



**The mezzo-soprano onstage and offstage: a cultural
history of the voice-type, singers and roles in the
French Third Republic (1870–1918)**

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SUMMARY

This dissertation discusses the mezzo-soprano singer and her repertoire in the Parisian Opéra and Opéra-Comique companies between 1870 and 1918. Mezzo-sopranos are often cast in operas as secondary characters such as mothers, villains and teenaged boys, but they also have leading roles which can match the dramatic complexity of those of their soprano colleagues. Mezzo-soprano roles exist in all major operatic repertoires, but feature strongly in the French repertoire composed during the Third Republic (1870–1940).

By analysing primary sources such as newspaper articles, contractual documents, correspondence, scores and images, this dissertation reconstructs the mezzo-soprano's history in a pivotal time and geographical location, when mezzo-soprano-led works such as Bizet's *Carmen* (1875), Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila* (1877), and Massenet's *Werther* (1892) were enshrined in the operatic repertoire. Focusing primarily on five mezzo-sopranos — Célestine Galli-Marié (1840–1905), Blanche Deschamps-Jehin (1857–1923), Meyriane Héglon (1868–1942), Marie Delna (1875–1932) and Lucy Arbell (1879–1947) — I discuss the Third-Republic mezzo-soprano in these state-funded opera companies. I begin by examining the mezzo-sopranos' techniques and education, and the realities of their professional lives in the companies. Next, I discuss *Carmen*, *Samson et Dalila* and *Werther* in the context of contemporary issues in the Third Republic, and how the core mezzo-sopranos of this dissertation interpreted their richly-drawn leading roles. Building from this, I finally explore the strong personal ties that three mezzo-sopranos had to their roles — Galli-Marié to *Carmen*, Delna to Marion in Godard's *La Vivandière* (1895) and Arbell to the title role in Massenet's *Cléopâtre* (premiered 1914) — and their effect on a work's performance history.

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I would like to thank my friends who helped me to get through this degree. Thank you to Teresa Kelly, who always provided the right encouragement when it was needed, and to Kyra O'Dwyer, who proved that a lot of tea could solve most problems. Finally, I would like to thank my father, William Higgins. He encouraged my interest in opera, brought me to my first opera performance, and strongly encouraged me throughout this degree. This dissertation simply would not have existed without your support.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation has a single goal: to establish the importance of the mezzo-soprano to the repertoire and rosters of the Parisian Opéra and the Opéra-Comique companies from the foundation of the Third Republic (September 1870) to the end of the First World War (November 1918) — a period of enormous change in operatic tastes and trends which saw the mezzo-soprano's status in French opera grow exponentially. The Third Republic succeeded Napoleon III's Second Empire (1852–70), and after the excesses of the Empire, this regime was focused on a more direct governing approach which conflated the personal and the political. It was strongly divided on gender lines: as part of this policy, men and women were fed radically different views of their paths in life. Men were politically active citizens in this Republic, and women were the mothers of citizens, and were discouraged from pursuing their own political interests.¹ In the arts, its policies included a push for a greater public interest in music, and thus the state-funded Opéra and Opéra-Comique, and their musicians, were at the heart of the Third Republic's musical life.²

The core of this dissertation focuses on the most influential mezzo-sopranos in both companies during this period, which include Célestine Galli-Marié (1840–1905), Blanche Deschamps-Jéhin (1857–1923), Meyriane Héglon (1867–1942), Marie Delna (1875–1932) and Lucy Arbell (1879–1947). Each one of these singers made important contributions to the musical life of the Third Republic. Galli-Marié was the Opéra-Comique's highest-ranking mezzo-soprano from 1863 to 1885 (excluding career breaks and tours), and premiered the title roles in Thomas' *Mignon* (1866) and Bizet's *Carmen*

¹ This was even encouraged in music, as a military music project during this period showed women as supporters of soldiers (another image of men in the Third Republic) and makers of sons (Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 444–47).

² Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France*, p. 84.

(1875). Deschamps-Jéhin was a leading mezzo-soprano in both the Opéra-Comique (1885–90) and the Opéra (1891–97), premiered the role of Margared in Lalo's *Le roi d'Ys* (1888, Opéra-Comique) and played Dalila in the Opéra's premiere of Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila* (1877) in 1892. Héglon was Deschamps-Jéhin's successor as the leading mezzo-soprano of the Opéra, and she was the defining Dalila of the *fin-de-siècle* in the company. Delna portrayed Charlotte in the French premiere of Massenet's *Werther* (1893, Opéra-Comique), and was a highly popular mezzo-soprano who sang for both the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique during her long career. Arbell was Massenet's final major artistic collaborator, creating six roles between 1905 and 1913, including the title role in *Thérèse* (1907) and Dulcinée in *Don Quichotte* (1910).

All of these women were admired not for vocal flair, but primarily for the warmth and beauty of their voices, and in many cases the dramatic investment that they made in their roles. The mezzo-soprano as we recognise her today is a modern conception — the rich timbre and strong middle range that characterise most mezzo-sopranos in the twenty-first century were not seen as markers of a mezzo-soprano voice in the Third Republic, although the presence of the former was often remarked upon in reviews. Mezzo-sopranos were a recognised voice type within musical circles during this time: the Paris Conservatoire trained girls as mezzo-sopranos and published specific manuals for mezzo-sopranos, and both the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique had mezzo-soprano sections to their troupes. However, the insertion of a voice type between a contralto and a soprano created terminological confusion in the press, and many lower-voiced singers were alternately called contraltos and mezzo-sopranos even within the same newspaper. For the purpose of clarity, terminological issues such as these will not be discussed in depth in this dissertation, as they often represent the individual opinions of writers outside of the professional world these singers operated in.

The mezzo-soprano repertoire discussed in this dissertation denotes an expansion both in the number and type of roles that mezzo-sopranos were able to play by the end of the First World War. Previous to 1870, Italian composers such as Donizetti and Rossini had provided *bel canto* roles for lower-voiced female leads, and seventeenth and eighteenth-century composers created supporting and leading male roles which were played *en travesti* by mezzo-sopranos in the absence of *castrati* or *haute-contres*. In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, Verdi wrote roles such as Azucena (*Il trovatore*) and Amneris (*Aida*) — women motivated by anger and revenge — and later wrote the comedic role of Mistress Quickly in *Falstaff* (1893). *Grand opéra* composers (for example, Meyerbeer and Halévy) wrote vocally and psychologically darker second leading roles (discussed further in Chapter One) which not only contrasted with the leading soprano, but also created a solid proto-repertoire for high-voiced mezzo-sopranos in the Opéra. The foundations for a coherent European mezzo-soprano repertoire were in place by 1870, and all that was needed was a set of commercially successful new operas with a mezzo-soprano in the starring role, which would change the leading mezzo-soprano who sang this repertoire into an indispensable member of a company's troupe. This expansion of the repertoire in France after 1870 was such that the dissertation will only discuss four operas in detail: Bizet's *Carmen*, Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila*, Massenet's *Werther* (1892) and Godard's *La Vivandière* (1895), with occasional references to other popular works.

This dissertation utilises a synthesis of opera studies, singer studies, and French-music studies to create its arguments, and owes much to its predecessors in these areas. The opera studies used in this dissertation focus on the issues highlighted by the works, and thus many of them discuss orientalism and social concerns in France during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which is particularly evident in Chapter Two. In the former category, Ralph P. Locke's work has been indispensable: his articles 'A

Broader View of Musical Exoticism’, and ‘Constructing the Oriental ‘Other’: Saint-Saëns’ ‘Samson et Dalila’ inform much of the discussion in Chapter 2.1 (on Bizet’s *Carmen*) and Chapter 2.2 (on Saint-Saëns’ *Samson et Dalila*).³ Clair Rowden’s *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet’s Hérodiade and Thaïs* covers many of the topics in Chapter Two, taking in early Third-Republic views on social issues and orientalist works, as well as the presence of Catholic doctrine in everyday life (which was crucial to the discussion of *Samson et Dalila*).⁴ This era also saw an escalation in both composers and music critics’ fascination with Wagnerian music, and as many works premiered during the first decades of the Third Republic were analysed for Wagner’s influence, Steven Huebner’s *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style* is an essential companion in understanding the debates surrounding these works, and was of particular use in discussing Massenet’s *Werther*.⁵ Whenever the narrative exceeds the boundaries of the Parisian operatic scene, the discussion has been informed by previous academic publications on these areas — for instance, on Elizabeth Kertesz and Michael Christoforidis’ ‘Confronting *Carmen* beyond the Pyrenees: Bizet’s opera in Madrid, 1887–1888’, which covers *Carmen*’s first productions in Madrid in 1887–1888, and Clair Rowden’s article ‘*Werther*, *La Navarraise* and *Verismo*: A Matter of Taste’, which discusses the circumstances surrounding *Werther*’s English premiere in 1894.⁶

³ Ralph P. Locke, ‘A Broader View of Musical Exoticism’, *The Journal of Musicology* Vol. 24, No. 4 (Fall 2007), pp. 477–521; Ralph P. Locke, ‘Constructing the Oriental ‘Other’: Saint-Saëns’ ‘Samson et Dalila’’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* Vol. 3, No. 3 (November 1991), pp. 261–302.

⁴ Clair Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet’s Hérodiade and Thaïs* (Weinsberg: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 2004).

⁵ Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶ Elizabeth Kertesz and Michael Christoforidis, ‘Confronting *Carmen* beyond the Pyrenees: Bizet’s opera in Madrid, 1887–1888’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* Vol. 20, No. 1 (March 2008), pp. 79–110; Clair Rowden, ‘*Werther*, *La Navarraise* and *Verismo*: A Matter of Taste’, *Franco-British Studies* No. 37 (2006), pp. 3–34.

Singer studies technically began with texts such as Catherine Clément's *Opéra ou la défaite des femmes* (*Opera, or the Undoing of Women*) in 1979, which separated the operatic role from the overall musical structure of the opera and criticised the social influences that shape the tragic stories of many operatic heroines, thus reorientating the focus onto the singers playing these roles instead of the composer.⁷ I use a similar approach in Chapter Two, placing the characters and plots of Third-Republic operas in their social and political contexts. Susan McClary further advanced this area with her study on *Carmen* (*Georges Bizet: Carmen*), by emphasising Galli-Marié's input into the opera, and contextualising the character (both literary and operatic) with the social mores of Paris in 1875.⁸ Following on from these precursors, singer studies as a strict subject area has grown exponentially since the beginning of the twenty-first century. While there were some texts on this aspect of opera before 2000 (John Rosselli's *Singers of Italian Opera* being an excellent example), works that strongly focus on female singers' experiences in the operatic profession of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have only emerged since then.⁹ Two examples of works of this kind are Susan Rutherford's *The Prima Donna and Opera: 1815–1930*, and the collection *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century* (edited by Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss).¹⁰ There are also books such as *Performing Salome, Revealing Stories* (edited by Clair Rowden) focusing on performers across the arts (including opera singers) in the context of artistic expression, and Karen Henson's *Opera Acts: Singers and Performance in the Late Nineteenth Century*, which discusses the approaches of four operatic singers (including Galli-Marié) to the acting demands of their profession between 1870 and

⁷ Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* trans. Betsy Wing (London: Virago, 1989).

⁸ Susan McClary, *Georges Bizet, Carmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁹ John Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss, *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

1900.¹¹ However, aside from these two books, many of the texts focus on the experiences of Italian and Anglophone (generally English and American) singers, and it can be difficult to find references to experiences that were individual to those singing in France, and specifically in the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique.

The first decades of the twenty-first century have also seen an increase in publications on the importance of music in the culture of the Third Republic. Texts that explore the relationship between music and politics in the Third Republic include Annegret Fauser's *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair*, Jann Pasler's *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* and the edited volume *French Music, Culture, and National Identity, 1870–1939* (edited by Barbara L. Kelly).¹² Yet, it is not always treated as an isolated era in French history; texts such as *Music, Theatre, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914* (edited by Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist) discuss important theatrical concepts across the four political eras of that timeframe. The discourses around music in the press from the July Monarchy through the Third Republic are also an important part of French-music scholarship, especially as journalism in France developed enormously during the nineteenth century. Katharine Ellis' *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris, 1834–1880* was the first text to explore music criticism in the nineteenth century in depth, and her work remains as an important resource for those seeking to discuss nineteenth-century French music and journalism.¹³ In recent years, primary sources in the form of newspaper reviews have become more widely available;

¹¹ Clair Rowden (ed.), *Performing Salome, Revealing Stories* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013); Karen Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹² Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005); Barbara L. Kelly (ed.), *French Music, Culture, and National Identity, 1870–1939* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008).

¹³ Katharine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris, 1834–1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

this is aided by the Bibliothèque nationale de France's digitisation of newspapers on its Gallica website. Additionally, the Francophone Music Criticism Project's publication of edited and curated collections of reviews (for example, there is a collection on *Carmen*'s first production in 1875) on their website provides a more specialised source for some of these documents. It is mainly by the use of these websites that this dissertation contains a wealth of primary sources to support its arguments.

At the time of this dissertation's completion, there are no published books that directly discuss singers in the context of Third-Republic politics, but there are books which discuss women in the arts. Mary Louise Roberts' *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* includes analyses of the careers and work of the journalists Marguerite Durand (the founder of *La Fronde*) and Séverine, as well as Sarah Bernhardt. There are also anthologies of women's writings and issues from the time — for example, the edited volume *Feminisms of the Belle Epoque: A Historical and Literary Anthology* (edited by Steven C. Hause and Jennifer Waelti-Walters) includes excerpts written by both men and women on the political and personal issues in women's lives between 1889 and 1914.¹⁴ There are, however, no writings from operatic singers in this anthology, but that is not surprising — the period of 1870–1918 saw the creation of a market for memoirs by retired operatic singers, but this was not necessarily a global one. Most French singers did not publish memoirs, and only two of the singers mentioned in this dissertation participated in this market — the soprano Emma Calvé (who was the Opéra-Comique's most popular *Carmen* after Galli-Marié) published *Ma vie* in 1922, and Delna published her memoirs in *La Liberté* between 17 January and 6 April 1925, but she stopped the timeline at April 1895 after the premiere of Godard's *La*

¹⁴ Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Steven C. Hause and Jennifer Waelti-Walters (ed.), *Feminisms of the Belle Epoque: A Historical and Literary Anthology* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

Vivandière, less than three years into her career.¹⁵ The Société d'histoire de Montmorency et de sa région compiled these articles into a short booklet in 2006, but there is no indication in this text as to why the articles stop at such an early stage in her career and to date, her memoirs have not been translated into English.¹⁶

As well as declining to write memoirs, many of these singers have no 'core biographies', but they have been mentioned in works concerning other people — for example, the composers they worked with.¹⁷ The closest that any author in the twentieth century came to creating a full biography of Galli-Marié was Mina Curtiss in *Bizet and his World* (1955); this was the first English-language text to discuss Galli-Marié as an active participant in the composition of *Carmen*.¹⁸ Arbell is mentioned in many biographies of Massenet; for example, James Harding's 1970 biography of the composer went into some detail on the singer, but his view of her was clearly negative.¹⁹ Delna is the subject of some smaller-scale French-language scholarship; for instance, Vincent Giroud's article 'Un compositeur et son interprète — Bruneau et Delna' discusses the working relationship that she had with Alfred Bruneau.²⁰ There have been full-length biographies of some other singers such as Pauline Viardot and Sibyl Sanderson, but biographies tend to take a confrontational view towards other singers who were active at the same time as their subject — for instance, Rosine Stoltz (Viardot's predecessor at

¹⁵ Emma Calvé, *My Life*, trans. Rosamond Gilder (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1922). Delna also did a series of interviews with *La Rampe* in 1930–31, which were labelled as memoirs but infrequently published.

¹⁶ Marie Delna, *La carrière d'une grande cantatrice: souvenirs de Marie Delna: publiés par La Liberté du 17 janvier au 6 avril 1925*, ed. Henri Decharbogne (Montmorency: Société d'histoire de Montmorency et de sa région, 2006).

¹⁷ The composers have also benefited from variable levels of interest from musicologists — of the composers who are mentioned in this dissertation, Bizet, Massenet and Saint-Saëns are the most prominent, but Godard has gained little discussion beyond his *Grove* article.

¹⁸ The edition consulted in this dissertation is: Mina Curtiss, *Bizet and his World* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1959).

¹⁹ James Harding, *Massenet* (London: Dent, 1970).

²⁰ Vincent Giroud, 'Un compositeur et son interprète — Bruneau et Delna', in *Aspects de l'opéra français de Meyerbeer à Honegger*, ed. Jean-Christophe Branger and Vincent Giroud (Lyon: Symétrie, 2009), pp. 95–135.

the Opéra) has been discussed in highly negative terms by Viardot's biographers.²¹ There have been challenges to these received histories: for instance, Mary Ann Smart has focused on Stoltz's reception in her articles 'The Lost Voice of Rosine Stoltz' and 'Roles, Reputations, Shadows: Singers at the Opéra, 1828–1849' which seek to discuss the singer in context of the Opéra's history, and to separate the fact from the sometimes vitriolic fiction.²²

It is in the scholarship on Stoltz and Viardot that most of the existing academic writings on mezzo-sopranos can be found, but there have also been some previous doctoral dissertations on different aspects of the mezzo-soprano and her repertoire. This dissertation is one of the largest works at graduate level on the mezzo-soprano, but it cannot claim to be the first. Previous PhD dissertations have included studies of mezzo-sopranos in Rossini operas, *travesti* roles, lyric mezzos, and issues with the Fach system, but many of them are accompanying documents for final recitals, and thus are quite short.²³ Naomi André's PhD dissertation, 'Azucena, Eboli and Amneris: Verdi's Writing for Women's Lower Voices', is one of the only full-length works on low-voiced roles and how they come to be written, and includes discussions of the singers who premiered the three roles in the title.²⁴ The Irish mezzo-soprano Edel O'Brien also completed a Masters' thesis titled 'The Important Contribution of the Mezzo Soprano to Nineteenth

²¹ For example, a recent Viardot biographer, Michael Steen, refers to Stoltz as a 'prize bitch' (Michael Steen, *Enchantress of Nations: Pauline Viardot — Soprano, Muse, Lover* (Cambridge: Icon Books Limited, 2007), p. 36).

²² Mary Ann Smart, 'The Lost Voice of Rosine Stoltz', *Cambridge Opera Journal* Vol. 6, No. 1 (March 1994), pp. 31-50; Mary Ann Smart, 'Roles, Reputations, Shadows: Singers at the Opéra, 1828–1849', in *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. David Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 108–128.

²³ Marilyn Poppino, 'Performance Parameters of Mezzo Soprano Roles in Selected Rossini Operas' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1992); Joy Ratcliff, 'Women in Pants: Male Roles for the Mezzo-soprano or Contralto Voice' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, 1997); Brittnee Marie Siemon, 'An In-depth Examination of the Defining Parameters of the Lyric Mezzo-soprano: Its Place in History and Future in Pedagogical Study and Performance Venues' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Carolina, 2007); Seung-Hee Han, 'Transcending the Fach: A Search for Identity Inside and Out of Mezzo-soprano Repertoire' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, 2006).

²⁴ Naomi André, 'Azucena, Eboli and Amneris: Verdi's Writing for Women's Lower Voices' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1996).

Century French Opera’, which does come close to the topic of this dissertation, but has a broader geographical scope, and different chronological boundaries.²⁵

In terms of methodology, the dissertation’s main focus is on gaining a historically correct view of the works and singers, and thus it is slanted strongly in favour of primary sources. I will utilise reception theory in my discussion of these singers, as contemporary reviews of these women are crucial to understanding how their reputations developed, rather than how they came to be perceived with the benefit of hindsight by more modern scholars. Reception theory has its downfalls; the use of reviews is necessary for the discussion of voices and technique (found in Chapter 1.1), but as Botstein notes:

Our understanding of how musical texts were received remains contingent on our grasp of historical performance practices and conditions. When it comes to late-nineteenth-century violin performance, for instance, David Milsom’s 2003 monograph makes plain that any certainty about how music was played, even in the nascent era of recording, is hard to come by. It is even more difficult to locate the links between performance practices and styles and the way past listeners perceived their expressive significance. What we may hear as stilted and vulgar — types of portamento or rubato, for instance — clearly signified something different for past audiences. To make matters more difficult, performances before the twentieth century were documented only through recollection in language. Without a firm sense of historical performance practices and conditions as well as markers linking responses to notated musical events and expressive emendations, the suggestion of meaning in reception becomes tricky. Only through individual and collective memory and the translation into descriptive language do accounts of performances survive. We have little else to help correlate the text and past performance. And the ‘text’ is more often than not the particular performance rather than the musical notation.²⁶

This awareness of the subjectivity of these sources is essential to discussing interpretations from a different era, which had different performance practices and concepts of good and bad performances. Additionally, Everist has stated that reception history has often been manipulated by biographers in the name of reception and canon;

²⁵ Edel O’Brien, ‘The Important Contribution of the Mezzo Soprano to Nineteenth Century French Opera’ (unpublished Masters’ thesis, Maynooth University, 1995).

²⁶ Leon Botstein, ‘Music in History: The Perils of Method in Reception History’, *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 89, No.1 (2006), pp. 1–16: p. 2.

he has advocated letting the subject speak for itself with the scholar translating and interpreting it.²⁷ In French opera this manipulation is no more apparent than in the reception of Bizet's *Carmen*, which has until recently been discussed as a unilateral critical excoriation in 1875, and a triumphant return to the Opéra-Comique in 1883 that did justice to the composer's memory, while the reality was more nuanced. This is a situation I hope to avoid in this work by allowing the primary documents to speak for themselves; the groundwork laid in Chapter One is intended to give some idea of the real performance practices of the first decades of the Third Republic so that we, as twenty-first-century readers, can get some sense of the real expectations and tastes of the operagoing public of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Parisian operagoers. The secondary analysis will be done mostly through comparisons with contemporary issues (Chapter Two), and a combination of reception theory and poststructuralist theory (Chapter Three), including the concept of these singers as Muses to major composers, and changes in the power dynamic of that relationship in the wake of the literal Death of the Author.

Chapter One focuses on the history of the mezzo-soprano in French opera, and the careers of singers within the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique. It utilises singing treatises and historical texts dating from the eighteenth century to the 1910s to show what techniques mezzo-sopranos were taught, and what they were meant to sing. The second half of the chapter discusses their professional lives in the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique, focusing on repertoire, contracts and salaries. Chapter Two discusses three core mezzo-soprano roles: Carmen in Bizet's *Carmen*, Dalila in Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila* and Charlotte in Massenet's *Werther*, and how their character types fit into Third-Republic society. This chapter takes in Third-Republic attitudes towards topics such as

²⁷ Mark Everist, 'Reception Theories, Canonic Discourses, and Musical Value' in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 378–403: pp. 378–79.

orientalism, female sexuality and female adultery, and uses them to contextualise the reception of the heroines of these three operas.

Chapter Three explores three operas in terms of the contributions of the women who created, or were designated to create, their leading mezzo-soprano roles. The first section returns to *Carmen*. Galli-Marié's collaboration with Bizet on the opera has been well-documented by Bizet scholars, and this section adds to the area by showing the influence that Galli-Marié had after the first production. It chronicles how she remained in the public consciousness through press coverage of her 1879–82 European tour, and the shadow that she cast over her successors' interpretations of her signature role. The second section deals with Delna's involvement in Godard's *La Vivandière*. In spite of a previous production without her in Brussels two years previously, Delna's reputation as the *créatrice* of the title role of Marion in the Opéra-Comique ran as a thread through the opera's history in Paris. The military element of the opera morphed throughout its history from a simple manifestation of patriotism in an era which rewarded such rhetoric, to a more idealistic expression of the harsh realities of war in 1914 and 1915, all with Delna as its figurehead. The third and final section explores Arbell's working relationship with Massenet, and how it complicated the posthumous premieres of his final operas. At the heart of this discussion is Arbell's first civil case against the Massenet family and various figures involved in the premiere of *Cléopâtre*. In this case, she posited that as Massenet's designated interpreter of the title role, she, and not Maria Kuznetsova, should have automatically been granted the role in the world premiere in February 1914, and that it should have gone to a company in Paris, not to the Opéra de Monte-Carlo. With the aid of contemporary newspaper reports, I will establish how Arbell and her lawyers were able to engineer unprecedented wins in the civil courts of two countries with nothing more than three short letters from the composer, proving that

in this era of changing tastes and professional possibilities for women, theoretically anything was possible.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MEZZO-SOPRANO AS A THIRD-REPUBLIC PROFESSIONAL MUSICIAN

1.1: Techniques and training

The first aim of this dissertation is to become familiar with the female vocal types and the singing techniques of the time, both in a general sense, and wherever possible, with examples discussing specific singers. The mezzo-soprano as a voice type dates back to the middle of the eighteenth century, but the formation of a repertoire that catered to its particular strengths and weaknesses is a nineteenth-century invention, and terminologically, it was not the only medium voice for women.²⁸ In addition to the main ‘mezzo-soprano’ type, there were several intermediate voice types present in Parisian singing methodology in the early decades of the Third Republic; each one was based on an Opéra or Opéra-Comique singer’s voice, and had its own specific training and techniques. This was not a phenomenon limited to female singers — for example, a *martin* or *baryton-martin* (named after Jean-Blaise Martin [1768–1837]) was a type of high baritone in the Opéra-Comique — but the specialist mezzo-soprano voice types appear to have endured the longest. The earliest mezzo-soprano sub-type in the Opéra-Comique was the *dugazon*, which was named after Louise-Rosalie Lefèbvre (1755–1821), who went by her stage (and married) name of Madame Dugazon. Dugazon was active for over two decades (1774–1795) in the Opéra-Comique, and she created sixty roles for the company ranging from *ingénues* at the start of her career to matrons at the end.²⁹ Her longest-standing legacy was her own voice type in the company, and unlike

²⁸ The term seems to have originated in the early 1750s: the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that the term ‘mezzo-soprano’ first appeared in 1753, and it is mentioned in Marpurge’s *Historisch-kritische Beyträge zur Aufnahme der Musik* (1754–55). Sources: J.B. Steane, *Voices, Singers and Critics* (London: Duckworth, 1992), p. 82; Elizabeth Forbes, Ellen T. Harris, Owen Jander, J.B. Steane and Gerald Waldman, ‘Mezzo-soprano’, in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane L. Root <www.oxfordmusiconline.com> [accessed 10 March 2015].

²⁹ Elizabeth Forbes, ‘Dugazon [née Lefèbvre], Louise-Rosalie’, in *Grove Music Online* ed. Deane L. Root <www.oxfordmusiconline.com> [accessed 18 December 2014].

most voice types, it reflected the entire development of her voice: singers who were hired as *petit dugazons* played *ingénues*, and *mère dugazons* played matrons.

Falcons, named after Cornélie Falcon (1814–1897) were a second type of high mezzo-soprano, which was characterised by a wide range, and atypical agility in the upper range; this was exploited in Falcon’s own roles by long, high-ranged vocalises. In the Third Republic, the term was used in official scores for roles such as Margared in Lalo’s *Le roi d’Ys* (1888), Marion in Godard’s *La Vivandière* (1895) and Prince Charmant in Massenet’s *Cendrillon* (1899) to indicate that a mezzo-soprano role had a high tessitura.³⁰ The third type of intermediate medium-to-high voice was a *galli-marié*, named after Célestine Galli-Marié (1840–1905), the first Mignon and Carmen. This voice type proliferated mostly in the provinces, where it came to have subcategories such as *première dugazon galli-marié* and *contralto galli-marié*, but they occasionally appeared in the Opéra-Comique roster: for example, they were included in the 1905–06 troupe announcement, possibly as a tribute to Galli-Marié, who had died in September 1905.³¹ Galli-Marié herself was the only high-profile mezzo-soprano to use one of these labels, entering the Opéra-Comique in 1863 as a *jeune dugazon*; while other famous mezzo-sopranos sang *falcon* roles like Margared and Marion, they were not referred to as *falcons*.³²

Both Parisian opera houses had a long history with mezzo-soprano singers, and had some influence on the overriding vocal techniques of this period. *Grand opéra*, the dominant genre in the Opéra from the 1820s to the 1880s, gave many *falcons* and high

³⁰ Édouard Lalo, *Le Roi d’Ys: Légende Bretonne: Opéra en trois actes et cinq tableaux* (Paris: Heugel, 1888), p. 1; Benjamin Godard, *La Vivandière: Opéra-Comique en 3 actes de Henri Cain, Musique de Benjamin Godard, Partition Chant et Piano, Nouvelle Version* (Paris: Choudens, 1895), p. 4. Prince Charmant is also referred to as a ‘soprano de sentiment’ in the piano-vocal score (Jules Massenet, *Cendrillon: Conte de Fées en 4 actes et 6 tableaux* (Paris: Heugel, 1899), p. 7).

³¹ Author Unknown, ‘Paris et Départements’, *Le Ménestrel* 3 October 1880, p. 351; Louis Reboul, ‘Toulon’, *L’Art dramatique et musical. Journal satirique* 15 October 1906, p. 20; André Nède, ‘La Saison de l’Opéra-Comique’, *Le Figaro* 24 October 1905, p. 2.

³² Votre Voisin de Stalle, ‘Correspondance’, ed. B. Jouvin, *Le Figaro* 17 August 1862, p. 2.

mezzo-sopranos opportunities to shine alongside the leading sopranos of the troupe as the genre evolved to accommodate two leading female roles.³³ One was a coloratura soprano role, and the other was a vocally darker and more declamatory role better suited to a mezzo-soprano, who often played a mother or an unsuccessful love rival.³⁴ The demand for a singer with a warmer vocal timbre and the range and abilities of a soprano created what musicologist Rodolfo Cellini called a ‘mezzosoprano begli’, which became a transitional type of singer between a generic lower soprano, and the dramatic mezzo-sopranos of Verdi’s later works such as Eboli (*Don Carlos*, 1867) and Amneris (*Aida*, 1870).³⁵ Rutherford credits Verdi with ‘creating’ the dramatic mezzo-soprano by both pushing up the tessitura of the mezzo-soprano’s role, and making her use more vocal power.³⁶ This new type of singing was common to all voice types — the wider introduction of the dramatic tenor voice (complete with the ubiquitous ‘tenor C’) forced all singers to increase the power and volume in their singing.³⁷ André argues that Verdi’s later heroines were a natural progression from the ‘mezzosoprano begli’ of *grand opéra*, and that it explains the size of these roles; while they are not clearly the leading female roles, they are much larger than most secondary ones.³⁸ From the ‘mezzosoprano begli’ repertoire, two roles were played by the Opéra’s mezzo-sopranos with some regularity until the turn of the twentieth century: Fidès in Meyerbeer’s *Le prophète* (1849), and Léonor in Donizetti’s *La favorite* (1840), an opera which deviates from the format by placing the darker mezzo-soprano in the leading position — a move that has been

³³ Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 2.

³⁴ Naomi André, ‘Azucena, Eboli and Amneris: Verdi’s Writing for Women’s Lower Voices’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1996), pp. 392–93.

³⁵ André, pp. 253–56.

³⁶ Susan Rutherford, *Verdi, Opera, Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 5, p. 112.

³⁷ Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 90.

³⁸ André, p. 63. However, the final versions of these lower-voiced roles differ from their original conceptions greatly: Azucena was originally meant to be the lead in *Il trovatore*, while Eboli’s role in *Don Carlos* was augmented during the composition process (Source: André, p. 84, p. 173).

attributed to a specific mezzo-soprano's preference rather than that of the composer. The first three decades of the Third Republic marked when the *falcon* and the mezzo-soprano in this company began to diverge in earnest: *falcon* roles through the nineteenth century included Isabelle and Alice in Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* (1831), Rachel in Halévy's *La Juive* (1835), Valentine in Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* (1836), Séluka in Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* (1865) and Sîta in Massenet's *Le roi de Lahore* (1877), and Henson suggests that *falcons* were the first Opéra singers to take on Wagner's leading roles.³⁹ In comparison, the company's leading mezzo-sopranos sang Fricka and Ortrud, as the dominance of the dramatic soprano type (which the *falcon* was trained to copy) pushed mezzo-sopranos back into secondary roles in this particular genre. In the Opéra, the size of the theatre, the Palais Garnier (in constant use from January 1875), also influenced who was able to sing there and thus pushed the emphasis further towards the dramatic voice types, as some singers could not fill the auditorium with sound and in particular reach as far as the amphitheatre (the top tier at the back of the hall), but singers like Delna could do so with ease.⁴⁰

As the company's core repertoire changed, the two long-surviving leading mezzo-soprano roles took on more importance as the only opportunities that many mezzo-sopranos had to sing in a leading capacity. They also had personal links with the company, as they were premiered by two of the Opéra's most famous mid-nineteenth century mezzo-soprano prima donnas. John of Leiden's mother Fidès — Pauline Viardot's (1821–1910) signature role with the company — was a role from a specific singing school: that of Viardot's father, Manuel García Senior (1775–1832), who had trained both her and her sister Maria Malibran. García Senior's school was continued by

³⁹ Karen Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 170, p. 131. André states that Isolde and Kundry were amongst the roles first sung by *falcons*, but does not specifically tie this casting practice to the Opéra (p. 63).

⁴⁰ Paul Dukas, 'Chronique Musicale', *La revue hebdomadaire* June 1898, pp. 120–21.

his son Manuel García Junior (1805–1906), and by his son’s students, which included Mathilde Marchesi (1821–1913), a famed teacher of the *bel canto* technique. Its greatest marker was the vocal versatility of its graduates: Viardot had been trained to sing across an enormous range (covering as much of the available repertoire as possible), and the roles that she created were so wide-ranged that alternative vocal lines had to be added to scores for subsequent interpreters (Fidès being a prime example). Vocally it is an example of the ‘darker’ *grand opéra* soprano role, combining high-ranged coloratura with sheer vocal power in contrast with the lighter role of Berthe, Jean’s fiancée. Fidès was sung by all of the leading mezzo-sopranos of the early Third Republic from Pauline Guéymard-Lauters to Méyriane Héglon, but *Le prophète*’s popularity went into decline in the mid-1890s, as the patrons’ tastes — and thus the repertoire — veered towards the Wagnerian.⁴¹

The other long-standing core role in the Opéra’s mezzo-soprano repertoire was Léonor in Donizetti’s *La favorite* (1840), which was written for Rosine Stoltz (1815–1903). Stoltz was an infamous figure in the Opéra’s history, dominating the repertory choices of the company between the late 1830s and 1846 with the aid of her partner Léon Pillet, who was the Opéra’s director. Stoltz’s strengths lay in declamation, and was more comfortable singing extended low-ranged phrases rather than the higher-pitched bravura passages favoured by composers at the time, so the roles that were commissioned for her are marked with echoes of her physical voice.⁴² Léonor also made unusually modern demands on the interpreter in terms of expression, for as Smart states, Léonor requires ‘not a pretty voice but a dramatic one’.⁴³ It focuses on a more

⁴¹ Pauline Guéymard-Lauters (1834–1908) was the Opéra’s leading mezzo-soprano from the late 1850s to the early 1870s. She premiered roles such as Eboli in Verdi’s *Don Carlos* (a role originally meant for Rosine Bloch) in 1867, and La reine Gertrude in Thomas’ *Hamlet* in 1868. Source: André, pp. 245–50.

⁴² Mary Ann Smart, ‘The Lost Voice of Rosine Stoltz’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* Vol. 6, No. 1 (March 1994), pp. 31–50: p. 49.

⁴³ Smart, ‘The Lost Voice of Rosine Stoltz’, p. 49.

declamatory type of singing, which was yet to develop into a technical requirement for most Opéra singers: as Parr notes, the ‘heavy’ singing of this time was a fuller, louder approach to coloratura-infused vocal lines, prizing richer vocal tone over the *leggiere* style of the *bel canto* era.⁴⁴ It also, possibly due to Stoltz’s preference for outright leading roles, favours the ‘dark’ soprano as the lead, with a lighter soprano as a secondary confidant; to this end, she has even been blamed for the end of the ‘dual-lead’ format in *grand opéra* because she refused to compete with other sopranos.⁴⁵ *La favorite*’s central position in the Opéra’s mezzo-soprano repertoire meant that every mezzo-soprano in this study who aimed to join the company was familiar with the role either as an interpreter, or a potential one, but like *Le prophète*, the rise of Wagnerian opera and the attendant fall of *grand opéra* at the turn of the twentieth century meant that after 1900, the opera disappeared from the repertoire almost completely.

Musically, these works were a relic from an irretrievable past — for instance, the standard diapason in Paris was lowered by almost a semitone to create a standard European diapason in 1859, changing the pitch of all works — but without a whole new repertoire to replace it, they remained relevant to the Opéra’s mezzo-sopranos during this period.⁴⁶ They were also affected by the *falcon* and dramatic soprano’s dominance over the new Wagnerian repertoire of the company: the rest of the Opéra’s Third-Republic mezzo-soprano roles were secondary ones, with the exclusion of Dalila from Saint-Saëns’ *Samson et Dalila* (first performed by the company in 1892), a role which was played almost solely by Héglon and Ketty Lapeyrette (1880–1960).⁴⁷ The waning

⁴⁴ Sean M. Parr, ‘Melismatic Madness: Coloratura and Female Vocality in Mid Nineteenth-Century French and Italian Opera’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 2009), p. 2.

⁴⁵ Mary Ann Smart, ‘Roles, Reputations, Shadows: Singers at the Opéra, 1828–1849’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. David Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 108–128: pp. 122–23.

⁴⁶ Parr, p. 98. This change was meant to take effect from 1 July 1859, but its uptake in the city was reportedly slow.

⁴⁷ This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.2.

decades of *grand opéra* saw the rise of more dramatic and Wagnerian works, and with them, more dramatic and taxing forms of singing. This meant that lighter, lyric singing was displaced by a greater focus on declamation, and the requirement to sing over orchestras that were not only larger, but more focused on louder instruments (for instance, Wagnerian music can lean heavily on the brass sections for dramatic effect).⁴⁸ In the Opéra, singers active in the 1880s and 1890s bore the brunt of this new movement, and had to adapt their voices to avoid being displaced.

A decade later this trend for vocal declamation reached the Opéra-Comique, driven by a combination of new repertoire and new, influential singers. While the Opéra-Comique's signature genre, *opéra comique*, was not as heavily focused on creating leading roles that could only be sung by high sopranos, its mezzo-soprano repertoire was, in comparison with the Opéra's, a much newer invention. Roles such as Mignon (Thomas' *Mignon*, 1866) and Carmen — two creations by Galli-Marié — formed a solid base for a leading mezzo-soprano repertoire; these operas were in such demand that they reached their 1000th performances in May and December 1904 respectively.⁴⁹ Unlike *grand opéra*, which had typical aural characteristics, *opéra comique* itself was a genre only held together by its mixture of sung and spoken dialogue and this allowed for a plethora of influences in each opera, yet its singing style was distinctive enough that it merited an *opéra comique* subject in the Paris Conservatoire's curriculum.⁵⁰ It relied less on heavy orchestration than *grand opéra* and its successors, and the Opéra-Comique's theatre was always smaller than the Opéra's, so singers who were vocally less inclined toward heavy singing, like Galli-Marié, flourished here until the company began to bow

⁴⁸ Declamation existed in all European operatic composition styles, but its importance grew exponentially in the final decades of the nineteenth century (Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, p. 239).

⁴⁹ Georges Loiseau, 'La Millième de Mignon', *Le Figaro* 13 May 1904, pp. 1–2; Raoul Aubry, 'La Soirée Parisienne: La millième de 'Carmen'', *Gil Blas* 24 December 1904, p. 3.

⁵⁰ M. Elizabeth, C. Bartlet and Richard Langham-Smith, 'Opéra comique' in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane L. Root <www.oxfordmusiconline.com> [accessed 24 November 2016] (1. Terminology).

to dominant trends in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Wagnerian works such as *Le roi d'Ys*, Massenet's *Werther* (1892, produced 1893) and d'Indy's *Fervaal* (1896, produced 1897) acted as a bridge between more classically lyrical roles like Mignon, and roles in more dramatic realist works such as *Cavalleria rusticana*, which imported what is often called the *verismo* movement into the company.⁵¹ While stalwarts of this era such as Puccini had few roles for mezzo-sopranos in their operas, the Opéra-Comique's repertoire had its own take on the movement which included some important mezzo-soprano roles. Massenet's *La Navarraise* (1894) was written as a star vehicle for Emma Calvé, a famous Santuzza (as well as the company's main Carmen at the time); the title role in Massenet's *Thérèse* (1907, produced 1910) was created for Lucy Arbell, who reportedly encouraged Massenet to include theatrical declamation in the opera, and Dukas' *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* was written for the singer and actress, and longstanding Carmen, Georgette Leblanc (1869–1941).⁵² *La Navarraise* was the most successful of these three operas by a large margin (*Thérèse* was revived a few times before 1918, and *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* only once), but the occasional additions of works like these gave a mezzo-soprano's potential repertoire a striking breadth, taking in mid-eighteenth century works (Gluck's *Orphée*), mid-nineteenth century *opéra comiques* (*Mignon* and Maillart's *Les Dragons de Villars*), and these more modern operas, some of which had received their world premieres with the company.

This era also embraced a greater emphasis on acting in opera, and in particular the sublimation of the singer into their role. The form of acting used in the first half of the century, histrionic gestures, was later demonised as redundant and lazy, but much

⁵¹ While the movement has some clear markers, such as an emphasis on violent, highly emotionally-charged plots, it is a word that some musicologists avoid using, as it is too much of a blanket term (Clair Rowden, 'Werther, La Navarraise and Verismo: A Matter of Taste', *Franco-British Studies* No. 37 (2006), pp. 3–34: pp. 6–7).

⁵² Jules Massenet, *My Recollections*, trans. H. Villiers Barnett (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1919), p. 261. This contribution will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.4.1.

like the realism prized in the final decades of the century, it was appropriate for its time.⁵³ There were some who clung to the timed gestures (using stances based on classical poses which changed at rehearsed points in pieces) long after these histrionics were succeeded by realism — accounts of former leading Opéra mezzo-soprano Rosine Bloch (1848–1891) in the Théâtre Lyrique’s production of *Samson et Dalila* in 1890 suggest that either she believed that Dalila was a more statuesque character who deserved a more classical interpretation, or as many critics insinuated during her time in the Opéra, she was uninterested in keeping up with new trends.⁵⁴ Singing actresses such as Calvé and Leblanc — picking up on the concept’s beginnings in the early nineteenth century — were responding both to the increased acting demands in the genre as a whole, and to the demands of composers such as Verdi and Wagner, who wanted singers to set aside their personalities and absorb themselves in the music and the characters.⁵⁵ There had been singers who did this before the *fin-de-siècle* — as Chapters Two and Three show, Galli-Marié was always professionally and personally invested in her roles, and Carmen most of all — but in this time, a singer was increasingly called upon to be an excellent singer and actress on stage: they could no longer neglect one in favour of the other.⁵⁶

In terms of the mezzo-soprano roles of the Third Republic, the overall trends in vocal writing suggest a rejection of coloratura, and the widespread adoption of a blend of lyrical and dramatic declamatory singing that was individual to each singer, depending on their abilities. After centuries of dominating vocal writing, coloratura singing was a rarity in the late nineteenth century. As Parr notes, Massenet and Delibes

⁵³ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, pp. 205–07.

⁵⁴ Stephen Studd, *Saint-Saëns: A Critical Biography* (London: Cygnus Arts, 1999), p. 182. El Zigali from *La Comédie* summarised this criticism of Bloch succinctly in his review of Diaz’ *La coupe du roi de Thulé* by comparing her with a complacent Jenny worker (‘Mlle est de l’école de Jenny l’ouvrière, elle se contente de peu’). Source: El Zagali, ‘Opéra’, *La Comédie* 19 January 1873, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, p. 207, pp. 212–13; Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century*, pp. 13–15. The *verismo* movement has often been credited with creating this concept of the ‘actress-singer’, but it is a much earlier invention (Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, p. 328 note 7).

⁵⁶ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, pp. 212–13.

were the only composers to indulge in such writing, and even then only rarely; what was once a trademark of both French and Italian opera was shunned by most *fin-de-siècle* composers in favour of heavier declamatory singing.⁵⁷ However, Massenet's use of coloratura was striking, as it was not the exclusive domain of sopranos in his work: the role of Dulcinée in *Don Quichotte* (1910) was written for Lucy Arbell with the intention of showing a different side to her normally dramatic singing style:

I recall, too, that knowing her vocal abilities I brightened the role with daring vocalizations which afterwards surprised more than one interpreter; and yet a contralto ought to know how to vocalize as well as a soprano. *Le prophète* and *The Barber of Seville* prove this.⁵⁸

Massenet's enlightened approach to roles like Dulcinée was rare within his late compositions, as all of the other roles that Arbell played for him were marked by her skill for, and possibly outright tendency towards, dramatic declamation.⁵⁹

The change from coloratura-infused roles to dramatic vocal displays was an enormous shift in tastes from previous generations, as coloratura had been, to quote Parr, 'a normative solo singing style since the invention of opera'.⁶⁰ In addition to an overall shift in compositional interests and techniques on the part of the composers (many of whom attended the institution), the Paris Conservatoire had a hand in the decline of this specialism amongst the majority of singers, which was symptomatic of a greater change in vocal pedagogy, and the pedagogues themselves. Most of the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique's Third-Republic mezzo-sopranos were trained by the Paris Conservatoire and reputable private teachers with connections to the institution, which reflected a wider change in singers' backgrounds. A few mezzo-sopranos from the older generation came from very musical families, which meant that they could benefit from shared experience

⁵⁷ Parr, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Massenet, *My Recollections*, p. 276.

⁵⁹ This is discussed at greater length in Chapter 3.4.1.

⁶⁰ Parr, p. 2.

as well as taught knowledge from a very young age. Unlike many of her successors, Galli-Marié came from a historically musical family; her father, a Paris Conservatoire graduate, was a former tenor (and later baritone) of the Opéra and Opéra-Comique troupes, having understudied with Gilbert Duprez in the former and premiered the role of Tonio in Donizetti's *La fille du regiment* (1840) in the latter.⁶¹ Her sisters Irma and Paola were operetta singers, and Galli-Marié sang with Irma in the Opéra-Comique in Poise's *La Surprise de l'amour* and Pessard's *La Char*. While Galli-Marié's daughter did not follow her mother into professional singing, Galli-Marié eventually passed her knowledge on to her niece Jeanne Marié de l'Isle (1872–1926), by coaching her to play Carmen and Mignon in the Opéra-Comique.⁶² Rosine Bloch had three younger sisters who were also singers, Lucie, Mathilde and Céline, and she sang in concerts with Lucie and Mathilde in the early stages of their careers (late 1870s–early 1880s), but there was no sense of long-term collaboration between the sisters in a similar manner to the Marié de l'Isles.⁶³ In comparison, even though Deschamps-Jéhin and Delna had siblings, they were the only members of their families to pursue a professional musical career. This era saw the end of multigenerational operatic families such as the Marié de l'Isles (as well as the Garcías and the Devriès) in French opera — as Henson notes, Galli-Marié's background gave her a 'slightly old-fashioned air' in comparison with a rising demographic of well-heeled first-generation opera singers — which also ended

⁶¹ Jules Prével, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 28 August 1879, p. 3.

⁶² Vincent Giroud, 'Liner Notes', *The Complete Recordings of Marie Delna and Selected Recordings of Jeanne Marié De L'Isle* <http://www.marstonrecords.com/delna/delna_liner.htm>.

⁶³ Little is known about Bloch sisters' voices, but Lucie was described in one review as an *ingénue*, possibly suggesting that she was a soprano. Lucie eventually joined the troupe of the Théâtre de Renaissance in Paris in 1882, Mathilde joined the Théâtre de Nouveautés in the same year and Céline joined the Théâtre Royal in Antwerp in 1888 as a *chanteuse légère*, but none of the sisters was able to attain a level of fame similar to that of Rosine (A. de Saint-Aubin, '4^o Concert de Monte-Carlo', *Le Figaro* 15 February 1879, p. 3; Jehan Valter, 'L'Hiver de 1882–1883 dans les Théâtres de Paris' *Le Figaro* 22 August 1882, p. 3; Jehan Valter, 'L'Hiver de 1882–1883 dans les Théâtres de Paris' *Le Figaro* 26 August 1882, p. 3; Author Unknown, 'Nouvelles Diverses', *Le Ménestrel* 21–27 October 1888, p. 343).

generations of accumulated knowledge.⁶⁴ While the Blochs received outside training (and at least Rosine attended the Paris Conservatoire), Célestine, Irma and Paola Marié de l'Isle were trained by their father, and were undoubtedly influenced by his experiences rather than by those of a stranger connected to the Conservatoire. In comparison with these legacy singers, whose knowledge bases spanned generations, the Paris Conservatoire functioned as a producer of homogenous singers of various types. It was designed to provide the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique with musicians, and its heavy curricular focus on the repertoires of these companies helped to shape singers into ideal new recruits who would fit into the then-current roster, to the exclusion of other vocal styles.⁶⁵

It was central to the production of new mezzo-sopranos in Paris in this period, and some of its teachers' publications show the progress from all singers receiving a generic form of training to the mezzo-soprano's recognition as a separate type of singer from sopranos and contraltos, who needed a more tailored training regime. The Paris Conservatoire's sway was such that almost every mezzo-soprano who attained the leading rank in either the Opéra or Opéra-Comique was influenced by their teaching methods. Bloch, Richard, Deschamps-Jéhin and Lapeyrette were graduates of the Conservatoire, and Galli-Marié, Delna and Héglon were students of graduates (Mécène Marié de l'Isle for Galli-Marié, and Rosine Laborde for Delna and Héglon). It was established as a replacement for Gossec's *École du chant* in the Opéra in 1795, and quickly became the model of an organised music school in Europe; it also maintained ties with the government, and like the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique was held to a

⁶⁴ Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century*, p. 55; Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, p. 82. The Devriès (from the Dutch surname de Vries) family was active across three generations — it comprised Rosa (1828–1889), her children Jeanne (c.1850–1924), Fidès (1852–1941), Maurice (1854–1919) and Hermann (1858–1949), and Maurice's son David (1881–1936).

⁶⁵ Jane Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 55.

cahier des charges.⁶⁶ In the late 1790s the newly-established school, which was searching for its pedagogical identity, sought treatises and input from experienced independent teachers. Amongst the published books that teachers submitted to be enshrined as required reading for singing students, one text stands out because it is the earliest publication in the Bibliothèque nationale de France's database to mention the mezzo-soprano. The composer and singing teacher Florido Tomeoni (1755–1820) submitted his *Théorie de la musique vocale, ou des dix règles qu'il faut connaître et observer pour bien chanter* to the board of the newly-established Conservatoire as a possible textbook in 1798.⁶⁷ An Italian who had lived and taught in Paris since 1783, his perspective on French technique was disdainful (he stated that French *portamento* and breathing techniques led to a retching effect), as were his views on how the French treated their lower-voiced singers:⁶⁸

The contralto voice is limited to the penultimate *mi* [e''] on the piano, at the highest *fa* [f'']; but it has no lower limits, the same for the mezzo-soprano voice, which is limited to the final *sol* [g''] of the piano. These two voices are very highly thought of and much sought-after in Italy; if we asked for the reason, we would find it in their resemblance to the sounds of the cello, which is the most touching and appropriate musical instrument to express tender and sweet feelings; moreover, these voices, having no shrill notes, never tire the ear or affect it unpleasantly. [...]

The French school does not cultivate in their women the voice of the *bas-dessus*, nor the *demi-dessus*, if it is not in padding out [ensembles] and in choirs. It is often a curiosity to hear French women, especially those who are destined for the theatre, and to whom nature has denied a soprano voice, torment and shout themselves hoarse to reach the high notes: this comes from an old custom

⁶⁶ Henri Lavoix *fils* and Théophile Lemaire, *Le chant: ses principes et son histoire* (Paris: Heugel et fils, 1881), p. 324; Richard Somerset-Ward, *Angels & Monsters: Male and Female Sopranos in the Story of Opera* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 163. Lully had technically started a singing and declamation school along with the creation of the Opéra, which was situated on the rue Saint-Honoré from 1698 to 1726, but 1795 was the founding date of the first official conservatoire in Paris (Lavoix and Lemaire, pp. 360–61). Part of the Paris Conservatoire's influence on European teaching (particularly in Italy) was because the First Empire government set up conservatories based on the model of the Paris Conservatoire wherever they gained control of the local government (for instance, in some states of Italy [John Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 110]).

⁶⁷ Florido Tomeoni, *Théorie de la musique vocale, ou des dix règles qu'il faut connaître et observer pour bien chanter* (Paris: C. Pougens, 1798), p. 131.

⁶⁸ 'Florido Tomeoni (1755–1820)', <http://data.bnf.fr/14789616/florido_tomeoni/> [accessed 7 March 2016]; Tomeoni, p. 18, pp. 27–28

of French theatre, which demands that people who present themselves there receive the knowledge of the repertoire.⁶⁹

This was not his only observation on the impasse between France and Italy involving preferred voice types (Tomeoni later commented that the two countries had opposing views on *haute-contres* and tenors), but here he highlighted the mezzo-soprano's established and even valued place in Italian opera at the end of the eighteenth century, and how France had yet to discover the voice type's value.⁷⁰ The text does not feature any specific exercises or repertory suggestions, however, focusing rather on Tomeoni's opinion of the Italian school's better use of techniques such as *portamento* and breath control, as well as outlining the appropriate times to embellish or edit a composer's work.⁷¹

Tomeoni's methods were not accepted by the board, and it was only in the 1850s that a real curriculum for mezzo-sopranos was created, with a method by Auguste-Mathieu Panseron (1795–1859) appearing in 1855.⁷² Panseron was an established member of the Paris Conservatoire's staff, and the author of two similar treatises — one for soprano and tenor, and the other for contralto, baritone and bass. He explained within his preface that the mezzo-soprano's belated recognition as a voice type was the reason behind this specialised publication:

⁶⁹ 'La voix de *contralto* se borne au pénultième *mi* du clavier, dont la dernière touche est *fa*; mais en descendant elle n'a point de bornes, de même que la voix de *mezzo-soprano*, qui se borne au dernier *sol* du clavier. Ces deux voix sont fort estimées et très-recherchées en Italie; si l'on en demandait la raison, on pourrait la trouver dans leur ressemblance avec les sons du *violoncelle*, qui est l'instrument musical le plus touchant et le plus propre à donner de l'expression aux sentimens tendres et doux: d'ailleurs ces voix n'ayant point de sons criards, ne fatiguent jamais l'oreille et ne l'affectent pas désagréablement [...] L'école française ne cultive pas dans les femmes la voix de *bas-dessus*, ni celle de *demi-dessus*, si ce n'est dans les remplissages et dans les chœurs. C'est souvent une curiosité d'entendre les Françaises, sur-tout celles qui se destinent au théâtre, et à qui la nature a refusé une voix de *dessus*, se tourmenter et s'égosiller pour attraper les sons aigus: cela vient d'un ancien usage du théâtre français, qui exige des personnes qui se présentent pour s'y faire recevoir, la connaissance du répertoire.' Tomeoni, pp. 51–53.

⁷⁰ Tomeoni, pp. 56–57. Tomeoni stated that *haute-contres* were a joke in Italy and tenors were valued, and that it was the opposite in France.

⁷¹ In this last suggestion, his argument was that a singer is allowed to change a composer's written work if there is an 'implied agreement' in the music. Tomeoni divides these alterations into 'agrémens' (long alterations) and 'broderies', short embellishments that could either delight or tire an audience (p. 29).

⁷² This was preceded by *Mezzo-Soprano: 25 vocalises et 25 exercices* in 1845.

We are no longer where we were thirty years ago, when professors only considered a pupil worthy to study singing when the compass of her voice extended from the low C of the Soprano to the A, B, and even to the C above the staff. In France at the present time, as in Italy, the range of the voice is no longer an indispensable qualification. It is now acknowledged that women have, like men, three distinct classes of voices — the Soprano, extending to C, the Mezzo-Soprano to G or A, and the Contralto to F. Certainly the following artists, Malibran, Viardot, Pisoni, Malanotti, Alboni, Degiorgi, Righetti, Pasta, Stoltz, Tedesco, &c., had and have beautiful voices, but not one of them a Soprano.

Composers said formerly, ‘we will not write principal parts for Contralto or Mezzo-Soprano since there are no such voices;’ and professors replied, ‘Why cultivate voices for which no one writes?’ Nevertheless, the genius of one composer [Rossini] has triumphed over the first of these obstacles, and taken the initiative in overcoming the difficulty. [...] The French repertory is enriched by [Halévy’s] *La Reine de Chypre*, [Halévy’s] *Charles VI*, *La Favorite*, *Le Prophète*, [Auber’s] *La Corbeille d’Oranges*, &c. There is a vast field for singers to explore, and we do not doubt that comic operas will also augment the list, for they have already taken the first step with the opera of [Massé’s] *Galathée*. It is therefore now understood that there are three varieties of female voices.⁷³

This introduction reveals a lot about changing attitudes in singing pedagogy: it was only by setting apart range from natural talent (and Rossini’s initiative) that the majority of teachers were willing to train lower-voiced singers, and this had belatedly resulted in a demand for both mezzo-soprano repertoire and singers (in comparison with Italy at least). In France, the late 1840s and early 1850s appears to have been the turning point for the recognition of mezzo-sopranos and contraltos in vocal pedagogy, and several high-profile teachers were eager to see this imbalance rectified: for example, in 1847, García complained in the first volume of his *École de García* that voice teachers neglected or misunderstood the contralto voice and range in their methodologies and he stated that in doing so, these teachers deprived the musical public of one of the most precious resources of the voice.⁷⁴ Panseron’s method was a response to a longstanding gap in the Paris Conservatoire’s curriculum, and his connections meant that his work

⁷³ Auguste-Mathieu Panseron, *Complete Method of Vocalization For Mezzo-Soprano*, translator unknown (Philadelphia: Theodore Fresser, 1863), preface.

⁷⁴ Manuel García, *École de García. Traité complet de l’art du chant en 2 parties* (Paris: E. Troupenas et Cie, 1847), p. 20.

was accepted by the board of the Conservatoire itself, as evidenced by a letter from the directors in the 1863 edition, which strongly advocated the treatise's use by the Conservatoire's voice teachers.⁷⁵ His text was not as clearly based on personal experience and preference as Tomeoni's, but as a teacher who was already in the fold, he did not have to prove the individuality of his methods — this was a supplementary text to his other two books, not a ground-breaking new method for teaching mezzo-sopranos as being completely distinct from other singers.

The Paris Conservatoire operated within strict age limits: from 1878, students were admitted from nine at the youngest, and twenty-two at the oldest; the students of the *sofège* (*solfeggio*) class also had to be thirteen or older.⁷⁶ This rule for the *sofège* class marked the age at which singing students could begin their serious training for the stage, as *solfeggio* was the subject of professional technique within the curriculum. *Chant* classes taught them the music, but *sofège* allowed them to master it to the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique's standards. These frameworks gave order and pace to the students' education, and it kept them in training for the correct period of time before they presented themselves for evaluation at the *concours*. The annual *concours* of the Paris Conservatoire acted as a final, competitive recital for students, and its results could give a singer's career a much stronger start that was by no means guaranteed through independent auditions with smaller houses, or indeed with the two major state-funded Parisian companies. Awards were divided into *prix* (generally *premier* and *deuxième*) and *accessits* (from *première* to *troisième*); the latter category functioned as a 'special mention' but a *premier prix* especially could give a student access to a Parisian opera company with near-instant affect. Winners of the *premier prix* were offered an

⁷⁵ Panseron, preface.

⁷⁶ A. Bardoux, 'Réorganisation du Conservatoire National de Musique et de Déclamation', *Le Ménestrel* 15 September 1878, p. 338.

immediate contract with the Opéra and a starting salary of 5,000 francs per annum. This salary, as will be elaborated on later in this chapter, was an important status symbol by itself, because it gave the young (possibly even teenaged) singer a higher salary than some singers who had been with the company for decades, and it was guaranteed to rise further if the new recruit fulfilled their performance quotas and stayed within the boundaries of their contract. The Paris Conservatoire was conceived as an institution to provide professionals for the state's musical institutions — which extended to its function as a producer of singers for the two Parisian companies, but by the end of the nineteenth century, the Conservatoire was thought to be producing singers just for the Opéra.⁷⁷ In response to the repertory demands of this company, the curriculum focused heavily on works by Meyerbeer, Gounod and Donizetti until 1905, when Gabriel Fauré reformed the curriculum.⁷⁸ Fauré's reforms were intended to produce singers who could perform more music (including lieder), and give more consideration to the historical techniques of their performances.⁷⁹ The effect of these policies was immediate: the winner of the 1906 female *chant* category in the *concours* sang 'Gretchen am Spinnrade' rather than the usual operatic pieces.⁸⁰

The connection between the Conservatoire and the most prestigious posts in the arts was well-known; Marnold, in praising the Schola Cantorum's greater independence, said that 'to be a graduate of the Paris Conservatoire [...] means professional privileges', and the advantages that these graduates received were evident even before their *concours*.⁸¹ In addition to their highly-specialised educations, the Paris Conservatoire's

⁷⁷ Fulcher, p. 27.

⁷⁸ Fulcher, p. 55.

⁷⁹ Katherine Bergeron, *Voice Lessons: French Mélodie in the Belle Époque* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 3; Fulcher, p. 145. There was an attempt in the 1870s to reform the Conservatoire, but Fauré was the first director to make a real effort to change the outdated curriculum after this (Bergeron, p. 191).

⁸⁰ Bergeron, p. 3.

⁸¹ Fulcher, pp. 55–56.

singing students occasionally sang in the chorus of the Opéra; this undoubtedly gave the students a professional edge on their privately tutored counterparts as they were acclimatised to singing on a massive stage in front of a large audience before their debuts — and when that time came, all that was left to do was to distinguish themselves as soloists.⁸² The Paris Conservatoire also equipped their students for a career in another area — they prepared singers to be active in the concert circuit, which was an excellent form of self-promotion. It also became a more viable alternative to a stage career throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries — for example, in England Clara Butt’s career was almost entirely based around concerts, and in France Claire Croiza (1882–1946) was renowned as both an operatic and concert singer. This concert training was influenced and advanced by their teachers — for example, Duprez formed his own coterie known as the ‘École Duprez’ (of which Deschamps-Jéhin was part in her student days), which gave small concerts.⁸³ The students of singing teachers with connections to the Paris Conservatoire also gained experience in the salon and private concert circuit, which allowed them to show off their repertoire (by singing the main arias from their roles) and make valuable contacts. Laborde was able, through her influence, to give Delna the opportunity to sing at private concerts under her real name of Marie Ledant, which would have enhanced her reputation in Paris before her audition for the Opéra-Comique in March 1892, and made her hiring a foregone conclusion.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, Delna never credited Laborde for all that she did for her pre-Opéra-

⁸² Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2009), p. 8; H. Moreno, ‘Semaine Théâtrale’, *Le Ménestrel* 29 June 1879, p. 244.

⁸³ H. Moreno, ‘Semaine Théâtrale’, *Le Ménestrel* 13 April 1879, p. 156.

⁸⁴ Giroud, ‘Liner Notes’, *The Complete Recordings of Marie Delna and Selected Recordings of Jeanne Marié De L’Isle* <http://www.marstonrecords.com/delna/delna_liner.htm>. Delna’s brief mentions of her auditions in her memoirs suggest that she was an unknown in Paris before she made her debut, but with multiple salon performances during her education it is impossible that she wasn’t well-known in musical circles as Marie Ledant before she signed her contract and changed her name. She also left out a concert in 1891 where she sang music from *Les Troyens* and *Carmen* to an audience that included Carvalho (Vincent Giroud, ‘Un compositeur et son interprète — Bruneau et Delna’, in *Aspects de l’opéra français de Meyerbeer à Honegger*, ed. Jean-Christophe Branger and Vincent Giroud (Lyon: Symétrie, 2009), pp. 95–135: p. 97).

Comique career, instead stating that a friend arranged her audition with Gaudemar (the administrator who heard her first audition).⁸⁵ There is also evidence that Massenet first met Arbell on the salon circuit (when she was singing under her real name as Georgette Wallace), as he had dedicated two songs ('On dit' for mezzo-soprano or baritone in 1901, and 'Les yeux clos' for mezzo-soprano or baritone in 1903) to her before her Opéra debut in 1903; it is unclear who taught Arbell, but as the granddaughter of Sir Richard Wallace (who was one of the wealthiest men in Paris), she would have had a similar level of access to these salons as a student of a high-profile teacher.⁸⁶ In spite of this, the only aspect in which Arbell's wealth made her experience of salons easier than any other student was that she already had social status that other singers did not have, and therefore would have been able to socialise as an attendee as well as perform.⁸⁷ All of these privileges came from talent, ambition and in some cases material wealth, but it is clear that either through the Paris Conservatoire or a Conservatoire-connected teacher these singers were given an advantage over their less fortunate contemporaries in gaining a contract with the Opéra or the Opéra-Comique early in their careers.

Little evidence remains of the prized educations that these singers received, but there are hints in singing manuals, which focused on building solid technique rather than outlining specific interpretations of current repertoire (most likely due to copyright reasons). Singing manuals are the most technical and specialised source for contemporary technique, as they were geared toward a specific and highly educated group: aspiring musical professionals, and their teachers. These were written by professional singing teachers, and represented a rich but specialised publishing niche by

⁸⁵ Marie Delna, *La carrière d'une grande cantatrice: souvenirs de Marie Delna: publiés par La Liberté du 17 janvier au 6 avril 1925*, ed. Henri Decharbogne (Montmorency: Société d'histoire de Montmorency et de sa région, 2006), p. 5.

⁸⁶ Laurent Bury, 'Lucy Arbell: la légataire contrariée', *Forumopera.com* 6 August 2012 <<http://www.forumopera.com/actu/lucy-arbell-la-legataire-contrariee>> [accessed 25 July 2014].

⁸⁷ Rosselli, p. 182. This division between the guests and performers was breaking down in Arbell's time, but it was rare for a singer to be a performer and a guest at a party or salon.

the middle of the nineteenth century in France — Oscar Commettant stated in 1861 that he knew of sixty-six methods of singing published in the country to that date, suggesting a growing corpus of knowledge.⁸⁸ 1861 also proved to be a turning point for singing manuals; Monahan noted that a roughly equal number of ‘empirical’ and ‘scientific’ texts on the voice were published in this year, but by 1891, the market was purely scientific.⁸⁹ This new, more scientific branch of singing theory was inspired by the discovery of the vocal cords by Manuel García Junior in the 1850s through the use of his laryngoscope. Some teachers adopted the apparatus as a pseudo-scientific predictor of a singer’s voice type, examining their students’ throats with the laryngoscope and basing their training regime on it, but some of them later admitted that it was impossible to tell the difference even between a soprano and a contralto by using this method.⁹⁰

Texts on singing published between 1870 and 1918 divide into two categories: medical texts by doctors (such as Gouguenheim and Lermoyez’ *Physiologie de la voix et du chant, hygiène du chanteur* and Castex’s *Maladies de la voix*), and medically informed manuals by professional singing teachers.⁹¹ The authors in the former category were more interested in the mechanics of singing, and how singers damaged their voices (a problem that these doctors witnessed first-hand). They did not have any claims to knowledge of either safe singing practices, or to the correct method for the fashionable singing techniques of the time. Many of the medically-informed manuals were much the same as any pre-laryngoscope publication — the only difference was that a chapter on physiology, complete with diagrams, was inserted into the early part of the text before progressing onto the usual chapters on voice types and *solfeggio*. This new scientific

⁸⁸ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, p. 92.

⁸⁹ John Potter, *Vocal Authority: Singing Style and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 55–56.

⁹⁰ A. Bouyer fils and E.J. Moure, *The Abuse of the Singing & Speaking Voice*, trans. Macleod Yearsley (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1910), pp. 40–42.

⁹¹ A. Gouguenheim and M. Lermoyez, *Physiologie de la voix et du chant, hygiène du chanteur* (Paris: A. Delahaye et E. Lecrosnier, 1885); André Castex, *Maladies de la voix* (Paris: C. Naud, 1902).

bent to singing-related texts does not make them into a perfect and accurate imprint of contemporary singing techniques, however. Singing manuals represent an idealised version of the voice and its techniques upon completion of studies, but many singers operated at an increasing remove from the methods of their initial vocal training, and picked up or lost various mannerisms as new repertoire was added to their daily workloads.

As mentioned earlier in the section, in addition to creating the laryngoscope (and broadly influencing all late-nineteenth century singing manuals), García was a teacher himself, and continued with his father's method of teaching. His approach — adapted from his father's technique of making students learn the notes before the lyrics — was to teach general vocal technique, and then use arias as case studies for specific styles and techniques.⁹² He also focused on the position of the larynx in his theories, and formulated his *coup de la glotte* theory with his knowledge of glottal movement.⁹³ To quote Stark, 'the *coup de la glotte* is a technique of beginning a tone, including both the 'setting up' action of the vocal muscles prior to phonation (prephonatory set), and the actual initiation of phonation'; this is prepared for through the stance and long slow breath, which is then executed as follows:⁹⁴

After you are thus prepared and when the lungs are full of air, without stiffening either the throat or any part of the body, but calmly and easily attack the tones very distinctly with a light stroke of the glottis on a very clear [a] vowel. The [a] will be taken well right at the glottis, in order that no obstacle may be opposed to the emission of the sound. In these conditions the tones should come out with ring and roundness... It is necessary to prepare the stroke of the glottis by closing it, which stops and momentarily accumulates some air in the passage; then, much as a rupture operates as a means of relaxation, one opens it with an incisive and vigorous stroke, similar to the action of the lips in pronouncing the consonant [p]. This stroke of the throat also resembles the action of the palatal arch performing the movement necessary for the articulation of the consonant [k].⁹⁵

⁹² Parr, pp. 43–44.

⁹³ Parr, p. 45.

⁹⁴ James Stark, *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 12.

⁹⁵ Stark, pp. 12–13.

This was the cornerstone of his teaching, but it was controversial. Most singing teachers thought that it was not only nonsense, but something else entirely: those who used it incorrectly allowed the air to build up until its release made the vocal folds rebound violently against each other and caused permanent damage, which meant that García and former students such as Marchesi and Jenny Lind spent years defending it.⁹⁶ His formulation of the *coup de la glotte* came during his time in the Paris Conservatoire, and through his lessons and those of his students, it became a widespread technique across the nineteenth century.⁹⁷ According to Marchesi, it became a scapegoat for the vocal problems of singers at the turn of the twentieth century, with singers such as Jean and Édouard de Reszké, Nellie Melba, Emma Eames and Emma Calvé giving talks in New York to already-convinced audiences on the damage their (bad) *coup de la glotte* technique had done.⁹⁸ The technique itself was safe — tellingly, this highly-publicised criticism was in support of Henry Holbrook Curtiss' competing manual *Voice Building and Tone Placing* — but García's methodology was in some other ways outdated by the end of the nineteenth century.⁹⁹ His belief was that a singer could either possess vocal power or flexibility, and his training programme did not allow for a singer who could do both; it also relied heavily on the *bel canto* composers and Mozart — repertoire that García Senior had specialised in, but appeared increasingly rarely on the stages of the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁰ Many of García's pupils were sopranos (the most famous example being Lind), but he was not a specialist in the voice type. Some other teachers in the latter part of the nineteenth

⁹⁶ Stark, pp. 14–15; Daniela Bloem-Hubatka, *The Old Italian School of Singing: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2012), pp. 19–22. It was also thought by Lucie Manén that this method did not use air pressure from the lungs, which was a key part of *bel canto* technique. García was blamed by many twentieth-century pedagogues for the decline of *bel canto* singing (Parr, p. 45 note 41).

⁹⁷ García was a Professor of Singing at the Paris Conservatoire from 1835 (Parr, p. 44).

⁹⁸ Stark, p. 18.

⁹⁹ Stark, p. 18. Curtiss was a staff doctor with the New York Metropolitan Opera.

¹⁰⁰ Parr, pp. 46–47.

century had the ability to specialise in subcategories of voice types — for example, Marchesi produced professional coloratura sopranos in the final decades of the century despite a declining market for coloratura singers.

None of the mezzo-sopranos in this study published a singing manual, only passing their techniques on to their singing students. Many of them had a second, post-stage career as teachers: Galli-Marié taught in Paris and Nice, Deschamps-Jéhin taught in Monte Carlo, and both Delna and Marié de l'Isle stayed in Paris, where the majority of students could be found. Yet, none of these women produced any new stars, and their appeal as teachers lay rather in their own former glories. What we do have from these women's training is the texts of some of their teachers. Rosine Laborde, Delna's teacher, published a method, as did Gilbert Duprez, who was one of Deschamps-Jéhin's teachers during her time in the Paris Conservatoire, but in terms of determining the techniques of specific mezzo-sopranos, Laborde's is far more informative as she was the main teacher of several famous mezzo-sopranos.¹⁰¹ Mécène Marié de l'Isle, Galli-Marié's father and teacher, published a treatise on singing called *Formation de la voix, vocalises et exercices de prononciation*, but I have been unable to find a copy.¹⁰²

Laborde (1824–1907) published her *Méthode de chant* in 1899. She dedicated her book to Emma Calvé, her most famous student, but her contributions to the training of mezzo-sopranos in early Third-Republic Paris cannot be overlooked: as well as Delna, she trained Jeanne Gerville-Réache (1882–1915) and was one of Héglon's teachers before she entered the Opéra. Her training was a mixture of Conservatoire and private instruction — she entered the Paris Conservatoire at age nine, and achieved a *premier prix* in *sofège* at thirteen before leaving to study with Francesco Piermarini (c. 1790–

¹⁰¹ Moreno, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel* 13 April 1879, p. 156.

¹⁰² Jules Prével, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 19 August 1879, p. 3. It is important to note that Mécène Marié de l'Isle started his career as a double-bassist with the Opéra-Comique before moving into singing.

1860), an Italian tenor.¹⁰³ Her career as a teacher had unusual longevity: she devoted herself to this career full-time from 1866 until her death.¹⁰⁴ Of the mezzo-sopranos she taught, Delna was the most open to her influence because Laborde was her first teacher, but in her later years she was critical of Laborde's methods. Laborde was so impressed at her first meeting with the fourteen-year-old Delna, she reportedly exclaimed that she was 'another Malibran', and this had a heavy influence on her training, much to Delna's chagrin.¹⁰⁵

Did she not maintain, with an inconceivable obstinacy, that I had a soprano voice? Consequently, she made me sing songs quite outside of my register, such as the famous 'Ange purs, ange radieux' from the finale of *Faust!* [...] My voice is, it's true, very wide, since it covers three octaves... But it is nonetheless clear that I sing low D [d] and low notes with characteristic ease. It was not necessary to take a great number of lessons for my conviction in this regard to be definitively set...¹⁰⁶

Delna's criticism of Laborde's decision to train her as a soprano (as García Senior had done to Malibran and Viardot seventy years previously) was intended to show how well Delna knew her own voice at an early age, but it provides a valuable link to Laborde's *Méthode de chant* because the default voice type in the book is a soprano. Yet, Delna's description of Laborde's methods goes directly against Laborde's own advice on most singers, whether or not they conformed to the expectations of their voice type:

Each voice also has its own character that it belongs to the teacher to preserve without spoiling it. This is why it is important to work with the voice in its average range, which we list below:

Soprano: g'-g''

Mezzo-soprano: a third below the soprano

¹⁰³ Rosine Laborde, *Méthode de chant* (Paris: Henry Lemoine, 1899), frontispiece.

¹⁰⁴ Laborde, frontispiece.

