

«Ma chère petite Aïno». The Role of a Paris Conservatoire Singing Professor as Architect of an Opera Singer's Career, as Seen through Letters of Edmond Duvernoy and Aïno Ackté

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«Моя милая Айно». Роль профессора пения Парижской консерватории в создании карьеры оперной певицы (по материалам переписки Эдмона Дювернуа и Айно Акте)

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**Аннотация.** Собрание рукописей оперной певицы Айны Акте-Яландер (Aino /Aïno Ackté-Jalander; 1876–1944) в Национальной библиотеке Финляндии (Хельсинки) содержит одну из самых обширных и интернационально ориентированных эпистолярных коллекций в архивах финских музыкантов-профессионалов. Коллекция не только проливает свет на солидную международную репутацию талантливой представительницы Великого княжества Финляндского в поздний период истории Российской империи, но и свидетельствует о динамичном процессе интернационализации финской музыкальной жизни.

В настоящей статье рассматриваются этапы профессионального становления певицы в связи с динамичным, постоянно менявшимся полем воздействия существовавших одновременно культурных столиц. Основу публикации составляют 117 писем, почтовых открыток, записок, которые преподаватель по классу пения Эдмон Дювернуа (1844–1927) писал Айно Акте в течение тридцати лет. Письма Дювернуа дают представление о карьерной стратегии оперной певицы прежде всего в Париже; раскрывают вопросы взаимодействия Парижской оперы с другими оперными театрами того времени, в частности Метрополитен-

опера Нью-Йорка. Письма же самой Акте к Дювернуа неизвестны.

Представленная переписка свидетельствует о ключевой роли преподавателя вокала в Париже как учителя пения, репетитора, опекуна и посредника между учащимся и оперным учреждением на протяжении всей профессиональной жизни певца. Учитель договаривался с оперными режиссерами об ангажементах, которые давали бывшему ученику роли, подходившие ему по типу. И действительно, Акте уже скоро довелось исполнять роли *ingénue*, художественно ограничивающие ее.

«Авторов» парижской карьеры Акте было несколько, они по-разному работали на успех певицы, но сотрудничали друг с другом. Размышляя о значении писем как исторического источника, Маарит Лескеля-Кярки пишет: «Взаимодействие и диалогичность переписки приводят к тому, что письма как бы частично принадлежат другому человеку».

Переписка раскрывает динамичную сеть контактов (*network*), действовавшую в тени «машины» Парижской оперы; демонстрирует относительность значения мастерства звезды – певца или певицы – для его (ее) собственной оперной карьеры. Я исследую специфические локальные и культурные условия формирования певческой карьеры Акте в период обучения, а также на протяжении всей ее профессиональной деятельности.

Можно с полным основанием утверждать, что Париж сформировал Айно Акте как артистку. В 1894–1897 гг., когда в Финляндии еще не существовало собственной оперной институции, Акте обучалась вокалу в Парижской консерватории, а затем, в 1897–1904 гг., была приглашена солисткой в *Opéra*. Будучи 24 лет от роду, в 1900 г., она стала самой высокооплачиваемой певицей *Opéra*. Айно Акте имела и международный успех за пределами Парижа, однако нигде более она не добилась столь длительного стабильного положения. После 1913 г. певица более не появлялась на зарубежных сценах.

Чтобы объективно оценить обстоятельства парижского успеха Акте и последующего заката ее карьеры, не-

обходимо изучить роль режиссера *Opéra* Педро Гайара (Pedro Gailhard), а также журналиста-либреттиста Пьера-Бартеlemi Гёзи (Pierre-Barthélemy Gheusi).

**Ключевые слова:** история музыки, история музыкального исполнительства, переписка учителя с учеником, вокальная педагогика, опера, Париж, стратегия карьеры, Айно Акте, Эдмон Дювернуа, Консерватория, *Opéra*, культурные столицы, космополитизм.

**Хелена Тюрвяйнен** – кандидат искусствоведения (PhD), музыковед, сотрудник Университета Хельсинки. Изучала музыковедение в Университете Хельсинки, в Париже (в *École Pratique des Hautes Études* у Франсуа Лезюра и Университете Сорбонны, Paris IV), а до этого – фортепиано в академии Сибелиуса (Хельсинки). Является специалистом по творчеству финского композитора Уно Клами (автором работы *Kohti Kalevala-sarjaa: Identiteetti, eklektisyys ja Ranskan jälki Uuno Klamin musiikissa* – «На пути к Калевале: Идентичность, эклектика и французский след в музыке Уно Клами», 2013); по истории финно-французских музыкальных контактов; по вопросам транскультурных отношений. Опубликовала статьи на финском, французском, английском и русском языках. В 1994–1998 гг. принимала участие в исследовательском проекте «Франция в северной музыке 1900–1939 гг.» («France in Nordic Music 1900–1939»; проект финансировался «Nordic research council in the Humanities»). Исследовательница является редактором нескольких академических антологий; организовала ряд международных конференций в Хельсинки, Санкт-Петербурге («Русско-финские музыкальные контакты на рубеже XX в. в контексте союза России и Франции» в Российском институте истории искусств, 2003 г., совместно с Жанной Князевой) и Париже («France dans la musique nordique – Relations musicales franco-nordiques 1900–1939» [«Франция в северной музыке – музыкальные контакты Франции и Северных стран 1900–1939»], 1999 г.). Читает гостевые лекции в *École Pratique des Hautes Études* (Париж, 2015) и в Универ-

ситете Кембриджа (2019). Ее исследования финансируются Академией Финляндии, Академией Сибелиуса, Культурным фондом Финляндии, фондом Конкордии, фондами Jenny and Antti Wihuri, the Niilo Helander Foundation, the Kone Foundation, Обществом Куменлааксо Культурного фонда Финляндии, the Alfred Kordelein Foundation, the Emil Aaltonen Foundation,

**Abstract.** The manuscript collection of opera singer Aino (Aïno) Ackté-Jalander (1876–1944) in the National Library of Finland, Helsinki, contains one of the most extensive collections of letters of any Finnish music professional. Besides documenting the solid international standing of this talented citizen of the Grand Duchy during the latter part of the Russian imperial era, it casts light on Parisian opera culture and on the dynamic internationalization of Finnish musical life taking place at the time. While Ackté is also remembered for her successful initiatives in Finland’s national musical culture, she appears in this article first and foremost as an international opera diva. In their quest for professionalism and success, European musicians at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century worked in a changing international environment established in several attractive cultural and musical centres. In this context I observe the formation of the career of one of Finland’s most successful music professionals in its relation to a dynamic powerfield of many contemporaneous but different cultural capitals (Christoph Charle), a powerfield under constant transformation. The principal source material for this study includes the 117 letters, cards, or notes that Aïno Ackté’s voice teacher Edmond Duvernoy (1844–1927) wrote to her over a period of about thirty years; Ackté’s letters to Duvernoy remain undiscovered. Duvernoy’s letters offer information on the strategy for a successful opera career in the Parisian context. This correspondence unveils a dynamic network operating behind the Parisian opera machine, and thus depicts a star singer’s mastery of her own career as only relative. It is along these lines that I investigate the specific local and cultural conditions behind the formation of Ackté’s singing career. A singer’s success in Paris did

not necessarily guarantee her a favoured position in other opera centres. Duvernoy's letters also shed light on the interaction and rivalry of the Opéra with other important opera houses, and in particular with New York's Metropolitan Opera.

It may reasonably be claimed that Paris shaped Ackté as an artist. At a time when no institutional operatic activity existed in Finland, she undertook her vocal studies at Paris's famous Conservatoire in 1894–1897, and was subsequently engaged as a soloist at the Opéra in 1897–1904. In 1900, at the age of 24, she was the Opéra's most highly paid female singer. She also enjoyed a remarkable international career outside Paris, but nowhere else did she gain an equally stable long-term status. After 1913 she appeared no more in foreign opera houses.

The letters of Duvernoy to Ackté reveal that in Paris the singing teacher's pivotal position as vocal coach, répétiteur, guardian, and contact person vis-à-vis the opera institution continued uninterrupted throughout a singer's professional life. The teacher negotiated with opera directors to find engagements that would match a student's role type; yet in fact, Ackté was soon to experience ingénue roles, which frequently were assigned to her, as artistically restrictive.

**Keywords:** history of music, history of musical performance, correspondence, teacher–student relations, vocal pedagogy, opera, Paris, career strategy, Aino Ackté, Edmond Duvernoy, Conservatoire, Opéra, cultural capitals, cosmopolitanism.

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Finnish-French and Franco-Nordic music relations, and questions of transcultural relations, on which she has published articles in Finnish, French, English and Russian. In 1994–1998 she participated in the NOS-H-financed Nordic research project *France in Nordic Music 1900–1939*. She has been Visiting Scholar at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (2015) and at the University of Cambridge (2019).

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In 1894 eighteen-year old Finnish soprano Aïno Ackté<sup>1</sup> (1876–1944) was enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire; among the female candidates for entry to the singing classes in that session, she was judged to be

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the best<sup>2</sup>. In a sense, her future professional prospects were thus sealed. Among the primary responsibilities of the Conservatoire was the training of singers for the chief institution of French music, the Opéra, and for the other nationally subsidised opera theatre, the Opéra-Comique<sup>3</sup>. In order to pursue his or her studies, which were free of charge, the student had to consent to work afterwards with a modest salary at one of these national theatres for two years – provided that this was justified by a prize granted by the Conservatoire, and if the directors of these theatres so wished<sup>4</sup>. Aino Ackté was engaged as a soloist at the Paris Opéra in 1897 at the age of 21.

In Finland, Aino Ackté's story has drawn lasting glamour from its close association with the Paris of *la belle époque*. In comparison, few present-day Finns know the reputation of their compatriot Alma Fohström (1856–1936), who was Professor of singing

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annoyed by her solfège teacher at the Paris Conservatoire, Paul Vidal, asking her 'at the beginning of each lesson': «Êtes-vous déjà achetée?» (Have you already been bought?) Aino Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja* 1 (Helsinki: Otava, 1925), 51. She therefore replaced the «h» of her family name with a «k». The reason for writing the «i» of her first name with a trema was clearly because the first two vowels are supposed to be pronounced separately.

<sup>2</sup> Many Parisian newspapers published the names of the chosen singing students in the order of acceptance, see e.g., *Le Journal*, 26 October 1894; *La Presse*, 27 October 1894; *La Liberté*, 25 October 1894; *Journal des Débats*, 25 October 1894; *Le Figaro* 25 October 1894.

<sup>3</sup> See Constant Pierre, *Le Conservatoire National de Musique et de Déclamation. Documents historiques et administratifs* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1900), 281–288 and e.g., Kimberly White, *Female Singers on the French Stage, 1830–1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 25.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre, *Le Conservatoire National de Musique et de Déclamation*, 394.

at the St. Petersburg conservatoire from 1909 to 1917, and who before obtaining this esteemed position had had a great international singing career<sup>5</sup>. It is easy to grasp today that Fohström's brilliant story was effectively silenced by the Bolshevik revolution and the national independence of the Grand Duchy of Finland in 1917. That the reputation of Ackté evolved differently is only partly the consequence of her memoirs, published in 1925 and 1935<sup>6</sup>. Since her death, a doctoral dissertation and several books and articles on Ackté have been published in Finland (in the Finnish language), as well as a collection of her correspondence. She is the heroine of the recent, partly fictional novel *Ackté!* by Raija Oranen and of an essay in the collection *Rooli ja kohtalo* (The role and the destiny) by writer Pekka Suhonen<sup>7</sup>. An opera named *Aino Ackté* by composer and opera director Ilkka Kuusisto was completed

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<sup>5</sup> On Fohström, see Svetlana Toivakka, *Alma Fohström: kansainvälinen primadonna* [Alma Fohström, an international primadonna, doctoral dissertation in Musicology, University of Helsinki], Acta Musicologica Fennica 31 (Helsinki: Suomen musiikkitieteellinen seura [Finnish musicological society], 2015). (Internet source: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-51-0827-2>, date of access: 06 July 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Aino Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja 1* (Helsinki: Otava, 1925); in Swedish, *Minnen och upplevelser* (Helsingfors: Söderström, 1925); Aino Ackté, *Taiteeni taipaleelta* (Helsinki: Otava, 1935).

