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Abstract

Hearing in Time: Bergsonian Concepts of Time in Maurice Ravel's *L'Heure espagnole*

Holly Elizabeth Chung

2021

This dissertation examines Maurice Ravel's first opera, *L'Heure espagnole* (1907–1911), as a turning point in the composer's aesthetic approach, marking a moment at which he reacted strongly against Debussy's influence and seems to have increasingly oriented his compositional perspective toward comedy, mechanism, and manipulations of musical time. In recent years, Ravel scholars have identified promising connections between Ravel's aesthetics and Bergsonism, but the musical underpinnings of Bergson's philosophy of time itself have remained vastly undertheorized. My project sets out to rectify this by locating both Ravel's aesthetics and Bergson's philosophy of time within the music-historical context of *debussysme*, and identifying a Bergsonian strain of music criticism in the writings of Louis Laloy and Vladimir Jankélévitch, both of whom studied under Bergson. Laloy and Jankélévitch's writings, in turn, reveal important information about the practical application of Bergsonism to music and the intertwining of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* with Bergsonian philosophical ideals. The dissertation culminates in an analysis of *L'Heure espagnole* as a site of exchange between music and Bergson's philosophy of time, analyzing it as a testing ground for the Bergsonian concept of duration, a theory of time that reflects our lived experience as it unfolds in the present. Ultimately, I theorize that Ravel's unique use of rhythm and meter in *L'Heure espagnole* encourages a practice of real-time analysis through the act of hearing, which in turn allows the listener to provisionally enact durational time through a constant re-evaluation of the metric and rhythmic frame based on material that was just heard.

My dissertation employs a twofold methodological approach to investigate the shift in Ravel's aesthetic direction around the time he was composing *L'Heure espagnole*: an archival approach (Chapters 1–3) and a hermeneutic approach (Chapter 4). The first half of my study (Chapters 1 and 2) surveys Ravel's personal correspondence with the Godebski family and the press reception of his works between roughly 1905 and 1910 as evidence for the creation of a new aesthetic posture that would distance him from Debussy and catalyze his novel use of time and meter as a distinctive aspect of his style. Chapter 3 presents archival research on Bergson and his interlocutors, linking his philosophy of time to contemporaneous research on music, sensation, and consciousness by Gustav Fechner, Théodule Ribot, and Paul and Pierre Janet. Here, I develop the grounds for a Bergsonian approach to Ravel's music by exploring the practical implementation of Bergson's theories of duration and intuition in music through Bergson's disciples, Laloy and Jankélévitch. My study concludes with a hermeneutic analysis of *L'Heure espagnole* that uses Bergson's theory of duration as an interpretive lens to make sense of the complex interaction between comedy, mechanism, and time in the opera.

Hearing in Time:
Bergsonian Concepts of Time in Ravel's *L'Heure espagnole*

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
Of
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In Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
Holly Elizabeth Chung

Dissertation Director: Brian Kane

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For my parents

INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to contribute to the effort to gain greater purchase on Maurice Ravel's aesthetics, concealed as they are behind layer upon layer of artifice, misdirection, and dissimulation.¹ Specifically, I focus on Ravel's first opera, *L'Heure espagnole* (1907–1911), as a defining moment in the articulation of his aesthetics, marking a point at which he reacted strongly against Debussy's influence and seems to have increasingly oriented his compositional perspective toward comedy, mechanism, and the manipulation of musical time. In recent years, Ravel scholars such as Michael Puri, Steven Huebner, and Jessie Fillerup have examined the composer's aesthetics through the prism of Henri Bergson's thought.² However, the musical underpinnings of Bergson's philosophy of time and their relationship to French music of the turn of the twentieth century have remained vastly undertheorized. Musicological scholarship has largely viewed the relationship between *fin-de-siècle* French music and Bergsonism as a one-way traffic of ideas rather than a mutual exchange: music has been thought to absorb ideas from philosophy rather than the other way around.

¹ The tendency to view Ravel's aesthetics as a type of pretense or a series of masks has been pronounced in Ravel scholarship practically since its inception. Ravel's student Roland-Manuel famously referred to Ravel's "aesthetic of imposture" in the 1925 biographical essay "Maurice Ravel ou l'esthétique de l'imposture," *La Revue musicale* 6 (April 1925): 16–21. Key recent publications exemplifying this critical perspective include the edited volume *Unmasking Ravel: New Perspectives on the Music*, ed. Peter Kaminsky (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011); see esp. Kaminsky's introduction, 1–6, and Barbara Kelly, "Re-presenting Ravel: Artificiality and the Aesthetic of Imposture," 41–62. Michael Puri's writings have also taken up this critical thread, commenting upon Ravel's dandyism. See Puri, *Ravel the Decadent: Memory, Sublimation, and Desire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), and "Dandy, Interrupted: Sublimation, Repression, and Self-Portraiture in Maurice Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* (1909–1912)" *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 60, no. 2 (2007): 317–372.

² Puri, *Ravel the Decadent*, especially pp. 3, 16, 121, 164, 174; Steven Huebner, "Laughter: In Ravel's Time," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 16, no. 3 (2006): 255–246; Jessie Fillerup, "Clockwork Souls: The Characterization of Time in *L'Heure espagnole*," chap. 6 in "Purloined Poetics: The Grotesque in the Music of Maurice Ravel" (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2009); Fillerup, "Eternity in Each Moment: Temporal Strategies in Ravel's 'Le Gibet,'" *Music Theory Online* 19, no. 1 (2013): 1–16, <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.13.19.1/mto.13.19.1.fillerup.php>; and Fillerup, *Ravel: Magician of Sound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming April 2021), esp. chap. 3, "Illusions of Form and Void."

My dissertation contributes to rectifying this imbalance by grounding both Ravel's aesthetics and Bergson's philosophy of time within the broader music-historical context of *debussysme* and situating Bergson within a long history of psychological research on the relationship between music and consciousness.³ I theorize Ravel's aesthetic orientation in *L'Heure espagnole* as a response to Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, which, in turn, became intertwined with Bergsonian philosophical ideals in an influential strain of music criticism associated with Bergson's disciples, Louis Laloy and Vladimir Jankélévitch. The dissertation culminates in an analysis of *L'Heure espagnole* as a site of exchange between music and Bergson's philosophy of time, analyzing it as a testing ground for the Bergsonian concept of duration, a theory of time that reflects our lived experience as it unfolds in the present. Ultimately, I argue that Ravel's unique use of rhythm and meter in *L'Heure espagnole* encourages a practice of real-time analysis through the act of hearing, one that allows the listener to provisionally enact durational time through a constant re-evaluation of the metric and rhythmic frame based on material that was just heard.

In my view, *L'Heure espagnole* represents an appealing case study for the analysis of Ravel's aesthetics due to its exceptional position with Ravel's oeuvre. Unlike the majority of Ravel's works, for which we have little information about his compositional intentions, a relative plethora of data exists on the origins of *L'Heure espagnole*, including Ravel's own writings regarding his aesthetic goals for the work, the *mise en scène*,⁴ and contemporary press coverage,

³ In this dissertation, I attempt to view the term *debussysme* from the perspective of Ravel's generation: I understand *debussysme* to refer to both an aesthetic movement embraced by Ravel and others who were inspired by Debussy's style, and a term widely used in the musical press to imply plagiarism of Debussy's musical lexicon, which dogged Ravel throughout his career.

⁴ The newly discovered *mise en scène* is currently held privately by Roy Howat and has been analyzed at length in Emily Kilpatrick, "The Carbonne Copy: Tracing the Première of *L'Heure espagnole*," *Revue de musicologie* 95, no. 1 (2009): 97–135.

a factor that has increased the attraction of this piece in recent scholarship. But Ravel's description of these goals is both lofty and vague, obfuscating as much as it reveals. In interviews he gave before the premiere of the opera, Ravel declared that he intended to reform comic opera writ large by using the music itself, as opposed to the libretto, to make the audience laugh. He states: "I wanted the chords, for example, to seem funny, like puns in language. If I may put it this way, I 'heard funny.'"⁵

Despite such primers from the composer himself, many early reviewers could not make sense of the music, suggesting that the opera "sounded funny" to them—and not in the way that Ravel intended. The relationship between the frivolity of the libretto and the seriousness of the music was a particular sticking point. Franc-Nohain's *L'Heure espagnole*, the play upon which Ravel's opera is based, premiered at the Théâtre de l'Odéon on October 1928, 1904, and achieved considerable success.⁶ However, as a piece of low-brow burlesque theater, it was seen as a bizarre and risqué choice for an opera libretto.

To briefly summarize the plot, the opera is set in eighteenth-century Toledo, in the shop of a watchmaker, Torquemada. Every Thursday, Torquemada leaves the shop for one hour to synchronize the town's municipal clocks (the "Spanish hour" of the opera's title). Concepcion, Torquemada's wife, generally uses this time to pursue her affair with Gonzalve, a poet. On this particular Thursday, Ramiro, a muleteer, comes in to have his watch repaired. Torquemada agrees, but Concepcion hastens to remind him that it is time for him to synchronize the clocks, and Torquemada departs. Devising a ruse to get rid of Ramiro, Concepcion asks him to carry a

⁵ René Bizet, "L'Heure espagnole," *L'Intransigeant* (Paris), May 17, 1911. Cited in Arbie Orenstein, ed., *Lettres, écrits, entretiens* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 339. English translation taken from Orenstein, ed., *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 411.

⁶ Ravel makes few alterations to the libretto, such that there is little material difference between the libretto and the text of the play itself. See Chapter 4 of this dissertation for my discussion of the libretto.

grandfather clock upstairs for her. Meanwhile, Gonzalve arrives, but Ramiro returns from his errand more quickly than expected. Taken by surprise, Concepcion shoves Gonzalve in a grandfather clock and asks Ramiro to move a different clock for her. This comedy of errors repeats itself when another of her paramours, the rotund financier Don Inigo, enters and must hide himself in a clock to avoid being seen. Concepcion quickly gets bored with both Gonzalve, who prattles on in effusive poetry, and Don Inigo, whose corpulent physique disgusts her, leaving them inside their clocks and running off with Ramiro instead. Finally, Torquemada returns, catching Concepcion and her lovers red-handed. In the final scene, all join in the moral: even the muleteer has his day.

The critical reception of *L'Heure espagnole* was mostly cool. Louis Fourcaud and Gaston Carraud, among others, found the music incongruously cold and mechanical, and could not understand why Ravel wrote such technically difficult, unemotional music to accompany Franc-Nohain's light farce of a libretto.⁷ Pierre Lalo took issue with the music's supposed plagiarism of Debussy: his scathing review remarked that the declamation in *L'Heure* sounded like "*Pelléas* played on a phonograph that turns too slowly."⁸ In sum, many prominent critics either were not receptive to or were flummoxed by Ravel's approach. Modern scholarship has similarly puzzled over the enigma of Ravel's aesthetic. Yet previous studies of *L'Heure* have generally demonstrated a narrow focus on indexing Ravel's leitmotifs and have often given short shrift to

⁷ Louis Fourcaud, review of *L'Heure espagnole*, by Maurice Ravel, June 15, 1911. Cited in "Revue de la Presse quotidienne," in *S.I.M. Revue musicale mensuelle* 7, no. 7 (June 15, 1911). Gaston Carraud, review of *L'Heure espagnole* by Maurice Ravel, *La Liberté*, May 28, 1911. Indeed, the opera proved so difficult to conduct that Louis Hasselmans, the conductor initially assigned to the work, was replaced by François Ruhlmann within a few weeks of the start of rehearsals. See Kilpatrick, *The Operas of Maurice Ravel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 42–43.

⁸ Pierre Lalo, review of *L'Heure espagnole*, *Le Temps* (Paris), May 28, 1911. "*Pelléas* répétée par un phonographe dont le mouvement serait excessivement ralenti." All translations from French are mine unless otherwise noted.

the aspect of the opera that most perturbed early reviewers: the fact that a comedy was set to a mechanical-sounding score.

To elucidate the convergence of the comic and the mechanical in *L'Heure*, Steven Huebner has proposed reading the work alongside Henri Bergson's roughly contemporaneous study of laughter, *Le Rire* (*Laughter*, 1900).⁹ Huebner suggests that Bergson's description of the comic as an "absence of feeling" and "*mechanical inelasticity*, just where we would expect to find the wideawake adaptability and the living pliability of a human being" illuminates the seemingly incongruous relation of the comic and the mechanical in Ravel's music, specifically the composer's mechanical use of leitmotifs.¹⁰ This technique, in turn, serves an aesthetic of surface structure that parodies "deep" leitmotivic technique as used in Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* and Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. As Huebner himself acknowledges, Bergson's theory of laughter depends on issues raised in the philosopher's other treatises, although he does not fully explore this idea, given the limited scope of his article.

My dissertation expands Huebner's hermeneutic framework by considering *L'Heure* not only in terms of Bergson's theory of the comic in *Le Rire*, but also in light of Bergson's philosophy of time more generally, as articulated in works that preceded *Le Rire*—*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (*Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, 1889) and *Matière et mémoire* (*Matter and Memory*, 1896).¹¹ In analyzing Bergson's philosophy of time, I

⁹ Steven Huebner, "Laughter: In Ravel's Time," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 16, no. 3 (2006): 255–246.

¹⁰ Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, in *Comedy*, trans. Wylie Sypher (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 63 and 67.

¹¹ The usual English translation of Bergson's *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* is *Time and Free Will*, but I prefer *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, a literal translation. I believe it more effectively conveys Bergson's interest in the study of consciousness and the relation of Bergson's philosophy to this current of psychological research. Suzanne Guerlac also advocates for a literal translation of the title in her study of Bergson. See Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson* (Cornell University Press, 2017), 21n19.

emphasize aspects of his work that touch on music and aesthetics, arguing that music represents a form of knowledge that can circumvent language and access duration. It is my contention that a Bergsonian reading of *L'Heure* that considers his philosophy holistically offers an advantageous perspective in that it can unite and help explicate themes central to both the opera and Ravel's oeuvre as a whole: comedy, irony, the grotesque, the strange warping of time and meter, and the allure, humor, and horror of machines.

Among the first objections to this sort of analysis is often that it relies on a *Zeitgeist*. Indeed, I will note that it is unclear whether Ravel was familiar with Bergson's work. Nevertheless, I would argue that my archival research demonstrates a convincing association between Bergson, *debussysme*, and the writings of his students, Laloy and Jankélévitch, which provide a crucial link between Bergson's theory of duration and the application of this philosophical approach to music. While there is, admittedly, no smoking gun that connects Ravel directly to Bergson, I would counter that my purpose is not to establish that Bergson had any direct influence on Ravel, but rather to examine points of correlation between Bergson's philosophy and Ravel's music concerning the relationship of time to experience. Like Jankélévitch, I believe Bergson's theories of time represent a powerful hermeneutic frame: in this case, I contend that they allow us to assess a type of listening that is both encouraged and problematized in *L'Heure*—an attention to the present. For Jankélévitch, as for Bergson, music is a form of art that can reveal important information about our experience of duration (that is, time as it unfolds in the present) and, ultimately, our experience of life, but only in the context of a Bergsonian philosophy that views time as “the essence of being and the most real reality.”¹² Yet

¹² Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 12.

Jankélévitch also problematizes music's elucidatory properties, claiming that music cannot always be made to mean something; it can admit of multiple meanings or mean nothing at all: "music means nothing and yet means everything."¹³ As a work that stages the literal passing of an hour and takes place in real time, I argue that the plot of *L'Heure* is in dialogue (whether consciously or not) with these philosophical ideas about time, and portrays this through the characters' lack of awareness of duration. Throughout the opera, the characters grapple with a fundamental problem of hearing, a problem of perception that prevents them from communicating with one another and focusing on what is important—taking advantage of the present, of the hour they have.

Moreover, temporality as a concept in itself pervades not only *L'Heure* but many of Ravel's other works, many of which incorporate manipulations of rhythm: hemiola, various shifts in meter, and rhythmic ostinati.¹⁴ Since *L'Heure* encapsulates so many characteristic elements of Ravel's style, I suggest the work functions as something of a *roman à clef* that can lead us in a new direction concerning our analysis of Ravel's aesthetic perspective. I propose that Ravel's odd phrase—that he "heard funny"—implies an aesthetic of double entendre in *L'Heure*, which manifests itself in Ravel's use of rhythmic and metric discontinuity and his irreverent quotation of other musical works. Ravel's ample use of musical puns on the Tristan chord, Debussy's *Nuages* and *Pelléas*, and even his own works, simultaneously parodies these other pieces and locates them within a dense network of intertextuality with *L'Heure*. In its emphasis

¹³ Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, 11.

¹⁴ Recent analyses of Ravel's approach to meter and temporality more generally include Gurminder Kaur Bhogal, "Not Just a Pretty Surface: Ornament and Metric Complexity in Ravel's Piano Music," in *Unmasking Ravel: New Perspectives on the Music*, ed. Peter Kaminsky (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 272–305; Fillerup, "Eternity in Each Moment: Temporal Strategies in Ravel's 'Le Gibet'"; and Fillerup, *Ravel: Magician of Sound*, esp. chapter 3, "Illusions of Form and Void."

on surface witticisms, I will argue that *L'Heure* represents Ravel's concretization of an aesthetic that turns away from both Romanticism and Symbolism, elaborating a deep suspicion of the transcendent and the sincere. If concepts of transcendence and sincerity were available to Wagner and Debussy, they are no longer a viable aesthetic strategy for Ravel, who sought to craft an original music that would respond to both composers. What is left, I claim, is a series of what Carolyn Abbate terms "double exposures,"¹⁵ ghostly reminiscences of another sound brought to life. In contrast to Abbate, however, I argue that this phenomenon of double entendre takes place not only on a musical plane but also on a philosophical one, allowing Ravel to express profound ideas about the oppressive nature of time through superficial, slapstick musical gestures.

Literature Review

Secondary literature on *L'Heure* has been rather sparse until quite recently, and has primarily focused on situating the opera within its historical context as opposed to considering broader philosophical issues of time and mechanism that the work engages. A common thread unites this body of literature: an interest in Ravel's compositional aesthetic and what it may imply concerning our interpretation of the work. The earliest studies tended to frame *L'Heure* as either a light, uncomplicated divertissement (Orenstein) or a compendium of Ravel's technical brilliance (Clifton), while recent studies have devoted more attention to specific themes in the opera such as its depiction of Spain (Langham Smith, Kilpatrick) and comedy (Huebner). The only literature that explicitly addresses connections between *L'Heure* and contemporary

¹⁵ Carolyn Abbate, "Outside Ravel's Tomb," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* (1999): 465–530, at 470.

philosophies of time is a small portion of Jessie Fillerup's 2009 dissertation, allowing an avenue for further research.

A ten-page section of Orenstein's 1968 dissertation was the first scholarly study of *L'Heure*, and situated the opera within the context of Ravel's other vocal works.¹⁶ Orenstein claims that Ravel's primary goal in his vocal writing at that time was to transcribe the natural lilt and cadences of French conversation, as he had done with *Histoires naturelles* (1906), which the composer later claimed would serve as the model for *L'Heure espagnole*.¹⁷ Like *Histoires naturelles*, *L'Heure*'s vocal lines frequently stand apart from their orchestral backing, as if the characters were speaking musically over the orchestral accompaniment rather than truly singing. *L'Heure* carries on *Histoires naturelle*'s project of eliminating the *e muet*, long a convention of French poetic diction and operatic composition, in favor of a text-setting closer to ordinary speech. For Orenstein, *L'Heure* has no overt symbolic or extramusical implications: it was "intended to be a divertissement, and it must be heard and judged in that light."¹⁸

If, for Orenstein, the work is a divertissement, for Keith Clifton it is a testament to Ravel's craft. Clifton's 1998 dissertation represents the first large-scale study of the opera.¹⁹ Its principal goals are to establish a more complete picture of the production history of the opera and give an aperçu of its motivic content. Example 0.1, below, shows Clifton's catalogue of various leitmotifs in *L'Heure*. Clifton identifies both leitmotifs that indicate the entrance of the

¹⁶ Orenstein, "The Vocal Works of Maurice Ravel" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1968). See especially pp. 209–219.

¹⁷ Ravel cited *Histoires naturelles* as the model for the type of naturalistic text setting used in *L'Heure espagnole* in promotional interviews with Charles Tenroc and René Bizet that preceded the premiere of the opera. For the interview with Bizet, see Orenstein, *Lettres*, 340. For the interview with Tenroc, see Orenstein, *Lettres*, 587.

¹⁸ Orenstein, "The Vocal Works of Maurice Ravel," 219.

¹⁹ Keith Clifton, "Maurice Ravel's *L'Heure espagnole*: Genesis, Sources, Analysis" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1998).

characters they represent (nos. 1–5) as well as “subordinate motives” (nos. 5–9 [*sic*]) that are “generally heard in one scene or section of the opera and never again.”²⁰

MOTIVE	FIRST APPEARANCE
1) Clock shop	Scene I, m.1
2) Ramiro	Scene I, m.9
3) Don Inigo Gomez	Scene VII, m.1
4) Gonzalve	Scene IV, m.33
5) Habanera	Scene II, m. 22

MOTIVE	FIRST APPEARANCE
5) Concepcion's impatience	Scene II, m.40
6) Concepcion's rage	Scene XVII, m.1
7) Inigo's longing	Scene VII, m. 18
8) Inigo's love waltz	Scene IX, m. 17
9) Gonzalve's farewell	Scene XIX, m.36

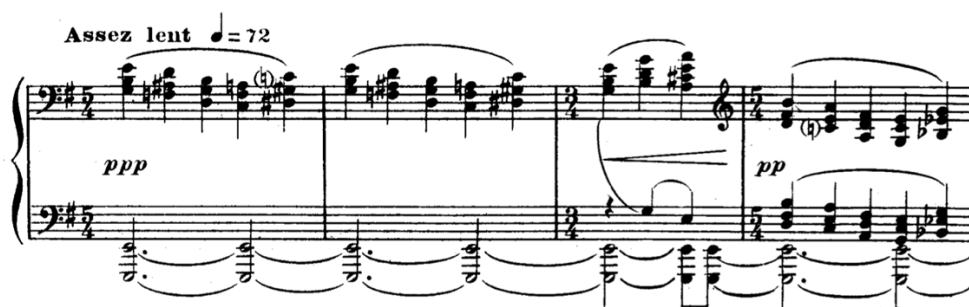
EXAMPLE 0.1: Keith Clifton, Motives in *L'Heure espagnole*. Clifton, “Maurice Ravel’s *L'Heure espagnole*: Genesis, Sources, Analysis,” (PhD diss., Northwestern University 1998), 168.

For Clifton, Ravel’s use of motives in *L'Heure* does not appear to serve a particular purpose beyond “maintaining a sense of musical and textual independence for each singer in virtually every scene.”²¹ In other words, placing motives in the orchestra rather than the vocal parts represents an astute technical device that allows the dialogue itself to remain free from leitmotivic burden. To cite an example of this technique, in Scene I, the “clock” theme of the overture (Example 0.2, below) reappears to accompany Ramiro as he explains to Torquemada that he must urgently have his watch fixed in order to perform his job properly (Example 0.3, below): “Or, je suis a votre service, muletier du gouvernement. Connaître l’heure exactement, en

²⁰ Clifton, “Maurice Ravel’s *L'Heure espagnole*,” 168.

²¹ Clifton, “Maurice Ravel’s *L'Heure espagnole*,” 233.

conséquence, c'est mon office.” (“At your service, government mule-driver. Consequently, knowing the exact time is my duty.”) (Scene I) However, Clifton does not offer an interpretation of this gesture.



EXAMPLE 0.2: “Clock” theme. Ravel, *L’Heure espagnole*, Introduction, (Piano-Vocal Score) (Paris: Durand, 1908), p. 1, mm. 1–4.²²

EXAMPLE 0.3: Reappearance of the “clock” theme to undergird Ramiro’s dialogue. Ravel, *L’Heure espagnole*, Scene I, p. 4.

More recent scholarship from 2000 onward, largely freed from the necessity of baseline archival research that characterized Orenstein’s and Clifton’s work, has been more focused on entertaining meanings behind Ravel’s compositional approach in *L’Heure*. Richard Langham Smith’s “Ravel’s Operatic Spectacles” (2000)²³ claims *L’Heure* to be a response to Debussy, highlighting points of comparison between *Pelléas* and *L’Heure* in which the works are shown to

²² So that the reader may quickly reference a given excerpt from the score, I generally label excerpts from *L’Heure espagnole* by scene number and page, rather than by measure number. I have adopted this practice because most secondary literature on *L’Heure espagnole* also references score excerpts by scene number.

²³ Richard Langham Smith, “Ravel’s Operatic Spectacles: *L’Heure* and *L’Enfant*,” chap. 9 in *Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

be diametrically opposed: Debussy wrote a serious opera, so Ravel would write a comic opera; Debussy wrote a full-length, five-act opera, so Ravel would write a one-act opera. To move beyond *Pelléas*, Langham Smith claims that Ravel “staked out territory elsewhere”²⁴—quite literally—by setting the opera in Spain, a location on which Debussy would have no purchase, for he could never truly inhabit it as a cultural outsider. Due to his mother’s Basque heritage, Ravel had, in Langham Smith’s words, “a sense of his belonging to Spain, and of Spain belonging to him, as it could not have done to Debussy.”²⁵ However, *L’Heure* does not present an idealized or nostalgic image of Spain. Langham Smith shows that contemporary French travel writers depicted Spain as a land of decadence in “a time-warp behind ‘civilised’ Europe,”²⁶ populated by people of excessive, sinful passions, a characterization of the Spanish that reappears in Concepcion, who represents an incarnation of uncontrolled lust.

Langham Smith briefly considers philosophical issues of time in *L’Heure*: he touches on the popularity of Schopenhauer’s *World as Will and Idea*, which probes questions of the fleeting quality of time and the association between time and man’s search for happiness, and also mentions Bergson in passing. Yet he does not delve into the implications of such issues, merely asserting vaguely that “ideas along these lines made a deep impression on post-Wagnerian France.”²⁷

Within the world of the opera, on the other hand, he theorizes that the “hour” of the work’s title encapsulates three distinct meanings. “L’Heure” refers to both the literal hour in

²⁴ Langham Smith, “Ravel’s Operatic Spectacles,” 188.

²⁵ Langham Smith, “Ravel’s Operatic Spectacles,” 188.

²⁶ Langham Smith, “Ravel’s Operatic Spectacles,” 190.

²⁷ Langham Smith, “Ravel’s Operatic Spectacles,” 192.

which the opera takes place²⁸ and to the French word for time in general, suggesting a vision of “how ‘time’ is passed in Toledo.”²⁹ The third meaning of time is Ravel’s own, “the hour of the muleteer,”³⁰ which references the Boccaccian final line of the opera: “There arrives a moment in the pursuit of Love, when even the muleteer has his turn” (Scene XXI). In Langham Smith’s view, Torquemada’s actions govern the rest of the characters’ lives as they each try to make use of the hour he spends synchronizing the municipal clocks. For Langham Smith, the concept of time in the opera serves only to highlight an image of a decadent Spain. In his words, Spain is “the convenient victim on which to foist this view of an effete society.”³¹ Yet in my view, Langham Smith’s interpretation of the tyranny of time in *L’Heure* does not adequately account for Gonzalve’s indifference to time, nor does it elucidate a second form of tyranny in *L’Heure*: that of Concepcion over her suitors.

In her study of *L’Heure*, Christine Souillard arrives at an opposite conclusion from Langham Smith’s: it is actually Concepcion and not Torquemada who controls the action of the plot, arguing that *L’Heure* is “a fable in which time and Woman are the forces that dominate and control man.”³² I find this interpretation quite compelling because it hints at the oppressive

²⁸ *L’Heure* joins a host of modernist works that take place in real time, including Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* (1888); operas in the vein of Italian *verismo*, e.g., Puccini’s *Tosca* (1900), Leoncavallo’s *Pagliacci* (1892), Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1890); and works of high literary modernism such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (serialized 1918–1920, published 1922), and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), all of which take place over the span of one day. Other relevant contemporaneous precedents for this attention to framing include Debussy’s *Prélude à l’Après-midi d’un faune* (1894), which contains exactly the same number of measures as there are lines in Mallarmé’s poem.

²⁹ Langham Smith, “Ravel’s Operatic Spectacles,” 193.

³⁰ Orenstein, ed., *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 412n4.

³¹ Langham Smith, “Ravel’s Operatic Spectacles,” 193.

³² Christine Souillard, “Commentaire littéraire et musicale” *L’Avant-Scène Opéra*, no. 127 (1990): 89. “*L’Heure espagnole* est une fable où le temps et la femme sont les forces qui dominent l’homme et le maîtrisent.” I will note here that Francophone scholarship on *L’Heure* is extremely thin on the ground, the only studies of any length being

forces under which male characters are compelled to function within the opera, yet I believe it fails to acknowledge that Concepcion herself remains a prisoner of time: her happiness is defined by the small window of time she has away from her husband's watchful eye.

As we have seen above, Steven Huebner has suggested that Henri Bergson's contemporaneous theory of laughter, articulated in *Le Rire* (1900), has special relevance for *L'Heure* because it equates the comic with the mechanical, that is, one's failure to be in touch with one's own humanity and act with grace. As Huebner indicates, Bergson's theories of laughter are dependent on concepts articulated in the philosopher's other treatises; for instance, the final section of *Le Rire* provides an extended meditation on aesthetics that incorporates ideas of time and intuition. In this section, Bergson claims that comedy represents an ideal art form because it occupies a liminal space between serious art and life, and can make commentaries on both. However, comedy must avoid direct engagement with serious issues, and it must not reveal that it depends on "a momentary anesthesia of the heart,"³³ an apathy toward the object of our laughter. In his analysis of *Le Rire*, Huebner writes that artisans of the comic only engage with the real on a superficial level, for to "couple the outer effect with causes that are too deep-seated, would mean to endanger...all that was laughable in the effect."³⁴ Comedy, in other words, requires that we remain oblivious to the reason we are laughing: if we were aware of the underlying motivation for our laughter—that is, our utter indifference toward the object of our ridicule—we would be duly horrified by our behavior. Thus, in Huebner's view, Bergson's theory of comedy rests on a sharp distinction between "surface" and "depth." The surface/depth

Souillard's, and Huebner's "*L'Heure espagnole: La Grivoiserie moderne de Ravel*," in *Aspects de l'opéra français de Meyerbeer à Honegger*, ed. Jean-Christophe Branger and Vincent Giroud (Monts: Symétrie, 2009), 192–213.

³³ Bergson, *Laughter*, 64.

³⁴ Bergson, *Laughter*, 169.

binary, in turn, maps well onto Huebner's appraisal of Ravel's craft as an art of surface structure and "crystalline exteriors."³⁵

Jessie Fillerup, on the other hand, explicitly characterizes *L'Heure* as a work about time, claiming that "Franc-Nohain employs several references to time and mortality in the play, but Ravel seems to take the playwright's conceit one step further, making Time the opera's primary subject and star."³⁶ Her dissertation chapter, "Clockwork Souls: The Characterization of Time in *L'Heure espagnole*," represents the only secondary literature on the relationship between *L'Heure* and contemporary philosophical ideas of time. As a whole, her dissertation advances a theory that Ravel's aesthetics may be approached through a framework of the grotesque, a metaphor that helps make sense of potentially incongruous aspects of his oeuvre, with its haunting, ethereal textures and cold mechanicity. In *L'Heure espagnole*, Fillerup sees the grotesque emerge out of many disjunctions: the mixed critical reception of the opera; the portrayal of characters as both human and mechanical; and metric displacements—to name but a few.

Turning specifically to manifestations of time in the opera, Fillerup theorizes that Ravel's manipulations of tempo and meter reflect distinctions between Einstein's and Bergson's theories of time and simultaneity. Einstein's theory of Special Relativity, published in 1905 as "On the

³⁵ Huebner, "Laughter: In Ravel's Time," 231.

³⁶ Jessie Fillerup, "Purloined Poetics," 189. More recently, Fillerup has examined issues of Ravel's compositional authority in *L'Heure* in her recent essay, "Composing Voices and Ravel's *L'Heure espagnole*," in Walter Bernhart and Lawrence Kramer, eds., *On Voice* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014), 179–196. Here, she considers Ravel's compositional persona and how it may be envoiced through the characters of *L'Heure* themselves. She claims the characters of *L'Heure* seem to project their own compositional authority and hence the voice of the composer, yet at the same time, the characters remain mere singers and hence executants of a work that masks Ravel's true identity. The issues of authorship she considers here are quite separate from the concerns of aesthetics and time that I wish to draw out in my analysis of *L'Heure*, so I will not consider this article in detail here.

Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies,”³⁷ begins with two fundamental principles of physics: 1) the laws of physics are the same for all observers in inertial (constant speed) frames of reference, and 2) the speed of light is constant for all observers, regardless of their motion relative to the light source. These principles can be confirmed by experiment: for example, a person who is stationary and a person moving at five miles per hour would still measure the speed of light at 186,000 miles per hour. Einstein theorized that if the speed of light is constant, and laws of physics uniformly apply to both observers, then something else must change: time. Thus, time changes relative to the frame-of-reference, an effect called *time dilation*: events that appear simultaneous to one observer may not appear simultaneous to another, depending on her frame of reference. Fillerup applies this perspective to *L'Heure*, theorizing that if time is relative to the viewer in Einstein's theory of Special Relativity, then each character in *L'Heure* seems to experience time according to his or her literal point of view. Bergson, on the other hand, would see these differences in the characters' subjective rendering of time as a function of their experience, a product of their consciousness and memory.

While I find Fillerup's analysis intriguing, I believe it is ultimately anachronistic, as Bergson held much more cultural currency than Einstein in France during the early years of the twentieth century. Indeed, the debate between Einstein's and Bergson's conceptions of simultaneity did not properly emerge until the early 1920s, with the publication of Bergson's *Durée et Simultanéité* (*Duration and Simultaneity*, 1922).³⁸ For the purposes of my study, I believe it would be more fruitful to exploit larger-scale connections between music and the

³⁷ Albert Einstein, “On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies,” *Annalen der Physik*, June 30, 1905. <http://www.fourmilab.ch/>.

³⁸ For an excellent study of the Einstein-Bergson debate and its shaping of scientific discourse, see Jimena Canales, *The Physicist and the Philosopher: Einstein, Bergson, and the Debate that Changed Our Understanding of Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

philosophy of time that already exist in Bergson's own writings and in the writings of his disciples, namely Laloy and Jankélévitch, which I explore in Chapter 3.

Emily Kilpatrick's monograph, *The Operas of Maurice Ravel* (2015),³⁹ represents the most recent work on *L'Heure* and gives a concise and masterful overview of the opera's production history.⁴⁰ In terms of her methodological perspective, Kilpatrick develops the groundwork Langham Smith lays out in his article, essentially forging a compromise between Clifton's and Langham Smith's approaches, investigating both motivic material and French portrayals of Spain that inform the concept of the opera. A particularly engaging chapter, "From *Carmen* to Concepcion," demonstrates ways in which Concepcion represents a musical and visual parody of *Carmen*, a veritable Urtext of *espagnolade* already deeply ingrained in the imaginary of the Parisian opera-going public. The costume designs for *L'Heure* were supposedly modeled after Goya's paintings, and Kilpatrick claims they were in dialogue with similar costuming for *Carmen*, as shown in Figure 0.1, below. The fact that Geneviève Vix, who created the role of Concepcion, had also sung the role of Carmen in the 1908 Opéra-Comique production enhanced the sense of parody. Moreover, the production score reveals that stage-walkers wearing costumes from *Carmen* itself were to pass by in the street, just visible beyond Torquemada's shop window, situated at the back of the stage.

³⁹ Kilpatrick, *The Operas of Maurice Ravel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁴⁰ On the original 1911 production of *L'Heure espagnole*, see also Kilpatrick's "The Carbonne Copy," which documents the rehearsal schedule and explores director Albert Carré's specifications for the opera via the newly discovered *régie* score. Kilpatrick's most recent piece on *L'Heure espagnole*, "Quand sonne *L'Heure espagnole*," *L'Avant-Scène Opéra* 299 (2017): 39–43, reiterates much of the substance of "The Carbonne Copy."



FIGURE 0.1: Costume designs for Carmen and Concepcion. Left to Right: Francisco Goya, *Portrait of the Duchess of Alba* (1797); Célestine Galli-Marié as Carmen (1884); Costume design for Concepcion (1911); Geneviève Vix as Concepcion (1911). Emily Kilpatrick, *The Operas of Maurice Ravel*, 205.

However, I would argue that the design for Concepcion’s costume is as French as it is “Spanish,” as it markedly resembles contemporary ladies’ fashion trends in 1911 Paris. Unlike Goya’s *Portrait of the Duchess of Alba* (1797), Henri Lucien Doucet’s painting of Célestine Galli-Marié as Carmen, and even the original costume design for Concepcion, the final version of the costume lacks a corseted bodice and a tiered ruffled skirt—crucial details of the other images. The design as a whole is quite minimalist, much like contemporary Paris fashion trends in 1911, as shown below in Example 0.4, taken from the fashion magazine *L’Écho de la Mode*. Similar to the ladies’ design in *L’Écho de la Mode*, Concepcion’s dress is loosely fit and has only minimal detailing at the base of the skirt, with only traces of “Spain”—a small front panel with a ruffle detail and a gathered hem, topped with a bolero jacket and a fanciful headpiece.



EXAMPLE 0.4: Ladies' fashion design, *L'Écho de la mode*, 22 October 1911.

At the end of Franc-Nohain's libretto, we learn that the story only has “un peu d’Espagne autour” (“a bit of Spain around it”), suddenly upending the entire scenario of the opera and raising the question of whether the opera is really “about” Spain.⁴¹ In my view, this abrupt about-face suggests that the audience has actually been watching itself on stage the entire time, and the “Spanishness” of the opera serves only to make this uncomfortable realization more palatable, as the audience can still choose to believe the opera is not in fact about them. As a result, “Spain” becomes a mere displacement of France, an idea that was amply represented in the press coverage that led up to the premiere of *L'Heure*.

In an interview with Ravel that appeared just days before the premiere, journalist Charles Tenroc described the “Spain” of the opera as “a very different Spain from that of Bizet...a

⁴¹ Franc-Nohain, *L'Heure espagnole: An Opera in One Act* (Libretto) (New York: Franco Columbo, 1919), 22.

hilarious Spain...seen from the heights of Montmartre.”⁴² And Franc-Nohain, in the 1904 foreword the original play, called the work a “fable of frankly Gaulois humor and arbitrarily Spanish costume.”⁴³ Kilpatrick implies that this sort of press coverage, intertwined with the production’s visual references to *Carmen*, would have been a way of essentially hoodwinking the audience into accepting the risqué subject material of opera, particularly Concepcion’s unrepentant attitude toward adultery.

Just as the elements of *Carmen* that were initially deemed most shocking and most ‘foreign’—the violence, Carmen’s overt sexuality—came to be acceptable within (and because of) its Spanish setting, Concepcion’s dominance, vitality and rapaciousness were admissible in turn through her positioning as a daughter of Carmen—and a daughter raiding her mother’s wardrobe, too.

Yet, as we have just seen, Tenroc’s article portrayed Spain as a mere illusion—one that would undoubtedly have been apparent to the first audiences for the production. While for Kilpatrick, the Spanish setting is an essential component of the opera that would have made it acceptable to early audiences, one might also adopt the opposite perspective that the press coverage would have dispelled any notion that the opera was somehow “about” Spain, a perspective that would support Huebner’s assertion that “as far as [Franc-Nohain] was concerned the action could have been situated anywhere else.”⁴⁴ In my view, the Spanish setting of *L’Heure* was, in effect, ancillary, a convenient maneuver to represent Parisians on stage.

Kilpatrick hardly considers the philosophy of time in her monograph, noting only that time and clocks are a significant “dramatic and thus musical force throughout *L’Heure espagnole*,” yet they do not merit “metaphysical discussion.”⁴⁵ Kilpatrick claims that Fillerup has

⁴² Maurice Ravel, “Thérèse et L’Heure Espagnole à l’Opéra-Comique,” interview by Charles Tenroc, *Comœdia*, May 11, 1911.

⁴³ Cited in Kilpatrick, *The Operas of Maurice Ravel*, 115.

⁴⁴ Huebner, “La Grivoiserie moderne de Ravel,” 206.

⁴⁵ Kilpatrick, *The Operas of Maurice Ravel*, 182.

already adequately discussed *L'Heure*'s relationship to contemporary philosophy of time, and does not entertain this perspective further. Rather, in her analysis, Kilpatrick highlights the parody of Spain and Spanishness as revealed in the costume designs.⁴⁶

From this overview of the literature on *L'Heure*, it is apparent that previous scholarship has prioritized analyses of leitmotivic content in the opera and reflections on the opera's Spanishness over other themes that emerge, namely time and mechanism, which remain undertheorized. Meanwhile, very few scholars, with the exception of Fillerup and Huebner, have given Bergson more than passing mention in their analyses of *L'Heure*. In my opinion, what is needed is a study that can link Ravel's compositional aesthetic to issues of time, comedy, and mechanism, and highlight the ways in which Ravel challenges the prevailing aesthetic paradigms of both Symbolism and Romanticism. I argue that reading Ravel through Bergson, whose philosophy of time and encompasses all of these issues, can further this perspective.

Methodology and Chapter Summary

My dissertation employs a twofold methodological approach to investigate the shift in Ravel's aesthetic direction around the time he was composing *L'Heure espagnole*: an archival approach (Chapters 1–3) and a hermeneutic approach (Chapter 4). I begin my study by examining Ravel's personal correspondence as well as the press reception of his works around 1907, the year he began composing *L'Heure*, as evidence for the creation of an aesthetic posture that would set him apart from Debussy and catalyze his novel approach to time and meter as a distinctive aspect of his style (Chapters 1 and 2). Chapter 3 presents archival research on

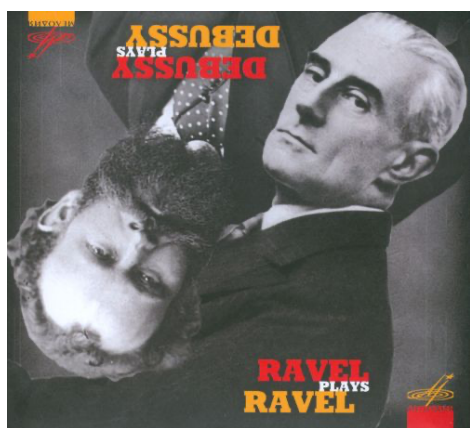
⁴⁶ Kilpatrick also comments briefly on *L'Heure*'s potential modal and melodic allusions to *Carmen*. See especially Kilpatrick, "From *Carmen* to Concepcion," chap. 9 in *The Operas of Maurice Ravel*.

Bergson and his interlocutors, linking his philosophy of time to contemporaneous research on music, sensation, and consciousness by Gustav Fechner, Théodule Ribot, and Paul and Pierre Janet. Here, I develop the grounds for a Bergsonian approach to Ravel's music by exploring the practical application of Bergson's theories of duration and intuition to music in the early musicological and music-critical writings of Louis Laloy, and, secondarily, Vladimir Jankélévitch, both of whom had studied under Bergson. My study concludes with a hermeneutic analysis of *L'Heure espagnole* that uses Bergson's theory of duration as an interpretive lens to make sense of the complex interaction between comedy, mechanism, and time in the opera.

CHAPTER 1

THE GENESIS OF *L'HEURE ESPAGNOLE* AND RAVEL'S SOCIAL NETWORK

Much to the chagrin of both composers, Ravel and Debussy have often been compared to one another. Today, that legacy has persisted as they continue to appear alongside each other on albums and concert programs like Janus-faced doubles of one another (see Example 1.1).



EXAMPLE 1.1: Album cover for *Debussy Plays Debussy, Ravel Plays Ravel*. Melodiya, 2013.¹

Publicly, they each claimed they admired the other's music and seemed to enjoy a cordial relationship, at least through March 1904, when Debussy was rumored to have told Ravel not to touch a note in his String Quartet. In his early career, Ravel stood in awe of Debussy, and, like many of his generation, was intrigued by Debussy's unorthodox compositional techniques. Ravel transcribed a number of Debussy's pieces: he began a two-piano transcription of Debussy's *Nocturnes* in 1901 (published 1909), and would later transcribe *Sarabande* (published 1923) and

¹ The designers of this album cover do not seem to have been aware that the photograph they chose to represent Debussy is actually of an unknown individual. The photograph of Ravel is accurate, however. My thanks to Gurminder Kaur Bhogal for bringing this to my attention.

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune (transcribed c. 1930) after Debussy's death.² In 1902, Ravel and his band of friends, dubbed the "Apaches," a slang term meaning "hooligans," attended every single performance of the first production of *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902).³ Ravel openly acknowledged Debussy's influence on his early career, particularly on his 1903 song cycle, *Shéhérazade*, writing in his Autobiographical Sketch that "Debussy's influence, at least on an intellectual level, is fairly apparent" in the work.⁴ Similarly, his String Quartet (1902–1903) of the same period owes a profound debt to Debussy's earlier essay in the genre, both in terms of its formal layout and compositional language.⁵ For Roland-Manuel, Ravel's student and one of his first major biographers, in the years around 1900, Ravel was less sure of himself and weighed down by Debussy's influence, whereas *Miroirs* (1904–1905) marked a moment when Ravel first staked out his own compositional territory.⁶ Yet it was also at this moment that Ravel began to face trenchant accusations of what would come to be known as *debussysme*, repeatedly coming under fire as a plagiarist of Debussy's. While Ravel revisited Debussy's works throughout his career via the activity of transcription, and even premiered Debussy's *D'un cahier d'esquisses* in

² Ravel also engaged with Debussy's memory through his own compositions, dedicating his Duet for Violin and Cello (the eventual first movement of his Sonata for Violin and Cello) to the memory of Claude Debussy as part of the *Tombeau de Claude Debussy* (1920). The *Tombeau* was a collection of musical tributes to Debussy commissioned by Henry Prunières for a 1920 special issue of the *Revue musicale*. Other contributors included fellow Apaches Florent Schmitt, Albert Roussel, and Igor Stravinsky. For the original publication of the duet, see "Supplément musical du 1er décembre 1920. *La Revue musicale*, 1ère année, no. 2," *La Revue Musicale* 1, no. 2 (December 1, 1920): 24–29.

³ Gerald Larner, *Ravel* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 64–65, 70–71.

⁴ Maurice Ravel, "Une esquisse autobiographique de Maurice Ravel," *Revue musicale, Numéro spécial: Hommage à Maurice Ravel* (December 1938): 20. All translations from French are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁵ The second movement in particular shows Debussy's influence quite clearly, importing elements such as its pizzicato texture and even the tempo indication, "Assez vif—Très rythmé" (Debussy's is "Assez vif et bien rythmé"). For a comparative analysis of the first movements of Debussy's and Ravel's String Quartets, see Stephen Hartke, "Comparative Aspects of the Treatment of the 'Harmonic Envelope' in the First Movements of Debussy's Quartet in G minor and Ravel's Quartet in F Major," (PhD diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 1982).

⁶ Roland-Manuel, *Ravel* (Paris: Mémoire du livre, 2000), 148.

1910 at the Société de Musique Indépendante, he nevertheless sought to forge his own unique path as a composer.

This new path, I argue, would crystallize with his first opera, *L'Heure espagnole* (1907–1911), in which Ravel would prioritize comedy, mechanism, and the manipulation of musical time as unique aspects of his style that would distance him from Debussy. Nevertheless, the roots of an aesthetic shift toward a greater emphasis on rhythm and meter are certainly present in a host of contemporaneous works by Ravel. *L'Heure espagnole* was produced in the midst of a burst of activity in which Ravel completed a song cycle, *Histoires naturelles* (1906); a major orchestral work, *Rapsodie espagnole* (1907–1908); and three other songs—the *Vocalise-Etude en forme de Habanera* (1907), *Les Grands Vents venus d'outremer* (text by Henri de Régnier, 1907), and *Sur l'herbe* (text by Verlaine, 1907).⁷ Moreover, his piano music from this period, namely *Miroirs* (1904–1905) and *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908), also demonstrates a preoccupation with metric complexity.⁸ However, in my view, it is only in *L'Heure espagnole* that Ravel truly takes on Debussy's most prominent work, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, by combining humor with inventive uses of rhythm and meter to concretize this new aesthetic direction.

It is significant that the bulk of *L'Heure espagnole* was composed in 1907, at the height of the press debacle between Debussy and Ravel, or what François Lesure has termed the

⁷ Ravel's increasing use of Spanish idioms is also notable in this phase of his career. On Spanish and Basque influence on Ravel's music, see Robert Orledge, "Evocations of Exoticism," chap. 2 in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁸ On Ravel's use of meter and rhythm in *Miroirs* and *Gaspard de la nuit*, see especially Gurminder Kaur Bhogal, "Ornament and Virtuosity in French Piano Music," chap. 3 in *Details of Consequence: Ornament, Music, and Art in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Bhogal, "Not Just a Pretty Surface: Ornament and Metric Complexity in Ravel's Piano Music," in *Unmasking Ravel: New Perspectives on the Music*, edited by Peter Kaminsky (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 272–305; and Jessie Fillerup, "Eternity in Each Moment: Temporal Strategies in Ravel's 'Le Gibet,'" *Music Theory Online* 19, no. 1 (2013), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.13.19.1/mto.13.19.1.fillerup.php>.

“Affaire Debussy-Ravel.”⁹ The period between 1905 and 1908 was especially fraught for Ravel for several reasons: his failure to obtain the Prix de Rome; the repeated accusations of *debussysme* he faced in the Paris press; and the illness and subsequent death of his father in October 1908. In this chapter, we will explore how Ravel’s friendship with the Godebski family, an influential family of artists and musicians, sheds light on these three crucial trials in the composer’s early career. The Godebskis provided a much-needed social refuge for Ravel, as well as a professional network of musicians, artists, and writers: they hosted their own salon, and also introduced Ravel to many eventual members of the Apaches, a collective of musicians, artists, and writers who were united by their admiration of Debussy, particularly *Pelléas*. However, Ravel’s private correspondence with the Godebskis reveals a greater complexity to his relationship with Debussy. Though he outwardly and sincerely conveyed a deep admiration for Debussy, his correspondence demonstrates that he also struggled with his relationship to the composer, and especially *Pelléas*.

The Godebski correspondence may also help us infer further details about the mission of the Apaches and how their aims developed over time as their evaluation of Debussy shifted, especially in response to press polemics that painted Ravel as a plagiarist of Debussy’s. The Apaches were known for zealously attending the first run of *Pelléas*, but the question of how Ravel’s reception of the opera transformed over time, in tandem with the goals of the Apaches, has been little understood. Despite excellent sociological work on the organization, existing scholarly literature has focused primarily on the early history of the Apaches, arguing that the group attended performances of *Pelléas* as much for the opera itself as for the “cause” of

⁹ François Lesure, “‘L’Affaire’ Debussy-Ravel,” in *Festschrift Friedrich Blume zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Anna Amalie Abert and Wilhelm Pfannkuch (Basel: Bärenreiter Kassel, 1963), 231–234.

elevating Debussy to the status of a great composer.¹⁰ The Godebski correspondence may also help shed light on the role that peripheral organizations, such as the Godebski salon itself, had in altering the aims of the organization after about 1906, when the Apaches no longer attended *Pelléas* with such frequency. As such, my research attempts to illuminate how the ethos of the Apaches developed over time, advancing a theory that it departed from its original mission of unwavering patronage of *Pelléas* to become an organization that rallied around Ravel and other composers in his circle who were in fact increasingly seeking to move beyond the influence of Debussy.

Moreover, Ravel's correspondence with the Godebskis can illuminate the composer's response to the maelstrom of negative press he received between 1906 and 1908, as *Pelléas* also surfaces as a common thread in much of the criticism on Ravel from this period, serving as the benchmark by which Ravel's works would be measured. Much of this will be explored in Chapter 2, but it bears mentioning here. Unlike much of his other correspondence, which tends to be highly formal in tone, Ravel's correspondence with the Godebski family displays a certain light-hearted spirit and vulnerability, suggesting that he felt free to share his true opinions, particularly of Debussy, *Pelléas*, and even other members of the Apaches, something he apparently could not do in their presence. Throughout this chapter, we will explore how this correspondence describes a turning point in Ravel's relationship with Debussy, articulating Ravel's transition from a star-struck admirer of Debussy's to a more critical listener, and ultimately a composer who planned to respond musically to Debussy through a major operatic

¹⁰ See Jann Pasler, "'Pelléas' and Power: Forces Behind the Reception of Debussy's Opera," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 10, no. 3 (1987): 243–264, especially pp. 262–264, and Pasler, "A Sociology of Les Apaches: Sacred Battalion for *Pelléas*," chap. 9 in *Berlioz and Debussy: Sources, Contexts, and Legacies*, ed. Barbara Kelly and Kerry Murphy (London: Ashgate, 2007). See also Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 28–30; and Orenstein, ed., *Maurice Ravel: Lettres, Écrits, Entretiens* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 17.

work, namely *L'Heure espagnole*. I suggest that Ravel, under extreme pressure from recent press coverage to produce a work that would completely shatter any illusions that his music resembled Debussy's, eventually decided on a complete parody of *Pelléas* as the surest way to clear an aesthetic path for himself—the work that would become *L'Heure espagnole*.

Ravel and the Godebskis, Part I: The Godebski Salon and the Apaches

Nearly thirteen years Debussy's junior, Joseph Maurice Ravel was born on March 7, 1875 in the Basque hamlet of Ciboure, the first child of Pierre Joseph Ravel, a Swiss engineer, and Marie Delouart, a Basque woman. A few months after his birth, the family would relocate to Paris. Ravel showed a keen interest in music at an early age, fascinated by the sound of machines he heard while he accompanied his father to various factories, and the Basque songs his mother would sing to him. Pierre Joseph Ravel, himself an amateur pianist, had a great deal of sympathy for his son's musical ambitions. He and his wife quickly recognized Ravel's talent and financed a world-class education with some of the most renowned teachers in Paris. Ravel began studying piano with Henry Ghys in 1882, and embarked on his study of composition with Delibes's student Charles-René in 1887. Charles-René would urge Ravel's father to send him to the Conservatoire, and in 1889, Ravel joined the piano studio of Émile Descombes, known for having been in Chopin's social circle and teaching Erik Satie.¹¹ Later that same year, he was admitted to the Conservatoire in Eugène Anthiôme's preparatory piano class.

¹¹ The claim that Descombes was one of the last students of Chopin has so far remained unsubstantiated, despite the fact that it remains rampant on the internet, for instance on his English Wikipedia page: "Émile Decombes," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Émile_Decombes. On Descombes, see Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 9–10; and Roy Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 60.

Ravel had a difficult experience at the Conservatoire and often struggled to conform to the exacting standards of the institution. That said, Ravel showed early promise as Anthiôme's pupil, winning first prize in preparatory piano in 1891. He was subsequently given the opportunity to study harmony under Émile Pessard and piano under Charles-Wilfrid Bériot. But his failure to maintain his position in the hyper-competitive climate of the Conservatoire, where prizes represented the only measure of achievement, resulted in his expulsion from the institution just four years later, in July of 1895. Between 1895 and 1898, Ravel continued to compose, unhampered by the academic demands of the Conservatoire. His works of this period, which include the *Menuet antique* (1895) and *Sites auriculaires* (1895–1897), are composed in rather disparate styles and reflect the experimentations of a young composer who was still searching for his creative path. Nevertheless, it seems that Ravel harbored a desire to be recognized by the academy as well as an ambition to learn his craft in a formal, institutional setting. In January of 1898, he determined to return to the Conservatoire, joining Gabriel Fauré's composition class. That same year, he also began studying counterpoint and orchestration privately with André Gédalge. He was again dismissed in 1900, having reaching the age limit of twenty-five. However, he was still registered at the Conservatoire as an "ancien élève" and would remain in Fauré's composition class as an auditor until 1903.¹²

Having also received his education at the Conservatoire, Debussy moved in the same professional circles as Ravel, who would eventually idolize him, particularly when Debussy finally achieved wider recognition with *Pelléas et Mélisande*, his first and only complete opera. *Pelléas* would provoke such a press scandal that it became all but expected for concertgoers to

¹² Ravel apparently also retained an ongoing connection with the Conservatoire as a judge for the piano juries, although this aspect of his relationship with the institution has yet to receive much scholarly attention. For example, his participation in a 1913 jury for female piano students at the Conservatoire is documented in *Excelsior*, "Les Concours du Conservatoire," June 29, 1913.

position themselves on one side or the other of the debate, leading Ravel and his Conservatoire friends to form the Apaches. The group was originally made up of students from the Conservatoire—mostly other pupils of Fauré’s—and the Schola Cantorum who met in the balcony seats. Together, they determined that they would attend as many performances of *Pelléas* as possible in order to show their support for Debussy. One day, as the group passed by a newspaper boy on their way home from a show, he shouted “Attention, les Apaches !” (“Watch out, you hooligans!”), and the name stuck.¹³

Ricardo Viñes (1875–1943), a fellow Apache and a standout pianist in Bériot’s studio, introduced Ravel to Cipa and Ida Godebski, bringing him along to a dinner at the couple’s home on June 16, 1904. Viñes noted the occasion in his diary.¹⁴ Also present at the dinner, according to Viñes, were composers Claude Terrasse and his wife,¹⁵ the composer and conductor Gabriel Grovlez,¹⁶ and the painter Léon Simon. Ravel played the first movement of his *Sonatine* for them

¹³ Pasler, “A Sociology of the Apaches,” 153.

¹⁴ See Nina Gubisch, ed., “Le Journal inédit de Ricardo Viñes: Introduction, traduction, et notes,” *Revue internationale de la musique française* 1 (1980): 202. Viñes’s mother brought him to Paris to study at the Conservatoire in 1887, on the advice of Isaac Albéniz, and it was there that he met Ravel, in Charles-Wilfrid Bériot’s piano studio. As young men, he and Ravel discovered new music, particularly Mussorgsky and Borodin, by sight-reading two-piano or four-hand arrangements of orchestral scores. Today, Viñes is remembered as an advocate and avid performer of contemporary music by French, Spanish, South American, and Russian composers. For a concise biography of Viñes, see David Korevaar and Laurie J. Sampsel, “The Ricardo Viñes Piano Music Collection at the University of Colorado at Boulder,” *Notes* 60, no. 2 (2004): 361–400, at 362–366. Various sections of Viñes’s diary have been published over the years, although a complete edition has yet to appear. A French translation of the diary (originally written in Spanish) is forthcoming from University of Montréal press, edited by Michel Duchesneau. For French translations of selected sections of the diary, see Nina Gubisch, ed., “Le journal inédit de Ricardo Viñes: Introduction, traduction, et notes,” *Revue internationale de la musique française* 1 (1980): 153–248; and Suzy Levy, ed., *Journal inédit de Ricardo Viñes: Odilon Redon et le milieu occultiste, 1897–1915* (Paris: Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1987). For excerpts in English, see Elaine Brody, “The Spaniards in Paris: From the Unpublished Journal of Ricardo Viñes,” in *Paris: The Musical Kaleidoscope, 1870–1925* (New York: George Braziller, 1987), 168–189.

¹⁵ Claude Terrasse (1867–1923) was a French organist and pianist.

¹⁶ Gabriel Grovlez (1879–1944), a native of Lille, was a French composer, pianist, conductor, and music critic. He served as professor of piano at the Schola Cantorum from 1899 to 1909, choir director of the Opéra Comique (1905–1908), and music director of the Théâtre des Arts (1911–1913). As music director of the Théâtre des Arts, he

that evening, and the whole group was apparently enchanted by the piece.¹⁷ Viñes also played that evening, but made no mention of the pieces he performed.

Cipa Godebski, just a year older than Ravel, was the son of Cyprian Godebski, a Polish sculptor and professor at the Imperial Academy of the Arts in St. Petersburg. At the time, Cipa, his wife Ida, and their children Mimie and Jean, were living at 20 rue de Chartres in the Paris suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine, and hosted soirées there and at their summer house in Valvins. Misia Sert, Cipa's half-sister and the muse of many prominent painters of the period, played a key role in the artistic scene and also afforded Ravel connections to some of the most influential figures in French artistic life. Through the Godebski's salon and the family's social connections, Ravel met many eventual members of the Apaches, including the writer Léon-Paul Fargue and the painter Pierre Bonnard.

Neither Ida (1872–1935) nor Cipa Godebski (1874–1937) published any writings related to Ravel, although we can gain a glimpse of their relationship with the composer as well as the workings of their salon through the memoirs of their children, Mimie and Jean, and their grandnephew, Jean Mycinski (1922–2010),¹⁸ who became a professor of musicology and European history at the Catholic University of Lille.¹⁹

oversaw the premieres of Ravel's *Ma mère l'oye* and Albert Roussel's *Le Festin de l'araignée*. From 1914 to 1934, he was the director of the Opéra de Paris.

¹⁷ Gubisch, ed., "Le journal inédit de Ricardo Viñes," 202.

¹⁸ Mycinski also published under the name Jean-Stanislas Mycinski.

¹⁹ See Mimie Godebska Blacque Belair, "Quelques souvenirs intimes sur Ravel," *Revue musicale* 19, no. 187 ("Hommage à Maurice Ravel," December 1938): 189–191; Jean Godebski, "Mon Ravel," *Revue internationale de musique française*, no. 24 (November 1987): 50–57; and Jean Mycinski, "Rue d'Athènes," *Revue internationale de musique française*, no. 22 (February 1987): 81–85. Jean Godebski's account represents the most thorough account of the three sources, and is the one upon which I will rely most heavily.

