

## Marie, the Modern Feminist? Donizetti and the Heroine of *La fille du régiment*

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From the Spartans to the women's suffrage movement in the United States in the 1910s, the battle for gender equality has been a perennial theme in history. The feminist experience of history, however, reveals that gaining political and social rights does not necessarily imply that those rights are retained by later governments. For instance, as James F. McMillan remarks, after the French Revolution, many women felt that "they had been cheated by the Revolution, obtaining only greater scorn and disdain."<sup>1</sup> The post-Revolutionary period in France was fraught with a continual feminist struggle that eventually played a role in the European Revolutions of 1848. Gaetano Donizetti would have been exposed to this growing political battle for women's equality during his time in Paris,<sup>2</sup> a detail that has particularly interesting implications for one work composed in the late 1830s and that premiered in 1840: *La fille du régiment* (*The*

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<sup>1</sup> James F. McMillan, *France and Women 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Donizetti moved to Paris in 1838 and remained there until his death in 1848. Julian Budden and Mary Ann Smart, "Gaetano Donizetti," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. Stanley Sadie, *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/51832> (accessed October 22, 2008).

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*Daughter of the Regiment*). The opera represents Donizetti's first foray into French opera; as a composer of numerous serious Italian operas, his venture into *opéra comique* was a comprehensive combination of his Italian compositional style with French musical and theatrical idioms. This musical-dramatic fusion of operatic traditions is evident in Donizetti's unusual depiction of the opera's protagonist, Marie. Marie's role as the Romantic heroine reflects the contemporaneous changes in women's roles in nineteenth-century society and exhibits a unique synthesis of Italian *opera buffa* and French *opéra comique* compositional conventions that evokes the progressive evolution of the role of women at the time.

*La fille du régiment* premiered on February 11, 1840 at the Opéra-Comique in Paris, with the libretto by Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges and Jean-François-Alfred Bayard.<sup>3</sup> By this time, the genre of *opéra comique* had grown from its vaudevillian roots into a grander form of musical theatre, although it still incorporated spoken dialogue instead of recitative.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, during this period, "authors [at the Opéra-Comique] provided romantic tales allowing for the exploitation of 'local colour' and with happy endings."<sup>5</sup> Reflecting this tradition, the plot construction of *La fille* demonstrates the dramatic conventions of *opéra comique* at the time.

The opera opens with a group of Tyrolean citizens praying for safety while a battle between their countrymen and the

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<sup>3</sup> William Ashbrook, "La fille du régiment," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. Stanley Sadie, *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O006301> (accessed October 21, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> M. Elizabeth C. Bartlett and Richard Langham Smith, "Opéra comique," *Oxford Music Online*,

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/43715> (accessed October 21, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

invading French rages outside. News arrives that the French have left and the people celebrate. Soon after, Sulpice, the sergeant of the Twenty-First Regiment of the French army, enters with his daughter, Marie. The audience learns that Marie was abandoned as a child and has since been raised as the daughter of the Twenty-First Regiment. All of the regimental soldiers act as a collective “father” to Marie, and she has agreed to marry one of them when she is ready. However, she has fallen in love with a young Tyrolean, Tonio, who saved her from falling into a precipice as she was picking flowers. The regiment discovers Tonio sneaking around and is about to kill him for spying when Marie identifies him as her saviour. Sulpice reminds Marie of her promise to marry one of the soldiers, and Tonio offers to join the regiment so that he and Marie might marry. Soon after Tonio’s enlistment, however, it is discovered that the Marquise de Berkenfield, a local noblewoman, has claimed Marie as her long-lost niece. Sulpice surrenders Marie to her aunt, leaving Marie and Tonio with no chance to marry now that he is an enlisted soldier and she is of genteel breeding. Months pass, and Sulpice has been recuperating at the Marquise’s chateau after being wounded in battle a few months earlier. It is soon revealed that Marie is to be married to the Duke of Krackenthorp and that the contract is to be signed that night. Displeased by this announcement, Marie reflects on Tonio and is saddened at her impending marriage to the Duke. Her thoughts are interrupted by the arrival of the regiment, including Tonio. As guests arrive for the contract signing, the Marquise reveals to Marie that she is in fact Marie’s mother. Marie agrees to sign the contract as an act of obedience toward her mother, but the Marquise, remembering her own dalliances with a captain of a regiment and seeing her daughter’s sadness, agrees to the marriage between Marie and Tonio.