<sup>7</sup> For Finnish-language literature on Ackté, see e.g., Pentti Savolainen, *Savonlinnan oopperajuhlat Aino Acktésta Martti Talvelaan* (Savonlinna: Savonlinnan oopperajuhlien kannatusyhdistys, 1980); Outi Pakkanen, *Aino Ackté, Pariisin primadonna* (Helsinki: WSOY, 1988); Raija Oranen, *Ackté!* (Helsinki: Teos, 2016); Pekka Suhonen, *Rooli ja kohtalo* (Helsinki: Otava, 1996); Pentti Savolainen & Matti Vainio (eds). *Aino Ackté: Elämänkaari kirjeiden valossa* [Aino Ackté: A curve of life seen in the light of letters] (Helsinki: WSOY, 2002); Anne Sivuoja-Gunaratnam, *Aino Acktén rooli Juhan librettistinä* [Aino Ackté's role as the librettist for Juha], in J. Hakkarainen,



in 2011 and first performed in 2017<sup>8</sup>. In Finland, her story is seen as a heroic story or, at the very least, as a story of «the lonely rider», and every cultivated Finn still knows the name Aino Ackté. Indeed, with many pieces of the big picture encompassing her still missing, she remains something akin to a national myth.

If, despite her international career, Ackté is today better remembered in Finland than elsewhere, this is no doubt due partly to the nature and location of the available source material. A noteworthy part of her voluminous, international correspondence is written in either Swedish or Finnish, neither of which is widely spoken<sup>9</sup>. Her entire archive is conserved in the National library of Finland, in Helsinki, – a remote destination from the viewpoint of many scholars. But Ackté’s files,

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P. Metso ja V. Kiiveri (eds), *Veisuin ylistäkää: Juhlakirja Hilikka Seppälän täyttäessä 60 vuotta* (Joensuu: Joensuun yliopisto, Ortodoksisen teologian julkaisuja 32, 2003), 175–194.

Research publications on Ackté in languages other than Finnish are rare. However, see Anne Sivuoja-Kauppalaa, «Salome’s slow dance with Lord Chamberlain», in Clair Rowden (ed), *Performing Salome, Revealing Stories* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 99–132. Reference-book data concerning Ackté are normally scarce and often erroneous. See e.g., André Tubeuf, «Aino Ackté», in Mathias Auclair, André Tubeuf & Charles Duprat (eds.), *Les tragédiennes de l’Opéra de Rose Caron à Fanny Heldy, le feu sacré des déesses du palais Garnier, 1875–1939* (Paris: Albin Michel [2011]), 108–111; J. B. Steane, «Ackté, Aino», in *Grove Music Online*, 2001 [<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.00130>], date of access: 25 October 2019; John Warrack & Ewan West (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of Opera* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Stéphane Wolff, *L’Opéra au Palais Garnier (1875–1962): Les œuvres Les interprètes* (Paris: Slatkine, 1962).

<sup>8</sup> The first performance of Kuusisto’s opera *Aino Ackté* in 2017 was a regional project taking place in Savonlinna, Finland.

<sup>9</sup> The home language of Ackté’s Finnish-minded family was Swedish, the other official language of the country.

together with those of composer Jean Sibelius and musicologist Ilmari Krohn, all of which are conserved in the Finnish capital, belong to the most important international collections with regard to the figures of Finnish music. The professional affirmation of all three, both nationally and internationally, took place towards the end of Finland's Imperial era, during the 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century, a period marked in Finland by vibrant international relations and the dynamic, self-assured professionalisation of the country's musical culture. Since a good part of these documents remains unexplored, the international standing of Finnish musical culture in the *belle époque* remains largely unknown. I hope in this article to redress this unfortunate situation to some extent, while at the same time adding a new aspect to the knowledge and understanding of one of the most powerful cultural capitals of the time, Paris.

Aïno Ackté studied at the Paris Conservatoire for three years (1894–1897) and did not need to receive her Conservatoire prizes (in opera: Deuxième Prix on 29 July 1896 and Premier Prix on 29 July 1897; in singing: Deuxième Prix on 22 July 1896)<sup>10</sup> to attract the attention of the Opéra director Pedro Gailhard<sup>11</sup>. Four successive contracts of engagement at the Opéra

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<sup>10</sup> In 1896 and 1897 no Premier Prix in singing was awarded. Ackté also gained a Third medal in solfège in 1897. See Constant Pierre, *Le Conservatoire National de Musique et de Déclamation*, 579–580, 684.

<sup>11</sup> As stated by Ackté in her letters from 20 and 29 May 1897 to her mother, Duvernoy and Gailhard had already told her before the 1897 competitions that she would be engaged by the Opéra. Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäankaari*, 52–53. See also Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 52, 54–55. Kimberly White points out regarding an earlier period that the «Opéra's *chefs de chant* and the *directeur de la scène* observed the students on a monthly basis». Kimberly White, *Female Singers on the French Stage*, 1830–1848, 26.

followed immediately, one after the other (1897–1904). The rise in her salary during this period points to the rapid progress of a splendid – indeed a meteoric – career<sup>12</sup>. The first contract, intended to cover a period of two years, was signed on 16 September 1897. It stated that she would be paid the unpretentious sum of five thousand francs during the first year and seven thousand francs during the second. But a second contract was already signed less than a month later, on 14 October of the same year. By that time Ackté had already made her sensational Opéra debut as Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust* on 8 October, but had only performed the role twice more<sup>13</sup>. According to the new contract, her engagement would be extended to 31 December 1900 and the singer would be paid the sum of one thousand francs per month in the period from 1 October 1897 to 31 December 1898, sixteen thousand francs per year in 1899 and twenty thousand francs in 1900. However, this second contract was amended twice to allow for further increases in her salary. Already on 1 January 1899 her annual salary was raised to twenty thousand francs, and on 15 January 1900 it was further increased to the sum of twenty-six thousand between that date and the end of the year<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Archives Nationales, Pierrefitte [=AN], AJ/13/1704, Archives du Théâtre national de l'Opéra, Contrats d'engagement, 1885–1907 (6). Ackté recounts in her memoirs that the rises in her salary were not the result of her own initiative. Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 107.

<sup>13</sup> Bibliothèque nationale de France, Opéra-Bibliothèque, Opéra, programmes 1897 septembre–décembre.

<sup>14</sup> These contracts are signed: «Bertrand, Gailhard, Año Ackté». Eugène Bertrand (1834–1899) was a director of the Opéra starting from 1892, first, jointly with Campocasso and then, from 1894 until his death, with Gailhard. The mentions in the contract of the increases in salary are signed by Gailhard alone. AN, AJ/13/1704. Archives du Théâtre national de l'Opéra. Contrats d'engagement, 1885–1907 (6).

Aino Ackté in her debut role as Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust*. «My costume was exemplary, but its design did not please me, for it made me look exceedingly thin and tall, which I was anyway. It would have suited a rich noble maiden well, but not the simple Marguerite. Yet I had to perform in this costume, for it was part of the Opéra's conservative traditions», – Ackté wrote in her memoirs (*Muistojeni kirja*, 1925, p. 59).

Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra



Edmond Duvernoy  
(1844–1927) around 1900.

Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France

On 30 May 1900 a third contract was signed to cover the period from 1 July 1900 to 31 May 1903, at an annual salary of sixty thousand francs<sup>15</sup>. This, according to Ackté, made her the «most precious» female singer of the Opéra and caused the illustrious soprano Lucienne Bréval «for the sake of honour» to beg Gailhard to pay her at least five francs more than Ackté received (the quotation marks are Ackté's); this made Gailhard laugh. There is reason to believe that what she wrote is true<sup>16</sup>. As regards Ackté's fourth contract, signed on 17 June 1903, this in fact preceded her departure for the United States and the Metropolitan opera, a move – to which we will return below – whose ramifications effectively brought to an end the singer's career in Paris.

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<sup>15</sup> This contract is signed by Ackté and Gailhard.

<sup>16</sup> Relatively soon thereafter Bréval fell out with Gailhard and left the Opéra. Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 107, 139. Contracts of engagement conserved in the Archives Nationales of France show that at the same time soprano Louise Grandjean (1870–1934) was paid 20,000 (soon raised to 36,000) francs a year; her pay went up to 60,000 francs in 1905–1906. In 1900, mezzo-soprano Meyrienne Héglon (1867–1942) received 30,000 francs a year, in 1901 36,000 and in 1903 43,200 a year. The very famous soprano Rose Caron (1857–1930), according to two contracts covering the years 1892–1896, received 8,500 francs per month, which equals an annual amount of 102,000 francs. It is not possible here to give full details of the terms included in each contract. Statistics from around 1879 published by White (*Female Singers*, 69) show that the highest annual Opéra salary was paid to soprano Gabrielle Krauss (100,000 francs) and the second highest to soprano Marie Heilbronn (80,000). The third female singer in the list is Edmond Duvernoy's wife, soprano Adèle Franck-Duvernoy (35,000). The highest male singer's salary was paid to baritone Victor Maurel (90,000), the second highest to tenor Pierre François Villaret (60,000), and the third highest to bass Auguste-Acanthe Boudouresque (50,000); future Opéra director, bass Pedro Gailhard is fourth on the list (39,375).

«At 21, Ackté who had made her debut as Marguerite, was the virginal Juliette of Gounod's dreams», André Tubeuf writes in his entry for the Finnish singer in the exhibition catalogue *Les tragédiennes de l'Opéra*<sup>17</sup>. More virginal roles in the Opéra followed: Elsa (*Lohengrin*, 1898), Herwine (Samuel Rousseau's *La cloche du Rhin*, 1898), Elisabeth (*Tannhäuser*, 1899) – a role in which, according to the singer herself, her voice assumed a rich and mellow timbre owing to the low range of the vocal writing<sup>18</sup> –, Hellé (Alphose Duvernoy's *Hellé*, 1900), Margyane (Ernest Reyer's *La Statue*, 1902), and Thisbé (Paul and Lucien Hillemaicher's *Orsola*, 1902). Ackté also played an endearingly naive trouser role as Benjamin (Étienne Nicolas Méhul's *Joseph*, 1899); her other roles were the title role in the classic Gluck opera *Alceste*, which was revived during the 1900 World's Fair<sup>19</sup>, the «stern» Nedda, at her own request (Leoncavallo's *Pagliasse*, originally *Pagliacci*, first French performance, 1902)<sup>20</sup>, and, long after her permanent engagement at the Paris Opéra was over, that of the courtesan Thaïs in Massenet's opera of the same name

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<sup>17</sup> Tubeuf, «Aino Ackté», 108. Ackté herself relates that Charles Gounod's widow, who became her friend, assured her that her Marguerite responded to the composer's ideal. Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 66.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>19</sup> Ackté rehearsed her part with Pauline Viardot, the legendary interpreter of the role of Alceste and the mother-in-law of Edmond Duvernoy's brother Alphonse. Only one scene from the first act, including the arias «Divinités du Styx» and «Non, ce n'est point un sacrifice», was given in this concert, which was a part of the official French concerts of the World's Fair. The production was met with such enthusiasm that it was staged at the Opéra during the following season. *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>20</sup> Ackté herself in her memoirs characterized Nedda as «stern». Many persons found at the time that this female character was not at all suited to her. *Ibid.*, 131–138.

(1910). The works in question were mainly French; in Paris Wagner's then very fashionable works were also performed in the local language.

In this paper, the focus of which is on Aino Ackté's professional activity in Paris, I would like more specifically to analyse the extent to which teachers may have contributed to their students' success. In this way I want to consider how a successful singer's career was built, and how, if at all, the circumstances concerning opera singers varied according to time and place. My main research material in this endeavour consists of the heretofore little known letters of Ackté's Parisian singing teacher Edmond Duvernoy to his student. Her letters to him are unknown, but much about her relationship with him can be learned through other sources, such as her memoirs and her mainly Swedish-language letters to her family<sup>21</sup>.

Maarit Leskelä-Kärki, who has theorised on the significance of letters as a source of history research writes: «The reciprocity and dialogic nature of writing [correspondence] has a consequence that letters are as if partly by another person»<sup>22</sup>. Ackté's Parisian career actually had several architects who worked for her

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<sup>21</sup> Since the files of Aino Ackté consist of thousands of letters and other items, it would have been too demanding for me in this essay to rely only on original manuscript letters. Thus it has been practical for me also to use her memoirs and the Finnish-language compilation of her letters published by Savolainen & Vainio, *Aino Ackté: Elämänkaari*, as sources.

