

RICE UNIVERSITY

**Defining Manon:
Three Operas on Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut***

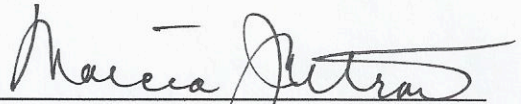
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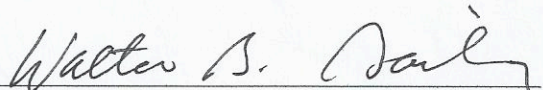
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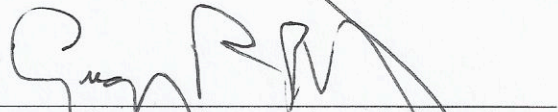
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ABSTRACT

Abbé Prévost's novel *L'Histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* (1731) has inspired at least four operas, notably by Daniel Auber, Jules Massenet, Giacomo Puccini, and Hans Werner Henze. This study will look at the three nineteenth-century operas based on that novel: Auber's *Manon Lescaut* (1856), Massenet's *Manon* (1884), and Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* (1893). Massenet's treatment receives the most attention because it is the most popular, and arguably the most well-known, of the three operas. I will discuss Manon's role in the novel and operas, and its impact on the dramatic conception of each work. In the three operas I will examine her arias and other music, and her relationships with other characters. The goal is to gain a better understanding of each composer's interpretation of Prévost's heroine and to explore why Manon is different in each work.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Although sometimes overshadowed by protagonists such as Carmen, Manon Lescaut remains an important female leading role in the operatic repertoire. She serves as the principal figure of no less than four operas,¹ two of which are still regularly performed worldwide. While it is not unusual to have several operas based on the same source material, it is remarkable that the four *Manon Lescaut* operas differ in plot and the characterization of Manon.

Manon Lescaut originates in Abbé Prévost's controversial novel, *L'Histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* (1731), the final volume of *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité* (Memoirs and Adventures of a Man of Quality). In this book, the Chevalier des Grieux is the main character. He falls in love with Manon and narrates their story after she dies of exhaustion in Louisiana. While the novel was banned initially due to issues of morality, it has remained popular since it was first distributed in the early eighteenth century, and it has inspired a number of theatrical adaptations.

Vivienne Mylne writes about the difficulties of adapting *Manon Lescaut* into a theatrical work: "On the face of it, *Manon Lescaut* does not seem very promising material for the stage, since the plot is somewhat repetitive."² Manon leaves the Chevalier des

¹ Daniel Auber's *Manon Lescaut* (1856), Jules Massenet's *Manon* (1884), Giacomo Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* (1893), and Hans Werner Henze's *Boulevard Solitude* (1952).

² Vivienne Mylne, "Prévost and 'Manon Lescaut,'" in *Massenet: Manon*, ed. Nicholas John (London: Calder, 1984), 29. Vivienne Gower Mylne (1922-1992) was an authority on eighteenth-century French literature. Her writings on Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* are referenced heavily in sources about the novel, and I have included many of her insights on the *histoire* in Chapter 2. Fittingly, she was also a fan of opera, having sung roles in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (1689), Mozart's *Idomeneo* (1781), and others in her lifetime, and she collaborated with Nicholas John in a guidebook to Massenet's *Manon*. Vivienne

Griex three times for wealthier men in the book. Prévost describes des Griex's thoughts for each of these events, but such introspective details do not translate to the stage easily. Providing another challenge for staged adaptations, an unnamed man and one of Manon's lovers narrate Prévost's book in a frame narration style, discussed in chapter 2. (I moved this to an earlier section) However, theatrical works started to appear soon after the book's publication. There are at least eight plays, some with songs; three ballets; and five film adaptations, including the silent movie *When a Man Loves* (1927), with John Barrymore as des Griex.³ *Manon Lescaut* has inspired at least four operas: Daniel Auber's *Manon Lescaut* (1856), Jules Massenet's *Manon* (1884), Giacomo Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* (1893), and Hans Werner Henze's *Boulevard Solitude* (1952).⁴

Mylne. "Prévost and 'Manon Lescaut,'" in *Massenet: Manon*, ed. Nicholas John (London: Calder, 1984), 29-38.

³ The eight plays are the anonymous *Suite de l'Histoire du Chevalier des Griex et de Manon Lescaut* (1762), Etienne Gosse's *Manon Lescaut et le Chevalier des Griex* (1820), Charles Henry Meltzer's *For the Love of Manon Lescaut* (1901), Edith Wharton's *Manon Lescaut* (1901), Vítězslav Nezval's *Manon Lescaut* (1940), Jean Barbeau's *Manon Lastcall* (1979), Michel Tremblay's *Damnée Manon, sacrée Sandra* (1981), and Jacques Layani's *Manon* (2006). The three ballets are *Manon Lescaut* (1830), choreographed by Jean-Louis Aumer with music by Fromental Halévy; *Manon Lescaut* (1846), choreographed by Giovanni Casati with music by Pio Bellini; and *L'histoire de Manon* (1974), choreographed by Sir Kenneth MacMillan with music by Jules Massenet arranged by Leighton Lucas. The four other films are *Manon Lescaut* (1926), directed by Arthur Robison; *Manon Lescaut* (1940), directed by Carmine Gallone; *Manon* (1949), directed by Henri-Georges Clouzot; and *Manon 70* (1968), a modern adaptation, directed by Jean Aurel.

⁴ The first dramatic musical work inspired by *Manon Lescaut* was Michael William Balfe's *The Maid of Artois* (1836). However, it is more of an operetta or ballad opera than an opera as Balfe includes ballads, some with ornamentation, instead of arias. Vivienne Mylne includes it in her list of plays inspired by Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*. It does not feature a Manon Lescaut or a Chevalier des Griex, and the finale changes substantially from Prévost's novel. Instead, the couple is Isoline and Jules, and they have a conflict with the Marquis. Because Balfe's *The Maid of Artois* is a lighter work than an opera, I will not cover it in this thesis. For more on this work and Balfe's music style see Raymond J. Walker, "Balfe's *The Maid of Artois*, 1836," *British Music Society News* 109 (Mar 2006): 16-17; Vivienne Mylne, "Prévost and 'Manon Lescaut,'" in *Massenet: Manon*, ed. Nicholas John (London: Calder, 1984), 31-33; and William Tyldesley,

I have chosen to look at three nineteenth-century operas for this thesis. Because *Boulevard Solitude* is a modern adaptation and important parts of the plot, like Manon's death, are not included, I did not write about Henze's opera.⁵

Manon's legacy has lived on past Prévost's novel, much like that of Don Juan from Tirso de Molina's *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest) (published 1630). Like Don Juan, Manon has a series of attributes that identifies her in various works. She is always portrayed as a young woman concerned with money and luxury, and she deserts men to find someone wealthier. She is always a woman of lesser wealth than the men.

Manon is an enigmatic character. In the novel, she rarely speaks and is not actively present for much of the book. Prévost tells the story through the perspective of des Grieux, which means that his description of Manon, the woman who scorned him several times and caused him to commit crimes, is biased and not trustworthy. The prejudiced narration clouds the depiction of Manon. She is a vague, mysterious character, but also an interesting one. Because there is little information about her from Prévost, she can be interpreted in many ways. I chose the title "Defining Manon," not because there is one concrete portrayal of her character among the three operas and the

Michael William Balfe: His Life and His English Operas (London: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), 61-69, 166.

⁵ For more information on Henze's *Boulevard Solitude* see Philippe Godefroid, "Boulevard Solitude: Manon 52," *L'avant-scène opéra* 123 (Sept 1989): 122-125; Hans-Gerd Winter, "Liebesdiskurse in den Libretti von Grete Weil und Ingeborg Bachmann," *Hamburger Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft* 20 (2003): 41-55; Hans-Joachim Wagner, *Studie zu Boulevard Solitude--Lyrisches Drama in 7 Bildern von Hans Werner Henze* (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse, 1988); and Mario Messinis, "Henze reinventa *Manon*: Polistilismo e teatralità--*Boulevard Solitude* festeggia a Genova i suoi cinquantanni ben portati," in *Ah, les beaux jours! Cronache musicali 1965-2002*, ed. P. Pinamonti (Venice: Olschki, 2002), 69-70.

original novel, but rather because it is quite the opposite. I was interested in why her characterization differs greatly from work to work. The purpose of this study is not to force Manon into a broad interpretation that covers all four sources. Instead, I explain how each composer distinguishes her and defines her as his own. Her portrayal in adaptations has ranged widely--from a loyal woman, who stays alive at the end of the anonymous play *Suite de l'Histoire du Chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* (1762), to a femme fatale, a figure who appeared frequently in nineteenth-century works.

Most generally, the femme fatale is an archetype of literature, music, and art. She is a mysterious woman who seduces men and often leads them into criminal actions. This unconventional and independent woman tempts men, linking sex to power for her own gain. Manon, like Homer's sirens and the Biblical Eve, can be seen as a warning of the dangers of unrestrained female sexuality. The femme fatale became increasingly popular in the Romantic period, a time when the *Manon Lescaut* operas were written.⁶ Manon Lescaut is arguably responsible for a series of femme fatale-like characters after her. Alexandre Dumas's *La Dame aux camélias* (The Lady of the Camellias) (1848), which inspired Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* (1853),⁷ refers to *Manon Lescaut* in the story, and the narrator even compares Marguerite Gautier, the female character in this book, to Manon. Marguerite, like Manon, is protected by several wealthy men, but falls

⁶ For more examples of the femme fatale, see Matilda in Matthew Gregory Lewis's novel *The Monk: A Romance* (1796); the lady in John Keats's ballad "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (1819); Dalila in Camille Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* (1877); Kundry in Richard Wagner's opera *Parsifal* (1882); and Salomé in Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* (1891) and in Richard Strauss's opera *Salome* (1905).

⁷ Catherine Clément discusses Verdi's *La Traviata* in Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing, ed. Susan McClary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 60-65.

in love with a young man with less money, causing a scandal to his family. Marguerite, like Manon, suffers an early natural death, this time by tuberculosis.

Prosper Mérimée's *Carmen* (1845), which inspired Georges Bizet's 1875 opera of the same name, features another woman who defies society's expectation of sexual chastity and fights to be free.⁸ Carmen is not a courtesan, like Manon and Marguerite, but a gypsy. Her murder is much more tragic than the natural deaths of the courtesans. This does not give Carmen an opportunity to repent or change at the end of the book. Bizet's *Carmen* was not successful when it premiered, as critics disapproved of the music and the lack of morality of many of the characters. There seems to have been much outrage that the main character was not a woman of virtue, especially at the socially conservative Opéra-Comique.⁹ More generally, a woman of such low moral standing was not a popular fit for mid-nineteenth-century opera. Massenet, who would start working on *Manon* just six years later, was one of the few that thought highly of the opera. In a letter of 1875 he wrote to Bizet: "How happy you must be at this time – it's a great success!"¹⁰ It is interesting that he thought highly of Bizet's controversial opera with its femme fatale lead, just before he wrote his own femme fatale opera.

Alban Berg's *Lulu*, composed several decades later (1934-1935), features a true femme fatale.¹¹ Lulu causes the death of many men in the opera. Sometimes this is

⁸ For more on Bizet's *Carmen* see Susan McClary, *Georges Bizet: Carmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁹ Michael Steen, *The Life and Times of the Great Composers* (London: Icon Books, 2003), 604-605.

¹⁰ This letter was undated, but it is assumed that Massenet wrote it about a week after the premiere; Mina Curtis, *Bizet and His World* (London: Greenwood Press, 1977), 395-396.

¹¹ *Lulu* was left incomplete at Alban Berg's death in 1935. The incomplete opera premiered in 1937 at the Zurich Opera. Erwin Stein completed a vocal score of act III shortly after Berg's death. Berg's wife asked Arnold Schoenberg to orchestrate the final

inadvertent, as in the Painter's suicide or the first husband's heart attack, and other times it is by her own hand, when she shoots her third husband, for instance. She breaks off one man's engagement by seducing him; commits adultery; and leads men, and one woman, to help her escape from prison. Toward the end of the opera, we see that her actions as a femme fatale cannot last for long, as the other characters try to blackmail her. In the last scene (of Berg's sketches for the incomplete work), Lulu works as a prostitute in London. She, her lover, and her female admirer are killed by two of Lulu's clients. Although she may be one of the most extreme examples of the femme fatale in opera, various scholars including Vivienne Mylne, Dietrich Kämper, and Peter-Eckhard Knabe have pointed out similarities between Manon and Lulu.¹²

Although Manon Lescaut seems almost tame in comparison, it is hard to imagine Marguerite and Violetta, Carmen, or Lulu without the model of Prévost's protagonist. As a figure of eighteenth-century literature, she is one of the early European women who embodies the idea that sexual openness and a desire for wealth or self-sufficiency could be deadly for women and dangerous for men. She is a highly influential character that led to a variety of works from the eighteenth century to the present.

Yet many of the operas based on Manon have received minimal attention. Robert Ignatius Letellier explains that Auber's lighter music is not considered a scholarly

act, but he declined. Friedrich Cerha orchestrated it over forty years later and the completed opera premiered at the Opera Garnier on February 24, 1979. For more information on *Lulu*, see Douglas Jarman, *Alban Berg, Lulu* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and George Perle, *The Operas of Alban Berg. II: Lulu* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

¹² Mylne, "Prévost and 'Manon Lescaut,'" 29-38; Vivienne Mylne, *Prévost: Manon Lescaut* (London: Edward Arnold, 1972); and Dietrich Kämper and Peter-Eckhard Knabe, "Un Requiem pour Manon," trans. Robert Nelson, in *Les Ecrivains français et l'opéra*, ed. Jean-Paul Capdevielle and Peter-Eckhard Knabe (Cologne: dme-Verlag, 1986), 185-195.

subject, and thus sources on Auber's *Manon Lescaut* are few.¹³ Overall, French nineteenth-century opera as a subject has not received the same attention as Austro-German orchestral works. Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* suffers from a similar fate. Many sources that discuss his work do so by comparing it to later operas, such as *La bohème*, *Suor Angelica*, and *Turandot*. Three articles and chapters by Suzanne Scherr and Susan Rutherford discuss *Manon Lescaut* exclusively and detail specific elements of the score, such as its compositional history or Manon's death scene.¹⁴ But Manon's music throughout the opera has not been examined. Scholars have looked most closely at Massenet's music and libretto, from a comprehensive examination of Leitmotifs by Hugh Macdonald, to several dissertations, to Massenet's own writings about the work.¹⁵ A few sources compare Massenet's *Manon* to Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, including one dissertation and two short articles by Mosco Carner and Richard Lalli.¹⁶ Vivienne Mylne, Naomi Segal, Patrick Brady, James P. Gilroy, and Lionel Gossman have written about different aspects of Prévost's novel, from Freudian theory to the importance of the

¹³ Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Daniel-Francois-Esprit Auber: The Man and His Music* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), xxv-xxxi.

¹⁴ Suzanne Scherr, "The Chronology of Composition of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*," in *Giacomo Puccini: L'uomo, il musicista, il panorama europeo*, ed. Gabriella Biagi Ravenni and Carolyn M. Gianturco (Lucca, Italy: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2007), 81-109; and Susan Rutherford, "'Non Voglio Morir': Manon's Death," *The Opera Quarterly* 24, no. 1-2 (2009): 36-50.

¹⁵ Hugh Macdonald, "A Musical Synopsis," in *Massenet: Manon*, ed. Nicholas John (London: Calder, 1984), 17-28; Dina Grundemann Foster, "Manon Lescaut and Her Representation in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Criticism, and Opera" (PhD Diss. Michigan State University, 1998); Andrew J. Miller, "Manon and Her Daughters: Literary Representations and Musical Adaptations of Three Femmes Fatales" (PhD Diss. Duke University, 2002); and Jules Massenet, *My Recollections*, trans. H. Villiers Barnett (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1919).

¹⁶ Clyde Simons Hiss, "Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* as Novel, Libretto and Opera" (DMA Diss. University of Illinois, 1967); Mosco Carner, "The Two 'Manons,'" in *Major and Minor*, ed. Mosco Carner (London: Duckworth, 1980) 136-138; and Richard Lalli, "The *Manon* Variations," *Opera News* 70, no. 9 (2006): 38.

desert scene.¹⁷ Two dissertations and one brief article by Dietrich Kämper and Peter-Eckhard Knabe compare some or all of the operas' librettos to Prévost's novel, and a DMA dissertation compares the novel to Puccini and Massenet's operas.¹⁸ What is lacking however, is an examination of Prévost's *histoire* in relationship to the music of the three nineteenth-century operas.

This thesis explores Manon's character in the three works. Chapter 2 concentrates on Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* and provides a summary of the larger themes of the novel, especially those associated with the operas. As we will see, a major element concerns the presence or absence of the double narrator. The next three chapters examine respectively the nineteenth-century operas and discuss the changes from the novel and the major areas explored by scholars. I have also analyzed Manon's music in each of the operas to provide insight into her characterization and the composers' different approaches to her music. I hope that this study sheds light on not just the subject of Manon, but also on elements of French and Italian Romantic opera, areas which would benefit from future analysis.

