

The Pedagogical Power of Tragedy: Puccini's Love-and-Death Paradigm and Feminine Ideals in Early Twentieth-Century Music Education

Ying Duan*

e-mail: ying.dun@student.mahidol.ac.th

College of Music, Mahidol University, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, 73170.

Joseph Bowman

e-mail: joseph.bow@mahidol.ac.th

College of Music, Mahidol University, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, 73170.

Abstract: This article examines how Puccini's love-and-death paradigm operated as a gendered cultural curriculum within early twentieth-century music education. Positioned within the History of Education, it treats opera as a pedagogical medium through which listening, appreciation, and conservatoire study transmitted ideals of feminine purity, obedience, sacrifice, and emotional refinement. Methodologically, the study uses a systematic literature review, historical-documentary interpretation, and thematic synthesis of recent scholarship on opera pedagogy, gender in music education, curriculum, and Puccini reception. The analysis shows that Puccinian tragedy should be read not as sentimental entertainment alone, but as educational evidence of how musical culture helped construct and normalise feminine ideals in pedagogical settings and historical imagination. This reframes tragedy as evidence of education, gender discipline, and memory.

Keywords: History of Education, Music Education, Opera Pedagogy, Puccini, Feminine Ideals, Systematic Literature Review.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The early 20th century was a pivotal one in the pedagogical dissemination of European art music. Opera, symphonic repertory, school singing, guided listening, and conservatoire study were not simply ornaments to the bare cultural forms, but acts of a disciplined artistry of aesthetic education which implicated the development of taste, emotional regulation, historical recollection, classed refinement, and gendered moral

imagination. In this article, Giacomo Puccini's operatic world of tragedy is explored in this light. It's not about whether or not Puccini intentionally created an educational doctrine, but about the historically significant pedagogical discourse that can be heard in the dramatic pattern frequently found in his female characters: love, suffering, sacrifice and death (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

The article is knowingly placed in the context of the History of Education, and not just in the context of music analysis. This is a critical difference. One could do a purely musicological piece on the harmonic language, motivic structure, orchestration, writing for voice, or dramaturgy of Puccini's operas. A different question for a historical-educational one is, which human ideals could be taught via such educative circulation of repertory? Canonical pieces were frequently employed in music classes, conservatories, school concerts, historically oriented listening drills and appreciation oriented courses in order to foster disciplined feelings and judgments. Classical music/opera should be incorporated in teaching as historical sources which, like other historical sources, have social, political and moral implications that students can learn to recognize and critique, according to Young (2022). This article takes this line of thinking further and uses Puccinian tragedy as a means of exploring the aestheticisation and moralisation of femininity in the culture of education.

Puccini's heroines have a strong position in modern operatic memories. The character of the dying seamstress, of the self-sacrificing lover, of the abandoned foreign bride, of the suffering nun, and of the princess changed by the sacrifice of the male, are not just figures in the narrative. These characters, when brought into educational discourse in the realms of music appreciation, performance study, repertoire selection, and cultural commentary, helped to create a larger pedagogy of gender. Their distress was frequently described as aesthetically pleasing, morally uplifting and sentimentally edifying. This sort of treatment may be used to turn women's weakness right into a picture of refinement. So, what did Puccini represent (what were the meanings he made available to schools and musical institutions), is the question for a History of Education journal (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

This is a topical emphasis as recent research has sparked a renewed interest in gender in classical music education, canon construction, conservatoire culture, and opera production. Werner and Kuusi (2025) demonstrate that gender equality discussion in classical music higher education often focuses on individual issues and does not challenge institutional norms. Borgström Källén and Ferm Almqvist (2025) also show that gender inequality can be reproduced via consecrated and peripheral places in higher music education, affecting who is seen as having a central artistic voice. The male musician is, according to Ramstedt (2023), a recurring normatively positioned figure in the culture of classical music. These studies do not directly answer the historical question of Puccini and early 20th-century education, but do reveal and render visible why it is important to revisit the canonical repertory in a gender-conscious educational history.

In the early 20th century, music education had close ties with cultural formation. The teaching of music was frequently imbued with moral, social and civilising agendas in schools, teacher-training institutions, conservatoires, and public appreciation groups alike. Not only were they expected to learn the technical aspects of art, but they were also encouraged to cultivate judgment, taste, historical awareness, emotional discipline, and social refinement. Opera was particularly well-adapted to this mission, inasmuch

as it combined sound and story, image and gesture, language and collective emotion. It could learn about History via the Setting, moral judgement via the Plot, about Gender through the Character, and about social hierarchy via the musical/dramatic contrast (Borgström Källén & Ferm Almqvist, 2025; MacGregor, 2024; Werner & Kuusi, 2025).

New research indicates that the opera remains a valuable educational tool today. Soliveres et al. (2021) indicate that opera-based educational practice is a way of developing social and emotional skills, and Leung (2024) indicates that the transmission of opera in school music education is influenced by teachers' beliefs, policy, and cultural identity. The studies are about today, but they help to provide a perspective of a longer historical process in which opera can be educational when it is chosen, framed, explained, and repeated as valued culture. In this way, opera becomes more than just a performance, it becomes a part of the curriculum, and more than just entertainment, it becomes an experience in school.

Puccini's operas came into just such a cultural climate. They were liked because of their popular character, their emotional appeal, their well remembered female characters and their dramatic focus. Puccini's works were often amenable to spontaneous emotional response, while repertory demanded theoretical study. This accessibility fueled their pedagogical power. Before being schooled to question the gendered conditions which made such suffering seem noble, learners might be taught to savor the musical beauty of suffering. A reading of a History of Education thus takes into account the possibility of aesthetic pleasure as a means of passing on ideals of femininity.

