

## Erik Satie's Letters

Nigel Wilkins

Numéro 2, 1981

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1013751ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1013751ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités  
canadiennes

### ISSN

0710-0353 (imprimé)

2291-2436 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer cet article

Wilkins, N. (1981). Erik Satie's Letters. *Canadian University Music Review /  
Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, (2), 207–227.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1013751ar>

## ERIK SATIE'S LETTERS

Nigel Wilkins

Although a substantial collection of letters written by Erik Satie was gathered together several years ago, little of this has appeared in print, either in the original French or in translation, for reasons which I indicated in a previous article dealing with letters concerning Satie's stage works, and those to Darius Milhaud (see Wilkins 1980a).

Such is the general interest in Satie as composer, prophet, wit, and humorist that it seems appropriate at least to attempt a summary with selected translations into English of the remainder of his intriguing correspondence, thus filling in a remaining gap in the overall publication of his writings (see Volta 1977 & Wilkins 1975 & 1980b).

In marked contrast to the celebrated open letters published in *Gil Blas* (1892) and *Le Ménestrel* (1894) (see Wilkins 1980b: 150-51) is one of the earliest personal letters by Satie preserved, and the only example which could be described as intimate. It is dated 11 March 1893 and is to Suzanne Valadon, "Biqui," with whom Satie had a brief but stormy relationship. They lived together for a while at the decrepid 6, rue Cortot, in Montmartre, also the "abbatial residence" from which the composer issued Edicts and Cartularies of his Metropolitan Church of Art of Jesus the Conductor, and on the walls of which he is said to have posted "excommunications" against those who incurred his displeasure, including his mistress:

11 March 1893: to Suzanne Valadon

Dear little Biqui,  
Impossible

to stop thinking of your  
whole being; I am completely full of you;

wherever I go  
 I see nothing but your lovely  
 eyes, your gentle hands  
 and your tiny feet.

You, you are happy; it is no  
 thought of mine which will make your transparent forehead  
 frown;  
 nor will any regret at not seeing me.

For me there is nothing but icy  
 loneliness which makes my head go empty  
 and fills my heart with sadness . . . .

[Collection of Robert Le Masle, reprinted  
 in *Catalogue of Exposition Suzanne Valadon*,  
 Musée d'art moderne, Paris, 1967]

The grandiloquent tone of Satie's "Church Writings" (see Volta 1977: *passim* & Wilkins 1980b: 36-56) persists in a number of letters also issued from the *Abbatiale*. A good example of this is the letter of thanks to Ernest Chausson as President of the Société Nationale de Musique after the performance in 1897 of Debussy's orchestration of the *Gymnopédies* No. 1 and No. 3:

23 February 1897: to Ernest Chausson  
 Honored Sir,

If abomination deserves to be punished by extermination, concord calls forth a homage from Righteousness. In consequence of which, We beg you to advise yourself of Our affection and Our Congratulations . . . .

. . . the anger still felt by Us against those who feed only on the flames of Hell, obtains by its petition Our gratitude toward the Good; a gratitude which We are happy to express every time it is Our power to do so; a gratitude which distinguishes them from those wretches who go in terror of the humbleness of Our bravery and the decency of Our aspirations . . . .

[Reprinted in the *Revue de musicologie*,  
 XLVIII (1962), 73-74]

Gustave Doret received a very brief note in a similar vein in the same year as the dedication of the *Gymnopédies*:

2 April 1897: to Gustave Doret

I embrace you, my Brother. May my embraces, through

their petrifying and consoling properties, preserve for Me the faithful companion that you are.

[Reprinted in the *Revue de musicologie*,  
XLVIII (1962), 74]

The Debussy orchestration of the *Gymnopédies* was still of great concern to Satie later on, as we see from his note of June 1911 to M. Rouart, the publisher (Rouart Lerolle & Cie):

*June 1911: to M. Rouart*

I greet you flat on my face and ask, as nicely as I am able, if you will be coming this evening to hear the *Gymnopédies*. If so, I shall be very pleased . . . .

[Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Ms. 8024.147]

The more virulent "abbatial" letters were, of course, directed against critics, in keeping with the attacks in the *Cartulaire* and the brochures, "Commune qui mundi nefas" and "Intende votis supplicum" (1895) (see Wilkins 1980b: 38-41), especially against "Willy" (Gauthier-Villars):

*31 March 1898: to M. Gauthier-Villars*

We are informed that, in some magazine where you officiate as a modest employee, with the aim of building up a sophisticated readership, you discourse on Us with masterly verve, pointing out Our impoverished state to all and sundry. All that is very fine, honored Sir; and We congratulate you for it; for in this We recognize that exquisite tact which has always won the admiration of your readers. To think that We mistook you for a stupid barbarian, for a coward, for a rather silly and pallid reject of Literature! How wrong We were, honored Sir; how wrong. A regrettable mistake! We are still ashamed about it; being so far out in Our judgement!