¹⁷ Vivienne Mylne, *Prévost: Manon Lescaut* (London: Edward Arnold, 1972); Naomi Segal, *The Unintended Readers: Feminism and Manon Lescaut* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Patrick Brady, *Structuralist Perspectives in Criticism of Fiction* (Las Vegas: P. Lang, 1978); James P. Gilroy, *The Romantic Manon and des Grieux: Images of Prévost's Heroine and Hero in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Sherbrooke, Quebec: Editions Naaman, 1980); and Lionel Gossman, "Male and Female in Two Short Novels by Prévost," *Modern Language Review* 77, no. 1 (1982): 29-37.

¹⁸ Dina Grundemann Foster, "Manon Lescaut and Her Representation in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Criticism, and Opera" (PhD Diss. Michigan State University, 1998); Andrew J. Miller, "Manon and Her Daughters: Literary Representations and Musical Adaptations of Three Femmes Fatales" (PhD Diss. Duke University, 2002); Dietrich Kämper and Peter-Eckhard Knabe, "Un Requiem pour Manon," trans. Robert Nelson, in *Les Ecrivains français et l'opéra* (Cologne: Verlag, 1986) 185-195; and Clyde Simons Hiss, "Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* as Novel, Libretto and Opera" (DMA Diss. University of Illinois, 1967)

Even though the three operas look to Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* as their source, the character of Manon varies considerably among them. Manon's relationships to des Grieux, other men, and wealth are remarkably different from each other. Overall, I found that the creation of three different Manons stems largely from her enigmatic character in the novel, the vagueness that comes as a result of the biased double narrator, the attention of composers and librettists to the femme fatale or self-sufficient woman, and the role of Manon in a famous cautionary tale for men.

Chapter 2

ABBÉ PRÉVOST'S *L'HISTOIRE DU CHEVALIER DES GRIEUX ET
DE MANON LESCAUT* (1731)

Manon Lescaut is an elusive and enigmatic character in Abbé Antoine François Prévost's eighteenth-century French novel, *L'histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*, which appears in the seventh and final volume of *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité*. The novel survived through illegal copies, despite its ban in the eighteenth-century for its controversial material. *L'histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*, now known as *Manon Lescaut*, is Prévost's best-known work. *Manon Lescaut* is a French *histoire*, similar to a *nouvelle*, which describes a modern story instead of a historical tale. Although most *histoires* are third-person narratives, Prévost's *histoire* is a first-person narrative conveyed by the otherwise unnamed Man of Quality. The novel grapples with themes of love, wealth, pleasure, disaster, death, jealousy, obsession, social barriers, sacrifice, and fidelity.¹ In this chapter, I summarize the novel, offer analyses of the characters des Grieux and Manon, and discuss major topics that scholars have addressed. Information on the characters, the role of luxury, the use of Louisiana, the frame narration, and sexuality is provided so that we can understand which parts of the novel were important to the librettists and composers of the operas, and get a sense of the original Manon as she is portrayed in Prévost's story.

¹ Patrick Brady, *Structuralist Perspectives in Criticism of Fiction* (Las Vegas: P. Lang, 1978), 36.

A Summary of the Story

Manon Lescaut is the story of the love affair between Manon and the Chevalier des Grieux in France and Louisiana in the eighteenth century. The Chevalier tells the tale of their relationship to the Man of Quality, the narrator of several stories from this collection, who immediately writes it down to preserve the account. The Man of Quality and the Chevalier first meet when Manon is in Le Havre in the process of being deported to Louisiana with other prostitutes. The guards prevent the Chevalier from seeing Manon, but the Man of Quality, sympathizing with des Grieux's grief, bribes the guards so the couple can be together. Two years later, the Man of Quality and the Chevalier meet again. At this point des Grieux relates his tale, in the first person, covering the entirety of his relationship with Manon, which began a few years before her exile to the New World. The Chevalier becomes acquainted with Manon at the Amiens Inn when she is preparing to become a nun. He instantly feels a desire for her and convinces her to run away with him, even though his friend Tiberge tries to stop him. The two move to Paris and intend to get married. However, they quickly forget about their plans as they are overcome with desire. The early scenes in Paris are detailed as happy ones, but they are some of the only happy moments in the book.

Throughout the novel Manon is portrayed as impulsive, happy, and pleasure-loving, but she deserts des Grieux when he runs out of money. This first happens when des Grieux discovers that she has been receiving money from the M. de B..., their wealthy neighbor. Des Grieux tries to convince himself that de B... is giving her money out of charity, but he senses something is wrong. One night during dinner, he notices that Manon looks tearful and distant. There is a knock at the door and Manon immediately

runs to her room as des Grieux is seized by his father's men. He is taken to St. Denis without her. Des Grieux promises his father that he will forget about Manon, but secretly he plans to escape. Sensing his son's plans, the father tells him that Manon was having an affair with the M. de B.... Out of jealousy and anger, des Grieux plans to kill both de B... and Manon, but his father stops him by imprisoning him in his house. The Chevalier spends the next six months studying, at St. Sulpice, and decides to become an Abbé.

After they have been apart for two years, Manon finds des Grieux at St. Sulpice and confesses her infidelity to him, saying that she only wanted the M. de B...'s money and that she was not in love with him. Des Grieux takes her back and she promises to be faithful. As Manon is still having relations with the M. de B..., the couple takes his money and escapes to the outskirts of Paris. Des Grieux assumes that the large amount of money they stole from de B... will last them for ten years. However, Manon's taste for luxury destroys their plans.

Manon's brother moves into their apartment and spends the couple's money to pay his gambling debts and provide entertainment for himself. When an accidental fire destroys their home and their money, des Grieux is frightened that he will lose Manon. Lescaut offers him options--he can send Manon off to a rich man, or des Grieux can offer himself to an older rich woman. Des Grieux, not pleased with either option, takes up gambling to provide Manon with the luxuries she desires. His friend Tiberge gives him money as long as he promises to leave Manon in exchange, but when Tiberge finds out the couple is still together he ends their friendship.

Des Grieux and Manon lose their money again when servants steal from them. At this point, Lescaut introduces Manon to the wealthy M. de G...M... with whom she

begins a sexual relationship to earn money. Manon gives this money to des Grieux, who poses as her relative, but de G... M... discovers their deception and has them thrown into separate prisons. Des Grieux escapes, killing one of the guards, and he breaks Manon out of her cell. As des Grieux depleted his funds escaping from prison, Manon is tempted to live with de G...M...'s son. She writes des Grieux a note stating that she cannot leave the luxury that de G...M... can provide her, and she sends the Chevalier a substitute prostitute to keep him company. Infuriated, des Grieux sends the prostitute back and proclaims that he hates all women. The couple reconcile, but they are caught by de G...M... and thrown into prison again. Manon is deported to Louisiana. Des Grieux is able to join her on the ship by telling the captain they are a married couple. Their two-month voyage is pleasant and they look forward to a new beginning in America.

They arrive in Louisiana, which Prévost describes as a desert. Des Grieux finds a job in New Orleans and they hope to get married, but their plans do not go well. The governor's nephew Synnelet asks his uncle to forbid their marriage so he can have Manon. Once des Grieux hears about Synnelet's request the two duel and the latter loses. Thinking he has killed Synnelet, des Grieux flees with Manon into the desert. Manon dies of exhaustion and des Grieux buries her as he prepares to die over her grave. Des Grieux is found the next day and placed in prison for Synnelet's attempted murder and Manon's murder.²

² Although it may seem like a fair fight, the duel became illegal in many parts of Europe by the early seventeenth century. For more on the history of dueling see Robert Baldick, *The Duel: A History of Dueling* (London: Spring Books, 1970).

At the end of des Grieux's tale, he heads back to Europe, where he meets the Man of Quality. He tries to convince the Man of Quality that he has reformed, feeling guilty about betraying his family's trust.

Des Grieux the Sensible Man and Manon the Enigma

The Chevalier des Grieux is the main character and one of the narrators of the story. He comes from a noble, wealthy family, and until he meets Manon, he has been described as a reasonable man. Because he is the narrator of the story, we know that he thinks that he is in love with Manon. However, we do not have any account of Manon's feelings about him.

Des Grieux is seventeen years old when he first meets Manon. He is of gentle temperament, and by all accounts, a levelheaded man before he meets her. However, when he meets Manon, something changes. He is filled with lust that he never experienced before. This pushes des Grieux from a rational man who was studying to take holy vows to a lust-filled and possessive lover to Manon. He gives up religion and reason for passion. Manon, or the desire for Manon, brings out the worst in him, and he finds himself murdering, gambling, and cheating just so he can be with her. After Manon dies and he spends time in prison, he resolves to reform back to his sensible, pious ways.

(I have reordered this paragraph) Early research on Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* focused on the relationship between the author's life, including an affair with Lenki Eckhardt, and the characters and situations in the book. Later, it was discovered that *Manon Lescaut* was written before Prévost met Eckhardt, thus the novel is not autobiographical. Recent scholarship has shown that the book was first published in

Holland in 1731, not in France in 1733, as was previously assumed.³ Nevertheless, Vivienne Mylne suggests that the information of Prévost's affair is still useful, for it shows that Prévost was a man whose personality is much like that of the Chevalier. Prévost decided to become a Benedictine Abbé in 1720, but had a change of heart eight years later. He left the monastery before proper forms were filed and ran into trouble with the law. In 1731, Prévost fell in love with Eckhardt, a notorious woman who had ruined other men. She was the former mistress of a Swiss colonel and she did not manage her financial matters wisely. Prévost could not satisfy her extravagant tastes so he ran into debt. However, we should not assume that the Chevalier is a complete and accurate representation of Prévost.⁵ There is no evidence that Prévost wished to create a self-portrait, and des Grieux's likeness to the author could be an unintended result of Prévost's subconscious, or a mere coincidence.

Despite des Grieux's first-person narration of the book, Manon serves as the central character, and she is an unusual one at that. Beautiful female characters that ruin or cuckold sensible men, like Manon or Columbina of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, are common throughout comic literature, but Prévost's novel is one of the first examples to display the tragedy behind the story.⁷ In his book, Prévost examines how passionate love can lead to immorality and finally death.

Those who are not very familiar with Prévost's depiction of Manon may interpret her negatively. Des Grieux portrays her as a woman who is responsible for the loss of his

³ Vivienne Mylne, *Prévost: Manon Lescaut* (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), 9.

⁵ Mylne, *Manon Lescaut*, 9.

⁷ Mylne, *Manon Lescaut*, 28.

innocence, as he is driven to kill and gamble because of her.⁸ Some, like Rodney Milnes in his entry on Massenet's *Manon* in *The Grove Book of Operas*, view her as a woman who is crazed with sexual desire and greed, a loose woman who easily discards men.⁹ However, a closer examination of Manon reveals a complex character, one who is determined to give herself a life full of wealth, and yet capable of genuine love.

Throughout the novel, Manon and her appearance remain a mystery. While both the Man of Quality and des Grieux describe her noble nature and her charm, they do not list her physical attributes. We are never told what color eyes Manon has, how fair her skin is, or if her hair is straight or curly. To the modern reader this can seem a deliberate choice by Prévost to allow the reader to picture his or her own idea of feminine beauty. Mylne, however, writes that Manon's mysterious physical appearance is not based on a conscious choice of Prévost. Instead, she points out that in this time period there was a tendency to see the spiritual, mental, and emotional aspects of a person instead of just the physical body.¹⁰ This is depicted in Manon's ethereal quality. (I moved this earlier) Prévost writes about Manon's "charm," which has associations with spells and enchantment, instead of her physical attributes.¹¹ Manon's charming and magical quality attracts, or at least pleases, nearly every man in the story. This, of course, is the basis of much of the plot, from Manon's decisions to find new lovers to des Grieux's jealousy. The first instance of Manon's power to attract men is when the Man of Quality first notices her. He sees her as she departs for Louisiana with the other prostitutes.

⁸ Naomi Segal, *The Unintended Readers: Feminism and Manon Lescaut* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 11.

⁹ Rodney Milnes, "Massenet: *Manon*," in *The Grove Book of Operas*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie and Laura Macy (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2006), 382-385.

¹⁰ Mylne, *Manon Lescaut*, 23.

¹¹ Mylne, *Manon Lescaut*, 23.

Identifying her as a special woman, he immediately picks her out from the group as having a noble quality. The second example of Manon's ability to attract men is when des Grieux sees her. Des Grieux is a sensible man at this point in the novel, but he experiences *coup de foudre*, or love at first sight, and expresses his irrational emotions. Mylne writes that the Chevalier and the Man of Quality subscribe to an essentialist rather than an existentialist psychology, and this explains their descriptions of Manon.¹² The essentialist view is that an individual is born of certain traits that make up the essence of their character, while the existentialist view is that the actions in an individual's life constitute their character. Thus the Man of Quality can see Manon as noble despite her behavior. Her noble essence is just one of the many aspects of Manon that makes her mysterious.

Depicting Manon as merely a beautiful woman would not be enough to explain why she attracts so many men, but her attractiveness is much more complex than mere physical beauty. Herbert Josephs argues that the character's legendary appeal is due partly to the incomplete physical description and her elusiveness.¹³ Writers and composers expand her character in different ways, allowing for conflicting interpretations and an overall intangible quality to her character. In addition to her mysterious appearance, Manon's class remains elusive.¹⁴ Des Grieux makes it apparent that her class is part of the reason that his family disapproves of her, but whether she is middle class or lower class, we do not know.

¹² Mylne, *Manon Lescaut*, 28.

¹³ Herbert Josephs, "Manon Lescaut': Literary Shadow and Operatic Form," *Ars Lyrica: Journal of the Lyrica Society for Word-Music Relations* 9 (1998): 34.

¹⁴ Brady, *Structuralist Perspectives*, 41.

In much of the novel, it is apparent that Manon has a love of pleasure--both erotic and of luxuries. Her parents send her to a convent because this love of pleasure has become a problem. At the beginning of the book des Grieux reveals that Manon is more sexually experienced than des Grieux, and throughout the novel she takes on many sexual partners. Her love of luxury sends the Chevalier into debt since he cannot afford to entertain her, but he wants to keep her from leaving him. It may appear that her love of luxury is greater than her love of pleasure: her desire for luxury pushes her into these sexual relationships, and she may consider them as a means to an end. But because Manon rarely voices her opinion and Prévost writes discreetly about any sexual relationships, it is hard to say that one pleasure is greater than the other.

Manon will not become anyone's daughter or anyone's wife. This is evident in her tense relationship with her parents and her relationship to des Grieux. She refuses to become a bride of Christ, and she never marries des Grieux and Manon in Paris, as des Grieux originally planned. Des Grieux says that they forgot about getting married, but his narration has a tendency to justify his actions that are not approved by society. Is it possible that Manon convinced des Grieux that they did not need to get married? Was she already exploring other options in the early days of the relationship? Unfortunately, des Grieux's narration does not allow us to answer these questions, but they are important to keep in mind because the three operas find solutions to these problems in different ways.

Mylne suggests that Manon is amoral.¹⁸ But does Manon really lack morals? She seems to care deeply for des Grieux and wishes for his happiness. She does not heed the strict sexual codes of her society, but she does appear to be emotionally faithful to the Chevalier. She favors des Grieux over her other lovers and seems to have sexual relationships with other men to receive money. Perhaps Mylne senses a childishness and impulsive quality that allows Manon to follow her desires, or she believes that Manon's status as a marked woman in society has led her to question Roman Catholicism's strict moral code.

There are two main views of Manon's general character. The first, proposed by F. Germain, argues that Manon is a more cunning and destructive woman than portrayed in the book, and she uses her language to deceive des Grieux.¹⁹ However, this argument fails to acknowledge Manon's confessions of her infidelity. If she did not hold good intentions for des Grieux in her heart, she would not have felt the need to go to Saint Sulpice. She had other men in aris she could seduce to get to their money, so des Grieux would not have been a concern to her. The other view, advanced by Henri Coulet, is that Manon is much like Mary Magdalene, a "repentant sinner" that selflessly sacrifices, and des Grieux wants to emulate her.²⁰ This perspective sees her as a victim of both des Grieux and society. After she breaks society's strict sexual laws, she cannot live a life without that mark of sexual impurity. As a result of her actions, she can choose to become a high-class courtesan or a low-class prostitute, so she chooses the wealthier lifestyle. With this interpretation, des Grieux becomes her *greluchon*, or her favored

¹⁸ Mylne, *Manon Lescaut*, 26.

¹⁹ R. A. Francis, *Prevost Manon Lescaut: Critical Guides to French Texts* (London: Grant & Cutler, Ltd., 1993), 46.

²⁰ Francis, *Critical Guides*, 48.

lover, and receives her emotional fidelity, but not her physical fidelity.²¹ She does not connect emotions or feeling to physicality, so taking on new lovers is not a problem for Manon. This explains why Manon sends des Grieux a substitute prostitute. Scholars have related this aspect of Manon to the modern emancipated woman, even though in this male-dominated society she relies on men to support herself.²²

Manon's disposition, morality, appearance, and her unusual place in society make her a woman that we cannot fully grasp. But these aspects are not the only challenges to understanding her character--Des Grieux's narration also makes her a truly enigmatic woman.

