

OPERA METAMORPHOSES OF THE STORY OF MANON LESCAUT

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SUMMARY. In the article, the opera genre is comprehended in its two hypostases – as the one inheriting the mythological tradition through the plots and experience of literature, and in the dynamics of the manifestation of individual creative consciousness. The tendency to demythologize the opera genre did not exclude the typification of situational motifs genetically related to the myth, while giving rise to their variable plurality in the new socio-cultural and artistic-aesthetic conditions. As a result, the opera reveals the ability to operate with archetypes, drawing closer to the mythopoetic consciousness. The considered compositions by D. Auber, J. Massenet, G. Puccini, H. W. Henze demonstrate the variety of opera metamorphoses of the story by Abbé Prévost. The path from the idealization of plot situations through the disclosure of the drama of feelings to the reduction of conflicts to the level of a tabloid story closes the circle of semantic overtones of the literary source.

Keywords: opera, mythopoetics, story by Abbé Prévost, compositions by D. Auber, J. Massenet, G. Puccini, H. W. Henze.

Introduction

The history of the opera contains many examples of repeated appeals to the same plots. From a time distance, this phenomenon can be explained by the desire of composers of different generations to reveal other facets of meaning, to place new moral and ethical accents, to show creative initiative in solving musical and dramatic problems in a well-known

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and understandable plot. Let us recall the artistic and aesthetic position of I. Stravinsky when creating *Oedipus Rex* which influenced a new type of unfolding of the events appears – not only in their mediated causal connections (linear time), but also in the system of expanding circles of Oedipus' own story cognition (cyclic time). Such a combination of the past, present and future at the same time, in the absence of action dynamics, testifies in favor of the activation of mythopoetic patterns.

At the same time, the opera was always mindful of its own specifics, which gave rise to a search for a balance between music and drama, an organic fusion of all components in the Wagnerian idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk, in B. A. Zimmermann's thesis about the total opera theatre, in A. Schönberg's desire to express oneself in *Die glückliche Hand* with using a colorful combination of all expressive visual and sound means.² The study of various innovations by the history of music often reveals socio-psychological motifs that are relevant to the time, influencing the interpretation of a mythological or well-known literary source chosen as a textual basis.

Behind these obvious facts lies one of the specific features of the opera as a musical and theatrical genre. Having taken shape in close interaction with mythological, legendary plots, more broadly with literature, the opera through them was assimilating the mythological tradition, because of which it turned out to be able to mythologize plots, types of heroes, situational positions owing to variable repetition in a different social environment and the increment of a new semantic layer. As a stable semantic structure, the opera has the properties of an archetype, acting as a model for imitation, like mythological paradigms. The opera, reflecting the diversity of ideas about it, demonstrates the modelling of reality in its integrity, in fact, revealing the alliance with the myth.

At the same time, as well as in literature, there was a process of demythologization of the genre, stipulated by the gradual strengthening of the individual creative principle. The self-determination of the opera in the context of the emerging tonal-harmonic system and genre formation stimulated the search for its distinctive properties. From these positions, the history of the opera development is the history of its assimilation of realistic plots and life-like situations. But the further it moved away from its "mythological past", the more the bonds that bound them came to light.

The problem of "opera and myth" is touched upon in several modern studies. According to S. Wegner, the actualization of questions of the origin of genres and types of music is typical for periods of radical renewal of its

² *Bühne – Arnold Schönberg Center*, <https://www.schoenberg.at/index.php/en/special-op-18> (accessed on 07.07.2023).

essential foundations.³ M. Garda focuses on the Wagnerian concept of “opera and drama”.⁴ Other musicologists are attracted by the direct embodiment of mythological plots in modern musical theatre. P. Petersen makes a significant addition to the title of the article devoted to a comprehensive analysis of H. W. Henze’s one-act opera *Venus und Adonis* (1997) – “opera as a myth”. It becomes the key to understanding both the composer’s concept and the theoretical postulates of the scientist, who reveals the similarity of the two very different phenomena.⁵ J. Brockmeier expands the field of cognition of the music of H. W. Henze. The researcher considers the close relationship in his thinking of myth, art and life based on compositions with mythological motifs and plots. The author writes: “In this sense, Henze is not a composer of myth, but a composer with the principles of myth in modern times. He (re)composes myths in the conditions of the modern times”.⁶ The multi-layered compositional and dramatic solution in the conditions of R. Zechlin’s chamber opera *Elissa* (2004)⁷ confirms the stable attributes related to opera and myth: “play”, “death”, “glorification of life”.⁸ Let us add to this the typical plot motifs of the opera genre, genetically related to the myth – a love triangle, murder because of jealousy, the struggle between duty and feeling, the struggle for power – many times varied in literary and dramatic compositions and acquiring an individual stylistic coloring. The noted properties of the opera genre affect the composer’s thought, giving birth to a certain play situation of competition upon appealing to the same plots. On the other hand, the variable multiplicity of the same semantic image, the technique of

³ Wegner, Sascha. Zum vorliegenden Band [For the Present Volume], *Über den Ursprung von Musik. Mythen – Legenden – Geschichtsschreibungen*, ed. by Sascha Wegner, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2017, p. 7.