You are a gallant man, very well-informed, unusually polite, an established wit, extremely competent; We admit it Ourselves, in person! And for this reason We wish directly, without delay, to be your humblest, most inferior, most lovable servant as long as you see no malice in Our intent or other impediment, honored Sir . . . .

[Bibliothèque Nationale, Mus., Lettres  
autographes, No. 1]

In 1900 Florent Schmitt also received a letter from the same address, in flippant mood, declining an invitation. This was followed by a particularly curious letter in 1907, when Satie had moved to Arceuil. It is clear from other evidence that Satie did not take Schmitt very seriously (see Wilkins 1975:298):

*21 November 1900: to Florent Schmitt*

My dear child — I in person have received your invitation to dine with those ladies and gentlemen, the so-called Prix de Rome winners for this year; and I regret to inform you in person, by the mouth of the pen with which I in person write these words, that I shall not be able to attend . . .

[Bibliothèque Nationale, Mus., Lettres autographes, No. 16, Don 10466 bis]

*31 January 1907: to Florent Schmitt*

. . . You did well to choose the day of St. André Corsin for our meeting again; he was a Bishop and Confessor. His brother-in-law, St. Apparatus, left a dissertation on "Human Excrement," the which, he says, is neither beautiful to behold nor pleasant in any wise, save in the throwing out of it.

We can speak of that at table, if you like; that's what St. Vechon did, who used to eat roots and sing sad songs. . .

P.S. I think you will find it hard to recognize me: I've let my eye-lids grow.

[Bibliothèque Nationale, Mus., Lettres autographes, No. 17, Don 10466 bis]

A further brief note to Schmitt, dated 22 April 1907, is preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale (B.N., Mus., Lettres autographes, No. 18, Don 10466 bis).

The most notable recipients of letters preserved from the early years are the composer's brother, Conrad (who had a successful career as a chemist and published a book on the chemistry of perfumes), whom he sometimes calls "Mr. Willow-Warbler" (M. Pouillot), and Vincent Hyspa, the café *chansonnier* whom Satie accompanied at the piano.

The letters to Conrad are warm and friendly, marked by characteristic humor. The brothers were evidently well able to understand one another, and we recall that Conrad wrote a glowing account of Erik's achievements in *Le Coeur* of June 1895:

14 August 1899: to Conrad Satie

Why should we attack God himself? He is just as unhappy as we are; since the death of His poor son, he takes no pleasure in anything, and just plays with his food.

Although he has seated him at his good old right hand, he is still quite taken aback at men playing such a dirty trick on one whom he cherished; he spends all his time grumbling, in the most miserable fashion: that is really not very nice.

I doubt whether he would even send one of his nephews into this world now; men have put him off sending his family travelling.

Let us leave him in peace, My friends; let us pray to him sincerely, as we ought to do, in any case. It is I, Saint Erik of Arcueil, Parcener and Martyr, who say this unto you.

[Fascimile in P.-D. Templier, *Erik Satie*  
(1932), Pl. XXVI]

ca. 1900: to Conrad Satie

I'm tired of being so desperately sad; everything I attempt with timidity fails with a boldness never before imagined.

What can one do, except turn to God and point it out? In the end I'm coming to think that he is more stupid than powerful, the old man . . . .

[Reprinted in P.-D. Templier, *Erik Satie*  
(1932), 25-26]

1910: to Conrad Satie

. . . In 1905, I started work with D'Indy. I was tired of being reproached for an ignorance I felt I must possess, since competent people pointed it out in my works.

Three years later, after much very hard work, I obtained my Diploma in Counterpoint at the Schola Cantorum, initialled by my excellent teacher; the which is certainly the most knowledgeable and the best man in this world. So there I was, in 1908, holding in my hands a diploma which entitled me to call myself a contrapuntist. Proud of my knowledge, I started to compose. My first work of this type is a chorale and fugue for piano duet. I have been much abused in my poor life, but never was so much scorn poured upon me. What on earth had I been doing with D'Indy? Before, I had written pieces of such immense charm. And now! How pretentious! What a bore!

Thereupon, the "young musicians" organized an anti-D'Indy movement and performed the *Sarabande*, the *Fils*

*des étoiles*, etc., works which had formerly been considered as the product of great ignorance, and wrongly so, according to these "young musicians."

That's life, old chap.

It's hard to understand.

