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Manon Lescaut and Her Representation in
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Dina Grundemann Foster

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**MANON LESCAUT AND HER REPRESENTATION IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE, CRITICISM AND OPERA**

By

Dina Grundemann Foster

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

MANON LESCAUT AND HER REPRESENTATION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE, CRITICISM AND OPERA

By

Dina Grundemann Foster

The abbé Prévost's haunting narrative, *Manon Lescaut*, first published in 1733, has fascinated readers for more than two-hundred-and-fifty years. Throughout the nineteenth century in particular, the novel enjoyed a remarkable popularity. Dozens of new editions were published, fourteen theatrical and operatic adaptations were staged, and a half dozen variants plus five continuations of the tale were penned. Among the published new editions of *Manon Lescaut*, seventeen included an original preface or introduction. The variety of approaches embodied in these essays, the numerous rewritings of the tale and its representation in opera suggest the possibility of an interdisciplinary study of the novel's reception in nineteenth-century France.

In this study, the depiction of the abbé Prévost's eighteenth-century heroine is compared with the figure altered and cherished in five nineteenth-century variants, if not rewritings, of the tale: Alexandre Dumas fils's *La Dame aux camélias* (novel and play), Prosper Mérimée's *Carmen*, Théophile Gautier's "La Morte amoureuse," and George Sand's *Leone Leoni*. These comparisons highlight the significance of other authors' variations on the familiar topos of disastrous passion. Massenet's opera, *Manon*, provides the

basis of an examination of the novel's transposition into musical drama. An analysis of the social, historical, cultural and artistic currents reflected in these works helps explain how and why reception and representation of Prévost's eighteenth-century novel and its eponymous heroine underwent a series of transformations during the succeeding century. Intertextual analysis illuminates diverse and shifting artistic expressions of common experience, as well as reveals how intertextual dialogue, across time, influences and enriches the meaning of both the new work and the original to which it alludes. This interdisciplinary study, while it nuances and deepens our appreciation and understanding of Prévost's *Manon-Des Grieux* story, provides an example of reception theory, central to which is the alteration of readings of artistic works effected by cultural change.

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INTRODUCTION

Manon! sphinx étonnant! véritable sirène
Alfred de Musset, *Namouna*

The Chevalier des Grieux's haunting narrative of his ignominious affair with Manon Lescaut, a *filles de joie*, has captivated readers for more than 250 years. Nineteenth-century readers in particular were fascinated by the Abbé Prévost's novel and its eponymous heroine. Dozens of new editions of *Manon Lescaut* were published, including seventeen with an original preface or introduction penned by writers such as Alexandre Dumas fils and Guy de Maupassant. Fourteen theatrical and operatic adaptations were staged, and five continuations plus a half dozen rewritings or variants of the tale were penned in the nineteenth century (Gilroy 141-144), not to mention the poetry inspired by the figure of Manon--most notably, stanzas LVII-LX of Musset's *Namouna*.

Since the *Histoire du Chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* was first published in France in 1733, numerous new editions have appeared. According to the *Catalogue général des livres imprimés: auteurs (imprimé)*, 81 editions of the novel were published in the nineteenth century, compared to 22 in the eighteenth and 44 between 1900 and 1960 (787-803). Citing different sources, Jean Sgard declares that it is the most frequently reprinted novel in France and reports 32 editions printed in the eighteenth century, 72 in the nineteenth, and 130 in the twentieth (221-223).

A prolific writer, Prévost authored numerous works in a variety of genres. Many of his contemporaries considered *Cleveland* his best work. Nor do all modern scholars consider *Manon Lescaut* his greatest achievement. Jean Sgard, for example, rates *Cleveland* and the *Histoire d'une Grecque moderne* among Prévost's best literary creations (233-34). *Manon Lescaut*, nonetheless, is the only one of his works to enjoy continuing popularity and a place in the canon. Today, among Prévost's other novels, only the *Histoire d'une Grecque moderne* attracts an occasional reader.

Manon Lescaut was originally published in Amsterdam in 1731, as volume VII of the novel *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité qui s'est retiré du monde*. In volumes I-VI, the aging Marquis de Renoncour unsuccessfully seeks to resolve the conflict between the traditional codes of gallantry and religion. Like Des Grieux, he questions the nature of passion and happiness. Having loved and lost, Renoncour believes that passion, which by its very nature cannot last, is a curse inextricably linked to suffering. Thus, he concludes, it is best avoided. Sparing the young Marquis de Rosemont the pain of an unhappy love becomes Renoncour's mission in life. Although interpreting his memoirs is beyond the scope of this study, putting Des Grieux's narrative at the end of his adventures does appear to negate the disdain for passion the Marquis has so carefully constructed. The ambiguity created is typical of the moral ambivalence found in *Manon Lescaut*. Renoncour and Des Grieux share an inability to reconcile reason with feelings, and like Prévost, each oscillates between living in the world and seeking retreat from it.

As in Racinian tragedy, love drives the plot of *Manon Lescaut* and leads to disaster, but Prévost's masterpiece about a young aristocrat's fatal passion for a girl of common birth, set in early eighteenth-century France,¹ represented a break with Classicism and appealed to a broad range of readers. Although Des Grieux and Manon turn to traditional notions of virtue and duty in the New World, that final episode offers but weak refutation of the self-centered values of their personal quest for happiness and pleasure felt so profoundly throughout the rest of the work. Important to the development of the European novel, *Manon Lescaut* was "a seminal work in the development of the ... Romantic literary sensibility which infused all the writers of the nineteenth century" (Gilroy 140).²

The work has also been cited as a precursor to realism. Eighteenth-century France saw a dramatic increase in the number of novels published (Coulet 287), but critics viewed the genre with skepticism as they debated the proper subject matter for literature. Often confusing moral with aesthetic issues, they attacked novels both for lacking verisimilitude and for painting a portrait of vice that was too realistic and often too enticing. By the end of the century, the movement to maintain classicism's idealized aristocratic values will have given way to the reality of a bourgeois society.

From 1715 to 1760, critics still judged novels according to classical criteria for drama: *vraisemblance* and morality (Coulet 353).

¹ Though referred to as a Regency narrative by nineteenth- and most twentieth-century critics, chapter 4 will argue that the story takes place at the end of the reign of Louis XIV.

² The Marquis de Sade praises the novel as perhaps France's best, concluding that without *Manon Lescaut* there might never have been a *Julie* (29).

Consequently, Prévost's novel was often denounced for portraying Manon's character flaws and dubious morality too realistically. Georges May has demonstrated that one of the forces contributing to the popularity of first-person narratives in the eighteenth century was the public demand for literary realism coupled with a demand for moral idealism. By composing a first person narrative, the author could claim to be simply relating what the person who lived the experience had actually reported. Then he would add a preface in which he argued that, seeing how his protagonists suffered, no reader would want to repeat their experiences. According to the "Avis de l'auteur" introducing Des Grieux's first-person account of his love affair with Manon, "[Le public] verra dans la conduite de M. des Grieux, un exemple terrible de la force des passions" (4³). "On y trouvera peu d'événements qui ne puissent servir à l'instruction des mœurs" (5). As incongruous as it may be with the story that follows, the "Avis" claims one can learn from others' experiences and that this book is in fact "un traité de morale, réduit agréablement en exercice" (6). Of course, the "Avis" is also a way of piquing reader curiosity about illicit love while circumventing accusations of immorality. May concludes, "Les romanciers découvrirent les merveilles du réalisme alors que leur but était de fuir les attaques des critiques" (247).

Critics have long debated whether or not Prévost really intended to write a moral treatise, as he claimed. Des Grieux adamantly argues that "[l]'amour est une passion innocente" (72), and

³ All references to *Manon Lescaut* are parenthetical and refer to the edition by Frédéric Deloffre and Raymond Picard (Paris: Garnier 1965).

"les délices de l'amour ... sont ici-bas nos plus parfaites félicités" (93). So it is difficult to know whether the author believes passion is a pleasure to be enjoyed or a destructive force to be avoided at all costs--if, in fact, one is free to make that choice. Both Renoncour, in his preface to Des Grieux's narrative (4), and Tiberge, at Saint-Lazare (90), claim that the young chevalier *chooses* to rush headlong into misfortune. Des Grieux, however, contends that he is a victim of fate. Herbert Josephs posits that even though the "Avis" may be a literary convention, faced with the challenge of "finding a proper balance between verisimilitude and an exalted spiritual purport," Prévost's dilemma is more than just a question of literary technique. For the "intellectual evasiveness" apparent in the preface of *Manon Lescaut* is fundamental to the entire novel (Josephs 186). The difficulty of defining Prévost's actual intent is typical of the novel's complexity.

As a precursor both of realism and romanticism, Prévost's novel represented an unfamiliar aesthetic form capable of challenging readers' expectations and confronting them with questions that traditional values could not satisfactorily resolve. Literature, as Hans Robert Jauss explains, has a "*socially formative* function that ... competes with other arts and social forces in the emancipation of mankind from its natural, religious, and social bonds" (45). That role, however, raises a controversy as critics debate whether literature should support the moral order, stimulate debate over the status quo, reflect reality, argue for a new social order, or refrain from mixing morality and politics with aesthetics. The only point on which all seem to agree is that the arts do influence attitudes and behavior, just as reality influences artistic

production and representation. The nature and extent of that influence are as controversial today as in times past--only nowadays the focus of the debate has shifted from literature to a battle for control of the National Endowment for the Humanities and to controversies over the influence wielded by television, movies and modern music. As for *Manon Lescaut*, we will see in chapter 1 that it challenged readers' expectations and social norms both in its own time and in the following century.

According to Wolfgang Iser, "The history of the novel as a 'genre' began in the eighteenth century, at a time when people had become preoccupied with their own everyday lives. Like no art form before it, the novel was concerned directly with social and historical norms that applied to a particular environment" (*Implied Reader* xi). "Norms are regulations." When transposed into a novel, "they are set in a new context which changes their function, insofar as they no longer act as social regulations but as the subject of a discussion which, more often than not, ends in a questioning rather than a confirmation of their validity" (xii). *Manon Lescaut* is a case in point.

Riddled with ambiguity and ambivalence, the novel poses a number of questions that remain unresolved. It is marked by moral ambivalence. Des Grieux argues for a new nobility of the heart which proves to have a destabilizing effect on the existing social order, as do his often unflattering portraits of pillars of the patriarchal order. Yet he is a class-conscious young aristocrat unable to thrive outside the established order to which he repeatedly turns in times of turmoil.

Des Grieux's representation of Manon's motives is equally ambiguous. Recounting how things *seemed* to him and what he *wants* to believe happened, he justifies her transgressions with an idealized version of events. Except for a brief comment by the *homme de qualité*, Des Grieux is our sole source of information about Manon, and the portrait he paints reveals his ambivalence. On one hand, she is a girl with common manners and dubious morals. A frivolous, ungrateful, unfaithful, and even treacherous girl, she has a "penchant au plaisir" which causes all of Des Grieux's misfortunes (20). On the other hand, she is "une créature toute charmante, qui eût occupé le premier trône du monde, si tous les hommes eussent eu mes yeux et mon coeur!" (79). A sweet angel who is "droite et naturelle dans tous ses sentiments" (190), she is the source of his most perfect happiness.

The novel's inconclusive complexity easily lends itself to multiple interpretations. In fact, the indeterminacies in *Manon Lescaut* help account for its enduring popularity. By seizing on whatever aspect of the novel suited their purposes, nineteenth-century authors and critics were able to use the novel as a springboard for discussing a broad range of issues and ideas.

The variety of approaches embodied in their introductory essays, the numerous rewritings of the tale and its transposition into musical drama suggest the possibility of a rich interdisciplinary study of the novel's reception in nineteenth-century France. To examine the ways in which *Manon Lescaut* was received and altered, this study addresses two issues: 1) How was *Manon Lescaut* read and interpreted in the nineteenth century, and how did reception of

the work evolve over time? 2) What artistic shifts and social, historical and cultural changes explain *Manon Lescaut*'s popularity and the changing attitudes toward the novel and its heroine? What is the significance of these developments?

Reception usually evolves slowly in subtly nuanced shades of meaning, not in a dramatic or linearly progressive fashion. Inevitably it is linked to issues of intertextuality. Throughout this study, textual analysis will illuminate diverse and shifting artistic expressions of a common experience, as well as reveal how intertextual dialogue, across time, influences and enriches the meaning of both the new work *and the original* to which it alludes. In Dumas fils' *La Dame aux camélias*, for example, Prévost's novel plays a significant role in the plot. It is an explicit intertextual allusion that informs interpretation of *La Dame aux camélias*. Our understanding of *La Dame aux camélias*, in turn, nuances our reading of *Manon Lescaut*.

Just as borrowings, echoes and adaptations of *Manon Lescaut* suggest the presence of the figure of Manon in many nineteenth-century works, Prévost's novel draws inspiration from its predecessors. The notion of a fatal love which gives rise to the mysterious and destructive force of passion finds its origins in the Tristan legend. In the course of this study, we will see that Des Grieux draws heavily from classical--and especially Racinian--tragedy. Frédéric Deloffre cites Robert Challes' *Les Illustres Françaises* (1713) as the most direct source of *Manon Lescaut*. There are similarities of plot, theme, names, titles and vocabulary. In Challes' work a moral is drawn from each of the seven tales

recounted. Deloffre posits that this may have given Prévost "l'idée de s'appuyer sur «l'expérience» et «l'exemple» pour présenter lui-même, dans un «ouvrage entier», un «traité de moral, réduit agréablement en exercice »" (Deloffre LXXVII).

Most of all, according to Deloffre, Prévost finds a literary genre in *Les Illustres Françaises*, the *histoire*, a genre that can be traced back to Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*. From this genre Prévost draws many of the elements used so effectively in *Manon Lescaut*: a frame narrator, a first-person narrative, and an oral--and relatively familiar--style. Based on the oral tradition, the *histoire* is shorter than a *roman*. It features several middle-class characters and is set in the recent past, unlike classical novels about noble characters in a distant era. Naming real places and events and presenting financial matters with authentic detail are just a few of the realistic elements found in *Manon Lescaut* (Deloffre LXXIV-XCIII) but inspired by its predecessors.

Literary theorists have used intertextuality--a term coined by Julia Kristeva to express the idea that each text is an intersection of texts past and future that continually absorb and transform one another--to describe a variety of phenomena. In this study it will be used as a broad term denoting explicit and implicit allusion to and literary exploitation of another text. Allan Pasco argues that a successful intertextual literary allusion must suggest something "different from either of the component texts" (6), and "it must be recognized before it can add to the effect of the story" (9). In chapter 4, for example, we will examine Massenet's adaptation of

verses from Musset's *Namouna* to evoke a new complex of metaphors for the figure of Manon.

While those are the richer and more interesting intertextual allusions, intertexts can serve practical purposes as well. By composing an opera based on a popular novel, Massenet generated interest in his new musical drama. In his *Manon*, the plot must necessarily be condensed to meet the demands of the lyric stage. For opera-goers familiar with the novel, allusions to the novel fill in the resultant gaps in plot and character development. Both the new work and the original benefit from the intertextual allusions.

We will see that when a reader infers a literary allusion, the effect is the same whether or not the writer consciously intended one. For that matter, a writer's conscious intent is often impossible to ascertain. On that basis, I will argue that Théophile Gautier's "La Morte amoureuse" (1836) is the Manon-Des Grieux story turned inward. Prévost's emphasis on Manon's bipolar nature and Des Grieux's confusion between the real world and the dream world leads inevitably to this fantastic retelling of *Manon Lescaut*. It problematizes the relationship between reality and representation in a tale that appeals to the Romantics' fascination with the macabre by exploiting Manon's demonic and divine duality.

In his important study entitled *The Romantic Manon and Des Grieux: Images of Prévost's Heroine and Hero in Nineteenth-Century French Literature*, James Gilroy provides a comprehensive survey of nineteenth-century fictional, dramatic and operatic adaptations and

continuations of Prévost's novel.⁴ He concludes that writers such as Prosper Mérimée, George Sand, and Alexandre Dumas *filz*, "actually rewrote the story of Prévost's lovers in order to make of it a vehicle for the expression of their particular vision of things" (140). Manon and Des Grieux had become well-known ambiguous types with sufficiently fixed significance that the mere mention of their names "evoked a special body of ideas, yet open and fluid enough so that each commentator could recreate them, so to speak, in his own image" (140).

In *Leone Leoni* (1834), the first rewriting of Prévost's novel examined in chapter 2, Sand challenges gender stereotypes by reversing the male and female roles. Mérimée shapes a new reading in *Carmen* (1845), developing the motif of *charmes* as the source of the *femme fatale*'s ability to ensnare the hero in a fatal passion. Alexandre Dumas *filz*' *La Dame aux camélias* (novel 1848, play 1852), the only variant with explicit references to *Manon Lescaut*, focuses largely on the popular theme, analyzed in chapter 3, of the courtesan redeemed by love. Each of these variants plays a significant role in *Manon Lescaut*'s continuing appeal because a literary work gains stature and continuing influence only if there are still readers who respond to it and "authors who want to imitate, outdo, or refute it" (Jauss 22).

⁴ Explaining differences and similarities in plot and character, Gilroy presents a wealth of information about these adaptations and continuations and documents a broad range of nineteenth-century commentary on Prévost's novel. He engages, however, in limited critical commentary on the material he presents.

The best-known nineteenth-century French opera inspired by Prévost's novel is Massenet's *Manon* (1884). This transposition of the work to the lyric stage is the subject of chapter 4.⁵ Finally, in chapter 5, a new reading of *Manon Lescaut* will incorporate insights drawn from this study. As Jauss observes, our interpretation and evaluation of a literary work is more than just the accumulated judgments of past readers. It "is the successive unfolding of the potential for meaning that is embedded in a work and actualized in the stages of its historical reception as it discloses itself to understanding judgment" (30).

Deloffre claims that all objective criticism of *Manon Lescaut* was written in the eighteenth century. After that, critics just used the novel as a vehicle for espousing their own world view. But even if that were so, it would confirm the masterpiece's power to challenge conventional thinking. While Deloffre concedes that a study of what nineteenth-century writers had to say about *Manon Lescaut* would be fascinating, he claims that their essays belong more properly to the purview of psychology and sociology than to literary criticism. In the end, according to Deloffre, these critics prove but one thing about Prévost's masterpiece, its essential ambiguity (CLXXV-CLXXVI). But ambiguity is, as he admits, an essential element in the novel's appeal. Critics respond to that ambiguity from within their cultural, social, and historical contexts.

⁵ Since this study is limited to French representations of *Manon*, it does not treat Puccini's popular 1893 Italian opera, *Manon Lescaut*.

Of course, that does not mean that just any interpretation is valid. Interpretations are derived from the semantic potential of the text, and responses vary, in part, according to the element of the novel the reader privileges. Iser refers to this as foregrounding. As readers read, they foreground or focus on certain elements of the literary work and let others recede into the background of their consciousness (*Act of Reading* 92-99). Critics and authors are first of all readers. The critic who sees men devoured by an avaricious *femme fatale* will have a different reaction to *Manon Lescaut* than the one who is intrigued by the loving and repentant heroine in the New World.

Ideally, critical judgments encompass a work in its entirety, yet the themes or narrative elements that most fascinate the critic will drive his⁶ reading. Moral issues will capture one critic's attention and social issues another's, while yet a third is captivated by the aesthetic rapture of the reading experience. Each of the diverse critical stances reflected in the introductions to *Manon Lescaut* tells us something about the novel, as well as about the critics and the times in which they lived. Their focus depends on their social, cultural and historical reality and on the literary conventions with which they are familiar. For example, critical reaction in the second half of the century often reflects growing fears that the sexual freedom pervading Paris threatens the bourgeoisie.

This study will begin, then, with an analysis of the original nineteenth-century introductions to *Manon Lescaut*. Because art and

⁶ All the new nineteenth-century prefaces and introductions were written by men.

society have an interdependent relationship, literature, as well as other art forms, both reflects and influences social and aesthetic values. In turn, social and aesthetic values informed by historical contexts affect readers' interpretation of a literary work. This study will demonstrate reception theory at work--or how culture alters readings.

Chapter 1

NINETEENTH-CENTURY EDITIONS OF *MANON LESCAUT*

La figure de Manon Lescaut hant[e] notre âme.
Guy de Maupassant

Eighteen editions of *Manon Lescaut* were published during the first half of the nineteenth century and 63 during the second half. Twenty-two of those editions appeared in the 1860s,⁷ the decade following Esprit Auber's popular 1856 opera, *Manon Lescaut - Opéra-Comique* and Alexandre Dumas fils' successful 1852 play *La Dame aux camélias*. Both generated interest in Prévost's novel. Auber's opera, in particular, contributed to *Manon Lescaut*'s increasing popularity just as a film based on a novel often boosts book sales today. Massenet's 1884 *Manon* and Puccini's 1893 *Manon Lescaut* further expanded the novel's audience later in the century and capped Manon's assimilation into the mass culture.

The novel was published both individually and in several series of French masterpieces. Interrelated literary, social and political factors account for the the novel's remarkable popularity. The novel as a genre gained critical respectability and mass popularity. Literacy rates were rising. The bourgeoisie thrived, as did works created to appeal to this audience. Melodrama was a democratic genre born of

⁷ Broken down by decade, one edition was published in 1818, five in the 1820s, six in the 30s, six in the 40s, eight in the 50s, 22 in the 60s, 12 in the 70s, 12 in the 80s and nine in the 1890s. Source: *Catalogue général des livres imprimés : auteurs (imprimé)*, pp. 787-803.

this era in which the population of Paris doubled in just thirty years, and literature written for the popular masses, particularly the urban masses, flourished. The public's predilection for melodrama contributed to *Manon Lescaut's* success, explains Jules Janin, because the novel is "un de ces chefs-d'oeuvre remplis de passion, de douleur, et d'amour" (ix).

Guy de Maupassant emphasizes that *Manon Lescaut* cannot be limited to a particular literary movement. That is part of its appeal. Its popularity endures because it has "la force de la sincérité" and an "éclatante vraisemblance des personnages" (xv). Furthermore, it depicts the condition of men's souls at a particular point in French history and thus is part of the history of a people. The Marquis de Sade would agree. In the late eighteenth century, in *Idée sur les romans*, he argued that novels "servent à vous peindre tels que vous êtes Le roman étant ... *le tableau des mœurs séculaires* [sic] est aussi essentiel que l'histoire, au philosophe qui veut connaître l'homme" (34). For nineteenth-century critics, *Manon Lescaut* was both a product and a symbol of Regency France.

Publication of Glady Frères' 1875 edition came at a particularly propitious moment in French history, according to Alexandre Dumas fils. Following a century of instability wrought by shifting political regimes and the 1870 debacle with Prussia, a movement to revive national pride and restore France's glory swept the country during the Third Republic.⁸ "Des monuments à tout ce qui fait la gloire de la

⁸ Although the 1860s saw the the greatest number of new editions published, the 1870s produced the most editions with an original introduction: five.

France" (Dumas XXI) were raised. *Manon Lescaut*, a literary masterpiece and forerunner of nineteenth-century Romanticism and realism, was "le chef de l'école française" (XXI). It belongs to Glady Frères' 1875 "collection ... comprenant tous les chefs-d'oeuvre de l'esprit humain commentée par les plus grands critiques de notre temps" (cover pages). The editors declare, "Nous élevons à la gloire des immortels représentants de l'esprit humain un monument typographique, enrichi de tout ce que l'art des livres recèle de plus exquis et de plus parfait, quels que soient le point de vue et les exigences du bibliophile le plus consommé" (XI).

According to Dumas, the strong market for new editions of *Manon Lescaut* was not due to book buyers who had any intention of reading the novel. Rather, the *nouveaux riches* purchased the novel because a fine book collection, like fine wines, exquisite furniture, elegant attire, luxury coaches, and a beautiful mistress, bestowed a "noblesse de l'argent" (XXVI) on the owner. The purchase of these elegant editions was a new form of luxury (XVIII), a speculative investment for some, an expression of vanity for others. Other publishers concluded that if readers paid for used copies, there must be a market for inexpensive new copies. Their editions targeted the newly-developing middle class audience and were frequently published in inexpensive installments.

Of the 81 editions of the novel published in France in the nineteenth century, seventeen include an original preface or introduction by a well-known author or critic. Criticism, of course, does not occur in a vacuum. It is influenced by the critic's literary

and life experiences, by the times in which he lives, and by previous readers' reactions.

One of the earliest articles on the *Histoire du Chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*, written by La Barre de Beaumarchais, appeared in *Lettres sérieuses et badines* in 1731. Interesting for several reasons, the essay demonstrates that from the beginning there were readers more intrigued by the figure of Manon than by Des Grieux. Although eighteenth-century critics frequently judged novels in terms of their moral value, many were responsive to Des Grieux's pleas for pity for "cette pauvre fille" (179). He knows "les principes de son coeur" (190). She intends no harm. According to Des Grieux, Manon "pèche sans malice...; elle est légère et imprudente, mais elle est droite et sincère" (148). La Barre refers to Manon as "une personne qui déshonore de la sorte son sexe."⁹ Nonetheless, he continues, it is impossible not to pity her because Prévost had "l'adresse de la faire paraître plus vertueuse et plus malheureuse que criminelle" (qtd. by Deloffre CLIX-CLX). This juxtaposing of moral indictments with sympathetic indulgence will be echoed throughout the nineteenth century.

Without crediting his source, La Barre borrows lines from Prévost's "Avis" to describe Des Grieux: "Enfin un caractère ambigu, un mélange de vertus et de vices, un contraste perpétuel de bons sentiments et d'actions mauvaises" (qtd. by Deloffre CLIX; Prévost, page 5). Because regulation of literary privilege was not enforced with the same vigor that copyright laws are today, criticism often was

⁹ Cf. Lescaut's comment about "sa soeur ayant une fois violé les lois de son sexe" (55).

not original. The history of La Barre's article demonstrates that plagiarism persisted well into the nineteenth century, and poses a challenge for those who wish to analyze evolving critical reaction.

In 1734 La Barre's essay was incorporated into an article that appeared in Prévost's journal, *Le Pour et contre*, without attributing the material to him. According to Deloffre, Prévost had nothing to do with the preparation of this issue, which was written and edited by Desfontaines and the abbé Granet (CLXV). Readers, however, have assumed that the journal article was written by Prévost. Arsène Houssaye quotes from it in his 1874 introduction to *Manon Lescaut* and attributes the citation to Prévost. To complicate matters further, the entire essay from *Le Pour et contre* appears verbatim in Glady frères' 1875 edition of *Manon Lescaut* under the title "Avis de l'auteur." Placed right after Prévost's¹⁰ "Avis de l'auteur," it gives the impression that he is the author. Indeed, it seems to be written by an author eager to refute charges of immorality, noting for example that "l'Auteur, en représentant le vice, ne l'enseigne point ... cet ouvrage découvre tous les dangers du dérèglement. Il n'y a point de jeune homme, point de jeune fille, qui voulût ressembler au Chevalier et à sa Maîtresse." Confusion over authorship of this article persists. As recently as 1980, Gilroy, for example, attributes the passage to Prévost (117). In fact, Prévost never commented directly on *Manon Lescaut*.

Although La Barre did not term Prevost's novel immoral, censors did. In the eighteenth century, the novel as a genre had an

¹⁰ Of course the "Avis" is ostensibly written by Renoncour.

equivocal literary status linked to concerns about its moral status, and novels were commonly condemned as immoral. In 1733, copies of the *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité*, including *Manon Lescaut*, were seized, and in 1735 the book was banned because "le vice et le débordement y sont peints avec des traits qui n'en donnent pas assez d'horreur."¹¹

Critics' however, generally expressed compassion for Prévost's protagonists and recognized that the novel's success was due to his skill as a novelist in arousing readers' compassion, not to his having exemplified the classical criteria of verisimilitude and morality. Even a critic who condemned the novel for immorality praised Prévost's style: "Cet ex-bénédictin est un fou qui vient de faire un livre abominable qu'on appelle l'histoire de Manon Lescaut [sic] ... on aurait dû brûler le livre et l'auteur, qui a pourtant du style."¹² Critics, in other words, were beginning to distinguish literary merit from moral concerns.

One of the most often cited judgments is Montesquieu's (1734):

Je ne suis pas étonné que ce roman, dont le héros est un fripon et l'héroïne une catin qui est menée à la Salpêtrière, plaise, parce que toutes les actions du héros, le chevalier des Grieux, ont pour motif l'amour, qui est toujours un motif noble, quoique la conduite soit basse. Manon aime aussi, ce qui lui fait pardonner le reste de son caractère. (qtd. by Deloffre CLXIII-CLXIV)

¹¹ *Journal de la Cour et de Paris*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. Fr. 25 000, page 229, cited by Deloffre, CLXII.

¹² Mathieu Marais, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. Fr. 24414, f^o 483. Cited by Deloffre CLXIII.

Nineteenth-century critics such as Jules Janin and Houssaye concur that love is a noble motive. They forgive Manon because Des Grieux does and because they share the chevalier's conviction that she loves him.

A 1767 article by Palissot articulates another argument developed by critics in the century to follow. He credits Prévost for "l'étude approfondie qu'il avait faite du langage des passions" and for his ability to elicit sympathy from "les âmes les plus honnêtes" for "un jeune libertin et une fille née seulement pour le plaisir et pour l'amour" (qtd. by Deloffre CLXIX-CLXX). The article marks a new stage in criticism of *Manon Lescaut*. While earlier critics often failed to distinguish the style of *Manon Lescaut* from that of *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité*, Palissot draws a clear distinction between *Manon Lescaut* and Prévost's other works and discusses Prévost's place in the development of the novel (Deloffre CLXVIII). Two years later La Dixmétrerie concurs that Prévost's strength and originality lie in his ability to depict great passions and to arouse interest in his immoral protagonists. The writer's art alone is responsible for that success (Deloffre CLXX-CLXXI).

An anonymous eighteenth-century critic perceptively comments on Prévost's talent as a writer. The novelist seduces the reader, lulls him--for neither Prévost nor the critic seems to envision a female reader¹³--into moral oblivion by having the reader see Manon only through Des Grieux's eyes and encouraging him to identify with the chevalier. The narrator--i.e., Des Grieux--portrays

¹³ For more on this subject, see Naomi Segal's *The Unintended Reader*.

both protagonists as victims of destiny's unfair persecution. The critic remarks that "on ne peut presque pas ... accuser [Des Grieux] plus qu'il ne s'accuse lui-même, tant nous nous portons aisément dans les mœurs et les habitudes de ceux dont nous lisons l'histoire" (qtd. by Deloffre CLXXIV). "Ce n'est pas à sa Manon que nous nous intéressons, c'est à l'objet de cette passion si tendre" (CLXXV). Although critics tended early on to term the novel Manon's story, some, like this anonymous writer, realized that it is Des Grieux's story as well and that the heroine's destiny as an individual interests us less than her role as the object of Des Grieux's desire, a motif to be developed in chapter 5.

Nineteenth-century critics echo most of the themes expressed by eighteenth-century writers: the style in which *Manon Lescaut* is written renders it a masterpiece and distinguishes it from Prévost's other works. Des Grieux and Manon can be forgiven for their transgressions because they are young, beautiful and in love. It is difficult to accuse Des Grieux when he heaps so much shame on himself. Manon is the novel's focal point. She was born for pleasure and love. She genuinely loves Des Grieux. For the most part, critics empathize with the chevalier, respond to his appeal for compassion, and pardon Manon because Des Grieux does.

Though influenced by their predecessors, nineteenth-century critics significantly expand the range of issues addressed by literary critics. They react to *Manon Lescaut* in biographical, moral, sociological and aesthetic terms. Five motifs stand out: the protagonists' historical models, Manon's redemption, Manon as

symbol of Regency France, Manon as metaphor for the social ills besieging contemporary France, and Manon as muse. Most striking are the critics' strident misogyny, their deep-seated conflict vis-à-vis the figure of Manon, their persistent quest to link the novel to Prévost's lived experience, and their preoccupation with the social ills attendant upon the rapid urbanization of Paris.

Manon Lescaut, they agree, is an "admirable histoire du coeur humain" (Janin i), a triumph of truth and passion. Because they believe an author, especially one whose other works show none of the same flair, could write such a deeply-felt tale only if he had lived it, these writers are intensely interested in Prévost's life. Reflecting nineteenth-century and Romantic preoccupation with historical authors, eight prefaces¹⁴ are largely devoted to reporting the little that is known about Prévost's life and to speculating on the rest.

Houssaye's 1874 study takes the biographical approach a step further. He wonders whether Des Grieux in the novel's opening scene isn't the author Prévost, arriving in Le Havre too late to save his real life Manon. Thus begins a fictional biography, Houssaye's imagined account of Prévost's life. Throughout his long introduction, he blurs the distinction between author and character. Describing Prévost as having "plus de coeur que de tête, plus de poésie que de raison, plus de rêves que de réflexions" (iv), Houssaye could just as easily be describing Des Grieux. Indeed, argues Houssaye, Prévost bases two of

¹⁴They are written by L.P., anonymous (1827 and 1875), Janin, Sainte-Beuve, Heilly, Montaignon, and France. Sainte-Beuve's and Montaignon's articles are included in editions that also contain essays on the novel by Planche and Dumas fils respectively.

his characters on himself. "Des Grieux, c'est lui, c'est sa passion; Tiberge, c'est lui encore, c'est sa conscience" (vi).

Pierre de Lescure (1879) testifies to nineteenth-century interest in Prévost's life, as well as the popularity of the novel, by commenting on the challenge of composing an original introduction when so many have already been published: "Le lecteur [de l'introduction de Lescure] n'a pas à redouter de nous une nouvelle biographie de l'abbé Prévost, une nouvelle critique de ses *Oeuvres*" (1). "Tout a ... été dit avant nous sur la vie et les oeuvres de l'abbé Prévost" (2). Nonetheless, Lescure assures us, he has found an original approach: an attempt to link the novel to historical events, people and places. The abbé Prévost "n'a fait que prêter ses propres aventures" (7) to Des Grieux. Lescure suggests other historical figures as possible models for various characters but emphasizes that he could easily be mistaken.

