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

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Abstract

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

Keyword

Manon Lescaut; Manon; Des Grieux; Prevost; Jules Massenet; More...

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