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The critics' initial reactions to the plot of Donizetti's opera were lukewarm. As Karl Loveland describes,

Complaints about the preposterous plot were numerous and then varied, depending on the ideological viewpoint of the critic. Some writers railed against the notion of a girl being raised by a regiment, others objected to her choosing for a husband a soldier over the obviously more aristocratic, and therefore more appealing, Duke of Krackenthorp.<sup>6</sup>

Critical response to the music was also mixed. Mendelssohn, a longtime critic of Donizetti's work, admitted: "I am afraid I like it...Do you know, I should like to have written it myself."<sup>7</sup> Berlioz, on the other hand, was less generous, writing that "the score of *La fille du régiment* is not at all one that either composer or the public takes seriously."<sup>8</sup> He goes on to say that Donizetti, in writing so many operas for Parisian audiences, "seems to treat [Paris] like a conquered country; it is a veritable invasion."<sup>9</sup> Despite the polarized response of the critics, however, the opera's public appeal was clear: audiences adored it. Zealous patriotic undertones resonated strongly with the French audience, most notably the song "Salut à la France!," and a tradition was soon established of performing the opera on Bastille Day.<sup>10</sup> From this ardent response, Loveland infers that Donizetti's opera "hold[s] up a mirror to

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Loveland, "Reading Donizetti's *La fille du régiment*: Genesis, transformations, and interpretations," (PhD diss., University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 1996), 70.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Fothergill Chorley, *Thirty Years' Musical Recollections*, quoted in William Ashbrook, *Donizetti* (London: Cassell, 1965), 123.

<sup>8</sup> Hector Berlioz, *Les musiciens et la musique* (Paris, 1903), quoted in Ashbrook, *Donizetti*, 234-5.

<sup>9</sup> Ashbrook, *Donizetti*, 234-5.

<sup>10</sup> Loveland, "Reading Donizetti's *La fille du régiment*," 158.

society...[where] we can catch a glimpse...of society in post-revolutionary France.”<sup>11</sup> The public’s interest in the work and the opera’s connection to current social issues of the era thus expose both the work’s dramatic appeal and its pertinence to the world of nineteenth-century French politics.

*La fille* incorporates both the French conflict with the Tyroleans during the Napoleonic era and the ongoing tension with the English in the late 1830s in order to provoke a strong response from the audience. In 1805, Napoleon defeated the Austrians and forced them to cede Tyrol to Bavaria.<sup>12</sup> The Tyroleans rebelled, but eventually the French succeeded in gaining control of the area.<sup>13</sup> In the opera, the librettists carefully portray the French as a “good-willed” invading army; Tonio’s conversion in support of the French signifies France’s complete dominance abroad. In addition, Donizetti’s overt use of regimental songs throughout the opera not only encouraged the audience to recall France’s triumph in the Tyrolean conflict but also prompted overt patriotism towards the contemporaneous conflict with the English. Anti-English sentiment in 1840 was often expressed through outbursts of the “Marseillaise” in the streets,<sup>14</sup> and Donizetti mirrored that use of song to evoke patriotism with his music. The musically patriotic regiment onstage thus becomes a direct reflection of the French audience’s own patriotic outbursts.

The audience’s connection to the action onstage extended more deeply than military battles, though; the fight for gender equality addressed in the opera was a second political issue on the public’s mind. Gender conflict and the plight of women are

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<sup>11</sup> Loveland, “Reading Donizetti’s *La fille du régiment*,” 234.

