

"I would like something very poetic and at the same time very simple, intimate and human!"

Previously unknown or unidentified letters by Tchaikovsky to correspondents from Russia, Austria and France

(Tchaikovsky Research Bulletin No. 2)

Presented by Luis Sundkvist

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Introduction¹

One of the most surprising letters by Tchaikovsky featured in the first Research Bulletin was that which he wrote in the summer of 1892 to the French librettist Louis Gallet, asking him to resume work on the libretto for the opera *La Courtisane*.² For in the standard reference books on Tchaikovsky it had always been assumed that after 1891 he had no longer expressed any interest in the projected French-language opera in three acts, *La Courtisane*, or *Sadia*, that, back in 1888, he had agreed to write in collaboration with Gallet and his fellow-librettist Léonce D troyat.³ This letter suggested otherwise, and whilst it is still true that Tchaikovsky does not seem to have even made any musical sketches for this opera which D troyat, in particular, had hoped would take the Parisian theatres by storm, the composer's continuing interest in this project called for further investigation.

A major incentive for Tchaikovsky seeking to collaborate with these two experienced librettists each of whom had already tasted success together with some of the leading French composers of the day, was unquestionably that stated in his letter to D troyat of 20 June/2 July 1888, in which he invoked the famous words of Henri IV: "Paris vaut bien une messe!" That is, Paris was then still the unrivalled opera capital of the world, and to triumph there with one of his stage works seemed to Tchaikovsky at times to be the highest goal that he could strive for.⁴ These hopes were never fulfilled in Tchaikovsky's own lifetime, although he did at least have the satisfaction of seeing (or hearing of) successful Czech, German, and British productions of *Evgenii Onegin*, *The Maid of Orleans*, *The Queen of Spades*, and *Iolanta*.

However, it could not just have been the desire to triumph in Paris that induced Tchaikovsky to keep repeating his promises to D troyat that he would start writing the music for *Sadia* as soon as he was free from other commitments. Something about the subject of this projected opera must have appealed strongly to his artistic nature. The explanation lies surely in the fact that the original idea for *La Courtisane*, or *Sadia* (as Tchaikovsky preferred to call the opera), which Tchaikovsky himself proposed to his French librettists, was based on Goethe's wonderful ballad *Der Gott und die Bajadere* (1797).

Interestingly, of the two Weimar Dioscuri, it was to Schiller that the young Tchaikovsky had first turned when, in 1865, he composed the cantata *Ode to Joy* for his graduation examinations at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory. And although just four years later he would set to music one of Mignon's songs from Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*—No. 6 of the Six Romances, Op. 6, whose title in English is most often rendered as *None But the Lonely Heart*—Tchaikovsky had at the time not read the novel as such, but was inspired rather by a fine Russian translation of that short song from it. Not until the summer of 1884, while staying at Nadezhda von Meck's estate at Pleshcheevo, would he discover Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* for himself. As he confessed in a letter to his brother Modest: "It was a true revelation for me; I had always thought that [this novel] was awfully boring, but, my God, what a delight it is, and how grateful I am to the fluke which caused me

¹ The author would like to emphasize that without the tremendous work done by his colleague Brett Langston in setting up the Tchaikovsky Research website on the basis of *TH* some years ago, it would not have been possible to bring to light and identify most of the letters presented below.

² Letter 4739a to Louis Gallet, 23 July/4 August 1892. See 'Klin, near Moscow, was the home of one of the busiest of men...' (February 2011), p. 36–39, which can be accessed via: <http://www.tchaikovsky-research.net/en/news/index.html>

³ See *MN*, p. 146; *TH*, vol. 1, p. 412; * W*, p. 793.

⁴ By the early 1890s, however, Tchaikovsky was becoming increasingly convinced that the Saint Petersburg Mariinskii Theatre, with its magnificent resources, was the ideal stage for his operas and ballets. See Lucinde Braun, *Studien zur russischen Oper im spten 19. Jahrhundert* = * St* 4 (1999), p. 188.

to stumble across it."⁵ Thus, although Tchaikovsky came to a full appreciation of Goethe quite late, the impression which that great master of poetic realism made on him was a lasting one.

It is important to bear this in mind in the context of *Sadia*, for, although Détroiyat and Gallet seem to have turned the simple story of *Der Gott und die Bajadere* into a rather fanciful libretto, the warm humanity and willingness to forgive of Goethe's Hindu god still remained at the heart of the opera's plot, and this could not fail to strike a chord with Tchaikovsky. Now, of his two French librettists it was with Détroiyat that Tchaikovsky corresponded most actively, which is understandable given that the initiative for this collaboration had come from Détroiyat in the first place. Apart from the remarkable "Paris vaut bien une messe!" letter, first published in full by Thomas Kohlhase in *ČSt* 3 (1998), only three other letters from Tchaikovsky to Détroiyat were known to scholars. Excerpts from these four letters were cited by André Lischke in the chapter dedicated to this Franco-Russian operatic project in his 1993 biography of the composer, with an explanation that these excerpts were taken from the catalogue of an auction at the Hôtel Drouot the previous year during which these letters to Détroiyat had disappeared into private collections. Because many of Détroiyat's own letters to Tchaikovsky have survived in the archives at Klin and have been published (albeit in Russian translation only) in *CZM* (1970), it was possible to deduce that it was precisely in a letter to Détroiyat that the composer had raised the idea of turning Goethe's ballad into an opera. The question was could this letter somehow be traced?

When investigating further one of the letters presented in the first bulletin—letter 3507a to Pauline Viardot—we decided to try contacting Myriam Chimènes, the author of the book in which that letter was cited, because a footnote suggested that the quotation was from an auction catalogue and we wanted to find out whether any more letters by Tchaikovsky had been advertised there.⁶ Mme Chimènes promptly replied and advised us to get in touch with Thierry Bodin, who, as she explained, had been the expert consulted at the time that letter to Pauline Viardot was auctioned. M. Bodin, an internationally renowned manuscript expert, as well as a Balzac scholar, most generously responded to our enquiry by sending us not just the photocopy he had made of that letter to Pauline Viardot, but also photocopies of several other Tchaikovsky autograph letters which had been auctioned under his supervision from 1990 to 1992. Among these were the four letters to Détroiyat mentioned above, plus a further four to the same correspondent whose existence had not been registered in Tchaikovsky scholarship previously, as well as an equally 'new' letter to Pauline Viardot.

Thanks to M. Bodin's generous help all these letters can now be published in full. Tchaikovsky's first letters to Détroiyat from the early summer months of 1888 contain his views on the Caucasus and its depiction by Russian writers, as well as on more general aspects of Russian and French literature and drama. In particular, two of these letters bear witness to Tchaikovsky's admiration for Alfred de Musset (1810–1857), and his life-long dream of writing an opera based on *Les Caprices de Marianne*, one of Musset's most striking plays. That Tchaikovsky felt an "enthusiastic love" for Musset, as Herman Laroche put it,⁷ was already known from other sources, but these two letters add richly to our understanding of his affinity with that Romantic poet who, unlike Victor Hugo, say, did not sacrifice truthfulness for the sake of effect in the portrayal of his characters.

It was precisely with Musset's plays in mind that Tchaikovsky, discussing in one of his letters to Détroiyat possible subjects for an opera, exclaimed: "I would like something very

⁵ Letter 2544 to Modest Tchaikovsky, 7/19 September–11/23 September 1884. *PSSL* XII, p. 434.

⁶ See Myriam Chimènes, *Mécènes et musiciens: du salon au concert à Paris sous la IIIe République* (Paris, 2004), p. 424.

⁷ See *VC*, p. 49.

poetic and at the same time very simple, intimate and human!"⁸ All these adjectives would apply equally well to Goethe's ballad *Der Gott und die Bajadere*, and tracing the development of Tchaikovsky's thoughts in these letters helps one to understand why he finally proposed that subject as the basis for the opera on which he was to collaborate with the two French librettists. Unfortunately, the actual letter to Détroyat in which Tchaikovsky made this suggestion does not seem to have been among those auctioned in Paris under M. Bodin's supervision, but there is still hope that it may turn up somewhere else eventually.

In order to establish what might have happened to Détroyat's archive, we decided to try to locate one of his descendants—something that was possible only thanks to an excellent genealogical internet resource designed by Fabien de Silvestre.⁹ M. de Silvestre kindly agreed to put us in touch with Détroyat's great-grandson, Jean-Pierre Mabile, formerly a professor of medicine at Dijon. Prof. Mabile not only confirmed that, regrettably, Tchaikovsky's letters to Détroyat were no longer in the possession of his family, but also sent us a copy of a very informative biographical essay he had written on his ancestor together with scans of some photographs of Détroyat that he has generously allowed us to publish on the Tchaikovsky Research website.¹⁰ This essay shows just how rich and varied Léonce Détroyat's life was, from his early career as a naval officer who took part in the Crimean War to his later years when he worked as a journalist and librettist—a librettist who had the unique opportunity to collaborate with Tchaikovsky, even if the opera they agreed to work on was never realized.

The order of presentation of the letters in this bulletin is as follows: first come the Russian correspondents (including Nicolas de Benardaky and Robert von Thal, even though they resided permanently in Paris), then those from other countries. Within the section for each country the correspondents appear in alphabetical order. The spelling in the Russian letters has been adapted to modern usage, with use of the symbol 'ë' to facilitate pronunciation. To save space, in the English translations dates have been omitted and the opening greeting has been joined with the first paragraph of the letter.

⁸ Letter 3581a to Léonce Détroyat, 30 May/11 June 1888. See Section III below.

⁹ See <http://israel.silvestre.fr/>, and, in particular, the family tree of Léonce Détroyat: http://genealogie.silvestre.fr/individual.php?pid=I1911&ged=IsraelSilvestre_ged#tree.

¹⁰ See http://www.tchaikovsky-research.net/en/people/detroyat_leonce.html.

List of abbreviations

- CA *P. I. Chaikovskii. Zabytoe i novoe. Al'manakh*, ed. Polina Vaidman & Galina Belonovich, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1995), vol. 2 (Moscow, 2003)
- ČSt *Čajkovskij-Studien*, ed. Thomas Kohlhase (Mainz, 1993–)
- ČW *Tematiko-bibliograficheskii ukazatel' sochinenii P. I. Chaikovskogo / Thematic and Bibliographical Catalogue of P. I. Čajkovskij's Works*, ed. Polina Vaidman, Liudmila Korabel'nikova & Valentina Rubtsova (Moscow, 2006)
- CZM *Chaikovskii i zarubezhnye muzykanty. Izbrannye pis'ma inostrannykh korrespondentov*, ed. Nikolai Alekseev (Leningrad, 1970)
- DiG *Dni i gody P. I. Chaikovskogo. Letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva*, ed. Vasilii Iakovlev (Moscow / Leningrad, 1940)
- DT *The Diaries of Tchaikovsky*, transl. Wladimir Lakond (New York, 1973)
- Mitteilungen *Tschaikowsky-Gesellschaft. Mitteilungen*, ed. Thomas Kohlhase (Tübingen, 1994–)
- MN *Muzykal'noe nasledie Chaikovskogo. Iz istorii ego proizvedenii*, ed. Kseniia Davydova, Vladimir Protopopov & Nadezhda Tumanina (Moscow, 1958)
- NC *Neizvestnyi Chaikovskii*, ed. Polina Vaidman, Ada Ainbinder & Valerii Sokolov (Moscow, 2009)
- PMA *Peterburgskii muzykal'nyi arkhiv. Sbornik statei i materialov*, ed. Tamara Skvirskaia (Saint Petersburg, 1997–)
- PSSL *P. Chaikovskii. Polnoe sobranie sochinenii. Literaturnye proizvedeniia i perepiska*, 17 vols (Moscow, 1959–81)
- TH *The Tchaikovsky Handbook. A Guide to the Man and his Music*, 2 vols, compiled by Alexander Poznansky and Brett Langston (Bloomington, 2002)
- VC *Vospominaniia o P. I. Chaikovskom*, 3rd ed. (Moscow, 1979)
- ZC *Modest Chaikovskii, Zhizn' Petra Il'icha Chaikovskogo*, 3 vols [Moscow, 1900–02], (Moscow, 1997)

I. Russia

(Nicolas de Benardaky, Pavel Peterssen, Robert von Thal)

1. Tchaikovsky to Nicolas de Benardaky, 10/22 November 1888 (?) [[letter 3723a](#)]

An old catalogue of the W. R. Benjamin autograph auction firm in New York includes the following summary of an autograph letter by Tchaikovsky:

E-312 TCHAIKOVSKY. ALS, in Russian, 2pp. 8vo, Nov. 22 [1888]. To Nicolai Dimitrivich, mentioning a rehearsal of the Theatre School and the marriage of Olga Pavlovna.¹

The year of the letter—which would probably have been dated by the auctioneer on the basis of a postmark on the envelope, assuming that had survived—and the names and patronymics of the persons mentioned in the above summary allow its recipient to be identified conclusively. This is Tchaikovsky's sole extant letter to the Russian state councillor and writer, Nikolai Dmitrievich Benardaki (1838–1909), known as Nicolas de Benardaky after he and his wife, Mariia Pavlovna (née Leibrock; 1855–1913), settled in France in the early 1880s. Benardaky was the youngest son of the army contractor and tax-farmer Dmitrii Egorovich Benardaki (1799–1870), who became one of Russia's first millionaires and who was the prototype for the virtuous landowner Kostanzhoglo in the second (unfinished) part of Gogol's *Dead Souls*. (Like the elder Benardaki, Kostanzhoglo is of Greek origins). The salon of Nicolas and Marie de Benardaky in their opulent house at 65 Rue de Chaillot was a magnet for Parisian high society—later to be frequented by the young Marcel Proust—as well as a venue for many musical soirées, since Marie had originally trained as a singer at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory and both she and her husband had been generous patrons of the Russian Musical Society before they moved to Paris.²

When Tchaikovsky arrived in the French capital on 12/24 February 1888 as part of his first European tour as a conductor of his own works, Benardaky immediately organized a musical soirée at his house in the composer's honour, for which he engaged the services of Colonne's orchestra, as well as those of several leading vocal and instrumental soloists, including the bass Edouard de Reszke, his brother the tenor Jean de Reszke, the baritone Jean-Louis Lassalle, the pianist Louis Diémer, the flutist Claude-Paul Taffanel, and Tchaikovsky's former student, the cellist Anatolii Brandukov, who was then based in Paris. This soirée, whose programme was drawn exclusively from Tchaikovsky's works, would take place on 16/28 February, and Benardaky sent out invitations to more than 300 persons drawn from the social and musical crème de la crème of Paris, including to Massenet, though he was ultimately unable to attend.³ The preparations for this event occupied much of Tchaikovsky's time during his first days in Paris, since he was supposed to both conduct the orchestra and accompany the singers on the piano. It was not just professional artists, though, who were due to perform on this occasion, but also the hostess herself, Marie de Benardaky, a fine amateur singer, and her younger sister, Ol'ga Pavlovna Leibrock (d. 1939), who was living with the Benardakys in Paris at the time. At the soirée Ol'ga would sing the *Cradle Song*, No. 1 of the

¹ *The Collector* (W.R. Benjamin Autographs, 1970), p. 4 (consulted via Google Books).

² See Myriam Chimènes, *Mécènes et musiciens: du salon au concert à Paris sous la IIIe République* (Paris, 2004), p. 423–424. For some biographical information on Nicolas de Benardaky, see the obituary which appeared in the *Proceedings of the Anglo-Russian Literary Society*, October–December 1910, p. 84–85.

³ See the telegram from Massenet to the Benardakys, sent on the very morning of the concert, which is cited in the introduction to *NC*, p. 15.

Six Romances, Op. 16, and *Why?*, No. 3 of the Six Romances, Op. 28. Tchaikovsky rehearsed these with her on 13/25 February, as we learn from his diary: "With Brandukov to Benardaky. The young lady, Ol'ga Pavlovna. The songs with her. Benardaky, his wife, lunch."⁴

When describing this soirée at Benardaky's salon, Modest Tchaikovsky, in his biography of his brother, pointed out that Ol'ga was "now the wife of Admiral Skrydlov".⁵ An article on Admiral Nikolai Illarionovich Skrydlov (1844–1918) on a website dedicated to the history of the Russian fleet states that he married Ol'ga Leibrock in January 1891,⁶ but this does not necessarily contradict the reference to "the marriage of Olga Pavlovna" in this letter of 1888, according to the auctioneer's summary, since Tchaikovsky may have been referring simply to Ol'ga's engagement to the admiral.

The exact dating of this letter does, however, present some problems. The year given in the catalogue "1888" is likely to be correct since that was the year when Tchaikovsky's contacts with the Benardakys were most intense. Thus, on 25 February/8 March 1888, halfway into his stay in Paris on that occasion, Tchaikovsky reported to Modest: "There is no way I can list all of my new acquaintances. I spend the most time with the Benardakys, who are extremely nice and kind."⁷ In May, not long after returning to Russia from his European tour and a short holiday in Tiflis, Tchaikovsky would write to Marie de Benardaky to thank her for everything that she and her husband had done for him in Paris, and he also sent greetings for her sister Ol'ga.⁸ If the date given in the catalogue were Old Style, then the letter would date from 22 October/3 November 1888, when Tchaikovsky was in Prague preparing for a concert of his works (including the recently completed Symphony No. 5) as well as for the first performance of *Evgenii Onegin* outside Russia which he had agreed to conduct. In that case, though, Tchaikovsky would have mentioned his being in Prague, and the auctioneer's summary would almost certainly have included that information. Thus, it seems more likely that "22 November" is a New Style date (Tchaikovsky probably wrote the date in both styles, with only the NS date being cited in the catalogue). If so, on 10/22 November 1888 Tchaikovsky was still in Saint Petersburg, a few days before leaving for Prague. The "Theatre School" mentioned in the summary probably refers to the Moscow Theatrical School, though we have not been able to confirm whether Tchaikovsky visited that institution during his brief stay in Moscow earlier in October.

It is not surprising that Tchaikovsky wrote about such matters to Nicolas de Benardaky, who was a great theatre-lover and himself wrote a number of comedies, in both Russian and French. A fine linguist, Benardaky also penned a skilful prose translation into English of Griboedov's famous comedy *Woe from Wit* (*Gore ot uma*; 1825) which was published in London in 1857, that is barely a year after the conclusion of the Crimean War. In the introduction to this play, he emphasized to English readers that many favourable changes had taken place in Russian society since Griboedov's day (and, implicitly, that more were to be expected since the death of Nicholas I in 1855).⁹

At the time of Tchaikovsky's visit to Paris in 1888, Benardaky also translated into French the text of *Don Juan's Serenade*, No. 1 of the Six Romances, Op. 38, which was performed by Edouard de Reszke at the soirée of 16/28 February. This romance is a setting of

⁴ *DT*, p. 235.

⁵ *ZC*, vol. 3, p. 204, n. 2.

⁶ See <http://morskoy-spb.22web.net/BookLibrary/00017-Bukva-S-ofitseryi/SKRYIDLOV.html> (last accessed on 2 April 2011). This article also includes a photograph of Ol'ga Pavlovna Skrydlova (née Leibrock).

⁷ Letter 3507 to Modest Tchaikovsky, 25 February/8 March 1888. *PSSL XIV*, p. 375.

⁸ Letter 3563a to Marie de Benardaky, 10/22 May 1888. *PSSL XVII*, p. 245–246.

⁹ *Gore ot Ouma. A comedy from the Russian of Griboiedoff, translated by Nicholas Benardaky* (London, 1857), p. 9–10.

a poem by Aleksei Tolstói, one of Tchaikovsky's favourite poets, and the composer thought very highly of Benardaky's translation.¹⁰ Another memorable event during his stay in Paris that year also came about thanks to Benardaky. This was his meeting with Caran d'Ache, the famous French satirist and political cartoonist whose real name was Emmanuel Poiré (1858–1909).¹¹ The aristocratic-sounding pseudonym was a play on the Russian word *karandash* ('pencil')—a pun that becomes understandable when we bear in mind that Poiré was born in Moscow and grew up there before emigrating to France in 1877. His father had been the owner of a gymnasium in Moscow which Tchaikovsky began attending in January 1871 to get some regular exercise. As Modest informs us in his biography, when describing the various acquaintances his brother made in Paris in 1888, "among those that had nothing to do with music, the one which pleased him most was his meeting with Caran d'Ache, whom he had last seen as a boy in Moscow in the early 1870s and who was now a Parisian celebrity."¹²

By a felicitous coincidence, it so happens that Caran d'Ache would supply the cartoons for several of Nicolas de Benardaky's humoristic albums, including *À la découverte de Russie* and *Prince Kozakokoff* (Paris, 1893), the latter a witty satire of Russian and European society.

2. Tchaikovsky to Pavel Peterssen, 4/16 November 1886 [[letter 3086a](#)]

Another letter by Tchaikovsky advertised for auction on 20 April 2011 by Bonham's on their website was described as follows: "Autograph Letter Signed ("P Tchaikovski") in Cyrillic, 2 pp recto and verso, 16mo, n.p., n.d., to Pavel Leontovich, fine. Tchaikovsky writes a friend explaining that his health is poor and he will not be able to keep their appointment, but that he hopes that they can see each other soon." A facsimile image of the first page was included on the website.¹³ The name and patronymic given for Tchaikovsky's addressee show clearly that it is addressed to Pavel Leont'evich Peterssen (1831–1895), a former professor of piano at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory and during the 1880s and early 1890s a member of the board of directors of the Saint Petersburg branch of the Russian Musical Society. A comparison of the contents of this letter with the sixteen already published letters from Tchaikovsky to Peterssen suggested that it might be a previously unknown one. An unpublished letter to Peterssen dating from 2/14 August 1892 is known to be held in the archives at Klin and was recorded as letter 4743a in the *Tchaikovsky Handbook* (2002). However, it is unlikely that this would be the letter now up for auction. We contacted Bonham's to request a copy or transcript of the letter, but received no reply to our enquiry.

However, while investigating this letter further we looked again at Thomas Kohlhase's publication of excerpts from various auction catalogues in *ČSt* 3 (1998), and noticed a summary of a letter to Peterssen from a Sotheby's catalogue from 1995:

No. 288. Fine autograph letter signed ("PTchaikovsky"), in Russian [die letzten neun Zeilen des Originals, mit Unterschrift, als Faksimile oben auf S. 148 des Katalogs], to Pavel Leontievich [Peterssen], apologizing for being unable to meet with him, explaining that he was unwell all day ("... with pains and boils on my gums, moreover, I can hardly

¹⁰ Letter 3690 to Félix Mackar, 8/20 October 1888. *PSSL* XIV, p. 558–560.

¹¹ Cf. the entry in Tchaikovsky's diary for 5/17 March 1888: "Dinner at Benardaky's. Portraits. Together at Caran d'Ache's." *DT*, p. 240.

¹² *ZC*, vol. 3, p. 205–206. See also *DT*, p. 240, n. 47.

