

Tiziana Leucci*

Théophile Gautier's "Orientalist" ballet librettos and novels as Marius Petipa's silenced sources of inspiration

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Email: danzaericerca@unibo.it

Www: <https://danzaericerca.unibo.it/>

Abstract

Lavorando sulla genesi dei due balletti a soggetto indiano *La Bayadère* e *Il Talismano*, composti da Marius Petipa a San Pietroburgo, mi sono resa conto di quanto il *maître de ballet* per le sue creazioni abbia tratto spunto dalle opere di Théophile Gautier, benché nelle sue memorie non ne citi mai il nome. In passato ho dimostrato come Petipa abbia costruito i tratti essenziali delle protagoniste dei suoi balletti "indiani" ispirandosi alle eroine di Gautier: la *bayadère* Nikia su modello di *Giselle*, e l'*apsaras* Nirriti su quello di *Sacountala*. In questo saggio analizzerò i balletti *Sacountala* e *La Péri*, che influenzarono profondamente i due balletti "indiani" di Petipa. Prenderò qui in esame anche due romanzi di Gautier che fornirono il soggetto di due altri balletti di Marius Petipa: *La Fille du Pharaon* e *Le Roi Candaule*, per poi ipotizzare un possibile incontro, avvenuto in Francia o in Russia, tra Petipa e Gautier.

By working on the genesis of the two ballets having an Indian plot, both composed by Marius Petipa in St. Petersburg, *La Bayadère*, and *The Talisman*, I realised how deeply the French *maître de ballet* drew on some novels and librettos written by Théophile Gautier, though he never mentioned him in his writings. Previously, I demonstrated how Marius Petipa conceived the female roles of the temple dancer Nikia in *La Bayadère*, and the *apsaras* Nirriti in *The Talisman*, by taking as examples the heroines of Gautier's ballets *Giselle, ou les Willis* and *Sacountala*. This time I will focus on the librettos for the ballets *La Péri* and *Sacountala*, which considerably influenced the plots of Petipa's "Indian" ballets. In this contribution, I will also deal with some of Gautier's novels which inspired Petipa for the creation of two other ballets, *The Daughter of the Pharaoh* and *Le Roi Candaule*. Finally, I'll discuss the issue of whether Gautier and Petipa ever met, either in France or in Russia.

* CEIAS, EHESS-CNRS, Paris; Conservatoire de musique et danse "Gabriel Fauré", Les Lilas, France.

Tiziana Leucci

Théophile Gautier’s “Orientalist” ballet librettos and novels as Marius Petipa’s silenced sources of inspiration ¹

“To my friend, Gérard de Nerval, in Cairo, [...] I really feel I have lived in the East, and when I dress up in a caftan and an authentic tarboosh at Carnival time, I seem to be donning my everyday clothes”.

“The earth, symbolised by Achmet, stretches its arms to the sky, which looks tenderly down to him through the azure eyes of the Péri”
(Théophile Gautier, *Opéra: La Péri*, in “La Presse”, 25th July 1843)².

“My father was a premier danseur and ballet master, and my mother enjoyed considerable renown as a performer of first roles in tragedies. [...] At seven, I started instruction in the art of dancing in the class of my father, who broke many bows on my hands in order to acquaint me with the mysteries of choreography”
(Marius Petipa, *Mémoires*, 1905)³.

Introduction

Over the past several years, by working on the genesis of the two ballets having an Indian plot,

1. A first shorter version of the present article was presented on 12th March 2021 at the International *Hommage à Marius Petipa* 2021 conference, organized by the Agrippina Vaganova Ballet Academy, in St. Petersburg. I would like to thank the organizers, Boris Illarionov, Natalia Zozulina, Olga Rozanova, Larisa Abyzova and Svetlana Lavrova, for inviting me to present my paper at this prestigious scientific and artistic event. I am also very grateful to Karina Kozlova for her remarkable translation into the Russian language of an abridged version of this text, which was read during the conference and will be published in the Journal of the Vaganova Academy. I would like to thank for our inspiring discussions about the French *maitre de ballet* my friends and colleagues Toni Candeloro, Donatella Gavrilovich, Pascale Melani and Pierre Philippe-Meden for having organized together, in 2018 in Rome and in Paris, the two Marius Petipa’s bicentenary commemoration international conferences, as well as Christine Bayle, Valentina Bonelli, Grigory Chicherin, Amy Growcott, Doug Fullington, Laura Hormigón, Concetta Lo Iacono, Flavia Pappacena and Jane Pritchard. Last but not least, special thanks are due to Elena Randi and Elena Cervellati, editors of the journal “Danza e ricerca. Laboratorio di studi, scritture, visioni”, and to Arianna Castellarin and Sara Gesuato (University of Padova) for kindly reading and revising the English text of this contribution.

2. Quoted in: Ivor Guest (texts selected, translated and annotated by), *Gautier on Dance. Théophile Gautier*, Dance Books, London 1986, pp. 113, 115.

3. Quoted in: Marius Petipa, *Russian Ballet Master. The Memoirs of Marius Petipa*, edited by Lillian Moore, translated by Helen Whittaker, Adam and Charles Black, London 1958, pp. 1, 3.

La Bayadère (1877), and *The Talisman* (1889), both composed by Marius Petipa (1818-1910) in St. Petersburg, I realized how deeply the French *maître de ballet* (fig. 1) had been inspired by some of the novels and the ballet librettos written by his fellow countryman, Théophile Gautier (1811-1872). Besides a large number of novels, tales, travelling accounts, poems, plays, theatrical reviews, etc., Gautier (fig. 2) wrote the librettos for twelve ballets, only six of which were staged⁴. The first one was *Giselle, ou le Wilis* (1841), followed by *La Péri* (written in 1842 and performed in 1843), *Pâquerette* (1851), *Gemma* (1854), *Sacountalâ* (1858) inspired by an ancient Indian play, and *Yanko le bandit* (1858). The first five ballets premiered at the Paris Opéra, whereas the last one was produced at the Porte-Saint-Martin Theatre. Of the twelve librettos, three were lost and one remained unfinished⁵.

In some of my previous works, I showed how inspiring the plots of the two Gautiers ballets *Giselle* and *Sacountalâ* had been for Marius Petipa, especially for the elaboration of the leading female roles of the Indian temple dancer Nikia in *La Bayadère*, and for the Indian celestial fairy, the *apsaras* Niriti in *The Talisman*⁶. Besides *Giselle* and *Sacountalâ*, in this article I would like to focus also

4. See: Théophile Gautier, *Théâtre. Mystères, comédies et ballets*, Charpentier, Paris 1872; Edwin Binney, *Les ballets de Théophile Gautier*, Nizet, Paris 1965; Ivor Guest (texts selected, translated and annotated by), *Gautier on Dance*, cit.; Walter Sorell, *Dance in Its Time*, Columbia University Press, New York 1986, pp. 251-293; Théophile Gautier, *Ecrits sur la danse, chroniques choisies, présentées et annotées par Ivor Guest*, Actes Sud, Arles 1995; Lynn Garafola (editor), *Rethinking the Sylph. New Perspectives on the Romantic Ballet*, Wesleyan University Press, Hanover and London 1997; Elena Randi, *Il balletto nel pensiero di Gautier*, in "Il castello di Elsinore", n. 38, 2000, pp. 5-24; Elena Randi, *La fusione dei sensi e dello spirito: Gautier e il balletto*, in Id., *Anatomia del gesto. Corporeità e spettacolo nelle poetiche del Romanticismo francese*, Esedra, Padova 2001, pp. 153-203; Hélène Laplace-Claverie, *Ecrire pour la danse. Les livrets de ballet de Théophile Gautier à Jean Cocteau (1870-1914)*, Honoré Champion, Paris 2001; Elena Cervellati, *Madrigale panteista. Poetica e ideologia del corpo danzante negli scritti di Théophile Gautier*, in "Teatro e Storia", vol. XXVII, 2006, pp. 221-242; Elena Cervellati, *Théophile Gautier e la danza. La rivelazione del corpo nel balletto del XIX secolo*, CLUEB, Bologna 2007; Elena Cervellati, *From the written word to the dancing body. Libretto and performance practice in Théophile Gautier*, in Society of Dance History Scholars [(edited by)], *Re-Thinking Practice and Theory. International Symposium on Dance Research / Repenser pratique et théorie. Colloque international de recherche en danse*, Proceedings [of the] Thirtieth Annual Conference / Actes [du] Trentième colloque annuel (SDHS/CORD/CND, Paris 21-24 June 2007), Society of Dance History Scholars, Paris 2007, pp. 300-305; "Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier", numéro monographique *Gautier et les arts de la danse*, sous la direction de Martine Lavaud, Corinne Perrin-Saminadayar, Giovanna Bellati et Patrick Berthier, n. 31, 2009; François Brunet, *Théophile Gautier et la danse*, Honoré Champion, Paris 2010; Louise Hingand, *Le livrets de ballet de Théophile Gautier*, travail d'études et de recherche, Master "Poétique et Histoire Littéraire", Université de Pau et de Pays de l'Adour, Pau 2017.

5. "Pour Gautier, les livrets de ballet n'étaient pas le résultat d'une exubérance de jeunesse qu'il aurait dépassée ou remplacée plus tard par des œuvres conventionnelles. Son premier ballet, écrit à l'âge de vingt-six ans, avait été encouragé par le cercle d'amis bohèmes avec lesquels il vivait à l'Impasse du Doyenné. Le dernier était son œuvre finale qu'il termina juste avant de mourir à l'âge de soixante-et-un ans. Gautier n'essaya jamais de nier qu'il avait fait ces livrets. Même si ce genre était très mineur" (Edwin Binney, *Les ballets de Théophile Gautier*, cit., p. 15).

6. See: Tiziana Leucci, *Devadāsī e Bayadères: tra storia e leggenda. Le danzatrici indiane nei racconti di viaggio e nell'immaginario teatrale occidentale (XIII-XX secolo)*, CLUEB, Bologna 2005; Tiziana Leucci, *Between Seduction and Redemption. The European Perception of India's Temple Dancers in Travel Accounts and Stage Productions from the Thirteenth to the Nineteenth Century*, in Frank Kouwenhoven — James Kippen (edited by), *Music, Dance and the Art of Seduction*, Eburon-Chime, Delft 2013, pp. 261-287, pp. 421-429 (notes & bibliography); Tiziana Leucci, *L'héritage de l'orientalisme et du romantisme dans deux ballets à sujet indien de Marius Petipa: "La Bayadère" (1877) et "Le Talisman" (1889)*, in Pascale Melani (édité par), *À la recherche de Marius Petipa. Un itinéraire franco-russe. Gros plan sur "La Bayadère"*, MSHA, Pessac 2019, pp. 91-102; Tiziana Leucci, *Nasledie romantizma i orientalizma v baletach Mariusa Petipa s indijskim motivom: "Bajaderka" (1877) i "Talisman" (1889)* [*The legacy of Romanticism and Orientalism in the ballets of Marius Petipa with an Indian motif*]

on Gautier's libretto for *La Péri*, which equally influenced the plots of both Petipa's "Indian" ballets. I will also deal here with two other creations by Petipa, *The Daughter of the Pharaoh* (1862) and *Le Roi Candaule* (*The King Candaule*, 1868), which were also inspired by two novels written by Théophile Gautier.

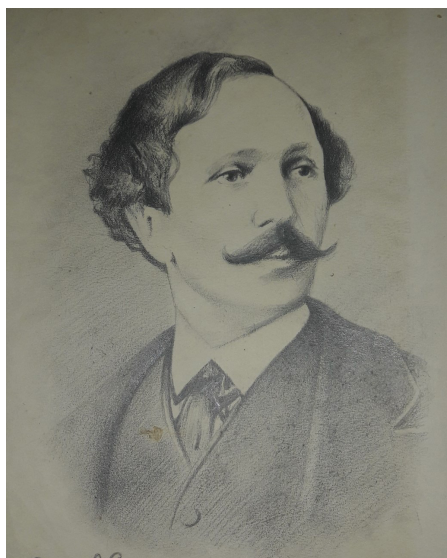


Figure 1. Graphite drawing pencil portrait of Marius Petipa by Anonimous (second half of 19th century). Courtesy of Toni Candeloro's collection.