<sup>12</sup> James B. Minahan, *One Europe, Many Nations: A Historical Dictionary of European National Groups* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000), 699.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Goubert, *The Course of French History*, trans. Maarten Ultee (New York: Routledge, 1991), 243.

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explored through Marie's character development throughout the opera. The political and social roles of women during and after the Revolutionary period (between 1789-1848) remained volatile. Immediately after the Revolution, the Marquis de Condorcet argued for the "[extension of] the sacred principles of the Declaration of the Rights of Man to include the rights of women to civil and political equality."<sup>15</sup> Those few rights women did gain vanished with Napoleon's Civil Code of 1804, however. Napoleon's legislations restricted female rights, further widening the gulf between the separate political spheres of men and women, so that "by 1814-15, womanhood had been truly redefined, and the domestic ideal had been established as the dominant model of femininity."<sup>16</sup> French etiquette books reinforced the sentiment that women should "temper their behaviour to make themselves pleasing to men" in the domestic realm.<sup>17</sup> Of course, there were those who ignored the call to be shining examples of idealized femininity. Those feminists seeking the reinstatement of divorce rights and the "decriminalization of adultery"<sup>18</sup> found support in various feminist publications and societies appearing in the mid-1830s, but these women were in the minority.

There *were* small contingents of women who bridged the gap between the role of household protector and that of independent citizen with rights, however. McMillan describes women who, in the 1830s, participated in the building of barricades in the streets as "a means of protest...since it epitomized the struggle to defend the neighborhood."<sup>19</sup> It is

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<sup>15</sup> Paraphrased in McMillan, *France and Women 1789-1914*, 16. For more on the Marquis de Condorcet and his political writings, see Condorcet, *Essai sur l'admission des femmes au droit [sic] de cité* (*Essay on the admission of women to the rights of citizenship*), July 1790.

<sup>16</sup> McMillan, *France and Women*, 44.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

with this final group of women that we find a close parallel with Donizetti's heroine, Marie. As the sole woman in the camp, Marie attends to the domestic duties of laundry, cooking, and entertainment. In the first act, Marie is elected as the *vivandière* (canteen-girl), a title in which she takes great pride. The title, however, is two-sided. Being the "canteen-girl" certainly highlights her domestic role, as a *vivandière's* duties involved providing water and food goods to those in battle, but having a title is a mark of respect for Marie. It suggests that she is now an "official" member of the regiment. Marie alludes to her wish to be a *fighting* part of the regiment during the duet "Au bruit de la guerre," which she sings with Sulpice:

Oui, je le crois, à la bataille, s'il le fallait, je marcherais!	Yes, I do believe, to battle if I had to, I'd march off!
Oui, je braverais la mitraille, et comme vous je me battrais!	Yes, I'd brave the hail of bullets, and like you I'd fight!
On dit que l'on tient de son père: je tiens du mien!	They say that one takes after one's father, I take after mine!
Je marcherais, Je me battrais...	I could march, I could fight... <sup>20</sup>

Marie expresses a strong desire to be accepted as an equal when she declares that "I'd brave the hail of bullets" and "I could march/I could fight." In fact, the text implies that the only thing separating Marie from battle is her physical gender; her excitement for battle and her claim that daughters take after their fathers parallels the excitement of a young boy emulating his father. Furthermore, Marie's use of the conditional tense in

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<sup>20</sup> J.H. Vernoy de Saint-Georges and F. Bayard, *La fille du régiment*, in *Italian/French Belcanto Opera Libretti*, vol. 3, trans. Nico Castel (Mt. Morris, New York: Leyerle Publications, 2002), 406.

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the French libretto makes it clear that she sees her designation of *vivandière* as a sign that she is one step closer to combat. As the duet concludes, the audience understands that Marie is not only proud to be the *daughter* of the regiment, she is proud to be a *member* of the regiment. Her commitment goes deeper than her womanly responsibilities and emphasizes a willingness to defend her “family” on the battlefield. Thus, we find in Marie the domestic protector of the women’s movement in the mid-1800s: a woman attending to the socially-prescribed realm of domesticity while seeking equality through combat.

