Manon through the lens of Clouzot (1948): 'images troublantes et précises'

Abstract:

If cinema may potentially recast what is most fundamental to literature, Henri-Georges Clouzot's version of Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* assumes its duty to show the once hidden heroine by transferring the novel to the early days of post-war France. Following an analysis of Maupassant's critique of the novel in which he proposes the heroine as a disembodied and mythical seductress, this article examines how eighteenth-century illustrations offer an alternative narrative to the text's monological account of infidelity. Hair emerges as a sign of desire and specularity, a combination that Clouzot's film develops at the level of both narrative and image. Profiting from the demands of the mainstream cinematic apparatus and his modern mise-en-scène, the director uses his heroine's hair to signal her metamorphosis from collaborator to prostitute to victim. Clouzot's adaptation is seen not as a betrayal of Prévost's novel, but as an example of the mythology of its heroine.

Key words: Novel. Adaptation. Illustration. Cinema. Body. Prévost. Maupassant. Clouzot.

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Somewhere at the heart of the abbé Prévost's *Histoire du Chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* lies its enigmatic and impalpable heroine. Since the novel's first appearance in 1731, a legion of artists has endeavoured to bring to light this 'étrange fille' (Prévost, 1990: 121), presenting her embodied manifestation in engravings, plays, ballets, operas and films.[i] But to realise this literary character in visual form is to recast her erotic fascination, which derives precisely from the elusiveness with which Prévost evokes her. Nowhere is this question of adaptation, erotics and vision more pertinent than in cinema. Of the dozen or so film adaptations of Prévost's text produced between 1908 and 1968, the most notable is Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Manon*, which, as well as being condemned by the Centrale catholique du cinéma (Bocquet, 1993: 57), was awarded the Leone d'oro at the Venice film festival in 1949 (Singerman, 2000: 375). From the creator of *Le Corbeau* (1943), *Quai des orfèvres* (1947), *Le Salaire de la peur* (1953) and *Les Diaboliques*

(1955), this now unjustly neglected film develops the predominant late nineteenth-century view of Manon as amoral *femme fatale*,[ii] and insistently presents the once hidden heroine to the spectator's gaze.

This article addresses Clouzot's strategies of depiction to determine the tensions that arise when the camera looks upon a character whom the novel's narrator deftly hides from his reader's gaze. How does the cinematic apparatus profit from its duty to display her in detail to the spectator? How does the film's ostensibly impersonal camera convey or alter the novel's subjective first-person narrative? In answering such questions, one cannot ignore eighteenth-century illustrations of the novel, early paratextual depictions that clash with the narrative strategies of manipulation and deceit. Although recent film scholarship has queried the notion of fidelity as a critical tool with regard to literary adaptations (Vincendeau, 2001; and Mayer, 2002), it is inconceivable that an analysis of this novel of betrayal might avoid the issue entirely.

The novel first appeared in the seventh volume of the *Mémoires et avantures* [sic.] *d'un homme de qualité qui s'est retiré du monde*. Two years later in 1733 it was given the title *Les Avantures* [sic.] *du chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* in its first separate edition (Prévost, 1990: 245-48); the initial parity between the characters has since disappeared as the title has been progressively shortened to *Manon Lescaut* and even to *Manon*. And while the novel's two main protagonists were

often given equal significance by contemporary readers ('l'on voit les honnêtes gens même s'attendrir en faveur d'un escroc et d'une catin', wrote Montesquieu [Prévost, 1990: c]), this equality was lost as the heroine took precedence in the reader's affections: 'L'amante a quelque chose de plus singulier encore' (Prévost, 1990: clxv).[iii] The attention popularly given to the heroine is epitomised by Guy de Maupassant's introduction to a lavishly illustrated edition of the novel, which was published in 1885, the year following the première of Massenet's *opéra-comique* *Manon*. Elegiac though crass, romantic yet chauvinistic, this text illuminates salient aspects of Clouzot's adaptation through its emphasis on female archetypes and its deliberate disregard for Prévost's own art.