Figure 2. Engraving by Amédée Bodin after the portrait of Théophile Gautier by Théodore Chassériau (19th century). Public domain.

Intrigued by all those works, I started to wonder if Marius Petipa and Théophile Gautier ever met, dialogued, or had any personal connection or artistic collaboration. Actually, though Gautier's librettos and some of his novels were such a precious source of inspiration for Marius Petipa, he never mentioned the name of Théophile Gautier in either his *mémoires* or his diaries⁷. Most probably,

"*La Bayadère*" (1877) and "*The Talisman*" (1889)], in "Bulletin of Vaganova Ballet Academy", n. 6, 2019, pp. 22-32, online: <https://vaganov.elpub.ru/jour/article/view/1224/899> (Accessed 10/26/2022); Tiziana Leucci, *L'immaginario romantico e orientalista nei due balletti a soggetto indiano di Marius Petipa: "La Bayadère" (1877) e "Il Talismano" (1889)*, in Donatella Gavrilovich — Annamaria Corea (a cura di), *Marius Petipa. Lo Zar del balletto classico (1818-1910). Danza, musica, arte e società*, UniversItalia, Roma 2019, pp. 81-95 (text), pp. 203-211 (images); Tiziana Leucci, *La herencia del Romanticismo y del Orientalismo en el ballet de temática india "La Bayadere" (1877) de Marius Petipa*, in Laura Hormigón (Edición de), *Marius Petipa. Del ballet romántico al clásico [Marius Petipa. From Romantic to Classic Ballet]*, Publicaciones de la Asociación de Directores de Escena de España, Madrid 2020, pp. 143-154.

7. See: Marius Petipa, *Russian Ballet Master. The Memoirs of Marius Petipa*, cit.; Marius Petipa, *Mémoires*, traduits du russe et complétés par Galia Ackerman et Pierre Lorrain, Actes Sud, Arles 1990; Marius Petipa, *The Diaries of Marius Petipa*, edited, translated and introduced by Lynn Garafola, in "Studies in Dance History", vol. III, n. 1, Spring 1992; Marius Petipa, *Memorie*, a cura di Valentina Bonelli, Gremese, Roma 2010; Marius Petipa, *Journal du maître de ballet des Théâtres Impériaux Marius Ivanovitch Petipa*, édition établie, préfacée et annoté par Pascale Melani, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, Pessac 2017; Marius Petipa, *Mémoires du maître de ballet des Théâtres impériaux Marius Ivanovitch Petipa*, transcription et traduction par Pascale Melani, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, Pessac 2018; Marius Petipa, *Memuary i Dokumenty [Memoirs and documents]*, preface and comments by Sergej Konaev,

the fact that he wrote them at a late age might justify such an omission: either he simply forgot to mention him or, for some other reasons unknown to us, he did not want or did not find it relevant to mention him. On the other hand, in his writings, Gautier referred to the proficiency of Marius Petipa's elder brother Lucien Petipa (1815-1898), to the beauty and talent of Marius' first Russian wife (fig. 3), Marija Sergueevna Surovščikova-Petipa (1836-1882), and to the artistic quality of the entire Petipa family⁸, as we will soon see. Indeed, Marius Petipa's parents and siblings were all performing artists: his mother, Victorine Morel-Grasseau (1794-1860), was an actress; his father Jean-Antoine Petipa (1787-1855) and his elder brother Lucien in those days were well-known dancers, choreographers and teachers⁹; Jean Petipa (1820-1873) was also a dancer; and the younger sister Amata Victorine (1824-1905) was an opera singer, whereas the eldest sister Elisabeth Petipa (1816-?) did not launch an artistic career¹⁰, although she learnt music and dance.



Figure 3. Photo portrait of the Marius Petipa first Russian wife, the ballerina Marija Surovščikova-Petipa, in the role of Lizetta in the Petipa's ballet *Parisian Market*, by Disderi, Paris 1864. Public domain.

From his early childhood and throughout his long and prestigious career as a dancer and

National Central Theatre Museum "A. A. Bachrušin", Moscow 2018; Marius Petipa, *Diari 1903-1907*, a cura di Valentina Bonelli, DNZ, Milano 2018.

8. See Théophile Gautier, *Voyage en Russie*, Charpentier, Paris 1867.

9. See: Jean-Philippe Van Aelbrouck, *Marius Petipa, une enfance bruxelloise (1819-1835)*, in "Slavica Occitania", numéro monographique *De la France à la Russie. Marius Petipa*, édité par Pascale Melani, n. 43, 2016, pp. 41-81; Romain Feist, *Lucien, l'autre Petipa*, in "Slavica Occitania", numéro monographique *De la France à la Russie. Marius Petipa*, édité par Pascale Melani, n. 43, 2016, pp. 83-91; Emmanuelle Delattre-Destenberg, *Un Petipa à l'Opéra: Lucien Petipa (1815-1889)*, in Pascale Melani (édité par), *À la recherche de Marius Petipa. Un itinéraire franco-russe. Gros plan sur "La Bayadère"*, cit., pp. 19-25.

10. Lynn Garafola, *Introduction*, in Marius Petipa, *The Diaries of Marius Petipa*, cit., p. xxv.

choreographer, Marius Petipa, who held the prestigious position of *premier maître de ballet* of the Russian Imperial Theatres, must have met many artists, composers, writers and theatre directors, that he probably could not remember and mention all of them in his *Mémoires*, written in the last years of his life, when he was quite disappointed and bitter due to the forced retiring from his artistic activities, and particularly after having been affected, in 1903, by the lack of success of his ballet *The Magic Mirror*¹¹.

Petipa wrote his *Memoirs* in a very dark hour, in 1905, when he was a disheartened and discouraged old man. His last ballet, *The Magic Mirror*, had been a disaster. His assistant and *protégé*, Lev Ivanov¹², whom he had hoped would succeed him as Ballet Master of the St. Petersburg Imperial Theatres, had died four years before. Alexander Gorsky, a young choreographer with whose experiments Petipa had little sympathy, seemed to be usurping his position. [...] In an attempt to justify his position and call attention to the length and scope of his distinguished career as a dancer and choreographer, Petipa decided to write his memories. He was eighty-six years old. Elderly people often recall most vividly the days of their early youth, and Petipa was no exception. [...] The end of his career found him full of doubts and disappointed¹³.

Thus, claiming the high artistic value of his work became in his *Mémoires* a priority. Perhaps, the "urge" to defend his own reputation, which was hurt by having been unjustly dismissed from his position as *premier maître de ballet*, must have led him to select and highlight only a few aspects of his professional life that could serve his cause, omitting – sadly for us – those which he did not consider relevant for his main purpose. Apparently, Théophile Gautier was not the only one he did not mention. Marius Petipa did not devote much attention even to his own brother, Lucien (fig. 4), and his work. Should the readers interpret this as evidence of his poor memory due to old age? Or rather as a sign of the artistic rivalry between the two brothers, betraying Marius's will to show that if Lucien achieved glory in Paris, he received equal fame and respect in Russia?! At present, it is very difficult for us to guess the real reasons behind Marius' intentions. However, despite the elder brother's great success at the Paris Opéra, today it is mainly the name of Marius Petipa which is still remembered and praised. Although, in Russia, scholarly studies on Marius Petipa have been published since the

11. See: *ivi*, pp. i-xxiii; Pascale Melani, *Les coulisses du ballet: Petipa contre Teliakovski*, in "Slavica Occitania", numéro monographique *De la France à la Russie. Marius Petipa*, n. 43, 2016, pp. 263-283; Donatella Gavrilovich, *Marius Petipa: un'altra storia. Il rapporto con gli scenografi e i direttori dei Teatri Imperiali*, in Donatella Gavrilovich – Annamaria Corea (a cura di), *Marius Petipa. Lo Zar del balletto classico (1818-1910)*, cit., pp. 39-64; Valentina Bonelli, *Il tramonto di Marius Petipa. "Lo Specchio Magico": l'ultimo balletto tra classicismo e pre-avanguardia*, in Donatella Gavrilovich – Annamaria Corea (a cura di), *Marius Petipa. Lo Zar del balletto classico (1818-1910)*, cit., pp. 109-120.

12. About Lev Ivanov's career, works and collaboration with Marius Petipa see: Roland John Wiley, *The Life and Ballets of Lev Ivanov: Choreographer of "The Nutcracker" and "Swan Lake"*, Clarendon Press, London 1997. Concerning Ivanov's elaboration of the two famous Petipa/Čajkovskij ballets *The Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*, see: Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets: "Swan Lake", "Sleeping Beauty", "Nutcracker"*, Clarendon Press, London 1991; Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky*, Oxford University Press, New York 2009.

13. Lillian Moore, *Introduction*, in Marius Petipa, *Russian Ballet Master. The Memoirs of Marius Petipa*, cit., pp. ix-xi. See also, Lynn Garafola, *Introduction*, in Marius Petipa, *The Diaries of Marius Petipa*, cit., pp. i-xxiii.

years following his demise, in 1910, in the West, only in the 1950s did the French *maître de ballet* start to receive the attention of dance historians¹⁴. Luckily, in recent years, and in particular for the bicentenary of his birth in 2018, several conferences, lectures, volumes, exhibitions, philological reconstructions of Petipa's ballets based on the Stepanov's notations, and other artistic events have taken place in Russia, France, Spain, Italy, United States, and in other countries, in order to study and celebrate Marius Petipa's rich and amazing choreographic productions¹⁵.

In his *Memoirs*, including in the pages devoted to his triumphant visit to Paris with his talented and beautiful wife (Maria Sourovchchikova Petipa)¹⁶, Petipa hardly ever mentions the name of his brother Lucien. Today, Lucien has been almost entirely overshadowed. When one reads the name Petipa on an old Paris Opéra playbill, it is natural to assume that it is Marius; but Marius never danced at the Opéra¹⁷, which in his youth was the centre of the ballet world. Lucien, the handsome elder brother, was the 'successful' member of the family, the one to be emulated. He is the one who attained the coveted position of *premier danseur* at the Opéra (in 1839, when Marius was still a wanderer without a permanent position), who partnered with Carlotta Grisi and, according to gossip, won her love, [...]. Marius was never the glamorous Paris star. He was the diligent and tireless worker, toiling unremittingly in a distant land where he still, after half a century, sometimes felt an exile. His *Memoirs* leave one with the feeling that he wondered, even after he had created a company which surpassed that of the Opéra itself, whether or not he had succeeded in catching up with Lucien. Time would tell¹⁸.

14. For a well-documented list of some major Russian studies about Marius Petipa, see *ibidem*.

15. Recently, several articles, volumes, Ph.D. thesis, conferences' proceedings, articles and monographic works have been published on Marius Petipa, reviving the research on his career and rich artistic productions, as well as some of Petipa's ballets philological reconstruction based on the Stepanov notation. See: Laura Hormigón, *Marius Petipa en España 1844-1847. Memorias y otros materiales*, Danzarte Ballet, Madrid 2010; Laura Hormigón (Edición de), *Marius Petipa. Del ballet romántico al clásico*, cit.; Doug Fullington, *The Stepanov Notations of the Harvard Theatre Collection*, in "Ballet/Tanz Magazine", December 2013, pp. 52-55; "Slavica Occitania", numéro monographique *De la France à la Russie. Marius Petipa*, édité par Pascale Melani, n. 43, 2016; Pascale Melani (édité par), *À la recherche de Marius Petipa. Un itinéraire franco-russe. Gros plan sur "La Bayadère"*, cit.; Tatiana Nikitina, *Le "ballet russe" de Marius Petipa: un exemple d'hybridation culturelle. Musique, musicologie et arts de la scène*, Unpublished Ph.D, Université Michel de Montaigne — Bordeaux III, Bordeaux 2018; Donatella Gavrilovich — Annamaria Corea (a cura di), *Marius Petipa. Lo Zar del balletto classico (1818-1910)*, cit.; Nadine Meisner, *Marius Petipa. The Emperor's Ballet Master*, Oxford University Press, New York 2019. Noteworthy, the bicentenary two commemorative volumes entitled Natalia Metelica (editor), *Marius Petipa. La Dansomanie*, published in 2018 by the St. Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music, as well as the annual conferences on Marius Petipa organized on Petipa's birthday, 11th March, by the A. Vaganova Ballet Academy in St. Petersburg along with the articles on the French ballet master published regularly in the "Vaganova Academy Journal". Last but not least, I would like to mention *The Petipa Society* internet site, edited by Amy Growcott. Soon two new volumes will also be published, the first one by Roland John Wiley (edited by), *The Petersburg Noverre: Marius Petipa in Russia*, Anthem Press, London (forthcoming), and the second one by Tiziana Leucci — Pascale Melani (édité par), *À la recherche de Marius Petipa, entre romantisme, orientalisme et avant-garde. Gros plan sur "La Belle au Bois Dormant"*, MSHA, Pessac (forthcoming).