¹⁰⁵ Jean-Charles Lefebvre, 'A Voice of Purple and Gold', in *Marie Delna: Enregistrements 1903–1918*, trans. Patrick Bade (La Celle-sur-Morin: Malibran Records, 2010), p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ 'N'affirmait-elle pas, avec une inconcevable obstination que j'avais une voix de soprano? En conséquence, elle me faisait chanter des morceaux tout à fait en dehors de mon registre, tel le fameux 'Ange purs, ange radieux' de l'apothéose de *Faust!* [...] Ma voix est, il est vrai, très étendue, puisqu'elle parcourt trois octaves... Mais il n'en est pas moins évident que je donne le ré grave et les notes basses avec une aisance caractéristique. Il ne m'avait pas été nécessaire de prendre un grand nombre de leçons pour ma conviction à cet égard fut définitivement assise...' Delna, p. 5.

Contralto: c'-c''

Tenor: g-g'

Baritone: a third below the tenor

Bass: c-c'

However, for certain strident bold voices, it is necessary to ascend into the highest register beyond the limit indicated above.¹⁰⁷

Laborde advocated the use of *solfeggio* to begin lessons, which acted as a warm-up for a training programme of drilling on chromaticism throughout the singer's range (a skill that increased in value as contemporary music moved away from traditional tonality), as well as older prized techniques such as long vocalises.¹⁰⁸ Her method focused quite early on the importance of *portamento*, and many of the exercises value vocal breadth and flexibility — while she never advocated for outrageously large vocal ranges, her exercises show an emphasis on a fluid use of the entire range; for example, exercise thirty-one, a chromatic arpeggiation, reaches from d' to c'' throughout the course of four pages (imitating an aria in length and difficulty).¹⁰⁹ Delna did not appreciate Laborde's presumed mislabelling of her voice, but if her training reflected the published manual, then the ease with which she sang across three octaves could be in part attributed to her first teacher. While this stress on training across a wide vocal range made her techniques stand out in a crowded market, Laborde did not make it into a cornerstone of her methodology. Singers who boasted of wide ranges (natural or created) were a joke in the musical circles of Europe, with some sopranos claiming to have four octaves at their disposal; the new scientific approaches of García Junior and Laborde's time were aimed at avoiding such unsustainable practices.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ 'Chaque voix a d'ailleurs son caractère propre qu'il appartient au professeur de conserver sans le dénaturer. C'est pourquoi il importe de travailler la voix dans son étendue moyenne que nous indiquons ci-après: Soprano: g'-g''; Mezzo-soprano: une tierce sous soprano; Contralto: c'-c''; Ténor : g-g'; Barytone : une tierce sous ténor; Basse: c-c'. Cependant, pour certaines voix stridentes cuivrées, il est nécessaire de monter dans le registre aigu au-delà de la limite indiquée plus haut.' Laborde, preface.

¹⁰⁸ Laborde, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Laborde, pp. 57–61.

¹¹⁰ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, p. 91.

In these texts, newer and role-specific technique is absent, with older concerns such as *portamento* and diction often coming to the fore instead because these were techniques that were highlighted by many as lacking or poorly executed in singers. *Portamento* (written as *porte de voix* in French scores) was a divisive technique in French singing schools. It appears in every training manual from Tomeoni to Panseron to Laborde, but Tomeoni in particular criticised its use. Tomeoni’s complaint was in line with the rest of his opinions on French singing — that French singers were butchering Italian tradition — but in some situations it was seen as an unnecessary approach to a piece: for instance, in an interview quoted later in this section, Hégлон stated that *portamento* was an inappropriate method to use in ‘Printemps qui commence’ from *Samson et Dalila*. Despite its mixed reception amongst singing experts, *portamento* was still used in new Third-Republic music, featuring in operas such as *Carmen*:

Figure 1.1: Use of *portamento* in Carmen’s Seguidilla¹¹¹



The problems with *portamento* stemmed from poor examples of its use; it still had a function in operatic music, but it was identified as a technique which was often lazy or sloppy in its execution, producing an undesirable slurring effect; in the wider musical community, there were much more damaging issues at hand — namely, the poor diction and pronunciation that plagued singers from those in training to those on the largest stages in France.

Diction, and the pronunciation of the French language was a major educational concern both in the wider education system and in vocal pedagogy. It created divisions

¹¹¹ Georges Bizet, *Carmen: Opéra Comique en Quatre Actes* (Paris: Choudens, 1875), pp. 98–99.

in operatic troupes along generational lines: the more targeted approach towards French-language education taken in the first decades of the Third Republic meant that singers born after 1870 had better diction than their older peers.¹¹² Amongst the older singers, these problems often manifested themselves onstage in the early performances of new additions to the companies' rosters, as Henri Heugel (writing as Henri Moreno) of *Le Ménestrel*'s review of Deschamps-Jéhin's Opéra-Comique debut shows:¹¹³

May she also take care that her low notes are not flattened and she watches her pronunciation. Do not pronounce: 'Je mâre' for 'je meurs'. For an artist who appears to us to be intelligent, these small issues should disappear quickly, if she applies herself to it.¹¹⁴

This is not to say that all singers of this era were lazy or remiss in their technique — there were singers in the companies whose diction in particular was marked out by critics as impressive: for instance, Saint-Saëns praised Galli-Marié's talent for good diction in an anniversary piece on *Carmen*.¹¹⁵ Also, music writer Camille Mauclair picked out singers including Jeanne Raunay (the Opéra-Comique's first Guilhen in d'Indy's *Fervaal*) as having 'in direct opposition to singers in the Opéra, [...] cultivated a subtler performance practice, adapting their vocal faculties to an entirely new aesthetic purpose, even going so far as to elaborate the principles of a new kind of diction.'¹¹⁶ Diction and pronunciation was a particular concern in the García school, and García Junior dedicated the first chapters of the second volume of his *École de García* to the issue, more than fifty years before it was highlighted by the majority of pedagogues as a concern.

¹¹² Bergeron, pp. 186–87.

¹¹³ Bergeron, p. 11, pp. 71–72.

¹¹⁴ 'Qu'elle veille aussi à ne pas trop écraser les sons d'en bas et qu'elle soigne son articulation. Ne pas prononcer: *Je mâre* pour *je meurs*. Comme l'artiste nous paraît intelligente, ces petits défauts disparaîtront rapidement, si elle veut bien s'y prêter.' H. Moreno, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel* 18 October 1885, p. 363.

¹¹⁵ Camille Saint-Saëns, 'La Cinquantenaire de Carmen', *Les Annales politiques et littéraires* 1 March 1925, p. 229.

¹¹⁶ Bergeron, p. 11. This comparison with the singers of the Opéra reflected that troupe's reputation at the time — Huebner states that in the *fin-de-siècle*, both the main troupe and the chorus were thought to be unwilling to learn large amounts of new music and generally complacent in their work (Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 4).

This new emphasis on improving singers' ability to sing their words in a manner their audiences could understand also created a market for former and struggling actors to teach singing students (and especially independent students) how to pronounce their words correctly. Delna began receiving lessons in diction and pronunciation from Berthe Savary, a former Comedie-Française actress, in December 1891. She had begun her training at roughly fourteen to fifteen years old (c. 1889–90), and the timing of Savary's engagement suggests that Delna's current singing teacher saw her language-specific skills as needing further finessing before she started to audition for companies in spring 1892.¹¹⁷ Delna continued to receive lessons from Savary until early 1896, when she dismissed her before her role debut as Orphée. Unlike her singing tuition (which was provided through a scholarship from Laborde), her diction and pronunciation lessons were not free, and Savary sued Delna for 18,400 francs in unpaid fees; eventually, the court awarded Savary 1,700 francs for lost income, having concluded that Delna owed her a mere 400 francs for lessons between October 1895 and March 1896.¹¹⁸ These lessons were kept a secret from the public — while her status as a former student of Laborde was common knowledge and various musical figures including Bruneau and Massenet (as well as various Conservatoire singing teachers such as Marchesi and Viardot) were invited to comment on Savary's importance to Delna's training during the trial, the press only became aware of Savary's function in Delna's life when Savary filed the suit in 1896.¹¹⁹

This new emphasis on diction created a dilemma for singing teachers outside of García's school who had previously prized sound quality and production over any

¹¹⁷ This teacher may have been Laborde, but Delna never specified the period she trained with her for, only stating in her memoirs that she left her after twenty months (Source: Delna, p. 5).

¹¹⁸ Author Unknown, 'Le Palais', *La Presse* 10 January 1897, p. 1; Author Unknown, 'Dernières Nouvelles', *Le Temps* 10 January 1897, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ Albert Bataille, 'Gazette des Tribunaux', *Le Figaro* 27 December 1896, p. 3.

linguistic concerns. Laborde was diplomatic about the rise of a new school of singing, stating in her *Méthode de chant* that:

We supplied in this method an important mechanism for singing itself, which today is somewhat sacrificed to the art of diction, [which] was specifically neglected in the past. They are two separate properties and yet they lend each other mutual aid. It is therefore appropriate to conduct training in both concurrently without allowing them to predominate over each other, and that, we believe, is the secret of the excellent results we have achieved to date.¹²⁰

The benefits of singers' better diction to an audience were obvious; the libretto was more easily heard, and distracting mistakes such as Deschamps-Jéhin's error at her Opéra-Comique debut were eliminated. This was all part of a greater movement towards respecting the texts — eighteenth and early-nineteenth century leading singers were given free rein on vocalisations and aria insertions, which could entirely distort the plot if abused, and by making singers conform to the musical and lyrical demands of the works, there was some restoration of the balance of power between singers and composers.¹²¹ There were outliers from this new tradition of musical performance; for instance, at the Opéra-Comique's 1896 company premiere of Berlioz' version of Gluck's *Orphée*, Delna took some liberties in the title role which annoyed some critics:

The singer had some beautiful accents in the famous aria 'J'ai perdu mon Eurydice', in spite of the excessive nervousness of her movements, but why the devil (I shudder to report it) does she believe that she is authorised to change Gluck's text, in finishing on a high G, where the least serious fault is that 'it is not the same', this admirable melody? O [what] desecration! And this, truly, I cannot forgive Mademoiselle Delna. (*Gil Blas*)¹²²

¹²⁰ 'Nous avons donné dans cette méthode une place importante au mécanisme du chante proprement dit, qu'on a aujourd'hui quelque peu sacrifié à l'art de la diction, précisément trop négligé autrefois. Il y a là deux étuis des biens distincts et qui se prêtent cependant un mutuel secours. Aussi convient-il de les mener concurremment, sans faire prédominer l'une sur l'autre, et c'est là, croyons-nous, le secret des excellents résultats que nous avons obtenus jusqu'à ce jour.' Laborde, preface.

¹²¹ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, p. 172, pp. 177–78. While aria insertions had almost died out by the start of the Third Republic, Rutherford remarks that there was some room for cadenzas in singers' interpretations in the later nineteenth century (p. 176). Aside from Delna, most of the singers in this study do not seem to have engaged in score alterations.

¹²² 'La cantatrice a eu pourtant de beaux accents dans l'air fameux 'J'ai perdu mon Eurydice', en dépit de la trop grand nervosité de ses mouvements, mais pourquoi diable (*horresco referens*) se croit-elle autorisée à modifier le texte de Gluck, en terminant par un *sol* aigu, dont le tort le moins grave est de 'n'être même pas dans l'accord', cette admirable cantilène? O profanation! et cela, vraiment, je ne

Let us be generous: Mlle Delna has made a considerable effort: her voice is always beautiful, her emotion is at times interesting. But the artist, probably from private advice, has not in any way respected the pure and noble line of the score. It has lost the taste and the style. (*Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*)¹²³

Delna was a performer who often made changes to her roles (several more instances arise in the next chapter), even if they were not popular with reviewers. Despite these criticisms, Delna's small changes to 'J'ai perdu mon Eurydice' continued through her career, and she soon began to experiment with tempo alterations which she used in both her recording of the aria, and all of her performances in France and America until at least 1910.¹²⁴ There is also a good chance that she made other unobserved changes to lesser-known works, as none of the reviewers noticed that Delna had used an aria insertion at the end of the first act of *Orphée*.¹²⁵

This ignorance on the part of the reviewers brings the topic of personal (as opposed to general) technique into focus. In terms of the technique of individual singers, recordings could give us some clues, but they cannot be presumed to be entirely identical to the stage performances, as these required a give and take between the demands of singing and acting, and pre-1918 recording technology could not successfully reproduce the volume and techniques such as vibrato without distorting the overall sound. There have been arguments for the exclusion of recordings (and not just early ones) as

saurais le pardonner à mademoiselle Delna.' G. Salvayre, 'Première Représentations', *Gil Blas* 8 March 1896, p. 3.

¹²³ 'Soyons généreux pourtant: Mlle Delna a fait un effort considérable; sa voix est toujours fort belle, son sentiment parfois intéressant. Mais l'artiste, privée probablement de conseils, n'a en aucune façon respecté le dessin pur et noble de la partition. Elle a manqué de goût et de style.' H. F.-G., 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* 8 March 1896, p. 3.

¹²⁴ Her use of tempo alterations eventually put her at loggerheads with Arturo Toscanini in the Metropolitan Opera. Her method involved a slow main aria and a fast coda; he advocated the opposite approach and both artists refused to back down, leading to a contest of wills during one performance of *Orphée* where Delna ignored Toscanini's conducting until he finally adjusted to her favoured tempo (Author Unknown, 'Mme Delna Raps Metropolitan Opera', *New York Times* 13 March 1910, page number unknown).

¹²⁵ These aria insertions involved the final aria of Act One of *Orphée*. In the initial productions, she replaced it with an aria from Gluck's *Echo et Narcisse* (which Adolphe Nourrit had also done in the 1820s), and with 'The Divinities of the Styx' from Gluck's *Alceste* for her run of performances with the Metropolitan Opera (William Gibbons, *Building the Operatic Museum: Eighteenth-Century Opera in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013), p. 99; Author Unknown, 'Delna, Pet of Paris, To Sing Saturday', *New York Times* 24 January 1910, page number unknown).

historical documents: Abbate has argued that scores and recordings are ‘the tactile monuments in music’s necropolis’, with a live performance constituting ‘the only authentic musical reality and hence the only valid subject for musicology’.¹²⁶ There is also Walter Benjamin’s argument for the alienation of the performer from their audience; he stated that this separation of audience and performer does not give them ‘the opportunity [...] to adjust to the audience during performance’ and ‘this permits the audience to take the position of a critic, without experiencing any personal contact’ with the performer.¹²⁷ Whether the listener is consuming the recording in the singer’s lifetime, or decades after their death, there is no possibility of a recording emulating a live performance, as the artist cannot tell if the audience is responding to their interpretation. However, it is the mechanical aspect of the recording and reproduction process that Benjamin — writing more on art and film than music in his essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility’ in the mid-1930s — recoiled from, as he acknowledged that ‘in principle, the work of art has always been reproducible’.¹²⁸ In light of arguments against the use of recordings as authentic documents, my views align with Cook, who, unlike Abbate and Benjamin, acknowledges the profound value of recordings (especially those of long-dead musicians), even when technology fails to capture all nuances.¹²⁹ Recordings are in some ways a superior primary source to singing manuals for analysis of technique, but there are obvious flaws when the era is taken into consideration. The limits of the technology mar the recordings, as certain frequencies

¹²⁶ Nicholas Cook, ‘Methods for analysing recordings’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, ed. Eric Clarke, Nicholas Cook, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and John Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 221–245: p. 242.

¹²⁷ Rajeev S. Patke, ‘Benjamin on Art and Reproducibility: The Case of Music’, *Walter Benjamin Studies: Walter Benjamin and Art*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 185–208: p. 193.

¹²⁸ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version’, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Beaknap Press, 2008), pp. 19–55: p. 20. As Patke observes, Benjamin rarely focused on music in any great detail, and it was his correspondent, Theodor Adorno, who was more interested in the effects of the modern world on music (p. 194).

¹²⁹ Cook, p. 242.

were easier for earlier recording technologies to pick up and preserve faithfully than others. The technology of the 1900s was ideal for high sopranos and tenors because of the frequencies that their voices fell between, but the upper registers of singers such as Adelina Patti and even the contralto Clara Butt sounded restricted and thin.¹³⁰ Powerful notes at a particular frequency also had a tendency to overload and distort the sound of the recording — for instance, an a’’ in Delna’s 1903/04 version of ‘O mon fils’ (from *Le prophète*) and a g’’ in her 1907 recording of ‘Hymne à la liberté’ (from *La Vivandière*) flooded the otherwise impressive soundscape of the recordings. There is also little indication of the rich tone that so many of these singers were praised for, as the technology could not pick up the nuances of individual voices to any degree of verity in the 1900s, which is when most of the singers in this study were able to record. These are the primary reasons why recordings will not be analysed within this dissertation. They cannot be treated as faithful reproductions of a singer’s performance either on stage or in concert, and it does a disservice to their real stagecraft to consider them to be so. Critics’ reports can give us a sense of a singer in her natural environment, and if a work was well-known (or the critic was very familiar with the score), nuances that were individual to that singer’s interpretation. However, reviewers were not necessarily musical professionals themselves (they ranged from generalist journalists to professional composers such as Bruneau, d’Indy, Dukas and Saint-Saëns) and also had to tailor their writing to a public whose musical competency was generally quite low, with little understanding of the specifics of technique.

¹³⁰ Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance* (London: CHARM, 2009), chapter 3.1, paragraph 11, <<http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/studies/chapters/chap3.html>>; Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, chapter 3.1, paragraph 25; Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, chapter 4, paragraphs 10–11, <<http://www.charm.rhul.ac.uk/studies/chapters/chap4.html>>.

Singers who chose to write memoirs often supplied superficial accounts of their approaches to their work, preferring to give impressions of their time on the stage and their former glories over specific performance practices, but some gave interviews or wrote in-depth analyses of their interpretations of their most famous roles. In 1930, Héglon gave a valuable interview with Annie le Guern of *Revivre* which included, as well as some commentary on the role which will appear in the next chapter, the following breakdown of her approach to 'Printemps qui commence', Dalila's first aria:

Le Guern: I explained that all of your admirers agree on the marvel that is the sculptural line which you gave to your heroine.

Héglon: I am above all attached to not lowering her, to keep in her betrayal all the majesty of her intentions.

The artist, while speaking, had approached the piano. And she granted a wish that we still do not dare to express in interpreting for us *mezzo-voce*, in an admirable style the aria 'Printemps qui commence' and the extract from the duet in the second act: 'Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix'. The ear still filled with the sounds she put there, we will study [her interpretation], in faithfully respecting her expressions of these two famous pieces which will become all the more intelligible to our readers now that they know the mind [behind the music]. We look, first of all, at the admirable singing of the first act. 'Printemps qui commence'. We know that Dalila sings to seduce Samson whom she has stopped in the crowd. The phrase at the beginning will be sung in a soft voice, with an enveloping charm, in a very smooth motion. Sounds very close [*legato*]. Breathe easily: make a half-sigh (in the first half of the third beat) between 'Commence' and 'Portant (l'espérance aux cœurs amoureux)'.

The orchestra's actions, Mme Héglon tells us, are never respected that much by the singers. The musical phrase, [which she plays] on the piano, should blend with their singing, as an extension of their vocal strength or softness. And the singing, in turn, is born [to be] a replica of the accompaniment without which we perceive the slightest clash, the lightest division.

[The lines] 'Ton souffle qui passe/De la terre efface/Les jours malheureux'. Articulated well, in cutting lightly the 's' in 'soufflé' (not singing it sufficed!). [She made] the same remark for the pronunciation of the word *passé* (without hardness on the p). Do not shy away from the beautiful chest note that one is entitled to expect from the b-natural on the 'ef' ('efface'). I can still hear the beautiful *diminuendo* that Mme Héglon sang on the c of the following syllable 'fa' in the same word.



What strength was given to the following sentence: ‘Les jours malheureux’. The voice is slightly alive in the following line: ‘Tout brûle en notre âme’. The words which are showcased, ‘brûle’ and ‘âme’, will be very [well] enunciated, without harshness. All of the related sounds indicated in the piece must be made with a deliberate exaggeration. I call, again, on a remark by Mme Héglon, which is a remark on the real psychology [of the piece].

Héglon: When a woman lies, have you noticed that she exaggerates, supports her assertions believably to give them more strength and the appearance of the truth. That is the case with Dalila. She wants to captivate Samson and feign a love that she does not feel. She exaggerates with languid modulations of the voice, but always without vulgarity or sickly sentimentality.

Therefore let us bind all of the notes together nicely, especially on the words or syllables underlined below: ‘Et ta douce flamme/Vient sécher nos pleurs/Tu rends à la terre/ Par un doux mystère/Les fruits et les fleurs’. But let us not confuse these vocal links with vulgar *portamento*! A happy opposition (which we always look for when the opportunity arises) will be noted in the differentiation of the identically written vocalises on the words ‘flamme’ and ‘mystère’: while, for the word ‘flamme’, will begin by a strong *forte* which diminishes and finishes as *piano*, the word ‘mystère’, that will be sung first of all very sweetly, gradually swelling to finish powerfully.



A little more warmth in the voice at the end of the couplet. Actively putting value on ‘(Je suis) belle et (Mon cœur) plein d’amour’. By snivelling on ‘Pleurant l’infidèle’, but using good articulation on the syllables ‘Pleur’ (‘Pleurant’) and ‘fi’ (‘infidèle’). One can breathe between ‘infidèle’ and ‘attend son retour’. For this sing like the minim d-sharp of the syllable ‘dè’ is a dotted crotchet d-sharp followed by a quaver d-sharp (as noted elsewhere in the German translation). Then glide without emphasising the final syllable ‘le’. A beautiful *crescendo* on: ‘Garde souvenance/Du bonheur passé’. The final d must be spun to die out in a *pianissimo* accurately extended by the accompaniment.

The start of the second part of the aria still has all of the sad charm. A velvet voice on the beautiful low notes ‘J’irai triste amante’. Then, soon, the animation builds with the expressed hope: ‘Chassant ma tristesse/S’il revient un jour’. Finally: ‘À lui ma tendresse’ vibrates with warmth. But we do not forget that Dalila is an accomplished seductress; quickly masking her passion in nothing more than tender languidness, it is with infinite sweetness, but full of passion, she sings: ‘El la douce ivresse/Qu’un brûlant amour/Garde à son retour’. A light *crescendo* on ‘brûlant amour’? Do it. But the last line tends towards *piano*, with the beautiful chest notes on the low d-sharp and f-sharp on ‘son retour’. And this *piano* lingers in the following lines. We imagine it, the eyes half-closed, dreaming of this return: ‘Chassant ma tristesse/S’il revient un jour’. Finally her love erupts in a beautiful soaring line in the twice-repeated phrase: ‘À lui ma tendresse’. A very forward articulation that does not cut the musical line, but nevertheless emphasises and puts value in every word. Then, continuing in her dream, Dalila gradually lets her voice die out.

‘Et la douce ivresse’ (mezzo-forte)

‘Qu’un brûlant amour’ (Mark out the close-lying sounds with a light *crescendo*)

‘Garde à son retour’ (*Perdendosi* [Dying away])¹³¹

Most of Héglon’s advice on the aria was based on minor changes that she made to the score for her interpretation, but it shows how this interpretation worked. To the audience, her Dalila was clearly not the sweet and sentimental woman that Samson comes to believe her to be, and to this end Héglon made deliberate actions that betrayed Dalila’s real nature. She played upon her belief that women exaggerate their behaviour when they are lying to make their target believe that they are telling the truth; this was particularly clear on her suggestion that the interpreter could use a small *crescendo* — just enough to differentiate the words from the rest of the verse — on ‘brûlant amour’. It was, like many periodicals and newspapers of the time, written for an audience with a basic level of musical literacy; while there are some short musical examples in the interview itself, the majority of the commentary is based on lyrical stresses and interpretations, and how she approached the role on a psychological level, providing

¹³¹ Annie le Guern, ‘Madame Héglon et le rôle de Dalila’, *Revivre* 5 February 1930, *Programmes et articles de presse sur ‘Samson et Dalila’, musique de Camille Saint-Saëns* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, date unknown). The original interview can be found in Appendix A. The analysis of ‘Mon cœur s’ouvre à ta voix’ was missing from the press clipping in the file.

insight into the finer details which set her interpretation apart from those of her contemporaries.

The techniques of this time, as well as creating a distinctive soundscape for the works interpreted, were important for preserving a singer's most valuable possession: their voice. The concern for students and their vocal health shown in Laborde's preface was a recurring statement from teachers of that era, as the impatience of students could undo all of their training. Marchesi stated in the 1890s that a singer should train for three years, but most were lured away before they had completed their training by the promise of an early debut, and the fame and fortune that followed.¹³² Damage to the voice or other faculties necessary for singing, while primarily a medical concern in singing texts, was a scourge of opera companies across all of the voice types. In the Opéra in particular, the previously mentioned focus on heavy singing took its toll amongst those whose voices were not strong enough or still too underdeveloped, prematurely and sometimes very publically ending promising careers. *Grand opéra* as a genre was a mixed blessing for this reason: while it gave mezzo-sopranos a platform as leading singers with its dual-leading format, it could strain or damage voices permanently with its shift towards heavier vocals, and one of its most public casualties was Cornélie Falcon. She was one of the first successful 'mezzosoprano begli' singers in the mid-to-late 1830s; her voice was characterised by a mezzo-soprano-like chest and middle register, and a vibrant, soprano-like head voice that extended to d''', a vocal profile later expected of *falcons*. This combination of beautiful tone and coloratura skill saw her rise to the position of prima donna by age twenty-three, but her dominance in the Opéra came at a cost, as Smart recounts:

Suddenly during a performance of Louis Niedermeyer's *Stradella* in 1837, she opened her mouth and nothing but noise came out: Berlioz described hearing

¹³² Daniel Snowman, *The Gilded Stage: The Social History of Opera* (London: Atlantic, 2009), p. 229.

‘raucous sounds like those of a child with croup, guttural, whistling notes that quickly faded like those of a flute full of water’. She experimented with a variety of remedies, from a sojourn in the warmer climate of Italy to a Hoffmannesque regimen of singing inside a glass bell, presumably intended to enhance her natural resonance. Despite all efforts, though, a comeback attempt in 1840 was disastrous.¹³³

The vocal problems which ended Falcon’s career — most likely caused by the strain of a heavy workload and repertoire on a still-developing voice — are a problem that has recurred across centuries in both male and female singers; her vocal problems only gained such a reputation because of their public unveiling. A rarer type of career-ending issue was with the auditory system, which prematurely ended Renée Richard’s (1858–1947) career in the early 1890s. Guillaume Ibos (1860–1952), a tenor who made his debut in September 1885 in Donizetti’s *La favorite*, recounted his first onstage impression of Richard to his son-in-law in 1947 and simultaneously explained the mysterious early end of her career:

I had for my female partner Madame Richard, certainly one of the greatest singers I have known in my life, and I have known many. I still have in my ear the notes with which she welcomed me in the second act, with ‘Mon idole, mon idole’. These notes were admirable. The stature, the proud bearing, the musical discipline and the style made Madame Richard a unique artist who would have become, without any doubt, a very great Wagnerian singer. Her career was ruined by an accident of the ear, which later brought a total hearing imbalance; what she [sang] sounded wrong to others, and vice versa. [...] My first great true vocal sensation was therefore the shock that I received from the admirable voice and technique of Madame Richard. One had the impression that the notes spread across the hall in waves, without force, without effort.¹³⁴

¹³³ Smart, ‘Roles, Reputations, Shadows: Singers at the Opéra, 1828–1849’, p. 116.

¹³⁴ ‘J’avais pour partenaire, femme, madame Richard, certainement une des plus grandes chanteuses que j’ai connues de ma vie, et j’en ai connu beaucoup. J’ai encore dans l’oreille les sons par lesquels elle m’accueillait au second acte, avec ‘Mon idole, mon idole’. Ces sons étaient admirables. La stature, la fierté d’allure, la discipline musicale et le style faisaient de Mme Richard une artiste unique qui serait devenue, sans nul doute, une très grande chanteuse wagnérienne. Sa carrière fut brisée par un accident d’oreille, qui devait par la suite lui apporter un déséquilibre total dans l’audition ; ce qu’elle entendait juste était faux pour les autres et vice versa [...] Ma première grande sensation vocale de vérité avait donc été le choc que m’avait donné l’admirable voix et l’admirable technique de madame Richard. On avait l’impression que les sons se répandaient en nappes dans la salle, sans poussée, sans effort’. Georges Loiseau, *Notes sur le chant* (Neuilly: Levallois, 1947), pp. 20–22.

His admiration of Richard (and his belief that she was destined to become one of the Opéra's first true Wagnerian singers) was intended as a very sincere compliment, as Loiseau's *Notes sur le chant* was designed to perpetuate Ibos' views on technique.

Ibos believed that he alone possessed the technique to preserve a voice long past the end of a professional career (and his son-in-law Georges Loiseau was clearly interested in perpetuating this belief), but behind his ego lay an indication of a more sensible type of singing ambition. In the mid-to-late nineteenth century — the period when most of the singers mentioned in this dissertation were trained — there was a market for teachers who claimed that they could make young students into stars by aping the techniques of singers such as Patti, which was an attractive idea for any singer who was impatient to begin their career and had no access to more prestigious options such as well-known teachers or conservatories.¹³⁵ These teachers, many of whom styled themselves as doctors, were invariably frauds with no connections to any school, ideological or otherwise, and could not coax anything worthy of a stage career from their gullible students in the short period of study that they advocated.¹³⁶ Some also insinuated themselves into the trust of relatively inexperienced professional singers, even those as well-connected as Delna, as this quotation from Ibos states:

And I must continue to talk about Delna, because the following is the sad demonstration of what I always strive to say: *There is no type of voice, so beautiful and so complete that they can resist a bad technique and scorn of the basic tenets of singing.* In other words: *no natural voice can resist the lack of vocal knowledge for long.* Our lodgings were close, and I often heard the patrons coming to see Delna, the celebrity of the moment. They complimented her above all for her low notes, asking her how far down she could go, and every time, proud of her exceptional voice, [that] good girl, [that] former restaurant waitress, happy at the same time to amaze the gallery, she descended [with] her low notes down to the extreme, notes before which everyone raved, without realising that it was contributing to the systematic destruction of a wonderful and unique vocal organ.

¹³⁵ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, p. 92.

¹³⁶ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, p. 92.

I had authority over her, and asked her one day if she was not crazy and if she did not want to destroy her voice. From that moment, she remained quiet [i.e. she stopped performing for the patrons in her lodgings], although, on several occasions, I heard her on stage while she sang ‘Les Lettres’ and the ‘Larmes’ [in Massenet’s *Werther*], making huge low notes in her full chest voice, as in other phrases in the first act; notes [that were] obviously amazing to the audience, who immediately applauded wildly. I learned that a charlatan, like [those] often [found] close to artists, especially close to female artists, had come to give her singing advice. I told her very firmly: ‘Those notes will cost you dear!’ I assured her further that she would not long retain the integrity of her voice; that a gap would open first [between] her lowest notes and her low middle range, that she would then lose her high notes and all the equilibrium in her vocal range, and that her breath under the wrong conditions would wobble and diminish. Taken aback, and not knowing what to say, she resolved to laugh.¹³⁷

Ibos was trying to act as a father figure to the then-teenaged Delna (she was seventeen when they sang together in *Werther*) by correcting her technique before she did any lasting damage, but he was competing with a flatterer who was unqualified to comment on such matters. He did not unequivocally state that she did destroy her voice doing this — it would have been impossible to believably argue this as Delna remained active until age fifty without any serious suggestion of vocal damage from any recordings or reviews — yet he showed how quickly singers could be tempted away from using the proper technique that singing teachers of the time advocated. Extremely young singers like

¹³⁷ ‘Et je dois continuer à parler de Delna, car la suite est bien la plus triste démonstration de ce que je m’évertue à dire depuis toujours: *Il n’y a pas de moyens vocaux, si beaux et si complets soient-ils qui puissent résister à une mauvais technique et au mépris des bases mines du chant.* En d’autres termes: *Aucune voix naturelle ne peut résister longtemps à l’absence de connaissances vocales.* Nos loges étaient proches, et j’entendais souvent les abonnés venant voir Delna, célébrité du moment. Ils la félicitaient surtout pour ses notes graves, lui demandant jusqu’où elle descendait, et chaque fois, fière de son organe exceptionnel, bonne fille, ancienne serveuse de restaurant, heureuse en même temps d’étonner la galerie, elle descendait ses sons graves jusqu’à l’extrême, sons devant lesquels chacun s’extasiait, sans se rendre compte qu’il contribuait à la destruction systématique d’un admirable et unique organe vocal. J’avais de l’autorité sur elle, et lui demandai un jour si elle n’était pas folle et si elle ne voulait pas détruire sa voix. À dater de ce moment, elle resta tranquille, quoique, à plusieurs reprises, je l’entendis en scène, pendant qu’elle chantait ‘Les Lettres’ et les ‘Larmes’, faire des sons graves énormes en pleine poitrine, de même dans d’autres phrases du premier acte; sons évidemment étonnants pour le public, qui aussitôt l’applaudissait à tout rompre. J’appris qu’un charlatan comme il y en a souvent près des artistes, surtout près des artistes femmes, était arrivé à lui donner des conseils de chant. Je lui dis très fermement: ‘Ces sons-là vous coûteront cher!’ Je lui certifiai, en outre, qu’elle ne garderait pas longtemps l’intégrité de sa voix, qu’un hiatus s’ouvrirait d’abord dans son grave et son bas médium, qu’elle perdrait ensuite son aigu et tout l’égalité de son clavier vocal, et que son souffle sur de mauvaises positions la ferait chevroter et baisser. Décontenancée, et ne sachant que dire, elle prit le parti de rire.’ Loiseau, p. 46.

Delna were becoming rarer in this period (in the 1900s, singers such as Arbell were waiting until their mid-twenties to debut), but arguably any new singer was vulnerable to those outside of the troupe who claimed that they could accelerate their success.

Ibos' quotation also shows that sopranos were not the only female singers at risk from overusing notes at the extremes of their ranges to impress the patrons of their companies. The official musical scores rarely advocated notes lower than a-flat, or higher than c'' for mezzo-sopranos, but this did not stop some singers like Delna from slightly changing the notes, or the position they sang the notes from (for example, Ibos' recollection that Delna was singing in her full chest voice where it was unnecessary in Acts One and Three of *Werther*). Some of this behaviour reflected wider trends — for example, the general adoption of Duprez' 'tenor high-C' (a c'' in the chest voice) in the mid-nineteenth century by tenors — yet some singers were doing this just to show that they could as an eager audience encouraged them. Delna's overuse of her chest voice when she should have been utilising a lighter timbre may also have been a way of artificially lowering the timbre of her voice, making her sound more like the contralto she believed she was at an age where that vocal colour had yet to develop. As a singer who began her career at a similar age to Falcon, Delna was lucky that her voice was strong enough to survive this phase in her development as a professional singer rather than face a forced early retirement.

This line between good and bad technique highlights one core reality of this profession: it was often a battle between preserving a singer's long-term ability to do their job, and finding a quick way to please audiences and raise their profile. Like with any other period of operatic history, common performance mannerisms were dictated by musician-approved sources (singing manuals, Fauré's Paris Conservatoire curriculum) and audience reaction, which fell on the side of pushing a voice to its extremes rather

than applauding good *portamento* or utter faithfulness to a score that few knew in any great depth. Artistic integrity was a personal decision and as the next section shows, there was far more to this profession than a simple pursuit of art. Opera houses were businesses as much as any other profit-making venture, and with state subsidies partially bankrolling the companies, the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique needed to make their efforts pay dividends, all while ostensibly showcasing the best music that France had to offer, and the best musicians that the companies could find.

1.2: Professional life in the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique

Having delineated some of the techniques and training that these singers had, the next step is to discuss the professional world into which these singers now entered. Armed with an enviable musical education, most of them aimed for Paris, and specifically for contracts in either the Opéra, or the Opéra-Comique, which were two of the most attractive opera companies in the world. They had solid reputations, they had moderate but competitive salaries, and most importantly, their continuing existences were guaranteed by the state, making them into stable employers. The companies benefitted from state subsidies dating from the First Empire (1805–1815), when the new government reorganised the structure and number of Parisian theatres.¹³⁸ During the Third Republic, this allowed them to outlast longstanding rivals such as the Théâtre-Italien (the Opéra's rival for works by composers such as Verdi which closed its doors in 1878), and various incarnations of the Théâtre-Lyrique, a name used for different companies — all of whom took on more new works than either the Opéra or the Opéra-

¹³⁸ Mark Everist, 'The Music of Power: Parisian Opera and the Politics of Genre, 1806–1864', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* Vol. 67, No. 3 (Fall 2014), pp. 685–734: p. 689.

Comique, but inevitably folded because of their artistic risks and administrative mismanagement.

The companies were operated on a different scale (the Opéra spent more and had a larger employee base), but their operating practices were the same. They were run by directors who bought into the company and were held to a *cahier des charges*, which was negotiated with the Ministre des Beaux-Arts and was individual to each incoming director.¹³⁹ These *cahiers* dictated the size of the troupes, choruses and orchestra, the number of acts of new music (of ballet and opera separately in the case of the Opéra) that were to be performed during the *cahier*'s lifetime, and much of the day-to-day running of the company.¹⁴⁰ Also, the directors were obligated to report new hirings and productions, as well as any 'notable' incidents that would be of interest to the Ministre des Beaux-Arts (and the wording of this clause was left deliberately open in the *cahier des charges*, forcing the directors to make choices on what to report).¹⁴¹

This period was characterised by relative stability in the companies' management and locations. A major figure in the Opéra's history in the first five decades of the Third Republic was Pedro Gailhard, a former bass in the company, who was a director for twenty-two years (1884–1906).¹⁴² In the Opéra-Comique, the direction of the company was dominated by two figures: Léon Carvalho, who was director for seventeen years (1876–87, 1891–97), and Albert Carré, whose directorship lasted for sixteen consecutive years (1898–1914).¹⁴³ There were exceptions, however. The second

¹³⁹ Everist, 'The Music of Power: Parisian Opera and the Politics of Genre, 1806–1864', p. 692 note 25.

¹⁴⁰ Everist, 'The Music of Power: Parisian Opera and the Politics of Genre, 1806–1864', p. 692.

¹⁴¹ André Spies, *Opera, State and Society in the Third Republic: 1875–1914* (New York: P. Lang, 1998), p. 40.

¹⁴² Harold Rosenthal, 'Gailhard, Pierre [Pedro]', in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane L. Root <www.oxfordmusiconline.com> [accessed 8 December 2016]. He shared the directorship with Eugène Ritt from 1884 to 1891, and Eugène Bertrand from 1893 until Bertrand's death in 1899.

¹⁴³ Steven Huebner, 'Carvalho [Carvaille], Léon', in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane L. Root <www.oxfordmusiconline.com> [accessed 10 March 2015]; Richard Langham Smith, 'Carré, Albert' in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane L. Root <www.oxfordmusiconline.com> [accessed 8 December 2016].

Salle Favart (the resident theatre of the Opéra-Comique) burnt down during a performance of *Mignon* on the night of 25 May 1887, and in the aftermath, Carvalho was jailed for negligence.¹⁴⁴ This left the company in a state of chaos in the 1887–88 season before Louis Paravey was appointed as director and the company was granted the use of the Théâtre de la Ville until the third Salle Favart was completed. The Opéra also lost a theatre during the first decades of the Third Republic — the Salle le Peletier burned down in the middle of the night on 29 October 1873 — but with the Palais Garnier almost complete, and no loss of life (in comparison, more than 100 people died in the Salle Favart), it represented an inconvenience rather than a destabilising event.¹⁴⁵ The status of these companies was such that neither remained inactive for long after a theatre was lost, as temporary theatres were easily acquired; for example, the Opéra-Comique reopened in the Théâtre de la Ville five months after the fire in 1887.¹⁴⁶

Aside from special access to theatres, the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique, as state-subsidised companies, were a more stable source of employment for singers than independent rivals such as the Théâtre-Lyrique and the Théâtre de la Gaîté. Their subsidies covered between twenty and twenty-five percent of their budgets, which increased in tandem with their costs, and ensured their continuing presence in the Parisian operatic scene.¹⁴⁷ However, as both companies had a clause written into their artists' contracts that they would be released from their engagements following the cessation of these grants, it was presumed that without governmental support, the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique could not survive independently, and would cease all activity from the day of the subsidies' withdrawal. This clause was somewhat necessary as the

¹⁴⁴ Huebner, 'Carvalho [Carvaille], Léon', in *Grove Music Online* <www.oxfordmusiconline.com> [accessed 10 March 2015].

¹⁴⁵ Demar Irvine, *Massenet: A Chronicle of his Life and Times* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), p. 152.

¹⁴⁶ Jules Prével, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 15 October 1887, p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ Spies, *Opera, State and Society in the Third Republic: 1875–1914*, p. 39.

subsidies were not universally popular; each new regime questioned the need to sponsor these companies, and whether they deserved it, and their budgets could also cause arguments between politicians on an annual basis.¹⁴⁸ This conflict over the costs incurred by the companies was not helped by the massive scale of the Opéra's operating budget; it was the largest in Paris, but poor repertory choices and expensive productions (both premieres and revivals) meant that during the Third Republic in particular the company sometimes posted a year-end deficit.¹⁴⁹

This administrative reliance on subsidies and *cahiers des charges* served to emphasise that these companies were not independent and could not act as such, but certain aspects of day-to-day life in the houses were meant to be free from outside interference: for example, casting operas was an internal decision in both houses. While some singers used their influence with composers to gain consideration for a role, directors insisted on having the final say.¹⁵⁰ In the Opéra, the aforementioned division into a higher, *falcon* mezzo-soprano type and a lower contralto-mezzo-soprano type in the troupe meant that mezzo-soprano roles such as Fidès and Léonor were increasingly marginal, and left to the leading mezzo-soprano of that time; even Dalila, as a leading role in a popular opera, was not sung by higher sopranos. The anachronistic nature of most of the mezzo-soprano's repertoire meant that as higher sopranos gained more roles in operas by Wagner and Strauss, two of the three leading roles in the mezzo-soprano's repertoire were close to being pulled from the roster permanently, but could experience resurgences with the right casts. *Le prophète* was a case in point — after four seasons where the opera was not staged (1893–97), it was presumed to have been dropped from the repertoire permanently, but following Delna's Opéra debut as Fidès in May 1898, it

¹⁴⁸ Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France*, p. 294.

¹⁴⁹ Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France*, p. 393.

¹⁵⁰ An instance of this is discussed in Chapter 3.4.2.

became the most profitable opera of 1898, and reached its 500th performance the next year. Fulcher attributes *Le prophète*'s return to the repertoire to Dreyfusard support for Meyerbeer, but the opera's renaissance coincided with Delna's tenure in the company (1898–1900), and like *La favorite*, was rarely seen on the Opéra's stage again after Delna left for the Opéra-Comique.¹⁵¹ The rest of the *grand opéra* repertoire also went into decline at this time, taking away the *falcons*' signature roles and permanently shifting the Opéra's female repertoire from a dual-leading format to a single dramatic soprano lead, with contralto or mezzo-soprano supporting roles — only *Samson et Dalila* truly deviated from this formula by the start of the First World War.¹⁵²

The Opéra-Comique's mezzo-soprano repertoire was larger, and had greater variations in its casting pools. Less popular mezzo-soprano roles such as Margared in *Le roi d'Ys* were invariably played by mezzo-sopranos and contraltos, but Carmen and Mignon were popular enough to merit a wider casting pool that included higher sopranos. This more relaxed kind of repertoire distribution played to the strengths of a new type of singer from the 1880s onwards — a soprano with a selective repertoire of mezzo-soprano and soprano roles. This trend started with sopranos such as Marie van Zandt playing Mignon in the early 1880s, and reached its apex with the careers of Emma Calvé, Georgette Leblanc and Zina de Nuovina in the 1890s and 1900s. They achieved their success by becoming experts in the mezzo-soprano and soprano repertoires simultaneously — playing Carmen and Santuzza alongside Puccini's heroines — while adapting to the new dramatic demands of their chosen repertoire. Amongst mezzo-

¹⁵¹ Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France*, p. 598 note 16; Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. ed. Edward Schneider (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), p. 235; Fulcher, p. 104.

¹⁵² While the dual-lead format was permanently out of fashion in the Opéra in the final decades of the nineteenth century, *Le roi d'Ys* arguably continued the tradition in the Opéra-Comique, with Rozenn (soprano) and Margared (mezzo-soprano/*falcon*) as co-leads. Lalo had originally intended to stage the work with the Opéra, but it was rejected by Halanzier, Escudier and Vaucorbeil at different times (Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 236).

sopranos, Charlotte Wyns (1868–after 1919) represented an inverse version of this phenomenon: while she almost exclusively sang mezzo-soprano roles with the Opéra-Comique, she played the soprano title role in a revival of Massenet’s *Griséldis* with the company, and Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut* in the Casino municipal de Nice.¹⁵³ Delna was also given higher soprano roles in her early career, playing Zerlina in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* in 1897 without transpositions, and reportedly gaining consideration for *Isolde*, and Catherine in Meyerbeer’s *L’étoile du nord*, although neither production reached the stage.¹⁵⁴

The Opéra-Comique’s fluid concept of a mezzo-soprano role was possibly influenced by the relative novelty of these types of roles in the company repertoire by the end of the nineteenth century. The mezzo-soprano repertoire began to take shape in the Opéra-Comique during the 1880s with *Carmen*’s first successful production in 1883, and *Le roi d’Ys*’ premiere in 1888. Its status in the general repertoire by the end of the decade was evident during the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889, where these two operas, as well as *Mignon*, achieved very respectable performance numbers and profits in a crowded schedule. The Exposition took place between 8 May and 31 October 1889, but Fauser included the week before and after in her list of performances (which presumably takes into account early and late delegate arrivals). During this period the Opéra-Comique staged 247 performances of twenty-eight works over 193 days (with some days featuring both a matinee and evening performance), and their repertoire was divided as follows:

¹⁵³ Author Unknown, ‘Paris et Départements’, *Le Ménestrel* 10 September 1905, p. 296; Serge Basset, ‘Courrier des Théâtres’, *Le Figaro* 13 December 1905, p. 6.

¹⁵⁴ Jules Huret, ‘Don Juan à l’Opéra-Comique’, *Le Figaro* 17 November 1896, p. 4; Author Unknown, ‘Échos et Nouvelles’, *La Grande Dame* 1893, p. 206; Charles Martel, ‘Écho des Théâtres’, *La Justice* 20 August 1892, p. 3.

Table 1.2a: Operas performed by the Opéra-Comique 1 May–10 November 1889
(operas with mezzo-soprano leads marked in bold)¹⁵⁵

Opera	Number of performances
<i>Esclarmonde</i> (Massenet, 1889)	77 (including dress rehearsal)
<i>Carmen</i> (Bizet, 1875)	30
<i>Mignon</i> (Thomas, 1866)	28
<i>Le roi d'Ys</i> (Lalo, 1888)	26
<i>Le Noces de Jeannette</i> (Massé, 1853)	18
<i>Les Dragons de Villars</i> (Maillart, 1859) <i>Le Pré aux clercs</i> (Hérold, 1832)	9
<i>Les Rendez-vous bourgeois</i> (Isouard, 1807)	8
<i>Zampa</i> (Hérold, 1831)	7
<i>Le Chalet</i> (Adam, 1834)	6
<i>La Dame blanche</i> (Boieldieu, 1825)	5
<i>La Cigale madrilène</i> (Péronnet, 1889)	4
<i>Fra Diavolo</i> (Auber, 1830) <i>Richard, Coeur de Lion</i> (Grétry, 1784)	3
<i>Galathée</i> (Massé, 1852) <i>Les Amoureux de Catherine</i> (Maréchal, 1876) <i>Le Café du roi</i> (Deffès, 1861) <i>La Fille du regiment</i> (Donizetti, 1840) <i>La Nuit de Saint Jean</i> (Lacome, 1882) <i>Philémon et Baucis</i> (Gounod, 1860)	2
<i>Le Barbier de Séville</i> (Paisiello, 1782) <i>Le Barbier de Séville</i> (Rossini, 1816) <i>Le Baiser de Suzon</i> (Bemberg, 1888) <i>Le Domino Noir</i> (Auber, 1837) <i>Le Maître de chapelle</i> (Paër, 1821) <i>La Soirée orageuse</i> (Dalayrac, 1790) <i>La traviata</i> (Verdi, 1853) <i>Raoul, Sire de Créqui</i> (Dalayrac, 1789)	1

¹⁵⁵ List compiled from the appendices of Fauser's book on the Exposition (Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), pp. 333–43).

Massenet's *Esclarmonde*, a star vehicle for Sibyl Sanderson, was designed as the centrepiece of the Opéra-Comique's exposition programme, but the enduring popularity of *Carmen* and *Mignon*, as well as the continuing post-premiere appeal of *Le roi d'Ys* (it had premiered in May 1888, and reached its *centenaire* during the fair) provided the rest of the regular repertoire across this period.¹⁵⁶ By 25 October, *Esclarmonde*, *Carmen*, *Le roi d'Ys* and *Mignon* had earned a million francs in receipts between them, which led to a surge of performances in all four towards the end of the fair.¹⁵⁷ The mezzo-soprano-led operas also appear to have almost been on a par with *Esclarmonde* in terms of audience sizes — *Esclarmonde*, *Carmen*, *Mignon*, *Le roi d'Ys* and *Les Dragons de Villars* (as well as *La Dame blanche* and *Le Pré aux clercs*) all averaged more than 6,000 francs per performance.¹⁵⁸

Following the *Exposition Universelle*, the Opéra-Comique's repertoire began to transform in earnest, as *opéra comiques* slowly dropped out of regular performance, and Italian works took precedence. By the time that Carré signed a new *cahier des charges* in 1904 which turned the Opéra-Comique into a general lyric theatre rather than a specialist company (and thus allowing them to stage almost any opera available for performance), Verdi's *La traviata* and *Falstaff*, Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* and Puccini's *La bohème* and *Tosca* were stalwarts of the repertoire alongside *Carmen* and *Mignon*, and *Le roi d'Ys*' position as the third mezzo-soprano opera had been usurped by Massenet's *Werther*.¹⁵⁹ These were the core works of the Opéra-Comique's repertoire, providing a monetary cushion for the company's more financially precarious world premieres, and comprising the bulk of regular performances.

¹⁵⁶ Fauser, p. 62.

¹⁵⁷ Georges Boyer, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 25 October 1889, p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ Charles Darcours, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 20 August 1889, p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 6 March 1904, p. 79.

These companies were at the heart of the musical life of Paris, but a third institution was crucial to the state-funded Parisian opera scene: the Paris Conservatoire. A clear and publically acknowledged link between the Paris Conservatoire and the Opéra was the *concours* which took place at the end of each academic year in the Conservatoire. The singers were divided by gender (but not voice-type) and could compete in three categories: *opéra*, *opéra comique* and *chant*. As mentioned in the previous section, the winners of the *premier prix* in *opéra* singing or *chant* were given automatic contracts with the Opéra, which allowed them to join the troupe at the beginning of the next season, and make their debut soon afterwards.¹⁶⁰ The influence of the demand for this route into the Opéra could be seen in the studies of Deschamps-Jéhin (who started studying in the Paris Conservatoire after finishing her studies in Lyon Conservatoire, but dropped out before taking part in a *concours* due to illness), but was more obvious in the early careers of Wyns and Lapeyrette.¹⁶¹ Unlike Deschamps-Jéhin, Wyns only attended the Paris Conservatoire, and following a respectable but not stellar first attempt at the competition (*deuxième prix* in *chant* and *deuxième accessit* in *opéra* singing) in 1891, she was reportedly offered a contract with the Opéra on the basis of these awards, yet she remained in the Paris Conservatoire for a further year in order to achieve the *premier prix* required for a higher-profile Opéra contract.¹⁶² This extra work was rewarded in 1892 when she won the *premier prix* in both *opéra* and *opéra comique*,

¹⁶⁰ While most prize-winners did choose to join the Opéra, some opted to join the Opéra-Comique instead. This order of precedence caused some friction between the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique's administrations in the late nineteenth century, as the Opéra-Comique was barred from hiring the best singers each year unless the singers in question preferred the Opéra-Comique (Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, p. 108).

¹⁶¹ Author Unknown, 'Mme Deschamps-Jéhin', *Journal du dimanche* 11 December 1892, p. 2; Author Unknown, 'Samson et Dalila', *Le Voleur illustré* 1 December 1892, p. 712.

¹⁶² Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 26 July 1891, p. 239; Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 2 August 1891, p. 247; Jules Ruelle, 'Bulletin Théâtral', *Le Ménestrel* 16 August 1891, p. 259. The 1891 contract appears to have been nothing but a rumour, as she does not appear in the 1891 salary book. Singers who got lower prizes were sometimes awarded contracts, but *premier prix* winners had guaranteed Opéra contracts.

and was signed to the Opéra for the 1892–93 season.¹⁶³ This was the clearest route to the stage of the Opéra, but it had varying results depending on the Opéra's needs at the time — Richard was instantly adopted as Bloch's understudy at the beginning of her contract, and became the leading mezzo-soprano within three years, but Wyns was signed at a point where three singers (Richard, Deschamps-Jéhin and Héglon) were already competing for the same repertoire, and after two cancelled debuts and then a casting as a minor Valkyrie in *Die Walküre*, she left for the Opéra-Comique in 1893. Lapeyrette's story was a happier one; after two years in the Paris Conservatoire she received a *deuxième prix* in the *chant* category in 1905, but chose to return to her studies rather than attempt to build a career.¹⁶⁴ She achieved her *premier prix* two years later, and began a long and successful career with the Opéra in the 1907–08 season.¹⁶⁵

The Opéra's link with the winners of the *opéra* and *chant* categories was long established, but in 1904, the terms of Albert Carré's new *cahier des charges* for the Opéra-Comique obliged him to engage the two winners of the *opéra comique* competition from that year onwards.¹⁶⁶ This action was most likely a concession from Carré or the Ministre des Beaux-Arts in return for the Opéra-Comique officially becoming a lyric theatre in the same *cahier*. By engaging singers who excelled in the company's older repertoire, it preserved the distinctly French aspect of the company (particularly as Puccini and Verdi were amongst the most profitable composers in the repertoire in 1904), and therefore justified the continuation of their subsidy. This created the first official Paris Conservatoire-to-Opéra-Comique link after decades of Paris Conservatoire graduates performing for the company. In the past, the Opéra-Comique

¹⁶³ Arthur Pougin, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel* 31 July 1892, p. 244; Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 7 August 1892, p. 255.

¹⁶⁴ Author Unknown, 'Nouvelles Théâtrales', *Le Matin* 11 November 1903, p. 4; Arthur Pougin, 'Les Concours du Conservatoire: Chant (Femmes)', *Le Ménestrel* 23 July 1905, p. 235.

¹⁶⁵ Nicolet, 'Courrier des Spectacles', *Le Gaulois* 16 February 1908, p. 3.

¹⁶⁶ Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 6 March 1904, p. 79.

had rarely hired mezzo-sopranos straight from the Paris Conservatoire, with some directors preferring to hire singers who had left or graduated from the institution and then joined another company — for example, Carvalho hired Wyns and Deschamps-Jéhin after they had established their careers in the Opéra and the Théâtre de la Monnaie respectively. The company also accepted singers from Paris Conservatoire-trained teachers (for example, Galli-Marié and Delna) — Carré’s acceptance of new *opéra comique* prize-winners was thus only the public confirmation of a long history between the two institutions.

We now turn to the contents of these highly-prized contracts. The Bibliothèque nationale de France holds two contracts for the companies during the Third Republic which I consulted — a blank contract from the Opéra-Comique during Camille du Locle’s tenure as sole director (1875–76), and a contract signed by Deschamps-Jéhin for a 32-month contract with the Opéra in October 1890. Signing a contract with one of the companies impacted on where the singer lived, and how their days, regardless of whether they were scheduled to sing on stage, were structured:

ARTICLE 4. No artist can reside outside of Paris nor [reside] more than two kilometres distance from the Theatre.¹⁶⁷

ARTICLE 5. To give the Administration, in the case of unforeseen circumstances, the ability to replace one work with another, every artist must leave their home [and come to the theatre if an issue occurs], [or] if they are absent, where they can be found; in all cases, they must be available to the Administration an hour before the beginning of the performance, and perform that same night in the piece that would be given. Consequently, on the day of a performance, they must not leave the city without permission.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ ‘ART. 4. Aucun artiste ne pourra demeurer hors Paris ni à une distance de plus de deux kilomètres du Théâtre.’ *Engagement de Madame Jéhin née Blanche Deschamps* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, 1890), p. 2.

¹⁶⁸ ‘ART. 5. Afin de donner à l’Administration, en case d’événements imprévus, la facilité de remplacer un ouvrage par un autre, tout artiste devra laisser chez lui, s’il s’absente, l’indication du lieu où l’on pourrait le trouver; dans tous les cas il devra se trouver à la disposition de l’Administration une heure avant le commencement du spectacle, et jouer le soir même dans la pièce qui serait indiquée. En conséquence, le jour du spectacle, il ne devra pas quitter la ville sans autorisation.’ *Engagement de Madame Jéhin née Blanche Deschamps*, p. 2.

This clause meant that singers had little privacy outside of the theatre, as any absence from their home on most days of the year had to be reported to the administration so that they could be found in case of an emergency. In the Opéra, there were mechanisms in place to save a scheduled performance, as article forty-nine of the 1888 *cahier des charges* had instituted a triple-casting system — each role in a production now needed a main singer, and two understudies — but article five of the contract was still considered necessary.¹⁶⁹ Singers were also expected to revise their repertoire constantly, as they may have been called upon to sing a piece that they had sung within the previous six months at any time without a rehearsal.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, they had to commit to learning new pieces in an emergency within set time limits (for example, the Opéra-Comique gave singers four days for one-act operas, six for two-act operas and ten for three-act ones).¹⁷¹

The operatic industry at this time thus relied heavily on fast but indirect communication in relation to both normal day-to-day events and emergencies, as companies and artists alike had to be appraised quickly of any changes of location or repertoire. The number of ways that singers and directors corresponded expanded during this period as telegrams and later telephones became more commonplace, but letters remained a popular method of communication.¹⁷² In addition to these throwaway missives, larger business could be initiated without a face-to-face meeting: for example, well-established singers of this era maintained the ability to accept roles without needing

¹⁶⁹ H. Moreno, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel* 21 October 1888, p. 339.

¹⁷⁰ *Engagement de Madame Jehin née Blanche Deschamps*, p. 2 (article 2).

¹⁷¹ *Archives de l'Opéra-Comique. Personnel. Formulaires d'engagement d'artistes, 1870–1880* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, 1870–1880), p. 2 (article 9).

¹⁷² Telephones in Paris were a growing commodity during the early Third Republic, and they were so widespread that by the end of the 1880s, telephone subscribers could listen in at the Opéra. However, uptake on the new technology amongst some demographics was slow: for instance, Massenet only obtained a telephone during the mid-1900s. Sources: Annegret Fauser, 'New Media, Source-Bonding and Alienation: Listening at the 1889 Exposition Universelle', in *French Music, Culture, and National Identity, 1870–1914*, ed. Barbara L. Kelly (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008), pp. 40–57; pp. 45–46; James Harding, *Massenet* (London: Dent, 1970), p. 167.

to be in Paris, or even in France. It appears to have been common for singers to make preliminary written commitments to roles in correspondence with the company's management, with more formal agreements such as contracts following when the singer returned to the company. The relationship that the singer had with the directors dictated the content of these notes. For example: Deschamps-Jéhin wrote a short note to Carré, agreeing to reprise Madame de la Haltière in *Cendrillon*:

Dear Monsieur Carré,

In response to your letter I have the pleasure of telling you that I accept the offer to sing in *Cendrillon*. I will be at your disposal to sing my role of Mme [de] la Haltière, from October 2 until the end of November with a minimum of twenty performances.¹⁷³

On the other hand, Galli-Marié, when initially accepting the role of Carmen, was more personal in her letter to du Locle:

'Yes, *cher Monsieur*, I accept—2,500 per month—four months—October 1874, November, December and January—twelve times a month—to create the *Carmen* of Messrs. Bizet, Meilhac, and Halévy—

Is that it, are you satisfied? That will make very nice performances at 208frs. 33 cent. a piece!! *Misère* as they say in the *faubourg* Antoine [sic]! However if the piece is successful, and if you prolong my engagement, I want a little more, and you won't find me unfair, will you...if I ask for 300 per night; for if it doesn't succeed, all is over between us! Come now, grant me this right away for once, without dragging me through the dust! (Particularly as in this weather it is more likely to be mud!). How you have made my self-esteem suffer! How you despise the good Lord's poor actors!! Nevertheless I am inclined to agree with you! But, look, what honourable trade is there that brings in 12,000 francs in twenty-eight days? What a chatterbox, what a chatterbox I am! The hope of seeing you again in ten months makes me garrulous!

I cannot accept your nice proposal to come back to Paris for the month of January, because if I am not in Brussels I shall be in Antwerp (still for 1,000 an evening)...My best wishes to M. Bizet (I am sure that he will dine well tonight).¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ 'Cher Monsieur Carré, En réponse à votre lettre j'ai le plaisir de vous dire que j'accepte l'offre de jouer du Cendrillon. Je serai à votre disposition pour chanter mon rôle en Mme la Haltière, le 2 octobre prochain jusqu'à fin novembre avec un minimum de 20 représentations.' Blanche Deschamps-Jéhin, 'Lettre de Blanche Deschamps-Jéhin à Albert Carré 18 June 1899', *5 lettres de Blanche Deschamps-Jéhin à divers correspondants, datées et non datée* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, date unknown).

¹⁷⁴ Curtiss, p. 364.

In addition to showing their relationships with company directors — Galli-Marié was far more familiar with du Locle than Deschamps-Jéhin was with Carré — these letters give us a glimpse of how new contracts were negotiated when singers were busy with other companies. They also show how contracts and salaries changed in twenty-six years; Galli-Marié negotiated a specific per-performance salary, but the absence of any mention of emolument in Deschamps-Jéhin’s letter suggests that *Cendrillon* would be part of her monthly allocation of performances, and that no extra salary (or raise after her agreed performances) was expected.

As well as determining their performance schedule without a face-to-face interview with the director, some high-ranking singers were given opportunities to have a greater involvement in the non-musical process of staging an opera. For example, singers could be empowered to order their own costumes from tailors, but if the tailor was unused to the level of bureaucracy and delays that working for a state-funded company entailed, they could target the singer directly for the bill. Galli-Marié ordered her full costume for Guiraud’s *Piccolino* (1876) from MM. Walter and Bonnardot, and after several months of non-payment from Opéra-Comique’s administration, one of the tailors filed a civil suit against her for double the original cost of the unpaid bill. This case reached the civil courts in April 1877, and unfolded as follows:

In *Piccolino*, Galli-Marié wears, as we know, a charming *travesti* that suits her perfectly, but what suits her less is the following bill her tailor, the creator of the *travesti* outfit, has sent. Judge for yourself:

Madame Galli-Marié:

An English velvet jacket	130
One pair knickerbockers	60
A pair of large gaiters	25
40 centimetres brown velvet	8
Imitation culottes	<u>30</u>
Total	253

The funds relating to these culottes appear to this intelligent artist to be a little like the barrel which was once claimed from the legendary apothecaries.¹⁷⁵ She told the tailor to go to the Opéra-Comique, as she had ordered the costume on behalf of the management.

So Mme Galli-Marié was buried under an avalanche of state-sealed papers. During these prevarications, if the success of *Piccolino* was growing, the tailor's memory grew his stomach in proportion and he increased it by half, because the tenacious supplier came to claim 500 francs for principal, interest, damages and costs. Experts estimate the travesti costume's worth at 140 francs. The artist, to end this, offered him 200. He refused and it was assigned to the 7th chamber.

So, believing that he would make the culottes [i.e. the costs of the whole trouser role costume], the gallant little couturier arrived quite simply to get the jacket [140 francs], because the tribunal thought that Galli-Marié's offers constituted a fully sufficient remuneration.¹⁷⁶

Luckily for Galli-Marié, the court found against the tailor, but he was not deterred; both of the tailors pursued her again over the costume in 1882, but the case was once again referred to experts to determine the true value of the items, permanently confounding the tailors' ambitions.¹⁷⁷

Contracts were signed for residencies in the company ranging from a few months for major international star singers to roughly thirty-six months for regular, long-term members of the troupe. The Opéra's contracts under Ritt and Gailhard (1884–91) required a specific number of performances per month from each artist in their roster.¹⁷⁸ As part of their contract, they were allocated a monthly quota and this affected their monthly income; Deschamps-Jéhin was contracted for ten performances every month, and each performance was worth one tenth of her salary. Therefore, missing a performance meant that she was paid nine-tenths of her salary, and extra performances

¹⁷⁵ Unfortunately I have been unable to trace the source of this saying.

¹⁷⁶ Author Unknown, 'À travers les tribunaux', *La Glaneur Parisien* 8 April 1877, *Galli-Marié Célestine: dossier biographique* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, 1867–1905). It is unclear which one of the tailors sued her this time, as the reports I consulted did not name the company (the names are from the 1882 filing), but *La Glaneur Parisien* insinuated that it was a single litigant against Galli-Marié. For the original French text, see Appendix B.

¹⁷⁷ Albert Bataille, 'Gazette des Tribunaux', *Le Figaro* 5 March 1882, p. 3; Minos, 'Chronique', *Le droit populaire* 11 March 1882, pp. 74–76: p. 75

¹⁷⁸ Rosenthal, 'Gailhard, Pierre [Pedro]', in *Grove Music Online*, <www.oxfordmusiconline.com> [accessed 8 December 2016].

(generally in circumstances such as extended productions of operas) added on an extra tenth each. Otherwise, her salary would remain at 4,000 francs per month, with a 500 franc-per-month increase at the end of each twelve-month period (this system for raises was also in place in the Opéra-Comique).¹⁷⁹ There was no holiday pay; singers with no prospects of temporary contracts in the provinces or abroad stayed in the Opéra and performed through the quieter (and less lucrative) summer months, drawing twelve consecutive months of income, while the stars of the company enhanced their incomes in locations such as Aix-les-Bains or Monte Carlo, and drew no salaries from the Opéra during that time. Their ability to take on these contracts was at the mercy of the management of the company, as their contracts stated that they needed their employers' permission to perform in any concerts or operas outside of the Opéra (as did the singers in the Opéra-Comique).¹⁸⁰ Most of these external employment prospects for singers in France in the nineteenth century were in provincial houses, or in spa towns, but these were supplemented by casinos from 1907 onwards, when the government lifted its ban on gambling, and by 1914, newly-opened casinos in Vichy and Deauville had become popular locations for summer residencies.¹⁸¹

Most of these temporary contracts held little significance, but contracts with companies such as the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels and the Opéra de Monte-Carlo belied the increasing rivalry between the Parisian companies and those in surrounding Francophone areas. This was fuelled by the new railways of the 1860s, which made many cities including Brussels and Rouen reachable within several hours of low-cost travel.¹⁸² While companies such as the Théâtre des Arts in Rouen were occasional audience

¹⁷⁹ H. Moreno, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel* 14 November 1886, p. 400. In this article, Heugel used the recently-signed soprano Cécile Simmonet's contract as an example: he stated that her salary was to increase from 1,000 per month to 1,500 in her second year, and 2,000 in her third.

¹⁸⁰ *Engagement de Madame Jehin née Blanche Deschamps*, p. 3 (article 9).

¹⁸¹ Lindy Woodhead, *Shopping, Seduction & Mr Selfridge* (London: Profile Books, 2012), p. 175.

¹⁸² F.W.J. Hemmings, *Theatre and State in France: 1760–1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 149. This worked in both directions; multiple towns situated within two or three hours

drains as a consequence of efforts to decentralise opera from Paris in the final decades of the nineteenth century, the companies faced a more sustained threat first from the Théâtre de la Monnaie, and later from the Opéra de Monte-Carlo.¹⁸³ These companies seized on the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique's reticence to develop their overall repertoires and promote their singers; the Théâtre de la Monnaie's rate of adoption of unperformed French works during Deschamps-Jéhin's time in the company (1879–85) was such that the directors nicknamed the company 'Paris's first house'.¹⁸⁴ The Théâtre de la Monnaie and the Opéra de Monte-Carlo, like the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique, staged works exclusively in French (which was undoubtedly attractive for Francophone singers), although the former allowed some singers to perform in Italian if they felt it was necessary.¹⁸⁵

Regardless of these rivalries and occasional losses of singers to other companies, the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique were guaranteed to remain in existence for as long as their subsidies continued. However, they still needed to provide clarity for situations such as unforeseen or unscheduled closures within their contracts, which was a necessity when the Paris-centred political turbulence which had erupted sporadically since the 1780s is taken into account:

Article 6 — In the case of the closure of the Theatre, for any reason whatsoever, no salary shall be due for the duration of the aforesaid closure; no artist can be engaged by another theatre before the term of three months since the closure has

by train of Paris only published advertisements for Parisian theatres in their newspapers even if the town had an active theatre (Hemmings, p. 158).

¹⁸³ Clair Rowden, 'Decentralisation and Regeneration at the Théâtre des Arts, Rouen, 1889–1891', *Revue de Musicologie* Vol. 94, No. 1 (2008), pp. 139–80: p. 139. Productions of interest to Parisians by the Théâtre des Arts included *Samson et Dalila* (March 1890), Reyer's *Salammbô* (1890) and Wagner's *Lohengrin* (1891), and Western Railways offered Paris–Rouen trips at a 50% discount for Parisians to encourage them to travel (p. 146 note 25). In spite of the occasional success of provincial theatres, this decentralisation did not occur properly until after 1945 (p. 175).

¹⁸⁴ Rowden, 'Decentralisation and Regeneration at the Théâtre des Arts, Rouen, 1889–1891', pp. 143–44.

¹⁸⁵ Kerry Murphy, 'Melba's Paris Debut: Another White Voice?', *Musicology Australia* Vol. 33, No. 1 (June 2011), pp. 3–13: pp. 4–5. Marcella Sembrich sang in Italian for a whole season while the rest of the ensemble sang in French, and Nellie Melba's debut as Gilda in *Rigoletto* was in Italian, but in this instance the ensemble sang in Italian whenever she was onstage.

elapsed; nor can they appear in any other theatre in the interval, without the permission of the director. In the case of an epidemic, civil war or war with another country resulting in the closure of the Théâtre National de l'Opéra, salaries will be suspended.¹⁸⁶

The early Third Republic experienced no major epidemics, but between September 1870 and November 1918, Paris was threatened twice by invasion from foreign armies. The first threat came from the Prussian army following Napoleon III's defeat at Sedan and subsequent abdication; once the active stage of the Franco-Prussian War had ended, the Prussian army advanced on Paris, besieging it from September 1870 to January 1871. With the news that the Prussians were days away from the city, the core troupes of the two companies scattered, presumably with the permission or even with the orders of the company directors. Galli-Marié, after a summer of performing in *Mignon* and singing 'La Marseillaise' in support of the war on the Opéra-Comique's stage, fled to Montpellier, and Bloch, along with multiple members of the Opéra's troupe, quickly signed a short-term contract with the Théâtre de la Monnaie and left the country.¹⁸⁷ The active threat from the Prussian army only lasted four months, but the formation of the Commune and the events of the *Semaine sanglante* deterred many of the stars from returning to the city until September 1871.

The First World War, and its focus on attrition warfare presented a different challenge. Its declaration two months into the Opéra-Comique's summer break of 1914 forced the government to announce a closure of all Parisian theatres in anticipation of an immediate threat to Paris.¹⁸⁸ The Opéra-Comique eventually reopened in December

¹⁸⁶ 'ART. 6. — En cas de clôture du Théâtre, pour quelque cause que ce soit, aucun traitement ne sera dû pendant toute la durée de ladite clôture; aucun artiste ne pourra s'engager avec une autre administration avant le terme de trois mois écoulés depuis la clôture, ni paraître sur aucun théâtre dans l'intervalle, sans la permission du Directeur. En cas d'épidémie, guerre civile ou étrangère entraînant la fermeture du Théâtre National de l'Opéra, les appointements seront suspendus.' *Engagement de Madame Jehin née Blanche Deschamps*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁷ Gustave Bertrand, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel* 31 July 1870, p. 275; Gustave Bertrand, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel* 7 August 1870, p. 283; Curtiss, p. 363; Émile Blavet, 'Échos', *Le Figaro* 23 September 1870, p. 2.

¹⁸⁸ Dominique Garban, *Jacques Rouché: l'homme qui sauva l'Opéra de Paris* (Paris: Somogy, 2007), p. 182.

1914, six months after the beginning of the summer closure, and one month after the singers were ostensibly free to find new contracts. The company's troupe was diminished, and they turned into a true repertory theatre, mostly performing works that were in their repertoire before June 1914. The Opéra was allowed to use the Trocadero concert hall for some performances in February and March 1915, but the Palais Garnier remained closed until November 1915, when the company director Jacques Rouché convinced the government to reopen it.¹⁸⁹

Aside from extreme circumstances like war, the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique operated like any other place of employment: most employees were rarely ill for more than a day, and the Opéra-Comique's requirement that their artists kept their repertoire in constant readiness for an unexpected performance provided their indisposed artists with cover for their scheduled performances if needed. Sometimes a more permanent change to an artist's health occurred, and once this was apparent, their removal from the company's roster could be swift:

ARTICLE 12 (Opéra-Comique): In the case where, by illness, by accident, by one cause or another, my abilities undergo an alteration that does not allow me to properly execute the employment for which I was engaged, my contract can be terminated by the Administration. The alteration will be confirmed by three doctors, chosen, one by the Administration, another by me, the third by the two [parties]; they will decide by a majority vote and without any recourse.¹⁹⁰

The only leading mezzo-soprano in the Opéra who suffered from a health problem serious enough to end her career was Richard, whose auditory issues were briefly outlined in the quotation from Ibos in Chapter 1.1. Many singers faced vocal burnout or damage in their late careers (and this was the most likely reason for the inclusion of the

¹⁸⁹ Garban, p. 182.

¹⁹⁰ '12^e: Dans le cas où, soit par maladie, soit par accident, soit par une cause quelconque, mes facultés viendraient à subir une altération qui ne me permettrait plus de tenir convenablement l'emploi pour lequel je m'engage, mon engagement pourra être résilié par l'Administration. L'altération sera constatée par trois médecins, choisis, l'un par l'Administration, l'autre par moi, le troisième par les deux; ils prononceront à la majorité des voix et sans aucun recours.' *Archives de l'Opéra-Comique. Personnel. Formulaires d'engagement d'artistes, 1870–1880* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, 1870–1880), p. 3.

clauses in the contracts for singers), but as Ibos stated, Richard was unable to process the sounds around her properly. It affected how she sang as well, probably making her regular repertoire difficult to perform, and learning new repertoire near-impossible; her voice was undamaged, but she was unable to use it to its full potential. This brought an end to the most successful part of her career in the summer of 1889, during the *Exposition Universelle*. Richard had been the company's leading mezzo-soprano since Bloch's departure in June 1880, and was earning 5,000 francs per month; after twelve years of steady service she took three months away from the company from January to mid-April 1889, and returned in time for the Exposition.¹⁹¹ The problem came to a head in the late summer: she completed ten performances in July 1889 across *Le prophète*, *Rigoletto*, *Henry VIII* and *Aïda*, but she only sang eight times in August. Following a performance of *Rigoletto* on 10 September (her sole performance that month), she suddenly left the company and was marked 'absente' in the salary logbooks — a note more synonymous with retirements than new engagements with rival companies.¹⁹² After Mlle Mounier replaced her as Amneris in *Aïda* on 18 September, Charles Foley of *L'Orchestre* made this statement at the beginning of his review:

Mlle Richard has left; it is completely natural that MM. Ritt and Gailhard are looking to replace the fugitive. If they did not succeed the first time, there is nothing to be surprised by, and to reproach them for it would be as insulting to Mlle Richard as it would be unjust to them.¹⁹³

Richard's sudden departure, and the lack of an explanation in the logbook suggests that she bowed out of her contract rather than face being evaluated and placing her whole career in jeopardy. She reappeared in the Opéra-Comique in 1892, playing Margared in

¹⁹¹ *Archives de l'Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1888–1891* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, 1888–1891), p. 117.

