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Citation for final published version:

Rowden, Clair 2018. Deferent daisies: Caroline Miolan Carvalho, Christine Nilsson and Marguerite, 1869. Cambridge Opera Journal 30 (2-3) , pp. 237-258. 10.1017/S0954586719000089

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0954586719000089>

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## Deferent Daisies: Caroline Miolan Carvalho, Christine Nilsson and Marguerite, 1869

Clair Rowden

### Abstract

This article explores a slice of the careers of two ‘rival’ coloratura singers – foremostly the Swedish soprano Christine Nilsson alongside the French soprano Caroline Miolan Carvalho – during the period 1867-1870, and considers the internationalisation of singing careers, women’s choices and negotiation of their career paths and fortunes made and lost. With both singers employed at the Paris Opéra from November 1868 onwards as Gounod’s *Faust* went into rehearsal, this article closely examines the ‘Battle of the Marguerites’ in the Parisian press in spring 1869 which raised heated questions of dramatic and vocal interpretation and style, often linked to cultural stereotypes, as well as artistic legitimacy and stature. Through examination of previously overlooked archival financial and legal records, this article also reveals for the first time that Miolan Carvalho was indentured to the director of the Opéra Emile Perrin during this period.

On 15 November 1867, Emile Perrin, director of the Paris Opéra, contracted the young but stellar-bound Swedish soprano Christine Nilsson. Plucked from extremely humble beginnings in rural Sweden, given a good education and then musical training of the highest calibre in Paris, Christine Nilsson began her professional career at the Théâtre-Lyrique, singing her grand solo debut on 27 October 1864, aged 21, as the title heroine in *Violetta* (the French adaptation of Verdi’s *La traviata*). For three seasons she trod the boards of the Théâtre-Lyrique, under the management of Léon Carvalho, singing alongside Caroline Miolan Carvalho, Léon’s wife and undisputed Parisian operatic queen. After the end of her contract at the Théâtre-Lyrique, Nilsson went to the Académie impériale de musique (Opéra) in

November 1867, where she was contracted to sing her début as Ophélie in Ambroise Thomas's new opera *Hamlet* in March 1868,<sup>1</sup> followed by roles within the repertoire including Alice in *Robert le diable*, Mathilde in *Guillaume Tell*, and Queen Marguerite de Valois in *Les Huguenots*, as well as Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust*.<sup>2</sup>

By this time, Nilsson was already a Parisian artistic and social phenomenon. While not exactly willowy, the singer was tall, had piercing blue eyes, and her hair was fair in comparison to the French. Fed up with the 'artifice' of Latin sopranos who had been tripping the boards before they could even talk, such as Adelina Patti, certain critics lauded the breath of fresh (Nordic) air Nilsson breathed onto Parisian and London stages. They praised her voice and interpretations in colourful language that reflected her nationality and simple origins: 'this Queen of the Night had upon her forehead the glacial glittering of the North star, and the compass immediately pointed to her. Of Italian sun, we'd had enough!'<sup>3</sup> The press

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<sup>1</sup> Nilsson later recounted the story of meeting Ambroise Thomas in the shop of the editor Henri Heugel, where Heugel proposed to Thomas that he should have the Nordic Nilsson for his Ophélie. She then implied that Heugel and Thomas worked behind the scenes to get her the offer of a contract from Emile Perrin at the Opéra. Christine Nilsson, comtesse de Casa-Miranda, 'Quelques Souvenirs de ma Carrière artistique', *Le Gaulois*, 24 November 1913, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Archives nationales, sub-series AJ<sup>13</sup>: Archives du Théâtre national de l'Opéra (hereafter AN AJ<sup>13</sup>) 476. Unsigned and undated copy of Nilsson's contract which runs from 15 November 1867 until 30 April 1869. The role of Marguerite is mentioned in the context of *Faust* being transferred (from the Théâtre-Lyrique) to the Opéra, a reality which only came into being in the wake of the collapse of the Théâtre-Lyrique in May 1868 (see below) and made official by an agreement signed between Gounod, his librettists and Emile Perrin on 31 July 1868. See Paul Prévost, 'Introduction', in Charles Gounod, *Faust (Version Opéra)* (Kassel, 2016), xiii. Two other roles in operas whose programming was not yet confirmed were also mentioned in Nilsson's contract: *Psyché*, in the opéra-comique by Thomas, and Rezzia (Reiza) in Weber's *Oberon*.

<sup>3</sup> F. de Lagenevais, 'Les Cantatrices suédoises: Jenny Lind et Christine Nilsson', *Le Ménestrel* 1080, no. 28, 9 June 1867, 217: 'cette reine de la nuit avait au front le scintillement glacé de l'étoile polaire, et l'aimant tout de suite vira vers elle. Du soleil d'Italie, on en avait assez!'

projected an image of her sensibility – humble yet frank demeanour, seriousness and wholesomeness. Her innocent and pure qualities were attributed to both her voice and persona, encouraged by her regular singing of Swedish folksongs both in theatres and society gatherings in a similar way to Jenny Lind, her older compatriot. Indeed, this practice likely inspired Thomas's incorporation of a simple Swedish song into Ophélie's mad scene in *Hamlet*, with Nilsson's nationality providing the composer with an excuse for highly effective local colour. Her youth and reserved, yet honest, stage persona easily conveyed the melancholic reverie of Ophélie; her vocal freshness as well as her fireworks portrayed Ophélie's innocence and fragile psyche; and her Pre-Raphaelite looks corresponded to an idealised femininity of the great North, which could have been anywhere from Harwich to Helsinki, Stratford to Stavanger.

But in 1869, Nilsson's talents were put under new scrutiny and into direct comparison with those of Caroline Miolan Carvalho. After twenty years of dominating Parisian stages as a virtuosic singer and as a significant creative force for both composition and the staging of opera, Caroline Miolan Carvalho was at the top of her game.<sup>4</sup> In this article, I will examine a short span of the careers of both Nilsson and Miolan Carvalho, during the years 1867 to 1870, which marked turning points for both singers, in historical, political and artistic terms. This brief period is nevertheless put into the context of the span of each singer's broader career with a particular focus on that of Christine Nilsson; this article, however, does not pretend to stand in for a comprehensive biographical study of either singer. Nilsson used this period as a springboard to launch herself onto the international operatic stage, while Miolan Carvalho suffered a series of career setbacks from which she quickly recovered, but which demonstrate the obstacles along the various paths to success of artists during this period. Thus, examined here are the choices they made, the commitments they fulfilled and the possibilities available

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<sup>4</sup> See Sean M. Parr, 'Caroline Carvalho and Nineteenth-Century Coloratura', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 23 (2012), 83-117.

to them at very different points in their careers. Nilsson and her exoticized Nordic cachet seem to have charmed audiences (yet often in different ways) more or less wherever she worked, while Miolan Carvalho's consummate artistry and reputation enthralled publics in Europe and beyond. But in 1869, the Parisian stakes were high for both singers.

### **Les deux Marguerites**

After a failed attempt to double up his troupe to provide opera performances for both the Théâtre-Lyrique and at the Salle Ventadour, Léon Carvalho declared bankruptcy in May 1868 and the Théâtre-Lyrique temporarily closed.<sup>5</sup> Carvalho was riddled with debts and even worse, his wife, whose income seems to have fairly regularly subsidized the Théâtre-Lyrique over the previous decade, was out of a job.<sup>6</sup> Thus, exactly one year after Nilsson had signed with Emile Perrin at the Opéra, Caroline Miolan Carvalho too signed on the dotted line.<sup>7</sup> In the meantime, the transferal of Gounod's *Faust* from the Théâtre-Lyrique – where it had been premiered ten years earlier with Miolan Carvalho as Marguerite – to the Paris Opéra had long

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<sup>5</sup> The Salle Ventadour, originally built for the Opéra-Comique in 1828, permanently housed the Théâtre-Italien from 1841 to 1878. Carvalho mounted performances three days a week at the salle Ventadour on the nights the Théâtre-Italien did not perform from March to May 1868, under the banner of the Théâtre de la Renaissance. See Nicole Wild, *Dictionnaire des théâtres parisiens (1807-1914)* (Lyon, 2012), 228-33, 378-79, 422-25.

<sup>6</sup> T. J. Walsh, *Second Empire Opera: The Théâtre lyrique, Paris 1851-1870* (London and New York, 1981), 120, 236. Gustave Vapereau (*Dictionnaire universel des contemporains* (Paris, 1880), 369, recounts how the Carvalhos' financial assets were legally declared separate ('séparation des biens') following judiciary procedures in the wake of the collapse of the Théâtre-Lyrique which established that Miolan Carvalho had not received a salary during the four previous years.