16. About the performances of Marija Surovščikova-Petipa in Paris, see: Bénédicte Jarrasse, *Maria Sourovchchikova-Petipa et Marfa Mouraieva à l'Opéra de Paris (1861-1864): les ballerines du Théâtre impérial au miroir de la critique parisienne*, in Pascale Melani (édité par), *À la recherche de Marius Petipa. Un itinéraire franco-russe. Gros plan sur "La Bayadère"*, cit., pp. 35-41.

17. In his *Mémoires*, Marius Petipa wrote that, after the years in Spain and just before he got engaged in Russia, he danced at the Paris Opéra: "I spent some time in Paris, where I participated in the farewell benefit of Therese Elssler, who was retiring from the stage. The sisters Fanny and Therese Elssler, my brother Lucien and I danced a *Pas de Quatre* on the stage of the Paris Opéra. Soon after this, I received a letter from the old ballet master, Titus, offering me an engagement in St. Petersburg" (Marius Petipa, *Russian Ballet Master. The Memoirs of Marius Petipa*, cit., p. 22).

18. Lillian Moore, *Introduction*, in Marius Petipa, *Russian Ballet Master. The Memoirs of Marius Petipa*, cit., p. xi.



Figure 4. Portrait of Lucien Petipa, in "Le Monde Dramatique", Paris early 1840s. Public domain.

While Marius Petipa never mentioned Gautier and was not so eager to talk about his brother Lucien in his writings, on the contrary, he mentioned Carlotta Grisi (1819-1899) with very admiring words (fig. 5). After having worked in the Grand Théâtre of Nantes, Marius returned to Paris and started to attend the classes of the well-known dance master of Italian origins, Auguste Vestris (1760-1842). Thanks to the progress he made, he was able to partner with Carlotta Grisi. He wrote in his *Mémoires* that the opportunity to dance with the celebrated Italian ballerina – and on that occasion with his brother Lucien, too, though he did not mention here that they all danced together – helped him to become famous, and later on to be engaged by the Grand Théâtre in Bordeaux:

Upon returning to Paris, and not having an engagement, I started to perfect myself in the class of the then famous old Vestris. My brother Lucien was already dancing in the Paris Grand Opéra; I also wanted to appear on some Parisian stage, and the opportunity presented itself. Having worked for two months with my talented professor, I was blessed with such good luck as I hadn't dared to dream. I took part in the benefit of the great actress Rachel, where I danced with such a great star as the then sensational Carlotta Grisi. Participation in such an outstanding performance made me known, and within a few days I received an invitation to Bordeaux, in the capacity of *premier danseur*¹⁹.

Actually, recent research has shown that, in his *Mémoires*, Marius Petipa was confused at times concerning the events and the people he described²⁰. For instance, when he danced in Paris, on 27th October 1842, with Carlotta Grisi and his brother Lucien, on the stage of the Comédie Française for

19. Marius Petipa, *Russian Ballet Master. The Memoirs of Marius Petipa*, cit., p. 10.

20. See Natalie Morel-Borotra, *Marius Petipa, "second danseur" au Grand Théâtre de Bordeaux*, in "Slavica Occitania", numéro monographique *De la France à la Russie. Marius Petipa*, édité par Pascale Melani, n. 43, 2016, pp. 93-112.

the ballet scenes of Molière's play *Le Bourgeois-Gentilhomme*, apparently such performance was not in honour of the famous French actress Elisa Félix, better known as M^{lle} Rachel (1820-1858), as he wrote, but rather in honour of M^{me} Anne-Catherine-Lucinde Paradol²¹. However, though Marius Petipa does not refer to Théophile Gautier, during his trips to France²², he perhaps had the opportunity to meet the French writer. He was seven years older than him, and was well known to his brother Lucien, who danced in the main male roles in both the *Giselle, ou le Wilis* and *La Péri* ballets, when they were premiered at the Opéra of Paris, the first one in 1841 and the second one in 1843. In 1858, Lucien also composed the dances for Gautier's ballet *Sacountalâ*.



Figure 5. Print of “Carlotta Crisi as a Fairy”. London 19th century. From The New York Public Library (<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/99702840-b3b5-0132-0174-58d385a7b928>).

Before analysing those librettos by Gautier, let us now focus on Gautier's pronounced “Orientalism”, which influenced those ballets, shaped by the ‘Oriental’ fashion in the literary and artistic circles of his time, and strengthened also by the tour of the authentic Indian temple dancers performing in Paris in 1838. Marius Petipa, too, though young at that time, was part of the “Orientalist” cultural and artistic processes which became a form of “craze” in Europe in those years²³.

21. See: Marius Petipa, *Mémoires du maître de ballet des Théâtres impériaux Marius Ivanovitch Petipa*, cit., p. 33, note 39 and 178; Pascale Melani, *Marius Petipa à la Comédie Française*, in Marius Petipa, *Mémoires du maître de ballet des Théâtres impériaux Marius Ivanovitch Petipa*, cit., pp. 177-178.

22. See: Martine Kahane, *Petipa in France. A Franco-Russian Story in Three Acts and a Coda*, in Natalia Metelica (editor), *Marius Petipa. La Dansomanie*, vol. II, St. Petersburg National Museum of Theatre and Music, St. Petersburg 2018, pp. 24-30.

23. About Orientalism as a cultural, philosophical and artistic movement in Europe, see: Raymond Schwab, *La Renaissance orientale*, Payot, Paris 1950; Edward Saïd, *L'Orientalisme. L'Orient créé par l'Occident*, Seuil, Paris 1980 (first edition published in 1978); Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe. An Essay in Philosophical Understanding*, Motilal Banarsidass,

Theophile Gautier's Orientalism and the everlasting impact of the Indian temple dancers in some of his ballet librettos

The five South Indian artists who arrived in France in 1838 with their master and two musicians were attached to a Viṣṇu temple located in the French territory of Pondicherry. The presence of authentic temple dancers (in Sanskrit: *devadāsīs* "female attendants at the service of a deity") on the Parisian stage had a remarkable effect on French writers and artists²⁴. Among them, Théophile Gautier was their most regular viewer and enthusiastic admirer, and, as a critic, he wrote many articles about them. He became so impressed by the mastery of their art, in particular by the beautiful dancer Amany (fig. 6), that they served him as "inspiring Muses" for the creation of some of his future ballet librettos.

When the troupe arrived in Paris, the young and rebellious Gautier was working as a dance critic for the newspaper "La Presse". At that time, he was a twenty-seven-year-old Romantic bohemian. A year earlier, in 1837, he had published a novel entitled *Fortunio*, in which he mentioned Indian dancers²⁵. A few months before Amany and the other artists arrived in France and performed

Delhi 1990 (first edition published in 1988); J. M. Mackenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts*, Manchester University Press, Manchester & New York 1995; Martin Clayton — Bennett Zon (edited by), *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s–1940s: Portrayal of the East*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2007; Tiziana Leucci, *Vestales indiennes: les danseuses de temple dans les récits de voyage et l'imaginaire théâtral orientaliste (1780-1811)*, in "Synergies Inde", numéro monographique *L'orientalisme à l'humanisme en crise. Ponts entre l'Inde et l'Europe*, coordonné par Vidya Vencatesan et Philippe Benoit, n. 4, 2009, pp. 171-180; Tiziana Leucci, *The Curiosity for the "Others". The Interest for Indian Dances and Oriental Customs (& Costumes) in Europe (1663–1821)*, in Uwe Schlottermüller — Howard Weiner — Maria Richter (herausgegeben von), *All'ungaresca — al español". Die Vielfalt der europäischen Tanzkultur 1420-1820*, Tagungsband 3. Rothenfels Tanzsymposium, Fa-Gisis Musik und Tanzedition, Freiburg 2012, pp. 109-131; Tiziana Leucci, *De la "danseuse de temple" des voyageurs et missionnaires Européens à la "bayadère" des philosophes et artistes (XVII^e-XVIII^e siècle)*, in Marie Fourcade — Ines Zupanov (sous la direction de), *L'Inde des Lumières: Discours, histoire, savoirs (XVII^e-XIX^e siècle)*, EHESS, Paris 2013, pp. 253-288.

24. About the receptions, perceptions and reactions to the Indian troupe's performances by Gautier and others, see: Tiziana Leucci, *Le "Devadāsī" nella Parigi di Luigi Filippo: le danzatrici indiane nella critica e nelle opere di Théophile Gautier*, in "Teatro e Storia", vol. XXV, 2004, pp. 1-29; Tiziana Leucci, *Devadāsī e Bayadères: tra storia e leggenda*, cit.; Tiziana Leucci, *Théophile Gautier on the Maria Taglioni's "Creation" in 1830 of the Bayadère Character, and the Indian Temple Dancers performing in Paris in 1838*, in Barbara Segal — Bill Tuck (edited by), *Dance and Heritage: Creation, Re-creation and Recreation*, Proceedings of the Early Dance Circle Biennial Conference 2010, Early Dance Circle & Victoire Press, London-Cambridge 2011, pp. 85-104; Tiziana Leucci, *Between Seduction and Redemption*, cit.; Tiziana Leucci, *Fascinantes bayadères, mais étrange musique... Réception française des danseuses indiennes: des récits de voyage aux œuvres de Jouy, Gautier et Berlioz*, in Luc Charles — Dominique Yves Defrance — Danièle Pistone (textes réunis par), *Fascinantes Étrangetés. La découverte de l'altérité musicale en Europe au XIX^e siècle*, L'Harmattan, Paris 2014, pp. 343-365; Tiziana Leucci, *L'immaginario romantico e orientalista nei due balletti a soggetto indiano di Marius Petipa: "La Bayadère" (1877) e "Il Talismano" (1889)*, cit.; Joep Bor, *Mamia, Ammani and Other Bayadères: Europe's Portrayal of India's Temple Dancers*, in Martin Clayton — Bennett Zon (edited by), *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s–1940s: Portrayal of the East*, cit., pp. 39-70.

25. The novel was firstly published under the title *L'Eldorado* in 1837 in instalments in a magazine, only in 1838, just before the Indian artists arrived in Paris, did it come out as a book. See: Théophile Gautier, *Fortunio*, in Id., *Ceuvres, textes réunis par Paolo Tortonese, Robert Laffont*, Paris 1995, pp. 477-580; Tiziana Leucci, *Devadāsī e Bayadères: tra storia e leggenda*, cit., p. 144, note 74.

in Paris, Gautier wrote a rather polemical review about ballerina Louise Fitzjames (1809-?) interpreting the role of the *bayadère* Zoloé in Eugène Scribe, Daniel Auber and Filippo Taglioni's *opéra-ballet Le Dieu et la bayadère ou la courtisane amoureuse* (*The God and the Bayadère or the Courtesan in Love*)²⁶. The ballet premiered at the Paris Opéra in 1830 and was revived in the same theatre in November 1837. Here, Gautier explains his personal conception regarding his ideal type of dancer, which fitted in well with his perception of the Indian *devadāsīs*: “It is essential for a dancer to have a body which, if not perfect, it [*sic*] should be at least graceful. [...] Dancing is essentially pagan, materialist and sensual”²⁷.



Figure 6. Print of the *Bayadère* Amany dancing the *Malapou*, after the bronze statuette by Jean-Auguste Barre. *Magasin Pittoresque*, Tome VI, p. 40, Paris, Octobre 1838. Tiziana Leucci's collection.