[Reprinted in P.-D. Templier, *Erik Satie* (1932), 32]

14 January 1911: to Conrad Satie

... Ravel is a very talented Prix de Rome winner. Like Debussy but more dazzling.

He assures me — every time I meet him — that he owes me a great deal . . . .

[Facsimile in P.-D. Templier, *Erik Satie* (1932), Pl. XXXIII]

Probably also to Conrad are two especially strange letters from 1897, the second of which cannot really be translated but reminds us of the fact that Satie's mother, Jane Leslie Anton, was Scottish, and that he had at least a passing acquaintance with the English language:

22 March 1897

... It is very clever of you to say that the Musical Art is still in its diapers, stinking diapers in poor taste, if you please; you are right in seeing Beethoven as a disturber of the peace; however you upset Me when you persist in putting forward the Marshall the Duke of Magenta as the most eminent clarinetist of the Middle Ages. Can you not see the damage you are doing? I am still working on the "Observations of an Imbecile (Me)"; it is to be hoped that I shall not shine in the humanities; as for the orchestration of the symphonic pieces entitled *Danses de travers* and *Airs à faire fuir*, that is coming on; quite soon I'll play them to you, these symphonic pieces, on the bag-trombone, complete with slide and chin-strap, and that will make your ears stop up, My friend. No, please don't thank me.

[Facsimile in *Humour poétique*, Georges Charbonnier, ed., special number of *La Nef*, No. 71-72 (Dec.-Jan. 1950-51)]

30 August 1897

My dear Guat,

Madame Jambe-de-cerf (Thank to the stag), est enfin venue chercher sa machine (at last come to look for his

engine). Cela n'a pas été tout seul, my dear chum; cette vénérable Dame ayant amené avec elle une sorte de maquereau, lequel se disait marchand de cycles (mackerel cycle manufacturer). Tu vois d'ici la chose (look the object); mais, grâce à Notre Sauveur (favour with Saviour of mankind), Je suis rentré maître absolu de la place, abîmant d'un seul coup le maquereau (sunk in grief the fish). On voulait, fondly cherished kinsman, nous mettre dedans (to try to put us within); ma malice a déjoué leurs vilains tours (unpleasant trick).

Sois calme donc (to prove to be quiet).

Jé t'embrasse et prie Dieu pour toi (I pray God to assist you).

[Harvard University, Houghton Library,  
Dumbarton Oaks Ms. LX]

Vincent Hyspa receives merely short notes in a tone of evident *bonhomie*:

ca. 1901: to Vincent Hyspa

You're as good as bread . . . . The weather is distinctly cold. Wrap yourself up well . . . .

[Reprinted in *Paris-Midi*, 7 May 1937]

23 September 1903: to Vincent Hyspa

Me come see you tomorrow Tuesday about noon your place where you know so well how to live agreeably.

We both speak and laugh one after another, no noise; after, me leave in person remembering good time we had . . . .

[Reprinted in *Paris-Midi*, 7 May 1937]

17 March 1906: to Vincent Hyspa

. . . . Me, I'm walking straight ahead, eyes wide open, elbows at my sides . . . .

[Reprinted in *Paris-Midi*, 7 May 1937]

19 September 1909: to Vincent Hyspa

. . . . I would very much like to see you — even with one eye — as the saying goes . . . . Drop me a line, please, and tell me what to do with it, Sir.

[Reprinted in *Paris-Midi*, 7 May 1937]

The only letters to Debussy which seem to have been preserved, from 1903, were published in the *Revue de musi-*



*cologie* (XLVIII (1962), 71-73). They deserve quotation, however, for the characteristic verve and play with language removes any doubt as to their authenticity:

*20 July 1903: to Claude Debussy*

... In Paris, Mr. Erik Satie chanced to witness a holiday named July 14th by reason of the fact that it falls on that number of the aforementioned month.

How was this holiday? Mr. Erik Satie finds it very uninteresting and verging on the vulgar. While it lasts, the humbler classes drink avidly and without moderation very bad wine, which they later bring up all over the pavement. Mr. Erik Satie knows no sight more repugnant than this, apart from what is so carefully presented to us by the Directors of the National Opera, where one of Mr. Erik Satie's works so full of the Dramatic is not being played: *Uspud* . . . .

*14 August 1903: to Claude Debussy*

... Mr. Erik Satie was in pain during this time from a nasty and cumbersome bout of sciatica, which made him walk bent double in the inconvenient way chickens do, and caused him much suffering. Mr. Erik Satie wonders if one can get used to this malady and acquire a taste for it . . . .

*17 August 1903: to Claude Debussy*

... Mr. Erik Satie is at present working on an amusing piece, the which is called "2 pieces in the shape of a pear." Mr. Erik Satie is crazy over this new invention of his mind. He speaks much of it and praises it highly. He believes it to be better than everything which has been written up to now; he may be mistaken; but it's no use telling him; he'd never believe it . . . .