<sup>22</sup> Maarit Leskelä-Kärki, «Kirjeet ja kerrotuksi tulemisen kaipuu: Kirjailija Helmi Krohnin ja säveltäjä Erkki Melartinin kirjeystävyys, 1906–1936» [Letters and the longing to be told: The letter-friendship of writer Helmi Krohn and composer Erkki Melartin, 1906–1936], in Maarit Leskelä-Kärki, Anu Lahtinen & Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen (eds), *Kirjeet ja historiantutkimus* [Letters and history research], Historiallinen arkisto 134 (Helsinki: SKS, 2011), 242–271 (254).

success from different angles, but in cooperation with one another. Besides herself and the Conservatoire's Professor of singing Edmond Duvernoy, those at the core of her professional circle included Pedro Gailhard, the Director of the Opéra, and Pierre-Barthélemy Gheusi, whose literary functions relating to this institution were manifold. All of these key figures were men. In comparison to European women more generally, the situation of a female opera singer was relatively independent, but Ackté's professional activity should nevertheless be seen in the context of a patriarchal culture<sup>23</sup>. The three men mentioned above played different roles in relation to her. Research into the contribution of all of these gatekeepers and power players would result in a more comprehensive picture of the constraints on Ackté's Parisian career, but this is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, the number of letters and notes from each of the men involved points clearly to the intensity of their contact with her. Her files include 117 letters, notes and cards from Duvernoy, 24 from Gheusi, nine from Gailhard, one from the other Director of the Opéra Bertrand; no message from the teacher of the Conservatoire's opera class Alfred Giraudet remains<sup>24</sup>.

I have worked previously on various research questions related to Finnish-French musical relations and their historical transformations and have asked, by way of example, how the power that was condensed in the institutions of the French capital affected people of foreign origin, and whether or not those working and studying at them were world-citizens in their own

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<sup>23</sup> See e.g., Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, Cambridge Studies in Opera (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 [2006]), 162.

<sup>24</sup> The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander, Coll. 4, Manuscript Department, the National Library of Finland, Helsinki.



right. I am inspired in this undertaking by the theory of cultural capitals of the French cultural historian Christoph Charle, based on the idea of a dynamic powerfield of several contemporaneous but different cultural capitals<sup>25</sup>. Networks connecting the various state institutions are typical of Paris in the period under consideration. This is the perspective I aim to bring to the existing knowledge concerning the international context of Aïno Ackté's career. Even when taking the limitations regarding the available sources into account, the case of Aïno Ackté will indicate that the operatic world was not one and undivided, whether seen through place, language, or gender.

*Duvernoy as Ackté's singing teacher:  
views on the voice and good singing*

Aïno Ackté arrived in Paris in the autumn of 1894 together with her mother Emmy Achté (1850–1924)<sup>26</sup>. Emmy had studied singing both privately and at the Paris Conservatoire with Professor Jean-Jacques Masset (1811–1903), and had subsequently become one of the leading Finnish female opera singers of her generation<sup>27</sup>. In Finland, Aïno had received some tuition from

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<sup>25</sup> Christoph Charle, «Introduction», in Christoph Charle (dir.), *Le temps des capitales culturelles, VIIIe–XXe siècles* (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 2009), 9–26.

<sup>26</sup> Aïno Ackté's mother Emmy never changed the orthography of her married family name, Achté.

<sup>27</sup> With regard to Emmy's studies at the Paris Conservatoire, see Ulla-Britta Broman-Kananen, «Emmy Achté's Tactics for the Concours at the Paris Conservatoire», in Kristel Pappel, Toomas Siitan, Anu Sõõro (eds.), *Musikleben des 19. Jahrhunderts im nördlichen Europa: Strukturen und Prozesse / 19th-Century Musical Life in Northern Europe: Structures and Processes* (Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2010), 265–288. Emmy was engaged by the first permanent opera company of Finland, Suomalainen Ooppera (Finnish

her mother and gained exceptional admiration when singing at a concert organised by the latter in Helsinki in October 1893, with such celebrities as composer Jean Sibelius and conductor Robert Kajanus in the audience<sup>28</sup>. Her skills in solfège at this point were non-existent, a handicap she would soon overcome. When Masset heard the young singer he considered her manner of singing flawless; in his opinion she would only need to work on matters of style and on her pronunciation of the French language. It was the aged Masset, who had by then retired from the Conservatoire, who led Aino Ackté to Edmond Duvernoy. The young singer made an immediate impression on Duvernoy when performing in his salon the virtuoso coloratura aria «Rayon de mon amour» (Bel raggio lus- inghier) from Rossini's opera *Semiramis* (*Semiramide*). Only after this, encouraged by Duvernoy, did she put her name down for the Conservatoire's entrance examination<sup>29</sup>.

Edmond Duvernoy was a baritone and an accomplished musician; he had graduated from the Conservatoire as a pianist and later as an opera singer, and had enjoyed a short stage career at the Opéra-Comique from 1873 to 1878<sup>30</sup>. He replaced Jean-Jacques Mas-

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Opera), which functioned in Helsinki in the years 1873–1879. From 1882 she worked as a singing teacher at the Helsinki Cantor and Organist School, which her husband Lorenz Nikolai Achté (1835–1900) had founded. After her husband's death she assumed the direction of the school until 1922.

<sup>28</sup> Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 19–20. See also Bis (pseudonym of Karl Wasenius), «Ovanligt lofvande sångtalang», *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 16 October 1893; K. (pseudonym of Karl Flodin), «Fru Emmy Achtés konsert i går», *Nya Pressen*, 11 November 1893.

<sup>29</sup> Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 30–38; Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäankaari*, 21.

<sup>30</sup> According to the tenor Eustace Thomas-Salignac, who had himself studied with Duvernoy, his teacher had participated

set at the Conservatoire in 1887 and was now one of the eight singing professors at the institution. When at the beginning of Ackté's second year of study Duvernoy had arranged a place for her in Alfred Giraudet's opera class, where the most promising singer talents were gathered, Ackté wrote to her mother:

D[uvernoy] is so sweet that I could eat him up. [...] D[uvernoy] must be in very good relations with the old men, after all, no student of any other teacher has been admitted in the middle of the term. Guirod is the only woman in our opera class besides me<sup>31</sup>.

Edmond Duvernoy's birth into an important family of musicians doubtless gave him many useful kinds of knowledge, facilitated his contacts, and made him influential both inside and outside the Conservatoire. His grandfather Charles Duvernoy and great-uncle Frédéric Duvernoy were among the founders of the Conservatoire, and his father Charles-François and broth-

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in the following premieres: Bizet's *Carmen* (Moralès), Ernest Boulanger's *Don Mucarada*, and Ernest Guiraud's *Piccolino*. In addition, Duvernoy sang in the following operas: Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* (Mercutio), Victor Massé's *Galathée* (Gany-mède), Ambroise Thomas's *Mignon*, Ferdinand Hérold's *Le Pré-au-Clercs*, Daniel-François-Esprit Auber's *Le Domino Noir*, Victor Massé's *Les Noces de Jeannette*. Thomas-Salignac names the following Duvernoy pupils: «Mesdames Aïno Ackté, Marie Beral, Germaine Bailac, Lucy Berthet, Marthe Davelli, Darclée, Pauline Donalda, Rose Féart, Marie Lafargue, Laute-Brun, Marguërite Mérentié, Berthe Mendès, Marthe Rioton, Aline Vallandri, etc., etc.; MM. Affre, Allard, Badiali, Bourbon, Baidous, David Devries [Devriès], Gaston Dubois, Delpouget, De Clery, André Gresse, Nivette, Paty, Paulet, Albert Petit, Sylvani, Sizet, Vigneau etc..., et signataire ému de ces quelques lignes [...]». E[ustace] Thomas-Salignac, «Edmond Duvernoy», *Lyrice* 29 (juillet) 1924, 320–321.

<sup>31</sup> Aino Ackté to Emmy Achté in a letter dated 21 October 1895. Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämänsaari*, 29–30.

er Alphonse were both professors there<sup>32</sup>. Edmond Duvernoy therefore possessed many of the qualities and skills needed for furthering a talented student's career. Importantly, he was a friend and a close collaborator of the Opéra director Pedro Gailhard<sup>33</sup>, although cracks were to appear in their relationship at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Ackté, their friendship at that time was put under strain by Edmond Duvernoy's and composer Alphonse Duvernoy's insistence that the latter's unpopular ballet *Bacchus* be brought to the stage of the Opéra<sup>34</sup>; their relationship, however, did subsequently recover<sup>35</sup>. It was to appear later that Ackté herself could become the cause of disagreement between Duvernoy and Gailhard.

Pierre-Barthélemy Gheusi, whether intentionally or unintentionally, underrated Duvernoy's importance to Ackté when in 1939 he stated in passing in his memoirs that the teacher had succeeded in freeing the singer from a guttural voice formation<sup>36</sup>. True, a commendatory mention of the brightness of her voice recurs in contemporary accounts of her singing. At the beginning of the century the distinguished French critic Adolphe Jullien wrote:

In addition to her plastic talents, to her prestigious scenic instinct, she always had this clear voice with crystal-

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<sup>32</sup> On the Duvernoy family of musicians, see Pierre, *Le Conservatoire National de Musique et de Déclamation*, 443; Thomas-Salignac, «Edmond Duvernoy», 320.

<sup>33</sup> See e.g., Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 52.

<sup>34</sup> Alphonse Duvernoy's opera *Hellé*, in which Ackté performed, had only a lukewarm reception in 1900. *Ibid.*? 114, 142.

<sup>35</sup> See note 119.

<sup>36</sup> Pierre-Barthélemy Gheusi, *Cinquante ans de Paris: Mémoires d'un témoin, 1889–1938* (Paris: Plon, 1939), 76.

line sonorities which stands out marvellously among the choirs and the orchestra [...]»<sup>37</sup>.

When, during her years of study, Ackté herself was content with her own performance, she mentioned that her voice was clear, beautiful and fresh<sup>38</sup>; she was particularly proud of her trills<sup>39</sup>. According to many testimonies, the voice of Ackté was already high and full-bodied from early on<sup>40</sup>.

The principles behind Duvernoy's methods of voice training have to be compiled from many sources for, unlike Masset and many of their colleagues at the Conservatoire, he never published a singing method. Ackté writes in her memoirs:

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<sup>37</sup> «[...] en plus de ses dons plastiques, en plus de son prestigieux instinct de la scène, elle avait toujours cette voix claire, aux sonorités cristallines, qui se distingue à merveille au milieu des chœurs et de l'orchestre [...]». Here, Jullien points especially to Ackté's performance at the Opéra as Elsa in Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, a role she sang for the first time on 5 April 1899. (Adolphe Jullien, «Mademoiselle Aïno Ackté de l'Académie Nationale de Musique», *Le Théâtre*. Undated clipping from the early 20th century in the Aïno Ackté files, Arts du spectacle, Bibliothèque nationale de France).

<sup>38</sup> Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäntaari*, 23, 40, 44. On 23 July 1897, the day after she had failed to win the Conservatoire's Premier Prix in singing, she wrote to her mother: «Yesterday my voice sounded good, it was clear, beautiful and fresh. Therefore, I was not worried. [...] [in the *concours*] I could not control my voice any longer and made some pianissimo effects. The coloraturas and the high trills went quite well and correctly, but they came out as screams in consequence of my fear» (57).

<sup>39</sup> «My trill was naturally quite pure and flawless», she wrote. Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 44.

<sup>40</sup> Bis, «Ovanligt lofvande sångtalang»; K., «Fru Emmy Achtés konsert i går».

The strongest side of his tuition was the firmness and the brightness of the voice, the legato or belcanto singing reminiscent of a string of even pearls, the technical rigour, the flawless and sublime purity of style and the exceptionally clear pronunciation of the words. He paid less attention to emotion and esprit so to say. Above all things he hated the tasteless sentimentality which always distinguishes the dilettante from the true artist. [...] Duvernoy did not care much for short songs. [He claimed that] anyone who could manage arias technically and possessed a minimum of intelligence would not have any problems with singing lieder<sup>41</sup>.

In 1924, another Duvernoy pupil, tenor Eustace Thomas-Salignac (1867–1943), wrote about the teacher in the following terms:

His method was that of the great singers of his time: of Faure, Bouhy, Lasalle, Gailhard, Lherie and of the beautiful French singing, which no «bel canto» could surpass... if it still existed! With an impeccable technique, he joined qualities which have remained ours: measure and taste. Duvernoy excelled in particular through style and musicality<sup>42</sup>.

Ackté recalled with appreciation that Duvernoy forbade the practice of chest tones, only allowing these as

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<sup>41</sup> Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 39, 40.

<sup>42</sup> «Sa méthode était celle des grands chanteurs de son temps: les Faure, Bouhy, Lasalle, Gailhard, Lherie et celle du beau chant français contre lequel aucun “bel canto” ne saurait prévaloir... s’il existait encore! A une technique impeccable, il joignait les qualités qui sont demeurées nôtres: la mesure et le goût. C’est par le style et la rare musicalité que Duvernoy brillait particulièrement». Thomas-Salignac, «Edmond Duvernoy», 320–321 (320). – The singers mentioned are baritone Jean-Baptiste Faure (1830–1914), baritone Jacques Bouhy (1848–1929), baritone Jean Lasalle (1847–1909), *basse chantante* Pedro Gailhard (1848–1918), and tenor – and later baritone – Paul Lhérie (1844–1937).

rare effects<sup>43</sup>. On the other hand, at times the teacher gave his student some technical advice that she could not accept<sup>44</sup>.