⁴ Garda, Michela. Ursprungsmythen der Moderne: Der Fall Richard Wagner zwischen „Oper und Drama“ und dem „Ring des Nibelungen“ [Origin Myths of Modernity: The Case of Richard Wagner between „Opera and Drama“ and „The Ring of the Nibelung“], *Über den Ursprung von Musik. Mythen – Legenden – Geschichtsschreibungen*, ed. by Sascha Wegner, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2017, pp. 191–207.

⁵ Petersen, Peter. Die Oper als Mythos. „Venus und Adonis“ von Hans Werner Henze [The Opera as Myth. „Venus and Adonis“ by Hans Werner Henze], *Musik und Mythos. Neue Aspekte der musikalischen Ästhetik V*, ed. by Hans Werner Henze, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1999, pp. 137–153.

⁶ Brockmeier, Jens. Mythische Imagination in der Musik Hans Werner Henzes [Mythical Imagination in the Music of Hans Werner Henze], *Hamburger Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft*. Band 20. *Hans Werner Henze. Die Vorträge des internationalen Henze-Symposiums am Musikwissenschaftlichen Institut der Universität Hamburg 28. bis 30. Juni 2001*, ed. by Peter Petersen, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2003, p. 19.

⁷ Mizitova, Adilya. Purcell’s Motifs in the Opera *Elissa* by Ruth Zechlin, *Scientific Herald of Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine*, Nr. 2 (31), 2016, pp. 76–90.

⁸ Petersen, Peter, *op. cit.*

metamorphosis, the emerging system of reflections outside of a single sample in a wide context of cultural traditions open the way to the mythologization of plot motifs and the activation of patterns of mythopoetic.

The reason for this kind of reflection was four well-known opera compositions – *Manon Lescaut* by D. Auber, *Manon* by J. Massenet, *Manon Lescaut* by G. Puccini and *Boulevard Solitude* by H. W. Henze. Adhering to historical authenticity, we should note that the opera *The Maid of Artois* by the Irish composer and singer Michael William Balfe became the first sign of the embodiment on the musical and theatrical stage of the once scandalous story by Abbe Prévost called *Histoire du Chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*, which premiered at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in 1836.⁹ The librettist A. Bunn not only changed the names of the characters, but also completed all the vicissitudes with a happy ending. The opera was staged in various cities of England, Scotland, America in the 40s of the 19th centuries. Information about productions in Europe is not given.¹⁰

Idealization of plot conflicts in the opera *Manon Lescaut* by D. Auber

Daniel Auber creates his *Manon Lescaut* in 1856. He fruitfully collaborated with the outstanding French playwright Eugène Scribe. Known for his perfect skill in building a plot, he processed the literary primary source quite freely. First, he significantly reduced the quantity of the acting characters, secondly, he introduced new characters, owing to which new plot motifs appeared; thirdly, the key figure of the novel Des Grieux is assigned a secondary role, which leads to the levelling of his role as a hero-lover in the opera. E. Scribe preserves the main intrigue of Prévost's story and the most problematic aspects of the human personality: the duality of nature, which is always in a situation of choosing between loyalty to love and love of luxury (Manon), an addiction to fatal passion (Des Grieux), a gambling addiction that pushes to crime (Lescaut).

The new protagonists introduced in the libretto contribute to the emergence of other meaningful accents, aimed at affirming certain moral ideals, emphasizing the honesty of intentions and the nobility of the representatives of the aristocracy. For example, the seamstress Marguerite sincerely helps Manon and sympathizes with the circumstances of her life

⁹ Zöchling, Dieter. *Die Chronik der Oper*, Augsburg, Weltbild, 1996, p. 98.

¹⁰ *The Maid of Artois – English Romantic Opera*, <https://www.englishromanticopera.org/operas/MaidofArtois.htm> (accessed on 28.06.2023).

and love. Despite this attitude, in the further development of plot conflicts, the librettist unobtrusively contrasts the honest, hardworking Marguerite and her fiancé Gervais with Manon and Des Grieux. At one time, Marguerite was not seduced by d'Hérigny's courtships, for which she was supported by his mother, who helped her with her work, owing to which the girl now has a sewing workshop. Against this background, the librettist adds new details to the image of Lescaut. According to the colonel, Le Marquis d'Hérigny, his subordinate is a drunkard, a duelist and a gambler, but "brilliant in bad things."¹¹ In particular, after learning that Manon is his cousin, he openly bargains with the Marquis, raising the "rate" for the kidnapping of the young temptress. Therefore, his behavior later, when Manon finds herself in d'Hérigny's estate, and his theft of the diamonds, for which an innocent girl was convicted, whose severe suffering led to her death, looks natural.