<sup>7</sup> AN AJ<sup>13</sup> 475. Unsigned copy of the contract, dated 15 November 1868, and due to run from 1868 until 14 November 1871. No mention of repertoire is made in Carvalho's contract but the press looked forward to hearing her sing (for the first time) the classic roles of the Opéra repertory: Mathilde in *Guillaume Tell*, Isabelle from *Robert le Diable*, Marguerite de Valois from *Les Huguenots*.

been secured for spring 1869.<sup>8</sup> And so five days after Miolan Carvalho had signed her contract, Nilsson took the unprecedented step of writing to Perrin (forwarding a copy of her letter to *Le Figaro* for publication) to graciously and deferentially abdicate the role of Marguerite in favour of the singer for whom the role had been written and with whom, by this time, it had become synonymous.<sup>9</sup> Perrin was extremely annoyed at Nilsson's gesture and public act, writing her a long letter chiding her and asking her to refrain from interfering in the affairs of running the theatre: 'Allow me to tell you also that the distribution of roles is an act of pure administration and that you are encroaching somewhat upon the mission of the Director. What would you say, Heavens, moreover what would the public say if I felt like indulging a fantasy to sing Ophelia?'<sup>10</sup> He also responded publically in *Le Figaro* the following day. His published remarks were more restrained as he assured Nilsson that the role of Marguerite was hers and that indeed, Miolan Carvalho would be given leave to fulfil commitments elsewhere at the time of the *Faust* premiere.<sup>11</sup> The following day, Miolan Carvalho also responded to Nilsson in *Le Figaro*, graciously acknowledging the sentiments Nilsson had expressed, and reassuring her of their continuing excellent artistic relations.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, a perilous task faced Christine Nilsson on the night of 3 March 1869: to bring to life a much-loved operatic heroine before 'le Tout Paris' in a work transferred from a small

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<sup>8</sup> Prévost ('Introduction', xiii) recounts the negotiations for the transferral of *Faust* to the Opéra repertoire, which included a payment of 20,000 francs by Perrin to Léon Carvalho for the privilege of performing *Faust*.

<sup>9</sup> AN AJ<sup>13</sup> 476, letter from Nilsson to Perrin, dated 'Vendredi soir 20 Novembre [1868]'; 'Correspondance', *Le Figaro*, 21 November 1868, 2.

<sup>10</sup> AN AJ<sup>13</sup> 476, letter from Perrin to Nilsson, 21 November 1868: 'Permettez-moi de vous dire aussi, la distribution des rôles est un acte de pure administration et vous empietez un peu ici sur les attributions du Directeur. Que diriez-vous, mon Dieu, que dirait surtout le Public s'il me prenait la fantaisie de chanter Ophélie.' Several drafts and clean copies of this letter exist in the archive.

<sup>11</sup> Jules Prével, 'Petit Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro*, 22 November 1868, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Prével, 'Petit Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro*, 23 November 1868, 3.

and intimate theatre to the imposing and cavernous space and acoustic of the Paris Opéra.<sup>13</sup>

Critics raised concerns about the nature of this adaptation, questioning why Gounod might contemplate the display of his *tableau de genre* in a frame that was too big.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, this adaptation was intimately linked to the dramatic and vocal styles and capabilities of the two Marguerites, Nilsson and the one to whom all Paris was to compare her: Caroline Miolan Carvalho. Indeed, Sean M. Parr affirms that Miolan Carvalho's interpretation of Marguerite became the standard against which all sopranos were measured in the role for the remainder of the century.<sup>15</sup> All the intimate and sentimental scenes and arias in which Miolan Carvalho had excelled were somewhat lost in the bigger house. And yet, what was unkindly referred to as the score's *mièvreries* or affectations – Marguerite's discovery of the jewel box accompanied by her show-stopping coloratura aria, her melancholic and folksy Ballad of the King of Thulé, the garden scene where Faust first awakens love in Marguerite's pure and innocent heart, and Marguerite's timid yet ardent and inevitable response – were actually the excerpts the Parisians loved and adored in Miolan Carvalho's rather sentimental portrayal of Marguerite.<sup>16</sup> As Miolan Carvalho sang naively yet heart-wrenchingly 'J'ai perdu

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<sup>13</sup> Prévost also gives a press review of the March 1869 Opéra premiere in his introduction to the recent Bärenreiter critical edition ('Introduction', xv-xvii).

<sup>14</sup> For example, Hippolyte Prévost, 'Revue musicale', *La France*, 7 March 1869; Jules de Leers, *Le Sport*, 17 March 1869. On the other hand, Gustave Chadeuil ('Revue musicale', *Le Siècle*, 9 March 1869) saw the work as now being in its rightful place, and that it had previously been squeezed into too tight a frame.

<sup>15</sup> See Parr, 'Caroline Carvalho', 104, 116.

<sup>16</sup> See for example, Gustave Bertrand, 'Le Faust de Gounod à l'Opéra', *Le Ménestrel* 1171, no. 14, 7 March 1869, 107-108; Flavio, 'Faust et les Deux Marguerites', *La Bourse comique: politique, philosophique et littéraire*, 12, BnF Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra (hereafter BnF Opéra), Dossier d'artiste, Christine Nilsson; Ernest Feydeau, 'Christine Nilsson', *La Revue internationale de l'art et de la curiosité*, no.4, 15 April 1869, 267-286 (281); Benedict [Jouvin], 'Opéra. Reprise de Faust', *Le Figaro*, 6 March 1869, 3.

ma mère... J'ai perdu ma petite sœur' ('I have lost my mother... I have lost my little sister'), the audience shed tears. Nilsson, critics argued on the other hand, came over more like a spoilt, soulless child who had lost her doll.<sup>17</sup> Others believed she had not understood the depth of passion, love, and suffering offered by the role.<sup>18</sup> Another insightful reviewer spoke of the way Nilsson regularly broke up the phrase (perhaps as a non-native French speaker) that Miolan Carvalho had delivered in such a polished manner, and one critic even suggested that Nilsson had held back and sung *mezza voce* in order to create a distinct contrast with the last act where the brilliance of her voice came into its own.<sup>19</sup> Only Jules de Leers suggested that Nilsson was handicapped in Act II by her Faust, the tenor Edouard Colin, whose own rendition of the duet was cold and loveless, forcing Nilsson into a modest reserve for dramatic purposes: to make advances to a Faust who had hardly made any of his own would have been dramatically implausible for a young naive woman who has not yet felt the first stirrings of love.<sup>20</sup> There were only a few dissenters who preferred Nilsson's fresh and sober, less conventional approach to these sections,<sup>21</sup> Théodore de Banville referring to her 'disdain of vulgar effects' as worthy of admiration.<sup>22</sup> But what one critic saw as unaffected, another saw as affected, and what one saw as simplicity, another saw as arched and overplayed.

On the other hand, the more grandiose tableaux – the Church and final scenes – were no doubt augmented in grandeur and power of rhetoric by the new setting. Moreover, these were the scenes in which Nilsson excelled: Marguerite's divine apotheosis reportedly transported

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<sup>17</sup> Léon Garnier, 'Premières Représentations', *L'Europe artiste*, 14 March 1869.

<sup>18</sup> Gaston Zap, 'Les Deux Marguerites de *Faust*', *Le Monde pour Rire*, 13 March 1869.

<sup>19</sup> Jules Comte, 'Théâtres', *La Chronique*, 11 March 1869. Parr ('Caroline Carvalho', 89, fn. 15) refers to Carvalho's rare ability to combine agility with gracefully spun, musical phrasing.

<sup>20</sup> Jules de Leers, 'Bruits du Monde', *Le Sport*, 10 March 1869.

<sup>21</sup> See for example Hippolyte Prévost, 'Revue musicale', *La France*, 7 March 1869.

<sup>22</sup> Théodore de Banville in *Le National*, quoted in 'Semaine Théâtrale. Les Deux Marguerite[s] de Faust', *Le Ménestrel* 1172, no. 15, 14 March 1869, 116-117.

both Nilsson and her auditors to great heights of mystical elation, redemption, and sublime transfiguration, and her pain and dejection in the Church scene were palpable in both her voice and stage movement.<sup>23</sup> Nilsson's 'superhuman art'<sup>24</sup> in the final trio was seen here to surpass that of Miolan Carvalho in her capacity to:

sustain the effect of the dramatic impetus, the treasures of youth, the wide-ranging phrase sung with a full, expansive, and sweet voice, without mannerism and always with a broad effect [...] The prison scene revealed in her a rare strength of sentiment and expression. At times, in this multi-faceted character, she reached the sublime and realized the ideal.<sup>25</sup>

This larger, more passionate drama thus seemingly acquired new importance and intensity, not least because of Nilsson's interpretation.<sup>26</sup> Once again, Nordic stereotypes and even landscapes – nixes (water nymphs in German and Nordic mythology), valkyries, swan women of Edda, glaciers, snow-capped mountains, the Northern lights, etc. – were marshalled to describe the temperament of the blonde, blue-eyed singer, this time put into direct contrast with the Latin brunette of a Miolan Carvalho (from Marseille) or even the Spanish born *wunderkind* Adelina Patti whose name was evoked by several critics in this rhetorical battle

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<sup>23</sup> Paul de Saint-Victor in *La Liberté*, quoted in 'Semaine Théâtrale. Les Deux Marguerite[s] de Faust', *Le Ménestrel*; Gaston Péroleaud, 'Chronique des Théâtres. Opéra, Faust', *Le Yacht*, 14 March 1869.

<sup>24</sup> Pierre Véron, 'Théâtres', *Le Charivari*, 6 March 1869.

<sup>25</sup> Prévost, 'Revue musicale', *La France*, 7 March 1869: 'balancer l'effet des élans dramatiques, des trésors de jeunesse, des grandes phrases dites d'une voix forte, étendue et suave, sans manière et d'un style toujours large, [...] La scène de la prison a révélé chez elle une rare puissance de sentiment et d'expression. Elle a parfois, dans ce caractère aux teintes multiples, touché au sublime et réalisé l'idéal.' Or as Eugène de Fère put it in his article 'Opéra', *L'Indépendance dramatique*, 17 March 1869: 'we will sigh with Mme Carvalho, then soar to redemption with Mlle Nilsson.' ('on soupirera avec Mme Carvalho pour voler à la rédemption avec Mlle Nilsson.')