¹³ Advertised as lot no. 281 in Sale 19377 (Manuscripts from the Estate of Charles Williamson & Tucker Fleming), due to take place in Los Angeles and New York on 20 April 2011. See the Bonham's website: <http://www.bonhams.com/eur/auction/19377/lot/281/> (last accessed on 24 March 2011).

talk. As a result of this, I must stay at home all day ..."), and suggesting that he calls on him with the publisher Jurgenson after breakfast, 2 pages, oblong 16mo (c. 9 x 10.5 cms), on blue-grey card, silvered border, with manuscript transcription and translation, no place or date [? Klin, ? 1893].¹⁴

It was clearly the same letter as the one now being advertised by Bonham's, but, unfortunately, it had been missed out by the compilers of *TH* and was not included in the Letters Catalogue there.

Because Prof. Kohlhase had added in square brackets that the auction catalogue contained a facsimile of the last page of this two-page letter, we realized that, having the image of the first page from the Bonham's website, we could piece together the letter's complete text if we managed to consult that Sotheby's catalogue from 1995. Stephen Roe, the Head of Music at Sotheby's, had in the past expressed his willingness to help the Tchaikovsky Research project, and so we contacted him to ask if he could provide a copy of the relevant pages in that catalogue. Shortly afterwards, Sarah Colville of Sotheby's kindly made these photocopies and sent them to us. This has allowed Tchaikovsky's letter to Peterssen to be published in full here:

[p. 1:] Дорогой Павел Леонтьевич!

Вчера мне целый день нездоровилось, а сегодняшнюю ночь я провёл самым болезненным образом и между прочим от боли и опухоли в дёснах могу [p. 2] с трудом говорить. Вследствие этого мне необходимо сегодня просидеть весь день дома. Очень, очень сожалею, что не могу с Вами позавтракать. Не зайдёте ли Вы с П[етром] И[вановичем] Ю[ргенсоном] ко мне после завтрака? Очень бы рад [был] повидать Вас.

Ваш

П. Чайковский

In English translation:

Dear Pavel Leont'evich! Yesterday I was ill all day long, whilst I spent last night in the most painful fashion, and, among other things, the pain and swelling in my gums makes it difficult for me to speak. As a result of this it is essential that today I stay at home all day long. I am very, very sorry not to be able to have lunch with you. Could you not drop in to see me after lunch together with Petr Ivanovich Jurgenson ? I would be very glad to see you.

Yours,

P. Tchaikovsky

The tentative identification of the place and year of writing of this letter given in the Sotheby's catalogue—"? Klin, ? 1893"—on the basis that "Tchaikovsky refers to him [Peterssen] in a letter to Bob Davydov dated 20 August 1893",¹⁵ did not seem entirely convincing, however, because such an appointment for lunch could only have taken place either in Saint Petersburg, where Peterssen was based most of the time, or in Moscow, where Tchaikovsky's publisher Jurgenson (also mentioned above) had his main office.

Although Tchaikovsky suffered from toothache quite frequently, we believe that it is possible to date this letter exactly to 4/16 November 1886 on the basis of his diary. On that

¹⁴ Thomas Kohlhase, "Paris vaut bien une messe!" Bisher unbekannte Briefe, Notenautographe und andere Čajkovskij-Funde', *ČSt* 3 (1998), p. 166.

¹⁵ *Sotheby's. Continental Manuscripts and Music. London, Thursday 18th May 1995*, p. 148, item no. 288.

day Tchaikovsky was in Saint Petersburg, where he had arrived on 18/30 October mainly so as to attend some concerts, as well as the première of his friend Eduard Nápravník's opera *Harold* at the Mariinskii Theatre. The première was in fact scheduled for 4/16 November, but would be postponed by a week. It so happens that Jurgenson also came over from Moscow in order to attend the scheduled première of *Harold* on 4/16 November, as Tchaikovsky had suggested he might like to do.¹⁶ On the previous day, however, Tchaikovsky had fallen ill, though he still mustered enough energy to attend the rehearsals for a forthcoming "Russian symphonic concert" conducted by Rimskii-Korsakov. This concert, part of the new series organized by Mitrofan Beliaev, did not feature any of his own music, but Tchaikovsky was still interested in hearing the works of his 'rivals', particularly in the case of such amiable ones as Rimskii-Korsakov and Glazunov. This is how he summed up the events of 3/15 November in his diary:

Felt ill in the morning. Conquered myself and went to the rehearsal. Glazunov's symphony [No. 2]. Rimskii-Korsakov's *Fairy Tale*. Lunch and rehearsal of the quartets at the Albrechts'. Became quite ill. Quinine. Slept at home. Dined and stayed at the Kondrat'evs'. My cheek pained. Slept at home and had nightmares. Felt better towards morning.¹⁷

This cheek pain and the nightmares he had would certainly tally with what is described in the letter to Peterssen above. The diary entry for the following day, 4/16 November, strengthens further the impression that these texts are referring to one and the same spell of ill health:

Learn from the newspapers that *Harold* is cancelled. Home all day. A pleasant feeling to be a bit ill and free. Sent out declinations. Jurgenson came twice. Worked. Lunched with Kolia [= Nikolai Konradi, in whose apartment Tchaikovsky was then staying]. Sasha Bazilevskaia and Sonia Drashusova came. Bessel. Towards dinner Ania [= Anna Merkling] and N. D. Kondrat'ev, as well as an unexpected guest, Taneev. Whist. Peterssen. Oh, what a rarely pleasant day!¹⁸

The above letter to Peterssen was very likely one of the "declinations" which Tchaikovsky sent out that morning.¹⁹ Although in this letter he apologized for not being able to have lunch with Peterssen because of his toothache, the reference to "lunch with Kolia" in his diary is not necessarily a contradiction: Tchaikovsky may simply have kept Nikolai Konradi company while the latter helped himself to lunch. At any rate, both Jurgenson and Peterssen seem to have found out quite quickly that their friend was unwell, for they both called on him in the course of that day to cheer him up. Peterssen seems even to have stayed for a round of whist, one of Tchaikovsky's favourite card games!

¹⁶ See letter 3081 to Petr Jurgenson, 26 October/7 November 1886. *PSSL XIII*, p. 483.

¹⁷ Diary entry for 3/15 November 1886. *DT*, p. 133. As always, when citing from this source, in the excellent translation by Wladimir Lakond, though with some spellings of names modified.

¹⁸ Diary entry for 4/16 November 1886. *DT*, p. 133.

¹⁹ Although not a letter declining an invitation as such, it is worth quoting Tchaikovsky's letter to the wife of his brother Anatolii on the same day, since it evidently describes the same situation: "I am living very comfortably at Modest's place [i.e. the apartment at No. 15, Fontanka Embankment, which Modest shared with his pupil, Nikolai Konradi]. They have the same apartment, but it's been rebuilt somehow, so that I have my own room. This is now the third day that I am unwell, and today I am not even going to leave the house all day long, because I have caught a very bad chill and yesterday suffered great pains in my cheek." Letter 3087 to Praskov'ia Tchaikovskaia, 4/16 November 1886. *PSSL XIII*, p. 490.

3. Tchaikovsky to Robert von Thal, 21 December 1877/2 January 1878 [[letter 699a](#)]

This 'official' letter to the Russian consul-general in Paris has to do with the decision by the Russian government to appoint Tchaikovsky a delegate to the music section of the Paris Exhibition of 1878, and is particularly interesting because here Tchaikovsky accepts the offer and expresses his intention of coming to the French capital for the preliminary organizational meetings, whereas just two days later he would write to Robert von Thal again, declining the honour on the grounds of "a very serious nervous ailment".²⁰ Tchaikovsky's letter—evidently his first to Thal—was recently sold by International Autograph Auctions Ltd., a specialist auction-house based in Nottingham (U.K.), and the company's director, Richard Davie, kindly allowed us to use the facsimile provided on their website for publication here.²¹ Tchaikovsky writes from San Remo, the Italian coastal resort where he had arrived on 19/31 December 1877, less than three months after leaving behind his wife Antonina in Moscow and fleeing from Russia:

Ваше Превосходительство!

Только сегодня я получил уведомление от Александра Ивановича Бутовского, что г. Министр Финансов назначил меня делегатом в Комиссию по устройству музыкального отдела Парижской выставки. Вследствие сего, имею честь доложить Вашему Превосходительству, что не позже 9^{го} числа текущего месяца я приеду в Париж. Таким образом я буду иметь возможность принять участие в заседаниях означенной Комиссии, которые, как пишет мне г. Председатель Высочайше учреждённой Комиссии по участию России в Выставке, имеют быть между 10^м и 18^м числ[ом] настоящего месяца. Как только приеду в Париж, буду иметь честь явиться к Вашему Превосходительству.

Покорнейше прося Вас принять уверение в истинном моём уважении, имею честь быть Вашего Превосходительства покорнейшим слугой

П. Чайковский

Сан-Ремо 2 Янв[аря] 1878/21 Дек[абря] 1877 Pension Joly

In English translation:

Your Excellency! It is only today that I have received Aleksandr Ivanovich Butovskii's notification that I have been appointed a delegate to the Commission for the organization of a music section at the Paris Exhibition. In consequence of this, I have the honour of reporting to Your Excellency that I shall arrive in Paris by the 9th of this month at the latest. I shall thus have the opportunity of taking part in the meetings of the aforesaid Commission, which, as the Chairman of the Commission established by His Imperial Majesty for the participation of Russia in the Exhibition has written to me, are due to take place from the 10th to the 18th of this month. As soon as I arrive in Paris, I shall have the honour of presenting myself before Your Excellency.

Whilst most humbly asking you to accept the assurance of my sincere respect, I have the honour of remaining Your Excellency's most humble servant,

P. Tchaikovsky

²⁰ See letter 702a to Robert von Thal, 23 December 1877/4 January 1878, first published in *Mitteilungen* 11 (2004), p. 19–22.

²¹ See the website of International Autograph Auctions: <http://www.autographauctions.co.uk/bidcat/detail.asp?SaleRef=0020&LotRef=555> (last accessed on 2 April 2011). This one-page letter was advertised as lot no. 555 in the catalogue of the Autograph Auction held at the Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow, on 2 April 2011.

To fill in the context of this letter, we can draw on not just the letters which Tchaikovsky wrote to his relatives, to former colleagues at the Moscow Conservatory, and to Nadezhda von Meck around the same time, but also on some documents in the small collection of correspondence between various French and Russian officials concerning the organization of the 1878 Exhibition which was sold together with the above letter to Thal. Images of all these documents were kindly scanned for us by Lana Sayer of International Autograph Auction (IAA) and supplied on a disc.²²

Since these auctioned documents are clearly all from Thal's archive, it is worth saying something about him first. Robert Christian von Thal (1808–1895) was a native of Dorpat (present-day Tartu in Estonia), and like many Baltic Germans he rose to high rank in the Russian civil service, eventually being appointed Russian consul general in Paris. Whilst still in Russia, in the winter of 1843/44, Thal had become friends with Pauline Viardot-García and her husband, the publicist and art historian Louis Viardot (1800–1883), when they came to Saint Petersburg following the singer's engagement at the Italian Opera Company there. Thal acted as Viardot's guide and hunting-companion on many occasions, and would be described by the latter, in his series of articles *Quelques chasses en Russie* (1844), as "one of the most distinguished, one of the kindest and most thoughtful men one could hope to meet."²³ It is likely that Thal was Viardot's main source of information on the situation of the serfs in the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire for his article *De l'affranchissement des serfs en Russie* (1846). Around 1855, Thal also helped to produce a translation into French of Gogol's story *The Overcoat*, but this was not used by Viardot and Turgenev in their project of acquainting the French public with Gogol's works.²⁴

To return to the context of Tchaikovsky's letter: the French Third Republic's decision, back in 1876, to expand the scope of the International Exhibition of Industry and Agriculture that was due to take place in Paris in the summer of 1878, so that it would also include the fine arts and literature, thereby truly becoming an *Exposition Universelle*, was a sign of how France, after the humiliating defeat against Prussia in 1870 and the horrors of the Paris Commune, was, as Patrick Waddington has put it, "re-establishing herself as a world force" and "rediscovering her historic calling and identity".²⁵ In August 1877, the French government decided to add music to the other arts to be represented in Paris, and Georges Berger (1834–1910), the director of the foreign sections at the Exposition, wrote to Aleksandr Ivanovich Butovskii (1814–1890), director of the Trade and Manufacture Department at the Russian Ministry of Finance and as such chairman of the commission set up to organize Russia's participation in the Exposition, asking him to appoint a delegate to represent Russia

²² Here is a list of the documents included on the disc, in the order that they were placed by IAA when drawing up this lot for the auction: (1) Facsimile of Tchaikovsky's above letter to Robert von Thal; (2) Draft letter from Thal to Aleksandr Butovskii, 27 December 1877/8 January 1878; (3) Draft letter from Thal to Butovskii, 17/29 January 1878; (4) Notes made by Thal (?) during meetings of the Music Committee in Paris in January 1878; (5) Letter from an official of the Russian Embassy in Paris to Thal, 17/29 December 1877; (6) French translation of Tchaikovsky's above letter to Thal; (7) Confirmation of payment made by Thal on 17/29 January 1878 to the French architect commissioned to design Russia's exhibition space at the World Fair; (8) Letter from Sébastien Krantz to Butovskii, September 1877; (9) Letter from Georges Berger to Thal, 13/25 September 1877; (10) Letter from Berger to Thal, 4/16 January 1878; (11) Letter from Berger to Thal, 7/19 January 1878; (12) Letter from Butovskii to Thal, 9/21 December 1877. Apart from (1) and (6), Tchaikovsky is mentioned only in documents (2) and (12).

²³ Cited by Michel Cadot in: 'Le rôle de Tourguéniev et de Louis Viardot dans la diffusion de la littérature russe en France', *Cahiers Ivan Tourguéniev, Pauline Viardot, Maria Malibran* 5 (1981), p. 51–62 (54).

²⁴ See the information provided by Alexandre Zviguilsky in: *Ivan Tourguénev. Nouvelle correspondance inédite*, 2 vols (1971–72), vol. 2, xxxii, p. 8–9.

²⁵ Patrick Waddington, 'I. S. Turgenev and the International Literary Congress of 1878', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* 1983, p. 37–70 (40).

at meetings of the *Commission des auditions musicales* which, in January 1878, would start preparing the music section.²⁶

Butovskii evidently discussed this matter with Karl Davydov and Nikolai Rubinstein, respectively the directors of the Saint Petersburg and Moscow Conservatories, and they both concurred in suggesting that Tchaikovsky be appointed Russia's delegate for music. During the composer's brief stay in Saint Petersburg in late September/early October 1877, immediately before his departure abroad, his brother Anatolii had informed him about these plans. As Tchaikovsky later confessed: "Since I was going abroad without any specific means and the Exposition seemed to me to lie so far away that I doubted whether I would still be alive when it opened, I did not consider it necessary to say no. Moreover, at the time everything seemed to me completely vague, nebulous, and uncertain, and I thought of nothing else other than my departure."²⁷ Although by the time of his arrival in Venice on 2/14 December, Tchaikovsky's financial situation was more secure, because Nadezhda von Meck had begun sending him a monthly subsidy of 1,500 francs, when he shortly afterwards received an official invitation from Butovskii asking him whether he agreed to be a delegate, he still felt that he could not say no outright and sent a reply to the effect that he needed to know if the Russian government would cover delegates' expenses before he could accept such an offer.²⁸ In this case the wheels of the Russian bureaucracy did not turn as slowly as usual, and by 9/21 December Butovskii was able to write to Thal in Paris that Tchaikovsky had been appointed delegate to the music section.²⁹

Because Tchaikovsky was frequently on the move at that time (travelling from Venice to Milan, then to Genoa and San Remo), the official letter from Butovskii confirming his appointment and fixing his salary at 1,000 francs a month did not reach him until the morning of 21 December 1877/2 January 1878 when he collected his post from the *poste restante* office at San Remo. Butovskii also instructed him to go to Paris and report to Thal, who was in overall charge of the Russian section at the Exposition. The letters which Tchaikovsky wrote to Anatolii and to Mrs. von Meck that same day show how this notification struck him "like a bolt from the blue" and confronted him with a dilemma. On the one hand, he was reluctant to have to leave San Remo in a rush when he was finishing the orchestration of his Symphony No. 4 and, moreover, was expecting the arrival of Modest from Russia together with his pupil Nikolai Konradi. The prospect of having to commit himself to stay in Paris for the greater part of 1878 and attend all sorts of official events also did not attract him. On the other hand, he felt that this appointment might be a good opportunity to make himself known in Paris, as well as to advance the cause of Russian music in Europe.³⁰ After thinking the matter over all day long, in the evening, as he confessed to Anatolii: "I dropped into a café, drank some brandy, walked a bit more, and then returned home [i.e. to the Pension Joly where he was staying], resolved not to be a wimp and to make my way to Paris by the 10th of January, come what may."³¹ It was then that he wrote the previously unknown letter to Thal presented above.

Over the next two days, however, Tchaikovsky was tormented by the thought of what lay ahead of him in Paris, and, finally, on 23 December 1877/4 January 1878 he wrote to

²⁶ Letter from Georges Berger to Aleksandr Butovskii, 13/25 September 1877. Facsimile of original on disc provided by Lana Sayer of IAA.

²⁷ Letter 720 to Karl Albrecht, 8/20 January 1878. *PSSL* VII, p. 28.

²⁸ Tchaikovsky's reply to Butovskii has not survived, but he summarized its contents in letter 698 to Nadezhda von Meck, 21 December 1877/2 January 1878, and letter 720 to Karl Albrecht, 8/20 January 1878.

²⁹ Letter from Aleksandr Butovskii to Robert von Thal, 9/21 December 1877. Facsimile of original on disc provided by Lana Sayer of IAA.

³⁰ See letter 698 to Nadezhda von Meck and letter 700 to Anatolii Tchaikovsky, both 21 December 1877/2 January 1878. *PSSL* VI, p. 318–322.

³¹ Letter 700 to Anatolii Tchaikovsky, 21 December 1877/2 January 1878. *PSSL* VI, p. 321.

Butovskii asking him to appoint another delegate in his place (this letter has not survived), as well as to Thal once again, explaining that since his first letter two days earlier he had unexpectedly suffered a relapse of "a very serious nervous ailment", and that his state of health prevented him from leaving San Remo and fulfilling properly the obligations of a delegate.³² In a letter to his sister, Aleksandra, the following day, he could be more honest about why he had revoked his earlier decision. Since this letter recaps the whole saga of Tchaikovsky's appointment as Russia's delegate for music at the Exposition, it is worth quoting at some length:

Darling Sasha! All these days I have been quite ill, upset, and unhappy. When I arrived here [in San Remo], I found at the *poste restante* an official notification stating that I had been appointed a musical delegate to the Paris Exposition, and that I had to be there already by the 10th of January and stay in Paris until the end of the Exposition. I cannot convey to you in words how shocked I was. To have to go to Babylon in the state that I am now, to be under the command of some old privy counsellor Thal, to have to take part in various commissions, meet masses of people, pay visits, drag myself to banquets and musical soirées and stay in Paris until the end of the Exposition, i.e. for eight months!!! I swear to you that the only thing that is keeping me alive is the hope of returning to Russia in the spring and spending the whole summer at your place [Kamenka]. Indeed, all my plans were all of a sudden ruined. And yet, I imagined that I was obliged to take these duties upon myself, that you [Aleksandra and Lev Davydov], my brothers, friends, indeed everyone who feels sympathy for me, would come to hate me profoundly and judge me irrevocably to be a contemptible person if I were to refuse. I decided to go. But how I suffered during all these days, that I cannot tell you! I didn't sleep or eat, out of grief I would even get drunk several times a day. Finally, today the following thought occurred to me. I have already been punished cruelly for having once gone against my own nature and imagined something to be my duty that wasn't so at all.³³ Why should I go and take part in something that I find loathsome and terrible? What should I do with Modest, who is coming with Kolia [Konradi] here, not at all expecting to have to live in Paris and not to be able to see me for days on end? And then, after all I am ill, I cannot stand crowds now, new acquaintances etc. I have written a formal letter rejecting the post [...] I cannot, I just cannot go there. The very thought makes me ill.³⁴

After receiving Tchaikovsky's letter Thal reported to Butovskii that until a new delegate was appointed he himself would take part in the preliminary meetings of the Music Committee in Paris.³⁵ The Russian government would eventually take the wise decision of appointing Nikolai Rubinstein to head the country's music delegation in Paris, and this would turn out to be very much to Tchaikovsky's advantage as well, since at all four of the "Russian Concerts" conducted by the energetic Rubinstein at the Palais du Trocadéro (which had been specially built for the Exposition) in September 1878, the composer's works figured prominently.³⁶

Turgenev, who was rather worn out by his efforts as vice-president of the International Literary Congress which had taken place earlier in June,³⁷ enjoyed this

³² Letter 702a to Robert von Thal, 23 December 1877/4 January 1878. *Mitteilungen* 11 (2004), p. 19–21.

³³ An allusion to his decision to marry Antonina Miliukova in July 1877.

³⁴ Letter 704 to Aleksandra Davydova, 24 December 1877/5 January 1878. *PSSL* VI, p. 327.

³⁵ Draft letter from Robert von Thal to Aleksandr Butovskii, 27 December 1877/8 January 1878. Facsimile of original on disc provided by Lana Sayer of IAA.

³⁶ For details of these concerts, see Thomas Kohlhase's presentation of letter 702a to Robert von Thal in: *Mitteilungen* 11 (2004), p. 28–33.

³⁷ For a lively account of the congress and Turgenev's role in it, see Patrick Waddington, 'I. S. Turgenev and the International Literary Congress of 1878', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* 1983, p. 37–70.

opportunity to get to know better the works of a composer in whom he had already taken great interest, and he wrote to Tolstoi from Paris in November: "Tchaikovsky's name has risen greatly in general estimation here after the Russian Concerts at the Trocadéro."³⁸ Not for nothing would the biographical notice on Tchaikovsky on the front page of the 24 November 1884 issue of *Le Gaulois* announcing the forthcoming publication of the *Album du Gaulois*—to which Tchaikovsky, like many of his great European contemporaries, had contributed a piano piece (see the letter to Louis de Fourcaud below)—recall the "powerful impression" caused by the Piano Concerto No. 1 when it was played by Nikolai Rubinstein at the first of these Russian Concerts at the Trocadéro.³⁹

Since Tchaikovsky's decision to turn down the post of musical delegate to the Exposition Universelle of 1878 also meant that he was able to concentrate on completing the orchestration of the Fourth Symphony and *Evgenii Onegin*, it really was a case of all's well that ends well.

³⁸ Letter from Ivan Turgenev to Lev Tolstoi, 15/27 November 1878. I. S. Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 28 vols (Leningrad, 1961-68), *Pis'ma*, XII/1, p. 384.

³⁹ The 24 Nov. 1884 issue of *Le Gaulois* can be viewed at Gallica, the digital archive of the Bibliothèque nationale de France: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k525210t>.