¹⁹² The performance statistics come from the 1889 editions of *L'Orchestre* found on Gallica.

¹⁹³ 'Mlle Richard est partie; il est bien naturel que MM. Ritt et Gailhard cherchent à remplacer la fugitive. S'ils n'ont pas réussi du premier coup, il n'y a pas à s'en étonner et leur en faire un reproche serait aussi injurieux pour Mlle Richard qu'injuste pour eux-mêmes.' C.F., 'Opéra : Début de Mlle Mounier dans *Aïda*', *L'Orchestre* August 1889, p. 70.

Le roi d'Ys, and made a return to the Opéra in 1893, but after a year in the latter in a greatly diminished position, she retired from the stage.¹⁹⁴ This was a position in which many singers who abused their voices found themselves — unable to continue with their careers, they faced either a very public decline before an internal review nullified their contracts, or they could bow out gracefully rather than risk their reputations from their better days.

Career-ending injuries could affect artists of either sex, but female artists (both singers and ballerinas) had two major sex-specific professional impediments at this time: their status as legal minors, and their ability to fall pregnant. The former issue generally meant that a female singer needed permission from her father or her husband to take a contract: for example, Léon Jéhin had to physically sign his wife's contract as well, writing 'I authorise my wife to take this contract' on the left side of the first page. Pregnancy was more contentious — the companies took different approaches to pregnant women: the Opéra made no provision for this situation in their contracts in the 1890s, but the Opéra-Comique in the 1870s did:

Article 11: In regards to pregnant women, the Administration will be the sole judge of the moment where it would seem appropriate to require the interruption of their service, and then (this measure is a question of convenience and respect towards the public), their salary will be stopped until they have recovered fully. In addition, and in regards to unmarried women, the Administration reserves, in the case of pregnancy, the right to terminate their engagement without compensation.¹⁹⁵

The wording of the final sentence suggests that falling pregnant within marriage could be as risky to a female singer's career as an illegitimate pregnancy would have been.

¹⁹⁴ Georges Boyer, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 25 April 1892, p. 3; *Archives de l'Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1891–1894* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, 1891–1894), pp. 45–46.

¹⁹⁵ '11e A l'égard des dames enceintes, l'Administration sera seule juge du moment où il lui paraîtra convenable d'exiger la discontinuité de leur service, et des lors (cette mesure étant une question de convenance et de respect envers le public), les appointements seront supprimés jusqu'à parfait rétablissement. En outre, et à l'égard des dames non mariées, l'Administration se réserve, dans le cas de grossesse, le droit de résilier leur engagement sans aucune indemnité.' *Archives de l'Opéra-Comique. Personnel. Formulaires d'engagement d'artistes, 1870–1880*, p. 3.

Elsewhere, singers paid what Rutherford calls ‘forfeit charges’ if they fell pregnant outside of marriage, but the Opéra-Comique was explicit about the fact that they reserved the right to fire them, and that the singers had no legal recourse.¹⁹⁶ The Opéra-Comique’s pregnancy clause added to the pressure of a career that not only promised to be short, but also generally coincided with a female singer’s childbearing years. Few of the leading mezzo-sopranos in the two major companies had children; Galli-Marié had a daughter before her first husband’s death in 1861 (and at least a year before joining the Opéra-Comique), and Delna had a daughter in September 1904, fifteen months after she retired upon her marriage.¹⁹⁷ Delna’s retirement was in this manner a practical one, but there was no contractual requirement that female singers retired upon marriage. Some were married before they joined the companies — for instance, Héglon was Madame Divoire in the logbooks of the Opéra from the month she joined — and most singers would marry during their active careers. These marriages commonly occurred during lulls in the operatic season (Deschamps-Jéhin and Wyns married their husbands in December 1889 and 1899 respectively), and after a brief honeymoon, the singer returned to the company and continued her career without impediment.¹⁹⁸

Whether their career was abruptly ended by a marriage or they bowed out after decades of work, the majority of singers had no pensions, as the sometimes extravagant income that some singers had during their careers should have been turned into a nest

¹⁹⁶ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, p. 195. While it is possible that singers would also be fired after they paid the charge, it appears that it may have been left at a large fine with the singer remaining in the troupe. These charges were in place until the 1930s in Italy.

¹⁹⁷ Author Unknown, ‘Paris et Départements’, *Le Ménestrel* 4 September 1904, p. 286. I have been unable to establish the name or date of birth of Galli-Marié’s daughter, who was only mentioned in passing in a few articles (an example being Albert Vizentini’s ‘Les Jeunes Premières du Jour I: Madame Galli-Marié’ in *L’Éclair* (8 December 1867), *Galli-Marié Célestine: dossier biographique* [Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, 1867–1905]). She had also become a grandmother by 1883 (Jean VII, ‘Paris d’Hier et d’Aujourd’hui: L’Opéra-Comique’, *Le Gaulois* 12 January 1883, p. 2).

¹⁹⁸ Nicolet, ‘Courrier des Spectacles’, *Le Gaulois* 27 December 1889, p. 4; Author Unknown, ‘Paris et Départements’, *Le Ménestrel* 3 December 1899, p. 390.

egg for their retirements.¹⁹⁹ Pensions were budgeted for in the Opéra, but they were rare; for example, their 1890 budget listed fifteen pension recipients: ten elderly former performers, four widows' pensions and one 'pension de réforme', which was temporary financial aid for a former artist.²⁰⁰ Instead, it was very common for popular singers to become singing teachers during their retirements, as their reputations could be used to attract a large complement of students even before their pedagogy produced new stars.²⁰¹

In terms of salary (and thus their ability to build their retirement fund) leading mezzo-sopranos fell into the middle of the hierarchy — they were amongst the lowest-paid leading singers in the troupe of both companies (below the leading soprano, tenor and baritone), but at the zeniths of their Opéra careers, they were always paid a comfortable salary.

Table 1.2b: Pauline Guéymard-Lauters' monthly salary (from 1872)²⁰²

1872	April 1876
5,000	Contract complete

Table 1.2c: Rosine Bloch's monthly salary (from 1872)²⁰³

1872	1874	1875-79	1879	June 1880
3,000	4,166	4,000	4,833.35 ²⁰⁴	Absent

¹⁹⁹ Many singers across Europe invested their savings in the hope of increasing their post-career income, but their success could be variable (Rosselli, pp. 173–74).

²⁰⁰ Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 8 March 1891, p. 78.

²⁰¹ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera: 1815–1930*, p. 203.

²⁰² *Archives de l'Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1872–1875* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, 1872–1875), p. 37 *Archives de l'Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1875–1878* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, 1875–1878), p. 51. There are no existing records for 1870–1871, but the company was closed or understaffed for much of the time between Napoleon III's defeat at Sedan and the dismantling of the Commune, so they would be too inconsistent to reflect their true salaries. The salaries listed remained the same until the next given date with temporary fluctuations for missed and extra performances. Salary increases were often given twelve months after the contracts were first signed.

²⁰³ *Archives de l'Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1872–1875*, p. 38; *Archives de l'Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1875–1878*, p. 52; *Archives de l'Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1878–1879* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, 1878–1879), p. 57; *Archives de l'Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1879–1882* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, 1879–1882), p. 57.

²⁰⁴ Bloch's gross salary was 5,000, but she had to pay an indemnity to the company each month, so her pay was worked out at 4,833.35 per month; her salary from 1875 had a similar indemnity as well (which is responsible for the drop in salary), but the logbooks do not state why she had to pay it.

Table 1.2d: Renée Richard’s monthly salary²⁰⁵

1877	2/1878	8/1878	9/1878	1879	1880	1881	1882	1883
416.65	833.35	1,000	1,500	2,000	2,500	3,000	3,500	6,000
1884	1885	1886	September 1889	1893				
6,500	7,000	5,000	Absent	1,818.20				

Table 1.2e: Blanche Deschamps-Jéhin’s monthly salary²⁰⁶

1891	1892	1894	May 1898
4,000	4,500	5,000	Contract terminated

Table 1.2f: Meyriane Héglon’s monthly salary²⁰⁷

1890	1892	1894	1895	1896	1897	1899	1903	February 1905	1906 (May, June)
250	600	1,000	1,500	2,000	2,500	3,000	3,600	Absent	3,600

Table 1.2g: Marie Delna’s monthly salary²⁰⁸

1898	February 1900
7,000	Absent

²⁰⁵ *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1875–1878*, p. 59; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1878–1879*, p. 62; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1879–1882*, p. 58; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1882–1885* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, 1882–1885), p. 62; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1882–1885* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, 1882–1885), p. 62; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1885–1888* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, 1885–1888), pp. 113–14; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1888–1891*, p. 117; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1891–1894*, pp. 45–46.

²⁰⁶ *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1891–1894*, pp. 117–18; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1894–1897* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, 1894–1897), pp. 153–54; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1897–1900* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, 1897–1900), p. 153.

²⁰⁷ *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1888–1891*, p. 110; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1891–1894*, p. 115; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1894–1897*, pp. 151–52; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1897–1900*, pp. 151–52; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1900–1903* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, 1900–1903), pp. 93–94; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1903–1906* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, 1903–1906), pp. 190–91; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1906–1907* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, 1906–1907), p. 94.

²⁰⁸ *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1897–1900*, pp. 163–64.

Table 1.2h: Ketty Lapeyrette’s monthly salary (to 1912)²⁰⁹

1908	1909	1910	1911	1912
416.65	583.35	1,200	1,500	2,000

Salaries were normally meticulously recorded in the logbooks, with the Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra even preserving small notes regarding abnormal or early payments that were inserted into the books during the course of their lifespans. This was a necessity in any company in order to protect it from allegations of financial mismanagement, and it was especially important in the Opéra (and the Opéra-Comique), as almost a quarter of their cash flow came from a government subsidy. However, Arbell’s entries are notably absent from 1903 to 1909, appearing nowhere in the index or the main body of the books. Some of these seasons could be explained by her sporadic presence in the company — she was often with the Opéra de Monte-Carlo or other companies during the course of an operatic season— but she was present in the company for fifty-eight performances of Massenet’s *Ariane* from 1906 to 1907. This oversight was corrected in January 1908, when she first appeared on the books for what would become the final two performances of *Ariane*, receiving a salary of 875 francs per month, which rose sharply to 4,000 per month when she returned to the company for *Roma* in April 1912 after an absence of two years.²¹⁰ It is unlikely that she was paid cash-in-hand for her performances previous to January 1908, principally because she was a moderately well-known singer playing prominent roles in a variety of operas and her absence in the logbooks would have been noted; a slightly more likely possibility is that she gave these performances *gratis* until this point, but there is no evidence to support this either.

²⁰⁹ *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1908–1909* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, 1908–1909), p. 71; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1910–1912* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra, 1910–1912), p. 68.

²¹⁰ *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1908–1909*, pp. 69–70; *Archives de l’Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1910–1912*, p. 90.

Singers' salaries were not private in any of the European or North American opera houses; many music journalists created false reports of singers' salaries to make them appear overpaid to their audiences, but in the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique, the real figures could be consulted by interested parties such as journalists.²¹¹ In addition to adding weight to arguments for or against the companies, these figures could be used as impressive pieces of trivia in essays and programme notes. An example of the latter case comes from a programme for performances of *Samson et Dalila* in the Opéra in the late 1900s and early 1910s. Using records of the artists' pay, Martial Teneo broke down how much each leading performer was paid in the first production — Deschamps-Jéhin was paid 4,000 francs per month, Edmond Vergnet (Samson) 4,500, Jean Lassalle (the Grand Priest) 9,000, and ballerinas Rosita Mauri and Julia Subra were paid 3,333 and 25,000 francs respectively, costing the directors 5833 francs 35 centimes every night.²¹² Taken without any indication of the Opéra's maximum or mean take on a given night years after the premiere, these figures suggest an impressive investment in the production, with some confidence of success. Yet, if the figures had been published at a date closer to the premiere, along with the information that the Opéra rarely exceeded 20,000 francs per performance in receipts (and needed roughly 16,000–17,000 to break even depending on the production), it could have caused outrage amongst readers (especially as one ballerina cost at least one-tenth of the maximum profit).²¹³

Henri Heugel used this kind of salary information in an article in *Le Ménestrel* on the Opéra-Comique after it had posted a loss for the 1885–86 financial year. It was

²¹¹ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, p. 186–87.

²¹² Martial Tomeo, 'Programme notes, *Samson et Dalila* Opéra programme 20 May 1910', *Programmes et articles de presse sur 'Samson et Dalila', musique de Camille Saint-Saëns* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, date unknown), p. 9. Tomeo does not explain how he got this number. Presuming that all of the artists were on a similar contract to Deschamps-Jéhin (one-tenth of their salary for each performance every month), the total should be around 4583.33, suggesting that at least one artist had a smaller monthly quota than Deschamps-Jéhin.

²¹³ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 20.

not as disapproving as the opponents of the company's bursary would have liked, as Heugel declared that it was unfortunate that Antonin Proust (the *Ministre des Beaux-Arts*) would not pay Marie van Zandt (their recently retired prima donna) more than 8,000 francs a month (the upper limit for salaries in the company).²¹⁴

Table 1.2i: Pay grades (per month) at the Opéra-Comique, 1885-86²¹⁵

Sample singers	Salary
Van Zandt (soprano [retired mid-season]) Heilbron (soprano) Talazac (tenor) Maurel (baritone)	8,000
Galli-Marié (mezzo-soprano) Isaac (coloratura soprano)	7,000
Bilbaut-Vauchelet (soprano)	5,000
Adler (soprano) Salla (soprano)	4,000
Mézeray (soprano/mezzo-soprano)	3,000
Mouliérat (tenor) Taskin (tenor) Fugère (baritone)	2,000–2,900
[Blanche] Deschamps (mezzo-soprano/contralto) Reggiani (mezzo-soprano/contralto) Simmonet (soprano) Muratet (tenor)	1,000–1,500
Castagné (mezzo-soprano/contralto, 583) Dupont (soprano, 500)	500–583

From this sample of singers' salaries, it appears that troupe incomes in the Opéra-Comique had a more even distribution than those in the Opéra — while the Opéra would eventually have salaries ranging from 100 to 15,000 francs per month, the Opéra-Comique's salaries only ranged from 500 to 8,000.²¹⁶ Yet, even though the possible salaries varied, the two companies had a similar pay structure for mezzo-sopranos. In the Opéra, the leading mezzo-soprano earned at least 2,000 francs per month more than her nearest competitor — which is evident from the salary tables supplied earlier in the

²¹⁴ Moreno, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel* 14 November 1886, p. 400.

²¹⁵ Moreno, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel* 14 November 1886, p. 400. These are estimated voice types, as the article did not mention which categories the singers belonged to.

²¹⁶ The soprano Gabrielle Krauss reached 15,000 francs per month between 1882 and 1885 (*Archives de l'Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1882–1885*, p. 38).

section — but the pay gap could be as much as 4,500 francs (between Héglon and Delna in 1898). In the Opéra-Comique, Galli-Marié was the highest-paid on 7,000 francs per month, with Mézeray, a singer who did not entirely specialise in mezzo-soprano repertoire but had sung in some of the roles, on the next tier at 3,000 francs. However, the Opéra-Comique's pay disparity was much greater for tenors and baritones, as the nearest rivals to Talazac and Maurel (8,000 francs per month) were in the 2,000–2,900 francs-per-month bracket.

This difference in the salary caps for the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique meant that on a wider scale, the Opéra was able to negotiate for new singers far more capably than the Opéra-Comique. It also had the ability to offer better salaries to existing Opéra-Comique singers such as Deschamps-Jéhin in 1890, and Delna in 1897, tempting them to change to a bigger company. However, not all singers demanded a raise every time they changed companies — Delna took a pay cut from 7,000 to 6,000 francs per month to return to the Opéra-Comique for her second contract in March 1900.²¹⁷ Delna was an unusual case, as in 1897, both companies reportedly offered her very attractive salaries in exchange for a three-year contract. It was rumoured that Carvalho offered her a 60,000 francs per annum contract, which increased by 10,000 per year up to 80,000 in 1899, but the Opéra outbid him, offering a contract for 80,000 francs, increasing to 100,000 by the final year of the contract.²¹⁸ In reality, Delna's maximum annual salary was 84,000 francs, and this was only in the unlikely event that she refused to work outside Paris for several months every summer, and continued to sing in the Palais Garnier year-round.

While a substantial raise was probably central to some singers' decisions to move up to the Opéra, some felt they had little choice. Deschamps-Jéhin's decision to leave

²¹⁷ Author Unknown, 'Gazette des Tribunaux', *Le Figaro* 19 January 1902, p. 3; Serge Basset, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 5 March 1902, p. 4.

²¹⁸ Author Unknown, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* 6 July 1897, p. 3; A. Kuntz, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *L'Aurore* 26 October 1897, p. 4.

the Opéra-Comique for the Opéra was borne not from an offer by the latter company's directors, but from an argument with the Opéra-Comique's director over her workload:

Very simply, M. Paravey, who was not pleasant to me, after making me sing four times in a row, imposed on me a fifth performance. I refused; he lost his temper, 'In twenty-four hours I will no longer be in your house', I replied to him. Indeed, MM. Ritt and Gailhard engaged me straight away after a visit I made to them with my husband, and I was their employee for eighteen months already when I debuted.²¹⁹

Deschamps-Jéhin made the process of leaving a company appear simple, but breaking a contract could have serious financial consequences. Singers were held to an indemnity which could be reclaimed if they left the company before their contract was complete. It was set at a prohibitively high amount — 127,000 francs in the case of the Opéra contract that Deschamps-Jéhin signed in October 1890, which was her salary for the entire two years and eight months of the contract. Through this the Opéra made it clear that even though they paid her on a monthly basis, this was a contract for the entirety of the thirty-two months — if she did not fulfil it, they could take back the money that they had and would have paid her. However, this was not always a strong enough incentive for singers to remain with the company if they were unhappy: the final years of Ritt and Gailhard's tenure as directors coincided with an exodus of singers, possibly due to the lack of new repertoire which eventually cost the directors 160,000 francs in fines.²²⁰ In the 1890s, artists ranging from minor singers such as Wyns to big, high-earning stars such as Patti and Melba (5,000 francs per month) and even the leading baritone Lassalle

²¹⁹ 'Très simplement, M. Paravey, qui ne fût pas pour moi aimable, après m'avoir fait chanter quatre fois de suite, m'en imposa une cinquième. Je refusai; Il s'emporta, 'Dans vingt-quatre heures, je ne serai plus chez vous', lui répondis-je. En effet, MM. Ritt et Gailhard m'engagèrent sur l'heure, après une visite que je leur fis avec mon mari et j'étais depuis dix-huit mois déjà leur pensionnaire lorsque je débutai.' Valmont, 'L'Étoile de ce Soir: Madame Deschamps-Jéhin (Dalila)', *Programmes et articles de presse sur 'Samson et Dalila', musique de Camille Saint-Saëns* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, date unknown). Deschamps-Jéhin debuted with the Opéra in December 1891, so if her timeline was correct, these events took place in June 1890, four months before she officially signed a contract. There had been rumours circulating for a few seasons that her move to the Opéra was imminent: in 1889, a rumour stated that the Opéra wished to cast her as Scozzone in Saint-Saëns' *Ascanio* in 1890, but Paravey insisted that she completed her Opéra-Comique contract (due to expire in 1891) before joining the Opéra (Van Helm, 'Théâtres', *Paris-Capitale* 4 December 1889, p. 4).

²²⁰ Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 15 June 1890, p. 190.

(then earning 11,000 francs per month) were terminating their contracts, and leaving for other companies.²²¹ The final years of the century saw the departure of two of the company's leading mezzo-sopranos in quick succession: Deschamps-Jéhin terminated her last Opéra contract in May 1898 during Bertrand and Gailhard's directorship (1893–99), and Delna completed hers in February 1900, months after Gailhard became the sole director — both promptly returned to the Opéra-Comique and never signed another contract with the Opéra.

Regardless of the personal issues that some singers had with the management of the houses, by singing in these companies, they benefited from greater visibility, and more non-theatrical opportunities than many of their peers in other companies. Aside from temporary contracts and private performances, there were further methods of raising their profile including product advertisements, and recordings. I have been unable to ascertain the income that singers derived from these activities, but they bear examination none the less. Advertising and product testimonials were not an invention of the *fin-de-siècle*, but the mezzo-sopranos of the Opéra-Comique, and particularly the Opéra, were, like all other popular public figures in the arts, invited to give their image and their approval to an increasing number of commercial items. As Wilson states, in Britain this was a ploy by the companies to harness the potential of a female singer's influence with 'products aimed at the increasingly powerful female market', and it is

²²¹ The difference in the approaches to the end of contracts can be seen in the logbooks — completed contracts are 'solde', and terminated ones are 'terminé'. Melba's salary could have been the reason behind her departure (in 1889 she was beginning to make a name for herself and could do better elsewhere), but Patti was forty-six when she signed to the company for the *Exposition Universelle*, and in spite of previous record-breaking contracts, her possible income would have been in decline; she was also underutilised during the Exposition, so 5,000 may not have been her true salary as outlined in her contract. Lassalle, who had been on 13,500 francs per month between 1883 and 1886, left the company twice in 1893–94, and the second time he left without doing a single contracted performance. Income information sources: *Archives de l'Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1882–1885*, p. 13; *Archives de l'Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1885–1888*, p. 35; *Archives de l'Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1888–1891*, p. 45, p. 129, p. 151; *Archives de l'Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1891–1894*, pp. 33–34; *Archives de l'Opéra. Personnel. Appointements. Chant: 1894–1897*, p. 43.

arguable that it was the same across the English Channel.²²² Singers were inundated with samples from a variety of companies asking for their endorsement in return, and while some singers (Wilson uses Luisa Tetrazzini as an example) refused to participate in a single advertisement, others were far more comfortable with associating their name with items including clothing, food and beauty products.²²³ Singers such as Bloch, Richard and Galli-Marié were active too early in the Third Republic to benefit from this, but Delna, Héglon and Arbell were particular favourites of the advertising industry in the 1900s and 1910s.

Figure 1.2a: Lucy Arbell in an advertisement for Revillon Frères furriers in an Opéra-Comique programme for *Werther* (1912)²²⁴



²²² Alexandra Wilson, 'Prima Donnas or Working Girls? Opera Singers as Female Role Models in Britain, 1900–1925', *Women's History Magazine* Issue 55 (Spring 2007), pp. 4–12: p. 6.

²²³ Wilson, p. 6.

²²⁴ 'Revillon Frères advertisement', in *Werther programme 8 February 1912, Programmes et articles de presse sur 'Werther', musique de Jules Massenet* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, date unknown), p. 12. Photograph by author.

Figure 1.2b: Full-page advertisement for Savon Cadum soap in *Le Petit Parisien*, 16 March 1913 (Arbell's picture and testimonial top row, second from right)²²⁵

L'ART ET LA BEAUTE
 payent leur tribut d'hommes
 aux qualités du
Savon Cadum

Les artistes les plus célèbres et les plus belles de Paris reconnaissent, avec reconnaissance, la beauté de leur toilette à l'usage du Savon Cadum. Elles trouvent qu'il nettoie et soigne le tout en évitant le plus doux et sans froter, sans piquer, sans rougir, sans faire suer, sans avoir pour le visage et la peau.

Ce que toute femme doit savoir

Il est important, en ce qui concerne la beauté, de savoir que le Savon Cadum est le seul qui nettoie et soigne le tout en évitant le plus doux et sans froter, sans piquer, sans rougir, sans faire suer, sans avoir pour le visage et la peau.

²²⁵ 'Savon Cadum', *Le Petit Parisien* 16 March 1913, p. 5.

Figure 1.2c: Delna as Marion (bottom left) in ‘Une Belle Poitrine’ advertisement, *Le Rire* 25 August 1917²²⁶

Une Belle Poitrine
bien Développée
et Ferme

Voilà une merveilleuse découverte pour les femmes qui ont une poitrine maigre, molle et déformée, par suite de l'abus de la toilette, de la grossesse, de la lactation, de la ménopause, de la vieillesse, etc.

Elle leur rend leur poitrine telle qu'elle était avant la grossesse, la lactation, la ménopause, etc. Elle leur rend leur poitrine telle qu'elle était avant la grossesse, la lactation, la ménopause, etc.

EXUBERANT BUST DEVELOPER
C'est le produit qui agit sur la poitrine, en lui donnant la forme et le volume qu'elle avait avant la grossesse, la lactation, la ménopause, etc.

EXUBERANT BUST DEVELOPER
C'est le produit qui agit sur la poitrine, en lui donnant la forme et le volume qu'elle avait avant la grossesse, la lactation, la ménopause, etc.

ATTESTATIONS

DÉVELOPPEMENT

Mme G. B., 10 rue de la République	18
Mme A. B., 10 rue de la République	18
Mme P. C., 10 rue de la République	18
Mme D. E., 10 rue de la République	18
Mme F. G., 10 rue de la République	18
Mme H. I., 10 rue de la République	18
Mme J. K., 10 rue de la République	18
Mme L. M., 10 rue de la République	18

RAFFERMISSEMENT

Mme N. O., 10 rue de la République	18
Mme P. Q., 10 rue de la République	18
Mme R. S., 10 rue de la République	18
Mme T. U., 10 rue de la République	18
Mme V. W., 10 rue de la République	18
Mme X. Y., 10 rue de la République	18
Mme Z. A., 10 rue de la République	18

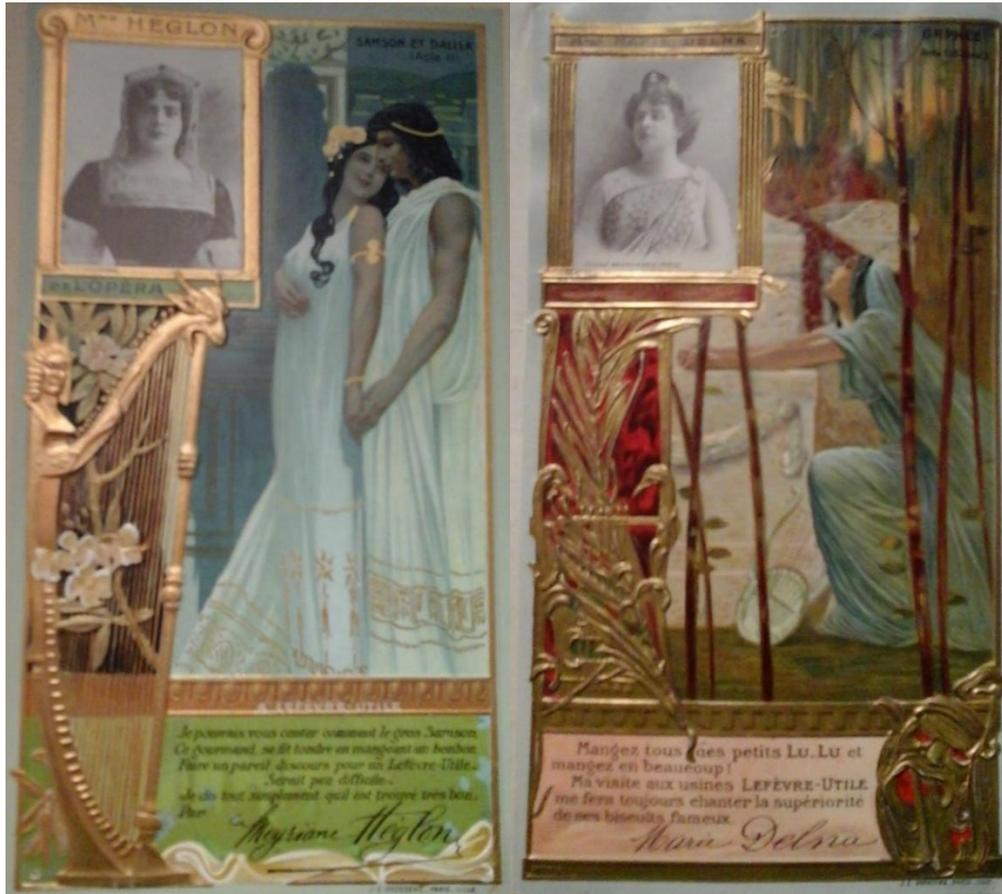
BON GRATUIT

pour conseils ou essai gratuit, s'adresser à M. HENRI DUBOIS, 10 rue de la République, Paris.

These were widespread campaigns in programmes and newspapers which could last for years, but sometimes they were asked to do more targeted, special-event items. An example of this type of advertisement is a collectable cards series for Lefèvre-Utile biscuits in which Delna and Héglon both featured in the early 1900s:

²²⁶ ‘Une Belle Poitrine’, *Le Rire* 25 August 1917, p. 2. This was a long-running campaign, and advertisements featured in newspapers such as *Le Matin* into the early 1920s.

Figure 1.2d: Lefèvre-Utile cards for Héglon and Delna²²⁷



Using gold-leaf decorated cards, the Lefèvre-Utile advertising campaign (which circulated around 1905) was a widespread one featuring a host of famous singers, actors, authors, composers and politicians, and included luminaries such as Sarah Bernhardt and Anatole France amongst its ranks. Héglon's card was based on *Samson et Dalila*, and featured a drawing from Act Two of the opera, below which was printed this limerick:

I could tell you how the fat Samson, this gourmand, got that way by eating a sweet. Making such a claim for a Lefèvre-Utile [biscuit], wouldn't be difficult, I'll just say that he thinks it's very good. By Meyriane Héglon.²²⁸

²²⁷ Photographs taken by author from: *Recueil. Dossiers biographiques Boutillier du Retail. Documentation sur Meyriane Héglon* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, date unknown); *Recueil. Dossiers biographiques Boutillier du Retail. Documentation sur Marie Delna* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, date unknown).

²²⁸ 'Je pourrais vous conter comment le gros Samson, ce gourmand, se fit tondre en mangeant un bonbon. Faire un pareil discours pour un Lefèvre-Utile, serait peu difficile, je dis tout simplement qu'il est trouvé très bon. Par Meyriane Héglon.' From Héglon's Lefèvre-Utile card, issued in a set c.1905; exact date of first publication unknown, but Delna's description as 'Mlle Delna' suggests that her line was produced pre-1903.

Delna's card was based on Orphée, one of her most prolific roles, with a lyre visible as Orphée pleads for Eurydice's return to Earth (and thus differentiating it from roles such as Cassandre, which featured similar long flowing costumes):

Eat all of my little LU-LUs and eat lots! My visit to the Lefèvre-Utile factories will make me sing forever the superiority of these famous biscuits, Marie Delna.²²⁹

The inserts in the top-left corners were both incongruous with the operatic scenes pictured in the drawing; Héglon is dressed as Anne de Boleyn from Saint-Saëns' *Henry VIII*, and Delna is Cassandre in Berlioz' *La prise de Troie* — both distinctive recent roles for the singers, but not their signature roles, which were featured in the main body of the cards. The general tone of advertisements ranged from tasteful (Arbell's Revillon Frères endorsement) to the playful (the Lefèvre-Utile cards, and Delna's inclusion in an advertisement for chest-enhancing tonics), but they reflected the singers' images in the public eye. Arbell, despite her status as Massenet's favourite singer and the *créatrice* of multiple new roles, appears only as herself, wearing expensive furs and highlighting her clear skin. Héglon was inseparable from her Opéra repertoire (and specifically Dalila), while Delna appears as Marion from *La Vivandière* or Orphée, two of her most distinctive Opéra-Comique roles, or as Cassandre as a reminder of her Opéra past.

A more novel form of self-promotion for singers in this time (and one already touched upon in this chapter) was recordings of their repertoire. The market for classical and operatic music dates back as far as 1897, when recordings first began to feature in catalogues (three years after the first recordings and phonographs were made available in France by Pathé).²³⁰ Initial operatic recordings were by long-retired former operatic singers singing their star arias in their then-anachronistic fashion, but by 1902,

²²⁹ 'Mangez tous mes petits LU-LU et mangez en beaucoup! Ma visite aux usines Lefèvre-Utile me fera toujours chanter la supériorité de ces biscuits fameux. Marie Delna.'

²³⁰ Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, chapter 3.1, paragraph 6, paragraphs 9–10; Bergeron, p. 113.

contemporary stars such as Enrico Caruso were engaging with this new form of self-promotion.²³¹ The home-listening industry began to develop in earnest after the wider release of Edison's Gramophone in 1904, and recordings were promoted by recording companies through 'singer-less tours', which involved playing gramophones to halls of people.²³² As Bergeron notes, alongside the novelty factor of the ability to replay a singer's performance whenever the listener desired, the era of recording brought a sense of lost voices, and a sense of urgency in capturing those that still existed.²³³

The nascent recordings industry offered recordings of everything from single arias by star singers to full operas in projects such as Pathé's 'Les théâtres chez-soi' collaboration with the Opéra by the 1910s, although only the former enterprise became profitable before 1918.²³⁴ Recordings could not reproduce the full voice of a singer before the end of the First World War, and flaws in the recording system meant that it required knowledge of a singer's true vocal timbre to listen to these recordings properly. The speed of records was not standardised until 1927, so it took a considerable amount of tweaking to get the timbre of a singer's voice right when playing a disk or cylinder, which was even more difficult for a listener who had never heard the singer or aria in person.²³⁵ Yet, all of these issues with early recorded music did not deter the companies or the consumers — from 1903 onwards, recording companies placed advertisements in

²³¹ Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, chapter 3.1, paragraph 6, paragraphs 9–10; Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, 'Recordings and histories of performance style' in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, ed. Eric Clarke, Nicholas Cook, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and John Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 246–62: p. 250.

²³² Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, chapter 3.1, paragraphs 10–11.

²³³ Bergeron, p. 116.

²³⁴ William Ashbrook, 'Liner Notes', *Donizetti: La Favorite: Recorded in the Original French Version 1912* <http://www.marstonrecords.com/favorite/favorite_liner.htm>.

²³⁵ Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 61.

Much of the repertoire recorded by these singers was in regular performance in either company, and constituted the best-known and most popular music that they sang. Delna's first recordings (as suggested by the running order of the Malibran Records' collection) were the Habanera and Seguidilla from *Carmen* and 'Ah, mon fils!' from *Le prophète*, and Héglon, unsurprisingly for a career Dalila, recorded 'Printemps qui commence' and 'Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix' with Saint-Saëns on the piano. Marié de l'Isle's recordings reflected her status as Galli-Marié's niece, student and putative successor — while her recordings include core arias from *Werther* (the greatest success of her career), the majority are from *Carmen* and *Mignon*. *Carmen* received particular attention: as well as the Habanera and Seguidilla, Marié de l'Isle recorded 'Les tringles des sistres' and 'Je vais danser en votre honneur' from Act Two, the 'Air des cartes' from Act Three, and fragments from *Carmen* and Don José's final duet in Act Four, with Léon Beyle as Don José, and Hector Dufranne as Escamillo.²³⁷ This filleting of operatic pieces had more to do with the technology than consumer tastes; as Leech-Wilkinson notes, pre-1908 wax cylinders and discs were only capable of recording roughly two minutes of music, and this dictated the length of the take, and what was recorded.²³⁸

One of the only roles to not benefit from a wide range of aria recordings by mezzo-sopranos was Léonor in *La favorite*, but instead it received a more experimental treatment in the new age of recording. It had maintained a modest level of success through the early Third Republic: it was sung by every leading mezzo-soprano up to Héglon and reached its 500th performance in 1888.²³⁹ It left the active repertoire in 1904, but the opera was revived with Ketty Lapeyrette in 1912 as a recording.²⁴⁰ *La favorite*

²³⁷ 'Track Listing', *The Complete Recordings of Marie Delna and Selected Recordings of Jeanne Marié De L'Isle* <<http://www.marstonrecords.com/products/delna>>.

²³⁸ Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance*, chapter 3.1, paragraph 19.

²³⁹ Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 235.

²⁴⁰ Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 339.

was the fifth opera chosen by the Opéra and Pathé to be recorded as a full opera, and Lapeyrette, as the Opéra's recently-established leading mezzo-soprano, helped to create a lasting memento of this opera's history in the company.²⁴¹ This unfortunately was not a declaration of an intent to revive the work by the administration — *La favorite* was revived for a final production in 1918, when Lapeyrette played the role onstage for the first time.²⁴² Both the choice of the opera and the overall scale of the project was a strikingly bold move forward in the recording industry, which had focused on single-track releases before the 'Les théâtres chez-soi' series (of which *La favorite* was part). However, perhaps because this ambition outstripped the limitations of the recording industry of the time, and due to the uneven quality of the recordings themselves, the series as a whole was a commercial failure.²⁴³ In the case of *La favorite*, I have been unable to establish whether it had any independent success. Still, the lack of press attention from publications such as *Le Figaro* and *Le Ménestrel* — in spite of a cast that included the Opéra's star mezzo-soprano at the height of her career — implies that this act of offstage promotion for the mezzo-soprano repertoire was only recognised eighty-five years later, when Marston Records re-mastered it for commercial release in 1997.

Each one of these new opportunities represented a change in the concept of celebrity at this time: none of these singers were the top earners in their companies or the most well-known, but with a growing market for recordings and endorsements, their status as minor celebrities gave singers like Arbell, Delna, Deschamps-Jéhin, Héglon,

²⁴¹ Ashbrook, 'Liner Notes', *Donizetti: La Favorite: Recorded in the Original French Version 1912* <http://www.marstonrecords.com/favorite/favorite_liner.htm>. Lapeyrette also recorded the parts of Azucena in *Il trovatore* and Maddalena in *Rigoletto* in the same year. These were not strictly sung-through performances of the operas, as *La favorite* was recorded in forty-two parts.

²⁴² Ashbrook, 'Liner Notes', *Donizetti: La Favorite: Recorded in the Original French Version 1912* <http://www.marstonrecords.com/favorite/favorite_liner.htm>. It did get partial performances before this — for instance, Delna returned to the Opéra for a short run of galas in January and March 1916 which featured single acts of *La favorite* (Author Unknown, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 7 January 1916, p. 3; Author Unknown, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 8 March 1916, p. 5).

²⁴³ Ashbrook, 'Liner Notes', *Donizetti: La Favorite: Recorded in the Original French Version 1912* <http://www.marstonrecords.com/favorite/favorite_liner.htm>. For instance, Ashbrook notes that while Lapeyrette clearly was a skilled mezzo-soprano, the recording does not reflect this.

Lapeyrette and Marié de l'Isle new promotional possibilities that their predecessors could never have been offered. Mezzo-sopranos in this period were very similar to any other type of operatic singer: their incomes were more limited than those of sopranos, tenors and baritones, but the structure of their professional lives was the same. Much of their repertoire became part of the daily musical life of Paris: for many years, operas such as *Carmen*, *Werther* and *Samson et Dalila* could be seen on an almost weekly basis, and some of their interpreters were so synonymous with their roles that their performance quotas were almost entirely taken up by a single role each month. The next chapter focuses on the circumstances surrounding these operas and the interpreters of their leading roles, and how each opera's plot fitted into the Third-Republic worldview. It was in the portrayal of these tragic and complicated figures that many of the mezzo-sopranos in this study showed that they were worthy of the professional confidence that these companies placed in them.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MEZZO-SOPRANO ROLE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THIRD-REPUBLIC SOCIETY

The business of being an opera singer in this period was, barring a few gender-related divergences in contracts, identical regardless of their voice type, but in terms of leading repertoire, mezzo-sopranos lagged behind the other voice types for much of the nineteenth century. While the permanent mezzo-soprano repertoire had its beginnings in the *bel canto* and *grand opéra* works of Rossini, Donizetti, Meyerbeer and Verdi, in both the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique it underwent a dramatic expansion during the early Third Republic far greater than that of any other voice type. This allowed for the creation of various *travesti* and maternal roles (especially in the Opéra-Comique) but three operas — containing young female mezzo-soprano leading roles — were the most popular: Bizet's *Carmen* (1875), Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila* (1877) and Massenet's *Werther* (1892). Each of the three operas discussed in this chapter not only surpassed the receipts and performance numbers of other mezzo-soprano-led operas, but also ranked amongst the most performed operas in their companies. The most successful mezzo-soprano-led opera by far was *Carmen*, which saw more than 1,000 performances before 1918, and 2,900 performances with the Opéra-Comique in total before its transferral to the Opéra in 1959.²⁴⁴ *Samson et Dalila* became a stalwart of the Opéra's repertoire following its company premiere in November 1892, and reached its 500th performance soon after Saint-Saëns' death in 1921.²⁴⁵ *Werther*, like *Carmen*, was not accepted into regular performance following its first production with the Opéra-Comique, but by the end of 1915, it had amassed 358 performances across sixteen operatic seasons, and remained in the company's repertoire until 1972.²⁴⁶ All three of

²⁴⁴ Mina Curtiss, *Bizet and his World* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1959), p. 436 note 7.

²⁴⁵ Stephen Studd, *Saint-Saëns: A Critical Biography* (London: Cygnus Arts, 1999), pp. 287–88.

²⁴⁶ Demar Irvine, *Massenet: A Chronicle of his Life and Times* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), pp. 316–17.

these operas were based on well-known stories or literary works — *Carmen* was based on a novella by Mérimée, *Samson et Dalila* was adapted from the story of Samson and Delilah from the Old Testament, and *Werther* was based on Goethe's first successful novel. This was not in itself unusual, as most operas were inspired by published literary works, which gave the public an opportunity to familiarise itself with the plot long before the premiere.

The leading roles of all three operas were personified by some of the most famous mezzo-sopranos in the Opéra or the Opéra-Comique, and in the case of *Carmen*, a handful of sopranos as well. The centrality of *Carmen*, *Dalila* and *Charlotte* to the mezzo-soprano repertoire meant that almost every prominent mezzo-soprano in these companies sang at least one of these roles during the early Third Republic, although Delna was the only one to sing all three. Once their parent operas were enshrined in the regular repertoire, these roles functioned both as centrepieces for established singers' personal repertoires, and opportunities for newer or lesser-known singers to shine, as the operas were performed with such regularity that a single singer could not entirely possess the leading role alone. These women and their cast mates provided an evolving aspect to the works, as new interpreters brought new sides to the roles, and developed them further, for as Barthes stated, 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination'.²⁴⁷ This is why this chapter's discussion of the operas continues beyond their initial productions by focusing on the major interpreters of their leading female roles — an opera's journey does not end with its first successful production.

Despite the trappings of safe repertory works — familiar plots and singers supplemented by famous arias — *Carmen*, *Samson et Dalila* and *Werther* were not entirely separate from the issues surrounding their source materials. Far from being

²⁴⁷ Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 148.

simple, light entertainment, these operas corresponded to touchstones in Third-Republic life. Two of the leading roles — Carmen and Dalila — were representative of both the initial and current concept of the Other, and their relationship with Third-Republic society. In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir stated categorically that French society enforced the difference between women and men at all levels, with women being taught that they were a mysterious and not fully human ‘Other’.²⁴⁸ While de Beauvoir’s target audience was most likely white, female, and middle-class, the concept of the Other has widened to include people outside of the western discourse who do not exhibit behaviours typical of ‘civilised’ people. This traditionally uneasy relationship between the West and the East was a political powder keg, but as a fictional conflict, it was useful and even lucrative when placed on the operatic stage in the form of characters such as Don José and Carmen, or Samson and Dalila.²⁴⁹ However, the operas’ depictions of Others were neither wholly accurate, nor totally invented, occupying a sometimes uncomfortable halfway space between the two extremes. The focal point of these issues was always the mezzo-soprano leading role, who was played off the Western figure personified by the leading tenor role, with a bass or baritone as her ally (the Grand Priest in *Samson et Dalila*) or a better match for her personality (Escamillo in *Carmen*), bringing a different angle to the traditional operatic trio of soprano, tenor and baritone.

While exoticism was still a box-office draw in the *fin-de-siècle*, these operas also incorporated more familiar topics; for instance, *Carmen* and *Werther* highlighted problematic aspects of the regime’s official stances on women and their domestic destinies. As a determined outsider, Carmen’s struggles with conformity are inevitable, but Charlotte represents a more recognisable type of woman — a bourgeois housewife.

²⁴⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. ed. H.M. Parshley (London: Vintage, 1997), pp. 16–21. De Beauvoir (1908–86) was also important as she grew up in the final decades of the Third Republic, and her observations on femininity reflected the way that women were portrayed during this time.

²⁴⁹ Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. ed. Edward Schneider (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 179–81, p. 185.

However, rather than exalting a woman who lives the life that Third-Republic doctrine prescribed, *Werther* showed her struggle and eventual deviation from good and acceptable behaviour through a major plot change from the novel. The opera's muted reception across Europe, especially with audiences, has been blamed on the music, the depressing plot and sometimes the interpreters, but it is undeniable that in France, this opera's depiction of Charlotte and Werther's relationship was a departure from a dramatic norm. It was this willingness to challenge these accepted dramatic frameworks which makes these works so striking, and why in this chapter, their underlying social themes and commentaries must be explored.

2.1: Bizet's *Carmen* and Third-Republic mores

Of the three operas discussed in this chapter, Georges Bizet's *Carmen* (1875) had the shortest lapse between the publication of its source material and the premiere of the opera. Prosper Mérimée's *Carmen* was published in serial form in the *Revue des deux Mondes* in 1845, and as a full novella the following year. In the thirty-year interval between its literary and operatic versions, it developed a reputation as a lurid tale of lust and murder. Mérimée's novella is cast as a report on the narrator's travels in Spain, which reflected Mérimée's own history of travelling through the country (this later occasioned him and *Carmen* some respect in the Spanish literary community, as his work was not pure fantasy).²⁵⁰ During the narrator's expedition, he encounters both Don José, an infamous soldier-turned-bandit, and Carmen, an irresistible Romani woman, in person. The narrator tells the reader — mostly from Don José's version of the story — how Don José met Carmen, who was working in a cigarette factory in Seville when she

²⁵⁰ Elizabeth Kertesz and Michael Christoforidis, 'Confronting *Carmen* beyond the Pyrenees: Bizet's opera in Madrid, 1887–1888', *Cambridge Opera Journal* Vol, 20, No. 1 (March 2008), pp. 79–110: p. 92.

came into his custody having attacked a co-worker. After she seduces him into releasing her, they reunite and start a tempestuous love affair, which culminates in Carmen's murder by Don José's hands in a secluded valley.

While it is a work that perpetuates inaccuracies about the Romani community in Spain, *Carmen* cannot claim to be Carmen's own story, for as Clark notes, she is always mediated through the accounts of the author and Don José; she never gives a straightforward version of her romance with Don José, or her life.²⁵¹ Mérimée endeavoured to present it as a true story that he was privy to, but it never purports itself to be Carmen's memoir, either written by her, or dictated by her to a biographer.²⁵² The only break in this imposed distance from the story is several encounters with Carmen herself. In keeping with the guise of the novella as an in-depth, realistic description of the people and places he encountered, the reader's first introduction to Carmen through Don José's narrative is very detailed:

She was wearing a very short skirt, below which her white silk stockings — with more than one hole in them — and her dainty red morocco shoes, fastened with flame-coloured ribbons, were clearly seen. She had thrown her mantilla back, to show her shoulders, and a great bunch of acacia that was thrust into her chemise. She had another acacia blossom in the corner of her mouth, and she walked along, swaying her hips, like a filly from the Cordova stud farm. In my country anybody who had seen a woman dressed in that fashion would have crossed himself. At Seville every man paid her some bold compliment on her appearance. She had an answer for each and all, with her hand on her hip, as bold as the thorough gipsy she was. At first I didn't like her looks, and I fell to my work again. But she, like all women and cats, who won't come if you call them, and do come if you don't call them, stopped short in front of me, and spoke to me.²⁵³

This description sums up how many respectable people see Carmen: as repugnant but irresistible. The latter aspect seems impossible, as she does not conform to any dominant concept of female beauty — she offers nothing familiar to the narrator, but he is drawn

²⁵¹ Robert L. A. Clark, 'South of North: *Carmen* and French Nationalisms', *East of West: Cross-Cultural Performance and the Staging of Difference*, ed. Claire Sponsler and Xiaomei Chen (New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 187–216: p. 198.

²⁵² Clark, pp. 188–89.

²⁵³ Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen*, trans. Mary Sophia Loyd (Amazon Kindle edition, 2012), pp. 15–16.

to her nonetheless.²⁵⁴ This quotation had an effect on several aspects of Bizet's opera: in addition to influencing the costuming of the role (one of Carmen's dresses was primarily red with white stockings in the first productions in the Opéra-Comique), the final line of this description was incorporated into the opera itself. The line 'she, like all women and cats, who won't come if you call them, and do come if you don't call them' is featured in the opera as Don José's commentary, but it was also echoed by the operatic version of Carmen in the Habanera's final line ('if you don't love me, I love you, and if I love you, watch out!') when singing about her views on love.²⁵⁵ This was a clever way of subtly changing the characterisation of the role — rather than tell the audience that she is naturally, almost primitively disobedient in the way that all women supposedly are, she asserts that she alone chooses her lovers and her fate, establishing the fatalistic thread that runs through the opera.

Carmen's characterisation was designed to be affronting for the average French reader — as Devorah states, Carmen was posited as a direct opposite to a 'true' French woman:

The characteristic nineteenth-century French woman was shy, chaste, innocent, pure, religious, and maternal. Carmen appears violent, murderous, free, unafraid, wild, cruel, boundary-less; she is Dionysian.²⁵⁶

This Dionysian aspect is established in the novella when Don José spends his first night with Carmen and her friends — she flits through Seville looking for sweets (which she finds in the form of oranges and Manzanilla) before returning for a night in Lillas Pastias' tavern, where she lives. In the opera, this is suggested first in the Seguidilla, when she conjures for Don José an image of Manzanilla-fuelled dancing with partners in the tavern, which is later hinted at in the Act Two opening number 'Les tringles des

²⁵⁴ Clark, p. 197.

²⁵⁵ Curtiss, p. 322.

²⁵⁶ Ninotchka Devorah, *Carmen, a Gypsy Geography* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), p. 29.

sistres'. In creating a female character who encourages her status as an outsider, Merimée deliberately created a protagonist who was, in essence, doubly Othered. She is the mysterious Other of de Beauvoir's theories, but she is the opposite of the original Other — the respectable French woman — in her behaviour and her traditions. Both in her literary and operatic forms, she is a rare character who revels in her Otherness and deliberately emphasises it, even though her behaviour is generically foreign until she embraces her Romani heritage by choosing to die in the manner predicted by the cards in Act Three.²⁵⁷

Even with Carmen's eventual embrace of her cultural identity, like many orientalist works of the nineteenth century, *Carmen* in both her literary and operatic versions cannot claim to be authentic, not least when it comes to Carmen's use of her sexuality. According to Colmeiro, the generic concept of the free-loving Romani woman was common amongst Parisian *bohémien*s, who saw them as ideal mistress/muse figures, rather than as members of a community who were in reality morally and sexually conservative.²⁵⁸ Mérimée's choice of a fictional Romani woman as his subject gave him the freedom to project his own fantasies onto this character, and appeal to a male Parisian reader's desires. Mérimée took the idea for *Carmen*'s story from that of a man in Malaga who had murdered his mistress (who was working as a prostitute) and combined the murdered lover with the Roma culture he had been studying, perhaps finishing the character with the name and allure of a barmaid he had met on his travels.²⁵⁹ It is evident from their first meeting that the narrator is challenged by the idea of this woman, but her presentation as an Other means that he has no responsibility to dig any deeper into her personality because he has no social reason to see her as a fully actualised person and to

²⁵⁷ Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 205; Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* trans. Betsy Wing (London: Virago, 1989), pp. 58–59.

²⁵⁸ José F. Colmeiro, 'Exorcising Exoticism: 'Carmen' and the Construction of Oriental Spain', *Comparative Literature* Vol. 54, No. 2 (Spring 2002), pp. 127–44: p. 133.

²⁵⁹ Clark, p. 192.

excuse her behaviour to his readers. This freed him to portray her as a completely transgressive character (a trait that the opera shares) — a doubly Othered, working-class smuggler who resists bourgeois sexual mores.²⁶⁰ This was symptomatic of the era's attitude to race, and the Orient, which could include Spain within its reaches; it was treated as a blank social canvas on which Westerners could explore their fantasies, and to an extent criticise their own cultures — the real cultures of these countries and their mores were relatively inconsequential.²⁶¹

The novella suffers from the tendency to fetishize and dehumanise Others, but Carmen's final choice in both texts — to settle down with Don José or die by his hands — ties back to de Beauvoir's arguments on the prescribed courses of women's lives. According to de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, women of her time and before it were shaped by societal forces to want marriage and domesticity, and see it as a necessary part of their lives — whether married or celibate, they were defined by it.²⁶² As a violent smuggler with a sexual past, Carmen is divorced on every level from the bourgeois concept of a marriageable woman, and the offer of a respectable life, while a neat solution to the 'problem' of more traditionally uncontrollable female protagonists, cannot be reconciled with her character. According to the novella, marriage is important in Roma culture; a narrator's note states that the Roma name means 'the married people' in their language, and both Carmen and Don José use the terms *rom* and *romi* to describe each other.²⁶³ However, Carmen does not treat it as a real marriage: to her, it is a temporary way of defining a relationship rather than a lifelong commitment (for instance, she tells Don José that she could replace him as her husband easily), and this means that she cannot reconcile herself to a more traditional and constraining concept

²⁶⁰ Clark, p. 187.

²⁶¹ Susan McClary, *Georges Bizet, Carmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 29.

²⁶² De Beauvoir, p. 445.

²⁶³ Mérimée, p. 22, p. 27, p. 36, p. 41.

of marriage.²⁶⁴ This is signposted early in the narrative, as she is in an open marriage with García *el Tuerto* when she meets Don José, and sees no moral conflict in taking him as a husband while her absent husband is still alive.

Carmen's unusual understanding of monogamy is a central part of her characterisation in both the novella and the opera, but its potential reception was influenced by the regimes that each version was written in. Bizet's *Carmen*'s relationship with Third-Republic life and rhetoric stems entirely from the dual identities of its eponymous heroine — those of a working-class woman, and a Romani woman who struggles with rejecting or embracing her heritage. Mérimée's July Monarchy-era novella touched on contemporary issues of exoticism and sexuality (albeit not as a deliberate act of social criticism), but *Carmen* the opera's timing was, in terms of class relations, difficult. As an opera with a working-class urbanised heroine, *Carmen* premiered at a sensitive moment in the Third Republic. During the Moral Order (1872–75), there was a general suspicion towards lower-class women, which had been fuelled by the alleged or actual behaviour of female participants in the Commune.²⁶⁵ The press demonised *les petroleuses* of 1871 — working-class women who firebombed upper-class areas of Paris, and were blamed for the burning of the Tuileries Palace — following the brutal dismantling of the Commune in the *Semaine sanglante*.²⁶⁶ Few women were actually arrested and deported after the Commune — and the *petroleuses* were in fact an urban myth — but the fear remained throughout the Moral Order. Current political sanctions against 'unruly women' had an effect on how a character like Carmen was

²⁶⁴ Mérimée, p. 37.

²⁶⁵ The Moral Order of 1873–75 was an extremely conservative post-Commune regime led by chief of state and later president Patrice Mac-Mahon (a monarchist who believed in hierarchy in society), whose deputy Albert de Broglie placed conservative politicians in various high-ranking positions (Alan Grubb, *The Politics of Pessimism: Albert de Broglie and Conservative Politics in the Early Third Republic* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1996), pp. 119–21).

²⁶⁶ Gay L. Gullickson, *Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 70, p. 171.

perceived, as the government was still court-martialing the participants of the Commune when *Carmen* premiered, having dealt with more than 50,000 people (including a small cohort of women) by 1875.²⁶⁷ Most of the women who had been arrested and brought before the court were working-class, like Carmen, and much of the discourse surrounding these women suggested that by rejecting traditional feminine pursuits (marriage and children), they fell into criminality and hyper-sexualised behaviour — so, in the mind of the average patron they were strikingly similar to the version of Carmen who had reached the Opéra-Comique's stage.²⁶⁸ This presumed vulnerability to sinful behaviour was exploited by bourgeois and upper-class men, who regarded working-class women as disposable mistresses.²⁶⁹ The aware and empowered use of Carmen's sexuality hinted at in the Habanera and her playful suggestions to Don José about her own disposable lovers in the Seguidilla lyrically propose a new type of working-class woman — one with a sexual morality that was dictated by her, and not by men who tried to use her implied lack of social worth against her. This idea was later developed upon in Gustave Charpentier's *Louise* (1900), where Louise's choices are celebrated and validated by the positive outcome of the opera, as she chooses a new life in Paris with her lover Julien over her family. *Carmen*'s well-known tragic denouement meant that it could not be an entirely positive portrayal of her personal choices, but in the context of the time, her ability to choose her lovers rather than them choosing her showed that she had more in common with the *communardes* incarcerated in Versailles than the women whom rich men could treat as objects, and hinted at a more positive view of an 'unruly woman' in Third-Republic society.

²⁶⁷ Gullickson, p. 202. While over 1,000 women were arrested, only 158 were sentenced (mostly to deportation to New Caledonia or other colonies).

²⁶⁸ Gullickson, p. 217.

²⁶⁹ André Spies, *Opera, State and Society in the Third Republic: 1875–1914* (New York: P. Lang, 1998), p. 144.

The characterisation of the *communardes* as corrupted and deviant because of their marital status was symptomatic of the era's view on women's roles and destinies, and *Carmen*, by presenting Mérimée's denouement from Carmen's perspective, makes a strikingly progressive statement on the effect these expectations had on women who were not raised to conform to them. Carmen is offered a choice between domesticity (the government's official stance on women's sole use to society in this period of French history) and death. In Carmen's case, the choice is starker, as it is between literal death, and choosing to 'kill' the person she is, in a manner that reflects de Beauvoir's attitude towards the identity change forced on women in marriage:

In marrying [...] she takes his name, she belongs to his religion, his class, his circle; she joins his family, she becomes his 'half'. She follows wherever his work calls him and determines their place of residence; *she breaks more or less decisively with her past, becoming attached to her husband's universe*; she gives him her person, virginity and a rigorous fidelity being required.²⁷⁰

Carmen's case was unusual: by virtue of her lifestyle, there is a real sense of Carmen being forced to renounce her entire life more than any of the women described by de Beauvoir. There was no need to suggest here that, like Louise in Charpentier's opera, she is a normal member of society pursuing an independent path; Don José gives her no opportunity to return to her own life once their confrontation begins and if she attempts to do so, she will die. Carmen's ethnic identity allowed her to live as she did until this moment in the story; as a natural outsider in a Western society, she had little reason to aspire to the respectability enjoyed by Micaëla, or Don José's family. Mérimée's Carmen was cast in the mould of the bohemian fantasy of the wild, exotic mistress, but

²⁷⁰ De Beauvoir, p. 449. Emphasis added by author. An opposing view had also been expressed during the nineteenth century: for instance, Proudhon claimed in 1858, that (to quote Rowden), 'marriage was instituted purely for women's benefit; in marriage, men forewent their strength and let themselves be exploited, sacrificing their liberty, fortune, pleasure and work, and risked their honour and wellbeing in order to fulfil a necessary social function', which gave men the right to subjugate their wives because 'for Proudhon, marriage without women's subordination was no longer marriage but rather concubinage: a material and sexual exchange which tended neither towards monogamy or indissolubility, but towards a liberal freedom without any notion of infidelity or jealousy' (Clair Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thaïs* (Weinsberg: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 2004), p. 60, pp. 63–64).

the Carmen of Bizet's opera is the focal point of the plot — most of the action is based on her perspective, rather than what Don José, or a narrator tells the audience about her. She is humanised by the fact that she is no longer mediated by the opinions of those around her like the character in the novella. There are still traces of this imposition of the fantasies of others on her: to the soldiers of Seville, she is the Carmencita, an idealised epitome of the women working in the cigarette factory, and Don José returns to Seville in Act Four seeking a version of Carmen that he can shape to his moral standards.²⁷¹ Yet, through the narrative's heavy focus on Carmen's experiences of the events in the opera, the audience sees both the performative parts of her personality, and glimpses of what may be the 'real Carmen' from her fear at her fate in the Card Scene, and her more affectionate interactions with Escamillo.²⁷²

In regards to its source material, Bizet's *Carmen*, through the efforts of librettists Meilhac and Halévy (as well as Galli-Marié and Bizet), retains some of the spirit of the original novella, but it is not a carbon copy. Meilhac and Halévy were, as Curtiss notes, 'the only thoroughly competent librettists Bizet ever had', but they were more used to producing libretti for boulevard theatres, and *Carmen* was their first foray into the genre of *opéra comique*.²⁷³ Despite the relative brevity of the novella, adapting it for the stage required conflation and cuts to the plot: for instance, Carmen's illicit activities in the opera are limited to assaulting a co-worker in the cigarette factory and smuggling, but in the novella she also disappears with some regularity to seduce men in far-off towns

²⁷¹ The nickname 'Carmencita' came from the aforementioned barmaid, whom Mérimée met in a Spanish inn in 1830 (Clark, p. 192).

²⁷² Clément, pp. 52–53. Locke however problematises this idea of a 'real' Carmen in the Card Scene working from McClary's analysis of the scene: while Carmen's behaviour is chameleon-like (even adapting to the musical styles of those around her), the vulnerability of the character when faced with her inevitable death makes her temporarily 'normal' and relatable, while the rest of the opera has endeavoured to portray her as an Other — after three acts of swinging between exoticist behaviour and mimicry of Spanish characters, this fear is her first emotion that is recognisable as universal (Ralph P. Locke, 'A Broader View of Musical Exoticism', *The Journal of Musicology* Vol. 24, No. 4 (Fall 2007), pp. 477–521: pp. 506–07, p. 511.

²⁷³ Curtiss, pp. 372–73.

and help her friends to steal from these men. In McClary's view, Bizet's Carmen might be thus seen as 'laundered', with her status as a *femme fatale* making up much of the operatic character's personality instead.²⁷⁴ Also, the plot is split between the libretto and the music: for example, Carmen's Otherness is evident in the music as much, if not more so, than in the libretto.²⁷⁵ The social issues the opera highlighted were topical, but as with many operas, *Carmen*, much like its source material, was a work that dealt superficially with issues such as race, class and sexuality. This was an inevitability in a work that needed to tell a coherent story in under three hours; there is no suggestion of deep-reading of philosophy or social commentary in the libretto, but as the next chapter will elaborate, Galli-Marié's search for an authentic version of the heroine had some influence on how the character was written.

One major aspect of the plot that was reworked was how Carmen discovers that she will be murdered by Don José. In the novella, she announces to Don José before their final meeting that she has seen their near-simultaneous deaths in her coffee grinds — therefore both characters make the fatalistic choice to have this confrontation (which is moved in the opera from a valley to outside of the amphitheatre in Seville).²⁷⁶ In the opera however, Carmen herself predicts her death with playing cards after Frasquita and Mercèdes have made frivolous predictions about their future lovers to pass the time, and keeps this prediction to herself. The use of playing cards had a specific meaning to French audiences — they strongly associated this type of fortune-telling with the Romani community.²⁷⁷ This established Carmen's 'credentials' as a stereotypical Romani fortune-teller, building on an audience's expectations rather than changing them. The creation of Frasquita and Mercèdes is another departure from the novella, as

²⁷⁴ McClary, pp. 21–22.

²⁷⁵ McClary, p. 22.

²⁷⁶ Mérimée, p. 36.

²⁷⁷ Devorah, p. 52.

various characters were conflated into a handful of named roles in the opera. Some characters' names were simply changed — the toreador Lucas becomes Escamillo — but some, like Micaëla, were creations by Meilhac and Halévy, designed to reconcile Merimée's story to the *opéra comique* form. Micaëla garners only a minor mention in the novella; as a simple country girl, she provides a dramatic counterpoint to Carmen in the opera by fulfilling a more traditional *opéra comique* heroine role.²⁷⁸ In a period where women were strongly defined as a binary of Mary (religious and obedient) and Marianne (more secular and rebellious), Micaëla and Carmen's dramatic opposition fulfils a narrative need, even if the Marianne type is the primary protagonist.²⁷⁹ As a lyric soprano to Carmen's contralto-like mezzo-soprano, she is her musical opposite as well, singing long and more traditionally tonal lines to combat Carmen's twisting, tonally challenging music.²⁸⁰ Through the expansion of characters such as Micaëla, the Opéra-Comique's directors hoped to change *Carmen* from a completely new and confronting musical work into a more traditional *opéra comique* with some new elements — a plan that became clearer when they tried to force Bizet and the librettists to cut Carmen's onstage death in the run-up to the premiere.²⁸¹

Carmen, much like Charlotte in *Werther*, was a character who had to be 'built', but the personal element of this role for its interpreters is more evident than that of Charlotte. The composition process of *Carmen*, and its *créatrice's* contributions to the work will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three — the function of this section is to explore the cultural and social issues that *Carmen* related to, and establish whether

²⁷⁸ Curtiss, p. 398; McClary, p. 21.

²⁷⁹ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thais*, pp. 28–29. While this dichotomy was preserved for much of the Third Republic, Rowden notes that there was some reconciliation between the stereotypes in the figure of the 'Republican mother', a devout and dutiful adherent to both the church and Republican ideology, from the 1880s onwards (p. 29).

²⁸⁰ Helena Matheopoulos, *Diva: Great Sopranos and Mezzos Discuss their Art* (London: Gollancz, 1991), p. 237; Helena Matheopoulos, *Diva: The New Generation: The Sopranos and Mezzos of the Decade Discuss their Roles* (London: Little Brown, 1998), p. 284.

²⁸¹ This incident will be discussed again in the next chapter.

the title role's interpreters in the Opéra-Comique fulfilled their audience's expectations of them as actresses and singers. Galli-Marié set the bar high in this regard, as her dramatic commitment to the role (excluding personal distaste for the character amongst some reviewers) was almost universally praised. *Carmen's* 1875 reception has evolved into one of the greatest musicological myths of the last two centuries. The history of the work as written by McClary suggests that the March 1875 was a critical bloodbath which drove Parisian operagoers away from the work, and that Galli-Marié's ultimate return to the Opéra-Comique as Carmen in September 1883 was a glorious triumph over conservative critics and opera directors.²⁸² The truth, however, is more nuanced.²⁸³ Most of the negative criticism came from the daily newspapers, but reviewers in the weekly and monthly publications were quite positive, yet completely oblivious to the staying power that the work would have.²⁸⁴ The image of a hysterical press arises from just two reviews: those of Achille de Lauzières of *La Patrie*, and Oscar Commettant of *Le Siècle*, whose criticism was puritanical even by Moral-Order standards.²⁸⁵ De Lauzières' review was a misogynistic rant about heroines of ill-repute on Parisian stages, which ended with the sentence that Carmen was 'a savage; half gypsy, half Andalusian; sensual, mocking, shameless; believing neither in God nor the Devil...she is the veritable prostitute of the gutter and the crossroads'.²⁸⁶ Commettant suggested that Carmen was 'more likely to inspire the solicitude of physicians than to interest the decent spectators who come to the Opéra-Comique accompanied by their wives and daughters', and referred to 'Mlle Carmen's uterine frenzies'.²⁸⁷ He also charged Galli-Marié with having failed with her obligation as a 'distinguished artist' to 'correct' the character.²⁸⁸ This language was

²⁸² McClary, p. 27.

²⁸³ Clark, p. 205.

²⁸⁴ Curtiss, p. 394. McClary somewhat acknowledged that the daily newspapers' reviews were the worst, as she used 'days' rather than 'weeks' in her account of the negative reviews (p. 28).

²⁸⁵ Curtiss, p. 404.

²⁸⁶ Curtiss, pp. 399–400.

²⁸⁷ McClary, p. 112.

²⁸⁸ Curtiss, p. 404.

provocative — as Curtiss notes, Bizet had been publically accused through these reviews of offending good bourgeois values by elevating a prostitute to the status of a heroine — but it was mere grandstanding by two reviewers in a market flooded with journalistic publications, where their voices were eventually overwhelmed by neutral and even positive reviews.²⁸⁹ However, while the critical and audience reception of the work soon improved, the performances were never sold out, and the box office receipts failed to cover the production costs, making *Carmen*'s continued presence in the repertoire untenable.²⁹⁰

Carmen was removed from the repertoire in 1876 but Galli-Marié remained with the Opéra-Comique until October 1879. Embarking on a grand tour, her first contracts were in Italy, singing as Mignon and Carmen in Milan and Naples, and she eventually reached Barcelona, where she sang as Carmen, amongst other roles. This was *Carmen*'s Spanish premiere, and while she acquitted herself well, these four performances — tacked on at the end of her contract in the 1880–81 season in the Teatro Lírico — were the only performances seen in Spain until 1887.²⁹¹ On this professional sojourn to Spain, she sought to add more authentic local colour to her interpretation of the character. She also endeared herself to her audiences by showing that she had knowledge of Spanish music beyond Bizet's borrowings in *Carmen*, finishing a benefit performance of *Mignon* (her final performance in the city) with a self-accompanied rendition of 'La Habana se va á perder', a well-known habanera.²⁹² She took flamenco lessons in the city, having previously relied on a flamenco that was more of an imitation than the real dance.²⁹³ Another aspect of her research not only reflected her interest in broader, more highly

²⁸⁹ Curtiss, p. 404.

²⁹⁰ Curtiss, p. 395.

²⁹¹ Kertesz and Christoforidis, p. 80.

²⁹² Kertesz and Christoforidis, pp. 109–10 note 106.

²⁹³ Lesley A. Wright, 'Rewriting a Reception: Thoughts on *Carmen* in Paris, 1883', *Journal of Musicological Research* Vol. 28 (2009), pp. 282–94: p. 293.

visible portions of the opera's staging, but in smaller details that few audience members would pick up on, or even be able to see from a distance. The initial production of *Carmen* (and Carvalho's April 1883 revival) both used a rose as the flower that Carmen throws to Don José in Act One.²⁹⁴ This action is important to the plot; Don José fixates on this flower in prison as he dreams of reuniting with Carmen (this is revealed in 'La fleur que tu m'avais jetée', Don José's Flower Song), but it has cultural significance as well. In certain Spanish regions, a girl who presented her lover with a carnation was expressing a desire to marry, and it is insinuated through his persistent belief that Carmen could settle down that Don José (who comes from Navarre) believes in this folk symbolism.²⁹⁵ Galli-Marié learned about this connection with carnations during her time in Barcelona, and she changed the flower from a rose to a carnation in all of her future performances, even though most audience members would not notice the inconsistency.²⁹⁶ This attention to detail was a career-long pursuit for her; according to Henson, Galli-Marié made costume and prop suggestions for multiple roles (including Rose Friquet in *Les Dragons des Villars*, another major role in her repertoire).²⁹⁷ However, this went beyond the natural artistic instinct for character building that she was known for, as she did real ethnographic research in Spain.

The use of a flamenco was *de rigueur* in the opera for seventeen years after Galli-Marié's first attempts in 1875, but the mention of a second dance — the seguidilla — was a relatively late invention in the composition process, which explains its absence from the staging. Until the orchestral score was assembled, number ten in Act One was a 'chanson and duo', but several lines of the piece were changed during rehearsals, and

²⁹⁴ Wright, 'Rewriting a Reception: Thoughts on *Carmen* in Paris, 1883', p. 288.

²⁹⁵ Wright, 'Rewriting a Reception: Thoughts on *Carmen* in Paris, 1883', p. 293.

²⁹⁶ Wright, 'Rewriting a Reception: Thoughts on *Carmen* in Paris, 1883', p. 293.

²⁹⁷ Karen Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 56–57.

the piece became a ‘séguidille et duo’.²⁹⁸ The opening line ‘J’irai dimanche en voiture’ was changed to ‘Près des remparts de Séville’, and ‘manger une friture’ became ‘j’irai danser la Séguidille’, probably at Bizet’s insistence.²⁹⁹ The first change gives a stronger descriptive sense to the piece, but the second can be interpreted as another attempt at local colour. Rather than sing about ‘friture’ (Lillas Pastia’s speciality in the novella), Carmen describes a slow Spanish dance for two that she does with her current partners to seduce Don José.³⁰⁰ The dance itself was not integrated on a deeper level into the music or the choreography of the work (for instance, in the scene where Carmen dances for Don José) most likely for reasons of time, as the orchestral score was only used in the final six months before the premiere during the rehearsal period.

Carmen’s use of French opera’s trademark version of exoticism in this way was completely acceptable to the Opéra-Comique’s patrons, but the first attempts at full productions in Madrid in 1887 and 1888 revealed that the opera’s depiction of Spain was divisive in the country itself, with one review in *La Iberia* stating:

The libretto of *Carmen* is the biggest absurdity which could have come from the French imagination. Even putting together all the absurd articles written on Spain by Frenchmen who have visited us, we could not have come up with a more unfortunate work.³⁰¹

While Galli-Marié thought that she was contributing to a richer depiction of the area with her research, she vastly underestimated the importance of the artistic and cultural history of Spain to its inhabitants, and how similar it was to France in some ways. *Opéra comique* was a genre which held some parallels with the Spanish *zarzuela* and after a legal battle for the performance rights between two companies, the Teatro de la Zarzuela and the Teatro Real, the Teatro de la Zarzuela staged a heavily-adapted Spanish-

²⁹⁸ Georges Bizet, *Carmen orchestral manuscript act I* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1875), p. 351.

²⁹⁹ Bizet, *Carmen orchestral manuscript act I*, pp. 353–54.

³⁰⁰ Mérimée, p. 21.

³⁰¹ Kertesz and Christoforidis, p. 92.

language premiere on 2 November 1887.³⁰² Reactions to the opera were divided on class and educational lines — ‘average’ Spaniards were used to depictions of bullfights, flamencos and violent cigarette factory workers in *costumbrismo* theatre, but members of the ‘intelligentsia’ were offended by *Carmen*’s representation of a primitive, lawless Spain.³⁰³ Rather than any specific suggestions of moral laxity in the heroine, these patrons were offended at the idea that Seville and its environs could be seen as backwards by an international audience through this opera — thus much of the criticism focused on the plot rather than the music. In a mirroring of the Parisian premiere, much of the ire in the reviews was directed at Meilhac and Halévy, as Mérimée enjoyed some respect as a writer who had lived in Spain for a time.³⁰⁴ From the characters, Don José was dismissed entirely by most as being unworthy of notice, but Carmen was highlighted by the critic Felipe Pedrell as being ‘a French coquette, rather than a full-blooded Spanish woman’.³⁰⁵ As the work was long-published in its operatic form, the Madrid critics had access to the original libretto and some critics came to the premiere expecting to attack a direct Spanish-language version.³⁰⁶ What they were presented with instead was a slightly different work to Meilhac and Halévy’s libretto, as the Teatro de la Zarzuela had hired a translator/rewriter, Rafael María Liern, to make the opera less offensive to the operagoers.

Liern made some superficial changes to the other characters (for instance, Escamillo became Joselillo, and Don José was simply José, as the origin of his title was too difficult to explain in translation), but Carmen’s generic Roma identity was exchanged for a more specific Andalusian one, and all mentions of gypsies in the

³⁰² Kertesz and Christoforidis, p. 83, p. 89.

³⁰³ Kertesz and Christoforidis, p. 90.

³⁰⁴ Clark, p. 188; Kertesz and Christoforidis, pp. 92–94.

³⁰⁵ Kertesz and Christoforidis, pp. 92–94.

³⁰⁶ Kertesz and Christoforidis, p. 94.