<sup>26</sup> Véron, 'Théâtres', *Le Charivari*, 6 March 1869.

for supremacy.<sup>27</sup> While Miolan Carvalho's Marguerite had been considered the embodiment of the painter Ary Scheffer's Marguerite in the 1859 reception of the opera, now the blonde Nilsson was seen physically to correspond more closely to ideals of a Germanic Gretchen, and Scheffer's 1846 painting of *Faust and Marguerite in the Garden* was once more cited as an ideal which translated Goethe's own.<sup>28</sup> Thus, Nilsson's art was perceived as more interiorised and subtle, Protestant even, and seen as less extroverted and superficial:

Do not ask her for roars of ardent passion, nor violence, nor fits of anger, nor all the transports of an agitated, stirred up, shaken soul. The woman knows none of these crises and the artist cannot even conceive of them intellectually. It is not a noisy river, bellowing, rumbling, dragging trees and debris on its thunderous journey; it is a silver lake, gently shimmering and which is hardly rippled by the melancholic breeze that makes the birch branches whimper. It is not the relentless, steaming, white hot, Provençal sun that irritates the mind and dries the grass.<sup>29</sup>

This perceived passive and dream-like quality to certain aspects of Nilsson's performance was of course a traditional mode of expression of femininity, especially in the

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<sup>27</sup> See for example, Bertrand, 'Le Faust de Gounod à L'Opéra' 108; Garnier, 'Premières Représentations', *L'Europe artiste*, 14 March 1869.

<sup>28</sup> Parr, 'Caroline Carvalho', 107, fn. 57.

<sup>29</sup> E[douard]. D[rumont]., 'Trois Portraits. Mademoiselle Nilsson', *La Chronique illustrée*, no. 41, 11 March 1869: 'Ne lui demandez ni les rugissements de la passion ardente, ni les violences, ni les colères, ni tous les transports de l'âme humaine agitée, remuée, secouée. La femme ne connaît aucune de ces crises et l'artiste ne se rend même pas compte intellectuellement. Ce n'est pas le fleuve sonore, mugissant, grondant, entraînant dans sa course retentissante les arbres et les débris; – c'est le lac d'argent miroitant doucement et que ride à peine la brise mélancolique qui fait gémir les branches des bouleaux. Ce n'est pas le soleil du midi implacable, ruisselant, chauffant à blanc les cerveaux et desséchant les herbes.'

portrayal of a heroine who strays from the righteous path.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Nilsson seems to have been happy to remain hidden behind these demure Nordic stereotypes, as the story of her youth and journey from rags to riches was trotted out regularly in the press while details of her private life in the late 1860s remained just that, private. Moreover, this rather sanitized portrayal suited certain audiences. Of Nilsson's restrained London portrayal of Violetta's death which eschewed realistic and carnal coughing and other outward symptoms of her tuberculosis, one author wrote 'Violetta dies, but scarcely of consumption. She fades away, a victim to disappointed love, to manly scorn.'<sup>31</sup> Nilsson's penchant for a more Romanticised embodiment of characters often went hand in hand therefore with the image of an exoticised or othered grand North. This North stood in strict contrast to the *feu sacré* which was idealised by the supporters of the more Latin Miolan Carvalho, along with her accomplished style of communicating human passion and exquisite sweetness.<sup>32</sup>

Nonetheless, some critics voiced an almost xenophobic wariness of Nilsson's beauty, turning those same glacial Germanic and Nordic stereotypes against both her and her voice, and even her success in the more dramatic sections of the work was turned against her.<sup>33</sup> Nilsson's talent was debased as wild and unbalanced, her qualities compared to those which

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<sup>30</sup> Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930* (Cambridge, 2006), 262-263. Citing Herman Klein (*The Golden Age of Opera* (London, 1933, 13)), Rutherford affirms that Nilsson was applauded as a 'dreamy poetic' Marguerite.

<sup>31</sup> Anon., *Memoir of Mdlle. Christine Nilsson* (London, n. d. [1869]), 21.

<sup>32</sup> While the adjective Latin was easily ascribed to singers from Italy and Spain, the French use of Latin is a little more complicated. During this period the French were continuously reinforcing their Latin heritage, and commonly, anyone from south of the Loire river, is seen to be of Latin blood. To be Latin, therefore, was to be quintessentially French, and Carvalho was 'marseillaise' to boot. This did not stop critics from distinguishing between cultivated, sophisticated French and Parisian performers and the more 'vulgar effects' of visiting, predominantly Italian, singers however.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Garnier, 'Premières Représentations', *L'Europe artiste*, 14 March 1869.

had made her a credible Ophélie,<sup>34</sup> and her technical prowess was seen as something to be avoided, rather than cultivated, in an international class of singer.<sup>35</sup> Still young and relatively inexperienced when thrown into *Faust* (at least in comparison with Miolan Carvalho, fifteen years her senior), Nilsson was effectively caught in a double bind: neither did she conform to the public's expectation of Miolan Carvalho's creation, nor did she seem to be able to create a wholly original Marguerite with her own personal, remarkable interpretation.<sup>36</sup> The press generally saw it as an ill-advised venture to go head to head with Miolan Carvalho on her home turf. But, of course, this was precisely the situation Nilsson had tried to avoid by graciously bowing out of the role in November 1868. Why, some asked, did Perrin retain Nilsson in the role when Miolan Carvalho was on the books? The answer is clear: by casting Nilsson, Perrin knew the public would come to see her in order to compare her to the great Miolan Carvalho. By then handing the role back to Miolan Carvalho after twenty performances (on 28 April) – the rhetoric of the usurped throne being rightfully taken back by the true sovereign was omnipresent in the press – he also knew people would return to hear her again, and witness her triumph anew.<sup>37</sup> Above all, the critics enjoyed the restoration of the former glories of the second act that they had so regretted in Nilsson's performance. Although some begrudgingly recognised Nilsson's superiority at revealing the dramatic possibilities of the Church scene, and regretted the youthful freshness that Nilsson's voice had brought to the

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<sup>34</sup> Comte, 'Théâtres', *La Chronique*, 11 March 1869.

<sup>35</sup> Garnier, 'Premières Représentations', *L'Europe artiste*, 14 March 1869.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Flavio, '*Faust et les Deux Marguerites*', 12.

<sup>37</sup> Gustave Chadeuil, 'Revue musicale', *Le Siècle*, 4 May 1869. Carvalho was given a standing ovation before she sang a note (see M. de Thémis, 'Revue musicale', *La Patrie*, 3 May 1869), she was recalled at the end of each act, and one critic even suggested that the public admiration went as far as delirium, or that it had at least exceeded the limits of truth and legitimacy. See H. Dumont, 'Semaine musicale', *La Comédie*, no. 333, 2 May 1869, 1-3.

role,<sup>38</sup> many were overwhelmingly grateful to Miolan Carvalho for restoring the charming emotions of the Garden scene:

Marguerite, the real Marguerite [...] has come back to us at last, with her sweet and simple grace, her communicative warmth and her melancholic resignation. [...] her nature as an artist is the exquisite gentleness of sentiment which transfigures her; it is the swift communication of the emotion she feels; it is the strength of diction which replaces the strength of the instrument; it is the cry of the soul which is substituted for the cry from the bosom and which goes right to the heart of the public which hears her.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> More than one critic (even Léon Garnier, 'L'Académie impériale de musique', *L'Europe artiste*, 2 May 1869) suggested a fading brilliance to Carvalho's voice. See also de Thémis, 'Revue musicale', *La Patrie*, 3 May 1869; Dumont, 'Semaine musicale', *La Comédie*, 1-3; X., 'Notes de Musique', *Le Gaulois*, 30 April 1869, 3. While a detailed analysis of the vocal traits and capabilities of the two Marguerites is beyond the scope of this article, Nilsson possessed a clear, *bel canto* voice with a high extension at the top which meant she was widely acclaimed as a Queen of the Night. From 1861 she studied with the tenor Pierre François Wartel, a former student of Adolphe Nourrit, and later took lessons from Manuel Garcia *fils* (see Ingegerd Björklund, *The Compelling: A Performance-Orientated Study of the Singer Christina Nilsson* (Göteborg, 2001), 40, 70). Despite the numerous and detailed accounts of Nilsson's great technical assurance and subtle artistry across the course of her career, reports of her performance of Marguerite are mixed, and it seems that her crystalline tone failed to sparkle or carry in the middle register in the vast house of the Opéra (Feydeau, 'Christine Nilsson', 275). There must have been a *spinto* quality in the upper register, and critics after *Faust* were split between those who marvelled at the evenness of tone across the whole range, and others who found the middle of the voice weak.

<sup>39</sup> Garnier, 'L'Académie impériale de musique', *L'Europe artiste*, 2 May 1869: 'Marguerite, la vraie Marguerite [...] nous est enfin revenue, avec sa grâce douce et simple, sa chaleur communicative et sa résignation mélancolique [...] sa nature d'artiste, c'est la douceur exquise du sentiment qui la transfigure; c'est la communication rapide de l'émotion qu'elle ressent; c'est la puissance de la diction remplaçant la puissance de l'organe; c'est le cri de l'âme, se substituant au cri de la poitrine, et atteignant au cœur le public qui l'écoute.'

