



University
of Glasgow

Code, D.J. (2001) *Hearing Debussy reading Mallarmé: music "après Wagner" in the "Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune"*. *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 54 (3). pp. 493-554. ISSN 0003-0139

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/49460>

Deposited on: 1 March 2011

Hearing Debussy Reading Mallarmé: Music *après Wagner* in the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*

DAVID J. CODE

Given that Mallarmé's poetry and Debussy's music, both famously elusive in their own right, have also by now become thoroughly entangled in critical tropes, any attempt at an appropriately allusive presentation will likely only obscure my principal argument. It will thus be best if I begin by stating bluntly that I am not just offering one more reading of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* as a piece whose musical language is vaguely indebted to the linguistic flavor of Mallarmé's *L'Après-midi d'un faune* or to the general tendencies of literary symbolism. In this article, I show for the first time that Debussy reads Mallarmé closely and in detail, achieving a sophisticated compositional equivalent of the aesthetic principles pursued by the poet and his lyric protagonist, the faun.

For various reasons, the claim is likely to seem absurd. Most problematically, perhaps, the composer himself seems (in an oft-quoted letter) to have disclaimed any close reading of Mallarmé in his piece. But while Debussy may not have been as blatantly mendacious as Stravinsky, he was notoriously flip-pant and sarcastic. His airy disavowal about his *Prélude* has only been taken as sincere because it has been borne out by the difficulty encountered in every attempt to illuminate his compositional response to Mallarmé. I will, in my discussion, revisit the famous denial to suggest how it might read differently if the primary authority is located in Debussy's music rather than his words.

Still, while distrust of the composer's own statements must be recognized as healthy, I imagine a more objectionable arrogance could be seen in my claim to have discovered some truth about this music that has been overlooked for more than a century. Perhaps it will help if I make clear that I have

This article originated as a paper presented to the Sixty-fourth Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Boston, November 1998. I would like to thank Katherine Bergeron for her inspired advice throughout the development of the main ideas, Tamara Levitz for her careful reading of earlier drafts, and my anonymous readers for their many valuable suggestions. The article was completed with the support of a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship at Stanford University: my thanks to the Mellon Foundation for this support, and to the members of the Stanford music faculty for their hospitality.

no interest in arguing, foolishly, that all previous writers, in missing some central facts about the piece, have contributed nothing to its interpretation. But the fact is that most critics, taking Debussy at his word, have not even attempted to relate Mallarmé's text closely to the details of the *Prélude*. For example, William Austin, whose Norton Critical Score—the essential reference work on the piece—still richly rewards rereading, largely treats the poem and the *Prélude* separately, saving his few, general comments on their possible relationship until the last paragraph of his analysis.¹ For another example, Laurence Berman, in an article of considerable literary insight, ultimately concludes that Debussy's compositional style in the *Prélude* falls short of the true Mallarméan complexity realized only years later in the ballet *Jeux*.² Many other writers, in suggesting general aesthetic affinities between the two works, have indicated a few musical fragments (such as the famous opening flute solo) as responses to the faun's words, but have steered clear of any proposals of close correspondence over large spans.³

In the one significant exception to this rule, Arthur Wenk has tried to show a closer correspondence between poem and *Prélude* based on the congruences he sees between their sectional structures. While Wenk does suggest a few detailed links, he acknowledges the looseness of his parallel: "In asserting a structural similarity between poem and *Prélude* we are mainly concerned with relationships within the two works, not between them."⁴ In my view, Wenk's willingness to overlook the clearest sectional articulations in Mallarmé's text (which are marked throughout by blank spaces after strong points of gram-

1. William Austin, ed., *Claude Debussy: Prelude to "The Afternoon of a Faun,"* Norton Critical Score (New York: Norton, 1970). See pages 95–96 for some possible relationships between poem and tone poem.

2. "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun and Jeux: Debussy's Summer Rites," *19th-Century Music* 3 (1980): 225–38.

3. For the other major prior discussions of the piece, some with more poetic suggestions than others, see Jean-Pierre Barricelli, *Melopoiesis: Approaches to the Study of Literature and Music* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 235–48; Leonard Bernstein, *The Unanswered Question* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 238–59; Matthew Brown, "Tonality and Form in Debussy's *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune*," *Music Theory Spectrum* 15 (1993): 127–43; David Cox, *Debussy's Orchestral Music* (London: BBC, 1974), 9–18; John Crotty, "Symbolist Influences in Debussy's 'Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun,'" *In Theory Only* 6, no. 2 (1982): 17–30; Christian Goubault, *Claude Debussy* (Paris: Champion, 1986), 136–40; Peter Gülke, "Musik aus dem Bannkreis einer literarischen Ästhetik: Debussys 'Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune,'" *Jahrbuch Peters* 7 (1978): 103–46; David Michael Hertz, *The Tuning of the Word: The Musico-Literary Poetics of the Symbolist Movement* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 56–84; Roy Howat, *Debussy in Proportion: A Musical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 149–53; Albert Jakobik, *Claude Debussy oder der lautlose Revolution in der Musik* (Würzburg: Konrad Tritsch, 1977), 30–44; and Richard Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy* (New York: Schirmer, 1979), esp. 36–38, 224–25, 240–43, and 263–67. In "Tonality and Form," Brown lists several more brief discussions of the piece in the context of more general music-theoretical works.

4. *Claude Debussy and the Poets* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 148–70, at 167.

matical closure) undermines even the loose formal parallels he suggests. But even in raising this single objection to his interpretation, I touch on a fundamental problem. Poetic interpretation has always been highly subjective. And any claim of greater accuracy in any one reading will seem hopelessly naive in the light of the literary theory of recent decades, with its endless elaborations on the radical indeterminacy of all texts.

The naiveté may appear all the more striking when the poetry in question is by Mallarmé, a central model for twentieth-century French literary theory from Valéry, Poulet, and Blanchot through Barthes, Kristeva, de Man, and Derrida. Indeed, Derrida, for one, stands directly in the path of my own argument. I find, through formal analysis, that the faun poem enacts a focused assault on the dichotomy between *speech* and *writing*. Derrida's celebrated deconstruction of this very dichotomy in *La Dissémination* was, in significant part, elaborated through a reading of Mallarmé.⁵ Not only will any claim to have discovered some neglected facts about the faun poem fly in the face of all assertions (Derridean or otherwise) about the uncontrollable diffusion of meaning in Mallarmé's writing, but the principal terms of my analysis will surely seem outdated given the pressure to which they have long since been subjected by deconstructive theory.

Without pretending that such literary-critical objections can be dismissed out of hand, I think it is pertinent to note that Derrida, who drew his theoretical generalities primarily from Mallarmé's critical prose, can be said to exemplify a tendency characterized succinctly by Mallarmé scholar Bertrand Marchal some years ago: "It is too often forgotten that Mallarméan theory was developed through a poetic practice."⁶ The *formal* energies of Mallarmé's *pratique poétique* have, in my view, gone underappreciated under every critical rubric, from the common style-historical discussions of symbolist poetry's essential "mystery" to Derrida's more extravagant riffs on the "logic of the supplement." Of course no reading of the faun poem for form can secure it against "dissemination." But it can raise to view the traces of the poetic effort through which Mallarmé sought to bring focus, "word by word," to the inevitable promiscuity of language.⁷ Arguably, to expose such formal

5. See in particular the final two sections, "La Double Séance" and "La Dissémination," in Derrida's *La Dissémination* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), 199–407.

6. "On oublie alors trop souvent que la théorie mallarméenne s'est faite au travers d'une pratique poétique" (*Lecture de Mallarmé* [Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1985], 7). (All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.) In "La Double Séance," Derrida starts from the critical essay "Mimique" and touches on many of the other important essays as well as the sketches for "Le Livre"; he eventually refers to some of the poems, but I think in a position of attendance on the criticism rather than vice versa. "La Dissémination," more concerned with Sollers than with Mallarmé, refers briefly to *Un Coup de dés n'abolira le hasard*, but more often to "Le Livre."

7. Mallarmé once described the practice of *reading* as "chance vanquished word by word" ("le hasard vaincu mot part mot"), which I take to reflect back onto the compositional process as well. See *Le Mystère dans les lettres*, in the first Pléiade edition of Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 382–87, at 387. (Hereafter cited as OC.)

efforts promises more precise historical understanding than to celebrate again the polysemous richness of his art. As Barthes once put it, "A little formalism turns one away from History, but . . . a lot brings one back to it."⁸ Saving a thorough consideration of formalism and indeterminacy in Mallarmé's poetry for another time, I can give one irrefutable reason why a deliberately naive attempt to read him *before* the whole array of twentieth-century literary-theoretical tropes accumulated around his work is necessary for my present purposes. Quite simply, that is the only way Debussy could have read him.

For Mallarmé and Debussy, speech, writing, form, expression, and the traditional "figures" of literature had not yet been dissolved into the all-embracing, relativist semiotics that would eventually be developed out of the work of their contemporary, Saussure.⁹ It is only by attuning ourselves again to the simpler powers once credited to poetic expression that it becomes possible to reread *L'Après-midi d'un faune* for its formed enactment of a moment on the cusp of the dissolution of these very powers. Temporarily postponing the generalizing ambitions of theory, such a reading might aim to discover a clearer sense of the poem's "modernity" in the "pragmatic" sense de Man once gave to this elusive term: "the problematical possibility of all literature's . . . being considered, or read, from a point of view that claims to share with it its own sense of a temporal present."¹⁰ To seek Mallarmé's modernity in this sense can lead to a more precise understanding of his modernism than is possible within any anachronistic appropriation of him as an avatar of poststructuralism. Similarly, Debussy's reading of Mallarmé to write what Pierre Boulez famously celebrated as the "awakening of modern music" can only be understood through an attempt to recover his articulation of a musical present that preceded the full ascendancy of the habits of analysis that were to characterize the institutionalized study of music for much of the twentieth century.¹¹

Although the tradition has never been monolithic, it is safe to say that most reputable twentieth-century analytical methods have shared a relatively clear set of biases, most obviously toward a quasi-scientific treatment of *pitch* as the primary—if not the sole—basis of musical coherence. Most analyses of the *Prélude*, exemplifying this bias, have parsed the piece for its scales or modes, referential harmonic sonorities, interrelated themes, or some combina-

8. "Myth Today," in Barthes's *Mythologies* (1957), ed. and trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 112. Beyond Barthes's rather flippant claim, my approach is in keeping with the recent reevaluation of formalism as seen, for one obvious example, in the March 2000 special issue of *Modern Language Quarterly*, "Reading for Form."

9. Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* was published posthumously in 1916; his "début" as a systematic linguist, the *Mémoire sur le système primitif des voyelles dans les langues indo-européennes*, appeared around the same time as the faun poem, in 1878.

10. "Lyric and Modernity," in his *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2d rev. ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 166.

11. Boulez included this famous claim in a 1958 encyclopedia article on Debussy: "La Musique moderne s'éveille à *L'Après-midi d'un faune*" (reprinted in Boulez, *Relèves d'apprenti*, ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez and Sophie Galaise [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995], 203–21, here 211; Austin includes a translation of the last paragraph in his Norton Critical Score, 160–61).

tion of all of these. Needless to say, such an approach has occasionally proven fruitful and will continue to offer important insights. But the possibility that Debussy's response to Mallarmé's textual forms might be articulated most strongly in a different musical dimension has never been carefully explored. And it is only by shifting analytical attention to Debussy's formal manipulation of *timbre* that we can begin to discern the essential outlines of his reading of *L'Après-midi d'un faune*. That is, to expose the interplay between the timbral outlines of the *Prélude* and its underlying syntax is to discover in Debussy's music a finely formed equivalent to Mallarmé's composed conflict between vocal expression and written artifice. Ultimately, by reading this formed tension against contemporaneous considerations of both pitch and timbre, we begin to restore the piece to its own moment of modernity, on the cusp of twentieth-century modernism.

The close readings themselves are of primary importance in this pursuit of a proto-modernist present, so I include considerable detail in my analyses. I mostly discuss the poetry and music in their own linear order, but it is worth bearing in mind that I began from the discovery, through two initially independent analyses, of the principal "nodes" of contact, and only later read outward to find further connections. I think the ancillary suggestions support the argument; even a skeptical reader might grant that a few unconvincing details need not undermine the credibility of the whole. Finally, my conviction that Debussy reads Mallarmé closely does not, of course, imply a totalizing claim about every note of the *Prélude*: even the most clever translation of literary principles into music is imperfect by definition. I have concentrated on those sections of the piece that demonstrate the relationship most clearly. Although many more passages can, indeed, be aligned on the basis of the same principles, a later inquiry could fruitfully aim to expose, against the basic profile of the reading, the points of aporia or *mis*translation. Even in this more complex understanding, the interaction of musical and literary principles in this historically self-conscious orchestral response to poetry should continue to shed valuable light "from behind" (to borrow a metaphor from Debussy) on the abstractions of modern music theory, before which it is apprehensively poised.¹²

Setting the Scenes

Speaking and reading Mallarmé

Another look at the troubled history of the faun poem can set the stage for an analysis of its forms. Mallarmé first conceived his faun project in 1865 as a verse drama on the model of Théodore de Banville's *Diane au bois*, performed

12. In a 1912 letter, Debussy praised *Parsifal* for its orchestral color "qui semble éclairée par derrière" ("which seems lit from behind") (Claude Debussy, *Correspondance, 1884–1918*, ed. François Lesure [Paris: Hermann, 1993], 311).

at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in 1863.¹³ In adapting some details from Banville's scenario, and attempting a similar work of his own, he seemed to have sensed an irresolvable conflict between his dreams of spoken drama and his poetic ideals. In a letter to his friend Henri Cazalis, he wrote:

I am rhyming an *intermède héroïque*, which has a faun for a hero. This poem encloses a very high and beautiful idea, but the verses are terribly difficult to make, because I am making it absolutely scenic, not *possible for the theater*, but *demanding the theater*. Even so, I want to conserve all of the poetry of my lyric works, even my verse, which I am adapting to the drama.¹⁴

The language oscillates obsessively between what seem like contradictory demands: the verses are "terribly difficult to make" because they must "demand the theater"—but Mallarmé wants to "conserve . . . even [the] verse" of his lyric poetry, which (back again) he is "adapting to the drama." The initial attempt to resolve this tension was unsuccessful, for the work was refused by Banville and the actor Constant Coquelin for presentation at the Théâtre Français. After putting it aside for much of a decade, Mallarmé took it up again in the early 1870s and revised one of the faun's original monologues into the *Improvisation d'un faune* of 1875. When this version was rejected for publication by *Le Parnasse contemporain*, he revised the text again before publishing it independently as *L'Après-midi d'un faune* in 1876, in a privately funded luxury edition.

The changes in the faun text from 1865 to 1876 have often served to illustrate a breakthrough in Mallarmé's style from the epigonic works of the 1860s to a recognizably mature symbolism.¹⁵ But such retrospective teleology gives

13. The most important study of the history is Henri Mondor, *Histoire d'un faune* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948). Many of the key details are included in the notes to the poem in the *OC*, 1448–66.

14. "Je rime un intermède héroïque, dont le héros est un faune. Ce poème renferme une très haute et belle idée, mais les vers sont terriblement difficiles à faire, car je le fais absolument scénique, non *possible au théâtre*, mais *exigeant le théâtre*. Et cependant je veux conserver toute la poésie de mes oeuvres lyriques, mon vers même, que j'adapte au drame" (*OC*, 1449).

15. All three versions have been available to critics since Mondor's pioneering study; all are printed in the *OC*. The new edition of the Pléiade *Oeuvres complètes* (ed. Bertrand Marchal [Paris: Gallimard, 1998]), less expansive in the notes, includes a transcription of the first "Intermède" as well as the subsequent editions of the poem. (This edition is cited hereafter as *OC2*.) So far, the earlier versions have largely served to clarify the more confusing language of the last. Valuable previous readings include Mondor, *Histoire d'un faune*; Lloyd J. Austin, "L'Après-midi d'un faune de Stéphane Mallarmé: Lexique comparée des trois états du poème," in *Essais sur Mallarmé*, by Lloyd Austin, ed. Malcolm Bowie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 175–81; Robert Greer Cohn, *Toward the Poems of Mallarmé*, rev. ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 13–32; Gardner Davies, *Mallarmé et la "Couche suffisante d'intelligibilité"* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1988), 41–137; Wallace Fowlie, *Mallarmé* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 148–67; Émilie Noulet, *L'Oeuvre poétique de Stéphane Mallarmé* (Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1940), 220–47; and Roger Pearson, *Unfolding Mallarmé: The Development of a Poetic Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 108–15. Pearson's account has

a slanted account of the long *travail de mallarméisation* undergone by this text.¹⁶ The usual emphasis on Mallarmé's progressive "dematerialization" of the faun's language toward a style that aims to "suggest" rather than "describe," that is, has made it all but impossible to recognize that his *travail* resulted not only in an attenuation of the poem's surface processes, but also in a tightening of its formal precision.¹⁷ Through the fine-tuning of symmetries, proportional patterns, and interrelated details of language, Mallarmé drew his text into focus, "word by word," around a crux between the two conflicting properties of poetry—written verse and spoken drama—that he failed to resolve in the 1865 "intermède." In other words, the final version, more suggestive in local detail, also became more precise in its articulation of the tension between speech and writing that was to recur throughout Mallarmé's criticism under the interrelated figures of the *theater* and the *book*.¹⁸

Mallarmé signals the published poem's deliberate confrontation with theatrical ambitions by designating a dramatic speaker, LE FAUNE, between the subtitle (*Églogue*) and the first verse.¹⁹ The divided body of this "character," an obvious symbol of the mind-body duality he experiences in his pursuit of two elusive nymphs, can suggest more interesting possibilities if it is seen as a summons to the reader to take the role of the faun and thus to experience—to enact—the linguistic tension that motivates the poem. The faun's lower body, symbol of his sexual desire, can also be seen as a metaphor for the motivating concern of the entire form: the desire for presence in and contact with a world of spaces and bodies through sensuous, sonorous verbal address. On the other hand, the faun's human upper body, perhaps most directly symbolic of the

the most in common with my own, though his sense of the form is less precise and his conclusions are significantly different.

16. I borrow this phrase from Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981), 261.

17. The emphasis on "suggestion" has become a central trope in the literature on symbolism; it recurs often in Mallarmé's criticism. See, for example, the interview with Jules Heret of 1891, *Sur l'évolution littéraire*: "Les Parnassiens, eux, prennent la chose entièrement et la montrent: par là ils manquent de mystère; ils retirent aux esprits cette joie délicieuse de croire qu'ils créent. Nommer un objet, c'est supprimer les trois quarts de la jouissance du poème qui est faite de deviner peu à peu: le suggérer, voilà le rêve" (*OC*, 869).

