VOX
IMAGO

PUCCINI
MANON LESCAUT

GIANANDREA NOSEDA
VITTORIO BORRELLI
TEATRO REGIO TORINO

VOX IMAGO
Series edited by
Electa / Musicom.it

Puccini
Manon Lescaut

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Exclusive edition

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For the first time ever, the "Vox Imago" series deals with a work by Giacomo Puccini, an eminent composer in the history of music, especially melodrama. It does so by focusing on Manon Lescaut*, the Lucca composer's first great success. The opera premiered at the Teatro Regio in Turin on February 1, 1893, just a few days earlier than the debut of another late-nineteenth-century masterpiece, Verdi's* Falstaff*, which had premiered on February 9 at La Scala. Giulio Ricordi, the publisher for both of these artists, thus triggered a specific communicative strategy, sanctioning a sort of handover from the old master of Italian opera at the final theatre performance of his career to a promising young artist who would renew its magnificence.*

The third title in Puccini's catalogue, Manon Lescaut *came after* Le Villi *and* Edgar*, works representative of the* Scapigliatura *movement that was in vogue in Italy at the time, and that served as an important turnaround. Indeed, thanks to this new work, Puccini became open to the musical and theatre experiences that were being witnessed in the rest of Europe, and could thus be considered a highly up-to-date international composer of operas. At the same time, Puccini did not overlook the inescapable lyricism of his own land, which contributed to the fame of so many pages of his opera.*

In presenting this masterpiece, we have chosen to trace back to Manon Lescaut*'s first performance in the late nineteenth century by offering the most recent production, signed by the conductor Gianandrea Noseda and the director Vittorio Borrelli, comprising the staging of the work realized by the Teatro Regio, which had already seen the triumph of* Manon Lescaut *and would be the stage for the premiere of* La bohème *a few years later.*

The entire project has been brought to fruition in close collaboration with the Centro studi Giacomo Puccini in Lucca as concerns the musicological contents and the creation of the documentary. In accordance with the series' endeavors to relate the ideas expressed in melodrama to the expressions of the other arts during the same period, the essays on painting, literature, and social history have focused on two specific moments in Manon*. On the one hand, the ambiguous and tragic chain of amorous events by evoking the colonial world and the eternal consequences of the female condition, and, on the other, a re-reading of what Turin was like at the time, being poised between tradition and modernity, as it accompanied the opera's success. Turin was home to Liberty style in Italy and at the same time even the site of expositions of international scope.*

Gian Maria Gros-Pietro
Chairman Intesa Sanpaolo

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CON PASSIONE DISPERATA

Michele Girardi

MANON LESCAUT: FUTURE AND TRADITION

… Kate rispose al Re:
"D'una zitella
perché tentare il cor?
Per un marito
mi fe' bella il Signor!"
Rise il Re,
poi le diè
gemme ed òr
e un marito… e n'ebbe il cor.

"I will feel it in the Italian way, with desperate passion." So Puccini responded in 1889 to the initial objections advanced by Marco Praga, at the time the chosen librettist of the opera. He also opened hostilities against the "powder and minuets" of the French style of his good friend and colleague Jules Massenet, whose *Manon* had been prominent in the international operatic panorama ever since 1884, the year of its premiere. Actually Puccini himself resorted to minuets and powder in the second act of his *Manon Lescaut*. Moreover the second act pervasively imitated the eighteenth-century atmosphere, evoked in the *Histoire du Chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* (1731), the novel by Antoine François Prévost d'Exiles from which the subject was taken.

In the "elegant salon in the house owned by Geronte," Manon's senile and lascivious Pygmalion, a hairdresser appears on the stage, played by an extra. He combs her hair and, twirling vivaciously, gives her a lacquered box containing beauty spots, which she browses among while flirting with the mirror (a stage prop with which she again addresses in the continuation of the act). There follows a chorus of musicians, who dedicate to Manon a gallant madrigal, studded with obscene allusions ("No!… Clori a zampogna che soave plorò / non disse mai no!", II.4). Then the focus switches to a sugary dance teacher, who gives her a lesson accompanied by a round of coy minuets, ruffled by unexpected melancholy when she

Photos of the staging of *Manon Lescaut* at the Teatro Regio di Torino; directed by Vittorio Borrelli, sets by Thierry Flamand, costumes by Christian Gasc, lighting by Andrea Anfossi, mimicry by Anna Maria Bruzzese.

Act I: Francesco Marsiglia (Edmondo) and the chorus.

Act I: Francesco Marsiglia (Edmondo) and the chorus.

Act I: Gregory Kunde (Des Grieux) and the chorus.

Act I: María José Siri (Manon) and the chorus.

has to perform the figure of the lorgnette. The action culminates with the dance of the lovely "Venus" dancing with her elderly, bewigged protector, elevated to mythical splendor by the bevy of hangers-on, who praise the fortune and vitality of the two lovers as "Mercury and Venus."

This period color cast abundantly over the scene differs radically from the eighteenth-century coloring Massenet impresses on the story, which pervades the whole work, and even the musical style, which is often light and exquisite in the manner of an *opéra comique*, a genre that looks back to the eighteenth century in which it was born. Closer to Prévost's novel (see the diagram below), Massenet always places a screen of gallantry between reality and powerful feelings. But for Puccini period color was a powerfully tragic medium. He transformed the setting from an atmosphere into a character (in fact he attributed to it the metaphorical role of social falsehood) and into love. This can be seen at once when everything changes drastically after Manon has shown herself to be an excellent pupil of good manners by singing a pastoral song, in the guise of Chloris, who sighs for her Thyrsis and longs for him. (An erudite allusion: in the madrigal played by Geronte's musicians, Geronte, who is present in the salon, took the part of Philenus, so in reality she desires Des Grieux.) The girl looks at herself in the mirror, as in the opening of the act, but now the stage is emptied of her gallant admirers, the timpani mark a tragic stubbornness, the woodwinds utter a cell of two notes (the major second, generating Manon's theme but harmonized in a minor mode), then a whirlwind rushes through the orchestra: Des Grieux, her beloved, betrayed yet still eagerly longed for, appears on stage, and a romantic upsurge filled with eroticism sweeps away the affected atmosphere that had pervaded the scene. As Fedele d'Amico observes: "The appearance of 'true' love is actually the gaping of an abyss."

Puccini's dramatic choices, made in a close exchange of ideas with Luigi Illica, were the basis of the undisputed success of his *Manon Lescaut*. It was a triumph at the Teatro Regio in Turin on February 1, 1893, eight days before *Falstaff* premiered at La Scala. In the same year the opera was performed in numerous important Italian cities as well as being given its German premiere in Hamburg, after which it rapidly took over theatres around the world.

Birth of a Masterpiece

An announcement in *Musica e musicisti* for June 9, 1889, stated that "G. Ricordi & C. have also commissioned Maestro Giacomo Puccini to compose two operas." The publisher would often announce new works to keep up public expectancy, but this time the two operas really existed. The proposal of the first subject went back to no fewer than four years before (March 23–24, 1885):

> Along with this nonsense I'll send you that play about Manon Lescaut. It's right for you to see that I'm thinking about the future, and keeping some subjects ready for you. Read this play at your leisure. – If you have read the book about Manon I gave you in Milan (and which you should return), you will get some idea of the mingling of elegance and tragedy that the breath of passion could draw from it musically.

Puccini's correspondent was Ferdinando Fontana. After supplying him with the libretti of *Le Villi* and *Edgar*, in the spring of 1889 he was the first to draw the musician's attention to Sardou's *Tosca*, the second opera referred to in the announcement. The letter shows how Puccini tended to choose subjects some years after he had considered them for the first time, and suggests he had at least glanced at a play based on Prévost's novel. But the libretto of *Edgar* fully revealed Fontana's shortcomings, and it is no wonder that Ricordi and Puccini did not want to continue the collaboration.

The publisher, looking for quality (his mirage was always the couple Boito-Verdi) decided to turn to the *Scapigliato* poet Marco Praga, son of the more famous Emilio and a fairly successful playwright at that time. Praga relates that he had met Puccini at the Café Savini in Milan. The composer apparently praised him and asked him eagerly to prepare a treatment based on Prévost's novel. The encounter, if it ever took place (and if it actually happened in the terms emphatically described by the writer), must have occurred between late 1889 and early 1890. The poet and lawyer Domenico Oliva was also involved in the project from the start, with the task of versifying his colleague's treatment (so foreshadowing Illica and Giacosa, paired librettists of Puccini's golden years and their respective tasks: producing drama and poetry). Then, until the completion of the work, several other artists worked on the libretto in various ways, especially Luigi Illica, who began his partnership with Puccini in this way.

On pages 16–17
Act I: Francesco Marsiglia (Edmondo), Gregory Kunde (Des Grieux), María José Siri (Manon), and the chorus.

Act I: Carlo Lepore (Geronte), Dalibor Jenis (Lescaut), and the chorus.

Act I: Dalibor Jenis (Lescaut) and the chorus.

Act I: Dario Giorgelè (the Inkeeper), Carlo Lepore (Geronte), and the chorus.

The difficulties presented by the source text were not insuperable. The novel had been published in the 1730s, hence it expressed a different sensibility and also had a metanarrative framework: in the *Histoire du Chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*, Prévost, like Merimée in writing *Carmen* later, pretended the story was recounted by an unfortunate young man speaking of his own experience. But in reality the dramatic structure of the opera and many of the key situations that enlivened it were based on "that play about Manon Lescaut" that Fontana had sent Puccini, who passed it on to his collaborators. Jacopo Pellegrini has recently investigated the matter successfully by identifying a possible direct source of Puccini's libretto in *Manon Lescaut*, "drame en cinq actes mêlé de chant" by Théodore Barrière and Marc Fournier, performed in Paris in 1851. Pellegrini maintains, with excessive prudence, that there is no concrete proof of this connection, but the similarities between the structure of the play and the libretto are too many to be coincidental. And then composers, and Puccini was no exception, preferred to use stories already produced on the stage. Remember that Barrière, with Murger, had already adapted *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* (1849), the hypotext of Puccini's subsequent masterpiece.

I not only accept Pellegrini's hypothesis, but I wish to support it by presenting a comparison between the structure of Barrière's *Manon Lescaut* and the operas by Massenet and Puccini. The diagram below shows that Puccini's libretto drew more directly on the play than the novel, both in the first draft created primarily by Praga, then as perfected by Oliva, and in the final version, developed mainly by Illica. The latter eliminated Act II, presenting Manon and Des Grieux's loving happiness, while the remaining four corresponded to Acts I, III, IV, and V of the play. By contrast, Massenet composed the irreverent scene from Prévost's novel set in Saint-Sulpice, where Manon seduces Des Grieux, who has become a deacon (III.2), and the one in the Hôtel de Transylvanie, where the young man rushes from the altar to the gaming table, degrades himself, and loses everything together with his beloved, who is sentenced to deportation (IV).

Meilhac and Gille likewise drew on Barrière in staging Manon's sufferings as a prisoner on the road to Le Havre—a glimpse missing from the novel—and there they had her die. But the play and Puccini's opera end in the wilds of Louisiana, just as Prévost recounts. And if Puccini's first act follows the structure of the play, in sketching out Act IV Praga announced festively to the composer: "I shat a grand duet, / Puccin, which is glorious!" (June 3, 1890). The decision to close the work with a long, exhausting duet was as important and intrinsic to Puccini's developing poetic as it has been criticized by scholars ("a lament in duet form, lasting as long as eighteen minutes and thus tailing on the dramatic plane," observes Mosco Carner). Hence it was taken over from Barrière's drama and from the start it was a part of the operatic adaptation. Puccini never had second thoughts about it, apart from inserting the great tragic monologue "Sola... perduta... abbandonata!", even when Illica proposed different solutions. This shows that he wished to keep the spotlight on the fatal destiny of a transgressive young woman, a symbol of true love, quite apart from the fatuity she displays. It is one of the most representative moments of Puccini's poetry, essential in bringing out the opera's central theme: love as curse and desperate passion.

Manon Lescaut	**Massenet's *Manon***	**Puccini's *Manon Lescaut***
BARRIÈRE-FOURNIER, 1851	MEILHAC-GILLE, 1884	PRAGA-OLIVA, 1890^/ILLICA *et alli* 1893*
I. An inn near Amiens.	I. An inn in Amiens.	I. In Amiens.^*
II. Salons and garden of Chaillot's villa.	II. Des Grieux and Manon's apartment in Rue Vivienne.	II. The garden of Chaillot's villa.^
III. An alcove in the palace of Commander de Brébœuf.	III.1 The walk in the Cours de la Reine. III.2 The visitors' room of the seminary of Saint-Sulpice. IV. The Hôtel de Transylvanie.	III.1 In Paris, alcove in Geronte's palace^* II.*
IV. A room in an inn at the gates of Le Havre.	V. The road to Le Havre.	III.2 Square near the Hospital.^ – III. L'Havre.*
V. In a desert near New Orleans.		IV. In America.^

The relation between the play and some specific passages in Puccini's libretto is further significant. This starts with the planning of the abduction by Des Grieux, denounced by the commander (the counterpart of the libertines Brétigny and Morfontaine in Massenet and of Puccini's Geronte): "Le commandeur: Manon arrivée hier à Amiens, devait entrer au couvent le soir à huit heures; à sept heures et demi elle s'est fait enlever" (I.3). Then in Act III the play presents the image of Manon torn between the luxury that surrounds her and true love, which stokes her desire "di labbra ardenti ed infuocate braccia" (as Puccini's protagonist puts it): "Riches habits! brillantes parures! que m'avez-vous donné en echange du bonheur que j'ai perdu pour vous conquérir? Diamants insensibles! l'éclat de vos milles facettes vaut-il un regard de l'amant aimé? [...] Riche collier, as-tu jamais fait tresaillir mes épaules nues?" (III.3)—and this is the clearly expressed source for the solo "In quelle trine morbide" (II.4).

From here it is a short step to the love duet which is the fulcrum of the work: "Son forse / della Manon d'un giorno / meno piacente e bella?" (II.7), a question asked before her of Des Grieux by the heroine of the play "(*l'enlaçant de ses bras*) Regardez-moi; j'ai cessé d'être belle?" (III.4). Massenet likewise used this point in the scene in Saint-Sulpice (III.2.7).

Shortly afterwards, we witness a topical episode of the opera, which brings to light the infantile cruelty of the woman when she returns to the mirror for the third time, and not just because it is an instrument of vanity and the ruthless chronicler of fading beauty (II.8):

Act I: María José Siri (Manon).

Act I: Gregory Kunde (Des Grieux) and María José Siri (Manon).

Act I: Gregory Kunde (Des Grieux), María José Siri (Manon), Francesco Marsiglia (Edmondo), and the chorus.

Act I: Dalibor Jenis (Lescaut), Carlo Lepore (Geronte), and the chorus.

MANON (*prende lo specchio, lo pianta in viso a Geronte, e coll'altra mano indica Des Grieux: trattenendo le risa*)
Amore? Amore!
Mio buon signore,
ecco!... Guardatevi!
S'errai, leale
ditelo!... Or poi
guardate noi!

MANON (*présentant un miroir à Synnelet*)
Monsieur le vicomte, regardez-vous bien; vous êtes jeune vous êtes beau!... et vous me demandez de l'amour? Eh bien! (*enlaçant Des Grieux*) voilà l'homme que j'ai juré d'aimer toute ma vie; et je vous déclare qu'aux yeux de votre très-humble servante, tous les Synnelet de la terre ne valent pas un seul des cheveux que je tiens.

Here too, the libretto develops a situation in the novel adapted with greater emphasis by Barrière, who created the character of the old commander's nephew, the sordid Synnelet (who appears in the novel only in America and in a completely different setting). In the play he woos Manon from Paris to Louisiana, and suddenly bursts in on the lovers. Manon requites him as follows (III.5):

The dying moments of Puccini's Manon in Act IV ("Tutta su me ti posa, / o mia stanca diletta / [...] / Tu soffri? – Orribilmente") then derived useful ideas from Act V of the play, which even includes a musical suggestion. These are among the last lines of the play:

DES GRIEUX
Non! non! pas adieu!... je veux te sauver; je veux t'emporter d'ici!... (*Il veut la soulever, et la voyant pâle et im-*

Act II: Francesco Scalas (a Hairdresser) and María José Siri (Manon).

Atto I: Chiara Amarù (Rosina) e Marco Filippo Romano (Bartolo).

Act II: María José Siri (Manon), Carlo Lepore (Geronte), and the chorus.

mobile.) Manon, réponds-moi! (*Depuis un instant l'orchestre fait entendre, sur un mode doux et lent, les premières mesures de la chanson favorite de Manon*.)

In *Manon Lescaut* Puccini experimented with a great variety of narrative devices (reprises and thematic elaborations with a symphonic breadth, but also melodic reminiscences and much else). When the young woman is dying, Puccini introduces an echo of the music that accompanied Act II, when she performed the dance figure with the lorgnette: ("Il maestro: A manca! / Brava!... A destra!... Un saluto! / (*figura dell'occhialetto*) / Attenta! L'occhialetto... / Geronte: Minuetto perfetto!," II.5). This is not one of the heroine's beloved motifs, and in this lies the greater fascination of the device adopted: the music evokes that alcove in a luxurious, dissolute palace, forcefully affirming the theme on which the opera turns: the identity between love, guilt, and death.

Illica and Ricordi at Work

Praga and Oliva's work on the libretto of *Manon Lescaut* failed to satisfy Puccini. Until the first night, he kept having second thoughts about the plot, because of the numerous problems raised by the dramatic choices. Even less satisfied was his mentor Giulio Ricordi, the impresario and publisher who had launched the composer of *Le Villi*, and was unwilling to take anything for granted in seeking to establish his reputation as Verdi's successor. Continuing to pursue the Verdi-Boito model, in the summer of 1890, the publisher called in Ruggero Leoncavallo, poet, playwright, and composer, though not yet of *Pagliacci* (1892). His work did little to improve matters. Meanwhile Puccini, who had begun composing the parts of the libretto prepared by Oliva (Praga had withdrawn in the fall of 1890), remained dissatisfied with the second and third acts (then still divided into two parts: the alcove and Le Havre). This prompted Ricordi to turn for help to Giuseppe Giacosa, a leading figure in the theatre at that time. Thanks to the playwright's mediation, an agreement was drafted with Praga and Oliva that the libretto, which was by too many hands, should remain anonymous, and Luigi Illica was appointed to make the necessary changes.

This was therefore the first trial of what was to become a lasting collaboration (launched three years later with *La bohème*), although in *Manon Lescaut* Giacosa remained to one side. It was Illica who dealt with the points in the libretto that Puccini felt were

Act II: Gregory Kunde (Des Grieux) and María José Siri (Manon).

weak, without affecting the balance between the parts of the work (Acts I, IV, and much of Act III) that had already been composed when he started work. Illica introduced the characters of the hairdresser, the singer, the dancing master, and the lamplighter, reflecting his characteristic inclination to fill the scenes with secondary and supporting parts. He introduced a dozen such figures in *Andrea Chénier* (1896) and *Siberia* (1903). He was not always capable of restraining this tendency and sometimes veered into a certain sketchiness. But the character roles that he introduced into *Manon Lescaut* are of vital importance to the plot's development, and they lend themselves wonderfully to realizing Puccini's idea of using historical color as the hallmark of the opera. It weighs on the life of the sensuous Manon (who eloped with a student in the finale of Act I) with tedium, etiquette, and conformity. The hairdresser's pirouettes, the musician who plays a madrigal, and the dancing master bore her. She tells all this to her brother, a skillful go-between, who goes off to fetch her lover Des Grieux.

Without these secondary roles, it would have been difficult to convey the sense of the contrast that pervades the protagonist, torn between the love of luxury and a lively sensuality. Moreover, the lamplighter who crosses the stage in Act III, singing the song of Kate (which I have quoted in the epigraph) adds a touch of dramatic power in itself. Illica broke up the continuity of the action by bringing in the tenor, who crosses the stage during the duet between Manon, a prisoner behind bars, and Des Grieux (III.3), and so interrupts the flow of musical memories during their first meeting, which stirs hope, that "always disappoints." This brilliant device not only creates a fearful tension at the very moment when Manon is meant to be set free, but denies the mirage itself, presenting a cynical reflection on the fate that binds women to their powerful seducers, who always win. The king defeats Kate's dream, and "had her heart" after giving her a husband. Puccini significantly heightens the effect, immediately citing the melody of his elegy *Crisantemi* written on the death of Amedeo, Duke of Savoy (1890), a kind of funeral march that banishes any remaining illusions of happiness.

Illica also made the beginning of the scene in Le Havre more lyrical, and suggested for its conclusion a "peroration, so to speak, or rather a very short seafaring passage evoking the effect of the *ship setting sail*" (to Ricordi, April 24, 1892). But above all, he solved the problem of the *concertato* with the prostitutes' roll call by writing to the publisher on May 1, 1892, and suggesting a precise formal strategy to the composer:

> The roll call begins: the commander hands over the prisoners to the captain by means of the sergeant. At first the roll call is spoken aloud and will evoke the striking effect of a real roll call. Meanwhile, Des Grieux approaches Manon, whom he saw lose her last hope of escape, and whose soul is anguished not only by her violent separation from Des Grieux, but also distraught with sad premonitions. Here Manon says her last goodbye to her lover. And this could be a passage of profound sadness, a surge of true melody (*Manon has no sentimental numbers in the opera*). Beneath it is the murmuring of the soldiers. Des Grieux has lost hope: he weeps and cannot speak for depth of feeling. But when Manon's name comes and raises him out of it, then he turns to the last hope that gleams before him: to move the captain. And so he implores him to take pity.

With this device, which Puccini at first had difficulty in developing musically, Illica skillfully untangled an intricate knot: thanks to his idea, Puccini was able to transform a static *concertato*, articulated in the traditional sections, into an action. This was the same task that Verdi had faced in the third act of *Otello*, without finding a solution. After the agitated *tempo d'attacco* ("Udiste! – Che avvenne?") in the central section of the *ensemble,* the sergeant's roll call, declaimed to a theme in E flat minor in the orchestra, acts as a pivot for the melodies of the protagonists and secondary figures, each of which deals with a specific action. In this way a plurality of situations unfold in synchrony, without the least detail being lost.

There remained the second act set in the house of the two lovers. This was probably eliminated in the summer of 1892, after Illica and the composer had spent a lot of time trying out many different treatments. It posed problems by making the opera excessively long, causing Puccini serious anxiety after his unhappy experience with *Edgar*. And above all it would make the new *Manon* too similar to Massenet's. This led to the omission of the last of the situations in the source text, which required the presence of Des Grieux's father, the Comte Des Grieux, to put an end to the couple's happiness by carrying off his son by force. It is only as a consequence of this act, in which she was inevitably

complicit, that Massenet's Manon agrees without much enthusiasm to become Brétigny's lover. Attenuating the weight of respectability and social constraints, Puccini makes Manon, sated with unhappiness, directly responsible for putting a temporary end to her relationship with Des Grieux: this accentuates her cynicism, making her more contradictory and fascinating.

The list of those who worked on the libretto should include Puccini, who added a few verses, and Giulio Ricordi, who had the soul of an artist as well as being an excellent analyst and inventor of dramatic situations. In particular, when the dramatic subject was still being thrashed out, he anticipated the possibility of connecting the two parts of the action through an *entr'acte*. On March 4, 1892, he wrote to the composer:

> Act III needs to be divided into two parts, lowering the curtain but continuing the music, which, I think, should describe the sequel to the turmoil of the arrest, then gradually change to sorrowful, and become gloomy as Scene 2 is revealed – night – etc. etc....

Evidently Ricordi had taken this idea from the beginning of the novel, when Des Grieux meets the *Homme de qualité* (alias Prévost) in Le Havre, after the attempts to release Manon have failed and begins to tell his sad story. In the score a sort of program, *The Imprisonment – The Journey to Le Havre*, transcribed literally from the *Histoire*, precedes one of the most original and moving moments of the whole opera:

> Des Grieux "I adore her! – My passion is so overpowering that I feel I am the most unhappy of creatures alive. – I tried every means in Paris to win her freedom. I implored the powerful... I knocked and begged at every door! I even used force. It was all in vain. – I had only one way left to me. To follow her. And I do. Wherever she goes. Even to the end of the earth."

The orchestra readily translates into sound Des Grieux's desperate longing to be reunited with Manon, resting on a thematic pattern that runs through the opera from the very first bars. In the initial section, Manon's melody turns on itself, first acephalous and

Act II: Dalibor Jenis (Lescaut), María José Siri (Manon), Carlo Lepore (Geronte), Davio Giorgelè (Sargent), and the chorus.

Act III: Dalibor Jenis (Lescaut) and Gregory Kunde (Des Grieux).

Act III: Gregory Kunde (Des Grieux) and María José Siri (Manon).

Act III: Gregory Kunde (Des Grieux).

Act III: María José Siri (Manon), Gregory Kunde (Des Grieux), and the chorus.

Act III: Cristian Saitta (the Naval Captain) and Gregory Kunde (Des Grieux).

Act IV: Gregory Kunde (Des Grieux) and María José Siri (Manon).

then immediately presented in a minor mode with a chromatic, heartrending accompaniment, in an opening where the movement of the parts, the sequence of sevenths and the use of instruments at the extremes of their registers explicitly reveal a stylistic debt to Wagner. The narrative continues in the following section—based on a reminiscence of the duet in Act II ("Io voglio il tuo perdono"), in which the glowing doublings of the strings contrast with the dark timbre that preceded them. Finally they flow into the hope motif (corresponding to Des Grieux's words in the duet in Act II, "Nell'occhio tuo profondo / io leggo il mio destin"), and it is as if the fates of the two lovers were united. Instead it is a prelude to misfortune and death, like the illusory B major, which makes the concluding bars even worse. Puccini succeeded in turning Prévost's prose into one of the most striking passages of European *fin de siècle* music.

The Skillful Orchestration

The music of the *entr'acte* powerfully foreshadows an immanent dramaturgy, but "opera is opera: symphony is symphony," as Verdi wrote to Count Arrivabene in 1884, criticizing the intermezzos in *Le Villi*. His objection, however, was only to the insertion of orchestral passages of a descriptive character in opera, and could therefore be extended to the intermezzo in question. But in *Manon Lescaut* Puccini went beyond the boundaries of the genre, skillfully adapting structures of a symphonic kind to the needs of the action. Act I has been analyzed by the renowned conductor and scholar René Leibowitz as a symphony in four movements:

I "Allegro" in two fundamental keys (A major - F sharp minor): it includes the brilliant exordium, Edmondo's "madrigal" ("Ave sera"), the *arietta* "Tra voi belle," and the reprise abbreviated and varied by inversion of the sections ("Baie: Misteriose vittorie");

II "Adagio," starting from the entrance of the carriage (F major - G major - B flat major);

III "Scherzo": the episode between Lescaut and Geronte and the game of cards (D minor - F major → A major);

IV "Finale", from Manon's return to the reprise of the scherzo, and the *arietta*, sung by the students (B flat major → G major → B flat minor - E major).

The whole act obviously entwines the motifs very cohesively; yet, the four sections are clearly differentiated, with some themes recurring cyclically and often varied. (For example, the sound of the postilion's horn offstage, which first announces the arrival of the carriage and then, entwined with the other melodies, recalls the sequence in which Des Grieux falls in love.) Then the recapitulation of the theme of the scherzo in the last movement has at least an illustrious precedent in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The impression of formal coherence is also strengthened by the orchestral style and the tonal plan (consider that the work ends in F sharp minor, a tone linked to the two initial keys). But "the thematic development [...] is entrusted to both the vocal parts and the orchestral parts," notes Leibowitz, and "it is clear that the

Act IV: María José Siri (Manon).

author did not mean to threaten the purely lyrical structure with the symphonic part."

The true novelty of this score lay in Puccini's ability to look to the future while also drawing on the past. The work is firmly anchored in European opera, with the emergence of formal structures that supported the narrative and developed an experimental musical language in the wake of Wagner, while continuing the glorious Italian tradition, which ensured the primacy of melody. Structures clearly associated with instrumental music would become more frequent in the works of his late maturity. Puccini would resort to them in a further experimental phase of his career, working even more closely with Europe-wide tendencies in the early twentieth century. But their unmistakable presence in this dazzling beginning also reveals his striving to create a new formal scaffolding, capable of giving dramatic events a different cadence from tradition.

Puccini also took advantage of the leitmotif technique, reviving it in original ways. The thematic material used in the opera determines an articulated system of relations that binds the characters to the situations they experience and their related moods, in associations where the music often acquires a decisive weight, sometimes freeing itself from purely narrative requirements to create refined symbolic overtones. We see an example in the brief glimpse we get of the treasurer-general Geronte di Ravoir, identified as a man of power and an intriguer by the wheezing chromatic theme in Act I that accompanies his words: "Io pago prima, e poche ciarle!" I.2. When he catches the lovers embracing in Act II, Manon, as we have seen, thrusts a mirror in front of his face to show that only his money, not his appearance, had secured him the love of a beautiful young woman. And the theme will reappear in a lively variant where the chromaticism is absorbed into the major mode (II.8), yet underscoring the young woman's instinctive cynicism.