Above all, his introduction provides an interesting socio-historical commentary on the Regency. Assuming that the story takes place during this period, he declares, "Sous la Régence, le désordre des mœurs monta à son comble" (44). Demonstrating to what extent Prévost's novel reflects the times in which it was written, Lescure's preface relates Regency decadence and corruption to the aristocratic mœurs portrayed in the novel, to the treatment of women at Salpêtrière, and to the efforts to populate France's colonies in the New World. In *Manon Lescaut*, aristocrats are expected to have mistresses. They summarily send Manon to jail and into exile. Des Grieux is sequestered, jailed and released according to patriarchal whim, not as the result of any legal proceeding. The chevalier cheats

at the gaming tables and even kills a servant. All is acceptable aristocratic behavior under the Regency, according to Lescure.

One of Lescure's anecdotes claims that *Manon Lescaut* influenced actual historical events. La Motte-Valois, a famous countess incarcerated at the Hôpital général, escaped by dressing as a man. According to Lescure, La Motte-Valois had read Prévost's novel and copied Manon's example. Though in the end Lescure admits that his attempt to link the novel to actual people and events is futile, his approach exploits romanticism's interest in authors and history.

Nine prefaces discuss redemption.¹⁵ Their authors declare that because Manon and Des Grieux have loved and suffered, they deserve our compassion and understanding. In other words, they have been moved by Des Grieux's plea for compassion and persuaded by his argument that suffering leads to redemption. Responding to his constant direct appeals to the interlocutor, they identify with the young hero. "Votre coeur n'est pas insensible; vous vous seriez laissé attendrir" (171), Des Grieux tells his father. Making a personal appeal to the old G... M..., he pleads for compassion because he is young and in love and because he suffers:

[L]a jeunesse m'a fait commettre de grandes fautes....
Mais, si vous connaissez la force de l'amour, si vous pouvez juger de ce que souffre un malheureux jeune homme à qui l'on enlève tout ce qu'il aime, vous me trouverez peut-être pardonnable. (155-56)

¹⁵L.P., Janin, Planche, Stephen, Heilly, Houssaye, Dumas fils, Montaignon, and France.

Although his argument does not convince G... M..., it does appear to have persuaded readers and critics.

A mild tone marks the early essays. Echoing Des Grieux's assessment of Manon, L.P. (1825) calls her a "fille bien légère,"¹⁶ Des Grieux "un mauvais sujet" (xv). Moved by their suffering and repentance, he excuses their "fautes" (xv). Jules Janin (1839), the first to distinguish between the two protagonists, argues that youth and beauty save Manon, love and devotion Des Grieux.

Because these writers identify with Des Grieux, all are reluctant to hold him fully accountable for his actions. Preferring always to find Manon the more guilty of the two lovers, they conveniently overlook Des Grieux's complicity with Manon, as well as his own transgressions. There is an unconscious collusion among these men who accept Des Grieux's claim that Manon's "penchant au plaisir ... a causé tous ses malheurs et les miens" (20).

Georges d'Heilly (1867) concurs that Manon is the more guilty of the two but takes an opposite tack. "La force de l'amour et la vérité de la passion réhabilitent en quelque sorte le vice lui-même" (xxi), and each protagonist transforms him/herself. Both are regenerated "par le malheur qui les accable, la constance qui les unit, par l'attrait qui les entraîne et les domine" (xxii).

Janin suggests that redemption requires more than just loving and repenting. Mere suffering is not sufficient expiation. Death alone sanctifies, bringing with it pity and pardon. Charles Stephen (1856) and Heilly will argue that death expiates Manon and Des Grieux's sins.

¹⁶ Cf. Des Grieux's description: "elle est légère" (Prévost 148).

However, death does not want two victims, so it takes Manon because, according to Heilly, morally speaking, she is the more guilty; she is the cause of all Des Grieux's troubles. Like his predecessors, Heilly absolves Des Grieux. Manon's touching death expiates the sins of both, the sins she provoked. Thus, in Heilly's reading of the novel, Manon becomes Des Grieux's downfall and his salvation. Cast as the object of Des Grieux's desire, she absorbs the young aristocrat's repressed sexual urges and then is sacrificed to restore the health and balance of the social order.

Prévost's novel, of course, reflects eighteenth-century mores. Troublesome women were simply eliminated. Like Manon, they were deported to populate the colonies, many dying in the process. The nineteenth-century introductions to *Manon Lescaut* reflect that century's view that prostitution is a social problem to be resolved, that desire is an illness to be cured in a soul that needs redeeming. In chapter 3, we will see that Dumas fils' heroine, Marguerite Gautier, is literally ill. To restore health to the social body, she must be cured of desire and redeemed.

John Lemoine (1860) posits the impossibility of redemption through love and suffering. Despite the rigor of his judgment, he nevertheless sketches a somewhat sympathetic portrayal of *grisettes*--at least they fulfilled a social function. In the eighteenth century, young men of good families formed youthful liaisons with *grisettes* who never expected to marry these men and therefore experienced no bitterness when abandoned, according to Lemoine. The 1789 Declaration of Rights theoretically did away with castes and thus *grisettes*. By 1860, *grisettes* aspire to legitimacy, and every

man wants a virgin, not a woman "sortie des bras de son seigneur" (v). Since the Revolution, character, not birth, has determined social class (vi). There are no more venial sins for women. While falls may be rarer, they are "plus irréparables" (vi).

Nineteen years later, Lescure (1879) rejects the possibility of redemption for another reason. Manon is incapable of repentance, he contends. Therefore, "la rédemption sociale [est] impossible" (58). His conclusion, however, is less a moral judgment than a statement of social reality. "On a querellé l'abbé Prévost sur cette poétique mort, trouvée invraisemblable en se plaçant au point de vue du caractère de Manon, dont l'incurable frivolité ne comportait qu'une fin étourdie, et de l'indulgence, de la complaisance des moeurs du temps pour la courtisane, qui ne se vit jamais réduite au désespoir ni au suicide" (59).¹⁷ The novel, according to Lescure, is more faithful to moral than to historical truth. Hence, "qu'importe que le XVIII^e siècle n'ait pas connu une Manon Lescaut capable de l'expiation par le malheur, de la transfiguration par l'agonie" (60).

Redemption is closely intertwined with the question of morality. Manon agrees to run off with Des Grieux minutes after meeting him and does not hesitate to begin an amorous relationship with him. Within a few weeks she betrays him for a wealthy lover. Morally indignant, Planche (1839), who intensifies the rhetoric initiated by Janin, deals harshly with women who are easy conquests. On one hand, his description of Des Grieux escaping from Saint-Lazare makes Des Grieux sound like Manon's toy, much as the eighteenth-century

¹⁷ Lescure cites Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's *La Femme au XVIII^e siècle*, p. 263, as his source.

Anecdotes sur Mme la comtesse du Barry depicted Louis XV as Madame Du Barry's toy. On the other hand, Planche envisions Manon suffering and repenting each time she strays, and thus, he claims, she deserves our compassion. Unable to effect a realistic reconciliation of his (unacknowledged) conflicting images of Manon, Planche, like Des Grieux and many of our conflicted critics, transforms her into a sweeter, more loving and chastened figure than the novel suggests.

All except Lemoine and Lescure, who take a more sober sociological approach, accept unquestioningly the interpretation affirming Manon's passionate love for Des Grieux and depict a heroine repentant for the anguish she causes him, a portrait not at all made certain by the novel--or at least not until the episode in the New World. Although Des Grieux portrays a heroine who pleads for pardon each time he reproaches her for infidelity, she does not hesitate to betray him again when their funds run low. Even when they first run off together, love is not her principal motivation. Rather, she is proud to have attracted such a desirable young man and eager to escape being confined to a convent. Critics, nonetheless, relish titillating scenes of expiatory repetition that stimulate their male fantasies.

Sympathizing with the hero, Planche goes to great lengths to prove that Des Grieux's behavior is "vrai et logique." Although Planche denies it, he is clearly trying to justify Des Grieux, a young man who obeys his feelings because he lacks the "faculté de se gouverner" (284). Though Des Grieux loses our esteem, he maintains our sympathy, contends Planche, who claims that Des Grieux is

Manon's saviour (281). Moral responsibility and the need for rehabilitation seem, once again, to fall entirely on Manon.

When Janin remarks that passion might have saved Manon and Des Grieux in a century governed by duty, he, in effect, attacks Regency mores. Planche levels another criticism at Regency France, suggesting it was possibly the spectacle of wealth, in other words, a sociological cause, that led Manon astray (288). According to Pierre Jannet, the novel "ne manque pas d'intérêt pour l'étude des mœurs du temps" (v). He then uses his comments on *Manon Lescaut* to express anxiety about a contemporary social problem: prostitution. The "Hôpital général ... [était] La Salpêtrière, où l'on enfermait les femmes de mauvaise vie."¹⁸ Le sort de ces femmes était entre les mains de la police, qui les traitait durement en cas de récidive. Il en est un peu de même aujourd'hui [i.e., 1867], et il ne peut guère en être autrement" (243). The anonymous author of an 1830 preface criticizes both Regency and contemporary mores by remarking that France has too long had a "goût de frivolité et la dépravation des mœurs" (7).

The authors of these introductions to *Manon Lescaut* frequently use their essays to rail against a decadent urban society. By transforming Manon into a mythical creature redeemed by love or by arguing that she is simply a product of her times, Regency France, critics are able to use the novel as a springboard for discussing contemporary concerns while holding the novel at arm's length. This approach permits them to attack public morals without directly

¹⁸ According to Lescure, women--even virtuous women--were also confined to La Salpêtrière for indigence.

assailing, and thus antagonizing, their contemporaries and allows them to protect literature against charges of inciting indecency.

Despite their eagerness to distance themselves historically from Manon, their essays attest to her power to crystallize reaction to contemporary social concerns. The romantics often saw themselves entrusted with a social mission. After 1850 that led to criticism that is largely sociological, and response to *Manon Lescaut*, especially in the second half of the century, reflects growing public concern about the social ills spawned by rapid urbanization and particularly by prostitution.

Sainte-Beuve's reference to "Manon et son Paris de vice et de boue, où toutes les ordures sont entassées" (xxv) links Manon to prostitution and to an image in which the prostitute symbolizes the underlying sexual ferment that contaminates the city. In *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution*¹⁹ in *Nineteenth-Century France*, Charles Bernheimer argues that medical officials and police officers responsible for regulating prostitution shared common fantasmatic ground with "creative artists committed to regulating the sexualized female through the formalities of literature and painting" (2). Growing fears of contamination are given medical justification by theories of degenerate heredity and syphilitic infection as the century progresses. They are reflected in literature through realism and particularly through naturalism.

Sainte-Beuve's 1839 essay manifests the influence of Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, a well-known doctor and member of

¹⁹ Bernheimer frequently uses "prostitution" as a general term that includes courtesans.

the Public Health Council. In 1836, he published "De la Prostitution dans la ville de Paris," a famous study that led to the regulation of venal trade in Paris. He viewed the work as a natural follow-up to his earlier study of the disposal of human waste. By analyzing behavior and examining bodies, he thought he could "contain and control the germs of degeneracy that threatened to infect and decompose social structure" (Bernheimer 69). The similarity of tone between Parent-Duchâtelet and writers like Sainte-Beuve supports Bernheimer's argument that sexual fantasies inform ideology just as ideology influences the unconscious and that artistic production was the product of science mixed with fantasy.

The Paris sewers were installed between 1852 and 1870, and the putrefaction of prostitution and of human waste were linked images in the public mind. Planche describes Manon as a dirty "fille perdue" (292) who "s'avilit ... [et] se dégrade" (275). According to Planche, Prévost does not try to hide "les souillures et l'avilissement de [Manon]" (274). Like Sainte-Beuve, Planche clearly associates Manon with the physical and moral decay of a decadent urban society. Yet I would observe that the only time Prévost depicts Manon in sordid conditions is when she is in prison and on the road to Le Havre, i.e. when she is under the control of public authorities.

Nineteenth-century critics do not envision a heroine with a healthy normal sex drive, nor do they even envision that such a woman exists. Rather they portray Manon as either a purified or decadent heroine. In the novel, Des Grieux occasionally mentions that he and Manon abandon themselves to delirious caresses. Beyond that, explicit allusions to the erotic nature of their love are

discreetly avoided. Commenting on the novel, an anonymous eighteenth-century critic writes, "Les peintures de cet amour le moins chaste, le moins légitime qu'on puisse imaginer, ne s'adressent jamais qu'au coeur, sans qu'on y rencontre le moindre détail capable de blesser l'imagination" (qtd. by Deloffre CLXXV). By also keeping his heroine free from pregnancy and venereal disease, Prévost endows her with a certain purity. This illusion of essential purity prepares Manon for her transformation in the New World, as well as the redemption envisioned by many of these writers.

Among nineteenth-century critics, Houssaye most explicitly acknowledges Manon as a sexual being when he declares that she "vivait dans l'orgie diurne et nocturne" (i). It is a decadent image of degradation and delight. Often these writers describe Manon as "une fille née seulement pour le plaisir et pour l'amour."²⁰ Planche discusses women "qui se livrent pour le seul plaisir de se livrer" (276). They seem to be reflecting their own fantasies and perhaps confusing her with Challes' Silvie, one of her literary predecessors. Silvie loves "les plaisirs, surtout ceux de l'amour" (311). This image of a sexually insatiable heroine is not found in Prévost's novel. His Manon experiences passion for just one man--Des Grieux. For her, "plaisirs" are entertainment and riches. Quite remarkably, she often avoids compensating her lovers' prodigality with sexual favors. Using love and pleasure as euphemisms for sex in these essays, critics confound romantic love and a yearning for material comforts with sexual enjoyment. Or perhaps it is simply male fantasy which

²⁰ Found on page 10 of an anonymous 1830 preface and plagiarized from Palissot's 1767 essay [op. cit.].

imagines that a courtesan takes lovers because she enjoys the work as much as the fruits of her labor.

Parent-Duchâtelet stressed social causes of prostitution: poverty, unemployment and lack of education. By the 1870s and 1880s, however, French authorities tended to view prostitution as instinctual and innate, the result of "a lubricious temperament, an inordinate love of pleasure, [and] a hereditary predisposition to debauchery" (Bernheimer 210). Nineteenth-century critics' reading of *Manon Lescaut* is a more accurate reflection of this contemporary ideology than of Prévost's novel.

Eager to hold Manon at arm's length, to deny that courtesans cross class barriers and upset the social order, or even more worrisome, may contaminate France's bloodline, Janin terms the tale a touching drama at the bottom of the social ladder. But Des Grieux is a gentleman descended from aristocratic parents, and Manon, who shows no signs of ever having been a lower-class laborer, is a courtesan cavorting with rich aristocratic lovers, not a common prostitute available to any man with a little cash. Lescure (1879) studies Regency class differences and reasonably concludes that Manon "devait être de petite bourgeoisie" (14), a conclusion that must have proved somewhat distressing for Lemoinne who had decided otherwise.

For Lemoinne, Manon represents the lovable but incorrigible weakness of her sex, the love of well-being (iii), and the overall picture he paints of women and novels is negative. Very critical of the effects of novels like *Manon Lescaut* on working-class women,

Lemoinne attacks the psychological and melodramatic bent of nineteenth-century novels. "Ce qui, dans ce [dix-neuvième] siècle, a perverti le plus de coeurs et perdu le plus d'imaginations, ce qui a enfanté le plus de misère, le plus de vices, le plus de crimes, ... ce sont les romans!" (ix). Novels used to depict the aristocracy but now poeticize characters with whom the working class can identify. As a result, these novels have popularized melancholy. But the working class does not have time to dream or cry. Melancholy, which has become an irresistible "fatale et chère enchanteresse" (xii), is an ailment for the idle rich. "Ennoblement moral" (viii), caused by poeticizing, carries a heavy price because novels tempt women to chase things beyond their reach.

As reflected in these essays, reaction to *Manon Lescaut* is linked to issues of genre, gender, social turbulence, and literature's role in society, as well as to nineteenth-century fantasy-ridden notions about the nature of female sexuality. Critics' response to Prévost's novel is the over-reaction of men in crisis, men experiencing intense sexual and social anxiety. The introductions written by Dumas fils and Maupassant merit special attention for they most sharply exemplify critics' unresolvable inner conflict and the ensuing tensions that Bernheimer argues stimulate artistic strategies to contain, dispel, sublimate or metamorphize the prostitute's threat to male mastery.

Functioning much like Renoncour, the frame narrator in *Manon Lescaut*, Alexandre Dumas fils (1875) assures readers that no "honnête homme" could help but feel compassion for Des Grieux, a

young man stricken by love (XXXIX). He stops short of saying that Manon and Des Grieux are redeemed, but at least they merit compassion and understanding. They are young and beautiful, a couple who love intensely and suffer immensely.

In an essay riddled with ambivalence, Dumas, perhaps the most conflicted of our critics, is torn between his fascination with the figure of Manon and his posture as moralist. His barbed commentary takes a dim view of both Regency and contemporary mores. All the novel's characters, according to Dumas, are simply products of their time, a period marked by moral and social decay. Not even Tiberge, whom these writers generally cite as a model of virtue, escapes unscathed. Lacking the moral force to refuse Des Grieux's appeal for financial assistance, Tiberge aids and abets his descent into shame and decadence. Dumas accuses him of having a "morale ... toujours vide" and a "bourse toujours pleine" (XXXVIII). Ironically, the only characters who receive even faint praise from Dumas are Manon and Des Grieux. Linking passion to illness, Dumas describes Des Grieux as one of "ces malades" (XXXVI). He warrants our eternal pity because he suffered eternally. He is an ungrateful son, a disloyal friend, a swindler, and even a murderer (XXXVCIII-XXXIX). Yet one is inclined to overlook a host of sins because Des Grieux is young, charming, and gripped by an all-consuming passion.

Manon, according to Dumas, is more than just the portrait, even the ideal (XXXVI), of Regency decadence transformed by love and suffering. She embodies the archetypal temptress. She is youth, sensuality, instinct, pleasure, and man's eternal temptation. She is *l'Amour même*, love that supersedes all else in life. "Qui ne t'a pas

aimée, Manon, n'est pas allé jusqu'au fond de l'amour; et c'est abominable à constater, mais qui n'aime pas comme des Grieux, c'est-à-dire, le cas échéant, jusqu'au crime et jusqu'au déshonneur, ne peut pas dire qu'il aime" (XXXIX-XL). It is a conflict without resolution permanently attached to the figure of Manon, a figure in which rapture and ruin are inextricably bound.

She has loved, he tells her, "autant qu'une femme comme toi pouvait aimer" (XXXVIII). "Comme toi." A woman like Manon, a courtesan, can never love as genuinely, as wholeheartedly as those of good breeding. Certainly never as worthily as Des Grieux, who is "mille fois mieux" (XL) than his beloved.

Manon is beautiful. Dumas lingers longingly on visualization.

Voyez ces grands yeux humides et à demi clos, ces joues à fossettes, ce nez mutin, ... ces bras arrondis, ces mains potelées et mignonnes, ces seins fermes et blancs, étoilés d'un point rose semblable à un soleil qui se couche sur un pic de neige, cette bouche fraîche et brûlant.... (XLI)

It is the portrait of seductive childlike innocence, of a prostitute with a child's mentality, which is how prostitutes were viewed in Dumas' day. Before we become beguiled by Manon's charms, Dumas crudely reminds us--and himself--that she is only a courtesan with her "petits pieds déchaussés, quelquefois plus haut que la tête" (XLI). Therefore, it will do no good to speak to her of morality or remorse because "elle n'y comprend rien" (XLII).

These descriptive details flow from Dumas' imagination, not the novel. Des Grieux never offers a physical description of his beloved.

Gripped by an obsession he can neither condone nor overcome, Dumas challenges Manon to explain herself and demands a response. He puts words in her mouth--in the novel she says virtually nothing--and his preface becomes a fictional dialogue with the sultry siren. His bitterness pours out. Youth and beauty fade, and man will have his revenge, he hurls at her. "Ce qui l'attirait en toi, le repousse, ce qui l'enivrait l'écoeure...; enfin, il te laisse crever à l'hôpital comme une mendiante et pourrir à même la terre comme un chien" (XLV-XLVI).

Twenty-three years earlier in Dumas' play *La Dame aux camélias*, M. Duval expresses the same idea less harshly to Marguerite. "[Que] restera-t-il [de votre passion] quand vous aurez vieilli tous deux? Qui vous dit que les premières rides de votre front ne détacheront pas le voile [des] yeux [d'Armand], et que son illusion ne s'évanouira pas avec votre jeunesse?" (300). The message is nonetheless the same: women are valued for youth and beauty. Once past her prime, a woman has little to offer.

In his 1848 novel of the same name, Dumas develops a similar theme. Learning of Marguerite's death, the frame narrator claims "une indulgence inépuisable pour les courtisanes" (30): "Dieu avait été clément pour elle, puisqu'il n'avait pas permis qu'elle en arrivât au châtiment ordinaire, et qu'il l'avait laissée mourir dans son luxe et sa beauté, avant le vieillesse..." (27). Manon, of course, continues to fascinate us in part because she dies while still young and beautiful. That is the poignant image that haunts men's souls.

In his novel, Dumas recounts the pathetic history of Louise, whose mother, an aged prostitute, made her young daughter

prostitute herself to support them. Obeying her mother, Louise "se livrait sans volonté, sans passion, sans plaisir. [...] La vue de cette surveillance scandaleuse m'inspirait le mépris et le dégoût" (28). One day Louise learns that she is pregnant and joyfully runs to tell her mother the happy news. The mother quickly crushes Louise's brief glimpse of happiness by telling her that they do not even have enough money to take care of the two of them, let alone a third person. A baby would be useless, pregnancy wasted time. Forced to have a backstreet abortion, Louise dies three months later. When he first saw Louise plying her trade under her mother's watchful eye, the frame narrator of Dumas' novel was "prêt à accepter ... la facile morale de [s]on siècle." The scene filled him with "le mépris et le dégoût" (28), but Louise's sad plight changes his perspective. The moral of his story is that we should not be so quick to judge such women without knowing their story. The tone and manner in which this story is told inclines the reader toward sympathy for Louise and even toward aging courtesans. Such is not the case in Dumas fils' introduction to *Manon Lescaut* written 27 years later.

In this imaginary debate between Manon and the author, the siren is not a hapless victim. She will not be silenced. "Puisque tu veux du plaisir, je t'en fournirai," she retorts; "mais tu me le payeras non-seulement de ta fortune, mais de tes muscles, de ta raison, de ton sang, de ton honneur, de ton âme" (XLVII). It is the portrait of a man-eating *femme fatale* who saps men's vitality and ruins them. She is a much more menacing figure, much more like Zola's Nana than Prévost's original.

Between Dumas' *La Dame aux camélias* and his introduction to Prévost's novel, the ills of rapid urbanization had exploded. His reading of *Manon Lescaut* was born of late nineteenth-century fears about the uncontrolled sexual freedom that pervaded Paris, threatening men and the bourgeoisie. In the burgeoning capitalist society of the 1850s and 1860s, desire seemed limitless and sexual relations became more commercialized. In 1871 prostitution was linked to the violence of the Commune: 246 of the 1051 Communard women arrested were prostitutes. Stories of their violent extremism "contributed to the reactionary discourse of the 1870s that blamed women's sexual derangement for what was perceived as a crisis in the health of the national organism, a lesion in the unity of the body politic" (Bernheimer 209-10). Clandestine prostitution was thought to be at an all-time high in 1870s and 1880s, arousing anxiety that the very virility of France was at risk. In *Les Origines de la France Contemporaine* (1878), Hippolyte Taine imagines "modern France infected by alcoholism, syphilis, and nervous depletion, all illnesses fomented by female [especially lower class female] sexuality" (Bernheimer 210). Syphilis, which was most rampant in 1879 and 1880, was thought to spread from the lower to upper classes (234-235). In brief, the change in Dumas' tone between *La Dame aux camélias* and his preface to *Manon Lescaut* reflects escalating fears of degeneration, contamination and death associated with active female sexuality.

Although Dumas' discourse is marked by contemporary anxieties, he is first of all a writer bent on achieving literary success. He contributes to the legend of Manon by integrating her into his

own work, *La Dame aux camélias*, and then uses his introduction to *Manon Lescaut* to immortalize his characters, Marguerite Gautier and Armand Duval. After he tells Manon that men will soon turn from her in disgust, the temptress responds, "«Oui, oui, c'était ainsi mon cher moraliste, quand je m'appelais Manon, et que j'étais assez sotté pour tenir à des Grioux, ... quand je m'appelais Marguerite Gauthier [sic] et que j'étais assez malade²¹ pour aimer Armand...»" (XLVI).

These intertextual references suggest a writer in conversation with writers across the ages. In his invective against aging beauty, Dumas declares to Manon, "Pour qu'on t'immortalise, il faut que tu meures jeune, en pleine beauté ... comme nous t'avons fait mourir, comme nous qui t'avons chantée" (XLIV). He and other literary artists have become "nous." Their muse, Manon, the archetypal temptress who encourages the arts (XLVIII), a theme Maupassant will develop.²²

Guy de Maupassant (1885) launches the most virulent attack against women but sidesteps moral issues. Dismissing all female accomplishment with one fell swoop, Maupassant argues that the ancient Greeks were wise in concluding that women are good for love and motherhood alone. And those two roles are incompatible. Women who fall into the first category are "les grandes courtisanes, dont le devoir consist[e] à être belles et séduisantes, à ravir les yeux, à captiver l'esprit et à troubler les coeurs" (x). The latter are strong, healthy women devoted to the holy and natural work of bearing and

²¹ The reader will note that love is once again equated with illness.

²² See chapter 3 for further discussion of Dumas fils' reading of *Manon Lescaut*.

raising children. He links this diatribe to an attack on women's career ambitions. Despite numerous attempts across the century, contends Maupassant, no woman has proven herself capable of artistic or scientific accomplishment. He opposes contemporary efforts to train women doctors and politicians,²³ and he uses his introduction to *Manon Lescaut* to pronounce it a futile effort.

Shifting to an aesthetic approach, Maupassant agrees with Dumas that Manon is the artist's muse. He posits that a few select images of femininity, including Manon Lescaut, are the source of the artistic impulse:

[L]'histoire de la pensée humaine, de la pensée artiste, est éclairée par quelques images féminines rêvées par les écrivains, dessinées par les peintres ou taillées dans le marbre par les sculpteurs. Le corps de la Vénus de Milo, la tête de la Joconde, la figure de Manon Lescaut hantent notre âme et l'émeuvent, et vivront toujours dans le coeur de l'homme, et troubleront toujours tous les artistes, tous les songeurs, tous ceux qui désirent et poursuivent une forme entrevue et insaisissable. (xii)

Manon stimulates artistic production because she is an elusive mythical--or idealized--figure who troubles men's souls and stimulates their fantasies. Because Des Grieux never describes her, each reader can envision his own ideal enchantress.

In literature, claims Maupassant, there are only three or four types of women who live in men's souls with such vividness and

²³ Public secondary schools had been opened to women in 1881; higher education for them soon followed.

intensity as to seem real: Dido, Juliette, Virginie, and "Manon Lescaut, plus vraiment femme que toutes les autres, naïvement rouée, perfide, aimante, troublante, spirituelle, redoutable et charmante" (xiii). She exercises a subtle, unhealthy charm. She incarnates "tout ce qu'il y a de plus gentil, de plus entraînant et de plus infâme dans l'être féminin" (xiii). She fascinates and enchants us because she is both the Eve of the Garden of Eden and the Eve of paradise lost.

The art work accompanying this edition of the novel presents an interesting dichotomy. The black and white illustration preceding the preface depicts Eve as the source of original sin, woman as the sower of evil, woman in need of rehabilitation. With a come-hither look, she is seated at the foot of the tree of good and evil in the Garden of Eden, holding out an apple, the forbidden fruit. The drawing at the end of the preface portrays a semi-nude muse floating above a pile of books. One is open to the title page of the *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité qui s'est retiré du monde*. In her hand, the muse holds a copy of *Manon Lescaut*. Throughout Des Grieux's narrative, several smaller black and white drawings depict archetypal characters in scenes that link love to disaster and destruction.

Maurice Leloir's full-page watercolors also illustrate the novel. They portray the youngest, freshest, and most innocent-looking Manon of any of the editions. The watercolors allow him to give a pinkish tint to her skin. He gives her young facial features and typically wraps her in layers of modest clothing. Even in the arrest scene, she is standing in a white cotton nightgown peering somewhat

timidly around the bed curtains at the men at the door. The contrast between Leloir's watercolors and the black and white sketches illustrates the difference between Prévost's and Maupassant's Manon, between the individual and universal implications of the story. Unlike the full-page illustrations, which are plot specific, the small black and white sketches capture the archetypal aspect of *Manon Lescaut*. Prévost's heroine is young, rather naturally beguiling, and fairly harmless. Maupassant imagines a mythical creature, the poet's muse, the archetypal *femme fatale*.

Maupassant is the only preface writer who explicitly describes *both* protagonists in archetypal terms, Manon as the eternal feminine and Des Grieux as the eternal masculine. Empathizing with Des Grieux--i.e., Adam, Maupassant admits, "nous nous sentons faibles devant cette image ravissante, devant cette unique évocation de la créature d'amour" (xiii). Attracted and repulsed, yet powerless to resist, he is haunted by fears of self-destruction when confronted by her sexual magnetism. Maupassant depicts the eternal feminine as the *femme fatale* no man could resist. Contaminated by Manon's depraved nature, Des Grieux falls victim to her spell.

Despite being a strident misogynist and referring to the novel as a "nouvelle immorale" (xvi), Maupassant issues no moral judgments about art. In fact, he seems to agree with Anatole France that we love Manon precisely because she is immoral. In courtesans like Manon, great men seek a nearly divine sensual and poetic intoxication. But if they are enchanted with historical figures such as Madame de Pompadour, they are even more enraptured by women created in the poet's imagination. Recalling Villon's "Mais où sont les

neiges d'antan?" Maupassant concedes that, in spite of themselves, men are moved by a charming death. Even Lescure, who deems Manon beyond redemption and unworthy of her poetic death, agrees that by dying, Manon elicits the reader's sympathy for protagonists of dubious character. "Il fallait que Manon mourût pour qu'on pût la plaindre et plaindre Des Grieux" (59).

To Maupassant's credit, he acknowledges Manon's complexity. She is a "fille diverse, complexe, changeante, sincère, odieuse et adorable, pleine d'inexplicables mouvements de coeur, d'incompréhensibles sentiments, de calculs bizarres et de naïveté criminelle." Prévost, he concludes, has rendered a true-to-life heroine. "Comme elle diffère des modèles de vice ou de vertu présentés sans complications" (xv) by sentimental novelists who do not understand that human nature is multi-faceted!

Concurring with Maupassant, France, and the anonymous author of an 1886 preface that readers do *not* want to rehabilitate Manon, G.H. (1893) acknowledges readers' ambivalence and admits that Manon is loved in spite of, perhaps even *because of*, her waywardness. In fact, G. H. continues, we like the novel *because of* its corruption. A less immoral Manon would no longer be the heroine we love (vi-vii).

Time and again we see that reception is informed by how critics position themselves artistically, historically, socially and culturally. Most critical reaction to *Manon Lescaut* tells us more about the nineteenth century and about the anxieties, desires and fears of these writers than about Prévost's novel. Their readings are born of an era

that believes social, moral, physical, and psychological disorders spring from active female sexuality. Men both desire and fear women. Their essays reveal this conflict.

Identifying with the narrator, critics confuse the eponymous heroine with the novel. In fact, they say relatively little about the novel, about Des Grieux's narrative. Their essays have even less to do with real women or with what women want. Just as Parent-Duchâtelet and other nineteenth-century sociologists give the prostitute no voice in their studies of prostitution, women, including women writers, have no voice in these essays. Rather, the goal of these works is to control the female threat to masculinity. Their representation of Manon is an image that springs from the male imagination; hence it is unreal. Their creativity is in part driven by their anxieties about masculinity.

Most critics exaggerate either her angelic or her infernal nature. Simultaneously they scorn and idealize Manon. Des Grieux's ambiguous, ambivalent depiction of Manon's character invites these multiple interpretations. Up until 1886, their commentaries tend toward an increasingly harsh and conflicted tone. She is young, gay and beautiful, but she is an unfaithful beauty who gave herself on a first encounter and soon thereafter betrayed her lover. She is a representative of her times, Regency France, a morally depraved epoch in French history. Her story is "le paroissien des courtisanes" (Dumas XXII). In a word, she is immoral, but delightfully so. These are their frequent refrains.

Early in the century, critics tend to privilege the carefree, young and gay Manon. The next wave of reception foregrounds the repentant Manon who begs Des Grieux's forgiveness for her infidelities

and is transformed into a loving angel in the New World. It recasts her, according to contemporary tastes, as a courtesan redeemed by love. After mid-century, the focus falls on the unfaithful Manon who betrayed Des Grieux, alienated him from his family, and defrauded her lovers. Cast as a *femme fatale* who leads men to ruin, she is portrayed as a more hardened, cynical and fearsome temptress than Prévost's heroine. Using Manon as a symbol of contemporary moral decay, their introductions to the novel serve as a platform from which to argue any number of contemporary issues. Eager to espouse their own world view, they rarely even cite *Manon Lescaut* in their introductions to the work.

Toward century's end, critics turn from sociological criticism to aesthetics. She is the poet's muse, and they debate her place in literary history. According to one, she will never have the nobility and purity of Shakespeare's Juliette, Ophelia, or Desdemona (Planche 275). According to another, her poetic death gives her the right to rest alongside the heroines of Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe, "toutes les amoureuses de la galerie idéale" (Houssaye iii). Yet another declares her the *Dame aux camélias* (Stephen xxvii) and Virginie before purification (Janin xi).

Perhaps most importantly, this plenitude of editions with original introductions demonstrates Romanticism's rejection of criticism that evaluates literary works according to dogmatic tastes. They show that *Manon Lescaut* continues to be read and reacted to. Hence it remains relevant. In fact, nineteenth-century readers transform Manon into a mythical creature. Dumas and Maupassant have argued that Manon is the eternal feminine, the artist's muse.