Letters to further composers of comparable stature include eight to Stravinsky, published in *Avec Stravinsky* (Monaco, 1958) and six to Poulenc, published by Francis Hell in his study, *Francis Poulenc* (Paris, 1958).

A major series of Satie letters preserved, comparable with that to Milhaud, is that to Satie's young protégé Roland-Manuel. There are forty-four of these, as well as fifteen to Roland-Manuel's step-mother, Mme F. Dreyfus.<sup>1</sup> These range over the years from 1911 to 1920. The following extracts are of interest either for the further illustration they give of Satie's

wit and verbal humor, or for the picture they convey of a changing relationship as the young protégé sought independence of thought and went so far as to offend Satie mortally by his rejection of *Parade* in 1917:

13 May 1911: to Roland-Manuel

. . . Your remark about the woods in the fresh morning air is neither bad nor unpleasant. One would have to be mad to say the opposite, unless one was being vindictive . . . .

30 May 1911: to Roland-Manuel

. . . I prefer the evening to the morning, if you don't mind. The evening is less morningish. That's obvious . . . .

8 July: to Roland-Manuel

. . . The "Habit de cheval" suits me quite well. I am working at it with the necessary calm.

About Roussel: we could go and see him after lunch on Monday. What do you say? But I do not know if he is still in Paris. He is very fond of travelling. Something he picked up in the Navy . . . .

30 July 1911: to Roland-Manuel

. . . I wrote to Roussel the other day; in reply he sent me a charming note which I did not dare send you in case it did not reach you. It is a delightful letter, and it will please you. Just let me know and I will send it on to you. Aren't I nice? Roussel is pleased to have you as a pupil. I am happy about it too . . . .

4 August 1911: to Roland-Manuel

. . . Here is Roussel's letter. I saw him — Roussel — the day before yesterday. He said again how pleased he would be to have you as a pupil. I played him what you know of *En habit de cheval* and the exposition of the other fugue, the *Fugue de papier*. He found it all amusing; and thought I was right in my new way of making a fugue: especially the expositions. He liked its little harmonies . . . .

Roussel played me a long piece based on impressions of the Far East; highly successful, too . . . .

9 September 1911: to Roland-Manuel

. . . I have just sold *En habit de cheval* to Rouart: it is complete now — two chorales and two fugues.

To my great regret . . . I shall not be able to come to Lyon

this year. Problems, my dear chap, are just pouring down onto my naked skull. I cannot tell you more about it.

Are you well? Debussy is back. We read through the proofs of *Morceaux en forme de poire* together . . . .

14 September 1911: to Roland-Manuel

. . . I am just deciding on my orchestra for *En habit de cheval*: 2 flutes; 2 oboes; 1 cor anglais; 2 clarinets; 2 bassoons; 1 sarrusophone; 2 horns (an instrument I despise); 2 trumpets (one should never have more); 3 trombones; 1 tuba; 1 Contrabass Tuba; percussion and all the rest, of course . . . . Concerning trumpets, D'Indy says three mean the end of the world.

20 October 1911: to Roland-Manuel

I myself am going to Ravel's, tomorrow, Saturday, about 2:30 p.m.

Would you like me to introduce you to this great man of whom I am very fond? . . .

1 April 1912: to Roland-Manuel

Old man — I have just come out from the S.M.I., where I saw Vuillermoz. We should have handed your thing over this very day; but the committee does not meet until Tuesday morning and so I obtained permission for the score to be submitted tomorrow morning. If you take longer than that, you will *have* to wait for another time. I wash my legs of it . . . .

. . . I asked Vuillermoz to introduce me as a phonometrician and not as a musician. I do not write music, just phonometry. It's better . . . .

8 August 1912: to Roland-Manuel

. . . Montfort thinks my "Choral et Fugue" splendid, and gave me a promising idea: write it out for string quartet. I found Montfort to be an admirer of all the serious and beautiful things I want to write. It is a great joy to me. The "Choral" is easily adaptable for quartet; the "Fugue" simply writes itself.

That will make me a fine piece, whatever you say about it, old chap. Exactly. How's your Minuet? Keep working, it's good . . . .

28 August 1912: to Mme F. Dreyfus

. . . I hope you are all well and that you are resignedly putting up with the beastly, peevish atmospheric condi-

tions of our present summer; and may the Lord, in his majesty and glory, be always with you . . . .

29 August 1912: to Roland-Manuel

. . . I am glad about what you tell me of your Minuet based on the blessed name of our great Ravel. You should have written a solemn march, rather than a Minuet. Perhaps you will get around to it . . . .

