The composer of this successful 18th-century French opera, Le mariage d’Antonio (The marriage of Antonio), was a remarkable French girl, Lucile Grétry, who began work on it aged only 13. A daughter of the celebrated composer of opéras comiques, André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry, Lucile received musical training from an early age. Le mariage was very well received by critics and audiences and stayed in the repertory for five years, outliving Lucile herself, who died of tuberculosis aged 17.

A-E-M Grétry was exceptional for his day in his attitude to women, and his views form an interesting counterpoint to those of the Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argued that a woman’s education should be designed solely around the needs of men. Through his copious writings, Grétry championed the creativity of women, proclaiming that they could possess genius in any sphere, and characterising his own daughter as an ‘image of feminine sensitivity and genius, coupled with a strong will to compose’. He singled out a musical career as achievable for many women and one that would offer them a welcome path to independence. This is in stark relief to Abraham Mendelssohn’s dictum in a letter of 1820 that, for his composer daughter Fanny, unlike for his son Felix, music ‘must be only an ornament’.
**Teaching ideas**
The University of Melbourne’s curriculum is rich and varied, and changes from year to year. For more teaching ideas, [contact a collection manager](#).

**Women in Music**
Study Lucile Grétry in the context of the ways in which gender and sexual difference have been represented in the making and composing of art music.

**Music in France, c. 1600–1789**
Using Lucile Grétry as a case study, situate her musical practice in its political, cultural and religious frameworks, to highlight issues and debates in notation, performance practice, and music theory from France in this period.

**Studies in Opera**
Visit the Rare Music Collection to view and study works from the operatic genre, with particular emphasis on their social and historical significance.

**Historical Performance Practice**
View scores from the Rare Music Collection for the critical evaluation of 17th- and 18th-century sources.

**French in a Global World**
Focus on French opera to reveal aspects of French language in a global world, involving transnational, cross-cultural, inter-generational or trans-historical perspectives.

**The French Revolution**
Study French opera in the context of the history of the French Revolution from its origins. Was this really a revolutionary age?

**Justice, Freedom and Equality**
Work in a group and discuss the historical writings of Grétry and Rousseau and their relevance to concepts of political argument, including oppression, ownership and equality.

**Writing: Inside and Outside the Text**
Focus on dialogue writing via libretti for opera, and its use of dramatic action. Study the relationship between writing and its visual or audio presentation through transnational text-based art, such as opera scores.

**Encounters with Writing**
Using objects such as music scores as triggers for memory and creativity, initiate and develop detailed knowledge in self-initiated creative writing projects.
Intersecting objects

Edmund de Goncourt (French, 1822–1896)
Sophie Arnould d’après sa correspondance et ses mémoires inédits
Paris: E. Dentu, 1877
Rare Books Collection
University of Melbourne Library

Wilhelm Hensel (German, 1794–1861)
Portrait of Fanny Mendelssohn (German, 1805–1847)
from Sebastian Hensel (German, 1830–1898)
Die Familie Mendelssohn 1729–1847: Nach Briefen und Tagebüchern
Berlin: B. Behr, 1879
Rare Books Collection
University of Melbourne Library

To learn more, visit the websites of the Rare Music Collection and the Rare Books Collection, University of Melbourne Library.

Further reading