«Duvernoy has started to allow me to sing [in class] in the normal way, nothing but pianissimo from the beginning to the end [...]», Aino wrote to her mother at the beginning of her second year of study, obviously implying that the first phase of her studies, which was devoted to vocalisation, was over, and that the pronunciation of the words had become a part of the singing<sup>45</sup>. She studied light soprano arias «of all times», some coloratura arias being among «the most demanding ones». She was expected to sing these from the music in the first lesson and by heart in the second lesson. In the third lesson nothing should remain to be corrected<sup>46</sup>. In her letters from her study years Ackté says that Duvernoy, besides praising her for being «very intelligent», required that she should concentrate on the various shades of the vowels «a» and «e»<sup>47</sup>. In his report on her progress for the Conservatoire he noted in January

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<sup>43</sup> Ackté, *Taiteeni taipaleelta*, 89.

<sup>44</sup> Ackté thought that Duvernoy's advice to «lower your larynx as if you were yawning» was silly, since this would have caused cramps, and she found it quite unnecessary that he should have asked a student not to move the tongue when she or he was not doing so in the first place. When Ackté's mother came to her daughter's lessons, she offered to serve as her translator; when doing so, she often added to her, in Swedish: «This is what he says, but of course you will not do so». Ackté. *Muistojeni kirja*, 40.

<sup>45</sup> Aino Ackté to Emmy Achté in a letter dated 16 October 1896. Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäankaari*, 29. For an account of the progression of vocal studies at the Conservatoire, see White, *Female Singers*, 25.

<sup>46</sup> Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 39.

<sup>47</sup> Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäankaari*, 22.

1895: «Very good student, organised and diligent» and in subsequent reports simply: «Excellent student»<sup>48</sup>. At an early stage of her engagement at the Opéra, Duvernoy reminded her in a letter: «Don't tire yourself, don't press the sound, don't imitate old English ladies [...]»<sup>49</sup>. Sometimes she was advised to save her voice and her time: «Just go through with the eyes»<sup>50</sup>. The primary importance of articulation to singing becomes evident in Duvernoy's later account of a female singer whose «bad articulation prevents her from being heard»<sup>51</sup>. When Ackté's sister Irma (later known as Irma Tervani), who also studied with Duvernoy, was changing her register to turn from a soprano to a mezzo, Duvernoy avoided giving her dramatic singing material from fear of making her neglect virtuosity<sup>52</sup>.

From what has been said above, one gets the unsettling impression – unsettling with regard to Ackté's future Wagner roles, and even more so in view of her later assumption of the title role in Richard Strauss's *Sa-*

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<sup>48</sup> In French: «Excellente élève». Archives de l'École royale de chant, de l'École royale dramatique, de l'École royale de musique et de déclamation, des Conservatoires impériaux, nationaux ou royaux de musique, ou de musique et de déclamation, à Paris (1784–1925). AN, AJ<sup>37</sup>295. Enseignement. Examens: rapports des professeurs sur leurs élèves pour les examens, généralement signés, janvier 1896 – 18 juin 1897.

<sup>49</sup> Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 11 August 1898. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>50</sup> «Repassez seulement avec les yeux». Duvernoy to Ackté in an undated card, postmarked 26 May 1900. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>51</sup> Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 2 February 1905 regarding a new Conservatoire-trained female singer at the Opéra. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>52</sup> Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 19 January 1906. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.



lome – that Duvernoy built on the cornerstones of the traditional Italian-French way of singing, which emphasised supple ornamentation, diction, expression, and taste<sup>53</sup>. The repertoire Ackté performed at the Conservatoire's seasonal examinations and at the annual prize competitions strengthens such an impression. Her repertoire on these occasions included the aria «Va, dit-elle, va, mon enfant» from Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* (14 January 1895); «Lucie. Air de la folie», in other words Lucia's famous aria from the mad scene in Donizetti's *Lucie de Lammermoor* (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), in French (May 1895); an aria from Gounod's *Philémon et Baucis* (December 1895); another «madness» aria, that from Ambroise Thomas's *Hamlet* (13 January 1896); Lucia's aria, again, together with an aria from Meyerbeer's opera *Pardon de Ploërmel* (May 1896); an extract from *Pardon de Ploërmel* (in the annual competition for the prizes in singing, 22 July 1896); the part of Marguerite in the Second Act of Gounod's *Faust* (in the competition for prizes in opera, 29 July 1896); an aria from Handel's opera *Jules César* (*Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, 15 January 1897); the aria «Ô beau pays» from Meyerbeer's opera *Les Huguenots* (31 May 1897); a duet from *Rigoletto* and, again, Marguerite's part in the Second Act of *Faust* (in the annual competition for the prizes in opera, 29 July 1897)<sup>54</sup>. The young

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<sup>53</sup> On the rivalry and attempts to merge the Italian and the French schools of singing at the Conservatoire, see White, *Female Singers*, 28–29.

<sup>54</sup> Principal sources: Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 47–54; AN, Série AJ<sup>37</sup>232, Conservatoire National de Musique, Enseignement. Concours ou examens d'admissions et examens en cours d'année: notes de séances prises par les membres du comité, puis des comités d'enseignement, et, à partir de 1871, des comités d'examen et jurys d'admission; Série AJ<sup>37</sup>252. Enseignement. Concours pour les récompenses, procès-verbaux de séances du jury. Procès-verbaux des concours annuels pour les Prix.

singing student wrote to her mother in the autumn of 1895: «I should also like to crow modern things, but what can I do?»<sup>55</sup>.

During her first autumn as a pupil at the Conservatoire, Aïno described her studies as follows in a letter to her future husband, the Finn Heikki Renvall (1872–1955):

In the Conservatoire, I have singing for 6 hours a week, solfège 6 hours a week, choral singing 2, music history lectures 2, and plastic for 1 hour. [...] In addition, I have 3 hours of solfège in private, 3 hours of French, and on top of all that, supplementary lessons at Duvernoy's place or rehearsals<sup>56</sup>.

The young singer also took private lessons in German<sup>57</sup>.

Among the female opera singers who made the greatest impression on Ackté during her time at the Conservatoire were the American Sybil Sanderson as Thaïs (in the autumn of 1894)<sup>58</sup>, the Swiss-born Lucienne

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<sup>55</sup> Aïno Ackté to Emmy Achté in a letter dated 21 October 1895. Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämänkaari*, 30.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 21. Ackté here uses the French word *plastique* (in Finnish, *plastikka*) to refer to a course on stage gesture or acting. The term *plastique* was used during the period in various ways to discuss elements from sculpture to stage gesture and facial expression. I am grateful to Kimberly White for an exchange of ideas to clarify the matter. Also see her *Female singers*, 25, and Sarah Fuchs's article «Animating Antiquity in the *Vision animée*», in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 30/2–3 (Prima Donnas and Leading Men on the French Stage), 115–137. When Ackté wrote this letter, she would not yet have known the precise content of the course, for she mentions that it had not yet started.

<sup>57</sup> Ackté in a letter to her mother dated 28 November 1895. Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämänkaari*, 33.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 22.

Bréval as Venus in *Tannhäuser* (on 23 May 1895)<sup>59</sup>, and a singer with whom she later became acquainted, Emma Calvé, as Anita in Massenet's *La Navarraise*<sup>60</sup>. On the other hand, she found the illustrious Rose Caron «awful» as Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* (on 23 May 1895): the voice sounded broken, the words were incomprehensible, and the acting was non-existent<sup>61</sup>. After hearing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in a Colonne concert Aïno wrote to her mother:

It is true that it is very beautiful, but I find that its great length makes it tiresome. And then one gets bored of the theme of the finale, for it is commonplace and is repeated unendingly. I liked it at first, but then I got tired<sup>62</sup>.

The musical tastes of young Ackté were clearly shaped by the operatic repertoire. A later letter dating from November 1905 from Duvernoy to Ackté, who was then engaged at the New York Metropolitan opera, is revealing in another way. He wrote:

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<sup>59</sup> Ackté in a letter to her mother dated 28 November 1895. Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämänkaari*, 24.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 33. On Ackté's various recollections of Calvé, see Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 223–225, 228, 229. She admired Calvé for many reasons, but criticised her for others. It is evident that she saw this French colleague as one of her most dangerous rivals.

<sup>61</sup> Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämänkaari*, 24. «Good Lord how awful she was. The voice was broken and terrible; she must have been shouting until the very end. Not one word of what she said could be understood. The Parisians (there are exceptions of course) are just enchanted. And how she acted, 'à la perfection', but I would say that she did not act at all. Sometimes she turned her eyes around and swam at times with her arms, but this did not impress me».

<sup>62</sup> Aïno Ackté to Emmy Achté in a letter dated 10 December 1895. Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämänkaari*, 34.

The Conservatoire is in a sad state. The new direction, under the pretext of reform, is unjustly convulsing the whole house through and through. This is very sad!!!!<sup>63</sup>

Duvernoy was here referring to the new reign of Gabriel Fauré as the Conservatoire's director and to his reforms, which aimed particularly at the tuition of singers. The Fauré scholar Jean-Michel Nectoux notes that the new director wanted to eliminate the aesthetic conformism which prevailed at the institution. The sixty-year-old singing professor delivered a note of objection to the reform of the singing classes to the Conservatoire direction<sup>64</sup>. In the eyes of the new management he would have appeared conservative.

### *Mastering social and media skills*

Edmond Duvernoy's contribution to the success of the young Aino Ackté extended well beyond matters of vocal training. In her book *Female Singers on the French Stage, 1830–1848* Kimberly White remarks that Parisian voice teachers used their influence in professional circles to support their students in several ways<sup>65</sup>. This is also true in the case of Duvernoy and Ackté. As was common in Paris, the teacher participated in furthering the singer's career for a long time after her graduation from the Conservatoire – and, indeed,

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<sup>63</sup> «Le Conservatoire est dans un triste état, et la nouvelle direction sous prétexte de réforme bouleverse toute la maison à tort et à travers c'est bien triste !!!!» Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 18 November 1905. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>64</sup> Jean-Michel Nectoux, «Le Conservatoire et la Schola Cantorum: une rivalité résolue?», in Anne Bongrain & Yves Gérard (dir.), *Le Conservatoire de Paris, Des Menus-plaisirs à la Cité de la musique, 1795–1995* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1996), 220–225.

<sup>65</sup> White, *Female Singers*, 23.

until the end of his life. The career of «my dear little Aïno» (to quote the way he used to start his letters to his student) was also that of Duvernoy. No clear dividing line separated the two.

Duvernoy and his wife, the renowned mezzo-soprano Adèle Franck-Duvernoy, often invited Aïno for dinner at their home, thus providing her with the opportunity to make important acquaintances<sup>66</sup>. The teacher advised her in matters concerning good and beneficial conduct within the Conservatoire. In this vein he told Aïno to study songs composed by the Conservatoire Director Théodore Dubois<sup>67</sup>. She also learned to make useful social calls. In the autumn of 1895, she wrote to her mother: «Now I need to go and study some of Veckerlin's pieces, for I shall imperatively need to pay him a call before the examination»<sup>68</sup>. Jean-Baptiste Weckerlin was a member of the Conservatoire's voice jury during the years 1871–1896<sup>69</sup>. Conservatoire-trained Emmy Achté was familiar with this kind of thinking and, in her letters from Helsinki, advised her daughter along the same lines. Duvernoy also intended to make Aïno sing for the composer Ambroise Thomas, whose

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<sup>66</sup> Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aïno Aïkté: Elämänkaari*, 34, 41.

<sup>67</sup> With regard to this, see below.

<sup>68</sup> Aïno Aïkté in a letter to Emmy Achté dated 10 December 1895. Later (31 January 1896), the singer wrote to her mother: «Duv and I have now agreed that I will sing in Veckerlin's [Weckerlin's] oratorio, which will be performed in the Erard hall in February». On 3 March 1896 she told Emmy: «The Veckerlin concert finally took place yesterday and it went very well, I had the biggest success of all. But the music is so tiresome, it seems to be the same all along. [...] Then I had my own solo, the voice was crystal clear, and everything went excellently. I had lots of applause». Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aïno Aïkté: Elämänkaari*, 34, 38, 40.