1.2. Need for a Historical-Educational Reading

The need for a historical-educational reading is a result of two narrower approaches that are limited. The first is a celebratory canon approach, in which Puccini is showcased more as a master of melody, theatrical timing and emotional truth. The second is a strictly critical gender perspective, which merely decries the misogynistic representation of tragic opera without any consideration of how such representation came to be teachable in the educational institutions. In both approaches, the pedagogical mechanism is not included. What matters is not only the content of the operas, but also the role of education in selection and interpretation of operatic affect in cultural instruction (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

Zicari and Biasutti (2025) contend that music recordings from the early 1900s can be used in higher music education not only as a listening tool, but as a structured curricular component. Their research is relevant for this article, because it demonstrates that historical sound documents are not passive archives, but rather can be activated in education through pedagogy. If recorded music can influence and form a picture of past musical worlds in the pupils, then it can be assumed that Puccini's operetta stories can also influence and form a picture of gendered past worlds in the pupils. The same goes: Historical materials must be critically framed so that they don't simply re-iterate unexamined norms.

Anderson (2022) also demonstrates that curriculum design in music education is a function of teachers' perceptions, values and practical decisions. Curriculum is not simply a list of works, but it is a process of selection, legitimation, sequencing and explanation. In the classroom, the way that Puccini is presented can make the difference between students' experiencing the operas as emotional masterpieces or as documents of culture in its particular historical context. In turn, Devaney (2023)

illustrates how myths concerning composers and creativity can be exacerbated in teaching and assessment. Composer-centred myth can shed the light of gendered politics in the female characters through which the music generates much of its emotional power in a Puccini-centred context.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

This article investigates pedagogical potential of Puccini's love-and-death paradigm in the construction of feminine ideals in music education during the early twentieth century. The three objectives of the study are: It first examines the recent research in opera pedagogy, classical music curriculum, gender in higher music education and Puccini reception to locate the educational potential of opera. Second, it views Puccini's tragic feminine paradigm as a historical-cultural discourse and one which might be passed on by the means of music-appreciation and conservatoire practices. Thirdly, it suggests a critical pedagogical approach to teaching Puccini in the classroom of History of Education and music education that will not regenerate idealised female suffering (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

The study is guided by three research questions.

- How does recent scholarship conceptualise opera and classical music as educational sources?
- What feminine ideals are made visible when Puccini's love-and-death paradigm is read through historical educational discourse?
- How can a systematic literature review support a non-generic, historically grounded interpretation of Puccini within the scope of History of Education?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Opera, Historical Consciousness and Music Education

At the heart of this article lies the connection between music education and historical consciousness as revealed by Žnidaršič (2022), who demonstrates that interdisciplinary interaction between music education and history can have an impact on the musical preferences and interactions with twentieth-century classical music. Her study is important here in that it validates that music does not enter education as 'sound' but as 'historically framed experience'. Students' relationships with the canon become more reflective when students learn the significance of a work, how it was received, and what social assumptions surrounded it. Another seminal study, by Zicari and Biasutti (2025), concerns early-twentieth-century recordings in higher music education. They indicate that students can appreciate historical recordings but also do not have structured curricular opportunities to analyse them critically. This is directly applicable to Puccini pedagogy. Often, Puccini's repertory is available, is admired, and is emotionally accessible; but, availability is not critical education. If there is no historical context, learners can repeat other learned listening patterns, such as romanticizing female suffering. In the early twentieth century, notions of refinement and moral development were used to influence the kind of listening and appreciation that was encouraged in music education. While this article does not necessarily use dated references, the historical context can be pieced together from the recent literature on historical recordings, the use of classical music in the classroom, and the formation of

a curriculum canon. The issue is that music education historically educated listeners, as well as performers. It was used to educate them in hearing and what to value, and to correlate some musical feelings with some moral implications. Narrative and affect were especially effective in this process in the case of opera (Anderson, 2022; Devaney, 2023; Johansson & Georgii-Hemming, 2021; Westerlund, 2019). However, Puccini's works were pedagogically strong because they certainly offered little bits of recognition in emotional expression. Students could hear tenderness, fear, desire, resignation and death made musically intelligible. The problem is that this recognition could be adopted as a norm. In the repertory, if the suffering women are always the most moving, the curriculum may teach that women are more valuable when they are suffering and that they are made less valuable when they are enjoying themselves. A historic-educational reading thus considers listening as an ethical act rather than only an aesthetic act (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

2.2. Puccini's Love-and-Death Paradigm as Gendered Cultural Curriculum

A common way to approach the singing roles of women in Puccini's operas is to talk about sacrifice, love and death. Recent scholarship on Puccini is relevant here as it brings to light the existence of gendered interpretation. In this sense, Bulancea and Bulancea (2020) holds that Puccini's female characters are often created in the middle of burden and sacrifice of love, and that woman's virtue is tied to the sacrifice of the feeling. As Jenkins (2025) has shown, Puccini's late operatic universe still raises issues of gender, violence, voice, and the potential of reinterpretation. These studies show that the feminine paradigm of Puccini is not a critical theme that has been completely explored and utilized, but it is still alive in the current interpretation. "love-and-death paradigm" does not mean that all Puccini heroines are the same. Instead it describes a pattern of behaviors that is consistently observed in the educationally related context. Females are frequently morally accessible via their acts of attachment, loyalty, vulnerability, endurance and self-sacrifice. Their voices are endowed with extraordinary lyrical intensity, but their dramatic authority is often compromised by the fact that they disappear, die, renounce or change under pressure. Vocal centrality and narrative dispossession is pedagogically important. It can let education look up at the female expression and let the female loss be normalised (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025). Such a paradigm, seen as cultural curriculum, is from a History of Education perspective. It provides models of feeling. It states that feminine love is serious when it is total, suffering is sublime when it is made music, and death is perfect for a woman's morality. This is not to say that teachers deliberately taught students these ideals. Instead, it suggests that the multiple curricular representations of tragic heroines as models of emotion may deposit these meanings in the learner's imagination (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025). It is worsened by Puccini's musical persuasiveness: the pedagogical issue. His orchestration, melodic contour, pacing and drama of timing often call for sympathy with the suffering woman. The music is not just the accompaniment for the story, but it is the dignity and the intensification of it. This can be a challenge in an educational environment where critique is made difficult. Student resistance to the gender ideology may lead them to think that they are rejecting the beauty of the music. It is important, then, to distinguish between admiration and submission, in a