The Chevalier des Grieux's First-Person Narration and Manon's Silence

We only see Manon Lescaut through the eyes of men. The novel is narrated by two men, the Chevalier des Grieux and the Man of Quality. This frame narration structure appears also in Mérimée's *Carmen* (1845) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). The Man of Quality, who claims he writes des Grieux's story down immediately after he hears it, is there to authenticate the story, but this does not mean that we should take his story as factually accurate.²³ While a first-person narrator is normally suspect, this double-remove from the events presents a bigger problem of accuracy. As Patrick Brady observes, the memories of both des Grieux and the Man of Quality become partly, or possibly wholly, fictional as the narrator tries to remember what happened.²⁴ He writes

²¹ Francis, *Critical Guides*, 48.

²² Francis, *Critical Guides*, 49.

²³ Lionel Gossman, "Male and Female in Two Short Novels by Prévost," *Modern Language Review* 77, no. 1 (1982): 30.

²⁴ Brady, *Structuralist Perspectives*, 60.

in another article that there can never be an assumption of perfect memory in this type of narration, so the reader should look for the intention of the narrator.²⁵ Events and quotations can be left out or changed, especially those concerning Manon. This problem with narration also explains why Manon is quiet in most of the novel. She is being remembered through two men and her words are not as important as des Grieux's actions in this story.

One could argue that because this is a work of fiction, the double narrator is a style and it does not affect the portrayal of the characters. Prévost may have written Manon the same way if he had chosen a third-person narrator, because it is Prévost's voice coming out of des Grieux. However, I believe that this viewpoint does not account for the events concerning Manon that are omitted; the unrealistic details; such as elevated speech; and Manon's reduced dialogue.

Part of the reason this first-person narrative is unreliable is because the narrator is able to create his own tale. This is what des Grieux does when he tells the story to the Man of Quality. The events he retells concern only his relationship to Manon, many events appear to be left out, and the events are linear and too perfect for real life.²⁶ Furthermore, any positive aspects or events concerning Manon could be omitted to make des Grieux look better. We can see des Grieux's spin on the story in his speech and in the mood of his narration. When des Grieux quotes lower-class people he gives them elevated speech, because, being of higher class, he does not possess any vulgar speech.²⁷

²⁵ Patrick Brady, "Deceit and Self-Deceit in 'Manon Lescaut' and 'La Vie de Marianne': Extrinsic, Rhetorical, and Immanent Perspectives on First-Person Narration," *Modern Language Review* 72, no. 1 (1977): 52.

²⁶ Brady, *Structuralist Perspectives*, 31.

²⁷ Brady, *Structuralist Perspectives*, 24.

The mode of his narration is fluid, as though it has been carefully constructed, and the structure of his narrative is deliberate, suggesting des Grieux is withholding information.²⁸ This shows that des Grieux is consciously or unconsciously creating a narrative that departs from actual events. While this does not mean that he is creating his own story the majority of the time, it suggests that we should suspect him of not being truthful. It is hard to tell how much des Grieux amends his narrative. He does justify his immoral actions--for example, he justifies murder by calling it self-defense. He will blame Fate instead of his own actions. How much could he be making up about Manon? His narration may be unconsciously distorted by his emotions toward Manon.²⁹ His memory of certain events—for example, Manon leaving him for M. de B...--could be clouded by his emotions.

We seldom hear Manon's voice in this novel, since Des Grieux rarely quotes her. Most of the time he paraphrases what she says. This is evident at the beginning of the novel, when he paraphrases her statement that she is more sexually experienced than he, and during his recollection of Manon's first abandonment. Manon's silence in the novel does not allow us to get a clear sense of what she is thinking. We have no explicit quotations from Manon about her feelings toward des Grieux or her suitors. Unfortunately, we are left to guess what she may have said or thought by reading her through these two men.

²⁸ Brady, *Structuralist Perspectives*, 23-24.

²⁹ Brady, "Deceit," 49.

Money and Luxury

Throughout the novel, the attainment and loss of money causes Manon to stay with or leave des Grieux. In this regard, Naomi Segal points out that the novel reflects a time when paper money is first used in France, during John Law's bank.³⁰ Law was a Scottish economist who believed that money was only a method of exchange. To him, only trade marked national wealth. In 1720, Law was responsible for an economic collapse in France. Prévost invokes this new economic climate to demonstrate the simultaneous financial and moral fall of des Grieux.³¹ Des Grieux thinks he needs to entertain Manon with frivolity in order to keep her happy. In trying to entertain her, he distorts the balance between budgets for necessity and luxury. Love of money becomes the means of love of Manon for des Grieux.³² He struggles to entertain Manon and he succumbs to gambling and relying on others to finance their relationship. This is not to say that Manon's relationship to des Grieux is based solely on money. She seems to have an emotional connection to him, for otherwise she would not have confessed her infidelity to him in St. Sulpice. But des Grieux, knowing her relationships with other, wealthier suitors and her love for luxury, may think that the only reason she stays with him is money.

Manon's earnings introduce a related problem. If Manon brings home money it means that she has slept with other men. This undermines des Grieux's masculinity both because she is sleeping with other men and she is the one making money.³³ It also shows Manon's independence and pragmatism. If des Grieux is not able to provide for her, then

³⁰ Segal, *Unintended Readers*, 97, 100.

³¹ Segal, *Unintended Readers*, 104.

³² Segal, *Unintended Readers*, 103.

³³ Segal, *Unintended Readers*, 105.

she will find a way to support herself, even if that means she needs to sell herself to men. In some senses she is like the modern businesswoman, finding her own way through the world.

Manon's relationship with money is reflected in her brother, Lescaut. Lescaut loses his money from gambling and moves in with Manon and des Grieux. He spends their money for his gambling debts and for his entertainments. He seems to be a burden for des Grieux. While the Chevalier understands that he can spend money to win Manon's attention, he receives little from Lescaut. This relationship between Lescaut and des Grieux depicts the unhealthy bond between Manon and des Grieux if love, or lust, were not involved. Lescaut ultimately is killed by a gambler he has wronged, an outcome that shows how a love of money can lead to the destruction of a person.

New Beginnings in New Orleans and Final Moments in the Desert

When Manon is deported to Louisiana and des Grieux decides to follow her, they think of America as a place where they can start new lives. In New Orleans they can finally be happy together, for no one knows about Manon's lower class and prostitution. It seems as if the couple will finally have a happy ending to their tragic story, but this is not the case. Upon their arrival in New Orleans, various men, including Synnelet, are attracted to Manon. Des Grieux lies to the residents of New Orleans when he tells them that Manon and he are married. When the truth is revealed, Synnelet duels with des Grieux so he can win Manon. Here, des Grieux dominates the scene and Manon is ignored.³⁴ We would instead expect them to be equals in their new life, but Manon is

³⁴ Segal, *Unintended Readers*, 86.

forced into the shadows again by des Grieux's possessive and jealous nature. She never gets her chance to be happy and be an equal in des Grieux's eyes. When des Grieux thinks he has killed Synnelet the couple is forced to flee to the surrounding desert, causing Manon to ask for death repeatedly.

Manon dies in a desert outside of New Orleans, but if we follow Prévost's description of their escape she would have died next to, or in the middle of, Lake Pontchartrain.³⁵ It may be tempting to assume this is a mistake because Prévost was a European who had little knowledge of America, but he has surprisingly accurate information about New Orleans, from the layout to the sorts of buildings there.³⁶ So if Prévost knew about New Orleans, why did he choose to depict Louisiana as a desert? Manon and des Grieux's journey to America had been good, and they were looking forward to their new lives in a new land. But arriving in a place that is barren and being forced to flee into the desert shows that the couple never has this opportunity. The desert reflects their isolation and despair, and forces them to become outcasts of society. Naomi Segal argues that the Chevalier's telling of Manon's death is a way for him to finally get rid of her.³⁷ As I will explain in the next section, he is not successful in parting from her.

³⁵ Carl Hammer Jr., "Goethe, Prevost and Louisiana," *Modern Language Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1955): 337.

³⁶ Hammer, "Goethe, Prevost and Louisiana," 335.

³⁷ Segal, *Unintended Readers*, 89.

Sexuality, Freud, and Eighteenth-Century Society

Segal uses Freudian theory to explain the complex relationship between des Grieux and Manon.³⁸ She examines Freud's idea that children are interested in pregnancy from a young age. Girls will look up to their mothers and be glad that one day they too will grow older and have children. Boys, on the other hand, will be jealous that girls have this experience. While girls understand that they will grow bigger and have the opportunity to become pregnant, boys look to their fathers and hope that their genitalia will grow larger. The girl values herself, while the boy values the phallus. The focus on the phallus and the jealousy of girls eventually turns sexual activity into a predatory activity for males. The woman is a conquest, something to be possessed or taken. Meanwhile, the woman's sexuality is not allowed to thrive in a culture dominated by male language.³⁹ In Prévost's novel, Manon values her sexuality, but her idea of love or pleasure and society's view of sexual chastity do not coincide.⁴⁰ Her sexuality is forbidden, then imprisoned, and finally destroyed by patriarchal society.⁴¹ While Manon struggles to find a place in society, eventually becoming a courtesan, des Grieux seeks to possess Manon. He is jealous of Manon's lovers, and he seeks to be her only romantic and sexual partner, possessing her entirely.

³⁸ I have included this section on sexuality and Freud because it is an essential chapter to understanding Manon in Naomi Segal's *The Unintended Readers*. Her book is an important source of information on Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*, but much of it examines des Grieux. This chapter gives insight on both characters.

³⁹ Segal, *Unintended Readers*, 256.

⁴⁰ Brady, *Structuralist Perspectives*, 36.

⁴¹ Josephs, "Literary Shadow and Operatic Form," 35.

(I have moved this earlier) Manon's place as a woman in this particular time also affects her idea of sexuality. As a woman in the new Regency order,⁴² she does not fit into typical social categories like nobles, ecclesiastics, and peasants, so she embodies the new modern world of money and relates most closely to the bourgeoisie.⁴³ This is why her relationship to money is so prominent. However, the typical bourgeois citizen would believe that love too should be regulated.⁴⁴ Manon does not. Instead, she accepts the oppressive society and learns to survive in it.

The novel can be seen as the trajectory of sexual desire, from the awakening when the couple meets, to the pursuit (of the woman) throughout the novel, closure, and a return to a state of rest.⁴⁸ Here again, the idea of des Grieux possessing and pursuing Manon comes into play. In fact, des Grieux fulfills his desire to possess Manon by telling her story, as she is completely dependent on him for her existence and unable to speak for herself.⁴⁹ But it is not the complete fulfillment that he seeks. Her elusiveness in the novel known only under her name and her appeal to different generations shows that she

⁴² The Regency (1715-1723) is a period when the Regent Philippe d'Orléans governed for King Louis XV, then a minor. It is marked as a time of corruption in the public life, the new association of the upper class with the bourgeoisie, and the introduction of new economic system that ultimately failed. After the Regency, France went through a brief period of financial distress. In 1726, King Louis XV appointed Cardinal Fleury as his chief minister. Fleury directed France into economic growth. At the same time the country expanded its population, and the growing middle class benefited from Fleury's ruling.

⁴³ Gossman, "Male and Female," 35.

⁴⁴ Gossman, "Male and Female," 35.

⁴⁸ Gossman, "Male and Female," 31.

⁴⁹ Gossman, "Male and Female," 36.

is still free despite des Grieux's narrative.⁵⁰ As I detailed in the "Introduction," she is able to live on in operas, ballets, and literature, popularized by her name alone.

Manon's enigmatic character and her complex relationship with des Grieux makes her a difficult character to study in Prévost's original source. This enigma has given librettists and composers freedom to interpret her as they wish. Herbert Josephs remarks that Manon remains voiceless in the novel, and yet she has a lyrical place in opera.⁵¹ At first glance, it is puzzling that her musical treatment in each of the operas is remarkably different, from virtuosic coloratura passages to French dance-based arias to lyrical melodies, and how her character lives on mainly through these works. Composers can give her long arias to express feelings that were never stated in Prévost's novel, or duets that present a more equal relationship between her and des Grieux.

As we will see in the next chapter, the plot of Auber and Scribe's opera barely resembles Prévost's *histoire*, but some of the major themes, like Manon's love of luxury and social status, remain. In Auber's *Manon Lescaut*, the Chevalier des Grieux serves a secondary role to Manon Lescaut. This allows for several arias and ensembles for Manon, which display her progression of emotions from light-hearted to mournful.

⁵⁰ Gossman, "Male and Female," 36.

⁵¹ Josephs, "Literary Shadow and Operatic Form," 35.

Chapter 3

DANIEL AUBER'S *MANON LESCAUT* (1856)

Manon Lescaut in Daniel Auber's opéra comique of the same name is a joyful, but tragic character. She speaks often, appears on stage for most of the work, and has more independence than in Prévost's novel. In the book, one can question if the main character is the Chevalier des Grieux or Manon Lescaut, but in Auber's opera it is clear that Manon is more important. Although Auber shows the heartbreaking nature of the heroine, he also presents a lighter, more frivolous side to her that is missing from the novel. She is likable and energetic, so we sympathize with her when she meets her fate. The opera achieves this through the removal of the double narrators. Manon is no longer confined to the double narrators' opinions of her--the first who did not know her, and the second who wants to be rid of her memory--so Auber and the librettist allow her to break free and speak as she pleases. Auber's Manon starts as a cheerful, liberated character but becomes a tragic heroine in the end trapped by fate. –

The reception of Auber's music has been mixed. His operas no longer belong to the standard repertoire, and only recently has there been a renewed interest in his music. Of the more than fifty operas he wrote, only two are considered standouts: *La Muette de Portici* (1828), receiving over 500 performances; and *Gustave III* (1833). Letellier often defends his decision to write a book on Auber, stating that even though his musical style is light, it is still worthy of study. Auber's operas were popular in German-speaking areas as well, which was atypical for French works.¹ Wagner's seemingly good opinion

¹ Fanny Mendelssohn (not yet married) writes a letter from Berlin to her brother Felix of July 1, 1829, where she mentions an “overflowing” crowd at the twentieth performance

of Auber may actually reflect a negative quality for French music in general. He especially cared for Auber's first grand opera, *La Muette de Portici*, writing about "the general passion, almost seething, which Auber knew how to sustain throughout [*La Muette de Portici*], like a flow of lava."² Auber's compositions were often less serious than those of his French contemporaries. If Wagner thought that the best French music was the lightest, he may actually be arguing that the French did not compose serious music well.³

Manon Lescaut is one of Auber's thirty-eight collaborations with librettist Eugène Scribe. The three-act opera was first performed at the Opéra-Comique in Paris on February 23, 1856. This is one of Auber's mature works, written when he was 74 years old. Giacomo Meyerbeer said of Auber's *Manon Lescaut* in August of 1856: "Auber's music is still full of freshness and invention, melodious and witty, in spite of his advanced age. This opera afforded me much pleasure."⁴ At the time, it was a fairly popular opera, traveling to Liège, Berlin, and Stockholm in the 1800s. Its popularity, however, did not last long. It was removed from the Opéra-Comique's repertory after sixty-three performances, but lived on through Manon's famous *Bourbonnaise* (or Laughing Song) in the first act.⁵ Indeed, *Manon Lescaut* is not Auber's most popular opera, but several companies have performed it in recent years, probably because of the shared story with Puccini and Massenet. Although he was not the first composer to set

of *Die Stumme von Portici*. See Fanny Hensel, *Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, ed. and trans. Marcia J. Citron (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 1987), 60.

² Richard Wagner, quoted in Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Daniel-Francois-Esprit Auber: The Man and His Music* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 43..

³ Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Daniel-Francois-Esprit Auber: The Man and His Music* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 43.

⁴ Letellier, *Auber: The Man and His Music*, 440.

⁵ Letellier, *Auber: The Man and His Music*, 440.

Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* to music, he was the first to compose an opera based on it. Both Auber's grand operas and opéra-comiques were well-received at the time. In fact, the video recording of the 1990 production at the Opéra-Comique, with Patrick Fournillier, uses a title screen stating that this is "L'autre *Manon*" (The Other *Manon*).⁶

The Libretto and Scribe's Changes

While Scribe uses Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* as a source, he departs from the novel on many occasions, even inserting new characters. In act I, the Marquis d'Hérigny asks his sergeant Lescaut to help him kidnap a beautiful girl he has seen. The two question her friend, Marguerite, and find out that the girl is Manon, Lescaut's cousin, whom Marguerite describes as "young, beautiful, and poor" (elle est jeune, belle et pauvre). After the two men leave, Marguerite and Manon talk in Manon's bedroom. Marguerite, who is engaged to Gervais, tells Manon of her happiness in the bourgeois life, like a typical opéra-comique ideal character. She believes Manon could be happy in this lifestyle, but Manon already desires luxury. Manon states that she is not suitable for domestic work and marriage. The Marquis sends Manon a love letter, and Marguerite informs her of his wealth. Manon's current lover, the Chevalier des Grieux, visits her in her bedroom and shows her the money he has raised. They decide to dine at Madame Bancelin's inn with Marguerite, Gervais, and Lescaut. Manon entrusts money to Lescaut, but he gambles it away. In order to pay the bill, the Chevalier is obliged to sign a paper selling himself to the Marquis's regiment. Determined to raise money herself, Manon

⁶ Patrick Fournillier conducts the Orchestre Régional de Picardie Le Sinfonietta. Elizabeth Vidal, Alain Gabriel, and René Massis star in this production. It was recorded live in 1990 and released in 1991.

sings and plays a guitar inside the inn. The Marquis, who is still interested in Manon, hears her and pays her a large sum of money. When she tries to redeem des Grieux's bond it is too late. He is arrested and taken to the regiment.

