by both a selfish desire to continue to enjoy the relationship with Chai and a more generous desire not to disappoint him.



Both Ben and Chai believe they have found true love with each other, so the story fulfils the requirements of a romance. But all they have is the sexual and the emotional – they lack the cerebral, and so its durability is questionable. But, in Pearce and Wisker's definition, it could be described as a romantic subversion because "the operation of the orthodoxy is exposed and challenged" (1998:p.1) in terms of the different races, the homosexuality and the age gap.

Cho Cho San is more or less a complete victim, guilty only of naiveté. But, for the reasons I have suggested, Chai is not. He is keen to develop the relationship with Ben, motivated initially by his desire to live in the West. He later tricks Colin to acquire Ben's address in the UK, blackmails a consulate official, Donald, to get visas for him and his brother to go to the UK, and then a passer-by in the UK to get money. The result is that, like Cho Cho San, he becomes a victim of his own naiveté, but because the power balance has been altered by queering the story, he is a much more active agent in his own downfall. Ben, as I have suggested, leads him on by downplaying his relationship with Alex, but he does not hide it completely and Chai is perhaps also a little guilty of hearing only what he wants to hear, just as Cho Cho San does in the 1932 *Madame Butterfly* film, thus, as I suggested in Chapter 2, attenuating Pinkerton's guilt. But then Ben is the older man and could be expected to demonstrate more responsibility, except that, as we learn, Alex has allowed him to be a child in their relationship. Ben now urgently needs to grow up, and that becomes his story arc.

I have deliberately not discussed in detail how the plot has been changed by queering this story because I wanted the plot to be driven by the characters, not by the source material – I am reconceiving *Madame Butterfly*, not reclothing her. I have identified the fault in my previous adaptations of prescribing the events to accord with the hypotext, rather than allowing the new characters to make their own decisions. However, the basic structural elements found in the hypotext remain:-

- the sexual encounter in an exotic location with a financial dimension.
- emotional involvement on one or both sides.
- separation for a significant period caused by the visitor's return home.

- reunion and disillusion.

As I suggested earlier, the final outcome for Chai needed to be his responsibility. Although the *Madame Butterfly* icon is a woman who kills herself for the sake of her child, as I discussed in Chapter 2, this resulted from Belasco's need for a theatrical ending, not from Long's original story. In *Miss Saigon* (1989) Maltby and Boubil also had Kim kill herself, but they made it a necessary act to achieve the outcome she wanted for her son - Cho Cho San's code of honour would not suffice in their context.

I have already established that, largely because I have queered the story, Chai is a more resourceful and proactive character than his literary ancestors. They have no alternative - he does. However disappointed and disillusioned he might be, he has established that Alex and Ben will give Tam a better life than he could dream of in Thailand and he knows he can survive, at least for now, by selling his body. So that is what he does, and, in these early drafts, he becomes, in effect, enslaved, albeit in a wealthy environment. Emotionally he is as dead as his forebears are physically, but his body lives on. The ending results from a decision appropriate for the character of Chai, but it echoes Long's original, in which Cho Cho San goes back, disillusioned, to her old life, albeit taking her son with her. The other difference from Long's version is that Chai has gone to the life of prostitution he was specifically trying to avoid.

I refer in Chapter 3 to Forster's desire to offer a happy ending to *Maurice*, however implausible it might seem, as a political signifier that gay relationships can be happy and lasting. In this, as with the two previous adaptations I have attempted, I have chosen tragedies, which, ipso facto, do not have happy endings. Do I therefore risk perpetuating the negative images Forster, and indeed others since, including Stephen Frears in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), Russell T. Davies in *Queer as Folk* (1999), and Fernan Özpetek in *Loose Cannons* (2010) have been so determined to change? I made the point earlier that the tragic endings must not, and do not in any of my three adaptations, result specifically from the fact that the character is gay, but rather from experiences similar to those of their heterosexual antecedents, thus demonstrating the commonality of emotional experiences.

However, here was an opportunity both to follow the tragic hypotext, and, at the same time, to offer a good outcome for some of the characters – namely Ben, Alex and Tam. I did not need to romanticise or idealise gay love. I could demonstrate that gay men's behaviour can be reprehensible, not specifically because of the different patterns of behaviour they follow, but because they are as human as heterosexuals. I could also demonstrate their capacity to do good, and to make themselves and others happy. In short I could offer a story with the potential to be a true reflection of aspects of the human condition, and which has become richer and more multi-layered because it has been queered.

However, just as with *Madame Chrysanthème* and *Madame Butterfly* before it, the outcomes offered in these first drafts of my story prompted some debate in terms of contemporary moral sensibilities. In the light of what my research had indicated about the importance of considering my intended audience, I had to respond carefully to this debate.

## **Responses and Revisions**

I completed three drafts of the script before showing the third to others. In this section I will review the responses I received and how they informed the redrafting, considering in particular how I addressed the potential difficulty of a mainstream, predominantly heterosexual audience's reaction to a story set in a gay milieu.

In my writing as well as in my film-making practice I find that an objective viewpoint is crucial to ensure that the work says what I want and believe it to. Whilst I can find some objectivity myself when reviewing or re-reading my work after a period of time, soon after completion of an early draft, or rough cut, it becomes important to have it seen by at least one 'fresh pair of eyes' - someone who does not have pre-existing knowledge of the story I am telling, and so will view the work from the same perspective as an audience seeing it for the first time. This can offer useful information about the clarity of the story and the characters, whether the story feels authentic and whether it engages. When the subject matter is potentially challenging to its intended audience it is particularly

important to solicit feedback from a cross section of people who could be members of that audience. As Baker points out:

“an understanding of marketplace dynamics within this creative industry is core knowledge required by practitioners in order to be successful in the field. Questions of intended audiences (or readerships) for creative artefacts is therefore an aspect of the PLR process that needs to be foregrounded in initial product and research design stages. In terms of a queered PLR, research into arts consumption is likely to circulate around how sexual and gender subjectivities lead, influence or inform that consumption.” (2011:p.37)

As Baker suggests, it was therefore important that the script was read by people identifying as both homosexual and heterosexual. Furthermore, whether or not I wanted to write a commercially viable film now became an important decision. If a mainstream, predominantly heterosexual audience cannot relate to it then it will be hard to find the necessary finance to make it. But do I want to compromise what I perceive as authenticity in order to make it sufficiently acceptable to that audience? If it remains an unproduced screenplay, the financial considerations are removed, but a reading audience still needs to be able to relate to it if it is to fulfil my stated intention. If it only speaks to gay men then I am ‘preaching to the converted’. In short, it needs to have general appeal whether or not it is to be produced. And, if it is, then that need will be the greater because of financial imperatives.

The readers of the early drafts of my script, by this time re-titled *Bangkok Boy* to point up the father/son theme as well as to avoid too obvious a transition from ‘*Madame Butterfly*’ and ‘*Miss Saigon*’, included some who had knowledge of what I was trying to achieve, as well as others who did not. Some identified as gay and therefore had a pre-existing understanding of the social context and behaviour patterns I was presenting, whilst others, identifying as straight, were less likely to. The feedback included many structural and technical notes and suggestions, but in terms of the scope of this thesis there were some particularly interesting responses, especially from readers who identify as heterosexual, including a friend and colleague of many years who is well acquainted with my work and with whom I had developed my gay-themed script *Queer Counsel* (2004). He made some very helpful observations, but saw Ben as entirely sexually motivated, suggesting that he would also be trying to have sex with Tam. He went on to suggest a very different ending involving both Alex and Ben taking

Tam captive and forcing him into sexual slavery. A producer at a production company, to whom I had sent the script speculatively because of their track record of gay-themed drama, made it clear that she perceived the story as being one purely of sexual exploitation and therefore not of interest.

Both these responses suggested that my intentions of presenting Ben as an insecure and vulnerable character, and of exploring the paternal element of his relationship with Chai, were not coming through clearly. Another possibility was that their responses might have been influenced by a pre-conception, and perhaps a level of disapproval, of male gay behaviour, especially in the Bangkok sex industry with its reputation for underage prostitution. It seemed that Gerald P. Mallon's 2004 observation might still hold true:

"The myth of gay men as child molesters remains ingrained in the psyche of most people, including social work professionals – so much so that the idea that gays would be allowed to parent seems, to some, incredible." (2004:p.10)

In the dozen years since he wrote that social attitudes, in the UK at least, have changed significantly. Civil partnerships and gay marriage are now available, and gay people are permitted by law to adopt children. But in terms of my story, if I was to avoid the outcomes I was offering being perceived by my potential audience as either amoral or inauthentic, there was clearly further work to do.

In his essay on the subject of intentionality in poetry, Wimsatt quotes Beardsley's suggestion that "The objective critic's first question, when he is confronted with a new aesthetic object ..is not 'What is this supposed to be?' but 'What have we got here?'" (1976:p.12-13). It could be argued that poetry is a more personal medium than a screenplay, and so the author's intention, and indeed his life experiences and emotional state, are more valid considerations when critiquing a poet's work than would be true in the case of a screenwriter. That said, my life experiences have still informed my work, but equally my readers' and potential viewers' experiences have informed their reading of it. If I am to deliver to them what I intend then I need to bear that firmly in mind. I needed to look not only at character and story, but also at how I sold the idea, for example in my Pitch and Treatment (See Appendix 6).

I needed to clarify my intentions, but the question I also needed to answer was whether I could solve the problem simply by minor editing of the script I had written, or whether I needed to change the story substantially to make it less alienating for a general audience – and therefore also more commercially viable as a film. This might include toning down the behaviour of the characters, making it more reflective of the heteronormative model, or simply showing less of a world which the audience might find offensive, even shocking. But by doing so I might undermine the authenticity of my portrayal of that world.

McAulay quotes McKee's description of emotional authenticity as "allied to 'believable character behavior'" (1999:p.188, quoted 2014:p.195) but, if the audience is not aware of the way characters in a particular community might behave, how will they recognise authenticity? Interestingly McAulay also quotes Mark Gatiss' 2012 Radio 4 *Film Programme* which compared two biopics on Cole Porter, one of which denies his homosexuality while the other focuses on it, describing the former as more authentic – "a biopic that absolutely mangles the truth but somehow does present something quite authentic about its subject" (2014:p.195). Perhaps I could still find emotional authenticity even with inauthentic behaviour, and that might provide access to a general audience. My challenge was similar to that faced by the makers of the Hollywood versions of the story as outlined in Chapter 2, but I was reluctant to go as far as they did in terms of compromise in pursuit of acceptability, nor was I constrained by anything of the nature of the Hays Code.

I had the interesting example to observe of Russell T. Davies' 2015 TV series *Cucumber* which, as I mentioned earlier, was transmitted whilst I was engaged in writing. In this series Davies in no way tones down the excesses of gay male behaviour – if anything he exaggerates them, presenting a kind of caricature world which is considerably further from authenticity, at least as far as my experience goes, than what I am offering. The series received considerable critical acclaim, and Wollaston's review in *The Guardian* was typical:

"I'm not gay (there, I've said it). This/these show/s is/are, very. Gloriously, explicitly, triumphantly, cucumberly. Gay to the core. But I never once felt left out, or that this wasn't relevant to me (on the contrary, I felt a worrying connection with Henry). As you'd expect from Davies, it's also dead funny and – most of all – very, very human." (Guardian.com)

Although that series told a very real love story it seems that the audience may have been attracted, at least in part, by the very ‘otherness’ of extreme gay behaviour, even if they then recognised elements of it with which they could empathise. Later the same year the BBC broadcast *London Spy*, another series set in a gay milieu which, although it also centred on a committed and loving relationship, featured drug-fuelled sado-masochistic orgies as normal, everyday behaviour amongst gay men.

In *The Matter of Images* Dyer explores extensively the stereotypes – “today almost always a term of abuse” (2002:p.11) – which have traditionally defined the representation of gay men, particularly on the screen and most often in a negative way. In his earlier essay in *Gays and Film* he quotes Klapp’s “distinction between social type and stereotype” (1980:p.29):

“stereotypes refer to things outside one’s social world, whereas social types refer to things with which one is familiar; stereotypes tend to be conceived as functionless or dysfunctional (or, if functional, serving prejudice and conflict mainly), whereas social types serve the structure of society at many points” (1962:p.16; quoted Dyer. 1980:p.29)

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is clear, and evidenced by changes in the law in terms, for example, of marriage and adoption, that social perceptions are changing and this damaging stereotyping is being challenged. Though gay men are no longer seen as ‘functionless or dysfunctional’, in a still broadly heteronormative society perhaps a new kind of representation of them is emerging - as still ‘other’ but with something attractive and exciting about them. Pickering suggests that “the concept of the Other has tended to displace the older concept of the stereotype” (2001:p.47) and goes on to describe how a social group “in the interests of a unified collective identity” might exclude those they perceive as ‘other’ because of:

“a fear of what cannot be admitted into an ordered identity or a critical lack, an absence in the presence of identity which demands that the Other be turned into an object of happy assimilation, as a spectacle, an exhibit, a source of entertainment, or as fantasy. The Other can be drawn into fantasies of desire, longing, envy and seduction in the interests of compensating for some perceived deficiency of cultural identity, or estrangement from inherited cultural values.” (2001:p.49)

So it could be that contemporary TV commissioners perceive in their audiences a similar fascination with the exotic and the other to the Japonisme which attracted audiences to the original *Madame Butterfly* story over 100 years ago, as discussed in Chapter 2. In my film version the relationship has the same elements of cultural ‘otherness’ as the hypotext, but additionally, at least for an audience with heteronormative expectations, the sexual ‘otherness’.

However, my intention was to attract an audience not to ‘otherness’, but rather to comparable, if differently-lived, human lives. Pullen identifies two alternatives of “Subcultural and Mainstream Pathways” for “gay people involved in cultural/social performance” (2007:p.15). His definition of the difference between these two parallels the choice available to me:

“on the one hand, ideas of “assimilationist democracy” – the formation of gay histories which relate, and to a certain extent integrate, with ideas of heterosexuality, and on the other, the promulgation of difference seen in the production of the gay subculture.” (ibid.)

My decision had to be informed by the audience I wanted to attract. Pullen quotes Hart’s observation on the importance of homophily, which he defines as: “the degree to which the characters are similar to the viewer” (2000:p.59), adding:

“The greater the homophily between the central characters in a narrative work and the individual viewing the work, the greater the chance that the work will be considered credible by that viewer, and the greater the chance that the viewer will be influenced personally by it.” (ibid.)

So if I wanted mainstream viewers to engage with my characters I had to ensure that they could identify with them. And, just as DiPietro (2009) had to make his rules clear, the feedback I received suggested that the different, homosexual, paradigm implicit in my story needed to be made explicit and totally clear. My life experiences and observations suggest that it is authentic, but I needed to make it accessible, and acceptable to a mainstream audience.