Let us emphasize that the talented playwright smoothest out the sharpest moments of Abbé Prévost's story, strengthening the didactic component of the plot, actualizing socially significant ideas and moral principles. It can be assumed that such interpretation is a kind of response to some reforms of Napoleon III (reigned 1852–1870). On the other hand, one can feel the influence of the novel of upbringing, which became widespread and gained various interpretations in the multilingual European literature of that time. In the presence of a second pair of lovers (Marguerite and Gervais) in the libretto, which appears as a model of decent relations, reinforces the emerging parallels.

Various opera forms of expression arise depending on a certain moment of plot development and are aimed at revealing the thoughts and feelings of the main characters. Considering the laws of the opera genre, there are actually three of them: Manon, Marguerite, and Marquis. In the last, third act of the opera, they are joined by Gervais, who is entrusted with the Aria, fitted into a multi-episode scene (No. 12). Insidious Lescaut, despite participating in several ensemble pieces, is treated as a character in the play, as he is revealed mostly through conversational dialogues and dramatic events. Others either play a fatal role in the fate of Manon and Des Grieux or add realism to the stage action in genre-household scenes. Des Grieux's modest role as a hero-lover in an adventure-lyrical plot is revealed both by his absence in the direct exposure of the intrigue, and by the absence of extensive solo utterances in his part, although the composer retains the tenor vocal role typical for such characters. In other words, Des Grieux acts as a necessary attribute of the traditional "love triangle"

¹¹ Scribe, Eugène. *Manon Lescaut. Opéra-Comique en trois Actes*. Musique de M. Auber. Paris, Michel Lévy Frères, 1856, p. 3.

rather than a full-fledged participant in it. Such an interpretation suggests a tendency to mythologize both the type of hero and the typical situation, which do not require any additional explanations, but are perceived a priori due to the established literary and musical context.

Des Grieux's rival – Le Marquis d'Hérigny, according to the tradition represented by a baritone, on the contrary, already at the beginning of the first act acquires a characteristic.¹² His Aria (No. 1) is composed in the spirit of lyrical romance. To embody the emotional state of the hero the composer combines a series of repeated short motifs of a small range with descending second turns, a dotted rhythm, and broad strokes by the balanced long durations. Gradually expanding the range, they reflect the emotional rise of the Marquis in love, a surge of feelings that D. Auber emphasizes with an expressive virtuoso cadence. As a result, it is the Marquis who appears to be truly in love owing to the sincerity of his feelings in his solo performance, although his vocal role reveals him to be a seducer. The following lyrical confessions of the hero reinforce the authenticity of his love.

Another perspective is provided for Manon, who is shown by the author in the *Verses*, G-dur (act 1, No. 2). The chosen form with its outwardly undemanding conditions allows reproducing the image of a young, ordinary, at first glance, girl. Many virtuosic fioriture brings grace and sophistication to these verses, which emphasize Manon's attractiveness, her natural ability to be the decoration of rich salons. Further, the composer dynamically unfolds the display of the nature of the heroine. In the Duet with Marguerite (No. 3), she appears as a frank and sensitive friend who shares the thoughts and intentions of the modest grisette to involve her in the work of a seamstress. But the following Aria and Cavatina¹³ reveal other facets of her character. In the recitative, Manon's vocal part is marked by the plasticity of the melodic and rhythmic pattern. At the same time, a certain monotony of the orchestral accompaniment plays a sound-imaging role, reflecting the monotony of the seamstress's hand movements, creating a feeling of the stiffness of life, which contradicts the young girl's ideas about the joys of every day, her desire to enjoy love and wealth. The melody of the Aria (Andante) is characterized by a soft rhythm of 6/8, chromaticism in the vocal part, which gives this music a touch of emphasized gallantry. The composer shades the coquettishness of the heroine with a series of fioriture, the crystal sonority of which enhances Manon's feeling of delight in herself. The natural continuation of the solo scene is the brilliant Cavatina.

¹² Auber, Daniel-François-Esprit. *Manon Lescaut. Opéra Comique en 3 actes*. Poème de E. Scribe. Partition piano et chant. Paris: Sylvain St-Etienne (succr. Boieldieu), n.d.[1856].

¹³ They are not isolated from the general musical context, but are indicated in the verbal text (Scribe, Eugène, *op. cit.*, p. 18).