But Marguerite had never been away, for indeed, despite assurances that Miolan Carvalho would be out of town at the time of premiere, she was not. The premiere of *Faust*, originally scheduled for early February was put off to early March, but Miolan Carvalho was on the scene from the start, singing the other Marguerite (de Valois) in *Les Huguenots*, just four days after Nilsson's premiere.<sup>40</sup> Perrin's strategy seems to have paid off: all through May the receipts from ticket sales, although not quite as high as for Nilsson, remained above average.<sup>41</sup>

### **Nilsson Abroad**

Nilsson managed to keep her private persona outside of the media spotlight and behind the wall of Nordic stereotypes and bourgeois respectability, forged in the company of her English *dame de compagnie* Ann Richardson, and her then sweetheart Auguste Rouzaud.<sup>42</sup> From the moment Nilsson was contracted at the Théâtre-Lyrique she moved into her own apartment with Richardson, who stayed with Nilsson for many years as private secretary, companion, and housekeeper.<sup>43</sup> Soon after the start of her contract at the Théâtre-Lyrique, she

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<sup>40</sup> Miolan Carvalho was actually singing Marguerite de Valois in *Les Huguenots* sporadically throughout the period of Nilsson's twenty performances of *Faust* from 3 March to 24 April 1869. See BnF Opéra, Journal de Régie, RE-21 (1869). Nevertheless, she still had time to sing in both Monaco and Brussels. See Edouard-Auguste Spoll, *Madame Carvalho: Notes et souvenirs* (Paris, 1885), 87-88. Yet Gustave Vapereau reports that Carvalho refused to honour a contract at La Monnaie in Brussels during March 1869 and was condemned by the Tribunal de la Seine to pay 600 francs damages per day of absence, although this sentence was not upheld on appeal. See Vapereau, *Dictionnaire universel*, 370.

<sup>41</sup> BnF Opéra, Journal de Régie, RE-21 (1869).

<sup>42</sup> A number of variant spellings exist for Rouzaud in the press, archives and general literature on Nilsson: Rozaud, Rozeaud and Rouzeaud are all present.

<sup>43</sup> AN AJ<sup>13</sup> 476 contains a number of letters (in impeccable French) from Ann Richardson to Georges Colleuille, stage manager at the Opéra, excusing Nilsson from performances due to illness. *The Musical World* (48/53, 31 December 1870, 864) described Ann Richardson as 'a devout English lady', and Lillie de Hegermann-Lindencrone remarked on Nilsson's astuteness at having provided herself with a chaperone cum surrogate

is said to have met Auguste Rouzaud who came from a (not very successful) banking and bourgeois background. It appears that their relationship was based more on friendship and mutual respect than cupid's arrow, but because Auguste's family disapproved of the match, Nilsson looked for performance opportunities elsewhere.<sup>44</sup> Although it was not in Rouzaud's interests to curb the career of his future wife, Nilsson's Swedish biographer Ingegerd Björklund affirms that Nilsson agreed to strictly limit her Parisian appearances and to not take on any trouser roles as a concession to Rouzaud and his family.<sup>45</sup> Thus from the summer of 1867 onwards, Nilsson spent three months (May-July) for over a decade at either Her Majesty's Theatre or Covent Garden, singing the roles that had made her name in Paris, as well as the odd trouser role. Nilsson, however, seems to have been uncomfortable *en travestie*, a feeling compounded no doubt by her agreement with Rouzaud. The English baritone Charles Santley suggested that she looked like a fish out of water as Cherubino in London in June 1868.<sup>46</sup> But it was Nilsson's London contracts which launched her career on a far more international trajectory, and in 1869, following her run of twenty performances of Marguerite in Paris and a triumphant *adieu* performance of Thomas's *Hamlet* (April 26), Nilsson went directly to London where she was singing *Lucia* and Flotow's *Martha* within a week, as well as Marguerite, Ophélie, and Violetta before the summer break.<sup>47</sup>

Despite Nilsson's careful planning of her career, one might consider a move in 1867 from Paris to London, where Adelina Patti had been ensconced since 1861, as jumping out of

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mother figure. She described Ann Richardson as 'primness personified, and so *comme il faut* that it is actually oppressive to be in the same room with her'. See Lillie de Hegermann-Lindencrone, *In the Courts of Memory, 1858-1875* (New York and London, 1911), 72-73, cited in Rutherford, *The Prima Donna*, 129.

<sup>44</sup> Nils-Olof Franzén, *Christina Nilsson: en svensk saga* (Stockholm, 1976), 179.

<sup>45</sup> Björklund, *The Compelling*, 68.

<sup>46</sup> Rutherford, *The Prima Donna*, 248 where she quotes Hermann Klein, *Great Women Singers of My Time* (London, 1931), 76.

<sup>47</sup> Nilsson sang her very last *Hamlet* in Paris on 2 May 1870. BnF Opéra, *Journal de Régie*, RE-22 (1870).

the frying pan and into the fire for, as far as those close to Patti were concerned, Nilsson was the most formidable rival she ever encountered.<sup>48</sup> Patti had been born into the opera business, and despite her short lived marriage to the Marquis de Caux in 1868, she spent much of her busy and international professional life with the French tenor (Ernest Nicolas) Nicolini. Through conscious decisions about their relationships with their partners, including perhaps the fact that neither had any children, both Patti and Nilsson were relatively free to travel and take advantage of the type of career available to international singers.<sup>49</sup> Each singer seems to have had her own camp of followers: ‘Some were for the blonde Swede, others for the Spanish brunette; it was a battle in which the projectiles were bouquets and garlands which reigned down like a perfumed shower of bullets.’<sup>50</sup> Indeed, in comparison to Nilsson’s relationship to Miolan Carvalho and a partisan French press, there was neither the weight of ownership of roles, nor the notion of national pride at stake in her dealings with Patti.

Patti was deemed technically unsurpassable, but Nilsson was a better actress and a superior musician from an interpretative standpoint. In a letter from London dated 19 June 1879, penned by Auguste Vaucorbeil, director of the Paris Opéra, and sent to the Parisian editor, Jacques-Léopold Heugel, Vaucorbeil discussed the merits of both singers. Of Patti he

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<sup>48</sup> Maurice Strakosch, *Souvenirs d’un impresario* (Paris, 1887), 38. Strakosch was Patti’s brother-in-law and agent.

<sup>49</sup> Hilary Poriss explores the tensions between touring and family life in relation to Pauline Viardot and her husband Louis, when Viardot went on a rare unaccompanied tour to Warsaw and Germany in 1857-1858, relatively soon after the birth of her fourth child. See Hilary Poriss, ‘Pauline Viardot, Travelling Virtuosa’, *Music & Letters* 96 (2015), 204.

<sup>50</sup> Victor Wilder, ‘Christine Nilsson’, in *Les Actrices de Paris* (Paris, 1882), 15-16, reporting on performances in St. Petersburg: ‘Les uns tenaient pour la blonde Suédoise, les autres pour la brune Espagnole; c’était une bataille où les bouquets et les couronnes servaient de projectiles et pleuvaient comme une mitraille parfumée.’

commented: ‘marvellous voice – mediocre singer in *L’Africaine* and hopeless actress –’.<sup>51</sup>

Another well-placed commentator, the librettist Ludovic Halévy was more expansive:

I believe I prefer the Swede. She does not have the liveliness and the playfulness of Mlle Patti, she has neither her swagger nor her boldness, but such strange and penetrating poise, such a way of singing which is all her own. I have never seen an artist so completely herself. She sings less purely than Madame Carvalho, less brilliantly than Mlle Patti, but how it goes straight to your soul this small crystalline voice of timbre both sweet and piercing!<sup>52</sup>

Yet however frequently and vehemently (male) writers pitted these three women against each other, Nilsson’s relationship with the other two women seems to have been cordial and professional, each singer being able to carve out a parallel career in an increasingly open field. Although Miolan Carvalho and Léon Carvalho had pitched Nilsson into the perilous role of the Queen of the Night at the Théâtre-Lyrique in February 1865 – Miolan Carvalho preferring to retain the role of Pamina for herself – this test on behalf of the older singer who was not just a senior colleague, but also Nilsson’s unofficial boss, seems justified in professional terms while also being a risky strategy for Miolan Carvalho’s own reputation as the dominant coloratura soprano in Paris. Nilsson excelled in the role and, despite some press reports that Miolan Carvalho had handed Nilsson a poisoned chalice, the Carvalhos’ strategy should rather be seen as giving a young singer a

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<sup>51</sup> BnF Opéra NLAS-193 (5), letter from Auguste Vaucorbeil to Jacques-Léopold Heugel, 19 June 1879: ‘voix merveilleuse – chanteuse médiocre dans *L’Africaine* et comédienne nulle –’

<sup>52</sup> Ludovic Halévy, *Carnets I: 1862-1869* (Paris, 1935), 84: ‘J’hésite très sincèrement entre l’Italienne et la Suédoise, et je crois que j’aime encore mieux la Suédoise. Elle n’a pas l’entrain et l’enjouement de Mlle Patti, elle n’a pas sa crânerie et son audace, mais quelle grâce étrange et pénétrante, quelle façon de chanter qui n’appartient qu’à elle. Je n’ai jamais vu artiste être plus complètement elle-même. Elle chante moins purement que madame Carvalho, moins brillamment que mademoiselle Patti, mais comme elle va à l’âme, cette petite voix de cristal, d’un timbre à la fois doux et perçant!’