18. Mallarmé's central writings on these themes, which recur throughout his criticism, were gathered in *Divagations* under the headings *Crayonné au Théâtre* and *Quant au Livre*; see *OC*, 293–354 and 369–87. Their last confrontation can be seen in the notebook sketches edited by Jacques Schérer as *Le "Livre" de Mallarmé*, rev. ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1977). For a fine treatment of Mallarmé's theoretical obsessions, see Mary Lewis Shaw, *Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé: The Passage from Art to Ritual* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

19. Of course, both the *Monologue* and the *Improvisation* are also written as language spoken by this character. While the *Monologue* begins by identifying "UN FAUNE," in capitals in the stage directions, such an explicit "dramatic" presentation is absent from the *Improvisation*. This indecision, perhaps, gives further evidence of the poet's continuing negotiations between verse and drama.

mental processes that intervene between desire and its complete, animal satisfaction, can represent, in the divided experience of reading, the visual and mental access to language as written text. To follow Mallarmé's language with—as—his dramatic character is to be led to experience, at the crux of the text, a singular moment of irresolvable conflict between speech and writing.

The double aesthetic implication of the faun's body is literally written into the text through an aspect of typographical presentation that is new to the 1876 version. Mallarmé prints the majority of the verses in roman type, but several passages are given in italics and quotation marks. The italicized passages, often seen as oblique, narrative "tellings" within the more direct discourse in roman type, are carefully deployed to highlight the internal, symmetrical, and proportional relationships of the entire text.²⁰ More subtly, however, they encode in the printed text itself an acknowledgment of the illusory promise of vocal presence in written words. For by giving every "telling" in *both* italics and quotes, Mallarmé has fixed in print a typographical excess that puts the implied differentiation between "types of speech" beyond the reach of the voice.²¹ As dramatic speakers, we can mark a typographical distinction with a change of vocal inflection. But there is no way to register in vocal sound the fact that in this poem the distinctions are consistently marked by a double typographical change, and not a single one (quotation marks alone) or even a more multiple one (imagine, in addition to quotes and italics, red ink, a larger font, a distinctive position on the page).²² Through a surfeit of visual information, Mallarmé ensures that the encounter with the printed poem will be shadowed with the knowledge that the speaker cannot speak the poem's complete written message.

Pastoral pasts

With a further addition to the final version—the subtitle, *Églogue*—Mallarmé places his faun poem in the lineage of Virgil's *Eclogues*, giving a classical pedigree to his struggles with the conflict between verse and drama. The monologues, dialogues, or singing contests of all ten *Eclogues* were assigned to named, quasi-dramatic speakers. This "dramatic" textual presentation reflects Virgil's own adaptation of the *Idylls* of the Sicilian poet Theocritus, long cele-

20. I derive the word "telling" from the faun's imperative "CONTEZ" ("TELL") in capitals just prior to the first typography change.

21. Shaw, who offers a brief reading of the faun poem, makes the most of any critic out of the typographical distinctions. Noting that the italicized sections are not significantly different in linguistic character from those in roman type, she suggests that the faun has an "inability . . . to distinguish clearly between . . . dramatic (direct) and narrative (indirect) discourse" (*Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé*, 149). This vagueness of *linguistic* distinction might be said to place the *formal* role of the typography changes in stronger relief.

22. Mallarmé did use different colors in the *Monologue*: black ink for the faun's words, red pencil for the stage directions.

brated as the wellspring of the Western pastoral tradition.²³ Classical pastoral offered lyric poems as miniature plays; Mallarmé, replacing the classical shepherds with a divided speaker who symbolizes the reader's divided experience of the text, brings into focus—materializes—the conflict between reading and speaking that the hybrid presentation of classical pastoral implies.

Most views of the pastoral tradition recognize a shift from prelapsarian Theocritean utterance in the *Idylls* to a more studied literary sensibility in Virgil. As Sainte-Beuve put it in 1855: Virgil must be recognized as the first modern, for while the beauty of his pastorals may show that he “loves the countryside,” their refined response to a literary model also shows that he “loves books.”²⁴ The Mallarméan resonances of such a figural history are obvious, and the attempt to read the faun poem back into its own historical context—and to recognize some details of Debussy's reading—benefits from the awareness that it composes the loss of prelapsarian voice through a layering of classical references. But a more familiar classical convention, the trope of pastoral piping, is of more embracing interest as regards Mallarmé's lessons for Debussy. By portraying the faun as a musician, Mallarmé adds to the poem's fundamental concerns another of his principal aesthetic obsessions.²⁵ Even a superficial glance through his critical essays suffices to establish that his ideas on music (as on so many matters) are irresolvably contradictory.²⁶ But it

23. For the tradition and conventions of Virgilian pastoral, including the deep debt of the *Eclogues* to Theocritus, see two studies by Paul Alpers, *The Singer of the Eclogues: A Study of Virgilian Pastoral* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979) and *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). The Virgilian background to the faun poem has often been noted in passing; other extensive considerations of its pastoral mode, with different emphases than mine, can be found in the chapter “L'Heure du Berger: Mallarmé's Grand Eclogue,” in Renato Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 283–311; and Stephen F. Walker, “Mallarmé's Symbolist Eclogue: The ‘Faune’ as Pastoral,” *PMLA* 93 (1978): 106–17.

24. “En même temps que Virgile aime directement la nature et les paysages . . . il aime les livres; il tient de son éducation première une admiration passionnée des anciens auteurs et des grands poètes: trait distinctif de ces poètes cultivés et studieux du second âge” (Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Étude sur Virgile* [Paris: Garnier Frères, 1857], 106). Sainte-Beuve's emphasis on Virgil's “modernity” (often repeated in the *Étude*) could be one of the first instances of a common trope: Alpers quotes Reuben Brower to the effect that “only a French critic, unhampered by English Romantic prejudices, could have seen in 1857 that Virgil, more than any single writer, was the inventor of modern literature as distinct from Greek or the older Roman” (Alpers, *The Singer of the Eclogues*, 248; from Brower, *Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Latin Tradition* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971]: 84). See also “Pastoral Convention,” in Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* 79–134.

25. The topic of music recurs throughout Mallarmé's criticism; for the most important single treatment of the subject, see *La Musique et les Lettres*, OC, 635–60.

26. Shaw thoroughly demonstrates the contradictions; see her *Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé*, esp. 29–49. Suzanne Bernard's *Mallarmé et la musique* (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1959) is also still of some value, but largely takes a somewhat one-sided view of Mallarmé's idealization of music.

remains possible to be more precise about the role assigned to music in the singular, structured environment of any given poem.

Music could be said to play three distinct roles in *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, all of which serve the primary confrontation with the conflict between voice and writing. First, the simplest meaning of poetic "music," the sounds of vowels and consonants as composed for the mouth and ear, is, of course, important throughout this text, as it is in the whole oeuvre. But more specifically, sonorous music plays a central role in conveying this poem's focus on the lyric voice.²⁷ While the form-defining moments of lyric utterance are marked most clearly in the faun's speech by hallowed grammatical signs—the "I/You" address; the "O" of apostrophe—this grammatical level of lyric voice is served, intensified, and even fundamentally facilitated by the poem's "orchestration" of spoken sound.

The explicit references in the text to the faun's flute present a second level of "music," thematic rather than substantive. As often noted, this portrayal of the faun as a desirous musician draws on Ovid's myth of Pan and Syrinx: Pan chased the nymph Syrinx to the river's edge, where the water nymphs helped her to "escape" by turning her into a stand of reeds, which Pan then cut to make the pipes on which he played to compensate for his thwarted desire. This mythological background easily blends with the Virgilian aspects of Mallarmé's *Églogue*, for Virgil's shepherds often take up their pipes in compensation for lost love, and they also often invoke Pan. But the faun poem differs significantly from both classical prototypes. After explicitly identifying himself as a pastoral piper three times in the first half of the poem (all in passages that admit to his inability to secure sensuous contact with the nymphs), in a fourth and final reference to the flute—the only time that he names it as "Syrinx"—the faun launches the second half of the poem by *casting it aside*. Thus, he begins as a pastoral performer, only to reject music's supposed compensations for thwarted desire, along with the Virgilian trope by which pastoral music-making—"tuning woodland musings on a delicate reed"—becomes metaphorical for the art of poetry.²⁸ As he makes clear after rejecting the flute—"Me, proud of my noise, I am going to *speak*" [line 54; my emphasis]—he does not want to pipe on a "Syrinx" in memory of his loves, he wants to contact them directly with the lyric voice.

27. The notion of "lyric" has, of course, been subject to endless debate. For some sense of recent trends, see Mark Jeffreys, "Ideologies of Lyric: A Problem of Genre in Contemporary Anglophone Poetics," *PMLA* 110 (1995): 196–205. Also, see again de Man, "Lyric and Modernity"; and W. R. Johnson, *The Idea of Lyric: Lyric Modes in Ancient and Modern Poetry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

28. The First *Eglogue* begins with the words of Meliboeus: "You, Tityrus, under the spreading, sheltering beech, / Tune woodland musings on a delicate reed; / We flee our country's borders, our sweet fields, / Abandon home; you, lazing in the shade, / make woods resound with lovely Amaryllis" (trans. Alpers, from *The Singer of the Eclogues*, 11). The reading of such flute playing as Virgilian self-representation is a commonplace (as in the title of Poggioli's book, *The Oaten Flute*); see the chapter "Representative Shepherds" in Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* 137–84.

In a third “musical” dimension of his text, Mallarmé significantly reinforces his exposure, at the thematic level, of the false promises of musical performance. The faun’s recurring expressions of frustration with pastoral piping actually unfold, formally, as an elegant literary adaptation of a fugue. One of Paul Valéry’s few specific comments on *L’Après-midi d’un faune* hints at this formal conceit with surprising accuracy:

The poem became [through revision] a sort of literary *fugue*, in which the themes interweave with prodigious artistry; every resource of poetics is employed to sustain a triple development of images and ideas. An extreme sensuality, an extreme intellectuality, an extreme musicality, combine, intermingle, or oppose each other in this extraordinary work.²⁹

Given that Valéry singles out exactly the themes that are most important to the poem’s fugal construction—the two aspects of language symbolized by the faun’s divided body, *intellectualité* and *sensualité*, and the pastoral *musicalité* that he rejects in his desire for speech—it is quite possible that he had received, during his many conversations with Mallarmé, some secret knowledge about this poem’s form. But his somewhat oblique description is deceptive in one important way. The poem *includes*, as the formal substrate of its treatment of the theme of music, a “fugue” articulated most clearly by what I will call, somewhat more simply than Valéry, a recurring contrast between *seeing* and *feeling*. But after the faun discards his “Syrinx,” musical form gives way to a more irreducibly *literary* form for the climactic progression through the second half.

By contrast with the first half of the poem, which deploys the typical fugal proportions of augmentation and diminution, the second proceeds as a series of nested or interleaved pairs of passages in precise, one-to-one symmetries, highlighted by the poem’s most extensive use of the contrasting typefaces and articulated by a careful deployment of blank spaces. Taking the lead from Mallarmé, who once referred to such blanks as the “intellectual armature” of a poem, “just as beautiful to compose as the verses themselves,” I read this structure as a cleverly composed virtual *foliation*, as in a book or pamphlet.³⁰

29. “Le poème est devenu une sorte de *fugue* littéraire, où des thèmes s’entrecroisent avec un art prodigieux; toutes les ressources de la poétique s’emploient à soutenir un triple développement d’images et d’idées. Une extrême sensualité, une extrême intellectuality, une extrême musicalité, se combinent, s’entremêlent ou s’opposent dans cet ouvrage extraordinaire” (Valéry, *Écrits divers sur Stéphane Mallarmé* [Paris: Gallimard, 1950], 86). I came across Valéry’s remarks *after* discerning fugal form in the poem; in considering why such a construction has not been perceived before, we might take as exemplary Bernard’s outright rejection of Valéry’s suggestion based on the *a priori* assumption that the formal precision implied by a “fugue” would be foreign to Mallarmé’s poetic ideals (Bernard, *Mallarmé et la musique*, 113).

30. In the draft of a letter found among the sketches for “Le Livre,” Mallarmé writes: “L’armature intellectuelle du poème se dissimule et tient—a lieu—dans l’espace qui isole les strophes et parmi le blanc du papier; significatif silence qu’il n’est pas moins beau de composer que les vers” (OC2, 623).

Its gathering of virtual bifolios centers on the faun's strongest burst of lyric utterance: his most direct address and his most sensuous verbal "music." But the literary form that gives focus and intensity to the illusion of lyric address at its crux simultaneously undercuts any belief that such language can provide union with its objects. In other words, the very typographical distinctions that draw the symmetrical passages around the climactic speech signal, through their unreadable excess, the illusory nature of the utterance itself. Having rejected musical (fugal) form for literary (foliated) form, the faun, and the reader, must ultimately recognize the writerly artifice that underlies the fleeting claim to voice, and see the pages of this virtual book closing on the unsustainable dreams of vocal presence in printed poetry.

Enter Debussy

It should not be supposed that this poem enfolds a "point of no return" in Mallarmé's developing modernism, for the devices of Romantic lyricism would reappear, problematically, throughout his later oeuvre. Moreover, the faun text itself was to haunt him for the rest of his life, through several further stages of revision. In 1891, for example, he announced a new edition of the poem, "revised and corrected by the author," in terms that testify that his dreams of drama were never relinquished: the edition was to be "pour la lecture et pour la scène."³¹ Such an edition "for reading and for the stage" never appeared in print. Around the same time, Mallarmé came across an ambitious set of *mélodies*, Debussy's *Cinq Poèmes de Baudelaire*, which seems to have inspired him to consider yet another attempt to dramatize the faun poem.³² He invited the composer to participate in a music-dramatic collaboration, which was announced as forthcoming as late as 1893 under the title *Prélude, interludes et paraphrase finale pour "L'Après-midi d'un faune,"* but never took the stage.³³ Debussy thus took part, nearly thirty years after the first rejection of Mallarmé's "intermède," in a further failure of the poem as theater.

If it seems surprising that Mallarmé, after composing a refined refutation of music's metaphorical promises, should later turn to a composer to aid his dramatic ambitions, it is easy to suppose that one reason had to do with the meteoric ascendancy of Wagner. Mallarmé had plenty of opportunity to encounter Wagner's theories after Baudelaire's *Tannhäuser* essay of 1861.³⁴ In the 1880s

31. OC, 1463.

32. For the story of Mallarmé's encounter with Debussy, see Jean-Michel Nectoux, "Debussy et Mallarmé," *Cahiers Debussy* 12–13 (1988–89): 54–66; and François Lesure, *Claude Debussy: Biographie critique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1994), 115–16.

33. The announcement appeared in the original edition of *La Damoiselle élue*.

34. Wagner's name appears once in Mallarmé's early essay *Hérésies artistiques: L'Art pour tous* of 1862, but hardly at all in the correspondence before the early 1870s, even though the poet was close friends with several ardent *wagneristes*, including Catulle Mendès and Judith Gautier. Beyond what could be gleaned from Baudelaire, a summary of the Wagnerian aesthetics could

he repeatedly expressed his own ambivalence about the Wagnerian “wedding” of music and poetry, in several essays and in the famous, refractory 1885 prose poem “Richard Wagner, Rêverie d’un poète français.”³⁵ In light of this oft-expressed doubt, the attempt to collaborate with Debussy a few years later seems all the more bizarre. Perhaps their shared failure offered Mallarmé some confirmation of his inconclusive objections. And perhaps his criticisms of Wagner’s dense orchestration and “arbitrary” leitmotivic system helped Debussy clarify his own objections, later stated in similar terms after the premiere of *Pelléas*.³⁶ But for Debussy, far more important than such rhetorical posturing about Wagnerian technique were the lessons offered by the poet’s obsession with the material underpinnings of his craft, and by the historical self-consciousness with which he brought these materials into literary form.

Debussy was well prepared to receive such lessons, for he had previously composed—or tried to compose—works that brought two of Mallarmé’s most important precursors, Baudelaire and Banville, together with aspects of Wagner’s musical style.³⁷ Much like Mallarmé, he was unsuccessful in his early attempt, in 1885, to draw dramatic inspiration from Banville’s *Diane au bois*.³⁸ Turning to Baudelaire as a more appropriate literary basis for the attempt to “make use” of Wagner, he seems, through the two years’ work on the *Cinq*

have been found in the “Lettre sur la musique” (later republished as “Music of the Future”) that appeared in 1860 as the foreword to the prose translations of *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, and *Tristan*; later, Wagner’s “L’Opéra et le drame,” “Sur la musique allemande,” “Sur l’ouverture,” and “De la direction de l’orchestre” appeared whole or in extensive excerpts in Guy de Charnacé’s anti-Wagnerian diatribe *Musique et musiciens* (Paris: Pottier de Laloine, 1873).

35. Significant references to Wagner occur, for example, in “Parenthèse” (OC, 322–24) and “Solennité” (OC, 330–36), both written between December 1886 and May 1887. The “Rêverie” appeared in the *Revue wagnérienne* 1, no. 7 (8 August 1885); see OC, 541–48. Shaw gives a summary sense of the ambivalence in the “Rêverie” (*Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé*, 87–96); see also the more detailed treatment in Robert Greer Cohn, *Mallarmé’s Divagations: A Guide and Commentary* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 103–18.

36. For Debussy’s famous sniff at Wagner’s leitmotivic practice as “une méthode un peu grossière” and his complaint that Wagner’s “développement symphonique” does not suit the expression of “le conflit moral où sont engagés les personnages,” see “Critique des critiques: *Pelléas et Mélisande*,” from *Le Figaro*, 16 May 1902, in Claude Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*, ed. François Lesure, rev. ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 275–77, at 277.

37. In a prose *Symphonie littéraire* of 1865, Mallarmé had singled out these two figures, along with Théophile Gautier, as his most daunting and inspiring precursors (OC, 261–65). For some suggestions about the possible relationship between *L’Après-midi d’un faune* and this prose “symphony,” see my dissertation, “A Song Not Purely His Own: Modernism and the Pastoral Mode in Mallarmé, Debussy and Matisse” (University of California, Berkeley, 1999).