Along with a few other writers and artists, Théophile Gautier attended a private performance given by the Indian troupe in their residence at the *Allée des Veuves* in Paris, and subsequently wrote an article describing the dancers and the musicians in detail, as well as their costumes and ornaments. The following quotation expresses Gautier's personal ideas about India, and his trepidation about such an exceptional event, which truly gave a new direction to his work: “The very word *bayadère* evokes notions of sunshine, perfume and beauty even to the most prosaic and bourgeois minds...

26. For the analysis of the *opéra-ballet Le Dieu et la bayadère, ou la courtisane amoureuse*, see: Tiziana Leucci, *Devadāsī e Bayadères: tra storia e leggenda*, cit., pp. 128-136; Tiziana Leucci, *Théophile Gautier on the Maria Taglioni's "Creation" in 1830 of the Bayadère Character, and the Indian Temple Dancers performing in Paris in 1838*, cit.

27. Théophile Gautier, *Opéra: Louise Fitzjames in "Le Dieu et la bayadère"*, in “La Presse”, 27th November 1837, quoted in Ivor Guest (texts selected, translated and annotated by), *Gautier on Dance*, cit., p. 29.

There is a sensation of dazzling light, and through the pale smoke of burning incense appear the unfamiliar silhouettes of the East"²⁸.

On 22nd August 1838, Gautier attended their public performances in Paris at the Théâtre des Variétés, where the eager audience rushed in large numbers to see them. If in the previous review Gautier was totally mesmerized by the Indian dancers and their art, here he relates the spectators' reactions as well:

When the lovely Amany recited her melancholy plaint, the antique beauty of her poses, the supple sensuality of her figure, the sorrowful languor of her gestures, and the plaintive sweetness of her half-smile aroused general applause. She could have been the dark-skinned Shulamite of the *Song of Songs*, swooning with love, and seeking her beloved on a mountain of balsam or in a garden full of aromatic plants²⁹.

In his descriptions, Gautier underlines the sensuality of Amany's dance, gestures, postures and expressions, enriched by the fragrance of the fresh flowers, the perfumed oils and the burning incense used in India during the performances, which arise and intensify the sensual pleasures of both sight and smell among the spectators: during the dance recital, they all have their visual and olfactive senses stimulated. It is not by chance that in India, in order to describe the effect of a performance on the audience, the Sanskrit polysemic term of *rasa* is used, which means: colour, fragrance, taste, aroma, perfumed essence, savor, pleasure and aesthetic experience as well.

Before focusing on the impact of the Indian artists on Théophile Gautier's ballet librettos, now I would like to draw attention to the etymology of the French word *bayadère*, not only because it was employed to define the Paris Opéra ballerinas interpreting Indian roles, but also because it was used to define Amany and her companions, who were also known as the "Pondicherry's *bayadères*". This term, of Portuguese origin (*baylhadeira* or *bailadeira*), means a "female dancer", and was firstly used by 16th-century Portuguese travellers and army officers to refer to the Indian dancers performing in temples and royal courts. Later on, the word entered literary French in the 17th century through Dutch travellers' accounts. Since then, the term has been absorbed into other European languages (i.e. German *Bajadere*, English *bayadere*, Spanish *bayadera*, Italian *baiadera*, Russian *bajaderka*, etc.) and adapted to define all types of Indian dancers, *devadāsīs* included, as well as the theatrical character of the same on the Western stage. Thus, the basic *bayadère's* features were shaped through a slow process of mutual interaction between the writings of travellers, the literary works of poets, philosophers, dramatists and librettists, the compositions of musicians and choreographers, and the drawings and

28. Théophile Gautier, *The Devadasis, otherwise known as Bayadères*, in "La Presse", 20th August 1838, quoted in Ivor Guest (texts selected, translated and annotated by), *Gautier on Dance*, cit., p. 39.

29. Théophile Gautier, *Théâtre des Variétés: Début of the Bayadères*, in "La Presse", 27th August 1838, quoted in Ivor Guest (texts selected, translated and annotated by), *Gautier on Dance*, cit., p. 49.

canvas of Orientalist painters. All of them contributed a great deal to the construction of the *bayadère's* stage character, which was cast mainly in cosmopolitan Paris, one of the major capitals of the theatre at that time³⁰.

1. “*Giselle, ou les Wilis*”

In 1841, three years after the performances in Paris by the Indian artists, Gautier wrote the libretto for the ballet *Giselle ou les Wilis*, one of the few from this period which is still performed today, thanks also to Marius Petipa, who helped preserve it in Russia³¹, and from there elsewhere³². Staged for the first time at the Opéra in Paris, it casts Carlotta Grisi and Lucien Petipa in the leading roles (fig. 7). The music was composed by Adolphe Adam (1803-1856), the choreography by Giovanni (Jean) Coralli (1779-1854) and Jules Perrot (1810-1892), and the scenery designed by Pierre-Luc-Charles Cicéri (1782-1868). Gautier's original libretto was written together with Jules-Henry Vernoy de Saint-Georges (1799-1875), who also helped adapt it for the stage. The plot drew on the work *De l'Allemagne* (1835) written by the German Romantic poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856). A peasant girl, Giselle, loves a noble young man who hides his true identity in order to approach her. When she discovers that he is already engaged to an aristocratic girl, she is shattered by sorrow, loses her mind, and dies. According to local beliefs, her soul becomes a Wili, a tormented ghost which does not find peace until it exacts revenge on the culprit. In the second act of the ballet, her beloved nobleman, who is distressed, goes to pay a visit to Giselle's tomb and there he sees her ghost (fig. 8). Although he was responsible for her premature death, she is still in love with him and saves his life from the fury of Myrtha, the queen of the Wilis. The ballet celebrates a true “triumph of love” which defies even death³³.

30. On the origin of the literary and theatrical character of the *bayadère*, see: Tiziana Leucci, *Devadāsī e Bayadères: tra storia e leggenda*, cit.; Tiziana Leucci, *From Jean-Baptiste Lully to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The Construction of the Indian Dancer Character (“Bayadère”) on the European Stage (1681-1798)*, in Uwe Schlottermüller — Howard Weiner — Maria Richter (Herausgegeben von), *Vom Schäferidyll zur Revolution. Europäische Tanzkultur im 18. Jahrhundert*, Tagungsband 2. Rothenfelder Tanzsymposium, Fa-Gisis Musik und Tanzedition, Freiburg 2008, pp. 115-131; Tiziana Leucci, *Between Seduction and Redemption*, cit.; Tiziana Leucci, *De la “danseuse de temple” des voyageurs et missionnaires Européens à la “bayadère” des philosophes et artistes (XVII^e-XVIII^e siècle)*, cit.; Tiziana Leucci, *L'immaginario romantico e orientalista nei due balletti a soggetto indiano di Marius Petipa: “La Bayadère” (1877) e “Il Talismano” (1889)*, cit.; Tiziana Leucci, *L'héritage de l'orientalisme et du romantisme dans deux ballets à sujet indien de Marius Petipa: “La Bayadère” (1877) et “Le Talisman” (1889)*, cit.; Tiziana Leucci, *The 16th century Portuguese travel accounts at the origin of the Indian dancer character of the “Bayadère” in the European literary and stage productions*, in “Choreologica”, special issue, *Colonial dancing in Europe, European dancing in the colonies*, edited by Geoff Whitlock, vol. XI, n. 1, Winter/Spring 2021, pp. 75-134.

31. See Marian Smith — Doug Fullington, *Récréer Petipa: “Giselle” et “Paquita”*, in “Slavica Occitania”, numéro monographique *De la France à la Russie, Marius Petipa*, édité par Pascale Melani, n. 43, 2016, pp. 383-396.

32. See Jane Pritchard, *Petipa Ballets in the United Kingdom*, in Natalia Metelica (editor), *Marius Petipa. La Dansomanie*, cit., vol. II, pp. 44-48.

33. About the ballet *Giselle ou les Wilis*, see: Théophile Gautier, *Théâtre. Mystères, comédies et ballets*, Charpentier, Paris 1872; Serge Lifar, “*Giselle*”. *Apothéose du Ballet Romantique*, Albin Michel, Paris 1942; Cyril W. Beaumont, *The Ballet called*

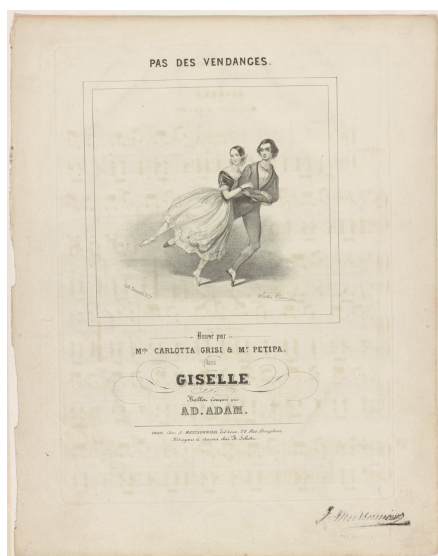


Figure 7. Print of Carlotta Grisi and Lucien Petipa dancing the *Pas de Vendanges*, in the first act of the ballet *Giselle, ou les Wilis* (1841). Paris, 19th century. Public domain.



Figure 8. Print of Carlotta Grisi dancing in the second act of the ballet *Giselle, ou les Wilis* (1841). From The New York Public Library (<https://digital-collections.nypl.org/items/7209fe70-b3b5-0132-fd26-58d385a7b928>).

After coming to know about the demise of Amany in London, though no precise information about this tragic event has yet been found³⁴, Gautier, in memory of the beautiful and talented Indian dancer, included in the libretto among the Wilis the character of the *bayadère* Zulmé, and the one of the *odalisque*, Moyna:

Giselle, Act II, Scene IV:

Like bees moving around their queen, in the same way, Myrtha spreads her blueish wings on the Wilis, then gives the signal for the dance to start. Some of them, one by one, advance towards their queen. Here is Moyna, the *odalisque*, performing an oriental dance; soon followed by Zulmé, the *bayadère*, who takes various Indian postures. [...] At midnight, from various points of the horizon, preceded by will-o'-the-wisps, arrive the shadows of the girls who died because of their dance [...] then a *bibiaderi*³⁵ with a costume similar to that of Amany, a bodice with sandalwood covering for the breasts, golden striped pyjamas, a golden girdle and a necklace which reflects the

³⁴ *Giselle*, Dance Books, Alton 2011 (first edition published in 1944); Cyril W. Beaumont, *Complete Book of Ballet*, Putnam, London 1951; Edwin Binney, *Les ballets de Théophile Gautier*, cit.; Elena Randi, *La fusione dei sensi e dello spirito: Gautier e il balletto*, cit.; Tiziana Leucci, *Devadāsī e Bayadères: tra storia e leggenda*, cit.; Elena Cervellati, *Théophile Gautier e la danza*, cit.

34. Ivor Guest (texts selected, translated and annotated by), *Gautier on Dance*, cit., p. 136, note 5.

35. The term *bibiaderi*, mentioned by Gautier, derives from the Hindi word *bibi*, meaning a "prestigious lady, a dame, madame, wife, mistress, a dear girlfriend, a beloved one". Actually, this term, employed also in Turkey, Persia and India as an honorific title for women, has origin in Central Asia. It is often a prefix denoting "esteem, awe and endearment" used as a respectful form of address for the ladies. In the past, the affectionate and prestigious title of *bibi* was usually referred to the North Indian cultivated female artists and courtesans that were so-called by their aristocratic patrons and lovers. Similarly, the word was also employed by the European officers in South Asia in order to define their local Indian wives and concubines. I would like to thank here my colleague Alessandra Fiorentini (Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Politique, Paris), a specialist in the Central Asian Muslim cultures and languages, for having kindly enlightened me about the etymology of this term. See also the entry *bibi* in John T. Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu Classical Hindi and English*, Manohar, New Delhi 2006 (first edition London 1884), *ad vocem*, p. 205.

light as mirrors, long flying scarves, peculiar jewels, nose-rings, ankle-bells...³⁶.

We do not know if the role of the Wili *bayadère* “Zulmé” and the *odalisque* “Moyna” had ever been portrayed in the ballet according to Gautier’s wishes, though in Russia in the list of the characters both Wilis “Zulma” and “Moyna” are mentioned. Interestingly, in the role of the Wili Zulma, Anna Pavlova (1881-1931) was portrayed, in 1899, in one of the photos in the commemorative volume that J. Pritchard and C. Hamilton published about the famous Russian ballerina³⁷.