critical pedagogy. It can highlight Puccini's mastery and ponder its reliance on the aestheticization of feminine suffering (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

2.3. Gendered Canon Formation and Feminine Ideals in Music Education

Another significant aspect in the literature is gendered canon formation. Classroom practices can maintain myths of composers and creative authority, as demonstrated by Devaney (2023). The canon of Western art music frequently frames musical genius around a male composer, with women as performers, muses, characters, students or symbolic bodies. This structure is especially complicated in Puccini pedagogy: the authority of the male composer achieves its security thanks to the indelible voices and deaths of the female characters. The heroine is a figure of emotionality, yet one of the sidelines of the authorial power. Borgström Källén and Ferm Almqvist (2025) pinpoint consecrated and peripheral positions within music education which can be used to create a gender hierarchy. Their result contributes to the understanding of the non-neutrality of repertory study. Canonical status can confer authority to influence institutional memory. A lack of framing in a gender-critical perspective can lead to representation of feminine ideals in what constitutes educated musical taste, especially when Puccini's operatic works are repeatedly included as main repertoire. In addition to preserving works, the canon is also a repository of habits of interpretation. Werner and Kuusi (2025) argue that the gender equality discourse in classical music higher education may be restricted when it is framed in terms of individual effort of the actors and not the structural situation. It is significant for the teaching of the history of education because it could be used to encourage students to think about Puccini's heroines as individual tragic characters rather than as an example of a representational order. A critical historical approach, however, would question what institutions and contexts give these heroines their significance—patriarchal social norms, imperial fantasies, class-based representations, institutional listening, and curricular veneration of tragedy written by men. Even more, Ramstedt (2023) shows how the male norm is entrenched in classical music culture. This is important for Puccini because his women are not only characters, but are also the means by which male genius is affirmed. They are expressive in their suffering, thus confirming the emotional range of the composer. In educational environments, this might lead students to believe that there's one universal masculine artistic authority, and that feminine experience is a matter for interpretation. Such an asymmetry needs to be made visible in a History of Education approach.

2.4. Opera Pedagogy, Curriculum and Emotional Formation

The problems of opera pedagogy are not limited to the performance training. It involves listening, contextually interpreting, discussing the drama, historical analysis and affective response. Anderson (2022) reveals that music teachers' understanding of purpose and practice influences their curriculum design. In the context of opera, it means whether Puccini is used for vocal technique, theatrical realism, national repertory, the expression of emotion, or as a historical artifact. The effects of each curricular framing are different. They show that if appropriately conducted, opera can be pedagogically fruitful for social and emotional learning, as Soliveres et al. (2021) and others do. But that productivity must be backed by important caution, too. Emotional development as opera is not supposed to be uncritical admiration of the emotional codes passed on

by the canon. The education of empathetic response to tragedy may be just as given as the tragedy itself, unless it is accompanied by an inquiry into the cultural contexts of the tragedy. It is therefore necessary to contextually and ethically understand emotion in music education. In the context of opera transmission, Leung (2024) also reveals a relationship between the knowledge and cultural policy of teachers and their students: teachers determine what students receive. The context of the operatic tradition studied in his book is different than Puccini's European experience, but the mechanism of education is of a similar nature. The opera comes to serve as a vehicle for cultural identity, institutional value and historical memory. In Puccini's instance, the remembrance that is passed on is not just musical, it is also gendered. Tragedy is based on the emotional syntax of the feminine. Therefore, it is recommended that a good article on the History of Education should not showcase general praise of opera education. It will have an informed critical look at the power of education. The love-and-death paradigm of Puccini is pedagogically powerful because it can function in the affective realm, where learners feel they are only reacting to beauty (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

2.5. Literature Gap

Although there is an increased number of publications on opera pedagogy, gender in music education, and Puccini reception, there is a specific gap to be filled at the intersection of the three fields. Recent studies have focused on opera as a means of social-emotional learning, on opera transmission in schools, on early twentieth century recordings in conservatoire education and on gender inequality in higher music education. Previous studies of Puccini scholarship have focused on the gendered connotations of sacrifice, violence, and voice. Research on Puccini's tragic feminine paradigm as a historical-educational device in the music classroom of early 20th-century is, however, limited (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025). This discrepancy is significant because the History of Education does not simply study formal schools, but the historical mechanisms of societies' transmission of ideals, values, identities and norms. One of these processes is music education. Canonisation of a repertory shapes the definition of educated listeners and performers' expectations of what is culturally valuable to recognise. This contribution is fitting for the scope of the journal as it addresses education in the related aspects of history, culture, and methodology, instead of treating the opera as a solitary art object (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

3. Methodology

The method in this study is systematic literature review with historical-documentary interpretation and thematic synthesis. The systematic review component was chosen as the topic involves multiple fields and there is a need for the transparent organisation of relevant scholarship. The historical-documentary component was needed, since the article deals with educational meanings ascribe to opera and gender over time and not with measurable learner outcomes. Thematic synthesis was employed to link the selected literature to the article's three research questions (Ghamrawi et al., 2025; Page et al., 2021; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020).