38. In an 1885 letter about his troubles with *Diane au bois*, Debussy wrote, “Wagner pourrait me servir, mais je n’ai pas besoin de vous dire combien il serait ridicule même d’essayer, je ne prendrais que son parti-pris dans l’enchaînement des scènes, puis je voudrais arriver à ce que l’accent reste lyrique sans être absorbé par l’orchestre” (Debussy, *Correspondance*, 38). See James R. Briscoe, “‘To Invent New Forms’: Debussy’s *Diane au bois*,” *Musical Quarterly* 74 (1990): 131–69; and Eileen Souffrin-Le Breton, “Debussy lecteur de Banville,” *Revue de musicologie* 46 (1960): 200–222.

Poèmes, to have achieved something like a successful exorcism. In 1887, he could describe *Tristan*, heard at the Concerts Lamoureux, as “the most beautiful thing I know, from the point of view of the profundity of the emotion.”³⁹ But by 1889, after hearing *Tristan* in Bayreuth and completing the *Cinq Poèmes*, such ardor had cooled: he wrote to his composition teacher, Ernest Guiraud, of his “chagrin” at his “growing sense of detachment from [Wagner’s music].”⁴⁰ He was to find in the faun poem a matchless exemplar for the next step, which was to capture this “detachment” in artistic form.

A note Debussy wrote for the Opéra-Comique in 1902, “Pourquoi j’ai écrit *Pelléas*,” cleverly encapsulated the challenge he had felt in the early 1890s, as he began his opera: “One could say that [Wagner] had put the final period after the music of his time, rather as Victor Hugo summed up all the poetry that had gone before. It was thus necessary to try and be *après Wagner* [after Wagner] rather than *d’après Wagner* [an emulator of Wagner].”⁴¹ Debussy’s choice of a literary parallel, in comparing the Wagnerian “final period” with the Hugolian poetic “summation,” gives a pointed reminder that the first labors on *Pelléas*, from 1893 to 1895, overlapped with the last stage of work on the faun prelude, his most challenging act of compositional “reading” to that time. A reading of Mallarmé’s post-Hugolian *Églogue* was an essential step in the development from Debussy *d’après Wagner* in the Baudelaire songs to Debussy *après Wagner* in *Pelléas*.

Debussy and Wagner

The debate about the relationship between Debussy’s mature musical language and that of Wagner’s late music dramas has continued since the beginning of his career. Mallarmé’s model of a composed tension between lyric expression and written artifice can suggest a new evaluation, richer than any fruitless weighing of “derivative” and “original” elements or any tired invocation of “anxiety of influence.” In fact, the Mallarméan dichotomy can already be glimpsed within the debate about Debussy’s Wagnerism.

On the one hand, many critics who argue for an essential continuity between Wagner and Debussy characteristically base their arguments on an appeal to *hearing*. Laurence Berman, for example, hears in the *Prélude*’s “remarkable consistency and flow” a “formal principle” that remains “genuinely

39. “Première acte de *Tristan et Iseut* [*sic*]: c’est décidément la plus belle chose que je connaisse, au point de vue de la profondeur de l’émotion, cela vous étreint comme une caresse, vous fait souffrir; pour tout dire: on passe par les mêmes sensations que *Tristan*, et cela sans violenter son esprit ni son coeur” (Debussy, *Correspondance*, 56).

40. “C’est un chagrin pour moi de sentir que je m’en détache.” Quoted in Lesure, *Debussy: Biographie critique*, 106.

41. “On peut dire qu’il avait mis le point final à la musique de son temps à peu près comme Victor Hugo engloba toute la poésie antérieure. Il fallait donc chercher *après Wagner* et non pas *d’après Wagner*” (“Pourquoi j’ai écrit *Pelléas*,” in Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*, 62–64, 63).

Wagnerian in spirit.” Thus, he finds the piece “closer to the nineteenth century” than the poem, whose formal “shards and fragments” seem to him “closer to the twentieth.”⁴² John Daverio seconds both Berman’s conclusion and his aural emphasis in a review of David Michael Hertz’s book *The Tuning of the Word*. He characterizes the *Prélude* as a “remarkable takeoff on the continuities of Wagner’s ‘Art of Transition,’ ” and asserts that Hertz’s attempts to differentiate the work from Wagnerian style do not “concord very well with what we actually hear.”⁴³ The danger of relying on “what we actually hear” is perhaps most clearly exemplified by Robin Holloway, who claims in his book *Debussy and Wagner* that “the loss of specific Wagnerian usage in a general Wagnerian *suffusion* that was first noticed in *La mort des amants* has in *L’après-midi* gone so much further that there is nothing analytical to be said about it.”⁴⁴ But as Carolyn Abbate has noted, the extraordinary number of “quotations” Holloway indicates might well testify to the “sensitivity of his ear,” but he offers no distinction between pointed references and the “coincidental and vague affinities” inevitable to works that partially share a harmonic vocabulary.⁴⁵

By contrast, Abbate, in her article “*Tristan* in the Composition of *Pelléas*,” significantly furthers the argument about Debussy’s *wagnérisme* by posing against such unreflective appeals to hearing a more knowing act of *reading*. Pointing out that Debussy responds “with suspicious consistency” to words like “triste” in the *Pelléas* libretto with “punning” references to the “Tristan chord,” she shows that such puns even occur in response to aspects of the silent textual apparatus—in an extreme case, to a performance indication (“tristement”) that fell away in the process of revision. Abbate rejects the argument that these secret marks of verbal preciousness can be ignored as irrelevant to the finished work. For it is only through attention to these verbal-musical “games,” she maintains, that it is possible to discover the main subtext of the opera, which identifies Debussy as a “Wagnerian commentator” of distinction.

The debate about the *wagnérisme* of the *Prélude* can only find a resolution through a reevaluation of its references to *Tristan* along similar lines. Like the verbal-musical puns in the *Pelléas* drafts, the words of *L’Après-midi d’un faune*, which preceded and fell away from the *Prélude*, remain as the hidden background to the piece’s “commentary” on composition after Wagner. But to argue that a reading for such secret clues is necessary to understand the historical stance of the *Prélude* is not merely to reject outright the more immediate, aural experience of the piece. On the contrary, to recognize that *both*

42. “Debussy’s Summer Rites,” 228–29, 232.

43. In *19th-Century Music* 13 (1990): 257–61, at 259.

44. *Debussy and Wagner* (London: Eulenberg Books, 1979), 222. For a valuable review, see William Austin, “Viewpoint: Debussy, Wagner, and Some Others,” *19th-Century Music* 6 (1982): 82–91.

45. “*Tristan* in the Composition of *Pelléas*,” *19th-Century Music* 5 (1981): 139; the points in the next paragraph are drawn from 138–41.

sides of this methodological split are equally crucial to interpretation is to open the deepest relationship between the *Prélude* and *L'Après-midi d'un faune*.⁴⁶ In Debussy's translation of Mallarmé, the faun, symbol of the challenge the poem poses to the reader, becomes a symbol of the *Prélude's* challenge to Debussy's audience conceived *both* as unreflective listeners *and* as knowing readers. The *Prélude* articulates a conflict between its seductive, seemingly immediate sonorous pleasures and the esoteric syntax that, in securing those pleasures, demands analytical scrutiny to be fully understood. By composing the irresolvable tension between these two dimensions of musical experience into the *Prélude*, Debussy offers his poignant answer to the challenge of writing music *après Wagner*.

Rereading Debussy's "denial"

The famous letter to the critic "Willy" in which Debussy denied any close musical reading of *L'Après-midi d'un faune* actually contains, in its deceptively cavalier wording, several hints about this composed division of musical experience:

The *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*? Dear sir, might it be what has remained of the dream at the tip of the faun's flute? More precisely, it is the general impression of the poem, because in following it more closely, music would run out of breath as if a dray horse were competing for the Grand Prix with a thoroughbred. It is also the disdain for that "science of eager-beavers" which weighs down our proudest brains; And then! It is without respect for the tonality! Rather in a mode that tries to contain every nuance, which is very logically demonstrable.

All the same, it follows the rising motion of the poem, and it is the décor that is described so marvelously in the text, with in addition the humanity contributed by thirty-two violinists who have got up too early! The ending is the last line prolonged:

*Couple adieu, je vais voir l'ombre que tu devins.*⁴⁷

46. In considering Debussy's scoring as one determinant of his pointed references to Wagner, Abbate gives some weight to hearing as well as reading. My sense of a composed *conflict* between the two in the *Prélude* could suggest a further point of inquiry into *Pelléas*.

47. "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 de 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 concourant pour le Grand prix avec un pur-sang. C'est aussi le dédain de cette 'science de castors' qui alourdit nos plus fiers cervaux; puis! C'est sans respect pour le ton! Et plutôt dans un mode qui essaye de contenir toutes les nuances, ce qui est très logiquement démontrable.

"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! La fin, c'est le dernier vers prolongé:

"Couple adieu; je vais voir l'ombre que tu devins" (Debussy, *Correspondance*, 113-14).

Oscar Thompson, who describes the letter as "banter and irony" and a "characteristic bit of mockery," is one of the few to hold these remarks at the proper distance. See his *Debussy: Man and Artist* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1937), 113.

Debussy's claim that his piece gives only a "general impression" of the poem is really nothing but a truism: music cannot keep exact pace with poetry, because the syntactical processes of the two art forms are fundamentally different. He significantly qualifies his disavowal by giving suggestive hints about the "rising motion" and the prolongation of the last line. But whatever we might eventually make of these specific clues, the letter also slyly suggests how the *Prélude*, at the deepest level of its musical means, responds to the motivating tension of *L'Après-midi d'un faune*. By claiming that the "mode that tries to contain every nuance" is "logically demonstrable," that is, Debussy pointedly places explanations in terms of pitch systems under the purview of a rational, intellectual mode of scrutiny like that suggested by the upper body of the faun. Two other references to music frame the nod to "logical" syntax: the "dream" that remains "at the tip of the faun's flute"; the "humanity" of "thirty-two violinists who have got up too early." The more immediate sensuality that conflicts with analytical reading, Debussy implies, can be heard by attending to the *Prélude's* manipulation of orchestral sound.

With few exceptions, the oft-celebrated orchestration of the *Prélude* has been treated as nothing more than the decoration of a musical process that can be adequately described in terms of pitch alone.⁴⁸ The two references to instruments in Debussy's letter suggest how the piece's instrumentation might be heard more precisely. The "dream" of the flute stands opposed to the "humanity" of the violins: a cerebral solo wind instrument, let us say, contrasts with a more sensuous string section. The first step toward an illumination of this musical reading is to note the close parallel between the succession of pointed timbral contrasts between winds and strings in the *Prélude* and the form-defining contrasts between seeing and feeling in *L'Après-midi d'un faune*. But this is, indeed, only a first step. A contrast between two timbres occurs on one level of musical experience: a flute may sound dreamy and the violin section more human (more fully embodied), but both are accessible to *hearing*. Debussy's translation of Mallarmé's dichotomy between lower- and upper-body experience depends not only on his articulation of the expressive implications in instrumental sound, but on the way these sounds direct analytical scrutiny into the coded esotericism of his syntax. And ultimately, after following the sonorous signals into the chordal wordplay beneath, we must recognize that the historical self-consciousness of Debussy's harmonic "games" reflects back, outward, onto the timbral materials themselves—marking their posteriority, too, to the acme of Romantic orchestral expression attained in Wagner's music dramas.

Mallarmé, in so many ways the best imaginable collaborator for Debussy at this moment, was a particularly appropriate interlocutor in a compositional negotiation with post-Wagnerian *orchestration*. His own characteristically ambiguous pronouncements on music—and specifically on Wagnerian music

48. The most notable exception is Austin, who suggests in the Norton Score of the *Prélude* some important ways in which orchestral sound plays a form-defining role. See esp. 85–91.

drama—repeatedly revolve around invocations of orchestral timbre.⁴⁹ One of Valéry's somewhat simplistic comments can serve to highlight, in a preliminary fashion, the aptness of this aspect of Mallarmé's musical obsessions as a model for Debussy's exploration of post-Romantic orchestral expression in the *Prélude*:

When he conceived a poem and executed it Mallarmé had beneath his eyes the image of the orchestra with the positions occupied by the different instruments, that of the woodwinds, that of the brass, etc. He wished that an analogous sonorous space could pass into his poem.⁵⁰

"Reorchestrating" Mallarmé's faun poem, so to speak, Debussy composes a commentary on the potential of real instrumental timbre to recover, *après Wagner*, a quasi-dramatic sonorous space for lyrical expression in his own archetypically lyrical art form. The tone and conclusion of that commentary can only be characterized, now, by hearing and reading the *Prélude* after we first read and speak the poem with the faun.

Analyses

A "literary fugue"

As printed in 1876, *L'Après-midi d'un faune* begins with a section seven lines long separated from the following verses by the poem's first structural blank space. The poem also ends with a seven-line section (lines 104–10) separated from the previous section by a blank.⁵¹ These two outer sections enfold the internal structure within a symmetrical frame—or indeed, within an outermost virtual "bifolio." In order to begin reading the "literary fugue" that begins at line 8, it is helpful to know that the opening section ends with a pained recognition of the treachery of poetic metaphor. In line 7, that is, the faun woefully acknowledges—"hélas!"—that in his claim, in the first line of the poem, to see an intoxicating vision of nymphs, he was really only offering himself, "alone" in his fantasy, "la faute idéale de roses"—say, "the lack, or shortfall (as an

49. The "Rêverie" contains several references to orchestration, as do many of his other writings on music, including *La Musique et les lettres*. As usual, these references are neither clear nor consistent.

50. "Quand il concevait un poème et l'exécutait, Mallarmé avait sous ses yeux l'image de l'orchestre avec la place occupée par les différents instruments, celle des bois, celle des cuivres, etc. . . . Il voulait que passât dans son poème un analogue espace sonore." Quoted in a note to the Mallarmé *Correspondance*, vol. 1, 1862–71, ed. Henri Mondor and Jean-Pierre Richard (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 309 n. 2.

51. The OC2 prints the "Édition de 1876" without the blank between lines 103 and 104, which is a possible reading of an ambiguous situation: given that the last seven lines occupy a folio of their own, it is unclear whether a blank is intended after the previous folio. A blank is given here in the printed "édition définitive" published in 1887, but neither this one nor the one between lines 7 and 8 is found in all other editions. Perhaps Mallarmé never decided how clear—how recoverable—the poem's "intellectual armature" should be.

ideal), of roses.” Perhaps, in other words, his initial vision of rosy flesh “vaulting into the air” was only a deceitful symbol, like a bunch of flowers—a hoary metaphor for amorous passion—whose color and scent, however captivating, cannot offer satisfying substitutes for desired bodies. On this note of frustration, he begins the literary “fugue” that gives form to his confrontation with the different metaphorical possibilities in the sounds of his flute.⁵²

Example 1 shows the whole “literary fugue,” lines 8–51. The typography, the line breaks, and the blank spaces appear as in the 1876 edition.⁵³ With pairs of boxes in solid lines, I indicate the three occurrences of the *contrast* between seeing and feeling that most clearly mark the “fugal” thematic process of the whole section. The words in three distinct fonts to the right of the example also identify, in addition to *contrast*, two more recurring themes: the faun’s *music*, and the *disappearance* of the desired objects that follows upon (or is caused by) the music in all three cases. (The larger box around the verses in italics clarifies the relationship between the smallest instance of the thematic pattern and the larger one into which it is inserted.) I have underlined some important verbal markers, but the “themes” are best understood as continuing through several lines.

The three patterns of themes indicated by the words at right show how precisely Mallarmé has adapted fugal process to literary form.⁵⁴ After a statement of the basic pattern (contrast–music–disappearance) in fifteen lines, the next statement of the same pattern is almost precisely doubled in length, to make a section of twenty-nine lines. This larger section enfolds within it another instance of the pattern, almost precisely halved to seven lines. In other words, after the “subject” is given in its normative length, an augmentation follows, within which is nested a diminution.⁵⁵

52. In reading the first seven lines as a single “folio,” I distinguish between “internal” and “structural” spaces based primarily on my sense of a clear hierarchy in the text, which is reinforced both by the symmetrical relationships between sections and by a careful, highly limited use of the line-ending full stop. The argument can also be made with respect to the *size* of the spaces in the original edition: internal ones tend to be two lines in width, structural ones three. For a facsimile, see Jean-Michel Nectoux, ed., *Nijinsky: Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (Paris: Éditions Adam Biro, 1989), 14–17.

53. In the interests of space, the structural blanks are shown as two lines in width instead of three. The blank after “Réfléchissons . . .” is also three lines wide in Mallarmé; the break in line 32, by contrast, is one line.

54. I have indicated an extra thematic relationship at the beginning of two out of three passages: the location by the *shores* is clear in both the augmentation (lines 23–51) and the diminution (lines 26–32)—the “bords” in line 23; the “ici” and “hollow reeds” in line 26—but no element in the opening of the subject (lines 8–22) is as clear as to location. This idea, in strengthening the relationship of the two later sections, does not cloud the patterning of the “fugue” as a whole.

55. Recalcitrant skeptics might object to my “almost” precise fugal proportions of 7–15–29 instead of 7–14–28. But in a poem in rhyming couplets, arithmetical relationships that are consistently precise to $n + / - 1$ reflect the interplay of two independent formal priorities: proportion and rhyme scheme.

