"Lyrical Movements of the Soul": Poetry and Persona in the Cinq Poèmes De Baudelaire and Ariettes Oubliées of Claude Debussy

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“LYRICAL MOVEMENTS OF THE SOUL”:
POETRY AND PERSONA IN THE
CINQ POÈMES DE BAUDELAIRE
AND ARIETTES OUBLIÉES OF CLAUDE DEBUSSY

By

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For one human being to love another
is perhaps the most difficult task of all;
the ultimate, the last test and proof;
the work for which all other work is but preparation.

——Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*
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ABSTRACT

Claude Debussy participated in the world of literature, especially that of French symbolist poetry, throughout his life. His associations with important literary figures, his correspondence, and his music all make clear the significance that literature held for this composer. This study examines two sets of Debussy’s songs, the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* and the *Ariettes oubliées*, and their intersections between music and poetry. An understanding of the evolution of the symbolist movement explains the roles of the two poets concerned, Charles Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine, in the development of this new approach to literature. In addition, a consideration of the poems in their own right examines both the stylistic features and meaning of these texts. The study then turns to the music in order to assess the influence of the poetry on the songs themselves. The analysis takes into account not only musical aspects, such as form, motives, and harmony, but also the songs’ personae. These figures, who stand behind the music and expand on the songs’ texts, also establish the aesthetic positions of the songs, whether romantic, symbolist, realist, or a hybrid aesthetic. In turn, understanding these aesthetic positions allows for a comparison of the musical and textual styles, as well as a consideration of how Debussy’s aesthetic compares to that of Baudelaire and Verlaine.
INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This study investigates two sets of songs by Claude Debussy—the Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire and the Ariettes oubliées to texts by Verlaine—in order to examine possible interactions between poetry and music in Debussy’s songs. The discussion first places the poets and their poems in historical context, then compares the texts with the “readings” of them in the songs. An understanding of the role that literature played in Debussy’s life and analyses of primary source materials contribute to the interpretation of these compositions. The narratological methodology of persona, or voice, is for the first time applied to these sets of songs in their entirety. The discussion of persona then enables consideration of the aesthetic position from which each song arises—romantic, symbolist, or otherwise—and demonstration of how literary techniques influenced Debussy’s composition across the whole of each set.

Background and Justification

Claude Debussy had a strong connection to the world of literature, especially to the symbolist movement. He spent time at several hangouts popular among these poets, even taking part in the famous Tuesday evening gatherings (the mardis) organized and presided over
by Mallarmé at the poet’s home. As his songs demonstrate, Debussy drew inspiration from symbolist poets throughout most of his compositional career. The poems of Verlaine appear in his music more than those of any other poet—seventeen different poems, to be exact, including some of Debussy’s best-known songs: the two sets of *Fêtes galantes*, individual songs such as “Mandoline,” and the *Ariettes oubliées*. In contrast, the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* represent his only settings of that poet’s works.

Within Debussy’s compositions links to the symbolist aesthetic emerge not only from the texts but from the music itself. For example, the symbolists’ interest in experimentation with the pure sounds of words finds a parallel in Debussy’s compositional techniques, such as chord streams and the use of nondiatonic scales. Additionally, both Debussy’s music and symbolist poetry convey a sense of ambiguity. The poets were known for exploiting nuance, formlessness, and fluidity in the rhythm of language. Likewise, Debussy’s music often abandons traditional structure in its form, harmony, timbre, and rhythmic organization, creating a musical style that displays a subtlety corresponding to that of symbolist poetry.

Debussy composed the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* between December 1887 and March 1889, using texts from Baudelaire’s collection titled *Les Fleurs du mal*. The songs appeared in two editions, the first published in 1890 by the Librairie de l’Art Indépendant, and the second in 1902, without revisions, by Jacques Durand. Although Debussy never explained the reasons why he selected the poems that he did, it is likely that they were chosen because they share the common image of night, which accompanies a change of mood or circumstance in each text. Additionally, four of the five songs express sadness as their primary emotion. The analysis in this study will consider what connections exist between the Baudelaire songs, if any, and whether any indication of cyclicity occurs within this work as a whole.
The *Ariettes oubliées*, which employ texts from Verlaine’s *Romances sans paroles*, predate the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*; Debussy composed the first *Ariette* in January 1885 and completed the last song in 1887 or 1888. These songs also appeared in two separate editions, first published by André Girod in 1888 as a collection entitled *Ariettes* and then by Eugène Fromont in 1903, with the title *Ariettes oubliées* and revisions to the songs. Although Debussy never explained his change of title for the second edition, it seems probable that he wanted to clarify that his songs were interpretations of Verlaine’s poems specifically. The first three poems that Debussy chose to set came from the section of *Romances sans paroles* entitled “Ariettes oubliées.” Any song might have been classified as an *ariette*, but calling a song an *ariette oubliée* brings the poet’s text to the forefront, a result that Debussy consistently valued and achieved. As with the Baudelaire songs, this study will consider whether sufficient connections exist between the *Ariettes oubliées* to classify them as a cycle.

**State of Research**

The body of writings on symbolist literature in general is rather large. (The sources most relevant to this project are listed in the Bibliography.) Among the scholars upon whose work this study relies are Kenneth Cornell, Guy Michaud, and Wallace Fowlie, whose substantial histories of the development of the symbolist movement formed the foundation of Chapter 1. Other helpful historical background information came from Anthony Levi’s work and from sources written or compiled by Anna Balakian. One important aspect of symbolist

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1 This study elects to consider the poems in chronological order rather than the songs; therefore, the two sets of songs appear in reverse order according to their dates of composition.
literature for the purposes of this study is the attitude of the symbolist poets toward music. David Hillery’s book, *Music and Poetry from Baudelaire to Mallarmé*, provides thorough historical background as well as discussion of music’s influence on the symbolists’ poetic style and techniques.

In compiling the biographical sketch of Baudelaire, the classic biographies by Claude Pichois, Enid Starkie, and Marcel Ruff proved invaluable. Writings by Lois Boe Hyslop and Hugo Friedrich provided detailed descriptions of Baudelaire’s literary style. Specifically, these works examine techniques that classify him as a modern poet, such as his innovative approach to form and his fascination with beauty as found in the bizarre. For in-depth discussions of *Les Fleurs du mal*, this study relied primarily on the works of Colin Burns and Peter Broome, who consider the work’s structure and meaning, respectively.

The primary biographical source on Verlaine remains Joanna Richardson’s monograph (1971), although Charles Chadwick’s and Edmond Lepelletier’s biographies also proved helpful. Among others, the analysis of Verlaine’s writing by Georges Zayed and Pierre Brunel provided stylistic information. David Hillery’s commentary on his edition of the *Romances sans paroles* also offered thorough historical background and analytical detail, and the work of Gretchen Schultz contributed to an understanding of Verlaine’s stylistic innovations within the context of these poems.

In comparison to other composers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Debussy has received relatively less scholarly attention. Edward Lockspeiser’s biography titled *Debussy: His Life and Mind* (1962, 1965) is still considered one of the best among the earlier writings, with more recent significant efforts being Marcel Dietschy’s *A Portrait of Claude Debussy* and Roger Nichols’s briefer but comprehensive *The Life of Debussy*. 
Debussy’s relationship to the symbolist movement has been a larger focus of research, garnering several important contributions to scholarship. Stefan Jarocinski’s *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism* and Arthur Wenk’s *Claude Debussy and the Poets* both discuss the biographical aspects of Debussy’s activities in literary circles and link his attitudes toward literature to his compositions with detailed analysis. In addition, essays by Marie Rolf, Rosemary Lloyd, and Christophe Charle in the collection titled *Debussy and His World* explain in detail his connection to figures such as Théophile Gautier and Stéphane Mallarmé and to the *fin de siècle* in general. David Michael Hertz’s *The Tuning of the Word* details the connections between Baudelaire, Wagner, the symbolists, Debussy, and Mallarmé, among others, including commentary on the philosophies of these figures and their impact on music.

In terms of Debussy song studies, journal articles make up nearly the entire body of research. These articles demonstrate a wide range of purpose and scope, but they rarely approach the methodology used in the current study. The aim of James Briscoe’s article “Debussy’s Earliest Songs” is to place the songs composed between 1880 and 1884 within their proper biographical and compositional context, which proved useful for the current study. Susan Youens has published more works on Debussy songs than any other scholar, dealing with aspects of cyclicity, prosody, and narrative in primarily the later songs. Her study of Debussy’s second set of *Fêtes galantes* may be considered representative of her general methodology; according to Youens, the narrative in this case comes purely from textual considerations, and she does not include musical analysis to highlight the plot or identify a narrator. Carolyn Abbate, in her article “Debussy’s Phantom Sounds,” offers a brief discussion of Debussy’s song “Mandoline,” with a focus on selected sounds within the song and their role in determining voice. In this case, however, the source of the song’s “voice” is not necessarily a human figure.
or persona; nature also serves to provide a voice, which indicates that Abbate’s method of
analysis differs from that offered here.

Only Wenk’s book attempts to discuss in their entirety the two sets of songs covered in
the present study. His analysis, however, remains brief, focusing primarily on theoretical
concepts (such as motives, intervals, and large-scale harmonic relationships) and how, on the
surface, those musical elements relate to the text. Two works discuss all of the Ariettes
oubliées, but with different goals from those of this examination. First, Marie Rolf’s detailed
study of the surviving manuscript sources for these songs offers valuable insight into the crucial
issues, but the scope of her article does not include analysis for meaning. Second, in her
master’s thesis on the Ariettes oubliées, Elisabeth Pehlivanian compares symbolist poetry to
these songs, but she focuses on Debussy’s compositional techniques rather than on issues of
aesthetic or voice.

A few journal articles delve into a single song in greater detail. “Harmonie du soir” has
served as the subject for three articles—by Fabrizio Di Donato, Nicholas Routley, and Orin
Moe and William Chappell—but each one discusses the text only as it contributes to aspects of
music theory. Katherine Bergeron has published an important study of “La mort des amants,”
which most closely approaches the type of analysis included in the present study. While
Bergeron thoroughly examines the textual-musical relationship, she stops short of a
narratological methodology. In summary, analysis of these two sets of songs has remained, for
the most part, on a superficial level. No one has attempted a discussion of these works founded
in narratological interpretation nor considered what conclusions may come to light when
examining the sets in their entirety.
Methodology

The initial step toward understanding Debussy’s songs is an investigation of the texts. A discussion of the history of the symbolist movement and the important characteristics of symbolist poetry, with specific attention to the works and techniques of Baudelaire and Verlaine, provides the background for poetic analysis. This examination analyzes the poems that Debussy utilized in these two collections and considers their use of language and imagery, their structure, and their meaning. The discussion also mentions elements of the poems that represent Baudelaire’s modernism and Verlaine’s symbolist style.

Although an understanding of the poems in their own right forms an important basis for comparison with the songs, the primary methodology of this study is musical analysis. The goal is to examine how the music constructs a new reading of the text—how Debussy’s compositional choices cause the listener to hear a version of the poem that may differ in meaning from, or expand the meaning of, the poem itself. In order to accomplish this goal, several types of analysis figure into this study.

First, the basic elements of musical style provide an understanding of each setting. The significant harmonic, formal, and motivic features of each song unite to create the song’s meaning. Additionally, the analysis relates these musical elements to the corresponding text, so that the song may be understood as interpreting the poet’s words through its musical characteristics.

Second, wherever possible, historical evidence is brought in to support the analytical conclusions. Unfortunately, Debussy left no record of his artistic intentions in composing these songs specifically; we can only infer that his documented attitudes toward poetry carried over
into their composition. There are, however, several manuscripts that sometimes provide clues as to what features of the songs are analytically significant. By considering the compositional process as seen in those songs with multiple sources available, a fuller understanding of the text’s relationship to its music can be achieved.

The surviving manuscript sources are housed at the Département de Musique of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the Bibliothèque François Lang of the Abbaye de Royaumont in Asnières-sur-Oise, and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. Primarily they represent autographs, most of which show evidence of having been sent to the publishers. In cases where multiple manuscripts have survived, comparison of sources shows that Debussy made significant revisions to some of these songs. The Bibliothèque Nationale holds two separate manuscript versions of the Baudelaire song “Recueillement.” This library also houses a two-page sketch for “Le Jet d’eau” in the Baudelaire songs, as well as a manuscript of an orchestral version of this song, the only one in either collection that Debussy orchestrated. For the song “Chevaux de bois” in the *Ariettes oubliées*, the analysis considers three extant manuscripts, each of which represents a distinct phase in the evolution of this song. One useful printed source, a set of publisher’s proofs for the *Ariettes oubliées* with a few corrections in Debussy’s hand, is housed at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

Third, each song is described in terms of its persona and, subsequently, that persona’s aesthetic position. The persona is defined here as the single figure who is responsible for relating both the text and the music to the listener. Therefore, the speaker of the poem becomes a part of the description of the song’s persona, but the latter requires a fuller understanding of how the spoken text interacts with the music (both sung and in the accompaniment). In general,
clues to the persona may be found in references to musical genres other than song; in references to extramusical objects or events; in titles and other textual inclusions in the score; and in any element within the music itself that signals the presence of a voice that elucidates or expands on that of the speaker of the actual text. The analytical procedures described above also lead to the identification of the song’s persona, as do some elements of compositional process, wherever they can be discerned.

The methodology of persona study in music is sometimes called narratology, because often a persona takes on a narrative position. The book *The Composer’s Voice* by Edward Cone and various writings by Lawrence Kramer are among those that apply principles of narratology to music. In order for a work to be considered a narrative in the narrow sense, it must have both a sequence of events (a story) and a figure who tells that sequence (a narrator or storyteller). A persona may, however, be either dramatic or lyric, instead of narrative. A dramatic persona shows events rather than tells them, as in a play rather than a novel. A lyric persona, on the other hand, retains a subjective (“I”) viewpoint but reveals the speaker’s thoughts and emotions as they relate to the world around him or her, rather than the progression of a story.

The poetry selected by Debussy for these songs generally falls into the category of lyric, although, as is characteristic of symbolist poetry, the “I” is at times present only subtly. When these poems are placed within a musical context, the song’s persona adds another layer, which subsumes the expression of the lyric voice, who is still understood as the speaker of the text. Additionally, however, the persona reveals the song’s aesthetic position, which in this case may be romantic, symbolist, or otherwise, and may at times contradict the aesthetic of the text alone.
As Debussy wrote in a letter to Eugène Vasnier dated 4 June 1885, the lyric persona, rather than a dramatic or narrative one, seems to be the type that he would have envisioned in his music:

. . . I believe that I could never confine my music to a mold that is too correct. I’m hurrying to tell you that I’m not speaking of musical form; it’s simply a literary point of view. I would always like better a thing where, in a way, the action is sacrificed to the expression, pursued at length, of the sentiments of the soul. It seems to me that then, the music can become more human, more true to life, and that with it one can examine and refine the means of expression.