One observation made by several readers of *Bangkok Boy*, including one from BBC Writersroom (2015), was that Ben, from whose perspective the story was primarily being told, was an unattractive and unsympathetic character who, in the end, was changed little by the events. This was an important revelation to me. I had fallen into the trap of writing the character I understood more fully than the



one whose life experiences I had not shared. In a sense I was following the structure of the hypotext, which begins as Pinkerton's story and becomes Cho Cho San's, but she does take that story over. While I could endeavour to make Ben perhaps a little more sympathetic, Chai was always going to be the more attractive character, and most likely to appeal to the audience, as well as being the one more changed and damaged by the events. I was telling the wrong person's story and I needed to rework the script to tell it from Chai's perspective. This became a crucial driver for the subsequent drafts.

An early decision as I began to redraft was to change the title to *Bangkok Butterfly*. This was specifically to draw attention to the hypotext and thus capitalize on its fame to attract an audience. It was also intended to de-emphasize the alienating perception of a film about child abuse.

To ensure I was telling Chai's story rather than Ben's I endeavoured to fill in more of his backstory, both through phone and text conversations with his mother and by developing the character of Jaime and his relationship with Chai. In the earlier drafts Jaime had simply been Ben's first Thai sexual encounter, but I now made him an old friend of Chai's from his home in Isaan who has introduced him to the job in the bar, and now taunts him for not taking advantage of the financial rewards on offer. I also rewrote many scenes, particularly the earlier ones before Ben and Chai actually meet, so that they were seen from the latter's perspective. In Appendices 4 and 5 I offer two versions of a scene which was redrafted in this way – showing how I also made him more responsible for engineering the job with Ben. The queering process had freed me to do this, and I could in this way make him still more proactive – still more of a protagonist and less of a victim. I moved him to centre-stage, allowing the audience, as I hoped, to identify with him rather than with Ben.

The early draft of *Bangkok Boy* was also read for a US Script competition: it was short-listed but not, in the end, selected for further development. The reader suggested that the ending was anticlimactic because Chai has already become a rent boy before he gets to the UK, and so his situation has not changed at the end. This was an interesting observation. My intention had been to make it clear that he only prostitutes himself in order to achieve his goal of being re-united with his lover, but the comment suggested that this needed to be clearer. I therefore

added a scene where he symbolically throws away his rent-boy number badge once he has got his tickets for the UK, so relinquishing the role he had been forced into with reluctance. I then changed the ending to a scene where he carves that same number into his wrist using a broken mirror, indelibly branding himself as the rent-boy he has once again been forced to become, but this time with no short-term objective – this is now how he identifies himself. I was also seeking to echo the suicide by knife of his literary ancestors (Belasco's (1900) and Puccini's (1904) *Cho Cho Sans*, and Hwang's (1989) *Gallimard*) with added overtones of self-harm which could be psychologically authentic for a young man so disillusioned.

Another suggestion was that the story lacked an important female character. Clearly a story which centres on a love triangle between three men is always going to struggle in this regard, but at the same time the female perspective could add an important additional layer. I therefore developed the character of Ngam – Colin's wife – as an emotional sounding board for Ben, at the same time adding details of her relationship with Colin to offer a different, heterosexual perspective on the open relationship paradigm. She also became a source of information on the Thai culture which would inform Chai's perspective and backstory. In this way Colin and Ngam came to represent the two sides of the hypotext character of Sharpless, who condones Pinkerton's marriage even though he sees the potential harm, but then endeavours to deal with the ensuing mess.

Two of my supervisors read the first *Bangkok Butterfly* draft, and their combined notes made it clear that either I had not resolved the issue of the heteronormative gaze, or I had written a morally unacceptable story. Echoing responses to the earlier draft, there was still a suggestion that, because he does not have a problem with having sex with teenage boys, Ben must, perforce, be a risk to Tam. I therefore endeavoured to make it clearer that it is Chai who initiates the sex because he wants it, and because he wants to please Ben. Ben is arguably unwise not to decline, but he is not a predator. Secondly I needed to make it equally clear that Tam is heterosexual and therefore will not be initiating, nor interested in sex with Ben or Alex, neither of whom demonstrates any interest in boys who are not sexually mature anyway. I therefore added a scene suggesting that Tam is looking at heterosexual pornography on the internet, and ensured

that all interaction between Alex and Ben and Tam is entirely paternal and filial - to do with games or school, with no suggestion of anything sexual.

Comments also included: 'Colin as a married man is a faithless provider who hurts his wife' and 'Ngam is 'romantically depressed' with values of love that her husband does not share'. Whilst I feel no particular need to make Colin attractive or otherwise, the point of his 'faithlessness' is to demonstrate that the idealistic heteronormative model is often a lie. As Pearce and Wisker put it:

"With even a minimal awareness of the 'logic' of queer theory, it should be clear that the codes and conventions of traditional romantic courtship/marriage are something that non-heterosexuals can imitate but never 'do'; moreover this realisation should quickly point to the fact that heterosexuals can never really do them either." (1998:p.2)

Ngam accepts the situation and is happy as long as Colin does not develop an emotional relationship outside the marriage – and so she understands the open relationship concept, and, in a way, lives by similar rules to Alex and Ben, albeit they have not been discussed. Colin's suggested sexual infidelities do not negate his value as husband or father, though more honesty between them, as Alex and Ben have, might be of benefit to their relationship. Given my overall intentions in the script I felt that it would be odd, and indeed counter-productive if I offered a perfect heterosexual relationship against which the gay couple are seen to fall seriously short. From my perspective Ngam is one of the strongest, wisest and most admirable characters in the story. So, further to cement her power, I decided, on advice, to add a suggestion that she would be equally free to have extra-marital sex should she wish to, and possibly already has.

Another comment on female characters was: 'Chai's mum is a victim, economically and socially, who loses her family. One genuinely feels she would not be happy to lose her children like this.' My research in Thailand had already suggested to me that that is the truth of life in Isaan, and further conversations with several Thai people in the light of that comment supported the story's authenticity. Stronger than her maternal instincts is the fervent desire for her sons to have a better life; and anyway she cannot manage Tam any more by herself. If she is indeed 'a victim' it is because she lives in a poor country, not because she is a woman, and the East/West macrocosm of my story is not so much changed from the hypotext. She is also, of course, a daughter of Cho Cho

San herself in that she is the mother who gives up her child, with equally strong echoes of Kim in *Miss Saigon* (1989). But it was also clear that as it stood she was a purely functional character - I had overlooked her emotional story arc. Additionally, she could, like her son, benefit from the queering process and wield more power. I decided to give her a name, Sumana, and have her come to the UK, accompanied by Ngam, to sanction the adoption of Tam. On arrival she is unhappy to find Ben and Alex now living apart and requires them to be together for that sanction. When she does hand over her son it is now a very emotional moment.

As a response to an observation that he still ‘gets away with it’, I decided that Ben must, at least temporarily, live apart from Alex – he needed to suffer more and work harder to redeem himself. He is now driven out of his home by the sense of alienation and blame from Tam and forced to re-evaluate his life, and to grow up. Empowering the women further, it is Ngam who encourages Ben to find Chai, which he does, and they have a brief meeting in London. Chai confronts Ben with what he has done, and although he will not come back, he is prompted by Ben to make contact with Tam and it is therefore Ben who has instigated the birthday text from Chai which gives Tam his happy ending, even though it is not the full truth. There is an intended irony here that Chai does not reveal the full truth to Tam or his mother any more than Ben had to him. The difference is that Chai gets no benefit from that – he does it simply to protect his brother and mother. Though Ben’s motivation is in part not to destroy Chai’s happiness, it is mainly to continue to get what he wants.

Another criticism was that adopting Tam would not be as easy as suggested – that Ben and Alex’s relationship would be carefully scrutinised by the authorities and found wanting. I therefore decided to leave it that, even with Sumana’s sanction, the adoption procedure is just getting under way and that there is a long hard road ahead for the men to rebuild their relationship, convince the authorities, and then to learn the lessons, however late in the day, that heterosexual couples starting a family need to learn in terms of responsibility and loss of freedom. Another story begins here, but it is not the *Madame Butterfly* story, nor is it Chai’s story. In terms of the story I was telling I felt it better to leave this as another beginning rather than to offer an ending which had been perceived as inauthentic, and too easy for the adopting couple.

Throughout the process of creating this story I maintained the determination that the characters' outcomes must be authentic, determined by who they are and what has happened to them in the story. They do not have to share the fate of their literary ancestors. As I have suggested, queering the story has freed them all, and Chai in particular, from the necessity to follow the path of the hypotexts. I always knew Chai would not kill himself, but my first versions had him becoming a sex slave, utterly disempowered, albeit eventually in a luxurious environment. But maybe, even though I had spared his life, he was still in the shadow of the monolithic myth of his ancestor. He is resourceful and intelligent and, unlike Cho Cho San, male and potent, so he is equipped to flourish, perhaps more than Ben, and it was suggested to me that he might do so.

On the other hand he remains an Asian immigrant, on a limited visa, damaged and disillusioned by his experience with Ben, and with no qualifications beyond his native wit and good looks. I therefore decided that, rather than being enslaved, he could become a high class escort, and thus empowered, and highly successful in terms of one of the original reasons he had come to Bangkok - to make money. But his profound disappointment in love has still left him emotionally empty and he considers himself unable to do anything beyond that. This feels authentic. It is crucial that the film ends with his outcome, because it is his story, and even though it might not be, in the classical sense of the word, entirely tragic, the bitter must come after the sweet, and be the taste with which the audience is left. I felt it would be profoundly inauthentic to suggest anything other than that, simply because of its wealth, the West still has the upper hand over poor Asian countries such as Thailand.

As I suggested in Chapter 1, for me a screenplay is fundamentally a blue-print for a film, even if it is a film which will only ever exist in my and any readers' imaginations. Should it go into production, even if I were to be able to go on and direct the film, as auteur, further development would require input from producers and actors, and be influenced by available locations, budgets and any distribution prospects, and that, as I have suggested, might involve further compromise in terms of what I perceive as its authenticity. What I now offer therefore, as part of this PhD, is a script which, as a screenwriter, I consider finished. It is the story I want to tell and the film I would like to make – it represents the end of the journey I can make more or less alone – it has, of course, already been altered by the

influence of others. If it makes the journey into production it will change a lot more, and it will cease to be my story – but I hope it will be enlarged and enriched by creative contributions to come.



## CONCLUSION

In this Conclusion I will look back to my research questions and evaluate what I have discovered both through my research and through my practice of adaptation in general, and queering in particular. I will examine how my approach to adaptation has been changed - I hope improved - by this practice-led research, and what new knowledge it can offer to both practitioners and adaptation scholars. I will address each question, and, to conclude, I will evaluate my script, both in terms of what it has to say to a contemporary audience and whether it remains a legitimate member of the *Madame Butterfly* family.

**By analysing the various works that have both prompted and emerged from the story of *Madame Butterfly*, how might a screenwriter understand adaptation as a creative practice which moves stories between different audiences and delivery media with the potential to contribute to societal and cultural debates?**

In Chapter 2 I traced the history of the *Madame Butterfly* story, looking for the motivation behind each version and the changes made within it. Without doubt this exploration offered me a broad range of options for my version. In my previous attempts at adaptation I had worked from only one, or at the most two hypotexts, while for this one I examined many more. While it was the Puccini opera which triggered the idea, my investigation of his sources unearthed hypotexts which offered material which, in many ways, was more useful to me, not least because they were naturalistic novellas or plays, not highly-wrought opera.

Examining these texts revealed a number of factors which had prompted changes to the story, but an important observation was that in almost every case these changes were, ultimately, driven by the intended audience for the work. That consideration clearly influenced nearly every author, composer, or, in the case of the heavily controlled early Hollywood versions, producer. During the century and a quarter that this story has existed in some form, the expectations of those audiences and the variety of their likely responses to what they might read or see



has varied massively in parallel with sociological change over the period, and between the different cultures in which it has been presented. And these variations have, inevitably, been reflected in the different works created for those audiences.

In particular, audience consideration seems to have dictated the level of culpability in the Pinkerton character - an issue in this story with which every adapter has had to grapple. He is one of the central characters, with whom a Western, particularly an American audience will more readily identify than they will with Cho Cho San, but they are likely to feel uncomfortable if he is perceived to be behaving badly. His perceived level of guilt and transgression has varied hugely through the various versions, and this was an issue with which I, like all those before me, had to deal. This relates to an early mistake I made in making Ben the central character in my story.

Related to that issue is the intrinsic Western chauvinism of the hypotext to which attitudes have also varied greatly, again over time and between cultures. It offended Hwang (1989), and prompted his version, and it was also challenged in *Miss Saigon* (1989) and *Cho Cho* (2011). The extent to which audiences would accept that chauvinism was clearly another prime consideration for adapters.

The medium in which the work is being presented has always been of paramount importance in terms of the changes made, and this once again relates, of course, to the intended audience. I have discussed how the operatic version, driven by the music, required less psychological realism, and, arguably, less depth to the characters even than the musical theatre version, *Miss Saigon*, and certainly than the naturalistic plays and screen versions. But the biggest change the story has seen – Butterfly's suicide in Belasco's version (1900) – which changed it forever, and became the central icon of the story, was driven by the change of medium from novel to stage. Ironically, Belasco's play, one of the least interesting versions of the story in terms of bringing anything new to it, and a version which seems likely to have been motivated purely commercially, had the most profound effect on its subsequent history.

Alongside audience considerations, the other principal driver of changes has been the adapter's motivation and consequent intention. This is particularly true

of Long (1898), Régamey (1893), and Hwang (1989) all of whom were prompted to write their versions by a moral response to a predecessor. Their intentions were to comment on what they perceived, and to redress the balance, or to give another character a voice, and this has required a substantial rebalance in the story. For example Régamey and Long, responding to the Loti's perceived chauvinism, told the girl's story instead of the man's, and Hwang, responding to his perception of Western chauvinism, turned the whole story on its head.

So, to sum up, as well as those necessitated by remediation of the story, many of the changes made in previous versions of the *Madame Butterfly* story were driven by societal and cultural differences and changes over the time period of the story's existence in all its forms, and so do inform debate as well as shedding light on their social and cultural context.

My research of so many versions helped me to identify the essence - the genetic identity - of the story, in terms of what elements they all share, and what Degabriele (1996) describes as the myth that the story has become. Having this firmly in my grasp freed me, I believe, to allow the story to follow its own path in the new context in which I had set it rather than simply directing it down that of its ancestors. Certainly this adaptation has departed from its hypotext much more substantially than my previous attempts did.

But, although I also made changes for similar reasons to my predecessors, in terms of remediation as well as location, cultural context and historical period, the principal driver of my changes was undoubtedly the queering which was central to my adaptation process. That leads me to my second research question.

**When the principal adaptation practice is queering, what effects does that have on the story? Does that process suggest or necessitate different considerations, particularly in terms of the potential audience, and can it inform adaptation practice in general?**

The discovery, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, that the effects of queering a story are far more pervasive than simply changing the gender and sexual preference

of the characters was also very liberating, and further enabled my version to travel pathways which diverged from that of the hypotext.

