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Debussy's D&#xfffd;cor: Music, the Arts, and Sociability at the Fin de Si&#xfffd;cle

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by

Damjan Rakonjac

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Debussy's Décor: Music, the Arts,
and Sociability at the Fin de Siècle

by

Damjan Rakonjac
Doctor of Philosophy in Musicology
University of California, Los Angeles, 2023
Professor Mitchell Morris, Committee Co-Chair
Professor Jann Pasler, Committee Co-Chair

With the increasing importance of the decorative arts in late 19th century France, evidenced by movements such as Symbolism and Art Nouveau, the concept of "décor" came to symbolize the intimate reciprocity between groups of artists and works of art. This dissertation frames three works by Claude Debussy – *La Damoiselle élue*, *Prélude de l'après-midi d'un faune*, and the Bilitis tableaux vivants *Musique de scène* – within the broader resonances of décor at the fin de siècle. In doing so, it reveals the ways in which the idea(l) and practice of décor informed Debussy's milieu and shaped both the production and reception of his music.

The dissertation of Damjan Rakonjac is approved.

Raymond Knapp

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University of California, Los Angeles

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Damjan Rakonjac is a musicologist whose research areas include 19th century French music and the decorative arts, music and French colonialism, Vietnamese music, and music in film/television. In 2013, Damjan was one of four emerging music critics invited to participate in the Creating New Voices festival and workshop at Carnegie Hall. Subsequently, he was invited to write music criticism for the LA Times and the NYC based journal Music & Literature. Damjan's continued interest in music criticism led him to the academic field of musicology and to UCLA, where he earned his PhD in the discipline. While developing a research focus on 19th century French music, Damjan began to take coursework in the Department of French & Francophone Studies at UCLA (now the Department of European Languages and Transcultural Studies), eventually adding a second PhD track in that field. A Ciro Zoppo Research Fellowship allowed Damjan to conduct research on the music of Edmond Bailly at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), in Paris, and subsequently organize a lecture-recital of Bailly's musical works at UCLA. Supported by a series of FLAS Fellowships from the US Department of Education, through the UCLA Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Damjan was able to undertake years of Vietnamese language study at UCLA and at Vietnam National University, Hanoi. Damjan has presented his research at UCLA, the Royal Northern College of Music, and the Centro Studi Opera Omnia Luigi Boccherini

in Lucca, Italy. His first scholarly publication, on The Kinks' 1974 rock musical, *Starmaker*, will appear in the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of the Television Musical* (Oxford University Press). In the fall of 2022, Damjan co-organized an international symposium on music in Vietnamese film at UCLA. Damjan is fluent in four languages: English, French, Serbian, and Vietnamese. He is currently a Lecturer at the Hall-Musco Conservatory of Music, at Chapman University.

Introduction:

The Object of the Objet d'Art, or Debussy and Décor at the *Fin de siècle*

> S'il était demandé à l'analyse non pas de détruire la force (pas même de la corriger ou de la diriger), mais seulement de la *décorer*, en artiste?
>
> Roland Barthes,
> *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*[1]

My dissertation frames several works by Debussy – *La Damoiselle élue* (1888), *L'après-midi d'un faune* (1894), and the Bilitis tableaux vivants (1901) – within the wave of enthusiasm for decorative art that swept over France in the late 19th century, shaping movements like Symbolism and Art Nouveau in its wake. Specifically, I trace the intimate connection between Debussy's works and his milieu by demonstrating the ways in which "décor," as an ideal and a practice, defined their relationship at the *fin de siècle*. The decorative movement looked to the 18th century as a period when French aristocratic sociability was complemented by the decorative skill of Ancien Régime artisans (the *artisanat*). Jann Pasler describes how this nostalgia for "the aristocratic French past" was subsumed by the contemporary republican project of "constructing a new history" for the Third Republic, while "elite figures" defined the movement's new values:

> [I]ts advocates looked to the eighteenth century, especially its decorative arts. Unlike the fine arts, these genres were not expected to teach and elevate. Both Proust and elite figures such as Edmond de Goncourt and the marquis de Chennevières found pleasure particularly in the decorative arts…This interest was not inconsequential.

[1] "What if it was demanded of analysis not to destroy force (or even correct or direct it), but only to *decorate* it, like an artist?" Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), 73. My translation. Emphasis in original. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

> Intellectuals and cultural leaders of the Union centrale des arts décoratifs, under Proust as president, beginning in 1882, believed that "a feeling for the decorative" was characteristic of French art and should be encouraged "for the greatest glory of the country."[58] In their journal *La Revue des arts décoratifs* in the early 1880s, they explained the utility of this revival. Numerous articles explored the transformation in French taste as reflected in the decorative arts from "grandeur" and "solemnity" during the time of Louis XIV to the "grace of private pleasure" under Louis XV. In this, the rococo period, when France was "the most delicate and playful nation in Europe," artists emphasized seductive grace and coquettishness with as much skill as that used previously in grandiose historical works. Art became more "organic, exotic, and erotic," or, as one critic put it, "feminized." This historical transformation served as a model for the shift in values they envisioned in contemporary French society, likewise from grandeur to grace.[2]

Indeed, the key difference in aristocratic life between the reign of Louis XIV and XV was that the Sun King prefered to keep the aristocracy occupied in Versailles, with its courtly grandeur; while Louis XV's reign was characterized by decentralization, as aristocrats retreated to their private residences in Paris, the *hôtels particuliers*, whose interior décors reflected the new emphasis on "playful" sociability. As Pasler observes, these new aethetic values had distinctly gendered overtones, as decorative art was linked to "private pleasure" and thus "feminized." Gender is thus an important secondary theme of my dissertation, considered in conjunction with the primary theme of décor as mediator between Debussy's milieu and his works.

This heavily gendered view of décor reflects an important societal shift in late 19th century French advocacy for decorative art, as it moved away from public institutions and toward private and distinctly male homosocial groups. As Debora Silverman writes: "Proust's selection as president of the Central Union in 1882 signaled the defeat of a comprehensive governmental project to improve the education of artisans; the focus of the craft cause shifted from the state to a private association." This move from public to private advocacy also institutes, for Silverman, a specific model of male sociability premised on an "aristocracy of the spirit," "fraternity of art," and "brotherhood":

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[2] Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 375.

> With the transfer of power from the marquis de Chennevières to Antonin Proust, the leadership of the Central Union shifted from the hereditary aristocracy to the aristocracy of the spirit…His writings and speeches as president of the union identified for the *amateur* a new role in shaping national taste and improving artisanal production. These *amateurs*, "elite spirits," understood the aesthetic power that both Edmond de Goncourt and the marquis de Chennevières had also attributed to the decorative arts: *séduction*. Proust affirmed the Central Union as a fraternity of art and cultivation, an artistic elite that transcended the divisiveness of politics, uniting its members in a common brotherhood of refinement.[3]

A good example of a "brotherhood of refinement" is Mallarmé's circle, to which Debussy belonged. The American composer and writer Francis Grierson, an eyewitness of Mallarmé's *mardis*, observes that the poet "never put on evening dress to receive his visitors. His receptions were for men, and the poet appeared in the clothes he had worn during the day."[4] Though his weekly gatherings attracted a distinctly homosocial group, the poet was famously described as "a bit of a priest, a bit of a [female] dancer."[5] Thus, rather than impinging on his masculinity, this feminized deportment was seen as the very source of his personal charm to the conspicuously male audience of the *mardis*. Mallarmé hosted his weekly receptions in the intimacy of his small apartment, so that in the imagination of his disciples the poet became closely associated with his décor, and the "private pleasure" he took in their company, which according to the logic just outlined "feminized" not only him but also them.[6] Mallarmé's association with décor followed him outside too. As we will observe in Chapter 2, when Mallarmé visited Debussy's apartment to hear the *Prélude de l'après-midi d'un faune* for the first time, the composer became reflexively self-conscious about his wallpaper. But he also recalls Mallarmé praising his music for furnishing the poem with an appropriate "décor." Thus the social reciprocity between décor and milieu can extend to musical works. They too, as Mallarmé

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[3] Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 119.

[4] Grierson's testimony is contextualized in Chapter 2. Francis Grierson, "Stéphane Mallarmé," The Atlantic, December 1, 1903. Quoted in: William Austin ed., Claude Debussy: Prelude to "The Afternoon of a Faun", Norton Critical Score (New York: Norton, 1970), 105.

[5] "Un peu de prêtre, un peu de danseuse." See, footnotes: 114, 115.

[6] Chapter 2 presents several accounts.

recognized, can create a décor. Ascertaining how they actually do so, both musically and within their historical context, is the central task of this dissertation.

To that end, each of the three body chapters brings together several focal points: one of Debussy's works from the list at the start, a particular aspect of sociability that shapes the collaborative context of its production and reception, and a musical (or performance) analysis that specifically considers the work through the lens of décor. Chapter 1 considers how the performance of *La Damoiselle élue* at the Belgian Libre Ésthetique Salon in 1894, among Symbolist and Art Nouveau artworks, drew out the work's connection to decorative art that were only latent in the first official audition of the work by an Académie des Beaux-Arts jury in 1888. The shift in the public perception of the work, rather than reflect any musical revisions on Debussy's part, reflects Debussy's involvement in private artistic circles during the intervening years. Chapter 2 inscribes Mallarmé's first private hearing of the *Prélude de l'après midi d'un faune* (before its official premiere), within the peculiar décor of Debussy's apartment, where this singular performance took place. According to Debussy, Mallarmé made the connection between the *Prélude* and décor explicit on that occasion by uttering: "This Music prolongs the emotion of my poem and situates its décor [*en situe le décor*] more passionately than color." Finally, in Chapter 3 I consider antiques (and antiquity) as objects situated in a specifically late 19th century decorative practice. In connection with this practice, I analyze the 1901 Bilitis tableaux performance as Debussy's and Louÿs' collaborative contribution to this modern conception of antique décor, as well as its broader resonances in French cultural life. Together, the three body chapters capture different angles of Debussy's music and milieu, offering three complementary ways that his works may be intepreted as décor. I elaborate on each of these ways below.

Chapter 1, "Handmaid Symphonies, or the *Dandysme* of a *Damoiseau*," situates the publication of *La Damoiselle élue* within the context of the Edmond Bailly's circle at the Librairie de l'Art indépendant. A bookshop founded in 1889 and situated in the upscale neighborhood near the Opéra

Garnier, the Librairie was more than just a place where books were sold. It was also the site of a key node of sociability for Debussy during the 1890s. The Librairie specialized in limited edition, artisanally crafted books that were themselves decorative objects. Many of these finely produced books were publications of new works by members of the Bailly circle itself, as testified by the 1896 Librairie catalogue, and many of them featured collaborative additions (in the form of cover art, or prefaces, for example) by other members of the group. As such, they are material evidence of the closeness of the Bailly circle.[7] Debussy's *La Damoiselle élue* is itself graced by cover art by the Symbolist (Nabis) artist, Maurice Denis.[8] On weekday evenings, artists gathered there in a fraternal atmosphere of conviviality, including Debussy and Satie, along with painters like Odilon Redon and Denis, and writers such as André Gide, Henri de Régnier, and Pierre Louÿs. There was a piano in the back of the shop that Debussy reportedly played on occasion.[9] However impromptu, these performances must have furnished the Librairie circle with its corresponding musical décor.

My discussion of *La Damoiselle élue* accounts for the transposition of Pre-Raphaelite influence into Debussy's French milieu. Both the translation by Gabriel Sarazin and the cover lithograph by Denis rework prototypes established by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, painter, poet, and co-founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in mid-19th century England. The infatuation of Debussy and his milieu with Preraphaelitism is contextualized within the longer tradition of British influence on French homosociality, in the form of *dandysme*.

Chapter 2 emerges out of a particular moment in 1892, the year Debussy moved into his first apartment, with Gaby Dupont, at 42 Rue de Londres, by the Gare Saint-Lazare. Although he resided

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[7] Edmond Bailly, *Catalogue de La Librairie de l'Art Indépendant* (Octobre 1896), accessed March 25, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k_991582b.

[8] See: Maurice Denis, *Théories, 1890-1910 : Du Symbolisme et de Gauguin Vers Un Nouvel Ordre Classique*, 3e éd. (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Occident, 1913), Accessed March 25, 2023, https://gallica.bnf. fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k96931928.

[9] Denis Herlin, "Le cercle de l'Art indépendant," 76.

there for only a year, the experience left at least one lasting impression. Decades later, he could still recall a visit to his apartment by Mallarmé, whose *mardis* he began attending around that time. It was on this particular occasion that Debussy presented the poet with a private audition of the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*.

Debussy recounts Mallarmé's reaction to this performance in a 1910 letter to the music critic Georges Jean-Aubry, quoted in the chapter. The account is suffused with invocations of décor, whic serves both to establish the setting, Mallarmé's outfit, and also Mallarmé's (positive) judgment of the piece. The slippage between these uses of décor is particularly important and will be discussed. Lesure has pointed out about this passage that Debussy "evoked the décor of this visit just as well as [*aussi bien que*] the reaction of the poet."[10]

While Chapters 1 and 2 present forms of French sociability that are characterized by regular gatherings of homosocial groups (Bailly, Mallarmé), Chapter 3 focuses on a related institution of *fin-de-siècle* sociability, the *amitié intime*, or close friendship. Debussy had several such *amitiés*, including with Satie and especially with Pierre Louÿs, who is the focus of Chapter 3 alongside the composer. Some of their most revealing correspondence is the set of letters that pertain to their collaboration on the 1901 performance of the Bilitis tableaux. These letters chronicle their thoughts on the project, concerns about their work and about the public, and provide insight into the ways in which Debussy and his fellow collaborator thought about music and décor in practical terms. The 1901 performance was organized by the well-known daily, *Le Journal*, and took place in their office building, in the *salle des fêtes*.[11]

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[10] "…évoquait aussi bien le décor de cette visite que la réaction du poète." François Lesure, *Claude Debussy Avant Pelléas, ou les années symbolistes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1993).

[11] For an alternate example of the culture of workplace concerts in the Third Republic, see Pasler's vivid description of an 1885 concert at the Bon Marché deparment store: Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkley: UC Press, 2009), 451-460.

Featuring barely clad models in antique poses – tableaux vivants means "living paintings" – the spectacle was designed to boost the journal's social profile (and readership). By framing their presentation of this collaborative work between Louÿs and Debussy as a "private evening," *Le Journal* hinted further at the voyeristic character of the artists' collaborive vision. The literary conceit is an account of scenes from the life of Bilitis, a fictional courtesan who lived during the time of Sappho. Louÿs and Debussy were tasked with creating the antique eroticizing décor that *Le Journal* desired to recreate in performance, and review for its readership. Chapter 3 chapter interrogates the problematic aspects of this representation in light of the homosocial character of Debussy's milieu, especially his freindship with Loÿs, and the trope of antiquity as a key facet of décor at the *fin de siècle*. Finally, my analysis takes seriously the assumption that Debussy improvised the celeste part during performance, and considers the decorative implications of a score that is partly improvised by design.

The word "décor" admits of a wide range of denotative and connotative meanings. So far, it has been deployed in a variety of ways: to describe the gathering place of a milieu, a piece of music, the goal of decorative art, and the object of historical nostalgia. Thus, it would be useful to consider the historical applications of the word, as well as point out differences between its usage in English and French, before considering existing literature on the topic and articulating a methodological approach.

The OED includes two entries for the word, with two distinct spellings. The earlier one, dated to the mid 1600s is spelled "decor," and it stands for "comeliness, beauty, ornament." This spelling, first attributed to the English lexicographer and antiquarian Thomas Blount, is now considered obsolete. But the alternate spelling, "décor," has seen a dramatic increase in frequency over the past century or so, from less than .02 occurrences per million words in written English in 1890 to .18 in 2023: a ninefold increase. The dictionary definition of this increasingly relevant version of the word is: "The scenery and furnishings of a theatre stage. Also *transferred* and *figurative*, setting, surroundings."

According to the OED, furthermore, the 1890s are not merely the decade during which "décor" began to chart, but also the time in which the word was borrowed for English use in the first place, with the *accent aign*, from the French. For example, the spelling "décor" was not included in the first edition of the OED, in 1884, and did not find a place in its pages until 1933. Its first recorded use is by the English literary historian and critic George Saintsbury, who specialized in French literature. Oddly enough, the first recorded instance of the word does not deploy its primary use to refer to stage scenery but rather in order to express the notion of applying real life experience to literary imagination; that is to say, its "transferred" or "figurative" use. Discovered in a book about the literary works of Sir Walter Scott, it goes like this: "Scott had obtained part of the scenery" for his poem, *The Lord of the Isles*, during a "visit to the Hebrides, and the rest in his yachting voyage…with the Commissioners of Northern Lights, which also gave the *décor* for *The Pirate*."[12] Décor is left italicized by Saintsbury, no doubt to emphasize its French exoticism, and to foreground the more figurative and richly connotational uses available to it in its language of origin.

Understandably, given its etymological context, French lexicography tells a different story. According to TLFi (Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé), which is run by the CNRTL (Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales), "*décor*" is a masculine noun whose primary meaning is: "An ensemble of that which serves to ornament, adorn, embellish, etc" and is "quasi-synonymous" with "decoration" as well as "ornament" and "embellishment."[13] More specifically, it refers to: "An ensemble of ornaments (paint, gilding, paneling, paintings, furniture, etc) employed in order to decorate an edifice, or an apartment."[14] Appropriately enough for the topic at hand, one of the first

[12] George Saintsbury, Sir Walter Scott, Famous Scots Series (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1897), 64.

[13] "Ensemble de ce qui sert à orner, parer, embellir, etc. (Quasi-)synon. décoration…, ornement, parure." DÉCOR : Définition de DÉCOR," accessed August 20, 2023, https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/d%C3%A9cor.

[14] Ensemble des ornements (peintures, dorures, lambris, tableaux, meubles, etc) employées pour orner un édifice, un appartment.

historical examples of the standard use of *décor* is from the Goncourt *Journal* (1895), which refers quite simply to: "The furnishing and décor of apartments,"[15] in which case "décor" is synonymous with the activity of "decoration."

The TLFi elaborates on a second sense of the word which will be particularly useful in our analysis of Debussy's musical works, and the development of his compositional style. This second sense is expressed as: "An ensemble of drawings, paintings that adorn certain objects (earthenware, porcelain, ceramics, etc) or some furniture."[16] Huysmans provides a use case for this second sense, drawn from his collection of art criticism, *Art moderne* (1883): "The art of painting applied to décors of fireplace fronts and blinds."[17]This definition exhibits a tension between fine art (painting) and the décors to which it is applied, indicative of the fine/decorative art devide. Another example offers a particularly useful analogy to the ways in which music, and specifically Debussy's music, can be thought of as exhibiting a décor. It comes from a 1962 book, *Le meuble en France* [Furniture in France], by the French art librarian Jacqueline Viaux: "Numerous are the pieces of furniture, and especially the chairs, whose floral décor is the only motif employed. The flowers are typically stylized…Even more than rocaille patterns, flowers are constantly employed in decoration [décor]…, be it in marquetry, or sculpture…, or bronze."[18] Viaux defines décor as a strategic use of motifs to both ornament specific decorative objects, like chairs, but also ultimately to unify the décor within which the objects are displayed. The example points to the latent tension between individual decorative objects and the décor itself.

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[15] "L'ameublement et le décor des appartements… ."

[16] "Ensemble des dessins, peintures qui ornent certains objets (faïences, porcelaines, céramiques, etc.) ou certains. meubles."

[17] "L'art de peindre appliqué aux décors des devants de cheminées et des stores."

[18] "Nombreux sont les meubles, tout spécialement les sièges, où le décor floral est le seul motif employé. Les fleurs sont généralement stylisées; elles peuvent former des gerbes, des bouquets, des guirlandes, des chutes; elles se mêlent aussi à des branchages. Plus encore que la rocaille, les fleurs sont d'un emploi constant dans le décor, soit en marqueterie (...), soit en sculpture en plein bois (...), soit en bronze.

The topic of the relationship of Debussy's music to decorative art is not new. Edward Lockspeiser's 1962 biography, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, includes an entire chapter on Art Nouveau, besides other aspects of *fin de siècle* décor. For Lockspeiser, Debussy's music defines the period as a whole, because it "realizes" its broader artistic ideals. Therefore it cannot be studied in isolation from the other arts of its time.

> I do not believe that one can approach the art of Debussy as an isolated musial phenomenon. It belongs as much to the history of literature and the visual arts as, specifically, to the history of music…Research over many years has convinced me that the art of Debussy is not merely a reflection of one aspect or another of his period. It is the period. Music was at the that time regarded as the quintessential, privileged art, and I see no other composer who so closely realized the musical ideals to which writers and painters of his time openly aspired.[19]

A more recent musicological account of these "musical ideals" is Gurminder K. Bhogal's *Details of Consequence: Ornament, Music, and Art in Paris*. The book, in which Debussy is one among several French composers in focus, describes "how and why the notion of ornament rose to the forefront of musical composition and aesthetics at the turn of the twentieth century in Paris." [20] Bhogal invokes the "elevation of the *arts décoraitfs*…to the superior category of the *beaux arts*" in the late 19th century as an important part of the background historical contex.[21] Although incorporating references to art, Bhogal defines "ornament" narrowly as musical ornamentation and acknowledges her "inclination to treat ornament and décoration as synonymous."[22] Thus, she does not deal with the issues of Debussy and décor head on, but she does offer a number of valuable insights about the ways in which Debussy adapted specific tropes from the visual arts of his day to his own compositional technique. For example, she describes the tendency of Debussy's music to "[glide] between long

[19] Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), xv-xvi.
[20] Gurminder Kaur Bhogal, *Details of Consequence: Ornament, Music, and Art in Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[21] Gurminder Kaur Bhogal, Details of Consequence, 5.
[22] Ibid., 6

durations and the intricate patterns of shorter rhythmic values" as both an adaptation of the "visual arabesque" and an approximation of the Impressionists' "suspended instant":

> Meandering, decorative melodies constituted Debussy's earnest efforts to create a musical analogue to visual arabesque during the 1890s. The irregular and unpredictable phrases of quasi-improvisatory arabesque melodies gradually unfurled themselves, gliding between long durations and the intricate patterns of shorter rhythmic values, as they articulated an uneven passage of time. In combination with the shifting metric placement of recurring melodic motifs, Debussy relied on metric and formal ambiguity to approximate a sense of stasis and timelessness that the Impressionists conceived of as *l'instant suspendu*. Debussy's manipulation of the listener's expectations with regard to musical time and form was essential to his pursuit of compositional innovation at the turn of the century.[23]

David Code's article, "The 'Song Triptych': Reflections on a Debussyan Genre," adds to this list of visual parallels by framing Debussy's turn to tripirtate form in the 1890s as a reflection of a contemporary decorative preoccupation in visual art:

> [I]t is at least somewhat suggestive…to find that the very years that gave rise to Debussy's first three-part cycles on the poetry of Verlaine also saw a widespread revival, throughout the post-Impressionist *milieu*, of the traditional painterly triptych structure of three interrelated panels. A particularly prominent and celebrated example can be seen in the great mural commissioned in 1886 for the amphitheatre of La Sorbonne from Pierre Puvis de Chavannes…This massive mural, articulated as three grand panels of the fields of learning…received specific mention in one of the most influential art-critical interventions of that moment. In his 1890 essay "Définition du néo-traditionnisme," the young Maurice Denis, critical spokesman for the so-called Nabis (a group of post-Impressionist painters who took their name from a Hebrew term for "prophets"), singled out Puvis as a key inspiration for a new "Symbolist" art that could move beyond both sterile academic realism and *plein-air* Impressionist illusionism to recover what he called the "decorative" values of the Medieval "primitives."[24]

Art historians have of course dealt with this phenomenon. Debora Silverman's *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (1989) is the classic account of the decorative arts in late 19th century France. It covers an impressive range of topics, including the "elaborately crafted retreat to the interior" of the *frères* Gouncourt, the politicized revival of rococo as a "privileged national

[23] Ibid., 279.

[24] David J. Code, "The 'Song Triptych': Reflections on a Debussyan Genre," in Debussy's Resonance, ed. François de Médicis and Steven Huebner (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer and University of Rochester Press 2018), 128-129.

tradition," the imprint of *la psychologie nouvelle* on Art Nouveau, and artists' desire to "disrupt the hierarchy of media and to reunite art and craft."[25] Silverman's book was not the first word on the topic from an art historical perspective. It was preceded just a few years earlier, for example, by Gabriel Weisberg's *Art Nouveau Bing: Paris Style 1900*, a work which focuses more narrowly on the influence of Siegfried Bing on *fin de siècle* art. Bing was a German-born collector who was instrumental in both the development of Art Nouveau and *japonisme* in France.[26] As we will see in the body of the dissertation, Debussy was acquainted with Bing and his shop of *objets d'art* from the Far East, which he collected.

Later art historical work built on these monumental early efforts. 1989 saw the publication of a special edition of Art Journal dedicated to "Nineteenth-Century French Art Institutions." Several of the articles in this volume demonstrate the ways in which institutional history is implicated in the increasing importance of the *Arts décoratifs* in France at the *fin de siècle*, and especially their increasing role within the program of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, founded in 1890. In her article therein, "Meissonier and the Founding of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts," Constance Cain Hungerford situates the foundational moment of the national institution as a "schism" that "decisively ended the hegemony of the official Salon, announcing a pattern of secession groups that would characterize the development of modern art throughout Europe in the succeeding decades."[27]

Debussy's affiliation with these secession groups in the 1890s was framed by the context of the "schism" between the academic standards of the official Salon, which he had absorbed as a Conservatoire student and Prix de Rome laureate, and the new decorative values that circulated among

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[25] Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 1.

[26] Gabriel P. Weisberg, *Art Nouveau Bing: Paris Style 1900* (New York : Harry N. Abrams Inc, 1986).

[27] Constance Cain Hungerford, "Meissonier and the Founding of the Société Nationale Des Beaux-Arts," *Art Journal* 48, no. 1 (1989): 71. See also: Jann Palser, "Four organizations, four agendas: Expanding the public for serious music in late 19th-century Paris," Organisateurs et formes d'organisation du concert institutionnalisation et pratiques, eds. Hans Erich Bödeker and Patrice Veit (Berlin: Berliner Wissensschafts-Verlag, 2008), 333-56.

his post-academic milieu. Hungerford points out how these new values inspired changes on the part of the official Salon, especially its selection process. As she points out: "During the 1890s, the new Salon became a more hospitable forum for younger Symbolists and Art Nouveau designers." Her pairing of "Symbolists" with "Art Nouveau designers" is indicative of the new interest in décor that motivated these institutional changes. But it also reveals a distinct institutional shift at which Hungerford depicts as a "departure" from the norm: "In its most striking departure from the practice of the exclusively 'fine-art' SAF Salon, the new Salon," she writes, "beginning in 1892, featured works of decorative art."[28]

Marie Jeannine Aquilino's, "The Decorating Campaigns at the Salon du Champ-de Mars and the Salon des Champs-Elysées in the 1890s," sheds more light on the institutional history of the decorative arts during this period. Aquilino focuses on the ways in which the founding of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1890 ushered in a new openness towards decorative art, starting with the very space occupied by the Salon: "With the aid of private backers," Aquilino writes, "the first floor of the Palais des Beaux-Arts was turned from 'a lot of rooms that looked like caves' into 'a comfortable and agreeable arrangement.'"[29] The transformation of the Salon was thus materially reflected in its new interior décor. Furthermore, Aquilino links the Société Nationale's "decorating campaign" with the desire to reflect the private interiors of patrons, thus linking public and private décor.[30] The

[28] Ibid. For a discussion of earlier changes in the Salon system in the 1880s and its relation to "eclecticism" in Third Republic musical life, see: Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 358-372.

[29] Marie Jeannine Aquilino, "The Decorating Campaigns at the Salon Du Champ-de-Mars and the Salon Des Champs-Elysées in the 1890s," Art Journal 48, no. 1 (1989): 79. Furthermore, there is the musical resonance that comes with the notion of "arrangement," I topic I my dissertaion will develop.

[30] "[T]he decoration of the interior of the Palais des Beaux-Arts was intended to appeal expressly to the tastes of a new consumer public. This consumer required that the experience of the Salon be as enjoyable, pleasurable, and relaxing as it would be had it ben held in a private living room. Small landscape studies…and painted decoration in the salle des conversations were intended to act as intermediary zones of decoration between the works of art and the more luxurious aspects of the. decor." Ibid.

redecoration of the fine art Salon's exhibition space is seen as a symbolic gesture, one that asserts the primacy of the decorative arts in the very "Palace" of the fine arts (Palais des Beaux-Arts).

Beyond these scholarly accounts, there are also a number of primary sources directly implicated in the increased advocacy on behalf of the decorative arts in late 19th century France, especially journals: including the *Revue des Arts Décoratifs*[31] (1880-1902), *Art et Décoration*[32] (1897-1938), *L'Art Décoratif*[33] (1905-1907), and the *Gazzette des Beaux-Arts*[34] (1859 – 1948). A key publication from the time is the journal *Le Japon artistique*[35] (1888-1891), published by Bing (who coined the term Art Nouveau) in order to promote *japonisme* as a form of artistic connoisseurship.

In synthesizing sources from multiplie acdemic disciplines, I drew on a methodology suggested by Carl Schoerske. Schoerske once compared the cultural historian to a weaver, one whose art consists of weaving together the warp of historical context with the woof of formal analysis. This the cultural historian does by drawing on the "specialized disciplines," like musicology, without being absorbed by them. Schoerske elaborates:

> The diachronic thread is the warp, the synchronic one is the woof in the fabric of cultural history. The historian is the weaver, but the quality of his cloth depends on the strength and color of the thread. He must learn something of spinning from the specialized disciplines…The historian's homespun will be less fine than theirs, but if he emulates their methods in its making, he should spin yarn serviceable enough for the kind of bold-patterned fabric he is called upon to produce.[36]

Schoerske's allegorical contrast between the "fine" cloth of the specialized disciplines, on the one hand, and the "homespun" utility of the historian's "bold-patterned fabric" informs my methodology. As a musicologist, I am bound to "learn something" from the "specialized disciplines" in order to approach the interdisciplinary topic of Debussy and décor. Therefore, in this dissertation

[31] "Revue des Arts Décoratifs," Gallica, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb32858171s/date.
[32] "Art et Décoration," Gallica, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb34348232c/date.
[33] "L'Art Décoratif," Gallica, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1204557d.image#.
[34] "Gazzette des Beaux-Arts," Gallica, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb343486585/date.
[35] "Le Japon artistique," Gallica, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k9115319.
[36] Schorske, Fin-De-Siècle Vienna, xxii.

I draw on Art History and my own background in French & Francophone Studies. Learning from art historians has helped me locate Debussy's music within French artistic movements, and has sharpened my ability to analyze and glean the significance of visual details alongside musical ones. My experience with French & Francophone Studies has given me linguistic and cultural access to both primary and secondary sources in French, without which this research would not be possible. In this dissertation, I use original sources whenever possible and translate them myself, a disciplinary practice that has helped me make connections I could not have made otherwise. As a musicologist, however, my "homespun" use of these specialized disciplines, while informative, is still secondary to the central topic of music. This is why I have decided to focus on only one work per body chapter: this leaves me enough room to contextualize each work within its art historical and French context, but also to offer a musical reading of its signifiance. Décor, methodologically speaking, is the result of their synthesis.

Schorske defined the situtation of artistic life in *fin de siècle* Vienna as a "multiplicity" of "modern movements," similar to Paris at the time, with its profusion of styles and "isms," framed by the broader contest between fine and decorative art. Schorske evokes this historical process of "fragmentation" by invoking Schoenberg's musical metaphor, "death-dance of principles." He frames the period as one of "decadence," which may be defined as the state of falling away from an ideal state:

> In what seemed like ubiquitous fragmentation – Nietzche and the Marxists agreed in calling it "decadence" – European high culture entered a whirl of infinite innovation…Not only the producers of culture but also its analysts and critics fell victim to the fragmentation…Indeed, the very multiplicity of analytic categories by which modern movements defined themselves had become, to use Arnold Schoenberg's term, "a death-dance of principles." What was the historian to do in the face of this confusion? It seemed imperative to respect the historical development of each constituent branch of modern culture…rather than hide the pluralized reality behind homogenizing definitions. I therefore turned for help to my colleagues in other disciplines.[37]

[37] See: Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, (1961; reis., New York: Vintage Books, 1981), xix.

Significantly, it was not only artists but also critics who "fell victim" to this confusion, thus leaving the task of making sense of the period to future historians. They in turn are obligated not to "hide the pluralized reality behind homogenizing definitions." In order to avoid turning décor into a homogenizing definition, I have decided to foreground its complex multivalance, even between two uses that look similar. For example, in each body chapter, I apply the concept of décor as a different facet of Debussy's music/musical performance. I also balance its centrality in my account by important secondary themes that help contextualize and historicize it; in particular gender and sociability. In fact, I have decided to use décor as the central concept of my dissertation as a response to another homogenizing definition that is everpresent in Debussy studies.

"What are we missing by insisting on Debussy's exceptionalism?"[38] About a decade ago, Pasler ended her critical overview of the state of current Debussy scholarship with this challenge in the form of a question, thus clearing a path for future research. Indeed, the attribution of exceptionalism to Debussy, and to his works, in one form or another, is a constant of critical literature about the composer, which already began to amass during his lifetime.[39] My dissertation, *Debussy's Décor: Music, the Arts, and Sociability at the Fin de Siècle*, responds to the persistent homogenizing definition of Debussy's "exceptionalism" by a sustained effort to situate his works at the intersection of a specific historical milieu and a particular décor.

[38] Although I emphasize this particular strand of questioning, Pasler's article presents it within an interwoven pattern of problems that culminate with Whittall's vision of Debussy research as "unfinished business": "How did Debussy think of genre over the long term, tonality, timbre, and time? How has his influence on successive composers affected how we hear his music as well as theirs? And what are we missing by insisting on Debussy's exceptionalism? As Arnold Whittall put it, 'the story of "Debussy now" is, above all, a story of unfinished business." Jann Pasler, "Debussy the Man, His Music, and His Legacy: an Overview of Current Research," *Notes* Vol. 69 No. 2 (December 2012): 215.

[39] This includes academic work: "More than a hundred dissertations have been written, starting with Archibald T. Davison's 'The Harmonic Contributions of Claude Debussy' (Harvard, 1908)." Ibid., 197.

Chapter 1:

Handmaid Symphonies, or the *Dandysme* Art of a *Damoiseau*

> The Mallarméan, Pre-Raphaelite and Cabalistic pretexts of his youth found for their expression a décor of iris and, within this décor, *la Damoiselle élue*.[40]
>
> Vladimir Jankélévitch

> Dandyism, which is an institution outside of laws, has rigorous laws to which all its subjects submit strictly, however much passion and independence of character they may otherwise possess.[41]
>
> Charles Baudelaire

Debussy's musical setting of Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel*, which is both a poem and a painting (Ex. 4), the work brings together layers of textual as well as visual references; and embodies the influence of British Pre-Raphaelite art on French artists at the *fin de siècle*. In 1848 the young Dante Gabriel Rossetti co-founded (and would henceforth be closely associated with) a homosocial[42] society known as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. This mid-century British movement left a distinct impression on

[40] "Les prétextes mallarméens, préraphaélites et cabalistiques de sa jeunesse ont trouvé pour s'exprimer un décor d'iris et, dans ce décor, *la Damoiselle élue*." Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Debussy et le mystere de l'instant* (1976; reis., Paris: Éditions Plon, 2019), 16.

[41] "Le dandysme, qui est une institution en dehors des lois, a des lois rigoureuses auxquelles sont strictement soumis tous ses sujets, quelles que soient d'ailleurs la fougue et l'indépendance de leur caractère." Charles Baudelaire, *Peintre de la vie moderne*, in *Oeuvres Complètes de Charles Baudelaire* (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1868), 91, accessed on March 18, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k10732385.

[42] My notion of the "homosocial" and its role in 19th-century sociability is grounded in: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985; reis., Columbia University Press, 2015).

the European avant-garde at the end of the century, and in particular on the Symbolism of Debussy's generation.[43]

La Damoiselle élue highlights Debussy's versatility as a composer who is able to manipulate the material at hand, whether literary or musical, or indeed painterly, in order to suit the program. This mirrors the multiple hats worn by Rossetti, as both poet and painter of *The Blessed Damozel*. Indeed, in his painted version(s) of the poem, Rossetti includes an artisanal frame, personally crafted, as a crucial part of the pictorial composition. The frame divides the canvas into separate architectural niches in the manner of an altar-piece (which it was expressly commissioned to resemble) (Fig. 1).

At the bottom, ensconced within the predella, the earthly lover lies supine gazing beyond the limit of the intruding framework at the heavenly Damozel caught leaning out, as the poem would have it, "from the gold bar of Heaven." Upon closer look, it is revealed that the gold bar is echoed by the dissecting frame itself, and that this frame has carved into it the name of the poem, that of the unnamed Damozel. Carved into the bottom part of the frame, four verses plucked from the poem (not necessarily in their original order) lie horizontally like the poet pictured above, bookended by two intricately decorative buttons. Significantly, Debussy's version (translated by Sarrazin) cuts this figure entirely out of the picture. In other words, Rossetti's painterly division (reflected in the poem itself by means of parentheses) between the homosocial isolation of the (single male) poet (indeed *damoiseau*), restricted to his side of the "gold bar," and the peopled plenitude in heaven above is abandoned entirely for the sake of the latter. This upper part of Rossetti's framework becomes the recipient of Debussy's undivided attention.

[43] Laurence Brogniez, *Préraphaélisme et symbolisme : peinture litteraire et image poetique* (Paris: Honoré. Champion, 2003).

Figure 1: *The Blessed Damozel*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1871-1878)[44]

[44] Dante Gabriel Rossetti, oil on canvas, *The Blessed Damozel* (1871-1878), Harvard Art Museums, accessed March 18, 2023, https://harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/299805.

One of the chosen carved verses, repositioned out of its original order (as verse seven) in order to represent the poem on the frame's "gold bar," describes the Damozel's heavenly host precisely in terms of their newness, which registers as a felt difference between their present (spiritualized) state and their old, earthbound selves – and in particular their former names:

Around her, lovers, newly met
'Mid deathless love's acclaims,
Spoke evermore among themselves
Their rapturous new names;
And the souls mounting up to God
Went by her like thin flames.

[Autour d'elle des amants
Nouvellement réunis,
Répétaient pout toujours, entre eux,
Leurs nouveaux noms d'extase;
Et les âmes, qui montaient à Dieu,
Parraient près d'elle comme de fines flammes.]

The newness of the "newly met" lovers stands out by its implication that, once reunited across the material barrier of the heavenly gold bar, the Damozel and her *damoiseau* must shed their bodies in order to assume new names as souls. The soundscape of heaven, by this account, is composed entirely of an unending litany of names. When it comes to name dropping, however, Rossetti's lyrical verse raises the proverbial bar, evoking the names of the divine hierarchs – Dame Marie, her handmaidens, and Christ – towards whom the flaming souls pause for intercession on their way to God ("*Dieu*"). In his music, as we will see in the analysis below, Debussy illustrates these disembodied encounters through vivid word painting.

La Damoiselle élue was a timely act of affiliation with Preraphaelitism. The impact of the Preraphaelites on French artists was in turn part of a longer 19th century tradition of influence from across the channel, known as *dandysme*, which stands for the French adaptation of "the dandy," a

British social type.[45] This chapter contextualizes the reception context of *La Damoiselle élue* in light of the influence of French *dandysme* on Debussy's milieu. It also shows how both are related to the incresing importance of décor and the decorative arts in late 19th century France, epitomized by Symbolism and Art Nouveau.

The dandy was understood to have a peculiarly ambiguous and performative stance toward gender. As Deborah Houk writes: "Issues of gender and its potential for uncertainty come to the forefront in any discussion of the dandy, largely because this figure so skillfully combines characteristics that are traditionally separated as either masculine or feminine."[46] The issue of gender should not be (mis)construed, however, according to the gender norms of our own time and place, but rather according to the quite different gender system of late 19th-century France. As Pasler points out, for example, in 1888 – the same year Debussy completed *La Damoiselle élue* (and with it brought an end to his academic apprenticeship) – no less an official figure than the French minister of "public instruction and fine arts," Gustave Larroumet, encouraged a class of future graduates at the Paris Conservatory to "aspire" to "charm and elegance" – qualities that were construed as being primarily (and essentially) French, before masculine or feminine.[47] "Charm," as Pasler points out, "could serve a political purpose."[48] While Pasler demonstrates that gendered aesthetic qualities such as "charm"

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[45] Rhonda K. Garelick, "The Treatises of Dandyism," in Rising Star, Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de Siècle (Princeton University Press, 1998), 14–46; Rhonda K. Garelick, Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de Siècle (Princeton University Press, 2021); Elisa Glick, "The Dialectics of Dandyism," Cultural Critique, no. 48 (2001): 129–63; Philip G. Hadlock, "The Other Other: Baudelaire, Melancholia, and the Dandy," Nineteenth-Century French Studies 30, no. 1/2 (2001): 58–67; Philip G. Hadlock, "The Other Other: Baudelaire, Melancholia, and the Dandy," Nineteenth-Century French Studies 30, no. 1/2 (2001): 58–67; Deborah Houk, "Self Construction and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century French Dandyism," French Forum 22, no. 1 (1997): 59–73; Christopher Lane, "The Drama of the Impostor: Dandyism and Its Double," Cultural Critique, no. 28 (1994): 29–52; Susanne Rossbach, "Dandyism in the Literary Works of Barbey d'Aurevilly: Ideology, Gender, and Narration," Modern Language Studies 29, no. 1 (1999): 81–102.

[46] Deborah Houk, "Self Contruction and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century French Dandyism," 59.

[47] Jann Pasler, "Mélisande's Charm and the Truth of Her Music," in *Rethinking Debussy*, ed. Elliott Antokoletz and Marianne Wheeldon (Oxford University Press, 2011), 55.

[48] Pasler, "Mélisande's Charm and the Truth of Her Music," 56.

and "elegance," beyond their role in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, also played into the nationalist political values of Third Republic France, in this chapter I recontextualize the distinctly gendered qualities of *La Damoiselle élue* within the semi-private homosocial domain of Debussy's post-academic milieu – through which it precociously came to symbolize the musical style that would come to be known as *debussysme*. Indeed, within this context, qualities such as "charm" and "elegance" could be said to project peculiarly gendered qualities. Though these very qualities may have been adopted to promote the mainstream political narratives of Third Republic France, they were also nonetheless circulated – and with a greater range of connotational liberty – among the homosocial counter-culture of *dandysme* that characterized Debussy's *fin-de-siècle* milieu.

The figure of the dandy possesses a particularly *longue durée* in France. The English originator of dandyism, the first dandy, "Beau" Brummel (1778 – 1840), was active during the Regency period in England. Though born a commoner, he managed to charm the Prince Regent's aristocratic circle and became synonymous with men's fashion. Beau, however, was not responsible for the concept's 19th-century transposition into French *dandysme* (though he did die – destitute, like Wilde later – in France, in 1840). By the last decade of the 19th century, *dandysme* had itself become the norm among Debussy's milieu, on both sides of the channel. Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* was originally published in French, by the *Librairie de l'Art indépendant*, in 1893 – the same year as *La Damoiselle élue*. In this later French incarnation, *dandysme* became taken with "the problem," in Rhonda Garelick's words, "of how originality can be replicated to create a whole movement."[49] Indeed, to be a dandy in distinction to normative bourgeois society was one thing; but to remain a dandy within a rarefied milieu of dandys – the socio-historical situation in which Debussy found himself around the 1890s – was quite another.

[49] Rhonda Garelick, *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de siècle* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 14.

In his influential essay, *Le dandy*, part of the oft-reprinted essay collection *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, originally serialized in the pages of *Le Figaro*, in 1863, Baudelaire also defines the dandy within a peculiar relationship to originality. Hinting at a definition of the word "*dandysme*," he writes:

> What is this passion which, having become doctrine, has created adept rulers, this unwritten institution which has formed such a lofty caste? Above all, it is the ardent desire to fashion for oneself an originality, contained within the exterior limits of propriety.[50]

Baudelaire's statement offers several useful clues about how exactly *dandysme* shaped Debussy's milieu. *Dandysme* had by mid-century already, as Baudelaire indicates, "become doctrine" ("*devenue doctrine*"); and not merely a doctrine but also a veritable "institution" that in turn formed a dandy "caste." For Baudelaire then, already in 1863 (Debussy was born in 1862), the question of *dandysme* is a social question, linked to the notion of an exclusive milieu ("caste"). Notice, however, how his response subsequently introduces the role of originality within the so-called dandy "caste." The dandy, Baudelaire suggests, has an "ardent need" ("*besoin ardent*") to self-fashion ("*se faire*") an original style ("*une originalité*"). But this dandy style, as Baudelaire warns, must still conform to the outward trappings of convention ("*contenu dans les limites extérieures des convenances*").

Deborah Houk places this apparent contradiction between the dandy's originality and conformism within the historical situation of *dandysme* in post-Revolutionary France: "Faced with the loss of class status as the bourgeoisie exerted its controlling influence in politics and economics," Houk writes, "the dandy chose a mode of defiance by flaunting his idleness and investing in the creation not of wealth but of himself."[51] The dandy is, by extrapolation, someone who rebels against the reproductive demands of bourgeois *utilité* by means of the resolutely unproductive (even

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[50] "Qu'est-ce que cette passion qui, devenue doctrine, a fait des adeptes dominateurs, cette institution non écrite qui a formé une caste si hautaine? C'est avant tout le besoin ardent de se faire une originalité, contenu dans les limites extérieures des convenances." Charles Baudelaire, *Peintre de la vie moderne*, 92-93.

[51] Deborah Houk, "Self Construction and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century French Dandyism," *French Forum* 22, no. 1 (1997): 60.

aristocratic) practice of self-cultivation. Nevertheless, in order to conform to the ideal of the dandy, this individualistic self-cultivation must appear to conform to societal convention. The dandy must not draw unwonted attention. To be a dandy means to not announce oneself as such.

As Baudelaire so perspicaciously comments, *dandysme* is an "unwritten institution." Tracing its historical development, Elise Glick frames Dandyism as "a contradiction between 'the seen' and 'the unseen' – a disjunction between the visibility of outward appearances and the invisibility of inner relations." Glick theorizes that the dandy "emerges out of the historical contradictions of capitalism – in particular, the opposition between outward appearance and inner essence."[52] This queer economy circulates not only "between men" but also, as Glick elaborates, between people and objects of art. Writing of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, for example, she points out that: "Wilde makes it clear that the portrait does not exhibit a single secret; rather, it is the site for circulation of secrecy in which all three characters…are implicated." [53] The portrait "contains a hidden meaning that is not immediately visible," yet which can nevertheless be "uncovered" through "microscopic" analysis.[54]

Indeed, if such a "microscopic" analysis could be applied to the portrait of a historical dandy rather than Wilde's fictionalized one, ideally somebody within Debussy's orbit, what might it uncover? Figure 2 is a telling portrait of just such a personage. The subject of the portrait is Octave Maus, the Belgian impresario who founded La Libre Ésthetique, a Belgian arts organization that hosted an all-Debussy program in 1894, headlined by *La Damoiselle élue*. [55] The portraitist, Théo van Rysselberghe

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[52] Elisa Glick, "The Dialectics of Dandyism," *Cultural Critique*, no. 48 (2001): 129.

[53] Ibid., 135.

[54] Ibid.

[55] La Libre Ésthetique was mainly a continuation of a previous Belgian Salon, named Les XX ("The Twenty") after a core group of mostly Belgian male artists – later expanded to include non-Belgians (mainly French) and the painter Anna-Rosalie Boch the only female member (and cousin of Octave Maus). Les XX and La Libre Ésthetique, both presided over by Maus, whose charismatic curation. embodies their very historical continuity. The musical programs of Les XX reveal a familiar society of. names, including: Ysaÿe, Chausson, and Vincent d'Indy. D'Indy was in fact personally tasked with musical. programing for the annual Les XX Salon during the second part of its decade-long run, 1883 – 1893. For. a more detailed account of the content of these Salons, the personalities involved, and the leadership of. Maus, see: Madeleine Maus, *Trente Années de Lutte*.

(1862 – 1926), besides being a prominent Belgian painter in his own right, was one of the co-founders, alongside Maus, of Les XX – the predecessor organization from which La Libre Ésthetique itself emerged. It is highly significant that Maus and his portraitist are part of the same milieu: the fact implicates the portrait in their (homosocial) "circulation of secrecy," as described by Glick. The 1885

Figure 2: *Portrait d'Octave Maus en dandy* (1885), Théo van Rysselberghe[56]

[56] Théo van Rysselberghe, oil on canvas, *Portrait d'Octave Maus en dandy* (1885), private collection, accessed March 18, 2023, http://impressionistsgallery.co.uk/artists/Artists/pqrs/Rysselberghe/pictures/Octave%20Maus%20Reading,%201885.jpeg.

painting is revealingly titled: *Portrait d'Octave Maus en dandy* (*Portrait of Octave Maus as a Dandy*). The title thus actively invites the viewer to deduce which attributes befit someone in the (unspoken) guise of a dandy.

First, there is the striking quality produced by thousands of individual brush strokes that are left visibly on the surface of the canvas (Fig. 2). These rhythmic marks lend to Rysselberghe's figuration of Maus, and of his vegetal surroundings, a distinctly decorative appeal: a musical intensity composed from the total effect of individual traces of movement across the canvas. This is a proudly handmade portrait, whose signs of artisanal labor (brush strokes) are left for all to see – very much unlike an academic painting, in which brushwork is blended away. As the very embodiment of the portrait's decorative surface style, Maus himself forms its bedecked subject, his bodily frame wrapped in impeccably bespoke attire. He sits on a barely visible stool, the only furniture mediating between his oblique, off-centered figure and the vibrantly green décor which forms a vivid contrast to his cool palette. There are sartorial accessories too, decorative personifications of the sitter's *dandysme*. An elegant cane lies askew his leg, leading the eye diagonally across, from below his shadowy nether regions up to its shiny metallic knob – evoking the (unattributed) anecdote quoted by Balzac as epithet to his *Traité de la vie élegante* (1833), considered the first canonic French treatment of *dandysme*: "The spirit of a man is surmised by the manner in which he holds his cane" ("*L'esprit d'un homme se devine à la manière dont il porte sa canne*").[57] Out of the other hand, an ashen cigarette stub protrudes, balanced with cool *désinvolture*. The white flower in his lapel and the white vest beneath; the tall hat, almost comical in its insistence, and the inconspicuously matching handkerchief barely emerging from the left coat pocket; finally, the foregrounded sense of individuality suggested by the non-peopled backdrop – all these qualities add up to depict the sitter as the possessor of a fine sensibility.

