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This issue is dedicated to Dr. Sheryl Murphy-Manley

Bad, Bad Woman: An Analysis of Carmen and Her Role within Society

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Abstract

Women within operas serve various functions that further the plot or story. Some characters are meant to cause conflict, to give comedic relief, or to support the lead actors. Two important roles involve the “good” woman and the “bad” woman. The audience is able to recognize each character based on dress, behavior, and musical accompaniment. Towards the end of the opera, the “good” woman is rewarded for her proper behavior; meanwhile, the “bad” woman is punished by misfortune or death. This plot device is a way to reflect expected social customs, providing the consequences of improper behavior.

Focusing on the opera, *Carmen*, I will explore elements of the leading woman, Carmen, including the use of exoticism, personality traits, musical accompaniment, and the expected social customs. Using Carmen, I will discuss the role of a “bad” woman in opera, her punishment, and what she represents in the larger scope of appropriate social behavior in the mid-1800s.