Habanera and ‘Les tringles des sistres’ were expunged.³⁰⁷ As Kertesz and Christoforidis state, this could be ‘interpreted as converting the exoticised ‘fake’ gypsy made from a conflation of European gypsy stereotypes into a much more accurately depicted *gitana andaluza*’.³⁰⁸ This greater investiture of an Andalusian identity on the story and the title character had a fantasy element as strong as Mérimée or Meilhac and Halévy’s vision of *Carmen*’s setting, as Andalusia, a generally non-separatist province, had the same exoticised old-world appeal to ordinary Spanish people as Spain did as a whole to Parisian audiences.³⁰⁹ The Teatro de la Zarzuela was the only company to adopt such a view on the opera, and attempt to bring their own type of ‘authenticity’ to its libretto (in Barcelona and the Teatro Real, it was performed unaltered). While it offers interesting insights into how *Carmen* could be rewritten into a truly Spanish story, its lack of wider adoption or critical praise indicates that like the Parisian audiences, the inclusion of real ‘local colour’ was a fascination on the part of the artists rather than the patrons. Galli-Marié’s interests in carnations and flamencos and Liern’s relatively small linguistic changes to the libretto were their way of staging the work in a manner that felt right to them, but Galli-Marié’s Parisian and Liern’s Madrid audiences either generally did not notice, or in the latter case, did not care for these changes to the original work.

Returning to the interpreters, the degree to which Galli-Marié influenced the development of the character is impossible to accurately ascertain, with each scholar who discusses her bringing their own theories on the level of her contributions, but it is undeniable that as a performer, she had the ability to embody and bring *Carmen* to life. The opera certainly has an appeal of its own without its *créatrice*, but the centrality of Galli-Marié to its greater, long-term success in the Opéra-Comique meant that the

³⁰⁷ Kertesz and Christoforidis, pp. 97–99.

³⁰⁸ Kertesz and Christoforidis, p. 98.

³⁰⁹ Kertesz and Christoforidis, p. 90.

management and the press struggled with the idea that she could be succeeded or replaced. This in turn affected her putative successors, as they were challenged with either avoiding Galli-Marié's interpretation entirely, or confronting its strengths and weaknesses in order to forge their own path.

Some singers, however, were given little opportunity to develop any long-term aspirations towards their concept of the role. The company's second Carmen, Adèle Isaac, was cast as part of Carvalho's plan for a less licentious version of *Carmen* in the April 1883 revival.³¹⁰ Isaac, a coloratura soprano, was better known for playing three of the four 'loves' of Hoffmann in Offenbach's *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (1881) — Carvalho had cut the Venice act and therefore the courtesan Giulietta — and was the polar opposite of Galli-Marié: tall, blonde and physically ungraceful.³¹¹ Critics were split on every aspect of her performance, suggesting that she was both a good and bad choice for the role: for example, vocally she simultaneously brought out aspects of the role that Galli-Marié could not (*Le Ménestral*), but her low notes were dull, and Carmen was a bit too low for a soprano like Isaac (*Le Figaro*, *Les Annales du théâtre et de la musique*).³¹² Following Isaac's transfer to the Opéra, Galli-Marié returned to the Opéra-Comique as Carmen in October 1883.³¹³ This forestalled any discussion of finding a permanent replacement, as she played the role more than 100 times in her last contract

³¹⁰ Lesley Wright, 'Carvalho and the Opéra-Comique: *L'art de se hâter lentement*', *Music, Theater and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914*, ed. Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 99–127: pp. 108–109.

³¹¹ This cut appears, because of Carvalho's well-known distaste for *Carmen*, to have been a moral decision, but it was a musical one; Carvalho and Ernest Guiraud tried to finish the act (which was incomplete at the composer's death) in time, but Carvalho made the decision five days before the premiere to cut the act and disperse the music throughout the other acts (Heather Hadlock, *Mad Loves: Women and Music in Offenbach's 'Les Contes d'Hoffmann'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 10).

³¹² H. Moreno, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestral* 29 April 1883, p. 171; Auguste Vitu, 'Premières Représentations', *Le Figaro* 22 April 1883, p. 3; Édouard Noël and Edmond Stoullig, 'Opéra-Comique', *Les Annales du théâtre et de la musique* 1883, pp. 72–73.

³¹³ H. Moreno, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestral* 10 June 1883, p. 219; Maurice Ordonneau, 'Échos des Théâtres', *Le Gaulois*, 22 September 1883, p. 3. The production also had a new Don José and Micaëla (source: Jules Prével, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 27 October 1883, p. 3).

with the company. She relinquished the role in late 1885, and only played Carmen with the Opéra-Comique one more time after this, on 11 December 1890 for a gala performance for a Bizet monument.³¹⁴ Jane Huré was initially lined up to replace Galli-Marié as the main Carmen in the company, but she failed to make a mark, and the role was split between a group of singers until a more permanent replacement for the role's *créatrice* could be found.³¹⁵

Galli-Marié and Calvé were arguably the most important Carmens of the *fin-de-siècle*, but in the interval of seven years between Galli-Marié's last regular performance in the role and Calvé's first of her reimagined Carmen, another important Carmen appeared. Deschamps-Jéhin (then Deschamps) was a well-known Carmen in Aix-les-Bains and the Théâtre de la Monnaie before she signed to the Opéra-Comique in 1885, but, despite her experience, her role debut with the company was delayed in favour of more rehearsal time to bring her interpretation into line with what the patrons expected.³¹⁶ *Le Ménestrel's* report suggested that Carvalho was wise to delay and give Galli-Marié more performances instead:

[As] Mlle Blanche Deschamps is still not sufficiently prepared to tackle in Paris the difficult character of Carmen, for whom it was intended, one had to appeal again to the talent of Mme Galli-Marié, and this was a shrewd act by M. Carvalho, since this always magical name on a poster attracted a crowd and filled the hall down to the last corner.³¹⁷

³¹⁴ She was meant to leave the role in early 1885, but her run was extended until she left for temporary contracts in Geneva and Monte Carlo in early 1886 (Author Unknown, 'Spectacles et Concerts', *Le Temps* 23 January 1885, p. 3; Édouard Noël and Edmond Stoullig, 'Opéra-Comique', *Les Annales du théâtre et de la musique* 1883, pp. 86-87; Author Unknown, 'Nouvelles Diverses: Étranger', *Le Ménestrel* 24 January 1886, p. 61; Jules Prével, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 18 February 1886, p. 3). The 1890 gala performance included Galli-Marié (Carmen), Jean de Reszké (Don José), Jean Lassalle (Escamillo) and Nellie Melba (Micaëla). It raised 42,000 francs for the monument, which was placed in the foyer of the new Salle Favart in 1900, after nine years of planning (Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 6 May 1900, p. 143).

³¹⁵ Pérkeo, 'Lettre de Bruxelles', *Le Figaro*, 9 September 1885, p. 4.

³¹⁶ Pérkeo, 'Lettre du Bruxelles', *Le Figaro* 27 August 1884, p. 4; Pérkeo, 'Lettre du Bruxelles', *Le Figaro* 9 September 1885, p. 4.

³¹⁷ 'Mlle Blanche Deschamps n'étant pas encore suffisamment préparée pour aborder à Paris le personnage difficile de Carmen, auquel on la destinait, on a dû faire appel de nouveau au talent de Mme Galli-Marié, et cela a été un acte habile de M. Carvalho, puisque ce nom toujours magique sur une

This postponement lasted for eight months, and Deschamps sang mostly minor roles in the interval (for example, Antonia's mother in *Les contes d'Hoffmann*), until she finally made her leading-role debut as Carmen in May 1886 to a full hall, and a mixed critical reception.³¹⁸ The onerous task of replacing Galli-Marié (and the presumed pressure that these delays suggested) was not lost on some critics:

The reprise of *Carmen* took place last night, at the Opéra-Comique, in front of a packed house. *Carmen* is today classed in the same category as *La Dame blanche*, *Le Pré aux Clercs*, *Le Domino noir* and *Mignon*. Bizet's opera is a repertory work. To the appeal of the work was added last night the taking possession, by Mlle Deschamps and M. Lubert, of the roles of Carmen and Don José. Mlle Deschamps had been very successful in this role, in Brussels, from where she came to us preceded by a very great artistic reputation. She could see once again that the Parisian public had widely ratified that it is in the musical and dramatic composition of this character where she had to struggle against the still-living memory of Mme Galli-Marié. The habanera in the first act won for her the sympathies of the entire hall. She succeeded in completely bringing out her personality and emphasising a Carmen through whose realisation the audience applauded a very real singing and acting talent. (*Le Gaulois*)³¹⁹

The succession of Galli-Marié has today passed to Mlle Deschamps, and it could not have fallen into better hands. Mlle Deschamps perhaps does not have the instinct for the nuances and the knowing perversity of her predecessor; she looks too much like a good girl and does not seem to want to change that; [Carmen] does what she likes, as she tells her lover José, and simply wishes to be left in peace. [Her Carmen] doesn't mean to be chided, or controlled. Her character is all talk, and that is how Mlle Deschamps wants us to hear it. We know the score. When it comes to her voice, doesn't Mlle Deschamps have the most marvellous contralto voice one has ever heard? Both in the *Habanera* and in the duet in the third act, so dramatic and colourful, she truly made a sensation. (*Les Annales politiques et littéraires*)³²⁰

affiche a attiré la foule et rempli la salle jusqu'au moindre coin.' H. Moreno, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel* 13 September 1885, p. 323.

³¹⁸ Auguste Vitu, 'Chronique Musicale', *Le Figaro* 25 December 1885, p. 3 (review of Deschamps as Antonia's mother).

³¹⁹ 'La reprise de *Carmen* a eu lieu hier soir, à l'Opéra-Comique, devant une salle comble. *Carmen* est aujourd'hui classée sur le même rang que la *Dame blanche*, le *Pré aux Clercs*, le *Domino noir* et *Mignon*. L'opéra de Bizet est œuvre de répertoire. À l'attrait de l'ouvrage s'ajoutait hier soir celui de la prise de possession, par Mlle Deschamps et par M. Lubert, des rôles de Carmen et de Don José. Mlle Deschamps avait obtenu beaucoup de succès dans ce rôle, à Bruxelles d'où elle nous est arrivée précédée d'une très grande réputation artistique. Elle a pu voir encore une fois que le public parisien la lui ratifiait largement dans la composition musicale et dramatique de ce personnage où elle avait à lutter contre le souvenir toujours vivant de Mme Galli-Marié. La habanera lui avait dès le premier acte conquis les sympathies de toute la salle. Elle est parvenue à dégager entièrement sa personnalité et à mettre en relief une Carmen dans la réalisation de laquelle le public applaudi une très réel talent de chanteuse de comédienne.' Nicolet, 'Courrier des Spectacles', *Le Gaulois* 29 May 1886, p. 3.

³²⁰ 'La succession de Galli-Marié est aujourd'hui échue à Mlle Deschamps; elle ne pouvait tomber en meilleurs mains. Mlle Deschamps n'a peut-être pas l'instinct des nuances et la perversité savante de sa

This idea of being too ‘good’ a woman to play Carmen resurfaced in her Monte Carlo reception as well, as this review from the *Grand revue* three years later shows in less diplomatic terms:

Mme Deschamps has a pure and clear voice. Her method is excellent. But... but you are, Madame, an Andalusian [who is] too *Chaussée d’Antin*, a *cigarière* [who is] too fair... and, it must be said, too well brought-up!! Galli-Marié, and after her Mme Grandin, they understood the role differently... We criticised them for being too realistic! — But, by Jove!... it is alive, this role of Carmen — She has red blood in her veins! — She is a fiery female — A type of little Messaline of smuggling... do not make of her a *demi-mondaine* in face powder, a blonde prostitute filled with languidness.³²¹

With the aid of her voice rather than her acting, Deschamps kept her position as the company’s main Carmen for four years, and sang in over 200 performances of the opera (including most of those during the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*).³²² Following her departure for the Opéra in 1890, the next singer to become the company’s main Carmen was Emma Calvé (1858–1942). She is credited with bringing a more ‘realist’ take to the role: for instance, she portrayed Carmen’s death as drawn-out and agonising rather than the sleep-like faint that Galli-Marié and her successors used.³²³ Her personality and background seemed to match Carmen’s character perfectly: as Huebner notes, ‘her understanding of Bizet’s protagonist came from her own Mediterranean blood, peripatetic lifestyle, and superstitious nature, even from the Gypsies with whom she had

devancière; elle a l’air trop bonne fille et ne cherche pas apparemment à raffiner sur le sentiment; elle fait ce qui lui plaît, comme elle le dit à son amoureux José, et veut simplement qu’on la laisse tranquille. Elle n’entend pas être morigénée, ni surtout commandée. Son caractère est là tout tracé, et c’est ainsi que Mlle Deschamps l’entend. Nous ne sommes pas loin de compte. Quant à la voix, qui ne sait que Mlle Deschamps a le plus merveilleux contralto qui se puisse entendre? Aussi bien dans l’*Habanera* que dans le duo du troisième acte, si dramatique et si coloré, elle fait véritablement sensation.’ Ely-Edmond Grimard, ‘Musique’, *Les Annales politiques et littéraires* 3 October 1886, p. 217.

³²¹ ‘Mme Deschamps possède une voix pure et limpide. Sa méthode est excellente. Mais... mais vous êtes, Madame, une Andalouse trop *Chaussée d’Antin*, une *cigarière* trop blonde... et, faut-il de dire, trop bien élevée!! Galli-Marié, et après elle Mme Grandin, ont compris le rôle autrement... On leur a reproché trop de réalisme! — Mais, sapristi!... il est *vécu* ce rôle de Carmen — Elle a du sang rouge dans les veines! — C’est une femelle ardente — Une sorte de petite Messaline de contrebande... N’en faites pas une *demi-mondaine* à la poudre de riz, une blonde horizontale remplie de morbidesse.’ Adam du Gay, ‘Courrier de Nice et de Monaco’, *La Grande revue* 10 January–25 March 1889, p. 646.

³²² She missed a single performance on 28 August, which fell during her twelve days of leave, and was replaced by Orea Nardi (Charles Darcours, ‘Courrier des Théâtres’, *Le Figaro* 29 August 1889, p. 3).

³²³ Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 269.

played as a little girl’, although her own feelings toward the role were decidedly mixed.³²⁴

I have often been asked whether Carmen is my favourite role. Indeed, it is not! I adore Bizet’s music, but the character is, on the whole, antipathetic to me [...] Carmen has only two redeeming qualities. She is truthful, and she is brave. Even in the face of death, she will admit that she no longer loves!³²⁵

Calvé claimed to not care much for the character in 1922, but in 1892 she put considerable effort into changing the way that Carmen was portrayed, applying her findings from a research trip observing Romani communities in Grenada to construct her version of Carmen’s costume and personality.³²⁶ The Opéra-Comique used this to their advantage, releasing reports to the press in the lead-up to the production.³²⁷ This research made Calvé’s Carmen appear doubly exotic, as she was both the Spanish woman that the audience expected and a character who was an Other in her own land. It was at odds with both the musical and dramatic conventions on Othered subjects at the time — musical orientalism was often based on sampling pieces of music from other cultures without context, and dramatic interpretation often did not depart beyond the performer’s own culture, or a simplified version of their supposed ethnicity. Until Calvé, Carmen performed a Spanish dance in Act Two and acted in a manner which marked her out as Spanish for French audiences, with only verbal mentions of her Romani heritage.³²⁸ Calvé first sang the role with the Opéra-Comique in December 1892, soon after her breakthrough as Santuzza in *Cavalleria rusticana*. Her success in that role garnered mentions in several reviews (and in the case of *Le Gaulois*, was presumed to

³²⁴ Steven Huebner, ‘*La princesse paysanne du Midi*’, *Music, Theater and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914*, ed. Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 361–378: p. 371.

³²⁵ Emma Calvé, *My Life*, trans. Rosamond Gilder (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1922), p. 83.

³²⁶ Calvé, pp. 81–82.

³²⁷ For example, the *Figaro* announcement of the production contained almost identical details of the trip to those later described in *Ma vie*, although they added in that she had learned about tarot reading and knife games as well (Georges Boyer, ‘*Courrier des Théâtres*’, *Le Figaro* 30 September 1892, p. 4).

³²⁸ This does not mean that Galli-Marié’s Carmen was recognisably Spanish to her Spanish audiences, as operatic exoticism in this period relied on stereotypes within French culture of other countries (Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 188–90, pp. 204–05).

have informed her Carmen), but many critics were unsure of the changes she made to the dramatic aspects of Carmen:

I will say, in a word, she understood the Italian woman [Santuzza] rather than the Spanish, and this is the main feature of her interpretation. She has, theatrically, indisputable qualities, a love of picturesque and picaresque detail, very studied bearing, an unbridled nature ruled by the slightness with which she nicely plays the [character's] wittiness [...] If we take it upon ourselves, however to know the truth, I will say that she showed us a seductive Carmen, coaxing and spiritual, but with an affected insolence, a spirit that was a little artificial, paradoxical and simpering. The gestures are scanty: every intention is emphasised too much. In only one scene, Mlle Calvé appeared to me to be greater [than this]: the card scene, in the third act, where she almost reached Mme Galli-Marié[’s interpretation]. In truth, that is really something. (*Le Gaulois*)³²⁹

We know Mme Galli-Marié struck an indelible mark on this role, to this point where none of the artists, some of whom were very distinguished, who had come after her, have not managed to satisfy those who always had in mind the memory of the great artist. But, we can say that Mlle Calvé has seized it triumphantly, and she gave us a very carefully designed Carmen, very original, very spicy, at once dramatic, strange and superbly passionate. Upon her entrance, in the first act, attention was strongly sought by her costume, by her appearance, through her serpentine bearing and soon the actress showed herself in all her days, stimulating, by a very curious personality, the applause of the entire hall. This success continued into the second act, and above all the third, where the card scene was played by her in an admirable fashion. The fourth perhaps was not as completely satisfactory. (*Le Ménestrel*)³³⁰

³²⁹ ‘Je dirai, d’un mot, qu’elle l’a compris plutôt à l’italienne qu’à l’espagnole, et c’est là le principal trait de son interprétation. Elle a, scéniquement, des qualités indiscutables, un amour du détail pittoresque et picaresque, des allures très étudiées, un débridé réglé par le menu qui jouent agréablement la verve. [...] Si l’on tient, cependant à savoir le vrai, je dirai qu’elle nous a montré une Carmen séduisante, enjôleuse et spirituelle, mais d’une effronterie affectée, d’un entrain un peu factice, paradoxal et minaudier. Le geste s’étriqué; chaque intention se souligne trop. Dans une seule scène, Mlle Calvé m’a paru supérieure: la scène des cartes, au troisième acte, où elle a presque atteint Mme Galli-Marié. En vérité, c’est bien quelque chose.’ F..., ‘Musique’, *Le Gaulois* 15 December 1892, p. 3.

³³⁰ ‘On sait si Mme Galli-Marié avait frappé ce rôle d’une empreinte ineffaçable, à ce point qu’aucune des artistes, parfois fort distinguées, que l’avaient repris après elle, n’était parvenue à satisfaire ceux qui avaient toujours présent à l’esprit le souvenir de la grande artiste. Or, on peut dire que Mlle Calvé s’en est emparée victorieusement, et qu’elle nous a donné une Carmen très étudiée, très originale, très savoureuse, à la fois dramatique, étrange et superbement passionnée. Dès son entrée en scène, au premier acte, l’attention fut vivement sollicité par son costume, par sa tournure, par ses allures serpentine, et bientôt la comédienne se montra dans tout son jours, excitant, par une personnalité vraiment très curieuse, les applaudissements de la salle entière. Ce succès se continua au second acte, et surtout au troisième, où la scène des cartes fut jouée par elle d’une façon admirable. Le quatrième fut peut-être moins complètement satisfaisant.’ Arthur Pougin, ‘Semaine Théâtrale’, *Le Ménestrel* 18 December 1892, p. 403.

There were also musical changes made to the opera; for instance, Arthur Pougin of *Le Ménestrel* was horrified by how different the opera sounded with Calvé's control of the conductor, and thus the orchestra, rather than by how it appeared:

But if we pass from the scenic side to the musical side, I allow myself to have many reservations. What happens, with Mlle Calvé, to the lovely music of Bizet? What happens to the movements, which becomes of the rhythms? Everything is changed, everything is shattered, the orchestra is unwound, it doesn't know anymore how to follow her, and not only are all of the traditions broken, but the logic, the same musical sense no longer exists. And, need I say, I find completely inappropriate the way of proceeding of Mlle Calvé, who allows herself to set the tempo of the scene by looking at the conductor to force him to follow her in her every whim, as happened to him in particular in the first act. These are ways to be manifestly inappropriate, I repeat the word, and with which, if all of the artists were mixed up in it, there would be no possible execution [of the music]. It is necessary that all artists, whoever they are, get into themselves this idea that the conductor is the musical regulator *par excellence*, and that he must have for them at times some condescension, they owe him in return, in a general point of view, absolute obedience. That is what Mlle Calvé seems to me to have forgotten by [having] too much independence.³³¹

Despite Pougin's argument that she took too much liberty with Bizet's score, Calvé's version of *Carmen* was a great success, and in her memoirs she was keen to take credit for parts of the new production. Her account of this production in *Ma vie* suggested that she had significant input into the costuming and onstage behaviour of the character, and thus bore some responsibility for the reactions to this production (rather than Carvalho, or the *régisiseur*, or François Bernard, the company's new *directeur de la scène*, for instance). The following extract is her account of her changes to the dancing in Act Two

³³¹ 'Mais si du côté scénique nous passons au côté musical, je me permettrai de faire de nombreux réserves. Que devient, avec Mlle Calvé, la musique adorable de Bizet? Que deviennent les mouvements, que deviennent les rythmes? Tout est changé, tout est bouleversé, l'orchestre est déroulé, il ne sait plus comment la suivre, et non seulement toutes les traditions sont rompues, mais la logique, le sens musical même n'existent plus. Et puis, faut-il le dire, je trouve parfaitement inconvenante la façon de procéder de Mlle Calvé, se permettant de battre la mesure en scène en regardant le chef d'orchestre pour obliger celui-ci à la suivre dans tous ses caprices, comme cela lui est arrivé notamment au premier acte. Ce sont là des façons d'être manifestement inconvenantes, je répète le mot, et avec lesquelles, si tous les artistes s'en mêlaient, il n'y aurait point d'exécution possible. Il faut bien que tous les chanteurs, quels qu'ils soient, se pénètrent de cette idée que le chef d'orchestre est le régulateur musical par excellence, et que s'il doit avoir pour eux par instants quelque condescendance, ils lui doivent en retour, au point de vue général, une obéissance absolue. C'est ce que Mlle Calvé me paraît oublier [sic] avec trop indépendance.' Pougin, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel* 18 December 1892, p. 403.

of the opera; previous productions had called for a flamenco in this scene, but Calvé stated that she could not continue with this tradition:

‘How do you expect me to imitate Galli?’ I protested. ‘She was small, dainty, an entirely different build. I am big. I have long arms. It is absurd for me to imitate anyone but the gypsies themselves!’

———Whereupon, I showed them the true dance of the *gitanas*, with its special use of arms and hands—a manner for dancing for which the Spaniards have invented the expression ‘el brazear’.³³²

As well as changing the dance, she also claimed that her costume — which in the first act was comprised of a shirt, long skirt, boots, and a shawl she said she had bought from a Romani woman — was accurate.³³³ This replaced a main costume with a knee-length corseted dress, bolero jacket, white tights, red high heels and a mantilla. The mantilla and the bolero jacket especially were generically Spanish items of clothing, tying Carmen to the cultural codes of Spain rather than to the Romani community. Whether or not she was telling the truth regarding her Carmen’s authenticity, her version of Carmen overtook Galli-Marié’s, and the costume became a staple of the Opéra-Comique’s subsequent productions of the opera. Galli-Marié created Carmen as a Spanish character, but Calvé was the first singer to attempt a complex portrayal of Carmen’s ethnic background based on real-life experience instead of Mérimée’s impressions of Romani women.³³⁴ However, there was also an aspect of a narrative coming full-circle, for as Clark notes: ‘It is intriguing that, sixty years after Mérimée, Calvé set off to find and study gypsies and, like him, composed a portrait in which her own voice and gestures sought to project an internalized and highly personalized vision of an other at once familiar and strange, inside and outside, shadowy and ostentatious’.³³⁵ In essence, it is entirely possible that Calvé’s Carmen was like Galli-Marié’s Carmen: a

³³² Calvé, p. 81.

³³³ Calvé, pp. 81–82.

³³⁴ While Calvé was proud of her version of the character, she did admit later that her interpretation was highly exaggerated (Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, p. 270).

³³⁵ Clark, pp. 207–08.

reflection of what each woman could relate to in a culture foreign to her own, rather than an authentic, definitive version of this complex character — the difference was created by their individual personalities and artistic tastes, rather than a progressive reaching towards an ethnographic truth.

Her *Carmen*, alongside roles such as Santuzza and Anita (in Massenet's *La Navarraise*) allowed Calvé to use her newfound success in the Opéra-Comique as a springboard for an international career which necessitated long absences from the company. Calvé remained an audience favourite whenever she did return, but her sabbaticals gave other younger singers a chance to make their own mark on *Carmen*. Jeanne Marié de l'Isle was another mezzo-soprano whose ascendancy in the company was marked by a new production of *Carmen*, but her rise was possibly aided by her relationship to Galli-Marié.³³⁶ She was set up as a second version of her aunt, and their paths to the Opéra-Comique were almost identical: Galli-Marié was scouted by then-director Émile Perrin in 1862 in Rouen, playing Mab in Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl*, and Marié de l'Isle was scouted by Léon Carvalho in 1896, when he saw her as Rose Friquet in Versailles.³³⁷

Some newspapers had little interest in a role that already had a long list of possible interpreters (for instance, *Le Figaro* simply wrote 'Mlle Marié de Lisle [sic] sang last night for the first time, and with success, in the role of *Carmen*').³³⁸ There was no mention of her family's history with the role (either due to lack of knowledge or

³³⁶ Author Unknown, 'Théâtres', *Le Temps* 8 February 1928, p. 5. She was referred to as a cousin or a niece of Galli-Marié during Galli-Marié's lifetime, but no correction by any family members was made, and Giroud describes her as Galli-Marié's niece (Vincent Giroud, 'Liner Notes', *The Complete Recordings of Marie Delna and Selected Recordings of Jeanne Marié De L'Isle* <http://www.marstonrecords.com/delna/delna_liner.htm>).

³³⁷ Arthur Pougin, 'Jules Duprato', *Le Ménestrel* 22 May 1892, p. 166; Votre Voisin de Stalle, 'Correspondance', ed. by B. Jouvin, *Le Figaro* 17 August 1862, p. 2; Giroud, 'Liner Notes', *The Complete Recordings of Marie Delna and Selected Recordings of Jeanne Marié De L'Isle* <http://www.marstonrecords.com/delna/delna_liner.htm>.

³³⁸ 'Mlle Marié de Lisle a chanté hier soir pour la première fois, et avec succès, le rôle de *Carmen*'. Jules Huret, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 3 July 1899, p. 4.

curiosity) but as Marié de l'Isle's role debut was in July, there was little interest in what the Opéra or the Opéra-Comique were staging anyway, because most of their stars were elsewhere. She was not the only debutante, as a Mlle Davies made her company debut as Micaëla that night, and *Gil Blas* only mentioned Davies in their report the next day (although they had advertised both role debuts in advance of the performance).³³⁹ Carré's decision with this role debut makes little sense; while Carvalho gave Calvé a new production, and Carré himself later allowed Delna's role debut both a long period of pre-premiere hype and a September role debut, Marié de l'Isle's Carmen was given no promotion, and premiered in the low season. It is possible that he saw the challenges she would face as a new Carmen — Calvé had brought a new vision of Carmen, and Delna had a voice which would do the role justice, but Marié de l'Isle's draw was her family history, and some training that she received from the role's *créatrice*.³⁴⁰ As a curiosity, she might not have held up to the scrutiny of a high-profile role debut. Also, unlike Calvé and Delna, her debut in the title role was not the first time that she performed in the opera with the company. She was cast as Mércèdes in 1898, but by July 1899, she was in the starring role in a new production, gaining a swift promotion from Carré. The press was slow to pick up on the link between Marié de l'Isle and Galli-Marié, but it did report on instances where other people compared them, as this report in *Gil Blas* from February 1903 shows:

The day before yesterday, at the Opéra-Comique, during an interval in *Carmen*, M. Bizet fils, who was attending the performance, was shown to the dressing room of Mlle Marié de l'Isle to congratulate her. 'You sang Carmen in an absolutely remarkable manner. This is not surprising at all, since you have Galli-Marié's blood in [your] veins.'³⁴¹

³³⁹ Colin Maillard, 'Propos de Coulisses', *Gil Blas* 2 July 1899, p. 4; Colin Maillard, 'Propos de Coulisses', *Gil Blas* 3 July 1899, p. 4.

³⁴⁰ Giroud, 'Liner Notes', *The Complete Recordings of Marie Delna and Selected Recordings of Jeanne Marié De L'Isle* <http://www.marstonrecords.com/delna/delna_liner.htm>.

³⁴¹ 'Avant-hier, à l'Opéra-Comique, pendant un entr'acte de *Carmen*, M. Bizet fils, qui assistait à la représentation, est monté dans la loge de Mlle Marié de l'Isle pour la féliciter. 'Vous avez chanté

A more obvious marker of her reputation as Galli-Marié's niece was her recording career. Marié de l'Isle was the first Carmen to record large portions of the opera; as mentioned in the previous chapter, Delna recorded the Habanera sometime in 1903, but Marié de l'Isle recorded numbers from all four acts, including 'Les tringles des sistres', the Card Scene and a truncated version of Carmen and Don José's final duet from Act Four, as well as the Habanera and Seguidilla. It is impossible to know if Marié de l'Isle sounded like her aunt, but having received training from Galli-Marié, she had a valuable link to the role's *créatrice* that Odéon and the Gramophone Company seized upon.³⁴² Onstage, this fascination with her aunt's legacy even extended to long-retired repertoire — for example, Marié de l'Isle featured as Zerbine in a performance of Pergolesi's *La serva padrona* in 1900, which had the distinction of being Galli-Marié's debuting role with the company in 1863.³⁴³ However, the opportunities arising from Marié de l'Isle's link to Galli-Marié only arose in France — all of her recordings were made in Paris, and her career was mostly confined to the city.

In 1900, Delna became one of the next singers to play Carmen, in a long anticipated role debut; she had studied the role as a seventeen-year-old with the Opéra-Comique in the 1892–93 season, but it was only in her second contract that it came to fruition, and while the audience reaction was positive enough to ensure more than 100 performances in the lifetime of her contract, the critical reaction was mixed.³⁴⁴

Hopes and fears have been realised in equal measure. Most certainly, Carmen has never been sung with such a magnificent voice, also most certainly Mlle Delna has got movement and gaiety; she acts with a spirit and frankness [*rondeur*] that we had hardly expected from her. But this gaiety and frankness

Carmen d'une façon tout à fait remarquable. Cela n'a rien d'étonnant, puisque [sic] vous avez du sang de Galli-Marié dans les veines.' Montbrun, 'Échos des Théâtres', *Gil Blas* 4 Feb 1903, p. 4.

³⁴² Giroud, 'Liner Notes', *The Complete Recordings of Marie Delna and Selected Recordings of Jeanne Marié De L'Isle* <<http://www.marstonrecords.com/products/delna>>; 'Track Listing', *The Complete Recordings of Marie Delna and Selected Recordings of Jeanne Marié De L'Isle* <<http://www.marstonrecords.com/products/delna>>.

³⁴³ Alfred Delilia, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 5 March 1900, p. 4.

³⁴⁴ Author Unknown, 'Delna, Pet of Paris, To Sing Saturday', *New York Times* 24 January 1910, page number unknown.

are a bit more copious than would be necessary, and less Spanish than it should be: Mlle Delna would be perfect as Carmen, if only *Carmen* was set in Beauce.³⁴⁵

Delna's energetic and unworldly Carmen was a reflection of her youth. The youngest singer to take on the role at twenty-five, she was perceived to be too young to sing it in a major house, even though she had performed it to great acclaim in Aix-les-Bains in 1894.³⁴⁶ Her lack of exotic dramatic flourishes was divisive: while Pierre Lalo found her lack of 'Spanish' mannerisms to be a flaw, Alfred Bruneau (who had worked with Delna before and knew something of her process) found it refreshing:

In this theatre of art, the Opéra-Comique, where we can recognise and showcase true talents, Mlle Marie Delna has just interpreted in the most original, the most curious and the most beautiful way the role of Carmen. The originality, the curiosity, the beauty and, frankly, the novelty of this interpretation are due to what she has that is simple and natural. In effect, contrary to common habits, Mlle Delna has not complicated her character with anything, she is not searching for anything 'beneath' it, she did not try, in a word, to put in what is not there. She sings Carmen with a voice of velvet and gold, a strong voice, sometimes sweet, sometimes brilliant, sometimes dark, sometimes light, sometimes tender, sometimes furious; she plays it with a surprising accuracy of intonation; she varies it effortlessly, inspired only by the truth; it easily grows, the instinct comes from life itself. And what I particularly welcome is that she did not exaggerate the role of the vulgarity, she did not make it tasteless by the distinction. That her Carmen is not absolutely and particularly Spanish, one cannot dispute it. She is better than that: she is '[of the] people', she is her essentially and superbly. She is her not like someone who is accustomed to being on stage, but like someone who is actually under the sunlight of free existence. And that is why she seemed to me to be unusual, curious and beautiful.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵ 'Les craintes et les espérances se sont également réalisées. Assurément, la partie de Carmen ne fut jamais chantée d'une voix aussi magnifique; assurément aussi Mlle Delna y met du mouvement et de la gaieté; elle joue avec un entrain et une rondeur qu'on eût à peine attendus d'elle. Mais cette gaieté et cette rondeur sont un peu plus copieuses qu'il ne serait nécessaire, et sont moins espagnoles qu'il ne faudrait: Mlle Delna serait parfaite en Carmen, si seulement *Carmen* se passait en Beauce.' Pierre Lalo, 'La Musique', *Le Temps* 9 October 1900, p. 3. Beauce is in north-western France.

³⁴⁶ Georges Boyer, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 29 August 1894, p. 6.

³⁴⁷ 'A ce théâtre d'art de l'Opéra-Comique, où l'on sait reconnaître et mettre en valeur les vrai talents, Mlle Marie Delna vient d'interpréter de la façon la plus originale, la plus curieuse et la plus belle le rôle de Carmen. L'originalité, la curiosité, la beauté et, pour tout dire, la nouveauté de cette interprétation sont dues à ce qu'elle a de simple et de naturel. En effet, contrairement aux habitudes courantes, Mlle Delna ne complique en rien son personnage, n'y cherche aucun 'dessous', n'essaye point, en un mot, d'y mettre ce qui n'y est pas. Elle le chante avec une voix de velours et d'or, une voix franche, tantôt douce, tantôt éclatante, tantôt grave, tantôt légère, tantôt tendre, tantôt furieuse; elle le joue avec une justesse d'intonation surprenante; elle le varie sans effort, s'inspirant de la seule vérité; elle l'agrandit sans peine, le campant d'instinct dans la vie même. Et, ce dont je la félicite particulièrement, elle ne l'outré pas part de la vulgarité, elle ne l'affadit pas par de la distinction. Que sa Carmen ne soit point absolument et spécialement espagnole, on ne peut le contester. Elle est mieux que cela: elle est bien 'peuple', elle l'est

To Bruneau, Delna's interpretation, rather than being symptomatic of not trying hard enough or being incapable of acting in recognisably Spanish ways, represented a more naturalistic way of seeing the role — by refusing to use the well-established stereotypes, she was creating a more realistic version of the character. Arguably however, Bruneau could not be subjective about Delna's performances, as she was a favourite performer of his — she had played Marcelline in *L'attaque du moulin* in 1893 and 1894, and would premiere the role of Marianne in *L'Ouragan* nine months after this review was published — but it is a rare review in imagining that *Carmen* could shed its reliance on stereotypes with the right leading singer.

With or without its trademark exoticism, the opera reached its *millième* (1000th performance) with the Opéra-Comique on 23 December 1904, with Calvé in the title role.³⁴⁸ By this point in the opera's history with the company, Calvé was the *Carmen par excellence*, but approximately half of those performances were sung by three of the Opéra-Comique's leading mezzo-sopranos: Galli-Marié (143 performances), Deschamps-Jéhin (more than 200 by 1891) and Delna (112 by 1902), and two other mezzo-sopranos, Marié de l'Isle and Wyns, were sharing the role with Calvé that season.³⁴⁹ Calvé did not specify in her autobiography how many times she had sung *Carmen* with the Opéra-Comique, but she claimed to have sung the role a total of 1,389 times between Europe and America.³⁵⁰ *Carmen* would continue to have leading singers of note both in the Opéra-Comique, and later when it moved to the Opéra, but the era from Galli-Marié to Calvé's performance in the *millième* was the opera's most revealing

essentiellement et superbement. Elle l'est comme on n'a pas coutume de l'être sur les planches, mais comme on l'est réellement sous le plein soleil de la libre existence. Et voilà pourquoi elle m'a paru originale, curieuse et belle.' Alfred Bruneau, 'La Musique', *Le Monde Artiste* 30 September 1900, p. 614.

³⁴⁸ Raoul Aubry, 'La Soirée Parisienne: La millième de 'Carmen'', *Gil Blas* 24 December 1904, p. 3.

³⁴⁹ Author Unknown, 'Spectacles et Concerts', *Le Temps* 23 January 1885, p. 3; Georges Boyer, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 23 April 1891, p. 3; Author Unknown, 'Delna, Pet of Paris, To Sing Saturday', *New York Times* 24 January 1910, page number unknown. Speaking to the *New York Times*, Delna claimed that she held the record for performances in the role in the company.

³⁵⁰ Devorah, p. 39.

period. Each major interpreter of this time grappled with the character's racial and sexual identity and unconsciously revealed how she interacted with Carmen through the emphasis she placed on different aspects of the role. Carmen began life as Mérimée's fantasy of a free-loving embodiment of orientalism, but with the aid of her interpreters, she was reborn as something approaching a real human being, and this journey, along with Bizet's music, made her irresistible to the Opéra-Comique's patrons.

2.2: Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila*, exoticism, Catholicism and patriotism

Samson et Dalila, the second orientalist opera discussed in this chapter, faced a longer wait between the premiere and its enshrinement in a state-funded company's repertoire than *Carmen*, reaching the stage of the Opéra in November 1892. Completed in 1877, *Samson et Dalila* musically predates most of the orientalist works of the early Third Republic, although operas such as Verdi's *Aïda* (1880, Opéra) and Delibes' *Lakmé* (1883, Opéra-Comique) were seen in Paris long before any company deemed to take a risk on the opera. Despite its late premiere, *Samson et Dalila* eventually became Saint-Saëns' most-performed work in the Opéra by a wide margin: *Henry VIII* (1883), his other Opéra success, reached its eighty-seventh performance with the company in 1919 before disappearing from the schedules permanently.³⁵¹ The reasons for this success were manifold: aside from its musical appeal, *Samson et Dalila* had a more personal charm than *Henry VIII* and his other Opéra works. Its identity in Paris centred on its Dalilas, and especially on Héglon, who dominated the role for much of the *fin-de-siècle* in spite of challenges from better-known mezzo-sopranos such as Deschamps-Jéhin and Delna.

³⁵¹ Irvine, p. 137.

The plot of *Samson et Dalila* is based on the story from the Book of Judges about Samson, a Hebrew leader, and Delilah, a Philistine priestess of Dagon from the Valley of Sorek. Departing from the liberties taken with the original plots of *Carmen* and *Werther*, *Samson et Dalila*'s plot melds closely to its source material. Act One establishes Samson's status amongst the Hebrews, and introduces Dalila. The second act shows both Dalila's attempts at seducing Samson and a scene with the Grand Priest of Dagon to reveal her plans to betray Samson; the end of the act sees Samson's confession of his weakness (that his strength lies in his long hair) to Dalila, and his arrest. The third and final act sees a shorn and blinded Samson being mocked by his captors, who perform a summoning ritual to Dagon in celebration of Samson's capture in the Bacchanale scene, before Samson gathers enough physical strength to tear down the columns he is bound to, crushing himself and the Dagon worshippers in the temple.

Aside from considerations of blasphemy accusations if the work deviated from the Bible too much, this faithfulness to the source material could have arisen because *Samson et Dalila* was not originally intended to be an opera — it was suggested by an elderly attendee of Saint-Saëns' salon in the form of an oratorio.³⁵² Saint-Saëns approached the poet Ferdinand Lemaire, the husband of a distant cousin, in 1868, with the intention of requesting an oratorio libretto; Lemaire advocated the operatic potential of a Samson project, and the opera was begun.³⁵³ Saint-Saëns already had multiple melodies in mind and work advanced quickly. In 1868, he premiered portions of Act Two (including 'Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix'), with Pauline Viardot singing Dalila, to an unenthusiastic gathering at his salon, and a private pre-Franco-Prussian war

³⁵² Brian Rees, *Camille Saint-Saëns: a life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999), p. 139.

³⁵³ Rees, pp. 139–40.

performance in 1870 which included Augusta Holmès as Dalila saw no further encouragement from the rest of his circle.³⁵⁴

Saint-Saëns had initially hoped to have *Samson et Dalila* staged with the Opéra, and in this Viardot was one of his strongest advocates. She staged a private performance of Act Two on 20 August 1874 in a garden in Croissy-sur-Seine, and played Dalila herself.³⁵⁵ She used her influence to guarantee Eugène Halanzier's presence in the audience, but *Samson et Dalila's* oratorio-like music and biblical theme ensured that Halanzier refused to stage the work.³⁵⁶ Halanzier's concerns about the opera's content blocked a Parisian world premiere, but Franz Liszt's interest in the work kept it from being shelved once again. Saint-Saëns put the finishing touches on the opera in 1877, and it premiered in the Grossherzogliches Theatre in Weimar on 2 December with a German cast and libretto, and with Liszt as the conductor.³⁵⁷ Saint-Saëns attended this performance, as did Gabriel Fauré, two publishers (Romain Bussine and Auguste Durand, the latter of whom was Saint-Saëns' publisher), Charles Tardieu (a correspondent and later co-director of *L'indépendance belge*), and Armand Gouzien, the editor of the *Journal de Musique*, who was the only figure from the Parisian musical press who went to Weimar.³⁵⁸ Despite its success, this premiere did not open doors in Paris; excluding an abandoned 1878 Théâtre-Lyrique production, the Parisian opera houses wanted nothing to do with the opera.³⁵⁹ It was, however, a constant presence in the Parisian concert circuit: both orchestras and military bands regularly played portions

³⁵⁴ Rees, pp. 140–42; Jann Pasler, 'Material Culture and Postmodern Positivism: Rethinking the 'Popular' in Late Nineteenth-Century French Music' in *Writing Through Music: Essays on Music, Culture and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 417–451: p. 445.

³⁵⁵ Studd, p. 101; April Fitzlyon, *The Price of Genius: A Life of Pauline Viardot* (London: J. Calder, 1964), p. 459.

³⁵⁶ James Harding, *Saint-Saëns and his circle* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1965), p. 131; Studd, p. 101.

³⁵⁷ Studd, pp. 116–17.

³⁵⁸ Rees, p. 211; Marie-Gabrielle Soret, 'Samson et Dalila ou Comment ébranler les colonnes du temple', in *Opéra et religion sous la III^e République*, ed. Jean-Christophe Branger and Alan Ramaut (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2006), pp. 103–122: p. 106.

³⁵⁹ Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 206.

of the opera through the 1880s and 1890s.³⁶⁰ The work's international reputation developed steadily, but more slowly than *Carmen*'s; following a concert performance in Brussels in 1878 and a production in Hamburg in 1882, *Samson et Dalila*'s true ascent into the wider European repertoire only began after the opera reached a French stage.³⁶¹

The French premiere of *Samson et Dalila* became a source of contention in the Parisian musical world as no company, and in particular the Opéra, made a solid promise on a premiere for twelve years while *Samson et Dalila* continued to make a respectable profit abroad.³⁶² The French premiere finally arrived on 3 March 1890, but it was not in Paris; Henry Verdhurt, the director of the Théâtre des Arts in Rouen, announced the production on 13 December 1889 as part of the 1889–90 season.³⁶³ In deference to the new wider audience of provincial theatres mentioned in Chapter One, the Parisian audience was given some precedence and tickets were being sold in Paris before the theatre's box office opened in Rouen, which enraged some Rouennais patrons.³⁶⁴ The premiere was not sold out by the time the box office opened, but by the end of the first day, not a single ticket remained.³⁶⁵ *Samson et Dalila* was performed seventeen times in the 1889–90 season, and the first twelve performances of the opera in Rouen made March 1890 their most profitable month of the season.³⁶⁶ Following this production, the opera finally gained momentum; it was performed in Lyon, Marseilles and Aix-les-

³⁶⁰ Pasler, 'Material Culture and Postmodern Positivism: Rethinking the 'Popular' in Late Nineteenth-Century French Music', pp. 446–48.

³⁶¹ Soret, p. 106.

³⁶² Pasler, 'Material Culture and Postmodern Positivism: Rethinking the 'Popular' in Late Nineteenth-Century French Music', p. 448.

³⁶³ Clair Rowden, 'Decentralisation and Regeneration at the Théâtre des Arts, Rouen, 1889–1891', *Revue de Musicologie* Vol. 94, No. 1 (2008), pp. 139–180: p. 149.

³⁶⁴ Rowden, 'Decentralisation and Regeneration at the Théâtre des Arts, Rouen, 1889–1891', pp. 150–51.

³⁶⁵ Rowden, 'Decentralisation and Regeneration at the Théâtre des Arts, Rouen, 1889–1891', p. 151 note 54.

³⁶⁶ Rowden, 'Decentralisation and Regeneration at the Théâtre des Arts, Rouen, 1889–1891', p. 171 note 136, p. 176. This figure may appear low but the opera was premiered late in the season, in the sixth month out of seven. There were no performances of the opera in the 1890–91 season (p. 177). The profit for that month was 41,420.95 francs. The most profitable month after that in the season was November 1889 with 36,122.30 francs.

Bains in 1891, and in 1892 in Bordeaux, Geneva, Toulouse, Nantes, Dijon, Algiers, Montpellier, Monte Carlo and Florence before the Opéra's production began that November.³⁶⁷

Halanzier's rejection of *Samson et Dalila* in 1874 slowed the progress of the opera, but like many composers, Saint-Saëns never relinquished the ambition to have his work staged in Paris. A production with the Théâtre-Lyrique (then managed by Albert Vinentini) appears to have been planned in 1878 following the premiere of *Le timbre d'argent* in 1877, but the project failed when Durand could not find appropriate leading singers, and Vinentini's company folded in January 1878.³⁶⁸ Despite this setback, Saint-Saëns refused to revise his goals or give up, saying 'should we struggle with the impossible? [*Samson et Dalila*] is and will remain my *chef-d'œuvre* but precisely for this reason it is not something to give away lightly'.³⁶⁹ Eventually the Théâtre-Lyrique's name was adopted by another new company (Vinentini's was an homage rather than a continuation of the original company), and with Henry Verdhurt as the managing director for the 1890–91 season, the Théâtre-Lyrique was able to stage the opera. The Parisian premiere was held on 31 October 1890 in the Éden-Théâtre, with a main cast of former Opéra and Opéra-Comique singers. Rosine Bloch, who had left the Opéra ten years previously, played Dalila, Alexandre Talazac (a former star tenor of the Opéra-Comique) was Samson, and Jacques Bouhy (the first Escamillo in *Carmen*) was the Grand Priest of Dagon. This production was directed by Verdhurt as well, but the Théâtre-Lyrique's residency at the Éden-Théâtre ended in December 1890 when Verdhurt overreached himself financially and the company went bankrupt.³⁷⁰ The opera

³⁶⁷ Soret, p. 107.

³⁶⁸ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 206.

³⁶⁹ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 206.

³⁷⁰ Rowden, 'Decentralisation and Regeneration at the Théâtre des Arts, Rouen, 1889–1891', p. 172.

Note 141 of the article uses the *Le Figaro* announcement of closure in the December 3rd issue (Georges Boyer, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro*, 3 December 1890, p. 6).

was a success in its initial five-week run, and the Édén-Théâtre's management decided to keep the opera in its repertoire, with an announcement in *Le Ménestrel* on 14 December of a revival with Elena Sanz as Dalila.³⁷¹ This was only eleven days after the *Le Figaro* announcement of the closure of the Théâtre-Lyrique production with Bloch in the role.³⁷²

1890 saw a marked change in French companies' views towards staging the opera, but the Opéra prevaricated for two more seasons before the premiere was set for the 1892–93 season. Following the announcement of an imminent production, the Opéra officially cast Edmond Vergnet (1850–1904) as Samson, Deschamps-Jéhin as Dalila, and Jean Lassalle (1847–1909) as the Grand Priest in September 1892.³⁷³ They were unable to invite Bloch back to the company for their production, because she had died in February 1891. In her absence, Deschamps-Jéhin was a natural choice for the role: she was the Opéra's leading mezzo-soprano, and a well-known and respected singer who had been active on the Francophone operatic scene for thirteen years. However, Saint-Saëns himself had doubts about her extra-musical suitability for the role, as this letter, sent to Durand on 8 February 1892, shows:

Now if you hope that Mme Deschamps will become a fanatic like Mme Viardot did, you will never be happy; it is not given to everyone to descend to the gypsies of Africa. She will be excellent, and it will still be there for the future, if some Sarah Bernhardt reveals herself in the ranks of the contraltos. [...] Anyway, Deschamps-Jéhin, is she the Dalila of our dreams? In voice certainly, but this is not at all the pantheress [that Dalila is]...³⁷⁴

³⁷¹ Sanz appears to have been a success as Dalila; she reappeared in February 1893 in the Théâtre des Arts playing the role (Arthur Pougin, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 12 February 1893, p. 55).

³⁷² The eighteenth and final performance of the Théâtre-Lyrique production was on 6 December.

³⁷³ Perdican, 'Les Théâtres, *Le XIXe siècle* 14 June 1892, p. 3; Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 4 September 1892, p. 287. Perdican mentioned in his article that while the cast was not confirmed yet, Deschamps-Jéhin was probably going to play Dalila.

³⁷⁴ 'Maintenant si vous espérez que Mme Deschamps deviendra une enragée comme eût été Mme Viardot, vous ne serez jamais content; il n'est pas donné à tout le monde de descendre des gitanes d'Afrique. Elle sera excellente, et il en restera encore pour l'avenir, si quelque Sarah Bernhardt se révèle dans les rangs des contraltos. [...] D'ailleurs, D[eschamps].J[éhin]., est-elle bien la Dalila de nos rêves? Comme voix certainement, mais ce n'est pas du tout la femme-panthère...' Soret, p. 116.

Saint-Saëns' concerns arose from his belief that she could not act like the Dalila he imagined, but as Soret explains in her introduction to this letter, he was still fixated on Viardot, his original ideal Dalila.³⁷⁵ Viardot was an impressive figure in Parisian musical circles, and she had been an influence on Saint-Saëns musically for most of his composing career: he first heard her sing in 1849 at a charity concert, and later commented that he admired her 'bittersweet' mezzo-soprano voice.³⁷⁶ However, her last public operatic production was Gluck's *Alceste* with the Opéra in 1861, long before the *Samson et Dalila*'s Weimar premiere, and her part in its history was to remain as one of inspiration and encouragement rather than the realisation of her designated role for a wide audience.³⁷⁷ Following the Opéra premiere, Saint-Saëns maintained his doubts about Deschamps-Jéhin's suitability for the role, saying that he preferred Bloch's interpretation of Dalila.³⁷⁸

Apparently unaware of Saint-Saëns' private concerns, and his later remarks about Bloch, Deschamps-Jéhin declared in an article published soon after the premiere that the composer had chosen her to be his Opéra Dalila.³⁷⁹ Regardless of Saint-Saëns' true feelings on the leading singers, the first Opéra production's start was inauspicious. The run-up to the premiere was marred by clashes between the composer and the production director, and Deschamps-Jéhin faced accusations that she was part of the conflict as well:

Valmont: But other rumours were circulating, it was said that there had been difficulties between the author, the direction and you...

Deschamps-Jéhin: I know, but this is only gossip from the boxes. You can tell that. There was what always happens in rehearsals, discussion between the

³⁷⁵ Soret, p. 116.

³⁷⁶ Harding, *Saint-Saëns and his Circle*, p. 41; Studd, p. 68.

³⁷⁷ Michael Steen, *Enchantress of Nations: Pauline Viardot — Soprano, Muse, Lover* (Cambridge: Icon Books Limited, 2007), p. 305.

³⁷⁸ Rees, p. 293.

³⁷⁹ Valmont, 'L'Étoile de ce Soir: Madame Deschamps-Jéhin (Dalila)', *Programmes et articles de presse sur 'Samson et Dalila', musique de Camille Saint-Saëns* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, date unknown).

production director and the author. For my part, you would think that I would have refrained from raising the least difficulty. M. Saint-Saëns is the master and I accomplish his wishes. The artist cannot be responsible, torn between M. Campo, for example, who wants more life, more animation, something closer to a public work, and M. Saint-Saëns, who, himself, continues in his design of an oratorio, and wants his hieratic work of sacred things. 'It is too strong. — It is not strong enough. — Put yourself here. — Put yourself there.' Sometimes the public and critics exclaim: 'But this artist is quite awkward'. What do you want? We must satisfy the one and the other...and the enterprise is sometimes uncomfortable.³⁸⁰

For her the dress rehearsal was fraught; she was suffering from vocal problems, it ran from 7.30pm to 1am with few breaks, and, as per tradition, this was the performance that some critics reviewed.³⁸¹ The real premiere was not as fraught, but even it did not start on time, as the performance had to be delayed by half an hour to allow the audience to get to their seats following a widespread discussion of the wars in Africa in the hallways.³⁸² The uneasiness described by Deschamps-Jéhin came across in the reviews, which were decidedly mixed. However, the aforementioned respect for her reputation and musical talent was evident even in negative criticisms of her interpretation, as Auguste Boisard of *Le Monde illustré*'s review shows:

Mme Blanche Deschamps is a singer who no longer needs to prove herself, and it in no way diminishes her great qualities to recognise her inaptitude in a role that is inconsistent with her artistic temperament, and this does not translate properly into the pernicious seductions, feigned ardour, passionate acts of violence, nor the charming litheness. Certainly, one could not hear it better sung, or more correctly; but, unless we also really change our vision of Dalila, nothing

³⁸⁰ 'Mais d'autres rumeurs ont couru, on a conté qu'il y avait eu des difficultés entre l'auteur, la direction et vous...' 'Je sais bien, mais ce ne sont que potins de loge. Vous pouvez l'affirmer. Il y a eu ce qui arrive toujours aux répétitions, discussion entre le metteur en scène et l'auteur. Pour ma part, vous pensez bien que je me serais gardé d'élever la moindre difficulté. M. Saint-Saëns est le maître et j'accomplie ses volontés. L'artiste ne saurait être responsable, tiraillée entre M. Campo, par exemple, qui veut plus de vie, plus d'animation, quelque chose qui rapproche davantage l'œuvre du public, et M. Saint-Saëns qui, lui, poursuit sa conception d'un oratorio, et désire à son œuvre l'hiératisme des choses sacrées. 'C'est trop fort. — Ce n'est pas assez fort. — Mettez-vous ici. — Mettez-vous là.' Parfois le public et la critique s'écrient: 'Mais cette artiste est bien empruntée'. Que voulez-vous? Il faut bien satisfaire l'un et l'autre... et l'initiative s'en trouve parfois gênée.' Valmont, 'L'Étoile de ce Soir: Madame Deschamps-Jéhin (Dalila)'.

³⁸¹ Valmont, 'L'Étoile de ce Soir: Madame Deschamps-Jéhin (Dalila)'.

³⁸² Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2009), p. 669.

about the bearing of Mme Deschamps evokes a resemblance with the biblical courtesan.³⁸³

Boisard then stated that Vergnet had also been miscast as Samson before he eventually revealed that he was unhappy with the entire cast, but he singled Deschamps-Jéhin out as the least suitable for her role. Alfred Bruneau, writing in *Gil Blas*, was more positive, but he was vaguer about her interpretation:

Dalila, that is Madame Deschamps-Jéhin. I do not know of an artist more courageous, more vibrant, more devoted to Music, more focused on doing her best, than this one.³⁸⁴

This approach was not rare, as many of the reviews that were positive were vague and brief, using only a single line to review her performance, and Bruneau and Fourcaud of *Le Gaulois* were amongst the few to include significant praise in two sentences or more:

Mme Deschamps-Jéhin, who personifies Dalila, uses all of her abilities, driven by a temperament better made for the violences than for the sweetnesses [of the role]. What an unequalled voice, moreover, and what treasures in the passionate, strong and sincere notes!³⁸⁵

As well as questions about her compatibility with an idealised fictional character, one real figure — Bloch — appeared in her reception as Dalila:

³⁸³ ‘Mme Blanche Deschamps est une cantatrice qui n’a plus à faire ses preuves, et ce n’est en rien diminuer ses grandes qualités, que de reconnaître son inaptitude dans un rôle qui ne concorde pas avec son tempérament artistique, et dont elle ne traduit pas comme il convient les séductions perverses, les ardeurs feintes, les violences passionnées, ni les charmeuses souples. Certes, on ne saurait mieux chanter, ni plus correctement; mais, outre que trop de correction nous éloigne encore du caractère de Dalila, rien dans l’allure de Mme Deschamps n’évoque la ressemblance avec la courtisane biblique.’ A. Boisard, ‘Chronique Musicale’, *Le Monde illustré* 26 November 1892, p. 354.

³⁸⁴ ‘Dalila, c’est madame Deschamps-Jéhin. Je ne connais pas d’artiste plus vaillante, plus vibrant, plus dévouée à la Musique, plus soucieuse du mieux, que celle-là.’ Alfred Bruneau, ‘Samson & Dalila’ *Gil Blas* 25 November 1892, pp. 1–2: p. 2.

³⁸⁵ ‘Mme Deschamps-Jéhin, personnifiant Dalila, se dépense tout en force, entraînée par un tempérament mieux fait pour les violences que pour les douceurs. Quel incomparable organe, au demeurant, et quels trésors de notes ardentes, amples et franches!’ Fourcaud, ‘Musique’, *Le Gaulois* 24 November 1892, p. 3.

Figure 2.2a: Rosine Bloch as Azucena (1874) and a drawing of Deschamps-Jéhin as Dalila from *Le Voleur illustré* (1892)³⁸⁶



It is obvious she is an artist of value; her voice is penetrating, marvellously coloured; but, in spite of these qualities, I believe that Madame Deschamps-Jéhin has not achieved the equal of her predecessor. (*La Revue Diplomatique*)³⁸⁷

It is Mme Deschamps-Jéhin who has accepted the heavy succession of Rosine Bloch, whose final creation, we remember, was a triumph – Rosine Bloch, who made Dalila her own, with her captivating beauty, her terrible caresses, the perfidious caresses of a siren’s song. Mme Deschamps is happy to sing the role with the full extent of her superb voice. (*Le Matin*)³⁸⁸

But Dalila, the foundation, the very soul of the opera, on the whole, has not found a happy interpreter in Mme Deschamps-Jéhin. What a difference with the late Bloch, so ardent, so breath-taking with love and hatred! Mme Deschamps does not have enough of the majesty, the magnitude demanded by Dalila. But the voice is beautiful, and the artist can change her interpretation. (*La Lanterne*)³⁸⁹

³⁸⁶ The Bloch photograph is from Gallica. Deschamps-Jéhin drawing: Author Unknown, ‘Samson et Dalila’, *Le Voleur illustré*, 1 December 1892, p. 712.

³⁸⁷ ‘C’est évidemment une artiste de valeur; l’organe est pénétrant, admirablement timbré; mais, malgré toutes ces qualités, je crois que Mme Deschamps-Jéhin n’est pas parvenue à égaler sa devancière.’ Gaston Lemaire, ‘Chronique Musicale’, *La Revue Diplomatique*, 26 November 1892, p. 9.

³⁸⁸ ‘C’est Mme Deschamps-Jéhin qui a accepté la lourde succession de Rosine Bloch, dont la dernière création, on se le rappelle, fut un triomphe – Rosine Bloch, c’était Dalila elle-même, avec sa beauté capiteuse, ses câlineries terribles, les caresses perfides d’un chant de sirène. Mme Deschamps se contente de chanter le rôle avec tout l’ampleur de sa superbe voix.’ Author Unknown, ‘Les Théâtres’, *Le Matin* 24 November 1892, p. 2.

³⁸⁹ ‘Mais Dalila, la base, l’âme même de l’opéra, tout entier, n’a point trouvé en Mme Deschamps-Jéhin un heureux interprète. Quelle différence avec la regrettée Bloch si ardente, si rugissante d’amour et de haine! Mme Deschamps n’a pas non plus la majesté, l’ampleur que réclame Dalila. Mais la voix est

In this respect, Deschamps-Jéhin was unlucky; Bloch was the only major cast member of the Théâtre-Lyrique's production who had died in the interim between the productions — Talazac (Samson) would live until 1896, and Bouhy (the Grand Priest) lived until 1929. She faced the daunting task of equalling or surpassing a dead woman's final triumph (Bloch appeared to be working on Gaston Salvayre's *Richard III* in the Opéra de Monte-Carlo at the time of her death, but *Samson et Dalila* was the last time she performed on stage), which was an uncomfortable prospect for some critics.³⁹⁰ In the end, Deschamps-Jéhin bore the brunt of this discomfort: the reviewers of *Le Matin* and *La Lanterne* insinuated in their reviews that she was content to simply sing the role, while Bloch had inhabited it, and Gaston Lemaire of *La Revue Diplomatique* was content with vague suggestions of Deschamps-Jéhin's inability to match 'her predecessor'. In terms of their interpretations, an objective opinion would have been difficult to defend — there was only a decade in age between the two women, yet their approaches to the character were markedly different. Bloch was an exponent of the older, more statuesque acting school, and she produced a technically acceptable if slightly cold performance, refusing to act seductively towards Talazac in the Théâtre-Lyrique production.³⁹¹ Deschamps-Jéhin did not share Bloch's view of acting, with Charles Darcours of *Le Figaro* noting her 'feline' approach to the character, creating a more predatory physical presence in the role.³⁹² Conversely, her interpretation was described in *Le Journal* as 'a little too bourgeois', suggesting that she was playing it too safe, and pandering to her audience rather than taking any artistic risks.³⁹³ In the end, neither singer was able to

belle, et l'artiste peut se raviser sur son interprétation.' Author Unknown, "'Samson et Dalila' au Théâtre de l'Opéra', *La Lanterne* 25 November 1892, p. 2.

³⁹⁰ Georges Boyer, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 2 February 1891, p. 3. This was the second time that Bloch was attached to this opera — she was cast in an 1884 Théâtre-Italien production that failed to reach the stage (Author Unknown, 'Tablettes Théâtrales', *Le Matin* 19 June 1884, p. 3).

³⁹¹ Studd, p. 182.

³⁹² Charles Darcours, 'Les Théâtres' *Le Figaro*, 24 November 1892, p. 3.

³⁹³ Pasler, 'Material Culture and Postmodern Positivism: Rethinking the 'Popular' in Late Nineteenth-Century French Music', p. 448.

capture a quintessential version of Dalila that most critics could agree on, and the role's future lay in either lowering expectations, or finding a 'contralto Sarah Bernhardt' to truly define Dalila in Paris.

Saint-Saëns' ideal future Dalila never materialised, but it is arguable that Deschamps-Jéhin's successor, Héglon, was the definitive *fin-de-siècle* interpreter of the role in the Opéra. Héglon initially served as an understudy for Deschamps-Jéhin, and these intermittent appearances as Dalila eventually garnered her interest in critics' circles. Their preference for the new Dalila was plain: for example, in February 1894, when Deschamps-Jéhin was in Monte Carlo for a performance of *Lohengrin*, Boisard of *Le Monde illustré* gave this glowing review of her possible successor:

Mme Deschamps' absence allowed us to applaud a young artist who one can, from today, call the definitive interpreter of the powerful and superb role of the biblical courtesan. By her constant work and persevering will, Mme Héglon knew how to conquer the general public, who were already seduced by her grace and beauty. She is, at this time, an accomplished singer, who is also a musical actress of great bearing. The success that she has just attained, principally in the second act where she encoored the famous duo, sung with a rare intensity of passion, and after which she was called back to acknowledge the applause twice, [has surely gained her] a place in the first rank of the troupe, and an important future role, where all of her beautiful qualities can find their full development.³⁹⁴

Boisard's review was overly focused on her appearance and onstage demeanour, but Héglon's reputation as the leading interpreter of Dalila began with this February 1894 performance. By 1895, Deschamps-Jéhin was no longer scheduled to share the role with Héglon — it had become the almost-exclusive property of the latter singer in a way similar to Calvé's concurrent hold over Carmen in the Opéra-Comique, and from 1894

³⁹⁴ 'Une absence de Mme Deschamps nous a permis d'y applaudir une jeune artiste que l'on peut, dès aujourd'hui, appeler l'interprète définitive du rôle écrasant et superbe de la courtisane biblique. Par son travail incessant et par sa volonté persévérante, Mme Héglon a su conquérir le grand public, déjà séduit par sa grâce et sa beauté. C'est, à cette heure, une cantatrice accomplie, comme aussi une tragédienne lyrique de grande allure. Le succès qu'elle vient de remporter, principalement au second acte où on lui a redemandé la célèbre phrase du duo, dite avec une rare intensité de passion, et après lequel on l'a rappelée par deux fois, la place au premier rang, et la désigne pour quelque importante création, où toutes ses belles qualités trouveront leur entier développement.' A. Boisard, 'Chronique Musicale', *Le Monde illustré* 24 February 1894, p. 122.

to 1905, Hégлон was Dalila's main interpreter. Through Dalila, Hégлон achieved a position in the 'first rank' of the troupe as predicted by Boisard through this role, and while a new signature role failed to materialise, her workload increased with her status. She also appears to have gained Saint-Saëns' approval: while I have found no descriptions of Saint-Saëns' opinions on Hégлон's Dalila, he was willing to publically support her interpretation, as he played the piano accompaniment on her recording of 'Printemps qui commence' and can be heard on the track joking with Hégлон after she finishes the aria.

In addition to assuming a public image as Dalila, Hégлон shared her conception of the character and preparation process with the press, although she waited for decades after her final performance to do so. Returning to the *Revivre* interview quoted in the previous chapter, Hégлон gave some general insight into her vision of Dalila at the beginning of the article:

To talk about the role of Dalila, we couldn't do any better than to interview the great and famous artist who made an indelible mark on it, Mme Hégлон. To get this interview, it required that we not only appealed to the friendship she wants to show us personally, but also to the sympathy she could not fail to keep for this revue whose ethos is in such perfect communion with the zeal which made her one of the leaders of the Union catholique du Théâtre. In this beautiful studio which Mme Hégлон reserves for intimate receptions and which is illuminated with a wonderful painting representing Mary Magdalene at the Saviour's feet, the celebrated artist welcomes us with the most affectionate good grace.

Hégлон: So, truly, you want me to talk about Dalila?... It is one of the roles with which I have consciously identified myself the most through studying and research.

Le Guern: Also see that she earned you one of the triumphs of your career! Prominent critics still say that you were unbeatable.

Hégлон: This proves once more that success is the reward for effort, because I always spent months preparing my roles. This role of Dalila, in particular, I really assimilated into my daily life before playing it. The Dalila of the Opéra is not a greedy courtesan, she is not venal. A priestess of Dagon, she sees Samson only as the enemy of her race, the vanquisher of the Philistines.

Le Guern: Documenting the scenic interpretation is valuable, but as for the singing, which especially interests our friends at *Revivre*...

Héglon: In that too, you need to get a feel for the character of the role. Do you want an example? In the duet in the second act, all of the part sung with Samson must be marked by a charm which changes into hateful triumph when Samson, conquered, gives in to the seductress. It is a constant duality which not only dictates her behaviour, but [also] transforms the voice. What bitterness in the exclamation which ends this duet! You need to mark it as much vocally as in your actions. And the actions, you do not improvise them. Shall I tell you that before I played this role I was surrounded by works of art which constantly surrounded me with a plastic vision. At home, I wore ample dresses, copied from biblical costumes; I made it a habit to move myself, in going and coming dressed like this. And I arrived at a point where I found myself more comfortable dressed like that than in the finery imposed by the fashions of the moment.³⁹⁵

Le Guern's scene-setting is important, because she endeavoured to emphasise the sincerity of Héglon's Catholic faith. Halanzier had seen *Samson et Dalila* as too great of a risk because it held the possibility of trivialising the biblical story and using it for cheap titillation in front of an audience that would be appalled by this treatment of something that was part of their core perception of the world. Héglon, who used her worldview to inform her interpretation of Dalila, therefore was the first singer to clearly identify with the audience and their beliefs. To her, Dalila was not sentimental, she was not a courtesan in a traditional sense, and she was not in any way in love with Samson: the duality that she discusses is between her motives and her behaviour rather than between faith and desire. Héglon appeared to have some sympathy for the character as this quotation (featured in the excerpt in Chapter One) states: 'I am above all attached to not lowering her, to keep in her betrayal all the majesty of her intentions'. In Héglon's interpretation, Dalila was a woman of devout religious faith serving her country with the only resource she had available to her — her body. Despite a physicality that mirrors

³⁹⁵ Annie le Guern, 'Madame Héglon et le rôle de Dalila', *Revivre* 5 February 1930, *Programmes et articles de presse sur 'Samson et Dalila', musique de Camille Saint-Saëns* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, date unknown). For the original interview, see Appendix A.

Carmen's, and the insistence of some critics that Dalila must be attractive, she was the opposite of Carmen in that her appearance hid a cold, calculating personality.

In terms of the opera's identity, Héglon's viewpoint was valid — it was a religious opera first, and an orientalist one second. As suggested by Deschamps-Jéhin's accounts of Saint-Saëns during the rehearsal process, he never truly relinquished the idea of *Samson et Dalila* as an oratorio, and thematically the transfer of the topic across genres raised problems that set it apart from other operas of the time. The plot's identification of Hebrew men as universally good, and Philistine men as evil stereotypes is an acceptable characterisation in an oratorio, but it is lazy in an opera, even when that opera is subject to other trappings of exoticist art.³⁹⁶ In contemporary terms, this was a complicated topic: Eugène Fromentin believed that staging biblical stories as dramatic works risked turning ante-history into history, but the Middle East's status as the real site of the Bible's accounts was both an affirmation of faith, and for some, already a commercial venture.³⁹⁷ The area's simultaneous identity as a real and fictional location was problematic; as Rowden states, the issue of 'local colour' in biblical operas involved a perceived loss of spiritual verity in exchange for cultural authenticity:

Despite their own orientalist writings and paintings [Théophile] Gautier and Fromentin believed that the introduction of local or historical colour to a Biblical scene closed off the realm of imagination and mysticism, of spiritual truth of the Christian faith, just as positivistic theology could be seen to be doing. But for both of these divergent groups, the Orient retained its fascination and its timeless quality that made contemporary Arab people, dress and customs relevant to the representation of Biblical scenes.³⁹⁸

To some, *Samson et Dalila* therefore had to strike a balance between the crowd-pleasing orientalist themes of operas set in the Middle East, and the theological requirements of

³⁹⁶ Ralph P. Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns' 'Samson et Dalila'', *Cambridge Opera Journal* Vol. 3, No. 3 (November 1991), pp. 261–302: p. 280, p. 283.

³⁹⁷ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thaïs*, p. 99; Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns' 'Samson et Dalila'', pp. 264–65.

³⁹⁸ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thaïs*, p. 100.

a group that valued spiritual mysticism over visual and musical additions in the search for authenticity. This was an important consideration: the aggressively secularist policies of the Third Republic's government from the 1890s onwards belied the fact that France was still a deeply Catholic country in the final decades of the nineteenth century.³⁹⁹ The activities of the government led to a reaffirmation of traditional clericalist beliefs amongst the devout, as they needed to provide a concrete opposition to these policies, but even those who were not as certain about their beliefs lived with a doctrine that was intrinsic to everyday life.⁴⁰⁰ Saint-Saëns' own position on religion was complex: a known anticlerical republican, his deist beliefs put his requirements for a biblical adaptation at odds with those of his audience.⁴⁰¹ It is this critical view of contemporary religious practice that may have informed the opera's plot, as Locke suggests that the war between the Hebrews and the Philistines in *Samson et Dalila* could be interpreted as a metaphor for the conflict between an ideal and actual version of religion in the final quarter of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰² However, by the time that the opera reached Paris, such theological concerns seem to have been ignored (possibly because *Samson et Dalila* had been published as a score and libretto and was therefore consultable long before it was performed in the Palais Garnier), and Dalila's reception as a character was inextricably linked to her interpreter rather than the source material.

It is arguable that even if the opera had premiered in around 1875–76 in the Opéra, it could have succeeded. Halanzier's excuse for his rejection of *Samson et Dalila* — the patrons' potential distaste for religious subjects on the Opéra's stage — was in

³⁹⁹ Cecil Jenkins, *A Brief History of France: People, History and Culture* (London: Robinson, 2011), p. 158; Barbara L. Kelly, 'The Roles of Music and Culture in National Identity Formation', in *French Music, Culture, and National Identity, 1870–1914*, ed. Barbara L. Kelly (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008), pp. 1–14: p. 3.

⁴⁰⁰ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thaïs*, pp. 37–38.

⁴⁰¹ Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns' 'Samson et Dalila'', pp. 285–88; J.-G. Prod'homme and Frederick H. Martens, 'Camille Saint-Saëns (Oct. 9, 1835–Dec. 16, 1921)', *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 8, No. 4 (Oct., 1922), pp. 469–486: p. 480.

⁴⁰² Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns' 'Samson et Dalila'', pp. 285–88.

some ways an exaggeration. Musical plays and operas on religious subjects were contentious in eighteenth-century France (only the Jesuits used them as educational tools), but Napoleon's campaign in Egypt inspired an interest in the biblical lands and their history, which led to a surge in biblically-themed operas in the 1800s.⁴⁰³ The Opéra's position on biblical works during the nineteenth century was complicated, as their rules regarding sung-through music (rather than long, potentially political spoken passages) meant that they were freer to stage religious operas than a company like the Opéra-Comique.⁴⁰⁴ According to Rowden, in the matter of state censorship, what came under scrutiny was not the figures depicted, but the form in which they were portrayed.⁴⁰⁵ In the mid-nineteenth century, it was easier for *grand opéra* composers to write religion-based operas which discussed religion but had no biblical figures (an example being *Le prophète*, Meyerbeer's opera about the Anabaptist leader John of Leiden).⁴⁰⁶ Even in its small subgenre, *Samson et Dalila* was atypical of biblical operas: it was faithful to its source rather than filling in dramatic gaps with later mythologies (like Massenet's *Hérodiade* four years later) — while the subject matter was sensitive, it was well-handled and respectful.

Samson, as Locke argues, was the naturally sympathetic leading character in this opera, not only as a leader of a monotheistic group, but as a prefiguration of Christ from the Old Testament, and Dalila is sent to bring about his fall, and thus the fall of the God-chosen West.⁴⁰⁷ His motives before he meets Dalila are clear and noble, and he does not need to justify himself through speeches or actions. However, Hégdon's insistence on

⁴⁰³ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thaïs*, pp. 94–96.

⁴⁰⁴ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thaïs*, p. 96.

⁴⁰⁵ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thaïs*, pp. 96–97.

⁴⁰⁶ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thaïs*, p. 96.