<sup>69</sup> Pierre, *Le Conservatoire national de musique et de déclamation*, 401.

opera *Hamlet* she was studying<sup>70</sup>. She had to ask her teacher for approval whenever she had an invitation to perform outside the Conservatoire. The cooperation between teacher and student did not finish when her studies were completed. Between 1897 and 1904, when Ackté was engaged as a soloist at the Opéra, and even later, Duvernoy continued to work for the benefit of his pupil, controlling her voice, directing her roles, and imparting many kinds of advice. His advice also concerned health, which was evidently a crucial matter for a performing artist. In a note (possibly from 1900) he writes: «The weather is horrible. Be careful so as not to catch a cold. If all the same you go out, take a closed carriage»<sup>71</sup>.

In 1900 Duvernoy wrote to Ackté questioning her judgement with reference to a project involving the prestigious composer Camille Saint-Saëns.

Your letter to St-Saëns needs to be very skillful, for the committee should not think that you are being pretentious; didn't Mr Gailhard tell you that he would assume the responsibility for this! In any case, if you want to send me your letter tomorrow morning before noon, I think that it would be better<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> Aino Ackté in a letter to Emmy Achté, presumably in October 1895. Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäankaari*, 32. It seems that this plan came to nothing. Thomas died in February 1896.

<sup>71</sup> Duvernoy to Ackté in an undated note, the postmark of which is unclear. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander. She wrote to her mother on 15 January 1897 when suffering from a sore throat: «I took therebentine sprays, drank milk with cognac, had honey with glycerine, clorate drops, etc.» Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäankaari*, 44.

<sup>72</sup> «Il faut que votre lettre à St-Saëns soit très habile, car il ne faudrait pas que le comité puisse supposer que c'est une prétention de votre part; M. Gailhard vous a dit n'est pas que c'était lui qui en prenait la responsabilité! Dans tous les cas

It is possible that the letter which Duvernoy wanted to inspect concerned the opera *Les Barbares*. The young singer had had the privilege of meeting and getting acquainted with Saint-Saëns at a reception in 1895<sup>73</sup>. The composer had also complimented her on her performance when, on 10 December 1899, she sang as a soloist in Handel's «Ode à la sainte Cécile» (*Ode for St. Cecilia's Day*) at a Société de Concerts du Conservatoire concert<sup>74</sup>. Akté had been meant to have a role in the world premiere of Saint-Saëns's opera *Les Barbares* on 23 October 1901, but according to her own statement illness prevented her from accepting the task<sup>75</sup>.

In 1901, in a note from Duvernoy to Akté with reference to the composer and influential critic on *Le Figaro* Alfred Bruneau, and perhaps also to the first performance of the latter's opera *L'ouragan*: «I advise you to send at once a beautiful telegram to Bruneau and tell him that since you will travel today, you were not

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si vous voulez bien m'envoyez votre lettre demain matin avant midi je crois que cela vaudrait mieux». Undated note from Duvernoy to Akté from March 1900. The postmark is unclear. The archive of Aino Akté-Jalander.

<sup>73</sup> «I have rarely heard anyone play the piano so divinely», Aino wrote to her mother after she had heard Saint-Saëns on 13 December 1895 in a lunch reception given by the Swedish-French married couple Enjolras. Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Akté: Elämänkaari*, 35.

<sup>74</sup> Akté wrote to her mother in a letter dated 11 December 1899: «He was very infatuated and said, among other things, that he had never heard a trill like mine». Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Akté: Elämänkaari*, 123. Akté had already performed this work during her studies at the Conservatoire. Akté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 52.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 128. Her daughter Glory was born on 28 November 1901.

present yesterday at his great success etc etc»<sup>76</sup>. The reminder, as a matter of fact, seems unnecessary in view of Ackté's friendship with the Bruneau family. The same year, learning a song of Dubois was included in her tight agenda, Duvernoy urged her:

It is obvious, isn't it, that if you think that you will not be able to learn Dubois's new *mélodie* in replacement of *J'ai rêvé*, he should be informed at once by telegram, and he should be told that you have sung yesterday and will be singing on Wednesday and on Saturday, and that to your great regret you think you will not have time to learn by heart the *mélodie* in question. But I think, and hope, that since it presents no difficulty either in terms of measure or of virtuosity, you will be capable of managing it easily, and I think that it will be very effective, [a fact] which is to be considered<sup>77</sup>.

While, according to Ackté herself, the increases in her salary were not the fruit of her own initiative<sup>78</sup>, it may be that Duvernoy was involved here too. In any case, in an undated note to Ackté, possibly from

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<sup>76</sup> «Je vous donne le conseil d'envoyer de suite une belle dépêche à Bruneau pour lui dire que partant aujourd'hui vous n'étiez pas là hier pour assister à son grand succès etc. etc.» Undated note from Duvernoy to Ackté. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>77</sup> «Il est bien entendu n'est-ce pas que si vous ne croyez pas pouvoir apprendre la nouvelle *mélodie* de Dubois en remplacement de *J'ai rêvé*, il faudra le prévenir de suite par dépêche, en disant que vous avez joué hier, que vous chanterez mercredi et samedi, et qu'à votre grand regret vous ne croyez pas avoir le temps d'apprendre par cœur la *mélodie* en question; mais je crois, et espère qu'étant donné qu'elle n'offre aucune difficulté ni de mesure, ni de virtuosité, vous pouvez facilement en tirer, et je la crois très a l'effet, ce qui est a considerer». Undated note from Duvernoy to Ackté, postmarked 19 January 1901. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>78</sup> Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 107.



18 March 1899 (the postmark is unclear), he mentions: «Bréval has sixty thousand francs»<sup>79</sup>. This is precisely the amount Ackté received starting from July 1900. In 1900, apparently before she signed the new contract with the Opéra, Duvernoy advised Ackté about the right kind of manner in dealing with the press: «One can say in the article that you hope to be engaged for three years on magnificent terms, but it would be in very bad taste to include the figures, that has never been done»<sup>80</sup>.

Their relationship underwent a crisis when Duvernoy, on the grounds of professional considerations, strongly objected to her marriage with Finnish lawyer and university assistant, the future senator Heikki Renvall. The singer relates in a letter to her mother the cruel scene that took place when, on 23 February 1899, she told him that she intended to get married in the coming summer.

Duvernoy got angry and expressed himself. I had to hear, for instance, that love was a minor point, that a marriage could only become a happy one in case one married for money. It could be worth considering if H. had e.g. a yearly income of 40 000 francs, but what would his position be like now! If he had an income of 10 000, everybody would know even then that I earned more, and what would it be like for him. I said that nobody would need to know that he does not have as much as I do. «Vous croyez que la Finlande est la Chine»<sup>81</sup> is the only answer I got. And besides, he said: «Do you think that

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<sup>79</sup> «Bréval a soixante mille francs». The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>80</sup> «On peut dire dans l'article que vous désirez que vous êtes engagée pour trois ans à de magnifiques conditions, mais, il serait du plus mauvais goût de mettre la chiffre cela ne s'est jamais fait». – Undated note from Duvernoy to Ackté with an unclear postmark of 1900. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>81</sup> «You think that Finland is China».

anybody would care about you as an artist any more if you were married. Indeed, it would be different if you were widely known, but you are still at the beginning. You can wait, gain wealth and reputation and then get married if you need necessarily to do that. If you do it now, let me tell you frankly that nobody will be interested in you any more. You will not get a single role anymore, for who would have the idea of giving a role to a married person on whom one cannot count any longer. Just say one word about this to Gailhard and you will see what an expression he will have on his face. As I said, do what you want (what a cheek!), but do know that when you get married, then your artistic career will be over [...].»<sup>82</sup>.

Ackté commented to her mother that she intended to wait until the end of her contract, at which point she would get married and give up her career altogether<sup>83</sup>. However, with the help of Gailhard the marriage finally took place in 1901<sup>84</sup>. This did not guarantee her happiness, however, for her personal life was thereafter divided even more between two remote countries than it had been previously. The couple had two children (in 1901 and 1908) and divorced in 1917.

There is often talk in Duvernoy's letters about paid-for services and news in the press which he considered an essential part of a career. These could also concern procedures within the Opéra, as for example when the former teacher advised his student how to prepare a visible and successful return after an absence.

[...] above all, Mr Sol must be given 100 or 150 francs on your return. This is necessary, and in addition, you should inquire at once by Colleuille if they are going to

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<sup>82</sup> Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäнкаari*, 97.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. With regard to this incident, see also Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 106–107.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 118.

put on the poster (return of Miss Achté) [.] if you see any doubt in his answer, go and see Mr Bertrand and tell him that you were advised by me to turn to him and that I consider it to be very important that your return should be mentioned on the poster [.] Since Mr Gailhard is absent, one should beware (this is strictly between you and me) [...]. Go through Faust well and don't be afraid of going to see Mr Bertrand who is the embodiment of amiability and who, I'm sure, will be happy to be agreeable with me<sup>85</sup>.

Duvernoy's letters convey the idea that with proper means a singer's career could be perfectly managed. Cooperating skilfully with the press was of prime importance. Ackté soon associated with Pierre-Barthélemy Gheusi – a librettist at the Opéra, director of *Le Gaullois littéraire*, and subsequently owner of *La Nouvelle revue*<sup>86</sup> – and with other influential men of the press. These often wrote commendatory reviews on her

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<sup>85</sup> «[...] il faut avant tout donner à M<sup>r</sup> Sol pour votre rentrée 100 ou 150<sup>frs</sup> Cela est nécessaire, de plus, il faudra vous informer de suite chez Collenille si l'on mettra sur l'affiche (rentrée de M<sup>lle</sup> Achté) [.] si vous voyez le moindre doute dans sa réponse, allez voir M<sup>r</sup> Bertrand et dites lui que c'est moi qui vous ai conseillé de vous adresser à lui et que je tiens beaucoup à ce que votre rentrée soit mentionnée sur l'affiche M<sup>r</sup> Gailhard étant absent il faut se méfier (ceci tout à fait entre nous) [...]. Repassez bien Faust et ne craignez pas d'aller voir M<sup>r</sup> Bertrand qui est amabilité même et qui j'en suis persuadé, sera heureux de m'être agréable». Edmond Duvernoy in an undated letter to Ackté. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>86</sup> Pierre-Barthélemy Gheusi (1865–1943) was co-director of the Opéra together with Gailhard in 1906–1907, Director of the Opéra-Comique starting from 1914, Director of the Théâtre-Lyrique du Vaudeville in 1919–1920, and *directeur-administrateur* of *Le Figaro*. He organised the merger of *Le Figaro* and *Le Gaulois* in 1929, only to lose his position on the paper in 1932. He was subsequently engaged again as Director of the Opéra-Comique, but resigned from this position in 1936.

and took care of her publicity. The Gheusis, too, invited her to their home, together with important figures from the upper echelons of society and French political life.

A time would come when Duvernoy's influence on Ackté's career would appear weak in comparison with that of Gailhard and Gheusi. When the singer told Gailhard about her idea of going to the USA, the Director of the Opéra yelled: «I know who incites you, it is Duvernoy, and I'm going to kick him out!»<sup>87</sup> The teacher demanded much from his student, but he was to prove more faithful than either Gailhard or Gheusi.

### *Paris – USA – Paris: the declining mastery of a career*

On 17 June 1903 Ackté signed a contract with Gailhard which satisfied her, and then, only a few days later, another contract with the New York Metropolitan Opera<sup>88</sup>. At the beginning of that year she had been very active in planning a new phase of life which would include the conquest of America. She writes in her memoirs: «Ungrateful as I was, it brought me no satisfaction anymore to be in every respect the most popular little star at the Opéra»<sup>89</sup>. Ever since her study years she had paid attention to the artistic, popular and financial successes of famous singers at the New York Metropolitan Opera and the Bayreuth Wagner Festival<sup>90</sup>. She, too, had had flattering tokens of interest from them,

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<sup>87</sup> «Duvernoy, je vais 'le foot' à la porte». Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 161.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>90</sup> «You know, Alvarez, my dearest favourite, has been engaged in New York next year for 25000 francs a month», – Ackté wrote to her mother in a letter dated 28 October 1895. Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäankaari*, 32. The French tenor Albert Alvarez was born in 1861 and died in 1933.

but the contract with the Opéra – not to mention the limitations set by Gailhard – prevented her from accepting invitations as a visiting artist<sup>91</sup>. Her Parisian world had begun to seem narrow, circumscribed, for it seemed to offer her little more than performances of Marguerite, Juliette, Elsa and Elisabeth to the point of saturation<sup>92</sup>, as well as casting her in the public's imagination as the ideal blonde, bashfully reserved virgin<sup>93</sup>. With Gailhard, problems recurred. Her cooperation with the famous tenor Jean de Reszké, of whose blockbuster value Gailhard was well aware, pleased neither of the two singers, and as a consequence Ackté soon noticed that Julia and Elsa were sung at the Opéra by new sopranos<sup>94</sup>. Her contract with the Opéra was due to end on 31 May 1903.