By his refined ability to shape the themes to serve a narrative function, Puccini also succeeded in characterizing *Manon* far beyond the conventions. When he decided to eliminate the act of the opera dwelling on the happiness of the lovers, he had to wrestle with a notable dramatic problem: to justify the sudden leap between the situation in which Manon in Act I goes off with a young man of her own age, with whom she is in love, and then explain why we find her in Act II in the palatial residence of an elderly libertine. In the version performed in Turin, Puccini had written an elaborate *concertato* for the finale of Act I, in which Geronte, infuriated, expressed all his spite at being cheated, while Lescaut drew his sword and could barely be restrained from striking. But Illica realized it was necessary to motivate Manon's transition from this sudden elopement to the *boudoir* of the palace in Act II. On October 20, 1893, he wrote to Ricordi:

> From listening to Massenet's *Manon* I got an idea... It's this: what if for La Scala we boldly cut out the finale of Act I, and in its place added something between Lescaut and Geronte that would make Act II clearer?...

Puccini understood his librettist's reasoning, and by the time the opera reopened at the Teatro Coccia in Novara on December 21, 1893, he had devised the finale known today. This was then presented at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples on January 21, 1894, a performance which he attended.

He had already used musical means to connect the different situations, having decided to omit the lovers' happiness around their "little table" and to focus on a cynical Manon and a desperate Des Grieux. So, from the central part of the tenor's *arietta* mocking love ("Palesatemi il destino"), he derived an important phrase of Edmondo's revealing to his friend that an old man is planning to carry off the young woman ("dal suo stel divelto, povero fior"). From here he derived the theme of the flute as the curtain rises on Act II, drawing leisurely arabesques to the impalpable accompaniment of strings and harp, rising over a light orchestral timbre, in which triangles, carillon, and celesta evoke the tinkling of jewels. The semantic link is simple and effective, and within the grasp of any attentive listener. But here we have to step back a moment in the story. Firstly, the destiny evoked by the young man is identified with the young woman who is the object of his attraction—Edmondo's "povero fior"—then it will become the destiny itself of her doomed passion. Strengthened by these elements, Puccini found it easy to eliminate the previous *concertato* and replace it with a reprise of Des Grieux's whole *arietta*, so closing Act I. Then, by passing the *arietta* to the students as a song, he also created a closer bond between the two pieces of stage music, as well as a more closely knit sequence of events. Hence "Venticelli ricciutelli" is not just neutral background, and the fragrance of the song brings out Lescaut's hypocritical suggestions to Geronte, when he suggests setting up an extended family at the expense of the old lecher: the doors of the "gilded palace" are ready to open to welcome a perfect courtesan—Manon's inevitable lot, a prisoner of the longed-for luxury and rituals of the society whose victim she will soon become.

But Puccini further showed his skill at tracing broad associations through the technique of variation. Eminent commentators have criticized the whole first part of Act II, built up on "eighteenth-century pastiches [...] notably cumbersome in the economy of a work that leaves large gaps in the chronological sequence of the plot" (Claudio Casini is referring to the elimination of Massenet's second act.) Yet they enable the audience to experience Manon's inner sense of time and suggest the motives for her reactions. Puccini did the same thing on two other occasions, in *Madama Butterfly* and *Suor Angelica*. Then this strategy has far-reaching ramifications. As soon as the dominant flute theme comes to an end and the hairdresser leaves, Manon confronts her brother in the almost canonical form of the traditional five-part duet. Into it the composer inserts pregnant thematic evocations, woven into Manon's solo, "In quelle trine morbide," a true hymn to erotic nostalgia, especially in the conclusion. In the last section (the traditional "cabaletta"), Manon, moved by the memory, evokes Des Grieux's return to her arms by rising to high C, singing a full and intense melody that is a flame of passion. This will translate into the first phrase of the pastoral that seals the eighteenth-century

Act IV: Gregory Kunde (Des Grieux) and María José Siri (Manon).

scene, together with the melodies of the minuets interwoven earlier, accompanying the dancing. In this way it is even clearer that she is waiting for the return of true love, the Thyrsis who has conquered her forever, despite her infidelity.

Manon, Sphinx étonnant

Manon arrives in the square in Amiens with a power unknown to her French sister, who alights from a coach and sings her *Leitmotiv*, "Je suis encore toute étourdie," with the grace of a coquette already on the traces of a pimp. The reason for this power is once again to be sought in Puccini's musical strategy. When the amorous tension created by the students is already high, the carriage arrives and everyone rushes to see who is getting out, while the air fills with four notes, two major second intervals together, launched from the chorus to the orchestra and so saturating the sound space. They form a simple descending tetrachord, apparently conveying a demure and modest attitude, but in reality also connoted by the words of the students expressing their curiosity ("vediam!") and appreciation of its luxury ("Viaggiatori eleganti!... Galanti!").

From this sequence Puccini took the cue for many key moments in the story, almost as if Manon's music potentially embodied her future and that of her lover. The tetrachord is connoted when Des Grieux approaches the young woman, in a classic case of love at first sight, and asks her name: "Manon Lescaut mi chiamo...." Could there be a better way to declare that the whole action will turn on the prima donna (a favorite theme of late nineteenth-century opera)? And when Manon is called away by her brother, the tenor passionately intonates the air "Donna non vidi mai," culminating in the theme of Manon's name. Unlike Massenet's Des Grieux, identified from the start with a noble melody, it is clear that Puccini's Des Grieux will have no distinct identity, and from now on will only live for the woman's love.

Subsequently Puccini shows a skill worthy of a symphonist in managing this descending tetrachord, either whole or reduced to its generative cell, the second interval that the listener associates with Manon as a facet of her many-sided personality. With only two notes the fugitive is evoked by Lescaut in the duet with his sister, when he describes Des Grieux's grief ("Ov'è Manon? ove fuggì?" II.4), after a variant of the tetrachord appeared in the *incipit* of the solo "In quelle trine morbide," confessing that in the alcove she now longs for all she had lost by becoming a kept woman. Puccini simply changes the mode of the cell from major to minor to convey a sense of the ominous future that affects the whole outcome of the love duet in Act II. Shortly afterwards, the tetrachord reemerges briefly to a scintillating arpeggio accompaniment of strings and woodwinds: an illusory moment of happiness associated with the frivolous Manon, who imagines herself free and rich ("Ah! ah! Liberi! Liberi! / Liberi come l'aria," II.8). But after the old and vengeful bloodsucker has had her arrested, the initial section of the intermezzo suggests a chromatic and heartrending variant of her melody, echoing the citations of the *Tristan* chord in the previous act.

Manon's musical signature is used in Act IV to heighten the atmosphere of despair that is the prelude to her death. The beginning and end are sealed by the generative cell: two notes that almost physically transmit the sense of a gust of hot wind sweeping the "boundless plain [...] of New Orleans" by leaping upwards two octaves and the dynamic intensity of the whole orchestra, growing from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo* in the saturated harmonic space. The chords are in minor modes and descend from the tonic to the modal leading tone, as at the opening of the duet: the foreboding heard "in the gilded alcove" has been fulfilled, and the tragedy moves towards its conclusion. But the theme still has its predominant role in two tormented passages, when Manon complains of her weakness ("La sete mi divora"), and again in the last moments of her life, where it makes us feel, in its most fateful chromatic variant, that only a last fading glimmer of her "brilliant youth" remains.

In this context, richly evocative, there follows the reminiscence of the minuet in the figure of the lorgnette, the music heard once only in Act II. This is rather like Sieglinde's melody in *Die Walküre*, which Brünnhilde, at the end of the *Ring des Nibelungen*, reprises in hope for rebirth in a better world. The difference is that here the light of hope is extinct. The act ends as it began, dominated by Manon, sincere forever: "Ma... l'amor mio... non muor..." With these broken words, swept away by the blasts of wind in the plain, uttered by one of the most embarrassing heroines in opera, Puccini gave a voice to all the *fin de siècle* disquiet, and consigned his first accomplished masterpiece to posterity.

Gianandrea Noseda, musical director of the Teatro Regio di Torino.

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Parfumed calendar inspired by *Manon Lescaut* published by the Valsecchi & Morosetti perfumers. Illustration of the duet in Act II between Manon and Des Grieux, 1912.

Gabriella Biagi Ravenni

TRACES OF A MASTERPIECE

The 30th Anniversary as Prologue

On December 26, 1922, the Carnival Season opened at La Scala with a memorable production of *Manon Lescaut*, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the opera's premiere (Turin, Teatro Regio, February 1, 1893). Success was ensured by an outstanding cast, with Juanita Caracciolo, Aureliano Pertile and Ernesto Badini in the leading roles, Giovacchino Forzano's direction, Caramba's costumes, Edoardo Marchioro's sets, and Arturo Toscanini as conductor. Puccini was confident of the outcome, as he wrote to Riccardo Schnabl (Carteggi 851):

> *Manon* tonight, a great *Manon*, and if the audience is not moved by it, it will mean we're living on Saturn instead of Earth. I assure you Toscanini is a true miracle of feeling, of subtlety, sensitivity, balance. What pleasure I felt at rehearsals! I have never, ever enjoyed listening to my music so much.

The audience was moved and the performance was a complete triumph. This is borne out by the reviews, which as usual counted the number of curtain calls for author and cast and particularly stressed Puccini's gesture of spontaneously embracing Toscanini. After the gala evening of February 1, Puccini put his emotions on paper (Carteggi 855):

> Dear Arturo,
> You gave me the greatest satisfaction in my life – *Manon* in your interpretation is above all that I thought in those far-off times – you have performed my music with a poetry, with a *souplesse* and an unequaled passion – Last night I felt all your great soul and your love for your old friend and companion in arms – I am happy because above all you were able to understand my young and passionate spirit of thirty years ago!

Gaetano Cesari's review (Corriere, December 27, 1922) likewise emphasized the work's "young and passionate spirit." Cesari, at that time the librarian of the Milan Conservatoire, added in support of his interpretation a detail that would certainly have been new to readers at that time:

Marco Praga, one of the authors of the libretto for *Manon Lescaut*.

> And in truth *Manon* remains what it was: a work emanating from the heart, warmed by a youthful imagination, conceived in the furrow of the traditional, yet free from the crystalized old systems as from the new, uncertainly blazing equally uncertain trails. [...] This vein of Puccini's is truly youthful: it wells up from personal sentiment, and from it alone, so as to clearly determine the master's personality. So true it is that one of his most typical and beautiful and successful melodies, Des Grieux's first words to Manon: *Cortese damigella perdonate al dir mio*, reproduces exactly the melody of a romanza for tenor composed in 1885 in the exam at our Conservatoire to the words of Felice Romani *È la notte che mi reca le sue larve* [*Mentia l'avviso*, 1883]. The secrets of the archives, however, reveal the much more interesting secret of Puccini's artistic spontaneity and personality, in embryo since the years at the Conservatoire.

He then went on to observe:

> *Manon* had some slight flaws in the orchestration, some exuberance of melodic backing, from which in some places there came a great plethora of sound, some swelling of orchestral attitudes, unsuited to the nature of the melodic thought. Puccini, today more experienced than ever, has not disdained to subject this orchestration to some retouching. In the second and fourth acts, especially, there are numerous amendments, and some others are evident already in the first act.

Puccini objected to this part of the review, so he sent a letter to the editor (Corriere, December 28, 1922):

> Your music critic claims that I have corrected the instrumentation of *Manon*. [...]
> Such changes are mere modifications of the coloring, but the score printed by Ricordi shows that the setting of the opera has not been altered by me. My *Manon* is just what it was thirty years ago. It has only been tuned... by Arturo Toscanini, which means in a way that gives the author the great and unusual joy of seeing his music illuminated by those lights that at the time of composition he had seen and dreamed and then he had not seen again.

Was it really just some slight "modification of coloring" compared to the *Manon* of 1893? If on the one hand it can be said that this opera was the one that gave the least concern to Puccini, on the other it has to be noted that it was the one that was subjected to modifications (and not just of coloring!) over the longest time span:

Gennaro Amato, detail of the engraving published in *L'Illustrazione italiana* for the first performance at the Teatro alla Scala, 1894. The figures depict the minuet and the death of Manon.

some thirty years. If we really have to go back as far as 1885, as suggested by Ferdinando Fontana, to find the origin of Puccini's interest in the Abbé Prévost's novel the *Histoire du Chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*, and if indeed the third opera Puccini mentions in a letter of January 1888 (Ep. I 121) is the future *Manon Lescaut*, we have to conclude that Puccini worked on it for an even longer time.

The history of *Manon Lescaut* is therefore very long and very complicated, because the documentation assisting us to reconstruct it is abundant but patchy. We can retrace some of its phases by drawing on the primary sources, while omitting to show how complex, though stimulating, Puccini's life was in that period: his domestic *ménage* (the difficulty of winning acceptance for his relationship with Elvira, financial problems, the death of his brother Michele); the commitments of work (the revisions of *Le Villi*, the completion of *Edgar* and then the revisions of it, and the reduction of the score of *Die Meistersingers* commissioned by Ricordi); his active involvement in productions of his operas (April 1889 *Edgar* at La Scala; November 1889 *Le Villi* in Milan; September 1891 *Edgar* in Lucca; January 1892 *Edgar* in Ferrara; March 1892 *Edgar* in Madrid; August 1892 *Edgar* in Brescia; November 1892 *Le Villi* in Hamburg).

Choice of Subject

With *Manon* we find ourselves for the first time in a situation that would become the norm from then on: the choice of subject was interwoven with other projects. In March 1885, when Fontana's suggestion kindled in his mind the idea of Prévost's novel, first in its original form, then in a stage adaptation, Puccini was at work with Fontana on his second opera, *Edgar*. And shortly before *Edgar* was staged (April 21, 1889), not very successfully, Puccini and

Three figurines by Adolf Hohenstein for the premiere of *Manon Lescaut*: Manon Lescaut, Act II; Manon Lescaut, Act IV; Des Grieux, Act I, 1893. Milan, Archivio storico Ricordi.

Stage equipment (the carriage of Amiens) designed by Adolf Hohenstein for the premiere of *Manon Lescaut*, 1893. Milan, Archivio storico Ricordi.

Fontana attended performances of Victorien Sardou's *La Tosca* in Milan and Turin, with Sarah Bernhardt as the heroine. It was a flash of inspiration and on May 7 Puccini wrote to Giulio Ricordi (Ep. I 131):

> After two or three days of country idleness to rest myself from all the weariness I was suffering from, I realize that the urge to work, instead of vanishing, has returned livelier than before... I'm thinking of *Tosca*! I beg you to take the necessary steps to get permission from Sardou, [...] because in this *Tosca* I see an opera that is just what I want.

The *Tosca* project proceeded slowly, following the usual stages (acquisition of rights and the appointment of a librettist, in this case Luigi Illica, to adapt the play, with meetings to work on it at Casa Ricordi), at least down to the end of 1891. Then the work was suspended (temporarily, of course) in 1893. The next mention of *Tosca* appeared in the epistolario dated August 9, 1895 (Ep. I 583, to Carlo Clausetti): "I will do Tosca."

Meanwhile, the seed planted by Fontana had produced Puccini's first great success, namely *Manon Lescaut*. It is not known exactly when Puccini decided it was to be his third opera, but it is well known that in July 1889 Giulio Ricordi had sent Marco Praga the contract for a libretto in three acts, to be returned with the signatures of Praga and Domenico Oliva. And that by the following August Puccini was already thinking of working on the first draft of the libretto (Ep. I 138, July 19, 1889).

Composition of the music seems to have begun in the summer of 1889. Did Puccini really believe that the work would be ready for La Scala's 1890–1891 Season? In late November he wrote (Ep. I 144) to his sister Tomaide: "I am working very hard now. I want to finish a work for the coming season at La Scala: I feel confident I will be able to have it performed." It seems that the "work" was *Manon Lescaut*, judging from a letter to his brother Michele on January 5, 1890 (Ep. I 147): "I am working on *Manon* and after I will do the *Budda*" (another project that never came to fruition; a draft of the libretto by Illica exists).

The issue is perplexed somewhat by articles published in the musical periodicals: on June 18, 1889, *Il mondo artistico* announced that the subject of one of the two operas commissioned from Puccini by Ricordi would be based on Sardou's *La Tosca*, and that the ibrettist was to be Fontana. And the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* for December 13, 1891, stated: "G. Ricordi & C. Editori [...] announce that they have bought from *Vittoriano Sardou* the right to adapt *LA TOSCA* as a lyrical drama. Maestro *Giacomo Puccini*, having completed his commitments with the firm, has received this new commission to write two more operas, one of which will be *LA TOSCA*, to a libretto by *Luigi Illica*." Still no explicit mention of *Manon Lescaut*.

Librettists and Genesis

As we have seen, in July 1889 Praga and Oliva had signed a contract for the libretto of *Manon Lescaut*. If the story told by Giuseppe Adami many years later can be relied on, Praga was the first to be contacted and stipulated that he should be accompanied by a poet to be responsible for versifying it, namely Oliva. But Puccini, in an interview in 1923 (*Il Serchio*, February 7), gave another version:

> - How did you get the idea of setting *Manon*?
> - Marco Praga who urged me to, and the urge became so strong that a few days later we were already working on the libretto of the new opera.

However it came about, Praga and Oliva immediately set to work and supplied Puccini with the first version of the text. By late summer 1889 he had begun composing the music.

No letter from Puccini to Praga has yet come to light, while we have two of his letters to Oliva. They hardly suffice to get a direct view of the composer's moods and requirements. Because, as is well known, with *Manon Lescaut* Puccini began to be a playwright and even a poet. We can get some idea of this by reading Oliva's letter to Puccini of April 17, 1890 (Bonturi-Razzi ms. 3694/1), dealing largely with Act I:

> Dear Puccini,
> Here is the new duet: I hope it is the final draft. I tried to put all the passion into it compatible with a conversation between two young people who are speaking to each other for the first time. The truth is that in this dialogue they don't say everything they think. Many obstacles hinder the affections from breaking out: the more passion is restrained, the more truthful it is. – Fortunately with music you can illustrate this concept better than I have done in poetry.
> As for the finale I have to say again that I cannot follow the outline. Firstly, Ricordi appears (if I have understood properly) not to want the scene following the duet between Manon, De Grieux, then Edmondo to be interwoven with the one between Lescaut, Geronte, and the other drinkers. Now that contradicts the outline, which instead indicates that the scenes are interwoven with words of doubtful clarity.

The composer and librettist Ruggero Leoncavallo.

Who should I listen to? If the scenes are to be divided, what will the lovers do while Geronte is at the inn and talking to Lescaut and the students? The plot seems the best system and so far I'm sticking to the outline. Going on, isn't it better for Geronte to leave Lescaut with the drinkers? Why should he bring out a character who would certainly be a hindrance to him? Here my variant seems logical and would not be sacrificed in the interest of the libretto.
Geronte goes looking for the girl: learns from the innkeeper she has eloped, and we are in the midst of the finale.
Is that all right? But what a mistake you made in abandoning the quartet in the first draft! I've reread it and it seems to me impossible that you should be prompted to discard such attractive artistic material!
Tomorrow night, if I can, I will write the finale. Then I will get down to Act III. Since we're now on the Act II it would be good to talk to each other. Praga has some good ideas for it. It would be best to listen to him. Fix a day and an hour from the 25th to the 30th, excluding the 29th, and we'll deal with all these points. For the verses, you repeat that you won't use one that's not approved by me. In brief I'd lose ten nights in a row, I want to save the form.
I clasp your hand. Reply soon.
Affectionately Oliva

We know that at some point in all the continual chopping and changing Marco Praga abandoned the enterprise, at any rate definitely after writing his doggerel letter of June 3, 1890 (Quaderni 2 p. 212): "O famed one! Do not curse and swear / Oh! Do not shout and yell: / If Manon is the cross you bear / It's still my cross as well!" Soon after Puccini wrote to his sister Tomaide (Ep. I 154, June 15, 1890): "I'm working on *Manon Lescaut,* but the libretto is driving me to despair. It had to be rewritten. Even now, we can't find a poet who does anything properly!"

The two surviving letters from Puccini to Oliva were written between late July and early August 1890 (Ep. I 156–157). We will quote few sentences from them: "So I am looking forward as soon as possible to getting something to work on. Please change the first scene. [...] Rack your brains for your friend," and "as for having to rewrite it, as I said the crazed rewriting will only be for this blessed first scene. After that we'll have the wind in our sails."

This was the situation when Ruggero Leoncavallo joined the ranks of the librettists working on *Manon Lescaut*. Since the account of this step, as well as the autobiography that relates it, is unreliable, we can again turn to the interview given by Puccini in 1923:

The first performers of the opera: Cesira Ferrani as Manon Lescaut (in *Ars et Labor*, May 1909) and Giuseppe Cremonini as Des Grieux (1893).

- And who wrote the libretto?
- So many people wrote it... that today it's nobody's.
- Can you explain that?
- It's too long to explain, and then it's an old story... I'll just say that the collaborators were Praga, Oliva, Illica and occasionally Leoncavallo.
- Leoncavallo?
- You should know that when Leoncavallo came to Milan as a young man he was taken on by Ricordi as a ... librettist. We became close friends. At that time I was renting a cottage in the country at Vacallo in Switzerland, and I was working on *Manon*. Leoncavallo also rented another cottage, then we both lived our *Bohéme*... in prose. It was the great success of *Cavalleria Rusticana* that kindled Leoncavallo's musical passion and made him decide to compose *Pagliacci*. So in the two houses we both worked on composing those operas that would give us so much satisfaction.

The surprise with which the interviewer heard Leoncavallo's name confirms that his work on the libretto was little known, perhaps deliberately kept secret. Leoncavallo is mentioned in relation to *Manon Lescaut* only twice in Puccini's letters: in late summer 1890, with a brief reference to lengthy discussions, and two years later in the drafting of two verses of Act II. Light is shed by a letter from Giulio Ricordi to Puccini on October 23, 1890 (Copialettere):

My silence does not mean that I have been neglecting you!... On the contrary, instead I have been working and having sessions with Leoncavallo, and I am sending you the fruit of the work. I think it will be useful for you to see it first, study it and if you approve, to send it back and I will then submit it to Oliva. Now I think the duet between Manon and Renato seems to be well planned and the finale is proceeding rapidly and clearly.

Yes, Giulio Ricordi! He was more than just as a mediator between the parties, as he had already been and would be again in future. Puccini recalled it:

- And my *Manon* had another collaborator...
- Who?
- Giulio Ricordi. One day on Via Omenoni, while discussing the finale of Act III, he suggested that passionate and dramatic scene where Des Grieux falls at the feet of the Naval Captain and begs to be allowed to sail as a cabin boy, as long as he is not separated from Manon...

The contribution of Luigi Illica was absolutely decisive and conclusive. Like Praga and Leoncavallo, he has left us a reconstruction of his involvement (Budden p. 117) :

> One day, Puccini came to my house very worried. He said he had spent too much time working on a libretto of *Manon* written by Oliva and Praga, but he didn't like it and so he was unable to find inspiration. He added that Ricordi had obtained for him the rights to adapt Sardou's *Tosca* as an opera and suggested that I write the libretto. He sent me the plot, because I was unfamiliar with the play. It made a very bad impression on me—so much so that I intensely disliked him... I went to Ricordi and told him I thought the subject of *Manon*, which I really liked, was much better suited to Puccini's temperament.

Although it has fictional overtones, the story is credible, and the events belong to late 1891. The first (known) letter from Puccini to Illica is dated January 9, 1892 (Ep. I 231), and represents him at work. The references in letters this year are a succession of requests for modifications, changes, rethinkings. They saw Illica, as well as Oliva, Ricordi and—in that one reference of August 1892—Leoncavallo at work.

In 1892 *Manon* acquired its definitive structure. Compared to the three acts mentioned in the contract with Praga and Oliva, work was then focused on a division into four acts, which according to Praga's account was more or less as follows: Act I, the meeting between Manon and Des Grieux in Amiens; Act II, the young lovers in their miserable "little white house" "with Lescaut's self-interested protection, his perfidious fame, his boastful immorality, his skeptical advice"; Act III, Manon lives in luxury as a recluse, the arrival of Des Grieux, their attempt to steal the jewels and escape, subsequent discovery and arrest; Act IV, Manon's death in the plains of Louisiana. Around mid-April 1892, it was decided to completely eliminate Act II, with the consequent splitting of the original Act III into what are now Acts II and III.

If, as we have seen, Puccini began to compose the music in the summer of 1889, and if we compare the dates that he wrote on the various pages of the autograph score, it becomes clear that the continual changes to the libretto were entwined with and overlapped the composition of the music. Among the many clues to this working method, we need only mention the letter to Illica early in April 1892 (Ep. I 254): "I need to find an arrangement of the final trio to Act III [now II] [...] as I have a rhythmic theme that I cannot change, because it is effective. I cannot cope with the trisyllabic verses at all – [...] They will have to be 6 *versi tronchi*." After completing the work (we will see how far this statement is deceptive), on October 6, 1892, he wrote to Illica: "then think of me, I am free and unemployed" (Ep. I 271).

The Premiere

We can follow some stages of the build-up to the premiere, which further complicated the jumble and muddle with the preparation of the necessary materials: a printed libretto, the *livret de mise en scène*, the vocal score in the reduction by Carlo Carignani (Puccini's childhood friend), a copy of the score for the conductor and the orchestral parts.

On July 15, 1892, Puccini wrote to Cesira Ferrani (Ep. I 265):

> I know you are in the country and have given up the idea of singing this autumn. I am very glad that you have taken this last decision so that you can rest and prepare for the *my tremendous battle*!
> [...] You will be an ideal Manon by figure, talent and voice. As soon as the material is ready and copied, I am in agreement with Signor Giulio to send it to you at once.

And Giulio Ricordi wrote to Puccini on July 22 (I-Lmp):

> Meanwhile, still fantasizing about Manon, look at the 4 masterpieces that I am sending you!.... worthy of Salvator Rosa – If you think that the group of these scenes is suitable, please send them to me immediately, because they will serve as a guide for the *livret* de *mise en scène*, which I would like to start right away so as to gain time. – I sent a copy of Act IV to Ferrani. Tomorrow Carignani will bring me half of Act I. As you see: fervet opus!... I am eagerly awaiting Part 1 Act 2. If the verses arranged do not reach you in time, send it all the same. They will have conformed to music.

And on July 31 (Copialettere):

> All the work of the last few days did not stop me working on Manon. The libretto was very confused, with poor stage directions, and so on. Finally, it seems to me to be fine, and most importantly, reading it right through, the overall impression is good. Tomorrow I will send these first drafts with all my observations and corrections. Add yours, then send them back to me in a wrapper by registered post, and then I'll give them to Oliva and Illica. I received the passage of Manon in the duet with Lescaut: I will give it to Carignani. I prefer the word vile to cruda, and to baked. Why haven't you sent me the cuts yet?... Why keep puzzling over it? For heaven's sake, don't compose any more music!! Stop, stop, at once. Remember time is slipping by quickly!! You still have all the 2nd finale!! I look forward to receiving the passage with the cuts, which you promised me 5 days ago!!

On August 2 (I-Lmp):

> Today I'm sending you 2 drafts of the libretto: one will serve for the *livret de mise en scène*: the other for printing the libretto. I had to do some grueling work to coordinate, clarify, and so forth. With all this there are still two or three points that fail to satisfy me, and some words that absolutely have to be changed, because they are too daring, or better suited to an operetta! – And even the end of the 2nd Act does not convince me yet. – But all told we'll find something. – The libretto as a whole strikes me as interesting, though a bit bloated in some parts, and in others overloaded with episodes, rather than dramatic moments: the music will salvage many of these defects. – Then there are large numbers of useless episodic characters, real accretions that spoil the work, apt to scare off impresarios and good for nothing else! Oh! I certainly cursed, seeing one of these characters popping up occasionally! Stop!... stop!... Why do we need a postmaster?... The innkeeper can receive the orders from Geronte just as well! – And that officer who says 3 words in Act II... and then a Commander who says 2½!!... Mamma mia! To the devil with all these futilities! Like the silly story of the jewels hidden in the farthingale! Ridiculous and undesirable, and unrealistic. – Can you see Manon, who is supposed to be running away in the street with her skirts raised?! – You should have the patience to carefully examine the 2 drafts but above all the one intended for the public [the libretto]: see if it is properly coordinated, if the stage directions are simple and clear and they match your musical intentions. In fact I've never had such a muddled libretto! – Carignani sent me the whole of Act 1: but he warned me not to work on it because you still have misgivings about a cut! For goodness' sake, dear Puccini, please don't inflict any more

The librettist Luigi Illica, 1900.

longueurs on me! Your music is all beautiful, too beautiful... but don't let yourself be deluded by musical philosophy or the libretto: forward, forward quickly. – I told you I thought a preface was needed: I enclose a sketch. It's rough but can serve as a guide. – Send me back everything (drafts and sheets) as soon as possible, by registered post.
I look forward eagerly to receiving the score.