These poems deal with a wide range of human emotion, and in Debussy’s songs the listener can observe the evolution of thought that lyric poetry potentially describes.

In the world of literary criticism the lyric voice is understood to come from a figure whose thoughts and emotions unite to present an experience rather than an idea. As part of this experience, the lyric voice can be transformed by the circumstances that surround it. Jonathan Culler asserts that while in the past the lyric was considered “a brief poem in which the poet intensely proclaimed his feelings,” where critics emphasized the expressive content, now the predominant view of lyric voice involves an understanding of “what sort of person was speaking, in which circumstances, and with what attitude.” Viewed in this way, the lyric is what Culler calls a “dramatic monologue,” where the thoughts and emotions being portrayed

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2 Claude Debussy, *Lettres 1884–1918*, ed. François Lesure (Paris: Hermann, 1980), 10. “. . . je crois que jamais je ne pourrais enfermer ma musique dans un moule trop correct. Je me dépêche de vous dire que je ne parle pas de la forme musicale, c’est simplement à un point de vue littéraire. J’aimerais toujours mieux une chose où, en quelque sorte, l’action sera sacrifiée à l’expression longuement poursuivie des sentiments de l’âme. Il me semble que là, la musique peut se faire plus humaine, plus vécue, que l’on peut creuser et raffiner les moyens d’expression.”


4 Ibid.
are seen as real-time events. Instead of defining the lyric as an expression of a past biographical experience, we observe “a consciousness attempting to come to terms with fundamental aspects of the human condition, as embodied in the situation confronting it.” The texts used in Debussy’s songs easily lend themselves to this kind of interpretation. With one exception (“La Mort des amants”), in these songs the lyric voice is subjected to transformation, the rise and fall of emotion, and resolution of situations that in the texts alone were left unresolved. Such an observation points out that the persona of the song, who may or may not be the same as the poem’s persona, can amplify the ideas from the text by providing additional information or even contradicting the poem.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 details the origins and development of the symbolist movement, including the important figures and stylistic features of symbolist poetry. In addition, the chapter explains Charles Baudelaire’s influence on the development of symbolism. Close attention is paid in this chapter to the relationship between symbolist poetry and music, including a discussion of poetic techniques that, for the symbolists, brought musical expression into their texts.

Chapter 2 includes brief biographical sketches of both Baudelaire and Verlaine, with detailed discussion of the background of the poetic works from which Debussy selected his texts (Baudelaire’s Les Fleurs du mal and Verlaine’s Romances sans paroles). In addition, each

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of the eleven poems is analyzed in detail, in order to understand their structural and stylistic
elements and to identify their personae.

Chapter 3 turns to Debussy, considering specifically the ways in which his life
intersected with the literary world. The chapter discusses the literary figures and works that the
composer knew, in order to understand his attitude toward poetry and how it impacted his
compositional style. Using this background information, the study continues by examining a
few works, both vocal and instrumental, that use symbolist texts, pointing out specific
compositional techniques that parallel the style and aesthetic of symbolism.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the two sets of songs in detail, first the Cinq poèmes de
Baudelaire and then the Ariettes oubliées. Each song is considered individually, with
discussion of its primary source materials and evidence of compositional process (if any),
analysis of musical details, and conclusions regarding each song’s musical persona and
aesthetic position. In each case the analysis details how the song “reads” the text, first bringing
the poem’s ideas into the music and then expanding on them through compositional techniques.

Chapter 6, the conclusion, compares the musical character of these songs in order to
examine how the poetry, especially symbolist poetry, influenced Debussy’s composition. This
discussion includes a synthesis of what the manuscripts may tell us about Debussy’s
compositional process in these songs. The chapter also summarizes the various personae and
the aesthetic relationships between the songs, analyzing how the different aesthetic positions
relate to each other and create continuity or disjunction between the songs and across the sets as
a whole. In addition, this chapter places these sets of songs in context with Debussy’s other
song compositions, and it considers the place of Debussy’s aesthetic within the development of
musical style, especially as compared to that of Baudelaire and Verlaine within the literary world.
CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:
THE SYMBOLIST MOVEMENT

Forerunners of Symbolism

In the late nineteenth century in France the evolution of literary style consisted of a series of relatively short-lived overlapping movements. Within this process of development, new trends in poetry contributed to significant changes in the character of literature as a whole. Poetic style gradually shifted away from romanticism as each new movement reacted to its precursors.

During the mid-nineteenth century the primary poetic and literary groups in France were the romantics and the realists. Authors such as Victor Hugo, Alphonse de Lamartine, and Alfred de Vigny represented the former; Gustave Flaubert and Honoré de Balzac, the latter. The naturalists, who arose as an extension of realism, flourished after 1870 around the work of Emile Zola. During the 1860s and 1870s the French public paid little attention to poetry, which hardly figured into the realist and naturalist movements. Both critics and readers were

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1 The distinction between realism and naturalism lies in the pseudo-scientific tenets of the latter, advanced by Zola, and in naturalism’s fascination with the baser aspects of human life. For the purposes of the evolution of symbolist poetry, the difference between these two related movements does not affect the path that the progressive poets, beginning with the Parnassians, took in reaction to earlier poetic styles.
interested primarily in novels, short stories, and plays, the genres that best suited the writers’ artistic concerns and attracted the largest audiences. Hugo had made the dramatic tragedy the most important literary genre, because its entertaining nature appealed to a less educated public who were not often a reading public. Poetry thus occupied only a very small place in the literary journals of the time. When critics spoke about poetry in this era, they discussed it in terms of its decline and even its disappearance from public recognition.

A new group of poets arose in the 1860s in direct response to romanticism and realism, as well as to the public’s apathy toward poetry. They called themselves Le Parnasse (the Parnassians) after the mountain belonging to the muses, because they sought to recapture the order, structure, and clarity that they perceived in the art forms of antiquity. Their poetry became more impersonal, due to the Parnassians’ belief that the romantics had elevated too highly the individual and his or her emotions. Instead these poets focused on objective description of their subjects. The Parnassians were also responsible for advocating the “art for art’s sake” philosophy (“l’art pour l’art”), which placed the highest priority on formal beauty rather than the sincerity of realism. The poet Catulle Mendès initially served as the center of the movement, but later the poets met at the home of Leconte de Lisle, who along with Théophile Gautier was one of the figureheads of Parnassianism.

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4 Ibid., 2.
For the Parnassians form was the most important aspect of art. Gautier’s poem “Lied” from his 1852 collection *Emaux et camées* demonstrates the perfect symmetry toward which these poets strove:

Au mois d’avril, la terre est rose,
Comme la jeunesse et l’amour;
Pucelle encore, à peine elle ose
Payer le Printemps de retour.

Au mois de juin, déjà plus pâle
Et le cœur de désir troublé,
Avec l’Été tout brun de hâle
Elle se cache dans le blé.

Au mois d’août, bacchante enivrée,
Elle offre à l’Automne son sein,
Et roulant sur la peau tigrée,
Fait jaillir le sang du raisin.

En décembre, petite vieille,
Par les frimas poudrée à blanc,
Dans ses rêves elle réveille
L’Hiver auprès d’elle ronflant.

[In the month of April, the earth is pink,
Like youth and love:
Virgin again, she scarcely dares
To pay the springtime to return.

In the month of June, already paler
And her heart troubled by desire,
All tanned by the summer’s sun,
She hides herself in the wheat.

In the month of August, drunken bacchante,
She offers her breast to the autumn,
And rolling on the striped skin,
Makes the juice of the grape gush.

In December, little old lady,
Powdered to white by the hoarfrost,
In her dreams she wakes
The winter slumbering beside her.]

This poem demonstrates symmetry in several ways. First, each line of the poem is octosyllabic. Second, the rhyme scheme in each stanza is a regular abab pattern. Finally, the progression of time is logical from beginning to end, with the months and seasons described in chronological order and the name of each month appearing at relatively the same place in the first line of each stanza. This poem is also an example of the disappearance of the lyric persona from Parnassian poetry. The description in this poem is not affected by the identity of the speaker; rather, the poem seems simply to observe the character of the seasons, with no reference to who is saying the words.

The Parnassians published their works in Le Parnasse contemporain, which began as a small magazine and ended after the appearance of three volumes of poetry by a total of ninety-nine authors.\(^7\) The first volume appeared in 1866; the second was compiled in 1869 but not published until 1871 due to the Franco-Prussian War, and the final volume was published in 1876. Among the contributors to the first volume were established authors such as Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, and Charles Baudelaire, as well as young poets who were as yet unknown, including Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine. The first volume included Verlaine’s poems “Il Bacio” and “Mon Rêve familier,” and a total of four poems by Mallarmé, including “Soupir.” Verlaine contributed five poems to the second volume, which also included Mallarmé’s “Hérodiade.”

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\(^6\) All translations are by the author, unless otherwise noted.

Because of the public’s lack of interest in poetry, apart from that which imitated the romantic style, the Parnassian publication served as one outlet for the work of progressive poets, even if their style did not necessarily conform to that of *Le Parnasse*. Mallarmé, for example, acknowledged Baudelaire as an important influence on his poetic style.\(^8\) In a series of letters written in 1864 and 1865, Mallarmé confided to his friend Henri Cazalis that he wanted his reader to be affected by the combination of sounds and meaning in his poetry. He recognized that his poems described sensation in a way that was different from that of the other poets of the time.\(^9\) Thus, even from early in his career, Mallarmé was following a different path than the Parnassians, even though his poems were being printed in their publications. Likewise, Verlaine’s *Poèmes saturniens* of 1866 reflect a Parnassian approach to formal perfection, especially in their reliance on the traditional alexandrine structure, but his experimental use of sound and rhythm was already a marker of his mature style.\(^10\)

In 1868 Gautier published an essay in which he described the Parnassians as the hope for poetry’s future.\(^11\) Unfortunately, the short-lived movement did not bring about the revival of poetry that he had imagined. It did, however, help establish some of the poets who would be key figures in the symbolist movement, especially Mallarmé and Verlaine.

By the publication of the 1871 volume of the *Parnasse contemporain*, the styles of poetry represented in this volume were diverging, and the goals of the artists were becoming

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\(^8\) Levi, 395. Even though Baudelaire’s poetry appeared in the *Parnasse contemporain*, its modern subject matter has more in common with the poetry of decadence than Parnassianism. Gautier himself did not wholeheartedly endorse Baudelaire’s writing (Cornell, 4–5, 24–25).

\(^9\) Cornell, 13.

\(^10\) Levi, 683.

\(^11\) Cornell, 4, 7.
more dissimilar, as well.\textsuperscript{12} As the Parnassian movement disintegrated, its younger contributors
began to feature a new style in their works, a style that eventually developed into what we call
symbolism. Because these poets were published in the \textit{Parnasse contemporain}, they were
identified as part of the most progressive element of the poetic world. They thus succeeded in
establishing themselves as the next generation of literary figures. Before the movement of
symbolism could begin, however, the younger poets had to distinguish themselves from the
Parnassians, and this distinction was achieved through the emergence of the concept of
decadence.

\textbf{Decadence}

Within the context of the evolution of poetry in the early 1880s, decadence denotes not
so much a defined movement as an attitude toward poetry. Decadence was associated with
assertions of poetry’s decline, which had persisted in poetic criticism since the 1860s. More
specifically, decadence in poetry at this time implied a desire to escape from everyday, bourgeois
life through obsession with the extraordinary.\textsuperscript{13} Charles Baudelaire, whose work had remained
relatively obscure but was now becoming widely known, was a primary figure in discussions of
decadence because of his morbid, satanic, and pessimistic writings.\textsuperscript{14}

The poets of this period were often grouped together in a category as “the decadents,”
even though they were not attempting to start a new movement. Their literary activities,

\textsuperscript{12} Levi, 477.

\textsuperscript{13} György M. Vajda, “The Structure of the Symbolist Movement,” in Balakian, \textit{The Symbolist Movement in the
Literature of European Languages}, 33.

\textsuperscript{14} Cornell, 24.
however, had the effect of separating them from the older (Parnassian) generation. The decadents formed their own close-knit literary clubs, which helped them portray themselves as a distinct subset of the poetic world. They dressed eccentrically and chose untraditional names to further that image. The group known as the Hydropathes (“water sufferers”) was one of the earliest, formed in 1878 by Emile Goudeau. The Hydropathes persisted and became the Hirsutes (“hairy fellows”) in 1881; by that time other groups had been established, including the Zutistes (“scorners”) and a group of regular attendees at a cabaret called Le Chat Noir. The Chat Noir was such a popular meeting place that its owner, Rodolphe Salis, published a journal (also titled Le Chat noir) containing poems from the cabaret. The journal first appeared in 1882 and remained in circulation until 1897.

The members of the decadents’ clubs were middle-class men (and occasionally women) who spent their days in humdrum jobs then “lived a second life” (in the words of Guy Michaud) as part of the decadent circles. Among the members of the Hydropathes were Paul

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16 This group’s name derives from a variety of influences. Its founder, Emile Goudeau, admired a waltz called the “Hydropathenvaltz,” and his name also inspired a pun, “goût d’eau,” appropriate for a group of artists who preferred wine to water (Philip Stephan, *Paul Verlaine and the Decadence, 1882–90* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974], 43). In a related anecdote, Maurice Donnay, in *Autour du Chat Noir* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1926), explained the etymology of the Hydropathes’ name as follows: “Hydropathes, this bizarre name . . . What is its etymology, its meaning? At first glance, it seems to have been forged under the influence of the word ‘neuropath,’ ‘one who suffers from nerves.’ Analogously, would not ‘hydropathe’ signify one who suffers from water, consequently one who does not like to drink water [i.e., one who drinks wine]?” (“Les Hydropathes, ce nom bizarre . . . Quelle en est l’étymologie, quelle signification? A première vue, il semble bien forgé sous l’influence du mot névropathe ‘qui souffre des nerfs’. Par analogie, hydropathe ne signifierait-il pas: qui souffre de l’eau, par conséquent qui n’aime pas boire de l’eau?”) See the web site www.lechatnoir.free.fr.

17 Cornell, 15, 27.


Bourget, Guy de Maupassant, Paul Arène, Maurice Rollinat, Sarah Bernhardt, Jean Moréas, Laurent Tailhade, Charles Cros, and later Gustave Kahn and Jules Laforgue. The *Album zutique*, published in the early 1870s, which featured poems signed with names of Parnassian poets but actually authored by Verlaine, Cros, Arthur Rimbaud, Léon Valade, and others, may have foreshadowed the meetings of the Zutistes. The names associated with the decadent clubs appear repeatedly in the critical journals of the time (both as subjects and as authors); these figures would come to play important roles in the progression from decadence to symbolism.