My examination of previous queered texts, as offered in Chapter 3, as well as my own practice in queering this one, suggested two crucial areas of change, and these subsequently led to others.

The first of these is the altered, and now flexible power balance of a relationship when both participants are the same sex. This is reflected in the question of who is exploiting whom – never in doubt in any of the heterosexual versions of *Madame Butterfly*, but very much open to query in Hwang's *M. Butterfly* (1989) as well as my own *Bangkok Butterfly*. This flexibility goes beyond the immediate sexual and emotional relationship to affect every aspect of the characters' behaviour, freeing Song Lilling to exploit Gallimard for secrets to pass to his Chinese spymasters, and Chai actively to make his way to the UK in search of his lover.

The second is the release from the conventional heteronormative model of romantic love and all the concomitant institutions suggested by Pearce and Wisker: "heterosexuality, marriage, monogamy, the family or the prescription for same-race relationships" (1998:p.1), to which they could have added 'the prescription for similarly aged participants'. The release is not necessarily complete. As I have suggested, in *Bangkok Butterfly* Chai still expects a relationship modelled on monogamous heterosexual marriage even though it will be gay, mixed-race and age-gap. But Ben and Alex's relationship is more fully released, in that they have agreed to sexual openness, and that is what permits Ben to begin the affair with Chai.

The difference in both race and age between Pinkerton and Cho Cho San could be said to place their relationship to some extent outside the heteronormative and therefore give it the potential, by Pearce and Wisker's (1998) definition, to be a subversive romance. But because neither of these aspects is explored in the story it does not *feel* subversive. In *Bangkok Butterfly* queering freed me to explore one of these aspects, the difference in ages, to illuminate an aspect of the gay experience, the 'frustrated father' as Isherwood (2011) puts it, which can result in older gay men confusing, and conflating paternal feelings with sexual

attraction, reciprocated by younger men in quest of a father figure. This significantly changed its focus and released it to explore new thematic directions and become subversive.

I explored how the impossibility of a child resulting from a gay sexual liaison presents an obvious need for change when a story is queered. Deconstructing the purpose the child serves in this story revealed that he simply has to have a strong emotional bond with, and need to be cared for by at least one, preferably both of the lovers. Once this was established, new possibilities presented themselves which again took the story in new directions. This completed the father/son theme which springs from the age gap between the lovers, and offered a resolution, very different from that of any of the hypotexts, to the story of Alex and Ben's relationship.

I discussed how the recent TV dramas *Cucumber* (2015) and *London Spy* (2015) suggested a possible direction which queering a text could take, which is to celebrate the very otherness of the gay experience for the majority of a mainstream audience – to follow 'gay subculture' rather than 'assimilationist democracy', as Pullen (2007) suggests.. Given that its 'exotic otherness' was, in the context of Japonisme, clearly an attraction of the original *Madame Butterfly* story this might have been an appropriate route for *Bangkok Butterfly*. But there is an attendant risk here of playing to voyeuristic inclinations. If the audience is attracted to the film for the same reasons as, for example, Victorian audiences visited freak shows – to observe someone because they are strange, different or extraordinary in their looks or behaviour – then I completely miss my declared intention of inviting Hart's 'homophily' (2000), and encouraging the audience to understand and empathise with my characters, whose behaviour might differ from theirs, but who still share their humanity.

To achieve this intention my story needed to be authentic but at the same time accessible and acceptable to a mainstream audience. My pre-practice research clearly indicated how crucial that audience consideration is, and my practice-led research demonstrated the extent of the particular challenge which faced me in that regard, given the new gay context and themes that my adaptation presented. If consideration of the audience is paramount, especially if the film is going to be made, then there is an additional problem when mainstream audiences might

have difficulty in accepting and relating to the new characters and context. There is, therefore, a crucial choice to be made between finding ways of reaching that audience, or accepting that it will be a niche film which risks ‘preaching to the converted’. In a sense this relates directly to Pullen’s “Subcultural and Mainstream Pathways” (2007) – the choice gay people have between being assimilated into heterosexual culture or forming their own subculture.

I am therefore in no doubt that the queering process was ultimately liberating, and that it genuinely emancipated *Madame Butterfly* - it freed the adaptation at least as much, if not more than my research into numerous previous versions.

### ***Bangkok Butterfly, An Evaluation***

To complete this thesis I will now, inasmuch as an author’s perspective can be sufficiently objective so to do, endeavour to assess the final pre-production draft of my script, and take a view as to its potential as an engaging, authentic contemporary film which achieves my original intention of appealing to mainstream audiences, with appropriate and acceptable outcomes for modern sensibilities. I will also try to assess whether *Bangkok Butterfly* is a more successful piece of work than my previous adaptations, and whether the queering process has taken it so far from *Madame Butterfly* that she can no longer claim maternity.

I described *Madama Butterfly* – the Puccini opera - as a tragic romance. Whether Long’s preceding novella, given that Cho Cho San survives, could be described as tragic is open to debate, but I would still describe it as a romance. Does *Bangkok Butterfly* fit that description? Selbo defines the genre thus:

“A screenplay constructed as a romance must feature major plot points that turn on the challenges and obstacles of finding true love....the pursuit (conscious or unconscious) of love must drive the story.” (2015:p.96)

She goes on to describe the eight stages of a romance:

“Boy meets girl  
Boy wants girl  
Boy tries to get girl

Boy gets girl  
Boy loses girl  
Boy realises his life is empty without girl  
Boy strives to get girl back  
Boy gets girl back (or not)” (2015:p.96)

Replace ‘girl’ with ‘boy’ and my story matches the pattern exactly, so I would say that this too is a romance. The resultant ambiguity of who is meeting, wanting and getting whom accords with the queering process I have described. In Pearce and Wisker’s definition, it could also be described as romantic subversion in that its queering challenges the “operation of the orthodoxy” (1998:p.2).

But is it tragic? Selbo suggests that: “truly tragic characters must cause their own demise” (2015:p.75). In the primary hypotext, Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*, Cio Cio San dies by her own hand, a victim of her naiveté, but much more of Pinkerton’s callous exploitation. Chai’s outcome, whilst not his physical demise, is the demise of his quest for love and his illusions in that regard, and although helped towards that by Ben’s thoughtlessness and lack of honesty, it is ultimately his choices that dictate his outcome. So it could be described as at least a kind of tragic romance. That said, he remains alive, albeit sadder and wiser. He is still young and good-looking, his physical and emotional wounds will heal and he is now empowered by wealth. Queering the story offered the possibility of a still better outcome for him, but for the reasons I suggested in Chapter 5, this one feels authentic.

In *Madame Butterfly*, despite his callous behaviour, Pinkerton survives unscathed, apart from the remorse and guilt he will carry through his life for Cho Cho San’s death. He has also, in almost all versions of the story, acquired a son. But the opera has rarely been criticised for this unfair outcome. Because it is her story, and it ends with her death the audience cares little about what might happen to him. In *Bangkok Butterfly* Ben, who also acquires a son, as well as reviving his failing relationship, could also be seen as ‘getting away with it’, even though he has had to do some rather belated growing up, and has a great deal more in prospect if he is to convince the authorities of his suitability as an adoptive father. Perhaps the outcome is not entirely fair, but again I believe it is authentic.

As in all the hypotexts, my love story echoes the macrocosm of the dominant West and submissive East, and suggests that, under the global rule of capitalism,

wealth will always prevail. Chai, corrupted by the West, is succeeding in that regard whilst it is Sumana, his mother, the Eastern woman, who pulls Alex and Ben together around Tam to make sure the boy receives the love - the more appropriate paternal love - which Chai has failed to find. In *Miss Saigon* (1989) Kim kills herself so that her son, Tam, can enjoy the American Dream, but the show has just cruelly satirised that dream. In the same way I hope *Bangkok Butterfly* does something to debunk the idea that the West is a happier place to live just because it is wealthier.

I suggested at the end of Chapter 2 that the *Madame Butterfly* story was, in brief, a love story involving cultural misunderstanding and exploitation in an exotic location with a hint of prostitution, and the consequence of a child whose future is seen as of paramount importance. Additionally there is usually an age gap between the lovers, whether or not that is explored. All of these elements are present in *Bangkok Butterfly* and the broad story arc mirrors the hypotexts. However, the theme is very much changed, with the age-gap relationship - raising issues of frustrated and confused paternal feelings - now being central. Remembering Sanders' suggestion that "it is usually at the point of infidelity that most creative acts of adaptation or appropriation take place" (2006:p.20), if this theme change is an act of infidelity then I would like to claim it as a creative act of adaptation.

As I pointed out in Chapter 2, the various original versions of the story differ quite significantly, not least in terms of the very survival of the eponymous character. Although it was Puccini's opera which triggered my adaptation, I would suggest that, as I foresaw in Chapter 2, even if my 'Pinkerton's' guilt is, to some extent, attenuated, the most positive paternity test would come from Long's original novella, in terms of its naturalism, the characterisation of Cho Cho San and her outcome.

I believe I have created a story which is authentic in its gay context, whilst avoiding the temptation to sensationalise it or exaggerate its 'otherness' in the hope of attracting a voyeuristic audience. If a mainstream audience is attracted to it for its human stories, perhaps invited in by *Madame Butterfly* herself, and leaves enlightened about the lives gay men lead - to use Davies' words "Who are we? Why do we do the things we do?" (2015) - and how those lives might differ

from their own, then I have succeeded. Berrong's (2003) contention that Loti, whose *Madame Chrysanthème* began this literary dynasty, was writing from a gay perspective suggests that perhaps the story has come full circle.

The quality of my artefact, both as a script and as a potential film, must, in the end, be for others to judge. However, I believe that my skill as an adapter has been enhanced by Baker's (2011) suggested bricolage of thorough research into the story, its other adaptations and previously queered texts, and, crucially, my practice. This bricolage has been a very informative research method, not only in terms of developing my own writing practice, but also of understanding the past practice of others. I hope that what I have discovered will now inform the practice of those embarking on and studying adaptation, and in particular queering, in the future.





## REFERENCES:

Arnold, E., 1884. *The Light of Asia*. London: Trübner.

Arnold, J., 2005 *The PhD in creative writing accompanied by an exegesis*. Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice. 2:1, pp 37-50.

Baker, D.J., 2011. *Queering Practice-Led Research: Subjectivity, performative research and the creative arts*, Creative Industries Journal 4: 1, pp 33-51.

- 2013. *Creative Writing Praxis as Queer Becoming*. New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing, 10:3, pp 359-377.

- 2013. Preface to *Scriptwriting as Creative Writing Research*. TEXT. Special Issue 19 <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue19/content.html>. Accessed 19th April 2015.

Bamford, N., 1988. *Rough Trade*. Produced: Bristol.

- 2005. *Love and War*. Unproduced. Unpublished.
- 2004. *Queer Counsel*. Produced: Hereford, London, Bristol.
- 2009. *Higamus Hogamus*. Unproduced. Unpublished.

Barthes, R., 1968/1977. *La morte de l'auteur*. Trans. Stephen Heath.

Batty, C., 2012. *Screenplays: how to write and sell them*. Harpenden. Kamera Books.

- 2013. *Creative Interventions in Screenwriting: Embracing Theme to Unify and Improve the Collaborative Development Process*. In: Shane Strange and Kay Rozynski (eds.). *Creative Manoeuvres: Making, Saying, Being – Refereed Proceedings of the 18th Conference of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs*, 2013, 1-11.

- 2014. *Screenwriters and Screenwriting: Putting Practice into Context*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

BBC Writersroom, 2005. Personal letter. 29<sup>th</sup> June.

- 2015. Personal email. 17<sup>th</sup> March.

Belasco, D., 1928. *Madame Butterfly (A Tragedy of Japan in One Act)*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co..

Behr, E. & Steyn, M., 1991. *The Story of Miss Saigon*. London: Jonathan Cape.

- Berrong, R., 2003. *In Love with a Handsome Sailor. The Emergence of Gay Identity and the Novels of Pierre Loti*. University of Toronto Press.
- Bishop, R. & Robinson, L. 1998. *Night Market: Sexual Cultures and the Thai Economic Miracle*. London & New York. Routledge.
- Bizet, G. Halevy L, Meilhac H., 1875. *Carmen*. Paris.
- Bluestone, G., 1957. *Novels into Film*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Blumstein, P. & Schwartz, P., 1983. *American Couples*. New York: William Morrow.
- Boon, K., 2008. *Script Culture and the American Screenplay*, Detroit: Wayne State U.P.
- Boublil, A. & Maltby, R.Jr., Produced 1989, published 1991. *Miss Saigon*. USA: Hal Leonard.
- Bourne M. 2011. Interview. Youtube.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Xv1kKYAKJM>. Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> August 2015
- Britten, B. & Piper, M., 1973. *Death in Venice*. London: Faber Music.
- Bronte, C. 1847. *Jane Eyre*. London. Smith, Elder & Co.
- Burke-Gaffney, B., 2004. *Starcrossed: A Biography of Madame Butterfly*. USA: Eastbridge.
- Butler, J., 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge.
- Carner, M., 1992. *Puccini: A Critical Biography*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co.
- Coleridge, S.T., 1817. *Biographia Literaria*. London: Fenner.
- Corkill, E., 2011, *Proud love pervades NHK's 'Madame Butterfly'*. Tokyo. Japan Times Nov. 18.
- Corse, S., 1983. *Mi chiamano Mimi: The Role of Women in Puccini's Operas*. Opera Quarterly 1983 1(1): 93-106.
- Children & Youth in History. "Age of Consent Laws [Table]," from: Item #24, <https://chnm.gmu.edu/cyh/primary-sources/24%5BAccessed>. Annotated by Stephen Robertson. Accessed: 5<sup>th</sup> January 2016
- Clark, A., *Till Death Us Do Part (1966-75)*. BFI Screenonline.  
<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/465503/> Accessed: 4<sup>th</sup> September 2013

Clum, J.M., 1994. *Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Crichton-Brauen, R., 2012. Producer *Don Giovanni, the Opera*. Personal interview, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

Cunningham, M., 1998. *The Hours: A Novel*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Dawson, S., *The Edward Carpenter Archive*.

<http://www.edwardcarpenter.net/ecbiog.htm>. Accessed: 12th June 2015.

Degabriele, M., 1996. *From Madame Butterfly to Miss Saigon: One hundred years of popular orientalism*. Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies, Vol. 10, Issue 2, pages 105-18.

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F., 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. B. Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

DiPietro, J., 2009 *Fucking Men*. New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc.

Drummond, K.G., 2003 *The Queering of Swan Lake: A New Male Gaze for the Performance of Sexual Desire*. Published in *Journal of Homosexuality* Vol. 45, No. 2/3/4 pp 235-255

Duncan, S., 2008. *Genre Screenwriting: How to Write Popular Screenplays That Sell*. London + New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd.

Dumas, A. fils, 1848. *La Dame aux Camellias*. Produced 1852

- 1887. *Francillon, Pièce en Trois Actes*. Paris: Calmann Lévy.