Act II takes place in the salon of Marquis's d'Hérigny's house, where Manon now lives. Manon secretly tries to find a way to meet with des Grieux, but he has escaped from the regiment. When she is alone, des Grieux enters through a window and dines with her. Unexpectedly, the Marquis returns and the Chevalier wounds him in a duel. Manon and des Grieux attempt to flee, but the police arrest both of them.

Act III opens on a farm on the Mississippi River in Louisiana. Marguerite and Gervais have immigrated to America and started a new life on a plantation in Louisiana. Marguerite is in her wedding dress and Gervais speaks lovingly about their marriage ceremony that will take place that day. They see Manon, who has been separated from des Grieux. She was deported to America for prostitution and is now serving time in a prison camp. Unknown to Manon, des Grieux followed her by hiding on a prison ship. He learns that she is a prisoner of a man named Renaud, who forces des Grieux to pay his entire fortune for ten minutes of conversation with her. With the help of Marguerite and Gervais, the couple escapes into the wilderness. Manon becomes sick in the desert and says that her last wish is to become des Grieux's wife. He brings her back into town, but she is close to death. Manon asks forgiveness and dies in des Grieux's arms, and later townspeople find des Grieux and Manon's body.

One way in which Scribe alters Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* is through the elimination or addition of characters. Marguerite and her fiancé Gervais are new to the story, created to provide necessary background information, since so much of the original

plot is removed from the opera. They also present a bourgeois-ideal to contrast with Manon and des Grieux. Renaud, also an addition, functions as both the governor and his jealous nephew Synnelet.⁷ Several characters--including the Man of Quality, des Grieux's father, the substitute prostitute, Manon's various lovers, and Tiberge--are cut, and the Chevalier des Grieux's role is reduced. While in Prévost's story des Grieux serves as the most active character and even the narrator, here he assumes a secondary role. The librettist cut many of the secondary characters to keep the cast small, so the focus can remain on Manon throughout the work.

Manon's interactions with men decrease in Auber's opera, and her only romantic relationships are with des Grieux and the Marquis d'Hérigny. Manon loves des Grieux in this opera, and there does not seem to be much doubt about her loyalty toward him. Robert Letellier argues that Scribe emphasizes Manon's "unwavering devotion" to des Grieux in part to disguise the immorality of the story, as their actions would not fit within the bourgeois ideals of opéra-comique and its audiences.⁸ She has only one other romantic relationship, with the Marquis d'Hérigny, a character who does not exist in Prévost's novel. Rather, he is a combination of three of the literary characters: Bretigny, the M. de G. M., and his son. Manon does not embark upon a relationship with Renaud, but he takes advantage of des Grieux's love for her by benefiting from his money.

Many scenes from Prévost's novel are missing, and some of the events in the opera do not come from the book. Most prominently, Auber's work omits Manon and des Grieux's meeting, des Grieux's kidnapping by his father, the couple's conversation at

⁷ Letellier, *Auber: The Man and His Music*, 438.

⁸ Letellier, *Auber: The Man and His Music*, 438-439.

the seminary at Saint Sulpice, and the scene at the Hotel Transylvanie. Perhaps Scribe cuts these scenes, which were so important to the novel, to deflect attention from des Grieux and place it on Manon, the star of the opera. Moreover, Scribe inserts an episode where des Grieux is arrested along with Manon and creates a scene that provides background information in Louisiana with Marguerite and Gervais. The prison-break plans of des Grieux and the murder he commits would have been problematic in opéra comique, both morally and theatrically, in 1856. He also adds a moment where Manon admits that she wants to marry des Grieux before she dies. This request, which has no counterpart in the book, is probably written to give closure to the story. Manon is held in high regard when she dies, unlike her death in Prévost's novel in the desolate wilderness. This also allows Auber to conclude with an ensemble, much like a Greek chorus, reflecting on Manon's fate.

Sarah Hibberd states that Auber focused on opera plots that center on dilemmas of individuals.⁹ For example, *La Muette de Portici* (1828), one of Auber's great achievements and an early grand opera, features a fictional heroine, Fenella, who was "caught up in events she did not understand and over which she had no direct control."¹⁰ The mute Fenella was seduced and abandoned by a nobleman, and later unjustly imprisoned by his guards. Manon is similar to the earlier figure. Her fate seems accidental, and we do not see her making choices to live with one man or another. Instead, des Grieux is taken away at the end of the first act and Manon is already living with the Marquis at the beginning of the second. In Auber's opera she is not making

⁹ Sarah Hibberd, *French Grand Opera and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5.

¹⁰ Hibberd, *French Grand Opera*, 21.

plans or doing this for financial reasons, as she does in Prévost's book. Instead, these events seem to have merely happened to her, defining Manon as a passive and tragic character.

In Scribe's libretto, the role of Marguerite functions not only to fill out the plot, but also to provide a foil for Manon. Marguerite is happy with the bourgeois lifestyle, her relationship, and her impending move to the New World. She appears rational compared to Manon. Manon, in contrast, is not happy with her current financial situation, and thus she considers offers from the Marquis while she is in a relationship with des Grieux. Her relationship with the Chevalier appears to be dependent on his money in the first act. She celebrates his receipt of an ample sum of money by going to an expensive restaurant. In the next two acts, however, Manon chooses des Grieux over wealth and thereby approaches Marguerite and her love for Gervais. By adding Marguerite, Auber emphasizes the tragedy of Manon's fate.¹¹

In act III the contrast between the two women becomes strikingly apparent. It is Marguerite's wedding day and she is already in her gown. She sings about her love of her life and her happiness in Louisiana. She is the most elaborately dressed person on stage, next to slaves and prostitutes. Manon is sick and tired from her trip from France. Marguerite does not recognize her at first, but points out that she looks less healthy than the rest of the prostitutes. Not only do Auber and Scribe compare Marguerite and Manon as individuals, but they use them to underline differences between the two couples—Manon and des Grieux, and Marguerite and Gervais. Both pairs are soprano-tenor duos,

¹¹ Dietrich Kämper and Peter-Eckhard Knabe, "Un Requiem pour Manon," trans. Robert Nelson, in *Les Ecrivains français et l'opéra* (Cologne: dme-Verlag, 1986), 186-187.

making their likeness obvious musically. Marguerite and Gervais are beginning their relationship and starting a new life, but Manon and des Grieux are wounded and dying. This also highlights the tragedy of Manon's fate.

Auber's Compositional Style

Auber's operas have been compared to Rossini's comic operas and were inspirations to French composers, including Jules Massenet.¹² Writing tuneful melodies is Auber's strength, and memorable songs appear throughout *Manon Lescaut*. His music has been described as light and clear, especially in his opéras comiques. Auber's operas are numbered works, and *Manon Lescaut* features spoken dialogue between the arias and ensembles. A famous characterization of Auber's style comes from Tchaikovsky in 1872, when he writes of an "elegant clarity of his harmonization, an abundance of delightful and rhythmically striking melodies, sensible moderation [...] for his beautiful instrumentation. What you cannot expect to find in Auber, though, are passionateness [sic], moments of tempestuous yearning and powerful inspiration."¹³

Generally in Auber's operas the soprano melodies are high coloratura passages that display virtuosity more than express text. In *Manon Lescaut*, we see a surprising number of nonsense syllables that allow Manon to sing up to high Fs. Although it seems to add little to the narrative, it does speak to her giddy character. The harmonies that accompany Auber's melodies tend to consist of just three chords, but in Letellier's view, this was common for operas at the time.¹⁴ The harmony, often triadic, functions as a

¹² Letellier, *Auber: The Man and His Music*, 12.

¹³ Letellier, *Auber: The Man and His Music*, vi.

¹⁴ Letellier, *Auber: The Man and His Music*, 25.

secondary element to the virtuosic top lines for the singers. The soprano, first violin, and a woodwind instrument typically receive the melody, and all others play or sing the harmony.¹⁵ Frequently, the composer chooses keys based on the events on the stage. If it is a serious matter he will pick a key with flats, but if it is a lighter subject he will prefer a key with sharps.¹⁶ Letellier claims that eighty percent of Auber's music is moderato or faster, making the few slow passages in his music unusual and important dramatically.¹⁷

Frivolity and Tragedy in Auber's Score

The overture to *Manon Lescaut* begins slowly and quietly, an atypical feature for Auber. An oboe solo captures Manon's tragic story by moving from major to minor (see Ex. 1). The pairing of Manon and the oboe is featured in the finale of act II, hinting at tragedy in Manon's strained relationship with the Marquis.¹⁸ In the overture, Auber suddenly moves to a new melody with a brighter character in E major, meeting the audience's expectations for a comic opera overture and reflecting the giddy character of Manon.

In the opera, Auber uses instrumental introductions and transitions to shape the general dramatic arc. Light-hearted music appears early on, and more somber music toward the end, possibly reflecting changes in Manon's emotions. For example, the lively Entr'acte of act II, in G major, features melismatic passages

¹⁵ Letellier, *Auber: The Man and His Music*, 41.

¹⁶ Letellier, *Auber: The Man and His Music*, 40.

¹⁷ Letellier, *Auber: The Man and His Music*, 40.

¹⁸ Letellier, *Auber: The Man and His Music*, 439.



Ex. 1 Auber, *Manon Lescaut*, Overture, mm. 10-19

similar to Manon's music in the rest of the act. This instrumental music reflects the lighthearted nature of the opera and Manon through this point in the story. In contrast, the Entr'acte and Introduction of act III exhibits a different flavor: quieter, slower, and more chromatic. It is in F major, which Auber would have considered to be serious because of its B-flat in the key signature. After this somber music, a quick allegretto ushers in the joyous opening of act III, which presents Marguerite's wedding.

Manon's music in act I is characterized by coloratura, major modes, and lightheartedness, depicting her as a happy and free character. Her opening couplets are light and high, all the way up to a high E. Her music often features ascending sequential melismas and triadic or scalar cadenzas, displaying virtuosity and gaiety. Manon and



Ex. 2 Auber, *Manon Lescaut*, Act I, No. 3, mm. 277-285

Marguerite sing a duet that consists of mostly parallel thirds and sixths. Then, Manon dreams of a life of luxury in “Les dames de Versailles” (The Ladies of Versailles), and reaches up to a high F in her thirty-three measure melisma. Her line exhibits rests between leaps that allude to a cheerful character (see Ex. 2).

In the second scene of act I we see Manon wandering about the inn, trying to raise money. She sings and plays the guitar, but there is no music notated, so the singer must improvise on both voice and guitar. It is odd that Auber does not write music for this moment, which would have been perfect for another virtuosic number. Perhaps the silence of the score hints at Manon’s futility in saving des Grieux from the Marquis’s regiment.

Highly melismatic passages function as an extroverted, and even seductive, device for Manon when she sings to others. For example, the Marquis does not speak to

Manon in the inn until she sings a flashy coloratura passage. Manon's famous Bourbonnaise is speech-like and playful at first, and includes a staccato descending scale denoting laughter. Her final melismatic phrase draws applause from the audience of the inn—a performative gesture that shows how Manon can charm others in the story.

Throughout act I Manon sings nonsense syllables, freeing herself from the substantive aspect of the libretto. It may seem like a way to display virtuosity, but it also communicates much about her character. Manon, at least in the first act, is playful and not to be taken too seriously. Except for her desire for luxury, she might come off as naïve and childlike. The departure from the libretto may also say something about her relationship with her narrators: the Man of Quality and des Grieux in the Prévost, and now Scribe in the opera. Auber allows Manon to rebel from her new narrator, Scribe, by creating these textless sections and, later, a moment of improvisation at the inn. She is a character who lives on her own terms and does what she pleases until her death.

The finale of the opera becomes a powerful moment in the work. In Letellier's view, it changes the genre of the opera from an opéra comique to a drame lyrique, but he adds that this is typical of Auber's later style.¹⁹ Auber takes Manon's death seriously, and he gives her dignity through musical elements that are unusual for his compositional style. Here, he uses melodies with non-triadic leaps and chromaticism.²⁰ A C minor tremolo, which switches to E-flat major periodically, starts the finale. In this scene Manon lacks her normal coloratura style, which suggests that the liveliness is draining from her. Her range has also moved down from the higher to middle register, and only once moves above a high G. Her descending lines are fragmented by rests, as if she is

¹⁹ Letellier, *Auber: The Man and His Music*, 439.

²⁰ Letellier, *Auber: The Man and His Music*, 440.

D. MANON.
- mé e le pour ras - tu? Mais... oui... je -

Ex. 3 Auber, *Manon Lescaut*, Act III, No. 16 , mm. 251-254

M. DESGR.
vais... moi ta fem me, T'at - ten - dre dans le Ciel. Ma non! Ma -

pp

Ex. 4 Auber, *Manon Lescaut*, Act III, No. 16 , mm. 251-254

MARG et GERVAIS.

Mor te!

Mor te! Dans un doux rê ve

Mor te! Dans un doux rê ve

Mor te! Dans un doux rê ve

And.te cantabile. (♩ = 72)

p *dolce sostenuto. legato.*

Qu'a - mour a - che - ve, Son cœur s'é - le - ve vers l'E - ter.

Qu'a mour a che - ve, Son cœur s'é - le - ve vers l'E - ter

Qu'a mour a che - ve, Son cœur s'é - le - ve vers l'E - ter

882.

Ex. 5 Auber, *Manon Lescaut*, Act III, No. 16, mm. 319-343

nel! Dans un doux rê ve, Qu'a-mour a-chè-ve,

-nel! Dans un doux rê ve, Qu'a-mour a-chè-ve,

-nel! Dans un doux rê-ve, Qu'a-mour a-chè-ve,

Son coeur s'é-lè-ve Vers l'E-ter-nel!

Son coeur s'é-lè-ve Vers l'E-ter-nel!

Son coeur s'é-lè-ve Vers l'E-ter-nel!

dolce. amors.

Ped

suivra. pp

Fin de l'opéra.

Ex. 5, cont. Auber, *Manon Lescaut*, Act III, No. 16, mm. 319-343

having trouble breathing (see Ex. 3). Manon's phrases are far less tuneful and more speech-like as she talks with des Grieux. Instead of spanning large ranges, her music often remains static on a few notes. The orchestration begins to thin as Manon dies, and she expires with a descending chromatic tetrachord interspersed with rests (see Ex. 4). Reverently, the opera ends with the chorus singing a four-part chorale-style number, in C major, and a final pianissimo C-major chord in the orchestra (see Ex. 5). This finale depicts Manon as a woman who deserves admiration for her ongoing love for des Grieux. Indeed, Dietrich Kämper and Peter-Eckhard Knabe argue that this ending brings Manon deliverance and redemption at the end of the opera.²¹ Perhaps Auber believes that she is saved at the end of the opera because of her love for him.

In Auber's interpretation of Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*, the title character remains a free, happy, yet tragic heroine. Her concern with luxuries is not as problematic as it is the original novel. She appears naïve here, not cunning, and her death is tragic because her character is innocent. Auber depicts her as a lover of des Grieux, although he is rarely on stage, and she is redeemed for that love at the end. The somber finale denotes the seriousness of Manon's situation in an otherwise light, comic opera. By departing from his usual musical language, Auber highlights the importance of Manon as a character. She is not just another virtuosic soprano role; she is someone to be revered.

²¹ Kämper and Knabe, "Un Requiem pour Manon," 185-186.

Chapter 4

JULES MASSENET'S *MANON* (1884)

Jules Massenet's *Manon* remains the closest to Prévost's novel of the three nineteenth-century operas. Massenet's Manon Lescaut is an emotional woman who makes her own decisions. Manon has relationships with many men, including des Grieux, de Brétigny, and to a lesser extent Guillot. While irresistible to men, Manon brings misfortune to them. She can be described as a shy girl at the beginning of the work and a coquette toward the middle.¹ Most important is Manon's sense of self-determination. Like the Manon in Prévost's novel, she makes conscious choices that affect her life and chart her growth in the work. But unlike Prévost's character, Massenet's protagonist expresses her thoughts about her decisions, allowing the audience to relate to her.