chance to confirm her talent in the wake of her outstanding debut as Violetta three months earlier. Moreover, it is unlikely that Miolan Carvalho could seriously think Nilsson would make a hash of the Queen of the Night after the success she had made of *La traviata*, and their successful double act in *La Flûte enchantée* only further contributed to the Carvalho's financial success.<sup>53</sup> The aforementioned cordial public exchange between the two singers with regard to Marguerite at the Opéra in November 1868 seems to confirm the nature of their professional relations, at odds with the way in which the press painted their 'rivalry'.<sup>54</sup>

In addition, despite Nilsson's abdication gaffe with Perrin in November 1868 in which she apparently overstepped the mark, her quiet ambition and generally shrewd dealings with directors and impresarios can never be in doubt. During her time at the Théâtre-Lyrique she came up against not only Miolan Carvalho but also her compatriot Signe Hebbe. Hebbe's biographer Inga Lewenhaupt has tried to get to the bottom of the relationship between the two Swedes despite the lack of unbiased evidence in the archives and family correspondence.<sup>55</sup> Hebbe was due to make her debut as Elsa at the Théâtre-Lyrique during the 1866-1867 season, a debut and performance of *Lohengrin* that was never realized, while the role of Myrrha in Victorin Joncières's *Sardanaple*, which was destined for her, was actually

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<sup>53</sup> Receipt books show that *Violetta* was performed 14 times at the Théâtre-Lyrique between 29 October and 29 November 1864, with average takings of 3690 francs per night. The average receipts for the first fourteen performances of *La Flûte enchantée*, given between 23 February and 20 March 1865 was 5965 francs, and frequent performances continued to bring in around 6000 francs each, right up until the end of May. See AN AJ<sup>13</sup> 459.

<sup>54</sup> A further example of Miolan Carvalho's professional practices and business sense can be seen by her ceding the role of Marguerite at the Théâtre-Lyrique to Caroline Vandenheuvel-Duprez in June 1867 while she sang Juliette in Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*. See Prévost, 'Introduction', xiii.

<sup>55</sup> Inga Lewenhaupt, *Signe Hebbe (1837-1925). Skådespelerska, operasångerska, pedagog* (Stockholm, 1988), 99-106. My thanks to Anne Kauppala for drawing my attention to this source.

premiered by Nilsson.<sup>56</sup> When questioned on whether Nilsson was responsible for Hebbe's missed debut, Léon Carvalho reportedly said to Hebbe's stepfather, the journalist Lars Hierta, that Nilsson was 'craftier than me and all the Parisian [theatre] directors put together.'<sup>57</sup> It can be assumed that the Carvalho couple knew the audience draw a Nilsson performance could bring to the theatre, while remaining lucid about her qualities as a sharp operator: Nilsson could generally obtain what she wanted from the men who employed her, assisted by a masterly command of the French language and polite epistolary conventions, as well as a respectful yet firm tone in negotiations regarding her commitments.

In September 1868 she renegotiated with Perrin, who offered to renew her contract which was due to finish at the end of April 1869. Nilsson wrote a deft and charming letter recalling the success that Ophélie (and by extension Thomas and Perrin) had afforded her in London, as well as projected performances of the opera in Germany and Sweden. She mused: 'How can I reconcile all these obligations with the new contract that you have kindly proposed that I sign now?'<sup>58</sup> She suggested an amendment to her current contract which would add only the period January to May 1870, suggesting that this left them the time and leisure to negotiate another, longer contract when they would both know better 'the services

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<sup>56</sup> Albert Soubies, *Histoire du Théâtre-Lyrique 1851-1870* (Paris, 1899), 47.

<sup>57</sup> In a letter to his wife Wilhelmina, dated 1 November 1867, Hierta reported Carvalho's response to his question: 'C'est très difficile de répondre à cette question, Monsieur, seulement je peux dire, que Mademoiselle Nilsson est plus finotte que moi et tous les directeurs de Paris ensemble.' Ambiguity exists because the word used for crafty is finot (feminine version, finotte) rather than the expected spelling and homophone finaud, which would give the feminine version finaude, which is no longer a homophone for finotte. Quoted in Lewenhaupt, *Signe Hebbe*, 105.

<sup>58</sup> AN AJ<sup>13</sup> 476, letter from Nilsson to Perrin, 29 September 1868: 'Comment concilier toutes ces obligations avec le nouvel engagement que vous voulez bien me proposer de signer dès aujourd'hui?'

that I may be called to render to French opera'.<sup>59</sup> Nilsson seems to have been angling for another world premiere such as *Ophélie*, and yearned for the level of collaboration, esteem and creative agency that she had enjoyed when working with Ambroise Thomas.

This type of working relationship was almost commonplace for Miolan Carvalho, who during her career gave the premieres of sixteen roles, many of which were written specifically for her.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, having endured the weight of the mantle of Marguerite in Miolan Carvalho's wake, Nilsson sought the privileged position of the *créatrice* and the prestige new roles afforded her in terms of critical reception. It seems likely that this was all that could hold her in Paris, for it certainly was not the financial rewards. The trajectory of her career was set, and it was not Paris with its partisan press that was going to prevent her from seeking her fame and fortune wherever she could make it.

Increasingly easy foreign travel, and the globalization of operatic markets galvanized by a press machine which reported from London, New York, Milan, and St. Petersburg, added to a growing star system which demanded big names to sell tickets. The opening up of the American market at precisely this time in particular meant that top-notch singers could demand the gold standard.<sup>61</sup> In 1869, Nilsson and Miolan Carvalho both had contracts from

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<sup>59</sup> AN AJ<sup>13</sup> 476, *Ibid.*: 'les services que je puis être appelée à rendre à l'Opéra français.' Nilsson did return to the Paris Opéra from January to 2 May 1870, singing *Ophélie*, Alice (in *Robert le diable* to Miolan Carvalho's Isabelle) and then replacing Miolan Carvalho as Marguerite for one of her last performances (22 April 1870) which was attended by the Emperor. Nilsson did not perform in Paris again until 1883, after the death of her first husband Rouzaud.

<sup>60</sup> Parr, 'Caroline Carvalho', especially 84 and 110. Nilsson only premiered three roles in her career: *Ophélie*, Myrrha and Estelle in Cohen's *Les Bleuets* (Théâtre-Lyrique, 23 October 1867).

<sup>61</sup> Strakosch, *Souvenirs*, 79, 154. Strakosch admitted that impresarios had effectively created the star system but then had to suffer it as they needed the stars to bring in the public, and he blamed American houses for taking down more than one director of a traditional troupe-based Italian opera company who could no longer compete in terms of singers' fees.

Perrin for 5000 or 6000 francs a month for eight or ten shows, with 600 francs for every supplementary performance (and during April and May 1869, Miolan Carvalho sang Gounod's Marguerite thirteen times and Meyerbeer's Marguerite four times).<sup>62</sup> Yet by heading to London, Nilsson could earn 5000 francs (£200) per night,<sup>63</sup> a sum rising to 7000 francs during her three-month tour of Imperial Russia in the winter of 1872-1873.<sup>64</sup> Following her summer London season in 1870, Nilsson put her fortune in the hands of London artistic manager Henry C. Jarrett and the impresario brothers Maurice and Max Strakosch to undertake a tour of the United States: in two seasons she netted 1,350,000 francs in fees and shares in concert profits.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, at various times through the 1870s Nilsson tried to negotiate a return to Paris, but it never worked out. The Opéra director Olivier Halanzier

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<sup>62</sup> Contracts already cited in AN AJ<sup>13</sup> 476, and AJ<sup>13</sup> 475. BnF Opéra, Journal de Régie, RE-21 (1869).

<sup>63</sup> E[douard]. D[rumont]., 'Trois Portraits. Mademoiselle Nilsson', *La Chronique illustrée*, no. 41, 11 March 1869. Drumont suggests that in 1869, Nilsson could already command sums of at least 100 guineas (c. 2500 francs) just to appear in salons, and 5000 francs for a concert. These figures are corroborated by Henry Mapleson, who affirms he paid Nilsson £200 per show during the 1872 Drury Lane season. This sum was supposed to have been a bone of contention between Patti and the impresario Gye at Covent Garden when Patti insisted on being paid more than Nilsson. Gye eventually settled on the slightly higher figure of 200 guineas (rather than pounds) per performance with Patti. See J. H. Mapleson, *The Mapleson Memoirs 1848-1888*, vol. 1 (London, 1888), 153.

<sup>64</sup> François Oswald, 'Bruits de coulisse', *Le Gaulois*, no. 2289, 21 January 1875, 4. It appears that Nilsson's tour to Russia was organised by the impresario Bernard Ullman, who also managed Nilsson during the 1876-77 season in collaboration with Henry Jarrett. See Laurence Marton Lerner, *The Rise of the Impresario: Bernard Ullman and the Transformation of Musical Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ann Arbor, 1972), 198.