Cipa came from a long line of artists and intellectuals, and elucidating his family history provides a more complete picture of the family's profound and complex ties to both French culture and the arts. The family's connection to France probably originated with Cyprian Godebski I (1765–1809), Cipa's grandfather, a poet and novelist who served in Napoleon's Polish Legions.²⁰ Cyprian I belonged to a circle of poets within the Polish Legions (Poètes de la Légion) who inaugurated a genre of Polish nationalist poetry. He also took part in the intellectual life of the Legions through the publication of its newspaper, *Dekada Legionowa* (*Decade of the Legion*). Napoleon would eventually recognize his efforts by bestowing upon him the title of Baron of Frankensthal. Yet once Cyprian I saw that Napoleon had no intention to reunify Poland after the 1795 partition, he became disillusioned with Napoleon's policies and, in 1806, he joined the Army of the Duchy of Warsaw, a faction of which envisioned an independent Poland. Nevertheless, he ultimately died protecting French interests at the Battle of Raszyn in 1809, attempting to keep Warsaw, then a French protectorate, out of Austrian hands.²¹

Cyprian I's son, François Xavier (Franciszek Ksawery) Godebski (1801–1869), followed in his father's footsteps and also became a writer and editor, publishing under the pen name of Dobrogost.²² From 1822 to 1823, he served as the editor of *Wanda*, one of the first literary magazines marketed to women.²³ He participated in the November Uprising of 1830, became a

²⁰ On Cyprian Godebski I, see Malou Haine, "Cipa Godebski et les Apaches," *Revue belge de Musicologie / Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Muziekwetenschap* 60 (2006): 221–266. Also see Jerzy Jan Lerski, George J. Lerski, and Halina T. Lerski, *Historical Dictionary of Poland, 966–1945* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood, 1996), s.v. "Godebski, Cyprian," and "Raszyn, Battle of."

²¹ His death is depicted in January Suchdolski's painting, "Death of Cyprian Godebski at Raszyn" (1855). For a reproduction, see [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Death_of_Cyprian_Godebski_at_the_Battle_of_Raszyn_1809_by_January_Suchodolski_\(1855\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Death_of_Cyprian_Godebski_at_the_Battle_of_Raszyn_1809_by_January_Suchodolski_(1855).png).

²² Meaning "good guest."

²³ The magazine's title likely references Princess Wanda, who lived in the eighth century and was the daughter of Krakus, the founder of Kraków. In the medieval bishop Wincenty Kadłubek's version of the legend, Wanda ruled

member of the Sejm in 1831,²⁴ and edited *Orzel Bialy* (*White Eagle*), a nationalist magazine that took its name from the Polish coat of arms. He emigrated to Paris in 1832, where he would reside until 1858, during which time he continued his political activism from afar. In 1841, he co-founded the École polonaise des Batignolles, and, in 1849, would edit *La Tribune des Peuples*, a French-language weekly devoted to Polish current affairs. The magazine was banned by the French police after mere months in print, at the behest of the Russian Embassy.

Cipa's father, Cyprian Godebski II (1835–1909), was an eminent academic sculptor of the Realist school, and trained under François Jouffroy in Paris.²⁵ Born and raised in France, Cyprian II led a cosmopolitan life, living and working in Lvov from 1858 to 1861, after which he moved to Vienna, under commission by the Imperial Court of Austria-Hungary. In 1863, he returned to Paris, and traveled frequently between France and Belgium. It was in Brussels that he met Zofia Servais (1843–1872) and married into the Belgian musical elite. Zofia, of Russian and Belgian heritage, was the eldest daughter of renowned cellist and composer Adrien François Servais (1807–1866) and Sophie Feygin (1820–1893).²⁶ One of the finest cellists of his time,

Poland after her father's death, leading her troops into battle against a German invasion. When the German army saw Wanda's beauty, they laid down their swords, and their commander committed suicide. In later versions of the tale, it was Wanda who heroically committed suicide because she refused to marry the German leader Rytygier, who had invaded her country.

²⁴ The Sejm is the lower house of the Polish parliament.

²⁵ On Cyprian Godebski II, see Stanislas Lami, *Dictionnaire des Sculpteurs de l'École française au dix-neuvième siècle*, vol. 3 G–M (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1919), 66–67. Available online at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k97419802?rk=64378;0>. The *Dictionnaire* provides quite a comprehensive list of his works, in addition to an index of Paris Salon expositions in which he participated. Items of musicological interest include a bronze medallion for the grave of Hector Berlioz in Montmartre, as well as busts of Beethoven and Bach commissioned by the Moscow Conservatory.

²⁶ On Adrien François Servais, see Patrick Peire, "Servais family," *Oxford Music Online*. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000025492> (accessed March 7, 2021).

Adrien François Servais was praised for his virtuosic technique and intonation; Berlioz dubbed him “Paganinian.”

The Servais family generously hosted numerous musicians and artists at their villa in Halle, Belgium, including the painters Antoine Wiertz, Nicaise De Keyser, and Félicien Rops, as well as the musicologists François-Joseph Fétis and François-Auguste Gevaert. Zofia gave birth to Maria Zofia Olga Zenajda Godebska—later known simply as Misia—but died in childbirth. Cyprian II would later marry sculptor Matylda Rosen (1836–1887), with whom he had Cipa (Cyprian III). From 1870 forward, Cyprian II would hold a professorship at the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg. He and Matylda would eventually organize an artistic salon in Warsaw in 1875 and later in Paris, where he would receive numerous accolades, including his election to the French National Academy and the medal of the Chevalier of the Legion of Honor (1899).

Misia Godebska (1877–1950) showed prodigious talent as a pianist, and studied under Fauré.²⁷ She first met the composer in Valvins, where her father had purchased a house near Mallarmé’s. That house would become the site of a small salon that functioned as a sanctuary and meeting place for the prominent artists, writers, musicians, and composers of the day, among them Ravel. Known for both a consummate virtuosity as well as a profound understanding of the emotive quality of contemporary French music, Misia preferred to display her considerable talents only in small, intimate gatherings of friends, giving just two public concerts in her lifetime.²⁸ Misia inherited an enormous sum of money as a child, upon the death of her

²⁷ The following narrative of Misia’s life is based on her memoirs in *Two or Three Muses: The Memoirs of Misia Sert*, trans. Moura Budberg (London: Museum Press, 1953).

²⁸ Misia gave her first public concert in February 1892 at the Théâtre d’Application, in which she performed three waltzes by Maurice Rollinat. In 1933, Misia and Marcelle Meyer gave a concert for two pianos to benefit Marcelle Meyer, presented at the ballroom of the Hôtel Continental. See Sert, *Two or Three Muses*, 165.

stepmother—300,000 francs— and grew accustomed to a lavish lifestyle. She would eventually marry Thadée Natanson, a relation of her stepmother, at just fifteen years old, the minimum legal age for marriage in Belgium at the time.

Her alliance to Natanson proved a fortuitous one that placed her firmly at the center of Parisian musical life. Natanson's art and literary magazine, *La Revue blanche*, which ran between 1889 and 1903, provided an essential forum for music criticism, famously carrying the writings of Debussy, who wrote under the pseudonym "Monsieur Croche." Immediately recognizable by its white cover, which set it apart from the purple cover of the more established *Mercure de France*, *La Revue blanche* rivaled the *Mercure* in the quality and prestige of its publications. Edited by Alfred Vallette, *Le Mercure de France* (founded 1890) was closely associated with the Symbolist movement in its early history, publishing works by Stéphane Mallarmé and José-Maria de Heredia, and later featuring André Gide, Paul Claudel, Colette, Guillaume Apollinaire, and the Apache Tristan Klingsor. The house at Valvins soon became a kind of second branch of *La Revue blanche*, where Misia invited only those whose company she enjoyed. Regular visitors included the artists Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Édouard Vuillard, and Pierre Bonnard. Toulouse-Lautrec apparently visited weekly, staying from Saturday through Monday.²⁹

Thus, for Cipa (1875–1937), salon culture would have been woven into the fabric of his upbringing and social life (see Example 1.2 below for a portrait of Cipa). Just two years younger than Misia, Cipa remained close to her and the rest of the Servais family throughout his life, consequently maintaining ties to the center of the Belgian and French music scenes, and would have seen first-hand how salons sustained artists and offered a space for productive aesthetic

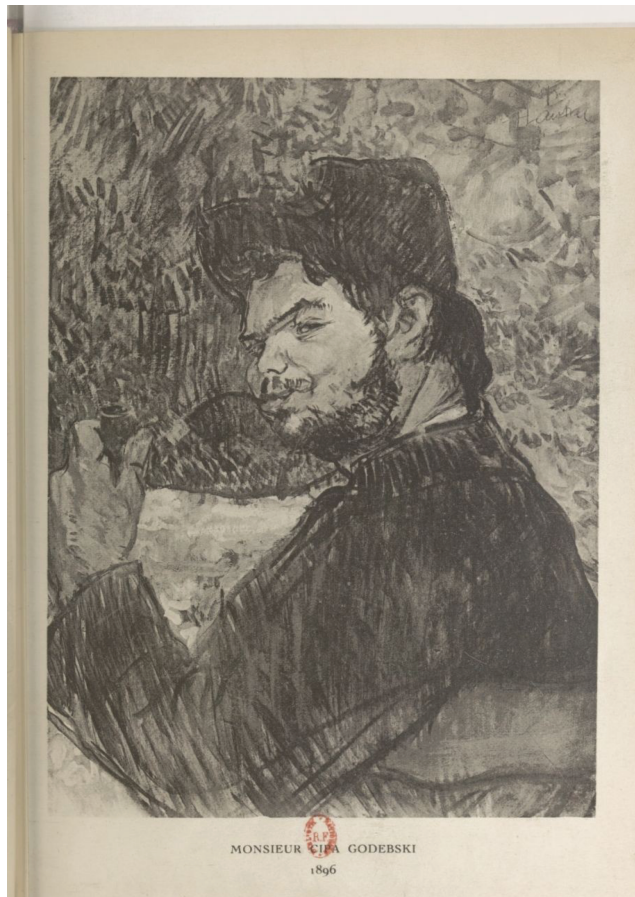
²⁹ Sert, *Two or Three Muses*, 40.

dialogue. However, according to Jean Godebski, Cipa's son, his family was much less extravagant and shunned the spotlight even more than Misia herself. Cipa and Ida Godebski were very much interested in cultivating an aura of what Jean describes as "finesse, distinction, and good taste, devoid of any snobbism, one entirely different from the atmosphere at my Aunt Misia's."³⁰

In his short memoir, "Mon Ravel," Jean portrays the atmosphere of the Godebski salon as a group of like-minded connoisseurs—"artists above all"—romanticizing the space as a sort of alchemy that gave the salon an intimate feeling unlike any other salon of the period. "At our house, we breathed a special air; evidently, it was made up of oxygen, nitrogen, etc., but it was also an extraordinary mixture, a nectar that Ravel drank as though it were whey—a result, it seemed to me, of the marriage of my parents."³¹ Indeed, the Godebskis apparently worked hard to give the salon the unpretentious feeling of a family home, while attracting artists of the highest caliber.

³⁰ Godebski, "Mon Ravel," 50.

³¹ Godebski, "Mon Ravel," 51.



EXAMPLE 1.2: Toulouse-Lautrec, portrait of Cipa Godebski.

Cipa apparently did not play an instrument, yet, as Jean relates, he was a great connoisseur of music and knew what he liked.³² Jean explains that Cipa often critiqued Ravel and occasionally articulated significant reservations about his music, but always did so in a diplomatic fashion. Unfortunately, Jean could no longer recall which pieces Cipa specifically disliked. However, he remarks that Cipa enjoyed Ravel's music immensely overall, something which Jean believes came out of his father's appreciation for excellence, finesse, and elegance.³³

³² Godebski, "Mon Ravel," 51.

³³ Godebski, "Mon Ravel," 52.

Cipa's wife Ida Godebska (1872–1935), née Kasperek, was of Polish and Scottish descent, and was born in Krakow. A capable pianist, she was the daughter of François Kasperek, Rector of the University of Krakow, an eminent legal scholar who provided Ida a bourgeois lifestyle. By Jean's account, his mother was a better pianist than Ravel: while she did not possess the fiery virtuosity of Misia, her playing demonstrated a great deal of emotionality. She also greatly appreciated contemporary music and was eager to play through works by those in her inner circle. Jean writes that she "understood Ravel's art perfectly."³⁴ Jean describes having observed numerous times when Ravel sought Ida's opinion on his music, recounting that Ravel would play several measures of something he was in the midst of writing and would tell her about the nature of the work, after which they would launch into an extended conversation. Dispelling any rumors about a potential romantic entanglement, Jean writes that Ravel had only a deep friendship with her and nothing more, finding in her "a soulmate, delicate and sensitive like himself."³⁵

The Godebski salon convened on Sunday evenings after dinner, and the couple would serve tea around eleven o'clock.³⁶ Georges d'Espagnat's (1870–1950) oil painting "Réunion de musiciens chez M. Godebski" immortalizes one such Sunday gathering (see Example 1.3 below). Here, Viñes and Ravel are flanked by other confirmed members of the Apaches: Calvocoressi, Séverac, Schmitt, and Roussel. Viñes is seated at the piano as Ravel leans on its case. Cipa,

³⁴ Godebski, "Mon Ravel," 52.

³⁵ Godebski, "Mon Ravel," 52.

³⁶ In a 1941 retrospective on his correspondence with Ravel, M.D. Calvocoressi claims that he met Ravel in 1898 at the home of a "French family at whose house informal gatherings took place on Sundays," suggesting that the gatherings with the Godebskis may have supplanted Ravel's previous Sunday engagement with this unnamed French family. See M.D. Calvocoressi, "Ravel's Letters to Calvocoressi with Notes and Comments," *Musical Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (January 1941): 1–19.

seated on the left directly behind Viñes, turns toward his son Jean. Meanwhile, Roussel, Calvocoressi, Séverac, and Schmitt appear lost in contemplation. Ravel's isolated position on the right of the frame may hint that Viñes is actually playing one of his compositions before the group, although the actual content of Viñes's music cannot be deciphered.



EXAMPLE 1.3: Georges d'Espagnat, "Réunion de musiciens chez M. Godebski," 1910,
<http://qcpages.qc.cuny.edu/hhowe/music784/images/index.html>.

The biggest stars of the Belle Époque passed through the Godebski salon, and many among them were close friends of Cipa and Ida. None, however, held such a privileged place in their hearts as Ravel, who often came by unannounced, nearly every day. Ravel apparently had a

terrific appetite, and when he came over, he would often joke that he was “not hungry at all,”³⁷ then proceed to eat the Godebski family out of house and home. He told the children marvelous and funny stories, and made crude scatological jokes that made them roar with laughter, much to Ida’s chagrin. And, like any doting adult, he often brought over boxes of chocolates, inventing a little ditty peppered with profanity that he sang to the children: “This isn’t shit, this isn’t shit, it’s chocolate.”³⁸

Jean Godebski writes that Ravel had a playful, naïve side to him, and preferred the small, intimate gatherings of the Godebski family to the more elaborate social posturing required of him in elite salons. The composer, according to Jean, “did not prioritize a complex social life—the witty banter of the most splendid salons, the joys of highly refined culture: there was a childlike, perhaps almost naïve side to him, [he had] the habit of surrounding himself with children to whom he would reveal the mysteries of fairy tales.”³⁹ In sum, the Godebski salon seemed the best of both worlds: despite attracting artists of the highest caliber, the salon had a relaxed atmosphere about it, and perhaps Ravel could occasionally retreat to talking with and entertaining the children if he tired of the concerns of the adults present.

Intriguingly, there is a great deal of overlap between Ravel’s relationship to the Godebski family and his relationship to the Apaches, right down to his use of the Apaches’ musical signature. Ravel often took long walks in the woods with Mimie and Jean while their parents were away, whistling the eight-note opening phrase of Borodin’s Second Symphony to let the children know where he was at all times. He would also whistle the same phrase to find them in

³⁷ Godebski, “Mon Ravel,” 53.

³⁸ “C’est pas de la m... ça (bis), c’est du chocolat.” Godebski, “Mon Ravel,” 54.

³⁹ Godebski, “Mon Ravel,” 54.

crowded public spaces.⁴⁰ Not coincidentally, this is the same snippet of music Ravel chose as a kind of call-to-arms and signal for the Apaches. Ravel also apparently considered using the theme from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Shéhérazade* for this function, but it was judged too difficult to execute with accuracy, due to its jagged melodic contour.⁴¹ The Apaches would whistle this Borodin tune to find each other in the foyer of the Opéra, to call up to someone's apartment from the street, and in any other situation in which they wanted to make their presence known to one another.

Viñes's personal diary provides the most reliable record of the meetings of the Apaches. But given the informal nature of the gatherings, Viñes did not always cite all the members present, instead using the phrase "toute la bande" (meaning "the whole group") as a shorthand. The group seems to have coalesced between 1902 and 1903. One of the first meetings of the Apaches may have been at Sordes's studio on January 22, 1903, where they began to meet regularly. Viñes also mentions evenings spent at the homes of Chadeigne, Séguy, and Calvocoressi, where they "made music and discussed it."⁴² However, Viñes does not use the phrase "the whole group" before September 19, 1903. By January 16, 1904, Viñes wrote that the group was now "very large and included many new people."⁴³ Around early spring 1904, the group christened itself the Apaches just as Delage started renting a "wigwam," a small building in a garden near Auteuil where they held the majority of their meetings.

⁴⁰ Godebski, "Mon Ravel," 54.

⁴¹ See Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht, "Ravel, et les Russes," *Revue musicale* 19, no. 187 (1938): 311–312. See also Haine, "Cipa Godebski et les Apaches," 241.

⁴² Pasler, "Sociology of the Apaches," 155.

⁴³ Pasler, "Sociology of the Apaches," 155.

Just months later, Viñes would introduce Ravel to Cipa and Ida Godebski. By July, Ida was already invited to the inner sanctum of Delage's wigwam: "Along with the usual Apaches, there were three ladies and an old man," wrote Viñes, the ladies being Ida, her sister-in-law Misia, and Jane Vasseur.⁴⁴ The old man was presumably Vasseur's husband Robert Mortier. Viñes recorded another meeting at the Godebskis' involving Ravel, Delage, and Séverac on Wednesday, May 13, 1905. By April 14, 1906, Viñes includes the Godebskis as part of "toute la bande"—affectionately referring to them as *les Cypa*—strengthening the case for their membership in the Apaches. The couple joined them at Delage's wigwam, suggesting their relatively rapid initiation into Ravel's inner circle.⁴⁵

At the Godebski salon, Ravel frequently came into contact with many members of the Apaches as well as other artistic luminaries of the time, including Colette; the painters Pierre Bonnard, Édouard Vuillard, and Félix Vallotton; poets Valéry Larbaud and Paul Valéry; composer Francis Poulenc; and pianist Arthur Rubinstein. Fellow Apaches Ricardo Viñes, Léon-Paul Fargue, Albert Roussel, Arthur Honegger, and Florent Schmitt also attended the Godebskis' soirées.⁴⁶ Malou Haine has attempted to verify membership in the Apaches by cross-checking multiple accounts, including those of Désire Inghelbrecht and Maurice Delage. However, I would contend that the membership of the Apaches was fluid, and we cannot foreclose the possibility that the other regulars at 22 Rue d'Athènes were also part of that collective. The Godebski salon also introduced Ravel to Hector Villa-Lobos and Polish composer Karol Szymanowski, whose works he would later promote in his activities as director of the Société

⁴⁴ Haine, "Cipa Godebski et les Apaches," 240.

⁴⁵ Gubisch, ed., "Le journal inédit de Ricardo Viñes," 205.

⁴⁶ Godebski, "Mon Ravel," 55.

Musicale Indépendante (SMI), with the enthusiastic participation of his secretary, Hélène Casella Kahn.⁴⁷

The atmosphere was generally very congenial and informal. The only outright conflicts Jean observed were between Ravel and Diaghilev regarding a dispute over *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912–1913), and a tiff between Ravel and Georges Auric (eventually of *Les Six*). In the former case, Diaghilev and Ravel disagreed over many aspects of the score of *Daphnis*, among them the “symphonic” quality of the score, which Diaghilev felt privileged musical atmosphere over dramatic action. In the latter, Auric immensely disliked Ravel’s music and, likely for that reason, only rarely frequented the Godebski salon. Of note, Debussy was never present at any of the Godebski’s Sundays, as was the case with the meetings of the Apaches. While it is not clear if Debussy was a central figure of admiration at the Godebski salon, as he was for the Apaches, the guarantee that he would be absent from the Godebski salon must have been reassuring to Ravel, especially during the years after about 1904, when their relationship soured. The salon encouraged an atmosphere of witty and civil discussion, and explicitly prohibited the discussion of money and politics.⁴⁸ Given Ravel’s aversion to these subjects, the salon must have felt like a

⁴⁷ Yale University’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library holds selections from the correspondence of Hélène Casella Kahn, secretary of the SMI. The Casella Kahn correspondence sheds light on the Society’s activities surrounding Szymanowski, particularly in the early 1920s. As the principal architect of the daily operations of the SMI, the wife of Italian composer Alfredo Casella, and a prodigious pianist and promoter in her own right, Casella Kahn had a direct connection to Szymanowski and organized many of his Paris appearances. Furthermore, she maintained a network of musicians and critics around the composer, serving as an intermediary between him and music critic Henry Prunières and composer Carlos Salzedo. She also publicized the work of other Polish composers and musicians, including Jan Sliwinski (alias Hans Effenberger or Jan Sliwinski-Effenberger, 1884–1950), a composer and writer of Polish heritage who had been adopted into an Austrian family, as well as a female relation of Szymanowski’s (a Mme. Szymanowski) for whom she sought an audition with Gabriel Pierné, then director of the Concerts Colonne. See Pierné to Casella Kahn, November 15, 1926. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁴⁸ Godebski, “Mon Ravel,” 56.

refuge, even a second home for him—a place where he could feel comfortable expressing his thoughts and sharing his work among peers and friends.

While Ida Godebska has never been considered a true member of the Apaches, her role as a connoisseur and patron of music was clearly very valuable to Ravel.⁴⁹ In this chapter, I would like to propose the idea that Ida be thought of as a “satellite” member of the Apaches, and the gatherings she and her family hosted as the “public face” of the organization, as it were, since they included many of the same members. My research on this correspondence also reveals the extent to which the Apaches eventually redirected their energies from continued patronage of *Pelléas* toward the defense of Ravel and others in his circle from hostile critics.

The story begins in 1899, as Ravel prepared to enter the Prix de Rome competition for the first time.

The Quest for the Prix de Rome

The great majority of Ravel’s surviving letters from 1899 through 1905 chronicle his obsession and frustration with the Prix de Rome competition. Organized and moderated by the music division of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, the annual competition was founded in 1803 and represented a major opportunity for young composers to gain exposure.⁵⁰ The winner would see his or her cantata performed at the Institut de France, attended by influential theater directors, journalists, and the artistic and political elite. He or she would also receive state-supplied

⁴⁹ She and her family were the dedicatees of several of Ravel’s works, including *Sonatine*, dedicated to her and her husband, and *Ma Mère l’Oye*, dedicated to her children, Mimie and Jean.

⁵⁰ During the Second Empire (1864–1871), however, the Paris Conservatoire had overseen the competition. For more on the history of the Prix de Rome prize in composition, see David Gilbert, “Prix de Rome,” *Oxford Music Online* <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.40632>. For a general history of the prize and its origins as a competition for artists, see Simon Lee, “Prix de Rome,” *Oxford Art Online* <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T069771>.

financial support for the performance of their work as well as military deferments, complimentary admission to cultural venues in Paris, and funding for travel. The government grant also financed study in Rome for three to five years, of which the first two were to be spent at the Villa Medici studying classical and Italian art, producing works inspired by these traditions.

The prize was seen as the ultimate goal for any high-achieving composition student at the Conservatoire, a stepping stone on the way to a brilliant career. The star-studded list of Prix de Rome alumni includes many of the major composers of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France, among them the wildly successful grand opera composer Fromental Halévy (1819), Berlioz (1830), Gounod (1839), Bizet (1857), Massenet (1863), Debussy (1884), and Charpentier (1887). Consequently, the Conservatoire curriculum explicitly focused on exams meant to prepare students for the competition, which consisted of completing two pieces: the *fugue d'école*, a standard four-voice fugue on a given theme, and the cantata, a choral piece for mixed voices and orchestra on a prescribed text. The Conservatoire judged the preparatory examinations harshly: if students failed to win a prize in two consecutive showings, they would be expelled. In January, eligible students would submit a cantata, and in July, they would submit a fugue.

While Ravel clearly sought official recognition of his achievements by the Conservatoire and all the advantages and accolades that would come with the Prix de Rome, he also wanted to pursue his own artistic path, one that was often at odds with the Conservatoire's reactionary administration. In July 1899, at the age of twenty-four, Ravel was finally deemed fit to enter the Conservatoire fugue competition, but he and five other students rebelled by refusing to submit their entries. The intent behind this protest remains opaque, yet Ravel's correspondence from this

time reveals his apparent resentment of Théodore Dubois, the director, who had assumed the position upon the death of Ambroise Thomas in 1896.⁵¹ He wrote to the Romanian composer Dumitru Georgescu Kiriak, a classmate from Fauré's composition class:

For the January examinations, I had patiently elaborated a scene from *Callirhoé*, the music of which was rather dull, prudently passionate, and with a degree of boldness which was accessible for these gentlemen of the Institute. As for the orchestration, Gédalge found it skillful and elegant. All of this ended up in a miserable failure. As Fauré tried to reassure me, Monsieur Dubois assured him that he was deceiving himself with regard to my musical nature. What is disturbing is that the criticisms were not addressed to my cantata, but indirectly to *Shéhérazade*, at whose performance, you may recall, the director was present. Will it be necessary to struggle for 5 years against this influence? I'm very sure that I will never have the courage to maintain the same attitude until the end.⁵²

Intriguingly, Ravel believed that the criticisms of the Conservatoire jury had more to do with the reception of *Shéhérazade* than the actual cantata before them, suggesting that their opinion was already colored by both the negative reception of the work by the Conservatoire establishment, and perhaps even the unenthusiastic press reviews.⁵³

Ravel's program notes had claimed that *Shéhérazade* unfolded according to a "classical plan," yet Pierre Lalo scoffed that "the 'developments' in particular are so hard to find that one would be tempted to believe that Ravel speaks of them ironically."⁵⁴ At the same time, Lalo acknowledged that the harmonic layout of the work was rather daring in that it did not adhere to established conventions for key relationships. Yet it also reflected "the pernicious influence of a musician that one should know how to appreciate but not imitate, M. Claude Debussy."⁵⁵ At the

⁵¹ Roger Nichols theorizes that Dubois's relentless criticism might have been a major motivating factor in his continued drive to win the Prix de Rome. Moreover, Dubois also undoubtedly had a role in preventing the ascension of Fauré, Ravel's beloved teacher, to the position of professor of composition. See Nichols, *Ravel*, 61.

⁵² Cited in Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 26.

⁵³ For a cogent study of *Shéhérazade*, particularly its relationship to the *Thousand and One Nights* and other Orientalist texts, see Andrew Deruchie, "Ravel's *Shéhérazade* and Fin-de-Siècle Orientalism," (master's thesis, McGill, 2000). On reviews of *Shéhérazade*, see Deruchie, master's thesis, 9–12 and 64–65.

⁵⁴ Pierre Lalo, review of *Shéhérazade*, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, June 13, 1899.

⁵⁵ Lalo, review of *Shéhérazade*, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, June 13, 1899.

same time, however, Lalo also praised Ravel's ability as an orchestrator and creator of timbral effects, remarking that these skills alone could make an artist of Ravel: "the orchestration is full of ingenious studies, and interesting effects of timbre. Out of all of this, an artist could emerge."⁵⁶

Likely mindful of the rather lackluster reception of *Shéhérazade*, Ravel thus crafted a strategy of writing music that was "dull, prudently passionate," and "accessible," rather than original, hoping to appease Dubois and the members of the jury. One can only imagine his frustration as he continued to try for the Conservatoire competitions as well as the Prix de Rome, all the while receiving encouragement from Fauré and Gédalge on the one hand, and extreme criticism from Dubois on the other.

Doubtless many Conservatoire pupils before Ravel, including Debussy, had been told to conform to a more conventional harmonic palette and study the works of their forbears in order to win the prize. As a case in point, Louis Laloy narrates an episode in which Ernest Guiraud, Debussy's composition instructor, cut him down to size when he brought in one of his new compositions:

One day, Debussy had set to music a comedy of Banville, *Diane au bois*, and had brought it, not without pride, to class; Guiraud read through it and pronounced: "Come to see me tomorrow and bring your score." The next day, after a second reading, [Guiraud asked]: "Do you want to win the Prix de Rome?" "Without a doubt," [Debussy replied]. "Well, all that's very interesting, but you must save it for later. Or else you will never win the Prix de Rome."⁵⁷

Debussy evidently did learn to swallow his pride, molding his winning cantata, *L'Enfant prodigue* (1884), to fit the norms of the Académie. Set to a text by Édouard Guinand, *L'Enfant prodigue* was based on the Biblical parable of the Prodigal Son. The work has an Orientalist

⁵⁶ Lalo, review of *Shéhérazade*, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, June 13, 1899.

⁵⁷ Cited in John R. Clevenger, "Debussy's Rome Cantatas," in *Debussy and His World*, ed. Jane Fulcher (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 13.

flavor, especially its opening arabesque melody, whose contour occasionally reappears throughout the cantata, as in the “Cortège et Air de Danse.” Yet *L’Enfant prodigue* is considerably more harmonically conservative than Debussy’s later works, largely remaining within established advanced tonal practice with only brief touches of modal color. The cantata also bears a strong stylistic resemblance to the ethereal textures and clean orchestration of Massenet. The trick to winning the Prix de Rome seemed to lie in creating just the right combination of utterly conventional style with a small hint of innovation.

Ravel would go on to compete for the Prix de Rome five times in total (1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1905), each without success. In 1900, Ravel’s first foray into the competition would include a fugue (now lost) and *Les Bayadères*, his cantata, but he was eliminated in the first round. In July of the same year, he submitted his entry for the required Conservatoire fugue competition, only to be given a mark of zero by Dubois, who remarked that the work was “impossible, owing to terrible inaccuracies in writing.”⁵⁸ Consequently, Ravel was dismissed from the institution: at twenty-five, he had both reached the age limit for full registration at the Conservatoire, and had failed to obtain any prizes for fugue in two consecutive competitions. Nevertheless, he persevered, and would remain registered in Fauré’s class as an “ancien élève” (former student) until 1903.

Even at this very early stage of his career, Ravel seems to have been keenly aware that he would be competing with the specter of Debussy’s achievements, notably Debussy’s winning bid for the Prix de Rome in 1884. Ravel’s correspondence reveals that he studied Debussy’s music intensively during this period and considered transcribing his *Nuages* and *Fêtes* as early as April 1901—even before the premiere of the complete version of the *Nocturnes* in October of that

⁵⁸ Cited in Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician*, 27.

year.⁵⁹ On April 8, 1901, he wrote to Florent Schmitt that he was actively working on “choruses, fugues, in preparation for the competition [i.e., the Prix de Rome]—among them the transcription of Debussy’s admirable nocturnes, in collaboration with [Raoul] Bardac.”⁶⁰ Schmitt himself had won the Prix de Rome just a year earlier, in 1900, so it is possible that Ravel sought his advice for how to prepare for the competition, and Schmitt suggested transcribing Debussy as part of that endeavor. Ravel must also have had contact with Debussy or his close associates during this time, as he clearly had advance knowledge of the complete work despite the fact that only the first two movements had been performed publicly. He wrote to Schmitt that “having shown some degree of ability for this type of work [i.e., transcription], the task of transcribing the 3rd, *Sirènes*, has fallen to me alone; [*Sirènes* is] the most perfectly beautiful, yet surely also the most perilous to undertake, as it has never been heard.”⁶¹ Although Ravel confessed to Schmitt that he was nervous about transcribing *Sirènes*, he also comes close to boasting, reveling in the fact that he was entrusted with the sole responsibility of arranging what was supposedly the most difficult piece in the set, made all the more so by virtue of the fact that he had never heard it performed before. In the end, Bardac never kept up his end of the bargain, and the work of transcribing the *Nocturnes* was entirely Ravel’s own, ultimately published under his sole authorship in 1909 by Fromont.

⁵⁹ *Nuages* and *Fêtes* were performed alone on December 9, 1900, but the *Nocturnes* were not performed as a complete set until October 27, 1901.

⁶⁰ Ravel to Florent Schmitt, April 8, 1901. Orenstein, *Lettres*, 64. According to Nichols, Debussy had directly or indirectly commissioned the two-piano transcription of the *Nocturnes*, selecting Bardac to transcribe the outer two movements (“*Nuages*” and “*Sirènes*”), and assigning Lucien Garban to “*Fêtes*.” It is not clear how Ravel came to be tasked with transcribing “*Sirènes*,” but it remains that he was the only composer of this group to complete his portion of the transcription. In the revised edition of Debussy’s correspondence, Denis Herlin notes that Debussy presented Ravel with a full score of “*Sirènes*” with a dedication that reads: “to Maurice Ravel. / with great appreciation. / Claude Debussy. / April / 1901.” See Nichols, *Ravel*, 36–37.

⁶¹ Orenstein, *Lettres*, 64.

In the eventual 1901 Prix de Rome competition, Ravel managed to obtain a second grand prize, but received no prize at all in 1902 or 1903, and did not enter the competition in 1904. In the spring of 1905, having reached the Prix de Rome's age limit of thirty, Ravel was determined to compete again, but was eliminated from the preliminary round, thus provoking a scandal that was soon splashed across the headlines as the "Affaire Ravel."⁶² Jean Marnold, who occasionally hosted meetings of the Apaches, wrote: "Is it conceivable that the author of *Jeux d'eau* and the String Quartet could be incapable of writing a *fugue d'école* and a choral piece after having been a finalist in the last three competitions?"⁶³ Marnold's opinion was shared even among critics who had been unfriendly to Ravel in the past, including Pierre Lalo, who grudgingly acknowledged that Ravel seemed among the most gifted of young composers on the scene.⁶⁴ Finally, it came to light that the competition was truly rigged—all the finalists had come from the studio of Charles Lenepveu.⁶⁵

Dubois resigned the directorship at once, and Fauré was appointed in his place.⁶⁶ Fauré brought a fresh sense of ethics to the position, appointing independent external judges to oversee

⁶² Nichols has advanced a compelling theory that the 1905 competition came at an especially poor time for Ravel's family, just after the failure of the "Whirlwind of Death," an amusement park ride invented by his brother, Édouard, caused the death of a woman. According to Nichols, Ravel's performance would have undoubtedly been affected, and Ravel may not even have been able to envision abandoning his family by taking the prize and moving to Italy at such a sensitive time. See Nichols, *Ravel*, 59–65.

⁶³ Jean Marnold, "Le scandale du Prix de Rome," *Mercure de France* (June 1, 1905): 466–469.

⁶⁴ In his January 30, 1906 review of Ravel's *Miroirs* (1904–1905), Lalo described Ravel as "one of the most supremely gifted composers of his generation," yet in the same breath, quipped that he also had "several highly apparent and rather unfortunate shortcomings." Lalo, *Le Temps*, January 30, 1906. The original is as follows: "Je vous ai déjà parlé de ce musicien, l'un des plus précieusement doués de sa génération, malgré quelques défauts forts apparents et assez incommodes."

⁶⁵ Before the scandal broke, Levepneu had been groomed to succeed Dubois as director of the Conservatoire that very year, and perhaps thought that having a student earn the Prix de Rome would be another jewel in his crown.

⁶⁶ According to Nichols, Dubois did not resign due to the controversy of the Prix de Rome scandal. Rather, his retirement was planned, announced in *Le Ménestrel* months before the Prix de Rome competition had actually taken place. See Nichols, *Ravel*, 63–65.

admissions, examinations, and competitions.⁶⁷ Dubbed “Robespierre” by disgruntled members of the Conservatoire who were used to trading favors to obtain preferential treatment for their students, Fauré was seen as a controversial dictator by some and a much-needed reformer by others. But Ravel, having aged out of the Prix de Rome competition, would not reap the benefits of Fauré’s tenure. Dejected, Ravel fell back on his social network, particularly the Godebski family.

Ravel and the Godebskis, Part II: A Deepening Relationship in the Wake of the Prix de Rome Scandal

In August 1905, after the dust had settled somewhat from the devastating “Affaire,” Misia invited Ravel on a cruise of the Netherlands with her second husband, newspaper tycoon Alfred Edwards, aboard their yacht, the *Aimée*, a welcome distraction from the press scandal. By all accounts, Ravel would seem to have quickly formed a connection to the Godebski family at this time, and relied on them greatly for emotional support as well as for the promotion of his own works and aesthetic.

Ravel’s known correspondence with the Godebskis, specifically Ida Godebska, begins during that very cruise, and reveals much about the fragility of Ravel’s emotional state, exposing his emotional vulnerability and dependence on friendship networks at this difficult crossroads. In August 1905, Ravel apparently wrote to Godebska frequently, and at first glance, it would appear that she received just a fraction of the letters he sent. On August 23, he wrote:

⁶⁷ On Fauré’s reforms, see Gail Hilson Woldu, “Gabriel Fauré, directeur du Conservatoire: les réformes de 1905,” *Revue de musicologie* 70, no. 2 (1984): 199–228.

Will you receive this letter? I'm afraid it's destined for the same fate as the first one, which doesn't seem to have reached you. [...] What's the point of writing eight pages if sending them just makes me look as though I forgot to write? What to do? I beg of you, reply as soon as you receive this, so as to assuage me.⁶⁸

At the time, the Godebskis were vacationing in Osiek in Galicia,⁶⁹ and perhaps already on their way to Brzezine to the west, so the letter could easily have gotten lost in the forwarding process.

However, my careful study of the postmarks on Ravel's letters indicates that it took, on average, just three to six days for a letter from Brittany, where Ravel was staying at the time, to reach Poland—even if the letter had to be forwarded to the correct location. As a result, I suggest that, from a logistical standpoint, Ravel's anxiety about hearing back from Godebska was often far out of proportion to the speed at which his letters actually reached her. For letters traveling shorter distances, for instance between locations within France, or between France and nearby Belgium or Switzerland, the transit time would have been just one or two days. A sample of these postmark dates is given below as Table 1.1. Godebska apparently left him hanging despite receiving the majority of his letters on time, even the eight-page missive to which Ravel refers in his August 23 letter, which in all likelihood was the previous surviving eight-page letter he had written to Godebska on August 9.⁷⁰ According to the postmarks, Godebska would have received that letter within just three days, on August 12, yet she must have taken at least several weeks to reply. Unfortunately, we no longer have Godebska's half of the correspondence and cannot see when and how she would respond.

⁶⁸ Ravel to Ida Godebska, August 23, 1905. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. "Recevrez-vous cette lettre ? J'ai bien peur qu'elle subisse le sort de la première, qui ne me semble pas v[ou]s être parvenue. Je v[ou]s en supplie, répondez-moi aussitôt que v[ou]s recevrez ceci, pour me tranquilliser."

⁶⁹ To be precise, as there are several towns that share this name, I want to specify that Ravel's letter was addressed to Osiek in Oświęcim County, Galicia. Galicia (formally, the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria) is the former name of a territory that now encompasses parts of western and southern Poland. The province was controlled by the Austro-Hungarian Empire from the late 1700s until it was annexed to Poland under the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

⁷⁰ Published in Orenstein, *Lettres*, 77–78.

POSTMARK DATES IN RAVEL'S EARLY CORRESPONDENCE TO IDA GODEBSKA

Letter Origin	Letter Destination ⁷¹	Date on Letter	Postmark at Final Destination
[No return address]	Osiek, Galicia, Poland	8/9/1905	8/12/1905
Morgat, France	Osiek, Galicia, Poland; <i>forwarded</i> to Brzezic, Poland via Podteze	8/23/1905	8/29/1905
[N/A, no envelope]	[N/A]	9/4/1905	[N/A]
Levallois, France	Aboard the <i>Aimée</i> , Ostende, Belgium	8/16/1906	8/17/1906
Hermance, Switzerland	Neuilly sur Seine, France; <i>forwarded</i> to Saint-Georges- de-Didonne, France	8/26/1906	8/30/1906
Hermance, Switzerland	Saint-Georges-de-Didonne, France	9/13/1906	9/15/1906
Hermance, Switzerland	Saint-Georges-de-Didonne, France	10/22/1906	10/23/1906
[N/A, no envelope]	Saint-Georges-de-Didonne, France	7/11/1907	[N/A]
Morlaix, France	Valvins par Avon, France	7/27/1907	Illegible
Morgat, France	[N/A, no envelope]	8/13/1907	[N/A]
Levallois, France	Valvins par Avon, France	10/8/1907	10/9/1907
Levallois, France	Valvins par Avon, France	11/15/1907	11/16/1907
Levallois, France	Valvins par Avon, France	[undated, postmarked 12/23/1907]	12/24/1907

TABLE 1.1: Postmark Dates in Ravel's Early Correspondence with Ida Godebska Held at Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Ravel must have felt rather slighted by Godebska's obliviousness to his evident need for social connection. Twelve days later, he wrote,

I arrived in Portrieux yesterday morning, and expected to find a bundle of letters from Poland. Now it's my turn to reproach you about the forgetfulness of friends. Haven't you received the postcards I addressed to you every day from all kinds of different places? Forgive me, I'm being a bit aggressive. In convalescence due to the darkest of moral crises [...] All this explains why I would very much like to hear from those upon whose affection I still count.⁷²

⁷¹ The locations given reflect modern borders, which do not correspond to the actual address in the case of Osiek, Poland, which was then controlled by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. See footnote 69 in this chapter.

⁷² Ravel to Ida Godebska, September 4, 1905. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. "Je suis arrivé au Portrieux hier matin, et comptais y trouver un paquet de lettres de Pologne. À moi, de v[ou]s retourner les reproches sur l'oubli des amis. N'avez-vous pas reçu les cartes que je v[ou]s ai adressées journallement, d'un tas d'endroits différents ? Pardonnez-moi, je suis un peu hargneux. En

Here, he sounds desperate to hear some encouraging words from Godebska and consumed by his depression over his rejection from the Prix de Rome. In the same letter, he contemplates hiding out in Pointe du Raz, never to return to Paris and its stifling social climate, where his every move would be scrutinized by the press. He calls the city a “wretched little place that, after you’ve left it for a while, you return to find it hostile, full of hate and slanders.”⁷³ He wrote similarly to Louise Cruppi (1862–1925)⁷⁴ a few days later, “For the first time in my life I don’t want to go back to Paris, in the middle of this city of snares, hate, and slanders that lie in wait for you as soon as you’ve left it for several months.”⁷⁵

Ravel’s emotional turmoil did not prevent him from throwing himself into his work, however. Perhaps because he felt safe discussing sensitive topics with Godebska and some of his female correspondents such as Cruppi, he could more quickly recover from emotional setbacks and complete his work efficiently. Indeed, my own cursory review of Ravel’s correspondence has shown that his letters to his male correspondents are typically business-related, whereas letters that mention delicate topics such as his views on the hypercompetitive Paris music scene,

convalescence d’une crise morale des plus noires. [. . .] Tout ça v[ou]s explique pourquoi je voudrais bien avoir des nouvelles de ceux sur l’affection de qui je compte encore.”

⁷³ Ravel to Ida Godebska, September 4, 1905.

⁷⁴ Louise Cruppi, née Crémieux, was the granddaughter of Adolphe Crémieux (1796–1880), a prominent Jewish lawyer who championed the rights of Jews and served as Minister of Justice under the Second Republic (1848) and the Government of National Defense (1870–1871). Cruppi would also marry into political power as the wife of Jean Cruppi (1855–1933), a member of parliament who served continuously from 1898 to 1919, and was appointed Minister of War during World War I. An author, activist, and musician, Louise Cruppi had studied piano with Gabriel Fauré and voice with Pauline Viardot, and maintained a musical salon at her home at 80 rue de l’Université in the wealthy 7th arrondissement of Paris. She would eventually have an influential role in convincing Albert Carré, the director of the Opéra-Comique, to bring *L’Heure* to the stage, as will be explored on page 31 of this dissertation.

⁷⁵ Ravel to Louise Cruppi, August 27, 1905. Orenstein, *Lettres*, 79. “Pour la 1^{ère} fois de ma vie je ne souhaite pas rentrer à Paris, au milieu de cette ville d’embûches, de haine et de calomnies qui v[ou]s attendent dès qu’on l’a quittée quelques mois.”

or the illnesses of his relatives, are more frequently addressed to female correspondents.⁷⁶ Unfortunately, the letters Ida Godebska and Louise Cruppi wrote to Ravel have either been lost or have not yet surfaced. But the fact that Ravel allows himself to appear emotionally vulnerable—if not genuinely be so—in front of his female correspondents points to a gendered way in which he may have conceived of friendship with women as more intimate and soul-bearing, unlike the majority of his friendships with men. This epistolary practice, in turn, suggests that he believed his friendships with women could provide a narrative space for his emotional life, which was practically absent from his correspondence with men, and which he also hid from public view. While we cannot know how these women responded, I propose that they performed what Arlie Russell Hochschild has termed “emotion work,” careful to distinguish it from “emotional labor” by virtue of the fact that it is uncompensated and hence does not carry *exchange value* but rather *use value*.⁷⁷

In systems of patronage, however, including the salon culture of which Godebska and Cruppi were a part, I question whether the categories of emotion work and emotional labor can be so neatly drawn. Both require the worker to support the artist in question, whether that is monetarily or through furnishing a positive social environment (a salon, a friendship network, etc.). Such emotion work, in my view, would, at the very least, consist of tolerating the emotional burden of listening to difficult issues Ravel brings up, and, at the higher end of the spectrum, using one’s influence to secure favors. In Cruppi’s case, she was able to leverage her

⁷⁶ M.D. Calvocoressi analyzed his own correspondence with Ravel as mostly practical in nature, stating that Ravel mainly wrote him to set up meetings with him, and only mentioned his mental state once in the context of what Calvocoressi considered a joke. During the time he was working on *Daphnis et Chloé*, Ravel jested that he was suffering from “neurasthenia” because he could not recall the name of Pan’s flute. M.D. Calvocoressi, “Ravel’s Letters to Calvocoressi: With Notes and Comments” *Musical Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1941): 1–19.

⁷⁷ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 39.

political clout as the wife of Jean Cruppi, a member of parliament, to convince Albert Carré, then director of the Opéra-Comique, to stage *L'Heure espagnole*. As a heavily state-supported entity, receiving some 300,000 francs per annum, the Opéra-Comique could not afford to lose face in front of a prominent politician such as Jean Cruppi, so Carré gave in to the request.⁷⁸

The year following the Prix de Rome scandal, Ravel's father fell terribly ill, another trying experience he would relate to Godebska in his correspondence. He might have felt he could trust Godebska with the information because it was something he had in common with Cipa, whose father was also ailing. He wrote to Godebska in August 1906:

A few words in haste: I've thrown myself into the "Cloche" with such intensity that I couldn't find the time to write 2 lines. [...] I'm leaving for Switzerland tomorrow with my father. He's doing the least awfully he possibly could be. I knew about the condition of Cipa's father, but I wasn't sure whether you were aware. That's why I didn't say anything to you about it. They told me his condition was improving, however.⁷⁹

Eager for his father to see his first operatic project onstage, Ravel was working tirelessly on *La Cloche engloutie* (*The Sunken Bell*), based on Gérard Hauptmann's 1896 five-act play, *Die versunkene Glocke*.⁸⁰ He had planned *La Cloche engloutie* as a five-act grand opera, which would have made quite a statement post-*Pelléas*, as the grand opera format would have been seen as antiquated. But he would eventually abandon the project in favor of *L'Heure* at some

⁷⁸ Statistics on the national funding of the Opéra-Comique may be found in Steven Huebner, "Introduction: The Business and Politics of Opera in Fin-de-Siècle Paris," chap. 1 in *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

⁷⁹ Ravel to Ida Godebska, August 16, 1906. Frederick Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁸⁰ Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 54. On the sketches for *La Cloche engloutie*, see Orenstein, "Some Unpublished Music and Letters by Maurice Ravel," *The Music Forum* 3 (1973): 291–334.

point around summer 1907, when it became clear his father's health was declining rapidly, and he needed a finished product in hand.

Bringing *L'Heure* to the Stage

The timeline of composition for *L'Heure* was extremely short. In a letter to Jane Courteault dated August 18, 1907, Ravel describes a “travail fou” over the summer of 1907, apparently completing the opera between May and August.⁸¹ Ravel remained optimistic that the opera would not encounter any undue obstacles in its journey to the stage: “the work will probably be performed at the Opéra-Comique this winter,” he wrote to Courteault, “the director having declared that he won't have to wait a long time.”⁸² With the expectation that the work would be premiered imminently, Ravel also hurriedly completed the piano-vocal score by October of the same year.

The frenetic pace at which Ravel completed the work is also confirmed by his correspondence with Ida Godebska, showing that Ravel pitched the opera to the director of the Opéra-Comique, Albert Carré, months before the vocal score would be completed, yet still had hope it would soon reach the stage. In a letter to Godebska dated July 11, 1907, he describes Ravel's meeting with Carré:

You're probably awaiting the results of Saturday's audition? It didn't happen. Or at least so little of it! Carré began by finding the subject matter a bit improper! This will not surprise you, given the moral austerity of the severe director.⁸³

⁸¹ For a transcript of this letter, see Orenstein, *Maurice Ravel: Lettres, Écrits, Entretiens* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 91–92.

⁸² Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 90.

⁸³ Ravel to Ida Godebska, July 11, 1907. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. “Vous attendez sans doute le résultat de l'audition de Samedi ? Carré a commencé par

Despite Carré's distaste for the risqué subject matter, Ravel nevertheless came away with the hope that the work would soon be staged. However, he seemed somewhat envious that Déodat de Séverac, a fellow Apache and Conservatoire alumnus, already had a more official agreement with Carré to produce *Le Coeur du moulin*, which was originally slated to appear on a double bill with *L'Heure*. "In many aspects, they told me there's reason to be hopeful," he wrote to Ida. "It is evident that Séverac has received more formal promises."⁸⁴

Interestingly, Ravel also seems to have planned to publish his transcription of Debussy's *Nocturnes* around the same time as the premiere of *L'Heure*. The fact that both works were scheduled to appear at roughly the same time could provide evidence that Ravel specifically intended to place the *Nocturnes* in an intertextual relationship with *L'Heure*, a subject that will be explored more fully in Chapter 4. Unfortunately, however, Léon-Paul Fargue apparently mishandled the publication of the *Nocturnes*: "Fargue has fairly severely compromised the publication of the 'Nocturnes,'" Ravel wrote to Ida in the same July 11 letter. About two weeks later, he wrote to Ida, "Durand has accepted all of our conditions,"⁸⁵ possibly hopeful that the transcription would soon be published under the aegis of Durand. But it would not go to press until 1909, and it would be published under a different editor—Fromont.

Ravel was so immersed in his work on *L'Heure* that his family and closest friends had no word from him for extended periods of time: at one point, Ida even thought he might be missing.

trouver le sujet un peu scabreux ! Cela ne vous surprendra pas, étant donné l'austérité des mœurs du sévère directeur."

⁸⁴ Ravel to Ida Godebska, July 11, 1907. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. "De plusieurs parts, on m'affirme qu'il y a de quoi me donner bon espoir. Il est évident que Séverac obtint des promesses plus formelles."

⁸⁵ Ravel to Ida Godebska, July 27, 1907. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

He chastised her for her extreme concern, expressing amusement that he had been relaxing and composing in Mary-sur-Marne the entire time she and Ravel's own family were panicking about his whereabouts:

Your comment sparked total panic. My mother read through all the papers that morning, expecting to find stories of catastrophes: water-logged cars, remains that no longer had human form. An hour later, Édouard went to the police station to offer a handsome reward to the person who found the missing composer... I was in Mary [Mary-sur-Marne], peacefully paddling along and adding sharps to "*L'Heure Espagnole*."⁸⁶

Yet his other extant correspondence with Ida suggests that there remained more work to be done on the opera than merely "adding sharps," explaining his lack of communication with the outside world.

Meanwhile, Carré still had not approved *L'Heure* by November, and Ravel was growing increasingly frustrated. "Carré has not yet responded to me, even though he said he would soon have news for me," he wrote to Ida. "I'm going to find him."⁸⁷ Ravel also told Ida that his father's health was continuing to decline:

Here at home, things aren't going well. My father continues to get weaker. His state of mind is at its worst: he mixes up every event and sometimes doesn't even know where he is. I no longer have any hope that he'll see my work on the stage: he's already too far gone to understand anything.⁸⁸

In a striking contrast with his heavily guarded public persona, Ravel felt safe communicating these sentiments to Godebska and was not afraid to appear vulnerable in front of her. She thus

⁸⁶ Ravel to Ida Godebska, October 8, 1907. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. "Votre mot avait semé la panique. Ma mère se ruait sur les journaux, le matin, appréhendant d'y trouver des relations de catastrophes : autos englouties, décombres n'ayant plus forme humaine. Une heure de plus, Édouard se rendait à la préfecture promettre une riche récompense à qui retrouverait le compositeur perdu... J'étais à Mary, payant paisiblement, et ajoutant des dièses à *L'Heure espagnole*."

⁸⁷ Ravel to Ida Godebska, November 15, 1907. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁸⁸ Ravel to Ida Godebska, November 15, 1907. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. "Mon père s'affaiblit toujours. Sa mentalité est au plus bas : il mélange tous les événements, ne sait même plus parfois où il se trouve. Je n'ai plus aucun espoir qu'il voie mon œuvre à la scène : il est déjà trop loin pour comprendre."

became a crucial source of emotional support surrounding Ravel's father's illness and death, as well as the tumultuous journey of *L'Heure espagnole* to the stage.

Debussy's Letters: An Alternative Reading

To return to the question of Ravel's relationship to Debussy circa 1904, I claim that reading Debussy's letters against the grain can also reveal just how entrenched the animosity between the composers may have been by that point. In a fabled 1904 letter which was held in private hands for decades, Debussy allegedly evinced admiration for the young Ravel, telling him that he should refrain from altering a single note in his String Quartet. However, the letter recently came to light in 2011, in Roger Nichols' *Ravel*, and could also be seen to show quite another side to their relationship.⁸⁹ A complete transcript of the letter, as well as my English translation and Nichols's translation, appear below in Table 1.2.

⁸⁹ This letter is reproduced in Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 53.

TRANSLATIONS OF DEBUSSY'S MARCH 4, 1904 LETTER TO RAVEL

Original	<p style="text-align: right;">Vendredi 4 Mars/04</p> <p>Cher ami,</p> <p>Bardac vient de me dire votre intention de faire jouer votre quatuor — surtout l'andante — moins fort... Aux noms de tous les Dieux et, au mien, si vous le voulez bien, ne faites pas cela. Songez à la différence de sonorité d'une salle avec et sans public... Il n'y a que l'Alto qui mange un peu les autres et qu'il faudrait peut-être apaiser ? Autrement, ne touchez à rien et tout ira bien.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mon affectueuse cordialité Claude Debussy</p>
My Translation	<p style="text-align: right;">Friday 4 March/04</p> <p>Dear Friend,</p> <p>Bardac just told me you intend to have the Quartet—especially the Andante— played less loudly... In my name and the name of all the Gods, I implore you, don't do this. Consider the difference in acoustics of a hall with and without an audience... There's just the viola that's eating up the others a bit and perhaps should be fed? Apart from that, don't touch anything, and everything will be fine.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Cordially yours, Claude Debussy</p>
Nichols's Translation	<p style="text-align: right;">Friday 4 March/04</p> <p>Cher ami,</p> <p>Bardac has just told me of your intention to have your Quartet—and especially the Andante—played less loudly. ... In the name of all the Gods, and mine, please, don't do that. Think of the difference in sonority between a hall that's full and one that's empty. ... It's only the Viola that slightly obscures the others and could perhaps be toned down? Otherwise, don't touch anything and all will be well.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">My cordial affection, Claude Debussy</p>

TABLE 1.2: Comparison of Translations of Debussy's March 4, 1904 Letter to Ravel.

While Debussy's casual salutation, "Dear friend," lends credence to anecdotes that the two composers were close in Ravel's early career, Debussy's rather crude comment on the viola "eating up" the texture of the third movement (see Example 1.4 below) stands out for its shift to a potentially derogatory tone (phrases marked in bold in Table 1.2 above).⁹⁰ The letter is dated the day before the premiere of the piece by the Heymann Quartet at the Société Nationale, so Ravel apparently trusted Debussy enough to invite him to the final rehearsal and solicit his opinion on the piece.

The image displays a musical score for the third movement of Ravel's String Quartet in F major, measures 14 through 18. The score is arranged for four instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature consists of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The Viola part is the primary focus, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and the instruction *très express.* (very expressive). The Violoncello part is also marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The Violin I and Violin II parts provide harmonic support with various melodic lines and rests.

EXAMPLE 1.4: Viola melody in Ravel, String Quartet in F, III, mm. 14–18.

Nevertheless, I believe Debussy's words could also be seen to contain stinging criticism of Ravel's aesthetic decisions, as he scoffs that the viola is "eating up" (*mange*) the texture of the third movement and "perhaps should be fed" (*faudrait peut-être apaiser*). Nichols translates this passage figuratively and with much less force than the original, rendering "eat up" as "slightly obscures" and "perhaps should be fed" as "could perhaps be toned down."⁹¹ However, Debussy

⁹⁰ Debussy erroneously refers to the third movement as the "Andante," whereas it is marked "Très lent," in the published edition. There are no other slow movements in the work, so it is apparent that Debussy is referring specifically to this movement.

⁹¹ Nichols, *Ravel*, 52.

could have used myriad other more conventional constructions to convey his sentiment, so I believe his language calls for a rougher, more literal translation, one that more deliberately reflects his possible sarcasm and antipathy.

In my view, Debussy's request that Ravel modify the viola part in the third movement is not a request for a light emendation, as Nichols' more sanguine translation might have us believe, but could actually amount to a disparaging comment on the entire aesthetic of the movement. In this movement, the viola carries the ethereal melody over the texture—a moment of unexpected, haunting lyricism that contrasts starkly against the lively pizzicato second movement. Moreover, the fact that the viola carries the melody at all represents an extremely rare configuration of parts in the string quartet genre as a whole. To change the balance of the parts, as Debussy suggests, would thus be to change the sound of the whole movement. Viewed in this light, Debussy's remarks take on a somewhat sardonic tone, as he essentially advises Ravel to tone down the most characteristic aspect of the movement, complaining that the viola “eats up” the surrounding voices, like an alto singer with a supporting role who has forgotten her place. In this very sentence, Debussy may even be making a play on words on “alto,” as the word “alto” in French can refer both to a viola as well as the alto voice type. Perhaps Debussy's remarks thus present Ravel with a dilemma: he cannot lower the volume of the viola part without drastically altering—that is, destroying—the entire compositional aesthetic of the third movement, yet he cannot appease Debussy without doing so.

In another potential play on words, Debussy warns Ravel to “consider the difference in acoustics of a hall with and without an audience,” begging him not to lower the dynamic level of the work as a whole. On the one hand, Debussy literally refers to the acoustics of a concert hall that is full versus one that is empty, indicating that the piece will need to be performed at a

higher volume if there are more people present, which there presumably would be at the premiere. However, he may also imply that Ravel will have no audience whatsoever if he either proceeds with the decision to have the quartet performed at a lower volume, or does not make Debussy's suggested revision of lowering the dynamic of the viola part in the third movement. Again, Debussy's double entendres seem to put Ravel between a rock and a hard place, uncertain of whether to take Debussy's comments literally or read between the lines.⁹²

There was also another moment, tied to the Godebski family, in which Ravel saw Debussy's true colors: his divorce from Lilly Texier. In her memoirs, Misia describes seeing Lilly Texier, Debussy's first wife, reduced to poverty after the composer left her for Emma Bardac in 1904.⁹³ Born Marie-Rosalie Texier, Lilly Texier was a beautiful model whom Debussy met in the spring of 1899 and impetuously married on October 19 of that same year, apparently after threatening suicide if she did not agree to marry him. While they enjoyed several years of happiness, Debussy soon became bored with her. Four years into their marriage, he met Emma Bardac, an amateur singer and the wife of a wealthy banker, and went to live with her in 1904. When Debussy left Texier, she attempted suicide by shooting herself twice in the groin with a revolver, a scandal which soon filled the pages of major French dailies and rocked elite Parisian social circles.⁹⁴ A year later, Debussy awarded Durand the exclusive rights to his works, thereby excluding Texier from claiming any rights to the royalties. His eventual divorce from Texier in

⁹² Lesure makes a similar argument regarding Debussy's sarcasm in "'L'Affaire' Debussy-Ravel," 231–234.

⁹³ Sert, *Two or Three Muses*, 37.

⁹⁴ The account in *Le Figaro*, published 4 November 1904, typifies the sensationalist news coverage of this event, featuring the melodramatic headline: "A Parisian Drama." "Mme. D...a beautiful young woman married to a distinguished composer, considered the leader of the young school and of whom a work recently obtained great success at one of the subsidized theatres, has, in these last days, attempted to commit suicide by shooting herself twice in the groin. She has been taken to a nursing home in the rue Blomet and her state is now hopeful." Cited in Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: Volume 1, 1862–1902: His Life and Mind* (New York: Macmillan, 1962–1965), 188n1.