In the kaleidoscope of rapid changes in the plot and stage situation, which involves the technique of moving the camera in the 20th century cinematography, the central role of Manon is revealed through a series of rather elaborate vocal utterances.¹⁴ The individualized circle of intonations (brilliant virtuosic cadences, soft prosaic inflections) is aimed at reflecting the nuances in the mood of the heroine, preserving the vividly embodied image of the young beauty who wants to enjoy life. However, the destruction of her hopes and a turn of events unexpected for her expands the range of means used by the composer: from a concert aria to various everyday genres.

In the interpretation of the authors of the opera, the image of Manon receives some significant differences compared to Prévost's story: the young beauty, admiring luxury and dreaming of a prosperous life, remains faithful to her beloved and is ready to compromise only for the sake of his salvation. Therefore, her death leaves an unforgettable trace of loss, perceived as a real tragedy, like samples of classical drama. Mythopoetic was formed in the bowels of the opera genre in such a complex interweaving of real motifs of time and accumulated cultural experience.

Drama of love in operas by J. Massenet and G. Puccini: similarities and differences

The last decades of the 19th century were the time of the revival of the story by Abbé Prévost on the opera stage. In 1884, *Manon* by J. Massenet was premiered on the stage of the Opéra-Comique, which caused a controversial reaction: the "pejorative", in the words of D. Zöchling, press,¹⁵ and an enthusiastic reception from the public. Nine years later, in 1893, in Turin, G. Puccini presented his version of the plot, which had "a sensational success."¹⁶ Both retain the leading position of the main character in the stage events, which is reflected in the title of the operas – the Italian composer has the surname added to the name: *Manon Lescaut*. The similarities and differences between the French and Italian operas are stipulated by the peculiarities of their libretto. J. Massenet retains all the dramatically important moments of the literary source. As a result, cause-and-effect connections are restored. It seems essential to preserve the motifs of the charming beauty of the young Manon, her admiration for luxury, the seduction of wealth,

¹⁴ We will remind you about the famous mocking song *C'est l'histoire amoureuse* (the finale of the 1st act), Aria (the 2nd act, No. 10), numerous ensembles.

¹⁵ Zöchling, Dieter *op. cit.*, p. 246.

¹⁶ Zöchling, Dieter, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

wealthy admirers, separation and much more, up to the condemnation and death of the heroine. Relying on the five-act structure characteristic of the French tradition, the authors of *Manon* introduce many new characters, ballet, enlarge the scale of mass scenes.

Evaluating the opera by J. Massenet from a historical distance, one can state the impact of novelistic dramaturgy, expanding the field of associative links: love/infidelity, social inequality, revenge of a rejected lover, gambling addiction, fatal passion, and tragic outcome. Widely developed in the European literature of the 19th century, these motifs served as the basis for a brilliant series of opera masterpieces, helping to consolidate these motifs as archetypes of culture.

Against this background, the story line of *Manon Lescaut* by G. Puccini looks much more modest. As in the French version, the intrigue is tied up in an inn in Amiens, where Manon arrived, accompanied by her brother, Lescaut, a sergeant of the Royal Guard. Her parents prepared the fate of a nun for her. The beauty of the young charmer is so mesmerizing that the rich nobleman, the royal tax tenant Geronte di Ravoir, who was travelling with them in the same carriage, decides to kidnap her. However, the prepared carriage is used by the poor student Des Grieux, who fell in love with Manon at first sight, and the culprit of the commotion. Unlike the opera by J. Massenet, the Italian version does not show the lovers' life together in Paris. The second act takes the audience to a luxurious apartment in the house of Geronte, where the beautiful Manon reigns. However, a rich life without love and entertainment bored her, and she yearns for Des Grieux. The appearance of the young man in love revives Manon's flame of love which seemed to have been lost. Prayers for forgiveness soften the heart of Des Grieux. According to the laws of melodrama, the love scene is interrupted by the unexpected return of Geronte. Manon mocks him, making him angry and thirsting for revenge. Instead of taking the opportunity to hide, Manon cannot part with the jewels. Geronte arrives in time with the soldiers and accuses her of stealing. Manon is arrested. The last two acts relate to an attempt to organize Manon's escape before being sent with other convicts to America and the death of the heroine on the desert plain of New Orleans.¹⁷

As one can see, the literary plot in G. Puccini's opera is presented "pointwise", appealing to the imagination and knowledge of the listeners. The composer is primarily concerned with the drama of feelings, the irresistibility of the problem of choice, the fatal all-forgiving passion and devotion of the heart. In this interpretation of the plot, it is Des Grieux who evokes the

¹⁷ *Manon Lescaut. Libretto. Deutsch Übersetzung*, <https://www.opera-arias.com/puccini/manon-lescaut/libretto/deutsch/> (accessed on 28.06.2023).

deepest sympathy. With the death of his beloved, his life turns out to be destroyed and devoid of any hopes. This does not mean a lack of empathy for the main character. Her untimely death is perceived as too high a price for the mistakes of careless youth. Let us note that there is an element of morality teaching in this.