The wealth of memorable literary and operatic creations inspired by *Manon Lescaut* seems to prove them right.

The number of writers who take up the question of morality underscores public debate on literature's function in society and public concern about the moral fiber of French society. The anonymous author of an 1875 preface defends the novel as less dangerous than modern novels because it paints mores of a distant epoch. Even Dumas fils, the great moralist, distinguishes literary from social standards. *Manon Lescaut* is not immoral; it is simply representative of its times, and "constater une chose n'est pas la glorifier" (xxx). None of these critics term *Manon Lescaut* immoral. Quite the contrary, they insist that it is a morally instructive book in which vice is always punished, virtue rewarded. Nowhere in the novel, they argue, does the reader encounter "une seule de ces dangereuses peintures propres à échauffer les imaginations" (L.P. xvi).

Yet clearly, the novel does inflame *their* imaginations. Despite their moral posturing, a lesson in virtue is decidedly not what draws these critics to the novel. These introductions to *Manon Lescaut*, like the novel they preface, are creative works at once reflective of the times in which their authors lived and of those writers' own repressed fears and fantasies. The figure of Manon acts as a lightning rod, sparking men's imaginations, providing a conduit for expression of deep-seated conflict, and crystallizing their reactions to literary and social issues.

Chapter 2

VARIATIONS ON THE MANON-DES GRIEUX STORY

*L'amour ... est toujours un motif noble,
quoique la conduite soit basse.*
Montesquieu

A literary work's meaning and significance are illuminated over time as succeeding generations of readers and writers react to the work. In this chapter we will examine how three nineteenth-century authors react to--or against--*Manon Lescaut* in creating their own versions of Manon and Des Grieux's ill-fated love affair. In *Leone Leoni*, an early feminist response to men's fears of Manon, George Sand depicts a sinister *homme fatal* who is much more menacing than Prévost's *femme fatale*. In a fantastic variant of Prévost's tale, Théophile Gautier's "La Morte amoureuse" stirs the cinders of repressed sexuality. In *Carmen*, Prosper Mérimée develops Prévost's emphasis on Manon's "charmes" and his portrayal of passion as a violent emotion. In chapter 3 we will study a fourth work inspired by Prévost's novel, Alexandre Dumas fils' *La Dame aux camélias*, "a kind of anti-*Manon*" (Gilroy 101) with explicit intertextual references to *Manon Lescaut*.

Though little of substance has been written about Sand's *Leone Leoni*, several writers, including James Gilroy and Leon Cellier, have observed that it is a "mirrored reversal of *Manon Lescaut*" (Riggs²⁴

²⁴ Larry Riggs' "Class, Gender and Performance in George Sand's *Leone Leoni*" is one of few articles devoted to the work.

50). In his 1846 *Choix de maximes consolantes sur l'amour*, Baudelaire draws a similar analogy. Troubled by men's attraction to women they should scorn, he concludes that love and scorn go hand in hand in the two works: "Les plus habiles, se voyant contraints par la nature de jouer l'éternel roman de *Manon Lescaut* et de *Leone Leoni*, se sont tirés d'affaire en disant que le mépris allait très bien avec l'amour." He goes on to advise enthusiastic acceptance of Manon and Leone as they are. Without their faults they would be incomplete: "Moins scélérat, mon idéal n'eût pas été complet" (474).

Sand penned *Leone Leoni* in 1834 while staying in Venice with Alfred de Musset. She writes that *Manon Lescaut* was the last work she read before leaving Paris. Having heard the novel discussed, she thought that "faire de Manon Lescaut un homme, de Desgrieux [sic] une femme, serait une combinaison à tenter et qui offrirait des situations assez tragiques, le vice étant souvent fort près du crime pour l'homme, et l'enthousiasme pour la femme" (Sand, *Impressions* 116).

There is no record of Gautier or Mérimée citing Prévost's masterpiece as their source of inspiration for "La Morte amoureuse" (1836) and *Carmen* (1845) respectively. But if not consciously, at least subconsciously their tales seem to have been inspired by *Manon Lescaut*, a story that had entered the cultural consciousness by the time these variants were written. L. De Wailly, in an 1852

Another discussion of *Leone Leoni* is found on pages 4 and 7-12 of Shawn Morrison's unpublished dissertation, "Women in the Novels of George Sand." Her conclusion echoes that of the scholars already mentioned: "*Leone Leoni* ... is George Sand's speculation on what would happen if there were a male 'Manon Lescaut'" (7).

article, is the first of many, including once again Cellier and Gilroy, who have commented on the similarities between *Carmen* and *Manon Lescaut*. Glossing over Des Grieux's shooting of a servant as easily as does the chevalier, Wailly seems to suggest that the murder is nothing more than a trifling offense. He argues that the differences between the two novels lie in the seriousness of the protagonists' offenses:

Le sujet de *Carmen* est à peu près celui de *Manon Lescaut*. Ainsi que le chevalier des Grieux, don José a été ensorcelé par deux beaux yeux. Seulement, au lieu d'une lorette affolée de plaisir, son démon est une Bohémienne qui vole, qui assassine [...] Aussi don José n'est pas quitte, comme le pauvre petit chevalier, pour quelques friponneries au jeu et autres peccadilles; par amour et par imitation de sa belle, il est entraîné au vol et à l'assassinat. (qtd. by Gilroy 103)

In the *Causeries du lundi*, Sainte-Beuve, too, characterizes the novel as Mérimée's response to *Manon Lescaut*. «Cette Carmen n'est autre chose qu'une Manon Lescaut d'un plus haut goût, qui débauche son chevalier des Grieux, également séduit et faible, bien que d'une toute autre trempe»" (qtd. by Gilroy 103). Later, comparing the two works in *Mes Poisons*, Sainte-Beuve notes that a principal difference is the change in setting: "Je viens de lire *Carmen* de Mérimée; c'est bien, mais c'est sec, dur, sans développement; c'est une Manon Lescaut plus poivrée et à l'espagnole" (qtd. by Gilroy 103).²⁵

²⁵ Readers interested in a review of the similarities of structure, theme and characters between *Manon Lescaut* and its variants are referred to James

Carmen, like *Manon Lescaut* and *Leone Leoni*, is a first-person account told to a frame narrator, a credible and respectable witness who directs our reaction to the narrator's tale. All of these variants borrow *Manon Lescaut*'s narrative structure. Each is a first-person account of a disastrous, life-consuming passion told to a sympathetic third party. Except for the frame narrator's comments, everything is seen from the principal narrator's point of view. Each is a confessional tale, a genre particularly popular during the Romantic period. Juliette, Romuald and Don José, characters patterned after Des Grieux, know their behavior is scandalous and want to believe themselves victims of an irresistible force. As James Gilroy points out in his discussion of *Leone Leoni* and *Carmen*, protagonists "led to ruin by [their] uncontrollable passionate love for an enigmatic figure who is, for the most part, unworthy of the love he or she inspires" (101) pursue "an unattainable happiness, an impossible ideal, and all are defeated in their attempts to resist the pressure of the external social standards which they defy" (102).

Tormented by his or her inability to resist the fatal allure of the enigmatic and elusive figure of Manon, metamorphosed into Leone Leoni, Clarimonde and Carmen, each narrator seeks to justify, or at least understand and explain, his or her behavior. To do so, they wrestle with the nature of love and passion, that seductive irresistible force capable of leading otherwise honorable souls to ruin. Across time, Sand, Gautier and Mérimée dialogue with Prévost

Gilroy's *The Romantic Manon and Des Grieux*: pages 111-117 for *Leone Leoni*, pages 102-111 for *Carmen*, and pages 95-97 and 118-120 for *La Dame aux camélias*.

and with one another in an attempt to characterize passion and to understand the nature of this force which leads people to irrational, degrading, destructive, and even violent behavior that is so often at odds with what they believe their natural temperament to be.

Sand tends to create idealized, larger-than-life characters. Her protagonists usually embody a particular sentiment, such as love. "As Manon had represented an incarnation of Prévost's ideal of femininity, so does Leoni represent Sand's ideal man. He is a fatal man, just as Manon is a fatal woman" (Gilroy 112). A handsome, charming young Italian noble, this enigmatic Byronic seducer is truly an *homme fatal*. At least two women, the Princesse Zagarolo and the young sister of a courtesan Leone loves, die because of their involvement with him. Others are led to financial ruin.

His ever suffering faithful lover is Juliette Ruyter, daughter of a rich Belgian jeweler. She recounts her life to don Aleo Bustamente, a Spanish aristocrat who wants to marry her. In *Manon Lescaut* and the other variants, a male narrator recounts his adventures to a second male. Sand does not depict the same kind of female collusion, and by telling her story, Juliette, unlike Des Grieux, does not seek reintegration into the society from which she came.²⁶ She may want

²⁶ Riggs, in fact, argues that she rejects the social order. In "Class, Gender and Performance in George Sand's *Leone Leoni*," he reads the novella as a feminist statement that challenges bourgeois morality and social discourse. "Though exhausted and tempted by the security of a respectable man's name and protection, [Juliette] will embrace the 'Wild Other' ... and the otherness in her self. Violation of the code performance that baffles expectations reveals the code's arbitrariness and the possibility of altering it" (51). "The George Sand of *Leone Leone* is the Sand of *Elle et lui* and of *Spiridon*, which is a critique of Catholicism against a background of utopian socialism" (57).

to purge herself of memories of Leone, but she does not seek self-vindication. Juliette is a passive heroine resigned to her fate.

Juliette's parents favor their daughter's marriage to the aristocratic Leone. Nonetheless, the protagonists run off together without the benefit of marriage. In the process, Leone absconds with the family's fortune in jewels. The scandal leads to the early death of Juliette's parents. Similarly, in Prévost's novel, Des Grieux's scandalous escapades are partly responsible for the death of his father (his only living parent).

A young innocent when she meets Leone, Juliette, again like Des Grieux, possesses a naturally calm and sweet disposition, but Leone soon awakens her to a previously undiscovered self. They spend their happiest moments in an idyllic pastoral retreat in Switzerland reminiscent of the New World and Des Grieux's dream of sharing a pastoral paradise with Manon. Juliette becomes a different person: "Que ce fût l'ouvrage de Dieu, celui de Leoni ou celui de l'amour, une âme forte se développa et s'épanouit dans mon faible corps. Chaque jour je sentis un monde de pensées nouvelles se révéler à moi" (25).

Ambiguity, however, casts an ominous shadow over Leone's motives and feelings for Juliette. For example, we are never sure whether Leone spends six poetic months with Juliette in their romantic rural retreat mainly because he loves her or because he is eager to avoid discovery after the jewelry heist. Initially she is blind to his duplicity, but even after she realizes that Leone is a thief and a

cardsharp who may be involved in even more sinister plots, she continues to be as blindly devoted to him as Des Grieux is to Manon.

To appease Leone, she involves herself in his increasingly treacherous schemes for raising money and gradually debases herself both morally and socially. In an episode that calls to mind Des Grieux's posing as Manon's brother at M. de G... M... 's, Juliette even agrees to pose as Leone's sister and move in with him and his rich mistress in order to dupe Princess Zagarolo. Not surprisingly, this exploit lands the protagonists in jail. Juliette experiences occasional shame and remorse, but no matter how low she has sunk, her "coeur battait comme au premier jour de [s]a passion" (55-56) the moment she sees the object of her affections.

Juliette's love is exceptional, and her beloved is an exceptional character. Leone is "[s]upérieur aux autres hommes dans le mal et dans le bien" (25). Always in need of money to support his addiction to gambling and his affinity for the excitement of a lavish lifestyle, Leone consciously and purposefully charms, deceives and manipulates everyone he meets. Manon, on the other hand, is rather naturally beguiling and never does serious harm to anyone but herself. Though Des Grieux ruins himself for her, it is not at her instigation.

By Juliette's account, Leone exhibits a mind-boggling bipolarity. His "âme est bien laide et bien belle, bien vile et bien grande; quand on n'a pas la force de haïr cet homme, il faut l'aimer et devenir sa proie" (43). His soul was "reçue du ciel et de l'enfer réunis" (62). Capable of sublime tenderness and violent cruelty, his feelings for Juliette are even more ambiguous than Manon's for Des Grieux.

Much more dangerous than Manon, he is an insidious character deft at manipulation. Admitting that his behavior is vile, he argues that Juliette is nonetheless better off with him than with a man "de mœurs régulières et de conscience délicate" because such a man would take Juliette's goodness for granted. "Avec cet homme-là," he tells her, "tu ne serais qu'une honnête femme; avec un homme tel que moi tu es une femme sublime, et la dette de reconnaissance qui s'amasse dans mon coeur est immense comme tes souffrances et tes sacrifices" (102). Contrary to his argument, however, his behavior manifests little appreciation for Juliette's sacrifices. The more she suffers, the more he abuses her, and Leone never undergoes the conversion that transforms Manon in the New World. In comparison to the *homme fatal*, the *femme fatale*, a myth fired by *men's* imagination, appears much less menacing.

In Sand's novella, some roles remain gender bound. Both Leone and Bustamente, as well as some of the minor male players, display the violence seen in Des Grieux. Male proclivity for violence is one of the reasons that the *homme fatal* is so much more menacing than the *femme fatale*. His violence poses a threat not just to the object of his affections but also to the men and women snared in his web of intrigue. Redemption, on the other hand, still depends upon a woman's selfless devotion and suffering. Leone tells Juliette that her love has redeemed him: "Je n'avais eu ... qu'une période vraiment belle, vraiment pure, celle où je t'ai possédée et adorée. Cela m'avait lavé de toutes mes iniquités" (62-63). Later, believing that Juliette is near death, he confesses that she is dying "saintement et chastement comme une victime expiatoire entre le ciel et moi" (95). Juliette asks

God to "accepter [s]es souffrances en expiation de [s]es fautes" (79). To a large extent then, in *Leone Leoni* Sand has accepted traditional gender-based roles.

Passion, pride, passivity and fantasy seem to govern Juliette's choices. She believes what she wants to believe. Like Des Grieux's story, her account is couched in self-reflective expressions such as "je me flattais d'ailleurs que..." (57), "je ne voulais pas comprendre..." (62), and "j'aimais encore à me persuader ..." (78). In other words she seems to suspect that perception alters reality. She lives her life as a fiction.

Part of Juliette's fascination with Leone stems from her vision of him as a fatal man. Leone exploits her "disposition romanesque" (42). Prefiguring heroines such as Emma Bovary, Juliette is influenced by the literature she has read.

[Ma mère] vit à peine le titre des ouvrages qui allaient bouleverser ma tête et mon coeur. C'étaient de beaux et de chastes livres, presque tous écrits par des femmes sur des histoires de femmes.... Ces récits touchants et passionnés, ces aperçus d'un monde idéal pour moi élevèrent mon âme, mais ils la dévorèrent. Je devins romanesque.... (25)

With her fantasies already inflamed by novels she has read, she imagines Leone and herself as tragic Romantic figures. The fact that he has a terrible deep dark secret makes Leone even more attractive to Juliette and stimulates her rescue fantasy.

J'imaginai mille infortunes romanesques. C'était alors la mode en littérature de faire agir et parler des

personnages frappés des malédictions les plus étranges et les plus invraisemblables. Les théâtres et les romans ne produisaient plus que des fils de bourreaux, des espions héroïques, et des forçats vertueux. [...] Je ... trouvai un attrait de plus dans ce mystère impénétrable, et ... mon âme de femme s'exalta devant l'occasion de risquer sa destinée entière pour soulager une belle et poétique infortune. (42)

Urging her to flee with him, Leone appeals to Juliette's self-image as a Romantic heroine: "Es-tu la femme que j'ai rêvée et que j'ai cru trouver en toi? Es-tu capable d'héroïsme? Comprends-tu les grandes choses, les immenses dévouements? [...] Sens-tu ce qu'il y a de beau, de sublime, à se sacrifier pour ce qu'on aime?" (32). It is a self-serving manipulative argument that apparently convinces Juliette. She seems powerless to resist and blindly follows Leone to ruin.

In *Manon Lescaut*, Tiberge opposes divine love to human love and tries to persuade Des Grieux that it is inexcusable to pursue an attachment that he knows will lead to guilt, misery and crime. Des Grieux counters that pursuing an unhappy passion is no less rational than the behavior of mystics who pursue delights of the soul at the expense of torments to the body. Human love at least promises earthly joys. There is no worse method of discouraging a heart from loving than to promise a Heavenly reward of greater happiness through the exercise of virtue because the only happiness we know is one which gives us pleasure. Arguing that human love and earthly happiness are the highest values, Des Grieux's declares that "les

délices de l'amour ... sont ici-bas nos plus parfaites félicités" (93).

In *Leone Leoni*, Juliette's aunt Agathe is the voice of reason, but she engages in no moralizing. If the novel takes any position on love, it would seem to be that love is everything. Having awoken Juliette to a passionate love she had not known existed, Leone asks her: "Crois-tu qu'il y ait autre chose dans la vie que l'amour?" (103). Juliette's complete surrender to the will of Leone and her gradual self-abasement indicate tacit agreement with his argument that love is as close to paradise as we get. Exalting love rather than any notion of virtue or morality, Leone suggests that there is no conflict between a heavenly and earthly paradise. With whomever we find love, we should enjoy it as a gift from God.

... quand Dieu nous l'accorde sur la terre, ce sentiment profond, violent, ineffable, il ne faut plus ... désirer ni espérer le paradis; car le paradis, c'est la fusion de deux âmes dans un baiser d'amour. Et qu'importe, quand nous l'avons trouvé ici-bas, que ce soit dans les bras d'un saint ou d'un damné? (103)

Leone Leoni, like *Manon Lescaut*, "La Morte amoureuse," and *Carmen*, attributes the narrator's life-consuming passion for an ignoble character to forces beyond the narrator's control. An exploration of the nature of that force is central to all four works and to the intertextual dialogue among them. Literature had traditionally cited love potions as the source of seduction. The best known example is the *philtre* responsible for Tristan and Iseult's tragedy. *Manon Lescaut* develops the tension between fate and free choice. Arguing that he is the victim of a cruel destiny, Des Grieux likes to

cast himself in the role of a tragic classical hero. Renoncour (4) and Tiberge (90), on the other hand, claim that he chooses to rush headlong into misfortune and disgrace.

Juliette's narrative talks about destiny, but the novel tends to characterize this irresistible force as a "puissance" or "force magnétique" (78, 111, and 127) and suggests the possibility of supernatural forces. From the opening scene, the story has Gothic overtones. "Quelques bougies éparses sur les tables et la lueur du foyer éclairaient faiblement cette pièce immense, et l'oscillation de la flamme semblait faire mouvoir les divinités allégoriques peintes à fresque sur le plafond" (3).

"[U]n affreux secret, un mystère épouvantable" (31) hangs over Leone's head. When she sees Leone dig up the little safe in the middle of the night in a remote region, fantastic stories come to mind and she thinks it is a cadaver (45). Later she imagines the safe "destiné à nous accompagner comme un talisman de salut ou comme un instrument de mort" (46).

An eerie sense of death is in the air. Juliette is "pâle comme la mort" (8), and her hand is "froide comme la mort" (29). Her tale mixes a sense of terror, confusion, illusion and foreboding. Juliette recalls: "La terreur que Leoni ne pouvait plus dissimuler acheva de brouiller toutes mes idées; une peur superstitieuse s'empara de moi, mon sang se glaça comme dans le cauchemar" (30). Later she is found lying on the floor "roide et glacée comme par la mort" (61). Leone becomes "pâle comme la mort et sembla frappé de l'apparition d'un spectre" (75). Elsewhere she reports, "Un froid mortel glaçait mes membres" (86). The foreboding is intensified by fever and the

fear of madness. Juliette recalls, "Une fièvre lente me consumait. L'émotion de la prière et l'air de l'église m'avaient baignée d'une sueur froide; je ressemblais à un spectre sorti du pavé sépulcral" (79). The unearthing of the Princess's corpse adds another touch of the macabre and prefigures scenes we will see in "La Morte amoureuse" and *La Dame aux camélias*.

Leone is twice resurrected. Ruined and confined to a mental hospital, he mysteriously emerges, seemingly cured, and rebuilds his fortune--though no one knows how. Henryet thinks he has killed Leone, but in fact he has mistakenly killed the wrong man, so once again Leone is given a new lease on life. Talk of Satan (112), demons (62), magic (27), and diabolic toasts (63) is ominous. Leone is dressed in green, the color of the devil (126) and he is described as "ce démon incarné" (134).

Manon Lescaut also suggests the presence of the supernatural. Prévost's narrator never offers any concrete description of Manon. She has a certain "air" and "figure." She is an apparition *surprenante*" (44). She lacks a material being. She is a goddess, "l'Amour même" (44), a mythical being. The main thing we know about Manon is "la façon dont elle hante la mémoire du chevalier, et la façon dont il tente de la ressusciter. [...]. Manon est à la fois un «fantôme» ou un «spectre», c'est-à-dire une création de l'imagination ..., mais aussi une «apparition», autrement dit ... une recreation par la foi ou la poésie" (Sgard 90). Sand expands on this sense of the unreal with its suggestion of the unclear distinction between the real and the imagined that is found in Prévost's novel. Gautier takes it a step further with a fantastic retelling of Des Grieux's tragic love for his

phantom mistress filtered through the images that permeate Sand's rewriting of *Manon Lescaut*: images of illusion, addiction, fever, madness, magic, demonic powers, and death.

"La Morte amoureuse," is the story of an old priest, Romuald, who recounts the double life he led as a young priest. At the moment of his ordination, "le regard de la belle inconnue" (122) awakens his latent sexuality. In both "La Morte amoureuse" and *Manon Lescaut*, the narrator recovers some peace of mind in religious life after the initial *coup de foudre*, only to be once again confronted by the seductive young beauty. Subsequently, the sacrifices demanded of a priest provoke an inner battle in which Romuald feels torn between religious expectations and his repressed sexual impulses. He begins to live a double existence. One is his lived experience, the other, it seems, his dream life. During the day he is a poor country priest, and at night a rich libertine, the lover of Clarimonde, a courtesan of rare beauty. At age 66, memories of Clarimonde continue to burn just below the surface, waiting to burst into flame at any moment, and Romuald still responds with flustered confusion: "[J]ose à peine remuer la cendre de ce souvenir" (117). "[J]e ne sais encore si c'est une réalité ou une illusion" (128).

The fantastic rests upon this ambiguity which is characterized by an eruption, or more precisely, the hero's perception of an eruption of something inexplicable or inadmissible in real life. In "La Morte amoureuse," the young priest suddenly finds himself in the presence of the mysterious Clarimonde, "un ange ou un démon, et peut-être tous les deux" (120). He feels divided between the "real"

world of his daytime life as a pastor of the Lord and the fantastic world of his night life as a young Italian lord. "Tantôt [il se croyait] un prêtre qui rêvait chaque soir qu'il était gentilhomme, tantôt un gentilhomme qui rêvait qu'il était prêtre" (143). Seeking to understand this strange phenomenon, he hesitates between rational and supernatural explanations. The fantastic effect is created by this hesitation, a hesitation that becomes one of the themes of the story, the problem of representation.

Manon, Leone Leoni and Clarimonde are absent. Des Grieux's, Juliette's and Romuald's narratives fill that void, but strategies of representation pose a problem. How do you represent something that does not exist and perhaps never existed except in one's fantasy? The narrator's discourse permits us to conceive of what is absent, and the supernatural is always absent.

Gautier's heroine is a vampire, a supernatural being. Once a famous courtesan adored by all, Clarimonde becomes a faithful lover like the heroine depicted at the end of *Manon Lescaut*. According to Romuald, she is as solicitous of him as Manon is of Des Grieux in the New World. By Romuald's account, although Clarimonde is near death and needs his blood to sustain her life, she fears wearing him out by taking too much blood from his arm. "[E]lle [lui] entoura avec soin le bras d'une petite bandelette après avoir frotté la plaie d'un onguent qui la cicatriza sur-le-champ" (147). His description is reminiscent of Des Grieux's depiction of Manon shortly before her death. They have fled into the arid countryside, and Manon is exhausted. Yet "son premier soin fut de changer le linge de [s]a blessure, qu'elle avait pansée elle-même avant [leur] départ" (198).

Gautier was not the first to envision a resurrected heroine. In the anonymously authored *Suite de l'Histoire du Chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*, Manon was not really dead when Des Grieux buried her. The work was first published in 1762, then modified and republished in 1847 and again in 1851.²⁷ The verse from Horace that accompanies the illustration at the beginning of the 1753 edition of *Manon Lescaut* may have suggested the vampire motif to Gautier. The illustration depicts a scene from Fénelon's *Télémaque* in which Pallas, in the guise of Mentor, is leading Télémaque towards virtue while Eucharis is reaching out for him and little Cupids are trying to restrain him. Deloffre translates and explains the verse from *Odes* I.27: "«Quels tourments n'endures-tu pas dans Charybde, jeune homme digne d'un plus noble amour!» Dès le XVI^e siècle, tous les glossateurs voient dans ce *Charybde* la courtisane avide qui suce le sang et l'or de ses amants" (9). Since fear of "la courtisane avide" was widespread in the nineteenth century, it is not surprising to see Manon represented as a vampire.²⁸ For the healthy, a fascination

²⁷ Feeling betrayed and believing Des Grieux tried to bury her in order to get rid of her, Manon returns to France and is making her vows as a nun when Des Grieux and Tiberge happen to enter the same church and the lovers are reunited. Regarding themselves as superior beings due to their extreme sensitivity, Manon and Des Grieux decide they can marry despite the class differences that separate them. In the eighteenth century continuation, they live happily ever after. In the nineteenth-century continuation, though they remain loving and faithful, domestic tranquillity bores them. Manon and Tiberge fall in love. To keep their virtue intact, Tiberge retires to a monastery and Manon enters a convent where she can channel her forbidden love into love of God.

²⁸ On pages 154-157 of his chapter on Baudelaire in *The Crisis of French Symbolism*, Laurence M. Porter discusses the poet's use of the word "vampire" to designate the desired woman (156) and his expression of what psychoanalysts term "the draining fantasy." This primordial fear arises from "the unconscious belief that one's vital essence will be drawn out through the penis during orgasm and lost. In the form of the fantasy which usually

with disease and death can enhance the allure of youth and beauty. Gautier's "dalliance with death and the supernatural in ... *La Morte amoureuse* reflects such perverse sensuality and carries premonitions of the decadence at the end of the century" (John 11). For many writers, of course, Manon, though of another age, came to suggest the decadence of late nineteenth-century France.

Gautier was one of the first to imagine a female vampire,²⁹ but his Clarimonde is more innocent than most *goules fatales*. Vampires were originally men, the "«homme fatal», paria romantique à la Byron" (Dottin-Orsini 275-76). In the second half of the nineteenth century, vampires changed gender. "La Morte amoureuse" is a forerunner to that transformation. With social life eroticized after mid-century and sexual relationships more commercialized in the industrialized society, the courtesan was more often viewed as a figure who exploited men than as a figure exploited by men. Even in his 1836 study of prostitution, Parent-Duchâtelet warned that prostitutes could destroy one's health as well as one's fortune because desire can lead to disease and death as a result of infection (Hutcheon 42). Vampirism became "une des modalités de la femme fatale" (Dottin-Orsini 274). For a man, the term vampire, when applied to a woman, "peut désigner toute femme réelle, si on la considère comme dangereuse pour sa santé, sa fortune, son intelligence, son honneur, son âme" (277). At the same time, the

reaches consciousness, the secondary defense of symbolic displacement substitutes for sperm the blood or vital organs reduced to a fluid" (154).

²⁹ Charles Nodier's *Smarra*, 1821, is an earlier work featuring a female vampire.

prospect of ruin is the courtesan's most potent fascination ((Hughes-Hallett 98).

In the scene at Saint-Sulpice, Des Grieux tells Manon, "Je vais perdre ma fortune et ma réputation pour toi" (46). Tiberge warns him that his soul is in danger and threatens him with "des châtements du Ciel" (65). No fortune is at stake in Romuald's relationship with the wealthy Clarimonde. The country priest's health, honor and soul, however, are jeopardized. Clarimonde drives Romuald to a sleeplessness and inner turmoil that nearly cause him "la perte de [s]on âme" (117).

Given nineteenth-century fascination with the macabre, the interest in the functioning of the human mind, especially the unconscious, and the obsessive fear of women, Prévost's novel invites a fantastic retelling. Its bipolar heroine and its tension between fantasy and reality, elements already developed in *Leone Leoni*, provide the basic ingredients. Des Grieux describes Manon as "un monstre" (69) and an "ingrate et dure maîtresse" (74), as well as a "charmante maîtresse" (86) who has "une douceur angélique" (102). His rhetoric, like Juliette's, is not firmly grounded in reality. Expressions such as "je crus apercevoir" (29), "je voulais le considérer une illusion" (28), "je veux le croire" (69), and "j'ai été toujours persuadé" (110) suggest a fantasy world of his own creation.³⁰

Hyperbole also leads to the supernatural. To say one has suffered or loved like no one else suggests an out of this world--or

³⁰ Des Grieux's rhetoric and the tension between fantasy and reality are topics that will be developed in chapter five. At this point, I simply wish to suggest that the basic elements of a fantastic tale can be found in *Manon Lescaut*.

supernatural--experience (Todorov 82). Manon swears to Des Grieux, "[S'il n'y eut jamais d'amour tel que le vôtre, il est impossible aussi d'être aimé plus tendrement vous l'êtes" (187). Romuald, too, claims to have lived an exceptional love: "[J']ai aimé comme personne au monde n'a aimé" (118).

Des Grieux's tale, like Romuald's, focuses on the heroine's irresistible charms, and both narrators portray themselves as helpless victims of forces beyond their control. Des Grieux admits: "C'est mon devoir d'agir comme je raisonne! mais l'action est-elle en mon pouvoir?" (93). Romuald describes himself as "la victime" (118) of a "fascination inexplicable" (118). "Victime" is a key word. Borrowing traits from Juliette, he is a typical fantastic hero. Passive and unpowerful, he is subject to events beyond his control. He is swept along by a mysterious force that leaves him confused and incapable of resisting.

When they meet the *femme fatale* who nearly destroys them, both Des Grieux and Romuald are inexperienced young men who seem well suited for the priesthood--Romuald by temperament and vocation, Des Grieux by temperament and an inclination toward study. Clarimonde is a sensual being who offers beauty, youth and love, those very qualities that endear Manon to critics. Clarimonde's eyes seem to say, "[J]e suis la beauté, je suis la jeunesse, je suis la vie; viens à moi, nous serons l'amour" (127). Consequently, Romuald and Des Grieux experience a conflict between human love and divine love. Divine love, however, poorly equips them for resisting the flood of emotions that accompany sexual awakening. Des Grieux declares, "Mon coeur s'ouvrit à mille sentiments de plaisir dont je

n'avais jamais eu l'idée" (21), and he "se croit transporté dans un nouvel ordre de choses" (45). A flood of sensations brings with it a new world view. Describing his experience in the imperfect, Romuald relives the moment when he "sentai[t] s'ouvrir dans [lui] des portes qui jusqu'alors avaient été fermées ... [il] venai[t] de naître à un nouvel ordre d'idées" (121). His experience unleashes the previously unknown "other" that was already within him. For Romuald, the battle is not against an outside force; it is with himself.

The bizarre events, the fantastic elements of Romuald's account, are what Freud would later attribute to the "'return of the repressed,' to the reappearance, in disguised form, of an event or fantasy an individual has unknowingly removed from consciousness because of its disturbing nature" (Rashkin 801). Both Romuald and Des Grieux are troubled by the explosion of their latent sexuality. Priests are expected to be asexual, and Romuald transgresses the priest's vow of celibacy. He recognizes that the priesthood asks him to kill a part of himself: "J'avais scellé moi-même la pierre de mon tombeau" (125). Both narrators feel uneasy about their repressed passion. Burning beneath the surface, it could easily be re-ignited.

"La Morte amoureuse" evokes a sense of delving into repressed feelings and memories. One manifestation is the anterior language, closer to nature and the sensation of the moment, that frequently erupts. "Oh! Quelles nuits! Quelles nuits!" exclaims Romuald. Des Grieux's tale is similarly filled with sighs and exclamations. Involuntary responses also spring from the unconscious. Romuald is not able to enjoy his accomplishments as a priest because "les paroles de Clarimonde [lui reviennent] souvent sur les lèvres comme une

espèce de refrain involontaire" (130). The haunting "visions" of his life with Clarimonde are "involontaires" (147). Des Grieux is also subject to "un mouvement involontaire" (37), and the novel offers no clear answer to the question of whether or not he "se précipit[e] *volontairement* dans les dernières infortunes" (4, emphasis added).

Near death, Manon regrets the pain she has caused Des Grieux and swears her love, admiration and gratitude. He is so overwhelmed that he "cru[t] sentir une espèce de division dans [s]on âme" (188). Gautier develops that idea. The once great courtesan, Clarimonde, becomes Romuald's loving and faithful mistress. As a result of their relationship, his "nature s'est en quelque sorte dédoublée et il y eut en [lui] deux hommes" (143). "La Morte amoureuse" is *Manon Lescaut* turned inwards. Rather than create a schism between himself and society, as Des Grieux does, Romuald experiences an inner schism. He remains within the social order, but in trying to deny his sexuality, he turns against himself. Clarimonde must die in order for him to reintegrate his own personality, just as Manon must die in order for Des Grieux to be reintegrated back into aristocratic society.