<sup>65</sup> Strakosch, *Souvenirs*, 112-113. *The Musical World* (48/53, 31 December 1870, 864) also gives a set of figures (in francs and dollars) for Nilsson's earnings on her first American tour of 1870. Lerner (*The Rise of the Impresario*, 123) affirms that Nilsson's three American tours between 1870 and 1874 represented the height of Max Strakosch's managerial career, making him the most popular American impresario with public and artists alike, and financially more successful than any of his predecessors.

wanted to inaugurate the Palais Garnier in January 1875 with the triumph of the last years of the Second Empire, Thomas's *Hamlet* with Nilsson in her signature role of Ophélie; however, this endeavour was never realized.<sup>66</sup> Once again, in 1879 Nilsson negotiated with the director Auguste Vaucorbeil, demanding 2500 francs a show (half of what she had earned in London a decade earlier), with ten performances a month, over a period of ten months, making the total value of the contract worth 250,000 francs.<sup>67</sup> However, two autograph letters from Vaucorbeil to Jacques-Léopold Heugel from London in June 1879 demonstrate Vaucorbeil's mixed feelings on both Nilsson's voice and her general health.<sup>68</sup> And yet these concerns were perhaps unfounded, as three years later, Nilsson signed with the impresario Henry Abbey for her third American tour, followed by the opening season at the Metropolitan Opera where she

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<sup>66</sup> There was much debate in *Le Figaro* and *Le Ménestrel* as to the programming and casting of the inaugural spectacle of the Palais Garnier. It appears that Halanzier did indeed want the inauguration to be a performance of *Hamlet*, but that the Theatre Commission imposed a varied gala programme, thought to be fairer and to better represent the best of French opera. When Halanzier informed Nilsson that she would not be singing the whole role of Ophélie (the excerpted third and fourth acts were suggested), nor Marguerite (which Nilsson suggested), she politely withdrew, quoting artistic scruples as a reason for not performing excerpts. Nevertheless, the editor in chief of *Le Figaro*, Hippolyte de Villemessant, implored Nilsson to sing the two acts of *Hamlet*, to which she agreed as long as Halanzier also added the Church scene from *Faust*. Halanzier was much indebted to the intercession of de Villemessant. See H. Moreno, 'Semaine théâtrale et musicale', *Le Ménestrel*, 2317, no. 2, 13 December 1874, 11-13; H. Moreno, 'Semaine théâtrale et musicale', *Le Ménestrel*, 2318, no. 3, 20 December 1874, 19-20; Masque de Fer, 'Echos de Paris', *Le Figaro*, 17 December 1874, 1; Masque de Fer, 'Echos de Paris', *Le Figaro*, 18 December 1874, 2. Moreno (Heugel) also suggests that Nilsson was making a huge financial sacrifice by accepting to sing in Paris due to lost earnings in Russia from where all these negotiations took place.

<sup>67</sup> Björklund, *The Compelling*, 83, fn. 238.

<sup>68</sup> BnF Opéra NLAS-193 (4 and 5), two letters from Vaucorbeil to J.-L. Heugel, 13 and 19 June 1879.

famously inaugurated the new house in October 1883 with a performance of Marguerite, banking 10,000 francs a show.<sup>69</sup>

Nilsson took a huge gamble on the first night of *Faust* in Paris in 1869, and she nearly lost out.<sup>70</sup> But her aims and ambitions did not stop at Paris's city walls, and by making her mark in *Faust* in Paris, she then managed to export it as one of the main international proponents of Marguerite over the next fifteen years, declaring in 1908 that Marguerite had been her favourite role.<sup>71</sup> Nilsson had pragmatic and romantic reasons that pushed her up and out of Paris; at the same time, she made Rouzaud wait until she had firmly established an international career with her American tours, and the couple married only on 27 July 1872 at Westminster Abbey. Rouzaud spent the next ten years accompanying Nilsson around the world. He had apparently served in the National Guard during the Siege of Paris in 1870-1871 and was described by Joseph Bennett as an 'amiable gentleman and keen sportsman'.<sup>72</sup> He looked after Nilsson's financial affairs without great success; he advised her to make investments in a large number of business deals that went wrong, either through ill-judgement or sheer bad luck, losing her millions of francs in the process.<sup>73</sup> He thus enjoyed the rich

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<sup>69</sup> Strakosch, *Souvenirs*, 90-93. Adelina Patti went to the higher bidder and old friend Mapleson who was organizing the season at the rival Academy of Music where she could earn in the region of 20,000 francs per night. However, Mapleson's venture soon went bankrupt. Strakosch (17) affirms that Mapleson paid Patti the even larger sum of 25,000 francs per night for a series of concerts in San Francisco in 1885. Parr ('Caroline Carvalho', 115) affirms that Carvalho was the highest paid French singer of her generation, and in his *Melismatic Madness: Coloratura and Female Vocality in Mid Nineteenth-Century French and Italian Opera* (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 2009, 103), writes that she could earn 20,000 francs per evening, although he does not specify where and when.

<sup>70</sup> B[énédict]. Jouvin, 'Théâtres. Opéra – Reprise de *Faust*', *La Presse*, 8 March 1869.

<sup>71</sup> See 'Deras Favoritroller', published in a Swedish periodical and reproduced in Björklund, *The Compelling*, 298.

<sup>72</sup> Joseph Bennett, *Forty Years of Music 1865-1905* (London, 1908), 250.

<sup>73</sup> Björklund, *The Compelling*, 84-5.

pickings and international lifestyle of his famous wife, before succumbing to a mental breakdown and swift death (which according to Strakosch, who called him mad, was a fate that had befallen two other members of his family as well).<sup>74</sup> Following a stock market crash in January 1882, his health took a turn for the worse; he became delirious, formulated grand plans to donate money to all those who worked at the Hotel Continental where he and Nilsson were living, and later thought himself to be a bond whose value was continuously rising. He was seen by three psychiatrists, including Jean-Martin Charcot, before being interned and died on 22 February in the clinic of Dr Goujon at the age of forty-five.<sup>75</sup> Following this distressing period, Nilsson ended up in court with Rouzaud's family who refused to pay her the monies she was owed from Auguste's estate, having given him large sums for various unwise investments.<sup>76</sup>

Although Nilsson's choice of husband may seem surprising, her dealings with him and his family showed deep trust, commitment, and a sense of fairness, even in the face of spurious claims on her fortune. This sense of loyalty and determination to follow through on promises was also displayed in her relationship with her second husband, the Count of Casa-Miranda, chamberlain to the Spanish royal family, whom Nilsson married at the Madeleine in Paris on 12 March 1887. However, there appears to have been an attachment and understanding between them as early as 1882, as Rosita, Casa-Miranda's motherless daughter from a previous marriage, accompanied Nilsson to the USA in November 1882, Franzén stating that Nilsson adopted Rosita.<sup>77</sup> While marriage to nobility was not uncommon among performing artists, it generally signalled the end of a woman's professional career. Despite

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<sup>74</sup> Strakosch, *Souvenirs*, 108.

<sup>75</sup> Franzén, *Christina Nilsson*, 212-213.

<sup>76</sup> Charles Limet, *Tribunal Civil de la Seine. Première Chambre Observations pour Mme Christine Nilsson contre Héritiers Rouzaud* (Paris, 1885).

<sup>77</sup> Franzén, *Christina Nilsson*, 234-236.

Casa-Miranda's *largesse d'esprit* to let his future wife and daughter live the life of itinerant artists, Nilsson nevertheless prolonged their unofficial engagement to undertake the next step of her American career, before consciously making the decision to wind down her stage performances, giving two farewell concerts at the Royal Albert Hall in London in May and June 1888.<sup>78</sup>

### **Miolan Carvalho in Paris**

Caroline Miolan Carvalho had made her name in Paris, and although she was able to travel, she only very briefly toured to London, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Brussels and Belgium, Baden-Baden, the French provinces, and Monte Carlo. Married to Léon Carvalho, perhaps the most influential character in the making of French opera over his forty-year-long career, during which he either directed or stage directed at the Théâtre-Lyrique, the Paris Opéra, and the Opéra-Comique (among others), Caroline Miolan Carvalho's married life and career was essentially in Paris.<sup>79</sup> Her son, as well as her role as unofficial 'directrice' at the Théâtre-Lyrique, tied her to Paris,<sup>80</sup> but why in the wake of the theatre's collapse did Miolan Carvalho remain close to home? As Parr argues, financial losses made by the Carvalhos' artistic ventures could have been recouped by a lucrative European concert tour during the summer months, Caroline's voice and artistry, or bankable coloratura, serving as a financial cushion against hard times.<sup>81</sup> What, this time, held her in Paris?

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<sup>78</sup> Björklund, *The Compelling*, 103. Nilsson came out of retirement to sing at the English tenor John Sims Reeves's farewell concert on 11 May 1891.

<sup>79</sup> On Léon Carvalho's career at the Opéra-Comique, see Lesley Wright, 'Carvalho and the Opéra Comique: *l'art de se hâter lentement*', in Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist (eds.), *Music, Theater and Cultural Transfer: Paris 1830-1914* (Chicago and London, 2009), 99-126.

<sup>80</sup> See Parr, 'Caroline Carvalho', 91.

<sup>81</sup> Parr, *Melismatic Madness*, 97.