Despite the difference in the coverage of the plot events of the story, both operas contain one significant moment that in Prévost's story appears in the characterization of Lescaut and in the situation of Des Grieux's desperate attempts to get money for a prosperous life for Manon – this is the motif of a card game. In a wide field of cultural tradition, it bears the stamp of a mythologeme, defining stable universals of consciousness. In this capacity, the motif of the card game acts as a way of modelling certain aspects of reality. The visual-sensual image that has developed during practice, in accordance with mythopoetic, is ambiguous: this is playing with fate, and a test of luck, and disappointment, and the collapse of all illusions, and finally, playing with someone else's life. The variety of its refraction is contained in both compositions, forming an additional meaningful series. J. Massenet exhibits it simultaneously with the heroine, whom Lescaut undertook to take care of. However, instead of doing this, after having given her instructions and left her alone in the middle of the hotel courtyard, he went to play cards with his drinking companions. In its main form, this plot motif will appear in the scene of the gambling hall of the Transylvania Hotel (act 4), when the image of Lescaut-player is revealed. But another hypostasis of the motif, linking into a single knot outwardly insignificant details, given as if in passing, is manifested in the tragic denouement of the main collisions. It is Manon who brings Des Grieux to the gambling hall and persuades him to sit down at the card table. It is Guillot de Morfontaine, challenging fate, who invites Des Grieux to play pharaoh with him. Not forgetting that the young charmer first preferred Des Grieux, and then de Brétigny, offended him with her inattention to the efforts to please her desire to watch the ballet at the city festival, after having lost a large amount, he accuses Des Grieux of cheating, and Manon of complicity. Manon's careless playing with other people's pride, selfishness, albeit motivated by various reasons, the desire to combine the incompatible – love and wealth at any cost – lead to the collapse of the heroine's life: The fate of the seductive beauty was decided. And Guillot is satisfied: "(to Manon; quietly): 'A thousand apologies, mademoiselle, but it was such an excellent occasion!' (to Des Grieux) 'I have returned the loss, sir. And you console yourself...'"¹⁸

¹⁸ Massenet, Jules. *Manon. Opéra-Comique en cinq actes et six tableaux*, Paris, G. Hartmann, n.d. [1884]. Reprinted: Paris, Heugel, n.d. [1891]. Revised edition: Heugel, 1895, p. 350, [https://imslp.org/wiki/Manon_\(Massenet,_Jules\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Manon_(Massenet,_Jules)) (accessed on 05.07.2023).

The motif of the card game in the opera by G. Puccini is solved somewhat differently. Keeping a direct connection with the plot by Prévost in the characterization of Lescaut, it is given in a wider field of meanings of the mythologeme of playing. The newly introduced character – student Edmondo, a joker and a merry fellow – mocks the modest, quiet comrade Des Grieux, who knows no love joys. Noticing his special attention to the unknown beauty who appeared, Edmondo and the students get a new reason to laugh at the poor young man. Later he arranges the escape of young lovers, despite the hesitations, timidity, and indecision of the naive girl. Love confessions and persuasion by Des Grieux, mocking comments by Edmondo are interspersed with scenes of libations and Lescaut playing cards. The atmosphere of excitement colours the entire rapidly developing multi-part scene. Important for understanding the essence of what is happening is Edmondo's remark, which sums up the psychologically complex dialogue of the young people: "Jester couple!" (act 1).¹⁹ This way, effortlessly, out of nothing to do, but perfectly understanding all the consequences, the joker Edmondo played the card of Manon's fate. A new twist in the development of the play's motif occurs in the scene of the Minuet, when Geronte shows off Manon to his guests as his expensive toy. But if Geronte sincerely lavishes enthusiastic compliments on her mistress, then she only adheres to the "rules of the game", plays a modest woman, and echoes her rich patron. In fact, her thoughts are again occupied by Des Grieux, his fiery love. Like in J. Massenet's version, the exuberant confrontation of the former lovers are developed in a large-scale duet. And at the peak of mutual bliss, everything collapses with the appearance of Geronte and his revenge. But the nobleman's words about the sincerity of his love feelings and Manon's mockery of him bring new details into the portrait of the heroine, whose dual nature turns into playing with other people's feelings.

How do composers act in the circumstances proposed by the libretto? According to D. Zöchling, the orientation of the librettists of J. Massenet's opera – Henri Meilhac and Philippe Gille – to the Grand Opéra style demonstrated itself in the slowness of the intrigue due to the introduction of a large number of minor characters.²⁰ It is difficult to agree with such an assessment, since due to the scenes that are not directly related to the literary source, the key figures who played a certain role in the fate of Manon – Guillot and de Brétigny are exhibited. The lengthiness of the initial

¹⁹ *Manon Lescaut. Libretto. Deutsch Übersetzung*, <https://www.opera-arias.com/puccini/manon-lescaut/libretto/deutsch/> (accessed on 28.06.2023).