1908 left her penniless. Stunned by Debussy's insensitivity, Misia, Ravel, and the soprano Lucienne Bréval (1869–1935) all agreed to provide Texier a small salary, a gesture for which Debussy allegedly harbored a grudge against them.⁹⁵

Ravel's Shifting Opinion of *Pelléas* and L'Affaire Debussy-Ravel

Meanwhile, the media was spinning a new image of Ravel in the press, one much less favorable than the one he enjoyed as the injured party of the 1905 Prix de Rome competition. By 1907, the year Ravel began work on *L'Heure espagnole*, the controversy surrounding the 1905 Prix de Rome scandal was no longer in the headlines, but another sort of "affaire" was brewing between Ravel and Pierre Lalo, the influential music critic of *Le Temps*. His excoriating review of *Histoires naturelles* (premiered January 12, 1907), effectively accused Ravel of jumping on the *debussyste* bandwagon and having few original thoughts of his own, calling *Histoires naturelles* nothing more than a "café concert with ninths."⁹⁶ Moreover, the orchestral version of "Une barque sur l'océan," which made its debut later that same year at the Concerts-Colonne, had "neither rowboat nor ocean; it's just notes, instruments; it's not the sea in the least."⁹⁷ To Lalo, Ravel's music sounded harmonically similar to Debussy's yet did not succeed in evoking a sense of the image at hand. Summarizing Lalo's perspective, an anonymous reviewer wrote in the *Revue musicale de Lyon*: "these works are completely saturated by *debussysme*, by the exterior and superficial *debussysme* that has replaced the outdated *massenetisme* and flagging

⁹⁵ Sert, *Two or Three Muses*, 37.

⁹⁶ "le café concert avec des neuvièmes." Lalo, review of *Histoires naturelles*, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, March 19, 1907. Lalo's review was apparently distributed in other magazines across France, also appearing in the *Lyon Revue musicale*. See "A travers la Presse," *Revue musicale de Lyon*, no. 27 (April 14, 1907): 773.

⁹⁷ Lalo, review of "Une barque sur l'océan," *Le Temps*, March 19, 1907.

wagnerisme among today's young people.”⁹⁸ Ravel's work was thus the worst of *debussysme*, an “exterior” *debussysme* that merely imitated the composer's style without its substance, retaining none of its supposed powers of depiction.

This strain of criticism was not without precedent: Lalo had similarly derided *Miroirs* in a 1906 article, cruelly playing on the title of the piece, implying that *Miroirs* simply held up a mirror to Debussy's compositional technique: “After Chopin, after Schumann, after Liszt, M. Debussy has created a new manner of writing for the piano, a special style, a distinctive virtuosity [. . .] all the young composers are immediately mirroring him, employing all the same methods, writing in the same style.”⁹⁹ Furious, Ravel shot back a letter to Lalo claiming that it was in fact his own *Jeux d'eau* (1902) that heralded a new kind of pianistic virtuosity, reminding Lalo that the work preceded Debussy's *Images* by several years.¹⁰⁰ While Ravel also professed a great admiration for Debussy in the same letter, the damage of Lalo's comments could not be undone: Lalo had set the stage for a stylistic rivalry between Debussy and Ravel, regardless of whether one truly existed or not.¹⁰¹ I suggest that it was at this point that Ravel's opinion of Debussy, and specifically *Pelléas*, began to take a turn for the worse, and Ravel may have already been thinking about how he would respond to Debussy through an operatic work.

⁹⁸ Lalo, *Le Temps*, March 19, 1907. “Ces oeuvres sont tout imprégnées de debussysme, de ce debussysme extérieur et superficiel qui, chez les jeunes d'aujourd'hui, a remplacé le massenétisme suranné et le wagnérisme défaillant.”

⁹⁹ Lalo, *Le Temps*, January 30, 1906. English translation as cited in Emily Kilpatrick, *The Operas of Maurice Ravel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 5.

¹⁰⁰ Ravel to Pierre Lalo, February 5, 1906. Cited in *Lettres, écrits, entretiens*, ed. Arbie Orenstein, 82–83. Series 1 of *Images* was published in 1905, and series 2 in 1908. Three pieces of a previous set called *Images* from 1894 were published posthumously as the “*Images oubliées*” in 1978.

¹⁰¹ For a discussion of pianistic innovation and the use of decorative figuration in Debussy's and Ravel's piano works of this period, see Bhogal, “Ornament and Virtuosity in French Piano Music,” chap. 3 in *Details of Consequence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Moreover, Ravel's correspondence with the Godebskis bears witness to this shift in his impression of Debussy.

Crucially, the bulk of the letters in which Ravel specifically critiques *Pelléas* emerge in early 1908, at the same time that Ravel was in the final stages of composing *L'Heure espagnole* and had been desperately attempting to convince Albert Carré, the director of the Opéra-Comique, to stage the work as soon as possible. A June 19, 1908 letter to Ida Godebska confirms that he and other members of the Apaches were still attending performances of *Pelléas*, although with less frequency than before. "Saw Séverac at *Pelléas* the day before yesterday," he wrote to Ida, apparently specifying a performance on June 17, 1908. He lamented that the opera was not what it used to be, and had lost the varnish of its early performances:

I didn't give you enough details about *Pelléas*. This was out of shame: one cannot imagine what it is these days: the Olympia's¹⁰² orchestra would have accompanied more discretely. Musical clowns would have made more realistic performers. You have to see Pérrier launch toward the wings sounds he wouldn't dare let the public hear! Maggie Teyte is an adorable doll. Physically, more Mélisande than Garden; vocally, superior. But she sings with a total incomprehension. The others sing at the top of their lungs, which allows them to pierce through the orchestra's racket every once in a while.¹⁰³

On the surface, Ravel seems to be criticizing a poor interpretation of *Pelléas*, in which the orchestra completely drowns out the singers, and "musical clowns" would have made for better interpreters, yet when we consider that Ravel penned this letter during the time he was finishing *L'Heure*, it suggests that a satire of *Pelléas* might have already been on his mind, and this performance-gone-wrong looked like a comedy to him. The letter suggests that Ravel also saw the characters as mechanical or artificial, perhaps calling to mind Bergson's definition of comedy

¹⁰² The Olympia, founded in 1888 and located in Paris' ninth arrondissement, was a music hall that staged light—and often racy—theater and dance works, as well as burlesque opera.

¹⁰³ Ravel to Ida Godebska, June 19, 1908. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

as mechanical in *Le Rire*¹⁰⁴: Teyle is portrayed as an “adorable doll” who has no consciousness of what she is singing, and Périer’s singing toward the wings evokes a kind of mechanical failure to direct his voice to the appropriate location. *Pelléas* was thus a subject of ridicule for Ravel, just as it seems to have been among the Apaches.

Indeed, in private quarters, the Apaches apparently made fun of *Pelléas* even as they esteemed it. On March 24, 1904, at a gathering at Maurice Delage’s home with “the whole group,”¹⁰⁵ Viñes wrote in his diary that everyone had a good laugh at Ravel and Delage’s parody of *Pelléas*. Many years later, in his memoirs, Désiré-Émile Ingelbrecht, a member of the Apaches and a prominent conductor, would recall that “amongst ourselves, *we spoke Pelléas*: — How are you? — I’m starting to get cold — Are we going to grab a pint? — Simply because it’s the custom.”¹⁰⁶

In a letter to Godebska dated August 5, 1908, Ravel describes one of Debussy’s character flaws—his sensitivity to criticism—suggesting that he was far from putting Debussy on an inviolable pedestal. “Last night, Debussy said to a person who was going to the performance of *Boris [Godunov]*: ‘Go see it! All of *Pelléas* is in it!’ If every morass of snobism should affect him to this degree, this isn’t the last time he’ll be disillusioned.”¹⁰⁷ Here, Debussy was surely

¹⁰⁴ Bergson’s book on laughter, *Le Rire*, achieved wide popularity in the late aughts and early 1910s, and was read by a diverse array of social classes. Jillian Rogers, “The Importance of Being Pleasing” (paper, annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, Boston, MA, November 2, 2019).

¹⁰⁵ Gubisch, ed., “Le journal inédit de Ricardo Viñes,” 201.

¹⁰⁶ “Entre soi, *on parlait Pelléas* : —Comment allez-vous ? — Je commence à avoir froid — Allons-nous prendre un bock ? Simplement parce que c’est l’usage.” Cited in Malou Haine, “Cipa Godebski et Les Apaches,” 232. “Je commence à avoir froid” (“I’m starting to get cold”) is Mélisande’s response to Golaud in Act I, Scene 2 when he discovers her in the forest and asks her how she is faring. In Act IV, Scene 1, Golaud proclaims, “simplement parce que c’est l’usage,” (“simply because that’s the custom”) as his justification for murdering Pelléas when he suspects Pelléas and Mélisande are having an affair.

¹⁰⁷ Ravel to Ida Godebska, May 22 or June 5, 1908. Orenstein, *Lettres*, 97. “Debussy disait hier soir à une personne qui se rendait à la représentation de Boris : ‘Allez voir ça, tout *Pelléas* s’y trouve !’ Si chaque marée du snobisme doit l’affecter à ce point, il n’en est pas à sa dernière désillusion.”

referencing Pierre Lalo's 1908 article in *Le Temps*, in which Lalo accused Debussy of deriving the innovative harmonic palette of *Pelléas* from Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*.¹⁰⁸ Ravel scoffed that if every snobbish critique affected Debussy to this degree, then he still had a lot to learn, perhaps intimating that he himself was the authority on how to keep a cool head under such circumstances.

By March 14, 1909, Ravel's opinion of Debussy seems to have reached a nadir: in a letter to Cipa Godebski, he even went so far as to direct accusations of *debussysme* at his own colleagues and friends, who appeared on the program for a Société Nationale concert. "Dear friend," he wrote to Cipa,

Blessed be your mumps¹⁰⁹ that saved you from having to hear the concert at the Nationale!¹¹⁰ Ah, those dirty musicians! Their orchestration is hopeless, and they plug your ears with 'Turkish music.' Fugal detours replace craft, themes from *Pelléas* stand in for inspiration. And what a noise it all makes! Tam-tam, tambourines, military drums, glockenspiel, and cymbals helter-skelter.¹¹¹

The concert to which Ravel refers took place on the evening of Saturday, March 13, 1909, and presented the premiere of eight orchestral pieces under the baton of Vincent d'Indy, Marcel Label, and many of the composers themselves.¹¹² The program was as follows:

¹⁰⁸ For further information on this press debacle, see Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 91.

¹⁰⁹ *oreillons*. This is a pun on the word for "mumps" and "little ears."

¹¹⁰ The Société Nationale, a group organized for the promotion of works exclusively by French composers. The society's motto, *Ars gallica*, further underscored its nationalist aims. The concert to which Ravel refers took place on the evening of Saturday, March 13, 1909, and presented the premiere of eight orchestral pieces under the baton of Vincent d'Indy, Marcel Label, and many of the composers themselves.

¹¹¹ Ravel to Cipa Godebski, March 14, 1909. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Reproduced in Orenstein, *Lettres*, 102–103. "Cher vieux, Loués soit vos oreillons, qui vous ont empêché d'ouïr le concert de la Nationale ! Ah, les sales musiciens ! C'est pas fichu d'orchestrer, et ça vous bouche les trous avec la 'musique turque.' Des divertissements de fugue remplacent le métier, des thèmes de *Pelléas* suppléent à l'inspiration. Et tout ça fait un bruit ! Du tam-tam, des tambours basque et militaire, du glockenspiel, des cymbales, à tort et à travers."

¹¹² The program is cited in Orenstein, *Lettres*, 102n1.

1. Symphony in D minor, Marcel Orban.
2. *Chants d'automne*, Pierre Bretagne
3. *Le Chevalier moine et les diables dans l'abbaye*, Pierre Coindreau
4. *La Toussaint*, Henri Mulet
5. *Deux poèmes pour chant et orchestre*, Florent Schmitt, chantés par Mme Jeanne Lacoste
 - a. "Tristesse au jardin" (Laurent Tailhade)
 - b. "Demande" (Jean Forestier)
6. *Pour le jour des premières neiges au vieux Japon* (poème symphonique), D.E. Ingelbrecht.
7. *Éginéa* (fragments du II^e acte), Blanche Lucas
8. Symphony in A, iii, *Assez animé*, Paul Le Flem.

According to Orenstein, Ravel's derogatory use of the term "Turkish music" refers to eighteenth-century Turkish military fanfares, which include the instruments Ravel references: "tam-tam, tambourines, military drums, glockenspiel, and cymbals."¹¹³ However, I contend that Ravel takes issue specifically with the density of the orchestral texture of these works, scoffing that "their orchestration is hopeless," using the Turkish instruments cited above to produce "noise" instead of music.¹¹⁴ "Inghelbrecht holds the record" he writes, "with a xylophone and a Turkish crescent added on."¹¹⁵ Ravel specifically singles out Desiré-Émile Inghelbrecht's *Pour le jour des*

¹¹³ See Orenstein, *Lettres*, 102n2.

¹¹⁴ Ravel to Cipa Godebski, March 14, 1909. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹¹⁵ Ravel to Cipa Godebski, March 14, 1909. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

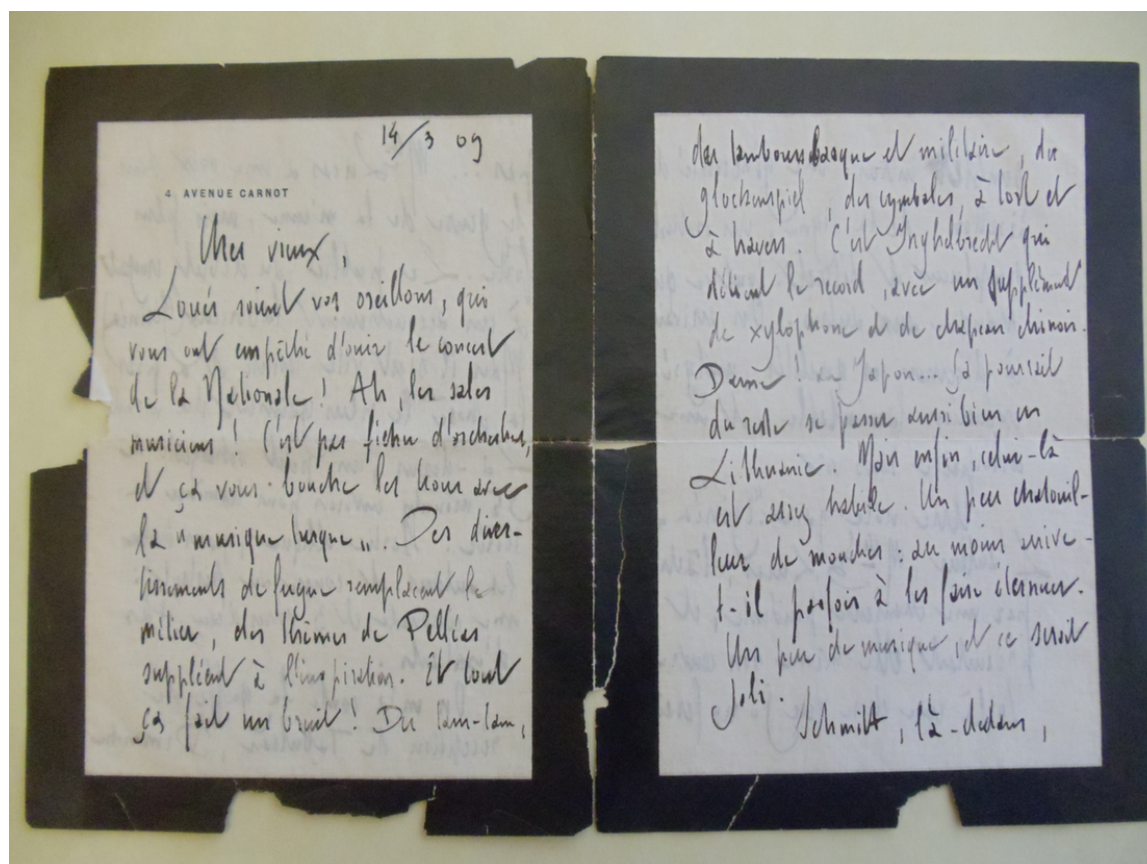
premières neiges au vieux Japon, which contains a substantial percussion section that includes four timpani as well as a triangle, gong, Turkish crescent, cymbals, bass drum, glockenspiel, celesta, and xylophone. Inghelbrecht's music is loosely in a rotational form and is texturally additive: each iteration begins differently, combining and re-combining short motives carried by individual instruments or timbral groups (e.g., the clarinet section), yet they all build up toward the *fff* the same tutti textural block each time (Example 1.5).

EXAMPLE 1.5: Tutti block in Desiré-Émile Inghelbrecht, *Pour le jour des premières neiges au vieux Japon*, mm. 100–104 (Paris: Maurice Senart, 1922).

In Ravel's time, the word "noise" (*bruit*) was frequently levied as a criticism of Wagner's music, or music with significant Wagnerian influence, hence this rhetoric would have been unmistakable.¹¹⁶ Thus, Ravel not only raises the specter of *wagnerisme*, accusing the composers featured on the program of creating "noisy," unoriginal, and quite possibly severely outdated music after Wagner's style, but also reproaches them for allowing "themes from *Pelléas*" to substitute for "inspiration," effectively branding all of these composers as both *wagneristes* and *debussystes*. Ravel must have felt he could be extremely candid with Cipa regarding his opinions, for among the composers on the program were his own fellow Apaches Florent Schmitt and Inghelbrecht, whom he indiscriminately condemned along with the others.

These accusations of *debussysme* reveal not only crucial information about Ravel's appraisal of the music of his contemporaries, as well as exactly how entrenched the stereotypes of *debussysme* and *wagnerisme* were by this point, but also give a measure of how much these ideas may extend to Ravel's aesthetic perspective in *L'Heure*. At the end of the letter, he mentions that he is in the final stages of completing the score for *L'Heure*, writing that Durand, his publishing company, would receive it the following day. I suggest that the fact that he was completing *L'Heure* at the very same moment he made these abrasive remarks shows he had adopted a derisive view of *debussysme* by this point.

¹¹⁶ For a useful summary of this strain of anti-Wagner criticism and a comparison to similar critiques of "visual noise" levied at Impressionist painters, see Therese Dolan, *Manet, Wagner, and the Musical Culture of Their Time* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 219–224. A familiar example might be André Gill's "Richard Wagner," which depicts the composer maniacally hammering a music note into an ear, drawing blood in the process. The engraving appeared on the cover of the April 18, 1869 issue of *L'Eclipse*. For the image, see the following link: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k10674360.r=I%27éclipse?rk=214593;2>.



EXAMPLE 1.6: Letter to Cipa Godebski, March 14, 1909. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Photograph from Jillian Rogers, “Grieving through Music in Interwar France, 1914–1934,” (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2014), 82.

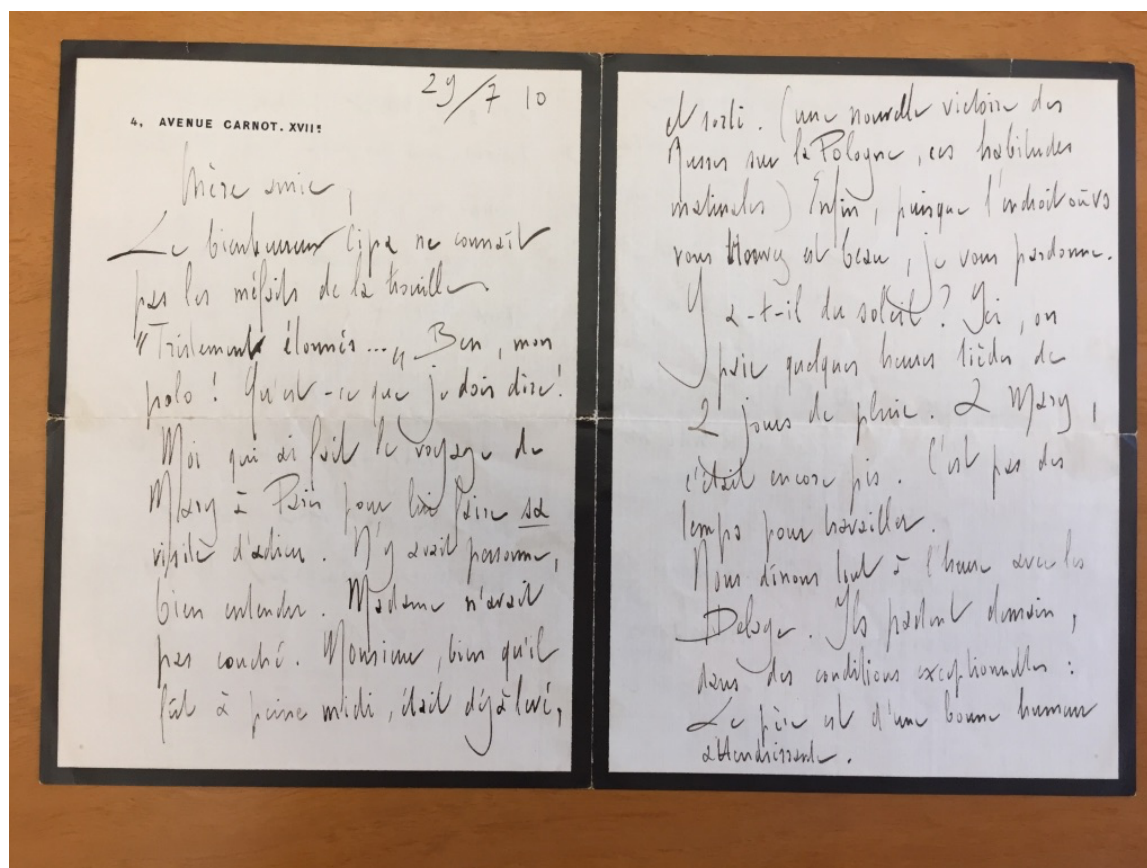
Furthermore, a strange feature of the stationery makes this letter stand out among so many letters written on plain paper—its thick black edge (see Example 1.6, above). For this letter, Ravel used special *papier de deuil*, or bereavement stationery—white paper edged with a black border, whose thickness was meant to correspond to the degree of grief one was experiencing. In her fascinating dissertation on the mourning habits of Ravel’s circle in the early twentieth century, Jillian Rogers shows that the composer’s habits diverged markedly from many of his contemporaries concerning his use of mourning stationery: Nadia Boulanger, Manuel de Falla, and Emma Debussy all made a regular habit of using *papier de deuil*, but Ravel used it “only on rare occasions—and never with any consistency—after the deaths of his father, his

mother, and his uncle.”¹¹⁷ Ravel’s father had died only several months previously, on October 13, 1908, so the composer would have been well within established mourning conventions, which indicated a period of mourning of one year for a parent.¹¹⁸ On this occasion, Ravel may have used bereavement stationery to mark the five-month anniversary of his father’s death, which would have been one day before this letter was penned. However, as Rogers states, he did not consistently use *papier de deuil* during this period, which begs the question of whether he had another motive for using the paper: was he using the stationery as an ironic subtext to herald the death of the Société Nationale and what it stood for, mocking them for becoming *debussystes*?

In support of this theory, I suggest that Ravel seems to have used bereavement stationery ironically in at least one other case, his July 29, 1910 letter to Ida in which he laments—with an equal measure of humor and melancholy—that Cipa and Ida neglected to say goodbye to him before they left to vacation in Carantec, a picturesque beach town in Brittany (see Example 1.7 below). According to Ravel’s account, they rose at an uncharacteristically early hour and were already gone when he arrived to see them off. Unfortunately, the envelope for this letter has not been preserved, but the addresses on Ravel’s two subsequent letters to Ida corroborate Ravel’s account of events. He indicated only the town and department, attesting to the fact that he had no idea of the Godebskis’ specific location, whereas his ensuing correspondence with Ida in Carantec is, in general, addressed specifically to the Villa des Fleurs.

¹¹⁷ Jillian Rogers, “Grieving through Music in Interwar France: Maurice Ravel and His Circle, 1914–1934,” (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2014), 83.

¹¹⁸ Rogers cites a contemporaneous pamphlet distributed by Baucheron, a Paris funeral home, regarding this convention. While the mourning period for the death of a parent was one year, that of a widow or widower was one year and six weeks. For the loss of a grandmother, grandfather, brother, sister, or child, one was expected to mourn for six months, and the passing of an aunt or uncle would require three months of mourning. See Rogers, “Grieving through Music in Interwar France,” 20.



EXAMPLE 1.7: Ravel to Ida Godebska, July 29, 1910. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

In this letter, Ravel claims he traveled all the way from Mary-sur-Marne to Paris—a distance of some 45 miles and an hour-long trip by train—just to say goodbye to Cipa, even though he had thought it should be Cipa who should come to him for “his [i.e., Cipa’s own] *visite d’adieu*.”¹¹⁹ “There was no one there, of course,” Ravel sighs. “Madame didn’t sleep. Monsieur, even though it was barely noon, had already risen and left. (a new victory of the Russians over the Polish, these matutinal habits).” In his other extant correspondence to the couple, Ravel notes that they are late risers, and seems mildly amused that, for once, they got up

¹¹⁹ Emphasis in original.

at a decent hour. We should also note that a significant portion of Poland was under Russian control during this period, so Ravel's jest about the superior morning routines of Russians was perhaps also a personal jab at Cipa's own family history, taking aim at his grandfather, a general in the Polish Legions who sought to defend the country from foreign incursion. Ravel goes on to joke that he forgives the couple because they were traveling to a locale with beautiful weather, complaining that, in Paris, "we're trading two days of rain for a few hours of warmth." Apparently, the poor weather also decreased his productivity: "this isn't good working weather," he writes.

Although Ravel hides behind a façade of humor and sarcasm, his use of bereavement stationery could also indicate his very real sadness at not having seen Ida and Cipa before their latest departure. The middle section of the letter describes a flurry of seemingly unimportant daily activities: Ravel recounts having dinner with the Delage family, with whom he remained so close throughout his life that this would have been a regular and mundane occurrence, and Maurice Delage's purchase of a "Greek sandwich" that cost 4f⁹⁵. But the end of the letter surprisingly mirrors the emotional state of the letter's opening, even though Ravel once again hides behind a mask of sarcasm. "I, too, vaguely hope to see you," writes Ravel, "if the circumstances allow. That is, if the distant uncle, whom we all keep in our hearts, dies in time."¹²⁰ The original for "dies in time" is "claque à temps," an indelicate slang phrase something akin to our "kick the bucket" in American English. Ravel could have been suggesting that he would have the financial means to visit Ida upon the death of his uncle Édouard, a painter who would later bequeath him a sizeable inheritance in 1920, but perhaps he was either speaking

¹²⁰ Ravel to Ida Godebska, July 29, 1910. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. "Moi aussi, j'espère vaguement aller vous voir, si les circonstances le permettent. C'est-à-dire si cet oncle lointain, que nous portons tous en notre cœur, claque à temps."

of Ida's own uncle, or "distant uncles" in the abstract. Could Ravel have been referring to an inheritance from Ida's or Cipa's uncle that enabled them to take this lavish trip? While it is impossible to know the true context and meaning behind Ravel's words, his tone appears irreverent, potentially camouflaging a deeper sadness or even bitterness that his friends did not even have the courtesy to wait for him to arrive and say a quick goodbye after he had traveled so far, nor did they leave him with a proper address so he could write to them without worry that the letter would be misdelivered. He then scoffs—with or without a hint of sarcasm—that he might just give them a taste of their own medicine by visiting them only when it is convenient for him, "if the circumstances allow."

In the postscript, as in many of his other letters to Ida, he once again asks Ida to respond to him as quickly as possible to find out if she has received his letter, despite the fact that he is aware of "le vague de l'adresse"—the inaccuracy of the address. He seems both frustrated with Ida and dependent on her prompt reply all the same.

Conclusion

As we have seen, Ravel's correspondence with the Godebskis exposes important information about how the composer's reception of Debussy—and particularly *Pelléas*—changed over time, paving the way for Ravel to satirize the innocence and sincerity of *Pelléas* through *L'Heure*. I also suggest that the Godebski correspondence complicates our view of membership in the Apaches and the changing mission of the Apaches, raising questions of the criteria for bona fide membership and whether Ravel's personal views on Debussy spread to the rest of the Apaches, or could have even been influenced by his interactions with the Godebskis. While the incompleteness of the archival record precludes establishing any definitive claims, I

argue that a productive place to begin would be to give hidden figures like the Godebskis a place in narrative. In the following chapter, we will examine Ravel's continuing re-negotiation of his relationship to Debussy through the press reception of his early works, especially *Histoires naturelles*, which would become the model for the avant-garde, speech-like text setting of *L'Heure espagnole*.

CHAPTER 2

LIFE AFTER DEBUSSY:

DEBUSSYSME, HISTOIRES NATURELLES, AND POST-PELLÉAS AESTHETICS

Faced with his failure to obtain the Prix de Rome and thus achieve notoriety by the usual channels in the Parisian market, Ravel found himself in a difficult position as a composer, regularly attacked in the press for a lack of originality and an over-reliance on innovative compositional techniques allegedly pioneered by Debussy. He also stood at a crossroads in terms of the prevailing discourse surrounding aesthetics. On the one hand, the academy—specifically, the Conservatoire—still controlled many of the pathways to success for young composers, namely through connections to committee members adjudicating the Prix de Rome competition as well as the directors of major opera houses and concert halls, many of whom, including Albert Carré, then the director of the Opéra, were Conservatoire alumni. In that institutional framework, a more reserved, academic style was favored. Yet, on the other hand, young composers in Ravel's circle were seeking to move beyond the limitations imposed by the Conservatoire's standards and push music in a different direction, one that followed Debussy's lead. Thus, the commercial climate for high-art music forced composers to tread a difficult line between the academy and the avant-garde: one had to simultaneously embrace current trends yet still remain marketable to both conservative and progressive consumers.

Writing in the shadow of Debussy, Ravel not only had to find a way to confront the influence of *Pelléas et Mélisande* but also manipulate his press reception to his advantage. As the contentious press reception of the 1902 premiere of *Pelléas* and the Prix de Rome scandal had

shown, the French press could make or break a composer's career.¹ Yet dominating media coverage in itself, whether through positive or negative attention, represented a significant and equally powerful means of garnering influence. The *succès de scandale* could be just as effective as a raft of positive reviews.

As Vanessa Schwartz has suggested, the outsize influence of the French press on public opinion can be traced to a media culture of spectacle that translated the complete, three-dimensional experience of modern urban life into a series of easily digested, sensationalized written depictions.² These depictions, in turn, made it easier for the public to stay informed about issues and events that mattered to them. While Schwartz does not consider the musical press in her study, I argue that her theory can be meaningfully applied to French music reviews of the same period because the process of writing that she describes functions so similarly to that of a review of a live performance. To a significant extent, the conversion of the experience of viewing a live spectacle into the two-dimensional printed word borrowed heavily from viewing practices already conditioned by popular performance venues such as the sidewalk café. Schwartz writes that the view from a sidewalk café created a frame for watching the spectacle of daily life that mirrored any theatrical spectacle that appeared at the Boulevard theaters, such as the Théâtre des Variétés, one of the oldest self-sustaining theaters in Paris (on the boulevard Montmartre), or the Théâtre Robert-Houdin, a site for magic shows (on the boulevard des Italiens), which was just down the street from the Opéra-Comique, the eventual site of the

¹ For an excellent study of the reception history of *Pelléas*, see Jann Pasler, "Pelléas and Power: Forces Behind the Reception of Debussy's Opera," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 10, no. 3 (1987): 243–264. See also Alexandra Kieffer, *Debussy's Critics: Sound, Affect, and the Experience of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), particularly chap. 2, "Pelléas et Mélisande and the Aesthetic of Sensation."

² Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1998).

premiere of *L'Heure espagnole*. Contemporaneous guidebooks such as *Paris en poche: Guide Conty*, also reflected this habit of viewing, comparing the vantage point of a seat at the café to a seat at the theater: “the best way to attend this spectacle [. . .] is to take your stall at the door of one of the many cafés on the boulevard Montmartre or the boulevard des Italiens, and while savoring your coffee or your grog, look with your own two eyes.”³ Thus, the readership of French newspapers was not only conditioned to view modern life as if they were constantly attending a performance at the theater, but also to direct their attention specifically toward spectacularized, sensationalized events that appeared in two-dimensional format in the newspaper.

In this chapter, I argue that the concerns of *debussysme*—namely, what sound was capable of representing and the means through which it would accomplish this—would profoundly inflect both Ravel’s personal opinion of Debussy as well as press coverage of Ravel’s works. Moreover, Ravel’s position was complicated by the fact that he remained heavily indebted to Debussy yet at the same time was trying to break away from his influence. Defining *debussysme* in this context is a rather complex endeavor that would involve tracing an intellectual history of this term from its origins in the critical reception of the premiere of *Pelléas* to the point at which the term came into regular use several years later, and how it was applied to Ravel. My particular intervention seeks to re-orient our perspective on the term from the vantage point of Ravel’s generation, although excavating the full extent of the intellectual history of *debussysme* remains beyond the scope of this chapter. In her recent monograph, *Debussy’s Critics*, Alexandra Kieffer claims that the term *debussysme* was “most often used to describe

³ Cited in Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*, 22–23.

Debussy's style of composition and those who imitated it."⁴ Moreover, she describes *debussysme* as containing a "compositional" and "discursive" dimension, implicating both composers and music critics.⁵ For the purposes of this chapter, I subscribe to Kieffer's definition of *debussysme* as music-critical discourse about Debussy, yet I also define *debussysme* somewhat differently in order to reframe the word from the perspective of Ravel's contemporaries: I use the term *debussysme* to refer to both an aesthetic movement with positive connotations, describing a new direction for younger French composers inspired by Debussy's compositional procedures—particularly those invoked in *Pelléas*—and, simultaneously, a derogatory term frequently levied by music critics at Ravel and composers of his generation who sought to follow Debussy's lead.

To clarify the definition of *debussysme* as an aesthetic movement, this chapter will begin with a general overview of the main concerns of *debussyste* discourse, focusing on the stakes of representation, sensation, and emotion in defining a *debussyste* aesthetic. I then turn my focus to Pierre Lalo, who admired Debussy's ability to convey imagery and sensation through his music, but nonetheless would wage war on composers who followed Debussy's example, especially Ravel. I consider closely two key reviews by Lalo: his review of Debussy's *Nocturnes* (1901) as a locus for the sort of representational claims about image, sound, and sensation that would be central to the *debussyste* aesthetic, and his review of *Ibéria* (1910) as a striking counterexample—an instance in which he argues that Debussy fell afoul of his own ideals, precisely by imitating everything he found irritating about Ravel's music, including its use of timbral special effects, rhythm, and its portrayal of Spain. I also consider Louis Laloy's writings on Gregorian chant and *Pelléas*, which are fleshed out more fully in Chapter 3. In essence, for

⁴ Kieffer, *Debussy's Critics*, 10n6.

⁵ Kieffer, *Debussy's Critics*, 10n6.

critics aligned with Debussy, the appeal of his best music lay in the “sensations” it provoked; it created an entire soundworld, transforming the score from a two-dimensional page to a multi-dimensional sonic evocation of images, emotions, and places.

As a result of its purported ability to evoke, I argue that Debussy’s music also had a philosophical potency grounded in claims of representational fidelity. In other words, there was something about the music’s ability to represent an image or feeling that allowed it to convey some kind of truth about the experience of that image or feeling. In particular, Debussy’s *Nocturnes* and *Pelléas* became prominent sites of *debussyste* commentary, marking out the limits for both the reception of Debussy’s music and music that was seen to be influenced by him, including Ravel’s. *Nocturnes*, as we have seen in Chapter 1, was already prominent in Ravel’s mind as a potential model for his Prix de Rome compositions, and would re-emerge as a site of engagement with Debussy in *L’Heure espagnole*, which I analyze in greater depth in Chapter 4. Moreover, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Ravel’s reception of *Pelléas* seems to have been shifting constantly at this time in response to press scandals that pitted the two composers against one another. As such, I claim that these pieces represent an especially fraught site of both admiration and parody for Ravel, a site wherein he was constantly re-negotiating his relationship with Debussy.

Following the consideration of criticism on Debussy, I will examine press coverage on Ravel, namely the “Affaire Debussy-Ravel” of 1907–1908. The “Affaire,” in turn, was set off by the January 12, 1907 premiere of Ravel’s song cycle *Histoires naturelles* (1906), a work which Ravel would later cite as a model for *L’Heure espagnole* (1907–1911). Ravel in fact began composing *L’Heure espagnole* at the very height of this press debacle, the moment when elaborating distinctions of style and aesthetic perspective from Debussy were at their most

crucial. *Histoires naturelles* represented both a significant shift in Ravel's compositional outlook and catalyzed a veritable avalanche of press coverage that would put him in the spotlight of the French musical world. Ravel's use of musical puns in *Histoires naturelles*, in addition to the unorthodox method of text setting he employed, stood at the forefront of the press debate. Many of Ravel's contemporaries, primarily the influential critic Louis Laloy, saw *Histoires naturelles* as emblematic of a new "humoristic" style in Ravel's music, while Pierre Lalo critiqued the coldness and mechanical quality of his writing, accusing him once again of being a poor imitator of Debussy's who worked in miniatures rather than on a grand scale. Yet I claim that press coverage that was favorable to Ravel would ultimately create a new compositional persona for him, distinguishing him from Debussy through his distinctive combination of humor and metric manipulation. Through the press, particularly Calvocoressi's ardent defense of his use of meter, Ravel would begin to chip away at the label of *debussysme*.

Finally, we will consider the case of Charles Koechlin (1867–1950), a contemporary of Ravel's who likewise sought to throw off the epithet of *debussysme* even into the late 1940s by invoking the individuality of his approach to polytonality, meter, and rhythm. Koechlin conveyed his aesthetic outlook in letters to the British musicologist Rollo Myers, who was writing a Grove article on Koechlin and his music. While it is not unexpected that Koechlin would want to define his compositional aesthetic in the context of correspondence regarding a future encyclopedia article, what is surprising is that he felt he needed to pre-empt any attempt to categorize him as a *debussyste* in the late 1940s. Koechlin provides a unique first-hand account of his generation's response to accusations of *debussysme*: first, he too exemplifies the tendency to emphasize characteristics of his style that were distinct from Debussy's; and, second, his

account reflects the sheer endurance of the term beyond the usual timeframe to which it has been thought to apply.

Ravel never directly articulated a particular opinion regarding the term *debussysme*, as Koechlin did, but the principle was the same: composers of Ravel's generation were continually fending off comparisons to Debussy. Through the press, especially allies in the Apaches such as Michel-Dmitri Calvocoressi, Ravel responded to claims that he was plagiarizing Debussy by embracing aspects of his style that were not deemed *debussyste*, particularly his unique way of handling rhythm and meter,⁶ the lack of sentimentality in his music, and his brand of ironic wit. While Ravel's own writings are largely silent on his aesthetics, I suggest that the broad outlines of Ravel's new aesthetic emerge from the criticism as a mythology about Ravel's music that is arguably borne out in his style.

Defining *Debussysme*: Sound, Politics, and Representation

In her landmark monograph on French nationalist politics and music, *French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War*, Jane Fulcher argues that

⁶ I do not mean to suggest here that critics never commented on Debussy's use of rhythm and meter, or that Debussy's music has no metrical basis: rather, I assert that the reception of *Histoires naturelles* framed Ravel's use of meter as new and unique to him, regardless of whether or not this was actually true in terms of the techniques he employed. Evidently, numerous examples could be cited of similar or identical approaches to meter in the works of Ravel and Debussy, such as the use of metric shifts or hemiola. However, I would argue that the specific confluence of a focus on temporality, mechanism, and a sly, ironic form of humor applies uniquely to Ravel. Moreover, the sheer degree of metric superimposition that occurs in *L'Heure espagnole*, with competing metric layers in both the notated music and the "environmental" timbral atmosphere of the ticking of various metronomes also seems particular to Ravel. In other words, the difference in metric approach between the two composers may be one of degree rather than kind. In her *Details of Consequence*, Gurminder Kaur Bhogal offers an alternative perspective on the relationship between Debussy's and Ravel's use of rhythm and meter in reference to their piano music circa 1905, exploring how their music relates to visual ideas of ornament, background, and foreground. In the critical discourses she examines, Debussy's rhythmic innovations are often framed in terms of his use of decorative figuration as an articulator of form, especially in the writings of Léon Vallas. Interestingly, Debussy and Ravel both seem to be portrayed on a more equal footing in this discourse as masters of ornament. See Bhogal, "Ornament and Virtuosity in French Piano Music," chap. 3 in *Details of Consequence: Ornament, Music, and Art in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

political culture infiltrated all aspects of musical life in France, rendering all debates on aesthetics political and ideological in nature.⁷ She writes: “meanings and priorities that we have previously construed as ‘purely aesthetic,’ autonomous, or related to the inner dynamics of the art and the field were, rather, freighted with ideological significance.”⁸ The social and cultural climate of France under the Third Republic (1870–1940) was marked by the rise of French nationalism and a corresponding surge in anti-German sentiment bolstered by fears of Germany’s burgeoning influence as an industrial power. These fears were, in turn, significantly magnified by the loss of Alsace and Lorraine, both of which were important industrial centers ceded to Germany following France’s humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. The Dreyfus Affair would play a central role in the redefinition, and ultimately the strengthening, of France’s national consciousness in the wake of the War, forcing France to once again confront its own Republican ideals.

To summarize the Dreyfus Affair: in 1894, Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish artillery officer of Alsatian extraction and a graduate of the elite *École Polytechnique*, was accused of attempting to transmit government secrets to the German embassy in Paris. Tried before a court-martial in closed session, he was convicted of treason, sentenced to life in prison, and exiled to Devil’s Island in French Guyana. Public opinion first sided against Dreyfus, and anti-Semitic groups capitalized on the case to bolster racist, anti-Semitic assumptions about the duplicity of French Jews. Meanwhile, Dreyfus’s family continued to advocate for his release, enlisting the writers

⁷ Jane Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics & Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁸ Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

Bernard Lazare⁹ and Émile Zola,¹⁰ and the senator Auguste Scheurer-Kestner¹¹ in his defense. Due to mounting public outcry, Dreyfus was granted a second court-martial in September 1889, but was found guilty with extenuating circumstances. In August 1898, an important document implicating Dreyfus was found to have been forged by Major Hubert-Joseph Henry of the intelligence division of the army, spurring public pressure for yet another trial of Dreyfus. In an attempt to bring a swift resolution to the scandal, the President pardoned him on September 10, 1899. Dreyfus was ultimately declared innocent by a civilian court in 1906 and allowed to be re-integrated into the army.

The Dreyfus Affair dominated political discourse from 1894 until its resolution in 1906, splitting French public opinion into “Dreyfusards,” those who defended Dreyfus, and “anti-Dreyfusards,” those who believed him guilty. Musical *affaires*, in turn, resembled political debates and were just as fraught with tension, competing ideologies, and emotional investment. In “Une tasse de thé,” a satire of Parisian salon culture in the early 1900s, music critic and Apache Émile Vuillermoz infamously claimed that debates about Debussy, and particularly

⁹ Lazare was known for his scholarship on anti-Semitism, and would eventually circulate two pamphlets on the Dreyfus Affair, rebutting the premise of the case and implicating the military in a conspiracy against Dreyfus.

¹⁰ The result of Zola’s intervention was his famous “J’accuse!...” (“I accuse”), which appeared in 1898. “J’accuse!” attacked the army for conspiring against Dreyfus, and had a profound role in attracting public attention to the case. A month after the letter was published, Zola himself was brought to trial under nebulous charges on February 7, 1898 and convicted of libel, resulting in a fine of 3,000 francs and a one-year prison sentence.

¹¹ Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, a Protestant and Alsatian, represented the Upper Rhine in the French senate, and had opposed the annexation of Alsace following the Franco-Prussian War. By 1895, he was elected Vice President of the senate and was informed that suspicion had shifted away from Dreyfus toward another officer, Major Ferdinand Walsin-Esterhazy. At this news, Scheurer-Kestner attempted to contact Dreyfus through Joseph Reinach, the deputy of the Lower Alps. Reinach appealed to the Minister of Colonies, André Lebon, but Lebon blocked the request. Scheurer-Kestner would then seek a meeting with the President and repeatedly contact the War Minister, all to no avail. He would eventually submit into evidence documents showing Esterhazy’s anti-patriotism, continuing to fight for Dreyfus until the end, even though he lost the vice presidency of the Senate following the acquittal of Esterhazy. Sadly, he passed away on September 10, 1899, the day of Dreyfus’s presidential pardon.

Pelléas, became music's own Dreyfus Affair.¹² In Vuillermoz's piece, the members of the fictional salon of Mme de F.—a mix of intellectuals, former military officials, and aristocrats—describe how the Dreyfus Affair and the “Debussy Affair” have dominated the conversation at the dawn of the twentieth century. The baron proclaims: “Music now has its own Dreyfus Affair...the friends and enemies of the Ninth indulge themselves in the same excesses of discourse as the supporters and detractors of the Saber and Aspergillum. The ‘Debussy Affair’ will divide France.”¹³ Dreyfus's defenders often used the phrase “the Saber and Aspergillum” as a metonym for the military and the clergy, suspicious that those in power within these institutions were working behind the scenes to falsely incriminate Dreyfus and cover up the truth.¹⁴ Just as the “Saber and Aspergillum” divided Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards, Debussy's use of ninths sharply divided supporters and antagonists of the composer.¹⁵ Further on in the article, an expert in Egyptology worries that future civilizations will confuse Achille Debussy¹⁶ and Alfred Dreyfus, conflating them into a fictitious person called “Achille Drefussy”: “One day, future ancient history books might teach students about a conductor of military music named Achille Drefussy, accused of high treason by an expert in harmony who

¹² Émile Vuillermoz, “Une Tasse de Thé,” *Le Mercure musical (La Revue musicale S.I.M.)* 1, no. 15 (November 1905): 505–510.

¹³ Vuillermoz, “Une Tasse de Thé,” 505.

¹⁴ Michael R. Marrus, “‘En Famille’: The Dreyfus Affair and Its Myths,” *French Politics and Society* 12, no. 4 (1994): 84.

¹⁵ Kieffer discusses Debussy's much-debated use of ninth chords at length in *Debussy's Critics*, theorizing that critics' opinions on his use of ninth chords became emblematic of their opinion of Debussy himself in the years immediately following the premiere of *Pelléas*. See *Debussy's Critics*, particularly chapter 3, “Marnold: Music as Epistemology,” and chapter 4, “Laloy: Music as Truth.”

¹⁶ Debussy's full name was Achille-Claude Debussy. He regularly signed his compositions Achille or Achille-Claude Debussy in the beginning of his career, but eventually abandoned the use of the name Achille.

studied his writing closely.”¹⁷ Vuillermoz clearly pokes fun at the highly politicized musical culture of the time, showing that music was not immune to polarization and sensationalism along political lines. Moreover, the elite audiences who read prominent dailies like *Le Temps* that featured both geopolitical news and music reviews, were in on the joke.

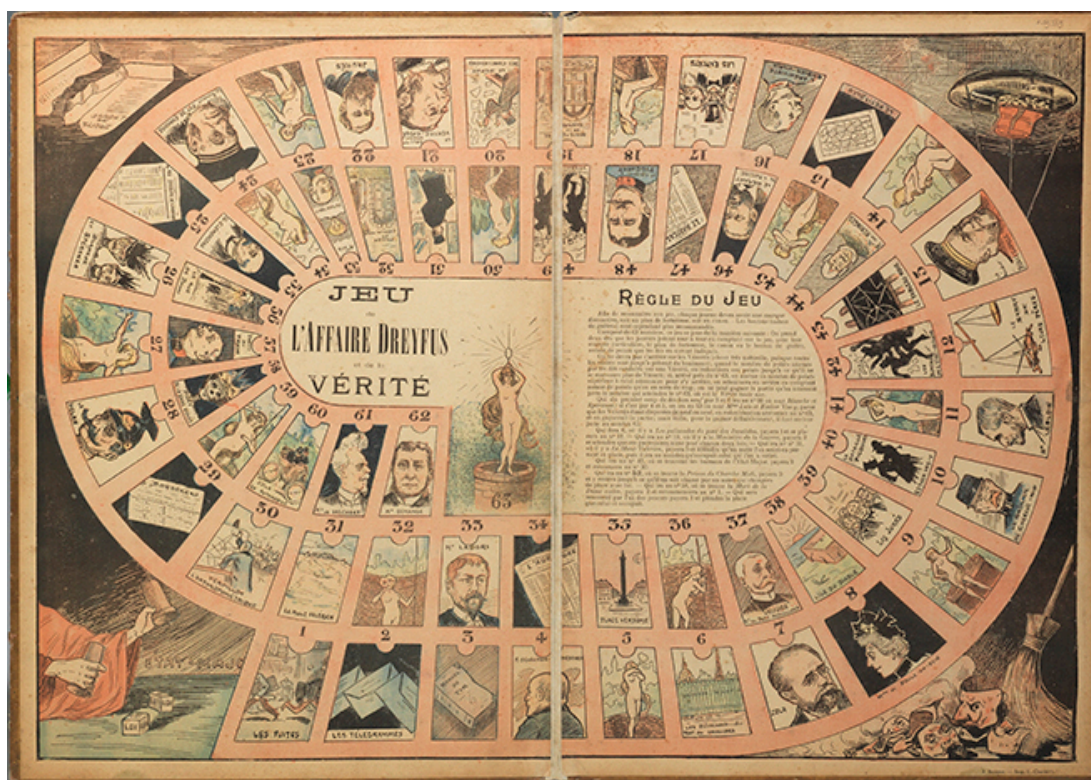
In her masterful analysis of the press coverage surrounding the premiere of *Pelléas*, Jann Pasler argues that the position of major newspapers on the Dreyfus Affair generally correlated with their opinion of *Pelléas*, although this was not always the case.¹⁸ In general, however, Dreyfusard (pro-Dreyfus, and hence more liberal) newspapers tended to voice appreciation for *Pelléas*, whereas anti-Dreyfusard (anti-Dreyfus, more conservative) newspapers often panned the opera.¹⁹ The Dreyfus Affair also entered the visual realm of popular culture, with depictions of the Affair appearing in drawings, cartoons, and even board games.²⁰

¹⁷ Vuillermoz, “Une Tasse de thé,” 505.

¹⁸ Pasler, “‘Pelléas’ and Power: Forces Behind the Reception of Debussy’s Opera,” *Nineteenth-Century Music* 10, no. 3 (1987): 243–264.

¹⁹ Pasler, “‘Pelléas’ and Power,” 244, 246.

²⁰ For a recent study of visual depictions of the Dreyfus Affair, see André Dombrowski, ed., *The Image Affair: Dreyfus in the Media 1894–1906* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).



EXAMPLE 2.1: Dreyfus Affair Board Game. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn544971>.

In this Drefyusard board game, “The Dreyfus Affair and the Truth” (“Jeu de L’Affaire Dreyfus et la vérité”), players move around the board square by square, progressing through the various twists and turns of the Dreyfus saga, interspersed with images of a nude woman: La Vérité (Truth) (see Example 2.1 above). La Vérité, I would also suggest, conspicuously resembles Marianne, the female personification of the French Republic.²¹ The images of La Vérité in the board game provide a sort of running commentary on the events of the Dreyfus

²¹ On visual representations of Marianne, see the work of Maurice Agulhon, who has written on images of Marianne from their earliest incarnations in the early 1790s through the early 2000s. On *fin-de-siècle* depictions of Marianne, see especially Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir: l’imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1880 à 1914* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989). See also Maurice Agulhon, Annette Becker, and Évelyne Cohen, eds., *La République en représentations: autour de l’œuvre de Maurice Agulhon*, (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006); Guillaume Doizy and Jacky Houdré, *Marianne dans tous ses états: la République en caricature de Daumier à Plantu* (Paris: Alternatives, 2008); Jean-Michel Renault, *Les fées de la République* (Paris: Créations du Pélican, 2003); and Georges Bringuier, *La Marianne du musée* (Vilemur-sur-Tam: Éditions Loubatières, 2020).

Affair; she alternately covers her eyes in shame at square 5, as she reacts to the initial accusation of Dreyfus, and appears in all her shining glory at square 63, when the truth has finally emerged and Dreyfus has been declared innocent. The winner is presumably the one to reach La Vérité first.

I cite this board game because it provides a powerful visual analogy for the politicization of *debussysme* and its latent nationalist and philosophical implications. The board game, like the actual Dreyfus Affair, represents a struggle to uncover the truth—a difficult path through a political scandal that would become one of the defining tests of the French Republican ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* (freedom, equality, brotherhood) in the face of the open anti-Semitism of the anti-Dreyfusards. In the end, the truth would prevail, and Dreyfus would be exonerated. Similarly, I argue that the *debussyste* aesthetic sought a similar vindication of ontological truth that was also bound up with a post-Franco-Prussian War search for a national French style that would overwrite Wagner's influence on French music.

In *Debussy's Critics*, Kieffer offers a somewhat different view of *debussysme* that focuses less intently on the nationalist and philosophical implications of Debussy's music, turning instead to considerations of the sonic materiality of Debussy's music and its impact on the historical human body. Kieffer's study operates at the crossroads between the intellectual history of *debussysme* as a compositional and discursive phenomenon, the reception history of Debussy's music itself, and a history of the body. She writes: "I am interested here not only in early-twentieth-century ideas about what constitutes a body and its interface with the material world but also about what it was, at this historical moment, to *be* a body engaged in listening to a new and often disorienting kind of musical sound."²² For Kieffer, the discursive sphere of

²² Kieffer, *Debussy's Critics*, 11.

debussyme is intricately bound up not only with secondary accounts of Debussy's music as they appear on the printed page, but the bodily experience of listeners and critics themselves in producing these accounts. From this viewpoint, Debussy's music functions not only as an object of interpretation but as a historical subject in its own right, imbued with a certain agency and capable of producing novel effects on its listeners. The importance of Kieffer's contribution lies in her argument that there is something fundamentally *strange* about the listener's experience of Debussy's music that continually tested the ability of contemporary reviewers and listeners to describe it adequately.

Kieffer cites a particular instance of this phenomenon in Léon Kerst's review of *Pelléas* for the widely read Parisian daily *Le petit journal*.²³

What did I hear? — after all, even if you understand almost nothing, you can't go to the theater without hearing *something* — I heard harmonized sounds (I do not mean harmonious) unfolding continuously, one after the other, without a single phrase, a single motif, a single contour. And, while we're on the subject, [I heard] useless singers, psalmifying the words—nothing but words, just as in a chant—droning, monotone, unbearable, laughable.²⁴

Although she acknowledges the tongue-in-check quality of Kerst's account, Kieffer values Kerst's eyewitness testimony primarily for its ability to communicate a particular listening experience of *Pelléas*, one in which the listener registered a sense of bewilderment upon hearing the opera. The very idea that contemporary reviewers could be so stupefied upon hearing Debussy's music thus leads Kieffer to propose an entirely different model of its reception

²³ *Le Petit journal* had a circulation of 900,000, second only to *Le petit parisien*, which had some one million subscribers. Claude Bellanger, Jacques Godechot, Fernand Terrou, and Pierre Guiral, eds., *Histoire générale de la presse française*, Vol. 3 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972), 300–304.

²⁴ Léon Kerst, "Premières Représentations," review of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, by Claude Debussy, *Le petit journal*, May 1, 1902. My translation. All subsequent translations from French are my own unless otherwise specified. "Ce que j'ai entendu? — car, on a beau ne rien comprendre, on ne va pas au théâtre sans entendre quelque chose — j'ai entendu des sons harmonisés (je ne dis pas harmonieux) se succédant de façon ininterrompue, sans une seule phrase, sans un seul motif, sans un seul contour ; et, là-dessus, d'inutiles chanteurs, psalmodiant des mots, rien que des mots, en manière de récitation, prolongée, monotone, insupportable, mourante."

history, one not necessarily based upon interpretations of Debussy's music itself but rather experiences of listening to it. She writes:

My concern, rather, is that a reception history that looks exclusively for interpretations—that understands contemporary accounts of musical experiences, in Fulcher's words, as governed by a “‘potent symbolism,’ framed by a discourse that imbued [music] with ideological meaning”—loses sight of the give-and-take between frames of intelligibility, by which music interacts with the cultural production of meaning, and the listening experiences to which those frames of intelligibility are (always incompletely) applied.”²⁵

Here, Kieffer pushes back against Jane Fulcher's theorization of musical discourse in *fin-de-siècle* France as profoundly steeped in ideology, suggesting instead an alternative model defined by “frames of intelligibility” that admits of the multiple—and even partial or incomplete—ways in which music can interact with cultural constructions of meaning. Yet the constructions of meaning that interest Kieffer are not necessarily the political and ideological frameworks that Fulcher prioritizes, but rather the negotiations between musical traditions and conventions and the lived experience of listening to music.²⁶ Kieffer sums up this approach most concisely in the following passage:

To put it succinctly, my argument is that *Pelléas* reception, like the *debussysme* that was soon to follow, held in tension, in a very specific and palpable way, “music” as a self-referential, historically (i.e., conventionally) bound system and “music” as a sonic materiality that exists outside all history and all convention. This tension was, in turn, intertwined with the *debussyste* shift away from the idea that music's engagement with the human person existed most essentially in the realm of *sentiment* and interiority as it turned, instead, toward the more amorphous terrain of *sensation*.²⁷

According to Kieffer, the reception of *Pelléas*—which serves as a kind of microcosm for *debussysme* as a whole—balanced notions of music as a historicized, “self-referential” phenomenon and music in the abstract, as “sonic materiality” that exists apart from history and conventions of musical style. The opposition between these two realms, argues Kieffer, was also linked to the *debussyste* prioritization of *sensation*—the nebulous landscape of experience and

²⁵ Kieffer, *Debussy's Critics*, 12.

²⁶ Kieffer, *Debussy's Critics*, 18.

²⁷ Kieffer, *Debussy's Critics*, 85.

frisson—over *sentiment*, the realm of one’s internal feelings and thoughts. The critical project of *debussysme*, then, consisted in treading a fine line between music as embedded in history and culture and music as an ahistorical set of sounds.

Unlike Kieffer, I do not see Fulcher’s aims as particularly reductive, and would argue that one could productively combine both the political dimension of Fulcher’s theories and Kieffer’s more abstract approach based on the subjective listening experience, viewing the experience of listening to music as simultaneously shaped by a heavily politicized cultural climate, yet irreducible to political and ideological meanings alone. I am not seeking to draw a compromise between Fulcher’s and Kieffer’s theses: rather, I claim that *debussysme* was in fact situated in a musical culture in which ostensibly abstract concepts such as sensation were in fact conditioned by the surrounding political and cultural climate. Music and discourse about music were fundamentally embedded in a political culture already poised to seize on the next scandal, the next subject of outrage, the next *affaire*. In my view, the sonic materiality of music was just as likely to be heard within this framework as it was to be heard as transcending it.

With this framework in mind, I argue that there is yet another discursive layer to music critic Léon Kerst’s account of *Pelléas* that can inform our understanding of *debussysme*: his parody of Debussy. In the remainder of his review, which Kieffer incidentally does not cite, Kerst lampoons the style of declamation in *Pelléas*, comparing it to chant and calling it “droning, monotone, unbearable, laughable.”²⁸

What did I hear? — after all, even if you understand almost nothing, you can’t go to the theater without hearing *something* — I heard harmonized sounds (I do not mean harmonious) unfolding continuously, one after the other, without a single phrase, a single motif, a single contour. And, while we’re on the subject, [I

²⁸ Kerst, “Premières Représentations.” As we will see in Chapters 3 and 4, Laloy would also use the metaphor of chant to describe Debussy’s *Pelléas*, but, in contrast to Kerst, he would praise it as an element of Debussy’s style that harkened back to the grandeur of medieval French musical heritage.

heard] useless singers, psalmifying the words—nothing but words, just as in a chant—droning, monotone, unbearable, laughable.²⁹

Viewing this passage in its complete context adds another dimension to Kerst's observation that Debussy's music was unintelligible: it was not only unintelligible on a musical level, as Kerst found it lacking in foundational elements such as "phrase," "motif," and "contour," but it was also ridiculous in its unintelligibility. In other words, Kerst's claim that he could not make sense of the music was not exclusively a reflection of the ineffable quality of his own experience or his lack of ability to describe what he heard, but also a value judgment of Debussy's music, purpose-built for a press culture that thrived on sensationalism. There is a paradoxical quality to Kerst's account that I wish to draw out here—the sense in which to claim that something is too complex to be understood is simultaneously to stand in awe of its intricacy and dismiss it, and the sense in which to mock something is simultaneously to scoff at it and consider it worthy of attention.

On the one hand, it seems clear that many critics believed Debussy's music was to be taken seriously, to be debated about, to be interpreted. Yet, on the other, I suggest that the extreme seriousness of purpose contained in Debussy's music was always on the verge of seeming ridiculous. Indeed, Kerst espouses both of these perspectives in the same review. Kieffer writes: "In the words of *debussyste* critic Jean Marnold, Debussy's music makes you 'lose your idea of what constitutes yourself,' an experience that surpassed the limits of intelligibility but which the participants of *debussysme* nonetheless felt compelled to try to explain."³⁰ The fact that Debussy's music exceeded the limits of *debussyste* critics to understand and interpret it certainly spurred a raft of press coverage that tried to do exactly that. Yet I also claim that the critics who defended Debussy's music took themselves so seriously that their

²⁹ Kerst, "Premières Représentations."

³⁰ Kieffer, *Debussy's Critics*, 19.

impassioned defenses of Debussy's music were also at risk of falling flat. On the subject of writing a history of *debussysme*, Kieffer claims:

A history of *debussysme*, is, in the end, a history of interpretations and reinterpretations; there is no getting around it. But I hope to suggest that there are lingering traces of something else, which needs only a subtle shift in conceptual orientation to become conspicuous: moments when interpretation is unmoored and when its experiential substrate is briefly visible."³¹

As in Kerst's account, I acknowledge that the moments when interpretation becomes destabilized and the underlying experience of the listener is briefly visible are indeed fascinating and worthy of study. But in some cases, these moments where the substrate of experience is revealed are precisely the moments when the parodic dimensions of *debussysme* also threaten to become visible. In other words, the listening experience revealed in these accounts is not exclusively one of unilateral reverence toward the mystery of Debussy and his aesthetic but also mockery, continually threatening to undermine the entire *debussyste* project.