During this time two somewhat separate factions of decadence were already forming. The first was associated with the Rive gauche (the Left Bank) in Paris, where the Hydropathes met. The other was centered in the Rive droite (the Right Bank), which was home to the Chat Noir. Although some figures, such as Moréas, belonged to both circles, the Rive gauche primarily hosted the “die-hard” decadents; the connection is evident in the name of one journal that came out of this group of poets, *La Nouvelle Rive gauche*, founded in November 1882. The poets associated with the Rive droite, on the other hand, were among those who would later call themselves symbolists.

Other literary journals founded by the decadents helped them distinguish themselves from the Parnassians. Initially the *Parnasse contemporain* led the way for publications such as the *Renaissance artistique et littéraire*, which featured a Parnassian style but included articles on

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21 Cornell, 15.

22 Bonneau, 23–24.
Baudelaire, as well as two poems by Verlaine that would later appear in the *Ariettes oubliées*, “C’est l’extase” and “Le piano que baise une main frêle.” This journal also published Mallarmé’s translations of the works of Edgar Allen Poe, who was a popular figure among the French at this time. The *Renaissance* ceased publication in May 1874, but not before Jean Richepin and others used it to issue a cry for sweeping changes in French literature.

Other journals followed, including *La République des lettres*, founded in 1875 by Catulle Mendès. This journal appeared for two years and had as one of its distinctions the publication of several prose poems by Mallarmé. A more significant journal was *La Nouvelle Rive gauche*, renamed *Lutèce* in March 1883. Among its contributors were Verlaine and Moréas. *La Revue indépendante* first appeared in May 1884 and remained in publication until April 1885. Its best-known contributors included Verlaine, Moréas, Charles Morice, and Laurent Tailhade.

These journals made important contributions to the concept of decadence. Kenneth Cornell notes the presence of “strange images and diction” and a “spirit of introspection, perversity, and tragedy” that were hallmarks of the decadents. The *Revue indépendante* especially proliferated the pessimism and eccentricity that characterized these poets. Through their gradual introduction of new arenas for the performance and publication of poetry, as well as new attitudes toward the poetry itself, the decadents aligned themselves as the harbingers of a new poetic style. Their poetry focused on the internal—the world of emotions and dreams—

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23 Cornell, 19.
24 Ibid., 17–21.
25 Ibid., 27–32.
26 Ibid., 29, 32.
rather than the external, bourgeois reality of late-nineteenth-century life. In this way the decadents contradicted both the Parnassians’ rejection of the subjective and the movements of realism and naturalism.

The novel *A rebours* (1884) by Joris-Karl Huysmans helped to solidify the view of the decadent personality. The protagonist, Jean Floressas des Esseintes, continually tries to escape his monotonous daily life (*la vie quotidienne*) through an intense fascination with illusion, sensation, and the exotic. For des Esseintes the bourgeois life brings out his pessimistic attitude about the world and his horror of being part of that which he detests. The novel became a sort of manifesto for decadence, because the poets identified so strongly with the protagonist’s viewpoint. The popularity of *A rebours* also resulted in increased publicity for the poetry of Mallarmé and Verlaine, whose works (among others) des Esseintes discusses in reference to decadence in modern poetry.

A significant event at this time was the 1885 publication of a satire of decadent poetry. Written by Gabriel Vicaire and Henri Beauclaire, the satire, entitled *Les Déliquescences d’Adoré Floupette*, appeared as a self-contained pamphlet after some of its individual poems had been published in the journal *Lutèce*. Among the influences on these poems, Cornell cites the prose style of Mallarmé, and the musicality, *impair* structure (use of lines with odd numbers of syllables), and vagueness of Verlaine, all of which came to characterize symbolist poetry.

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29 Fowlie, 6.
30 Ibid., 107.
31 Cornell, 37–38.
The poetic style of the satire thus demonstrates that symbolism and decadence grew out of the same response to the poetry of the previous decades, even though they would eventually diverge as opposing movements.

Among poets of the early 1880s, Verlaine was most often singled out as the “master” of decadence. He aligned himself with this poetic trend in his 1883 poem “Langueur”: “Je suis l’Empire à la fin de la décadence” (“I am the Empire at the end of decadence”). For Verlaine decadence was “the refined thoughts of an extreme civilization, a high literary culture, a soul capable of intensive delight . . . It is made up of a mixture of carnal spirit and melancholy flesh and all the violent splendors of the late Empire.” In *A rebours* Huysmans also called Verlaine a decadent poet. Verlaine’s poems contained a melancholy view of life that was attractive to the pessimistic decadents.

The publication of *Adoré Floupette* forced the decadents to defend themselves in the press, even though they themselves never had a unified doctrine that held true for all of decadent poetry. By creating their own journals, they attempted to promulgate their ideals among the public. Repeatedly they made reference to reacting against the literature of the past and destroying what came before them. Already, however, the decadent circles had experienced the beginnings of a division among their members. Mallarmé played a key role in separating the Rive gauche decadents from those of the Rive droite. He accomplished this through the increasing popularity of the Tuesday evening gatherings at his home in the rue de Rome. The

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32 Quoted in Fowlie, 6.

33 Quoted in Levi, 650. “. . . des pensées raffinées d’extrême civilisation, une haute culture littéraire, une âme capable d’intensives voluptés . . . Il est fait d’un mélange d’esprit charnel et de chair triste et de toutes les splendeurs violentes du Bas-Empire.”

34 Fowlie, 105, 107.
center of poetic activity thus gradually shifted from the Rive gauche to the Rive droite and from the café to the salon.  

Even at this time, before symbolism was known as a movement, the seeds were sown in the literary journals. Moréas proposed in an article published on 11 August 1885 that “symbolists” would be a better name than “decadents” for the young, progressive poets. He appears to have taken the term from his assessment of decadent poetry’s continual search for the “eternal Symbol.” With this article Moréas took the first concrete step that would lead symbolism to replace decadence as the prevailing term for this revolutionary style of poetry.

The Birth of the Symbolist Movement

Although it arose gradually, the symbolist movement was officially born at the end of 1886. The Polish-born critic Téodor de Wyzewa listed some of symbolism’s main tenets in an article on Mallarmé, written in August 1886: “All is symbol. . . . Every image is the microcosm of all of nature. . . . And art, expression of all the symbols, must be an ideal drama, summarizing and canceling these natural representations that found their full awareness in the soul of the poet. . . . Thus, Mallarmé sought the intimate correlations of things.” Wyzewa’s writing

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36 Wellek, 18.
37 Michaud, Message poétique, 330.
38 Wyzewa (1862–1917) had considerable knowledge about music; he wrote about Beethoven in the Parisian journals, and he also wrote a lengthy biography of Mozart.
39 Quoted in Wellek, 20. “Tout est symbole. . . . toute image est le microcosme de la nature entière. . . . Et l’art, expression de tous les symboles, doit être un drame idéal, résumant et annulant ces représentations naturelles qui ont trouvé leur pleine connaissance dans l’âme du poète. . . . Ainsi M. Mallarmé a cherché les intimes correlations des choses.”
anticipates the opinion held by present-day scholars that Mallarmé was the true leader of the symbolist movement.

Jean Moréas continued the idea he had put forth in 1885 when he published “Le Symbolisme,” an article that scholars call the symbolist manifesto, in the 18 September 1886 literary supplement of *Le Figaro*. Here Moréas spoke of literary evolution and the need for a new form of art: “A new manifestation of art was expected, necessary, inevitable. This manifestation, smoldering for a long time, is coming to light.” He went on to describe the presence of decadent tendencies in every period, thus making the name “decadence” inappropriate to characterize the specific innovations occurring in his own time. For him symbolism was the only term that could adequately describe the creative spirit of that era.

In his article Moréas also ascribed the positions of influence to the three poets who continue to be the focus of scholarly discussions of symbolist poetry: “Charles Baudelaire must be considered the true precursor of the present-day movement; Stéphane Mallarmé allots to it the sense of mystery and the ineffable; Paul Verlaine broke in his honor the cruel obstructions of verse that the prestigious fingers of Théodore de Banville had relaxed previously.” With this essay Moréas makes clear one reason why the progression from decadence to symbolism is a source of confusion: the same poets served as figureheads for both movements. Verlaine especially was sought after as a potential contributor by all the important journals, and indeed

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41 Ibid., 25. “Charles Baudelaire doit être considéré le véritable précurseur du mouvement actuel; M. Stéphane Mallarmé le lotit du sens du mystère et de l’ineffable; M. Paul Verlaine brisa en son honneur les cruelles entraves du vers que les doigts prestigieux de M. Théodore de Banville avaient assoupli auparavant.”

42 Cornell, 46.
his poems appeared in the various publications whose affiliations represented either decadence or symbolism.

After the publication of Moréas’s manifesto, a literary battle ensued. The war was waged in the journals, those that already existed and those that sprang up to fight for one side or the other. The journal *Le Décadent* had first appeared earlier in the year, under the editorship of Anatole Baju. On 7 October 1886 *Le Symboliste* was founded by Moréas and Gustave Kahn, and its counterpart *La Décadence*, founded by René Ghil, also appeared in that month. Other journals took part in the conflict, including *La Pléiade*, which had been published since March 1886 and which became an important publication for up-and-coming symbolists such as Maurice Maeterlinck. In November 1886 the *Revue indépendante* returned to publication after a year’s hiatus, under the editorship of Edouard Dujardin, and became an important symbolist journal, favoring Mallarmé among its contributors. He was also an important figure for *La Vogue*, which had appeared earlier in 1886. This journal had featured Wyzewa’s article on Mallarmé mentioned previously, in addition to some of Mallarmé’s prose poems and important writings by both Verlaine and Rimbaud.

The battle between the decadents and the symbolists was a serious one. Both sides defended themselves in their respective journals; in general these articles include well thought-out definitions of the movement to which the author adhered, but the description of the opposing side tends toward name-calling rather than serious critique. The critic and novelist

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43 Ibid.


45 Cornell, 48.
Paul Adam published an article in the first issue of *Le Symboliste*, in which he described the symbolists as follows:

We ask of the writers who will adopt our theories a complete science of the language and of the mother languages, the search for the exact word that, in its single form, will combine the material of three or four actual sentences. If they put light in their books, it is necessary that it bursts, that it vibrates, that it is filtered, that it shines; their materials must yield, extend their colors and break them; . . . then give rhythm to the sentence according to the pace of the idea; employ certain sonorities for such a sensation, a certain melody for another; proscribe the sounds that are repeated without desired harmony. . . .

The purpose of Adam’s article is to counter published critiques by MM. Sutter Laumann and Anatole France; hence, the author spends little time discussing the decadent poets. He did write the following, however, regarding the word “décadent”:

Some very young people raised this title, united themselves under this word. As unused to writing as they were to thinking, they composed some works that set up some excellent intentions, but which do not yet represent appreciable talents. Maliciously one confused them with the real personalities of the symbolist movement, one allotted to the former the works of the latter and vice versa.

Adam rejects decadence as a whole by stating that the true decadent writers—such as Racine—existed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, writing in a style characterized by hollow

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46 Paul Adam, “La Presse et la Symbolisme” (*Le Symboliste* 1 [7 October 1886]), n.p. “Nous demandons aux écrivains qui adopteront nos théories une science complète de la langue et des langues mères, la recherche du mot exact qui, sous sa forme unique, réunira la matière de trois ou quatre phrases actuelles. S’ils mettent de la lumière dans leurs livres, il faut qu’elle éclate, qu’elle vibre, qu’elle se tamise, qu’elle brille; leurs étoffes doivent se plier, étendre leurs teintes et les rompre; . . . puis rythmer la phrase selon l’allure de l’idée; employer certaines sonorités pour telle sensation, certaine mélodie pour telle autre; procrire les sons qui se répètent sans harmonie voulue. . . .”

47 Ibid. “De très jeunes gens relevèrent ce titre, s’unirent sous ce mot. Inhabiles à écrire comme à penser, ils composèrent des œuvres où s’érigent d’excellentes intentions, mais qui ne signifient pas de talents encore appréciables. Malicieusement on confondit avec eux les réelles personnalités du mouvement symboliste, on attribua à ceux-ci les œuvres de ceux-là et réciproquement.”
and monotone sentences, “devoid of all sensitive power, color, jewels, psychology and concision.”**48** The symbolists, therefore, must reject this term, since they “cultivate precisely a literature contrary to that of these writers.”**49**

Anatole Baju published an article in 1888 that defended the decadent poets much in the same way as Adam did for the symbolists. At the outset Baju states that the purpose of his article is to explain what differentiates the two groups of poets, because “one generally intends to take these two words for synonyms. The majority of journalists employ them indifferently to designate the writers of the younger generation. . . . The reporters who do not grasp so well all the nuances always join them one to the other like two Siamese twins, out of fear of being mistaken.”**50**

As was the case with Adam’s article, Baju fails to distinguish the decadents and symbolists in a meaningful way. He describes the decadents as

. . . a group of young writers disgusted with Naturalism and seeking the restoration of art . . . They belong to the laborers; they bring the new form. For the flat and monotonous versification of the Parnassians, they substituted a vibrating and sonorous poetry where one feels something like the shivers of life passing. They removed all the verbosity of the old literatures in aid of sensation and idea: their books are quintessences.**51**

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48 Ibid. “. . . dénué de toute puissance sensitive, de couleur, de joaillerie, de psychologie et de concision.”

49 Ibid. “. . . nous cultivons précisément une littérature contraire à celle de ces écrivains.”

50 Anatole Baju, “Décadents et Symbolistes” (*Le Décadent* 23 [15 November 1888]), 1. “On affecte généralement de prendre ces deux mots pour synonymes. La plupart des journalistes les emploient indifféremment pour désigner les écrivains de la jeune génération. . . . Les reporters qui ne saisissent pas si bien toutes les nuances les accolent toujours l’un à l’autre comme deux frères siamois, dans la crainte de se tromper.”

51 Ibid. “. . . un groupe de jeunes écrivains écoeurés du Naturalisme et cherchant la rénovation de l’art . . . Ce sont des laborieux; ils apportent la formule nouvelle. À la versification plate et monotone des Parnassiens, ils ont substitué une poésie vibrante et sonore où l’on sent passer comme des frissons de vie. Ils ont supprimé tout le verbiage des vieilles littératures au profit de la sensation et de l’idée: leurs livres sont des quintessences.”
Regarding the symbolists, however, Baju avoids any discussion of their literary techniques, instead critiquing their character:

“Symbolist,” apart from its etymological significance, designates another group of writers who follow in the steps of the Decadents. But the symbolists brought nothing new, they make use of the ideas of their precursors by truncating them; they are the pseudo-decadents. By a kind of romantic heredity they exhibit an air of eccentricity and express their taste for innovations, [but] at the heart they are spoiled with the banality of our time. . . . What they want is notoriety, they are rowdies, greedy for publicity, and never saw in literature anything but a means of achieving status. Powerless to create, they sought to monopolize the work of the Decadents: they are the parasites of an idea.