Example 1 Mallarmé's "literary fugue": *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, lines 8–51 (S = subject, A = augmentation, D = diminution)

S	8	Réfléchissons . . .	
		ou si les femmes dont tu gloses	
	9	Figurent un souhait de tes sens fabuleux!	
	10	Faune, l'illusion s'échappe des yeux bleus	
	11	Et froids, comme une source en pleurs, de la plus chaste:	
	12	Mais, l'autre tout soupirs, dis-tu qu'elle contraste	CONTRAST
	13	Comme brise du jour chaude dans ta toison?	
	14	Que non! par l'immobile et lasse pâmoison	
	15	Suffoquant de chaleurs le matin frais s'il lutte,	
	16	Ne murmure point d'eau que ne verse <u>ma flûte</u>	MUSIC
	17	Au bosquet arrosé d'accords; et le seul vent	
	18	Hors des deux tuyaux prompt à s'exhaler avant	
19	Qu'il <u>disperse</u> le son dans une pluie aride,	DISAPPEARANCE	
20	C'est, à l'horizon pas remué d'une ride,		
21	Le visible et serein souffle artificiel		
22	De l'inspiration, qui regagne le ciel.		
D	23	O bords siciliens d'un calme marécage	SHORES
	24	Qu'à l'envi de soleils ma vanité saccage,	
	25	Tacites sous les fleurs d'étincelles, <u>CONTEZ</u>	
	26	<i>"Que je coupais ici les creux roseaux domptés</i>	SHORES
	27	<i>"Par le talent; quand, sur l'or glauque de lointaines</i>	
	28	<i>"Verdures dédiant leur vigne à des fontaines,</i>	
	29	<i>"Ondioie une <u>blancheur</u> <u>animale</u> au repos:</i>	CONTRAST
	30	<i>"Et qu'au <u>prélude lent</u> où naissent <u>les pipeaux</u>.</i>	MUSIC
	31	<i>"Ce vol de cygnes, non! de naïades <u>se sauve</u></i>	DISAPPEARANCE
	32	<i>"Ou plonge . . .</i>	
A		Inerte, tout brûle dans l'heure fauve	
	33	Sans marquer par quel art ensemble détalà	
	34	Trop d'hymen souhaité de <u>qui cherche le la:</u>	
	35	Alors m'éveillerai-je à la ferveur première,	
	36	Droit et seul, sous un flot antique de lumière,	(visual staging in light)
	37	Lys! et l'un de vous tous pour ingénuité.	
			CONTRAST
	38	Autre que ce doux rien par leur <u>lèvre</u> ébruité,	
	39	Le <u>baiser</u> , qui tout bas des perfides assure,	
	40	<u>Mon sein</u> , vierge de preuve, atteste une <u>morsure</u>	(oral/tactile contact)
	41	Mystérieuse, due à quelque auguste <u>dent:</u>	
42	Mais bast! arcane tel élu pour confident		
43	<u>Le jonc vaste et jumeau</u> dont sous l'azur on joue:	MUSIC	
44	Qui, détournant à soi le trouble de la joue,		
45	Rêve, dans <u>un solo long</u> , que nous amusions		
46	La beauté d'alentour par des confusions		
47	Fausses entre elle-même et notre chant crédule;		
48	Et de faire aussi haut que l'amour se module		
49	<u>Évanouir</u> du songe ordinaire de dos	DISAPPEARANCE	
50	Ou de flanc pur suivis avec mes regards clos,		
51	Une sonore, vaine et monotone ligne.		

Example 1 continued

Let us reflect . . . or if the women that you are glossing / Figure a wish of your fabulous senses!
 / Faun, the illusion escapes of the eyes, blue / and cold, like a weeping spring, of the more
 chaste one: / But, the other all sighs, would you say that she contrasts / Like a hot breeze of
 the day into your fleece? / Ah no! out of the immobile and weary swoon / Suffocating with
 warmth the cold morning if it struggles, / Murmurs no water save what my flute pours / Into
 the thicket sprinkled with chords, and the only wind / Except for the two pipes quick to exhale
 before / It disperses the sound into a dry rain, / It is, at the horizon not stirred by a ripple, /
 The visible and serene artificial breath / Of inspiration, which regains the sky. // O Sicilian
 shores of a calm marsh / Which, emulating sunbeams, my vanity ransacks, / Implied beneath
 flowers of sparks, TELL / *“That I was here cutting hollow reeds tamed / By talent; when, on the
 glaucous gold of the distant / Greenery dedicating its vines to fountains, / Undulates an animal
 whiteness at rest: / And that at the slow prelude in which the pipes begin, / This flight of swans, no!
 of naiads escapes / Or plunges . . .* Inert, everything burns in the wild hour / Without marking
 by which art together has fled / Too much union desired by he who searches for the A: /
 Therefore I will awaken to the first fervor, / Erect and alone, beneath an antique wave of light,
 / Lilies! and one of all of you for innocence. // Other than this sweet nothing by their lip
 sounded out, / The kiss, that softly the perfidious ones assures, / My breast, virgin of proof, at-
 tests a mysterious / bite, due to some august tooth: / But enough! such a secret chose for con-
 fidant / The vast twin reed which beneath the azure one plays: / Which, turning back on itself
 the trouble of the cheek, / Dreams, in a long solo, that we amuse / The surrounding beauty
 with false confusions / between itself and our credulous song; / And [dreams] to make just as
 high as love modulates / To vanish from the ordinary dream of back / Or of pure flank pur-
 sued by my blind looks, / A sonorous, empty, monotonous line.

Closer reading clarifies the formal precision of the “fugue.” The “subject” begins with a collective verb, “let us reflect,” as the faun turns from his woeful opening soliloquy into a dialogue with himself. Identifying himself with the second-person pronoun “tu” (line 8), he wonders if the women he is “glossing” might be just a “wish of his fabulous senses.” He proceeds to deepen the inquiry with an attempt to describe the two nymphs that clearly contrasts seeing and feeling, in four lines punctuated as two plus two. Characterizing the more “chaste” one as an escaping illusion of blue and cold eyes (10–11), he leaves no doubt about the poverty of vision as a means of sensuous gratification. Then, by asking himself whether the other (“all sighs”) might be like a “hot breeze” into his “fleece,” he poses heat against coldness; an intimate approach against an escape to distance; lower-body—animal—sensation against seen illusions.⁵⁶ If the cold nymph is both seer and seen—eyes and object of the eyes—the faun’s (imagined) relationship to the hot one is sensually richer: it is her mouth, of course, that might breathe sighs into his fleece. In this first conjunction of oral and tactile experience, we readers are given a brief foretaste (or fore-*sense*) of the breathy passion that might lie in store with the full

56. The *Improvisation* had the much more precious “l’autre au tiède aveu” (“the other of the warm [or soft] avowal”) for “l’autre tout soupirs,” and “brise du jour vaine” instead of “chaude.” Far from blurring his final text, Mallarmé has in this instance both clarified the imagery and strengthened the thematic contrast.

attainment of spoken "music," for the faun's words actually *materialize* the "warm breeze of the day" as a crescendo of three sibilant consonants: "brise du jour *chaude*," "s-j-ch."

The faun answers his own inquiry with an abrupt denial, "Que non!" And now, for the first time, he recognizes the metaphorical deceptions of his own musical performance. Water, wind, sound, sensation—all are merely "murmurs" "poured forth" by his flute. The finely chosen verb, "verser" ("to pour"), relates the deceitful music directly to the art of poetry—"vers"—itself. And in the description of the thicket as "*arrosé d'accords*" ("sprinkled with chords"), the adjective echoes the "*roses*" the faun recognized, just prior to the "fugue," as false substitutes for his opening vision of rosy flesh. Pastoral piping is identified as just as treacherous, in its proliferation of metaphors, as the poetic imagination that ensnares sensuous experience in conventional symbols.

The *disappearance* that completes the thematic shape of the fugue subject negates or confuses the idea of breathing in particular. In the last mention of the flute (line 18), the "deux tuyaux" ("two pipes") are said to "exhale." As the sound "disperses," the faun's experience of his world becomes visual again: an "artificial breath of inspiration" becomes visible at the horizon and "regains the sky" to draw the "subject" to a close (lines 20–22). Some general rhythms can be discerned through the syntactical haze: "inspiration," which can also mean *inhalation*, answers the earlier exhalation of the flute, and brings this now-disembodied breath under the shadow of the adjective "artificial" (line 21). "Artificial inspiration," it seems to me, sums up the recognition, across the whole passage, that poetic craft, with all of its metaphors and musics, offers no more than an insubstantial artifice of experience. With a final rise of breath and "inspiration" to the sky or heaven ("ciel"), the faun's language regains the upper reaches of the imagination from which the search for sensuous substances began.

The contrapuntal elaboration begins with an even stronger linguistic gesture than the "subject."⁵⁷ With an apostrophic invocation (line 23), one of the most powerful devices of lyric utterance, the faun addresses his pastoral setting: "O Sicilian shores of a calm marsh." This is a typical Virgilian nod to the founder of pastoral poetry, as in the fourth and sixth *Eclogues*: "Sicilian muse, let's sing a nobler song"; "My playful muse first chose Sicilian verse: / She did not blush to dwell among the woods."⁵⁸ But rather than invoking a

57. The term *contrapuntal* may seem problematic given that the thematic patterns cannot be *spoken* simultaneously as in a musical fugue. But the textual presentation can still be said to effect a literary equivalent of "counterpoint," since the thematic shapes exist simultaneously in the *visual* experience of the text—and it is in the "fugue" that Mallarmé first makes use of the poem's two typographical special effects: the capitals of "CONTEZ" and the italics of the "telling." (Mallarmé's first experimentation with typography in this poem has long been recognized as a forerunner of the later, much more elaborate visual composition of *Un Coup de dés n'abolira le hasard*, which seems more obviously deserving of the label "counterpoint" even though it, too, cannot actually be realized as such in speech.)

58. Translations from Alpers, *The Singer of the Eclogues*, 27 and 37.

Sicilian muse, the faun can only—in his “vanity”—claim to be ransacking “Sicilian shores” “in emulation of sunbeams”—and the shores remain “tacites” (“silent,” that is, hidden or implied) beneath “flowers of sparks” (line 25). In the simplest reading, we might say that dazzling reflections on the water conceal the shores from his searching eyes. But we must also expect a deeper, figural meaning. On this point, Sainte-Beuve, whose *Étude sur Virgile* exemplified the tradition of reading Virgil as the “first modern,” can be of further help. In his preface, Sainte-Beuve celebrates literary tradition with a conventional metaphor: a torch (“flambeau”) that has passed from the Greeks to the Romans, through the Renaissance, to the modern era. More precisely, for Sainte-Beuve, only a few sparks from this torch have survived the vicissitudes of time and modern literary extravagance; it is the job of the careful classicist to make sure these “étincelles” never go out.⁵⁹

Perhaps the “étincelles” that blind LE FAUNE to the “Sicilian shores” are the very sparks of tradition so cherished by classicist critics like Sainte-Beuve. But in Mallarmé, these “étincelles” do not guide the faun’s eyes into the vistas of literary history: they actually obscure the “Sicilian shores” from his “ransacking” vision. The overwritten pages of centuries of modern literature, we might say, now intervene, blindingly, between this divided pastoral speaker and the Theocritean muse of his art. At the end of his classical invocation, the faun begs the silent shores to “TELL,” in a desperate plea for *aural* recovery, at least, of the originary voice whose source has been lost to view.

The change in typography for the diminution suggests that the shores respond to the faun’s summons to speak. But the “telling” begins in the first person rather than the third person of narrative; it starts in a past tense (“coupais”) but soon shifts to the present (“ondoie,” line 29). The faun can only pretend to hear the originary Sicilian voice, as he himself revisits the thematic pattern of the previous section. After marking his location, “here” (“cutting hollow reeds” [“creux roseaux”]), another echo of “roses” and “arrosé”), and giving a few details of the setting (the distant greenery, the fountains), he glimpses an undulating vision (line 29). His description, “blancheur animale,” encapsulates in two words the contrast between seeing and feeling. “Blancheur” (“whiteness”), a seen color, relates to the earlier vision of the blue-eyed nymph; through its figurative meaning of purity or innocence, it

59. The preface to the *Étude sur Virgile* is a “Discours” given by Sainte-Beuve on his accession to the chair of Latin poetry at the Collège de France in March 1855. See pp. 30–31: “En ce siècle où l’on a tant fait de systèmes et de professions de foi; ou à tout propos, dans toute matière, philosophique, sociale, littéraire, on a introduit et prodigué le mot de croyance, je ne veux pas dire que l’on en ait peu; mais il est aussi une religion plus discrète qui tient à l’amour du beau, du naturel, du fin et du délicat dans la poésie. Les Grecs l’eurent; les Romains après eux en recueillirent et en rassemblèrent en foyer plus d’une étincelle; ils tinrent à leur tour le flambeau. Quelques-unes de ces étincelles, diminuées, mais vives encore, ont passé jusqu’à nous: ne les laissons jamais s’éteindre. Vous me verrez très-attentif et très-zélé à les réunir et à les ranimer sous vos regards.” Sainte-Beuve’s particular emphasis on the need to animate these “étincelles” beneath the “regards” of his audience meshes well with my reading.

also recalls the chastity of that prior illusion. The adjective “animale,” on the other hand, adds a palpable *frisson* to the vision—as if the whiteness is suddenly recognized as desirable flesh—and a link back to the sighing nymph in the subject, who seemed to breathe into the fleece of the faun’s own animal half.

As in the subject, the faun’s glimpse of sensuous promise leads immediately to the theme of music. Now both the type of music, a “slow prelude,” and the instrument, the “pipes,” enter the “telling,” dispersing vision and sensation (lines 30–31). Unable to decide whether he has seen swans or naiads, the faun is equally confused about their manner of escape: either a “flight” (“vol”) or a “plunge” into the waters beyond the shores.

The augmentation that enfolds the diminution resumes with the return to roman type. In a transition, the faun notes that the burning heat of noon (“l’heure fauve”) erases all trace of the desired objects, and identifies himself in musical terms as “the one who searches for the *A*” (line 34). The augmented contrast then begins with three lines (35–37) in which he asserts that he will awaken to his “first fervor,” “erect and alone, beneath an antique wave of light.” It is as if he has claimed the visual stage of the poem, beneath a spotlight of tradition. Such boldness, it seems, inspires a sudden lurch to metaphor. Exclaiming the name of a white flower—“Lys!”—and relating it to his own “ingénuité” or innocence, the faun underlines its symbolic link, through the “blancheur” in the “telling,” back to the chaste nymph of the fugue subject.

After a blank, the second half of the contrast appears in four lines (38–41), shown in the second large box. The faun resumes, obscurely, in mid-thought: “other than this sweet nothing by their lip sounded out.” Perhaps the line refers back to the “telling,” in oblique acknowledgment that the “lip” of the shores actually said nothing. But rather than seeking a clear anecdote in these lines, it is best to read the tangled syntax as the result of a multilayered chiasmus pivoting around the faun’s reference to his own breast (“Mon sein”). On one side, we read of the “lip” and the “kiss”; on the other, of the “bite” and the “tooth.” Deepening the chiasmus, the guilty overtones of “perfidés” on one side contrast with the purity of “vierge” on the other; even more clearly, “bas”—low—on the side of the lip opposes “auguste”—august, or high—on the side of the tooth. Altogether, two more “animal” types of oral contact, the kiss of a (lower?) lip and the bite of an (upper?) tooth, here intensify the sensuality of the oral/tactile conjunction initially given in sighs.

The tactile counterpart to the orality has risen from the “fleece” that received the “breeze” to the faun’s “breast” or heart. Perhaps the claims to a spotlight visual presence and a centered oral/tactile experience show, dimly, some progress in the attempt to open a dramatic space and claim a sensuous presence. Initially, the themes of seeing and feeling arose from a description of the nymphs; now they have congealed more closely around the faun himself. But he is still trapped in his conventional role of musician. With an abrupt

ejaculation—"Mais bast!"—in the same formal position as the denial—"Que non!"—in the fugue "subject," he turns, again, to pastoral piping (line 43).

As in the diminution, the theme of *music* in the augmentation refers both to the instrument, the "vast twin reed," and to what it plays, "a long solo" (lines 43–45). The faun attributes to the reed a "dream"—that "we amuse / the surrounding beauty with false confusions / between itself and our credulous song"—which blends music and setting much in the way the flute that murmured into the chord-sprinkled thicket did. And as before, his syntax now becomes particularly baroque. The reed, it seems, also "dreams . . . to make as high as love modulates / to vanish from the ordinary dream of back / or of pure flank pursued by my blind looks / a sonorous, vain and monotonous line" (lines 45–51). Reading through the verbal tangles, we can recognize in this *disappearance* ("to vanish") both the "rising motion" ("aussi haut") hinted at in Debussy's letter to "Willy," and a last return to vision ("regards"). Perhaps the odd ascription of this vision to "blind" or "closed" eyes ("regards clos," line 50) adds a note of confusion similar to the "visible breath" in the subject and the indistinct whiteness in the diminution. With a negative turn much like the "artificial breath of inspiration" that closed the subject, the fugue ends with an acknowledgment that artistic "modulations" of sensuous desires into representational or musical lines can only be "vain" and "monotonous."

Debussy's reading of the "literary fugue"

Some of the general implications of this section of the poem have long been recognized; its concern with the artifice of poetic creation, for example, is hard to miss. But to expose the "literary fugue" is to discover the formal armature of Debussy's musical reading. Needless to say, there is nothing remotely fugal about the music of the *Prélude*, but Mallarmé's contrapuntally articulated succession of themes provides a clear template for musical composition. As with the poem, some summary comments on the opening of the piece—with its famous flute solo, harp sweeps, and horn calls—can help to set up the reading of the fugue.

Debussy's opening flute solo, perhaps the obvious timbre to represent the faun's initial solitude in his world, is answered by harp arpeggiations of a half-diminished seventh chord up and down through four octaves—a clear sonorous equivalent to the opening vision of "rosy flesh" that "vaults into the air." This first chord, as many have noted, unmistakably nods to the famous opening half-diminished seventh of *Tristan und Isolde*, although neither the harp arpeggios of a root position (A#–C#–E–G#) nor the accompanying first inversion precisely echo Wagner's distinctive voicing. We could well imagine that Debussy might draw on the symbolic implications of Wagner's chord in this oblique manner as an equivalent to the faun's first vague vision of desired flesh. By the time of the *Prélude's* composition, after all, such symbolism had hardened into the convention of leitmotivic labeling: in French leitmotivic

guides the leitmotif containing the original “Tristan chord” was designated “le Désir.” Debussy’s reading of the “literary fugue” will give more precise support to the suspicion that he is using the Wagnerian leitmotivic associations of the half-diminished seventh to effect esoteric links to Mallarmé’s poem.

Example 2 shows the beginning of Debussy’s reading of the fugue, beginning a few bars after the second iteration of the opening solo at measure 11. Prior to the example, the final A# of the flute solo was transferred to the oboe. In order to locate this as a moment in the “reading,” we must recognize that Debussy does not, in the *Prélude*, read Mallarmé’s structure-defining blank spaces with silences (the only bar of silence, measure 6, is best understood as a response to a blank *within* the poem’s opening section). The smoother elision of the music, by contrast with the poem, makes even delicate timbral shifts all the more significant. This transfer of the leading line from flute to oboe, I suggest, captures in sound the grammatical pivot, “Réfléchissons” (“let *us* reflect”), that starts the “literary fugue” with a turn from soliloquy to virtual dialogue (in which the faun addresses himself as “tu”). For after the oboe rises through an octave, we reach the *Prélude*’s translation of the contrast between the *seen* and *felt* nymphs in Mallarmé’s fugue “subject.”