[57] Honoré de Balzac, *Traité de la vie élégante* (Paris: Librairie Nouvelle, 1854), accessed March 18, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k315524z.image.

Rysselberghe paints Maus in the guise of an individual who aesthetically corresponds, *en dandy*, to the surrounding décor.

The all-Debussy concert organized by Maus took place on March 1, 1894, in Brussels, a crucial city for the development of both Symbolism and Art Nouveau as European movements during the *fin de siècle*.[58] The program opened with Debussy's *Quatuor*, performed by the Ysaÿe Quartet, who had premiered the work months earlier, in Paris, in 1893, on a Société nationale de musique program.[59] In contrast to its purely instrumental overture, next the concert foregrounded the textuality of Debussy's *Proses lyriques*. This performance featured the composer himself at the keyboard, as Debussy authored both the text and music. Thérèse Roger, who had premiered the work, sang. *La Damoiselle élue* was saved for last. Unlike the intimate works that preceded it, *Damoiselle* commanded the considerable forces of a fifty-one piece orchestra, a women's choir, and female soloists.[60]

This was not the work's premiere, which taken place the previous year, in 1893, on a Société nationale de musique program; but it was more significant than the premiere.[61] That is because the Libre Ésthetique program reveals the way in which the work came to be thought of, in retrospect, as

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[58] On the specific national character of Belgian modernity at the fin de siècle, see: Debora Silverman, "'Modernité Sans Frontières:' Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of the Avant-Garde in King Leopold's. Belgium, 1885-1910," American Imago 68, no. 4 (2011): 707–97. On Belgian decorative arts reform as precursor of Art Nouveau, see: Daniela N. Prina, "Design in Belgium before Art Nouveau: Art, Industry. and the Reform of Artistic Education in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," Journal of Design History 23, no. 4 (2010): 329–50. For the colonial context of Belgian Symbolism, see: Debora L. Silverman, "Art Nouveau, Art of Darkness: African Lineages of Belgian Modernism, Part I," West 86th: Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture 18, no. 2 (2011): 139–81; Debora L. Silverman, "Art Nouveau, Art of Darkness: African Lineages of Belgian Modernism, Part II," West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture 19, no. 2 (2012): 175–95; Debora L. Silverman, "Art Nouveau, Art of Darkness: African Lineages of Belgian Modernism, Part III," West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture 20, no. 1 (2013): 3–61.

[59] David Code, "Debussy's String Quartet in the Brussels Salon of 'La Libre Esthetique,'" 19th-Century. Music 30, no. 3 (2007): 257–87.

[60] The program is reproduced in: David Code, "Debussy's String Quartet in the Brussels Salon of 'La. Libre Esthetique,'" 261. Originally from: M. O. Maus, *Trente années de lutte pour l'art* (Brussles, 1926), 174-175, accessible online at: https://bibliotheque-numerique.inha.fr/collection/item/26784-trente-annees-de-lutte-pour-l-art-1884-1914?offset=1.

[61] Like Code, who opts to "subvert the mythic status music history so often grants to the premiere" by starting with its "deuxième." Code, "Debussy's String Quartet in the Brussels Salon of 'La Libre Esthetique,'" 257.

the first flowering of Debussy's compositional style – even though other works were thought of in this way first: notably the *Cinq poèmes de Charles Baudelaire* (1890) (of whom more later).

La Damoiselle élue was completed by Debussy years earlier, in 1888. It served then as one of the "*envois*" – literally "shipments" – that Debussy sent to the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris, as a Prix de Rome laureate.[62] In 1888, the work struck the Académie as an odd compromise between adhesion to and independence from academic norms. Their assessment vacillates between veiled admiration and didactic admonishment for this "[c]omposition written on a rather obscure text, with music that is poetic and not without charm, in which we regretfully find the continuation of vague tendencies, enemies of specific form [*forme détérminée*]."[63] Six years later, in 1894, when *Damoiselle* headlined a concert at the Libre Ésthetique Salon, it was obvious that the status of the work had changed. It was now showcased along with artworks that represented the latest tendencies in Symbolism and Art Nouveau. The work itself was not modified in any way, but it had now found an appreciative milieu, and an appropriate décor.

The French art critic and Beaux-Arts administrator, Roger Marx, wrote of the 1894 Libre Ésthetique Salon that, among art exhibitions of its day, "none has shown itself as apt to demonstrate the unity of art: paintings, statues, engravings, the works of decorators intimately allied, and certain rooms one could have taken for an apartment put together by an aesthete of refined culture."[64] Thus "unity of art" at the Salon equaled a décor fit for an "aesthete," which is another term for "dandy." The resonances with Debussy are obvious. Jean-Michel Nectoux has described the apartment Debussy

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[62] Peter Bloom, "Academic Music: The Archives of the Académie Des Beaux-Arts," 19th-Century Music. 7, no. 2 (1983): 129–135.

[63] "Composition écrite sur un texte en prose assez obscur, musique poétique et non dénuée de charme, dans laquelle nous trouvons avec regret la continuation des tendances vagues et ennemies d'une forme déterminée." François Lesure, *Claude Debussy Avant Pelleas Ou Les Annees Symbolistes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1993), 83.

[64] "Pour le monde d'exposition, nul ne s'était encore révélé comme pareillement apte à démontrer l'unité de. l'art: tableaux, statues, estampes, travaux des décoraterus s'alliaient intimement, et de certaines salles on. eût dit un appartement ordonné par un esthète à la culture raffinée." Madeleine Octave Maus, *Trente. Années de Lutte Pour l'art, 1884-1914* (Brussels: Librairie L'Oiseau Bleu, 1926), 176.

occupied from 1905 as an "interior which, by the surrounding frame, infinitely reflected the tastes of a sensitive aesthete who could not live and breathe freely, and even less so compose, except in an artistically selected and disposed décor, the very image of his work [*oeuvre*]."[65] Looking back on his career, years later, Maus himself describes the 1894 Salon as a milieu framed by a décor:

> It was the time of an aestheticism that survived the Pre-Raphaelites…And nothing was more curious than a look into our Salons where elegant women rubbed shoulders in carefully premeditated attire, whose velvet green or mauve silk tunics, peplums of orange gauze, headbands, handbags, the lilies they sometimes carried around like candles, attempted to strike a chord [*tentaient un accord*], however unusual, between their Ruskinian outfits and the modern frame in which they moved.[66]

Significantly, Maus deploys a musical metaphor ("*accord*" can mean "chord") in order to describe the visual resonance between the "Ruskinian outfits" of the patrons and the décor of the Salons – decorated by Symbolist and Art Nouveau artworks. The specific references to the Pre-Raphaelites and the English art critic John Ruskin further reinforce the strong connection between the Salon and *La Damoiselle élue*.

The curiously open-ended name of La Libre Ésthetique, which translates into the deceptively simple phrase, "The Free Aesthetic," begs the question that would aspire to define the aesthetics of a milieu even with various artists, working across various artistic and artisanal disciplines. The unifying question would be: "Free" of what? In other words, what does the "*libre*" ("free") in La Libre Ésthetique represent? Does it truly announce a unified aesthetic across this diverse artistic milieu? What exactly is the evidently normative ideal, aesthetic or otherwise, being opposed, or proposed, by

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[65] "…son intérieur, où se reflétaient les goûts d'un esthète sensible, infiniment, au cadre qui l'entourait, ne pouvant vivre et respirer librement et, à plus forte raison, composer, que dans un décor artistement choisi et disposé, à l'image de son oeuvre même." Jean-Michel Nectoux, "«Je veux écrire mon songe musical…»," in *Debussy: La musique et les arts*, ed. Guy Cogeval, Others (Paris: Skira Flammarion, 2012), 16.

[66] "C'était le temps d'un esthétisme qui avait survécu aux Préraphaëlites…Et rien n'était plus curieux qu'un vernissage de nos Salons où se coudoyaient, dans des accoutrements longuement médités, des femmes. élégantes dont les tuniques de velours vert ou de soie mauve, les peplum de gaze orange, les ferronières, les réticules, les lys que parfois elles portaient comme des cierges, tentaient un accord, d'ailleurs insolite, de toilettes ruskiniennes avec le cadre moderne dans lequel elles évoluaient." Madeleine Maus, *Trente Années de Lutte*, 178.

this titular assertion of artistic liberty? What, therefore, can be gleaned from this historical context about the reception of Debussy's *La Damoiselle élue*?

Tracing significant historical and musical threads across this threadwork of problems, the present chapter focuses on a specific portion of time, which François Lesure labels Debussy's "*années symbolistes*" ("Symbolist Years").[67] Roughly synonymous with the 1890s, the "Symbolist Years" come to an end in 1902, with the advent of *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Théatre de l'Opéra Comique. This chapter is mainly concerned, however, with the years leading up to and including 1894, culminating in the Libre Ésthetique program (the subsequent period is the focus of Chapters 2 and 3). The opera brought Debussy not only his first real taste of professional success but also a personal following among a younger cohort of musicians who, alongside Ravel, came to be called *debussystes, pelléastres,* as well as *les Apaches*.[68] From then on, Debussy would remain publicly-acknowledged as the progenitor of *debussysme*. Yet how, as a matter of fact, did Debussy's music come to be so closely identified with Debussy's personality that the two became synonymous?

Thinking of *debussysme* as a form of *dandysme*, I argue, helps us understand its historical origins. Both began as a cult of personality, tied to the idea of a personal style, and both got their start among a distinctly homosocial milieu. Although it would not be publicly labeled as such until 1902, *debussysme* as a compositional style started to emerge in 1888, with a distinct shift in Debussy's social life. That year, Debussy returned to Paris after his years in Rome, submitted *La Damoiselle élue* to the Académie des Beaux-Arts, and started engaging in Parisian artistic life, including salons run by women, such as that of Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux,[69] but also a number of conspicuously male homosocial artistic

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[67] François Lesure, *Claude Debussy avant Pelléas, ou les années symbolistes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1993).

[68] Jann Pasler, "A Sociology of the Apaches: 'Sacred Battalion' for Pelléas," in *Berlioz and Debussy: Sources, Contexts and Legacies*, eds. Barbara L. Kelly and Kerry Murphy (New York: Routledge, 2007), 149–166.

[69] For more on Debussy's salon life, female patronage, and its relation to his music, see: Adlard, Emma. "Interior Time: Debussy, 'Fêtes Galantes', and the Salon of Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux." The Musical Quarterly96, no. 2 (2013): 178–218..

circles in which *dandysme*, having been championed by Baudelaire, was a constant presence, with its ideal of dandies forming an exclusive milieu ("caste").

Before the 1894 concert, it is clear that *La Damoiselle élue* had already gained traction among one of the key nodes of that milieu, Edmond Bailly's bookshop, the *Libraire de l'art indépendant*. In 1893, the year of its premiere, Bailly's Libraire published a vocal score of the work. Many books published by the *Librairie* are the collaborative effort of several constituent members of Bailly's ciricle. This homosocial milieu gathered at the bookshop afterhours on weekdays, attracted by Bailly's artisanal approach to bookmaking, but also his knowledge of literature, the occult, and music.[70] The *Librairie* circle published its own official journal, *La Musique*, edited by Bailly himself, who also (self-)published several scores of his own music, including a setting of Mallarmé's poem *Apparition*, which Debussy also set.[71]

As a material object, the Librairie score of *Damoiselle* is in itself a decorative *objet d'art*, intended to grace the interior décor of its possessor. The score was only published in a limited, luxury edition of 160 copies, printed on variously numbered sets of fine papers.[72] Debussy and Bailly took great personal pains in order to arrange for a pleasingly delicate arrangement of the sumptuously decorative musical score, characterized by a liberal spacing of staves on the page, and artisanally selected fonts. The cover is graced by a hand-made lithograph by Maurice Denis, a Libraire regular, thus emphasizing the score's rootedness in the Bailly milieu.

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[70] Denis Herlin, "Le cercle de l'Art indépendant," in *Debussy: La musique et les arts*, ed. Guy Cogeval, others (Paris: Skira Flammarion, 2012). See also: Denis Herlin, "À la Librairie de l'Art indépendant : musique, poésie, art et ésotérisme," Histoires littéraires, vol. XVII no 68; October–December 2016, 7–56.

[71] Edmond Bailly, *Catalogue de La Librairie de l'Art Indépendant* (Octobre 1896), accessed March 18, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k_991582b.

[72] Claude Debussy, *La Damoiselle élue: Poème lyrique d'après D.-G. Rossetti* (Paris: Librairie de l'Art. indépendent, 1893), accessed March 18, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52000076j.

Figure 3: Cover lithograph of *La Damoiselle élue* score (1893), Maurice Denis

The lithograph, seen in Figure 3, draws on the earlier example of Rossetti's own painting (Fig. 1). Like Debussy's edited version of the text, however – and unlike Rossetti's poem and painting – the Damozel's earthly lover is nowhere to be seen. Denis has taken Debussy's hint (his score does not include male voices) and removed any trace of the male lover's gaze that is left visible within Rossetti's original frame. The framing architectural device of the "gold bar of heaven," prominently featured in both the poem and painting, also divides the composition of the lithograph. Above this barrier, as Lockspeiser highlighted, the decorative curves of the Damozel's hair undulate freely, while the handmaidens – whose names, the poem tells us, are "sweet symphonies" – encircle the top-left corner of the star-studded composition. Denis plays with the materiality of the book as both negative space that frames the composition but also as the very stuff of its figuration. The Damozel and the heavenly handmaidens are hewn out of the same tan material as the book cover, in feint outline: suggesting that they are consubstantial with the materiality of the book whose cover they grace. The suggestion is further reinforced by the Damozel's handling of a book, or perhaps a score: in either case a codex from which she has momentarily averted her gaze, presumably to better hear the "sweet symphonies" of the handmaidens just behind. The message being, presumably, that if we handle the artisanal, handmade score with reverence, like the Damozel on the cover, we too might (like Lockspeiser) hear the "purely visual" music of its "sweet symphonies."

Like Debussy, Denis had received an academic formation as an artist, studying at the École des Beaux-Arts. During the "*années symbolistes*," however, he became the leading theorist of Symbolist art, as well as the leader of an avant-garde (all-male) circle whose members called themselves The Nabis, Hebrew for "The Prophets."[73] From his first tract, the *Définition du néo-traditionnisme* ("Definition of Neo-Traditionalism") of 1890, as Allison Morehead writes, Denis sought "to devalue academic and

[73] On musical parallels to this movement, see: Marie Amélie Anquetil, "Peintres et Musiciens de Concert, Au Temps Des Nabis," RIdIM/RCMI Newsletter 21, no. 2 (1996): 46–57.

naturalist practices" in favor of emerging Symbolism.[74] The next year, as Morehead elaborates, Denis attempted to put theory into practice for his first exhibition with an abstracted female nude significantly titled, *Décor*.

> Denis's ten submissions to the 1891 Salon des Indépendents – ten was the maximum allowed – testify to the ambitions of the twenty-year-old artist. With eight paintings, one fan design, and a suite of drawings inspired by Paul Verlaine's *Sagesse*, Denis contrived to attract the attention of symbolist critics, especially with *Décor*, under whose title in the catalogue he included a suggestive line from Charles Baudelaire's translations of Edgar Allan Poe.[75]

But this was far from a simple chronological transition from academic to post-academic art, as Morehead specifies:

> Despite the anti-academic rhetoric of the "Définition," Denis had continued to study at the École des beaux-arts through the fall of 1890, regularly submitting drawings to the various juried competitions. In November 1890, he received his third and final mention for a study after a classical cast…Flipping over this prize-winning drawing, Denis subsequently produced a large study for *Décor*, thereby enacting the break with academic and naturalist modes that he had called for in the "Définition."[76]

The fact that Denis produced *Décor* on the back of a prize-winning academic study resonates with the early reception of *La Damoiselle élue*. It too was created as an academic submission yet later came to symbolize the *debussysme* that he was to develop throughout the 1890s. Unlike Denis' *Décor*, however, Debussy did not repurpose his original academic study to produce a new anti-academic work; rather, only the work's reception changed.

By 1894, Debussy's academic "cantata" was reframed as a highly personal work that symbolized in music the latest literary and artistic tendencies that idealized decorative art, which is what its inclusion in the Libre Ésthetique Salon signified. As David Code writes of the 1894 performance in Brussels, "the *Proses lyriques* and *La Damoiselle élue*, might seem more promising subjects

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[74] Allison Morehead, *Nature's Experiments and the Search for Symbolist Form* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2017), 47.
[75] Allison Morehead, *Nature's Experiments*, 51.
[76] Ibid., 52.

for such interdisciplinary investigation. But the Quartet's *lack* of explicit programmatic lures can productively enforce a search for deeper shared grounds of coherence."[77] I take seriously the "programmatic lure" referred to by Code. With an "interdisciplinary investigation" of *La Damoiselle élue*, I demonstrate that, in the case of Debussy, program music may attune the musicologist to "shared grounds of coherence" that can be at least as deep as those that may be revealed through absolute music.

Because I lean on the programmatic quality of *La Damoiselle élue*, my music analysis cannot operate on its own: it will not remain strictly within the formalist confines of the "music itself." Rather, the specific focus of my musical analysis is Debussy's text setting, a compositional activity that by its very nature links music to extra-musical meaning. This calls for a reading that moves self-reflexively between Debussy's music and the text. As is often the case, text can also signal one's milieu – the poet and his readers. In this case, one also needs to consider the other artists involved in the production of the score and Bailly who brought them together.

For the following score analysis, I rely on the Librairie vocal score itself (1893). Debussy modified the orchestration multiple times, so that it would be a question better suited to a manuscript studies approach to deal with the problem of deciding on the "authoritative" version(s) of the orchestration – if there is finally such a thing.[78] The comparative advantage of Bailly's score is precisely that it obviates the need to decide between alternate orchestrations, by sole virtue of being a vocal score personally prepared by Debussy. Second, the vocal score format is by definition focused on text

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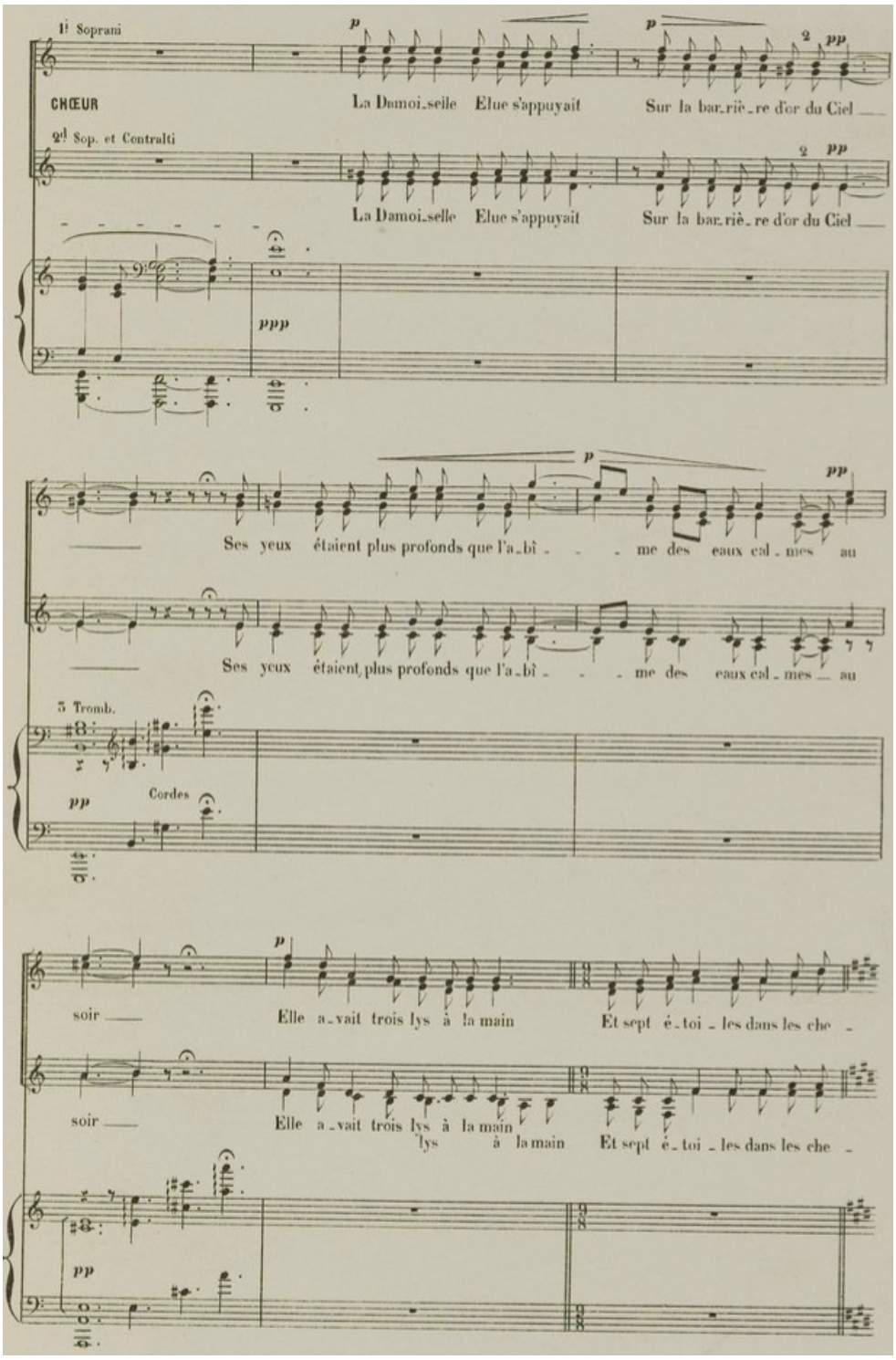
[77] Ibid.

[78] In an article about the infamous problem of versions in Debussy's *Nocturnes*, Denis relates a telling anecdote from Robert Godet: "When it came to the *Nocturnes* he showed me a score covered in all sorts of corrections…'Which are the right ones?' I asked. 'I'm not actually sure,' he replied, 'they are all possibilities. Take this score with you and use whatever you like from it.'" Denis Herlin, trans. Sidney Buckland "Sirens in the labyrinth: amendments in Debussy's *Nocturnes*," in *Debussy Studies*, ed. Richard Langham Smith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 56-58. Herlin comments: "Debussy's evasive disconcerting reply…was no doubt due to extreme tiredness caused by his ilness." I think there may be something more to Debussy's mature reply.

setting, which can only aid the present critical attempt to pay close attention to the various ways in which names are depicted by the music. Third, Debussy has included specific instances of orchestral timbre, or expressive indications, and had them duly engraved into the body of the score. As a consequence, this particular score alerts the analyst to orchestral timbres that were considered important enough by the composer to be indicated in the vocal score.

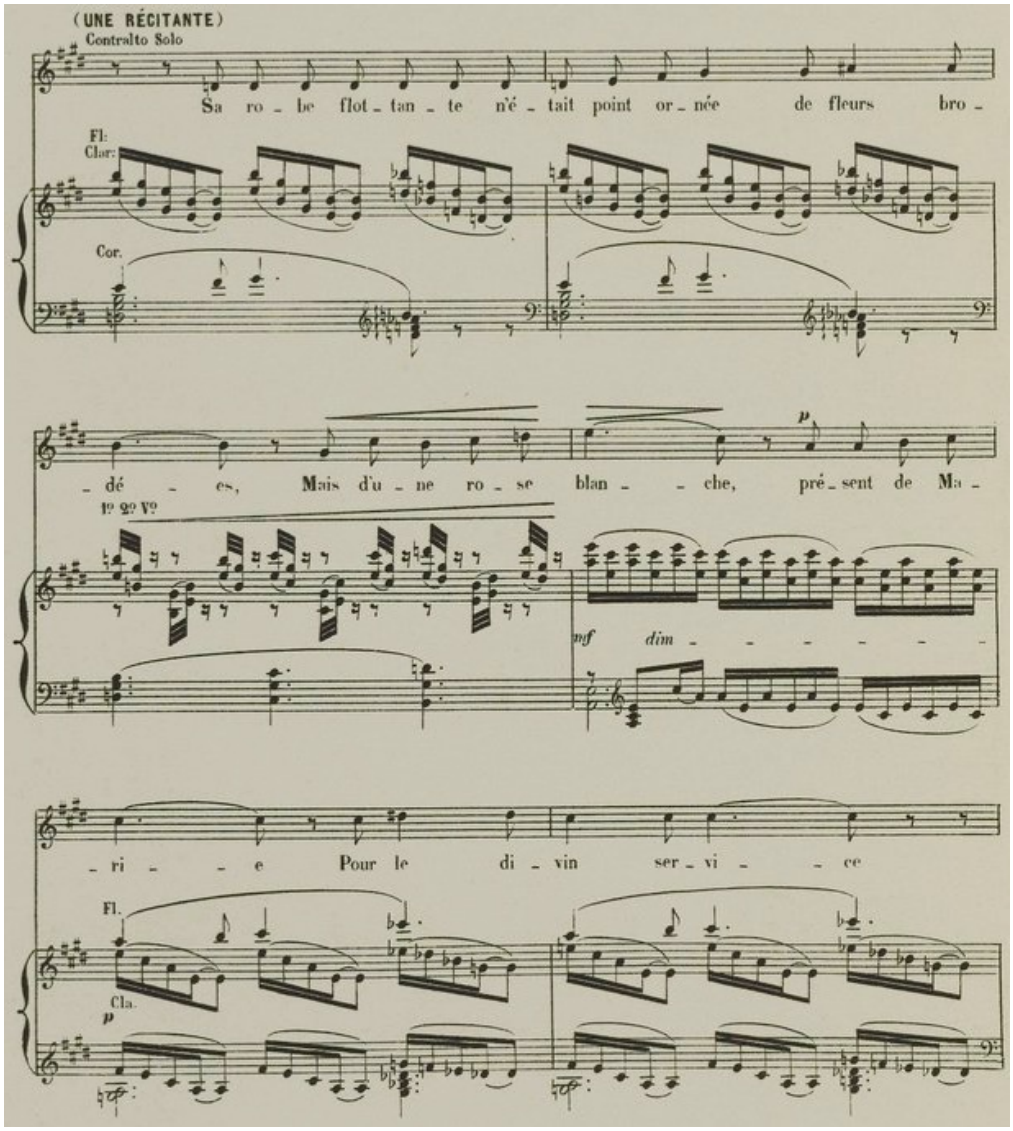
The initial entry of voices on M3(P3) [Ex. 1], a homophonic recitative intoned by sopranos and contraltos, sits there unaccompanied.[79] This angelic acapella section, carried over on a breathy undulation between E major and D minor triads, leans into a soft invocation of the name, or rather the title, of the piece itself: "*La Damoiselle Elue s'appuyait*..." ("The Blessed Damozel leans…"). As the Damozel "leans," the spiritual weightiness of her supraphysical body is registered by a subtle dynamic leap, whose ambitus is further expanded in the course of the next vocal outburst in M5-8(P3) [Ex. 1]. The next mention of a name comes only a bit later, with the introduction of the solo *récitante* from M5(P4) [Ex. 2]. The name "Marie" appears on the lips of this contralto soloist-narrator in M8-9(P4) [Ex. 2] in connection with a stunning white rose ("*rose blanche*") bestowed upon the Damozel by the hand of the Blessed Virgin herself. The agogic, dynamic, and registral accentuation of the word "*blanche*" ("white") is echoed by the attenuated, now merely augitic extension of the name "Marie" – a subtle text setting strategy that serves to accentuate the exemplary pre-Raphaelite correspondence at work between the virginal colorlessness of the (white) flower and the symbolic spotlessness of the (pure) Lady. This early mention of Marie is only a brief foretaste of her later appearance, however. It prepares

[79] Because the 1893 vocal score does not include measure numbers, but does have page numbers, I refer to measure numbers within the context of the specific page they are printed on in the edition, by using the following system of abbreviation. M3(P3) means: "Measure 3, Page 3." M3-5(P3) means: "Measures 3-5, Page 3." M3-M2 (P3-4) means: "Measure 3, Page 3 through Measure 2, Page 4."


1ère Soprani
CHŒUR
La Damoi_selle Elue s'appuyait Sur la bar_riè_re d'or du Ciel
2de Sop. et Contralti
La Damoi_selle Elue s'appuyait Sur la bar_riè_re d'or du Ciel
Ses yeux étaient plus profonds que l'a_bî_me des eaux cal_mes au
Ses yeux étaient plus profonds que l'a_bî_me des eaux cal_mes au
3 Tromb.
Cordes
soir Elle a_vait trois lys à la main Et sept é_toi_les dans les che_
soir Elle a_vait trois lys à la main
lys à la main Et sept é_toi_les dans les che_

Example 1

us for the dantesque vision of indescribable *paradiso* towards which the poet's vision aspires. Before we may visit the *Dame*, however, we must linger awhile in the immediate vicinity of the Damozel's eroticized purgatory, a realization into which we are ineluctably swept up by means of an exclamatory vocal breakthrough that, starting monophonically in M11-12(P5), leads us into temptation with its suggestive lingering "*Autour d'elle*" ("Around her"), where lovers are continually "newly reunited" ("*nouvellement réunis*") [Ex. 3].

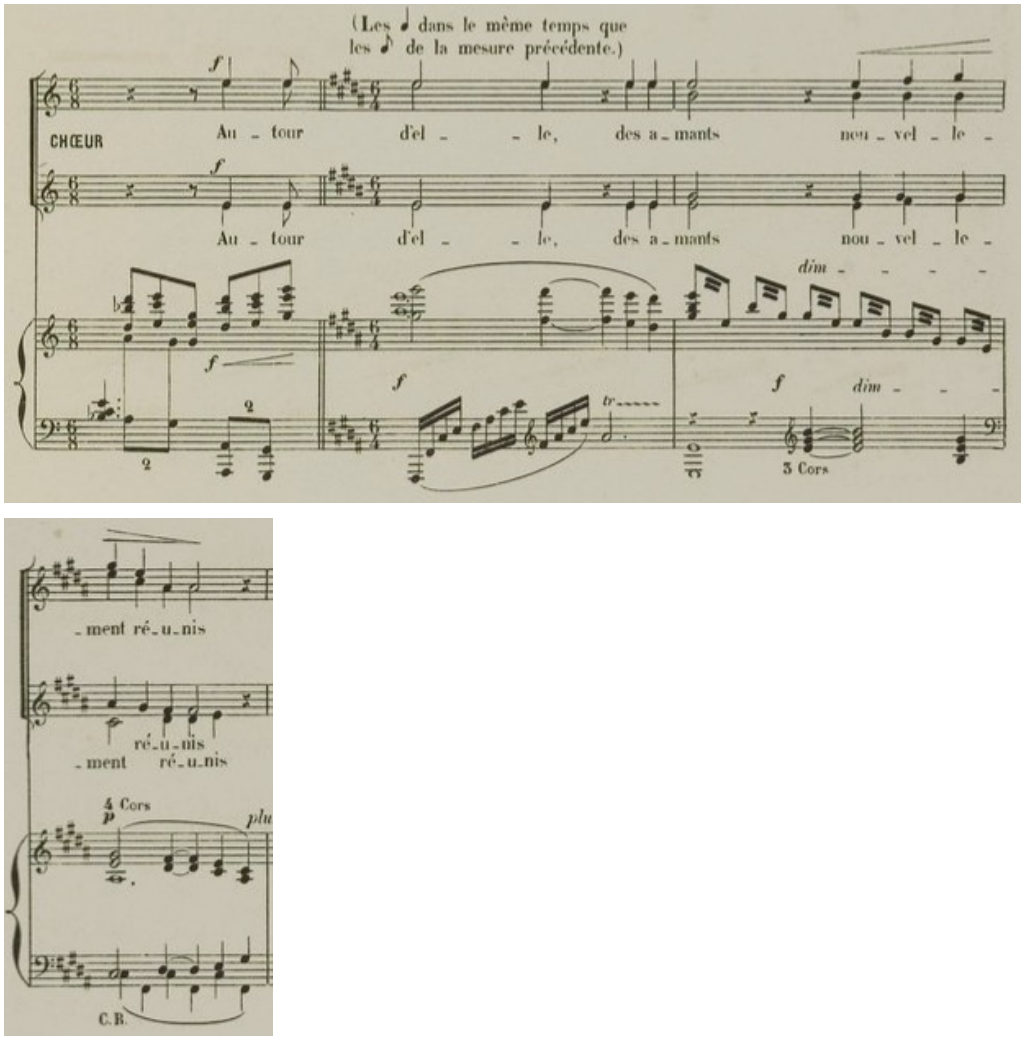


Example 2

These bodiless couples sublimate their heavenly (re)union by uttering each other's names aloud in ecstasy, a soundscape of spectacular – and evidently also unending – perversion, marked musically by the sudden appearance of a rhythmic diminution that alights on the indirect object, "new names" ("*nouveaux noms*"), in M3(P6). This conspicuous quickening of the text then leads to a sustained ejaculation on the prolonged "*ta*" that lies spooned within the trisyllabic setting of "*ex-ta-se*" and arrives on top of the downbeat in M6(P6) [Ex. 4]. This is indeed the same mention of "new names" that, in our aforementioned analysis of the painting, could be observed artfully carved into the gold bar of the artisanally-made frame itself. Clearly, through his "somewhat perverse" text setting (as Willy's aforementioned review half-innocently describes it), Debussy is amplifying the very passages which earned Rossetti's poem its tantalizing disapprobation as "the fleshly school of poetry." By playing into the fleshly school's rote recitation of new names, experienced eternally for the first time in their virginal newness, Debussy is reveling in the decadent perversity at hand. He is also thereby publicly exposing his private approbation of the very passages that, like the coveted censured poems stemming from *Les Fleurs du mal*, stick out the most in their unabashed suggestiveness.

As though a real *deus ex machina* were lowered on cue in order to satisfactorily deflate the naughty textual accretion of the aforementioned improper "names," mere measures after the above-described ecstatic lovers' reunion we get the first appearance of "God" ("*Dieu*"). And God, as Debussy's text setting reveals to us on M9(P6) [Ex. 4], can only be fingered on the appropriately attributeless white keys of a C major triad – and then only in the universal brilliance of their uninverted root position. This direct modulation to C starts tellingly on the words "And the souls that ascended up to God," which vocal line itself descends [Ex. 4]. This opaque (because remarkably unmarked) super-normative deity is, at the very least, neither male nor female. It is non-sexed. This is not God "the Father." This is quite simply God, *tout court*. If anything, the score suggests that behind the abstract non-named God of the poem there lies a quietly personable, yet strictly non-personal, effulgence.

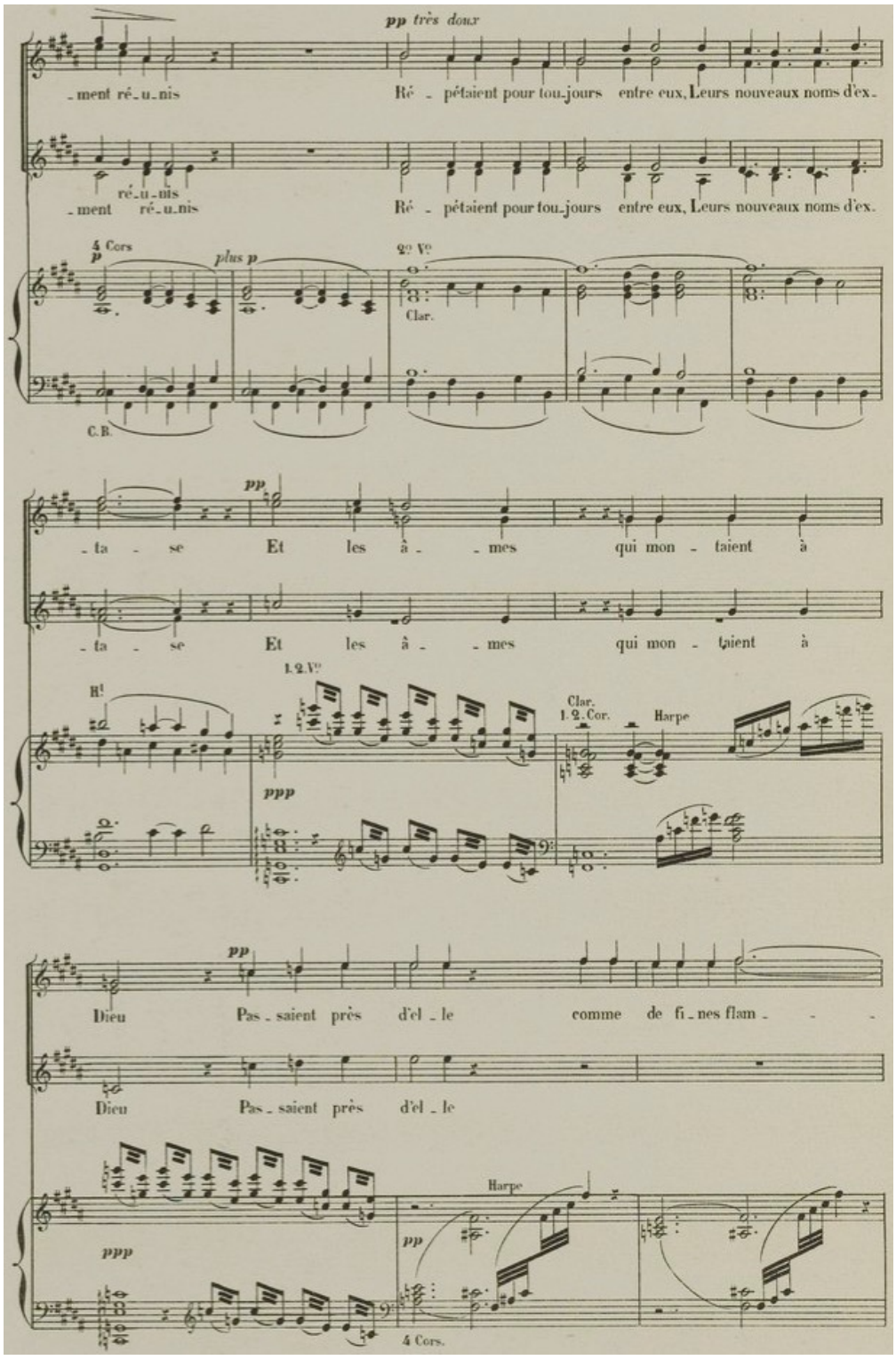
Example 3



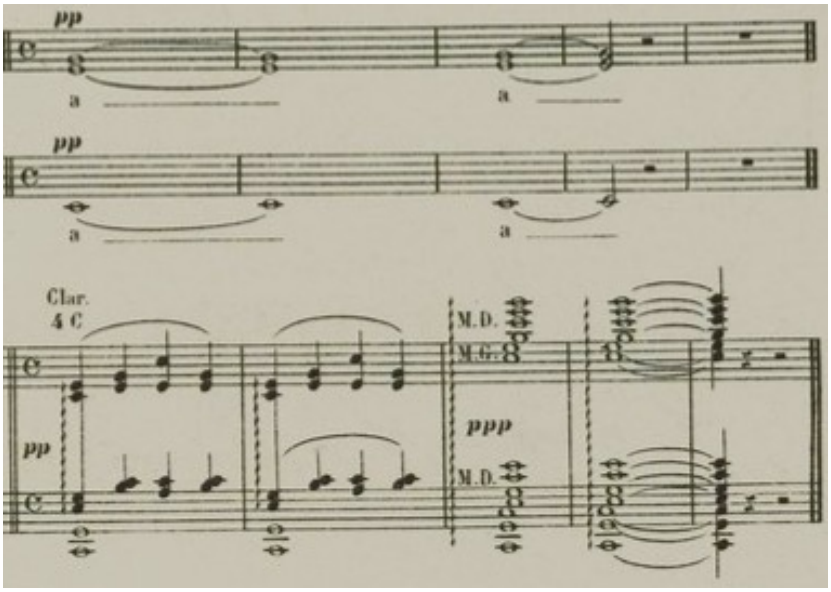
Furthermore, this entity sustains the cosmos by means of the pale triunity of its perfect C triad, and does so from a distant, unmarked location – third-related, by mediant common-tone modulation from the opening E tonal center – from which what vibrations reach us at all finally arrive to us in a pale pianissimo of themself. This initial iteration of God as a vertical triune sonority prefigures the ultimate moment of harmonic culmination at the very end of the work in M17-21(P21) [Ex. 5]: which, by yet again proceeding from a non-functional mediant succession that results in a C major triad, manages to arrange a meaningful, cyclical exit for the work itself. The pianist's hands, as indicated by the score at this point, are stacked thumb-to-thumb like a single ten-fingered appendage – worthy of

the anatomical excesses of biblical angels – as they rise from bass to treble clef, twice traversing the registral ascent. A single "a" vowel sustains the triadic vocal center of this quietly microcosmic *Überklang* that just happens to be rooted in Do(minus). Finally, the seemingly premature end of the vocally-expressed "a(hh)" that lingers on into the penultimate measure, M20(P21), but no further, nevertheless implies its own ultimate prolongation through the subtle envelope of the dovetailed instrumental sonority, held-over precisely in order to foreground three inarticulately resounding beats as the beginningless background for the *musica universalis* that subsequently rests on three more inarticulate (yet duly notated) beats of silence.

Between the first and the final instances of the God-in-C phenomenon in Debussy's musical setting, as just described, there remains yet a third iteration, in M18(P11). In this single instance alone, God is somewhat personified; at least in so far as the Damozel and her reunited lover become the subjects of a suggestively scopophilic interest as they "bathe there in God's sight," in the "deep wells" of light ("*sources*" in Gabriel Sarrazin's French translation) into which they wade. While God's first mention is introduced by an objective narrator, namely the *récitante*, and while the lasting traces of God's (instrumental) lingering beyond the final articulated triad, this middle mention of "*Dieu*" in Debussy's *Poème lyrique* is a personal, subjective utterance that belongs to the Damozelle herself. In the space of M16-17(P11), she lowers her voice from an Eb ceiling on "*nous y baignerons*" (literally "we will bathe there") and slips down to a mediant-related G floor quite specifically on "God's face" ("*face de Dieu*") [Ex. 6]. Along with the accompanying diminuendo, the Damozel's bashful drop in register mimes a sudden bout of *poudeur* on her part: a complex self-eroticizing gesture that ironically declares (in the very act of trying to hide) her self-conscious delight at bathing *à la face de Dieu*.


pp très doux
ment ré-u-nis
Ré - pétaient pour tou-jours entre eux, Leurs nouveaux noms d'ex-
ré-u-nis
ment ré-u-nis
Ré - pétaient pour tou-jours entre eux, Leurs nouveaux noms d'ex-
4 Cors
p
plus p
2e Vc
Clar.
C.B.
pp
-ta - se
Et les â - - mes
qui mon - taient à
-ta - se
Et les â - - mes
qui mon - taient à
1.2.Vc
Bl
Clar.
1.2.Cor.
Harpe
ppp
pp
Dieu
Pas - saient près
d'el - le
comme de fi - nes flam - - -
Dieu
Pas - saient près
d'el - le
Harpe
ppp
pp
4 Cors.

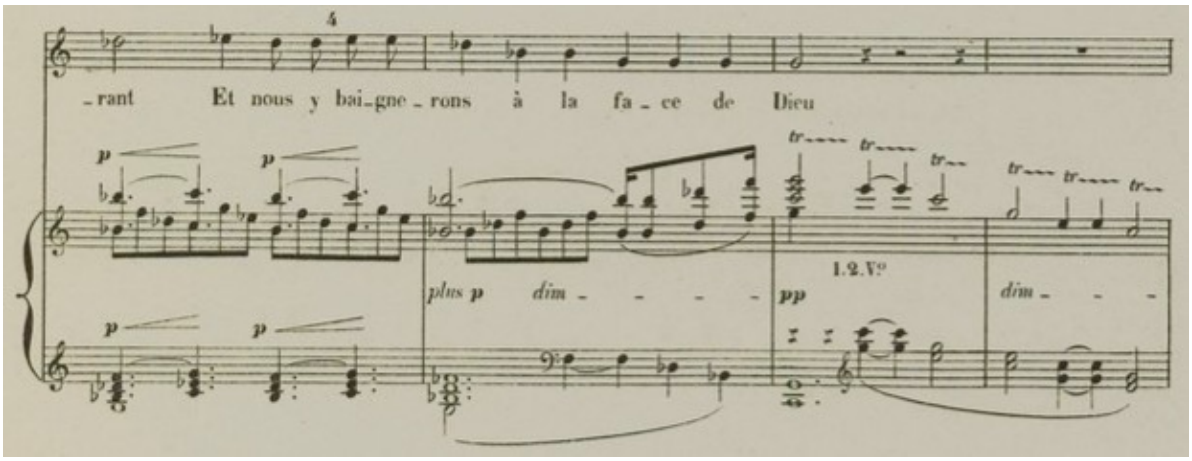
Example 4



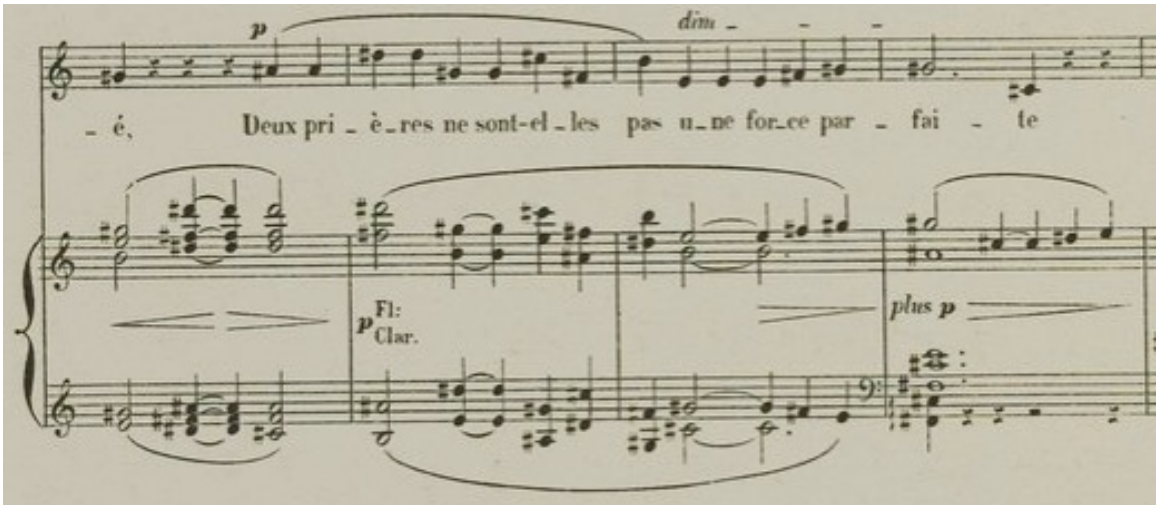
Example 5

No matter their relationality to the all-female cast, these repeated utterances of "*Dieu*" still evoke a singularly abstract deity with no personal face and no proper name, a figure that remains entirely without assignably gendered features. Therefore, those rarely encountered instances in which, along their path up the divine ladder, the disincarnate couple is met (as in Rossetti's model, the *Divine Comedy* of Dante) by biblical personages in-the-flesh, these are indeed moments of significant word-painterly figuration. Immediately on the heels of her Edenic first utterance, "I wish that he were come to me" ("*Je voudrais qu'il fut déjà près de moi*"), the Damozel persistently sends up an intervalicaly blameless prayer to the Lord ("*Seigneur, Seigneur*") that eventually falls fifth-down right over the trisyllabic (francophone) rendering of the word "perfect" ("*par-fai-te*") across M12-13(P10) [Ex. 7]. Debussy blends her lordward ejaculation with the distantly stentorian timbre of "4 Muted Horns" ("*4 Cors Sourdini*"), as he indeed takes the trouble to indicate in the vocal score right above the piano reduction in M7(P10) [Ex. 8]. Meanwhile, the Damozel's aspirational pleas, fifth-upping then fourth-topping over themselves up into a high F sharp ceiling, have not been trumpeted aloud in vain. The

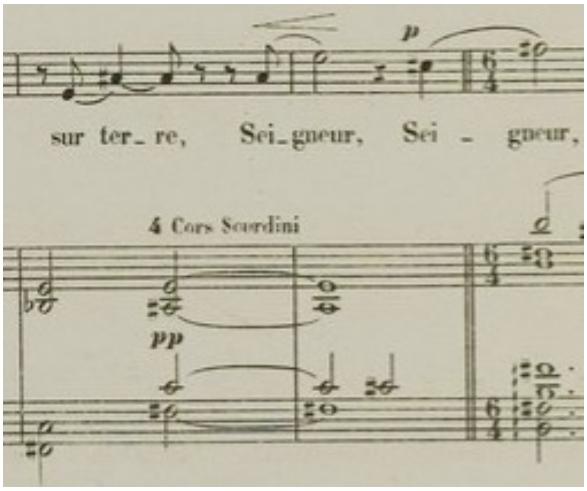
following highly eroticized invocation of "the dove" ("*la colombe*") also rises, with a longer and more conspicuously undulating build-up this time, onto an unresolved appoggiatura that leans into yet another high F sharp across M3(P13) [Ex. 9]. Given the strict concordance of "God" with the C major triad found within the work, as we noted already, the co-occurrence of "Lord" and "the Dove" on F sharp triangulates between a revealing intervallic symmetry that unites the entirely unrepresentable background deity – in itself not far from the vague "*Dieu*" of the *philosophès* – with the foregrounded stars of iconic representability: "*le Seigneur*" and "*la colombe*." (See: the white dove prominently placed at the very top of Rossetti's pictorial composition, above). More than offer a merely structural allusion to the infamously abstruse theological concept of triunity, the inspired repetition of "Lord" in the Damozel's opening air also manifests its practical efficacy, hastened perhaps by her frustrated, half-threatening crying aloud that alludes most pleadingly to Christ's biblical promise about "two or three" gathered together: "Are not two prayers a perfect strength?" ("*Deux prières no sont-elles pas une force parfaite*").