5 September 1912: to Roland-Manuel

. . . Victory! — for the moment. I wrote a strange letter to Jacques Durand to ask if he wanted me to send him the *Véritables préludes flasques*. I added: "Sir, please be so good as to let me know whether you find my request agreeable or intolerable." In a word, I was playing a tune on my second string, which I had just tuned up after my fashion. — I received a letter, the first words of which are: "We shall be delighted to see the manuscript you offer us of the *Véritables préludes flasques*. A meeting is to be arranged. How will all this end? . . . .

14 September 1912: to Roland-Manuel

I am a man whom women do not understand. Moreover, men understand me no better. Some of them at least. M. Durand has sent back my manuscript — like a glove.

I remembered what you had told me about Demets, and went to see him. At once, this fine man took my manuscript and paid me on the spot. So thank you very much, old chap. M. Durand speaks of his *customers* who might not like to own my work. That is likely . . . .

3 December 1912: to Roland-Manuel

. . . What a success! What a success!

Everything went off well. One must not criticize the performance: youthful, which is a good thing, a very good thing. You were superb. Your brother, fantastic. Roger, magnificent.

Roussel was there. Someone saw him.

As for your music, dear friend, it struck me as rather like Debussy, and with his type of orchestration. You are very gifted. I wanted to take you in my hairy arms. Impossible. I had to leave . . . .

1912: to Mme F. Dreyfus

. . . Thank you for your sympathy for "poor artists." It is very kind of you. I would not like Roland ever to become

one: may he never be an artist, the poor chap! An artist?  
That's not nice at all . . .

28 March 1913: to Roland-Manuel

Finished at last, *Le Piège de Méduse* (the play) . . .

26 October 1913: to Roland-Manuel

My poor old fellow — Are things not so good? Pain in the neck? Do you like your superior officers? You have to like them. Anyway, with your military spirit you are bound to be a very, very good soldier.

Your superior officers are a constant example to you of discipline and martial devotion. The longer one lives with them, the more strongly one comes to like them.

Have you had the pleasure of seeing your flag, or some other miraculous object of that kind? What a wonderful thing a flag is! I really must buy myself one. I shall have it photographed and then send you a print. Long live the Army, my friend! . . .

5 January 1914: to Roland-Manuel (on the back of a card opened in error)

I have just done something terrible, a betrayal of trust: I opened this card. Will you forgive me?

It is something a stupid youngster would do . . . , a youngster stupified . . . by drink.

If you will not forgive me, I shall swallow my saliva and drown my stomach. I shall go dropsical. Maybe someone will paint my portrait . . .

5 January 1916: to Mme F. Dreyfus

Dear Madam — Please would you trust me — for two or three days — with the collection by the Russian Five (Rimsky, César Cui, Borodin, etc. . . .) on the theme:



This work, published in Germany, is unobtainable, even though Russian, and I need it most urgently. Roland has it with his Russian music . . .

19 April 1916: to Roland-Manuel

. . . I listened to your talk carefully. It was perfect. You have already done much for me; yesterday, you did more than ever . . .

17 May 1916: to Mme F. Dreyfus

. . . I hear that our old Roland is to be restored to us for a while.

Are you pleased? Me, I am delighted, beside myself with joy: that splendid fellow plays a very important part in my life. When he is not there, I am just like a wretched duffer, all sad and anxious . . . .

Yes, I am fifty years old. I would never have thought that it could be so easy. I have not changed my ways at all. The sun smiled on me. I think I can get used to it, don't you? It isn't difficult . . . .

19 May 1916: to Mme F. Dreyfus

. . . I'm writing to you in a dive: I have taken a walk out this way (Clichy).

What ink!

What a pen!

I sent you a note to Lyon to thank you. Did you receive it? . . .

. . . There is one good thing about this war: it tightens the bonds of friendship . . . .

August 1916: to Mme F. Dreyfus

Thank you for your kind note. Roland invited me to dinner today. Can't make it. But I'm off — hot-foot — to St. Mandé. I think I shall see him at least for five minutes — His pamphlet on "Me" is out. It is fine. You will have seen it, of course — I saw Raveton — *Ravel*, naturally. I helped see him off. Sad was I. I do not like leave-takings. Not nice. Nothing unusual here. Cloudy sky. Rain. The wind seems idiotic. The sun is being very shy . . . .

30 July 1917: to Mme F. Dreyfus

. . . Forgive me for writing to you on such paper: restrictions. Just tell yourself that it is French paper! And therefore good! . . .

How Ravel has changed! Don't you think so? He really looks rather comical . . . and absurd. Let us hope it is not serious. Have you noticed how "militarism" has followed him into civilian life?