On August 5 (I-Lmp):

I have received drafts of the libretti, and yours of yesterday [not known]. In fact, as I wrote to you myself, the libretto as a whole does not seem bad. It's a miracle, after being so hashed over so much! The corrections made by you are fine, and I'm glad you have approved the general version as I conceived it. As for me, for the finale at Le Havre, I just don't like that embrace! It's unlikely: how to allow a young man to embrace a condemned woman!!... and in front of the commander, the soldiers, the whole populace! It is against all possibility! Hâvre Hâvre.
And so? Manon moves off slowly with the others, while Des Grieux pleads. Winning consent, he can shout rather than sing: Manon!... Manon I'll follow you! Manon turns, and falls to her knees, raising her hands in a gesture of joy and thanksgiving to heaven. Des Grieux runs to Manon. The curtain falls. It's not very warm! No! But more likely. Think about it.
I have summoned Illica for tomorrow, for the sake of those few adjustments needing to be done. Oliva is still absent, and I am very sorry for it, because if I had the last act corrected by him, I would have it engraved at once. Anyway, we'll see about it soon, because if Edgar begins on the 14th, it will be necessary to be in Brescia on the 10th. So you should come to Milan on the 9th, and we could decide everything about Manon, and then go to Brescia. Send, or bring with you, that draft of the preface. What you say is fine, but it will serve as an embryo. Hohenstein is already in London: he will be there for 6 or 7 days, then go on to Paris for the studies involved in Manon.
Meanwhile I will start the *livret de mise en scène*. So the pot will keep boiling until everything is nicely cooked. As for the cut in Act I, you can adjust that when you come to Milan.

So Oliva had not yet read the drafts of the libretto? Ricordi would write to him again, more than once, to get his approval and then persuade him to have the libretto published under his name as well as Illica's. Without results. There had been various contacts, propitiated by Giacosa, to solve the problem of the too many authors. But, as is well known, the libretto was published without an attribution.

1893 opened with a telegram (Copialettere, January 1) from Ricordi to Puccini, already in Turin: "Many thanks for your best wishes. We all return them heartily for the new year to bring you all deserved rewards by placing Doge on the throne." But the telegram of the next day depicted a serious problem, clarified in the following ones: Puccini was dissatisfied with the tenor Giuseppe Cremonini:

I am astonished, all the more so as I do not know how to remedy the matter, there being no artists at all possible. If you confirm he is unsatisfactory, we can only withdraw the opera. I'm busy now but if needed will run over within the week. Meanwhile, rehearse again patiently, since it seems to me almost impossible, the singer having been always successful, that he is completely inadequate now. (Copialettere, January 2, 1893)

I'm absolutely desperate to get your letter! [not known]. What can I say, if not what I telegraphed before, that there is no alternative but to withdraw the work, since a better tenor than Cremonini cannot be found.
You do not need to insist on the great importance of Manon being staged. For me, there is something far greater than the material interest of our firm at stake: for me there is the absolute moral conviction of the value of the work and its Author!!
So, you can imagine whether I care about its success. – But, until I have proof to the contrary, let me cast a little doubt on such a firm statement about Cremonini. – I have taken new information, and all agree in declaring him among the finest artists of the day. How can a tenor that was a huge success in Gounod's Romeo now become impossible? He may be clumsy, he may be awkward because he does not yet know the part: this is his fault, and the impresario's, who should have gotten him to study it. So the opera will be staged, when it is staged, meaning when he knows the part thoroughly and we will be able to stage it properly.
You're nervous, and because of a first impression! For example: you thought Polonini [who created the role of Geronte] was a dog, and now you depict him as Beckmesser number 1!!! –
As I telegraphed you, I will rush over briefly: but I think it's time wasted unnecessarily to hear Cremonini in the Meistersinger: better to hear him in a rehearsal of Manon when he knows something about it. – But above all, it takes patience to instruct artists who are mediocre musicians! It takes patience, and lots of it!!
I look forward anxiously to some further news, reassuring me. As it is I was too agitated in the face of the dilemma: either Cremonini will do, or if not, withdraw the opera. (Copialettere, January 4, 1893)

Parfumed calendar inspired by *Manon Lescaut* published by the Valsecchi & Morosetti perfumers. Title page and internal illustration of the duet in Act II between Manon Lescaut and Des Grieux, 1912.

Withdraw the opera? Find a better tenor than Giuseppe Cremonini? The problem was overcome, thanks in part to Ricordi hurrying over as promised. Objections raised to the singers during the rehearsals were almost the rule. With the opening night imminent, Puccini would write to his sister Nitteti (Ep. I 294): "The singers are a bit feeble, but what's to be done? There aren't any!"

Meanwhile Casa Ricordi sent the necessary supplies to the opera company: the orchestral parts "but without having time to make the necessary corrections" (Copialettere, January 6), the "Variante Minuetto" (January 14), and about 300 copies of the libretto (January 19). And finally they entered into the thick of the staging:

> Very good news. Hurray. I'm sending the *mise en scène*. Start rehearsing on this. I will come on Sunday night 10:47. Arrange two good rehearsals Monday, being unable to stay longer. (January 19)

> For my presence to be useful it is necessary to have already prepared the staging, especially the positions, entrances and exits of the chorus, and division of groupings. Otherwise, it will be impossible to finish just two rehearsals on Friday [27]. I confirm you must be in Milan on Saturday morning. (January 25)

As is well known, Ricordi was "all infatuated with *Falstaff*" (which premiered on February 9 at La Scala), and Puccini knew he would only attend the dress rehearsal (Ep. I 291, January 19). But from Milan he did not fail to send advice, even after the opening night ("If possible modify the scene of the appeal [Act III]. Place the row of archers spaced one pace between the footlights and the chorus by passing the prostitutes behind the archers. The sergeant on this side clearly in sight"). He also sent his congratulations: "Deepest regret I was absent, compensated for by immense joy at your triumph. It is one of the greatest satisfactions of my life. A hug, dear Doge" (Copialettere, February 2).

Vespasiano Bignami, Poster for the premiere of *Manon Lescaut* at the Teatro Regio in Turin, 1893. Milan, Archivio storico Ricordi.

Success and Productions

The first night was indeed a triumph, a complete success in which public and critics were for once in full agreement. There is no record of Puccini's immediate reactions, but we can say with certainty that his life changed decisively. His financial insecurity was at an end, and he could afford to buy back the family home, which he and Michele had had to sell to his brother-in-law Raffaello Franceschini in 1889, with the right to repurchase it within five years.

The first night was not immediately followed by further performances, but starting with the production in Trento (June 10), the opera spread through Italy and abroad, favored by Ricordi's shrewd entrepreneurial policy of frequently promoting it together with *Otello* or *Falstaff*, and always insisting on quality, while refusing to give the impresarios discounts.

In 1893 Puccini personally had a hand in the stagings in Trento, Brescia (August 24), Lucca (September 3), Hamburg (November 7, but he left before the opera opened), Bologna (November 4), Rome (November 8). But in the same year, 1893, there were many other productions.

Changes After the Premiere

As noted earlier, *Manon Lescaut*, despite the complete success of the premiere, was subjected to adjustments, cuts, and adaptations, changes large and small over the next thirty years.

The first substantial alteration was the complete revision of the finale of Act I. This was a collective decision taken, perhaps at Illica's suggestion, after Massenet's *Manon* debuted in Italy at the Carcano Theatre in Milan on October 19, 1893. Ricordi wrote to Illica on November 2 (I-PCc):

> I am perfectly of your opinion with regard to the comparison between the two Manons [Massenet's and Puccini's]: namely, Acts 2, 3, 4 of Puccini's superior. There remains Act I, in which a comparison could show up the finale: but I fear that whether it remains the way it is, or is modified or is changed radically, the end of the act will always be cold. It is also something we have to study. I'll be back in a few days and we'll talk about everything right away.

Massenet's *Manon* is explicitly mentioned in Puccini's correspondence in August 1895 (Ep. I 583), in the context of a vibrant attack on the Milanese press that failed to value him rightly, although none of the other opera composers had had "the satisfaction to be applauded everywhere in an opera like me, with the aggravating contrast with Massenet's fine opera of the same name!" The first mention of Massenet goes back to February 24, 1882, in relation to the production of *Hérodiade* at La Scala, about which Puccini wrote stunned to his mother (Ep. I 14). And Giulio Ricordi had already written to Puccini on December 6, 1892, about the comparison with Massenet (Copialettere), commenting on his intention to propose a performance of *Le Villi* and "Le Chevalier Des Grieux [*sic*]" to the director of the Vienna Opera:

> I see what you write to me about Manon. Dear Doge, remember that when you mentioned this subject to me, not once but a dozen times, I observed that Massenet's work would do it a lot of damage abroad! And then you insisted and decided on Manon. With that, you finally did a wonderful job: but you have to take the consequences, regrettably. Change the title? It would be ridiculous, neither more nor less, with such a well-known subject!

Manon Lescaut with the new finale of Act I was presented at the Teatro Coccia in Novara on December 21, 1893, with Carlo Carignani conducting. Puccini was able to observe the effect at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples on January 21, 1894, and wrote to Illica (Ep. I 395): "The new finale of Act I went down very well and was encored."

The cuts and reintegrations were particularly interesting in Act IV, especially the aria "Sola... perduta... abbandonata!...", which in some editions was simply eliminated.

Definitive Versions?

Important productions for establishing subsequent versions were those in 1910 and 1922–23. On June 9, 1910, *Manon Lescaut* was performed in Paris at the Théâtre du Châtelet, during a season organized by Giulio Gatti Casazza, for a tour by the Metropolitan Opera House, New York. The conductor was Arturo Toscanini. Puccini wrote to a friend a few days later in these terms (US-Wc): "The 3 performances of Manon took in 200,000 lire! Two more will be performed – extra – the success is immense – I'm sending you a newspaper – I never thought of such a result, the biggest in my life." On returning to Milan, he was careful to involve Toscanini in a particularly important work (Carteggi 564):

> Casa Ricordi has finally decided to print the score of Manon. You will receive a copy to revise. Believe me, you could not do me a greater favor. So, after your corrections of the coloring and effective legatos for the strings etc., etc. I will finally have a definitive Manon and free it from the anarchy that besets it.
> My soul is bursting with your execution.

An important production was presented at the Teatro del Giglio in Lucca (September 8) to verify the work done. Again writing to Toscanini, on July 28 (Carteggi 566): "Do you still have that lightened version of Manon? I will need it because it will be presented in Lucca soon." He alerted his childhood friend Guido Vandini, a musician who worked for the Teatro del Giglio, that the material would arrive and sent him detailed instructions (Pintorno 266):

> I *consign* to you the score of *Manon*, in which there are some corrections. You need to find a good and accurate copyist to add the corrections to the parts made in *red* and *black* pencil.
> [...] The biggest task is in Act I. In the other acts there is little to do. *I will pay*. Fix the price as for your own work. And the scores *are mine*. They will have to return to Milan later so that corrections can be made on all the materials. When Maestro Deliliers comes he will have my markings added to his score.

In Lucca *Manon Lescaut* was also a great success. The periodicals emphasized the excellence and importance of the execution, not least for the definition of the score.

We have already described the subsequent Milanese triumph in 1922–1923. To conclude we can again quote Puccini, in the second part of the letter he sent to the editor of the *Corriere della sera*:

> For too long in Italy we have been in the habit of representing the so-called repertoire [...]: an orchestral rehearsal, none of the *mise en scène* and away with all the dead weight of disfigurement and abuses that the bad habits of conductors and singers have gradually encrusted around the opera.
> When Arturo Toscanini [...] sets his hand to the scalpel and hacks away at those eyesores and restores the work to its natural state, revealing to the public the author's true intentions, the old work appears new and the public says: it's different. No, it's simply brought to life by the greatest animator musical art can boast.
> At La Scala these miracles happen frequently nowadays: and when the public's emotion grew last night [...] it overcame me too and I was impelled to embrace our Toscanini. That embrace was not just a gesture of selfish gratitude for the execution of my *Manon*. No, it was the gratitude of one artist to another artist who had succeeded in making La Scala a true temple of consecration and artistic reconciliation.
> [...] I travel theatres all over the world and I see and study what's going on. It seems to me time to say that today what is being done at La Scala is not being done at any other theatre abroad. Toscanini not only works as a musician, but also as an organizer and has created an institution that is the pride of Italian art, and everything that is done there is now by his will the work of Italian artists.
> [...] This nucleus of energy guided and animated by Toscanini produces the results by which, as happened last night, *Manon* appears a new work, so much so that I felt thirty years younger. And on leaving La Scala I forgot that I was descending from the stage and not, like thirty years ago from the loggia, and I was about to go to the Osteria Aida to consume, alas, one of those modest meals whose accounts used to be marked inexorably on the score of good Signora Assunta.
> Thirty years younger! A sweet illusion.
> Giacomo Puccini

The following abbreviations have been used in the text:

Bonturi-Razzi	Fondo Bonturi-Razzi, Biblioteca statale, Lucca.
Budden	Julian Budden, *Puccini*, Carocci, Rome, 2005.
Carteggi	*Carteggi pucciniani*, edited by Eugenio Gara, Ricordi, Milan, 1958.
Copialettere	Copialettere di Casa Ricordi, Archivio storico Ricordi.
Corriere	*Corriere della sera*.
Ep. I	*Giacomo Puccini. Epistolario*, I: *1877–1896*, edited by Gabriella Biagi Ravenni and Dieter Schickling, Olschki, Florence, 2015.
I-Lmp	Museo di Casa Puccini, Lucca.
I-PCc	Fondo Illica, Biblioteca comunale Passerini Landi, Piacenza.
Pintorno	*Puccini: 276 lettere inedite. Il fondo dell'Accademia d'arte a Montecatini Terme*, edited by Giuseppe Pintorno, Nuove Edizioni, Milan, 1974.
Quaderni 2	*Quaderni pucciniani*, 2, 1985.
US-Wc	Library of Congress, Washington.

Angelo Inganni, *Piazza del Duomo in Milan*, detail, 1870. Brescia, Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo.

Riccardo Pecci

MILAN, THE WAY OF THE CROSS "STREWN WITH TRIBULATIONS AND PUBLISHERS"

"He had arrived in Milan with his music under his arm," and "wandered around, chewing over musical thoughts and dreams of youth and glory." This is Paolo, the penniless musician who is the male protagonist of a novella set in Milan by Giovanni Verga (*Primavera*, 1876). Porta Ticinese and Porta Garibaldi, Piazza Cordusio, Piazza Castello, and the Foro Buonaparte, Teatro Dal Verme with its "round windows," the Arch of Sempione, the Biffi and Gnocchi cafés, as well as the humble ale houses of the center and the suburbs: Paolo's movements form a map that converges—not by accident—on the recently built Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, with its shop windows and glass roof illuminated at nightfall by gaslight: a symbolic light source that draws the "artist's dreams" of provincials such as him like moths. "Those tragic larvae that arrive in swarms from all the corners of Italy to grow pale and fade away beneath the gleaming crystals of the Gallery."

Paolo is clearly an alter ego of the writer from Catania in Sicily, attracted in 1872 to "the most city-like of all Italian cities": "a Babylon more Babylonian than the original," which had become the pulsating capital of the Italian cultural market, with its increasingly successful publishers, and magazines and newspapers with unprecedented circulations that fed the incessant noise of dozens and dozens of printing presses, the influential literary salons of good society, the restaurants, and cafés animated by discussions among some of the most maverick and "European" intellectuals of the entire peninsula. It was a place of extraordinary opportunities, but at the same time of chaos and perdition, which, according to Verga, rewarded the tenacity of those who were thrown into its melee and resisted until they conquered a place in the sun. "On this Way of the Cross that we find ourselves, strewn with tribulations and publishers, you have to proceed with your bag empty and your feet aching, if you are to count among the wandering Jews of this faith." The conclusion is blunt: "those absent are wrong."

At the time of *Manon Lescaut*, Giacomo Puccini perfectly understood—from his own experience—the meaning of Verga's

Filippo Carcano, *The Naviglio at Via Senato*, detail, 1875. Milan, Civico Museo di Palazzo Morando.

letter to Luigi Capuana. In the autumn of 1880, the musician from Lucca, little more than twenty years old, became one of this array of "wandering Jews" who arrived "from all corners of Italy" to the capital of Lombardy, with the same dreams of musical glory as Paolo in *Primavera* and with the same financial problems as Verga and his character (but his "bag" was fortunately not entirely empty, thanks to the income guaranteed by his father's cousin, the doctor and philanthropist Nicolao Cerù, and a scholarship from Queen Margherita). He was determined, of course, that his wings would not be singed by the dazzling lights of the Galleria.

Giacomo's immediate goal was to complete his training at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Milan. Within the walls of the convent of Santa Maria della Passione, the young Puccini had encounters that would prove decisive for his career, reinforcing artistic leanings already evident in the years of his first apprenticeship. Born in Lucca like Francesco Geminiani and Luigi Boccherini, he was not only the heir to a long line of organists but also studied in Lucca in one of Italy's first music schools in the modern sense, the "Pacini" Institute, now the "Luigi Boccherini." Rather than the skills of a future opera composer he had shown a precocious talent for orchestral composition and the handling of instrumental timbre (beginning with the delightful *Prelude for Orchestra* that opens the Puccini catalogue). His talents were certainly nurtured by the "reformed" Milanese conservatoire directed by Alberto Mazzucato (1872–1877), Stefano Ronchetti-Monteviti (1878–1882) and Antonio Bazzini (1882–1897). The symphonic-instrumental culture and the study of the classics occupied an important place in the curriculum, with frequent instrumental *accademie* and an intense dialogue with the local chamber music and symphony orchestras. With the Società del Quartetto (1864), the Concerti popolari (1873) and the Società orchestrale del Teatro alla Scala (1878) Milan offered a rich diet from the European chamber-symphonic repertoire. As Puccini's letters show, even the opera "dishes" served up during those years by theatres such as La Scala, Dal Verme, and Carcano were flavored with orchestral spices from beyond the Alps to tickle the palate of a budding composer: *Der Freischütz* by Weber; Gounod's *Faust* and oratorio *The Redemption*; *Mignon* by Thomas; Bizet's *Carmen*; and the music of the author of the other *Manon*, Massenet, at La Scala with *Hérodiade* ("what an orchestra, what

Puccini's first house in Milan, on Via Ronchetti, near Vicolo San Giacomo.

instrumentation [...]! it could drive you mad. How small we pygmy students are compared to a colossal master like that!")

In Milan, the poor "pygmy" Puccini's first master was Antonio Bazzini, then Amilcare Ponchielli—both prominent figures (albeit to a different extent) of the relaunch of Italian instrumentalism and symphonicism, which had been suffocated by the invasion of opera. As a student of the conservatory he was distinguished by two successful instrumental attempts: a symphonic *Prelude* and, above all, an ambitious symphonic *Capriccio* written as a thesis composition (1883). It was the success of the *Capriccio*, with its blatantly narrative music, later recycled in the scores of *Edgar* and *La bohème*, that was Puccini's passport to the world

Vespasiano Bignami, *Portrait of Amilcare Ponchielli*, c. 1880. Cremona, Civico Museo Ala Ponzone.

of opera, consolidating the newcomer's reputation and starting him along that Milanese Way of the Cross "strewn with tribulations and publishers" of which Verga spoke.

It begins with the widow Giovannina Lucca (neé Strazza), the energetic manager of the homonymous music publishing house, who was to repay Puccini's energetic "courtship" by publishing a four-hand piano reduction of the *Capriccio*, conducted by Franco Faccio both in Milan and in the concerts of the Italian General Exposition in Turin. It continues with the competition held by the publisher Sonzogno for promising young Italian opera composers (a few years later the competition would launch *Cavalleria rusticana*), in which Puccini participated thanks to Ponchielli's good offices, a member of the selection committee, and a fantastic subject (*Le Willis*, later *Villi*) written by the *Scapigliato* poet and playwright Ferdinando Fontana, inspired by the music of the *Capriccio*, which our Giacomo greeted enthusiastically, saying "there is much room for symphonic-descriptive work." It concludes with an enviable contract signed with Lucca's and Sonzogno's powerful rival, Giulio Ricordi, who Puccini had already approached (with the help of the ubiquitous Ponchielli) without any particular success but who would acquire *Le Willis* after the controversial—possibly manipulated—failure of the *opera ballo* in the competition. The contract envisaged that *Le Willis* be extended to two acts, as well as commissioning a second work, and above all assured the survival of the young composer from Lucca and gave him an opportunity to pursue his artistic ambitions by providing him with a monthly salary; paving the way for one of the most successful collaborations of the opera repertoire, inaugurated in 1893 (after the unfortunate parenthesis of *Edgar*) with the Turin triumph of *Manon Lescaut*. Meanwhile, he had contact with a fourth, smaller Milanese publisher, Alessandro Pigna, who in 1884 published Puccini's *Three Minuets* for string quartet. Their knowing eighteenth-century idiom recreated through a *fin de siècle* sensibility is both an extreme tribute to the instrumental and pedagogical tradition of Lucca and a demonstration of Giacomo's skill in this area, achieved through his studies in his hometown and their refinement in Milan.

This is the story of an education, which we find inscribed in *Manon Lescaut*. There is almost a symbolic value to the fact that it is one of the Pigna minuets (the second, accelerated into a brilliant *Allegro*) that welcomes us at the beginning of the opera and reappears regularly throughout the plot; and that the opera ends with an act (the fourth) that revolves around the music of the *Crisantemi* string quartet, a threnody dedicated "to the memory of Amedeo of Savoy, Duke of Aosta" and commissioned from Puccini in January 1890 by violinist Leandro Campanari for the quartet that bore his name.

The idea—ultimately successful—that Italian musical theatre could be revitalized by instrumentalism (and by an expanded historical-aesthetic culture) was strongly felt in the environment of the Milan conservatory, which in Puccini's time was still in its S*capigliata* phase. It was accused by many of its detractors of being *avvenirista* (i.e. in thrall to the "music of the future" as written by composers such as Wagner) and irreverently anti-Verdian but was backed by influential writers such as Filippo Filippi who wrote for *Perseveranza*. It was the age of Mazzucato, Bazzini, and Faccio (a teacher of harmony and counterpoint), but also of the *Scapigliato* poet Emilio Praga (teacher of poetic and dramatic literature) and above all of Arrigo Boito, who way back in May 1865 had advised in the pages of the *Giornale della Società del Quartetto*: "Practice with the symphony and quartet if you want to be able to handle opera."

In the spring of 1884, Boito was one of the first of the private financers to put his hand in his wallet to induce a discouraged Puccini to stage *Le Willis*, rejected at the competition, at Dal Verme. He also helped to book the theatre. More, much needed money came from the pockets of Boito's friends such as the rich composer, critic and amateur violinist Marco Sala, who lent Giacomo his well-attended *salotto* so that he could promote his ill-fated theatrical creation at the piano. And all under the direction of the industrious Fontana. If we add that he could count on the support of Faccio (who had conducted the *Capriccio* and was to tie his career to *Le Villi* and *Edgar*), the favorable reviews of *Capriccio* and *Le Willis* by Filippi (who was sufficiently authoritative to influence Ricordi), and finally recall Ponchielli's commitment to provide his—sometimes indolent—pupil with contacts, we can conclude that the young Puccini had been adopted by the Milan of the *Scapigliatura*: Italy's lively and disorderly bohemia that from "Lombardy's tiny Paris" (Cletto Arrighi) had continued to throw down, at least for the first twenty years after Italian Unification (1861), a gauntlet to the Academism and provincialism of Italian art. They were a nomadic and undoubtedly picturesque community of writers, painters, and musicians who could be seen wandering between the cafés in the center, the "Polpetta" trattoria and the Ottagono of the Galleria. In the post-Unification years they weaved a network of relationships that guaranteed it "dominion of all things musical in Milan," as one exasperated adversary was to remark. The "thread" of the *Scapigliatura* network ran from the conservatory to the Società del Quartetto; from the Concerti popolari to the Società orchestrale; from sympathetic publications and journalists, such as Filippi and *Perseveranza*, to Faccio, who in 1871 had settled in as the director and conductor of the orchestra of the Teatro alla Scala, having come to fame as opera composer of the prestigious Ricordi stable (*I profughi fiamminghi* and *Amleto*, with libretti by his friends Praga and Boito).

The music publisher Giulio Ricordi. Torre del Lago, Villa Museo Giacomo Puccini.

Elvira Bonturi, Puccini's companion, who became his wife in 1904.

Before falling apart as the Umbertine era proceeded, the network and the culture of the *Scapigliatura* gave protection, intellectual and creative stimuli—as well opportunities for friendship—to the young Puccini, who had arrived from Lucca "chewing over dreams of youth and glory" like Verga's Paolo. At the same time, he was soon forced to come to terms with the movement's glaring limitations, which by the end of the decade were to prove almost fatal.

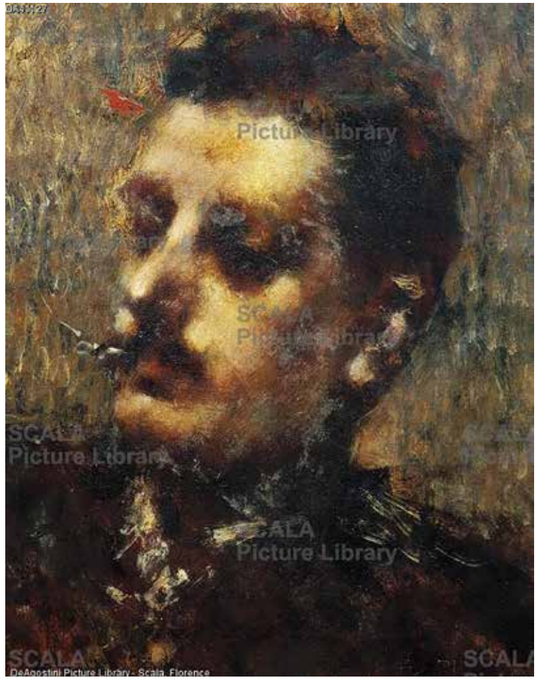
Like many veterans of the *Scapigliatura*, Giacomo was constantly haunted by fear of *la stoja*, that is, the miseries of poverty, as well as some decidedly bohemian experiences that were to feed a number of rich (and sometimes imaginative) anecdotes. The *stoja* was to torment Puccini until the success of *Manon Lescaut* freed him from its clutches forever. It grew worse in the years dominated by his concerns over *Edgar* and its lack of success (1884–1890), when his monthly salary from Ricordi had to keep not only him but his companion Elvira (the wife of a rich grocer from Lucca), his little son Antonio, and his step-daughter Fosca. He really worried about ending up like Schaunard in *La bohème* (1896). But it was his carefree experiences as a student at the conservatory to which *La bohème* pays an almost emotional tribute. While we may not be able to imagine Puccini trying to divide a sardine into four, as in Act IV of the opera, his letters are full of references to how familiar he was with the problem of the freezing cold Rodolfo and Marcello faced in the opening episode. It is said that Giacomo and his companion Pietro Mascagni would help each other out to trick their creditors in a manner similar to poor Benoît. It is, in the end, a kind of attempt to recreate the *Scapigliatura* of Milan, that famous hut/tavern in Torre del Lago (renamed "Club La bohème" in 1894) where Puccini took refuge while composing the opera, the tavern where the painter Francesco Fanelli and the young widow with whom he had a stormy relationship would exchange more or less the same insults that fly between Marcello and Musetta in the quartet at the end of Act III.

The *Scapigliatura* not only had a clear influence on his life but also left an unmistakable mark on Puccini's operatic debut, through the mediation of Fontana and his two libretti. *Le Villi* and *Edgar*—incursions into the territory of the supernatural and Nordic legends—are in fact a typical *Scapigliatura* revival of the "repressed romanticism" of Hoffmann, Poe, or Nerval (Enrico Ghidetti), with its mysteries, ghosts and nightmares, disturbing fantasies and morbid sensuality: the "follies from beyond the Alps," in short, that were ostracized both by literary Manzonism and by the opera of the Risorgimento. In the center lay the romantic-Baudelairian theme of the human condition as "an eternal restlessness between heaven and hell" (Arrigo Boito, *Dualism*, 1864), that is, as a dualism of a leap towards the Ideal and a plunge towards Evil. It is a shame that it works very well on the small scale of *Villi*, but escapes Fontana's control in *Edgar*'s four acts (later reduced to three). The flaws and clumsiness with which critics have traditionally accused this second libretto are attributable to failings typical of the *Scapigliatura*: overambition, eccentricity for its own sake, the chasm between the loftiness of its intentions and the mediocrity of the medium, as well as a certain stylistic carelessness. The latter is in part the result, as noted by Giovanna Rosa, of the by now industrial pace imposed on the writing by the Lombard "literary factories." Unfortunately Puccini was not sufficiently resistant to these shortcomings and in 1889 they risked sinking his career once and for all, when *Edgar*'s debut at La Scala in Milan received a cold reception from both audiences and critics.

In this sense, Fontana unknowingly gave Puccini a harsh lesson, which he never forgot. It was the problems he had with *Edgar* that led to the teamwork of composer, librettists, and publisher—methodical, supervised and relentless—that bore fruit, even if laboriously, for the first time in *Manon Lescaut*.