Many sources point to a war of nerves between Ackté and Gailhard in the spring of 1903 in the run-up to the definition of her new contract. At the same time the singer was also labouring under the burden of the prolonged illness of her little daughter Glory. The opera director did not want to lose his Finnish star. She wanted a contract with the Opéra which would allow her to work in the United States for a long period, while at the same time the contract with the Metropolitan Opera had yet to be confirmed. Gailhard made her aware of her dependent position in a harsh manner, postponing the signing of the contract and delaying decisions as to its terms. Moreover, he was in direct contact with the directors of the Metropolitan Opera and the Bayreuth Wagner Festival, to both of whom he confided infor-

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<sup>91</sup> Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 127, 139; Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäankaari*, 211–212.

<sup>92</sup> Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 101, 131, 134.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 131–134, 139–140.

mation on Ackté<sup>95</sup>. The anxiety which was to become a permanent burden on the erstwhile carefree, favourite singer seems to have originated at this time<sup>96</sup>. During that spring of 1903 she was allowed to sing in very few productions. Gailhard told Ackté that he had recommended her to Heinrich Conried, the director of the Metropolitan Opera, but her only performance in May was followed by a four-week break at the very moment when Conried was due to come to Paris to hear her<sup>97</sup>.

Emmy Achté wrote to her daughter from Helsinki:

I can understand that this is an excruciating time for you and I think that you should be prepared to learn that G:hard is not willing to accept the conditions you have proposed to him. A rising salary and so much leave, he would not be able to afford that. You are difficult to replace. Yes, that is true for a singer with your talent, but in an emergency one does use singers with less talent who can nevertheless fill their place to a satisfactory degree, and those do exist. If I were you, I should not insist so much on a higher salary but much more on leave and on the right to visit.

You should not look down on Germany so much – Vienna and Berlin; all the others who have world fame perform there often, and hear now, it is undisputed that whatever

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 141–143, 155–156, 161–162, 177–178. Ackté learned from Siegfried Wagner, the conductor of the Bayreuth Wagner Festival and Richard Wagner's son, that he had heard from Gailhard that the Opéra was unable to lend Ackté to Bayreuth, and that she did not sing in German. Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämänskaari*, 212. See also pp. 241–242.

<sup>96</sup> See Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 142.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 162. She sang in the following performances during the 1903 spring season: 11 February 1903 as Elsa; 13 February as Elisabeth; 3, 6, 9, 11, 18, 27 March, 20 April as Margiane (*La Statue*); 25 April as Nedda; 27 April as Elsa; 11 May as Nedda; 8 June as Elsa. Programmes. Opéra-Musée. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Frenchmen may say, one is considered more solid so to say when one has been applauded by the German music centres. [...] Don't be sincere with Duv[ernoy] – he will run and deliver via Capoul to G-hard. Don't admit to him that you are worried. What is more, try to hold on to the thought that it is God who ultimately steers everything towards what is best. If you are not re-engaged on the conditions which you think you can accept, that would be because God has meant it otherwise with you<sup>98</sup>.

The singer wrote to her mother:

I'm not likely to sing any more at the Opéra, for Gailhard has had a petty enough mind to take all roles from me. I should not have thought that of him. Enfin, this makes me sad, but I now have more hope than ever, for Conried has sent his secretary to inquire when I will perform, and he himself will arrive at the end of the month in order to engage me. Duv[ernoy] together with Capoul is now trying to make me sign with the opera for two years with such a condition that I would be able to travel to America at most only for two months, but I will not fall into the snare<sup>99</sup>.

Ackté managed to get her way with both opera houses independently of Duvernoy's wishes, despite the fact that Conried did not have the opportunity to hear her before engaging her. The contract signed with Gailhard on 17 June 1903 stipulated that the engagement at the Opéra would last for four months. This period would be divided into two parts: from 25 November 1903 to 24 January 1904, and from 15 May to 14 July 1904. The monthly pay was 5000 francs, and each month would include ten performances<sup>100</sup>. In retrospect it can be

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<sup>98</sup> Emmy Achté to Aïno Ackté in a letter dated 3 April 1903. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>99</sup> Aïno Ackté to Emmy Achté in a letter dated 17 May 1903. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>100</sup> AN, AJ/13/1704. Archives du Théâtre national de l'Opéra. Contrats d'engagement, 1885–1907 (6). Proportionally, there-

concluded that this is when, to all intents and purposes, Aino Ackté's position as a star singer at the Paris Opéra came to an end. When she came back from the US the 24-year reign of Gailhard as the Director of the Opéra (1884–1891, 1893–1907) was nearing its end<sup>101</sup>.

When Ackté first showed Duvernoy the offer she had received from the mighty Maurice Grau, who was at the time Director of both the New York Metropolitan Opera and London's Covent Garden<sup>102</sup>, his first reaction according to her was to lose his temper:

Asking me if I was out of my mind, and if I knew what America was, a country where the female singers ate and tore each other to pieces in jealousy, he determinedly slipped Grau's letter into his breast pocket, and I have not seen it since. I now understood that Duvernoy had nonetheless seen fit for the sake of my future contracts to boast before my director about this offer and maybe even about others I had received<sup>103</sup>.

Duvernoy's attitude towards Ackté's departure became more positive with time, a change of mind which, according to the singer, was fed by his controversy with Gailhard<sup>104</sup>.

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fore, Ackté's recompense from the Opéra was now somewhat smaller than it had been in her 1900 contract.

<sup>101</sup> Ackté recalls that even in 1903, a few years before Gailhard's tenure as Director of the Opéra came to its end, Gailhard had already appeared worn-out to her. It was at this point that she realised that he had many worries. Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 177. For her impressions on the final phase of Gailhard's leadership, see also p. 211.

<sup>102</sup> Maurice Grau (1849–1907) was the Director of the Metropolitan Opera until 1903. On Ackté's negotiations with Conried, see Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 162–163, 178.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 210–211.



Duvernoy's influence did not reach as far as the new world, but Ackté's departure for the US nevertheless did not mean that she was removed from his sphere of influence. His long letters documenting this time offer the researcher very instructive information as to the permanence of the position of the teacher-agent. During her time in the US, in the years 1904–1906, which included appearances in several American cities besides New York on the tours of the Metropolitan Opera<sup>105</sup>, in her first season she sang her old roles of Marguerite, Juliette, Elsa and Elisabeth, and in her second season Micaëla (*Carmen*), Eva (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*), Senta (*Der fliegende Holländer*), Brünnhilde (*Siegfried*), and Donna Elvira (*Don Giovanni*)<sup>106</sup>. Along with the distance from her teacher, her artistic fight for independence seems to have brought about a disconnection from the sense of security she had previously possessed. It was brought home to her that her earlier protected position no longer existed and that she was artistically and socially on unsafe ground. In the context of this paper, this period of her life can only be observed in terms of the interaction between Duvernoy and Ackté.

During this time, Duvernoy's care for Ackté displays frenetic traits. His thoughts continued to focus on Paris rather than on the American musical life of which she was now a part. In his letters to her Duvernoy repeatedly reminded her of the need not to let the Paris Opéra and the Parisian audience forget her. Victories in New York would generate interest in Paris. It was therefore essential to transmit good reviews to the French press.

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<sup>105</sup> On the tours of the Metropolitan Opera, see John Dizikes, *Opera in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven & London, 1993). 257–296.

<sup>106</sup> For further information, see Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*; Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäankaari*.

But a strange silence regarding her American conquests reigned in France. Duvernoy's letter from March 1904 reads as follows:

As for Figaro and Gaulois, a perfect silence remains. You are not telling me if you have written to Gheusi like I advised you to. After all, people should know prior to your return to Paris that you have had a great success, for you would understand that the good little comrades have seen fit to distribute the little telegram that was also sent to me and which you will find in this envelope – therefore people must know that all of this is wrong. An announcement concerning your re-engagement by Conried would be an excellent occasion to do this, for it seems to me that you cannot count on Lara. One must find something else. You give 2000 francs and not one word about you is being published, you would admit that this is extraordinary [...] <sup>107</sup>.

The press clipping Duvernoy referred to announced:

Mlle Ackté in Philadelphia. (By commercial cable to the Herald.) [...] Mlle. Ackté made her first appearance in opera here last night, singing in «Faust». She made a poor impression, the critics referring to her voice as being «clear as ice» <sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>107</sup> «Quant au Figaro et au Gaulois toujours silence complet, vous ne me dites pas si vous avez écrit à Gheusi comme je vous l'avais conseillé, car avant votre rentrée à Paris il faudra pourtant qu'on sache que vous avez eu un grand succès, car vous devez bien comprendre que les bons petits camarades ont pris soin de faire circuler la petite dépêche qu'on m'a envoyé également et que vous trouverez sous ce pli – donc, il faut qu'on sache que tout cela est faux et l'annonce de votre réengagement par Conried serait une excellente occasion pour le faire, puisqu'il me semble que vous ne pouvez pas compter sur [le journaliste René] Lara, il faut trouver autre chose, vous donnez 2000 fr et aucun mot ne paraît sur vous, vous m'avouerez que c'est extraordinaire [...]». Duvernoy in a letter to Ackté dated 31 March 1904. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>108</sup> The following undated comment of Duvernoy to Ackté is clearly related to this anonymous initiative: «The first cable

As revealed by Duvernoy's mention of the 2000 francs paid by Ackté to the journalist René Lara, publicity in Paris was fuelled with money, but this was also the case in New York. The teacher urged Ackté to spend more money on gaining a reputation there: «Believe me, I assure you that Melba, Calvé, Nordica, Sembrich etc. etc. do the same»<sup>109</sup>. Ackté felt that she had had her share of the female star singers' rivalry in America, for instance, when Emma Calvé, who moved with confidence among the local press, tried in vain to steal Ackté's role as Marguerite – an attempt which resulted, however, in public condemnation of the Finnish singer, – and when Emma Eames's friend, the critic William James Henderson of *The New York Sun*, wrote negatively about her after she had replaced Eames at the Met<sup>110</sup>. Duvernoy expressed to his student his indignation about the scheming of her rivals<sup>111</sup>.

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is by a jealous bitch». («[L]a première dépêche est l'œuvre d'une personne jalouse et rosse»). Ackté kept the clipping and wrote on it in Swedish: «Sent in Paris to several persons by an anonymous jealous person».

<sup>109</sup> Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 24 February 1904. Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämänskaari*, 223.

<sup>110</sup> Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 224–225, 227–228. I have been unable to check the information from other sources and am only quoting Ackté on these matters. She mentions in her memoirs that she was surprised to learn of Calvé's manoeuvres, for the French colleague had been friendly towards her. See also Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämänskaari*, 226, 232.

<sup>111</sup> «Your letter which I received yesterday has caused me great pain, for I can see well how much trouble you have there handling all these female intrigues. As for the defamatory articles, on top of everything else, what can one say! It is really disgusting». («Votre lettre que j'ai reçue hier m'a navré, je vois bien quelle peine vous avez à manœuvrer au lieu de toutes ces intrigues féminines; quant aux articles diffamatoires il ne manquait plus que cela, qu'est-qu'on a pu dire! Vraiment c'est

Although Ackté's letters to Duvernoy remain unknown, it can be judged from her letters to her family and from Duvernoy's answers to her own letters that in the United States she was often alarmed. The reviews, at the beginning in particular, were not as brilliant as they used to be in Paris, although she felt that the audience was devoted to her<sup>112</sup>. As time went on she integrated better and the critics became more positive. However, she did not feel at home in the United States, but found the country prosaic<sup>113</sup>. Duvernoy encouraged her to have confidence; after all she was a «true artist», and establishing popularity in New York necessarily took time. Ackté should have enough character to sing the way she normally sang<sup>114</sup>. His tone, however, is often impetuous rather than encouraging.

Why the devil do you listen to the advice of the orchestral conductor, you are an artist, you are not a pupil, but you are so afraid of displeasing someone that you act like a little girl at the beginning of her career, this is not the way to impose oneself on the public, you see that I was even below the truth when I told you what was happening in New York, you should see now that I was right, and one needs time, much time, to be accepted, but in order to achieve that one needs to have character and

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dégoutant [...]»). Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 6 January 1905. Earlier, Ackté had written to her mother from Chicago: «Yesterday I had a chat with [a manager named] Weltzer and found out from him that not only Eams [Emma Eames] but also [Lilian] Nordica have paid the press to attack me». Aino Ackté to Emmy Achté in a letter dated 13 March 1904. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander. See also Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämänskaari*, 225.