II. Austria (unidentified)

1. Tchaikovsky to an unidentified male correspondent, 8/20 September 1887 [[letter 3342a](#)]

The Slovene tenor Anton Dermota (1910–1989) was a keen autograph-collector, and he was in the habit of trying to acquire manuscripts written by the composers of those operas in which he had made successful appearances. Thus, after his first major debut at the Vienna State Opera in 1937, as Lenskii in *Evgenii Onegin*, he began looking for something written in Tchaikovsky's own hand and eventually succeeded in adding to his collection an autograph letter by the composer dating from 1887.¹ Dermota generously made his collection available to the Austrian National Library (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek; ÖNB) as a permanent loan, and Tchaikovsky's letter was duly recorded in a catalogue of the musical manuscripts of that collection which came out in 1988.

544 TSCHAIKOWSKY, PETER ILJITSCH (1840–1893)

Eigh. Brief m.U. an die Neue Symphonische Gesellschaft in Wien. St Petersburg. 28 (?). 9. 1887. 3 S 21 x 13,5 cm

"c'est avec le plus grand plaisir que j'accepte l'invitation que vous avez bien voulu m'adresser de la part du Comité de la Nouvelle Société symphonique de Vienne." Tschaikowsky wurde eingeladen, in Wien ein Konzert zu dirigieren.²

This letter appeared to have escaped the notice of the compilers of the *Tchaikovsky Handbook* in 2002, and since it had not been mentioned in any subsequent publications, it seemed to be an entirely 'new' letter. However, comparison of the extract cited above with the slightly longer extract of a letter included by Thomas Kohlhase in a series of excerpts from auction catalogues in *Čajkovskij-Studien* 3 (1998), which had been auctioned in Vienna in 1994 and whose date was given there as 8/20 September 1889, suggested that these two letters were one and the same.³ In the Letters Catalogue of *TH* the letter had in fact been recorded among Tchaikovsky's letters for 1889, namely as letter 3931a, purportedly dating from 8/20 September of that year, which meant that it would have been written in Frolovskoe.

Because it seemed very puzzling that Tchaikovsky, in September 1889, should have accepted an offer to conduct a concert in Vienna, when such a plan is not mentioned in any of his other letters from that period, the only possible conclusion was that the year given in *ČSt* 3 (1998) was incorrect (possibly the fault of the auction catalogue cited), and that the letter was in fact from 1887, as recorded in the catalogue of the Anton Dermota collection. Seeking clarification, we contacted Thomas Leibnitz, the director of the Music Department at the ÖNB who was one of the co-compilers of that catalogue. First of all, he confirmed that the Dermota collection had been returned to the tenor's heirs after his death, which explains why the letter turned up for auction in 1994. He also explained that the ÖNB had microfilmed the

¹ See Herbert Zeman, *Musik und Dichtung. Anton Dermota zum 70. Geburtstag* (Vienna, 1980), p. 39.

² *Katalog der Sammlung Anton Dermota: Musikerhandschriften und Musikerbriefe*, compiled by Thomas Leibnitz and Agnes Ziffer (Tutzing, 1988), p. 167. In an abbreviated English translation: "Autograph signed letter to the New Symphonic Society in Vienna. Saint Petersburg. 28 (?) 9. 1887 [...] 'it is with the greatest pleasure that I accept the invitation which you were so kind as to send me on behalf of the Committee of the New Symphonic Society of Vienna'. Tchaikovsky had been invited to conduct a concert in Vienna."

³ See Thomas Kohlhase, "'Paris vaut bien une messe!' Bisher unbekannte Briefe, Notenautographe und andere Čajkovskij-Funde", *ČSt* 3 (1998), p. 185–186.

entire collection of manuscripts before returning it, and kindly offered to send us a PDF copy of Tchaikovsky's letter. This has allowed us not only to catalogue the letter correctly (since it does definitely date from 1887), but also to publish its full text for the first time. Tchaikovsky writes from the apartment which his brother Modest shared with his pupil Nikolai Konradi in Saint Petersburg:

[p. 1:] St Petersburg 8/20 Sept[embre] [18]87
Fontanka, 15

Monsieur!

Je m'empresse de Vous annoncer que c'est avec le plus grand plaisir que j'accepte l'invitation que Vous avez bien voulu m'adresser de la part du Comité de la Nouvelle Société symphonique [= symphonique] de Vienne. Je considère cette invitation comme un très grand honneur pour moi et je V[ou]s prie, Monsieur, de transmettre mes vifs remerciements au Comité.

L'époque la plus favorable pour moi serait le mois de Fév- [p. 2] -rier depuis le 1 jusqu'au 29. Cependant, si V[ou]s trouviez que le concert que je dois conduire, devrait avoir lieu un peu plus tard ou un peu plus tôt, – veuillez bien dès aprèsent [= à présent] fixer la date [= date] probable de ce jour pour que je puisse arranger mes affaires de manière à pouvoir arriver quand Vous le trouverez nécessaire [= nécessaire].

Quant au programme du concert, je le ferai et Vous l'enverrai aussitôt [= aussitôt] que Vous aurez l'obligeance de me faire savoir que mon invi- [p. 3] -tation est décidée d'une manière tout à fait sûre.

En attendant que j'aie l'occasion de faire personnellement Votre connaissance, veuillez bien agréer, Monsieur, l'assurance de mes sentiments les plus distingués.

P. Tchaïkovsky

P. S. J'écris [= J'écris] très incorrectement l'allemand et j'espère que Vous m'excuserez d'avoir répondu en français.

In English translation:

Sir! I hasten to notify you that it is with the greatest pleasure that I accept the invitation which you were so kind as to send me on behalf of the Committee of the New Symphonic Society of Vienna. I regard this invitation as a very great honour for me, and I would ask you, Sir, to convey my fervent thanks to the Committee.

The most convenient period for me would be in February, from the 1st to the 29th of that month. However, if you feel that the concert which I am to conduct should take place a little later or a little sooner, please could you now fix the likely date of my concert so that I can organize my affairs in such a way as to be able to come to Vienna when you feel it is necessary.

As for the programme of the concert, I shall draw it up and send it off to you as soon as you are so kind as to let me know that my invitation has been settled quite for certain.

Until I have the opportunity to make your personal acquaintance, would you please accept, Sir, this assurance of my finest sentiments.

P. Tchaikovsky

P. S. My written German is very faulty, and I hope that you will forgive me for having replied in French.

Although Vienna was ultimately not included in the itinerary of Tchaikovsky's first concert tour of Western Europe in January–March 1888, there is clear evidence that he did indeed receive an invitation from Vienna in the late summer or autumn of 1887. Thus, a fortnight after the letter presented above, he wrote to Nadezhda von Meck: "I have been invited to

conduct two concerts of my works in Vienna and Hamburg in January."⁴ This prompted Mrs. von Meck to ask him in a letter from Geneva on 17/29 October 1887: "I am awfully glad about all the invitations which you have received from abroad, and I would very much like to know which Society has invited you to Vienna, since there are several of them there. Please, my dear, do not fail to tell me that, and also what works of yours are to be performed."⁵ However, in his subsequent extant letter to Mrs. von Meck, written in Saint Petersburg on 19/31 October, Tchaikovsky did not clarify the details of his invitation to Vienna (perhaps he had not yet received his benefactress's letter), and by the time of his next letter to her, on 13/25 November, he did not mention Vienna among the European cities where he was soon due to give concerts of his works. The Viennese engagement had evidently fallen through by then. Still, at the start of the account of his concert tour which he wrote up in April 1888, shortly after its conclusion, Tchaikovsky made a point of including Vienna among the great musical centres of Europe which had invited him: "In June I received an invitation from the Philharmonic Society in Hamburg to come to their city at the end of January 1888, in order to direct the performance of some of my works. Shortly afterwards I received similar invitations from Vienna, Dresden, Copenhagen, Prague, Leipzig, Berlin, and London."⁶

Unfortunately, the commentaries for these texts in the editions available to us do not specify which concert society in Vienna had invited Tchaikovsky. When the above letter was mistakenly catalogued as letter 3931a in *TH*, its addressee was recorded there as "the Committee of the New Symphonic Society (*Neue Symphonische Gesellschaft*)", that is a direct translation of Tchaikovsky's French. However, no musical association by such a name seems to have existed in Vienna at the time. It is possible that the society in question was simply the famous *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* which, for example, is known to have invited Grieg to conduct two concerts of his works in Vienna at the start of 1888 (these plans were not realized).⁷ Such invitations would probably have been sent out by the society's secretary, Ludwig Koch, rather than by its director, Hans Richter. In any case, Tchaikovsky's reply cannot be addressed to Richter, since he would otherwise not have failed to thank him again for how he and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra had supported Adolph Brodsky in the world premiere of the Violin Concerto in Vienna six years earlier. Further research is necessary to establish the identity of this letter's addressee.

⁴ Letter 3360 to Nadezhda von Meck, 21 September/3 October–25 September/7 October 1887. *PSSL* XIV, p. 220–223.

⁵ Letter from Nadezhda von Meck to Tchaikovsky, 17/29 October 1887. Quoted here from *P. I. Chaikovskii. Peregipiska s N. F. fon-Mekk*, 3 vols (Moscow, 1934–1936), vol. 3, p. 502. The second volume of the new edition of this correspondence prepared by Polina Vaidman, which covers the year 1878, has recently come out, but this was not available to us: *P. I. Chaikovskii—N. F. fon-Mekk. Peregipiska*, vol. 2 (Cheliabinsk, 2010).

⁶ Chapter II of the *Autobiographical Account of a Tour Abroad in the Year 1888*. An English translation of the whole article-diary is available on the Tchaikovsky Research website:

<http://www.tchaikovsky-research.net/en/Works/Articles/TH316/index.html>

⁷ See Grieg's letter to Max Abraham from Karlsbad on 1/13 October 1887 in: Finn Benestad & Hella Brock (eds), *Edvard Grieg. Briefwechsel mit dem Musikverlag C. F. Peters 1863–1907* (Frankfurt, 1997), p. 156. Also available at The Grieg Archive on the website of Bergen Public Library:

<http://www.bergen.folkebibl.no/cgi-bin/websok-grieg?mode=p&tnr=381948&st=m>

III. France

(Léonce Détroyat, Paul Dultier, Louis de Fourcaud, Martin Kleeberg,
Ambroise Thomas, Pauline Viardot-García)

1. Tchaikovsky to Léonce Détroyat, 10/22 May 1888 [[letter 3563b](#)]

Shortly after the conclusion of Tchaikovsky's first conducting tour of Western Europe (January–March 1888), during which he had, among other things, obtained several notable successes in Paris, his French publisher, Félix Mackar, wrote to him to explain that the librettists Léonce Détroyat and Louis Gallet, who had "great influence in the press and at the Opéra," had asked him to forward to the composer a draft libretto which they had drawn up for an opera (in French) entitled *La Géorgienne*. Tchaikovsky was kindly requested to read it through and to reply directly to Détroyat at his address at No. 6, Rue d'Isly, Paris, to say whether he would like to use it or not. Mackar emphasized that if Tchaikovsky was not happy with it, he should not hesitate to say so and to explain what kind of libretto he was looking for. He added that Détroyat and Gallet were entirely at Tchaikovsky's disposal, and that they were both very keen to collaborate with the Russian composer in producing an opera that would be a great success in Paris.¹

Tchaikovsky wrote to Mackar on 27 April/9 May 1888 from his new house at Frolovskoe, into which he had just moved in after returning to Russia from his travels in Europe and the Caucasus. He explained that he had not yet received the draft libretto, but that as soon as it reached him he would read it and let Détroyat know his frank opinion. He also noted that the idea for an opera entitled *La Géorgienne* was something that Détroyat had already raised when they first met in Paris two years earlier and the Frenchman had offered his services as a librettist.²

A few days after this letter to Mackar Tchaikovsky finally received the draft libretto for *La Géorgienne*, and, as he had promised, after reading it through he wrote to Détroyat to let him know what he thought about it. Tchaikovsky's letter to Détroyat (probably his very first one to the librettist) was auctioned at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris in 1992. In his biography of the composer which came out the following year, and which included a chapter entitled 'Un projet d'opéra en français', André Lischke was able to quote an extract from this letter on the basis of the summary given in the auction catalogue.³ Now, thanks to Thierry Bodin, who made a photocopy of this and the other letters from Tchaikovsky to Détroyat sold on that occasion, we are able to publish its full text for the first time. Tchaikovsky is writing from Frolovskoe, but he gives Klin as his address, since it was the nearest town:

[p. 1:] Kline, prés [= près de] Moscou
10/22 Mai 1888

Cher et très respecté Monsieur!

C'est non sans un certain effroi que je prends la plume pour répondre [= répondre] au si aimable envoi d'un scénarium d'opéra [= d'opéra], que Vous avez bien voulu me faire. Je Vous suis bien reconnaissant, je suis énormément flatté de l'attention que Vous m'avez témoignée, je suis fier de ce qu'un écrivain [= écrivain] de Votre valeur ait désiré m'avoir

¹ Letter from Félix Mackar to Tchaikovsky, 7/19 April 1888. *CZM*, p. 158. Only a selection of Mackar's letters to the composer have been published so far (in Russian translation only).

² Letter 3557 to Félix Mackar, 27 April/9 May 1888. *PSSL XIV*, p. 420–421. See also Note 6 below. Tchaikovsky recorded his meeting with Détroyat in Paris on 5/17 June 1886 as follows in his diary : " At Marmontel's [...] Détroyat, the librettist, a stout jolly fellow offering me a libretto". *DT*, p. 85.

³ See André Lischke, *Piotr Ilyitch Tchaïkovski* (1993), p. 542–543.

pour collaborateur et cependant, malgré tout, je me vois obligé de renoncer à l'honneur de cette collaboration. Non que je trouve <ce> scenarium peu intéressant [= intéressant] ou defectueux [= défectueux]; au contraire [p. 2] je le crois excellent et plein d'effets scéniques [= scéniques]; je ne doute pas qu'un musicien français soit capable d'en faire un opera [= opéra] à grand succès. Mais (Vous me permettez, n'est ce pas, Monsieur, de parler franchement) malgré toutes ses belles qualités, ce sujet me laisse froid et ~~que~~ j'aurais beau m'efforcer de bien faire, jamais je ne parviendrai à élever mon inspiration musicale au niveau des qualités scéniques [= scéniques] et littéraires [= littéraires] de Votre libretto. Peut être [= Peut-être] est-ce parce que [= parce que] Vous avez transporté les personnages d'un roman de Chateaubriand très fantaisiste et un peu en dehors de la réalité, dans un pays que je connais pour l'avoir souvent visité et dont les mœurs, les usages, les coutumes n'ont rien de commun avec les beaux sentiments, le langage choisi et le caractère romantique de Khoudza, Nuddra, Gourgène etc. Or, en qualité de russe, je suis très soucieux de la vérité [= vérité] locale et historique. C'est probablement un [p. 3] défaut, car Scribe, par exemple, n'était [= n'était] nullement scrupuleux sur le chapitre de l'histoire et de l'ethnographie, ce qui n'a pas empêché [= empêché] que des opéras écrits sur ses poèmes aient fait le tour du monde. Pour en revenir à la Géorgienne, je me permettrai, Monsieur, de Vous dire, que si pour Vous le Caucase est un pays exotique et très peu connu, pour moi, comme pour tous mes compatriotes, c'est une de nos provinces, dont l'histoire, l'ethnographie, les mœurs, les us et coutumes sont aussi bien connus que ceux et celles de Kalouga, de Tver, de Smolensk etc. Les Russes n'ont jamais pris Tiflis, car la Géorgie dès 1783⁴ s'est soumise à la Russie et nos bataillons y sont entrés sans coup férir. Depuis, lors Tiflis, comme tout le reste de la Géorgie, est devenu, malgré de toutes petites différences dans les coutumes, ~~une ville~~ dans le genre de vie et les mœurs, une ville russe. Rien de ce qui se passe dans Votre scénarium [= scénarium], n'a pu se passer dans ce pays si souvent décrit, peint et illustré poétiquement par nos grands écrivains [= écrivains] et nos peintres. Je ne demande pas mieux que de faire un opera [= opéra] sur un sujet Caucasiens, car nul pays au monde ne se prête [= prête] mieux [p. 4] à l'illustration musicale et scénique [= scénique], – mais alors il faut que ce soient de vrais Géorgiens, avec leurs vrais noms, de vrais Tcherkesses, Lesguiniens, Mingrèliens et enfin de vrais Russes qui y figurent. On peut les idéaliser [= idéaliser] un peu, comme l'ont fait Pouschkine et Lermontoff, nos deux grands poètes, mais encore faut-il que l'histoire et la couleur locale soient rigoureusement observées.

De grâce, Monsieur, veuillez m'excuser d'avoir si franchement et sincèrement dit mon opinion et tâché d'expliquer pourquoi La Géorgienne ne me convient pas. Et cependant avec quel bonheur, quel plaisir, j'aurais travaillé à un opera [= opéra] français, dont le sujet aurait été [= été] fait par Vous, Monsieur. Pourrai-je espérer que Vous continuerez à m'honorer de Votre bienveillance et que peut-être [= peut-être] penserez Vous encore à moi. Si Vous me trouviez un sujet d'opera [= d'opéra] (dans le genre de celui de Carmen) capable de me rendre digne de Votre collaboration, combien je serais heureux, content et fier!!! De grâce, très respecté Monsieur, écrivez [= écrivez] moi quelques mots; dites moi que Vous me pardonnez et que je puis encore espérer [= espérer] obtenir de Vous un beau libretto!!!

En attendant veuillez croire à ma grande reconnaissance et à ma très haute estime.

P. Tchaïkovsky

In English translation:

Dear and highly esteemed Monsieur! It is not without a certain shudder that I take up my pen to reply to your ever so kind dispatch of a scenario for an opera. I am very grateful to

⁴ Tchaikovsky had originally written "1683" but then he wrote over the "6" turning it into a "7".

you, I am enormously flattered by the attention you have shown me, I am proud that a writer of your merits should have wished to have me as a collaborator, and yet, all this notwithstanding, I find myself compelled to forego the honour of such a collaboration. It is not that I find this scenario lacking in interest or defective; on the contrary, I consider it to be excellent and full of theatrical effects; I have no doubt that a French musician would be able to turn it into an opera with great success. But (You do allow me to speak frankly, is it not so, Monsieur?) in spite of all its fine qualities, this subject leaves me cold, and however much I were to exert myself to do it well, I should never manage to raise my musical inspiration to the level of your libretto's theatrical and literary qualities. Perhaps this is because you have taken the characters from a novel by Chateaubriand⁵ which is very fanciful and a little out of touch with reality, and put them in a country which I know because I have often visited it, and whose customs and mores have nothing in common with the fine sentiments, exquisite speech, and romantic temperament of Khoudza, Nuddra, Gourgène etc. For, as a Russian, I set great store by local and historical truth.⁶ This is probably a shortcoming, because Scribe, for example, had no scruples whatsoever with regard to history and ethnography, and yet this has not prevented the operas based on his poetic texts from achieving world-wide success. To return to *La Géorgienne*, I shall permit myself to say to you, Monsieur, that whilst for you the Caucasus may be an exotic and almost unknown country, for me, as for all my compatriots, it is one of our provinces whose history, ethnography, customs and traditions are as well-known to us as those of Kaluga, Tver, Smolensk etc. The Russians have never taken Tiflis, because Georgia has since 1783 submitted to Russia, and our battalions went in there without having to strike a single blow.⁷ Moreover, Tiflis, like the rest of Georgia, has since then—despite all the little differences in customs, lifestyle, and mores—become a Russian city. Nothing of what takes place in your scenario could possibly have happened in a country which has been described, depicted, and illustrated so often by our great writers and painters. I could not ask for anything better than to create an opera on a Caucasian subject, because no other country in the world lends itself so well to musical and dramatic illustration, but in that case it should have to feature real Georgians, with their real names, real Circassians, Lezgins, Mingrelians, and, last but not least, real Russians. One can idealize them a little,

⁵ At their meeting in Paris in June 1886 Détröyat seems to have given Tchaikovsky the impression that the libretto which he wanted to write for him, entitled *La Géorgienne* (or *La Circasienne*), was based on a work by Chateaubriand. In fact, as Détröyat would go on to explain to Tchaikovsky, it was based on a short story published in the *Revue britannique* in 1828: *Les amours du Cosaque et de la Géorgienne*. He had drawn on Chateaubriand's prose epic *Les Natchez* (1826), which deals with the North American Indians, only for the language of the Georgian characters in his libretto, but its plot was taken from that story by an unidentified author. See Détröyat's reply to Tchaikovsky from Paris on 22 May/3 June 1888. *CZM*, p. 115–116. Like all of Détröyat's letters to Tchaikovsky, this one has only been published in Russian translation so far.

⁶ In that slightly earlier letter to Mackar referred to above, in which he explained that he had not yet received Détröyat's libretto, Tchaikovsky confessed that he had some misgivings about it: "I think that the poem in question cannot be suitable for me, given that Mr Détröyat has had the ill-advised idea of transposing a novel by Chateaubriand to Russia—to Tiflis even. As soon as the plot is set in Russia it is necessary that it should contain no utterly impossible things—of the likes of those one finds in *Pierre Strogoff* [= *Michael Strogoff: The Courier of the Czar*, the popular 1876 novel by Jules Verne]; and I am only too certain that Mr Détröyat knows Russia as well as I know China. That a French composer might be able to set to music a subject of this kind, that I can conceive, but as for me, being a Russian and accordingly setting great store by local and historical truth, I could never bring myself to start work, no matter how effective on the stage Détröyat's poem may be, if it is teeming with historical nonsense. Anyway, we shall see." Letter 3557 to Félix Mackar, 27 April/9 May 1888. *PSSL* XIV, p. 420–421. As the above letter to Détröyat shows, these misgivings were very much borne out.

⁷ Heraclius II (Erekle; 1720–1798), the king of eastern Georgia, decided to place his kingdom under the formal protection of Russia in 1783 so as to stave off any threats from the Ottoman Empire (western Georgia had been under Turkish control for over two centuries). Georgia thereby became a Russian protectorate, and eventually, in 1801, lost her independence altogether as she was annexed by the Russian Empire.

as Pushkin and Lermontov, our two great poets, did, but it is essential to pay heed rigorously to the local history and colour.

Please, Monsieur, do forgive me for having spoken my mind so frankly and sincerely, and for having tried to explain to you why *La Géorgienne* is unsuitable for me. And yet, with what happiness, with what pleasure I would have liked to work on a French opera whose subject had been provided by you, Monsieur. May I hope that you will continue to honour me with your goodwill and that perhaps you will think about me a little? If you could find an opera subject (in the same genre as *Carmen*) that were capable of making me worthy of your collaboration, how happy, satisfied, and proud I should be!!! Please, highly esteemed Monsieur, do write to me a few words; tell me that you forgive me and that I can still hope to obtain a fine libretto from you!!!