Example 6



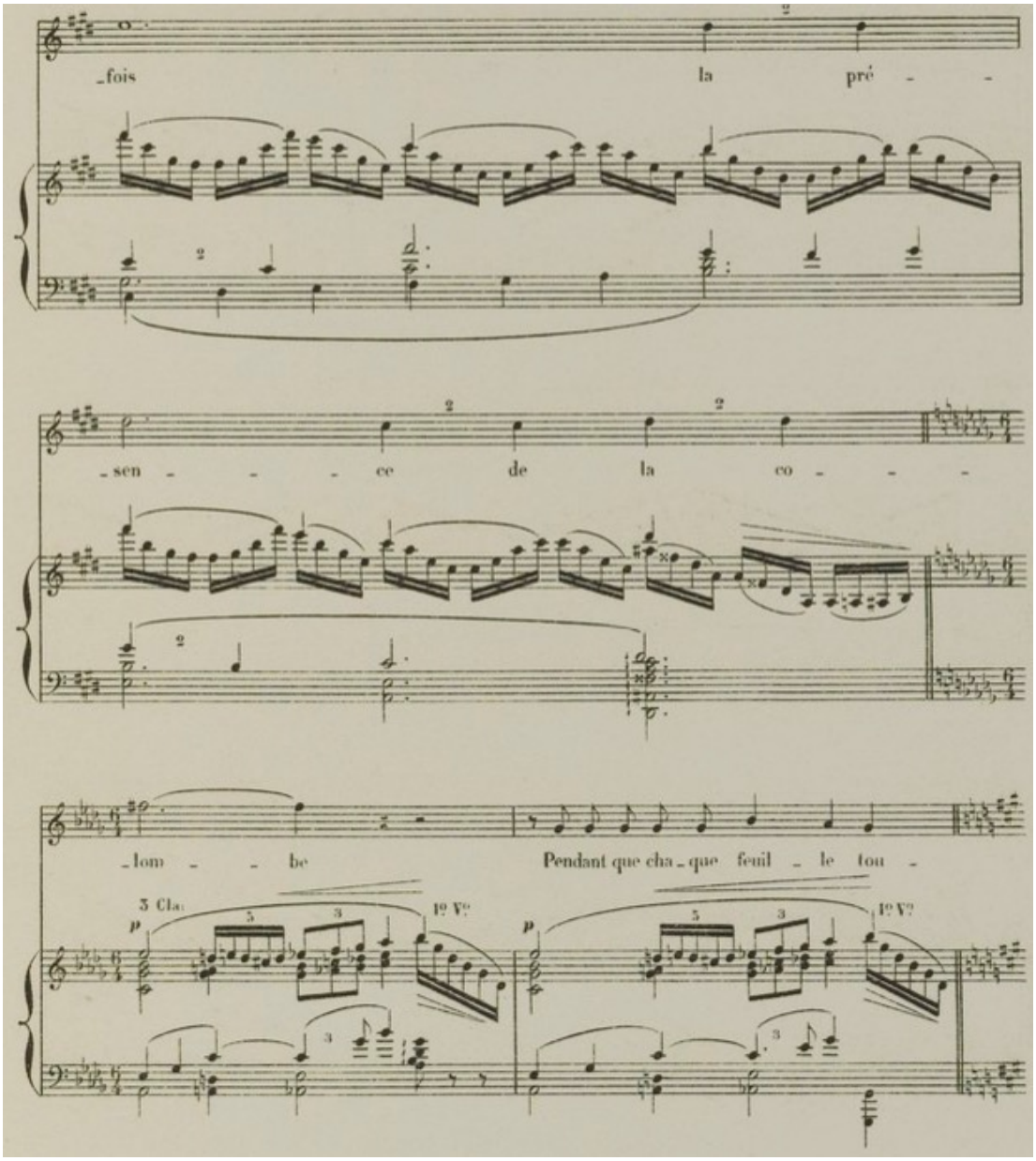
Example 7



Example 8

As we can see for ourselves, such a sincerely felt exhortation surely works wonders, with the immediate miraculous appearance of "*la colombe*" in M2-3(P13) [Ex. 9], followed by that of the *Dame* and her five euphonious handmaidens in M4-14(P14) [Ex. 10], leading gradually to the mid-register, chesty, heartily matter-of-fact invocation of the presence of "*Christ Notre Seigneur*" ("Christ Our Lord") in M7-8(P17) [Ex. 11], instrumentally spotlighted (as Debussy takes care to indicate in the piano score) with annunciatory trombones. Whereas Christ is lauded as an individual figure, the "Dove" is made

manifest as a simultaneous utterance of names strummed on the leaves themselves, each leaf becoming name-conscious by means of tactile inspiration. As simply put in Rossetti's original lines: "every leaf that His plumes touch/Saith His name audibly." However, Sarrazin's French translation of the phrase reads, "*chaque feuille touchée par ses plumes dit son nom distinctement*," which shifts the stress of the phrase away from the personal pronoun ("His") and towards the gender-ambivalent (and lowercase) "*son nom*" – which in French can indicate "his name," "her name," or even "its name," depending on the context. The stark (if syntactically subtle) rhetorical difference between the English and French versions is musically expressed as a shift in stress. At the phrase level, in Sarrazin's French translation, the stress lies rather distinctly on the direct object "*nom*" ("name") rather than on the possessive pronoun "His," as it does in the English original. Sarrazin/Debussy's version thus neuters Rossetti's masculine possessive pronoun, His, and distributes its identity (specifically, its unrevealed name) in M4-5(P13) [Ex. 12] into "*chaque feuille touchée*." That is, the Dove's homonymity – a portmanteau of synonymity (with itself) and anonymity (for the reader): a name which sounds the same, whatever it may be – is proclaimed by "every leaf touched." Debussy's agogic and registral accent is placed palpably on the tactile adjective "touched," rather than on "each leaf" that serves as an individuated object of touch. Whereas Debussy musically renders the French equivalent of "His" ("*son*") in diminutive fashion, as an eighth-note pickup into M6(P13) [Ex. 12], the connected downbeat on "name" ("*nom*") is set by him on a longish quarter-note and a half, then syntactically prolonged through the adverb "*distinctement*." In Debussy's musical rendering of Rossetti's pre-Raphaelite symbolism, to sum up, rather than exclaim itself to be an object of "His" possession, each distinct "leaf" is imbued with the name-bearing spiritual fertility bestowed upon it by the Dove's feathery touch. This clear case of symbolic correspondence between touch and speech – in which only the touched flowers may (but also must) utter aloud the Dove's name – is just one of the many instances of synesthetic framing that may be observed in Debussy's text setting.

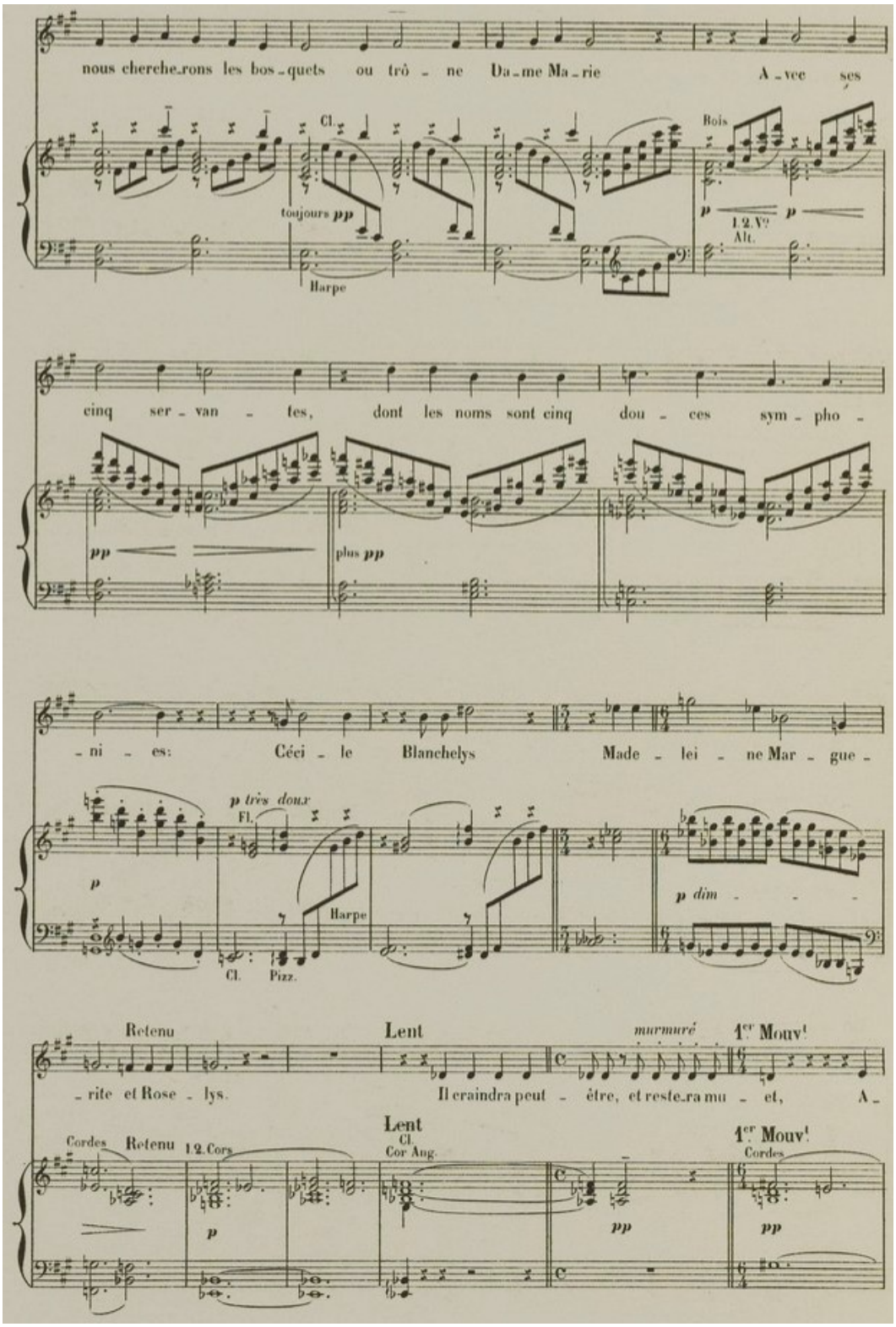


Example 10

Following the Dove's descent, we are led ineluctably along with by the Damozel, and along with her newly reconnected lover, to the "throne of *Dame Marie*" herself on M2-3(14) [Ex. 13], along with her "five handmaidens" whose names, scattered across M9-14(P14) [Ex. 10], are called "five sweet symphonies." Each name in this itemized attendants' list – Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen, Margaret,

and Rosalys (all of which translate to their French equivalents, besides the irredeemably Germanic Gertrude: "*Cécile, Blanchelys, Madeleine, Marguerite et Roselys*") – becomes a lexical niche in the syntactic pattern of Debussy's "symphonic stained-glass" ("*vitrail symphonique*"), as Willy (another inveterate name-dropper) so pithily summed it up in his 1893 review of *La Damoiselle élue*. From a resting position on middle G, the first three handmaidens glide up a major third, then another, then another, transported each time by a common tone, completing themselves within the intervallic perfection of its texturally accentuated climax on G, expressed an octave above. Subsequently, the dynamic and registral deflation of the phrase over the course of "*Mar-gue-ri*[-]*te et Ro-se-lys*" through M12-14(P14), calls for the insertion of the expressive marking "*Retenu*," in the piano and vocal parts, to indicate the emotively "withheld" aftertremors of a just-ebbed passion. Finally, the Damozel fears that, faced with such a divine display of heavenly handmaidens, her newly initiated lover may become dumbstruck with fear ("*Il craindra peut-être, et restera muet*") – a line that Debussy marks "*murmuré*," as if all the Damozel's spent lips can do after such a rapturous evocation of the handmaidens is mumble through the fatigue and into silence.

Indeed, what is remarkable in this presentation of the handmaiden symphonies is the extent to which it mirrors the tight-knit homosociality of Debussy's own circle, and (as we will see) the programmatic values of La Libre Ésthetique, in which artists' names are grouped together precisely in order that their individuality might be made more readily apparent. Each of the names is a symphony unto herself, as the poem announces, and as is indeed fulfilled by Debussy's musical setting; yet there is nevertheless an overall grouping at work.

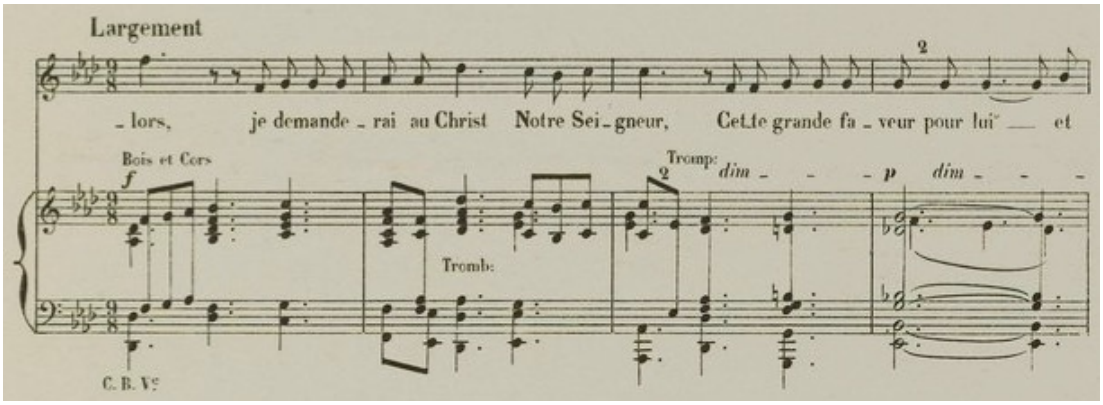

nous cherche-rons les bos-quets ou trô - ne Da-me Ma-rie A-vec ses
Cl.
toujours pp
Harpe
Bois
p
1.2.Vns Alt.
cinq ser-van - tes, dont les noms sont cinq dou - ces sym-pho -
pp
plus pp
-ni - es: Céci - le Blanchelys Made - lei - ne Mar - gue -
p très doux
Fl.
Harpe
Cl. Pizz.
p dim
Retenu
Lent
murmuré
1er Mouv!
-rite et Rose - lys. Il craindra peut - être, et reste-ra mu - et, A -
Cordes
Retenu
1.2.Cors
Lent
Cl.
Cor Ang.
1er Mouv!
Cordes
p
pp
pp

Example 10

Over the long utterance of the word "*symphonies*" in M7-8(P14) [Ex. 10], which sets up the subsequent annunciation, there is a rhythmic augmentation both in the voice, which transforms from dotted quarter notes to a dotted half (before alighting on a single quarter note), and also in the accompaniment, which expands from eighth to quarter notes before descending on a long-held sonority. Debussy marks the subsequent iteration of these individual name-symphonies in the piano part with the expressive indication "*très doux*" ("very softly"), suggested also by the distinctly heavenly instrumental combination of woodwinds (flutes and clarinets) and plucked strings (pizzicato and harp) indicated in M9(P14) [Ex. 10]. Related by way of the oblique symmetry of mediant third relationships (rather than the functional perfection of a cycle of perfect intervals), each name-symphony is tied together by a delicate push and pull between its reliance on common tones and its individualized niche.

Each personalized niche is offset by a combination of register, rhythmic profile, and pitch. Cécile and Blanchelis, in M9-10(P14) [Ex. 10], are individually framed by the surrounding rests, yet related by their upward major thirds around a common pitch B. Although there is no rhythmic space between Madeleine and Marguerite, across M11-13(P14) [Ex. 10], the latter is offset by a unique pitch, B-flat, which occurs only once in the vocal sequence, and is thus distinguished from the B-natural hinged between Cécile and Blanchelys. Marguerite is further individuated by the only perfect interval in the phrase, whose fourth descent from Madeleine places her in a distinct registral space, yet one which nevertheless continues the outlined E-flat triad that begins with her predecessor. Roselys, finally, is articulated on a neighboring tone, suggesting closeness to Marguerite, but also the Damozel's own lassitude. It is over the name of Roselys that the aforementioned indication "*Retenu*" appears, and her name is the only one marked by the conjunction "*et*" ("and"). This final detail should also alert us to the grammatical arrangement of these names into, literally, a sentence – just like in Willy's review, and the Libre Ésthetique program.

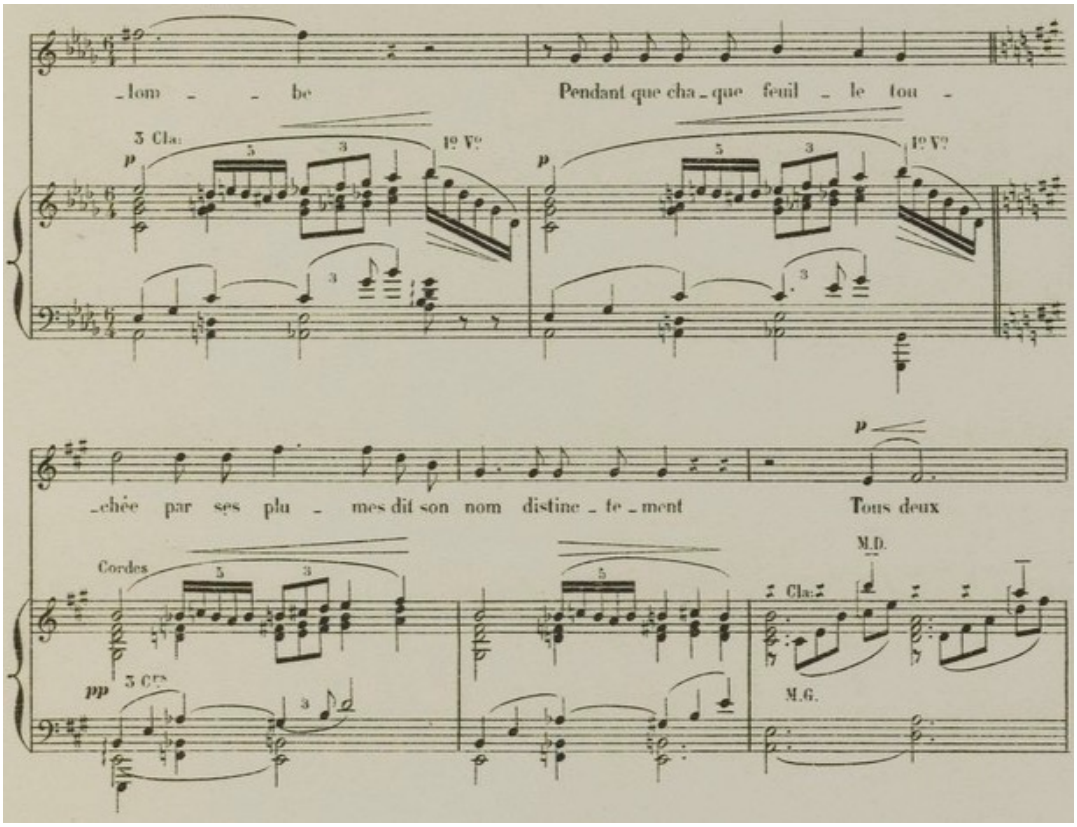
The handmaidens are a sisterhood, not a mere congeries of individuals. The message is obviously contained within the intervallic frame of the octave. But it is also more subtly reinforced by the striking family resemblance of each names with the word "*symphonies*" itself. Each name echoes in its own particular way (no two names being a perfect rhythmic match) the rhythmic profile of that source word, with something of its short-short-long-short ("*sym-pho-ni-es*") pattern. The resemblance depends on the syllabic profile of each name, for Debussy's setting is perfectly syllabic, rather than (as might be expected in a vocally expressive phrase) melismatic. Cécile, for example, only has one "short" syllable before the half note on "*ci*" whereas "*Blan-che-lys*" has two. The name Marguerite is agogically accented by its uniquely long initial half note, which nevertheless proceeds into the typical pattern of short-long-short, a pattern finally reinforced with the three quarter-notes followed by dotted-half that intone "*et Ro-se-lys.*"



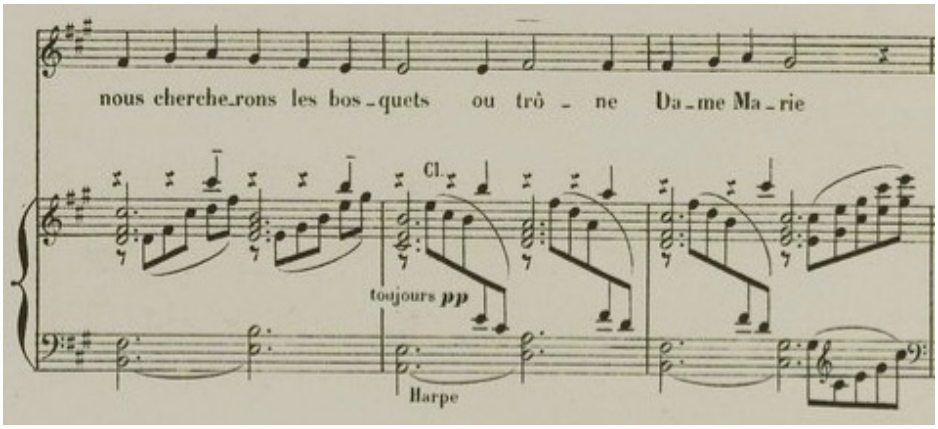
Example 11

In Debussy's setting, there is a cumulative urgency to the Damozel's expression of these handmaid "symphonies." The first two names are individuated by the silent spaces of vocal rests, while the subsequent three names are borne aloft on a continuous ecstatic arc in the course of which the Damozel finds herself reduced to half-articulate murmur, as if out of breath. Of all the divine names that are pronounced in the course of Debussy's musical setting, the handmaidens receive the most attention, the most individualized treatment: notably, even more than "*Christ Notre Seigneur.*"

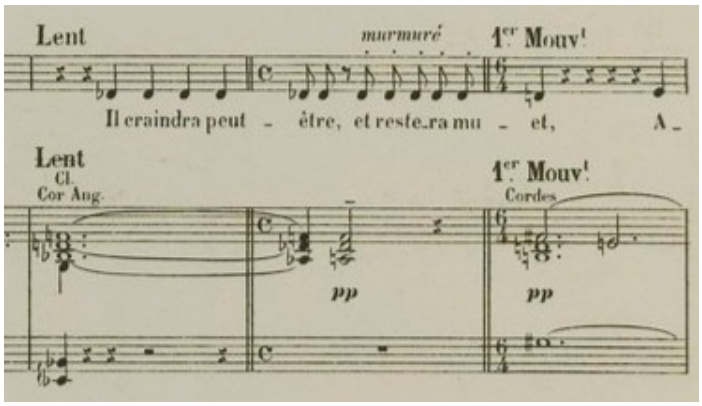
Indeed, in M16-18(P14) [Ex. 14] the weary Damozel herself wonders aloud whether the extent of her rapturous symphonic utterance of the handmaidens' names would not be entirely too much for her significant other, newly arrived in heaven: "He may be afraid" after such an ecstatic display, she suggests, "and remain mute" ("*Il craindra peut-être, et restera muet*").



Example 12



Example 13



Example 14

Weeks after the premiere 1893 premiere of *Damoiselle* the seemingly indefatigable music critic, Henri Guathier-Villars, or "Willy," noted Debussy's presence at the society's subsequent *séance* by applying to the up-and-coming composer a rather curious epithet. He referred to him as a "*damoiseau élu*" – "Blessed Damoiseau," or male *mademoiselle*.[80] The very next year, in 1894, this early review was reprinted in a collection of Willy's music criticism, *Rhythmes et Rires* (*Rhythms and Giggles*).[81] Apparently, this gender inversion of the title of Debussy's *La Damoiselle élue*, did not go unobserved among readers of his popular column and the phrase stuck. Decades later, Debussy's first biographer, the musicologist Léon Vallas (1879 – 1956), highlighted the gender-bending moniker in his own overview of the work's early reception.[82] But Willy's catty catchphrase remains untranslated in the 1933 English rendition of Vallas' biography, by Maire and Grace O'Brien, which is where a generation of Anglophone readers caught on to it.[83] However, in the same way that peculiarly "decadent" Latin verse was handled in 19th-century French school anthologies (by simply leaving them in Latin), Vallas' English translators apparently judged it wiser to leave this naughty bit in its original tongue.

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[80] Henri Guathier-Villars, *Rhythmes et Rires, L'Ouvreuse du Cirque d'Été* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Plume, 1894), 139, accessed March 18, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2055357/f137.item.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Léon Vallas, *Claude Debussy: His Life and Works*, trans. Maire and Grace O'Brien (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 75, accessed on March 18, 2023, http://archive.org/details/claudedebussy his0000vall.

Long before it was taken up by Debussy's generation as a precursor of and influence on Symbolism, Rossetti's dantesque verse had become notoriously censured in Victorian England, where it was disparagingly dubbed "the fleshly school of poetry," due to its characteristically Pre-Raphaelite marriage of spirituality and eroticism.[84] For Debussy's generation of self-consciously Anglophile aesthetes, or *dandys,* the work's twinned reputation of Britishness and literary Decadence was precisely its draw. If there was a single collection of French poetry that was appreciated, coveted even, among Debussy's milieu, more so than any other, it was without a doubt Baudelaire's archly-decadent *Fleurs du mal*; and specifically the half-dozen "condemned" poems that were intended for that collection but were forbidden from publication within France due to elements that were judged, in a court of law, to be guilty of "obscenity and offence against public morality."[85] Baudelaire's status as both poet and theorist of *dandysme* – itself a French transposition of a British ideal – was lost neither on Debussy's milieu nor on his critics.

It also had an impact on his oeuvre. Debussy's connection to Baudelaire is explicitly reflected in his song cycle, *Cinq poèmes de Charles Baudelaire* (1890), a connection Willy spells out in his very first mention Debussy in his column, on March 9th, 1890.[86] Significantly, this is the work by virtue of which Debussy is reputed to have come to the attention of the Symbolists, in particular Mallarmé's circle. Although the *Cinq poèmes* did not, as Lesure points out, receive a public performance until fifteen years after their publication, they were performed shortly after publication for a private audience

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[84] Brogniez, *Préraphaelisme et symbolisme*, 93. Brogniez summarizes anti-Rossetti criticism thus: "The fusion of the erotic and the divine, the tension between an idealist moral code and the imperatives of the flesh express an attempt to excorcise the Manichaean fear of the body haunting Victorian society, which did not hesitate to denounce, under the pen of Robert Buchanan, the immorality of the 'fleshly school or poetry' represented by Rossetti and his sonnets." ["La fusion de l'érotique et du divin, la tension entre un code moral idéaliste et les impératifs de la chair expriment une tentative d'excorcisme de la peur manichéenne du corps hantant la société victorienne, qui n'hésita pas à dénoncer, sous la plume de Robert Buchanan, l'immoralité de l'"école charnelle de poésie" représenté par Rossetti et ses sonnets."]

[85] Michèle Hannoosh, "Reading the Trial of the Fleurs Du Mal," *The Modern Language Review* 106, no. 2 (2011): 374.

[86] Claude Debussy, *Cinq Poèmes de Ch. Baudelaire* (Paris: L. Paxent, 1890), accessed March 18, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k3217808/f17.item.

brought together by Ernest Chausson.[87] Willy, who was invited on the occasion, reported on the work in the piquant manner expected of his column. Debussy, Willy suggests, "fertilizes Baudelaire's Flowers with his music."[88] Surely, what Willy intends to lampoon Debussy's attempt to graft his own budding reputation onto that of Baudelaire, the patron saint of French *dandysme*, by domesticating the composer's artistic daring into a garden-variety chore. The back-handed compliment is significant in itself because Debussy is imagined as cultivating his garden, and in doing so using his music as a form of landscaping décor.

Another of Willy's reviews to which Vallas points the self-reflexive relationship between composer and poet even more explicit. In this follow-up, Willy caricatures Debussy's haughty, dandyish deportment: "The vertiginous Debussy," Willy writes, "who is more *Fleur-du-mal* than ever, listened with disdainful pity."[89] These early satires undergo a change of tone in 1893, specifically on the basis of the *La Damoiselle élue* premiere. Willy keeps his satirical edge about Debussy the person, but writes with unequivocal enthusiasm about the work:

> A revelation: *The Blessed Damozel*, symphonic stained-glass by Fra Angelico Debussy (a bit perverse all the same), on a pre-Raphaelite text by Dante Gabriel Rossetti…Worthy of interpreting this marvel, Ms. Julia Robert was ideal; it now only remains for Debussy to wrap himself in a white robe and to camp ["*se camper*"] a (clip-on) halo on his head. He deserves it.[90]

In his description of the musical "revelation," Willy itemizes the decorative accoutrements of Pre-Raphaelite art. Yet we are hereby called to take Willy's campy review seriously lest we lose sight of its decorative basis: an image that brings together Debussy and the *Damoiselle* into a single décor, specifically the stained-glass of a church interior. The music is depicted as "symphonic stained-glass"

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87 Lesure, *Claude Debussy Avant Pelleas*, 93-94.

88 Léon Vallas, *Claude Debussy: His Life and Works*, trans. Maire and Grace O'Brien, 75.

89 Ibid.

90 "Une révélation: *la Damoiselle élue*, vitrail symphonique de Fra Angelico Debussy (un peu pervers tout de même), sur un texte préraphaélitique de Dante Gabriel Rossetti….Digne d'interpréter cette merveille, Mlle Julia Robert fut idéale; il ne reste plus à Debussy qu'à s'enrouler dans une robe blanche et à se camper (clings) une auréole sur la tête. Il la mérite." Henri Guathier-Villars, *Rhythmes et Rires*, 127-128.

("*vitrail symphonique*") and Claude Achille as Fra Angelico, the famed Italian friar-artist, predecessor of Raphael, whose frescoes and altar pieces decorate religious sites from Florence to Rome. The nod to Fra Angelico, who belonged quite literally to a strict monastic brotherhood (of Dominican friars), is prolonged by an allusion to a contemporary homosocial (artistic) order, that of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Then, within a single sentence, the latter part of Willy's review pairs the virginal marriage-status of "Miss" ("*Mlle*") Robert, which (paired with her performance, presumably) makes her "worthy of" ("*digne d[e]*") interpreting the role of *Récitante*. Debussy is imagined behaloed and sporting a white *robe* – also the French word for "dress."[91] Presumably as one familiar with Willy's column in its time, Vallas notes retrospectively that this counts as a positive review on Willy's part. Lockspeiser agrees, assessing the review with a queer aside that puts the critic himself into play in connection to his gender reversal of Debussy: "Flatteringly, the witty music critic Willy (Colette's husband whose appearance was later to remind everyone of Edward VII though Colette insisted that he was more like Queen Victoria) declared that Debussy could now claim to be *le damoiseau élu*."[92]

To comprehend something of this journalistic tendency to spectacularize reception that Willy's column so patently embodies, it would suffice to take a closer look at his review of the *La Damoiselle élue* premiere. It may be observed in this review that Debussy was far from the only target of Willy's wit. The reason for this state of affairs is simple enough: the young, up-and-coming composer was also far from the only personality of note in the audience on that occasion. In fact, Debussy's newfound status as a male "*madamoiselle*" itself forms but one entry in a spectacularly long list of names that finally adds up to a paragraph the length of a run-on sentence: an obligatory roll-call of composers whom Willy had spotted in the audience that day and thought worthy of his praise:

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[91] For a nuanced case study of travesty and sexual identity in late 19th-century French musical life, see: Mitchell Morris, "Camille Saint-Saëns in (Semi-)Private," in *Camille Saint-Saëns and His World*, ed. Jann Pasler, vol. 32 (Princeton University Press, 2012), 2–7.

[92] Lockspeiser, *Debussy: Volume 1*, 121.

> After the execution of a triangle solo titled *Orientale*, by Mr. Crevant (excuse me, Meurant!), I count, in the audience, Lazzari, very beautiful, Debussy, damoiseau élu, Hüe, cheerful bon vivant, the severe Dukas, the brilliant Alphonse Benoît, the two Della Sudda, always oriental, Chansarel, always with a sad smile, Charles Malherbe, still documented, Andrès, forever altered, Erlanger, who doesn't wait around for his music to go live, and all the authors of all that has been performed.[93]

What does Willy imply by his snarky descriptions? Every mention of a composer seems to invite a joke, which is in turn amplified by the bumptious rhetoric of the whole. The effect of the repeated "*toujours*" is lacking in my English translation, in which I give in to the connotational variety of "always," "still," and "forever" implied in each instance by the same French word. But the short bursts of description punctuated by names – Lazzari, Debussy, Hüe, Dukas, Andrès – that rhythmic rhetoric is preserved, as are the two long clauses that serve as agogic accents at the end. Nevertheless, singular double-entendres are lost in translation. The proper names Crevant and Meurant, for example, I have been obliged to keep for the sake of readability, but consider the bemused Francophone audience at the time who would have understood "Mr. Croaker" ("*crever*," from which "*crevant*" derives, means "to croak") to be a set-up for a punchline on Meurant – whose real name is an unfortunate homonym of the French word for "dying." A particularly spirited reader may have been caught dying laughing: surely, this was the desired effect. The care taken to pull off such a pun ultimately reveals the presence of the word "execution" at the very start of the description, as a synonym for musical performance, to be a rather tragicomic *mot juste*.

It would be instructive, by way of conclusion, to consider Debussy's own music review column, from 1901. Debussy christened his music-critic alter-ego Monsieur Croche, which translates to Mr. Crotchet (or Mr. Eighth Note). Although the Croche part of Debussy's heteronym may typically draw

[93] "Après exécution d'un solo de triangle intutilé *Orientale*, par M. Crevant (pardon, Meurant!), je. dénombre, dans l'assistance, Lazzari, très en beauté, Debussy, damoiseau élu, Hüe, joyeux viveur, le sévère Dukas, le brillant Alphonse Benoît, les deux Della Sudda, toujours orientaux, Chansarel, au sourire toujours triste, Charles Malherbe, toujours documenté, Andrès, toujours altéré, Erlanger, qui n'attend pas après sa musique pour vivre, et tous les auteurs de tout ce qu'on a joué." Henri Guathier-Villars, *Rhythmes et Rires*, 139.

attention, the "Mister" part is, as this chapter should have made clear by now, equally deserving of it. Why does Debussy include the gendered identifier *Monsieur* in the name of his music critic alter-ego? Could Debussy's deflective self-description be something of a compensatory gesture, given his early treatment at Willy's whim? Willy was at the time married to Colette, who was known to ghostwrite for him, alongside several other silent partners. Whatever Willy may have thought of his own column, its author, *l'Ouvreuse*, is undoubtedly multiple people. The paradoxical conclusion is that Willy is not in fact synonymous with his own pseudonym. So when Debussy names his music critic persona Mister Croche, the "Mister" projects to late 19th-century readers of witty music criticism (a demographic shared between Willy and Debussy) his personal distance from the inauthenticity of Willy's *Ouvreuse* (Debussy actually penned his own column) but nevertheless shares in Willy's satirical stance towards the stereotype of the (always male) music critic as a pontificator of "heady" truths.

Around the same time as Debussy assumed the mantle of critic, Remy de Gourmont (1858 – 1915), an arbiter of literary taste of the Symbolist generation, published a manual of style in the ironic form of a "refutation" against yet another manual of style. In the preface to his laconically-titled 1902 treatise, *Le Problème du style*, Gourmont asserts a rather showy paradoxical opinion about the function of criticism:

> 'At this time, one of the creators of a new science told me, we cannot establish any theory, but we can demolish all those that have been established.' One should try to remain always at this stage: the only fruitful search is the search for the non-true [*non-vrai*]. Thus, and only thus, criticism can make of itself a superior work. 'My métier is to sow doubts.' This saying of Pierre Bayle contains an entire method and an entire ethic. Truth is tyrannical; doubt is liberating. [94]

[94] "'A cette heure, me disait l'un des créateurs d'une science nouvelle, nous ne pouvons établir aucune théorie, mais nous pouvons démolir toutes celles qu'on établirait.' Il faut tâcher d'en rester toujours à ce. stade: la seule recherche féconde est la recherche du non-vrai. Ainsi, et seulement ainsi, la critique fait une oeuvre supérieure. 'Mon métier est de semer des doutes.' Ce mot de Pierre Bayle continet toute une. méthode et toute une morale. La verité est tyrannique; le doute est libérateur." Remy de Gourmont, *Le Problème du Style* (1902; reis., Paris: Mercure de France, 1916), 8, accessed on March 18, 2023, https://archive.org/details/leproblmedust00gour/page/8/mode/1up?ref=ol&view=theater&q=la+verité+est+tyrannique.

Not only does Gourmont extol the *fin-de-siècle* Nietzschean virtue of doubt (as agent of liberation), he makes sure to affiliate himself with the renowned lexicographer, Pierre Bayle (1647 – 1706), whose *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, comprised in the main of oblique, skeptical articles in the guise of definitions, was a model of critical skepticism for the 18th-century *Encyclopédistes* themselves. Unlike their hallowed lexicographer predecessors, however, Gourmont's contemporaries, like Willy and Debussy, did not only care to name others, they also manifested a peculiar penchant for re-naming themselves. In the guise of l'Ouvreuse and M. Croche, respectively, Willy and Debussy indicated to their dear readers that the subject of their criticism was as much the musicians on-stage, and the audience members off-stage, as it was the music critics behind-the-scenes. They were interested in the whole milieu.

It may reasonably be asked, given Gourmont's formulation of criticism as a liberatory practice, how it is that the "non-truth" of these names could be liberatory, for them or for their readers? It depends, of course, on their relative distance from one another. For the casual observer who may have thrown the occasional glance over at music reviews, their adoptive pseudonyms may have assured them near anonymity. But for informed readers, those who through their very dedication to the column gained access to the critics' own milieu, their pen names would have signified a double-entendre: pointing to the difference between Willy, a person that could be encountered within a specific décor, and l'Ovreuse, a pen name that could only be encountered through the medium of print, in the pages of a journal. And this raises once again the issue of décor, or shared aestheticized space. The difference between the two readers is precisely those who were at the concert and those who were not. Debussy's reading experience of Willy's column must have, from time to time, been particularly palpable, especially when he is written up for simply being in the audience, sharing the same décor as the critic.

If we return our attention back for a moment to Willy's long-winded concert attendance-sheet, we may observe that Debussy is neither first nor last on the didactic list, but rather stuck somewhere in the middle. Willy is not writing simply about music, but also even more importantly about milieu and décor. As he implies at the start of the review, this was in fact the "*ultime séance*" ("final event") of the Société nationale de musique season, and it was customary for "all the authors of all that had been performed" to show up in support of the series which had supported them. Debussy was there because of the *Damoiselle* premiere. Before him, the composer Sylvio Lazzari is treated by Willy to a side-glance comment, "very beautiful" ["*très en beauté*"], and later down the line the Della Sudda brothers are curiously spotlighted for their "oriental" appearance: whatever that means. As retrospective readers, clearly we are missing something. In other words, to be able to visualize the caricature engendered by each of Willy's flirtatious character-sketches – including that of Debussy as *Damoiseau élu* – would require nothing short of an insider's point of view: the vantage point of someone who knows how to arrange the names of these disparate figures together within a single sentence, and thus literally make sense of them (or harmonize them) together within a unified space – a décor – on and off the page. This person would of course (could of course) only be the authoritative figure of the music critic who, upon encountering such a motley assortment of musical personalities, would have the requisite *savoir-faire* to know them by their works.

In a remarkable passage describing the peculiar kind of "sense" [*sens*] to be found within Debussy's music, Jankélévitch writes: "The music of Debussy does not have *sense* like the discourse of a professor, the plea of a lawyer or the sermon of a priest does, which leads us *somewhere* or wants to prove some thesis." Clarifying the musical sense behind his philosophical puzzle, he continues: "A succession of immobilities, it is said, does not make a movement; a succession of perfect chords is not progress." "Is there not in all this," he concludes, "some misunderstanding?" Part of the answer, he suggests, lies in the much discussed conversation Debussy had with his composition teacher Ernest

Guiraud about his own views on harmony around 1890 (as reported by his Conservatoire classmate Maurice Emmanuel, who was present): "In his passionate conversations," Jankélévich writes, "Debussy himself pleads…for incomplete and floating chords: the sound is submerged 'one goes where one wants, one leaves by the door that one wants… .'" The idea of coming and going through doors – a direct citation of Debussy (by way of Emmanuel) – creates a uniquely architectural metaphor that makes Debussy's own views of harmony analogous to the creation of an interior décor. The idea that Debussy's harmonic procedure is one of creating space rather than delimiting a harmonic trajectory is subsequently elaborated by Jankélévitch:

> These are first of all trails of perfect chords juxtaposed without transition, chords belonging to multiple heterogenous tonalities that act on each other at a distance, attracting one another through the void: there is no material continuity, there is rather a space of sympathetic or telepathic communication. With subtlety, Debussy perceives the secret and somehow suprasensible affinities that relate tonalities which are the most distant and most strange to one another.[95]

Having described this Debussyan harmonic space as one in which individual sonorities partake of mystical, nonlinear communication – like Pre-Raphaelite bodies floating through paradise – Jankélévich then shifts his focus in order to describe the effect that such a harmonic arrangement has on the listener.

> The auditory imagination and memory task themselves with filling the discontinuities: they create a sort of magnetic aura that, radiating around harmonies, permits the instantaneous transmission of "charm" [*charme*] and the *influence* of its *influx* across the musical ether. It is true that many musicians, notably Erik Satie, the great precursor, wrote in the "flat" or immobile "style" more or less issuing from plainchant. With Debussy the Prélude of La Damoiselle élue is almost as "Rose-Croix" as Pre-Raphaelite; evoking the polychromy of stained glass, ten tonalities are traversed at the annunciation of "five handmaidens, whose names are five sweet symphonies: Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen, Margaret and Rosalys.[96]

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[95] "Ce sont tout d'abord les traînées d'accords parfaits juxtaposés sans transition, accords appartenant à plusieurs tonalités hétérogènes qui agissent l'une sur l'autre à distance, s'attirent l'une l'autre à travers le. vide: il n'y a pas de continuité matérielle, il y à plutôt une espèce de communication sympathique ou. télépathique. Avec une subtilité, Debussy perçoit les affinités secrètes et en quelque sorte suprasensibles. qui relationnent les tonalités les plus lointaines et l'une à l'autre le plus étrangères." Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Debussy et le mystère de l'instant* (1976; reis., Paris: Éditions Plon, 2019), 99.

[96] "L'Imagination et la mémoire auditive se chargent de combler les discontinuités: elles créent une sorte d'aura magnétique qui, rayonnant autour des harmonies, permet la transmission instantanée du 'charme' et

Once again, as with Willy, the image of stained glass emerges to symbolize the musical unity of *Damoiselle*, as a way to subordinate its harmonic "discontinuities" into a larger whole. The unity of the glass is ensured by an underlying "musical ether" through which tonalities are "traversed," while its stability is ensured by a style described as "immobile." By drawing on these spatial metaphors to describe the work, rather than relying on linear or teleological models, Jankélévich is treating the musical work like a décor, one in which distinct objects (harmonies in this case) correspond with one another to create a unified space centered around "the polychromy of stained glass."

According to this model, the musical space of *Damoiselle* produces an effect on the listener. Jankélévich calls this effect "charm." (Pasler's work on Debussy and "charm," cited above, comes back to mind.) Significantly, Jankélévich's model of musical "charm" features a prominent role for the listener's "imagination" and "memory," both understood as unconscious or preconscious processes, since they "task themselves." More precisely, they are charmed by the music itself into the task of "filling the discontinuities in the work." Jankélévitch suggests, therefore, that the "charm" of Debussy's compositional style, as revealed by *Damoiselle*, is to leave room for the listener. The listener's mind then willingly unifies the musical space in the same way that it would a well decorated interior, by treating all individuated things in its vicinity, people or objects, as parts of a whole: not a random crop of individuals but a milieu, not a smattering of *objets d'art* but a décor.

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l'influence de son *influx* à travers l'éther musical. Il est vrai que beacoup de musiciens, et notamment Erik Satie, le grand précurseur, écrivaient entre 1890 et 1900 dans ce 'style plat' et immobile plus ou moins issu du plain-chant. Chez Debussy le Prélude de La Damoiselle élue est presque autant 'rose-croix' que préraphaélite; évoquant la polychromie d'un vitrail, dix tonalités sont parcourues à l'appel des 'cinq servantes, dont les noms sont cinq douces symphonies: Cécile, Blanchelys, Madeleine, Marguerite, Roselys.'" Jankélévitch, *Debussy et le mystère de l'instant*, 99-100.

Chapter 2:

"…the way one enters a scene":
On the Décor of an Afternoon With the Faun

> In the XVIII century, there weren't any young bibeloteurs; that's the difference between the two centuries. For our generation, bric-a-brac mania ["bricabracomanie"] is nothing but a stand-in for woman, who no longer possesses the imagination of man.[97]
>
> Edmond de Goncourt

> All in all, Desire is everything: you have a mad, sincere craving, almost a need, for an art object (a Velasquez, a Satzuma vase, or a new type of necktie). What a joy when you own it, it is truly love.[98]
>
> Claude Debussy

In the literary and artistic world of late 19th century France, the idea of interior décor as a refuge for homosocial aesthetic ideals was encapsulated, for Debussy's generation, by Des Esseintes, the dandy anti-hero of Huysmans' decadent novel, *À Rebours* (*Against the Grain*), first published in 1884.[99] A childless bachelor, Des Esseintes is the last member of an aristocratic French line. Beset with the *ennui* of the upper classes, he sequesters himself from Parisian society by blowing his inheritance on a house in the suburbs. As he furnishes his new residence with singular decorative objects, the chapters are divided according to the decorative scheme of each room. The books, paintings, and other art *objects*

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[97] "Au XVIIIe siècle, il n'y a pas de *bibeloteurs* jeunes: c'est là la différence des deux siècles. Pour. notre génération, la *bricabracomanie* n'est qu'un bouche-trou de la femme qui ne possède plus l'imagination de l'homme." Edmond de Goncourt, *La Maison d'un Artiste, Tome I* (Paris: G. Charpentier, Éditeur, 1881), accessed March 25, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5432104d.texteImage#. (Emphasis in the original.)

[98] Denis Herlin, "An Artist High and Low, or, Debussy and Money," trans. Vincent Giroud, in *Rethinking Debussy*, ed. Elliott Antokoletz and Marianne Wheeldon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 165.

[99] Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À Rebours*, original edition (Paris: G. Charpentier et C[le], Éditeurs, 1884), accessed March 25, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1045576p.

d'art that Huysmans details in *À Rebours* were subsequently adopted by Debussy's milieu, for whom it became a style guide. But it also turned into a lifestyle guide, a model for how an artist of taste might cultivate their personal artistic through a meticulous focus on their interior décor.

More often than not, for Debussy's milieu during the 1890s, the spaces of their own interior décors, rather than those of the public cafés, became particularly marked by their largely homosocial encounters. As we will see, Debussy was acutely aware of the décor of his various lodgings – whether he happened to be in decent enough material circumstances to decorate to his taste or not – and he had a longstanding passion for collecting *bibelots*, the little trinkets that form a seemingly negligible yet in fact essential role in interior decoration. The interior décor of his artistic mentor at the time, Mallarmé, was personalized (quite literally) by two portraits of himself that hung in the sitting room, where his disciples met weekly, but also equally by the actual person, and personality, of Mallarmé himself. By all accounts, his peculiar mannerisms formed the center of attention. Mallarmé's interior décor was yet another node of sociability in what formed a distinctly homosocial network of personalities and personalized décors during the 1890s, including that of Debussy.

Of course the true doyens of the idea of interior décor as both a homosocial and a personal artistic ideal in late 19th-century France, and the real-life models for Huysman's influential novel, were the *frères* Goncourt. The brothers Jules and Edmond de Goncourt were inseparable, though Jules passed away far in advance of his brother, who was left to consolidate their legacy in a collection of writings, and also through his arts advocacy, over the succeeding decades.[100] The central aspect of this legacy, however, was their own house in the Auteil suburb of Paris. Like Des Esseintes' residence, its décor was furnished with singular *objets d'art* – items they personally collected over a lifetime. In 1881,

[100] The classic account of the Goncourt borthers' relationship to 19th-century French culture, and particularly their influence on the arts of the period, remains: "The Brothers de Goncourt between History and the Psyche," in "The Goncourts' Legacy," Part One of: Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siecle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 17-42.

three years before Huysman's novel was published, Edmond Goncourt published his own magnum opus, *La Maison d'un artiste* ("The House of an Artist").[101] Much like Huysmans' decadent novel, published in its wake, Edmond's book is essentially an episodic tour of the brothers' suburban residence in Auteuil, chapter by chapter, room by room. Although they provided a model for late 19th century artists, the *frères* themselves idolized 18th century French styles from the pre-revolutionary period.

As Debora Silverman points out, the rehabilitation of 18th-century French style which the Goncourt brothers epitomized, and which would eventually issue forth, in the 1890s, in a modernized guise, under the label Art Nouveau, was based on nostalgia for the style period associated with the reign of Louis XV.[102] In brief, upon the death of the Sun King (Louis XIV), in 1715, the courtly prestige of Versailles faded in comparison to that of aristocratic residences in Paris. Aristocratic social life would no longer be centered around the court – or centered at all. Instead, it would become dispersed throughout the personalized residences of the aristocracy, most notably the *hôtels particuliers* of Paris. Thus, around the middle of the 18th century, aristocratic sociability started to play out across a variety of private interiors rather than on the very public stage of the centralized court at Versailles. This social fragmentation was echoed in the arts by a new "*Rocaille*" style, nicknamed "Rococo," that expressed, in its dizzying curves, the lively intimacy of interior décor in private residences as opposed to the classical, grandstanding political iconography of Versailles.

This aristocratic retreat into the sociability framed by private interior spaces – away from the centralized court – was adopted wholesale by the Goncourt brothers but it was adapted by them too,

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101 Edmond de Goncourt, *La Maison d'un Artiste, Tome I*, and: Edmond de Goncourt, *La Maison d'un Artiste, Tome II* (Paris: G. Charpentier, Éditeur, 1881), accessed March 25, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5433968d.image.

102 As Silverman elaborates: "The brothers were deeply attached to an idealized image of the social hierarchy and cultural grace of Old Regime France, whose culmination they assigned to the epoch of Louis XV (1715 – 1774). Resentful and bitter children of the nineteenth century, the Goncourts considered themselves born too late to enjoy the effervescent leisure and langorous sensuality that noble elites had enjoyed during the era of the *fêtes galantes*." Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*, 17.

and heavily modified by their own 19th-century social context. After all, it was necessary for the Goncourts to square their own contemporary moment with these superannuated artefacts from the *ancien régime*. They felt these objects to materially objectify, and thus provide continuity on behalf of the aristocratic forms of French sociability for which they originally served as décor. In the mind of the Goncourts, the few remaining vestiges of the historical reciprocity between private décor and aristocratic sociability threatened, in their own day, to disappear altogether.

Unlike their 18th century aristocratic counterparts, however, the Goncourts' were not running away from a centralized court but from what they perceived as the exteriorization of interior life that threatened French public life. In other words, they were escaping Paris. Whether in the guise of etchings, books, furniture, or various other elements dislodged from pre-revolutionary décors to be rehabilitated both within their own house and in their writings, the Goncourts' retreat to the interior was framed, quite literaly, as a reactionary move.