<sup>112</sup> See e.g. *ibid.*, 223.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 233. Of the American cities she visited, only Boston pleased her. Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 239.

<sup>114</sup> Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 29 December 1904. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

sing the way you habitually do, if you listen to the advice of the orchestral conductor, of the director, of the journalists, etc etc you will achieve nothing there<sup>115</sup>.

In such letters, indeed, Duvernoy appears to lack detachment, seeming rather to fight for his own status. Meanwhile, however, he tirelessly sought new occasions for Ackté to perform in Paris.

Several sources indicate that Ackté started to sing differently in the US from how she had previously sung in Paris. In spring 1904, she returned to Paris only to find that Gailhard was making it difficult for her to sing at the Opéra. Thanks to Duvernoy's initiative, she appeared as Micaëla in *Carmen*, a character whom she herself viewed as «a hen», at a charitable performance at the Opéra-Comique<sup>116</sup>. Her teacher was shocked. He was now working to conquer new roles for her, but insisted that she should be better prepared next time<sup>117</sup>. Ackté's name had been mentioned in connection with the planned premiere of Massenet's *Ariane*, but Duvernoy added:

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<sup>115</sup> «[...] pourquoi diable, écoutez vous les conseils du chef d'orchestre, vous êtes une artiste, vous n'êtes pas une élève, mais, vous avez tellement peur de déplaire à quelqu'un, que vous agissez comme une petite fille qui commence sa carrière, ce n'est pas de cette façon qu'on s'impose au public, vous voyez que j'étais encore en dessous de la vérité quand je vous disais ce qui se passait à New York, vous devez voir maintenant que c'est moi qui avait raison, et il faut du temps, beaucoup de temps avant d'être adoptée, mais pour cela il faut avoir du caractère et chanter comme vous avez l'habitude de faire, si vous écoutez les conseils du chef d'orchestre, du directeur, des journalistes, etc etc etc vous n'arrivez à rien là-bas». Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 249, 251, 255. She did, in fact, sing Elsa at the Opéra during this sojourn in Paris.

<sup>117</sup> Duvernoy to Ackté in an undated letter. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

For Massenet and [the music editor Henri] Heugel success abroad does not count, advertisement is good for the public, it is necessary, but composers want to hear before deciding [.] The contradictory rumours regarding your American seasons leave a doubt in their minds and likewise in the minds of the directors, thus it is necessary to prove right from the first rehearsals that you are in full possession of your voice and of your talent<sup>118</sup>.

He urged the singer to be confident, but his heated words probably gave rise to quite different feelings.

When one sings in all languages and in all countries one necessarily adopts bad habits, in particular when one has no one around who could guide you, I know quite well that you do not always listen to your dear mother and consequently, you are left to yourself, and if someone owes you the truth, that is me. If I told you about [Massenet's] Ariane, it was because your name was mentioned, I have been seeing Gailhard quite often for some time now, he was very kind to me at the moment of Miss Merentié's debut and he did everything in order for our relations to be good; that is why you must force yourself to be admirably prepared when you arrive in the first rehearsals and not always put your nerves in the first place, really, when you sang Michaëla in Paris you got yourself into a terrible state in order to sing an easy role, you no longer dared to take a mid-range «D», you did not dare to take a «B flat» etc etc etc [.] You must be reasonable, you are a fool to have had these ridiculous fears,

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<sup>118</sup> «[P]our Massenet et [l'éditeur de musique Henri] Heugel les succès à l'étranger ne comptent guère, le réclame c'est bon pour le public, c'est nécessaire, mais, les compositeurs veulent entendre avant de se décider les bruits les plus contradictoires sur vos deux saisons en Amérique laissent un doute dans leur esprit, comme dans celui des directeurs, il faut donc dès les premières répétitions prouver que vous êtes en pleine possession de votre voix et de votre talent». Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 18 November 1905. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

with [your] voice and your talent you have nothing to be afraid of, but in order to achieve that, you will need to start to work seriously<sup>119</sup>.

Here again, we may note Duvernoy's view of the importance of a polished diction and a good command of style – and, apparently, even of his own limitations. Ackté had already studied German during her time at the Conservatoire, and in the United States she had studied the roles of Elsa and Elisabeth with the conductor Felix Mottl and performed them in German<sup>120</sup>. Duvernoy, for his part, repeatedly warned Ackté not to sing in German and not to adopt the flaws of German singers. But since it seemed that she could not avoid singing in German, at the very least she should find

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<sup>119</sup> «Quand on chante dans toutes les langues, et dans tous les pays, on prend forcément des mauvaises habitudes surtout quand on n'a personne auprès de soi qui puisse vous guider, je sais très bien que vous n'écoutez pas toujours votre chère maman, par conséquent, vous êtes livrée à vous même, et si quelqu'un vous doit la vérité, c'est moi. Si je vous ai parlé d'Ariane [de Massenet], c'est que votre nom a été prononcé, je vois assez souvent Gailhard depuis quelque temps, au moment des débuts de Mlle Merentié il a été très gentil pour moi, et il a fait tout, pour que nos relations soient bonnes; c'est pour cela qu'il faut vous efforcer d'arriver aux premières répétitions admirablement préparée et ne pas toujours mettre vos nerfs en avant, vraiment, au moment où vous avez chanté Micaëla à Paris, vous vous mettiez dans un état épouvantable pour chanter un rôle facile, vous n'osiez plus prendre un ré en médium, vous n'osiez plus prendre un si b etc etc etc il faut vous faire une raison vous et [êtes] folle d'avoir eu ces craintes ridicules, avec voix et votre talent, vous n'avez rien à craindre, mais, pour cela, il faut vous mettre à travailler sérieusement». Duvernoy to Ackté in an undated letter. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>120</sup> Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäankaari*, 205; Ackté. *Muistojeni kirja*, 248.

enough time to prepare to perform in France and in French<sup>121</sup>.

What also seems to have been very problematic from her point of view was that Duvernoy tended to see her as a specific role type. This type was calm, serene, and embodied purity of style. Those are the qualities he referred to when assuring Ackté (probably in 1905) that the role of Marie Madeleine in Massenet's opera of the same name would suit her «marvellously».

Marie Madeleine's role suits you marvellously, but it requires great calm, a great serenity, few gestures and a very pure style, if you think that you will be able to sing it without working much and without anybody's help, then do it. But I had to tell you everything that I have told you, when you came back from America you had adopted big flaws, we did not have enough time to correct them, you gestured much too much, you sometimes sang flat, your expressions were exaggerated, these things do not work in France, remember your great successes, Joseph, the Gluck arias, Ode to Sainte Cecile etc etc, we touched perfection, we will be able to arrive there again if you want it, nobody is going to talk to you like I do, for you know

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<sup>121</sup> See e.g., Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 21 November 1908. When Aino's younger sister Irma – she too a former Duvernoy student, later known by her stage name Irma Tervani – left her French teacher to study in Dresden with Luise Reuss-Belce, Duvernoy wrote to Ackté: «I hope for her sake that she will not change her way of singing and that she will remember my advice a little, but I'm afraid that she will produce all the flaws of the German singers». («[...] je souhaite pour elle qu'elle ne change pas la manière de chanter et qu'elle se souviendra un peu de mes conseils, mais je crains bien, de lui faire produire tous les défauts des chanteurs Allemands [...]»). Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 4 March 1907. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander. Tervani was engaged by the Dresden Court Opera.



what affection I have for you and that you will always be able to count on me<sup>122</sup>.

Here, two things are worthy of note. Even Finnish listeners were later to comment on Ackté's problems with pitch and on her excessive gesticulation (in Helsinki in 1912 as Traviata)<sup>123</sup>. But what Ackté writes in her memoirs about Emma Calvé is interesting in another sense. To her mind Calvé, out of a desire to appeal to «the artistically merely half-advanced American public» by means of mannered little nonsenses, performed less well in the USA than in Paris<sup>124</sup>. Ackté's awareness of the weight of tradition in the city of her training is here revealed<sup>125</sup>. Some indications suggest

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<sup>122</sup> «[L]e rôle de Marie Madeleine vous va à merveille, seulement, il demande un grand calme, une grande sérénité, peu de gestes et un style très pur, si vous croyez pouvoir le chanter sans le travailler beaucoup et sans le secours de personne, faites le. Mais tout ce que [je] vous ai dit, je devais vous le dire, quand vous êtes revenue d'Amérique, vous aviez pris de gros défauts, nous n'avons pas eu le temps de les corriger, vous faisiez beaucoup trop de gestes, vous preniez des sons en dessous, votre mimique était très exagérée, ces choses là, ne portent pas en France, rappelez vous vos gros succès, Joseph, les airs de Gluck, l'ode à Ste Cécile etc etc, nous touchions à la perfection, nous pouvons y arriver encore si vous le voulez, personne ne vous parlera comme je le fais, car vous savez quelle affection j'ai pour vous et que vous pouvez toujours compter sur moi». Duvernoy to Ackté in an undated letter. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>123</sup> Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäankaari*, 359.

<sup>124</sup> Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 224.

<sup>125</sup> Ackté remarks in her memoirs that the French are just as sensitive in matters concerning the style of French music as the Germans are concerning their own Wagner tradition. She considered the habit of adding «tasteless pre-notes» to the vocal lines in Gounod's *Faust*, for example, a particular flaw of the German singers. *Ibid.*, 225.

that she herself consciously changed her manner of performance, scenic and perhaps even vocal, during her time in the United States.

In the end it was Lucienne Bréval who sang the title role of *Ariane* in 1906; but in the same year Ackté did perform Marie Madeleine twelve times at the Opéra-Comique, which was then under the direction of Albert Carré (1898–1914, 1919–1925)<sup>126</sup>. This project caused a catastrophic conflict between teacher and pupil – a conflict which took a long time to calm down; Duvernoy's irritated outburst in response to her letter fills eight sheets. We read that after her performances Ackté had complained to him that this role was not suited to her while, as the teacher reminded her, she had had the score for more than a year in order to decide whether to accept the role or not. Gailhard had been troubled to hear her so badly prepared for a role; the opera director had recognised neither her voice nor her voice projection [émission]. In Gailhard's mind, Duvernoy was too fond of Aïno and her sister Irma to notice their shortcomings. But the teacher had also heard other negative comments from the audience. On top of everything else, he revealed to her that several subscribers at the Opéra, «her friends», had been impatient when they heard her sing notes below pitch in *Roméo et Juliette* after her arrival from the US. Duvernoy concluded that his students were for him like his children, and Ackté was the one in whom he had been the most interested. Therefore he had been troubled to read her letter, as had his wife<sup>127</sup>. In spite of this collision of minds and others of the same type, their cooperation in France continued. Duvernoy found new

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<sup>126</sup> Ackté, *Taiteeni taipaleelta*, 86.

<sup>127</sup> Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 15 August 1906. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

occasions for Ackté to perform and gave her professional feedback, but the encounters were painful.

The joint leadership of the Opéra under André Messager and Leimistin Broussan (1908–1914) had already begun when Ackté wrote to her mother from Paris on the eve of a performance of Massenet's opera *Thaïs*, which was to take place on 26 February 1910:

But Duv drives me crazy. He is so restless and sure that everything will go badly that he precipitates everything, he watches every tone no matter how beautifully I take it. It is no more the matter of singing wrong now, but of thousands of other things. [...] [Duvernoy] has always known how to suck the life out of me, and he is now worse than ever<sup>128</sup>.

*Thaïs* was for Ackté a success with the public and with the press, but Messager was not content. When the Opéra required that she should buy a certain number of tickets for her next performances in *Tannhäuser* (she had already purchased tickets for *Thaïs*), she took offence and left the Opéra, claiming that she was ill. Her two performances as *Thaïs* were the last she ever gave at the Opéra<sup>129</sup>.

Ackté had always wanted to study a more modern repertoire than the one her Parisian surroundings required, and in which she had been trained as a singer<sup>130</sup>.

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<sup>128</sup> Aino Ackté to Emmy Achté in a letter from Paris dated 9 February 1910. Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäankaari*, 305–306.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 308; Ackté, *Taiteeni taipaleelta*, 175–176.

<sup>130</sup> What Ackté meant by «modern» is by no means evident. The Paris Conservatoire did include repertoire specified as modern in its curricula and in its *concours*. However, singers were not allowed to compete with works that had had their first performance more recently than ten years beforehand and which were not currently performed in one of the nationally subsidised theatres. A student who competed for the first time

She herself remarks in her memoirs that she had started to find realistic roles more of a challenge than her old roles at the Opéra<sup>131</sup>. Her intelligence and her power of scenic transformation granted her full potential for this orientation, which was manifest in Leipzig in 1907 in her singing and dancing the title role of Richard Strauss's *Salome*, and later, in 1910, at London's Covent Garden opera house, where she performed the same work under the baton of the composer. She prepared this role very seriously, for example by practising the «Dance of the Seven Veils» under the direction of the Paris Opéra dancer Emma Sandrini and studying the inner world of *Salome*<sup>132</sup>. She later considered her debut as Marguerite at the Paris Opéra and her London performance of *Salome* her greatest triumphs<sup>133</sup>. Concerning *Salome*, Duvernoy had written to her: «It is a very hard role which will make you lose completely the qualities of charm that are the basis of your reputation»<sup>134</sup>.