⁴⁰⁷ Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns' 'Samson et Dalila'', pp. 271–74.

the devout nature of Dalila bolsters the argument that Dalila was also intrinsically relatable to the Third-Republic patron, as she embodied two somewhat contradictory personality traits of the ideal Third-Republic woman — religiosity and patriotism. Her patriotism was more of a masculine, active kind than the instructive type expected of Third-Republic women; to truly embody a ‘real’ woman of this era, Dalila would be encouraging a man to find a way to defeat Samson, but the extreme need of her people excuses her breaking of traditional gender roles, as does her status as an Other. This argument does not excuse the opera’s misogynistic depiction of the character; as Locke states, there are few, if any, nineteenth-century operas which portray a leading female character as a threat to the tenor, and her behaviour is by modern standards repugnant.⁴⁰⁸ Many exoticised heroines who became the love interests of heroic Westernised tenors were lyric sopranos with gentle personalities, but Dalila, like Carmen, is a brash and violent mezzo-soprano who belongs to a distinct ethnic group in an already exotic setting — Dalila comes from a different part of Israel to Samson, and follows the traditions of the Philistines instead of the Hebrews.⁴⁰⁹ Yet, unlike *Carmen*, we have no paragon of Western virtue to compare Dalila with in the opera, as there are no female soloists amongst the Hebrews.⁴¹⁰ It can be argued that Dalila is more complicated than Locke’s statement suggests, as she adopts a version of a typical exoticised heroine’s personality when she is trying to seduce Samson and trick him into revealing the secret of his strength. The way that Saint-Saëns wrote the music plays on the duality of the seductiveness of this woman, and her deceptiveness, as the love themes from Act Two are parodied in Dalila’s vocal lines when she addresses Samson in Act Three.⁴¹¹ It is not

⁴⁰⁸ Locke, ‘Constructing the Oriental ‘Other’: Saint-Saëns’ ‘Samson et Dalila’’, pp. 289–91, p. 271. Locke suggests *Carmen* and *Tannhäuser* as possible genre-mates for *Samson et Dalila*, but holds Saint-Saëns’ opera apart for the baldness of the portrayal of its female lead.

⁴⁰⁹ Locke, ‘Constructing the Oriental ‘Other’: Saint-Saëns’ ‘Samson et Dalila’’, p. 263.

⁴¹⁰ Locke, ‘Constructing the Oriental ‘Other’: Saint-Saëns’ ‘Samson et Dalila’’, p. 274.

⁴¹¹ Locke, ‘Constructing the Oriental ‘Other’: Saint-Saëns’ ‘Samson et Dalila’’, p. 285.

always clear whether the Opéra's Dalilas were able to capture this duality dramatically — for instance, Boisard's reviews only highlighted when a singer failed to convince him; his review of Héglon stated that she was passionate, graceful and beautiful without any suggestion of how she approached Dalila's real personality.

Despite her behaviour, Locke states that she was still an attractive character because she was a patriot and she therefore was doing what was required to capture Samson (a motive recognised by Héglon).⁴¹² In her admission of her designs on Samson, Dalila describes her calling to help her war-torn country by discovering the secret of the Hebrews' unstoppable leader and general. However as a Philistine, she is part of the dominant power, not the revolutionary forces seeking their freedom.⁴¹³ Also, while she refuses money in exchange for her betrayal, there is a relatively unexplored romantic side to the character originating from her past with Samson, which could justify a need for revenge from hurt pride.⁴¹⁴ This combination of political interest and sexual motivation had echoes in nineteenth-century French rhetoric, as anti-emancipation advocates preached that political activity would be followed by women's sexual freedom and licentiousness.⁴¹⁵ Héglon argued that Dalila's motives were those of her cause, but as a female character recreated in the late-nineteenth century, it is difficult to reconcile her religious devotion to her political actions because in this period it was believed that one precluded the other.⁴¹⁶ Dalila's eventual victory also rings hollow, as this is 'an inverted power relationship that is set right by Samson's God-ordained act of

⁴¹² Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns' 'Samson et Dalila'', p. 292.

⁴¹³ Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns' 'Samson et Dalila'', p. 263.

⁴¹⁴ Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns' 'Samson et Dalila'', pp. 291–92, pp. 296–97. Musically, love is difficult motive to prove: many scholars have labelled 'Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix' as a mockery of love, but the music holds none of the mocking characteristics that Dalila employs in Act Three (Locke, pp. 296–97).

⁴¹⁵ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thaïs*, p. 81.

⁴¹⁶ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thaïs*, p. 25.

destruction, which would also have been understood as an act of national liberation'.⁴¹⁷ The audience was meant to sympathise with the political objectives of both leading characters, but in the end, the Westernised civilisation must triumph over a race that is portrayed in the final act as being cruel and savage — turning the plot from a multi-layered narrative on colonisation to a simple opposition of good (Samson) versus evil (the Philistines).⁴¹⁸

The moral and political dilemmas posed by the opposition of these two tribes in ancient Israel had the potential to kindle theological and social discussion, but in the end they were mere subtext in the reception of the opera, and more shallow concerns had a tendency to readily come to the fore. One of these topics was the appearance of the mezzo-soprano playing Dalila, which featured in many of the reviews, and was treated akin to a skill, garnering positive or negative feedback from the critics. This was not the result of a type of Parisian superficiality imposing itself upon the work: Marianne Brandt, the first intended Dalila in Weimar in 1877, lost the role because she was considered too ugly.⁴¹⁹ This fixation on the female lead's physical appearance was a particularly strange phenomenon because Viardot, Saint-Saëns' vocal model for the role, was popular in spite of the fact that she was not conventionally beautiful.⁴²⁰ The opera was also the inspiration for gossip about its Dalilas: for instance, in 1897, Delna's presumed inclusion of Dalila in her forthcoming Opéra repertoire was rumoured to have caused some strain in the troupe, with *Le Monde Artiste* and *La Justice* reporting that

⁴¹⁷ Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns' 'Samson et Dalila'', p. 263.

⁴¹⁸ This does not necessarily mean that the composer agreed with this concept — personally, Saint-Saëns was an anti-imperialist (Georgina Born and Desmond Hesmondhalgh, 'Introduction: On Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music', in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed by Georgina Born and Desmond Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 1–58: p. 9).

⁴¹⁹ Rees, p. 210. Auguste von Müller premiered Dalila in Brandt's place.

⁴²⁰ Steen, p. 7, pp. 50–51. While he appears to have had no part in Brandt's removal, Saint-Saëns was not beyond criticising appearances himself — he mentioned Galli-Marié's 'mediocre beauty' in an article on *Carmen* (Camille Saint-Saëns, 'La Cinquantenaire de Carmen', *Les Annales politiques et littéraires* 1 March 1925, p. 229).

Héglon would be discomfited by such a high-profile rival for her roles.⁴²¹ The rumours suggested that Héglon attempted to block Delna's hiring because she saw Delna as a threat to her status as the primary Dalila.⁴²² However, she did not have the sway in the company required to nullify the offer, and Bertrand and Gailhard signed her rival with no clauses banning her from playing Dalila; their only concession to Héglon was that Delna would not make her company debut in *Samson et Dalila*.⁴²³ Eventually, Delna debuted with the Opéra as Fidès in *Le prophète* in May 1898, and focused solely on that role until her second debut as Dalila in January 1899. The press and patrons' extended wait for this role debut did not work in her favour, and the reviews were mixed. As with many other roles in her repertoire, her voice was never criticised, but aspects such as her appearance and her acting were emphasised as flaws. Boisard of *Le Monde illustré* once again was fixated on his concept of an ideal Dalila, which was clear from his review:

The heroine that she portrayed had lost all the charm, all the seduction; this is not the immortal enchantress, the woman of the valley of Sorek, of whose beauty, treachery and victory the Bible tells us, but a massive and imposing person whose gait appears hindered, with a heavy vulgar demeanour, with gestures without harmony. However beautiful Mlle Delna's voice is, she does not know how to compensate for the perpetual contradictions of a physique that is badly suited to this role which above all requires a charming interpreter.⁴²⁴

To further add insult in this review, Boisard suggested that her next role should be Queen Gertrude in *Hamlet*, insinuating that Delna was better off playing motherly, non-romantic characters such as Fidès and Gertrude for the foreseeable future. He had no issues with her vocally, but he was incensed by her extra-vocal performance, and what

⁴²¹ Author Unknown, 'Notes', *Le Monde Artiste* 4 July 1897, p. 426; Author Unknown, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *La Justice* 12 June 1897, p. 3.

⁴²² Author Unknown, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *La Justice* 12 June 1897, p. 3; Author Unknown, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *La Justice* 4 July 1897, p. 3.

⁴²³ Author Unknown, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *La Justice* 12 June 1897, p. 3; Author Unknown, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *La Justice* 4 July 1897, p. 3.

⁴²⁴ 'L'héroïne qu'elle a imaginée a perdu tout charme, toute séduction; ce n'est plus l'immortelle enchantresse, la femme de la vallée de Sorek, dont la Bible nous a dit la beauté, la trahison et la victoire, mais une massive et imposante personne à la démarche comme entravée, aux allures lourdes et vulgaires, aux gestes sans harmonie. Si belle que soit la voix de Mlle Delna, elle ne saurait compenser les contradictions perpétuelles d'une physique mal appropriée à ce rôle qui exige avant tout une charmeuse.' A. Boisard, 'Chronique Musicale', *Le Monde illustré* 14 January 1899, p. 35.

he saw as permanent flaws in how she presented herself. This dichotomy of the beauty of Delna's vocal performance and the ungraceful way she performed physically would continue to play out across her career in relation to this role. In addition to her 1907 recording of 'Printemps qui commence', she recorded 'Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix' three times — in Paris for her career revival in 1907, in New York in 1910 for her contract with the Metropolitan Opera, and in London for an Edison disk in 1913 — but after her 1898–1900 contract with the Opéra, she never played Dalila again, even to promote these recordings.

In addition to the comments about her weight and mobility issues, Delna's debut was bungled by a relatively inexperienced Samson. Agustarello Affré (1858–1931), had only played Samson once before this production began, and was described in Jullien's second review for the *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* of the production as being 'mediocre' in the role.⁴²⁵ The depth and creativity of her interpretation inspired a mixed reaction. The reporter in *Le Ménestrel's* 'Paris et Départements' column was kinder, and put less of an emphasis on Delna's appearance, but he also inferred that there were better, and better-known Dalilas in the company:

Yesterday Friday, Mlle Delna took possession of the role of Dalila at the Opéra. Her beautiful voice replicated all of the success that this role had already earned her in Aix-les-Bains but on a purely sculptural level: one pined for the lovely performances of Mme Héglon, who has held the role for many years to everyone's satisfaction.⁴²⁶

In *Le Figaro's* 'Courrier des Théâtres' column, Jules Huret was of the opposite opinion to *Le Ménestrel's* reviewer regarding Delna's performance (aside from the quality of her

⁴²⁵ Émile Marsy, 'Derrière la Toile', *Le Rappel* 4 January 1899, p. 4; Jullien, 'Revue Musicale', *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* 22 January 1899, p. 1.

⁴²⁶ 'Hier vendredi, Mlle Delna a pris possession du rôle de Dalila à l'Opéra. Sa belle voix y a retrouvé tout le succès que ce rôle lui avait déjà valu à Aix-les-Bains mais du côté purement plastique: on a pu y regretter les belles performances de Mme Héglon, qui tenait le personnage depuis plusieurs années à la satisfaction générale.' Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 8 January 1899, p. 14.

voice, which they both agreed upon), and praised her for taking on critically maligned aspects of the score itself:

At the Opéra: Mlle Delna sang yesterday, for the third time, *Samson et Dalila* and her success was greater again than those of the other performances. The great artist accelerated a little the movement of Saint-Saëns' music, which some critics have found too slow, and her admirable voice earned her the spectators' unanimous applause.⁴²⁷

As a professional singer, Delna was more successful as a generalist — albeit with some roles where she distinguished herself from her contemporaries and sang in the majority of the opera's performances — but this made it impossible for her to overcome the strong singer-role relationship Héglon had with Dalila in the public eye. Delna's mixed reception was also eventually reflected in the frequency of her appearances as Dalila — despite Héglon's rumoured fears about Delna taking over the role, Héglon remained as the major interpreter of Dalila with the Opéra, and outlasted her rival by five seasons. Delna's failure to claim Dalila in some way also symbolised her inability to fit into the company: within thirteen months of this role debut, she had arranged to return to the Opéra-Comique.

The era of Delna and Héglon's supposed conflict over the role coincided with a new way of presenting an opera's cast to the public through a wider variety of publicity photographs. *Samson et Dalila*'s arrival in the French repertoire in the 1890s imbued its promotion with a sense of near-modern celebrity, and the usual memorabilia of photographs on cards (generally singers in their costumes) were supplemented from 1904 onwards by recordings by singers like Héglon and Delna.⁴²⁸ These cards came in

⁴²⁷ 'A l'Opéra: Mlle Delna a chanté hier, pour la troisième fois, *Samson et Dalila* et son succès a été encore plus grand qu'aux deux autres représentations. La grande artiste a hâté un peu le mouvement de la musique de Saint-Saëns, que quelques critiques avaient trouvé trop lent, et sa voix admirable lui a valu les applaudissements unanimes des spectateurs.' Jules Huret, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 14 January 1899, p. 4.

⁴²⁸ Despite Pathé's presence in France as distributors of phonographs since 1894, it was the 1900s before the operatic recording industry took shape (Katherine Bergeron, *Voice Lessons: French Mélodie in the Belle Époque* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 113).

two types: the small *carte de visite*, initially designed in the mid-nineteenth century as collector's items for albums, and larger 'cabinet cards', which featured more up-close photographs.⁴²⁹ The more defined images of the cabinet cards coincided with a move towards more natural poses in publicity photographs, but also allowed for the images of female singers to become more sexualised in an era which eschewed the older, more nuanced promotion of singers and overall staging of operas.⁴³⁰ Amongst the Dalilas, this can be seen most plainly in the difference between Héglon's 1897 portrait, and Jane Margyl's cover photograph for *Musica* eight years later:

Figure 2.2b: Meyriane Héglon as Dalila (1897) and Jane Margyl as Dalila for *Musica* (November 1905)⁴³¹



Héglon's picture is in the traditional mode of star photography — she is not looking at the camera, and adopts a stock stance from theatre conventions. Margyl's is the opposite — she directly gazes into the camera, and stands in a suggestive pose with her chest appearing prominent. This was not a new or rare type of stance — Sibyl Sanderson's

⁴²⁹ Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century*, p. 98.

⁴³⁰ Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century*, pp. 117–19.

⁴³¹ Both images are from Gallica.

promotional pictures for Saint-Saëns' *Phryné* (1893) featured her décolletage prominently, and Georgette Leblanc adopted a similar pose for her Carmen and Ariane photographs (albeit in less revealing costumes). Héglon's publicity photograph postdates Sanderson's *Phryné*, but even in an opera as focused on the appearance of its heroine as *Samson et Dalila*, the costume confirms that she was not required to emphasise her sexuality (and as Héglon's *Revivre* interview decades later stated, this was not her vision of Dalila). The costuming for Dalila remained the same from the initial 1892 production until 1905, when the white linen costume was replaced by a slightly transparent black dress. This was the first time Dalila's costume was portrayed as deliberately seductive instead of exotic, with garlands of flowers replacing a headdress which included large discs covering the ears.⁴³² Margyl's dress is also more practical in terms of physical movement on the stage, as the old costume had a stiff semi-skirt which made walking gracefully more difficult, as well as costume jewellery covering the shoulders. This reinvention of the costume for Margyl's generation arrived in the same year that Héglon left the Opéra (and thus her signature role) presumably for good.⁴³³ Margyl's photograph announced that Dalila was still an attractive character, but now she was younger and more overtly seductive. The opera's public image was not entirely serious (as the Lefèvre-Utile card from the previous chapter suggests), but it was important to maintain a particular appealing image of the mezzo-soprano playing Dalila, who could be tasked with singing the role for multiple seasons in a row, and becoming a singer that many patrons associated entirely with Dalila.

Margyl in this respect was an ideal successor to Héglon; while she was famed for her beauty (most of the reviews I found of her debut made a point of mentioning her

⁴³² A production photograph from the Metropolitan Opera in 1915 in Locke's article ('Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns' 'Samson et Dalila'', p. 278) suggests that this was a wider costuming trend for the opera, but it is unclear whether the Opéra costume alteration occurred before theirs.

⁴³³ Héglon did return for two months in summer 1906, but 1905 marked the end of her reign as the leading mezzo-soprano in the Opéra.

appearance), she was also a talented and ambitious singer. She had worked her way up to the Opéra over the course of seven years: after joining the Folies-Bergère in 1898, she moved to the Opéra-Comique in 1902 before signing to the Opéra in early 1905, with a company debut as Dalila bookmarked for that September.⁴³⁴ Her Opéra debut was an event of note that season, and Saint-Saëns himself attended the performance; as Pierre Lalo's review from *Le Temps* shows, it also attracted a different crowd (which included some of Lapeyrette's friends from her time in the Folies-Bergère) who had little interest in copying the restrained behaviour of the usual patrons.⁴³⁵

At the Opéra, one has seen a unique debut; but it was not devoid of piquancy: it is that of Mlle Margyl in *Samson et Dalila*. Mlle Margyl is a very pretty young woman, who once appeared on less august stages, and one day conceived a laudable ambition to rise from the Folies-Bergère to the Académie nationale de musique: the example of Mlle [Lina] Cavalieri was made to encourage her. This is how we saw her last week, [when] she appeared in the character of Dalila. The sight of the hall was brilliant and curious. In the orchestra seats whose regulations allow access to the ladies, and in all of the rows in the amphitheatre, we saw beautiful people whose shoulders sparkled with gems; and even those who were less beautiful were not adorned with less magnificence. The presence of these dazzling people, whom one does not normally see in such a large crowd at the Opéra, gave the hall a glow, an air of joy, festivity and gallantry that is not in the air every night. And during the intervals, they enlivened their walk through the generally more austere corridors [of the Palais Garnier]. They also formed an extraordinarily generous audience; never has such warm applause resounded in the most solemn of our theatres: cordial enthusiasm that honours these beautiful people, and their spirit of solidarity. It is true that the debutante was not unworthy of this benevolence. She is nice to see on the stage; she acts with ease, and with elegant gestures. Her voice is lovely, although some notes in her middle are somewhat weaker than they should be. If she does not have much fire or passion, she sings in a precise and correct manner, she sings accurately, she pronounces [the words] distinctly. In short, it is a very honest debut. But why dress Dalila in a costume [which is] so severe and shrouds her completely in such dark draperies? Excess in anything is a fault.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁴ Author Unknown, 'Théâtres', *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* 21 April 1905, p. 3.

⁴³⁵ Author Unknown, 'Théâtres', *Le Journal* 2 October 1905, p. 6.

⁴³⁶ 'À l'Opéra, l'on n'a vu qu'un début unique; mais il n'a pas été dépourvu de piquant: c'est celui de Mlle Margyl dans *Samson et Dalila*. Mlle Margyl est une jeune femme fort jolie, qui parut autrefois sur des scènes moins augustes, et qui conçut un jour l'ambition louable de s'élever des Folies-Bergère à l'Académie nationale de musique: l'exemple de Mlle Cavalieri était fait pour l'encourager. C'est ainsi qu'on l'a vue, la semaine dernière, paraître dans le personnage de Dalila. Le spectacle de la salle était brillant et singulier. Aux rangs de l'orchestre dont le règlement permet l'accès aux dames, et à tous les rangs de l'amphithéâtre, l'on voyait de belles personnes dont les épaules étincelaient de pierreries; et

Margyl's reputation as Héglon's possible successor as Dalila continued to grow from 1905 to 1907, but her sudden death in August 1907 left the position vacant, and with Héglon's retirement from the Opéra now permanent, the role's identity was in a state of flux, like Carmen's was between Galli-Marié and Calvé's tenures.⁴³⁷

Figure 2.2c: Ketty Lapeyrette as Dalila (date unknown)⁴³⁸



A year later, Ketty Lapeyrette made her company debut as Dalila, but her performance did not exude the confidence of a leading singer from the beginning:

Mlle Lapeyrette, who made her debut last night, came to us with the reputation of brilliant lessons in M. Bouvet's class, and of a *concours* that caused a sensation. A visible case of 'stage fright', to the point of worrying her friends, paralysed her entrance in the first act of *Samson*, and was more marked than

celles mêmes qui étaient moins belles n'étaient point parées avec moins de magnificence. La présence de ces personnes éblouissantes, que l'on n'a pas coutume de voir s'assembler en aussi grande foule à l'Opéra, donnait à la salle un éclat, un air de joie, de fête et de galanterie qui n'est point son air de tous les soirs. Et pendant les entr'actes, elles animaient de leur promenade les couloirs ordinairement plus austères. Elles formaient d'ailleurs un public extraordinairement bienveillant; jamais applaudissements aussi chaleureux n'avaient fait retentir le plus solennel de nos théâtres: cordial enthousiasme qui fait honneur à ces belles personnes, et à leur esprit de solidarité. Il est vrai que la débutante n'était pas indigne de cette bienveillance. Elle est agréable à voir sur la scène; elle joue avec aisance, et a des gestes élégants. Sa voix est jolie, bien que quelques notes dans le médium soient un peu plus faibles qu'il ne faudrait. Si elle n'a pas beaucoup de flamme ni de passion, elle chante de façon précise et correcte; elle dit juste; elle prononce distinctement. En somme, c'est un début fort honnête. Mais pourquoi revêtir Dalila de costume si sévères et l'envelopper tout entière de si sombres draperies? L'excès en tout est un défaut.' Pierre Lalo, 'La Musique', *Le Temps* 3 October 1905, p. 3. Lina Cavalieri (1874–1944) was a café-concert singer who had worked her way up the operatic stage by the early 1900s.

⁴³⁷ Margyl's link to the role is evident on her monument, which features a scene from *Samson et Dalila* watched by a crying Muse of music (Author Unknown, 'Théâtres et Concerts', *Le Journal* 2 November 1908, p. 6).

⁴³⁸ *Album Reutlinger de portraits divers, vol. 51: photographie positive* (Paris: Reutlinger, 1875–1917), p. 24. Source: Gallica.

those of the next two [singers], Mlles Lozeron and Cochin, showing an untimely gaiety; the debutante's emotions persisted throughout the first act, and yet, there was no snag, no weakness, no stumble in the sound, this proves the solidity of Mlle Lapeyrette's voice and training: the game was won. The new Dalila at length showed her worth, in the second and third acts, [with] her wonderful voice which she possessed and handled with astonishing security and mastery. A dark-haired Dalila, with a southern accent, with arms that are a little skinny, she sang marvellously, with the tenor Gautier, the great duet of the second act, which ended in a sound that was too loud and too bright for the B on 'Je t'aime!' A warm and well-coloured voice, brilliant in the upper register, and with a strong Marseille accent, which is tolerated in tenors!⁴³⁹

Margyl and Lapeyrette's debuts were a common sight amongst mezzo-sopranos; Dalila was used as a well-established leading role for debutantes — a famous debutante in this capacity was Arbell, who made her Opéra debut as Dalila in October 1903. Still, these were often one-off breaks for singers such as Héglon, whose personal performance quotas were mostly filled by the role, and it was only from July to early September that minor singers were given multiple consecutive performances — for example, a Mlle Loventz was Deschamps-Jéhin's summer replacement in 1893.⁴⁴⁰ These performances gave lesser-known singers a promotional boost, but if there was a more permanent Dalila installed in the company at the time, they had no hope of dethroning her. Lapeyrette was fortunate that Dalila was, at that time, without a major interpreter, and despite a shaky start, she soon became the Opéra's leading mezzo-soprano, holding the position for an unprecedented thirty-two years until her final retirement in 1940. Dalila was amongst the roles that she played for the entirety of her career with the Opéra. She and Héglon

⁴³⁹ 'Mlle Lapeyrette qui débuta hier soir, nous arrivait avec la réputation de brillantes études dans la classe de M. Bouvet, et d'un concours qui fit sensation. Un 'trac' visible, au point d'inquiéter ses amis, paralysa son entrée au premier acte de *Samson*, et fut d'autant plus marqué que ses deux suivantes, Mlles Lozeron et Cochin, manifestant une gaîté intempestive; l'émotion de la débutante persista pendant tout le premier acte, et, pourtant, il n'y eut aucun accroc, aucune faiblesse; aucun son ne fut accroché, ce qui prouve la solidité de la voix et de l'instruction de Mlle Lapeyrette: la partie était gagnée. La nouvelle Dalila fit longuement valoir, aux 2^e et 3^e actes, son admirable organe qu'elle possédait et maniait avec une sûreté et une maîtrise étonnantes. Dalila brune, à l'accent méridional, aux bras un peu maigres, elle chanta admirablement, avec le ténor Gautier, le grand duo du 2^e acte, que celui-ci termina par un son trop fort et trop éclatant sur le *si* de 'je t'aime!'. Voix chaude et bien timbrée, éclatante dans le registre aigu, et fort accent marseillais, toléré chez les ténors!' C.B., 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Gil Blas* 16 February 1908, p. 3. The comment on Lapeyrette's arms was apt, as Dalila highlights her arms in her first words to Samson (Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns' *'Samson et Dalila'*', pp. 276–77).

⁴⁴⁰ P. E-C, 'Paris et Départements' *Le Ménestrel* 6 August 1893, p. 255.

were the dominant Dalilas in the company during the Third Republic, playing the role as its main interpreters for forty-three out of the forty-eight years (from the company premiere to the end of the regime) between them. Playing a character whose identity fell between a historical figure and a character from a story, the women who portrayed Dalila across the early decades of the opera's history in the company all had different interpretations of the character, although Héglon's was the closest to a quintessential, universally praised one. The pre-premiere history of the Opéra's engagement with this work is replete with examples of its management's inability to take worthwhile risks, but its enormous success (only Gounod's *Faust* received more performances in this period) indicates that through its respectful treatment of the source material combined with the popularity of Saint-Saëns' music and its interpreters, French opera had reached a point where it could directly interact with the religious faith that was of the utmost importance to so many of its patrons.⁴⁴¹ The heady mix of exoticism and spirituality in the music and the setting, and the irresistible charm of Dalilas such as Héglon was such that even in a decade which saw the inexorable rise of Wagner's bombastic, mythology-based works in the Opéra, there was still an appeal in telling a biblical tale with conviction and respect.

2.3: Massenet's *Werther*, infidelity and maternity

Two months after *Samson et Dalila*'s Opéra premiere, the Opéra-Comique staged their debut performance of a foreign-premiered, mezzo-soprano-led opera, Massenet's *Werther* (1892) in the Théâtre de la Ville. *Werther* was based on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's 1774 epistolary novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*). The novel had a reputation as being a sensationalist work at the time of its

⁴⁴¹ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 212.

publication. Goethe was associated with the *Sturm und Drang* movement in European art, which used heightened scenarios and emotional reactions from its subjects to express the experiences of the young during the final decades of the eighteenth century, and as Huebner notes, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* is ‘an interior drama that proceeds relentlessly towards an ever darkening horizon’.⁴⁴² It also had an element of truth in it, as Goethe’s *Werther* melded aspects of the author’s autobiographical tale of unrequited love with the well-publicised suicide of a young man, Karl Wilhelm Jerusalem.⁴⁴³ Goethe himself stated that ‘he breathed into the work all the passion that results when there is no difference between fact and fiction’, and this concept of emotional catharsis through creativity fed the ‘Werther fever’ that ensued after its publication.⁴⁴⁴ The novel’s effect on its readership was such that it was linked to a string of suicides by lovesick young men and women who were found with the book in their pocket (a phenomenon found in France as well as Germany).⁴⁴⁵ The fanaticism inspired by the novel had a less serious side as well, leading to a range of tangentially-related merchandise ranging from bread boxes and china to gloves, fans and jewellery to an *Eau de Werther*.⁴⁴⁶ In the initial decades after its publication, it accrued a reputation as a work of art, as a central point for an urban myth, and as a piece of late-eighteenth century pop culture. It was Goethe’s first literary success, but was outpaced by his *Faust* long before the author’s death in 1832.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴² Burton D. Fisher, *Massenet’s Werther (Opera Journeys Mini Guide Series)* (Boca Raton, Florida: Opera Journeys, 2006), p. 20; Huebner *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 113.

⁴⁴³ Margaret Bald, *Banned Books: Literature Suppressed on Religious Grounds: Revised Edition* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2014), p. 315.

⁴⁴⁴ Bald, p. 315.

⁴⁴⁵ Bald, p. 315.

⁴⁴⁶ Steven P. Sondrup, ‘Wertherism and *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*’, *European Romanticism: Literary Cross-currents, Modes, and Models* ed. Gerhart Hoffmeister (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), pp. 163–81: p. 165.

⁴⁴⁷ Clair Rowden, ‘*Werther, La Navarraise* and *Verismo*: A Matter of Taste’, *Franco-British Studies* No. 37 (2006), pp. 3–34: p. 22. In England, its reputation had degenerated the novel into something of a melodramatic joke, with writers such as William Makepeace Thackeray mocking it.

Goethe's works had achieved great success when adapted for the operatic stage in the latter half of the nineteenth century; Gounod's *Faust* (1859) became the most performed work of the century in the Opéra's repertoire following its 1869 company premiere, and Thomas' *Mignon* (1866, based on *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre*), a star vehicle for Galli-Marié, reached its 1000th performance with the Opéra-Comique in 1904.⁴⁴⁸ *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* had been adapted for the stage (both as an opera and a play with music) before Massenet's version; Amedée Boutarel's essay for the Opéra-Comique's programmes in late 1900s and early 1910s described Rudolphe Kreutzer's *Charlotte et Werther*, first performed in the Théâtre-Italien on 1 February 1792, as the first *Werther*-based work to be performed in Paris. After Kreutzer, all known operatic adaptations of the novel came from Italy: Vincenzo Pucitta's *Werter e Carlotta* (1802), Nicola Benvenuti's *Il Werther* (1811), Carlo Coccia's *Carlotta e Werther* (1814), Mario Aspa's *Carlotta e Werter* (1849), Raffaele Gentili's *Werther* (1862), Arturo Franchi's *L'ombra di Werther* (1899) and Derozi's *Werther* (1906), although their fidelity to the source material was in some cases dubious.⁴⁴⁹ Massenet's musical adaptation was the first large-scale French-language work based on Goethe's first novel in almost a century, possibly because of its depressing subject matter, and its structure. Goethe's *Werther* centres on the unrequited love that Werther, a young artist, has for Charlotte, an engaged and later married woman. Werther's letters to his friend Wilhelm chronicle his increasing despair in his professional and romantic failures, and the novel culminates in his suicide using a pistol belonging to Albert, Charlotte's husband.

⁴⁴⁸ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 212; Georges Loiseau, 'La Millième de Mignon', *Le Figaro* 13 May 1904, pp. 1–2.

⁴⁴⁹ Sondrup, p. 178 note 8; Stephen N. Cristea, 'The Fortunes of 'Werther' in Italy', *Collected Essays on Italian Language & Literature Presented to Kathleen Speight*, ed. Giovanni Aquilecchia, Stephen N. Cristea and Sheila Ralphs (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), pp. 227–57: pp. 248–49.

Massenet's *Werther* maintained the 1770s German setting of the novel, but its treatment of the plot, from the necessity of character and narrative development, diverged in multiple ways. As Huebner has observed, Charlotte was not a character who could be transplanted from the novel unchanged, as the novel was purely from Werther's perspective, and gave little indication of Charlotte's inner life.⁴⁵⁰ The libretto uses fragments of speech from the novel, but the librettists had to write a considerable amount of original text to create a believable leading role. The plot and overall structure finds a balance between the two characters — one fleshed-out, one reduced — by focusing on four episodes in their relationship: their first meeting, Werther's return to the town following Charlotte's marriage, their Christmas Eve meeting in her home, and their mutual confession of love in Werther's home. The content of the final act is the greatest liberty that Blau and Milliet took with the text. In the novel it is presumed that Werther's love is unrequited, and having shot himself in the head, he lingers for days in a coma before dying. In the opera, Charlotte bursts into Werther's rooms, and finds him dying from a wound to the abdomen but still conscious for most of the final act. This facilitates a bittersweet declaration from Charlotte that she returns Werther's affections and she finally kisses him. Werther, temporarily strengthened by this and the sound of Charlotte's siblings singing Christmas carols in the street, dies soon after this declaration, and a desolate Charlotte wanders into the street and collapses.

Charlotte's personality was changed from the novel; the operatic Charlotte is more typically domestic and less clever than her literary counterpart.⁴⁵¹ This was possibly symptomatic of her reduction to a 'Massenet type'. The music critic and Massenet biographer Louis Schneider stated in his description of Massenet's heroines that they were symbolic of a larger figure rather than distinct personalities:

⁴⁵⁰ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, pp. 113–14.

⁴⁵¹ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 117.

This vision that Massenet has translated into harmonious waves...it is, in a word, Woman, whether he names her Thaïs or la Vierge, Sitâ or Marie-Magdeleine, Esclarmonde or Manon, Charlotte or Sapho.⁴⁵²

Santillane made the same observation in 1894, but he was less diplomatic, stating that each new opera merited a new entry in the list of 'les femmes de Massenet', suggesting that the composer had a type of heroine which he was loath to diverge from.⁴⁵³ This fixation on a distinctive type of fictional woman was part of Massenet's own reputation as a composer who at best aimed his work toward a female audience, and at worst was irretrievably feminised himself (which inspired the nickname 'la fille du Gounod').⁴⁵⁴ It is far too reductive to suggest that Charlotte is one of twenty-four near-identical heroines, but *Werther* has Massenet's characteristically strong emphasis on the experiences and emotions of its female protagonist, as much of Act Three focuses on Charlotte's feelings and inner conflicts, rather than the exclusively one-sided narrative of the epistolary novel from Werther's perspective.⁴⁵⁵ However, this approach did not add up to an immediate success for the work, as various factors contrived to make the opera founder in its first productions both in the Opéra-Comique and abroad.

Paul Milliet, one of the librettists, claimed that the genesis of *Werther* was on a train journey in 1878, where he and Georges Hartmann (Massenet's publisher), discussed the idea for a libretto, but Massenet only devoted significant time and effort to the work from 1885.⁴⁵⁶ The opera was not composed in a quick succession of conception to completion and premiere, and Massenet himself was rumoured to have doubted the quality of the music; a story suggests that he wanted to burn the opera while

⁴⁵² Karen Henson, 'Of Men, Women and Others: Exotic Opera in Late Nineteenth-Century France' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford, 2000), p. 89.

⁴⁵³ Henson, 'Of Men, Women and Others: Exotic Opera in Late Nineteenth-Century France', p. 88.

⁴⁵⁴ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 225.

⁴⁵⁵ Twenty-five of Massenet's operas have been performed, but only *Le jongleur de Notre-Dame* (1902) has an all-male cast.

⁴⁵⁶ Steven Huebner, 'Massenet and Wagner: Bridling the Influence', *Cambridge Opera Journal* Vol. 5, No. 3 (Nov 1993), pp. 223–38: pp. 223–24.

it was still in sketch form after seeing *Parsifal* in Bayreuth in 1886, but he eventually finished *Werther* in July 1887.⁴⁵⁷ It predates *Esclarmonde* (1889) and *Le mage* (1891) in composition, but, according to the composer, it was hindered by its plot rather than its music. Massenet wrote in *Mes souvenirs* that he pitched it to Léon Carvalho in 1887, who thought it was boring and wanted another *Manon*.⁴⁵⁸ Carvalho also was said in this source to have wanted the soprano Rose Caron to play Charlotte, but discussions on the opera ceased after the Salle Favart burnt down on 25 May.⁴⁵⁹ The problematic nature of *Mes souvenirs*, where Massenet uses a significant amount of artistic licence, is such that we cannot be certain that he was telling the truth here.⁴⁶⁰

Following the Opéra-Comique's change of director after the Salle Favart's destruction, the opera was shelved for four years until Massenet finally embarked on a search for a premiering company and cast in other parts of Europe. The work was eventually premiered by the Wiener Hofoper on 16 February 1892, with Ernest van Dyck (1861–1923) as Werther, and Marie Renard (1864–1939) as Charlotte. In Paris eleven months later, the leading roles were played by Guillaume Ibos and Delna, with Max Bouvet and Jeanne Laisné in the supporting roles of Albert and Sophie respectively. Massenet and Delna seem to have met before she was cast as Charlotte and Massenet personally asked her to play the role, but their memoirs disagree on when and where this was. Massenet described the meeting as follows in *Mes souvenirs*:

The same week [that I gave the score of *Werther* to Carvalho] Mme. Massenet and I dined with M. and Mme. Alphonse Daudet. The other guests were Edmond de Goncourt and Charpentier, the publisher. After dinner Daudet told me that he wanted me to hear a young artiste. 'Music herself,' he said. This young girl was Marie Delna! At the first bars that she sang (the aria from the great Gounod's *La*

⁴⁵⁷ Irvine, p. 150; Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 88.

⁴⁵⁸ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 77.

⁴⁵⁹ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 77.

⁴⁶⁰ Huebner (*French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 77) states that Massenet couldn't keep his story straight regarding this discussion in later interviews, which is highly suspect.

Reine de Saba) I turned to her and took her hands. ‘Be Charlotte, our Charlotte,’ I said, utterly carried away.⁴⁶¹

Delna’s account differs in the date and location: Massenet said that this private performance happened before her debut as Didon, but according to Delna, they met in the summer of 1892 (after her debut) in Ménard-Dorian’s garden, not Daudet’s home.⁴⁶² Regardless of the true manner and date of their first meeting, Delna was most likely the first singer to be unofficially engaged for a role in the opera.

Charlotte, like Carmen, was not viewed as role that was exclusively for mezzo-sopranos. The music journals and Carvalho all appeared to have initially favoured older sopranos for the Opéra-Comique’s first production. The rumours regarding Charlotte’s casting began soon after the Vienna premiere — on 20 March 1892, *Le Ménestrel* named Sibyl Sanderson as the most likely to play Charlotte, and it was later rumoured that she had relinquished the role in favour of Delna mere weeks in advance of a planned premiere before the summer break of 1892.⁴⁶³ However, it is hard to credit this rumour, as there were no rehearsal reports or official speculations on premiere dates in the press — if a production of *Werther* had been rehearsed almost to a performable standard in the spring of 1892 and jettisoned at the last moment, it was kept uncharacteristically quiet by the company. In reality, Adèle Isaac had sung some of *Werther* in a private performance in June 1892 and following this Carvalho scheduled the opera for the next season, but without casting Isaac in the role.⁴⁶⁴ The real first cast was announced on 24 September in *Le Figaro*, with Delna as Charlotte.⁴⁶⁵ The original *Werther*, Etienne

⁴⁶¹ Jules Massenet, *My Recollections*, trans. H. Villiers Barnett (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1919), pp. 170–71. Alphonse Daudet (1840–1897) was a French novelist.

⁴⁶² Vincent Giroud, ‘Un compositeur et son interprète — Bruneau et Delna’, in *Aspects de l’opéra français de Meyerbeer à Honegger*, ed. Jean-Christophe Branger and Vincent Giroud (Lyon: Symétrie, 2009), pp. 95–135: p. 99.

⁴⁶³ Author Unknown, ‘Paris et Départements’, *Le Ménestrel*, 20 March 1892, p. 94; Jack Winsor Hansen, *The Sibyl Sanderson Story: Requiem for a Diva* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 2005), p. 179.

⁴⁶⁴ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, pp. 104–05.

⁴⁶⁵ Georges Boyer, ‘Courrier des Théâtres’, *Le Figaro* 24 September 1892, p. 4.

Gibert, was publicly replaced on 20 November in a cryptic announcement about a cast change in *Le Figaro*.⁴⁶⁶ Following speculations elsewhere focusing on the wrong cast member, the paper clarified the next day that it wasn't Delna who had left, but the next paragraph speculated that Sanderson could be the next Charlotte, adding fuel to that particular rumour.⁴⁶⁷ The casting of the title character continued to cause instability in rehearsals — Gibert's replacement, Charles Delmas, was chronically ill throughout December (which led to cancelled rehearsals and further delays of the premiere), and was officially replaced by Ibos on 21 December.⁴⁶⁸ Ibos claimed that Massenet was close to rewriting *Werther* for the baritone Victor Maurel in his desperation to find an appropriate and available singer, having auditioned seven tenors without finding one whom he believed could carry the role for the French premiere.⁴⁶⁹ After Ibos had been confirmed as the new *Werther*, the cast had (including theatre closures for Christmas) only twenty-six days to perfect their interpretations before the company premiere on 16 January.

The production's problems with its *Wethers* were a real and pressing concern, but the press had fixated absolutely on the idea of Charlotte going to Sanderson for a year before the company premiere. While she never sang as Charlotte in Paris, *Werther's* various delays were worked into the growing mythology of Sanderson's partnership with Massenet, as the *New York Times* report on the Viennese premiere showed:

The young lady [Sanderson] said she would go on the stage if he consented to write an opera for her. M. Massenet thought of 'Werther', but Lotte is a mezzo-soprano. He therefore composed 'Esclarmonde' for her, which Miss Sibyl Sanderson created and played 100 times at the new Opera Comique. [...] The composer in the meantime entirely forgot 'Werther', which was left in the drawer. When, a year ago, he came to Vienna to be present at the first

⁴⁶⁶ Georges Boyer, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 20 November 1892, p. 3.

⁴⁶⁷ Georges Boyer, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 21 November 1892, p. 4.

⁴⁶⁸ Georges Boyer, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 21 December 1892, p. 6.

⁴⁶⁹ Georges Loiseau, *Notes sur le chant* (Neuilly: Levallois, 1947), pp. 27–28.

performance of ‘Manon’ and for the first time heard Vandyk [sic] and Mlle. Renard, he was struck with the idea that these two should be his Werther and Lotte. It is thus that this opera is only now being performed for the first time and in Vienna.⁴⁷⁰

Eventually, their ambitions came to naught: within months of the Parisian premiere, Sanderson had signed a contract with the Opéra, and Delna’s position as the main Charlotte was secure, as her supposed rival was too busy with a final new role: Phryné in Saint-Saëns’ *Phryné* (premiered 24 May).⁴⁷¹ *Werther* continued into the next season, but it was performed less and less (which was normal for moderately successful productions), and Delna did not have to relinquish the role of Charlotte as she prepared and sang as Marcelline in Bruneau’s *L’attaque du moulin* in autumn 1893, and Mistress Quickly in Verdi’s *Falstaff* in spring 1894. Once the initial production was finished, there were no ‘one-off’ performances between 1894 and 1897, with the work remaining dormant in the repertoire and no critics demanding a new production.

In Paris in 1893, *Werther*’s reception was coloured both by the ongoing Wagnerian debates, and also the respect occasioned by a major Goethe work in its novel form, but at least it was the only Massenet opera premiered in the company that season: in Covent Garden, *Werther* and *La Navarraise* premiered within ten days of each other in June 1894, and the abortive production of *Werther* suffered from negative comparisons with Massenet’s newer, more successful opera in the British press.⁴⁷² Its promotion in France was also flawed: *Le Ménestrel*, in spite of its function as a musical journal for Heugel (Massenet’s publisher), did not contribute a review of the Parisian premiere — instead, a fragmentary digest of various reviews from other newspapers was

⁴⁷⁰ Author Unknown, ‘London Managers Pining a Season of Unusually Bad Business’, *The New York Times* 21 February 1892, page number unknown.

⁴⁷¹ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, pp. 108–09.

⁴⁷² Rowden, ‘*Werther*, *La Navarraise* and *Verismo*: A Matter of Taste’, pp. 5–6.

collated into a single article.⁴⁷³ This left *Werther* solely at the mercy of critics who had no particular interest in seeing the opera succeed, or even wished to see it fail.

The content of this version of Goethe's story had the ability to distract reviewers from the work itself — for instance, the bulk of Paul Dukas' review for *La revue hebdomadaire* was based on differences between the source material and the adaptation.⁴⁷⁴ While he had no issues with any of the cast members' performances, *Le Figaro*'s Charles Darcours was not very sympathetic towards the suicide aspect of the plot, referring to Werther's first expression of suicidal tendencies in Act Two as 'the criminal thought' ('la pensée criminelle'). This was an inevitable drawback of the plot: while some nineteenth-century operas feature death through self-sacrifice (i.e. *Carmen*), suicide was not an understandable action, and under Catholic doctrine is a grave sin. It was also a rare resolution to a plot at that time: for instance, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, with its depiction of Cio-Cio-san's suicide, was only composed in 1903. Knowing how the story had to end if it was to remain faithful to its source, Darcours appears to have come to the opera convinced that the final act was inevitably fated to be depressing and difficult to watch:

The denouement, we know: it is lugubrious and terrible. Here the librettists changed Goethe's text. Charlotte arrives too late. God permitted that, but she can receive Werther's last words.⁴⁷⁵

Dukas and Darcours were unusual however, as most critics were able to put aside their moral or literary qualms for the production, and preferred to squabble over the usual issues: Wagnerian music, and the interpreters. Of all of the leading singers in the initial Opéra-Comique production, Delna's reception was the most uncertain. Despite rumours

⁴⁷³ Heugel became Massenet's publisher in May 1891 when he bought Hartmann's publishing business (Irvine, p. 173).

⁴⁷⁴ Paul Dukas, 'Chronique Musicale', *La revue hebdomadaire* 11 February 1893, pp. 296–309.

⁴⁷⁵ 'Le dénouement, on le connaît: il est lugubre et terrible. Ici les librettistes ont altéré le texte de Goethe. Charlotte arrive trop tard. Dieu l'a permis, mais elle peut recevoir les dernières paroles de Werther.' Charles Darcours, 'Les Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 17 January 1893, p. 3.

that she would play Catherine in a revival of Meyerbeer's *L'étoile du nord* at the beginning of the 1892–93 season, the management of the Opéra-Comique waited until January 1893 — seven months after her debut — for her second role debut.⁴⁷⁶ Delna's treatment by the management was in many ways unusual; while it was reported that she was signed as a *galli-marié*-type singer to play long-standing roles such as Carmen and Rose Friquet, she had been excluded from gaining more stage experience in these roles.⁴⁷⁷ Delna's youth, and her extraordinary success in *Les Troyens* meant that critics were waiting to see whether she was a future star, or simply a teenager who had been trained to perform a single role to perfection. No critics appear to have doubted at all that her voice would remain as impressive as at her debut as Didon, but acting skill was a negative point that, upon reflection following her debut, many reviewers believed she needed to work on. The poor casting of the leading roles, and in particular Delna, has been used as an excuse for the opera's initial lack of success. Huebner specifically cites her age (he notes that she was seventeen at the premiere) and her inexperience as the reason for her underwhelming reception in the role.⁴⁷⁸ There were signs that Delna had a problem with reconciling a well-trained voice with an incomplete dramatic education: for example, Fourcaud of *La Grande Dame* said that 'for her is her beautiful voice, and against her is her awkwardness'.⁴⁷⁹ Still, several critics saw the potential of the young singer, even if the night's performance fell short of her debut:

Mlle Delna is in the process of climbing to the horizon, but she has not already reached its zenith, and the role of Charlotte seemed to me to be a little less happy for her than Didon in *Les Troyens*, although in it she gives proof of an already

⁴⁷⁶ Charles Martel, 'Écho des Théâtres', *La Justice* 20 August 1892, p. 3.

⁴⁷⁷ R. des Coulys, 'Revue Théâtrale', *La revue mondaine illustré* 25 March 1892, p. 14; Perdican, 'Les Théâtres', *Le XIXe siècle* 12 March 1892, p. 3. Both of these signing notices mention *Carmen* or *Les Dragons de Villars* as possible debuts for her.

⁴⁷⁸ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 106.

⁴⁷⁹ 'Mlle Delna, qui a pour elle son magnifique organe et contre elle sa gaucherie.' L. de Fourcaud, 'Théâtres', *La Grande Dame* 1893, p. 105.

assured talent and an excellent method, not to mention her generous voice. (*Le Correspondent*)⁴⁸⁰

Mlle Delna did not deceive those who believed in her after *Les Troyens*; she has worked on her style and her acting, complimenting a superb voice as that would not always be enough. She still needs to get rid of a certain heaviness in her gestures and in her performance. But for the time being this is an artist who has made her place. (*Le Rappel*)⁴⁸¹

In addition to these hopeful but not glowing reviews, Delna's inexperience was seen as an asset by some critics such as Darcours because it gave a more natural aspect to the role:

Mademoiselle Delna has a full voice, generous, with which she sings and gives her phrasing a stress that other singers cannot achieve with a much more complete art. This young girl sings and acts simply; maybe, [when] the day [comes] where she will have the talent, she will make less of an effect. Meanwhile, she made of Charlotte a figure of fair expression which delighted the audience.⁴⁸²

What Darcours liked about her inexperience was the naturalness it inspired in her performance style — Delna reacted rather than acted, and it brought some interest to a character who spends most of the opera restraining herself and her feelings. Darcours wasn't alone in this assessment, as Ely-Edmond Grimard of *Les Annales politiques et littéraires* also praised the effect that her inexperience had on her interpretation of Charlotte.⁴⁸³ There were also critics who saw Charlotte as an improvement: Ernest Reyer of the *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* stated that he preferred her 'Frankfurter bourgeoisie' over her Carthaginian queen.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸⁰ 'Mlle Delna est en train de monter à horizon, mais elle n'est pas encore arrivée à son zénith, et le rôle de Charlotte m'a paru un peu moins heureux pour elle que ne l'avait été celui de Didon dans *les Troyens*, quoiqu'elle y fasse preuve d'un talent déjà sûr et d'une excellente méthode, sans parler de sa voix généreuse.' Victor Fournel, 'Les Œuvres et Les Hommes', *Le Correspondant* 1893, p. 394.

⁴⁸¹ 'Mlle Delna n'a pas trompé ceux qui croyaient en elle après *les Troyens*; elle a travaillé son style et son jeu, comprenant qu'un organe superbe comme le sien ne suffit pas toujours. Elle a besoin encore de se débarrasser d'une certaine lourdeur dans le geste et dans l'émission. Mais dès à présent c'est une artiste qui a sa place faite.' Georges Bertal, 'Les Théâtres', *Le Rappel* 18 January 1893, p. 2.

⁴⁸² 'Mademoiselle Delna possède une voix pleine, généreuse, qui chante d'elle-même et donne à son phrase un accent que d'autres chanteuses ne sauraient obtenir avec un art beaucoup plus complet. Cette jeune fille chante et joue simplement; peut-être, le jour où elle aura du talent, fera-t-elle moins d'effet. En attendant, elle a fait de Charlotte une figure d'une juste expression qui a ravi le public.' Darcours, 'Les Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 17 January 1893, p. 5.

⁴⁸³ Ely-Edmond Grimard, 'Musique', *Les Annales politiques et littéraires* 22 January 1893, p. 58.

⁴⁸⁴ E. Reyer, 'Revue Musicale', *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* 22 January 1893, p. 2.

However, this artistic immaturity, whether it was praised or tolerated for a limited period by critics, does not take into account Delna's lack of success in 1897, when she was twenty-two and far more experienced as a musical actress. Delna's suitability for Charlotte aside, Huebner's argument ignores the generally slow uptake of the opera globally — for instance, the Viennese production closed after three performances, and after one performance of the opera, *Werther* was not performed again in Covent Garden until 1979.⁴⁸⁵ Operatic trends were slowly turning towards what is often referred to as the *verismo* movement, but while Werther's company premiere fell halfway between those of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* (1891) and Massenet's *La Navarraise* (1895), it both arrived too early to take advantage of this change in tastes (*Cavalleria rusticana*'s success, while it was an important milestone, was not the beginning of a consistent rise of the realist movement in the company), and was not dramatic enough in its treatment of the tragic plot. Musically, Massenet was trying to keep up with new trends in opera; he labelled it as a *drame lyrique* rather than an *opéra* of some type, which to quote Rowden, 'inscribed [*Werther*] into the new, realist aesthetic in French opera, viewed as a middle path between Wagnerian symphonic and continuous music drama and Italian lyric formulaic opera'.⁴⁸⁶ This neither shielded it from criticism (much like most late-nineteenth century operas of note, it was criticised by both *wagnérien* and *anti-wagnérien* reviewers for insufficient and overabundant Wagnerian elements respectively) nor guaranteed success; like *Manon*, Massenet's *Werther* would

⁴⁸⁵ Loiseau, p. 27; 'Werther', *Royal Opera House Collections Online* <<http://rohcollections.org.uk/work.aspx?work=717>> [accessed 14 July 2016]. The Augustus Harris Company staged the first performance in 1894, while the production in 1979 was the Royal Opera House's company premiere. A second performance was scheduled in 1894, but Jean de Reszké (*Werther*), after initially convincing Harris to continue with *Werther*, dropped out of the production when Harris informed him of the very poor sales for the upcoming performance (Rowden, 'Werther, *La Navarraise* and *Verismo*: A Matter of Taste', p. 4 note 7).

⁴⁸⁶ Rowden, 'Werther, *La Navarraise* and *Verismo*: A Matter of Taste', p. 4.

need to wait for an appropriate time and cast to find its place in the Opéra-Comique's repertoire.⁴⁸⁷

The critics were divided on the opera, but the audience reaction to *Werther* was lukewarm, and the production petered out in early 1894.⁴⁸⁸ There was no sign of a new production for the 1894–95 season, or the 1895–96 season, as roles such as Marion and Orphée became part of Delna's signature repertoire rather than Charlotte. Her return to the role in mid-1897 followed the announcement that she would be moving to the Opéra for the next operatic season, and was officially billed as a last chance for the company's patrons to see her in one of her old roles.⁴⁸⁹ Delna and Bouvet (Albert) were the only returning main cast members, and Delna sang opposite Lucien Muratore and Julien Lepestre, who were sharing the title role. Unlike the premiere production, Delna's presence in the role was limited by her contract: when the company closed for the summer at the end of June, her contract was completed and she was no longer part of the Opéra-Comique. This gave her regular understudy, Charlotte Wyns, the opportunity to sing as Charlotte for the first time. It was part of the usual dynamic between the two singers — Wyns had debuted with the company fifteen months after Delna and was often cast as the younger singer's understudy. Later in 1897, Ely-Edmond Grimard commented that Delna had kept Wyns in second place for some time, intimating that Delna's absence would finally give Wyns a chance to shine.⁴⁹⁰ Wyns had benefitted from changes in Delna's repertoire before; she was moved up to the main cast as Méala in Massé's *Paul et Virginie* in March 1895 after Delna left the production to focus on Godard's *La Vivandière*.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁷ Rowden, 'Werther, La Navarraise and Verismo: A Matter of Taste', pp. 4–5.

⁴⁸⁸ Rowden, 'Werther, La Navarraise and Verismo: A Matter of Taste', p. 26.

⁴⁸⁹ Jules Huret, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 15 June 1897, p. 4.

⁴⁹⁰ Ely-Edmond Grimard, 'Musique', *Les Annales politiques et littéraires* 5 December 1897, p. 362.

⁴⁹¹ Author Unknown, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *La Justice* 12 March 1895, p. 3.

Following her return to the Opéra-Comique in early 1900, Delna was absent from the company again for the 1902–03 season, which allowed many singers to finally step out from her shadow like Wvns had in 1897, and give new life to some of her discarded roles, one of which was Charlotte. Wvns was the first singer to play Charlotte with the company other than Delna, but the first mezzo-soprano to lead a completely new production was Marié de l'Isle in 1903.

Figure 2.3a : Jeanne Marié de l'Isle as Charlotte (1903)⁴⁹²



The new production, with Léon Beyle in the title role, was the first to make enough of a profit to enshrine *Werther* in the Opéra-Comique's regular repertoire. Marié de l'Isle had already sung as Charlotte elsewhere, playing the role in Ghent's Grand-Théâtre during the 1902 Christmas break as part of a Massenet festival.⁴⁹³ According to several reviews, Carré had been planning a production for a long time, even visiting Wetzlar in 1901 to get a feel for the countryside that had inspired Goethe, and the documents he

⁴⁹² *Album Reutlinger de portraits divers, vol. 24: photographie positive* (Paris: Reutlinger, 1875–1917), p. 38. Source: Gallica.

⁴⁹³ Gébé, 'Etranger: Gand', *Le Monde Artiste* 4 January 1903, p. 9.

brought back were rumoured to have inspired the new décor of the production.⁴⁹⁴ The pre-premiere promotion of this production followed this theme of renewed interest within the company, and Carré's greater interest in authenticity in recreating the scenery of the setting, suggesting that Carvalho had put little thought into his two productions.

The opera was helped by a sea-change in critical tastes as well: by early 1903, many critics were ready to write a glowing review of the work in the Opéra-Comique with the right staging. In his review of Carré's revival of *Werther*, Gabriel Fauré believed that the work was enshrined already in the European repertoire:

You do not expect me to enter here into a detailed analysis of a work already so universally known, constantly played in the theatres of France and of Europe, commonly encountered on all pianos, and sung by all and especially by those who sing.⁴⁹⁵

Much like the second production of *Carmen*, some critics rushed to find a scapegoat for the first production's lacklustre reception. Heugel claimed in *Le Ménestrel* that Carvalho had rushed into producing the opera, and that no care was taken with its interpretation, while suggesting that the new production's lack of star singers was its greatest asset:

And so *Werther* was mounted, [in the] Place du Châtelet, not with ill will — I will not go that far — but certainly without sufficient conviction and without [sufficient] rehearsal. The beauties of the score at least still appeared nevertheless, but they were not presented in their full light. One can, at present, say all of these things, it seems to us; because they are already in the pages of ancient history.

But the work is engaging, we said, and when it catches you, it does not let you go. It stayed alive in the memory of hearts and minds, and M. Albert Carré wanted to sound it out on his turn [as director]. We believe he will not happen to repent it. For Friday's performance did not proceed indifferently. It is not that we have read on the posters the disappointing name of some great star; no! The star was the work itself, honestly defended by a group of sincere and touching artists who did not seek to shine for themselves and at the cost of the

⁴⁹⁴ Author Unknown, 'Notes et Informations', *Le Monde Artiste* 22 February 1903, p. 124.

⁴⁹⁵ 'Vous n'attendez pas que j'entre ici dans l'analyse détaillée d'une œuvre aussi universellement connue, constamment jouée sur les théâtres de France et d'Europe, rencontrée couramment sur tous les pianos, et chantée par tous ceux et surtout par toutes celles qui chantent.' Gabriel Fauré, 'Les Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 25 April 1903, p. 4.

interpreted score. That is without doubt the secret of the evening's excellent result.

We must greatly commend M. Beyle, who was just wonderful in this role where his tenderly musical voice blends so harmoniously throughout without ever jarring by a useless moment. And we owe the same praise to Mlle Marié de l'Isle, very sober, very intelligent in the very complex character of Charlotte. Mme Marguerite Carré made the ideal Sophie, all cheerful, all slight, all nice, — a ray of sun in this dark plot.⁴⁹⁶

Heugel of course had a vested interest in claiming that the interpretation had failed the opera in the first Opéra-Comique production, as he was Massenet's publisher and would never admit to any flaw in the music itself. Yet, the insinuations about the 1903 cast's lack of self-aggrandisement are striking, as the only real 'star' to have sung in the opera before them was Delna (and to a lesser extent, Ibos). However, it is likely that it was a general complaint about narcissistic singers who only aspired to glorify themselves (which Beyle, Marié de l'Isle and Carré apparently had no intention to do), rather than target a woman who at the company premiere was only seventeen years old and on her second debut — hardly a great star.

Beyle, who had supposedly learned the title role in a matter of days, was undeniably the cornerstone of the revived opera's soaring reputation; Fauré was particularly impressed with him, but he gave some credit to Marié de l'Isle's performance:

⁴⁹⁶ 'Et c'est ainsi que *Werther* fut monté, place du Châtelet, non pas avec mauvais volonté — je n'irai pas jusque-là — mais assurément sans conviction suffisante et sans entraînement. Les beautés de la partition n'en apparurent pas moins malgré tout, mais elles ne furent pas présentées dans leur pleine lumière. On peut, à présent, dire toutes ces choses, nous semble-t-il; car ce sont déjà des pages d'histoire ancienne. Mais l'œuvre est attachante, nous l'avons dit, et, quand elle vous a pris, elle ne vous lâche guère. Elle était restée vivace dans le souvenir des cœurs et des intelligences, et M. Albert Carré en a voulu tâter à son tour. Nous pensons qu'il n'aura pas lieu de s'en repentir. Car la représentation vendredi n'a pas passé indifférente. Ce n'est pas qu'on ait lu sur les affiches le nom décevant de quelque grande étoile; non! L'étoile fut l'œuvre elle-même, honnêtement défendue par un ensemble d'artistes sincères et émus qui n'ont pas cherché à briller pour eux-mêmes et aux dépens de la partition interprétée. C'est là sans doute le secret de l'excellent résultat de la soirée. Il faut grandement féliciter M. Beyle, qui fut simplement admirable dans ce rôle où sa voix tendrement musicale se fond si harmonieusement dans l'ensemble, sans jamais détonner par un inutile effort. Et l'on doit les mêmes éloges à Mlle Marié de l'Isle, très sobre, très intelligente dans le personnage si complexe de Charlotte. Mme Marguerite Carré fut l'idéale Sophie, tout gaie, toute menue, tout gentille, — un rai de soleil en cette noire intrigue.' H. Moreno, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel* 26 April 1903, p. 131.

The new interpretation of *Werther* was entrusted to Mme Marié de l'Isle, who was, yesterday, a Charlotte first gaily maternal and light-hearted, then tender, then sweetly serious, and finally eloquently passionate and moving.⁴⁹⁷

Fauré's interpretation of how Charlotte's emotional journey throughout the opera should have been portrayed was far more common in 1903 than in 1893, as critics were more receptive to this aspect of the plot ten years later, when the altered coda was an accepted part of Massenet's *Werther*, and the subtlety of this character arc was seen as well-done rather than underwhelming.

The 1903 production with Béyle and Marié de l'Isle finally earned the opera a place in the regular repertoire, and it garnered 316 performances in ten years; of Massenet's works, only *Manon* was performed more in this period.⁴⁹⁸ After a succession of new if not long-term interpreters, Delna returned to the role in 1914, but not as its sole interpreter; as the First World War began, Delna's repertory focus shifted (as Chapter Three will elaborate), and others were cast in the role, including Arbell in 1916. While some small notices regarding her return as Charlotte appeared in the press, there were no in-depth reviews; for instance, *Le Figaro* preferred to simply publish a small positive notice and eschew a review later that week:

Mme Marie Delna, who has not sung [in *Werther*], in the Opéra-Comique, in some years, will reappear in Massenet's beautiful work, next Thursday, in the matinée performance. Her voice, powerful and beautiful, is especially enhanced in the role of Charlotte.⁴⁹⁹

Delna's status as Charlotte's Parisian *créatrice* was not mentioned in this advertisement, but it was rare that she was referred to as such, especially after she returned to the stage

⁴⁹⁷ 'L'interprétation nouvelle de *Werther* est confiée à Mme Marié de l'Isle qui fut, hier, une Charlotte d'abord gaiement maternelle et enjouée, puis tendre, puis doucement grave, et enfin éloquentement passionnée et émouvante.' Fauré, 'Les Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 25 April 1903, p. 4.

⁴⁹⁸ Irvine, p. 317. Every year had more than twenty performances except for 1904, which only had four.

⁴⁹⁹ 'Mme Marie Delna, qui n'a pas chanté, à l'Opéra-Comique, depuis des années, reparaitra dans le bel ouvrage de Massenet, jeudi prochain, en matinée. Sa voix, puissante et belle, est particulièrement mise en valeur dans le rôle de Charlotte.' Régis Gignoux, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 9 June 1914, p. 6. The matinée that day was comprised of *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Werther*.

in 1907 following a four-year retirement.⁵⁰⁰ In addition to articles in the newspapers of the time, this was evident in the programmes that the Opéra-Comique produced in the late 1900s and the 1910s for performances of the opera — despite her place in the company's recent history, Boutarel's essay on the opera did not allude to her (or Ibos) at all. There were also no pictures of her in the programmes, but it was common practice to focus more on recent interpreters of the main roles in the photo inserts, especially as those singers were more likely to reprise their roles than any of the original cast. An example of this was Lucy Vauthrin, a regular interpreter of Sophie, who featured heavily in the pre-war programmes collected by the Bibliothèque nationale de France, regardless of whether she was in that day's performance. The company had, to a certain extent, left Delna's contributions in the past; of the mezzo-sopranos who played Charlotte in the company between 1893 and 1918, Marié de l'Isle and later Suzanne Brohly were arguably more strongly connected to the role than Delna, especially as the former had been part of the first successful production in the Opéra-Comique.⁵⁰¹

In light of the changeable critical and audience views which undermined the opera's first ten years in the Opéra-Comique, it is important to discuss how the plot had some resonances with contemporary issues. Thematically *Werther* focuses on two ideas — the psychological effects of unrequited love (characterised by Werther) and the struggle between love and duty (characterised by Charlotte). The former theme is at the core of the source material, but the latter was produced entirely by the librettists' changes to the plot, as in the novel Charlotte gives no strong indication of her own feelings toward Werther. There have been versions of the Werther story that allowed for Werther

⁵⁰⁰ During her retirement, the title had some currency; for instance, in their notice for Delna's daughter's birth, *Le Ménestrel* referred to her as the *créatrice* of Charlotte (Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 4 September 1904, p. 286).

⁵⁰¹ Brohly (1882–1943) was a long-term member of the Opéra-Comique; she also played Sélysette in the first production of Dukas' *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* in 1907, and produced a variety of recordings for HMV under her name and as Alix Martell from 1908 to 1922.

and Charlotte to be together — Friedrich Nicolai's *Die Freuden des jungen Werthers* (*The Joys of Young Werther*) involves a convoluted plot where Albert fills the pistols with chicken blood and tells a surprised Werther that he will live and be with Charlotte — but it is the impossibility of their relationship that provides the narrative drive of the most faithful adaptations.⁵⁰²

Lyricaly, Massenet's *Werther* places a strong emphasis on Charlotte's dutifulness; Werther refers to her as an 'ange de devoir' (dutiful angel) and her faithfulness to Albert is based on the promises she made to her mother (which never existed in the novel).⁵⁰³ Werther's own awareness of the centrality of duty and morality to her personality evolves over the course of the opera. In Act One, he chooses not to respond to Charlotte's story about her mother's death, preferring to focus on her appearance and his attraction to her, but by the end of Act Four, he forgives Charlotte's rebuffs as she was only doing what was right. This is part of Milliet's envisioned redemption arc for Werther: by refusing to end the story with the pistol shot, he intended to write Act Four as Werther's transcendence of earthly physical and mental pain, telling Charlotte that his life has just begun.⁵⁰⁴ Their tragic first kiss is soon followed by his death; Werther dies vindicated and loved, but Charlotte's future is unknown, and having chosen love over duty, she is in dramatic terms, an adulteress.

Unfortunately, I have no accounts of how the interpreters of the role felt about its alterations to the original source, or Charlotte's journey through the story. Delna made no commentary on her own opinion of Charlotte's behaviour, but she did recount a story involving her grandmother's opinion in her memoirs:

In the most moving passage, when Charlotte, putting her love ahead of her duty, prepares to go to Werther's house, the poor Mme Ledant turned in complete

⁵⁰² Sondrup, p. 165.

⁵⁰³ Fisher, p. 22.

⁵⁰⁴ Huebner, 'Massenet and Wagner: Bridling the Influence', pp. 223–25.

alarm towards Baudouin and said: ‘I hope that she is not going to betray her husband!’ For this righteous and simple soul, the fiction of the theatre didn’t exist. This was not the lovelorn Charlotte that she saw in that scene, but rather her little Marie, who was raised so honestly that she would never think of the idea of adultery...Alas, yes! My dear grandmother, Charlotte betrayed her husband, but you had to pardon her fault when you knew that she died of love.⁵⁰⁵

Madame Ledant did not represent the average Opéra-Comique patron — it is likely that her granddaughter’s performances were her first operatic experiences — but she understood from the staging that this was a depiction of adultery, even if the line between reality and fiction was, according to Delna, somewhat blurred for her.

In the eyes of many people in Third-Republic France, adultery was related not to any emotional attachment to an extramarital lover, but to the creation of an insatiable sexual appetite through the marriage itself.⁵⁰⁶ This was an extension of the rhetoric applied to the *communardes* described in Chapter 2.1 — all women were vulnerable to corruption through sex, even if they followed the prescribed path by contracting a marriage and working towards starting a family. The act of adultery from a woman also undermined the family unit, as it challenged the husband’s dominance over his wife, and the attendant risk of pregnancy meant that a man could become legally responsible for another man’s children.⁵⁰⁷ These were two reasons why the legal punishments for adultery differed between the sexes — a woman could be jailed for up to two years on a

⁵⁰⁵ ‘Au passage le plus pathétique, lorsque Charlotte, donnant à l’amour le pas sur le devoir, se prépare à aller chez Werther, la pauvre Madame Ledant se tourna toute effarée vers Baudouin et lui dit: ‘J’espère bien qu’elle ne va pas tromper son mari!...’ Pour cette âme droite et simple, la fiction du théâtre n’existait pas. Ce n’était pas l’amoureuse Charlotte qu’elle voyait sur la scène, mais bien, sa petite Marie, si honnêtement élevée qu’elle n’aurait même pas du concevoir l’idée d’un adultère...Hélas, si! Ma chère grand-mère, Charlotte a trompé son mari, mais vous avez dû lui pardonner sa faute quand vous avez su qu’elle était morte d’amour.’ Marie Delna, *La carrière d’une grande cantatrice: souvenirs de Marie Delna: publiés par La Liberté du 17 janvier au 6 avril 1925*, ed. Henri Decharbogne (Montmorency: Société d’histoire de Montmorency et de sa région, 2006), p. 17. Eugène Baudouin was the painter who reportedly discovered Delna singing in her grandmother’s inn when she was fourteen. While Madame Ledant believed that Charlotte died at the end of the opera, the stage directions say ‘comprenant tout enfin, elle s’évanouit et tombe inanimée par terre devant le fauteuil’ (Jules Massenet, *Werther: Drame Lyrique en Quatre Actes et Cinq Tableaux* (Paris: Heugel, 1892), p. 229). If Charlotte died at the end, it would have stated ‘elle meurt’.

⁵⁰⁶ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet’s Hérodiade and Thaïs*, p. 64.

⁵⁰⁷ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet’s Hérodiade and Thaïs*, p. 65.

broader charge of adultery, but a man only faced a fine of up to 2,000 francs if it could be proven that the adultery took place in his home in the marital bed.⁵⁰⁸ According to the social mores of the second half of the nineteenth century, a woman cheated on her husband because he could not control her in her newly married state, but she would be the one who paid the price for it. Men and women were punished in relation to their resources; men relinquished money under very limited circumstances, but women, as legal minors with no independent financial resources, lost years of their lives.⁵⁰⁹

Female adultery was not a stock plotline in opera, but it was established within spoken theatre in Paris and always treated negatively. Adulteresses in theatre cheated for revenge or out of jealousy, and their characterisation was unsympathetic.⁵¹⁰ It was important that a mixed-sex audience remained on the side of the husband.⁵¹¹ This assuaged the fears of both men and women over the newly-revived topic of divorce — Naquet's law allowing for divorce in limited circumstances was passed in 1883 — as adultery (grounds for divorce under the new law) was depicted in women as an act of desperation and completely devoid of the kind of emotional attachment which could destroy a marriage.⁵¹² Outside of the theatre, this view of female adultery was held not only by men, but by female writers as well — the feminist author and campaigner Maria Deraismes saw female adultery as stemming from male adultery, as the latter action

⁵⁰⁸ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thaïs*, p. 65.

⁵⁰⁹ In the Third Republic, single women were not granted full legal capacity until 1893, while a married woman had no control over any income she brought in, or her husband's, until 1907 (James F. McMillan, *Housewife or Harlot: The Place of Women in French Society 1870–1940* (Brighton: Harvester, 1981), p. 26).

⁵¹⁰ Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 33–37.

⁵¹¹ Roberts, pp. 33–37.

⁵¹² Hélène Brion, 'La Voie féministe', in *Feminisms of the Belle Époque: A Historical and Literary Anthology*, ed. Steven C. Hause and Jennifer Waelti-Walters (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), pp. 146–63: p. 161 note 20 (footnote by editors). In the First Republic, when divorce was first legalised, the government had a similar approach in its censorship of works featuring divorce, but this was to discourage the abuse of the new law (F.W.J. Hemmings, *Theatre and State in France: 1760–1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 99).

sanctioned the former.⁵¹³ Massenet started to compose music for *Werther* in 1885, a mere two years after Naquet's law was enacted, but by the time that the opera premiered in Paris, divorce had been legal for ten years, and the feared abuse of this law had not materialised. The issue would always remain controversial to some — while the Republic itself allowed divorce, it was forbidden under Catholic doctrine, which imposed a moral dilemma on the majority of citizens who considered it — but by January 1893, it was not the sensitive, almost unmentionable topic that could have blocked its progress to the stage in the early 1880s.

Werther was not the first Massenet opera to deal with relationships that threaten or undermine marriages — as Rowden notes, *Hérodiade* in *Hérodiade* (1881) was a divorced woman.⁵¹⁴ However, *Hérodiade* exhibits more of the typical 'adulteress' traits (she is vengeful and unsympathetic) than Charlotte. As a whole, *Werther* does not fit into this traditional genre of moral drama — to begin with, the attraction between the characters is evident from their first meeting (which predates Charlotte's wedding) — but this is in part because Goethe was not writing for a late nineteenth-century Parisian audience, and because Blau and Milliet were imposing a new version of the ending not to titillate or make a moral statement, but to create a more defined narrative arc. Writing a Charlotte who did fit into these stereotypes of adulteresses would have undermined all of the characteristics that Werther admires in her — her dutifulness and parental role towards her siblings in particular — and betrayed the original spirit of the novel more than the final act already did. Thus, Charlotte is portrayed as a maternal, stable figure. Albert is also a sympathetic character, eliminating much of the impetus for revenge from Charlotte; he is a respectable middle-class man, who, while he does not express his

⁵¹³ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thaïs*, p. 64 note 174.

⁵¹⁴ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thaïs*, p. 142.

admiration for Charlotte in such ecstatic terms as Werther, has some affection for her. If Charlotte, in giving in to temptation in Act Four, is railing against anything, it is her duty and her fate rather than Albert himself. However, Albert seems to recognise the threat that Werther poses to his marriage earlier than Charlotte does; he tries to convince Werther to court Sophie (who was aged up to fifteen from eleven in the novel to serve this purpose) in Act Two.⁵¹⁵ After Werther's sudden departure on Charlotte's orders, Albert makes his suspicions clear to the audience, declaring 'Il l'aime' as the curtain falls on the act. The libretto offers no tangible clues to Albert's state of mind in his final appearance in Act Three, but he knows why Werther wants the pistols and still forces Charlotte to hand them to Werther's messenger, which hints at the extent of his jealousy.⁵¹⁶

Blau and Milliet's fidelity to Goethe's characterisation of Charlotte was important to the plot, but it had drawbacks: because she was a maternal figure, she was not viewed as a traditionally attractive character. Head of her family following her mother's death, Charlotte is introduced to the audience as her siblings' caregiver before she is considered to be Werther's love interest or Albert's fiancée. Charlotte's responsibility in this opera for these children and her demeanour when Werther was not onstage during the first two acts made critics see her as a 'Hausfrau', and not a particularly viable romantic lead.⁵¹⁷ This shows the stark difference between Charlotte and other 'romantic' mezzo-soprano roles such as Carmen and Dalila. Carmen and Dalila's appeal came from their romantic interactions with their love interests in their respective operas, combined with their youth and the assumed attractiveness of their interpreters. Charlotte, who at twenty years old remains one of the youngest leading

⁵¹⁵ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 115.

⁵¹⁶ Fisher, p. 22.

⁵¹⁷ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 119.

mezzo-soprano roles in the modern repertoire, struggled to live up to this image, as her serious personality and her internal battle with her feelings failed to appeal to audiences who came to the theatre to enjoy the unabashed chemistry between the two leads of an opera. In keeping with Charlotte's characterisation, the iconography of the role was naturally very different to those of Carmen and Dalila. The drawings and photographs I have found from the initial production either depict Charlotte in the letter scene, Charlotte and Werther sitting together awkwardly (this was most likely the Ossian scene in Act Three, or their conversation in Act Two, in which Charlotte dismisses Werther until Christmas Eve), or when Charlotte is physically pulling away from Werther. This focuses most of the opera's promotion onto Act Three, and Charlotte's struggle to resist Werther's advances and her own feelings, rather than on Werther's decline and the tragic final act.