Des Grieux's love provokes violent reactions he is unable to reconcile with his gentle self-image. That is, passion transforms him into a man he is reluctant to acknowledge being. Romuald too is baffled by and tired of his dual existence. In a scene that will be developed in *La Dame aux camélias*, the abbé Sérapion, something of a counterpart to Tiberge, suggests that they dig up Clarimonde, the succubus, so that Romuald will no longer be tempted to "perdre [son] âme pour un cadavre immonde dévoré des vers." "Voulant savoir,

une fois pour toutes, qui du prêtre ou du gentilhomme était dupe d'une illusion" (148), Romuald agrees. After uncovering Clarimonde's corpse, Sérapion sprinkles holy water on her and draws a cross on her coffin. Without Romuald's love, Clarimonde will die because she will no longer be able to drink his blood, and the sight of her disgusting "cadavre immonde dévoré des vers" transforms the priest's love into repulsion. A vision of Clarimonde had awoken love, and now it kills love. Clarimonde's "beau corps tomba en poussière," and "le seigneur Romuald, amant de Clarimonde, se sépara du pauvre prêtre" (148).

This scene develops the macabre aspect of *Manon Lescaut*. When Manon dies, Des Grieux remains "plus de vingt-quatre heures la bouche attachée sur le visage et sur les mains de [s]a chère Manon" (200). When Romuald is first summoned to Clarimonde's death bed, he finds that death makes her even more appealing. She has "une puissance de séduction inexprimable," and he can not resist the "triste et suprême douceur de déposer un baiser sur [ses] lèvres mortes" (134). In both works, dead women have erotic appeal.

During his ordination ceremony, Clarimonde gives him "une oeillade pleine de divines promesses" (122), but in truth Romuald is the one making a sacred promise. He often describes Clarimonde in an attitude of prayer, "les mains jointes sur la poitrine" (132), but, in fact, it is the priest, not the courtesan/vampire who is praying. According to the priest, it is always Clarimonde who speaks of love. It is she, the courtesan, who insists that their love is something pure and unique. She is a projection of his own desire. She says "je t'aime," "nous sommes fiancés" (135), but in truth, Romuald is the

one who loves her and who imagines himself a young husband. He dreams of her, and yet he claims that she tells him, "Tu étais mon rêve" (141). The line between reality and fantasy remains blurred. The fantastic underscores the role of perception in creating one's personal reality.

If we accept the Freudian notion that art makes public repressed fears and fantasies, albeit in a disguised form, the transposition of Des Grieux's narrative into a fantastic tale is not surprising. It is a tale that exploits men's attraction to and fear of the figure of Manon. As a vampire, Clarimonde is both human and superhuman, living and dead; she is a figure that both fascinates and repulses. She is at once more frightening and less real than Manon. While relegating her to the supernatural world renders her more horrifying, it also distances her, contains her and bars her entry into the real world. Romuald's narrative reveals a troubling potential *in man himself*, a force that both the individual and the society try to repress, but as Romuald recognizes, man pays a heavy price: "La paix de mon âme a été bien chèrement achetée" (150).

Before transforming Manon into a tender, loving angel in the New World, Des Grieux frequently describes her as "charmante" (79, 86, 126, 157, etc.). His use of the word "charme" should be understood in its archaic sense of bewitchment. After their first meeting, Manon is quite satisfied with the effect of her "charmes" (22). When she re-seduces Des Grieux at Saint-Sulpice, he notes that she is "plus charmante que jamais" (45). Betraying him with the young G... M..., she still has a "fonds inépuisable de charmes" (135).

In his *Manuel lexique*, Prévost defines "charme:" "Ce mot signifie, dans le propre, un enchantement ou l'effet d'un pouvoir qui surpasse celui de la nature.... [O]n l'applique à tout ce qui est capable d'attacher fortement le coeur ou l'esprit."³¹ Learning that Manon betrayed him with Monsieur B..., Des Grieux is sure that B... did not win her heart. Rather he must have used violence or "l'a séduite par un charme ou par un poison" (35).³² When analyzing Prévost's use of "charme," "[i]l faut entendre à sa source étymologique, l'incantation magique: *carmen*, la formule que savaient prononcer les sorcières, pour capturer les coeurs, ou pour faire danser la lune dans les clairières nocturnes" (Starobinski, "L'Unique objet" 50). Quite appropriately then, when Mérimée reincarnates Manon in the figure of an exotic and seductive young Gypsy who mixes up strange potions and casts spells, he names her Carmen.

She is described as "une sorcière, [...] une servante du diable" (196), "un démon" (239), and "cette diable de fille-là" (210). She is busy with "sa magie" (238). When she argues with Don José, "[s]on oeil s'injectait de sang et devenait terrible" (199). She has "un sourire diabolique" (230). Even Carmen tells Don José, "Tu as rencontré le diable, oui, le diable; il n'est pas toujours noir" (216).

³¹ Quoted on page 322 of glossary appended to *Manon Lescaut*.

³² "Charme" was linked to "poison" in *Phèdre* (I.3): "Quel charme ou quel poison en a tari la source?" This intertextual allusion lends a sense of classical tragedy to Des Grieux's narrative (35n1). Defining the traditional "philtre" in his *Manuel lexique*, Prévost again uses the word "charme." It comes from a Greek word meaning to love. "[L]es seuls philtres qu'on puisse reconnaître sont les influences immédiates d'un sexe sur l'autre, soit par le seul instinct de la nature, qui les porte l'un vers l'autre, ... soit par les charmes de la beauté, de l'esprit, et des autres qualités ... qui agissent tout à la fois sur les sens et sur l'imagination" (qtd. in glossary, 323).

Yet when Don José is wounded, she becomes an angel of mercy, as do Manon and Clarimonde, and her love is as exceptional as theirs. "[E]lle me soigna avec une adresse et avec des attentions que jamais femme n'a eues pour l'homme le plus aimé" (234). Each of our male authors harbors fantasies about being cared for by a beautiful, tender, loving woman, the elusive mother and lover, Madonna and Magdalen melded into one. For Des Grieux, Romuald and Don José, the figure of Manon represents both the force that attracts him and the force against which he needs protection. She is both the object of desire, comforting, and maternal, the one who heals all wounds, and she is the devouring abyss that saps men's vitality and destroys them.

Don José is a "figure à la fois noble et farouche" that reminds the archaeologist/frame narrator of "le Satan de Milton" (188)--in other words, he is a fallen angel. Yet, he claims, sounding like Des Grieux, "[I]l y a encore en moi quelque chose qui mérite la pitié d'un galant homme" (191-92). Casting himself as a sensitive man, he has to stop a moment in order to "maîtriser son émotion" (202). He cries "larmes chaudes" (218) more than once. Like Des Grieux and Romuald, he was once destined for the priesthood. "On voulait [qu'il] fût d'Église" (203). He imagines himself to be a great romantic hero riding across the countryside with Carmen mounted behind him. Sensitive though he may be, his self-image is nonetheless fantasized. He is a violent man with a history of violence before meeting Carmen. His relationship with her is violent from the beginning. The first time the archaeologist sees them together they quarrel violently. As his frustration mounts, Don José begins beating her.

When she wants to leave him, he begs her to seek a better life with him in the New World. She refuses. He gives her time to flee, asks a priest to pray for her soul, begs her to save herself--and him--or to let him save her (237-39). Like Romuald, Don José is confronted with a strong female character, a surrogate of the devil. She will not yield: "Je te suis à la mort, oui, mais je ne vivrai plus avec toi. [...] Est-ce ici? [...] Tu veux me tuer, je le vois bien...; c'est écrit, mais tu ne me feras pas céder. [...] Carmen sera toujours libre" (238-39). Her defiant resistance is a direct assault on Don José's masculinity, on his social mastery, and by extension, on male pride. "J'aurais voulu qu'elle eût peur et me demandât grâce, mais cette femme était un démon" (239). Appealing for sympathy, Don José reminds the frame narrator that he offered Carmen everything: "tout, monsieur, tout; je lui offris tout" (239). She remains unyielding, and so, he seems to suggest, he has no choice but to kill her.

To restore the social order, the "victims" of temptation must expose and purge temptation, the source of destabilizing desire, from society. However, in *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death*, Linda and Michael Hutcheon remind us that although in Don José's mind, "*his* passion, *his* jealousy, *his* desire are not to blame: *she* is" (186), this is violence against women. "Despite what the critics say, there is nothing 'universal' or eternal about this view of woman as devil, any more than there is about smoking as sexy: both are constructions of a certain culture" (187). So, too, the representation of passion as a violent emotion, a theme underlying *Manon Lescaut* and each of the variants but depicted most openly in *Carmen*, is a cultural construct.

After Don José kills Carmen, her "grand oeil noir" continues to stare at him. She will not release her grasp. Her unbridled eroticism has drained the life from both of them. In another scene borrowed from Prévost's novel, Don José remains "anéanti une bonne heure devant ce cadavre" (240), before burying Carmen in a grave he has dug by hand with just the help of his knife.

In *Leone Leoni*, Juliette cites an overly indulgent and decadent tutor as the cause of Leone's weaknesses. Bustamente, the frame narrator, cites lax parenting as the source of Juliette's problems. Don José takes it a step farther, blaming not just a given set of parents for Carmen's waywardness, but rather a whole society: "Ce sont les Calés qui sont coupables pour l'avoir élevée ainsi" (240). The frame narrator is also interested in the sociological implications of Don José's story.

In contrast to Renoncour and Bustamente, he expresses a much more ambivalent attitude toward his protagonists. At the end of Don José's story, he appends a final chapter³³ in which he outlines his "études sur le rommani" (247), a description of Gypsies' language and customs. His observations about Gypsies represent a crude and rudimentary effort to observe a society and provide a scientific study, along with a limited critique, of that social environment. His criticism of Gypsies in general and the depiction of the miserable and violent world in which they live sound like the scientific determinism of Zola. His commentary reflects the mixture of science

³³ The work was first published in *La Revue des Deux Mondes* (as was *Leone Leoni*) in October 1845 without this final chapter. Chapter 4 was added in 1846.

and fantasy that reinforces the social construct that social deviance is located in a lower class which in large part brings misery upon itself. The narrative impact is twofold. It weakens the emotional impact of Des Grieux's story and adds scholarly credibility to the account, as if this is indeed a *study* of human customs and behavior. As a social scientist, the frame narrator has limited interest in his protagonists as individuals.

Whereas Renoncour is eager to assure readers that Des Grieux's tale is morally instructive, morality is hardly a concern for the archaeologist.³⁴ He defines his protagonists as social creatures, but his portrait of Gypsies as exotic, erotic, lascivious, manipulative, deceptive, independent and unlawful is not objective. It is a culturally determined image--as is the transformation of Manon into an *homme fatal*, a vampire or the devil's surrogate.

With its exotic setting, which once again serves to hold the *femme fatale* at a distance and mark her as the "Other," its portent of black magic and tragedy, and its macabre climax, *Carmen* is predominantly a Romanticized version of *Manon Lescaut*. Prévost's masterpiece has proven itself a rich resource for recasting in the Romantic tradition, and Sand, Gautier and Mérimée have each seized upon different aspects of Prévost's novel to create their own work. Whether passion be a "force magnétique," a supernatural power or a "charme," its "victims" all argue that they are helpless to resist. Although the protagonists are isolated Romantic heroes, Juliette, Romuald and Don José have increasingly distanced themselves from

³⁴ Within the novella, *Carmen* and Don José are both punished for their crimes, but that is not the focus of the archaeologist's comments.

the classical noble hero and approached the "ordinary" hero of realism. In other words, the trajectory followed by variants of *Manon Lescaut* reflects broad literary movements.

Chapter 3

MARGUERITE GAUTIER, A COURTESAN REDEEMED BY LOVE

*Il te sera beaucoup pardonné,
parce que tu as beaucoup aimé.*
Act V, scene 9, *La Dame aux camélias*

Alexandre Dumas fils' 1848 novel *La Dame aux camélias* opens with the auction of the worldly goods of Marguerite Gautier, a beautiful young courtesan who has just died. Soon after buying Marguerite's copy of *Manon Lescaut*, a gift from her lover Armand Duval, the frame narrator of *La Dame aux camélias* meets the grief-stricken Armand who asks to buy back the novel and eventually recounts his tragic love affair with Marguerite.

"Il ne fait pas de doute que [Dumas] récrit l'*Histoire du chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*," according to Henri Béhar (348). Corrado Rosso calls *Manon Lescaut* "un point de départ obligé" for Dumas. "En un sens un livre crée l'autre" (340). If "Dumas n'imite pas expressément Prévost," there is, nonetheless "une présence presque magique de Manon" (339) in *La Dame aux camélias*. Rosso goes on to argue that despite this apparent *fil conducteur* between Manon and Marguerite, there is an infinite distance between them. Manon is a creature beyond good and evil who belongs more to nature than to humanity. Void of conscience, she is totally irresponsible. Even in the New World, she is transformed by an understanding of what it means to love and be

loved, not by any notion of virtue. Good and evil, however, do exist for Marguerite, and she suffers from that awareness (Rosso 343). The idea of virtue gives her the peace of mind sought by classical heroines like the Princesse de Clèves. Des Grieux, on the other hand, does not seek peace of mind so much as he seeks happiness, and when he proposes marriage to Manon, the idea fills her with "joie" (190), not peace nor pride in her new virtue.

Believing his son's liaison with Marguerite sullies the family honor, M. Duval asks Marguerite to prove her love by sacrificing her love to Armand's future. The paternal manner in which M. Duval speaks to her, the pure and noble feelings in her that he evokes, the opportunity to win the father's respect and in time Armand's as well, "tout cela éveillait en [s]on coeur de nobles pensées qui [la] relevaient à [s]es propres yeux, et faisaient parler de saintes vanités, inconnues jusqu'alors" (232). Making her love for Armand "l'espoir, le rêve et le pardon" (232) of her life, she agrees to leave Armand in such a way as to create an insurmountable barrier between them. Unable to tell Armand her real reason, she lets him believe that a yearning for luxury has led her to leave him for another man.

To drown out the pain, Marguerite throws herself into a frenzied lifestyle. The lifestyle she chooses and the cruelty to which an outraged and uncomprehending Armand subjects her drive the consumptive Marguerite to an early death. She literally consumes her life, squanders her vitality. At the time, sexual activity, the feverish activity associated with tuberculosis, was believed to be one of the causes of a consumptive's declining health. Rosso terms her decision to leave Armand "un véritable et profond holocauste" (344,

a voluntarily imposed death sentence. Marguerite explains that women like her "sont quelquefois forcées d'acheter une satisfaction pour [leur] âme aux dépens de [leur] corps" (149).

That said, Rosso wonders if Marguerite's sacrifice is sufficiently motivated (345). What he overlooks is the role played by *Manon Lescaut*. Armand's father comes to Bougival, the pastoral retreat to which Marguerite and Armand have withdrawn, to demand that Marguerite renounce his son. Marguerite has bid adieu to her former life, thoughts of which now embarrass her (167). Since their arrival in Bougival, she has often read *Manon Lescaut* and even made notes in the margin. She repeatedly tells Armand, "lorsqu'une femme aime, elle ne peut pas faire ce que faisait Manon" (169). After she leaves Armand, he finds the novel open on the table, and "d'endroits en endroits les pages étaient mouillées comme par des larmes" (201). It is the moral she has deduced from *Manon Lescaut* that inspires her "holocaust."

Having been awakened to selfless love, an already seriously ill Marguerite sees few options for herself when she chooses self-abnegation. A realist, she has already told Armand, "tu ne sais pas combien est léger le fil qui retient dans le coeur l'amour que l'on a pour des filles comme moi" (179). "Malgré toi, tu penses déjà à me quitter un jour. [...] [Tu] veux conserver la distance morale qui nous sépare" (180-81). Marguerite is a realist. She understands that once desire is fed, the fantasy is dead. She realizes that she has transgressed traditional morality and that the stain of sin will forever mark her as an outcast from respectable bourgeois society.

What then is *Manon Lescaut*'s role in *La Dame aux camélias*? The novel itself creates and seals the friendship between Armand and the frame narrator that leads to a retelling of Marguerite's story. The novel also motivates plot in that, as we have seen, it seems to inspire Marguerite's sacrifice. Before giving the novel to Marguerite, Armand wrote this dedication: "Manon à Marguerite, Humilité" (40). It is this personal dedication that attracts the frame narrator's attention and leads him to purchase the novel. Moreover, the dedication establishes a relationship between Marguerite and Manon, but the meaning of the dedication remains uncertain, thus prompting a certain curiosity, a desire to continue reading in order to answer that mystery. The intertextual allusion is a narrative strategy that draws on cultural images of Manon and titillates readers' interest in the new work by linking it to a familiar provocative image. More importantly, it suggests a comparison between Marguerite and Manon.

A distinction must be made between Manon Lescaut the character and *Manon Lescaut* the novel. Both play a role in *La Dame aux camélias*. It is clear that the character has already entered the French cultural consciousness, that the mere mention of her name conjures up an idea that is more or less fixed in people's minds. Concerned about the family's reputation, M. Duval warns his son that Marguerite can turn him into a *greluchon*: "Toute Manon peut faire un Des Grieux, et le temps et les mœurs sont changés" (187). She is a cultural referent, the archetypal *femme fatale* who exists in all times and places and who leads men to dishonor, if not to ruin. The implication is that the story needs a modern retelling because times

have changed. *La Dame aux camélias* modernizes the story by placing it in nineteenth-century bourgeois society which revolves around family and is principally concerned with property and conventional morality.

When Marguerite tells Armand that she has found a means for them to spend the summer together in the country, Armand is embarrassed. Retelling his story, he explains, "Je me rappelai Manon Lescaut mangeant avec Des Grieux l'argent de M. de B..." (132). Not wanting to be a gigolo, Armand rejects Marguerite's offer. She soon betrays him, they reconcile, and after their third night together, Armand sends Marguerite a copy of *Manon Lescaut* (154) with the now famous dedication.

When the frame narrator first reads the dedication he speculates on its meaning, wondering if, according to this M. Armand Duval, Manon recognized "une supériorité de débauche ou de coeur" (41) in Marguerite. The second is more likely, he decides, since the first would be too impertinent. Reflecting on Prévost's novel, he recognizes it as a timeless and irresistible story which paints a sympathetic portrait of a courtesan who stimulates the imagination.

Certes, *Manon Lescaut* est une touchante histoire dont pas un détail ne m'est inconnu, et cependant lorsque je trouve ce volume sous ma main, ma sympathie pour lui m'attire toujours, je l'ouvre et pour la centième fois je revis avec l'héroïne de l'abbé Prévost. (41)

The comparison made between Manon and Marguerite, he continues, is an added impetus to read or reread *Manon Lescaut*, and his "indulgence, s'augmenta de pitié, presque d'amour pour la pauvre

filles à l'héritage de laquelle [il devait] ce volume" (41). Béhar says that Dumas fils' decision to rewrite *Manon Lescaut* is a way of paying homage to Prévost (11). However, Prévost's novel is not the only work from which Dumas fils draws inspiration. "Hugo a fait *Marion Delorme*, Musset a fait *Bernierette*, Alexandre Dumas [père] a fait *Fernande*" (42), writes Dumas fils. All were sources for *La Dame aux camélias*.³⁵

What does Dumas fils add to the story? Like Sand, Gautier, and Mérimée, Dumas fils infuses his retelling of Prévost's masterpiece with several Romantic elements: tragedy, pathos, melodrama, and the macabre. The protagonists are exceptional individuals. No one has ever loved Marguerite the way Armand does (104). "L'histoire de Marguerite est une exception," and if it were not, there would be no reason to tell it (250). While Dumas poeticizes his protagonists, there is also an injection of raw realism, so Dumas fils' style in *La Dame aux camélias* might best be termed a new realistic romanticism.

In the novel Marguerite carries white camellias all but five days each month. Those days she carries red ones--i.e., she uses flowers to announce when she is menstruating. However, the flowers' symbolism is never made explicit. When Marguerite agrees to become Armand's mistress, she gives him a red camellia "parce qu'on ne peut pas toujours exécuter les traités le jour où on les

³⁵ Though beyond the scope of this study, excerpts from all three can be found on pages 379-393 of the Béhar edition.

signe." Asked when he should return, Marguerite tells Armand, "Quand ce camélia changera de couleur" (106).

In all the variants, a woman is buried or dug up. Romanticism at its most morbid, both scenes are drawn from *Manon Lescaut*. Des Grieux buries her, and later "Synnelet avait pris soin de faire transporter le corps de [Manon] dans un lieu honorable" (203). Although the pretext for digging up Marguerite is the same--i.e., to move her to a more dignified resting place, the exhumation is a disgusting scene in *La Dame aux camélias*. Unlike "La Morte amoureuse," in which Clarimonde's corpse simply dissolves into dust, Marguerite's rotting corpse is described in detail,³⁶ prefiguring realistic and graphic death scenes such as Madame Bovary's slow death from poisoning.

Reflecting that God was merciful in taking Marguerite while still young and beautiful because old age is the "première mort des courtisanes" (27), the frame narrator remembers Louise, the daughter of an aging prostitute. This scene, discussed in chapter one, is another example of the novel's raw realism nuanced with a bit of Romanticism. It also typifies the novel's conflicted moral and social commentary. If we compare Dumas' depiction of Marguerite to Zola's portrayal of Nana, Dumas offers a sympathetic portrait of courtesans--or at least of Marguerite, who is the exceptional courtesan. Nonetheless, it is a portrait tainted by the arrogance, titillated bourgeois voyeurism, and moral rectitude of both narrators.

³⁶ See page 94 for further discussion of this scene.

With a mixture of vanity and voyeurism, he recounts his visit to Marguerite's apartment before the auction of her belongings: "Moi qui ne m'effarouchais pas à la vue du cabinet de toilette d'une femme entretenue, je m'amusais à en examiner les détails..." (2). Condescendingly, he remarks that "Dieu avait été clément pour elle" because he allowed her to die "dans son luxe et sa beauté" (29). At this point, with an attitude of moral rectitude, he remembers the story of Louise. Then, as if to underscore Marguerite's status as a commodity for male consumption, he inquires about her debts and who will receive the proceeds from the auction. Attempting to paint himself as a sensitive man sympathetic to the plight of courtesans and prostitutes, he succeeds only at depicting himself as an arrogant man with an overgrown sense of self-importance who undermines the moral and social commentary the author is ostensibly trying to interject: "Cette indulgence instinctive, cette pitié naturelle que je viens d'avouer tout à l'heure me faisaient songer à sa mort plus longtemps qu'elle ne méritait" (31).

Unlike *Manon Lescaut*, *La Dame aux camélias* is not set in an aristocratic world where characters are concerned with proving their nobility of character. The values espoused in *La Dame aux camélias*, both in the novel and in the play, are bourgeois. The family is sacred, and the father is the head of the family.

In *Manon Lescaut*, Des Grieux's aristocratic father is a distant, symbolic figure. He mocks his son's naiveté. He has him abducted and sequestered when he does not approve of his behavior. When Des Grieux refuses to give Manon up, his father renounces him. In

essence, the "problem" is simply gotten rid of, just as books are banned and women deported when they become a problem.

Armand's father, on the other hand, is a physical presence in his son's life. He intervenes to avoid or resolve problems. He commands respect. Especially in the play, Marguerite explicitly tells Armand that he should not quarrel with his father (III.6). Even Prudence advises him that it would be a mistake (290). Marguerite, unlike Manon, urges Armand to write to his father (III.2). Correcting M. Duval's erroneous impression of her, Marguerite tempers her remarks by saying, "avec tout le respect que je dois au père d'Armand" (III.4). Elsewhere, she declares, "je tiens avant tout à l'estime du père d'Armand" (III.4), and "je vous respecte et je vous aime, parce que vous êtes son père" ((III.4).

In a blend of pathos and conventional morality, Dumas fils envisions a repentant courtesan. The divine voice speaks through the father, M. Duval. He baptizes Marguerite with his tears when she decides to redeem her soul by sacrificing her earthly well-being for love of the son, Armand. When Armand's father embraces her, she feels "sur [s]on front deux larmes de reconnaissance qui furent comme le baptême de [ses fautes d'autrefois]" (233). Symbolically she is born again, just as one is in baptism. She has internalized the patriarchal moral code, but parting with Armand is indeed heart-wrenching. On the verge of faltering, she asks God for strength: "[C]e qui prouve qu'il acceptait mon sacrifice, c'est qu'il me donna cette force que j'implorais" (233). For those who read *la Dame aux camélias* as an intertextual continuation of *Manon Lescaut*, Marguerite's redemption retroactively transforms Manon into a "tart

with a heart of gold" (Segal xxi), an altogether different image than that left by Carmen.

Béhar contends that the author of *La Dame aux camélias* is, above all, a novelist and not yet the moralist he will become (11, 14, 354). While I would agree that his posture as moralist is deeply suspect, he does infuse his narrative with more direct and forceful Biblical metaphors and intertextual references than any of the other works we are studying. Even *Manon Lescaut*, written by a priest and recounted by a former seminarian, and "La Morte amoureuse," ostensibly told by a priest, can not match Dumas fils' Biblical rhetoric.

Urging compassion and indulgence for prostitutes, the frame narrator reaffirms the conservative, patriarchal social order which limits the aspirations of the women whose redemption it champions. Redeeming the courtesan simultaneously confirms that she needs redemption, that she is a permanently tainted marginal creature.

Le christianisme est là avec sa merveilleuse parabole de l'enfant prodigue pour nous conseiller l'indulgence et le pardon. Jésus était plein d'amour pour ces âmes blessées par les passions des hommes, et dont il aimait à panser les plaies en tirant le baume qui devait les guérir des plaies elle-mêmes. Ainsi, il disait à Madeleine: «Il te sera beaucoup remis parce que tu as beaucoup aimé»,³⁷ sublime pardon qui devait éveiller une foi sublime. Pourquoi nous ferions-nous plus rigides que le Christ?

(43)

³⁷ Cf. Luc, VII, 47: "C'est pourquoi, je te le dis, ses nombreux péchés ont été pardonnés : car elle [Mary Magdalene] a beaucoup aimé."

For all the talk about compassion and redemption, there is no reward for goodness in *La Dame aux camélias*. On the one hand, serious sin offers the opportunity for cataclysmic conversion. On the other, the line taken by Dumas fils in *La Dame aux camélias* is as hard as the Marquis's in *Nana* who, when asked, "N'est-ce pas, mon ami, on doit pardonner beaucoup aux autres, lorsqu'on veut être soi-même digne de pardon?" responds, "Non, pas de pardon pour certaines fautes... C'est avec ces complaisances qu'une société va aux abîmes" (282). According to *La Dame aux camélias*, "Il n'y a pas d'absolution sans pénitence" (121). Suffering expiates sin. Death purifies, but there is no forgiveness in the here and now, and Marguerite dies a lonely death. While this harsh attitude augments the reader's sympathy for Marguerite, it is also indicative of the inner conflict Dumas fils feels between compassion for and fear of courtesans, of sexually active women who both attract and frighten him.

The potentially redemptive power of love is the best-known theme Dumas fils adds to the myth of Manon. As overly sentimental as the theme may appear to modern readers,³⁸ it is the theme that most appealed to the Romantic imagination (Cellier 263). Manon begins to appreciate Des Grieux's genuine selfless love on the road to Le Havre, and the experience of such a love leads to her conversion and self-sacrifice in the New World. *La Dame aux camélias* develops that theme. In Dumas' rewriting, it is Armand, the character loosely inspired by Des Grieux, who does not match the nobility of sentiment

³⁸ In fact, the success of the movie *Pretty Woman* demonstrates the appeal of the underlying storyline.

of the original character. Whereas Marguerite, replacing Manon, surpasses the original's devotion and nobility. And if Armand's love does not match Des Grieux's, it is precisely because *Manon Lescaut* figures so predominantly in his thinking, making him more suspicious of Marguerite.

Because he is haunted by the story of Manon and Des Grieux, he is fearful that Marguerite is but another Manon and is anxious not to replay that story with her. Gilroy calls *La Dame aux camélias* "an anti-*Manon* because the resemblance between Prévost's heroine and [Dumas fils'] is mostly in Armand's mind. Marguerite's total devotion is in complete contrast with Manon's thoughtless egoism" (96). I would counter that the novel develops the image of Manon converted in the New World. The frame narrator describes Marguerite as a "pécheresse comme Manon, et peut-être convertie comme elle" (41). In other words, the frame narrator finds Manon's conversion convincing. Yet for Armand and his father, Manon is an unfaithful courtesan ready to sell her sexual favors in order to support her *amant du coeur*. The tension of this conflicting portrayal is felt throughout *La Dame aux camélias*. Bourgeois society wants the courtesan redeemed, the "problem" resolved--and prostitution is a social problem, but they do not want the redeemed courtesan admitted to their ranks. They want class differences to remain clearly marked, and they are doubtful about the possibility of genuine and permanent redemption.

Dumas' subject was apparently dear to his heart. He admits modeling his heroine, Marguerite Gautier, after Marie Duplessis, a beautiful young courtesan with whom he had an affair from 1844-45

(Dumas fils, *A propos...* 367). In his 1875 preface to *Manon Lescaut*, Dumas assumes that Prévost has written "une histoire dont la plupart des faits se sont certainement passés comme il le raconte" (xxxii), and that Prévost "a peut-être été le héros, dans certaines parties," of *Manon Lescaut*. Continuing, Dumas posits that the best--and the most difficult--way for a writer to write a masterpiece is to depict "ce qu'il a vu, ce qu'il a éprouvé" (xxxiii).

Certainly he encourages us to speculate on the similarities between himself and Armand, with whom he shares the same initials, and between himself and the frame narrator. The story opens with the frame narrator urging us to believe "la réalité de cette histoire dont tous les personnages, à l'exception de l'héroïne, vivent encore" (25). All the authors examined in this study use the same literary device: a frame narrator assures us that the story we are about to read is true. Dumas fils, however, is the only one to name the person on whom his story is based and to publish a biographical sketch of her, written by the critic Jules Janin, along with his own work.

Janin, who had met Marie Duplessis on three occasions, wrote a piece about the historical "Mademoiselle Marie Duplessis" in 1851. Soon it served as an introduction to most editions of *La Dame aux camélias*. In his 1839 introduction to *Manon Lescaut*, it will be recalled, Janin argues that redemption requires more than just loving and repenting. Death alone sanctifies, bringing with it pity and pardon. He appears nonetheless to be quite taken by Marie Duplessis whom, after her death, he describes sympathetically. Exceptional, even among the great courtesans of her time, "elle était une femme

d'esprit, de goût et de bons sens" (356). "L'ennui a été le grand mal de sa vie" (359). "Elle était ... un produit brillant d'une société expirante" (365).

Dumas fils met Marie Duplessis more than two years after first seeing and falling in love with her. Clémence Prat, a milliner past her prime, arranged for him to have dinner at Marie's apartment. Suddenly, Marie became ill and left the table. "Alexandre followed her and within minutes had convinced the seriously-ill Marie of his genuine love. That he wanted, above all, to take care of her and nurse her back to health was indisputable. [...] He truly believed that a love as powerful as his could redeem the most expensive whore in Paris" (Eduardo 48).

In brief, Marie Duplessis loved Alexandre Dumas fils, he went broke, she strayed, they went to the country for a week and then back to Paris where she betrayed him. The couple separated, Dumas fils took a long trip abroad, and Marie found a new lover, went to England, and a year or two later she died of consumption. Knowing that she was dying, Dumas fils wrote to her from abroad asking her to pardon him for the bitter fashion in which he had severed their relationship.³⁹ A few days after her death, he arrived back in Paris.

³⁹ Having learned of Marie Duplessis's illness, Dumas fils wrote to her from Madrid on October 18, 1846. "Voulez-vous me permettre de m'inscrire au nombre de ceux qui s'attristent de vous voir souffrir? [...] Si je trouve à la poste restante, un mot à mon nom, et qui me pardonne une faute que j'ai commise il y a un an, je reviendrai moins triste en France, si je suis absous, et tout à fait heureux si vous êtes guérie" (340). In the novel, we know that Armand writes a similar letter to Marguerite because she writes to him saying yes she is sick, thanking him for his letter, declaring that if anything could cure her, it would be his letter, and telling him, in response to his plea, that yes she forgives him (49-50).

This résumé of Dumas and Duplessis' relationship could be mistaken for a summary of *La Dame aux camélias*. The distinction between fact and fiction is blurred, as for example, in Armand Duval's note to Marguerite Gautier.

Adieu, ma chère Marguerite; je ne suis ni assez riche pour vous aimer comme je le voudrais, ni assez pauvre pour vous aimer comme vous le voudriez. Oublions donc, vous, un nom qui doit vous être à peu près indifférent, moi, un bonheur qui me devient impossible. (138)

At midnight on August 30, 1845, Dumas fils, the betrayed lover, wrote this note to Marie Duplessis:

Ma chère Marie. Je ne suis ni assez riche pour vous aimer comme je le voudrais ni assez pauvre pour être aimé comme vous le voudriez. Oublions donc tous deux, vous un nom qui doit vous être à peu près indifférent, moi un bonheur qui me devient impossible.⁴⁰

Both Dumas and his hero are in love with a high-priced courtesan he is unable to support in the style to which she is accustomed, and neither is willing to be supported with the courtesan's profits. Armand regrets sending his note to Marguerite and waits for a reply that never comes. Perhaps Dumas fils did likewise and his novel is the fantasy response he would have liked to have received from Marie Duplessis. Or maybe the nascent moralist

⁴⁰ For a copy of the original note, see page 49 of Leigh Eduardo's article "The Lady of the Camellias" in the summer 1996 issue of *France*. The note is also reprinted on page 340 of Béhar's chronology accompanying *La Dame aux camélias* although there is a small error: "Je ne suis *ni* assez riche" is reprinted as "Je ne suis *pas* assez riche."

needs to justify his love for a courtesan. In the avant-propos of *Le Doyen de Killerine*, Prévost comments on what motivates novelists to write: "quelque vue d'intérêts propre, qui leur fait souhaiter que certain faits obscurs ou équivoques auxquels ils ont eu part, soient expliqués dans un sens honorable pour eux-mêmes et pour leur parti" (qtd. by Sgard 16). Perhaps Dumas fils seeks to explain, "dans un sens honorable," why he loved Marie and why she left him.