Ravel, I argue, would use this feature of *debussyste* criticism to his advantage in manipulating press coverage of his own works, particularly *Histoires naturelles* and *L'Heure espagnole*. While Ravel may have wanted to transcend a cultural climate that eminently politicized musical production, endlessly debating its nationalist and philosophical import (and, indeed, he would arguably try to do so through the establishment of the Société Musicale Indépendante in 1910),³² he inevitably had to operate within this landscape in order to promote

³¹ Kieffer, *Debussy's Critics*, 18.

³² The Société Musicale Indépendante was founded in 1910 by Ravel in conjunction with Fauré and a host of other allies, including Charles Koechlin and Florent Schmitt, as a response to the overt politicization of the Société Nationale and the Schola Cantorum. By this time, d'Indy had transformed the Schola into a promotional engine for the music of César Franck and historical repertoire, including Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Haydn. Meanwhile, the Société Nationale fiercely promoted the composition of French music and the cultivation of a serious aesthetic that would counteract the frivolity of the Second Empire, often to the exclusion of foreign composers. For a comprehensive study of the interaction between these three societies, see Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics & Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). On the Société Musicale Indépendante, see Michel Duchesneau, "La Société musicale indépendante," in *L'avant-garde musicale et ses sociétés à Paris de 1871 à 1939*, 65–115 (Paris: Mardaga, 1997). On the Société Nationale, see Duchesneau, "1871. La Société National de musique," in *Nouvelle histoire de la musique en France (1870-1950)*, edited by

his works. Indeed, it seems to have been Ravel's acute awareness of the politicized and sensational nature of the press that led him to court scandal with *Histoires naturelles*. To explore Ravel's response to *debussysme*, we first need to explore the discursive roots of critics' claims that Debussy's music embodied a certain authenticity and representational power.

Pierre Lalo on Debussy: Nature, Place, and Authenticity

The sounds of nature became a flashpoint of *debussyste* criticism, holding a special kind of authenticity that stood outside the limitations of compositional technique imposed by the Conservatoire. As James Hepokoski has noted, Debussy's own writings around 1900 persistently express his desire to create a music liberated from the institutional demands of the Conservatoire.³³ As Debussy indicated in a 1901 letter, the function of music was not to make one "think"; rather, "it would be enough if music could make people listen, in spite of themselves and in spite of their petty, mundane troubles."³⁴ This prioritization of the materiality of listening, of *écouter* as opposed to *penser*, would continue the Symbolist project of discouraging direct signification in favor of a certain dreamy opacity. The type of music that would support this hyper-attentiveness to listening, in turn, would be Debussy's own: as Debussy himself wrote in a 1907 letter to his publisher, Jacques Durand, he sought a music that would

Musique en France aux XIXe et XXe siècles : discours et idéologies, <http://emf.oicrm.org/nhmf-1871> (published online March 12, 2020).

³³ James Hepokoski, "Clouds and Circles: Rotational Form in Debussy's 'Nuages,'" *Dutch Journal of Music Theory* 15, no. 1 (2010): 2.

³⁴ Debussy to Paul Dukas, February 11, 1901, in *Correspondance 1884–1918*, edited by François Lesure (Paris: Hermann, 1993), 161–162. "Il suffirait que la musique force les gens à écouter, malgré eux, malgré leurs petit tracas quotidiens."

break the bonds of “rigorous and traditional form,” and would instead consist of “rhythmicized colors and time.”³⁵

In numerous reviews of Debussy’s music, depiction of natural imagery is associated with the ideas of sensation and fidelity of representation. Criticism on Debussy, Kieffer claims, reflects a preoccupation with sensation, revealing ways in which French musical culture may have spurred a reinterpretation of the relationship between perception and the possibility of representation. Sensation, in turn, is often configured in *debussyste* criticism as *sensibilité*, a word with a tripartite definition that not only refers to “sensation” as we understand it in English, but also carries the meanings of “sensitivity” and “sensitivity.” Thus, an attention to *sensibilité* in writings on Debussy suggested a music that was attuned to sensation as a perceptual phenomenon, as well as *sensibilité* as aesthetic sensitivity and sensitivity.

One of the prime examples of this facet of *debussyste* discourse is Pierre Lalo’s review of the premiere of the first two movements of *Nocturnes*.³⁶ Both “refinement” and “strangeness” came naturally to Debussy, wrote Lalo, as well as the adroit depiction of imagery using unique timbral effects. He portrays Debussy as a painter of sound, a consummate artist capable of astonishing the viewer by disguising the techniques he uses to obtain a particular effect.

What beautiful, fine, and profound painting of things one finds in these two short pieces! The subtle **sensations** of the night, the wind, and the clouds drifting in the sky in the first piece! How the second piece transports us to the astonishing and delicate impression of dances, lights, and far-away sounds! **And we do not know how this is made:** very short themes, small touches of color that an instrument deposits here and

³⁵ Debussy to Jacques Durand, September 3, 1907, in Claude Debussy, *Correspondance 1884–1918*, 230–231. “Par ailleurs, je me persuade, de plus en plus, que la musique n’est pas, par son essence, une chose qui puisse se couler dans une forme rigoureuse et traditionnelle. Elle est de couleurs et de temps rythmés.” There is some debate about the appropriate translation of this passage as “colors and rhythmicized time” or “rhythmicized colors and time.” As Hepokoski notes, this passage has most frequently appeared in English translation as “colors and rhythmicized time,” as it does in the English edition of Debussy’s correspondence. See *Debussy Letters*, edited by François Lesure and Roger Nichols (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), 184. Simon Trezise also repeats this translation in his “Debussy’s ‘Rhythmicised Time,’” in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, edited by Simon Trezise (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 232–255.

³⁶ At this point, only the first two movements, “Nuages” and “Fêtes” were publicly performed.

there, like a small brush; the newest, most surprising effects and timbres; and the most unexpected modulations, the boldest alongside the most graceful.

Et la jolie, fine et profonde peinture des choses qu'on trouve en ces deux courtes pièces ! Les subtiles sensations de la nuit, du vent, des nuages passant dans le ciel que donne la première ! L'éblouissante et délicate impression de danses, de lumières et de bruits lointains qu'on emporte de la seconde ! Et cela est fait on ne sait avec quoi : des thèmes très courts ; de petites touches de couleur que pose çà et là un instrument, comme un pinceau léger ; et les effets de timbres les plus neufs, les plus piquants ; et les modulations les plus imprévues, les plus audacieuses et les plus gracieuses ensemble.³⁷

In his comments on “Nuages,” Lalo praises Debussy’s ability to capture the sensation of the shifting light and colors of clouds drifting overhead. He describes Debussy’s compositional aesthetic as if it were an Impressionist painting, in which “short themes,” “small touches of color,” and the “newest effects and timbres” are laid down on a sonic canvas like brushstrokes, combining to form a sublime impression of the whole. The individual brushstrokes used to create the painting remain obscure, however, enveloping the work in a sense of mystery.

But in a 1910 review of Debussy’s *Ibéria* (1905–1908, full score 1910), Lalo roundly criticized Debussy’s timbral technique, apparently chastising him for making his sonic brushstrokes too obvious.³⁸ Lalo opined that Debussy’s music did not succeed in projecting a unique perspective of Spain, but rather an “everyday Spain,” a Spain of “tout le monde” that could be confused with any other exotic destination in the world.³⁹ In other words, Debussy himself was also capable of falling short of a representational ideal. “It is impossible for me to make out a vision or an evocative sensation of the earth and sky, or the people and things of that region,” Lalo wrote. The piece contained: “curious rhythms, ingenious timbral effects, an extreme attention to detail, but no overall impression. And too many details, too many effects,

³⁷ Lalo, review of *Nocturnes*, by Claude Debussy, *Le Temps*, January 8, 1901. My emphasis.

³⁸ Debussy composed the *Images* suite (comprising *Gigues*, *Ibéria*, and *Rondes de printemps*) between 1906 and 1912. *Ibéria* and *Rondes de printemps* were completed in 1910 and premiered that same year, while Debussy did not finish *Gigues* until 1912. *Gigues* was not premiered until 1913.

³⁹ Lalo, review of *Ibéria*, by Claude Debussy, *Le Temps*, February 26, 1910.

too many different noises, and too much drumming and tumult.”⁴⁰ Significantly, Debussy’s *Ibéria* also represented for Lalo precisely everything he hated about Ravel’s music: it demonstrated rhythmic and timbral ingenuity and made use of countless orchestral special effects, but did not convey the kind of fidelity to imagery and sensation that Lalo sought from Debussy’s music.⁴¹

There was also the question of the Spanish “setting” of the piece, and the fact that, in Lalo’s opinion, Debussy had failed to evoke convincingly the “sensation of the earth and sky, or the people and things of that region.”⁴² Whether Debussy had actually been to Spain and could attempt the quasi-ethnographic endeavor of transcribing its terroir and culture into sound was immaterial to Lalo: all that mattered was that “his music should go there; his music should transport the listener there.”⁴³ But, to Lalo, the listener’s imagination was not transported to Spain but still stuck in Paris, confined to simply “reading descriptions of Spain” in the piece’s movement titles.⁴⁴ Perhaps *Ibéria*, then, was little better than dry travel literature about Spain; it did not possess the quality of spectacle—the sheer magic—that could transform it from mere notes on the page to the true embodiment of a place. Throughout, Lalo laments that Debussy did

⁴⁰ Lalo, review of *Ibéria*, *Le Temps*, February 26, 1910. Lalo’s remarks about the overload of “details” and “effects” in *Ibéria* may also imply that there was a maximum level of ornamentation that could be tolerated in exoticist music. On the use of Spanish idioms in French music, see especially Hervé Lacombe, “L’Espagne à Paris au milieu du XIXe siècle (1847–1857). L’influence d’artistes espagnols sur l’imaginaire parisien et la construction d’une ‘hispanicité,’” *Revue de musicologie* 88, no. 2 (2002): 389–431. See also *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914*, ed. Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁴¹ Recently, Jennifer Beavers has commented on the importance of timbre as a defining indicator of form and structure in Ravel’s Piano Concerto in G. See Jennifer P. Beavers, “Beyond Mere Novelty: Timbre as Primary Structural Marker in Ravel’s *Piano Concerto in G Major*,” *Music Theory Online* 25, no. 4 (2019), <https://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.4/mto.19.25.4.beavers.html>.

⁴² Lalo, review of *Ibéria*, *Le Temps*, February 26, 1910.

⁴³ Lalo, review of *Ibéria*, *Le Temps*, February 26, 1910.

⁴⁴ Lalo, review of *Ibéria*, *Le Temps*, February 26, 1910.

not live up to his own example, unable to replicate the *sensibilité* evoked in his greatest works, among them the *Nocturnes*.

Critical discourse on Debussy's use of rhythm and meter was likewise connected to natural imagery, yet also reflected a preoccupation with ritualized structures of time, particularly the rhythm of Gregorian chant.⁴⁵ In "Gregorian Chant and French Music," and elsewhere in his writings,⁴⁶ Louis Laloy frequently speaks of the resemblance of Debussy's *Pelléas* to Gregorian chant.⁴⁷ Laloy identifies rhythmic fluidity as part of a nationalistic French aesthetic heritage dating back to Gregorian chant, sketching an artistic family tree that stretches from medieval French composers through Couperin and Rameau to d'Indy and Debussy:

The French, from the sixteenth century to today, passing through the eighteenth century with Couperin and Rameau, have always looked for new rhythms: the alternation of measures in triple and duple meter, measures in five or seven meter, phrases with unequal parts. This predilection still asserts itself today, both with musicians who like to strongly mark rhythm, as with Vincent d'Indy, and with those who, like Claude Debussy, free themselves from it; the result is...in the second case [i.e., for Debussy], a fluid music with supple and smooth⁴⁸ movements and an enchanting grace.⁴⁹

According to Laloy, Debussy's use of rhythm and meter had a natural elegance about it; shifts of meter in his music were subtle and seamless. Elsewhere in the same article, Laloy refers to the flexible rhythmic quality of Gregorian chant as akin to birdsong: "[Gregorian chant] enjoys an

⁴⁵ See Chapters 3 and 4 for my discussion of Laloy's analysis of the opening of *Pelléas* and its associations with Gregorian chant and the sacredness of the forest. On ritualized, cyclical notions of time in "Nuages," see Hepokoski, "Clouds and Circles."

⁴⁶ See the above footnote.

⁴⁷ Laloy, "Le chant grégorien et la musique française," *Le Mercure musical et bulletin français de S.I.M.* (January 15, 1907): 78. On this article, see Bhogal, *Details of Consequence*, 170–173.

⁴⁸ *fondus*, literally "melted." This unusual terminology could suggest a reference to Bergson's notion of duration as a succession of qualitative changes that melt into one another: "une succession de changements qualitatifs qui se fondent." See Henri Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Paris: Alcan, 1889), 49, http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/bergson_henri/essai_conscience_immediate/conscience_imm.html.

⁴⁹ Laloy, "Le chant grégorien et la musique française," *Le Mercure musical et bulletin français de S.I.M.* (January 15, 1907): 78. Translation as cited in Bhogal, *Details of Consequence*, 172, with light emendation. Here, I have replaced Bhogal's "indistinct" with "smooth" as a translation for the word *fondus*.

extreme rhythmic freedom, which allows it sometimes to keep pace with the word and adjust itself according to the accents of the word, sometimes to spread out in long vocalizations...regular as much as birdsong can be.”⁵⁰ For Laloy, the rhythmic suppleness of Gregorian chant allowed it to produce a certain kind of declamation that was sensitive to the inflections of words. Moreover, it could achieve the naturalness and beauty of birdsong. Yet, as we have seen, Kerst’s and Lalo’s accounts show us just how easily the representational ideal of Debussy’s music could be struck down. If, for Laloy, Debussy’s chant-like rhythmic structures were the epitome of naturalness and grace, for Kerst, they sounded “droning, monotone, unbearable, laughable.”⁵¹

To a significant extent, criticism of Ravel’s works would inherit *debussyste* preoccupations with sound and imagery, and Ravel would be relentlessly evaluated against Debussy’s example.

Pierre Lalo on Ravel: *Debussysme* Becomes the New Wagnerism

Unlike his reviews of Debussy’s music, Lalo’s reviews of Ravel were almost wholly negative for the great majority of his career, deriding him for a consummate lack of originality. From his very earliest reviews of Ravel, dating back to the composer’s 1899 “fairy overture” *Shéhérazade*, Lalo linked Ravel to a new, deplorable phenomenon—the direct imitation of Debussy. This phenomenon did not yet have a name, but would come to be known as *debussysme*.

⁵⁰ Laloy, “Le chant grégorien et la musique française,” 76. Translation as cited in Gurminder Bhogal, *Details of Consequence*, 171.

⁵¹ Kerst, “Premières Représentations.”

Lalo's review of Ravel's String Quartet stands out as a particularly salient example of the tenor of Lalo's accusations. According to Lalo, the String Quartet was entirely modeled after Debussy's *Pelléas*, from its harmonies to its formal structure. This resemblance was of "such a strong degree that, whilst one is listening to it, one cannot help but sing *Pelléas et Mélisande* to oneself."⁵² He continued: "one of my friends, who has heard the opera nineteen times and thus could not be suspected of hostility [toward *Pelléas*], said of the Quartet: 'It's my twentieth time hearing *Pelléas*.' This is the illness of which I was speaking just now; this is the imminent epidemic."⁵³ Lalo portrayed the emulation of Debussy's style as a disease, one that was fast spreading among composers of the younger generation, and defined a resemblance to *Pelléas*, rather than any of Debussy's other works, as its primary symptom. Although Lalo did not yet use the term *debussysme* at this time, mentions of a likeness to *Pelléas* became a shorthand for *debussysme* in his writing, and, conversely, *debussysme* seems to have become synonymous with sounding like *Pelléas*.

At the end of his review, Lalo prophesied that the discipleship of Debussy would reach its zenith when someone finally composed a complete forgery of *Pelléas*, a critical opinion that I argue would prove influential for the composition of *L'Heure espagnole*, as we will explore more fully in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. "And someday soon," Lalo wrote, "a work will be performed on the lyric stage in which *Pelléas* will appear to be copied down to every last detail; and how many others will follow?"⁵⁴ For Lalo, the emulation of Debussy's style was a complete

⁵² Lalo, review of String Quartet, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, April 19, 1904. "C'est à tel point que, tout le temps qu'on l'écoute, on chante en soi-même, et malgré soi, *Pelléas et Mélisande*."

⁵³ Lalo, review of String Quartet, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, April 19, 1904.

⁵⁴ Lalo, review of String Quartet, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, April 19, 1904. "Et quelque jour prochain, sur la scène lyrique, on représentera un ouvrage où *Pelléas* apparaîtra copié dans ses moindres détails ; et combien d'autres viendront ensuite ?"

bastardization of Debussy's compositional techniques without their substance. In addition, this sort of emulation would have likely been seen as sacrilege in an era that prized originality above other values, particularly in opera, which at that time, represented the principal site of compositional innovation.⁵⁵ Indeed, Lalo said as much in a searing indictment of *debussyste* composers as mere clones of Debussy: "This, therefore, is the lesson that these young people have taken from the most original work that has been seen in the last quarter-century; this is how they have understood it. It said: be yourself; they heard: be Debussy."⁵⁶

To imitate or compose after Debussy's style was, for Lalo, "a new servitude" that simply plagiarized his compositional techniques rather than capturing the true essence of his sound. Lalo wrote of Debussy, "what we like in him, what he has that is most admirable and precious, is his poetic sentiment, it is the essence of his sensitivity and his spirit; it is not at all his art and his procedures."⁵⁷ Lalo makes a tenuous distinction between the elusive "spirit" of Debussy's music and Debussy's compositional practices themselves, emphatically denying that these were one in the same. He continued,

Rather, we love his art only because it is the spontaneous expression of his poetic sentiment. When other musicians whose type of spirit and sentiment is entirely apart [from Debussy's], and who do not all possess within themselves this poetry, industriously reproduce certain harmonic progressions or certain orchestral timbres borrowed from *Pelléas*, they produce the most fastidious, vain, and dead work in existence, for the art of M. Debussy cannot be expressed by anyone but M. Debussy himself.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Louis Laloy makes a similar point in the 1908 essay "La musique de l'avenir," theorizing that the unrelenting quest for originality defined the French aesthetic paradigm in force around the turn of the twentieth century. "Every author who does not pursue originality at any cost is disqualified; every inventor of any form or chord who delays proving its effectiveness, exploiting his discoveries, or organizing his conquests, is immediately accused of laziness or cowardice. The march forward is ruthless: we push aside everyone who wants to admire the scenery along the way." Laloy, "La musique de l'avenir," *Mercure de France*, December 1, 1908, 419.

⁵⁶ Lalo, review of String Quartet, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, April 19, 1904. "Voilà donc la leçon que ces jeunes gens ont tirée de l'oeuvre la plus indépendante qui se soit rencontrée depuis un quart de siècle; voilà comment ils l'ont comprise. Elle leur disait : soyez vous-mêmes ; ils ont entendu : soyez Debussy."

⁵⁷ Lalo, review of String Quartet, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, April 19, 1904.

⁵⁸ Lalo, review of String Quartet, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, April 19, 1904.

Lalo effectively forecloses the possibility of viewing as innovative works that take *Pelléas* or any of Debussy's pieces as a stylistic model, since they were not producing their own "spontaneous expression" of "poetic sentiment" within their own music, but merely trying and failing to adopt Debussy's. Ultimately, Lalo concludes that no one can recreate the "poetic sentiment" that animates Debussy's pieces but Debussy himself, establishing a truly unattainable standard of originality and authentic self-expression that many composers of Ravel's generation could not meet, for many of them had in fact been profoundly influenced by Debussy. While imitation of a master may have functioned well in other contexts, Lalo reasoned that composers' attempts to imitate Debussy while endeavoring to retain the sentiment behind the music was a lost cause, owing to "the singularity of their model."⁵⁹

Paradoxically, however, Lalo states that one could theoretically imitate Wagner, by virtue of the fact that Wagner "reunited all the forces of the classical tradition" within his style.⁶⁰ Lalo does not explain exactly what he means by the "classical tradition," or why it would be more acceptable to emulate such a style. Nonetheless, I believe he may be referencing both a common trope that the "classical tradition" and classical style are universal and belong to all composers,⁶¹ as well as a reactionary, "classical" vision of Wagner. In a recent article, Steven Huebner theorizes that, in France of the early twentieth century, a prominent sub-section of conservative

⁵⁹ Lalo, review of String Quartet, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, April 19, 1904.

⁶⁰ On the role of Wagnerism in debates concerning Symbolism and the beginnings of *debussysme*, see Kieffer, "Wagnérisme and the Aesthetic of Sentiment," chap. 1 in *Debussy's Critics*. In Kieffer's view, Debussy's music "came to stand for an entirely different set of values from those that formed the Symbolist movement in the late 1880s; that, indeed, Debussy was *not* the musical fulfillment of Symbolism." (Kieffer, *Debussy's Critics*, 27). On Wagner and Ravel, see Michael Puri, "The Passion of the Passacaille: Ravel, Wagner, *Parsifal*" *Cambridge Opera Journal* 25, no. 3 (2013): 285–318.

⁶¹ The classical style has frequently been portrayed as universal in relation to the music of Mozart, Haydn, and particularly Beethoven. See, for example, Edmund Morris, *Beethoven: The Universal Composer* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005) and Mark Whale, "How Universal is Beethoven? Music, Culture, and Democracy," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 23, no. 1 (2015): 25–47.

composers claimed Wagner not as a revolutionary, but rather as an heir to the grand tradition of the German symphony and the means of tonal organization and motivic development that the genre implied.⁶² Among conservative composers such as d'Indy, for instance, Wagner was seen to embody classical ideals such as logic and unity.⁶³ Yet Lalo still ultimately saw Wagnerites as imitators: “What has the imitation of Wagner actually produced?”⁶⁴ Lalo asked rhetorically, implying that any imitation of Wagner was hopelessly derivative. Imitating Debussy, on the other hand, occupied an even lower stratum on Lalo's hierarchy of imitation as “pure chimera and aberration.”⁶⁵

Lalo thus placed Debussy at the forefront of a new stylistic movement, as Wagner before him, yet he believed this movement would exhaust itself more quickly than Wagnerism because Debussy's style could be imitated readily.

And here is the sole achievement they will bring to pass: they will succeed in making of Debussy a cliché, like their elders had made of Wagner; they will succeed in this more quickly and easily, as its more straightforward form is easier to reduce to a formula; and they will tire us with *Pelléas*, as the others tired us of the *Ring Cycle*: great work, all in all, for which we should be grateful.⁶⁶

Even more so than Wagner's, Debussy's style could be distilled into a formula for which *Pelléas* served as the blueprint. According to Lalo, this was both a blessing and a curse: on the one hand,

⁶² Steven Huebner, “Classical Wagnerism: Albéric Magnard's ‘Bérénice’” *Journal of Musicology* 34, no. 1 (2017): 115–147.

⁶³ Huebner, “Classical Wagnerism,” 132.

⁶⁴ Lalo, review of String Quartet, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, April 19, 1904.

⁶⁵ Lalo, review of String Quartet, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, April 19, 1904. “c'est chimère et c'est aberration toutes pures.”

⁶⁶ Lalo, review of String Quartet, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, April 19, 1904. “Et voici l'unique succès à quoi ils atteindront: ils réussiront à tirer de M. Debussy un ‘poncif,’ comme leurs aînés en ont tiré un de Wagner ; ils y réussiront plus vite et plus aisément, car la forme plus étroite est plus facile à réduire en formule ; et ils nous lasseront de *Pelléas*, comme les autres nous ont lassés de la *Tétralogie* : belle besogne, et dont vraiment on leur peut savoir gré.”

Debussy would be remembered as the standard-bearer of a new aesthetic, but on the other, his style risked becoming a cliché, denuded of its former wonder and substance.

Histoires naturelles: Manufacturing the “Affaire Debussy-Ravel” and Ravel’s New

“Humoristic” Style

Ravel’s reception in the French press in the years immediately following 1905 reflected three major currents: a reactionary old guard, exemplified by Pierre Lalo and Auguste Sérieyx; pro-Ravel critics who were also members of the Apaches, namely Émile Vuillermoz, Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi, and Jean Marnold; and critics who claimed a moderate perspective, such as Louis Laloy and Henry Gauthier-Villars (Willy). In general, critics of the old guard recognized Ravel’s prodigious talent as an orchestrator but branded him as a rank imitator of Debussy’s, refusing to accord Ravel any right to claim aspects of his style as particularly innovative. Meanwhile, pro-Ravel critics in the Apaches highlighted aspects of Ravel’s style that stood in contradistinction to Debussy’s, such as the supposed emotional restraint and emphasis on rhythm and meter in his music. Middle-of-the-road critics attempted to acknowledge innovative aspects of both composers’ work. Despite the professed admiration of Debussy among composers in Ravel’s circle, critical perspectives on Ravel’s music did not correspond well to similar divisions between pro- and anti-Debussy criticism. Lalo, for instance, praised Debussy for the use of an innovative harmonic and timbral palette, yet condemned Ravel for using similar techniques. Yet, at the same time, many who defended Debussy also wrote laudatory reviews of Ravel’s music, among them Laloy.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the negative press that hounded Ravel around 1907–1908 eventually escalated into what François Lesure would later term the “Affaire

Debussy-Ravel” as the press pitted the aesthetic visions of each composer against one another in a sensationalized power struggle. The press scandal coalesced around Ravel’s *Histoires naturelles* (“Natural Histories”),⁶⁷ a five-movement song cycle based on text from a collection of prose poems of the same name by Jules Renard.⁶⁸ *Histoires naturelles* occupies an important position in Ravel’s compositional output as one of his few song cycles: the two cycles pre-dating *Histoires naturelles* were *Shéhérazade* (1903), on orientalist texts by Tristan Klingsor, originally scored for mezzo-soprano and orchestra and later arranged for piano and voice (1903), and *Cinq melodies populaires grecques* (1904–1906), based on Greek folk songs translated into French by Michel-Dmitri Calvocoressi. Between the late 1890s and 1903, Ravel had written a number of cantatas for the Prix de Rome as well as a handful of individual songs for piano and voice, but the song cycle was among his first essays in long-form genres.⁶⁹ Ravel conceived both *Shéhérazade* and *Histoires naturelles* as models for operatic projects—*Shéhérazade* was planned as an opera based on the *Thousand and One Nights*, and *Histoires naturelles* became a model for *L’Heure espagnole*.⁷⁰ This may point to a potential compositional strategy by which Ravel sought to build up operatic works from song cycles.

⁶⁷ This title has sometimes been translated as *Nature Stories*, but could also be translated as *Natural Stories* or *Natural Histories*, with accompanying connotations similar to those that exist in English. The phrase “Histoire naturelle” (in the singular) was often used as a title for both zoological and botanical treatises, but in the late 1700s, it had also been used for studies of various othered peoples, including the Corsicans, Japanese, and Vietnamese, suggesting a possible resonance with racist discursive practices. See, for example, Engelbert Kaempfer’s *Histoire naturelle, civile, et ecclesiastique de l’empire du Japon* (The Hague: P. Gosse & J. Neaulme, 1729). For texts and translations of the lyrics to the Ravel song cycle, see <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/145>.

⁶⁸ In writing *Histoires naturelles*, Renard may have also been punning on his own surname, which means “fox” in French.

⁶⁹ Ravel’s Prix de Rome cantatas include: *Les Bayadères* (Lost, 1900), *Myrra* (1901), *Alcyone* (1902), and *Alyssa* (1903).

⁷⁰ *Shéhérazade* was planned as a “fairy-tale opera” set to a libretto written by Ravel himself, based on the Arabic-language folktales of *The Thousand and One Nights*. Yet Ravel would complete only the overture, *Shéhérazade, Ouverture de féerie* (*Shéhérazade, Fairy Overture*, 1898). Due to the poor reception of the overture at a concert of the Société Nationale on May 27, 1889, he withdrew the work from publication, but it is not clear whether he had completely abandoned any hope of staging the eventual opera at this point. Critics have vehemently disagreed as to

Renard's *Histoires naturelles* is a collection of prose poems that fancifully describe the lives of animals, anthropomorphizing them by imagining them within the context of everyday human dramas. For instance, in "Le Paon" ("The Peacock"), a peacock endlessly readies himself for his wedding day—preening himself, fanning his feathers, and calling out in vain ("Léon!"), for his mate never arrives. Ravel's choice of text itself was seen as bizarre in an aesthetic landscape in which song cycles typically featured romantic themes—one could cite, for example, Debussy's considerable catalogue of songs written for Madame Blanche Vasnier in his early career.⁷¹

Although at a significant remove from the premiere of *Histoires naturelles*, Laloy's account in his 1928 memoir, *La Musique retrouvée*, provides a rare and thorough account of what actually transpired in the room that evening. Laloy writes: "The choice of this prose—full of artifice and contracted by irony—seemed such a challenge to set to music that some listeners, insensitive to the charm of the chords, supposed that the composer wanted to make fun of them."⁷² Laloy's version of events would portray Ravel's unusual choice of text as imbued with "artifice" and "irony," yet some members of the audience could not be won over by Ravel's harmonies. At the end of the performance, some members of the audience booed—among them loyalists of D'Indy and the Schola—yet others applauded enthusiastically, calling for an encore.

whether the 1903 song cycle uses material Ravel originally intended for the opera, and the lack of source material for the opera further compounds the problem, as the overture is the only existing source. For a summary of critical opinion on this issue, see Andrew Deruchie, "Ravel's *Shéhérazade* and Fin-de-Siècle Orientalism" (master's thesis, McGill University, 2000), 65–67.

⁷¹ On this repertoire, see James R. Briscoe, "Debussy's Earliest Songs," *College Music Symposium* 24, no. 2 (Fall 1984): 81–95.

⁷² Laloy, *La musique retrouvée* (Paris: Plon, 1928), 162.

The composer and theorist Charles Koechlin gave another eyewitness account, writing that the audience took offense to the declamation expressing shock at the use of rests in “Le Grillon” (“The Cricket”) to literally depict points at which the insect was “resting,” and jeered loudly at a phrase in “Le Martin-Pêcheur” (“The Kingfisher”): “Ça n’a pas mordu ce soir” (Not a bite this evening).⁷³ The musical passages in question are given below as Example 2.2 and Example 2.3. Both these examples show passages from “Le Grillon” in which the piano’s rhythmically steady accompaniment, replete with high-register grace-note chirping, completely drops out when the text describes the cricket “resting” (“Il se repose” // “He rests”). Example 2.3, however, adds another layer to the sonic joke, which is preceded by the line, “Puis il remonte sa miniscule montre” (“Then, he resets his tiny watch”). The musical punchline this time is not only the cricket resting, but also the watch stopping, prefiguring a similar musical pun in *L’Heure espagnole* when Ramiro’s watch stops.⁷⁴ Example 2.4 shows the other offending musical passage cited in Koechlin’s account, the opening phrase from “Le Martin-Pêcheur,” in which a fisherman laments, “Ça n’a pas mordu ce soir” (“Not a bite this evening”). Once again, the piano accompaniment drops out: the only sound accompanying the text is the progressive decay of the *pianissimo* attack of an overly *recherché* B7b5b9 chord intoned on the second beat of m. 2 (although the bass note of this chord is held over from m. 1).

⁷³ Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 52.

⁷⁴ The musical pun in question occurs in Scene I of *L’Heure espagnole*. As Torquemada is examining Ramiro’s watch, the orchestral accompaniment drops out completely as he remarks, “The watch has just stopped” (“C’est à présent la montre qui s’arrête”). See also Chapter 4 of this dissertation for my analysis of musical jokes in *L’Heure espagnole*.

Il se re_pose.

ppp *long* *p*

EXAMPLE 2.2: The Cricket Resting in “Le Grillon,” mm. 31–34. (Paris: Durand & Fils, 1907).

Puis il remonte sa minuscule mon_tre.

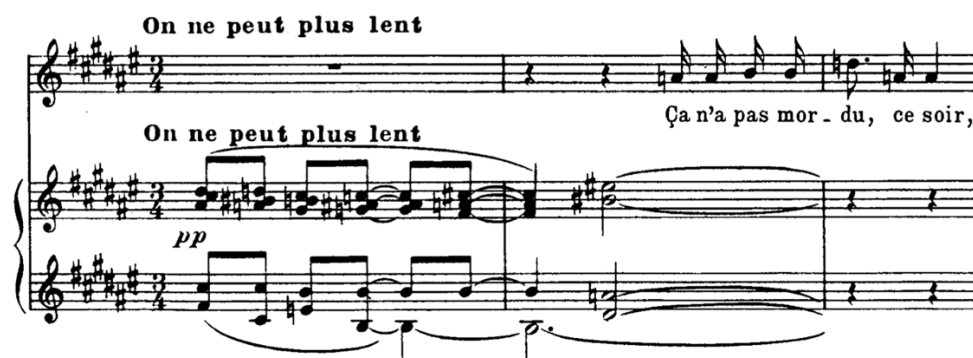
pp *ppp* *long*

A volonté

A-t-il fi_ni? est-elle cas_sée? Il se re_pose encore un peu.

suivez

EXAMPLE 2.3: The Cricket Resets his Tiny Watch. “Le Grillon,” mm. 35–39 (Paris: Durand & Fils, 1907).



EXAMPLE 2.4: Opening of “Le Martin-Pêcheur,” mm. 1–2 (Paris: Durand & Fils, 1907).

Judging by the reaction of some listeners, who laughed and jeered at these musical gestures, the musical effect of this total clearing out of the pianistic accompaniment seemed akin to a musical punchline, but not everyone appreciated Ravel’s humor. The overly lugubrious and harmonically complex accompaniment to the opening of “Le Martin-Pêcheur,” replete with cluster chords in the right hand, may also have seemed rather ridiculous. Evidently, some listeners at the premiere of *Histoires naturelles* thought this kind of musical literalism—or, what might be considered musical slapstick comedy—simply went too far.

Two weeks after the performance, Auguste Sérieyx, a disciple of D’Indy’s and a professor of harmony at the Schola Cantorum, published an excoriating review in the *Courrier musical* in which he proclaimed it his mission to defend against the “musical decay” represented by Ravel’s poor excuse for “music.”⁷⁵ Sérieyx found Ravel’s use of rests in “Le Grillon,” as well as his use of glissandi and dissonant seconds in “La Pintade” to portray the squawks of the guinea fowl, to be in poor taste.

In response, a flurry of reviews appeared on every side of the debate. The timeline below shows how quickly new opinions of *Histoires naturelles* were generated in the months following

⁷⁵Auguste Sérieyx, “Société Nationale,” review of *Histoires naturelles*, by Maurice Ravel, *Courrier musical* 10, no. 1 (January 1, 1907), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=iau.31858042544100&view=1up&seq=89&size=125>.

the premiere of the piece, whether they were printed publicly or expressed in private correspondence (see Table 2.1 below). Clearly, the song cycle provoked much debate among musicologists, critics, and composers, soon fueling a press scandal that saw Ravel's name splashed across the pages of every prominent French music publication, from *Le Temps* to *Le Mercure musical*, and even prominent regional journals such as the *Revue musicale de Lyon*. On average, new criticism on *Histoires naturelles* or the ongoing problem of Ravel's relationship to *debussysme* seems to have appeared at least once every two weeks after its premiere, for a period of at least six months, reflecting the sustained attention focused on the piece and Ravel as a composer during this period.⁷⁶ To an extent, this was a continuation of a previous trend: press coverage on *Miroirs* (1905) in the previous year had similarly focused on Ravel's relationship to *debussysme*, but the frequency of coverage of *Histoires naturelles* was on a different order of magnitude.

TIMELINE OF THE "AFFAIRE DEBUSSY-RAVEL"

Date	Event	Remarks
January 12, 1907	Premiere of <i>Histoires naturelles</i> at Société Nationale	
January 15, 1907	Carraud, review of <i>Histoires naturelles</i> in <i>La Liberté</i>	
January 20, 1907	C. Ch. [Chambelann?], review in <i>Le Guide musical</i>	
February 1, 1907	Sérieyx, review of <i>Histoires naturelles</i> in <i>Courrier musical</i>	

⁷⁶ *Histoires naturelles* was not the only work of Ravel's premiered during this period: Ravel's orchestration of "Une barque sur l'océan" premiered at about the same time, with the Concerts-Colonne. As a result, some of the coverage of *Histoires naturelles* is actually embedded within discussions of "Une barque sur l'océan" and vice versa.

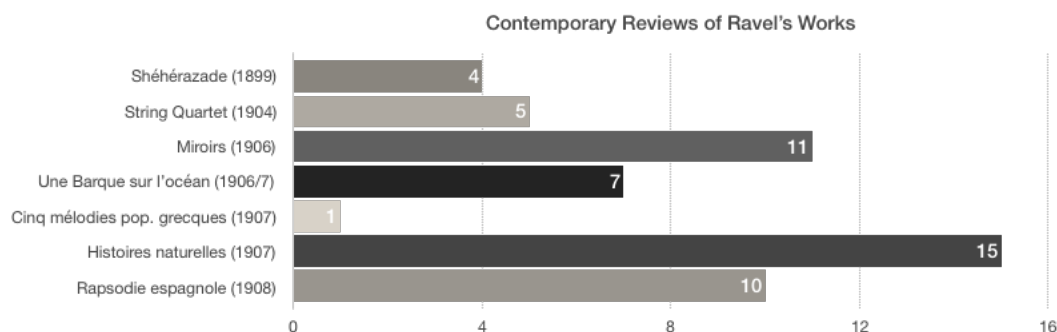
February 1, 1907	S., review of <i>Histoires naturelles</i> in <i>Revue musical</i>	
February 15, 1907	Laloy, review of <i>Histoires naturelles</i> in <i>Mercure musical</i>	
February 15, 1907	Jean d'Udine, review of "Une barque sur l'océan" and <i>Histoires naturelles</i> in <i>Courrier musical</i>	
February 22, 1907	Debussy, letter to Laloy	Debussy lambasts Laloy for comparing <i>Histoires naturelles</i> to Mussorgsky's <i>The Nursery</i>
February 25, 1907	Debussy, letter to Durand	Debussy confirms receipt of score for <i>Histoires naturelles</i> from Durand
March 1, 1907	Calvocoressi, review in <i>Courrier musical</i>	
March 8, 1907	Debussy, letter to Laloy	Further critiques Laloy's review of <i>Histoires naturelles</i> , discounting the idea of "humoristic" music
March 15, 1907	Laloy, second review in <i>Mercure musical</i>	
March 19, 1907	Lalo, review in <i>Le Temps</i>	
End of March or Early April 1907	Ravel sends letter to the editor-in-chief of <i>Le Temps</i> defending himself against charges of <i>debussysme</i>	
April 9, 1907	Lalo responds to Ravel's letter in <i>Le Temps</i>	
April 14, 1907	Vallas, "A travers la presse," <i>Revue musicale de Lyon</i>	Summary of critical reception of new works, including <i>Histoires naturelles</i>
April 15, 1907	Laloy, "Les Ecoliers" <i>Mercure musical</i>	Decries infighting among critics, dismisses notion that Debussy no longer leads the musical avant-garde

May 1, 1907	Léon Vallas (and Jean Marnold), “ ‘L’Affaire Ravel’ L’opinion de M. Jean Marnold,” <i>Revue musicale de Lyon</i>	
May 10, 1907	Calvocoressi, “Les Histoires naturelles de Maurice Ravel et l’imitation <i>debussyste</i> ” in <i>Grande Revue</i>	
June 1, 1907	Henry Gauthier-Villars (Willy), summary of the debate in <i>Mercure de France</i>	
June 15, 1907	Vuillermoz, reply to Laloy in <i>Mercure musical</i>	
July 20, 1907	Georges Jean-Aubry, review in <i>Censeur Politique et Littéraire</i>	
November 1907	Joseph de Marliave, review in <i>La Nouvelle Revue</i>	
March 15, 1908	Premiere of Ravel’s <i>Rapsodie espagnole</i>	
August 18, 1909	Lalo, review of the 1908–9 concert season	On <i>debussyste</i> imitation
February 26, 1910	Lalo, review of Debussy’s <i>Ibéria</i>	
February 27, 1910	<i>Revue musicale de Lyon</i> retrospective on press reception of <i>Histoires naturelles</i>	

TABLE 2.1: Timeline of the “Affaire Debussy-Ravel.”

Histoires naturelles gave rise to the largest number of articles that had yet been written about any work of Ravel’s, as I show in the bar graph below (Example 2.5), using data

assembled from Stephen Zank's *Maurice Ravel: A Guide to Research*.⁷⁷ While Zank's research guide is not meant to be definitive, it represents the most comprehensive repository of current data on contemporary criticism of Ravel's music and thus comprises what I believe to be a representative sample of critical opinion on Ravel.



EXAMPLE 2.5: Contemporary Reviews of Ravel's Works⁷⁸

The graph also reveals another important trend, showing that coverage on Ravel's music soared following two major press scandals: the 1905 Prix de Rome debacle and the 1907 "Affaire Debussy-Ravel" fiasco involving *Histoires naturelles*.

While I clearly cannot summarize every aspect of the reception of *Histoires naturelles* here, I aim to show that press coverage of the song cycle played a significant role in framing Ravel's new aesthetics as oriented toward humor and temporality. Although *Histoires naturelles* has received scant attention as a piece that encapsulates Ravel's aesthetics or indeed the aesthetic direction of French music as a whole at this particular historical juncture, Gaston Carraud, for

⁷⁷ Data compiled from articles mentioned in Stephen Zank, "Contemporary Criticism of Ravel's Music," in *Maurice Ravel: A Guide to Research* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 402–422.

⁷⁸ The graph limits data on contemporary reviews to the year in which the piece in question was premiered (for instance, all data on reviews of the String Quartet is collected from 1904, not subsequent performances). Reviews referenced in the graph also include articles which focus primarily on aesthetics in which *Histoires naturelles* is mentioned.

one, had to take the somewhat drastic step of assuaging his readers that the controversial work would not lead to the demise of French musical aesthetics. In the Parisian daily *La Liberté*, Carraud wrote that French music would certainly survive the shock of *Histoires naturelles*, which at any rate did nothing to diminish Ravel's promise as a composer.

So it is that after having initially inspired unwavering enthusiasm, he has been unanimously dragged through the mud over the last two weeks—all because he put on a few tiny farces from the Zoo [*Jardin d'Acclimatation*]⁷⁹ at the Société Nationale. Let me simply say that this is ridiculous. French Art is not in danger because of this.⁸⁰

Carraud expressed disbelief that the press had been so hypercritical in its evaluation of *Histoires naturelles*: at best, *Histoires naturelles* inspired a certain degree of enthusiasm among Ravel's devotees, and at worst, it was a work of light entertainment possibly worthy of ridicule—mere “farces from the Zoo.” Either way, it did not reach the formidable dimensions of an aesthetic shift and hence would not imperil the soul of French Art.

But, Louis Laloy, in the first of his reviews of *Histoires naturelles*, had an entirely different evaluation of the piece, seeing it as a reflection of Ravel's coming-of-age as a composer worthy of comparison to the Russian master Mussorgsky. Laloy wrote: “I would readily say that the whole spirit of Mussorgsky's ‘The Nursery’ can be found therein, but united with remarkable surety of taste and prodigious ability.”⁸¹ But the fact that Laloy ascribed any Mussorgskian

⁷⁹ On the symbolism of the Jardin d'Acclimatation as an exemplar of racialized colonial discourse on acclimatization and its relationship to collections of foreign musical instruments in France, see Pasler, “The Utility of Musical Instruments in the Racial and Colonial Agendas of Late Nineteenth-Century France.” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 129, no. 1 (2004): 31.

⁸⁰ Cited in “L’Affaire Ravel,” *Revue musicale de Lyon* (February 10, 1907): 521. “Voici qu’après avoir excité des enthousiasmes intransigeants, il est depuis quinze jours unanimement traîné dans la boue, parce qu’il a fait chanter à la *Société Nationale* quelques petites farces de Jardin d’Acclimatation. Permettez-moi de le dire : c’est idiot. L’art français n’est pas en danger pour cela.”

⁸¹ Laloy, “Le Mois — concerts, Société Nationale — Histoires naturelles, de Jules Renard, par Maurice Ravel,” *S.I.M. Revue musicale* 3 (15 February 1907): 155. Cited in Lesure, “‘L’Affaire’ Debussy-Ravel: Lettres inédites,” 232. “Je dirais volontiers que tout l’esprit de la ‘Chambre d’enfants’ de Mussorgski se trouve là, mais uni à quelle sûreté de goût et quelle prodigieuse habileté.”

influence to Ravel seems to have touched a nerve with Debussy. A week after the review came out, Debussy fired off a reply to Laloy, questioning his critical judgment:

I have received the second issue of the S.I.M. and am shocked to read that a man of your taste has sacrificed the pure and primal masterpiece that is “The Nursery” on the altar of the contrived Americanism of M. Ravel’s “Histoires naturelles.” In spite of his undeniable ability, it could only be music that is “out of place.” Leave it all to the butler, then, Calvocoressi.⁸²

Distancing *Histoires naturelles* from the impossible heights of Mussorgski’s *The Nursery*, Debussy cast it down to earth as “contrived Americanism,”⁸³ and told Laloy to leave the job of defending Ravel to one of his slavish acolytes, the music critic and member of the Apaches, Michel Dmitri Calvocoressi. Perhaps Debussy, who by that point had benefitted from Laloy’s impassioned defenses of his aesthetics, betrayed a slight jealousy that Laloy had turned his attention to a younger, up-and-coming composer.

However, as Lesure notes, Debussy may not even have heard or seen the *Histoires naturelles* for himself before he dashed off that particular letter to Laloy. Just three days later, he wrote Jacques Durand to say that he had successfully received the score of *Histoires naturelles* from him, and evaluated the work slightly more generously than before:

Dear friend, thank you for the ‘Histoires naturelles’...It’s extremely odd! It’s artificial and chimerical, rather like a magician’s house. But “The Swan,”⁸⁴ is nevertheless quite pretty music.⁸⁵

⁸² Cited in Lesure, “‘L’Affaire’ Debussy-Ravel: Lettres inédites,” 232. “Je reçois le No 2 de la S.I.M. et m’étonne d’y lire qu’un homme de votre goût sacrifie délibérément le pur et instinctif chef d’œuvre qu’est ‘Chambre d’enfants’ à l’américanisme voulu des ‘Histoires naturelles’ de M. Ravel. Malgré l’indéniable habileté de celui-ci, elles ne peuvent être que de la musique ‘déplacée.’ Laissez donc cela au valet de chambre Calvocoressi.”

⁸³ While it is unclear exactly what Debussy means by “contrived Americanism” in this context, he may be referring to the percussive piano accompaniment of “La Pintade.” At points, the texture of the piano accompaniment resembles a ragtime march rhythm: in 4/4, the left hand articulates staccato, eighth-note bass notes followed by stabbing, staccato eighth-note chords in the right hand.

⁸⁴ “Le Cygne,” the third piece in *Histoires naturelles*.

⁸⁵ Cited in Lesure, “‘L’Affaire’ Debussy-Ravel: Lettres inédites,” 232. “Cher ami, merci pour les ‘Histoires naturelles’...C’est excessivement curieux ! C’est artificiel et chimérique un peu comme la maison d’un sorcier. Mais le Cygne est tout de même de la bien jolie musique.”

Debussy's appraisal of *Histoires naturelles* as "extremely odd," "excessively curious," and "rather like a magician's house" could hardly be said to qualify as high praise, yet his comments also seem to recognize Ravel's talent for creating magical, whimsical sonic textures in his work. His comments to Durand also seem more apt than his perplexing assertion to Laloy that the most offensive aspect of the piece was its "Americanism." To be sure, Debussy clearly adjusted the tone of his writing to fit his prospective reader—in this case his publisher—yet Lesure's theory holds: the fact remains that Debussy had not cited any specific details about *Histoires naturelles* in his previous letter to Laloy, perhaps because he had had no direct knowledge of the work at that point.

On March 8, he again wrote to Laloy, this time reflecting on the aesthetic implications of *Histoires naturelles* and Ravel's new "humoristic" style:

As for Ravel, I recognize your usual ingenuity there...Although it doesn't appear to me that he has completely found "his path," he could at least thank you for having shown him one...But, between you and me, do you really believe in "humoristic" music? For one thing, it can't exist by itself; it always requires some kind of context: either from a text or a situation...Two chords with their feet in the air, or in any other ridiculous position, won't necessarily be "humoristic" and can't objectively become so. I agree with you in recognizing that Ravel couldn't be any more gifted, but what irritates me is that he portrays himself as a "trickster," or, better yet, as a charming Fakir who makes flowers grow out of a chair...Unfortunately, a trick is always prepared, and it can surprise only once!⁸⁶

Debussy again makes a joke at Ravel's expense, remarking that even if Ravel had not quite "found 'his path'" as a composer, then he should at least thank Laloy for having indicated one for him in "humoristic" music. Debussy's suggestion that Ravel did not choose this aesthetic

⁸⁶ Debussy to Laloy, March 8, 1907. Cited in Lesure, "L'Affaire Debussy-Ravel," 232. "Quant à Ravel, je reconnais là votre ingéniosité habituelle...S'il ne me paraît pas absolument qu'il ait trouvé 'sa voie', il pourra vous remercier de lui en avoir montré une...Mais, entre nous, est-ce que vous croyez sincèrement à la musique 'humoristique' ? D'abord ça n'existe pas en soi ; il lui faudra toujours l'occasion : soit d'un texte, soit d'une situation...Deux accords, les pieds en l'air, ou dans n'importe quelle autre position saugrenue, ne seront pas forcément 'humoristiques' et ne pourront le devenir que d'une façon empirique. Je suis d'accord avec vous pour reconnaître que Ravel est on ne peut plus doué, mais ce qui m'agace, c'est son attitude de 'faiseur de tours' ou mieux de fakir charmeur, qui fait pousser de fleurs autour d'une chaise ... Malheureusement, un tour, c'est toujours préparé, et ça ne peut étonner qu'une fois !"

direction himself but rather envisioned it with Laloy's help is revealing: not only does Debussy take his own *debussyste* dig at Ravel by claiming he had no clear "path" before Laloy suggested one to him, he also interrogates this approach in a genuine way, questioning whether it can stand alone as a self-sufficient aesthetic. Presumably, Ravel's music required a pre-existing context—a generic contract, if you will—to make the humor function. Music could not be funny in and of itself. Moreover, Debussy complained that Ravel was a Fakir and a trickster, yet would eventually run out of tricks with which to amuse his audience: the sonic punchlines of *Histoires naturelles* would never remain fresh on multiple hearings. In other words, once one had heard one Ravellian trick, one had heard them all.

In his 1907 review of *Histoires naturelles*, Pierre Lalo similarly criticized Ravel's pretensions to humor, characterizing his music as stilted, dry, and fundamentally unmusical.⁸⁷ Furthermore, he complained that the chord progressions contained in *Histoires naturelles* were unnecessarily complex, calling them "industriously obscure [*rarissime*]...contorted and complicated."⁸⁸ Where he did commend Ravel's style was in his commentary on *Miroirs*, remarking that the set of piano pieces showed some originality in their sheer virtuosity. Nevertheless, he almost immediately went back on his word, quipping that these works represented a mechanical kind of virtuosity that was nowhere close to the true musicality exemplified by Debussy's style: "this affair of virtuosity, mechanism, and compositional technique [*écriture*] hardly has anything to do with music at all."⁸⁹ As we saw above, in his review of Debussy's *Ibéria*, Lalo also scorned Ravel's use of timbre as a superficial

⁸⁷ Lalo, review of *Histoires naturelles*, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, March 19, 1907.

⁸⁸ Lalo, review of *Histoires naturelles*, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, March 19, 1907.

⁸⁹ Lalo, review of *Histoires naturelles*, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, March 19, 1907. "Mais cette affaire de virtuosité, de mécanisme et d'écriture ne touche que fort indirectement à la musique."

compositional procedure without any substance behind it, without any ability to depict.

Interwoven in this same article is Lalo's assessment of the orchestration of "Une barque sur l'océan," which he accused of presenting a mere catalogue of interesting timbral effects. For Lalo, the orchestration of "Une barque sur l'océan," like *Histoires naturelles*, was a poor imitation of Debussy's greatest works: *l'Après-midi d'un faune*, "Nuages," and *Pelléas et Mélisande*. To put it succinctly, Ravel's music was Debussy without Debussy's *sensibilité*. According to Lalo, Debussy's sensibility resided in his consummate ability to depict natural imagery as well as human emotion:

Sensibility before the spectacle of nature, which allows him, without any concern for description to evoke the soul of things: in *l'Après-midi d'un faune*, the ardent joy of day; in *Nuages*, the weightless silence of the night, the movement and the shadow of clouds passing over the face of the moon; in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, melancholy and felicity dispersed in the night air, and the beauty of moonlight on the ocean waves, the soft crashing of waves in the darkness, the trembling of wind and water, the mystery of the night and the sea. Sensibility before the actions and the emotions of mankind: recall the moving emotionality, the profound humanity that produce the beauty of the final scene of *Pelléas*.⁹⁰

Ravel's works, in Lalo's estimation, plainly did not measure up to Debussy's depictions of the true "soul of things"—their true essence. Worse yet, Lalo accused Ravel and the other *debussystes* of having the audacity to put a work such as "Une barque sur l'océan" or *Histoires naturelles* up against Debussy's greatest large-scale orchestral and operatic masterpieces, "as though one were placing before a grand palace one's miniature sugar sculpture reproduction."⁹¹

⁹⁰ Lalo, review of *Histoires naturelles*, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, March 19, 1907. "Sensibilité devant le spectacle de la nature, qui lui permet, sans aucun souci descriptif, d'évoquer l'âme des choses : dans *l'Après-midi d'un faune*, la joie ardente du jour ; dans *Nuages*, le silence léger de la nuit, le mouvement et l'ombre des nuées qui passent sur la lune ; dans *Pelléas et Mélisande*, soit la mélancolie et la félicité éparses dans l'air du couchant, et la beauté du soir rayonnant sur les flots, soit le sourd battement des vagues dans les ténèbres, le frémissement du vent et de l'eau, le mystère de la nuit et de la mer. Sensibilité devant les actes et les émotions des hommes : rappelez-vous cette émotion pénétrante, cette humanité profonde qui font la beauté de la scène finale de *Pelléas*."

⁹¹ "comme on placerait devant un palais merveilleux sa minuscule reproduction en sucre filé." Lalo, review of *Histoires naturelles*, by Maurice Ravel *Le Temps*, March 19, 1907. Lalo makes a similar point of ridiculing the miniaturism of the *debussystes* in his review of the 1909 season, commenting on a surfeit of pieces of "petites proportions" (small proportions), and the apparent impatience of the audience for compositional techniques supposedly borrowed from Debussy, which for Lalo had become so predictable that they could be boiled down to a "recipe." See Lalo, "La Musique," *Le Temps*, August 18, 1909.

But Ravel still had one more trick up his sleeve: a complete parody of the *debussysme* of which he was accused, which would manifest itself in *L'Heure espagnole*. As we shall see in Chapter 4, precisely the elements that Lalo critiques are on full display in *L'Heure*: mechanism, explorations of timbre and texture, the miniature one-act architecture.

The Cavalry Arrives: Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi's Defense of Ravel

In the March 1, 1907 edition of the *Courrier musical*, Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi came to Ravel's defense to counter charges of *debussysme*, while also taking advantage of Ravel's moment in the spotlight to publicize his works. At stake was the public perception of Ravel as an imitator rather than an innovator: not only did Calvocoressi need to convince his readers that Ravel's music was different from Debussy's, he also had to convince them it was original. In this article, Calvocoressi barely camouflages his attempts to promote Ravel, describing him as a composer worth watching precisely because his recent works had "provoked such passionate discussions."⁹² Calvocoressi implies that this tendency to spur debate itself was an indication of Ravel's genius, claiming that only "interesting productions" were the subject of such intense scrutiny and debate.⁹³

Calvocoressi goes on to express his astonishment that Ravel continued to be branded as *debussyste*, whereas he thought the debate had already been put to rest two years earlier with his 1905 article on Ravel's String Quartet.⁹⁴ According to Calvocoressi, the intervening years had

⁹² Calvocoressi, "Cercle Musical," *Le Courrier Musical* (March 1, 1907): 141–142.

⁹³ Calvocoressi, "Cercle Musical," 141.

⁹⁴ Calvocoressi mistakenly cites the publication date of his own article as February 15, 1905, whereas it in fact appeared on March 1, 1905.

only sharpened the differences between their styles, which were especially evident in Ravel's new works:

Two years later, new works have been produced which accentuate the differences that exist, both in terms of spirit and substance, between the works of M. Debussy and those of M. Ravel... What remains particular to M. Ravel is the almost complete lack of stylized interpretation. By this, I mean that artistic elaboration, for him, is simply the process of transcribing into sound the things that have provoked in him a desire to create [*l'émotion créatrice*, literally "creative emotion"]; in listening to his works, one must be capable of feeling, of reproducing inside oneself the emotional process by which these works are produced.⁹⁵

For Calvocoressi, in contrast to Debussy's supposedly highly stylized music, Ravel's works had nothing about them that could be considered emotional, apart from the emotion he invested into creating them. Any emotion that could be found in Ravel's music was *émotion créatrice*: a desire to create. In this context, *émotion créatrice* seems to describe a work ethic more than any particular attention to the dangerously *debussyste* construction of sentiment. Effectively, Calvocoressi seems to ask Ravel's audience to reconceive of their relationship with emotion, relating to Ravel's works not on a visceral, sentimental level but an intellectual one. He asks them to see Ravel not as a conjuror of sentiment, but as a craftsman of sound.

By creating an image of Ravel as an artisan of sound, Calvocoressi stakes out new aesthetic territory for Ravel, but also potentially forecloses the possibility that Ravel's works could be seen as emotional in and of themselves. Calvocoressi describes Ravel's works as primarily "expressive" as opposed to Debussy's works, which he characterizes as "decorative," perhaps passing judgment on Debussy's supposedly excessive use of ornamentation.⁹⁶ His descriptions of the emotional characteristics (or lack thereof) of Ravel's works are frustratingly vague. Calvocoressi's statement on listening to Ravel's music is perhaps the most curious: "in

⁹⁵ Calvocoressi, "Cercle musicale," 141.

⁹⁶ On the use of ornament and arabesque in Debussy's music, see Bhogal, *Details of Consequence*, particularly chap. 2, "Ornament and the Arabesque from Line to Melody," chap. 3, "Ornament and Virtuosity in French Piano Music," and chap. 4, "Ornament and Antiquity from Debussy's Arabesque to Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*."

listening to his works, one must be capable of feeling, of reproducing inside oneself the emotional process by which these works are produced.”⁹⁷ According to this interpretation, Ravel suppressed the emotion he invested into creating the work, burying it somewhere deep within the musical structure, yet allowing the listener to excavate it. Listening to Ravel’s works “properly” would seem to reverse this process, in which the listener could hear the emotional process of creation in the actual performance of the work, and re-create it for herself in the act of listening. With this statement, Calvocoressi would seem to transfer the burden of locating and interpreting any latent emotional content to the listener. Therefore, the music was not emotional at a surface level, as it were, but required complex mental acrobatics on the part of the audience to make it so. Nevertheless, perhaps the act of listening itself, if done properly, could also bring one closer to the original intent behind Ravel’s works. This process of listening differs vastly from the immediate *frisson* of feeling and sensation described in critical discourse on Debussy. If Debussy’s music was supposed to make one listen rather than think, then perhaps Ravel’s music was supposed to make one reflect on the act of listening itself.

For Calvocoressi, Ravel’s use of rhythm and meter was also central to his defense of Ravel’s originality. Calvocoressi hails “rhythmic suppleness” in particular as one of the distinctive and innovative features of his music:

M. Ravel’s recent works are entirely new with respect to rhythm: there is nothing comparable to the rhythmic suppleness of *Alborada* or the *Barque sur l’Océan*, for example. Therein, barlines have regained their primitive role, the only true one they possess: serving as points of orientation for the performer, so much so that free rhythm, toward which it is evident that music is moving nowadays, has been realized in its entirety.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Calvocoressi, “Cercle musicale,” 141–142.

⁹⁸ Calvocoressi, “Cercle musicale,” 142.

Ravel's music, according to Calvocoressi, exemplifies a trend toward "free rhythm," in which barlines serve no objective function other than as a way of marking time for the performer, but not the listener. Here, it is notable that Calvocoressi emphasizes Ravel's approach to rhythm rather than harmony in "Alborada del gracioso" or "Une barque sur l'océan," the fourth and third movements of *Miroirs*, respectively. Presumably, Calvocoressi sought to counter Lalo's opinion that Ravel's harmony was merely a cheap imitation of Debussy's style.⁹⁹ "Alborada" demonstrates a striking contrast in rhythmic styles over the course of the piece, beginning in a driving *assez vif* 6/8 rhythm reminiscent of Spanish flamenco music and abruptly shifting to a haunting lyrical section that vacillates between rhythmically free *en récitative* passages and a ghostly 3/4 complete with resonant pedal effects.¹⁰⁰ Finally, it returns to the original 6/8 meter, culminating in cascades of technically demanding 32nd-note double fourths and thirds for the right hand. "Une barque sur l'océan," meanwhile, submerges the meter in a haze of arpeggios for the left hand, with the right hand picking out an ethereal, syncopated melody that floats over the texture. While the structure is often intelligible in terms of recurring melodic units in the right hand, as in Example 2.6 below, the meter remains much less so.

⁹⁹ See Lalo's review of *Miroirs* in *Le Temps*, January 30, 1906. Lalo had remarked that the resemblance in style between Ravel and Debussy's harmonies was striking, akin to Debussy's harmonic procedures in *Pelléas*, *l'Après-midi d'un faune*, and *Chansons de Bilitis*.