It is significant, in this regard, that nothing was more indicative of the decadence of 19th century social life, for Edmond Goncourt, than the cafés of Paris. These Parisian urban spaces *par excellence* were interpreted as empirical proof of the decay of private life in their own time. Accordingly, the flaneurs and frequenters of these public spaces were seen by Edmond not as private individuals exercising their right to access public spaces but rather as invaders, whose incursion into public space trespassed against private life. As Silverman so trenchantly observes, Edmond himself framed his (and his brother's) move away from the city as a response to the encroaching effects of urbanization on a now threatened "interior." Acoordingly, their Auteuil home could be read as "a response to the experience of menacing Haussmannization."[103] As Edmond himself complained with such palpable urgency: "My Paris, the Paris where I grew up is disappearing. Social life is undergoing a vast evolution.

[103] Ibid., 20.

I see women, children, households, and families in the cafés. The interior is dying. Life threatens to become public."[104]

Silverman uses Edmond's harangue against 19th-century café culture because of its clear expression of the "interior" as a space of psychological refuge from the encroaching (and deleterious) exterior effects of urbanization. I consider a complementary face of Edmond's statement, however, one suited to my own focus on sociability rather than psychology. In this light, it is remarkable to find Edmond itemize the offensive points of urbanization in terms of specific, and quite gendered, groups of people – notably, the "women, children, households, and families" who fill the ranks of the café society he decries. Notice that men, whether as individuals or in groups, are never singled out in the description: the excursion of men away from the interior into public life was only a problem if it took place as part of a family or household unit. What is offensive to Edmond about these collectivities of people, what makes him want to retreat away from (their) public life, is not necessarily the identity of the groups in question, but rather their overstepping of an implied public/private divide. "Women, children, households, and families" are assumed by Edmond's account – as the container "households" already suggests – to correspond to a homebound, interior realm that is clearly construed as a feminine, or feminizing, space. In contradistinction to this feminized interior realm, the Goncourts' vision pictures Parisian cafés as an exclusive (and thus exclusionary) space, a public space evidently reserved for a type of male homosociality from which interior family/feminine life is excluded.

The "problem" which the Goncourts' faced was that their rigidly gendered and proscriptive division between private and public space did not adhere to the *actualité* of their historical moment. Their solution was simply to move away from the problem, and to install themselves within a décor reflective of their private, homosocial *fraternité*:

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[104] Ibid., as quoted (and translated) in: T. J. Clark, "The Bar at the Folies-Bergère," in *The Wolf and the Lamb: Popular Culture in France from the Old Regime to the Twentieth Century*, ed. J. Beauroy and M. Bertrand (Saratoga, Calif.: Anma Libri, 1976), 247.

> To struggle against this menace of invasive public life, the Goncourts enclosed themselves in a world of private interiors. To counter the oppressive boulevard, "lacking in all curves, implacable axes of straight line," the Goncourts celebrated in their aristocratic retreat the epitome of an art that defied regularity and uniformity. In their house, every object was unique, glorifying nature's undulating, curvaceous, and irregular rhythms.[105]

It was precisely the Goncourt's ideal of an aestheticized retreat from public life into a refined interior décor, with its accompanying fraternization among a selective and typically homosocial peer group that captured the attention of Debussy's milieu. What else were Mallarmé's *mardis*, which Debussy attended so assiduously, if not semi-private gatherings of aristocrats (of the spirit) within a private interior décor (Mallarmé's own)? The American composer and writer Francis Grierson, a longtime attendee of the *mardis* connects the dots between specific qualities of Mallarmé's interior space, his "aristocratic" bearing, and the homosocial constituency of his circle in the following account:

> It always gives one pleasure to see artists and writers living in comfort, removed from the noise and distractions of the world; but I found Mallarmé living in a house that resembled thousands of other houses. There was no distinctive character in anything, except in the man himself…Mallarmé's reception room was so small that a company of fifteen persons filled it. Yet, to this little room, containing nothing but a centre table and chairs, came the intellectual youth of France, representing every school and social grade – future academicians, deputies, diplomats, novelists, editors, historians, and composers, the visitors being of all ages, but principally under thirty…Mallrmé was an intellectual aristocrat. His tranquil dignity, spiritual pose, politeness without hypocricy or affectation, his freedom from the usual vulgarities of a society skilled in the art of sensation and puffery, made him conspicuous…There was nothing eccentric about his face or his person, and he never put on evening dress to receive his visitors. His receptions were for men, and the poet appeared in the clothes he had worn during the day. In this he also reminded me of Walt Whitman, whom I saw in Washington in 1868.[106]

Observe that Grierson's account ostensibly diminishes the importance of décor. Yet in fact he amplifies it by connecting it to Mallarmé's own personality: "There was no distinctive character in

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[105] Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siecle France*, 20.

[106] William Austin ed., *Claude Debussy: Prelude to "The Afternoon of a Faun"*, Norton Critical Score (New York: Norton, 1970), 102-105.

anything, except in the man himself." Furthermore, it is the very lack of showy qualities observed in the décor that also transfers to his later analysis of Mallarmé's aristocratic deportment, defined negatively by his being "without" affectation, his "freedom from" sensationalism ("puffery"), and the notion that he was most conspicuously *not* eccentric, not even dressing up for his visitors. The later oversight is excused by the remarkable fact that "[h]is receptions were for men," which in turn could be related back to the frank sparseness of the furnishings, "containing nothing but a centre table and chairs." In other words, "the man" and the décor are reciprocally related.

The English writer and critic Arthur Symons is another key witnesses of this relationality. When his book, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, was first published in 1899 it was the first serious introduction to French Symbolism for Anglophone audiences.[107] Such was the success of the book that a revised edition appeared in 1919, to which Symons added several essays, including those on Baudelaire and the Goncourt brothers (the essay on Mallarmé was part of the original 1899 edition). Symons' testimony is particularly valuable because he too, like Debussy, attended Mallarmé's *mardis* during the 1890s. His first-hand account, published shortly after Mallarmé's passing, is particularly outstanding for its fresh, detailed depiction of the Rue de Rome appartment and Mallarmé's embodied relationality to it. Symons' account also explicitly notes the homosocial makeup of Mallarmé's Tuesdays, though for him this social fact is a mere assumption, mentioned only in passing as a way to depict the worshipful attitude of the "young men" in question. With a touch of nostalgic irony, Symons writes that "the attitude of those young men, some of them no longer exactly young, who frequented the Tuesdays, was certainly the attitude of the disciple."[108]

Significantly, Symons' account evokes the testimony of Rodenbach's elegy (an excerpt of which was quoted above) in order to depict Mallarmé as a figure who possesses, to a conspicuous

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[107] Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, revised ed. (1919; reis., New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1958).

[108] Ibid., 66.

degree, both masculine and feminine traits. Not just half-man/half-goat, Mallarmé turns out also, in the eye of his beholders, to become half-man/half-woman. Below, we can read Symons' own reasons for offering up this account of Mallarmé's interior décor within the pages of a book that is ostensibly about Symbolism as a literary style. His testimony is uniquely relevant for our discussion because it reveals the extent to which, for Mallarmé's intimate acquaintances, it was practically impossible to separate the poet's artistic *oeuvre* from the interior décor of his apartment; or from his gender non-conforming deportment within this intimate space. The Tuesdays thus come to represent, for its homosocial constituency, the complex relationality at work between the poet, his works, and his singularly gendered embodiment within his own décor. As Symons observes:

> In estimating the significance of Stéphane Mallarmé, it is necessary to take into account not only his verse and prose, but, almost more than these, the Tuesdays of the Rue de Rome, in which he gave himself freely to more than one generation. No one who has ever climbed those four flights of stairs will have forgotten the narrow, homely interior, elegant with a sort of scrupulous Dutch comfort; the heavy, carved furniture, the tall clock, the portraits, Manet's, Whistler's, on the walls; the table on which the china bowl, odorous with tobacco, was pushed from hand to hand; above all, the rocking-chair, Mallarmé's, from which he would rise quietly, to stand leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, while one hand, the hand which did not hold the cigarette, would sketch out one of those familiar gestures: *a bit of a priest, a bit of a danser* [*danseuse*] (in M. Rodenbach's admirable phrase), with which he had the air, each time, of entering into conversation the way one enters a scene.[109]…There would have been something almost of the challenge of the improvisatore in this easily moved alertness of mental attitude, had it not been for the singular gentleness with which Mallarmé's intelligence moved, in these considerable feats, with the half-apologetic negligence of the perfect acrobat. He seemed to be no more than brushing the dust off your own ideas, settling, arranging them a little, before he gave them back to you, surprisingly luminous.[110]

Symons begins his account of Mallarmé not by dealing directly with his literary works but rather by evoking before the reader the interior décor of his appartment; a description that is much more detailed and careful than Grierson's. Tellingly, no less than two portraits of Mallarmé hang on the walls, mirroring his likeness, and framing his décor as a space of reflection: both literally and

[109] "Un peu de prêtre, un peu de danseuse avec lesquels il avait l'air chaque fois d'entrer dans la conversation, comme on entre en scène."

[110] Symons, *The Symbolist Movement*, 64-65.

figuratively. As with Rysselberghe's portrait of Octave Maus that we discussed in Chapter 1, *Maus en dandy*, both portraits of Mallarmé mentioned by Symons are painted by personal acquaintances of the poet. Both painters, in other words, are part of his millieu. Whistler himself attended the *mardis* and Mallarmé personally encouraged the French government to purchase Whistler's famous *Arrangement in Gray and Black No. 1* (1871), popularly known as *Whistler's Mother*. Furthermore, Mallarmé also translated Whistler's main critical statement, the *Ten O'Clock* lecture, into French. Manet, on the other hand, was not only a close personal friend of Mallarmé's, he actually illustrated the first edition of *L'après-midi d'un faune* (1876). Manet was thus the first artist to capture the iconic image of Mallarmé's faun in visual form, as seen in Example 1 (which we will discuss later). In that very same year, 1876, Manet also painted the abovementioned portrait of Mallarmé (as exhibited in Example 2).

Behind the subtle economy of portraiture that, as Symons hints, ties together the poet's personality, his personal décor, and his particular milieu, there lies a fundamental claim, namely: that Mallarmé's significance is based on his relationship to the Symbolist milieu "almost more than" his literary works. It would be mistaken, then, to infer from Symons' account an opposition between two competing visions of Mallarmé: Mallarmé as an embodied focal point of Symbolist sociability, the Mallarmé of the *mardis*, and then – off somewhere, ensconced in his own private world – Mallarmé the individual artist, producing literary works that circulate outside his milieu. To posit an opposition between these two aspects of his work would be to miss the underlying relational basis on which the comparison rests: that of the décor that brings them together. Symons' view highlights the social reciprocity at play between Mallarmé's production and reception context; and I base my observations in this chapter on the premise that Debussy scholars ought to do so as well, because he participates in the Mallarméan milieu.

Taking a cue from Mallarmé, Debussy's generational milieu, though they inherited the overal propensity to idealize décor and decorative objects from the Goncourts, they did not necessarily

imitate the brothers' style. Like Mallarmé, they were perfectly willing to let a few personal elements stand in metonymic relation to the whole, as long as their own personality could could be seen reflected in these objects. For the Goncourts, that meant 18th century antiques, but for Mallarmé it sufficed to have a table and some chairs, alongside two portraits of himself. At times, for Debussy, as we will see, it was simply a (lent) piano and perhaps a few of the *bibelots* that he was so fond of spending his money on, ever since his student days. And yet, as I argue in this chapter, this idealizing attitude towards décor as an aesthetic and personal ideal very much affected the debbusyiste musical style that he was developing throughout the 1890s. Building on this historical observation, the present chapter elaborates on Debussy's own relationality to this decorative ideal, as well as to its social situatedness in Mallarmé's milieu, and offers a musical analysis of its affect on the composition and reception of the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*.

We start with a moment during which Debussy's private furnishings took on some importance in the reception of the work itself. In June of 1891, the twenty-eight-year-old Debussy managed to move out of his family home and occupy a room of his own, at 42 Rue de Londres ("London Street"). Despite residing there for only two years (until July of 1893),[111] and despite the humble material circumstances of the (pre)furnished *garçonnière*, the experience left at least one lasting imprint on Debussy's memory. Almost two decades later, in fact, the now fêted composer could still recall with fondness a particular visit to his studio: that of the poet and charismatic *maître* of literary Symbolism, Stéphane Mallarmé. This extraordinary visit *chez* Debussy was occasioned by an event as singular as the visitor himself. The composer offered Mallarmé a private audition of the *Prélude de l'après-midi d'un faune*, which he had been working on since at least 1891. Not only was the piece based on Mallarmé's eponymous poem, but the poet himself was associated specifically with the faun as a self-fashioned literary alter-ego.

[111] Claude Debussy, *Correspondance*, ed. Denis Herlin and François Lesure (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 1261.

Mallarmé's identification with the faun persisted even posthumously among his milieu. In an elegy published in the pages of *Le Figaro* on September 13, 1898, just a few days after the poet's death (and mere months before his very own), the Belgian Symbolist writer Georges Rodenbach (author of *Bruges-la-Morte*) described Mallarmé "the man" in the following terms:

> Faun, he was really it, even in his face, with its pointed ears, his vast horizontal eyes, his voluptuous mouth among the thicket of his beard; but above all in his spirit, being a bit of a stranger among common people, both different and superior, half-man and half-god, seeing things that others did not see, saying words that one only half understood, gathering everything to himself and into a unity, because he lived at the center of Nature…And, like the Faun, he belongs to the race of Immortals.[112]

It was as the mythical faun of his own literary creation that Mallarmé was to be remembered. Nevertheless, the prototype of "the faun" was later overtaken in the public imagination by Nijinsky, in the wake of his (in)famous 1912 performances, within the décor of Léon Bakst's stage scenery, and animated by the musical accompaniment of Debussy's *Prélude*. It bears repeating in this connection that, prior to Nijinky's faun, Mallarmé was himself personally identified as the Faun. We might introduce Debussy's memory of that occasion by noting the homosocial economy of performance which it frames. This chain of affiliation – in which Debussy sets to music Mallarmé's poem (whose subject is Mallarmé himself in the guise of a faun) and plays it for him – implies that the musical work is part of a homosocial circle. Furthermore, the intimate co-location of composer, poet, and music is furnished by and reinforced by the work's programmatic implications. The music thus functions as a specific kind of décor. Summarizing the situation, we might say: Debussy's *Prélude de l'après-midi d'un faune* is a musical work that not only sets to music Mallarmé's poem, but that in a more fundamental

[112] "Faune, il le fut vraiment, même de visage, avec ses oreilles pointues, ses yeux au vaste horizon, sa bouche. voluptueuse parmi l'herbe drue de la barbe; mais d'esprit surtout, un peu étranger au commun des hommes, différent et supérieur aussi, mi-homme et mi-dieu, voyant des choses que les autres ne voyaient pas, disant. des paroles qu'on n'entendait qu'à moitié, ramenant tout à soi-même et à l'unité, parce qu'il vivait au centre. de la Nature…Et, comme le Faune, il appartient à la race des Immortels." "Figaro: Journal Non Politique," Gallica, February 14, 1898, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2842896. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

sense, indicative of its (homo)social situation, the work sets Mallarmé *himself* to music, in the guise of a faun.

Figure 4: Frontispiece of *L'après-midi d'un faune* (1876), Éduard Manet[113]

Manet had done this earlier, in his own work, when he contributed illustrations to the original publication of Mallarmé's poem, including the frontispiece pictured in Figure 4. I have turned the image on its side, as the original reader was expected to do with the book in order to take in the landscape portrait of the faun. I have preserved, however, the surrounding space (as much as possible) around Manet's drawing. Surely, the relative dimension of the drawing itself, which appears in miniature compared to the surrounding blank space of the page, mirrors something of Mallarmé's

[113] Ex. 1, Stéphane Mallarmé, *L'après-Midi d'un Faune : Églogue, Avec Frontispice, Fleurons et Cul-de-Lampe par Édouard Manet* (Paris: Alphonse Derenne, 1876), frontispiece, accessed March 25, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8625643g.

own obsession with the blank page as a supremely poetic space of writerly potential. That is to say, the materiality of the blank page itself becomes part of the implied landscape, which has been fleshed out only in the immediate vicinity of its central protagonist. The scene is to be extended to the edges of the page and beyond by the activity of the reader's own imagination. The faun's upturned tail, a kind of misplaced phallus, protrudes from the small of his back; while the goatee contributes yet another leftward whisp to the nearby foliage, a decorative scheme that fuses the "half-man" with his surrounding "Nature" (to refer back to Rodenbach's characterization). His goat-like lower body is explicitly revealed not only by the hoof that is grounded on a blank area of the page, which stands for earth, but also by the matted thickness of Manet's strokes along the faun's legs, which push into view their wooly surface.

Manet also painted a portrait Mallarmé, which was completed the very same year as his portrait of the faun in Figure 4. The portrait, one of the two that hung in Mallarmé's sitting room, offers a useful visual complement to this poetic image. In Manet's subtle character study, as seen in Figure 5, we can observe the poet thoroughly ensconced within his décor as its centerpiece, like in Grierson's description. Manet's portrait not only formed a part of Mallarmé's own décor, but it is also very much compositionally balanced by the way in which Manet places Mallarmé within the pictorial composition.[114] We observe that Mallarmé, whose body is placed off to the side of the composition,

[114] Not coincidentally, the contemporary American painter Henry Rankin Poore, who studied at the Académie Julian in Paris, subsequently wrote a primer on the subject of pictorial composition in 1903, whose introduction culminates with the words: "It is the apt correlation of the arts which accounts for the acknowledgment by an English story writer that she got her style from Ruskin's 'Principles of Drawing'; and of a landscape painter that to sculpture he owed his discernment of the forest secrets, by daily observing the long lines of statues in the corridor of the Royal Academy; or by *the composer of pictures to the composer of music*; or by *the preacher* that suggestions to discourse had come to him through the pictorial processes of the painter." The "preacher," judging by the aesthetic of this *fin-de-siècle* account, might as well be Mallarmé. And of course, Poore's reification of "composition" as a word that applies equally to painting and music is significant in light of the fact that Debussy must have seen Manet's portrait of Mallarmé every time he visited his apartment. Clearly, Poore's trip to Paris left him with a lingering appreciation of Symbolism. Henry Rankin Poore, *Pictorial Composition and the Critical Judgment of Pictures: A Handbook for Students and Lovers of Art*, sixth edition (1903; reis., New York: The Baker & Taylor Co., 1912), 13, accessed on March 25, 2023, https://play. google.com/books/reader?id=VNoUBJ81FO8C&pg=GBS.PA13&hl=en. [Emphasis mine.]

is leaning back with great *désinvolture*. His legs are crossed. A cigar balances casually between his right-hand fingers. The blankly pensive look on his face guides our eye toward the bottom left corner of the canvas. Here, the cigar-holding hand pushes softly against an empty page. The entire composition seems to hinge on this tactile connection to the written word: or rather, to the purity of its absence on the blankness of the unwritten page. The page is not entirely blank, however. A low light source, an interior lamp presumably, itself part of the interior décor, casts a shadow across it, so that Mallarmé's subtle hand gesture actually leaves a dark diagonal mark across the empty page – a mark made permanent by the painterly trace of Manet's own brushwork. In this context, the cigar can be seen as an idealized pencil, or even better a baton, since it traces Mallarmé's gestures in the air without leaving a lasting trace on paper.

Figure 5: "Stéphane Mallarmé" (1876) by Éduard Manet[115]

[115] Ex. 2, Éduard Manet, "Stéphane Mallarmé," Oil on Canvas, 1876, Musée d'Orsay.

Besides this manipulated shadow, fixed in space by Manet's portrait, there is another shadow cast across Mallarmé's entire body. This second shadow is projected over the chair and is prolonged along the wallpaper. As in Manet's original visual representation of the faun in Fig. 4, the wallpaper suggests a bucolic landscape, with thickets of foliage surrounded by non-representational space. If we turn to the sonic counterpart of Manet's focus on visual blank space, we might say his portrait depicts nothing so much as one of Mallarmé's famous silences. As in Debussy's anecdote, in which Mallarmé hears the *Prélude de l'après-midi d'un faune* for the first time, the poet seems about to create an utterance, yet remains silent for a moment before doing so. The interior is indeed comfortable, suffused with a light that emanates from an intimate distance just beyond the frame, thus implying the actual décor within which the portrait was to be placed.

Light brushstrokes against the wall suggest a quaintly naturalistic motive for the wallpaper, across which whispy leaves form an arcadian bower. Here the inspired poet may commence his soliloquy. And yet, even though Mallarmé is the center of attention, as the ostensible subject of the portrait, yet he is nevertheless conspicuously decentered within Manet's compositional scheme. Manet leaves most of the pictorial space to the room itself, so that rather than dominating the space Mallarmé becomes a figure who makes sense only in reference to his surrounding décor.

Mallaré's own décor was only one among a network of interiors that formed his milieu. Debussy's own studio, as mentioned above, was another; and it allows us to observe the imprint left by Mallarmé's freindship and mentorship on the work itself. Debussy's account of Mallarmé's 1891 visit to his studio was communicated in a letter to the music critic Georges Jean-Aubry in 1910. It should be noted that it was penned almost two decades after the event it depicts. Debussy obliges his interlocutor by recalling Mallarmé's reaction to his very first audition of the *Prélude*, which took place, quite significantly, in the very room where the work was composed. Debussy not only sets up the

performance situation describing the interior décor (and his reaction to it), but décor becomes the keyword in Mallarmé's own reaction to the music, thus implying a correspondence between the two:

> At that time I lived in a small furnished apartment on London Street. With singular fantasy, the paper that covered the walls reproduced [*représentait*] the portrait of M. Carnot encircled by little birds! Can't you figure out for yourself whither the contemplation of such a thing can lead? The need to never be at home [*chez soi*] – among others –
>
> Mallarmé came to me with a fateful air, and adorned with a Scottish plaid shawl. Having listened, he remained silent for a long moment, and then told me: "I did not expect something like that! This Music prolongs the emotion of my poem and situates its décor [*en situe le décor*] more passionately than color."[116]

In Debussy's account, it is impossible to make a neat distinction between the musical work "itself" and the work's role as a (homo)social object of shared attention. This intimate entanglement, in which Mallarmé found himself equally the object of Debussy's performance (as its putative addressee) but also the literal subject of the musical work (as the faun of the poem), creates a situation in which music serves as décor in two senses: it both contributes to the existing décor of the shared space within which the private musical performance takes place and it also creates a new imagined décor that emerges from the music's programmatic associations. In the second sense, décor is the result of artistic collaboration between Debussy and Mallarmé that is grounded in their mutual friendship.

Consider the reality of Debussy's décor at the time. Vital Hocquet's account of Debussy's Rue de Londres studio, published in 1931 (also, like Rodenbach's abovementioned elegy of Mallarmé, in the pages of *Le Figaro*), describes the same décor Mallarmé witnessed that day. And by all accounts, it was a dismal interior. Tellingly, one key piece of furniture nevertheless stands apart in Hocquet's

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[116] "J'habitais à cette époque un petit appartement meublé rue de Londres. Le papier qui revêtait les murs, représentait, par une singulière fantaisie, le portrait de Monsieur Carnot entouré de petits oiseaux! On ne peut se figurer ce que la contemplation d'une pareille chose peut amener…? Le besoin de ne jamais être chez soi – entre autres –

Mallarmé vint chez moi, l'air fatidique et orné d'un plaid écossais. Après avoir écouté, il resta silencieux. pendant un long moment, et me dit: "Je ne m'attendais pas à quelque chose de pareil! Cette Musique. prolonge l'émotion de mon poëme et en situe le décor plus passionnément que, la couleur." Ibid.

account: the Pleyel piano. This single object redeems the drudgery of the other elements of the décor: "The Rue de Londres room is a kind of paneled attic where a rickety table, three straw chairs, a semblance of a bed and a splendid Pleyel, lent naturally, are arranged in singular disorder."[117] Nothing besides the piano seemed designed to offer a refuge from the inaesthetic interior. Indeed, it is around the piano that the issue of décor revolves in the composer's own memory, as well as in his recollection of Mallarmé's reaction to the performance. Unlike Hocquet, Debussy is not concerned about the visual qualities of the piano itself as a piece of furniture, but rather the way in which his performance on the piano was able to transcend, for Mallarmé, the drab interior décor of the prefurnished flat during a key social moment in his artistic life. Just as the poet was able to animate his somewhat sparse décor with the presence of his utterances (and silences) so Debussy seemed to complete (and even rectify) his décor with his musical performance.

As François Lesure points out about this particular scene, Debussy "evoked the décor of this visit just as well as [*aussi bien que*] the reaction of the poet."[118] Indeed, Debussy's entire opening paragraph is taken up with the task of registering his acute sense of discomfiture with the wallpaper. Curiously, the offending object featured an image of (then) President Sadi Carnot. By voicing his distaste for the intrusive, politicized décor – which, suggestively, makes him want to flee his interior – Debussy signals not only his distaste of the furnishings but also his disapprobation of the inaesthetic utilitarianism of Third Republic France.[119]

Accordingly, Debussy's account above is wholly taken up with his own and Mallarmé's reaction to "décor," but of two different kinds. Debussy himself uses the word "décor' to refer to his

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[117] "La chambre de la rue de Londres est une sorte de galetas lambrissé où voisinent en un singulier. désordre, une table bancale, trois chaises de paille, un semblant de lit et un splendide Pleyel, prêté. naturellement." Claude Debussy, *Correspondance*, 1261, note 2.

[118] "…évoquait aussi bien le décor de cette visite que la réaction du poète." François Lesure, *Claude Debussy Avant Pelléas, ou les années symbolistes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1993).

[119] For a rich historical contextualization of the notion of *utilité* ("utility") in French cultural and political life during this period, see: Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

furnishings. This is self-explanatory, from a biographical point of view: even at a remove of almost two decades, Debussy is unable to avoid evoking the acute anxiety he felt in having over to his place such a respected literary figure among furnishings that he thought lacked taste. Tellingly, Mallarmé's own subsequent reaction is just as concerned with "décor." Except the poet uses the word "décor" to refer to the music itself. More specifically, this Mallarméan décor is understood as something that can be "situated" by music.

Consider the following use of "décor" by Debussy, in an 1895 letter to the music critic Willy:

> The *Prélude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, dear Sir, perhaps it is what remains of dream at the bottom of the faun's flute? More precisely, it is the poem's general impression, for to follow it more closely the music would run out of breath, like a carriage horse running in the Grand Prix against a thoroughbred…It would be without respect for the tone!...Nevertheless it [the *Prélude*] follows the poem's ascending movement, and that is the décor marveously described in the text, to which is added the humanity delivered by thirty-two violinists who woke up at too early an hour![120]

Décor is described as an ascending movement; just as importantly, it is tied to the program of the poem, in which the composer has noted such a movement. In the spirit of Willy's own music reviews, Debussy's discussion of décor is rounded out with an all-too-human evocation of actual musicians, the social situatedness of their common "humanity" comically engulfing the performance space. Debussy caricatures the notion that program music might follow a literal reading of a Mallarméan text: the swift play of connotation in Mallarmé's indirect literary style would, according to Debussy's implication, literally run circles around "the music itself," not to mention that it would elicit a lively reaction from the audience in the race-track stands, which is to say the gaudy public décor of the concert-going public. Such criticism of public musical events by way of the incongruity of the music and the décor of the performance venue would not have been lost on a music critic whose pen

[120] "Le Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune cher Monsieur, c'est peut-être ce qui est resté de rêve au fond de la flûte du faune? Plus précisément c'est l'impression générale du poème, car à le suivre de plus près, la musique s'essoufflerait ainsi qu'un cheval de fiacre courant pour le Grand prix avec un pur-sang…C'est. sans respect pour le ton!…Maintenant cela suit tout de même le mouvement ascendant du poème, et c'est le décor merveilleusement décrit au texte, avec en plus l'humanité qu'apportent trente-deux violonistes levés de trop bonne heure!" Claude Debussy, *Correspondance*, 278.

name, *l'ouvreuse du cirque d'été* ("Usher of the Summer Circus") pokes fun at the longstanding venue of the Pasdeloup Orchestra at the Cirque d'Hiver ("Winter Circus"), an actual circus venue.

Returning to the question raised by Mallarmé's comment to Debussy upon hearing the *Prélude* for the first time – what does it mean for a piece of music to situate a décor – we turn now to an analysis of the music itself. First, I will elaborate on a classic reading of the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* by William Austin. Starting from Austin's general observations, I will demonstrate the formal ambiguity of the work, and will in turn analyze how this is related to Debussy's deployment of motifs. The purpose of this opening section of the musical analysis is simply to present, in a detailed way, the problems inherent in attempting to account for the *Prélude* as a non-programmatic piece of ("absolute") music. This section will be broadened to include the role of motifs, and specifically their repetition, within Debussy's oeuvre as a whole, and the *Prélude's* position within that more general stylistic practice. For this broader consideration, I will draw on the relatively recent work of Sylveline Bourion, specifically her excellent, imaginative, and quite exhaustive survey of Debussy's style, *Le style de Claude Debussy Duplication, répétition et dualité dans les stratégies de composition*.[121] Finally, I will focus on the question of the function of motivic work and repetition in the *Prélude* by reconsidering the opening (repeated) motif in relation to the work as a whole and its programmatic associations, taking more than a hint from Jankélévitch's *Debussy et le mystère de l'instant* along the way. Ultimately, I hope to show the ways in which the décor suggested by the program is in fact, as Mallarmé suggested to Debussy in 1891, "situated" by the music and is therefore essential rather than incidental to an analytical understanding of the music.

[121] Sylveline Bourion, *Le style de Claude Debussy Duplication, répétition et dualité dans les stratégies de composition* (Paris: Vrin, 2011).

In his standard analysis of the piece, William Austin admits to this perplexity, even titling his work at a cautious distance, "Toward an Analytical Appreciation."[122] The distinction between an analysis and an "analytical appreciation" seems to be warranted in this case by Austin's insistence that the *Prélude's* singular resistance to analysis ought in the first place to be described. His observation about the difficulty of discerning a privileged point of entry is a useful starting point for my own analysis:

> Every part of this music clings to every other part so firmly, so naturally, that it is hard to identify parts when we want to talk about them. No part torn out of context makes sense. No part spontaneously breaks loose to lodge in our memories as a tune. While we listen, the parts seem to overlap each other, so that the continuity of the whole work is extraordinarily smooth, and our recollection of it at the end is imprecise, though intense.

Austin's points line up with Debussy's description of the arabesque in a most striking fashion. The idea that every part of the music "clings" to every other is tied to the idea of the arabesque as a naturalistic motive, one that, in the visual language of Art Nouveau, is most often depicted as an interwoven pattern of plant stems or vines, "so naturally" as Austin would have it. Secondly, there is no tune; and specifically, there is no niche for a tune to come forward, to "break loose" from the texture. Indeed, in a texture comprised of overlapping contrapuntal curves, there is neither a clear background nor a foreground, only a decorative middle ground in which "the parts seem to overlap each other."

Comparing various formal analyses of the *Prélude*, Austin is finally forced to acknowledge the futility of choosing a single approach toward the work as a "whole":

> …Barraqué correctly states that these mobile sections…make the piece as a whole somewhat resemble a sonata form, while the exposition, contrasting middle part, and recapitulation make it resemble a "song form," like that of many classical dances with trios. At least one listener, Ernst Decsey, begins a twofold middle section at m. 31. Decsey then finds subdivisions of every part to match the "bar form," AA'B, and further subdivisions of these B's into aa'b.

[122] Austin, *Claude Debussy: Prelude to "The Afternoon of a Faun."*

> All these different analyses are plausible. Need we prefer one to another? The experts' disagreement can be left unreconciled…Perhaps the disagreement is more about the meaning of the labels than about the way the music coheres. Or perhaps the music coheres in more than one way; that is, different ways of organizing the experience of listening to it are complementary, not contradictory. As we shall observe again and again with respect to details within the whole form, Debussy's music characteristically evades or blurs all sorts of classifications and abstractions. It is unique.

Austin suggests that various observations about the Prélude's form might be reconciled as "complementary." We might consider the music's formal complementarity in this case an instance of its ontology as décor. Although it is ultimately one space, different observers of an interior décor, as of the *Prélude*, are drawn to its various aspects: some to the porcelain *bibelots* on the mantelpiece, some by the hypnotic patterns of the wallpaper, and yet others by the fine material quality of the books on the shelf. Yet each observer is viewing parts of the same whole, and there is no privileged object within the décor that can stand formally on its own: that defines the entire space in isolation. In a similar way, Austin's account suggests that the *Prélude* features various formal properties – glimpses of sonata form, song form, and bar form – none of which can satisfactorily account for the form of the work as a whole; at least not by themselves. Indeed, the assumption that the *Prélude* is indeed a "whole form" – whereas the piece itself is only the initial part of an unfinished set originally intended as incidental music for Mallarmé's (unrealised) play – already betrays the structural bias of traditional analysis, with its ideal of discovering, describing, and breaking into constituent parts a self-contained, self-sufficint, purely musical (absolute), and therefore single form. Austin avoids this approach by diplomatically suggesting that the form is in the ear of the beholder. But he does not leave things there.

Indeed, his analysis suggests that even the most basic formal divisions are occluded by a subtle overriding unity at the level of the motive. The musical whole, according to this idea, resides not in grand architectural articulations of a predetermined form but rather in the interstitial motifs that obfuscate would-be structural demarcations by the sheer profusion of their surface-level organicism.

After making a basic formal division of the *Prélude* into two parts, A and B, Austin nevertheless introduces ambiguity into his own analytic account by the citation of specific instances of these motifs:

> …we might call everything up to the last quarter of the piece (m. 79) Section A, and call the remainder B. But les us reject that as too far-fetched. Further, let us admit the "flowing motif" (mm. 24, 28, 68, 73, 96) and the "syncopated motif" (mm. 39, 54, 67) as new material, not obviously derived from the opening phrase. The participation of these motifs in the various parts of the piece, often in the accompaniment as well as the main melody, is enough to mark the extraordinary interlocking of parts. Also, the unobtrusive introduction of such important unifying motifs is peculiar; this peculiarity, more than the resemblance of contours in the opening phrases, makes the full-blown melody of Section B organically one with Section A.

As in an Art Nouveau interior, therefore, with its profusion of organic (curved) surface patterns that obfuscate the underlying space(s) they ornament, Austin insists that these specific motifs surreptitiously unify the underlying structural divisions of the musical work they decorate. In other words, they unify the space not by revealing its architectural shape but rather by covering the surfaces of the room with a profusion of motif-level material that creates a unified musical décor. It is of utmost importance, in Austin's account, that the motifs work subtly rather than in a foregrounded way, that their "unobtrusive" presence is cumulatively felt without drawing attention to itself at particular moments.

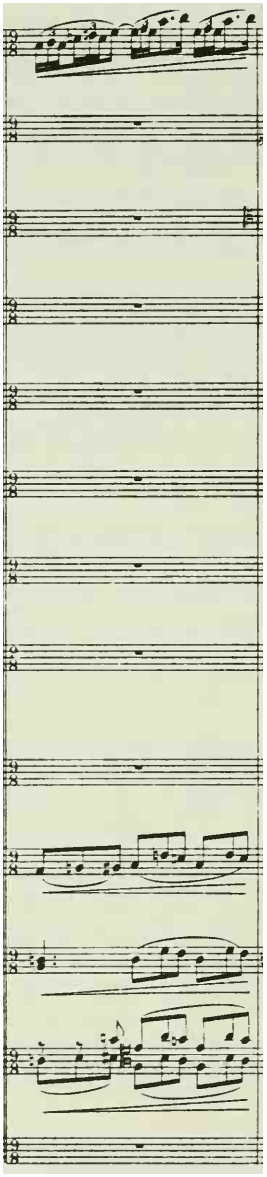
It is the work of the analyst, therefore, to account for how these motifs attenuate the foregrounding of formal divisions through their decorative middle ground organicism in specific instances. In order to do so, we turn to the selections singled out by Austin. The measures within which he singles out the various permutations of the "flowing motif" are rendered in Ex. 1; while those representative of the "syncopated motif" are shown in Ex. 2. We see between the several deployments of the "flowing motif" a range of presentation that extends to: orchestration, rhythmic permutation, and even melodic profile. Speaking of orchestration, for example, we might observe that the m. 24 instance of the motif is scored for solo flute while in m. 28 it is now doubled. In mm. 68 and 73 the motif has been moved down to the string section, through simple unison doubling in the

former case (with a pedal point in the double basses) and in the later iteration in a more complex divisi arrangement that features doubling between the violins and cellos supported by harmonic motion in the violas and double basses. In m. 96 the motif is extended beyond the flutes into the woodwind section, where it is doubled by oboes. Rhythmically, too, each instance presents a distinct profile, with no exact repetition of the motif as a whole. M. 24 features dotted rhythms peculiar to it, m. 28 prolongs the triplet pattern to three consecutive iterations, m. 68 affixes two duple meter beats to the triplet rhythm, m. 73 adds articulation and ornamentation, and m. 96 rhythmically augments the motif as a whole. At the level of melodic contour, we observe the same individuation: m. 24 moves distinctly upward, m. 28 cascades down a minor seventh by way of an escape tone, m. 68 diminishes that ambitus by gently sloping down a perfect fifth without any leaps, m. 73 inserts a subtle modification of that pattern by keeping both of the long tones (eight notes) on the same pitch (though accenting that subtle difference through its articulation), and m. 96 has the melody leap up to its starting point at the end.

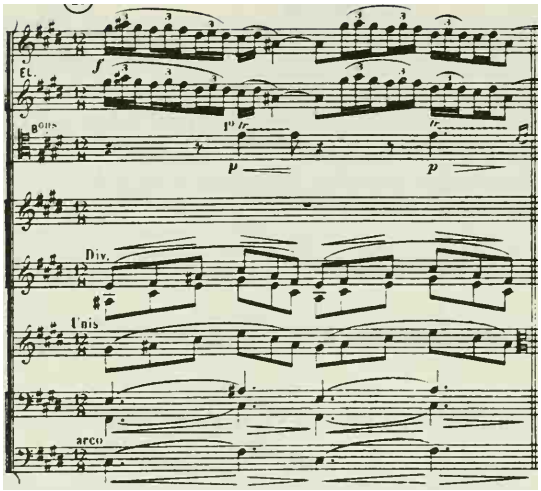
In none of these examples is the motif presented in an identical way; there are always changes, often at a very subtle level that is prone not to be trackable in a casual listening situation. The orchestration, rhythm, and melody of the motif are all modified in each iteration. And yet the motif is not only easily identifiable (as a repetition of itself) in each case, it is also quite easily derivable from the famous opening flute theme, with its combination of simple and complex meter, preponderance of undulating stepwise motion, and the importance of woodwinds in the orchestration. In this, it is difficult to agree with Austin's claim that the motifs present "new material, not obviously derived from the opening phrase."

Example 1, "Flowing Motif"

m. 24

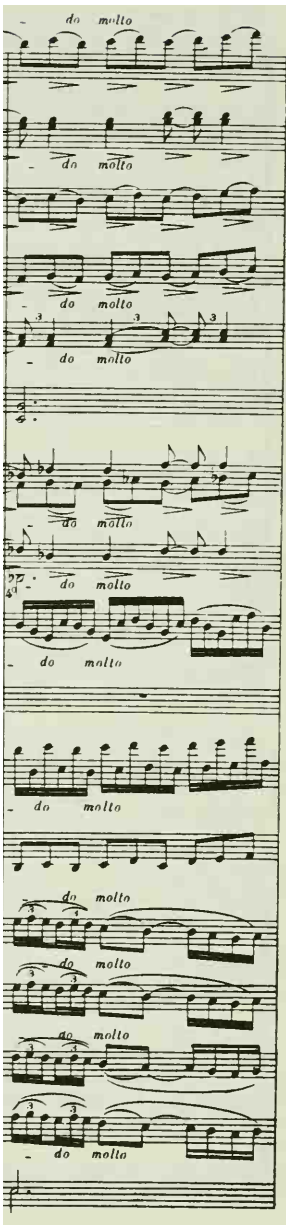


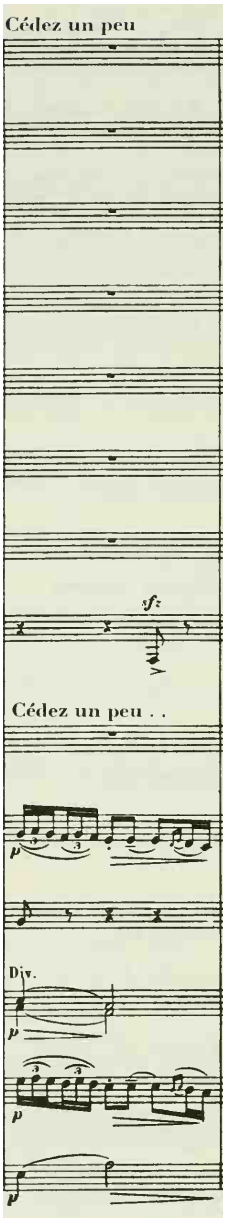
m. 28

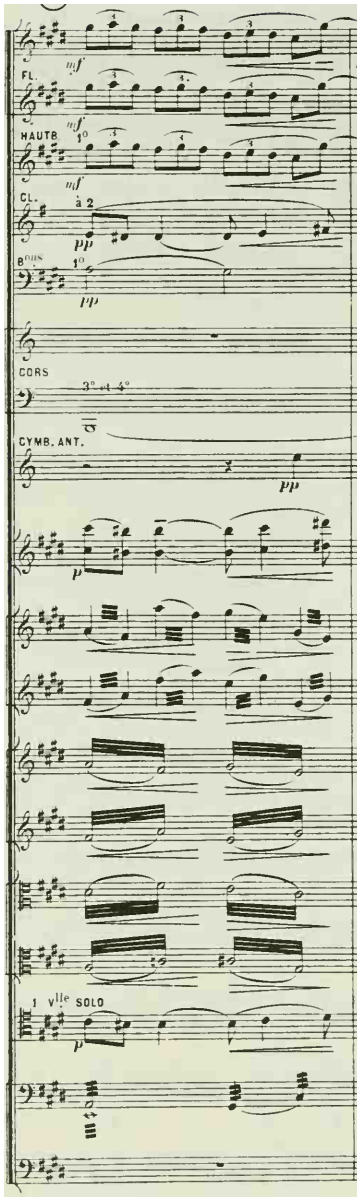


[Example 1 cont.]

m. 68 m. 73 m. 96







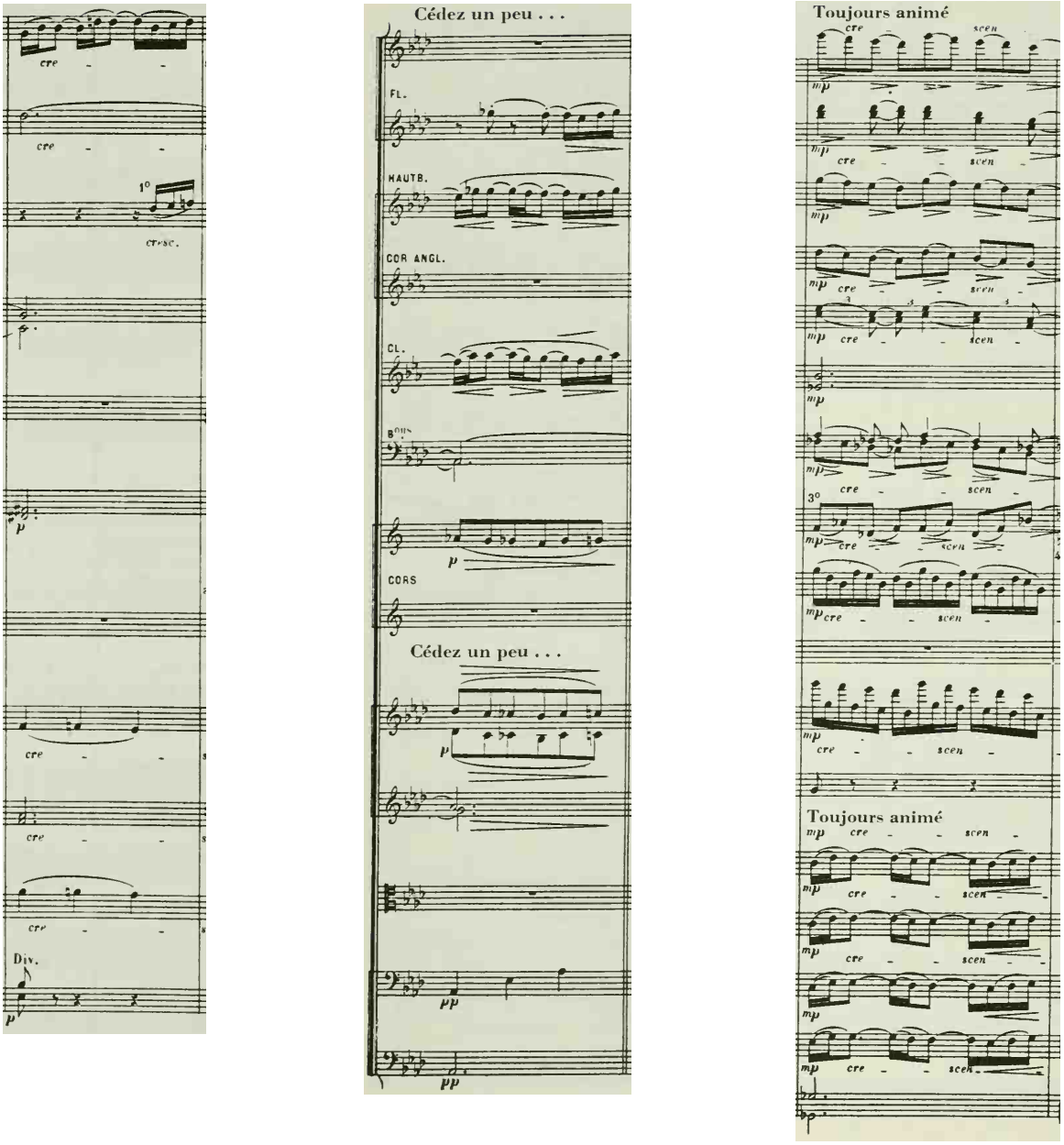
The same observations pertain to the aforementioned instances of the "syncopated motif" in evidence in Ex. 2, although the rhythmic profile and melodic contour do remain relatively more consistent across the various instances in this case. At the level of orchestration, we can observe the "syncopated motif" move from being placed in the oboes in m. 39, to being distributed among the woodwinds with flute and clarinet doubling in m. 54, to its iteration in the strings in m. 67. Melodically, too, there are differences: m. 39 fills in a fifth by movement in thirds, while the next two examples fill in a third by way of stepwise motion. Even rhythmically, though the three iterations may appear the same, there are subtle distinctions in articulation. In each case, for example, the breath or bowing marks are grouped differently. M. 54 also features a partial doubling of the motif in the flute, which suggests its own rhythmic sub-articulation. The very subtlety of the differences of each iteration of these motifs, the "unobtrusive" character of their individuated appearances, is, according to Austin, ironically what allows them to transcend structural divisions.

So now that we have taken a brief look at the motifs themselves, it makes sense to ask how it is that they do this. Let us take as our structural pivot precisely m. 79, which Austin claims divides the piece into two section, A and B. Ex. 3 shows the measures around m. 79. One of the clearest signs that there is a recapitulatory moment occurring on m. 79 is of course the marking "Mouvt. du Début" which indicates the original tempo from the start of the piece. Nevertheless, the change from the original 9/8 meter that leads into the passage to a common meter creates a distancing effect from any too obvious "return" to the opening. The descending chromatic passage in the solo flute is also a give away of the recapitulatory moment. Yet this motivic similitude now appears with a harmonic difference. It appears in a diatonic guise, signaled by the tonally appropriate ambitus of a perfect forth, from (tonic) E down to (dominant) B; whereas the opening motif leans into the modal ambiguity of its chromatic ambitus from C# down to G natural. And whereas the opening is defined by the absence of accompaniment of any kind, m. 79 is initiated harmonically, with a pedal point on an E major chord,

before the melody even emerges. Furthermore, the announced key change and common chord modulation of the dovetailed woodwinds held over from mm. 77-78 seem to leave no room for the modal ambiguity of the opening measures of the piece.