Maupassant argues that history and art have bequeathed a handful of female 'images' who haunt the imagination of all those artists and dreamers who 'désirent et poursuivent une forme entrevue et insaisissable' (Prévost, 1889: ix). The visual arts have given us the body of the Venus de Milo and the head of the Mona Lisa, whereas writers have left us 'seulement trois ou quatre de ces types de grâce qu'il nous semble avoir connus, qui vivent en nous comme des souvenirs, de ces visions si palpables qu'elles ont l'air de réalités' (Prévost, 1889: xiii). Dido represents the older, passionate woman,[iv] Shakespeare's Juliet is the young girl who awakens to love, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's Virginie epitomises the virgin and martyr to poetic love:

> Puis voici Manon Lescaut, plus vraiment femme que toutes les autres, naïvement rouée, perfide, aimante, troublante, spirituelle, redoutable et charmante. En cette figure si pleine de séduction et d'instinctive perfidie, l'écrivain semble avoir incarné tout ce qu'il y a de plus gentil, de plus entraînant et de plus infâme dans l'être féminin. Manon, c'est la femme tout entière, telle qu'elle a toujours été, telle qu'elle est, et telle qu'elle sera toujours. (Prévost, 1889: xiv)

Maupassant proposes that Manon – the new Eve – joins the select rank of female characters who supersede the work in which they originated to take a mythological existence. This tendency from the particular to the universal is inscribed within the novel; Manon's death transforms her from flawed actor in Des Grieux's drama to untouchable subject of his tale, and this idealisation is also foregrounded in the preliminary 'avis de l'auteur', which proposes the account as 'un traité de morale, réduit agréablement en exercice' (Prévost, 1990: 6).[v]

In order to emphasise his subject's archetypal nature, Maupassant's ode to the story's heroine downplays Prévost's literary strategies. Thus while he writes with admiration that 'c'est par ces traits subtils et si profondément humains que l'abbé Prévost a fait de Manon Lescaut une inimitable création', Maupassant neglects Prévost's narrative framework, and contrasts him with the period's more theoretical and sophisticated writers:

> Combien d'autres romans de la même époque, écrits avec plus d'art peut-être, ont disparu! Tout ce que les écrivains ingénieux ont inventé et combiné pour amuser leurs contemporains s'est émietté dans l'oubli. (Prévost, 1889: xvii-xviii)

Maupassant's analysis reduces Prévost's technique, and explains the novel's longevity and its troubling moral stance principally by reference to the vision of its heroine's beauty. He proposes that the reader comes to absolve Des Grieux because 'nous nous sentons faibles aussi devant cette image ravissante, devant cette unique évocation de la créature d'amour' (Prévost, 1889: xv). The difficulty of portraying the physical yet immaterial hybridity of this ephemeral being makes Maupassant shift sensorial metaphors, describing Manon as 'une odeur légère et presque insaisissable' (Prévost, 1889: xvi). He then writes how the reader (implicitly configured as male) envisages Manon in his mind's eye:

> Nous la voyons encore avec nos yeux, cette Manon; nous la voyons aussi bien que si nous l'avions rencontrée et aimée. Nous connaissons ce regard clair et rusé, qui semble toujours sourire et toujours promettre, qui fait passer devant nous des images troublantes et précises; nous connaissons cette bouche gaie et fausse, ces dents jeunes sous ces lèvres tentantes, ces sourcils fins et nets, et ce geste vif et câlin de la tête, ces mouvements charmeurs de la taille, et l'odeur discrète de ce corps sous la toilette pénétrée de parfums. (Prévost, 1889: xvii)