Meanwhile, I ask you to believe in my great gratitude and my high esteem for you,

P. Tchaikovsky

At the time of writing, Tchaikovsky had already visited the Caucasus on three occasions: in 1886, 1887, and, most recently, in the spring of 1888, when he had again stayed with his brother Anatolii and his family in Tiflis (Anatolii had recently been appointed deputy governor there). The fact that his impressions of the region were very fresh in his mind explains partly why he reacted so strongly against the incongruities of Détróyat's libretto set in Georgia. It is interesting that in this connection he should mention Scribe, for in a review of a production of Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* at the Moscow Bol'shoi Theatre in 1872 he had commented ironically on Scribe's far-fetched libretto.⁸

The other main reason why Tchaikovsky rejected the stylized French libretto of *La Géorgienne* was, as he himself pointed out, because there existed a rich tradition in Russian literature (and painting) of portraying the landscapes and people of the Caucasus with a warm, poetic realism which did not turn a blind eye to the 'savage' customs that sometimes prevailed among these mountain-dwellers. Tchaikovsky had already drawn inspiration from Pushkin's narrative poem *The Gypsies* when he composed *Zemfira's Song* in the 1860s, and in the winter of 1889/90 he would turn to another great poet of the Caucasus, Lermontov, when he agreed to collaborate with Anton Chekhov in adapting the story *Béla* (from the novel *A Hero of Our Time*) for the operatic stage. Unfortunately, that project was never realized. It is not surprising, then, that Tchaikovsky was reluctant to set to music a libretto by a Frenchman who, despite having travelled widely (including to the south of Russia),⁹ was not familiar with the Caucasus. In a letter to Désirée Artôt in 1890 he would recall the libretto for *La Géorgienne* with some bemusement: "I have held in my hands a libretto for a French opera written by that very same Jules [= Léonce] Détróyat. The action was supposed to take place in Tiflis!!! My God, who could describe it!!!"¹⁰

Another aspect of Tchaikovsky's above letter to Détróyat worth emphasizing here is his search for a subject for an opera that would captivate him as strongly as Bizet's *Carmen* had. This is a recurring theme in Tchaikovsky's letters, especially in those to the main librettist of his later years, his brother Modest.¹¹ As we shall see, the 'story' which Tchaikovsky and Détróyat eventually agreed to develop into an opera was rather different

⁸ An English translation of this article is available on the Tchaikovsky Research website: <http://www.tchaikovsky-research.net/en/Works/Articles/TH265/index.html>.

⁹ See the biographical essay on Léonce Détróyat written by his great-grandson Jean-Pierre Mabile which, as explained in the Introduction, has been published with Prof. Mabile's kind permission on the Tchaikovsky Research website: http://www.tchaikovsky-research.net/en/people/detroyat_leonce.html.

¹⁰ Letter 4050 to Désirée Artôt-Padilla, 25 February/9 March 1890. PSSL XV-B, p. 73–75.

¹¹ Cf. letter 4919 to Modest Tchaikovsky, 17/29 April 1893: "For God's sake, try to find or invent a subject which, if possible, is not fantastic, something like *Carmen* and *Cavalleria rusticana*." PSSL XVII, p. 85.

from *Carmen*, though it too contained some of the essential elements that Tchaikovsky generally looked for when writing for the stage.

2. Tchaikovsky to Léonce Détröyat, 30 May/11 June 1888 [[letter 3581a](#)]

Détröyat replied to Tchaikovsky's letter presented above on 22 May/3 June 1888, explaining that he had shown it to his friend and colleague Louis Gallet. They had both marvelled at Tchaikovsky's profound understanding of artistic questions, Détröyat wrote, and rather than coming up with a subject themselves, they suggested that he should point out a suitable subject to them whereupon they would immediately start drawing up a scenario based on it and then they would consult him at every stage of writing the libretto to ensure that it met with his approval. All the same, Détröyat in this letter informed Tchaikovsky that he had already made some sketches for a libretto dealing with the tragic fate of the Castilian nobleman Juan de Padilla (1490–1521), one of the leaders of the Revolt of the Comuneros against the rule of Charles I in 1520–21 (The young king had recently absented himself from Spain in order to be crowned Holy Roman Emperor as Charles V). Given his excellent knowledge of Spanish, acquired partly during his years in Mexico,¹² it is not so surprising that Détröyat should have turned to such a subject from the history of Spain, and in his letter he cautiously enquired whether Tchaikovsky might wish to take it up.¹³

Tchaikovsky's fascinating reply to this letter—in which, after rejecting the story of Juan de Padilla, he described his expectations of an operatic subject in the words that we have used as the title for this bulletin, and then spoke of his wish to write an opera based on one of Alfred de Musset's plays—has never been published before, not even in the form of excerpts in Lischke's book. Thanks to the photocopy of this letter provided by Thierry Bodin, it can now be published here for the first time:

[p. 1:] Kline près Moscou

30 Juin/11 Juillet [= 30 Mai/11 Juin]¹⁴ 1888

Cher et très respecté Monsieur!

Que Vous êtes [= êtes] bon! Combien je suis touché par le ton si bienveillant, si amical de Votre lettre! Non seulement Vous ne m'en voulez pas, comme je le craignais un peu (car la susceptibilité des auteurs quelque supérieurs qu'il[s] soient est bien grande), mais Vous

¹² For more information, see again the essay written by Jean-Pierre Mabile on his great-grandfather: http://www.tchaikovsky-research.net/en/people/detroyat_leonce.html.

¹³ Letter from Léonce Détröyat to Tchaikovsky, 22 May/3 June 1888. *CZM*, p. 115–116 (Russian translation only).

¹⁴ The date written by Tchaikovsky at the top of the letter—"30 Juin/11 Juillet 1888"—is obviously incorrect because there is not a difference of twelve days between the OS and NS dates he indicated. In contrast to other letters (mainly those written from Russia to foreign correspondents) in which he made a mistake in the date, here it is not the usual case of his having confused an OS date for a NS one, or vice versa—leading to one of the two dates at least being correct—but, rather, that he wrote the correct day of the month ("30") in the OS date, but the wrong month ("June"), leading to both the OS and NS dates being incorrect. The letter from Détröyat to which Tchaikovsky is replying here bears the date "Paris, 3 June 1888" (NS). When Tchaikovsky sat down to write his reply at Frolovskoe eight days later, on 30 May/11 June, he had "30 May" in his mind as the day of the month (according to the Russian calendar), but seeing "3 June" on his correspondent's letter in front of him caused him to make a slip of the pen and to write "30 June" as the OS date, though he was still proceeding from the assumption that the current month had 31 days when he calculated the (equally mistaken) NS date as "11 July". A glance at the contents of the other letters exchanged by Tchaikovsky and Détröyat in 1888 confirms that the correct date must be "30 May/11 June"—thus, Tchaikovsky in this letter proposes writing a French opera based on one of Musset's plays, and it is this suggestion that Détröyat comments on in his letter to Tchaikovsky from Paris on 6/18 June when he explains that Musset's sister had forbidden any adaptations of her late brother's works for the opera stage. See Détröyat's letter in *CZM*, p. 116–117.

poussez Votre bonté jusqu'à vouloir persévérer [= persévérer] dans l'intention de collaborer avec moi. Merci, cher Monsieur! Et je commencerai par [p. 2] affirmer ce que Vous aviez déjà [= déjà] présumé. Effectivement, le sujet de Juan Padilla est trop révolutionnaire [= révolutionnaire] pour la Russie. Et d'ailleurs, je Vous avouerai que [je] suis peu porté pour des sujets de ce genre. C'est trop tragique, trop compliqué, trop grand opéra! Je voudrais quelque chose de très poétique [= poétique] et en même [= même] temps de très simple, très intime et humain! Quelque chose qui ait le don de remuer profondément tous les cœurs, mais non éblouir les yeux par un spectacle grandement et richement monté! Et puisque Vous m'autorisez à trouver un sujet, <je me> permettrai d'en soumettre [= soumettre] plusieurs à Votre jugement. Je n'ai jamais pu comp- [p. 3] rendre pourquoi aucun compositeur français ne s'est jamais inspiré par les Comédies d'Alfred Musset (si ce n'est pas la Carmosine cependant)? Quant à moi je ne trouve rien de plus délicieusement poétique [= poétique] et de touchant que Les Caprices de Marianne, ou bien le Chandelier. On dit que ces chefs-d'œuvre ne sont pas assez scéniques [= scéniques]. Peut être [= Peut-être]! Mais des connoisseurs aussi profonds et aussi habiles que Vous et M^r Gallet, ne pourriez Vous pas adapter à la scène et aux exigences d'un scénario d'opéra [= d'opéra] les données de ces magnifiques et puissantes œuvres d'un poète, que je considère comme l'un des plus grands qui aient jamais existé? Je préférerais [= préférerais] surtout Les Caprices de Marianne et souvent j'ai songé à en faire un opéra [= opéra] russe. Mais la langue russe (très belle et très riche) ne se prête [= prête] pas assez dans [p. 4] sa duresse et sa saveur tout soit peu barbare à ce genre de poésie [= poésie] trop exquise, trop subtile, trop délicieusement fine pour qu'une autre langue que la Votre, en rende tout le charme. Mon Dieu, que je me sens emballé quand je pense au bonheur de pouvoir mettre en musique quelque chose d'Alfred <Musset>; je Vous écris [= écris] ces lignes, les larmes aux yeux, – gage sûr de l'inspiration sincère et féconde. Je suis bien curieux d'apprendre ce que Vous pensez de mon idée.

Quant à des sujets russes, – je Vous dirai franchement que si j'en trouvais un, – c'est dans notre langue que je désirerais le libretto. Je me sens incapable de mettre en musique des personnages russes parlant français. Que l'on traduise mes operas [opéras] sur des sujets russes dans toutes les langues du monde, – je ne demande pas mieux et si [p. 5] par impossible une telle chance m'arrivait – je m'en réjouirais profondément, – mais de la [= là] à pouvoir faire un opéra [= opéra] russe sur des paroles françaises ou italiennes il'y a bien loin.

Les tragédies d'Oseroff, dont Vous parlez, Monsieur, ont été faites dans un temps ou pour ainsi dire il n'y avait pas encore de littérature russe, ou la langue littéraire [= littéraire] russe, n'était pas encore inventée. Cet homme avait beaucoup de talent, mais pas assez cependant pour créer [= créer] un genre national et trouver des voies nouvelles. Il ne savait qu'imiter avec beaucoup de savoir-faire Racine et Corneille, mais il n'y a rien [p. 6] au monde de plus hétérogène que les chefs-d'œuvre de ces grands <auteurs> tragiques et le génie littéraire [= littéraire] russe. Aussi ses productions sont elles tombées dans l'oubli le plus profond et je me rendrais ridicule en Russie si j'évoquais les fantômes de Dmitry Donskoï, de Xenia et autres personnages historiques russes qu'Oseroff avait déguisés en héros [= héros] grecs parlant une belle langue française traduits en mauvais russe. Vous ne sauriez croire, Monsieur, ne connaissant que la bonne traduction française, combien les tragédies d'Oseroff sont fausses, dépourvues de sincérité et d'originalité et com- [p. 7] bien, malgré son talent d'imitation il est inférieur à Vos grands auteurs tragiques, qui avaient le talent d'être [= d'être] vrais malgré toutes les entraves des trois unités et autres exigences pseudo-classiques, et dont les personnages parlent en si beaux vers!

Enfin, cher et très respecté Monsieur, puisque Vous êtes [= êtes] aussi bon et condescendant pour moi, veuillez prendre en considération que je me sens capable de faire un bon opéra [= opéra] sur des paroles françaises seulement si le sujet n'est pas

russe. Mon vœu le plus cher serait de pouvoir mettre en musique un poème d'opéra tiré d'une comédie d'Alfred Musset et [p. 8] adapté et mis en vers par M^r Gallet et Vous.

Veillez bien transmettre à M^r Gallet l'expression de ma vive reconnaissance pour l'attention flatteuse qu'il veut bien me témoigner et croyez, cher et bon M^r Détröyat[,] à mes sentiments les plus cordiaux pour Vous.

Votre bien dévoué serviteur

P. Tchaïkovsky

C'est avec l'impatience la plus vive que je vais attendre Votre réponse.

In English translation:

Dear and highly esteemed Monsieur! How good you are! How touched I am by the so well-disposed and friendly tone of your letter! Not only are you not angry with me—something that I had been fearing a little (because authors, no matter how eminent they may be, are always highly susceptible)—but you drive your kindness so far as to wish to persevere in your intention of collaborating with me.¹⁵ Thank you, dear Monsieur! And I shall start by confirming what you had already supposed. The story of Juan Padilla is indeed too revolutionary for Russia. Besides, I must confess to you that I am but little inclined towards subjects of that kind. It is too tragic, too complicated, too much like grand opera!¹⁶ I would like something very poetic and at the same time very simple, very intimate and human! Something endowed with the ability to move everyone's hearts deeply, without dazzling one's eyes by a grandly and lavishly staged spectacle! And since you give me permission to look for a subject myself, I shall take the liberty of submitting several to your judgement. I have never been able to understand why no French composer has ever let himself be inspired by Alfred de Musset's Comédies (with the exception possibly of Carmosine)?¹⁷ As far as I am concerned, I cannot think of anything more deliciously poetic and touching than Les Caprices de Marianne, or also Le Chandelier.¹⁸ It is said that these masterpieces are not sufficiently effective for the stage. That may well be so! However, could such discerning and skilful connoisseurs as you and Mr Gallet not

¹⁵ In letter 3563b to Détröyat on 10/22 May 1888, Tchaïkovsky had tactfully explained the reasons why he could not use his libretto for *La Géorgienne* which was set in the Caucasus. Tchaïkovsky's rejection of the libretto was above all due to its failure to portray truthfully the Georgians' national character and customs. Détröyat, in his reply to that letter on 22 May/3 June, had hastened to acknowledge his mistake, explaining that he had tried to portray the Georgians in the same manner as the North American Indians in Chateaubriand's epic poem *Les Natchez*. See Détröyat's letter in *CZM*, p. 115.

¹⁶ One of the main elements of the libretto for *Juan Padilla* was to be the tragic love between Padilla's son and Blanca (Blanche in the French libretto), the adoptive daughter of Charles I's regent in Castille, which ended with Blanca dying together with her beloved fighting for the rebel cause. In his letter of 22 May/3 June 1888, Détröyat explained to Tchaïkovsky that he was unsure as to whether he should propose such a subject in the first place, since "you may perhaps find it a little too... revolutionary for Russia". See *CZM*, p. 115–116.

¹⁷ *Carmosine*, written in 1850 and published in 1852, is one of Musset's finest plays, but was only staged posthumously, in 1865, and it was not received well at the time. According to Détröyat, in his reply of 6/18 June 1888 to Tchaïkovsky's above letter, Musset's elder brother Paul (1804–1880) was responsible for an operatic adaptation of *Carmosine* with music by Ferdinand Poise (1828–1892) which was soon to be staged at the Opéra-Comique. See *CZM*, p. 117. This production, however, did not go ahead. See Musset, *Théâtre complet*, ed. by Simon Jeune (Paris, 1990), p. 1223–1224.

¹⁸ Musset's bold Romantic drama *Les Caprices de Marianne*, published in 1833, was not staged in Paris until 1851 (in a revised version made by Musset himself for which he modified many of the passages that might be seen as blasphemous or immoral). The original (and superior) version was used when publishing the play in the first edition of Musset's collected stage works, *Comédies et proverbes* (1840), whereas the revised version was used in later editions of that anthology from 1853 onwards. After 1878, however, the original version of *Les Caprices de Marianne* was reinstated both on stage and in printed editions. (It would be interesting to find out which version Tchaïkovsky was familiar with.) The comedy *Le Chandelier* was published in 1835 and was later also included in *Comédies et proverbes*.

manage to adapt for the stage and with a view to the requirements of an operatic scenario the essential elements of these magnificent and powerful works by a poet whom I consider to be one of the greatest to have ever lived? I would prefer *Les Caprices de Marianne* above all, and I have often dreamed of making a Russian opera out of it. However, the Russian language (for all its great beauty and richness) does not, on account of its roughness and its ever so slightly barbaric flavour, lend itself sufficiently well to this genre of poetry, which is too exquisite, too subtle, too deliciously refined for it to be possible that any language other than yours could render all its charm. My Lord, how thrilled I feel when I think of the good fortune of being able to set to music something by Alfred [de] Musset. I am writing these lines to you with tears in my eyes—a sure pledge of sincere and fertile inspiration. I am very curious to find out what you think of my idea.

As for Russian subjects, I shall tell you frankly that if I were to find one, I would wish the libretto to be in our language. I feel incapable of setting to music Russian characters speaking in French. Let my operas on Russian subjects be translated into all the languages of the world – I could not ask for anything better, and if, contrary to all likelihood, such good fortune were to befall me, it would delight me profoundly, but from there to being able to write a Russian opera on a French or Italian text, it is a very long way indeed.

The tragedies by Ozerov which you mention, Monsieur, were written at a time when, so to speak, there was no Russian literature yet, when the Russian literary language had not yet been created.¹⁹ This man had a lot of talent, though not enough to enable him to create a national genre and to find new paths. All he knew was how to imitate, with a great deal of skill, Racine and Corneille, but there is nothing on earth more disparate than the masterpieces of those great tragic authors and the Russian literary genius. Moreover, his [Ozerov's] works have fallen into the deepest oblivion, and I would make myself a laughing-stock in Russia if I were to evoke the phantoms of Dmitrii of the Don, Ksenia and other Russian historical figures whom Ozerov dressed up as Greek heroes talking in beautiful French and subsequently translated into poor Russian. You cannot imagine, Monsieur, given that you are familiar only with a good French translation, how false Ozerov's tragedies are, how devoid of sincerity and originality, and how, in spite of his talent for imitation, he is so much inferior to your great tragic authors, who possessed the talent of being true, all the fetters of the three unities and other pseudo-classical requirements notwithstanding, and whose characters utter such beautiful verses!²⁰

In short, dear and highly esteemed Monsieur, since you are so kind and generous towards me, could you please take into consideration that I feel capable of writing a good opera on a French text only if the subject is not Russian. My most cherished wish would

¹⁹ In his letter to Tchaikovsky of 22 May/3 June 1888 Détroyat had explained that he was not very familiar with Russian drama, but that he did know a few tragedies by Vladislav Ozerov (1769–1816), including *Fingal* (1805)—which Mirsky, in his famous history of Russian literature, describes as "a sentimental tragedy with choruses in an Ossianic setting"—and *Dmitrii of the Don* (1807), which was very successful at the time because of its "patriotic tirades". All these tragedies were constructed on the French classical model. See D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature* [1926] (New York, 1958), p. 68. Détroyat had suggested that if the story of *Dmitrii of the Don* had not been turned into an opera in Russia yet, he and Gallet could make a splendid libretto out of it for Tchaikovsky. See *CZM*, p. 116.

²⁰ This passage confirms what was already known about Tchaikovsky's love for French theatre—here specifically for the plays of the classical period which he had many opportunities to see at the Comédie-Française during his visits to Paris. He also had the works of Racine and Corneille in his library at Klin. On this subject, see the following two articles in *CA* 2 (2003): Galina Belonovich, 'Frantsuzskii dramaticheskii teatr v zhizni Chaikovskogo', p. 139–149, and V. A. Somov, 'Frantsuzskaia kniga v lichnoi biblioteke Chaikovskogo', p. 288–295.

be to be able to set to music an operatic libretto drawn from a comedy by Alfred [de] Musset and adapted and versified by Mr Gallet and you.²¹

Could you please convey to Mr Gallet the assurance of my keen gratitude for the flattering attention which he is so kind as to bestow upon me, and I would ask you, dear and good Mr Détroiyat, to believe in the most cordial feelings which I have for you.

Your very devoted servant,

P. Tchaikovsky

It is with the keenest impatience that I shall await your reply.

This letter is particularly important because it confirms Tchaikovsky's life-long admiration for Musset.²² Almost exactly ten years earlier, while staying at Nadezhda von Meck's estate of Brailov in August 1878, he had re-read Musset's works, which he found in the bookcase of her library, and, in a letter to his benefactress written over several days, he had shared with her his enthusiasm for the French poet and the creative plans which all this reading had stirred in him. Significantly, many of the observations about Musset he would make in the above letter to Détroiyat are anticipated in this earlier one to Mrs. von Meck:

I passionately love all of Musset's dramatic works. How many times have I dreamt of making a libretto out of one of his comedies or dramas. Alas! for the greater part, they are too French, they are unconceivable and lose all their charm when translated into a foreign language, for example *Le Chandelier* or *Les Caprices de Marianne*. [...] I do not understand why French composers have so far not drawn from this rich source?

After encouraging her to re-read all of Musset's plays herself, he continued:

Pay particular attention to *Les Caprices de Marianne*, *Il ne faut pas badiner avec l'amour*, and *Carmosine*. Tell me, is all this not simply begging to be set to music? How full all these works are of thoughts, of wit; how deeply felt they all are, how astonishingly graceful! [...] In Musset there is no vain striving for local truth [i.e. historical and geographical authenticity], just as with Shakespeare; rather, he displays just as much universally human and eternal truth—truth which does not depend on the historical period and place—as Shakespeare. Only, his framework is narrower and his sweep is somewhat lower. But on the whole, there is scarcely any other author writing for the stage who came as close to Shakespeare as he did. The play *Les Caprices de Marianne* has made a particularly strong impression on me, and today I have been thinking all day long about how it might be adapted into a scenario for an opera.²³

In his letter to Détroiyat ten years later, Tchaikovsky did not make this comparison between Shakespeare and Musset, though it is implicit in the way he described the latter as "one of the greatest [poets] to have ever lived". It is certainly a legitimate comparison, especially in the case of *Les Caprices de Marianne*. As has been pointed out, the basic idea of Musset's play—that of a woman falling in love with the friend of her timid admirer whom the latter had asked to tell her about his feelings—was inspired by the similar situation in *Twelfth Night*, and,

²¹ It proved impossible for Tchaikovsky to fulfil this wish, because, as Détroiyat explained in his reply from Paris on 6/18 June 1888, Musset's sister was firmly opposed to any operatic adaptations of her late brother's works. See also letter 3590a to Détroiyat of 13/25 June 1888.

²² Again, see Galina Belonovich, 'Frantsuzskii dramaticheskii teatr v zhizni Chaikovskogo', *CA* 2 (2003), p. 139–149 (147–148).