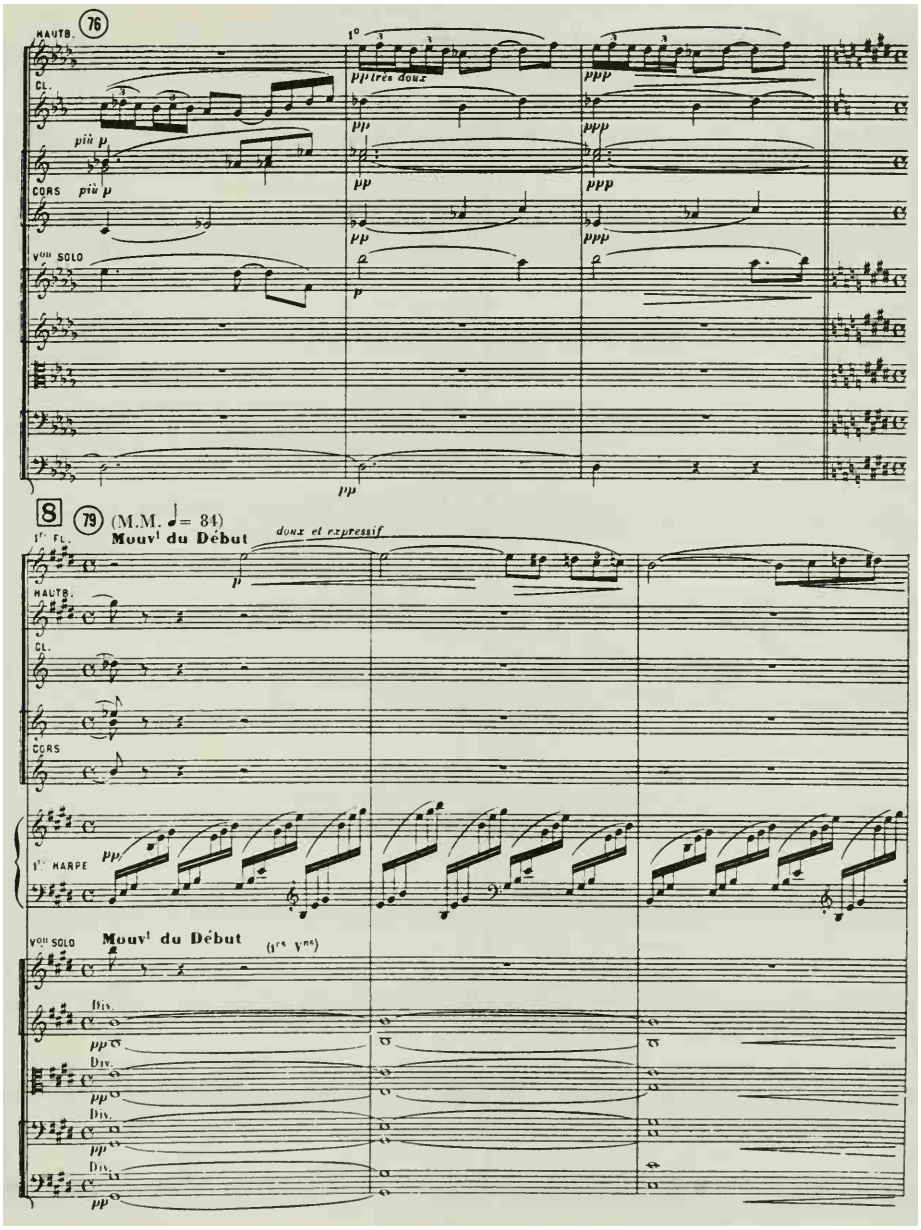
Example 2, "Syncopated Motif"

m. 39 m. 54 m. 67



Example 3, Structural Pivot

mm. 76-79



The tonal self-assurance of m. 79 does not last long, however, as the E major triad shifts parsimoniously to a C#m7 on m. 81, thus hinting at the specter of the modal ambiguity of the work's opening gambit. Moreover, the mediant ambivalence between C#m and E major that is a point of tension in the work, and clearly defines this key formal division, is intensified in subtle ways by Debussy. Note that the E major chord on m. 79 is not in root position, but rather in a very obvious

first inversion, the chordal third, G#, fortified by divisi cellos and double basses. If we follow this bass line in its shift from G# up to the C# on m. 81 we get a sense that Debussy is suggesting a dominant function, with its circle-of-fifths motion up to the root position chord (C#m). Of course while the bass may appear to be fulfilling a dominant function in respect to C#m, the rest of the chord cannot be, because it is clearly an E major triad and not a G# (dominant) chord: it is missing both a B# (chordal third) and D# (chordal fifth). Though yet again, if we include the chromatic flute motif (re)introduced on m. 79 we can see that it provides those very pitches (B# in the enharmonic form of C natural) right before the shift to C#m. There is yet another harmonic possibility included if we take into account the interaction between melody and harmony. The first inversion E traid on mm. 79-80 could also be interpreted as a German augmented sixth rooted on G#. In that reading, E functions as the flat sixth, B as the (minor) third, and the C# (also in the chromatic flute line) as the augmented fourth. If accounted for as a German flat sixth chord, however, the problem becomes its resolution, since the augmented four (C#) does not resolve in the orthodox way, up by a half-step; but rather downward by the same interval. Nevertheless, the E in the flute (the flat six) does indeed start with a correct downward half-step resolution – although it too oversteps the boundaries of this "correct" movement to slide further down. Thus, at this key transitional moment, Debussy introduces harmonic ambiguity by the combination of homophonic texture in the strings with the cooperation of the flute-led monody.

Austin points to the importance of the conjunction of melody and harmony in Debussy's style. He insists that the motivic "continuity" which forms the basis the *Prélude's* formal ambiguity relies on the intimate cooperation between melody and harmony – an observation that bears important formal consequences. Austin writes that:

> [The motivic] continuity depends not only on melodic motifs, but also, of course, on chords and their progressions, and on the relationships among pitches in both chords and melodies…In some kinds of music, melody and its accompanying harmony can be distinguished as "elements." Saint-Saëns, for one, made much of this distinction.

> To him and some other listeners Debussy's *Prelude* seemed deficient in melody, while the euphonious chords and unconventional successions of chords seemed to hold attention for their own sake, regardless of their place in the long time span. But in fact the thrilling quality of the chords depends on their whole moving context, and especially on their relationship to melody, while at the same time every note in a melodic line has harmonic value too – often more than one value in equivocal balance.[123]

For Austin, it is the very complementarity of harmony and melody in Debussy's motivic work that detracts away from formal demarcations; because structural arrival points, after all, imply the kind of direct repetition that Debussy' motivic variations constantly evade. Unlike a classical sonata form recapitulation, neither m. 79 nor any other moment in the entire *Prélude* admits of simple restatement. And this lack of repetition holds true not only for the motivic aspect of the work, but its harmonic or tonal framework. Due to Debussy's melodic-harmonic complementarity, if the melody (or motif) is different in every iteration – and it is (however subtly) in the *Prélude* – then its harmonic implications are as well. This lack of direct repetition and therefore structural recursion creates formal ambiguity.

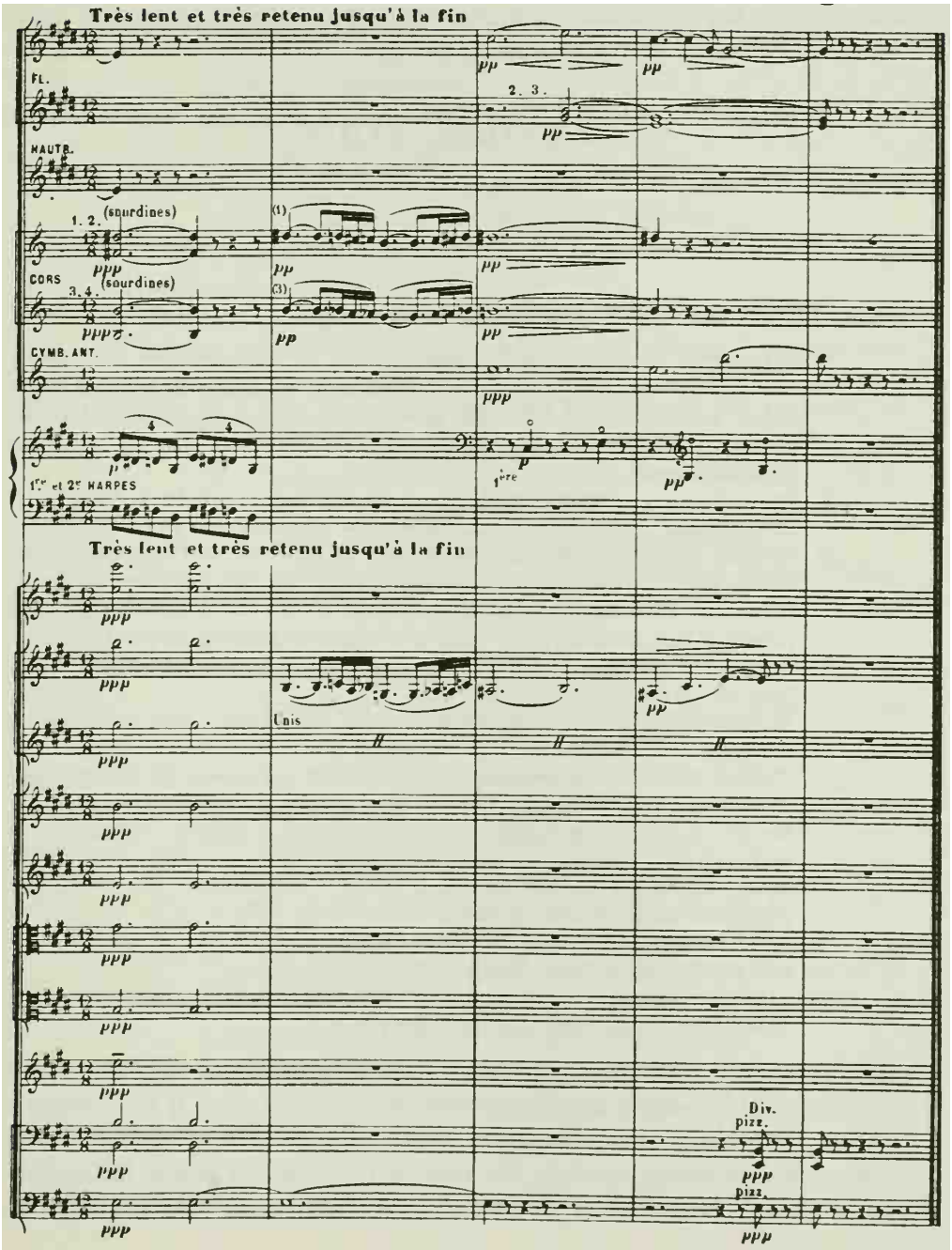
A natural place to test this assessment would be to take a look at the end of the work, surely a key "structural" point in any piece of music. The closing measures of the *Prélude* are diplayed in Ex. 4, where we observe the final appearance of the opening motif in m. 107. The descending chromatic line is now iterated by the horns. Unlike the single flute of the opening, however, this iteration of the melody casts its own harmonic shadow. Over a pedal point E held by the double basses, the horns fall chromatically in thirds, while the violins provide a homophonic counterpoint to this (quite modified) reiteration of the opening arabesque. The resulting succession of chords, discounting the pedal tone, may be listed as: E^{6}, Cm, $D^{6/4}$, Bbm, $C^{6/4}$, $Db^{6/4}$, $D^{6/4}$, Cm. Rhythmically, the augogic accents fall on the initial E^{6} and the $C^{6/4}$ in the middle of the sequence. And the sequence as a whole starts on E^{6} and ends on $C^{6/4}$. Like the work as a whole, therefore, there is a fundamental ambiguity between E and C (or C#). Not only is the harmonic succession as a whole framed by this mediant

[123] Austin, 75-79.

relationship but all of the other chords in the sequence are related either by step, half-step, or third relation. There is not a single perfect interval suggestive of either a dominant or any harmonic function.

Example 4, Closing Measures

mm. 106 - 110



It might be suggested that the lack of harmonic function during this important moment is made up for, at the structural level, by the clear repetition of the opening motif in itself. After all, the isolated repetition of the initial motif at the end of the work brings a moment of structural closure, does it not? Not exactly. Upon closer analysis, we can observe significant differences between the ostensible repetition at work and the reality of its motivic individuation from other instances of the theme, and especially the opening iteration. Ironically, it is these very differences in iterations of the theme that chart key structural moments. For example, the ambitus of the motif itself has become more constricted over the course of the piece. In the opening measures, the flute traces a tritone from C# down to G. At Austin's formal half-way point of the piece, on m. 79, the chromatic motif has been reduced from a tritone to a perfect fourth (E down to B). In its final iteration in m. 107, it has been further reduced down to a major third (G# down to E). Importantly, the ambitus of the theme has not only changed in size but also in the quality of the interval each time, suggesting first whole tone, then diatonic, and finally mediant harmonic relations in turn.

Moreover, there is a conspicuous reduction in rhythmic complexity. Whereas the opening motif offers an interwoven pattern of simple and complex meter that slides into and out of triplet figures, the closing figuration of the same motif offers a much more rhythmically "reduced" type of motion that offer no metric contrast. There is also a difference in tempo between these two iterations. While the opening measure is to be played "Très modéré," which is to say in a distinctly moderate tempo, the final iteration operates within a temporal environment that is marked "Très lent et très retenu jusqu'à la fin," that is: "Very slow and very restrained until the end." Because there is nothing inherently structural about this particular iteration of the opening motif, nor its harmonic underpinning, Debussy finally relies on the timbral and temporal context in order to simply make it sound like an end: coupled with the distant effect of the muted pianissimo horns, and the ever slowing tempo, the theme really does give off the effect of slowly dying away. Yet there is no structural reason

why this effect should be applied here; there is only the tautological logic that Debussy simply decided, like he had done before in improvisatory settings, that this is where the piece ends.

The unsatisfactory character of the ending as a formal closure can be observed in the succeeding (and final) three measures, m. 108-110. Having moved from E^6 to $C^{6/4}$ in the previous measure (the augogicaly foregrounded chords) Debussy continues the downward mediant trajectory to land on an A#maj7 on m. 108. A# is a novel pitch to emphasize, especially as it did not appear in the foregoing chromaticism of M. 107, yet it also brings back old associations do to its tritone distance from E: the tritone being the original ambitus of the opening motif. By the second half of m. 108, however, the tritone A#, intoned solely by the violins, resolves up into B which becomes the chordal fifth of an $E^{6/4}$ triad. This mediant harmonic oscillation between A# and E is subsequently repeated in a motivically modified way in m. 109, at which point the E tonality is confirmed, though hesitantly, by a gentle pianississimo pizzicato in the low strings.

The harmonically inconclusive character of this final iteration of the opening theme is further emphasized by its voicing across the orchestral palette. The low strings only play the root and chordal fifth, E and B. And Debussy choses to have the double basses pluck an E on the first position of the D string, rather than simply utilize the more robust timbre of the open low E, thereby weakening the potential impact of the pitch. The left out chordal third, G#, is placed at a great distance from the low strings, up in the flutes. Floating high above both strings and flutes is the soft ping of the high B in the crotales. This highly dispersed voicing of the final E triad, at both the registral and timbral levels, obfuscates its finality. The piece seems to simply run out of steam rather than reach a meaningful sense of closure.

In considering two key structural points in the *Prélude*, the start of Austin's B section at m. 79 and also the end of the work, we have observed how Debussy's deployment of motivic repetition, always subtly individuated in each iteration, occludes the formal architecture of the work by its sheer

profusion, like a room covered whose contours are utterly covered over by the curved decorative patterns of an Art Nouveau wallpaper. This organic aspect of Debussy's style, relying on a constant stream of motivic repetition, obfuscates moments of structural clarity that might, in a less textually busy piece of music, emerge unproblematically into the foreground. Sylveline Bourion has systematically categorized this specific aspect of Debussy's compositional style, which she terms "duplication." Bourion's vocabulary treats Debussy's "duplication" as a set of military strategies deployed against listeners in order to throw them off the trail: so that they cannot tell just how much repetition is at work. For her, this procedure ultimately defines Debussy's compositional style.[124] In her careful survey of Debussy's entire oeuvre, she point out that duplication "is integrated into Debussy's compositional system as much as the use of the whole tone scale or chromaticism. The figures of this statistical preponderance speak for themselves: depending on the period and the works in question [leaving aside *Pelléas et Mélisande*], between 70% to 100% of the material is submitted to the process of duplication! The extreme importance of this phenomenon makes one think that Debussy must have gathered together a bundle of strategies, consciously, and voluntarily, in order to regulate their economy."[125]

This constant use of motivic duplication in Debussy's style was also one of Austin's key points of observation, but his more local focus on the *Prélude* did not permit the kind of big picture analysis carried out by Bourion, who categorizes, and articulates in detail, a vast array of approaches to repetition in Debussy's arsenal, illustrated by no less than 230 examples. One of the general observations she makes about Debussy's deployment of motifs pertains to the openings of his pieces,

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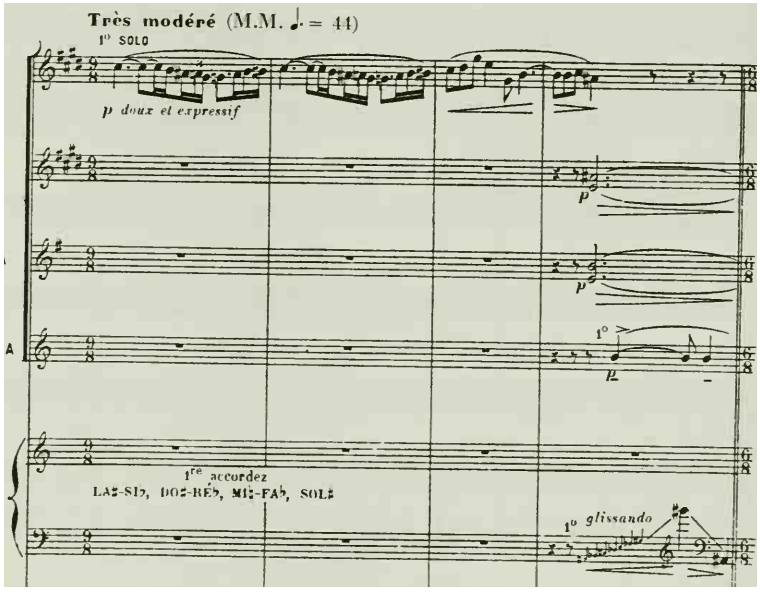
124 Bourion, 17.

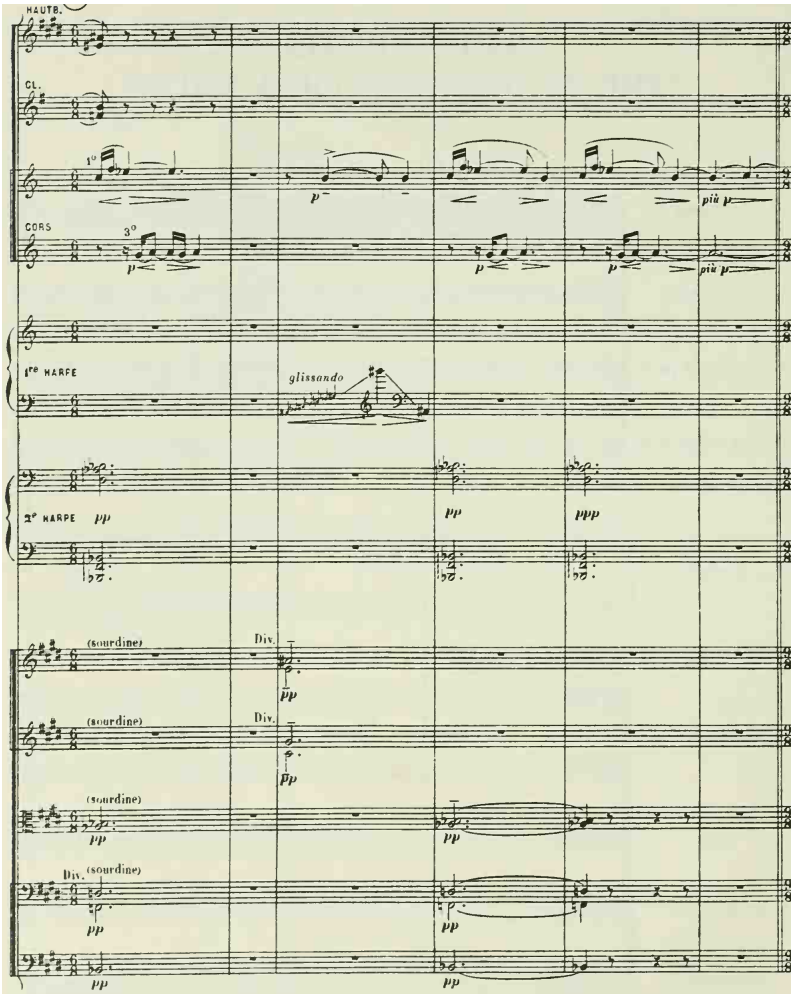
125 "La duplication…fait partie intégrante du système compositionnel de Debussy, au même titre que l'usage de la gamme par tons ou du chromatisme. Les chiffres de cette préponderance statistique parlent d'eux-mêmes: selon les périodes et les oeuvres, c'est entre 70% et 100% du matérieau en présence qui est soumis à l'emploi de la duplication! Cette extrême importance du phénomène donne à penser que Debussy a bien dû mettre au point un faisceau de stratégies, conscientes, volontaires, afin d'en réguler le marché."

Example 5

mm. 1-4



mm. 5-10



the statistic majority of which, according to her research, open on what she terms a "structural theme" ["*thème structural*"].[126] She defines the term, simply enough, as a theme "whose periodicity of return will mark the form of the piece."[127] This falls in line with Austin's observation about the importance of motifs in the formal structure of the *Prélude*. Indeed the opening flute line is one of Bourion's own examples of a "structural theme." Yet Bourion takes her analysis of Debussy's thematic work further, by describing ways in which the the themes themselves, in their internal makeup, contribute to the formal ambiguity of the musical work. For Austin, the themes simply create ambiguity around key structural moments of the piece, precluding their recognition as structural moments; but Bourion finds formal ambiguity within individual articulations of the theme. She points out that, at the beginning of the *Prélude*, "not less than three parameters leave indices of contradictory cuts." That is to say, the statement of the opening flute motive is already beset with formal ambiguity. At the level of instrumentation, Bourion points out the following "cut" ["*découpage*"]: section A represented by the flute solo in mm. 1-3 and section B defined by the "progressive entry of other sections" in mm. 4-10. In contrast to this formal division of the first ten measures, there is yet another cut of the same opening measures at the level of what she calls "global phrasing" ["*phrasé global*"]. This time, A' is distributed across mm. 1-5 and B' by mm. 7-10, with a measure of silence between the two. Taking a look at Ex. 7, we may observe the opening ten measures of the *Prélude* for ourselves and confirm Bourion's contradictory "cuts," one for the obvious shift in instrumentation starting in m. 4, with the entry of other instruments in the woodwind section and the harp glissando, and another that ends with the equally obvious whole rest on m. 6, which clearly divides the opening phrase from its continuation.

Another cut that might be considered is the harmonic and textural interplay between the monophonic opening on m. 1-3 and the harmonic arrival on m. 4-5. The clear allusion to *Tristan* in

[126] Bourion, 80.
[127] "…dont la périodicité de retour viendra marquer la forme de la pièce." Ibid.

this gesture is not merely represented by the similar tension between melody and harmony in the opening measure of Wagner's overture, it is also alluded to by the A# half-diminished seventh chord (an enharmonically spelled Tristan chord) introduced by the lush complex of woodwinds and harp in m. 4. The parsimonious voice leading of this chord into the B flat seven chord on m. 5, decorated by imitative appogiaturas in the horns, further amplifies the connection.[128]

Austin's earlier comment that the *Prélude* "coheres in more than one way," can now be interpreted in the light of Bourion's contradictory cuts. Yet even with Austin's careful attention to the interaction of form and motif, and Bourion's meticulously systematic analysis of Debussy's uses of duplication and cuts as compositional strategies, we are left with a reading of the *Prélude* whose meaning is wholly musical. In other words, even if we can describe in the most minute detail each and every motivic and/or structural ambiguity in the entire work, we are still left without a meaningful reason for such a systematic deployment of formal and motivic ambiguity in the first place. Purely musical analysis will only get us so far. Like Mallarmé's statement upon first hearing the *Prélude*, a musical analysis should incorporate the work's programmatic associations in order to allow the listener to ascertain how music "situates the décor" of the poem.

One place to start making the connection between the formal properties of the music and its programmatic associations is Hepokoski's notion of "formulaic openings" in Debussy.[129] Hepokoski's notion has the virtue of going beyond Bourion's merely structural interpretation of openings, which are by design cut off from extra-musical significance. For Hepokoski, on the other hand, the originality of Debussy's style is instantiated by the increasingly ritualized function of the opening sections of his works during the Symbolist period, especially the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*:

> In the Faune he [Debussy] created an eloquent musical analogue to the prevailing Decadent and Symbolist ideal of interior, rather than exterior, growth. This is a musical

[128] For an alternate take on this opening, see: Mark DeVoto, "Memory and Tonality in Debussy's *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune*," *Cahiers Debussy* 37-38 (2014), 6.

[129] James A. Hepokoski, "Formulaic Openings in Debussy," *19th-Century Music* 8, no. 1 (1984): 44–59.

> counterpart of the centripetal subtlety and ambiguity of Mallarmé in the *Faune* poem, the sealed-off, private luxury of Des Esseintes's house in Huysman's *A Rebours*, the exotic, interior vegetation of the Maeterlinckian hothouses or *serres chaudes*. The mysterious florification in Debussy's *Faune* is all vertical, involuted, like the closed mind feeding on itself…Here in the opening ritual of the *Faune*, one finds a legitimate translation of the Symbolist aesthetic of interiority, a sacralized aesthetic carried out within a context of sensual pleasure.[130]

Hepokoski makes the connection between the initial measures of the work as an initiatory gesture of ritual and a spatial/psychological sense of interiority linked to Symbolism. All we would wish to add to this description is a timely reminder of the centrality of interior décor as a homosocial space of sociability for Debussy's milieu, and the influence of this idealization of décor on the artistic works produced by this milieu. How might we conceive of the *Prélude* in those terms, which connect the traditional gestures of musical analysis to the programmatic considerations that this work embodies, as the result of collaboration between Mallarmé and Debussy? I will analyze the well-known opening theme of the *Prélude* in order to demonstrate such a reading.

As seen in Ex. 5, the opening flute gesture of Debussy's *Prélude* is as much a visual undulation on the page as it is an aural curve: the soloist intones a chromatic scale.[131] The most striking thing about the opening passage, whether heard in the concert hall, or (as in the case of Mallarmé's visit to Debussy) in a private piano performance, is the thinness of this initiating gesture. On the page, this very thinness presents the viewer with a singular visual economy. Almost the entire orchestral score is left blank. Save for the topmost line, that of the flute, the full complement of orchestral forces is left blank, not decorated with arabesques of its own. This sparsity is in itself all too reminiscent of Mallarmé's own insistence that, in poetry, the blank areas of the page (or in this case, manuscript paper) are just as significant as the words inscribed onto the page. Because it

[130] Ibid., 56-57.

[131] For this score-based analysis, I am using: Claude Debussy, *Prélude à "l'Après-Midi d'un Faune"/Trois Nocturnes*, Dover Miniature Scores (1999; reis., Mineola: Dover Publications, 2021).

allows the solo flute to reverberate unobstructed, this blank visual and sonic area activates the space around it, the silence within which it is situated.

This negative sense of space is far from the only sign of décor in the opening passage, however. While the unaccompanied solo flute line does indeed create a negative dynamic *vis-à-vis* the surrounding silence of the other instruments, it also posits a very particular kind of "image" within this negative space, which is evoked by its own particular kind of resonance within the space. This line contributes specificity to the décor, a specificity that is not merely aural but also spatial and visual. First, there is the very fact of the soloistic nature of the gesture. Rather than all three flutes covering this passage, or working in complementary fashion to create contrapuntal arabesques, only a single flute is allowed to broach the subject of this orchestral tableau. Because the main character of the poem is also singular, *a* faun (rather than several fauns), the listener is immediately confronted with a one-to-one correspondence between the program and the music. Any music analyst wishing to account for this work without recourse to its program would fall short within the very opening measures of the piece.

Yet if, as Debussy insists, the musical score is not tied to the poetic text in a literal sense, then what is the role of the program? How can we indeed situate the décor that it contributes? The personalization of the solo flute line is our first clue. Visualize an orchestral performance of the *Prélude*. Everyone remains mute save for one person: the flautist. On the piano, as Mallarmé heard the work before its premiere, the sparsity of the texture is equally conspicuous, equally minimal in comparison to the full range of keys (and fingers) available. Registrally, whether on the piano or on the flute, the line sits nestled unassumingly in the middle range, thus establishing a broad sense of negative registral space, both above and below. As noted, certain qualities of the line itself furnish the surrounding negative space with a positive sense of décor, with the details and "props" of the décor. They do so in several ways. First, there is its strictly programmatic correspondence with the

faun of the poem, embodied by the performance of the flute soloist. Because the faun was understood to represent Mallarmé, not to mention the later layers of association with Nijinsky and Debussy himself, the soloist in fact plays a key dramatic role, one that embodies, and in so doing unifies, the strata of historically accumulated identities associated with the faun. The faun is not only embodied by the singularity of the flautist, of course, but by the singularity of the flute as a representative instrument.

Thus, critical organology becomes one of the key correspondences that allows us to bridge the program and the music. It is all the more appropriate, therefore, that it should be a visual as much as an aural phenomenon. Indeed the identification of the faun with the flute, which is the topmost line of the orchestral score, also contributes a visual element that orients the score-bound music analyst on the page. The top line, that of the flutes, and often simply the solo flute, comes to occupy its own niche in comparison to the rest of the instruments, written below. This division establishes a monodic situation, in which the flute takes on a horizontal "melodic" element while the rest of the orchestra plays a fundamentally accompanying role, buttressing the flute's winding arabesque curves with moments of vertical articulation and integration, not to mention imitative interplay. Aurally, this interplay of a primarily horizontal and a primarily vertical division of labor produces a basic sense of space: that of the two-dimensional page. The dimension of depth is still lacking. This too, however, is furnished by the flute's soloistic gesture in the opening measures. In this case, however, it is not the positionality of the flute solo in relation to the rest of the orchestra that is at work, but rather the particular quality of the flute line itself and its programmatic associations that calls to attention specific elements of the décor.

In the opening measures, the flute does not remain just another part of the orchestra, a voice that contributes to a larger representation. Rather, it becomes a material prop in itself. As an incantatory gesture, the flute opens with a fully chromatic traversal, from C#5 down to G4, and

back up. The gesture is repeated twice, exactly. The fluid, unaccompanied rhythm that slides by diminution down this tritone ambitus, then subtly augments on the way back up, contains this irregular ebb and flow. It is an organic rather than a mechanical rhythm, reminiscent of a warm-up scale, where the tone quality of each note (the passage is marked "*doux et expressif*": "sweet and expressive") is more important than its rhythmic precision. The faun is evidently warming up. Indeed, the opening verses of the poem describe the act and even specifies its "upward movement" that, as we saw earlier, Debussy claimed to be the basis of his musical "décor."

The first reference to the faun's flute comes not at the very opening of the text but rather just on its heels, in the first long stanza (of fourteen lines). This initial evocation of the flute in the poem, which takes up the last seven lines of that stanza, situates it within a landscape. The flute, comprised of "two pipes" ("*deux tuyaux*"), becomes the instrument of a "visible" breath, that of "inspiration." Furthermore this inspiration is directional: it is said to "regain" ("*regagne*") the sky.

> No water murmurs that my flute does not pour
> On the thicket sprinkled with chords; and the sole wind,
> Outside the two pipes quick to exhale before
> Dispersing the sound into an arid rain,
> Is, in a horizon not stirred by a ripple,
> The visible and serene artificial breath
> Of inspiration, which regains the sky.[132]
>
> [Ne murmure point d'eau que ne verse ma flûte
> Au bosquet arrosé d'accords; et le seul vent
> Hors des deux tuyaux prompt à s'exhaler avant
> Qu'il disperse le son dans une pluie aride,
> C'est, à l'horizon pas remué d'une ride,
> Le visible et serein souffle artificiel
> De l'inspiration, qui regagne le ciel.]

Debussy claims to imitate the movement described in the poem, rather than its literal meaning. Even this short sample of Mallarmé's poem, with its highly convoluted style, should make

[132] Stéphane Mallarmé, *L'après-Midi d'un Faune*, 8.

readily apparent why the composer ridiculed the idea that his music should follow the poem line by line. When it comes to the poem's "movement" however, as well as its "décor," we are better situated. Indeed, the entire tenor of the passage makes the faun's flute, and presumably thus the faun himself, an instrument of the natural environment. Therefore, we must attend to three levels of detail: the description of the flute itself, the description of its environment, and finally the description of the relationship between the flute and the environment. In doing so, we can observe how the musical décor is constructed and discern the particular manner in which it is related to its program.

First, for the instrument itself. As mentioned above, the flute is described as being comprised of "two pipes" ("*deux tuyaux*"), which brings to mind the ancient *aulos* of Hellenic as well as Hellenistic antiquity. Although the modern flute is far from an exact match with the ancient *aulos*, from an organological viewpoint both can broadly be categorized as woodwinds. This should prompt us to reconsider, given this programmatic organology, the leading role that woodwinds play in the orchestration of the *Prélude*. It allows us to look beyond the flute itself as a self-contained instrumental voice in the *Prélude*, and rather treat is as an entity that is inherently interactive with the rest of the woodwind section; a situation in which all of the woodwinds form a composite picture of different aspects of the aulos, at various points in the work. In this light, the flute actually suggests striking correspondences with its Graeco-Roman prototype. This organological relationality of the woodwinds in turn allows us to answer structural musical questions – but only if we attend to both the music "itself" and its programmatic associations. For example, we might ask why is the opening phrase of the *Prélude* repeated twice? From a purely formalist perspective, there is no reason this should be so. We cannot posit an antecedent-consequent relationship here because the two iterations are exactly the same. But if we turn to the programmatic solution suggested by the "two pipes" of the faun's flute, we arrive at a simple enough explanation: the faun

is warming up on each of the two individual pipes in turn, which involves the same scalar, tone-production exercise. The organological doubling of the faun's flute thus becomes a "purely" musical repetition.

Other "purely" musical phenomena in the *Prélude* can also be explained only by recourse to this programmatic organology. In M5, when the horns enter with an overlapping motif, repeated several times in M8-10, is that not the faun trying out the contrapuntal and timbral possibilities of playing both pipes at once? These are divisi horns after all, one player to a part, and horns are still woodwinds. There is also a drone-like aspect to this horn motif, where each line holds its position unless iterating a pitch movement. This quality of a drone is yet another characteristic associated with aulos performance. We can only guess at the historical timbre of the aulos, let alone account for the many variations that must have proliferated in the ancient world, though it is considered to be a double reed, at least in surviving accounts. Either way, we may imagine that Debussy, like Mallarmé, is using the premise of an antique organology in order to play with it, rather than reconstruct it musicologically. Therefore the music analyst must do the same, in order to reconstruct that sense of playfulness at work. For example, when the oboes take over the melodic curve of the melody in M14-19, doubled by clarinets from M17, we may consider that to be yet another aspect or timbre of the programmatic organology of the aulos. In other words, it is simply another modality of the faun's flute. And when, a measure later (M20), a solo clarinet becomes the sole point of connection, sliding chromatically into the next iteration of the flute theme (starting in M21), we need not treat the clarinet and the flute as different instruments. Once again, the importance of the program is paramount if we are to understand not just the instrumentation (or choice of instruments) but the orchestration (or combination of instruments) that animate the *Prélude* and imbue it with musical significance.

The second aspect of Mallarmé's poetic depiction of the flute above to which we should attend is his description of the environment in which the faun and the flute find themselves. What is particularly idiomatic about Mallarmé's description is that it is oblique. Instead of describing a body of water, a river, a brook, a pond, or a lake, for example, he writes: "No water murmurs that my flute does not pour." So there are murmuring waters, we gather, but they are evoked by way of absence rather than presence. They are described negatively in relation to the flute. Likewise, the evocation of rain does not come with a container. What landscape is the rain falling on? Ocean? Desert? Plain? Mountains? We only get an implication of landscape through its opposite: the sky above. Yet even this sky is not satisfactorily outlined. Mallarmé writes of "a horizon not stirred by a ripple." This is a purely negative ideation of sky, defined by the absence of any defining characteristic, or any individuating marks (in French, the word for "ripple," which is "*ride*," also means "wrinkle"). This is an abstract sky, not contrasted with any land (or water) below. In this passage, we are told that the "breath of inspiration" is a "visible" feature of the landscape, which can thus be seen as it "regains the sky." Beyond mere abstraction, we are now firmly situated in a landscape of made of metaphor. This is why, in order to understand the role of this landscape, in order to situate it as a specific décor, we must account for the third aspect of Mallarmé's description: the relationship of the landscape to the flute. If we do so, the flute is revealed to be not merely a prop within a décor but a representation of the entire décor. And this metonymic relationship between prop and scenery is accomplished specifically through the operation of music.

Let us return to the Mallarmé's description of landscape above, and now consider it in light of its relationality to the flute, and by extension the central role that music plays in this relationship. "No water murmurs that my flute does not pour/ On the thicket sprinkled with chords [*accords*]." This is the first mention of the flute in the poem. The abstracted elements of landscape composed of murmuring water and thickets is integrated into a complete picture centered on the operation

of the flute. It is the flute that, quite literally, pours the murmuring water. The word Mallarmé uses for the flute's "pour," however, is "*verse*," which also means "verse" (as in "poetry"), adding an important touch of ambiguity to the equation. Through this lexical ambiguity, the flute becomes not only the pourer of murmuring water, but also the instrument of "verse" itself. Conveniently, Mallarmé lets us know what the flute's pour/verse produces: chords that sprinkle the thicket. The flute thus waters the arid landscape with the sound (murmur) of water, which is heard as a sprinkling of chords. In other words, the flute creates landscape by playing music. But who, in turn, plays the flute?

Here the issue becomes more complicated, but essentially, like the flute itself, divided into two parts. On the one hand, there is the wind that circulates outside the flute, which is characterized as the "artificial breath/ Of inspiration." On the other hand, the "two pipes" are said to exhale by themselves, becoming an "arid rain" of sound. In both cases, the respective aural phenomena related to breath/exhalation turn into visual metaphors. In the second case, the "artificial breath" is simply declared to be "visible." This breath, the breath that resides outside the two pipes, is revealed to be "*inspiration*," a word that does not require translation, but which, in an etymological sense, refers to the simple act of breathing in. Breathing becomes a circular metaphor that ties together the two polarities: the landscape's wind and the pipes' exhalation. It does so, implicitly, through the figure of the faun, who is half-man/half-animal: an artificial creation that bridges the divide between nature and artistic creation. The inspiration that flows into the faun, is breathed through the faun's pipes, and then, beginning the cycle over, "regains the sky."

The circularity of this image of artistic creation – its cyclical flow of time – creates a strong sense of space. This flow, or movement, as Debussy described it, has a shape, and a direction; both implying a space. Remarkably, the "upward movement" that Debussy describes is identified as inspiration. And Mallarmé's spectacular *mot juste*, "regains," reveals the cyclical nature of this

process: if inspiration "regains" the sky then presumably it had already come down from there before. Debussy's "upward movement" is not, therefore, a movement that merely ascends – and that we should therefore seek in some sort of perpetually rising musical figure or structural pattern in the *Prélude*. The upward movement is not just an ascent but always a re-ascent, flowing back up into the sky from which it must have already descended. The process is continuous but irregular in its manifestations, like precipitation. Let us reconsider the opening measures of the *Prélude*. Why does the opening gesture repeat?

From our new perspective, we arrive at two complementary explanations to this question (adding to the earlier one). An analysis of the music "itself" could not have yielded either of these answers; they both depend on a careful consideration of the ways in which Debussy's music draws on its Mallarméan program. First, the repetition of the opening phrase establishes a cycle, initiating a background process. If the phrase were iterated only once – if, in other words, we were to skip from the end of M1 to the start of M3, leaving out M2 entirely – then it would not have clued us into its cyclic nature. It would have represented merely a single instance, but not the existence of a continuous cycle. But this observation in turn points to the fact that each measure therefore must represent one complete cycle. Which brings us to our second observation: a single complete cycle is comprised of a descent followed by an equal and opposite reaction, or ascent. This pattern is of descent-then-ascent is inexorable, like a law of nature. Debussy's "upward movement" is an oblique expression, offering a partial view of the process. In the complete picture provided by the program we can hear it as not just an ascendant movement on its own, but rather a reascending movement that follows a descent. This process of inspiration and exhalation is mediated by the flute itself.

It should be observed that the historical models of this exact sort of reciprocity between personality and décor, the Goncourt brothers, made the equivalence between their interior decorating and their artistic work (writing) explicit. Edmond not only went shopping for antiques for his various

rooms, he also wrote about them in *La Maison d'un artiste*. Far from being a purely literary event, in other words, the *mardis* were actually inextricable, for attendees like Debussy, from the social spectacle of their own interaction within a given décor, and likewise from the works they produced.

Clearly, the earnest "disciples" that flocked to Mallarmé on Tuesdays gathered there because his vocal utterances seemed truly understood only in conjunction with the graceful choreography of his accompanying mannerisms: "something of a priest, something of a dancer," in Rodenbach's piquant phrase. Tellingly, Symons leaves Rodenbach's quote in French – though I translate it above. One reason could very well be that the word "*danseuse*," used to describe Mallarmé's deportment in this case, would be translated simply as "dancer" in English (as I have rendered it), and would therefore miss the oddly gendered inference: in French, the word *danseuse* specifies a "female dancer." Rodenbach's original phrase thus depicts Mallarmé's movement within his décor in singularly gendered terms. On the one hand, Mallarmé is made out to incarnate priestly qualities ("*un peu de prêtre*"), associated, in the French Catholic context, with vows of abstinence and lifelong allegiance to a homosocial peer group (the all-male clergy) – the in-joke being that the lofty initiates of Symbolism bear more than a passing resemblance to seminarians or, once again, disciples. In apparent contradiction to this image, Mallarmé is then depicted as a female dancer ("*un peu de danseuse*"), perhaps with more than a touch of allusion to his well-known fascination with *danseuses* such as "Loïe" Fuller, the American dancer that became the talk of Paris at the *fin de siècle* and to whom, among other *danseuses* of the Parisian stage, Mallarmé dedicated several fascinating pieces of criticism in the form of prose poetry.[133]

These writings, inspired by the performances of *danseuses*, and grouped together in *Divagations* (1897)[134] under the subheading *Crayonné au théâtre* ("Penned at the Theater"), further underscore

[134] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Divagations* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1897), accessed on March 25, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8626855p.

Mallarmé's gender ambiguous deportment not as an eccentric mannerism but rather as a consciously fleshed out idea:

> [T]he dancer (female) is not a woman who dances, for the juxtaposed reasons that (a) she isn't a woman, but a metaphor summing up one of the elementary aspects of our form, sword, cup, flower, etc. and (b) she doesn't dance (in the ordinary sense; rather) suggesting by the prodigiousness of (either) short-cuts or élans, with a bodily writing what it would take paragraphs of prose dialogue as well as descriptive (prose) to express in a written text: (she is) a poem freed from all the apparatus of a scribe. [135]

Mallarmé posits the female dancer as the ultimate embodiment of gender fluidity; a being who, through the art of her movement within space, can move beyond ontological categories (including gender) to become any object, whether natural or man-made. By framing Mallarmé himself as a *danseuse*, Rodenbach seems to imply (and Symons in turn to amplify) that, within the canvas of his décor, Mallarmé participated in the very act of "bodily writing" which for him characterized the on-stage performance of the *danseuses* that he was fond of reviewing. Mallarmé's stage was the interior of his apartment on the Rue de Rome, where he could be observed "entering into conversation," as described by Symons, "the way one enters a scene."

Moreover, Mallarmé's gender non-conforming "choreography," as it played out in the semi-private theater of *les mardis*, was a distinct focal point for Debussy's milieu and an influence on their work. The singular importance of the homosocial makeup of Mallarmé's captive audience on these occasions cannot be overestimated. According to the gendered sociability of late 19th century French salon culture, Mallarmé was situated in a rather queer position which stems from his role as *maître* of a social circle that met at his residence. Inevitably this resembled a *salon* (a name Grierson explicitly attaches to the *mardis*[136]) which in 19th century France was understood to be the social domain, as well as personal décor, of a charismatic female presence.

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[135] Michel Deguy, "The Dance: Mallarmé," trans. Christopher Elson, *Dalhousie Review* 77.3 (Autumn 1997): 335-338. See also: Christopher Elson, "A Poetics of Summing-up and Making-Away-with: Michel Deguy and Stéphane Mallarmé," *L'Esprit Créateur* 40, no. 3 (2000): 86–96.

[136] Austin, 99. "An American at Mallarmé's Salons" is the title of the piece excerpted by Austin.

As French historian Anne Martin-Fugier asserts near the start of her magnificently detailed account of 19th-century French salons: "*Un salon, c'est d'abord une femme. Et, de préférence, une femme qui a de l'esprit.*" That is to say: "A salon, that is first-and-foremost a woman. And, preferably, a woman who possesses wit."[137] According to the norms of 19th-century French sociability, as described by Martin-Fugier, a *salon* was expected to be the social domain of a charming female host, around whom would be centered regular meetings of a semi-closed group. By way of illustration, she points to the well-known example of Mme Récamier, whose salon is described in pithy terms by the writer (and salon attendee) Prosper Mérimée. He says of Mme Récamier that "her goal was to rule over a little court of distinguished persons. She didn't demand much. Only good attendance, and the appearance, more than the reality, of devotion." [138] Mallarmé, however, seems to have inspired real rather than apparent devotion, judging by contemporary accounts of the *mardis* (think of Symons' comment about Mallarmé's "disciples"). It is exactly this spirit of ascetic devotion that distinguishes the homosocial coreligionism of Mallarmé's *cénacle* from Mme Récamier's worldly *salon*.

It is worth noting, in this vein, that, in his description above, Symons compares Mallarmé's mentorship style to the domestic act of housecleaning. Mallarmé is pictured, in Symons' account, "brushing the dust off" the ideas brought to his apartment by his disciples and then "settling, arranging them a little" before returning them to their original owner – now "surprisingly luminous." In his conceptualization of ideas as *bibelots* (decorative objects) which are to be dusted and rearranged, Symons evokes a Mallarmé who aligns in spirit with the *frères* Goncourt. In the *préambule* of *La maison d'un artiste*, Edmond develops a uniquely gendered view of the newfound passion for collecting decorative objects that was gripping the young men of his time. He claims that contemporary life is

[137] Anne Martin-Fugier, *Les salons de la IIIe République: art, littérature, politique* (Paris: Perrin, 2003), 8.

[138] "Son but a été de dominer sur une petite cour de gens distingués. Elle n'en exigeait pas grand-chose. Une grande assiduité seulement, et l'apparence, plutôt que la réalité, du dévouement." Martin-Fugier, *Les salons de la IIIe République*, 9.

less inherently social than that of the 18th century, and that therefore this more "sedentary" mode of existence has led "man" to focus on his "*home*," a word italicized by Edmond to highlight its English origin – which also happens to be a near homophone of the French word for "man" (and "person"): "*homme*." "At the same time," Edmond writes:

> these less worldly habits brought about a lessening of the role of the woman in masculine thought; for us [men] she was no longer the galant occupation of all our existence, this occupation that was in former times the career of so many [men], and, following this modification in mores, here is what happened: the interest of man [*l'homme*], who left behind the charming being [woman], was transferred in large part onto the pretty inanimate objects, and this passion is clothed with something of the nature and character of love. In the XVIII century, there weren't any young *bibeloteurs*; that's the difference between the two centuries. For our generation, bric-a-brac mania ["*bricabracomanie*"] is nothing but a stand-in for woman, who no longer possesses the imagination of man.[139]

Compare Goncourt's observation to Denis Herlin's insistence, in a fascinating essay about the composer's financial life, that Debussy "was well aware of his irresistible and sudden infatuations with objects. As he wrote to André Poniatowski in February 1893: 'All in all, Desire is everything: you have a mad, sincere craving, almost a need, for an art object (a Velasquez, a Satzuma vase, or a new type of necktie). What a joy when you own it, it is truly love.'"[140] Prince Poniatowski was one of Debussy's most (financially) supportive patrons. Debussy's inveterate *bricabracomanie* is usually interpreted as a symptom of fiscal carelessness. Herlin argues for a more detailed account of the role of money in Debussy's life, one that is especially attuned to the decorative resonances of the composer's

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[139] "Du même coup, ces habitudes moins mondaines amenaient un amoindrissement du rôle de la femme. dans la pensée masculine; elle n'était plus pour nous l'occupation galante de toute notre existence, cette occupation qui était autregois la carrière du plus grand nombre, et, à la suite de cette modification dans les moeurs, il arrivait ceci: c'est que l'intérêt de l'homme, s'en allant de l'être charmant, se reportait en grande partie sur les jolis objets inanimé dont la passion revêt un peu de la nature et du caractère de l'amour. Au XVIIIe siècle, il n'y a pas de *bibeloteurs* jeunes: c'est là la différence des deux siècles. Pour. notre génération, la *bricabracomanie* n'est qu'un bouche-trou de la femme qui ne possède plus l'imagination de l'homme." Edmond de Goncourt, *La Maison d'un Artiste, Tome I* (Paris: G. Charpentier, Éditeur, 1881), accessed March 25, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5432104d.texteImage#. (Emphasis in the original.)

[140] Denis Herlin, "An Artist High and Low, or, Debussy and Money," trans. Vincent Giroud, in *Rethinking Debussy*, ed. Elliott Antokoletz and Marianne Wheeldon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 165.

psychology. For example, he credits some of Emma Bardac's charm over Debussy to the effect of her tasteful approach to interior decoration (and her ability to finance it with her ex-husbands' funds).[141] Herlin, who co-edited Debussy's complete correspondence, furthermore writes: "Several details in Debussy's correspondence show to what extent he was sensitive to the way Emma organized her daily life, for example when he arrived in Vienna, alone, in late November 1910 and emptied his suitcases in his hotel room: "I go back upstairs, sadly unpack my bags, note their prodigious orderliness; I do not miss the lovely opportunity to marvel tenderly at your domestic virtues. I think what this unremarkable room would be like if you were with me, with your decorative genius."[142] As usual, Herlin files Debussy's *bricabracomanie* under wasteful spending (and unnecessary borrowing). "To be sure," Herlin writes, "Debussy had a relationship with money that did not make it easy to put any aside in savings. At the Villa Médicis he freely borrowed from fellow students or Count Primoli, ostensibly to help his needy parents but actually to purchase a few coveted objects."[143] Furthermore, Herlin cites Michèle Worms de Romilly's account of Debussy during his years with Lilly:

> Debussy had the surest, most refined natural taste, and loved beautiful things. He enjoyed ancient art; he spent long sessions at an antique dealer's, close to our home on Avenue Victor Hugo, using the lesson fee as down payment (to the despair of his wife, who anxiously awaited his return to buy dinner supplies). There was above all a certain Louis XV sofa he often spoke to me about; he was dying to acquire it.[144]

The Louis XV sofa is another dead giveaway that Debussy had absorbed the lessons of *La maison d'un artiste*, directly or indirectly. Debussy was the very image of the "young man" *bibeloteur* who, according to the epigraph to this chapter, in his very passion for 18th-century decorative art defined the 19th-century difference. Which brings us back to Mallarmé's *mardis*.

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[141] Ibid., 164.
[142] Ibid., 165. Quote taken from: Claude Debussy, *Correspondance*, ed. Denis Herlin and François Lesure, 1337. [Translated by Vincent Giroud.]
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.

As Martin-Fugier points out in her later work on "masculine conviviality" in 19th-century France,[145] there is in fact an important distinction to be made between the female-led (and co-ed) *salons* like that of Mme Récamier, and the distinctly male homosocial spaces that competed for attention during the same period. The *fin-de-siècle* milieu of Mallarmé's *mardis* falls squarely among this latter group of contemporary, overlapping, homosocial societies. Mallarmé's visit to Debussy's apartment in the early 1890s is a clear example of the reciprocity that characterized this milieu. Importantly, these same-sex networks functioned in a way that was homologous to official government structures. Martin-Fugier points out that "the negotiations that preceded the elections" for membership to one of the all-male *dîners* "was as delicate as elections for the Académie"[146] – and about as closed to female membership, we might add. For example, the Prix de Rome competition that Debussy won in 1884, which was directly administered by the Académie des Beaux-Arts, would not begin to accept female candidates until 1903; and a woman would not actually be awarded the prize until a full decade later, in 1913, when Nadia Boulanger claimed it for herself.[147]

Although ostensibly informal, in other words, these semi-private homosocial gatherings of artists at the *fin de siècle*, like that of Mallarmé's *mardis*, may be thought of as continuous with French state institutions of the period. In their social composition, both the official institutions and these unofficial societies were, with rare exceptions, comprised exclusively of male members. This social fact may be evinced by the all-male Beaux-Arts academicians who adjudicated the Prix de Rome competition, as well as the all-male pensioners of the French Académy in Rome where, along with Debussy, competition winners spent years cohabiting the same palatial décor (that of the Villa Médicis).