Whatever the reason, Dumas transforms his affair into a legendary tale of love and sacrifice. Yet *La Dame aux camélias* is not autobiographical. Rather, Dumas fils' own life experience is one source of ideas and inspiration, just as his fantasies and *Manon Lescaut* are others. Perhaps his alter ego Armand speaks of his need to fantasize this relationship when he confesses, "quoique ce fût une fille entretenue, je m'étais tellement, peut-être pour la poétiser, fait de cet amour un amour sans espoir" (109). "Je faisais des rêves incroyables...." (110). The author has associated himself with the hero, and through Armand, Dumas suggests that *La Dame aux camélias* gives life to his own fantasies, to his own need to poeticize reality, to give grandeur and moral value to the ordinary. Armand even suggests to the frame narrator that "Il faut pourtant que je vous raconte cette histoire; vous en ferez un livre auquel on ne croira pas, mais qui sera peut-être intéressant à faire" (71). Both the author and his protagonist fancy themselves the romantic hero of a sentimental drama.

Dumas fils draws inspiration from life and literature in order to transform Marie Duplessis' death into Marguerite Gautier's heartrending fictional death. In the novel, Marguerite dies a lonely

death. No one comes and no one cares. Drawing from a literary source of inspiration, the frame narrator compares her death to Manon's. "Manon était morte dans un désert" (41), he writes. Marguerite died "au milieu de ce désert du coeur,⁴¹ bien plus aride, bien plus vaste, bien plus impitoyable que celui dans lequel avait été enterrée Manon. Marguerite, en effet, ... n'avait pas vu s'asseoir une réelle consolation à son chevet, pendant les deux mois qu'avait duré sa lente et douloureuse agonie" (41). It is a fictional scene that springs from the imagination of a writer who wants to see the Fallen Woman expiate her sin in a work that appeals to bourgeois tastes.

Marie Duplessis, in fact, was gently cradled and consoled by many friends as she lay dying. Having preserved an innate decency, as did Marguerite, Duplessis "eut le bon goût suprême de vouloir être enterrée à la pointe du jour, à quelque place cachée et solitaire, sans embarras, sans bruit, absolument comme une honnête mère de famille" (Janin 364). After her funeral mass at the Madeleine, she was first put in a temporary grave. Then on February 16, 1847, thirteen days after her death, she was moved to her permanent grave.⁴² The transfer of the courtesan's corpse was a matter of

⁴¹ Verdi's opera *La Traviata* is based on *La Dame aux camélias*. The composer follows Dumas fils's play but draws from Dumas' novel as needed. For example, "au milieu de ce désert du coeur" is a line from the novel that he uses with great effect to characterize the Parisian society in which the young courtesan lives. It also establishes a connection with *Manon Lescaut* whose heroine crosses "de stériles campagnes" (197) and dies "au milieu d'une vaste plaine" (198).

⁴² She is buried in line 4 of division 15 of Montmartre cemetery. Her body lies beneath "un petit monument carré qui porte sous ces mots: *Alphonsine Plessis*, une couronne de camélias blancs artificiels, scellée au marbre, dans un écrin de verre" (Dumas fils, "A propos" 368). Marie Duplessis is the more euphonious name the girl from Gacé (Today there is a museum dedicated to her in this Norman town.) created for herself when she went to

practical considerations and was much less dramatic than the fictional exhumation of Marguerite Gautier.

In fiction, the exhumation serves the storyline. Marguerite was so young and beautiful when Armand last saw her that he finds it difficult to believe that she is dead. He needs to see her corpse to accept her death as a reality. Sick at a time when love was considered a sickness and physical illness a sign of moral decay, Armand insists that seeing Marguerite's dead body is the only thing that can cure him. He must see her putrid rotting corpse in order to be so disgusted by the sight of her that it cures his passion for her: "peut-être le dégoût du spectacle remplacera-t-il le désespoir du souvenir" (63). Her decomposing corpse marks the end of desire's infection and guarantees his safety. Once dead he can speak for her, he can imagine an idealized love.

None of Marie Duplessis' belongings were sold as she lay dying but rather from February 24 to 27 at a public auction attended by Dumas fils, who later composed an elegy for M. D. (Marie Duplessis) that was published at the end of his collection of poems entitled *Péchés de jeunesse* (Béhar 341) and dedicated to Théophile Gautier who "consacra [à Marie] quelques lignes d'oraison funèbre à travers lesquelles on voyait s'évaporer dans le bleu cette aimable petite âme que devait... immortaliser le péché d'amour" (Dumas, "À propos" 367-68).⁴³ It is at once a sweet poetic line and a condescending one, as if

Paris. When she died, she was covered with camellias, but during her lifetime she was never known as *La Dame aux camélias*. Alexandre Dumas fils is also buried in the Montmartre cemetery.

⁴³ The lives of Dumas fils, Gautier and Sand seem to crisscross continually. In his 1867 introduction to *La Dame aux camélias*, Dumas fils

to remind readers that Marie was a sinner and to accuse her of making sin attractive. What makes Dumas' moralizing misogynistic is his failure to implicate himself or his narrator as a man who appropriates and exploits the courtesan's body.

When first published in 1848, *La Dame aux camélias* was a big success, but interest in the novel soon waned, and Dumas derived little income from the work. Then the public learned that the heroine was based on a real life figure, and interest in the novel resurged. Janin's article not only prompted renewed interest in Dumas fils' novel and play, but it also spurred Marie Duplessis's transformation into a legend.

Whether Janin's portrait of Marie Duplessis is accurate and objective or whether he is somewhat given to Romantic excesses, he assures readers that *la Dame aux camélias* was a real woman and that Dumas fils' work was based on real life. He recognized that

Le public, qui veut tout savoir et qui sait tout en fin de compte, apprend l'un après l'autre tous ces détails, et le livre lu, on voulait le relire, et il arriva naturellement que la vérité, étant connue, rejaillit sur l'intérêt du récit.
(366)

We know, of course, that as Armand Duval, Dumas ennobles his affair with Marie Duplessis with fantasies of what might have been.

explains that he spelled *camellia* with one "l" first by mistake and then stuck with that misspelling because "madame Sand écrivant ce mot comme moi, j'aime mieux mal écrire avec elle que bien écrire avec d'autres" (367n1). Today, of course, both *camélia* and *caméllia* are accepted spellings.

Dumas was more interested in popular success than critical acclaim, so just one year after writing the novel (though it would be 1852 before the censors allowed the work to be performed), he transposed it to the theatrical stage, "le lieu de la consécration et de la reconnaissance immédiate des écrivains" (Béhar 17). As Dumas fils himself would later write, this play was "la source de cette indépendance matérielle d'où découle, pour qui sait la diriger, l'indépendance morale" (376).

Gautier calls the play "the least perfect work of Alexandre, but certainly the most seductive" (qtd. by Eduardo 48). The play dispenses with much of the sociological and psychological background that attempts to explain Marguerite and to encourage a compassionate audience reaction. The novel seems more suited to such topics and can interject anecdotes such as the story of the young girl forced into prostitution by her mother. Marguerite's mother beat her for twelve years (150), and her family never loved her (245), according to the novel. Her mother died of tuberculosis (227), suggesting a genetic weakness. All that remains in the play is a brief comment near the end that Marguerite's family never loved her.

Theater, above all, is the art of representation. Theatergoers generally seek an uplifting aesthetic experience. In the theatrical version of *La Dame aux camélias*, Marguerite's life has been further poeticized and melodramatic elements have been added to appease the censors and appeal to popular tastes. It happens in ways small and large. In the play, for example, instead of telling Armand to come back when her flowers change from red to white, Marguerite tells him to return when the flower has faded. That is, the flower

now portends her death. In both works, men's adultery is accepted as natural, but in the play, there is a stand against adulterous women. When Marguerite first meets Armand in the novel, she advises him, "Prenez une femme mariée" (102). In the play she says, "[A]imez une autre femme, ou mariez-vous" (I.10). Perhaps because there is no longer a frame narrator between the author and his hero and because a play is more public, Dumas distances himself from Armand. The letter Armand sends Marguerite to announce that he is leaving her is entirely different from the real life letter used in the novel. It is also more arrogant and sarcastic: "Il ne me convient pas de jouer un rôle ridicule, même auprès de la femme que j'aime. [...] Pardonnez-moi le seul tort que j'aie, celui de ne pas être millionnaire ..." (II.7).

The novel's sickening morbidity has been eliminated from the play. The decaying corpse is not something most people want to see. Knowing that the public found M. Duval's attitude objectionable, Dumas has M. Duval write to Armand confessing the true story of why Marguerite left him and granting his permission for Armand to return to her. Adding to the melodrama, Armand arrives just in time for Marguerite to die in his arms, which is, of course, why his father allowed him to return; he knew that Marguerite was near death and that the relationship could not last.

In the play, Armand does not take a new mistress, and there is no conflict between Olympe and Marguerite. On the other hand, Marguerite is not publicly humiliated in the novel the way she is in the play in the scene in which Armand throws money in her face in front of everyone and ends up fighting a duel with Varville.

Armand's suspiciousness, jealousy, arrogance and haughtiness are dramatically played out on stage. Unlike Des Grieux, Armand is not striving for heroic fidelity and nobility of the heart. Armand hurts Marguerite. While some scenes from the novel were expunged from the play, this scene was added, suggesting that Dumas' audience tolerates a certain level of violence towards women. In both *Manon Lescaut* and *La Dame aux camélias*, the protagonists stand in contrast with one another. But whereas Des Grieux's character is superior to Manon's, the role are reversed in *La Dame aux camélias*. Marguerite is the self-sacrificing character, and she conducts herself with more dignity than Armand. Recounting how Marguerite responded to his cruel attacks with "le calme sans dédain, la dignité sans mépris," Armand confesses that her reaction "la faisait supérieure à moi [et] m'irrit[ait] encore contre elle" (219). In the novel, in the aftermath of the tragedy, he is distraught and remorseful, but during Marguerite's lifetime his behavior is governed by jealousy and wounded pride.

In the play, when Marguerite tells Armand she has figured out a way they could spend the summer together in the country, he asks her if she has read *Manon Lescaut*. She has. He fears that she intends to support a summer in the country together the same way Manon supported her life with Des Grieux--i.e., with money from a wealthy lover: "Marguerite, vous avez plus de coeur qu'elle, et moi, j'ai plus de loyauté que lui!" (II.4). He imagines that they both have more character than their literary ancestors.

When Marguerite leaves Armand, he is totally unaware of what has happened. Waiting for Marguerite to come home, he spots *Manon Lescaut* on a table: "*Manon Lescaut!* La femme qui aime ne

fait pas ce que tu faisais." Randomly opening the book, he reads in its entirety the letter Manon wrote Des Grieux announcing that although he is "l'idole de [s]on coeur," given their sorry financial state, "c'est une sotte vertu que la fidélité," and that she has gone off to make money "pour rendre [s]on chevalier riche et heureux." "Elle avait raison, mais elle n'aimait pas, car l'amour ne sait pas raisonner.... Cette lecture m'a fait mal, ce livre n'est pas vrai" (III.7), concludes Armand. Moments later, when he finds Marguerite's letter telling him she has left, he is ready to believe that Marguerite is but another Manon. Confused, hurt and uncomprehending, Armand seeks to understand and explain Marguerite's behavior. Manon becomes a metaphor, a new embodiment for this devastating experience that he now carries with him in his imagination.

Essentially, *La Dame aux camélias* argues for individuality, for a case by case consideration, for a nobility of character, while simultaneously arguing that such cases are indeed rare. Although Armand is the narrator in the novel, our sympathy for Marguerite rests in large part on her own words and on the journal she writes for Armand to explain why she left him. Consequently, *La Dame aux camélias* is not characterized by the ambiguity that pervades *Manon Lescaut*. Marguerite, unlike Manon, has voice. In the play, of course, she has an even stronger voice and presence; thus she elicits an even more sympathetic response. Armand, on the other hand, becomes less likeable because, in fact, he treats Marguerite cruelly, and we do not see the heartbroken and despairing figure who recounts their tragic love.

The Biblical reference is moved to the end of the play, a position of emphasis that makes it memorable. The curtain comes down on the line, "Dors en paix, Marguerite! il te sera beaucoup pardonné parce que tu as beaucoup aimé" (V.9). It is the same explanation critics cite for excusing Manon and Des Grieux's transgressions--though they do not couch their argument in Biblical language.

But if the theatrical transposition of the tale heightens the theme of redemption, it also more strongly underscores the hero's role, as opposed to *Manon Lescaut's* role, in inspiring that conversion. The novel portrays the hero's role in general terms: "quelquefois un grand homme a réhabilit[é les courtisanes] par son amour et même de son nom" (42). In the play, the love of a good man is more explicitly the cause of Marguerite's conversion. "[J]e suis bonne... C'est Armand qui m'a transformée!--Il m'a aimée, il m'aime" (III.4). Armand's father characterizes their love as "un bonheur pour [Armand] et une réhabilitation pour [Marguerite]" (230). It is a convenient theory that gives an *honnête homme* an excuse for loving a courtesan.

M. Duval attempts to persuade Armand to renounce Marguerite for the sake of his family's reputation.

Que vous ayez une maîtresse, c'est fort bien; que vous la payiez comme un galant homme doit payer l'amour d'une fille entretenue, c'est on ne peut mieux; mais que vous oubliiez les choses les plus saintes pour elle, que vous permettiez que le bruit de votre vie scandaleuse arrive

jusqu'au fond de ma province et jette l'ombre d'une tache sur le nom honorable que je vous ai donné, voilà ce qui ne peut être, voilà ce qui ne sera pas. (186)

M. Duval thinks it only natural that his son have a mistress. He just wants him to be discreet and avoid scandal. The mistress is not to compromise family life. In the play, M. Duval asks Marguerite if at Armand's age, "le coeur peut-il prendre un engagement définitif? Le coeur ne change-t-il pas perpétuellement d'affections?" (299). The double standard is obvious: one expects a man to change affections often, but a woman who loves more than one man is tainted for life.

The play, first banned on moral grounds, adds a virtuous couple, Gustave and Nichette, who end up happily married. In an opening scene, Nanine explains that Gustave is not yet Nichette's husband but that he will be. Gustave loves only Nichette. She loves only him and *has never loved anyone but him*. He will marry this "très honnête fille" (I.3). An "honnête fille" is expected to have but one lover, her husband, but no such demand is made of the man. Even in subtle ways the double standard is advocated although the author may indeed think he is taking a more compassionate attitude and railing against hypocrisy. Dumas' essay on *La Dame aux camélias* demonstrates his muddled thinking. He describes Marie Duplessis as "une des dernières et des seules courtisanes qui eurent du coeur" (367). Apparently he feels a man should be able to buy true love.

The frame narrator opens *La Dame aux camélias* by painting himself as having a natural indulgence and compassion for courtesans, but his compassion is mixed with disdain and arrogance as he characterizes courtesans he has known: "Pauvres créatures! Si

c'est un tort de les aimer, c'est bien le moins qu'on les plaigne" (42). According to Armand, seducing a sixteen-year-old virgin is easy (120), and he in no way suggests that there is anything wrong with it. Winning a courtesan's love, on the other hand, the love of a professional, is viewed as real victory (121). His arrogance and failure to acknowledge his double standard throw doubt on the sincerity of his sympathy and on his whole posture as a voice for moral authority

Just as Des Grieux, Juliette, Romuald and Don José talk about desire in an effort to put an end to desire, so does Armand. Once all has been told, "Armand, toujours triste, mais soulagé un peu par le récit de cette histoire, se rétablit vite" (249). Throughout his account, Armand appeals to "vous," the frame narrator--and by extension, the male reader, to empathize with him. "Vous savez ce que c'est d'aimer une femme, vous savez comment s'abrègent les journées, et avec quelle amoureuse paresse on se laisse porter au lendemain. Vous n'ignorez pas cet oubli de toutes choses, qui naît d'un amour violent, confiant et partagé" (170). After Armand's tale of how Marguerite has suffered, often unjustly, the frame narrator responds, "Je comprends ce que vous avez dû souffrir, mon ami" (249). Not a word of sympathy for Marguerite. This is a men's club and the frame narrator's sympathy rests with Armand. Armand's narrative strategy has succeeded.

In comparison to the other rewritings of *Manon Lescaut*, one of the most striking aspects of *La Dame aux camélias* is the sense of the author's personal involvement with his heroine (a characteristic also noted in his preface to *Manon Lescaut*). As we have seen, *La Dame*

aux camélias springs from a curious mix of life and literature in which one nourishes the other.⁴⁴ Simply put, Dumas fils never seems able to let go of Manon Lescaut. He is obsessed with her. Like his hero Armand and the other narrators studied, Dumas fils is trying to put an end to desire by talking about desire, albeit indirectly. He is an "artiste obsédé par un chef-d'oeuvre inimitable mais transposable" (Béhar 11). In 1851,⁴⁵ he pens *Le Régent Mustel*, a rather bizarre novella in which Manon, Des Grieux, Paul, Virginie, Bérnardin de Saint-Pierre, Werther, Charlotte, Goethe and Mustel all come back to life and see their fates crossed. In 1867 he writes a preface to *La Dame aux camélias*, in 1875 his introduction to *Manon Lescaut*, and in 1881 another introduction to *La Dame aux camélias*.

Armand admits, "J'avais eu affaire à une fille semblable à toutes les filles entretenues, je l'avais beaucoup trop poétisée" (137). Perhaps feeling likewise, Dumas fils distances himself from his heroine and his work, which he discusses in quite impersonal terms in his two prefaces to *La Dame aux camélias*. The man that emerges is a proud, sensitive man who takes pains to point out that if Marie

⁴⁴ As we have seen, life and literature are intertwined in *La Dame aux camélias*. Dumas fils' own father, the celebrated writer, Alexandre Dumas père, did not recognize his son until he was six years old, and as an adult Dumas fils long fought for the rights of natural children. More specifically, *La Dame aux camélias* gained the praise of Alexandre Dumas père and effected a reconciliation between father and son. In his 1881 introduction to his work, he calls his father "mon juge suprême" (375). The elder Dumas had not thought it possible to successfully transpose *La Dame aux camélias* to the theatrical stage. Unexpectedly one day, he learned his son was trying to do just that and asked his son to read to him what he had written. Dumas fils began rather nervously but seeing that his father was moved, he continued a bit more boldly. Before it was all over, Dumas père cried like a baby and declared the play new, bold, original and moving (375).

⁴⁵ It was first published as *Les Revenants*. In 1852 the title was changed to *Le Régent Mustel*.

Duplessis "n'a rien sacrifié à Armand [i.e., Dumas fils], c'est qu'Armand ne l'a pas voulu" (368).

Assuming the role of moralist, he takes up a theme hinted at in *La Dame aux camélias* when describing how respectable women follow fashion trends set by courtesans. Dumas fils rails against a society in which one can no longer tell women apart, can no longer tell the difference between respectable women and courtesans. In his 1867 preface, he writes that courtesans "devinrent une classe, elles s'érigèrent puissance. [...] Les femmes du monde ... acceptèrent la lutte avec ces dames sur le terrain où celles-ci l'avaient placée. [...] Non seulement on eut les mêmes toilettes, mais on eut le même langage, les mêmes danses, les mêmes aventures, les mêmes amours, disons tout, les mêmes spécialités. [...] Nous allons à la prostitution universelle" (372).

The Second Empire (1852-1870) encouraged a permissiveness born of unrestrained gaiety, but the age of the great courtesans ended with the collapse of the Second Empire. Dumas speaks for a generation that believed the scandal was not that courtesans were depicted in novels and on the theatrical stage, but rather that they existed. As we saw in his 1875 preface to *Manon Lescaut*, Dumas fils is a conflicted writer who never made peace with the figure of Manon, a writer for whom love and scorn, passion and fear, fever and creative imagination are inextricably bound. A writer whose best known works are about a woman he believes never should have existed, Dumas fils poignantly gives voice to the conflict and confusion of men who love women they can neither accept or reject.

Leone Leoni, "La Morte amoureuse," *Carmen* and *La Dame aux camélias*, the best known literary works inspired by *Manon Lescaut*, cluster around the publication of the famous 1839 Bourdin and Charpentier editions of the novel which marked the height of the novel's fame. None of the variants has enjoyed the critical and popular success of *Manon Lescaut*. Mérimée's *Carmen* is known mostly through Bizet's opera which is one of most popular operas performed in France today. Dumas' *La Dame aux camélias* is also well known in large part due to the success of Verdi's *La Traviata*.

What sets Prévost's masterpiece apart? First of all, the force of the myth and mystery of the heroine has inspired many retellings, each of which further enriches the myth of Manon. Prévost's characters seem more real and are more sympathetic than their imitators. The frame narrators in the variants do not predispose us to view the protagonists as compassionately as Renoncour does. *La Dame aux camélias* is a confused overly sentimental and overly self-important work. Leone, Clarimonde and Carmen are all threatening figures. Certainly we are much more suspicious and fearful of Leone than of Manon. Clarimonde and Carmen arouse uneasiness although we can dismiss the discomfort and the characters because they live outside our realm of reality.

Despite her nineteenth-century representation, Prévost's heroine is not a menacing figure. She is a frivolous and insouciant young beauty. The confusion, anguish, and charm with which Des Grieux narrates their ill-fated love endears the protagonists to us. That is, we do not pull away, we do not distance ourselves from them. We share the magic and mystery, rapture and ruin of a life-

consuming passion. And precisely because we do not draw back, because Prévost succeeds in arousing our interest in his protagonists, his novel challenges our expectations and causes us to question our values in a way that *Leone Leoni*, "La Morte amoureuse," and *Carmen*--and to some extent *La Dame aux camélias*--do not: Clarimonde, Carmen, Leone and Marguerite are already marked as pathological or unnatural creatures and thus as different from us. In *Manon Lescaut*, the focus is on Des Grieux's story, not Manon's. We see very little of her life as a courtesan whereas Marguerite's opulent lifestyle is portrayed in concrete detail.

With their Romantic emphasis on the exotic, pathetic, melodramatic, and even macabre, the variants are not as universal as *Manon Lescaut*. In each of the variants, the Manon figure is described, she acquires a physical presence, and thus she no longer fans our imagination in quite the same way Prévost's original does. The variants are less open-ended and emotionally less powerful. None leaves us with the ambiguity that continues to intrigue us in *Manon Lescaut*. None has the humor of Prévost's novel.

The variants are also more localized. They appeal too much to the tastes of their times. Prévost's work, though certainly a reflection of his times, nonetheless focuses on the more universal aspects of his tale. And to the extent that it reflects his times, it is more a reflection of a historical period than a response to the tastes of the masses, as is *La Dame aux camélias*. That said, *La Dame aux camélias* is also a weaker work precisely because the author has too high a personal investment that is translated into muddled thinking. He has not sufficiently distanced himself from personal experience.

Symbolically, the story Des Grieux tells Renoncour is nine months in the making, that is, nine months pass between Manon's death and Des Grieux's return to France where he meets Renoncour.

Read as variants of the Manon-Des Grieux story, these works influence our reading of *Manon Lescaut* by focusing our attention on certain aspects of the novel. Each narrator embraces a character who embodies his or her "other" self, a less socially acceptable self whom each tries to understand and explain "dans un sens honorable." The personal conflict, the inner schism between self-image and the awareness that there is an "other" lurking within him is most forcefully expressed in "La Morte amoureuse." *Leone Leone* develops several motifs found in *Manon Lescaut*: Manon's bipolarity, the ambiguity of Des Grieux's portrayal of her, Des Grieux's fictionalizing of his experience, and the effect emotion has on perception and interpretation of reality. In *Carmen*, we are left to question whether the protagonists are victims of fate or free will or something else--sorcery or biological and sociological forces, for example. Passion is depicted as a violent and fearsome emotion. Eros, it seems, must be repressed--or at least the ritual of the "sacrifice" of Eros must be enacted. *La Dame aux camélias* causes us to consider more seriously the plausibility of Manon's conversion. As a whole, the novel moves in the direction of the lover developing into a storyteller.

Chapter 4

THE VOICE OF ENCHANTMENT IN MASSENET'S *MANON*

*Ah! les expressions ne rendent jamais
qu'à demi les sentiments du coeur.*
Des Grieux in *Manon Lescaut* (178)

Still drawing a sell-out crowd more than a hundred years after its composition, Massenet's 1884 *Manon*, like Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*, has enjoyed a popularity that none of the composer's other works has matched. According to Massenet's memoirs, he was in the library of Henri Meilhac, his principal librettist, when he spotted Prévost's novel and was struck with the idea for this opera. However, Edward Noël, secretary of the Opéra-Comique and later one of Massenet's collaborators, claims that during a performance in memory of Auber, a celebrated soprano and tenor sang a duet from Auber's largely forgotten *Manon Lescaut* (1856). The effect was so phenomenal that the director of the Opéra-Comique suggested that Massenet compose a new operatic rendition of the novel. Yet another theory is that Philippe Gille, Massenet's other librettist, noted the novel's popularity and suggested the idea (Branger 31-33).

A burst of national pride and the popularity of opéra-comique account for both the interest in Auber and the composition of a new *Manon*. French nationalism and genre vogue are two cultural influences that also explain the publication of new nineteenth-century editions of Prévost's novel. Following France's disastrous 1870 defeat under Napoléon III by the Prussians at Sedan, the

French were particularly bent on resisting Wagnerian theater and the German cultural invasion; a new adaptation of a *French* masterpiece seemed highly desirable.

Jean Sgard argues that, in fact, it was the success of Verdi's *La Traviata* that led to the composition of operas based on *Manon Lescaut*.⁴⁶ Generic transformation and intertextual influence thus came full circle. As previously discussed, Prévost's work inspired Dumas fils' novel *La Dame aux camélias* in 1848. The following year Dumas fils created a melodramatic theatrical adaptation (first performed in 1852) of his novel. Shortly thereafter, Verdi composed *La Traviata* (1853), an opera based on Dumas fils' play. Finally, Auber (1856)⁴⁷ and Massenet (and later Puccini), inspired by the success of *La Traviata*, transposed Prévost's novel to the lyric stage. Massenet's *Manon* even borrows scenes from *La Traviata*. The success of each of these works attests to the power of *Manon Lescaut* to transcend time, demonstrates the unending circle of influence among writers and composers, and shows how the success of one work can help elevate the popularity and stature of another. Massenet's *Manon*, for example, gave new life to the *novel*. Between 1885 and 1889, eight new editions were published, varying in price from 25 centimes to 200 francs-or (Sgard 228). That is a rather extraordinary phenomenon in itself, indicating that the novel appealed to readers across a broad spectrum of socioeconomic classes.

⁴⁶ Cited by Starobinski, "L'unique objet" 57.

⁴⁷ Auber's *Manon Lescaut - Opéra-Comique* bears little resemblance to Prévost's story.

Massenet and his librettists, Meilhac and Gille, began work on their *Manon* in early 1882, and the work, composed between May and October 1882, was first performed on January 19, 1884, at the Opéra-Comique in Paris. Massenet wanted to contribute to the development of opéra-comique, "un genre éminemment national" (Gautier 142-43). While Gérard Condé contends that *Manon* is "in many ways pastiche, or imitation opéra-comique and owes much of its artistic success to the fact that it is more an exercise in style--a sequence of genre pictures--than a sentimental drama" ("Massenet" 15), Jacques Joly points out that except for a few one-act works, *Manon* is the only one of Massenet's works "à être baptisée 'opéra-comique.' La tradition de ce genre typiquement français (dont *Manon* est devenu ... un des archétypes) nourrit donc l'oeuvre" (15).

Hervé Lacombe defines opéra-comique, which reached its peak between 1830 and 1840, as "essentiellement une comédie ou une tragi-comédie à dénouement gai où le chant alterne avec le dialogue et prend sensiblement la même importance que lui ..." ("L'opéra-comique" 43). However, by 1883, the term opéra-comique no longer signified a lighthearted plot or a happy ending. After Bizet's *Carmen*, an opéra-comique first performed in 1875 which climaxes with Don José killing Carmen, no subject could be excluded from opéra-comique.⁴⁸ By using spoken passages but replacing the spoken dialogues, characteristic of traditional opéra-comiques, with recitative (sung speech), Massenet builds on French tradition in order

⁴⁸ The moving death scene in Auber's 1856 *Manon Lescaut* - *Opéra-Comique* actually marks a turning point in the staging of opéra-comique death scenes. However, the violence and power of Carmen's murder sparked considerable controversy.

to rejuvenate an essential characteristic of this genre and mark his difference from Verdi and Wagner. And he did so even though, as of March 1882, the Opéra-Comique no longer required that works alternate between sung and spoken lines (Branger 35, n24).

In *Manon*, the spoken word is a dramatic element. Lines spoken over music intensify the emotional impact of a scene, quicken the pace of the plot, and provide comic relief. In Act I, for example, the ridiculous Guillot de Morfontaine speaks to Manon in his effort to seduce her. In the frenetic Hôtel de Transylvanie scene (Act IV), the spoken lines, usually dialogue about gambling, are continually juxtaposed with lines that are sung and which play out the sentimental drama against the tumultuously frivolous gambling den backdrop. When Manon first sees Des Grieux and says to herself, "Quelqu'un! Vite! A mon banc de pierre!" (I.viii), the spoken word quickens the action and signals that this is a moment of dramatic importance. The spoken dialogue in Manon's final moments raises the pathos to fever pitch as she gasps, "Ah, je meurs!" and Des Grieux cries out, "Manon!" as she resignedly and realistically rejoins, "Il le faut! Il le faut" (V.v).

The comic scenes likewise provide more than just comic relief. Developing the novel's tension between passion and pleasure, Massenet's opera sustains a contrast between Manon and Des Grieux's unfolding drama and the general merriment that ironically underscores the protagonists' personal tragedy. In an effort to open new possibilities for the lyric stage, Massenet sought an authentically French genre which incorporated both the Italian masters' emphasis on the voice and Wagner's focus on the dramatic atmosphere

(Branger 35). The result is a popular *French* opera that changes much of Prévost's narrative and yet remains essentially the same story--or at least it *feels* the same. Yet neither plot, character, theme, setting, tone, nor narrative structure remains unaltered. A look at the differences and similarities between Prévost's novel and Massenet's opera will more effectively illuminate Massenet's transformation of Prévost's masterpiece.

Critics have long debated whether or not Prévost really intended to write "un traité de morale" (6). Des Grieux adamantly argues that love is an innocent passion. Yet he is at a loss to understand how love has become "une source de misères et de désordres" which has caused him to become "si criminel" (72). Even though "les délices de l'amour sont passagères ... et seront suivies par d'éternelles peines, ... elles sont ici-bas nos plus parfaites félicités" (93). It is a morally evasive position, typical of Des Grieux's stance throughout the novel, which leaves us uncertain of Prévost's moral intent. Both Renoncour and Tiberge claim that the young chevalier plunges into misfortune by choice. Des Grieux, however, contends that he is a victim of fate. In the novel, the conflict between fate and free will is left unresolved. In Massenet's opera, as in most operas, moral quandaries are not central to the experience of the opera.

There is no pretense that the opera is a lesson in morality. The tale is no longer a retrospective first-person narrative told to a sympathetic frame narrator. In the novel, Manon has virtually no voice. Her side of the story is never told. We see her mostly through Des Grieux's eyes. But in the opera, Manon speaks; we see her on

stage. Most of the story's moral ambiguity and some of Des Grieux's ambivalence about Manon's character are lost. There is no Tiberge figure, and the protagonists' sins are substantially minimized. Des Grieux's father remains alive and well at the end of the story, the protagonists never leave the Old World, and Manon dies, without plausible cause, on the road to Le Havre. Thus the conflict between Old World and New World values is averted in the opera.

Prévost's narrator both idealizes Manon and blames "cette charmante et perfide créature" (43) for all his "désordres." While Massenet's Manon is no longer as perfidious, she is also no longer as angelic as Prévost's narrator would have us believe. Nonetheless, Massenet envisions a complex figure. Because the operatic Manon has voice, she is no longer seen exclusively through the eyes of others. The opera is not Des Grieux's tale, and the Manon that emerges exhibits a subtlety and range of emotion not seen in the novel.

To showcase Manon and her voice, Massenet and his librettists set the six scenes, four drawn from the novel and two of their own creation, they feel best capture the essence of the story: Manon and Des Grieux's first meeting, Manon's betrayal of Des Grieux, Manon's life as a courtesan, the lovers' reunion at Saint-Sulpice, gambling and arrest at the Hôtel de Transylvanie, and finally, Manon's poignant death.

Act I dramatizes the *coup de foudre*. Des Grieux meets Manon in a bustling Amiens courtyard and their fate is sealed. Both his words and the stage directions indicate that, from the beginning, the opera largely circumvents the tension felt throughout the novel

between choice and determinism. Incorporating one of the novel's motifs, the stage directions specify that Des Grieux turns "involontairement" toward Manon, the mistress of his heart, and tells the enchantress: "On dirait que ma vie / Va finir ou commence! / Il semble qu'une main / De fer me mène en un autre chemin / Et malgré moi m'entraîne devant elle!" (I.viii). Manon is bewitching, and, as his music and body language dramatize, Des Grieux is powerless to resist.

For her part, Manon has just refused Guillot's advances. Yet she is tempted by his tantalizing proposal of pleasure, and a dreamy internal struggle ensues: "Combien ce doit être amusant / De s'amuser toute une vie! / Ah! Voyons, Manon, plus de chimères! / Où va ton esprit en rêvant ? Laisse ces désirs éphémères / A la porte de ton couvent" (I.vii). She is realistic enough to try to prepare herself for life in the convent, but also self-aware enough to realize it will be difficult to curb her yearning for amusement. In the beginning, Massenet's Manon is both more innocent and more ambivalent than Prévost's original, and his Des Grieux is less naive.

In Act II, they are living on rue Vivienne in Paris. The beautiful music, first heard in Act I when the lovers meet, evokes the joy of love, the wonder of their first meeting. Des Grieux is writing a letter to his father, pouring out his heart and requesting paternal approval for marriage. Describing how enchanting Manon is, his letter is a lyrical evocation of her seductive charms, of her sweet voice and tender glance. "On l'appelle Manon, elle eut hier seize ans. En elle tout séduit, la beauté, la jeunesse, la grâce!" His words call to mind those of Prévost's hero when confronted with the

vision of Manon at Saint-Sulpice. "Elle était dans sa dix-huitième année. Ses charmes surpassaient tout ce qu'on peut décrire" (44). As in the novel, the operatic Des Grieux offers no physical description of Manon; his father is left to imagine this exemplar of feminine perfection. Of course, in the opera, we do see her, she acquires a physical presence, albeit at a distance, but her identity and her charm lie in her voice. Musically, the soprano must be capable of inspiring Des Grieux's immediate, devoted love. She is a *femme fatale* in the tradition of Circe. "Nulle voix n'a de plus doux accents" (II.i). Totally enraptured, Des Grieux has no idea that Manon is just moments away from betraying him.