How very strange!

That causes me much grief — much.

Such a great artist! and a good sort! — after all.

I sent Roland a letter as long as a telescope. Poor old chap! . . .

16 August 1917: to Mme F. Dreyfus (see Wilkins 1980a: 407-08)

3 September 1917: to Mme F. Dreyfus

. . . I went to consult a somnambulist (Maybe I should have consulted a calligrapher). We spoke about time [temps: time/weather]. Thinking to please me she told me about the time of Henry IV. Very politely, I asked this lady to tell me something about the present time, and especially about September, which is rather close.

She told me: The days will grow shorter; the temperature will be normal; leaves will fall from the trees; and the following month will probably be October — “Your friends will return,” she told me . . . .

15 October 1917: to Mme F. Dreyfus

. . . And Roland? I had some news from him. He is coming in November. So much the better. I shall be pleased to see him. You will have seen how Marnold has taken his inspiration from Lalo, Jean d'Undine, and Poueigh. He keeps good company. His article attacking me is such a devastating bore! If only he read some of the letters artists have sent me! What a bore! . . . .

1917-18: to Roland-Manuel (see Wilkins 1980a: 409)

14 March 1918: to Roland-Manuel

. . . Your kind letter arrived this morning. What I wrote to you was simply a statement of fact. Nothing more, believe me.

It was just a fact: and I told you so.

\* \* \* \*

I am not cross with you. Anyway, why should I be?

We are not travelling in the same direction, that's all.

Each of us is following his own path.

The way we are going, we shall never meet — but we can still remain good friends, can't we? That's the line I take.

One should continue on one's journey. That's life, life to the full.

\* \* \* \*

When are you coming back?

I shall be pleased to see you.

But we shall speak of nothing — nothing.

It's better that way.

One should continue on one's journey.

\* \* \* \*

Greetings, Dear Roland. Serious things are happening — very serious things — that no one knows about. So much the better.

Yes.

I prefer it that way.

E.S.

P.S. Old Chap — there was very nearly no more Satie: I just escaped being killed the other day. The bombs were terribly close to me. What happened to me? Some were killed, but not me. Lucky, don't you think! I stuck it out, though only a civilian. That's life — life to the full.

15 March 1919: to Roland-Manuel (see Wilkins 1980a: 410-11)

. . . I can see from your letter that you are a "good sort," and I thank you for sending it to me. . . .

. . . The struggle will be hard, My Poor Old Chap; and, alas! we are not on the same side. I told you that before. We cannot be . . . .

All the time, the gulf is growing deeper . . . and wider . . . Your friends (I am speaking here of artistic friendship — of course) are not my friends; mine are not yours . . . So?

. . . Greetings, My Dear Roland. I dare not say: "see you soon." Why? . . . You know very well . . . .

29 August 1919: to Roland-Manuel

My dear Roland — I am very sorry to know about your accident. It is awful to think what might have happened, from what you tell me. . . .

Concerning *L'Éclair*, I have nothing to tell you.

Congratulations on your promotion to this post of critic.

Take care of yourself, My Dear Roland, and get well soon. . . .

23 February 1920: to Roland-Manuel (see Wilkins 1980a: 411)

My Dear Roland—I read your article on *Socrate*. Thank you for what you say about it. All the same you are a good sort—all the same. I tell you that as an old friend. I know you well, dear Friend, both you and your qualities, but . . . .

One day, when we are alone, I shall talk to you—if you like—not as an "old bore," but as a comrade. . . .



14 March 1920: to Roland-Manuel

My Dear Friend — I can't manage tomorrow. Do you mind putting it off until some other day? . . .

21 March 1920: to Roland-Manuel

. . . I am very busy this week and next. Will write to you soon, if I may. . . .

Apart from Mme Dreyfus, Satie found comforting but entirely respectable friendship in several other ladies. Valentine Hugo (née Gross), artist and stage-designer, was a particular *confidante*, and had been of special assistance in smoothing relationships between Satie, Cocteau, and Picasso during the creation of *Parade* (see Wilkins 1980a: 406). Satie also wrote to her about his enthusiasm for *Socrate* (see *ibid.*: 410). In all, a large number of letters are said to have been sent to Valentine Hugo, but many of them appear to have been lost or at least to have passed from public view. Several were published by Valentine Hugo herself in the special Satie Number of *La Revue musicale* (1952: 139-45). In the Bibliothèque Nationale (Mus., Lettres autographes, No. 11, Acq. 597-63) we find a further example:

2 May 1920: to Valentine Hugo

Dear Friend — Jean tells me that you entrusted Auric with a message for me from you. I have met Auric several times recently: he hasn't told me anything. Why?