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145 Anne Martin-Fugier, "Convivialité masculine au XIXe siècle : les dîners Bixio et Magny," *Romantisme* 137, no. 3 (2007): 49–59.

146 "Les négociations qui précédaient les élections au dîner étaient tout aussi délicates qu'à l'Académie." Ibid., 53.

147 For a thorough historical contextualization of this topic, see: Annegret Fauser, "'La Guerre En Dentelles': Women and the 'Prix de Rome' in French Cultural Politics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51, no. 1 (1998): 83–129.

All that to say that Debussy's social formation was played out within the parameters laid out by a homosocial network that was already an institution in its own right. It is in this light Mallarmé's relationship to Debussy should be understood, and, just as importantly for the present chapter, the *Prélude* as a product of their homosocial *aimitié*.

In an 1894 letter to Mallarmé, which serves as the poet's invitation to attend the official premiere of the *Prélude*, Debussy suggests the *Prélude* was a scribal act, a simple dictation exercise suggested by the Faun himself. His note labels the work not as "music" but rather as "arabesques." "Dear Maître," it reads, "[d]o I need to tell you the joy it would bring me, if you would encourage with your presence the arabesques that a betraying pride made me believe were dictated by the Flute of your Faun."[148] In an overview of literature about the arabesque as a topic of Debussy studies, Gurminder Kaul Bhogar points out that the term has been deployed to signify "a variety of musical elements from melody and harmony to ornament and texture." Accordingly, she wonders: is it "possible for such a broad, multifarious concept to yield sensitive and valuable analytic insights?" Ultimately, Gurminder seeks "to deconstruct preconceptions of arabesque as 'decoration', an 'attractive' musical gesture that remains structurally insignificant and dramaturgically impotent."[149] Alternately, I propose that the Debussy's use of the word points to his conception of the musical work as (a shared) décor.

The historical resonances of the term "arabesque," as deployed by Debussy, reveal a concern with décor. Just as the Goncourts valued their collection of *bibelots* as a form of rehabilitation of

[148] "Cher Maître: Ai-je besoin de vous dire la joie que j'aurais, si vous voulez bien encourager de votre presence, les arabesques qu'un peut-être coupable orgueil m'a fait croire être dictées par la Flûte de. votre Faune." Claude Debussy, *Correspondance*, ed. Denis Herlin and François Lesure, 228.

[149] Gurminder Kaur Bhogal, "Debussy's Arabesque and Ravel's Daphnis et Chloé (1912)," *Twentieth-Century Music* 3, no. 2 (September 2006): 173. See also: Gurminder Kaur Bhogal, *Details of Consequence: Ornament, Music, and Art in Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

historical objects, in a similar fashion Debussy found in the arabesque a historical object that could be rehabilitated in the present. In a 1902 review, Debussy writes:

> The old Bach, who contained all of music, mocked, you better believe it, harmonic formulas. He preferred the free play of sonorities, whose curves, parallel or contrary, prepared the unexpected blooming that ornaments with imperishable beauty the least of his inumerable notebooks. That was the epoch in which the "the adorable arabesque" flourished, and music thus participated in laws of beauty that are inscribed within the total movement of nature…Art is the most beautiful of lies. And though one desires to incorporate therein the life of one's quotidian décor [*décor quotidien*], one should desire that it remain a lie, on the pain of becoming something utilitarian, sad like a factory.[150]

Debussy's insistence that the art of music should be contrasted to "quotidian décor" implies that it should in fact create a new, less quotidian décor. Just as the *Prélude*, that day in 1891 when Mallarmé first heard it, transcended the shoddy furnishings of Debussy's apartment with its own poetic "décor," so too the loftiest musical ideal, that of "old Bach," mocks the drabness of harmonic formulas. "Quotidian décor" can refer not only to one's living space but also to functional harmony, whose décor is finally "sad like a factory." By way of contrast, Debussy depicts Bach's "sonorities" not as functional harmonies – indeed, he begins the letter by excoriating the Conservatoire method which teaches "all musicians…to harmonize in the same manner" – but rather as horizontal bands of lines, or "curves." Noting that these curves are described as either "parallel or contrary" in their relationship to each another, we come to understand that Debussy's own music criticism here offers a visual representation of counterpoint. Just as importantly, the visuality of the passage is not arrested within that simple metaphor. Debussy also pictures for the reader what it might be like to view, up close, one of Bach's notebooks, in which these musical "curves" could be seen in the compositional

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150 "Le vieux Bach, qui contient toute la musique, se moquait, croyez-le bien, des formules harmoniques. Il leur préférait le jeu libre de sonorités, dont les courbes parallèles ou contrariées, préparaient l'épanouissement inespéré qui orne d'impérissable beauté le moindre de ses innombrables cahiers. C'est l'époque où fleurissait 'l'adorable arabesque,' et la musique participait ainsi à des lois de beauté inscrites dans le mouvement total de la nature...L'art est le plus beau des mensonges. Et quoiqu'on essaie d'y incorporer la vie dans son décor quotidien, il faut désirer qu'il reste un mensonge, sous peine de devenir une chose utilitaire, triste comme une usine." Letter published in *Journal Musica* in 1902: Claude Debussy, *Correspondance*, ed. Denis Herlin and François Lesure, 690.

traces of Bach's hand, literally the visual arabesques that "ornament," in Debussy's words, the old manuscript paper.

A year earlier, in a 1901 music review for *La Revue Blanche*, Debussy already defined these terms, once again in reference to Bach:

> In the music of Bach, it isn't the character of the melody that moves us, it is its curve [*courbe*]…There one finds the musical arabesque almost intact, or rather this principle of ornament that is the basis for all the modes of art. (The word ornament has nothing to do here with the meaning it has been given in grammars of music.)[151]

Debussy's "curve" is an ornamental principle that has nothing to do with musical ornamentation. Rather, it points to a more abstract, decorative ideal. Ornament is understood as décor, with its free play of musical objects (curves), rather than as a mere surface dressing for formal structure and its complementary harmonic function. As such, it becomes the basis of all "modes of art," not solely of music.

If we are going to reconsider décor as something that inheres both in historical spaces and in musical works, as in Debussy's recollection of Mallarmé's visit to hear the *Prélude*, we should think about its significance in its own time. Symons' foregoing observation that Mallarmé would enter a conversation "the way one enters a scene," allows us to reframe, and thus begin to reconstruct, the significance of Debussy's socio-historical situatedness, or décor, as both the context and content of his works. In order to theorize the reciprocity between historical spaces (Debussy's apartment) and the space of musical works (the *Prélude*) in our conception of décor, we might turn to Mallarméan poetics, not least because of its central importance to Debussy's milieu.

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[151] "Dans la musique de Bach, ce n'est pas le caractère de la mélodie qui émeut, c'est sa courbe…On y retrouve preque intacte cette arabesque musicale ou plutôt ce principe de l'ornement qui est à la base de tous les modes d'art. (Le mot ornement n'a rien à voir ici avec la signification qu'on lui donne dans les grammaires musicales)."

There are few more succinct statements of Mallarméan poetics than a phrase he himself wrote in an 1864 letter to the Symbolist poet, Henri Cazalis. In this now well-known missive, the young Mallarmé offers an expression of his emerging (Symbolist) poetic ideal. "To paint," Mallarmé says, "not the thing, but the effect that it produces." "Verse should not be composed of words; but of intentions, and all words," he further insists "should be effaced before sensation."[152] The primacy of sensation in Mallarmé's aesthetic vision surpasses the area of lexical choice (word choice) to encompass non-verbal "intentions." In other words, as poet, Mallarmé uses words not primarily for their sense, or the meaning one might obtain from them in the course of a silent reading, but rather for their aural quality, for the sonic qualities with which the words, as sonorities that reach the listener's senses, reverberate in the space of poetic recitation. By this account, the aural effect of the recitation of a poem is, for Mallarmé, the very "sensation" to which a poem gives rise, at its most fundamental level. The accompanying images and narratives to which the sensations give rise are of secondary importance. The traditional narrative "program" is secondary, and may be ambiguous.

Mallarmé's idea that sonic sensations of words are the fundamental units of poetry, along with the "unspeakable" (because literally wordless) intentions behind them, corresponds to the Debussyian ideal in music. According to this model, both writing poetry and composing musical works are the same: they can be defined as the intentional act of arranging a succession of sonorities so as to evoke sensations. This suite of sensations, as Mallarmé suggest to Debussy in 1891, is not merely represented by the musical work but is ultimately "prolonged" by it.

The idea of prolongation allows us to zoom out from the limited view afforded by score analysis and back out onto the broader notion of décor as a spatial metaphor that represents the basic ontology of the musical work, its very "program" as music. Thus, we should understand prolongation

[152] "Peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit. Le vers ne doit pas, là, se composer de mots; mais d'intentions, et toutes les paroles s'effacer devant la sensation."

from the Mallarméan point of view not as a process focused on harmonic duration, or the linear progression of a narrative program, but rather on the inherently spatial and sensual characteristics of music: the décor each piece of music creates as it resounds through space and touches our senses. This is precisely the quality of "situatedness" that, in line with Mallarmé's initial reaction to the *Prélude*, defines not only the correspondence between Debussy's music and his poem, but also their mutual situatedness (on that occasion) in Debussy's apartment.

Décor, in this sense, implies a specific kind of ontology, for it presupposes a type of "work" that exists not only against the grain of individuated objects of art, by the fact of their co-location in space – so that it cannot be pigeonholed into the divisive logic of "music" *versus* "poetry" *versus* "painting" – but also works against the grain of the image of an artist as an individual, separated from other artists in other disciplines. In the place of this divisive logic, the Debussyan notion of décor posits an image of artistry that is inherently collaborative and decidedly fraternal. It makes historical sense, therefore, that those most affected by Mallarmé's poetics during the "*années symbolistes*" belonged to the homosocial circle that attended his ritualized *mardis*, including Debussy. The works of art produced by this milieu at the time, including, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, are prolongations of their shared décor.

Chapter 3:

The Den of Antiquity, or On the Performance of Décor in the Bilitis Tableaux

> In these times where things, whose latent melancholy life was evoked by the Latin poet, are largely associated by modern literary descriptions with the History of Humanity, why not write a memoir of things among which a human existence has been spent?[153]
>
> Edmond de Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste*

Edmond de Goncourt opens his 1881 book, *La Maison d'un artiste* [*House of an Artist*] with the above epithet, repeated here (in my translation) in order to highlight the two central tenets of Edmond's thinking at the time. First, the idea that decorative objects contain a latent form of life, which is reciprocal with human sociability; and second, the idea that this idea itself stems from antiquity. The relationship between decorative objects, sociability, and antiquity (or antiques) is one that defines the Symbolist milieu during the period that Debussy belonged to it in the 1890s.[154] But the roots of this relationship stretch back for at least a generation. In this chapter, we will trace these roots and bring them to bear on a new interpretation of a performance of Debussy's incidental music for a series of talbeaux vivants based on his friend Pierre Louÿs' *Chanons de Bilitis* poems, demonstrating, in the process, not only that Debussy and Louÿs considered their collaboration as the production of a décor,

[153] "En ce temps où les choses, dont le poète latin a signalé la mélancolique vie latente, sont associées si largement par la description littéraire moderne à l'Historie de l'Humanité, pourquoi n'écrirait-on pas les mémoires des choses au milieu desquelles s'est écoulée une existence d'homme?" Edmond de Goncourt, *La Maison d'un Artiste, Tome I* (Paris: G. Charpentier, Éditeur, 1881), accessed March 25, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5432104d.texteImage#. All translations in this chapter, unless otherwise indicated, are by me.

[154] For more on Debussy and Symbolism, see: Stefan Jarociński, *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism* London: Eulenberg Books, 1976). François Lesure, *Claude Debussy avant Pelléas, ou les années symbolistes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1993).

but that thinking of Debussy's music as décor in this case yields valuable analytical insights about the ontology of this particular performance of the work.

The first part of this chapter outlines basic facts about the performance in question, introduces the key themes of *amitié* (friendship) and antiquity through the lens of which the Bilitis performance will be interpreted, and offers a timely intervention regarding the problem of the male gaze that any confrontation with the Bilitis material is bound to encounter, and especially so in its late 19th century French context. Following this introductory work, the chapter considers the production and reception of the Bilitis tableaux on a more granular historical level, interrogates the *amitié* between Debussy and Louÿs by scrutinizing their correspondence, and offers a fleshed out analysis of the role of antiquity and décor at the *fin de siècle* as points of reference for the Bilitis tableaux vivants by contemplating artistic representations from the period that are specifically oriented around new views of antique statuary. Finally, I offer a meditation of the uses of antiquity in France from the foundational perspective of the Goncourt brothers and consider how the 19th century mania for collecting antiques was intimately related to the production of modern styles of décor.

A final disclaimer is in order about musical ontology. Above, I write that I am interested in the "performance of the work" rather than simply the work (itself). I do so because there is a conspicuous slippage between the work and its performance in the case of the Bilitis tableaux, due mainly to the incomplete state of the manuscript. It has often been assumed that the work as a whole was only performed once, at its premiere, and that subsequent reconstructions are not able to recreate the work in its totality. In this chapter, however, I argue that the manuscript's incompleteness actually points to its very indeterminacy as a closed off piece of (absolute) music, and that we should therefore seriously consider the possibility that Debussy never completed the score but planned to partly improvised it in performance, a thesis for which there is plenty of historical evidence that we will consider in the rest of the chapter. In light of this thesis, I argue for the ontological status of the 1901

Bilitis performance as a "décor" that reimagined antiquity for contemporary audiences of its day rather than as the presentation of a formally closed musical work in the more traditional 19th century sense. In this chapter, in other words, it is the performance of the work, in conjunction with its setting, attendant choreography, the written correspondence between Debussy and Louÿs leading up to the event, contemporary reproductions of antique statuary, 19th century collecting practices, and even its promotion in the press, rather than the work itself, that situates Debussy's music within a "décor." For this reason, my analysis is not focused on a score based analysis of the work, as in the previous chapters, but rather in an ontological reconsideration of its historical situatedness.

Because the manuscript offers important material clues about the performance itself, we start with a discussion of the current state of the manuscript and its provenance, which is recounted in a number of sources. The first published edition of the work, that of Belgian musicologist and composer Arthur Hoérée in 1971, lays out the basic narrative:

> The manuscript was presumed lost. All of a sudden, Léon Vallas, Debussy's reputable biographer, received instrumental parts of short pieces for two flutes, two harps, and celesta accompanied by recited and mimed poems by Pierre Louÿs from Lily Texier, the composer's first wife…these separate parts, acquired by the Bibliothèque Nationale, have permitted the creation of the score of the present edition. The celeste part has unfortunately not come down to us.[155]

Yet was the Bilitis tableaux score ever complete, even in its own time? The idea that there must have been a celeste part that has since disappeared is the most salient feature of the standard account that we must contend with. David Grayson, for example, at least considers the possibility that Debussy might have improvised the celeste part for the *Journal* event, even though he is ultimately dismissive of the idea:

> Prior to the performance, Debussy promised to give Louÿs "the slight and hasty manuscript of the music for the Chansons de Bilitis." This gesture may explain the disappearance of the score and consequently the absence of the celesta part, assuming

[155] Claude Debussy, *Les Chansons de Bilitis: Musique de scène de Claude Debussy devant accompagner la. recitation de douze poèmes de Pierre Louÿs pour récitant, deux flutes, deux harpes et celesta, réalisation de la partie de célesta par Arthur Hoérée* (Paris: Jobert, 1971), introduction. (My translation.)

> Debussy (or somebody else) played this part from the score. In another letter dealing with preparations for the performance, Debussy asked Louÿs to remind the concert organizers at Le Journal that they still needed to hire the instrumentalists: two flutes, two harps, and a Mustel celesta. By naming the manufacturer of the celesta, he may have been referring to the rental of the instrument rather than the hiring of the player, but even if he intended to engage a celesta player, he might not have found one. Debussy was not listed in the review as being in the audience, though his wife was…but this is hardly conclusive evidence that he was playing the celesta.[156]

Yet more conclusive evidence does exist. Léon Vallas himself. He states outright, without a shadow of suspicion, that Debussy not only played the celeste on the evening of the first performance but that, indeed, he improvised the part. Where is his testimony to be found? On the title page of the manuscript itself, on which he writes: "Score established according to the parts (some in Debussy's hand) that were given to me by the first wife, Lily Debussy. The celeste part was obviously ["*évidemment*"] improvised at the instrument by Debussy himself. There are only two brief initial passages on pages 11 and 17."[157] The statement continues in a noticeably more ragged version of the same hand, with darker ink: "It was completed in April of 1954 by Pierre Boulez for a performance at the Marigny Theater (April 10, 1954)." Below this is a faded signature by Vallas. Beneath the signature is a crossed out address, followed by another address, not crossed out: "~~21, quai Voltaire Paris~~" then "286, rue Vendôme – Lyon." Apparently, Vallas wrote the initial part of the statement at an earlier moment, perhaps at the time he handed over the manuscript to the BnF. He then added the later statement about Boulez after he had moved to Lyon later in life (which gave him cause to cross out his former Paris address). Léon Vallas died in Lyon, in 1956, two years after Boulez "reconstituted" the *Bilitis* score.

What is most remarkable about this account is not that Vallas admits that Debussy most probably improvised the celeste part in 1901, it is that, even after expressing this opinion, he should

[156] David Grayson, "Bilitis and Tanagra: afternoons with nude women," 131.
[157] I made a detailed English translation from a copy of the manuscript.

still feel the need to write, and on the very same page, that Boulez had "completed" the score. If the score was never complete in the first place, Debussy having improvised the celeste part in performance, than how can it be completed? As a musicologist active in the first half of the 20th century, Vallas exhibits the familiar disciplinary prejudice towards score based ontologies of the musical work. This means that even if Debussy never came around to finishing the score, or even intentionally decided to improvise his part, someone else must nevertheless write out the part on his behalf in order for the work to be considered complete.

What has been the consequence for our own contemporary understanding of the Bilitis incidental music of the traditional view that has been reinforced by multiple modern editions that "complete" the work by writing out a celeste part? Surely it has been to discredit the possibility that it the work was only partially written out by design, so as to be more responsive to the tableaux vivants and poetic recitation which it was intended to accompany. From the celeste, Debussy could cue the ensemble according to the speed of the poetic recitation, and thus more closely adhere to the transitions between tableaux, the pace of which would not have been possible to determine precisely beforehand. We know from the Debussy-Louÿs correspondence, which we will look at in this chapter, that the music came last: the performance of the tableaux vivants was already booked before Louÿs ever reached out to Debussy. In this chapter, I seriously reconsider the possibility that Debussy not only improvised the celeste part in during the 1901 performance, but that this performance should make us reconsider the ontology of the work in light of a specifically *fin-de-siècle* French taste for antique décor.

The figureheads of this taste were the *frères* Goncourt, with reference to whom this chapter opens. Following the death of his brother Jules, in 1870, Edmond Goncourt continued to inhabit the décor of their home in the Parisian suburb of Auteuil, famous for housing their spectacular collection of decorative objects. Indeed, the very décor of their Auteuil home forms the subject of *La Maison*

d'un artiste (1881) which, as discussed in Chapter 2, treats one room per chapter in order to chronicle the brothers' lifelong penchant for collecting antiques. To be clear, Edmond's "memoir" both offers a descriptive catalogue of the historical objects which they collected and describes the interior décor within which these antiques were rehabilitated.

Published just as the Third Republic emerged from the impasse that had made France politically instable throughout the 1870s, *La Maison d'un artiste* became Edmond's oblique form of protest against the new republican milieu, whose artistic products could evidently not live up to the antique (aristocratic) society of his (and his brother's) *ancien régime* antiques. The Goncourts' challenge to contemporary artists did not go unheeded. Their advocacy for a new art based on a decorative ontology of antiques – which become *objets d'art* only by virtue of becoming part of a décor – became second nature to artists of Debussy's generation, whose own penchant for antiques was couched within the emerging style of Art Nouveau.

It was during this period, roughly the 1890s, that Debussy discovered his own individual voice as a composer (a process further discussed in Chapter 1); but it was also during this period that he began to network in earnest with other young artists who belonged to the Symbolist milieu; not least among them Pierre Louÿs, with whom he shared a lifelong friendship of great intimacy.[158] Louÿs became well-known in the 1890s for his signature brand of decadent, erotic literature almost invariably set in antiquity. In 1897, Debussy set three of Louÿs' poems from the collection, *Les Chansons de Bilitis* (1894). As a musical rendering of antiquity, *Trois chansons de Bilitis* draws on the eroticizing gaze of Louÿs and his readers, for whom it traces, with an anthropological prurience, the sexual maturation of its eponymous, Hellenic-era courtesan.[159]

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[158] For a closer look at friendship (*amitié*) among Louÿs' milieu, including Debussy, see: Gordon Millan, *Pierre Louÿs: Ou, le Culte de l'amitié* (Aix-en-Provence: Pandora, 1979).

[159] On the use of antique tropes in Louÿs' oeuvre, see: Jean-Paul Goujon, "Pierre Louÿs: du pastiche à la parodie," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 112, no. 1 (2012): 37–50.

In early 1901, however, Louÿs tasked Debussy with yet another musical iteration of this antique theme. As evinced by their lively correspondence around that time (which we take a closer look at below), he all but coaxed the composer into doing him the favor of writing incidental music for a performance that involved a series of tableaux vivants ("living pictures" in which models pose as antique sculptural groups) that were supposed to illustrate the simultaneous recitation of Louÿs' *Bilitis* poems. Debussy's music, which forms the focal point of the present chapter, not only accompanied the choreography of the models who represented scenes from the Bilitis story, as we will see, in long-held (and barely-dressed) antique poses, it also provided a melodramatic envelope for the poetic recitation. In this chapter, I demonstrate the ways in which the lively late 19th-century rehabilitation of antiquity (and antiques), of the kind encouraged by the Goncourts (among others) and later taken up by Debussy's milieu, informs the essentially decorative ontology of music in evidence in the *Bilitis* tableaux.

Accordingly, the present chapter contextualizes and reconsiders the sole performance of this incidental music during Debussy's lifetime (and until 1954, when it was unearthed by Boulez) in light of the decorative ontology of antiques that defines the period. Writing of Debussy's *Trois Chansons de Bilitis* (1897), Sylveline Bourion frames them within the historical context of she terms the "antique-o-mania [*anticomanie*] of the arts in the XIXth century."[160] This is the context within which I in turn contextualize the Bilitis tableaux, a work which draws on even more representational aspects of antiquity, since it includes (besides music) recitation and choreography. Moreover this singular performance was itself, as we consider below, intended to be merely an audition for a projected run at the Variétés theater.

[160] Sylveline Bourion, "1897. Les Chansons de Bilitis, un érotisme antiquisant fin de siècle," in *Nouvelle histoire de la musique en France (1870-1950)*, under the direction of the group "Musique en France aux XIXe et XXe siècles : discours et idéologies," uploaded on September 13, 2022, https://emf.oicrm.org/nhmf-1897/.

By way of delimiting a production/reception context for the work, instead of focusing on a particular node of sociability within Debussy's milieu – as I did in Chapters 1 (Bailly's circle) and 2 (Mallarmé's *mardis*) – I take an oblique approach with the Bilitis tableaux by considering it in relation to an adjacent *fin-de-siècle* homosocial institution, namely: *l'amitié*, the French word for "friendship" (whose Latinate etymology already shades into the amorous). Along with continuing to think through the dynamics of male homosocial pairings during the period (the Goncourt brothers, Debussy and Mallarmé, and now Debussy and Louÿs) as we have done throughout the dissertation, in this chapter we trace how the *Bilitis* tableaux represented, for its own time, an antique décor that stages female homosexuality, or as it was then often referred to, *le saphisme*, for public consumption. Before jumping into the work at hand, therefore, it is important to deal with the inevitably troubling aspects of the themes that will be dealt with in the remainder of the chapter, in particular the eroticization of female homosexuality for male consumption.

Representations of lesbian or "sapphic" relationships were a regular feature of 19th century French cultural life. As a number of scholars have pointed out, sapphic tropes were used by French writers and artists for an astounding variety of reasons. As Lowry Gene Martin puts it, "the explosion of Sapphic representation [in late 19th century France]…became a type of shorthand to discuss everything from declining natality to changing gender roles, from military fears to urban space to the nature of artistic production."[161] Although the present chapter is mainly concerned with the last mentioned of these uses, it is nevertheless important to keep in mind that the significance of the sapphic trope in France during Debussy's lifetime was applied in an astounding variety of ways, for an equally multifarious range of reasons. It is equally important to acknowledge at the outset of this chapter, therefore, that one of the main reasons was the erotic titillation of a largely male

[161] Lowry Gene Martin, "Desire, Fantasy, and the Writing of Lesbos-sur-Seine, 1880-1939" (PhD diss., UC Berkeley, 2010).

readership/audience. This deeply problematic aspect of 19th century French cultural life is quite obviously in evidence in the Bilitis tableaux performance, whose basic selling point (as judging both by Louÿs' correspondence and also the review published by the very journal that sponsored the event) was the nude or barely-clad models that in fact created the tableaux vivants by evoking an antique décor with their statuesque bodies.

In her magisterial exposition of the topic, *Sapphic Fathers: Discourses of Same-Sex Desire From Nineteenth-Century France*, Gretchen Schultz poses the problem in a way that reveals the peculiarity and ubiquity of the French male obsession with the sapphic trope in literature:

> This study asks why lesbian literature, written nearly exclusively by men, proliferated in France during this time, and what impact it might have had on the lives and self-perceptions of women motivated by desire for other women and, more broadly, on the culture of its stereotypes. The sheer quantity of French writing about female homosexuality eclipses any comparable corpus in English, evincing France's profound fascination with the subject. Writers of all genres devised plots, diagnosed symptoms, detailed traits, described milieus, and imagined couples and couplings of women. Given the weight of those accumulated images, women who engaged in same-sex practices became a familiar type, begging the questions: what stake did French male writers have in female homoeroticism, and what kind of heritage did these sapphic fathers bequeath to the subsequent generations of readers?

Although the scope of this chapter does not permit a thorough response to the important questions raised by Schultz (and to which she otherwise responds at length in her book), it would be imprudent, to say the least, not to draw on her work and the work of other scholars who have, in the past 30 years or so, done a marvelous job shedding light on the historical origins and development of the sapphic trope up through Debussy's time. Before delving into the Bilitis tableaux, therefore, and zooming in on Debussy's particular milieu, it would behoove us to review some of the key points raised by this illuminating scholarly literature.

In terms of periodicity, it is commonly acknowledged that, as Schultz puts it, "[t]he phenomenon of male interest in female homosexuality, which has been referred to as male lesbianism,

was neither new to the nineteenth century nor particular to France."[162] Nevertheless, "French interest in female homoeroticism became more noticeable towards the end of the eighteenth century, and this fixation grew in intensity as the nineteenth century dawned and moved forward."[163] Diderot is a canonic figure in this trajectory, both because his *Encyclopédie* (1751) included an entry for "*tribade*," an alternate French word for lesbian, but even more importantly because his novel *La Religieuse* (1792), with its sadomasochistic representation of nuns, became a canonic reference point for later sapphic literature.[164]

During the romantic period French novels depicting same sex love became noticeably more "interested in gender indetermination." Balzac's *Sarrasine* (1830) and Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835) are two landmarks of this movement, the former focused on the love of a young male sculptor named Sarrasine for Zambinella, an opera singer who he takes for a woman but is in fact a castrato, and the latter which sees both D'Albert and his mistress Rosette fall in love with Théadore, who is in fact the cross-dressing eponymous protagonist of the novel. Notably, these precedents go beyond purely sapphic themes to encompass trans-identity, which remains an adjacent preoccupation during the late 19th century.[165]

It was specifically in the later 19th century that sapphic literature took on both the stereotypical character and the sheer ubiquity that it would henceforth posses in France and around the world. Schultz justifies her own historical scope by pointing to this shift in the literature as well as its dependence on what had clearly by then become a self-aware literary tradition:

> I start with poetic production at mid-century [19th century], not because it marks the first apparition of literary sapphism in France, but because it inaugurates a break form earlier representations and marks the germination of the vogue. The bulk of these

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[162] Schultz, 11.
[163] Ibid. 12.
[164] Ibid. (12)
[165] For a thorough introduction to the topic of trans-identity in French literature during this period (and beyond), see: Carl J. Gomolka, "Hushed bodies, screaming narratives: the construction of trans-identity in 19th- and 20th-century French literature," Romanica Silesiana 8/1 (2013): 115-128.

> representations are to be found in the novels of the late nineteenth century, commercial best-sellers as well as loftier works. [These works]…drew on the previous fictions dating back at least to Denis Diderot's *La Religieuse*. Sapphic novels such as his were routinely referenced by later authors seeking to situate their work in a tradition.

One of these "loftier works" was Pierre Louÿs' poetry collection, *Chansons de Bilitis* (1894), whose immediate success launched his career as an author, and subsequently defined the tenor of his oeuvre, as is evident in his follow up novel, *Aphrodite* (1896). Both are characterized by scenes of lesbian eroticism set in antiquity. Louÿs' work fits perfectly into Schultz's estimation that late 19th century sapphic works tended to knowingly invoke sapphism as a literary tradition. Louÿs went so far as to claim in the introduction to his *Chansons de Bilitis*, that the work was in fact his translation of recently rediscovered poems by one of Sappho's students from antiquity. Indeed, as Nicole Albert reminds us, Sappho, who was born in Lesbos in the 7th century B.C., started a "famous school where she taught music and poetry."[166] According to the Sappho myth, which Albert traces through *fin de siècle* French literature, "[t]hat's how and where she would have emerged as a figure of ill repute for having sexual intercourse with her young female pupils."[167] Albert reminds us that "[t]hese few biographical facts have fed a controversy that was never more vivid than in the second half of the 19th century and after."[168] One of the key texts in this latter day development of the Sappho myth was Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857), based on which we can "see the forthcoming evolution of Sappho at the end of the 19th century: either a prostitute or a lesbian, sometimes both, but sexualized in all cases."[169] Thus, Louÿs' eroticization of Bilitis is far from an isolated instance of literary prurience coupled with sapphic themes in the French literature of Debussy's time.

Instead of surveying the long tradition of French sapphic eroticism, as introduced above, this chapter focuses on one particular instance, namely Debussy's and Louÿs' *Bilitis* tableaux, staged in

166 Nicole Albert, Sappho Mythified, 88.
167 Albert, 88.
168 Ibid.
169 Albert, 89.

1901, and in particular on its ontology as a musical performance in which is reflected both something of the poet and composer's *amitié* an also contemporary French tropes related to antique décor on which they both drew for their collaborative work. The troubling and frankly pornographic elements of the work will be confronted with the background understanding that there is an entire literature that has already done much to deconstruct these clichés and their role in French society at the time. This will allow us to interrogate the role of Debussy's music in the performance, which has hitherto received noticeably less attention compared to the literary trope it sets, and by whose programmatic associations it instantiates an antique décor of a stereotypically late 19th century French kind.

Turning to the performance at hand, it would be useful to situate it with some basic facts. The premiere of the *Bilitis* tableaux took place on February 7, 1901 in the *Salle des Fêtes* (or banquet hall) of the offices of *Le Journal*, the Parisian daily that both sponsored and covered the event.[170] Its own coverage is our primary source of reception. Much of the historical context laid out in this chapter concerns the twinned themes of antiquity (or antiques) and friendship (*amitié*). For example, in their own review of the *Bilitis* performance, as we will have chance to observe, *Le Journal* drew on public knowledge about Debussy and Louÿs as friends who belonged to the same avant-garde (Symbolist) milieu. From the vantage point of 1901, the movement had come to characterize the refined artistic circles of the 1890s, with their echoes of aristocratic forms of sociability (and décor) from the Rococo era, *à la Goncourt*, updated for an emergent Art Nouveau façade (of which more will be said at the end of the chapter). Symbolism had been particularly prominent among what the critic Remy de Gourmont had, just in 1900, termed "*les petits revues*."[171] In light of these *fin de siècle* artistic currents, what were the particular characteristics of Debussy's and Louÿs' *amitié* that *Le Journal* wished to associate itself with when it commissioned the performance?

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[170] "Le Journal," Gallica, February 8, 1901, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7628708m.

[171] Remy de Gourmont, *Les Petites Revues : Essai de Bibliographie* (Paris: Librairie du Mercure de France, 1900), https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k96898676.

In order to present chapter to draw on Edmond's idea of "things among which a human existence has been spent." The virtue of this approach is that it allows us to consider their *amitié* as itself a product of the very *objet d'art* that it produced (the *Bilitis* tableaux). But the performance of the tableaux was not the first artistic object based on the Bilitis theme, and not even the first time that the composer and poet collaborated, and thus created occasions for mutual socializing, based on the sapphic trope. Three of Louÿs' *Chansons de Bilitis* poems from the collection that forms the basis of the 1901 performance were already set to music by Debussy as a song cycle as the *Trois Chansons de Bilitis* (1897). The relationality between object of art and *amitié* is especially heightened in this case because the first edition of the *Bilitis* poems (1894, though dated 1895) was published by Bailly's *Librairie de l'Art independent*, which was yet another important node of sociability for Debussy (see: Chapter 1).

The trope of antiquity was another major aspect of the work. Louÿs played a ruse on the public. Specifically, he presented the poems as authentic antiques rather than originals. The ruse begins with the title itself (which translates to *The Songs of Bilitis*) asserted as historical fact rather than fiction. Thus the "songs" that make up the collection, so Louÿs claims in the introduction, were actually written by a historical Bilitis, a courtesan who lived in the time of Sappho.

The ruse was elaborate. Louÿs claimed to have translated the poems from the original Archaic Greek inscriptions that were discovered by a German archeologist named J. G. Heim, who supposedly uncovered Bilitis' tomb in the Eastern Mediterranean, somewhere on the island of Cyprus (Sappho had famously lived on the nearby island of Lesbos). Bilitis' tomb was built underground – "according to the Phoenician custom," Louÿs adds ["*selon la coutume phénicienne*"] thus alluding to her cultural hybridity between a (Western) Hellenic culture and an (Eastern) Phoenician one – and was thereby preserved from tomb raiders (other than German archeologists). The original edition of *Les Chansons de Bilitis* was itself intended to assume the rarity of an artefact – a specialty of Bailly's artisanal approach

to publication. The recto side of the title page reveals that only 500 copies of the work were published by Bailly's *Librairie* and that, moreover, as is typeset below this information: "This edition will never be reprinted" ["*Cette édition ne sera jamais réimprimée*"]. From its inception, therefore, the *Bilitis* collection not only claimed to be a work belonging to antiquity, but was itself intended to become a collectible antique.[172] This ruse, in other words, was enabled by Louÿs' *amitié* with the publisher, Bailly, who, along with the homosocial circle that gathered around him, a group that included Debussy, was in on the joke played on the public.

Debussy did not intend the *Bilitis* tableaux music for posterity. Tellingly, only parts survive – parts that Lily Texier, his wife at the time, eventually handed over to Manuel Vallas, his early biographer, who in turn handed it over to the Bibliothèque nationale de France (where it fortuitously landed, as we will later see, into the hands of Pierre Boulez). Scored for two flutes, two harps, and celeste, the piece has long been considered incomplete, or at least handed down in an incomplete state, because the celeste part has been presumed to be missing. As we will see, his correspondence with Louÿs in the days running up to the performance reveal Debussy's reticence and lack of initiative in regard to Louÿs' project. But that does not indicate any ill will toward Louÿs; quite the contrary, it shows that the composer regarded Louÿs highly enough to actually want to finish the project (a precarious proposition with Debussy throughout the 1890s). Nevertheless, it appears as though Debussy might not have actually completed the celeste part.

Since the Variétés run never materialized, and since (as we will see) the *Journal* performance was supposed to be just a test run for that, not to mention a source of publicity, Debussy had no reason to finish the celeste part: since presumably no one else would play it. Thus, he may have decided to only fully write out the flute and harp parts, and leave the celeste (his part) largely blank (besides a

[172] Pierre Louÿs, *Les Chansons de Bilitis: Traduites du grec pour la premiere fois* (Paris: Librairie de l'Art indépendant, 1895), accessed March 25, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k15236176.

few indications of texture here and there). Such a decision would have allowed him the flexibility to respond in real time to the recitation and the accompanying succession of tableaux vivants. Though the vocal part is strictly recited (not written out to be sung) it was nevertheless accompanied by Debussy's music, a fact we know from *Le Journal's* own review (of which more below). On the occasion of its single performance during Debussy's lifetime (and well past), therefore, the *Biltis musique de scène* served as a kind of makeshift scenic décor, intended to provide programmatic continuity for a performance that required the coordination of several simultaneous extramusical elements whose tempos were unforeseen, and whose accompaniment would therefore have to, at some level, respond to them in *in situ*.

Choreographic considerations take precedence in this programmatic arrangement, because tableaux vivants are choreographed as a series of long-held poses, rather than the smooth, virtuosic passagework between poses characteristic of classical ballet. Accordingly, music cannot be tailored for tableaux vivants the same way that it can structure ballet choreography. That is because rhythm is simply measured in uninterrupted, sculptural continuity, rather than segments of time that can be subdivided into a (pre)determined number of measures. Debussy's solution, I argue, was to make the music flexible enough – by allowing himself the liberty to expand or contract the celeste part *in situ* – to follow the sculptural poses that it was meant to frame, and the recitation it was meant to illustrate. As in a film, Debussy's music provides continuity between parts of the whole, but it is not substantial enough to stand on its own – nor was intended to be. The question remains: how, then, might we approach an analysis of this singular performance, given its multifarious, pluridisciplinary ontology?

The most useful place to start is *Le Journal's* own review which, the *Journal* being a daily, was published the day after the event itself, in the February 8 (1901) issue.[173] *Journal's* review not only

[173] "Le Journal," Gallica, February 8, 1901, accessed March, 25, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7628708m.

evokes the complex nature of the performance, as just outlined, but it also offers a framework within which to understand the performance as a whole (social event). The music, as we will see, is framed in *Le Journal*'s own view by its sociability – both on and off stage. Indeed, the event is identified from the very start of the review as a "private soiree," rather than a concert. The review subsequently demonstrates that the music and its composer were both quite secondary. In fact, the reviewer spells Debussy's name wrong (consistently) as "de Bussy." (Adding to the confusion, Debussy had for a time actually used that orthography, but had not done so for practically a decade.) Clearly, Debussy was a secondary figure in the social and artistic hierarchy that evening. That would change the very next year, in 1902, with the premiere of *Pelléas et Mélisande*. The reviewer's lack of awareness concerning "de Bussy," we should therefore recall, was due to the fact that, at this historical moment, Debussy was still not yet well known beyond a very particular milieu (as described in Chapters 1 and 2).

This was in stark contrast to Louÿs. Louÿs had been well-known for several years already by that point, from the time of the publication of his erotic novel, set in Hellenic antiquity, impeccably named *Aphrodite* (1896) – a thematic follow-up, in prose, to *Les Chansons de Bilitis* (1894). Luckily, the *Journal* reviewer paid more attention to the music that evening than he did to the musician. We therefore have a description not just of the *Bilitis* tableaux but also the surrounding acts that appeared on the 1901 program. Below, I have translated the entire original review. I have only left out two passages. First, I have left out a brief paragraph that simply lists the movements of the tableaux in order (which is superfluous here, and the list is incomplete besides). Secondly, I have left out the impressively lengthy roll call of audience members' names. Observe how, in discussing the musical performance, the review returns time-and-again to the idea(l) of antiquity:

> In a private soiree that brought together an elite audience last night, in the Salle des Fêtes of the "Journal," a performance of the "Chansons de Bilitis" took place, from our brilliant collaborator Pierre Louys; and let us declare at once that it was one of the most artistic spectacles that has been offered.

The "Chansons de Bilitis," accompanied by tableaux vivants whose direction was minutely overseen by Pierre Louys himself, and by the captivating music of Mr. de Bussy, received an enthusiastic response.

Pierre Louys is no longer one of those who has to be introduced to the literary world. His "Aphrodite" has placed him among the Masters from the start. Those who have subsequently read his songs had the good fortune to savor their recitation, their marvelous recitation by Ms. Milston. A gracious music, ingeniously archaic, composed by Mr. de Bussy, Prix de Rome, accompanied the voice of Ms. Milton and formed with her a lullaby rhythm, whose charm added to the antique beauties of the poem.

The verse, the music, which would have sufficed to keep us charmed, were yet augmented by the most artistic tableaux vivants that has ever been given to us to applaud. The subject was naturally taken from the songs of Bilitis.

[Here the tableaux are (incompletely) listed.]

For the composition of these diverse tableaux, Mss. Loulii, Marcel, Darcy, Lecourt, Marie Chaves, Lucienne Delbeau, etc., have brought the precious contribution of their impeccable forms, and a great effort towards the ideal dreamed up by the poet. In contemplating these marvelous antique poses [*académies*], at times slender, at times powerful, always pure and draped with art, the spectators could believe themselves transported to the great epochs of pure nudity.

Before the curtain was lowered, Ms. Loulli reappeared before us as "Tanagra," after the statue of Gérôme, this while Ms. Milton recited verses by M. Paul Bilhaud that captivated the audience.

At the start of the evening, we applauded Ms. Arlette Dorgère, with her marvelous singing of an elegy by Massenet, accompanied by the delicate artisty of Mr. Petitjean; then Ms. Luz Chavita, in the spice of her Spanish dances, which would have made Saint Anthony damn himself.

In the playful [*coquette*] Salle des Fêtes of the "Journal," numerous audience members were in attendance. At random, we cite:

[Here there is a long list of names.]

At half-past midnight, the performance was finished. And each person wished that it could continue the next day.[174]

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[174] "Dans une soirée privée, qui a réuni une assistance d'élite, hier soir, avait lieu, au "Journal," dans sa Salle des Fêtes, l'audition des "Chansons de Bilitis," de notre brillant collaborateur Pierre Louys; et disons tout de suite que ce fut un des spectacles les plus artistiques qu'il ai été donné de voir.

Les "Chansons de Bilitis," accompagnées de tableaux vivants dont la mise au point avait été. minutieusement surveillée par Pierre Louys lui-même, et d'une musique captivante de M. de Bussy, ont obtenu un succès d'enthousiasme.

Pierre Louys n'est plus de ceux que l'on présente au monde littéraire. Son "Aphrodite" l'a, du premier coup, classé parmi les Maîtres. Ceux qui ont lu ensuite ses chansons ont eu hier l'agrément de les savourer, dites, merveilleusement dites par Mlle Milton. Une musique gracieuse, ingénieusement archaïque, composé par M. de Bussy, prix de Rome, accompagnait la voix de Mlle Milton et formait avec elle un rythme berceur, dont le charme s'ajoutait aux beautés antiques du poème.

Les vers, la musique, qui eussent suffi pour nous retenir sous le charme, s'augmentaient encore de tableaux vivants les plus artistiques qu'il nous ait jamais été donné d'applaudir. Le sujet était, naturellement emprunté aux chansons de Bilitis.

[here each tableaux is listed]

Pour la composition de ces divers tableaux, Mlles Loulli, Marcel, Darcy, Lecourt, Marie Chaves, Lucienne Delbeau, etc., ont apporté le précieux appoint de leurs formes impeccables, et un grand effort vers l'idéal rêvé par le poète. A contempler ces merveilleuses académies, tantôt grêles, tantôt

For the time being, let us put aside the reviewer's reference to an "elite audience," and the supposed "at random" list of audience names. We will focus, instead, on the way in which the program itself is described. Clearly, Louÿs was the principal figure that evening: "our brilliant collaborator," as the review puts it. Indeed, while Louÿs was personally tasked by *Le Journal* with organizing the tableaux performance, he in turn asked Debussy to contribute music to the project. As far as the journal was concerned, therefore, Louÿs was in charge. Yet what was it that he was in charge of?

In the days leading up to the performance, Louÿs wrote to his brother, a French diplomat then stationed in St. Petersburg, to whom he described not only the rehearsals but also the potential for censorship and scandal which could be utilized to garner publicity around the event.

> This week I spent all my afternoons among nude women. It's beautiful. I mean the models who are going to present eleven *Chansons de Bilitis* on stage at the *Journal*, at times with draped veils, at times in kôs dresses, at times without anything at all but their two hands or their position, in three-quarter profile. Mr. Béranger has called the director and menaced him with imprisonment by the Republic if he allows the project to continue. But we are so determined to carry it out that [the soirée will take place] in front of three-hundred people, and without the least changes. Music by Debussy, a lecture by Vanot, recitation by Mss. Moreno or de Sivry. It's bound to create some buzz.[175]

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puissantes, toujours pures et drapées avec art, les spectateurs purent se croire transportés aux. grandes époques de la nudité pure.

Avant le baisser du rideau, Mlle Loulii nous est réapparue en "Tanagra," d'après la statue de. Gérôme, ce pendant que Mlle Milton nous disait des vers de M. Paul Bilhaud, qui ont captivé l'auditoire.

Au début de la soirée, nous avons applaudi Mlle Arlette Dorgère, chantant merveilleusement une élégie de Massenet, avec accompagnement du délicat artiste qu'est M. Petitjean; pous Mlle Luz Chavita, dans la piment de ses danses espagnoles, des danses qui feraient se damner saint Antoine lui-même.

Dans la coquette Salle des Fêtes du "Journal," l'assistance était venue nombreuse. Au hasard, nous citerons: [here the list of names]

A minuit et demi, la représentation était terminée. Et chacun souhaitait qu'elle eût un lendemain." Ibid.

[175] "Je passe cette semaine toutes mes après-midi avec des femmes nues. C'est du joli. Il s'agit de modèles qui vont représenter onze Chansons de Bilitis sur la scène du Journal, tantôt avec des voiles drapés, tantôt en robes kôs, tantôt sans rien du tout que leurs deux mains ou leur position, de trois quarts en arrière. M. Béranger a fait appeler le directeur et l'a menacé de l'envoyer dans les in-pace de la République s'il donnait suite à son projet. Mais nous y donnons si bien suite, que la soirée aura lieu le 4, devant trois cents personnes et sans le moindre changement. Musique de Debussy, conférence de Vanor, récitation par Mlles Moreno ou de Sivry. Cela fera un certain potin." Claude Debussy, Correspondance, ed. Denis Herlin and François Lesure (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 581, footnote 3.

Obviously the personnel were not quite worked out at this stage, nor was the program itself. It should be noted, however, just how late in Louÿs' account Debussy's name comes up. When it does so, it is listed among other collaborators as equals. It is not singled out in any special way. (Which makes sense: at this point, Louÿs' brother was only aware of the composer through Louÿs himself.) The brevity and perfunctoriness with which Debussy is mentioned in the account resembles *Le Journal's* own review, in which Louÿs' name is listed twice before "de Bussy" ever comes up. And while Louÿs receives a proper introduction, as the author(-who-needs-no-introduction) of *Aphrodite*, Debussy could not at the time be associated with any sufficiently known work to merit mention.

What is most striking about *Journal's* music criticism comes down to two qualities. First, Debussy's music is described with constant reference to antiquity and antiques. Second, it always pairs music with its role in accompanying either recitation or choreography. That is to say, the music is never pointed to apart from being described as antique, or placed in a supporting role (or both). The first mention of the music, for example – "the captivating music of Mr. de Bussy" – places it, along with the tableaux, in an accompanying role: music is not only secondary to poetry in this arrangement, but it shares second place with the tableaux vivants. The second mention of music combines the theme of antiquity with that of accompaniment, thus covering all the bases: "A gracious music," it reads, "ingeniously archaic, composed by Mr. de Bussy, Prix de Rome, accompanied the voice of Ms. Milton and formed with her a lullaby rhythm, whose charm added to the antique beauties of the poem." The theme of antiquity is subtly sustained throughout this last sentence. First described outright as "ingeniously archaic," the music's antiquity is further reinforced by the sudden reference to Debussy as a Prix de Rome laureate: which would have signaled to the public Debussy's long residency in Rome, with all the exposure to antiquity and antiques that such a sojourn implies. Furthermore, the Prix de Rome represents yet another kind of antiquity, that of the Académie des Beaux Arts, the centralized French institution that administered the prize, and whose own founding

stems back to the *ancien régime* (as discussed in Chapter 1). Even this brief aside about Debussy's academic triumph, in other words, (by then over a decade old) contains yet another appeal to antiquity.

Lastly, the sentence inserts yet a third reference to antiquity, this time in an adjectival form that speaks of the "antique beauties of the poem," which are further augmented by the combination of Ms. Milton's recitation and Debussy's music. These two "add to the charm" of the poem's "antique beauties," to be exact. So it is by virtue of their shared antique qualities that the poem, the recitation, and the music combine to create more than the sum of their parts. The tableaux vivants are subsequently described as "*académies*," which I translate as "antique poses." By means of choreography and décor, these *académies* are said to have "transported" the audience that evening "to the great epochs of pure nudity," a reference not only to antiquity itself but to the eroticizing gaze associated with antiquity at the *fin de siècle*, and specifically to the literary pornographic oeuvre of Louÿs (who was an avid photographer besides).

We learn through the review that a Ms. Loulli, one of the *Bilitis* tableaux models (the first mentioned) reappeared on stage at the very end of the evening. This time in another antique guise (besides that of the *Bilitis* tableaux). She appeared as *Tanagra*, the 1890 statue by the respected academic painter (and sometime sculptor) Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824 – 1904). Gérôme was particularly well-known for his academic historical paintings of scenes from antiquity. Therefore, even if we do not know what the Bilitis dancers wore and cannot reproduce their antique poses, we may get a glimpse of what they had in mind by taking a look at Gérôme's statue, reproduced below in Figure 6.