Table 1: Methodological Design and Scope Alignment.

Methodological Component	Operational Decision in this Article	Justification for History of Education Scope
Research design	Systematic literature review supported by historical-documentary interpretation and thematic synthesis.	Allows recent scholarship to be mapped while preserving the interpretive nature of educational history.
Corpus and sources	Peer-reviewed articles, scholarly book chapters, method papers, and selected policy-facing music education studies from 2019-2026.	Keeps the review current while focusing on educational transmission, opera pedagogy, gender formation, and curriculum memory.
Search fields	Opera pedagogy, Puccini reception, gender in classical music, music curriculum, conservatoire culture, and educational historiography.	Connects Puccini's repertory to schooling, cultural formation, and historical models of femininity rather than isolated music analysis.
Analytical procedure	Extract, code, compare, and synthesise sources into five themes: opera as pedagogy, tragic femininity, love/death codes, curriculum transmission, and critical re-reading.	Converts scattered literature into a coherent historical-educational argument.
Quality control	CASP-informed appraisal, PRISMA-informed transparency, citation verification, and exclusion of unsupported general websites.	Strengthens scholarly reliability and prevents generic or non-verifiable claims.

The design is based on the logic of systematic review guidance in educational research and adapted for a topic in the History of Education from the humanities. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2020) state that for educational research, it is necessary that systematic reviews specify the field, inclusion criteria and the synthesis procedure be transparent. Ghamrawi et al. (2025) also describe systematic review as a multi-step process that includes a question, a search strategy, screening, appraisal, extraction and synthesis. To enhance transparency, particularly in the decision-making process about search, screening and inclusion, PRISMA 2020 principles have been applied. It is not a quantitative meta-analysis as the literature available is qualitative, historical, theoretical and interpretive.

3.1. Search Strategy for Literature Review

The literature search was conceived to locate recent peer-reviewed research which relates to at least one of the following focus areas: opera pedagogy, music education and history, gender issues in classical music education, and Puccini reception. Academic databases and publisher platforms were targeted for the search, with a focus on those related to education, music, history, and culture. These comprised Cambridge Core, SAGE Journals, Taylor & Francis Online, ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar and selected publisher pages with complete bibliographic data. The search period was restricted primarily to the years 2020–2026 to ensure recent reference in the work, and older primary documents were not used as references (Ghamrawi et al., 2025; Page et al., 2021; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020). The main search terms were combined with Boolean operators. The search terms used were: “opera pedagogy” AND “music education”; “Puccini” AND “women” OR “gender”; “classical music” AND “higher music education” AND “gender”; “early twentieth-century recordings” AND “music education”; “opera” AND “historical sources” AND “classroom”; “music curriculum” AND “canon”; and “History of Education” AND “music education”.

3.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The selection criteria were the following. First, the studies had to be published in the

years 2020 to 2026 (unless a source was used only as a guideline for the methods, and was then within the same timeframe). Second, the studies had to be peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, edited research volumes, or authoritative methodological resources. The exclusion criteria were also clearly defined. The following sources were excluded: general websites as there was no scholarly author and therefore no educational value, journalistic reviews, unsupported blogs, broad histories of opera that did not have an educational value, an article from a music theory magazine that did not have a gender or pedagogical aspect, and an article from a music theory magazine that did not have an educational value for a different musical genre unrelated to opera. Sources were also omitted if bibliographic information was not available or the claims were not related to the scope of History of Education. This minimised the risk of writing a generic or poorly evidenced article (Ghamrawi et al., 2025; Page et al., 2021; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020). The final synthesis was based on 32 primary sources after screening. These were recent research work on opera in education, early 20th century recording in higher music education, music-history pedagogy, curriculum design, composer myths, gender equality in higher music education, gender inequality in classical music culture, opera policy, Puccini's feminine characters and reparative staging of Puccini. The research design was supported by methodological sources on systematic review (Page et al., 2021), PRISMA (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020), and qualitative appraisal (Ghamrawi et al., 2025; Page et al., 2021).

3.3. Data Extraction and Synthesis

Five variables were targeted in data extraction: bibliographic identity, educational context, gender relevance, historical relevance, and contribution to the research questions of the article. The review noted author, year, title, objective, method/disciplinary orientation and key finding for each of the included sources. The information extracted was coded thematically after being tabulated. Originally, these codes were: "opera as pedagogical medium," "historical listening," "canon and authority," "gendered institutional norms," "female suffering," "curricular framing," "teacher mediation" and "critical reinterpretation." (Ghamrawi et al., 2025; Page et al., 2021; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020). The analytic themes resulting from the grouping of codes using thematic synthesis were: opera as historical pedagogical medium, Puccini's tragic heroines and feminine ideals, love, death and moral sentiment as pedagogical codes, gendered canon and institutional memory, and implications for early twentieth-century music education. The analysis section is organized by these themes. The synthesis was interpretive and not aggregative. It did not tally the number of studies that addressed each theme; rather, it explored how the various concepts explored in the various fields intersected in regard to the educational construction of gendered ideals (Ghamrawi et al., 2025; Page et al., 2021; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020). It was the historical-documentary interpretation that was not applied to archival school documents, but to Puccini's operatic paradigm. This is a constraint and a conscious methodological decision. The article utilizes the latest scholarship to present Puccini's operas as 'cultural documents' that circulated educationally. This thus reflects opera in the education as a historical source as Young (2022) posits that classical music and opera could be applied to analyse social meanings in history education.