Dyer, R., 1980. *Gays & Film*. London. BFI.

- 2002. *The Matter of Images*. Abingdon. Routledge.

Fielding, H., 1742. *Joseph Andrews*. London. Millar.

Forster, E.M., 1971. *Maurice*. London. Penguin.

Foucault, M., 1979. *What is an author?* Screen 20, pp 30-33

- 1986. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 3: The Care of the Self*. New York: Random House.

Genette, G., 1997 [1982] *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Gilbert, W. & Sullivan, A., 1885. *The Mikado*. Leipzig: Bosworth & Co.

- Greenberg, D.F., 1988 *The Construction of Homosexuality*. University of Chicago Press.
- Halperin, D., 1996. *Saint Foucault: Towards A Gay Hagiography*. Oxford University Press.
- Harper, G., 2012. *Creative Writing: interviews with contemporary writers*. London: Palgrave.
- Harrison, S., 2005. *Adaptation: From Short Story to Big Screen*. New York: Random House.
- Hart, K., 2000. *The AIDS Movie*. New York: Haworth Press.
- Haseman, B., (2006) *A Manifesto for Performative Research*. Media International Australia, incorporating Culture and Policy, Theme Issue 'Practice-led Research', 118, pp 98-106.
- Hutcheon, L. with O'Flynn, S., 2013. *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Oxford: Routledge.
- Hwang, D.H., 1989. *M. Butterfly*. New York: Penguin.
- Isherwood, C., 2011. Ed. K. Bucknell. *Christopher Isherwood: Diaries*. London: Vintage.
- Jeffreys, S., *Heterosexuality and the desire for gender*. In Richardson (ed.), *Theorising Heterosexuality: Telling it Straight*, Buckingham: Open University Press, pp 75-90.
- Kerr, D., 1991. *David Henry Hwang and the Revenge of Madame Butterfly*. In *Asian Voices in English*, Ed. Mimi Chan & Roy Harris. Hong Kong University Press.
- King, D., 1982. *The Influence of Maurice on Lady Chatterley's Lover*. *Contemporary Literature*, Vo. 23, No 1. pp 65-82.
- Klapp, O., 1962. *Heroes, Villains and Fools*. Englewood Cliffs. Prentice-Hall.
- Lambourne, L., 2005. *Japonisme: Cultural Crossings between Japan and the West*. London & New York: Phaidon Press.
- Larsson, D., 1982. *Novel into Film: Some preliminary reconsiderations*. In *Golden* 1982, pp 69-83.
- Lawrence, D.H., 1960. *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. London. Penguin.
- Levi-Strauss, C., 1962. *La Pensée Sauvage*. Paris: Librairie Plon.
- Loti. P., 1887. *Madame Chrysanthème*. Translated by Laura Ensor 2005. New York: The Modern Library. E-book #15335

- Luther Long, J., 1898: *Madame Butterfly*. Published in *The Century*; a popular quarterly. Volume 55, Issue 3 pp 374-393. Republished 1903. Grossett & Dunlap: New York.
- Mallon, G.P., 2004. *Gay Men Choosing Parenthood*. New York. Columbia University Press.
- Maltby R. Jr., 2012. Personal email. USA. See Appendix 2.
- Marowitz, C., 1970. *The Marowitz Hamlet & The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus: a Collage Version of Shakespeare's Play and a Free Adaptation of Marlowe's Play*. London. Penguin.
- Matless, D., 2009. 'Reflexivity' in *The Dictionary of Human Geography*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, Derek Gregory, Ron Johnston, Geraldine Pratt, Michael J Watts and Sarah Whitmore (eds) n.p.  
<http://www.credoreference.com.exproxy.scu.edu.au/entry/bkhumgeo/reflexivity>.
- Mcaulay, A., 2014. *In Screenwriters and Screenwriting: Putting Practice into Context*. Ed. Batty, C. Basingstoke & New York. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Mckee, R., 1999. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*, London. Methuen.
- Messenger, A., 1893. *Madame Chrysanthème*. Comédie Lyrique, poème de G Hartmann et A. Alexandre. Paris: Choudens.
- Merimee, P., 1846. *Carmen*. Paris. Michel Lévy.
- Morgan, J. 2016. <http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/gay-people-likely-open-relationships-stay-monogamous/#gs.NoAAj0l>.
- NATLEX. 1996. Thailand: Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act.  
From:  
<http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/WEBTEXT/46403/65063/E96THA01.htm>.  
Accessed: 5<sup>th</sup> January 2016.
- Pearce, L. & Wisker, G., 1998. *Fatal Attractions: re-scripting romance in contemporary literature and film*. Michigan. Pluto Press.
- Pickering, M., 2001. *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Puccini, G., GIACOSA, G. ILLICA, L., 1904. *Madama Butterfly*. Italy. Ricordi.
- Pullen, C., 2007. *Documenting Gay Men*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland.
- Rain, D., 2012. *The Heat of the Sun*. UK: Atlantic Books.
- Reed, C., 2010. *The Pink Notebook of Madame Chrysanthème & other documents of Japonisme*. USA: University of Hawaii Press.

- Régamey, F., 1894. *Le Cahier Rose de Madame Chrysanthème*. Paris: Bibliothèque Artistique & Littéraire.
- Rhys, J. 1967. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. UK. Norton.
- Richardson, S., 1740. *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*. London: Rivington & Osborn.
- Rock, D., 2012 Personal interview. 1<sup>st</sup> May 2012.
- Russo, V., 1987. *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*. Harper Collins: New York.
- Sanders, J., 2006. *Adaptation and Appropriation (The New Critical Idiom)*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Seguin, D., 1993. *Sex with Dave*. <http://www.davidcronenberg.de/eyefly.html>. Accessed 23rd August 2014.
- Seidman, S., 2004. *Beyond the Closet: The Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Life*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Selbo, J., 2015. *Film Genre for the Screenwriter*. Oxon. + New York: Routledge.
- Shairp, M., 1933. *The Green Bay Tree*. London: G. Allen & Unwin.
- Shaffer, P., 1973 *Equus*. London: Andre Deutsch.
- Sheppard, W.A., 2005. *Cinematic Realism, Reflexivity and the American 'Madame Butterfly' Narratives*. Cambridge Opera Journal, Vol 17, No1 pp 59-93.
- Schnitzler, A., 1897. *La Ronde*. Published 1903, Vienna. Produced 1920, Berlin.
- Smith, H. & Dean, R., 2009. *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Stoppard, T., 1967. *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead*. Grove Press: New York.
- Sullivan, N., 2003. *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Tatchell, P. *Thailand: Gayness, Bar Boys and Sex Tourism*. <http://petertatchell.net/international/thailand/thailand.htm>. Published 1989: Gay Times. London. Accessed: 5<sup>th</sup> June 2014.
- Van Rij, J., 2001. *Madame Butterfly: Japonisme, Puccini, & the Search for the Real Cho-Cho-San*. Berkeley: Stonebridge Press.
- Wagner, G., 1975 *The Novel and the Cinema*. London: Tantivy Press.
- Verdi, G. & Piave F., 1853. *La Traviata*. G. Ricordi & Co.: Milan.

Weeks, J, Heaphy, B., Donovan, C., 2001. *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments*. London & New York: Routledge.

Williams, L., 1991. *Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess*. Film Quarterly, Vol. 44, No. 4. Summer.

Williams, R., 1976. *Keywords*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wimsatt, W.K.Jr., 1976. *Genesis: An Argument Resumed*. In *Day of the Leopards*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, pp 11-39.

Wollaston, S., 22.1.2015. Review of *Cucumber*. The Guardian.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/jan/22/cucumber-banana-tofu-review-gloriously-triumphantly-explicitly-gay-tv-event-of-week>. Accessed: 15th April 2015.

Woolf, W., 1926 *The Movies and Reality*, New Republic 47 (4 Aug.) pp 308-10.

- 1925. *Mrs. Dalloway*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Stonewall Youth. "Legal Equality". From:  
<http://www.youngstonewall.org.uk/lgbtq-info/legal-equality>. Accessed: 5<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

Zizek, S., 2003. *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*. New York: Routledge.

### **Films, Performances & Broadcasts:**

*Basic Instinct*. 1992. Dir. Paul Verhoeven. US. Carolco Pictures.

*The Buddha of Suburbia*. 1993. Writer: Hanif Kureishi. Dir.: Roger Michell. UK. BBC2, 3-24 November.

*The Celluloid Closet*. 1995. Dir. Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman. Channel 4 films et. al..

*Cho Cho*. 2011. Writer: Shin'ichi Ichigawa. Japan. NHK. 19 & 26 November. 21.00.

*Cucumber*. 2015. Writer: Russell T. Davies. Channel 4. 22<sup>nd</sup> January – 12<sup>th</sup> March. 21.00.

*Don Giovanni, The Opera*. 2012. Prod. Richard Crighton-Brauen, Dir. Dominic Gray. Stage. UK. London.

*The Film Programme*. 2012. Mark Gatiss discusses Cole Porter biopics. BBC Radio 4. 23<sup>rd</sup> August. 16.00.

*Fatal Attraction*. 1987. Dir. Adrian Lyne. US. Paramount Pictures.



*Front Row*. 2015. Russell T. Davies interviewed by John Wilson. BBC Radio 4. 15<sup>th</sup> January. 19.15.

*Kinky Boots*. 2012. Writer Harvey Fierstein. Stage. US: Chicago.

*La Cage Aux Folles*. 1983. Writer Harvey Fierstein. Stage. US: Boston, New York.

*La Traviata*. 1853. Giuseppe Verdi, Francesco Maria Piave. Stage. Italy: Venice.

*Lawrence of Arabia*. 1962. Dir. David Lean. UK. Horizon Pictures.

*London Spy*. 2015. Writer: Tom Rob Smith. UK. BBC2. 9<sup>th</sup> November - 7<sup>th</sup> December, 21.00.

*Loose Cannons*. 2010. Dir. Fernan Özpetek. Italy. Fandango.

*M. Butterfly*. 1993. Dir. David Cronenberg. U.S. Geffen Pictures, Miranda Productions Inc.

*Madama Butterfly*. 1995. Dir. Frederic Mitterand. France. Erato Films.

*Madama Butterfly*. 2006. Dir. Anthony Minghella. Stage. Metropolitan Opera, New York.

*Madame Butterfly*, 1915. Dir. Sidney Olcott. US: Famous Players Film Company.

*Madame Butterfly*, 1932. Dir. Marion Gering. US: Paramount Pictures.

*My Beautiful Laundrette*. 1985 Dir. Stephen Frears. UK. Working Title Films, Channel 4 Films, SAF Productions.

*On the Waterfront*. 1954. Dir. Elia Kazan. US. Columbia Pictures.

*Prospero's Books*. 1991 . Dir. Peter Greenaway. UK. Allarts.

*Queer as Folk*. 1999. Russell T. Davies. UK. Channel 4. 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb 1999 - 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb. 2000. 21.00.

*Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet*. 1996 . Dir. Baz Luhrman. Bazmark Films + Twentieth Century Fox.

*Swan Lake*. 1995. Dir. Matthew Bourne. UK. Adventures in Motion Pictures.

*Torch Song Trilogy*. 1982. Writer Harvey Fierstein. Stage. US: New York.

*West Side Story*. 1961. Dir. Jerome Robbins & Robert Wise. U.S. United Artists.

# **Appendix 1**

## ***Love and War* extract**

89 EXTERIOR. ALLEYWAY. EVENING.

CARL is walking. JOE comes up to him and stops him.

JOE  
What's going on Carl?

CARL  
Joe, forget it.

JOE  
No. It's alright. I've got some cash. We can get a room.....

CARL  
Oh Joe. Get real.

He turns and walks on.

JOE follows.

JOE  
For Christ's sake Carl, it's the only thing that makes any sense.

CARL  
Is it?

JOE  
We've still got each other.

CARL  
How's that going to help?

JOE  
What's got into you, Carl?

CARL says nothing.

JOE (cont'd)  
Why are you doing this ..?

CARL says nothing.

JOE (CONT'D)  
Carl I don't need this!

CARL  
Do any of us?

JOE  
For Christ's sake, we've got to talk!

90 EXTERIOR. NEARBY STREET. EVENING.

LAMB & CARTER are looking for JOE & CARL.

91 INTERIOR. THE GIG. EVENING.

EDDIE rushes on to the stage to greet his fans. He is provocatively dressed and thrusts his groin at the assembled fans who scream their approval.

93 EXTERIOR. OUTSIDE THE QUEEN'S ARMS. EVENING.

JOE & CARL

JOE

Carl, this time yesterday I had a career, promotion prospects and a fiancée. Now all I've got is you.

CARL

You're a sad bastard then aren't you

JOE

No. No I'm not.

CARL looks at him

JOE (cont'd)

Something's clicking. Something's right. I know we're in the shit but..

CARL

My fault. Sorry.

JOE

Yeah. Maybe. So?

CARL

So why me?

JOE

What d'you mean why you?

CARL

Look Joe, there's a bar full of horny men in there most of whom would happily swap a bollock for a night in the sack with you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE  
So what?

CARL  
So do yourself a favour.

JOE  
What's happened Carl? What's gone wrong?

CARL  
Just the usual shit.

JOE  
Nothing we can't shovel up together.

CARL  
It's a lovely idea Joe...

JOE  
But?

CARL  
But I don't like getting my hands dirty.

JOE  
I'd wash them for you.

CARL  
Yeah?

JOE  
I'd take you in the shower - wash you all over.

CARL  
Sounds nice. Why would you do that?

JOE  
You know why!

CARL  
Do I?

JOE  
Course you do!

CARL says nothing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE  
Us. You and me.

CARL  
What about us?

JOE  
For fuck's sake, Carl.

CARL says nothing

JOE (cont'd)  
I...Maybe I am a dickhead... but..  
I don't know. I don't know anything  
any more.

CARL looks at him.

JOE (cont'd)  
Fuck it Carl, I love you!

CARL looks at him for a long time, then...

CARL  
I remember the last time someone  
said that to me. It was my old man  
- I must have been about 12. He had  
his cock up my arse at the time.  
Then he pissed off.

JOE  
Shit! Carl.....!

A long silence.

JOE (cont'd)  
They do a lot of that in Sicily?

CARL looks at him, smiles sheepishly.

JOE  
Hang on - you said he was murdered  
- the mafia and that ..

CARL shakes his head.

JOE  
Grandad wasn't a Romanian count  
either, then?

CARL  
More of a Roman cunt if Mum's to be  
believed. It was all bullshit Joe.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE  
And Elton John..?

CARL  
That's me. A piece of shit.

JOE  
Alright, alright - you made a prick  
out of me. So what. That doesn't  
matter now. I won't piss off.

CARL  
No, I can see that! I will though.  
So I might as well get it over  
with.

He turns to leave, but is stopped by JOE 's sharply changing  
tone of voice as he draws the knife.

JOE  
I'll kill you!