As we might now expect from his letter, Debussy paints the contrast between the two nymphs with a contrast between winds and strings (mm. 17–18). In this first instance, the solo oboe, joined by another oboe and two clarinets, states a single bar of melody that is immediately echoed by the high, octave-doubled first violins. This shift from winds to violins, whose exact melodic repetition makes it redundant to pitch-based analyses, is Debussy’s equivalent to Mallarmé’s first contrast between seeing and feeling. The first violins have only appeared once before in the piece, in a low *pianissimo* chord (m. 7). Now, they irrupt with a sensuality that is striking even at a *piano* dynamic. As the dynamic level rises across the repetitions of the three-note surges, the wind scoring gradually thins—one oboe drops out, followed by one and then both clarinets—while the violins continue to repeat their crescendos in unabated *forte*. Like the *seen*, chaste nymph, the wind sounds recede; like the warm breath into the fleece, the violin sound becomes more intimate to the ear.⁶⁰

This first timbral contrast hinges on a reference to Wagner that could hardly be more direct. The first G# of every three-note gesture in measure 19 is set to the “Tristan chord” at pitch, with one enharmonic change:

60. In many recordings, the strings are reduced to background coloration in all but the central climax. My recognition of the form-articulating dialogue between winds and strings sprang from a hearing of Pierre Boulez’s 1968 recording for CBS with the New Philharmonia Orchestra, rereleased in 1989 on the CBS Masterworks collection *Debussy: Orchestral Music* (MB2K 45620). While Boulez’s recordings of Debussy have occasionally been criticized as coldly clinical, in this case his text-faithful timbral balance invaluable (if fortuitously) makes audible the crucial “nodes” of the musical reading of Mallarmé.

E#[F]–B–D#–G#. Such a direct reference is appropriate for the first physical sensation of a desired object that was initially only distantly seen. Indeed, in this instance Debussy has almost stayed close enough to the Wagnerian model that a shift to *reading* from hearing is unnecessary to recognize the symbol of desire. The repeated crescendos of string sound, which infuse the “desire” chord with something like its original passion, relate mimetically and materially to the poem’s own “music.” In place of Mallarmé’s crescendo of sibilant consonants—the “*s-j-ch*” in “*brise du jour chaude*”—Debussy gives repeated three-note ascending crescendos, G#–B–C#. He thus realizes, in the sensuous “humanity” of the high first violins, the hint in the poem that the contrast between a seen and a sensed nymph stands for a deeper contrast between modes of experiencing the text itself.

The collapse to solo clarinet is a collapse back to distance, as in the faun’s self-denial: “Que non!” As we should expect from the poetic template, the first violins now disappear until they are called on to express the “animal” desire in the faun’s “telling.” In the poem the faun now recognizes that his own flute “pours forth” his desirous illusions. To paint this “thematic” music Debussy brings back the solo flute, which had disappeared from his reading of the pivotal contrast, garlands it with harp figuration (a conventional “pastoral” scoring), and adds a second flute, to bring his reading of the fuge subject to a close with an equivalent of the poem’s “two pipes” (“*deux tuyaux*,” mm. 27–30).

Debussy reads the whole of Mallarmé’s “augmentation” as a clearly demarcated section, measures 31–54. In Example 3, I show only the central passage (mm. 36–48), which includes the timbral exchanges that mark the two thematic contrasts. The beginning of the entire section makes the most extensive use of the whole-tone scale in the piece (mm. 32–33 and 35–36: the last bar of this material starts the example). At this point in the poem, the faun, blinded by “sparks,” cannot see into the classical tradition. In Debussy’s reading, the modern whole-tone scale draws a syntactical scrim over the traditions of tonal practice, as grace notes in the harp flash like the sparks that dazzle the faun’s eyes.

For all its delicacy, the shift from the harp-brightened whole-tone “shores” to the modal oboe solo is as striking to the ears as the poem’s first change of typography is to the eyes. The musical mode of the solo follows the “modern” implications of the whole-tone field with an even more specific response to the poem’s invocation of the “*Sicilian*” pastoral poet, Theocritus. The solo begins as if it might be pentatonic, but the three accompanying chords in the first bar state all seven notes of the Dorian mode on F#. In the second bar, two more pitches, D# and E, are added to the melody, giving the oboe, in all, six of the seven notes of the Dorian mode (only the A is missing). The Dorian dialect of Theocritus’s *Idylls* was often celebrated for its rustic immediacy, for example by Sainte-Beuve:

Example 3 Debussy's orchestral reading of Mallarmé, from just before the diminution through the thematic contrast in the augmentation: *Prélude*, mm. 36–48

O bords siciliens . . .

CONTEZ

36

1^{re} FL. *En animant* (M.M. ♩ = 72)

HAUTB. *f*

CL. *1^o SOLO*
doux et expressif

B^{ons} *1^o*
p

. . . sous les fleurs d'étincelles,

1^{re} HARPE *p*

En animant

Div. arco *p*

arco *p*

arco *p*

Melody: [a b

Example 3 continued

(winds) (strings)

39

1^{re} FL. ... *Ondioie*

HAUTB. *une blancheur* (à 2) *p* (*cygnes*)

COR ANGL. *crescendo* *mf*

CL. *cresc.* 1° (2) 1°

B^{ons} *cresc.* *mf* *p*

CORS *p* *cresc.* *mf* 3°

se sauve

animale ... *arco* *cresc.* *mf* *p*

crescendo *mf* *p*

crescendo *mf* *p*

crescendo Div. *mf* *p*

arco *mf*

c c a' b'

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for a woodwind and string ensemble. It is divided into two main sections: '(winds)' and '(strings)'. The woodwind section includes 1st Flute (1^{re} FL.), Horn in A (HAUTB.), English Horn (COR ANGL.), Clarinet (CL.), and Bassoon (B^{ons}). The string section includes Corsage (CORS), Violin (V^{ns}), Viola (V^{las}), and Cello/Double Bass (C^lo/B^{as}). The score is marked with various dynamics such as *p* (piano), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *crescendo*. Performance instructions include *Ondioie*, *animale*, *arco*, and *Div.* (divisi). The piece is in a key with three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a common time signature. The score is divided into measures, with a vertical dashed line separating the woodwind and string parts. The bottom of the page is marked with 'c', 'c', 'a'', and 'b''.

One hears, even with a somewhat debased ear, how well this *dialecte dorien*, with its open sounds, lends itself to the painting of the broad perspectives of nature. This dialect is grandiose and sonorous; it is replete; it reflects the forest greenery, the calm, the freshness, the vast expanse, the brilliance of the light.⁶¹

Sainte-Beuve makes clear the conventionally Theocritean nature of Mallarmé's imagery in the "telling"; his idealistic hearing of the *dialecte dorien* fits well with the naive modality of Debussy's oboe solo. Not only does Debussy set the ostensible "telling" of the "Sicilian shores" in the *mode dorien*, but by juxtaposing this mode with the whole-tone scale, he finely captures in music Mallarmé's modern figuration of the broken continuity of classical tradition.

In a rare instance of numerical correspondence, Debussy reads Mallarmé's "telling" with seven bars for seven lines. As indicated below the example, the oboe solo begins with two bars of melody (ab); after the two-bar timbral exchange that paints the thematic contrast (cc) these first two bars recur transposed, with the second bar repeated (a'b'b').⁶² As before, the two-word contrast "blancheur animale" is expressed as an alternation, with exact melodic repetition, of wind and violin, linked to the poem both by direct mimesis and by a nod to Wagner. Within the rhythmically staid oboe solo, the syncopations in the two pivotal bars (mm. 39–40) undulate ("ondoie," line 29) like the faun's vision of whiteness. The Wagnerian signal is more abstract: the half-diminished seventh G#–B–D–F# is simply arpeggiated (with one passing note) above the E bass. It is appropriate that the distantly *seen* carnality in the "telling"—like the earlier vision of vaulting flesh—should receive a vaguer harmonic expression than the "desire" chords that set the breeze into the fleece.

By continuing the exchange between high violins and winds to lead out of the "telling," Debussy responds to the further antinomies that follow on this instance of the main thematic contrast: the faun's confusion between "swans" and "naiads," and between their "escape" or "plunge." By ending the seven-bar phrase with a departure from whole-bar units (m. 44) that is far less aurally striking than the modal shift at its beginning, he finds an equivalent to the ellipsis that ends the "telling." In the poem, at this point, the faun refers to himself as "the one who searches for the A." Already, by leaving out this one pitch from the oboe's statement of the Dorian mode, Debussy has secreted a clever response to this poetic-musical conceit in his leading melody. Now, in measure 44, he marks the moment at which the faun mentions "le *la*" by emphatically compensating for the previous omission. Exactly where we would expect, just

61. "On sent, même avec une oreille à demi profane, combien dans ce dialecte dorien l'ouverture des sons se prête à peindre largement les perspectives de la nature. Ce dialecte est grandiose et sonore; il est plein; il réfléchit la verdure, le calme, la fraîcheur, le vaste de l'étendue, l'éclat de la lumière" (Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, "Théocrite" [1846], in *Portraits littéraires*, rev. ed. [Paris: Garnier Frères, 1862], 3:10).

62. The formal congruence also exemplifies the proportional flexibility of Debussy's reading: the pivotal contrast occurs earlier in the seven-bar phrase than in the seven-line "telling."

before the third contrast, the principal flute, in dialogue with all of the winds, moves twice to a rhythmically strong A.⁶³

Debussy reads the third contrast between seeing and feeling much like the previous two. Within the somewhat complicated texture of measures 46–47, we find again a one-bar gesture in the winds (cor anglais and clarinet) answered by violins in octaves and linked to Mallarmé's text by a pun on *Tristan*.⁶⁴ The winds in this exchange are set to a "minor triad with major sixth" voicing of the "Tristan chord," at the very pitches—B \flat –D \flat –F–G—of the chord that begins the introduction to act 3 of *Tristan und Isolde* (see Ex. 4). In French leitmotivic analysis, the motive that includes this voicing of the chord bears the label "La Solitude," which is precisely appropriate for the faun's identification of himself at this point as a figure "erect and *alone*" ("droit et seul").⁶⁵ If the "desire" voicing of the "breeze into the fleece" retained a trace of Wagner's passion, this later reference is far more removed from the unforgettable pathos of the act 3 introduction. A leitmotivic reading has become essential to recognize the linguistic basis of Debussy's compositional choices.

Debussy overlays the violin side of this exchange (m. 47) with a one-bar call for *two horns*, the only brass instruments in his orchestra—a fine response to the "sweet nothing by *their lip* sounded out." The horns actually "sound out," at pitch, over the D \flat -major added-sixth chord that will initiate the *Prélude's* central section, the full bar of melody that later reappears precisely at the climactic crux (mm. 67–70). But given that both the violins, *piu forte*, and the horns, *très en dehors*, are crucial to the reading, Debussy's scoring has become almost impossible to hear clearly. This timbrally crowded moment can be seen as a sophisticated response to the chiasmus in the poem, whose formal density blocks clear linear reading. And by marking this dense scoring as an anticipation of the expressive center of the piece, Debussy gives emphasis to the arcane hint of future-directed desire in Mallarmé's chiasmus. Recall that

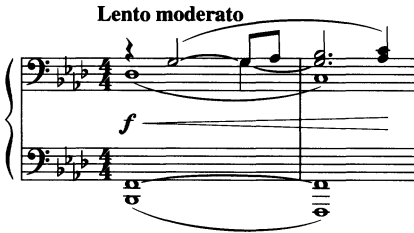
63. In a recent article on Debussy's setting of Verlaine's "Mandoline," Abbate comments that "A is . . . the note shouted loudest of all by Verlaine's poem, as the tonic of the Aeolian mode, the traditional pastoral mode, hence of ancient lyre-sounds that abandoned mandolins would make could we ever really hear their speech. This pastoral A appears as well in 'L'après-midi d'un faune,' where Mallarmé's faun tunes his pipes in a search for the same symbolic note, and thus for a prelapsarian past when breath had not yet gone out of the world" ("Debussy's Phantom Sounds," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 10 [1998]: 84). The *Prélude's* musical reading of the faun's "search for the A" actually makes use of a different "traditional pastoral mode" than the Aeolian—one whose Theocritean associations are more precisely appropriate to the figural history in Mallarmé's poem.

64. I link the violins with the words "Mon sein" in the example, but only as the central idea of the whole passage, not as a direct one-to-one correspondence; hence the parentheses.

65. On the basis of the precision of this Wagnerian pun, we might note retrospectively that the first half-diminished seventh chord in the *Prélude*, which includes a "minor triad plus major sixth" in the winds, could well be voiced to symbolize the "desirous solitude" of the faun at the beginning of the poem (which is marked by the poem's only other use of the adjective "seul" for the faun himself, line 6).

Example 4 The “solitude” motive and chord, as labeled by Albert Lavignac in his *Le Voyage artistique à Bayreuth* (Paris: Librairie Charles Delagrave, 1897)

LA SOLITUDE



on either side of the faun’s “breast,” we have read, on the one hand, of “their lip,” in some association with “bas” or “low,” and on the other, of an “*angust* tooth.” In other words, the formed language dimly prefigured the faun’s true goal: the sensuous conjunction of his own *lower lip* and *upper tooth* in passionate speech. Debussy’s musical realization makes such prefiguration explicit: the sensuous violin sound is masked by horns that sound out the very fragment of melody that will eventually be claimed by the violins in their most compelling musical equivalent to lyric speech.

Whole-tone harmonies (mm. 48–50) efface the diatonic flavors of the sonorous chiasmus—“Mais bast!”—and a “long solo” in the clarinet (a “*jonc*” or reed, in place of the “two pipes” that ended the subject) carries us out of Debussy’s orchestration of the “literary fugue” (mm. 51–54). With this upward-wandering solo (a “sonorous and monotonous line”) Debussy paints in sound the “rising motion” that characterizes the *disappearance* at the end of the whole “literary fugue” and delivers us to the piece’s central effloration.

Orchestral background

Some brief consideration of the details of Debussy’s sonorous reading so far can help prepare a full understanding of his response to Mallarmé’s climactic passage. Most importantly, we should account for his choice of strings, not winds, as the sound of breathy sensuality in the reading of the fugue. We might begin by interpreting this configuration as no more than an activation of Romantic cliché: to be sure, in nineteenth-century writing, violin sound is often discussed (along with the rest of the string quintet) as an abstract “foundation” of the orchestra, but it is also regularly celebrated as the most sensuous timbre.⁶⁶ Either way, it is rarely given the poetic attributions that often

66. For the former, see for example Henri-Marie-François Lavoix, *L’Histoire d’instrumentation depuis le seizième siècle jusqu’à nos jours*, where the violins are identified as “ces instruments que forment le fond et comme le squelette de nos orchestres” and as “la véritable base de l’édifice instrumental” ([Paris: Librairie Fermin-Didot, 1878], 31–32). (The association with sensuality, of course, is commonplace.)

accru to the winds. But given the evidence in Debussy's syntax of his sensitivity to Mallarmé's self-conscious confrontation with convention, the scoring of the *Prélude* demands recognition as more than a mere manipulation of cliché. A look into the most influential of all nineteenth-century works on instrumentation, Berlioz's *Grand Traité*, can suggest some ways in which Debussy's timbral choices, like his harmonic puns and his formal processes, are based on a self-conscious act of *reading*.

Debussy's three sonorous contrasts make good on the hints in his letter to Willy in general terms, but not in specifics: the "dreamy" flute is absent from all three contrasts between winds and "human" violins, which feature oboe with clarinet, oboe solo, and clarinet with English horn. Berlioz's comments on the wind instruments suggestively imply just such a differentiation between the flute and the instruments more appropriate for a contrast between poetic and sensuous sounds. Regarding the flute, Berlioz writes:

The sonority of this instrument is gentle in the middle range, somewhat piercing in the upper, very characteristic in the lower. The medium and high tones have no specific, well-defined expression. They can be used for melodies of diverse character.

We might say already that such lack of "well-defined" character could make the flute apt to encapsulate the faun's vague position in his world at the opening of his poem, from which he will *seek* a more defined expression in the lyric voice. But in Berlioz's continuation a more subtle avenue of inquiry opens:

However, with closer study [*en l'étudiant bien*] one finds that the flute is endowed with a character peculiarly its own and with a special aptitude for expressing certain feelings. . . . For instance, if one desires to give an expression of desolation to a sad melody, combined with a feeling of humility and resignation, the weak medium tones of the flute, especially in C minor and D minor, will certainly produce the intended effect.⁶⁷

Berlioz can only offer his characterization of this instrument with a *shift in attention* from hearing to "closer study." We glimpse, in this turn of phrase, a shadow of intellectual mediation—something like an opposition between hearing and reading written into the *Traité* itself. And if Berlioz's words sug-

67. "La sonorité de cet instrument est douce dans le médium, assez perçante à l'aigu, très caractérisée au grave. Le timbre du médium et celui du haut n'ont pas d'expression spéciale, bien tranchée. On peut les employer pour des mélodies ou des accents de caractères divers. . . . Il semble donc que la flûte soit un instrument à peu près dépourvu d'expression, qu'on est libre d'introduire partout et dans tout, à cause de sa facilité à exécuter les groupes de notes rapides, et à soutenir les sons élevés. . . . En général cela est vrai; pourtant en l'étudiant bien, on reconnaît en elle une expression qui lui est propre, et une aptitude à rendre certains sentiments. . . . S'il s'agit par exemple, de donner à une chant triste un accent désolé, mais humble et résigné en même temps, les sons faibles de médium de la flûte, dans les tons d'Ut mineur et de Ré mineur surtout, produiront certainement la nuance nécessaire" (Hector Berlioz, *Grand Traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration modernes* [Paris: Schöenberger, 1843], 153).

gest that an effort of study might be necessary to read “humility” into the ill-defined character of flute sound, his words on the other winds depend much more overtly on appeals to reading.