²³ Letter 897 to Nadezhda von Meck, 14/26 August–17/29 August 1878. *PSSL* VII, p. 368–371. This letter is amply quoted in the history of the projected opera *Les Caprices de Marianne* in *MN*, p. 132–134, as is letter 898 to Modest Tchaikovsky of 16/28 August 1878, in which Tchaikovsky expresses his intention of adapting that play for the opera stage even more firmly.

unafraid to be accused of plagiarism, Musset even borrowed the Italian names of some of Shakespeare's characters.²⁴ The Romantic dualism, however, between the idealistic Cœlio and his older friend Octavio, with his 'cynical' attitude to life (which, as with many a Shakespearean hero, masks a noble and generous heart), is developed by Musset in a striking manner that is very much his own. It is easy to see why Tchaikovsky was so fascinated by this play, and why he felt such sympathy for Cœlio, whose tragic death at the end is not even mourned by the selfish Marianne. In this respect, it is interesting to note that the French title chosen for the opera *Cherevichki*—chosen either by the composer himself or by his publisher, Mackar—was *Les Caprices d'Oksana*. For Oksana, in Tchaikovsky's opera, as well as in Gogol's story on which it is based, is ultimately less cruel than Marianne, even if Musset's heroine can perhaps be forgiven on account of her love for Octavio that causes her to cast aside all her earlier aloofness.

Tchaikovsky did not realize his "dream" of turning *Les Caprices de Marianne* into an opera, neither in 1878 nor in 1888—partly due to a factor that Détroiyat reminded him about in his next letter to the composer (see below)—but in the last year of his life he did apparently consider writing an opera based on Musset's *Carmosine*²⁵—a more lyrical play than *Les Caprices de Marianne*, and one, moreover, which with its healing of the innocent young heroine, Carmosine, through compassionate love, shows some resemblances to the 'happy end' of *Iolanta*. It is to Herman Laroche that Tchaikovsky confided these plans, and this is not surprising since his old friend had, back in 1865, conceived the idea for an opera *Carmosine* of which ultimately only the overture was written. Laroche's *Carmosine* overture, with its rather unusual scoring for orchestra and two solo pianos, was given its first performance in Moscow in 1870 under the direction of Nikolai Rubinstein, but it was also one of the works that Tchaikovsky selected for the programme of the first Russian Musical Society concert of the season in Saint Petersburg on 16/28 October 1893 at which he also conducted the première of his own Symphony No. 6, and which would turn out to be the last concert he ever conducted. Tchaikovsky carefully studied the score of his friend's *Carmosine* overture when preparing for this concert, and it is this which evidently prompted him to start thinking of writing a Musset-based opera again.²⁶

3. Tchaikovsky to Léonce Détroiyat, 13/25 June 1888 [[letter 3590a](#)]

In response to Tchaikovsky's above letter and the suggestion it contained about turning one of Musset's plays into an opera, Détroiyat, writing from Paris on 6/18 June 1888, explained that over the past year he had paid several visits to Hermine-Charlotte Lardin de Musset (1819–1905), the poet's younger sister who owned the copyright to all of her late brother's works, in order to try to persuade her to grant him permission to adapt *On ne badine pas avec l'amour* into a libretto for Gounod. Mme Lardin de Musset had refused categorically to allow any of her brother's works to be adapted for the opera stage.²⁷ Tchaikovsky's reply to that letter from

²⁴ See the excellent commentary by Jean Baisnée in his edition of Musset, *Les Caprices de Marianne. Le Chandelier* (Bordas, 1964), p. 26.

²⁵ See Herman Laroche's tribute to the composer 'Na pamiat' o P. I. Chaikovskom', in *VC*, p. 414.

²⁶ See Tamara Skvirskaiia's article 'Avtografy P. I. Chaikovskogo v Otdel rukopisei Peterburgskoi konservatorii', *PMA* 1 (1997), p. 117–122 (120), in which she clarifies the misunderstanding that had led many scholars to believe that Laroche's *Carmosine* overture had been orchestrated by Tchaikovsky, whereas in fact the scoring of that work was done by Laroche himself. It was instead his friend's Overture-Fantasia that Tchaikovsky orchestrated in 1888. See also letter 5006a to Ekaterina Laroche of 11/23 August 1893, in which Tchaikovsky requests her to arrange for a copy of the *Carmosine* overture to be sent to him as soon as possible. This letter (humorously written in English!) was presented in: 'Klin, near Moscow, was the home of one of the busiest of men...' (February 2011), p. 9–11, which can be accessed via:

<http://www.tchaikovsky-research.net/en/news/index.html>.

²⁷ Letter from Léonce Détroiyat to Tchaikovsky, 6/18 June 1888. *CZM*, p. 116–117.

Détroyat was also unknown previously, and is published here for the first time thanks to the photocopy of the complete letter provided by Thierry Bodin. As was to be expected, Tchaikovsky expressed his great disappointment over the attitude of Musset's sister:

[p. 1:] Kline près Moscou
13/25 Juin 1888

Cher et très respecté Monsieur!

Il est bien triste que M^{me} Lardin de Musset s'oppose à la mise en musique des chefs-d'œuvres de son frère, car j'envisage ce caprice comme un obstacle insurmontable pour la réalisation du rève [= rêve] que j'avais fait de faire un opéra [= opéra] sur une ou sur plusieurs de ses comédies! Certainement on pourrait se contenter de l'Etranger, mais n'est-ce pas triste et décourageant de faire un opéra [= opéra] français, sur un sujet français et se dire que cet opéra [= opéra] ne peut être [= être] représenté [= représenté] en France! [p. 2] Je ne m'en sens pas la force! Non! A 48 ans on n'a plus l'inspiration assez féconde pour se donner le plaisir de travailler à une grosse partition et ne pas être [= être] en même [= même] temps plus ou moins sûr de son sort! Et le sort d'un opéra français sur un sujet français n'est il [= n'est-il] pas énigmatique si l'on n'a pas même [= même] le droit d'espérer [= d'espérer] que cet opéra [= opéra] sera donné sur une scène française? Malgré toute l'ardeur de ma passion pour Musset, je préférerais [= préférerais], cher Monsieur, que Vous Vous donniez la peine de me trouver un autre sujet. Je n'éprouve [= n'éprouve] aucune honte à Vous confesser que j'ambitionne énormément l'honneur [p. 3] de faire jouer sur une scène Parisienne un opéra [= opéra] de moi écrit spécialement pour Paris et que cette ambition (selon moi très pardonnable) sera certainement la source principale de mon inspiration; car rien n'aiguillonne [= n'aiguillonne] l'invention artistique avec autant d'intensité, que le désir de complaire à un public dont on apprécie le suffrage, comme j'apprécie celui du public du Parisien [= du public Parisien].

Je chercherai de mon côté [= côté]!

Le meilleur serait certainement si M^{me} Lardin de Musset cédait! Mais je doute fort qu'elle m'octroie ce qu'elle a refusé à [= à] Gounod!!!!

Un ballet en 5 actes avec soli et chœurs!... Avec la sincérité que me commandent les égards qui Vous sont dûs – je dirai non, cher et bon M^r Detroyat. [p. 4] Un vrai ballet ou un vrai opéra [= opéra]! Je ne conçois pas une œuvre d'un genre neutre et d'ailleurs Vous parlez de la faire jouer pendant l'exposition [= l'exposition], tandis qu'il faut au moins deux ans de travail assidu pour terminer une partition en 5 actes! Et puis le sujet de Mefistofela me tente peu; c'est trop profond, trop allemand, trop philosophique. Comme je Vous l'ai déjà [= déjà] dit, ce que je désire, c'est un petit drame très intime, très humain, très terre à terre et au même [= même] temps très touchant. Ou bien si l'élément fantastique s'y mêle [= mêle], que ce soit quelque chose de moins profond que Mefistofela (que je connais)!

Que d'excuses j'ai à Vous faire à propos de La Georgienne. Un compositeur russe m'ayant visité et ayant vu le manuscrit sur ma table, m'avait prié de le lui prêter [= prêter] pour quelque temps et la dessus [= là-dessus] le voila parti pour un voyage d'agrément [= d'agrément] au Caucase. J'ai eu certainement tort de le lui avoir donné sans Votre autorisation, mais je m'étais imaginé [= imaginé] que Vous n'en auriez pas besoin tout de suite. Vite j'ai écrit [= écrit] au jeune homme de me renvoyer La Géorgienne mais Dieu sait quand ma lettre le rattrapera [= rattrapera]! Il se passera certainement quelques semaines avant que Vous ne l'ayez reçue. De grâce veuillez excuser ce manque impardonnable de discrétion! [p. 6]

Sur ce permettez moi, cher Monsieur de Vous remercier encore et encore pour toutes les bontés dont Vous me comblez. Dieu veuille que Vous trouviez pour moi un sujet qui me convienne parfaitement, que j'en fasse un bon opéra [= opéra] et que cet opéra [= opéra] soit représenté [= représenté] à Paris. Quelque chose me dit que c'est là

une ambition utopique que j'ai tort d'alimenter [p. 7] par l'espérance et que si le sort veut qu'une musique de moi se fasse entendre par un public de théâtre [= théâtre] Parisien, cela ne peut arriver que longtemps après ma mort. Mais on peut toujours espérer [= espérer].

Je suis, cher Monsieur, Votre bien dévoué [= dévoué] et reconnaissant serviteur

P. Tchaïkovsky

In English translation:

Dear and highly esteemed Monsieur! It is very sad that Mme Lardin de Musset is opposed to her brother's masterpieces being set to music, because I regard this whim of hers as an insurmountable obstacle to the realization of the dream I had of creating an opera based on one or several of his comedies! Of course, one could content oneself with foreign countries, but is it not sad and discouraging to create a French opera, on a French subject, and to have to say to oneself that this opera cannot be performed in France!²⁸ I don't feel that I have the strength to do that! No! When one is 48 years old one no longer has a sufficiently fertile inspiration to be able to give oneself the pleasure of working on a bulky score and not being at the same time more or less certain of the fate awaiting it! And the fate of a French opera on a French subject, is it not shrouded in mystery if one is not even entitled to hope that that opera will be produced in a French theatre? In spite of all the ardour of my passion for Musset, I would prefer it, dear Monsieur, if you were to take the trouble of finding another subject for me. I do not feel any shame in confessing to you that I aspire tremendously to the honour of having a Parisian theatre produce an opera of mine specially written for Paris, and that this ambition (which in my view is quite forgivable) would certainly be the principal source of my inspiration, for nothing stimulates artistic invention with as much intensity as the desire to please a public whose voice one appreciates, as I appreciate that of the Parisian public.

For my part, I shall also look for something!

The best thing of course would be if Mme Lardin de Musset were to give in! However, I very much doubt that she will grant me what she has refused Gounod!!!!

A ballet in 5 acts with soli and choruses!.... With the sincerity enjoined on me by the consideration that I am due to you, I must say no, dear and kind Mr Détroyat. It must be either a genuine ballet or a genuine opera! I cannot conceive of a work of indeterminate genre,²⁹ and, besides, you speak of having it performed during the Exposition, whereas it would in fact take at least two years of assiduous work to finish a score in 5 acts! And then the subject of Mefistofela has little to entice me; it is too profound, too German, too philosophical.³⁰ As I have already told you, what I desire is a

²⁸ In his letter of 6/18 June 1888, Détroyat had observed: "Could we not get round this prohibition abroad? And would not Mme de Musset resign herself to the necessity of allowing a work to be staged in France which had returned to us from abroad in triumph and bearing the signature of such a name as yours?". *CZM*, p. 117.

²⁹ In the summer of 1891, Tchaikovsky would reiterate his aversion to combining opera and ballet in a single work in letter 4415 to his friend the stage designer Karl Val'ts (1846–1929) who had sent him the libretto for an opera-ballet on an oriental subject entitled *Watanabe*: "I simply cannot tolerate or understand that indefinite and unappealing artistic genre which goes by the name of opera-ballet. It must be one thing or the other: either my characters will sing, or they will mime. To have them do both at the same time is quite inconceivable for me." *PSSL XVI-A*, p. 150–151. Further on in this letter Tchaikovsky wrote that he was willing to use the *Watanabe* libretto for a ballet, but this was to remain another unrealized project.

³⁰ In his letter of 6/18 June 1888, Détroyat had suggested that Tchaikovsky in his "spare time" might like to write a ballet in five acts with vocal numbers to be entitled *Mefistofela*. Détroyat offered to send the composer the scenario for this ballet, explaining that it was an adaptation of Heinrich Heine's satirical poem *Der Doktor Faust. Ein Tanzpoem in fünf Akten* (1847)—in which Mephistopheles is represented by a ballerina, hence "Mefistofela"—made by himself, his wife, Hélène Louise (née Garre), and the poet Armand Silvestre (1837–1901). Moreover, Détroyat asked Tchaikovsky whether he could finish the ballet in time for the Exposition Universelle in Paris in the summer of 1889. *CZM*, p. 117.

small drama that is very intimate, very human, very down-to-earth and at the same time very moving. Or if the fantastic element is to be involved, then it must be something less profound than *Mefistofela* (which I am familiar with)!

I have so many excuses to give you regarding *La Géorgienne*. A Russian composer who called on me and saw the manuscript on my table, asked me to lend it to him for a while, and now there he is, having left for a pleasure trip to the Caucasus. I was of course wrong to give it to him without your permission, but I had thought that you wouldn't be needing it at once. I have written swiftly to the young man asking him to return *La Géorgienne* to me, but God knows when my letter will catch up with him!³¹ It will undoubtedly take several weeks before you can receive it. Please do forgive this unpardonable lack of discretion!

On this note, allow me, Monsieur, to thank you yet again for all the kind things which you are lavishing on me. God grant that you manage to find a subject for me which suits me to perfection, that I can turn it into a good opera, and that that opera is performed in Paris. Something tells me that this is a utopian ambition which I am mistaken in nourishing through hope, and that if fate wishes that a musical work of mine should be heard by the audience of a Parisian theatre, that is something which can only happen a long time after my death. Still, one can always hope.

I remain, dear Monsieur, your very devoted and grateful servant,

P. Tchaikovsky

Before Tchaikovsky's above letter had even reached him in Paris, Détróyat wrote not just one further letter to the composer, but two, on consecutive days! Thus, in the first of these, on 12/24 June 1888, he informed Tchaikovsky that he had come up with yet another idea: a few years earlier he had written a libretto based on Victor Hugo's drama *Marion Delorme* (1829), with the intention of offering it to a French composer and then presenting the finished opera to Hugo for his approval. Nothing had come of that plan, and now Détróyat enclosed with his letter the libretto of *Marion Delorme* suggesting that Tchaikovsky might like to use it himself, and that if the opera were successful in Saint Petersburg it was bound to be accepted by one of the major Parisian theatres. He also enclosed the scenario for the ballet *Mefistofela* which he had already mentioned in his earlier letter, adding: "In Petersburg you have a first-class ballet... Surely we could introduce there a ballet featuring singers and choruses?"³² Détróyat followed up these suggestions in a shorter letter the next day, explaining that if Tchaikovsky was not entirely happy with the libretto of *Marion Delorme* he should not hesitate to say so, and he, Détróyat, would make all the requested changes.³³

This veritable "bombardment" with letters and suggestions to which Détróyat was subjecting the composer, as Modest put it in his biography,³⁴ put him under quite some pressure, since Tchaikovsky always found it difficult to say no, fearing that he might offend those who had been kind to him. Finally, on 20 June/2 July 1888, Tchaikovsky mustered the energy to write a lengthy reply to Détróyat—his only letter to the Frenchman that has been published in full before, namely by Thomas Kohlhase in *ČSt* 3 (1998). In this fascinating letter Tchaikovsky explained in detail why he disliked the Romantic drama *Marion Delorme*

³¹ *La Géorgienne* was the title of the draft libretto which Détróyat earlier that year had drawn up for a French-language opera set in the Caucasus. Tchaikovsky had politely but firmly rejected this subject in letter 3563b to Détróyat on 10/22 May 1888 (see above). In his letter of 6/18 June, Détróyat had asked Tchaikovsky to return the libretto to him. We have not been able to establish who the young Russian composer who had recently visited Tchaikovsky at Frolovskoe and borrowed Détróyat's libretto was.

³² Letter from Léonce Détróyat to Tchaikovsky, 12/24 June 1888. *CZM*, p. 118.

³³ Letter from Léonce Détróyat to Tchaikovsky, 12/24 June 1888. *CZM*, p. 118–119.

³⁴ See *ZC* 3, p. 374. Interestingly, Modest decided to replace Détróyat's name with the cryptogram "X" when referring to him, even though Détróyat was no longer alive at the time of writing.

for its false portrayal of the characters, confessing that he was far from being an admirer of Victor Hugo. He also listed the many projects that he was currently working on, including the Symphony No. 5 and the overture-fantasia *Hamlet*, and added that though he was indeed keen on writing a new opera afterwards, he had two Russian libretti to which he had to give priority: *The Captain's Daughter* and *The Bayadere*. Still, he admitted that the prospect of seeing an opera of his staged in Paris was very alluring for him, invoking the famous saying of Henri de Navarre when, shortly before his coronation as Henri IV, he forswore his Protestant faith in order to secure the allegiance of his Catholic subjects: "Paris vaut bien une messe!" (Paris is well worth a mass!). Tchaikovsky therefore promised that he would eventually take up D troyat's offer of collaboration, though he set two main conditions that were necessary for this to materialize: (a) that D troyat should come up with a subject that really was capable of inspiring him; (b) that their opera should be written with a specific Parisian theatre in mind, because, Tchaikovsky insisted, composing an opera in French for a Russian theatre would mean doing violence to his artistic nature.³⁵

4. Tchaikovsky to L once D troyat, 28 October/9 November 1888 [[letter 3712a](#)]

After receiving Tchaikovsky's lengthy letter of 20 June/2 July 1888, D troyat did not write to him again until about a month later. In this letter, written in Biarritz where he was taking a summer break, D troyat emphasized that he understood that the composer was very busy at the moment, but, picking up on Tchaikovsky's invocation of "Paris vaut bien une messe!," he observed that this encouraged him to hope that their collaboration on a French-language opera would eventually bear fruit. He had spoken about the matter with his colleague, Gallet, and they had agreed that the best way to proceed was for Tchaikovsky himself to propose a subject that appealed to him. They would then develop it into a libretto in accordance with his wishes, and would ensure that the score for this opera was commissioned from him by a specific Parisian theatre, perhaps even by the Op ra de Paris itself, though D troyat hastened to add that it was still too early to entertain such high hopes.³⁶

Unfortunately, Tchaikovsky's reply to that letter from D troyat does not seem to have been among the manuscripts sold at the auction for which Thierry Bodin acted as consultant, since it is not among the photocopies he kindly sent us. We do know, however, that in this letter Tchaikovsky proposed to his aspiring librettist Goethe's ballad *Der Gott und die Bajadere* (1797) as the basis of the French-language opera on which they were to collaborate.

Goethe's ballad, subtitled "An Indian Legend", tells of the god Mahad h, who descends to earth and assumes human form. A bayadere, or Hindu dancing girl, invites the fair stranger into her house and offers herself to him. Deciding to test her heart, Mahad h yields to her solicitation. When she awakens the next day she is horrified to see him lying dead next to her. The corpse of the stranger, who is dressed like a nobleman, is carried away by priests to be burnt on a pyre in accordance with Hindu custom. She rushes after them and begs them not to separate her from her husband. The priests sternly remind her of who she is, adding that only virtuous women could follow their husbands into death. When the funeral pyre is lit, however, she forces her way through the assembled crowd and jumps into the flames. Suddenly, a divine figure is seen soaring above the pyre and carrying the bayadere in his arms. Goethe concludes his ballad with these verses: "Es freut sich die Gottheit der

³⁵ See letter 3598a to L once D troyat, 20 June/2 July 1888, in: Thomas Kohlhase, "'Paris vaut bien une messe!'" Bisher unbekannte Briefe, Notenautographe und andere  ajkovskij-Funde', * St* 3 (1998), p. 239–242, and Prof. Kohlhase's commentary accompanying this letter.

³⁶ Letter from L once D troyat to Tchaikovsky, 23 July/4 August 1888. *CZM*, p. 119.

reuigen Sünder; / Unsterbliche heben verlorene Kinder / Mit feurigen Armen zum Himmel empor."³⁷

This remarkable poem was translated into Russian many times, including by Konstantin Aksakov and Aleksei Tolstoi. It was fresh in Tchaikovsky's mind at the time of his correspondence with Détroiyat in the summer of 1888, because earlier that year Ippolit Shpazhinskii, his librettist for *The Enchantress* (1887), had suggested turning it into an opera to be entitled *The Bayadere*. However, this project was shelved after Ivan Vsevolozhskii, director of the Imperial Theatres, reminded Tchaikovsky that there was already an opera on that subject—Auber's *Le Dieu et la Bajadère*—and that even the Mariinskii Theatre might not be able to cope with all the special effects required by the fantastic Indian subject, especially the burning pyre at the end.³⁸

The idea of using Goethe's ballad had evidently appealed to Tchaikovsky, however, and that is why he suggested it to Détroiyat and Gallet. Since, as mentioned earlier, the letter to Détroiyat in which he made this suggestion is still unknown, we can only speculate on what he might have said in it to support his choice of subject. It is almost certain, though, that Tchaikovsky liked the poem precisely because it combined those elements that, as he had already explained to Détroiyat (see letter 3590a above), he was looking for in the subject for an opera: that is, it was "very poetic and at the same time very simple, intimate and human". Moreover, despite the ostensibly non-Christian setting of this ballad—not for nothing was Goethe called "the great pagan" (*der große Heide*) by his contemporaries!—it is in fact suffused by the Christian message of charity and forgiveness. The same message had moved Tchaikovsky deeply when he re-read the New Testament in February 1886: "What eternal poetry and, touching to tears, what feeling of love and pity towards mankind in the words: 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden'."³⁹ All these factors are likely to have played their part in prompting Tchaikovsky to put this idea to Détroiyat.

After receiving Tchaikovsky's (non-extant) letter, Détroiyat sent an enthusiastic reply from Paris on 29 August/10 September 1888, saying that both he and Gallet were enchanted by the idea of using Goethe's poem, and that they would start working out a libretto at once. To avoid repeating Auber's opera, the ever resourceful Détroiyat added, they would simply turn the heroine into a singer (rather than the bayadere, or dancing girl, of the original version).⁴⁰ Already by mid/late October Détroiyat and Gallet were able to send Tchaikovsky the scenario for this projected opera in three acts, which they suggested calling *La Courtisane* (the heroine, Sadia, being a courtesan, as in Goethe's ballad), and for which they had done a lot of research into ancient Hindu history and customs. This scenario in Détroiyat's hand has survived in the archives at Klin and is reportedly sixteen pages long. On the first page is a list of all the characters (which, besides Sadia, includes: Suriya, a brahmin; Tun Koor, a rajah; Shuri, a young Hindu; and Mahra, a former courtesan); the action takes place in Allakhabad.⁴¹

In his letter of 12/24 October 1888 accompanying the scenario Détroiyat, moreover, suggested to Tchaikovsky that the vocal part of Sadia's friend, the older courtesan Mahra, could be based on the songs of the Russian gypsies, which he had heard during his travels. He also asked the composer to send his comments on the scenario as quickly as possible, so that he and Gallet could take them into account when writing the libretto, as well as to give some

³⁷ "The Godhead rejoices in penitent sinners; / With fiery arms immortal beings / Lift prodigal children up to heaven."

³⁸ See the history of the projected opera *The Bayadere* in: *MN*, p. 143–144.