CARL  
Oh, for Christ's sake Joe!

JOE  
I mean it. I've done it once ...

CARL  
So you have. You lost your  
virginity. How was it?

JOE  
I don't know. It was an accident. I  
didn't mean to.

A customer going into the pub behind them observes the  
knife.

He goes into the pub and rushes to the bar, where two men  
are kissing. Hurried conversation then the Landlord reaches  
for the phone.

95 EXTERIOR. ALLEYWAY. EVENING.

LAMB & CARTER still looking for CARL & JOE. A passer-by  
points them down the alleyway.

96 INTERIOR. POLICE CAR. EVENING

PC + WPC

RADIO

Disturbance outside the Queen's  
Arms.

PC

On way

97 EXTERIOR. OUTSIDE THE QUEEN'S ARMS. EVENING

JOE still threatens CARL with the knife

CARL

For fuck's sake put the fucking  
thing away and let's have a drink.

JOE

I'm not going in there!

JOE (cont'd)

You've got to come with me.

CARL

Have I bollocks!

JOE

Don't wind me up!

CARL

Don't be such a sad prat. Get in  
that bar and find yourself some  
cock. You'll feel better for it.

JOE

I will kill you!

CARL:

Yeah, yeah.

JOE:

Carl!

CARL:

Come on then - get on with it! And  
let me know if it turns you on.

JOE puts out his left hand to CARL - at first he grabs his  
throat and pushes him against the wall where he holds him,  
choking him.

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED:

Then the grip relaxes and it becomes a tender gesture to the cheek.

But CARL turns his head away firmly.

Suddenly something snaps in JOE - he plunges the knife efficiently into CARL with his right hand - a stroke born of training.

The expression on CARL's face is firstly of utter surprise - he really never thought JOE would do it. Then the pain - but to look at him he could be climaxing.

Then a kind of post-coital euphoria as he feels his life ebbing away. He sinks to the ground, half-supported by JOE, who looks on appalled.

As he slips down CARL reaches his hand out to touch JOE's crotch and finds the expected erection. He smiles weakly and dies.

98 INTERIOR. THE GIG. EVENING

EDDIE launches into his new single to adoring fans. His performance is sexually provocative.

JEM in the wings looks on proudly.

Music continues under...

99 EXTERIOR. OUTSIDE THE PUB. EVENING

LAMB and CARTER arrive at the murder scene a few moments after the civilian police.

LAMB:

Fuck!

PC (ON RADIO)

Ambulance please. Outside the  
Queen's Arms. And backup please.  
Serious assault.

JOE sees the army boots beside CARL's body and slowly looks up to see LAMB's face - his supposed first victim. He tries to take this in, then looks back to CARL - his real one.

LAMB TO PC

Reckon this one's got to be yours  
now. Try and keep hold of him.

To CARTER

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

And they wonder why we don't want  
poufs in the army!

WPC attends to CARL

PC cautions JOE who makes no attempt to resist arrest.

Crowds gather along with more police and an ambulance.  
Soundtrack of EDDIE's song mixed in.

Roll credits.



# **Appendix 2**

**Email interview with Richard Maltby Jr.**

**Replies received: 21<sup>st</sup> December 2012**

*My PhD is examining, from a practitioner's perspective, what drives the changes an adapter makes to an original story. Is it the new context or period? The differing demands of a different medium of delivery? The adapter's particular area(s) of interest – i.e. what drew him/her to the story, and prompted the work? Etc. etc...*

*With these thoughts in mind, I have the following questions about the development of 'Miss Saigon':-*

### **General plot and structure:**

Adaptation theorists have identified the difference between 'adaptation' – setting an existing story in a new context or telling it through a new medium - and 'appropriation' – taking material from the story and fashioning it into something else – I call this 'reclotting' and 'reconception'. So Baz Luhrman's *Romeo & Juliet* is a reclotting while *West Side Story* is a reconception – you don't need to know R & J to enjoy that show, though you might get more out of it if you do.

On the other hand Hwang's *M. Butterfly* is also a reconception but you definitely need some knowledge of the opera to get everything out of that play.

Do you think your audience needs to know anything about *Madame Butterfly*? Will they get more out of the show if they do?

**I think the audience is fine not knowing anything about MADAME BUTTERFLY. Most Americans don't know opera plots. Although the show was triggered by a connection to the plot of the opera/play/novel, as a practical matter those connections disappeared in the writing process rather quickly. They were completely overpowered by the truths of the Vietnam War. As you know, the idea for the show came from Claude-Michel seeing a photo (it's in the book) of a Vietnamese mother handing over her Asian/American child to be taken away and raised in America by the child's American father. The huge emotion of this moment was so powerful to Claude-Michel that he thought it might be explored as a play, and that led to pilfering the plot of MADAME BUTTERFLY. Alain and Claude-Michel read the opera, the Belasco play, and Loti's original novel, and then started to construct the musical. They were triggered by the photograph, and so the story developed as a new story set in Vietnam, following the trajectory of MADAME BUTTERFLY, and not a version of MADAME BUTTERFLY set in a new location. I don't know what that means in your two categories, but I would guess this is 100% a reconception. The test would be if the story forced itself to follow the events of the source, and this plot doesn't. When push came to shove, as it often did, the Vietnam story always prevailed.**

How important was the source material of Loti, Long and Puccini/Giacosa/Illlica to *Miss Saigon*?

To what extent were decisions about the characters and plot made in a deliberate attempt to be faithful to the original story/stories? Or were those merely starting points from which to develop a new story believable in the Vietnam context? Did you feel in any sense constrained by the originals..?

To continue the thought above, the sources gave us a structure but the new location overpowered the sources. There was never a moment in my experience with the show when we said, “But MADAME BUTTERFLY did this or that.” Really all that remains from the original source was “an Asian girl (possibly a prostitute) falls in love with an American who leaves her, and she waits for him to come back because she has borne him a child.” Everything else was invented – the Engineer, Thuy, John, Kim’s back story, the flight to Bangkok, the bui-doi – everything. The other idea that Alain had had previous to the show was to do a show with a beauty pageant in it, and so he added that to the context of the bar-girls in the Engineer’s seedy club, and which gave the show its title. Alain and Claude-Michel laid out the show completely before I came on board. The one thing remaining from the opera was that the soldier (then named Trevor) was like Pinkerton. He didn’t really care about Kim. I argued that Pinkerton was always the liability in MADAME BUTTERFLY. He was a shit and who cared about him, or really about Cio-Cio-San for loving him. I felt we had to correct this. They had to fall in love. But how? Then I realized that when Saigon fell, and Vietnam was completely closed to foreigners, there would be no way for Chris (now his name) to find Kim or even learn of what became of her. This was a gift from the God of plots. Chris could now really love Kim, and then be separated from her in the evacuation of the city, and thereafter even spend years trying to find her – before deciding it was hopeless, and moving on and marrying an American girl. At which time, he can learn that Kim is alive and he has a son. What a dilemma! A horror story with no villains.

For example in Long Butterfly doesn’t kill herself – the successful suicide was introduced by Belasco probably just for theatrical effect. Did you ever consider letting Kim live?

As soon as we defined the above, that meant that Kim was saved as a character too. Instead of moping around like Cio-Cio-San, waiting for this man who will never come, Kim had a purpose: to get her child to America so that he could be raised in peace and health. She was driven to save her child. And to find the soldier she loved. When she finds Chris and realizes that there is no place for her in her child’s story, that in fact she is now the impediment to getting the future she wants for her son, her suicide is the only answer. This is much stronger than the opera suicide, and we were very proud of having made the suicide a real part of the story, not just a melodramatic climax to bring down the curtain.

There are quite substantial additions/changes to the original plot – Chris’s relationship with Ellen, killing Thuy, the whole Bui Doi element, the escape to Bangkok and the finale there instead of Saigon as well as the political backdrop and big numbers like *The American Dream*.

Accepting that the plot of the original could be written on the back of a postage stamp, did these additions come from the need to flesh it out to fill an evening? (Belasco's was a 1 act play!)

**The changes all came from reality, from telling the new story. Nothing is there for theatrical effect, and no choice, even THE AMERICAN DREAM or the helicopter was made to make the show a “musical.” In fact during the writing, I kept wondering what the large cast was going to be doing all evening, because on the page the show is all two-scenes or three-scenes. I didn't reckon on Nick Hytner populating every scene with citizenry.**

**Here are some examples:**

**Thuy. In order to give tension to Kim's plot, Alain and Claude-Michel invented Thuy, a young man promised to Kim by a parental arrangement, but who went over to the Viet Cong. We then filled out Kim's entire back-story with typical events. She was from a quiet village torn apart by division between Viet Cong and the government loyalists. Since many villagers became Viet Cong (not her parents) the village was bombed (napalmed) and her parents burned to death. With nothing left in her life, Kim fled, as so many did, to the possible sanctuary of Saigon – where they found almost no life to be had. A job as a bar girl was a salvation. But Thuy still believes Kim was promised to him, and now a Viet Cong, he infiltrates Saigon to locate her. Finding her with an American he is chased away, but later, after he has become an officer, he is still obsessed with Kim. He brings the Engineer out of a re-education camp back to Saigon because he knows the Engineer will find her in the vast faceless Saigon slums. The Engineer finds her, but when Thuy learns she has an American son, he can't allow Kim to live with that “shame,” so he tries to kill the child. Defending the child, Kim kills Thuy (she uses the gun Chris gave her for protection on the night of the evacuation). Now having killed an officer, she has no choice but to flee the country as part of the Boat People. Which allows her to get out of the country to a place where Chris can come to meet her when he hears of the child. You can see from this that all of this plot follows the logic of the new Vietnam story. Nothing comes from MADAME BUTTERFLY.**

**The Engineer. We made him Eurasian, son of a Vietnamese (tattoo-artist) father and French (prostitute) mother. Such low-life people made their way in the underbelly of the Saigon, and the deluge of dollars that accompanied the American soldiers made it possible for such people to do really well. The Engineer has a popular bar. On the side, he will do anything, sell bogus Rolexes, anything. Nonetheless, if Saigon falls he is in real trouble. He needs to raise real money to get a US visa and passage to the US. This triggers the plot.**

The escape to Bangkok. This came from necessity but served the plot perfectly. When Kim kills Thuy, she must escape – which means joining the Boat People on the hugely dangerous trips to Thailand. This coincides with the Engineer's release from the re-education camp. He wants to escape the country too, but there is no way he'll be admitted to America. Then he sees Kim's bui-doi child, and realizes that such a half-American child is always admitted to the US, and if he pretends to be related to Kim, he'll get in too. So he takes Kim and the child to Bangkok. The plot is served by the reality.

The timing of the last weeks before the fall of Saigon. We scrupulously followed the facts of this fateful week and used it to define the events that took place in the story. Saigon was surrounded by the Viet Cong. It was obvious the city's days were numbered. Anyone who had collaborated with Americans felt sure they would be killed if they didn't get out of the country. (They weren't; they were sent to re-education camps, but they believed they would be killed.) When the Engineer finds a pretty lost country girl on the street, he knows she'll bring extra money at his club, being a virgin. That had value to some men. So he takes her in. And the story starts.

The evacuation. The American ambassador announced that all Vietnamese who worked with Americans would be evacuated before he left. The mass evacuation was still going on when he received a direct order from Washington to leave. So he did. Then the remaining marines were ordered to leave. Each helicopter out left fewer marines guarding the embassy. When the last helicopter came, the last marines plunged into it, leaving all the remaining Vietnamese collaborators to their fate. This is true, and it totally served the needs of the plot.

Bui-Doi. As it turns out, there were thousands of children of Vietnamese women and American soldiers left in Vietnam after the war. These children were ostracized, put into camps, their mothers vilified as collaborators. Not knowing what else to do with these children, the Vietnamese allowed certain organizations to try to identify the fathers of these children and ship them off to America. One such child whose father had been located was the child in the photo Claude-Michel saw. This served our plot perfectly, since Kim's child would be a bui-doi. All we had to do was have John decide, post-war, to get involved with one of these organizations, and have access to the file trying to find Kim's soldier. The facts of the bui-doi gave us our essential plot.

Ellen. Here again, reality's logic made the world safe for our plot. Chris is forced onto the last helicopter out of the city, unable to locate Kim and bring her along. He is crazed by this failure. For a long time he tries to get word to her, get news of her. He tries everything. But Vietnam is completely sealed off, and his attempts are hopeless. So he finally (after two years)



marries an American girl he has met who feels for him, who senses the pain he is sitting on and who vows to bring him back to life. Ellen is a nice simple girl with a good heart. And she is American. Chris can finally choose to leave behind whatever madness he felt for a pretty Vietnamese prostitute, and he can come home. Spiritually, Ellen is saving him – although the horrible dreams Chris has of Kim dying back in Vietnam, and shouting her name in his sleep still disturbs her. Ellen is a nice girl with a good heart who wants to do the right thing. But nothing in her simple uncomplicated upbringing prepares her for playing a role in the events that ensue when it turns out that her husband has a child by a Vietnamese girl he has not really told her about. All this is invented. The Puccini wife is a cipher.

**Bar Girls.** Bar girls in Saigon were not necessarily prostitutes. The girls worked in bars to encourage men to drink. Of course with horny American soldiers flooding the city, it didn't take long for bar girls to become prostitutes – and in the last days of Saigon, a bar girl would do anything to find a soldier who would marry her and take her to America.

**The helicopter.** Much has been made of the on-stage helicopter, and it is often derided as an example of manipulation of plot in order to manufacture a big stage effect, like the chandelier in *PHANTOM*. But as you can see from the above, the story is actually ABOUT the last helicopter to leave Vietnam. It is not a stunt. In truth, the real facts were impossible to put on stage. In reality, the last marines threw tear gas down into the mob filling the Embassy yard, to keep them from attacking the helicopter on the roof. When the chopper started to take off, the rotors sucked tear gas up into the cab – and the last helicopter out of Vietnam flew out blind. Metaphor, metaphor! (We'll have to wait for the movie for this.)

**The American Dream.** Cameron was certain that the lyricist to work with Alain on English lyrics needed to be American. And he was so right. One thing none of the Europeans connected to the show really understood was what the end of the war did to our vision of ourselves. In our mythology, Americans were always the good guys saving the world, John Wayne always came over the hill and saved the day, and we never lost. And suddenly, we were the bad guys, John Wayne wasn't saving the day, and we lost. This was devastating to our self-image. My major contribution to the show was to make my European collaborators understand what defeat in Vietnam meant to the American psyche.