Donizetti deftly blends aspects of the French and Italian traditions to reflect musically Marie’s dual political role as domestic protector. Charles Cronin confirms that the French tradition of *opéra comique* has “few distinctions in melodic style or aria form *based upon the social class* of the character in question.”<sup>21</sup> Donizetti exploits this tradition by granting Marie multiple musical styles. With her arsenal of regimental songs, Marie is fluent in the language of the military, yet she is also capable of evoking great pathos with her two introspective pieces, the *romanze* from Act I (“Il faut partir”) and the double-aria from Act II (“Par le rang et par l’opulence”). This musical flexibility allows her to react and develop throughout the opera without being restricted to the specific musical conceits, either political or social, that often dominate the Italian *opera buffa* style.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> My emphasis. Charles P.D. Cronin, “The comic operas of Gaetano Donizetti and the end of the *opera buffa* tradition,” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1993), 151.

<sup>22</sup> “Se vuol ballare” from *Le nozze di Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is an example of how a musical conceit, in this case meter, carries political implications typical of *opera buffa* style. Figaro’s threats to the Count are phrased in the meter of a minuet. As a servant, Figaro has no social claim to the dance, and it is his adoption of a noble style that makes his insult to the Count particularly stinging. When Figaro makes more overt threats, the meter switches to a 2/4 contredanse, a middle-class group dance. His final mockery, however, comes at the end when, after a recapitulation of the minuet rhythm, the contredanse concludes the aria, mocking the dignified minuet and representing Figaro’s musical triumph over the Count. Wye

Donizetti retains some Italian compositional traditions, most notably the double-aria form. “Au bruit de la guerre,” the Act I duet between Marie and Sulpice, preserves the first half of the double-aria form.<sup>23</sup> After the *tempo di mezzo* section, during which the audience learns that Marie has been named *vivandière*, the *cabaletta* section is replaced by a restatement of the main theme followed by a stirring finale of “rataplan” rhythmic figures. The *tempo di mezzo*, which usually brings about some form of character enlightenment, here does not lead to a new musical section, suggesting that Marie is content with and in control of her regimental life. Later, in Act II, the double-aria form appears in its entirety in “Par le rang et par l’opulence” to highlight Marie’s unhappiness with the restrictive world into which she has been forced by the Marquise. Although Marie follows the conventional double-aria form, her musical reaction to her situation demonstrates the resilience instilled by her regimental upbringing. She remains in charge of the musical changes that occur rather than being confined to the strict aria forms that often dominate *opera buffa*. Thus, Donizetti’s synthesis of the French tradition of lyrical freedom with the Italian tradition of structural forms produces a Romantic opera heroine whose organic, unaffected musical development remains unrestricted by social or musical conceits.

Marie sings in a variety of styles to illustrate her character’s development, yet Donizetti maintains musical continuity by

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Jamison Allanbrook, *Rhythmic gesture in Mozart: Le nozze di Figaro & Don Giovanni* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 61-62, 79-82.

<sup>23</sup> The typical form of a double-aria consists of four sections: *scena*, *cantabile*, *tempo di mezzo*, and *cabaletta*. The *tempo di mezzo* generally serves as the dramatic transition between the lyrical *cantabile* and the faster *cabaletta*. In most cases, some sort of dramatic catalyst (such as the interruption of the *cantabile* by the chorus or another character) accompanying the *tempo di mezzo* brings about an emotional shift in the musical style, leading the character(s) into the faster-paced *cabaletta*. Richard Taruskin and Piero Weiss, *A History of Western Music*, 7th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005), 685-686.