However, the *Scapigliatura* did have one wholly positive influence. It is fair to think that Fontana, by forcing Puccini to deal with characters with very unconventional psychologies (at least, by the standards of pre-Unification Italian opera), allowed him to sharpen his talents to face the challenges ahead: some brushstrokes of the "beautiful and fatal" Tigrana from *Edgar*, for example, probably ended up in the complex, many-faceted portrait of that "bizarre mixture of love, coquetry, venality and seduction" that is the protagonist of *Manon Lescaut*. Incidentally, it was Fontana who first suggested the subject to Puccini, again in 1885; and it was Emilio Praga's son, Marco, who began writing the tormented libretto in a sort of generational handover.

Luca Zoppelli suggests that *La bohème* represents a full return to the generation of their fathers, and not only (as we have seen) on the obvious level of the events and locations brought to the stage, but also on the less obvious one of form. From this point of view, *La bohème* appears as an outright masterpiece of the *Scapigliatura*, with a clear continuity of intent with the experimentalism and artistic research of an Emilio Praga or a Carlo Dossi. Thanks to a virtuoso interplay of musical registers and styles, Puccini's fourth opera manages to reveal another linguistic "game"—that of the speeches of his characters (from the humble flower girl Mimì to the intellectual Rodolfo), fed by the stereotypes and conventions of mass culture. *La bohème* would thus return to what had been the fertile ground of the *Scapigliatura*, namely the anguish, the conflicts, the contradictions, and the paradoxes of modern urban bourgeois society, the culture of mercantile and industrial dynamism, of utilitarianism and money, whether in Henry Murger's early-nineteenth century Paris or the later post-Unification



Luigi Conconi, *Portrait of the Young Giacomo Puccini*. Lucca, Museum Puccini, Casa natale di Giacomo Puccini.

Pietro Mascagni, Alberto Franchetti and Giacomo Puccini, c. 1890. .

Milan of Puccini, "which incessantly celebrates and sanctifies, with pomp, with magnificence, the great God of modern society, *Work*" (Capuana).

Whether or not one agrees with Zoppelli's hypothesis, it is certain that Puccini's career, from *Le Villi* to *La bohème* by way of *Edgar* and *Manon Lescaut*, seems to head in the opposite direction of most *fin de siècle* opera: the so-called operatic *verismo*, which was once again born and propagated in Milan's "music factories." When the phenomenon exploded in the early 1890s, Puccini was just a thirty-something artist still struggling to establish himself and recover from the recent debacle of *Edgar*. Just as his stock was on the downturn, the two milestones of the *verismo*, *Cavalleria rusticana* (1890) and the no less fortunate *Pagliacci* (1892), seemed to be launching the names of two formidable competitors, Pietro Mascagni and Ruggero Leoncavallo. With them came a taste for a "slice of life," the realistic and brutal picture of the world of the slums, which pointed an irresistible way out of the *Scapigliatura* and Fontana's world of legends.

The promoter of this so-called *Giovane Scuola* ("Young School") of composers, born, like Puccini, around the time of Italian Unification, was Ricordi's only serious rival in the opera world, Edoardo Sonzogno, who Puccini tried in vain to impress at the time of *Le Willis* and the competition. They could not have been more opposite, and the commercial, journalistic, and even judicial jousting between the two houses marked a long period in the history of Italian opera and the life of the Lombard capital ("Milan is hell," Elvira writes in February 1904, after one of Puccini's most stinging humiliations, the disastrous world premiere of *Madama Butterfly* at La Scala, as the public booed and mocked, a fiasco that we can now read as the result of *Butterfly* being in direct competition with *Siberia* by Umberto Giordano, a composer from Sonzogno's stable). The duopoly of the opera market at the time was perfectly described by the critic Leone Fortis: On the one hand Puccini's publishing house, Ricordi, "was rightly proud of its ancient artistic lineage" and proudly guarded in its archives a century of precious operatic memories that spanned (and still span) from Rossini to Verdi; on the other hand, Sonzogno's publishing house, active in music only since 1873, "has no genealogy, has no history [...] is not hampered by traditions, and has the boldness of its youth," "in a few years creating a space for itself [...] elbowing and pushing its way in," becoming a "maternally benevolent protector of young composers." So while Ricordi "steered clear of novelty" and tended to lock itself away "in its repertoire," the publisher of *Cavalleria* and *Pagliacci*—not having any repertoire in which to lock itself away—made a virtue of necessity and (as Adriana Guarnieri says) adopted an alternative distribution strategy, on focusing "the new and the low." A "democratic" line, as Fortis called it: on the one hand, acquiring and staging operas of the French school in Italian theatres; while on the other hand aiming at a broad audience, the new public of blue- and white-collar workers, trying to lure them in with the power of the voices (hence the *lirici spinti* sopranos, the *di forza* tenors) and with an orchestral writing that almost has an "oral quality" (the intermezzo of *Cavalleria*). Equally democratic was its way of engaging musicians: Fortis noted that Sonzogno "enlists as many recruits as possible under his banner," thus offering opportunities to promising youngsters, without worrying too much about the quality of the staging and abandoning the composers to their fate as soon as the public seemed to lose interest.

Looking back, it is impossible to overestimate the benefits that Ricordi's "aristocratic" (according to Fortis) policy had instead for Puccini's career. Unlike Sonzogno's overgenerous recruitment campaigns, Giulio Ricordi operated in a selective and inexorable manner. He had one goal: identifying Verdi's heir and betting everything (literally everything) on his success. One can only admire the nose of a publisher who spotted Giacomo's potential to be the "greatest maestro in Italy" in 1885, and only three years later considered him the "only young man who has serious hopes" and "could reach a place of eminence." From the expectations raised by *Le Willis* to the difficult years of *Edgar* until the summer of 1893, when the success of *Manon Lescaut* finally appeared incontrovertible and the clouds lifted from Puccini's future, Giulio's confidence and support did not waver. Ricordi's entire company, all the power and prestige of the publishing house, were placed at the service of Puccini's career. "Sör Giuli"—as he was known in Milan—managed to impose Puccini's works on theatres thanks to the excellent press (starting with the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, the house organ) and the care with which he followed or had others follow the productions, but also thanks to the "mobbing" of Giacomo's potential Italian rivals (his fellow citizen Alfredo Catalani knew something about that) and, above all, the pressure, the shameless intimidation and real blackmail directed at impresarios. (What it meant not to be top of a Ricordi's list, Puccini would learn much later when he felt he was being ignored by Tito, Giulio's son, who was completely taken up with the task of paving the way for his new "greatest maestro in Italy," Riccardo Zandonai and his *Francesca da Rimini*. However, in this case, the calculation proved to be mistaken, and Sonzogno would win the only Puccini score in his catalogue, *La rondine*).

In addition to the brilliance of the symphonic vein that made him appreciated from Lucca to Milan, another obstacle soon rose

Giacomo Puccini at Torre del Lago, c. 1900. Torre del Lago, Villa Museo Giacomo Puccini.

up between Puccini and the *verismo* of the Sonzogno brand, his interest in Richard Wagner, which had ample opportunities to grow in Milan. In a boast during his time at the conservatory, Giacomo called himself "a great musician [...] a wonderful person of great intellect who brought to the field of Italian art a blast of the power that was almost an echo of that of Wagner north of the Alps," words that surely give an eloquent insight into the importance of Wagner in Puccini's education. Incidentally, a love of Wagner went well with the anti-conformity of the *Scapigliatura*, and the German composer had many admirers (even among Puccini's closest friends, like Bazzini and Fontana himself), and intellectuals who swung like a pendulum between attraction and aversion (Boito). There was also the publisher Lucca in Milan, as we know. In Lucerne in 1868, he had bought the Italian copyright for Wagner, both for completed compositions and for compositions yet to be composed (an exclusive that covered the music and its adaptations, libretti and translations, staging and concerts). And it is precisely Lucca's adaptation for voice and piano of the recent *Parsifal* (in fact, *Parcival*) that Puccini bought in co-ownership with Mascagni, when they lived together in Milan (the two students had to invest a total of 120 lire).

Among the favors Giulio Ricordi did for Puccini was to give him the opportunity—albeit entirely involuntarily—of an intense *tête-à-tête* with the mature Wagner's dramaturgy and language, which was perfectly timed with the gestation of *Manon Lescaut* (1889–1892). In 1888, Giovannina Lucca, who was now exhausted by the competition, had left the scene, accepting Ricordi's proposal to buy out her publishing house. Along with the machinery, warehouse and extensive catalogue, the "Sör Giuli" found himself the reluctant owner of the famous Wagner copyright. A little later, Puccini would be commissioned by his publisher to write a reduced edition of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, for its debut at La Scala (December 1889), with some working "pilgrimages" to Bayreuth. He traveled "at the expense of the publisher," as was waspishly underlined by Alfredo Catalani, the more senior opera composer from Lucca, who felt Ricordi was treating him badly. He attacked the "unheard of casualness" with which his fellow citizen had "made the necessary cuts [...] to adapt [the score of *Die Meistersinger*] to the shoulders of the good Milanese, like a suit."

We can understand Catalani's envy: Ricordi's assignment allowed Puccini not only to immerse himself in the Saxon composer's laboratory, but also—thanks to the much talked-about travels at the publisher's expense—to attend two performances of *Die Meistersinger*, two of *Parsifal*, and perhaps one of *Tristan und Isolde*. It is certainly no coincidence that the composition of *Manon Lescaut* marks a significant leap in quality in Italian reception of Wagnerian *Musikdrama*.

In the second act of *Manon Lescaut*, *Tristan*'s language gives voice to the woes of desire, contrasting with the eighteenth-century *pastiche* associated with Geronte's insipid and gilded world. In this context, the self-mocking camouflage of the *Agnus Dei* Mass for Four Voices of the Lucca years (which here becomes the coy madrigal "Sulla vetta tu del monte") seems to send a clear signal, when success is still far from certain, and the doubts about Puccini's talent raised by *Edgar* still had not been dispelled. The bridges with the past had been burned and Giacomo was never to return to his aborted career in Lucca as an organist and composer of sacred music in the family tradition. He continued to go to Milan, and continued along his Way of the Cross, "strewn with tribulations and publishers."

Cover of the libretto by Nino Besta for *Le Villi*. Milan, Archivio storico Ricordi.

Cover of the libretto for *Edgar*. Milan, Archivio storico Ricordi.

Leonetto Cappiello, *Puccini at the Piano*, published in *Le rire*, no. 191, 1898.

Virgilio Bernardoni

MANON LESCAUT'S INTERNATIONAL ITALIANNESS

Manon Lescaut catapulted Puccini, in a single stroke, to the status of a major composer in Italy and abroad. The work's numerous productions in Italian opera houses during the first two years of its existence were joined by performances in the most important European cities, the Americas, St. Petersburg, and Alexandria. The organist of Lucca (the details and the scores of Puccini's official engagement as organist, which continued all through the 1870s and beyond, have recently come to light), the pupil of Antonio Bazzini and Amilcare Ponchielli at the Milan Conservatoire, the composer who made his debut with uneven works, conceived in the feeble wake of the *Scapigliatura*, in the early 1890s, at the age of thirty-five, in the rising wave of new Italian opera, became a composer capable of developing a competitive musical language and distinguishing himself on the international opera scene with a renewed dramaturgical project, original and independent of the new works by young Italian composers such as *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci*.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Richard Wagner*, 1882. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

In his early works (*Le Villi*, *Edgar*) Puccini had measured with the most recent phase of opera at the time, so-called *opera ballo* and Italian-style *grand opéra*. With *Manon*, however, wittingly based on a subject recently set to music by Jules Massenet, the French composer of the day, he threw down an open challenge on the terrain of the new European bourgeois drama established in Paris, characterized by psychological and emotional realism. In both cases, however, the truly unavoidable question concerned his relation to Richard Wagner and *Musikdrama*, whose prestige after the master's death (February 13, 1883) dominated practically the whole of the European musical world. It was a term of comparison that decided the positioning of a new opera in the context of international musical theatre.

Descriptive Symphonism

The "case of Wagner" had concerned the Italian musicians of Puccini's generation ever since their formative years, hence much earlier than the generation of their masters, who had faced it in their full maturity or late in their careers. For instance, the operas of Amilcare Ponchielli—one of Puccini's teachers of composition

Poster for a performance of *Manon* by Jules Massenet, early twentieth century.

at the Milan Conservatoire—contained some Wagnerian echoes only with *La Gioconda*, the fifth he composed. Among the younger generation, artistic enthusiasm for linguistic aspects of Wagner's music—already in itself high—was even more intensified by the emotional involvement produced by the death of the German master in Venice, thus eliciting from some of them the wish to express their sorrow in music. "Wagner's death affected me deeply," wrote Pietro Mascagni, "and inspired an *Elegy* that will be my best work when I have finished orchestrating it. It is for full orchestra and fairly long. My friends are enthusiastic about it [...]. When I finish it I'll take it to Maestro Ponchielli." They were almost certainly impelled to attend the musical events that formed the framework of the tributes. In Milan the highlight was a concert given by the Società orchestrale at the Teatro Carcano on April 4, 1883, with performances of Wagnerian pieces alone, taken from the music dramas, including passages from *Parsifal* that had not been heard before. For some twenty days Puccini and Mascagni had been studying the score of it for piano and voice in which they had gone shares. On the whole, however, in the 1880s an Italian musician could draw on a broader range of resources to understand the results of Wagner's dramaturgy, not only from readings of the scores of post-1850 works, but also from the early performances of the operas in Italian presented at Italian opera houses: *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in Venice, Bologna, Rome, Turin, and Trieste in 1883, *Tristan und Isolde* in Bologna in 1888, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in Milan in 1889. Puccini played a decisive role in the last of these performances, as the adaptor of the original text to a commission from Giulio Ricordi. (Ricordi had held the rights to Wagner's works in Italy since 1888, when he took over the Lucca publishing house and they fell into his hands, without filling him with much enthusiasm.) Ricordi sent Puccini in advance to Bayreuth for this purpose, where he also saw *Parsifal* and most probably *Tristan und Isolde*.

Puccini, Mascagni, and their peers, however, by this time had a set of judgments and ideas about Wagner behind them and had to reckon with them. The dominant position in the circles they frequented could be described as the "critical Wagnerism" of the Milanese school, rooted in the season of *Scapigliata* opera. Significant in this respect was the evolution of the ideas of Arrigo Boito, who had passed from admiration for *Musikdrama* to censure.

> Wagner's first words, we should confess, had moved us; [...] Wagner destroyed the melodramatic formula; Wagner promised to extend the bounds of rhythm and melody. Wagner poet-master-aesthete with his threefold face seemed to be the man born and predestined to carry out the innovative mission. Falsity. [...] His dramas are inept, low, ridiculous in the face of the supreme task they are called upon to perform. The great problem has remained unresolved.

He eventually came to stimulate his Italian colleagues to invent their own music drama of the future through the renewal of tradition in the spirit of the symphony and the classical quartet:

> Today's music is all about melodrama. [...] Now music [of the future] lies in this melodrama more than elsewhere. The glorious era of *independent* art (to use the Hegelian phrase) has long been dormant, inert. Exclusively instrumental music, for the last twenty years, has barely vegetated. [...] The Symphony, that ideal apex of *independent* music, ceased, in order to bring to light the modern melodrama, that ideal of the other branch of Art. [...] Let us practice the Symphony and the Quartet so as to undertake *Melodrama*.

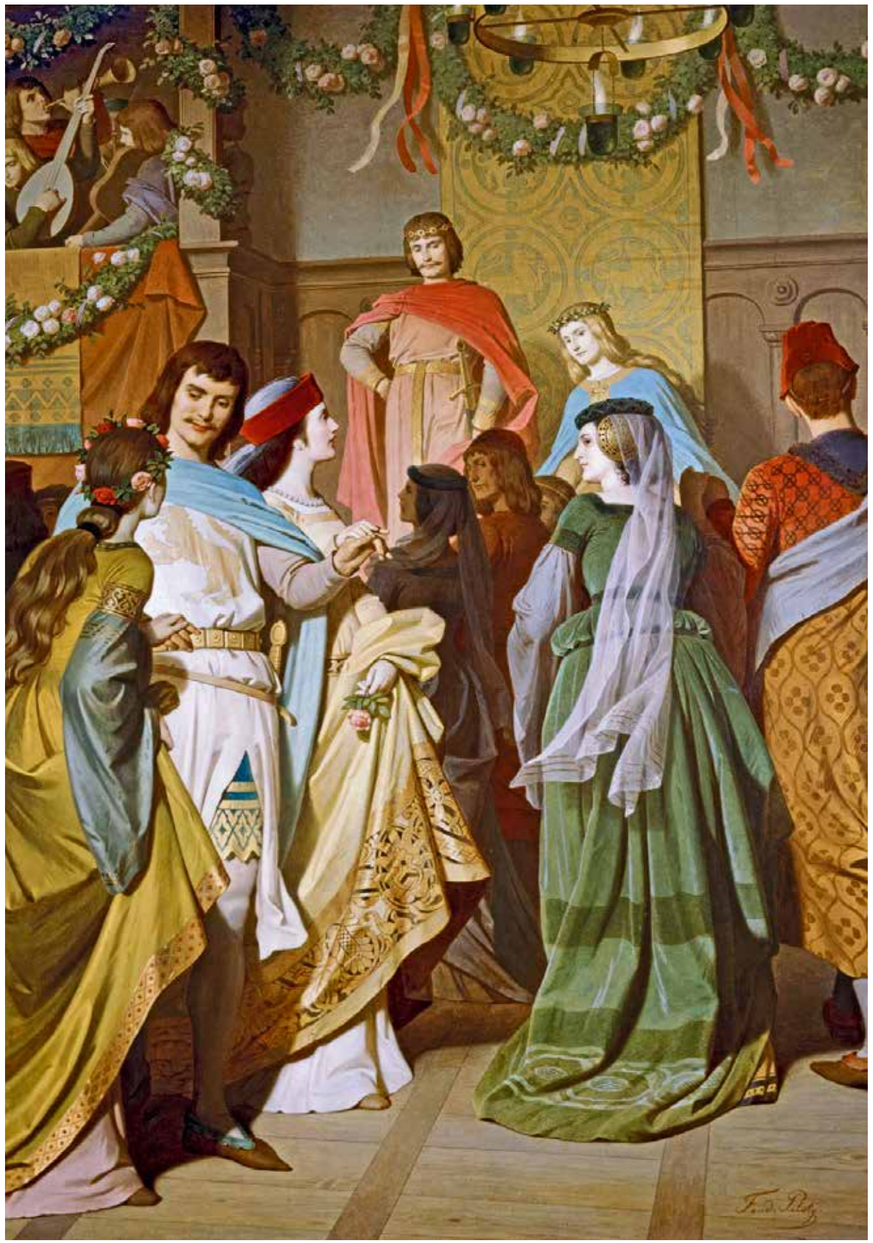
Ponchielli, after conducting some rehearsals of the premiere of *Lohengrin* in Rome (March 1878), expressed his reservations, albeit cautiously, about the dramatic qualities of the Wagnerian system:

> Music has also undergone a change, which increasingly persuades me of the power of passing time! But it seems to me that some composers have gone too far, and they are not inaptly called *avveniristi*! They belong to the orchestral or symphonic genre and confuse this style with the one that is required for the theatre, where, if the impresario is to make money, it has to be understood by the public, including the watchmaker, coal dealer, and seller of sealing wax.

As if to say, paraphrasing a famous observation by Verdi: "Symphony is symphony, opera is opera," and therefore Wagnerism in the original sense, in the right place in orchestral music without dramatic intentions, when applied to music theatre was suspected of causing a decline in the conventions and the tacit pact between composers and audiences. Even Ferdinando Fontana (the librettist of Puccini's operas before *Manon Lescaut*) was inspired by Wagner's ideas to formulate a heterodox utopia with respect to *Oper und Drama*. He

Photographic portrait of Giacomo Puccini with a dedication to Gustav Mahler, 1892. Paris, Médiathèque musicale Mahler, Fonds de La Grange / Fleuret, Fondation de France.

Frescoed studio dedicated to *The Ring of the Nibelung* by Wagner, Neuschwanstein, Castle, Füssen, 1869–1886.



Detail of the fresco cycle dedicated to *Parsifal*, Neuschwanstein, Castle, Füssen, 1869–1886.

indicated a possible way out of the conventions of the "old melodrama" with its reformulation in a symphonic key. In his polemical pamphlet titled *In teatro*, published in 1884, the year after the premiere of *Le Villi*, he wrote:

> Opera tends to be transformed into a symphonic poem for the stage; this means it tends to be a theatrical performance, true, but one in which theatricality should not gain the upper hand over art, but art over theatricality. The musical theatre, in short, tends to become symphonic par excellence, hence to shape the rest of the spectacle on the symphony, the finest form of musical art. This spectacle may be of two kinds: the *fantastic symphonic* spectacle and the *scenic symphonic* spectacle. We already see the former, entrusted exclusively to the orchestra, in popular concerts. [...] The latter will be the sublimation of today's melodrama. Then there will be a vast symphony in which every part will form an Act, but it will envelop all the developments of action like a circular breath, abolishing old habits, effacing the old design.

Boito's ideas, Ponchielli's convictions, and Fontana's theory were symptoms that in the twenty years preceding the creation of *Manon Lescaut* the architecture of melodrama was increasingly shifting from vocal forms defined in themselves—scena and aria,

scena, and duet, *concertato*—to the continuum of the interweaving of voice and orchestra with motifs of particular dramatic significance. This positive theoretical reaction to the Wagnerian influences, far from being a closure for the sake of the inviolability of the dramatic primacy of melody, had not yet been brought to complete fulfillment in the early 1890s, being seen only in the last works of Verdi, notably *Falstaff*, coeval with *Manon Lescaut*.

The newcomer Puccini was clearly drawing on the Milanese ambiance early in his first collaboration with Fontana, when he declared he favored the "symphonic descriptive genre," meaning that he considered subjects that allowed him to fully engage the orchestra those best suited to his compositional powers. He had before his eyes the libretto of *Le Villi*, in which the orchestra is given broad areas of narrative independence in two consecutive orchestral intermezzi, *L'abbandono* and *La tregenda*. On the whole, they constitute a true symphonic poem in two parts, with a substantial program intended to be read in Fontana's verses, to metaphorically bridge the gap between the events in the first and second act: probably the most accomplished example of what Fontana meant by a "scenic symphonic poem."

The symphonic intermezzo between *Manon Lescaut*'s second and third act, titled *La prigionia – Il viaggio all'Havre* (The Imprisonment – The Journey to Le Havre), belongs to the category of dramatic passages freed from singing, in which the orchestra plays the preeminent part, so abridging the lengthy time gap between what went before and what will follow. An orchestral piece of symphonic quality bridges the omission on the stage of a substantial part of the story of Manon and the Chevalier Des Grieux. This intermezzo is introduced by the quotation from the passage in Prévost's novel in which Des Grieux gives some account of his vain attempts to save Manon and declares himself determined to share her fate. The music unfolds an expressive rhetoric associated with catastrophe (despair)/hope, tracing a dynamic arc similar to those of independent symphonic works such as the *Preludio sinfonico* and the *Capriccio sinfonico*. Starting with a slow variation on Manon's motif, in a B minor eluded in the spirals of dissonant and chromatic harmonies, we come to a strongly diatonic B major with the emergence of the motif present in two passages of the duet in Act II (at Des Grieux's words, "Nell'occhio tuo profondo / io leggo il mio destin," and then at the culminating verses which Manon addresses to him at the end: "Ah! Vivi e t'inebria / sovra il mio cor"), passing through other themes taken from the duet and above all through the missed cadences and harmonic instability that characterize it.

The functional correlation of the narrative intermezzo with Acts II and III, a distinctive feature of the new Italian dramaturgy, marks one of the most notable differences from Massenet's *Manon*. It must also have inspired Massenet himself, who began to make use of it in *Thaïs* and *La Navarraise*, which he composed in the year after the debut of Puccini's opera. The comparison between the two ground plans of the two versions of *Manon* in this respect brings out profoundly different dramatic conceptions. Massenet is more faithful to the novel and presents all the main steps in the story: the meeting of Des Grieux and Manon, love at first sight and their elopement (Act I); the couple's life in a Parisian apartment, where the fickle and superficial Manon conceals a secret longing for liberty culminating in the abduction of Des Grieux by emissaries of Guillot, the elderly gentleman who is his rival in love (Act II); Manon's solitary promenade on the boulevards in the midst of a colorful crowd, driven by her frivolous existential instinct, during which she encounters the Comte, Des Grieux's father, and discovers that his son has withdrawn to a seminary and is about to take vows (Act III, Tableau I). Impulsively she visits him and seduces him for the second time (Tableau II); finally, the phase of Manon's decline, with the scene of Des Grieux being induced to gamble and cheating Guillot of his money, followed by the arrest (Act IV, Tableau I) and Manon's death from her hardships on the way to Le Havre in Des Grieux's arms (Tableau II). Puccini follows Prévost as far as Act II, but omits the lovers' peaceful life together, and then invents almost the whole of the two tableaux that, in the scene of their embarkation and their flight into the "endless plain on the borders of the territory of the New Orleans" are almost a continuation of the tale. With this, despite its obvious imbalances in terms of narrative coherence, Puccini's project is dramatically much more dynamic and effective than the *opéra comique* plan chosen by Massenet. The opera's concentrated essence, resting on a series of culminating situations in the manner of a one-act opera like *Cavalleria rusticana*, was not yet the practice for a work divided

Mariano Fortuny, *The Flower Maidens*, Wagnerian fresco cycle of *Parsifal*, 1896. Venice, Palazzo Fortuny.

into several acts. And it ultimately proved to be decisive for the work's success, even though it was pursued at risk of disruption, such as the lack of any connection between Manon's psychology in Act I, when she appears timid and restrained, and the Manon of Act II, a courtesan and covetous of wealth.

Music and Drama, Symphony and Opera

Starting from *Le Villi*, which incorporated some of the instrumental works composed during Puccini's years of study, such as the *Scherzo in A*, practically all of his later works are filled out with youthful orchestral pieces. Again in *Madama Butterfly*, Puccini exhumed the first four measures of the *Trio in F*—four measures of the few orchestrated of a school composition that we know only from a rough draft, and which has never been performed—and used them to mark Ambassador Sharpless's first entrance to the stage. Far from being a sign of creative laziness, these transfusions from one field to the other give the measure of the permeability between opera and symphony in Puccini's expressive world and show how profoundly he had absorbed the descriptive, characteristic or narrative conception that, by the century's end in Milan, united the idea of pure symphony with the function of the orchestra in musical theatre.

Something similar happens in *Manon Lescaut*. The spectacular quality of the symphonic element, a quality never so pronounced before, was also developed by reusing preexisting instrumental materials in the various parts of the opera. These were the second of the three *Minuets for String Quartet* and the Scherzo-Finale of the D major *String Quartet* in Act I, and *Crisantemi*, also for string quartet, whose broodingly elegiac tone underpins the opening of the dialogue between Manon and Des Grieux in Act IV. Act I, in particular, is an example of the way Puccini implemented the Wagnerian principle of continuous composition by integrating lyrical interpolations into stage sequences with a prevalently symphonic texture. This act's narrative unity is secured by the symphonic movements comprising the *Allegro brillante* derived from the attack of the second *Minuet* and the *Allegro vivo* constructed on the thematic elements of the finale of the D major *Quartet*: two sections with clearly stressed thematic profiles, but independent of the characteristic themes of the work, which on the whole constitute a diatonic and linear antidote to the harmonic chromaticism (another feature with an unequivocally Germanic matrix) and qualify the context of the story with a sound aura in the eighteenth-century style. (Note that the mimesis of antiquated stylistic details might have been an embryonic mode for an Italian musician to preserve the national identity from the prevailing musical Germanism.) The musical vicissitudes of the *Allegro brillante*—made more dynamic than the version of the *Minuet* and sparklingly orchestrated—impart their coloring to the first half of the act, until the scene of the conversation between Lescaut and Geronte, which is excluded from it, and create an uninterrupted stream of sound from which are excluded the opening choral scene and the semiserious "madrigal," "Ave, sera gentile," the entrances of Des Grieux and Manon, the "a due" in which they become acquainted. The *Allegro vivo*—comparable to a free form of rondo—extends to the next part, with few exclusions beyond the lyrical portions of the second "a due" between Manon and Des Grieux ("Vedete? Io son fedele"), and the episode following the elopement of the two protagonists.