On January 19, 1884 Massenet's five-act *Manon* premiered at the Opéra-Comique in Paris, the same theatre in which Auber's *Manon Lescaut* first appeared. The librettists were Henri Meilhac and Philippe Gille. Although it is an opéra-comique, the term at this time no longer meant a light-hearted work with a happy ending, especially after Bizet's *Carmen* (1875).² The only requirement for the genre was spoken dialogue. Nevertheless, certain conventions appealed to audiences: the church scene, the gambling scene, and the street scene allow choral participation and movement.³

The title role is noted for its vocal virtuosity, and these demands on the voice make it a difficult role to cast, much like Verdi's Violetta. Steven Blier notes that many

¹ Mosco Carner, "The Two "Manons," in *Major and Minor*, ed. Mosco Carner (London: Duckworth, 1980), 137.

² Hugh Macdonald, "A Musical Synopsis," in *Massenet: Manon*, ed. Nicholas John (London: Calder, 1984), 17.

³ Macdonald, "A Musical Synopsis," 17.

voice types have sung this role recently, from light lyric sopranos to spintos.⁴ Early in the opera's history, coloratura sopranos were preferred, due to the melismatic passages in Manon's arias. But as orchestras and opera houses have increased in size, singers with larger, dramatic voices typically perform Manon.⁵

Auber's and Puccini's operas are not considered their best works, but Massenet's *Manon* ranks as his finest accomplishment, written when he was in his prime.⁶ In contrast, Auber was quite old when he wrote *Manon Lescaut*, and his most popular operas come from the middle part of his career. Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* is an early work and his first success. Massenet's *Manon* remains his most performed opera today. Interestingly, Massenet introduced a one-act sequel, *Le Portrait de Manon*, in 1894. It does not contain Manon Lescaut, but it does present an older Chevalier des Grieux and Manon's niece, Aurore, who does not appear in Prévost's work. *Portrait* was not a success, however, and is rarely performed today.

The Libretto and Changes from Prévost's Novel

Act I takes place at an inn in Amiens, where de Brétigny, a nobleman, and Guillot, the Minister of Finance, dine with three young actresses. Lescaut, a Guardsman, says that he plans to meet a member of his family there. Then, Manon descends from the carriage, and Lescaut immediately recognizes her as his cousin. She says that this is her first journey alone and she is going to the convent ("Je suis encor tout étourdie"). Guillot, interested in Manon, tells her that he has a carriage waiting for her and they can

⁴ Steven Blier, "Portraits de Manon," *Opera News* 65, no 9 (2001): 16

⁵ Blier, "Portraits de Manon," 17.

⁶ Carner, "The Two 'Manons,'" 137.

leave together. Lescaut sees that Guillot is trying to seduce Manon, so he lectures her about proper behavior. After he leaves, Manon admires the fashionable dresses of the three actresses, but vows to rid herself of worldly possessions. Meanwhile, the Chevalier des Grieux travels home to see his father, but he catches sight of Manon and falls in love with her. They exchange romantic vows and plan to escape to Paris, but we see that Manon is more interested in going to Paris than in living with des Grieux. The couple departs for Paris by stealing Guillot's carriage.

Act II takes place in the couple's apartment in Paris. Des Grieux writes to his father asking for permission to marry Manon. Unexpectedly, Lescaut enters with de Brétigny, disguised as a Guardsman. Des Grieux shows Lescaut his letter, while de Brétigny warns Manon that des Grieux will be abducted that evening, on the orders of his father. He offers Manon a better future with wealth and protection. After Lescaut and de Brétigny leave, Manon wonders which option would be better for her. Des Grieux leaves the room to send his letter and Manon says goodbye to the life they shared together, clearly choosing to be with de Brétigny ("Adieu, notre petite table"). Unaware of her decision, des Grieux comes back and sings about their bright future ("En fermant les yeux" or "Dream Song"). He goes to check on a noise outside, but soldiers capture him. The act ends with Manon's regret over her decision.

Act III begins in Paris on the Cours-la-Reine on a feast day. De Brétigny arrives with Manon, who is fashionably dressed and admired by a large crowd. She sings about her new lifestyle ("Je marche sur tous les chemins") and follows with a gavotte about love and youth ("Obéissons quand leur voix appelle"). Des Grieux's father, the Comte, greets the couple. Manon hears that des Grieux is no longer a Chevalier, but an Abbé, for

he entered the seminary of Saint-Sulpice. Manon approaches the Comte to find out if des Grieux still loves her. Before she receives an answer, Guillot, still pursuing Manon, brings over ballet dancers from the Académie Royale de Musique, whom Manon had wanted to see. The desire to see des Grieux overwhelms her, however, and she ignores the dancers and heads to Saint-Sulpice. There, the congregation praises des Grieux's sermon. His father is proud of him, but also wants him to carry on the family name. The Comte leaves, as he failed to change his son's mind to marry. While des Grieux prays, Manon appears and asks for forgiveness. He tries to reject her, but she sings about their past romance, and they reaffirm their love to each other.

In Act IV, Lescaut and Guillot are gambling, watched by the three actresses, at the Hôtel de Transylvanie. Manon arrives with des Grieux, who declares his love for her and gambles in hopes of gaining the wealth she desires. Guillot accuses des Grieux of cheating and brings in the police. The Comte enters and tells des Grieux that he will help him, but not Manon. Manon laments the situation, and des Grieux swears to defend her. The two are arrested.

Act V takes place near the road to Le Havre. Manon has been condemned to deportation to America. Des Grieux, who was freed by his father, and Lescaut, now an ally, wait to help Manon. Soldiers arrive with the prisoners, and the two men realize that their plans are hopeless. Lescaut bribes a sergeant to let Manon stay behind until evening. The group moves on, but Manon, sick and exhausted, falls to the ground at des Grieux's feet. She sings about their former happiness. Des Grieux tells her that they can have their old life again, but Manon knows that it is too late. She speaks her final words,

“et c’est là l’histoire de Manon Lescaut” (and that is the story of Manon Lescaut), and dies.

Although Massenet’s opera is the closest to Prévost’s novel, we see some changes to the original story. Many characters from the novel are removed, or their relationship to the couple changes. The librettists cut Des Grieux’s friend Tiberge, a voice of reason in the novel. Instead, Massenet deploys des Grieux’s father, a character who appeared in the book, in Tiberge’s place. Because Manon is the only female character of the opera (except for the three actresses, who are minor characters), the audience’s attention goes to her automatically.⁷ This helps to explain why the substitute prostitute, an important figure in the Prévost novel, does not appear in the opera.

Manon’s relationships with men have changed from the book. As in Auber’s opera, Manon leaves des Grieux only once, for de Brétigny. Unlike Auber, however, Massenet introduces another male role, Guillot, to show men’s attraction to Manon. This creates conflict in the story, more so than in Auber’s *Manon Lescaut*, where it is only a love triangle. In Massenet’s opera, as in Prévost’s original, we get a sense that Manon’s femininity is irresistible to men.

The carnival scene in act III, an addition, depicts Manon’s new life and her love of wealth. In this scene she regrets leaving des Grieux and does not pay attention to the expensive production in front of her. Instead, she transitions from the secular and luxurious first scene, to the religious and somber second scene. By including this extravagant scene, Massenet has us understand that Manon will have to give up everything she received in her new life to be with des Grieux again.

⁷ Macdonald, “A Musical Synopsis,” 20..

Lescaut's role represents a major change from the novel. In the Massenet, Lescaut is Manon's cousin, not her brother. The librettists introduce him at the beginning of the opera, instead of the middle of the story, as in the book, and this renders him a much more important character than he was in the original. He still has a gambling addiction, and he does push Manon to leave des Grieux by bringing over de Brétigny. Moreover, des Grieux and Lescaut do not kill anyone in the opera, and Lescaut remains alive.

Unlike Auber, Massenet omits the Louisiana setting. Manon never makes it to New Orleans. Instead, she dies in Le Havre, where des Grieux and Lescaut meet her. Lescaut appears in the scene with des Grieux, but he would not have been able to do this if Manon was in the New World. Perhaps the reason why Manon does not travel overseas is to allow for the redemption of Lescaut through his own actions, which connect the couple at the end of the opera. In the book Prévost portrays him as negative character to Manon and des Grieux's relationship, because Lescaut encourages gambling and suggests that Manon leave des Grieux. Here, he feels badly about his previous actions and acts as the Man of Quality, though not in the narrator function, letting Manon and des Grieux speak to each other one last time.

Compositional History and Sibyl Sanderson's Influence

Massenet began thinking about his own opera on *Manon Lescaut* in 1881, when he was scheduled to compose *Phoebé* to Henri Meilhac's libretto.⁸ Massenet disliked Meilhac's text and wished to work on a different project. He suggested Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* to Meilhac, who wrote the first two acts for their meeting the next day.⁹ The libretto was finished by the summer of 1882. He composed parts of *Manon* while lodging at the Hôtel de l'Europe in a room where Prévost had once stayed.¹⁰ Massenet finished the vocal score by February 1883 and played it at a dinner party with the librettists and several others.¹¹ Soprano Caroline Carvalho, a guest at the dinner, loved it so much that Massenet dedicated the score to her. From the beginning of his work on *Manon*, Massenet was very particular about the title. When people would ask him about his latest project he would reply "*Manon*." He notes that numerous people would ask him if he meant "*Manon Lescaut*," but he always replied that it was just "*Manon*."¹²

One of the famous interpreters of *Manon* suggested changes in the vocal part, which affect singers today. Sibyl Sanderson (1864-1903) was an American soprano who appeared frequently at the Opéra-Comique. She was a favorite of Massenet, and he

⁸ Demar Irvine, *Massenet: A Chronicle of His Life and Times* (Seattle: Demar Irvine, 1974), 162.

⁹ Irvine, *Massenet: A Chronicle of His Life and Times*, 162.

¹⁰ Jules Massenet, *My Recollections*, trans. H. Villiers Barnett (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1919), 140.

¹¹ Irvine, *Massenet: A Chronicle of His Life and Times*, 168.

¹² Massenet, *My Recollections*, 144.

MANON (avec charme et émotion) *rall.*
p Je suis... en - cor... tout é - tour - di - e... Je suis... en - cor...
pp
dol. *a Tempo.*
suivez.
rall. *piu f*
 tout en - gour - di - e... Ah! mon cou - sin!.. Ex - cu - sez -
espressivo. *f*
suivez.

Ex. 6 Massenet, *Manon*, “Je suis encor,” mm. 1-6

created several parts for her, including the title role in both *Esclarmonde* (1889) and *Thaïs* (1894). Another soprano, Marie Heilbron, premiered the role of Manon, but Sanderson later became a well-known interpreter of the famous character, becoming so popular that she performed it at Covent Garden. However, her debut at the London house did not go well, and she demanded that Massenet meet her in Switzerland to make major revisions to the role. These revisions remain in the published score.¹³

¹³ Jack Winsor Hansen, “Sibyl Sanderson’s Influence on *Manon*,” *The Opera Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1999): 42.

Sanderson wanted small changes in nearly every scene of the opera, and she asked that the spoken dialogue be set to music.¹⁴ In her arias, she wanted more suspensions and appoggiaturas, which Jack Winsor Hansen argues made Manon more seductive. For example, in “Je suis encor tout étourdie” she wanted an appoggiatura on the last syllable of “étourdie” to convey Manon’s naïveté (See Ex. 6).¹⁵ This accented nonchordal tone deemphasizes the F resolution, creating a feminine cadence. She also requested other markings for textual emphasis. For instance, at the end of the same aria she wanted tenuto markings over the first and last syllables of the phrase “pardonnez à mon bavardage.” In addition, she asked that a significant amount of coloratura and a higher tessitura be inserted. One telling example occurs in “Je suis encore.” Massenet had written Manon’s laughter as a series of short “ahs,” but Sanderson suggested a passage of fioratura for the laughs and a high ending to the aria.¹⁶ Sanderson also influenced the popularity of the arias. In the original score, Massenet had smaller, less important arias for Manon. “Adieu notre petite table,” notably, was originally more of an ariette, but she insisted on a more dramatic rendering.¹⁷ Her suggestion allowed the revised number to become one of the most well-known excerpts from the opera.

While the early stages of Massenet’s relationship with Sanderson were helpful in his composition, the later part was bitter. Massenet became jealous of her fiancé, Antonio Terry, a Cuban millionaire who moved to the United States with her. She sang Manon for her Metropolitan Opera debut in January 1895, but the company never

¹⁴ There is no record of Sibyl Sanderson’s influence affecting changes in any of Massenet’s other operas or any other composers’ operas.

¹⁵ Hansen, “Sibyl Sanderson’s Influence,” 42.

¹⁶ Hansen, “Sibyl Sanderson’s Influence,” 42.

¹⁷ Hansen, “Sibyl Sanderson’s Influence,” 43.

received the revised score. It is now apparent that Massenet never sent it, and he lied to her when he said he had.¹⁸

All in all, Sanderson had a profound impact on Massenet's revisions of *Manon* and on the popularity of the opera. She became so connected to the role that she was painted on the ceiling of the Théâtre Lyrique as Manon—an image that remained until 1955, when the ceiling was redecorated.¹⁹ She is the only American to have received this honor. It is hard to imagine the popularity of Massenet's *Manon* without Sanderson's suggestions.

The Narrator Removed and Manon's Emotions

As in the Auber opera, Massenet strips the Man of Quality and des Grieux from their roles as double narrators. There is no onstage narrator as there is in Jacques Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann* (1880). By expanding Manon's character, Massenet's des Grieux is far less developed than in the novel, except for his struggle at Saint-Sulpice.²⁰ In Prévost's literary work, as we have seen, the views of these male narrators distort Manon's image. Yet even in Massenet's opera, she does not quite break free from men's ownership. Lescaut scolds her and tells her how to behave, Guillot tries to seduce her in acts I and III with his wealth, she is de Brétigny's mistress, and des Grieux tries to buy her affections by gambling. Manon is a possession to them. This is not as

¹⁸ Hansen, "Sibyl Sanderson's Influence," 46.

¹⁹ Massenet's *Manon* did not premiere at the Théâtre Lyrique, but it was an important opera company in Paris in the nineteenth century. It was founded in 1847 as Opéra-National by composer Adolphe Adam, and renamed in 1852. Today, it is known for the premiere of Wagner's *Rienzi* and Gounod's *Faust*.

²⁰ Dina Grundemann Foster, "Manon Lescaut and Her Representation in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Criticism, and Opera" (PhD Diss. Michigan State University, 1998), 138.

pronounced in Auber's opera, which centers on Manon and downplays the other characters. While Manon cannot break free from ownership by others, she serves a larger role in the opera than in the novel. In the book, des Grieux describes her as almost perfect, even though she deserts him. Here, she is flawed. Her personality and emotions go through many changes in the course of the opera. She begins as a naïve girl in act I, but by act II she becomes torn.

In this opera, Manon choose to leave des Grieux for another man. Auber skips over her decisions and shows her already living with another, richer man after a conflict with des Grieux. Massenet, however, wishes to humanize Manon, and therefore allows her to express her thoughts in "Adieu notre petite table." In this aria, Manon mentions the household objects, such as the table and glass, that she shared with des Grieux. This domesticates Manon, creating a stark contrast with her character in the next act.²¹ It is interesting that she describes the objects and how she will abandon them, instead of admitting that she will leave des Grieux. After discussing Manon's voiceless nature in Prévost's novel, Andrew Miller argues that Manon creates a remove from herself at certain moments in this opera. She will sing explicitly about herself, using "je," when she expresses her innocent or gay side, but her language approaches a third-person description in intimate and revealing scenes.²² Miller likens this to her separation from the double narrator. Without the narrators she is finally able to speak for herself, but because Prévost includes little information about her emotions in the book, the librettists have trouble allowing her to express herself fully.

²¹ Andrew J. Miller, "Manon and Her Daughters: Literary Representations and Musical Adaptations of Three Femmes Fatales" (PhD Diss. Duke University, 2002), 62.

²² Miller, "Manon and Her Daughters," 48-49.

Morality in Massenet's Opera

In *Manon Lescaut*, Auber adds a character, Marguerite, who acts as an angelic woman compared to Manon. Even Bizet's *Carmen*, with a similar female protagonist, has a sweeter, contrasting character in Micaëla. In Massenet's opera, however, the divide between good characters and fallen characters is minimized. Instead, Massenet diminishes the crimes of Manon and des Grieux. Dina Grundemann Foster contends that this means the innocent characters are not necessary in the opera.²³ Massenet reduces the details of Manon's luxuries, cuts out the murders, and balances the tragic with the comic.²⁴ In this regard, the literary history of Prévost's novel is noteworthy. As I detailed in Chapter 2, Prévost revised *Manon Lescaut* about twenty years after the first edition to make the story more morally acceptable. Massenet keeps to the original novel, which does not highlight morality as much as the revised edition. As a result, notions of good and bad recede to the background in the opera.