It is not known if, in 1838, Marius Petipa, who at that time was twenty years old, attended the South Indian troupe’s performances in Paris. Even if he did not see their shows, surely he must have heard about them, perhaps from his own brother Lucien. Most probably, he read the reviews concerning the Indian artists, including those written by Théophile Gautier. Indeed, it is not by chance that in his ballet *La Bayadère* he made Nikia attached to the temple of the god Viṣṇu, exactly as Amany and her companions, who were all consecrated to this specific Hindu deity’s shrine. I previously showed how Petipa was inspired by the tragic character of Giselle when he created the role of Nikia³⁸. Nevertheless, we know for sure that after this ballet was premiered in Paris in 1841, Marius Petipa attended it with Carlotta Grisi and his brother Lucien and that he noted down some details of the choreography and the gestural expressions on a piano musical score adaptation³⁹. *Giselle* was also a ballet that he himself staged and interpreted several times in the leading role of Albrecht in Spain⁴⁰, France and Russia. Let us now turn our attention to the other “Oriental” two acts ballet: *La Péri* by Gautier.

36. Théophile Gautier, *Théâtre. Mystères, comédies et ballets*, Charpentier, Paris 1872, pp. 351-352, 366-367 (my translation from the original French).

37. Jane Pritchard — Caroline Hamilton, *Anna Pavlova. Twentieth Century Ballerina*, Booth-Clibborn, London 2013, p. 8.

38. See: Tiziana Leucci, *Devadāsī e Bayadères: tra storia e leggenda*, cit.; Tiziana Leucci, *Between Seduction and Redemption*, cit., pp. 261-287, 421-429; Tiziana Leucci, *L’héritage de l’orientalisme et du romantisme dans deux ballets à sujet indien de Marius Petipa: “La Bayadère” (1877) et “Le Talisman” (1889)*, cit., pp. 91-102; Tiziana Leucci, *Nasledie romantizma i orientalizma v baletach Mariusa Petipa s indijskim motivom: “Bajaderka” (1877) i “Talisman” (1889)* [*The legacy of Romanticism and Orientalism in the ballets of Marius Petipa with an Indian motif: “La Bayadère” (1877) and “The Talisman” (1889)*], cit.; Tiziana Leucci, *L’immaginario romantico e orientalista nei due balletti a soggetto indiano di Marius Petipa: “La Bayadère” (1877) e “Il Talismano” (1889)*, cit.; Tiziana Leucci, *La herencia del Romanticismo y del Orientalismo en el ballet de temática india “La Bayadera” (1877) de Marius Petipa*, cit.; Tiziana Leucci, *The 16th century Portuguese travel accounts at the origin of the Indian dancer character of the “Bayadère” in the European literary and stage productions*, cit.

39. See Marian Smith, *The Earliest “Giselle”? A Preliminary Report on a St. Petersburg Manuscript*, in “Dance Chronicle”, vol. XXIII, n. 1, 2000, pp. 29-48.

40. See: Laura Hormigón, *Marius Petipa en España 1844-1847. Memorias y otros materiales*, cit.; Laura Hormigón, *Marius Petipa y sus años en España*, in Id. (Edición de), *Marius Petipa. Del ballet romántico al clásico*, cit., pp. 35-71.

2. "La Péri"

After the success of *Giselle, ou les Wilis* in 1841, the following year Gautier started to write the libretto for *La Péri*, staged at the Opéra of Paris, in 1843, with the music by the German composer Friedrich Bergmüller (1806-1874), the choreography by the Italian *maître de ballet* Giovanni (Jean) Coralli (1779-1854), who collaborated with Gautier in the elaboration of the libretto as well, and Carlotta Grisi and Lucien Petipa in the leading roles⁴¹.

In the Arabian, Middle-Eastern and Indo-Persian cultures, the *Péris* (Persian: *pari*, "a winged celestial being") are beautiful fairies living in Heaven, often evoked in poetry, legends and plays (fig. 9). For the libretto, Gautier drew on one of the *The Thousand and one nights* tales, entitled *The history of the prince Ahmed and the fairy Péri-Banou*, and by the poem having an Indian topic *Lalla Rookh*, composed by the Irish poet Thomas Moore (1779-1852), published in 1817. In 1830, Gautier himself wrote a poem *La jeune fille* [*The young girl*] in a collection of lyrics entitled *Premières poésies* [*First poems*], in which the character of a *Péri* appears. Some years earlier, in 1824, the famous French writer Victor Hugo (1802-1885) wrote the poem *La Fée et la Péri* [*The Fairy and the Péri*], being similarly inspired by Thomas Moore's lyrics of *Lalla Rookh*. For the Carnival of 1843, at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, the Italian *maître de ballet* Filippo Taglioni (1777-1871) staged a ballet with a Persian plot titled *La Peri*, interpreted by his daughter, Maria Taglioni (1804-1884), in the leading female role of the charming fairy, with the music by Giacomo Panizza (1803-1860), scenery by Baldassarre Cavallotti⁴². Similarly, in 1843, the German composer Robert Schumann (1810-1856) created a work entitled *Das Paradies und die Peri* [*The Heaven and the Péri*], classified as his op. 50, also by drawing inspiration from Moore's poem *Lalla Rookh*. Hence, the character of the Muslim celestial beauty of the *Péri* was well known and appreciated in the European Romantic and Orientalist circles of writers and artists of the time.

41. About the ballet *La Péri*, see: Théophile Gautier, *Théâtre. Mystères, comédies et ballets*, cit.; Cyril W. Beaumont, *Complete Book of Ballet*, cit.; Edwin Binney, *Les ballets de Théophile Gautier*, cit.; Ivor Guest (texts selected, translated and annotated by), *Gautier on Dance*, cit.; Ivor Guest, *Le Ballet de l'Opéra de Paris*, Flammarion, Paris 2001; Hélène Laplace-Claverie, *Ecrire pour la danse. Les livrets de ballet de Théophile Gautier à Jean Cocteau (1870-1914)*, cit.; Elena Randi, *La fusione dei sensi e dello spirito: Gautier e il balletto*, cit.; Elena Cervellati, *Théophile Gautier e la danza*, cit.; Louise Hingand, *Le livrets de ballet de Théophile Gautier*, cit.; Vannina Olivesi, *Entre discrétion et quête de reconnaissance: Jean Coralli à l'Opéra, une ascension professionnelle au défi de la standardisation du ballet (1830-1854)*, in José Sasportes – Patrizia Veroli (a cura di), *Giovanni Coralli l'autore di "Giselle"*, Aracne, Roma 2018, pp. 123-231.

42. *La Peri. Ballo fantastico di mezzo carattere in tre atti di Filippo Taglioni da rappresentarsi nell'I. R. Teatro alla Scala il Carnevale 1843*, per Gaspare Truffi, Milano 1843. See also Flavia Pappacena, *Il Settecento e l'Ottocento*, in Ornella Di Tondo, Flavia Pappacena, Alessandro Pontremoli, *Storia della Danza e del Balletto*, Gremese, Roma 2019, pp. 235-236.



Figure 9. Indian miniature of a *Pari* (French: *Péri*). Rajaput painting 19th century. Archaeological Museum, Bhopal, India. Public domain.

The plot of Gautier’s version of the ballet takes place in Cairo, Egypt, and it premiered in Paris on 17th July 1843, just a few months after Taglioni’s one. As in Taglioni’s composition, both the ballets are conceived in a true “Oriental” setting – they narrate the love story between prince Attar and the Peri (in Taglioni’s version), and prince Achmet and the Queen of the *Péris* (in Gautier’s version). In both the ballets, the two *Péris* give a magic “talisman” to their beloved princes.

In the first act of the Gautier libretto, Achmet is represented as a pensive and quite melancholic young man in his gorgeous palace. He does not pay much attention to his Favorite and to the other pretty *odalisques* and concubines of his *harem*, including the four new beautiful girls coming from Spain, Scotland, Germany and France, whom his eunuch has just purchased for his master from a local slave-trader. Though Achmet seems to appreciate those foreign girls’ performances, each one executing the dance of their own native countries (the Spanish a *bolero*, the Scottish a *gigue*, the German a waltz, the French a *minuet*), the prince soon becomes distracted and lost in his thoughts. The eunuch, worried about his health, brings Achmet the opium pipe requested by his master. After smoking that, the prince falls asleep and, in his visions, a dreamy group of divine *Péris* appear to him. Immediately, Achmet falls in love with their charming queen (fig. 10). She too, on seeing him, falls in love with the prince (fig. 11). In this famous *Dream scene* of the ballet, Carlotta Grisi impressed the audience by jumping from a high platform placed on the stage directly into Lucien Petipa’s arms (fig. 12). Before returning to Heaven, the *Péri* gives Achmet a “talisman” enabling him to call her back to earth. Once he wakes up, Achmet cannot forget his beloved fairy... In the second act, the queen of the *Péris* tests the love and the faithfulness of his mortal prince, by entering the body of a fugitive slave

girl, named Leïla, who dies during her escape from the cruel Pacha. The young prince takes pity on the distressed runaway maid, who is actually the queen of the *Péris* in disguise, and offers her shelter and protection in his palace, causing the jealousy of his Favorite (fig. 13). Thus, the generous, rightful and faithful prince, courageously protects Leïla, at the cost of losing his own life. He then refuses to give the fugitive slave girl to her brutal master, who claims her back, and after a number of tragic events, he is finally captured, imprisoned and killed by the pitiless Pacha. After his death, his soul is taken to Heaven by the *Péris* in a true apotheosis. There he joins his beloved fairy queen, and their sincere and deep love unites them eternally. The ballet ends with a magnificent scene of the amorous couple in the *Péris'* celestial abode.



Figure 10. Print of Carlotta Grisi in the role of the *Péri* (*Rôle de La Péri M^{lle} Carlotta Grisi*). "France Théâtrale", n. 15 Opéra (Ballet) *La Péri*, Paris 19th century. From The New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/438f3560-b3ba-0132-e753-58d385a7bbd0>.



Figure 11. Print of Carlotta Grisi and Lucien Petipa dancing in the ballet *La Péri* (London 1843). From The New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/3c705600-b3ba-0132-768c-58d385a7bbd0>.



Figure 12. Print of Carlotta Grisi jumping in the arms of Lucien Petipa during the “dream dance” (French: “pas du songe”) of the ballet *La Péri* (Paris 1843). “Le Ménestrel, Journal de Musique”, n. 2, bis Rue de Vivienne, Paris 1843. Public domain.



Figure 13. Print by Adolphe Mouillon of Carlotta Grisi as the Queen of the *Pèris*, Lucien Petipa as the Prince Achmet and I. Marquet as the Favorite Mourmahal, in the ballet *La Péri* (Paris 1843). Album de l'Opéra n. 7, Paris 1843. Public domain.

It is not difficult to notice similarities between the *Dream scene*, the love between a human being and a divine fairy, the talisman given by the *Péri* to Achmet, the various tests of faithfulness demanded by the heroine (*Péri/Leïla*) to his beloved prince in this ballet, with the *Kingdom of Shades*, the characters of Nikia and Nirriti, and the final scene of the “apotheosis”, found in both Marius Petipa’s creations, *La Bayadère* and *The Talisman*⁴³. It is worth mentioning that a similar ending in Heaven, with an enchanting apotheosis of faithfulness and love, was presented in the final scene of the above-mentioned *opéra-ballet* having an Indian plot, *Le Dieu et la Bayadère, ou la courtisane amoureuse*, inspired by the ballad *Der Gott und die Bajadere. Indische Legende* [*The God and the Bayadère. Indian Legend*], composed by the German poet Johan Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) in 1797, and published in 1798⁴⁴. This *opéra-ballet* was premiered at the Paris Opéra in 1830, with the choreography by Filippo Taglioni, the libretto by Eugène Scribe (1791-1861), the music by Daniel-François-Esprit Auber (1782-1871), with Maria Taglioni (fig. 14) and the tenor Adolphe Nourrit (1802-1839) in the leading roles. The revivals in Paris of this *opéra-ballet* were reviewed

43. See: Cyril W. Beaumont, *Complete Book of Ballet*, cit.; Natalia Zozoulina, *La Bayadère de M. Petipa. La question du quatrième acte du ballet*, in Pascale Melani (édité par), *À la recherche de Marius Petipa. Un itinéraire franco-russe. Gros plan sur “La Bayadère”*, cit., pp. 115-122; Elena Randi, *Prove di “regia del balletto”: Petipa, “Il Talismano”*, in Donatella Gavrilovich – Annamaria Corea (a cura di), *Marius Petipa. Lo Zar del balletto classico (1818-1910). Danza, musica, arte e società*, cit., pp. 97-107.