There may have been any number of reasons why Miolan Carvalho rode out this storm in Paris. Nevertheless, there is one significant and yet previously unrecounted reason to explain why she stayed put. On 8 September 1869, Miolan Carvalho was forced to renegotiate her contract with Perrin: she was the guarantor of her husband's debts after his bankruptcy at the Théâtre-Lyrique, a debt that Perrin bought off her for 178,000 francs, along with 35,600 francs accrued interest, in exchange for a new contract.<sup>82</sup> At face value, this contract looked very much like the previous one in terms of remuneration and number of performances expected, and yet its tone is stricter regarding absences and a need for Perrin to recuperate any time lost due to the singer's indisposition. But the archives tell a fuller story: they are stuffed with papers containing tables of figures, letters from creditors and syndicate partners, receipts for payments made and received. It seems that Perrin and his syndicate (which included at least two others, a certain F. Dommartin, porcelain merchant, and the astute entrepreneur editor Antoine Choudens who, moreover, owned the rights to Gounod's *Faust*) decided to write off over half of Carvalho's debt.<sup>83</sup> However, 90,000 francs were left as a debt in Caroline's name, and payments appear to have been made to clear that debt. It is thus revealed that Miolan Carvalho's salary from mid-November 1869 to July 1870, totalling 51,000 francs, was not paid to her but into 'her account', this sum in fact being paid directly to Choudens, in addition to three other payments in July 1870 and March 1871 totalling 16,000 francs.<sup>84</sup> Léon Carvalho also provides receipts for four payments worth a total of 8,000 francs 'for the account' of Mme Carvalho between September 1870 and February 1871: these were not monies she received but money that her husband was paying into her debtor's account. The

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<sup>82</sup> AN AJ<sup>13</sup> 475.

<sup>83</sup> See Steven Huebner, *The Operas of Charles Gounod* (Oxford, 1992), 53-4. Choudens's interest in keeping *Faust* on the Opéra stage cannot be underestimated.

<sup>84</sup> The wording used on these receipts varies little from 'Reçu de l'administration du Théâtre Impérial de l'Opéra la somme de [...] pour le compte de Madame Carvalho.'

original agreement drawn up in September 1869 suggested that the debt would be written off by the end of 1870, but payment and receipt dates go beyond this, the political situation in Paris no doubt throwing things into turmoil. Additionally, the archive contains a letter from Léon Carvalho to Perrin, dated 28 February 1872, asking for the deeds of the original debt agreement which expired on this day.<sup>85</sup> Thus examination of these documents adds another layer to our understanding of the complexity of the relations between Perrin and the Carvalho couple and reveals, for the first time, that for nearly two and a half years, Caroline Miolan Carvalho was indentured to Perrin. They were on excellent terms and perhaps the best of friends, but both she and her husband were highly indebted, literally, to Perrin, and were beholden to do his bidding, to sing the roles that he saw fit, as many times as he deemed necessary.

Miolan Carvalho worked hard to pay back her debts: she performed 150 times from January 1869 until mid-July 1870, before taking a month's leave. Despite the ongoing war, she returned again in the autumn for the opening of the season with *Guillaume Tell* on 2 September, the day the battle of Sedan was lost and the Third Republic declared.<sup>86</sup> At precisely this time, Nilsson set sail from Liverpool for her superbly successful tour of the United States which set the tenor of her international career that followed and brought her great personal fortune. Miolan Carvalho, on the other hand, fled Paris and took refuge in Brussels from where, on 14 September, she wrote an anxious letter to Perrin about her

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<sup>85</sup> One month after the deeds of the original debt agreement had been obtained at the end of February 1872, Léon Carvalho was quickly back on his feet again with a new venture at Théâtre du Vaudeville (until December 1873). Following this short period, he became Stage Director to the Opéra, as discussed below.

<sup>86</sup> BnF Opéra, Journal de Régie, RE-22 (1870). Archival documents show that during 1869 Carvalho performed a lead role in 101 of the 181 performances given at the Opéra, three times as many as any other *prima donna*. The only other leading singer who gave similar service was Jean-Baptiste Faure with 102 performances. See BnF Opéra, Archives, 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, 135, 'Relevé du travail pendant l'année 1869'. My thanks to Kimberly White for drawing this document to my attention.

cherished diamonds.<sup>87</sup> They had obviously been pawned for some considerable time and had been costing her money in interest payments. Deferentially, Miolan Carvalho asked her old friend and paymaster if he could get her jewels out of pawn, if he could redeem them, pay off this debt also and get them safely to her. The war had endangered her insurance policy that a singer's jewels often provided, and she needed security.<sup>88</sup> Miolan Carvalho remained outside Paris, singing in Brussels and London during the Siege of Paris and only returned to Parisian stages at the start of September 1871 when she began a new contract with her operatic *alma mater*, the Opéra-Comique, singing the roles that had made her name there twenty years earlier, as well as her successes from the Théâtre-Lyrique, including Gounod's Juliette and Mireille.<sup>89</sup> Her homecoming, the return to her Parisian 'square one' in her mid-forties could be seen to have a nostalgic and perhaps even declining air to it, yet once again she shone and enthralled domestic audiences. Prior to the fall of the Empire, financial and political instabilities had kept her professionally once more in Paris, and in straightened circumstances. While a remarkable solidarity (as well as vested interests) among theatre professionals provided an issue for the Carvalhos' bankruptcy debt, it effectively tied Caroline to the Opéra while she could have been earning much greater and badly needed sums of money abroad. Miolan Carvalho had no choice, for a few months at least, but to impose upon Parisian operatic society as the *prima donna* of the highest instance of state-sponsored opera.

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<sup>87</sup> AN AJ<sup>13</sup> 475.

<sup>88</sup> The different roles played by a singer's prized possessions were discussed in the session 'Operatic Objects' at the Royal Musical Association Annual Conference, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London in September 2016. This session, convened by Dr Alexandra Wilson, examined the relationship between physical artefacts and historical narratives within the field of opera studies, and considered how cultures and individuals create fluid meanings through objects.

<sup>89</sup> Lesley Wright (in 'Carvalho and the Opéra-Comique', 102) mentions that Léon served a short stint directing the theater in Cairo at this time. The detailed movements and/or performances of both Léon and Caroline Carvalho after September 1870 go beyond the scope of this article.

## Casting at the Opéra after the Franco-Prussian War

In Nilsson's career, the years 1868 and 1869 were a significant turning point, and the roles of Ophélie and Marguerite stand out as defining her contribution to operatic history, both Parisian and international.<sup>90</sup> She rehearsed excerpts from these two roles for the inaugural spectacle of the Palais Garnier in January 1875 before falling ill and disappointing many on that gala occasion, and the audience had to content itself with male singers, the chorus and orchestra in excerpts from *Les Huguenots* and *Guillaume Tell* instead.<sup>91</sup> In his concern over this affair, Henri Heugel wrote a long chronicle in *Le Ménestrel*, saying: 'we think [...] as we have always thought, that an artist of the value of M<sup>me</sup> Nilsson can only make her return to the Paris Opéra in a new role'.<sup>92</sup> Heugel here echoes the sentiments expressed by Nilsson herself in her letter to Perrin of September 1868 (discussed above) with regard to 'her value' for French opera in Paris, in which she intimated her desire to create a new role, and he

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<sup>90</sup> During her career, Nilsson sang relatively few roles; see the repertoire list in Appendix B of Björklund, *The Compelling*.

<sup>91</sup> BnF Opéra, Journal de Régie, RE-27 (1875). From the *Journal de Régie* (RE-26 (1874) & RE-27 (1875)), it appears that Nilsson arrived for a first rehearsal of the *Hamlet* ensemble on 29 December, but that rehearsals in the New Year ran into problems: the stage rehearsal with Faure of *Faust* on 1 January was cancelled due to the new scenery order from Cambon not being ready, and the general rehearsal of *Faust* on 3 January did not take place because Nilsson was ill. An entry for 4 January reported that Nilsson had been ordered by the Doctor Guerin to take several days rest. Since the inauguration of the new Opéra was due to take place the following day and could not be postponed, the programme had to be modified. The two acts of *Hamlet* were replaced by the 'Bénédictions des poignards' scene from *Les Huguenots*, and the Church scene of *Faust* by the overture to *Guillaume Tell*. See also Björklund, *The Compelling*, 76-77.

<sup>92</sup> H. Moreno [H. Heugel], 'Semaine théâtrale et musicale', *Le Ménestrel*, 2317, no. 2, 13 December, 1874, 11-13 (12): 'nous pensons [...], comme nous l'avons toujours pensé, qu'une artiste de la valeur de M<sup>me</sup> Nilsson ne peut rentrer à L'Opéra de Paris que par une nouvelle création.'

also expressed the most obvious reason why a singer with the brilliant international reputation of Nilsson in 1875 would indeed once again grace the French capital with her presence.

The early years of the Third Republic saw a heightened period of nationalism, and the growing internationalization of the opera market started to destabilize Paris in its position as operatic mecca. In January 1875, the Opéra director Halanzier and the high society Opéra public, aided and abetted by *Le Figaro* editor-in-chief Hippolyte de Villemessant, desperately wanted their ‘darling’ Nilsson as Ophélie and Marguerite for the new Palais Garnier. Due to circumstances beyond anyone’s control, they did not get it, but a plan was quickly executed to more than compensate the Parisian public. In a previous bid to stay at the top of the game in October 1874, Halanzier had organised guest appearances for Adelina Patti in the role of Marguerite (once again with Jean-Baptiste Faure as Méphistophélès) in which she was much acclaimed. But due to a scandal over guest artists’ fees exceeding those of house artists (which was accompanied by ticket price rises), the press was quick to condemn a new operational model for international opera which privileged ‘star turns’ over ‘home grown’ talent. Journalist Jules Guillemot wrote: ‘I cannot hide the fact that in France, we have in Mr Faure and Mme Carvalho, the two best singers in the world. Crowds, attracted by novelty, worked on by publicity, could well pay more to hear this or that artist; but for the connoisseurs, I think the affirmation that I express is beyond reproach.’<sup>93</sup> Halanzier seems to have listened. Having appointed Léon Carvalho as stage director on 12 January 1874,<sup>94</sup> Halanzier brought Miolan Carvalho into the fold at the end of her Opéra-Comique contract, just two months after the Nilsson inauguration debacle. Miolan Carvalho went straight into

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<sup>93</sup> Jules Guillemot, ‘Revue dramatique’, *Le Journal de Paris*, 26 October 1874: ‘Il ne faut pas nous dissimuler que nous avons en France, dans M. Faure et Mme. Carvalho, les deux premiers chanteurs du monde. La foule, attirée par la curiosité, travaillée par la réclame, pourra payer plus cher pour entendre tel ou tel artiste; mais, pour les connoisseurs, je crois que l’assertion que je formule est hors de discussion.’