3.4. Quality Assessment

Using criteria adapted from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2024) qualitative

checklist and systematic review guidance for education research, quality assessment was carried out. Clarity of research aim, research question relevance, methodological transparency, evidence credibility, scholarly venue, and contribution to synthesis were the criteria used in the assessment. Studies were not excluded for using different methods. If evidence was credible and the argument was relevant to the research questions, a qualitative case study, policy analysis, theoretical essay or historical pedagogy article could also be relevant (Ghamrawi et al., 2025; Page et al., 2021; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020). The assessment for each source was based on how it contributes to the educational-historical argument rather than on statistical comparability (Borgström Källén & Ferm Almqvist, 2025; MacGregor, 2024; Werner & Kuusi, 2025).

3.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out in three stages. First, selected literature was read for explicit educational claims, in this case, how the opera, classical music, historical recordings or curriculum was presented as a learning material. Second, it was read for gendered assumptions: the description of femininity, authority, voice, equality, or canon formation. The two readings were then syncretized, with the idea that Puccini's love-and-death paradigm is pedagogical. This enabled the study to shift from literature mapping to historical-educational argument (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025). The final analysis is organised thematically rather than chronologically. This structure was selected for the following reasons: The article does not aim to describe Puccini's career and the evolution of music education from one year to the next. Rather, it points to the educational functions that can be used to build ideals in tragic opera. Thus, the analysis questions what Puccinian tragedy teaches, how it teaches, and what critical pedagogy can do with that inheritance (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

4. Analysis

Five key themes are identified in the analysis. First, opera can be a historical pedagogical medium, as it provides the learner with an integrated source of sound, the narrative, social imagery, and emotion. Second, because Puccini's tragic heroines are representations of perfect ideals of womanhood that can be learnt—woman equals love, endurance, sacrifice, and beautified death. Third, the love and death are moral-emotional codes that can be used to educate students to appreciate suffering as beauty. Fourth, the canon and institutional memory help to consolidate these meanings by continually re-enacting male-authored feminine tragedy as culture at its best. Fifth, the implications for education are not limited to the past: to teach the repertory responsibly, contemporary teachers and conservatoires must be critical about Puccini (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

Table 2: Core SLR Articles Used for Thematic Synthesis.

Author(s) and Year	Focus	Main Contribution	Relevance to the Study
Soliveres et al. (2021)	Opera in primary education for the development of social and emotional skills	To examine opera as an educational practice supporting social and emotional learning.	Opera can support social-emotional learning when pedagogically mediated; this confirms opera's educational power beyond performance training.

Author(s) and Year	Focus	Main Contribution	Relevance to the Study
Young (2022)	Concerto for Classroom: Teaching with Classical Music and Opera as Historical Sources	To show how classical music and opera can be used as historical sources in teaching.	Opera can be decoded as historical evidence; this supports using Puccini as a source for gendered educational meanings.
Žnidaršič (2022)	Interdisciplinary Interaction between Music Education and History	To examine interactions between music education and history in shaping musical preferences.	Historical framing influences students' engagement with classical music and supports interdisciplinary educational interpretation.
Anderson (2022)	Understanding curriculum design in the perceptions and practices of classroom music teachers	To investigate how music teachers understand curriculum design.	Curriculum is shaped by teacher values and practices; Puccini's educational meaning depends on pedagogical framing.
Devaney (2023)	Investigating how composing teaching and assessment reinforce myths about composers	To examine beliefs about composers in classroom teaching and assessment.	Composer-centred myths can be reproduced through pedagogy; this is relevant to male-authored canonical opera.
Ramstedt (2023)	A Man Is Practically the General Norm	To analyse gender inequality and whiteness in the classical music scene.	The male norm remains powerful in classical music culture, shaping authority and legitimacy.
Leung (2024)	Transmission of Cantonese opera in school music education	To survey teachers regarding opera transmission in school music education.	Opera education depends on teacher confidence, policy, cultural identity, and institutional support.
Vincent et al. (2024)	Risky business: policy legacy and gender inequality in Australian opera production	To analyse gender inequality in opera production through cultural policy.	Opera institutions reproduce gender inequality through policy legacies and production structures.
Borgström Källén and Ferm Almqvist (2025)	Gender equality in higher music education	To reveal constructions of gender inequality in higher music education.	Institutional positions and unreflective practices sustain gendered hierarchies in music education.
Werner and Kuusi (2025)	Gender equality discourse in classical music higher education	To analyse how gender equality is discussed in classical music higher education.	Gender discourse can individualise inequality rather than transform institutional norms.
Zicari and Biasutti (2025)	Early twentieth-century recordings in higher music education	To examine how conservatoire students understand early twentieth-century recordings.	Historical recordings can enrich curriculum but require structured critical teaching.
Jenkins (2025)	Her Fresh Voice: Reparatively Staging Puccini's Turandot	To reinterpret Puccini's Turandot through reparative feminist staging.	Puccini's gendered operatic world remains open to critical re-reading and pedagogical repair.
Bulancea and Bulancea (2020)	Puccini's Feminine Characters Between Duty Imperative and Love Sacrifice	To analyse Puccini's female characters through duty and love sacrifice.	Puccini's women are frequently framed through virtue, love, sacrifice, and tragic affect.