For Berlioz the oboe “has a rustic [*agreste*] character, full of tenderness—I might even say of shyness.”⁶⁸ This direct association of oboe sound with character markedly contrasts with the hesitation about the flute. The adjective “agreste,” of course, near-synonymous with “pastoral,” identifies the strongest topical implication of oboe sound, which is cunningly enriched by Debussy’s Dorian mode in measures 37–38.⁶⁹ The poetic basis of such sonorous characterizations becomes more explicit in these words on the clarinet:

The character of the medium range sounds, imprinted [*empreint*] with a sort of pride that tempers a noble tenderness, makes them favorable for the expression of the most poetic sentiments and ideas. . . . The character of the clarinet is epic rather than idyllic—like that of the horns, trumpets, and trombones. Its voice is that of heroic love.⁷⁰

Claiming to hear a poetic *imprint*, and invoking the modes of poetry—epic, idyllic—Berlioz gives his description of this sound a strong literary inflection. He continues even more explicitly: “I have never been able to hear military music from afar without being profoundly moved by that feminine quality of tone present in the clarinets; it has always left me with impressions similar to those received when reading ancient epic poems.”⁷¹

Finally, according to Berlioz, the cor anglais sounds “melancholy, dreamy, noble, somewhat veiled—as if played in the distance.” Debussy’s third timbral contrast adds this distanced wind sound to the readerly clarinet sound (m. 46), thus matching the intensified sense of mediation in this moment’s Wagnerian harmonic pun. Berlioz further suggests that the cor anglais “has no equal among the instruments for reviving images and sentiments of the past if the composer intends to touch the hidden chords of tender memories.”⁷² In the musical reading of Mallarmé’s “fugue,” this third timbral contrast marks

68. “Le hautbois est avant tout un *instrument mélodique*; il a un caractère agreste, plein de tendresse, je dirai même de timidité” (ibid., 104).

69. The oboe and the cor anglais, not the flute, are the “pastoral” instruments of choice for both Berlioz and Wagner.

70. “Le caractère des sons du *médium* empreint d’une sorte de fierté que tempère une noble tendresse, les rends favorables à l’expression des sentiments et des idées les plus poétiques. . . . La clarinette est peu propre à l’*Idylle* c’est un instrument *Épique* comme les Cors, les Trompettes, et les Trombones. Sa voix est celle de l’héroïque amour” (Berlioz, *Grand Traité d’instrumentation*, 138).

71. “Je n’ai jamais pu entendre de loin une musique militaire sans être vivement ému par ce timbre féminin des Clarinettes, et préoccupée d’images de cette nature, comme après la lecture des antiques épopées” (ibid.).

72. “[Le cor anglais,] c’est une voix mélancolique, rêveuse, assez noble, dont la sonorité a quelque chose d’effacé, de *Lointain*, que la rend supérieure à toute autre, quand il s’agit d’émouvoir en visant renaitre les images et les sentiments du passé, quand le compositeur veut faire vibrer la corde secrète des tendres souvenirs” (ibid., 122).

the faun's lonely wish to "awaken to his first fervor beneath an antique wave of light." Perhaps, by adding to the clarinet an instrument celebrated for its evocation of "memories," Debussy captures the faun's nostalgia for a primordial "fervor" beneath the light of ancient tradition.

The general point, at any rate, is clear: Debussy has chosen the wind instrument of faintest "character" to stand for the ill-defined position of the faun in most of his text, saving the more clearly poetic instruments for the more precise task of representing the faun's visual experiences of his world.⁷³ If it is entirely understandable that the close collaboration with Mallarmé would have attuned him to such invocations of literary *mode*, of *reading*, and of *character* or *imprint*, it is also easy to imagine that in reading Berlioz's treatise *d'après Mallarmé* he would have been struck by this exceptionally extravagant instance of the cliché about the violins:

Nothing can equal the stirring sweetness of some twenty E-strings vibrated by as many skilled bows. Here is the true female voice of the orchestra, a voice at once passionate and chaste, rending and soft, which weeps and cries and laments, or sings and prays and dreams, or bursts forth with jubilation—as no other instrument can. A minute movement of the arm, even a sentiment unnoticed by the player, hardly perceptible with a single instrument, produces in a group the most wonderful shadings and arouses feelings which penetrate to the depth of the heart.⁷⁴

Unmediated by appeals to poetic associations, images, or memories, these words on the violin break forth from the context of Berlioz's treatise much as this sound breaks through the sonorous surface of Debussy's tone poem. The exceptional primacy that Debussy gives to the wind instruments in the *Prélude*, often celebrated as an end in itself, more importantly serves to free the violin sound utterly from its normative, abstract, or foundational role, such that its sensuality can appear in the soundscape as the exceptional sound, the sound desired and pursued by the ear of the faunlike listener.

Of course, by the 1890s further layers of instrumental theory had been added to Berlioz, and we should expect that some of these might further en-

73. The choice may seem obvious, given the faun's explicit mention of his "flute." But this is only a single reference in a poem that also refers, more generally, to "tuyaux" and "pipeaux," and to a "jonc"—and that does *not* feature explicit musical reference in most sections. It is thus best to understand the solo flute as a sign of the faun in his world rather than a specific equivalent of his instrument. (This interpretation can account for the fact that the flute returns to lead the prelude to a close, even though pastoral music is absent from the latter half of the poem.)

74. "Les mélodies tendres et lentes, confiées trop souvent aujourd'hui à des instruments à vent, ne sont pourtant jamais mieux rendues que par une masse de violons. Rien n'égale la douceur pénétrante d'une vingtaine de chanterelles mises en vibration par vingt archets bien exercés. C'est là la vrai voix féminine de l'orchestre, voix passionnée et chaste en même temps, déchirante et douce, qui pleure et crie et se lamente, ou chante et prie et rêve, ou éclate en accents joyeux, comme nulle autre ne le pourrait faire. Un imperceptible mouvement du bras, un sentiment inaperçu de celui qui l'éprouve, qui ne produirait rien d'apparent dans l'exécution d'un seul violon, multiplié par le nombre des unissons, donne des nuances magnifiques, d'irrésistibles élans, des accents qui pénètrent jusqu'au fond du coeur" (Berlioz, *Grand Traité d'instrumentation*, 33).

rich a hearing of the *Prélude*. For example, in various treatises published between 1860 and 1890, F.-A. Gevaert both quotes Berlioz extensively and expands his sketchier descriptions. His elaboration of Berlioz's association of harp timbre with bright light, for example, supports one strong poetic implication of the harp throughout the *Prélude*. But he has more to offer our hearing of the horn, the last of the "mythic trio"—Pan's flute, Apollo's lyre, Diana's horn—that begins the piece. To the celebrated capacity of the horn to evoke distance, Berlioz adds only a slightly more precise idea of its "chaste" tone, presumably based on the association with Diana.⁷⁵ Gevaert can significantly enrich our hearing of the collision of sounds in Debussy's third sonorous contrast (mm. 46–47):

In the dramatic orchestra, which attempts to translate not only vague aspirations, but determinate states of the soul, the horn, treated as a solo instrument, controls sentiments and situations in which the imagination intervenes in an active way: hope for the future . . . ; recollection of the past, reminiscence of moving words spoken in a solemn moment . . . ; memory of the loved one . . . ; appeal to an unknown or mysterious being . . . ; anxious anticipation of the beloved. . . . In all of these ways, the horn is heard as an ideal voice, which makes itself heard across time and space.⁷⁶

The strong *temporal* powers attributed to the horn by Gevaert find precise exemplification in the horn call that overlays the *Prélude*'s third wind-string exchange. With an exact anticipation of the "moving words" to the "beloved" that will be claimed by the violins at the piece's climax, Debussy marks his third timbral contrast as an "active . . . hope for the future." If his careful deployment of wind instruments shows suggestive links to Berlioz's instrumental poetics, his use of the horn in this particular instance could mark a sensitive response to a subsequent layer of the tradition. The implications of such a suggestion are best pursued after we read further, into the crux of Mallarmé's linguistic form, to prepare a hearing of Debussy's realization of the hope sounded out by the horns.

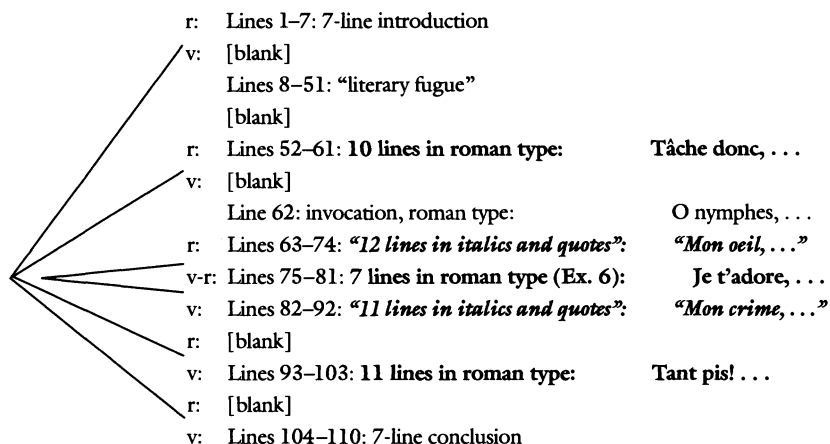
The linguistic crux: reading as the faun

In the schematic representation of the poem's form in Example 5, I show the whole structure, including the outermost "bifolio," and highlight the symmetries of the second half. After the "fugue" and prior to the seven-line close,

75. Berlioz writes of "la voix chaste et réservée des cors" (ibid., 184).

76. "Dans l'orchestre dramatique, qui s'attache à traduire non-seulement de vagues aspirations, mais des états déterminés de l'âme, le cor traité en instrument principal a pour domaine les sentiments et les situations où l'imagination intervient d'une manière active: espoir en l'avenir . . . ; rappel du passé, réminiscence de paroles émouvantes prononcés dans un moment solennel . . . ; souvenir de l'objet aimé . . . ; appel à un être inconnu et mystérieux . . . ; attente inquiète du bien-aimé . . . Partout ici le cor est conçu comme une voix toute idéale, qui se fait entendre à travers le temps et l'espace" (François-Auguste Gevaert, *Nouveau Traité d'instrumentation* [Paris: H. Lemoine, 1885], 211).

Example 5 Schematic diagram of the “foliated” form of *L’Après-midi d’un faune*, emphasizing the proportional and typographical symmetries of the second half



Mallarmé presents a unified array of sections whose one-to-one proportional relationships are clearly marked by the two different typefaces. As the diagram on the left of the example shows, by reading each of the main blanks of the poem’s intricate “intellectual armature” as a blank folio, and by taking the changes in type that are not separated by blanks as immediate turns from recto to verso of a single folio, it becomes possible to interpret the second half as two interleaved bifolios.⁷⁷

In providing the first two words of each section, I give only the briefest indication of the many ways the proportional symmetries between the paired passages are reinforced by linguistic detail.⁷⁸ The virtual “foliation” gives form to a dynamic progression in agency of speech leading into the central seven lines (Ex. 6) and out into retrospection. Without the “extra” line 62, the seven pivotal lines, 75–81, would fall at the exact center of the whole symmet-

77. As for the “fugue,” the “one-to-one” relationships are precise to ± 1 : ten and eleven lines in roman type, twelve and eleven in italics. It should be clear that the represented foliation is *virtual*, that is, an aspect of poetic form that is independent of the *actual* foliation of Mallarmé’s original edition, in which the physical pagination is all but entirely independent of the textual form (i.e., many poetic sections cross from one printed folio to the next). Also, I have left out of the diagram the precise relationship between the “literary fugue” and the rest of the foliated form, because it does not bear directly on Debussy’s reading in the *Prélude*. For an analysis of the virtual “book” that includes the “fugue,” see the first chapter of my dissertation, “A Song Not Purely His Own.”

78. Of the four symmetrically paired incipits (“Tâche donc,” “Mon oeil,” “Mon crime,” and “Tant pis!”), all but the third are changed for the 1876 version in ways that exemplify Mallarmé’s formal clarification through revision. “Mes yeux” becomes “Mon oeil,” which is closer to “Mon crime”; the exclamation “Tant pis!” replaces “Dédaignons-lez!” in line 93, which creates the new section-leading consonant pair with “Tâche donc, instrument . . .”; this line, too, altered from

Example 6 *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, lines 75–81: the pivotal passage in the “virtual foliation” of the second half of the poem

- (v) 75 Je t'adore, courroux des vierges, ô délice
 76 Farouche du sacré fardeau nu qui se glisse
 77 Pour fuir ma lèvre en feu buvant, comme un éclair
 (v-r) 78 Tressaille! la frayeur secrète de la chair:
 (r) 79 Des pieds de l'inhumaine au coeur de la timide
 80 Que délaisse à la fois une innocence, humide
 81 De larmes folles ou de moins tristes vapeurs.

I adore you, wrath of virgins, O fierce / Delight of the sacred naked burden which slides / To flee my fiery drinking lip, like a lightning bolt / Thrills! the secret terror of the flesh: / From the feet of the inhuman one to the heart of the shy / Let all at once relinquish an innocence, humid / With foolish tears or with less mournful vapors.

rical structure (10 + 12 lines before; 11 + 11 after). The interpolated apostrophe to the nymphs, in fact, both underlines the main point of the passage and deepens the dynamic move toward the central crux. *Invocation*, a summoning of the world through speech, is precisely the aesthetic motivation of the whole second half of the poem.

Example 6 shows the climactic attainment of vocality and the pivotal turn in the foliated form. The simple exclamation of love, “Je t'adore,” is the only time that the faun speaks to the nymphs directly, with the “je-tu” address that is the most potent promise of presence in lyric poetry.⁷⁹ After the apostrophe, “ô délice,” the language of the first three lines dissolves the prosody in a literally “delicious” rush to the climactic diphthong of “*Tre*” and the slide of the double *s* into “*aille*.” With the labiodental fricatives in “vierges,” “farouche,” “fardeau,” “fuir,” “lèvre,” “feu,” and “buvant,” the lower lip and upper tooth of the last thematic contrast meet in the faun’s own mouth. Claiming his sensations for “my lip” in place of “their lip”—the only two instances of this word in the poem—he celebrates the thrill of materialized speech in its maximal intimacy.

In the exact center of the central passage, marked by an exclamation mark, the rush of lyricism halts as the faun admits to a “secret terror.” Now the language palpably turns a corner. The prosody falls into order again as he separates and specifies the two bodies in a parallel structure that clearly marks the hemistiches of the alexandrine: “Des pieds de l'inhumaine / au coeur de la timide.” Unlike the tumbling elisions leading to the central “thrill,” the enjambment between lines 80 and 81 stutters on the blandest vowel: “humide /

“Tâche, noble instrument . . .,” comes closer to its formal companion in sentence structure (two words to a point of punctuation) and tone (the hint of colloquial speech in “donc”). See the *Improvisation* in *OC2*, 160–62.

79. Previously, the faun has only spoken the second-person pronoun to himself (lines 8–13; see Ex. 1) and to his flute, when he discards it in lines 52–53.

De larmes.” The liquid *l* and the closed-lipped *m* accumulate, quenching the breathy hiss, as we read out, through the musically crowded pairing “moins tristes,” to the dissipation of passion and linguistic presence into “vapors.”

Reading for verbal music, we share with the faun a sense of vocal presence that surges across lip and tooth to the central flowering of “Tressaille!” We share, too, after this pivotal moment, the feeling of retreat: the congealing of prosodic order, the muting of the poetic music, and the deceleration. As a composition for mouth and ear, the passage seems, briefly, to consummate the desire that has motivated the entire text: language has truly materialized as voice, and the dreams of drama have been recovered in a sonorous space of poetic timbres. But while we may want to believe, with the faun, that his climactic lyric music has attained intimate contact with the world, the text will not, in fact, allow such unreflective naïveté. For beyond the word that *seems* like the climactic arrival, the rush of breath delivers us to a clause whose affective cast immediately perturbs any sense of lyric wholeness. The exclamation mark may insist on the thrilling sounds in “Tressaille,” but this word, here, is a transitive verb: at its sonorous climax, the phrase remains grammatically incomplete. With the given grammatical completion, we find ourselves carried ineluctably beyond voiced presence to a darker, more inward realm of experience.

To speak of a “secret terror” right after a “thrill” of vocal presence undercuts such presence with troublesome thought. Slipping ineluctably from a reading of dramatic presence to a mentally mediated reading, we are forced to acknowledge that the surrender to the music of these lines is only possible through a willful blindness to problematic shadows of meaning. Once we begin to scrutinize the text more carefully, we find that it is shot through with thematic reminiscences that undermine the lyric address. Even in this moment, for example, the nymphs remain “vierges”: the theme of chastity, associated throughout with the frustrations of seeing, carries over into the attempt to affirm the carnal promises of speech. And the very sensation of breath and tooth on the faun’s lip, we must now notice, derives its energy from the “flight” of these virginal nymphs from vocal contact much in the way that the illusion of blue eyes and the flight of swans or naiads escaped the faun’s sight. Finally, even the climactic conjunction of “je” and “tu,” saved for this moment, finds only an unindividuated “courroux” of virgins and an unspecified “fardeau nu.” The very attempt to divide and specify a single “tu” for intimate linguistic union occurs within—perhaps even causes—the withdrawal of language back from a “sonorous space” into the ordered prosody of a printed poem.

The crux of the *Prélude*: listening as the faun

Some commentators have regretted the lush lyricism at the heart of the *Prélude* as a youthful lapse (Ex. 7). With the vibration of bows against strings

Example 7 continued

4 Bars "inner verso"

66

Toujours animé

FL. *mp crescendo molto*

HAUTB. *mp crescendo molto*

COR ANGL. *mp*

CL. *mp crescendo molto*

Bons *mp*

CORS *mp*

1^{re} HARPE *mp crescendo molto*

2^e HARPE *mp crescendo molto*

ma lèvres
Toujours animé

mp crescendo

mp crescendo

mp crescendo

mp crescendo

molto

molto

molto

molto

* Appoggiatura (= "T chord")

Example 7 continued

69

FL. *mf* *f*

HAUTB. *mf* *f*

COR ANGL. *mf* *f* *mf*

CL. *mf* *f*

Bons. *mf* *f* *f* *à 2* *3*

CORS *mf* *f* *f* *4°* *4° b.*

1^{re} HARPE *mf* *ff* *f* *3*

2^e HARPE *mf* *ff*

... comme un éclair Tressaille! la frayeur secrète de

ff * Appoggiatura (=“T chord”)

Example 7 continued

4 Bars "inner recto"

72

Cédez un peu (M.M. ♩ = 60)

FL. *mf* 3

CL. *mf* 1° 3

Bons *mf*

CORS *mf* 4° 3° *p* *espressif et doux*

1^{re} HARPE *f* 3 *sfz*

la chair... *mf* 3 3 *p* *pp*

Div. *p* 3 3 *pp*

Example 7 continued

4 Bars "outer verso"

75
HAUTB.

CL. *p* très doux

...moins tristes vapeurs

CORS *pp* *ppp*

Solo *p* doux et expressif

sourdines

sourdines

sourdines

pp

so savored by Berlioz, the massed violins lead all of the strings in a broad Romantic melody in $D\flat$. The tune has been linked to various composers, from Chaikovsky to Saint-Saëns, Balakirev to Massenet. With William Austin, I take the most direct reference to be Chopin's $D\flat$ Nocturne, an iconic evocation of bel canto lyricism.⁸⁰ The wind instruments, shedding their distanced, poetic role, now reinforce the vocal effusion of the strings with two-note slurs that match the fricatives of the poem's onrush to "Tressaille!" (mm. 63–70).