In addition to telling Manon's story, Massenet comments on eighteenth-century French society. Auber's opera focuses on Manon and her relationship to des Grieux, so that there is little commentary on society. He omits the gambling scene, not allowing us to see how the people of the time viewed money or luxury. By including a gambling scene, Massenet emphasizes that the aristocracy thinks only of their own pleasure and are concerned with entertainment and spending money. Furthermore, Grundemann Foster argues that Massenet parodies society in the scenes with large choruses. He can do this partially because of the setting provided by Prévost. Prévost's novel takes place during

²³ Grundemann Foster, "Manon Lescaut and Her Representation," 141.

²⁴ Grundemann Foster, "Manon Lescaut and Her Representation," 142.

the Regency period (1715 – 1723), after the death of Louis XIV—a time of greed, anarchy, and movement away from religion—so Massenet sees fit to parody it.²⁵ This suggests that Massenet does not view Manon as an immoral character. He thinks of her, and des Grieux, as no more or less moral than the rest of society at the time.

Motivic Practices in *Manon*

Massenet, like many opera composers before him, associates musical motifs with certain characters or emotions. His use of motifs is not as thorough as Wagner's practices, but it does provide another interpretive guide for the opera.

Massenet deploys motifs that are connected to scenes or objects in the opera.²⁶ For example, the coach that brings Manon into the opera has its own theme (See Ex. 7). It appears before Manon arrives as the townspeople become interested in the coach, and it also sounds at her arrival. Massenet restates the coach theme later, in “Je suis encor tout étourdie,” when she sings about her journey. He assigns gambling its own theme, too (See Ex. 8). This is the most prominent motif in act IV, highlighting the importance of money. The soldiers are associated with another theme (See Ex. 9). This motif appears in both act IV and act V when the soldiers are escorting Manon. This creates a sense of unity in the two acts that are in very different geographical places.

²⁵ Grundemann Foster, “Manon Lescaut and Her Representation,” 121.

²⁶ Macdonald, “A Musical Synopsis,” 20.

Andantino



Ex. 12 Manon's First Innocence Motif

Andantino lento



Ex. 13 Manon's Second Innocence Motif



Ex. 14 Manon's Playful Motif



Ex. 15 Passion Motif

All^o moderato

Ex. 16 Gavotte Motif

that introduces him in act I, but also comes back in act II when he appears there. Des Grieux also has only one motif (See Ex. 11). Calm and serious, it shows him to be a sensitive character.²⁸

Manon, on the other hand, has several motifs. Her first two, prominent in act I, display her innocence--the first with its syncopation, and the second with its ornamented line (See Ex. 12 - 13). These motifs disappear quickly in the opera, as does Manon's innocence.²⁹ Another motif, which first appears in act II, depicts Manon's light-hearted and playful side with its staccato notes and major mode (See Ex. 14). The use of multiple motifs for Manon, but not for other characters, shows that she goes through drastic changes in the opera. She moves from an innocent girl in act I to a woman who is concerned with luxuries and entertainment in acts II and III. As Manon dies in act V, her second innocence motif comes back briefly, reminding us of her naïveté early in the opera and persuading us to sympathize with her as she dies. In a preface to the score (1884), Massenet explained that Manon's multiple motifs show variations in her character: "her personality is a mixture of melancholy and gaiety" (*dont le type est un mélange de mélancolie et de gaieté*).³⁰

A passion motif expresses the turbulent relationship between des Grieux and Manon (See Ex. 15).³¹ This appears in the orchestra when the two first meet, and then

²⁸ Macdonald, "A Musical Synopsis," 22.

²⁹ Macdonald, "A Musical Synopsis," 18.

³⁰ Jules Massenet, quoted in Miller, "Manon and Her Daughters," 46.

³¹ Macdonald, "A Musical Synopsis," 18.

again in their first duet after their individual motifs.³² The passion motif appears at important points in the opera, including the apology scene and the final scene.

The motifs associated with specific characters or events appear in conjunction with other motifs during the opera to convey something about the plot. For example, a few of the motifs are introduced in the prelude to the opera, including the gavotte motif (See Ex.16) and the soldiers' music (although in the major mode at first). This describes Manon's love of luxury and her tragic fate from this obsession. It is important to note that the motifs associated with Manon's character do not appear in the prelude. Only her fate is foreshadowed. The scene in the apartment of act II features several motifs to reiterate the drama. The passion motif sounds in the orchestra when Manon and des Grieux speak, but it is not long before des Grieux's jealousy creeps in over Manon's gaiety theme in the orchestra. When Lescaut and de Brétigny enter, their motifs enter with them.³³ As des Grieux leaves to send his letter, Manon's playful motif comes back, conveying that she is interested in what wealthier men can offer her. Des Grieux comes back in and sings the passion motif, showing his interest in Manon before she leaves him.³⁴

Act III features frivolous motifs, the passion motif, and somber music to depict the actions on stage. The gavotte motif appears frequently in the first scene, illustrating a dance hall. In the second scene, a more somber motif emerges in the organ. The passion motif is used in dramatic places in this scene to show des Grieux's struggle. He first recalls the passion theme when he thinks about his past with Manon, before she visits him

³² Macdonald, "A Musical Synopsis," 22.

³³ Macdonald, "A Musical Synopsis," 23.

³⁴ Macdonald, "A Musical Synopsis," 25.

in the church. When she comes to see him, he is angry at first, and the passion theme leaves his music. As she wins him over, the passion theme climatically ends the act. The use of contrasting motifs in this act shows Manon's two lives—one of luxury and wealth, and one of poverty but with love.

Manon's Arias and Ensembles

While the motifs do reflect the characters and dramatic moments in the plot, Massenet uses many other musical means to express the drama and characterize Manon. Massenet's Manon has a larger number of arias and greater prominence in ensembles than in Auber's opera, and examining her music provides much insight into her character.

As with many of Massenet's other operas, the vocal lines in *Manon* are meticulously marked.³⁵ Massenet carefully places dynamics, breath marks, vocal inflections like tenuto markings, and tempo designations over much of the score. At one point he marks Manon's music as piano, but pianissimo three notes later, making sure the singer knows exactly what sound he wants.

The orchestra introduces Manon with her motif in act I. She then sings two phrases to Lescaut before jumping into her first aria, "Je suis encor tout étourdie." This aria is filled with ornamentation, including the appoggiaturas, grace notes, and coloratura that Sanderson suggested. There are also many rallentandos that allow the singer playing her to lean into the higher notes of phrases, such as the two in Ex. 6. She suddenly switches to fast passages when she describes that she has never been away from home

³⁵ Gérard Condé, "Massenet," in *Massenet: Manon*, ed. Nicholas John (London: Calder, 1984), 7.

The musical score is for a scene from Massenet's *Manon*, measures 42-47. It is written in 3/4 time. The vocal line (soprano) begins with the lyrics "met au couvent Tout à l'heu - re... Et c'est là l'histoi - re" and ends with "de Manon... de Manon Les - cant!...". The tempo is marked "Allegretto." and the dynamics include "sans retenir.", "mf", and "p (simplement)". The piano accompaniment features a variety of notes, rests, and dynamic markings, including "p" and "f".

Ex. 17 Massenet, *Manon*, "Et je sais votre nom," mm. 42-47

before. This aria, with its ornaments and innocent text, shows that Manon is a young and naïve figure when we first see her. Manon has a very different character later in the act when she sings "Voyons Manon," and admires the actresses. The B-minor music, sigh motifs, and slow tempo convey Manon's desire to be like the wealthy women she sees. Her second innocence motif is prominent in this passage, displaying her fight against her desire to live a life of luxury.

Manon and des Grieux share a love duet, "Et je sais votre nom," before they leave for Paris in act I. This occurs immediately after des Grieux first sees her. The passion theme appears in the orchestra before they speak to each other. The duet begins tentatively, with the alternation of phrases between the two. Manon tells des Grieux of

Andante. (sans lenteur) 68 = ♩

Hautb. *p* *dim.* *pp*

Clar. *p* *dim.* *pp*

Viol. *pp* *très soutenu* *(de même)* *div.* *unis.* *mf* *ppp* *div.* *ppp*

pp *très soutenu* *I? Solo.* *pp*

(Manon s'est approchée peu à peu de la table toute servie.)
(avec émotion et simplicité) *espressivo* *mf* *pp*

M. A dieu, no tre pe ti te ta ble, Qui nous ré u nit si sou vent!... A dieu, a dieu, no tre pe...

Solo. *mf* *pp*

Ex. 18 Massenet, *Manon*, “Adieu notre petite table,” mm. 1-6

her parents’ wish for her to stay at a convent. She even includes a verbal pun to Prévost’s well-known *histoire*: “et c’est là l’histoire de Manon” (and that is the story of Manon) (See Ex. 17). These words later become Manon’s last words. Manon and des Grieux end the duet by singing in unison octaves, which creates a powerful sense of mutuality in the couple.

Manon’s aria of act II, “Adieu, notre petite table,” comes while des Grieux mails his letter and she decides to leave him. It features a thin orchestral accompaniment (See Ex. 18), a device Massenet uses for the sadder moments of this opera, such as Manon’s death. The accompaniment is soft and in the middle range of the strings, clarinet, and oboe, lacking a traditional low-sounding bass line until the final chord. Manon’s G-minor melodies also lay in her middle range, providing contrast with her first aria and her flashy arias of act III. Although the text of “Adieu, notre petite table” is removed from her relationship with des Grieux, musically it sounds like the most introspective and intimate aria of the opera because of the hushed dynamics and simple melody.

Manon's arias of act III show that she has temporarily abandoned the internal struggles experienced in act II. At the beginning of Act III she loves the luxuries and admirers of her new life. She starts her first aria, "Je marche sur tous," after a chorus introduces her. Manon no longer seems innocent in this ornamented aria full of coloratura, a style we saw in the first act. Fittingly, the two innocence motifs do not appear in these arias. Instead, the text shows that she is concerned about wealth and reputation. Then she moves into her famous gavotte, "Obéissons quand leur voix appelle." The most important part of this light-hearted dance is that men sing with Manon, showing their admiration for her. Like Auber's Manon, Massenet's Manon does not merely attract a few men, but proves irresistible to all of the men in the opera.

In act III, scene 2, Manon enters the church and apologizes to des Grieux. Before she sees him, she hears a chorus sing a polyphonic, G-major Magnificat, which is not based on any of the eight traditional Magnificat chant tones. Manon speaks over them, wanting to pray. She then sings her own prayer, asking God to forgive her. Her G-major line grows naturally out of the choral cadence, and she follows the same contours as the subject of the choral piece, though she does not repeat it directly. Massenet writes vocal swells and crescendos to higher notes that make this music sound more emotional and sincere than some of Manon's earlier music. As she sings her final note of the prayer, the chorus concludes the Magnificat and des Grieux enters. This mixture of the sacred with Manon's secular lifestyle is interesting. The Magnificat, a text linked to the Virgin Mary, allows Manon to repent for her abandonment of des Grieux for her new lifestyle. Here, as in the end of act II, we can briefly see another moment of Manon's regret and love for des Grieux.

All° 138 = ♩
 (Changeant de ton, et revenant à la réalité)
 M. Notre opulence est en vo - lé - e... Cheva -
 All°
 f p
 M. -lier, nous n'avons plus rien!.. Mais i - ci, quand on le veut

Ex. 19 Massenet, *Manon*, “Notre opulence,” mm. 1-6

Manon’s music of act IV is shorter than her music of the previous acts. She does not sing many major arias, and she dies slowly so her music fades away with her. In this scene Manon’s concern with wealth is apparent, even though she is poor. When she reflects on her impoverished state with des Grieux in the gambling scene, she sings in G minor, the key of “Adieu notre petite table,” with thin, plucked accompaniment (See Ex. 19). Perhaps the resemblance to her earlier aria is Massenet’s way of subtly highlighting the reversal of her decision. Instead of saying goodbye to her life with des Grieux, she accepts the fact that she will have to live without luxury. Manon does not stay depressed for long, however. She encourages those in the scene to enjoy life and gamble. Now she sings a catchy melody in C major with small vocal ornaments and playful leaps. The actresses join her, and in some productions so do members of the chorus. These two

a volontà **pp** **Stesso tempo.** (ce murmure)
 M. je meurs!... il le faut... il le faut!... **pp** Et c'est
 B. Manon!...
 G. *f* (avec effroi)
 suivez. *très doux.* **Stesso tempo.** *dim.*
 M. là... l'histoi - re... *parlé* (elle meurt) de Manon, Lescart!... LES GRIMES jete un cri déchirant et tombe sur le corps de MANON.
 a Tempo. **ff**
 BIDEAU.
 8^e basse, 8^e basse, 8^e basse.
allargando.
 8^e basse

Ex. 20 Massenet, *Manon*, finale

contrasting sections show that Manon still obsesses over money even though she has relinquished it to be with des Grieux.

Manon does not have an aria in her death scene. Instead, she sings a duet with des Grieux, mostly in unison octaves. The number features descending lines, a characteristic that we have seen in Auber's finale. When they discuss the past, the passion motif plays softly in the background. Manon ends the opera unaccompanied with "et c'est là l'histoire de Manon Lescaut" (and that is the story of Manon Lescaut) before a four-measure closing passage in the orchestra (See Ex. 20). Manon's line is notable because of its lack of orchestral accompaniment and the interesting harmonies. The preceding duet was in B-flat major, and Manon moves directly into her final phrase from that duet. The tonality, the pedal notes, and the scalar passages resemble the end of act III, creating symmetry in the opera and also alluding to Manon's seduction of des Grieux. The four notes in her passage (G-flat, A-flat, F, and E) seem unsettling, but they reflect the G-flat major tonality related to B-flat major. Her line fades away, which is common with female deaths in opera. Immediately after her phrase, the orchestra quickly moves back to B-flat major, with tonic pedals in the remaining measures and a B-flat major chord in the final bar. Because of this chromatic moment, Manon's final phrase does not feel firm or finalized. It is almost as if Massenet acknowledges that Manon is a character who lives on beyond a singular work.

Massenet's Manon is perhaps the most introspective of the three operas. In Auber's opera she serves mainly as a vehicle for virtuosity, and as we will see in Puccini's opera des Grieux occupies much of the spotlight. In Massenet's work we see a

transformation from a young naïve girl, very different from Prévost's novel, to a wealthy, but depressed courtesan, to a repentant sinner, to a dying, nostalgic woman. By using certain motifs throughout, Massenet provides us with a sense of Manon's changing character and her relationship with des Grieux. Because her character goes through an obvious evolution, she feels more realistic and audiences sympathize with her. Massenet can bring Prévost's vague, enigmatic, Manon Lescaut to life by letting her experience real emotions. As we will see in the next chapter Puccini, like Massenet, emphasizes the emotional and passionate nature of Prévost's novel, this time by depicting Manon and des Grieux as a pair of lovers.

Chapter 5

GIACOMO PUCCINI'S *MANON LESCAUT* (1893)

A complete departure from the virtuosic singing and gay character of Daniel Auber's *Manon Lescaut* and the French music of Massenet's *Manon*, the heroine of Giacomo Puccini's tragic and passionate opera is a lyrical and loving figure. She is an Italian operatic heroine, with her melodic lines, declarations of love, and passionate outbursts. While the Manon in Abbé Prévost's novel desires wealth, Puccini's Manon, at least in the scenes we see, acts through love for the Chevalier des Grieux. This allows her to move past her desire for wealth and makes her a relatable character to Italian audiences.

Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, the last of the three *Manon* operas, premiered at Turin's Teatro Regio on February 1, 1893. Puccini knew Prévost's novel, as it was popular in Italy at the time, and he wrote the opera at Giulio Ricordi's suggestion.¹ He wrote the work from 1889 to 1892. The compositional history is difficult to organize due to Puccini's many revisions. He composed the opera in an unusual order, beginning with act I, proceeding to act IV, then act II, and finally act III.²

Puccini was familiar with Jules Massenet's score to *Manon* (1884), but Massenet's opera did not premiere in Italy until after *Manon Lescaut* became a success. Puccini is quoted as saying that Massenet's opera was too French "with the powder and

¹ William Weaver, "Puccini's Manon and His Other Heroines," in *The Puccini Companion*, ed. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2000), 113.

² Suzanne Scherr, "The Chronology of Composition of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*," in *Giacomo Puccini: L'uomo, il musicista, il panorama europeo*, ed. Gabriella Biagi Ravenni and Carolyn M. Gianturco (Lucca, Italy: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2007), 82.

minuets. I shall feel the story as an Italian, with desperate passion.”³ While passion and romance exist in Prévost’s French novel, Puccini strips the story of smaller details, such as references to the French economy, and diminishes the amount of luxury to create an opera about the relationship between the two characters. Puccini avoided competition with Massenet’s score, leaving out key scenes in Massenet’s opera. For example, the Italian scenario skips over the couple’s time in Paris, relieving Puccini of comparisons with Massenet’s “Adieu notre petite table” and “En fermant les yeux” (“Dream song”).⁴ Instead of staying true to the narrative of the story, as in Massenet’s opera, Puccini and his librettists chose a handful of scenes that are prominent in the novel. Puccini thought this would provide a sharper focus on the characters and the drama of the story. It is not known whether Puccini knew Auber’s *Manon Lescaut*.