Act III is divided into two sharply contrasting *tableaux*. The first is a carnival scene on the promenade of the Cours-la-Reine, a scene not found in the novel, which showcases Manon, the resplendent courtesan. Featuring a pastiche of Regency style music, the scene is introduced by an eighteenth-century minuet heard as a recurring theme throughout the scene, and it features an opera-ballet set to music of the period. As might be expected from a composer intent on rejuvenating a French genre and seeking to distinguish himself from the German and Italian masters, "Chacun [des tableaux de la pièce] a sa tonalité propre, son atmosphère à soi. Chacun d'eux a la couleur exacte du milieu qu'il représente, à son époque précise" (Massenet, qtd. by Lacombe, *Les voies* 172-73). Massenet's protagonists are forcefully situated in their times, Regency France, and the eighteenth-century music and imagery is

essential to capturing the world of the rococo Regency felt throughout the work.⁴⁹

In the novel Des Grieux insists that his father would love Manon if only he met her (26). The opera plays out this possibility. Spying Manon in the Cours-la-Reine, the Comte des Grieux concedes, "Elle est charmante et je comprends qu'on l'aime" (III.1er.v). Yet he remains steadfast in his opposition to a union between Manon and his son. The difference of social class would presumably constitute an affront to family honor. In the novel, the two never meet. Massenet's scene appears to be inspired by the encounter between Violetta and Germont in *La Traviata*⁵⁰ and, as we shall see, is but one of several intertextualities.

The emotionally-charged second tableau captures the novel's pivotal scene at Saint-Sulpice, which so moved Massenet that it is the first scene he composed (Hiss 122). Des Grieux is haunted by the female erotic figure. In an obsessional meditation, he attempts to chase memories of Manon from his mind and regain his serenity: "Ah! Fuyez, douce image à mon âme trop cher, / Respectez un repos cruellement gagné" (III.iii). Manon's entrance follows immediately upon this moving aria.

⁴⁹ By way of contrast, Puccini is less interested in recreating a Regency atmosphere--although he does capture it in the Act II dancing lesson scene in Manon's grand boudoir. Instead, Puccini focuses on creating an *Italian* opera filled with desperate passion that stresses the unavoidable tragedy. Whereas Massenet has a more substantive text which highlights lyrics and drama, Puccini emphasizes voice and music. With limited plot development and few light moments, heavy emotion resonates throughout his *Manon Lescaut* in music less restrained than Massenet's.

⁵⁰ In *La Traviata*, Verdi changes the names of Dumas fils' protagonists to Violetta and Alfredo. Alfredo's father is renamed Germont.

She begs God's forgiveness, confesses her guilt to Des Grieux, implores his pardon, and like a siren beckoning a sailor to shipwreck, caressingly reminds Des Grieux of the love they once shared, and beseeches him to love again. Just as mariners were defenseless against the mythical Greek Sirens who lured men to their death by their seductive singing, Des Grieux appears powerless to resist Manon's enchanting voice. He capitulates to her charms, to the irresistible appeal of her voice.

Much of what Prévost expresses through text, Massenet quite naturally expresses through music and through Manon's voice. In the novel Manon overwhelms her chevalier with "mille caresses passionnées" (45). In the opera, her voice does the caressing, the seducing, as she sings a moving aria in which she pleads with Des Grieux to acknowledge that she is still the same Manon he once loved so passionately. For Massenet, as for Prévost and many of the critics discussed in chapter one, man's sexual desire for a woman does not originate in the man. Rather it emanates from the woman who wants to be desired and whose presence unleashes desire. Massenet's desire to transcend the destabilizing threat of corporal reality inspires his transfiguration of Des Grieux's desire into Manon's voice. Even though her body is on stage, her physical presence as an object of desire, possessing the power of seduction, is sublimated through her voice. The voiceless Manon of the novel, imprisoned in the language of Des Grieux, is endowed with a tantalizing vocal brilliance when placed upon the lyric stage. Her absent body reappears filtered in and through the voice. Des Grieux seems to have no choice but to surrender.

"On the face of it, *Manon Lescaut* does not seem very promising material for the stage," according to Vivienne Mylne, "since the plot is somewhat repetitive" (29). Consequently, Massenet omits most of the novel's remaining episodes: the protagonists' life and the fire at Chaillot, borrowing money from Tiberge, their servants' theft of their worldly goods, duping M. de G... M..., Manon's imprisonment at the Hôpital Général and Des Grieux's at Saint-Lazare, Des Grieux's attacks on M. de G... M... and threats to the Superior at Saint-Lazare, his subsequent escape during which he kills a servant, Lescaut's⁵¹ death, the attempt to defraud the young G... M..., their imprisonment at Châtelet, their life in the New World, the duel with Synnelet, Des Grieux's reunion with Tiberge and his anticipated return to the family fold. Most of these events are eliminated to avoid redundancy or to lessen the severity of Des Grieux and Manon's offenses. To condense text and action, a few incidents are suggested in brief allusions that those familiar with the novel will recall. For example, "Notre opulence est envolée... nous n'avons plus rien" (IV.iii) alludes to their servants stealing their valuables, thus explaining their need for money. But opera aims to create a pleasing aesthetic experience by capturing the mood, atmosphere, and emotion of key moments, not plot detail. Unlike a novel which most read but once, an opera is often listened to and enjoyed several times. Opera-goers frequently know the story line beforehand, and

⁵¹ In the novel Lescaut is Manon's brother, and he enters the story shortly before the fire at Chaillot. In the opera he is her cousin and meets her when she arrives in Amiens.

Massenet even relies on audience familiarity with the novel to fill in the gaps in plot development and character motivation.

Act IV, a splendid period piece at the Hôtel de Transylvanie, is rich in intertextuality but weak in plot development and character motivation. One moment Des Grieux swears he would never gamble, and the next moment he is winning sizable stakes. Guillot accuses him of cheating and has Des Grieux arrested and Manon deported. The act ends with the improbable appearance of Des Grieux's father⁵² who obtains Des Grieux's release. In Act V, Manon dies in Des Grieux's arms, begging his forgiveness and recalling happy times past.

Two problems are evident in Act IV: plot improbability and inconsistent character development. Although Prévost's novel includes no dates within the narrative, nearly all critics term the tale a Regency narrative. Sgard, however, amply documents the evidence leading to his conclusion that *Manon Lescaut* explicitly takes place between 1712 and 1716 and that only the Louisiana episode takes place after the death of Louis XIV. All historical allusions signal a society in crisis, a period marked by disillusionment and the collapse of a social value system that, for Prévost, characterized the end of the reign of Louis XIV. Only under the sun king, during a period of rigid rules, would the conflict depicted in the novel arise between father and son, between the traditional patriarchy and what Des Grieux calls "un nouvel ordre de choses" (45), governed by a nobility

⁵² Though a familiar operatic convention, his appearance is improbable in terms of plot development.

of the heart. Des Grieux's ignominious affair with Manon, *une fille de joie*, scandalizes his family and friends and even the narrator himself. His exploits are *not* part of the collective frenzy that marked the Regency, argues Sgard, because they would not have seemed aberrant during that period. The disruption of the moral order depicted in *Manon Lescaut* erupted in a stable world. (56-61).

Massenet, on the other hand, clearly indicates that his *Manon* takes place in 1721--i.e., during the Regency. This date is important for several reasons. The Regency is characterized, at the beginning of volume VI of the *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité*,⁵³ by greed, debauchery, irreligion and anarchy. It was an age in which the aristocracy thought only of their own pleasure, but temporal distance later allowed the Romantics to poeticize the Ancien Régime and render it picturesque. The opera follows in that tradition. While Massenet's *Manon* appears to view the Ancien Régime with affection, it exaggerates the notion of a frivolous society where pleasure reigned and few earned their living by working. By situating the opera in the Regency, Massenet was thus able to use traditional eighteenth-century imagery in which society revolves around spending money, libertinage and entertainment (Joly 54). These themes easily lend themselves to parody and to the light moments needed for contrast with the unfolding drama. In fact, explains Gérard Condé, this lightness is at the heart of the drama. Regency frivolity is what lures Manon and Des Grieux into decadence. Their tragic destiny plays itself out against this backdrop, a world in which

⁵³ *Manon Lescaut* is volume VII.

their less than exemplary behavior is hardly remarkable. That is what makes the opera a tragedy ("De la beauté" 40).

Though perhaps overstating the tragic aspect of the opera, which lacks the depth needed to provoke a cathartic experience,⁵⁴ Condé highlights a significant point in noting that Des Grieux and Manon are no better and no worse than their contemporaries and that their transgressions are "fautes ordinaires" in this Regency society. Yet they suffer extraordinary consequences ("De la beauté" 40). Were the opera to take place, as does the novel, before 1715, Des Grieux and Manon's sins would no longer be "fautes ordinaires." In the novel, Des Grieux, while imprisoned at Châtelet, tries to convince his father that he has done no worse than other aristocrats, but this argument undermines his attempt to paint himself as an exceptional noble living an extraordinary love. By changing the dates and eliminating Des Grieux's claims of character superiority, Massenet more convincingly develops the theme that Des Grieux is neither better nor worse than his peers.

Placed within the Regency, Manon's deportation becomes less improbable, though still without basis. She runs off with Des Grieux in the coach Guillot provided for her. She is not appreciative of the opera the latter orders for her amusement. And she is Des Grieux's accomplice while he allegedly cheats at cards. A misdemeanor or two at most, but hardly crimes that call for deportation. Nonetheless,

⁵⁴ This is to be expected. Lacombe explains: "L'opéra français ne recherche que rarement le sublime, l'intensité et la profondeur de l'expression ou la densité de l'écriture; il leur préfère ce qui est divertissant, agréable, nuancé, léger, mais aussi, tout ce qui étonne et impressionne" (*Les voies* 9).

Guillot wants vengeance and his success in using the arm of the law to obtain it depicts the corruption of a society where wealth and power can buy inordinate influence. Unable to purchase Manon's favors, Guillot purchases his revenge, an act that seems at odds with his portrayal as a silly old lecher. We could infer that Poussette, Javotte, and Rosette's betrayal (Act III) has helped embitter him, but the story line makes no such connection.

The characterization of Des Grieux's father may be consistent with a pre-1715 setting and with nineteenth-century morality, but it is less consistent with Regency France. In contrast to the novel's final scene, which implies that Des Grieux will be reconciled with his family even though his escapades have been a contributing cause in his father's death, the comte rejects the possibility of reconciliation with his son. "Pas de pardon! Non, pas de pardon!" is his response to Des Grieux's plea for compassion. Urged by the crowd to take pity on the young man, the comte's final words are "Non, jamais!" (IV.v). Having allied himself with the despicable lecher Guillot, his contention that he must guard the family honor, a claim reminiscent of the scheming Lescaut's appeal to Manon to respect his role as "gardien de l'honneur [d]e la famille!" (I.vi), is somewhat hypocritical. The patriarchy is clearly degenerating.

The constant interplay between Prévost's novel and Massenet's opera is one type of intertextuality that fills in the gaps, nuances, enriches, and even changes the meaning of *Manon*. Despite Guillot's accusation of cheating, the libretto attributes Des Grieux's winnings to beginner's luck. Yet the improbability of a novice winning and the

knowledge that in the novel Des Grieux is, in fact, a cardsharp easily lead one to see cheating on the opera stage.

This Act IV gambling scene at the Hôtel de Transylvanie, as well as the Cours-la-Reine scene in Act III is inspired by the festive scene at Flora's party in Act II of *La Traviata*. In both operas, these scenes give the composers opportunity aplenty to interject the local color so popular with opera audiences. To entertain her guests, Flora has ordered a chorus of fortune-telling Gypsies followed by a lovely ballerina who gracefully descends the staircase into her waiting matador's arms. Manon's regal entrance at the Cours-la-Reine and the opera and ballet arranged by Guillot draw inspiration from this scene⁵⁵ in which the real action at Flora's, the confrontation between Violetta and Alfredo, takes place against the gaming and entertainment backdrop. In Massenet's work, Manon's music at the Cours-la-Reine is among the most popular in the entire opera. The appeal to youth and the *carpe diem* theme capture the wonderfully appetizing narcissism of her self-appreciation.

In her final adieu to images of happier days, "l'auberge ... la petite table ... ta robe noire" (V.v), Manon's mood is naturally quite different. Not found in Prévost's novel, the scene again draws from *La Traviata* and Violetta's poignant farewell to beautiful dreams of the past. Like all artists, composers and librettists continually

⁵⁵ The Gypsy-matador motif of the entertainment at Flora's suggests a comparison with the tragic fate of Carmen (in both Mérimée's novella and Bizet's 1875 opera), once again reinforcing the intertextual relationship among the three heroines, Manon, Marguerite/Violetta, and Carmen, and among the literary works and operas that give them life. Though beyond the scope of the present inquiry, the relationship among the transposition of these three novels into musical drama suggests the possibility of a rich study.

borrow successful ideas from one another. By borrowing from *La Traviata*, Massenet echoes the familiar courtesan-redeemed-by-love theme without resorting to the tedious moralizing found in *La Dame aux camélias*.

An explicit intertextual allusion is heard when Des Grieux sings a verse from Musset's *Namouna* (1832⁵⁶) in the gambling den scene (IV.iii). Suggesting that dreams enrich our lives, the poet is enraptured by Manon, a literary figure "si vivante et si vraiment humaine" (stanza LVII) that she has long embodied the fantasy of many a reader who feels s/he knows her. The poet, like Des Grieux, has ambivalent feelings. He is attracted to and repulsed by Manon. He loves her and yet harbors a certain fear of her.

Manon! sphinx étonnant! véritable sirène,
Coeur trois fois féminin...
[.]

... que je t'aime et te hais
... quelle ardeur inouïe
Pour l'or et le plaisir! ...
... ah! folle que tu es,
Comme je t'aimerais demain, si tu vivais!
(stanzas LIX and LX)

⁵⁶ The reader will recall that Musset met George Sand in 1833, and in 1834, during her stay in Italy with Musset, she wrote *Leone Leoni*, her own variation of *Manon Lescaut*. Certainly she was familiar with this verse from *Namouna* because she used the stanza just before it as an epigraph for volume 2 of *Lélia* (1833).

Singing this verse, Massenet's Des Grieux expresses his love and despair. With minimal modifications in the lyrics, the creators of *Manon* once again demonstrate their genius in extracting material judiciously and modifying it to suit their needs⁵⁷ while at the same time remaining faithful to the spirit of *Manon Lescaut*, as well as to their other sources. In just a few words set to powerful music, they capture the hero's ambivalence and conflict as Manon urges him to take up gambling in an effort to restore their fortune.

Prévost's novel is a retrospective first person account told to a sympathetic frame narrator. Des Grieux, the narrator, relives his great passion by remembering Manon and recounting their life together. To capture this retrospective aspect, Massenet creates a motif of memory and remembrance by infusing the opera with recurring musical themes and with the language of remembering. With her aria at Saint-Sulpice, a scene to which we shall return, Manon re-seduces Des Grieux by appealing to the past and attempting to make it appear present once again: "N'est-ce plus ma main que cette main presse? [...] Tout comme autrefois? Rappelle-toi ... N'est-ce pas ma main?" (III.2e.vii).

If we again consider the verse borrowed from Musset, we see a more complex way of translating retrospection onto the opera stage. Jean Starobinski explains: "C'est attribuer au héros, dans l'opéra,

⁵⁷ They add a first line echoing her name, "Manon! Manon!"; combine two of Musset's verses into one: "pour le plaisir et l'or quelle ardeur inouïe"; and change the final line to unconditional love: "Comme je t'aime!" Manon's response interjects the conditional: "Et moi, comme je t'aimerais si tu voulais..." (IV.iii).

c'est-à-dire dans l'histoire elle-même, les mots d'un poète qui se souvient d'une fiction; c'est donc introduire une dimension de réflexion nostalgique et de mémoire" (58). Prévost, Musset and Massenet, through their characters, are all participating in the same self-reflective literary dialogue. The poet remembers a fictional hero. Thinking of Manon, Des Grieux remembers the poet remembering Manon, a memory within a memory, a memory rendered more powerful by its circular effect.

Perhaps even more important than the words, though, is the music that recreates a sense of remembering. "Les retours thématiques ravivent l'ivresse du premier regard et de l'*innamoramento* dans la cour de l'hôtellerie. L'éblouissement initial s'inscrit dans une ligne mélodique qui revient lors de la scène du parloir et dans l'agonie de Manon" (Starobinski 59). The most celebrated melodies in *Manon* derive their power from the effects of memory.

For example, when Manon knows Des Grieux is about to be seized in an abduction to which she is a silent accomplice, she bids adieu to their little table, a theme she again takes up in her dying moments.

Adieu notre petite table
Qui nous réunit si souvent!
Adieu notre petite table,
Si grande pour nous cependant.
On tient, c'est inimaginable,
Si peu de place en se serrant! (II.iv)

Then a change of verb tense signals that the present scene is fading into bittersweet memories of times past.

Un même verre était le nôtre,
Chacun de nous, quand il buvait,
Y cherchait les lèvres de l'autre.

Ah! Pauvre ami comme il m'aimait! (II.iv)

Blending realism and sentimentality, Manon's plaintive song focuses her melancholic memories on concrete objects symbolizing the simplicity of happy moments they shared.

In the novel, there is no equivalent to this scene of Manon remembering tenderness she will no longer have. Des Grieux, however, does describe their emotional "last supper," as it were. Erich Auerbach cites this "interrupted supper" as an example of an "intérieur," a portrait of contemporary mores, sentimentalized and eroticized, that is frequently found in eighteenth-century novels. It is "a neatly framed, vivid, intimate picture ... whose polished elegance, tearful sentimentality and erotic and ethical frivolity represent a mixture unique in its kind" (398). In the opera, Manon paints the "intérieur." In both the novel and the opera, the protagonists' high tone lends seriousness and a sense of tragedy to the domestic scene. Although there is no mention of an erotic subject in either scene, both are steeped in sensuality.

The frame narrator is the second element of the novel's narrative structure. Renoncour, the *homme de qualité*, is Prévost's frame narrator. His role is to suggest how we might read Des Grieux's adventure. Before we hear Des Grieux's account, Renoncour predisposes us to view the protagonists with compassion and a

certain respect. At first glance he recognizes Des Grieux as "un homme qui a de la naissance et de l'éducation," and who has "un air si fin et si noble que [Renoncour se sentit] porté naturellement à lui vouloir du bien." The little that Des Grieux divulges strikes the frame narrator as so touchingly extraordinary that he is moved to offer financial assistance. Des Grieux's gratitude convinces Renoncour that he was "né quelque chose, et qu'il méritait [sa] libéralité" (15). Likewise, our first view of Manon is through the frame narrator's eyes. "[S]a vue [l']inspira du respect et de la pitié" (12).

In a similar fashion, Massenet's crowd guides our sympathies and judgments. When Brétigny and Manon majestically sweep into the festival at the Cours-la-Reine, the crowd sings:

Voici les élégantes,
Les belles indolentes,
Maîtresses des coeurs,
Aux regards vainqueurs! (III.1er.iv)

The visual image is verbally and musically reinforced: these are beautiful people leading empty lives. Manon, however, stands out. A magnificently attired courtesan, she is "ravissante [...], adorable, divine." Though of common birth, Manon appears to be a "princesse, [ou] au moins une duchesse" (II.1er.iv), and she is dressed like one. In the novel, the *homme de qualité* remarks that even in a sorry state and chained to five prostitutes, Manon stands out as "un peu mieux que ses compagnes." Under any other circumstances, he would have taken her to be a person of distinguished rank (12). In the opera, however, it is not until Manon dresses the part that the crowd acclaims her a noblewoman. Portrayed more realistically, she

does not exhibit the innate nobility that Renoncour suggests for Prévost's heroine.

When Manon and Des Grieux are about to be arrested, the crowd counsels,

Ah cédez à ses pleurs!

Pour sa jeunesse!

Grâce! Tant de beauté

Mérite que l'on ait pitié. (IV.v)

As the couple are seized, the crowd once more urges Guillot and the comte to take pity, but their pleas fall on deaf ears. Although Manon has committed no crime, that is not the basis of the crowd's plea for her release. Rather they appear to assume her guilty of something--but to know what, one would need to be familiar with the novel--and urge compassion for the same reason that is found in many of the nineteenth-century introductions to the novel: she is young and beautiful, and she suffers. Her tears in this scene are typical of the tears, both Manon's and Des Grieux's, that fill the novel and reflect the importance that tears, as an independent motif, assumed in eighteenth-century literature. Hovering between the soul and the senses, tears evoke the thrill of sentiment mixed with eroticism that the eighteenth-century audience found so tantalizing (Auerbach 397-98).

In the opera, orchestral and vocal music underscore the opposition between the brouhaha of the crowd and the isolation of the protagonists lost in reverie and torn between the fire of their own desires and the demands of the social order. The novel opens on

a courtyard in Pacy buzzing with activity. Arriving to spend the night, Renoncour, the *homme de qualité*, is surprised by the brouhaha he encounters. Everyone's curiosity has been aroused by the arrival of two wagonloads of young women. Renoncour asks an archer accompanying the convoy what is happening and learns, "Ce n'est rien, monsieur, ... c'est une douzaine de filles de joie" (34). According to Jean Starobinski, Massenet's *Manon* develops this notion of "rien" and possession that the heroine's name represents: Manon, a possessive adjective (ma) plus a negation (non). In the novel, the void created by this "rien," by this lack of concrete portraiture, sets the readers' imaginations to work envisioning their own ideal of a young woman of high rank. *Rien* is also a way a negating, of discounting Manon. The *non*, the second syllable of her name, is another negation, one that can be read as both a negation of the girl who carries the name and as the girl's refusal to be anyone's possession. For Starobinski it is the latter. Des Grieux is obsessed with the girl and with the name, as if by grasping the name he can hang on to the girl who continually eludes him and who seems to have no permanent identity. "[M]ais ce souffle, ce nom, Manon porte en lui un semblant d'identité permanente" (51). Voice, name and identity are closely interwoven throughout *Manon*. Her voice is seductively beautiful; it is the source of her irresistible appeal, and it gives her a personal identity.

Yet her name is something others give her. In the novel Des Grieux tells us, "Mademoiselle Manon Lescaut, c'est ainsi qu'elle me dit qu'on la nommait" (41). Since she rarely speaks, she exists only in the words of others; she is their possession. Proof, states

Starobinski, of the passivity that tradition has long attributed to women (52). In the opera, too, others give Manon her identity. "On m'appelle Manon" (I.viii),⁵⁸ she tells Des Grieux. And her name echoes throughout the work. It is repeated 88 times: 43 times by Des Grieux, 16 by Manon, and 29 by others. The opera repeatedly insists on naming her as if somehow to ground her identity. Des Grieux begins his letter to his father by naming her. Modifying Musset's verse in Act IV, he echoes her name, "Manon! Manon!" He is obsessed with the name. Trying to chase her memory from his mind at Saint-Sulpice, he cries, "Je ne veux que chasser au fond de ma mémoire un nom maudit! Ce nom qui m'obsède" (III.2e.iii).

References to Manon's voice also resonate throughout the opera. In the novel's scene at Saint-Sulpice, Des Grieux takes Manon's hands in his after she overwhelms him with caresses. Simultaneously giving voice to Manon and developing the role of memory, Massenet's Manon, dressed in all her splendor,⁵⁹ pleads "avec un grand charme et très caressant" (according to the stage directions),

N'est-ce plus ma main que cette main presse?

N'est-ce plus ma voix?

N'est-elle pour toi plus une caresse,

Tout comme autrefois!

[..]

⁵⁸ In Puccini's *La Bohème* (1896), Mimi's celebrated aria sounds a similar theme: "Mi chiamano Mimi, il perché non so" (They call me Mimi, why I do not know). In Puccini's and Massenet's operas, a name given by others brings to life a heroine soon to exist but in memory, a memory evoked by the mere mention of her name.

⁵⁹ She has just come from the Cours-la-Reine.

Ne suis-je plus moi? N'ai-je plus de nom?

[..]

N'est-ce plus Manon? (III.2e.vii)

With an impressive economy of means, several motifs are intertwined: remembrance, plus a voice, name and identity for Manon. As she insists, "Regarde-moi! Ne suis-je plus moi? N'est-ce plus Manon?" she presses Des Grieux to remember and to respond.

The nostalgia and beauty of the final scene are intensified when *Des Grieux* echoes Manon's words:

N'est-ce pas ma main que cette main presse,

N'est-ce pas ma voix!

N'est-elle pour toi plus une caresse

Tout comme autrefois! (V.vii)

Starobinski sums up his argument thus: "Au moment de son épuisement extatique, la passion renoue avec son origine, avec ce rien fulgurant qui a décidé de tout. Cela sonne juste. Il fallait que l'opéra glorifie ce que la musique ajoutait au roman: l'attrait irrésistible de la voix" (59). The opera not only adds, but celebrates, her voice, the gloriously irresistible voice of a mythical siren.

Massenet also accentuates the other side of Manon's character, her initial innocence and inexperience. She starts out, as a rather dreamy-eyed innocent dazzled by the excitement of her first trip. When Guillot tries to seduce her, she reacts rather naively. Shortly thereafter she turns serious as Lescaut counsels more prudent conduct (I.vi). In the next scene, after Lescaut's departure, we both hear her sadness and see it in her facial expression while an inner

struggle ensues between her yearning for pleasure and her effort to resign herself to the convent life her family intends for her. Yet another facet of her character is soon revealed when she suggests to Des Grieux that they run off in Guillot's carriage. Nonetheless, she has some doubts. She is torn between the allure of beauty and pleasure and the earlier exhortations of her cousin.

In the novel, M. de B... and Manon plot Des Grieux's arrest together (34), but in the opera, Manon is not an active participant in the plot, though Brétigny buys her silence with the promise, "Vous serez reine par la beauté! Ah, Manon, c'est la fortune!" (II.ii). Her fluctuating emotions--elation, regret, nostalgia and anguish--all convey her complexity.

Later she is transformed into a vain and sophisticated courtesan caught up in the carnival atmosphere. She is also a bit nostalgic remembering lost love. When she sees the Comte des Grieux and hears that Des Grieux is about to take orders, she implores, "Mon Dieu, donnez-moi le courage [d]e tout oser lui demander" (III.1er.vi). Learning that Des Grieux has forgotten her, she becomes lost in reverie and pays no attention to the opera and ballet Guillot has summoned for her entertainment in hopes of winning her favors. The first tableau of Act III concludes with her hasty departure for Saint-Sulpice.

From the beginning, Manon's love for Des Grieux seems much more certain in the opera and in nineteenth-century criticism than in Prévost's work. After talking to Des Grieux's father, she is visibly shaken, and her decision to seek out Des Grieux at Saint-Sulpice is purposeful. In the novel, it is more by impulse than by plan that she

goes to see him. Des Grieux's account of Manon's motives are, as usual, ambiguous. Manon hears his name in the streets. "Elle ne le reconnut pas avec certitude sous le titre d'abbé; mais un reste de curiosité, ou peut-être quelque repentir de m'avoir trahi (je n'ai jamais pu démêler lequel de ces deux sentiments) lui fit prendre intérêt à un nom si semblable au mien; elle vint en Sorbonne avec quelques autres dames" (43).

In the opera, the focus is on a complex Manon rather than on Des Grieux's self-reflective need to express and grapple with the doubts that plague him. Just before seeing Des Grieux, she begs God's pardon three times. The repetition betrays the depths of her anguish, and yet her plea is somewhat ambiguous. She seems to be pleading for forgiveness of her past sins while at the same time asking God to indulge her once more, this time by granting her the heart of one of His own servants:

Pardonnez-moi, Dieu de toute puissance,
Car si j'ose vous supplier
En implorant votre clémence,
Si ma voix de si bas peut monter jusqu'aux cieux,
Ah! c'est pour vous demander le coeur de Des Grieux!
Pardonnez-moi, mon Dieu! Pardonnez-moi, mon Dieu!
(III.2e.vi)

Turning to God adds a new dimension to Manon's character not seen in the novel. Until her transformation into a faithful, selfless, loving Manon in the New World, she is an amoral girl untroubled by questions of virtue. Nonetheless, Des Grieux assures us that "Manon n'avait jamais été une fille impie," and when he proposes marriage in

"le Nouvel Orléans," she is as eager as he to ennoble their "amour par des serments que la religion autorise" (190). Massenet envisions a Manon close to this idealized heroine. It is something of an inversion of roles because the operatic Des Grieux sheds his cloak of religious language.

Throughout the novel, he exhibits a moral delicacy that causes him a shame and remorse not evident in the opera. He has an "aversion naturelle pour le vice" (17). Intent on self-justification, he is caught up in the conflict between *liberté* and *fatalité*, *grâce* and *Providence (chrétienne)*, guilt and innocence. Des Grieux's conversation is a blend of Christian and pagan vocabulary. More particularly, he frequently uses the traditional literary vocabulary of tragedy ("fatale" and "funeste," for example). At Saint-Sulpice, he responds to Manon "avec un mélange profane d'expressions amoureuses et théologiques" (45). His friend Tiberge, a character not found in the opera, is his conscience. Tiberge argues for adherence to conventional Christian virtues, and Des Grieux often uses religious discourse to appeal for the compassion of Tiberge and other defenders of established patriarchal values. In the opera, other than his appeal to God ("Mon Dieu, purifiez mon âme!" III.2e.iii), just before his unexpected reunion with Manon, he paints his conflict in the language of classical Greek tragedy and casts Manon as a pagan goddess, a "véritable sirène" (loc. cit.). As in Greek myths, he seems to have no choice but to surrender to his fatal destiny. "Et dussé-je sur moi faire crouler les cieux, [m]a vie est dans tes yeux! Ah, viens, Manon! Je t'aime, je t'aime! (III.2e.vii).

Based on Prévost's depiction of Manon's conversion and death in the New World, the opera portrays a humbled, repentant Manon who dies on the road to Le Havre with a grief-stricken Des Grieux at her side. In both the novel and the opera, Des Grieux's decision to share her exile and misery awakens Manon to an understanding of what love really is and leads to her conversion: "Je ne sais qu'aujourd'hui la bonté de ton coeur, / Et si bas qu'elle soit, hélas, Manon réclame / Pardon, pitié pour son erreur" (V.v). Recognizing her impending death, she still has the self-awareness and wit to poke gentle fun at herself and her coquettishness. Spotting a shining star and comparing it to the sparkling diamonds she formerly coveted, she murmurs, "Ah, le beau diamant! Tu vois, je suis encore coquette" (V.v).

Massenet's heroine displays personality, depth of character and individuality. Yet she is also a more loving figure closer to Des Grieux's idealized *vision* of her in the novel than the *actual* heroine he depicts in that narrative. After arguing that the Romantics tried to tame Manon, Leon Cellier concludes that the one who succeeded was Massenet, "un musicien qui savait trop bien... que la musique adoucit les moeurs" (268). Above all, Manon is a figure of enchantment, a literary legend that had already entered the cultural consciousness when the opera was composed. Her death on the opera stage is more poignant than tragic. The opera is a celebration of her feminine charms. Forever elusive and enigmatic, she is at once more real and more mythical, more individualized and more idealized than Prévost's original. She is simply marvelously, surprisingly and delightfully captivating. And when she sings,

neither man nor God⁶⁰ apparently can resist that enchanting voice. Therein lies her perennial power to bewitch us.

Massenet's *Des Grieux*, on the other hand, is a less well-developed figure than in the novel. Except for his inner struggle at Saint-Sulpice to chase from his soul the "douce image" of the "perfidie Manon" and the text borrowed from Musset, Massenet's *Des Grieux* evidences little ambivalence. Though his escapades with Manon lead him to a fall from aristocratic grace and alienation from his father, his transgressions are but common offenses. He exhibits neither the initial naïveté nor exceptional sensitivity of Prévost's hero, and his basic character evinces little depth and undergoes minimal transformation *within* the opera. The significant differences are those between Massenet's hero and Prévost's original. The operatic *Des Grieux* is never imprisoned, not even by his father. Though it is suggested he cheats at cards, there is no evidence that he defrauds anyone. We are given fleeting glimpses of his latent violence (II.ii and IV.v), but in fact he attacks no one, and murder is hardly among his offenses.

In part this may be a response to genre conventions, but more significantly, the substantial differences between the fictional and operatic *Des Grieux* suggest a shifting social order and a late nineteenth-century audience that would be offended by the behavior of Prévost's hero, by a decadent aristocrat who could kill a servant with impunity. Ironically, it is still a man's world, so on the lyric

⁶⁰ After she implores God, "Si ma voix de si bas peut monter jusqu'aux cieux / Ah! c'est pour vous demander le coeur de Des Grieux!" (loc. cit.), she does, in fact, win back the seminarian's heart.

stage, only the perfidious *femme fatale* merits punishment despite having committed no crime. Yet she did the unthinkable; she wounded male pride. She spurned Guillot's attention and generosity for Des Grieux's love, and he wants vengeance. More importantly, this is still a world that believes man's desire emanates from woman. To control passion's power to wreak havoc in our lives, the woman must be controlled.

With so many differences between Prévost's novel and Massenet's opera, what has *not* changed? Why does the opera *feel* like the original story? In other words, what is the essence of *Manon Lescaut*? And among the modifications Massenet makes, which are most significant? What does Massenet, with the help of Meilhac and Gille, add to the story?