Never entrust him with things like that.

He is a great artist, but I can't help feeling uneasy about him: I remember the Poiret "thingummy." . . .

In addition, such letters occasionally surface from private collections, such as the following:

2 October 1915: to Valentine Gross

Dear Lady —

I wonder if you are coming round to better things,  
— that is, to Paris.

It isn't nice to abandon the poor world and leave it all alone like a worm.

Do you have any news of all those ladies and gentlemen?

Of Mme Jeanne Tribe — *I am writing to her* — of Varèse, of Mlle Roche? of the Vögels?

At any rate, you haven't heard my news, from me.

Well! You must know that I was almost killed. Yes. Really. Another step and I'd had it. How? Man is but a frail thing! Without my star, my guiding star, my lovely Place de l'Étoile — I would have been done for, I would exist no longer.

At this very moment I'd be enjoying the delights of the tomb and shroud.

Yes, dear Lady; I was nearly killed, cowardly killed; killed by Boredom, which is very boring and depressing, and gives me black, very black thoughts.

May I hope for a word from you?

[Collection of B. Pavitt]

Two 1923 letters to Sybil Harris, an American patroness resident in Paris, are preserved from the Harvard manuscripts:

20 January 1923: to Sybil Harris (see Wilkins 1980a: 412)

Collaer wrote to say that the "Danses du Piège de Méduse" (of which you have the original score) were very successful when they were played in the Capital of our Belgian friends, last Wednesday. Hurry back. It's still hot here, but not so stormy. I'm not going out any more without my trousers on. . . .

[Harvard University, Houghton Library,  
Dumbarton Oaks Ms. LXIX]

3 November 1923: to Sybil Harris (see Wilkins 1980a: 414)

. . . I have finished the 3rd act of the good *Médecin malgré lui*. Yes . . . .

The Gounod family are bringing a lawsuit against Diaghilev and claiming several millions in damages because of the harm done to the memory of their august relation. Yes . . . . I shall be obliged to pay that family at least seven or eight thousand francs. . . . I think I shall have to sell my jewels and furs. . . .

[Harvard University, Houghton Library,  
Dumbarton Oaks, Mss. LXIX & LXX]

Adrienne Monier, who established in Paris the *Maison des Amis des Livres*, frequented by Satie from 1919 or thereabouts, received several letters now preserved in the *Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet* (Mss. 8701-04):

1919 (?): to Adrienne Monier

I was coming to say hello and return your kindness (for

coming to the Odéon, the other day).

I would have liked to say hello to you myself, in person. It ain't possible, since you are not here. . . .

*15 April 1919: to Adrienne Monier*

Dear Poor Little Lady — Ill? It's this awful weather which has settled on your stomach. That isn't funny, not comical either. I am not very well myself: I think I have false vision, or something like that. My man is very anxious about it. . . .

*20 July 1919: to Adrienne Monier*

. . . I am ashamed to come into your presence. I do it with a trembling hand — Yesterday I met good old Fargue. He was as bright as a paint brush. . . .

*21 September 1922: to Adrienne Monier*

. . . What a delicious evening! All in all, everyone was polite and agreeable, don't you think?

Not the slightest discordant note, I thought. It is true that no instrument was played. Yes . . . .

Few letters to performers are preserved, but a series of six short letters or notes from 1912 to 1924 to Ricardo Viñes, the Spanish pianist who did much to promote Satie's music and often included pieces by him in his recitals, is preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Mus., Lettres autographes, Nos. 7-10, Acq. 597-63 and Nos. 2-3, Acq. 4481 1.50):

*17 March 1916: to Ricardo Viñes*

Dear and delicious friend — Chailley (Mr.) has agreed to play my little "concoction."

He wants the music of this thingummy. I'll come and collect it (the music of the thingummy) tomorrow, Saturday, about 11 o'clock. If you can't see me, dear friend, please be so good as to leave the thingummy with your concierge. . . .

*3 April 1916: to Ricardo Viñes*

. . . You are as good as bread. How can I thank you enough?

No: I'm too much of a duffer: I'll have to keep mum—mum-my.

Anyway — Please accept the thanks of an old nitwit who admires you as he is able.

An easy-going style characterizes short letters to non-musical friends and collaborators such as Pierre de Massot, Constantin Brancusi, and Pierre Bertin.

Pierre de Massot was responsible for arranging the collaboration between Satie and Picabia for the Ballet Suédois' *Relâche* in 1924, and was editor of the periodical 391. The following letters were reprinted in a small booklet with a preface by Pierre de Massot (*Oui*, Paris, 1960):

*12 August 1922: to Pierre de Massot*

I'm not having much fun here. I'm working flat out, . . . writing with one hand and thinking with the other — rather odd, don't you think?