Simplifying somewhat, it could be said that in these schemes Puccini redefined the dramaturgical bipolarity peculiar to Italian opera: on the one hand the dramatic plane, meaning the phases of the action resolved on stage in a fragmentary conversational style, held together in the orchestra by episodes based on instrumental procedures, such as the variation and transformation of the motif; on the other, the lyrical plane, the moments of subjective expression and emotional outpouring, fixed in passages that satisfy the function rather than the form of the aria or duet, vocally preeminent and gravitating in the orchestra around the characteristic motifs, the doubling of the singing and the formulas of accompaniment. ("Donna non vidi mai," for instance, has in the orchestra a series of transformations of the opera's principal leitmotif, the motif of the presentation of the protagonist—"Manon Lescaut mi chiamo"—which in the hesitant, diaphanous sequence of five parallel chords descending by degrees is also the center of irradiation of a harmonic color so typically Puccinian as to be present already in a piece for organ written when he was about eighteen.) René Leibowitz defined this dramatic-musical bipolarity with the formula as the "lyrical-symphonic dialectic," which epitomized Puccini's closeness to Wagner's methods and, at the same time, its substantial difference from them. The first reviewers of *Manon Lescaut*, on the other hand, chose to bring out the work's extraneousness to Wagnerism, which they completely bypassed, rather comparing it to classical symphonism. Glancing over the newspaper reports following the premiere in Turin, we find praise of the "ingenious and learned counterpointist" and of the "cultured and tasteful instrumentalist" (Berta in the *Gazzetta del popolo*), of the "fundamental unity" of a music that succeeded in remaining "healthy" amid "hysteria, Byzantinism, and rampant decadentism" (Giuseppe Depanis in the *Gazzetta piemontese*), and the unreserved Italianness of Puccini's inspiration. In the *Corriere della sera* Alfredo Colombani wrote:

> If there is one of our young musicians who has understood the famous recommendation, "Return to the antique," it is Puccini. *Manon* can be described as an opera of a classical character. Its music has the development and style of the great symphonists, without in this sacrificing the expression essential to the drama. And without forgoing what may be called the Italianness of melody. Puccini is truly an Italian genius.

With Wagner and beyond Wagner

The passionate element in *Manon*, which from the start Puccini considered essential to his dramatic interpretation of Prévost's novel ("[Massenet] will feel it in the French way, with powder and minuets. I will feel it in the Italian way, with desperate passion," was his comment on the subject), reflected precisely those decadent, northern and Wagnerian influences that Italian criticism, inclined to emphasize the Latin health of Puccini's music, sought to ignore out of a contrived chauvinism. The passages of Wagner's inspiration that persist in *Manon Lescaut* can easily be listed. The emotionally charged atmosphere and some details of *Tristan* have affinities with the harmonic chromaticisms through which passion gradually surges in the Act II duet ("Tu, tu, amore? Tu?"), the ominous theme of the night attack in Act III (homologous with the opening motif of Wagner's Act III), and perhaps the song of the Lamplighter ("E Kate rispose al Re"), whose model might have been the song of Wagner's helmsman. A profound knowledge of the score of the *Meistersinger* emerges with a near quotation of the brooding soundscape at the beginning of Act III in the passage with cello and viola that opens the intermezzo (another variation on Manon's motif). There we should consider a reference to the harmoniously ambiguous conformation of *Tristan,* become famous as the "Tristan chord," which Puccini employs as a sonorous allusion to Wagner's music drama most closely bound up with the genesis of *Manon*, and somewhat as a hallmark of musical modernity (an orientation very popular in European music at the end of the century). The *Tristan-Akkord* is distinctly heard

The newly inaugurated Bayreuth Festspielhaus, engraving, 1876.

twice in Act II. It appears in two elusive bars between the dance lesson and the pastoral song "L'ora, o Tirsi," where it sounds like a linguistic object alien to the eighteenth-century artifice of the music and dancing going on in Geronte's mansion, almost a sound flashback that elicits in Manon her undiminished passion for Des Grieux. Hence it becomes the most direct linguistic intermediary of the erotic tension of this passion in the delicate and yet ardent resolution of the embrace at the end of the duet between the two young lovers. This is not much for an opera in which the influence of Wagnerian music is evident; it is already a great deal for a work in which Wagner's processes are bent to the purposes of a new dramaturgy.

Exploring the potential for renewal by starting from the Wagnerian matrix, the authors of *Manon Lescaut* reached the climax in the great *concertato* of the appeal and the embarkation of the prostitutes in Act III. Here the application of the principle of dramatic continuity, evolving in the post-Wagnerian phase of European music theatre, led them to conceive an extensive scene with a multifocal action, in which the music alternately develops a series of events in the uninterrupted flow of a single chronometric time. The sergeant conducting the roll call of the women with customary indifference; the crowd lounging about the port of Le Havre, mocking and insulting the prostitutes about to be transported to America; Lescaut seeking vainly to incite the crowd against the soldiers; Manon and Des Grieux speaking sorrowfully apart: all these are woven into a single dynamic tableau. Puccini, as the omniscient narrator, develops it on a slow and desolate motif, whose cadenced rhythms seem to be so many leaps into the void, and as the musical director he focuses attention on the two protagonists lost in the crowd, bringing out in the foreground now Manon's grieving farewell and now Des Grieux's bitter anguish.

At the end, the dramatic symphonism of Act I, the narrative orchestration of the intermezzo, and the multidimensional character of the prostitutes' embarkation, which interprets the old *concertato* on a dynamic plane, extending its scope almost to the whole act, are dramatic achievements rooted in the development of Italian opera. In these respects, *Manon* was the most significant stage of that oscillating movement, first of immersion in Wagnerism, and then progressive deviation from it, which began with the symphonic compositions of Puccini's youth and passed through his two "Milanese" operas, *Le Villi* and *Edgar*. This course was warmly encouraged by Giulio Ricordi, who even as Puccini was working on an adaptation of the *Meistersinger* (in practice a drastic reduction), during the genesis of *Manon* exhorted his young author to free himself from the Wagnerian model, pointing to the crux: "Only Wagner is allowed to exceed all limits with words devoid of common sense and ultra-Gothic music."

It is symptomatic that the forward-looking and non-imitative creative act of Puccini's *Manon* was fully understood abroad rather than in Italy. In reviewing the first performance in London in May 1894, Bernard Shaw observed that in *Manon* the very idea of Italian opera "is so transformed that you could almost think yourself in a new country." And offering a comparison with the other novelties of the moment, he explained the reasons for this: "In *Cavalleria* and *Pagliacci* I can find nothing but Donizettian opera rationalized, condensed, filled in, and thoroughly brought up to date; but in *Manon Lescaut* the domain of Italian opera is enlarged by an annexation of German territory." (Note that earlier the *Berliner Tageblatt*, after the premiere of *Le Villi* in 1883, had titled its review "A Modern Italian German," underscoring the dramaturgical autonomy of an opera inspired by Wagner's musical language). Shaw then entered into the merit of the work, explaining that in Act I, "there is genuine symphonic modification, development, and occasionally combination of the thematic material, all in a dramatic way but also in a musically homogeneous way, so that the act is really a single movement with episodes instead of being a succession of separate numbers, linked together, to conform to the modern fashion, by substituting interrupted cadences for full closes and parading a leitmotif occasionally." He also pointed out that Puccini's use of harmony and syncopated rhythm denoted "a strong technical interest," judging this in an Italian musician "the most refreshing symptom of mental vigor." He also observed that the "free" use of dissonances and the "reckless prodigality" of the orchestration endowed the music with "a robustness and a variety that reduce the limited tonic and dominant harmonic technique of Donizetti and Bellini, by contrast, to mere Christy minstrelsy." And he concluded almost with surprise that thanks to *Manon* (and to

Cavalleria, *Pagliacci*, and *Falstaff*, which had accompanied it in the London season), Italian opera had a secure future and not just a glorious past.

In short, while distinguishing the work from Massenet's earlier opera, and gradually distancing himself from Wagner, while playing his own game in their special fields, in *Manon Lescaut* Puccini finally produced a universally convincing embodiment of the Milanese ideas of Wagnerism. The melodrama could thus be present itself renewed and modern on the international scene, with the face of a young author by formation and mindset freed from the restraints of the elderly Verdi. And what would be the outcome of this epiphany, Puccini demonstrated in *La bohème*, which developed consequentially out of *Manon*, completely freed from deference to Wagnerism accommodated in the Italian style.

Maurice Leloir, *The Death of Manon*, c. 1892. New York, Dahesh Museum of Art.

Music and the Figurative Arts: Analogies, Echoes, Cross-Pollinations

Along the pathways of the critical success of Puccini's opera we rather frequently come across the extension of an interpretive and popular study as concerns the contexts of the contemporary situations that can somehow be related to musical expression, such as science, philosophy, literature, or the figurative arts. This is in response to the stimuli of the finest Late Romantic tradition that was to nurture the experimental tension typical of twentieth-century modern culture in dimensions that unquestionably went beyond what was local. In the decades between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, the vigorous aspiration (or perhaps myth) toward a "total work of art" that would usurp any distinction of genres and the specific characterization of the language was asserted. This would serve as the most vital source for the so-called avant-gardes.
By focusing attention on the music-figurative art axiom it becomes necessary to measure the elements in Puccini's own culture of a dynamic process that was not very systematic, but not for this reason superficial; a process based on various international experiences backed by frequent trips to other European countries and beyond, from the Tuscany and Milan

Tranquillo Cremona, *High Life*, 1876–1877, Milan, Galleria d'Arte Moderna.

Gaetano Previati, *On the Grass*, 1890. Florence, Galleria d'arte moderna.

Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, *The Sun*, 1904. Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea.

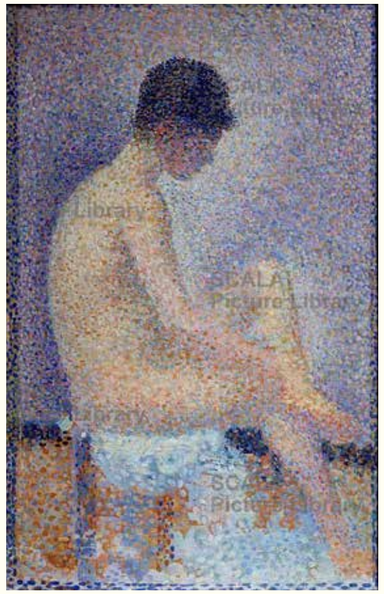
of his early years, to Paris, Vienna, Germany, even traveling as far as America.
If we provide a chronology for the composer's various experiences, beginning from those that took place during his youth, precociously so, we can determine that the years when *Manon Lescaut* was being performed (it premiered in Turin in 1893) were significant ones. A period that can be offset—in a synopsis with European painting at the end of the century—by an ideal arc that stretches from long-lasting experimentation with the real (within which the epic phenomena of Impressionism was asserted) to the different expression of a decidedly anti-positivist Symbolism, when completely opposite needs were postulated, all the way to mysticism and at the same time to the values of an extreme scientism.
As concerns specificity, the distinctive characteristic of the various late-nineteenth-century aesthetics was based on painting that featured an extreme use of pure color and the function of light as part of the organization of the pictorial composition, which corresponded in music to the vibrant magic of the timbre. In both cases, what counted was expressivity and not objectivity, emotion more than imitation.

From Tuscany to Milan

Among all the places where Puccini's visual sensibility was formed, it is reasonable to hypothesize that his "native home" comes first, a place where he must have had a direct knowledge of the work of the Macchiaoli artists and the various nuances—from the golden city of Lega and Signorini to the rustic representations of Fattori—and later to the more sophisticated work of the Milanese *Scapigliatura* with its strongly allusive and synthetic expressions based on luministic abbreviations in Cremona, Ranzoni, and Conconi.

Camille Pissarro, *The Boulevard Montmartre at Night*, 1897. London, National Gallery.

Edgar Degas, *After the Bath. Woman Drying her Neck*, 1898. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

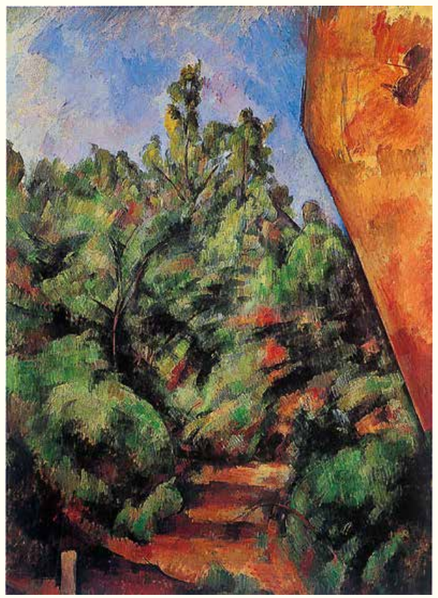


Claude Monet, *The Garden at Giverny*, 1900. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

Paul Cézanne, *The Red Rock*, 1895–1900. Paris, Musée de l'Orangerie.

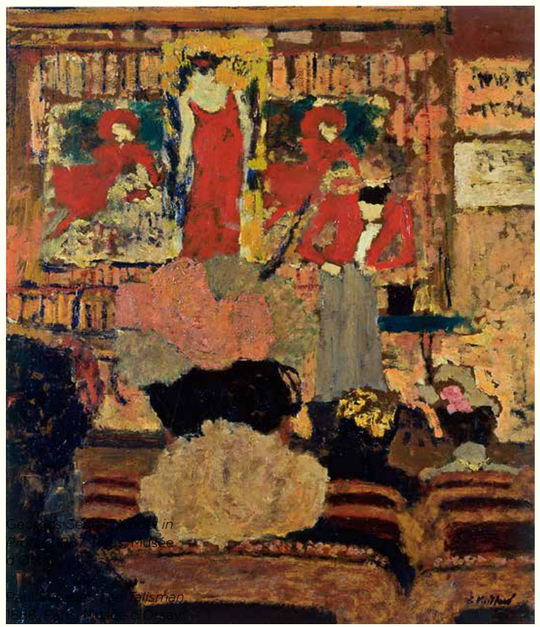
Georges Seurat, *Model in Profile*, 1887. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

Paul Sérusier, *The Talisman*, 1888. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.



Paris

The scant biographical information available tells us that Paris was the privileged place of Puccini's direct curiosity as concerned his work, proven by the fact that he declaredly wrote *Manon Lescaut* as an antithesis to Massenet's previous story. As for the figurative arts, Paris at the turn of the century had a great deal to offer that was stimulating, combining both the technical and formal side of the figurative language (suffice to think of a novelty like photography and to the rising importance of the "popular" thanks to the printed media). Painting specifically ended with the extreme consequences of the multiform epic of Naturalism, above all in the color-light dialectic and in a new syntax for spatial arrangement, soon to be unhinged by the advent of novel, highly dynamic notions concerning the element of time: such innovations were also important for the communicative processes of the theatre and specifically melodrama, precisely because it featured the word, music, and moving images. Painting overall, complete with the novelties of the 1890s, which is when Puccini was composing *Manon Lescaut*, represented the metamorphosis of what was true in nature (already idealized in the requirements for the "impression") in a significant reorganization of the image via grammar formulated according to scientific rules (*pointillisme*).



Édouard Vuillard, *The Magician*, c. 1895. Zurich, Stiftung Sammlung E.G. Bührle.

Pierre Bonnard, *The Luncheon*, 1899. Zurich, Stiftung Sammlung E.G. Bührle.

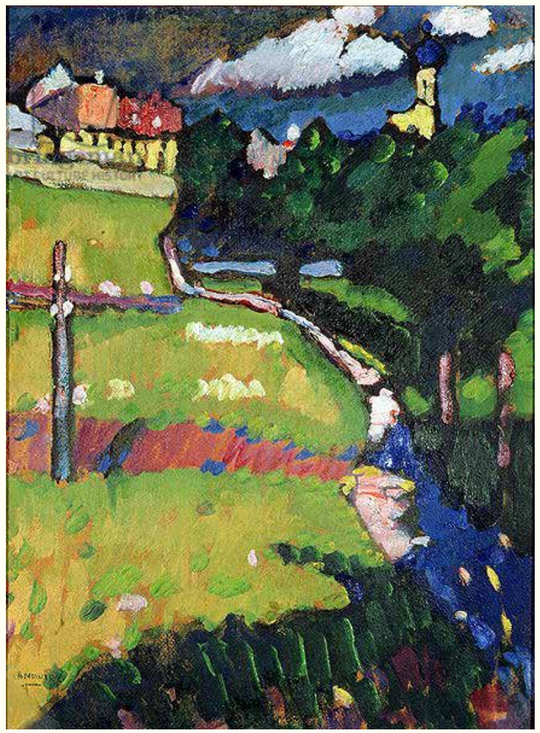
Gustav Klimt, *The Longing for Happiness*, detail of the *Beethoven Frieze*, 1902. Vienna, Secession Building.

Gustav Klimt, *Poster for the First Exhibition of the Viennese Sucession*, 1898. New York, Museum of Modern Art.

Koloman Moser, *Poster for the 13th Exhibition of the Viennese Sucession*, 1902.

From Vienna to Bayreuth

In the bittersweet gossip that surrounded Puccini's melodramas, the composer was often accused of being a condescending Germanophile. These attributes were fueled by his close relationship with Wagner's revolution, as well as by his remodeling of traditional melodrama into ongoing theatre, and the repositioning of a particular symphonism the Lucca maestro adopted with prudence equal to the absolute freedom of expressive re-elaboration that was also favored by his direct knowledge of the figurative testimonies of the work of the Master of Bayreuth and of his multifarious traces identified in the international culture that stemmed from two considerably different sources: the highly reflexive and problematic one of the Vienna Secession, exemplified in Klimt and his sophisticated and varied academia; and the one that corresponded to the expressionistic rage of the nascent German avant-gardes, which would first be seen in the aristocratic tenderness of Der Blaue Reiter group, and later in the acute violence of the Die Brücke movement.



Wassily Kandinsky, *The Church in Murnau*, 1908–1909. Omsk, Regional M. Vrubel Art Museum.

Emil Nolde, *Summer Afternoon*, 1903. Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza.

Ugo Gheduzzi, maquettes for the premiere of *Manon Lescaut* at the Teatro Regio in Turin, 1893. Milan, Archivio storico Ricordi.

From left to right:
Act I: *In Amiens. A large public square near the Paris Gates*.
Act II: *In Paris. In a drawing room of Geronte's apartments.*
Act III: *Le Havre. In a square at the Port of Le Havre.*
Act IV: *In America. An endless barren and bordering the territory of New Orleans.*

SYNOPSIS

Act I

In Amiens. A large public square near the Paris Gates

Edmondo, with other students, is courting the girls and teasing Des Grieux, who appears indifferent to feminine charm. A carriage arrives, and the elderly treasurer Geronte de Ravoir, the sergeant Lescaut and his sister Manon get out. Attracted by the girl, Des Grieux approaches; learning that her father is sending her to a convent, he tells her to rebel. Called back by her brother, Manon has to leave, but promises Des Grieux to rejoin him shortly. Des Grieux has fallen in love with her at first sight, and now his friends tease him for having yielded to Cupid's arrows. Meanwhile, Geronte learns from Lescaut what the future holds for Manon; he considers seducing her, and asks the innkeeper to provide him with a carriage to take her with him to Paris, but Edmondo, who has overheard the conversation, informs Des Grieux. Therefore, when Manon appears for the appointment, Des Grieux informs her of what is happening and convinces her to run away with him, using the same carriage reserved by Geronte. Geronte is furious, and wants to pursue them, but Lescaut asks him to desist, cynically reassuring him: sooner or later, Manon will choose the luxury and wealth that he can offer to the love of a young pauper.

Act II

In Paris. In a drawing room of Geronte's apartments

Manon has abandoned Des Grieux, giving in to Geronte's blandishments. While her hair is being done, she receives a visit from her brother. By now, bored with her life as a rich kept woman, she feels nostalgia for the passionate relationship with her young lover, and asks for news of him. In the meantime, a group of singers and players arrives, and they perform a madrigal for her; after their performance, Manon receives a visit from a group of Geronte's friends, and a dance master gives her a lesson under the satisfied gaze of Geronte. Alone at last, Manon finds Des Grieux unexpectedly before her; in the meantime, Lescaut had told him of Manon's desire to see him. He accuses her of betrayal, but her charm soon gets the better of his resistance, and the passion between them is rekindled: thus, Geronte, returning, surprises them embracing. The old treasurer leaves once again, this time to report Manon to the police, but the two lovers linger, disoriented, and when Lescaut arrives, urging them to escape, it is too late: the soldiers, bursting in with Geronte, surprise Manon as she gathers up jewels and precious objects, and they arrest her. Des Grieux, drawing his sword, wants to throw himself upon Geronte, but Lescaut holds him back, thus preventing him from compromising himself irreparably.

Act III

Le Havre. In a square at the Port of Le Havre

Manon is about to be deported to America with a group of prostitutes. It is almost dawn. Lescaut and Des Grieux are counting on the complicity of a bribed guard in order for Manon to escape. Locked up in the barracks near the port, she appears behind the bars and Des Grieux tries to encourage her. Their impassioned conversation is interrupted by the passing of the lamplighter, who, singing to himself, makes the morning rounds to extinguish the lanterns. Manon's attempt to escape is foiled by the soldiers, and the crowd drawn by the confusion throngs to witness the embarkation of the convicts. While a sergeant proceeds with the roll call and the guards direct the prisoners towards the ship, Des Grieux begs the ship's captain to accept him as a ship boy in order to follow Manon to America. Moved to pity, the officer takes him on board amidst general enthusiasm.

Act IV

In America. In an endless barren land bordering the territory of New Orleans

Manon and Des Grieux, on the run, cross a desolate territory, exhausted from thirst and hardships. While Des Grieux goes off to look for help, Manon, delirious with fever, recalls images from her past. Des Grieux returns; he has found no signs of life. Manon, feeling that the end is drawing near, begs him to declare his love once more, and dies sweetly in his arms.

William Bouguereau, *Manon Lescaut,* detail, late nineteenth century, Hartford, CT, Wadsworth Atheneum.

Gabriella Bosco

WOMEN AND SIN IN FRENCH LITERATURE

There is a book circulating among the pages of *Camille: The Lady of the Camellias*, and it tells the story of *Manon Lescaut*. A gift Armand had given to Marguerite one day, it first appears at the beginning of the novel, auctioned off along with the other objects owned by the woman after her death, and purchased for ten times its actual value by the first-person narrator, without even knowing what book it was, out of a sort of sixth sense. The narrator was certain—he tells us—that it was important; the auctioneer had told him there was an inscription on the title page, along with a few words written in ink.

And so Dumas, *fils*, uses a *mise en abyme* to set the work by the Abbé Prévost inside his own novel, and then has it reappear several times over the course of the events. He does this to forge a link between the two main characters, no doubt, but also to point to something deeper, more significant, from a literary point of view. If, on the one hand, Armand Duval's gift to Marguerite Gautier causes the woman to find in Manon's story an antecedent for her own—the tears that fall on certain passages are proof of the reader's heartfelt, painful empathy for suffering that is familiar to her—on the other, the use of this literary device implies, on the part of the author, the recognition of a literary text as a specific referent. More than a century later—Abbé Prévost's novel was written in 1731, that of Dumas, *fils*, was published in 1848—the physical presence of the former inside the latter is a sort of hyperlink: instead of using passages from it, disseminating them here and there in strategic points of the story, Dumas, *fils*, uses *The Story of Chevalier Des Grieux and Manon Lescaut* as if it were a cornerstone. And thanks to his use of a further device, he also appropriates himself of the referent: the words written by hand by the person making the gift bestow a certain coloring on the object. "Manon to Marguerite," it says. And beneath, "Humility." It is Armand's dedication to his beloved. And it is indeed followed by the man's signature.

"What was the meaning of the word 'Humility?,'" the narrator wonders. "Was Manon to recognize in Marguerite, in M. Armand Duval's opinion, her superior in vice or in affection?" This is the

Augustin de Saint-Aubin (attr.), *Alleged Portrait of the Abbé Prévost*. Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

Title page of *Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas, *fils*, in the Calmann-Lévy edition of 1889.

alternative he puts forward, immediately followed by his choice: "The second interpretation seemed the more probable, for the first would have been an impertinent piece of plain speaking which Marguerite, whatever her opinion of herself, would never have accepted." Dumas, *fils*, then has the narrator make several other considerations after he has gone home, once he has gone to bed and picked up the book to read once again: "*Manon Lescaut* is a touching story. I know every detail of it," he confides to the reader, "and yet whenever I come across the volume the same sympathy always draws me to it. I open it and for the hundredth time I live over again with the heroine of the Abbé Prévost. Now this heroine is so true to life," he adds, "that I feel as if I had known her." But in this new condition, the narrator continues, he couldn't help but compare Marguerite with Manon. A new reading of the book, in light of this unprecedented comparison, led him to feel pity, rather than mere indulgence, actually almost love, for the woman whose inheritance had been the reason for his ownership of that copy of Prévost's novel. "Manon died in the desert, it is true, but in the arms of the man who loved her with the whole energy of his soul; the man who, when she was dead, dug a grave for her, and watered it with his tears, and buried his heart in it; while Marguerite, a sinner like Manon, and perhaps converted like her, had died in a sumptuous bed (it seemed, after what I had seen, the bed of her past), but in that desert of the heart, a more barren, a vaster, a more pitiless desert than that in which Manon had found her last resting-place."

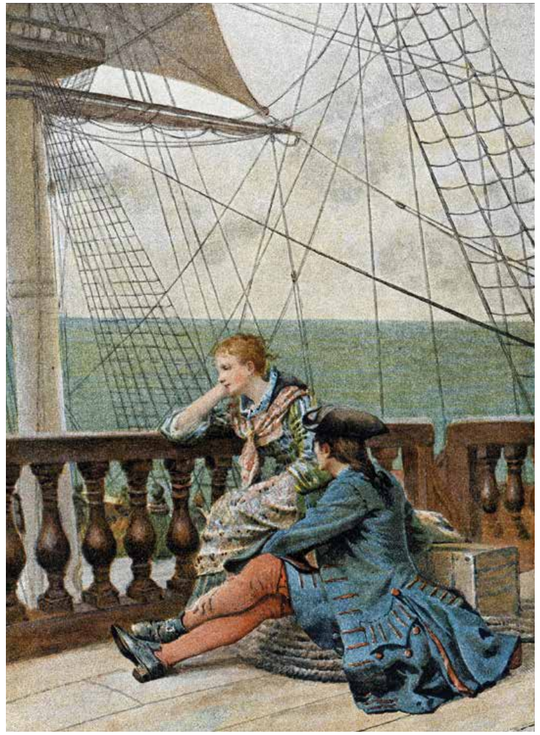
This is how Dumas, *fils*, framed the crux of the matter, and he did so based on two points: the protagonist's realism, and the punishment for her sins. All of which was so true he felt he had met Manon personally; a sinner (albeit repentant) who dies young to expiate the sins she had sullied herself with. Is Marguerite guiltier than Manon, seeing that her atonement is harsher, at least in the narrator's mind, and that she dies alone surrounded by her wealth, while Manon dies from hardship and far from her home, but with the help of the man who loved her so much he was willing to follow her to the bottom of her abyss?

In the history of French novels, at least in the ones where the leading character is a woman, the concerns of the authors mostly revolve around these two matters: the realism of the story told, and the problem of the sin of which the heroine is almost fatefully guilty.

Joseph Caraud, *The Abbé Prévost Reads "Manon Lescaut,"* detail, 1856. Broadway, Haynes Fine Art at the Bindery Galleries.

The devices used by the authors to make their stories seem more real are thus multiplied, and the principle of truth always involves portraying a woman, especially a beautiful one—actually in some ways a victim of her beauty—who is weak before temptation and sin. As for Manon Lescaut, the author carefully explains at the start of the book that he could easily have added the story to his memoirs, having personally met Chevalier Des Grieux, and that the only reason he did not do so was because, being a lengthy episode, it would have been too long a diversion, an excessive interruption in the main storyline. Memoirs, the autobiography of an author, are the genres that, more than any other, best guarantee the authenticity of the contents. The pact that regulates this type of writing says just that: the writer vows not to lie; the reader must believe him. In Marguerite Gautier's case, the initial episode of the auction, unsurprisingly told in the first person, serves the same purpose.

As for the matter of guilt, the rule here is that sin is a necessary ingredient used to attract the reader, especially when it is presented as a sin that really was committed, guaranteeing



punishment in the end and the re-establishment of the work's morality. It's an age-old story, and the idea of identifying sin with a woman also stems from the distant past.

The same narrative device is used in what is considered to be the first novel in French literature (according to the modern definition of the novel), that is, Madame de La Fayette's *La Princesse de Clèves*, written half a century before *Manon Lescaut*. Actually, the narrative device is doubled here: because the author is herself a woman and because the main character's only sin is her intention. She is all the same punished, and once again the punishment is death (although, initially, it is only symbolic). The hypothesis of adultery—regardless of the fact that it is just that, a hypothesis—will not allow for an alternative solution. The moral imperative, during that particular phase of Louis XIV's reign, required it. There was no author who failed to comply, the penalty being the prohibition of publication. In love with the Duke of Nemours, simply for having thought of betraying her husband, the Prince of Clèves, the main character chooses the reclusion of a monastery where, having atoned for her sins by living a life of sacrifice and prayer, she will eventually die. In this story, the person who truly pays for those adulterous thoughts—actually determining the existence of a victim notwithstanding the materialization of infidelity—is her husband the prince. The confession by the heroine—who cannot forgive herself for having desired another man—is a key scene in

Maurice Leloir, *On the Ship*, 1885, illustration for the *Histoire du Manon Lescaut et de Chevalier Des Grieux*.

Tony Johannst, *The Death of Manon*, illustration for *Manon Lescaut*.

François de Troy or students, *Marie-Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne, Comtesse de La Fayette*, late seventeenth–early eighteenth century, Château de Chambord.