Maupassant may declare that he clearly sees Manon's body, but it remains effectively invisible to the reader. The word 'corps' occurs twenty-eight times in the novel, although only four of these instances refer to Manon. The first is when the *homme de qualité* sees her and the other deportees with chains around their bodies, the second when Des Grieux describes her en route to Pacy: 'Mais figurez-vous ma pauvre maîtresse enchaînée par le milieu du corps' (Prévost, 1990: 178); the two other occasions refer to her dead body (Prévost, 1990: 200 and 203). Manon's is referenced only when it is humiliated or ruined, and the narrator keeps the pleasurable body for himself. Maupassant claims to see her teeth, lips, eyebrows and waist, but at no point in the novel do these words appear; although the word 'bouche' occurs ten times, Manon's mouth is only mentioned twice, both times to describe her inability to express herself, and if the word 'tête' appears seventeen times, Manon's own head is mentioned but twice. And of utmost relevance to the following analysis of Clouzot's film is Raymond Picard's observation that while we know that the Princesse de Clèves is blonde, we do not even know the colour of Manon's hair or of her eyes (Prévost, 1990: cv). Maupassant's preface thus tells how Prévost's ineffable heroine stands apart from the text that engendered her in the vaguest of terms; one of those 'images troublantes et précises', she is incarnated in the imagination of the desiring reader through the potency of her seductive charm.

Maupassant may disregard Prévost's artistry, but an understanding of his technique has critical implications if one is to grasp Clouzot's contribution to the Manon myth, a contribution that insistently displays the character on screen. In the 270 years since its initial publication, *Manon Lescaut*'s appeal has derived from its realistic depiction of the criminal and sexual underworld, its portrayal of passion, its moral ambiguities and its *sensibilité*; indeed the marquis de Sade somewhat unexpectedly exclaims 'quelles larmes que celles qu'on verse à la lecture de ce délicieux ouvrage' (Sade, 1987: 40). Recent criticism has rejected Maupassant's example to focus instead on Prévost's narrative techniques,[vi] returning in a sense to the issue of artistry that the novelist's contemporaries acknowledged: 'Quel art n'a-t-il pas fallu pour intéresser le lecteur, et lui inspirer de la compassion, par rapport aux funestes disgrâces qui arrivent à cette fille corrompue!' Prévost, 1990: clxx-clxxi).[vii]

Fundamental to Prévost's art are his techniques of framing the central narrative and of directing the reader's gaze and interpretation. Two liminal accounts frame Des Grieux's narrative; the 'avis de l'auteur' and Renoncour or the *homme de qualité*'s own account of witnessing the two protagonists and of being told the hero's story. In the *avis* the narrator states that 'une narration doit être déchargée des circonstances qui la rendraient pesante et embarrassée' (Prévost, 1990: 3); the effect that these seemingly exterior, though explicitly functional

perspectives have on the reader's response to the central 'aventures de fortune et d'amour' must therefore be scrutinised. The two main frames form what Gérard Genette terms 'paratexts'; their status may be predominantly functional, in that they aim to determine or manipulate the reading of the principal text, but they cannot help but become part of the general text, and therefore be subject to an equivalent interpretation (Genette, 1987: 180). As Suzanne Necker, mother of Mme de Staël, succinctly writes: 'Le cadre est une chose très-importante dans un ouvrage' (Staël, 1801: I.205). Her use of the preposition 'dans' rather than 'autour' confirms that the frame forms an integral part of the fiction whose interpretation it would control. Renoncour's description of his narrative technique does little to dispel the frame's ambiguous status or effect:

> Je dois avertir ici le lecteur que j'écrivis son histoire presque aussitôt après de l'avoir entendue, et qu'on peut s'assurer, par conséquent, que rien n'est plus exact et plus fidèle que cette narration. Je dis fidèle jusque dans la relation des réflexions et des sentiments, que le jeune aventurier exprimait de la meilleure grâce du monde. Voici donc son récit, auquel je ne mêlerai, jusqu'à la fin, rien que ne soit de lui. (Prévost, 1990: 16-17)

Renoncour attempts to efface his narrative presence by making it indistinguishable from that of Des Grieux; yet as Genette warns, even when the paratext would disavow its own role, its importance as a screen to the main text remains (Genette, 1987: 17). Thus

while Renoncour claims fidelity to the chevalier's *récit*, his own sighting of Manon, to whom he is directed by an old woman, alerts the reader to the distorting effect of privileging presentation over information:

> Ah! monsieur, entrez, […] et voyez si ce spectacle n'est pas capable de fendre le cœur! La curiosité me fit descendre de mon cheval, que je laissai à mon palefrenier. J'entrai avec peine, en perçant la foule, et je vis, en effet, quelque chose d'assez touchant. Parmi les douze filles qui étant enchaînées six à six par le milieu du corps, il y en avait une dont l'air et la figure étaient si peu conformes à sa condition, qu'en tout autre état je l'eusse prise pour une personne du premier rang. Sa tristesse et la saleté de son linge et de ses habits l'enlaidissaient si peu que sa vue m'inspira du respect et de la pitié. Elle tâchait néanmoins de se tourner, autant que sa chaîne pouvait le permettre, pour dérober son visage aux yeux des spectateurs. (Prévost, 1990: 11-12)

The old woman's exclamations and the narrator's responses take precedence over the description of Manon, of whom only brief details are given. Even when ostensibly a reluctant object of the gaze, the manner in which she is viewed, depicted and interpreted by others directs the reader's consideration of her. Throughout the novel she appears as an object of the gaze; Monsieur B… is attracted to her when he sees her framed in a window; her brother recognizes her in the same position; and even when she is dead

she is an object to be looked upon: 'Je m'assis encore près d'elle. Je la considérai longtemps' (Prévost, 1990: 200). Such is the force of her visual qualities that when Des Grieux is sequestered at his father's house, his attempt to forget her comes undone by her haunting image: 'Il est certain que je ne l'estimais plus; comment aurais-je estimé la plus volage et la plus perfide de toutes les créatures? Mais son image, les traits charmants que je portais au fond du cœur, y subsistaient toujours' (Prévost, 1990: 36).

Manon may impose herself through visual means but, as Jacques Proust reminds us, there is not a single descriptive reference to the heroine's 'traits charmants' (Proust, 1980: 107). We know her to be younger than Des Grieux, but her appearance is described only in general terms, such as the apposite phrase 'ma belle inconnue' (Prévost, 1990: 21); indeed the circumstances that render a tale 'pesante et embarrassée' are arguably the evidence of the heroine's body of which this essentially prudish, or at least *bienséant* account would rid itself. Since Manon has no presence unless there is an observer, the reader must approach her through comparison, reflection and refraction. At one point, she sends 'une des plus jolies filles de Paris' to console Des Grieux for her infidelity. He acknowledges the girl to be extremely pretty: 'Mais je n'y trouvai point ces yeux fins et languissants, ce port divin, ce teint de la composition de l'Amour, enfin ce fonds inépuisable de charmes que la nature avait prodigués à la perfide Manon'

(Prévost, 1990: 134-135). The comparison between copy and original cannot illuminate the reader's image of Manon; that the reflection should clarify and compensate for the original is a false promise. Her resemblance to Des Grieux himself (Prévost, 1990: 77) also sends the reader to another blank canvas (although it does serve to feminise the hero, a point to which we shall return).

In place of the heroine's portrait, the text offers a number of viewpoints that direct the reader. When, for example, the two lovers arrive in Saint-Denis, the innkeeper and the coachmen look upon them 'avec admiration' (Prévost, 1990: 25); and later Des Grieux notes that his valet was touched by the spectacle of his love for Manon (Prévost, 1990: 104). The reader displaces an enquiry for Manon's image from objective description to subjective points of view. The dominant point of view is clearly Des Grieux's, the narrative form adopted by Prévost obliging the reader to view the story through the hero's perspective. As an anonymous contemporary wrote: 'l'ivresse de l'amant nous peint les charmes de sa belle, nous la voyons par ses yeux, nous l'aimons avec son cœur' (Prévost, 1990: clxxxi). The tensions and assumptions inherent in this narrative are clear when the lovers are separated by M. de G… M…'s guards:

> Ma malheureuse maîtresse fut donc enlevée, à mes yeux, et menée dans une retraite que j'ai horreur de nommer. Quel sort pour une créature toute charmante, qui eût occupé le

> premier trône du monde, si tous les hommes eussent eu mes yeux et mon cœur! (Prévost, 1990: 79)

Moving effortlessly from his role as observer to the belief that everyone should view Manon after his subjective manner, Des Grieux would keep Manon hidden from the reader's gaze only to demand that the reader co-opt his problematic viewpoint. Through diverse yet complementary perspectives, the reader is enticed into accepting Des Grieux's mediated portrayal of the immaterial and invisible Manon.