**Chris.** But as a result of the above, we added many things to the story that are rich, and this mostly affected the creation of Chris. Chris was no officer, like Pinkerton. He'd be an ordinary kid from some small town probably in the South. Barely in his twenties, not particularly bright, not political, but a man with a soul and a heart. He'd believe what he was told, that the

Americans were in Vietnam to save the world, to do something good. We even decided he was probably a southern redneck, who unexpectedly found that his best friend was a black man. This kind of irony was common in Vietnam. Remember that simultaneous with the Vietnam War was the integration chaos in America. A kid like Chris from a poor town found life as soldier in Saigon like heaven. His money could buy anything. He lived well. He was taken care of. After a term of duty he would go home, find nothing working for him, no jobs available, and worse, (remember) vilification, not praise, for being a soldier. Veterans were spat at. So he'd re-up. Saigon offered so much more than home. But as the war was waning, Chris was too sensitive not to feel the weight of corruption in the city and sense the doom. Others might pretend it wasn't serious, but Chris is disillusioned. He knows the party is over and senses that the things he believed about the war were not true. It gets to him, and he just wants it all to end and get out. Seeing this, John decides to cheer him up by taking him to a club and buying him a girl for the night. They happen to enter the Engineer's Dreamland, and Chris meets Kim: Someone pure and untouched. Something undamaged. Something good. He tries to help her, he falls in love with her, and when he see the danger she is in (after Thuy arrives) he decides to marry her and bring her back with him to America. He is clearly, top to bottom, not Pinkerton, and that is because we followed the logic of Vietnam, not MADAME BUTTERFLY. In fact, in his dopey, good-hearted way, Chris became almost a metaphor for the American involvement in Vietnam. The crux of Chris' breakdown "Christ, I'm an American, how can I fail to do good" expresses this, as do the next lines: "All I made was a mess in a place full of mystery that I never once understood." None of these expressions would have been possible from anyone in MADAME BUTTERFLY.

From a desire to enrich the characters?

**Yes, to enrich them, but not from some cynical calculation as to what would make then interesting. We just kept exploring what the reality would be for these characters, and the answers always enriched the plot. We were writing a play.**

From the need to make the story believable in its new context? Vietnam is war-ravaged, which Nagasaki wasn't.

**I think I've answered this.**

From the demands of the medium of musical theatre to have some big production numbers?

Answered this too. **THE MORNING OF THE DRAGON** is the only production number in the first act, and that allowed us to leap in time to see what happened to Saigon after it became Ho Chi Minh City. The war was won by the Viet Cong and they had a lot of pride. And while it was militant, it was not the end of civilization as we know it. The Vietnamese were celebrating their victory. As for Act II's **THE FAL, OF SAIGON**, I have mentioned that. The only out-and-out production number is the penultimate **THE AMERICAN DREAM**. This was written for the Engineer to sing in a Bangkok bar. In its French version, the lyric was something like "I sell what they want and they buy what I sell." Alain and I didn't think that was much of an idea for a song. But we couldn't come up with a better title. The idea of the American Dream being a force in the show had been part of our discussions from the first time I came on the show. Alain talked about how alive it was even when he was a boy in Algeria, and how he found it alive in Italy as well, when he lived there. One of the first songs I wrote for the show, my original lyric for **THE MOVIE IN MY MIND**, had the title **LE REVE AMERICAIN**. I thought since the bar girls all spoke French from the preceding regime, it would make sense for them to use a French phrase. But no one else thought it was a good idea to have a song with a French title in the show, so we took a line from the lyric and called it **THE MOVIE IN MY MIND**. The phrase "the American dream" simply didn't fit naturally into the shape of the existing melody. Fast forward to much later, when we were approaching this last song for the Engineer, Alain suddenly noticed that the phrase "the American dream" fit perfectly on the music. And voila! It was perfect. Still, as I wrote all those "air" rhymes, I had no idea how it was going to be staged. It was set in a bar. A lot of customers would sing along? That made no sense. It was Nick Hytner and Bob Avian who decided it should **BE** the Engineer's fantasy American Dream, where all the men looked like Elvis, and all the women looked like Marilyn Monroe. The irony of having these fantasy characters played by our Asian cast was all the better. Hence, the huge production number was born. But Alain and I didn't sit down to write a splashy production number. We set out to write the Engineer's perverted vision of America. We set out to write a solo.

From a desire on the part of the writers to introduce other elements important to them..?  
e.g. Schonberg's reported interest in Bui Doi...

All of the above?!

### **Structure**

Was the non-linear structure – i.e. the flash-back to the evacuation scene – done simply to ensure an additional big number in Act 2? Or was there another dramatic reason?

**The structural change was part of Alain and Claude-Michel's original design. I believe they felt that with the fall of Saigon in the first act, there would be too much big scaled excitement in the top of Act I and nothing but**

small stuff happening in act II and that that would be disappointing on stage, a second act let-down. I'm sure they were right, and I never questioned that structural choice. We did wonder whether or not the audience would go along with the time leap from **THE LAST NIGHT OF THE WORLD** to three years later, and Chris and Kim are not together – but to my personal astonishment, not once, not ever, did anyone ever say that they found it confusing.

Was there a bigger dramatic reason for this switch? I can't think of one. It wasn't for suspense, since the audience doesn't know it's coming. But somehow it is very satisfying on a story-telling level to not know this part of the story until this late in the plot. It also seems to help set up the hotel scene – which is of course entirely invented (Ellen meets Kim alone), not in any way from **MADAME BUTTERFLY**, and for my money the proudest writing achievement in the whole musical.

#### **Pinkerton/Chris:-**

Chris is very much not Pinkerton

- 1 he's in love, not just lust.
- 2 he's more a victim of misfortune than a thoughtless user.

Beyr and Steyn suggest that Schonberg began with 'we didn't want Chris to be a bastard like Pinkerton'. They also suggest that there were extensive discussions between you and Boublil about how good/bad a character he should be – the US innocent abroad, or the burnt-out drug- and whore-user, with the result somewhere between the two..

Was this left entirely up to you guys to resolve artistically? Or did Cameron Mackintosh, or indeed you, have an eye to the Broadway potential of the show and the extent to which that audience would accept an American behaving badly?

'Christ, I'm an American.

How could I fail to do good?'

After all, it's clear that his literary ancestor was made greatly less blameworthy by Belasco than he had been in Long's story, presumably with similar considerations in mind....

I forgot this question was coming so I answered it above. But the impetus to change Pinkerton into a Chris was not a calculation for American audiences. I have to say that this change came primarily from me. Their original "Trevor" was not a total shit like Pinkerton, but not much better. I have always felt that Pinkerton is one of the great insufferable characters in all opera. I brought that sensibility to the first discussions we had. I thought it would be a horrible musical if we took the cue from the opera. The original novel was so different from the play and opera that it provided no help. What to do? Then I started the historical research, with books Alain gave me, plus some early work on the show from James Fenton, and I suddenly saw the possibility afforded by the closing down of the city and the whole of Vietnam after the fall. And there it was: Chris could fully fall in

**love with this girl, but then finally give up on ever finding her again. Bingo!**  
**Love story! Pinkerton? No longer a shit!**

# **Appendix 3**

## **The BOYS from BANGKOK (w/t)] Initial Character Breakdowns and Step Outline**

## **Character breakdowns:-**

### **Ben**

42 – been living with Alex for 10 years. He is emotionally immature and indecisive – depends on Alex more than he realises. Their relationship has become more or less sexless and drifted into openness without dealing with it head-on.

In the banking sector, he is comfortably off but not a high-flyer or leader of any kind. Does his job with competence but not ambitious.

Somewhat spoilt as a child of wealthy parents, he is more of a taker than a giver. He has never lived alone – went straight from parents into a short-lived marriage, then to living with Alex – and so has never learned to take care of himself. He is firmly on course for a mid-life crisis.

### **Alex**

44 – Much more practical and resourceful than Ben. Left home at 18 when he went to uni & came out then lived alone, but with numerous affairs before he settled down with Ben at 34. He is 'big brother' and mum to Ben to some extent, and it's a role he enjoys. But the reward is emotional commitment, and when he feels that ebbing he begins to doubt the relationship, and so challenges Ben to commit.

### **Chai**

16 – bright and resourceful, but never got the education he deserved because Dad died and there was no money. He's a natural self-starter, and determined to make a life for himself. He is gay and felt at odds with his friends at home to has come to Bangkok to try his fortune – he has the direct intention of finding an older guy – to whom he is attracted in some measure because he lost his own Dad – and sees the UK or US as the place he needs to be. He hates the rent-boy scene and will only dance at the club, not have sex. He had to be a Dad to Tam when their father died, and this has made him mature beyond his years.

He wants above all to love and be loved, but sees how disposable the rent boys are to their clients. He has therefore developed a deliberate strategy of not giving himself readily, of playing hard to get. But, like all boys, he is at the mercy of his sexual needs. And he has a thing for older men....

## **Tam**

11 – much more of a boy than his brother. He is wayward and gets into scrapes, but shares his brother's determination to find a better life.

## **Colin**

50. Has lived and worked in Bangkok for a number of years and is married to a Thai wife with 2 mixed race children. He has seen many employees and visitors of all sexual preferences fall prey to the honey traps of Bangkok, but remains reserved and non-judgemental. He is hard-headed and business-like.

## **Step Outline:-**

### **Title sequence 1**

Go-Go Boy bar. 'Sea of boys' - Chai swimming.

### **Title sequence 2**

Ben arrives in Bangkok – aware of boys – text from Alex – taxi driver points out girl bars, boy bars – boy sees him looking and smiles.

### **Scene 1**

Office – Colin buys Ben coffee – set up job - 'How's Alex' – backstory – 10 years – open relationship. Tour of offices – '3 months'. Colin's acceptance of Bangkok scene – Ben ingénu. Colin's warning – 'don't get sucked in'.

V/O over Sc2

### **Scene 2**

Go-Go Boy bar. Ben watches show – sees Chai, but not available. Chatted up by Gee 'Mama San' – Offered a boy –

V/O 'The hierarchy'

Ben with boy – appalled by cost of drink – charged by Gee to take boy out of the bar.

V/O 'agree your price'

- Ben asks boy how much - boy won't say.

V/O 'Watch the ones looking for a ticket out'



### Scene 3

Ben's Hotel Room. Boy getting dressed – 'Where do you live' – 'with girlfriend and baby' - Ben gives him money – boy looks very pleased - and leaves – clearly not been a success.

### Scene 4

Office. Colin & Ben – 'How's the hotel' – 'flat available tomorrow' –

### Scene 5

The flat – nice kitchen - 'can't cook'

### Scene 6

Go-Go Boy bar. Gee & Chai – row about money – 'I can't live on X' - 'you could make more' – 'won't be a fuck boy' - 'I hate this country'

Ben comes in and observes Chai walk out – Gee sees Ben's look - 'he needs a job - you want? - Can he cook? – 'I guess' - Gee calls Chai – negotiate in Thai. – Ben mistrusts - 'give me x now and your address' – x when I bring Chai tomorrow evening.

### Scene 7

The Flat.

*Chai wants to please – Ben doesn't want to take him for granted. Misreading and misunderstanding*

Ben making himself at home – 2 bedrooms - Ben undecided how to play it – makes up 2nd bed – light off – light on - doorbell – Gee introduces Chai – Chai gives polite smile - is it recognition? – Ben pays Gee — reads Chai's response as meaning 'no sex' - shows him into 2<sup>nd</sup> bedroom – Chai disappointed..

Ben offers to take him to dinner – Chai won't have it – insists on shopping for food. Ben gives money + worries about whether he will see him again.

Ben on phone to Alex – row about boy/sex.

Chai returns, cooks – Ben relieved.

Eating bad dinner – Chai ashamed. Backstory – no girlfriend – from 'Ilaam'-works –. Ben offers to wash up - Chai won't allow - Was living with 4 other boys from the bar - Chai very servile – reluctant to open up – makes it clear he only has sex with a guy he loves. Offers to find Ben a fuck-boy. Ben not sure how to play – leaves it.

Chai spends ages in the kitchen cleaning everything. Ben leaves him to it.

When Chai emerges Ben stretches – he's ready for bed – tired and still jet-lagged. Winces at stiff shoulder. Asks cheekily if Chai does massage. Chai agrees.

Chai massages Ben – still clothed, Ben under towel. Ben concerned that Chai has left his flat and his job at the bar – feels he has taken on more than bargained for.

Ben on his back aroused by massage. Chai sees – embarrassed exchange of comments. Chai too is aroused, but tries to hide it with his hands. Ben takes his hands away and is tempted to make a grab for his erection – but instead holds his hand and tenderly brushes his cheek.

### **Scene 8**

Flat next morning

Ben in bed with Chai. Chai asleep – Ben ruffles his hair.

Colin drops by to collect Ben – notices spare room with unslept bed - Ben plays it cool – Chai wants to feel like bf – treated like houseboy for Colin's sake.

### **Scene 9**

In street. Colin & Ben. Colin tells story of colleague who married a Thai bride – ended up looking after whole family.

### **Scene 10**

Back at flat – Ben nervous after Colin's story, but Chai anxious to please – has cooked English dinner.

*Ben wants to find out what he's after. Chai doesn't want to show his hand.*

It's the weekend - seeing sights in Bangkok. Ben extracts backstory– lived with Mum – Dad died – left home because gay + Mum can't afford - sends money home - misses Mum & brother – what does he want? – Chai won't say 'go to uk'.

Later Chai cleaning up after dinner. Ben Skyping with Alex – we see his face for 1<sup>st</sup> time talking about open relationship – 'ok to go with guys but be careful —. 'Missing you' – 'enjoying the boys'? - Alex 'thought any more about a C.P.?' – 'Talk when I get back' – Alex annoyed.

Chai listening as he passes through on way to bedroom – who is it? – My friend – Chai doesn't believe him - withdraws affection in bed. Chai 'I'm just your houseboy – cook and fuckboy.

### **Scene 11**

The Flat – Sunday morning.

Next morning.

Gee comes for his money.

Ben sees loads of text messages – asks – it's Chai's 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. Ben shocked – hadn't realised he had had sex with a 15 yr old. 'No cooking tonight - I'm buying dinner'

### **Scene 12**

Restaurant – Ben & Chai – Colin there with his wife – Ben introduces Chai, but uncomfortable being seen by colleague – Chai happy to feel like Ben's partner – Ben gives Chai a present – an i-phone - Chai thrilled - talks about UK – wants to live there – later in a romantic Bangkok location. Ben says one day they will....

### **Scene 13**

Flat: Chai using I-phone to Skype with Tam (11 year-old brother). – Tam wants to come to Bangkok – 'Tell Mum I'm happy – got a new friend' – 'Can we come and visit? Uncle will bring us.'

Meanwhile Ben has testy Skype with Alex. Real issues of life at home.

### **Scene 14**

Flat, that evening. – Chai very attentive – asks about family visit – Ben not happy – 'Family important – want to meet my new boyfriend' – Ben trapped - 'how long' – just dinner.

### **Scene 15**

Flat 1 week later. Chai awaiting family – preparing dinner - nervous, stressed. – Ben stressed too – needs to work. – Chai goes to meet family.

### **Scene 16a**

Flat. Brian Skyping Alex – Alex knows he's stressed – Brian pretends it's work

Intercut with:

### **Scene 16b**

Bangkok city. Chai and family seeing sights - Mum pleased to see Chai again – can't handle Tam - Tam excited to be with Chai - Uncle trying to protect all from seedier sights.