I Had Fallen to the Ground and Was Dragged, illustration for Denis Diderot's *La Religieuse*.

the novel, and so great is her husband's suffering because of it that he is inexorably consumed.

About a decade earlier, in 1669, similar labors of love had tormented the Portuguese nun and author of the *Letters* that were for a long time believed to be authentic until their later attribution to the Count of Guilleragues—a diplomat by profession, a frequenter of salons, a friend of La Rochefoucauld, Madame de Sévigné, and Racine. Although many critics still do not accept the attribution, Leo Spitzer does, among others. The *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* is an epistolary novel consisting of five letters written by Marianne—Mariana Alcoforado was the name of a nun who actually existed and is the main character in the story—to the French officer she was hopelessly in love with, but who by then was distant, indifferent, and had forgotten her. "I shall be unhappy for the rest of my life," writes Marianne in the fifth and last letter to the unfaithful officer, adding that during the time she was madly in love with him she had lived in idolatry, so she would forever be forced to bear her unendurable remorse. She has decided, she writes, to find peace by seeking to heal from the illness caused by her love, but should she not succeed, she is prepared to take her own life. The narrative device is somewhat different here: while the person speaking is the main character, for her feelings to be more complete—there is no authorial filter in autobiographical fiction—then the scope of the sin, adultery not just towards a man but towards God, a sin that is in itself incommensurable, although not entirely justifiable, is at least understandable: Marianne has chosen to become a nun not by choice but because her family forced her to. Dispatched to a monastery when she was young, while it is true that she has sinned, she is not completely responsible for her actions. Plausible if not true is the scourge of being forced to take the habit. With respect to Manon and later to Marguerite, weak like them and like them helpless before pleasure, she is guilty because of a social law, and not because of the author's narrative.

A more famous late-eighteenth-century novel has a comparable structure, and its conception is based on a similar story: that novel is Denis Diderot's *La Religieuse* (*Memoirs of a Nun*). Having personally experienced what it means to lose one's freedom while he was imprisoned for a short time in 1749 for the materialist nature of his *Letter on the Blind*, and having had a sister driven

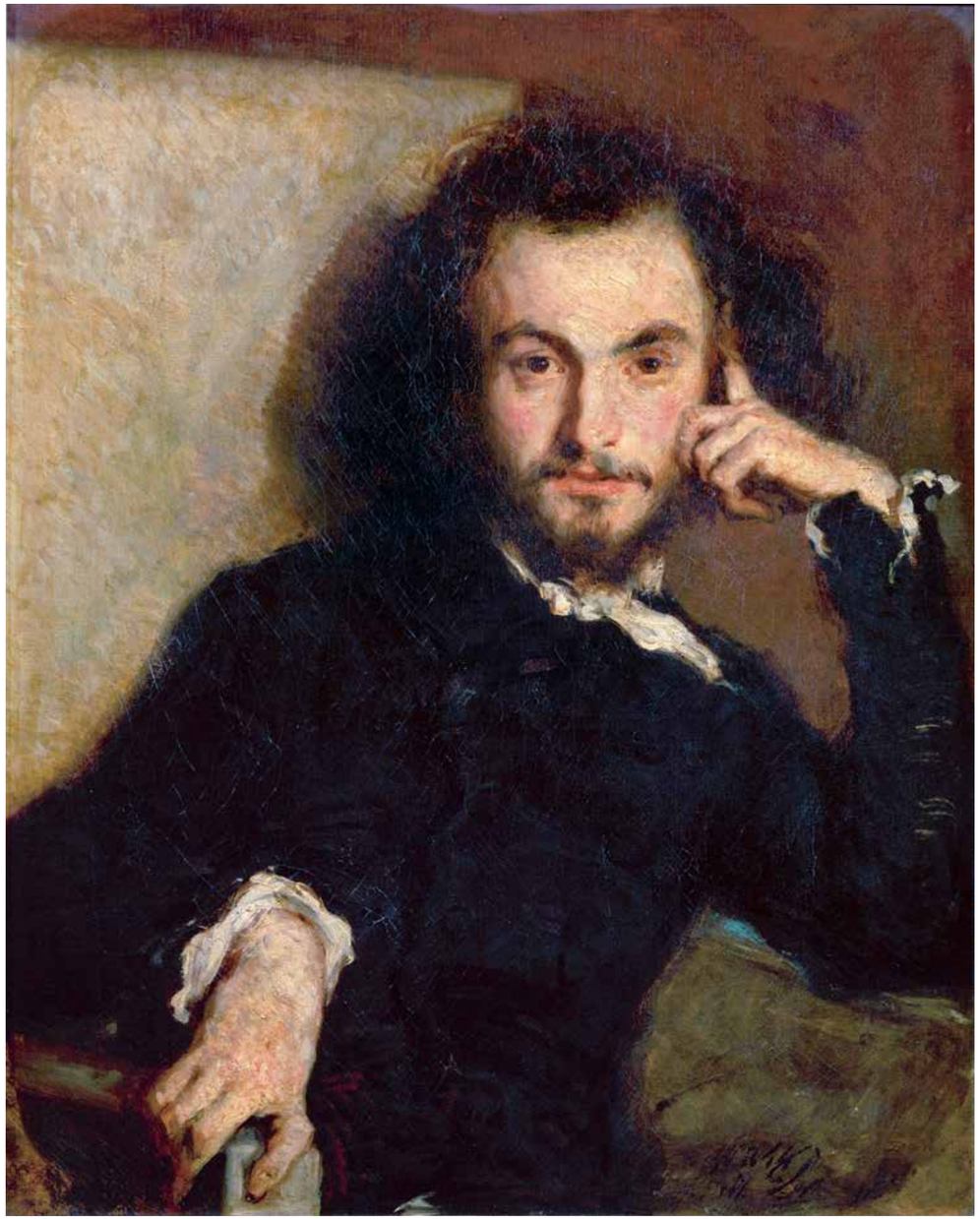
to madness and death at the age of twenty-eight because of her life of marginalization inside a monastery (though Angélique had not been forced to become a nun, once inside the monastery she had not been able to stand the loss of self), it was through his novel that Diderot expressed his own personal and civic protest. A novel in the form of a memoir written between 1760 and 1780 (but published in a single posthumous volume, in 1796—Diderot wanted to avoid other consequences, in light of the contents), *La Religieuse* features a narrative device that forcefully aims to prove that the story told actually took place, while at the same time apparently denying that it did. The text, written in the first person by Suzanne Simonin, a nun who says she wants to convince the Marquis de Croismare to testify that she was forced to become a nun, was originally a piece of fiction orchestrated by Diderot and a group of his friends to convince the Marquis, who had withdrawn to Normandy, to return to Paris—where he had previously been a regular member of their circle and whose absence they regretted—for the purpose of helping the poor girl who had fled the monastery. In truth, this fiction within a fiction—which is actually a part of the novel itself—aims to prove the authenticity of the story. The Marquis de Croismare really was interested in the fate of women who were forced to pronounce their vows, and the figure of Suzanne Simonin is closely inspired by that of Marguerite Delamare, a nun who actually lived in the Abbey of Longchamp. Marguerite had aroused interest and debate among those who met to discuss philosophy for having sought justice through a memoir

Albert-Auguste Fourié, *The Death of Madame Bovary*, ante 1883. Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts.

in which she asked to be freed. One of her arguments concerned the risk of madness caused by being forced into isolation. By having us believe he had simply devised a strategy, albeit in a literary form, to lead the Marquis back to Paris, Diderot intended to avert the risk of a further sentence, which he would likely have incurred given the novel's condemnation of serious abuse and unpardonable connivance with the ecclesiastical authorities.

In this case as well, just as in that of the Portuguese nun, the sin that led to the punishment—imprisonment for life in the absence of vocation—was committed by others, not by the protagonist herself. Suzanne was forced to take the veil to atone for the adultery that had been committed by her mother who, by offering the fruit of her betrayal to God, could avoid perdition. However, the conclusion of the novel, and therefore of the story told in the first person by the fugitive, precisely because the sin was committed by someone else, and by virtue of the author's atheism—and thanks also to the precautions that were taken in terms of the narration—is not punitive, as it was for the Princess of Clèves, or for Manon Lescaut, or for as it would be for Marguerite Gautier. Rather, it is a question of liberation or at least escapism. In actual fact, there is no real epilogue, and the risk of being discovered forces Suzanne into a clandestine life. But the author, by choosing this ending for her, saves her from suicide, which she comes very close to committing at the lowest point of her experience, and from madness, to which other nuns in the novel instead succumb.

Madame Bovary, perhaps the most famous heroine in French literature, instead commits adultery many times. And yet, while it is true that the basic scheme remains the same—the ostentation of realism, and the punishment of sin as what appears to be a guarantee of the story's morality (or perhaps an alibi for it)—it should be noted that Gustave Flaubert's narrative intent moved in a completely different direction. To understand this, the letters he penned to his friend and lover, Louise Colet, while he was writing the novel (for as long as the "Bovary workshop" was open) are of great value to us. In them Flaubert explained the nature of his project, and it is obvious that the main character's adultery—in which the fullest manifestation of so-called Bovarism has been obstinately sought, understood as eternal dissatisfaction, the perennial search for an illusory gratification, destined each time to turn out to be more deceptive than the previous one—is not at all what interested the author. What Flaubert really wanted to write was "a book about nothing" that would remind the reader of the color of mold. Only partially provocative, Flaubert was, in short, interested in the *what,* not in the *how*. The fact that the novel is about the events in the life of a provincial woman who is unhappy about a marriage in which she had put so much hope, a woman who becomes unfaithful, who incurs debt after debt to fulfill her petty ambitions, to the point that all she could do to get out of her quandary was to drink arsenic and kill herself, is totally fortuitous. The local news in a Rouen newspaper had published a short article about the tragic end of the life of a Normandy woman, the wife of a physician, and the pettiness of the story itself (that is, its triteness, its unexceptional nature) had offered the author the perfect idea for the narrative experiment he had in mind. "Madame Bovary, c'est moi" (Madame Bovary is me), the famous words that Flaubert is thought to have uttered (or even written) and repeated, proof that the novel was told from her point of view, that of the heroine and sinner, were never even countenanced by the author. At least, there is no proof Flaubert ever said those words. The false quote exists because it was written in the first biography of Flaubert, published in 1909—Flaubert had died thirty years earlier in 1880—signed by René Descharmes. Someone he knew, the biographer said, had told him Flaubert had written those words in a letter to his friend Amélie Bosquet. A third- or fourth-hand source that cannot be verified and is, therefore, worthless. For the sake of accuracy from a historiographical standpoint, this needs to be made clear. However, we might wonder why those words were invented and the reason for their success. In short, does it make sense to ask whether Flaubert, who never uttered those words, *could have* uttered them? The answer is that he could have uttered a sentence that was very similar yet radically different. In one of the aforementioned letters to Louise Colet we



Émile Deroy, *Portrait of Charles Baudelaire*, 1844. Versailles, Musée national du Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon.

Franz von Stuck, *Sensuality*, c. 1891. Private collection.

Odilon Redon, *The Flowers of Evil*, c. 1890. Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, gift of Dieter Scharf in memory of Otto Gerstenberg.

find the following passage: "It is a delicious thing to write, to be no longer yourself but to move in an entire universe of your own creating. Today, for instance, as man and woman, both lover and mistress, I rode on horseback through a forest beneath the yellow leaves of an autumn afternoon, and I was the horses, the leaves, the wind, the words my people uttered, even the red sun that made them almost close their love-drowned eyes." That afternoon (it was December 23, 1853), Flaubert had written the pages about Emma's horseback ride through the woods in the company of her lover Rodolphe, and in his letter to Louise he carefully described how while writing that scene (while writing *tout court*), he himself had become all the elements in his narrative fiction, all the characters, all the objects, all the words. A surprising anticipation of Rimbaud's *I Is Another*, this declaration of poetics by the author of *Madame Bovary* provides us with proof of how his interest was in the creative mechanism and not in the story itself. If, on a certain day in 1850, Flaubert had read a different piece of local news, he would have written a different story; his considerations—the ones we are reading about now, a century and a half later—would still have been the same, however.

To end what only appears to be a digression, and prove the extent to which Flaubert was indifferent to the sins of his protagonist, who committed suicide not because this is what inevitably happens to a person who strays from the straight and narrow path, but because this is what happened in the story that had inspired the author (who was totally indifferent to its miseducational value), let us recall the following: the existence of another heroine, Félicité, in Flaubert's masterpiece *A Simple Heart*; and the conclusion of Flaubert's and his novel's trial for offence to public morals. Félicité is an elderly servant to whom Flaubert dedicates a long story based on a famous scene in *Madame Bovary*. While Emma and her lover take advantage of the town fair they have no interest in to touch and hold hands, vowing to commit adultery, while sitting in a room on the first floor of the Town Hall, below them in the town square an elderly peasant woman is being awarded a gold medal for her "half a century of service." The woman's hearing is bad and she doesn't completely understand what's happening to her. She's dazed and frightened, and when she finds the medal in her hands she decides she will give it to the village priest. In *A Simple Heart* Flaubert expands this episode by delving deeper into the protagonist's sense of bewilderment, which is the same as that of the narrator. He doesn't know where he is going as the story unfolds, but he blindly follows the creative process, which is what interests him, just as Félicité doesn't fully understand the meaning of what is happening to her, but embraces faith with all her might, which guides her and which she naively envisions in the parrot Loulou, in her mind the embodiment of the Holy Spirit. In short, for Flaubert writing is the real protagonist; the heroine is only the means. As for the trial, the author's defense lawyer was Maître Sénard, who famously pleaded that if evil did indeed exist in the novel, then it was to be found in the soul of the reader—not in the soul of the protagonist, nor in that of her author. The famous carriage scene, which the trial focused on in particular, sees Emma and Léon, the young lawyer who would become her second lover, pull the curtains tight, and ask the driver to drive them around aimlessly (the driver's desperation at not knowing where he is going also represents the use of narrative metalepsis, the image of the narrator who is prey to his writing). The scene is immoral only for the person who imagines the illicit actions of the characters taking place behind the drawn curtains; it is not so for those who interpret the author's sense of decency. By pulling the curtain the author hides from the reader's view what it is best they not know about. No scene in *Madame Bovary* describes sin or illustrates it. As predicted, Flaubert and his novel were found not guilty. Instead, six months later in July 1857, in a trial for the same crime, involved both Charles Baudelaire and *The Flowers of Evil*, the outcome was the exact opposite. The prosecutor for both cases was Maître Pinard. In Baudelaire's case, six compositions in perhaps the most famous collection of poems in the world were incriminated for being dedicated to women considered to be immoral. Once again, we find ourselves before women who are guilty, but in this case, what exactly are they guilty of? The *poète maudit par excellence*, the inventor of mauditism, was not persecuted because of the overall

Marcel Mariën, montage for the cover of the Gallimard edition of *Nadja* by André Breton, c. 1938.

meaning of his collection, the inevitability of the evil that is sung therein, its fascination, nor because of the absoluteness of both, but rather because of the presence therein of six compositions considered to be offensive to both public and religious morals (Baudelaire would not be found guilty as concerned religious morals) because they described Sapphic love. This is yet another example of the author's in-depth realism based on his personal familiarity with the women he describes. Baudelaire condemned these women by writing about them, but it was neither more nor less than what he did to himself, to the poet that inhabited his soul, a poet condemned to eternally write poetry that was the source of atrocious pain and at the same time of heartrending pleasure. It is impossible to forget images like those of the voluptuous lover whose mouth is as red as strawberries, in whose bed impotent angels would damn their souls, who sucks the marrow from the poet's bones, only to become a swollen slimy wineskin bulging with pus. The poet shuts his eyes, but when he opens them again he sees that she has become a quivering skeletal debris creaking shrilly like a weathercock, swinging in the wind on a chilly winter's night. He, the poet who had in childhood been admitted "to the black mystery of frantic laughter mixed with sombre tears" (from *The Vampire's Metamorphosis* and *Lesbos*, two of the six poems that were condemned. The ban was not lifted until May 31, 1949, but the poems were published in Belgium in 1866 under the title *Les Épaves*).

Flaubert and Baudelaire, each in their own way, are the fathers of modern literature, and each of them gave women and their sins roles that were new and different with regard to the past. When their works were published and put on trial, only a few years had gone by since the publication of *Camille*. However, those were crucial years. While Dumas, *fils,* looked to the past, to Manon Lescaut, for his heroine, in both *Madame Bovary* and *The Flowers of Evil* the authors' gaze was toward the twentieth century. Alain Robbe-Grillet, the father of the *nouveau roman*, saw Flaubert as his direct predecessor, and there is no doubt that without the visionary quality of Baudelaire's works, Surrealism would never have existed (in the movement's *First Manifesto*—dated to 1924—Breton wrote "Baudelaire is surrealist in morals"). Nadja, the female embodiment of Surrealism, and the title of Breton's first novel (1928), in some ways brings our discussion to an end. In the novel Léona Camille Ghislaine Delcourt, who really did exist, chooses the name Nadja ("because in Russian it's the beginning of the word hope, and because it's only the beginning"). The author met Nadja accidentally while strolling through the city of Paris, and in his eyes she embodied the artistic avant-garde for which he was laying the foundations. Completely unaffected by reason, aesthetics, or morality, Nadja acted by following her stream of thought, as uncontrollable and sudden as the language of dreams. Too "different" to live among people who live by the rules, she is committed to a psychiatric hospital, where she spends the rest of her days. Breton abandons her to her fate: she had been, and would always be, for him the turning point in a creative process, in the revolution of writing. So real as to be real, to paraphrase Dumas, and guilty, in turn, of too much excess.

More or less at the same time another novel was seeing the light, dedicated to a woman or, rather, to the absence of one: that novel was *Sido* by Colette. She who had become famous for her series of novels about *Claudine*, who had been tricked by her husband Willy, but who had managed to free herself from that beginning and become a great writer, dedicated a portrait to her deceased mother Sidonie, whom she called Sido, by juxtaposing the images that various members of the family had of her: her husband, Captain Jules Colette, and Sido's other children, the writer's sister and two brothers. And so, through a third party, Colette created what might be seen as a self-portrait. Colette attempted to superimpose her own figure as a "pure and impure" woman onto that of her mother, a catalyzing and independent figure. By absolving her she absolved herself.

Is Manon distant from her? If we look at her from the twentieth century, she appears to be very much so, forced by her author to die in that great American desert, without a tree under which to find shelter, in the tragic night of her deceitful senses. And yet she is also close, very close: because of our powerless desire to remove the pin that pierces her butterfly-like body, beneath the glass of time through which we gaze at her with clarity.

Henri Manuel, *Portrait of Colette Wearing a Man's Suit,* c. 1909.

Marie Guillemine Benoist, *Portrait of a Black Woman*, 1799–1800. Paris, Musée du Louvre.

Giuseppe Patisso

MIGRATION AND DEPORTATION IN THE NEW FRANCE

France In North America

Between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, in the territories of what are known today as Canada and the United States, various European monarchies endeavored to build colonial empires with which to undermine the primacy that the Spanish and the Portuguese had earned for themselves in Central and South America. The Dutch, the Swedes, and the English settled along the Atlantic coast, colonizing the lands that more or less stretched from Virginia to present-day New York. The French, after the first tentative attempts they made toward Florida (where there was a strong presence of Spaniards), in the early seventeenth century decided to settle in the regions of the gulf where the Saint Lawrence River flowed. Following the waterways within the continent, in slightly less than a century they managed to take possession of the lands that were close to the Mississippi Delta, and that were named Louisiana by the explorer René Robert Cavelier de La Salle (1643–1687) in 1682, in honor of then King Louis XIV (1638–1715). Over the course of the seventeenth century, the standard of the fleur-de-lis would fly over much of Northeast Canada and the South Central United States. The empire built by the French in North America would become one of the most extensive and longest-lasting in North American colonial history. Stretching from the last icy offshoots of the Hudson Bay all the way to the Gulf of Mexico, the *Nouvelle France* (New France), the name French territory went by, for almost two centuries became the most concrete representation of France's imperial dream in North America. A *rêve impérial* that was abandoned after the Seven Years' War (1756–1763) that witnessed the rise in British strength on the Atlantic and the loss of France's North American colonies.

Unfolding in the background were the historical events that inspired the novel *Story of the Chevalier Des Grieux and of Manon Lescaut* by Antoine François Prévost, which also inspired Puccini for *Manon Lescaut*.

The Society of the North American Colonies: Immigration, Public Perception, and Historical Reality

From the very first steps taken by France in the New World, the

Map of the New France, late eighteenth century, engraving.

D.G. Thompson, *The Port of New Orleans*, c. 1873. engraving based on a drawing by Alfred Rudolph Waud.

colonization of such vast, uncultivated territories brought the issue of the population of its overseas possessions to the attention of the French crown. Initially, the French who chose to abandon Europe to settle in the Canadian colonies were few in number. The living conditions on the other side of the Atlantic were harsh: the freezing cold winters along the Saint Lawrence River, the scurvy epidemics, and the food shortages led to the deaths of many of the people who had chosen to cross the ocean to settle in the lands that had been claimed and colonized by the explorers at the service of the French crown. The sad, at times dramatic events that characterized the earliest experiences of the French colonies influenced the very perception of the New World on the part of the people. Those who were living in Continental France, aware of the hardships that the settlers across the Atlantic had to face, were unwilling to abandon their own wretched conditions to try their luck in the New World, putting their own lives at risk. For this reason, when the privileges offered by the king and the trading companies were not enough to convince the potential colonists, an attempt was made to deal with the issue of underpopulation by taking the necessary demographic resources from the prisons. For a long time, a part of the French population in North America consisted of outlaws and criminals of all sorts who were sent across the ocean to serve time. The fact that the New France was, in a certain sense, conceived like a penal colony, the destination for characters judged to be "undesirable" in France, should be kept in mind when historically contextualizing the events in Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*.

Though the deportation of convicts to France's North American colonies was not so widespread, it still cannot be overlooked. The presence of outlaws in the colonies especially had repercussions on the public perception of the living conditions across the ocean. The preconception that colonial societies were mostly made up of "rejects" from the Old Continent was a popular belief. And this idea was reinforced by the fact that several of these colonies had demonstrated their willingness to welcome the political exiles who fled from Europe because of religious persecution. Hence, in ordinary usage, the societies that were formed in the

New World were a sort of rabble of vagabonds, criminals, and the persecuted, where any morally virtuous God-fearing person would have struggled to survive.

This perception was so common among the French that it was often represented in the literary works that told the stories of those living on the other side of the Atlantic, and the *Story of the Chevalier des Grieux and of Manon Lescaut* was no exception. Contained in the novel that inspired Puccini were many of the preconceptions disseminated among the French concerning the everyday lives of the colonists. Louisiana, the colony the main character of the opera managed to reach after her prison term, is portrayed as an arid, barren land populated by shady individuals whose behavior bordered on the illegal. From a historical standpoint, this French colonial territory, thus called in honor of the Sun King, was one of the hardest to populate because of its climatic and orographic features. The sweltering heat in the summer, the frequent downpours, and the swampy land made it very hard to set up a colony there. A direct consequence of this was its underpopulation, an issue that many of Louisiana's French governors were forced to deal with.

After La Salle discovered it in 1682, the demographic plans in Louisiana were abandoned by the French until the early eighteenth century. It was during that period that the French crown, because of the growth of the British colonies in North America, began to view that territory as being strategic. Thanks to the explorations of Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville (1661–1705) and Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville (1680–1767) that took place right at the start of the eighteenth century, several experiments began to populate the area. The first colonists to reach Louisiana often died of disease or hunger. Seeing all the failures of the early settlement plans, attracting new colonists grew increasingly difficult, also because, as was often stressed by the colony's authorities, the French on the Old Continent did not have much of an adventurous spirit and found it very difficult to adapt to what could be extreme living conditions.

Notwithstanding the profuse efforts made by the crown and the administrators, for the first decades of the eighteenth century Louisiana continued to be an underpopulated colony that was also hard to rule, elements that unquestionably had repercussions on the colony's safety. In conditions such as these, any attempt to start business activities that could valorize the colony proved to be complex. The scant demographic resources hindered the fruitful growth of the economy, which led the first governors—d'Iberville, Bienville, and Cadillac—to try to find a solution to the problem.

At first, the political authorities tried to send some contract workers, so-called *engagés,* to the colonies, men who were offered a salary and board and lodgings for an average of three years, in the hope that they could be convinced to lend their services to the colony. This plan soon turned out to be unsuccessful: for as much as the conditions offered were advantageous, the French colonists thought of migration to North America as a form of exile, the last possible alternative should their homeland not have been able to offer anything better. It was seen as a sort of extreme and painful alternative to desperation. Aware of how difficult it was to recruit colonists from the Old Continent, several colonial administrative figures suggested to their homeland that in order to solve the problems of the population and the workforce needed by the colony if it was to survive, they should adopt what was referred to as the "British solution," that is to say, the large-scale importation of African slaves. Antoine Crozat (c. 1655–1738), a shareholder in the Louisiana Company and a proprietary owner of the colony, began to pursue this population strategy around 1712–1715, but it went on to be adopted with more continuity by John Law (1671–1729), a Scottish economist at the service of Louis XIV who tried—to no avail—to transform the Mississippi Valley into a land of plantations and speculation.

Between 1717 and 1720, the powerful John Law promoted what was truly a marketing campaign as concerned Louisiana, aimed at promoting the region's beauty and economic potential. Investments in the plantation system and the earnings that were promised to those who put money into the Mississippi Company founded by Law himself turned the colony into an appealing destination as compared with what it had been in the early part of the century. During those years, many French citizens who lived on the margins of society decided to cross the ocean and try their luck in a colony that appeared to be enjoying strong growth. Deserters, vagabonds, beggars, gypsies, and *filles publiques* (prostitutes, like Manon Lescaut) reached Louisiana in increasing numbers: between 1717–1720 almost 20% of the colony's population was made up of these members of society. The size of the migration was in no way insignificant, and it strengthened the public opinion that the society living across the Atlantic, and especially in Louisiana, teemed with individuals of dubious morality. They were, according to popular wisdom, lawless, and Godless territories. In actual fact, the migrations of convicts and down-and-outs were phenomena that never achieved such a dimension as to justify the "bad reputation" that the societies of the New World, and Louisiana in particular, had in the eyes of those living on the Old Continent. Moreover, akin to what had been the case for the *engagés*, the criminals and downtrodden who migrated to the colonies in the New World also often saw those lands as being a temporary exile, time they had to do before they could go back to live in their native land. In short, not only did the latter not represent the majority of the population, as public opinion would have it, but many of them lived in that new country for just a short period of time.

Throughout French domination (1683–1763), Louisiana was forever underpopulated. This was not so much due to the presence of the "undesirables," but to the fact that the region remained a wilderness, with tiny settlements scattered here and there. Any human presence in the vast, flat, marshy lands was barely noticeable. This led the colonists who reached them, regardless of their social background, to experience a feeling of desolation and abandonment that made them feel depressed and oppressed. Those were exactly the sentiments Manon seemed to feel the moment she saw Louisiana for the first time: a dusty land covered in lifeless trees, an uninhabited wasteland, with no sign of life.

Gender Migration: Filles du roi *and* filles "à la cassette"

Another issue to keep in mind, to better understand the world surrounding the story of *Manon Lescaut,* concerns the problems that the colonial authorities had to deal with in guaranteeing a well-balanced gender migration. Given the harsh living conditions in the New World, only rarely did women migrate to the other side of the ocean of their own accord. It was mostly men who moved there, often with the promise of becoming wealthy and being able to purchase land. For the first sixty years of the French Empire's existence in North America (1608–1663), women who migrated to the New France were essentially either the migrants' wives, or the

Jacques Guillaume Lucien Amans, *Creole Woman with Red Turban*, c. 1840, New Orleans, The Historic New Orleans Collection.

members of religious orders, the ones the French called *dévotes*. Women of marrying age (*filles à marier*) traveled there in very small numbers. This condition, as the years went by, resulted in a considerable imbalance between genders: the male population was many times greater than the female one. This greatly influenced the development of the colonies and the chance that migrants who made it to the other side of the Atlantic could take a wife and sink roots in North American soil. To solve the problem, over the course of the 1660s, during the period of the great reforms initiated by Louis XIV, different demographic policies were drafted that were aimed at stimulating the growth of the population in the colonies. The most important of these probably concerned the migration of almost eight hundred *filles du roi*, women of marrying age, who arrived in France's territories (especially Quebec) to marry and have the children who, in the intentions of the homeland, were supposed to constitute the demographic backbone of the North American French Empire. And, indeed, the policy concerning the *filles du roi* achieved positive results in that after their arrival the number of inhabitants in France's territories rose substantially. Though it was a rather positive policy, it still did not succeed in permanently solving the issues linked to underpopulation and the numerical imbalance between men and women in the New France. When the French Empire expanded by purchasing Louisiana, the same problems that afflicted the colonies in the North also occurred in the region discovered by La Salle. D'Iberville, who is considered the colony's first governor, repeatedly stressed the need to provide for

Alexis Simon Belle (attr.), *Antoine Crozat, Marquise Du Châtel, Dressed as the Grand Treasurer of the Order of the Holy Spirit after His Nomination on September 28, 1715*, early-eighteenth century. Versailles, Musée national du Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon.