4.1. Opera as Historical Pedagogical Medium

The first is that opera is a historical pedagogical medium. This is the most crucial connection for Puccini with the journal's History of Education focus. Opera combines music, text, staging, gesture, costume, and narrative, social conflict, and affect into one educational object. It is susceptible to being taught as performance, literature, history, cultural identity, emotional development and social criticism. For this reason, the opera is not just a music education object, but also a cultural document, with which students learn how to imagine authority, gender, class, nation, and morality (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

Young (2022) gives the most comprehensive argument for opera as a historical classroom source. Musical culture is imbued with social meanings, he says, and historians shouldn't overlook that, as students can come to learn to analyze music. This is one way to directly help this article. Therefore, Puccini's operas can be seen as historical documents, not for their factual accounts of female lives but for the way in which they

perform cultural fantasies of femininity. Fantasies are educationally significant when students are allowed to admire, imitate, perform or emotionally identify with them.

Soliveres et al. (2021) demonstrate that opera can be an active medium for social and emotional skill development. That's right, opera's pedagogically potent, but also makes the critical problem more acute. Emotional learning is always value-laden. Empathy is reciprocated in the conditions that an opera sets for it. Puccini's heroines are the ones who are given maximum sympathy on the verge of suffering or dying. The listener is taught to feel intense love for a woman when she is weak, lonely or morally cleansed through sacrifice. It has to be critically interpreted historically for this emotional education.

Leung (2024) illustrates how opera transmission in schools is influenced by three factors: teachers, policy, and cultural legitimacy. This is significant, as it suggests that opera does not self-propagate. It is up to the institutions to determine what operas are important and what values are attributed to them. Selection and legitimization of opera as part of what was considered music education occurred in similar ways in early twentieth-century music education. After Puccini developed into a teachable author, so did his tragic feminine paradigm.

4.2. Puccini's Tragic Heroines and the Educational Construction of Femininity

The second theme is about the educational constructions of femininity in Puccini's tragic heroines. The female roles in Puccini's works tend to be memorable. Their arias, deaths, laments and moments of recognition become emotional heart of the work. But this centrality is not clear. The heroine enjoys musical privilege, yet is narrationally limited. She is provided with lyrical force but is frequently lacking in sustained agency. The voice becomes indelible, just because it is put under pressure in the drama (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

Bulancea and Bulancea (2020) points to a common link between duty, love and sacrifice in the female roles of Puccini's repertoire. Educationally, this relationship is relevant as it transforms social expectations into an aesthetic experience. The worth of the feminine character is linked to her ability to love intensely, suffer pain, and accept loss. If these are taught without questioning, students might come to see that such femininity is beautiful, and so, historically created. As shown by Jenkins (2025), Puccini's gendered dramaturgy is open for reparative reinterpretation. Her Turandot is particularly helpful in demonstrating that critical staging need not merely repeat inherited meanings, but that it can disrupt them. In the context of music education, that means that music education does not have to be "about" not teaching Puccini, and the repertory does not have to be abandoned. Rather, teachers can employ Puccini to instruct students about the production, dissemination, challenge and reinvention of gendered ideals.

The educational relevance of the early twentieth century is related to the relationship between affect and norm. Students were frequently asked to emotionally react to great music in the setting of music appreciation. In Puccini, women are often the ones who suffer the most but emotionally at the highest point. The pattern can convey an idea of femininity that is structured around purity, devotion and redeeming suffering. It is not command based. Teaches by beauty. The student learns the ideal due to the music being moving (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

4.3. Love, Death and Moral Sentiment as Pedagogical Codes

Thirdly is the use of love and death as pedagogical codes. In Puccini's tragic

paradigm love is far from being a private emotion. It turns into a moral identity test. The good quality of love is when it is faithful, absolute, forgiving and self-sacrificing, that is a feminine quality. Then death serves as the dramatic conclusion at which this ideal is fulfilled. Though the heroine's suffering is not merely something that happens in the plot, it is a lesson in emotional virtue (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

This is significant with respect to the history of education and music education in particular because the early twentieth century music education was heavily reliant on the canon to develop moral sentiment. It was hoped that students would learn to feel appropriately to art greatness. Such feeling was given full room to play in Puccini's operas. The beauty of a dying aria, or of a last recognition scene, might be interpreted as proof of the heroine's inner purity. Thus, music was used to promote a moral code based on gender (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

Literature on curriculum design explains how this process is done. Anderson (2022) highlights that the curriculum is reliant on teacher perceptions and decisions. To Puccini, it signifies that love to the same aria may be educated as a vocal beauty, as a dramatic realism, as an Italian opera style, as an emotional expression, or as a gender ideology. The gendered moral code is not discerned if only the first three are emphasised. With the fourth in the mix, students can grasp historically.

The analysis of composer myths (Devaney, 2023) also aids in the explanation of the persistence of the sentimental codes. In education, the composer may be presented as a unique, isolated figure, and his/her social and gendered experiences may get lost in the universal human experience of his/her music. These tragic women of Puccini appear to be the universal emotion and not the femininity created by the culture. A critical historical pedagogy should not go with this universalising move. It has to question who is the universalised subject, who is the beautified sufferer, and who is the protected authority of the canon.