<sup>94</sup> BnF Opéra, Journal de Régie, RE-26 (1874).

rehearsal for her first ever performance of Ophélie which took place on 31 March 1875. The Journal de Régie notes: ‘M<sup>me</sup> Carvalho’s premiere was greeted by bravos from the entire house. In addition, the evening was nothing more than one long succession of ovations for M<sup>me</sup> Carvalho who can add the role of Ophélie, which she was singing for the first time, to the list of her beautiful *créations*.’<sup>95</sup> The baritone Jean-Baptiste Faure also was said to have surpassed previous form as both singer and actor, and the text concludes: ‘On seeing the enthusiasm which reigned in the house, one felt that the public was happy to commend by its applause these worthy exponents of the French school.’<sup>96</sup> For the Opéra stage management at least, and in contrast to Heugel’s and de Villemessant’s very public feelings of three months previous, this hour of familiar French singers triumphing, mid-season, in a French work was poignant. The Opéra had an international reputation to uphold and could act as a showcase for significant galas attended by the top ranks of nobility and instances of political and ambassadorial power, but the national product and domestic market was also to be celebrated, lauded, and cherished.

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Christine Nilsson worked hard and conscientiously on her journey to become a world-class operatic soprano. Like other singers and actresses before her, she ended her career with a second marriage to nobility but was once again a widow fifteen years later, returning to her native Sweden until her own death in November 1921. Despite her financial setbacks, generally engendered by the mismanagement of her affairs by her first husband Rouzaud, she nevertheless was a wealthy woman, an avid and eclectic art collector bequeathing over two

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<sup>95</sup> BnF Opéra, Journal de Régie, RE-27 (1875): ‘La Rentrée de M<sup>me</sup> Carvalho a été saluée par les bravos de la salle entière. Du reste la soirée n’a été qu’une longue suite d’ovations pour M<sup>me</sup> Carvalho qui peut ajouter le rôle d’Ophélie qu’elle chantait pour la première fois au nombre de ses belles créations.’

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*: ‘A voir l’enthousiasme qui régnait dans la salle, on sentait que le Public était heureux de saluer par ses applaudissements ces dignes représentants de l’école française.’

hundred items to the Swedish National Museum in Stockholm,<sup>97</sup> and was known to enjoy the odd trip or two to the casino in Monte-Carlo.<sup>98</sup> Eight years after her death, her remaining jewels were put into a sale by Christie's in London. Forty-seven lots were sold but just two contributed to over half the value of the sale: a diamond necklace of foliage and cluster design which brought in £470 (or about 68,000 francs), and a fine octagonal emerald and diamond ring which netted £1700 (or over 200,000 francs).<sup>99</sup> It is tempting (but no doubt futile) to try to match jewels appearing in the sale catalogue to the tales of jewels she received during her career: In St. Petersburg, Nilsson once again sang Marguerite to great acclaim and was astounded to receive during the performance a river of diamonds and emeralds with earrings to match in the jewel box which Marguerite opens during her aria, 'Ah, je ris de me voir si belle en ce miroir', as a gift from the Tsar and the opera subscribers.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, such treasured gifts were important markers of respect for idolised performers and recognition of the 'sacrifices' made in the name of Art. Like Miolan Carvalho, Nilsson would have been attached both sentimentally and materially to her diamonds, brought out for society occasions, but put away as an insurance policy for a rainy day which could come without warning in such a precarious and demanding profession.

In the Parisian 'battle of the Marguerites', or rather the deferent daisies, Nilsson did not come out unscathed. The ownership of the role of Marguerite for Miolan Carvalho was

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<sup>97</sup> [http://www.nationalmuseum.se/Global/Publikationer/DetModernaLivet\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.nationalmuseum.se/Global/Publikationer/DetModernaLivet_ENG.pdf), 84-9

<sup>98</sup> Aino Ackté, *Taiteeni Taipaleelta* (Helsinki, 1935), 42-44. This section of Ackté's biography is dedicated to her encounters with and gossip about Nilsson. Nilsson apparently reserved 60,000 francs of her yearly interest on investments to spend in casinos. My thanks to Anne Kauppala for drawing this source to my attention.

<sup>99</sup> *Catalogue of Jewels, the Property of the Late Dowager Countess de Casa Miranda (Madame Christine Nilsson), the Lady Alexandra Palmer and from Various Sources* (London, 1929). BnF Estampes, Mfiche CVE 36344.

<sup>100</sup> Christine Nilsson, comtesse de Casa-Miranda, 'Quelques Souvenirs de ma Carrière artistique', *Le Gaulois*, 24 November 1913, 1.

too strong and Carvalho's position in the Parisian musical and operatic world was unassailable. Yet Nilsson embraced the *Faust* controversy as an opportunity to capitalize on the international acclaim and popularity that Thomas's Ophélie had afforded her. She thus steered her career in a more international direction, similar to that of her direct contemporary Patti, rather than battle the doyenne Miolan Carvalho on her home turf. But in 1869, Miolan Carvalho was in a tight spot for specific reasons and what this episode so clearly demonstrates is the precarious and fluctuating nature of fortunes in the nineteenth-century operatic world. Both women knew how to look after their best interests and they were adept at dealing with directors, managers, and impresarios directly, even if Nilsson's Achilles heel seems to have been her first husband. Both singers were active in the era before sound recording and the overt mediatization and monetization of a singer's artistic and physical capital. Yet numerous photographs exist of both singers, in costume and in civil dress, and neither seemed to shy away from the camera lens. In terms of public relations, however, neither singer wrote an autobiography (although Nilsson did read and edit the manuscript of Beyron Carlsson's 1921 biography of her).<sup>101</sup> Nilsson rarely gave interviews; the article to which she contributed her 'memoirs' and sentiments in *Le Gaulois* in 1913 was a rare exception, published well after her retirement and the death of her second husband.<sup>102</sup> With regard to public image, Nilsson rarely took on a trouser role and while she sang a number of innocent victims, she in no way shied away from the harpies and courtesans of the operatic repertoire, cultivating a distanced Romanticised portrayal to protect the singer from moral judgements which could be made

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<sup>101</sup> Beyron Carlsson, *Kristina Nilsson. Grevinna de Casa Miranda. Minnen och upplevelser* (Stockholm, 1921).

<sup>102</sup> There were, of course, a series of short biographical articles of Nilsson which appeared in the press in the late 1860s and which repeated the standard story of her origins and early musical life. Nilsson apparently distrusted journalists, feeling that they twisted her views, and she was not above bringing lawsuits against them (Björklund, *The Compelling*, 284).

about the character.<sup>103</sup> Miolan Carvalho was a consummate artist and more modern readings of her career and artistry have rehabilitated her creative agency as entirely positive and liberating, in musical, artistic, biographical and historiographical terms.<sup>104</sup> Both women profited from the growing star system,<sup>105</sup> but remained subject to an era in which political and financial instability were the norm, in which fortunes were made and lost, and made over again, and when women conservatively and relatively privately balanced a career, husbands and family, and their reputation.<sup>106</sup> Despite press rhetoric which preferred diva rivalry to respect, their deferential attitude towards one another in public meant that rather than battle over Marguerite, each could own the role and instrumentalize it in different ways (and at different times) on their respective career paths to international success.

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<sup>103</sup> Despite her extremely humble beginnings there are reports of Nilsson's natural nobility and ease in fashionable high Parisian society, not just as a sought-after guest for a musical turn, but on an equal footing with that society. See Jules de Leers, *Le Sport*, 17 March 1869. Her natural nobility and reserve, one might surmise loftiness, may be a characteristic which did not disappear on stage and could therefore hinder and/or influence her performance of certain characters. Björklund and others comment on her frank and refreshing naturalness, even before royalty, making them wait if she had good cause (such as a benefit commitment to fulfil), and chiding royalty when the boot was on the other foot.

<sup>104</sup> See particularly the work of Sean M. Parr.

<sup>105</sup> See Christophe Charle, *Théâtres en Capitales: Naissance de la société du spectacle à Paris, Berlin, Londres et Vienne 1860-1914* (Paris, 2008); Jean-Claude Yon, *Une histoire du Théâtre à Paris: de la Révolution à la Grande Guerre* (Paris, 2012).

<sup>106</sup> Joy H. Calico examines the ways in which three German sopranos negotiated public image as loving wives and mothers (in comparison to their *femme fatale* operatic roles) in her chapter 'Staging Scandal with *Salome* and *Elektra*', in Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss, eds., *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford and New York, 2012), 61-82.