After four bars, the scoring thickens as the harps rise to illuminate the return of the melodic gesture anticipated by the call of two horns (m. 67). No

80. Austin juxtaposes the Chopin and the Debussy in his Norton Critical Score, 73. Debussy himself wrote a *Nocturne in D \flat* in 1889, which anticipates the harmony of the climactic passage of the *Prélude* but avoids the Chopinesque cantilena. What would have been too close an imitation in a piano nocturne could be framed, later, within the self-conscious web of historical voices in the orchestral *Prélude*.

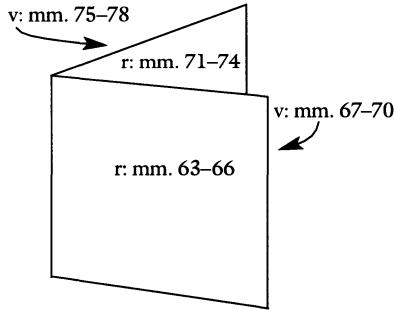
longer sounded out distantly by "their lip," the rising-third melody has been claimed by the violins it initially masked, becoming the sonorous equivalent of the faun's own lyric utterance. Debussy harmonizes this climactic claim to sensuous "speech" with root-position E \flat -minor and G \flat -major chords, as if these most naive pre-dominant harmonies have been released from beneath Wagner's verbal-musical tangles. At the peak of the two crescendos (mm. 68 and 70), a triplet flourish delivers an appoggiatura C–B \flat —a recovery, within Debussy's loosened harmonic vocabulary, of the single most expressive device in the history of tonal lyricism.

At measure 71 the piece palpably turns a corner: the light of the harp is extinguished; the winds cease their impassioned breathing; the descending strings muse, in decrescendo, on the second bar of the climactic flourish. The expected tonic arrival is clouded by the flattened seventh as a horn call "speaks across time," recalling both the climactic utterance and, more distantly, its own anticipation of the climax. The D \flat tune returns scored for solo violin, a sonorous equivalent of the faun's attempt to *separate* the tangle of flesh into individuals, which seemed to cause the fall away from vocal presence. As Berlioz suggests, the physicality of the whole group of violins is "hardly perceptible in a single instrument." Over this fragile memory, the winds rise in repeated reminiscences of the central flourish, painting the "vapeurs" that end the fleeting moment of lyric address.

With a hearing that surrenders to the scoring and the sweep of lyricism, this section captures the impression of a reading of Mallarmé's central seven lines that rides the breath, savoring the verbal music. Debussy's brilliant initial scoring plunges to a moment of breathy intensity, only to slip with lightning quickness into a retrospective penumbra. But again, even these fleeting pleasures can only fully be claimed by deliberately ignoring—overlooking—troubling undercurrents. If we look back, we find that this seduction of the listener will not withstand the upper-body scrutiny of the reader any more than the fleeting sense of untroubled lyricism at the heart of Mallarmé's poem.

Debussy has cast his central section as something like a virtual "bifolio" (see Ex. 8). The phrasal symmetry of the sixteen measures from 63 to 78 is exceptional in the *Prélude*: four bars offer the D \flat tune, four bars state the climactic gesture twice, four bars echo the climax in descent, and four bars bring back the D \flat tune. Imagine printing measures 63–66 on an outer folio recto (D \flat tune); 67–70 on the inner verso of that folio (climactic gesture); 71–74 on the recto of the next folio (climactic gesture varied); and 75–78 on the outer folio verso (D \flat tune). The changes of orchestration every four bars strongly reinforce—for the eye if not the ear—the sense of a hidden literary order. The structure is articulated around a moment of slippage markedly similar to that at the formal center of the poem's booklike form: like the verb "Tressaille!" the climactic gestures over pre-dominant harmony are syntactically incomplete. And like Mallarmé, Debussy does complete his syntax, but only with a rhythmically weak move to the dominant *after* the climax, as the timbral plenitude of the central bars falls away.

Example 8 Schematic representation of Debussy's climactic passage, mm. 63–78 (Ex. 7) as a “virtual foliation”: “outer” folios show the two appearances of the $D\flat$ -major tune; “inner” folios show the four climactic bars and the four-bar retrospective variant



Reading back, we must acknowledge that the lyric immediacy sensed in the $D\flat$ tune was really no more straightforward than that in the faun's address to the nymphs. The melody itself may breathe, in its diatonic naiveté, a frank lyricism equal to the poem's “je-tu” address, but only if we deafen ourselves to the clouding whole-tone harmony that follows the tonic, over the tritone bass motion $D\flat$ –G. This interval has defined the flute solo's ambiguity in its tonal world from the very start. By extension, it has been related to the whole-tone field that Debussy exposed as a syntax of historical occlusion. Here, the whole-tone chord over the bass G interposes a harmonic aporia within what seems, fleetingly, like a stable harmonization of bel canto melody.

Under even more careful scrutiny, we must also, finally, recognize that the simple pre-dominants at the very point of climax bear perturbing shadows of the same historical self-consciousness that has infused the piece's post-Wagnerian puns. The appoggiatura at the heart of the piece, a seeming revenant of Romantic lyricism, actually poises plangently between immediacy and esotericism. The $C\sharp$ appoggiatura, in this instance, is the added major sixth that turns the $E\flat$ -minor triad into the “Solitude” voicing of the “Tristan chord.” Given the symbolic precision with which this voicing appeared earlier, we must see its recurrence as similarly studied. The most effusive melodic flourishes, that is, are faintly shadowed with the analytical *writing* that has, in giving literary meanings to Wagnerian harmonies throughout the *Prélude*, simultaneously marked their remove from the robust expressive context that once seemed to infuse them with intimacy.

Implications

Reading in history

At the center of the piece, as in the poem, the conventions of Romantic lyricism seem, briefly, to be recovered, only to be recognized as incurably broken into syntactical and sensuous components. Perhaps we have always known

that the *Prélude* hovers between nineteenth- and twentieth-century modes of musical thought. But a precise exposure of *how* the equipoise is achieved, on the model of *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, can offer new refinement to the understanding of Debussy's poise on the threshold of modernism. In conclusion, it is possible to suggest some wider implications of Mallarmé's lessons for musical modernity by glancing briefly into the historical contexts for the syntactical and sonorous means by which Debussy achieves his musical equivalent to the poetic conflict between speech and writing.

As regards musical syntax, the Wagnerian references in this tone poem attain greater symbolic specificity than the puns on Wagner's *title* that Abbate has shown in *Pelléas*. References to leitmotivic labels, that is, are traces not just of Wagner's works, but of a way of understanding them. The distinction is crucial for historical understanding, for leitmotivic analysis was a relatively late addition to the spectrum of French responses to Wagner. The *Revue wagnérienne*, for example, initially featured far more reverential testimonials than careful analyses.⁸¹ During the course of the 1880s and 1890s, the leitmotivic approach gained ascendancy both in the *Revue* and in the wider context of French Wagner reception.⁸² Debussy's *Prélude*, written during the latter stages of this analytical ascendancy, was premiered as the first flood of full-length leitmotivic analyses was published in France. With the verbal-musical puns that mark his translation of a tension between vocal immediacy and literary artifice, Debussy encapsulates in music the deepest historical implications of the analytical method. The *Prélude* marks a moment in history in which the celebrated intimacy of Wagner's music was being broken, captured, *flattened* by systematic analysis—a moment in which the Wagnerian sensorium, so to speak, was fading ineluctably into the scriptorium.

Abbate, who suggests that the harmonic puns in *Pelléas* "illustrate a late nineteenth-century analysis of one aspect of Wagner's style," actually adumbrates, for that work, the historical implications I see in the *Prélude*.⁸³ But in her strongest statements about Debussy's "games" she begs a central question. She suggests that once we "clear away" all "coincidental" Wagnerisms from the interpretation of Debussy's music we are left with quotations whose

81. Baudelaire's 1861 essay on *Tannhäuser* reappeared in the *Revue*, for example, along with latter-day emulations by *wagnéristes* such as Catulle Mendès; Wagner's own writings appeared in translation, along with reports from pilgrims to Bayreuth.

82. See Pierre Bonnier, "Documents de critique expérimentale: Le Motif-organe des maîtres-chanteurs," *Revue wagnérienne* 1, no. 2 (March 1885); Charles Bonnier and Pierre Bonnier, "Documents de critique expérimentale: Parsifal," *Revue wagnérienne*, 3, nos. 2, 3, 8–11 (March–December 1887); Charles Cotard, "*Tristan et Iseult*": *Essai d'analyse du drame et des leitmotifs* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1895); Maurice Kufférath, *Guide thématique et analyse de "Tristan et Iseult"* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1894); Hans von Wolzogen, "*Tristan et Iseult*": *Guide sur la légende, le poème et la musique*, trans. Charles Cotard (Paris: Fischbacher, 1894); and Albert Lavignac, *Le Voyage artistique à Bayreuth* (Paris: Librairie Charles Delagrave, 1897).

83. Abbate, "*Tristan* in the Composition of *Pelléas*," 141.

“purpose . . . may indeed be completely unallied to the exigencies of musical composition”—in other words, with references which have “no actual musical function or consequence.”⁸⁴ But just as Mallarmé’s poem does not enact a conflict between the “poetic” and the “nonpoetic,” but rather a historically determined tension between possibilities of poetic expression, it is the very definition of the “musical” that is centrally at stake for Debussy in the *Prélude*. His Wagnerian puns exemplify a shift in the possibility of musical expression, by which such esoteric mediations come to be recognized as unavoidable in the face of a loss of a previous era’s claims to immediate communication.

A different, related response to the lessons of Mallarmé can help in the attempt to characterize precisely the *tone* of Debussy’s encapsulation, in the *Prélude*, of this historical moment. An approaching loss of musical immediacy to quasi-literary reception, had, in fact, been hailed in surprisingly positive terms some years earlier in the pages of the *Revue wagnérienne*. Teodor de Wyzewa, a friend of Mallarmé, wrote in 1886:

Already the time is approaching in which musical sounds will no longer be able to produce emotion, if they are directly heard; their true character as sounds will prevent the soul from considering them as pure signs of emotion. A new music will become necessary, written, not played, suggesting emotion without the mediation of heard sounds—suggesting it better and more intimately. The music of words, which is poetry, originally needed to be spoken in order to be moving: today we read poetry: and its sonorities produce emotion in us more completely, without the mediation of the voice.⁸⁵

De Wyzewa’s invocation of “pure signs of emotion” echoes Mallarmé’s own more succinct statements of his vision of modern poetry. Yet before following de Wyzewa and deciding to hear (and see) in Debussy’s *Prélude* a similarly triumphalist enactment of a modernist historical teleology, we should recognize that this passage, with its patently Mallarméan inflection, can be taken to exemplify an all-too-common simplification of Mallarmé’s own stance before modernity. His essay “Crise de vers,” for example, completed about the time he first met with Debussy, contains this oft-quoted paragraph:

The pure work implies the elocutionary disappearance of the poet, who cedes the initiative to the words, mobilized by the shock of their inequality; they flare

84. Ibid., 139.

85. “Mais déjà l’heure approche où les sons musicaux ne pourront plus produire l’émotion, s’ils sont directement entendus; leur caractère propre de sons empêchera l’âme de les considérer come de purs signes d’émotions. Une musique nouvelle deviendra nécessaire, écrite, non jouée, suggérant l’émotion sans l’intermédiaire de sons entendus. La suggérant meilleure et plus intime. La musique des mots, qui est la poésie, avait d’abord le besoin pour émouvoir, d’être dite: aujourd’hui nous la lisons: et ses sonorités nous procurent plus entièrement l’émotion, sans l’intermédiaire de la voix” (“Notes sur la musique wagnérienne et les oeuvres musicales françaises en 1885–1886,” *Revue wagnérienne* 2, no. 6 [July 1886]: 183–93, and 2, no. 8 [September 1886]: 259–68, 266).

up with reciprocal reflections like a virtual trail of fire on jewels, replacing the respiration perceptible in the ancient lyric breath or the enthusiastic personal address of the phrase.⁸⁶

Often seen as a celebratory assertion of modernist teleology, this passage might better be read, after formal analysis of the faun poem, as exemplary of the “ironic slant” that Paul de Man locates in many of Mallarmé’s more grandiose critical claims.⁸⁷ The climactic crux of the poem recovers, briefly but precisely, both the “respiration perceptible in the ancient lyric breath” and the “enthusiastic personal address of the phrase.” Although the work might *also* show the “ancient lyric breath” evaporating as illusion—or shattering into “reciprocal reflections of words”—the dichotomy, in this poem, is never resolved. Whatever his criticism might assert, Mallarmé’s poetry brings writerly “purity” into plangent tension with the promises of communication and sensuality it displaces.

Such elegiac poise might be seen as one of the deepest lessons Mallarmé took from classical pastoral. In his important studies of this tradition, literary critic Paul Alpers suggests that Virgilian *Eclogues* are not primarily concerned with rustic bliss or utopian landscapes, as has often been assumed, but rather with the fiction of poetic “singing” itself. Not only does Alpers’s shift of emphasis fit well with a formal analysis of Mallarmé’s *Églogue* that restores the “lyric voice” to the center of its formal struggles, but the way in which the poem poises, unresolved, before the disappearance of an ideal of lyricism falls into line with his clearest statement about pastoral form:

“Suspension” is the word that best conveys how the oppositions and disparities of Virgilian pastoral are related to each other and held in the mind. As opposed to words like “resolve,” “reconcile,” or “transcend,” “suspend” implies no permanently achieved new relation.⁸⁸

No “permanently achieved new relation” between voice and writing is claimed in the faun *Églogue*. And in following Mallarmé’s modernist adaptation of Virgilian pastoral and centering his musical *Églogue* on a musical equivalent of “lyric voice” that is as divided as the faun’s body, Debussy composed

86. “L’oeuvre pure implique la disparation élocutoire du poète, qui cède l’initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés; ils s’allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle traînée de feux sur des pierreries, remplaçant la respiration perceptible en l’ancien souffle lyrique ou la direction personnelle enthousiaste de la phrase” (*OC*, 366).

87. In “Lyric and Modernity,” de Man recognizes a “half-ironic” tone in Mallarmé’s references to “Le Livre” as the *telos* of his literary project (p. 180). He suggests elsewhere that the English literati to whom Mallarmé initially read *La Musique et les lettres* “probably had difficulty understanding the rhetoric of crisis that Mallarmé was using, with an ironic slant that would not have been lost in Paris, but that certainly baffled his foreign audience” (“Criticism and Crisis,” in his *Blindness and Insight*, 5). It seems to me that his Parisian followers were just as likely as any foreign audience to miss this irony.

88. Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* 68.

his own elegiac “suspension” on the brink of music’s fade into an art form “written, not played,” only expressive, if at all, “without the mediation of heard sounds.”

Hearing in history

It is somewhat more difficult to demonstrate that the *Prélude*’s orchestration, in itself, might stand with “suspended” pastoral poise before a vision of music “written, not played.” On the model of its self-consciously intertextual syntax, however, it is possible to hear the piece’s “sounds” themselves as poised at a turning point of an ineluctable historical trajectory. Characterizing such a trajectory in Mallarméan terms, we might well locate Debussy’s piece against the background of a gradual encroachment of conventional *written* description on a sonorous tradition that could once claim immediacy of expression.

Berlioz’s *Traité* would stand as both source and center of such a history.⁸⁹ All of Berlioz’s words on sounds, inflected by literature or not, had a testamentary immediacy: he was describing, in the terms of his own cultural investments, his hearing of Gluck, Beethoven, and Weber. The first stage of a progressive loss of immediacy to intertextuality could be noted in Gevaert’s extensive quotation of Berlioz in his three treatises (1863, 1885, and 1890)—a trend that was to continue through the 1892 *Traité pratique d’instrumentation* of Debussy’s teacher Guiraud, into the 1904 treatise of Widor (titled as a continuation—“suite”—of Berlioz).⁹⁰ The first official history of orchestral practice, Henri Lavoix’s *Histoire de l’instrumentation depuis le seizième siècle jusqu’à nos jours* of 1878, might be drawn into the story as another central symptom of the fade of a testamentary poetics of sound into the scriptorium of convention.⁹¹ The end of the story would be harder to determine. Berlioz receives further extensive quotation in the Lavignac *Encyclopédie* of 1913–21; no doubt later instances abound. But Richard Strauss’s 1905 reedition of Berlioz would seem to mark an important turning point, after which later

89. Besides the 1837 *Manuel des compositeurs* of Fétis, Berlioz’s *Traité* had at least two significant precursors: Georges Kastner’s *Traité général d’instrumentation* (Paris: Prilipp, 1837 [suppl. 1844]) and *Cours d’instrumentation considéré sous les rapports poétiques et philosophiques de l’art* (Paris: Prilipp, 1839 [suppl. 1844]). Kastner’s name recurs as a point of reference late into the century, but Berlioz’s *Traité* quickly supplanted Kastner’s as the central work on the topic. For more on the sources for Berlioz’s treatise, see Joël-Marie Fauquet, “The *Grand Traité d’instrumentation*,” trans. Peter Bloom, in *The Cambridge Companion to Berlioz*, ed. Bloom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 164–70.

90. François-Auguste Gevaert, *Traité général d’instrumentation* (Ghent, 1863), *Nouveau Traité d’instrumentation*, and *Cours méthodique d’orchestration* (Paris and Brussels: H. Lemoine, 1890); Ernest Guiraud, *Traité pratique d’instrumentation* (Paris: A. Durand et fils, 1892); and Charles-Marie Widor, *Technique de l’orchestre moderne faisant suite au Traité d’instrumentation et d’orchestration de H. Berlioz* (Paris: H. Lemoine, 1904).

91. Lavoix’s *Histoire de l’instrumentation* was commissioned (through a competition) by the Académie des Beaux-arts.

instances could arguably be seen as *belated*.⁹² For by adding copious examples from Wagner to his edition, Strauss draws the most grandiose and intimate realization of Romantic timbral poetics into the pages of the Berlioz treatise itself, rounding off a history of hearing and writing (and rewriting) that extends from Gluck, through Berlioz and Wagner, to Strauss and his contemporaries Mahler and Debussy.