Figure 2.3b: Drawing of Delna during the letter scene (1893), and Delna as Charlotte with Mouliérat (1897)⁵¹⁸



⁵¹⁸ Artist Unknown, 'Mlle Delna, créatrice du rôle de Charlotte dans *Werther*', *Les Annales politiques et littéraires* 22 January 1893, p. 57; Henry Cossira, 'La grande pitié des vedettes périmées', *Le Monde illustré* 20 November 1937, p. 808.

Figure 2.3c: Drawing of Act Three duet between Delna and Ibos (1893)⁵¹⁹



This restrained nature was present at a musical level as well, as her darker vocal tone combined with a controlled, relatively modest vocal line throughout most of the opera made her into a clear maternal figure rather than a romantic one.⁵²⁰ The only time that Charlotte shows any signs of more dramatic musical behaviour is when she is around Werther, or can no longer hide her feelings for him — for example, she reaches an ‘a-sharp’ in the Ossian scene of Act Three on the line ‘Defendez-moi Seigneur contre lui’ (Lord protect me from him).⁵²¹ This conflict between her rational maternal nature and her attraction to Werther eventually leads to the neglect of her parental responsibilities, with most of her duties appearing to pass to Sophie as she leaves the house on Christmas Eve. Musically and dramatically, this is strongly emphasised by the change in the sister who leads the children’s Christmas carols — Charlotte is introduced in Act One with a

⁵¹⁹ Édouard Zier and Albert Bellenger, ‘Théâtre de l’Opéra-Comique, Werther, drame lyrique en 4 actes de MM. E. Blau, P. Milliet et G. Hartmann, musique de M. Massenet: Werther, M. Ibos, se jetant aux pieds de Charlotte, Mlle Delna, au 3e acte’ (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1893) [Source: Gallica].

⁵²⁰ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, pp. 116–17.

⁵²¹ Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 116.

rehearsal of the carols that the children will sing months later, but it is Sophie who brings them carolling offstage at the end of Act Four. By the end of the opera, it is clear that her failure as a mother is irrevocable.

This failure was as important as any adultery within the plot (especially as the couple's romance is cut short by Werther's fatal wounds), as Charlotte had, until the end of Act Three, followed the course that women were expected to follow in this era. Unlike Carmen, she had embraced marriage and was raising her siblings (a surrogate for her own children) to the exclusion of her personal ambitions and desires, but rather than finding the fulfilment that so many writers claimed women found in this life, she is distracted and miserable (as shown by the Letter Aria in Act Three). While the children are not biologically hers, Massenet's Charlotte appeared at a time when a depopulation crisis gave the government and social theorists free rein to control women's lives and education with the aim of producing healthier children in greater numbers.⁵²² In accordance with Rousseau's theories on society, the First Republic (and later the Third Republic) heavily limited women's freedoms by conditioning them to see the home, and specifically the nursery, as their natural sphere.⁵²³ In the wider European artistic scene there were reactions to this narrative, an example being Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), which premiered in France in the Théâtre du Vaudeville a year after Massenet's *Werther* reached the Opéra-Comique.⁵²⁴ *A Doll's House* flirts with the concept of female adultery (Dr Rank's confession of love to Nora is rebuked), but its social statement comes when Nora, a dutiful mother of three, realises that she needs to leave her family

⁵²² An example of this was the debate over intellectual overstimulation's effect on women's childbearing capabilities and even their breast milk, and to this end, measures such as the reduction of time given to more intellectually demanding subjects in girls' *lycées* in 1897 were introduced (Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thaïs*, pp. 82–83).

⁵²³ Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in Opera: Massenet's Hérodiade and Thaïs*, pp. 26–27.

⁵²⁴ Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism and Style*, p. 77; Roberts, p. 22.

to find herself, and does so at the end of the play. Neither *A Doll's House* nor *Werther* was specifically angled as an argument for emancipation or in solidarity with the feminisms of the time. Yet, this growing interest in depicting the unhappiness of some women in their domestic destinies showed an awareness of the restrictive nature of imposed social traditions, and a sympathy for those who could not, for various reasons, satisfy their demands.

This backlash against repressive stereotyping — arguably begun with the sympathetic portrayal of Violetta in Verdi's *La traviata* (1853) — was a mark of the era. Despite the staggered Parisian premieres, all three major mezzo-soprano-led operas were chronologically close together: *Werther's* timeline begins three years after *Carmen's* premiere, and just one year after *Samson et Dalila's* (and coincidentally, a year before *A Doll's House* premiered in Copenhagen). The socio-political atmosphere into which it emerged in Paris in January 1893 was very different to that of 1878, but Milliet's envisioned redemption of a suicidal artist was still received not as a revelation, but as a misstep. Neither Blau and Milliet's libretto, nor Massenet's music truly embraced the realism-influenced trends of the early 1890s, and the result was a lukewarm reception from critics and audiences alike. Its subtlety was only appreciated ten years later, when it made an apparently long-awaited return to the Opéra-Comique's stage. Like with Deschamps-Jéhin and Dalila, Charlotte's French *créatrice* Delna failed to make the role her own, which showed that not just any singer could take on a high-profile role, no matter how feted she was in a previous role. Turning towards the topic of the next chapter, it is clear that regardless of the ideological issues surrounding a work, a singer's presence (or lack thereof) could be a deciding factor in an opera's success, even in an era when the cult of the composer's genius overruled that of the diva's creative prerogative.

CHAPTER THREE: THE MEZZO-SOPRANO AS MUSE

3.1: Introduction: the muse/musician concept

The reception histories of *Carmen*, *Samson et Dalila* and *Werther* show how central a leading singer could be to an opera's image and success, but historically it is difficult to reconcile the popular figure with the concept of the singer as a creative individual in the process of an opera's composition. The opera house has always been a nexus of creativity, originating from both performers and composers, yet in the Third Republic, the visibility and acknowledgement of the creativity of the performers was a rare occurrence. This period saw wide-ranging developments in the structure and content of operas, but there were few new works which had a singer as a focal point, either as a decision-maker, or as an inspiration for a composer. This does not suggest that singers were absent from the process entirely — any singer who participates in an opera's premiere may expect to work with the composer in order to finalise their role at the rehearsal stage, but during the scope of this study, some mezzo-sopranos professed deeper claims to certain roles which would continue far beyond the initial production run. This chapter will focus on three mezzo-sopranos — Galli-Marié, Delna and Arbell — who appeared in abnormally prominent positions during an opera's composition and rehearsal process, discussing their contributions to the performance history of three operas under extraordinary circumstances. Each one of these singers emerged as the opera's greatest advocate, yet the manner in which they championed the work adhered to Third Republic mores on passive feminine behaviour — in public, they presented themselves as the composer's muse, inspiring and then realising another person's works without any insinuation of artistic ambitions of their own.

The figure of the female muse in European mythology suggests that they are a necessary part of the creative process — an artist could be abandoned by his muse and

entirely lose the ability to create art of any worth, and these women were the pure personification of the potential for great art. In the Third Republic however, two conflicting concepts of the muse existed — the first was an artist who inspired another artist to create works, and the second was an artist’s model, but they were not created equally. One could conceivably theorise that this was due to parallels with other figures in the Third Republic — traditional muses can be seen as the artistic equivalent of the mother inspiring patriotism (a popular image in the regime), whereas the artist’s model was fulfilling a function closer to that of a courtesan. The concepts of these two types of muses pervaded the arts — and not just in terms of how partnerships between composers and singers operated. They are integral to the actual plots of Third-Republic operas such as Offenbach’s *Les contes d’Hoffmann* (1881) and Massenet’s *Sapho* (1897), both of which premiered with the Opéra-Comique. The traditional figure of the muse appears in *Les contes d’Hoffmann*, which features a mezzo-soprano as the Muse of Poetry, who disguises herself as Hoffmann’s best friend, Nicklausse, and tries to push him away from his pursuit of earthly love towards his art, which requires that he loves her above all others.⁵²⁵ The artist’s model was perceived more negatively, and dramatized in *Sapho*, a star vehicle for Emma Calvé. The climax of the plot is powered by Jean’s disgust at the revelation that his lover Fanny is the scandalous artist’s muse, Sapho. Jean discovers that, as part of this life, Fanny has had multiple lovers and an illegitimate child, and so decides to leave her — they eventually reconcile, but Fanny recognises that this relationship cannot work, and leaves him. Much of Jean’s reaction can be explained by Fanny’s sexual past, but there is a distinct link between a muse of multiple artists and perceived devaluation of her intentions and her fidelity. The Third Republic may have

⁵²⁵ Today this role is played by one mezzo-soprano who changes her costume when the Muse metamorphoses into Nicklausse, but the initial production had two mezzo-sopranos – Zoe Mole-Truffier (1855–1923) played the Muse, and Marguerite Ugalde (1862–1940) played Nicklausse.

valorised classical arts and civilisations, but in this society, a muse's relationship with her artist was not only to be pure, but also eternally monogamous.⁵²⁶

This fixation on the purity of muse figures can be seen in the 'Festival of the Crowning of the People's Muse' (created by Gustave Charpentier) — a musical event which took place in Paris and other French cities around the turn of the twentieth century. It saw a working-class girl crowned as the Muse of the People; these girls were often between sixteen and eighteen years old (twenty-one at the oldest), and were subjected to thorough background checks on their behaviour and character to ensure that they were appropriate candidates for the title.⁵²⁷ There are also instances of female composers acting as muses — for example, Augusta Holmès was, following the staged premiere of her *Ode triumpnale* at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*, described in these terms by Saint-Saëns: 'We needed more than a man to celebrate the Centenary [of the French Revolution]; in the absence of a god impossible to come by, the French Republic has found what it needed: a Muse!'.⁵²⁸ This image as the musical muse of a nation was a publicity coup for Holmès, but it came at the cost of maintaining a constant reputation for nationalist sentiment.⁵²⁹

This view of women as muses could thus limit their scope of activity, as Eva Rieger states: 'As 'muse', woman gains in value and is idealized, but at the same time

⁵²⁶ Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 649–51.

⁵²⁷ David M. Pomfret, 'A Muse for the Masses': Gender, Age, and Nation in France, Fin de Siècle', *The American Historical Review* Vol. 109, No. 5 (December 2004), pp. 1439–74: p. 1445, p. 1453.

⁵²⁸ Karen Henson, 'Of Men, Women and Others: Exotic Opera in Late Nineteenth-Century France' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford, 2000), p. 104.

⁵²⁹ Henson argues that Holmès' attempts at a more balanced view of the claims of both warring countries in *La Montagne noire* (1895) undermined her own image as a French nationalist, as the libretto should have been skewed heavily in favour of the Montenegrins' cause (because Montenegro was the closest to a representation of the West and therefore France within the opera), and this empathy left her open to accusations of being a typical empathetic female composer rather than being able to compose and think at the same level as men ('Of Men, Women and Others: Exotic Opera in Late Nineteenth-Century France', pp. 119–20, pp. 134–35).

the opportunities for action on the part of the ‘real’ woman are diminished’.⁵³⁰ This ties in with Abbate’s view that recreating the woman as a muse excludes her from the creative process, as:

when a positive critical concept — ‘indeterminacy’ — is tagged as something ‘feminine’, what has happened is that Woman is converted into the Muse, an objectified female figure to be gazed upon and learned from by men, who then go on to do what they have always done: lay down the (critical) law.⁵³¹

In Abbate’s view, being a muse is not a position of power. It is a token gesture of retaining the muse in the composition history without forcing the author to relinquish ownership of the work, for it reduces the woman’s real contributions to the work and presents her as merely a source of inspiration. It also simplifies the legal situation immensely, particularly when there are no unbiased records of the creative process, as authorship of an existing text is easier to recognise than the source of the idea. This devaluation of a singer’s creative agency is so pervasive that it haunts singer biographies — Steen’s *Enchantress of Nations* is subtitled *Pauline Viardot: Soprano, Muse, Lover*, but the muse aspect dominates the narrative, and in his introduction, Steen immediately dismisses Viardot’s compositional output as unimportant, and continues to describe her as an inspiration for roles without mentioning the considerable musical knowledge she possessed in her dual professions of composer and singer.⁵³² Henson also states in *Opera Acts* that ‘Viardot was a muse, intellect and a composer’, perhaps choosing to reflect her reputation when Viardot was alive rather than her current status in musical scholarship.⁵³³ Similarly, Maria Malibran and Rosine Stoltz’s compositions are also

⁵³⁰ Eva Rieger, *Richard Wagner’s Women*, trans. Chris Walton (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011), p. 100.

⁵³¹ Carolyn Abbate, ‘Opera, or the Envoicing of Women’, in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 225–58: p. 230.

⁵³² Michael Steen, *Enchantress of Nations: Pauline Viardot — Soprano, Muse, Lover* (Cambridge: Icon Books Limited, 2007), p. 3. Steen specifically dismisses Liszt’s statement that Viardot was the first ‘woman composer of genius’ by stating that ‘her operettas, songs and many other compositions never justified her being awarded this accolade’.

⁵³³ Karen Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 55.

ignored. As this is the kind of scholarly treatment meted out to singers with official compositions to their names, it is disappointing but not surprising to discover that singers without any known published music are even less likely to be thought of as creative individuals in their own right. This does not mean that singers without publications absolutely never attempted musical compositions on their own — it is impossible to rule out, as they were professionals with musical training and creative talent which they showcased in their daily life with their companies — but it means that many of their known creative endeavours were collaborations with composers, which leaves them open to reductive characterisations as muses, and nothing more.

Composers and singers have technically collaborated since the genre's inception — singers often had input into the work that they were performing, and until composers began to demand that their scores were performed intact from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, operas were subject to alterations during performances ranging from small vocal flourishes to aria insertions.⁵³⁴ Forcing singers to perform complete, unembellished readings of their notated parts changed how they related to their roles — it was no longer a case of making a role fit a singer, but the other way around.⁵³⁵ Working directly with a composer was the only way for a singer to circumvent this new order, and it allowed them to create roles that were simultaneously personally suited to the *créatrice*, and adaptable for later performers. The earliest evidence of this in the mezzo-soprano repertoire is Meyerbeer's *Le prophète*, as the vocal score includes both Viardot's original vocal line from the 1849 premiere production and the one that was sung by most mezzo-sopranos.⁵³⁶ This catered to both the *créatrice*'s unusually wide

⁵³⁴ Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 172, pp. 177–78. This collaborative aspect of opera was at its strongest in the mid-eighteenth century (p. 172).

⁵³⁵ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, p. 172.

⁵³⁶ Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. ed. Edward Schneider (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), p. 26.

vocal range, and the more limited ranges of most singers, but many roles only conformed to the latter. There were still roles built around their *créatrice*'s vocal skills in the Third Republic; the title role in Massenet's *Esclarmonde* (1889) was written to emphasise Sibyl Sanderson's enormous range, and reaches as high as g''— her signature note. This is not to say that only female singers inspired composers to write roles: in fact there was a comparable number of influential baritones between 1860 and 1918, but the working relationship between a male composer and a female singer was often regarded as a more unequal but common one.⁵³⁷ There was also a certain level of linguistic power in the word '*créatrice*', as it carried greater connotations than just 'first interpreter' — these women had (in an appropriately maternal metaphor) given these characters life.⁵³⁸ In this creative environment, three mezzo-sopranos had one clear advantage over the influential sopranos and baritones of the Third Republic — the circumstances surrounding the operas they starred in forced them to become the public driving force behind the work, and brought another dimension to their ownership of these roles as they replaced the operas' dead composers as active promoters of the opera in the public eye. In the cases of Bizet's *Carmen* (1875), Godard's *La Vivandière* (1895) and Massenet's *Cléopâtre* (1914), Galli-Marié, Delna and Arbell respectively rose above and challenged normal perceptions of composer-muse power dynamics not only on an ideological level, but in Arbell's case, on a legal level as well. Each one of these case studies reveals the true nature of these collaborations and their legacies, as *créatrices* could be alternately

⁵³⁷ There are three prominent baritone examples: Jean-Baptiste Faure's (1830–1914) baritone voice was used to great effect in title role of Thomas' *Hamlet* (1868), which was designed for him. Victor Maurel (1848–1923) was one of Verdi's favourite baritones, and created the roles of Iago in *Otello*, and the title role in *Falstaff*. Feodor Chaliapin (1873–1938) was the inspiration for the title role in Massenet's *Don Quichotte*, and sang alongside Arbell in the premiere production with the Opéra de Monte-Carlo.

⁵³⁸ Hervé Lacombe, 'La version primative de l'air d'entrée de Carmen: réflexion sur la dramaturgie et l'autorité d'un opéra', in *Aspects de l'opéra français de Meyerbeer à Honegger*, ed. Jean-Christophe Branger and Vincent Giroud (Lyon: Symétrie, 2009), pp. 35–56: p. 37.

adored or loathed depending on how they contributed to the works' future performances and performance prospects, or in one case, utterly confounded them.

3.2: Célestine Galli-Marié and Georges Bizet

The first singer-composer collaboration discussed in this chapter concerns a composer working with an experienced professional mezzo-soprano — Georges Bizet (1838–1875) and Galli-Marié. The previous chapter in this dissertation elaborated on specific cultural references that Galli-Marié and her successors brought to *Carmen*, but in widening the perspective to that of contributions to the opera as a whole, her influence is visible throughout its pre-premiere development, and its post-premiere reception. The evidence for her contributions lies in reports by rehearsal observers, and letters between the composer and the singer. Neither Bizet nor Galli-Marié left behind accounts of the composition and rehearsal process; Bizet died three months after the premiere, and while Galli-Marié gave some interviews on *Carmen*, they were lacking in specific details such as the sources of dramatic or musical material. This reliance on accounts by those exterior to the partnership is not ideal, but the fact that Galli-Marié's influence on the work was remarked upon at all is encouraging, because it was evident even in 1875 that she was more than a simple *créatrice*.

Figure 3.2: Célestine Galli-Marié as Carmen⁵³⁹



Bizet had never worked closely with a singer to create a role prior to *Carmen*, but Galli-Marié had done so at least once before with Ambroise Thomas on *Mignon* (1866).⁵⁴⁰ *Mignon*'s composition process was dissimilar to *Carmen*'s, insofar as Thomas waited until the directors had cast *Mignon* to write the role, which meant that Galli-Marié became the vocal model for its mezzo-soprano tessitura. *Mignon* was a collaboration that included the entire company: after creating two versions of 'Connais-tu le pays', Thomas and Galli-Marié eventually let the orchestra decide which version would make it into the final score of the opera.⁵⁴¹ With *Carmen*, though, some of the role may have been written before Galli-Marié joined the cast.⁵⁴² A core aspect of the *Carmen* collaboration was that Bizet was now working intensively with a specific

⁵³⁹ Photograph by Nadar. Gallica dates this photograph to 1883, but it is possible that it was for the original production (1875–76). Source: Gallica.

⁵⁴⁰ Galli-Marié may also have had significant input into Émile Paladilhe's *Le Passant* (1872). *Le passant* was a much less successful opera than *Mignon*, and only had three performances but it had a personal connection for Galli-Marié as Paladilhe was her partner at the time (Winton Dean, *Bizet*, 3rd ed. (London: Dent, 1975), p. 97; Mina Curtiss, *Bizet and his World* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1959), p. 311, p. 322).

⁵⁴¹ Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 25; Georges Loiseau, 'La Millième de Mignon', *Le Figaro* 13 May 1894, pp. 1–2. According to Eugène Ritt, the orchestra picked the first four bars of one version, and the final four of the other for the aria's melody (Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 356 note 60).

⁵⁴² Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century*, p. 71.

leading singer over the course of fifteen months. This allowed Galli-Marié to have a remarkable amount of input into the writing process, and to make a noticeable impact on the role.

The long and fruitful association that Galli-Marié had with the role of Carmen almost never came to pass, as the part was originally offered to Zulma Bouffar, an operetta singer, and Marie Roze, an Opéra-Comique soprano. Bouffar, who had worked with Meilhac and Halévy before, was reportedly removed from contention for the role because Meilhac did not want to write a scene where she was stabbed.⁵⁴³ Roze auditioned for Bizet; she impressed him vocally but it was clear that she was not able to play Carmen, as her letter from 7 September 1873 elaborates:

I am entirely of your opinion. The tragic end of *Carmen* had made me presuppose dramatic action that would modify the very scabrous side of this character; the explanations you were kind enough to make to me at the outset of our interview having showed me that the character was to be scrupulously respected, I understood immediately that the role would not suit me, or more accurately, that I would not be suited to it.⁵⁴⁴

Within three months of this letter, du Locle and Bizet had agreed to contact Galli-Marié and offer her the role. While she was not the first choice for Carmen, it cannot be said that Bizet did not admire Galli-Marié's talents; accounts from the premiere production of *Djamileh* (1872) in the Opéra-Comique suggest the exact opposite. Bizet wanted Galli-Marié or the soprano Marguerite Priola for the title role, and Paul Lhérie (who would premiere Don José) for Haroun, but Aline Preilly and Alphonse Duchesne were cast as the leads instead.⁵⁴⁵ She had also been identified as being suitable for the character long before Bizet composed his *Carmen*, as Victor Massé was considering a version of *Carmen* in 1864 with her in the title role.⁵⁴⁶ Massé's idea never went beyond

⁵⁴³ Curtiss, p. 355.

⁵⁴⁴ Curtiss, p. 355.

⁵⁴⁵ Dean, p. 97.

⁵⁴⁶ Curtiss, p. 357.

the concept phase and he never contacted her about the possibility of starring in the opera, but even at that early stage, Massé insisted that Carmen's onstage death would feature in his version.⁵⁴⁷

However, one of the major barriers to Galli-Marié taking the role was her status in the Opéra-Comique, which had commissioned the work in 1872 on the basis of the minor success of *Djamileh*.⁵⁴⁸ Following the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, Galli-Marié returned to the Opéra-Comique in the 1871–72 season, and performed solely in *Mignon* for the rest of 1871. 1872 was one of the most active years of her career, with three new roles, all of them *en travesti*, as well as playing *Mignon* regularly. She premiered *Fantasio* (a role originally written for tenor Victor Capoul) in Offenbach's *Fantasio* in January, *Zanetto* in Paladilhe's *Le passant* in April, and *Lazarille* in Massenet's *Don César de Bazan* in November. Her career in the company stalled after she began to suffer from vocal strain in the summer of 1872, and she spent long periods of time away from the company in 1873 and 1874.⁵⁴⁹ She intermittently toured in France and Belgium during this career break playing *Mignon*, *Rose Friquet* and *Marguerite* in Gounod's *Faust*. She still gave occasional performances of *Mignon* when she was in Paris, and was the company's only *Mignon* until 1874.⁵⁵⁰ This more nomadic period in her life was underlined by a sense of ennui in her career; she revealed to Bizet in a letter dated July 1874 that she had made various oral promises to take on contracts in 1874, and was hiding in a chateau near Bordeaux under the pseudonyms of 'Madame Cipriani'

⁵⁴⁷ Curtiss, p. 357.

⁵⁴⁸ Susan McClary, *Georges Bizet, Carmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 15–16. *Djamileh* ran for eleven performances.

⁵⁴⁹ Curtiss, p. 363.

⁵⁵⁰ The first production of *Mignon* without Galli-Marié in the title role began in March 1874, when Marguerite Chapuy (who would later play Micaëla in the first production of *Carmen*) took on the role, receiving disparaging comparisons from commentators such as the author of the 'Soirée Théâtrale' column in *Le Figaro* (Un monsieur de l'orchestre, 'Soirée Théâtrale', *Le Figaro* 20 March 1874, p. 3).

and ‘Madame Paladilhe’, and pretending to be ill to avoid signing physical (and legally binding) contracts.⁵⁵¹

Galli-Marié’s attitude towards her career changed when Bouffar and Roze were both ruled out of contention for the role, and du Locle approached her via letter, asking if she would be interested in playing Carmen.⁵⁵² She was seemingly unaware of Mérimée’s novella when du Locle offered her the role, sending a letter to Lhérie stating ‘Your little marmoset of a director writes to ask if I wish to create Carmen. What is it?’⁵⁵³ Her lack of familiarity with the novella and its reputation was most likely an aid to her later efforts in building the character — she came to the role without any preconceptions, or longstanding opinions on Carmen’s personality and actions. After completing all of her contractual obligations elsewhere, Galli-Marié officially returned to the company in September 1874 with a contract for *Carmen* (originally to premiere in October) and a revival of Gounod’s *Mireille* (for the roles of Taven and Andreloun) in 1874, and Guiraud’s *Piccolino*, which was to premiere after *Carmen*. Her return to the company was several months later than she had intended, as she had initially agreed to create Carmen during the summer of 1874, but various issues postponed the premiere, not least Bizet’s procrastination on writing enough music to begin rehearsals.⁵⁵⁴ Bizet had timed the first act to be completed by autumn 1873 in time for rehearsals with a different leading singer, but the rehearsals were delayed and he moved onto other projects.⁵⁵⁵ He returned to *Carmen* and finished the piano-vocal outline in spring 1874, and finished the 1,200 pages of orchestration in Bougival by the end of August for the rescheduled first rehearsal in September.⁵⁵⁶ He had also supplied parts for Galli-Marié

⁵⁵¹ Curtiss, p. 368. Cipriani was the name of the castle in *Mignon*.

⁵⁵² Curtiss, pp. 355–56.

⁵⁵³ Curtiss, p. 357. This letter for Lhérie was accidentally sent to du Locle, and Lhérie received the letter meant for the director.

⁵⁵⁴ Curtiss, p. 364.

⁵⁵⁵ McClary, p. 22.

⁵⁵⁶ McClary, p. 23; Dean, p. 108; Curtiss, p. 367.

during the summer, but he was slow to send the music to her, and was admonished for it in several letters by the singer.⁵⁵⁷

Rehearsals began very late on the opera, starting a month before the first performance was initially scheduled to take place. Adding to the strain of this now overdue production, other members of the cast (as well as the supposedly troublesome Galli-Marié) and the chorus caused more difficulty than Bizet or the directors had expected. The female chorus members resisted the acting demands of the first act for several months, preferring to stare ahead at the conductor rather than interact with each other; Bizet also felt that he needed more first and second sopranos for the first act (six firsts and four seconds) and du Locle tried to dissuade him.⁵⁵⁸ Jacques Bouhy, who played Escamillo, was repeatedly warned about his behaviour during his entrance in Act Two, when he persistently patted the female chorus members on the cheeks while singing his first lines.⁵⁵⁹ Lhérie, who had been part of the Opéra-Comique for many years, had a pitch problem when singing *a cappella* and this became so noticeable that Bizet had to ask members of Franck's Paris Conservatoire class to play the harmonium for the two lines of text where Lhérie was singing offstage during Act Two to correct his pitch.⁵⁶⁰ The only member of the core cast who did not appear to cause any difficulty or make any extra demands on resources was Marguerite Chapuy, the soprano playing Micaëla.

In the midst of this chaos, one Opéra-Comique singer emerges as an active agent in the opera's pre-premiere stage: Galli-Marié. However, Bizet's biographers do not

⁵⁵⁷ Curtiss, pp. 368–69.

⁵⁵⁸ Curtiss, p. 371, pp. 381–83.

⁵⁵⁹ Curtiss, p. 383.

⁵⁶⁰ Dean, p. 115, p. 121; Curtiss, pp. 392–93. McClary (p. 26) identifies this section as the unaccompanied march and states that many singers playing Don José have had pitch problems in this section. This group of students included Vincent d'Indy, who played the harmonium offstage in a number of later performances (Dean, p. 118). Curtiss (p. 393) claims that he took part in thirty of the later performances and saw the audiences dwindle.

agree on whether she was a positive creative force during the opera's first production, or just troublesome and stubborn. While her most visible additions to the opera were in her later promotion of *Carmen* abroad, there are signs of her opinions and artistic integrity in the final work. Her contributions have been traced to three core scenes: the Habanera in Act One, Carmen's dance for Don José in Act Two and Carmen's death in Act Four. There is also a piece of operatic mythology dating from June 1875 that ties her to a scene in Act Three which further developed her public image as Carmen. As mentioned earlier, most of this information comes not from Galli-Marié or Bizet, or the scores of the opera, but eyewitness accounts from those outside of the partnership. The accounts from the rehearsals (where many of these changes to the opera were meant to have taken place) were from other singers such as Bouhy and Lhérie, and Bizet's friends and students (including Ernest Guiraud), who came to watch the process of the opera's preparation. Guiraud was intimately involved in the opera's journey following Bizet's death, writing recitatives to replace the spoken dialogue in the opera for houses that required that all operas were sung-through, making him more of an interested party in the work's success than most.⁵⁶¹

Carmen's initial entrance aria was a ballad titled 'L'amour est un enfant rebelle'. According to witnesses, because Galli-Marié wanted a more upbeat piece, the aria went through thirteen versions before Bizet wrote the final version, 'L'amour est un oiseau rebelle', better known as the Habanera. As Heather Hadlock has observed, the reception of this cycle of revisions has varied greatly between Bizet scholars, with some considering Galli-Marié to be a hard worker and a perfectionist, while others simply dismiss it as the behaviour of a diva.⁵⁶² Curtiss states that the final version was the first

⁵⁶¹ McClary, p. 18.

⁵⁶² Heather Hadlock, 'Return of the Repressed: The Prima Donna from Hoffmann's *Tales* to Offenbach's *Contes*', *Cambridge Opera Journal* Vol. 6, No. 3 (November 1994), pp. 221–43: p. 234 note 26.

that both artists agreed upon, so it is possible that Galli-Marié was not responsible for every setback the aria had; she also noted that Bizet rewrote parts of duets for Lhérie when he requested them, indicating that Galli-Marié was by no means the only singer who could make suggestions on Bizet's music.⁵⁶³ Most accounts credit Galli-Marié with an intensive involvement in each rewrite, but Henson implies that Galli-Marié's only major contribution to this piece is suggesting the Habanera genre to Bizet.⁵⁶⁴ She was supposedly made aware of the genre through a Habanera that Paladilhe dedicated to her, but Bizet chose a different composer's Habanera to adapt for Carmen's entrance aria. He based it on Sebastián Yradier's 'El Arreglito' ('The Marriage'), extending the descending chromatic vocal line and the bass rhythm in the accompaniment.⁵⁶⁵ The melody and rhythm's origins were revealed in Charles Pigot's *Bizet et son œuvre* in 1886, and Heugel was forced to defend Bizet in *Le Ménestrel*, as Pigot had overstated the extent of the composer's borrowings.⁵⁶⁶ This use of another composer's musical ideas entirely changes the aria — for example, while Bizet's two arias maintain similarities in the lyrics, the first and final versions are drastically different.

While Bizet's status as the musical composer of the Habanera was in some peoples' view suspect, he asserted himself in the lyrics more strongly. As the alterations to the lyrics of the Seguidilla mentioned in Chapter Two suggested, Bizet was comfortable with changing Halévy's lyrics to suit his music, substituting whole sentences if he needed to, but the entrance aria was one of the most contentious parts of

⁵⁶³ Curtiss, p. 383.

⁵⁶⁴ Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century*, p. 51, p. 53.

⁵⁶⁵ Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century*, p. 192 note 19.

⁵⁶⁶ Lacombe, 'La version primitivede l'air d'entrée de Carmen: réflexion sur la dramaturgie et l' 'autorité' d'un opéra', pp. 48–49.

their collaboration.⁵⁶⁷ Bizet sent some initial ideas for the aria to Halévy, and Halévy sent a long verse in return, which are compiled in the table below:⁵⁶⁸

Figure 3.2: Lyrics of first and final versions of the Habanera (differences in text bolded)⁵⁶⁹

First version (Bizet and Halévy)	Final version (Bizet)
<p>Bizet's suggestion:</p> <p>L'amour est un rebelle Et nul ne peut l'appivoiser. C'est en vain qu'on l'appelle Il lui convient de refuser</p> <p>Halévy's verse:</p> <p>Hasard et fantaisie, Ainsi commencent les amours, Et voilà pour la vie, Ou pour six mois ou pour huit jours, Un matin sur la route On trouve l'amour — il est là. Il vient sans qu'on s'en doute Et sans qu'on s'en doute il s'en va. Il vous prend, vous enlève, Il fait de vous tout ce qu'il veut. C'est un délire, un rêve Et ça dure ce que ça peut.</p> <p>Bizet's suggestion:</p> <p>L'amour est enfant de bohème, Il ne connaît jamais de loi. Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime!... Si tu m'aimes...tant pis pour toi!... L'oiseau que tu croyais surprendre Battit de l'aile et s'envola. L'amour est loin — tu peux l'attendre, Tu ne l'attends plus, il est là. Tout autour de toi, vite, vite,</p>	<p>L'amour est un oiseau rebelle, Que nul ne peut appivoiser, Et c'est bien en vain qu'on l'appelle, Si lui convient de refuser!</p> <p>Rien n'y fait, menace ou prière, L'un parle bien l'autre se tait, Et c'est l'autre que je préfère, Il n'a rien dit, mais il me plaît.</p> <p>L'amour est enfant de bohème, Il n'a jamais connu de loi. Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime, Si je t'aime, prends garde à toi! L'oiseau que tu croyais surprendre Battit de l'aile et s'envola; L'amour est loin, tu peux l'attendre, Tu ne l'attends plus, il est là. Tout autour de toi, vite, vite,</p>

⁵⁶⁷ According to Curtiss (p. 383), he also made a number of changes to Carmen's lyrics in the Card Scene, although Locke suggests that Bizet did not like Meilhac and Halévy's seventh and eighth couplets for the scene, and this is why Carmen repeats her lines obsessively at the end (Ralph P. Locke, 'A Broader View of Musical Exoticism', *The Journal of Musicology* Vol. 24, No. 4 (Fall 2007), pp. 477–521: p. 510).

⁵⁶⁸ Curtiss, pp. 383–85; Lacombe, 'La version primative de l'air d'entrée de Carmen: réflexion sur la dramaturgie et l'«autorité» d'un opéra', p. 53.

⁵⁶⁹ Lacombe, 'La version primative de l'air d'entrée de Carmen: réflexion sur la dramaturgie et l'«autorité» d'un opéra', p. 53, p. 55.

<p>Il vient — il s'en va — puis revient, Tu crois le tenir — il t'évite — Tu crois l'éviter — il te tient! L'amour est enfant de bohème, Il ne connaît jamais de loi. Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime! Si tu m'aimes...tant pis pour toi!</p>	<p>Il vient, il s'en va, puis il revient; Tu crois le tenir, il t'évite, Tu crois l'éviter, il te tient! L'amour est enfant de bohème, Il n'a jamais connu de loi. Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime, Si je t'aime, prends garde à toi!</p>
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The first version of the aria which Bizet set to music, 'L'amour est enfant de bohème', was a blend of the first and final versions of the lyrics. Musically, this version was less rhythmically distinct — while the Habanera relies on its famous dotted-quaver-semiquaver-quaver-quaver rhythm, this entrance aria was a simple 6/8 piece with little indication of Carmen's personality as seen in the final opera.⁵⁷⁰ The first attempt uses Halévy's verse, and follows it with the verse that Bizet wrote, which would in time replace it. The thirteenth version was a different creation entirely; as Lacombe suggests, Bizet and Galli-Marié were the primary authors of a piece which musically and lyrically traced Carmen's exotic, dangerous personality and presented it in relief with the music of a more traditionally *opéra comique* character, Micaëla (who had been introduced earlier in the act).⁵⁷¹ Eventually, this piece contained nothing of the original libretto or the plan for the first act in it: with Bizet's lyrics, and in the very least, Galli-Marié's knowledge of the Havanaise genre and ambition for a more striking entrance, it is representative of what the two musicians could achieve in collaboration.

If Galli-Marié's feelings on the Habanera were based on a dual desire to showcase her voice and the character's impressive personality, her contributions to Act Two were centred on her aspirations for a greater dramatic verity to the character's physical behaviour. Her pursuit of a more authentic flamenco for this act was chronicled

⁵⁷⁰ Lacombe, 'La version primativede l'air d'entrée de Carmen: réflexion sur la dramaturgie et l'autorité' d'un opéra', p. 50.

⁵⁷¹ Lacombe, 'La version primativede l'air d'entrée de Carmen: réflexion sur la dramaturgie et l'autorité' d'un opéra', p. 38, pp. 50–52.

in Chapter Two, but it bears restating in this chapter as evidence of her influence on Carmen's most physically-involved act. However, despite the freedom she had with the flamenco, there were instances where Galli-Marié did not have a say in the staging of this act: an apparent sticking point in the rehearsals was Carmen's use of a broken plate — which the singer was to break in half onstage — as castanets. This was Bizet's idea, but Galli-Marié reportedly thought that it was vulgar; its inclusion in the final choreography in the March 1875 production suggests this was one battle that she had to concede.⁵⁷² She was not alone in believing that the plate castanets were ridiculous, because at least one gentleman walked out of an early performance in disgust (having become increasingly agitated as the evening progressed) at this point.⁵⁷³

The Card Scene in Act Three has a strange personal link to Galli-Marié, which formed during the production rather than the composition and rehearsal process. The composer Ernest Reyer was the source of a mystical rumour about Galli-Marié — that she had similar fortune-telling powers to Carmen — which she demonstrated onstage on the night of Bizet's death:

One evening, Mme Galli-Marié felt an unfamiliar impression when reading her game of omens of death. Her heart was pounding, and she felt that a great misfortune was in the air. Back in the wings, after intense efforts to get to the end of the piece, she fainted. When she was revived, we tried in vain to calm and reassure her, [but] the same thought constantly haunted her, the same feeling troubled her. But it was not for herself she was afraid; she sang it then, and has since been able to sing [it]. The next day, Mme Galli-Marié learned that, during the night, Bizet had died! I know that sceptics will shrug their shoulders. But we were no less deeply moved by listening the other night to the trio of the cards in the third act of *Carmen*.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷² Dean, p. 121; Harvey E. Philips, *The Carmen Chronicle: The Making of an Opera* (New York: Stein and Day, 1973), p. 166. Marilyn Horne, the Carmen of the 1972 Metropolitan Opera production at the centre of the book wanted to do plate castanets in the production and stated, 'Galli-Marié thought it was vulgar. Well, everyone knows I'm a vulgar singer'.

⁵⁷³ Dean, p. 121.

⁵⁷⁴ 'Un soir, Mme Galli-Marié ressentit une impression inaccoutumée en lisant dans son jeu des présages de mort. Son cœur battait à se rompre, et il lui semblait qu'un grand malheur était dans l'air. Rentrée dans la coulisse, après des efforts violents pour aller jusqu'à la fin du morceau, elle s'évanouit. Quand elle revint à elle, on essaya en vain de la calmer et de la rassurer, la même pensée l'obsédait toujours, le même pressentiment la troublait. Mais ce n'était pas pour elle qu'elle avait peur; elle chanta donc,

This story (which was also told by Guiraud) was in circulation as early as September 1875, and was used to promote the continuation of *Carmen*'s initial production for the 1875–76 season. It served to encourage the idea that Galli-Marié was perfect for this role, personifying Mérimée's character in her entirety. This marketing trick failed to attract more patrons, but the rumour persisted for decades.⁵⁷⁵

The fight for Carmen's onstage death in Act Four is one of the most dramatic events in the opera's pre-premiere history, and according to some accounts, it permanently undermined the Opéra-Comique's then-current management. It was linked to opera-house politics, and the company's image rather than any purely creative choices on the part of the cast or composer. From its genesis as a post-*Djamileh* commission in 1872, the plot was to culminate in Carmen's death onstage at the hands of Don José, and neither of the two leads appear to have had any problems with this arrangement. De Leuven and du Locle spent months watching from afar without intervening in rehearsals to a notable degree, but in the final run-up to the premiere (at an unspecified date, probably in early 1875), they made the demand that Carmen's onstage death be excised from the opera.⁵⁷⁶ Their ultimatum was met with resistance; both Galli-Marié and Lhérie threatened to drop out of the production if they enforced the change, and Bizet stood behind them, and eventually an arbitrator was brought in to mediate between the two parties.⁵⁷⁷ In the end, the two singers' threats were enough to make du Locle back down,

puisqu'il fallait chanter. Le lendemain, Mme Galli-Marié apprenait que, dans la nuit, Bizet était mort! Je sais bien que les esprits forts hausseront les épaules. Mais nous n'en étions pas moins fort ému en écoutant l'autre soir le *trio des Cartes* au troisième acte de *Carmen*.' F.M., 'Paris au jour le jour', *Le Figaro* 22 November 1875, p. 2. The columnist is quoting from Reyer's column in the *Journal des débats*.

⁵⁷⁵ For example, it appeared in *Le Chenil*'s obituary of the singer (Fulbert-Dumonteil, 'Chanteurs et Musiciens: Galli-Marié', *Le Chenil* 28 September 1905, p. 459).

⁵⁷⁶ Curtiss, p. 383.

⁵⁷⁷ McClary, p. 23.

but de Leuven resigned soon afterwards, as the stress of the situation was aggravating his already ill health.⁵⁷⁸

This act of resistance may have had a knock-on effect on the opera's success, as McClary argues that by revolting against his suggestions, they lost the support of the remaining director, and even earned his ire.⁵⁷⁹ Du Locle, having failed to change the ending, then engaged in an active attempt to sabotage the opera's premiere. It backfired somewhat, as he ensured that the regular patrons stayed away because he believed that the opera was likely to shock and offend them, and had thus attracted an audience who were looking for a scandal.⁵⁸⁰ This audience liked Act One and some of Act Two, but after Escamillo's 'Votre toast' the reception began to change as the opera strayed from the *opéra comique* form, and the reaction at the end of the opera was muted.⁵⁸¹ In the aftermath, Bizet was demonstrably infuriated by some of the reviews of *Carmen*; privately he railed against its reception in letters to friends (including Saint-Saëns), and he publicly confronted Oscar Commettant of *Le Siècle* in the foyer of the Paris Conservatoire in front of a group of Commettant's students.⁵⁸² Galli-Marié's reaction to these reviews is unknown, but as a professional accustomed to negative criticism, it would have been uncharacteristic for her to be discouraged by bad reviews. She later stated that her commitment to the opera could not be swayed by any of the early setbacks, and she attributed this to her unwavering faith in *Carmen*'s destiny.⁵⁸³

Carmen's first production continued as normal for three months, but after Bizet's death on 3 June, the opera's future, and Galli-Marié's future in the company, looked uncertain. Galli-Marié had initially stated that she would only stay with the Opéra-

⁵⁷⁸ Curtiss, p. 383.

⁵⁷⁹ McClary, p. 23.

⁵⁸⁰ McClary, p. 27.

⁵⁸¹ Curtiss, pp. 389–91.

⁵⁸² Curtiss, p. 396, pp. 413–14.

⁵⁸³ Author Unknown, 'Galli-Marié', *Le journal du dimanche* 1 October 1905, p. 636.

Comique if *Carmen*'s run was extended, telling du Locle in her acceptance letter that 'if it doesn't succeed, all is over between us'.⁵⁸⁴ This was complicated by the contract that she signed in early 1874, as she had upcoming roles by the time that *Carmen* was removed from the roster in February 1876. Without intending to do so, she had re-entered the Opéra-Comique as a full troupe member rather than an *artiste en représentation*, which simultaneously weakened and strengthened her position in the company: her long-term contract meant that she couldn't threaten to leave if *Carmen* was pulled, but she was able to work on a multiple-season plan if necessary. Her devotion to *Carmen* after Bizet's death has been remarked upon by multiple biographers. Even Henry Malherbe, who was openly contemptuous of her personality and professional behaviour, made this comment at the end of the Galli-Marié section of his book:

At all costs, it was necessary to continue the work of dedication and dissemination to which she had assigned herself. She had a debt of conscience, obligations of all kinds to the memory of Georges Bizet.⁵⁸⁵

Whether it was through her belief in the work, or 'a debt of conscience', Galli-Marié appears to have stepped into a negotiating role in regards to the opera in the immediate aftermath of Bizet's death. Her belief in *Carmen* was such that (along with Choudens, Bizet's publisher) she convinced du Locle to keep the opera in performance up to the end of June 1875, and revive it in the autumn.⁵⁸⁶ After the end of the first production (which lasted for forty-eight performances, the exact duration of Galli-Marié's contract) in February 1876, Galli-Marié returned to predominantly playing Mignon. She was now

⁵⁸⁴ Curtiss, p. 364.

⁵⁸⁵ 'Coûte que coûte, il lui fallait poursuivre la tâche de dévouement et de diffusion qu'elle s'était assignée. Elle avait une dette de conscience, des obligations de toutes sortes envers la mémoire de Georges Bizet.' Henry Malherbe, *Carmen* (Paris: A. Michel, 1951), p. 293.

⁵⁸⁶ Curtiss, p. 427. Choudens' intervention would have strengthened Galli-Marié's position against du Locle considerably, as the publisher was known for withholding the rights to operas if a company refused to perform another work that they were trying to promote (Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 64–65).

negotiating her repertoire with Carvalho, as du Locle had stepped down as the director of the company in 1876, only outlasting his former co-director de Leuven by one operatic season. The two directors had been at the helm since Émile Perrin (the director who hired Galli-Marié) had resigned in 1863, and Carvalho's assumption of the directorship changed the hierarchy that Galli-Marié was used to. Carvalho had been well-known for taking some artistic risks as the director of the Théâtre-Lyrique in the 1850s, premiering works such as *Faust* and *Les Troyens*, but he had a conservative streak which made him hostile towards *Carmen*, and in particular Galli-Marié's interpretation of the title role.⁵⁸⁷ This situation, compounded by her father's death in August 1879, and a lack of new roles for her in the 1879–80 season, prompted Galli-Marié to leave the Opéra-Comique for four operatic seasons while she cultivated her career abroad.⁵⁸⁸ In the four years between her departure from the Opéra-Comique and her return as *Carmen* in 1883, Galli-Marié sang the role in Bordeaux, Dieppe, Genoa, Florence, Naples, Barcelona and Brussels. Her residencies as *Carmen* in France and Belgium were short-term, but she settled in Spain long enough to do the research discussed in Chapter Two, and she performed in Italy in three separate seasons, beginning in Naples in 1879, and concluding in Genoa in 1881.

According to Dean, the musical press of Paris played a major part in getting *Carmen* restored to the Opéra-Comique, starting with Lefèvre's call to arms in *Le Clarion* in 1882, yet they also acted as chroniclers for Galli-Marié's successes as *Carmen* in other countries.⁵⁸⁹ Some music writers were initially unsympathetic to her self-imposed exile from the Opéra-Comique; for instance, the writer of the 'Étranger' column in *Le Ménestrel* took to referring to her as an 'Italianate prima donna' during her time in

⁵⁸⁷ Dean, pp. 129–30.

⁵⁸⁸ Dean, pp. 129–30.

⁵⁸⁹ Dean, p. 130.

Naples and Milan.⁵⁹⁰ However, that same writer commended her less than six months later for continuing with a performance of the final scene and taking a curtain call following an accidental facial injury at the hands of her Don José in Genoa.⁵⁹¹ Galli-Marié started her campaign only two months after she left the Opéra-Comique, sending a letter to *Le Ménestrel* from Naples in December 1879. Ostensibly discussing the success of a *Mignon* production in the city, the missive concludes with Galli-Marié describing how the Italian weather had not lessened her yearning for France: ‘It is lovely, lovely, lovely — but in spite of all of this, I want to return to Paris’. The letter appeared to be innocuous, yet was reprinted the following month in *Le Gaulois*, suggesting that while she was no longer physically in Paris, some writers were preparing for a triumphant return at least as *Mignon* if not *Carmen*.⁵⁹²

As well as sending pointed letters to *Le Ménestrel*, Galli-Marié’s time was not wholly spent on promoting *Carmen* abroad — she is known to have sent letters to Bizet’s widow Geneviève (as well as Carvalho, Meilhac and Halévy), asking for help in reviving the opera with the Opéra-Comique, and when it was confirmed that Carvalho had agreed to revive *Carmen*, she wrote to Geneviève in June 1882 to request that she get her cast in the role.⁵⁹³ She did this by appealing to the memory of Geneviève’s husband, stating:

Certainly if poor Bizet was still among us, I would be the only one to revive the piece he wrote specifically for me and to which I am so attached — I am wracking my brain to figure out the cause of the hostility I feel but can’t uncover! My dear Madame, will you continue your kind support and defend me? With your help I shall be strong and shall not have to bear the heartbreak of seeing my dear *Carmen* go to another!⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹⁰ Author Unknown, ‘Étranger’, *Le Ménestrel* 25 June 1881, p. 239.

⁵⁹¹ Author Unknown, ‘Étranger’, *Le Ménestrel* 4 December 1881, p. 6. According to some obituaries, Galli-Marié was accidentally stabbed on up to four separate occasions by the tenors playing Don José — this was just the first. She finished the run of performances with a bandage on her cheek (Malherbe, p. 293).

⁵⁹² ‘Il fait *bon, bon, bon* — et malgré tout cela je veux revenir à Paris.’ François Oswald, ‘Échos des Théâtres’, *Le Gaulois* 5 January 1880, p. 3.

⁵⁹³ Dean, p. 130. Carvalho, Meilhac and Halévy ignored these letters.

⁵⁹⁴ Curtiss, p. 432. Much of the hostility that she mentions here came from Meilhac and Halévy, not Carvalho (p. 431), and she swore that she would bring a good tenor with her to sing as Don José, and even change her acting style to one the librettists approved of if they relented.

These pleas were mostly ignored by Geneviève until June 1883, when Adèle Isaac signed a contract with the Opéra for the next season and therefore forfeited the role. Geneviève was finally convinced by Galli-Marié's arguments and she intervened with Carvalho, forcing him to cast Galli-Marié in the role she had created.⁵⁹⁵ Galli-Marié's return in October 1883 was hailed as a triumph, and several reviewers praised her for embodying Mérimée's heroine, an unthinkable compliment in 1875.⁵⁹⁶

As the lauded *créatrice* of Carmen, Galli-Marié's reputation as a musical actress was entirely safe, but there were some who would question her vocal reputation long after she left the stage for the final time, as this quotation from Saint-Saëns shows:

Ever since *Carmen* entered the repertoires of all the lyric theatres, many very talented artists have played this celebrated [lead] role: none of them have been able to forget the creator of the role, in spite of her uneven voice and mediocre beauty. What did she have? Charm? Others have had this advantage. She had something inexpressible, which transcends everything and brings a character to life; and she had diction and rhythm — these are qualities of masters and hard to find. Only one singer may have been better: Mme Viardot, with her version of a Spanish gypsy, her voice bitter and magnificent. But for such an interpreter, *Carmen* came too late.⁵⁹⁷

Saint-Saëns' commentary showed some bias (for example, the obvious mention of his friend and 'muse' Viardot as an ideal Carmen), but he acknowledged that Galli-Marié had certain extra-vocal qualities which compensated for her voice, and made her into a natural choice for new roles. By 1875, Galli-Marié had created roles in operas by composers such as Maillart, Massé, Massenet, Offenbach, Paladilhe and Thomas, as

⁵⁹⁵ McClary, p. 120.

⁵⁹⁶ Ely-Edmond Grimard, 'Musique', *Les Annales politiques et littéraires* 18 November 1883, pp. 326–27; p. 327; Raoul de Saint-Arroman, 'Premières Représentations', *La Presse* 29 October 1883, pp. 2–3.

⁵⁹⁷ 'Depuis que *Carmen* est au répertoire de tous les théâtres lyriques, bien des artistes de grand talent ont incarné ce rôle célèbre: aucune n'a pu faire oublier à ceux qui l'ont vue la créatrice du rôle, malgré sa voix inégale et sa beauté médiocre. Qu'avait-elle donc? Le charme? D'autres en avaient davantage. Elle avait ce qui ne saurait se dire, ce qui est supérieur à tout et fait vivre un personnage; et elle avait la diction, le rythme, ces qualités maîtresses et si rarement rencontrées. Une seule cantatrice aurait été peut-être supérieure: Mme Viardot, avec son type de bohémienne espagnole, sa voix âpre et magnifique. Mais pour avoir une telle interprète, *Carmen* était venue trop tard.' Camille Saint-Saëns, 'La Cinquantenaire de Carmen', *Les Annales politiques et littéraires* 1 March 1925, p. 229. Saint-Saëns used the word 'bitter' to describe Viardot's voice multiple times, initially by comparing it to a bitter fruit (Steen, p. 51).

well as participating in revivals of older works, which gave her a rich catalogue of roles to draw from. Her fame at the time of the premiere clearly eclipsed Bizet's — when the production was announced, *Carmen* was first and foremost *her* next opera, not Bizet's, in the press — and she had a long-established reputation as an interpreter of an entirely different type of character.⁵⁹⁸ As mentioned in Chapter One, Galli-Marié was signed to the Opéra-Comique by Perrin in the 1862 season as an interpreter of *jeune dugazon* repertoire — while she began to play *travesti* roles two years later, her repertoire was primarily comprised of *ingénue* characters, playing young girls who were undoubtedly the protagonists of the opera, and she had never played a villain of any type.⁵⁹⁹ Her repertoire diversified somewhat as she took on roles like Fantasio and Taven in her thirties, but she was, above all, the creator of one of the most endearing roles in the repertoire — Mignon. By the time of *Carmen*'s premiere, Galli-Marié had sung in almost every one of the Opéra-Comique's performances of Thomas' opera, which amounted to more than 300 performances — more than enough to create an unbreakable tie between her and Goethe's character in the minds of her Parisian audience.⁶⁰⁰ Vocally, Galli-Marié was eager to distance herself from Mignon with her new role: she asked Bizet if he would base the rest of the role's tessitura on that of Marguerite in *Faust*, stating that the '*Mignon* tessitura' he was using was too 'commonplace'.⁶⁰¹ In a marked difference to Mignon, her onstage behaviour was very physical as well: she swayed her hips and shook her shoulders to what some critics saw as an excessive degree, and came onstage in Act One with the rose stalk between her teeth before throwing it to Don

⁵⁹⁸ H. Moreno, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel* 18 January 1874, p. 52; H. Moreno, 'Semaine Théâtrale et Musicale', *Le Ménestrel* 25 January 1874, p. 60.

⁵⁹⁹ Votre Voisin de Stalle, 'Correspondance', ed. B. Jouvin, *Le Figaro* 17 August 1862, p. 2. Technically her first *travesti* role was a particularly inauthentic one, as Kaled in Maillart's *Lara* (1864) was a girl dressed as a boy.

⁶⁰⁰ Henson states that Galli-Marié was better-known for her *travesti* roles rather than for Mignon (*Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century*, p. 69), but I would argue that by *Carmen*'s premiere, she had probably sung as Mignon more times than all of her *travesti* roles combined.

⁶⁰¹ Curtiss, p. 365.

José.⁶⁰² She saw the potential in this project, and devoted her energies to creating not only what she saw as an authentic Carmen (as shown in the last chapter), but also a new role that she could truly excel with in the middle of her career.

While this embodiment of Carmen was an artistic triumph, it was to create a singer-role conflation that gave licence to some to spread rumours about her after her death. The partnership between Galli-Marié and Bizet, both based on her professional experience and the fact that they were almost the same age, was perceived as being an artistic and professional one throughout the rest of Galli-Marié's life. However, Henry Malherbe's book *Carmen* (1951) invented a more salacious version of events that compromised the singer's artistic integrity: he claimed Galli-Marié and Bizet had an affair during the rehearsal process, and that the composer's death was in part caused by the end of this affair, with Galli-Marié driving him over the edge with her vicious temper.⁶⁰³

After Bizet's death, Galli-Marié repented bitterly of having harassed the late composer with her requirements. By her incessant recrimination, by the changes she had stubbornly demanded to the score, by her mood swings, had she not contributed to the fatigue that had ruined Bizet's health? Moreover, had she not attached herself to Bizet, like I have been told, by intimate connections that she had suddenly broken, in the days preceding the death of the great musician?⁶⁰⁴

Galli-Marié was not the first singer to be accused of causing the downfall and death of a talented composer — for example, Stoltz was rumoured to have driven Donizetti insane during the rehearsals for *Dom Sébastien* in 1843 — but Galli-Marié was one of

⁶⁰² Ralph P. Locke, 'Spanish Local Color in Bizet's *Carmen*', in *Music, Theatre, and Cultural Transfer: Paris 1830–1914*, ed. Mark Everist and Annegret Fauser (London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 316–61: pp. 354–55 note 40; Dean, p. 121; Lesley A. Wright, 'Rewriting a Reception: Thoughts on *Carmen* in Paris, 1883', *Journal of Musicological Research* Vol. 28 (2009), pp. 282–94: p. 288.

⁶⁰³ Curtiss, pp. 358–59.

⁶⁰⁴ 'Après la mort de Bizet, Galli-Marié se repentait amèrement d'avoir harcelé avec ses exigences le compositeur tant regretté. Par ses récriminations incessantes, par les changements qu'elle s'entêtait à réclamer dans la partition, par ses sautes d'humeur, n'avait-elle pas contribué aux fatigues qui avaient ruiné la santé de Bizet? De plus, ne s'était-elle pas attachée à Bizet, comme on l'a raconté, par des liens intimes qu'elle avait brusquement rompus, dans les jours qui ont précédé la mort du grand musicien?' Malherbe, pp. 292–93.

the most respected singers of her generation and this kind of behaviour seems beneath her.⁶⁰⁵ Malherbe also claimed that she was unreasonable and obstructive during the early rehearsals — according to him, she acted with a complete lack of professionalism because Bouffar was considered for the role before her, and Bizet had to win her over:

Meilhac and Halévy with difficulty consented to Galli-Marié's casting in the role of Carmen. They feared that the interpretation of the *créatrice* of *Mignon* would be too conventional. To take the role of the gypsy, they preferred, as I said, Zulma Bouffar, a lithe operetta singer. Thanks to Du Locle and Ponchard, the choice finally fell on Galli-Marié, who had been informed of the possible involvement of Zulma Bouffar.

This explains the bad mood which Galli-Marié appeared to be in for the first rehearsals of *Carmen*. With the strength of her rights as a star of the Opéra-Comique and irritated by the hesitation of the authors in giving her the role, Galli-Marié had no end to her demands nor her claims. We remember that she made [Bizet] restart the first aria [the Habanera] of *Carmen* thirteen times. Like all those around her, she did not at first have a good opinion of Bizet's music whose novelty disconcerted her.

Georges Bizet was not patient by nature. He nevertheless [behaved with] good grace towards the wishes and whims of his main interpreter. Within a few days, all opposition ceased. Sensitive and intelligent, the singer was little by little conquered by the art and the spirit of the musician. In the chaos of the dress rehearsal, she had been grabbed deep within herself by Bizet's genius. The evening of the first performance, she despaired to see that the public was not easily persuaded by Bizet's ideas, by his burning [musical] language, new and direct, by his lively and daring art.⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰⁵ Mary Ann Smart, 'The Lost Voice of Rosine Stoltz', *Cambridge Opera Journal* Vol. 6, No. 1 (March 1994), pp. 31–50: p. 34.

⁶⁰⁶ 'Meilhac et Halévy avaient difficilement consenti à l'attribution du rôle de Carmen à Galli-Marié. Ils craignaient que l'interprétation de la créatrice de *Mignon* fût trop conventionnelle. Pour tenir le rôle de la bohémienne, ils préféraient, comme je l'ai dit, Zulma Bouffar, frétilante chanteuse d'opérette. Grâce à Du Locle et à Ponchard, le choix se porta finalement sur Galli-Marié, qui avait été informée de l'engagement éventuel de Zulma Bouffar. On s'explique ainsi la mauvaise humeur dont témoigna Galli-Marié pendant les premières répétitions de *Carmen*. Forte de ses droits de vedette de l'Opéra-Comique et irrité par les hésitations que les auteurs avaient eues avant de lui distribuer le rôle, Galli-Marié ne mit plus aucun frein à ses exigences ni à ses prétentions. On se rappelle qu'elle avait fait recommencer treize fois l'air d'entrée de *Carmen*. Comme tous ceux qui l'entouraient, elle n'avait pas d'abord bonne opinion de la musique de Bizet dont la nouveauté la déconcertait. Georges Bizet n'était pas patient de nature. Il se prêta pourtant de bonne grâce aux désirs ou aux caprices de sa principale interprète. Au bout de quelques jours, toute opposition cessa. Sensible et intelligente, la cantatrice fut peu à peu conquise à l'art et à l'esprit du musicien. À la vielle de la répétition générale, elle était saisie au plus profond d'elle-même par le génie de Bizet. Le soir de la première représentation, elle se désespérait de constater que le public ne se laissait pas aisément persuader par les trouvailles de Bizet, par son langage brûlant, neuf et direct, par son art vivant et osé.' Malherbe, pp. 291–92.

Even if Malherbe's lack of references to specific sources is ignored, it is difficult to tell if Galli-Marié was jealous of Bouffar, but as Galli-Marié was in semi-retirement (and deliberately confounding directors' efforts to make her return to the stage full-time) when both singers were being considered, it would have been unreasonable for Galli-Marié to resent any other candidates for a role. This petulant behaviour matched with how Malherbe saw Galli-Marié as a person and an artist; what emerges above all else from his account is an admiration for Bizet, who he characterises as a true musical genius, and disdain for Galli-Marié, whose only gift was to belatedly recognise Bizet's talent. The tale imparted in the two quotations was most likely built on information from Pigot's *Bizet et son œuvre*, which depicted Galli-Marié as a demanding prima donna who contributed to Bizet's death by overwork.⁶⁰⁷ This belief in the power of the prima donna's ego is evident in Malherbe's argument that she was difficult and demanding because her status in the Opéra-Comique allowed her to behave that way, and that she had no reason to treat this relative stranger with respect. What Malherbe's sources seem to have ignored (or not known, in the case of the interviewees), was that Galli-Marié had written to Bizet soon after agreeing to create *Carmen* to state that she would try to include the opera in her future contracts, and that they had continued to converse through letters in the run-up to the first rehearsals.⁶⁰⁸

Malherbe was not present at the premiere of *Carmen* (he was born in 1886), but his formative years coincided with the development of the myth that operagoers initially rejected the work and demonised Galli-Marié's interpretation of *Carmen*, especially her physical adoption of what she saw as *Carmen*'s personality onstage, which coloured his opinion of the singer. He regarded Galli-Marié only as an inspiration for Bizet, who destroyed him by seducing and tormenting him (as did *Carmen* to Don José). This

⁶⁰⁷ Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century*, pp. 51–53.

⁶⁰⁸ Curtiss, p. 368.

exemplified the phenomenon that Abbate discusses in ‘Opera, or the Envoicing of Women’. A woman perceived through the concept of the death of the author to have contributed to a work must be reduced to a muse. That way, she becomes ‘an objectified female figure to be gazed upon and learned from by men, who then go on to do what they have always done: lay down the (critical) law’.⁶⁰⁹ Malherbe’s demotion of Galli-Marié’s position from collaborator to mistress denies both her creative agency as the vocal and dramatic model for the role, and the reputation that she had as a seasoned performer before the production. Galli-Marié also brought a crucial physicality to the role in the face of resistance from both the choreographers and the critics through her choice to embody Carmen — a woman whose allure was primarily sexual — as well as sing her lines.⁶¹⁰ It was, however, this revolutionary, explicit use of her sexuality onstage that probably brought about these rumours, which Malherbe used to discredit her contributions in 1951. He attributed his information to Bouhy and Lhérie (both of whom were dead by 1951), who were quoting from backstage gossip.⁶¹¹ Even if this was just Malherbe’s theory, it in some ways makes the story of Bizet’s *Carmen* conform more easily to the muse concept. As Rieger warned about all muses, in the eyes of some, Galli-Marié became the personification of the fictional character that Bizet was trying to depict through music as well as Bizet’s muse. This reduces their working relationship to one based on the composer’s desire for his muse, which, Malherbe speculated, led to his death. His account endeavoured not just to negate Galli-Marié’s contributions, but tried to suggest that she was to blame for all of the tragic events between March and June 1875. Taken in this light, Curtiss’ book (published four years after Malherbe’s) was a riposte to the rumours that were started or revived about Bizet’s opera in the mid-twentieth century. Using primary sources such as letters and logbooks from the Opéra-

⁶⁰⁹ Abbate, p. 230.

⁶¹⁰ Curtiss, p. 409, p. 421.

⁶¹¹ Curtiss, pp. 358–59.

Comique's archives, she wrote a more sympathetic and detailed account of the events from December 1873 to June 1875, which I believe is the more accurate version of the opera's early history. Curtiss made no mention of an affair between the two musicians, even though elsewhere she was frank about their personal lives — for instance, she noted that Bizet's marriage was in trouble during the *Carmen* rehearsals, and that Galli-Marié and Paladilhe were co-habiting for a period in the 1870s.⁶¹²

Malherbe's description of these events was in many ways inaccurate, yet the most glaring problem is how he perpetuated a misunderstanding of how Galli-Marié conceived the character. More devoted to creating the real Carmen than Bizet was, Galli-Marié saw her as a character who deserved to be portrayed correctly, and could therefore only make her impersonation of the character more accurate as time went on. What makes this immersion in the character more remarkable is that she had never heard of Mérimée's novella before she signed on to the project, and had to borrow a copy from a friend; while Henson notes that Galli-Marié was always strongly involved in her creations, *Carmen* was her most invested project.⁶¹³ The declarations by critics in 1883 that she was the personification of Mérimée's Carmen were more of a reward for her creative work than Bizet's — this does however mean that her interpretation appears to be partly Mérimée's rather than exclusively hers. Yet, Galli-Marié cannot be said to have been in the thrall of the 'author-god' in a manner that reduces her agency — on the contrary, she was a singer who, on a par with many composers over the centuries, was invested in the work from its genesis in a way that few singers could ever lay claim to.

⁶¹² Curtiss, pp. 362–63, p. 407.

⁶¹³ Curtiss, p. 357; Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century*, pp. 56–57. Henson does not appear to believe that Galli-Marié had read *Carmen* in the intervening period between her first letter in 1873 and the premiere (p. 87), but considering Galli-Marié's investment in character research, it is very unlikely that she did not read it.

While Galli-Marié continued to play Carmen outside of the Opéra-Comique for several years after her 1886 departure, it is important to note how her interpretation affected her successors in the Opéra-Comique. Singers such as Jane Huré and Nina Pack tried to imitate her, while Deschamps tried to combine Galli-Marié's mannerisms with her more independent version of Carmen to a mixed reception — for many years no-one dared to truly deconstruct and reimagine Carmen as anything other than Galli-Marié's greatest role. Many critics mentioned Galli-Marié in the reviews of her successors, and evaluated their success based on how their interpretation measured up to hers. This was evident even in reviews of experienced Carmens from other companies like Deschamps, and of well-established singers such as Delna:

There is a lot of power in Mlle Deschamps, but it is often misused. The person is too big for the character, and as the actress is not very adept, the result of which is clumsiness [, aspects] which lend themselves to laughter, especially in passages where the artist claims to be seductive and coquettish. I don't want to be shown this little pantomime at the end of the third act, where Carmen, hearing the voice of the Toreador walking away, burns to follow and is furious to be held still under the gaze of José. Mlle Deschamps has there a small gesture repeated twice, which consists of snapping her fingers and jumping while turning on her legs like girl full of joy to go *courir la pretantaine*.⁶¹⁴ This gesture, Mlle Deschamps undoubtedly believes to have borrowed from Mme Galli-Marié. Yet what a nuance between the two artists! [Galli-Marié] knew how to keep the right balance and not to swallow the woman, who must retain her own grace amid Carmen's cynicism. There is only triviality in Mlle Deschamps' interpretation. I stick to this example, but there are twenty similar ones in the course of the role that I could equally invoke. My intention is not to discourage Mlle Deschamps, because there are within her very great qualities. The singer certainly has a unique sound and her voice is superb in its harshness. All she has to do is soften it and take on the tone of the house. Maybe also she would find a better use for her talents in the Opéra, whose vast dimensions would suit her better. (*Le Ménestrel*)⁶¹⁵

⁶¹⁴ This phrase means mindlessly going to and fro.

⁶¹⁵ 'Il y a beaucoup de force chez Mlle Deschamps, mais elle est souvent mal employée. La personne est trop grande pour le personnage, et, comme la comédienne n'est pas très exercée, il en résulte des gaucheries qui prêtent à rire, surtout dans les passages où l'artiste a des prétentions à la séduction et à la coquetterie. Je n'en veux pour preuve que cette petite pantomime à la fin du 3^e acte, où Carmen, entendant la voix du Toréador qui s'éloigne, brûle de le suivre et enrage d'être maintenue immobile sous le regard de José. Mlle Deschamps a là un petit geste deux fois répété, qui consiste à faire claquer les doigts et à sauter en tournant sur les jambes comme une fille tout en joie d'aller courir la pretantaine. Ce geste, Mlle Deschamps croit sans doute l'avoir emprunté à Mme Galli-Marié. Quelle nuance pourtant

During yesterday evening, which was a lovely evening, it should be said right away, I recalled many times the first time that I heard Bizet's admirable and eternally youthful work. It was in the old Salle Favart, and Galli-Marié sang as Carmen. She was no longer young, and I was not very old, and yet I have always kept a memory of this interpretation that none of the other artists could ever erase nor even diminish. Galli-Marié was a challenging *cigarière*, romantic and dramatic, but never vulgar. Her fists were boldly placed on her hips; the same gesture [was] at times brutal, [yet] remained gracious and was never shocking. Galli-Marié was elegant. [Her interpretation] was perfection itself.

Since her, Mlle Calvé, [was] the first to approach this perfection; the Carmens who succeeded her, next, [were] colourless and indifferent for the most part. In turn (the test was curious and had assumed the proportions of a true [event of] artistic solemnity), Mlle Delna has just approached this seductive and attractive role, which was to try her as an actress and a singer. The actress was intelligent, dramatic and passionate; the singer, with her beautiful voice in so extended a register, essayed marvellously the aspects of the role, [which is] so varied from the musical point of view. But, if I insisted somewhat, a short while ago, on the plastic side which, in this character, has its grand importance, and where Galli-Marié was incomparable, Mlle Delna was perhaps not as superior as she might have been, unnecessarily accentuating some swaying and some glances. This is only, however, a critical detail, and the artists, [who] came in large numbers to applaud their friend, feted her as she deserved. (*Le Matin*)⁶¹⁶

entre les deux artistes! Celle-ci savait garder la juste mesure et ne pas trop ravalier la femme, qui doit conserver sa grâce même au milieu des cynismes de Carmen. Il n'y a que de la trivialité dans l'interprétation qu'en donne Mlle Deschamps. Je m'en tiens à cet exemple, mais il y en a vingt analogues dans le courant du rôle que je pourrais également invoquer. Mon intention n'est pas de décourager Mlle Deschamps, car il y a chez elle de très grandes qualités. La chanteuse a certainement un singulier relief, et sa voix est superbe dans sa rudesse. Il ne lui reste qu'à l'assouplir et à prendre davantage le ton de la maison. Peut-être aussi trouverait-elle un meilleur emploi de son talent à l'Opéra, dont les vastes dimensions lui conviendraient mieux.' H. Moreno, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel* 30 May 1886, p. 207.

⁶¹⁶Durant la soirée d'hier, qui fut une belle soirée, il convient de le dire tout de suite, je me suis rappelé à maintes reprises la première fois où j'ai entendu l'œuvre admirable et d'éternelle jeunesse de Bizet. C'était à l'ancienne salle Favart, et Galli-Marié chantait Carmen. Elle n'était plus très jeune, et je n'étais pas très vieux, et cependant j'ai toujours gardé de cette interprétation un souvenir que nulle autre artistes n'a jamais pu l'effacer ni même l'amoindrir. Galli-Marié était une cigarière provocante, amoureuse et dramatique, mais jamais vulgaire. Ses poings se campaient aux hanches hardiment ; le geste même brutal parfois, demeurait gracieux et n'était jamais choquant. Galli-Marié avait de la race. C'était la perfection même. Depuis elle, Mlle Calvé, la première, approcha de cette perfection ; des Carmen se succédèrent, ensuit, incolores et indifférentes pour la plupart. À son tour (l'épreuve était curieuse et avait pris les proportions d'une véritable solennité artistique), Mlle Delna vient d'aborder ce rôle séduisant et attrayant, qui devait tenter en elle la comédienne et la cantatrice. La comédienne fut intelligente, dramatique et passionnée ; la cantatrice, avec sa belle voix au registre si étendu, fit valoir à merveille les aspects du rôle, si variés au point de vue musical. Mais, si j'ai insisté quelque peu, tout à l'heure, sur le côté plastique qui, dans ce personnage, a sa grande importance, et par où fut incomparable Galli-Marié, c'est que Mlle Delna n'y fut peut-être pas aussi supérieure qu'elle aurait pu s'y montrer, accentuant inutilement certains déhanchements et certains œillades. Ce n'est là, d'ailleurs, qu'une critique de détail, et les artistes, venus en grand nombre applaudir leur camarade, lui ont fait fête comme elle le méritait.' Robert Gangnat, 'Les Premières', *Le Matin* 23 September 1900, p. 3.

Robert Gagnat and Henri Heugel's reviews of Delna and Deschamps respectively reveal the positive and negative ways in which Galli-Marié's shadow over the role was interpreted by critics. While Gagnat felt that Delna had acquitted herself well in comparison to her unbeatable predecessor, Heugel's commentary on Deschamps' interpretation of a short portion of Act Three showed that he was clearly offended by what he saw. He suggested that she was attempting to copy Galli-Marié's onstage mannerisms but because she had not tried to understand the motives behind these actions, Deschamps' performance was shallow and almost a caricature of the original. As mentioned in the previous chapter, neither of these singers made their role debuts at a moment's notice: Deschamps delayed her role debut for months, and Delna's was eight years in the making. These interpretations were prepared, rehearsed and even performed on other stages before the performances reviewed above, but in *Carmen*'s first company, these women were inevitably compared to the title role's *créatrice*, and found wanting. This conflict between original contributions and mirroring the first *Carmen*'s physical performance punctuated the opera's reception as whole for up to a quarter of a century after the opera's first production; how to confront Galli-Marié's legacy as a performer became as important to some as the new singer's interpretation of Bizet's music, if not more so.

Between 1883 and 1892 (and at events such as Delna's role debut in 1900), one could argue that through her immense presence in the collective memory of the public and the troupe that the work performed was not Bizet's *Carmen*, but Galli-Marié's *Carmen*, and it would take a total reinvention of the title character to shake off this association. As stated in the previous chapter, *Carmen*'s costuming and *mise-en-scène* remained strikingly similar to the original production's (with the exclusion of Carvalho's expurgated April 1883 version) from 1875 to 1892, when Calvé's debut in the role signalled a greater interaction with the concepts of dramatic realism. What is unusual

was her attitude in her memoirs towards the previous production and her most famous predecessor; rather than denigrate the old version as outdated and unfit for purpose, she centred her arguments on her inability to be like Galli-Marié, and used a quotation from the then long-dead *créatrice* to show how respectful the interaction between the two singers was:

But my greatest reward was the appreciation and praise of the generous and warm-hearted Galli-Marié. ‘Bravo! Calvé!’ she said to me one day, after the performance. ‘You are most interesting and original. This is the first time I have consented to attend a performance of this opera which reminds me so poignantly, so vividly, of my own youth.’⁶¹⁷

This praise, as well as Galli-Marié’s telegram for the 1000th performance of *Carmen* (which was read onstage by Calvé’s husband at the interval), indicates that both singers were eager to show that while Calvé was now Carmen, this was an approved hand-over between the two singers.⁶¹⁸ Calvé continued to show deference to the role’s *créatrice*, but Galli-Marié recognised that the character needed to be more than just limited to her version, and it speaks volumes about her legacy that Calvé still felt the need to emphasise this in 1922, seventeen years after Galli-Marié’s death, and many years since Calvé herself had relinquished the role. Calvé eventually became a better-known Carmen than Galli-Marié, but Galli-Marié remained as the singer who gave greater weight to the title of *créatrice* and made Carmen into a central role in French opera, regardless of her ‘uneven voice and mediocre beauty’.