44. See Tiziana Leucci, *From Jean-Baptiste Lully to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The Construction of the Indian Dancer Character (“Bayadère”) on the European Stage (1681-1798)*, cit.

several times by Théophile Gautier, and a revival of it was staged in Russia, in 1856, by Marius Petipa himself. Another element in *La Péri*, which had already been exploited before by other choreographers, and that in future will be largely employed by Marius Petipa too in his own ballets, was the use of "national" and "character" dances belonging to the traditions of various European, North-African and Asian countries⁴⁵.

Gautier, when reviewing *La Péri* in the Parisian newspaper "La Presse", gave symbolic and metaphorical meanings to this ballet, writing the following description of it to his friend, the French poet and writer Gérard de Nerval (1808-1855), who was at that time in Cairo, in the exact place of the ballet's plot:

The earth, symbolised by Achmet, stretches its arms up to the sky, which looks tenderly down on him through the azure eyes of the *Péri*. Indeed, if mortals have dreamt since time immemorial of divine unions, so has Heaven, in the endless boredom of its happiness, frequently sought its distractions on earth. [...] Achmet and the *Péri* – or in other words, mind and matter, love and desire – meet in the ecstasy of a dream, as on neutral soil. It is only when the eyes of the body are asleep that the eyes of the soul awake. The carnal bonds are then loosened, and the invisible world is revealed; the spirits of heaven descend, those of the earth rise up, and mysterious unions are formed in a vague twilight in which the dawn of eternity can already be sensed. But every initiation demands a trial, every faith calls for its martyr. [...] The spirit must be recognized in all its incarnations, even in the modest disguise of the flesh, in the fragile and perishable envelope of life. [...] Desire is nothing without love; that ethereal essence must acquire a body, and she whom you loved as a *Péri*, must now be loved as a woman, deprived of wings, crown and magic power⁴⁶.

After having praised the high quality of Giovanni (Jean) Coralli's choreography and admired the dancing and the expressivity of both Carlotta Grisi and Lucien Petipa, Gautier expressed his appreciation for the other interpreters of the ballet, which also included the characters of some "Kashmiri Indian dancers" (fig. 15):

The kiosk of the Kashmiri women is a charming conception, and the *pas de quatre* in the second act is full of originality and colour, both in the music and in the dance, and it is perfectly performed by M^{lles} Caroline, Dimier, Robert, Dabbas, who is very pretty⁴⁷.

It is worthy of note that, in the years following its creation in Paris, Marius Petipa too inter-

45. See: Lisa C. Arkin — Marian Smith, *National Dance in the Romantic Ballet*, in Lynn Garafola (editor), *Rethinking the Sylph. New Perspectives on the Romantic Ballet*, cit., pp. 11-68; Laura Hormigón, *Marius Petipa en España 1844-1847. Memorias y otros materiales*, cit.; Laura Hormigón, *El ballet Romántico en el Teatro del Circo de Madrid (1842-1850)*, Publicaciones de la Asociación de directores de escena de España, Madrid 2017; Laura Hormigón, *Marius Petipa y sus años en España*, cit.; Michaela Böhmig, *L'esotismo occidentale-orientale di Marius Petipa*, in Donatella Gavrilovich — Annamaria Corea (a cura di), *Marius Petipa. Lo Zar del balletto classico (1818-1910)*, cit., pp. 65-79; Boris Illarionov, *La dansa de caràcter en los ballets de Petipa*, in Laura Hormigón (Edición de), *Marius Petipa. Del ballet romàntico al clàssico*, cit., pp. 85-104; Doug Fullington, *Elementos de danza de española en dos producciones de "Paquita"*, in Laura Hormigón (Edición de), *Marius Petipa. Del ballet romàntico al clàssico*, cit., pp. 105-120.

46. Théophile Gautier, *Opéra: La Péri*, in "La Presse", 25th July 1843, quoted in Ivor Guest (texts selected, translated and annotated by), *Gautier on Dance*, cit., pp. 115-116.

47. *Ivi*, p. 120.

preted the role of Achmet in France, Spain⁴⁸ and Russia⁴⁹. In 2010, *La Péri* was revived in Berlin at the Staatballett, with the choreography by Vladimir Malachov, who also interpreted the leading role of the prince Achmet, partnered by Diana Višnëva as the Queen of the *Péris*⁵⁰.



Figure 14. Lithograph portrait by Alfred Edward Chalon of Maria Taglioni in the role of Zoloé in the opéra-ballet *Le Dieu et la bayadère, ou la courtisane amoureuse* (Paris 1830). Public domain.



Figure 15. Music score front page of four *Quadrilles* after the ballet *La Péri* with the music by F. Burgmüller adapted for the piano by J. B. Tolbecque, Paris 19th century. Public domain.

3. “Sacountalá”

In 1846, Théophile Gautier went to Her Majesty’s Theatre in London to attend the ballet with an Indian plot *Lalla Rookh or the Rose of Lahore*⁵¹, also inspired by Thomas Moore’s poem. The music was composed by Felicien David (1810-1876) and Cesare Pugni (1802-1870), the choreography by Jules Perrot, and the scenery by Charles Marshall (1806-1890). The principal role of the Indian princess was performed by the Italian dancer Fanny Cerrito (1817-1909), partnered by her husband⁵²,

48. Laura Hormigón, *Marius Petipa en España 1844-1847. Memorias y otros materiales*, cit.

49. See: Marius Petipa, *Russian Ballet Master. The Memoirs of Marius Petipa*, cit.; Marius Petipa, *Mémoires*, cit.; Marius Petipa, *Memorie*, cit.; Marius Petipa, *Mémoires du maître de ballet des Théâtres impériaux Marius Ivanovitch Petipa*, cit.; Marius Petipa, *Memuary i Dokumenty [Memoirs and documents]*, cit.

50. Horst Koegler, *A New “La Péri” for the State Ballet Berlin*, in “Danceviewtimes”, March 4th 2010, online: <https://www.danceviewtimes.com/2010/03/vladimir-malakhov-produces-la-p%C3%A9ri-for-the-state-ballet-berlin.html> (Accessed 11/2/2022).

51. Some years later, in 1862 *Lalla Rookh* was revived as an opera, performed in Paris at the Opéra Comique, with the music composed by Félicien David and libretto by M. Carré and J. Lucas.

52. After the departure of Jules Perrot from Russia, Arthur Saint Léon became *premier maître de ballet* in St. Petersburg, until he left the Imperial capital in the year 1869. Marius Petipa then obtained this prestigious position, previously held by his two compatriots.

the French dancer and *mâitre de ballet* Arthur Saint-Léon (1821-1870), in the role of the prince disguised as the musician named Feramors. Enchanted by the stage special effects of *Lalla Rookh*⁵³, Gautier started to work on the ballet's libretto, based on his version of the Indian drama *Sacountalā* [Sanskrit: *Śakuntalā*], composed around the 4th century C.E, by the poet Kalidāsā, with the original Sanskrit title of *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* [*The Recognition of Śakuntalā*]. Undoubtedly, the *devadāsīs'* performances in Paris, in 1838, increased his personal interest in Indian culture, motivating him to study ancient Indian literary works more systematically.

In 1850, Gautier's friend, the above-mentioned poet Gérard de Nerval, together with the novelist Joseph Méry (1797-1866), had staged another ancient Indian drama by Śūdraka entitled *Le Chariot d'enfant* [*The Little Clay Cart*, in Sanskrit *Mṛcchakaṭikā*] at the Odéon Theatre in Paris. The adaptation of Śūdraka's drama was the first Sanskrit text ever staged in France⁵⁴. Later on, a friend suggested to Gautier that he should read Kalidāsā's drama *Śakuntalā*, translated into French by Antoine-Léonard de Chezy in 1830. The beauty of the drama, which had already charmed the German poet Johan Wolfgang von Goethe some decades earlier⁵⁵, impressed Gautier so much that he decided to compose the libretto for a ballet based on it. In 1851, Gautier visited the Indian pavilion at the Universal Colonial Exhibition in London. There he saw Indian miniatures and watercolours by Western artists of Indian palaces and landscapes, suggesting new ideas to him for the scenery of his ballet. Back in Paris, he started to work on this new creation, but he had to reduce the original number of acts and add new characters in order to employ all the members of the *corps de ballet*. His basic idea was to make the costumes, props and scenery conform as much as possible to the Indian ones. This is also why Gautier carefully selected his collaborators: the painters Hugues Martin, who lived in India for a period; François-Joseph Nolau and Auguste-Alfred Rubé; the costumer Alfred Albert, who tried his best to reproduce the *devadāsīs'* dresses and jewels; and the composer Ernest Reyer, who had lived in Algeria and, according to Gautier, could add some oriental flavour to the music. The character of *Śakuntalā* was entirely modelled on Amany, and the role was assigned to the Italian dancer Amalia Ferraris (1827-1904) (fig. 16). The ballet was first performed at the Paris Opéra

53. Regarding the dances, which were reminiscent of those performed by Maria Taglioni in the *opéra-ballet* *Le Dieu et la Bayadère ou la courtisane amoureuse* (1830), a critic of "The Times" wrote on 12 June 1846: "The *Pas Symbolique* of Hindoo girls [...] may be pronounced one of the most elegant scarf dances ever yet contrived, and show what new combinations are possible in a style apparently so hackneyed. The last figure in this *pas* in which Cerrito stands as a statue on a pedestal, and the girls with pink scarfs form a series of steps, is entirely novel in its effect, and admirably conceived" (Cyril W. Beaumont, *Complete Book of Ballet*, cit., p. 323).

54. See Claudine Le Blanc, *Le théâtre classique indien sur la scène romantique française: quelques remarques sur "Le Chariot d'enfant de Nerval et Méry", d'après "Le Petit Chariot de terre cuite" / "Mṛcchakaṭikā" de Śūdraka*, in "Synergies Inde", numéro monographique *L'orientalisme à l'humanisme en crise. Ponts entre l'Inde et l'Europe*, coordonné par Vidya Vencatesan et Philippe Benoit, n. 4, 2009, pp. 13-22.

55. See: Tiziana Leucci, *From Jean-Baptiste Lully to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The Construction of the Indian Dancer Character ("Bayadère") on the European Stage (1681-1798)*, cit.; Tiziana Leucci, *Vestales indiennes: les danseuses de temple dans les récits de voyage et l'imaginaire théâtral orientaliste (1780-1811)*, cit.

in 1858, exactly twenty years after the tour of the Indian artists in Europe. Thus, the score composed by Ernest Reyer (1823-1909), the interpretation by Amalia Ferraris and the choreography by Lucien Petipa, who most probably attended the performances of the Indian dancers in 1838 as many of the Opéra dancers did in Paris at that time, enriched with a vague “Indian savor” both the music and the dances of this ballet, as suggested in this comments by Gautier:

Ernest Reyer’s music justifies all the expectations that have long been held of this young composer, for whom we wrote the verses of *Le Sélam*⁵⁶. Reyer has a deep understanding of Oriental music; [...]. He can write for dancing *almehs*⁵⁷, whirling *dervishes*⁵⁸, and the Arab dreaming at the entrance of his tent. All these qualities he has displayed in *Sacountala*, producing, without descending to puerile imitation, music that could not be more indigenous or Indian. (Lucien Petipa, who has previously produced only divertissements, has become a past master at his first attempt. He possesses grace, originality, freshness, a feeling for plastic form in groups and an ease in handling masses. As for the mime passages, his own talent in this direction is already well known. What is to be said about M^{me} Ferraris? She danced her five *pas* with lightness, gentleness and an imaginable suppleness⁵⁹).



Figure 16. Print of Amalia Ferraris dancing in Vicenza (1853). Public domain.