¹⁰⁰ Ravel calls for the soft pedal and the sustain pedal to be used simultaneously, giving the sound a hushed yet resonant quality (marked "2 *Ped.*" in the score).



EXAMPLE 2.6: Ravel, “Alborada del gracioso,” mm. 1–4.¹⁰¹



EXAMPLE 2.7: Ravel, “Alborada del gracioso,” mm. 63–73, showing transition from 6/8 meter to 3/4 *Plus lent* section.



EXAMPLE 2.8. Ravel, “Une barque sur l’océan,” mm. 1–2.

¹⁰¹ All selections from *Miroirs* are taken from Maurice Ravel, *Miroirs* (London and New York: Edition Peters, 1995).

As we shall see in Chapter 4, these techniques—frequent metric shifts, the use of recurring, short motivic units to denote the passage of time, and the use of Spanish-inflected rhythms—appear abundantly in *L'Heure espagnole*, cementing this engagement with musical time as a new aesthetic direction.¹⁰²

In his evaluation of *Histoires naturelles*, Calvocoressi would praise its “realist” style of declamation, a compositional approach that also reappears in *L'Heure*. He writes:

Not only is the [style of] declamation extremely new and of a remarkable suitability [to the text]; it is also remarkable how original and supple the harmonic style is, while remaining precisely analyzable down to the last detail; and how the author attains a captivating realism while at the same time constructing his music musically, that is, in a clear and autonomous fashion.¹⁰³

For Calvocoressi, it was Ravel’s text setting, above all, that allowed Ravel to lay claim to originality. In contrast to Lalo’s accusations that Ravel’s style was dependent on Debussy’s and wholly unmusical, Calvocoressi claimed that *Histoires naturelles* demonstrated Ravel’s originality: it was “musical,” and “autonomous.” Moreover, unlike Debussy’s harmony, which he would call mysterious and “unanalyzable” in a subsequent review of *Histoires naturelles*,¹⁰⁴ Ravel’s harmony remained limpid and eminently logical despite remaining innovative. With this naturalistic form of text setting, *Histoires naturelles* would capture the rhythmic patterns of speech, thus offering a form of realism not dependent upon stylized depiction and incantation-

¹⁰² Bhogal has written convincingly about short decorative figurations in both Debussy’s and Ravel’s piano music as an indicator of form. See Bhogal, “Ornament and Virtuosity in French Piano Music,” chap. 3 in *Details of Consequence*.

¹⁰³ Calvocoressi, “Cercle musical,” 142.

¹⁰⁴ Calvocoressi, “Les ‘Histoires naturelles’ de M. Ravel et l’imitation Debussyste,” *Grande revue* 41 (May 10, 1907): 514.

like declamation, as Debussy's had been, but rather attentive to the rhythms of the everyday sound of speech.¹⁰⁵

Charting a Middle Ground: Henry Gauthier-Villars (Willy) and Louis Laloy

In contrast to the ideological extremes we have just seen in Lalo's and Calvocoressi's accounts, other reviewers, namely Henry Gauthier-Villars (known by his pen name, Willy) and Louis Laloy, attempted to chart a middle ground, urging moderation in the face of what had become, in just a matter of months, a fierce debate regarding Ravel's originality as a composer. Gauthier-Villars complained that Lalo took Ravel for "a very talented plagiarist and nothing more,"¹⁰⁶ advising his readers to brush off such a fanatical opinion of the composer. However, he also noted that Lalo's review reflected a strain of conservative criticism that seems to have been widespread: the same people who took this "execution without trial" to be a *fait accompli*, he wrote, were the same self-professed music-lovers who "applaud the sectarianism of M. Séryeix, the hardened Scholiste, and the graceful Raymond Bouyer, who is hostile to decadent Lieders, works of art that are more and more amorphous—so he says, the triumph of the spineless, etc. etc.) As a result, Lalo crudely lauds hypo-*debussysme*."¹⁰⁷ Gauthier-Villars's remarks expose important information regarding the reception of Lalo's reviews, implying that they held sway for significant portion—if not a majority—of self-professed music connoisseurs and, by extension, perhaps even a large segment of his own readership. Effectively, he states that many

¹⁰⁵ On the relationship between realism and environmental sound in Ravel's piano pieces involving sonic images of bell sounds, see Alexandra Kieffer, "Bells and the Problem of Realism in Ravel's Early Piano Music," *Journal of Musicology* 34, no. 3 (2017): 432–472.

¹⁰⁶ Henry Gauthier-Villars, "Musique," *Mercure de France* 18, no. 239 (June 1, 1907): 528. "En revanche, le critique du *Temps* tient ce jeune compositeur pour un plagiaire bien doué, sans plus."

¹⁰⁷ Gauthier-Villars, "Musique," 528.

music connoisseurs had not made the effort to educate themselves adequately on the debate, routinely dismissing Ravel out-of-hand, based solely on Lalo's reviews. Moreover, these same connoisseurs espoused an ill-considered support for Sérieyx, a major composer at the Schola Cantorum, and Raymond Bouyer, a music critic for *La Revue politique et littéraire*, both of whom represented a traditionalist, reactionary, and anti-*debussyste* faction within elite Parisian musical circles. Numerous other pieces in the *Mercure de France* around this time also seek to provide a digest of issues relevant to a wider bourgeois readership; thus, the appearance of the "Affaire Debussy-Ravel" in this journal would seem to reflect its primacy in elite Parisian society.

Gauthier-Villars positions himself as a neutral party in the debate, urging his readers to evaluate both sides—exemplified by Lalo and Laloy—with some measure of reason and critical inquiry. Whereas Lalo attempted to shoot down any claim that resemblances between Ravel's and Debussy's music were not the result of plagiarism, Gauthier-Villars counseled a more rational approach, arguing that Lalo's knee-jerk accusation of plagiarism, while inflammatory and eye-catching, did not offer a satisfactory explanation of shared aesthetics in the composers' respective styles. These commonalities, he wrote, were more likely the result of a shared aesthetic milieu: "parallel sensibilities, commonalities of expression, coincidences in technique or aesthetics, influences of one's milieu, etc."¹⁰⁸

In order to carry Lalo's theories to their logical conclusion, Gauthiers-Villars claimed, one would equally have to see Debussy himself as a plagiarist—of Russian music—and every stylistic innovation that came after Debussy as a form of plagiarism. "The accusation of plagiarism," he wrote,

¹⁰⁸ Gauthier-Villars, "Musique," 528–529.

is evidently a more simplistic argument, but it also does not explain anything. If one negates the possibility of these fortuitous similarities, my dear Lalo, one must admit that Debussy is a vile copyist of Russian musicians (in 1886, Rimsky-Korsakov was writing ultra-*debussyste* melodies), and that the author of *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* is imitating servilely that of *Pelléas*, for, like him, he does not always resolve all his appoggiaturas and uses the whole-tone scale, “the eternal Chinese scale,” says the *Revue Bleue*, captivated by what Paul Lacour would call an insidious voluptuousness.¹⁰⁹

Gauthier-Villars critiques the idea that Debussy emerged *ex nihilo* as an innovator, quipping that, by this logic, Rimsky-Korsakov would have written melodies that were anachronistically “*debussyste*.” Furthermore, Paul Dukas’ *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* would be wrongly accused of imitating *Pelléas*, whereas the supposedly innovative features of *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*, such as unresolved appoggiaturas and its use of the whole-tone scale, were actually appropriated from “Chinese music.” Ultimately, Gauthier-Villars’s argument veers away from the question of Ravel’s plagiarism toward *debussysme* in general, reinforcing the idea that compositional techniques now seen as either *debussyste* or literally belonging to Debussy, were not in fact proprietary but appear in other kinds of music.

The term *debussyste* had a complex relationship with pro-Ravel criticism: Gauthier-Villars somewhat paradoxically identifies Lalo as “anti-*debussyste*,” meaning that Lalo did not approve of *debussysme* as the foundation of an entire aesthetic,¹¹⁰ whereas he labels Laloy and Vuillermoz as *debussyste*, and, by implication, also pro-Ravel. Yet the term *debussyste* did not always mean that one was pro-Ravel. According to Gauthier-Villars, Debussy and Ravel were distinct in their approaches and their personalities, but anyone who was using the new, innovative harmonies—that is, seventh, ninth, and thirteenth chords—was essentially a *debussyste*. The harmonies themselves, however, were out there waiting to be discovered, and

¹⁰⁹ Gauthier-Villars, “Musique,” 529. *Insidious Voluptuousness* (*L’insidieuse volupté*) is a 1907 novel by Paul Lacour, also an occasional critic for the *Revue Bleue*, that revolves around a series of male protagonists who are each corrupted inexorably by their romantic entanglements.

¹¹⁰ See Lalo’s critique of *debussysme* in *Le Temps*, March 19, 1907.

did not belong to a particular person or style. As a whole, Gauthier-Villars's review offers a critique of a blind faith in either the pro-Debussy or pro-Ravel camps. However, he cites Calvocoressi's article from the *Grande Revue*¹¹¹ as the last word on the subject, concluding that the composers are ultimately dissimilar, and a large of part of that dissimilarity stemmed from Ravel's commitment to rhythm and meter.

In his account of *Histoires naturelles*, Louis Laloy instead emphasized Ravel's humor, an element of his style which he deemed unique and original to Ravel.¹¹² Laloy claimed that *Histoires naturelles* represented a moment when was beginning to solidify his own aesthetic perspective, exemplified primarily by his sense of emotional sobriety, irony, and humor,¹¹³ although Laloy did quibble that Ravel's early work, especially his piano pieces, contained a "slight overload of ornamentation."¹¹⁴ Like Calvocoressi, Laloy portrays Ravel's works as marvels of emotional restraint, calling Ravel's style "precisely expressive."¹¹⁵ Moreover, Laloy also saw the charm in Ravel's "light, ironic" approach to humor:

A mocking hobgoblin lives in his mind, singing and playing bells, for Ravel discovers in the blink of an eye the unexpected comedy and as it were the secret grin inside all things. And this light, ironic touch, far from lessening the emotion, on the contrary quickens it and makes it more poignant; nothing is closer to tears

¹¹¹ Calvocoressi, "Les 'Histoires naturelles' de M. Ravel et l'imitation Debussyste," *Grande Revue* (May 10, 1907): 508–515.

¹¹² Laloy, "Maurice Ravel," *Le Mercure musical et bulletin français de la S.I.M.* (March 15, 1907): 279–282. Cited in English translation in Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 249–251.

¹¹³ Of course, emotional sobriety, irony, and humor are now familiar tropes in Ravel studies. See, for example, Stephen Zank, *Irony and Sound: The Music of Maurice Ravel* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2009); Peter Kaminsky, ed., *Unmasking Ravel: New Perspectives on the Music* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011); and Kaminsky, "Vocal Music and the Lures of Exoticism and Irony," chap. 8 in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹¹⁴ Cited in Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 250. On ornamentation and its relation to meter in Ravel's piano works, see especially Bhogal, "Ornament and Virtuosity in French Piano Music," chap. 3 in *Details of Consequence: Ornament, Music, and Art in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Bhogal, "Not Just a Pretty Surface: Ornament and Metric Complexity in Ravel's Piano Music," in *Unmasking Ravel: New Perspectives on the Music*, ed. Peter Kaminsky (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011), 272–305.

¹¹⁵ Cited in Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 250.

than this smile, which was that of Cervantes and Dickens before it belonged to Jules Renard or Tristan Bernard. Maurice Ravel is a humorous composer; he was born thus.¹¹⁶

If, in Lalo's words, Debussy understood "the soul of things,"¹¹⁷ then for Laloy, Ravel could convey the "unexpected comedy and...the secret grin inside all things." Moreover, contrary to Lalo's repeated claims that Ravel's music was emotionless, Laloy believed the humoristic irony inherent in Ravel's compositional style did not reduce its emotional content but rather threw it into relief, making it all the more poignant. Crucially, Laloy positioned humor as central to Ravel's particular aesthetic approach and even his personal identity, explaining that Ravel was "born thus." I claim that Laloy's evaluation of *Histoires naturelles* as a work of deep and expressive emotion, in spite of its superficial humor and slapstick timbral effects, provides a strong foundation for the highly ironic approach to comedy Ravel would use in *L'Heure espagnole*. I also suggest that Laloy's definition of Ravel's brand of humor may allude to Bergson's description of comedy as the truest form of realism in *Le Rire*, which we shall explore in greater detail in Chapter 3. For Laloy, Ravel's music operates at the border between humor and sadness, just as Bergson's theories of the comic tread the line between comedy and tragedy, and between the humor and horror of living things made mechanical.

In his 1928 memoir, *La Musique retrouvée*, Laloy claims that it was he who suggested to Ravel that he embrace the strength of his "humoristic" approach rather than capitulate to expectations that he become the next Debussy. He also laments that Ravel was seen as a successor to Debussy: not only did music criticism in this vein place an enormous amount of pressure on Ravel, it also drove a wedge between him and Debussy. During this period, Laloy claimed he did everything he could to prevent a rift between Debussy and Ravel, but music

¹¹⁶ Cited in Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 250.

¹¹⁷ Lalo, review of *Histoires naturelles*, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, March 19, 1907.

critics exacerbated the problem. All the same, Laloy took heart that Ravel had seemed to follow his recommendation to pursue a new aesthetic direction rooted in comedy, citing *L'Heure espagnole* and *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* as evidence of this new artistic path. He wrote: “As for my advice to listen to the ‘mocking hobgoblin,’ perhaps it was not so bad, since after the *Histoires naturelles* Maurice Ravel wrote *L'Heure espagnole*, on the comedy by Monsieur Franc-Nohain, and quite recently with Madame Colette, *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*.”¹¹⁸

Defying *debussysme*: The Case of Charles Koechlin

Finally, we will turn to the case of Charles Koechlin (1867–1950), a contemporary of Ravel’s who was haunted by the epithet of *debussysme* throughout his career. Ravel was far from the only musician of his generation seeking to escape the label of *debussysme*: Koechlin apparently had to dispel the notion that he, too, was a *debussyste* even into the late 1940s, long past the point at which the term has been thought to have any relevance.¹¹⁹ Due to the aid of rich primary source material on his aesthetics—something which only exists in scant documents for Ravel—I show that Koechlin’s case provides a useful corollary on how Ravel and other composers within his circle who were similarly accused of *debussysme* managed to defy those claims: by embracing aspects of their style that they believed ran counter to Debussy’s, particularly with regard to the manipulation of rhythm and meter.

¹¹⁸ Laloy, excerpt from *La Musique retrouvée*. Cited in Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 251.

¹¹⁹ Kieffer places the demise of *debussysme* around 1914, to coincide with the reconfiguration of scientific discourse as divorced from the historical particularism of the human body and hence a historicized listening subject, a phenomenon that she claims obliterated the liminal space between scientific and humanistic discourse in which *debussysme* had existed. Kieffer also argues that this transition toward ahistorical modes of analysis motivated by *psychologie* spurred a shift in critical writings defending Debussy around this time, as Laloy’s writings on Debussy began to focus more squarely on Bergsonism. See Kieffer, *Debussy’s Critics*, 288–289. Evidently, I argue for precisely the opposite claim in Chapter 3, demonstrating that the association between Debussy’s music and Bergson’s philosophy dates back to some of Laloy’s earliest writings on Debussy.

During the late 1940s, the British musicologist and critic Rollo Myers was working on the first Grove Dictionary article on Koechlin, and the composer corresponded with him over several months regarding his life and works.¹²⁰ Koechlin seemed anxious about particular omissions from the historical record, including the debt *Les Six* owed to their predecessors, Debussy and Ravel, yet also sought to rectify any notion that he, too, had followed in Debussy's footsteps. Speaking of a conference that Milhaud had recently convened in the United States on modern French music, Koechlin laments that Milhaud "made no mention of Ravel's name,"¹²¹ and the bulk of the proceedings were devoted to *Les Six*.¹²² Meanwhile, Koechlin seems to take pride that Milhaud credited him as "the only one of my generation not to have been severely afflicted by the influence of Claude Debussy."¹²³ Nevertheless, Koechlin also attempts to set the record straight, writing that Milhaud himself had "learned a great deal from the works of this master,"¹²⁴ and should have given him his due.

Across several letters to Myers, Koechlin, a fellow classmate of Ravel's in Fauré's composition class and a committee member of the Société Musicale Indépendante (SMI), hints at

¹²⁰ For Myers' Grove article, see Rollo H. Myers, "Charles Koechlin," *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5th ed. (1954). Excerpts from Koechlin's correspondence to Myers were published in Rollo H. Myers, "Charles Koechlin: Some Recollections," *Music & Letters* 46, no. 3 (July 1965): 217–224. However, these excerpts appear only in English translation and are cited out of context. Rollo Myers (Hugh Rollo Myers) (1892–1985) was a music critic for the *London Times* and then the *Daily Telegraph* from 1920 to 1934. He then served on the BBC staff from 1935 to 1944, and became a British Council officer in Paris in 1944. Myers took a particular interest in French music of the early decades of the twentieth century, and authored biographies of Ravel, Satie, and Debussy, as well as a general survey of French music of this period.

¹²¹ Koechlin to Myers, November 27, 1948.

¹²² It seems probable that Koechlin refers to a series of lectures Darius Milhaud gave at Tanglewood in the summer of 1948. On Milhaud's career in America, see Erin K. Maher, "Darius Milhaud in the United States, 1940–71: Transatlantic Constructions of Musical Identity," (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2016).

¹²³ Koechlin to Myers, November 27, 1948. "Néanmoins, il [Darius Milhaud] m'avait cité, en affirmant que j'étais le seul, de ma génération, à ne pas avoir subi fâcheusement l'influence de Claude Debussy."

¹²⁴ Koechlin to Myers, November 27, 1948. "Mais Milhaud lui-même avait appris beaucoup par les œuvres de ce maître!"

his own fraught relationship with Debussy: on the one hand, he appreciates Debussy's unique experimental compositional techniques, but also takes pains to dissociate himself from Debussy via his supposedly unique approach to rhythm and structure. He collected his reflections in a 10-page missive, "Notes on the Life and Works of Ch. Koechlin," and sent them to Myers around the end of February 1949 (see Example 2.9 below).¹²⁵

In the same letter, he would also characterize his style as "polytonal," also much unlike Debussy's in that Koechlin's pieces frequently end in a different key than the one in which they begin. Koechlin thought his Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 53 (1902–1915)¹²⁶ best exemplified this aspect of his compositions: the first movement begins in C lydian and ends a tritone away, on an F#-major chord, prefiguring the overall tonal motion of the sonata. He claims to have started writing in this style around 1913, when he began writing chamber works and supposedly discovered his true compositional voice.¹²⁷ Koechlin narrates this episode of his career as a kind of origin story, an epiphany when he realized he could finally dispense with a great deal of received wisdom and write more authentically.

I felt incapable of writing in classical forms and keys. But, the day I said to myself: "Well, that's too bad! I will write what I want and modulate how I would like, even if this means not ending in the initial key!" — the day that I found my path, it worked... So, I composed the Sonata for Piano and Flute, the first String

¹²⁵ This document itself is undated, but the postscript is dated February 26, 1949.

¹²⁶ There is a great deal of disagreement in the source material as to the dates of composition for this Sonata, so I have chosen to follow the dating listed in Robert Orledge's current Oxford Music Online article on Koechlin. Koechlin himself cites the dates of composition as 1913–1915 in his own correspondence to Myers, but the 1923 Maurice Senart edition gives 1912–15. Meanwhile, the Oxford Music Online article lists them as 1902–1915. See Robert Orledge, "Charles Koechlin," *Oxford Music Online* <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.15248> (accessed May 3, 2019).

¹²⁷ For more on Koechlin's chamber works, see Robert Orledge, "1911–24: The 'Perilous Domain of Chamber Music,'" in *Charles Koechlin (1867–1950): His Life and Works* (Chur, Switzerland and New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1989), 103–142.

Quartet, and, above all, I have to mention my Viola Sonata (1913–1915),¹²⁸ where bitonality fearlessly asserts itself.¹²⁹

He seems careful to emphasize that this Viola Sonata, and hence the roots of his mature style, did not find their foundations in Debussy, but rather the influence of Stravinsky, particularly the latter composer's *The Rite of Spring* (1913), as well as Darius Milhaud, to whom Koechlin dedicated the piece. He writes:

To be sure, I benefitted from the discoveries [*trouvailles*, literally “findings”] that *Pelléas et Mélisande* made famous*; but it cannot be said (in spite of my admiration of Debussy) that I was a *debussyste*. My writing and my thinking were different. My *Three Poems from the Jungle Book* came out before Cl. Debussy's *Pelléas* and even his *Nocturnes*. There was a need for rhythm that distinguished me quite clearly from the [style of the] admirable *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and, in terms of construction, a contrapuntal type of writing in which the spirit of the fugue remains ever-present.

*along with earlier ones by Chabrier, Satie, and Franck, whom we have forgotten all too quickly¹³⁰

Interestingly, beyond a basic chronology of his works, almost none of the content of Koechlin's letters went into Myers's eventual article—certainly not this and other lengthy reflections he offered on his aesthetics.¹³¹ Here, however, Koechlin goes to great lengths to establish the originality of his works, emphasizing his reliance on rhythm and fugue-like contrapuntal technique as primary aesthetic elements of his pieces, in contradistinction to Debussy. He is also careful to cite Debussy's predecessors, Chabrier, Satie, and Franck, rather than Debussy himself

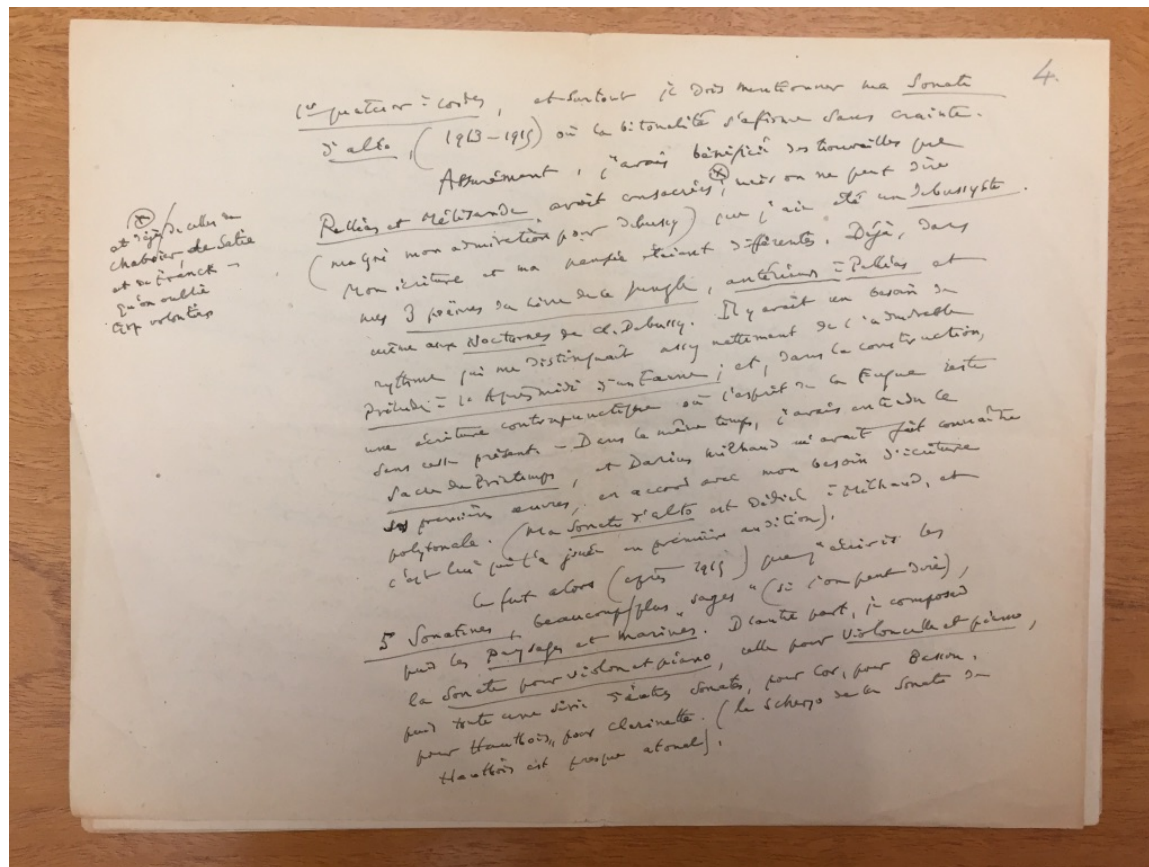
¹²⁸ See footnote 126, above.

¹²⁹ Charles Koechlin to Rollo Myers, “Notes sur la Vie et L'Oeuvre de Charles Koechlin,” undated. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹³⁰ Charles Koechlin to Rollo Myers, “Notes sur la Vie et L'Oeuvre de Charles Koechlin.” Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. I have attempted to preserve as much as possible the original punctuation and formatting of Koechlin's letter. “Assurément, j'avais bénéficié des *trouvailles* que *Pelléas et Mélisande* avait consacrées ;* mais on ne peut dire (malgré mon admiration pour Debussy) que j'aie été un *debussyste*. Mon écriture et ma pensée étaient différentes. Déjà, dans mes *3 poèmes du Livre de la jungle*, antérieurs à *Pelléas* et mêmes aux *Nocturnes* de Cl. Debussy. Il y avait un besoin de rythme qui me distinguait assez nettement de l'admirable *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* ; et, dans la construction, une écriture contrapunctique où l'esprit de la fugue reste sans cesse présent.”

¹³¹ As mentioned previously, selections from Koechlin's correspondence to Myers were published in Myers's article in *Music & Letters*, although Myers cites Koechlin's writings out of context and only in English translation. See footnote 120, above.

among his influences, claiming that these composers have received too little credit for their stylistic innovations in comparison to Debussy. Koechlin's account, like the pro-Ravel criticism of members of the Apaches, reveals significant information about what *debussysme* is *not*: for Koechlin, Debussy's style does not have a substantial rhythmic impulse, and it does not make use of contrapuntal technique.



EXAMPLE 2.9: Koechlin, “Notes on the Life and Works of Ch. Koechlin.” Unpublished manuscript, c. February 1949. Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Koechlin's purposeful selection of the Viola Sonata as the vehicle for this type of compositional technique may provide a useful point of comparison with *L'Heure espagnole* in that it, too, employs constant shifts in the metric notation of the piece and multiple layers of metric conflict. In Koechlin's piece, these metric contradictions are not only horizontal but

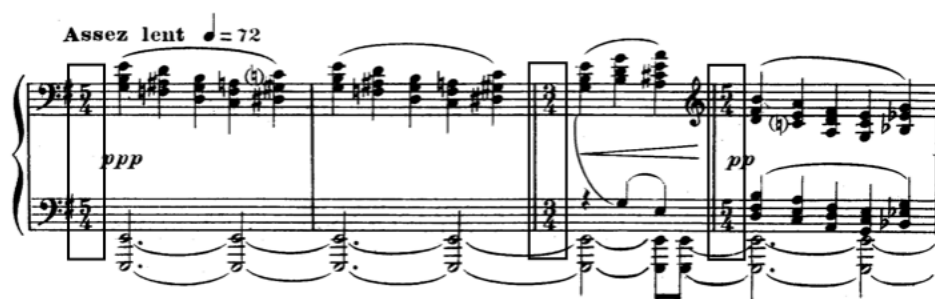
vertical. The viola is notated in 6/4 while the piano is notated in 3/2. However, the piano accompaniment itself is a series of eighth-note broken fifths that are easily grouped in twos, often disrupting the triple-meter feel of the viola line. The viola, in turn, can be parsed not only in 6/4 but also in smaller rhythmic groupings of 3/4. A series of metric shifts (to 5/4 and 3/4) also heighten the sense of blurring of the meter, shifting the metric ground from underneath the listener, as there seems to be no resolution to the metric conflicts in sight. Similar metric ambiguities occur in the opening of *L'Heure espagnole*, as shown in Example 2.11 below. The constant shifts in meter of the introduction, coupled with layer upon layer of metric dissonance from the ticking “pendulums” in the background (metronomes that each tick at different rates), create a confusion of metric hierarchies that reflects a more extreme degree of metric complexity than in Debussy’s *Pelléas*.

The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of Koechlin's Viola Sonata. The score is written for Alto and Piano. The Alto part is in 6/4 time, and the Piano part is in 3/2 time. The score includes French lyrics and performance instructions. The Alto part starts with a tempo marking of 'Très lent' and a note about metric changes. The Piano part starts with a tempo marking of 'Très lent' and a note about the piano's role. The score shows metric shifts and complex rhythmic patterns.

ALTO' *Très lent*
 dans tous ces changements de mesure, sauf indication contraire.
 (descendre DO à SI b)

PIANO *Très lent* (les courts, sauf indication contraire)
ppp très lié, un murmure à peine perceptible

EXAMPLE 2.10: Hemiola and Metric Shifts in Koechlin, Viola Sonata, mm. 1–4 (Paris: Maurice Senart, 1923).



EXAMPLE 2.11. Shifts in Metric Notation in Ravel, *L'Heure espagnole*, mm. 1–4 (Maurice Ravel's Piano Reduction; Paris: Durand, 1908).

For both Koechlin and Ravel, it was important to cement their legacy as innovators of their era who had moved beyond the stylistic affordances of Debussy's *Pelléas* to new frontiers. One of these new frontiers was a greater emphasis on the manipulation of meter and musical time. In the musical examples above, both Koechlin and Ravel use shifts in metric notation to create a sense of time that is difficult to parse, recalling Calvocoressi's invocation of "free rhythm."¹³²

Conclusion

For Ravel's defenders, humor and new ways of conceiving rhythm, time, and speech declamation increasingly became central to Ravel's style: these features were already prominent in *Histoires naturelles* and would resurface again in *L'Heure espagnole*. In my mind, it is no coincidence that Ravel's debut opera was largely composed at the height of the "Affaire Debussy-Ravel" press debacle, during the summer of 1907. While the heightening of these characteristics of his style was surely not the result of Ravel's press reception alone, *debussysme*

¹³² Calvocoressi, "Cercle musicale," 142.

cast a long shadow over Ravel and many of his contemporaries, including Koechlin, compelling them to continually adapt their style to market forces in order to be seen as original and path-breaking in their own right.

As we have seen, press coverage—particularly the advent of musical *affaires*—could be both a bane as well as a useful means of self-promotion. This culture of media sensationalism provided Ravel with the means to use the controversy surrounding *Histoires naturelles* to his advantage to stake a claim for a new aesthetic perspective based on humor, mechanism, and the organization of musical time. In Chapter 3, we shall explore how Ravel's new aesthetic direction intersects with Bergson's definition of comedy in *Le Rire* as well as his philosophy of time more generally, articulating another yet another facet of Ravel's response to being labeled a *debussyste*.

CHAPTER 3

PHILOSOPHY BECOME MUSICAL:

BERGSON, HIS INTERLOCUTORS, AND HIS MUSICOLOGICAL DISCIPLES

In a 1910 interview, Georges Aimel asked Bergson to situate his philosophy within the current cultural climate, intimating that Bergson's first major work, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (*Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*) articulated a theory of modern art.¹ Bergson replied that there was certainly a coincidence between the appearance of his *Essai* in 1889 and the beginning of the Symbolist movement, although he was initially unaware of Symbolist poetry. Nevertheless, he later developed an affinity for Maeterlinck and Debussy, remarking that others had characterized the music of "M. Debussy and his school" as a "music of 'duration'":

I was also told...how much the music of M. Debussy and his school is a music of 'duration,' due to the employment of continuous melody which accompanies and expresses the unique and uninterrupted current of dramatic emotion. Incidentally, I have an instinctive predilection for the work of M. Debussy.²

In his *Essai*, Bergson defines duration, the main concept behind his philosophy of time, as a qualitative multiplicity, describing a succession of states of consciousness that blend into one another: comparing it to the notes of a melody, he claims that duration is at once a series of

¹ Henri Bergson, *Mélanges*, ed. André Robinet (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972), 843. Georges Aimel was a philosopher and political theorist. He advocated for Bergson's philosophy as a means of self-actualization in the 1908 article "Individualisme et philosophie bergsonienne" ["Individualism and Bergsonian Philosophy"], *Revue de Philosophie* 12, no. 8 (June 1908): 582–593. The majority of his work, however, was devoted to current affairs in France and North Africa.

² "J'ai éprouvé toutefois, plus tard, une vive attirance pour l'œuvre de M. Maeterlinck, surtout pour son théâtre. On m'a aussi signalé...combien la musique de M. Debussy et de son école est une musique de la 'durée,' par l'emploi de la mélodie continue qui accompagne et exprime le courant unique et ininterrompu de l'émotion dramatique. J'ai d'ailleurs une prédilection instinctive pour l'œuvre de M. Debussy." Bergson, *Mélanges*, 844.

individual moments in time and a qualitative whole.³ But what does it mean for this concept to apply to music, specifically to the music of Debussy? In this chapter, I investigate the roots of this connection between Bergson and Debussy, suggesting that Ravel's eventual recourse to satire in *L'Heure espagnole* may not only have demonstrated his frustration at his inclusion in an ever-growing category of *debussyste* composers but also represented an aesthetic strategy unto itself, meant to address the perceived philosophical efficacy of Debussy's music as compared to his own.

Appraisals of Debussy's work, especially *Pelléas et Mélisande*, increasingly began to revolve around the subjective listening experience and the ability of Debussy's music to approach its own apparent Bergsonian philosophical ideals of resemblance to a lived experience of place and sensation. Perhaps nowhere was the philosophical—and specifically Bergsonian—import of Debussy's music more explicitly articulated than in the writings of Bergson's disciple, Louis Laloy. In 1914, Laloy would reinforce the symbiotic relationship between Bergson's philosophy and Debussy's music:

M. Bergson is the philosopher of our time, just as M. Debussy is the musician of our time, and M. Rodin the sculptor. These towering figures each manifest the state of our civilization in their own way, while at the same time defining it. That is why secret links unite them, and one may say that such a music could not be produced except within the orbit of such a philosophy, and vice versa.⁴

Here, Laloy positions both Debussy and Bergson in defining roles that profoundly shaped French culture, framing them within a landscape that saw music and philosophy as interdependent and equally capable of offering significant intellectual contributions to society. This Bergsonian

³ Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Paris: Alcan, 1889), 50, http://classiques.ugac.ca/classiques/bergson_henri/essai_conscience_immediate/conscience_imm.html.

⁴ Louis Laloy, "La musique chez soi : M. Henri Bergson et la musique," *Comœdia*, February 19, 1914. "M. Bergson est le philosophe de notre temps, comme M. Debussy en est le sculpteur. Chacun de ces grands esprits manifeste à sa manière l'état de notre civilisation, en même temps qu'il le détermine. C'est pourquoi des liens secrets les unissent, et on peut dire qu'une telle musique ne pouvait se produire que dans le voisinage d'une telle philosophie, et réciproquement."

moment in French cultural life, roughly encompassing the period from 1889—the year of the appearance of Bergson’s *Essai*—to the dawn of the First World War in 1914, witnessed a unique integration of music and philosophy. The year 1889 also marked two other significant cultural events: the centennial of the French Revolution and the 1889 Exposition Universelle, the site of foreign musical exhibits on Javanese gamelan and Vietnamese opera (*théâtre annamite*) that had a significant impact on generations of French composers, including Ravel and Debussy.⁵

What Laloy calls the “secret links” that tie Debussy to Bergson have been explored in a variety of recent scholarship. Jann Pasler has suggested the relevance of Bergson’s *Évolution créatrice* (*Creative Evolution*) to Debussy’s focus on time and meter in *Jeux*;⁶ Jane Ellen Harrison has argued that spiritualism serves as the guiding force behind both Bergson’s writings and Debussy’s music;⁷ and Daniel Shanahan’s dissertation suggests that Bergson’s theories of time can form part of the foundation for a perceptual analysis of Debussy’s *Préludes*.⁸

⁵ I use the term “Javanese gamelan” as a shorthand: the majority of the musicians and dancers involved in the performances at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair were Sundanese and hailed from the Parakan Salak plantation in west Java, but four court dancers from central Java were also hired. The question of how the Javanese dancers could adapt to performing to Sundanese music (or vice versa) has been shrouded in mystery, even in early ethnomusicological accounts. For a cogent overview of gamelan music at the World’s Fair and current scholarship on this subject, see Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005). More recently, Sumarsam has critiqued Fauser in his 2013 monograph, *Javanese Gamelan and the West* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013). He claims Fauser neglects to properly account for significant morphological differences between Sundanese and Javanese music in her theorization of how the Sundanese musicians and central Javanese dancers might have performed together. See Sumarsam, *Javanese Gamelan and the West*, 96–101, for his commentary on Fauser.

⁶ Jann Pasler, “Debussy, ‘Jeux,’: Playing with Time and Form,” *Nineteenth-Century Music* 6, no. 1 (1982): 60–75.

⁷ Jane Ellen Harrison, “The Spiritualiste Connection: Stylistic Affinity and Structural Homology between Bergson and Debussy,” *Música em Contexto* 1 (2015): 55–88. For an overview of the Spiritualist movement in French philosophy, see Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 9, *Modern Philosophy: From the French Revolution to Sartre, Camus, and Lévi-Strauss* (New York: Image Books, 1974), 155–177.

⁸ Daniel T. Shanahan, “Debussy’s Forms of Deception: Toward a Theory of Implication, Tension, and Attraction in the *Préludes*” (PhD diss., Trinity College Dublin, 2011). Michael L. Klein also reflects on connections between Bergson and Debussy in a portion of his analysis of *L’Isle joyeuse*, although his article mainly views the work through the lens of later theories of assemblage articulated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. See Klein, “Debussy’s *L’Isle joyeuse* as Territorial Assemblage,” *Nineteenth-Century Music* 31, no. 1 (2007): 28–52.

Theoretical perspectives linking Bergson and Ravel have also proliferated in recent years.⁹ However, little attention has been devoted to interrogating the basis for the use of musical concepts in Bergson's philosophy itself, as well as locating the historical roots of a Bergsonian perspective in French music criticism of the early twentieth century, particularly in early theoretical and music-critical evaluations of Debussy's music.

Aesthetics, particularly Bergson's magnum opus in this area, *Le Rire* (*Laughter*, 1900), has often been seen as secondary to his overall theoretical approach and thus of limited relevance.¹⁰ In this chapter, I seek to establish the centrality of music to Bergson's thought and develop a theoretical language to address the philosophical implications of Ravel's music. In the first section, I articulate an intellectual history of Bergson's thought by examining the work of his main interlocutors: Gustav Fechner, Théodule-Armand Ribot, and Paul and Pierre Janet. Here, I establish a context for the appearance of musical concepts within Bergson's philosophy of time, showing that Bergson's theories are intimately bound up with concurrent research by these scholars in psychology and the related disciplines of psychophysics, physiology, and medicine, which increasingly sought to comprehend metaphysical problems of perception, sensation, consciousness, and memory through the lens of aesthetics, specifically music.

In the second section, I trace the roots of a contemporaneous Bergsonian strain in music criticism through Louis Laloy, a prominent disciple of Bergson who went on to produce

⁹ These include Michael Puri, *Ravel the Decadent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), especially pp. 3, 16, 121, 164, 174; Steven Huebner, "Laughter: In Ravel's Time," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 16, no. 3 (2006): 255–246; Jessie Fillerup, "Clockwork Souls: The Characterization of Time in *L'Heure espagnole*," chap. 6 in "Purloined Poetics: The Grotesque in the Music of Maurice Ravel" (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2009); Jessie Fillerup, "Eternity in Each Moment: Temporal Strategies in Ravel's 'Le Gibet,'" *Music Theory Online* 19, no. 1 (2013), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.13.19.1/mto.13.19.1.fillerup.php>; and Jessie Fillerup, *Ravel: Magician of Sound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming April 2021), esp. chap. 3, "Illusions of Form and Void." See the introduction to this dissertation for my discussion of several of these sources in relation to *L'Heure espagnole*.

¹⁰ For example, A.R. Lacey's *Bergson* (London: Routledge, 1989), one of the foundational anglophone texts explicating Bergson's philosophy, limits discussion of *Le Rire* to less than ten pages.

influential music-critical and musicological works about Ravel and Debussy. In my analysis of Laloy's writings, I show that *Pelléas* emerged as a cornerstone of this Bergsonian approach, serving as a model for the kinds of philosophical ideas music could convey. Although he plays a supporting role in this account, Vladimir Jankélévitch, a philosopher and musicologist who also studied under Bergson, provides meaningful insight into the implementation of Bergson's philosophical principles in his early writings, particularly *Henri Bergson* (1930).¹¹ Together, Laloy's and Jankélévitch's writings shed light on the practical application of Bergson's thought to music.

Finally, I demonstrate the centrality of Bergson's aesthetic theory, as encapsulated in his most popular work, *Le Rire*, to his broader philosophical œuvre. Here, I lay the groundwork for a Bergsonian reading of *L'Heure espagnole*, showing that music functions as a formidable analytical tool that allows access to duration in a way that language cannot. I claim that live performance of music, unlike other forms of art, can essentially accomplish its own analysis, a procedure I will call *autoanalyse*. Bergson's writings seem untroubled by theorizing music as a type of pure perception that can return to duration, but Vladimir Jankélévitch's writings on Bergson both reify and complicate this symbiotic relationship between music and philosophy: music allows access to duration, but only provisionally because duration itself cannot be represented.

While Ravel did not specifically invoke Bergson in defense of his aesthetics, it remains that he took the lessons of the "Affaire Ravel" and the "Affaire Debussy-Ravel" to heart, taking pains to adopt an especially robust public relations strategy for *L'Heure*, as we will explore in

¹¹ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Henri Bergson*, ed. Alexandre Lefebvre and Nils F. Schott, trans. Nils F. Schott (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), Kindle.

Chapter 4. Even if Ravel did not readily admit that Laloy had essentially supplied him an aesthetic orientation, as Debussy had haughtily scoffed in private correspondence to Laloy, it does seem as though he took Laloy's recommendation seriously.¹² I suggest that Ravel's new prioritization of time, rhythm, and especially humor in his stylistic approach demonstrated a way of outdoing Debussy on another front: Debussy's association with Bergson. As Ravel's first operatic project, I argue that *L'Heure* responds to *Pelléas* on the level of comedy, time, and mechanism, essentially becoming arguably more Bergsonian than *Pelléas*.

Philosophy in *fin-de-siècle* France: Bergson and His Interlocutors

Bergson's philosophical ideas were a revelation for intellectuals and artists who came of age around the turn of the twentieth century, as the rational and positivistic worldview that reigned in the first half of the nineteenth century continued to be dismantled. A vestige of the Second Empire and an heir to the rationalist heritage of the Enlightenment, the positivist orthodoxy made of science a new religion whose principal tenet was a limitless faith in the power of science to unmask tradition and superstition, revealing a rational cause behind every conceivable physical or spiritual phenomenon. Historian Ernest Renan wrote in 1889 that science would be the key to the mysteries of the physical world: "Science is a religion, science alone will henceforth make the creeds, science alone can solve for men the eternal problems, the solution of which nature imperatively demands."¹³ Through science, the world could allegedly be made

¹² For my analysis of Debussy's letter to Laloy, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation, pp. 119–120.

¹³ Ernest Renan, *L'Avenir de la Science*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1947–1961), 1272, cited in R.C. Grogin, *The Bergsonian Controversy in France, 1900–1914* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1988), 2.

entirely knowable in terms of the laws of Newtonian mechanics and chemistry, devoid of all illusions.

Bergson's philosophy has often been characterized as an utter rejection of positivism in favor of duration, intuition, and *élan vital* (vital impulse), concepts which have been routinely criticized for their imprecision.¹⁴ In the face of Einstein's theory of relativity, an innovation that actually had little effect on Bergson's reception until the early 1920s,¹⁵ Bergson's language, particularly about the nature of time, may now appear to us imprecise, unfathomable, and ultimately too nebulous to be of any concrete use.¹⁶ But this reductionist view of Bergson as a pure philosopher uninterested in scientific observations about the way the world works is largely a product of our modern bias toward scientific over philosophical ways of knowing, and does not give due credit to Bergson's own popularity and influence, particularly in the early decades of

¹⁴ Bergson's concept of intuition was belittled in favor of rationality in many early studies of his philosophy in the 1950s and 1960s. See, for example, Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), 16; and A.O. Lovejoy, *The Reason, the Understanding, and Time* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1961), 68.

¹⁵ In her monograph, *The Physicist and the Philosopher*, Jimena Canales pinpoints the origin of the Einstein-Bergson debate as we know it—a disagreement between Einstein's relativity and Bergson's philosophical, experiential rendering of time—on the date that Einstein met Bergson, April 6, 1922. 1922 was also the year in which Bergson's *Durée et Simultanéité* (*Duration and Simultaneity*) was published, in which Bergson disparaged Einstein's theory of time due to Einstein's belief that duration represented a "deficiency." See Canales, *The Physicist and the Philosopher* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 45. See also Canales, "Einstein, Bergson, and the Experiment that Failed: Intellectual Cooperation at the League of Nations," *Modern Language Notes* 120, no. 5 (2005): 1168–1191.

¹⁶ A prominent strain of scholarship on Bergson in the early 1960s claimed that he did not adequately understand the physics behind the theory of relativity, a point which many modern scholars now refute due to Bergson's demonstrated proficiency in mathematics. Thomas Hanna, for instance, argued that Bergson was "not sufficiently conversant with the outlook and problems of mathematics and physics." See Hanna, introduction to *The Bergsonian Heritage*, ed. Thomas Hanna (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1962), 23. Alternative perspectives include those articulated by Olivier Costa de Beauregard, Milič Čapek, and more recently, Jimena Canales. See Costa de Beauregard, "Certain Aspects of the Irreversibility of Time in Classical Quantum Physics," in P.A.Y. Gunter, ed. and trans., *Bergson and the Evolution of Physics* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969), 77–104; Milič Čapek, "What is Living and What is Dead in the Bergsonian Critique of Relativity," in *The New Aspects of Time: Its Continuity and Novelty* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 296–323; and Canales, *The Physicist and the Philosopher* and "Einstein, Bergson, and the Experiment that Failed," cited in the footnote above. Of note, Jankélévitch defended Bergson's critique of Einstein's relativity, calling the temporalities of relativity "fictitious times... 'where one is not.'" Jankélévitch, *Bergson*, ed. Alexandre Lefebvre and Nils F. Schott, trans. Nils F. Schott (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 26.

the twentieth century.¹⁷ The Einstein-Bergson debate of the 1920s has largely colored our view of Bergson: in the words of Jimena Canales, the rift between Einstein and Bergson's theories of time "spiraled down dangerously conflicting paths, splitting the century into two cultures and pitting scientists against humanists, expert knowledge against lay wisdom."¹⁸

In fact, Bergson did not necessarily dispute the results of scientific experiments but instead believed they introduced new and compelling metaphysical problems that science alone could not explain satisfactorily, for example, the nature of sensation, perception, and time, which are amply discussed in his early works, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (*Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, 1889), and *Matière et mémoire* (*Matter and Memory*, 1896). Bergson's *Essai* questions the effort of psychophysicists to quantify sensory perceptions, and *Matière et mémoire* critiques theories of brain localization advanced by psychopathology. Bergson did not see his position as contrary to recent scientific advances, but rather complementary to them. In *L'Évolution créatrice* (*Creative Evolution*, 1907), he wrote that philosophy could "superpose on scientific truth a knowledge of another kind, which may be called metaphysical. Thus combined, all our knowledge, both scientific and metaphysical, is heightened."¹⁹ Ultimately, Bergson believed that science and philosophy contributed in unique ways to an overall body of knowledge about the world.²⁰ Moreover, I contend that it is

¹⁷ Bergson's weekly lectures at the Collège de France regularly attracted so many people that there was not enough space to seat everyone. Audience members listened from the sidewalk or perched on the windows of the lecture hall. For more on Bergson's popularity and for images of crowds at Bergson's lectures, see Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 4–5.

¹⁸ Canales, *The Physicist and the Philosopher*, vii.

¹⁹ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt, 1911), 199.

²⁰ Even in the case of relativity, Bergson initially felt that Einstein's theory was compatible with his philosophy of time in that it showed the outer limits of the applicability of spatial reasoning to time. Bergson immersed himself in a thorough study of the mathematics of relativity and confided to a friend that he intended to publish a short piece on it that would "show the agreement between relativity and my views on space and spatial time." Cited in Jacques Chevalier, *Entretiens avec Bergson* (Paris: Plon, 1959), 34. Yet Bergson's approach ultimately proved to be

imperative that we move beyond considering Bergson's relationship to "science" as a monolith and instead adopt a more nuanced approach to his influences.

In this section of the chapter, I focus on Bergson's relationship to his main interlocutors: Gustav Fechner, a pioneer in the field of psychophysics; Théodule Ribot, a prominent psychologist and philosopher; and Paul and Pierre Janet, scholars in the fields of philosophy and psychology, respectively. The boundaries of these disciplines were quite porous in Bergson's time: scholars frequently produced work in more than one area, and individual fields of study were not as strongly demarcated as they are today. In sketching this constellation of Bergson's contemporaries, I show that these disciplines were not only related by virtue of their attempt to answer fundamental questions about consciousness, but also by a more surprising factor—their reliance on experimental data involving music and musicians. The integration of music in the work of these intellectuals varied widely, from Fechner's immersion in the musical culture of Leipzig and his experiments on sound stimuli to Pierre Janet's use of music as a treatment for patients suffering psychological trauma. Crucially, however, all these researchers had in common a unifying reliance on music to explore the nature of consciousness.

My account of Bergson's interlocutors will privilege Bergson's relationship to researchers engaged in the scientific study of sensory perception and memory, yet it is also important to acknowledge the ever-present critique of Kant in his writing. Bergson's philosophy most strongly criticizes Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), particularly Kant's characterization of human knowledge and his account of the phenomenology of space and time. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant theorizes that the world is divided into observable

incompatible with Einstein's, as he sought to advance a theory of time as defined by one's lived experience, rejecting both scientific and philosophical theories that refused to embrace the notion of time as a metaphysical, fluid entity that defied intellectual attempts to categorize it.

phenomena, which can be comprehended by human reason and observation, and *noumena*—things in themselves—which are strictly unintelligible. According to Kant, we can only know the world as a function of our own understanding and, hence, our own reason. Kant also claims that space and time are a function of our perception of objects; the concepts of space and time do not exist independently of us. He refers to objects in space and time as mere “appearances,” and argues that we have no other recourse to knowledge than our sensory input. This concept is known as transcendental idealism. Kant defines transcendental idealism as the “doctrine that [appearances] are all together to be regarded as mere representations, and not as things in themselves, and accordingly that space and time are sensible forms of our intuition, but not determinations given for themselves or conditions of objects as things in themselves.”²¹ Our notion of space and time, according to Kant, is delimited by our intuition, which, as he defines it, is our subjective understanding about the world.

Bergson elaborates his critique of Kant by proposing radically different definitions of the key concepts of intuition and time. In contrast to Kant, Bergson views time and intuition as interrelated and central to our behavior in the world and the nature of reality. Bergson defines intuition not as a passive act of absorbing sensory input but an action-oriented “pure perception,” which represents “a system of nascent actions that buries its roots deep into reality.”²² For Bergson, intuition is a form of actualizing past experience in order to make the right decision in any given moment: one ought to act in accord with what one has learned in the past.²³ In addition to the concept of intuition, Bergson redefines time, dividing it into quantitatively expressed time

²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited and translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A369.

²² Bergson, *Matière et mémoire : Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1906), 47.

²³ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, 45.

(i.e., clock-time) and duration, a kind of time that obliterates the distinction between past and present. He claims that we use clock-time for convenience, but we really live our lives in durational time, despite the fact that we may be unaware of doing so. Bergson argues, against Kant, that we can actually come to know things in themselves, but only if we prioritize intuition and thus put ourselves in touch with duration and our inner lives. Under the rubric of intuition, we would be able to witness reality as it unfolds in the present: “the reality of things would no longer be constructed or reconstructed but touched, penetrated, lived.”²⁴ Through intuition, reality would be made manifest through our lived experience rather than intelligible only in the abstract through reason.

Clearly, Bergson’s approach represented an alternative to Kantian philosophy that young people found appealing. His lectures at the Collège de France drew thousands of young people, particularly in the years between 1900 and 1914. However, his lack of a prestigious university appointment meant that Bergson had no direct advisees who were specifically trained in his methodology and thus lacked a dedicated group of students who would carry on his legacy. The wide public availability of Bergson’s philosophy through his open lectures—as opposed to lectures given by professors at the École Normale Supérieure or the Sorbonne, which were intended for a specialist audience—meant that Bergson’s philosophy was also open to public interpretation, resulting in an often piecemeal approach to his theories.²⁵ The vagueness and

²⁴ “La réalité des choses ne sera plus construite ou reconstruite, mais touchée, pénétrée, vécue.” Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, 47.

²⁵ Bergson’s popularity was frequently seen not as an asset but a liability. His philosophy met with derision from the far right (Charles Maurras and Pierre Lasserre), the left (George Politzer and Georg Lukács), and the Catholic Church, which added his works to the index of banned books in 1914. Among his most vociferous critics was the philosopher Julian Benda, who quipped that Bergson’s philosophy was devoid of intellectual merit and was “perhaps the only philosophy to have really been understood by the vulgar.” Cited in Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), 12.

opacity of Bergson's own writings, particularly concerning duration, certainly did not help matters.

Thus, situating Bergson in relation to his contemporaries in psychology and the related fields of philosophy, physiology, and medicine helps to illuminate core concepts of his philosophy, especially duration and memory, while at the same time providing a rationale for the centrality of music to his work. In what follows, we will explore several of Bergson's main interlocutors, Gustav Fechner, Théodule Ribot, and Paul and Pierre Janet, all of whom conducted experiments using music and sound, or appropriated experimental data on music to justify their approach. Exploring the connection these intellectuals had with music can help us better understand why music occupies such a prominent place in Bergson's philosophy.

Bergson contra Fechner: Just-Noticeable Difference and the Quantification of Unquantifiable Phenomena

Throughout his writings and most prominently in the *Essai*, Bergson took Gustav Fechner, a leading researcher in the field of psychophysics, to task for his theory that sensation, including the experience of sound and music, could be quantified in a series of just-noticeable differences. In order to examine the roots of Bergson's critique of Fechner, we first need to explore the relationship between psychophysics, Fechner himself, and music. Recently, Alexandra Hui has posited that the study of physics, physiology, and psychology became increasingly intertwined with the study of music in Germany and Austria between 1840 and 1910.²⁶ The new discipline of psychophysics, in turn, would fuse these disciplines in an attempt

²⁶ Alexandra Hui, *The Psychophysical Ear: Musical Experiments, Experimental Sounds* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), xiii.

to reconcile physical and physiological observations about sensation with the historical and cultural vagaries of musical aesthetics. Hui has argued that this rapprochement of psychophysics and music led to two consequences: first, psychophysicists increasingly framed their theories in terms of musical aesthetics; second, they prioritized the individual listening experience as the sole means by which sound sensation could be studied and interpreted.²⁷ This focus on subjective listening experience thus gave musicologists and psychophysicists common ground for discussion.

According to Hui, the study of the sensory perception of sound in the period she examines underwent a series of fundamental shifts. Whereas the earliest incarnations of the psychophysics of sound focused on sensory perceptual threshold or just-noticeable difference, the field eventually transformed into the study of hearing. Furthermore, the subjective experience of the listener became increasingly central to the psychophysics of sound. The scientific study of sound sensation, contrary to the trajectory of other natural sciences at the end of the nineteenth century, became *more* rather than less bound up with the cultural and aesthetic concerns of music.

The psychophysicists themselves also shared common goals and a similar sociocultural background despite differences in academic training. They assumed sound and music to be equivalent, and music to include only Western music; their studies on sound sensation used Western instruments and demonstrated sound via Western music-theoretical concepts. In addition, they were competent if not proficient musicians themselves, theoretically controlling all aspects of the experimental process in a way that was unique to the discipline.²⁸ Hui shows that

²⁷ Hui, *The Psychophysical Ear*, xiv.

²⁸ Hui, *The Psychophysical Ear*, xvi-xvii.

music was in fact so integrated into their “material culture” that it required no special justification of its place in their studies, an indication of the extent to which knowledge of music was already ingrained in their sociocultural environment.²⁹

In reaction to psychophysics, philosophy also acquired an inclination toward aesthetics, necessarily adopting the framework of musical aesthetics to critique the experiments of psychophysics and return the theorization of physical sensation to the province of philosophy. Moreover, like the psychophysicists, philosophers were a product of a culture that expected musical literacy of its bourgeois class. Bergson’s own father, Michel (Michał), of Polish-Jewish descent, was a composer and pianist of considerable ability, remembered chiefly for his three operas, in addition to numerous technical studies and other works for the piano.³⁰ According to Bergson, the only reason his father was not more widely known was that he “disdained notoriety” and “did not attach enough importance to promoting his music.”³¹ The truth, however, was undoubtedly more complicated, as his Jewish identity certainly seems to have been a major obstacle to his success in pre-Dreyfus-Affair France and Switzerland. In 1863, Michel had been appointed to the position of director of piano instruction at the Geneva Conservatory, but faced an arduous struggle for recognition.³² Geneva had only recently begun to recognize the civil

²⁹ Hui, *The Psychophysical Ear*, xvii.

³⁰ In his Oxford Music Online article on Michel Bergson, Jerzy Morawski reports that Bergson’s compositions “strictly adhere to the conventions of the period,” and his pieces for domestic use “generally make few demands on the players.” Although most of his music is entirely unknown today, the clarinet solo from the Scene and Air from his grand opera *Luisa di Montfort*, op. 82, remains in circulation in the clarinet repertoire.

³¹ Bibliothèque nationale française, *Henri Bergson: Exposition du centenaire* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1959), 15.

³² The historian Louis M. Greenberg and the Oxford Music Online entry on Michel Bergson report that Michel inflated his own title, claiming he was the former director of the Geneva Conservatory. Greenberg cites *The Jewish Chronicle*, March 18, 1898; and François-Joseph Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot, 1878), 74. The 1878 edition of Fétis’s *Biographie* claims that Michel rose from the position of director of piano to become the director of the institution itself. However, the second edition of the *Biographie universelle* (1880) omits all information about his appointment in Geneva. Fétis, *Biographie universelle*, 2nd ed.,

status of Jews in 1857, and the community in which Michel Bergson found himself remained deeply prejudiced. An unrelenting verbal assault by François Bartholony, the president of the Geneva Conservatory, effectively drove him to resign from his post in 1867, despite having received consistently positive evaluations on inspection reports.³³ Yet the young Henri fared better than his father: Joseph Wertheimer, Geneva's Chief Rabbi, was quick to notice his brilliance and procured him a scholarship to the Springer Institution, a Jewish pension in Paris where he lived while pursuing his education at Lycée Bonaparte.³⁴ Following Michel's resignation, the family reluctantly returned to Paris.

The extent of Henri Bergson's own musical education remains somewhat mysterious, as Bergson lived apart from his family for a significant portion of his childhood. In 1870, when Bergson was just ten years old, his family left Paris for London while Bergson stayed at Lycée Bonaparte. Michel would spend the remainder of his life giving lessons in London, in what Louis M. Greenberg has termed "genteel poverty."³⁵ Meanwhile, Bergson quickly showed a talent for both mathematics and philosophy, and went on to win *premiers prix* in both subjects. Any specific musical aptitude Bergson might have demonstrated has so far been lost to history.

vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot, 1880), 358. Meanwhile, a short notice in *The Musical World* from 1864 lists his position correctly. See "Geneva—(From a Correspondent)," *The Musical World* (April 2, 1864), 222.

³³ Louis M. Greenberg, "Bergson and Durkheim as Sons and Assimilators: The Early Years," *French Historical Studies* 9, no. 4 (1976): 619–634, at 621–622. This article is reprinted in Ivan Strenski, ed., *Emile Durkheim* (London: Routledge, 2016).

³⁴ The Lycée Bonaparte has since been renamed the Lycée Condorcet.

³⁵ Greenberg, "Bergson and Durkheim," 622–623.

However, his father continued to send him copies of his own scores throughout his life, so it seems Bergson had more than a passing knowledge of music.³⁶

Fechner's theories similarly developed in a musical milieu. Born in Leipzig in 1817, Fechner was surrounded by Leipzig's flourishing arts scene. According to Hui, Fechner claimed two connections to the Leipzig music world: Clara Wieck Schumann and the music publisher Hermann Härtel. Fechner's niece, Klementine Fechner, and her stepdaughter, Clara Wieck—who would later marry the composer Robert Schumann—were concert pianists. Clara Schumann would become one of the preeminent virtuoso pianists of the Romantic era and would write a small body of fine compositions. Meanwhile, Robert founded the *Davidsbündler* (League of David), a music society that defended contemporary compositional aesthetics, and established the musicological journal *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, its publication arm. In addition to the Schumanns, Mendelssohn and Brahms also frequented the Leipzig arts scene. Although Fechner himself repeatedly claimed to lack musical expertise, he made sure to familiarize himself with cutting-edge music-theoretical treatises such as Eduard Hanslick's *On the Musically Beautiful* and Helmholtz's *On the Sensation of Tone as a Psychological Basis for the Theory of Music*.³⁷ Fechner also counted Hermann Härtel of the publication and piano-manufacturing firm Breitkopf and Härtel among his close friends. Härtel's position at the center of the music scene in Leipzig afforded him connections to prominent composers and musicians. Härtel frequently hosted large gatherings involving the musical elite of the period, which Fechner also attended.³⁸

³⁶ In a letter dated March 6, 1892, Michel Bergson requests that one of his recent compositions be sent directly to Bergson, then a philosophy instructor at Lycée Henri-IV. See Bibliothèque nationale française, *Henri Bergson: Exposition du centenaire*, 15.