This statue, as well as the related series of paintings which depict Tanagra in various guises and poses (much like a series of tableaux vivants), were directly inspired by the archeological (re)discovery of antique statuettes, named after the site in which they were first excavated in the 1870s, in the Greek city of Tanagra. (The story immediately brings to mind Louÿs' own claim that the *Bilitis* poems were unearthed by an archeological expedition.) The Tanagra statuettes were a particularly

important find for 19th-century archeology because traces of the polychromy that originally covered their surface remained. Thus the discovery of this statuary came to furnish the public with the earliest evidence that the antique sculptures whose marble-white aspect European artists had long imitated were actually covered in color in antiquity.[176]

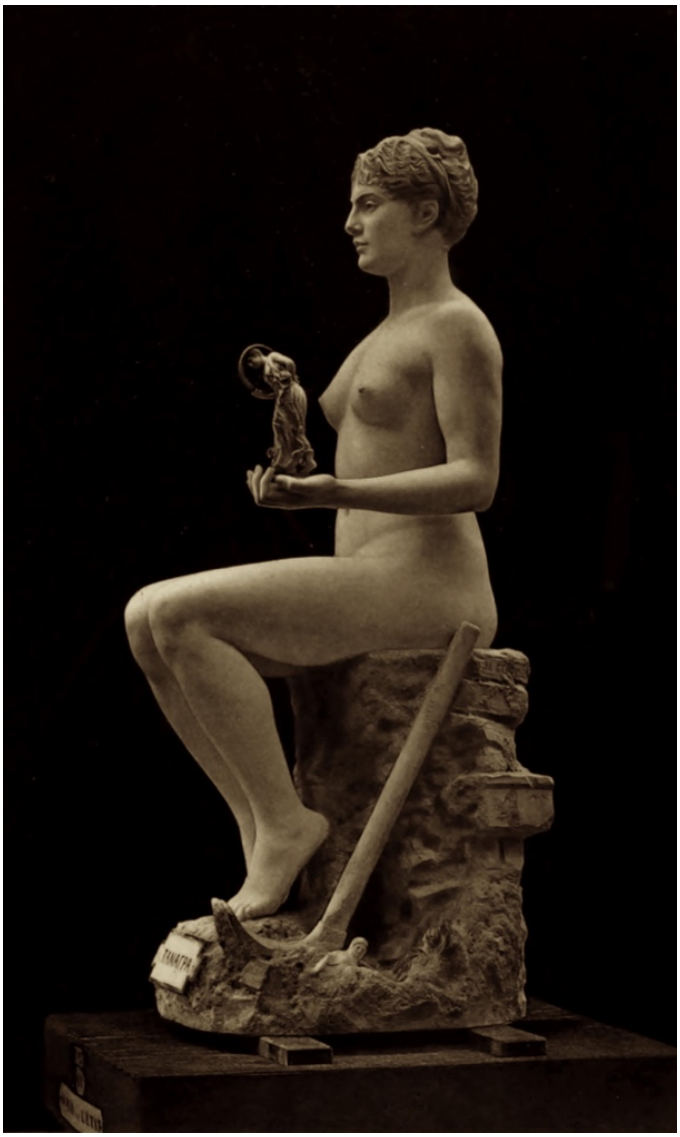

Figure 6: *Tanagra*, 1890, polychromic marble, Jean-Léon Gérôme (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

[176] Gérôme's reputation has undergone a critical reassessment in recent years. See: Scott Allan and Mary G. Morton, *Reconsidering Gérôme* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2010). On this topic, see also: Philippa Kaina, "Resuscitating Gérôme?," *Art History* 35, no. 4 (September 2012): 854–56. For a fascinating material analysis of what may be Gérôme's last work, a statue named *Corinthe*, whose original polychromy was (relatively) recently uncovered from beneath a layer of paint that had been subsequently applied, see: Anne-Solenn Le Hô, "La Corinthe de J.-L. Gérôme, Reconstitution Ou Libre Imitation de La Polychromie Grecque Antique ?," *Technè*, no. 40 (January 2014): 123 – 131.

Figure 7: *Sculpturæ vitam insufflat pictura* [*Painting Breathes Life Into Sculpture*], 1893, oil on canvas, Jean-Léon Gérôme (Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada)

We observe in Gérôme's *Tanagra* that the statue herself nests a Tanagra statuette in the palm of her hand – neither of which, ironically, are painted over. We also observe that one is clothed (in the antique manner) while the other transports us, to borrow *Journal's* own description of the *Bilitis* tableaux, "to the great epochs of pure nudity." But if Gérôme's statue allows us to imagine the extent to which nudity was part of the attraction of the tableaux, Gérôme's 1893 painting, *Sculpturæ vitam insufflat pictura* ("Sculpture Breathes Life Into Painting"), seen in Figure 7, allows us to understand the extent to which that nudity was in turn subordinated to a historically specific, *fin-de-siècle* vision of antiquity that was included within a reimagined décor.

As previously mentioned, this is one of several interrelated paintings, and sculptures, that Gérôme created during the 1890s around the Tanagra topic.[177] Its Latin title already clues us in on its pretention to represent antiquity. What the painting represents, however, is imagery inspired by the late 19th-century reconsideration of antique statues as painted objects. This created a genre distinction problem: was it painting or sculpture? According to French academic tradition it was neither precisely because it attempted to be both. Gérôme's image is thus ultimately a response to what Sarah Lippert characterizes as the 19th-century "bias against polychrome sculpture" and thus a kind of nostalgic "return" of antiquity within a present-day reception. Lippert highlights the importance of the Tanagra discovery within the 19th-century French context, whose consequences for the European image of Graeco-Roman antiques, and specifically antique statuary, were momentous.

> In order to understand these biases, we must briefly consider the history of polychrome in modern France. The earliest major French study on the subject was Antoine Quatremère de Quincy's *Le Jupiter Olympien* (1814) (although it was pre-dated by the Comte de Caylus's treatise *Antiquities of the Egyptians, Etruscans, Greeks and Romans* of 1752). Previously, the art world had been largely ignorant that ancient sculptors used colour to enliven their works (Herder, 2002: 15). Of course, the French had heard the stories of Phidias's *Zeus* at Olympia and the *Athena Parthenos*. However, these statues were no longer extant, making it easy to dismiss their descriptions as inaccurate (Ackerman, 1986a: 18). In 1898, Maxime Collignon published *La Polychromie dans la sculpture grecque*, offering some evidence for, and acceptance of, ancient Greek polychrome as 'fine art', but the most pivotal evidence came forth in the discovery of hundreds of Greek Tanagra statues in Boetia.[178]

Gérôme's fascination with the Tanagra topic thus taps into an important archeological event of Debussy's time, one which offered a new conception of antique statues as a hybrid art form, between sculpture and painting. Gérôme's painting (Fig. 7) responds to this new image of antiquity by questioning the genre distinction not only between painting and sculpture, but also between

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[178] Sarah J. Lippert, "Jean-Léon Gérôme and Polychrome Sculpture: Reconstructing the Artist's Hierarchy. of the Arts," *Dix-Neuf* 18, no. 1 (April 2014): 107.

sculpture and (human) nature, and thus between a *tableau* (or "painting") and a *tableau vivant* ("living painting").

In the bottom left of the composition, a woman is seated on a pedestal, in a meditative, cross-legged pose. Her attention is turned fully toward the little Tangra figurine balanced on her hand: the same figurine that is held by Gérôme's 1890 statue. This time however, both the sitter and her subject (the statuette) are painted. Except that the colors with which the live artist is depicted are so blindingly pale that she appears like a (19th-century) statue. Meanwhile, she contemplates the enlivening effects of color on the real antique statuette before her. She marvels at this little figurine which seems to come alive before her, whom she "breathed life" into (according to the title) with her brush. We see before our antique sculptor, laid out on her work desk, a row of finished Tangra figurines in coordinated poses: acting out a tableau vivant.

Echoing the pose of the artist herself, a remarkably lifelike statue appears in the window, on the right-hand side of the canvas. She too holds in her hand a smaller Tangra figurine. In fact, this entire statue (along with her statuette) is a replica of Gérôme's original: the same one that was represented in living form by Ms. Loulli at the conclusion of the *Journal* program. Compared with Gérôme's original, however, the figure on the windowsill is painted in vivid color, which makes her appear more lifelike than the statue whose form she borrows. That evening in 1901, Ms. Loulli thus simply continued the natural progression from statue to lifelike painting to living painting ("*tableau vivant*"), like in a latter-day Pygmalion tale.

The obvious parallels to (Ovid's) Pygmalion become particularly interesting if we consider the role of female homosociality as depicted in the painting. Not only are the artist and all her figurines women, but so are the background figures conversing near the window. This holds true for the *Bilitis* tableaux as well, in which not only all the models but also the *recitante* herself are women. There is a clear thematic link at work here. Louÿs was particularly well-known for the lesbian content of his

oeuvre. Bilitis herself is said to have known Sappho, and spends a central part of the book with a female companion named Mnasidika, before becoming a courtesan. The novel *Aphrodite*, which brought Louÿs fame, and was subtitled "antique mores," also frankly depicts erotic scenes between women. Perhaps the most well-known real-life consequence of Louÿs' reputation for precisely this kind of content was the direct influence of his works on, and his close friendship with, Natalie Clifford Barney, the wealthy American expat who became an important Parisian socialite lesbian writer in her own right. There are obvious problems with a too simplistic reading of Louÿs as a champion of women's rights or gender equality, but it would not be wrong to declare that the *Chansons de Bilitis* provided a key literary model for the representation of female homosexuality at the end of the 19th century, and long into the 20th. Tama Lea Enkling introduces the historical complexities of Bilitis reception in a way that should resonate not only with the current chapter's themes of antiquity and friendship, but also the emphasis on homosocial artistic circles in Chapters 1 and 2.

> Despite the first-person feminine voice and the lesbian content of these titillating songs, the dedication Louÿs placed on his *Chansons de Bilitis* seems highly ironic since its intended audience was probably not women at all, but a select literary circle of men including Stéphane Mallarmé, André Gide, Jean de Tinan, Remy de Gourmont, and Henri de Régnier who told Louÿs that "Reading Bilitis threw me into erotic transports that I am going to satisfy at the expense of my lawful spouse."…Yet women did read the work, including a wealthy young American named Natalie Clifford Barney, who not only identified herself as one of those "girls of the future society" [to whom the book was dedicated] but declared that her own Sapphic writing was inspired by Bilitis…Why would a feminist like Barney, one of the first women since Sappho to write openly about same sex love, befriend a known lesbian pornographer?[179]

It is ironic that Régnier should express himself thus to Louÿs about his "lawful spouse" since Marie de Régnier, his lawful spouse – daughter of the Cuban-born poet José-Maria de Heredia – had a long-running affair with Louÿs. The Heredia household held a salon on Saturdays, which Debussy, Louÿs, and Régnier attended. Marie not only organized a Sunday annex to the salon especially for the

[179] Tama Lea Engelking, "Translating the Lesbian Writer: Pierre Louÿs, Natalie Barney, and 'Girls of the Future Society,'" *South Central Review* 22, no. 3 (2005): 62-63.

more intimate, literary subset of the salon, she also became an author, publishing works under the (male) pseudonym, Gérard d'Houville. Louÿs may have been a "lesbian pornographer" in terms of his literary reputation, but when it comes to his photographic oeuvre, among his most starkly erotic images are precisely those he took of Madame Régnier herself, who was thus preserved by him on film, the living image of a *tableau vivant*.[180] It is equally ironic that some of the biggest fans of Bilitis at the time (and since) have been lesbian authors and activists. The very first lesbian civic organization in the United States, for example, which went by the name The Daughters of Bilitis, was founded in 1955 (almost serendipitously in the wake of Boulez' rediscovery of Debussy's music for the *Bilitis* tableaux in 1954).[181]

To turn to its other constituency, among the short list of names that flesh out the "literary circle of men" for whom, as Enkling reminds us, the *Bilitis* poems were intended, we can easily add that of Debussy. The deep understanding between Debussy and Louÿs on these matters manifests itself in a most vivid way in their correspondence, in which they communicate (even when conducting business) in an intimate, playful idiolect that bespeaks a certain behind-the-scenes intimacy. David Grayson points out the "behind-the-scenes" context of Louÿs' own infatuation with Meryem bent Ali, the young Algerian mistress with whom he took up based on André Gide's recommendation. Not

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[180] For a curated account of, and look at, some of these photographs, see: Jean-Paul Goujon, *Dossier secret: Pierre Louÿs – Marie de Régnier* (Paris: Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 2002).

[181] Recounting the origins of the group, Marcia Gallo insists that a recording of Debussy's *Chansons de Bilitis* had an important pedagogical role to play in its formation. It is informative also to note the way in which antiquity is used as a shield, a source of plausible deniability of (contemporary) homosexuality, and therefore its stylistic mode of access to representation: much as at the *fin de siècle*. "At their second gathering, everyone agreed to adopt the name Daughters of Bilitis. There is no recorded debate over its pronunciation, but 'Bill-EE-tis' is correct, according to former members. 'Bill-EYE-tis sounded like a disease,' Phyllis Lyon [one of the founders] insists. 'Later, when we acquired a copy of the recording of *Songs of Bilitis*, we found this to be the correct pronunciation.' They knew that, as descendants of Sappho's 'friend,' the new group would be shielded from unwanted public attention while subtly signaling its link to lesbian sexuality. It was to be the first – and only – unanimous decision the four founding couples would make." Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: a History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007), 3.

only was the first edition of the *Chansons de Bilitis* dedicated to both Gide and to Meryem (signaled by the initials "M.b.A.") but the second edition of the poems (1897) included a frontispiece portrait of Bilitis that was executed by none other than Paul-Albert Laurens, the painter who, as Grayson explains, "'discovered' Meryem bent Ali, employed her services, and then offered to share her with Gide."[182] For Louÿs, Meryem seemed to simultaneously embody eroticism and "antique mores" (to quote the subtitle of *Aphrodite*) – an association he made explicitly known to his friends, including Debussy:

> Louÿs had begun to write the *Chansons* on March 5, 1894, and his records indicate that he had completed about two-thirds of them by May 23, that is, prior to meeting her. But he also indicated (in a copy of the 1914 edition, which he annotated for his brother) that from the day he first laid eyes on Meryem, he recommenced the *Chansons* entirely with her in mind. He described her there as "a marvel of grace, of delicacy, and of antique poetry." Writing to Gide on August 10, 1894, he effusively compared her to a Javanese, an American Indian, the Virgin Mary, and most evocative of Bilitis, a Tyrian courtesan bedecked with jewels like those found in antique tombs. In a letter to Debussy dated July 31, 1894, he was less poetic but more explicit, describing her as having "the most depraved morals": "her French is so good that, in a situation that I cannot describe without becoming indecent, she lets loose with this declaration: 'Tarrarraboum!! Ça y est…'[183]

Clearly, Debussy was privy not only to the behind-the-scenes connection between Meryem and Bilitis, but also to the boudoir scenes that Louÿs felt comfortable enough to share with him. Given this level of intimacy between the composer and the poet, it would be useful to take a look at their correspondence, especially the letters that lead up to the 1901 performance, in order to understand what they intended to accomplish with the *Bilitis* incidental music; and also in order to contextualize the prominent role played by *amitié* ("friendship"), theirs and otherwise, in the development of the *Bilitis* project.

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[182] David Grayson, "Bilitis and Tanagra: afternoons with nude women," in J. Fulcher (Ed.), *Debussy and his World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 119.

[183] Ibid., 118-119.

Louÿs' very first letter to the composer concerning the Bilitis project was sent on October 25, 1900, from Barcelona. Observe the extent to which, in his musical description of the future score, Louÿs seems to anticipate both Debussy's needs as a composer (to compose in his own characteristic style) as well as the needs of the audience. The audience, at this stage, is only tangentially the *Journal* audience. Louÿs only asks Debussy to write music, we come to learn, because he was given the opportunity to offer the tableaux to the Variétés theater, following its test-run at *Le Journal*. However, this required the addition of music to the original format (consisting only of recitation and tableaux vivants). Also, note the gossipy, spirited tone of the letter, replete with inside humor and ironic allusions that clearly indicate Louÿs' long familiarity and close friendship with Debussy. "Brave Claude," he begins:

> I can't tell from your last letter if you can work or not. – It's just that I have something to propose to you.
>
> At the same time as I will surely sue my ex-friend Herold to stop him from having *Aphrodite* played in the Atheneum of Gay Authors [*Athénée des Auteurs Gais*], I am on the contrary disposed to permit Mr. Samuel to take up the Bilitis representations that are going to be attempted at the Journal; (it's got to do with recited and mimed songs)
>
> But:
>
> Samuel wants to have the stage music of these songs (?) made by the celebrated, nay the eminent Serpette! And I am not at all of his opinion.
>
> My question is therefore the following:
>
> Do you have a spirit free enough to write eight pages for violins, silences, and brassy chords that could give off what we could call "an impression of art" at the Variétés – without making the poor Jewish director,[184] who would prefer Serpette better, scream.
>
> I ask this favor of you because I would myself do it if I was in your place; and I am convinced that you could write pages that are still "absolutely yours" while sustaining the Variétés public within that type of agitation which it finds necessary…
>
> I forgot to mention that it's *ultra-urgent*. The Journal performance takes place on the 7th. – Samuel would like the music *soon after*.[185]

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[184] A footnote elaborates on this apparently tasteless comment: "Samuel wasn't Jewish, but he made it believed that he was in order to facilitate his success in the theatrical milieu, in the image of Rosine Bernard, who took as her stage name Sarah Bernhardt." Claude Debussy, *Correspondance*, ed. Denis Herlin and François Lesure, 571, footnote 5.

[185] "Brave Claude, Je devine mal, d'après ta lettre si tu peux ou non travailler. – C'est que j'ai quelque chose à te proposer. En même temps que je vais sans doute intenter un procès à mon ex-ami Herold pour l'empêcher de faire jouer Aphrodite dans l'Athénée des Auteurs Gais, je suis au contraire disposé à permettre à M. Samuel de reprendre aux Variétés les représentations de Bilitis qui vont être tentées au

Louÿs makes his request for a favor on Debussy's part sound like a favor offered (the perils of being friends with a subtle writer). The letter is riddled through with allusions to, assertions about, and withdrawals from friendship. Sociability and artistry are indissociable. One of the first things Louÿs mentions is his "ex-friend Harold," whose staged version of *Aphrodite* he comes out strongly against. Notice that Louÿs' lack of artistic faith in his "*ex-ami*" is coupled with his withdrawal of friendship, so that it is impossible to tell from the letter which is primary, their *amitié* or their artistic collaboration. Fernand Samuel on the other hand, the (legendary) director of the Variétés (nicknamed "Samuel le Magnifique") stood on better terms with Louÿs it seems. Though he nevertheless gets a snub, in particular for his musical taste which Louÿs implies was more suited to the lighter fare offered by Serpette, a popular Variétés composer, than the highbrow Symbolist artistry of Debussy. But we should not assume, as it may appear, that Louÿs was thereby positing a strict highbrow/lowbrow distinction. Rather, the way in which he weaves Serpette's name into the account, ostensibly to use as a negative example (an example of what *not* to do), actually makes him out to be a model for Debussy to follow.

At first Louÿs distances himself rather sarcastically from "the celebrated, nay the eminent Serpette" by specifying that Samuel is the one who wants to work with him. "And I am not at all of his opinion," adds Louÿs for emphasis. And yet, he later asserts: "I am convinced that you could write pages that are still 'absolutely yours' while sustaining the Variétés public within that type of agitation

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Journal; (il s'agit de chansons récitées et mimées)

Mais:

Samuel voudrait faire faire la musique de scène de ces chansons (?) par le célèbre, disons même l'éminent Serpette! Et je ne suis pas tout à fait de son avis. Ma question est donc celle-ci: As-tu l'esprit assez libre pour écrire huit pages de violons, de silences et d'accords cuivré qui donnent ce qu'on peut. appeler "une impression d'art" aux Variétés – sans faire hurler d'avance le pauvre directeur juif qui, au fond, aimerait mieux Serpette.

Je te demande cela, parce que, à ta place je le ferais; et je suis convaincu que tu peux écrire ainsi des. pages "absolument de toi" tout en entretenant le public des Variétés dans l'espèce d'agitation qui lui est nécessaire…

J'ai oublié de te dire que c'est archi-pressé. La représentation du Journal a lieu le 7. – Samuel. voudrait sa musique aussitôt après." Claude Debussy, *Correspondance,* 571.

which it finds necessary." This "type of agitation" is of course exemplified by the music of Serpette. Playing off of Debussy's sympathies and antipathies in ways that only a close friend can, Louÿs' letter convinces Debussy, perhaps without him realizing it, to write something at least partly in the style of Serpette. The decision to reach out to Debussy was not merely a snub of Serpette, but actually a way to try to get some Serpette out of Debussy. The composer is tasked with coming up with music that could create, in Louÿs' phrase, "an impression of art" for the Variétés audience. This places the music in neither the highbrow nor lowbrow camp, but rather squarely in the middlebrow.

The fact that Debussy's *musique de scène* for Bilitis stems not from the demands of the *Journal* event itself but rather from the Variétés opportunity has other important consequences for ontology as a work. Namely, if the music was intended for the Variétés then its "private" premiere ("*soirée privée*") at the *Journal* could be treated as a semi-public audition. Notice that Louÿs closes the letter with an implied deadline for Debussy's music: "The Journal performance takes place on the 7th. – Samuel would like the music *soon after*." Louÿs signals to Debussy a subtle distinction: that between the date on which the "performance takes place" and a time "*soon after*" (italicized in the original) when "Samuel would like the music." In fact, these are two deadlines. An earlier one for the performance and a second, antecedent deadline for "the music." That means Debussy did not necessarily feel the need to complete the score by the 7th, and this would hold especially true for his own (celeste) part. As long as the other musicians in the ensemble, two harpists and two flautists, could read their parts, then Debussy could cue them from behind the keyboard *in situ* during the *Journal* premiere/audition. This would also allow the composer the make changes, and even try different textures and gestures in the celeste part, before committing to a single version for the Variétés run (for which he would need to commit it to paper).

Debussy's reply to Louÿs' initial request for the Bilitis music is exceedingly warm and eager. Three days after Louÿs' letter, on October 28, he writes: "My dear Pierre, I ask for nothing but to do

that which you demand, and this quite happily, only the timeline is horribly short and you didn't even tell me how many songs we are dealing with? So, I accept but do inform me right away."[186]

The next mention of the Bilitis project is Debussy's letter to Louÿs on December 9th, which simply starts with the words "I've heard no news from the *Journal*," before going on to invite Louÿs to the premiere of (the first two movements of) the *Nocturnes*. Then the matter seems to subside in the wake of the *Nocturnes* premiere and the New Year. In mid-January, however, Debussy suddenly writes his friend and collaborator: "My dear Pierre. I'm putting the finishing touches on *Bilitis*…if I dare express myself so, but I haven't the slightest news from the *Journal* or from you; what should I do with all this music? Could you come see me tomorrow around 5 o'clock or would you prefer I come to you? Always your old pal [*ton vieux*], Claude."[187] Upon which Louÿs replies to his "old pal" at length.

> Dear Claude-in-sugar,
>
> The *Journal* is as upset at Mr. Fordyce as you, since he took control of everything and yet has done nothing. – But there is no time to lose. The matinée *was* fixed for the 29th; the latest news is that that date will be replaced by a soirée "the week of"; therefore we have ten, twelve or fifteen days left in front of us. To me this seems sufficient.
>
> Only here's the bitter pill (though I'd rather give you an aspirin): they demand that you choose your own instrumentalists. I've heard nothing about the copying costs, but it seems to me like you can have the score engraved wherever you like and simply present the *Journal* with the bill.
>
> 2nd rehearsal tomorrow at half-past 4. – Drop by if you're free, between half-past 4 and 6 o'clock. – It could be better, it could be worse [of the décor]. Apart from a quite unfortunate plush blue background which sadly gives flesh a Carolus Duran aspect, the rest is doable: proper costumes, exact accessories, an iron gauze full of good intentions, poses without pose (without lifting a pinky finger, as you'll see) and finally three out of five women. In total a powerful impression of art.[188]

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[186] "Mon cher Pierre, Je ne demande qu'à faire ce que tu me demandes, et cela très joyeusement, seulement le temps est horriblement court et tu ne me dis même pas de combien de chansons il s'agit? Donc, j'accepte et mets-moi au courant tout de suite." *Correspondence*, 572.

[187] "Mon cher Pierre. Je mets la dernière main à Bilitis…si j'ose ainsi m'exprimer, mais je n'ai aucune nouvelle du Journal et do toi-même; que vais-je faire de toute cette musique? Pourrais-tu venir me voir demain vers 5h ou préfères-tu que j'aille chez toi? Toujours ton view, Claude." *Correspondence*, 581.

[188] "Petit Claude en sucre, Le *Journal* est aussi fâché que toi-même contre M. Fordyce, qui s'était chargé de. tout et qui n'a rien fait. – Mais il n'y a pas de temps de perdu. La matinée *était* fixée au 29; aux dernières. nouvelles on la remplace par une soirée de la 'même semaine'; nous avons donc dix, douze ou quinze

Louÿs ends his letter by declaring that the rehearsals of the Bilitis tableaux produces the "impression of art" ["*impression d'art*"] which is the same phrase he uses in his initial letter to Debussy, and puts it in quotes, when describing to him what kind of music the Variétés public requires for its enjoyment. Louÿs' "powerful impression of art" is thus to be taken with a wink and a nod to signal not a sincere assessment of the situation but rather a double entendre. The powerful impression Debussy is to understand by the careful placement of Louÿs expression is that the "powerful impression" is salvaged, no thanks to the décor, by "the women" on stage. Just as in the Pre-Raphaelite strain of Symbolism discussed in connection with *La Damoiselle élue* in Chapter 1, Louÿs' antique strain was also premised on the male homosocial identification of art with female homosociality. Art thus becomes an object that transcends the difference between the two homosocialities, male and female, the former which is presumed to be primary, real, the cause (creator) of the art, while the latter was posited as art itself, or herself: a female ideal beyond the reach of male homosociality, if not beyond the ken of its collective imagination. In the case of the *Bilitis* tableaux, however, the ideal is not embodied in a painting or a poem, but fleshed out in real bodies.

The very next day, January 19th, the day of the rehearsal, Debussy replies with a set of concerns of his own. This time he in turn delves into more detail:

> Old pal,
>
> I just returned home at 6 o'clock to find your note!...this makes me want to tell you more about the subject – First I ask myself what I should do with the music for the *Journal*? These people are either drunk or too journalistic; how is it that there are no instrumentalists have yet been chosen! nor music copied! Ah! what are they thinking?

jours devant nous. Çà me paraît suffisant.

Seulement voilà la pilule (j'aimerais mieux pour toi un cachet): on te demande de choisir toi-même. tes instrumentistes. On ne m'a pas parlé de la copie, mais il me semble que tu peux faire calligraphier. cela où tu veux, et envoyer froidement la note au *Journa*l.

2e répétition demain à 4h 1/2. – Viens un instant si tu es libre, entre 4h 1/2 et 6h. – Çà pourrait être. mieux mais çà pourrait être bien plus mal. À part un fond de peluche bleue, assez fâcheux, qui donne. aux chairs un aspect tristement Carolus Duran, tout le reste est louable: costumes propres, accessoires exacts, une gaze de fer pleine de bonnes intentions, poses sans pose (sans lever le 5e doigt, tu vois ça) et enfin trois femmes bien sur cinq. Au total une puissance impression d'art." *Correspondance*, 581.

> I'm no dumber than anyone else, I just want to understand…Could you please remind them what's required: *Two harps*, *two flutes*, *a mustel celesta* …[189]

Debussy is even more specific twelve days later, on January 31st. Rehearsals are obviously not going well, and the event organizers at the *Journal* are only adding to the composer's frustration. He vents to Louÿs about the whole situation.

> Dear Pierre:
>
> Do you know that yesterday, after you left, everything was once again put into question? And moved to the 7th or 8th of February? Truly the direction of the *Journal* seems weak to me, there is truly something rotten in this Denmark! – I absolutely must see you tomorrow, could you come to the Journal between 5 and half-past 5, moreover it appears ardently necessary to me to do an *ensemble rehearsal* before the general rehearsal, lacking this we would be running towards a scandal!...[Postscript:] The slight and hasty manuscript of the *Chansons de Bilitis* music will belong to you from now.[190]

Debussy's note reveals the lack of planning that seems to have pervaded the entire enterprise. The fact that only days before the performance its date had still yet to be fixed is indicative of the situation. This, coupled with the *Journal's* lack of initiative about hiring musicians and copying parts (as described in Debussy's previous letter) adds up to an already precarious situation in regard to the musical performance. When Debussy demands "an *ensemble rehearsal* before the general rehearsal" (italics in the original), his panicked tone indicates that the ensemble itself had trouble moving through the music, even apart from the recitation and tableaux. But if the music had been fully written out than why would it have been so? The flue and harps parts are not virtuosic *per se*, and it isn't the

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[189] "Mon vieux, Je rentre à la maison à 6h et trouve ton mot!...cela me dispense de t'en dire plus long sur ce sujet – D'abord je me demande ce que j'aurais été faire avec ma musique, au Journal? Ces gens-là sont saouls ou par trop journalistes; comment il n'y a pas encore d'instrumentistes de choisis! pas de musique copiée! Ah! ça qu'est-ce qu'ils s'imaginent? Je ne suis pas plus bête qu'un autre mais je voudrais comprendre… Veux-tu leur rappeler qu'il faut: Deux harpes, deux flûtes, un célesta mustuel…" *Correspondance*, 582.

[190] "Cher Pierre: Sais-tu q'hier, après ton départ, de nouveau tout a été mis en question? et reporté aux 7 e 8 Février? Vraiment la direction du Journal me paraît faiblarde, il y a assurément quelque chose de pourri dans ce Danemark! – Il faut absolument que je te voie demain, veux-tu aller au Journal entre 5h et 5h 1/2, en outre il me semble ardemment nécessaire de faire un répétition d'ensemble avant la répétition générale, sans cela nous courrons à quelque chose de scandaleux!...Le manuscrit, mince et rapide de la musique des Chansons de Bilitis t'appartient désormais." *Correspondance*, 583.

competence of the individual players that Debussy seems primarily concerned about but the integrity of the ensemble. His postscript about the "slight and hasty" manuscript seems to hint at its incomplete state. And his concern with the ensemble seems to indicate more than problems with deciphering parts, but rather a problem of coordinating them. If Debussy indeed improvised the celeste part (even partly) then issues of cueing and ensemble work would arise, issues which could only be coordinated in a rehearsal situation. Debussy's language makes it clear that the issues he is concerned about are not merely related to the goal of playing well but rather the sheer ability to play together at all: lacking an ensemble rehearsal, Debussy all but states it outright, would be akin to "running towards a scandal!" Louÿs in turn senses his friend's anxious tone. His reply, their last epistolary exchange before the performance, ends with a deferential gesture that acknowledges the favor granted: "You have been truly so good to make this music!"[191]

In the epigraph from *La Maison d'un artiste* with which this chapter begins, Edmond frames the book as a "memoir," and therefore inherently oriented toward the past. By this account, Edmond values his collectibles not only because he highly esteems the value of their craftsmanship but also (and especially) for their historical value: at both the personal and political levels. Edmond sees these antique objects as representatives of pre-Revolutionary (aristocratic) sociability; but he also sees them as the interior furnishing's of his brother's memory. (Before Jules passed away, the brothers co-wrote a series of books on 18th-century historical topics, so that the line of demarcation between the personal and the historical in Edmond's view must have been particularly tenuous.) In their very survival, therefore, these objects are thought to contain the promise of a restored (glorious, French, aristocratic – but also personal) past. According to the Goncourt worldview, these finely-wrought, artisanal objects – by virtue of having peopled the social life of *ancien régime* France (and the *maison d'Auteuil*

[191] "Tu as été vraiment si bon de faire cette musique!" Ibid.

more recently) – still hold the potential to furnish late 19th-century France with the social *savoir fare* of this supposedly more effervescent historical period. As Jean-Paul Clément puts it: "For the Goncourt brothers, the XIIIth century was not only the Great Century, but the only one – their very own Antiquity."[192]

How a decorative antique might activate a form of latent social agency, or effervescence, may be gathered from an anecdote recounted in *La Maison d'un artiste* itself. In one particular episode, Edmond describes a difficult scene during which he is forced to handle a cherished antique in a most utilitarian manner. The circumstance called for it. It was during the winter of 1870-71, amidst the Prussian shelling of Paris, that Edmond made the difficult decision to sacrifice his own pet chicken, Blanche, because of continuing food shortages due to the Prussian siege of Paris. It turned out to be a task that Edmond could not simply delegate to household staff. He did, however, call on the aid of a household object: a Japanese "saber" (a katana) that he or his brother had at one point collected, and which had hitherto served not as an instrument of battle, but simply as one of the many decorative objects that peopled their home.

> I told the maid to butcher *Blanche*. She didn't know how, having never slaughtered an animal. Me either, and I wanted her transition from life to be without suffering. I sought out the means to do it for a long while, then recalled having a Japanese saber in the house whose blade, I was told, was equal to that of the scimitars with which Sultan Saladin could cut a feather pillow in half.
>
> The instrument of death having been found, I called the chick into the garden. At this very moment, a hurricane of Prussian shells passed over the house on its way to the suburb of Saint-Germain; and the chick interrogated the sky with the defiant look that the animals at the Jardin des Plantes had then, – who had the look, from the depths of their enclosures, of asking if the storm which had been exploding above for two months was going to end. It was also terribly cold that winter, and the chilly bird hesitated to risk going outside. Finally, gourmandize triumphed, I scattered a bit of a galette made with real flour, baked that morning, on the tiles of my fireplace. I carefully took my aim, and at the moment that she stretched her neck in order to taste a piece that was slightly larger than the others, with my Japanese saber, I detached her head as

[192] "Pour les frères Goncourt, le XVIII^{e} siècle était non seulement le Grand Siècle, mais le seul – leur Antiquité à eux." Jean-Paul Clément, "Les Goncourt, historiens de la Révolution et du Directoire," in *Les Goncourt dans leur siècle : Un siècle de "Goncourt,"* ed. Jean-Louis Cabanès et al., *Histoire et civilisations* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2020), 53.

> well as could have been done by an executioner from the land of the saber…but what do you know, the decapitated chick started to run, leaving behind a red trail in the alley snow, in the pale twilight of day, she continued moving on her tottering legs, flapping her wings frenetically, – a plume of blood spurting on top of her cut neck, in place of a head.
>
> This assassination is one of my regrets,…even more so because, I have to admit, it was horribly difficult, *Blanche!*...
>
> Finally, one day, out of this parlor [*petit salon*] that had become a chicken coop during the siege, and a target for bullets and shells under the Commune, a fantasy overtook me to create a kind of museum of drawings of the French school collected by my brother and me over many years. To make over a room [*faire une pièce*] in my house: almost always after the publication of a book, and with the money that it brings in, that is the recreation, the recompense that I give myself. I have often told myself: If I wasn't a writer [*littérateur*], if I didn't have my work cut out for me already, the profession that I would have chosen would have been to be an inventor of interiors for the rich.[193]

We can only imagine the swift motion that carried off Blanche's head – but Edmond takes care to describe the headless bird's subsequent romp through the frozen shrubs, and the trail of blood it left behind in the snow. This sanguinary image cuts Edmond's recollection short, at which point he

[193] "Je dis à ma domestique de tuer Blanche. Elle ne savait pas, elle n'avait jamais tué d'animaux. Moi pas. plus, et je voulais faire passer de vie à trépas la bestiole sans la faire souffrir. Longtemps je cherchai le. moyen, quand je me rappelai avoir à la maison un sabre japonais, dont la trempe, m'avait-on dit, valait la trempe des cimeterres avec lesquels le sultan Saladin coupait en deux un coussin de plumes.

L'instrument de mort était trouvé, et j'appelais la poulete dans le jardin. En ce moment, il y avait dans le ciel un ouragan d'obus prussiens passant au-dessus de la maison pour aller tomber dans le faubourg. Saint-Germain; et le poulette interrogeait le ciel avec le regard défiant des bêtes du Jardin des Plantes d'alors, – et qui avaient l'air, du fond de leurs cabanes, de demander si l'orage qui tonnait là-haut depuis deux mois n'allait pas finir. Il faisait aussi le terrible froid de ce terrible hiver, et la frileuse hésitait à se risquer dehors. Enfin la gourmandise triompha, j'avais émietté par terre un peu d'une galette de vraie farine, cuite le matin, sur les carreaux de ma cheminée. Je prenais bien mes mesures, et au moment où elle relevait le cou pour la déglutition d'un morceau un peu plus gros que les autres, avec mon sabre japonais, je lui détachai la tête aussi bien qu'aurait pu le faire un bourreau du pays du sabre…mais ne. voilà-t-il pas que la poulette décapité se met à courir en laissant derrière elle un sillon rouge sur la neige. de l'allée, dans le jour blême de l'heure entre chien et loup, elle allait toujours sur ses pattes titubantes, battant frénétiquement des ailes, – une aigrette de gouttelettes de sang, au-dessus de son col coupé, à la place de tête.

Cet assassinat est un de mes remords,…d'autant plus que, je dois l'avouer, elle était horriblement. dure, Blanche!...

Enfin, un jour, de ce petit salon devenu un poulailler sous le siège, une cible à balles et à obus sous la. Commune, il me prit la fantaisie d'en faire une espèce de musée des dessins de l'école française recueillis par mon frère et mois depuis longtues années. Faure une pièce dans ma maison: voilà presque toujours, après la publication d'un livre et avec l'argent qu'il rapporte, la récréation, la récompense que je me donne. Bien souvent je me suis dit: Si je n'étais pas littérateur, si je n'avais pas mon pain sur la planche, la profession que j'aurais choisie, ça aurait été d'être un inventeur d'intérieurs pour gens riches." Edmond Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste*, 23-25.

exclaims aloud: "This assassination is one of my regrets…*Blanche*!"[194] Enabled by the katana itself, Blanche's sacrifice in turn becomes a manifestation of the decorative object's latent warrior life: mimicking the war outside, Edmond takes his own battle (for nourishment) out-of-doors. His Auteuil backyard thus becomes a microcosm of the larger theater of war, a metonymic relationship amplified in Edmond's account by the "hurricane of Prussian shells" heard overhead. Edmond notes that the bombs fly over Auteuil to fall onto the Saint-Germain neighborhood – where Debussy was born in 1862, a decade before the war, the Commune, and the subsequent start of the Third Republic.

Let us note that Edmond's confessional account of ritualized violence reflects not only the real-and-present dangers of wartime but also his singular fascination with the French Revolution, whose bloody imagery it echoes – not least by the central image of beheading.[195] By this account, the Japanese katana becomes an alternate form of the French guillotine. And yet Edmond imagines himself in quite a different cultural context, wielding the katana blade "as well as," he thinks, "an executioner from the land of the saber": a samurai. Not to mention that he initially compared the katana's effectiveness by recourse to the Ottoman context of the sultan's scimitar. Samurai or sultan? Edmond never had to decide because all of the objects at hand (real or virtual, latent or manifest) were considered equals in their underlying status as antiques.

Edmond's account takes a turn at this point. We come to understand that the grotesque domestic microcosm of war (the Blanche episode) was played out in order to introduce an even more menacing situation than that of the Prussian siege of Paris; namely, the domestic troubles of the Paris

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194 Ibid., 25.

195 Before writing fiction, the *frères* Goncourt authored a voluminous body of historical literature, all of it on various aspects of 18th-century French social life. Jean-Paul Clément summarizes it well: "Their *History of French Society During the Revolution*, published in 1854, inaugurated a series of eight books consecrated to the end of the Old Regime, which took their authors a dozen years to write and of. which the best known – if not the best – is without a doubt *The Woman of the XVIIIth century*." ["Leur *Histoire de la société française pendant la Révolution,* publiée en 1854, inaugure une série de huit livres consacrés à l'Ancien Régime finissant, qui requit leurs auteurs pendant une dizaine d'années et dont le plus connu – sinon le meilleur – est sans doute *La Femme au XVIIIe siècle*."] Jean-Paul Clément, "Les Goncourt, historiens de la Révolution et du Directoire," 53.

Commune. While the Prussians had obligingly aimed their artillery over his own neighborhood (and into Debussy's), Edmond implies, the Communards had on the other hand used the *maison d'Auteuil* as target practice. And it was in reaction to this rampant left-wing militancy that Edmond decided to redecorate his *petit salon*. His décor is, in the literal sense, reactionary. The *communards* of 1871 were proudly conscious of rehabilitating their own preferred slice of 18th-century French history, much in the way that the *frères* Goncourt set out to do. In other words, they had concurrent opinions of the 18th century: while the Goncourts' gloried in recreating the aristocratic sociability of those days, the Paris Commune named itself after the Revolutionary political body.

The brutal military repression of the Commune ordered by the Versailles government in May resulted in such a heavy loss of life that it came to be referred to as "*la semaine sanglante*" ("bloody week"). Blood is also a key object of attention in Edmond's account. The image of blood may be subtly related to his brother Jules' death in 1870. But of course the image of blood as a family trait also carried reactionary overtones. In other words, unlike the revolutionary *communards* whose "*fraternité*" was for the most part metaphorical, the *frères* Goncourt, Edmond may have implied, were actual blood brothers. From the vantage point of 1881, however, when the book was published, during the triumph(alism) of the Third Republic as a viable political institution, such implication was better passed over in silence.

These unacknowledged background factors, both political and personal, offer a rich field of alternate possibilities for a reconsideration of the Auteuil house as more than merely (as Edmond would have it) a storehouse of antiques. Edmond denied, of course, that he thought of collecting and interior decoration in terms of political or social engagement; yet that very act of denial signals his self-conscious awareness of these themes, and their importance for the time period. During the conciliatory era of opportunism in the early 1880s when *House of an Artist* was published, moderate liberals (known as *républicains opportunistes*) very successfully promoted a vision of Third Republic

France in which seemingly opposed historical values could be reconciled, whether associated with aristocratic privilege or populist taste, so long as they were seen to be historically French and therefore indicative of national unity – and ultimately the political stability of the Third Republic.[196]

By this new standard, *ancien régime* objects could in fact be reconciled to republican notions about utility, and it did not pay to speculate about the differences between, say, aristocratic and republican styles of (or uses for) art. It was more convenient, then, to subtly brush differences aside and ignore even the most obvious imputations of political meaning. The very opening words of *La Maison d'un artiste* are already engaged in this act of depoliticization.

> On the boulevard Montmorency, at n. 53, rises a house, and embedded on its balcony, a laureled profile of Louis XV, in gilded bronze, that has the air of a medallion, and which decorated the musical tribune of the dining room of Luciennes, depicted in the watercolor of Moreau that on can see at the Louvre. This head, that some walkers-by regard with a fierce look, is not in the least, – do I need to say it? – a poster for the homeowner's political opinions, it is simply [*tout bonnement*] a sign for one of the most brimming nooks of 18th-century stuff [*choses*] that exists in Paris.[197]

Edmond brushes aside what appears to be a distinctly political gesture: that he had placed above the very entrance of his *maison d'Auteuil* the likeness of the last non-guillotined French king. Namely, he claims that the large profile of Louis XV that he had placed in such a prominent location, on the public-facing exterior of his house, is just not a political emblem – "not in the least," in his words ["*n'est point*"]. Rather, Edmond insists, the singularly public placement of this *ancien régime* monarch is merely a "sign" that hints at his home's interior contents, which is to say simply: 18th-century antiques. However, Edmond characterizes the interior of his home not (as one might be

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[196] Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

[197] "Sur le boulevard Montmorency, au n° 53, s'élève une maison pourtant, encastré dans son balcon, un profil lauré de Louis XV, en bronze doré, qui a tout l'air d'être le médaillon, dont était décorée la tribune de musique de la salle à manger de Luciennes, représenté dans l'aquarelle de Moreau que l'on voit au Louvre. Cette tête, que quelques promeneurs regardent d'un oeil farouche, n'est point, – ai-je besoin de le dire? – une affiche des opinions politiques du propriétaire, elle est tout bonnement l'enseigne d'un des nids les plus pleins de choses du XVIIIe siècle qui existent à Paris." Edmond Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste*, 1.

forgiven for assuming he might) as a reactionary wonderland of pre-Revolutionary antiques, but rather in conspicuously neutral, "objective" terms, simply as: "one of the most brimming nooks of 18th century stuff that exist in Paris."[198]

Reading against the grain of this ostensible disavowal of politics, we can observe that it was actually foremost on Edmond's mind, and presumably that of his many readers. Nevertheless, the Goncourt brothers subsequently developed a reputation as fashionable tastemakers, rather than as political agitators. Their subsequent reception as disinterested culture brokers is reflected in Edmond's depoliticized rhetoric: the house simply serves as a container of 18th-century "stuff." But we know that the Auteuil house, far from serving merely as a container (or an archive), was in fact something very different, something more "positive": a lived-in décor.

This is reflected in Edmond's narrative deployment, in *La Maison d'un artiste*, of a decorative Japanese saber. In the light of the Goncourts' advocacy of French Rococo era décor, we are faced with an "objective" historiographical problem: Edmond claims that his house is merely a décor full of antiques (with no political messaging) but how does a Japanese katana fit in with their taste for *ancien régime* antiques?

For all their idealization of pre-Revolutionary French (aristocratic) society, and its decorative objects, the *frères* Goncourt did share yet another abiding passion with European collectors of the second half of the 19th century: "*Japonisme*."[199] However, was not *Japonisme* strictly distinct from the Goncourts' contemporaneous fascination with 18th-century French objects? The question may appear to take us far afield, but it will be important to traverse this adjacent territory in order to truly

198 "[L]'un des nids les plus pleins de choses du XVIIIe siècle qui existent à Paris." Ibid.

199 The term "Japonisme" was coined by Burty for a series of articles published in the journal *La Renaissance Littéraire et Artistique*, in 1872-73. This was long after the Goncout brothers had started collecting Japanese *objets d'art* (Edmond's katana anecdote takes place in the winter of 1870-71). To view the original of the first article in Burty's series, see: "La Renaissance Littéraire et Artistique," Gallica, May 18, 1872, accessed on March 25, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6268798z.

reconsider the situation of "the antique" at the *fin de siècle*, and thus come to more finely render the aesthetic-historical context within which the Bilitis Scène de musique made sense in its time.

In order to highlight this other aspect of the antique, however, we introduce another historical character, whose friendship and familiarity with *fin-de-siècle* artists was instrumental in the development of collecting and thinking about antiques for Debussy's generation. The 19th-century social obsession with Japanese *objets d'art* in France, and throughout Europe, was closely related to the decorative movement that would come to be known as Art Nouveau in the 1890s. Both tendencies were incarnated in the person of Siegfried Bing, who was not only the foremost dealer of Japanese art in 19th-century France but also the gallerist who coined the term Art Nouveau, when he renamed his Parisian gallery *La Maison de l'Art Nouveau* in 1895. The link with the *frères* Goncourt is obvious. Consider how the very title of Bing's gallery, *La Maison de l'Art nouveau*, invites comparison with Edmond Goncourt's own *La Maison d'un artiste*. Both Bing's "*maison*" and Edmond's "*maison*" are premised on an idea of artworks that function not on their own but, like antiques, as parts of a decorative whole, which is to say a unified décor.

Bing's house was initially one of the 18th-century *hôtels particuliers* that served as cozy nooks for aristocratic sociability during the reign of Louis XV (as described in Chapter 2): the very monarch so innocently perched above Edmond's doorstep. In the 1880s, the location of "*hôtel Bing*" was used to sell objects from the *Extrême Orient* ("Far East"): especially the Japanese objects which were then in such vogue. We know that Debussy was a dedicated follower of Bing's wares. When Bing passed away in 1905, the composer was one of the privileged few to receive a personal invitation to the final (posthumous) showing of Bing's collection of East Asian *objets d'art*.[200] We also have reason to believe that Bing was not indifferent to Debussy. We know, for example, that Bing and his wife – as *Le*

[200] Jean-Michel Nectoux, "Je veux écrire mon songe musical…," in *Debussy: La musique et les arts*, ed. Guy Cogeval and Jean-Michel Nectoux (Paris: Skira Flammarion, 2012), 18.

Journal's own review takes pains to specify – attended the 1901 *Bilitis* program. What must have Bing thought in the audience that evening, watching these antique statues which came to life before him? Did he recognize Debussy behind the celeste?

Although we do not possess a record of Bing's thoughts about the particular evening in question, he has not deprived the historical record of traces of his ideas about antiques and their relation to art. In his leading role as (trans)cultural broker, Bing – who was born to a wealthy family of German merchants, and whose brother resided in Japan to help facilitate their full-time trade in East Asian objects – founded a platform for his own art criticism. From 1888 to 1891, the period during which Debussy returned to Paris from his Prix de Rome years, Bing personally founded, as well as contributed articles to, the journal *Le Japon artistique* [*Artistic Japan*]. It was one of the many "*petites revues*" at the time that, to evoke Gourmont again, came to represent various (fragmented) aspects of Symbolism. Not only was the journal artisanally decorated with lithographic reproductions of Japanese woodblock prints, each issue thus becoming a decorative object in itself, but the essays published therein argued for the explicit connection between *Japonisme* and the decorative style that would shortly come to branded "Art Nouveau" by Bing himself.

In one rather representative article, Bing expresses the notion that, following the Meiji Restoration of 1868 – a Japanese political event clearly akin, in his mind, to the French Revolution (but closer in time to the Paris Commune of 1871) – the people of Japan suddenly cast aside their own antiques, and therefore their historical continuity: just as, in Edmond Goncourt's mind, the people of post-revolutionary France. Though written by Bing, in fact, the opinion could have been penned by Edmond himself in a more recognizably French national context. And yet the national context was already there, for who would be there to appreciate these antique Japanese artefacts in the wake of their sudden historical discontinuity in post-Meiji Japan? The answer is obvious. The task fell, naturally, to European aesthetes such as Bing and Edmond – and by extension, as we will shortly

see, to Debussy himself. Through their common participation in the national enthusiasm of *Japonisme*, so the logic goes, European artists and critics would rehabilitate these antique objects within a new moment and milieu: that is to say, within the new 1890s art ("Art Nouveau"), an art that self-consciously aspires to the condition of décor, which is to say the condition of an antique.

This is how Bing describes the situation of Japanese antiques in modern France in the pages of *Le Japon Artistique*. He first sets the scene, describing the Meiji Restoration as "a formidable social and political push which, in 1868, swept away all the elements of the old ["*antique*"] organization." He then proposes a new décor within which these antique *objets d'art*, lately neglected in Japan, can be grafted onto a European cultural context: this transcultural union conveniently brokered within the pages of Bing's very own journal. Post-Meiji Japan is described, quite literally, as a nation in ruins – not due to material loss, however, but rather the loss of tradition. The ruins are themselves potential antiques: neglected decorative accoutrements.