56. “Ernest Reyer owed much to his friendship with writers such as Gautier, who wrote the verses for an early work, *Le Sélam, scènes d’Orient*, a descriptive symphony, first performed in Paris at the Théâtre des Italiens, on April 5th 1851. Eighteen years previously, in 1833, Gautier had written a preface to a collection of pieces by contemporary writers entitled *Le Sélam*, explaining that a *sélam* was a bouquet of allegorical flowers offered to their favourite lovers by *odalisques*, in which each flower represented a phrase in the language of love”. Ivor Guest (texts selected, translated and annotated by), *Gautier on Dance*, cit., p. 286, note 17.

57. *Almehs* (from the Arabic word *ālīma*, “to know, be learned”). This term indicates a class of female artists and courtesans educated from a young age to perform, recite classical poetry and converse wittily. The *Almehs* were cultivated ladies trained in dancing, singing and poetry, present at festivals and socio-religious entertainments in the Arabian, North African, Middle Eastern and Persian world.

58. *Dervishes* (from the Persian word *darvīsh*, “mendicant, a needy person”). This term indicates, in the Persian and the Turkish Muslim traditions, a class of religious beggars and poets belonging to the *Sufi* (from Arabic *Ṣūfī*, “dressed in woollen cloths”) mystic confraternities, who practice material poverty, total submission and dedication to God. Their religious ceremonies include dance, too. This term corresponds to the Arabic word *fakīr* (*faqīr*, “the one who feels love for the divine and fraternity for the other beings”) referring to those wandering ascetics that live by praising God and by serving and helping the people.

59. Théophile Gautier, *Opéra: Sacountala*, in “Le Moniteur Universel”, Paris, 19th July 1858, quoted in Ivor Guest (texts selected, translated and annotated by), *Gautier on Dance*, cit., pp. 285-286.

The memory of Amany and her companions was still so vivid in Gautier's mind that all of them appeared in the distribution of feminine roles in the ballet as *bayadères*, priestesses and *apsaras*. Though Gautier's *Sacountalâ* was very successful and every performance was sold out at the Paris Opéra, it was never staged again. The same fate befell the role of Zulmé, the Wili *bayadère* in his previous ballet *Giselle*, which soon fell into disuse⁶⁰, though in Russia, as I mentioned above, we still find the name of Zulmé [spelt Zulma] in the list of the Wilis. Considering Gautier's passion for ballet and Indian art as well, we cannot but agree with Edwin Binney, when he wrote:

Certainly the number of spectators who attended the Gautier ballet *Sacountala* was higher than all those who went to see any other Indian play in the 19th century. Instead of treating the ballet scornfully, considering it as a meaningless artistic form, like many scholars do, it would be better to keep in mind that the evenings at the Opéra when the ballet was performed spread the knowledge of Indian culture amongst the people as much, if not even more than all the works and translations done by the Indologists⁶¹.

Did Marius Petipa and Théophile Gautier ever meet?

It is not known if Marius Petipa was able to attend the ballet *Giselle* when it premiered in Paris. Most probably, he could not, as, at that time, he was engaged in the Grand Théâtre of Nantes, a city in the North-Western France, but we know for sure that he saw the ballet later on, and that he took some notes of the choreography on a music score adapted for the piano. We also know that he danced, on 13th May 1843, in the role of Albrecht in *Giselle*, at the Grand Théâtre of Bordeaux, with M^{lle} Elisa Bellon in the role of the tragic heroine⁶². Marius Petipa himself mentioned in his *Mémoires* how the interpretation of the Gautier's ballets *Giselle* and *La Péri* was crucial for his engagement in Bordeaux, and he recalled the verdict of the jury as follows: "M. Petipa is accepted, after three *débuts*, by the decision of the majority of the audience, because he had such a great and fully deserved success in *Giselle*, *La Péri*, and *La Fille Mal Gardée*". Again applause, and I am with a job⁶³.

In 1858, Marius Petipa was in Paris, attending the performances of Gautier's ballet *Sacountalâ*, for which his brother had composed the choreography. As previously mentioned, Lucien Petipa knew very well Gautier for having often collaborated with him. Moreover, besides Amany, Gautier was also in love with Carlotta Grisi, and both the Indian and the Italian dancers acted for him as inspiring "Muses" for his ballets' librettos. Lucien Petipa is said to have won the love of Grisi, and probably

60. In 1843, two years after the first performance in Paris, the Wili "Zulmé" no longer appears among the characters listed in the libretto for the revival of *Giselle*, held in Milan at the Teatro alla Scala.

61. Edwin Binney, *Les ballets de Théophile Gautier*, cit., pp. 333-334.

62. See: Marius Petipa, *Mémoires du maître de ballet des Théâtres impériaux Marius Ivanovitch Petipa*, cit., p. 35; Natalie Morel-Borotra, *Marius Petipa, "second danseur" au Grand Théâtre de Bordeaux*, cit., p. 96.

63. Marius Petipa, *Russian Ballet Master. The Memoirs of Marius Petipa*, cit., p. 11.

Théophile, too, had a relationship with her. Anyway, Gautier kept a close friendship with Carlotta throughout his life, and he lived and had two daughters with her sister, the opera singer Ernesta Grisi (1816-1895) (fig. 17). This means that Théophile, Lucien, Carlotta and Ernesta used to see each other quite often, either by working together for the staging of Gautier's ballets, or for some other informal family meetings (fig. 18). One can guess that, at least once in his life, Marius Petipa met Théophile Gautier on one such occasion, either on the stage during his brother's rehearsals, or during a performance, or just during a friendly visit. Perhaps, the fact that Marius Petipa never collaborated directly with Gautier prevented him from mentioning his name in his writings, as he did with the other French librettist and the director of the Opéra Comique in Paris, Jules-Henry Vernoy de Saint-Georges⁶⁴, who adapted Gautier's libretto of the ballet *Giselle* for the stage. Indeed, J.-H. V. de Saint-Georges collaborated with Marius Petipa for three of his ballets: *La Fille du Pharaon* [*The Pharaoh's Daughter*, 1862], *Le Roi Candaule* (1868), *Camargo* (1872), as well as for the revival of Mazilier's ballet *Le Corsaire* in 1868, and, in 1874, for Paul Taglioni's ballet *Le Papillon* (1860), whose librettos were written by J.-H. V. Saint-Georges himself.



Figure 17. Théophile Gautier, Ernesta Grisi and their two daughters (19th century). Courtesy: Fonds Gautier des Archives départementales des Hauts-de Seine, France. Public domain.



Figure 18. Photo portrait of Carlotta Grisi (1819-1899) and her eldest sister Ernesta Grisi (1816-1895). Lacombe & Lacroix, Genève, 1860 circa. Public domain.

4. “*The Pharaoh's Daughter*” and “*Le Roi Candaule*”

After Jules Perrot left St. Petersburg, Marius Petipa was asked to create a new ballet. Therefore,

64. See: Tatiana Nikitina, *Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges et Marius Petipa: histoire d'une collaboration*, in Pascale Melani (édité par), *À la recherche de Marius Petipa. Un itinéraire franco-russe. Gros plan sur “La Bayadère”*, cit., pp. 55-60.

in 1861, he travelled to Paris to meet J.-H. V. de Saint-Georges, and on the way back to Russia, he visited the famous Egyptian Museum in Berlin in order to examine relevant material for his new creation titled *The Daughter of the Pharaoh*:

Having sketched out a plan for the ballet, I left for Paris, to discuss the details with M. Saint-Georges. I spent three weeks there, working every day with the composer, and when we had finished working out the whole programme of my ballet, *The Daughter of the Pharaoh*, I returned to St. Petersburg. On the way back I visited the Egyptian Museum in Berlin, with the tombs of the Pharaohs, which had Egyptian paintings on them. [...] I studied all these pictures attentively⁶⁵.

Actually, for the plot of this new ballet Petipa was also inspired by Théophile Gautier's novel *Le Roman de la momie* [*The Mummy's Novel*], published in 1858, which narrates the love between a young British gentleman, Lord Evandale, with an ancient Egyptian girl, Tahoser, whose body and beauty remains miraculously preserved for more than 3500 years!⁶⁶ In the plot of the ballet, Lord Evandale, who is renamed as Lord Wilson, visits the desert and during a sand storm, he finds shelter in a pyramid where he discovers the mummy of the beautiful Aspacia, the "daughter of the Pharaoh". After having taken some opium which was offered to him by the local people (as for Achmet in *La Péri*), in his visions, the lovely Aspacia and Lord Wilson, transformed into an ancient Egyptian young man named Ta-Hor, meet and fall in love (as Achmet and the queen of the *Péris* do in the ballet). Once again, Gautier's libretto for the ballet *La Péri*, along with the novel *Le roman de la momie*, deeply influenced Marius Petipa's new creation.

Concerning the preparation of the ballet, in his *Mémoires* he related quite an interesting and hilarious meeting between the Italian dancer Carolina Rosati (1826-1905), the first interpreter of the role of Aspacia (fig. 19), Marius Petipa himself, who played the roles of both Lord Wilson and Ta-Hor (fig. 20-21), and the Director of the Imperial Theatres of St. Petersburg, Andrej Saburov⁶⁷, reporting that the ballet was well received:

In six weeks the posters announced the first performance of *The Daughter of the Pharaoh*. This ballet had an enormous success, and we gave it the entire Easter week, matinees and evenings. [...] With the conclusion of the winter season, M^{lle} Rosati's contract also terminated. This season was her swan song; she left for Paris, and never appeared on the stage again. The role of Aspacia in *The Pharaoh's Daughter* was given to my wife (Maria Sourovchtchikova-Petipa), and it became one of her finest roles; the public always gave her a magnificent reception in it⁶⁸.

65. Marius Petipa, *Russian Ballet Master. The Memoirs of Marius Petipa*, cit., pp. 49-50; Marius Petipa, *Mémoires du maître de ballet des Théâtres impériaux Marius Ivanovitch Petipa*, cit., p. 66; Marius Petipa, *Memuary i Dokumenty* [*Memoirs and documents*], cit., p. 82.

66. Théophile Gautier, *Le Roman de la momie*, in Id., *Cœuvres*, cit., pp. 917-1040.

67. See: Marius Petipa, *Russian Ballet Master. The Memoirs of Marius Petipa*, cit., pp. 50-54; Marius Petipa, *Mémoires*, cit., p. 48-52; Marius Petipa, *Mémoires du maître de ballet des Théâtres impériaux Marius Ivanovitch Petipa*, cit., pp. 66-68; Marius Petipa, *Memuary i Dokumenty* [*Memoirs and documents*], cit., pp. 82-86.

68. Marius Petipa, *Russian Ballet Master. The Memoirs of Marius Petipa*, cit., pp. 53-54.

It is noteworthy that, beside *The Pharaoh's Daughter*, Marius Petipa also got the idea for the plot for another of his ballets *Le Roi Candaule* [*The King Candaule*], staged in St. Petersburg in 1868, from the homonymous Gautier's novel, published in the French newspaper "La Presse"⁶⁹. The ballet's plot relates to a story taking place in Ancient Greece (fig. 22).



Figure 19. Photo portrait of Carolina Rosati (1826-1905) in the role of the princess Aspasia in the Marius Petipa ballet *The Pharaoh's Daughter*, St. Petersburg 1862. Courtesy: The Marius Petipa Society.

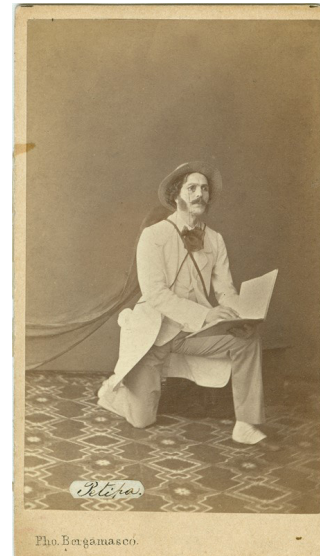


Figure 20. Photo portrait of Marius Petipa in the role of Lord Wilson in the Marius Petipa ballet *The Pharaoh's Daughter*, Photo: Bergamasco, St. Petersburg 1862. Courtesy: The Marius Petipa Society.