⁶¹⁷ Emma Calvé, *My Life*, trans. Rosamond Gilder (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1922), pp. 82–83.

⁶¹⁸ Raoul Aubry, ‘La Soirée Parisienne: La millième de ‘Carmen’’, *Gil Blas* 24 December 1904, p. 3.

3.3: Marie Delna and Benjamin Godard

3.3.1: *La Vivandière*'s conception and premieres: 1893–95

The next Opéra-Comique production to feature a signature leading mezzo-soprano role after *Carmen* was arguably Godard's *La Vivandière* (1895), which was reportedly designed as a star vehicle for Delna. As a popular opera that was commissioned by the Opéra-Comique, the course of *Carmen*'s creation has been well-catalogued, but *La Vivandière*'s composition process, and the intentions of all of those involved, are far murkier than *Carmen*'s. It was originally premiered with a different cast in an initial three-act version in the Théâtre de la Monnaie on 21 March 1893, but when it was presented in the Opéra-Comique two years later in a revised form, it was marketed as a new opera, with Delna as the *créatrice* of the title role. Godard did not live to see the premiere, having fallen ill around the time that Carvalho agreed to stage the work, and deteriorating as the rehearsals advanced. This altered how *La Vivandière* was perceived; reviews were couched in respectful language discussing the kind composer who died just after he finished composing the opera, with an appropriate title role for an aspiring star as one of his main concerns. However, many of these statements were a fiction that obscured a difficult composition and rehearsal process with an ailing composer, rather than a teenaged mezzo-soprano, at its centre.

Godard came from a wealthy family — they owned two chateaux in the French countryside and a hotel on the rue Pigalle in Paris — and to the public and the press, it was presumed that he was comfortable enough to compose for pleasure.⁶¹⁹ Yet, by the time that he fell dangerously ill, his finances were in a precarious state, and he had no royalties coming in. According to his biographer Clerjot, he fell ill on 24 June 1894, and continued to sicken throughout the summer without making much progress on *La*

⁶¹⁹ Maurice Clerjot, *Benjamin Godard* (Paris, E. Roberts, 1902), p. 7.

Vivandière, until a doctor insisted that he took a year's break from work.⁶²⁰ This prompted a reticent but desperate letter to Choudens, his publisher, on 20 August:

All of this is the result of the fatigues of *Jocelyn* and *Dante* and above all the barriers that I had with these works. When the doctor came, he said 'but you have been ill for a long time my dear friend, you are overworked, you must take a year of rest'. It is he who has condemned me to flee in September for Hoyères, where I will pass all of the winter otherwise I will not return the next spring! You see that he was not joking. So I doubt that, my dear Choudens despite all of my desire to achieve a good deal (which I very much need!) [that I will] be able to compose *La Vivandière* for this winter but, frankly, if I do half of it, there would be no point and I am too weak to write all of it (and the orchestration) in a month. You see, what would be good, just fair, would be that Monsieur Carvalho, who has Calvé, restages *Jocelyn*, who would help (for the royalties) the sick author to live in a country where it is necessary that it should not be for nothing; the entire public would applaud those two hands because they would point out in the newspapers this generous action of the director, and [then] announce that Monsieur Godard can fully recover thanks to this spontaneous idea of Monsieur Carvalho's, who would have his new work ready for the 95–96 season — but, but, but...the goodness and justice are [from] people who rarely ever see me. Shall I leave this to your thoughts? Maybe this time you will take my cause into your hands. I understand that you have no more money to give me for performances I only ask that you act for me, I am seriously ill and a small amount of royalties would render me a great service.⁶²¹

Choudens took Godard's offer to Carvalho, but rather than swapping *La Vivandière* for *Jocelyn* in the upcoming season, and staging *La Vivandière* the following year, Carvalho seems to have pushed not only for *La Vivandière* in the 1894–95 season, but also for

⁶²⁰ Clerjot, p. 8.

⁶²¹ 'Tout cela est le résultat des fatigues de *Jocelyn* et du *Dante* et surtout des débarres que j'ai eues avec ces ouvrages. Quand le docteur est venu, il a dit 'mais il y a longtemps que vous êtes malade mon cher ami, vous êtes surmené il vous faut un an des repos'. Ce qui fait qu'il m'a condamné à partir fuy septembre pour Hoyères afin d'y passer tout l'hiver sous peine de ne pas reviens le printemps prochain! Vous voyez qu'il n'y a pas à plaisanter. Je doute donc, mon cher Choudens malgré tant mon désir de réaliser une bonne affaire (dont j'aurais pourtant grand besoin!) de pouvoir composer *La Vivandière* pour cet hiver car, franchement, si j'en faisais la moitié cela ne servirait à rien et je suis trop faible pour écrire le tout (et orchestre) en le mois. Voyez-vous, ce qui serait bon, juste équitable, ce serait que monsieur Carvalho, qui a Calvé, remonte *Jocelyn*, cela aiderait (pour les droits d'auteur) l'auteur malade à vivre dans un pays où faut ne doit pas être pour rien; le public entier applaudirait des 2 mains car au ferait valoir dans les journaux ce mouvement généreuse du directeur et l'on annoncerait que, monsieur Godard pouvant se rétablir complètement grâce à cette idée spontanée de monsieur Carvalho tiendrait prêt son nouvel ouvrage pour la saison 95–96 — mais, mais, mais...la bonté et la justice sont des personnes que l'on me voit presque jamais. Je livre cela à vos réflexions? Peut-être prendrez-vous cette fois ma cause en mains. Il est bien entendu que vous n'avez plus d'argent à me donner pour représentations je ne vous demande que de me faire jouer, je suis gravement atteint et un peu d'argent de droits d'auteur me rendrait grand service.' Benjamin Godard, 'Lettre de Benjamin Godard à Choudens 20 August 1894' (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1894).

something more specific from Godard, as a letter from Godard to his mother Laure shows:

You understand well, my dear mother, that in writing to Choudens I had no illusions about his good dispositions towards me nor those of old Carvalho; this is a band of rascals and they would kill me by their own hands if they found 50,000 francs in my belly. Do you think that I ever believed for one minute in the false demonstrations of interest contained in the letters of Madame Carvalho? All this is only an act! Like you say it, we needed a work for Delna, a work written in real music with clear themes without being vulgar. Yet...where to find [someone to write it]...Delibes is dead, Massenet...nearly...then what [?] It is annoying to go through it but you have to go to Godard [in the end]. Godard asks for nothing better but with the luck that always accompanies [such opportunities,] he finds it impossible to do the thing for this coming winter: 'Well, my good man, since you cannot fill our pockets arrange it and die in your corner, it does not concern us'. That is the soul of the aforementioned rogues.⁶²²

The wording of the letter suggests that Godard was the last person to guess that Delna was the intended central figure in this opera's promotion. While Godard envisioned himself as an obvious choice because of the deaths (or enfeebled states) of several major composers, Carvalho probably chose him, because, like Galli-Marié and Bizet, Godard's star was unlikely to outshine Delna's. This rapprochement in August was also more of a confirmation than a new deal on his existing contract with Carvalho. Delna was attached to the opera in the press from as early as June, but Carvalho only made an official announcement about the production of *La Vivandière* on 27 August 1894 — exactly a week after Godard's letter to Choudens — claiming that the main roles had

⁶²² 'Tu comprends bien, chère mère, qu'en écrivant ainsi à Choudens je n'avais aucune illusion sur ses bonnes dispositions à mon égard ni sur celle du vieux Carvalho; c'est une bande de gredins et ils me tueraient de leurs propres mains s'ils n'avaient trouvé 50,000fr dans mon ventre. Crois-tu que j'aie jamais cru une minute aux fausses démonstrations d'intérêt contenues dans les lettres de madame Carvalho? Tout cela n'est que comédie! Comme tu le dis, on avait besoin d'un ouvrage pour Delna, d'un ouvrage écrit en vraie musique avec des motifs clairs sans être vulgaires. Or...où trouver...Delibes est mort; Massenet...à peu près...alors quoi C'est bien ennuyeux d'en passer par là mais il faut s'adresser à Godard. Godard ne demande pas mieux mais, avec la chance qui l'accompagne toujours il se trouve dans l'impossibilité de faire la chose pour l'hiver prochaine: 'Eh bien, mon bonhomme, puisque tu ne peux pas nous remplir les poches arrange-toi et crève dans ton coin cela ne nous regarde pas!'. Voilà l'âme des coquins plus haut nommés.' Benjamin Godard, 'Lettre de Benjamin Godard à Laure Godard 3 septembre 1894', *Six lettres de Benjamin Godard à Laure Godard sa mère, 1888-1894* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1888-94).

been written for Delna, Bouvet (baritone) and Mandot (tenor).⁶²³ Judging from his letter to his mother, Godard seemed incensed by the idea that his opera was a star vehicle rather than his work (which would be sung by some of the company's stars) in the eyes of the public. However, because of his health problems, he had no choice but to accept Carvalho's terms. In a letter to his mother on 13 September 1894, he wrote that in this deal, he was at least able to negotiate a working schedule which accommodated his poor health (despite his earlier assertions that Choudens and Carvalho were unsympathetic to his problems):

I arrive at another subject I have foreseen for you. On reflection, I have (proof) that if I cannot write an opera in three acts, entirely in numbers, for the next month, it may be possible for me, on the contrary, to write an *opéra comique*, this is to dine on pieces of mimicry, six per act, roughly, that makes it eighteen for the whole work. I proposed this to [Henri] Cain who is known in Carvalho's house, Carvalho accepted this proposal and Cain is in third heaven! I will go so easily, without tiring myself writing little by little these eighteen pieces and they can put on the piece in March or April..⁶²⁴

It appears that the finer details of a deal between the composer and the director were yet to be agreed upon on 27 August, but Carvalho was confident enough that Godard could somehow complete the work on time that he went ahead with an announcement for a production in the upcoming season three weeks before this compromise was met. Surprisingly, Godard never mentioned the previous incarnation of his opera, and his agreement to write eighteen pieces includes no mention of adapting older material. *La Vivandière*'s final version as premiered in April 1895 comprises twenty-five numbers, suggesting that seven are either copied from the older version almost intact (excluding

⁶²³ Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 10 June 1894, p. 183; Intérim, 'Courier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 28 August 1894, p. 4.

⁶²⁴ 'J'arrive à un sujet plus j'ai un prévu pour toi. En réfléchissant, j'ai (preuve) que si je ne puis pas écrire un opéra en 3 actes, tout entier en numérique, pour le mois prochain, il me serait peut-être possible, au contraire, j'écrire un *opéra-comique*, c'est à diner les morceaux de mimique, 6 par acte, à peu près, ce qui fait 18 pour le tout. J'ai proposé cela à Cain qui a connu chez Carvalho, Carvalho a accepté cette proposition et Cain est au 3^e ciel! Je vais donc tranquillement, sans me fatiguer écrire peu à peu ces 18 morceaux et l'ai pourra monter la pièce en mars ou avril.' Benjamin Godard, 'Lettre de Benjamin Godard à Laure Godard, 13 septembre 1894', *Six lettres de Benjamin Godard à Laure Godard sa mère, 1888–1894* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1888–94).

any transpositions) or that Godard exceeded his expectations to set enough of the libretto to form a coherent story.

Godard had completely finished the piano-vocal version of Act Two of the opera by the final week of November, and despite his continuing poor health, he was putting research into the music for the final act, writing a late eighteenth-century quadrille given to him by the music writer Jean-Baptiste Weckerlin into one of the numbers.⁶²⁵ At this point, the opera was in rehearsals, but Godard rarely mentioned them, or any of the singers in the production in his surviving letters. While Carvalho proudly announced that all three leading roles were written for three specific singers, Godard does not seem to have worked with any of them in the way that Bizet or Massenet did with Galli-Marié and Arbell respectively. Carvalho was playing up the special nature of the roles by saying they had already been written for their voices, but it appears that Godard only began to work with the singers when the opera entered rehearsals in September 1894. The composer's illness delayed the rehearsals, as he was determined to oversee all of them in spite of his deteriorating health. This slowed the process of completing the score and led to at least one cancelled rehearsal in the early stages.⁶²⁶ By late October it had clearly become a bone of contention between Godard and his sister Magdeleine, who suggested an unnamed supervisor for the opera in his stead, and Godard refused:

Now we talk about your idea on the subject of the person who would supervise the *Vivandière* rehearsals. In telling me about this candidate you thought that he would act there as an advertisement [for the work], [not of] the real technical work to be done by the person that you designate to me [who has] hardly the instinct of a musician, and would not have any authority to create for artists such as Delna, Bouvet, Belhomme etc.: nuances or vocal effects, where they would laugh at him...not to his face, but behind his back. Then there would be the orchestral rehearsals!!! When he would have on stage eighty chorus members, eighty orchestra members, and the artists and Danbé at the podium, how would

⁶²⁵ Benjamin Godard 'Lettre de Benjamin Godard à Magdeleine Godard 12 novembre 1894', *Douze lettres de Benjamin Godard à Magdeleine Godard, 1894* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1894).

⁶²⁶ Georges Boyer, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 3 September 1894, p. 4.

this person stop all of this with the authority of an artist and say for example: 'Sorry but the horns held a bar for too long'???

Come, come, you let yourself be deceived by...your friendship, I suppose, because there is no other reason why you would propose that to me. The person who will be in any case open to it, she couldn't do otherwise and, anyway, the effect of *Vivandière* will be so big that one will need no other advertisement.⁶²⁷

The fact that he believed that all of the artists (including Delna) would mock Magdeleine's nominated supervisor shows that he had low opinion of the artists' patience with rehearsal notes from a high-profile but inexperienced replacement (judging from the wording of the letter), and that it was doubtful that anyone could fit these roles to the singers as well as he could. However, he seemed to have a more suitable candidate in mind: in the letter, the gender of the supervisor changes in the final paragraph from 'il' to 'elle', which suggests that Magdeleine's nomination of someone else was to recuse herself from rehearsals.

In the absence of a different surrogate for Godard, the company muddled through the rehearsals as well as they could with a partial score. It appears that no-one realised how advanced Godard's illness was as the rehearsals broke up for Christmas 1894 with no premiere date in sight and a still incomplete orchestral score. Godard did not live to finish the opera, dying during the Christmas break in Cannes on 10 January 1895; the vocal score was complete at the time of his death, as was the orchestration of Act One, but the orchestration of Acts Two and Three had to be completed by Paul Vidal, a

⁶²⁷ 'Maintenant [nous] parlons de ton idée au sujet de la personne qui surveillerait les études de la *Vivandière*. En me parlant de ton candidat tu n'as pas réfléchi qu'il ne s'agit pas là l'une réclame mais l'un réel travail technique à faire on la personne que tu me désignes est à peine musicien l'instinct, et n'aurait aucune autorité pour faire à les artistes comme Delna, Bouvet, Belhomme etc : des nuances ou des effets vocaux, où lui rirait...pas au nez, mais par derrière. Puis quand viendraient les répétitions d'orchestre!!! Quand il y avait en scène 80 choristes, 80 artistes d'orchestre, et les artistes et Danbé au pupitre, comment ferait cette personne pour arrêter tout cela avec l'autorité d'un artiste et dire par exemple: 'Pardon, mais les cors sont parti une mesure trop tard' ??? Allons, allons, tu t'es laissé illusionner par... ton amitié, je suppose, car il n'y a vraiment aucune autre raison à ce qui tu m'as proposé. La personne sera en tous cas bien disposée, elle ne peut pas faire autrement et, d'ailleurs, l'effet de la *Vivandière* sera si grand qu'on n'aura besoin d'aucune réclame.' Benjamin Godard, 'Lettre de Benjamin Godard à Magdeleine Godard, 27 octobre 1894', *Douze lettres de Benjamin Godard à Magdeleine Godard, 1894* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1894).

conductor with the Opéra.⁶²⁸ Vidal would later be written out of some accounts of the opera's composition, as Clerjot (writing seven years after the composer's death) claimed that Godard completed the orchestral score a mere hour before he died.⁶²⁹ This was an impossible, romanticised scenario which suggested that Godard could not die until his masterpiece was completed, bringing a sense of closure to his generally unexpected death. In reality, it is unclear if Godard continued to believe that he could finish the whole opera as his health continued to worsen. Thanks to Delna's memoirs, we know that Godard eventually acknowledged that he at least had no hope of living to see the premiere, as a letter to Henri Cain, his librettist, showed:

‘My poor Cain, I feel good, I haven't felt so for a long time. Here is the phrase that you asked me for and which Marie Delna sings so powerfully. In any case, I've written it down roughly, and it is my will'...He was talking about the ‘Hymne à la liberté’. He often stated repeatedly that: ‘I believe in this hymn, alas I'll never hear it, I'll never get to applaud Delna. Thanks to her lovely talent, she will encore it for the public, and that is what consoles me.’⁶³⁰

This letter may also reflect how Godard saw Delna's centrality to the opera's future success. The choice of this letter by Delna is somewhat self-aggrandising, but if it reflects Godard's thinking at the time, then he seems to have reconciled himself to the idea of *La Vivandière* as Delna's star vehicle, and was won over by her voice. While she never elaborated on how well they knew each other, there is a distinct sense that she saw her adoption of this adapted role as a duty to him after he had changed so much of the role to suit her. However, aside from this letter, it is hard to discern what Godard's

⁶²⁸ Author Unknown, ‘Paris et Départements’, *Le Ménestrel* 14 October 1894, p. 327; Arthur Pougin, ‘Benjamin Godard’, *Le Ménestrel* 13 January 1895, p. 10. Vidal was also a *solfège* teacher with the Paris Conservatoire (Anne Sivuoja-Kauppalaa, ‘Salome's Slow Dance with the Lord Chamberlain, London 1909–10’, in *Performing Salome, Revealing Stories*, ed. by Clair Rowden (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 99–132: p. 100 note 6).

⁶²⁹ Clerjot, p. 8.

⁶³⁰ ‘Mon pauvre Cain, je le sens bien, je n'en aurai pas pour longtemps. Voici la phrase que vous me demandez et que Marie Delna chante si puissamment. En tous cas, je l'ai rudement vécue et c'est mon testament'...Il s'agissait de l'Hymne à la liberté. Il répétait souvent à ce sujet: ‘Je le crois chic cet hymne, hélas je ne l'entendrai pas, je n'y applaudirai pas Delna. Grâce à son beau talent, elle saura le faire bisser du public et c'est ce qui me console.’ Marie Delna, *La carrière d'une grande cantatrice: souvenirs de Marie Delna: publiés par La Liberté du 17 janvier au 6 avril 1925*, ed. Henri Decharbogne (Montmorency: Société d'histoire de Montmorency et de sa région, 2006), p. 20.

opinion on Delna was once he had worked with her. In spite of Delna's presence in the title role of the opera, she rarely appears in Godard's surviving letters, and with the exclusion of his suggestion that she, alongside her co-stars, would mock an incompetent rehearsal supervisor, he gave no indication of their interactions in rehearsals. If he had problems with Delna, it would have surfaced in his personal letters to his mother and sister, where he was naturally more candid about his experiences as a composer than in those to his publisher or librettist. In these letters he was more cynical about the process of bringing the opera to the stage, but crucially, aside from one mention of Carvalho's insistence that *La Vivandière* would be a star vehicle for Delna, he seems to have held no grudge against the young singer that may have been reflected in these letters. Godard did sometimes clash with Cain, telling his mother on 20 September that Cain continually quoted Massenet to him during the rehearsals (Cain had co-written the libretto for *La Navarraise*, which had premiered in Covent Garden on 20 June that year), which Godard interpreted as Cain comparing him negatively to the more successful composer.⁶³¹ This translated into a stilted style of communication between the two, as the letter from Godard quoted in Delna's memoirs is markedly different to the more personal letters to his family and even his publisher quoted above. There is also a chance that the later letters were mediated by Magdeleine. The handwriting in his letters from late November 1894 onward changed drastically and resembled hers, and it is likely that he was too weak to write letters in any great volume from this point, so she had to write them for him. The tone of the letter in Delna's memoirs suggests (she did not clarify when it was sent) that it was written in his final months, and may coincide with this change.

⁶³¹ Benjamin Godard, 'Lettre de Benjamin Godard à Laure Godard, 20 septembre 1894', *Six lettres de Benjamin Godard à Laure Godard sa mère, 1888–1894* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1888–94).

Godard's death delayed the resumption of rehearsals until early February, and it was March before the orchestral rehearsals began, with an intended premiere date of the first week of April.⁶³² Following his death, it was not just Vidal who monitored rehearsals in his stead but Magdeleine, who became the driving force behind maintaining Godard's legacy following the premiere of his final opera.⁶³³ Magdeleine was the only surviving member of Godard's immediate family, as their mother Laure had died a week before Benjamin.⁶³⁴ Strangely, Magdeleine did not appear to recognise how important Delna (or any other singers) would be to the reception history of her brother's final opera until the time of the 1906 gala, as her only letter to the theatre following the premiere was to the conductor Jules Danbé and the orchestra.⁶³⁵ The premiere took place on 1 April 1895, and was a great success for Delna, as well as for Lucien Fugère (Bernard) and Edmond Clément (Georges), who had replaced Bouvet and Mandot respectively early on in rehearsals.⁶³⁶ The production also used a live donkey for the first performances to pull Marion's cart, which the audiences liked, but it appears to have been too much trouble and was cut from the staging.⁶³⁷ It was performed thirty-seven times between 1 April and 30 June, and returned after the Opéra-Comique's summer closure on 17 September.⁶³⁸ The success of the opera was significant enough that Delna included *La Vivandière* in her summer contracts, performing as Marion in Aix-les-Bains in August.⁶³⁹

⁶³² Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 17 March 1895, p. 87.

⁶³³ Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 10 February 1895, pp. 47–48.

⁶³⁴ Clerjot, pp. 8–9.

⁶³⁵ Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 14 April 1895, p. 118.

⁶³⁶ Lucien Fugère (1848–1935) was a French baritone who also sang with Arbell during his career (as Sancho in *Don Quichotte*), and Edmond Clément (1867–1928) was a French tenor who went to the Metropolitan Opera in 1910 in the same group as Delna.

⁶³⁷ Delna, p. 23.

⁶³⁸ This information was gathered from *La Vivandière's dossier d'œuvre* (*La Vivandière: dossier d'œuvre* [(Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, date unknown)]).

⁶³⁹ Georges Boyer, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 17 August 1895, p. 3.

La Vivandière's revised production was a posthumous triumph for Godard after a career with little large-scale success; it was his first work staged with the Opéra-Comique, but his sixth opera overall, and the second to be placed in a military setting. Godard had shown an interest in women in military life before, having included a contralto *vivandière*, Rosanna, in his 1884 opera *Pedro de Zalamea*, but only as a secondary character. *La Vivandière* in contrast sees Marion as the catalyst for most of the plot. The opera is set in the Vendée in 1794, and the action revolves around Marion (the *vivandière* of a passing regiment), Georges (the younger son of the Marquis de Rieul) and Jeanne (an orphan girl), with Bernard (Marion's husband and the regiment's captain) and Balafre and Lafleur (two prominent soldiers) as supporting characters.⁶⁴⁰ Georges is in love with Jeanne, but his father will not let him marry her; after Marion hears of their story, she persuades Georges to enlist and fight for the Republic. Georges agrees, and after a final argument with his father, he is disowned and marches off to war. Jeanne is so distressed by these events that she collapses at the side of the road, but is picked up by Marion who swears to be a mother to her, and Jeanne is brought along with the army in her cart. Georges and Jeanne are reunited in Act Two, but the army must return to Georges' village, as the Jacobin forces (with the Marquis at their head) are massing. The two armies clash in the interval between Acts Two and Three, and Georges' father is captured and condemned as a traitor. Georges, who did not enlist under his real name, is distressed and tries to plead for his father's life, but Marion stops him from revealing his name, and tells Georges and Jeanne that they will free the Marquis together that night. She then sneaks into the holding cells alone and releases him. When the escape is discovered in the morning, Marion admits to Bernard that she

⁶⁴⁰ André Spies, 'The French Revolution and Revolutionary Values in Belle Époque Opera', in *Essays in European History: Selected from the Annual Meetings of the Southern Historical Association, 1988–1989, Volume 2*, ed. June K. Burton and Carolyn W. White (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1996), pp. 59–70: p. 63.

did it, and he tells her that she is a traitor and will be court-martialled for her actions. Luckily, the Convention declares an amnesty on condemned prisoners, and the chorus announces that the war is over, but there is no hint of the fates of any of the leading characters, as unusually for an *opéra comique*, they do not join in the chorus.

Marion's actions were not those of a loyal *vivandière*, but, she was a mother figure more than a military one — she extended the image of the *vivandière* as a maternal force in the army, which was how they were seen in the Third Republic. The audience's acceptance of her behaviour was also mitigated by the fact that the opera was set in a different political regime, and as Spies argues, was designed to warn against over-zealous views like those of the Jacobins.⁶⁴¹ The opera materialised when the real-life *cantinières* were being pushed to extinction by the government, as their numbers were being reduced, and their businesses were increasingly limited and strictly regulated. Its portrayal of the army was also a product of its time — there was a recognition that Marion had to be married to a member of the regiment, but she and Jeanne were the only women travelling with the regiment during a period that would have seen large numbers of women and children following the army.⁶⁴²

Vivandières — who were better known as *cantinières* from the Napoleonic period onwards — were women who sold food and drink to soldiers, and ran their own canteens (which were the alternative to the army canteens). They were officially part of the army train, having received patents from the Ministère de la Guerre, but they were regarded as *employées*, not *militaires*, meaning they were not part of the army itself, and

⁶⁴¹ Spies, 'The French Revolution and Revolutionary Values in Belle Époque Opera', pp. 63–64.

⁶⁴² Thomas Cardoza, *Intrepid Women: Cantinières and Vivandières of the French Army* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2010), pp. 48–50. It was only in 1793 that the Convention moved to expel the civilian women (aside from *cantinières* and *blanchisseuses* [laundresses]) from the army, and it is highly unlikely that the regiment could have expelled all of the followers by the period that the opera covers. Musically, a historically accurate portrayal of military camps should have facilitated the use of an SATB chorus outside of village scenes.

were unable to claim pensions for their work for most of their existence in the army.⁶⁴³ They were regarded as mother figures in the army, providing men with food, drink, shelter in the evenings, and a sympathetic female ear for their troubles, so Marion's maternal characterisation was true to life. This image only became more entrenched as the government began to phase them out of the army after 1875, and only long-term older *cantinières* were left, having been allowed to serve until they retired.⁶⁴⁴ As the 1890s advanced, *cantinières* were increasingly portrayed more negatively in the arts, showing them as bad influences on the soldiers, but their maternal instincts and patriotism were often emphasised as redeeming traits.⁶⁴⁵ Marion in *La Vivandière* follows this path somewhat; she was a flawed character who was sympathetic to her audience because she was a mother above all else, even when she was helping people who were not her biological children to commit a serious crime. She is also completely immersed in military life (a natural characterisation as every *cantinière* either married a soldier or was the daughter of a soldier), and acts as a recruiter as well as a mother figure for her regiment.

Delna addressed the duality of the role in her memoirs, but like every other role she mentioned in the short series of articles, she claimed that she had no issues with Marion and her characterisation:

The spirit of my role could have scared me somewhat, because it was very new to me, with its mix of military toughness and maternal tenderness, but I had the chance to understand it as it was conceived, in spite of my age; it was indeed under the cover of the dolmen of *La Vivandière* that I celebrated my twentieth year.⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴³ Cardoza, pp. 219–20.

⁶⁴⁴ Cardoza, pp. 180–181, p. 187, pp. 200–01.

⁶⁴⁵ Cardoza, pp. 212–13.

⁶⁴⁶ 'L'esprit de mon rôle aurait pu quelque peu m'effrayer, car il était bien nouveau pour moi, avec son mélange de rudesse militaire et de tendresse maternelle, mais j'eus la chance de le comprendre tel qu'il avait été conçu, en dépit de mon âge, ce fut en effet revêtue du dolmen de la Vivandière que je célébrais ma vingtième année.' Delna, p. 22.

Delna's comment that she had a chance to understand Marion as the role was conceived is somewhat disingenuous in light of the opera's previous history, but the work did dominate her existence for a very long period in her early career when her repertoire was still quite small. *La Vivandière*'s rehearsal process was unusually protracted — six months of rehearsals from September 1894 to April 1895, with no rehearsals in January out of respect for the deceased composer — and much of Delna's repertoire at this time was centred on supporting roles. Her workload was also gradually decreased as the premiere approached, allowing her to finesse her interpretation of her first 'premiering' leading role. By the middle of March 1895, Delna had been removed from the role of Méala in Massé's *Paul et Virginie* to focus on *La Vivandière*, reportedly at her own request.⁶⁴⁷ Writing in 1925, Delna was determined to portray her teenaged self as precocious and mature for her age, but she ignored the fact that she was a teenager in an extraordinary situation that could have lent itself to her creative process when learning Marion. She had played a maternal figure in a military-themed opera before *La Vivandière* — Marcelline in Bruneau's *L'attaque du moulin* in 1893 — but the character's beliefs regarding war are the opposite of Marion's. Marcelline criticises the villagers who wish to defend their homes from the invading soldiers because she lost her two sons in the most recent war. Functioning as a symbol for the damage of war, Marcelline acted as a mouthpiece for the anti-war views of the composer and librettist by depicting a woman whose entire family was wiped out in an ultimately useless conflict.⁶⁴⁸ However, Henri Heugel found another way of interpreting this character — he praised Marcelline because she was a clear allegory of France, whose 'sons' were stand-ins for Alsace and Lorraine.⁶⁴⁹ The opera received a brief revival in 1894, and

⁶⁴⁷ Author Unknown, 'Courrier des Théâtres, *La Justice* 12 March 1895, p. 3.

⁶⁴⁸ *L'attaque du moulin*'s librettist was Émile Zola.

⁶⁴⁹ Vincent Giroud, 'Un compositeur et son interprète — Bruneau et Delna', in *Aspects de l'opéra français de Meyerbeer à Honegger*, ed. Jean-Christophe Branger and Vincent Giroud (Lyon: Symétrie,

Delna sang as Marcelline in a production in Covent Garden that same year, but the opera had little chance of being revived again by the time that *La Vivandière* premiered. Yet, what many critics remembered of the opera was Delna's triumph as Marcelline, and the scene-stealing success of her aria 'Ah, la guerre' (which remained in her concert repertoire long after the Opéra-Comique productions ended). Most singers would gather a repertoire with roles of polar-opposite beliefs, but at least one reviewer, Louis Gallet of *La nouvelle revue*, felt that Delna's previous tirades against war as Marcelline deserved a brief but not critical mention when he reviewed her as the pro-war Marion:

The vivandière Marion, that is Mlle Delna, who no longer curses 'the terrible war' in *L'attaque du moulin*; who likes it, on the contrary, amid the din and adventures and there shines her cheerfulness, her enthusiasm and her admirable dramatic instinct; she uses her very beautiful voice generously here; however robust it may be, it appears that she has asked it for such efforts where [Marion's] courage breaks forth, but this could perhaps have depleted some of its resources. That would be a great pity. Fortunately, the holidays will [soon] arrive and that will make all traces of fatigue disappear. Meanwhile, the success of Mlle Delna was as considerable as it was justified.⁶⁵⁰

La Vivandière was billed from the beginning as a tailor-made starring role for Delna, but several critics aside from Gallet observed that this role appeared to be too much for her vocally, and Paul Dukas (writing in *La revue hebdomadaire*) was not impressed with her interpretation of the spoken sections:

No, you do not doubt the tragic emotion which unfolds; on the side of the most exhilarating comic fantasy, is Mlle Delna in the role of the Vivandière. The artist who made a hall cry, in reading the touching letter of a conscript's elderly parents, after she had, in other scenes, caused inextinguishable laughter, is a great artist. But, for God's sake, if he is watching her, but I fear that this overwhelming

2009), pp. 95–135: p. 110. In a move that encouraged this interpretation, Marcelline was given an Alsatian costume in the 1907 Théâtre de la Gaîté revival of the work (p. 127).

⁶⁵⁰ 'La vivandière Marion, c'est Mlle Delna, qui ne maudit plus 'l'horrible guerre' de *l'Attaque du moulin*; qui se plait, au contraire, au milieu du fracas et des aventures et y brille de sa gaieté, de son ardeur et de son admirable instinct dramatique; sa voix très belle s'y dépense généreusement; si robuste qu'elle soit pourtant, il semble qu'on lui ait demandé des efforts où éclate son courage, mais où pourrait peut-être s'épuiser une partie de ses moyens. Ce serait grand dommage. Heureusement, les vacances viendront qui feront disparaître toute trace de fatigue. En attendant, le succès de Mlle Delna a été aussi considérable que justifié.' Louis Gallet, 'Théâtre', *La nouvelle revue* March–April 1895, p. 907.

role will eventually take from her many of her vocal qualities. And that would be a crime! (*Le Monde Artiste*)⁶⁵¹

The performers had, in the success, their glorious part. Mlle Delna as Marion, was celebrated, acclaimed, and admirable. But it seemed that while the voice of this great artist remains triumphant, there can be signs of fatigue found there. Mlle Delna makes of her voice what she wants, but she needs to *want* it. There is, people will say, a subtle quarrel! Also, does she have there more scope than to be a warning of a beloved artist who has to be monitored and told to exercise caution [?] Especially, it is better that, to repeat, Mlle Delna gave her role an accent of emotion and grandeur where no other singer could have achieved it. (*Le XIXe siècle*)⁶⁵²

Mlle Delna is a buxom vivandière, a little young perhaps for the maternal role that she plays in the piece, but infinitely personal and interesting. The only serious complaint that we can address to her, is the really worrying abuse that she makes of the spoken interjections and flow of *speech* in the music. This café-concert style could not have been more out of place in a lyrical work, and we would watch with sorrow an artist of this quality who gets into [this] habit. (*La revue hebdomadaire*)⁶⁵³

As Gallet had noted, the summer closure was approaching (in the 1890s, it began around the end of June every year, and singers departed once their final scheduled performance was completed), but he was the only one who suggested that it was normal, end-of-the-season fatigue. Others had begun to hear signs of behaviour and habits that could lead to permanent vocal damage in a singer who was not yet three years into her career. The

⁶⁵¹ ‘Non, vous ne vous doutez pas de l’émotion tragique que déploie; à côté de la fantaisie comique la plus exhalante, Mlle Delna dans le rôle de la *Vivandière*. L’artiste qui fait pleurer une salle, en lisant la lettre touchant des vieux parents du conscrit, comme elle l’a fait après avoir, dans d’autres scènes, provoqué des rires inextinguibles, est une grande artiste. Mais, pour Dieu, qu’elle se surveille, car j’ai peur que ce rôle écrasant ne finisse par lui prendre une grande partie de ses qualités vocales. Et ce serait un crime!’ Fernand le Borne, ‘*La Vivandière*’, *Le Monde Artiste* 7 April 1895, p. 185.

⁶⁵² ‘Les interprètes ont eu, dans le succès, leur glorieuse part. Mlle Delna en Marion, a été fêtée, acclamée, et admirable. Mais il m’a semblé que si la voix de cette grande artiste reste triomphale, on y devine une apparence de fatigue. Mlle Delna fait de sa voix ce qu’elle veut, mais il lui faut *vouloir*. C’est là, dira-t-on, une querelle subtile ! Aussi n’a-t-elle d’autre portée que d’être un avertissement à une artiste aimée d’avoir à se surveiller et à se ménager. D’autant mieux que, pour le redire, Mlle Delna a donné à son rôle un accent d’émotion et de grandeur où nulle autre cantatrice n’aurait pu atteindre.’ Marcel Fouquier, ‘Les Premières’, *Le XIXe siècle* 3 April 1895, p. 2.

⁶⁵³ ‘Mlle Delna est une accorte vivandière, un peu jeune peut-être pour le rôle maternel qu’elle tient dans la pièce, mais infiniment personnelle et intéressante. Le seul reproche sérieux que l’on puisse lui adresser, c’est l’abus vraiment inquiétant qu’elle fait des interjections et du débit *parlé* sur la musique. Ce *style* de café-concert est on ne peut plus déplacé dans une œuvre lyrique, et nous verrions avec peine une artiste de cette valeur en prendre l’habitude.’ Paul Dukas, ‘Chronique Musicale’, *Le revue hebdomadaire* April 1895, p. 626.

anonymous reviewer of *Le Temps* made a more specific insinuation about the role — that it needed to focus less on her upper range:

I have not already said and I cannot wait to tell [you] that the interpretation and the *mise en scène* of *La Vivandière* are of the first order. Mlle Delna has shown us, in a very heavy role, that her vocal and dramatic resources have no end. It need not be that one abuses her; and it need not be that she abuses herself. Besides, we still love her better in numbers where her voice keeps all of its warm and penetrating caresses than in the passages where the valiant artist ventures, for example, towards [her] higher range, [which] is dangerous and [produces] a much less rich sound, on b-flat''. Mlle Delna is gifted like no-one else. She still works and still manages to charm us.⁶⁵⁴

This suggestion harks back to the problem described in Ibos' commentary from Chapter One: Delna was once again being asked to sing more in her lower range, but there were plenty of opportunities to show off her rich chest and middle range in the role anyway. According to the piano-vocal score published in 1895 (and presuming that Delna stuck to the freshly-completed score at the premiere), Marion did not utilise the upper range that much — like most mezzo-soprano roles, the highest that the voice ventures with any frequency is to around g'' — but it did use declamation in the upper-middle range, (a skill that composers such as Bruneau would also emphasise in Delna's roles) in pieces such as the 'Hymne à la liberté', which could have contributed to the worrying strained sound that several critics highlighted in their reviews.⁶⁵⁵

This emphasis on Delna's abilities was part of the heavy focus the Opéra-Comique had placed on Delna's centrality to the work's history: *La Vivandière*'s success was a triumph for Delna and a fitting tribute to Godard, but the narrative surrounding

⁶⁵⁴ 'Je n'ai pas encore dit et j'ai hâte de dire que l'interprétation et la mise en scène de la *Vivandière* sont de premier ordre. Mlle Delna nous a montré, dans un rôle très lourd, que ses ressources vocales et dramatiques n'ont pas de fin. Il ne faudra pas qu'on abuse d'elle; et il ne faudra pas qu'elle abuse d'elle-même. D'ailleurs, nous l'aimerons toujours mieux dans les morceaux où sa voix garde toutes ses chaudes et pénétrantes caresses que dans les passages où la vaillante artiste se hasarde, par exemple, vers les régions aigues, périlleuses et de sonorité bien moins riche, du *si bémol*. Mlle Delna est douée comme personne ne le fut davantage. Qu'elle travaille encore et qu'elle se ménage pour nous charmer.' Author Unknown, 'La Musique', *Le Temps* 3 April 1895, p. 3.

⁶⁵⁵ Delna's skill with declamation in her upper/middle range would be further utilised by Bruneau in the role of Marianne in *L'Ouragan* (1901) [Giroud, 'Un compositeur et son interprète — Bruneau et Delna', p. 122].

the premiere deliberately muddies the composition timeline. The surviving scores offer little indication that this was a revised opera — Choudens' scores implied that the Opéra-Comique production was the world premiere, by using the phrase 'performed for the first time on 1 April 1895' above the cast list, which in turn only featured the Opéra-Comique singers. The Paris Choudens editions are also the only ones held by the Bibliothèque nationale de France. As there is little record of the Brussels premiere nor a record of who the first Marion really was, it is not possible to compare the original and revised versions.⁶⁵⁶ The only acknowledgements of the opera's previous incarnation were the inscription *Nouvelle Version* on the cover pages and a note on the cast page of every edition stating that the role of Marion had been transposed — making it appear that the otherwise unmentioned Brussels (and probably by that time unavailable) score contained the first, authentic version of the role as it was originally sung.⁶⁵⁷ This minor acknowledgement of the original production was representative of the attitude that the Parisian press took to the work, especially once it became Godard's final opera. The version created in Paris may not have been the absolute original, but it was the definitive *La Vivandière*, and Delna was, under this logic, Marion's *créatrice*, taking the place of the unrecognised true Belgian *créatrice*.

This distortion of the history of *La Vivandière* may have altered perceptions of Godard's career, but it also elevated Delna as the *créatrice* of a leading role which would remain in the repertoire. Delna clearly had a voice that the Opéra-Comique's patrons loved, yet what truly built the myth of her 'golden voice' was how passionately the audience reacted to her early performances:

When she launched into the aria 'Chers Tyriens' in the first act [of *Les Troyens à Carthage*] there 'arose in all parts of the audience, a unanimous outburst of

⁶⁵⁶ The Bibliothèque nationale de France does hold two manuscripts for the original version, but they are partial, and may not reflect the eventual Brussels version.

⁶⁵⁷ Benjamin Godard, *La Vivandière: Opéra-Comique en 3 actes de Henri Cain, Musique de Benjamin Godard, Partition Chant et Piano, Nouvelle Version* (Paris: Choudens, 1895), p. 2, p. 4.

applause that forced the orchestra to stop for a considerable time...never had they heard a more exceptional voice, or one more homogenous and wide in range, or more richly coloured...never a more noble and pure declamation. A minute was enough to establish the glory of a seventeen-year-old child.’⁶⁵⁸

In addition to this common portrayal of Delna’s unusually successful debut, Massenet’s account of his first meeting with Delna (quoted in the previous chapter), and specifically Alphonse Daudet’s description of Delna as ‘Music herself’ entirely encapsulated what attracted audiences to Delna: rich, even and incredibly expressive, her voice suggested a maturity beyond her years.⁶⁵⁹ Even at seventeen, she embodied the potential for artistic perfection sought by so many others. Accounts of her singing merely a few bars before audiences reacted may be exaggerated, but they still show the intense connection she created with the public when role and voice harmonised. Her voice was lauded regardless of her overall reception, so any composer who could write a role that suited her was guaranteed a lasting hit with the opera for the duration of her stay with the company. Thus one would expect to see that she was in demand by multiple composers as a ‘muse’. However, the problem was that no composer appears to have attempted to create a brand new role for her, possibly because the Opéra-Comique’s administration was not prepared to commission new works with their attendant financial cost and risk for a singer whose star was not consistently on the ascendant. Delna was also very young at this point in her career — she celebrated her twentieth birthday two days after *La Vivandière* premiered — and taking the leading role in a world premiere may have been too much for most composers (especially those who did not know her) to ask.

Yet, there is evidence that Delna was, at that point in her career, receiving some form of special treatment by the Opéra-Comique. While she was later hired by the Opéra as a repertoire mezzo-soprano, and began to sing repertoire roles such as Carmen and

⁶⁵⁸ Jean-Charles Lefebvre, ‘A Voice of Purple and Gold’, in *Marie Delna: Enregistrements 1903–1918*, trans. Patrick Bade (La Celle-sur-Morin: Malibran Records, 2010), p. 5.

⁶⁵⁹ Jules Massenet, *My Recollections*, trans. H. Villiers Barnett (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1919), pp. 170–71.

Margared in her second contract with the Opéra-Comique, her repertoire during her first contract showed an attempt on the administration's part to set Delna apart from her predecessors. They cast her in a variety of company premieres and revivals of long-abandoned works, and side-stepped the usual practice of casting her in roles such as Mignon, distinguishing her from her contemporaries as a possible star. This treatment was rare for a mezzo-soprano — arguably the last mezzo-soprano who had received this type of career management was Galli-Marié in the 1860s. It was a hit-and-miss tactic — while Delna was lauded as Didon and Marcelline, and as Mistress Quickly in Verdi's *Falstaff* in 1894, her Charlotte did not make a lasting impression. Her first successful roles were dramatic in nature, yet her success as Mistress Quickly indicated strengths in comedy. Her greatest weakness as an actress was the romantic aspects of roles. This was present from the beginning of her career — Delna even joked about it in her memoirs, recalling Carvalho's advice 'to think of strawberries and cream' when she was struggling with a scene where Didon was singing of her love for Enée — and would have posed a threat to the success of any signature role.⁶⁶⁰ Marion's construction as a maternal rather than a romantic figure allowed Delna to circumvent this weakness, as Marion's marriage to Bernard in *La Vivandière* is not overtly romantic, acting more as her reason for joining the army train than a subplot. The reduction of the character down to two personality types — patriot and mother — thus brought out the best in her tragic and comic instincts, inciting tears and laughter (to paraphrase le Borne of *Le Monde Artiste's* review) with her acting rather than just the awe her vocal performances reportedly inspired. Her greatest post-debut triumphs were in secondary roles, and it took a role which combined her acting talents with her immensely powerful voice to finally reconfirm her potential

⁶⁶⁰ Delna, p. 8. Delna explained that her specific problem in this instance was that Lafargue, the Enée of the production, was very overweight (she said 'il était gros, énorme, presque caricatural').

as a leading singer, almost three years after *Les Troyens à Carthage*, but its continuing success was by no means guaranteed as the rest of her career played out.

3.3.2: *La Vivandière* in peace and war: 1895–2013

In the aftermath of the premiere, the Parisian reception of *La Vivandière* was dominated by two aspects of the opera, which were not entirely linked to the music — the fate of its composer and the success of its stars. Delna would sing with both Fugère and Clément in other works, but once the 1894–95 season ended, she became *La Vivandière*'s longest-reigning cast member. Her presence seems to have had an effect on the number of performances — while the crowd did not react as enthusiastically at the premiere as the first time she sang in *Les Troyens à Carthage*, she was an invaluable asset to the opera's continuing success. In terms of receipts, the first production of the opera (1 April 1895–13 March 1896) began strongly. After the premiere — an event that, due to the number of free tickets given to various people who were associated with the opera or the press, only made 503 francs — *La Vivandière*'s profits remained high, with twenty-one of the twenty-two following performances making more than 6,000 francs (the 8 April performance made 4,774 francs).⁶⁶¹ Starting from the performance on 27 May, the opera's receipts began to slip, and it averaged 3,000–4,000 francs per performance. Despite this reduction in profits, the opera's performance frequency only declined from the end of November, with Christmas Eve being the only performance in December. This fall in the number of performances coincided with preparations for Delna's debuts in other roles such as Jeanne in Lalo's *La jacquerie* (December 1895) and Orphée in Gluck's *Orphée* (March 1896). Delna shared the role with Nina Pack during the final rehearsals for *La jacquerie*, but *La Vivandière* had a resurgence in January as *La*

⁶⁶¹ Information from the *dossier d'œuvre* held in the Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra.

jacquerie began to fail (its final performance was 6 February).⁶⁶² *Le Figaro* reported on 13 February that the performances of *La jacquerie* had been interrupted to allow Delna to return to *Orphée*, but the report also stated that it was uncertain that *La jacquerie* would be staged again after *Orphée* was finished; the matter was promptly dropped after this.⁶⁶³ Taken in this light, *La Vivandière*'s first production also appears to have been jettisoned in favour of *Orphée* — Delna's debut as Orphée was on 7 March, and *La Vivandière*'s final performance of the season came six days later.

While many works experienced a natural waning of performance frequency in the months following their premieres, the effect of Delna's unavailability was clear. Replacement singers were brought in as a temporary measure (for instance, Pack played Marion when Delna was too busy at the beginning of rehearsals for *Orphée* and *La jacquerie*), yet it was not inferred until her retirement in 1903 that the company would attempt to find a singer to permanently replace Delna in the role. For these reasons, the opera was performed only eighty-five times between 1895 and 1901.⁶⁶⁴ In contrast, Delna played Orphée and Carmen more than 100 times each in a similar timeframe.⁶⁶⁵ *La Vivandière*'s performance count was impressive — few new works amassed that many performances across six years — but its performances seem to have been determined by Delna's availability, and this most likely stopped it from reaching its *centenaire* in this period. The opera's lack of 'autonomous' success became particularly evident when Delna left the Opéra-Comique in 1897 and 1902. While *La Vivandière* was staged a number of times annually with singers such as Pack (1898) and Marié de l'Isle (1900) playing Marion, it had almost fallen out of the repertoire by the mid-

⁶⁶² Georges Boyer, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 30 September 1895, p. 4.

⁶⁶³ Jules Huret, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 13 February 1896, p. 4.

⁶⁶⁴ Spies, 'The French Revolution and Revolutionary Values in Belle Époque Opera', p. 64.

⁶⁶⁵ Serge Basset, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 14 February 1902, p. 4; Author Unknown, 'Delna, Pet of Paris, To Sing Saturday', *New York Times* 24 January 1910, page number unknown. *Orphée* attained more than 100 performances between March 1896 and February 1902, and Delna played Carmen 112 times with the company between 1900 and 1902.

1900s.⁶⁶⁶ Without Godard or Delna to push for further performances, *La Vivandière*'s success looked likely to have been intense, but short-term.

The most high-profile performance of the opera after Delna's retirement in 1903 was on 30 May 1906 for a gala night organised by Magdeleine Godard. Much like Galli-Marié's final return to the Opéra-Comique in 1890, Delna returned for what appeared to be a one-off break in her retirement at Magdeleine's behest.⁶⁶⁷ The main goal of the performance was to raise money for a monument to Godard (in the same way that Galli-Marié returned to the stage one last time for a gala for a Bizet monument). A second effect, as it transpired the following year, was that Delna reconsidered her retirement and returned to the stage permanently, though not with the Opéra-Comique. However, this revival in the public's interest in a fictional *cantinière* did not reflect a real-life renaissance for these women and their work: *cantinières* were finally banned from joining the army on campaign in 1905, before a further circular in October 1906 ended the hiring of new *cantinières*.⁶⁶⁸

La Vivandière became central to Delna's revived career, but rather than opting to return to the stage with her first company, she signed to the Théâtre de la Gaîté, which was then managed by Émile and Vincent Isola. This contract was an anomaly in Parisian theatre — she was paid 150,000 francs in total to sing every night in the three months from October 1907 to January 1908, first in *La Vivandière*, then in *Orphée* and finally in *L'attaque du moulin*.⁶⁶⁹ The initial reports suggested that it would be an equal number

⁶⁶⁶ Jules Huret, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 19 November 1898, p. 4; Alfred Bruneau, 'Les Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 16 May 1900, p. 3.

⁶⁶⁷ Serge Basset, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 30 April 1906, p. 7.

⁶⁶⁸ Cardoza, pp. 210–12.

⁶⁶⁹ Author Unknown, 'Paris et Départements', *Le Ménestrel* 29 June 1907, p. 208. There are no suggestions as to whether Delna received an offer from the Opéra-Comique, but it appears that the Isola brothers offered her the contract, and she decided to (at least temporarily) end her retirement. She was also paid more in the Théâtre de la Gaîté than in the Opéra-Comique, as she was paid 1,666.66 francs per performance to the Opéra-Comique's 1,000.

of performances, but as Delna stated to the *New York Times* in 1910, the ratio ended up being very different:

In October 1907, I began a season at the Paris Gaieté [sic]. I sang 88 times there in 92 days; 18 performances of ‘Orfeo’, 25 of ‘L’Attaque du Moulin’, and 47 of ‘La Vivandière’. You will see that I sang every night but four. Everybody said that I should lose my voice but I didn’t.⁶⁷⁰

The eventual schedule, which was split into three distinct blocks of performances, showed that *La Vivandière* was by far the most popular opera. It was also the only work that the Isola brothers needed direct permission from Carré to stage, as it was technically still in the repertoire of the Opéra-Comique.⁶⁷¹ This was the height of *La Vivandière*’s popularity, with the run of *Orphée* being cut short to keep it onstage and Gaumont producing a short film (that Delna appears to have had no part in) based on Marion in *La Vivandière* in 1908.⁶⁷² The structure of the contract limited *La Vivandière*’s renaissance, as Delna’s next contract did not include the opera, and the public’s interest faded before Delna could truly capitalise on her most distinctive role. She was not contracted to play Marion with the Metropolitan Opera (probably because it was not in their repertoire), while her 1911 contract with the Opéra-Comique focused heavily on *Carmen*, Lazzari’s *La lépreuse* and from early 1914, a revival of *Werther*. With the outbreak of the First World War, however, both Delna and Marion became relevant to the workings of the Opéra-Comique once again.

Before Germany invaded Belgium on 4 August 1914, Delna was facing a very different 1914–15 season; she had recently been allowed to reprise Charlotte after

⁶⁷⁰ Author Unknown, ‘Delna, Pet of Paris, To Sing Saturday’, *New York Times* 24 January 1910, page number unknown.

⁶⁷¹ Serge Basset, ‘Courier des Théâtres’, *Le Figaro* 23 June 1907, p. 5. The production of *L’Attaque du Moulin* was also important, as Bruneau composed a new scene for Marcelline for Delna’s stage return, which featured a higher tessitura (Giroud, ‘Un compositeur et son interprète — Bruneau et Delna’, pp. 124–26).

⁶⁷² *La Vivandière* was extended by a week, and then *Orphée*’s first performance was put back to give Delna some time to recover (which led to Mme Fiérens taking the final *La Vivandière* performance), resulting in a delay of nearly two weeks (Source: Serge Basset, ‘Courier des Théâtres’ *Le Figaro* 13 November 1907, p. 5; Serge Basset, ‘Courier des Théâtres’, *Le Figaro* 18 November 1907, p. 5). The Bibliothèque nationale de France holds a copy of the *Vivandière* film in its catalogue.

seventeen years, and there was to be a new production of *L'attaque du moulin*.⁶⁷³ Delna had been studying Marcelline again from late 1913, and performed in a production in Nantes during the 1913 Christmas break.⁶⁷⁴ Just as Bruneau's opera was set to return to the company's stage, the German offensive during the summer break threw the Opéra-Comique and Delna's plans into crisis. Both the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique remained closed past the traditional start of the operatic season (the first week of September) as German soldiers were spotted forty kilometres north-east of Paris in Chantilly, and some Parisians feared that the city would be besieged again.⁶⁷⁵ The Allied victory at the First Battle of the Marne in early September meant that the soldiers retreated back to the east of Rheims, where the Western Front would sit for the majority of the next four years, but it was December before the Opéra-Comique re-opened, and under very different terms. The singers who remained in the Opéra-Comique during the war did so under changed circumstances — they all took a pay cut, and were under what the company director, Pierre-Barthélemy Gheusi, described as a 'heavy burden'.⁶⁷⁶ The stagehands changed constantly as they were deployed or Gheusi hired injured soldiers, and the company faced a shortage of chorus tenors.⁶⁷⁷ The Opéra-Comique also operated year-round during the war, staging 150 performances between December 1914 and September 1915. In the second year of the war, weekly performance numbers became more inconsistent, as they ranged from three to six times a week in the 1915–16 season, with a 'war repertoire' of thirty-four established works which were staged in full (this was later revised to one with thirty-five French works and seven foreign works in the 1916–17 season).⁶⁷⁸ *Manon*, *Carmen*, *Lakmé*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Tosca*, *La traviata*,

⁶⁷³ Santillane, 'Informations', *Gil Blas* 18 June 1914, p. 5.

⁶⁷⁴ Etienne Destranges, 'La Province', *Revue musicale S.I.M.* 1 January 1914, p. 65.

⁶⁷⁵ Alistair Horne, *Seven Ages of Paris* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2003), p. 347, pp. 350–52.

⁶⁷⁶ P.-B. Gheusi, *L'Opéra-Comique pendant la guerre* (Paris: 'Éditions de 'La Nouvelle Revue'', 1919), p. 10.

⁶⁷⁷ Gheusi, p. 12.

⁶⁷⁸ Gheusi, p. 11, p. 16, p. 27.

Werther, *La bohème* and *Louise* remained as the top earners (bringing in between seven and ten thousand francs per performance), but many operas including *La Vivandière* produced high enough profits to justify keeping them onstage.⁶⁷⁹

When Delna returned to the stage in early December, her repertoire had changed — she was still slated to play Charlotte, but instead of returning as Marcelline, she found herself reprising Marion. The inclusion of *La Vivandière* was appropriate because it, along with Donizetti's *La fille du régiment* (which technically also features a *vivandière*) and the soldiers in *Carmen*, featured one of the few depictions of military life in the company's repertoire in the first two years of the war.⁶⁸⁰ It also, like *La fille du régiment*, had the benefit of being a happy portrayal of military life, but *La Vivandière* alone evoked patriotic military engagement, as the regiment helped to suppress the revolts in the Vendée.⁶⁸¹ Almost from the earliest opportunity, the company moved to consolidate this opera's link with the army through charitable causes. On 6 December 1914, the Opéra-Comique (in addition to other notices) announced that 'the management also prepares, and completely for the benefit of victims of the war, a sensational performance of *La Vivandière*, the *chef-œuvre* of Benjamin Godard and M. H. Cain, with the assistance of Mlle Delna, the incomparable *créatrice* of Marion, the *vivandière*.'⁶⁸² This benefit performance, scheduled for the matinée on 13 December, featured Delna singing 'La Marseillaise', and finished with a rendition of 'Chant du départ'.

As well as publically showing support for soldiers, Gheusi's revival of *La Vivandière* also had parallels with the policies that the government adopted during the

⁶⁷⁹ Gheusi, p. 19.

⁶⁸⁰ Cardoza, pp. 119–20.

⁶⁸¹ Spies, 'The French Revolution and Revolutionary Values in Belle Époque Opera', p. 64.

⁶⁸² 'La direction prépare également, et toujours au bénéfice des victimes de la guerre, une représentation sensationnelle de *La Vivandière*, le chef-œuvre de Benjamin Godard et M. H. Cain, avec le concours de Mlle Delna, l'incomparable créatrice de Marion, la vivandière.' Programme announcement, *Recueil factice d'articles de presse et programmes sur 'La Vivandière' de Henri Cain* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, date unknown).

war to compensate for the newly all-male status of the army. As Cardoza argues, the *marraines de guerre* (women who wrote to soldiers and sent them gifts) were to be replacements for the *cantinières* who had been removed from the army. As a more acceptable version of the *cantinières*, they did not supply the men with alcohol, nor were they present on the battlefield (and unlike an unspecified number of *cantinières*, they did not take up arms alongside the soldiers).⁶⁸³ In this context, Marion was not as effective as these *marraines de guerre*, but she functioned as a comforting, patriotic figure at the heart of the action — sharing an emotional intimacy with soldiers whose *marraines* existed at a remove from them. *La Vivandière* did not portray battles — it showed two military reviews and a march to war, but the heart of its plot was the camaraderie of the army, and its function for some as a surrogate family.⁶⁸⁴

For civilian audiences, this was a cheerful take on a contemporary issue, and they were able to enjoy it with the same psychological distance which they generally benefited from as citizens who were only tangentially involved in the war. To soldiers, for whom Gheusi arranged free tickets, it hit closer to home, as an administrative officer working in Paris observed:

15 January [1915] - I took advantage of a snowy Sunday afternoon to relax my nerves and was given a free ticket thanks to M. Gheusi, so I went to the Opéra-Comique which played *La Vivandière* and the 'Marseillaise' was sung by Delna.

The hall was full, lots of officers, the injured, the soldiers. The artists performed perfectly, and when Delna sang 'Viens avec moi petit', it evoked an emotional call to arms. How many of the 'petits' have already left, and how many will return? The 'Marseillaise' with choir makes for a great effect. We stood listening in the religious silence and the whole theatre communed in a great impulse of

⁶⁸³ Cardoza, p. 223. Importantly, the *marraines de guerre* provided the soldiers with luxury items such as chocolate, which the *cantinières* had previously sold to them.

⁶⁸⁴ *Carmen* also depicts an auspicious military march (Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 130), but Don José's relationship with the army deteriorates to the point of his desertion in Act Two (and his subsequent crimes tallied with the image of a deserter), whereas *La Vivandière* showed the positive, ordered existence soldiers were meant to live.

patriotism. These are healthy performances which M. Gheusi has mounted, and they lend themselves well to the circumstances.⁶⁸⁵

Despite the presence of Marion's solemn hymn on the march to war in Act Two, which was supposedly tailor-made for Delna by Godard for the purpose of moving the audience, an upbeat aria resonated with the soldiers more strongly. 'Viens avec nous, petit' — Marion and the regiment's request that Georges joins them — was more effective and somehow more in line with their experiences: all of the soldiers recognised in this section of the opera their own naïveté when they joined themselves. He also called 'Viens avec nous, petit' 'Viens avec moi, petit', a common mislabelling of the piece. This mistake makes the number seem more personal — that the recruitment of Georges was undertaken by the maternal figure of Marion alone (rather than a whole regiment), by appealing directly to him, offering him a greater purpose in life. This brings the narrative closer to that of the Republican figure of Marianne asking young men to join her in the war, while highlighting the collective patriotism of the civilians, and the individual obligation felt by the soldiers.⁶⁸⁶

As a figure in French culture, Marianne was born during the French Revolution as a fictional military leader based on classical goddesses, perhaps stemming from the old image of France as a woman which existed in the *ancien régime*.⁶⁸⁷ The Republicans

⁶⁸⁵ '15 Janvier — Je profite d'une après-midi neigeuse de dimanche pour me détendre les nerfs et muni du billet de faveur dû à M. Gheusi je vais à l'Opéra-Comique entendre jouer la *Vivandière* et le chant de la *Marseillaise* par Delna. La salle est pleine, beaucoup d'officiers, de blessés, de soldats. Les artistes jouent à merveille, et quand Delna chante 'Viens avec moi petit', c'est une émotion générale. Combien de 'petits' sont aussi partis et combien en sont revenus. La *Marseillaise* avec chœur, fait grand effet. On l'écoute debout dans un silence religieux et toute la salle communique dans un grand élan de patriotisme. Ce sont de saines représentations qu'a monté M. Gheusi et qui se prêtent bien aux circonstances.' Author Unknown, *Les Archives de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Éditions et librairie, 1919–1924), pp. 1593–94. These performances were regular events, and Gheusi stated that he had admitted 25,000 military men into performances for free by the end of the war (p. 17).

⁶⁸⁶ Giroud states that Marion and Marcelline are representative of two types of female war symbols (patriot and grieving mother respectively), but Marion is the less subtle of the two, and the most obvious to her audience (Giroud, 'Un compositeur et son interprète — Bruneau et Delna', pp. 133–34).

⁶⁸⁷ Edward Berenson, 'Unifying the French Nation: Savorgnan de Brazza and the Third Republic', in *French Music, Culture, and National Identity, 1870–1939*, ed. Barbara L. Kelly (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008), pp. 17–39: p. 34 note 4; Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir. L'imagerie et la symbolique républicaine de 1880 à 1914* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), p. 134.

first began to suggest that Marianne (without her red Phrygian cap) be used as a symbol of the Third Republic in the 1870s, but it was only in the 1880s and early 1890s that she became popular again — just as Godard was composing *La Vivandière* for its Belgian premiere.⁶⁸⁸ She was not based on a real woman, but as Agulhon argued, she was the ‘permanent (symbolic) queen’ of France, balancing with the ‘transitory (real) monarch’, the president; she had no specific appearance or name (she was often referred to as La Liberté, La République or La France on monuments), but was recognisable as an iconic figure nonetheless.⁶⁸⁹ Marion is indisputably Marianne — she inspires men to go to war with her patriotism, which is strident to the point where her character appears one-dimensional for much of the first two acts. This characterisation is similar to that of the working-class title character in Alexandre Picot’s play *Marianne* (performed in the Odéon in 1892): she encourages her brother to fight for his *patrie*, and fires up the patriotism of the revolutionaries in her quarter. Additionally, Picot’s work celebrated a near-centenary of real-world events, much like *La Vivandière* may have premiered 100 years after the events of the Vendée revolts if Godard had not fallen ill.⁶⁹⁰ When depicting the polarising political and social landscape of the First Republic at such a distance from the events, it appears that placing a Marianne figure within the narrative — whether the aims of the work were more conservative like *La Vivandière*, or anarchist like *Marianne* — made sense of the violent chaos of that era: her patriotism functions as an anchor for other characters. *La Vivandière* was also not the only time that a Marianne figure was conflated with *cantinières*: Georges Montorgeuil used a *cantinière* as an updated Marianne for his children’s history book in 1897, which went through multiple editions.⁶⁹¹ Marianne’s age was never specified: while she was often depicted

⁶⁸⁸ Berenson, p. 18; Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), pp. 137–38.

⁶⁸⁹ Agulhon, pp. 9–10. This theory was based on Ernest Kantorowicz’s ‘King’s Two Bodies’ concept.

⁶⁹⁰ Agulhon, p. 181.

⁶⁹¹ Cardoza, p. 222.

as an adult woman, there were both positive and negative concepts of her as an older woman which reached their apex at the same time as the ‘aging’ of the *cantinières*’ popular image. A positive concept of an older Marianne was the ‘Marianne-mère’, a familiar, maternal and protecting force, but there was also the idea of an aging, outdated, pro-government Marianne of a former generation at the turn of the twentieth century.⁶⁹² A pamphlet for a nationalist candidate in Sceaux in 1902 claimed that there was now two republics: ‘Ours’, a young beautiful woman with a Phrygian cap and a naked breast, holding a flag between a soldier and a worker, and ‘Theirs’, an old cook in a large wrinkled Phrygian cap standing before the table of Law.⁶⁹³ This was a classic conflict of the generations and an attempt to reclaim the First Republic vision of Marianne, but the image of the old cook is very similar to the degenerate old cooks who distracted soldiers from their duty with alcohol that *cantinières* had supposedly become by the end of the nineteenth century.⁶⁹⁴ While there was never a real Marianne (her image coming from a muse or model of the artist each time she was depicted), it was not unusual to see real women gaining reputations as Marianne figures, as Augusta Holmès acquired and encouraged an image of herself as a type of adopted musical Marianne from the late 1870s, giving her an opportunity to avoid categorisation as a typical female composer.⁶⁹⁵ Adopting an image as a Marianne was similar to embracing a reputation as a muse — by conforming to an assumed motive, female artists of the Third Republic could be lauded for behaviour that was not part of the passive ideal. To once again return to Rieger’s argument on muses, this self-labelling raised them onto an ideological pedestal, but diminished the opportunity to diverge from their adopted image: a muse or a Marianne could destroy their whole image by attempting to broaden or alter the

⁶⁹² Agulhon, p. 284, p. 347.

⁶⁹³ Agulhon, p. 284.

⁶⁹⁴ Cardoza, pp. 212–13.

⁶⁹⁵ Henson, ‘Of Men, Women and Others: Exotic Opera in Late Nineteenth-Century France’, p. 100.

stereotype. This was why Delna's adoption of such an image was more successful than that of Holmès, for example; aside from a beautiful voice, there was little that was distinctive about Delna. She was not an overt, polarising advocate of any political or musical movements, and she established little in the way of a personality offstage. All of her patriotism was funnelled through her emotive interpretation of 'La Marseillaise', rather than any speeches or interviews that she gave — not for the first time in her career, her musical voice entirely eclipsed the person creating it.⁶⁹⁶ As a figurehead during a time of war, Delna's efforts did not go unnoticed in the opera house or beyond. She was rewarded for her patriotism not just by being given 'La Marseillaise' to sing with every performance of *La Vivandière* in the Opéra-Comique, but with the opportunity to take part in the official Bastille Day celebrations in Paris for the first time in her career in 1915. That day she sang 'La Marseillaise' (alongside other soloists) with the choirs of the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique.⁶⁹⁷

The appearance of a positive and patriotic opera in the Opéra-Comique's repertoire at the beginning of the war had undoubtedly bolstered the company's image through the first year of war-time performances, but as the first full year at war drew to a close, *La Vivandière* was removed from the regular schedule. The reason for the company pulling the opera was simple: its revival had only slowed the decline of Delna's career, and *La Vivandière* was no longer viable commercially (particularly as some of the performances had been free). Also, France, like many other countries, was becoming aware that the conflict was not the masculinity-restoring war that they had hoped for; on the contrary, it was becoming a massacre. While the war effort still dominated public discourse, there was more of a sense of fatigue than enthusiasm for war, and *La*

⁶⁹⁶ For example, the *Vétéran* report on the Bastille Day concert particularly notes her emotional investment in her interpretation of 'La Marseillaise'. Source: J.S., '14 Juillet 1915', *Le Vétéran* 20 July 1915, p. 10.

⁶⁹⁷ J.S., '14 Juillet 1915', *Le Vétéran* 20 July 1915, p. 10.

Vivandière became less and less appropriate to stage. This failure of propaganda did not stop Delna from taking the work elsewhere once her contract with the Opéra-Comique was completed; she sang in *La Vivandière* in both the Théâtre de la Gaîté and the Trianon-Lyrique from 1917 up to 1919, with the Théâtre de la Gaîté becoming her artistic home for the rest of the First World War. She returned to the Opéra-Comique in 1920, but she was not contracted to play Marion, with the one-season contract only allowing for a handful of performances as Orphée and Carmen. After the war, she rarely sang the role again, but the most popular image of her (as Orphée) had been replaced by that of Marion, and many of the reviews and articles about her included pictures of her as Marion if they included any at all.

Figure 3.3.2: Photograph of a younger Delna as Marion from a 1931 *La Rampe* article⁶⁹⁸



The opera's fortunes without the title role's *créatrice* were somewhat poor. Choudens continued to contact Godard's family regarding performances of his works after the First World War, but the Bibliothèque nationale de France holds only one pair of letters concerning *La Vivandière* after this war. In 1945, the publisher contacted M.

⁶⁹⁸ R.B., 'Marie Delna, ou L'École du Cœur', *La Rampe* 1 June 1931, p. 8.

Simonnet-Godard (the relative now in control of the rights) to seek permission for the company premiere of *La Vivandière* in the Strasbourg Municipal Opera's 1946–47 season as part of their 'Les Grandes Fêtes de la Libération et de l'Armistice' series, to which he acceded.⁶⁹⁹ The opera is rarely performed in the twenty-first century; it was broadcast in full as part of the Festival Radio France Montpellier on 24 July 2013, with Nora Gubisch as Marion, and this comprises the only full recording I have found.⁷⁰⁰ The Opéra-Comique's removal of the opera from the repertoire had heralded the end of an era — almost twenty-one years after Delna had first stepped onto the stage as Marion, she put to rest a character who had represented Marianne, a mother figure, and a propaganda figure, and her duty to Godard and his ambitions for a successful opera on a stage-funded stage.

3.4: Lucy Arbell and Jules Massenet

3.4.1: Arbell the self-constructed Muse

The final collaboration discussed in this chapter is technically very different to those of *Carmen* and *La Vivandière*, as Arbell was involved in the first productions of six of Massenet's operas across seven years, and claimed that she should have been cast in a further two. They first met in 1901 at the latest, when she was singing as Georgette Wallace on the salon circuit, but it appears to have taken an opera production, *Ariane* (1906), to bring them together as collaborators for the first time; coincidentally this was the only time that she did not depend on her Massenet connection to be cast in one of

⁶⁹⁹ Choudens, 'Lettre de Choudens à M. Simonnet-Godard 22 mai 1945' (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1945); M. Simonnet-Godard, 'Lettre de M. Simonnet-Godard à Choudens 28 mai 1945' (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1945).

⁷⁰⁰ Marie-Aude Roux, 'Fallait-il exhumer 'La Vivandière'? Non, mon général!', *Le Monde* 26 July 2013 <http://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2013/07/26/fallait-il-exhumer-la-vivandiere-non-mon-general_3454147_3246.html> [accessed 19 July 2016].

his operas.⁷⁰¹ The original plot of *Ariane* had a minor part for Arbell's character, Perséphone, but by the time the opera premiered, Perséphone was the dominant character of Act Four. According to Harding, Arbell directly asked Massenet for an expanded role (although this request has sometimes been attributed to Massenet's granddaughter) — Arbell couldn't let a career-making opportunity pass by and it marked the beginning of their working partnership.⁷⁰² This, much like Massenet's partnership with Sibyl Sanderson in the 1880s and 1890s, was initially well-received by the press, with many taking notice of Arbell for the first time, and others such as Arthur Pougin of *Le Ménestrel* reviewing her for the first time since her debut in October 1903:

What to say about Mlle Lucy Arbell in the role of Persephone? Truly a surprise. A large voice and real acting skill, to this point of declaiming that it is as good as that [found] in the Comédie-Française! Her success [in this role] was very clear.⁷⁰³

It also gave Arbell an opportunity for an encore every night with the aria 'Des roses! Des roses!', and an interviewer joked that she therefore had sung the role 120 instead of 60 times (which indicated both the size and popularity of the part).⁷⁰⁴

Their next collaboration, *Thérèse*, was a two-act opera set during the First Republic which ran to a little over an hour but held huge significance for Arbell's career. It was the first leading role that she premiered — albeit in the Opéra de Monte-Carlo. While he did not credit her with any large innovations in the plot, Massenet suggested in *Mes souvenirs* that Arbell's behaviour during a social gathering inspired *Thérèse*:

One summer morning in 1905 my great friend, Georges Cain, the eminent and eloquent historian of Old Paris, got together the beautiful, charming Mme. Georges Cain, Mlle. Lucy Arbell, of the Opéra, and a few others to visit what had once been the convent of the Carmelites in the Rue de Vaugirard. We had

⁷⁰¹ Laurent Bury, 'Lucy Arbell: la légataire contrariée', *Forumopera.com* 6 August 2012 <<http://www.forumopera.com/actu/lucy-arbell-la-legataire-contrariee>> [accessed 25 July 2014].

⁷⁰² James Harding, *Massenet* (London: Dent, 1970), p. 165.

⁷⁰³ 'Que dire de Mlle Lucy Arbell dans le rôle de Perséphone? Une surprise vraiment. Grande voix et véritable intelligence scénique, jusqu'à ce point de déclamer tout aussi bien qu'à la Comédie-Française! Son succès fut très vif.' Arthur Pougin, 'Semaine Théâtrale', *Le Ménestrel* 3 November 1906, p. 345.

⁷⁰⁴ Massenet, *My Recollections*, p. 252.

gone through the cells of the ancient cloister, seen the wells into which the blood-stained horde of Septembrists had thrown the bodies of the slaughtered priests, and we had come to the gardens which remain so mournfully famous for those frightful butcheries. Georges Cain stopped in the middle of his recital of these dismal events, and pointed out to us a white figure wandering alone in the distance. 'It is the ghost of Lucile Desmoulins,' he said. Poor Lucile Desmoulins so strong and courageous beside her husband on his way to the scaffold where she was so soon to follow him!

It was neither shade nor phantom. The white figure was very much alive! It was Lucy Arbelle who had been overcome by deep emotion and who had turned away to hide the tears. *Thérèse was already revealed*....⁷⁰⁵

After this supposed genesis of the story (if we take Massenet at his word), Massenet continued to build the work around Arbelle, even choosing a significant location in her family history as the basis for half of the scenery. By placing the action of Act One in a replica of Bagatelle House, which had associations with both Sir Richard Wallace and the line of the Marquis of Hertford (of whom Massenet stated she was a well-known relative), the plot of *Thérèse* had strong personal links to Arbelle specifically.⁷⁰⁶ These suggestions came from Massenet (for instance, the Bagatelle replica was a request from Massenet to *Thérèse's* stage designer) rather than from Arbelle directly, whose own approach to her second persona was inconsistent.⁷⁰⁷ The allusion in *Thérèse* to a former family seat in France could appear a cynical attempt on Arbelle's part to cash in on her family's history, but the references to her family in her career remained relatively obscure, with most promotion only tracing her biography back as far as her grandfather. It may have been because her link to the Marquis of Hertford was as part of an illegitimate line, but it is more likely that her approach to this was at the heart of her own

⁷⁰⁵ Massenet, *My Recollections*, pp. 254–55.