> On the ruins of the past, a new edifice has since been erected. No one can predict that which it will become. But in the shock of breaking the chain of the ancient ["*millénaires*"] traditions, in order to set the foundation for a new era, there has nevertheless been one great victim: the cult of the ideal. Not only have spirits turned away from the practice of art, but they have become supercilious about the precious treasure left by their ancestors, and – in a most singular return of things – it is we who were formerly indifferent who began to feel ourselves moved by the look of these neglected marvels ["*merveilles délaissés*"].[201]

Bing's presumptions about the role "we" should play – presumably, the readers of *Le Japon Artistique* – in rescuing the traditions of (Japanese) ancestors is remarkably similar to Edmond's own views about the "neglected marvels" of 18th-century France, which he and his brothers likewise

[201] …sous l'effort de la formidable poussée politique et sociale qui, en 1868, culbuta tous les éléments de. l'antique organisation. Sur les ruines du passé un nouvel édifice s'érigue depuis lors. Nul ne peut prédire ce qu'il sera. Mais dans le choc qui rompit la chaîne des millénaires traditions, pour asseoir les fondements d'une ère nouvelle, il y eut en tout cas une grande victime: le culte de l'idéal. Non seulement les esprits se détournèrent des pratiques de l'art, mais ils devinrent insouciants des précieux trésors légués par les ancêtres, et – singulier retour des choses – c'était nous, les indifférents de jadis, qui commencions à nous sentir émus à l'aspect de ces merveilles délaissées.

sought to rescue from the sweeping effects of modernization. We might think back to Louÿs idealization of Meryem, when (writing to Gide) he "effusively compared her to a Javanese, an American Indian, the Virgin Mary, and most evocative of Bilitis, a Tyrian courtesan bedecked with jewels like those found in antique tombs."[202]

Jean-Michel Nectoux sums up Debussy's own penchant for collecting East Asian *objects d'art*: "Since his young years, Debussy demonstrated a great sensibility toward the esthetic current that the critic Philippe Burty called '*japonisme*,' just after the war of 1870."[203] As mentioned in Chapter 2, the composer is often taken to task by biographers, as well as acquaintances, for this very habit. It is usually seen as a frivolous, wasteful activity, a distraction from his craft, not to mention a needless drain on his finances. But in light of the present reconsideration of the centrality of decorative antiques in the context of late 19th-century French cultural life, it may be wiser to take a different view of Debussy's spendthrift attraction to these exotic *bibelots*.

It has often been pointed out that Debussy decorated his Bois-du-Boulogne apartment, where he lived from 1905 until his death in 1918, with Japanese woodblock prints and other decorative accoutrements form the *Extrême Orient*. Some of these, as we just saw, he might very well have purchased from Bing's shop – and we know the shop was provisioned by his brother, who lived in Japan, from where he directed the Tokyo branch of the Bing family's commercial empire. The programmatic influence of these decorative objects on Debussy's musical works has just as frequently been cited. *La Mer*, the first edition of which is graced by a lithographic adaptation of Hokusai's famous woodblock (*ukiyo-e*) print, *Under the Wave off Kanagawa*, is only the most well-known example.

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[202] David Grayson, "Bilitis and Tanagra: afternoons with nude women," 119.

[203] "Depuis ses jeunes années, Debussy avait montré une grande sensibilité au courant esthétique que le critique Philippe Burty appela 'japonisme,' peu après la guerre de 1870." Jean-Michel Nectoux, "Je veux écrire mon songe musical…," 16.

Another prominent instance is the movement *Poissons d'or*, from the second book of *Images*. This ebullient work is thought to be inspired by a Japanese lacquer panel featuring a golden carp (*Poissons d'or* means *Golden Fish*) that decorated the same apartment. Nectoux points to a second possible source for the imagery: Debussy's Japanese-made cigarette case, itself rendered in the same style, and on the same theme, as the lacquer panel. Then there is Arkel, the Japanese carved wooden toad (and namesake of the croaky paternal figure in *Pelléas et Mélisande*) that not only sat on Debussy's Bois-du-Boulogne work desk (as a paperweight) but also followed the composer on his travels, thus taking part in his sociability, and we could even say therefore shared a kind of friendship with the composer.[204] Far from being exceptional, however, as Nectoux asserts, Debussy's pronounced taste for *Japonisme* was simply *de rigeur*. It transcended national lines and biographical periods of Debussy's life, including both his Rome years and his Symbolist period of the 1890s.

> Speaking of Debussy, one must cite the count Giuseppe Primoli in Rome, nephew of princess Mathilde and a frequenter of the villa Médicis, who did him the honor many a time of showing him his villa in Fiumicino, with its considerable library, its works of art, including a celebrated collection of kakemonos [Japanese hanging scrolls]…The oriental collections of the count seemed to have infected the young pensioner of the villa Médicis with a real Japanified fever [*fièvre japonisante*]; Gabriel Pierné described his friend's Roman years (1885-1887) in these very terms: 'He went out a lot, made runs of antique shops and really rounded up the miniscule Japanese objects which so ravished him.' On his return to Paris in 1887, Debussy also very probably had occasion to consult some of the fifteen volumes of *Manga*, the impressive collection of thousands of wood engravings based on Hokusai's drawings, greatly prized by Parisian connoisseurs. Did not Manet take from this publication the waterlily motif that illustrates the ex-libris logo of *L'Après-midi d'un faune* of Mallarmé, in 1876? That is to say, the *objets d'art* coming from the Orient represented the *ne plus ultra* of taste among refined Parisian milieux around 1890.[205]

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[204] Ibid., 22.

[205] "Autour de Debussy, il faut citer à Rome le comte Giuseppe Primoli, neveu de la princesse Mathilde et. familier de la villa Médicis, qui lui fit à diverses repreises les honneurs de sa villa de Fiumicino, sa considérable bibliothèque, ses oeuvres d'art, dont une célèbre collection de kakémonos…Les collections orientales du comte semblent avoir communiqué au jeune pensionnaire de la villa Médicis une vraie fièvre japonisante; Gabriel Pierné décrit en ces termes son camarade dans ses années romaines (1885-1887): 'Il sortirait beacoup, courait les antiquaires et faisait une véritable rafle de miniscules objets japonais qui le ravissent.' Revenu à Paris en 1887, Debussy eut aussi très probablement l'occasion de consulter quelques-uns des quinze volumes de La Manga, impressionant recueil de milliers de bois gravés d'après des dessins d'Hokusai, fort prisés des connaisseurs parisiens. Manet n'avait-il pas emprunté à

It should be noted how Nectoux inadvertently frames Debussy's *Japonisme* within the context of homosicial pairings, namely: that of Debussy's camaraderie with count Primoli, and Manet's with Mallarmé. We have already seen the important role played by friendship, or *amitié*, in the creation, performance, and reception of the *Bilitis* tableaux. But when we consider the Bilitis tableaux as related to antiquity, we seem to forget that they are also (or so the conceit goes) supposed to be thought of as translations, as belonging originally not only to a different time but to a different place. The charm of the antique, at the *fin de siècle*, is intimately related to the thrill of *dépaysement* – a radical change of scenery that is attended by an untranslatable sense of "de-countrying" oneself. In connection with this idea of "de-countrying," let us consider how remarkable it is that Debussy expended such significant efforts rummaging around Roman antique shops yet did so not in order to collect Roman antiques, but rather Japanese ones. Almost as if Debussy confused Rome for Tokyo (an even better comparison might be the pre-Meiji capital, Kyoto). Almost as if, already being far from Paris, he sought an even more extreme form of *dépaysement*. Or is what he sought in these objects actually more akin to a kind of nostalgia for Paris, with its *Japonisme*?

The connection between Graeco-Roman and Japanese antiques was not in any case at all tenuous in the second half of the 19th century: from the French perspective, they were both exotic infatuations. Nectoux, for example, even interprets Manet's use of a Japanese motif in *L'Après-midi d'un faune* – which, as discussed in Chapter 2, the artist illustrated – as a precursor of 1890s *Japonisme*. Yet Mallarmé subtitled his poem "*éclogue*" [*eclogue*], the pastoral genre with not merely etymological roots but also a literary tradition rooted in Graeco-Roman antiquity. Mallarmé's poem draws on exoticism specific to the Mediterranean, not that of *l'Extrême Orient*. In light of such a major

cette publication le motif au nénuphar illustrant l'ex-libris de L'Après-midi d'un faune de Mallarmé, en 1876? C'est dire si les objets d'art venus d'Orient représentaient le ne plus ultra du goût dans les milieux parisiens raffinés vers 1890." Ibid., 17.

geographical difference, how were these distant aesthetic traditions – as far as Tokyo is from Rome – reconciled in Debussy's Parisian milieu? Precisely through the decorative category of the antique, and specifically through the antique's relationality to both Art Nouveau (for whom it serves as ontological model) and Symbolism (in its guise as literature). The *Bilitis* tableaux, like much of Debussy's oeuvre during this period (which becomes publicly recognizable with the advent of *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1902), comes to represent the musical wing of this decorative, inter-art – in short, *fin-de-siècle* – style.

We might frame the problem by thinking through Bing's notion of Japanese antiques as historical objects that have been sidelined within their national context by the rapid onset of industrialization and modernity foisted (in this view) on Japan by the Meiji Restoration of 1868. As I mentioned, Bing's views about pre-Meiji Japanese objects match Edmond Goncourt's nostalgia for pre-Revolutionary French antiques. The distance in time between the French Revolution, which starts in 1789, and the Meiji Restoration of 1868 is easily bridged if we consider that the Third Republic, so-named because of its specific historical identification with the revolutionary First Republic, was founded in the wake of the events of 1870-71, marked by the twin political disasters of the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune. Thus, the 1870s come to be considered a time of revolutionary discontinuity from the past, a period which definitively severed both France and Japan from its pre-revolutionary tradition(s), and especially from aristocratic forms of sociability. The response of aesthetes like Edmond and Bing to this historical discontinuity was a sustained public campaign on behalf of the rehabilitation of antique objects – at times irrespective of whose antiquity they belonged to.

As a consequence of their advocacy on behalf of decorative antiques, the Goncourts' views are often taken at face value, as if their penchant for *ancien régime* antiques was a simple return to 18th-century aesthetic ideals, rather than a latter-day adaptation in the context of distinctly novel, 19th-century decorative practices. Pamela Warner alerts us to the pitfalls of the notion that the Goncourt

brothers deployed their collection of antiques to simply recreate an 18th-century décor. "Known for their dyspeptic remarks about the ugliness of modern life," she warns, "the Goncourts are often thought to have occupied a Rococo fantasy world. More recently, scholars have extended the idea to include their home, seeing it as a reconstruction of eighteenth-century interior design principles."[206] Grounding her critique in a series of photographs that capture the *masion d'Auteuil* interior (as it was in Edmond's lifetime), Warner demonstrates the contemporary, 19th-century decorative principles of framing, symmetry, and contrast that shaped their design.

This results in a décor that is quite different from the 18th-century décors in which their antiques were originally housed. For example, Edmond's preferred color scheme for the Auteuil house consisted of red and black. This basic tonality results in interiors that frame individual objects in high contrast. However, this itself contrasts, as we saw, with the actual 18th-century practice of blending decorative objects into an overall aesthetic ensemble. Moreover, Edmond's penchant for symmetry center's attention on the subtle interplay between objects themselves, so that the impression is comprised of the individuated objects in the room rather than the room itself. Tellingly, Warner describes Edmond's divergence from authentic 18th-century practice by referring to "decorative harmonies," a metaphor that is simultaneously musical, visual, and (ultimately transcending the distinction) essentially decorative.

> It is this use of symmetry and color contrasts to highlight specific objects in the collection that ultimately seems furthest from eighteenth-century decorative harmonies, in which every aspect of a room's decoration blends to create a unified aesthetic experience. Rather than generate an overall sensuous effect, Edmond staged a series of aestheticized encounters with cherished objects. Avoiding the Rococo tendency toward asymmetry in his decorative arrangements, he permitted complex visual nuances to emerge for contemplation and appreciation. Viewers may indeed acquire a greater understanding of and admiration for the fine and decorative arts of the French Rococo, but Edmond did not lead them to that conclusion by imitating or

[206] Pamela J. Warner, "Framing, Symmetry, and Contrast in Edmond de Goncourt's Aesthetic Interior," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 15, no. 2 (2008): 36.

> recreating Rococo decorating patters. Rather, he sought the best installation possible to make beloved features stand out.[207]

In reconsidering Debussy's incidental music for the *Bilitis* tableaux in light of its relationality to the antique at the *fin de siècle*, we should see it (or rather hear it) in this way: as an occasional musical work whose purpose was essentially to serve as an antique décor in the 19th-century *frères* Goncourt sense. To borrow Warner's formulation, Debussy's and Loÿs' *Bilitis* tableaux "staged a series of aestheticized encounters with cherished objects." In both cases – and this is the key point – the objects are available for aestheticized *encounters* only because they are treated as antiques: as objects that are not quite familiar within the time and place of their collectors, but that might nevertheless be rehabilitated, artfully, within a newly created décor.

[207] Ibid., 54-55. (Emphasis mine.)

Chapter 4:

Décor as Point of Contention/Solidarity, a Historical Postlude

On Tuesday, March 24th, 2021, the Beaux-Arts de Paris – the historic institution's new name now conspicuously foreshortened to exclude the old moniker, "Académie" – hosted an event called *Penser le présent* [Thinking the Present] with special guest, the French philosopher Jacques Rancière.[208] In his opening remarks, art historian Christian Joschke pointed out the significance and irony of the setting: the interior décor of the spectacularly ornamented École des Beaux-Arts. He more than points to it, in fact: he rises to the defense of the Beaux-Arts' décor, preemptively, against the implicit charge that such a grandiloquent setting might be utterly incongruous with Rancière's presence as a politically engaged philosopher:

> At the risk of falling into caricature, I would like to recall that we are here in the seat of honor of the École des Beaux-Arts, surrounded by a fresco of Paul de la Roche and another fresco of Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, and that all this obviously recalls that, before it became the school that it is today, this *école* had been the Academy, and therefore, in a certain way, it was the temple of norms that were vertically inculcated into student-artists who attended it. And it seems like the contemporary period has given it a different role: it has become a space of liberty, of discoveries of the self. To put it differently: a site of emancipation.[209]

Why does Joschke assume that a French audience might still be predisposed to think of the Beaux-Arts as an exclusionary institution? Because, as one of the five constituent Académies that

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208 A video of the proceedings was posted on the Beaux-Arts' YouTube channel: Jacques Rancière, Christian Joschke, and Alain Berland, "Penser le présent," YouTube Video, March 24, 2021, Beaux-Arts de Paris, 4:25 to 5:09, https://youtu.be/Ri4_s-ShfYU. My transcription follows in footnote 224. (My translation above.)

209 "Au risque d'être un petit peu caricaturale, je voulais rappeler que nous sommes ici dans [?] d'honneur de l'École des Beaux-Arts, entourée d'une fresque de Paul de la Roche et d'une autre fresque de Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, et que tout ça nous rappele évidemment que avant d'être l'école qu'elle est aujourd'hui c'est école a été l'Académie et donc, d'une certaine façon, le temple des normes inculcées verticalement aux artistes-élèves qui l'on fréquenté. Et évidemment l'âge contemporain lui a donnée un autre rôle: elle est dévenue le lieu de liberté, de découvertes de soi. Pour le dire autrement: un lieu d'emancipation."

comprise the Institut de France (including the Académie Française), the Académie des Beaux-Arts, as its name implies, has traditionally been regarded as official arbiter of the state of the Fine Arts ("Beaux Arts"), a label traditionally applied to a narrow set of 19th-century "sister arts" that included music, architecture, sculpture, and painting. In Debussy's time it was the most prestigious art institution in France, but it was also the frequent subject of attack by the the milieux in which Debussy moved, such as the "independent" circles of artists that formed the subject of each of the preceding chapters. In this concluding chapter, I show the historical complexity behind this apparent antagonism and demonstrate how evocation of décor could be used to cover over commonalities. I then trace specific uses of the word "décor" in the Librairie catalogue, to reveal the ways in which Debussy's milieu promoted a specifically musical undestanding of the word.

Debussy's affiliation with the Conservatoire and the Académie on the one hand, and independent milieux on the other, is complex. We might recall his time at the Villa Médicis as described in Chapter 1; the seat of the French Academy in Rome, and the palatial residence in which Prix de Rome laureates (which before 1903 were necessarily men) were expected to live together in a fraternal spirit of camaraderie, but also competition, during the stipulated award period. In this way, the Académie sought to mold promising young artists into a centralized homosocial milieu that reflected its Beaux-Arts ideals. This dynamic included not only the laureates themselves but also their mentors. Like Mallarmé and Bailly during his Symbolist years, Debussy looked up to individual teachers during his Conservatoire period. He was particularly close with Ernest Guiraud, with whom he fraternized outside the classroom. Yet Guiraud was also instrumental in Debussy's Prix de Rome bid. As one of the founders of the Société nationale de musique, and a member of the Académie since 1891, Guiraud was in a good institutional position to help Debussy compete for the prestigious award. Not only was he well-connected but, as a former Conservatoire student, he had himself obtained the Prix de Rome in 1859 – as his father, Jean-Baptiste-Louis Guiraud, had obtained it before him, in 1827. We might

observe once again, this time from the perspective of patrilineal line of laureates, from father to son to Debussy, the generational *longue durée* of this homosocial institutional framework. This same pattern of mentorship by older artists to whom younger artists flock is apparent in the homosocial artistic circles that have been the focus of previous chapters.

Debussy's life after Rome can be thought of not as a break with the values of the Académie but rather as their transference onto a different homosocial milieu of artists, with a new set of mentors, peers, and, importantly, a new décor: a shift rather than a break. In Chapter 2, we considered the important role of Mallarmé's *mardis* in Debussy's post-academic life. And it is true that Mallarmé was considered by some of his disciples as standing in opposition to the Académie and its influence in French cultural life. This view was shared, for example, by Grierson, whose testimony we encountered in Chapter 2. We might return here to his well-articulated account in order to observe how he contrasts, in vividly polarizing terms, Mallarmé's milieu with that of the Académie:

> [I]t is easy to understand the jealousy of some of the Sorbonne professors who saw young authors of talent doing homage to a man who paid no heed to the examples of the academicians. It was but natural that "official" professors should pretend that Stéphane Mallarmé was without serious influence. Their attitude was, in part, the result of ignorance…Little did the professors at the Sorbonne know of this ascendency, revolving, as they were, in their own limited circle which they mistook for the universe…At a time when academicians were ridiculing Mallarmé, he, without trying, was undermining the old edifice with hundreds of disciples, many of whom had been the cleverest students in the *lycées* of the Latin Quarter. Some of these young men were already acknowledged journalists of talent, others would become critics, playwrights, politicians.
>
> So great was the outcry in 1889 and the following years that the question of abolishing the Académie Française was freely discussed, many deputies taking sides with the young writers of the advanced schools. It needed only a few visits to Mallarmé's salon to convince me that here was the one vital force operating in the literary world of Paris. Renan was lecturing at the Sorbonne; Mallarmé was rolling cigarettes and talking nonchalantly to visitors at his own fireside.[210]

[210] Francis Grierson, Francis Grierson, "Stéphane Mallarmé," The Atlantic, December 1, 1903. Quoted in: William Austin ed., Claude Debussy: Prelude to "The Afternoon of a Faun", Norton Critical Score (New York: Norton, 1970), 104-105.

In Grierson's account, the university setting of the Sorbonne is conflated with the Académie Française as two aspects of the same "academic" milieu. His account also elides continuities between the two that may have undermined his position. Grierson casually refers to Mallarmé's followers as "young men," incidentally highlighting the commonality of their homosocial environment. He also builds his dichotomy on differences in décor, contrasting the public "grandeur" of the Sorbonne (to apply Pasler's distinction from the Introduction) with the domestic "grace" of Mallarmé's interior, evoked by its fireplace. Grierson chooses to depict Mallarmé rolling cigarettes, as if his habit of smoking was an extension of the smoky hearth, the traditional center of the home and symbol of domesticity. Yet such was the "grace" that emanated from this unassumingly private gesture, in Grierson's representation of events, that it threatened the very existence of the Académie Française.

Bailly's Librairie de l'Art indépendent is yet another case in point. One the one hand, it was thought of as a milieu whose "independence" from the Académie was, quite literally, baked into its name. Yet it too was an exclusive instituion that guarded access to knowledge. It was plainly understood by members of the Libraire circle that one had to be a regular member of the group to access certain texts. After all, only so many copies were produced of each publication in the Libraire catalogue. This became yet another point of solidarity between members of the Bailly milieu but it also created a exclusionary dynamic that rivaled the worst stereotypes leveled against members of the Académie. André Lebey relates the following anecdote about the perils of going to the Librairie without being admitted into the ranks of Bailly's circle:

> A customer once asked him for *Tel qu'en songe* [by Henri Régnier] of which he only had a few copies left. He stared him down coldly and went to a different shelf to take *L'Homme tout nu* by Catulle Mendès, all while explaining to his stunned but acquiescent client that this book would suit him better. "With a head like that *Tel qu'en songe*!..." he murmured while shutting the door on the blasphemer!" [211]

[211] Ibid.

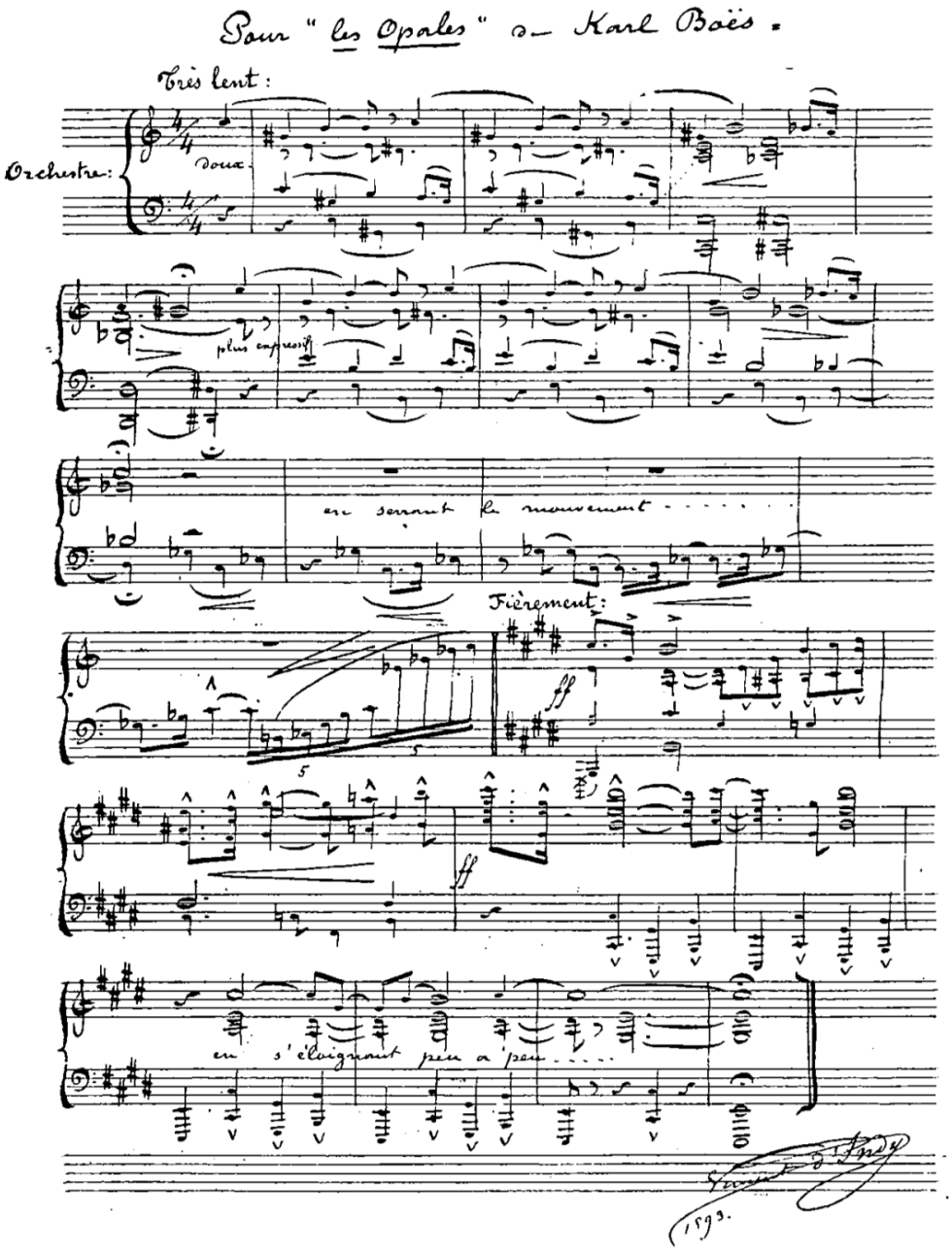

Figure 8: Pour "les Opales" de Karl Boës, Vincent d'Indy (1893)[212]

[212] Karl Boès, *Les opales: prologue musical* (Librairie de l'art indépendant, 1893), Accessed March 18, 2023, https://shorturl.at/agsCI.

The exclusivity of Bailly's circle promoted the adoption of group symbols, which included key words but also niche genres that were used as a badge of recognition among its members. In order to demonstrate the use of "décor" as a keyword among Bailly's milieu, I first turn to an example (Figure 8) of a niche genre of this kind, called a "musical frontispiece."[213] Composed as an introduction to a new poetry collection by Karl Boës (also spelled Boès), *Les Opals*,[214] published by the Librairie in 1893, Example 1 presents the musical score by Vincent d'Indy. D'Indy's handwritten score poses more questions than it can answer at first glance. There are several reasons for this, which I will list before discussing its connection to "décor."

The handwritten quality of Fig. 8 announces itself as a personalized manuscript rather than an anonymously engraved score. The intimacy of this inscription in turn becomes a sign of sociability and collaboration, a specialty of the books published by Bailly. (Recall Denis' lithograph for Debussy's *La Damoiselle élue*, also published by the Librairie in the same year.) The scriptural quality of D'Indy's piece seems to efface itself before the importance of the published (and typeset) text. In fact the piece does not feature any particular title of its own. Instead, its makeshift name simply displays the minimum of authorial decorum, conveying just enough basic information to subordinate itself to the text: "For 'The Opals' of Karl Boës." The piece is thus simply "for" another work. And that clues us in to its role in the book, which is nothing less than to take the place of a preface.

Indeed, the poetry collection features a brief, enigmatic note by the author, followed by d'Indy's musical score, before delving directly into the poems. Awash in keywords, Boès' note is worth quoting in full, if only in order to demonstrate the symbol laden rhetoric that all but requires personal participation in Bailly's milieu for its decipherment:

> With the invocation of Plato, de Vinci, Shakespeare and Wagner, the author has gilded these symbolic Opals in his purest gold.

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213 Edmond Bailly (Librairie de l'art indépendant), *Catalogue de La Librairie de l'Art Indépendant: Octobre 1896*, Accessed on March 18, 2023, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k991582b.

214 Karl Boès, *Les opales: prologue musical* (Librairie de l'art indépendant, 1893).

> Profoundly and painfully materialist, despite this and perhaps because of this, the poet pronounces the idealist formula: ART FOR THE SOUL.
>
> He belongs to the cruelly injured souls that Religion can no longer console nor Love put to sleep, whose suffering Art will ennoble.[215]

The highly elliptical style deployed here leaves the uninitiated reader at a loss. What do the great figures of philosophy, art, literature, and music (Wagner), have to do with each other, and why are they specifically, and quite religiously, being invoked in the manner? What do they symbolize? Moreover, how can profound materialism lead to an "art for the soul"? And how can art ennoble suffering? Contained within sentence-long stanzas of prose poetry, these statements are asserted simply and without elaboration, as if part of a ritual litany whose repeated cadence brooks no dissent. Indeed, there is a distinctly religious quality both to the form and content of the "invocation," perhaps appropriate in a text that is ostensibly about the replacement of religion by art, except for the circular logic that the notion implies: if art becomes a new religion, then has a loss of religion truly occurred or simply a change of faith?

The phrasing of Boès' all-caps assertion "L'ART POUR L'AME," which I translate above in a quite literal way as "art for the soul," bears an echo of the well-known French phrase "l'art pour l'art," typically translated as "art for art's sake." By so visibly alluding to the symbolic epithet in his own profession of faith, Boès implies, I believe, that the poems in his new collection require no outside justification nor framing, except for a kind of faith in art that surpasses the logic of language. What better way, then, to introduce *The Opals* than to circumvent a written introduction entirely by way of a non-texted musical score by a composer whose combination of fervent Catholicism and Wagnerism were well known.

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215 "*Sous l'invocation de Platon, de Vinci, de Shakespeare et de Wagner, l'auteur a serti de son or le plus pur ces Opales symboliques.*

Profondément et douloureusement matérialiste, malrgé cela et peut-être à cause de cela, le poète prononce cette formule idéaliste: L'ART POUR L'AME.

Il est des âmes cruellement blessées que la Religion ne peut plus consoler ni l'Amour endormir, l'Art ennoblira leurs souffrances." Ibid.

Indeed, the very opening of the piece (Ex. 1) evokes the opening texture of *Tristan*, with its chromaticism, the prominence of the tritone, the parsimonious voice leading, the heavy use of suspensions and anticipations (as seen in the cadence in m. 4), and a dynamic arc that features a quiet introduction followed by a sudden fortissimo outburst, one that is introduced, moreover, by ascending passagework (m. 12). Boès' invocation of Wagner among the lofty names of Plato, de Vinci, and Shakespeare, certainly finds its counterpoint in d'Indy's musical preface. But the Wagnerian quality of d'Indy's brief piece is its least puzzling aspect, since Wagnerism was a well attested aspect of Symbolism and therefore belonged quite naturally in a book published by Bailly. Indeed, the truly odd aspect of d'Indy's "musical frontispiece" first reveals itself in the unbridgeable distance between its published form and its potential decipherment in performance. How was this piece of music expected to be performed?

To start with, what we clearly see in the top left corner of the score in Ex. 1 is not the expected indication "for piano," which the grand staff would seem to imply as the instrument of choice, but rather carries the surprising designation "*orchestre*," with no further indications as to the actual instrumentation of passages. Nevertheless, there are plenty of clues embedded in the score itself which make it truly feel like an orchestral reduction. Orchestral layers are suggested, for example, by the persistent bifurcation of note-stems into opposing directions on the same staff. This visual cue alerts us to the presence of simultaneous, independent, horizontal lines, as in an orchestra, rather than the more typically pianistic division of right- and left-hand textures into vertical agglomerations that are at times spread out (arpeggios) and at times struck simultaneously (chords). This polyphonic touch is all the more emphasized by the slow tempo ("*Très lent*") and sweet tone ("*doux*") indicated at the start, which gives the individuated lines more air time within which to imprint their individual contours. It also lends the implied orchestral texture some timbral personality. Furthermore, the slurs connecting the individual melodic motifs are reminiscent of breath marks or bowings, and thus the "*doux*"

expression could be hinting at the mellifluous texture of a woodwind ensemble or muted strings, or both by way of doubling. Either way, it is intended for instruments that can sustain the contour of contrapuntal melodic lines over a slow tempo, which is not a forte of the piano. The second part of the work, played "*Fièrement*" ["Proudly"] simply calls for fortissimo fanfare, suggesting brass and concomitant percussion, while the transitional arpeggio between the two sections is nothing if not a place-holder for a harp glissando.

In a very material sense, therefore, this orchestral indication already begins to defamiliarize what seems at first blush like a fairly transparent piano score. It makes us reconsider the performance ontology of the work in question. In other words, even if someone were to open *Les Opales* to the exact page on which d'Indy's score is found, lay it out on a piano stand, then play the entire piece from start to finish – taking the greatest care to execute each note in tempo and according to expressive markings – the resulting performance would still be far short of representing the "music itself." Because d'Indy's score is not, as we come to realize by attending to it closely, a piano piece at all: rather, it is a piano reduction of an orchestral work that was never meant to be fully orchestrated, only suggested – though suggested by design, in the music itself. In a way, as I suggest about Debussy's incidental music for the Bilitis tableaux in Chapter 3, d'Indy's score is intentionally incomplete.

It is fascinating to consider the purposefully fragmented quality of Debussy's Bilitis score and d'Indy's musical preface as sharing, through the node of sociability, and décor, of Bailly's Librairie – where both *Les Opales* and *Les Chansons de Bilitis* were published as new poetry collections in 1894 (though *Bilitis* was postdated to 1895) – the aesthetic preferences of the same milieu. As discussed in Chapter 3, Louÿs claimed in his preface that his poems were translations from what remained of an antique author's oeuvre, namely Bilitis herself. The "missing" celesta part of Debussy's incidental music thus strangely corresponds to the overarching theme of artefacts "missing" pieces by design. Likewise, d'Indy's orchestral "reduction" reduces an orchestration that neither previously existed nor

was intended to exist at a later time. And just as Debussy's partially written music matches Louÿs' "incomplete" poetry collection, there is a correspondence between the unheard orchestra of d'Indy's musical preface and the contents of the poetry collection it introduces.

The correspondence can be most readily observed in the second poem in Boès' collection, *La Marche à la Mort* [*The March to Death*], which directly takes up the theme of music both in its content and its form, and pairs it, significantly, with an explicit reference to décor. The poem's thematization of music is made explicit in the following two verses (the second and the second to last, to be specific), by virtue of which Boès' "march" is programmatically linked to the processional quality of d'Indy's musical contribution to the volume, and in particular its second half. The highly rhythmic quality of the poetic meter, amplified by the repetitiveness of the abaa rhyme scheme, is exceedingly obvious in the French original, though not necessarily in my translation:

> To march towards Death while sounding the horn –
> Like a Knight in pompous armor
> Entering the tournament in the King's sight –
> Marching towards Death in a beautiful décor
> …
> Without being before bullying Death,
> Hearing without fear, hope or remorse
> The subterranean hymn chanted by the Dead,
> The triumphal cry of the Dead: Never More!
>
> [Marcher vers la Mort en sonnant du cor –
> Tel un Chevalier en pompeux arroi
> Entrant au tournoi sous les yeux d'un Roi –
> Marcher vers la Mort en un beau décor
> …
> Sans être devant la Mort matamore,
> Ecouter sans peur, espoir ni remords,
> L'hymne souterrain que chantent les Morts,
> Le cri triomphal des Morts: Never More!]

It is illuminating to note the instance of "décor," as a verse ending rhyme word, paired with a direct borrowing of Poe's refrain from *The Raven*, "Never More," placed in the same position within its verse, and written in English. In referencing Poe, Boès not only reveals the source of the macabre

mood of the poem he also alludes to a long line of French translators of Poe honored in the Symbolist literary canon; foremost among which are Baudelaire and Mallarmé. More specifically, Boès is citing the *Philosophy of Composition*, translated by Baudelaire as *Méthode de composition*, in which Poe supposedly reveals the method by which he composed *The Raven*. Following Baudelaire's cue, the method was taken seriously by French Symbolists. Significantly, Poe's *Philosophy* insists on the importance of repetition and variation of sound, rather than meaning, as the criterion of selection for words in poetic composition; and Poe claims that he chose the word "Nevermore" because of its sonic properties and then created a poem around the compositional logic of its repeated refrain. Once again, this is entirely in accord with both the rhythmic musicality of Boès' poem and its persistent Raven like rhyme scheme. And what better way to further suggest that one's own poetry is composed with musical parameters in mind than having the volume itself introduced by an actual musical composition?

As a concluding addendum to the more developed cases of musical décor I present in the preceding body chapters, I want to suggest that the role of "décor" in this poetic compositional scheme, and specifically its connection to the theme of music, is not incidental but that it was already part of a tradition of the poets published by Bailly; and that moreover it was a trope of which Debussy was well aware.

Consider Henrei de Régnier's poem *Scènes au Crepusclue* [*Scenes at Dusk*], published by Bailly's Librairie in 1890 as part of the collection titled: *Poèmes anciens et romanesques, 1887-1889*.[216] It is well-known that Debussy is considered to have based early drafts of what became his Trois nocturnes (in the form of an abandoned violin concerto) on this very poem, with which he was intimately acquainted. Observe, in the French original, how the explicit evocation of the word "décor," used twice this time in verse ending position (just as in *Marche à la Mort*), is paired both with "*d'or*" [of gold] and "*mort*" [death], rhymes that are repeated verbatim years later in Boès' poem; as well as the poems'

[216] Henri de Régnier, *Poèmes Anciens et Romanesques: 1887-1889* (Paris: Librairie de l'Art indépendant, 1890).

shared use of an aaba rhyme scheme (not preserved in my translation). I have left out only the few stanzas that do not explicitly mention music or evoke sound:

> The evening wind denudes the deflowered robes
> The enamel belt and the silken scarf,
> Heavy sheets undulate on trestles in the meadows
> Where the banner that unfurls shudders
>
> It filters a thin flute and viol air
> Sigh of vibrating bow on thin strings of gold
> And cease when falls from the starry choir
> Some sigh that pierces the canvas of the décor.
> …
> The conch's clear cry entwines with viols,
> Dying from the gold-tipped trestles' wings
> While low flutes cry vaingloriously,
> And oarsmen of hopeful Vessels cry over the waters!
> …
> And the Players in their deflowered robes
> Feel their voices hesitate before forgotten roles,
> The stones' brilliance dies on them
> And their masks fall and break at their feet;
>
> Trembling more in shadows where the viol trembles
> They hear all of death shiver,
> And spring up like a cry from the starry choir
> The clear conch that breaks the canvas of the décor!
>
> Face to face before the fascinating evening
> In the strange prairie depeopled of flowers
> None Avid to hear the sybilline Fable
> That would speak their voices as Sisters and Lovers!
>
> [Le vent du soir dénoue aux robes défleuries
> La ceinture d'émail et l'écharpe de soie,
> Les draps lourds des tréteaux ondulent aux prairies
> Où frissonne la banderole qui s'éploie
>
> Il filtre un air épairs de flûte et de viole
> Soupir d'archet qui vibre aux grêles cordes d'or
> Et cesse si faillit du choeur qui s'étiole
> Quelque sanglot trouant la toile du décor.
> …
> Le cri du buccin clair s'enlance de violes,
> Il meurt des ailes aux franges d'or des trétaux
> Et des flûtes tout bas pleurent des glorioles,
> Rames des Nefs d'espoir en larmes sur les eaux!

…
Et les Joueuses en leurs robes défleuries
Sentent leur voix rétive aux rôles oubliés,
Sur elles se mourir l'éclat des pierreries
Et leurs masques choient et se brisent à leurs pieds;

Plus tremblantes dans l'ombre où tremble une viole
Elles écoutent frissonner toute la mort,
Et jaillir comme un cri du choeur qui s'étoile
Le buccin clair trouant la toile du décor!

Face à face et devant le soir qui les fascine
A l'étrange prairie où ne foule les fleurs
Nul Avide d'ouïr la Fable sybilline
Que se diraient leurs voix d'Amantes et de Soeurs!]

Note the extent to which the themes of antiquity and lesbian eroticism are entwined within this poem's meditation on music and décor: themes that should certainly resonate based on our discussion of Bilitis in Chapter 3. And their shared resonance with Boès' poem is undeniable, as well as their shared indebtedness to Poe whose "Nevermore" and "Leonore" refrains are the sonic precursors of each "*décor*" in both poems.

The uncanny level of resemblance between Régnier's and Boès' poetry is not, of course, a simple case of plagiarism. Rather it presents us with concrete evidence of the persistent and mutual influence of the authors' shared milieu and décor on their respective works. If Boès learned from Régnier, then Régnier learned from Mallarmé, who in turn looked to Baudelaire's Poe translations as models for his own. We should hasten to add that Debussy and Louÿs were both close to Régnier. Their shared sociability throughout the 1890s was well established by their common frequentation of Bailly's bookshop, Mallarmé's *mardis*, and José-Maria de Heredia's salon, and further cemented by Régnier marriage to Héredia's daughter Marie, whose pen name was Gérard d'Houville and with whom Louÿs fathered a child (as discussed in Chapter 3). All that to say, their *amitié* was of a most intimate kind; which makes it all the more plausible that they should have shared ideas that are found in their works. Might not Debussy have discussed the issue of décor, so prominently placed in a poem

that he intended to turn into an orchestral composition, with Régnier himself? Or might he have brought it up with Mallarmé at one of the *mardis*, at which Régnier usually sat at the right hand of the poet as his privileged (and silent) interlocutor?[217]

The timing of Debussy's attraction to Régnier's poem is significant in light of the timeline of his development as a composer. By the author's admission, the collection in which *Scènes au Crepusclue* is found includes poems written between 1887-1889. This is precisely the period of Debussy's transition from academic life, as a Prix de Rome pensioner, to a life lived among a network of conspicuously homosocial artistic circles, often in private or at least semi-private spaces. The Librairie was, as we saw earlier, not welcoming to outsiders unfamiliar to Bailly's milieu, and Mallarmé's *mardis* were by invitation only. There is a particular resonance at work, therefore, between Debussy's attraction to Régnier's poem, his increasing participation in the poet's very milieu, and his newfound frequentation of the same network of décors.

Just as fervently as Debussy took to the décor and milieu of his post-academic life in Paris, he resisted and complained bitterly about both the décor and the company of the Villa Médicis. A study in contrast across this transitional period, by way of a brief look at the Roman period, can yield a much needed overarching perspective on Debussy's preoccupation with these themes, and their importance to him even before his subsequent era of stylistic maturity. Even upon receiving the news of his Prix de Rome victory, while standing on the Pont des Arts in Paris, he suddenly developed serious reservations. These however seemed less motivated about anxieties related to Rome than concerns about being compelled to leave Paris for several years. As a consequence, Debussy developed a

[217] "M. Henri de Régnier, who on each occasion occupied the same seat in the corner at the host's right, was always silent. He seemed to be the guest of honour. Mallarmé frequently addressed his conversation to him, but M. de Régnier was not there to talk, but to listen; instead of replying he simply took a few extra whiffs of his cigarette. Every one understood." Francis Grierson, "An American at Mallarmé's Salons, 1889-92," in: William Austin ed., *Claude Debussy: Prelude to "The Afternoon of a Faun"*, Norton Critical Score (New York: Norton, 1970), 105

thoroughly disenchanted attitude towards the Villa Médicis, the palatial residence where the (all-male) Prix de Rome pensioners were expected to reside in a spirit of mutual camaraderie and enlightened otium during the stipulated award period.

Biographers tend to link Debussy's distaste for Rome with an early reluctance to remain far from Marie Vasnier, who resided, like the Académie des Beaux-Arts, in Paris.[218] Curiously, though probably in a bid to have the sorrows of young Claude reach her ear by oblique means, it is in a series of confessional letters written not to Marie herself but rather to her husband, Henri Vasnier, that Debussy bears his deepest doubts about the stuffy atmosphere of his Roman exile:

> You know my character very well, and you also know just how much I am influenced by ambient things [*choses ambiantes*] and, well, this whole villa crushes me, annihilates me. I'm suffocating and I am entirely incapable of shaking off this bad torpor that makes me see everything as if through detestable weather. This hasn't progressed so far as to make me lose my sense for beautiful objects, but I don't love them as I should love them, and for this [stay in Rome] to truly be profitable for me…it seems to me that one should profit from the only thing that the Villa [de Médicis] has of worth (one of your arguments), which is to say all the freedom to work in order to make something original and not always fall into the same ruts. Though it's guaranteed that the Institut won't be of my opinion, since it clearly thinks its own way is the only proper one. Too bad! I like my liberty too much for that, and that which is mine. At least if [the Villa] takes away my freedom of association [*milieu*] I'll be able to avenge myself through my liberty of spirit.[219]

Debussy's specific complaints about the villa are usually dismissed, as hinted above, as sublimated complaints about being far from Mme. Vasnier. However, if we take his complaints at face

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[218] Lesure explains Debussy's counterintuitive reaction to being awarded the prestigious prize by the Académie des Beaux-Arts thus: "If all his joy vanished, it's because the consequence [of winning] appeared suddenly to haunt him: at least two years of separation from Marie." ["*Si toute sa joie tomba, c'est que la conséquence lui apparut tout à coup obsédante: au moins deux ans de séparation avec Marie.*"] François Lesure, *Claude Debussy Avant Pelléas, ou les années symbolistes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1993), 60.

[219] "Vous connaisez très bien, mon caractère et vous savez encore combien je subis l'influence des choses ambiantes, eh bien toute cette villa m'écrase, m'anéantit. J'étouffe et je suis parfaitement incapable d'un bon mouvement pour secouer toute cette torpeur mauvaise qui me fait voir les choses sous un jour. détestable, ça ne va pas jusqu'à avoir perdu le sens des belles choses, mais je ne les aime, comme il faudrait que je les aime, et pour que cela me soit vraiment profitable …il me semble qu'il faut profiter de la seule chose que la Villa a de bon (un de vos arguments), c'est-à-dire la liberté entière de travailler, pour faire une chose originale et ne pas toujours retomber dans les mêmes chemins, il est certain que l'Institut ne sera pas de mon avis, trouvant évidemment que son chemin est le seul bon. Tant pis! j'aime trop ma liberté, et ce qui est à moi, au moins si elle me défend la liberté de milieu, je pourrai me venger sur celle de l'esprit." *Correspondance*, 29 (1885-7).

value, I argue, they become even more fascinating, and certainly more significant in regard to his future stylistic development as a composer; a process that after all begins at the villa, where he writes *La Damoiselle élue*, which is acknowledged (as discussed in Chapter 1) as the first bona fide piece in the stylistic trajectory of *debussyisme*.

In his letter to M. Vasnier, Debussy complains that he has an acute sensitivity to "ambient things" and that, as a consequence, the villa itself has a negative effect on him – negative in a quite literal sense of "annihilation." Debussy's feeling of annihilation in respect to the villa are telling in light of our foregoing observations, throughout the dissertation, about his acute awareness of the décor of his own apartment during Mallarmé's 1891 visit, and also of the testimony of Mallarmé's disciples as to the poet's reciprocity with his own interior space. Furthermore, Debussy complains that his basic incongruity with the décor has a deleterious effect on his work. The composer specifically links his willingness to work with his "sense for beautiful objects," which may be understood to refer to the decorative objects, or *bibelots*, which he was so fond of collecting during his time in Rome (as contextualized in Chapter 1).

In the same breath as Debussy voices his grievances about the villa's décor, he characterizes the Institut de France as a coercive institution to which he would oppose his "liberty of spirit." Specifically, he fumes at the Academy (des Beaux-Arts) for requiring him to spend time in a décor and associate with a milieu which feels too constricting to his already strikingly venturesome ideas about artistic development:

> It is entirely because I am here, by virtue of a decree that has forced me to come here, that I feel the Academy's shadow weighing on me. Ah! the Villa Médicis is full of academic legend, from the doorman who wears a green suit to the director who lifts his eyes to heaven in an ecstatic expression every time he mentions the fact, and the homages paid to Michelangelo, Raphael, etc, all resemble a reception speech. I'm absolutely certain that Michelangelo would laugh if he heard one of those = I'm not sure if I'm just fooling myself but it seems to me that Michelangelo, that's the modern pushed to its last limit, because he dared to push himself to the point of madness. And

> I think if one were to follow his route, it wouldn't take you directly to the Institut. It's true that we boys are too small to go adventuring along those paths.[220]

Debussy's sardonic agreement with the Academy at the end ("[i]t's true we boys are too small") is based on a biting caricature of the villa's staid homosocial milieu. By contrast, real artists like Michelangelo pushed themselves to the limit of the unknown in art, heroically risking madness in the process. Surprisingly, Debussy suggests that, in so doing, artists like Michelangelo actually achieved a "modern" style. In his Roman period, Debussy is already rehabilitating 16th century artists for their modern qualities, much as artists like Michelangelo did during the 16th century, when they repurposed for the benefit of their own emerging styles, and careers, lessons from the antiques then just being unearthed.

As a closing gesture, I rehabilitate an old text whose resonance with Debussy may seem to rest solely on the ambient notion that they both spent time in Rome and reflected on it in writing. It is neither a text by an expert nor a contemporary of Debussy, but it has stuck with me for a long while as a particularly worthwhile description of the process that is at work in the relation of Debussy's stylistic development to his milieu. In her stylish travelogue (and handy travel guide from 1960), *A Time in Rome,* the Irish born writer Elizabeth Bowen reimagines the quintessentially Renaissance scene:

> Known of by hearsay, perhaps explored, through inlets, by adventurous children, it was finally penetrated by adventurous painters: Raphael and his pupils discovered themselves to be in a wonderful mine. Inspired, excited, rigging up scaffolding, fixing lanterns, the young men fell furiously to work, copying the mural. Sense of event made them sign their names down here…Back again on the contemporary surface, which was the Roman-Renaissance princely art-market, the discoverers brandished their finds in the faces of their patrons: thus were engendered (or re-engendered) those

[220] "Tout cela parce que je suis ici, en vertu d'un décret qui m'y a forcé, que je sens peser sur moi l'ombre de l'Académie. Ah! la Villa Médicis elle en est remplie de la légende académique, depuis le portier qui a un habit vert, jusu'au directeur qui lève les yeux au ciel d'un air extatique toutes les fois qu'il en parle, et les éloges que l'on fait de Michel-Ange, Raphaël, etc. ressemblent à un discours de réception. Je suis bien sûr qu'il rirait bien Michel-Ange s'il entendait tout cela = je ne sais si je me trompe mais il me semble que Michel-Ange, c'est le moderne poussé à sa dernière limite, il a osé jusqu'à la folie et je crois si l'on suivait sa route, elle ne vous conduirait pas tout droit à l'Institut, il est vrai que nous sommes trop petits garçons pour nous aventurer dans ces chemins-là." Correspondance, 25 (1885-4). (My translation.)
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> decorations in the style to be known as "the grotesque." Aesthetic frivolities swarmed, like genii out of long-stoppered bottles, back again into the sun of favour.[221]

Bowen's vision might just as well have shaded into a more anarchic heterotopia were it not for the unified *esprit de corps* in evidence in the homosocial effervescence of "Raphael and his pupils," and were it not for the spectacular unity of place brought into focus when this up-and-coming school of artists found themselves in a "mine." The coordinated efforts of this Raphaelite brotherhood proved their fascination with, and admiration for, the temporal discontinuity of their found objects.

As they reached back into the "mine" of the past and subsequently celebrated the antiques they found there, they became conscious of handling artefacts that had lain dormant for a period of time historically significant enough to have been forgotten; and thereby also to have the capacity to be reintroduced under the rubric of the new, like Debussy's "modern" Michelangelo. What they discovered under this rubric we are not told (though we may surmise from historical sources); but we are told that by means of these rediscovered objects, and through the homosocial interest that attended their redeployment in the present, "were engendered" new kinds of decorations. As has happened time and again throughout this dissertation, we discover décor serving as the medium of a homosocial economy of art, and particularly as the driver of stylistic evolution. Bowen is neither an art historian nor a musicologist, but she is a perfectly astute and seasoned writer. Her characterization of stylistic discovery as a rehabilitation of antique objects within the decorative prerogatives of a new social context evocatively describes the historical situation that pertains just as well to Debussy's milieu, décor, and as I argue in this dissertation, his musical style.

[221] Elizabeth Bowen, *A Time in Rome* (1959; reis., London: Random House, 2003).

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