²⁰ Zöchling, Dieter, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

phase is later compensated by the composer's music lyrical in nature, which develops along the line of increasing tension, culminating in the death scene of the heroine. To a large extent, this was facilitated by a new approach to colloquial dialogues traditional for the French comic opera.²¹ The author, as a rule, solves them in a melodramatic manner, accompanies them by an orchestra, although he retains the expression of dramatic speech. The strengthening of the musical element in the score brought to the fore the regularities of opera dramaturgy, ensured the organic inclusion of solo quasi pieces into a dynamic scene, a plastic transition from one form of utterance to another. Such is Manon's expositional arioso, in which she appears as a touching, direct, very young person who left her father's house for the first time. The style of the vocal-orchestral part is unusually diverse: expressive lyrical cantilena, recitation, virtuoso fioriture, rising interrogative intonations, drooping chromatic small second moves, quick changes in tempo and texture – this whole complex draws a touching, charming creature. Therefore, the very thought of a monastery seems monstrous, depriving Manon of the opportunity to discover and cognize the world around her. At first glance, the composer somewhat idealizes his heroine. However, with one stroke, he outlines a different Manon, who is able, without hesitation, to laugh at an unfamiliar, rather respectable gentleman, instead of giving a worthy rebuff to his obscene proposal. In this act, the coquetry of the young seductress, the awareness of her beauty, to which much is allowed, is already guessed. J. Massenet completes her characterization with an aria and a duet with Des Grieux²². The aria (Andantino lento, h-moll, 3/4) is preceded by a recitative, where two opposite facets of Manon's image are indicated: in a small orchestral introduction, the heroine's lyric-dreamy leitmotif sounds, in recitative remarks – delight from the dresses and rich jewelry of the ladies. The aria, both in content and in terms of intonation, refers to the tradition of the lamento aria, renewed by the softness of the waltz rhythm and the expression of romantic lyrics. The middle section of the three-movement form is distinguished by the brevity of expressive arioso-declamatory phrases, reflecting a passionate desire to enjoy a carefree life.

The monologue of Des Grieux following Manon's lyrical entry takes one to another world of thoughts and emotional experiences. Comparing the musical portraits of the main characters, presented like a picturesque

²¹ The genre definition of J. Massenet's *Manon* is comic opera.

²² Let us recall that there is no number structure and designation of forms traditional for the genre, but the type of intonation, the nature of the utterance, the composition make it possible to apply established concepts to such episodes of the opera stage.

diptych, J. Massenet emphasizes the differences between people who were united by a sudden feeling of love. The seriousness and depth of nature of Des Grieux are revealed by the principle of vocal and orchestral solutions. The counterpoint conjugation of the expressive melody of the orchestra (the dialogue of cellos and violins) with arioso-declamatory vocal phrases embodies the state of the young man, his reflections on the choice he made, about his father. Plural repetition of an orchestral melody against the background of a pulsating accompaniment, followed by a tonal shift a tone up (Es-dur – F-dur), a change in tempo (*Andante molto tranquillo* – *Allegro*), an expansion of the scale of vocal phrases, the undulation of their melodic relief – everything is subordinated to the task of capaciously conveying the essence of the character and mentality of the hero. The composer uses the technique of subito contrast to enhance the sudden change in Des Grieux when looking at Manon. After the uplift, which is confirmed in the monologue with its flexible dynamics, the orchestral part is reduced to long dissonant pedals and excited figurations in a high register, the dynamics fades to pianissimo, the brevity of the initial recitative remarks indicates a sudden shock.

Let us pay attention to one detail: when Manon sees the carriage, she says with a smile that it was sent for her by a new admirer (let us recall, it is Guillot), and immediately decides to take revenge on him by taking his carriage. The self-satisfied gentlemen will return his debt to them in full later. Thus, the stretching of the plot turns into a dramatic device, stimulating the rapid development of collisions.

The lyrical drama in 4 acts by G. Puccini is free from any genre restrictions, allowing the composer to show his musical and dramatic talent. The figure of Des Grieux occupies one of the key positions in the exposition of opera intrigue. The appearance of the hero is accompanied by a soulful descending melody in a velvety cello register, interrupted by scherzo motifs that characterize the mocker Edmondo. Involving against his will in the dialogue imposed on him and maintaining a certain irony of tone, Des Grieux reveals himself as a person capable of deep feelings. The orchestral part that accompanies his sincere bewilderment about the unhappy love supposed by the merry Edmondo and the confession of his ignorance in this matter is one of the brightest examples of inspired lyrics, full of restrained passion. A small arioso complement the declared image, despite the scherzo motifs that testify to the “game” of love confessions that cause the laughter of the young people. The intended expression of the love experience affects the general tone of Des Grieux’s vocal part in his duet with Manon and subsequent solo-ensemble utterances. Complemented by an expressive orchestral part, as it develops, it is enriched with new emotional overtones,