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inflecting Marie's arias with recurring musical rhythms (specifically triplets, triple meters, and complex duple/quadruple meters subdivided into groups of three) that remain consistent from aria to aria. Interestingly, her characteristic triplet motive differs rhythmically from the regiment's duple and quadruple rhythms associated with a marching rhythm; this further suggests that Marie remains independent from the regiment.<sup>24</sup> For example, "Au bruit de la guerre" is in 3/4 meter and has triplet embellishments throughout. The meter and extensive triplets are fitting, given that the song celebrates Marie as the daughter of the regiment, describes her upbringing, and announces her new position as the *vivandière*.

Likewise, "Chacun le sait," the regimental song, though it begins in a square 4/4 meter, has numerous triplet embellishments and then switches to 3/8 for the main cry of "Il est là, morbleu!" "Chacun le sait," sung by Marie to entertain the regiment, represents a musical moment where Marie identifies with the regiment while concurrently establishing her individuality. While the verses are set in 4/4, a march beat, Marie's characteristic triplets decorate her vocal line. Her ability to sing in the regimental meter indicates her ties to the regiment, but Donizetti's usage of triplets in Marie's vocal line highlights her individuality.

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<sup>24</sup> I am indebted to Joy Calico for this observation.

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**No. 2 – “Au bruit de la guerre” from LA FILLE DU RÉGIMENT**

By Gaetano Donizetti

Libretto by Jean-François Bayard & J.H. Vernoy de Saint-Georges

English Version by Humphrey Proctor-Gregg

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Triple meter features in Marie's Act I lament, "Il faut partir," which is in 6/8, again signifying her distinct style. As with "Au bruit de la guerre," the setting of "Il faut partir" in complex duple meter emphasizes that Marie is the focus of the aria. Her vocal line consists almost entirely of either dotted quarter notes or quarter note-eighth note alternations. The lilting rhythm suggests Marie's struggle to keep back tears as she bids farewell to her regiment.

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### No. 7 – "Il faut partir" from LA FILLE DU RÉGIMENT

By Gaetano Donizetti

Libretto by Jean-François Bayard & J.H. Vernoy de Saint-Georges

English Version by Humphrey Proctor-Gregg

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To emphasize further Marie's unhappiness, Donizetti avoids beginning her phrases on the downbeat, which weakens the metric pulse. As a result, her entrance sounds uncertain and awkward, as though she is disoriented by grief, and the quarter rests on the downbeat of several measures act as "sighing" figures, further emphasizing her despair. This aria demonstrates Donizetti's incorporation of Marie's fundamental triplet motives within an introspective setting that alters her characteristic rhythms to depict her vulnerable emotional state, thereby suggesting that the triple rhythms are at the musical core of her character.

Likewise, Donizetti makes overt use of triplets and triple meters in Marie's Act II double-aria, "Par le rang et par l'opulence." The *scena* begins as Marie reflects on her new life

and expresses her helplessness and loneliness. During the *cantabile* section, she sings of the insecurities that she will need to hide “beneath [the] jewels and lacy frills” of her new life.<sup>25</sup> Significantly, Marie’s simple quadruple meter clashes with the orchestra’s accompanying triplet patterns; in the midst of uncertainty, Marie has “forgotten” herself even as the orchestra recalls her distinctive triplet figures. Soon, her thoughts turn to the regiment as she sings,

O vous à qui je fus ravie, dont j’ai partagé le destin... je donnerais toute ma vie pour pouvoir vous serrer la main!	Oh you from whom I was wrested with whom I did share my destiny... I’d give my whole life to be able to clasp your hand! <sup>26</sup>
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With this stanza, her melody develops into various sextuplet figures. Marie has “remembered” herself through her memories of the regiment, and she returns to an abbreviated and embellished version of the *cantabile* in 12/8 and her vocal line features conspicuous triplets. As she sings, she remains focused on the memories of the regiment and repeats her text continually until she is interrupted by the *tempo di mezzo* section, in which the orchestra announces the approach of the regiment.