Let there be no mistake: The Decadents are one thing, the symbolists are shadows of that thing; the former are for progress with the future, the latter would like to regress to the Middle Ages, they live in the past.  

The battles waged in the journals confused not only journalists but also naturally the public about the state of poetry. They saw decadence and symbolism as two names for the same type of literature, and they understood none of it. The articles quoted here make clear reference to this problem. Though some articles, such as Baju’s, claimed to differentiate the two groups, the distinction remains incomprehensible because of the lack of definition regarding the opposing side. The defensive stance of these articles offers little in the way of impartial critical understanding.

52 Ibid., 1–2. “Symboliste, en dehors de sa signification étymologique, désigne un autre groupe d’écrivains qui suit les traces des Décadents. Mais les symbolistes n’ont rien apporté de neuf, ils se servent des idées de leurs devanciers pour les tronquer; ce sont des pseudo-décadents. Par une sorte d’hérité romantique ils affichent des air d’excentricité et manifestent leur goût pour les innovations, dans le fond ils sont pourris de la banalité de notre époque. . . . Ce qu’ils veulent, c’est la notoriété, ils sont tapageurs, avides de réclame et n’ont jamais vu dans la littérature qu’un moyen de parvenir. Impuissants à créer, ils ont cherché à accaparer l’œuvre des Décadents: ils sont les parasites d’une idée.

“Il n’y aura donc plus à s’y tromper: les Décadents sont une chose, les symbolistes sont l’ombres de cette chose; les premiers sont pour le progrès avec l’avenir, les seconds voudraient rétrograder jusqu’au Moyen Age, ils vivent avec le passé.”

53 Michaud, Message poétique, 363.
Instead we must rely on modern critics to explain how the two differed. Anthony Levi believes that the distinction between decadents and symbolists lies in their goals: “The symbolists by definition sought a refined aesthetic satisfaction not available at the level of ordinary mundane experience. If decadence required the stimulation of sensation, symbolism required the veiling of significance. . . .” In other words, decadence sought to avoid *la vie quotidienne* through sensual experiences, but symbolism evoked those experiences through suggestion. As Cornell states, the decadents described the poet’s sensations precisely, while the symbolists portrayed sensual experiences through suggestive language.

Mallarmé and Verlaine themselves did not take sides in this war of poets and critics. Verlaine praised both Moréas and Ghil, heads of the opposing journals founded in the midst of the quarrel, and after these journals ceased publication, he wrote the following in a letter dated 22 November 1886: “Thank God, the quarrel between the Symbolists, Decadents, and others who are disappearing is assuaged.” He did recognize the division between and within the two groups of decadent poets: “There is a schism in the world of the Decadents. . . . There are as many Symbolists as there are different symbols. . . . The symbol is metaphor, it is poetry itself.” In this last sentence Verlaine minimizes the importance of any symbolist doctrine, as all of poetry depends on symbols for its expression.

When this war was over, Mallarmé emerged as the acknowledged leader of the new symbolist movement. His legendary *mardis* gave him the role of figurehead, as did the 1891

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54 Levi, 650.
55 Cornell, 45.
56 Cornell, 51. “Dieu merci, la querelle entre les Symbolistes, Décadents, et autres enphuistes est apaisée.”
banquet of Pèlerin passioné, where the important symbolist figures gathered to celebrate their accomplishments. The banquet was organized by Moréas, and Mallarmé took his position as master by presiding over the festivities.\footnote{Ibid.} By this time symbolism had replaced decadence as the leading poetic school, and history would recognize symbolism as influential on poetry in many countries and as having paved the way for the surrealist style of the twentieth century.

**Symbolist Poetry and Music**

The symbolist poets professed a strong connection between their art and that of musicians. The reasons for their attraction to music in particular were based in the belief that music was the ideal art form for the expression of emotional content. Excerpts from several symbolist writings explicate more specifically their ideas about musical expression:

To translate emotion by means of exact words was evidently impossible; that would be to distort emotion and thus destroy it. Emotion, even less than the other vital modes, cannot be directly translated; it can only be suggested to us. And, to suggest emotion, that subtle and ultimate aspect of life, a special sign was invented: musical sound.\footnote{Téodor de Wyzewa, quoted in Hillery, *Music and Poetry*, 73. “[Musique] doit traduire, par le mélodie symphonique, nos sentiments et nos émotions, parce que ni le roman, ni la poésie, mais la musique seule peut exprimer cet arrière fond émotionnel situé, parfois, sous nos idées.”}

[Music] must translate, through symphonic melody, our sentiments and our emotions, because neither the novel, nor poetry, but only music can express this deepest emotional level, sometimes located beneath our ideas.\footnote{Téodor de Wyzewa, quoted in David Hillery, *Music and Poetry in France from Baudelaire to Mallarmé* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1980), 32. “Traduire l’émotion par des mots précis était évidemment impossible; c’était décomposer l’émotion, donc la détruire. L’émotion, moins encore que les autres modes vitaux, ne peut être traduite directement; elle peut seulement nous être suggérée. Et, pour suggérer les émotions, mode subtil et dernier de la vie, un signe spécial a été inventé: le son musical.”}
Music constitutes a system of natural signs, in the sense that there are characteristics common to the movements of the soul: it is thus, *par excellence*, expressive of the passions. The poet thus had to first exploit it to express himself and to associate it with verbal signs that are above all conventional.  

Music’s ability to express emotion without naming it would naturally serve as a model for poets who were striving for the same evocative quality in their use of language. The appeal of music lay in its potential representation of characters, events, or emotions (as found in program music) without the necessity of explicit reference to what is being represented. Music elicits an emotional response without requiring specific elements of meaning.  

Paul Valéry summarizes music’s power in the following passage, in which he also names the composer most admired by the symbolists:

> Among all modes of expression and of excitation, there is one that imposes itself with an excessive power: it dominates, it disparages all the others, it has above all an effect on our nervous world, overexcites it, penetrates it, subjects it to the most capricious fluctuations, calms it, shatters it, lavishes on it surprises, caresses, illuminations, and turmoil; it is a master of our experience of passing time, of our tremblings, of our thoughts: this power is *Music*, and it happens that the most powerful of musics reigns at the same time when our young symbolist, at the moment of his birth, engages with his destiny: he is intoxicated with the music of Wagner.

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63 Ibid., 32. “Parmi tous les modes de l’expression et de l’excitation, il en est un qui s’impose avec une puissance démesurée: il domine, il déprécie tous les autres, il agit sur tout notre univers nerveux, le surexcite, le pénètre, le soumet aux fluctuations les plus capricieuses, le calme, le brise, lui prodigue les surprises, les caresses, les illuminations et les orages; il est maître de nos durées, de nos frémissements, de nos pensées: cette puissance est *Musique*, et il se trouve que la plus puissante des musiques est souveraine au moment même que notre jeune symboliste à l’état naissant s’engage dans sa destinée: il s’enivre de la musique de Wagner.”
The symbolists saw in Wagner a musician who expressed emotion implicitly rather than explicitly, while also inviting a strong emotional reaction on the part of the listener. Wagner’s popularity among artists at the turn of the century was immense, as the following discussion will demonstrate.

**Wagnerism**

Wagner was not always a popular composer in France, to say the least. Early in his career he dreamed of achieving success in Paris. His first stay there, from September 1839 to April 1842, brought only a series of disappointments. The culmination must have been the sale of his libretto for *Der fliegende Holländer* to the Paris Opera, which had no interest in having Wagner compose the music for this work. Wagner and his wife Minna left Paris in poverty. He did not return until 1849, when he was fleeing Dresden during the revolution. Still no theaters would perform his works, and it would be ten years before he could again attempt Parisian performances, this time with greater success.

During the 1850s supporters of Wagner had begun to voice their opinions. Among these were Gautier and the poet Gérard de Nerval, both of whom had seen Wagner’s operas in Germany and subsequently championed them in the press. These artists who wrote

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66 Gérard de Nerval (1808–55) was the pseudonym of Gérard Labrunie. He belonged to the circle of romantic poets that included Victor Hugo. A contemporary and friend of Gautier, his contribution to modern poetry was a joining of the world of dreams with the world of reality. His unrequited love for the actress Jenny Colon led to two bouts with madness and eventually his suicide by hanging. Both the symbolists and surrealists considered him among their influences.
enthusiastically about Wagner must have admired his ability to compose and write freely about any subject without fear of the consequences, for France at that time was under the anti-intellectual regime of the Second Empire, which had practiced censorship against writers such as Flaubert and Baudelaire.\textsuperscript{67}

Despite the growing support for his works, performances of Wagner’s music continually drew protest. The most vehement demonstrations took place at the 1861 performances of \textit{Tannhäuser} at the Paris Opera, where members of the Jockey Club protested ostensibly Wagner’s refusal to write a ballet for the second act. Implicitly, however, the protest was directed against Princess Pauline Metternich, who was the wife of the Austrian ambassador to France and who represented the Second Empire to those who detested it (including members of the Jockey Club), especially because she allegedly sought to improve the relationship between France and Austria.\textsuperscript{68} She encouraged Napoleon III to command the 1861 performances, thereby associating the opera with sentiments in favor of Germanic interests as well as those of the Empire.\textsuperscript{69} The members of the Jockey Club subsequently interrupted all three performances of the opera, first by laughter and then by blowing whistles, sometimes for periods of as much as fifteen minutes.\textsuperscript{70}

Some performers continued to support Wagner’s works, although the riotous reactions of the public did not completely subside until the 1890s. The conductor Jules Etienne

\textsuperscript{67} Giesberg, 109.


\textsuperscript{69} Giesberg, 111.

\textsuperscript{70} Westernhagen, 290.
Pasdeloup mounted a successful performance of Rienzi on 6 April 1869, the first of thirty-nine such performances at the Théâtre Lyrique. In the early 1870s, after the Franco-Prussian War, anti-German sentiment renewed itself so strongly that Wagner’s music was again an incitement to demonstrations by audiences and even orchestras.\footnote{F. W. J. Hemmings, *Culture and Society in France, 1848–1898: Dissidents and Philistines* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1971), 223.} By the end of the decade, however, politics had subsided, and concert series such as the Concerts Calonne and the Concerts Lamoureux were able to program works by Wagner. Although performances of his music continued to cause rioting into the 1880s, the intellectual elite had made Wagner all the rage, so that Bayreuth became one of the most fashionable destinations for members of upper-class European society.\footnote{Ibid.; Giesberg, 112.} In spite of the public’s overwhelming distaste for Wagner, the symbolists and other artists had made him their hero. His admirers grew in number thanks to writers such as Mendès and Baudelaire. Baudelaire had heard excerpts from several of the music dramas at the Concerts Lamoureux in 1860, and he saw Tristan und Isolde performed at the Paris Opera in 1861. He subsequently published an essay entitled “Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris” in the *Revue européenne* on 1 April 1861. In this essay Baudelaire described the beauty of the music as having effects similar to those of opium, because both the drug and Wagner’s music lead the imagination into wild, clairvoyant dreams and thus into a state of synesthesia.\footnote{Anna Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal* (New York: New York University Press, 1977), 44.} Here Baudelaire found a parallel between his own aesthetic ideas and Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which the poet applauded and which displays marked similarities to Baudelaire’s theories of

\begin{itemize}
\item[72] Ibid.; Giesberg, 112.
\end{itemize}
synesthesia and *correspondances*. Briefly, these theories refer to connections between the various art forms and the ability of, for example, a sound to suggest a color or a scent.

Baudelaire wrote in his article on Wagner,

>The reader knows what purpose we pursue: to demonstrate that true music suggests analogous ideas in different minds. Moreover, it would not be ridiculous to reason here *a priori*, without analysis and without comparisons; for what would be truly surprising would be to find that sound *could not* suggest color, that colors could not give the idea of a melody, and that sound and color were improper to translate ideas; these things always being expressed by a reciprocal analogy, since the day when God called the world into existence as a complex and indivisible totality.⁷⁴

Mendès’s description of Wagner’s music dramas in the following paragraphs provides an example of the kind of emotional response that listeners to this music might have experienced:

>“If you are lacking in prejudice, if you seek in the grand artistic spectacles something more than pleasure for the eyes and ears . . . if the lyric drama, such as that which [Eugène] Scribe was allowed to conceive, does not satisfy your aspirations, if you are full of a sincere enthusiasm for true dramatic art, . . . enter resolutely into the œuvre of Richard Wagner and, in truth, wonderful pleasures, increased by the charm of surprise, will be the prize of your initiation.

Through the audacity and the simplicity of his tragic designs, through his intimate knowledge of human passions, through his musical verse, through his poetic music, through the invention of a new melodic form that is known as continuous melody . . . Richard Wagner will transport you ecstatically into an unknown milieu, where the dramatic subject, penetrating you with a power

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⁷⁴ Hillery, *Music and Poetry*, 17–18. “Le lecteur sait quel but nous poursuivons: démontrer que la véritable musique suggère des idées analogues dans des cervaux différents. D’ailleurs, il ne serait pas ridicule ici de raisonner *a priori*, sans analyse et sans comparaisons; car ce qui serait vraiment surprenant, c’est que le son *ne pût pas* suggérer la couleur, que les couleurs ne pussent pas donner l’idée d’une mélodie, et que le son et la couleur fussent impropre à traduire des idées; les choses s’étant toujours exprimées par une analogie réciproque, depuis le jour où Dieu a proféré le monde comme une complexe et indivisible totalité.”
incomparable by means of all the senses at once, will make you undergo emotions not yet experienced.

Another important figure in the growing Wagner cult was Edouard Dujardin, a long-time participant in the Parisian poetic circles. He had been a student at the Paris Conservatoire with Debussy and Paul Dukas, and he began his literary career by publishing music reviews in the Paris journals. He went on to write short stories, novels, and poems, and he was one of the attendees at Mallarmé’s mardis. Dujardin heard the Ring cycle in London and later in Munich, where he learned about Wagner’s doctrines from the British political philosopher Houston Stewart Chamberlain. Dujardin was enthralled with the philosophies of Wagner and with the music itself, so much so that he wore bars of the music and other Wagnerian symbols embroidered on his waistcoats. He soon joined with his friends in the cafés to create a unified group of followers of Wagner. At the same time, the Revue indépendante, of which Dujardin would later become editor, had begun to praise Wagner in its first issue.