The appearance of illustrations within the body of the text necessarily compromises such a strategy of narratorial dominance. Transparent equivalence between text and image is an impossibility, for a text's illustrations do not represent an unmediated copy of an episode, nor do they simply translate the written story into visual form. Instead the illustration may, in Philip Stewart's words, act 'against' rather than 'for' the text, and may 'probe its tacit ambiguities if not its weaknesses' (Stewart, 1992: xi). Peter Wagner adds that 'if images are able to bring something to light (which is the original meaning of illustration), they are equally able to obfuscate, distort or misrepresent. Like verbal texts they can be studies as *representations* and hence as *interpretations*' (Wagner, 1995: 12).The notion that text and image do not reflect one another, that they may be 'dialogical, at times even polylogical and even contradictory' (Wagner, 1995: 161), is pertinent to our discussion of *Manon Lescaut*. When paratextual images reveal to

the reader's gaze the face and body of Manon, whose erotic charge depends at least partially on being hidden, do these intrusive perspectives betray the novel? Does an 'image précise' tell a story different from that suggested by an 'image troublante'?

The first edition of the novel to feature illustrations appeared in 1753, an edition that one scholar has recently called 'a pivotal work in the evolution of the illustrated novel in the French eighteenth century' (Cronk, 2002: 398). Not only the first illustrated edition of this novel, the 1753 text itself saw numerous alterations, most notably the addition of the episode of the Italian prince. This edition includes eight images, two designed by Hubert-François Gravelot and engraved by Jacques-Philippe Le Bas, and the remaining eight designed and engraved by Jean-Jacques Pasquier alone. The illustrations represent the lovers' first meeting, the parlour scene, the dinner with M. de G… M… where Des Grieux plays the fool, the reunion of the two lovers, the episode with the Italian prince, the arrest scene where Manon is confronted with the jewels, the trip to Le Havre and finally Manon's burial. These images (which seem to have been made with Prévost's approval, if not his active participation) (Cronk, 2002: 404), recast the monological narrative. In focusing on the lovers to the detriment of the other characters, these images excise the representatives of morality, such as Tiberge, Des Grieux's father, and the Church (in the parlour scene at St Sulpice there is no crucifix on the wall); in their stead are

depicted the sympathetic characters of M. de T., Marcel the valet and the guards and archers (Sgard, 1995: 170-174).

Although the early illustrations portray the novel's enigmatic heroine, they do not generally depict her with any degree of particularity. An exception is the 1797 edition, where Lefèvre's version of the lovers' arrest depicts Manon in a nightshirt that reveals her breasts (Prévost, 1797: II.102). The heroine's explicitly eroticised depiction clearly recasts the written narrative:

> Nous étions prêts à nous mettre au lit. Il ouvre la porte, et il nous glace le sang par sa vue. Ô Dieu! c'est le vieux G… M…, dis-je à Manon. Je saute sur mon épée ; elle était malheureusement embarrassée dans mon ceinturon. Les archers, qui virent mon mouvement, s'approchèrent aussitôt pour me la saisir. Un homme en chemise est sans résistance. (Prévost, 1990:152)

Whereas the passage skirts over Manon to concentrate on Des Grieux's state of undress (and implied emasculation), Lefèvre's picture reverses this emphasis by placing the semi-naked Manon in the foreground. The tentative use of foreshortening to make her loom out of the illustration adds to the effect. This particular image exacerbates the tendency of all the novel's illustrations, which is to offer Manon as an embodied and erotic object to the external gaze, thereby denying Des Grieux sole possession of his 'belle inconnue'. More than a neutral depiction of an episode in the story, this extra-diegetic image disrupts the subjective

narrative by illuminating the obscure object of desire that it strives to keep hidden.