³⁹ Entry in Tchaikovsky's journal for 22 February/6 March 1886. *DT*, p. 244 (with spelling modified).

⁴⁰ Letter from Léonce Détroiyat to Tchaikovsky, 29 August/10 September 1888. *CZM*, p. 120.

⁴¹ See the summary in *ČW*, p. 793 (in Russian), p. 817–818 (in English). The name of Mahra was later changed to Fabra.

indication as to when the opera might be ready, so that they could begin negotiations with the Paris Opéra or the Opéra-Comique.⁴² Tchaikovsky's reply to this letter was previously known only from a brief extract cited in André Lischké's book.⁴³ Here it is published in full for the first time on the basis of the photocopy provided by Thierry Bodin:

[p. 1:] Kline près Moscou

Le 28 Octobre/10 [= 9] Novembre 1888

Cher et très respecté Monsieur!

Votre lettre et le manuscrit [= manuscrit] de „La Courtisane“ sont arrivé ici quand je n'y étais [= étais] pas. Rentré à Moscou après une petite excursion en province, j'y ai reçu Votre lettre et quant au manuscrit [= manuscrit], c'est aujourd'hui seulement que j'en ai fait connaissance et je m'empresse de Vous adresser mes merci[e]ments les plus chaleureux d'abord et ensuite de Vous dire ce que j'ai ressenti en lisant Votre scénario. Je le trouve parfait et c'est avec le plus grand plaisir que j'en ferai la mu- [p. 2] -sique, dès que Vous aurez mis en vers le contenu de cette délicieuse carcasse d'opéra [d'opéra].

Je n'ai aucunes indications, aucune[s] observations à Vous faire. Je trouve le scénario [= scénario] parfaitement bien combiné, excessivement scénique [= scénique], poétique et touchant. Seulement je me permettrai de Vous dire que l'idée que Vous avez d'introduire une fête [= fête] de Bohèmiens [= Bohémiens] russes au deuxième acte n'est pas tout à fait de mon goût. Il faut Vous dire, Monsieur, que les Bohèmiens [= Bohémiens] russes ne chantent que des chansons nationales russes à leur façon. Il n'y a que leur manière de chanter qui est vraiment originale et je ne crois pas que la fête bohème [p. 3] -mienne [= fête bohémienne] que Vous projetez, telle que Vous Vous l'imaginez [= l'imaginez] (c'est à dire musicalement illustrée par des chants bohèmiens [= bohémiens] russes) ajoute quelque chose au charme de notre futur opéra [= opéra]. Ce serait une dissonance, quelque chose qui clocherait avec tout le reste. Des pagodes, des mendiants-bouddhistes, des charmeurs de serpents, des bayadères – et avec tout cela des bohèmiens [= bohémiens] russes, chantant des mélod[i]es banales, quoique rendues ~~ave~~ non sans un certain charme sauvage, – non, cela ne va pas ensemble!!!

Il est tout à fait impossible que notre opéra [= opéra] soit prêt [= prêt] pour l'Exposition. Après[-]demain je pars pour un grand voyage! J'ai deux concerts à Petersbourg [= Pétersbourg] à conduire; ensuite un opéra [= opéra] à Prague [p. 4] à mettre en scène et puis une suite interminable de concerts à conduire en Allemagne, en Suède, en Angleterre! Je ne pourrai me mettre sérieusement au travail que dans une demi-année et encore, ai-je plusieurs tâches à remplir avant de consacrer tout mon temps à notre opéra [= opéra]. J'espère pouvoir livrer la partition pour le commencement de la saison 1890–1891.

Ne croyez Vous pas, cher et bon M^f Detroyat, que le titre de „La Courtisane“ soit capable de nous attirer les [= le] reproche de n'avoir pas assez ménagé la décence? Du moins en russe ce titre-là est tout à fait impossible. On pourrait inventer un autre titre, n'est-ce pas?

Sadia, Mahra, Jourya, Joury: tous ces noms-la [= noms-là], sont ils vraiment des noms Hindous? Joury est un nom [p. 5] masculin russe et chez nous on ne le prendrait jamais pour un nom hindou. Je Vous adresse cette question en titre de renseignement, non pas comme reproche ou critique.

Voilà [= Voilà] cher Monsieur[,] tout ce que je puis Vous dire maintenant. Résumons. Avant tout, laissez <moi> Vous remercier encore et encore et Vous dire que je suis on ne peut plus touché de Votre bonté pour moi et de [p. 6] l'honneur que Vous me faites de vouloir bien collaborer avec Votre humble serviteur. Veuillez bien transmettre à

⁴² Letter from Léonce Détrouyat to Tchaikovsky, 12/24 October 1888. *CZM*, p. 120–121.

⁴³ André Lischke, *Piotr Ilyitch Tchaïkovski* (1993), p. 543.

M^f Gallet l'expression de ma grande reconnaissance. Ensuite je dis encore que je ne demande pas mieux que de faire un opera [= opéra] sur votre scenario [= scénario], mais je il ne peut être [= être] prêt [= prêt] avant la saison 1890–1891.

Pour les détails, la versifications [= versification], la forme – je Vous donne carte blanche. Tout ce que [= ce que] Vous ferez sera mis par moi en musique, j'ai pleine confiance en Votre [p. 7] expérience [= expérience] et Votre savoir-faire. Le difficile était [= était] de se trouver d'accord sur le choix de sujet. Maintenant que le choix est fait il s'agit seulement d'attendre que les vers soient faits et puis de se mettre à l'œuvre dès que cela sera possible.

Attendu que je vais maintenant constamment changer de place, veuillez, cher et bon Monsieur[,] m'adresser Vos lettres à Moscou 10, Neglinnaïa P. Jurgenson. Ce dernier est [p. 8] mon éditeur et mon chargé d'affaires; il est toujours au courant de mes pérégrinations et m'enverra toute ma correspondance [= correspondance]. Il est tout probable que je serai à Paris pendant l'hiver. Comme ce serait bien de Vous voir, de Vous dire de vive voix combien je Vous suis reconnaissant et combien j'ai de sympathie [= sympathie] et de vive affection pour Vous!

Au revoir, cher Monsieur Détroyat! Merci, merci encore!

Votre bien dévoué

P. Tchaïkovsky

In English translation:

Dear and highly esteemed Monsieur! Your letter and the manuscript of *La Courtisane* arrived here when I was away. Upon my return to Moscow after a brief trip to the provinces I received your letter there;⁴⁴ as for the manuscript, it is only today that I have been able to familiarize myself with it, and I hasten to convey to you my most fervent gratitude to start with, and then to tell you what I felt while reading your scenario. I consider it to be perfect, and it is with the very greatest pleasure that I shall set it to music once you have versified the contents of this delightful skeleton of an opera.

I have no instructions or observations to make to you. In my view the scenario has been put together perfectly well; it is exceedingly stage-worthy, poetic, and touching. I shall only take the liberty of telling you that your idea of including a feast of Russian gypsies in the second act is not at all to my liking.⁴⁵ I must tell you, Monsieur, that Russian gypsies sing nothing but Russian folk-songs, in their own way. It is only their manner of singing which really is original, and I do not think that your proposed gypsy feast, such as you have envisaged it (that is, musically illustrated by the singing of Russian gypsies), could add anything to the charm of our future opera. Pagodas, Buddhist beggar-monks, snake-charmers, bayaderes – and to have alongside all that Russian gypsies singing banal tunes, even if they are rendered not without a certain savage charm... No, there is no way these can go together!!!

⁴⁴ Tchaikovsky seems to be referring not to Détroyat's letter of 12/24 October 1888 accompanying the scenario for *La Courtisane*, but to his earlier letter of 29 August/10 September, in which Détroyat had announced that he and Gallet were delighted with Tchaikovsky's suggestion. Tchaikovsky had spent late August/early September at Kamenka before coming to Moscow on 2/14 September 1888 and returning to his house at Frolovskoe a few days later. It was evidently in Moscow on that occasion that he received Détroyat's letter. The parcel with the scenario, however, was sent directly to Klin (the town nearest to Frolovskoe), as we learn from Détroyat's accompanying letter of 12/24 October 1888.

⁴⁵ In his letter of 12/24 October 1888, after suggesting that Tchaikovsky might like to consider writing the vocal part for the former courtesan Mahra following "the inflections of Russian gypsy women, whose songs so captivated me when I heard them," Détroyat had added: "We could even include in Act II (since the theatre is based on convention) a feast of your Russian gypsy women whom we would dress up in the costumes of that age—costumes which are also very much based on convention!" *CZM*, p. 120.

It is completely impossible for our opera to be ready for the Exposition.⁴⁶ The day after tomorrow I am leaving on a long journey! I have two concerts to conduct in Petersburg;⁴⁷ immediately after that I have an opera to stage in Prague,⁴⁸ and then there is an endless succession of concerts I have to conduct in Germany, Sweden, and England!⁴⁹ I will not be able to set to work in earnest until after half a year's time, and, moreover, I have several tasks to fulfil before devoting all my time to our opera. I hope to be able to deliver the score in time for the start of the 1890–1891 season.

Do you not think, dear and kind Mr D troyat, that the title of *La Courtisane* is liable to expose us to the reproach that we have not given sufficient heed to propriety? In Russian at least this title is utterly out of the question. We could come up with another title, don't you think so?

Sadia, Mahra, Jurya, Jury: are all these names really Hindu names? Jury is a Russian male name, and in our country it could never be taken to be a Hindu one. I put this question to you merely by way of enquiry, not as a reproach or a criticism.

There, Monsieur, you have everything that I can say to you for now. Let us sum up. Before anything else, allow me to thank you yet again and to tell you that I am tremendously touched by your kindness towards me and by the honour which you do me in wishing to collaborate with your humble servant. Could you please convey to Mr Gallet the assurance of my vast gratitude. Then I should like to say again that I could not ask for anything better than to create an opera based on your scenario, but that it cannot be ready before the 1890–1891 season.

With regard to the details, the versification and form, I give you *carte blanche*. Everything that you write shall be set to music by me, for I have complete confidence in your experience and know-how. The difficult step was to come to an agreement regarding the choice of subject. Now that this choice has been made, it is a question merely of waiting for the verses to be written, and after that to set to work as soon as that is possible.

Given that I am now going to be on the move constantly, could you please, dear and kind Monsieur, address your letters to: Moscow, 10 Neglinnaia Street, P. Jurgenson. The latter is my publisher and my authorized agent; he is always informed about my wanderings and will forward all my correspondence to me. It is very likely that I shall come to Paris during the winter. How nice it would be to see you, to tell you in person how grateful I am to you and how much sympathy and keen affection I feel towards you!

Till we meet, dear Monsieur D troyat! Thank you again and again!

Yours very devotedly,

P. Tchaikovsky

During his stay in Paris in March–April 1889 (he did not actually conduct any concerts there during this second European tour) Tchaikovsky would indeed manage to meet up with D troyat, and this is the subject of the next letter.

⁴⁶ i.e. the Exposition Universelle which was to take place in Paris in the summer of 1889.

⁴⁷ On 5/17 November 1888 Tchaikovsky would conduct a concert of the Saint Petersburg Philharmonic Society featuring a number of his works, including the premi re of the Symphony No. 5; and on 12/24 November, he would conduct the second half of the Russian Musical Society's third concert of the season in the imperial capital, the programme again drawn from his works and featuring the premi re of the overture-fantasia *Hamlet* and a further performance of the Fifth Symphony.

⁴⁸ *Evgenii Onegin* was performed in Prague for the first time on 24 November/6 December 1888, with Tchaikovsky himself conducting the orchestra of the National Theatre.

⁴⁹ During his second conducting tour of Western Europe in January–April 1889 Tchaikovsky conducted concerts of his works in several German cities, as well as Geneva and London. There had also been plans for a tour of Sweden (and Norway), but the singer who was to have accompanied Tchaikovsky—Aleksandra Panaeva-Kartsova (1853–1942)—was not given leave of absence by the management of the Italian opera company in Saint Petersburg where she worked. See her reminiscences in *VC*, p. 155–156.

5. Tchaikovsky to Léonce Détroyat, 23 March/4 April 1889 [[letter 3827a](#)]

After fulfilling his conducting engagements in Germany and Switzerland Tchaikovsky arrived in Paris on 8/20 March 1889. A fortnight later he called on Détroyat, but the latter was unwell and could not receive him, as suggested by this entry in the composer's diary for Wednesday, 22 March/3 April: "Before lunch a visit to Détroyat; he is in bed".⁵⁰ Shortly after that failed visit Tchaikovsky seems to have received a note from Détroyat inviting him to call on him again on Friday, when he was likely to be feeling better. Tchaikovsky's brief reply to this invitation has never been published before, and is included here thanks to the photocopy made by Thierry Bodin:

Cher M^e Détroyat!
Je serai exact au rendez-Vous.
A demain!

4 Avril [18]89

P. Tschaïkovsky

In English translation:

Dear Mr Détroyat! I shall come punctually to our rendezvous.
Till tomorrow!

P. Tchaikovsky

From an entry in his diary the following day after this note we know that Tchaikovsky did indeed keep his appointment, and that at Détroyat's house that day he also met Louis Gallet: "At Détroyat's. Gallet. Home".⁵¹ Tchaikovsky confirmed then his commitment to writing the music for *La Courtisane*. Thus, a few days after this meeting with his two librettists he informed his nephew Vladimir ("Bob") Davydov in a letter from London: "It is decided that I shall write a French opera entitled *La Courtisane*."⁵²

6. Tchaikovsky to Léonce Détroyat, 17/29 July 1889 [[letter 3905a](#)]

Already by 8/20 July 1889 Détroyat was able to send Tchaikovsky the libretto for Act I of *Sadia*, as the opera was to be entitled following the composer's reservations about the original title (see letter 3712a above). Détroyat and Gallet had divided their workload such that the former was responsible for developing the scenario into a draft libretto in prose, whilst the latter turned that into verse. In his letter accompanying the Act I libretto, which like the scenario has survived in the archives at Klin,⁵³ Détroyat emphasized that Tchaikovsky was free to request any amendments that he were necessary. He also asked the composer to give an approximate date by which the whole opera might be ready, so that he and Gallet could then start negotiations with various Parisian theatres to get it staged.⁵⁴ A long excerpt from

⁵⁰ Diary entry for 22 March/3 April 1889. *DT*, p. 268.

⁵¹ Diary entry for 24 March/5 April 1889. *DT*, p. 269 (with spelling corrected).

⁵² Letter 3830 to Vladimir Davydov, 29 March/10 April 1889. *PSSL XV-A*, p. 87–88.

⁵³ See *MN*, p. 146.

⁵⁴ Letter from Léonce Détroyat to Tchaikovsky, 8/20 July 1889. *CZM*, p. 121–122.

Tchaikovsky's reply to this letter appeared in André Lischké's book,⁵⁵ but here, thanks to the photocopy provided by Thierry Bodin, we are able to publish its text in full for the first time:

[p. 1:] 17/29 Juillet 89
Kline, près [de] Moscou

Cher Monsieur et ami !

Je viens de recevoir le 1^{er} acte de Sadia. Je le trouve fort beau et Vous en remercie de tout mon cœur. La forme en est vraiment remarquable: c'est mouvementé, c'est intéressant, c'est poétique [= poétique] – et pas de longueur, rien de trop. Et puis les vers sont ma- [p. 2] -gistralement fait[s]. Enfin je suis on ne peut plus content. Je Vous dirai plus tard, cher Monsieur, quand j'aurai déjà [= déjà] fait la musique sur la plus grande partie de l'acte, s'il y a quelque chose à ajouter dans la scène IV^{me}. Je ne puis encore me prononcer définitivement [= définitivement] sur cette question maintenant.

Vous me demandez quand je pourrai être [= être] prêt. Je ne saurai Vous le dire au juste. J'ai maintenant un grand travail [p. 3] à terminer et je ne pourrai me mettre à l'œuvre qu'en automne. Ensuite tout dépend [= dépend] de la situation d'esprit dans la quelle [= laquelle] je me trouverai et d'une quantité de choses que je <ne> puis prévoir [= prévoir]. J'espère pourtant être [= être] prêt dans un an, c'est à dire vers la fin de l'été prochain. Il faut surtout bien faire et ne pas trop songer au terme de sa tâche. Je ne suis pas paresseux et Vous pouvez être [= être] certain que je ne perdrai pas un seul moment! Mais, en supposant qu'il n'y aura [p. 4] pas d'obstacles imprévus [= imprévus] qui empêchent [= empêchent] mon travail, je crois sans trop présumer de mes forces, que ma partition pourra être [= être] livrée vers la fin de l'été de 1890.

Veillez transmettre mes salutations chaleureuses à M^e Gallet et recevez encore une fois l'expression de ma vive reconnaissance.

Au revoir, cher Monsieur Detroyat !

P. Tschaïkowsky

In English translation:

Dear Monsieur and friend! I have just received Act I of Sadia. I think it is very beautiful and thank you with all my heart. Its form is truly remarkable: it is animated, it is interesting, it is poetic – and there is no prolixity, nothing that is superfluous. And then the verses have been written in a masterly fashion. In short, I could not be happier with it. I shall tell you later, dear Monsieur, once I have written the music for the greater part of the act, if there is anything that needs to be added to Scene 4. At this point I cannot yet give a definitive opinion on this matter.⁵⁶

You ask me when I might be ready. I would not be able to tell you that exactly. I currently have a big job to finish, so I won't be able to set to work until the autumn.⁵⁷ After that everything depends on the frame of mind in which I happen to find myself, as well as on a lot of things which I cannot foretell. Still, I hope to have finished within a year, that is to say, towards the end of next summer. What matters above all is to do it well and not to think too much about the end of one's task. I am not lazy, and you can rest assured that I shall not waste a single moment! However, assuming that no unforeseen obstacles arise which might hinder my work, I believe, without boasting too much of my capabilities, that I shall be able to deliver the score towards the end of the summer of 1890.

⁵⁵ André Lischke, *Piotr Ilyitch Tchaïkovski* (1993), p. 543.

⁵⁶ In his letter of 8/20 July 1889 accompanying the Act I libretto, Détroyat had emphasized that Tchaikovsky was free to modify it, and pointed out that he himself felt that the duet in Scene 4 could be expanded a little so that it concluded with a quartet accompanied by the chorus.

⁵⁷ Tchaikovsky was then completing the orchestration of *The Sleeping Beauty*.

Could you please convey my cordial greetings to Mr Gallet and accept once again this assurance of my vivid gratitude.

Good-bye, dear Monsieur Détröyat!

P. Tchaikovsky

Because of other commitments Gallet could not versify the remaining acts of the libretto for *Sadia* so quickly at the time, but Détröyat was hoping that Tchaikovsky would start setting Act I to music anyway. In a letter to Gallet in early/mid September 1889 which has not survived, Tchaikovsky, however, insisted that he needed to have the complete libretto before he began composing any of the music: this is clear from Gallet's reply of 14/26 September 1889, in which he wrote that he understood Tchaikovsky's wish perfectly well, and that, as soon as circumstances permitted, he would resume work on the libretto, since this joint project meant a lot to him.⁵⁸

In November 1889, however, Tchaikovsky accepted Vsevolozhskii's commission to write the opera *The Queen of Spades*. Pushkin's story so captured his imagination that from January to June 1890 he was completely engrossed in the composition of his new opera, and all plans for *Sadia* were shelved. After completing *The Queen of Spades* he was in no rush to write another opera (especially one in French), and, replying to a letter from Mackar, who had informed him that Détröyat had spoken with the director of the newly-built Théâtre de l'Éden and that the latter had agreed to stage *Sadia* there, he told his French publisher that only if *The Queen of Spades* were successful at its première in Russia later that year would he set about writing *Sadia*. This particular letter from Tchaikovsky to Mackar has not come to light, but its contents can be deduced from a letter which Détröyat wrote to the composer soon afterwards: Mackar had shown him Tchaikovsky's reply, and Détröyat now reproached Tchaikovsky for setting further conditions and urged him not to betray the hopes which he and the director of that theatre had placed on *Sadia* being ready for staging in the winter of 1890/91.⁵⁹

Tchaikovsky clearly took Détröyat's reproaches to heart, and in order to fulfil his obligations towards his French librettists, he came up with a new idea, as he explained in a letter to Modest from Frolovskoe in July 1890: "I want to go to Paris in order to untangle my relations with Messrs. Détröyat and Gallet, which are a terrible burden on me because they are expecting an opera from me right now, and the Éden-Théâtre has even promised to stage it immediately. However, I want to suggest to them that they translate and adapt for the French stage *The Queen of Spades*."⁶⁰ Tchaikovsky did not in fact travel to Paris that summer, but he asked his friend the actor Lucien Guitry to have a word with Détröyat on his behalf.⁶¹

7. Tchaikovsky to Léonce Détröyat, 9/21 September 1890 [[letter 4214a](#)]

In the autumn of 1890, however, while in Tiflis to get some rest and also to conduct a concert of his works, Tchaikovsky himself contacted Détröyat directly in his last extant letter to the French librettist. This letter is published here for the first time on the basis of the photocopy provided by Thierry Bodin:

[p. 1:] Tiflis (Caucase)

⁵⁸ Letter from Louis Gallet to Tchaikovsky, 14/26 September 1889. *CZM*, p. 104–105.

⁵⁹ Letter from Léonce Détröyat to Tchaikovsky, 23 June/5 July 1890. *CZM*, p. 122–123.

⁶⁰ Letter to Modest Tchaikovsky, 4/16 July 1890. *PSSL XV-B*, p. 204.

⁶¹ See Lucien Guitry's letter to Tchaikovsky from Paris on 5/17 September 1890. *CZM*, p. 211.

9/21 Septembre 1890

Cher et bon Monsieur !

Je viens d'arriver ici et y trouve Votre lettre du 5 Sept[embre] / 23 Août, à laquelle je m'empresse de répondre tout en m'excusant du grand retard de la réponse occasionné par la grande traversée que je viens de faire.