Figure 21. Photo portrait of Marius Petipa in the role of Ta-Hor in the Marius Petipa ballet *The Pharaoh's Daughter*, Photo: Bergamasco, St. Petersburg 1862. Courtesy: The Marius Petipa Society.



Figure 22. Photo portrait of an unidentified dancer in the role of an Amazon in the Marius Petipa ballet *Le Roi Candaule*, Photo: Bergamasco, St. Petersburg 1891. Courtesy: The Marius Petipa Society.

69. Théophile Gautier, *Le Roi Candaule*, in Id., *Œuvres*, cit., pp. 687-727.

Theophile Gautier visiting Russia in 1858, his opinion about the Russian dancers and Petipa's family

In the autumn of 1858, just a few months after the ballet *Sacountalâ* was premiered in Paris, Gautier travelled for the first time to Russia and visited the cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow. During his journey, he kept a diary which was published later, in 1867, with the title *Voyage en Russie* [*Journey to Russia*]⁷⁰ (fig. 23). In St. Petersburg, he attended the performance of Jules Perrot's ballet *Eoline, ou la Driade*, with the music composed by Cesare Pugni (1802-1870), and Amalia Ferraris in the leading role⁷¹, who had, just a few weeks before, performed the heroine *Sacountalâ* in Paris. Gautier left a detailed description of Perrot's ballet in a chapter of his diary entitled *Journal de Saint-Petersbourg*, dated 23rd November 1858, in which he appreciated the artistic taste of the highly demanding Russian audience of the dance *connaisseurs* and *ballettomanes*, who attended the performances of the most brilliant artists of the time. He enjoyed the Italian ballerina's interpretation and the qualities of the Russian dancers as well:

Bolshoi Theatre, St. Petersburg: *Eoline, ou la Driade*, grand ballet fantasque in 4 acts and 5 scenes, choreography by Jules Perrot, music by Cesare Pugni. November 4th/16th, 1858 (in the old Russian calendar). [...] M^{me} Ferraris' triumph was complete, and the Russians are notoriously difficult in matter of dance. They have seen Taglioni, Elssler, Cerrito and Carlotta Grisi, not to mention their own ballerinas, a young choreographic army graduated from their ballet school, one of the best run in the world, agile, supple, marvellously disciplined, and with talents already fully formed that lack only stage experience, which will come with time⁷².

In the following paragraphs, Gautier expressed his fascination for the Russian ballerinas and their exotic names, which he compared to the melodious sounds of singing birds and also to the Sanskrit names he employed for the libretto of his "Indian" ballet *Sacountalâ*. Quite interestingly, here he referred to the beauty and the talent of Marius Petipa's first Russian wife, Maria Surovščikova-Petipa, also being appreciative of Petipa family's members, even if he did not specify the names of each of them:

70. Théophile Gautier, *Voyage en Russie*, cit.

71. About the presence of the Italian dancers in Russia and in Europe see: Ivor Guest, *La Divine Virginia. A Biography of Virginia Zucchi*, Marcel Dekker, New York 1977; José Sasportes (a cura di), *La danza italiana in Europa nell'Ottocento*, in "La danza italiana", quaderno n. 3, maggio 2013; Valentina Bonelli, *Le Carnaval des Italiennes. Les danseuses italiennes à Saint-Petersbourg à l'époque de Petipa*, in Pascale Melani (édité par), *À la recherche de Marius Petipa. Un itinéraire franco-russe. Gros plan sur "La Bayadère"*, cit., pp. 61-74; Toni Candeloro, *L'Italia nel mondo coreografico di Marius Petipa*, in Donatella Gavrilovich — Annamaria Corea (a cura di), *Marius Petipa. Lo Zar del balletto classico (1818-1910)*, cit., pp. 171-175; Concetta Lo Iacono, *Lex choreutica in nuce. Danzatrici e coreografi italiani in Russia*, in Donatella Gavrilovich — Annamaria Corea (a cura di), *Marius Petipa. Lo Zar del balletto classico (1818-1910)*, cit., pp. 29-38.

72. Théophile Gautier, *Bolshoi Théâtre Saint-Petersbourg, "Eoline, ou la Dryade"*, in "Journal de Saint-Petersbourg", November 23rd 1858, quoted in Ivor Guest (texts selected, translated and annotated by), *Gautier on Dance*, cit., p. 293.

And remember that I am a foreigner who arrived only yesterday, listening with surprised fascination to all those strange feminine names, sounding like unknown birdsongs, and yet so sweet, so full of vowels and music that they might be mistaken for Sanskrit names in some unknown Indian drama by William Jones or Schlegel: Prikhunova, Muravieva, Amosova, Kosheva, Lyadova, Snetkova, Makarova... It seemed that we were transcribing from the text of *Sacountala*, for the benefit of the dancers of the Rue de Peletier⁷³, all those beautiful names, full-bloomed and scented like the flowers of India, that caused them such alarm. Well, with your greater knowledge of all this charming world; just imagine that each one of those names signifies beauty, talent, or at least youth and hope. As for M^{me} Petipa, her French name acts as a guide although she is Russian, and we can state more specifically that she is delicate, pretty, light, and worthy to be admitted to that family of distinguished choreographers⁷⁴.

If, in his large number of ballets' reviews, Gautier had often mentioned the name of Lucien Petipa, by appreciating his work and qualities as a dancer and as a choreographer, this is the first time that he has referred to the entire Petipa family, by praising their artistic values. According to Martine Khahane: "These (Gautier's) lines were undoubtedly read by Marius Petipa, the 40-year-old soloist in the dance company of the same theatre. During half a century, he choreographed the great historical ballets that remain the base of the repertory of all classical dance companies today"⁷⁵.

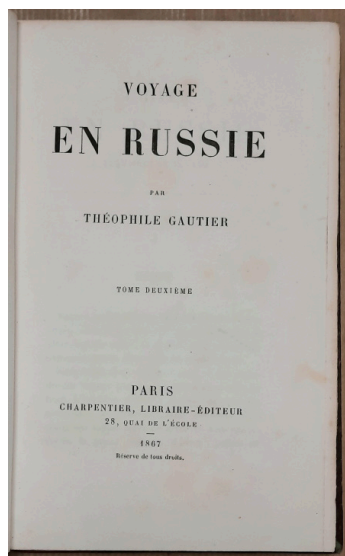


Figure 23. Front page of the Théophile Gautier's book *Voyage en Russie*, t. II, Charpentier, Paris 1867. Public domain.



Figure 24. Front page of the Sergej Nikolaevič Chudkov volume *History of Dances* (Russian: *Istorija Tancev. Vsech Vremen i Narodov*), St. Petersburg 1913-1917. Public domain.

73. The "Rue de Peletier" was the name of the street where previously was located the Opéra of Paris, before the construction of the Palais Garnier in 1875.

74. Théophile Gautier, *Bolshoi Théâtre Saint-Petersbourg, "Eoline, ou la Dryade"*, in "Journal de Saint-Petersbourg", November 23rd 1858, quoted in Ivor Guest (texts selected, translated and annotated by), *Gautier on Dance*, cit., pp. 293-294.

75. Martine Kahane, *Petipa in France. A Franco-Russian Story in Three Acts and a Coda*, cit., p. 25.

Epilogue

Despite the lack of historical evidence, at present we can only guess that, during his several visits to France, Marius Petipa had the possibility to meet Théophile Gautier, perhaps with the help of his brother Lucien, who eventually acted as the intermediary. Unfortunately, we do not know if such a meeting ever took place, either in Paris or in St. Petersburg, when Gautier visited Russia twice, in 1858-1859 and in 1861. However, what we can say for sure is that Gautier appreciated the work of all of Petipa's family members. Though Marius Petipa never mentioned his name in his writings, and though he most probably did not collaborate directly with him (as he did with J.-H. Vernoy de Saint-Georges), there is no doubt that he was inspired by Gautier's three librettos *Giselle ou les Wilis*, *La Péri* and *Sacountalâ* for the elaboration of his two "Indian" ballets *La Bayadère* and *The Talisman*, and by Gautier's novels *Le roman de la momie*, for his ballet *The Pharaoh's Daughter*, and *Le Roi Candaule* for his homonymous ballet. Perhaps, if they ever met, it may also be that Marius Petipa did not get along well with Théophile Gautier, and therefore he did not acknowledge him in his writings. Nevertheless, we can also add that, at the end of his life, Petipa was not so kind to other librettists with whom he collaborated, as in the case of the art critic Sergej Chudekov (1837-1928), co-author with Marius Petipa of the librettos for some ballets as *La Bayadère* (1877) and *Roxane, la beauté du Montenegro* [*Roxane, the Beauty of Montenegro*, 1878] with the music by Ludwig Minkus (1826-1917) as well.

For though (Chudekov) the publisher of the "Peterburgkaja Gazeta" ["The Petersburg Gazette"] had contributed the librettos to *La Bayadère* and other Petipa ballets of the 1870s and 1880s, by the early 1900s the former collaborators appear to have fallen out, given the consistently unflattering remarks about Chudekov ("the most miserable of men, faithless and without honour!!") and his newspaper that appears in the choreographer's diaries⁷⁶.

Consequently, Gautier was not at all an exception in Marius Petipa's old-age forgetfulness, resentment, bitter thoughts and hard feelings. Interestingly, Chudekov was a passionate lover and a fine *connaisseur* of the Indian arts. In the beginning of the 20th century (between 1913 and 1917), he wrote a richly documented *History of Dance*, published in Russia (fig. 24), in which he devoted a full chapter on the Indian dances and dancers.

As many artists were used to do at that time, Marius Petipa drew inspiration on several literary and artistic sources, and elaborated the plots, the characters and the settings of some previous ballets,

76. Lynn Garafola, *Introduction*, in Marius Petipa, *The Diaries of Marius Petipa*, cit., p. x. See also: Snejana Tikhonenko, *Petipa et Khoudekov. Le problème du livret de "La Bayadère"*, in Pascale Melani (édité par), *À la recherche de Marius Petipa. Un itinéraire franco-russe. Gros plan sur "La Bayadère"*, cit., pp. 103-107.

by adopting and adapting them to the taste and the expectations of the contemporary audiences⁷⁷. Though in those days it was quite a common practice to borrow, revive, and re-interpret the ballets' sequences of other *maîtres de ballet*, it could also happen that the authors of the choreographies claimed their own copyright, as in the case of Jules Perrot, who lodged a complaint against Marius Petipa for having used some of his compositions without his permission⁷⁸. So far, unless new evidence is found about the possible meetings and interactions between Théophile Gautier and Marius Petipa, we can only say for sure that Gautier appreciated Petipa family's artistic work, and that Marius Petipa conceived and staged a few of his own choreographic compositions by drawing direct inspiration on some of Gautier's ballets librettos and novels. Perhaps, the fact that, in his travelling accounts to Russia, Gautier fully reported only the name of Marius Petipa's first Russian wife, by praising her artistic qualities and beauty, and not that of Marius Petipa, or the names of the other members of his family, such an omission eventually upset him by hurting his own ego, and, therefore, in his writings, Petipa did not refer to Gautier intentionally.

Being fully aware that the present study cannot claim to be exhaustive on this topic, I trust that further research in the archives will enable us to better investigate my hypothesis, by adding more historical evidence on the possible connection between Marius Petipa and Théophile Gautier.

However, by way of a conclusion, we can acknowledge that, despite the fact that Marius Petipa did not always mention his sources of inspiration, nevertheless, he has handed down to us such a rich and amazing choreographic heritage which, since the second half of the 19th century, is still enchanting and intriguing our imagination, as well as the creativity and the sensitivity of several generations of performing artists, choreographers, dance critics and masters, students, scholars and spectators!

77. See: Sergey Konaev, *Marius Petipa, una forma de vivir y una forma de crear*, in Laura Hormigón (Edición de), *Marius Petipa. Del ballet romántico al clásico*, cit., pp. 15-34; Boris Illarionov, "La Bayadère" de Marius Petipa: *questions of style*, in Pascale Melani (édité par), *À la recherche de Marius Petipa. Un itinéraire franco-russe. Gros plan sur "La Bayadère"*, cit., pp. 109-113.

78. Concetta Lo Iacono, *Lex choreutica in nuce. Danzatrici e coreografi italiani in Russia*, cit.