Massenet's *Manon* remains the lyric tale of ill-fated love between a ravishing young temptress who loves pleasure and a young man equally enamored of her. Destined for the priesthood, Des Grieux is thunderstruck by the vision of a beautiful girl who awakens his latent sexuality with such a force that he forsakes family and fortune, foregoes the priesthood, and surrenders pride, honor and decency to the irresistible charms of this enchanting beauty. Her love of luxury and her consequent infidelity lead them on a downward spiral to shame and disaster, which ends with her deportation and touching death, a death which ultimately immortalizes his devotion and the power of her charms.

Much of what at first appears changed is, in fact, transposed to the lyric stage, though often subtly or cursorily, as seen, for example,

in the motif of remembering that runs throughout the work and in Manon's brief explanation of why they need money. By simplifying the plot, Massenet focuses more attention on the atmosphere and on Manon's inner conflicts. The emphasis on Manon's emotional state and the lack of credible conflict between Des Grieux and Guillot internalize the conflict, which, though largely undeveloped, is, in part, a struggle for individuality, a rejection of the paternal values represented by Guillot and Des Grieux's father.

The principal differences, then, between the opera and the novel are not the more obvious plot changes, but rather the sometimes subtle modification of character. Both of Massenet's protagonists are more demure than Prévost's originals. Their real crimes have been expurgated. Any implied criticism seems to be directed at the corruption of the Ancien Régime and the "goût de frivolité et la dépravation des mœurs" (7) which concerned the author of an anonymous 1830 preface. Yet the French in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century had a fascination with the Ancien Régime, a system they had long since rejected politically. Their relationship to Manon is somewhat analogous. Publicly they condemn her and yet she captures their imagination in a way no pristine heroine can match. Massenet's very *French* opera reflects an affection and compassion for Manon and a certain fascination with and nostalgia for the Ancien Régime, an important chapter in France's glorious past.

Whether the modified portrayal of Manon and Des Grieux is motivated chiefly by a desire not to offend the opera-going public, by Massenet's personal vision of the story, or by genre consideration

is difficult to ascertain with certainty, but is most likely a combination of all three factors. Part of Massenet's originality is that he develops the comical aspect of what Des Grieux calls his and Manon's "triste comédie" (34). Since Des Grieux and Manon's offenses are largely obliterated, there is no need for the moralizing Tiberge. Nor is moralizing high in entertainment value, as recognized by the poet who reminds Manon, "Tu m'amuses autant que Tiberge m'ennuie" (*Namouna*, stanza LX). Unlike *Carmen*, where a figure of innocence, Micaëla, is added as a musical and moral foil to Carmen, Massenet's *Manon* has already minimized Des Grieux and Manon's transgressions to such an extent that no figure of innocence is needed to balance and soften the impact of the protagonists' immorality. Quite the contrary, the characters added are three Regency courtesans whose beauty and riches Manon first admires and then surpasses.

Significantly, Des Grieux's character undergoes the greatest transformation. With much of his ambivalence lost and his inner conflict glossed over, Des Grieux also becomes a less interesting character. While he is still a privileged young man with a devotion to Manon that sets him apart, he is no longer the apostle of a new nobility of the heart depicted in the novel.

In Massenet's *Manon*, the spotlight is on Manon. She is the much richer character. New depth and complexity mark her evolution as they did the evolution of a whole society of burgeoning individuals in the nineteenth century.⁶¹ Typical of Massenet's

⁶¹ For more on this topic, see volume IV of *A History of Private Life* (page 455, for example), Michelle Perrot ed.

century, Manon, too, acquires some individuality, an identity. She is both the young innocent of Act I and the gold-digging courtesan of Acts III (first tableau) and IV. We twice see her fall from grace and plead for pardon.⁶² By de-emphasizing the details of her decadence and balancing the tragic with the comic, Massenet reduces the menace posed by Manon while intensifying the lyric drama of her life.

In the opera we *see* Manon, and more importantly, we *hear* her, that exquisitely beautiful and hauntingly seductive voice and the music that exalts the young innocent, the sophisticated courtesan, and the repentant lover. Because Manon loves greatly and dies opportunely, readers and opera enthusiasts, like Prévost's Des Grieux, tend to idealize her. The proliferation of works inspired by *Manon Lescaut*, in a variety of genres, raises her legend to mythic proportions. This masterpiece of musical drama crowns Manon's mythical standing as the Eternal Feminine, a muse capable of firing men's imaginations by unleashing their latent fears and fantasies and transporting them to new lyrical heights. She is not such a passive creature, such a "rien," after all. Over the years, many have concluded that the *Histoire de Manon Lescaut et du Chevalier des Grieux* is a story about Manon,⁶³ not about Des Grieux, nor even

⁶² This exaltation of pity that counterbalances the excesses of masculine power is typical of the nineteenth-century (*History of Private Life*, Vol. IV, page 605).

⁶³ Mylne seems to suggest that interest centered on Manon practically from the beginning. She writes that "as early as 1746 one edition carried the title *Histoire de Manon*, thus recognizing that she was the main attraction of the book" (33). However, it should be noted that the 1885 and 1886 editions, among many others, carried the title *Histoire de Manon Lescaut et du Chevalier des Grieux*, so critics have long differed on this issue. In the next chapter, I

about Manon and Des Grieux. That is what Massenet shows us better than anyone before him, and the Manon he creates is a figure of enchantment who seems to captivate every man she meets--but without any conscious effort.

Set within the Regency, Massenet's *Manon* can exalt the beauty of her story without dwelling on its moral implications. The novel's hero captured Manon's archetypal essence: she is "l'Amour même." As narrator of their story, Des Grieux tries to transform the earthly Manon into an idealized Manon. His narrative represents our need to ennoble ordinary mortals and capture a universal essence in a beautiful story that transcends banal reality and celebrates the magic and mystery of love. The opera crystallizes that effort. When Manon's story is set to music, it is clear that her power of enchantment makes the work particularly well-suited to the lyric stage and accounts for much of Manon's enduring appeal.

will argue that the *novel*, unlike the opera, is more about Des Grieux than Manon.

Chapter 5

THE BIRTH OF A STORYTELLER IN *MANON LESCAUT*

*J'ose à peine remuer la cendre de
ce souvenir." "Je ne sais encore si
c'est une réalité ou une illusion.
"La Morte amoureuse"*

The Chevalier des Grieux's love affair with Manon Lescaut provides rich evidence that many experiences in life are better in the retelling than in the living. His lived experience is a life-altering passion for a blossoming beauty of inferior social station which leads the young aristocrat on a downward spiral to degradation and disaster. But when he recounts his illicit passion to the Marquis de Renoncour, he transforms this rather tawdry personal affair into a powerful expression of a universal experience: the magic, confusion and disgrace experienced by a young man caught in the grips of an "amour fatal" (61).

After just a few weeks with Des Grieux, Manon betrays him. Forcefully separated from her and sequestered in his father's house, Des Grieux is torn by conflicting emotions, but books help him regain some peace of mind: "Tous mes sentiments n'étaient qu'une alternative perpétuelle de haine et d'amour, d'espérance ou de désespoir. [...] On me donna des livres, qui servirent à rendre un peu de tranquillité à mon âme" (37-38). Having experienced love, he discovers new meaning in the classical poets: "Les lumières que je devais à l'amour me firent trouver de la clarté dans quantité d'endroits d'Horace et de Virgile, qui m'avaient paru obscurs

auparavant" (38). New sensations and new feelings expand and transform his consciousness. A flood of emotions clamor for expression and understanding. The young man, who claims to have had "le défaut d'être excessivement timide" (19) before meeting Manon, now has something to say, "l'amour [lui] ayant ouvert extrêmement l'esprit" (23).

He composes his first literary work, a commentary on Book IV of the *Aeneid* (38). In Book IV Virgil gives allegorical expression to desire and the nature of young manhood,⁶⁴ a theme with which Des Grieux identifies. Like Des Grieux, Aeneas is snared by a fatal passion that leads to confusion and disgrace. Eventually Aeneas chooses duty over passion. After he abandons his beloved and faithful Dido, she dies. "C'était un coeur tel que le mien qu'il fallait à la fidèle Didon" (38), Des Grieux concludes, stressing his own capacity for fidelity.

Inspired by classical literature, he idealizes his love affair with Manon and imagines himself the faithful and devoted lover Dido needed. Recounting his adventures to Renoncour, Des Grieux casts himself not as a disgraced or foolish aristocrat, but rather as a classical hero in a tragedy of ill-fated love. The problem is that Manon is not a faithful Dido, at least not without the literary license of a nascent storyteller who transforms the object of his desire into a literary heroine worthy of his devotion.

Of course, if she were faithful, Des Grieux would experience no compulsion to tell his story repeatedly as he seeks to understand and

⁶⁴ Throughout this chapter, the material on the *Aeneid* is drawn from Bernardus Silvestris's *Commentary on the First Six Books of Virgil's Aeneid*.

justify his behavior, no need to fictionalize his experience as he tries to give it shape and meaning. However, the aristocratic and the classical literary traditions in which he was raised prove to be ineffectual guides unable to account for the likes of Manon Lescaut. To tell his story, he will need to create a new value system and a new genre. In this chapter we will study Des Grieux's development as a storyteller, examine his narrative techniques, and analyze how he turns shame and degradation into an argument for a new nobility of the heart and how he transforms "la plus volage et la plus perfide de toutes les créatures" (36) into "an amante incomparable" (198), the most perfect of all beings (200).

When Des Grieux, Manon, and her brother have dinner with M. de G... M..., Des Grieux has an opportunity to expand his burgeoning literary talents. Posing as Manon's brother and feigning inexperience in the ways of the world, he creates and tells a story for his own amusement and that of Manon and Lescaut. "Je trouvai l'occasion ... de ... raconter [à M. de G... M...] sa propre histoire, et le mauvais sort qui le menaçait. (...) Je faisais son portrait au naturel; mais l'amour-propre l'empêcha de s'y reconnaître, et je l'achevai si adroitement qu'il fut le premier à le trouver fort risible" (85). He is developing his capacity for deceit and realizing that, with a little imagination, truth can be altered and manipulated to create an entertaining, compelling scenario with more than one layer of meaning.

Writing to his father, "d'une manière si tendre et si soumise qu'en relisant [sa] lettre, [il se flatta] d'obtenir quelque chose du coeur paternel" (115), Des Grieux becomes a satisfied reader of his

own text, aware of and pleased with himself as a writer. At the end of the first part of *Manon Lescaut*, Renoncour says, "Notre attention lui fit juger que nous l'avions écouté avec plaisir. Il nous assura que nous trouverions quelque chose encore de plus intéressant dans la suite de son histoire" (116). Thus Des Grieux does not promise a true and complete account of his adventures, but rather an interesting story.

He is a man who appreciates a good story. When Manon gives him an "explanation" that he knows is untrue, he observes, "Par un tour naturel de génie qui m'est particulier, je fus touché de l'ingénuité de son récit, et de cette manière bonne et ouverte avec laquelle elle me racontait jusqu'aux circonstances dont j'étais le plus offensé" (147-48). Touched by a storytelling technique similar to his own, Des Grieux is aware of Manon's talent for invention and of his own literary sensibilities, sensibilities that reach full flower when he tells Renoncour his tale. Although this is the first time he recounts the entire story of his fateful attachment, it is not the first time he has narrated certain episodes. He hones his rhetorical and narrative skills while telling parts of his story to eight others: his father, Tiberge, Lescaut, the père supérieur at Saint-Lazare, the Lieutenant général de Police, M. de T..., the ship's captain, and the Governor of Louisiana. His first is his father.

When Des Grieux's father begins making fun of his son for having been Manon's "jolie dupe" (33), Des Grieux remains silent. His father continues to detail Manon's infidelity. When he bluntly portrays her betrayal, Des Grieux faints. Regaining consciousness, thoughts of betrayal loosen Des Grieux's tongue. Along with a torrent

of tears, he unleashes "les plaintes les plus tristes et les plus touchantes" (34-35). Des Grieux is perceptive enough to notice his father's sympathetic reaction but has not yet learned to turn sympathy to personal advantage. He pleads with his father to be allowed to return to Paris to kill Monsieur B.... As a result of this indiscreet outburst, his father locks him in an upstairs room. Later, when his father tries to reason with him, he again cries and talks of vengeance, a reaction that earns him another six months of sequestration.

When Des Grieux meets his father two years later, while imprisoned at Châtelet, the fledgling storyteller has learned to elicit a more favorable response by adapting his story to his audience. Arguing that society is corrupt, he contends he has done no worse than others. It is a strategy he tried out earlier on Tiberge using ecclesiastical references: "[U]n grand nombre d'évêques et d'autres prêtres ... savent accorder fort bien une maîtresse avec un bénéfice" (65). Talking to his aristocratic father, he changes the comparison from men of the cloth to nobles. Because his father is upset by the stain on family honor created by his son's escapades, Des Grieux endeavors to convince his father that he has done no worse than other aristocrats. "À chaque faute dont je lui faisais l'aveu, j'avais soin de joindre des exemples célèbres pour en diminuer la honte" (163). He is aware of his rhetorical skills: "[Mon père] fut ... touché du tour que j'avais donné à mes excuses" (163). Having learned to adapt his rhetoric to the situation, Des Grieux is successful in persuading his father to get him released from prison.

A fatal passion, he argues, is the source of all his woes. "C'est l'amour, vous le savez, qui a causé toutes mes fautes. Fatale passion!" He is not in prison because of violence, deceit or kidnapping. Quite the contrary. "L'amour m'a rendu *trop tendre*, trop passionné, *trop fidèle* et peut-être, trop complaisant pour les désirs d'une maîtresse toute charmante; voilà mes crimes" (162, emphasis added). The young hustler who has brought shame to his family and himself argues that he has "trop d'honneur" not to condemn himself for having "desseins sur la bourse des deux G... M..." and asks his father to "pardonner cette faiblesse aux deux violentes passions qui [l']avaient agité, la vengeance et l'amour" (164). Vengeance, according to this argument, is a violent passion but not a crime.

Wanting to believe he is still the quiet and gentle soul he was when he met Manon, Des Grieux remains incapable of acknowledging that his passion for Manon has transformed him into a man given to violent outbursts whenever his desire is thwarted. His narrative does not depict any objective reality. Rather, it is a subjective, incomplete account influenced by illusions and delusions that have become a part of his identity. His tears, his modest and respectful attitude, his appeal for pity, his self-blame, and his stance as tragic hero work in concert to arouse his father's pity and prompt him to obtain Des Grieux's release from prison. These are themes and narrative strategies he has successfully deployed more than once, strategies that seem to have taken shape during a conversation with his friend Tiberge, whose friendship surpasses "les plus célèbres exemples de l'antiquité" (18).

After losing everything in the fire at Chaillot, Des Grieux turns to the virtuous and devoted Tiberge. In the *Aeneid*, Mercury chides Aeneas for his disgraceful behavior and persuades him to put passion aside in order to fulfill his duty. Tiberge likewise tries to reawaken Des Grieux's sense of duty. Confused and embarrassed when his friend meets him in the Palais-Royal garden, Des Grieux asks if he can still consider Tiberge a friend. Tiberge responds that "[s]es malheurs mêmes, ... [s]es fautes et [s]es désordres, avaient redoublé sa tendresse pour [Des Grieux]" (58-59). As if taking a cue from Tiberge, Des Grieux explains what has happened since he fled Saint-Sulpice.

Je le satisfis; et loin d'altérer quelque chose à la vérité, ou de diminuer mes fautes pour les faire trouver plus excusables, je lui parlai de ma passion avec toute la force qu'elle m'inspirait. Je la lui représentai comme un de ces coups particuliers du destin qui s'attache à la ruine d'un misérable, et dont il est aussi impossible à la vertu de se défendre qu'il l'a été à la sagesse de les prévoir. Je lui fis une vive peinture de mes agitations, de mes craintes, du désespoir où j'étais deux heures avant que de le voir, et de celui dans lequel j'allais retomber, si j'étais abandonné par mes amis aussi impitoyablement que par la fortune; enfin, j'attendris tellement le bon Tiberge, que je le vis aussi affligé par la compassion que j'étais par le sentiment de mes peines. (59)

"Représentai" is a key word. This is a *représentation*, a dramatic tale artfully told to take advantage of Tiberge's "tendresse" in order to elicit his pity and gain access to his purse.

Des Grieux contends that he has not altered the truth. Perhaps he has not altered events, but the heart of Des Grieux's story does not lie in a chronicling of events. It lies in the mood he creates and the interpretation of events he offers. He appeals to Tiberge's emotions, not his sense of reason or virtue. To understand how subjective Des Grieux's account is, we need only consider the story his father would tell. Likely it would be to the effect that here is a foolishly naive young man who, caught in the claws of a duplicitous and avaricious whore, brings shame upon himself and his family.

Des Grieux, on the other hand, gives free rein to his passion and imagination. Displaying an artist's self-awareness of sensitivity, he savors his eloquence. Although his bond with Manon is carnal, he discreetly circumvents any account of the "plaisirs de l'amour" (40) which inflame his passion. As he attempts to impose order on this sensory firestorm, his imagination is inseparable from his senses. Both his lived and his literary experiences stimulate his fantasy, a fantasy that is displacing reality. Feeling ashamed and seeking self-justification, he suggests a comparison between himself and the literary hero, the victim of a tragic fate, he imagines himself to be. He paints a vivid picture of his apprehensions and despair, a picture calculated to garner Tiberge's compassion. His dramatic story, followed by his declaration that death would be preferable to separation from Manon, transforms Des Grieux's escapades into pathos.

As Deloffre and Picard have demonstrated, even when talking to a priest, Des Grieux, a former seminarian, more closely identifies his situation with literary tradition, especially with Racinian and classical tragedy, than with theological tradition. Des Grieux suggests that he is a tragic hero. Like classical heroes and heroines, he is the victim of fateful forces. "Oreste, Roxane, Phèdre, sont des victimes exemplaires du Destin; Des Grieux se glisse parmi elles, et l'univers tragique se constitue autour de lui" (Deloffre CXXX-CXXXI).

Casting himself in the role of tragic hero, his passion as a fatal attraction that destiny has visited upon a hapless victim, Des Grieux cloaks his story in the rhetoric of classical tragedy. In Racinian tragedy, love is "aveugle" and "funeste." So too in *Manon Lescaut*. "L'amour suffisait seul pour [lui] fermer les yeux sur toutes [les] fautes [de Manon]" (148). Des Grieux suffers from a "funeste ascendant" (42); Manon is subject to "funestes pensées" (183); they both suffer a "funeste événement."⁶⁵

According to Jean Sgard, Des Grieux marshals all the resources of Ciceronian rhetoric. His eloquence renders his apparent modesty, sincerity and suffering all the more poignant. Skillfully Des Grieux guides Tiberge's response--and ours. "Il n'est pas besoin de m'aimer autant que vous faites pour ... être attendri [par mes peines]" (59). He opposes his friend's "compassion" to fortune's "impitoyable" manner of abandoning him. This is typical of Des Grieux's habit of manipulating his interlocutors' sympathies and judgments by reducing situations to polar opposites and appealing to their

⁶⁵ Other uses of *funeste* are found on pages 73, 125, 164 and 183.

emotions. Frequently, he notices or is even able to predict the reaction of his interlocutors. Here he notices that the "bon" Tiberge is "affligé par la compassion" (59). "Bon," of course, is not an evaluation of Tiberge's moral fiber. Rather, he is deemed good because he is the ideal reader, one who responds compassionately.

Despite Des Grieux's seeming sincerity and forthrightness in admitting his errors, lies of omission are apparent. When Des Grieux asks Tiberge to deliver a letter that will set in motion his plan to escape from Saint-Lazare, he makes no mention of his intention to flee. Just before going into exile with Manon, Des Grieux writes Tiberge to ask for money once again. Declaring, "je ne puis ... laisser [Manon] partir sans quelques soulagements" (181), he conveniently omits mentioning that he intends to follow her to the New World.

Taking the captain aside on the voyage to Louisiana, Des Grieux even convinces himself that lies are not lies: "Pour m'attirer de lui quelque considération, je lui avais découvert une partie de mes infortunes. Je ne crus pas me rendre coupable d'un mensonge honteux en lui disant que j'étais marié à Manon" (183-84). Judging which of his woes are most likely to touch the captain's heart, Des Grieux reveals selected episodes from his story, and as might be expected, the sympathy that he succeeds in arousing results in better treatment for him and Manon.

At Saint-Lazare he also develops his aptitude for drama and deceit, his ability to transform fact into fantasy. Taking advantage of the priest's hope of effecting a conversion in Des Grieux, the chevalier resolves to increase the priest's good opinion of his "excellent fond de caractère" (82), not because he has experienced any real conversion,

but rather because he sees it as the surest way to shorten his imprisonment. To give the priest proof of the change that the priest *wants* to see, Des Grieux plays the role of a chastened young man: "Je feignis de m'appliquer à l'étude. (...) Cependant il n'était qu'extérieur. ... [J]e jouais, à Saint-Lazare, un personnage d'hypocrite" (83). He admits that his modest, sincere air disguises his real objective: escape from Saint-Lazare. "J'observais soigneusement le visage et les discours du supérieur, pour m'assurer de ce qu'il pensait de moi, et je me faisais une étude de lui plaire, comme à l'arbitre de ma destinée" (83).

Although the priest is as virtuous and serious as Tiberge, he is easy-going, perhaps even a bit senile. He will be easily swayed by Des Grieux's tears and lofty rhetoric. To elicit the priest's pity, Des Grieux passionately recounts his tale and judiciously seasons it with cries to heaven: "O Dieu! ... justice du Ciel!" (85) and "O Ciel!" (86).

He begins with respect, tears, and despair. Speaking in superlatives, he paints a vivid picture of his "insurmontable passion" (86). Rhetorically he directs the priest's--and thus the reader's--response: "Vous êtes bon, vous aurez pitié de moi" (86). He creates the illusion of sincerity and tragedy. He glosses over those aspects of the story that are at odds with his objective and self-image. His attack on G... M... becomes incidental in Des Grieux's version of events: G... M... is a barbarian, Des Grieux and Manon his victims. Playing on his interlocutor's self-image, Des Grieux calls the priest "bon" and opposes the good father and himself, a man dominated by a great love, to the despicable, cowardly and unworthy G... M..., a man prone to the most hideous cruelties. He is so successful in playing

the role of tragic hero and portraying himself as a sensitive young man victimized by a brute that the priest, who is also his prison keeper, endeavors to comfort him!.

Throughout his tale, Des Grieux posits reductive opposites. Those who are moved by his and Manon's anguish are depicted as good, compassionate and generous souls, those opposed to their designs as barbarians, a recurring motif. Some form of "barbare," used thirteen times,⁶⁶ is a motif introduced early. The archers transporting Manon to Le Havre "ont la barbarie de ... repousser [Des Grieux] brutalement" whenever he tries to approach Manon. Only a "barbare" (47) would not be moved by Manon's tender remorse at Saint-Sulpice. The concierge at the Hôpital is the only one, "dans le séjour de la dureté et de la barbarie" (167), to react compassionately to Des Grieux's suffering. Even his father is characterized as "barbare" (194) when he fails to respond compassionately to Des Grieux's "plaintes." In the scene at Saint-Lazare, Des Grieux deflects attention once again from his own behavior--he has just tried to strangle G... M...--by claiming that G... M... is "le barbare qui venait de [l']assassiner" (85). G... M... 's real crime? He sent Manon to the Hôpital.

The rhetoric with which Des Grieux deflects attention from his attempt to dupe and later strangle G... M... is so effective that it completely changes the priest's understanding of events. "Il me dit qu'il n'avait jamais compris mon aventure de la manière dont je la racontais" (87). The père Supérieur goes to the Lieutenant général

⁶⁶ Pages 11, 14, 30, 47, 79, 85, 86, 143, 167, 172 (twice), 193 and 194.

de Police to plead for leniency for Des Grieux. Leniency, however, does not lead to a release from prison, so Des Grieux plots his own escape. And when he kills a servant to implement his plan, he devotes but a single sentence to the deed. Then he adds, "Voilà de quoi vous êtes cause, mon Père" (97). It is a familiar pattern. He shifts responsibility to someone else, first "le bon Père" and later Lescaut (97). This lack of remorse over the murder of a servant may be explicable by the chevalier's social standing in early eighteenth-century France. Nonetheless, his unwillingness to accept personal responsibility is yet another reminder that he renders a very subjective account.

When Des Grieux must deal directly with the Lieutenant général de Police, he notices that the officer is "un juge raisonnable"-i.e., inclined to attribute Des Grieux's transgressions to imprudence and folly rather than malice. Des Grieux explains his situation "d'une manière si respectueuse et si modérée, [que le Lieutenant général de Police] parut extrêmement satisfait de [s]es réponses, ... et il sentait disposé à ... rendre service [à Des Grieux], en faveur de [s]a naissance et de [s]a jeunesse" (160). Class is an underlying issue felt throughout the novel, and Des Grieux benefits from a society indulgent toward young people with aristocratic origins. The priest at Saint-Lazare, the Lieutenant général de Police, M. de T... and Renoncour all give him special treatment because of his class.

At the beginning of the novel, before we meet Des Grieux, the Marquis de Renoncour predisposes us to view Des Grieux as a young man of good breeding who is worthy of our interest and respect. He has "un air si fin et si noble" that Renoncour feels "porté

naturellement à lui vouloir du bien." It is a narrative technique used by the author, frame narrator and storytelling hero. The frame narrator or Des Grieux predisposes the reader to view a character favorably or unfavorably before revealing what the character says or does. Before we learn anything about Manon, Renoncour tells us she is a young woman "dont l'air et la figure étaient si peu conformes à sa condition, qu'en tout autre état je l'eusse prise pour une personne du premier rang" (11-12). Her sadness and the filth covering her inspire him with "respect" and "pitié." She turns away so that people cannot see her face. The gesture is "si naturel qu'il paraissait venir d'un sentiment de modestie" (12). Similarly, Des Grieux favorably depicts anyone who responds compassionately to his and Manon's plight and negatively anyone opposed to their desires. For example, he paints G... M... as a barbarian, the guards charged with transporting the convoy of prostitutes to Le Havre as "misérables" and "lâches coquins" (13) before disclosing that he attacked them and then complaining that they limit his access to Manon. Tiberge, on the other hand, has "un zèle et une générosité" (18) unsurpassed in the annals of friendship. Before revealing that M. de T... helps Manon escape from prison, Des Grieux announces that M. de T...'s appearance and manners augur well for him. Of course, this is *Prévost's* narrative strategy, but he attributes the same device to his narrator/hero.

Returning to France after Manon's death, the nascent storyteller meets Renoncour and recounts the full history of his fateful passion. The narrative strategies developed while spinning his stories-within-the-story are evident, but the larger story is a much

richer, more complex narrative complete with character, plot, and theme. Whether his narrative shapes or reflects his fate, it gives life to the destiny he imagines for himself.

Their fateful first meeting is the *coup de foudre*. When he sees Manon in that Amiens courtyard, she is "si charmante" that Des Grieux finds himself disoriented and "enflammé tout d'un coup jusqu'au transport" (19). It is a sexual awakening for a young man who had never thought about the "différence des sexes" (19). For Des Grieux, as for Aeneas, excitement of the flesh leads to desire, and he is spontaneously propelled toward "la maîtresse de [s]on coeur" (19).

Much of the power of his narrative lies in his attempts to articulate his feelings. When Manon appears unexpectedly in the celebrated scene at Saint-Sulpice, Des Grieux experiences "a total disorientation of his inherited categories of perception and their accompanying modes of discourse" (Josephs 187), just as he did at their first meeting. She is a dazzling enchantress beyond description. He attempts to express the fear and chaos that grip him as he stands speechless and trembling before her blinding beauty and troubling sensuality.

Quel passage, en effet de la situation tranquille où j'avais été, aux mouvements tumultueux que je sentais renaître! J'en étais épouvanté. Je frémissais, comme il arrive lorsqu'on se trouve la nuit dans une campagne écartée: on se croit transporté dans un nouvel ordre de choses; on y est saisi d'une horreur secrète, dont on ne se remet

qu'après avoir considéré longtemps tous les environs.

(45)

Struggling to understand and explain his reaction, he talks of a passage, but it is a movement of his heart, mind and soul, not a physical movement. He describes the disturbing, frightening sensations that so easily overwhelm his hard-won serenity and propel him into a "un nouvel ordre de choses." His metaphor suggests that understanding, along with a less terrifying view of this captivating creature, will come later. Regaining his speech, he speaks in a new language, "un mélange profane d'expressions amoureuses et théologiques" (45). Despite the tinge of theology, his discourse resonates with the power of Manon's earthly charms. Throughout his narrative, however, he persists in this process of spiritualization as he seeks to deal with the unfamiliar reality represented by Manon. Transforming her into an abstraction, "l'Amour même" (44), he attempts to move from sensation to understanding.

Translating Manon into linguistic form allows Des Grieux to dominate her and to relive and reshape the memory of his great passion while grappling with the questions that haunt him, questions about the nature of passion, about Manon, about their relationship, and about himself. He struggles to put a name to his experience and to understand by what fatality love, "une passion innocente" became "une source de misères et de désordres," and how he, who had led a life "si sage et si réglée" (17), became "si criminel" (72).

In the course of his tale he will often describe the "désordre" created by Manon's bewitching power over him. He is embarrassed by the realization that his life is dominated by forces he feels

helpless to control. Her sexuality is a disturbing presence that obliterates his self-control, causing him to behave in scandalous ways it shames him to admit. He frequently depicts himself in a state of confusion and smarts at "la honte et l'indignité de [s]es chaînes" (61). For Des Grieux, like Aeneas, desire leads to impurity of the flesh, causes confusion, and clouds judgment and discretion. In the *Aeneid*, not even the public disgrace of a bad reputation checks Aeneas's scandalous behavior, nor does it Des Grieux's. As long as Manon lives, she can erupt at any moment and turn his life upside down.

By imposing his script on her after her death, he wrests control from Manon and regains some control of his own life. There is no possibility of her compromising his story or disproving his assessment of her character. Only after her death is he able to take control of his script, reconcile purity and desire, and become once again "douce et tranquille" (17). His narrative melds his life experience with his literary experience to stimulate fantasies that displace sordid realities.

Des Grieux is on his way to meet his brother when he meets Renoncour in Calais. It has been three or four years since the two brothers have met. Quite possibly the story he tells Renoncour is a trial run of the story he will tell his brother and friends later on in an attempt to narrate his way back into the traditional Old World social milieu in which he grew up. Manon's death provides the necessary preamble for the re-establishment of the traditional patriarchal social order and for Des Grieux's reintegration into that social order. He recounts his adventures to Renoncour, a member of his social class. William Ray argues that by listening to Des Grieux's

story, this older nobleman, who is touched by Manon and yet possesses the principles of virtue which the chevalier has transgressed, can perform Des Grieux's reintegration into the social order (192).

Des Grieux tells his story just after learning of his father's death, to which he fears his "égarements" (204) may have contributed, but this realization comes to him in the time of the narration as he comes to understand the shamefulness of his conduct. In part his story is an attempt to persuade himself that his behavior was not so scandalous as to have been a contributing factor in his father's death. To admit responsibility for that death--and, symbolically, for the death of the old order--would be to negate his role as a classical hero victimized by a tragic destiny.

Throughout his story, his violent passion is at odds with his gentle self-image. Citing aristocratic origins, he notes that he comes from a good family, that he led an exemplary life as a student, and that he has an innate aversion to vice. "J'ai l'humeur naturellement douce et tranquille" (17). His use of the present tense suggests that his basic nature remains unchanged, yet it is an assessment difficult to reconcile with his violent outbursts: his desire to kill B..., attempt to strangle G... M..., his murder of a servant, his duel with Synnelet, the "apoplexie violente" (66), etc. Unable to justify his violence or to reconcile it with his self-image, he claims that others provoke him, he blames someone else, or he simply glosses over his violent behavior. His self-assessment, in other words, is fictionalized and incomplete. As narrator, he lacks the intellectual and moral distance

needed to challenge the inconsistencies in his story. The problem is reflected in the confusion of tenses.

Des Grieux intersperses his narrative with frequent judgments in the present tense, often using the subject pronoun "on" to introduce generalizations. Because he so readily mixes past and present tenses, it is difficult to distinguish between the narrator and protagonist. Reacting to the letter in which Manon announces that she has run off with M. de G... M..., both protagonist and narrator appear suspended in confusion as Des Grieux struggles to express how he felt.

Je demeurai, après cette lecture, dans un état qui me serait difficile à décrire car j'ignore encore aujourd'hui par quelle espèce de sentiments je fus alors agité. Ce fut une de ces situations uniques auxquelles on n'a rien éprouvé qui soit semblable. On ne saurait les expliquer aux autres, parce qu'ils n'en ont pas l'idée; et l'on a peine à se les bien démêler à soi-même, parce qu'étant seules de leur espèce, cela ne se lie à rien dans la mémoire, et ne peut même être rapproché d'aucun sentiment connu. Cependant, de quelque nature que fussent les miens, il est certain qu'il devait y entrer de la douleur, du dépit, de la jalousie et de la honte. (69)

A retrospective account offers the possibility of understanding. Yet Des Grieux, who is recounting this episode more than two years after it occurred, remains unable to unravel the troubling turmoil into which Manon's letter throws him. It appears that time and distance

have not quelled the disquieting feelings she awakens. Anguished confusion characterizes his account.

Citing evidence that Manon loves him, he asks plaintively, "Quelle raison aurait-elle de se contrefaire jusqu'à ce point?" (110). The question gnaws away at him. He tries to work out an answer by revisiting his entire relationship with Manon. The inadmissible possibility is that Manon did not love him as much as he wants to believe she did, and that hers was not just an infidelity of the flesh, but also an infidelity of the heart. "Accuser Manon, c'est de quoi mon coeur n'osait se rendre coupable" (30). Yet he is tormented by doubts. "O dieux! dieux! serait-il possible que Manon m'eût trahi, et qu'elle eût cessé de m'aimer!" (35). As he relives his great passion, we cannot tell if he is talking in the time of the action or in the time of the narration. It appears to be both, once again confusing the roles of the narrator and the protagonist. It is the purposeful confusion of a narrator captivated by the power of his own story.