³⁷ Hui, *The Psychophysical Ear*, 23.

³⁸ Hui, *The Psychophysical Ear*, 25–26.

In his work to establish a theory of psychophysics, Fechner sought to prove an objective, empirically verifiable basis for subjective sensations such as light, color, and sound, veering away from what he called the “night view” (*die Nachtansicht*) of materialism toward a dual psychical and physical understanding of consciousness which he called the “day view” (*die Tagesansicht*). Ultimately, Fechner’s *Elements of Psychophysics* (1860) concretized this work and now represents the defining treatise on psychophysics. Fechner pioneered the theory and techniques of psychometrics, laying the groundwork for experimental procedure in modern neuroscience. His main innovation was to provide a formula for quantifying psychic stimuli, proposing that “equal relative increments of stimuli are proportional to equal increments of sensation.”³⁹ Ernst Heinrich Weber, under whom Fechner had studied, had previously proposed a similar theory, known as Weber’s law, stating that the just-noticeable difference (i.e., the smallest change in stimuli that can be perceived) is proportional to the initial stimulus intensity. But it was Fechner who formulated it into a simple mathematical equation now known as Weber Contrast. The equation is given below, wherein p is defined as perception; dS is the difference threshold (i.e., the least perceptible difference); and S is the initial stimulus.

$$dp = \frac{dS}{S}$$

The equation for Weber Contrast can also be written as follows, wherein k is a constant related to the particular sense being examined (e.g., vision, hearing, etc.).

$$dp = k \frac{dS}{S}$$

³⁹ Gustav Fechner, *Elements of Psychophysics*, ed. Davis H. Howes and Edwin G. Boring, trans. Helmut Adler (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), 54.

From Weber Contrast, Fechner derived another formula that strove to account for variations in the perceptibility of individuals, now known as Fechner's law. This formula states that subjective sensation is proportional to the natural log of the stimulus intensity. Fechner derived this equation from Weber Contrast by integrating it, then solving for C , the constant of integration.⁴⁰ Integrating the formula for Weber Contrast yields the following, wherein \ln is the natural log and C is the constant of integration:

$$p = k \ln S + C$$

To solve for C , we assume that the perceived stimulus p becomes zero at the threshold stimulus S_0 . This yields:

$$C = -k \ln S_0$$

Now we can solve for p by substituting the value of C into our original equation:

$$p = k \ln \frac{S}{S_0}$$

These two equations, Weber Contrast and Fechner's law, are often collapsed as the Fechner-Weber law.

Fechner's work provided the concrete means to quantify sensory perception and influenced generations of researchers in psychology and psychophysics including Carl Stumpf, Ernst Mach, Hermann Helmholtz, and William Wundt.⁴¹ The ability to "measure" sensation

⁴⁰ Solving for the indefinite integral involves finding some function $F(x)$ such that $F'(x) = f(x)$. However, the function $F(x)$ in itself does not provide a specific answer to this problem, given that any constant will always reduce to zero when we take the derivative. For example, $F(x) = x^2 + 5$ has the same derivative as $F(x) = x^2$. The constant of integration accounts for this fact, indicating that all integrals of the given function differ by, at most, a constant C . We can thus solve for a whole class of solutions as opposed to a particular solution.

⁴¹ Fechner's law is still used in psychophysics experiments today, although researchers now believe there are notable limits to Fechner's and Weber's theories at the highest and lowest levels of stimulus intensity, particularly for loudness and brightness. On sound intensity discrimination, see William A. Yost, *Fundamentals of Hearing: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (San Diego: Academic Press, 2000), 158, <https://archive.org/details/fundamentalsofhe00will/page/158/mode/2up>. For a helpful summary of various early approaches to measuring the perception of luminance, see Rafal Mantiuk, "Models of Early Visual Perception,"

quantitatively created the conditions for scientific experimentation on the mind and sensory experience, paving the way for much of modern neuroscience. Hui argues that the Fechner-Weber law not only had profound implications for cognitive science but also for aesthetics; she shows that Fechner conceived of the study of subjective experience as a tool to understand aesthetic judgment. By this logic, Fechner's experiments were ultimately studies in experimental aesthetics.

While Fechner's work on sound perception is slight in comparison to the attention he devoted to the visual arts, he believed that experiments on sound intensity and pitch discrimination offered a fruitful avenue to examine the relationship between the subjective, psychological world and the objective, physical world.⁴² For Fechner, the subjective and objective worlds were different facets of the same reality, governed by an "inner psychophysics" and "outer psychophysics." Inner psychophysics described the relationship of the psychological domain to internal functions of the body, whereas outer psychophysics expressed the relationship of the psychological realm to the outside world. Fechner believed inner psychophysics corresponded to higher-order mental activity such as thought and finer aesthetic discrimination, and was only crudely measurable because it was not limited to a "specific relationship to physical processes."⁴³ Outer psychophysics, however, corresponded to the lower mental processes of sensation and drive, and was directly measurable through the Fechner-Weber law. In theory, Fechner

University of Cambridge Computer Laboratory,
https://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/teaching/1516/AdvGraph/03_Models_early_perception.pdf.

⁴² One of Fechner's most notable experiments on the visual arts, recorded in his 1876 treatise *Vorschule der Aesthetik (Introduction to Aesthetics)*, involved the comparison of the two Holbein Madonnas, one held in Dresden and the other in Darmstadt. To determine which one was more beautiful, he polled visitors at a joint exhibition of the two paintings.

⁴³ Fechner, *Elements of Psychophysics*, vol. 1, 13.

considered music, namely the experience of harmony and melody, to be an example of both inner and outer psychophysics. But, in practice, it too was defined by sound sensation and could be described according to psychophysical laws. In essence, experiments on sound sensation, including pitch discrimination and sound intensity, purportedly revealed the source of musical aesthetics.

Bergson begins his *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* with a trenchant critique of Fechner's psychophysics, refusing his assertion that sensation is proportional to the quantity of sensory stimulation. Instead, Bergson advocates for a qualitative appreciation of sensation, arguing that there is merely a "passage" and not a true mathematical, quantifiable difference between one's reaction to stimuli of varying intensities. In other words, Bergson seeks a description of sensation that adequately accounts for our experience. The root of the problem, for Bergson, is that we have reproduced this same confusion between qualitative and quantitative entities in our theories about time, and thus in our theories of the nature of life itself, reducing the human experience of the passage of time to a "homogeneous," countable entity (i.e., clock-time) instead of accounting for our lived experience of time. Rather, he claims that we actually experience time as duration, a succession of qualitative states that cannot be quantified. When we live in duration, we are truly conscious of our actions and thus can perform acts freely, but we actually live most of our lives bound by homogeneous representations of time and thus unaware of our actions.⁴⁴ For Bergson, the true problem with Fechner's theories is that one cannot determine at which point sensation becomes conscious and we truly become aware of just-noticeable differences between two stimuli.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Bergson, *Essai*, 102.

⁴⁵ Bergson, *Essai*, 32.

Ribot, Paul Janet, and Pierre Janet: Bergson and the Nature of Consciousness

Investigation into the relationship between music and mental processes was not limited to psychophysical studies of sound sensation but also profoundly affected the study of physiology and psychology in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. I will focus here on three prominent researchers, Théodule-Armand Ribot, Paul Janet, and Pierre Janet, whose work spanned the fields of medicine, psychology, and philosophy. Their research primarily centered on the relationship of consciousness to memory, particularly altered or pathological states of consciousness, including hypnosis and epilepsy. These altered states of consciousness, in turn, revealed a potential for a unique psychological environment in which memory was supposedly infinitely accurate yet either partially or totally unconscious: in the numerous experiments they conducted or cited, subjects would be unconscious of their actions at a particular moment, yet they would be able to execute a task perfectly.

Examining the research of these scholars helps situate Bergson's theories of memory and duration within a broader intellectual context that extended well beyond the disciplinary boundaries of philosophy proper. The borders of the disciplines of psychology, physiology, and philosophy were much more fluid in late nineteenth-century France than they are today, with many prominent researchers, including Pierre Janet and Ribot, publishing treatises across several areas of study. Pierre Janet in particular took degrees in both philosophy and medicine, completing his medical training under the eminent psychiatrist Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris. Throughout his career, Pierre Janet would continue to explore connections between mechanism and thought processes, beginning with his 1889 dissertation, *l'Automatisme psychologique* (*Psychological Automatism*). Similarly, Ribot published in the

areas of philosophy and psychological research, penning an introduction to the philosophy of Schopenhauer as well as a series of influential treatises that explored the relationship between neurological and psychological phenomena.⁴⁶

Ribot: Organic and Psychological Memory

Bergson owed much to Ribot both intellectually and professionally.⁴⁷ Ribot influenced Bergson profoundly, although Bergson vehemently disagreed with him at practically every turn. Yet it was also Ribot who published many of Bergson's early articles in the prestigious *Revue Philosophique de la France et de L'Etranger*, as the publication's founder and editor in chief. Bergson's work, particularly *Matière et mémoire*, primarily responds to Ribot's *Les maladies de la mémoire* (1881), in which Ribot investigates how memories develop, why some memories are retained better than others, and what effect disease processes such as aphasia have on memory.

Ribot was among the first to advance a theory that memory was at least partly physiological in nature: he argued that memory was a result of nervous system activity⁴⁸ that could evade conscious attempts to recall it. He divides memory into two types: psychological

⁴⁶ See Théodule Ribot, *La philosophie de Schopenhauer* (Paris: Librairie Germer Baillière, 1874); Ribot, *Les maladies de la mémoire* (Paris: Librairie Germer Baillière, 1881); Ribot, *Les maladies de la volonté* (Paris: Librairie Germer Baillière, 1883); Ribot, *Les maladies de la personnalité* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1885); and Ribot, *Psychologie de l'attention* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1889).

⁴⁷ On Bergson's relationship to Ribot, see S. Nicolas, "Les idées sur la mémoire d'un contemporain de Bergson: Théodule Ribot (1839–1916)," in *Cerveau et mémoires: Bergson, Ribot, et la neuropsychologie*, ed. E. Jaffard, B. Claverie, and B. Andrieu (n.p.: Éditions Osiris, 1998), 11–42. See also Frédéric Worms, *Introduction à "Matière et mémoire" de Bergson* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997).

⁴⁸ In the era in which Ribot wrote *Les maladies de la mémoire*, there was considerable debate as to whether the nervous system was organized as a large network of tissue, the view propounded by the Reticularists, or as a system of discrete cells, the perspective held by the Neuronists. It was not until the electron microscope was used to study the nervous system in the 1950s that the so-called "neuron doctrine" could finally be cemented and the debate put to rest. For a brief history of the use of electron microscopy in medicine, see Graham Knott and Christel Genoud, "Is EM dead?" *Journal of Cell Science* 126 (2013): 4545–4552, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.836.7803&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

and organic. Both can be characterized as a series of actions, although psychological memory is conscious whereas organic memory is unconscious. Walking up a flight of stairs, for instance, can be broken down into a series of flights, landings, and individual steps. In the examples Ribot provides, organic memory differs from psychological memory only in the respect that we are not conscious of the richness of its details. In effect, Ribot describes our memory as a series of snapshots that we can link together with varying degrees of accuracy in our conscious lives (psychological memory), yet we can theoretically do so with perfect accuracy when we are not conscious of our actions (organic memory). Again, using the example of climbing a flight of stairs, Ribot writes:

Our psychological memory is ignorant of the number of steps; but the organic memory knows this, as well as the number of flights, the arrangement of the landings, and other details; it is never deceived. May we not say that to the organic memory these well-defined series are precisely analogous to a phrase, a couplet of verse, or a musical air to the psychological memory?⁴⁹

According to Ribot, our organic memory provides what we might call a lossless environment, in which memory is infinitely accurate and capable of recalling every last detail. In the example of climbing a flight of stairs, this would include unconsciously memorizing the number of flights, landings, and the like. However, accessing this type of memory in our conscious lives (psychological memory) becomes problematic apart from the examples that Ribot cites. Ribot implies that the “well-defined series” that exist in organic memory can only be accessed in one’s conscious life through certain activities that duplicate the process of creating such “well-defined series,” many of which involve memorization and performance. The work of an actor, for

⁴⁹ Ribot, *Les maladies de la mémoire*, 8. The translation above is taken from Ribot, *Diseases of Memory*, trans. William Huntington Smith (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1882), 17. “Notre mémoire psychologique ignore le nombre des marches ; notre mémoire organique le connaît à sa manière, ainsi que la division en étages, la distribution des paliers et d’autres détails : elle ne se trompe pas. Ne doit-on pas dire que, pour la mémoire organique, ces séries bien définies sont rigoureusement les analogues d’une phrase, d’un couplet de vers, d’un air musical pour la mémoire psychologique ?”

instance, entails memorizing a “phrase” and a “couplet of verse,” and a musician must memorize a “musical air.”

To support this theory, Ribot relied on experimental data involving musicians. Citing the internist Armand Trousseau’s data, Ribot provides a concrete example of this type of memory in the form of an orchestra violinist afflicted by “vertige épileptique, appelé ‘petit mal,’” or what we would now call petit mal seizures.⁵⁰ The violinist would frequently experience these seizures during performance, yet would still be able to perform his part flawlessly. Through this and other data gathered from case studies on subjects who were musicians, Ribot determines that memory is fundamentally mechanical rather than conscious. Rather, consciousness is only “an element that is added on to memory.”⁵¹

Ribot compares the formation of memories to the phenomenon of negative afterimages, theorizing that our recollection of an object is, in essence, a negative afterimage of our original perception of that object. A negative afterimage describes a visual phenomenon that occurs when we stare at a stationary item for a long time and then suddenly look toward a white background. On the white background, we see a “negative” image of the item in its complementary color. For instance, if we stare at a red ball then suddenly look toward a white background, we see a phantom image in the shape of a bluish-green ball. Wundt, in his research on vision, had shown that the optical nerve was active at both stages of this phenomenon. Ribot theorized that memory also worked this way: the nervous system was active both when it was perceiving an object and

⁵⁰ Ribot, *Les maladies de la mémoire*, 9. In our current understanding of epilepsy, petit mal seizures describe a type of generalized seizure that affects both sides of the brain, and can cause rapid blinking or a few seconds of staring into space. The other type of generalized seizure is the grand mal seizure. Grand mal (or tonic-clonic) seizures can cause the patient to lose consciousness, cry out, fall to the ground, and have muscle spasms. For more information on these categories of seizures, see Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Types of Seizures,” <https://www.cdc.gov/epilepsy/about/types-of-seizures.htm>.

⁵¹ Ribot, *Les maladies de la mémoire*, 9.

recalling an object. Moreover, the nervous system stored memories in specific “nervous centers” in the brain that retained “the residues of motor reactions.”⁵² Over time, according to Ribot, these motor processes become so ingrained that they become automatic. Hence, Ribot believed that memory was inextricably tied to a parallel action triggered by the nervous system, such that the memory would be etched in one’s brain with continued repetition of an action.

For Ribot, this type of fully automatic, unconscious memory becomes an ideal type of memory, a lossless state of what he calls “completely organized” memory.⁵³ At one time, these tasks took conscious effort, but they have now been rendered completely automatic by the repetition of the same action over time. In an experimental context, Ribot claims that these motor processes are routinely observed in tasks that require fine motor coordination and at least some degree of rote practice, including performing music, writing, dancing, and drawing.

The resemblance between Ribot’s and Bergson’s approach to the issue of memory is uncanny, except that Bergson comes to the opposite conclusion: memory is not a step-wise progression of individual snapshots but always a complete whole in itself, what Jankélévitch would later call “organic totality” in his exegesis of Bergson.⁵⁴ Moreover, memory can be made conscious and actualized through intuition. Ribot’s definition of ideal memory recalls what Bergson will later call duration, except that for Bergson, this is a conscious rather than an unconscious phenomenon. Ribot’s psychological memory, in turn, seems akin to Bergson’s notion of ordinary memory and homogeneous or clock-time—the framework in which we conduct our everyday lives.

⁵² Ribot, *Les maladies de la mémoire*, 12.

⁵³ Ribot, *Les maladies de la mémoire*, 48.

⁵⁴ Jankélévitch, *Bergson*, 3.

Paul and Pierre Janet: The Relationship between Free Will and Consciousness

The work of Paul Janet (1823–1899) and his nephew Pierre (1859–1947) explored the relationship of consciousness—specifically time-consciousness—to free will, prefiguring Bergson’s theory of duration. Both Janets were well-versed in philosophy and the current psychological debates of their era, although Paul tended to approach these debates from a philosophical perspective, whereas Pierre did so primarily from a medical standpoint. Significantly, Paul would reframe hypnotic suggestion as a philosophical problem of time-consciousness. Pierre Janet, in turn, would propose a solution in the form of the concept of psychological dissociation, splitting time-consciousness into two planes: one conscious and the other unconscious, anticipating Bergson’s distinction between durational (conscious) and homogeneous (unconscious) manifestations of time.

Paul Janet was a respected philosopher who was heavily influenced by Kantian idealism and is also considered to be one of the last exponents of Victor Cousin’s eclectic school.⁵⁵ He became chair of philosophy at the Sorbonne in 1864, publishing a series of treatises on metaphysics, morality, and the history of philosophy. While Paul Janet largely hewed to the Kantian conventions of his time, his writings demonstrate that he was also intimately familiar with the latest advancements in psychological and medical research.⁵⁶ In his “De la suggestion

⁵⁵ According to Frederick Copleston, Cousin’s eclecticism borrowed from sensualism, idealism, the philosophy of common sense, and mysticism. See Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 9, 44. Paul Janet authored a biography on Cousin in 1885, *Victor Cousin et son oeuvre* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1885), ruing the fact that Cousin’s ideas had fallen so far out of favor among younger scholars.

⁵⁶ On the subject of Paul Janet’s adherence to convention, Hugh Chisholm scoffed in his 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica entry on Janet that his writings were “not characterized by much originality of thought,” and called his theories of morality “little more than a somewhat patronizing reproduction of Kant.”
https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclopædia_Britannica/Janet,_Paul.

dans l'état d'hypnotisme" ("On Hypnotic Suggestion"), Paul praised Charcot's experiments in hypnotizing his hysteria patients and cited numerous neurological studies on other forms of unconscious memory, including sleepwalking and aphasia.⁵⁷ Although his theoretical treatises do not directly advocate for the integration of contemporary psychological and neurological research into the study of philosophy, Paul clearly showed an interest in this research and believed in its relevance to philosophy.⁵⁸

Paul Janet was also a prominent exponent of associationist theories of philosophy, which Bergson would critique in both his *Essai* and *Matière and Mémoire* as a form of psychological determinism.⁵⁹ Associationism has its roots in British philosophy, notably Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). According to Locke, ideas can become interconnected over time, even if they are not directly related to one another. Rather, they are connected due to the fact that one has experienced them together on many previous occasions. Building on Locke's legacy, Hume argued that associationism could describe an entire theory of mental processes, essentially boiling down all mental processes into a single theory: the ability to associate ideas.⁶⁰ Paul Janet defined associationism as a theory of suggestion: "when two ideas are found together, or one after the other, in the same act of consciousness, if one is produced by

⁵⁷ Paul Janet, "De la suggestion de l'état d'hypnotisme," *Revue politique et littéraire* 34 (1884): 100–101.

⁵⁸ His history of philosophy, for example, intended for general use in *lycée* courses around the country, contains a large section on psychology. See Paul Janet and Gabriel Séailles, *Histoire de la philosophie: Les problèmes et les écoles* (Paris: Librairie Ch. Delagrave, 1887).

⁵⁹ See especially Bergson, *Essai*, 68–74; and Bergson, *Matière et mémoire* (Brussels: UltraLetters Publishing, 2013), 83–97.

⁶⁰ "Associationist Theories of Thought." Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/associationist-thought/#WhaAss>.

accident, the other tends to produce itself as well. In other words, one *suggests* the other.”⁶¹

Hence, one idea would suggest another that was habitually associated with it.⁶²

Hypnosis fascinated Paul Janet as a state of what he called “morbid suggestion” that could allow for the uninhibited expression of the laws of association.⁶³ According to Paul Janet, hypnotic suggestion eviscerates free will and thus allows the hypnotist to suggest any kind of action or feeling to the subject:

It is the operation through which, in the state of hypnotism or perhaps in certain waking states that have yet to be defined, we may, with the help of certain sensations, especially speech, provoke in a well-disposed nervous subject a series of more or less automatic phenomena and make him speak, act, think, and feel as we wish him to, in other words, we can transform him into a *machine*.⁶⁴

The hypnotized subject, while apparently remaining awake, would nonetheless lose all capacity to resist the hypnotist and be forced to execute any command, essentially turning him or her into a machine. Paul Janet’s description of the hypnotic subject as a machine embodies the type of rhetoric characteristic of contemporaneous scientific literature; in LeBlanc’s words, these were “standard metaphors for the apparently passive and fatalistic actions of the hypnotic subject.”⁶⁵ Like the liminal state between organic and psychological memory described in Ribot’s studies, hypnosis would place the subject into a mental state beyond the reach of ordinary, conscious

⁶¹ André LeBlanc, “The Origins of the Concept of Dissociation: Paul Janet, His Nephew Pierre, and the Problem of Post-Hypnotic Suggestion,” *Science History Publications Ltd* (2001), <http://articles.adsabs.harvard.edu/pdf/2001HisSc..39...57L>.

⁶² This becomes the first of four laws of association. Laws of association applied to movements as well, yielding a second law: movements could suggest other movements. If both movements and ideas operated according to a logic of association, then it followed that ideas could suggest the movements with which they had been associated and vice versa. André LeBlanc provides a succinct summary of these laws of association: “(1) ideas suggest ideas; (2) movements suggest movements; (3) ideas suggest movements; and (4) movements suggest ideas.” See LeBlanc, “The Origins of the Concept of Dissociation.”

⁶³ On the laws of association, see the above footnote.

⁶⁴ Paul Janet, “De la suggestion de l’état d’hypnotisme,” 102–103. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁵ LeBlanc, “The Origins of the Concept of Dissociation.”

memory. In this altered state, one would be perfectly able to execute a task, yet one would be entirely unaware that one had done so.

In response to a recent hypnosis experiment by the French physician Hippolyte Bernheim, Paul Janet proposed a new theory of hypnotic suggestion in 1884, arguing that it in fact constituted a philosophical problem of time-consciousness.⁶⁶ Bernheim's experiment can be summarized as such: after having undergone hypnosis, a subject is told to return to the hypnotist in thirteen days. Although conscious, the subject seems to have no recollection of the command, yet nonetheless returns at the appointed time. So how does the subject remember to return if she was hypnotized and thus lacked awareness when this information was stated?

Two years later, in 1886, Pierre Janet would put forward a solution to this paradox: the concept of dissociation. He proposed that one's consciousness was effectively divided into two: the main consciousness and a second consciousness that unwittingly kept track of time and executed the command without fail. In experiments with patients being treated for hysteria, Pierre Janet theorized that this doubling of the consciousness (*dédoublement de conscience*) was also the locus of hysteria and could indicate that the patient was attempting to escape the memory of a traumatic event. Pierre Janet's theory of doubled consciousness resolved the logical inconsistencies of the argument for a unitary consciousness that simultaneously remembered prior instructions clearly and yet was apparently completely unconscious, and also built on Ribot and Paul Janet's theories of thought processes. Ribot and Paul Janet both conceived of altered states of mind—including hypnosis, sleepwalking, and neurological disorders such as epilepsy and aphasia—as states in which one loses control of one's free will completely and becomes an automaton. In one's conscious life, however, one would theoretically exercise full control over

⁶⁶ LeBlanc, "The Origins of the Concept of Dissociation."

one's will. Pierre Janet's theory, on the other hand, opened up the possibility that consciousness could occur on two planes at once. Furthermore, Pierre's experimental data on patients who had experienced past trauma purported to show that the boundary between these two planes of consciousness was sometimes porous. When dealing with trauma, one could gradually assimilate unconscious memories into one's conscious life through the intervention of the therapist.

Pierre Janet eventually developed a detailed treatment protocol for patients suffering from what we would now call post-traumatic stress, dividing the recovery process into three stages:

1. Stabilization, symptom-oriented treatment and preparation for liquidation of traumatic memories.
2. Identification, exploration and modification of traumatic memories.
3. Relapse prevention, relief of residual symptomatology, personality reintegration, and rehabilitation.⁶⁷

Stabilization involved controlling the patient's environment as much as possible by reducing stress and complex tasks in their daily lives. If necessary, they were hospitalized. During the second phase of treatment, Pierre Janet employed hypnosis to induce a trance state in which the patient could unconsciously recall their traumatic memories and neutralize, substitute, or reframe them. The therapist would often have the patient write down the traumatic memory while under hypnosis (automatic writing). Then, the therapist would help the patient "neutralize" the offending memory by bringing it to conscious awareness over several sessions (neutralization). Other strategies involved encouraging the patient to think of a positive memory in place of the traumatic one, sometimes through hypnotic suggestion (substitution), or helping the patient reframe the memory in such a way that it became acceptable to the patient (reframing). In the third stage of the treatment protocol, Janet attempted to solidify the gains of the previous two

⁶⁷ Onno Van der Hart, Paul Brown, and Bessel A. van der Kolk, "Pierre Janet's Treatment of Post-traumatic Stress," *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 2 no. 4 (1989): 382.

stages and ultimately enable patients to avoid resorting to dissociation if and when they had to reprocess their trauma.

In the second edition of his *L'État Mental des Hystériques* (1911), Pierre Janet provides perhaps the most complete account of treatment methods for the third phase of treatment.⁶⁸ Janet had probably been using these therapeutic protocols on his patients since at least 1894, when the first edition of *L'État Mental des Hystériques* was published, but the second edition explains them in greater depth. One of his key observations about trauma was that it caused a kind of sensory overload, leading patients to be unable to react to certain stimuli or make complex decisions.⁶⁹ However, he emphasized that this was not an actual deficiency in sensory perception but rather an inability to handle complex mental tasks involving what he called “mental synthesis,” which encompassed free will, attention, and judgment.⁷⁰ Moreover, many patients had suppressed their experiences of trauma to the point that recalling them, either consciously or under hypnosis, caused “hysteria”—that is, severe distress. The usual treatment for this distress involved complete psychological rest.⁷¹ But in his treatment sessions, Janet focused on retraining patients to regain their ability to think clearly by making them “regularly perform mental work, like children at school.”⁷² To Pierre Janet, it was important that these tasks not “degenerate into simple exercises of automatic memory”⁷³ but should involve enough effort to exercise the mind

⁶⁸ Pierre Janet, *État mental des Hystériques*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Alcan, 1911).

⁶⁹ Van der Hart et al., “Pierre Janet’s Treatment of Post-traumatic Stress,” 393.

⁷⁰ Pierre Janet, *État mental des hystériques* (1911), 674–675.

⁷¹ Pierre Janet, *État mental des hystériques* (1911), 675.

⁷² Pierre Janet, *État mental des hystériques* (1911), 675. “travailler cérébralement d’une manière régulière, comme des enfants à l’école.”

⁷³ Pierre Janet, *État mental des hystériques* (1911), 675.

without becoming odious. His approach could be likened to a physical therapy for the mind: after a period of rest, the mind would be progressively exercised until it reached its normal capacity. The mental exercises Pierre Janet prescribed included the incremental study of “history, translations of foreign languages, music, and painting.”⁷⁴

Onno van der Hart and Barbara Friedman have compared this mental rehabilitation process to modern occupational or art therapy.⁷⁵ However, they erroneously state that Janet’s treatment involves “listening to music” rather than playing music, whereas Janet himself refers to “music” in the abstract and does not specify whether “music” has a passive or active connotation.⁷⁶ On the contrary, I claim that the fact that Janet refers to music as a “practice” (*pratique*) suggests that he meant to refer to music in the active sense of playing a musical instrument or singing.⁷⁷ Music and similar, semi-rote tasks, according to Pierre Janet, would give the patient “a regulated life, in which every moment is occupied with a task or by an action determined in advance...All the psychological phenomena that depend on mental synthesis increase, evidently, and we see a parallel disappearance of anesthetics and a decrease in suggestibility.”⁷⁸ The goal of Pierre Janet’s program was to progressively re-acclimate the patient to mental processes that involved the faculty of what he called “mental synthesis.” When their ability to conduct “mental synthesis” began to return through therapy involving semi-rote

⁷⁴ Pierre Janet, *État mental des hystériques* (1911), 676.

⁷⁵ Onno van der Hart and Barbara Friedman, “A Reader’s Guide to Pierre Janet: A Neglected Intellectual Heritage,” in *Rediscovering Pierre Janet: Trauma, Dissociation, and a New Context for Psychoanalysis*, ed. Giuseppe Craparo, Francesca Ortu, and Onno van der Hart (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

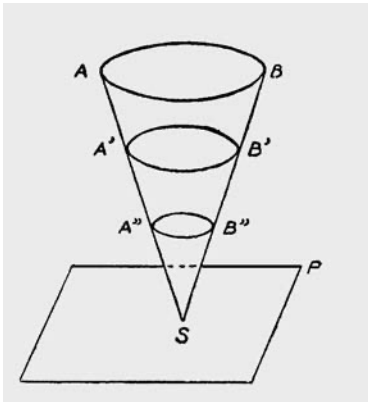
⁷⁶ Van der Hart and Friedman, “Reader’s Guide to Pierre Janet,” 25.

⁷⁷ Pierre Janet, *État mental des hystériques* (1911), 676.

⁷⁸ Pierre Janet, *État mental des hystériques* (1911), 676.

tasks, patients' sensitivity to everyday sensations and actions such as pain and movement would return, and they would be less vulnerable to hypnotic suggestion by the therapist.

Bergson would arguably appropriate Pierre Janet's theory of consciousness occurring on two planes through his division of time into linear time (i.e., clock-time) and duration. Linear time is forward-directed and irreversible, while duration is fluid, encompassing past, present, and future in an eternal present. Bergson also makes a similar distinction between memory and perception: memory can exist on any number of planes between the distant past and the present, but perception only occurs within the present. Bergson explicates this concept through his cone of memory, reproduced below as Example 3.1. In contradistinction to Janet's theory of an unwelcome memory resurfacing during an episode of hysteria, Bergson's theory of memory emphasizes the importance of the ability to shift back and forth between the realms of memory and perception in order to function properly in our daily lives.



EXAMPLE 3.1: Bergson's Cone of Memory.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, 108.

The base of the cone, AB, represents our unconscious memory, which gradually filters down the cone into an infinite number of cross-sections A'B', A''B'', etc. Memory only comes in contact with perception—that is to say, the present—only at the point S, whereas the plane P represents the vast surface of the present that is theoretically available to be observed. Thus, we only perceive a tiny portion of the present, on which we bring to bear only a fraction of our memory at the point S. We use only the portion of our memory that is useful to our present action. The past, on the other hand, is almost entirely hidden by virtue of the exigencies of the present, and can only resurface when we detach from the present in dreams.

At the same time, Bergson believes it is dangerous to live only in dreams, just as it is to live mechanically.

A human being who should *dream* his life instead of living it would no doubt thus keep before his eyes at each moment the infinite multitude of the details of his past history. And, on the other hand, the man who should repudiate this memory with all that it begets would be continually acting his life instead of truly representing it to himself: a conscious automaton, he would follow the lead of useful habits which prolong into an appropriate reaction the stimulation received. The first would never rise above the particular, or even above the individual; leaving to each image its date in time and its position in space, he would see wherein it *differs* from others and not how it resembles them. The other, always swayed by habit, would only distinguish in any situation that aspect in which it practically *resembles* former situations; incapable, doubtless, of *thinking* universals, since every general idea implies the representation, at least virtual, of a number of remembered images, he would nevertheless move in the universal, habit being to action what generality is to thought.⁸⁰

A person who lived only in dreams would have a remarkable consciousness of her past, but would be fixated on the date, time, and space in which events took place, and would not see the totality of her experience. At the other extreme, if one never relied on memory at all, one would

⁸⁰ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, 110. “Un être humain qui *rêverait* son existence au lieu de la vivre tiendrait sans doute ainsi sous son regard, à tout moment, la multitude infinie des détails de son histoire passée. Et celui, au contraire, qui répudierait cette mémoire avec tout ce qu’elle engendre jouerait sans cesse son existence au lieu de se la représenter véritablement : automate conscient, il suivrait la pente des habitudes utiles qui prolongent l’excitation en réaction appropriée. Le premier ne sortirait jamais du particulier, et même de l’individuel. Laisant à chaque image sa date dans le temps et sa place dans l’espace, il verrait par où elle *diffère* des autres et non par où elle leur ressemble. L’autre, toujours porté par l’habitude, ne démêlerait au contraire dans une situation que le côté par où elle *ressemble* pratiquement à des situations antérieures. Incapables sans doute de *penser* l’universel, puisque l’idée générale suppose la représentation au moins virtuelle d’une multitude d’images remémorées, c’est néanmoins dans l’universel qu’il évoluerait, l’habitude étant à l’action ce que la généralité est à la pensée.”

become what Bergson calls a “living automaton,” merely translating nervous excitation into the appropriate reaction without reflecting on the past. Both of these people—the dreamer and the automaton—would be incapable of conceptualizing the universal: the former because she can only think of how images differ from one another, and the latter because she can only think of how images resemble one another.

In the pages that follow, Bergson maps this discussion onto a critique of Nominalism and Conceptualism, both of which he claims are insufficient to apprehend the universal. Of the *idée générale*, Nominalism retains only the extension, “an indefinite and open series of individual objects”,⁸¹ whereas Conceptualism views every object as representative of a whole class of objects. Bergson theorizes that the essence of *l’idée générale*, however, is to be able to shift back and forth between the spheres of perception and pure memory. Here, Bergson implies that one would be able to apprehend the universal by precisely through this movement between perception and pure memory. In both Nominalism and Conceptualism, however, the universal remains confined to the ineffable. Implicit in this statement is also a critique of Kantian transcendental idealism, particularly the idea that the universal is unknowable because it belongs to the realm of *noumena*.

For Bergson, the interplay between memory and perception is more than abstract: it carries real-world consequences. If we cannot marshal the forces of memory and perception to make the correct decision in the present, we risk living an entirely unconscious life, either because we linger too long in memories of the past or do not think consciously about how our memory bears on our actions in the present. The degree to which we can negotiate this

⁸¹ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, 111.

movement between past and present, between memory and perception, is a measure of the fortitude of our free will and our ability to handle the challenges of modern life.

Laloy, Jankélévitch, and Bergson: *Pelléas* as Philosophical Model

Now that we have established the origins of Bergson's philosophy of time as a reaction to contemporaneous research on the relationship between music and consciousness, we can explore how Bergson's theories were applied to music by his students, especially Louis Laloy (1874–1944), a prominent musicologist and music critic, and, secondarily, Vladimir Jankélévitch (1903–1985), a philosopher and musicologist. Laloy first came into contact with Bergson as a student in his philosophy class at Lycée Henri-IV in 1889, the year Bergson began teaching there.⁸² Jankélévitch met Bergson in 1923, at the age of twenty-one, while a doctoral student in philosophy at the École Nationale Supérieure.⁸³ My inquiry into the application of Bergsonism to music will focus primarily on Laloy's analyses of the opening bars of *Pelléas*, establishing a connection between Laloy's veneration of *Pelléas* and Bergsonian philosophical ideals, particularly continuity, emotional and sensory intensity, and duration. While Jankélévitch's writings play a peripheral role in my study, his early works on Bergson are helpful in explicating certain elements of Bergson's philosophy, especially duration, and also reveal the potential limitations of duration as a practicable concept.

⁸² In addition to his admiration for Bergson's philosophy, Laloy adored Bergson for helping him improve his writing. Laloy had struggled in French composition throughout most of his *lycée* career, receiving a mark of just two out of ten, and was turned away outright the first time he tried to apply to the École Normale Supérieure. Laloy himself attributed his initial lack of facility in French to the fact that the Alsatian dialect was his first language, which he spoke at home with the family's servants, not "proper" French. Ironically, however, he excelled in foreign languages, particularly Latin, and would eventually see his work published in the prestigious *Revue littéraire* of the École Normale Supérieure.

⁸³ André Lefebvre, introduction to *Henri Bergson*, by Vladimir Jankélévitch, trans. Nils F. Schott, ed. Alexandre Lefebvre and Nils F. Schott (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), Kindle, 1.

To understand the impact of Bergsonism on Laloy and Jankélévitch, we must first explore the place of philosophy within public education in France around the turn of the twentieth century. Bergson's philosophy emerged in a cultural context in which philosophical literacy was highly valued and formed a crucial aspect of education for his disciples who became music critics and musicologists, particularly Laloy and Jankélévitch. In France, some form of philosophical training was mandated for all children who attended secondary school (*lycée*). Instruction in philosophy represents a time-honored tradition in French *lycée* curricula, first instituted in 1808, ostensibly to pay homage to French Enlightenment thinkers. Today, philosophy remains a compulsory subject for all students in "terminale," the last year of secondary school. In a 2011 interview, Simon Perrier, then director of an association of French philosophy teachers, described the *lycée* philosophy curriculum as a means for students to prepare themselves for the real world through conscious reflection on what they have learned: "the aim is to teach students to reflect on what they learn every day at home and in school. They learn how to approach issues thoughtfully by being introduced to philosophical texts."⁸⁴ The purpose of such demanding training in philosophy is to provide students a framework to address problems in their lives and reflect more deeply on their actions. Philosophy is thus seen as a means of practical education on how to better live one's life. Students embarking on a course of study in the humanities receive eight hours of instruction in philosophy per week, while those in the sciences receive two.

By and large, the place of philosophy in French secondary education around the turn of the twentieth century did not differ markedly from the state of philosophical education today,

⁸⁴ Gaëlle Le Roux, "Are French Students Taught to be More Philosophical?" *France 24*, June 16, 2011, <https://www.france24.com/en/20110616-france-baccalaureate-exams-philosophy-europe-curriculum-university>

apart from two key factors: first, a wider swath of students was required to enroll in the more extensive philosophy course; second, *lycée* instructors of the time were generally also active philosophers. According to André Lalande's 1905 article, "Philosophy in France," young men who aspired to careers in the professions, including medicine, law, academia, and administration, took the longer course, which required 8.5 hours of instruction per week.⁸⁵ The shorter course, generally undertaken by future engineers and occasionally those who intended to teach the hard sciences, consisted of training in the physical sciences, algebra, and geometry, in addition to three hours per week of logic, methodology of the sciences, and ethics.⁸⁶ Thus, education in philosophy was and remains profoundly embedded in French secondary education, representing a foundational element of academic training for students like Laloy, and many of his contemporaries in music criticism, who would proceed along a humanist track of study in the French university system.

In his writings, Laloy often portrays both Bergson and Debussy in Messianic terms. He describes his experience as a student of Bergson as akin to being "witness to a miracle"⁸⁷—"miracle" being the exact word he would also use to characterize his first encounter with *Pelléas* in chapter XV of his 1928 memoir, *La musique retrouvée*.

Pushing aside the prejudices of geometric reasoning [*raison géométrique*] one after the other, and separating with a heretofore unknown rigor the domain of space, where it [i.e. space] has sole reign, from that of duration, where its power stops, this master succeeded...in projecting on [his object of study] all the rays of his spirit, as if he had the blinding light of a laryngologist strapped to his forehead."⁸⁸

⁸⁵ André Lalande, "Philosophy in France," *Philosophical Review* 14, no. 4 (July 1905): 430.

⁸⁶ Lalande, "Philosophy in France," 430. Young women at the École Normale de Sèvres, meanwhile, received a course in ethics in the fourth year of *lycée* and a course in "psychology applied to ethics and education" in the fifth year. According to Lalande, courses in ethics and psychology were also a crucial component of university education for women studying to become teachers.

⁸⁷ Laloy, *La musique retrouvée* (Paris: Plon, 1928), 28.

⁸⁸ Laloy, *La musique retrouvée*, 29.

Laloy paints Bergson as a Messianic bearer of a new philosophy that opened his mind to the mystical power of duration, wherein space was separated entirely from time. In this context, Laloy's strange description of Bergson as a laryngologist is perhaps less bizarre than it seems on the surface: Laloy apparently viewed Bergson as a doctor of sorts, capable of diagnosing the ills of society and offering a potential roadmap of life to a generation that was increasingly disillusioned by the false promises of scientific objectivism. Yet the metaphor of Bergson as a laryngologist also accomplishes something else, linking Bergson to medical investigation surrounding the voice and to his contemporaries in medicine and related fields, among them Fechner, Ribot, and Paul and Pierre Janet.⁸⁹

Laloy and many of his contemporaries became acolytes of Bergson, attempting to pattern their lives after his philosophy, esteeming intuition and re-evaluating their actions at all times.

Laloy writes:

It is very true that, in agreement with the definition of an intuitive life that we owed to Bergson, our concern was henceforth to behave thus: not to direct our thoughts according to Descartes's program, but to direct our sentiments according to the will of the universe. It has nothing to do with cultivating our self [*moi*] through a fierce defense of its borders, as Barrès advised, but, on the contrary, to put it in the broadest possible communion with our entire existence.⁹⁰

Laloy's focus on the philosopher René Descartes and the right-wing writer and politician Maurice Barrès (1862–1923) in this passage is significant for what it reveals about Bergsonian theories of mind and sense perception, and how these may have actually been implemented

⁸⁹ On the relationship between voice and laryngology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see J.Q. Davies, "In Search of Voice: *Nourrit's* Voix Mixte, Donzelli's Bari-Tenor," chap. 5 in *Romantic Anatomies of Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014) and Benjamin Steege, "Vocal Culture in the Age of Laryngoscopy," chap. 2 in *Nineteenth-Century Opera and the Scientific Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁹⁰ Laloy, *La musique retrouvée*, 31. "Il est bien vrai que, d'accord sur la définition d'une vie intuitive que nous devons à Bergson, notre souci était désormais de conduire, non point nos pensées par ordre selon le programme de Descartes, mais nos sentiments selon le vœu de l'univers. Il ne s'agissait pas du tout de cultiver notre moi par une âpre défense de ses frontières comme le conseillait alors Barrès, mais au contraire de le mettre en communion le plus largement possible avec toute existence."

among Bergson's followers. The Bergsonian blueprint, according to Laloy, would not follow a pattern of Descartes's substance dualism (i.e., mind-body dualism), which holds that mind and matter are distinct entities with independent properties. Descartes argued that matter, broadly construed, had its own laws of operation that would require the intervention of a mind (in other words, human action) to subvert. In other words, a body without a mind was incapable of thought and feeling. Rather, the mind would direct the movements and actions of the body through the pineal gland.⁹¹ Laloy claims that the Bergsonian model would establish a different relationship between the mind and body: the goal was not for the mind to achieve complete control over one's thoughts and actions, but instead to adapt one's sentiments to one's surrounding environment.⁹² To translate this passage, I adopted a literal translation of the word *sentiments* as "sentiments," but this word can also mean "sensations," indicating the primacy of physical and environmental sensations within Bergson's model. Thus, Laloy implies that, in Bergson's philosophy, sensations are actually the most important determinant in one's relationship with the outer world as a whole.

Unlike Maurice Barrès's *culte du moi* (cult of the self), which held that the self was the "sole tangible reality,"⁹³ the Bergsonian model would instead seek to orient the self within the wider world.⁹⁴ In opposition to Barrès, Laloy emphasized not our relationship to our inner

⁹¹ On the evolution of Descartes's thought on the pineal gland, see Gert-Jan Lokhorst "Descartes and the Pineal Gland," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/pineal-gland/>.

⁹² Laloy, *La musique retrouvée*, 31.

⁹³ Maurice Barrès, *Examen des trois romans idéologiques: Sous l'oeil des barbares, Un homme libre et Le jardin de Bérénice* (Paris: Perrin, 1892), 49.

⁹⁴ Laloy, *La musique retrouvée*, 31. Barrès's *culte du moi* refers to an influential trilogy of novels published between 1888 and 1891: *Sous l'oeil des Barbares* (*Under the Eyes of the Barbarians*, 1888), *Un Homme libre* (*A Free Man*, 1889), and *Le Jardin de Bérénice* (*The Garden of Bérénice*, 1891). In his novels as well as his political work, Barrès advocated the relentless pursuit of nativism as well as individualism. A native son of Lorraine, which had recently been annexed to Prussia during the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), Barrès captured the reactionary, anti-German

selves but our “communion with our entire existence,” practically lifting the phrase wholesale from Bergson’s *Le Rire*, which speaks of the possibility of “immediate communion with things and with ourselves.”⁹⁵ I suggest that this phrase offers two potential avenues for interpretation. First, it serves as a philosophical rebuke of both Cartesian mind-body dualism and Kantian transcendental idealism. Second, it betrays a Dreyfusard political motivation behind Bergsonism as a form of opposition against the reactionary, anti-Semitic, right-wing nationalist status quo then in force among France’s political elite. Bergsonism, then, not only functioned as an alternative philosophical discourse but also an alternative political discourse, particularly for young people of Laloy’s age.

Yet Laloy could not always regiment his life to the degree required by the Bergsonian program. He writes: “sentiments that were so constantly scrutinized⁹⁶ could not prevail in every situation, and our youthful ardor necessitated some flights of passion...this dandyism of the heart. It was thus that Wagner impressed upon us his entire empire.”⁹⁷ The strictures of Bergsonism, it seemed, were at times too much to bear for a young person in want of a certain modicum of hedonism. For Laloy, and undoubtedly many of his contemporaries, Wagner became somewhat of a guilty pleasure as well as a means of expressing their passionate impulses.

Laloy’s *La musique retrouvée* (*Music Rediscovered*, 1902–1927) is a prime example of the influence of Bergson on his musicological writings. Published in 1928, it functions as an eye-

political fervor of the moment. He was elected to the position of deputy in Nancy, in northeastern France, serving from 1889 to 1893. He ran for deputy again in Paris and held the office from 1906 to 1923.

⁹⁵ Bergson, *Laughter*, in *Comedy*, trans. Wylie Sypher (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), 157.

⁹⁶ The word Laloy uses here is *surveillés* (literally, “surveilled”), suggesting a potential connection with Foucault’s much later analysis of surveillance as a restrictive kind of discipline.

⁹⁷ Laloy, *La musique retrouvée*, 32.

witness account of French musical culture around the turn of the twentieth century, particularly the events surrounding the premiere of *Pelléas* and the subsequent paradigm shift in musical aesthetics that accompanied it. Laloy lived through and recorded his experience of practically all the major events we now associate with *fin-de-siècle* French culture: concerts organized by the Concerts Colonne and the Société Nationale; the influence of Russian music; Javanese gamelan music at the 1889 World's Fair; and, of course, the premiere of *Pelléas*. In the first chapter of the book, evocatively titled "Living in Music" ("Vivre en musique"), perhaps a veiled reference to Bergson, Laloy describes his writing style as almost journalistic, presenting the facts alone, and leaving the reader to decide for herself about the implications of his narrative. He writes: "There are many ways of writing history. After several attempts, I have come to believe that the best remains to gather contemporaneous statements on each fact and place them before the reader, giving him the freedom to make conclusions as he sees fit."⁹⁸ Yet, for Laloy, the laying out of musical events that marked his own evolution as a musicologist and critic represented not only a method of organizing his memoir or historical narrative, but a way of constructing time and memory, betraying his roots as a pupil of Henri Bergson at the Lycée Henri-IV. The title of the book itself (*La musique retrouvée*), which could be translated as *Music Regained* or *Music Rediscovered*, also knowingly plays on Proust's *Time Regained*, the final installment of *In Search of Lost Time*.⁹⁹ Comparing his work to Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, Laloy muses:

⁹⁸ Laloy, *La musique retrouvée*, 1. "Il y a bien des manières d'écrire l'histoire. Après plus d'un essai, j'en viens à croire que la meilleure est encore de recueillir, sur chaque fait, les dépositions contemporaines, et de les mettre sous les yeux du lecteur en lui laissant la liberté de conclure à sa guise."

⁹⁹ *Time Regained* had been released in 1927, just one year before the publication of *La musique retrouvée*. Bergson also had a connection with Proust, having married Proust's cousin, Louise Neuburger in 1891. For an intriguing reading of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* through the lens of contemporaneous philosophy, particularly Bergsonism, see Guerlac, *Proust, Photography, and the Time of Life* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

“Music was for me, and remains to this day, not only a friend but a confidant, a counselor, a teacher, which, year after year transformed, through a series of necessary revelations, the rhythm of my will and the harmony of my consciousness.”¹⁰⁰ Perhaps, as in Bergson’s own writings, the “rhythm” of Laloy’s will and the “harmony” of his consciousness were not idle metaphors, but instead a measure of how much his own perspective on music was colored by his background in Bergsonian philosophy.

Laloy apparently maintained a relationship with Bergson throughout his career and also actively engaged with him on matters concerning the philosophy of music. Shortly after the publication of *La musique retrouvée*, Bergson wrote a cordial letter to Laloy, thanking him for the book and claiming that it represented an important contribution to the study of aesthetics, providing an “extremely interesting contribution to the philosophy of music.”¹⁰¹ Bergson made particular mention of pages 115–118, a chapter entitled “Sur Deux Accords” (On Two Chords) in which Laloy analyzes the opening of *Pelléas*. Significantly, this is also the same section of music Laloy examined in at least two other publications: a November 1902 analysis in the *Revue musicale* and his 1904 article “Claude Debussy: La Simplicité en musique,” his first article of some length on Debussy.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Laloy, *La musique retrouvée*, 2. “Elle [la musique] a été pour moi, et jusqu’à ce jour, non seulement une amie mais une confidente, une conseillère, une éducatrice, qui d’année en année a changé par une suite de révélations nécessaires le rythme de mon vouloir et l’harmonie de ma conscience.”

¹⁰¹ Henri Bergson to Louis Laloy, June 30, 1928. This letter is held in the private collection of Vincent Laloy and has been published in Deborah Priest, *Louis Laloy (1874–1944) on Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999), Plate 9. It does not appear in the edition of Bergson’s correspondence, nor does any of Bergson’s other correspondence with Laloy. For Bergson’s correspondence, see André Robinet, ed., *Henri Bergson: Correspondances* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2002).

¹⁰² Louis Laloy, “Claude Debussy: La Simplicité en Musique,” *La Revue musicale* (15 February 1904): 106–111. The full text appears in English translation in Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 65–74.

In a chapter titled simply “Le Miracle” (The Miracle), Laloy represents *Pelléas* as the epitome of a deliberate style of composition that sought to reflect the contours of sensation and nature, without sacrificing the ability to hold one’s attention. According to Laloy, it accomplished the latter function even better than the *Nocturnes*, which were “so original and charming that one could easily listen to them twice over, but even then, one’s attention would wander somewhat.”¹⁰³ Like many others of his generation, including Ravel’s band of Apaches, Laloy would return to see *Pelléas* numerous times. Laloy not only enjoyed the opera immensely but, similarly to Ravel, he saw his attendance at performances of *Pelléas* as a demonstration of support for an opera that was regularly being attacked in the press.¹⁰⁴ As it had been for Ravel, going to see *Pelléas* became a social event for Laloy; he cites music students Fernando Gallardo and Charles Bordes, and the secular clergyman Abbé Léonce Petit among the friends that he saw regularly at performances of *Pelléas*.¹⁰⁵ Abbé Petit was also a friend of Ravel’s, so there was at least some overlap in Laloy and Ravel’s social circles.

Laloy was with Gallardo on the night he first saw *Pelléas*, confessing that he and Gallardo had both been put “under the spell” of *Pelléas*.¹⁰⁶ Gallardo, on the other hand, was “more anxious than I to discover the source” of the bewitching qualities of the opera, namely Debussy’s harmonies.¹⁰⁷ Laloy recalled:

¹⁰³ Laloy, *La musique retrouvée*, 104.

¹⁰⁴ On Ravel’s repeated viewings of *Pelléas*, see Jann Pasler, “A Sociology of the Apaches: ‘Sacred Battalion’ for *Pelléas*,” chap. 9 in *Berlioz and Debussy: Sources, Contexts, Legacies*, ed. Kerry Murphy and Barbara Kelly (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007). Laloy wrote of his advocacy of *Pelléas*: “A group organized around *Pelléas*. It was necessary to do so to defend a work that music critics had been practically unanimous in condemning.” See Laloy, *La musique retrouvée*, 106.

¹⁰⁵ Laloy, *La musique retrouvée*, 105.

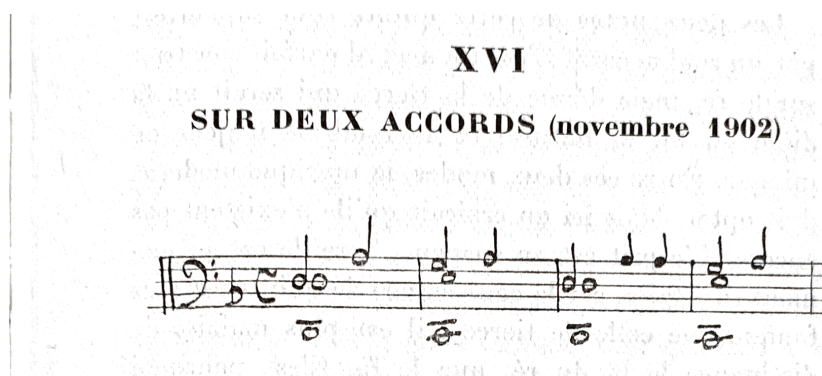
¹⁰⁶ Laloy, *La musique retrouvée*, 105.

¹⁰⁷ Laloy, *La musique retrouvée*, 105.

I remember having said to him: “those aren’t dissonances. They’re more perfect than perfect [*plus que parfait*] chords,” by which I meant consonances in which, in place of each note, another consonance was used.¹⁰⁸

In essence, Debussy’s principal harmonic innovation, according to Laloy, was that he had transformed perfect chords from the standard combination of tonic, mediant, and dominant into an entire palette of possible consonances through the use of upper extensions (sevenths, ninths, elevenths, etc.). Laloy’s definition of what he calls “more perfect than perfect” chords also seeks to account for Debussy’s unconventional, sometimes hollowed out chord voicings, for example, seventh chords without the fifth. Crucially, Laloy’s theorization of Debussy’s consonances as a skeleton of a chord with numerous possible permutations sets up his analysis of the opening of *Pelléas* in the following chapter of *La musique retrouvée*—the one Bergson highlighted as “what ought to be...a study of aesthetics.”¹⁰⁹

To understand why the analysis of the opening of *Pelléas* holds such pride of place in Laloy’s theoretical works, we must return to its original publication in the November 1902 issue of *La Revue musicale*, given below as Example 3.2.



EXAMPLE 3.2: “Sur Deux Accords,” Laloy’s analysis of mm. 1–2 of *Pelléas* in *La Musique retrouvée*, 115.

¹⁰⁸ Laloy, *La musique retrouvée*, 105. “Je me souviens de lui avoir dit : ‘Ce ne sont pas des dissonances mais des accords plus que parfaits,’ entendant par là des consonances où à la place de chaque note était mise une autre consonance.”

¹⁰⁹ Bergson to Louis Laloy, June 30, 1928. Cited in Priest, *Louis Laloy*, Plate 9.

In late 1902, Laloy began a series for the *Revue musicale* called “Exercices d’analyse” (Exercises in Analysis) that dealt with thorny music-theoretical problems. An anonymous reader from Switzerland soon wrote in to request that Laloy analyze the opening bars of *Pelléas*, which had just premiered in May of that year, complaining that he struggled to determine the mode or tonality of the opening phrase. Laloy published this letter in the October 1902 issue of the *Revue musicale*:

I’ve followed your *Exercices in Analysis* with great interest, in which harmony melds so admirably with the musical meaning and the aesthetic-psychological study of the works considered...In spite of my good faith and some knowledge of harmony, I could not figure out in which tonality or mode the first chords were written, nor what the alterations afterwards meant, nor how one would justify the four parallel fifths that follow. Four parallel fifths! That’s a lot for two measures. Don’t you think?¹¹⁰

The reader notes his appreciation for Laloy’s ability to relate the study of harmony to the larger aesthetic and psychological implications of the works at hand, suggesting that the wider readership of the *Revue musicale* was interested not only in a technical account of Debussy’s harmonies but also the psychological theory behind them.

In the following issue of the *Revue musicale*, in November 1902, Laloy describes the opening D-A dyad of *Pelléas* as a perfect chord (i.e., a root position chord) lacking a third, rather than as an open fifth. He writes: “such a chord has a floating, mysterious quality, and something of the splendor of the indeterminate.”¹¹¹ For Laloy, much of the power of *Pelléas* seems to reside in the opening chords alone, precisely because of their indeterminacy.

Only the third, major or minor, allows one to sort a chord into one of the two modes, major or minor, between which our modern music must choose: a chord without a third, especially when it appears at the

¹¹⁰ Laloy, “Exercices d’analyse,” *Revue musicale* 2, no. 10 (October 1902): 431.

¹¹¹ Laloy, “Exercices d’analyse,” *Revue musicale* 2, no. 11 (November 1902): 471. “Un tel accord a pour nous quelque chose de flottant, de mystérieux, et comme la majesté de l’indéterminé.”

beginning of a phrase, thus seems to us as though it were anterior and superior to all specialization; it is a generic and empty form, capable of being specified in two different ways.¹¹²

In the absence of the third, Laloy claims that one could not classify the chord as major or minor, particularly not at the beginning of the phrase, with no other context that could provide an indication of the key or mode. If we understand the opening of *Pelléas* within the frame of Bergsonism, then the power of the “*Pelléas* chord,” so to speak, resides in exactly this ambiguity of tonal function: unlike the automatic or semi-automatic thought processes that Fechner, Ribot, and Pierre Janet ascribed to music, the *Pelléas* chord necessitates the conscious intervention of the listening subject to determine its function. For example, it could not operate according to the Fechner-Weber principle, which outlines a direct relationship between stimulus and sensation, as it lacks the stimulus of the third in the first place.

In the first two measures of *Pelléas*, Laloy calls attention to a succession of descending parallel fifths (D-A to C-G), which quickly resolve to an A-minor chord in second inversion (see Example 3.3, below). Laloy frames this progression as a mere passage from the tonic with an as yet indeterminate mode (D major or D minor) to the dominant (A)—in this case, the minor dominant—thus attempting to explain away the use of forbidden parallel fifths and ignoring the potentially jarring C-major chord on the first beat of m. 2 as a passing chord. “There is only a passing oscillation [of notes], and we return to the point of departure: the G anticipates the A that

¹¹² Laloy, “Exercices d’analyse,” *Revue musicale* 2, no. 11 (November 1902): 471. “Seule la tierce, majeure ou mineure, permet de classer un accord dans l’un des deux modes, majeur ou mineur, entre lesquels notre musique moderne doit opter : un accord sans tierce, surtout lorsqu’il se présente au début d’une phrase, nous apparaît donc comme antérieur et supérieur à toute spécialisation ; c’est une forme générale et vide, susceptible de se préciser de deux manières différentes.”

follows it...[it is] part of the class of passing alterations that are permitted by melodic but not harmonic motion.”¹¹³

EXAMPLE 3.3: Laloy’s Analysis of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, mm. 1–4.

Laloy explains that the melodic phrase is incomplete on the first beat of m. 2, and in fact what we want to hear is the resolution upward toward A: we want to hear the melodic continuity of the entire phrase. “A C-chord appears, but we are not dupes, we refuse to let it rest at this point; what we want to hear is an A chord, because there is a natural progression from D to A...Thus, the parallel fifths, instead of interrupting the phrase, let us know that it has not yet ended, and fortify rather than impoverish the unity of the phrase.”¹¹⁴ Here, Laloy emphasizes the importance of the melodic unity of this passage, echoing Bergson’s view of melody as an indivisible, organic whole.

¹¹³ Laloy, “Exercices d’analyse,” (November 1902), 472. “Il n’y a là qu’une oscillation passagère, qu’on reviendra au point de départ : le *sol* fait prévoir le *la* qui lui fait suite...[il] rentre dans la classe des altérations passagères, qui sont justiciables du mouvement mélodique et non de l’harmonie.”

¹¹⁴ Laloy, “Exercices d’analyse,” (November 1902), 472.

In his 1928 analysis of this same musical passage in *La musique retrouvée*, Laloy analyzes the question of the minor mode slightly differently and uses a more overtly Bergsonian framework, theorizing that our perception of mode changes as a function of our memory. When the chord progression from the first two measures of *Pelléas* returns in mm. 3–4, Laloy argues that we have retained the minor mode in our memory, and now perceive the reprise of the opening D-A dyad in minor. Accordingly, we re-evaluate the first open fifth of the piece as belonging to the minor mode as well. “The question is soon settled, and we perceive that the first chord, still present in our memory, could only belong, it too, to the minor mode. Thus, the author knows how to give the feeling of mystery while avoiding obscurity, by means of a simplicity that amounts to a kind of genius.”¹¹⁵ For Laloy, the harmonic ambiguity in the first four measures of *Pelléas* represents a principal component of Debussy’s genius, whereby Debussy succeeds in creating a sense of Symbolist mystery without venturing too far into the realm of abstraction. Interestingly, Laloy’s analysis never truly resolves the question of whether the opening of *Pelléas* is in fact in D minor, noting only that we “perceive” the first chord in the minor mode retroactively, once we are able to re-evaluate our frame-of-reference based on what occurs in mm. 3–4.