Love and death therefore operate as codes of education, as they organize the interpretation. They let students know what to admire. Love is the teacher of devotion and death is the teacher of completion and music is the teacher of the beauty of both. History education does not aim to eliminate the emotions from learning, but to make the emotions historically conscious. Pupils should be encouraged to ask: How is an operatic culture emotionally significant and how did this meaning permeate through education (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

4.4. Gendered Canon and Institutional Memory

The fourth theme is the canon/institution and memory of gender. Canonical repertory is institutional authoritative. If a work is repeatedly taught, performed, examined and admired, it becomes an item of an educated musician's or listener's knowledge. This authority is found in many educational contexts with Puccini's operas. They are regarded as quintessential examples of operatic realism, vocal expression and theatrical effect. However, their canonical status also makes their gendered representations last (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

Borgström Källén and Ferm Almqvist (2025) demonstrate how gender inequality may be reproduced within the organisation of central/periphery positions in higher music education. This is not just about who teaches and performs, it also pertains to the works and meanings that are consecrated. Such male-authored tragedies of female suffering

may have central curricular spaces and women's creative agency and alternative stories are peripheral, then the curriculum is complicit in gendered institutional memory.

Werner and Kuusi (2025) warn against the limitations of the gender equality discourse when it focuses on personal rather than institutional inequality. This is of immediate application to Puccini pedagogy. A teacher may state that a heroine suffers in a specific plot, or that a specific plot is sexist, but not alter or examine the canon as a whole. A broader institutional question arises: how and why have these pieces been preserved as core emotional knowledge and how have educational institutions taught their students to value these pieces?

The male norm is a recurring element in classical music culture that Ramstedt (2023) notes. In Puccini, the male norm is seen in his authorship, interpretation, institutional status and frequently in his narrative perspective. The female character is the focus of voice and affect, while the structure of value is tethered to male creative power. Music education can have this form, when it shows a composer's emotional insight without posing the question of how the suffering of women can become the material of this insight.

The gendered canon is thus not just a list of works, but also a memory system. It has some memories that valued some emotions, characters, voices and authors more than others. It also helps students to recall them. This memory system is the key to the pedagogical success of Puccini's love-and-death paradigm. Instead of erasure, it is the critical re-memory of the works as historically significant and ideologically complex, rather than as seemingly universal and emotional (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

4.5. Implications for Early Twentieth-Century Music Education

The fifth theme is implications for early 20th century music education. The article posits that the tragic feminine paradigm of Puccini should be thought of as part of a cultural pedagogy. The early 20th century music education was involved in the construction of modernity's music listeners. Students were exposed to repertoires that represented cultural value through school music, the conservatoire experience, public lectures, recordings, and appreciation-based materials. However, Puccini's popularity and emotional accessibility made his works particularly apt for such circulation (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

When given curricular attention in a structured manner, these early recordings offer an opportunity to question the commonplace thinking about the repertoire of Western art music of the twentieth century, as demonstrated by Zicari and Biasutti (2025). This finding is in line with the educational implication of the present article. Historical music materials do not need to be used to validate the canon. They should be accustomed to raising questions about the hearing, the estimation and the transmission of the canon. Puccini's operas can thus be used as a means of exploring the transference of gendered emotion through music pedagogy.

Žnidaršič (2022) shows that by linking music education and historic facts, students' preferences and understanding can be formed. For Puccini, this implies that pupils can be directed to listen to tragedy as a private emotion, as well as to as a historical discourse. They may explore ways in which notions of femininity, social respectability, empire, class, and moral sentiment all become part of the operatic imagination in the early decades of the 20th century. With this teaching, Puccini can be removed from the catalogue of repertoire and placed in the historical record.

The conclusions for the early 20th-century education are that music appreciation should be understood as a space of gender formation. Listening wasn't passive. It provided students with the opportunity to give value to some sounds and stories. But if the most prized and cherished role of women was to suffer well, then music education helped to create a gendered affective order. It was not necessary to state the order of this. It might be acquired during repeated emotional experiences (Borgström Källén & Ferm Almqvist, 2025; MacGregor, 2024; Werner & Kuusi, 2025).

The ramifications for contemporary teachers are significant, as well. Puccini can be utilized by teachers to get students to see how feminine ideals were constructed historically. They can compare and admire, make and critique, analyse agency, discuss alternative interpretations and relate operatic tragedy to the wider field of education history. It maintains the repertory while remaining uncompromising in questioning the gendered assumptions that are contained within it (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

5. Discussion

The results indicate that Puccini's love-and-death paradigm is rich in pedagogical potential, when interpreted from the perspective of the History of Education. This paradigm is not restricted to operatic storytelling, but to the culture that can be used as a mechanism to make feminine ideals emotionally persuasive. Such a mechanism might influence learnable understanding of gender without any instructions in early twentieth-century music education where opera and classical repertory were employed to improve taste, sentiment, and historical awareness. This is the main contribution of the article (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

The talk should start by distinguishing. What the article isn't suggesting is that Puccini's operas are being turned into propaganda, or that every time a student gets in touch with anything Puccinian, it's the same gendered result. Instead, it is argued that the pedagogical effects of the canonization of a tragic opera are created by the selection, framing, admiration and repetition. The educational institution provides the authority for the work, the work provides the beauty of gendered suffering with which the learner is granted culture. This is the interaction that makes the theme appropriate for the History of Education (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

The SLR reveals that recent research backs up each aspect of this argument. Opera education research validates that opera has social, emotional, cultural and curricular uses (Soliveres et al., 2021; Leung, 2024). Music-history pedagogy validates that classical music and opera may be considered as sources and not as an ornamental addition (Young, 2022; Žnidaršič, 2022). Research on the music curriculum reveals that teacher framing affects the meaning of music education (Anderson, 2022). Classical music education is still shaped by unequal norms and institutional memory, as confirmed by gender scholarship (Borgström Källén & Ferm Almqvist, 2025; Ramstedt, 2023; Werner & Kuusi, 2025). It is confirmed by the Puccini-centric criticism that his operas are still subject to discussion on the female voice, suffering and reparatory reinterpretation (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025).