expressing the power of a genuine love feeling. Owing to this, Des Grieux dominates this scene, which determines his no less significant role in further plot conflicts. On the contrary, the image of Manon is written very modestly, in accordance with the appearance of a young, inexperienced girl. Therefore, against the background of Des Grieux's passionate confessions, her indecision and refusal to run away are perceived as natural behaviour, and her hasty decision is perceived as an impulse, a desire for freedom, cognition of the joys of the world around her. The more striking is the change of the heroine, who appears as a full-fledged mistress in the house of the rich Geronte.

The attention to the expositional sections of both operas can be explained by the definition of the key moments of the drama and the main features of the characters in them. Further all the declared semantic motifs and characters are developed, supplemented, without going beyond the designated archetype. Enriching the genre tradition with individual creative consciousness, creating "demythologized" opera samples, J. Massenet and G. Puccini do not avoid connection with the mythopoetic consciousness, which is seen in the conventionality of the language of expression (singing), violation of spatial-temporal boundaries, in the typification of situations and human nature, the motif of the playing, the variability of the meaning, etc.

Pages of the tabloid chronicle in the opera by H. W. Henze

The above considerations are confirmed by the opera *Boulevard Solitude* by H. W. Henze, written more than half a century after the universally recognized masterpieces in 1952. Its genre designation – "lyrical drama" – in combination with the title corresponds to the tradition of the nineteenth century. However, the text by Grete Weil and the script by Walter Jockisch deprive the well-known plot of any veil of romance. The action of the one-act opera in seven scenes is transferred to a large French city and begins at the station, where travelers, paperboys, porters, street girls and idlers scurry about. As usual, there is also a small cafe, at one of the tables at which the main characters meet. Manon is sent to Armand des Grieux, who was seeing off his friend, by her brother Lescaut, who is accompanying his sister to the boarding house. From what happens next, it becomes obvious that he intends to use the beauty and youth of his sister to a greater advantage for himself than to send her to a strict school. Therefore, seeing that the young couple is leaving, he does not interfere in what is happening. In the dialogue of acquaintance, new motifs sound, evoking the nostalgic notes of Boris Vian's novel *L'Écume des Jours*: loneliness, tenderness, the search for love, disappointment, jazz rhythm intonations. In the French writer's

work Colin and Chloé, who are in love, were enveloped in a pink cloud, in the libretto Weil Armand says: “You see how the big station building is bowing before us, watching our playing. Trust me. We are floating quietly.” Manon picks up: “Quietly, detachedly, we are floating, lost in dreams, past the concierge, who will redirect our luggage.”²³ However, if in Vian’s version love as the highest value is opposed to a monster city, then in Henze – Weil’s opera the womb of Paris sucks the couple into the whirlpool of the unsightly aspects of city life: love for sale, pimping, drug addiction, robbery, murder. Some poetization of events in the story by Abbé Prévost here turns into a story from the tabloid chronicle. Thus, having gone through a series of metamorphoses, the adventurous love plot in the opera by Henze appears by its reverse side, exhausting all the meanings inherent in it.

To no lesser extent, *Boulevard Solitude* gives reason to talk about the generalization of the genre tradition. By compressing the series of events into a one-act structure, the composer activates the compositional and dramatic possibilities of the chamber opera with its dynamics of changing plot situations, the increasing role of orchestral episodes, and the rapid advance towards the solution of the declared conflicts. Five Intermezzo and the orchestral Ostinato, which precedes the 1st scene, determine the emotional and figurative atmosphere of the musical stage action. The dominance of percussion and brass instruments, the rigidity of vertical junctions, and the expansion of scales intensify the tension, excluding any hint of lyrics. In their own way, the authors of the opera embody the idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk, which gained popularity in the modern period. One knows the history of the creation of *Ariadne auf Naxos* by R. Strauss as part of the grandiose project of H. von Hofmannsthal. In *Boulevard Solitude* the pantomime, dance scenes, participation of extras create an additional semantic range.

At the same time, it is obvious that the well-established features of a multi-act piece structure are preserved, based on traditional forms of vocal expression: aria, duet, tercet, stage, chorus. This impression is also facilitated by the active use of such an attribute at the end of an act or a large scene as a curtain. It drops after the 2nd, the 3rd, the 5th, and the 6th scenes, which is associated both with a change in the situation and with the deployment of plot ups and downs “in a circle”. This feeling, with the concentration of the series of events, is enhanced by the participation of the father and son Lilaque in the love affair. Owing to this technique, H. W. Henze achieves the effect of variable repetition, striving to infinity.