The simplest reading of the *Prélude's* position in such a history could probably consider it only in relationship to the source, Berlioz's *Traité*. That is, it is one thing to invoke "reading" in the hearing of wind sound, as Berlioz does, but it is quite another to *read* such invocations *as shadowed by reading*, as Debussy does in the *Prélude*. In other words, an immediate set of associations for the author of the treatise, when drawn into a formed realization of Mallarmé's conflict between hearing and reading, is exposed as thoroughly mediated by cultural literacy, and thus distanced—like Virgil's pastorals—from truly lyrical expression. Debussy's writing for the violins, on the other hand, might best be understood by supplementing questions of orchestral theory with exemplary practice, and by comparing the orchestral form of the *Prélude* with that of one of the important points of reference in its Wagnerian puns. In Wagner's introduction to act 3 of *Tristan*, strings lead through a meandering horn passage to the famous cor anglais solo identified by Tristan as "Die Alte Weise": "poetic" pastoral wind writing appears as a nostalgic island amidst the fundamental string textures of the nineteenth-century orchestra. By giving primacy to the winds in his pastoral, Debussy reverses the relationship, such that the violins, and their lyricism, come to be heard nostalgically, as "Die Alte Weise."

Beyond simply marking a moment both "after Berlioz" and "after Wagner," however, the *Prélude* could also be said to distill into music its moment in the wider history of nineteenth-century instrumental theory. Debussy's timbral poetry, in other words, might mark a point on this historical continuum somewhat like that exemplified in words by Gevaert. Whether or not Debussy actually read Gevaert as one direct source of inspiration, his collaboration with Mallarmé would have attuned him to the wider issue: the progressive capture of expression by writing, through the accumulation of intertextual layers of tradition. And Mallarmé occasionally, in his invocations of musical timbre, hinted that he was sensitive to an encroachment of writing on orchestral expression in particular. The 1886 sonnet "Hommage à Richard Wagner," for example, ends with these lines:

Du souriant fracas originel haï
 Entre elles de clartés maitresses a jailli
 Jusque vers un parvis né pour leur simulacre

92. Hector Berlioz, *Instrumentationslehre*, rev. and trans. Richard Strauss, 2 vols. (Leipzig: C. F. Peters, 1905).

Trompettes tout haut d'or pamé sur les velins,
 Le dieu Richard Wagner irradiant un sacre
 Mal tu par l'encre même en sanglots sibyllins.

(From the smiling originary fracas hated / Amongst themselves by masterful clarities has sprung / To a parvis born for their simulacrum // Trumpets on high of gold faded on vellum / the God Richard Wagner irradiating a rite / Badly silenced by ink itself in sibylline sobs.)

Mallarmé's arcane imagery of a "rite badly silenced by ink itself" is dominated by a reference to instrumentation, "trumpets faded on vellum [pages]." Various interpretations have been proposed for these obscure lines. I read them as an apt epigraph—or epitaph—for the *Prélude*, which, in punning on musical syntax *après Wagner*, similarly holds up the promises of nineteenth-century orchestration as *faded* into the pages of convention—"silenced by ink itself."

Rehearing Debussy's modernism

To arrive, with Mallarmé, on pastoral elegy (and on "sibylline sobs") is to stray widely from the usual celebrations of the *Prélude*'s initiatory modernity—and even, perhaps, to approach the critical terrain of Adorno, whose own musings in his essay "Classicism, Romanticism, New Music" push even further in this melancholy direction:

If in the course of history [music] has come to resemble the other arts in many respects, this process—which is a process of being permeated with language—has left it scarred. The unconscious suffering resulting from those scars is not the least of the reasons for the rebellion against this linguistic affinity that has been detectable ever since the emergence of the new music.⁹³

By locating the source of "unconscious suffering" in the resemblance between music and other arts, Adorno might suggest a reflexive turn in my historical argument: if the *Prélude* is "scarred," that is, this may be not only because of the games in its syntax or the faded intertextuality in its timbral poetry, but also—before or beneath these—because it is thoroughly "permeated" with Mallarmé's language in the first place. Still, Adorno's morbid language seems to raise again, even more insistently than my own faintly mournful tones, Daverio's question as to "what we actually *hear*?" Can such pathos truly be located in a piece whose free "flight" and youthful "breath" were celebrated by Boulez as the "awakening to modern music"? The question encapsulates the challenge of understanding the *Prélude*'s "modern" means of expression. For if we could *hear* the accents of mourning in the music, that would imply that Debussy had reactivated the rhetoric of pathos of the expressive world he is on the point of relinquishing. But elegy, in the *Prélude*, as in Mallarmé's *Églogue*,

93. Theodor W. Adorno, "Classicism, Romanticism, New Music," in his *Sound Figures*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 108–9.

does not reside primarily in expressive rhetoric, but rather in the forms given to artistic material. The point calls for one last look at poetry and music.

Debussy claimed to have “prolonged” Mallarmé’s last line: “Couple, adieu; je vais voir l’ombre que tu devins.” Mallarmé draws all of the poem’s key terms into suspended opposition in a line whose full message of farewell is carried by the formal web. “Couple” is given the singular pronoun “tu,” echoing the slippage between plural and singular address that undercut the central utterance. “Je” opposes “tu” one last time. “Vais voir” (“will see”) doubly opposes “devins” (“became”): seeing opposes being; the spoken future tense opposes the (written) past historic. The “shadow” of evening hovers amidst the terms like the shadowy present between past and future, and the shadow between “je” and “tu” that lyric address seeks, vainly, to overleap. The valediction, “adieu,” similarly suspended within the formal web, speaks to the world once more, only to relinquish it. In Debussy’s reading (Ex. 9), the last rise of octave-doubled violins is answered by the low harps in mirror motion centering on the destabilized tonic, E. A last variant of the leading motif brings a faint memory of sensuous violin sound together with the chaste horns. Finally, the flute’s falling fourth combines with the rising tritone of the violin in a revoicing of the “Desire” chord that collapses, without a dominant, onto the “tonic” third E–G#. Dimly lit by harp harmonics like the star (“astre”) in Mallarmé’s penultimate line, Debussy’s ending relinquishes a set of poetic and expressive promises in melody, timbre, and harmony. In the future that both he and Mallarmé “will see,” the conventional syntax of Romantic expression, shattered by analysis, will have to be acknowledged as arbitrary; the timbral materials of speech and of the orchestra will retain nothing of their previous promise of presence.

Of course, the important question about such modernist enactments is never whether they are *true* in any absolute sense: while it is easy to think ahead, on the one hand, to music of much more occult esotericism, and on the other, to far more resolute manipulations of sound as brute material, the conventions of Romantic expression would remain available to anyone who rejected the inevitability of the loss staged by Debussy *d’après Mallarmé*. But perhaps to consider the *Prélude* primarily within a history of *composition* in this way is to misconstrue its articulation of a moment on the cusp of modernism. That is, we might take the fact that the sonorous poetry of Debussy’s reading went unrecognized for so long as poignant evidence that the anticipated entrapment of music by readerly esotericism did, in fact, come to pass. Within the systematic, pitch-focused methodologies that predominated for much of a century, the pastoral poise of the *Prélude*’s poetic materials could never be perceived, because analysis had always *begun* by flattening music into unequivocal “writing.” In this sense, a hearing and a reading of the *Prélude*’s reading of *L’Après-midi d’un faune* can significantly deepen our understanding of twentieth-century modernist musical culture as a culture *après Debussy*.

Example 9 The last line of *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, line 110, and its orchestral “prolongation” in the *Prélude*, mm. 105–10

Couple, adieu; je vais voir l'ombre que tu devins.

105

FL. *Très retenu* 12 *Très lent et très retenu jusqu' à la fin*

HAUTB. *p*

CORS *pp* 2° 1, 2. (sourdines) *ppp* (1) *pp*

3, 4. (sourdines) (3) *pp*

1^{re} et 2^e HARPES *p* 4 4

DEUX 1^{rs} V^{ns} *Très retenu* *Très lent et très retenu jusqu' à la fin*

p *pp* 2 *ppp*

p *pp* 2 *ppp*

p *pp* 2 *ppp*

1 V^{lc} SOLO *p* *pp* 2 *ppp*

p *pp* *ppp*

p *pp* *ppp*

Unis. *ppp*

Example 9 continued

108

FL. *pp* 2, 3. *pp*

CORS *pp*

CYMB. ANT. *ppp*

1^{er} HARPE *p* *pp*

Div. pizz. *ppp* pizz. *ppp*

*
“T chords”:
“Le Désir” voicing

Works Cited

- Abbate, Carolyn. "Debussy's Phantom Sounds." *Cambridge Opera Journal* 10 (1998): 67–96.
- . "Tristan in the Composition of *Pelléas*." *19th-Century Music* 5 (1981): 117–41.
- Adorno, Theodor W. "Classicism, Romanticism, New Music." In *Sound Figures*, by Theodor W. Adorno, translated by Rodney Livingstone, 106–22. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Alpers, Paul. *The Singer of the Eclogues: A Study of Virgilian Pastoral*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979.
- . *What is Pastoral?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Austin, Lloyd J. "L'Après-midi d'un faune de Stéphane Mallarmé: Lexique comparée des trois états du poème." In *Essais sur Mallarmé*, by Lloyd Austin, edited by Malcolm Bowie, 175–81. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.
- Austin, William. "Viewpoint: Debussy, Wagner, and Some Others." *19th-Century Music* 6 (1982): 82–91.
- , ed. *Claude Debussy: Prelude to "The Afternoon of a Faun."* Norton Critical Score. New York: Norton, 1970.
- Barricelli, Jean-Pierre. *Melopotesis: Approaches to the Study of Literature and Music*. New York: New York University Press, 1988.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Translated by Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.
- Berlioz, Hector. *Grand Traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration modernes*. Paris: Schonenberger, 1843.
- . *Instrumentationslehre*. Revised and translated by Richard Strauss. 2 vols. Leipzig: C. F. Peters, 1905.
- Berman, Laurence. "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun and Jeux: Debussy's Summer Rites." *19th-Century Music* 3 (1980): 225–38.
- Bernard, Suzanne. *Mallarmé et la musique*. Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1959.
- Bernstein, Leonard. *The Unanswered Question*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.
- Bonnier, Charles, and Pierre Bonnier. "Documents de critique expérimentale: Parsifal." *Revue wagnérienne* 3, nos. 2, 3, 8–11 (March–December 1887).
- Bonnier, Pierre. "Documents de critique expérimentale: Le Motif-organe des maîtres-chanteurs." *Revue wagnérienne* 2, no. 2 (March 1885).
- Boulez, Pierre. *Relèves d'apprenti*. Edited by Jean-Jacques Nattiez and Sophie Galaise. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995.
- Briscoe, James R. "'To Invent New Forms': Debussy's *Diane au bois*." *Musical Quarterly* 74 (1990): 131–69.
- Brower, Reuben. *Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Latin Tradition*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.
- Brown, Matthew. "Tonality and Form in Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*." *Music Theory Spectrum* 15 (1993): 127–43.
- Charnacé, Guy de. *Musique et musiciens*. Paris: Pottier de Laloine, 1873.
- Code, David J. "A Song Not Purely His Own: Modernism and the Pastoral Mode in Mallarmé, Debussy and Matisse." Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1999.

- Cohn, Robert Greer. *Mallarmé's Divagations: A Guide and Commentary*. New York: Peter Lang, 1990.
- . *Toward the Poems of Mallarmé*. Rev. ed. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980.
- Cotard, Charles. *"Tristan et Iseult": Essai d'analyse du drame et des leitmotifs*. Paris: Fischbacher, 1895.
- Cox, David. *Debussy's Orchestral Music*. London: BBC, 1974.
- Crotty, John. "Symbolist Influences in Debussy's 'Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun.'" *In Theory Only* 6, no. 2 (1982): 17–30.
- Daverio, John. Review of *The Tuning of the Word*, by David Michael Hertz. *19th-Century Music* 13 (1990): 257–61.
- Davies, Gardner. *Mallarmé et la "Couche suffisante d'intelligibilité"*. Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1988.
- Debussy, Claude. *Correspondance, 1884–1918*. Edited by François Lesure. Paris: Hermann, 1993.
- . *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits*. Edited by François Lesure. Rev. ed. Paris: Gallimard, 1987.
- de Man, Paul. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. 2d rev. ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
- Derrida, Jacques. *La Dissémination*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972.
- Fauquet, Joël-Marie. "The *Grand Traité d'instrumentation*." Translated by Peter Bloom. In *The Cambridge Companion to Berlioz*, edited by Peter Bloom, 164–70. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Fowlie, Wallace. *Mallarmé*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.
- Genette, Gérard. *Palimpsestes*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981.
- Gevaert, François-Auguste. *Cours méthodique d'orchestration*. Paris and Brussels: H. Lemoine, 1890.
- . *Nouveau Traité d'instrumentation*. Paris: H. Lemoine, 1885.
- . *Traité général d'instrumentation*. Ghent, 1863.
- Goubault, Christian. *Claude Debussy*. Paris: Champion, 1986.
- Guiraud, Ernest. *Traité pratique d'instrumentation*. Edited by Henri Busser. Paris: Durand, 1892.
- Gülke, Peter. "Musik aus dem Bannkreis einer literarischen Ästhetik: Debussys 'Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune.'" *Jahrbuch Peters* 7 (1978): 103–46.
- Hertz, David Michael. *The Tuning of the Word: The Musico-Literary Poetics of the Symbolist Movement*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987.
- Holloway, Robin. *Debussy and Wagner*. London: Eulenberg, 1979.
- Howat, Roy. *Debussy in Proportion: A Musical Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Jakobik, Albert. *Claude Debussy oder der lautlose Revolution in der Musik*. Würzburg: Konrad Tritsch, 1977.
- Jeffreys, Mark. "Ideologies of Lyric: A Problem of Genre in Contemporary Anglophone Poetics." *PMLA* 110 (1995): 196–205.
- Johnson, W. R. *The Idea of Lyric: Lyric Modes in Ancient and Modern Poetry*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982.
- Kastner, Georges. *Cours d'instrumentation considéré sous les rapports poétiques et philosophiques de l'art*. Paris: Prilipp, 1839 (supplement 1844).

- . *Traité général d'instrumentation*. Paris: Prilipp, 1837 (supplement 1844).
- Kufférath, Maurice. *Guide thématique et analyse de "Tristan et Iseult."* Paris: Fischbacher, 1894.
- Lavignac, Albert. *Le Voyage artistique à Bayreuth*. Paris: Librairie Charles Delagrave, 1897.
- Lavoix, Henri-Marie-François. *L'Histoire de l'instrumentation depuis le seizième siècle jusqu'à nos jours*. Paris: Librairie Firmin-Didot, 1878.
- Lesure, François. *Claude Debussy: Biographie critique*. Paris: Klincksieck, 1994.
- Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Correspondance*. Vol. 1, 1862–71. Edited by Henri Mondor and Jean-Pierre Richard. Paris: Gallimard, 1959.
- . *Oeuvres complètes*. Edited by Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry. Paris: Gallimard, 1961.
- . *Oeuvres complètes*. Edited by Bertrand Marchal. 2d rev. ed. Paris: Gallimard, 1998.
- Marchal, Bertrand. *Lecture de Mallarmé*. Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1985.
- Mondor, Henri. *Histoire d'un faune*. Paris: Gallimard, 1948.
- Nectoux, Jean-Michel. "Debussy et Mallarmé." *Cahiers Debussy* 12–13 (1988–89): 54–66.
- , ed. *Nijinsky: Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. Paris: Éditions Adam Biro, 1989.
- Noulet, Émilie. *L'Oeuvre poétique de Stéphane Mallarmé*. Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1940.
- Parks, Richard. *The Music of Claude Debussy*. New York: Schirmer, 1979.
- Pearson, Roger. *Unfolding Mallarmé: The Development of a Poetic Art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- Poggioli, Renato. *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.
- Sainte-Beuve, Charles-Augustin. *Étude sur Virgile*. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1857.
- . "Théocrite." In *Portraits littéraires*, by C.-A. Sainte-Beuve, 3:3–35. Rev. ed. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1862.
- Schérer, Jacques. *Le "Livre" de Mallarmé*. Rev. ed. Paris: Gallimard, 1977.
- Shaw, Mary Lewis. *Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé: The Passage from Art to Ritual*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993.
- Souffrin-Le Breton, Eileen. "Debussy lecteur de Banville." *Revue de musicologie* 46 (1960): 200–222.
- Thompson, Oscar. *Debussy: Man and Artist*. New York: Dodd Mead, 1937.
- Valéry, Paul. *Écrits divers sur Stéphane Mallarmé*. Paris: Gallimard, 1950.
- Walker, Stephen F. "Mallarmé's Symbolist Eclogue: The 'Faune' as Pastoral," *PMLA* 93 (1978): 106–17.
- Wenk, Arthur. *Claude Debussy and the Poets*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976.
- Widor, Charles-Marie. *Technique de l'orchestre moderne faisant suite au Traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration de H. Berlioz*. Paris: H. Lemoine, 1904.
- Wolzogen, Hans von. "Tristan et Iseult": *Guide sur la légende, le poème et la musique*. Translated by Charles Cotard. Paris: Fischbacher, 1894.
- Wyzewa, Teodor de. "Notes sur la musique wagnérienne et les oeuvres musicales françaises en 1885–1886." *Revue wagnérienne* 2, nos. 6, 8 (July, September 1886): 183–93, 259–68.

Abstract

Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* has so far been thought to relate only obliquely to Mallarmé's poem *L'Après-midi d'un faune*. The actual sophistication of Debussy's reading of Mallarmé becomes apparent through a newly precise formal analysis of the poem, and a new analytical emphasis on the orchestration of the prelude. In adapting the conventions of classical pastoral, notably the quasi-dramatic textual presentation of both Virgil's *Eclogues* and Theocritus's *Idylls*, Mallarmé focuses his text on an irresolvable moment of conflict between sensuous speech and literary writing. The faun, the poem's main "character," comes to symbolize the reader's divided experience of a text composed on the cusp of a loss of Romantic lyricism to modernist impersonality. In Debussy's reading, a recurring contrast between strings and winds audibly tracks Mallarmé's poetic template and also, more subtly, signals an esoteric layer of puns on Wagnerian leitmotifs in its syntax. A division between hearing and analytical reading is created, which encapsulates a historical moment in which the Romantic orchestral poetics exemplified in Berlioz's influential treatise is losing its immediacy, and the Romantic harmony that attained an expressive limit in Wagner's music dramas is being broken up by systematic analysis.