Just as the novel draws attention to the narrating act, so do the illustrations alert the reader-viewer as to the erotic nature of spectatorship. It is telling that at the very moment that the illustrations first appear Prévost adds the episode of the Italian prince that displays the hero as an object of beauty and desire, entirely by reference to Des Grieux's coiffure. This scene's significance is confirmed by the fact that the only illustration – by Pierre-Clément Marillier – to the novel as it appears in the *Œuvres choisies de Prévost* of 1783, is of this very episode (Cronk and Mander, 1999: 326). Of central importance is the notion that hair signifies beauty, worth and attractiveness; at once part of the body yet in a sense removed from it, hair is ambiguously natural and cultural, and so functions as a privileged site for the production and staging of the self in terms of gender, race, class and indeed politics.[viii] The five occurrences of the word 'cheveux' in the novel refer not to Manon, but rather to Des Grieux as she prepares and presents him to the Italian prince. The dressing of his coiffure appears to last all morning as he becomes an attractive object of her gaze: 'Dans le cours de son travail, elle me faisait tourner souvent le visage vers elle, et s'appuyant des deux mains sur mes épaules, elle me regardait avec une curiosité avide' (Prévost, 1990: 122). The text depicts the presentation of Des Grieux to the prince as a dramatic tableau; 'un spectacle qui ne dut pas

lui causer peu d'étonnement' and as a 'scène' that leaves him speechless. Text and the accompanying image work in tandem to foreground the act of viewing, underscored by the mirror that Manon gives to the prince:

> Voyez, monsieur, lui dit-elle, regardez-vous bien, et rendez-moi justice. Vous me demandez de l'amour. Voici l'homme que j'aime, et que j'ai juré d'aimer toute ma vie. Faites la comparaison vous-même. Si vous croyez lui disputer mon cœur, apprenez-moi donc sur quel fondement, car je vous déclare qu'aux yeux de votre servante très humble, tous les princes d'Italie ne valent pas un des cheveux que je tiens. (Prévost, 1990: 123)

The earlier presentation of Manon as a half-glimpsed object of desire is here replaced by the sight of Des Grieux as the erotic object of someone else's gaze; and this episode is effective precisely because hair is configured as the key element in the deliberate erotic display of the character. Paratextual illustrations, those 'images précises' so contrary to the novel's chiaroscuro aesthetic, thus offer an alternative (because exterior) narrative to Des Grieux's original subjective account, and confirm hair as a central component in the erotics of spectacle.

The apparently frivolous conjunction of hair and desire also features in Clouzot's film *Manon*, but in keeping with its pessimistic retelling of Prévost's tale,[ix] hair takes on a darker significance. Far from being an example of reassuringly nostalgic

cinéma de papa, Clouzot's film – co-written by Jean Ferry – transposes Prévost's story to the first days of the Liberation. Whereas in the novel the protagonists are deported to New Orleans, the film links their fate with that of the Jews as they join a convoy of refugees to the Holy Land, eventually perishing in the desert. The director acknowledged that the move to modernity was deliberate:

> Prévost n'a pas écrit un roman historique: il a tracé une étude de mœurs contemporaines. Les milieux qu'il a dépeints au cours de son intrigue n'existent plus et leur évocation n'offrirait guère qu'un intérêt rétrospectif. […] En somme, je me suis livré au jeu de me demander ce que seraient, ce que feraient de nos jours et très précisément en 1944, au lendemain de la Libération, une Manon, un Des Grieux, un Lescaut (Pilard, 1969: 95-96)

Whilst Clouzot's transposition is ideologically provocative, particularly given the scandal over *Le Corbeau*'s allegory of collaboration, of particular interest at present is his elision of the modern *mise-en-scène* with the demands of the film apparatus.