Uncle & Mum board Skytrain to go to where they will stay. Tam goes with Chai back to flat.

### **Scene 17**

Flat.– Chai working hard on dinner. Tam keen to make conversation with Ben in basic English. Ben trying to work but gives up - feels invaded. Tam playing computer games on Ben's computer

Family arrive – polite introductions – Chai determined to please/impress – Mum and Tam impressed by flat - Uncle asking Chai questions about Ben in Thai – Ben aware he's being talked about but feels excluded in own flat – Tam still on computer and Ben apprehensive.

Uncle goes to use loo – takes opportunity to inspect bedrooms, spying on sleeping arrangements –

Chai telling Mum he and Ben will live together in UK – she wants him to be happy – but misses him already.

Uncle comes in – asks how many bedrooms they will have in UK? – Tells Mum they are sleeping together – Chai stands up for himself – in UK they can get married – have a good life – Uncle denounces him – shame on family – drags Tam from computer – Tam doesn't want to leave - hugs Chai – Uncle drags family out of flat ignoring Ben – beautiful meal not eaten – Chai distraught – Ben comforts him – realises what he has taken on – he is now all Chai has.

### **Scene 18**

Office. Colin + Ben. Job coming to an end – Colin offers longer – Ben torn – conflict of head and heart.

### **Scene 19**

In Chai's new smaller flat. Chai moving in – Ben has paid for 3 months' rent – 'then I come to uk?'- 'then you come to the uk'

### **Scene 20a**

Bangkok: Chai alone – and lonely.

### **Scene 20b**

UK: Brian back home to Alex – old friends dinner party. – OFs have been to Thailand – OF1 waxes lyrical about the delights, OF2 found it all rather sordid. Alex accepts that Ben's dalliances there are in the past – dismissive. Ben reticent – eclipsed by the others and pensive. Others notice – 'I'm jet-lagged'.

### **Scene 20c**

Bangkok. Chai looking for work – bar – restaurant – gets crappy job cleaning - walks past Go-Go bar – his picture still there - but won't go in – in flat waiting online for Ben — chatting to Tam – 'go to UK soon'.

Montage intercut with:

UK. Ben back to old office where he's at home . Skyping with Chai 'hugs & kisses/missing you etc.' – making sure Alex cannot hear.

### **Scene 21**

UK. Ben & Alex's home. Ben in his study chatting to a boy online – boy is in London – Chai comes online – messages '3 days since he heard from B – everything ok? – Are you still with Alex?' – Ben tries to juggle 2 boys – Chai annoyed ' days since we chatted, now no time for me' – Alex comes in – 'Chai your Bangkok Boy?' – Ben downplays – Alex annoyed - supposed to be going out – Ben trying to keep everyone happy – less firm about getting Chai over - makes appointment to chat another day.

### **Scene 22**

Chai's flat. Gets text that Tam is at the station – misses Chai and wants to be with him — how did you get here? - Mum gave him birthday money - Chai tells him to go home – Tam hates home – wants to come to uk – Chai calls Mum - tomorrow will take Tam to catch the train.

### **Scene 23**

Bangkok station next day. Tam runs off – Chai chases through city – Mum calls to find out when he Tam will arrive – Chai tells her he missed train and ran off – Mum helpless - 'always like this – you look after him' - Tam finds boy bars Uncle stopped him seeing – guy starts chatting to him – Chai finds him, takes him back

to the flat – ‘take me to UK – Ben will take care’ – ‘didn’t even bring your passport’ – He did – Chai looks for Ben online.

#### **Scene 24**

UK. Ben & Alex’s home. Ben sees a young guy out before Alex gets home.

#### **Scene 25**

Bangkok supermarket. Chai and Tam shopping - Tam wants new trainers – expensive food – Chai has to stop him.

#### **Scene 26**

UK. Ben & Alex’s home. Ben online – chatting to another boy – sees Chai’s message – Ben makes appointment to chat next day .

#### **Scene 27**

Chai’s flat/UK. Ben & Alex’s home: Chai needs to get food but waiting for Ben at agreed time online – Ben late - Tam offers to do shopping - Chai gives him money, tells him what to buy.

Ben worried because Alex hasn’t come home – texting him.

Finally Ben goes online - Chai ‘when can I come. I need to know’ – online row because both stressed – and because Chai in love.

Tam returns with shopping – has bought more than he could have afforded with the money – Chai guesses he’s stealing – threatens to send him back to live with Uncle – ‘when will we go to UK?’

Alex returns – he’s been with another guy – triggers row about relationship – Ben feels distant since Bangkok – Alex sets ultimatum – CP or separate.

#### **Scene 28**

Go Go Bar. Gee + Chai – Chai asks to borrow money – Gee won’t lend but offers him a room and place in the show – Chai looks at room and comings and goings that Tam would see – refuses.

#### **Scene 29**

UK. Ben & Alex’s home. Ben gets email from Chai – desperate to borrow money – deletes it – plans underway for CP (email from other friends)

### **Scene 30**

Bangkok back street. Tam rummaging in bins for food - finds discarded takeaway – takes it back to flat – Chai desperate – looks at flights to UK.

### **Scene 31 (Montage)**

Go-Go Bar/Flat. Chai performing again – hiding money – not enough – puts himself in the line to go with guys – gets the money for tickets – goes to travel agent – told he needs visas – Gee introduces a British guy looking for a boy to CP with – Chai refuses – ‘already engaged’.

### **Scene 32 (Montage)**

UK. Brian & Alex’s CP party – seem happy together.

### **Scene 33**

Bangkok. Colin’s office. Chai comes to see with Tam – asks for Ben’s address – Colin can’t give – offers to write to Ben – at Chai’s prompting Tam distracts Colin by asking where loo is and makes Colin show him – Chai finds address on computer and copies (photos on phone?) behind Colin’s back.

### **Scene 34**

Go-Go Bar. Gee sets Chai up with Donald, who works at British Consulate – upstairs together – Donald confesses he’s married - Chai asks him for help with visas – Donald refuses – Chai takes photos of them with i-phone – finds Donald’s card in wallet with address while Donald in shower.

### **Scene 35**

UK. Ben’s Office. Ben gets email from Colin about Chai looking for him – starts to write to Chai but changes his mind.

### **Scene 36**

Chai’s flat. Chai on computer – prints letter to Ben’s address - Emails pics to Donald with his address – will print and give to his wife unless he fixes visas – looks at pics of him and Ben taken with i-phone at birthday dinner – on table is 17<sup>th</sup> birthday card from Mum.

### **Scene 37**

UK. Ben & Alex’s home. Ben gets Chai’s letter - hides it from Alex – does nothing.

### **Scene 38**

Heathrow Airport. Chai and Tam go through Border Control with visas – calls Ben's home number – credit runs out instantly – find a payphone and call again – goes to voicemail which gives Ben's mobile – leaves their number – tries Ben's mobile – also voicemail - make their way into central London.

### **Scene 39**

UK. Ben & Alex's home. Ben listens to voicemails – alarmed – deletes land-line message as he hears Alex come home – turns mobile off.

### **Scene 40**

Central London. Chai and Tam thrilled by the sites at first – then tired – keep calling Ben's number but phone remains off – end up sleeping rough – propositioned by guy – Tam wants to accept – Chai drags him away.

### **Scene 41**

UK. Ben & Alex's home. Ben & Alex – looking at CP photos – Ben distracted – row with Alex – relationship feels empty.

### **Scene 42a**

London + the journey. Very cold & tired Chai & Tam walking round London – trying to find train to Ben's town – asking at the wrong station – finally find the right train but only enough money for one ticket – get on the train – Tam hides in the loo when the inspector comes.

Intercut with:-

### **Scene 42b**

Ben + Alex's home. Alex says working at home – Ben apprehensive but has to go to work.

### **Scene 43**

Ben's town. Boys at the station – ask how to get to his address – it's 5 miles – it's raining – they have to walk – try to thumb a lift but no success.

### **Scene 44**

Ben + Alex's home. Boys arrive exhausted, soaked and bedraggled – Alex's reaction – sends them to shower and prepares food – phones Ben 'I think you'd better come home'.



### **Scene 45**

Ben + Alex's home - kitchen. Boys eating ravenously – clothes in the washing machine - Ben arrives – greets Tam first because he doesn't know how to greet Chai – love, lust, remorse, guilt, embarrassment in front of Alex – Chai love and disappointment.

### **Scene 46**

Ben + Alex's home - study. Ben & Alex – Ben full of remorse – 'give them money to get home' – Alex 'Chai loved and trusted you – you have to see this through'

### **Scene 47**

Ben + Alex's home. The boys fast asleep in the spare room.

### **Scene 48**

Ben + Alex's home. Next day. Alex home, playing computer game with Tam – Ben returns – 'where's Chai' – Alex 'upstairs – go and see him' – Ben goes up – Chai depressed – didn't realise Ben & Alex were boyfriends – Ben plays it down – 'just friends' – Chai hugs Ben & wants sex – Ben wants it too but feels awkward – they do.

Alex passes the door en route to the loo – hears them – carries on.

Post-coital Chai now happy – thinks he has Ben back – talks about CP for when his visa expires – Ben can adopt Tam – 'Uncle' Alex – Ben says nothing – Chai notices.

### **Scene 49**

Ben + Alex's home: Ben being a big kid with Tam – listening to his music, play fighting – Alex brings a package back – it's the CP photo framed – leaves Tam playing and takes Ben to another room - he's also been to the adoption office and established that they can adopt Tam if his mother agrees, but Chai too old.

Chai comes in and sees photo – realises the truth – overhears the following from Alex & Ben...

..Alex suggests divorce so that Ben can marry Chai – Ben paralysed with indecision – 'Is it what you want?' – 'is it what you want?' – 'no but it's what Chai needs. 'We can survive here without it – Chai can't.' – 'does it mean we separate?' etc.

### **Scene 50**

Ben + Alex's home: Chai creeps upstairs – packs his bag – leaves a video message on his phone, then leaves phone on Tam's bed with a note – writes another note - goes into Ben & Alex's bedroom to leave it – sees Ben's wallet and takes money – goes downstairs and says to Tam he's going to the shops – gives him a big hug but Tam doesn't latch on – busy playing his game – Chai creeps quietly out.

#### **Scene 51**

Ben + Alex's home: Alex & Ben finishing a long & suppressed row - Alex cooking a meal – agree to sleep on it and not say anything in front of the boys – call them in to dinner – Chai not there – Tam says he went out – Ben finds his wallet with a note – 'Goodbye. Sorry about the money. I love you' – calls Chai's phone – hears it in the boy's bedroom – goes in with Tam and they find the phone & video message – Alex gets in car and drives to station.

#### **Scene 52**

Train: Chai already on his way to London.

#### **Scene 53**

Ben + Alex's home: Alex on phone reporting missing person – subdued reheated meal – Tam very upset.

#### **Scene 54**

Great Compton St. etc. - montage. Chai soon picked up – night of sex he doesn't enjoy – leaves in the morning – wanders the streets - picked up again next night – twice in one night – still finishes up in a bar at closing time – rough leather guy says he can stay – used as a sex toy and pimped out to friends.

#### **Scene 55**

Ben + Alex's home: - montage. Adoption papers through – Tam starts school – meets family etc. – makes UK friends – sleepovers - Ben finds evidence on computer he's looking at straight porn amused – Alex puts parental controls on.

#### **Scene 56**

Ben + Alex's home: Months later. Birthday party for Tam with his friends – gets 'Happy Birthday' text from Chai (number withheld) with picture of him smiling on an expensive yacht – all are happy that he seems to be well and happy.

#### **Scene 57**

Expensive Yacht. Chai is summoned to be used by numerous men – his face spiritually and emotionally dead.

**The End**

**Appendix 4**  
***Bangkok Boy***  
**Scenes 21-22**

21 INTERIOR GAY GO-GO BAR. NIGHT.

GEE & CHAI are arguing backstage in Thai.

CHAI looks sadly at his pay packet.

CHAI  
*1,000 baht for 1 week. You said  
1500!*

GEE shrugs

GEE  
*You were late 2 nights.*

CHAI  
*I won't look so cute if I'm  
starving!*

GEE  
*You want more you know how.*

He indicates the boys still parading on the stage for the remaining customers.

CHAI  
*I'm not a money boy. You know  
that. You promised me 3 months  
ago. '1-2 weeks - you're flying  
to New York'!*

GEE shrugs

GEE  
*There's a lot of boys.*

CHAI  
*You know I bring them in. I'm  
worth more.*

GEE  
*You know the money. Up to you.*

CHAI  
*Fuck you! I quit!*

He storms out through the bar, GEE in pursuit

GEE  
*Chai! Chai!!*

BEN is entering and CHAI pushes past him. BEN recognises his face from last night and the photos.

GEE changes his manner suddenly to welcome BEN

( CONTINUED )

GEE

Mister! So good to see you  
back. Nice time with Dem last  
night?

BEN

OK.

GEE

Late tonight mister. But not too  
late. Dem busy tonight but I  
find you nice boy.

BEN

I'll just have a beer and watch  
the show thanks

GEE gestures to a reluctant waiter who was about to clean  
up to bring a beer.

GEE

Beer no problem. But show  
finished!

He makes an unhappy grimace.

I find you nice boy - he give you  
private show.

BEN

You have a nice boy who can cook?

GEE

Sure. Plenty cook boys! I find  
you nice boy. You take him home  
- he cook you nice meal. You fuck  
him.

BEN shakes his head.

BEN

It's ok. I was joking. I need  
something a bit longer term.

GEE

No problem. How long you stay  
Bangkok?

BEN

Three months.

The beer arrives

GEE

I give good price. Nice  
boy. Good cook.

( CONTINUED )

BEN

Look, forget it - I can't afford...

GEE

3,000 baht. 1 week.

BEN

You serious? He cooks all my meals for that?

GEE

Sure. Cook. Clean. Whatever you want. You want him stay?

BEN

Well there is a spare room...

GEE

1 room - 2 room. No problem. Where you stay?

BEN

Look - it's a nice idea but...

GEE

You give me 1,000 now. 1,000 when I come tomorrow with boy. 1,000 after 1 week. Where you stay?

BEN

Are you sure he can cook?

GEE

Sure he cook - all boy cook.

BEN

How do I know you'll come.

GEE shrugs

GEE

You know where find me!

BEN reaches uncertainly for his wallet, then stops.

BEN

No. I'm sorry, I'm...

GEE

500. 1,500 tomorrow. You no like him I give you back.

BEN is persuaded.

He opens his wallet and hands over 500 Baht.

22 INTERIOR. OFFICE. MORNING.

BEN meets COLIN getting coffee.

COLIN  
You look knackered.

BEN  
Couldn't sleep - I think I'm  
still jet-lagged.

COLIN  
Flat OK?

BEN  
I might have found a cook.

COLIN  
Really?

BEN  
What's the going rate?