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75 Catulle Mendès, “Sur la théorie et l’œuvre Wagnériennes,” Revue Wagnérienne (14 March 1885): 34–35. “Si vous êtes dépourvus de parti pris, si vous cherchez dans les grands spectacles artistiques quelque chose de plus que le plaisir de l’oreille et des yeux . . . si le drame lyrique, tel qu’il fut permis à Scribe de le concevoir, ne satisfait pas vos aspirations, si vous êtes pleins d’un enthousiasme sincère pour le vrai art dramatique . . . entrez résolument dans l’œuvre de Richard Wagner et, en vérité, d’admirables jouissances, accrues par le charmé de la surprise, seront le prix de votre initiation.

“Par l’audace et la simplicité de ses conceptions tragiques, par son intime connaissance des passions humaines, par son vers musical, par sa musique poétique, par l’invention d’une nouvelle forme mélodique qu’on a appelée la mélodie continue . . . Richard Wagner vous transportera extasiés dans un milieu inconnu, où le sujet dramatique, vous pénétrant avec une puissance incomparable par tous les sens à la fois, vous fera subir des émotions encore inéprouvées.”

76 Chamberlain was Wagner’s son-in-law, and a strong Wagnerian supporter and a philosopher whose writings on Aryan supremacy contributed to the ideals of the Third Reich. Near the end of his life he became a German citizen.

77 Hemmings, 225.

78 Michaud, Message poétique, 255–56.
Dujardin conceived the idea of founding a journal devoted to Wagner. He wanted to promote his belief that Wagner was more than a musician—he was also a great poet and a great thinker.\(^7^9\) He saw his efforts rewarded with the founding of the *Revue Wagnérienne* on 8 February 1885. This journal helped Dujardin and others bring Wagner’s music to wide acceptance in France.\(^8^0\) The avid Wagnerism among the most prominent poets is evidenced by the publication of eight effusive sonnets in his honor in the 8 January 1886 issue of the journal, composed by the symbolist elite: Mallarmé, Verlaine, Charles Morice, René Ghil, and Stuart Merrill, as well as the critic Wyzewa, the poet and journalist Charles Vignier, and Dujardin himself.

A typical issue of the *Revue Wagnérienne* contained a calendar of performances across Europe, as well as reviews (especially of performances at Bayreuth) and critical articles. The latter took Wagner’s music as their primary subject matter, but authors also addressed any artistic figure or form whose philosophies interacted with those of Wagner, including Schopenhauer, Tolstoy, Beethoven, and French painters. The connections that Wagnerist critics drew between the various arts serve as a further illustration of the continuation of Baudelaire’s concept of *correspondances*: visual, musical, and literary arts were drawn together in this journal when a critic observed in another work the same effects as those found in Wagner’s music.

Although published only until July 1888, the *Revue Wagnérienne* became an important symbolist journal, largely due to the contribution of Mallarmé.\(^8^1\) After Dujardin introduced Mallarmé to Wagner’s music, the attendees of his *mardis*, such as Ghil, Merrill, and Morice,

\(^7^9\) Ibid., 256.


\(^8^1\) Michaud, *Message poétique*, 325.
became contributors to the journal. Mallarmé’s own essay on Wagner in the August 1885 issue afforded him greater popularity and likewise placed this journal securely into the symbolist world.  

David Michael Hertz ascribes part of Wagner’s appeal to the ideas expressed in *Oper und Drama*. In his discussion of *Stabreim*, Wagner wrote that music is joined to feeling when the “superfluous words” are taken out. His approach to text was, in his view, the opposite of artificial French poetic forms such as the couplet, which is boring and emotionless. Wagner also provided a model for the secondary nature of action and plot in comparison with character and emotion, as Mendès emphasized in the 8 June 1885 issue of the *Revue Wagnérienne*: “His drama—not always but sometimes . . . dwells on long recitatives, sprawls in vast developments of characters or passions, idealizes itself through the search for symbols until it becomes unreal. . . .” The leitmotives function as symbols and provide layers of emotion without the need for a dramatized series of events. This type of structure parallels the predominantly lyric poetry of the symbolists, for whom suggestion, not action, was the expressive force.

Ultimately the symbolists followed Baudelaire’s example in their admiration for Wagner’s philosophies, namely the idea of the total art form. They believed that their writing most closely mirrored the suggestion of emotion found in music. According to Wyzewa, these

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82 Ibid., 323; Cornell, 40. Although Mallarmé was the center of his literary circle, he gained a reputation with the public more slowly. The 1884 publication of *Les Poètes maudits*, which included Verlaine’s chapter on Mallarmé, introduced the poet to a wider audience, so that he was recognized when he went out in public, and the attendance at his mardis also increased (Stephan, 61–62).


84 Ibid., 47. “Son drama—non pas toujours mais quelquefois . . . s’attarde à de longs récits, s’étale en de vastes développements de caractères ou de passions, s’idéalise par la recherche des symbols jusqu’à devenir irréal. . . .”

85 Ibid.
poets were seeking “a renewal of verbal music [i.e., poetry] comparable to the renewal achieved in Wagner’s instrumental music.” In the *Revue Wagnérienne* Dujardin linked Mallarmé’s poetry to Wagner, calling the poems a “Wagnerian literature” for their ability to suggest all human emotions in a way that is at the same time colorful, musical, and abstract. Gradually the poets and critics shifted their focus away from poetic music and toward musical poetry, as Wyzewa summarizes in the following passage:

But already the time approaches when musical sounds will no longer be able to produce emotion, if they are directly heard: their own character of sound will prevent the soul from considering them as pure signs of emotion. A new music, written, not played, will become necessary, suggesting emotion without the intermediary of audible sound—the better and more intimate manner of suggestion. The music of words, which is poetry, had at first the need to move, to be spoken: today we read it, and its sonorities procure emotion for us more thoroughly, without the intermediary of the voice.

The following discussion clarifies the ways in which music affected symbolist poetry, and how critics and other poets referred to this new verbal music.

**Musical Imagery in Symbolist Poetry**

Even a cursory examination of symbolist poems reveals the prevalence of musical terms and images in these works, an indicator of the symbolists’ view that their writing had an

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86 Quoted in Hillery, *Music and Poetry*, 35. “... une rénovation de la musique verbale comparable à la rénovation faite dans la musique instrumentale par Wagner . . .”


88 Quoted in Hertz, *Tuning of the Word*, 52. “Mais déjà l’heure approche où les sons musicaux ne pourront plus produire l’émotion, s’ils sont directement entendus: leur caractère propre de sons empêchera l’âme de les considérer comme de purs signes d’émotions. Une musique nouvelle deviendra nécessaire, écrite, non jouée; suggérant l’émotion sans l’intermédiaire de sons entendus. La suggérant meilleure et plus intime. La musique des mots, qui est la poésie, avait d’abord le besoin pour émouvoir, d’être dite: aujourd’hui nous la lisons: et ses sonorités nous procurent plus entièrement l’émotion, sans l’intermédiaire de la voix.”
inherent relationship to music. According to David Hillery, the poets wanted to show their intention to imitate music itself by using its terminology, and also perhaps to bring the element of sound into their poetry in a definitive way. Of all the poets to use musical images and terms, Verlaine was the most influential. His work set a clear precedent for the later symbolist poets.

Verlaine’s poetry contains examples of musical terminology that have often been cited by scholars: the playing of the lute and singing in a minor key in “Clair de lune,” the violins of autumn in “Chanson d’automne,” the piano that kisses a fragile hand in the fifth of the *Ariettes oubliées* (and the musical references seen in these titles themselves). Numerous examples in this vein could be cited. By using such terms, Verlaine created vivid images that establish a mood and bring the element of sound to the forefront. The examination of one poem in its entirety demonstrates the overall effect of the use of music in poetry. The poem is “Nevermore” from the *Poèmes saturniens*:

Souvenir, souvenir, que me veux-tu?
L’automne
Faisait voler la grive à travers l’air atone,
Et le soleil dardait un rayon monotone
Sur le bois jaunissant où la brise détone.

Nous étions seul à seule et marchions en rêvant,
Elle et moi, les cheveux et la pensée au vent.
Soudain, tournant vers moi son regard émouvant:
“Quel fut ton plus beau jour?” fit sa voix d’or vivant,

Sa voix douce et sonore, au frais timbre angélique.
Un sourire discret lui donna la réplique,
Et je baisai sa main blanche, dévotement.

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90 This opening line may itself be a musical reference to Le Bovier de Fontenelle’s question, quoted by Rousseau in his 1768 *Dictionnaire de musique*: “Sonate, que me veux-tu?” My thanks to Douglass Seaton for this observation.
—Ah! les premières fleurs, qu’elles sont parfumées!
Et qu’il bruit avec un murmure charmant
Le premier oui qui sort des lèvres bien-aimées!

[Memory, memory, what do you want of me? The autumn
Was making the thrush fly through the lifeless air,
And the sun was beating down a monotone ray
On the yellowing wood where the breeze detonates.

We were alone and walking in a dream,
She and I, hair and thoughts in the wind.
Suddenly, turning toward me her moving glance:
“What was your most beautiful day?” said her voice of living gold,

Her sweet and sonorous voice, in a cool angelic timbre.
A discreet smile gave her the reply,
And I kissed her white hand devotedly.

—Ah! the first flowers, how they are perfumed!
And how it rustles with a charming murmur,
The first yes that comes from beloved lips!]

An important feature of this poem is the pervasive use of words that refer not specifically to music but to sound in general. The word “monotone” in the first stanza effectively depicts the steady beating down of the sun. The beloved in the second stanza has a voice of living gold, a sweet and sonorous voice, with an angelic timbre. These phrases are mellifluous in their own right, and they connote singing in a way that establishes not actual music but the beauty of the woman being described. The final three lines also contain a reference to sound, with the charming murmur that escapes from the beloved’s lips.

The presence of musical terms in the realm of symbolist poetry was not limited to poems themselves. Critics and poets alike relied on images or phrases borrowed from music when describing other poets. Albert Mockel, a Belgian poet and critic, wrote of “the radiant melodic perfection of Mallarmé . . . the singing detours as found in certain verses of Geste ingénu by
Many such references describe the works of Verlaine. E. Vigié-Lecocq described Verlaine’s poetry as “the trembling of life, the shiver of a dream, the music of the soul . . .” Huysmans also referred to Verlaine’s poetry as “something vague as music that allows one to dream of the beyond . . .” André Barre wrote that in the Romances sans paroles, “the verse seems to be nothing but the written form of melody. The poetry [of Verlaine] is, so to speak, music itself . . .” The presence of music in symbolist poetry was clearly in the minds of poets and critics alike.

Musicality as Poetic Technique

Above all, music influenced the symbolist poets in their verbal style. The influence of music on poetic technique can be divided into two main categories: rhythm and sound repetition. Rhythm primarily refers to form, including the structure of the lines and the rhyme scheme. Throughout the nineteenth century, French poets had made innovations in terms of form. Specifically, they gradually loosened the traditional structure of the alexandrine, which contains twelve syllables per line. The “correct” grouping had consistently been two groups of six syllables, with each group containing a complete unit of meaning, that is, the line contains emphasis on the sixth syllable to provide a conclusion for the first group. Increasingly,

91 Quoted in Hillery, Music and Poetry, 34. “. . . la radieuse perfection mélodique de M. Stéphane Mallarmé . . . les détours chanteurs comme il s’en trouve en certains vers du Geste ingénu de M. Ghil . . . la merveilleuse gamme syllabique de M. Gustave Kahn . . .”

92 Ibid. “. . . le frémissement de la vie, le frisson du rêve, la musique de l’âme . . .”

93 Quoted in Michaud, Message poétique, 322. “. . . quelque chose de vague comme une musique qui permette de rêver sur des au-delà . . .”

however, nineteenth-century poets diverged from this requirement by grouping lines in three units of four syllables, by dividing lines into uneven groups, or by placing a grammatically weak word (e.g., a conjunction or preposition) as the sixth syllable. Baudelaire was one of the primary figures responsible for advancing these techniques.

Verlaine, who frequently used the alexandrine, also used the *impair*, which contained an odd number of syllables per line. His poem “Art poétique,” published in *Paris moderne* on 10 November 1882, describes the *impair*, which Verlaine seems to prefer for musical poetry, in the first stanza.

De la musique avant toute chose,
Et pour cela préfère l’Impair
Plus vague et plus soluble dans l’air,
Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose.

[Music before everything,
And for that prefer the *impair*,
More vague and more soluble in air,
Without anything in it that is heavy or stable.]

 Appropriately, Verlaine uses lines of nine syllables for this poem. He does not say exactly why the *impair* is more musical; Hillery hypothesizes that the musicality comes from the asymmetrical character of the odd number of syllables. For instance, the first line of the stanza quoted above would be divided into a group of four syllables followed by a group of five; both groups would be performed within the same time frame, accelerating the second group. Whatever the poetic technique involved, for Verlaine the key to the *impair* is clearly its

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96 Ibid., 50.
nuance, as he includes in his description, in successive stanzas of “Art poétique,” words such as “indecision,” “vague,” and “nuance” itself.

The height of the symbolists’ experiments with the poetic rhythm came with the emphasis on vers libre, or free verse, among some within the movement. This style freed poetry from the constraints of any formula in favor of form of the poet’s choosing. Wagner again served as an apt comparison, as the proponents of vers libre saw their work as parallel to the free rhythms of Wagner’s Stabreim. Not all symbolists believed that free verse was ultimately more musical than regular verse, to be sure; in fact, some argued that musicality in poetry derived from greater rhythmic regularity, not rhythmic freedom. The point to be made here is that, for both sides of this debate, the inherent musicality in verse was an important feature, especially in terms of its rhythmic character.

Rhyme functions rhythmically by accenting the end of a line, or at times words within a line, through phonemic stress. Usually this stress coincides with semantic stress. For the symbolists, however, the use of enjambments and irregularity of structure within individual lines was more common than for previous poets. According to traditional French poetry, the caesura in the alexandrine should correspond to a rhyme. The symbolists did not always follow this rule; instead they ignored rhyme within the line or placed the rhyme at the “wrong” place. This technique was known as a reject, and it created irregular rhythms by thwarting the expected function of a rhyming word.

97 Ibid., 60–61.
98 Ibid., 63.
99 Ibid., 43.
These techniques may not seem overtly musical at first glance. The symbolists, however, had applauded music for its ability to suggest emotions rather than state them explicitly. The use of irregular formal structures helped to provide the vagueness and evocative quality that the symbolists admired. By avoiding a clearly delineated form, these poets created a poetic approach that they believed verbally mirrored music as closely as possible.