One way to approach film adaptation is to distinguish between *narrative* and *enunciation*, the former being, in Brian McFarlane's terminology, 'elements of the original novel which are transferable because not tied to one or other semiotic system', the latter being 'the whole expressive apparatus that governs the presentation – and reception – of the narrative'

(McFarlane, 1996: 20). These are not entirely discrete categories in Prévost's novel; given the enunciation's partial nature there are few identifiable aspects of the heroine that may be extracted in their integrity and transferred to the screen. Clouzot does gesture towards Prévost's framing technique (or enunciation) by having Robert Des Grieux – with Manon beside him – recount his adventures to Ange Bouscat, the captain of the ship on which the lovers stow away, but it is debatable if a film can even present 'a consistent psychological viewpoint derived from one character' (McFarlane, 1996: 16). Instead, just as the illustrations challenge the single perspective of Des Grieux's account, so the director's succession of 'images précises' in 623 shots similarly profits from what his chosen medium cannot generally deny – the duty of showing and looking. The film's self-consciously cinematic quality is apparent not only in the epic closing sequences in the desert, and in the fact that Lescaut owns a cinema, but when the lovers awake in a mill after their first night together, the scene is deliberately spectacular, as a script held at the Bibliothèque du film in Paris describes: 'Nous nous apercevons avec eux que la pièce où ils se sont aimés n'a que trois murs, comme au théâtre, la maison ayant été coupée par une bombe.'[x]

From the moment the two lovers appear on screen, they are the object of the camera's insistent gaze; in shot 50 the camera follows the ship's mate from behind as he goes into the hold and in the next shot a close-up matches what the beam reveals, the

faces of Robert and Manon. And while it is not inconceivable that a director might erase the female lead entirely, or partially efface her by veils and other gauzes, as von Sternberg does with Dietrich, Clouzot follows mainstream cinematic practice to place Cécile Aubry, the actress playing Manon, squarely before his lens. His heroine is complicit in her own 'to-be-looked-at-ness'; in shot 78, for example, she uses a Jewish refugee's mirror to examine her face, biting her lips to make them redder, in the next shot she is offered lipstick by another shipmate, and in shot 154 she expresses with brevity her thoughts to Robert on being imprisoned: 'Ça me rendra laide et méchante, c'est tout… Vous me trouvez jolie?'

Details and their meaning are problematic in cinema. Seymour Chatman has written how film depicts a plethora of details but does not describe a single one; the camera presents objects to the viewer but cannot assert an object's quality as a text can. An object's property, he notes, 'emerges by the way' (Chatman, 1981: 124). It is precisely by focusing on Manon in detail that Clouzot's lens monitors her progression from suspected collaborator to possibly redeemed outcast in the desert. Having already noted that hair speaks of sexual attraction and specularity, it is striking to observe that Clouzot benefits from his contemporary setting and a specifically cinematic language to foreground the significance of his heroine's coiffure. To encourage the viewer to focus on the narrative significance and emotive charge of the heroine's hair,

Clouzot profits from his wartime *mise-en-scène* to depict Manon in the first scene of the flashback (shot 115) being pursued by a mob intent on shearing off her locks as punishment for her consorting with German soldiers. Other details reinforce the importance of hair within the film's narrative; this very scene takes place in a bombed-out hairdressers,[xi] Manon's mother was a hairdresser, and in shot 176 the heroine uses a font of holy water in a bombed-out church to check her hair.

The script amply evidences the importance Clouzot attached to Manon's hair, for it has fourteen handwritten notes, all of which refer solely to the hairstyles of the two chief protagonists. That Robert is mentioned in only three of the annotations may indicate how the film (contrary to the Italian prince episode) disavows the male's potentially disruptive beauty.[xii] Manon's hair, however, is described in all but one of the additions; for the sequence in the half-destroyed mill, she has a 'coiff floue – sans raie – avec peigne et frange [sic.]'; for the pedicure sequence (shots 225-39) she has a 'coiffure relevé – frange droite legerement bombée, nuque droite – cotes ondulés [sic.]'; and when Robert's father visits them in a hotel, she has a 'coiff relevée. nuque ondulée, boucles plates dessus, <u>côtes relevés droits</u> [sic.]' (shot 251). Her hair signals her corruption, the script annotations describing it in greatest detail when she appears before Robert in the brothel: 'coiff relevée – nuque droite de biais – cotes relevé avec un cran – frange. Boucles plates dessus [sic].'