The Libretto and Changes to Prévost’s Plot

(I have made cuts here to shorten the plot summary) In act I, Manon and the Chevalier des Grieux meet at a public square in Amiens, and they escape to Paris by stealing Geronte’s carriage. Puccini skips over Manon and des Grieux’s time in Paris. Instead, he starts the next act after Manon has left des Grieux. At the beginning of act II Manon is Geronte’s mistress in the French capital. While she primps in front of a mirror, she complains to her maids that Geronte is too old, and he bores her. Her thoughts turn to des Grieux, and her brother overhears her musings. Lescaut is upset by Manon’s unhappiness about her relationship with Geronte and sends for des Grieux. While this is

³ No date given. Weaver, “Puccini’s Manon and His Other Heroines,” 113.

⁴ Weaver, “Puccini’s Manon and His Other Heroines,” 113.

happening, musicians arranged by Geronte perform a madrigal, a minuet, and a gavotte to entertain Manon. Even though Puccini disapproved of Massenet's French music, he includes French dances in his own opera. Perhaps Puccini parodies Massenet's opera in this scene. Des Grieux arrives at Geronte's house and the lovers reconnect, but Geronte comes back to his house earlier than expected. Manon declares that she cannot love Geronte, and he leaves. Before she can escape, soldiers enter the house and arrest Manon. Des Grieux is left behind and not permitted to follow her. A brief intermezzo, not normally staged, occurs between acts II and III. Act III begins with des Grieux en route to Le Havre because he is not able to free her from prison. Lescaut bribes a guard to let des Grieux and Manon speak. Soon they learn that she will be deported to Louisiana. Des Grieux unsuccessfully tries to rescue Manon. As the crowd makes brutal calls at the prostitutes, Manon walks to the ship with the other prostitutes, looking pale and sad. The captain of the ship sees des Grieux's grief and allows him to board with Manon. Finally, Manon dies in the desert outside New Orleans in act IV

A large team of librettists, at least seven, worked on Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*. These include Marco Praga, Giuseppe Giacosa, Domenico Oliva, Luigi Illica, composer Ruggero Leoncavallo, publisher Giulio Ricordi, and Puccini himself. No librettist is listed on the title page of the original score. Harvey Sachs argues that the large number of librettists led to a confused plot, and forced Puccini to deemphasize the story and play up the musical depiction of the two main characters.⁵ Puccini's unhappiness with the original libretto conceived by Oliva caused the myriad of librettists. In September 1890 Puccini sent it to Ricordi for revision, but the composer was not satisfied with the newer

⁵ Harvey Sachs, "Manon, Mimi, Artù," in *The Puccini Companion*, ed. William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2000), 129.

version. Puccini himself noted flaws in *Manon Lescaut*. Later in his career, he called it “youthful” and admitted that it had “some defects.”⁷ It was an early opera, and his masterpieces started with *La Bohème*. Still, the opera’s premiere in Turin was met with public acclaim, and the popular work traveled as far as Buenos Aires and St. Petersburg.⁸

Like Auber’s *Manon Lescaut*, the libretto to Puccini’s opera departs from Prévost’s novel in several ways. One involves the addition, removal, and changing of characters. The new character Edmondo does not contribute much to the plot, but he introduces the theme of pleasure and allows des Grieux and Manon to have separate dramatic entrances. The Man of Quality, des Grieux’s family, and his friend Tiberge, who function as voices of reason, are eliminated. The librettists remove the substitute prostitute from the opera. Manon’s brother is remarkably different in Puccini’s opera from his original character in the novel. In the literary work, Prévost portrays Lescaut as a man who is only concerned with his own pleasures, like gambling. In the opera, Lescaut worries about Manon’s happiness, and he seeks out des Grieux for her. Lescaut, instead of the Man of Quality, bribes the guards so that the couple can speak. This change in Lescaut’s character makes up for the removal of the reasonable characters such as the Man of Quality and Tiberge.

Due to the excessive cuts from the novel, many of the major themes of Prévost’s work do not survive. Only briefly in act II does the theme of wealth and pleasure become important. Major themes from the *histoire*--good and evil, religion, and class distinction--

⁷ Suzanne Scherr, “Editing Puccini’s Operas: The Case of *Manon Lescaut*,” *Acta Musicologica* 61, no. 1 (1990): 62.

⁸ Scherr, “Editing Puccini’s Operas,” 70.

-are no longer present. Puccini's composition follows the relationship between Manon and des Grieux, thus the theme of love is prominent. Sachs describes this phenomenon as being more of a character-centered opera instead of a narrative-driven opera.⁹ The work's structure is closer to a series of vignettes than a linear narrative, forcing Puccini to emphasize the romance and passion between Manon and des Grieux instead of detailing smaller events.

The most noticeable change to the libretto is the removal of large portions of the plot. Puccini's opera covers the couple's first encounter, Manon's new relationship with Geronte, her time in prison, and her death in the desert. Many elements are omitted: the couple's bliss in Paris, des Grieux's period of study and his father's recommendations, the murders, Manon's other lovers and second arrest, the couple's hopeful time on their voyage to Louisiana, and the jealousy of Synnelet. In fact, without knowledge of Prévost's story, the acts of this opera seem loosely connected, with large narrative gaps, and the opera comes off as a collection of scenes of a well-known story.¹⁰

In Puccini's opera, Manon is most importantly the lover to des Grieux. Her feelings for him are fleeting, but it is not clear why. Instead of being concerned with wealth, as she is in much of Prévost's novel, she wishes for beauty and worldly possessions for a shorter period of time. In the opera, she seeks beauty for only a few moments before she remembers her life with des Grieux.

⁹ Sachs, "Manon, Mimi, Artù," 130.

¹⁰ Weaver, "Puccini's Manon and His Other Heroines," 113.

Manon as Puccini's First Heroine

Manon Lescaut was a transitional opera for Puccini in terms of character development. It was Puccini's third opera, coming after *Le Villi* (1884) and *Edgar* (1889), and is followed by *La Bohème* (1896). The female characters in Puccini's first two operas function in secondary roles to men. In *Le Villi*, Anna, merely the fiancée of the main character Roberto, dies of a broken heart early in the opera. In *Edgar*, Fidelia embodies virtue and chastity while Tigrana represents exotic sexuality and debauchery. However, neither woman has the character development of Edgar. Manon is not so simple. William Weaver contends that she functions as a character like Don Juan: she "steps out of literature, defies any author and stands on her own."¹¹ Unlike Anna, Fidelia, and Tigrana, Manon is a complex character who acts as more than a supporting character to the tenor, thus marking a change in Puccini's operatic heroines.

Weaver identifies a sense of yearning in many of Puccini's late heroines that sets them apart from the female leads in the first two operas.¹² Cio-Cio San desires the return of Pinkerton, Mimì hopes for good health that will allow her to remain with Rodolfo, and Suor Angelica yearns to be with her son. Manon, in the novel, yearns for wealth and pleasure. While this is not explicitly described in the opera, the story would have been well known to the audience and her desires would have been inferred.

Manon arguably evolves in Prévost's novel, but critics disagree whether Manon grows or changes in Puccini's opera. Susan Rutherford contends that she is not allowed

¹¹ Weaver, "Puccini's Manon and His Other Heroines," 112.

¹² Weaver, "Puccini's Manon and His Other Heroines," 118.

spiritual growth in this work.¹³ She cites Manon's laments for herself only, not for des Grieux, in the final act as proof of Manon's stability. Alessandra Campana, however, notes differences in Manon in each act. In act I Manon appears as a youthful, innocent girl; in act II a beautiful woman in the midst of treasures; and in act III a desperate heroine unjustly sentenced.¹⁴ These may not be changes in Manon's character or spiritual growth, but this could be her way of modifying how she appears to the outside world. Manon is concerned with appearances, as we see in act two when she admires her gaze in the mirror. Perhaps Manon, in Puccini's adaptation, unconsciously develops varied personas to deal with specific situations, instead of exposing her true character. The final act gives us hints of this. The openness of the setting in the desert, with only des Grieux, would seem to allow Manon to search for her true identity. Instead, Manon mimics the isolated and lifeless nature of the desert by mirroring it with her own, singular death.¹⁵

Puccini's operas are often compared to those of Verdi, but their treatment of female characters is remarkably different. While Verdi's heroines make choices that determine their fate, the fate of many of Puccini's heroines is predetermined by the actions of other characters or the consequences of events.¹⁶ For example, Gilda in *Rigoletto* makes a conscious choice to sacrifice herself because she loves the Duke. Suor Angelica, however, who wants to be with her son again, sees a vision of him persuading her to come into heaven and finally realizes she has mistakenly committed suicide. In a similar vein, Manon mourns her death as the result of her beauty, but not her choices.

¹³ Susan Rutherford, "'Non Voglio Morir': Manon's Death," *The Opera Quarterly* 24, no. 1-2 (2009): 39.

¹⁴ Alessandra Campana, "Look and Spectatorship in *Manon Lescaut*," *The Opera Quarterly* 24, no. 1-2 (2009): 22.

¹⁵ Campana, "Look and Spectatorship in *Manon Lescaut*," 23.

¹⁶ Weaver, "Puccini's Manon and His Other Heroines," 113-114.

Manon bears a striking resemblance to Violetta from Verdi's *La Traviata*. In fact, there is even a prostitute named Violetta in the third act to pay homage to Verdi's heroine.¹⁷ Rutherford contends that Puccini writes Manon like Violetta to make her "an Italian version" of the French character. The two women have similarities even before Puccini exaggerated them. Both women are young, beautiful French courtesans who find true love, but die natural deaths in the arms of their lovers. Puccini plays up these similarities by writing Manon's vocal music in the same range, color, and tessitura as Violetta.¹⁸ But key differences distinguish Manon and Violetta. Violetta begins her story as a prostitute and moves toward purity, while Manon undergoes the opposite process. Rutherford explains that sexual chastity was a popular topic in Italy in the mid to late 1800s because Italy was suffering from a crisis of pregnant unmarried women. In the 1880s, for example, roughly forty percent of brides were pregnant, so Italians held the Virgin Mary as an ideal for female chastity.¹⁹ Female chastity and promiscuity were in the thoughts of Italian men at this time, and the theme figured prominently in many works of art.

As Puccini's heroine, Manon becomes a tragic character, who had unfortunate events happen to her. Thus, Puccini does not assign blame to Manon for the tragedy of this opera. Instead, she mourns that her beauty causes her fate. Though not as complex as Mimì and Tosca, Manon Lescaut is an important transitional heroine for Puccini.

¹⁷ As stated in the introduction, *La Traviata* is based on Alexandre Dumas's *La Dame aux camélias* (The Lady of the Camellias) (1848), which was inspired by Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*.

¹⁸ Rutherford, "'Non Voglio Morir,'" 40.

¹⁹ Rutherford, "'Non Voglio Morir,'" 40.

Public vs. Private or Masculine vs. Feminine

One of the ways Puccini develops Manon's character is by emphasizing the idea of private and public. According to Roger Parker, a man lives in a public world of politics and civic display, and a private world of family and personal relationships.²⁰ As women of the time rarely entered politics, they existed almost wholly in the private realm. This opera shows both sides of the two characters, which allows Puccini to examine how they act in different situations.

The busy, outdoor scenes of act I convey a public and masculine-dominated sphere. Puccini emphasizes the extroverted nature by structuring the tempi, and orchestral and vocal textures, but not thematic development, to reflect the symphonic genre.²¹ The symphony was the most well-known genre available to the masses. The first movement lasts until the arrival of Manon. This part of the act is full of musical and dramatic activity, and motivic exploration of an orchestral theme. The second, slow movement ensues when Manon and des Grieux meet. This allows Puccini to pause and broaden this key event. The plotting of Geronte and Lescaut functions as an active scherzo. Tying the act together, the finale features the various events and characters of the plot and reunites them like a recapitulation. This section occurs when des Grieux and Manon plan to live in Paris. At this time, des Grieux is the most prominent character, singing more music than Manon. Here, Manon seems shy, naïve, and private, so she remains reserved in public.

²⁰ Roger Parker, "Manon Lescaut and the Apotheosis of Private Man," in *Una Piacevole Estate di San Martino: Studi e ricerche per I settant'anni di Marcello Conati* (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2000), 315.

²¹ Parker, "Manon Lescaut and the Apotheosis of Private Man," 320.

Puccini mixes private and public elements in act II. The setting, Geronte's house, is private, but musicians, dancers, soldiers, Lescaut, and Geronte add a public element to this scene. The private setting would imply the feminine, but Manon feels conflicted with her feelings toward des Grieux and her current relationship with Geronte. Puccini allows Manon to enter the public world even though she is a woman. As a courtesan, she would have been a working woman who would have commonly associated with the public. Thus the librettists introduce both private and public to subtly illustrate her role as a courtesan, without explicitly stating it.

Act III takes place at a prison with soldiers, prisoners, and the major characters. This public scene leads to important moments with des Grieux, but not Manon. In the middle of quiet music, he suddenly bursts into the aria "Guardata passo son." Manon stays in the background in this public area. Unlike act I, she is not naïve instead; she is a convicted criminal. Her silence in the public arena demonstrates how men have control over Manon in the world. Her wealth and her relationship are entirely dependent on men and her future depends on their actions.

The final act is isolated, both in staging and orchestration, and in the wilderness. It is just Manon and des Grieux in the desert of Louisiana. The orchestration thins out, abandoning the couple and leaving them even more alone. Although Manon dies in this scene, she thrives musically here. Des Grieux has less music and less dialogue. This section features more restraint and contemplation than acts I and III. Manon, tired of remaining silent from the last act, speaks up.

Puccini and the librettists write Manon into public and private scenes to explain her changing position in the story. She begins as a naïve girl, but quickly becomes a

courtesan, criminal, and dying woman. Manon's reserved demeanor in acts I and III conveys men's dominating relationships to her. They do not allow her to speak, and they try to control her actions and emotions. Her extroverted nature in act II suggests she is modifying her behavior to live in the masculine world. Finally, the lonely desert of act IV allows Manon to finally speak as she pleases.

Manon's Musical Characteristics and Vocal Mimicry

Manon's vocal lines and orchestration gradually change over the course of the first act, reflecting the progression from her first meeting with des Grieux to her beginning a relationship with him.²² In Act I she only sings when des Grieux is also on stage, normally to him or with him. Her vocal lines at the beginning of the act fall in the middle of her range and are in a speech-like *parlante* style, full of repeated pitches and short phrases. Des Grieux's lines soar into a high register and display a lyrical, aria-like style. His phrases are considerably longer at the beginning of the act, sometimes lasting pages, while Manon's extend only a few measures (See Ex. 21). Des Grieux's music often begins on the beat, usually on strong beats, whereas Manon's entrances are typically syncopated. This reflects their respective approaches to love. Des Grieux's expressive lines convey his love for Manon, while Manon's textual lines depict aloofness and uncertainty. In any case, the two characters do not have equal vocal lines at the beginning—it is clearly one sided, just as in Prévost's novel.

²² I consulted the following score, available at IMSLP Petrucci Music Library: Giacomo Puccini, *Manon Lescaut*, 1st ed. (Milan: G. Ricordi, 1915).

74

Fl. I. II.

Ob. I.

in Sib
Cl. in Sib

Fag.

MANON (con semplicità e modestamente, alzandosi)

D.G. Ma. non..... Lescaut mi chia. mo.

di. can. le dol. ci lab. bra come vi chiama. te...

Viol.

V. le

Vo.

Cb.

pp

uniti

div.

Ex. 21 Puccini, *Manon Lescaut*, Act I, 6 mm. after rehearsal no. 27.

Puccini differentiates the orchestration between Manon and des Grieux in the first act. Lush, full orchestration, especially active string parts and busy winds and brass, accompanies des Grieux. This heavy orchestration goes well with his aria-like vocal lines. Manon's orchestration is much thinner. The strings are often silent or static



Ex. 22 Puccini, *Manon Lescaut*, Act I, 2 mm. after rehearsal no. 30

beneath her speech-like lines, and the brass drop out. But the oboe, clarinet, and/or flute often double and accompany her phrases (See Ex. 21). Perhaps Puccini associated the fuller sounds of the orchestra with the masculine and the lighter sounds of the winds with the feminine. In addition, orchestral music functions differently for Manon and des Grieux. The instrumental lines in des Grieux's music sound independent and do not merely accompany his lines. In Manon's music, the instrumental music reflects her vocal writing. The independence of des Grieux's lines could symbolize his overwhelming feelings when he first meets Manon, and her thin, "dependent" orchestration could depict her aloofness and relate to our uncertainty of her thoughts. This contrast shows that the characters are not at equal stages in their relationship, at least at the beginning of the opera.