Repetition of sounds was another popular technique for the symbolist poets. By repeating individual sounds, words, images, or even entire lines, the poet drew the reader’s focus away from meaning and turned it toward the tonal qualities of the words themselves. Cuénot described how Verlaine used sounds in a musical way:

[Verlaine’s poetry is] a music of prodigiously refined vowels and consonants. Almost everything can be explained by this music; it is a question of emptying the words of their intellectual sense, of disorganizing the language and breaking the syntax so that the word recaptures its independence and can be used at the mercy of the poet like the notes in a piece of music.

Like the rhythmic quality of symbolist poetry, the repetition of sounds, words, or phrases can be compared to Wagner’s leitmotives, which unified his musical works and provided relationships between a variety of different symbols. In a poem full of the nuance that the symbolists loved, repeated sounds or entire lines or stanzas provide a quasi-musical sense of cohesion that may be absent from the form or the content. The following excerpt from “Très loin, toujours plus loin” by Gustave Kahn (from his collection Les Palais nomades) demonstrates how sound can unify a text:

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100 Quoted in Hillery, *Music and Poetry*, 71. “... une musique des voyelles et des consonnes prodigieusement raffinée. Presque tout s’explique par elle; il s’agit de vider les mots de leur sens intellectuel, de désorganiser la langue et de briser la syntaxe pour que le mot reprenne son indépendance et puisse être utilisé au gré du poète comme des notes dans un morceau de musique.”

Exil, lointain exil! Trouveras-tu jamais
Les palais tapissés de clair où vent ton rêve
Dans des fraîcheurs, des puretés, musiques brèves,
Revêtir un oubli profond du: Je t’aimais.

[Exile, distant exile! Will you ever find
The palaces hung with bright tapestries where your dream wishes,
Amid freshness, purity, brief musics,
To take on a deep oblivion of: I loved you.]
Horreur! la Terre a mis au monde; et, pris de peur,
Le noir ivre—sonnez!—ulule à voix mauvaise:
Dans l’Inouï sonnez! ô vous que rien n’apaise,
Sonnez, horreurs du noir et dièse vainqueur! . . .

[One evening the church organ, to the spasms of the violins,
Raised high its muted sadness in long moans:
Voice of genesis, Love and Demise, oh long tears!
One evening the organ rose in the horror of the violins . . .

Horror! the Earth weeps, and, great Ancestress,
By the vulva and the ovary in openings like mouths,
Like a woman in childbirth calling and groaning alone:
Horror! the Earth weeps and pushes, in her terror,
Her breast of red clay and the great sharp notes
Of weeping genesis that makes her bleed and injures her:
Horror! the Mother weeps and the genesis of the Universe
In the blackness wailed the first great tear:

Horror! the Earth gave birth to the world; and, full of fear,
The drunken blackness—resound!—hoots in an evil voice:
In the extraordinary resound! oh you that nothing soothes,
Resound, horrors of the blackness and conquering sharp notes! . . .]

This poem is full of repetitions of both sounds and entire words. In the first stanza the rhyme scheme of *abba* uses the same words, not merely their sounds. (The overall structure of the poem is equally symmetrical, because the final stanza is an exact repetition of the first.) The first stanza also establishes several words that will appear throughout the poem: “l’Orgue,” “les Violons,” “genèse,” “horreur,” and various forms of “pleurs” (and its various noun and verb forms). In fact, “-eur” is one of the most common word endings in the poem and serves as one of the prominent rhyming syllables (note also “douleur,” “terreur,” “peur,” and “vainqueur”). The word “genèse” includes the /ɛz/ sound that appears equally prominently (as in “glaise,” “dièse,” and “mauvaise”).

The second stanza frequently uses words ending in /l/ and words including the sounds /p/ (or /pr/ or /pl/) or /v/, consonants that the rest of the poem continues to feature. One specific
image in this stanza, that of weeping, shows a parallel between “la Terre pleure” and “la Mère pleure,” phrases that also rhyme. A strict overall rhyme scheme (aaabcccb) emphasizes the repetition of sound throughout the poem; in the four longer stanzas, three consecutive lines feature the same rhyming syllable (as shown here in stanza 2), and the last two rhyming syllables of the second stanza continue to appear in stanza 3. The combination of this repetitive rhyme scheme and the recurrence of key words and phrases creates a series of sound patterns that bring the aural characteristics of the poem to the forefront.

A final example of the symbolists’ approach to sound is Rimbaud’s famous poem “Sensation”:

Par les soirs bleus d’été, j’irai dans les sentiers,
Picoté par les blés, fouler l’herbe menue:
Rêveur, j’en sentirai la fraîcheur à mes pieds.
Je laisserai le vent baigner ma tête nue.

Je ne parlerai pas, je ne penserai rien:
Mais l’amour infini me montera dans l’âme,
Et j’irai loin, bien loin, comme un bohémien,
Par la nature—heureux comme avec une femme.

[Through the blue summer evenings, I will go down the paths,
Prickled by the wheat, [I will] walk on the thin grass:
Dreaming, I will smell its freshness at my feet.
I will allow the wind to bathe my bare head.

I will not speak, I will think of nothing:
But infinite love will rise in my soul,
And I will go far, far away, like a bohemian,
Through nature—happy as with a woman.]

A phonetic version of this poem is helpful in illustrating the patterns of sounds. The slashes indicate the division of the lines into two groups of six syllables (only lines 3 and 8 deviate from this pattern). Each stanza has an abab rhyme scheme.
The repetition of sounds in this poem primarily rests with the vowels. In the first stanza the /e/ sound appears frequently, including as an internal rhyme at the hemistich in the first and third lines. Two vowel sounds trade places within the two halves of the stanza: In lines 1 and 2, the first hemistiches use the /a/ sound, while the nasal sound /ʁ/ appears in the second hemistich of line 1. Then, for lines 3 and 4, these two vowels reverse their positions. Other vowel sounds that commonly occur in this stanza are /ɛ/ and /ɑ/.

Overall, in this stanza the vowels tend toward darker sounds; the bright /e/ sound that figured so prominently in the first stanza occurs only twice in the second. Three of the lines feature a primary vowel sound: /ɑ/ in the first, /ɛ/ in the third, and /a/ in the fourth. The second line exhibits a more diverse selection of sounds. In contrast to the first stanza, the second stanza lacks any internal rhyme at the hemistiches, although word repetition (“je ne parlerai/penserai” and “loin, bien loin”) provide some structure. This stanza also features /m/ as a prominent consonant, whereas no single consonant dominated the first stanza.

With this poem Rimbaud achieved an approach to sound that demonstrated the symbolists’ aim: to suggest meaning but to make the sound of the words the most prominent feature. The actual meaning of the words mattered less than the atmosphere they projected.
The issue of sound versus sense was indeed an important one for the symbolist poets. Sound in poetry is, as this section has illustrated, closely tied to the presence of music. David Hillery has discussed the way in which an emphasis on sound makes emotion, not intellectual meaning, prominent in a poem.\textsuperscript{102} If the symbolists indeed used music to suggest sound, and sound in turn suggests emotion, then musical poetry is emotional poetry—a concept that coincides with the symbolists’ own statements about music’s relationship to emotions.

Although the symbolists believed that their poetry struck an appropriate balance between sound and meaning, to readers the latter often appeared sacrificed in favor of experiments in pure sound. One can easily imagine that the more a poet emphasizes sound, the more difficult clarity of meaning is to achieve, because the restriction to a limited range of phonemes limits the pool of words from which the poet can choose. The poetry of Ghil, Merrill, and Kahn serves as evidence of the lengths to which these poets went to experiment with sound. In contrast, Mallarmé is viewed by today’s scholars as a master in part because he was able to use original approaches to sound in poems that are also full of meaning.\textsuperscript{103}

\textbf{Conclusion: Characteristics of Symbolist Poetry}

Symbolist poetry came to include several stylistic features that grew out of its various evolutionary stages. The reaction against the strict forms of the Parnassians contributed to a freedom of form, and, in the case of \textit{vers libre}, the absence of traditional formal structures. The symbolists created a flexibility in poetic form that France had never known. Even in their use

\textsuperscript{102} Hillery, \textit{Music and Poetry}, 72.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 93.
of traditional forms such as the sonnet, the symbolists added new elements of unusual line lengths or innovative use of rhyme.

As already mentioned, the symbolists also opposed the Parnassians in the objective/subjective dichotomy. While the Parnassians suppressed evidence of a lyric persona from their works, with decadence the poets began to center their poems around the direct experiences of the speaker. For the symbolists the lyric persona may be disguised by the nuance of the poem, but the reader understands that the emotion in the work comes from a personal viewpoint.

Another contribution from the decadent phase was the focus on sensual stimulation. The description in decadent poetry was meant to appeal to the senses, as was everything in the life of a decadent character such as Huysmans’s des Esseintes. The symbolists retained this sensual quality in their poetry, but to this they added vagueness, nuance, and plurality of meaning. Although symbolist poetry usually has a definite speaker who describes his or her experiences, the nature of these experiences—and often the verbal meaning—is veiled behind the nuance of the words and sounds. Despite their insistence that meaning was not compromised, the work of the symbolist poets is characteristically ambiguous, making multiple interpretations possible.

Musicality appears to have been a driving force in the establishment of vagueness as a symbolist trait. The poets’ goal, as stated earlier, was to express in words what they saw expressed in music: a suggestion of emotion without explicit statements of that emotion. Music was influential not only in the symbolists’ philosophy but also in the techniques of their poetry, especially in the works of Verlaine and his successors such as Ghil and Merrill.

Verlaine and the other acknowledged masters Baudelaire and Mallarmé served as the figureheads of this new poetic style. Baudelaire, although not of their poetic generation, influenced the symbolists through his focus on morbid and pessimistic imagery, as well as a
loosening of the alexandrine structure. Verlaine’s musicality and continued structural innovations, as described in his “Art poétique,” gave the symbolists their technical foundation. Mallarmé, whom critics viewed as the leader of the movement, united the poets as a group through his weekly gatherings, which (as will be discussed in Chapter 3) served as a link to the musical world, as well. He also provided the model for the nature of a symbol in poetry. All of these contributions united in the symbolist style that evolved over a period of thirty years.
CHAPTER 2

BAUDELAIRE AND VERLAINE: 
POETRY AND PERSONA

Charles Baudelaire

Baudelaire and Les Fleurs du mal

Charles Baudelaire was born in Paris in 1821. The death of his father when Charles was only six fostered a close relationship between Baudelaire and his mother, Caroline. Caroline remarried Major (later General) Jacques Aupick in November 1828, and the new family moved to Lyons in 1831. There Baudelaire attended the Collège Royal until 1836, when his stepfather was transferred back to Paris. At that time he was enrolled at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand. He had problems with discipline, however, and after repeated incidents of poor behavior he was expelled in 1839.

Baudelaire remained in Paris and took up the study of law at the École de Droit. Soon, however, he began to devote his attention not to his studies but to the literary, bohemian circles in the Quartier Latin. His associations with prostitutes and other members of the demimonde, as well as his rapid accumulation of debts, dismayed his family. In June 1841 General Aupick arranged for Baudelaire to depart on a voyage that would take him to India. Baudelaire

remained with the ship until October, when it docked in Mauritius. Despite the captain’s urging, the young poet insisted on remaining there. He then departed on 4 November on another ship that returned to Paris in February 1842 via the Cape of Good Hope, Italy, and the Azores. Although the voyage had been forced upon him, the exotic images he encountered during his travels had a profound influence on his later poetry, as in works such as “A une dame créole” (his first published poem, appearing in 1845), “Le Cygne,” and “Parfum exotique.”

Soon after his return to Paris, Baudelaire came into his inheritance of 18,055 francs, some shares of farmland, and four pieces of property in Paris. The inheritance provided the means for a comfortable existence, and he began living the life of a dandy, wearing expensive clothes, pursuing art and literature, and experimenting with hashish and opium. This life of freedom was expensive, however, and Baudelaire again accumulated debts. Eventually his family took away his control of his own finances, when in 1844 they assigned a conseil judicaire to watch over his money and provide him with a small yearly allowance. Also during this time the mulatto woman Jeanne Duval became Baudelaire’s mistress; they had a stormy relationship for fourteen years, and she served as the inspiration for much of his love poetry.

Along with “A une dame créole,” Baudelaire had his first important publication in 1845 with his criticism of that year’s Salon, an annual art exhibition held in April. He was an avid art

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2 Pichois, 76–80.

3 Ibid., 85; Alex de Jonge, Baudelaire, Prince of Clouds: A Biography (New York: Paddington), 43.

4 No connection can be drawn between Jeanne Duval and the poem “A une dame créole.” Baudelaire wrote the poem during his voyage, based on the inspiration of Mme Emmeline Autard, the wife of his host in Mauritius (see Pichois, 78–79), although for the author there may have been a connection between the two women. Baudelaire and Jeanne were already lovers by the time of the poem’s publication in 1845.
collector and considered himself qualified to serve as an art critic. At this time most of his publications were critical ones, focusing on both literature and art. Some of Baudelaire’s writings in this vein appeared under pseudonyms. His only novel, *Fanfarlo*, was published in 1847. During the late 1840s Baudelaire also began translating the works of Poe, an activity that would become one of the most lucrative endeavors of his career.

What is now considered Baudelaire’s poetic masterpiece, the collection of poems titled *Les Fleurs du mal*, evolved over a period of nearly two decades. According to Baudelaire’s friend Ernest Prarond, most of the poems had been written before 1844, although Baudelaire likely revised the poems before their final publication. The original title of the work was *Les Lesbiennes* (1846); in 1848 Baudelaire changed the title to *Les Limbes* (Limbo). No poems were published under either of those titles, however, despite four announcements of imminent publication in the late 1840s. Eleven sonnets, taken from *Les Limbes* but without a collective title, were published on 9 April 1851 in *Le Messager de l’assemblée*, and on 1 June 1855 another eighteen appeared in the *Revue des deux mondes*, using the title *Les Fleurs du mal* for the first time. In 1857 twelve more poems were published: nine in *La Revue française*, including “Harmonie du soir,” and three in *L’Artiste*. The complete collection was not published until 25 June 1857.

As soon as the first edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* appeared, it generated immense controversy. The government, which increasingly sought to control perceived immorality in

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5 Pichois, 119.
6 Ibid., 144–45.
8 Ruff, 77.
literary works, ordered the books confiscated. Various critics launched attacks on the poet; the
government condemned thirteen poems in all for their sexual and religious perversity.
Baudelaire appeared in court on 20 August 1857, and at the end of the trial he was fined three
hundred francs and forced to remove six poems from the work. The government continued to
ban these poems from inclusion in any French publication of *Les Fleurs du mal* until 1949. In
March 1866 a publisher in Amsterdam printed a work entitled *Les Épaves* (Remains), which
contained the six condemned poems as well as others that Baudelaire had omitted from *Les
Fleurs du mal* prior to publication. The latter may have been the poems referred to by
Baudelaire in a letter to his mother (dated 9 July 1857), in which he describes removing a third
of the poems to avoid exactly the reaction that the work nevertheless received. Only 260 copies
of *Les Épaves* were printed, and some were smuggled into France with specific instructions as to
the journalists, publishers, artists, and others who were to receive them. Baudelaire asserted in a
letter to Catulle Mendès, dated 19 January 1866, that he had nothing to do with this publication
and hoped to keep it from drawing the French government’s attention.