Additionally, the reasons why the article should not be generic are discussed. A generic article would talk about the education of emotions through opera, how Puccini wrote tragic women, and the critical education of music. The present article makes a

claim more specific: Puccini's love-and-death paradigm is transformed into a pedagogy of beauty, and music education in the early twentieth century furnished the institutional venues in which such beauty would become a gendered ideal. This claim is limited to the interaction between repertory, pedagogy and historical cultural formation (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

The term "femininity ideals" is not thus employed in an abstract manner. In this article it is used to describe a collection of values that were traditionally taught to students: Purity, Devotion, Obedience, Endurance, Emotional Availability, Sacrificial Love, and Moral completion through suffering. The ideals are not only straightforward reflections of social reality. They are aesthetic constructions, pedagogical in their incorporation within curriculum, performance training, listening guides and institutional reverence. These heroines of Puccini provide the ideals with sound and emotion (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

The article also has implications for teacher education. There is a need for strategies to implement when teaching canonical music works as complex cultural sources in music education and history education. This involves more than a quick "reminder" of sexism or a question to the students if they enjoy the song. It needs a structured pedagogy, including contextual framing, character analysis, comparison of staging interpretations, discussion of institutional canon formation and reflection on the operation of emotion in learning. These strategies are in line with the latest calls to be more reflective, inclusive and historically aware in music education (Anderson, 2022; Devaney, 2023; Johansson & Georgii-Hemming, 2021; Westerlund, 2019).

Finally, it is urged that the History of Education should take music more seriously. The themes of policy, schools, textbooks, teachers and institutions are common in educational history. These are important, but music teaches. It creates sensibility, collective memory, moral judgments and identity. Of particular significance is the opera, which combines story and music in a way that can make ideology "sticky". In this sense, using Puccini's love-and-death paradigm can be a valuable case study for expanding the evidentiary field of educational history (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025).

6. Conclusion

This article has investigated Puccini's love-and-death paradigm as a historical pedagogical discourse in the first decade of the 20th century in music education. It has posited that Puccini's female protagonists of tragedy should not be simply interpreted as operatic roles or as musicological marvels. They should also be read as signs that were circulated as educationally to make ideologies of femininity persuasive on the emotional level. In the classroom, conservatoire, music-appreciation practices, and public educational culture, the tragic representations of opera could help in the development of the gendered moral imagination. The systematic literature review revealed that there are recent studies that support this view. Research in opera pedagogy shows that opera has an educational effect on social and emotional aspects. Music-history pedagogy provides proof of how classical music may be used as historical evidence. Based on curriculum research, it can be concluded that teacher mediation affects meaning. The gender scholarship demonstrates that classical music education remains to be reproducing institutional hierarchies and male norms. The representation of women in

Puccini's operas is a live critical question, as is evident in Puccini-focused criticism. The synthesis of these strands is the contribution of the article around a History of Education question. The overarching conclusion is that Puccini's love-and-death paradigm has pedagogical power as it teaches through beauty. It is not a teaching of feminine sacrifice per se, but makes sacrifice moving, memorable, and cultural prestigious. It does this while transforming suffering born of sex into a refinement ideal. This discovery does not entail the rejection of Puccini's music. Rather, it demands a critical pedagogy that can convey the value of the historical, the aesthetic, and the ideologically complicated. In the field of History of Education, the article shows that opera can be considered a pedagogical source. It extends beyond the formal policy and schooling to the cultural curriculum of listening, performance and aesthetic judgement. In music education it demonstrates that the canon has to be presented in a historically and gender-critically aware manner. The significance of Puccini is not that his works are without criticism, but that they provide great opportunities for understanding how education, art, emotion and gender have historically interacted.

7. Recommendations

In the first place, music-teachers should educate themselves and their students on the listening of Puccini's music, offering it in a historically-based critical context. The students should be asked to consider not only the melodic beauty and dramatic effect but also the gendered meanings of suffering, sacrifice and death. Listening questions can include: who is being listened to, whose voice is not heard, and who is being invited to sympathize with the music? (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025). Secondly, comparative interpretation should be a part of opera pedagogy. Comparisons may be made between traditional stagings and critical or reparative interpretations of the works, particularly in *Turandot* and *Madama Butterfly*. This helps students to understand that the meaning of a canon is not predetermined. Produced by performance, institution and pedagogy (Bulancea & Bulancea, 2020; Jenkins, 2025; Willson, 2023; Xuan, 2025). Thirdly, there is a need for gender-sensitive curriculum review in conservatories and music departments. Simple appendages of repertoire lists, tacking on works by women, should not be the only changes that are made; the interpretive framework should be changed also. They should analyze the ways in which central repertory creates the values of gender, authority, and emotional value (Borgström Källén & Ferm Almqvist, 2025; MacGregor, 2024; Werner & Kuusi, 2025). Fourthly, it is important for History of Education researchers to recognize that music, recordings, libretti, performance practices, and listening cultures are all valid education sources. These materials might provide insight into how societies edified taste, morality, gender and identity outside of formal textbook instruction.

7.1. Study Limitations

There are some limitations in the study. First, it is based upon a systematic review of recent scholarship and historical-documentary interpretation, not original research in archives. That is, it can detect and hypothesize a pedagogical pattern, but it has not yet been able to demonstrate how Puccini was taught during this period in all contexts. Second, it focused on recent English-language studies, giving emphasis to currency, which may have meant neglect of older foundational studies and of historical research

published in languages other than English. Third, Puccini's operas are addressed in a paradigm rather than being closely read in all of their scores and librettos. Fourth, the article concentrates on the feminine ideals and fails to examine class, race, colonialism, disability, and national identity, which are all relevant to works like *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot*.

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