In these regions, nobody has ever displayed such industry.

Foreigners, recognizable by their weird appearance, show themselves coolly on all sides.

Yes.

*30 July 1923: to Pierre de Massot*

Nothing unusual here. Just that I have a frantic amount of work to do — madly frantic. Yes.

It has been very hot here. So now I understand why Diogenes had a barrel and not a little cask . . . . He filled it with water and put himself coolly inside it. Yes.

*20 January [1924]: to Pierre de Massot*

. . . Blow up works which have just emerged all smoking from the human hand (of Man)? . . . Hm . . . If that's what they do, I'll blow my brains out. Yes . . . .

*11 July 1924: to Pierre de Massot*

. . . I'm sweating copiously. In living memory, I have never sweated so much. Yes . . . . I'm not nice to see. . . .

Constantin Brancusi, the sculptor, was a close friend and helped design the tombstone on Satie's grave at Arcueil. Five letters and postcards from Monaco and Bruges sent to him between 1921 and 1924 are preserved in the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet (Mss. 7537, 9-13):

*5 November 1921: to Constantin Brancusi*

. . . If you would like me to dine extremely well (as one always does in your house), I shall be pleased to join you. . . .

24 August 1922: to Constantin Brancusi

My dear Friend — I'm in a hell of a mess: quite broke. My article on Debussy will not be finished until tomorrow morning, round about 7 o'clock (I shall spend the night doing it), and then I can send it off. Would you do me a little favor so that I can last out until the cheque comes in two days' time? I'll drop in at your studio tomorrow morning, about 8:30 a.m. . . .

16 April 1923: to Constantin Brancusi

Dear old Druid — and how is my good friend's good old health? Don't you think that we should dine together at the house of our friend Mme Harris? I hear that you are a little saddened, dear friend. Is that true? . . . Since that is how things are, I want to drop round and say hello to you, you who are so good — the best of men, like Socrates, whose brother you must surely be. . . .

Pierre Bertin, actor and theatrical producer, gave the first performance of the *Piège de Méduse* in 1921, himself taking the part of Baron Medusa. Three letters to him were reproduced by Pierre-Daniel Templier in his book, *Erik Satie* (Paris, 1932). A section from the third of these, followed by an unpublished letter to Milhaud, with the original French matched against an attempted translation, demonstrate well the delight Satie took in linguistic games and the kind of problem he often sets when he is to be transposed into a foreign idiom:

August 1918 [?]: to Pierre Bertin

. . . J'étais ici, tout seul avec mi. Faudrait voir m'figure triste. Personne ne pensau à mi, sauf vous et trois cents amis. J'arrivau l'soir à m'maison, toute vide. L'piano m'regardaut, l'pauvre fieu; il n's'avaut pas. . . .

[. . . Ere Oi were, all on me own. You oughter zee moy zad face! Nobody thoughter me, 'cept you an' three hun' red fre'n's. Oi come back of an evenin' to moy 'ouse, all empty it were. The pianner were lookin' at me, poor thing; it wer'n't to know. . . .]

16 July 1920: to Darius Milhaud

Aussi taux que vous serez ichi — à Pary — soie hier assez bon pour me fer cygne.

J'os raie grand plaisir à vous voir.

Vous vous lait bien?

Je soeur est désolé chi je ne vous voyelle pas à votre passage dent la capitale.

Et cris vert moie un maux.

Bonjour, mon Cher Ami; je chuis votre tous dévoué cas marc rade. . . .

[collection of Darius Milhaud]

[A' soon as you are 'ear — in Parry's — pleas' bee so kind as to tail me sew.

Ice ale be very pleased to see you.

Hall write with you?

I wood be sad knot to sea you while you are inn the capital. Right mean an oat.

Greetings, My Dear Friend; I am yore devout head comrade. . . .]

It is much to be hoped that before long permission may be granted for a complete edition of Satie's correspondence and its translation in its entirety.

## NOTES

1. All most kindly communicated to me by the composer's son, M. Claude Roland-Manuel, to whom I express my gratitude.

## REFERENCES

VOLTA, O.

- 1977: *Erik Satie: Écrits*. Edited and annotated by Ornella Volta. Paris: Éditions Champ Libre.

WILKINS, N.

- 1975: "The Writings of Erik Satie: Miscellaneous Fragments," *Music and Letters*, LVI/3, 288-307.
- 1980a: "Erik Satie's Letters to Milhaud and Others," *The Musical Quarterly*, LXVI/3, 404-28.
- 1980b: *The Writings of Erik Satie*. Edited and translated by Nigel Wilkins. London: Eulenburg.