The obscenity trial caused irreparable damage to Baudelaire’s reputation, and the first
publication of *Les Fleurs du mal* was a failure. In 1861 he began preparing a second edition,
which included one new section and thirty-two new poems. Upon its publication the
government and the critics paid it little attention. Most of the reviewers criticized the poetry
severely, especially its macabre character; one of these reviews, written by the conservative
critic Armand de Pontmartin, condemned the work for the same type of perversity that brought

9 Pichois, 338.

about the 1857 trial. Positive opinions toward *Les Fleurs du mal* appeared rarely, although one notable exception was a review written by Leconte de Lisle in response to Pontmartin’s article. This review defended Baudelaire, praising the work’s “strange and powerful appearance” and “rich and dark diversity.”

Before his death Baudelaire began preparing what he called the “definitive” third edition. In a letter to Michel Lévy, dating from August or September of 1862, he described his vision for this edition: it would include ten to fifteen new poems, a preface explaining his approach to poetry, and a previously published review of the work by Théophile Gautier that Baudelaire admired. Baudelaire was unable to complete this project, although a third edition was published posthumously in 1868, compiled by Théodore de Banville and Charles Asselineau. This edition included several poems that had been published elsewhere during Baudelaire’s lifetime. Critics eventually rejected assertions from early in the twentieth century that this version followed Baudelaire’s plans for the third edition, and they have generally focused instead on the 1861 publication as Baudelaire’s final authenticated statement on his plan for *Les Fleurs du mal*.

*Les Fleurs du mal* represents the majority of Baudelaire’s work in traditional poetic forms. After his trial ended, he turned primarily to prose poems and critical writings. In later years he became increasingly ill from the syphilis that he had contracted in the early 1840s, and he died in 1867.

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11 Pichois, 275–76.
13 Ruff, 86.
By the time of his death the future symbolists had already chosen him as their inspiration. In the early 1860s critics began to recognize Baudelaire’s influence in the writing of the next generation of poets, and these younger artists dedicated some of their poems to him.14 Later, on 1 February 1865, Mallarmé published an article in L’Artiste in which he described the ability of Les Fleurs du mal to “[draw him] into a surprising landscape which lives in my eye with the intensity of those created by profound opium.”15 At the end of that same year Verlaine published his important review of Baudelaire, an article that increased the reputation of both its author and its subject.

The Structure and Character of Les Fleurs du mal

Baudelaire’s first edition of Les Fleurs du mal contained one hundred numbered poems, introduced by the prefatory address “Au Lecteur.” Baudelaire conceived of Les Fleurs du mal as a unified work rather than a collection of individual poems. In a letter to the publisher of the first edition, Auguste Poulet-Malassis, dated 9 December 1856, Baudelaire stressed that he wanted to work with Poulet-Malassis to establish the order of the poems, because it was an important issue.16 When he sent the second edition to Alfred de Vigny, he stated: “The only praise I hope for is that the book be acknowledged, not as a mere collection, but as having a beginning and an end.”17

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14 Pichois, 277. Pichois mentions works by the poets Henri Cantel, Albert Glatigny, Albert Mérat, and Léon Cladel.
15 Ibid., 334.
16 Lloyd, Baudelaire Letters, 89.
17 Ruff, 77.
Some critics have observed a continuity or even a progression of action between the sections. Colin Burns considers the work to be dramatically unified in its “commentary on the struggle between Good and Evil in the soul of Man.” Hugo Friedrich describes the structure as “an over-all downward curve” that ends in the “abyss” of death, with each section providing progressively more desperate attempts at escape. T. A. Unwin asserts that *Les Fleurs du mal* has a “pseudo-narrative” structure revolving around the artist’s fall from grace; although Unwin does not wish to ascribe a specific story to the work, he does allow for an implicit chronology across the sections. Baudelaire’s comments to Poulet-Malassis and de Vigny suggest that he had a definite plan for the work as a whole, but he did not provide any details as to whether he intended to create a structure such as those identified by these critics.

The poems in the first edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* were grouped into five sections: “Spleen et idéal,” “Fleurs du mal,” “Révolte,” “Le Vin,” and “La Mort.” “Spleen et idéal,” as its title suggests, focuses on the contrast between melancholy and ecstasy. The section includes in its seventy-seven poems the love poems written for and inspired by Baudelaire’s three significant lovers, Jeanne Duval, Apollonie Sabatier, and Marie Daubrun. Although some of these poems, especially among those written for the first two women, praise the female poetic objects, the predominant emotion of this section is despair at the inability to achieve the ideal that the speaker desires. The poems at the end of the section remain in a dark mood, focusing

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on death, hatred, despair, nothingness, the futility of life, and the inability to stop the passage of time. Baudelaire’s four poems entitled “Spleen” appear among these last poems, indicating which of the two primary motifs of this section ultimately triumphs.

The twelve poems in the section “Fleurs du mal” are fascinated with sadistic dreams of violence and destruction as a means to combat ennui. Sexual perversity offers one way to escape the routine of everyday life. The three lesbian poems that were among the six poems banned in subsequent editions originally came from this section. The “Fleurs du mal” poems frequently include references to blood, corpses, and death, especially “Une Martyre,” which describes a decapitated female corpse in detail, and “Un Voyage à Cythère,” in which scavenging birds and animals destroy a human body. The words describe these horrific images in such a way that they nearly become beautiful, an aesthetic often mentioned by Baudelaire: “It is one of the astounding prerogatives of art that the horrible, artistically expressed, becomes beauty. . . .”[22] Baudelaire often referred to the ugliness of the modern world and the beauty that he saw in the bizarre.[23]

The theme of the section titled “Révolte” is rebellion against God. The three poems in this section illustrate the importance of Christian symbolism in Baudelaire’s poetry—not as a way of praising God but as a source of contrast between Christianity and Satanism. The poem “Les Litanies de Satan,” the last of the three poems, resembles a liturgical formula with its repeated cry to Satan to take pity on the speaker and its closing prayer addressed to Satan. In

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addition, the text glorifies Satan in adoring language usually reserved for God or Christ. Poems from other sections of Les Fleurs du mal echo the worship of Satan, such as the concluding line of “Le Possédé”: “O mon cher Belzébuth, je t’adore!” (Oh my dear Beelzebub, I adore you!)

In these poems Baudelaire’s speaker views the suffering of humankind as a direct result of God’s inability or unwillingness to defeat Satan. This viewpoint is evident in “Le Reniement de Saint Pierre” (The Denial of St. Peter), in which Baudelaire writes that God laughed while Christ was crucified and continually ignores the cries of his followers, and St. Peter was right to deny Jesus, because he failed to rule for eternity. Despite the apparent rejection of Christianity, Baudelaire needed the Christian framework to provide a point from which he could diverge. Without Christian images—which are quite common in his poems—Baudelaire could not demonstrate the power of evil.

“Le Vin” is a section of five poems. The first, “L’Âme du vin” (The soul of wine), personifies wine itself as the provider of hope, relief from pain, strength, and brotherhood. Each of the succeeding poems describes the importance of wine to a particular person or group of people: ragpickers, an assassin, the lonely, and lovers. For these various subjects wine provides an escape from whatever aspects of their lives cause unhappiness.

In its three poems that conclude the work, “La Mort” revolves around the search for peace in death. Death serves as a means of escape from the disappointments and boredom of life, because the ideal sought in “Spleen et idéal” is always elusive. In the end the only ideal that exists is the hope that something unknown and better than life’s experiences will be found in the afterlife.

25 Hyslop, 81.
By February 1859 Baudelaire had written some new poems for the second edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*. In a letter to Alfred de Vigny, dating from December 1861, Baudelaire stated that he intended the new poems to fit the framework that he had established for the overall work. He added nineteen new poems to “Spleen et idéal,” a section whose internal order he also revised, and three new poems to “La Mort.” The second edition lacks the six banned poems, which comprised three from “Spleen et idéal” and the three lesbian poems from “Fleurs du mal.” Concurrently, Baudelaire made further changes to the structure of the work; he moved “Le Vin” ahead of “Fleurs du mal” and “Révolte” and added a new section entitled “Tableaux parisiens,” to be placed after “Spleen et idéal.” This section consisted of ten poems new to the second edition and eight transferred from “Spleen et idéal.”

Many of the new poems illustrate Baudelaire’s discovery of beauty in the strange and abnormal. According to Baudelaire, beauty must be strange to some degree in order to contrast the ordinary and the banal:

> Beauty is always bizarre. I do not mean to say that it is voluntarily, coldly bizarre. . . . I mean that it always contains a bit of strangeness, naïve strangeness, not intentional but unconscious, and it is this strangeness that causes it to be particularly Beauty. That is its matriculation, its characteristic. Reverse the proposition, and try to conceive of a commonplace beauty.

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26 Lloyd, *Baudelaire Letters*, 175; Friedrich, 22.

In the “Tableaux parisiens” poems Baudelaire focused on the suffering of modern Parisian life, which he found beautiful and mysterious. For Baudelaire “modernity” meant large, ugly cities and all that accompanied them, as well as new technology such as electricity and steam power. People such as prostitutes, beggars, cripples, and criminals represent the poverty and decay that he saw in the city, which he in turn saw as sources of beauty. Baudelaire’s fascination with these images of modernity also played a significant role in his later prose poems, *Le Spleen de Paris*.

Baudelaire avoided an autobiographical subject in his poems; although many of the poems in *Les Fleurs du mal* are in first person, the “I” that is speaking is not to be understood as Baudelaire himself. He stated that his poetry was deliberately impersonal, which Hugo Friedrich interprets to mean that any human emotion can be expressed in Baudelaire’s poetry. Ultimately for Baudelaire it was imagination that gave poems their power, not personal emotions or sensibilities:

The sensitivity of the heart is not absolutely favorable to the poetic process. . . . The sensitivity of the imagination is of another nature; it knows how to choose, judge, compare, avoid this, seek out that, rapidly, spontaneously. It is from this sensitivity, which one generally calls *Taste*, that we draw the power of avoiding the *evil* and looking for the *good* in poetic material.

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28 Friedrich, 25.
29 Ibid., 21.
This principle represents one of Baudelaire’s significant departures from romanticism. The individual emotions of the speaker were of prime importance for romantic poets; Baudelaire’s poetic speakers, on the other hand, appear only indirectly, through the images in the poems. The later symbolist poets continued the evolution of the indirect role of poetic persona, in that their poetry derives from a personal viewpoint but the speaker is often veiled in the nuance of the language.

Baudelaire thus occupies a transitional role in the historical view of French poetry in the nineteenth century. He retained the traditional forms and subjects of the romantic poets, but his approach to language (as described in Chapter 1), his modern view of beauty, and the position of the persona signify a departure from romanticism and preparation of French poetry for the symbolist movement.

Poetic Analysis

“Le Balcon”

Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses,  
O toi, tous mes plaisirs! ô toi, tous mes devoirs!  
Tu te rappelleras la beauté des caresses,  
La douceur du foyer et le charme des soirs,  
Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses!  

Les soirs illuminés par l’ardeur du charbon,  
Et les soirs au balcon, voilés de vapeurs roses,  
Que ton sein m’était doux! que ton cœur m’était bon!  
Nous avons dit souvent d’impérissables choses  
Les soirs illuminés par l’ardeur du charbon.  

Que les soleils sont beaux dans les chaudes soirées!  
Que l’espace est profond! Que le cœur est puissant!

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31 Balakian, The Symbolist Movement, 38.
En me penchant vers toi, reine des adorées,
Je croyais respirer le parfum de ton sang.
Que les soleils sont beaux dans les chaudes soirées! 15

La nuit s’épaississait ainsi qu’une cloison,
Et mes yeux dans le noir devinaient tes prunelles,
Et je buvais ton souffle, ô douceur! ô poison!
Et tes pieds s’endormaient dans mes mains fraternelles.
La nuit s’épaississait ainsi qu’une cloison.

Je sais l’art d’évoquer les minutes heureuses,
Et revis mon passé blotti dans tes genoux.
Car à quoi bon chercher tes beautés langoureuses
Ailleurs qu’en ton cher corps et qu’en ton cœur si doux!
Je sais l’art d’évoquer les minutes heureuses! 25

Ces serments, ces parfums, ces baisers infinis,
Renaîtront-ils d’un gouffre interdit à nos sondes,
Comme montent au ciel les soleils rajeunis
Après s’être lavés au fond des mers profondes?
—O serments! ô parfums! ô baisers infinis!

[Mother of memories, mistress of mistresses,
Oh you, all my pleasures! oh you, all my duties!
You will remember the beauty of caresses,
The sweetness of home and the charm of the evenings,
Mother of memories, mistress of mistresses!]

The evenings illuminated by the glow of the coal,
And the evenings on the balcony, veiled in pink mists,
How sweet your breast was to me! how good your heart was to me!
We often said imperishable things
In the evenings illuminated by the glow of the coal.

How beautiful the suns are in the warm evenings!
How deep is space! how powerful the heart is!
In bending down toward you, queen of beloveds,
I believed I breathed the perfume of your blood.
How beautiful the suns are in the warm evenings!

The night thickened like a partition,
And my eyes made out your pupils in the blackness,
And I drank in your breath, oh sweetness! oh poison!
And your feet fell asleep in my brotherly hands.
The night thickened like a partition.
I know the art of evoking the happy minutes,
And relive my past snuggled in your knees.
For what good is it to look for your languorous beauty
Elsewhere than in your dear body and in your sweet heart?
I know the art of evoking the happy minutes!

These oaths, these perfumes, these infinite kisses,
Will they come to life again from a forbidden abyss at our probing,
As the rejuvenated suns rise in the sky
After being washed at the bottom of the deep seas?
—Oh oaths! oh perfumes! oh infinite kisses!

“Le Balcon” comes from “Spleen et idéal”; it was one of the poems Baudelaire wrote for Jeanne Duval. This poem exemplifies Baudelaire’s use of traditional French poetic versification, the alexandrine. Each line contains the standard twelve syllables with caesuras commonly placed after the sixth syllable (e.g., lines 2, 7, 8, 12, etc.), in accordance with poetic convention. Baudelaire provided formal repetition in four ways in this poem: through the ababa rhyme scheme, occasional internal rhymes that coincide with the caesuras (e.g., lines 1–2, 6–7, 14–15), the use of identical lines to open and close each stanza (with the exception of the slight alteration of the last line of the poem), and the parallel structures within and between lines (e.g., lines 6–7, 8, 12).  