Je crois que j'ai commis une grande faute en fixant la date vers laquelle la partition de Sadia pourrait être [= être] prête [= prête]. Mon excuse [p. 2] est que je ne pouvais prévoir [= prévoir] ni que ma santé serait compromise au point que pendant plusieurs mois j'ai dû renoncer au travail, ni que la Direction Impériale de Petersbourg [= Pétersbourg] m'offrirait d'écrire [= d'écrire] au plus vite une partition pour la saison prochaine. Enfin, quoiqu'il en soit, je confesse ma faute et Vous adresse ainsi qu'à M^e Gallet mes plus humbles excuses. Mais je ne retomberai plus dans la même [= même] faute et ne Vous comblerai pas comme il y a un an de promesses, que peut-être [= peut-être] je ne pourrai tenir. Ce que je puis promettre, c'est [p. 3] que, comme je Vous l'ai déjà [= déjà] annoncé, j'ai la ferme intention de composer la musique de Sadia et que, certes, je la composerai si le bon Dieu me prête [= prête] vie et santé. Je crois, je désire, je me berce de l'espoir, que la partition sera prête [= prête] dans un an. Si cela ne suffit pas pour conjurer Votre juste mécontentement, j'ose Vous prier, cher et bon M^r Détroyat, de me châtier en retirant ce que je possède déjà [= déjà] du livret de Sadia. Si, au contraire, Vous me conservez [p. 4] Votre bienveillance et continuez à vouloir que je sois Votre collaborateur – veuillez prendre en considération [= considération] toute[s] les raisons qui m'ont empêché [= empêché] d'être [= d'être] exact et attendre encore un peu. Il ne s'agit pas de faire une musique quelconque, il s'agit d'en faire une très bonne, – et pour cela il faut du temps. Si M^e Gallet voulait bien m'envoyer les autres actes, j'en serai charmé. Il est bon avant de commencer, de posséder [= posséder] tout le texte du poème qu'on va mettre en musique. Je réitère mes excuses, je promets encore une fois de me mettre à l'œuvre dès que je le pourrai, j'exprime encore une fois l'espoir de pouvoir être [= être] prêt [= prêt] dans un an et tout en Vous suppliant de me pardonner, je signe

P. Tschaiïkovsky

[*written upside down at the top of p. 1*]

Je resterai ici encore six semaines; si Vous m'écrivez [= m'écrivez], veuillez adresser Russie, Tiflis, P. Tschaiïkovsky, chez M^r le vice-Gouverneur de Tiflis.

In English translation:

Dear and kind Monsieur! I have just arrived here and found waiting for me your letter of 5 September/23 August,⁶² to which I hasten to reply whilst at the same time apologizing for the long delay in my reply, which was due to the long journey I have just made.

I think that I made a big mistake when I specified the date by which the score of Sadia might be ready.⁶³ My excuse is that there was no way I could foresee both that my health would be undermined to the extent that during several months I have had to abstain from work,⁶⁴ and that the Imperial [Theatres'] Directorate in Petersburg would propose

⁶² This particular letter from Détroyat is not included in *CZM*, and it is not yet clear whether it has survived in the archives at Klin.

⁶³ In letter 3905a to Détroyat of 17/29 July 1889 (see above) Tchaïkovsky had promised to complete the score of Sadia by the end of the following summer.

⁶⁴ It is not clear which bout of ill health Tchaïkovsky is referring to here. Towards the end of his stay in Florence earlier that year he had been suffering from influenza-like symptoms, with fever and a general feeling of tiredness (see e.g. letter 4070 to Modest on 14/26 March 1890), but he later acknowledged that it was probably the result of exhaustion from his work on preparing the piano reduction of *The Queen of Spades*. At any rate it did not prevent him from continuing work on the orchestration of that opera or from writing the string sextet *Souvenir de Florence* while back in Frolovskoe that summer.

that I should as quickly as possible write a score for the next season.⁶⁵ Anyway, however that may be, I acknowledge my mistake and offer my most humble apologies to you, as well as to Mr Gallet. However, I shall not relapse into the same mistake again, and shall not, as was the case last year, overwhelm you with various promises that perhaps I may not be able to keep. What I can promise is that, as I have already announced to you, I firmly intend to compose the music of *Sadia*, and that I will indeed compose it if the good Lord grants me life and health. I believe, I desire, I nourish the hope that the score will be ready in a year's time. If that is not enough to dispel your justified displeasure, I would venture to ask you, dear and kind Mr D troyat, to punish me by taking back from me what I already have of the libretto of *Sadia*. If, on the contrary, you remain well-disposed towards me and continue to wish that I should be your collaborator, could you please take into consideration all the reasons which have prevented me from being punctual and wait a little longer. It is not a question of writing any music whatever, but, rather, of writing some very good music – and that is something which takes time. If Mr Gallet would be so kind as to send me the other acts, I would be delighted. Before making a start it is good to have the whole text of the work which one is going to set to music. I reiterate my apologies, I promise once again to set to work as soon as I can, I express once again my hope of being able to have finished it in a year's time, and while begging you to forgive me, I sign myself

P. Tchaikovsky

[*written upside down at the top of p. 1*]

I shall remain here for six more weeks; if you want to write to me, could you please use this address: Russia, Tiflis, P. Tchaikovsky, at the house of the Deputy Governor of Tiflis.⁶⁶

D troyat did take up Tchaikovsky's suggestion that he should write to him in Tiflis: his letter from Paris on 22 September/4 October 1890 is the last of the ten letters from D troyat to the composer to have been published in *CZM*. D troyat warmly thanked Tchaikovsky for the above letter, saying that all the past upsets were forgotten. He and Gallet would soon be able to send him the complete libretto of *Sadia* so that Tchaikovsky could write the music in time for the Exposition Franaise which was to be held in Moscow from April to October 1891 (D troyat was hoping that the opera could then be staged with French singers at the Moscow Bol'shoi Theatre). D troyat added: "I am expecting a masterpiece!... in a year's time."⁶⁷

Tchaikovsky, however, was at the time not inclined to begin work on *Sadia*, as would soon become clear when, on 3/15 January 1891, Gallet wrote to the composer, apologizing for not having been able to resume work on the libretto until recently, but promising to complete it very soon and asking if Tchaikovsky had any requests to make regarding the libretto.⁶⁸ In his lengthy reply to Gallet, Tchaikovsky in turn apologized for having continually postponed the composition of the music for *Sadia*, and for having to set that project aside again because he had just accepted two major commissions for the Mariinskii Theatre: the opera *Iolanta* and the ballet *The Nutcracker*. He explained that, although he would prefer it if Gallet and D troyat could find another composer, he was willing to attempt

⁶⁵ In November 1889, when Tchaikovsky was in Saint Petersburg, Vsevolozhskii had commissioned him to compose *The Queen of Spades* in time for the next season. Tchaikovsky accepted, even though he had originally promised to D troyat, in letter 3905a of 17/29 July 1889, that he would begin writing the music of *Sadia* that autumn. As is clear from Gallet's letters to Tchaikovsky in September 1889, he too was under the impression that Tchaikovsky was intending to start work on *Sadia* very soon, since he already had the libretto of Act I. See *CZM*, p. 104–105.

⁶⁶ Tchaikovsky was staying in Tiflis as a guest of his brother Anatolii, who had recently been appointed deputy governor of the city.

⁶⁷ Letter from L once D troyat to Tchaikovsky, 22 September/4 October 1890. *CZM*, p. 123.

⁶⁸ Letter from Louis Gallet to Tchaikovsky, 3/15 January 1891. *CZM*, p. 105.

to compose the music for *Sadia* in 1892. At the end of his letter Tchaikovsky mentioned to Gallet the idea that had occurred to him the previous summer : namely, that he and Détroiyat might like to consider translating and adapting *The Queen of Spades* for the French stage, and that if the latter was successful in Paris it might pave the way for *Sadia*.⁶⁹

In his next letter to Tchaikovsky, Gallet emphasized that he need not feel under any pressure to compose *Sadia*, noting wryly that Détroiyat had clearly been fantasizing when he had told him about Tchaikovsky's alleged impatience to receive the remainder of the libretto. Gallet added that he genuinely wished to write the libretto of *Sadia* for no other composer, but that if Tchaikovsky decided to abandon the project at any point , he would accept that . Gallet also enclosed a copy of the letter he sent to Détroiyat that same day , in which he clarified that Tchaikovsky would not be able to start working on *Sadia* before 1892–93, if at all, and in which he also urged Détroiyat to find a theatre in Paris that would commission the score from Tchaikovsky.⁷⁰ When two months later, Tchaikovsky came to Paris to conduct a concert of his works on 24 March/5 April 1891, he again met with both Gallet and Détroiyat at the house of his publisher Mackar, and they apparently then decided to abandon their joint project.⁷¹

This, however, was not the end of the story as far as *Sadia* was concerned. For on 18/30 July 1892 Mackar informed the composer that Détroiyat , who had recently been appointed director of the Théâtre de la Renaissance, had told him that if Tchaikovsky was able to complete *Sadia* in the summer of 1893, he, Détroiyat, would undertake to stage it at this theatre during the 1893/94 winter season. Mackar asked Tchaikovsky either to reply to Détroiyat directly or to let him know what he should say to him on the composer 's behalf. Tchaikovsky chose not to reply to Détroiyat, but to Gallet instead, writing from Klin on 23 July/4 August 1892: "Would you be so extremely obliging as to resume the versification of *La Courtisane*, of which I shall be impatiently awaiting Acts II and III! I send you in advance my most fervent thanks."⁷²

Unfortunately, Tchaikovsky did not get round even just to make a start on the score of *Sadia*, perhaps because Gallet was again prevented by other commitments from versifying Acts II and III of Détroiyat's scenario. But whilst it is strictly true that all that remains of this projected opera is the latter scenario and the unused libretto of Act I in the Klin archive, we are nevertheless indebted to this unique Franco-Russian collaboration for these letters by Tchaikovsky in which he memorably expressed many of his most cherished aesthetic views.

8. Tchaikovsky to Paul Dultier, 17 February/1 March 1889 [[letter 3800a](#)]

This previously unknown letter is described in an old catalogue of the W. R. Benjamin autograph auction firm in New York (NB. no accents are given in the French quotation from the letter):

⁶⁹ See letter 4288a to Louis Gallet, 6/18 January 1891, which was first published in: Thomas Kohlhase, "'Paris vaut bien une messe!'" Bisher unbekannte Briefe, Notenautographe und andere Čajkovskij-Funde', *ČSt* 3 (1998), p. 249–253.

⁷⁰ Louis Gallet's letter to Tchaikovsky of 11/23 January 1891 was published, with the help of Polina Vaidman, in the original French for the first time in: Thomas Kohlhase, "'Paris vaut bien une messe!'" Bisher unbekannte Briefe, Notenautographe und andere Čajkovskij-Funde', *ČSt* 3 (1998), p. 255–257.

⁷¹ As explained in a note in *CZM*, p. 124, n. 11. The source of this information, however, is not given there, and it would be important to clarify this if possible.

⁷² Letter 4739a to Louis Gallet, 23 July/4 August 1892. See 'Klin, near Moscow, was the home of one of the busiest of men...' (February 2011), p. 36–39, which can be accessed via: <http://www.tchaikovsky-research.net/en/news/index.html>.

R-557 TCHAIKOVSKY, Peter Ilich (1840-1893). Great Russian composer. ALS, in French, 2pp. 8vo, Leipsik, Mar. 1, 1889, on his monogrammed paper. To Paul Dultier, apologizing for being a poor correspondent. "...en ete j'etais plonge dans un travail qui me prenait tout mon temps et maintenant je voyage et suis toujours empeche de repondre aux lettres que je recois. Bientot je serai a Paris..." The summer work the composer refers to was an international concert tour as conductor [*sic.*], on which he met, at Leipzig, Brahms, Grieg and others; at Prague, Dvorak; at Paris, Gounod, Massenet and Paderewski. In this year, too, he finished his Fifth Symphony in E Minor. Fine item. With stamped and addressed envelope.⁷³

In English translation the brief passage quoted from the letter reads:

[...] [T]his summer I was engrossed in a task which took up all my time, and now I am travelling so that there is always something preventing me from replying to the letters I receive. I shall be in Paris soon[...]

No one by the name of Paul Dultier features among Tchaikovsky's known correspondents—at least those known to us, though the Klin archive does hold many letters sent to Tchaikovsky by European and American correspondents who do not appear in the indices of *PSSL* because Tchaikovsky's replies to them (if any) had not come to light at the time *PSSL* came out—nor is any meeting with such a person recorded in Tchaikovsky's diary during his stay in Paris from 8/20 March to 28 March/9 April 1889. Searches in Google Books suggest that there is an author called Paul Dultier (pseudonym: Pierre Latin) who wrote such books as *Oeillets et pensées* (1894) and *Fresques et arabesques* (1922), but we have not been able to find out anything more about these or their author, nor can we be sure that it is the same person as Tchaikovsky's correspondent.

It seems that Dultier (if that is the right spelling of the name) had written to Tchaikovsky in the summer of 1888 with some request, and that, absorbed as he was in his work on the Symphony No. 5 (begun in May that year), the composer had forgotten about that request. Perhaps Dultier had then written to him again, prompting this belated reply, written in Leipzig on 17 February/1 March 1889, in the middle of Tchaikovsky's second European conducting tour. Tchaikovsky did not have any concerts to conduct in Leipzig on that occasion, and just two days later he was on the road again, this time heading for Geneva where he did have a concert engagement. However, his brief stay in Leipzig allowed him to visit the Brodskys and also to catch up with his post.

9. Tchaikovsky to Louis de Fourcaud, 18/30 September 1884 [[letter 2550a](#)]

In an online finding aid for the Carlton Lake Collection of French Manuscripts at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (HRC) in the University of Texas at Austin, we came across a brief reference to an autograph letter by the composer: "Tchaikovsky, Peter Ilich, 1840–1893 to Unidentified. Dated 1886".⁷⁴ Since in the *Tchaikovsky Handbook* there was no record of a letter held at that institution, it seemed very likely that this was a previously unknown letter. We therefore sent an enquiry to the University of Texas, and shortly afterwards Elizabeth L. Carter, French Collections Research Associate at the HRC, very kindly sent us a photocopy of the whole letter and allowed us to publish its text. It turned out

⁷³ *The Collector* (W.R. Benjamin Autographs, 1952), p. 65 (accessed via Google Books).

⁷⁴ See <http://research.hrc.utexas.edu:8080/hrcxf/view?docId=ead/00291p10.xml> (last accessed on 12 March 2011).

that the year of the letter had been recorded incorrectly in that finding aid, and that it in fact dated from 1884, as Tchaikovsky had clearly written at the top of the first page. Tchaikovsky writes from Pleshcheevo, the estate of Nadezhda von Meck in the Podol'sk district of Moscow province, where he had been invited to spend part of the summer (in his benefactress's absence):

[p. 1:] Podolsk, près Moscou
18/30 Sept[embre] 1884.

Monsieur!

Permettez moi de Vous remercier bien vivement pour l'honneur et l'extrême [= extrême] plaisir que je Vous dois de pouvoir m'associer à tant de musiciens éminents pour concourir à une publication dont le caractère m'est doublement sympathique [= sympathique].

C'est avec le plus grand empressement [p. 2] que je me suis appliqué, dès que je l'ai pu, à la composition du petit morceau que j'ai l'honneur de Vous envoyer, en Vous priant de vouloir bien le remettre à M. le Directeur du Gaulois.

Sa [= Si] ma bonne étoile me conduit à Paris, croyez, Monsieur, que ce sera pour moi un doux devoir de me présenter chez V[ou]s et de Vous remercier de vive voix pour l'attention flatteuse que Vous [p. 3] voulez bien me témoigner.

Recevez, Monsieur, l'expression de mes sentiments les plus distinguées.

P. Tchaïkovsky

In English translation:

Monsieur! Allow me to thank you most fervently for the honour and extreme pleasure for which I am obliged to you in being able to join so many eminent musicians collaborating with a publication whose character is doubly agreeable to me.

It is with the greatest haste that I have applied myself—as soon as I was able to do so—to the composition of the small piece which I am honoured to send you, and I would ask you to be so kind as to forward it to the Director of Le Gaulois.

If my lucky star takes me to Paris, believe me, Monsieur, when I say that it shall be a sweet duty for me to call on you and to thank you in person for the flattering attention which you are so kind as to bestow upon me.

Please accept, Monsieur, this assurance of my finest sentiments.

P. Tchaikovsky

From the contents of this letter, it was clear that it had to do with the piano piece *Impromptu-caprice*, which Tchaikovsky wrote while at Pleshcheevo in response to a request to contribute a small piano or vocal piece to the album that the Paris-based daily newspaper *Le Gaulois* intended to bring out in 1885 as a New Year's gift for its subscribers.

The question was to *whom* the letter might be addressed, that is which member of the editorial staff of *Le Gaulois* had actually put this request to Tchaikovsky in the first place? At first we thought it might be the journalist and librettist Maurice Ordonneau (1854–1916), to whom Tchaikovsky had written in 1883 in his capacity as editor of *Le Gaulois* to refute the false reports picked up by that newspaper from the Russian press to the effect that he had been asked to compose the cantata for the coronation of Tsar Alexander III after Anton Rubinstein had refused to do so—an insinuation aimed at Rubinstein's alleged lack of patriotism for which he had often been unjustly reproached by journalists with anti-Semitic

tendencies ever since the 1860s.⁷⁵ However, further research revealed that Ordonneau was not the addressee of the letter of 8/20 September 1884 presented above.

First of all, thanks to Gallica, the excellent digital archive of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, we were able to access the *Gaulois* issue of 24 November 1884 on the front page of which the newspaper's owner and director, Arthur Meyer (1844–1924), announced the forthcoming publication of the so-called *Album du Gaulois*. This album containing pieces written by no less than 61 composers from France and other European countries—both established masters and younger members of the profession—had been lavishly produced by the Heugel & Cie publishing firm and would be offered for sale only to subscribers of *Le Gaulois*. Part of the proceeds from sales of the album, Meyer added, would go to the relief fund of the *Société des artistes musiciens*. (This explains why Tchaikovsky, in the above letter, spoke of this publication as being "doubly agreeable" to him, since he himself was always willing to help out musicians suffering hardship.) Meyer's preface is followed by a complete list of the composers who had contributed to the album and the titles of their pieces, as well as short biographical notices on the more well-known ones, including Tchaikovsky. A quick glance at this list shows that he had indeed joined the ranks of "so many eminent musicians," for alongside his we find such names as Liszt, Anton Rubinstein, Gounod, Massenet, Saint-Saëns, Clara Schumann, Grieg, Delibes, Franck, Lalo, Fauré, and Dvořák.⁷⁶

To try to establish the identity of the recipient of the above letter, it therefore made sense to look at editions of the correspondence of these composers. Because the Grieg Archive on the website of Bergen Public Library played such an important role in the first Tchaikovsky Research Bulletin,⁷⁷ we decided to start with the Norwegian composer. As it happens, this excellent internet resource had published the facsimile of the letter which Louis de Fourcaud (1851–1914), the music critic of *Le Gaulois*, wrote to Grieg from Paris in September 1884, explaining what the purpose of the projected album was and asking him, on behalf of the newspaper's director, to contribute a small piano piece or a song.⁷⁸ Dvořák also received a similar request from Fourcaud around the same time.⁷⁹ In the case of César Franck, he not only accepted Fourcaud's request to contribute to the *Album du Gaulois*, but even decided, for this purpose, to set to music a poem by Fourcaud himself.⁸⁰

Thus, the addressee of Tchaikovsky's letter must also have been Louis de Fourcaud, who had been asked by the director of *Le Gaulois* to write to all the composers who it was hoped would contribute to the album. In a slightly later letter to Fourcaud on 12/24 October 1884, Tchaikovsky mentioned the proofs of a piano piece which the editors of *PSSL* identified as being *Impromptu-caprice*.⁸¹ The *Album du Gaulois* which came out in 1885 proved to be successful, helping to boost the newspaper's flagging finances, and the venture would be repeated several times, though Tchaikovsky did not contribute to later albums. As

⁷⁵ See letter 2291 to Maurice Ordonneau (in his capacity as editor of *Le Gaulois*), 10/22 May 1883. *PSSL* XII, p. 163. This letter appeared in the following day's issue of *Le Gaulois* and can be viewed as it was published there on Gallica, the digital archive of the Bibliothèque nationale de France:

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k524644b/f4> (last accessed on 20 March 2011).

⁷⁶ See the 24 Nov. 1884 issue of *Le Gaulois* at: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k525210t>.

⁷⁷ See 'Klin, near Moscow, was the home of one of the busiest of men...' (February 2011), in particular the Introduction and the letters to Francis Arthur Jones and Edouard Bergson. The bulletin can be accessed on the Tchaikovsky Research website: <http://www.tchaikovsky-research.net/en/news/index.html>.

⁷⁸ Letter from Louis de Fourcaud to Edvard Grieg, 11 September 1884. See The Grieg Archive at: <http://www.bergen.folkebibl.no/cgi-bin/websok-grieg?mode=p&tnr=296494&dok=0&pf=kort&side=0>.

⁷⁹ See his letter to František Ladislav Rieger, written in Prague by 10 November 1884, in: Antonín Dvořák, *Korrespondence a dokumenty*, 8 vols (Prague, 1987–2000), vol. 1, p. 449.

⁸⁰ See Louis de Fourcaud's letter of 22 September 1884 thanking him for this in: César Franck, *Correspondance*, ed. by Joël-Marie Fauquet (Sprimont, 1999), p. 143.

⁸¹ See letter 2567 to Louis de Fourcaud, 12/24 October 1884. *PSSL* XII, p. 461.

for the *Impromptu-caprice* which appeared in the 1885 album, and the manuscript of which Tchaikovsky enclosed with his first letter to Fourcaud, the location of the original score is unknown. Elizabeth Carter of the HRC confirmed that it was not in their collections.

It is also unclear whether Tchaikovsky, as he had promised to do, actually called on Fourcaud during his brief stay in Paris at the end of 1884. No such meeting is mentioned in his letters, although during a later stay in Paris, in February–March 1889, he did record in his diary a "visit of the *rédacteur* of *Le Gaulois*".⁸² This may possibly have been Fourcaud.

10. Tchaikovsky to Martin Kleeberg, 7/19 June 1886 [[letter 2967a](#)]

In a Sotheby's catalogue from 1986 we came across a reference to a previously unknown letter:

TCHAIKOVSKY (PYOTR IL'YICH) AUTOGRAPH LETTER SIGNED ("Tschaikovsky"), to M. Kleberg, in French, informing him that he will be unable to visit him today and suggesting another appointment, *1 page, oblong 8vo, with annotations in another hand in mauve ink, postmarked: "Paris 19 June [18]86"*⁸³

Although this brief summary is all that we have to go by, it is at least sufficient to identify the letter's addressee. The surname suggests that it must be the father of the French pianist Clotilde Kleeberg (1866–1909), to whom Tchaikovsky would write a very friendly letter five years later, apologizing for having failed to take up an invitation to visit her and her parents. The original autograph of that letter to Mlle Kleeberg is held in Frankfurt and was first published by Thomas Kohlhase in 1993 after Polina Vaidman had helped him to identify its addressee by locating, in the archives at Klin, the letter of invitation to which Tchaikovsky was replying.⁸⁴ Together with her letter Mlle Kleeberg had enclosed the visiting card of her parents, which reads: "M^R & M^{ME} MARTIN KLEEBERG / 10, RUE DE PHALSBOURG".⁸⁵ Thus, the pianist's father was called Martin Kleeberg and it is he who was the addressee of Tchaikovsky's letter of 7/19 June 1886.

We know very little about Martin Kleeberg, except that he was born in Mainz and was of Jewish origins. By the time of his daughter Clotilde's birth in 1866 he had already emigrated from Germany and settled in Paris.⁸⁶ Hopefully further genealogical research may yield more information.