Puccini starts to introduce aspects of each character's music into the writing for the other to show their growing love. Des Grieux first begins to mimic Manon's style by switching to a *parlante* style, showing that he becomes closer to Manon. He still keeps elements of his music by staying in a high range, which is not typically suitable for such vocal lines, and he starts to enter both on and off the beat (rehearsal no. 29). Manon picks up des Grieux's musical style later, after Lescaut calls to her. She moves to a higher range and has lyrical vocal lines that begin on strong beats (See Ex. 22). Puccini may feel that she starts to connect with des Grieux here, and her hesitancy starts to fade. She still holds on to her thinner, wind-based orchestration, however, which shows that

she has not committed to the relationship and the two are not a couple. In their first meeting at the beginning of the act the couple never sings together, depicting separation.

After a scene where the couple does not appear on stage, they meet again and plan to run away. Manon and des Grieux continue to sing separately, but here they sing in compatible styles (Rehearsal No. 53-54). Their lines are long and lyrical. The strings are still thicker when he sings and thinner when she sings, allowing the winds to shine through. Eventually her orchestration mirrors his, morphing into full textures with strings and winds (See Ex. 23). The violins, which had at first been absent, double her now, reflecting earlier music of des Grieux. Finally, at rehearsal no. 57, the couple sings together for the first time in the opera and affirms their relationship. Their vocal music displays the lyrical style and full orchestration that was characteristic of des Grieux, as though Manon is merely mirroring or adopting his style and abandoning her own. Lescaut and Edmondo join the couple in an ensemble. After a moment of panic the couple sings their last phrase in the act (Rehearsal no. 61). They sing in octaves with strings, clarinet, oboe, and flute, an abrupt change from the thick orchestration depicting panic in the ensemble. Despite their similar musical styles, however, the two have different texts and are still not completely connected.

At the beginning of act two, Manon has abandoned des Grieux to live with Geronte, who is wealthier. She starts off the Paris scene by singing with her brother. Her music with Lescaut is much like her music when she first meets des Grieux: short, off the beat, speech-like, and full of wind accompaniment (Rehearsal no. 1). A more melodic

(56) *a tempo* appena trattenuto *a tempo*

Fl. I. *pp* *mf*

Ob. I. *pp*

Cl. in Sib. I. *pp* *mf*

F&E. *mf*

Corn. I. & II. *pp*

Corn. III & IV. *mf*

Arpa *pp*

a tempo *appena trattenuto* *a tempo*
 MANON (con semplicità)
 Una fanciulla... po-ve-ra son io, ... non ho sul volto luce di bel-là, rigna tristezza sul destino

Viol. *ppp subito*

Vcl. *con molta espressione* *ppp*

Vc. *con molta espressione* *ppp*

Cb. *pizz.*

Ex. 23 Puccini, *Manon Lescaut*, Act I, rehearsal no. 56

Fl. *I. Andantino giusto* ♩=69

MANON (con la massima civetteria, rivolta a Geronte)

L'o-ra, o Tir - si, è vaga e bel - la... Ri - de il gior - no, ri - de in - tor - no la.....

Viol. *pizz.* *mf* *p*

V.le *pizz.* *pp*

Vc. *pizz.* *pp*

Andantino giusto ♩=69

Ex. 24 Puccini, *Manon Lescaut*, Act II, 4 mm. after rehearsal no. 22

section highlights her boredom with Geronte, so Puccini displays lyrical lines, earlier associated with feelings of love for des Grieux, to signify of worldly possessions, including makeup, beauty, and clothing (18 mm. after rehearsal no. 3). When Geronte enters, her music is sweet, featuring winds, the lower strings, and chorus (15 mm. after rehearsal no. 16). They sing at the same time, but their words, rhythm, and melodies are different, showing that Manon is over the relationship and her thoughts are wandering back to des Grieux. At two measures before rehearsal no. 17, Manon sings one of her few melismas, in the midst of mostly syllabic passages on “ah!” This is the first time we see Manon’s many admirers. She glances around and thanks the crowd, basking in their flattery, but coquettishly asks them not to praise her anymore. She sings by herself, watched by Geronte and her other admirers, and sings an ornamented minuet to Geronte with a flute drone and pizzicato strings (See Ex. 24). Her fluid passages and wind

M. Labbra dolci a ba-cia-re!..... Doleissimo sof-frir!.....

D. G. Doleissimo sof-frir!.....

Ex. 25 Puccini, *Manon Lescaut*, Act II, 4 mm. after rehearsal no. 22

accompaniment, more pronounced here than when she sang with des Grieux early on, show that Manon feels at home in the midst of her treasures and admirers. Although she sings about love, she does not explicitly include the word “love” but instead discusses the magical powers about love. Once again she avoids confirming her relationship with Geronte.

When des Grieux enters, Manon springs into the famous duet “Tu, tu amore tu.” Even before he sings, the active string part anticipates and highlights the importance of his entrance, whose purpose is to confront Manon. At first when she reflects on her past with des Grieux and admits her fault, Puccini writes Manon’s vocal lines as ecstatic, short, high, and chromatic (rehearsal no. 28). Her lines are longer than his in this duet, shifting their relationship from act one. As she keeps begging des Grieux to forgive her and as she convinces him, her music becomes more stable and more melodic, sticking to scalar passages instead of large leaps, and becoming more diatonic (7 mm. before rehearsal no. 30). As Manon becomes more insistent in the duet, trying to win over des Grieux (8 mm. after rehearsal no. 30), he changes his mind about her. At three measures before rehearsal 34, they finally sing together for the first time in this act, as the winds and strings double them, although they are singing different words. Finally displaying their unity as a couple, they sing the same text and music for the first time in the opera at the end of the duet (See Ex. 25). When Geronte catches the lovers Manon

M. *f* Ohi - mè, m'affretto! (a Lescaut) Unistante! que - sto smaglian - te sme. (prendendo un gioiello sulla petti.

DES GRIEUX (a Manon) Si, ba - da a te! vec - chio vill! An.

Ex. 26 Puccini, *Manon Lescaut*, Act II, 5 mm. before rehearsal no. 50

mocks him, almost laughing with a marcato descending scale (rehearsal no. 39). This reveals a mean-spirited side to Manon we have not seen before. When Manon thinks she is free, the full winds join her joyous line (rehearsal no. 41). At that point the couple starts to act as one, singing the same music with the same text (4 mm. before rehearsal no. 45 to rehearsal no. 47). After Lescaut tells them to hurry, des Grieux pleads for Manon to come, but she does not want to part with her possessions. At eight measures before rehearsal no. 50, she separates herself from his music, concerned with only her jewels and gold. Here, we see Manon's fleeting nature displayed in her music. Out of desperation des Grieux reaches up to her pitch as he coaxes her to come with him and warns her of her ex-lover (See Ex. 26). Perhaps des Grieux even expresses jealousy of Geronte. He knows that Geronte can provide Manon with the luxuries she desires, but he is not. Before she can leave soldiers drag her off to prison.

Manon, whom soldiers placed in jail with the other prostitutes, changes her musical style often in act III. Puccini does this so we can peer into Manon's emotions, if only for a moment. When she first addresses des Grieux she has melodic phrases, but that soon changes to more recitative-like passages. Strings accompany her more often as compared to acts I and II, but the winds participate several times in the act. When she talks about her situation, she sings unstable lines, which feature large leaps and

Ex. 27 Puccini, *Manon Lescaut*, Act IV, rehearsal no. 24

descending chromatic scales (rehearsal no. 13). When she sings about her love to him she changes to more aria-like music. For dramatic purposes, her music sounds static when she asks him to leave her, but she has outbursts when she finally says goodbye (7 mm. before rehearsal no. 23).

In act IV, Puccini depicts Manon's impending death with smaller ranges, shorter phrase lengths, and thinner orchestration. She moves from medium-length phrases to short phrases, showing that she is running out of energy and life. Puccini writes long phrases when she talks about her fate, allowing her to express fully that it is not her fault. Mirroring Manon's fate, the orchestral accompaniment slowly thins out. It is interesting that Puccini still retains the connection between Manon and the winds--especially the flutes, clarinets, and oboes, prominent in this act--while des Grieux, who plays a significantly smaller role in the final act, corresponds with the strings. The winds often punctuate Manon's phrases or double her music. In some places the winds are active for Manon's music but completely disappear when des Grieux sings just a short time later (Rehearsal no. 18 and 19). One notable instance of the opposite process, however, occurs

in act IV: the passage where des Grieux says that he cannot live without Manon and wishes to die (Rehearsal no. 23). As she expires, the strings fade out and she is left with flute and clarinet accompaniment (See Ex. 27). Flute, clarinet, viola, and harp accompany her last sung note. After she dies the entire orchestra re-enters, and this forces des Grieux to stay silent for the last few measures.

Act IV can be considered the antithesis of act I. In act I, des Grieux was the more active character, having most of the music and stage time, but in act IV, Manon's music is far more prominent than des Grieux's. Whereas act I was lengthy and full of action and characters, act IV is one scene and short, and isolated in a desert. But there are some similarities. Where in act I Manon seemed to adopt des Grieux's musical language and discard her own, in the finale des Grieux meets Manon's music. He reaches up to her and they sing in unison for the second, and final, time in the opera (rehearsal no. 6). Her dying phrases are low and short, so he matches her pitches with his exclamation. It is here that we understand that the power has shifted from him to her. Manon is too weak to sing lyrical phrases with him, so he goes out of his way to mimic her. She has the last phrase in the opera, again showing that she is a more important character.

Puccini gives Manon an Italian identity by focusing on two aspects important to Italian opera: melody and drama. Because her melodies change constantly, Manon is not static or subordinate in the opera, but rather someone who is conscious of her place in relationships. Puccini creates a work that is dramatic by overlooking many of the details in Prévost's novel, and in so doing makes Manon and her tragedy accessible to the Italian public. Perhaps Manon in Prévost's work was too foreign to relate to the Italian reader.

Puccini tries not merely to write a different opera from Massenet's famous work, he adapts it to an audience that expects entirely different things in opera. He tries to flesh out Manon's character from the skeleton provided in the original novel. He composes dramatic and ecstatic music when she pleads with des Grieux to forgive her. He writes beautiful, serene music when the couple is united, but thin, uneasy music when she dies. While it may appear that Puccini depicts Manon in a less important or even negative light as compared to des Grieux, the final act shatters this impression. Here, her active role in the libretto, the private feminine musical genre, and her assertion that beauty caused her death render her an important operatic heroine—one whom Puccini admired greatly.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

As we saw in the Introduction, Vivienne Mylne contends that Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* was not an obvious choice for the stage. Yet it did inspire three operas in the nineteenth century. These operas had to abandon much of the material in the novel, especially the double narrator and the repetitive plot, to make the story feasible for the stage. This allowed the musical works to expand upon Manon's character, although they do so in contrasting ways, because Manon appeals to the three composers for different reasons. While Mylne argues that the story was not perfect for the stage, the vagueness associated with Manon is ideal for composers and librettists who are looking for a heroine that will meet their specific needs. Auber is attracted to the iconic French figure and fittingly makes her a popular, virtuosic, and even honorable role. Massenet appreciates the realism of Prévost's novel and emphasizes the Romantic notion of the femme fatale in Manon. Finally, Puccini is interested in the relationship between Manon and the Chevalier des Grieux, and changes it into a love story, a desirable element in Italian opera. While none of these characteristics of Manon is pronounced in the novel, all have their roots in Prévost's original story.

Manon's influence in the operatic realm is significant, because she, like Carmen, is most popular in this medium. In the past few decades, Prévost's novel has become less popular and few academic studies have been written on it.¹ The plays based on Manon

¹ *Manon Lescaut*'s popularity has dwindled in academic books and journals, and new film and ballet adaptations have not come out since the 1970s. For more information on Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* see Vivienne Mylne, *Prévost: Manon Lescaut* (London: Edward Arnold, 1972); and Naomi Segal, *The Unintended Readers: Feminism and Manon Lescaut* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Lescaut are rarely discussed, and the films have not become classics. Kenneth MacMillan's ballet *Manon* (1974) has drawn attention, however. Its story takes much from Massenet's opera, featuring similar scenes. Even though no music from Massenet's opera is used, compiler Leighton Lucas chose music exclusively from Massenet's repertoire.² *Manon* lives on mostly through the opera, so her operatic incarnations contribute a great deal to the general impression of the figure. Audiences see *Manon* as not just an amoral woman, as they do in Prévost's novel, but as a more nuanced character in the operas: someone who is forced to make important decisions about her life in Massenet's opera, someone who does care for des Grieux in Puccini's opera, and someone who has a strong sense of virtue in Auber's opera. Without these three works, *Manon* would be interpreted completely differently.

As a precursor to the modern woman, *Manon* is an important female figure in literature and art. Historically, her terrible fate cautioned men, warning that female sexuality should be restrained for women's own good. Her control over des Grieux warns men to not get involved with such women. As time progressed between the novel and the late Romantic operas, composers saw her as less of a threat and more as an interesting and tragic character. Her lack of morality was downplayed in the operas, but her money-earning role as a courtesan was not. In these works, she represents the Parisian bourgeoisie but also the courtesan, a role that connects her to Verdi's *Violetta*. *Manon Lescaut* is significant because she introduces a figure that inspires many works in

² More information on *Manon* can be found at Kenneth MacMillan's website, <http://www.kennethmacmillan.com/>

the literary and musical world.³ She is a woman who is able to make decisions about her life, monetary income, and relationships. Though several men try, no man completely controls her. Unlike many heroines, she is no one's daughter, wife, or lover for long. She represents the new woman emerging from the bourgeoisie during a time when the French government was undergoing immense changes. Because her story was so scandalous and popular it inspired other characters in French novels, including *La Dame aux camélias* and *Carmen*.

Although they have similar female leading roles, Manon and Marguerite Gautier proved far less controversial than Carmen and Lulu. All four women are introduced by men before the story begins--Manon, Marguerite, and Carmen are dead when their stories begin, and Lulu is presented by a circus master, who calls her a snake. The major difference between the first and second pairing is their respective fate. Manon and Marguerite die of natural deaths--exhaustion and tuberculosis--and therefore have time to become faithful to only one man. In contrast, Carmen and Lulu are both murdered. The unrelenting characters never conform to a more socially acceptable lifestyle. This allows Romantic audiences to think of Manon and Marguerite as more moral women, or as women who learned their lesson.⁴ Carmen and Lulu, in contrast, are scandalous and amoral, far removed from society's moral code.

³ Vivienne Mylne, "Prévost and 'Manon Lescaut,'" in *Massenet: Manon*, ed. Nicholas John (London: Calder, 1984), 31; and Dina Grundemann Foster, "Manon Lescaut and Her Representation in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Criticism, and Opera" (PhD Diss., Michigan State University, 1998), 10-11.

⁴ Andrew J. Miller, "Manon and Her Daughters: Literary Representations and Musical Adaptations of Three Femmes Fatales" (PhD Diss., Duke University, 2002), 210.

Auber's *Manon Lescaut*, Massenet's *Manon*, and Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* do not receive equal attention in academic writing or even in the current repertoire. In scholarly sources Massenet's *Manon* remains the most popular of the three operas, due to the popularity of the work in the current repertoire, the compositional devices like Leitmotifs, and the introspective nature of the title character. Though it is popular in opera houses, many consider Puccini's opera to be a problematic work due to the excessive cuts and its place as an early work in the composer's career. Auber's *Manon Lescaut* is the least known out of the three, with only two recordings available.⁵ Performers rarely play Auber's music today, citing its lightness as a flaw.

The least successful elements of the three operas relate to the cuts from the original novel. Puccini and his librettists' choice of scenes seems fragmented to audiences, and Auber and Scribe's changes at times oversimplify the story and depart too much from Prévost's novel. Massenet and his librettists downplay des Grieux's love for Manon, lessening the turmoil she caused on his life. The music of Auber and Massenet's opera is the most successful aspect of both works. In Auber's *Manon Lescaut*, the contrast between the coloratura-heavy act I and the lower and more syllabic music of act III depicts an extreme change in Manon's character—from naïve and joyful, to experienced and mournful. In Massenet's *Manon*, the large amount of arias and duets for Manon allow for more insight in her emotions. For Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, the most successful element is Manon's role as Puccini's first heroine.

⁵ Patrick Fournillier, *Manon Lescaut*, Chant de Monde. DOM11015 DVD, 2011; and Jean-Pierre Marty, *Auber's Manon Lescaut* B000063XQD CD EMI, 1990.

Manon Lescaut is a complex character, and her presentation in different media allows the figure to evolve with the era. As a precursor to the modern woman, she inspires such important operatic characters as Violetta, Carmen, and Lulu. The adapters of *Manon Lescaut* do not carefully obey the original source because Manon's character is so vague. Her depiction in Prévost's novel serves as a starting point for the three different, but great nineteenth-century operas. There is only enough information in Prévost's novel to get a small glimpse of Manon, and her character is never fleshed out in a way that is necessary for a stage work. Because Manon is ever-present in des Grieux's narration, but mysterious as she is not active, the composers are able to project a quality onto her. The operas add much to the few actions in the story and edit out what they think is not important. This heavy amending allows these three interpretations and the different characters of Manon to come to life. The absent elements of the Prévost--the frame narration with the biased double narrators, the vague descriptions of Manon, and her off-stage existence in most of the novel--are essential elements in Manon Lescaut's presence in the three differing operatic interpretations.

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