The emotional impact of Debussy’s music also represents a significant aspect of Laloy’s appreciation of Debussy, upon which he expounded in the 1904 essay, “Claude Debussy, Simplicity in Music.” Here, he ardently defends Debussy’s unorthodox use of harmony and form, and rails against the conventional opinion that Debussy’s music had little substance

¹¹⁵ Laloy, *La musique retrouvée*, 117–118. “L’équivoque est alors dissipée aussitôt et nous nous apercevons que le premier accord, présent encore à notre mémoire, ne pouvait appartenir, lui aussi, qu’au mode mineur. C’est ainsi que l’auteur sait donner le sentiment du mystère en évitant l’obscurité, par des moyens dont la simplicité tient du prodige.”

because it did not conform to accepted academic standards.¹¹⁶ He praises Debussy's use of "music without formulae, in which everything comes from the heart, music with no idle developments, modelled on the drama, or rather on life itself, of which the words of the drama were only a pale reflection; simple, apt declamation, clear, contained orchestration; irresistible emotional power."¹¹⁷ He goes on to paint structural components such as development sections as mere "formulae," arguing that they have structure but no emotional substance. Rather, the ideal opera, for Laloy, seems to be one that mirrors "life itself," whose simple declamation and clear, restrained orchestration would reinforce its emotional force. I propose that Laloy's invocation of "life itself" may stand for something more philosophically concrete than previously imagined, and may even be modeled on Bergsonian precepts regarding the "continuity of life."

For Laloy, the concept of the continuity of life seems to be inextricably linked with Debussy's use of harmony to convey emotion. Here, Laloy identifies two existing types of harmony: the "harmony of encounter,"¹¹⁸ and "tonal"¹¹⁹ harmony. In the harmony of encounter, the ear processes chords, but they have no independent function, as the work focuses solely on opposing lines of melodic counterpoint, as in music of the medieval period.¹²⁰ Tonal harmony, on the other hand, aims to establish a particular key or tonal area. Laloy complains of "perpetual tonic and dominant chords, when the tonality hardly changes," disparaging nineteenth-century Italian opera for this reason. While he claims that both systems are in use by modern

¹¹⁶ Laloy, "Claude Debussy: La simplicité en musique," *La Revue musicale* (15 February 1904): 106–111. Citations that follow are from the English translation in Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 65–84.

¹¹⁷ Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 66.

¹¹⁸ Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 69.

¹¹⁹ Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 70.

¹²⁰ Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 69.

composers,¹²¹ he argues that Debussy's harmony represents a different variety entirely, retaining evidence of "very definite tonalities," but remaining "essentially expressive" above all.¹²²

Debussy's innovation, he argued, did not reside in new harmonies themselves—the infamous seventh and ninth chords—but rather the fact that he imbued his harmonies with an unprecedented expressive function.

Laloy extols Debussy's harmonies as a particular kind of genius, in that they capture fleeting moments of emotion, and uses Bergsonian language relating to continuity to describe Debussy's unique ability to depict lived experience. He writes: "Monsieur Debussy paints with chords...and thus succeeds in noting down momentary nuances of feeling. It is, if you like, Impressionism, but of the best kind, for it makes the continuity of life easier to grasp, instead of interrupting it."¹²³ When viewed independently of any additional context, Laloy's use of the phrase "continuity of life" may appear incongruous. But when seen through the lens of Bergsonism, Laloy's comments evince a connection between Debussy and core tenets of Bergsonian philosophy, among them continuity and duration. Laloy's remarks could thus be seen as belonging to an intellectual history of Bergsonism that permeates his early music criticism, and also seems to have shaped his interpretation of Debussy, particularly *Pelléas*, in his later memoir, *La musique retrouvée*.

The idea of "the continuity of life" is inextricably connected to Bergson's definition of duration, the foundational element of his philosophy. Under the logic of duration, the past and present coexist in constant, mutual exchange: one's past experiences and impressions form the

¹²¹ Laloy cites d'Indy and Dukas as exponents of the harmony of encounter, but does not cite any practitioners of tonal harmony. See Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 70.

¹²² Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 70.

¹²³ Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 70.

basis for one's evaluation of the present, and the present continually forces a re-evaluation of the past. In other words, for Laloy, Debussy's use of harmony reflects not only his capacity to portray emotional content, but also reveals something to us about how we might potentially access duration—a holistic understanding of time as encompassing both past and present. While Laloy does not elaborate further on this connection between music and access to duration, Vladimir Jankélévitch's analysis of Bergson may be helpful in clarifying this point. Jankélévitch, a philosopher and musicologist who studied under Bergson, wrote of duration as a past that is "presently experienced and lived by a consciousness"¹²⁴ in a complete, all-encompassing form. In an ideal situation, the past is totally accessible to us at any given time, but our sense of rationality disrupts our ability to recall the past in total continuity. Jankélévitch writes that we are horrified by the idea that the past and present can indeed coexist, and thus seek to suppress this natural state of what he calls "mutual immanence."¹²⁵ Art, on the other hand, allows this exchange to flourish, and none more so than music. Jankélévitch writes: "none, however, succeeds better than music, undoubtedly because, thanks to polyphony, it has more means at its disposal than any other art to express this intimate interpenetration of states of mind."¹²⁶ Although Bergson's writings are not always explicit about the connection between music and his philosophy, for Jankélévitch, music was perhaps the ideal medium to convey Bergsonian duration, as it allowed for several simultaneous melodic lines to occur at once.

¹²⁴ Jankélévitch, *Bergson*, 8.

¹²⁵ Jankélévitch, *Bergson*, 6.

¹²⁶ Jankélévitch, *Bergson*, 6.

Surprisingly, with no apparent reference to Laloy, Jankélévitch also suggests that the beginning of *Pelléas* (specifically m. 18 ff.) bears a special relevance to this particular tenet of Bergsonism. He writes:

Recall, for example, the mysterious prelude to *Pelléas et Mélisande*, which, starting in the eighteenth bar, sets Golaud's theme against Mélisande's and thereby expresses the tragic union that will tie the two destinies together... This is what the inner life does at every moment: in paradoxical counterpoints, it associates experiences that appear to us as without connection, such that each of them bears witness to the entire person.¹²⁷

The musical passage in question is given below as Example 3.4. Golaud's theme appears in the bassoons and horns, and Mélisande's theme in the flute, oboe, and clarinet. According to Jankélévitch, the superimposition of Golaud's and Melisande's motifs in this passage mimics one's experience of the passage of time: it allows for "paradoxical counterpoints" that coexist alongside one another, just as one's past and present lived experiences can coexist in duration. The idea that music can portray lived experience—particularly, a Bergsonian idea of that experience—also pervades Laloy's early writings on Debussy.

¹²⁷ Jankélévitch, *Bergson*, 6.

EXAMPLE 3.4: Debussy, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Prelude, mm. 18–22 (Paris: Fromont, 1904).

Throughout his early music criticism, Laloy frequently inserts Debussy as the protagonist in a Messianic narrative, casting him as the savior of the art of harmony and the prophet of a new musical style, one that appears distinctly Bergsonian in conception. In the 1910 article “Claude

Debussy et le Debussysme” (“Claude Debussy and Debussyism”), Laloy placed *debussysme* at the forefront of a new movement in music on a par with Symbolism and Impressionism before it:

The innovations he has brought to music are summed up by a vocable which has already been much used, as an insult by some, as a proud motto by others: Debussyism. Debussyism corresponds to what Symbolism was in poetry, and Impressionism in painting. The analogy is not fortuitous: born in 1862, Claude Debussy came of age precisely at the time when these systems triumphed; and he was a frequent visitor at Stéphane Mallarmé’s salon, which was the temple where the mysteries were piously celebrated.¹²⁸

Laloy frames Debussy as carrying forward the goals of Symbolism and Impressionism, to which he claimed Debussy was the rightful heir as a frequent visitor to the Tuesday night soirées Mallarmé hosted for writers, artists, and musicians. Just as Laloy cites Christian imagery in reference to Mallarmé, he casts Debussy as another Messiah. “Only with Debussy did deliverance come; it was sudden and effortless; as if touched by a magic wand, the ramparts vanished instantly into thin air, and nature was opened up, quivering, rustling, radiant and unlimited.”¹²⁹ For Laloy, it was Debussy who liberated French music from a supposed Dark Age that preceded it: he transformed music into a sensory experience of nature in all its fullness, almost as surely as Jesus made water into wine.

I argue that Laloy positioning Debussy in this way not only lent legitimacy to *debussysme* as an artistic movement in its own right but also aligned the aesthetic goals of Symbolism, Impressionism, and *debussysme* with the core Bergsonian concepts of duration and intuition. According to Laloy, Symbolism, Impressionism, and *debussysme* all sought to escape the confines of form, reaching toward an art of sensation that imitated life. Symbolism would accomplish this by transfiguring language into music, whereas Impressionism would focus only

¹²⁸ Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 107–8. “Ce qu’il a apporté d nouveau dans la musique se résume sous un vocable qui a beaucoup servi déjà, aux uns d’insulte, aux autres de fière devise : c’est le Debussysme. Le Debussysme répond à ce que fut, pour la poésie, le symbolisme, et l’impressionnisme pour la peinture. L’analogie n’est pas fortuite : né en 1862, Claude Debussy achevait sa jeunesse au moment où ces systèmes triomphaient ; et il a fréquenté le salon de Stéphane Mallarmé, qui fut le temple où l’on en célébrait pieusement les mystères.”

¹²⁹ Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 90.

on visual sensations. *Debussyste* music, in turn, would abandon conventional form and harmonic progressions, operating as an art of pure sound. I argue that the relationship that Laloy defines between Symbolism and music has special relevance for the philosophical and symbolic potential of music as an art form. Laloy wrote that poetry existed at the intersection of meaning and sensation: “The word, the instrument of the poet, is itself open to two interpretations [*acceptions*]: it has to evoke a meaning while at the same time awakening a sensation. It is the meeting point of an idea and a sound.”¹³⁰ The ultimate goal of Symbolism, according to Laloy, was to separate meaning from sound and “extract from language... [the] musical effects of which it is capable.”¹³¹ In other words, the aim of Symbolism was to transform words themselves into musical objects.

It is worth noting here that Laloy’s reflections on Symbolism echo those of Mallarmé, the figure most associated with the Symbolist movement in poetry. Mallarmé considered music the ideal form of art because he believed it was the most abstract of all the arts. In an interview with Jules Huret in 1891, Mallarmé extols the power of allusion, suggestion, and mystery to subvert signification:

There must...only be allusion. The contemplation of objects, the image flying away from the reveries inspired by them, are song: the Parnassians, for their part, take the thing in its entirety and show it: by doing this they lack mystery....To *name* an object is to suppress three quarters of the pleasure of a poem, which resides in the delight of guessing [at meaning] little by little; to *suggest*, that is the ideal.¹³²

¹³⁰ My translation from the French given in Priest, *Debussy, Ravel et Stravinski: textes de Louis Laloy* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2007), 108.

¹³¹ Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 88.

¹³² Cited in Helen Abbott, *Between Baudelaire and Mallarmé: Voice, Conversation, and Music* (Farnham, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 183. “Il faut. . .qu’il n’y ait qu’allusion. La contemplation des objets, l’image s’envolant des rêveries suscitées par eux, sont le chant: les Parnassiens, eux, prennent la chose entièrement et la montrent: par là ils manquent de mystère. . . . Nommer un objet c’est supprimer les trois quarts de la jouissance du poème qui est faite du bonheur de deviner peu à peu; le suggérer, voilà le rêve.”

If, in the Symbolist universe, allusion, suggestion, and mystery were the ideal means of communication in poetry, then it was music—as opposed to language—that could supply the necessary abstraction. Interestingly, however, it was not just any music that would do, but rather what Mallarmé identifies specifically as vocal music: *le chant*. As Helen Abbott points out, however, “a certain degree of slippage” exists between *le chant* and other terms Mallarmé used to refer to music, including “musique,” “lyre,” and “harmonie,” raising the question of whether vocal music or absolute music would be better suited to the Herculean task of liberating poetry from semantic content.¹³³ Yet the question remains: why write poetry at all if one could bypass the problematic aspects of language by writing music instead? Abbott contends this irresolvable contradiction stands at the heart of Mallarmé’s theorization of poetry, caught between sound and signification:

So the relationship between words and music, between a poetry that sings and a poetry that is pure (instrumental) music is complicated by the fact that poetry can never release itself from words, and that fundamentally, poetry cannot release itself from a vocal enactment, because there is no instrument that can “play” the poetry other than the human voice itself.¹³⁴

Abbott makes a cogent argument that poetry is inextricably tied to words and “vocal enactment” because both depend upon the human voice. However, I would argue that evaluating Mallarmé’s argument on its logical inconsistencies alone does not adequately recognize the sheer audacity of his claim that poetry could indeed resemble music. Mallarmé continued to aspire to a poetry not based on words themselves, *per se*, but rather combinations of sounds and the evocation of imagery. As Geoffrey Allan Wilson has eloquently articulated, Mallarmé sought to create poetry that “place[d] the relationships between words in the poem in the foreground, with the ‘meaning’ of the poem existing, if at all, through the network of images and sounds that the words

¹³³ Abbott, *Between Baudelaire and Mallarmé*, 184.

¹³⁴ Abbott, *Between Baudelaire and Mallarmé*, 193.

engage.”¹³⁵ I claim that Mallarmé did in fact seek to accomplish something inherently paradoxical: to create poems made from words that functioned like music, merely suggesting or alluding to meaning through images and sounds.

Eventually, Laloy claimed, both Symbolism and Impressionism would culminate in “the apotheosis of sensation.”¹³⁶ Music was apparently already lightyears ahead in this process because it already was an art of sensation. Laloy writes: “Music appeals only to sensation. The sounds it employs have no meaning, and cannot represent any object. So it seems that music must have been, naturally and from the very beginning, the most Symbolist and Impressionist of all the arts.”¹³⁷ However, Laloy cautioned against going too far in the direction of pure sensation, lest music become totally abstract and meaningless. But, for Laloy, Debussy’s music struck exactly the right balance between abstraction on a formal, thematic, and harmonic level while still remaining true to the Bergsonian goal of mirroring lived experience. Furthermore, it was *Pelléas* that best embodied this ideal: it was opera—not pure music—that fulfilled this model.

While Laloy rarely mentions Bergson by name in his writings, he often uses odd turns of phrase in his writings that only make sense within the lexicon of Bergsonism. For instance, Laloy writes that Debussy “extended the power of music, and established it on new laws which to tell the truth had long been sought, some of which had even been glimpsed, but without the unity and the whole ever being grasped.”¹³⁸ To put it succinctly, Laloy apparently viewed

¹³⁵ Geoffrey Allan Wilson, “Music and Poetry in Mallarmé and Debussy,” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2007), 10.

¹³⁶ My translation of the French from Priest, *Debussy, Ravel et Stravinski*, 110.

¹³⁷ Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 89.

¹³⁸ Priest, *Louis Laloy*, 85.

Debussy's music as containing some sort of philosophical truth-claims: it demonstrated the nature of unity and the whole, a concept referable to Bergsonian notions of organic totality.

A Preliminary Bergsonian Analytical Language

From this overview of Laloy's early criticism on Debussy, I argue that we can establish a preliminary set of Bergsonian philosophical precepts that Laloy believed *debussyme* should accomplish. I also suggest that we can use these precepts as the foundation of an analytical language to explore Bergsonism in music, as I will show more fully in Chapter 4.

1. *Debussyste* music should **imitate life** as much as possible, through both sound and imagery. Opera, as a medium that incorporates words as well as music, would also fulfill Symbolist aims that would not be possible in untexted music.
2. *Debussyste* music should reflect **organic totality** (unity and the whole).
3. Music is fundamentally an art of **sensation**. While it is not limited by any intrinsic meaning of its own, ideally, it should not descend into complete abstraction, or it would risk losing its ability to depict life. That said, like Symbolist poetry, it can also demonstrate its own ineffability.

As I will show in the following section of this chapter, I claim that Bergson's own philosophy of aesthetics, as articulated in *Le Rire*, provides evidence that we should not only reexamine the philosophical potential of *fin-de-siècle* French music but also that we should rethink the musical implications of *fin-de-siècle* French philosophy. Reading *Le Rire* alongside Laloy's and Jankélévitch's writings reinforces the case that Bergson's philosophy can be framed

not only as a philosophy of aesthetics but a philosophy of music that his acolytes saw as having practical implications for how one ought to live one's life. Viewing Bergson's philosophy in this way gives rise to two further propositions:

1. Bergsonism offers an alternative to becoming a conscious automaton. One should **live and think within duration** as much as possible.
2. Music can reflect both the **linear and durational nature of time** better than other artforms because it unfolds in real time.

Re-framing Bergson's philosophy as a philosophy of music also allows us to see his work in dialogue with that of his contemporaries in the fields of psychophysics, physiology, medicine, and philosophy who also incorporated music into their research. As we explored previously in this chapter, Fechner viewed music as an object of psychophysics, a methodology through which one could theoretically ascertain the nature of subjective experience by quantifying sensation. Ribot and Pierre Janet's work argued that music, consciousness, time, and memory were inextricably related. Their experimental data framed music performance as an automatic, rote task that was relatively easy to execute without the necessary intervention of consciousness or free will. For Ribot, music served as a prime example of a physiological basis for memory and brain localization. Ribot essentially claimed that every single action must be practiced in order to sink into memory, and would then be stored in a specific part of the brain. Meanwhile, Pierre Janet believed playing music could serve as a stepping stone toward recovery from psychological trauma because it required little conscious mental effort and could be done automatically. Through this exploration of the work of Bergson's interlocutors, we have seen that music has

been central to their approach, and it is frequently invoked as a task that involves only automatic thinking. For Bergson, on the other hand, music represented the key to freedom from automatism, as we shall see below.

Le Rire: A Bridge Between Philosophy and the Arts

Bergson's essay on laughter, *Le Rire: Essai sur la signification du comique* (*Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*), published in 1900, was Bergson's most widely read work and thus represents a key text that could provide insight into the practical implementation of Bergsonian philosophical principles. In *Le Rire*, Bergson argues that comedy, particularly high-art forms of comedy, is the most life-like of the dramatic arts because it captures essential elements of human nature. For Bergson, the entire premise of comedy is based on our lack of sympathy for a comedic character because we perceive him or her as an automaton. Our laughter thus serves as a social corrective that admonishes the mechanism and rigidity of the character. In addition to its function as a social boon, Bergson claims that comedy should be considered an educational tool that shows us how to live our lives in accordance with duration and intuition. Through the use of stock characters, comedy provides an education about the types of people we encounter in life. As Bergson's sole treatise specifically dealing with aesthetics, I argue that *Le Rire*, more than any of Bergson's other works, reveals crucial information about the place of comedy and the arts—particularly music—in his philosophy. In this treatise, I claim that Bergson links the arts and comedy in a system of understanding that would help us take stock of reality. While Bergson does not directly assign any specific primacy to music within this system, I argue that the quantity of musical metaphors he uses to explicate his theory of aesthetics does have the effect of giving music special purchase on the nature of reality.

In *Le Rire*, Bergson defines laughter as a type of social corrective that distances us from living as an automaton. We never laugh *with* someone but always *at* someone, because they have behaved in a manner that we consider inappropriate to the situation at hand. Bergson argues that what we are actually laughing at is the person's automatism, which we are in fact attempting to censor through the function of laughter as an instrument of humiliation. "The rigid, the ready-made the mechanical, in contrast with the supple, ever-changing and the living, absentmindedness in contrast with attention, in a word, automatism in contrast with free activity, such are the defects that laughter singles out and would fain correct."¹³⁹ Laughter thus shines a spotlight on behavior that we find to be abhorrent and encourages us to choose a set of alternatives: suppleness over rigidity, the living over the mechanical, and attention over absentmindedness.

In the conclusion to *Le Rire*, Bergson characterizes the arts as a means through which we can gain knowledge about reality. "So art, whether it be painting or sculpture, poetry or music, has no other object than to brush aside the utilitarian symbols, the conventional and socially accepted generalities, in short, everything that veils reality from us, in order to bring us face to face with reality itself."¹⁴⁰ The goal of art, according to Bergson, is to help us confront reality directly, removing the world of "utilitarian symbols" and social conventions through which we normally conduct our lives and unmasking reality itself. In his discussion of the arts, the extent to which Bergson employs musical metaphors is striking, indicated in bold below:

Could reality come into direct contact with sense and consciousness, could we enter into **immediate communion with things and with ourselves**, probably art would be useless, or rather we should all be artists, for then **our soul would continually vibrate in perfect accord with nature**...Deep in our souls we should hear the strains of our **inner life's unbroken melody,—a music that is oft-times gay**, but more

¹³⁹ Bergson, *Laughter*, 145.

¹⁴⁰ Bergson, *Laughter*, 162.

frequently plaintive and always original. All this is around and within us and yet no whit of it do we distinctly perceive.¹⁴¹

In this passage, Bergson argues that if we could truly know reality and “enter into immediate communion with things and with ourselves,” we would have no use for art at all. But if we understood everything that art had to offer us, we would hear “the strains of our inner life’s unbroken melody,” and our soul “would continually vibrate in perfect accord with nature.”

While Bergson does not directly state that music possesses more power than the other arts in its ability to reveal reality to us, I argue that the extensive use of musical metaphors in Bergson’s explication of his aesthetic theory testifies to the opposite conclusion. In Bergson’s worldview, reality is not the abstract stuff of Kantian *noumena* but rather can be brought into direct contact with our consciousness. It is present in the “vibrations” of nature and the “unbroken melody” of our inner life. Even so, we have no means to tap into these vibrations and unbroken melodies without Bergsonian philosophy. Bergson portrays the true nature of reality as a kind of silent music: the true nature of reality is all around us as a kind of background vibration, if only we could *hear* it. Our failure to understand the nature of reality is thus also a failure of *hearing*.

At the same time, our sense perception itself can only relay so much data about the world, and much of it is clouded with the interference of language as a medium of understanding and analysis.

In short, we do not see the actual things themselves; in most cases we confine ourselves to reading the labels affixed to them. This tendency...has become even more pronounced under the influence of speech; for words—with the exception of proper nouns—all denote genera. The word...intervenes between it and ourselves, and would conceal its form from our eyes, were that form not already masked beneath the necessities that brought the word into existence.”¹⁴²

Due to the exigencies of everyday life, we live in a world regulated by language. Language allows us to communicate and process information efficiently, but it comes at a cost: the loss of

¹⁴¹ Bergson, *Laughter*, 157–158. Emphasis added.

¹⁴² Bergson, *Laughter*, 159.

reality, the loss of things in themselves. Moreover, the very act of living can make us lose touch with reality by virtue of the fact that we are constantly making choices as to how to conduct ourselves in any given situation. Bergson writes:

Life is action. Life implies the acceptance only of the *utilitarian* side of things in order to respond to them by the appropriate reactions...I look and I think I see, I listen and I think I hear, I examine myself and I think I am reading the very depths of my heart. But what I see and hear of the outer world is purely and simply a selection made by my senses to serve as a light to my conduct; what I know of myself is what comes to the surface, what participates in my actions. My senses and my consciousness, therefore, give me no more than a practical simplification of reality.¹⁴³

In order to survive in the modern world, we act based upon the reality conveyed to us by our senses, but have little contact with our inner selves and thus reality as it truly is. One may think one is truly seeing, hearing, and experiencing the world as it is, but what one is actually seeing and hearing is ultimately only a superficial version of reality because it is oriented toward some form of practical action. Art momentarily releases us from this action-oriented conception of the world, returning to us a sense of things as they appeared to us when we first perceived them, without the intervention of verbal or quantitative reasoning, in their “native purity”.¹⁴⁴ For Bergson, music may be the art that brings us closest to ourselves and distances us from language-based understanding:

For a few moments at least, he [i.e., the artist] diverts us from the prejudices of form and color that come between ourselves and reality...Beneath these joys and sorrows which can, at a pinch, be translated into language, they grasp something that has nothing in common with language, certain rhythms of life and breath that are closer to man than his inmost feelings...Thus they [i.e., artists] impel us to set in motion, in the depths of our being, some secret chord which was only waiting to thrill.¹⁴⁵

Art, and perhaps especially music, captures a certain quality of the experience of life that language cannot. It brings to the surface “certain rhythms of life” and “some secret chord”: in short, everything we have repressed in the service of practicality in our own lives. In his

¹⁴³ Bergson, *Laughter*, 158.

¹⁴⁴ Bergson, *Laughter*, 160.

¹⁴⁵ Bergson, *Laughter*, 161–162.

Bergson, Jankélévitch speaks of this return to our initial perceptions as the essence of Bergson's concept of duration, calling duration a "continuous springtime" in which we live in a continually renewed present.¹⁴⁶ Ideally, we would exist in this world all the time, but can only access it in glimpses through art.

Bergsonian Time: Learning to Think in Duration

Bergson's conceptualization of reality as a silent music in *Le Rire* can help us understand duration, which he also frames in musical terms in his other writings. For Bergson, the central obstacle to true, contemporaneous perception is the fixation on what he calls "spatial" understanding—a mathematical understanding of time as exclusively forward-directed and irreversible. This problematic spatial worldview, in turn, disrupts our perception of time and our sense of reality, or what Suzanne Guerlac poetically terms "the richness of the real."¹⁴⁷

Bergson's principal innovation was to offer the concept of duration (*durée*) as an alternative to spatial knowledge, a notion of time in which the past and present coexist. Particularly in his early writings, Bergson repeatedly refers to duration as a "melody" and a "living being," just as he associates the true nature of reality with both comedy and music in the conclusion to *Le Rire*.¹⁴⁸ In my view, it is no accident that Bergson refers to chronological time as spatial and duration as fundamentally musical in some way. Through these metaphors, Bergson frames this dichotomy

¹⁴⁶ Jankélévitch, *Bergson*, 258.

¹⁴⁷ Guerlac, "Henri Bergson," in *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 431.

¹⁴⁸ Bergson, *Essai*, 48.

not only as two opposing worldviews, but also two competing ways of literally experiencing the world as either primarily visual or primarily auditory.

Bergson's theory of duration relies on a somewhat counterintuitive notion of unity that treats time as at once a complete whole in itself and a series of individual moments. Duration describes the succession of our states of consciousness when we allow ourselves to live in the moment and refrain from establishing a separation between present and past. Past and present states, in turn, form an organic totality that is at once an indivisible whole and the sum of its individual components, which Bergson compares to the notes of a melody. In *Matière et mémoire*, Bergson writes: "couldn't we say that although these notes follow one another, we nevertheless perceive them as interlocking, and their amalgamation as comparable to a living being, whose parts, while distinct, penetrate one another by the very result of their unity?"¹⁴⁹ This quote is striking for what it reveals about Bergson's dependence on music to elucidate the concept of duration. His mention of melody is neither an idle metaphor, nor an analogy to the concept at hand. Rather, Bergson allows melody to retain its power and potential as an explanatory tool in its own right. He intentionally relies on melody because it is a mode of signification that can bypass verbal reasoning or logic, and is thus able to access at least one property of duration, its state of organic totality. "We can thus conceive of succession without distinction," he writes, "as an interpenetration, a unity, an intimate organization of elements, in which each one, representative of the whole, can only distinguish itself and isolate itself for a

¹⁴⁹ Bergson, *Essai*, 48. "Ne pourrait-on pas dire que, si ces notes se succèdent, nous les apercevons néanmoins les une dans les autres, et que leur ensemble est comparable à un être vivant, dont les parties, quoique distinctes, se pénètrent par l'effet même de leur solidarité ?"

mind capable of abstraction.”¹⁵⁰ Within melody, we can more easily conceive of “succession without distinction,” an organic totality in which the parts are representative of the whole. If we were to isolate specific parts of the melody by abstract thought, we would do violence to its wholeness. Our understanding of melody as an indivisible, living being is in fact crucial to our understanding of duration. When we say that a minute has passed, we mean 60 oscillations of the pendulum of a clock, and we conceptualize this in space as a straight line of succession. But if we are able to think of each swing of the pendulum not as a separate event distinct from the last one but rather as connected to all the previous ones, then we can approach the idea of duration. We have made a mistake in that we represent time as pure succession, as an irreversible juxtaposition of separate entities. Pure duration, on the other hand, which describes our true, lived experience of time, is a succession of qualitative changes without precise edges, which melt into one another. It can contain past, present, and future all at once.

Similarly, if we hold a note too long when performing a melody, we would not be offended by the length of the note itself but by the resulting imbalance of the whole phrase, as melody exists in duration, as a totality, rather than in chronological time, as a series of discrete notes. We tend to have difficulty conceiving of pure duration, Bergson claims, because we mistakenly believe that external things *endure* as we do. From this erroneous perspective, time appears to be a homogeneous medium, and we mistakenly believe that it can be measured quantitatively.¹⁵¹ We see clock-time as homogeneous, invariable, and forward-directed, whereas

¹⁵⁰ Bergson, *Essai*, 48. “On peut donc concevoir la succession sans la distinction, et comme une pénétration mutuelle, une solidarité, une organisation intime d'éléments, dont chacun. représentatif du tout, ne s'en distingue et ne s'en isole que pour une pensée capable d'abstraire.”

¹⁵¹ Bergson, *Essai*, 50–51.

duration is heterogeneous, ever-changing, and occurs only as a function of our lived experience, which encompasses past, present, and future.

Yet there is an intractable obstacle to the realization of this philosophy: Bergson offers no concrete roadmap for how we are to truly live in duration. As Michael Gallope has suggested, Bergson appears to be cognizant of, yet unfazed by, the irresolvable dilemma that this vision creates: how are we to understand duration if we cannot grasp it through conventional means of analysis?¹⁵² Jankélévitch, on the other hand, feels keenly the difficulty of carrying out Bergson's vision, referring to it as a "tragedy" in his *Bergson*.¹⁵³ His use of the word "tragedy," in turn, conveys a deep sorrow that we live in a world regulated by clock-time rather than duration, and thus cannot access our underlying humanity because we are so often forced to operate in a mechanical world. Our very knowledge of the world operates on a dislocation of time: it is only possible to know something by reflecting on it after the fact. Jankélévitch writes: "Knowledge is only possible because I can be *posterior to the fact*. The tragedy of the mind consists in this, that our knowledge of objects so to speak obstructs our intimate and central understanding of them."¹⁵⁴ Duration cannot be defined—it can be understood, but not through discourse. In the interval between the event and discursion after the fact, time has passed, and the event is now outside the realm of duration because it no longer exists in the present and must be recovered from the past. Jankélévitch proposes that the Bergsonian ideal would be to do without language as a medium of inquiry altogether, and instead understand movement and action through intuition—that is, through moving and acting. "Only the act itself, or the function of knowledge

¹⁵² Michael Gallope, "Musical Technique and Metaphysical Singularity in Bloch, Adorno, Jankélévitch and Deleuze" (PhD diss., New York University, 2011), 163.

¹⁵³ Jankélévitch, *Bergson*, 96.

¹⁵⁴ Jankélévitch, *Bergson*, 116–117. Emphasis in original.

that imitates it—that is, intuition—measures up to the living,”¹⁵⁵ writes Jankélévitch. All intellectual operations take one out of the present moment, yet there is no other way for intellection to proceed. Only a method of analysis that is perpetually contemporaneous with the real and returns to the purity of initial perception can bridge the distance between event and *post facto* discursion.

For Abbate, the solution to this paradox of intellection is a “drastic” approach to analysis, centered on the experience of live performance, which may include composing or performing music but not the act of writing about music.¹⁵⁶ Relying on the score, or any notion of structure and form, negates that experience, and discussing the technical features or hermeneutic layers of a work signals a refusal to accept the state of wordless awe that live performance can engender in us. But I take a different view, following along the lines of Gallope’s analysis of Jankélévitch in *Deep Refrains*: Jankélévitch’s methodology allows for a “speculative *multiplicity*” that puts forth multiple “philosophies of music that are united by their deliberate refusal of any kind of language-like character,”¹⁵⁷ yet these philosophies also aim to “touch on the *mystère* of a musical instant, and heighten our attention to its inconsistency.”¹⁵⁸ In my view, Jankélévitch is not necessarily suggesting that we forgo analysis and glean what we can from live performance, but rather that we meditate on the problem of the impossibility of analysis, exactly the *presque-rien* and the *je ne sais quoi* that fascinated him throughout his career.

¹⁵⁵ Jankélévitch, *Bergson*, 58.

¹⁵⁶ Carolyn Abbate, “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?” *Critical Inquiry*, 30, no. 3 (2004): 505–536.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Gallope, *Deep Refrains: Music, Philosophy, and the Ineffable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 28.

¹⁵⁸ Gallope, *Deep Refrains*, 182.

The ideal analysis of an action, then, in my reading of Jankélévitch, would be for the action itself to become an apparatus of understanding and perform a philosophical exegesis of itself in real time. In what is likely his earliest published writing on Bergson, “Deux philosophes de la vie, Bergson, Guyau” (“Two Philosophers of Life, Bergson, Guyau,” 1924), Jankélévitch writes: “the best way to understand moral, economic, aesthetic, and religious values is not to deconstruct and analyze them as concepts, but rather to feel and *live* them.”¹⁵⁹ In other words, the actions of feeling and living would constitute, in and of themselves, a method of understanding philosophical concepts. Moreover, like Bergson, Jankélévitch theorizes that art, unlike other mechanisms of understanding, has a unique power to reveal the nature of reality and also allows us to know ourselves better, essentially holding up a mirror to our lived experience:

Art, like the wave of a magic wand, topples the barriers that separate the subject from the object: in expressing the immanent life of things, it transports us wholesale into the bosom of absolute reality at the same time that it allows us to touch the obscure depths [*tréfonds*] of our individual self.”¹⁶⁰

Due to the fact that it deals with the “immanent life of things,” art exposes information about reality itself and our individuality that other ways of knowing cannot provide. In essence, art accomplishes two things at once: it both represents reality and provides a method of understanding reality, a mechanism I call *autoanalyse*.

As a medium that unfolds in real time, music has a distinct advantage over other arts in that it encapsulates the tension between duration and linear time, and would thus seem to be the ideal vehicle for *autoanalyse*. I argue that if we apply this theory to *L'Heure*, then the opera offers no solution for Bergson’s philosophical dilemma of analysis: the opera simply puts it on display, but in so doing, performs its own philosophical *autoanalyse* in real time. The work does

¹⁵⁹ Jankélévitch, “Deux philosophes de la vie Bergson, Guyau.” *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger* 97 (1924): 440. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶⁰ Jankélévitch, “Deux philosophes de la vie,” 437.

not perform its own hermeneutic analysis, for it *says* nothing, but rather *does* something, in this case enacting its own philosophical critique.

Conclusion

In the following chapter, we will examine *L'Heure espagnole* through the lens of Bergsonism. In my reading, *L'Heure espagnole* represents an opera that both radically aspires to ideal durational time while still operating in the literal confines of clock-time, constructed from a single, hour-long act. However, the opera does not create an artificial stage-world in which Bergsonian precepts suddenly become possible. Instead, as I will argue, it traces a Bergsonian worldview onto an opera that depicts a satire of everyday Parisian life, imagining what Bergsonian duration could actually look like through its real-time performance of *autoanalyse*. Furthermore, through the outright parody of *Pelléas et Mélisande* and *Tristan and Isolde*, *L'Heure* demonstrates how inadequate Debussy's and Wagner's music are in addressing this task. The flat, machine-like characters of *L'Heure* have much in common with Bergson's stock characters: they theoretically have the option to act against clock-time and make different choices to act in accordance with a durational view of time, but we find them funny precisely because they do not make these adjustments. Ultimately, I will argue that *L'Heure* both reclaims Bergson's notion of comedy as social critique and comedy as a display of the mechanical.

CHAPTER 4

MUSIC BECOME PHILOSOPHICAL?

A BERGSONIAN READING OF *L'HEURE ESPAGNOLE*

In his first opera, *L'Heure espagnole*, Ravel would have to contend with *Pelléas et Mélisande* not only as the embodiment of the new aesthetic movement of *debussysme* but possibly also of Bergsonian philosophical ideals. Ravel was under significant pressure to produce an operatic work that would stand up to *Pelléas*: as his first essay in the operatic genre, *L'Heure* would be judged mercilessly by the standard already set by *Pelléas*, just as Ravel's previous works had been. To stake his claim in an arguably Bergsonian musical territory that was already marked out by Debussy, I demonstrate that Ravel made use of a suite of aesthetic strategies that could be read productively through a Bergsonian lens: manipulations of musical time; comedy; and mechanism. Although cloaked in the guise of comic opera, *L'Heure espagnole* presents a serious reflection on the passage of time, symbolically asking the same question of both its characters and the audience: how should one make use of an hour of one's life?

In my analysis, I suggest that *L'Heure* is both an opera about time and radically situated within real time. The "Spanish hour" of the opera's title is thus not only figurative but literal, as the opera takes just one hour to perform. Reading *L'Heure* through the lens of Bergson's philosophy sheds light on our understanding of Ravel's complex use of rhythm and meter. Viewing the opera within a Bergsonian hermeneutic frame also accounts for Ravel's reliance on mechanism not only as a compositional strategy to distinguish himself from Debussy but also as a kind of Bergsonian dramatic device that underscores the comedy and tragedy of the human

condition. I show that these strategies pervade every aspect of this tightly constructed opera, from the casting to the formal contours of the work.

I also suggest that the benefit of analyzing Ravel's opera in the context of Bergson's philosophy of time can be reciprocal: analyzing *L'Heure espagnole* through the lens of Bergsonism not only provides insight into the potential relevance of Bergsonism to French music of this period, but can also allow us to gain further purchase on the musical underpinnings of Bergson's philosophy. As we saw in Chapter 3, music occupies a special role in Bergsonian philosophy as a means of knowledge that does not rely on language or external sources of signification, and can thus allow at least provisional access to duration. Through the act of its very performance, music can essentially provide its own apparatus of analysis, a quality I call *autoanalyse*. Music possesses this power because it is an artform that unfolds in real time and can also be processed in real time, unlike other forms of art that require the intervention of intellection. I propose that *L'Heure* radically enacts *autoanalyse* by calling into question the act of visual and aural perception itself through compositional techniques that have the spectator constantly hearing and seeing double.

In this chapter, I show that significant portions of *L'Heure espagnole*, despite Ravel's claims to the contrary in various press releases, are actually manifestly in dialogue with Debussy's *Nocturnes* and *Pelléas*, almost overwriting scenes from *Pelléas* in a kind of musical palimpsest. By engaging with *Pelléas*, particularly on a temporal level, I claim that *L'Heure espagnole* may also participate in a wider dialogue involving the practical application of Bergsonism to music. This chapter will focus on three specific elements of *L'Heure espagnole* that engage with Bergsonian ideas of comedy, mechanism, and time: the introduction, Ravel's methods of characterization, and the ensemble finale.

Framing *L'Heure*: Ravel's Press Releases

Ravel's press releases tied to *L'Heure espagnole* represent a notable exception to the composer's general silence about the aesthetic aim of his works, offering a unique, yet often frustratingly enigmatic glimpse at his compositional intentions.¹ On May 17, 1911, just days before the premiere of *L'Heure espagnole* on May 19, *Le Figaro* published Ravel's letter to the editor detailing his objectives for the opera. In the letter, he explains that his goal is no less grand than to “revive Italian opera buffa,”² inaugurating a new genre of what he calls *comédie musicale* in which the music alone, rather than the comedic effect of the libretto, would make the audience laugh.

To be sure, the premise of the libretto is indeed amusing, but the music is by turns ridiculous and incongruously sterile as it reflects on the passage of time. The opening clock noises of the introduction lay the scene for the appearance of Torquemada, the master clockmaker of Toledo, at his worktable with his back to the audience. All manner of automata—an automaton playing the trumpet, a bird of paradise, and *marionettes en musique*—intervene in the introduction, producing a comical sonic mass of ticking clocks, bells, and alarms, yet one that is also engineered with an almost uncomfortable precision to produce a cold, calculating satire. Ramiro, a muleteer, comes into Torquemada's shop to have a watch fixed, complaining that it stops all the time. The pretention of his request that the watch be fixed extremely urgently, even

¹ On the complexity of Ravel's compositional intentions, see Gurminder Kaur Bhogal, “Orchestral Tissue, Subordinate Arabesques, and Turning Inward in Maurice Ravel's *Boléro*,” *Music Theory Online* 26, no. 2 (September 2020), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.20.26.2/mto.20.26.2.bhogal.html>; and Peter Kaminsky, “Composers' Words, Theorists' Analyses, Ravel's Music (Sometimes the Twain Shall Meet)” *College Music Symposium* 43 (2003): 161–177.

² Maurice Ravel to *Le Figaro*, May 17, 1911, in Arbie Orenstein, ed., *Lettres, écrits, entretiens* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 118. “Ce que j'ai tenté, en écrivant *L'Heure espagnole* ? C'est assez ambitieux : régénérer l'opéra-bouffe italien.”

though he is merely a mule-driver employed by the state, highlights the absurdity of the situation. “Or, je suis a votre service, muletier du gouvernement. Connaître l’heure exactement, en conséquence, c’est mon office.” (“At your service, government mule-driver. Consequently, knowing the exact time is my duty.”)³ He goes on to weave a richly colored, melodramatic story about how the watch once belonged to his toreador uncle and saved him from the fatal blow of the bull’s horns, all over a background of sumptuous “Spanish”-tinged E-Phrygian harmonies in the orchestral accompaniment.⁴ Torquemada’s wife Concepcion enters and reminds him that today is Thursday, the usual day when he must spend an hour synchronizing the municipal clocks. The play of pomposity continues as Torquemada leaves, proclaiming haughtily that “l’heure officielle n’attend pas” (“the official time waits for no man”).⁵

Concepcion usually has a weekly tryst with Gonzalve, an aloof poet who sings in absurdly verbose and melismatic lines. But a comedy of errors ensues when she suddenly has two other men at her disposal, Ramiro, the muscular yet dim-witted mule-driver, and Don Inigo (a play on words on *nigaud*, “foolish”), a repugnant, overweight financier. Not knowing how else to hide her affair with Gonzalve, she comes up with a scheme to stuff him in a grandfather clock and have Ramiro carry him upstairs. Meanwhile, Don Inigo gets into a second grandfather clock, thinking that this will confer some advantage on him in the race for Concepcion’s affections, but Concepcion continues to be disgusted by his advances. Seeing Ramiro effortlessly carry the clocks up and down the stairs, she ends up ditching her lover Gonzalve in favor of the lowly

³ Maurice Ravel, *L’Heure espagnole* (Paris: Durand, 1911), Scene I.

⁴ On the subject of Ravel’s use of Spanish-inflected harmonies in this scene, particularly as it relates to a parody of or allusion to Bizet’s *Carmen*, see Emily Kilpatrick, *The Operas of Maurice Ravel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 177–179.

⁵ Ravel, *L’Heure espagnole*, Scene II.

muleteer, culminating in a moral that some early reviewers considered obscene: “there comes a day...when even the muleteer has his turn.”⁶

Probably due to the risqué nature of the libretto, in his press statements on the opera, Ravel provides little in the way of plot summary, focusing instead on the work’s musical features.⁷ In keeping with his mission to regenerate opera buffa, Ravel is keen to distinguish *L’Heure* from the standard structural features of Italian opera buffa as well as French *opérette*. Ravel charts his own course, eschewing the traditional reliance of opera buffa on set pieces and ensemble finales in favor of passages of extended recitative. The only trace of opera buffa in *L’Heure*, Ravel claims, is its final quintet: “Only the final quintet recalls—through its shape, its vocalizations [*vocalises*], and its vocal effects [*effets de voix*]—the ensemble finales of the repertoire.”⁸ Ravel also refers to *L’Heure* as a “musical comedy” (*comédie musicale*) as opposed to a comic opera, perhaps in an attempt to emphasize the libretto’s origins in the world of Parisian Boulevard theater.⁹ In spite of his use of this unusual terminology, however, Ravel did not take any formal cues from Boulevard musical theater, apart from his use of slapstick sound effects, for there is no spoken dialogue in *L’Heure*, unlike in *opérette*. Elsewhere, in a May 17 interview for *L’Intransigeant*, he lambasted two prominent composers of Boulevard operetta, Offenbach and Claude Terrasse, claiming that neither of them wrote music that made people laugh.¹⁰ As the reader may recall from Chapter 1, Ravel met Terrasse at a dinner hosted by the

⁶ Ravel, *L’Heure espagnole*, Scene XXI. “Il arrive un moment où...le muletier a son tour.”

⁷ Albert Carré, the director, initially refused to stage the work because he considered the storyline obscene. See Chapter 1, especially pp. 54–59, for my discussion of Carré.

⁸ Orenstein, *Lettres*, 118.

⁹ Franc-Nohain’s *L’Heure espagnole* premiered at the Théâtre de l’Odéon on October, 28 1904.

¹⁰ René Bizet, “L’Heure espagnole,” *L’Intransigeant* (Paris), May 17, 1911. Cited in Orenstein, *Lettres*, 339.

Godebskis.¹¹ This must have been a particularly low blow for Terrasse, who had previously written several operettas based on other libretti by Franc-Nohain, the author of the play upon which *L'Heure espagnole* is based. Indeed, as Arbie Orenstein claims, Terrasse may in fact have introduced Ravel to the playwright in 1906.¹² As opposed to *opérette*, which relied on comical situations for its humor, Ravel stated that *L'Heure*'s music would somehow be funny all on its own: "I wanted the chords, for example, to seem funny, like puns in language. If I may put it this way, I 'heard funny.'"¹³ Moreover, instead of relying on previous models for comic opera, Ravel claimed that *L'Heure* abandoned the "traditional form" of opera buffa, instead taking inspiration from Mussorgsky's *The Marriage* (1868), a work that ostensibly had no relation to opera buffa conventions.¹⁴

Ravel's invocation of *The Marriage* as a compositional model offers valuable insights into his public relations strategy for *L'Heure* which, I claim, focuses on pre-empting any accusations of plagiarism of operatic models that were well-known to French audiences, especially Debussy's *Pelléas*. Ravel writes in his letter to *Le Figaro*:

Like its direct ancestor, *The Marriage*, by Mussorgsky, a faithful interpretation of Gogol's play, *L'Heure espagnole* is a *musical comedy*. [There has been] no modification of Franc-Nohain's text, apart from a few cuts.¹⁵

¹¹ On Ravel's first encounter with Terrasse, see p. 30 of this dissertation.

¹² Orenstein, *Lettres*, 587n1.

¹³ René Bizet, "L'Heure espagnole," *L'Intransigeant* (Paris), May 17, 1911. Translation as given in Arbie Orenstein, ed., *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 411. The original reads as follows: "J'ai voulu que des accords, par exemple, semblent drôle comme des calembours dans le style. J'ai 'entendu drôle,' si je peux dire." See also the introduction to this dissertation for my discussion of this passage in relation to what I theorize as Ravel's aesthetic of double entendre.

¹⁴ Orenstein, *Lettres*, 118. Ravel makes this claim across all three interviews for *L'Intransigeant* and *Comoedia* as well as in his statement for *Le Figaro*.

¹⁵ Orenstein, *Lettres*, 118. "Comme son ancêtre direct, *Le Mariage*, de Moussorgski, interprétation fidèle de la pièce de Gogol, *L'Heure espagnole* est une comédie musicale. Aucune modification du texte de Franc-Nohain, hormis quelques coupures." Orenstein notes that Ravel had written to Robert d'Harcourt, the author of the French translation of Gogol's *The Marriage*, expressing his interest in orchestrating Mussorgsky's opera. However, Ravel apparently never carried out the project due to insufficient funding from Bessel, the intended publisher.

If we take Ravel at his word, he conceived of *L'Heure espagnole* as an accurate translation of Franc-Nohain's original play into music, that, like *The Marriage*, preserved the structural integrity of the original text in the libretto. But invoking *The Marriage* as the "direct ancestor" of *L'Heure espagnole* and the sole precedent for this aesthetic choice could also be seen as a deflection from Debussy's handling of the libretto in *Pelléas*. Ravel's assertion that *L'Heure* contains practically no modifications to the text mirrors Debussy's approach to the libretto for *Pelléas* which, in a departure from standard compositional practice, set Maeterlinck's text mostly as written. At the same time, however, Debussy exerted more authorial control over the text than Ravel, altering the narrative shape of Maeterlinck's play by cutting four scenes and heavily reducing the role of the serving-women.¹⁶ Ravel, in contrast, constructed an image of himself as a faithful interpreter of Franc-Nohain.¹⁷ Ultimately, Ravel negotiated his own aesthetic path, yet he was careful to camouflage any traces of influence that could lead back to Debussy.

All the same, the constant measuring of Ravel against Debussy's example haunted an earlier interview he had given for *Comoedia* on May 11, 1911, with Charles Tenroc, perhaps prompting the letter Ravel ultimately sent to *Le Figaro*. Tenroc was clearly familiar with the recent press scandals surrounding Ravel, providing a summary of them for his readers in his preamble to the transcription of the interview: "After having presented him as a counterfeiter of Debussy—one of those Impressionists¹⁸ who allegedly 'endeavored to exhaust the resources of

¹⁶ Act I, Scene 1; Act II, Scene 4; Act III, Scene 1; and Act V, Scene 1 were all cut from the original play. On Debussy's alterations to the libretto, see Roger Nichols and Richard Langham Smith, *Claude Debussy: Pelléas et Mélisande* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 34.

¹⁷ Ravel did cut some transitional material, but as Keith Clifton has pointed out, he does not cut key scenes. Clifton, "Maurice Ravel's *L'Heure espagnole*: Genesis, Sources, Analysis," (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1998), 56.

¹⁸ *tachistes*. Translated literally, this term denotes someone who paints with small stains (*taches*); it was used in a derogatory sense to refer to Impressionist artists.

this new genre’—many well-informed people now compare him with Debussy.”¹⁹ But Tenroc emphasized that Ravel had plenty of compositional resources of his own: “In any case, M. Ravel...possesses musical resources of an infinitely fascinating variety and color; his palette is at ease whether painting the *Gibet* [*The Gallows*] or the *Pintade* [*The Guinea Fowl*].”²⁰ In citing these disparate movements from Ravel’s *Gaspard de la nuit* (*Le Gibet*) and *Histoires naturelles* (*La Pintade*), Tenroc highlighted Ravel’s skill at depicting a wide range of emotional states and using an assortment of timbral palettes, thus defending Ravel against the recurring charge of emotional flatness. Moreover, Tenroc’s mention of *La Pintade* in this passage also bolstered Ravel’s claim to originality, reinforcing Ravel’s statements that his own *Histoires naturelles* supplied a model for *L’Heure espagnole*.²¹

The fact that Ravel invoked Mussorgsky as his model may also hint at the importance of Ravel’s own social connections with the Godebskis, at whose summer house he responded to reporters’ inquiries related to *L’Heure* and drafted the letter to *Le Figaro*.²² As I suggested in Chapter 1, Ravel’s relationship to the Apaches and the Godebskis may well have had significant impact on his eventual aesthetic decisions in *L’Heure*, for it was likely through the Apaches that

¹⁹ Cited in Orenstein, *Lettres*, 587. “Après l’avoir présenté comme un pasticheur de Debussy, un de ces tachistes qui, disait-on, ‘s’efforcent d’épuiser les ressources du genre nouveau,’ beaucoup de gens avertis l’opposent aujourd’hui à Debussy.”

²⁰ Cited in Orenstein, *Lettres*, 587. “En tous cas [*sic*], M. Ravel...possède des ressources musicales d’une variété et d’une couleur infiniment intéressantes ; sa palette est aussi à l’aise dans le dessin du *Gibet* que dans celui de la *Pintade*.”

²¹ Ravel claimed *Histoires naturelles* served as a study for *L’Heure* in both his interviews with Tenroc and Bizet. For the interview with Bizet, see Orenstein, *Lettres*, 340. For the interview with Tenroc, see Orenstein, *Lettres*, 587.

²² In a letter to Cipa Godebski dated March 22, 1911, Ravel claims that reporters wrote to him at La Grangette (the Godebskis’ summer house) to secure interviews, although it is unclear whether or not Ravel solicited these interviews himself. See Orenstein, *Lettres*, 116–117. While the autograph manuscript of the final version of Ravel’s letter to *Le Figaro* has so far not been located, drafts of the letter are held in the Frederick R. Koch Collection at Yale’s Beinecke Library. These drafts are transcribed in Steven Huebner, “*Laughter*: In Ravel’s Time,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18, no. 3 (2006): 245–246.

Ravel became acquainted with *The Marriage* in the first place. Michel-Dmitri Calvocoressi in particular devoted a sizable portion of his musicological career to researching Mussorgsky, producing three biographies of the composer. The first of these appeared in 1908, and thus around the same time at which Ravel was working most intensely on *L'Heure*.²³

On a structural level, *The Marriage* may have made an attractive model due to its metrically free approach to text setting. Mussorgsky employs frequent shifts of meter in *The Marriage* to mimic the cadence of everyday speech, and Ravel seemingly would follow suit, yet other similarities between the operas remain difficult to locate.²⁴ However, Ravel's use of meter is actually far more systematic than that of Mussorgsky; Ravel often uses meter to affect the audience's perception of the passage of time itself or delineate his characters. In my view, the rhetorical importance of the introduction to *L'Heure* gives the lie to Mussorgsky's influence on Ravel: whereas the introduction occupies a structurally essential position in *L'Heure*, and its principal "clock" leitmotif recurs throughout the opera, Mussorgsky's *Marriage* dispenses with any sort of opening altogether, plunging straight into dialogue. In contrast, the opening measures of *Pelléas*, as we examined in Chapter 3, were extremely important to critics like Laloy in terms of defining the philosophical potency of the opera as a reflection of Bergsonian principles. In the following section, we will explore how Debussy and Wagner continue to reverberate through *L'Heure* in spite of their conspicuous absence from Ravel's public remarks on the inspiration behind the opera.

²³ M.D. Calvocoressi, *Moussorgsky* (Paris: Alcan, 1908).

²⁴ Mussorgsky himself had been inspired by Alexander Dargomizhsky, whose opera *The Stone Guest* had previously experimented with non-melodic text setting.

The Introduction to *L'Heure espagnole*: A Metric “Overture”

The introduction to *L'Heure espagnole* stands out for its brevity and its defiance of generic expectations for the opening of an opera: unlike the vast majority of opera overtures, it uses meter rather than harmony to convey tension. While the opening of *L'Heure espagnole* could hardly be called an overture in the proper sense, given its extremely short length, it nonetheless serves an essential rhetorical function in establishing the stage-world of *L'Heure*, but on a miniaturized scale. As the first musical statement of an opera, an overture typically gives some indication of the general dramatic arc of the work, often by laying out several of the principal musical themes or establishing a harmonic or melodic dichotomy that correlates to a central conflict within the plot. To cite a well-known example, the overture to Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1787) opens with booming D minor chords that eventually give way to a jaunty interlude in D major. While the D major music does not return again, this tonal opposition between major and minor foreshadows the main dramatic conflict, establishing a stark contrast between Don Giovanni's devil-may-care attitude (D major) and those seeking retribution against him (D minor), ultimately culminating in the return of the thundering opening chords at the end of the opera, as the protagonist faces his final judgment at the hands of the ghost of the Commendatore. Similarly, the works with which I claim Ravel engages in the introduction, namely Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* and Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, also hew to this general overture model of using pitch-based material as a vehicle to foreshadow key elements of the plot.²⁵ The *Tristan* Prelude is rich with symbolism in its use of dissonance, foreshadowing

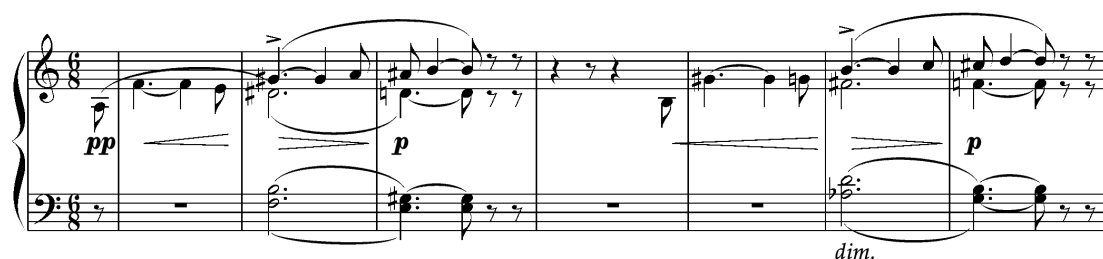
²⁵ I follow the conventional tendency to refer to the opening of *Tristan and Isolde* as a prelude in spite of the fact that it is marked as an introduction in the score. Similarly, I use the term “introduction” to refer to the opening of *Pelléas*, following Laloy and Jankélévitch, although there is no separate heading for the opening at all; the opera simply begins at Act I, Scene I.

the plight of its star-crossed lovers through its chromatic voice-leading that strains toward an ever-elusive resolution. The melody stretches upward chromatically over the infamous Tristan chord, an augmented-sixth chord that resolves to a dominant seventh, a chord which is itself classified as a dissonance in tonal harmony (see Example 4.1).²⁶ While there has been much debate about the harmonic categorization of the Tristan chord, for my purposes, it will suffice to note that one possible interpretation of the chord analyzes it as a French augmented-sixth chord in the key of A minor, resolving to the dominant, E7, an interpretation that links it to both *Pelléas* and *L'Heure* (see Example 4.2, below). The introduction to *Pelléas* also sets up a dramatic tension between competing pitch-spaces that mirrors the conflict between two leitmotifs, Golaud's and Mélisande's. In his analysis of *Pelléas*, Elliot Antokoletz frames the harmonic and motivic language of the opera within an overarching conflict between diatonic and whole-tone pitch-spaces.²⁷ For Antokoletz, this pitch-space architecture mirrors the central drama of the opera, reflecting a dichotomy between characters as human beings with agency (diatonic) and characters as an instrument of fate (whole-tone). Like the overture to *Tristan*, it also employs an augmented-sixth chord in its opening measures; in this case, Debussy uses a French augmented-sixth chord as a foundational element of Golaud's motif (see Examples 4.3

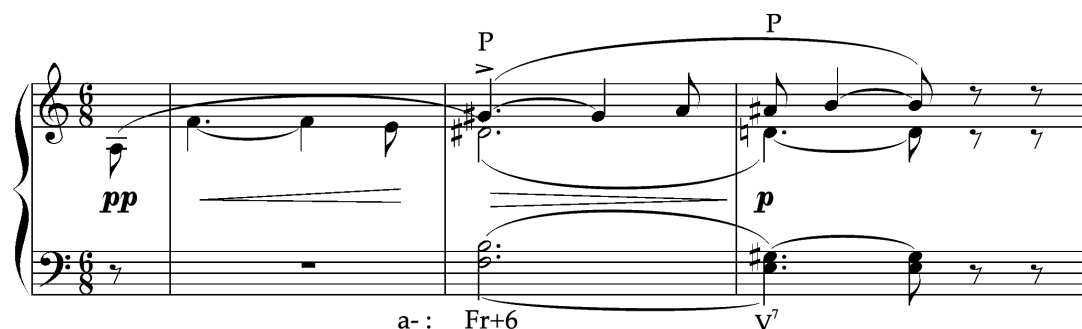
²⁶ Theorists have disagreed ad infinitum about the proper labeling of the Tristan chord as either a half-diminished seventh chord or some type of augmented-sixth chord, given its unusual spelling and voice-leading. Martin Vogel's *Tristan-Akkord und die Krise der modernen Harmonie-Lehre* (Düsseldorf: Im Verlag der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der systematischen Musikwissenschaft, 1962) provides a useful compendium of theoretical approaches to the Tristan chord through the early 1960s. Daniel Harrison has argued for an alternative perspective on the Tristan chord as what he terms a "dual" German sixth chord, an analysis that acknowledges that the Tristan chord inverts the usual intervallic relationships of the German-sixth chord. See Daniel Harrison, "Supplement to the Theory of Augmented-Sixth Chords," *Music Theory Spectrum* 17, no. 2 (1995): 170–195, esp. 183–184.

²⁷ Elliot Antokoletz, "Polarity of Characterizations: Human Beings as Real-Life Individuals and Instruments of Fate," chap. 4 in *Musical Symbolism in the Operas of Debussy and Bartók* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Antokoletz includes pentatonic, major and minor scales, and modal scales in his definition of diatonic spaces. He similarly adopts a broad perspective on whole-tone collections, considering them as inclusive of symmetrical and interval cycle collections.

and 4.4, below). Debussy's employment of the French augmented-sixth chord will become important to *L'Heure espagnole* as well. In both *Tristan* and *Pelléas*, harmony and pitch-space are the principal sites of dramatic conflict and articulation of central themes of the plot.



EXAMPLE 4.1: Richard Wagner, Prelude to *Tristan and Isolde*, mm. 1–7.



EXAMPLE 4.2: Analysis of Tristan chord as French augmented-sixth chord, with G# and A# as accented passing tones. Wagner, Prelude to *Tristan and Isolde*, mm. 1–3.

The musical score for the introduction to *Pelléas et Mélisande* (mm. 1–16) is presented in piano. The tempo is marked *Très modéré*. The score is written for piano and includes measures 6, 12, 14, 15, and 16. The dynamics range from *pp* to *p*. The score is written for piano and includes measures 6, 12, 14, 15, and 16.

Forest leitmotif

Golaud leitmotif

Mélisande leitmotif

Très modéré

pp

p

pp

p *doux et expressif*

EXAMPLE 4.3: Leitmotifs in the introduction to *Pelléas et Mélisande*, mm. 1–16 (Piano-Vocal Score) (Paris: E. Fromont, 1902).²⁸

²⁸ For convenience, henceforth, I will mainly refer to examples from *Pelléas et Mélisande* and *L'Heure espagnole* by scene and page number.

Très modéré

(G-A)

(C-D)

(French-Aug.-6th with axis C-D)

EXAMPLE 4.4: Elliot Antokoletz's analysis of the opening of *Pelléas*, mm. 1–6, showing use of French augmented-sixth chord with symmetrical whole-tone axis at C–D.²⁹

Assez lent ♩ = 72

PIANO

ppp

pp

mf

EXAMPLE 4.5: Ravel, piano reduction of the opening of *L'Heure espagnole*, mm. 1–8 (Paris: Durand, 1908).³⁰

²⁹ Example 4-1 in Antokoletz, *Musical Symbolism in the Operas of Debussy and Bartók* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 62.

³⁰ All examples taken from *L'Heure espagnole* refer to pagination and measure numbers in the piano-vocal score as opposed to the full score, unless otherwise noted.