⁷⁰⁶ Massenet, *My Recollections*, p. 260. The reality of Arbelle's link to the Marquis of Hertford is tenuous — Sir Richard Wallace was once thought to be the illegitimate son of the fourth Marquis of the current line, but was later thought to be the son of the Marquis' mother and was thus only related to the family by marriage (Walter Armstrong, 'Wallace, Sir Richard (1818–1890)', *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Sidney Lee, Vol. 59 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1899), pp. 102–03). The family of the Marquis of Hertford (which the Wallaces claimed they were related to) is the Seymours, who descend from the first Earl of Hertford, Edward Seymour (1500–52), the brother of Jane Seymour (Henry VIII's third wife). Richard Wallace did purchase Bagatelle House during the nineteenth century, so if her family history was complicated, her link to the house was at least more easily verified.

⁷⁰⁷ Harding, *Massenet*, pp. 167–68.

type of self-mythologizing. While Gilbert and Gubar refer to a woman's pseudonym as 'a name of power, the mark of a private christening into a second self, a rebirth into linguistic primacy', Arbell knew that by subtly maintaining ties to her life as Georgette Wallace, she had more control over her own image.⁷⁰⁸ She did this by continuing to use it as her legal name and allowing *Le Figaro* to reveal her real name in their report of her debut:

Mlle Lucy Arbell, who makes her debut this evening at the Opéra in the role of Dalila in *Samson et Dalila*, is none other than Mlle Georgette Wallace, the granddaughter of the famous philanthropist. Tall, fair, exceedingly pretty, she is twenty-four years old, and gives, we can assure you, promises of a strong original talent.⁷⁰⁹

These shifts between Wallace and Arbell gave her a more effective balance of her on- and offstage personality than if she had stuck to only one of these personae. This conscious construction of her own image would resurface throughout her career (for example playing upon her public image as the faithful friend and muse of the composer after his death, and her second career as the patron of an orphans' choir following the First World War), but this was the closest she ever came to constructing a public persona with a history and a personality beyond her profession.

After *Thérèse's* minor success in the Opéra de Monte-Carlo in 1907, Arbell and Massenet collaborated on three more operas which premiered during his lifetime — *Bacchus* (1909), *Don Quichotte* (1910) and *Roma* (1912). Arbell thus appeared in every one of Massenet's late operas — which started to grate on several critics. *Don Quichotte* was a hit both in the Opéra de Monte-Carlo and the Théâtre de la Gaîté, but *Bacchus* was a critical and financial failure, and cancelled by the Opéra after only nine

⁷⁰⁸ Smart, 'The Lost Voice of Rosine Stoltz', p. 42.

⁷⁰⁹ 'Mlle Lucy Arbell, qui débute ce soir à l'Opéra dans le rôle de Dalila de *Samson et Dalila*, n'est autre que Mlle Georgette Wallace, la petite-fille du célèbre philanthrope. Grande, blonde, fort jolie, elle a vingt-quatre ans et donne, nous assure-t-on, les promesses d'un talent fort original.' Serge Basset, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* 23 October 1903, p. 3.

performances, while *Roma* (in both the Opéra de Monte-Carlo and the Opéra) fell out of the repertoire soon after Massenet's death. This growing distaste for Arbell is evident in reviews for three of the four Opéra and Opéra-Comique productions — *Thérèse* in the Opéra-Comique, and *Bacchus* and *Roma* in the Opéra. The reviews for *Roma* suggested that something was lacking in her performance — for example, that her acting disrupted her concentration on her singing:

Mlle Arbell is very moving in the role of Postumia. Maybe she has sacrificed too many of the musical effects for dramatic ones. She speaks almost as much as she sings, and her notes at times too systematically turn into moans and tragic gasps.⁷¹⁰

These reviews reflect a growing and wider concern that Arbell was not capable of achieving the balance between singing and acting required by a leading opera singer. She had been given every opportunity to do so — more than Galli-Marié or Delna, she was through Massenet capable of creating a varied personal repertoire that would flatter her voice and allow it to appear on a level with her acting abilities. However, many critics, especially those who were unimpressed with her perpetual presence in the premiere productions of Massenet's new operas could always identify this imbalance, but they could not agree on which of her talents was the weakest, as these reviews from the Opéra premiere of *Bacchus* attest:

Queen Amahelli has Mlle Arbell for an interpreter, a conscientious artist who fails, sadly, to match the richness of her voice. (*Le Gaulois*)⁷¹¹

Mlle Arbell, for whom the role of Amahelli is written, has the conviction and the voice; it is regrettable that she doesn't make better use of one or the other. (*Le Temps*)⁷¹²

⁷¹⁰ 'Mlle Arbell est très émouvante dans le rôle de Postumia. Peut-être a-t-elle trop sacrifié les effets musicaux aux effets dramatiques. Elle parle presque autant qu'elle chante, et ses notes deviennent parfois trop systématiquement des gémissements et des hoquets tragiques.' Marcel Habert, 'Premières Représentations', *La Presse* 26 April 1912, p. 2.

⁷¹¹ 'Celui de la reine Amahelli a pour interprète Mlle Lucy Arbell, artiste consciencieuse à qui fait, malheureusement, défaut la richesse de l'organe.' Fourcaud, 'Musique', *Le Gaulois* 6 May 1909, p. 3.

⁷¹² 'Mlle Arbell, pour qui fut écrit le rôle d'Amahelli, a de la conviction et de la voix; il est à regretter qu'elle ne fasse pas meilleur usage de l'une et de l'autre.' Pierre Lalo, 'La Musique', *Le Temps* 11 May 1909, p. 3.

Both Arbell and Massenet appear to have shrugged off these reviews, but one reviewer's remarks hit closer to home. As a former student of Massenet, Bruneau's disapproval of Arbell provoked him more than those of any of the other reviewers. Bruneau had worked personally with older mezzo-sopranos such as Deschamps-Jéhin and Delna, and held them both in high regard, but he found Arbell unimpressive. He made no secret of his dislike for Arbell, labelling her a 'pallid contralto' in a review of *Thérèse* which infuriated Massenet, and led to a confrontation in the foyer of a theatre between the two composers as Arbell watched.⁷¹³

Over time, some critics went beyond noting simple imbalances or flaws in her performances, and began insinuating that the partnership had become unhealthy and useless. Jean Chantavoine of *La revue hebdomadaire* implied in his review of *Thérèse* that the problems with Arbell were rooted in Massenet's fixation with his muse: 'Everyone knows that M. Massenet no longer wants, for any of his works, another female protagonist than Mlle Lucy Arbell; he is wrong'.⁷¹⁴ This statement, aside from being inaccurate (Arbell had only premiered two leading roles at this point), mirrored a review of *Bacchus* by H.-Jacques Parés, who was more frank in his opinion:

Mlle Arbell has a beautiful role and an unpleasant voice; the one does not agree with the other. M. Massenet sticks with this interpreter; he gives her a role in all of his works. Fetishism, habit or gratitude? Who knows! In all cases this is still an unfortunate collaboration.⁷¹⁵

⁷¹³ Harding, *Massenet*, p. 169.

⁷¹⁴ 'On sait que M. Massenet ne veut plus, pour aucune de ses œuvres, d'autre protagoniste féminine que Mlle Lucy Arbell: il a tort.' Jean Chantavoine, 'Chronique Musicale', *La revue hebdomadaire* June 1911, p. 579.

⁷¹⁵ 'Mlle Arbell a un beau rôle et une vilaine voix; l'un ne fait pas accepter l'autre. M. Massenet tient à cette interprète; il lui confie un emploi dans toutes ses pièces. Fétichisme, habitude, ou reconnaissance? Qui sait! En tous cas c'est encore une collaboration malheureuse.' H.-Jacques Parés, 'Musique: Premières Représentations', *La Critique indépendante* 15 May 1909, p. 2. The critic gave a similar evaluation of her skills two years later in *Don Quichotte* at the Théâtre de la Gaîté, calling her a 'lamentable' Dulcinée, 'without voice, without talent, without grace, she has nothing that justifies the Maître[Massenet]'s choice' ('Sans voix, sans talent, sans grâce, elle ne justifie en rien le choix du Maître.' H.-Jacques Parés, 'Musique', *La Critique indépendante* 15 January 1911, p. 2).

Parés' indication that it was perhaps Massenet's 'fetishism, habit or gratitude' that kept winning her roles, shows the formation of a reputation that had a historical basis — that of the undeserving singer. Arbell's reception history raises a serious issue if only the evidence contemporaneous to her is considered; while Galli-Marié and Delna were thought of as talented enough to merit their collaborations with composers as a part of their professional life, Arbell's limited repertoire and reputation during her career condemned her to a less flattering category: singers who needed male intervention to advance their careers. Singers like this had always existed; Anna Girò (c.1710–unknown) and Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741) had a similar working relationship, and Léon Pillet was said to have engineered the Opéra's repertoire to solely flatter Stoltz's voice during his directorship. They all also share the same flaw — their voices were not considered strong enough to make them into prima donnas — and they were all mezzo-sopranos. Arbell, like Girò and Stoltz, was seen to concentrate heavily on the acting side of roles, and few critics were impressed by her voice; she was also described as being very attractive.⁷¹⁶ This does not reflect any prevailing bias against mezzo-sopranos: Stoltz was succeeded by Viardot, one of the most respected mezzo-sopranos of her time, and Arbell and Delna were both present in the Théâtre de la Gaîté and the Opéra-Comique at the same time, but only Arbell stood out as a flawed performer. These singers do not appear to have achieved what can be perceived as independent success — while Arbell resembled the then-current *bête noire*, the New Woman, in her unerring focus on her career, almost her entire professional career was helped and shaped by a male composer.⁷¹⁷ However, what their careers really show is how so much of this genre

⁷¹⁶ Goldoni, Vivaldi's librettist, thought that Girò's voice was weak, but that she was attractive and a good actress, and Stoltz had a flawed and limited (but powerful) voice of about two octaves, but was an excellent actress who was highly skilled at declamation and considered to have a striking appearance. Michael Talbot, 'Vivaldi, Antonio, 3: Years of Travel', in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane L. Root <www.oxfordmusiconline.com> [accessed 7 October 2014]; Smart, 'The Lost Voice of Rosine Stoltz', pp. 47–50.

⁷¹⁷ The New Woman was a generally middle-class woman who chose a career over a life as a housewife, and engaged in relationships that were not intended to end in marriage. The French press was obsessed

was controlled by men: the vast majority of composers and directors were men, while most of the women in the opera house were leading or chorus singers. The only real difference between Arbell and singers such as Delna or Viardot is that in her case the intervention and career control by men was visible to the public. She later attempted to turn this visibility to her advantage by inverting their relationship in the public eye as what appeared to be a one-sided partnership transpired to have been mutually reliant.

This reliance meant that Arbell was part of both Massenet's personal and professional life, spending a lot of time with the composer and his acquaintances. As Massenet's current preferred singer, Arbell joined his social circle, as did her mother (most likely as Arbell was unmarried). The two women sometimes appear to have acted as barriers to meeting Massenet himself, as this 1908 letter from Gabriel Astruc (the president of the Société des Auteurs) suggests:

My dear Maître,

After our conversation yesterday, I could still maintain some doubts about the meaning of some of your lyrics. Mme and Mlle Arbell were charged with enlightening me. That leaves me to wait to be 'written to' by a man to whom I've always worn, to whom I still bear the greatest affection. This word, out of your mouth, and addressed to me is doubly painful. But when one accepts a task that is entrusted to me by the Société des Auteurs, of which I am the obedient and completely disinterested representative, one is there equally to receive the knocks. I gave to Mlle Lucy Arbell enough evidence of my devotion, and of my friendship, and of my admiration so that you do not have the tooth to doubt me.

Your deeply devoted

Gabriel Astruc.⁷¹⁸

with this type of woman in the 1890s and 1900s, pitting her against the '*vraie femme*', a retiring and childlike woman who had no interest in current issues or debates who was espoused by the press as the ideal woman (Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 3–7; William Gibbons, *Building the Operatic Museum: Eighteenth-Century Opera in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013), p. 15).

⁷¹⁸ 'Mon cher Maître, Après notre conversation d'hier, je pourrais encore conserver quelques doutes sur la signification de certains de vos paroles. Mme et Mlle Arbell se sont chargées de m'éclairer. Il me reste donc à attendre d'être 'rédigé' par un homme à qui j'ai toujours porté, à qui je porte encore la plus grande affection. Ce mot, venant de votre bouche, et s'adressant à moi est doublement douloureux. Mais quand on accepte une tâche comme celle que m'a confiée la Société des Auteurs, dont je suis le représentant docile et entièrement désintéressé, on est là également pour recevoir des coups. J'ai donné à Mlle Lucy Arbell assez de preuves de mon dévouement, et de mon amitié, et de mon admiration pour

Astruc was diplomatic about Arbell and her mother's behaviour, but the last line suggests that he needed to be patient with her if he wanted to remain in Massenet's good graces. At the time of Astruc's letter, Arbell and Massenet were most likely in constant contact, as Massenet had just finished the orchestral score of *Bacchus* and she had a significant role as Queen Amahelli — if anyone wanted to get Massenet's attention, impressing Arbell was a good bet.⁷¹⁹ There are also several letters from admirers of Massenet's music in the Bibliothèque nationale de France's archive which specifically mention Arbell's performances in operas, even if she was not playing the leading role (for example, Gustave Dreyfus wrote in a letter of 1912 that he would go and applaud Arbell in *Roma* when he returned to Paris), but the admiration is clearly for Massenet rather than for his interpreter.⁷²⁰

Despite this growing opposition to the partnership amongst friends and colleagues alike, Massenet saw Arbell as a true artist in the old tradition and this, to him, apparently justified any behaviour in her that others judged grasping or overambitious. This perception permeates his memoirs, with most mentions of Arbell being followed by a variation of 'that true artiste'. As he broke off the collaboration in the final weeks of his life, and even then only in private, many would continue to see Arbell as a muse serving her master until she broke away from this trope by attempting to take control of his posthumous reception. He maintained that Arbell 'is not only a singer, she is an artist in the most exalted and purest meaning of the word', but objectively, it is hard to see how skilled she was as a musical performer, especially as she did not leave any

que vous n'ayez pas la dent de douter de moi. Votre profondément dévoué, Gabriel Astruc'. Mathias Auclair, 'Massenet et les théâtres', *La Belle Époque de Massenet*, ed. by Christophe Ghristi and Mathias Auclair (Montreuil: Gourcuff Gradenigo, 2011), pp. 29–55: p. 38.

⁷¹⁹ According to the orchestral manuscript of *Bacchus*, Massenet finished the score on 12 May 1908, the same day as Astruc's letter (Jules Massenet, *Bacchus orchestral manuscript* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, 1908), p. 1575).

⁷²⁰ Gustave Dreyfus, 'Lettre autographe signée de Gustave Dreyfus à Jules Massenet, 9 août 1912' (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1912). The letter only refers to her as 'lui', but the notice on Gallica verifies that this 'her' is Arbell rather than Kuznetsova (the leading soprano).

recordings.⁷²¹ While there was much to suggest that a lot of Arbell's success was entirely based on her partnership with Massenet, she was determined and ambitious both as a singer and an actress — for instance, she learned to play the guitar for *Don Quichotte* instead of simply mimicking playing one onstage (the option that most other singers chose).⁷²² Her voice fell into the 'mezzo-contralto' category, more likely due to the extended lower range she possessed rather than an affinity with the timbre of the voice type (it is likely that her range extended from e–b'', if not further).⁷²³ Most of the roles Massenet wrote for Arbell were for a contralto, with the exclusion of Colombe in *Panurge*, which is one of the final roles that he wrote for her. As a repertoire mezzo-soprano in the Opéra, she sang as Amneris, Dalila, Fricka and Maddalena (*Rigoletto*), but she was also (for a low-voiced singer of that era) unusually skilled at florid singing, as Massenet's quotation from Chapter One showed.⁷²⁴ He considered Arbell to be a contralto, but the move towards mezzo-soprano roles as Arbell entered her thirties suggests her voice was becoming better suited to the mezzo-soprano tessitura of her earliest roles, and had Massenet lived for longer, she probably would have premiered several outright mezzo-soprano roles, although it is unlikely that any of them would have been leading roles in the Opéra or the Opéra-Comique. While the operas she sang in are rarely performed, one thing is clear: Massenet believed she deserved the opportunity to showcase her voice in a way that many lower-voiced singers were not allowed to by other composers, and she has a tangible legacy within Massenet's *œuvre*.

Arbell, as one of Massenet's closest friends, was entrusted with manuscript copies of several of his operas which have survived to this day — she (or her estate)

⁷²¹ Harding, *Massenet*, p. 173.

⁷²² Massenet, *My Recollections*, p. 276.

⁷²³ Elizabeth Forbes, Ellen T. Harris, Owen Jander, J.B. Steane and Gerald Waldman, 'Mezzo-soprano [mezzo]', in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane L. Root <www.oxfordmusiconline.com> [accessed 4 March 2013] (3. 20th century).

⁷²⁴ Massenet, *My Recollections*, p. 276.

donated her personal copies of *Ariane* (which was a Christmas present in 1905) and *Bacchus* to the Bibliothèque nationale de France, as well as a draft score of *Thérèse*. I have been unable to locate her personal manuscript scores for *Don Quichotte*, *Roma*, *Panurge*, *Cléopâtre* or *Amadis* (and as the next section will elaborate, the loss of the *Cléopâtre* score in particular is significant). The *Ariane* score's status as a Christmas present also suggests that it was not the copy that she brought to rehearsals, as it is relatively empty of marks on the music and around the edges of the pages (other scores of this era held by the Bibliothèque nationale de France include small alterations and markings with red pencil). It does however hold a comment on one of Perséphone's scenes, where Massenet included a note from October 1905 which stated that he had inserted a page of orchestral music for Mlle Georgette Wallace, and that he 'had written it after her impression'.⁷²⁵ The draft score of *Thérèse* was also purely intended as a gift: its clear usage as a drafting book for the opera made it obsolete for day-to-day use in rehearsals. It was designed as a memento of the project, which Massenet gifted to her with this inscription on the first page:

To Mademoiselle Georgette Wallace, to whom 'Thérèse' is dedicated by the authors. These pages were written under your inspiration; you must have them as a fond souvenir of those minutes, of those hours, of those months that were yours. To Mademoiselle Lucy Arbell of the Opéra, our beautiful and vibrant collaborator. J. Massenet.⁷²⁶

Massenet's choice of a double dedication to both Wallace and Arbell was more of an artistic flourish than an attempt to keep up the pretence that they were two separate women. Still, the linguistic difference is interesting: Wallace was an inspiration, and

⁷²⁵ Jules Massenet, *Ariane manuscript score* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1905), p. 427. Massenet's comment was: 'j'ai écrit cela d'après son impression'.

⁷²⁶ 'À Mademoiselle Georgette Wallace à qui 'Thérèse' est dédiée par les auteurs. Ces pages ont été écrites sous votre inspiration; vous devez les posséder en souvenir ému de ces minutes, de ces heures, de ces mois qui ont été vôtres. À Mademoiselle Lucy Arbell de l'Opéra, notre belle et vibrante collaboratrice. J. Massenet.' Jules Massenet, *Thérèse piano-vocal manuscript* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1906), p. 7.

Arbell was a collaborator — suggesting that the society lady was his muse, and the artist was his equal.

Notwithstanding his promising dedication to her in the *Thérèse* manuscript, and a mention of her influence on a scene and a small personal note from Massenet on one page in *Ariane*, Arbell's scores have no notes or comments that can be traced directly to her, or refer to her partnership with Massenet — her scores are identical to any other manuscript used for rehearsals from this period in Massenet's life.⁷²⁷ Many of Massenet's collaborators in the least signed the manuscript of the score with their characters' names, but as a long-term collaborator of his, Arbell is conspicuous in her near-absence.⁷²⁸ The only manuscript score which Arbell signed was that of *Thérèse*, but this is understandable as it was the only opera that was strictly designed as a star vehicle for her (for example, *Don Quichotte* was written to showcase Feodor Chaliapin's talents as much as hers). This lack of physical evidence of Arbell's connection to these scores is disappointing, but it matches the rest of the narrative of her working relationship with Massenet. She is always mentioned and quoted by someone else, and she typifies Rieger's concept of the muse — while Massenet commented on her influence as an inspiration, she is often presented as a passive figure, even though some mediated accounts of her behaviour (for example, Harding's) suggest that she had an assertive or even forceful personality.

In *Roma*, there is one change to the orchestral score (which was more likely to be used in the final weeks of the rehearsal process) which was not directly attributed to

⁷²⁷ This comment is based on consultation of orchestral manuscripts of *Ariane*, *Thérèse*, *Bacchus*, *Don Quichotte* and *Roma*, as well as the piano-vocal scores of *Thérèse* and *Bacchus*. The note on the *Ariane* score (on page 473 of the Bibliothèque nationale de France PDF of the score) is an unclear mention of *Werther* at 7.30 on Monday, suggesting that Massenet gave her coaching on Charlotte during the *Ariane* rehearsal process.

⁷²⁸ Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century*, p. 121. Calvé was an exception; in the *La Navarraise* score, she signed herself as 'his unworthy interpreter' instead, and she only signed her name on the *Sapho* score.

Arbell, but was most likely at her instigation. In Act Four, Arbell's character Postumia sings an e, which is the lowest note that Arbell ever sang on stage, but according to the score, the note was originally a e', which was then crossed out and transposed down an octave.⁷²⁹ While Massenet himself may have made the suggestion (and the final decision), it is unlikely that a composer would write in such a low note for a singer without their feedback. Also, Massenet's memoirs support the idea that she was proactive and outspoken in the rehearsal process for at least one of the operas, recalling an episode from the early rehearsals for *Thérèse* as follows in *Mes souvenirs*:

During the first reading Lucy Arbell, a true artist, stopped me as I was singing the last scene, where Thérèse gasps with horror as she sees the awful cart bringing her husband, André Thorel, to the scaffold and cries with all her might, 'Vive le Roi!' so as to ensure that she shall be reunited with her husband in death. Just then, our interpreter, who was deeply affected, stopped me and said in a burst of rapture, 'I can never *sing* that scene through, for when I recognize my husband who has given me his name and saved Armand de Clerval, I ought to lose my voice. So I ask you to *declaim* all of the ending of the piece.'⁷³⁰

Yet, while this excerpt shows that Arbell's keen dramatic sense prompted major alterations to the entire final scene, Massenet refused to publically acknowledge her contribution as anything more concrete than 'inspiration'. His mention of her as a *collaboratrice* in the *Thérèse* score appears encouraging, but she was in reality another in a long line of *collaboratrices* — for instance, Massenet used the term to describe Calvé during the 1890s when she premiered the leading roles in *La Navarraise* and *Sapho* for him, and she never used this to make any greater claims on her two roles.⁷³¹ Hence, it is not hard to see why Arbell opted to focus instead on his legally binding promises to her in his letters when she was fighting for her rights over *Cléopâtre* — if

⁷²⁹ Jules Massenet, *Roma orchestral manuscript* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1912), p. 217.

⁷³⁰ Massenet, *My Recollections*, p. 261. This happened as Massenet was playing through the final scene in rehearsal to show the cast how he wanted it sung. Massenet's recollection of the process here may be slightly confused; according to the first draft score of *Thérèse*, several bars were composed with notes, but were crossed out and replaced with the declamation marks before Massenet had finished setting that text (Massenet, *Thérèse piano-vocal manuscript*, p. 285).

⁷³¹ Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century*, p. 121.

even Massenet would have disputed her view of herself as an owner of the work, a court would certainly have thrown out the case.

Her concurrent reframing of herself as a passive muse figure rather than an active collaborator during this case worked, because there was a visible aspect of ‘inspiration’ in their collaboration. Harding credited Arbell with reigniting the creative spark that had been missing from Massenet’s operas for years, as *Thérèse* marked the point at which Massenet stopped the lazy reuse of techniques that had made his older operas popular.⁷³² However, Arbell and Massenet’s working relationship is nowhere near as idealised as the one between Sibyl Sanderson and Massenet. What perhaps made the collaboration with Arbell appear more ridiculous to many was the age difference — Massenet was forty years older than Arbell (in comparison with the twenty-two-year age gap with Sanderson), and the general perception of this relationship was that Arbell was taking advantage of an old man’s infatuation. This was highlighted by the use of the word ‘fetishism’ in Parés’ review, as the term had specific connotations of sexual desire and obsession in *fin-de-siècle* psychology, and was seldom used to suggest anything else.⁷³³ This perception has even influenced the modern interpretation of his works with Arbell — a 2014 production of *Don Quichotte* ‘reverts’ the opera’s main characters to their true forms — Don Quichotte becomes Massenet, and Dulcinée becomes Arbell.⁷³⁴ French critics of the early twentieth century did not need to watch a heavy-handed meta-narrative of this partnership to conclude that the relationship was inappropriate. To this end, Massenet’s family (most likely following the 1914 court case) appears to have

⁷³² Harding, *Massenet*, p. 166.

⁷³³ Stephen C. Downes, *The Muse as Eros: Music, Erotic Fantasy, and the Male Creativity in the Romantic and Modern Imagination* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 179 note 37.

⁷³⁴ George Hall, ‘Don Quichotte Review — Meta-Operatic Twist on Massenet’, *The Guardian* 22 June 2014 <<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/jun/22/don-quichotte-review-grange-park-opera>>. Hall’s review is critical of this production as he sees it as heavy-handed and clumsy – for example, it uses the sheet music of *The Rite of Spring* as a prop to symbolise Massenet’s struggle with modernism in spite of Massenet’s death occurring nine months before its premiere.

destroyed Arbell and Massenet's correspondence or else not released it to the public, as the Bibliothèque nationale de France holds no letters or even calling cards between them (perhaps tellingly, there are no letters from Sanderson either). While the relative lack of documents between Arbell and Massenet could be explained by the telephone, which Massenet used from 1906 at the latest, the total lack of documents suggests that items were lost or destroyed.⁷³⁵ Much like Malherbe's interpretation of Galli-Marié and Bizet's relationship, there is a sense of revisionist history in the need to emphasise male creativity and excise her contributions in her biography — Arbell was either the muse who gave Massenet back the inspiration he lost after the death of his previous muse, or a transgressive and cynical woman who used Massenet to advance her career. It does not matter how good her voice was or how good an actress she could be, or even how she refreshed Massenet's perspective on composition — this collaboration could never be interpreted positively, regardless of her actual behaviour towards the composer.

On Arbell's side of this partnership, it was important that she remained on good terms with the composer, because she had no legal right to the roles by herself. The granting of performance rights to an opera company was often brokered by the composer's publisher, although the composer could have been involved if they had the standing and experience that Massenet had. As mentioned in Chapter One, casting was the company's prerogative, and bringing in external singers cost extra money in new contracts which many companies would prefer to avoid. By joining Massenet's social circle and becoming his favourite singer, Arbell found a way to get into new companies (such as the Opéra-Comique in 1911 for *Thérèse*) and gain guaranteed new roles, because Massenet, as one of France's most successful and respected living composers, had some control over rights and casting in regards to his own works. Massenet thus

⁷³⁵ Harding, *Massenet*, p. 167.

used his status as *le maître* of French music to give Arbell roles in all of his operas from 1906 to his death, although as a small mercy to the companies involved, they were rarely leading roles: this set-up made the casting of the opera easier for the company and avoided discomfiting their intended leading female singer. This was very convenient for Arbell when Massenet was alive and she was in favour, but without any claim to the copyright of the work such as a co-writing credit, she was in a vulnerable position. There were few Third-Republic singers who had any such claims on works — while Victor Capoul turned to writing libretti in latter part of his career, most were strictly kept in the position of an employee of a company: any money that they earned was a pre-ordained amount that was part of a contract, and there was no specific legal attachment between a singer and a role, even if they were its creator or its best-known interpreter. A singer's continuing presence in a role in any company was based on the favour of either the management, or the royalty holders of the work, whether they were the composer or their families following the composer's death. The favour of the composers' families was used by Galli-Marié and Delna for *Carmen* and *Marion* respectively, but Arbell's only advocate was Massenet himself.

In relation to the length of their partnership, the breakdown of Massenet's relationship with Arbell was extremely swift. As his health deteriorated during the summer of 1912, Arbell began to pressure Massenet to write two legally binding letters (to supplement one for *Amadis* in January) which would give her the performance rights to the title roles in *Cléopâtre* and *Amadis* (with *Panurge* already under contract with the Théâtre de la Gaîté, these were the only unperformed operas left). Harding described the 'break' in detail in his biography of Massenet:

Gradually Massenet himself began to understand her tactics. He saw with bitter clarity how, at each of his illnesses, she had taken advantage of his weakness and played upon the confusion of a sick man to fulfil her increasingly exorbitant demands. One day he was speaking to a friend in the presence of Lucy Arbell.

The latter, with a proprietorial air, gave an unasked opinion about some private matter. ‘Massenet was furious,’ said the friend later, ‘shut her up abruptly and threw her a look of hatred such as I had never associated with him before.’ He quickly recovered and treated her from then on with elaborate politeness. But his feeling for Lucy Arbell, whom once he had adored as another Sibyl Sanderson, was now changed into malevolence. He never forgave her.⁷³⁶

While this was not necessarily meant to be a permanent break between the two musicians, Massenet avoided her for the rest of his life, and refused to let her see him in his final days. This appears to have been a private argument — it was not mentioned in the court case, and the translator of *Mes souvenirs*, H. Villiers Barnett, addressed the book ‘to Lucy Arbell, consummate dramatic artist and greatest contralto singer of our time, in affectionate admiration I dedicate this English version of her beloved master’s work’ in 1920, in spite of the events of 1913–14, and 1919–20.⁷³⁷ In the end, it was Massenet’s wife and daughter who would make a public break with the singer, as they were exposed to the complicated legal situation that Massenet’s devotion to his muse created.

3.4.2: *Le procès de Mlle Lucy Arbell — the fight for Cléopâtre and Amadis*

Massenet’s death in August 1912, whether it preceded a legal withdrawal of the performance rights of his works from Arbell or not, complicated the premieres of two of his operas — *Cléopâtre*, and to a lesser extent *Amadis* — both of which were to be performed with Arbell in the title role. Raoul Gunsbourg, the director of the Opéra de Monte-Carlo, had obtained the right to mount *Amadis* directly from Massenet, but had yet to schedule or cast the opera. Arbell was most likely too busy with *Panurge* in Paris to pursue Gunsbourg over *Amadis*, but she did attempt to pitch a production of *Cléopâtre* to the directors of the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique without success and in 1913,

⁷³⁶ Harding, *Massenet*, pp. 193–94.

⁷³⁷ Massenet, *My Recollections*, dedication page.

Gunsbourg complicated matters further. While Arbell was in Paris, he obtained the rights to stage *Cléopâtre* from Heugel, Massenet's publisher, and premiered the opera with the soprano Maria Kuznetsova in the title role on 23 February 1914.⁷³⁸ However, he underestimated Arbell's professional and personal investment in this opera. Within days of the production announcement in December 1913 Arbell filed a civil suit against him, Heugel, Henri Cain and Louis Payen (the librettists of *Cléopâtre*), and Massenet's widow Constance and his daughter Juliette (the recipients of his royalties) for the lost income from this production, and to secure the right to control the casting of the title roles of both *Cléopâtre* and *Amadis*. This case has been looked upon dismissively by Massenet biographers such as Harding and Irvine, but I contest that both its success and its coverage in the press show that this was taken far more seriously than most would believe.

While this would have been a scandalous situation for many composers' families, most newspapers showed no interest in this case — all but a few of Massenet's works had been declining in popularity even before his death, and Arbell was not a well-known singer. *Le Matin* took some notice of the case, and produced a front-page article (complete with pictures of Arbell and Massenet) soon after the lawsuit was announced, which included this quotation from Arbell:

You'll see that I'm very sorry, Mlle Arbell told us, about the stir made by this case. Believe me, I'd rather not have to intervene in this already sensitive issue. But I have always been honest and decent, and nothing will stop me from doing what I consider to be my duty. The *maître*, in his final wishes, formally designated me as the interpreter of the roles of *Amadis* and *Cléopâtre*. He gave the right to stage *Amadis* to M. Gunsbourg. *Cléopâtre* was destined for the Opéra or the Opéra-Comique. But M. Heugel has authorised M. Gunsbourg to stage *Cléopâtre* in Monte-Carlo, with Mlle Kousnetzoff as the interpreter. They're playing on a foreign stage a work that was reserved for the French stage. They have taken from me a role that was specially written for me, and this role, for [a]

⁷³⁸ This was not the first time that a publisher had sold a composer's work without permission from him or his family — Reyer's publisher Choudens was able to license *Salammbô* to the Rouen Théâtre des Arts without Reyer's input in 1890 (Clair Rowden, 'Decentralisation and Regeneration at the Théâtre des Arts, Rouen, 1889–1891', *Revue de Musicologie* Vol. 94, No. 1 (2008), pp. 139–80: p. 162).

contralto, has been given to a soprano. All of this was done without anyone telling me. I do not speak as if they have offended me in these proceedings. I have but one sole preoccupation: defending the work of the *maître* and carrying out his final wishes. I have asked the barrister M. Busson-Billault to defend this cause. All honest people, I am sure, will take my side.⁷³⁹

Arbell's statement was entirely designed to portray her as being in the right, and as the only one who respected Massenet's final wishes. She also couched her speech in language that suggested the situation forced her to act, e.g. 'I'd rather not have to intervene [...] [but] nothing will stop me from doing what I consider to be my duty'. By declaring that she was fulfilling an obligation, she not only presented the defendants of the case as remiss in this regard towards Massenet, but she also presented herself as a passive, well-behaved woman of the Republic who in no way resembled the overambitious singer described in reviews and maligned by Massenet's friends and relatives. With this addition to her already well-crafted image, she assumed the role of a concerned muse and pleaded to the legal system that the legacy of her working relationship with Massenet was in danger. Knowing that she was pitching her case to a French audience (although the case would be heard in two countries), she heightened the stakes further by pandering to national insecurities and playing up the issue of a French work being performed on a foreign stage.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁹ 'Vous me voyez très peinée, nous a répondu Mlle Arbelle, de tout le bruit fait autour de cette affaire. Croyez bien que j'aurais préféré ne pas avoir à intervenir dans une question aussi délicate. Mais j'ai toujours été franche et brave, et rien ne m'empêchera d'accomplir ce que je considère être mon devoir. Le maître, dans ses dernières volontés, m'a formellement désignée comme l'interprète des rôles d'Amadis et de Cléopâtre. Il avait accordé à M. Gunsbourg le droit de monter *Amadis*. *Cléopâtre* était destinée à l'Opéra ou à l'Opéra-Comique. Or voici que M. Heugel autorise M. Gunsbourg à jouer *Cléopâtre* à Monte-Carlo, avec pour interprète Mlle Kousnetzoff. On joue sur une scène étrangère un œuvre réservée à une scène française. On m'enlève un rôle spécialement écrit pour moi, et ce rôle, pour contralto, est distribué à un soprano. Tout cela a été fait sans qu'on m'en ait même avisée. Je ne parle pas de ce qu'il y a de blessant pour moi dans ce procédé. Je n'ai qu'une seule préoccupation: défendre l'œuvre du maître et faire respecter ses dernières volontés. J'ai prié M. le bâtonnier Busson-Billault de défendre cette cause. Tous les honnêtes gens, j'en suis sûre, seront avec moi.' Author Unknown, 'Défense de jouer du Massenet inédit sans Mlle Lucy Arbelle', *Le Matin* 12 December 1913, p. 1.

⁷⁴⁰ As mentioned in Chapter One, this was a problem that had occurred repeatedly throughout the Third Republic as the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique had refused to perform works by well-known and new composers alike.

While she technically demanded ownership of two roles, Cléopâtre was the most important to Arbell. Not only had she already lost income on the role, but she also declared that the defendants had disrespected Massenet's wishes in another way — by changing the score. Arbell claimed that she had found 288 separate changes to the score in her testimony; these were ostensibly so that Kuznetsova could sing the role (even though it appears as a mezzo-soprano role in the piano-vocal score), but it raises the question of how the role was originally written.⁷⁴¹ Harding suggested that Cléopâtre is vocally very similar to Thaïs, with similar vocal lines and intervals, and this may have been why — it was easier for the composer who did the alterations to adapt from a previous role than to attempt to imitate Massenet directly.⁷⁴² However, Arbell only verbally claimed that these changes were made — failing to present her copy of the score to the court or the detailed list of changes, she simply stated that it was no longer the same role as the one that Massenet had written for her. She indicated that it was meant to be a contralto role at first, but it is unlikely that she would only find 288 changes across the entire score if all of Cléopâtre's lines had to be transposed (and probably in the case of duets or ensemble pieces, multiple characters' vocal lines to avoid clashes) in their entirety.

The case reached the civil courts of Monaco in February 1914, and was ongoing at the time of *Cléopâtre's* premiere; however, the Monaco court only dealt with Arbell's claim against Gunsbourg — the rest of the dispute was thrashed out in Paris.⁷⁴³ After a year and a half of using the letters to try to convince the directors of the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique of their obligations to Massenet to stage the works with her as the lead, Arbell produced them in full for both courts as proof that she was the injured party in

⁷⁴¹ Demar Irvine, *Massenet: A Chronicle of his Life and Times* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1994), p. 303.

⁷⁴² Harding, *Massenet*, p. 185. I have been unable to establish the identity of the composer who made the changes.

⁷⁴³ Author Unknown, 'Dernières Nouvelles', *Le Temps* 20 February 1914, p. 6.

the dispute and to argue that they essentially constituted a type of will. The wording of the letters suggests that their function was as a strict order from Massenet to the companies stating that these roles were for Arbell alone, but the first letter shows Massenet to have been in a more generous mood than in the other two letters:

I designate, absolutely, to create the role of Amadis, Mlle Lucy Arbell of the Opéra.

This remarkable artist will create this role and sing in the performances which follow, in the theatre that will play *Amadis*, [which has a] libretto by M. Jules Claretie, of the Academie française. I sign this declaration in case of my death and whether the work is presented in my lifetime, or after my death.

J. MASSENET (Paris, 18 January 1912)⁷⁴⁴

The role of Amadis will be created by Mlle Lucy Arbell, 10, avenue de l'Alma, Paris. I designate her for this creation in Monte-Carlo and Paris and also in the other theatres which will play it in the near future and then for the rest of the performances.

J. MASSENET (29 May 1912)⁷⁴⁵

The role of Cléopâtre was written for Mlle Lucy Arbell, 10, avenue de l'Alma, Paris. I designate her for the creation of this role and the performances which follow of *Cléopâtre*.

J. MASSENET (Paris, 29 May 1912)⁷⁴⁶

As well as producing these letters, Busson-Billaud stated that Massenet had used the terms 'your role', 'your creation' and 'your scene' in other correspondence relating to the two roles. The barrister for Massenet's family and Payen, Maurice Bernard, recognised that these letters did demonstrate Massenet's desire to see Arbell in these

⁷⁴⁴ 'Je désigne d'une façon absolue, pour la création du rôle d'Amadis, Mlle Lucy Arbell, de l'Opéra. Cette remarquable artiste créera ce rôle et chantera les représentations qui suivront, dans le théâtre où l'on jouera *Amadis*, poème de M. Jules Claretie, de l'Académie française. Je signe cette déclaration en cas de ma mort et si l'ouvrage est représenté soit de mon vivant, soit après ma mort. J. MASSENET (Paris, 18 January 1912)'. Author Unknown, 'Tribunaux', *Le Matin* 20 February 1914, p. 2.

⁷⁴⁵ 'Le rôle d'Amadis sera créé par Mlle Lucy Arbell, 10, avenue de l'Alma, Paris. C'est elle que je désigne pour cette création à Monte-Carlo et à Paris et aussi dans les autres théâtres qui joueraient aussitôt et puis pour la suite des représentations. J. MASSENET (29 May 1912)'. Author Unknown, 'Tribunaux', *Le Matin* 20 February 1914, p. 2.

⁷⁴⁶ 'Le rôle de Cléopâtre a été écrit pour Mlle Lucy Arbell, 10, avenue de l'Alma, à Paris. C'est elle que je désigne pour la création de ce rôle et les représentations qui suivront de cet ouvrage de *Cléopâtre*. J. MASSENET (Paris, 29 May 1912)'. Author Unknown, 'Tribunaux', *Le Matin* 20 February 1914, p. 2.

roles, but stated this was not enough, citing the Parisian opera companies in his argument:

The produced acts, he said in summary, did not constitute in any way either a contract, or a will. There was a desire expressed by M. Massenet, but [just] a simple desire. The directors of the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique refuse to accept Mlle Lucy Arbell as an interpreter.⁷⁴⁷

This was supported by letters from the directors, which were procured by Heugel:

M. Heugel, Massenet's publisher, placed two letters into evidence: one from MM. Messager and Broussan, the other from M. Albert Carré; the directors of the Opéra wrote that they 'give up on staging *Cléopâtre* in light of the difficulties raised by the issue of the leading role' and the director of the Opéra-Comique writes 'that he will only receive the piece on the condition that he is free to assign the roles to his troupe, without engaging anyone'.⁷⁴⁸

These refusals showed how reliant Arbell was on Massenet's influence and favour — once he was dead, she had no way of getting works performed through her own efforts, or demanding a leading role she had never performed before, and she found that her perceived lack of independence worked against her. While *Amadis* was tied up in Monte-Carlo, Arbell should have been in an ideal position to negotiate with her Parisian employers for *Cléopâtre*, but unlike Galli-Marié or Delna, she lacked the atypical influence that they had acquired through playing their roles and the directors felt free to ignore her, which allowed Heugel to give Gunsbourg permission to stage *Cléopâtre* with the Opéra de Monte-Carlo. Having exhausted all of the usual routes towards getting a role, now her only option was to hope that the courts of one or both countries saw her as a helpless muse victimised by her composer's relatives and colleagues.

⁷⁴⁷ 'Les actes produits, dit-il en substance, ne constituent en aucune façon soit un contrat, soit un testament. Il y a là un désir exprimé par M. Massenet, mais un simple désir. Les directeurs de l'Opéra et de l'Opéra-Comique refusent d'accepter Mlle Lucy Arbell comme interprète.' Author Unknown, 'Tribunaux', *Le Matin* 20 February 1914, p. 2.

⁷⁴⁸ 'M. Heugel, éditeur de Massenet, a bien versé aux débats deux lettres: l'une de MM. Messager et Broussan, l'autre de M. Albert Carré; les directeurs de l'Opéra écrivent qu'ils 'renoncent à monter *Cléopâtre* en présence des difficultés soulevées par la question du rôle principal' et le directeur de l'Opéra-Comique écrit: 'qu'il ne veut recevoir la pièce qu'à la condition d'être libre de distribuer les rôles à sa troupe, sans engager personne'.' Georges Claretie, 'Gazette des Tribunaux', *Le Figaro* 13 March 1914, p. 5.

Surprisingly, the judges of Monaco and Paris found in favour of Arbell, and the Parisian judge — who gave the final verdict — awarded her 30,000 francs. The court reporter from *The Times* did not truly regard this as a victory, as it was not won against all of the defendants:

The prima donna was non-suited in the action which she simultaneously brought before the Court at Monaco, but the First Chamber of the Civil Tribunal of the Seine has given a verdict in her favour, assessing damages at £1,200 [30,000 francs]. In its judgement, however, the Court only admits the liability of the heirs of Massenet.⁷⁴⁹

The Times' report was misleading, as what Regnault, a judge in Monaco, and Bricourt, the Parisian judge, had done was more complicated than only selecting Constance and Juliette Massenet as the liable parties. Arbell won her case against the Massenets by proving that the letters were codicils to Massenet's will and this was included in the judgement given on 5 March by Regnault, and 12 March by Bricourt — this was a matter that therefore only concerned the beneficiaries of the will. As for the comment on the suit in Monaco, Arbell had failed to block the production, but a judgement was made by the Ministère Public of Monaco.⁷⁵⁰ The Parisian judgement was far more in-depth, and it was Bricourt who confirmed Regnault's decision as the report in *Le Figaro* specifically stated that 'through the three times [that he had expressed the wish], [Bricourt] accepted from Mlle Arbell that these codicils completed the will'.⁷⁵¹ This meant that not only was Arbell entitled to compensation from what the beneficiaries of his will received, but Constance and Juliette had refused to carry out a binding duty given to them through his will:

Whereas [he said] in summary to the Massenets, that in selling their rights unconditionally and refraining from making any serious effort to ensure that Lucy Arbell created the roles of Amadis and Cléopâtre, they have seriously failed

⁷⁴⁹ Author Unknown, 'An artist's right to a role', *The Times* 12 March 1914, page number unknown.

⁷⁵⁰ Author Unknown, 'Dernières Nouvelles', *Le Temps* 20 February 1914, p. 6; Author Unknown, 'Tribunaux', *Le Matin* 6 March 1914, p. 2. Her attempt to block the production was refused by 20 February, but the civil case continued, mostly in Paris.

⁷⁵¹ 'Par trois fois, il remit à Mlle Arbell des codicilles complétant son testament.' Claretie, 'Gazette des Tribunaux', *Le Figaro* 13 March 1914, p. 5.

in their duty to the memory of their father and husband; that the failure was not only a violation of their moral duty, that it constitutes a breach of an obligation that was formally imposed by his will; that they may have encountered difficulties in executing this wish, but they could have easily overcome them if they had truly wanted to, and ultimately they cannot justify any barrier that can presently and legally absolve them of their obligation.⁷⁵²

Bricourt's judgement also had wider legal implications:

Arbell is therefore entitled to damages. She has lost the incomes that she had in Monte-Carlo, incomes that were always high. In the Opéra in 1911 she reached 4,000 francs a month for ten monthly performances, and in 1907, in Monte-Carlo, Enghien and Deauville, she received between 1,250 and 2,500 francs per day. She therefore, by [her exclusion from] the performance of *Cléopâtre*, was entitled to damages for the past event that the Tribunal estimated at 30,000 francs without prejudice for damages that she could receive if there are future performances.⁷⁵³

The inclusion of the final part of the article indicates that this was not presumed to be a one-off case — if *Cléopâtre* was staged again or *Amadis* was premiered without her, Arbell could sue the Massenets again.

By refocusing the liability and rights issue onto Massenet's relatives, the civil court avoided restructuring the rights system for operas (something which was most likely beyond their remit), and transformed the case into one of author versus muse, as opposed to the 'author and muse versus administration' contest that Bizet and Galli-Marié had fought. The Opéra in particular recognised Constance and Juliette as legally

⁷⁵² 'Attendu en résumé que les dames Massenet, en cédant leurs droits sans condition et en s'abstenant de toute démarche sérieuse pour assurer la création par Lucy Arbell des rôles d'Amadis et de Cléopâtre, ont gravement manqué à leurs devoirs envers la mémoire de leur père et époux; que le manquement n'est pas seulement la violation d'un devoir moral, qu'il constitue la violation d'une obligation de faire qui leur avait été formellement imposée par le testament; qu'elles auraient peut-être rencontré des difficultés pour l'exécution de cette volonté, mais elles les auraient facilement surmontées si elles l'avaient réellement voulu, et en définitive elles ne peuvent justifier d'aucune impossibilité qui soit actuellement et juridiquement de nature à les exonérer de l'obligation qui leur incombait.' Claretie, 'Gazette des Tribunaux', *Le Figaro* 13 March 1914, p. 5. This echoed Regnault's judgement on the matter as well, but *Le Figaro* only published the speech that Bricourt made directly to Massenet's family.

⁷⁵³ 'Mlle Arbell a donc droit à des dommages-intérêts. Elle a perdu les cachets qu'elle aurait eus à Monte-Carlo, cachets toujours élevés. A l'Opéra elle touchait en 1911, 4,000 francs par mois pour dix représentations mensuelles; et en 1907, à Monte-Carlo, à Enghien et à Deauville, elle gagnait de 1,250 à 2,000 francs par jour. Elle a donc, par la représentation de *Cléopâtre*, éprouvé un dommage que le Tribunal estime pour le passé à 30,000 francs sans préjudice des dommages qu'elle pourrait éprouver s'il y avait des représentations futures.' Claretie, 'Gazette des Tribunaux', *Le Figaro* 13 March 1914, p. 5.

being the same as Jules Massenet by continuing to pay them any royalties from performances in perpetuity.⁷⁵⁴ However, their assuming the role of Massenet's replacements (as Geneviève Bizet and Magdeleine Godard had done with their relatives before them) came with what Bricourt called a 'moral duty' not only towards Massenet, but towards Arbell as well. Geneviève and Magdeleine could be said to have had an equivalent duty towards Galli-Marié and Delna which they did fulfil, but the other two singers were also better connected, and less hostile to the power hierarchies in the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique than Arbell was perceived to be. By dismissing Arbell's claim against Gunsbourg, Heugel, Cain and Payen, Bricourt reinforced the separation between the business and creative sides of opera, but he also placed the Massenets in a vulnerable position — as the rights to stage the two operas had already been sold, the Massenets had little power over whether the directors opted to stage them. Therefore, if Gunsbourg (or any other company director) staged either opera without Arbell, they put the Massenets at risk of further legal action.

The 'sans prejudice' ruling for further cases should have put Arbell in a position of hitherto unseen power as a singer (only superstar prima donnas such as Giuditta Pasta had been able to potentially influence company repertoire in this manner before).⁷⁵⁵ However, she continued to be blocked by directors after she had gained the judgement against Massenet's family. Even when she alone could offer directors the right to stage the operas in Paris without the threat of another civil case, with only her presence in the title roles as a stipulation, the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique were not interested. Arbell had won the right to play the lead in either opera, but she could not legally compel the companies to perform the works, and it was far easier for the companies to avoid these

⁷⁵⁴ André Spies, *Opera, State and Society in the Third Republic: 1875–1914* (New York: P. Lang, 1998), p. 124.

⁷⁵⁵ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, pp. 167–68.

operas than attempt to circumvent Arbell's 'moral right' to the roles, which was all that she had as an artist with her standing in Paris. This stalemate was complicated further as the First World War broke out five months after the judgement. In the Opéra-Comique's truncated 1914–15 season, Arbell could only negotiate a revival of *Thérèse*, which started a month into the new season, and this was with Gheusi, Carré's successor. The First World War arguably revived Delna's career, but it affected Arbell's negatively, as her legal triumph turned into a wait for the war to end, and by the time that the war was over, the Massenets were ready to appeal, and her ownership of the roles was once again in jeopardy.

One of Arbell's major arguments for her case was that *Cléopâtre* was meant for Paris, and it was eventually staged in the city in 1919, but in the Théâtre du Vaudeville with Mary Garden in the title role.⁷⁵⁶ Constance Massenet appealed the judgement in that year (possibly to preclude a new lawsuit over this production), and in 1920, Bricourt's decision was overturned.⁷⁵⁷ By then it was too late to make the two operas into a success in the larger opera houses, as operatic tastes across Europe changed following the First World War, and Massenet was now seen as a sentimental and seriously outdated composer. *Cléopâtre* and *Amadis*, in spite of Massenet's already reducing returns at the box office in 1914 (his most recent lasting success in the Opéra or the Opéra-Comique being *Cendrillon* in 1899), were worth fighting over before the war, but they were now only valuable in a nostalgic sense. Thus, the first production of *Amadis* was part of a commemoration to mark the tenth anniversary of Massenet's death, and even then the Opéra de Monte-Carlo did not continue the performances after the

⁷⁵⁶ Irvine, p. 303.

⁷⁵⁷ Irvine, p. 303.

festival. Arbell was excluded from the premiere of *Amadis*, but she was able to sing as Cléopâtre in Bordeaux and Nantes in 1921.⁷⁵⁸

Aside from this delayed role debut, the effect on Arbell's own career was noticeable. The court case had effectively ended her relationship with the Opéra de Monte-Carlo, and neither of her contracts with the Opéra or the Théâtre de la Gaîté were renewed. This left the Opéra-Comique as her only company — and Carré's comment about having to engage someone outside of the troupe suggests that either her contract there was terminated or insecure, or that she had no current commitments with the company. Her singing career survived both the 1914 case and the 1919–20 appeal, but her stage appearances became increasingly sporadic until she retired after a final production of *Don Quichotte* in the Opéra-Comique in 1931.⁷⁵⁹ A second career beckoned as the patron of the Orphelinat des arts, a children's choir for the orphans of artists, after the war. This brought her appointment as an *officier de l'instruction publique* into official use, and earned her a *Croix de la Légion d'honneur* in 1936, but her artistic career was almost ended by the sense of betrayal in the musical community over the case.⁷⁶⁰

It is debatable whether Arbell's motives were pure, or if they were based on money and the need to advance her career with two new leading roles, but her court case challenged assumptions of musical ownership which no other singer had dared to

⁷⁵⁸ Nicolet, 'Les Théâtres', *Le Gaulois* 19 January 1921, p. 4; Nicolet, 'Les Théâtres', *Le Gaulois* 18 March 1921, p. 3.

⁷⁵⁹ She participated in the first Opéra-Comique production in 1924 as well, but she was only hired for this opera on both occasions.

⁷⁶⁰ As well as gaining a Croix de la Légion d'honneur for her work, she bequeathed her home in Bougival to the Orphelinat on her death in 1947. The title of *officier d'instruction publique* was common amongst musicians, and especially those in state-funded institutions; Arbell was given this honour within three months of her Opéra debut. Sources: Author Unknown, 'Le 'Matin' autour de Paris', *Le Matin* 23 March 1936, p. 6 (the section of the newspaper also included a photograph of Arbell receiving the medal); Author Unknown, 'Une conférence sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau musicien', *Le Matin* 10 February 1943, p. 2; Author Unknown, 'Les Palmes Académiques', *Le Matin* 4 January 1904, p. 5; Author Unknown, 'Upper Bougival, La Jonchère and the Seine River Banks: La Garenne', *Bougival Office du Tourisme* <<http://www.tourisme-bougival.com/Upper-Bougival-La-Jonchere-and-the>> [accessed 21 March 2013].

question before. The status of *créatrice* gave singers such as Galli-Marié and Delna an almost automatic right to sing their signature roles without any directors interfering by the height of their operas' popularity, but Massenet's death provided a barrier to Arbell's possession of these roles. This case not only showed her commitment to shaping her own repertoire — it also revealed, through her temporary victory, that even in 1914 there existed some recognition that a singer could own a role in a legal sense, and claim financial compensation if a company violated that right, even if in reality these judgements were impossible to enforce. It is questionable whether Arbell was truly 'defending the work of the *maître*' in her civil case, but it is clear that she was not just a muse, but a female professional who fought for her own rights in the otherwise male world of operatic administration and management.

CONCLUSION

The Third Republic, and especially the period between 1870 and 1918, was a transitional era for the mezzo-soprano in the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique. It was not the beginning for the voice type in Paris — as Panseron noted in 1855, the creation of a firm foundation in terms of pedagogy and repertoire had taken place during the 1840s and 1850s. Mezzo-sopranos were also present as low sopranos in French theatre long before 1870, whether they were audience favourites like Madame Dugazon, or shouting themselves hoarse in an attempt to imitate their higher-voiced colleagues, like the singers in Tomeoni's evaluation of French theatre. While the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique did not cater to the existing mezzo-soprano repertoire in all of its variety (in particular, Rossini's mezzo-soprano heroines are conspicuous in their absence), there were *ingénues* and *travesti* roles in the Opéra-Comique, and *grand opéra* and Verdi roles in the Opéra which gave their mezzo-sopranos some opportunities to shine. What made the Third Republic important to the history of the mezzo-soprano was the composition of three operas that remain central to the genre as a whole, which were composed and premiered between 1873 and 1892, and were either premiered, or designed to be premiered by one of the companies. *Carmen*, *Samson et Dalila* and *Werther* amassed hundreds of performances across this period and were in a constant state of renewal through new productions and new interpreters. The popularity of these operas meant that any mezzo-soprano of note had to impress the patrons of the Opéra as Dalila, and as Carmen or Charlotte in the Opéra-Comique. This represented a change from the emphasis on individuals of earlier decades — while Galli-Marié was honoured with her own voice type in the Opéra-Comique, most others could not live up to the cult of Viardot, or even the sometimes antagonistic relationship that Stoltz had with her public.⁷⁶¹

⁷⁶¹ This antagonism came to a head when Stoltz returned to the stage after a string of cancelled performances of *Robert Bruce* (a Rossini and Niedermeyer pastiche) in 1846 due to a respiratory

This comment is not meant to disparage these women's achievements: while most of the mezzo-sopranos in this study disappeared from the opera-going public's awareness soon after their retirements, they were celebrities in their time, recording their signature arias in the first decades of the medium's history, and advertising beauty products and food. Far from having a frivolous lifestyle, their professional careers were intense and heavily controlled by their companies' schedules. Their days were filled with rehearsals and performances, and they were responsible for personally keeping their repertoire revised and ready to use at a moment's notice. They were paid well for their work, with singers such as Galli-Marié and Delna attaining high salaries in tandem with their level of audience demand, although they would not achieve parity of pay with the other leading singers of their troupes during this period. Their relationships with their companies and in particular the companies' administrations could vary from friendly (like Galli-Marié and du Locle's relationship before *Carmen*) to hostile (Deschamps-Jéhin's argument with Paravey, or Arbell's relationship with both companies after Massenet's death). New possibilities also complicated these relationships: Lucy Arbell's victories in the civil courts of France and Monaco in some ways signified a new horizon for operatic singers — suddenly, legal redress was available for those who had lost almost-guaranteed roles — although pursuing this path was, if the case's aftermath was an indication, a career-limiting decision.

In terms of the career's vocal demands, the Third Republic coincided with a shift towards a heavier, more dramatic form of singing, and the mezzo-sopranos who rose to high positions in the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique's rosters from the 1880s onwards were all noted for their vocal power, and their ability to be heard in massive auditoria

infection. The Opéra's claque turned against her during the performance which led to an onstage breakdown from Stoltz, and her resignation soon afterwards. Mary Ann Smart, 'The Lost Voice of Rosine Stoltz', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (March 1994), pp. 31–50: p. 40.

over a full orchestra. The change in repertoire in the Opéra-Comique was such that by the First World War, *opéra comiques* such as *La Dame blanche* and *Le Pré aux clercs* had disappeared from performance, and many of the company's most performed works were global favourites by composers such as Verdi and Puccini rather than company specialities. Similarly, the Opéra's repertoire shifted away from *grand opéra*, its own signature genre, to cater to the public's taste for Wagner and Wagnerian works, moving the vocal emphasis from loud lyrical singing with long vocalises to a more declamatory style. Aside from a further demand on singers for more power, the major issue of this time appears to have been diction and pronunciation rather than specific singing techniques. Longstanding techniques such as long vocalises and *portamento* either vanished, or were as often scorned as advocated by professionals. Techniques that had been expected of vocalists since the Middle Ages were falling out of favour, and composers of French and Italian opera's responses to stylistic innovations and experiments by composers such as Wagner were in part to blame.⁷⁶² In consequence, musicians, both orchestral and vocal, were forced to adapt to a more intense and potentially damaging form of performance. As science became a larger part of vocal pedagogy, it is unsurprising that doctors published books on how this profession and its physical requirements were damaging singers' voices permanently, and yet most of these singers had unusually long careers, with none suffering from vocal damage like Falcon's in the 1830s; changes which were attributable both to proper vocal instruction, and a repertoire that was better-suited to their voices than that of their predecessors.

Opera to a certain extent was enjoyed by many simply as escapism, rather than social commentary, but this does not undermine the composers and librettists' attempts at using art to add their voices to a current discourse. Orientalism, and to a certain extent,

⁷⁶² Sean M. Parr, 'Melismatic Madness: Coloratura and Female Vocality in Mid Nineteenth-Century French and Italian Opera' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 2009), p. 2.

anti-orientalism, which pervades the music and plot of both *Carmen* and *Samson et Dalila*, for instance, was a highly topical dramatic device. The late nineteenth century was the final period of colonialism in French history, and a fascination with new lands and peoples was exploited by many opportunists, as others such as Saint-Saëns took personal stances against the imperialist narrative that reports on these countries propagated.⁷⁶³ A similar thread emerged in relation to people and fictional characters who could not live within the imposed social rules of nineteenth-century Europe, which was reflected in the characterisations of Carmen and Charlotte. Carmen refuses to follow the normative path that Don José demands of her, and loses her life as a result, and Charlotte's struggle between duty and love ends in tragedy. Carmen's case was particularly complex, as her status as a doubled Other, both foreign and Romani, means that she was not just working-class or sexually unconventional — her identities simultaneously added new interpretative avenues for singers to explore, while giving the character a licence to act as she did, because, despite what the Spanish critics said in 1887, Carmen was not recognisably French. This line of argument was so powerful that according to critics' reports, Delna was apparently the first Carmen to attempt to play the character in the Opéra-Comique without these protective layers of orientalist stereotypes, twenty-five years after the opera's premiere.

Carmen, more than Dalila or Charlotte, created the most expectation for an individual and personal interpretation from each high-profile singer who took on the role, and their contributions varied widely: while Deschamps made little changes to Galli-Marié's version, Calvé's account suggests that she recreated the character as one that was true to her and her background, while still relying heavily on the mannerisms

⁷⁶³ Georgina Born and Desmond Hesmondhalgh, 'Introduction: On Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music', in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed by Georgina Born and Desmond Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 1–58: p. 9.

that made Carmen Spanish. Of the Dalilas, Héglon is the only singer who emerges as a creatively involved interpreter, with her later assertions that she wore similar dresses to get used to walking in a biblical costume, and generally investing a lot of time in building a connection with the character. She also had the physical attractiveness which some critics saw as necessary to play the role. She was in this way fortunate: singers such as Deschamps-Jéhin and Delna were compared negatively with their predecessors, and their ability to play their role was linked not to the beauty of their voices, but to their appearances, and in this respect, both were found wanting. Charlotte however does not seem to have needed a particularly beautiful singer — if the critics were to be believed, the problems with the original production in the Opéra-Comique revolved around an apathetic director and his cast. Yet, much like *Carmen* in 1883, there is a sense of revisionism in this evaluation of the first production — it was easier to claim that the opera had been staged incorrectly than to admit that as reviewers, their instincts about the work had been wrong.

This emphasis on directors and singers who could bring new life to supposedly static items like repertory roles was a mark of the times, as this period of operatic history was defined not only by a change in musical styles, but by an increasing need to perform the works as they were written in the score, in a movement led by composers such as Verdi and Wagner. While philosophically it can be argued that no work is eternally complete and unchangeable after its composer or author has finished adding their contributions, the mentality of the time was based on shaping the interpreter to the work, a concept that singers like Victor Maurel and Emma Calvé embraced wholeheartedly in their adoption of the word ‘interpreter’ when describing themselves and their working relationships with Verdi and Massenet respectively.⁷⁶⁴ Creatively, for some singers this

⁷⁶⁴ Karen Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performances in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 13, p. 121.

was a complete change to their approach to their work, as cadenzas and aria insertions were discouraged in favour of fidelity to the composer's actual wishes, rather than the implied ones that singers used as validation for their alterations.⁷⁶⁵ When composers and singers did work in collaboration in the nineteenth century, the singer's reputation could influence how the working relationship was perceived — for example, the previously mentioned incident between Donizetti and Stoltz, which was a case of one writer using her reputation as a demanding performer to spin a medically impossible tale of a singer driving a composer insane.⁷⁶⁶ In a century where few journalists and biographers were held to account for libelling singers or composers, inaccuracies were rife, and the self-aggrandising nature of singers' and composers' autobiographies means that in some cases, it is difficult to find the truth about a collaboration, or the collaborators' relationship with each other. The contemporary portrayals of the operas' histories discussed in Chapter Three reveal a need for order and a lack of conflict, and like the reports of critics who refused to acknowledge their mistakes regarding *Carmen* and *Werther*, are rife with revisionism. Godard's struggles with the Opéra-Comique's management and his own ill-health were reframed by the press and his own biographer as a race against time to finish a final work for his newly-discovered muse. Narratives about Arbell and Massenet's professional relationship were split between two biased sets of accounts: those of Arbell and Massenet, who emphasised the collaborative and positive aspects of their partnership, and biographers and critics who depicted Arbell as manipulative and Massenet as gullible. Even Galli-Marié and Bizet's collaboration on *Carmen* has been opened to misinterpretation by authors such as Henry Malherbe, who not only portrayed Galli-Marié as jealous and unprofessional, but reduced their partnership to a torrid affair. However, in the case of Galli-Marié and Bizet, scholarship

⁷⁶⁵ These alterations came in many types — Tomeoni's suggestions are outlined in footnote 71.

⁷⁶⁶ Smart, 'The Lost Voice of Rosine Stoltz', p. 34. Smart traces this rumour's printed source to Charles de Boigne's *Pétits Mémoires de l'Opéra* (1857).

starting from four years after Malherbe's book was published has sought to rectify this mistake, with authors such as Curtiss and McClary revealing and lauding Galli-Marié's efforts and dedication to the work, which arose not out of guilt (like Malherbe suggested), but out of a conviction that it deserved a better treatment than the Opéra-Comique was willing to give it in 1875. It is this integrity that defines the mezzo-soprano in this period — their status rarely approached that of their storied predecessors, but on two of the most prominent stages in Europe they made real contributions to their repertoires by either creating important and long-lasting roles, or interacting with the traditions begun by the roles' *créatrices*. The major operas that they performed in survived through so many years and shifts in taste because the companies' patrons loved the works and returned to hear them sung over and over again, and yet, these singers were key to that success, both through the warm, rich qualities of their voices, and their personifications of their leading roles. Not every leading mezzo-soprano could attain the respected position in operatic history accorded to Galli-Marié, or the more temporary adoration enjoyed by Delna, but each one of these prominent singers made a contribution, no matter how small, to the histories of operas which have survived not only to the end of the Third Republic, but remain in regular performance to this day.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Méyriane Héglon's interview with Annie le Guern in *Revivre*

(5 February 1930): (i) section quoted in Chapter 2.2

Afin de commenter le rôle de Dalila, nous ne pouvions mieux faire que d'aller interroger la grande et célèbre artiste qui l'a marqué d'une empreinte ineffaçable, Mme Héglon. Pour obtenir d'elle cet entretien, il a fallu que nous fassions appel non seulement à l'amitié qu'elle veut bien nous témoigner personnellement, mais aussi à la vive sympathie qu'elle ne pouvait manquer de réserver à cette revue dont l'esprit est en si parfaite communion avec la zèle ardent qui a fait d'elle une des animatrices de l'Union catholique du Théâtre. Dans ce beau studio que Mme Héglon réserve aux réceptions intimes et qu'éclaire une admirable toile représentant Marie-Magdeleine aux pieds du Sauveur, la célèbre artiste nous accueille avec la plus affectueuse bonne grâce.

'Alors, vraiment, vous voulez que je vous parle de Dalila ?...C'est un des rôles avec lesquels j'ai conscience de m'être le plus complètement identifiée à force d'études et de recherches.'

'Aussi vois a-t-il valu l'un des triomphes de votre carrière ! D'éminents critiques disent encore que vous y étiez inégalable.'

'Ce qui prouve une fois de plus que la réussite est le prix de l'effort, car je consacrais toujours à mes rôles plusieurs mois de préparation. Ce rôle de Dalila, notamment, je l'ai vraiment assimilé à ma vie quotidienne avant que de le jouer. La Dalila de l'Opéra n'est pas une courtisane cupide, elle n'est pas vénale. Prêtresse de Dagon, elle ne voit en Samson que l'ennemi de sa race, le vainqueur des Philistins.'

'Documentation précieuse pour l'interprétation scénique, mais pour le chant, qui intéresse plus spécialement nos amis de *Revivre*...'

'Là aussi, il faut faire sentir le caractère de personnage, En voulez-vous un exemple? Dans le duo du second acte, toute la partie chantée avec Samson doit être empreinte d'un charme prenant qui se change en triomphe haineux dès que Samson, vaincu, cède à la séductrice. C'est une dualité constante qui non seulement dicte les attitudes, mais transforme la voix. Quelle âpreté dans l'exclamation qui termine ce duo! Il faut la marquer autant vocalement que par le geste. Et le geste, on ne l'improvise pas. Vous dirai-je qu'avant de jouer ce rôle je me suis entourée d'œuvres d'art qui m'en mettaient sans cesse sous les yeux une vision plastique. Chez moi, je portais d'amples robes, copiées sur les costumes bibliques ; je m'habitue à me mouvoir, à aller et venir aussi drapée. Et j'étais arrivée à me trouver plus à l'aise ainsi vêtue que sous les parures imposées par la mode du moment.'

(ii) Section quoted in Chapter 1.1

'Je m'explique que tous vos admirateurs s'accordent à dire merveille de la ligne sculpturale que vous donniez à votre héroïne.'

'Je me suis surtout attachée à ne pas la vulgariser, à garder à sa trahison toute la majesté d'intention qu'elle recèle.'

L'artiste, tout en parlant, s'était rapprochée du piano. Et elle exauça un souhait que nous n'osions pas encore formuler en interprétant pour nous *mezzo-voce*, dans un style admirable l'air de *Printemps qui commence* et l'extrait du duo de deuxième acte: *Mon cœur d'ouvre à ta voix*.

L'oreille encore tout emplie des nuances qu'elle eut y mettre, nous allons étudier, en respectant fidèlement ses expressions ces deux morceaux célèbres qui deviendront d'autant plus intelligibles à nous lecteurs qu'ils en connaissent maintenant l'esprit.

Voyons, tout d'abord, l'admirable chant du premier acte. *Printemps qui commence*. Nous savons que Dalila chante pour séduire Samson qu'elle a aperçu dans la foule. La phrase du début sera dite en demi-teinte, avec un charme enveloppant, dans un mouvement très souple. Sons très liés. Respirer à l'aise: profiter du demi-soupir (première moitié du troisième temps) contre *Commence* et *Portant (l'espérance aux cœurs amoureux)*.

Le dessin d'orchestre, nous disait Mme Héglon, n'est jamais trop respecté par les accompagnateurs. La phrase musicale, au piano, doit se fondre avec le chant, prolonger ses intentions de force ou de douceur. Et le chant, à son tour, dont naît de la réplique d'accompagnement sans qu'on perçoive entre eux le moindre heurt, la plus légère scission.

Ton souffle qui passe/De la terre efface/Les jours malheureux.

Bien articuler, en laissant légèrement désirer l's de *souffle* (sans suffirent surtout!). Même remarqué pour la prononciation du mot *passe* (sans dureté sur le p). Ne pas escamoter la belle note de poitrine qu'on est en droit d'attendre sur le *si* naturel de *ef* (*efface*). J'entends encore le beau *diminuendo* de Mme Héglon sur le *do* suivant syllabe *fa* de même mot.

Quelle force il donnait à la phrase suivante: *Les jours malheureux*.

La voix s'anime légèrement sur le vers suivant: *Tout brûle en notre âme*.

Les mots à mettre en valeur, *brûle* et *âme*, seront très articulés, sans dureté.

Tous les sons liés indiqués au cours du morceau doivent l'être avec une exagération voulue. Je m'appelle, là encore, sur une remarque de Mme Héglon, remarque de fine psychologie.

'Lorsqu'une femme ment, nous dit-elle, avez-vous remarqué qu'elle exagère, appuie ses affirmations croyant ainsi leur donner plus de force et l'apparence de la vérité. C'est le cas de Dalila. Elle veut captiver Samson et feint un amour qu'elle ne ressent pas. Elle exagère donc les modulations langoureux, mais toujours sans vulgarité ni mièvrerie.'

Sachons donc lier joliment tous ses sons, notamment sur les mots ou syllabes soulignées ci-après: Et ta douce flamme/Vient sécher nos pleurs/Tu rends à la terre/ Par un doux mystère/Les fruits et les fleurs.

Mais gardons-nous de confondre ces liaisons vocales avec le vulgaire port de voix!

Une opposition heureuse (il faut toujours les rechercher quand l'occasion nous en est donnée) sera notée pour différencier les vocalises identiques écrites sur les mots *flamme* et *mystère*: tandis que, pour le mot *flamme*, on débutera par un forte souple pour

diminuer et finir en *piano*, le mot *mystère*, lui, sera dit tout d'abord très en douceur, puis enflé progressivement pour finir bien en valeur.

Un peu plus de chaleur dans la voix sur la fin du couplet, Mettre activement en valeur (*Je suis*) belle et {*Mon cœur*} plein d'amour. Par de pleurnicherie sur *Pleurant l'infidèle*, mais bonne articulation des syllabes *Pleur* (*Pleurant*) et *fi* (*infidèle*). On peut respirer entre *infidèle* et *attend son retour*. Pour cela chanter comme si le *ré#* blanche de la syllabe *dè* était un *ré#* noire pointée suivi d'un *ré#* croche (ainsi qu'il est noté d'ailleurs pour la traduction allemande). Glisser alors sans appuyer, sur la syllabe finale *le*.

Un beau *crescendo* sur: *Garde souvenance/Du bonheur passé*.

Mis le *ré* final doit être filé jusqu'à mourir en un *pianissimo* fidèlement prolongé par l'accompagnement.

Le début de la seconde partie du morceau est encore tout de charme triste. Une voix de velours sur les belles notes graves *J'irai triste amante*. Puis, bientôt, l'animation monte avec l'espoir exprimé: *Chassant ma tristesse/S'il revient un jour*.

Enfin le: *A lui ma tendresse* vibre avec chaleur. Mais n'oublions pas que Dalila est une séductrice accomplie; voilant rapidement sa flamme pour n'être plus que langueur tendre, c'est avec une douceur infinie, mais pleine de flamme, qu'elle dira: *El la douce ivresse/Qu'un brûlant amour/Garde à son retour*.

Un léger *crescendo* sur *brûlant amour*? Soit. Mais le dernier vers *piano*, avec de beaux sons de poitrine sur les *ré#* et *fa#* graves de *son retour*.

Et ce *piano* se prolonge sur les phrases suivantes. On l'imagine, les yeux mi-clos, rêvant ce retour: *Chassant ma tristesse/S'il revient un jour*.

Enfin son amour éclate dans une belle envolée sur la phrase deux fois répétée: *À lui ma tendresse*.

Une articulation très en avant, qui ne coupe pas la ligne musicale, mais qui pourtant accentue et met en valeur chaque mot.

Puis, reprise par son rêve, Dalila laisse peu à peu s'éteindre sa voix.

Et la douce ivresse (mezzo-forte)

Qu'un brûlant amour (Bien marquer les sons liés d'un léger *crescendo*.)

Garde à son retour (*Perdendosi*)

Appendix B: *La Glaneur Parisien* 8 April 1877 — Galli-Marié and the tailor

Dans *Piccolino*, Mme Galli-Marié porte, on le sait, un charmante travesti qui lui sied à merveille, mais ce qui lui sied moins, c'est la note suivante que son tailleur, auteur dudit travesti, lui a fait parvenir. Qu'on en juge :

A Madame Galli-Marié

Une jaquette velours anglaise	130
Un knickerbocke	60
Une paire de grandes guêtres	25
40 centimètres velours marron	8
Façon d'une culotte	<u>30</u>
Total	253

Les fonds afférents à cette culotte parurent à l'intelligente artiste être un peu du même tonneau que cause que réclament jadis les légendaires apothicaires. Elle renvoya d'ait leurs le fournisseur à la cause de l'Opéra-Comique en disant que le costume avait été exécuté pour le compte de la direction.

Alors tomba sur Mme Galli-Marié une avalanche de papier marqué du sceau de l'Etat. Pendant ces tergiversations, si le succès de *Piccolino* allait grandissant, le mémoire du tailleur prenait du ventre en proportion et il avait grossi de moitié, car le tenace fournisseur arrivait à réclamer 500fr pour principal, intérêts, dommages et frais.

Expertisé, le travesti fut estimé 140 francs. L'artiste, pour en finir, en offrit 200. Refus et enfin assignation devant le 7^e chambre.

Or, en croyant confectionner une culotte, le peu galant couturier était arrivé tout simplement à obtenir une *veste*, car la tribunal a pensé que les offres de Mme Galli-Marié constituaient une rémunération au moins suffisante.