²³ Henze, Hans Werner. *Boulevard Solitude. Lyrisches Drama in sieben Bildern [Boulevard Solitude. Lyrical Drama in Seven Scenes]*, Text von Grete Weil, Szenarium von Walter Jockisch. Klavierauszug von Kurt Stiebitz. Mainz, B. Schott’s Söhne, 1979, pp. 11–12.

Two tendencies interact in the composition of the whole. One of them is conditioned by the logic of symphonic development directed to the climax, the other relates to the content of the scenes, their solution and function in the form of the whole. From this point of view, the 4th scene stands apart: a radical change of the place of action as a transition to another world – the hall of the university library, the introduction of the chorus – the students in Latin read love lyrics of Catullus, which tells about his unhappy love for Lesbia. Against this background, there is a brief dialogue between Francis and Armand, which in a few phrases reveals the difference in the natures of the friends. For Francis, the world of art and science gives not only hours of happiness, but also fences off from the truth of life. For Armand, time is empty without the beloved. The conversation then switches to Manon and Francis tells the friend about her misadventures. To this Armand replies: “Even if she were in prison, I would believe her!”²⁴ As the distant echo of the story we recall the lines of Catullus: “But I can’t stop loving, even if you were a criminal.” Such depth and constancy of feeling, echoing the thoughts and experiences of Catullus, expand the field of intertextual connections, going beyond the boundaries of what is happening “here and now”. Therefore, the subsequent joint reading of the lyrics of the ancient Roman poet by Armand and Manon is perceived as the culmination of the scene, a kind of declaration of love. The three-phase structure of the 4th scene, aimed at affirming the theme of love, becomes an island of lyrics, closing the first circle of development of the tabloid-adventurous plot.

A new round of similar events covers the 5th and the 6th scenes. The invariability of the essence of the situational provisions is reinforced by the change of the acting figures – now Lilaque Sr. is being replaced by his son. Neither he nor the head of the family, who is not averse to remembering past joys, are at all embarrassed that Manon was the kept woman of his father. Dramatic, with a tragic outcome, the last piece of the 6th scene (No. 21) is called *Colportage*.²⁵ Thus, the vicissitudes of Manon’s life appear as “peddling” in the prism of the value scale of modernity.

The final 7th scene draws a line under the narration and the last mythopoetic motifs. The bipolarity of the world is finally affirmed as an inseparable integrity of the sublime and the low, the top and the bottom, the spiritual and the material bodily. Having lost his beloved, perceiving the world as a closed space with his loneliness, Armand says bitterly: “I am no

²⁴ Henze, Hans Werner, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

²⁵ “Cheap popular literature, originally sold by itinerant hawkers called colporteurs” (Baldick, Chris. *Colportage*. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Oxford University Press, 2008).

longer Orpheus, that unfortunate one, torn to pieces by maenads.”²⁶ In the final Revue of the opera, several Manon-dancers grow from Manon, and several Pierrots in white rise from Armand (the remark in the vocal score).²⁷ The image of a sad lover, a long-suffering rival from the commedia dell’arte, breaking the boundaries of an outwardly trivial plot, brings into the compositions a feeling of nagging pain for the lost ideals of love. The simultaneously repeated lines “Jubilate, exultate Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs!” of the unpretentious children’s song in a kind of opera coda correspond in an unexpected way with the title of the first novel (*Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, 1941–1942) by the French novelist, playwright, and poet Jean Genet. It is known that his compositions caused a lot of controversy, since he elected representatives of the bottom of social society as his heroes. Such a 180-degree turn of the opera plot keeps the demythological position of the opera as a special musical stage genre in its ability to reflect urgent problems.

Conclusion

The considered operas by D. Auber, J. Massenet, G. Puccini, and H. W. Henze are original samples of the individual creative embodiment of the story by Abbé Prévost. The originality of each of them is stipulated by both the talent of the composer, his artistic and aesthetic priorities, and the development trends of the opera genre itself, the degree of its social and ideological relevance. The approach proposed in the article, without denying the traditional methods of analyzing the phenomena of composing practice, makes it possible to identify similarities and differences in samples separated in time and space, based on the mythopoetic genetically inherited by the opera genre. Owing to this, the metamorphosis of the same plot-semantic motifs is revealed in conditions of variable repetition. The emerging situation of competition inevitably gives rise to a search (aware or intuitive) for other deep meanings of the chosen literary source, considering the demands of the time, topical moral problems, and the prevailing scale of spiritual values. At the same time, the tendency of the opera genre to typify and operate with archetypes is revealed. This provides an unfading research interest in the “adventures” of familiar characters in new circumstances, like mythological heroes passing the path destined from above.

²⁶ Henze, Hans Werner, *op. cit.*, pp. 126–127.

²⁷ Henze, Hans Werner, *op. cit.*, pp. 129–130.

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