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<sup>25</sup> Vernoy de Saint-Georges and Bayard, *La fille du régiment*, 446.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 446-47.

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**No. 9 – “Par le rang et par l’opulence” from LA FILLE DU RÉGIMENT**

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Libretto by Jean-François Bayard & J.H. Vernoy de Saint-Georges

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Marie's delight prompts her to sing "Salut à la France!," which is in a resolute 3/4 meter and affords Marie several opportunities to perform joyous triplet runs. "Par le rang et par l'opulence" announces Marie's arrival as the new Romantic opera heroine whose music embodies a combination of both the French and Italian operatic musical styles.

Contemporary musicologists often deny Marie's status as a strong Romantic opera heroine. Certainly, part of this disregard for Donizetti's character stems from the lack of scholarly attention paid to his opera generally. Karl Loveland's dissertation on Donizetti's opera proves a notable exception; however, he proposes his own interpretation of *La fille's* heroine and finds her unpersuasive as a strong Romantic model of femininity. While Loveland details several modern stage productions that present Marie as a spunky tomboy or, as Beverly Sills suggests, a "lovable klutz,"<sup>27</sup> he compares her unfavourably to Rossini's Rosina.<sup>28</sup> Whereas Rosina is crafty, Loveland argues, Marie "is neither exploitative, nor willing to use her 'supposed feminine traits' to have her way."<sup>29</sup> He concludes that Marie "may be one of the most helpless of all female comic-opera characters," a remark that merits further scrutiny.<sup>30</sup>

First, in his criticism of Marie's "unfeminine" methods, Loveland fails to recognize the success of her unconventional traits; the same failings he identifies in her can be seen equally as character strengths. Loveland's reading centres on Marie's

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<sup>27</sup> Lawrence Linderman and Beverly Sills, *Beverly Sills: an autobiography* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 209.

<sup>28</sup> Loveland claims that Rosina (from Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*) better personifies the role of a Romantic opera heroine as she is a "feisty, independent woman, who...takes matters in her own hands." Loveland, "Reading Donizetti's *La fille du régiment*," 247.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

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social position as *vivandière* – an undignified position in his eyes since she has no real military responsibilities.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, although Marie avoids sexual manipulation and remains dependent on her fathers, she also defends her status as an independent person heroically; while not “crafty,” Marie’s pride in being the *vivandière* reflects a different type of self-assertion. For a work developed during an era of tumultuous gender relations, a heroine who rejects idealized femininity personifies the contemporaneous social climate better than a stock *opera buffa* character.

Second, Loveland argues that Marie lacks any distinct musical style (his analysis evades discussion of her triplet motives) and instead depends on other characters for musical material. In order to examine Marie’s musical character in more depth, Loveland isolates the three regimental songs, two ensembles, and two solo arias in which Marie participates; he argues that in each case where Marie sings with others, she imitates their respective styles.<sup>32</sup> However, Loveland’s criticism of Marie’s “dependent” musical style does not acknowledge Donizetti’s unique departure from the traditional compositional style of Romantic opera, which often includes specific musical forms (such as the *cavatina* and the double-arias) that correspond to specific character types.<sup>33</sup> In contrast to this tradition, Donizetti allows Marie the freedom to maneuver through various styles throughout the opera, granting her equal participation in regimental choruses and solo arias; far from lacking self-determination, Marie exerts her voice with the

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<sup>31</sup> Loveland, “Reading Donizetti’s *La fille du régiment*,” 247-8.

<sup>32</sup> For a more detailed analysis of each musical moment, please see Loveland’s dissertation for his analyses of Donizetti’s music.

<sup>33</sup> Regarding the typical Romantic comic heroine’s emotional response, Ashbrook remarks that “Rossini’s comic heroines only rarely express feelings of a sentimental nature with conviction,” an emotional shortcoming which can be attributed to a less flexible musical style as per convention. Ashbrook, *Donizetti*, 391.

characteristic triple meter rhythm that provides a continual thread through the music.