COLIN  
Depends. Is she.. he full-time?  
Live-in? Cooking and cleaning?  
Or just cooking?

BEN  
I'm not sure. How does 3,000 a  
week sound?

COLIN  
A bit steep - but if he's  
good.... For God's sake keep  
your passport somewhere safe.

BEN  
And my wallet I guess.

COLIN  
No. Just your passport. Don't  
forget that meeting tomorrow in  
Mo Chit. I'll pick you up at 9.





**Appendix 5**  
***Bangkok Butterfly***  
**Scenes 21-22**

21 INTERIOR GAY GO-GO BAR. NIGHT.

GEE and CHAI are arguing backstage in Thai.

CHAI waves the envelope he was carrying - his pay packet.

CHAI  
*You said 1200!*

GEE  
*You were late 2 nights.*

CHAI  
*You said I'm your best boy! I  
won't look so cute if I'm  
starving!*

GEE  
*You want more you know how.*

He indicates the boys still parading on the stage for the remaining customers.

CHAI  
*I'm not a money boy. You know  
that. You promised me 3 months  
ago. '1-2 weeks - you're flying  
to New York'!*

GEE shrugs

GEE  
*There's a lot of boys.*

CHAI shakes his head sadly and leaves. GEE follows.

GEE  
*Chai! Chai!!*

BEN is entering and CHAI pushes past him, before recognising him. GEE intervenes, changing his manner suddenly to welcome BEN.

GEE  
*My friend! So good to see you  
back. Jaime busy tonight but I  
find you nice boy.*

BEN  
*I'll just have a beer and watch  
the show, thanks*

GEE gestures to a reluctant waiter who was about to clean up to bring a beer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHAI hovers by the door, hoping to catch BEN's eye again.

GEE

Beer no problem. But show  
finished!

He makes an unhappy grimace.

GEE

I find you nice boy - he give you  
private show.

BEN

You have a nice boy who can cook?

CHAI is listening.

GEE

Sure. Plenty cook boys! You take  
him home - he cook you nice meal.

He whispers in BEN's ear.

GEE

You fuck him.

BEN shakes his head.

BEN

It's ok. I was joking. I need  
something a bit longer term.

The beer arrives. BEN takes it and goes to watch the  
parade.

CHAI approaches GEE and whispers in his ear. GEE listens,  
then shoos him out of the club, and approaches BEN again.

GEE

How long you stay Bangkok?

BEN

Three months.

GEE

I have good cook. Nice boy.

BEN

How much?

GEE

I give good price. 3,000 baht. 1  
week.

BEN looks at him, at the parade, thinks.

22 INTERIOR. CHAI'S ROOM. DAY.

CHAI is talking in Thai on his phone to his Mum, SUMANA.

CHAI

*Hi Mom. I have a new job.*

SUMANA

*What job?*

CHAI

*Private cook.*

SUMANA

*But you don't know how!*

CHAI

*I learn.*

SUMANA

*How much?*

CHAI

*2000 baht a week! I send you  
1000.*

SUMANA

*My clever boy!*

# **Appendix 6**

## ***Bangkok Butterfly***

### **Pitch & Treatment**

# NICK BAMFORD

## BANGKOK BUTTERFLY

*‘Vogliatemi bene, un bene piccolino, un bene da bambino’*

Cio Cio San, *Madama Butterfly* – Puccini/Giacosa/Illlica

**With his relationship going stale, 40-year-old Ben takes advantage of a work posting to explore new sexual horizons in Bangkok, where 16-year-old Chai dreams of a new life in the West.**

**When a job leads to love, the collision of their desires changes both their lives forever.**

Inspired by the love story written by John Luther Long, and immortalised by Puccini in his opera *Madama Butterfly*, as well as its descendants such as the stage play *M. Butterfly* and the musical *Miss Saigon*, *Bangkok Boy* throws a 21<sup>st</sup> century light on the themes of East meets West, cultural misunderstanding and exploitation, and sex tourism which are common to all versions of this iconic story.

It is a love affair set in the age of the internet, global communication and travel – and in a world where men can marry and be accepted. It leaves behind the ‘coming-out’ stories and the AIDS stories, and explores gay relationships as profound, as complicated and as romantic as straight ones.

It explores the nature of the ‘open relationship’ paradigm, common in gay relationships, as well as the complex issues which ensue when frustrated paternal instincts collide with sexual attraction. .

It demonstrates that when men love each other it is in some ways the same as when they love women, but in others it’s very different.

In essence this story shares the DNA of its ancestors – the main difference is the question of who is exploiting whom?

### Full draft script available

‘A heart-wrenching look into the lives destroyed by the sex trade...Dialogue is excellent.’ *Eyestorm* script search

‘The story has a very contemporary feel, candidly examining modern relationships and demonstrating how they can be influenced by modern technology. There are some neat touches and effective details throughout’  
BBC Writersroom

# NICK BAMFORD

## The story:-

Chai, a 16-year-old boy from Isaan in northern Thailand, works in a Bangkok go-go bar run by Gee. He has left his home both to find work in order to send money home to his widowed mother, and because he is gay and finds that not easy in his village. But he refuses the lucrative career of a rent boy and will do no more than dance in the show at the bar. He is constantly on the lookout for a westerner who will enable him to get a European or US passport and leave Thailand, but is teased at the bar for his refusal to become a 'money boy'.

Middle-aged businessman Ben has been living with, Alex, for 17 years. It's a sexually open relationship, but their sex life together has dried up. So when Ben's business opens a branch in Thailand he seizes the opportunity to take a 3-month secondment to Bangkok and explore the sexual delights that city offers. His British, but Bangkok-based colleague Colin welcomes him. Although straight himself and married to a Thai wife, Ngam, Colin is very knowledgeable about Bangkok, having lived there for some years, and has seen many ex-patriots get themselves into trouble in quest of easy sexual encounters. He puts Ben wise on places to go as well as on the pitfalls of the Bangkok sex trade. Ben has dinner with Colin and Ngam, and shares some details of his relationship with the latter.

Observed by Chai, Ben explores the gay bars and samples what they have to offer, including the one where Chai works. He sees and likes Chai, but since he is not available, goes home with another boy. But he finds the encounter functional and unsatisfying – not least because the boy is straight. He feels increasingly lonely and alienated by his new environment, soon finding the gay scene shallow and commercial. His contacts with Alex, who is clearly also taking full advantage of his sexual freedom, become increasingly sporadic and terse. Ben's alienation and loneliness increases when he has to move into a flat, and his inability to cook for himself doesn't help.

Chai complains to Gee of his lack of money, but he still won't have sex to earn more. So when Ben visits the bar again and asks Gee whether he knows of a cook, Chai sees an opportunity and so does Gee for some commission.

Gee brings Chai to the flat but there is confusion about what is expected on both sides. Chai declares that 'man who gets Chai's heart gets Chai's cock', and Ben remembers that he was not available at the bar. But before long Chai's sexual needs get the better of him and they are soon sharing a bed. Chai is not a good cook, but makes great efforts to learn in order to please his new English friend in the hope that he might offer a ticket out. Although Chai sees Ben chatting to Alex on Skype, the latter plays down that relationship. In any case he isn't sure how secure it is.

When Chai's birthday comes Ben is amazed to discover that it is only his 17<sup>th</sup>. But he takes him out to dinner, where he meets Colin and Ngam. He feels awkward in a restaurant with his 'cook', and when Alex hears about it he too is unhappy that Ben is clearly having more than sex with Chai. Ever the spendthrift, Ben has bought Chai an expensive i-phone with which he is thrilled. Carried away by the romance of the evening and annoyed by increasingly tetchy communications with Alex, Ben offers Chai his dream of coming back to the UK.



# NICK BAMFORD

Emboldened by his new friend and new life, Chai asks Ben if he can invite his family down from the countryside. He has been using his new phone to chat to his 11-year-old brother Tam, and Tam misses him and wants to see him again. Ben is very reluctant, sensing himself being sucked into more than he is prepared for. He has coffee with Ngam, who warns him of the potential significance of meeting the family. But Ben has talked to Chai of living with him, and, if he is to continue that intention, then he has to agree. Chai's mother, Sumana and Tam come to visit, accompanied by stern Uncle Banyat.

Tam is thrilled to be once more with his brother and awed by what he sees around him, however much Banyat tries to protect him from the seedier sights. Chai, too, is happy to be reunited with his mother and brother, and Tam also gets on very well with Ben.

At the dinner party which ends the day, and which Chai has taken enormous trouble to prepare, Banyat observes the sleeping arrangements in the flat and denounces both Chai and Ben. Chai stands his ground and explains the nature of his relationship with Ben, and his plans to live in the UK. His mother is happy for him, but Banyat is unrelenting. A massive row ensues, ending with Chai insulting his uncle in a way which shocks everyone. Banyat storms out with Sumana, leaving the meal uneaten and dragging the reluctant Tam with them. Chai is devastated, but then picks himself up and re-arranges the dinner for just the two of them. He now has no-one in the world but Ben.

But a month later Ben's secondment has finished. Although Colin offers another job in Chiang Mai if he wants to stay, Ben's old life in the UK is catching up with him and, tempted though he is, he realises he has to go home.

He and Chai enjoy a last weekend having a holiday on Phi Phi island, where Ben feels awkward amongst other holidaymakers. He feels like Chai's dad, and is embarrassed that he is also his lover.

Before finally leaving he repeats his promise to bring Chai over to the UK and gives him enough money to rent himself a smaller, cheaper flat in the meantime.

Back in the UK, after at first feeling alienated by his friends' casual and unfeeling discussion of the Bangkok fleshpots, Ben falls back into the comfort of his life with Alex, co-existing in the same house with no difficulty, but rarely sharing quality time. At first he chats regularly with Chai on the internet.

In Bangkok Chai lives a very frugal life on the money Ben has left him and doing a menial job in a restaurant kitchen.

Little by little Ben's chats with Chai become less frequent – in their different worlds they have soon run out of things to talk about and Ben finds casual sex in the UK via the internet.

Tam turns up one day in Bangkok, having run away. Chai tries to send him home, but the boy runs away again and Chai has to rescue him from a paedophile. Sumana says that Tam must stay with Chai as she can no longer handle him. Secretly Chai, in his loneliness, is delighted to have the company of his little brother.

But Chai's money is running very low and, now with two mouths to feed, and a brother with expensive tastes and a big appetite, he goes once again to see

# NICK BAMFORD

Gee, who offers him a job back in the show, with accommodation included. Chai refuses, fearing that the suggestible Tam will fall into the easy money trap of renting.

In the UK, Alex has become frustrated with Ben's emotional distance and tries to bring matters to a head in terms of their relationship by suggesting a Civil Partnership.

In desperation Chai writes to Ben asking more about coming over, which prompts Ben to give up his contact. But Chai still logs on every night in the hope of finding him.

The responsibility for Tam begins to weigh heavily on Chai, especially when Tam is reduced to raiding dustbins for food. Finally, in desperation, Chai sees no alternative, if he is to offer Tam any kind of life beyond renting on the streets of Bangkok, but to get to England somehow. Tam too wants to go to the UK. All they need is the money for the fares. Chai goes on the game to raise enough money to buy flights for both him and Tam to the UK.

Chai goes, with Tam, to see Colin. He asks for Ben's address and phone number in the UK, but Colin, will not hand it over. Chai and Tam trick Colin into leaving his office for long enough for Chai to check Ben's address on his computer.

Discovering that he also needs visas for them both, with Gee's help Chai blackmails a Consulate employee with whom he has sex at the bar.

It's now a year since Ben's return to the UK, and Chai emails to tell him of his and Tam's impending arrival. He writes a letter too. Ben receives both but is paralysed with fear of the possible repercussions and does nothing.

Chai arrives with Tam at Heathrow and calls Ben's number. There's no reply, so he leaves a voicemail and they start to try to find Ben's address. They assume it is in London though in fact it is in Leicester. Having found their way to Leicester Square they finally discover the truth, but they can't get there and end up spending the night at Victoria Bus Station.

Ben hears the voicemail but deletes it, now convinced that Chai will exploit him in some way. He desperately hopes that the boy will not come, or will somehow disappear into London.

But the next day Chai and Tam make it to Leicester on a bus and find their way to Ben and Alex's house. It's pouring with rain and they don't have warm clothes, so they arrive cold and bedraggled to be greeted by an astonished Alex. He feeds and generally mothers them until Ben returns that evening to face the - very loud! - music .

Ben's best suggestion is to pay for the boys' tickets home, but Alex berates him for such insensitivity after what the boys have been through for him. He is practical and begins to try and sort out the mess. The boys stay in their spare room.

Chai is very upset when he discovers the true nature of Ben & Alex's relationship, and Tam is angry at Ben's deception. Chai attempts to make love to Ben again, but it doesn't work.

# NICK BAMFORD

Alex discovers that they might be able to adopt Tam, but that Chai is too old. As they discuss what to do Chai finds a framed picture of the CP which has just arrived, and he realises the full truth. As Alex suggests to Ben that should get divorced so that Ben can marry Chai and keep him in the UK, Chai makes the decision that he has to go. Leaving his phone with a voice message for his brother he creeps out of the house, having stolen a few pounds from Ben's wallet and hitches a lift back to London.

Alex, Ben & Tam are devastated and try to find him at the train and bus stations, but to no avail.

Chai finds his way to Old Compton Street, where he is quickly picked up and taken back by a man for sex, but, without anywhere to live, he is soon back on the streets. Eventually he meets a man who offers him work for an exclusive escort agency.

Tam is devastated at Chai's departure, but Alex take cares of him. He gets him into a school and applies to adopt him. However, Tam has taken a profound dislike to Ben who feels increasingly a stranger in his own home. Eventually he recognises the nature of his relationship with Alex as an overgrown son with his dad, and that he has now been supplanted by Tam. He moves out.

But the attempt to adopt Tam is moving ahead and Sumana comes to the UK with Colin and Ngam to make the arrangements. Thrilled that both her sons will have lives in the UK, she is nevertheless very unhappy to find that the men are not living together as she wants her son to have two parents.

Ngam persuades Ben to find Chai, which he does with considerable difficulty after scouring the internet and London gay bars. He tricks Chai into meeting him by booking him, and Chai confronts him with what he has done, but runs away when Ben invites him out to dinner.

Ben returns to Alex for Tam's birthday, and Sumana, Colin and Ngam are also invited. Alex and Ben try to call Chai but he's changed his number. Sumana indicates that as the men are together she will sanction the adoption and symbolically wraps their arms round her son, but it's clear there is still much work to be done in terms of the authorities. As the party gets under way, Tam gets a message from Chai with a picture of him on a luxury yacht. Chai says it was Ben who asked him to do it. Tam and Sumana are delighted to see that he has landed on his feet, but Ben and Alex have their suspicions. He has withheld his number.

The truth is that he is being used as a high class escort for rich businessmen. His quest for love has left him rich financially, but spiritually and emotionally dead. The film ends as he carves into his wrist the number he used as a money boy in Bangkok – forever branding himself a rent boy.