The Sad Embarkment of the Prostitutes from Paris, 1726, print. Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

The Conduct of the Prostitutes from Salpêtrière Prison, 1757, print.

The Departure for the Islands, early eighteenth century, print by Antoine Watteau. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Rothschild collection.

the migration of women to within the territory, so as to allow the men who arrived there to take a wife and start a family. This, in the eyes of the Canadian explorer and commander, was an essential condition to guarantee the growth of the colonial economy. And this belief was in part shared by the governors who succeeded the legendary "*Cid canadien,*" the nickname for d'Iberville. In the minds of the administrators, in fact, married men were much more inclined to devote themselves to settled economic activities, for example, agriculture, while those who did not have family ties tended to go into trade, particularly of animal pelts. For a long time, this particular occupation was at the heart of the French colonies in North America. Hence, from the point of view of the administrators, bringing women into the territory would have to a certain extent meant influencing and guiding the evolution of production in the colonies.

In late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Louisiana, to solve the problem of the lack of women of marrying age, mixed marriages between French men and American Indian women were encouraged. The young Europeans were attracted to the Native American women; they were enthralled by their beauty and were willing to make them their concubines or wives. On several occasions even Louis XIV voiced his agreement with this solution, as he was convinced that integrating the native populations and colonial society would have been to the considerable advantage of the French economically speaking as well as from a military point of view, also keeping in mind the problems encountered by the French in providing for a population that was financially supported by the region. Several times the king authorized sending governesses to the New World, women who could teach European values to the Native Indian women, and thus turn them into better wives for the French colonists.

In spite of this, however, the mixed marriage strategy did not have the effects the administrators had hoped for. Indeed, what instead happened was that in most cases the young native American women refused to embrace the customs of European society and continued to live according to their own ideals and values. Actually, in many cases, the husbands were the ones to embrace the American Indian way of living, abandoning European customs and becoming *coureurs des bois* (runners of the woods).

This phenomenon was widespread in the French colonies, and in some ways it represented a social evil for the New France's political authorities. When the colonist became a *coureur des bois*, he would move away from the built-up areas and seek refuge in the Indian encampments where, in addition to having their own family, he could conduct his business. These runners were usually involved in the very profitable trading of animal pelts, a very precious material that could be obtained by exploiting the relationships that they had managed to create with the tribes with whom they came into contact. For the political authorities, if on the one hand this social phenomenon guaranteed a greater supply of pelts, and therefore a flourishing and buoyant trade, on the other hand, it demographically drained the French towns that were already suffering from endemic underpopulation. Introducing French women into the colonies was a way of guaranteeing greater control over this phenomenon, thus avoiding further reductions in the already limited demographic resources available.

To solve some of these problems the Louisiana governors began insisting on the introduction of French women to the colonies. Between 1701 and 1720, several hundred of them reached the Mississippi, but without really improving the conditions of the colony.

Despite the warnings that were issued over and over again by the officials who were responsible for the fate of the colony, the

Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale, *The Arrival of the "Filles du Roy" in Québec in 1667*, ante 1927. Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada.

trading companies that worked to recruit these women acted without paying much attention to the characteristics that were requested of them. The Louisiana government asked that the young women be attractive and of sound body and mind so that they could survive the hardships that came with living in the New World. The truth of the matter is that only a small percentage of the women who arrived in the overseas territories had the qualities they needed to deal with the difficult everyday life of the colony. Only when the women were chosen by prominent political or religious figures were there positive repercussions benefiting the colony. A case in point concerns the dispatch of twenty-two women organized by the Bishop of Quebec, Jean-Baptiste de Saint-Vallier, in 1704. These women, with the exception of a few who died during the crossing, immediately found a husband and went on to have big, healthy families.

In the first two decades of the eighteenth century, women of any social extraction were taken to the New World, either voluntarily or in chains, to be able to fulfill the colonists' needs. Many of them were taken out of prisons and institutions, the *hôpitaux*, where they were segregated or marginalized. Many of them had a history of mental illness that had gotten them into trouble with the law for a host of reasons (some of them had even been involved in multiple murders).

Frequently, then, the ships that set sail for Louisiana were filled with thieves, murderers, prostitutes, and blasphemers, figures who had little to contribute to the well-being of the colony. Their integration with colonial society was often complicated and involved consequences for public order. The French colonists, besides physical appearance, were very careful about the reputation of the wife they were about to choose. Women who had a turbulent past or who had already had sexual relations with members of the opposite sex were not looked upon kindly. This is why marriages with the so-called *filles à la cassette*—they were given that name because when they set sail for the ocean they were carrying a box with all their personal belongings—were much more successful. These women were very young (usually between fifteen and twenty-five years of age), carefully recruited in French ecclesiastic and charity institutes. They were viewed as being ideal wives because they were educated and polite, and also because, seeing the environments they came from and the meticulous selection, it was highly likely that they were still virgins. One of the most substantial migrations of *filles à la cassette* took place in 1720, when Louisiana, as said above, was governed by John Law's company.

Regardless of their social extraction and their more or less successful integration in the colony, the women who arrived in Louisiana, either voluntarily or because they were forced to, were also softened up by the propaganda that the political and religious authorities pushed concerning the good life that was led by the members of the colony. When, for instance, in 1704, women of marrying age were recruited for the North American colonies, emphasis was placed on the fact that they wouldn't have in any way suffered once they had landed in the New World. Similarly, the *filles à la cassette* who arrived in Louisiana between 1720 and 1721 had been told of a colony that resembled an earthly paradise and was extremely rich in resources and fertile. However, as we mentioned before, what they actually found was entirely different. When the recruited women arrived in Louisiana, they probably experienced the same malaise that struck Manon as soon as she disembarked in the New World. None of the things they had been led to believe matched the actual situation. The inhabitants of these territories struggled with hunger and disease on a daily basis: meat, flour, and sometimes even water were so rare as to become precious, much sought-after delicacies. So little food was available to each inhabitant that many of them resorted to crime just to survive. Many women, to be able to get what they needed to stay alive, turned to prostitution even after they had married. The colonists used every means possible to survive. The character of Manon, in Prévost's novel as well as in Puccini's opera, fittingly represents the precarious living conditions of the women and men of Louisiana. The events in her life probably capture the essence of the society that developed within this territorial context in the early decades of the eighteenth century.

Les filles du roy, commemorative plaque in memory of the women taken from the Salpêtrière in Paris and sent to Canada between 1663 and 1673. Dieppe, Porte des Tourelles.

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Carlo Stratta, *Arachne*, 1893.
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Anna Villari

ART AND CULTURE IN TURIN BETWEEN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

When Adolf Hohenstein created the figurines and stage designs for the first performance of *Manon Lescaut*, at the Regio in Turin on February 1, 1893, he had already been the artistic director at Ricordi for four years, a Milanese music company, and the most advanced of them all when it came to technology, equipment, and skilled workers. Thanks to the insight and taste of "Signor Giulio," Ricordi was above all famous for producing printed material, brochures, advertising posters, and posters in general. To be truthful, in 1893, Italy hadn't as yet fully embraced the *réclame*, as it was just beginning to venture down the path of poster-making and graphic research that was influenced by and, to a certain extent, foreshadowed modernist tastes and trends in painting. Hohenstein himself, who had moved to Milan from Vienna in the early 1880s, and whose posters eventually became emblematic of the Italian *Belle Époque*, was mostly working as a painter, portraitist, and stage designer at the time. Hohenstein's debut and first collaboration with Giacomo Puccini dated back to 1884, when he designed equipment and models for *Le Villi*. Theirs was a relationship of mutual trust and esteem that would last many years. In 1889 Hohenstein made the figurines for *Edgar*, in 1896 the poster and figurines for *La bohème*, in 1900 those for *Tosca*, and in 1904 the poster for *Madama Butterfly*. But by 1893, the new genre of the advertising *affiche* was still not, in Italy, one of the main channels for the dissemination of the style, symbols, and the idea itself of twentieth-century modernity. The famous poster for the *Società anonima per la incandescenza a gas, brevetto Auer*, designed by Giovanni Maria Mataloni, featuring a sparkling and allusive floral style—which was to trigger, according to the critic Vittorio Pica, the diffusion of the *réclame* in Italy—would not be seen hanging on the walls of Italian cities until two years later, in 1895. Hohenstein himself was still working in line with late nineteenth-century naturalism, which was both descriptive and narrative, and particularly visible in the figurines for *Manon Lescaut*. The poster for the performance, commissioned to Vespasiano Bignami, a *Scapigliatura* painter, an illustrator, and a professor at Brera Academy, featured the same types of figurines. In it there was something harsh about the choice of the moment portrayed—Manon's death in the American wasteland—and

Adolf Hohenstein, *Fiammiferi senza Fosforo del Dottor Craveri. Torino - Carignano,* 1905, Lit. Doyen di Luigi Simondetti – Torino, chromolithograph. Treviso, Museo Nazionale Collezione Salce.

Leopoldo Metlicoviz, *Manon Lescaut Musica di G. Puccini*, 1907, Officine Grafiche Ricordi & C, chromolithograph. Treviso, Museo Nazionale Collezione Salce.

the use of the monochrome. How different and how much more captivating would Hohenstein's attempts soon be in the field of illustration and commercial and musical poster-making, and, in general, his way of representing and communicating cultural and artistic occasions, products, *nouvelle siècle* merchandise, with figures and objects that were beginning to forcefully emerge from the stage. These compositions now featured arabesques, agile convolutions, and pathbreaking typographical fonts in Liberty taste. Fewer than fifteen years later, the poster for *Manon Lescaut* by the Trieste-born poster-maker Leopoldo Metlicovitz, a work so fresh, airy, even bold in its deliberate chromatic contrast and in the slant of the composition, would offer proof that a visual and narrative transformation had taken place.

Those figurines and that poster dated to 1893 serve to exemplify a moment of rapid transition between nineteenth-century traditions and twentieth-century forms, languages, innovations, characters, and artists; a transition in which all of Italy and Turin in particular played leading roles and were witnesses to. "Suspended between the old and the new," is how Zino Zini, a philosopher and writer, described it in his *Appunti di vita torinese*. Turin appeared to be experiencing the transition placidly, but the truth of the matter is that its strident reality was there for all to see, and perhaps best expressed in Gozzano's poetry. "Somewhat old and provincial," or, in the words also written by Zini, "a bit behind the times, a bit lazy, an earthly paradise of office clerks and pensioners," but nonetheless "favorable to pleasures" and fragrant. Famously described by Gozzano as "of Parisian manners," the Turin of the 1890s was above all turning into an "industrious, modern, progressive city," one that, between its attachment to the traditions of the old Savoy aristocracy and the emergence of middle class affluence, witnessed the affirmation of the reality of the factory and the first demands of the working class. Even the city's face was poised between the old and the new, visible in the streets now marked by the tracks of the streetcars and lit by gas lamps, in the shops with glittering decor, in the palazzi and their interiors, in sitting rooms adorned with works of art, furniture, glass, sculptures, and portraits of elegant ladies wrapped in silk, fur, and feathers. These were the wives of the industrialists and lawyers who commissioned their own portraits and those of their consorts from painters like Carlo Stratta. An artist of international fame with frequent forays into the Orientalist genre, and in the 1870s a student of Thomas Couture in Paris, Stratta's work, dedicated to the anecdotic scenes of the everyday life of the low and middle classes, appeared to be perfectly in tune with the fashions, trends, and languid *fin de siècle* elegance. Or like Giacomo Grosso, who debuted in 1884 with *La cella delle pazze* (*The Madwomen's Cell*) (Turin, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea). A professor of painting at the Albertina in 1889, Grosso was beloved by both the upper middle class and the aristocracy (Toscanini, Puccini, Agnelli were among his patrons) for his painting of great dramatic effect, and above all for his sumptuous portraits painted with thick, naturalistic brushwork, often hovering between skillful formalisms and the warm, at times superficial sensuality of the *pompier* style. The patrons of such artists grew concerned about leaving an eternal memory of themselves and their name of recent fortune in marble and family gravestones as well, whose creation they entrusted to emerging sculptors, artists who endeavored to translate the difficult theme of the afterlife in monuments that were no longer celebratory or rhetorical, but filled with allusions, angst, and modern sensibilities. New buyers and new collectors who belonged to a new social scene, and for whom the traditional and academic artists worked, as did younger ones with a less academic background, mindful of what was going on outside of Italy and of capturing and lending a voice to French, English, and Mittel-European research and ferment.

Proceeding in an orderly fashion, we can try to follow this suggestive Turinese landscape between past and modernity, between nineteenth-century elegance and feverish entrepreneurial activism, between late Risorgimento nostalgia and European inspiration, which embraced the ever-growing opportunities for encounter between new buyers or would-be collectors—the observers of the changes in style and trends who wanted to increase their own social status through art—and young artists whose goal was to be affirmed in an artistic and social scenario that was open to modernization. Life in Turin between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries was indeed marked by some of the major art and industry exhibitions that from the Unification of Italy onwards periodically enlivened Italy's market, figurative confrontation, and theoretical debate under Savoy rule. In the space of just twenty years, from that privileged

Giacomo Grosso, *Portrait en Plein Air*, 1902.
Piacenza, Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi.

observatory a change in fashions, in names, in figurative genres took place. The former capital of a young kingdom, Turin compensated for its lost royal status by trying to become the sharp edge of the spear of a nation that was developing into a contemporary political, economic, and cultural mosaic. And in the early twentieth century, emerging from Turin were the boldest reflections on the contemporary arts and art in general.

Hence, a city that was no longer dominated by aristocracy, but by a middle class involved in business and industry, Turin celebrated itself in the Italian General Exposition of 1884, pervaded by a "frenzy of festive expectation and a breath of youth and hope." These were the words of Edmondo De Amicis as he visited the pavilions and the open spaces, including the castles and historical villages reproduced in medieval style—in deference to the dominant late nineteenth-century eclecticism—and curated by the architect Alfredo d'Andrade. Promoted by a group of industrialists and supported by both the government and the municipal administration, the exhibition cast light on the more recent themes of a social, economic, and institutional nature, anticipating thresholds that would not be achieved until a few years later. Abreast with the times as concerned industrial development, the exhibition did not offer anything substantial about what was new in the contemporary figurative world, which was closely bound to landscape realism and paintings depicting modern life.

Having been confirmed as the most advanced hub for technical and scientific research in that period, not even fifteen years later, in 1898—a critical moment for the history of the country shaken by uprisings and strikes against unemployment and the rising costs that the government only knew how to react to with obtuse violence—a new General Exposition, inaugurated by Umberto I and dedicated to the fifty years of the Albertine Statute, aimed to reassure the entire country by celebrating the many successes of the liberal nation represented by the progress made in the arts and sciences.

By then, Turin's population was three hundred thousand, including numerous administrative clerks who were determined to claim their rights before a government that mismanaged the balance between fragile industrialization and still archaic productive agriculture-based systems. But the city was in ferment, in search

Giovanni Battista Carpanetto, *FIAT - Fabbrica Italiana di Automobili*, 1899, Lit. Doyen di L. Simondetti – Torino, chromolithograph. Treviso, Museo Nazionale Collezione Salce.

Giovanni Battista Carpanetto, *La Stampa*, 1899, Lit. Salussolia - Torino, chromolithograph. Treviso, Museo Nazionale Collezione Salce.

of solid ideal and cultural foundations, and it came forward to take the reins of progress, development, and social peace in lieu of Milan, which had been bloodied that very same year by the repression of General Bava Beccaris. Its new-found stimulus was also due to the so-called "socialism of the professors," to the cultural wealth fostered by an intellectual elite of literati and scientists. Edmondo De Amicis, Giuseppe Giacosa, Cesare Lombroso, the writer, journalist, and intellectual progressivist Giovanni Cena, the poet and literary critic Arturo Graf, along with painters and sculptors, supported in a different way the need for new forms of commitment on the part of culture and the arts within the social sphere.

The people working in increasing numbers in the factories and plants were beginning to resemble full-fledged masses. The factories were old but recently renovated, or brand new, and all of them were made more efficient thanks to the ever-growing use of mechanized systems. The cotton industries and the food and drink sector, from whence came Turin's Vermouth—Carpano began to produce *Punt e Mes* in 1889—made their products artisanally for over a century, and from the late nineteenth century onwards they began using safer industrial systems. There was also the industrial plant run by Fiat, Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Torino (Italian Automobile Factory of Turin), a limited liability company founded in 1899 by a group of entrepreneurs and professionals including Giovanni Agnelli, who would soon become almost its sole owner. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Turin was already famous for its car manufacturing: the carriages, streetcars, and omnibuses produced by the Diatto brothers in the factory at the foothills of the Monti Cappuccini, or the luxury vehicles by Chevalier Alessandro Locati, whose customers were rich Russian or English customers. Fiat—whose advertising posters were created by a fashionable painter like Giovanni Battista Carpanetto in 1899—started out with 150 workers and a surface area of 10,000 square meters in 1900, but in just six years' time it could boast of 2,500 employees as it produced, over a surface area of 40,000 square meters, automobiles that were instantly approved of by the Royal family as well. Indeed, Queen Margherita, an unparalleled model of elegance and an "accidental" instructor of fashion and lifestyle, was a lover of beautiful cars (Fiat, but also Talbot, Rapid), and owned a large number of them, which she used for her excursions to the countryside as well as for rides in the city.

The first Italian city to focus on industrial growth as well as on historical research, political economy (with Luigi Einaudi), civil rights (Francesco Ruffini), criminology (Cesare Lombroso), electrotechnical research (Galileo Ferraris), at the turn of the century, Turin was moving fast down the road to a promising future that, on the one hand, represented technological and industrial progress, and, on the other—though they are actually two sides of the same coin—renewed and more popular figurative styles, applied to the so-called major genres, as well as to the ever-growing and appreciated decorative arts. Thus were born objects of average or low cost featuring refined forms, making the dream of middle class respectability a possibility for all. In 1898, therefore, not only did we witness the triumph of the modernity for which the first signs were seen in 1884—the electricity exhibition had at the time remained more or less misunderstood—but what emerged with greater awareness were the figurative ferments that were to lend a voice to the new focus on the human condition.

The great Valentino Park, which had previously been utilized in 1884, became a "city of wonders," the theatre of every imaginable manifestation of beauty, art, and innovation; but amidst the zootechnical and hygienic shows, the car contests, kiosks devoted to the media and to journalism, lighting, fireworks, and a celebration of gymnastics, demonstrations on how Marconi's wireless telegraph worked, and the gazebos of the chocolate companies, the Division of Fine Arts seemed willing to embrace the echoes of what was new and, to a certain extent, angst-ridden in Piedmontese and Turinese artwork from the early 1890s. In the First Triennial Exhibition, organized by the Turin Promotrice in 1896, as well as in the publication—*La Triennale. Giornale Artistico torinese*—that had been founded at the same time, artists and art theoreticians were beginning to bravely express themselves vis-à-vis the solid realist tradition that Piedmontese painting had been tied to for a decade, but also as concerned the recent Symbolist debate. The directors of the journal, including Stratta, Grosso, the landscapist Lorenzo Delleani, the engraver Carlo Chessa, the sculptors Davide Calandra and Leonardo Bistolfi of Casale Monferrato, with Giovanni Cena as the editor-in-chief, had from the start been favorable to an art that was not aristocratic or perched on literary and idealist positions, but rather, expressive of society's moods and sensibilities. This was art that attracted artists like Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo and Alessandria-born Angelo Morbelli, both of whom had humanitarian and socialist beliefs.

Amidst lyrical landscapes and the odd Neo-Renaissance and historicist temptation, in the late 1890s, Divisionism and Symbolism seemed to have become the most interesting languages for young painters from Piedmont, including Pellizza da Volpedo. After a grueling academic apprenticeship carried out in Milan, Rome, Florence, and Bergamo, and after an educational trip to Paris to

Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, *The Mirror of Life*, 1895–1898. Turin, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea.

Leonardo Bistolfi, *Commemorative Plaque for the Cassa di Risparmio di Cuneo*, central part of the triptych, bas-relief in plaster, 1905–1906. Turin, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea.

visit the 1889 Expo, having befriended the painter Plinio Nomellini, whose sympathies were anarchic and revolutionary, Pellizza was already contemplating the themes of progress, labor, humanity on the march, to which his name would eventually be indissolubly linked. And of special importance at the 1898 Expo was *Specchio della vita* (*Mirror of Life*) (Turin, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea), a fragment of nature studied from up close and offered to the viewer through the lengthy scientific procedure of optical division, i.e. the execution of tiny lines and dots of pure color, immersed in a harmony of forms, wavy lines, tones, and luminous halos. According to Pellizza's own words, such a procedure "represented one side of the great idea of life," a reassuring "immanent order of the universe."

The numerous publications dedicated to *L'arte all'Esposizione del 1898*, directed and published by Luigi Roux (who, along with Luigi Einaudi, was already directing the liberalist and liberal magazine *La Riforma Sociale*), whose mission was to "reflect all the trends, serve as the interpreter of the many currents, both old and new, that invade and fertilize the field of art," as was stated in the first editorial, were curated by an artistic committee made up of Davide Calandra, Giacomo Grosso, Carlo Chessa, and Leonardo Bistolfi. In the articles and reviews they wrote, the authors clearly expressed their opinions on the openings, successes, and limits of the exposition. Leonardo Bistolfi was an especially important member of the magazine's editorial board. After a period of time spent with the *Scapigliatura* in Milan, Bistolfi arrived in Turin in 1880 armed with a solid cultural and literary background, and instantly became involved in the city's liveliest circles. From the early 1890s—of crucial importance was the production in 1892 of the funerary monument for the Pansa family in Cuneo cemetery, brimming with literary inspirations, as well as heralding a new allegorical and idealist language—the sculptor received an ever-growing number of acknowledgments and relevant commissions, including plaques and monuments featuring Symbolist moods and sensibilities. A friend of Cena, Bistolfi also participated, with works, art criticism, and his activities as a cultural organizer, in the humanitarian socialism that Cena himself would soon be bringing to Rome, and especially to the Pontine marshes. His commitment to the new Liberty style also fulfilled a growing desire to "democratize beauty," whose utmost dissemination, based on the principles of the English Socialist William Morris, should have contributed to the moral elevation of the new working and proletarian masses.

It is also thanks to Bistolfi's success and example that the memory of deeds, heroes, and the protagonists of the Risorgimento were on the wane, until then celebrated with the Verista attention that the teachings of Vincenzo Vela, a professor at the Albertina until the day he died, in 1867, had handed down to his students and admirers. Garibaldi, Victor Emmanuel II, and the Crimean War had been and were still the subject of monumental memory in the works of Odoardo Tabacchi (1887), Pietro Costa (1899), Luigi Belli (1892), but the great entrepreneurial families preferred to turn to the younger artists, commissioning them to eternalize their name and their successes and entrepreneurial "achievements" in marble.

In 1898, Turin, a city still cautious about fully embracing the modernist and progressivist creed, may have also to some extent resembled the "Grissinopoli" described by Emilio Salgari in *Bohème italiana*, the only non-adventure novel in the writer's vast output, and to a certain extent an autobiographical one. The work satirized the Turinese "artistic family," which appeared to be *bohémienne,* but was actually solidly anchored to sound middle class values. A few clues to this can be found in the pages of Roux's *Giornali dell'Esposizione* where, with one eye on contemporary European examples, the critic Ugo Fleres glimpsed "rapid technological progress" in the art world, progress that did not, however, go hand in hand with a real Italian "renaissance," with a proposed modern, independent, and national figurative style: "The form of the object, the decoration of a theatre, even the four brushstrokes that create a poster hanging in the square, come from outside. All that surrounds and that thus fundamentally educates our taste does not have an Italian physiognomy, and if it does, it is not modern, and is accepted here because it is in vogue elsewhere," he lamented in an essay published in *Pittura d'oggi in Italia*.

In the same pages Giovanni Cena discussed the "social" need for "renewal in the decorative arts." "What monotony, what poverty, what ennui!" in the "Greek key design, the spirals, the gryphons, and the grotesques": new styles and forms according to the critic should have "poured into this great common house that is the city," renewing its appearance as well as its moral and civic atmosphere.

Among others, the section devoted to photography looked "vile," according to Carlo Brogi (*La fotografia all'Esposizione*). "This bearing of modernity, this ingenious art [...] seems to want to subtract itself from advertising [...] and in past, present, and probably future Exhibitions, photography is neither considered nor classified with rational criteria," wrote the photographer (son of the founder of the famous Edizioni Brogi). Brogi deplored the "locations that were unpleasant because of their site and their lighting" and, in general, their scant attention toward a genre that still seemed to struggle to find its own critical and market space.

Giovanni Battista Carpanetto, *Torino 1902. Festeggiamenti durante l'Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Decorativa Moderna*, 1902, Lit. Doyen di L. Simondetti – Torino, chromolithograph. Private collection.

Edoardo Rubino, *Dance (the Four Graces)*, 1902. Turin, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea.

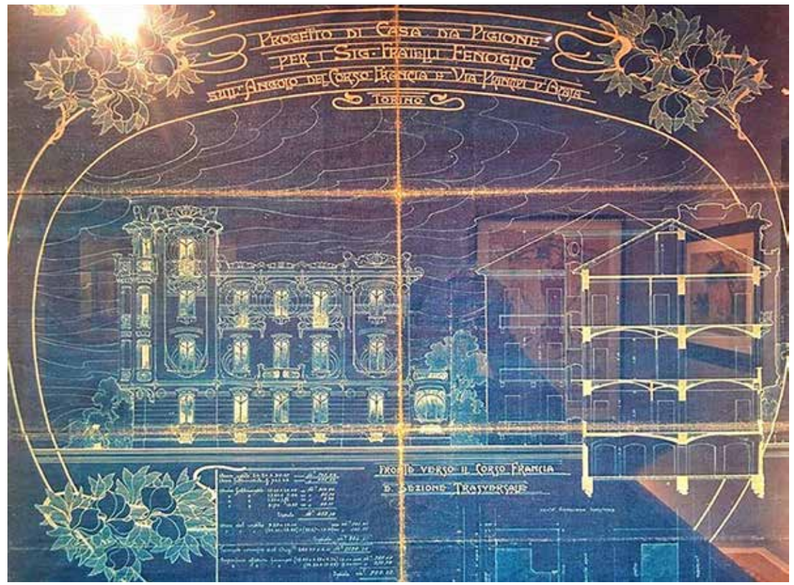
The answer to these gaps would come from the minds and efforts of Bistolfi's circle only four years later, in 1902, with the first International Exposition of Modern Decorative Art, a triumph of forms, lines, of that creative freshness that the Liberty style embodied throughout Europe. Bistolfi himself, "a forerunner of the floral style"—as the critic Enrico Thovez wrote about him in a lengthy article published in one of the Journals of the 1898 Exposition—in line with England's Arts and Crafts movement, was "totally preoccupied by the decorative arts, practical arts scorned by practical men and yet dear to pure artists." Moreover, thanks to his all-encompassing gaze he was also the author of plaques, medals, posters, decorative panels, and textile paintings. Bistolfi was one of the most tenacious inventors and supporters of the Turin Exposition, which two years after the successes of the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris (with its almost 51 million visitors) appeared before the Italian and foreign public as a radical rethinking of style and of the productive mechanisms of the applied arts, updated in their forms, and made commercially more appealing thanks to the new industrial manufacturing systems. In Paris, Morbelli had been awarded a gold medal for *Giorno di festa al Pio Albergo Trivulzio* (*Feast Day at the Pio Albergo Trivulzio*) (Paris, Musée d'Orsay), a bitter, dramatic, social theme, with a brand new slant, perspective, and technique, pure overlapping colors, and long parallel brushstrokes. Bistolfi had instead presented silk panels for a music room furnished by Giacomo Cominetti, featuring gossamer female figures amidst flowers traced in undulating, captivating and wholehearted Liberty style. But as a whole, Italy's decorative production received much criticism for its eclectic, outdated historicism filled with citations, and devoid of originality, and most of the Italian artists had shown they had not understood. The words recorded in the diary of a young Brera Academy student, Giuseppe Palanti, who visited the Paris Expo were: "that modern society needs something new, ingenious, something that will impose itself without any sort of fear."

Precisely in light of this recent defeat, the Turin exhibition of 1902 thus became the opportunity for the renewal of a city that had acted as a catalyst for all of Italy and even for a revolution. As the publicist Riccardo de Spigliati put it in his introduction to the short guide to the exhibition: "The artistic field is celebrating: the

Facade of the Cafè Baratti & Milano, architect Giulio Casanova and sculptor Edoardo Rubino, 1909. Turin, Archivio Accademia Albertina, Fondo Casanova.

Giovanni Battista Carpanetto, *Esposizione fotografica, Febbraio-Marzo*, 1900, Lit. Doyen di L. Simondetti – Torino, chromolithograph. Treviso, Museo Nazionale Collezione Salce.