Thus, Loveland argues that it is Marie's low social standing combined with her musical variety that render her incapable of fulfilling the role of Romantic opera heroine. For Loveland, this ideal heroine is embodied by Rosina, who uses feminine wiles to escape unsavoury situations and whose music adheres to conventional musical tropes (which in *opera buffa* demand character differentiation through music). In this regard, Loveland fails to recognize that Marie does indeed have a distinct musical characteristic in the form of her rhythmic motive, although perhaps this is not a sufficiently structural innovation in his eyes.

Despite his ungenerous portrayal of Donizetti's protagonist, Loveland draws attention to another point of consideration – the various theatrical interpretations of Marie throughout history. Loveland suggests that the presentation of Marie as “genteel” is most appropriate due to historical theatrical tradition. He cites the performance of Jenny Lind, the famous Swedish soprano from the mid-1850s, who “played the role with a naïveté and propriety that her audiences would expect to see from a lady.”<sup>34</sup> Given the plot, however, one would not necessarily expect Marie to be a well-bred, “genteel” lady. Having been raised by a regiment, Marie's education in etiquette is incomplete. Loveland's preference for a more “genteel” reading of Marie seems to reflect historical precedence more than a close reading of the libretto and might be influenced by his own preference for Rosina's heroic character. Such an interpretation, however, seems to overlook Donizetti's radical portrayal of a strong-minded heroine in the midst of French political turmoil (both operatic and extant). Interestingly, Loveland notes that in 1848, performer Anna

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<sup>34</sup> Loveland, “Reading Donizetti's *La fille du régiment*,” 279.

Thillon deviated from the traditional “lady-like” interpretation of Marie and was chastised for her portrayal by the press. He cites a *Sunday Times* critic, who wrote that Thillon “is gay and coquettish, but her coquetry is that of a Parisian grisette, not of an innocent and light-hearted girl.”<sup>35</sup> This frank criticism suggests that Thillon’s interpretation might have reflected a more “modern” feminist interpretation that prompted strongly-worded reviews. As the opera’s performance history indicates, the interpretation of character reflects specific ideologies and aesthetic tastes; thus, the various interpretations of Marie (and subsequent critical receptions) serve to question and explore the limitless possibilities of Donizetti’s operatic character.<sup>36</sup>

Through all of these political and theatrical transformations, Donizetti’s Marie has remained convincing and progressive. Born from the synthesis of *opera buffa* and *opéra comique*, Marie remains an active participant in the feminist journey. Her musical adaptability preserves her independence while resisting total familial (and political) domination. Donizetti’s protagonist serves as a reminder that the task of forging one’s own path takes time and determination, two qualities embodied by Marie and by women for generations.

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<sup>35</sup> Review, *Sunday Times (London)*, 2 July 1848, quoted in Loveland, “Reading Donizetti’s *La fille du régiment*,” 279.

<sup>36</sup> In addition to various performance interpretations of the work, the opera exists in several editions. In later Italian versions of the opera (entitled *La figlia del reggimento*), Marie’s role was reduced in order to give Tonio a more prominent role. Furthermore, the political fervour of her grand “Salut à la France!” was also tempered. The Italian libretti, including one performed at the Teatro Nuovo, limited mention of references to France for political reasons as per the censors. The first Italian version, adapted by Donizetti and the librettist Calisto Bassi, premiered at La Scala on October 6, 1840. Another version was adapted in the summer of 1841 by Andrea Passaro at the Teatro Nuovo in Naples. For a fuller discussion of the subsequent versions and adaptations of Donizetti’s work, see Cronin, “The comic operas of Gaetano Donizetti and the end of the *opera buffa* tradition,” 147, and Francesco Izzo, “Comedy between Two Revolutions: *Opera Buffa* and the Risorgimento, 1831-1848,” *The Journal of Musicology* Vol. 21, no. 1 (Winter, 2004): 154-6.

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