When Des Grieux learns that the priest at Saint-Lazare has been fully informed of his scandalous escapades, shame and confusion overwhelm him. But avowals of confusion are a shield he uses to protect himself from having to deal with disgrace and embarrassment. By repeatedly admitting his shame, he hopes to absolve himself of shame.

A passage follows in which Des Grieux proposes a nobility of sensitivity, the new value system by which he and his story are to be judged. Shame and vengeance (i.e., his violent attacks on others), which he terms two "violentes passions" (81, 164), are metamorphosed into virtues.

Il y a peu de personnes qui connaissent la force de ces mouvements particuliers du coeur. Le commun des hommes n'est sensible qu'à cinq ou six passions, dans le cercle desquelles leur vie se passe, et où leurs agitations se réduisent. Otez-leur l'amour et la haine, le plaisir et la douleur, l'espérance et la crainte, ils ne sentent plus rien. Mais les personnes d'un caractère plus noble peuvent être remuées de mille façons différentes; ... et comme elles ont un sentiment de cette grandeur qui les élève au dessus du vulgaire, il n'y a rien dont elles soient plus jalouses. De là vient qu'elles souffrent si impatiemment le mépris et la risée, et que la honte est une de leurs plus violentes passions. (81)

Once again, Des Grieux carefully guides the priest's and our reading of his story. He first expresses and then celebrates his feelings. In addition to compassion, he now wants our approval and admiration as well. As Herbert Josephs has so persuasively demonstrated, this passage, along with others, represents the resourceful intellectual evasiveness which pervades the novel. Speaking in the present tense, Des Grieux never achieves the critical distance needed to examine the possible implications of a new aristocracy. Nor does the class-conscious narrator, whose thoughts often turn toward home with pride and yearning, ever address the conflict between a new aristocracy founded on sensibility and the old aristocracy based on birth, a system whose privileges he is reluctant to relinquish.

His discreet cynicism also reveals a moral and intellectual evasiveness. After fire consumes their home at Chaillot, it occurs to

Des Grieux to use his "esprit" and "qualités naturelles" (53) to take up gambling and dupe others at the gaming tables. In fact, "Le Ciel [lui] fait naître [cette] idée" (53). "C'est un fond excellent de revenu pour les petits que la sottise des riches et des grands" (54). Rather than acknowledge that he is a scoundrel or express any regret over having bilked other gamblers of their money, he claims it was a divinely inspired idea for sharing wealth, a plan ordained by "la divine Sagesse" (54) for taking care of everyone's needs. Like his avowals of shame and confusion, his cynicism sidesteps the moral and intellectual challenge we might expect from a narrator who claims a return to virtue at the end of his account.

Telling his story to Renoncour, he is torn between his need to create an idealized Manon that merits his faithful adoration and his need to acknowledge that some of her behavior is indeed difficult to defend. He oscillates, dealing intermittently and in different ways with his conflict. He admits her intended infidelity with G... M..., then diffuses the pain of betrayal with ironic humor: "Elle ne pouvait espérer que G... M... la laissât, toute la nuit, comme une vestale" (147). As narrator, he repeats his father's account of Manon's betrayal. As protagonist, he refuses to believe that she willingly betrayed him. He insists that M. de B... must have used a charm or poison to seduce her, an idea he may have drawn from *Phèdre*.⁶⁷ More often he tries to justify behavior that appears to conflict with his idealized vision of Manon. Such is the case after she rejects his plan to write his father requesting permission to marry. "Les

⁶⁷ "Quel charme ou quel poison en a tari la source?" (*Phèdre*, I.3, qtd by Deloffre, 35, note 1).

difficultés qu'elle y opposa n'étant prises que de sa tendresse même et de la crainte de me perdre" (26).

Manon appears to feel a genuine affection for Des Grieux, but it is at odds with the penchant for pleasure that drives her to betray him. He describes her demeanor at their "interrupted supper:"

Je crus apercevoir de la tristesse sur le visage et dans les yeux de ma chère maîtresse. [...] Je remarquai que ses regards s'attachaient sur moi d'une autre façon qu'ils n'avaient accoutumé. Je ne pouvais démêler si c'était de l'amour ou de la compassion, quoiqu'il me parût que c'était un sentiment doux et languissant. (29, emphasis added).

"Je crus apercevoir" and "il me parût" are two of the many self-reflective signs that Des Grieux uses and wants us to hear throughout his narrative. This is the subjective account of a narrator who recognizes how emotion and affect shape and influence our perception. Just as he is aware of and needs to voice the realities of his experience, he is aware and needs to say that this reality can be transformed.

Moments after their initial encounter, Manon reveals herself as a self-interested young woman with some talent for duplicity. She is "plus expérimentée" than he (20). She responds "ingénument" when Des Grieux asks what brings her to Amiens (20). Of course, these are observations that occur only later to Des Grieux the narrator. Pride, not affection, seems her primary motivation. She finds Des Grieux likeable, but more importantly, "elle se trouva flattée d'avoir fait la conquête d'un amant tel que [lui]" (22), a handsome aristocrat. From

the very beginning, then, there are indications that Manon's passion for Des Grieux is less fervent than his for her. Yet his story is ambiguous: "Quelque passionné que je fusse pour Manon, elle *sut me persuader* qu'elle ne l'était pas moins pour moi" (24 emphasis added). He recognizes he may have been deluded and yet he clings to his fantasy of loving a faithful Dido.

When the protagonist finally begins to recognize the hints that Manon may have a new lover, he finds it difficult to "donner à tant d'énigmes un sens aussi favorable que [s]on coeur souhaitait" (28). At once he is confessing that her infidelity is difficult to admit and that his heart is unwilling to entertain just any explanation, but rather it demands an explanation in accord with his fantasized vision of their relationship. When his father tells him he hopes "cette petite aventure" (50) will make him wiser in the future, Des Grieux confesses his proclivity for self-delusion: "Je ne pris ce discours que dans le sens qui s'accordait avec mes idées" (32). From the beginning, Des Grieux, a young man who grew up buried in books, clings to fantasies about noble but ill-fated love affairs found in classical literature. Refusing more realistic explanations, he seeks within his narrative to fuse the more sordid realities of his actual experience with the glow of his fictional aspirations.

The devoted Manon depicted at the end is different from the faithless, frivolous, amoral Manon portrayed throughout most of his story. Des Grieux's attempt to transform Manon's character is his solution to his need both to idealize her and to acknowledge that she is unworthy of his devotion. In death he immortalizes the "other" Manon, the one that he has imagined all along. Giving his memory a

permanent literary form enables him to revisit and relive his love affair. As he grows older, his story will allow him to continue to enjoy «cette erreur de jeunesse» (38). He transposes her into a literary subject he can contemplate, admire and adore. The literary Manon belongs to him alone. Others can only look and admire; they cannot possess her. She is a complex literary heroine of his own creation.

He argues that she has beauty, charm, and a sweet gentle quality. Until their arrival in the New World, we see few manifestations of her "douceur," but Des Grieux offers the testimony of a prison guard at the Hôpital who reports that she has behaved with "une douceur angélique" (102). This use of third-party testimony adds credibility to his own assessment of his beloved's character. During incarceration Manon cried continually, sewed and read, according to the guard. In fact, she seems to dissolve into tears as easily as Des Grieux, suggesting an emotionally fragile young woman, not the dangerous *femme fatale* described by writers such as Dumas fils and Maupassant. The vision of Manon sewing presents a new image that counterbalances visions of a courtesan who threatens social stability. And she is literate (102, 130, 140), again a portrait out of keeping with typical notions about early eighteenth-century *filles de joie*. Like Des Grieux, she stands out from her peers. Or does she? Some of Des Grieux's claims seem questionable.

He claims that the scene with the Italian prince demonstrates "les agréments de son esprit" (119). Actually she is a bit crude in this scene in which she finds it highly amusing to drag one aristocrat around by the hair in order to insult and embarrass another for no

reason other than her own entertainment. Manon displays a commonness of manners and moeurs that represent an unfamiliar reality for the class-conscious Des Grieux. Her letter announcing her betrayal, for example, reflects a certain vulgarity: "C'est une sotte vertu que la fidélité. Crois-tu qu'on puisse être bien tendre lorsqu'on manque de pain?" (69). Having renounced family and fortune for love of Manon, Des Grieux is shocked by Manon's sense of economic realities, which are so foreign to his aristocratic sensibilities: "Elle appréhende la faim. Dieu d'amour! quelle grossièreté de sentiments!" (70). However realistic her sentiments might be, they lack *délicatesse*.

For every proof of a certain nobility in Manon's character that Des Grieux offers, he negates it with contradictory evidence. In one scene she has "un caractère extraordinaire" (61), in another "un misérable caractère" (142). His inability to understand Manon continues to plague him. He is both drawn to and repulsed by her. It is this ambivalence about her character and his reluctance to shoulder responsibility for his own complicity that, in large part, drives his narrative because Des Grieux continues to find it difficult to reconcile reality with the more ideal world he imagines.

Despite his doubts about Manon's sincerity, he reports that she was never happy with M. de B... because "elle portait, au fond du coeur, le souvenir de mon amour, et le remords de son infidélité" (47). Her reticence in delivering promised sexual favors to M. de G... M... and his son suggest her love for Des Grieux was genuine. Manon is not given to debauchery. For every indication that her love was not sincere, there is another that suggests that she did love Des

Grieux--at least in her own fashion if not in the way he would have liked. His obsession with his inability to resolve his mixed feelings and unravel the mysteries of this enigmatic charmer drives his narrative.

One of his most balanced assessments of her seems to occur after their money disappears during the fire at Chaillot. Des Grieux worries that "quelque fidèle et quelque attachée qu'elle [lui] fût dans la bonne fortune, il ne fallait pas compter sur elle dans la misère" (53).

Jamais fille n'eut moins d'attachement qu'elle pour l'argent, mais elle ne pouvait être tranquille un moment, avec la crainte d'en manquer. C'était du plaisir et des passe-temps qu'il lui fallait. [...] Elle m'aurait préféré à toute la terre avec une fortune médiocre; mais je ne doutais nullement qu'elle ne m'abandonnât pour quelque nouveau B... lorsqu'il ne me resterait que de la constance et de la fidélité à lui offrir. (61-62)

It is the portrait of a love that will always be tainted by suspicion, a portrait that portends disappointment and betrayal. Despite this clear-headed assessment of Manon's character, Des Grieux remains incapable or unwilling to avert disaster.

Often his portrait of Manon resembles his self-portrait. She has a "tristesse extraordinaire" and is overcome by "larmes" (31). At Saint-Sulpice, "elle confessait que son infidélité méritait ma haine" (44), much as Des Grieux openly admits his shame to Renoncour. Sounding every bit as dramatic as Des Grieux, she claims, "Je prétends mourir ... si vous ne me rendez votre coeur, sans lequel il

est impossible que je vive" (45). When transported for exile, shame paralyzes Manon with despair and renders her incapable of speaking. "Il semblait que la honte et la douleur eussent altéré les organes de sa voix" (179). She suffers more from social condemnation and exclusion than from physical and material discomfort. This reaction recalls the shame and humiliation that placed Des Grieux beyond consolation at Saint-Lazare (81).

Manon describes her love as exceptional, a rhetorical device typical of Des Grieux's discourse. "S'il n'y eut jamais d'amour tel que le vôtre, il est impossible aussi d'être aimé plus tendrement que vous l'êtes. [...] Je sens bien que je n'ai jamais mérité ce prodigieux attachement que vous avez pour moi. [...] J'ai été légère et volage, et même en vous aimant éperdument, comme j'ai toujours fait, je n'étais qu'une ingrate" (187). The polarized portrait of Manon in France gradually shifts to a portrait of Manon in the New World that is more consistent with a classical heroine. As he transforms her from an unfaithful girl of dubious moral character into literary heroine worthy of aristocratic concern, he endows her with his rhetorical eloquence.

In her letter announcing her betrayal, Manon calls Des Grieux "l'idole de mon coeur" (68). At the Hôpital, he uses the same expression (101), and in the end, he buries "l'idole de mon coeur" (200). They even wear the same clothes. Helping her escape from the prison to which the patriarchy condemned her, he ironically gives her his own clothes, clothes of the patriarchy, to wear. And when he buries her, he once again wraps her in his clothes, the clothes of the aristocracy. Language and clothes blur the distinction

between Manon and Des Grieux, gradually transforming a young woman of common birth into an aristocratic heroine.

Manon "pèche sans malice...; elle est légère et impudente, mais elle est droite et sincère" (148), according to Des Grieux. The Lieutenant général de Police releases Des Grieux from jail because he sees in Des Grieux's behavior "plus d'imprudence et de légèreté que de malice" (160). As Des Grieux transforms Manon, he gradually projects himself onto her by attributing his own qualities to her.

Another way in which he subtly shapes our perception of Manon is by reversing the connotation of expressions used to denigrate her. Her brother suggests that "une fille comme elle," a girl "ayant ... violé les lois de son sexe" (55), should support them (by prostitution). When Des Grieux goes to see Manon at the young G... M... 's, he first reproaches her. Frightened by his outburst, she trembles as she looks at him without daring to breathe. Suddenly, he is asking her pardon and confessing that he does not deserve to be loved by "une fille comme elle" (143). He has taken an expression used derogatorily to paint Manon as a girl of loose morals and used it to connote superiority.

Des Grieux's decision to follow Manon into exile and misery triggers her conversion. Finally understanding what it means to love and be loved, "Cette pauvre fille se livre à des sentiments si tendres et si douloureux" (179). On the boat Manon recognizes that Des Grieux is continually attentive to her needs, and "cette vue, jointe au vif ressentiment de l'étrange extrémité où je m'étais réduit pour elle, la rendait si tendre et si passionnée, si attentive aussi à mes plus légers besoins, que c'était entre elle et moi, une perpétuelle

émulation de services et d'amour" (184). Again, the distinction between them is blurred.

In le Nouvel Orléans, she is faithful, adoring and solicitous. Her love becomes as exceptional as his, she confesses her errors and praises his "bonté extrême" in forgiving her (187). Yet some ambiguity remains. When Des Grieux suggests that they ennoble their love through marriage, he depicts a humble Manon thrilled by the idea--but only after a moment's hesitation: "*Il me parut que ce discours la pénétrait de joie*" (190 emphasis added). His doubts are never completely eradicated. They are fundamental to his tale. Once Manon announces, "*Je suis changée*" (188), the story is over.

His portrait of Manon remains as a tribute to her charms. Even when she is in filthy degrading conditions, Des Grieux describes the woman who has betrayed and ruined him as "cette figure capable de ramener l'univers à l'idolâtrie" (178). The woman his tale immortalizes is thus metamorphosed into a mythical goddess capable of toppling nations. As nineteenth-century reception, capped by Massenet's *Manon*, demonstrates, Des Grieux so successfully celebrates the charms of this enchanting figure who inspires his obsessive, blind adoration, that she captures the imagination and stimulates the fantasies of centuries of readers to come.

Renoncour commented early in the novel on the "caractère incompréhensible des femmes" (15). Des Grieux's story explores this dimension of mystery in life and the confusion wrought by the incomprehensible. Memories of Manon still unleash troubling, terrifying, incomprehensible tremors of desire, but they are calmed as he fuses them with memories of classical literary heroines.

Combining the two he creates a new heroine, new values, and a new genre. His love affair pits him against established authority. He wants to affirm his value as an individual and the validity of his experience without relinquishing his class privilege. To do so, he depicts himself as an extraordinary individual living a unique experience. His love and devotion are exceptional. No one has loved more tenderly than Des Grieux and Manon (187). His experience is unparalleled: "J'étais dans une agitation que je ne saurais comparer à rien parce qu'il n'y en eut jamais d'égale" (194). His insistence on the uniqueness of his situation is characteristic of the new genre Prévost is creating. It is one the earliest novels written in the first person and "reflects one of the fundamental beliefs upon which the modern novel form is predicated, that individual experience is always original and not simply the most recent expression of a never-changing natural order" (Josephs 187).

One of the forces contributing to the popularity of first-person narratives in the eighteenth century was the public demand for realism coupled with a demand for moral idealism. By using a first-person narrative, the author could say, "This is what actually happened," or "this is the story told to me."⁶⁸ Then he would add a preface in which he argued that no reader would want to repeat the experiences of his protagonist. So, too, in the "Avis de l'auteur" introducing *Manon Lescaut*, we read, "[Le public] verra dans la

⁶⁸ Later in the century, in novels such as Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, the first-person narrative will often take the form of an epistolary novel, and the author's justification will be, "These are the letters that came into my possession."

conduite de M. des Grieux, un exemple terrible de la force des passions" (4). "On y trouvera peu d'événements qui ne puissent servir à l'instruction des mœurs" (5). Prefatory promises to the contrary, the novel suggests an ideal more appealing than virtue: passion with all its intolerable suffering offers glorious delights to those who submit to its irresistible forces.

We have seen that Prévost's mixing of tenses establishes a close identity between the protagonist and narrator that sometimes makes it difficult to know who is speaking. This ambiguity of voice also makes it difficult to identify Prévost's voice. Speaking through Renoncour, the author seems to suggest how the story might be read when he concludes that Des Grieux "était né quelque chose, et qu'il méritait ma libéralité" (15). Des Grieux suggests a similar reading of his tale when he admits to misdeeds and shameful weaknesses, then quickly adds: "Je suis sûr qu'en me condamnant, vous ne pourrez pas vous empêcher de me plaindre" (16). By yielding authorial control to his narrator, Prévost's position on the established moral and social order becomes even more ambiguous. He seems to be in complicity with his hero. Neither the didactic claims of the preface nor Des Grieux's moralizing afterthoughts are ever given the dramatic life needed to challenge the power of illicit passion so profoundly felt throughout the rest of the novel.

One might have expected that Des Grieux would tell Tiberge his full story. Instead he chooses two relative strangers, two interlocutors with no firsthand information about what has happened, an audience unlikely to counter his version of events with personal knowledge of people and events. He is aware that he has

transformed reality. Recounting his adventures, Des Grieux edits and embellishes his experiences to make them appear more tragic, his characters more noble and extraordinary. His is a complex tale with several layers of meaning. He carefully controls and gradually elevates the tone throughout his narrative, interjecting commentary as needed to guide our assessment of characters and events. He consciously crafts his narrative to pique and maintain our interest. It is a story contrived for dramatic effect. From the outset we know that something devastating has befallen our hero. He promises to reveal "[ses] malheurs, [ses] peines, ... [ses] désordres, et [ses] plus honteuses faiblesses" (16). Arguing he was born "pour les courtes joies et les longues douleurs" (75), he unfurls a plot structure in which waves of increasingly serious trials and tribulations are relieved by brief moments of happiness.⁶⁹ Continual foreshadowing of fatality builds to the dramatic climax in the Louisiana "desert." Only then, at the very end of a long and emotionally exhausting story, do we learn that Manon is dead.

Des Grieux paints his protagonists as he pictures them to himself and as he would like others to see them. He offers a positive interpretation of their basest behavior and defuses the gravity of their transgressions with ironic humor. Sordid realities play but a comic role in his narrative. Manon's manners and morals reflect her common birth, but words like *courtisane*, *grisette*, and *fille de joie* are not part of his lofty rhetoric. Manon is a *reine*, his *chère*

⁶⁹ See Appendix A for an outline of the novel's undulating plot structure in which waves of increasingly serious offenses and misfortunes are relieved by brief moments of happiness.

maîtresse, and *la première princesse du monde*. Learning that she has been sent to the Hôpital, Des Grieux reacts in horror but does not detail the realities of confinement in the infamous prison. Rather he paints Manon as a sad, demure, domestically-occupied young woman who attracts the compassionate attention of her guard.

She does not die a lonely and forgotten death following a ridiculous duel over a deported prostitute in a distant land. Rather, she dies a lyricized death that forever marks a young French nobleman's heart. Nor does she die a faded courtesan. She dies while still young and beautiful. That is the image that captures the chevalier's imagination and ours. Nineteenth-century fascination with Manon testifies to the enduring power of that image.

As Des Grieux crafts his tale, he forgets what it suits him to forget. He convinces himself that a lie is not a lie, that modifications and embellishments create a story that more accurately conveys the essence of his tale. As Jeanne Monty remarks, "There is present throughout the work a leitmotif of admiration for Manon which relegates any of her actions, as well as those committed at her instigation, to a level of secondary importance, of merely transitory relevancy. What are essential and constant are her charm and beauty, her capacity for inspiring at all times men's respect and admiration. That is the 'real' Manon" (152).

Telling his story allows Des Grieux to idealize and savor the magic of Manon. "Je trouve encore de la douceur dans un souvenir qui me représente sa tendresse et les agréments de son esprit" (119). Recounting his long adventure to virtual strangers demonstrates his need to talk about, to try to articulate, his experience of this

mystifying enchantress. His analysis often goes in circles, revealing only that reason and analysis sometimes fail in the presence of love. The workings of the human heart remain a mystery, and the hope that retelling his tale will give shape and meaning to his experience remains largely unrealized.

His polarized portrait of his beloved reflects his soul's anguish and confusion over a woman and an experience that have opened his heart to joys and sorrows previously unknown to him. The inconstant, unworthy Manon is essential to the originality of the creation and of the particular drama, intellectual, imaginative and, above all, loving, that constitutes Des Grieux's story. Responding creatively to the spontaneous and irrational, he imagines her apotheosis in the New World, an act by which he also elevates his own soul for Manon represents a part of his being that still leaves him troubled and uncomprehending. Apotheosizing Manon is his uneasy truce with his inner conflict, a truce between purity and desire, between a yearning for the excitement of sensuality and the order of tranquillity.

Finally, Des Grieux attempts to dignify and give meaning to his experience by arguing for a new nobility of the heart, values that will later be expressed in works like *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. He depicts an old nobility that often appears ridiculous, capricious and vindictive. Yet origins exert a strong pull, and he remains a young man proud of his birth and education and anxious to gain the approbation of an *homme de qualité*. While his story takes him to the New World, it closes on the Old World as he literally follows Tiberge, his "Mercury," a representative of the Old World, back to the

Old World. As he stands in Calais recounting his story, he is remembering the New World, but heading into the Old World. He has opened the door to new possibilities, but appears hesitant to cross the threshold. That hesitancy is reflected throughout the novel in the narrator's moral and intellectual evasiveness.

His first words to Renoncour are about Manon (13). His last are about his family. He looks back with pride and nostalgia on his youth in Amiens where he was admired for his "sagesse et ... retenue" (19). He relates his entire experience to an *homme de qualité*, a representative of the traditional Old World from which he comes. When Des Grieux kills a servant at Saint-Lazare, he expresses no remorse. Yet when Manon dupes the Prince of..., a man of the established noble class, Des Grieux feels pity for "un homme de considération:" "Je me sentais porté à réparer ce petit outrage par mes politesses" (123). His aristocratic sensibilities remain intact.

His reactions suggest that his sympathies remain with the Old World tradition, or at least with its class system for it is to the social order, not the moral order, that he returns. "Mais le Ciel, après m'avoir puni avec tant de rigueur, avait dessein de me rendre utiles mes malheurs et ses châtements. Il m'éclaira de ses lumières, qui me firent rappeler des idées dignes de ma naissance et de mon éducation" (202). On the question of religion and morality, he is as ambiguous as ever. He tells Tiberge that the seeds of virtue are beginning to bear fruit "pour lui causer une joie à laquelle il ne s'attendait pas" (204). No genuine spiritual renewal appears imminent. The ambiguity of his story lingers unresolved, and it is

that ambiguity which constitutes much of the book's power and charm.

Des Grieux cannot live apart from the social milieu in which he was raised, nor can he forget Manon. Her death and his storytelling reconcile those two desires by allowing him to combine the pleasure of reliving his great passion with his duty to live a respectable, orderly life that does not scandalize his family name. Love has unleashed Des Grieux's verbal and literary powers. Storytelling channels and develops them. A capacity for deceit, self-delusion and fantasy is fashioned into literary talent. A sordid affair is sublimated into literary art. Throughout Des Grieux's story we see the unfolding of his burgeoning literary talents. In the beginning his stories are rooted in his lived experience and told for practical purposes. Developing his narrative for Renoncour, however, any pragmatic objectives are relegated to secondary importance and creative imagination assumes a larger role as Des Grieux wrestles with the realization that life rarely corresponds to our visions of what it should be. He struggles to express his fundamental angst, the conflict between his carnal desires and his yearning for a nobility of the spirit that nourishes his senses whilst elevating his soul. The New World figure of Manon appears to be a crystallization of the "other" Manon, the classical heroine, the faithful Dido that Des Grieux has imagined all along as worthy consort for his own fictional persona.

During his early education, his sequestration in his father's house and his studies at Saint-Sulpice, Des Grieux reveals a natural affinity for literature, books and study. He daydreams about a pastoral paradise that includes "un commerce de lettres avec un ami

qui ferait son séjour à Paris, et qui m'informerait des nouvelles publiques, moins pour satisfaire ma curiosité que pour me faire un divertissement des folles agitations des hommes" (40). Recounting his experience, he essentially plays both roles: the protagonist has his "séjour à Paris," and the narrator composes a text on the "folles agitations des hommes." When Des Grieux wants to restore order and respectability to his life without giving up Manon, he decides he would like to pursue his studies at the university, the only "honnête et... raisonnable" (114) pursuit for which he seems suited. His yearning to meld passion with profession is not new.

"Je fis un commentaire amoureux sur le quatrième livre de l'*Énéide*; je le destine à voir le jour, et je me flatte que le public sera satisfait» (38). In one sentence, he moves from the past to the present to the future: he composed his commentary three or four years ago; he plans to publish it, and he envisions a favorable public response to his literary effort. Other than the expectation at the end of the novel that he will soon be reunited with his brother, this passage is the only one in which Des Grieux voices any plans for the future. Returning to the family fold to restore order to his life a second time, he is contemplating the possibility of writing, just as he did the first time. Clearly he is unsuited for the priesthood. Maybe his story will one day be published, thus immortalizing Manon and providing him with a vehicle for exercising his desire to write about love. And indeed, we have the book in hand, so we know that Renoncour will be sufficiently moved by the story to find it worth writing down and publishing, thus making the *homme de qualité* a

reader (and writer) as well as a listener, Des Grieux a writer, a creator of the fiction, as well as a fictional character.

We have seen that critics were eager to explain why *Manon Lescaut* stands out from the abbé Prévost's other works by declaring it a thinly disguised autobiographical account of one of Prévost's love affairs. The facts, however, do not bear out that theory, and the aspect of *Manon Lescaut* that is most demonstrably autobiographical is ignored--i.e., the development of the writer. Like Des Grieux, Prévost, in *Le Pour et Contre*, depicts himself as seeking "consolation [...] dans les charmes de l'étude"⁷⁰ when cloistered in the monastery. The works Des Grieux studies and comments on are texts of Classical Antiquity. Prévost's body of work indicates that he considered commentary and translation the most noble forms of literature (Deloffre 38 n2). Drawing inspiration from their knowledge of classical texts, both Des Grieux and Prévost submit their experiences in and out of the monastery to the transforming power of imagination.

Throughout *Manon Lescaut*, there is virtually no authorial intrusion, and at the end, Des Grieux is the only character left. The others have all disappeared. Not even the frame narrator, who opens the tale, reappears as we might expect. Initially, the frame narrator distances Prévost from his hero, but that barrier soon disappears, never to reappear. Des Grieux's voice thus seems to be Prévost's. Contrary to much critical thought over the last 250 years, *Manon Lescaut* is not primarily about Manon; it is Des Grieux's story, the

⁷⁰ From the apology of the *Pour et Contre*, feuille XLVIII, p. XL, cited by Deloffre, p. 38, fnl.

story of a passion that, among other things, plants the seed of literary vocation. The original title says it best--it is *L'histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*.

Early in the novel, believing that Des Grieux is "tout à fait revenu de [sa] passion" (42), his father allows him to return to his studies in Paris. In the end Des Grieux is literally "revenu de sa passion" and ready to put his life back in order. Yet his experience has had a profound effect on him. He neither can nor wishes to forget it. Telling his tale permits him to combine love with literary aspirations by giving permanent imaginative life to the memory of his great passion, a story much more poetic in the retelling than it was in the living.

CONCLUSION

*Depuis Manon Lescaut jusques à Dalila
Toute la fine fleur du beau sexe était là
Pour offrir à l'ancêtre, en signe d'affection,
En guis' de viatique, une ultime érection.*
Georges Brassens, *L'ancêtre* ⁷¹

Manon lives. She is part of the cultural consciousness, largely as a result of the legends created by her representation in nineteenth-century literature, criticism and opera. The human spirit seeks both titillation and exaltation, and Des Grieux's lofty, eloquent and dolorous rhetoric transforms his ignoble love for a vulgar girl into an expression of a more universal experience, the disturbingly magical, confusing and disgraceful experience of a fatal love. The public responds to this image of tarnished youth, beauty and charm immortalized by a tragic death and celebrated with lyrical eloquence because they too need to transcend the ordinary and attach themselves to something beautiful, meaningful and enduring.

Early in the nineteenth century, a reincarnated Manon is given a new locus in middle class France. Successive bourgeois images of pathological or unnatural heroines attempt to distance, contain and control the *femme fatale*. This is a world that thinks and experiences life in concrete terms. They tend to imagine Manon at one extreme or the other, either as an angel or as a devil. In Prévost's novel, Manon is often a phantom-like figure. In the nineteenth century she is represented in much more concrete images. Even as a vampire, she has a greater physical presence than Prévost's heroine. No

⁷¹ *Poèmes et chansons*, page 216.

longer experienced as an abstract ideal, she symbolizes a concrete threat to male mastery.

Critics react in broad strokes, offering virtually no textual analysis and often straying far from the novel in their introductions to it. Because Manon has name recognition, the mere mention of her name conjures up a body of ideas. Yet because Des Grieux's tale is characterized by ambiguity and ambivalence, Manon is a suggestive, malleable heroine easily adapted to nineteenth-century interests and tastes. Critics use Manon as a symbol of contemporary problems, their essays as a foray into social issues. These new approaches to criticism open the door to new avenues of interpretation. *Manon Lescaut* challenges us to read in new ways precisely because we see how it troubled nineteenth-century readers. Finally, critics recognize what the authors of the variants implicitly recognized: Manon is a muse capable of stimulating dreams and fantasies that permanently enrich our lives. That is the mythical Manon, the Manon that lives. A less mystifying, less wayward Manon would no longer be the heroine we love. In the end, the nineteenth century audience simply submits to the power of her story without asking many questions of the text. Massenet's opera deals with an idealized Manon and minimizes the other, "more real" Manon. Already a literary legend, she is a more lyricized and universal figure. Massenet celebrates her power of enchantment while also providing an avenue for the French to revel in their glorious past.

The loving, demonic, dangerous, and redeeming potential in Manon's character is brought into sharper relief for those who read *Leone Leoni*, "La Morte amoureuse," and *La Dame aux camélias* as

rewritings of *Manon Lescaut*. Though often represented by critics and novelists as a loving, repentant courtesan or as a man-eating *femme fatale*, she is neither in Prévost's novel. Yet those representations, incited by and attached to Prévost's heroine, create a rich complex of images that make it impossible to see her ever again as simply a rather naturally beguiling, amoral and insouciant young beauty.

Above all, representation of Manon reflects widespread male insecurity about masculinity in nineteenth-century France. Though critics identify with Des Grieux, their own insecurities cause them to focus on Manon. Confusing the heroine with the novel, they lose sight of Prévost's focus. Manon is a literary figure, not just as heroine of Prévost's novel, but also as heroine of Des Grieux's narrative. This is Des Grieux's story, a vision of Manon based on his needs and influenced by his reading of classical literature.

His story is grounded in imagination and influenced by a literary experience and a literary tradition ill-equipped to account for the common, the affective, and the irrational. Carving out a new language, *Manon Lescaut* expresses an emotional truth, a subjective and yet a universal truth. It hovers on newness as it demonstrates the human yearning for transcendence and the power of imagination and rhetoric to transform reality, to poeticize our lives and to explain even our basest behavior "dans un sens honorable."

APPENDIX A

An Outline of the Novel's Plot

The undulating structure of Des Grieux's account alternates brief periods of happiness with increasingly serious misfortunes.

FORTUNE	MISFORTUNE (4 Rivals)
Des Grieux and Manon meet at Amiens and enjoy approximately two weeks of bliss together.	Des Grieux finds Manon with M. de B.... Soon thereafter, he is abducted by his father's lackeys and sequestered in his father's house for about six months.
Des Grieux returns to the seminary. Just as he is to take orders, Manon appears at Saint-Sulpice and their passion is re-ignited. Fleeing together, they install themselves in an idyllic retreat at Chaillot.	Manon's brother begins his parasitical relationship with the couple, and a fire at Chaillot ruins them.
Des Grieux borrows 100 pistoles from Tiberge for cardsharpping at the Hôtel de Transylvanie.	Their servants steal everything they own, and Manon leaves Des Grieux for M. de G... M....
Manon passes Des Grieux off as her brother at M. de G... M...'.s. Then she and Des Grieux run off together with the money she received from G... M....	M. de G... M... has them arrested and imprisoned, Des Grieux at Saint-Lazare and Manon at the Hôpital Général.
Des Grieux escapes from Saint-Lazare and, with the help of M. de T... fils, frees Manon from the Hôpital.	Manon's brother is killed.
The protagonists once again spend happy days at Chaillot.	Manon takes up with the young G... M....
Manon and Des Grieux have the young G... M... detained while they enjoy themselves at his house.	Alerted by a servant, the old G... M... has Manon and Des Grieux arrested.
Des Grieux is released from Châtelet.	Manon is deported to the New World. Failing to free her from the group of <i>filles de joie</i> being transported to Le Havre, Des Grieux decides to follow Manon into exile.
Passing themselves off as man and wife, Manon and Des Grieux lead a tranquil existence in le Nouvel Orléans and decide to legitimize their union through marriage.	Learning that Manon and Des Grieux are not married, the governor of Louisiana refuses them permission to marry because his nephew Synnelet is secretly in love with Manon.
Synnelet and Des Grieux fight a duel which Des Grieux wins.	Believing he has killed Synnelet, he and Manon flee. Manon dies in flight.

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