The introduction to *L'Heure*, however, largely subverts the pitch-space paradigm, creating a sonic environment in which meter tends to outweigh harmony or melody as the major organizing principle, although these other variables do remain important. Unlike *Pelléas*, the prominent motives that emerge from the introduction to *L'Heure* have no direct relationship to any of the characters' leitmotifs, although the material from the introduction does reappear in Ramiro's soliloquy in Scene XVI. As a result, I contend that the main tension in the introduction arises from a conflict between metric spaces: a complex metric world that breathes life into the atmosphere of Torquemada's clock shop, and intrusions of simple meter that seem bizarrely out of place. This contrast is mirrored on a larger scale in the remainder of the opera: long sections of metrically free recitative are juxtaposed with brief moments in which the characters sing in regular meter. The glaring contrast between complex meter or irregular metric groupings on the one hand and simple meter on the other essentially becomes a compositional strategy by which Ravel can re-orient the attention of the audience toward meter and innovate beyond forms of tonal and harmonic conflict that motivated the overall structure of previous operatic works.

The introduction to *L'Heure* establishes a sonic landscape in which the listener can identify time solely through metrical blocks that are recognizable through short leitmotivic units, a technique of handling meter that forces the listener to constantly re-evaluate how the metrical blocks fit together and what relationship they have with surrounding timbral events. Thus, I argue that the metric structure of the introduction encourages a Bergsonian type of listening, asking the listener to question the musical present in reference to what was heard immediately before, and use his or her past experience to make a judgment about what will occur next. By compelling the listener to perform a real-time, active analysis of the music's construction of time, I suggest that this compositional process represents the radical enactment of a concept I call

autoanalyse, producing a music that fosters real-time analysis through the process of hearing and provides a gateway to living in duration without recourse to intellection. As the reader will recall from Chapter 3, one of the goals of living in duration is to create a method of understanding that can operate in real-time, as opposed to intellectual deliberation, which can only take place after the fact. Music, for Bergson, seems to circumvent the delay involved in intellectual inquiry, as it is an art that happens in real time.

I suggest that Ravel's approach to meter may reflect Bergson's ideal conception of knowledge that dispenses with verbal inquiry in favor of action and movement, thus putting into practice the concepts of duration and intuition. At the same time, however, *L'Heure espagnole* also demonstrably exists within the confines of clock-time, as it is performed in real time, within the space of one actual hour. Moreover, there is evidently no guarantee that the audience will hear the introduction using the active techniques I have described. In my view, the main grounding element of the introduction is the persistent 5/4 "clock" motive (m. 1 of Example 4.5, above), yet the heard length of the motive may be variable, depending on the metric context. There is, nonetheless, a sense of an omnipresent quarter-note pulse throughout, even if its groupings are irregular. In effect, all we may hear from the orchestra in the introduction is the persistent quarter-note ticking of a giant clock, in addition to the "real" ticking of other clocks (that are in fact metronomes): exactly the opposite of a durational hearing.

In other words, what I see as the entire project of the introduction could fall apart at any moment: it could be seen as a spatial representation of time that is antithetical to Bergsonian duration. Essentially, the content of the introduction could be reduced to a cacophony of ticking clocks, which, by Bergson's definition, reflect only homogeneous manifestations of time. This is also Huebner's point in "*Laughter: In Ravel's Time*," in which he argues that clocks, either as

sonic image or as literal objects onstage, cannot stand for anything more than a superficial, spatialized understanding of temporality within Bergson's philosophy of time, and do not reflect the lived experience of duration. He writes: "Ravel's orchestra does not probe intuition—Wagnerian or Debussyian or Bergsonian—but rather joins the clocks themselves on a flat panel of representation."³¹ For Huebner, the relentless ticking of clocks in the introduction undercuts any sense of durational transcendence, resulting in a literalized, utterly flattened perspective that conveys no information beyond itself. This sonic literalism also cancels out any reference to Debussy's Symbolism: "Debussyian symbolist mystery (or Bergson's reflections on the inexpressibility of time, if one prefers) becomes de-sublimated by quiet background ticking. The end result is not an experience of the *au-delà*, but rather...surface confusion."³² However, I argue that the metric confusion Huebner identifies serves a larger purpose that does indeed engage with both Bergsonian duration and Debussyian Symbolism.

I suggest that Ravel's use of metric shifts in the introduction stages a conflict between linear and durational modes of parsing time, ultimately encouraging us to listen in duration by forcing the listener to readjust his or her perception of the passage of time in relation to the musical past. I claim that viewing the type of listening cultivated by *L'Heure* in dialogue with Bergson's philosophy of time, in turn, reveals practical information about how we might actually go about enacting duration within our own lives by learning to hear in time. Due to the constant shifts of meter in the introduction, the listener is continually compelled to re-orient him- or herself metrically. However, this is a process that remains fundamentally incomplete, both for the listener and in the world of the opera.

³¹ Huebner, "*Laughter*: In Ravel's Time," 239.

³² Huebner, "*Laughter*: In Ravel's Time," 239.

Revisiting Laloy's Association between Debussy and Bergsonism in the Opening of *Pelléas*

In Debussy's *Pelléas*, the function of the opening is to set the scene: in this case, the dark forest in which Golaud first sees Mélisande, whom he observes weeping next to a spring. In my view, Debussy's sonic rendering of the forest is not literal, but rather affective, encapsulating a mysterious and ominous feeling of being in the woods. With their open fifths, the first chords of *Pelléas* convey the grandeur and solidity of tall trees, but there is no literal sound-painting of rustling leaves, for instance. In Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of this dissertation, we explored how music criticism on Debussy, particularly writings by Laloy, repeatedly vaunted this type of attention to affect and place in Debussy's music. In Laloy's analysis, the hollow fifths and octaves of the opening chords express the sacredness of the forest rather than a literal image, recalling the sonic texture of Gregorian chant, and, by association, the deep piety of medieval France. He writes of this moment in the November 1902 issue of the *Revue musicale*:

In this phrase [i.e., the opening four measures of *Pelléas*], all of us recognize the voice of the past that bids us kneel and worship [God's] inscrutable commands. The faith of ages past comes back to life with the stroke of the baton of the great conjuror named M. Debussy.³³

Laloy claims that the opening of *Pelléas* reaches back through historical time to touch the past, forming a connection to the medieval past and France's Catholic heritage. But, for Laloy, I argue that this is also a living heritage, capable of coming back to life through the power of Debussy's music.

In her recent monograph, *Debussy's Critics*, Alexandra Kieffer interprets this passage as evidence that Laloy believed the archaism of parallel fifths constituted a fundamental aspect of

³³ Louis Laloy, "Exercices d'analyse," *Revue musicale* 2, no. 11 (November 1902): 471. My translation. "Nous reconnaissons tous, dans cette phrase, la voix du passé qui nous dit de plier le genou, et d'adorer des ordres impénétrables. La foi des anciens âges se ranime au coup de baguette du grand charmeur qui se nomme M. Debussy."

Pelléas.³⁴ Moreover, she argues that archaism served two divergent yet complementary purposes, at once creating a distinction from and continuity with the past. She claims that, on the one hand, Laloy saw the parallel fifths of the opening of *Pelléas* as signaling a difference between modern and past listeners: modern listeners found the parallel fifths jarring, while hypothetical past listeners would have perceived them as commonplace, as part and parcel of their ordinary sonic life. On the other hand, as one of the perfect consonances of Gregorian chant, the interval of the open fifth also functions as something that binds people together across time, evoking unity through a common French national and religious identity, which Kieffer terms “an overarching appeal to racial sameness.”³⁵

While I do not dispute the facts of Kieffer’s argument, I suggest that reframing this passage in terms of Laloy’s roots as a disciple of Bergson can help us make sense of the apparent contradictions in his writing regarding the relationship of the opening of *Pelléas* to the musical and historical past. Indeed, if we interpret this passage under the rubric of duration, in which the past is distant from us yet theoretically totally available to us, I argue that Laloy’s claims are no longer contradictory but rather logically consistent with one another. Viewed in this light, the opening of Debussy’s *Pelléas* thus acquires new meaning as a gateway not only to the literal medieval past but also a larger sense of a Bergsonian past that is at once distinct from and contiguous with the present moment. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Laloy accords enormous importance to the two opening chords of *Pelléas* and their Bergsonian philosophical implications. I argue that Bergsonian principles constitute the core of Laloy’s project

³⁴ Alexandra Kieffer, *Debussy’s Critics: Sound, Affect, and the Experience of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 196.

³⁵ Kieffer, *Debussy’s Critics*, 196.

surrounding the rehabilitation of Debussy as a master of technique, and, without considering the role of Bergson's philosophy in Laloy's appraisal of Debussy, we may risk misunderstanding his claims. Let us recall that Laloy's 1902 and 1928 analyses of the opening of *Pelléas* state that the harmonic function of the opening two chords is ambiguous, but when the same progression returns at mm. 3–4, the listener will necessarily re-evaluate the initial chord as i in D minor.³⁶ I argue that these four measures represent an instance of the Bergsonian theories of duration and intuition in practice, as the listener is forced to re-evaluate the present moment in terms of past experience (that is, what has just been heard), in order to make sense of an organic totality (the entire four measures). Moreover, the case of the opening two chords of *Pelléas* provide a textbook definition of organic totality: two identical chord progressions, one after the other. The repetition of the opening two measures may spur a reconsideration of the first two measures. In his characterization of Debussy as a "great conjuror" who can resurrect the past, I claim that Laloy essentially views Debussy as enacting durational time by literally bringing the past to the sonic surface, thus creating a literal sonic rapprochement between the past and the present. For Laloy, this sense of the immediacy of the past is made possible by Debussy's harmonic language, which at once transports the listener to the historically distant shores of Gregorian chant while at the same time invoking the just-heard musical past to force a re-evaluation of the sonic present.

By aurally quoting or otherwise referencing Debussy's works in the introduction to *L'Heure espagnole*, I suggest that Ravel negotiates similar issues of reconciling the sonic past and present, staging the problem of access to duration through double entendres, and questioning

³⁶ See my argument in Chapter 3, especially pp. 183–190..

the act of aural perception itself.³⁷ Instead of quoting Debussy verbatim, Ravel uses sophisticated techniques of metric and timbral deformation both to camouflage his allusions to and present a commentary on Debussy. Ravel's engagement with Debussy also calls to mind Pierre Lalo's snide remark that *L'Heure* could be reduced to "*Pelléas* played on a phonograph that turns too slowly."³⁸ Although Lalo surely meant this to be an insult, I intend to use it as a productive metaphor for analysis: that *L'Heure* might be heard as *Pelléas* coming through a phonograph, somehow filtered through a mass of machinery that distorts its timbres and rhythmic values. In the following section, I analyze a matrix of associations that link *L'Heure* with Debussy's *Pelléas* and *Nuages*, and have the listener seeing or hearing "double." Using this system of *trompes l'oeil* and double entendres, *L'Heure* imitates and, at the same time, warps existing works by Debussy as if in a fun house mirror.

Hall of Mirrors: *L'Heure*, *Pelléas*, and *Nocturnes*

Due to the fact that both *Pelléas* and *L'Heure* premiered at the Opéra-Comique, both relied on a common set of artists for casting. Jean Périer, the baritone who created the role of Ramiro in *L'Heure*, had famously premiered the role of *Pelléas* in 1902. In Albert Carré's estimation, Périer's slight frame and handsome features made him eminently suitable to play *Pelléas*. Carré likely also favored Périer for the role of Ramiro in *L'Heure* due to his physical appearance, as Concepcion admires Ramiro for his physical beauty and superhuman strength, but

³⁷ Gurminder Bhogal speaks of "*trompe l'oreille*," or a trick of the ear, in reference to Ravel's use of ornament in "Noctuelles" to manipulate the listener's perception of metric continuity, form, and texture. This sort of aural deception, in turn, leads to a confusion of levels similar to *trompe l'oeil* in art, for instance, the confusion of foreground with background. See Bhogal, *Details of Consequence: Ornament, Music, and Art in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 155.

³⁸ Pierre Lalo, review of *L'Heure espagnole*, by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps* (Paris), May 28, 1911. "*Pelléas* répétée par un phonographe dont le mouvement serait excessivement ralenti."

Périer's slender build must have enhanced the comic effect. The role of Concepcion, in turn, was an anti-Mélisande, a parody of Mélisande's sincerity and innocence embodied in a character that symbolized what Richard Langham Smith has called "the mythical-over-sexed Spanish female."³⁹ Geneviève Vix created the role but was known for her interpretation of Carmen, adding another trick of the eye to *L'Heure*'s comedic matrix.

The introduction to *L'Heure* engages with Debussy by perpetrating two double entendres on the listener: first, on a timbral level, it recalls the opening of *Nuages*, as Huebner has noted;⁴⁰ second, I suggest that it borrows heavily from the metric structure and symbolism of Act II, Scene I of *Pelléas*, seeming to both imitate and overwrite it. Importantly, Act II, Scene I of *Pelléas* itself echoes imagery from the opening scene of *Pelléas*: both scenes take place by a spring at which Mélisande drops a circular object into the water. Thus, through a complex web of associations, the introduction to *L'Heure* also re-engages all the Bergsonian philosophical baggage of the opening measures of *Pelléas*.

In 1909, and thus around the same period in which he orchestrated *L'Heure*, Ravel was working on a transcription of Debussy's *Nocturnes*, so *Nuages*, the first movement of the work, would have been fresh in his mind and his hearing.⁴¹ Moreover, as we saw in Chapter 1, Ravel actually started transcribing *Nocturnes* as early as 1901, so he would have been intimately familiar with it. The texture and orchestration of the opening bars of *L'Heure* is nearly identical to *Nuages*. Both *Nuages* and *L'Heure* use a block-chord texture for the opening melody. This is

³⁹ Richard Langham Smith, "Ravel's Operatic Spectacles: *L'Heure* and *L'Enfant*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 190.

⁴⁰ Huebner, "Laughter: In Ravel's Time," 239.

⁴¹ In a letter to Cipa Godebski dated March 14, 1909, Ravel wrote that he was in the final stages of orchestrating *L'Heure*, and the proofs would soon be sent to Durand. See also Kilpatrick, *The Operas of Maurice Ravel*, 40.

especially visible in the piano transcriptions of both works, shown in Examples 4.6 and 4.7 below. Moreover, the instrumentation is remarkably similar. In *Nuages*, the clarinets and bassoons carry the opening melody, accompanied by a touch of timbral color from the oboe (Example 4.6). In *L'Heure espagnole*, the clarinets, reinforced by the addition of a bass clarinet, have the opening five-note motive, which is supported by a drone in the basses, with added color from sustained tones in the cellos (Example 4.7). In the following measures, the five-note motive is taken up again by the bassoons, oboe, and muted French horns.

NOCTURNES

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

I. NUAGES

Transcription pour 2 Pianos 4 mains
par Maurice RAVEL

Modéré
très expressif

pp

Modéré
pp
expressif

PIANO I

PIANO II

EXAMPLE 4.6: Ravel, Transcription of *Nuages* for two pianos, mm. 1–4 (Paris: E. Fromont, 1900).

Introduction

Assez lent $\text{♩} = 72$

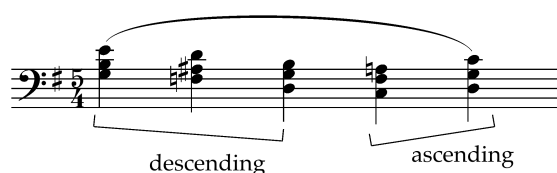
PIANO

EXAMPLE 4.7: Ravel, *L'Heure espagnole*, mm. 1–8.

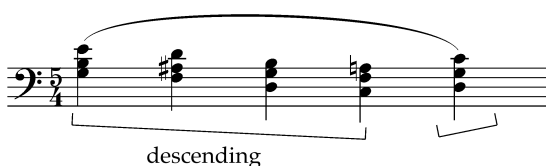
In contrast to the metric regularity of the opening of *Nuages*, in which the melody articulates a clear $2 + 2 + 2$ division of the $6/4$ metric frame, the introduction to *L'Heure* subverts our expectations at every turn, giving us little purchase on a metric frame of reference. Ravel also warps Debussy's $6/4$ into $5/4$, throwing the entire phrase rhythm off-balance from the start, as there is no possible symmetrical division of the measure. While $5/4$ is typically organized as either a $3 + 2$ or $2 + 3$ grouping of the beat, it is difficult to hear where the emphasis falls here. In my hearing, there is no definitive way to comprehend beat groupings at the level of the individual $5/4$ measure, as there are no internal accents. On repeated listenings, however, I tend to hear a $3 + 2$ grouping, based solely on my perception of the melodic contour as divided into more or less discrete descending and ascending units (see Example 4.8, below). Conversely, another hearing might assume a conventional $4/4$ meter, only to have to reevaluate one's perception when the five-beat melodic cell repeats again in the next measure. This second hearing would group the first four chords together as a four-beat unit with an odd beat out at the

end, where the melodic contour ascends (see Example 4.8, below). These are by no means all the possible permutations in play, however.

3 + 2 beat grouping:



4 + 1 beat grouping:



EXAMPLE 4.8: Two Possible Hearings of Metric Division in *L'Heure*, m. 1.

At the overarching metric level, the opening phrase of *L'Heure* (mm. 1–3) is grouped into a 2 + 1 metrical arrangement that is immediately subverted by the next phrase (mm. 4–7), which is grouped as a 3 + 1 arrangement: two measures of 5/4 plus one of 3/4, followed by three measures of 5/4 plus one of 3/4. The transition to 3/4 from 5/4 would hardly be noticeable except for the fact that the opening three measures establish a melodic pattern that mirrors the metric shifts, repeating the same melodic unit (what I call the “clock” motive) in both of the 5/4 measures, while using a contrasting ascending melodic contour for the shift in meter to 3/4 at m. 3. The listener may expect that a 2 + 1 configuration will follow the 2 + 1 grouping of the opening three measures, and, indeed, m. 4 sets up the expectation of a melodic sequence by transposing the clock motive from m. 1 up a fifth. However, the melody veers off-course on the fourth beat of m. 5; this measure preserves the overall contour of the initial five-note clock

motive but modifies the last two notes. The metric groupings continue to be irregular throughout the introduction, following no identifiable series. Moreover, the melody contradicts what little metrical frame of reference has already been established. On top of this already vertiginous rhythmic texture, Ravel adds competing rhythmic layers by adding three “pendulums” to the sonic texture (in practice, these are actually three metronomes) that each tick at different rates ($\text{♩} = 40$, $\text{♩} = 100$, and $\text{♩} = 232$). The score also calls for various musical automata, although they are used as props, not sound-producing devices in themselves. Their music is fully scored, and a stagehand controls their movements, either from beneath a table onstage or within the wings.⁴²

The alternation between 5/4 and 3/4 meter continues throughout the introduction, apart from two instances of 6/4. As the curtain rises, a clock softly chimes nine times in 9/8 meter, interrupted by another that chimes in 2/4. Suddenly, out of the *pppp* haze, an ominous tutti chromatic descent bursts into the texture at *mf*, in 6/4 meter, as another clock chimes out of sync (Example 4.9). Even more strangely, the chromatic descent occurs on a series of parallel French augmented-sixth chords with an added minor ninth. Technically, the French augmented-sixth chords are spelled as dominant seventh chords with a flattened fifth, but they eventually resolve to a dominant seventh chord (at m. 22), just as the Tristan chord does. At the very moment of the resolution to B7 at m. 22, a crack of the whip jolts us into another sonic realm as an automaton begins to play the trumpet.

⁴² The *régie* score for the original 1911 production of *L'Heure espagnole* specifies how each musical automaton is to be operated and where the sound of each one is to be localized, whether in the orchestra pit or backstage. For example, the sound of the cuckoo and clock chimes are produced in the orchestra pit, while the sound of Torquemada winding up Ramiro's watch is produced backstage with a rattle. See Kilpatrick, “The Carbonne Copy,” *Tracing the Première of L'Heure espagnole*, *Revue de musicologie* 95, no. 1 (2009): 116.

4

Gdes Fl. *mf*

Hrb *mf*

Cor A. *mf*

Cl. *mf*

Cl. B.

Bass *mf*

Sarr. *mf*

Cors *mf*

Tromp. *mf*

Timb. *mf*

Bal.

Jeux de Timbres *mf*

Cloches

1re Harpe *mf*

Div. Sourdines *mf*

Div. pos. nat. *mf*

Div. 1

p

mf

e- : Fr+6

EXAMPLE 4.9: Tutti Chromatic Descent. Ravel, *L'Heure espagnole* (Full Score), mm. 16–17 (Paris: Durand, 1911).

In the metrically disorienting atmosphere of the introduction, moments of relative metric regularity suddenly stand out as intrusions into an otherwise inscrutable metrical frame. Often, these divergent metric spaces are correlated with divergent pitch-spaces. Irregular meter is often correlated with non-diatonic pitch-space, and simple meter is frequently correlated with diatonic pitch-space. But in the introduction to *L'Heure*, interjections of stable meter or diatonic pitch-space do not provide any reassurance of an orderly sound-world, given that they arise not from any exertion of human agency but rather the automata on stage: the trumpet player and the musical marionettes. In Example 4.10 below,⁴³ the “trumpet”—actually a French horn using a special stopped technique to produce a shrill, brassy sound—interjects a reveille topic in the foreign key area of B major, playing out of alignment with the surrounding meter.⁴⁴ A few measures later, the marionettes establish yet another tonal area of Bb minor within a surrounding Ab mixolydian modal context, and provide their own 2/4 metric regularity within a highly irregular metric frame. Meanwhile, undergirding all of this is another conflict between harmonic and motivic areas, as statements of octatonic scales alternate with the reappearance of the clock motive.

⁴³ I have modeled this reduction on Ravel's own piano-vocal score for the opera (Paris: Durand, 1908), while at the same time seeking to include more information from the full score. I have substituted the original indications from the full score (e.g., the direction “*cuivré*” at m. 22) in place of those from the piano-vocal arrangement and have labeled the original instrumentation for the automata in square brackets. I have also added a percussion staff for the whip (“*fouet*” in the full score) and cymbal, and reproduced the original notation for the celesta in mm. 28–29. *N.B.* In mm. 26–27, accented *fortissimo* octave A's appear in the lower treble line in Ravel's piano-vocal score but not the full score. I have omitted them in this transcription so as to give a more accurate representation of the full score.

⁴⁴ The French horn is notated with a series of “+” marks in the score to denote stopped notes. Ravel directs the horn to be played open, without the use of valves; thus, the performer must create the pitches and timbral quality requested in the score through the use of hand-stopping alone. For an explanation of the mechanics of this technique, see Colin Dorman, “The Theory Behind Stopping the Horn,” <https://colindorman.com/horn/theory-behind-stopping-horn/>, and Frank Lloyd, “French Horn: Setting the Record Straight on Stopped Notes,” YouTube, beginning at approximately 4:00. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azHNkMBk4bc&feature=emb_logo.

22 [Whip] *mf*

An automaton plays the trumpet
Un automate joue de la trompette

[French Horn] *pp* brassy (without mute or valves)
cuivré (sans sourdine et sans pistons)

ppp *ppp*

octatonic

p *pp* *mp*

octatonic "clock" motive "clock" motive

26

[Trombone]

octatonic octatonic

p *mf*

28 [Cymbal]

[Celesta]

The musical marionettes start dancing
Les marionnettes à musique se mettent à danser

pp

"clock" motive returns in full voicing

EXAMPLE 4.10: Automata in the Introduction to *L'Heure espagnole*, mm. 22–29. My transcription.⁴⁵

Although the metric shifts in the introduction to *L'Heure* appear arbitrary, I claim that they are in fact symbolic, referencing similar uses of meter in *Pelléas*. I suggest that Ravel's use of meter in the introduction mirrors that of Act II, Scene I of *Pelléas*, which shifts between 6/4 and 3/4 or 4/4 meter. In Ravel's "Note pour l'Exécution" ("A Note on Performance"), a prefatory statement on *L'Heure* included with both the original full score and piano reduction, Ravel remarks that he wants the opera to have the overall texture of recitative: "Apart from the final quintet, and, for the most part, the role of Gonzalve, a lyric [tenor] with affectation, *say* rather than *sing* (brief phrase endings, portamenti, etc.). At almost all times, it should be the *quasi-parlando* of Italian opera buffa recitative."⁴⁶ However, I would argue that the way in

⁴⁵ Please refer to footnote 42, above, for my explanation of my process in creating this transcription.

⁴⁶ "Note pour l'exécution," preface to Ravel, *L'Heure espagnole* (Paris: Durand, 1911).

which Ravel employs meter is not effectively neutral, as in recitative, but rather creates a wide array of intertextual references that lead back to *Pelléas*.

In Act II, Scene I of *Pelléas*, Pelléas takes Mélisande to a spring in the park behind the castle in the late morning, telling her of its supposed powers to cure blindness. But no one believes in its power anymore, since Arkel, the elderly king of Allemonde, has already lost most of his sight and could not be cured. Act II, Scene I unfolds in a free-flowing 6/4 meter, but as the scene progresses, the meter begins to alternate between 6/4 and 3/4 as Pelléas begins to interrogate Mélisande about how she and Golaud met, and dramatic tension rises within the scene. Mélisande, apparently uneasy with the tenor of the conversation, fiddles with her wedding ring, playing a risky game of tossing it in the air and catching it over the well. The metric shifts continue over repeated iterations of a dotted rhythm recalling Golaud's leitmotif as Pelléas admonishes her to be careful ("Ne jouez pas ainsi au dessus d'une eau si profonde!" // "Don't play like that above such deep water!"). But, at points, he appears to join in the fun of Mélisande's game with childish abandon, intoning, "How it [i.e., the ring] shines in the sunlight!" ("Comme il brille au soleil!"). As both the 6/4 and the 3/4 measures use similar melodic material and are similarly subdivided, I would argue that the result is not a jarring disconnect in heard versus notated meter, but rather an identifiable foreshortening of the phrase rhythm. Here, Pelléas's dialogue spans exactly half the metrical length of Mélisande's, thus conveying a sense of urgency.

en animant
MÉLISANDE

A - vec l'an - neau qu'il m'a don - né.

Ne jou -

ez pas ainsi au - des - sus d'une eau si pro - fon - de...

MÉLISANDE

Mes mains ne trem - blent pas...

Comme il

brille au so - leil!

EXAMPLE 4.11: Excerpt from Act II, Scene I of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, (Paris: E. Fromont, 1902), p. 58.

In a moment freighted with symbolism, as the clock strikes noon, Mélisande accidentally drops her wedding ring in the water, which Debussy captures with an onomatopoeic descending arpeggio (Example 4.12). This scene reiterates the imagery of the opening of *Pelléas*: Golaud loses his way while hunting, happening upon Mélisande in the woods. He discovers her weeping at the edge of a spring, staring down through the water at her crown, which has sunken to the bottom.

The musical score is in 6/4 time and consists of two systems. The first system features a vocal line for Golaud with the lyrics "Ne le je - tez pas si" and a piano accompaniment with a descending arpeggio marked *f*. The second system features a vocal line for Mélisande with the lyrics "haut vers le ciel!" and a piano accompaniment with a descending arpeggio marked *f*. The piano part in both systems is characterized by a descending arpeggio pattern.

EXAMPLE 4.12: Mélisande Loses her Wedding Ring. *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Act II, Scene I, p. 59.

Elsewhere, at the very moment that Mélisande drops her ring, Golaud falls off his horse and injures himself. The audience does not witness this coincidence in real time, however, but hears about it after the fact from Golaud in the following scene. *Pelléas* has many moments like this, in which the audience does not witness key events of the plot, such as Mélisande's marriage to Golaud. Many events occur offstage, are summarized later by another character, or are only narrated through indirect discourse, through hearsay or in letters. In the next scene, when Golaud asks her how she lost her ring, Mélisande lies in "his" meter (that is, mostly in 4/4), telling him that she felt it slip off her finger when she was in a cave by the ocean, gathering seashells for Golaud's son, Yniold.

Throughout the opera, Debussy seems to accord special prominence to 6/4 as a meter in which Mélisande speaks and in which Mélisande and Pelléas communicate with each other, whereas Golaud frequently speaks in 3/4 and 4/4.⁴⁷ Debussy again uses 6/4 meter in Act IV, Scene 4 to depict the fleeting but rapturous union of Pelléas and Mélisande, one of the only moments in the opera during which either of the title characters actually sings on the beat, in time with the orchestra.

⁴⁷ While its metrical association with *Pelléas* may be tenuous, as the reader will recall from Example 4.1, above, the *Tristan* prelude is also in six (6/8).

Modéré

Pelléas

On di - rait que ta voix a pas - sé sur la mer_ au prin - temps!... Je ne

p doux et expressif

più p dim.

5

EXAMPLE 4.13: Metric alignment between Pelléas's vocal line and orchestral accompaniment.
Pelléas et Mélisande, Act IV, Scene IV, p. 221–222.

Debussy also uses 6/4 meter in the final scene of *Pelléas*, as Mélisande lays dying. Mélisande again sings in a mellifluous 6/4 meter, in a dreamy modal harmonic language. Yet we do not hear but only infer Mélisande's last words: we hear her leitmotif in the orchestra but not her actual voice. The opera ends wordlessly in 12/8 in triple subdivision, perhaps reflecting a final peace between both Golaud and Mélisande's leitmotifs and meters, as both are resigned to their respective fates.

In the introduction to *L'Heure*, there are only two instances of 6/4 meter, both of which occur at a chromatic descent over parallel Tristan chords (Example 4.9, above). Thus far, Ravel seems to have already tried out at least several wordless sonic puns: a reminiscence of *Nuages* that toys with the meter; a raft of chromatically descending Tristan chords that at first appear portentous but are soon interrupted by the crack of a whip and a trumpet automaton sounding a reveille, as if literally telling the listener to “wake up!”; a pun on the sound of a trumpet itself, which is actually a French horn; and a highly abstruse metric inside joke on *Pelléas* and *Tristan* that seems to ridicule meters in six as the meter of lovers. I suggest that 6/4 functions as an

illusory meter in the introduction to *L'Heure*—mostly replaced by 5/4, the “real” meter that reflects the unevenness of lived experience. In *L'Heure*, we are no longer in the realm of symbolism, but the real world.

While *Nuages* is clearly not without its own metric dislocations, the 6/4 frame articulated in the opening provides a fairly consistent metric ground in the first section of the piece. The irregular groupings of measures in the opening of *L'Heure*, on the other hand, combined with incessant ticking of various timepieces, completely disorient the listener, both from the perspective of the spectator as well as within the world of the opera itself, leading even Torquemada—the watchmaker, who is supposedly in control of time—to ask, “But what time is it, then?...These clocks, Monsieur, one can’t hear them chime anymore: it’s enough to drive one crazy!”⁴⁸

Such dislocation of time impairs the characters’ ability to hear correctly: indeed, they frequently cannot communicate with one another or understand one another’s intentions. In the world of *L'Heure*, all the characters appear mechanical and thus may not be equipped to properly understand one another: like machines, they can only execute a single task. For instance, Torquemada, the time-keeping machine, appears oblivious or indifferent to Concepcion’s affairs, enamored with the way she calls him “Totor.” Concepcion, the desire machine, tries to get rid of Ramiro several times in order to have her romantic tryst with Gonzalve. Yet, Ramiro, a machine that moves furniture, does not take the hint and leave after he has finished the various tasks Concepcion gives him. Meanwhile, Gonzalve, the poetry-machine, spins phrase after phrase of effusive poetry instead of paying attention to the time and going upstairs when he and Concepcion had the chance to get away. Don Inigo, the financier and money-making machine,

⁴⁸ Ravel, *L'Heure espagnole*, Scene II.

persists in courting Concepcion despite her refusals as well as her revulsion of his corpulent physique.

Ravel even stages this problem of hearing through what Huebner has termed “*autoparodie*,”⁴⁹ quoting the opening of his own *Ondine* (1908) at the very moment at which Gonzalve bids farewell to the clock in which he had been confined.⁵⁰



EXAMPLE 4.14: Gonzalve bids farewell to the clock. Ravel, *L'Heure espagnole*, Scene XIX, p. 91.



EXAMPLE 4.15: Ravel, “Ondine,” first movement in *Gaspard de la Nuit*, mm. 1–4 (Paris: Durand, 1909).

⁴⁹ Huebner, “*L'Heure espagnole*: la grivoiserie moderne de Ravel,” in *Aspects de l'opéra français de Meyerbeer à Honegger*, ed. Jean-Christophe Branger and Vincent Giroud (Lyon: Symétrie, 2009), 209.

⁵⁰ On metric disruption and ornament in *Ondine*, see Bhogal, “Ornament and Virtuosity in French Piano Music,” chap. 3 in *Details of Consequence*.

This inability to hear through *trompe l'oreille*—to distinguish aurally the original from the copy—calls into question aural perception itself, staging a problem of knowledge that mirrors the paradox of intellection analyzed in Jankélévitch's *Bergson*. In sum, Jankélévitch writes that what is tragic about intellection is that our knowledge obstructs our understanding, thus impeding our access to duration. In *L'Heure*, I claim an analogous process takes place in which hearing disrupts listening. The characters may hear one another, but cannot process the implicit meaning of what is actually being said. Jonathan Sterne writes in *The Audible Past* of a distinction between hearing as a sensory, physiological phenomenon and listening as a constructed practice.⁵¹ For Sterne, listening can take many forms, although the two main types he references are cultural listening, in which certain features of sound, such as timbre, might be prioritized among certain cultures; and audible technique, a type of listening adapted for a specific technical purpose, for example, auscultation.⁵² While I am not making an argument for a technical understanding of listening within *L'Heure*, I am intrigued by Sterne's conceptualization of the activity of listening—in the sense of audible technique—as a discrete task by the end of the nineteenth century.⁵³ By Sterne's logic, the sheer sonic bombardment of multiple timbral and metric layers in *L'Heure* would seem to create an environment in which listening as a discrete activity is not possible.

I argue that Ravel's genius here is not only to make this failure of hearing palpable to the characters within the world of the opera itself but also to the audience through manipulations of

⁵¹ See Jonathan Sterne, "Techniques of Listening," chap. 2 in *The Audible Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁵² Sterne, *Audible Past*, 98.

⁵³ Sterne, *Audible Past*, 93.

the perception of time. In effect, this creates several layers of mirroring: the inability of the characters to comprehend one another mirrors the audience's difficulty latching onto the metric structure which, in turn, mirrors the larger philosophical problem of the inability to represent and live in duration. If viewed within a Bergsonian hermeneutic frame, the audience's failure to make any sense out of the metric structure—our failure to literally hear in time—can function as an allegory for our own grave failure to live our lives in the present, in accord with duration and with total awareness of our actions.

Ravel's Characterization

As we explored in our consideration of the introduction to *L'Heure*, Ravel creates a sonic ecosystem in which, contrary to our usual associations, regular meter seems absurdly out of place, given the predominance of constant metric shifts. Likewise, among *L'Heure*'s characters, the use of regular meter is noticeable and forms a stark contrast to the overwhelmingly recitative-like texture. In a Bergsonian frame of reference, the characters' maladaptation to this soundworld recalls Bergson's idea of comedy as a farcical kind of rigidity that is wholly inappropriate to the situation at hand. With its machine-like music and flat characters, I suggest that *L'Heure* calls to mind what Bergson terms "conscious automatism,"⁵⁴ a mode of behavior that allows us to conduct the majority of our daily lives, which are regulated by clock-time. This adaptation to life comes at a cost, however: our very free will. In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, we explored how Bergson's interlocutors dealt with the issue of consciousness and its relationship to music. On a continuum between conscious and unconscious thought, the researchers whose work we surveyed—Gustav Fechner, Théodule Ribot, and Pierre Janet—associated music with partially or

⁵⁴ Henri Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Paris: Alcan, 1889), 105.

totally unconscious automatism. Bergson, however, associated music with precisely the opposite mode of being: music opened the door to new ways of thinking within duration, and provided freedom from the hegemony of clock-time.

For *L'Heure espagnole*, I contend that a Bergsonian analysis of the opera is appealing because it helps us make sense of Ravel's aesthetic choices regarding his use of rhythm and meter, which otherwise appear arbitrary, and leads us back through potentially unforeseen connections to other operatic works within *L'Heure*'s immediate orbit, namely *Pelléas*. I suggest that *L'Heure*'s characters appear most ridiculous when they are speaking in regular meter, given that irregular meter is the standard for "normal" conversation within *L'Heure*. Ravel's use of leitmotifs, particularly the many reappearances of the "clock" motif, also establishes a dramatic irony that separates the text and vocal lines of the characters from the orchestral accompaniment, letting the audience in on the joke that the characters are not conscious of their fate. The orchestra seems to laugh at the characters with every reappearance of the "clock" motif, knowing that they cannot hear what time it is. However, this disjunction between the orchestra and the dialogue is not a tragic kind of dramatic irony, as in similar instances of textural disjunction in *Pelléas*: it merely makes the characters look ridiculous.

In Scene I of *L'Heure*, Ramiro advertises himself to Torquemada with the line: "At your service, government mule-driver. Consequently, knowing the exact time is my duty."⁵⁵ But under his lyrics, the orchestra repeatedly sounds the "clock" motif in the "wrong" meter—7/8, not 5/4 as in the opening.

⁵⁵ Ravel, *L'Heure espagnole*, Scene I. "Or, je suis a votre service, muletier du gouvernement. Connaître l'heure exactement, en conséquence, c'est mon office."

RAMIRO

p

Or, je suis, a vo-tre ser-vi-ce, Mu-le-tier du gou-ver-nement, Con-
 Sir, I am, at your ser-vi-ce, a mule-teer of the gov-ernment, 'Tis

p

120

p

clock leitmotif

clock leitmotif

R.

-nai-tre l'heure exac-tement, En conséquence est mon of-fi-ce
 there-fore quite im-per-a-tive that I should know the ex-act time,

p

p

clock leitmotif

EXAMPLE 4.16: Ramiro and the Clock Leitmotif. Ravel, *L'Heure espagnole*, Scene I, p. 5.

In Scene IV of *L'Heure*, Gonzalve finally arrives for his weekly tryst with Concepcion, a parody of Act IV, Scene 4 of *Pelléas*, in which Pelléas and Mélisande finally declare their love for one another with a chaste kiss. In *Pelléas*, Act IV, Scene 4 represents another instance of metrical symbolism that harkens back to earlier such moments in the opera, echoing the same metrical fluctuation that occurs in Act II, Scene 1, discussed above in my analysis of the introduction to *L'Heure*. In Act IV, Scene 4, Mélisande and Pelléas again meet at the Blind Man's Spring, just as they had in Act II, Scene 1, this time under cover of darkness. Their initial plan was only to see each other, after which Pelléas had originally decided to leave so as to avoid acting on his feelings for Mélisande. But they get locked out of the castle and hastily decide to run away together, only to be thwarted by Golaud, who kills Pelléas and wounds Mélisande. In the following scene, Mélisande subsequently dies after giving birth to an underweight girl, thus reinscribing an intergenerational cycle of trauma.

Pelléas, having arrived first, begins a soliloquy in 6/4, overcome by emotion at his sudden realization that he is in love with Mélisande, yet he is fully aware of the stakes of his transgression. But the voice of moderation creeps in a few bars later, as the orchestra abruptly shifts to Golaud's meter of 4/4, swelling to *forte* as Pelléas sings "It would be better for me to leave without seeing her again."⁵⁶ Throughout the scene, the 6/4 meter becomes symbolic of the lovers' union, but it is continually disrupted by shorter rhythmic units that tend to appear when one of the characters expresses doubt or apprehension. Often, these moments are notated in a separate meter, in 3/4 or 4/4, but they also occur as a hemiola or a quickening of the rhythmic subdivision within the 6/4 frame. The fact that 3/4 and 4/4, the meters in which Golaud usually speaks, are used here, may foreshadow his appearance later in the scene. Fatefully, Mélisande convinces Pelléas to stay with her even as he begs her to leave with him, while the orchestra marks out the 6/4 meter with the tempo indication "cédez un peu" (slow down a bit). But, as Pelléas becomes anxious again, fearing that Mélisande is becoming distant and will leave him, he sings in shorter phrases and the tempo snaps back into *tempo primo*, "animé" (animated). These shorter phrases, in turn, are supported by shorter melodic units in the orchestral accompaniment, leading to a potential sense of compression in the meter to 3/4 time (shown in Example 4.17, below).

⁵⁶ Debussy, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Act IV, Scene 4. "Je ferais mieux de m'en aller sans la revoir."

Cédez un peu
MÉLISANDE

Non, non, res-tons i-ci... Je suis plus près de

p *più p*

au mouv^t (animé)

M toi dans l'obs-cu-ri-té...
PÉLLÉAS

Ou sont tes yeux? Tu ne vas

pp *mf*

3
4

E. 1416. F.

P pas me fuir?

mf e cresc.

EXAMPLE 4.17: Metric Compression in *Pelléas*, Act IV, Scene 4, pp. 229–230.

As the scene progresses, the tempo increases to a frenetic pace as time runs out for Pelléas and Mélisande, and Golaud emerges from the woods to hunt them down.

In Scene IV of *L'Heure*, the consequences for Concepcion and her potential suitors—in the case of this scene, Gonzalve—are infinitely less dire, and Ravel parodies the sense of urgency that haunts the lovers in *Pelléas*. In a reversal of roles, it is the male romantic lead, Gonzalve, who tries to prolong time in vain: Gonzalve is partial to inappropriately long melodies and melismas that seem to stretch out time, whereas Concepcion typically speaks to him in much shorter phrases. In the example below, announcing his presence with a silly-sounding rubato melisma in 12/8, Gonzalve begins what seems to be the opening of an aria, “Enfin revient le jour si doux” (“Finally, the sweet day has returned”), in the “lovers’ ” meter of 6/8 but repeatedly gets distracted by his own melodic flourishes (Example 4.18, below). Extremely satisfied with his own mediocre ingenuity, he repeats this opening line three times, not realizing that he is wasting precious time musing upon his affection for Concepcion. Meanwhile, Concepcion grows increasingly impatient, comically reminding him of the time as the orchestra repeatedly sounds the clock theme (Example 4.19, below).

Throughout, Gonzalve continually gets lost in his own thoughts rather than attending to the situation at hand. Unlike the parallel situation in *Pelléas*, Gonzalve’s actions do not reflect any expression of doubt as to Concepcion’s affections, which might perhaps win him sympathy from the audience, but rather a comical insistence on doing exactly the wrong thing at the wrong time. Concepcion shifts to shortened phrases and repeated entreaties to try to force Gonzalve’s attention back to the present moment, but she is ultimately unsuccessful. As in Act II, Scene I of *Pelléas*, in which Pelléas (or more precisely, the orchestral accompaniment) uses phrase units half as long as Mélisande’s to warn her of impending disaster as she tosses her wedding ring over the spring, Concepcion sings over phrase units that are half as long as Gonzalve’s (3/8 as compared to 6/8). Afraid of being seen alone with Gonzalve, Concepcion hatches an absurd plan

to shove Gonzalve in a clock and have Ramiro carry him upstairs. Yet I suggest that this plan also has a crudely symbolic meaning: by literally forcing Gonzalve into a time-keeping device, Concepcion attempts to get him to internalize a sense of the urgency of the passage of time and the importance of taking advantage of the present moment.

Lent
in the hall
GONZALVE dans la coulisse

f Ah! He goes out carrying the clock on his shoulder.
il sort, emportant l'horloge sur son épaule.

pas de conver - sa - ti - on
have no conver - sa - ti - on

Lent = 50

pp

au Mouvt
who is waiting at the window
CONCEPCION qui guette à la fenêtre

Il é - tait temps, voi - ci Gonzalve!
'Tis nearly time, there is Gonzalve.

mf espress.

En - fin re - vient
At last re - turns the

au Mouvt

pp

le jour si doux.
day so sweet.

Har - pes, chan - tez, é - clatez, sal - ves!
Let the harps sing, and let the bells ring!

EXAMPLE 4.18: Gonzalve's melisma in "Enfin revient le jour si doux." Ravel, *L'Heure espagnole*, Scene IV, p. 20.

En *mf* haut (aloud) pressant peu à peu

Oui, mon a - mi, mais pro - fi - tons de l'heure u - nique... Tiens, sens, Come, feel,

En pressant peu à peu

p agité

comme bat - tait mon cœur en t'at - ten - dant! how my heart flut - ters and throbs while wait - ing for you! *ff*

GONZALVE *ff* déclamant

Hor - lo - This clock -

Lent *Même mouvt*

- - - ge, c'est ton cœur, le rythme en est le même, Ton cœur bal - it is your heart, its rhythm is the same. Your dancing

Lent $\text{♩} = 50$ *Même mouvt*

suivez *p*

EXAMPLE 4.19: Concepcion grows impatient with Gonzalve. Ravel, *L'Heure espagnole*, Scene IV, p. 22.

In *L'Heure*, Concepcion does not fall in love with a man, exactly, but rather a clock. I suggest that Concepcion has the most agency within the opera because she is free from any bondage to a particular leitmotif and all the male characters compete for her attention, yet she

nevertheless has few choices because she must choose among machines instead of men. In the world of the opera, which is so closely regulated by time, all the male characters appear compelled to adopt mechanical behavior, both to adapt to the pressures of clock-time and to ingratiate themselves with Concepcion. Over the course of the opera, both Gonzalve and Inigo attempt to embody clocks and become mechanical so they can please Concepcion. In Scene VI, Concepcion tells Gonzalve to get into a grandfather clock so Ramiro will not see him. Gonzalve is apprehensive at first, singing “In this box of cypress, / Pine, oak, or cedar?” Gonzalve’s concern with the type of wood with which the clock is constructed is absurd and comical, yet also grotesque, for it is in this moment that he realizes that the clock has a strange resemblance to a coffin. In his next line, he capitulates to Concepcion, reimagining his “death” as an opportunity to “taste new sensations”: “It pleases me to cross your threshold/Between closed boards, as in a coffin,/There I shall taste new sensations.” Ravel sets this line to an explicit auditory reference to Chopin’s Bb minor funeral march, further playing up the ridiculous yet grotesque aspects of this scene.

In Scene IX, Concepcion rejects Don Inigo’s advances and leaves the room, but he is determined to win her over, devising a plan to hide in a clock until she comes back. “In these extreme positions, / A lover would, artfully, / Conceal himself in a cupboard: / So much the worse, my soul, if I demean myself...These clocks are the cupboards of clockmakers.” He ends his soliloquy determined to show Concepcion another side of himself that is not “stern and pompous” but rather “more suited to her passionate temper,” and at these words, his leitmotif transforms from a dotted rhythm to a waltz. Don Inigo hears someone coming down the stairs, and closes the front of the clock hurriedly, intoning “coucou!” in high falsetto. There is

something grotesque about this as well: to gain Concepcion's affection, Inigo feels he must literally inhabit and impersonate a clock.

At the end of the opera, Inigo is still stuck in the clock, and Torquemada, Gonzalve, and Concepcion form a human chain to tug on Inigo but cannot manage to get him out. Then, Ramiro steps forward and pulls him out of the clock with no apparent effort, displaying his superhuman, machine-like strength. After convincing both Gonzalve and Don Inigo to buy the clocks in which they were hiding, Torquemada exclaims, "You won't have a clock anymore, darling!"⁵⁷ Pointing to Ramiro, Concepcion responds: "Regular as a chronometer, / Monsieur passes beneath my window every morning with his mules..."⁵⁸ Having been her lover, Ramiro will now become her clock.

The only route to love in *L'Heure* seems to be for Concepcion to fall in love with a machine, yet none of her suitors truly appeal to her, as she laments in "Oh la pitoyable aventure!" (Scene VII), the dramatic climax of the opera. She complains that Gonzalve only wants to "compose florid [*baroques*] verses," and Don Inigo "still more grotesque, / Could come only halfway out of the clock, / With his belly entangled with trinkets." Imprisoned by time, Concepcion eventually chooses Ramiro primarily because of his physique and his lack of intelligence, but also to exploit the few minutes that remain of the "Spanish hour." She has not fallen in love with a human, but a machine, the implication being that he too will ultimately disappoint her, just as Gonzalve, the lyric poetry machine, and Don Inigo, the aristocratic financier and hence money-making-machine, both disappointed her. Concepcion's choice of Ramiro thus appears not to be truly made of her own volition, but because she has no other

⁵⁷ Ravel, *L'Heure espagnole*, Scene XXI.

⁵⁸ Ravel, *L'Heure espagnole*, Scene XXI.

satisfactory choice. In my view, this suggests that, in a world dominated by time, people become machines and cannot exercise their free will, a theme amply represented in Bergson's *Essai*.

In *Matière et mémoire*, Bergson writes that a mechanical person is in some ways superior to a fully human person because she is well adapted to daily life in society. According to Bergson, in order to function well in society, one must apply the series of past experiences stored in one's memory to any given action with machine-like precision, choosing the right response at the right time. "An experience of an entirely different order is thus formed, which deposits in the body a series of constructed mechanisms, with increasingly numerous and variable reactions to exterior excitations, with ready-made answers to an infinite number of possible interpellations."⁵⁹ Over time, this type of memory becomes an adaptive automatism that allows the body to function in society by means of these learned mechanisms of action. The body thus becomes a machine that selects the correct response to an external stimulus at the correct time based on the information culled from one's past experiences.

Ideally, one's memory would always be geared toward the action at hand and would be situated in the correct moment in time, "tending toward action, seated in the present, and looking only to the future."⁶⁰ However, the epitome of a correctly functioning memory, according to Bergson, would make action and memory indistinguishable from one another, as memory would no longer represent the past as a series of images, but play it out, using past experiences only to inform the present action. "Truly, it [i.e., memory] no longer represents our past, it plays it out; and if it still merits the name of memory, it is not because it preserves previous images, but

⁵⁹ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire : Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1906), 56. "Ainsi se forme une expérience d'un tout autre ordre et qui se dépose dans le corps, une série de mécanismes tout montés, avec des réactions de plus en plus nombreuses et variées aux excitations extérieures, avec des répliques toutes prêtes à un nombre sans cesse croissant d'interpellations possibles."

⁶⁰ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, 56. "tendue vers l'action, assise dans le présent et ne regardant que l'avenir."

because it prolongs their useful effect up to the present moment.”⁶¹ Thus, the past is only effective as it is able to correctly motivate real-time action.

I suggest that this positive aspect of mechanism is partly visible in Ramiro, who does exactly what he is told, carrying clocks up- and downstairs without complaint. Furthermore, he believes he is adapting to a particular role assigned by Concepcion: “And besides [she is] a capable manager, / To assign to each visitor a role: / Conforming to his talents / I...my talents...are my shoulders!”⁶² (Scene X) However, in Bergson’s *Le Rire*, mechanism can also be disabling and hence comic: someone who is too mechanical fails to adapt to the present and is thus ridiculous. In *L’Heure*, Gonzalve and Don Inigo are examples of this type of mechanism in that they refuse to adapt to the present circumstances: Gonzalve because he continues with his poetic outpourings instead of listening to the time, and Don Inigo because he refuses to accept that Concepcion is not interested in him. Perhaps each suitor’s techniques had worked in the past, but no longer. In other words, they do not act within the correct frame of time, lingering in the past rather than focusing on the present. Ironically, at the end of the opera, they are caught red-handed in Torquemada’s clock shop, with Don Inigo still stuck in his clock, adding to the comedy of the situation: like Torquemada in the opening of the opera, they are surrounded by clocks but do not know what time it is, and have not anticipated his return.

Thus, I argue that *L’Heure* reflects both sides of Bergson’s characterization of mechanism. Concepcion chooses positive aspects of mechanism in Ramiro, and avoids the negative aspects of mechanism embodied by Gonzalve and Don Inigo. There is the problem,

⁶¹ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, 56. “À vrai dire, elle [i.e., la mémoire] ne nous représente plus notre passé, elle le joue ; et si elle mérite encore le nom de mémoire, ce n’est plus parce qu’elle conserve des images anciennes, mais parce qu’elle en prolonge l’effet utile jusqu’au moment présent.”

⁶² Ellipses in original.

however, that all of these men are machines, and thus do not approach any real humanity, contributing a sense of emptiness and tragedy to the opera, particularly its final quintet, in which *L'Heure*'s characters sound the most mechanical of all. The characters in *L'Heure* face few consequences compared to the protagonists of *Pelléas* or *Tristan*: no one dies, and, in an ironic wink at her name, Concepcion bears no children, thus avoiding the intergenerational cycle of despair that occurs in *Pelléas*. Concepcion also escapes punishment for any of her affairs. The worst fate that befalls any of them, namely Gonzalve and Don Inigo, is that have to purchase the clocks in which they had been hiding. Nevertheless, the characters, particularly Ramiro, appear to have learned little from their misadventures, seemingly condemned to repeat their mistakes ad infinitum.

Finale: Toward a Moral for *L'Heure*

If *L'Heure* can be read in a Bergsonian light, then, like *Le Rire*, *L'Heure* can expose a similarly salutary conclusion, one in fact diametrically opposed to its superficial Boccaccian moral that “there comes a day...when the muleteer has his turn.”⁶³ In his *Bergson*, Jankélévitch analyzes *Le Rire* as a cautionary tale that warns against “*anachronisms* that prohibit us from having a *synchronous* vision of the present: incapable of making up for the lag, posthumous consciousness lets the miraculous occasions of contemporaneity pass by forever. In our perpetual delay vis-à-vis-life, in the awkwardness of our reconstitutions, the *Laughter* book discovers the main source of the comical.”⁶⁴ The comical, like the mechanical, thus has a double face: it represents a hilarious awkwardness to adapt to a particular situation, yet it is also a grave form of

⁶³ Ravel, *L'Heure espagnole*, Scene XXI.

⁶⁴ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Henri Bergson*, ed. Alexandre Lefebvre and Nils F. Schott, trans. Nils F. Schott (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), Kindle, 16. Emphasis in original.

anachronism—of being out of time—that inhibits a real-time analysis of the present, and lets the wonder of the present slip by. Bergson’s *Essai* and *Matière et mémoire* offer hope in the form of the possibility of a pure perception of both ourselves and the world around us that will allow us to become fully present to our own experience of life, yet this is ultimately inaccessible in the world of *L’Heure*.

The machine-like characters of *L’Heure*, ruled by the clock and unable to live in the present, make their way through the opera among artificial, or what Bergson calls “homogeneous,” manifestations of time—clocks of all sorts—but cannot access duration, true time in the form of present, lived experience. They, like the audience, only experience it in fleeting moments, for instance in moments that reference the introduction, but one is never quite sure what one is hearing: is the “clock” motive truly the sound of a clock, or the sound of duration? *L’Heure* ends with a quintet, an ensemble finale that calls to mind conventional finales in comic opera. This ending seems to symbolize a final surrender to clock-time as the vocal lines finally capitulate to the metric frame, and the characters’ melodic lines gradually overlap until they are in complete lockstep with one another: any inkling of compromise between the orchestra’s “clock” theme (Example 4.20) and the characters’ own leitmotifs has been crushed by the final habanera (Example 4.21), which contains the same 3 + 2 beat grouping as the opening. This effect is further enhanced by the rhythmic diminution (eighth notes rather than quarter notes) and the repeated, static chords of the latter example.



EXAMPLE 4.20: Ravel, *L’Heure espagnole*, Introduction, “Clock” Theme, m. 1.

[illegible]

EXAMPLE 4.21: Finale of *L'Heure espagnole*, “Habanera,” Scene XXI, p. 102.

Rather than providing a sense of resolution, the ending of the opera re-establishes the rhythmic profile of the opening theme, elaborating a cyclic structure. Like a mechanical toy, it winds up again for another round.

For Bergson, there is cruelty and prejudice under the surface of laughter, and when we scratch the surface of *L'Heure*, we likewise find a disturbing ugliness within: we uncover the tragedy of the human made mechanical, and of time made chronometric. Thus, I contend that *L'Heure* is both a Bergsonian comedy and a Bergsonian tragedy, offering a satire of a life lived by the clock and a warning: do not treat life with flippancy and rote automatism or risk turning into a machine.

EPILOGUE

THE AFTERLIFE OF *L'HEURE ESPAGNOLE*

For all of Ravel's aesthetic statements on *L'Heure espagnole* purporting to create an operatic world in which music could be funny independently of the libretto, the initial reception of *L'Heure espagnole* was generally cool: critics didn't get the joke. Clearly, audiences also had great expectations for Ravel's debut at the Opéra-Comique, and many were disheartened that *L'Heure* did not seem to live up to them. Even Émile Vuillermoz, a member of Ravel's loyal band of Apaches, shared this sentiment in his review of *L'Heure*, contending that Ravel's first opera should have earned him a spot in the "family tree of our French music," yet failed to measure up.¹ Indeed, rave reviews of Massenet's *Thérèse*, whose French premiere shared the bill with *L'Heure espagnole*, often overshadowed coverage of *L'Heure* in contemporaneous reviews. Vuillermoz lamented that Ravel had chosen "the wrong travel companion" in the form of Franc-Nohain's libretto, wasting his energies on a "meaningless venture."² Pierre Lalo echoed this reaction, protesting that Ravel had frittered away his wealth of talent on an insignificant, too-risqué storyline that was rapidly exhausted in its single act and gaudily overstated in the cramped physical space of the Salle Favart.³

Yet the negative reviews of *L'Heure espagnole* did not misinterpret Ravel's aesthetic aims: on the contrary, they often reflected a sophisticated understanding of how *L'Heure*

¹ Émile Vuillermoz, "Les Théâtres: *L'Heure espagnole*—*Thérèse*—*Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*," *Le Mois/S.I.M. Revue mensuelle* (June 15, 1911): 65.

² Vuillermoz, "Les Théâtres," 66. "une aventure sans portée."

³ Steven Huebner, "Laughter: In Ravel's Time," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18, no. 3 (2006): 226–227.

espagnole related to his previous vocal works, particularly *Histoires naturelles*. Vuillermoz, for example, commented on the declamation in both works, writing that “Ravel has always dreamt of a musical prosody that precisely duplicates the rhythm of speech.”⁴ But, for Vuillermoz, the recitative texture not only robbed the music of its charm but also its “simple humanity.”⁵ In other words, not only was the declamation unfunny, it was also disturbingly dehumanized. The *Journal Amusant* (*The Funny Paper*), ostensibly an arbiter on humor, also found the disconnect between the libretto and the music strange. A reviewer signed “Ut Majeur” (“C Major”) wrote: “*L’Heure espagnole* is a very entertaining work, but even more surprising is that, as the libretto gets funnier, the score becomes more serious and bizarre.”⁶

However, after the First World War, by the time the opera was revived in 1922 at the Opéra Garnier, reviewers praised exactly these mechanical aspects of the work. Even Lalo, who had so often criticized Ravel’s work, came to see the opera’s characters as a manifestation of Ravel’s facility with timbre and a certain brand of ironic humor.⁷ Lalo compared the characters to figurines on a cuckoo clock, but praised Ravel’s ability to depict their mechanicity: “[the characters’] action and dialogue are not stripped of comedy, a comedy that is both excessive yet

⁴ Vuillermoz, “Les Théâtres,” 68.

⁵ Vuillermoz, “Les Théâtres,” 68.

⁶ Ut Majeur, “Chronique Musicale,” *Journal Amusant*, May 27, 1911, 14. “*L’Heure espagnole* est une œuvre très divertissante et d’autant plus étonnante que plus le livret est amusant, plus la partition est sérieuse et curieuse à la fois.”

⁷ Lalo, review of *L’Heure espagnole* (1922 production), by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, February 3, 1922.

restrained, exaggerated yet cold, a comedy that is an extreme form of irony... What musician could better convey this than Ravel?"⁸ And by 1938, as early retrospectives of the composer began to emerge after his death, *L'Heure espagnole* was, perhaps surprisingly, hailed alongside the likes of *Daphnis et Chloé* and *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* as one of his greatest works, although the opera is rarely staged today.⁹

The question of the motivating factors for the shift in reception of *L'Heure espagnole* could occupy another lengthy study, so I only wish to broach this issue here. What impact did the First World War have on the reception of comedy and mechanism in *L'Heure*, and what relationship might this shift in opinion have to Bergson's *Le Rire*, a popular book during the war?¹⁰ Why does *L'Heure* suddenly seem to become more relevant to audiences at this historical juncture? How does the inclusion of *L'Heure espagnole* as a major work in Ravel's oeuvre affect our notion of his legacy as a composer? Through the present study, I have suggested that *L'Heure espagnole* articulates a turning point in Ravel's aesthetics at which he claimed mechanism, humor, and the manipulation of musical time as key aspects of his style. Moreover, I have made the case that these features lend the opera to a Bergsonian analysis, which unites

⁸ Lalo, review of *L'Heure espagnole* (1922 production), by Maurice Ravel, *Le Temps*, February 3, 1922.

⁹ See, for example, René Dumesnil's contribution to the 1938 special issue of *La Revue musicale* dedicated to the memory of Ravel, in which he praises the conversational quality of Ravel's text-setting in *L'Heure espagnole* and *Histoires naturelles* as a form of poetry. René Dumesnil, "Maurice Ravel poète," *La revue musicale* 19, no. 187 (December 1938): 124–127.

¹⁰ Bergson's book on laughter, *Le Rire*, was exceedingly popular in the late aughts and early 1910s, and was widely known at all levels of Parisian society. Nadia Boulanger even sent it to Jean Cocteau and other members of *Les Six* in care packages during the First World War. Although *Le Rire* undoubtedly acquired a different set of implications in wartime, it was nonetheless seen as a popular diversion, a light book about laughter that could also make one laugh. Jillian Rogers, "The Importance of Being Pleasing" (paper, annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, Boston, MA, November 2, 2019).

these seemingly disparate qualities. To assess the changing reception of *L'Heure* and the early project of legacy-building surrounding Ravel, I suggest that we continue to re-center *L'Heure* in our evaluation of Ravel's aesthetic perspective.

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