After her triumph, Duvernoy in his unbridled manner wrote to her:

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was only allowed to chose repertoire classified as «classique». A foreign first-year student was not allowed to compete at all. Pierre, *Le Conservatoire National de Musique et de Déclamation*, 394. Ackté's understanding of modern, however, would appear to stand for new music in a more general sense.

<sup>131</sup> Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 131, 134.

<sup>132</sup> Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäankaari*, 273; Sivuoja-Kauppalä, «Salome's slow dance with Lord Chamberlain».

<sup>133</sup> Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäankaari*, 320.

<sup>134</sup> «[C]'est un rôle très dur qui vous fera perdre complètement les qualités de charme qui ont fait votre reputation». Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 10 December 1907. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

We are very happy about the good news in your letter. Although I do not like Salome's music and I find it dangerous for the voice, I'm willing to admit that a great effect can be made through it [...] <sup>135</sup>.

But, as Ackté wrote to her mother, she herself had noticed that *Salome*, while being artistically rewarding, tired her, and that her voice was breaking <sup>136</sup>. After this her career started to decline. Ackté's final years as an opera singer were marked by tiring tours and home-sickness, and after 1913 she no longer appeared on foreign opera stages.

This energetic woman did not remain idle, however. In 1911 she was one of the founders of the Domestic Opera of Finland (Suomen Kotimainen Ooppera), later called the Finnish Opera, and today the Finnish National Opera (Suomalainen Ooppera, Suomen Kansallisooppera). In 1912 she founded the Savonlinna opera festival, and the following year commissioned from Sibelius what was to become one of his most modernist works, *Luonnotar* op. 70, for soprano and orchestra;

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<sup>135</sup> «Nous sommes bien heureux des bonnes nouvelles contenus dans votre lettre, quoique la musique de Salome ne me plaise guère et que je la trouve dangereuse pour la voix, je reconnais volontiers qu'on peut y faire beaucoup d'effet[...]». Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 28 November 1910. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>136</sup> This she had noticed already before the London performances of *Salome*. She wrote to her mother from Frankfurt on 19 September 1910: «These Salome evenings are terrible; I have all the time the feeling that my heart is tearing». On 27 September she asked Emmy to inquire from a doctor what medicine she could take in order to make a tired and hoarse voice bright. The end of the year would have been extremely hard for her. After the London *Salome* premiere, which took place on 8 December 1910, she was invited to perform the role four times during six days. See Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämänskaari*, 281, 286, 313–314, 322.

she sang the solo part at its first performance in England, at the Gloucester music festival, on 10 September 1913. She wrote several books, and a libretto based on the novel *Juha* by the Finnish writer Juhani Aho for the operas of the same name by Aarre Merikanto and Leevi Madetoja. Her farewell performance at the Domestic Opera took place in 1920, but she taught and performed in Finland as well as in Paris even after that time. In 1938–1939 she was the Director of the Finnish Opera<sup>137</sup>.

### *Conclusions*

In Finland Edmond Duvernoy is sometimes portrayed as a tyrant, but this would seem to be an unjust simplification<sup>138</sup>. A passion for excellence is evidence of the Western learned music culture, and this phenomenon contributes to the power structures that are part and parcel of it. It probably seemed evident to Duvernoy that his responsibilities as a teacher continued after a student had finished his or her Conservatoire studies. After all, the three-year voice training of the Paris Conservatoire, as Kimberley White states, had long been criticised for being too short, and for leading to too narrow a field of specialisation<sup>139</sup>. As far as Ackté

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<sup>137</sup> *A dossier d'artiste* on Aïno Ackté in the Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, summarises the outlines of her career.

<sup>138</sup> A different image of Edmond Duvernoy is revealed by the fact that in the early years of the 20th century, in the wake of Aïno Ackté's success, he was a favoured teacher of many Finnish female singers. Ackté's younger sister Irma Achte, later called Irma Tervani (1887–1936), studied with him at the Conservatoire. His successful Finnish private students included Hanna Granfelt, Greta von Haartman, Dagmar Hagelberg-Raekallio, Mally Burjam-Borga, and Agnes Poschner.

<sup>139</sup> White, *Female Singers*, 30.

is concerned, her need of Duvernoy's cooperation is not exceptional, for few opera singers can manage a long-term career without having their voice controlled by a voice coach. What dissatisfied Duvernoy was the fact that Ackté did not, in his view, prepare her later Parisian performances well enough. His anxieties concerning her after her period of engagement at the Opéra suggest that she had left his ideal of singing far behind, while his reputation was at stake with every Parisian performance of hers.

It is true that in various sources we find Aïno complaining about his negative and excessive demands, but these dark tones are by no means consistent. Indeed, the entries in her memoirs seem more like reminiscences of her feelings at specific moments rather than a final judgement of him as a person and an associate. In 1927 she wrote in a travel account from Paris, which was published in a Finnish periodical:

My famous 82-year-old singing teacher Edmond Duvernoy died recently. He was brisk and humorous, just as he had been in his best days, and yet I arrived here as if I was supposed to accompany him to his grave. Two days before his unexpected death he wanted to hear me sing. Indeed, this is what I did. I thank heaven for it<sup>140</sup>.

Duvernoy could be very patronising, and his advice could be rational to the point of being cynical. It is obvious that he did not fully grasp Ackté's vulnerability, which was nourished by professional rivalry and intrigues as well as by separation from her loved ones. But if the relations between the teacher and student were painfully symbiotic at times, at their best they were close, warm and inspiring. The elaborate reports of the operatic events in Paris that Duvernoy supplied to her during her absences from the French capital make

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<sup>140</sup> Aino Ackté-Jalander, «Päiväkirjastani», *Aitta* 3 (1 March) 1927, 35–37 (37).

the couple look like two mutually admiring colleagues and soulmates. It can hardly be denied that he paved the way for Ackté, without sparing his own efforts. His contribution to his student's success was crucial.

In 1919 at the age of 74 Duvernoy wrote to Ackté who was then 42 years old:

As you know well, I have loved you. I dreamed of an excellent singer's career for you. It is sad to hear you say that you did not always have the wish to ask for my advice, but remorse does not help, there is no point in looking back. Courage, dear little Aino. I embrace you tenderly<sup>141</sup>.

He advised her generously when in the 1920s she returned to Paris to found a short-lived private singing school<sup>142</sup>. Warmth, benevolence and artistic admiration are the undertone of the letters that he wrote to Ackté over several decades, almost up until his death in 1927.

Duvernoy's artistic outlook was apparently dated. The skills he could provide were limited and closely tied to local traditions. It seems imprudent from today's perspective that Ackté should have performed numerous Wagner roles at a very young age. It is striking that in his way of thinking they were not mutually exclusive of roles implying a supple coloratura singing; after her engagement at the Opéra was over he continued to imagine her as the Countess in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*<sup>143</sup>, and even as Ophelia in Adam's *Ham-*

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<sup>141</sup> Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 18 January 1919. Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämänskaari*, 374.

<sup>142</sup> Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 19 July 1926. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>143</sup> Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 19 January 1906. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander. It was agreed between director Albert Carré and Ackté in 1905 that she would sing the Countess at the Opéra-Comique the following year, but in the event this plan came to nothing. Ackté, *Taiteeni taipaleelta*, 29.



Aldem Elou et dan Elisabete, et il n'est  
pas le seul qui pensent comme lui.

Malgré mes conseils vous avez quitté très  
tôt l'Opéra, où vous étiez adoré,

un directeur et un maître qui ne voulaient  
que votre bien, vous étiez aux yeux de nous

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restés au théâtre de vos débuts pendant

trois ans encore, vous auriez pu y

faire une création qui aurait consolidé  
votre réputation; mais, il n'y avait

rien à faire, vous vouliez vous marier

et parcourir l'Amérique sans

On 22 June 1924, two and a half years before his death, the aged Edmond Duvernoy wrote to Aino Ackté:

Despite my advice you left the Opéra, where you were adored, *too soon*, [you had there] a director and a teacher who only wanted the best for you, you were young enough to stay at the theatre of your debut for three more years, you could have created roles which would have consolidated your reputation; but there was nothing to be done, you wanted to get married and tour America without [your arrival] being preceded by a lot of publicity, as my old friend Capoul often told you.

Photo: The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander, Coll. 4, Manuscript Department, National Library of Finland, Helsinki

let<sup>144</sup>, Paris was for him the centre of the world, and he could not ensure for his student an enduring international success. Duvernoy might have been right when he pointed out to his «dear little Aino» that she should have consolidated her position in Paris, where she was worshipped, before leaving for the Met<sup>145</sup>. The most beautiful words of admiration he could have expressed were included in a letter to Ackté from 1907: «There is only Paris for true artists, and now you see how much one misses it when one is no longer there»<sup>146</sup>.

Paradoxically, the available materials documenting Ackté's period of great success in Paris show the Finnish singer in a subordinate position. She was there reminded of her expected loyalty towards France, the country that had provided her with free musical training<sup>147</sup>. She was considered, one might say, as French property; this line of thought would have been one of the causes of Gailhard's offence. Through Ackté's case we can also therefore apprehend the rivalry and the interdependence of the different opera capitals of the world. Singers, opera directors and impresarios circulated between the power centres of Paris and New York. Repertoires were shared, and the press reported on the

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<sup>144</sup> Ackté had agreed with Gailhard before leaving Paris for the US that on her return she would perform the role of Gilda at the Opéra. However, another singer was given this role. Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 211, 239. See also Savolainen & Vainio (eds), *Aino Ackté: Elämäankaari*, 226.

<sup>145</sup> Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 22 May 1924. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>146</sup> «[I]l n'y a que Paris pour les vraies artistes, et vous voyez maintenant, combien on le regrette quand on n'y est plus». Duvernoy to Ackté in a letter dated 10 December 1907. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

<sup>147</sup> With regard to this, see Pedro Gailhard to Ackté in a letter dated 30 April 1902. The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander.

news on both sides of the Atlantic. Ackté's particular French merits, her mastery of the French language, repertoire and style, as well as her French morality, meant that she was not as indispensable in New York and the United States as she was in Paris, not least because she had no influential agent on her side in New York to equal Duvernoy in Paris, and no one there to control her voice<sup>148</sup>.

Under what conditions can letters open for us a person from the past and be of help in biographical research? – asks Maarit Leskelä-Kärki. She reminds us: «Correspondence always implies at least two parties, two subjects who might be telling and reading different stories, two voices through which the self is continuously being defined and redefined»<sup>149</sup>. If Ackté's missing letters to Duvernoy were found, they would not necessarily tell the same story as her teacher's do. Gailhard's reproach of Ackté in his conversation with Duvernoy reminds us of the non-independent position of the teacher within the network of the Parisian actors. The stories of Duvernoy and Ackté must be seen as but one part of the stories of many subjects in their surroundings and of the preconditions set by institutions; it is not possible to go into these in any greater depth here. The bigger picture of the content and the factors affecting Ackté's career thus remains incomplete.

Finally, a comparison with the other items in Aino Ackté's files illuminates the importance of this teacher-student relationship in a specific manner. The 117 known letters, notes or postcards from Edmond Duver-

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<sup>148</sup> For Ackté's understanding of the role of opera singers' press agents in the US, see Ackté, *Muistojeni kirja*, 228–229.

<sup>149</sup> Leskelä-Kärki, «Kirjeet ja kerrotuksi tulemisen kaipuu», 245.

noy to Ackté can, in terms of their number and of their time span of almost thirty years, be placed on a par with those from her dear family members – her mother Emmy Achté (625 items), her sister Irma Tervani-Wieck (207), her second husband Bruno Jalander (198), and her father, Lorenz Achté (17)<sup>150</sup>. I hope to have established that not only do they furnish an invaluable documentation of Ackté’s life and career, but that they also serve as an important source of information about Parisian operatic culture more generally.

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<sup>150</sup> The archive of Aino Ackté-Jalander. Additionally, 203 items from the years 1899–1903 from Maurice Colleuille, *directeur de la scène* of the Opéra, to Ackté have also survived; with one exception, these are not letters but cards announcing the times and places of the repetitions and the spectacles.