Pietro Fenoglio, *Casa Fenoglio "La Fleur,"* 1902, heliograph on blue paper mounted on canvas. Archivio storico della città di Torino, Progetti edilizi 1902/167.



hope is that the Artists and all those who love Art have achieved the ideal they themselves dreamed of: the revolution of decorative art. Revolutionary spirits, the minds of poets, artists adapt poorly to antiquated forms that oblige them to copy, while the instinct to create comes to them naturally."

The 1902 exhibition was imagined as an international contest open to companies, businesses, artists, designers, invited to present their ideas on three major themes: the house, the room, the city street. Banned was any product that merely reproduced "existing styles," or the product of an industrial fabrication that was "not inspired by art," as could be read in the General Rules and Regulations. Participants were required to show utmost originality and "an effort towards the aesthetic renewal of form, allowing, however, within the scope of the program, the greatest freedom of encounter" between European and American architects, designers, producers and entrepreneurs for the past few years engaged in the modernist "revolution."

For all the critics gathered there for the occasion—Alfredo Melani, Vittorio Pica, Leonardo Bistolfi (as both theorist and artist), Enrico Thovez, among others—the Turin exhibition was an opportunity for discussion, a privileged observation point to sound out moods and contemporary trends. "Between the disparaging sarcasm of the bigots of tradition and the enthusiastic praise of the fanatics of the new, most of the public were perplexed," wrote Vittorio Pica in *L'arte decorativa all'Esposizione di Torino del 1902*. Perhaps the public and some of the critics were unready to perceive the innovative bearing of what they saw there: the Scottish section and the furniture, lamps, and panels by the Glasgow School, for example, with their geometric, essential forms delighted Pica, who found Mackintosh and his colleagues to be "refined cerebrals" capable of amalgamating "Egyptian elements with Indian and Japanese elements and with ultramodern elements"; on the contrary, those same objects appalled Ugo Ojetti, who judged them to be "mystifying and fake." Among the currents that—within the same floral style—were being defined, the common byword for these new decorative arts and, in general, for Italian artistic and industrial production seemed to have been "modernity." These currents were more naturalistic and abstract, aristocratic or democratic, and the latter, again according to Pica, was aimed at leading "today's decorative movement toward the social movement, and procuring

Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, *The Fourth Estate*, 1901. Milan, Museo del Novecento.

Reproduction of Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, *The Fourth Estate*, in *L'Avanti della Domenica*, May 7, 1905 (a. III, n. 18, Rome), p. 7.

for all, with no class distinction, the pure joys of art." Intellectual and artistic trajectories sought to define a new national spirit, one that was no longer provincial and thus devoid of bias, free from the past and from loftiness yet for this very reason restricted. Modern and new were the techniques, products, forms, starting from the exhibition spaces themselves, this time designed by the Friuli architect Raimondo D'Aronco, as well as the decorative apparatuses, including the large-scale sculptures of the Turin sculptor Edoardo Rubino—the group *La danza* about five meters high for the cupola of the rotunda of honor, *La pittura* and *La scultura* for the main facade—which earned the artist a diploma and a gold medal. D'Aronco was the inventor among others of the Pavilion—ephemeral like everything else—of the Cycle and the Automobile, which amidst Secessionist and Mittel-European echoes, a system of electrical lights equipped with a timer, and the curiosity aroused by the models on display, represented one of the exhibition's main attractions. Photography as well, which Brogi, in 1898, had complained about because it had been so poorly dealt with, had in the space of just a few years acquired a new public and new attention, and was given its own dedicated venue at the event.

Among the attempts that were at times contradictory and heterogeneous, the Turin show seemed to be a starting point, thanks also to a direct international confrontation and a continuous updating on and debate about a new creative path, which was also guaranteed by trade publications and magazines. Turin itself was very influenced by the event; this was clearly visible in its artistic production, public spaces, buildings. Liberty style having become the language and the "habit" of the establishment and the upper class, in just a few years' time the city became filled with villas, palazzi, industrial buildings, shops, whose friezes, furnishings, and decor were the work of the leading artists.

A case in point is the architect Pietro Fenoglio, who made over three hundred buildings. Fenoglio was among the organizers of the 1902 exhibition; he was a successful professional, a constructor, the founder of the magazine *L'architettura italiana moderna*, a town councilor for the new urban plan completed in 1908. His Casa Fenoglio-Lafleur, in the San Donato neighborhood, conceived in 1902 as a house-cum-studio featuring clear echoes of French and Belgian Art Nouveau, is an organism with undulating, plant-inspired lines, where everything, down to the smallest details of the windows or the fixtures, is both elegant and harmonious.

But also during 1902, the story of one of the most famous examples of Novecento painting was emblematic of the suspension between the old and the new mentioned at the beginning of this essay, hence, typical of *fin-de-siècle* Turin culture. A culture capable of looking ahead in time and beyond the national borders in an open dialogue with the contradictions and problems of modernity, but at times almost intimidated before its own insights, and almost crushed by the Milan of the "industrial revolution" and the Rome of political authority.

For the previous ten years, Giuseppe Pellizza had been hard at work on a large-scale painting depicting a "fiumana" (torrent) of workers (the painter had initially intended to use that word for the title) advancing compact to plead their common case: they were the workers of the painter's native Volpedo (in the Alessandria region), and Pellizza had personally witnessed their protest, which had a great impact on him. Drawings, pastels, tracing paper, notes, letters bear witness to the long gestation period of the painting. Pellizza had been an active member of a Socialist benefit society in Volpedo and, spurred by positivist scientific studies, he began reading Marx and Tolstoy. Portrayed in his works were his ideological convictions on solidarity and social peace, as well as the pictorial research and reflections he would bring up to date according to the French example and based on his intimate conversations with his friends Nomellini and Morbelli. The results were revolutionary, from all points of view. The canvas was two and a half meters high and four meters wide, and it was painted in accordance with the rigorous Divisionist technique. The artist was familiar with the works of Courbet and Millet, as well as with classical sculpture and painting, and so he chose to place a woman "characterized by an erect and robust shape" (Pellizza's own words) in the foreground. The woman appears to be as proud and vigorous as a Nike; next to and behind her are the people of the proletariat marching against the "the feeble aristocracy." Pellizza painted these men and women of Volpedo to represent hard work and hunger, but he also bestowed on them the authority and nobility of the philosophers of Raphael's *School of Athens*. Pellizza was convinced he had made his most mature contribution not to a form of vague populism, but to the struggle behind true, evolutionary, and peaceful Socialism. However, the presentation of the *Fourth Estate* at the 1902 Turin Quadriennial was a failure, contrasting sharply with the fact that the artist Giacomo Grosso, who was instead impermeable to the unrest of the contemporary age, had been given his own personal room. Pellizza had hoped, in vain, that the painting would be purchased by the Royal House of Savoy, but the majority of the critics panned the work from a formal and technical point of view, not to mention condemning its contents. The painting, appreciated only by the "party political" press, would remain misunderstood until it was eventually acquired by Milan's Socialist Administration in 1920, long after the author's death by suicide in 1907. During the immediate postwar years Turin witnessed a renewal of its ideas, as well as a social, cultural, and artistic comeback. The titles of the journals founded by Antonio Gramsci and Piero Gobetti, respectively—*Città futura*, *L'ordine nuovo*—are a perfect example.

But in 1902, only Giovanni Cena was enthusiastic about the *Fourth Estate* and its message. His prophetic words to Pellizza were: "Respect. It is something that will stay forever; it fears not time because time will be to its advantage."

Gustavo Mola di Nomaglio

Turin, a City in Modern Italy

The Transfer of the Capital of Italy

Mayor Emanuele Luserna di Rorà's 1863 Report to the Turin City Council was the hymn to a promising future. To be able to transform the first capital of Italy into a major European capital, to host the parliament, ministries, embassies, public offices, and the numerous inhabitants that were all arriving at a fast pace, articulate and ambitious plans for development and expansion were devised and implemented. Among the earliest building and infrastructural projects envisioned, the creation of Piazza Statuto, in a joint venture with the British Italian Building Society, constituted a major project that was destined to shape one of the largest and most elegant squares in Europe.

At the same time, enlargements and infrastructures—in the broadest sense—were also quickly and in an orderly fashion being made along other avenues, for example, Via Cernaia and Corso Vittorio Emanuele II. The work was expected to be completed by no later than the early 1880s. Needless to say, the daring designs were matched by substantial costs, but all of this fueled unconditional optimism.

Hence, the news of the treaty signed on September 15, 1864 (known as the "September Convention") with which Napoleon III imposed the transfer of the capital of Italy to Florence was like a bolt from the blue. A serious economic crisis and immediate decline seemed to be inevitable. The city would soon lose not only its government, administrative, and financial offices, and the copious flow of money that came with them, but many other activities and companies as well, whose businesses were affected by state orders; a case in point were the various typographies that employed numerous workers. The loss of many well-heeled inhabitants also created fears for the future of commercial enterprises of lesser (but on the whole fundamental) importance, such as the cafés, hotels, restaurants, and warehouses in general. The fate of those who, from Piedmont or from other regions, had settled in the city in search of fortune, often without the chance to make their way back to their places of origin, suddenly seemed gloomy and uncertain. Turin, having seen its political importance compromised, remained, in the words of Vittorio Bersezio, "momentarily stunned," but it was not long before his practical sense, intelligence, and ability to plan got the upper hand.

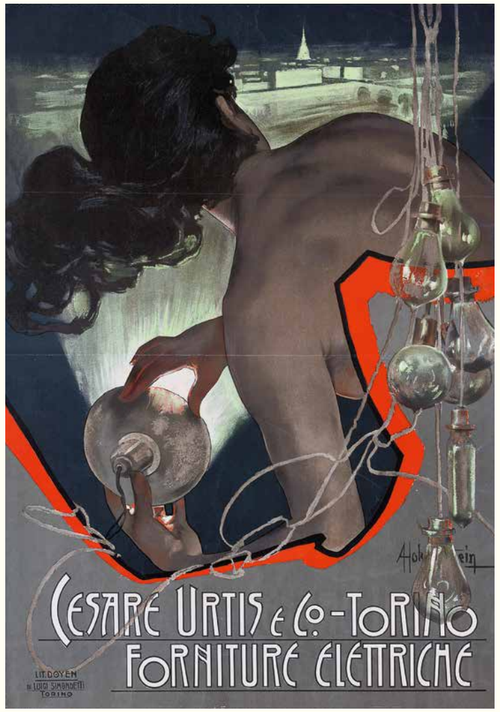
Piazza Statuto, 1867, photograph from the album *Turin ancien et moderne*, H. Le Lieure Editeur. Florence, Raccolte Museali Fratelli Alinari.

Carlo Bossoli, *Piazza Castello in Turin*, 1852. Turin, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea.

A Laboratory of Innovation

Being a historical capital of silk manufacturing, having successful factories in its territory, being at the top of a territorial district in which the agricultural product was still greatly in excess of domestic consumption was no longer enough to ensure a future for the old and the new inhabitants. In a short time, prudent and shrewd businesses in the industrial, commercial, and banking fields proliferated. The city became a laboratory of technological, scientific, and cultural innovation, turning out to be a locomotive for the rest of Italy in all the productive sectors, and, along with Milan, a beating heart especially in the secondary and the tertiary sectors.

For a long time at the cutting edge in the field of public lighting, the first in Italy, in relatively far-off times, to equip itself with gas systems, Turin had benefited from electrical lighting since 1879, the first city to do so in Italy, after the success of an experiment involving the Jablochkoff system, which had illuminated the Subalpina gallery as if it were broad daylight for three whole nights. Three years later, by testing the Bürgen system, Porta Nuova station was completely illuminated, and in no time at all several streets in the historic quarter of the city were as well—Via Roma, Via Po, followed by much of the inhabited central areas. One of the first experiments in electrical lighting inside buildings was conducted in the Municipal Council hall, involving Maxim lamps. In 1886, an experiment was successfully performed using the system implemented by Piedmont-born Alessandro Cruto, who is considered to be the true inventor of the incandescent lightbulb, in spite of the fact that the record was called into question by Edison, who ended up benefiting the most. During that year, the Società anonima dei consumatori gaz luce was already a leading company, with a big turnover and a fully paid-up capital of around 1,800,000 lire. Private lighting spread like wildfire, and the electrical network was made available to manufacturers as well. Unsurprisingly, in Turin the leading companies would also be consolidated, when they weren't already monopolistic at a national level, in the fields of gas

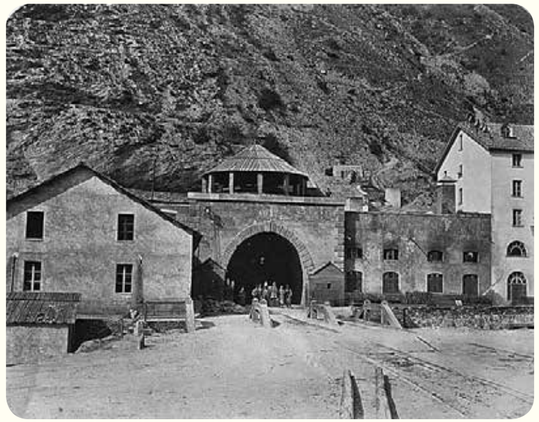


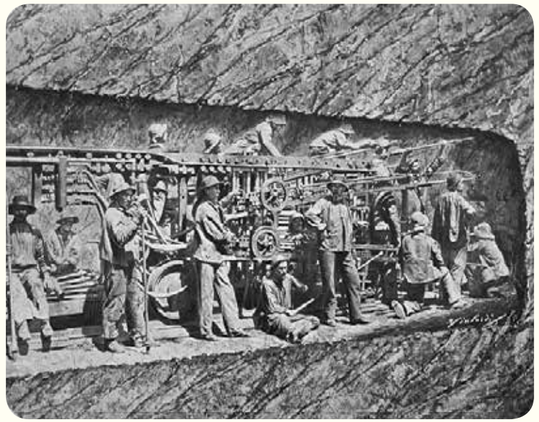
Adolf Hohenstein, *Cesare Urtis e C.o Torino Forniture elettriche*, c. 1899, Lit. Doyen di Luigi Simondetti – Torino. Treviso, Museo Nazionale, Collezione Salce.

Galleria dell'Industria Subalpina a Torino, c. 1880. Florence, Raccolte Museali Fratelli Alinari.

distribution, electrical energy, communication, and telephony. As concerns the latter, the telephone service officially began on August 1, 1881, with twelve subscribers. In this field as well, growth was fast, comparable, we might say, to the spread of the Internet and its various terminals in today's world.

Just fifteen years after the loss of its status as capital, Turin, notwithstanding the Cassandras that had forecast its decline, was a volcano capable of erupting its many successes relentlessly. Although there is no shortage of historians who especially enjoy emphasizing critical situations and negative contingencies (such as the building and banking crises of the 1880s and 1890s), not only did the people of Turin look to the future, but they ambitiously planned and implemented that future at an energetic pace, also laying the groundwork for a strong role in finances and banking nationally, and driving the creation of public works in the whole of Italy.





The Railway Network

At the beginning of the 1880s, Turin was a fundamental hub not only for the Italian railway system but internationally as well, both in terms of passenger traffic and the transportation of industrial and agricultural goods; this is also proven by the presence of major national and international shipping agents. A few years before there had even been a plan to turn Turin into a "seaport." The possibility of this taking place was put forward in a project, which was never realized, by the visionary engineer Gaetano Capuccio who, by connecting Turin with Liguria via a waterway, intended to build the first segment in a navigation line between the Adriatic and the Mediterranean Seas. Turin's local Committee for Internal Navigation, established in 1910, would later serve as a mouthpiece for the many supporters of a waterway transportation system, and offer the chance to formulate new hypotheses, including the building of a Turin-Savona canal. There was nothing overly-ambitious here, but in this case as well, the costs for excavating, building, and managing the locks system that was required to overcome the differences along the route appeared to be excessively high, and it became necessary to focus on improving and enhancing the road and rail connections.

In the 1870s, barely a month went by without having news of the extension, completion, or implementation of a new railway line. On December 25, 1870, the excavation of the Fréjus Tunnel was completed. The first to conceive of it was Pietro Paleocapa, ardently supported by Camillo di Cavour along with some of the other ministers, until the plans put forward by Germano Sommeiller, Sebastiano Grandis, and Severino Grattoni demonstrated its feasibility and utility. Thanks to the Fréjus Tunnel, Turin was almost as close to Rome, which had just become the capital of Italy, as it was to Paris, constituting a leading European commercial hub. Because of this Turin became an inescapable hinge for communications and commercial exchanges between Italy and northwestern Europe and all the regions connected to it. The first Turin-Paris train left from Porta Nuova on October 16, 1871, at 7:35 a.m. and arrived at 6:55 a.m. the following day. As early as in 1876, the amount of time required to travel had become shorter, and many foreign locations, thanks to the connections ensured by the Turin-Paris line, could be rapidly reached.

The subalpine city thus also became a tourist destination, and as early as 1880, it had four railway stations: besides Porta Nuova and Porta Susa, Lanzo, and Rivoli as well.

Southern Entry to the Fréjus Tunnel on the Italian Side, 1867. Florence, Raccolte Museali Fratelli Alinari.

Worker Using a Compressed Air Perforator to Dig the Fréjus Tunnel, 1867. Florence, Raccolte Museali Fratelli Alinari.

Porta Nuova Railway Station in Turin, c. 1870. Florence, Raccolte Museali Fratelli Alinari.

Public Transportation

In 1880, Turin was criss-crossed by the omnibus services, operating from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m., and by the tracks of the streetcars, both horse-driven and steam-powered, the first of which had begun operating in early June 1879, connecting Piazza Castello to the "Barriera di Piacenza" and Moncalieri. New direct lines toward all the major towns in the Turin hinterland and beyond followed at breakneck speed; often, only a few days went by between one inauguration and another. Streetcar and omnibus tickets were affordable by all, though the cost was equal to at least one hour of daily pay for a skilled worker. There is no need to emphasize how important it was—in an industrial, manufacturing and artisanal city, where great masses of workers, employees, and artisans had to move on a daily basis to reach their workplaces that were often quite far away—to have an urban and out-of-town transportation network available, capable of minimizing problems, times, and cost per trip for those who did not just live in the cities and its outskirts, but in the greater area as well.

In 1883, work began on the bold Cremagliera Superga, and the line was soon in full swing. By 1886, several trips a day were being made to coincide with the arrival of the "Ponte di Barra" streetcar: there was no Italian or foreign visitor who didn't succumb to the enchantment of the Basilica and of the panoramic views that could be enjoyed from it. During the same year, as Turin was about to exceed 300,000 inhabitants, there were 534 cars working as taxis, located at permanent taxi stands or concentrated at the stations, theatres, major hotels, and restaurants. Interestingly, a high percentage of licensees (some of whom also involved in the activity of "horse-hire") were women. Many of them moreover held several licenses, and their companies were of a certain standing. The service operated day and night and cost somewhat more than traveling by streetcar.

Omnibus in Piazza Vittorio Emanuele in Turin, late nineteenth century. Florence, Raccolte Museali Fratelli Alinari.

Superga Hill Funicular, late nineteenth century. Florence. Racccolte Museale Fratelli Alinari.

The City of Night-Lovers

The numerous restaurants, cafés, and pubs, open until late at night told the story of a dynamic social life. For instance, the advertising for the Londra e Caccia Reale Hotel, overlooking Piazza Castello (where, during the fascist period, the "Torre Littoria" was erected, better known today as the Reale Mutua skyscraper) offered "restaurant service at all hours," which also meant during the night and until the first light of dawn. In those days, Turin was already considered a culinary center with solid as well as prestigious traditions. A guidebook from the 1880s written for French tourists reads that Piedmontese cuisine had been renowned from ancient times, characterized by excellent meat, fish, legumes, dairy products, fruit, and that white truffles—described at the time as being an "exclusive product" of Piedmont and in particular of the Langhe area—were so delicious that when they were in season they were worth the trip. Not to mention the wines and the celebrated vermouth, millions of bottles of which were exported around the world by the leading producers, or the breadsticks, which were greatly appreciated by foreign visitors. All this was available—even late in the evening or in the middle of the night—first of all for theatre-goers, who crowded the venues after the show. Turin's theatres were internationally renowned and had top-rate billings. This was the case of the Teatro Regio, which in 1870 was taken over by the City of Turin.

The National Exhibition at Turin was organised to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Constitution. It was formally opened early in the year, in the presence of the King and Queen of Italy, the Prince and Princess of Naples, and many other notabilities, and from the first has been a pronounced success

THE NATIONAL EXHIBITION AT TURIN: THE CAFÉ AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE MOORISH COURT

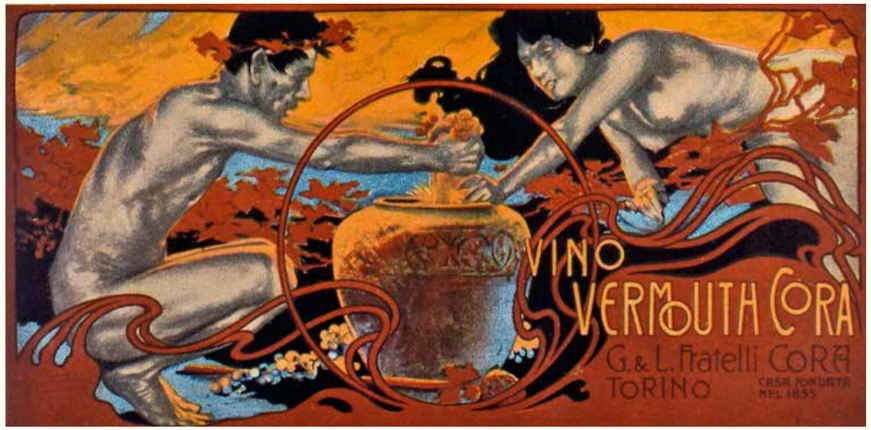
DRAWN BY A. BIANCHINI

The National Exhibition at Turin: The Café at the Entrance to the Moorish Court, illustration published in *The Graphic*, July 23, 1898. Private collection.

Adolf Hohenstein, *Vino Vermouth Cora G.&L. Fratelli Cora Torino*, late nineteenth century.

Vino-Vermouth, F.co Cinzano & Cia Torino, Lit. Doyen di L. Simondetti – Torino, late nineteenth century.

Giuseppe Boano, *Teatro Regio Torino*, 1898. Private collection.



Lorenzo Delleani, *The Founders of Fiat*, 1899. Turin, Centro Storico Fiat. In the center, Emanuele Cacherano di Bricherasio.

Industry and the Great Exhibitions

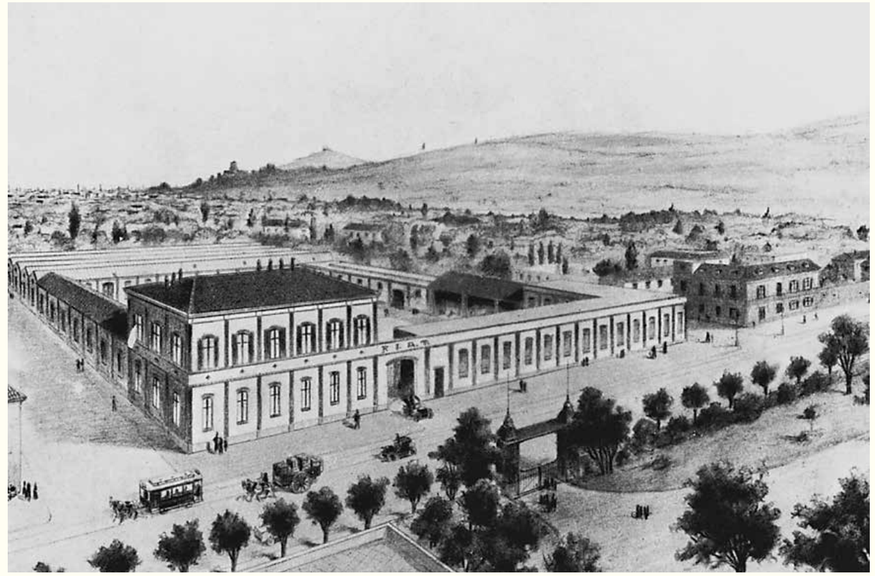
Turin was also a primary technological and international automobile manufacturing center. Not only is the city famous for Fiat, founded in 1899 by a group of nobles and members of the bourgeoisie, among whom Emanuele Cacherano di Bricherasio and Giovanni Agnelli, but long before then, Virginio Bordino had conceived one of the oldest and most efficient automobile prototypes in history. It was in Turin that the Ceirano brothers, after flooding the market with Welleyes bicycles, went on to create motorized "bicicletti," followed by automobiles. The Diattos, after producing and selling railway wagons and streetcars around the world, also began manufacturing cars that were much sought-after by enthusiasts. And at the start of the century, it was again in Turin (not to mention the many "minor" manufacturers and auto body builders) that the Lancias, after years of success in the food preserves sector (surpassed only by Francesco Cirio, born in Nizza Monferrato, who in Turin had built an empire in the sector), grew to fame for manufacturing automobiles.

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, Turin was also the focus of national and international attention because of the general exhibitions that were held there, and that made the city famous around the world. Important testimonies and legacies of the 1884 Exposition still exist today, for instance, the Medieval Borgo in Valentino Park. If the success of the 1898 General Exposition became the stuff of legend, that of 1911 (International Exposition of Industry and Labor) saw over 5 million paying visitors. Contrary to what was happening elsewhere, the Turin exhibitions were renowned because they managed to close without taking a loss and thus avoiding a negative financial aftermath—which was usually not the case.

The First Fiat Plant on Corso Dante in Turin, 1899.

Sales Point for Cirio Preserves at the Italian General Exposition in Turin, Valentino Park, 1884. Florence, Raccolte Museali Fratelli Alinari.

Advertising Poster for Giovanni Ceirano Bicycles, 1894. Private collection.



Die Maschinengalerie auf der italienischen Nationalausstellung in Turin

The Castle of the Medieval Borgo, Turin, conceived for the 1884 Italian General Exposition by Alfredo D'Andrade. Florence, Raccolte Museali Fratelli Alinari.

Main Entrance to the 1884 Italian General Exposition at Valentino Park, Turin. Florence, Raccolte Museali Fratelli Alinari.

Giosuè Carducci in a Hot Air Balloon in Turin, 1898. Private collection.

The Machinery Gallery at the 1884 Italian General Exposition, Turin. Private collection.

Prima Esposizione internazionale di arte decorativa moderna, Torino, postcard, 1902. Florence, Raccolte Museali Fratelli Alinari.

Aldo Mazza, *Poster for the First International Exposition of Turin*, 1911. Private collection.

Leonardo Bistolfi, *Prima Esposizione Internazionale di Arte Decorativa Moderna, Torino*, 1902. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Sports Clubs and Leisure Activities

Turin was lively and passionate in the field of sports as well. Horse racing was popular and championships were commonly held, being one of the favorite leisure activities of the upper classes. In 1882, the Veloce Club was established, a cycling club chaired by Count Agostino Biglione di Viarigi, who took part, in August 1884, along with several other similar associations, in the organization of the first Italian cycling championships.

Again in the 1880s, several canoeing clubs were founded, like the Caprera (1883) and the Esperia (1886), whose boats rowed by brawny men enlivened the urban flow of the Po River, whose banks were filled with cabins, kiosks for the sale of beverages, and restaurants.

The Sport Club Juventus was founded ten years before the Torino Soccer Club, in 1897, by a group of students from Massimo d'Azeglio secondary school. On March 15 of the following year, the Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio (FIGC) was also founded in the city; a few months later, the first soccer championship was held in Piazza d'Armi. On November 15, the Automobile Club di Torino was founded, eventually spawning the Automobile Club d'Italia, whose national headquarters would remain in Turin for many years. Soon afterwards, this triggered the first International Automobile Show (the direct origin of today's car shows) and car races, including, in 1901, the Giro Automobilistico d'Italia. Many of these events and activities would last in time.

In this effervescent turn-of-the-century city, characterized by its long-sighted gaze toward the future, cinema also played an important role. The first Italian Lumière cinematographic experiment took place in Turin in March 1896 (a similar experiment was carried out in Rome around the same time), and the first film screening with a paying audience was held in Turin on November 7 that same year in a building that was refurbished for that very purpose and named Cinema Lumière. In less than a decade, the famous "Guida Marzorati" could name eighteen active cinemas—growing tumultuously also thanks to the impetus of pioneering productive ventures—some of which, albeit with another name and look, still exist. It is safe to say that thanks to the cultural terrain, made fertile by several movie producers and, in particular, by the one created by Arturo Ambrosio with friends like Roberto Omegna (just under 1,500 films produced before the decline due to the general crisis of Italian cinema on either side of the First World War), first the radio and then, as its natural evolution, Italian television saw the light in Turin. The general management of RAI (formerly EIAR) was located in Turin until the 1950s, after which it moved to Rome, the site of its legal headquarters.

Il cinematografo Lumière a Torino, poster, March 1896. Private collection.

Achille Beltrame, *Rome Greets Turin, Start of the Bicycle Relay Race from the Capital to Turin*, illustration in *La Domenica del Corriere*, May 21–29, 1911. Private collection.

Cover Design
FG Confalonieri

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This book was printed for Mondadori Electa S.p.A. by Elcograf S.p.A.,
Via Mondadori 15, Verona