The above letter also fits in with what we know of Tchaikovsky's movements in Paris in the summer of 1886. He evidently had to decline Mr Kleeberg's invitation for Saturday, 7/19 June, because that evening a dinner and musical soirée in Tchaikovsky's honour was hosted by Adèle Bohomoletz, a French lady married to a wealthy Russian who had settled in Paris. It was on that occasion, incidentally, that Tchaikovsky made the acquaintance of Fauré,

⁸² Diary entry for 14/26 February 1889. *DT*, p. 235.

⁸³ *Sotheby's. Catalogues of Sales*, issue 7480, part 1 (1986), p. 260, item no. 578 (consulted via Google Books).

⁸⁴ See letter 4362a to Clotilde Kleeberg, 30 March/11 April 1891 in: Thomas Kohlhase, "...ich bin wahnsinnig müde..." Zwei bisher unbekannte Briefe P. I. Čajkovskijs', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 154, no. 5 (September, 1993), p. 45–48 (45–46). Also reprinted in: 'Drei bisher unbekannte Briefe Čajkovskijs von 1887, 1891 und 1893, sowie sechs weitere Briefe vom 20. August 1893', *ČSt* 1 (1995), p. 36–38.

⁸⁵ See Thomas Kohlhase, "...ich bin wahnsinnig müde..." Zwei bisher unbekannte Briefe P. I. Čajkovskijs', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 154, no. 5 (September, 1993), p. 48, n. 18.

⁸⁶ See the biographical article on Clotilde Kleeberg in: A. Ehrlich, *Berühmte Klavierspieler der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (1898), p. 157.

whom he found to be "charming".⁸⁷ However, he made good his promise to visit the Kleebergs on another occasion—Mr Kleeberg had clearly invited Tchaikovsky mainly so that he could judge his daughter's playing, perhaps with a view to her being invited to give concerts in Russia—for on 10/22 June, just two days before his departure from Paris, he noted in his diary: "Called on Kleeberg. She plays nicely."⁸⁸ The fact that in his letter to Clotilde Kleeberg herself five years later, he sent "warm regards" for her parents suggests that he still remembered Mr and Mrs Kleeberg fondly.

11. Tchaikovsky to Ambroise Thomas, 13/25 September 1889 [[letter 3935a](#)]

In the same Sotheby's catalogue as the letter to Martin Kleeberg presented above, there is a summary of a letter to the French composer and teacher Ambroise Thomas (1811–1896):

TCHAIKOVSKY (PYOTR IL'YICH) AUTOGRAPH LETTER SIGNED ("P. TCHAIKOVSKY"), TO AMBROISE THOMAS ("Illustre maitre!"), in French, a letter of recommendation for Jules Conus, a talented young man who wishes to enter the Paris Conservatoire ("... Permettez moi de recommander à votre haute protection Mr. Jules Conus, jeune homme de beaucoup de talent..."), 1 page, 8vo, embossed monogram in top left-hand corner, integral blank, no place, 13/25 September [18]89⁸⁹

The extracts from the letter in English translation read: "Illustrious maestro! [...] Allow me to recommend to your worth protection Mr Jules Conus, a young man of great talent [...]".

This is Tchaikovsky's third letter to Ambroise Thomas to have come to light so far. Although back in 1872 he had written a very critical review of Thomas's opera *Hamlet* when it was staged at the Moscow Bol'shoi Theatre with Christina Nilsson as Ophelia,⁹⁰ Tchaikovsky would find Thomas himself to be "a very nice and affectionate old man" when he met him at the Paris Conservatory towards the end of his stay in the French capital in the summer of 1886.⁹¹ Thus, when the violinist Iulii Konius (1869–1942; known outside Russia as Jules Conus) graduated from the Moscow Conservatory in the summer of 1889 and decided to study further in Paris, Tchaikovsky, who had great faith in the young man, was glad to write the above letter of recommendation on his behalf, for Thomas was the director of the Paris Conservatory where Konius was hoping to study. On the same day Tchaikovsky wrote a similar letter to his French publisher, Mackar: "I most warmly recommend to you Mr Jules Conus, a remarkable violinist and young man of great merits. Please guide him a little around the artistic world of Paris."⁹²

Tchaikovsky would write to Thomas again in June 1890, explaining that Konius's father had asked him to put in a good word for his son so that the examiners at the Paris

⁸⁷ Diary entry for 7/19 June 1886. *DT*, p. 86. One letter from Tchaikovsky to Fauré is believed to survive: letter 3824a of 20 March/1 April 1889, an excerpt from which was copied by Louisa von Westernhagen from an old Stargardt catalogue, and tentatively identified as being addressed to Fauré by Thomas Kohlhase in: 'Ein bisher unbekannter Brief Čajkovskijs (Anfang der 1890er Jahre) sowie Hinweise auf weitere, zum Teil bisher unbekannte Autographe', *Mitteilungen* 8 (2001), p. 3–14 (8–9).

⁸⁸ Diary entry for 10/22 June 1886. *DT*, p. 87.

⁸⁹ *Sotheby's. Catalogues of Sales*, issue 7480, part 1 (1986), p. 261, item no. 579 (consulted via Google Books).

⁹⁰ An English translation of this article is available on the Tchaikovsky Research website: <http://www.tchaikovsky-research.net/en/Works/Articles/TH272/index.html>.

⁹¹ See letter 2971 to Modest Tchaikovsky, 11/23 June 1886. *PSSL* XIII, p. 365–366. In 1892, Thomas would second Emile Paladilhe's motion that Tchaikovsky be elected a corresponding member of the Institut de France. See Paladilhe's letter to Tchaikovsky of 23 November/5 December 1892 in *CZM*, p. 217.

⁹² Letter 3936 to Félix Mackar, 13/25 September 1889. *PSSL* XV-A, p. 181.

Conservatory's violin competition in July would be sure to recognize his talents.⁹³ In his reply Thomas emphasized that he had not forgotten that Konius had enrolled in the Conservatory thanks to Tchaikovsky's recommendation, and that the young man had impressed the examiners very much.⁹⁴

12. Tchaikovsky to Pauline Viardot-García, 25 February/8 March 1888 [[letter 3507a](#)]

This letter was presented in abridged form in our first bulletin on the basis of the quotation given by Myriam Chimènes in her study of the role of aristocratic patronage in *fin de siècle* music life in Paris.⁹⁵ We subsequently contacted Dr. Chimènes to try to find out more about this letter, and she explained that she had cited it in her book on the basis of a catalogue for an auction which took place at the Hôtel Drouot on 27 November 1990. It was she who helpfully suggested that we get in touch with Thierry Bodin, who had been the consultant on that occasion, as well as for the auction in 1992 at which the letters to Détrouyat presented above were sold. M. Bodin had also made a photocopy of this brief note, and thanks to his generous assistance we can now publish its full text here:

8 Mars 1888

Madame!

M^{me} de Benardaky voudrait beaucoup être invitée chez Vous demain. Oserai-je Vous prier de vouloir bien satisfaire le desir [= désir] de cette dame?

Votre bien dévoué

P. Tchaïkovsky

In English translation:

Madame! Mme de Benardaky would very much like to be invited to your place tomorrow. May I dare to ask you to fulfil this lady's wish?

Yours very devotedly,

P. Tchaikovsky

As discussed in the first bulletin, Tchaikovsky, during this visit to Paris, had himself taken the initiative and called on Mme Viardot on Friday, 19 February/2 March 1888, and it was then or shortly afterwards that she invited him to a musical soirée at her house the following Friday. In the meantime, on the Tuesday of that week, Tchaikovsky had once again had dinner with the Benardakys at their lavish house on the Rue de Chaillot (see the letter to Nicolas de Benardaky presented in the Russia section above),⁹⁶ and he evidently told them about the invitation he had received from Mme Viardot. It is not surprising that Marie de Benardaky, a talented amateur singer, should have expressed the wish to attend that soirée. Given how indebted he was to the Benardakys for the successful start of his first visit to Paris as a conductor of his works, Tchaikovsky could not refuse to do his best to help Marie by writing to Mme Viardot on her behalf.

⁹³ Letter 4136a to Ambroise Thomas, 4/16 June 1890. *Mitteilungen* 6 (1999), p. 7–9.

⁹⁴ Letter from Ambroise Thomas to Tchaikovsky, 22 May/3 July 1890. *CZM*, p. 218.

⁹⁵ See Myriam Chimènes, *Mécènes et musiciens: du salon au concert à Paris sous la IIIe République* (Paris, 2004), p. 424; and also 'Klin, near Moscow, was the home of one of the busiest of men...' (February 2011), p. 50–51, which can be accessed via: <http://www.tchaikovsky-research.net/en/news/index.html>.

⁹⁶ Diary entry for 23 February/6 March 1888: "Dinner at Benardakys". *DT*, p. 238.

13. Tchaikovsky to Pauline Viardot-García, 18/30 March 1889 [[letter 3824a](#)]

The following letter to Pauline Viardot from the following year is completely new, and is published here for the first time thanks to the photocopy made by Thierry Bodin before it was auctioned. Despite its brevity, this note is of considerable interest because it explains why before travelling on to London, the final stop of his second European conducting tour, Tchaikovsky decided to stay an extra day in Paris:

30 Mars 1889

Chère et très respectée Madame!

C'est avec le plus vif plaisir que je profiterai de Votre trop aimable invitation, et même [= même] je retarde d'un jour mon départ pour Londres afin de pouvoir assister à Votre charmante soirée.

Recevez, Madame, l'expression de mon très profond respect

P. Tschaïkowsky

In English translation:

My dear and highly esteemed lady! It is with the keenest pleasure that I shall take advantage of your ever so kind invitation, and I shall even postpone my departure for London by one day in order to be able to attend your charming soirée.

Receive, Madame, this assurance of my very profound respect,

P. Tchaikovsky

The invitation to which Tchaikovsky is replying here has survived in the Klin archives and has been published. In this equally brief note, sent the previous day, Mme Viardot had written: "Dear Mr Tchaikovsky. If you do not disdain to come to listen to an operetta without any pretensions which I composed quite a long time ago, I should be very happy to see you at my place on 8 April at 9:30. I kindly ask you to accept, dear Maestro, this assurance of my feelings of sympathy and admiration. P. Viardot."⁹⁷

The soirée duly took place at Mme Viardot's house on Monday, 27 March/8 April 1889, and Tchaikovsky was among the select few to have been invited to this special private performance. He would share his impressions of it in a letter to his nephew Vladimir ("Bob") Davydov from London two days later: "The day before my departure [from Paris] I went to a soirée at Viardot's. There was a performance of an operetta of hers, which she composed twenty years ago to a libretto by Turgenev. The cast featured her two daughters, as well as her students, amongst whom one Russian girl performed a Russian dance, to the great delight of the audience."⁹⁸

In many publications, including the commentary for this letter in *PSSL*, it was assumed that the operetta which Tchaikovsky saw and heard at Mme Viardot's house was *Le Dernier Sorcier* (1869), but the Turgenev scholar Nicholas Žekulin has established that it was in fact a performance of the earlier operetta *Trop de femmes* (1867).⁹⁹ Unlike Tchaikovsky with regard to Détrouyat and Gallet, Turgenev had not hesitated one moment in collaborating with a 'foreigner' on a French-language stage work, though, admittedly, the scope of *Sadia* was rather more ambitious and daunting than these operettas which had originally been

⁹⁷ Letter from Pauline Viardot to Tchaikovsky, 17/29 March 1889. *CZM*, p. 209.

⁹⁸ Letter to Vladimir Davydov, 29 March/10 April 1889. *PSSL* XV-A, p. 88.

⁹⁹ See Nicholas G. Žekulin, *The Story of an Operetta. 'Le Dernier Sorcier' by Pauline Viardot and Ivan Turgenev* (Munich, 1989), p. 97.

conceived as works in which Mme Viardot's students could gain some experience of the stage and of ensemble singing.

New information on previously identified letters

Tchaikovsky's very interesting letter of 10/22 June 1888 to the German conductor Julius Laube (1841–1910), first published by Thomas Kohlhase in *ČSt* 3 (1998) courtesy of the owner at the time, and catalogued as letter 3587a in the *Tchaikovsky Handbook*, has recently been advertised for auction by J. A. Stargardt in Berlin on 19 and 20 April 2011.¹

Of the four letters by Tchaikovsky to his friend the pianist Vasilii Sapel'nikov (1868–1941) now known to exist, the location of the autograph of the earliest, dating from 17/29 April 1889 and catalogued in *TH* as 3839a, is unknown, but a photocopy is reportedly held at the Klin Museum. Since this letter has never been published, we felt it would be interesting to include here the summary given in the Sotheby's auction catalogue from 1986 in which it was advertised together with the letters to Ambroise Thomas and Martin Kleeberg presented above:

TCHAIKOVSKY (PYOTR IL'YICH) REMARKABLE AUTOGRAPH LETTER SIGNED, [ABOUT THE BALLET "THE SLEEPING BEAUTY"], in Russian, to the pianist, Vassily Sapellnikov, enthusiastically expressing his happiness at the continued success of the young pianist, mentioning that he has been thinking of him constantly and has even dreamt of him, explaining that he has been so busy in Moscow (a town he says he abhors), that he has only composed a single section of his new ballet (*The Sleeping Beauty*); he insists that they must see each other before Sapelnikov goes to Odessa and that he will assemble some piano pieces together which the pianist can perform and sends his best wishes to Sophie Menter, the publisher, Bessel, Blumenfeld and Soloviev. 4 pages, 8vo, some damp-staining, repaired. 17 April [18]89²

Hopefully, the actual complete text of this letter will be presented in a future publication of the Klin Museum.

The letter which Tchaikovsky wrote to a certain E. Elias on 27 November/9 December 1889 enclosing a musical autograph from the *Andante cantabile*, and which was catalogued as 3976b in our first bulletin, is, as explained there, part of the Miklós Rózsa collection held at the Thornton School of Music at the University of Southern California.³ Despite repeated enquiries, a copy or transcript of the letter has unfortunately not been released yet, but from the following summary in the 1970 (?) issue of an American magazine for autograph collectors we now know at least how the Hungarian-born film composer Miklós Rózsa (1907–1995) came by this letter:

G-532 TCHAIKOVSKY, Peter Ilyich (1840-1893). Noted Russian composer. ALS, 16mo, Moscow, Dec. 9, 1889. Written on his personal stationery bearing his blue embossed initials. To E. Elias, to whom he apologizes for not answering his letter more promptly. He has not had a spare moment, but now hastens to grant his wish. In a postscript he apologizes for writing in French, but he writes German very badly. On the third side of the four page lettersheet he has written out a splendid four bars of music for piano, signing again with a large signature and dating it again Dec. 9, 1889 at Moscow. A superb framing item.⁴

¹ See J. A. Stargardt. *Auktionskatalog. Katalog 695: Autographen aus allen Gebieten. Auktion am 19. und 20. April 2011 im Opernpalais, Berlin*, p. 304–305, item no. 621. Also available online at: <http://www.stargardt.de/de/kataloge/> (last accessed on 27 March 2011).

² *Sotheby's. Catalogues of Sales*, issue 7480, part 1 (1986), p. 263, item no. 580 (consulted via Google Books).

³ See 'Klin, near Moscow, was the home of one of the busiest of men...' (February 2011), p. 89, which can be accessed via: <http://www.tchaikovsky-research.net/en/news/index.html>.

⁴ *The Collector* (W.R. Benjamin Autographs, 1970), p. 12 (consulted via Google Books).

In his lively autobiography, Rózsa lamented that the "strong, sharply Shakespaerian overture" he had written for Joseph L. Mankiewicz's famous screen version of *Julius Caesar* (1953) was ultimately not used: "For reasons beyond my control it was decided that stereophonic sound was going to make its debut with a film of an orchestra in a concert hall playing Tchaikovsky's *Capriccio Italien* before the picture. Now I am a great admirer of Tchaikovsky, but the *Capriccio Italien* is one of his cheapest works and is certainly not an appropriate prologue to one of the greatest human dramas ever written."⁵ Despite this rather unjust dismissal of the *Italian Capriccio*, it is clear that Rózsa's professed admiration for Tchaikovsky in general was genuine, since otherwise he would not have troubled himself to buy that letter!

Among the photocopies sent by Thierry Bodin were copies of letter 3591 to Édouard Colonne of 14/26 June 1888, and of letter 4037 to Herman Laroche of 15/27 February 1890 concerning the Russian song which Polina and the other girls sing in Act I, Sc. 2 of *The Queen of Spades* to cheer Liza up. Both these letters had been published in *PSSL* on the basis of photocopies held at the Klin Museum, since the location of the originals is unknown. The fact that M. Bodin was able to make these copies of his own suggest that the autographs were probably auctioned at the Hôtel Drouot in the early 1990s, and they may well turn up some day.

⁵ Miklós Rózsa, *Double Life* (New York, 1982), p. 161.

Chronological list and details

of the 17 letters by Tchaikovsky presented in this bulletin

("FP" = first complete printed publication / "PP" = partial publication;
page(s) of the bulletin in which the letter is presented;
owner of the autograph where known; summary of contents)

699a. Tchaikovsky to **Robert von Thal**, Paris; from San Remo, 21 December 1877/2 January 1878 (FP): p. 11–15. Tchaikovsky expresses his intention of coming to Paris in a few days' time to take part in meetings of the commission set up by the Russian government to organize concerts of Russian music as part of the Paris World Fair in the summer of 1878.

2550a. Tchaikovsky to **Louis de Fourcaud**, Paris; from Pleshcheevo, 18/30 September 1884 (FP): p. 43–46. University of Texas, Harry Ransom Center, Austin (Texas, USA). Tchaikovsky encloses the piano piece (*Impromptu-caprice*) he had specially written for the musical album of *Le Gaulois*, and asks Fourcaud to forward the score to the newspaper's director.

2967a. Tchaikovsky to **Martin Kleeberg**, Paris; from Paris, 7/19 June 1886 (PP): p. 46–47. Tchaikovsky informs Mr Kleeberg that he cannot call on him that day, and suggests another appointment.

3086a. Tchaikovsky to **Pavel Peterssen**, Saint Petersburg; from Saint Petersburg, 4/16 November 1886 (FP): p. 8–10. Tchaikovsky explains that because he is feeling unwell he cannot keep an appointment for lunch with Peterssen.

3342a. Tchaikovsky to **an unidentified male correspondent**, Vienna; from Saint Petersburg, 8/20 September 1887 (FP): p. 16–18. Tchaikovsky accepts an invitation to conduct a concert in Vienna at the start of 1888.

3507a. Tchaikovsky to **Pauline Viardot-García**, Paris; from Paris, 25 February/8 March 1888 (FP): p. 48. Tchaikovsky asks Mme Viardot to invite Marie de Benardaky to her musical soirée the following evening.

3563b. Tchaikovsky to **Léonce Détrouyat**, Paris; from Frolovskoe, 10/22 May 1888 (FP): p. 19–23. Tchaikovsky rejects Détrouyat's draft libretto for a French-language opera *La Géorgienne* which was to be set in the Caucasus because of its insufficient attention to local and historical detail, but expresses the hope that their plans for collaboration might still be realized in future if Détrouyat succeeded in finding a suitable subject.

3581a. Tchaikovsky to **Léonce Détrouyat**, Paris; from Frolovskoe, 30 May/11 June 1888 (FP): p. 23–28. Tchaikovsky turns down another subject proposed by Détrouyat and tells him of how he had often dreamed of turning one of Alfred de Musset's plays into an opera. He also gives his views on Racine and Corneille and their Russian imitators in the eighteenth century.

3590a. Tchaikovsky to **Léonce Détrouyat**, Paris; from Frolovskoe, 13/25 June 1888 (FP): p. 28–32. Tchaikovsky laments Détrouyat's failure to secure permission from Musset's heirs to adapt one of his plays for the opera stage, and rejects the librettist's suggestion of writing an

opera-ballet *Mefistofela* based on a poem by Heine. Nevertheless, he reiterates his hope of seeing one of his operas performed in Paris eventually.

3712a. Tchaikovsky to **Léonce Détryat**, Paris; from Frolovskoe, 28 October/9 November 1888 (FP): p. 32–36. Tchaikovsky says he is delighted with the outline scenario for *La Courtisane*, though he proposes a different title and rejects Détryat's idea of including a gypsy feast in the second act. He explains that he could only start work on the opera in the summer of 1889, aiming to finish it by the 1890/91 season.

3723a. Tchaikovsky to **Nicolas de Benardaky**, Paris (?); from Saint Petersburg (?), 10/22 November 1888 (?) (PP): p. 6–8. Tchaikovsky mentions the marriage (or engagement?) of his correspondent's sister-in-law, Ol'ga Leibrock.

3800a. Tchaikovsky to **Paul Dultier**, Paris (?); from Leipzig, 17 February/1 March 1889 (PP): p. 42–43. Tchaikovsky apologizes for replying late, explaining that he had been very busy over the summer and was now constantly on the move because of his concert tour.

3824a. Tchaikovsky to **Pauline Viardot-García**, Paris; from Paris, 18/30 March 1889 (FP): p. 49–50. Tchaikovsky accepts Mme Viardot's invitation to attend a private performance of one of her operettas at her house, and says he will postpone his departure for London by one day in order to be able to do so.

3827a. Tchaikovsky to **Léonce Détryat**, Paris; from Paris, 23 March/4 April 1889 (FP): p. 37. Tchaikovsky confirms that he will call on Détryat the following day.

3905a. Tchaikovsky to **Léonce Détryat**, Paris; from Frolovskoe, 17/29 July 1889 (FP): p. 37–39. Tchaikovsky thanks Détryat for sending the libretto of Act I of *La Courtisane*, and promises to have the score of the whole opera ready by the end of the following summer.

3935a. Tchaikovsky to **Ambroise Thomas**, Paris; from Moscow, 13/25 September 1889 (PP): p. 47–48. Tchaikovsky recommends the young violinist Iulii Konius to the director of the Paris Conservatory.

4214a. Tchaikovsky to **Léonce Détryat**, Paris; from Tiflis, 9/21 September 1890 (FP): p. 39–42. Tchaikovsky apologizes for not having been able to start work on *La Courtisane* yet, and promises that he will complete the opera in a year's time.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to the following people who helped us to locate specific letters in the above list and/or obtain images of them, and, in some cases, to find out more about them.

- Thierry Bodin, Les Autographes, Paris (France): 3507a, 3563b, 3581a, 3590a, 3712a, 3824a, 3827a, 3905a, 4214a
- Myriam Chimènes, Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), Paris (France): 3507a
- Sarah Colville, Sotheby's, London (UK): 3086a
- Richard Davie, International Autograph Auctions Ltd., Nottingham (UK): 699a
- Elizabeth L. Garver, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin (Texas, USA): 2550a
- Thomas Leibnitz, Musiksammlung Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna (Austria): 3342a
- Stephen Roe, Sotheby's, London (UK): 3086a
- Lana Sayer, International Autograph Auctions Ltd., Nottingham (UK): 699a

* * *

The following libraries had books and other materials that helped us in our work, and we are also very grateful to their staff.

- British Library, London
- Society for Co-operation in Russian and Soviet Studies, London
- University Library, Cambridge
- Westminster Music Library, London