

Luigi Illica

Italian dramatist Luigi Illica (1857–1919) wrote librettos for a number of important operas around the turn of the 20th century. He worked with Puccini on the texts of *Manon Lescaut*, *La bohème*, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly* and wrote librettos for many other operas, including Catalani's *La Wally* and Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*.

Illica was born near Piacenza and ran away to sea as a young man. In 1879 he settled in Milan, working as a journalist; during this period he lost part of his right ear in a duel. He began creating theatre works in 1875, and his first libretto – for Antonio Smareglia's *Il vassallo di Szigeth* – dates from 1889. In 1892 Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa became the final two librettists to work on Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, bringing the text to completion after its long gestation. Illica and Giacosa also collaborated on *La bohème*, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*, with Giacosa versifying Illica's drafted scenarios. Illica worked independently on more than thirty further librettos, including a number by Giordano and Mascagni.

Though Giacosa's death in 1906 brought an end to Illica's most fertile period of collaboration with Puccini, Illica worked on *Maria Antonietta*, ultimately never set by Puccini, until he enlisted for military service in 1915 at the age of 58.