The intention here is not to propose an exact semiotics of Manon's fringe and curls, hairpins and combs. But given that the narrative invests her hair with such significance, because it has been so fetishised in a context of post-war austerity, it does serve as a particularly suggestive marker of the heroine's journey from collaborator to prostitute and ultimately to redeemed victim. With almost no dialogue from shot 550 in the deserted ruins, to Manon's death in 600 and her burial in 621, the last moments are predominantly imagistic. The hair that had signified the heroine's frivolity is ruined, even effaced as her 'sinful' flesh fades away, as this new Eve finds salvation in the Holy Land. This emphasis on Manon's redemption is conveyed directly through the camera's lens, that is through mastery of a specifically filmic apparatus, not mediated through the hero-narrator's imaginative reconstruction of events as in the novel.

In conclusion, a word about adaptation, the myth of Manon and fidelity. The move from Prévost's 'images troublantes' via the illustrations of 1753 to Clouzot's 'images précises' shows how another perspective fundamentally recasts a subjective enunciation, but this is not necessarily a betrayal of Prévost's novel. As André Bazin remarks about D'Artagnan, there are some select characters who enjoy an autonomous existence, whose 'original' work is an accidental, even superfluous manifestation of their being (Bazin, 1985: 81). Maupassant, as noted, claims this mythological status for Manon. She may be represented in any number of ways, media, genres and disciplines, yet she exists in

the collective cultural imagination, outside these various texts. Just as the promiscuous heroine desires 'la fidélité […] du cœur' (Prévost, 1990: 147) but refuses to commit her body to one single man, so these various adaptations may be faithful to the novel's spirit if not its form. Embodied in any number of ways, Manon remains an archetype of, in Des Grieux's words, 'un amour fatal' (Prévost, 1990: 61).

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[i] On adaptations of the novel, see Engel (1961: 467-75); Cain (1963: 43-48); and Sgard (1995: 177-87).

[ii] Melding romanticism with surrealism, Ado Kyroi writes about Clouzot's heroine, 'Dans une totale ignorance du mal, dans une instinctive négation du "péché", elle cherche désespérément à être femme tout en réalisant l'amour fou avec l'homme qu'elle aime' (Kyroi, 1957: 400).

[iii] This is probably the opinion of La Barre de Beaumarchais.

[iv] Des Grieux, of course, wrote 'un commentaire amoureux sur le quatrième livre de l'Énéide', which provokes him to exclaim: 'Hélas! […] c'était un cœur tel que le mien qu'il fallait à la fidèle Didon' (Prévost, 1990: 38).

[v] On the idealisation of the heroine, see Jaccard (1975: 71-81).

[vi] See, for instance, Mander (2000: 169-179).

[vii] Although this is from Prévost's own *Pour et Contre*, Deloffre casts doubt on the possibility that Prévost himself may have written it.

[viii] See, for example, the recent collection of essays on hair edited by Angela Rosenthal (2004).

[ix] Jean d'Yvoire asks 'Trouve-t-on dans ce récit un seul personage sympathique? Non. […] Clouzot reste donc le pessimiste que l'on

connaît déjà' (Pilard, 1969: 149-51). For a sample of contemporary reactions to the film, see Bocquet (1993: 57).

[x] The title page reads 'Manon / Un film de Henri-Georges-Clouzot / Scénario et dialogues de H.G. Clouzot et Jean Ferry.' All references will be given to the number of the shot, as noted in this script. It is unclear whose script this was; arguably it belonged to the person responsible for hair and make-up on the set.

[xi] This setting is clarified in an anonymous novelisation of the film; see *Manon, d'après le film de Henri-Georges Clouzot* (1949: 19).

[xii] Mulvey claims that 'the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like' (Mulvey, 1993: 117). For an extended critique of this proposal, see MacKinnon (1997). The hero of Clouzot's film may indeed be de-feminised, but the sequence where the couple fight and kiss in the abandoned church may arguably be read as a parodic deflowering, for the 'bleeding virgin' is the male, not the female partner. The novelisation reads: 'Elle m'avait égratigné la joue de ses ongles de petite chatte. Je saignais. Nous haletions tous les deux. Très gentiment, elle essuya mon sang d'un petit mouchoir qui sentait l'eau de Cologne. C'est seulement alors que je m'en aperçus: elle était jolie, très jolie…' (1949: 21-22).