The first stanza indicates that the addressee of the poem is a woman; the speaker calls her both mother (a metaphorical reference) and mistress (a representation of the woman’s actual relationship to the speaker), images that establish the importance of the woman to the speaker. She is responsible for the speaker’s memories and represents the feminine ideal. The first stanza also provides the first of many references to night. The speaker nostalgically recalls

evenings spent with the woman, and the couple appear to have been lovers. Line 5 reiterates the opening of the poem; the repetition forms an interruption, not a true conclusion to the line of thought, and it refocuses attention on the addressee, the apparent source of the fond memories. It should be noted that although the addressee is clearly female, the gender of the speaker is not actually specified. Sensual language typifies Baudelaire’s love poems and does not indicate either a male or a female persona.

The second stanza continues as if the reiteration of line 1 as line 5 has not interrupted the speaker’s train of thought. The speaker gives an atmospheric description of the nights spent on the balcony. Peter Broome points out that a balcony is a place that is suspended, where one passes from an enclosed room into indefinite space. In this way the balcony is a metaphor for memory, which spans the time between the present and the past and which plays a role in this stanza as the speaker recalls the lovers’ nights on the balcony. Baudelaire’s use of the imparfait implies that the lovers met on the balcony repeatedly. The nostalgia of these nights continues in the third and fourth stanzas; the language is sensual, as the speaker continues to recall the evenings the lovers spent together.

The fifth stanza introduces a change from the imparfait to the present tense as the speaker continues to remember the evenings on the balcony. The text describes the addressee’s beauty as unparalleled in any other woman. It is unclear whether the woman is physically present at this point in the poem; line 22 can be read either that the speaker remembers the past while in her embrace or merely recalls the time spent in her embrace previously. Even if the

33 Ibid., 121–23.
34 Ibid., 126.
lovers are in fact together in the present, the happiness described is only in the past. The sixth stanza confirms this and elaborates on it. The poem ends with an extended simile in which the speaker questions whether their love will be reborn like the rising of the sun after the depth of night. The question is unanswered, however. Although the sunrise is a sure and predictable event, whether the speaker will regain happiness with the beloved is unknown. Thus, the images of dark and light used by Baudelaire provide a parallel to the progression of the lovers’ relationship: the speaker’s recollections describe the increasing darkness of the night, while in their lives their relationship was waning. The rising of the sun is symbolic of the hope that with the rebirth of light will also come the renewal of love. This progression does not assume the status of a true narrative, but it does imply that a sequence of unnamed events caused the shift from the happiness of the past to the speaker’s present uncertainty.

The alterations in the final line of the poem intensify the emotion of the text. Had Baudelaire retained the original demonstrative articles that preceded the words “oaths,” “perfumes,” and “kisses,” the line would not have the same power as it does with the new exhortations. The line illustrates that throughout the poem the repeated lines serve to heighten emotion, but in this case, by changing the last line of the poem slightly, Baudelaire achieved this effect to an even greater degree. The change also prevents the poem from having a closed circular motion and thereby increases the sense of ambiguity represented in the speaker’s unanswered question.

In summary, the speaker, or persona, of this poem appears to be a lover who was once happy with the beloved, the addressee, but is no longer happy with her, for a reason unknown to the reader. Assuming that the woman is with the speaker from the beginning of the text, the

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35 Ibid., 141.
poem constitutes a direct appeal to her to return to the happiness of the past. The speaker hopes that enumerating the pleasures experienced in previous evenings, in sensual and descriptive language, will persuade the beloved to allow their love to be reborn.

“Harmonie du soir”

Voici venir le temps où vibrant sur sa tige  
Chaque fleur s’évapore ainsi qu’un encensoir;  
Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir;  
*Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!*  

*Chaque fleur s’évapore ainsi qu’un encensoir;*  
*Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu’on afflige;*  
*Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!*  
*Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir.*

*Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu’on afflige,*  
*Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir!*  
*Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir;*  
*Le soleil s’est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.*

*Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,*  
*Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige!*  
*Le soleil s’est noyé dans son sang qui se fige . . .*  
*Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostenoir!*

[Here comes the time when, vibrating on its stem,  
Each flower evaporates like a censer;  
The sounds and scents revolve in the evening air;  
Melancholy waltz and languorous vertigo!]

*Each flower evaporates like a censer;*  
*The violin trembles like a heart that is distressed;*  
*Melancholy waltz and languorous vertigo!*  
*The sky is sad and beautiful like a great altar.*

*The violin trembles like a heart that is distressed,*  
*A tender heart, which hates the vast, black nothingness!*  
*The sky is sad and beautiful like a great altar;*  
*The sun has drowned in its freezing blood.*
A tender heart, which hates the vast, black nothingness,
Collects all vestiges from the luminous past!
The sun has drowned in its freezing blood . . .
Your memory shines in me like a monstrance!

“Harmonie du soir” appears as part of the Apollonie Sabatier cycle from “Spleen et idéal.” Baudelaire wrote this poem as a pantoum, a Malaysian form that some earlier French poets, including Victor Hugo and Leconte de Lisle, had adopted in the nineteenth century. In the pantoum the second and fourth lines of each stanza become the first and third lines of the following stanza. Thus, Baudelaire’s four-stanza poem uses only ten different lines to form its total of sixteen, resulting in a lilting poetic form that alters the meanings of repeated lines based on their changing contexts. Each line is an alexandrine, although in this case Baudelaire did not define the caesuras with punctuation. The rhyme scheme here is abba within each stanza, which contradicts the abab rhyme scheme that was conventionally used in the pantoum. The use of this rhyme scheme requires the poem to contain only two rhyming syllables, a feature that adds to the text’s circular motion. Baudelaire also ignored the standard practice of repeating the first line of the poem as the closing line, which enabled him to avoid the pantoum’s traditional circular conclusion and end the poem somewhere other than where it began.

Like “Le Balcon,” the setting of this poem is the evening. The images in the poem primarily relate to the senses; Baudelaire included vivid visual images such as the flowers vibrating on their stems (lines 1–2), but he also used musical imagery, as in the waltz in lines 4 and 7 and the violin in lines 6 and 9, and of course in the title of the poem itself. The first

30 Ibid., 161.
stanza establishes a sense of movement, with the sounds and scents turning in the motion of a waltz. This movement is reinforced by the repetitive form of the poem and the alternation between “-oir” and “-ige” syllables. The melancholy of the waltz also provides insight into the general mood of the text. As part of the pantoum form, the word “melancholy” is repeated in the second stanza, where Baudelaire also introduced the words “distressed” and “sad” (to be repeated likewise in the third stanza).

Stanzas 1–3 of this poem are primarily descriptive. The first stanza establishes the overall sad mood and the motion of the poem, as well as the evening setting. The repeated line that begins the second stanza signals a continuation of the same mood. With the introduction of the “vast, black nothingness” and the sun drowned in blood in the third stanza, the mood intensifies beyond mere sadness to despair. Throughout these descriptive lines, no speaker or addressee emerges; Baudelaire avoided explicit reference to both characters until the last line of the poem. Thus, this poem appears to be an example of the suppression of the romantic ego, although Baudelaire did provide a clue to the emotional position of the poetic persona, the reference to the distressed heart first made in line 6.

When it is first mentioned, the heart serves as the secondary part of a simile that compares its beating to the sound of the violin. Through the placement of this image, Baudelaire maximized the effect of the pantoum form. In the third stanza line 6 is repeated as line 9, but here the heart, rather than the violin, becomes the primary image. In line 10 the reader learns how deep the heart’s distress is, although the nothingness that it hates has not yet been defined. The fourth stanza begins with the expected return of line 10, which leads to the new line 14. In this context the nothingness is the present, contrasted with the “luminous past” of line 14. As both the speaker and addressee finally make their appearance in the last line, the
connection is evident between the anonymous heart and the speaker, whose memory of the addressee is the only light in the dark sadness of the speaker’s heart. By connecting the heart and the speaker in the last line, Baudelaire associated the melancholy of the descriptive stanzas with the mood experienced by the speaker.

Religious imagery holds a prominent place in the poem; although Baudelaire used only three such images, the repetitive form intensifies their effect. In lines 2 and 5 the flowers and their scents are compared to a censer. The use of this image gives the reader a specific olfactory association for the scents in the air, as well as the pendular motion of the swinging of the censer. Other religious references, also used as sources of comparison, are the reposoir of lines 8 and 11 and the ostensor, the monstrance, of the final line of the poem. A reposoir is a temporary altar for holy relics, usually used in a procession. The ostensor, the monstrance, is a base, usually of gold or silver, used to display the consecrated host for the Eucharist. Baudelaire’s decision to use as metaphors two objects that hold sacred relics symbolizes the retention of memories as sacred things. In addition, the association between the addressee’s memory and a monstrance describes how significant the addressee is to the speaker: brilliantly beautiful, holding a place of prominence, and more sacred than any other thing. Overall the use of religious images elevates the mood of the poem and, with the final line, brings a connotation of worship to the memory of the addressee.

This poem does not allude to any skeleton of a progression of events, as “Le Balcon” does, but is instead a lyric expression of the speaker’s emotions. The mention of the distressed heart and the importance of the addressee’s memory implies that the relationship between

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37 Ibid., 154.
speaker and addressee has been one of love. This relationship is presumably part of the “luminous past” and separate from the present, which is characterized by the descriptive dark images. Thus, the persona seems consistent with that of “Le Balcon”—a lover whose relationship was happy in the past but now reflects only sadness.

“Le Jet d’eau”

Tes beaux yeux sont las, pauvre amante!
Reste longtemps, sans les rouvrir,
Dans cette pose nonchalante
Où t’a surprise le plaisir.
Dans la cour le jet d’eau qui jase
Et ne se tait ni nuit ni jour,
Entretient doucement l’extase
Où ce soir m’a plongé l’amour.

La gerbe épanouie
   En mille fleurs,
Où Phoebé réjouie
   Met ses couleurs,
Tombe comme une pluie
   De larges pleurs.

Ainsi ton âme qu’incendie
L’éclair brûlant des voluptés
S’élance, rapide et hardie,
Vers les vastes cieux enchantés.
Puis, elle s’épanche, mourante,
En un flot de triste langueur,
Qui par une invisible pente
Descend jusqu’au fond de mon cœur.

[refrain]

O toi, que la nuit rend si belle,
Qu’il m’est doux, penché vers tes seins,
D’écouter la plainte éternelle
Qui sanglote dans les bassins!
Lune, eau sonore, nuit bénie,
Arbres qui frissonnez autour,
Votre pure mélancolie
Est le miroir de mon amour.

[refrain]

Debussy’s refrain:

La gerbe d’eau qui berce
Ses mille fleurs,
Que la lune traverse
De ses paleurs,
Tombe comme une averse
De larges pleurs.

[Your beautiful eyes are weary, poor beloved!
Stay a long while, without reopening them,
In this nonchalant pose
Where pleasure surprised you.
In the courtyard the fountain that chatters
And is silent neither at night nor in daytime,
Sweetly maintains the ecstasy
Into which love plunged me tonight.

The spray blossoms
In a thousand flowers,
Where delighted Phoebe
Puts on her colors,
It falls like a shower
Of large tears.

Thus your soul that sets fire to
The burning light of voluptuousness
Soars, rapid and bold,
Toward the vast, enchanted heavens.
Then, it [the soul] is poured out, dying,
In a flood of sad languor,
Which by an invisible slope
Descends into the bottom of my heart.

[refrain]

Oh you, whom the night renders so beautiful,
How sweet it is to me, leaning toward your breasts,
To listen to the eternal lament
That sobs in the [fountain’s] basins!
Moon, sonorous water, blessed night,
Trees that tremble all around,
Your pure melancholy
Is the mirror of my love.

[refrain]

Debussy’s refrain:

The spray of water that rocks
Its thousand flowers,
That the moon passes
With its pallors,
[The water] Falls like a downpour
Of large tears.]

Baudelaire never published “Le Jet d’eau” as part of Les Fleurs du mal, although it appeared in 1866 in the “Galanteries” section of Les Épaves. According to F. W. Leakey, it is likely part of the one-third of the original poems that Baudelaire removed from the work prior to publication of the first edition. For this poem Baudelaire used a refrain form: three stanzas, each with eight lines of eight syllables per line, with a six-line refrain following each stanza. The syllabic pattern in the refrain alternates between lines of six and four syllables. The rhyme scheme is *ababbedc* in each stanza and *ababab* in the refrain.

The first stanza of this poem establishes its sensual mood. Here the speaker addresses the beloved in a way that indicates that the couple has recently ended a sexual encounter. The description of the fountain in the first stanza provides a vivid aural image of the soothing sound of the water, a familiar sound that fits the sensuality of the text.

The poem's nighttime setting, first mentioned in line 8, is consistent with the two poems already discussed. The refrain is connected to night by referring to Phoebe, who was associated

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with the moon goddess Artemis in Greek mythology. Debussy used the refrain as it appeared when the poem was published in *La Petite revue* in July 1865. In this version of the refrain, the mention of Phoebe is replaced by the moon itself, making the reference to nighttime clearer than in the refrain that appeared with the poem in *Les Épaves*.

The second stanza signifies a shift from pleasure to sadness, a change that is foreshadowed by the fountain’s tears in the refrain. In Debussy’s refrain, the sadness is even greater—a downpour rather than a shower. As the beloved’s soul reaches toward the heavens (perhaps a metaphor for orgasm), what is left is the sadness that descends into the speaker’s heart. The repetition of the refrain reinforces the presence of the fountain, which is not mentioned in the second stanza.

In the third stanza the feeling of sadness is intensified by changes in imagery relating to the fountain. Whereas the first stanza described the fountain as sweetly chattering, in the third stanza the fountain produces a sobbing lament. The speaker now addresses the surrounding elements of nature—the moon, the water, the trees, the night itself—and describes them as melancholy, a mood that matches the speaker’s love. Thus, the reflection of love must also be a reflection of sadness. From the recent sexual encounter arose immediate pleasure but also lasting melancholy. The final utterance of the refrain allows the reader to fully understand the fountain as a reflection of the speaker’s emotion. In the first stanza, the chattering fountain matches the speaker’s happiness, but the moods of both the fountain and the speaker change to

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39 Jacques Crépet and Georges Blin (eds.), *Les Fleurs du mal* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1968), 291. One word in Debussy’s version is different from that in *La Petite revue*. The fourth line of the refrain in this published version read “De ses lueurs,” but Debussy used “De ses paleurs.” Crépet and Blin do not have an explanation for Debussy’s altered version, although they wonder whether Debussy knew of another manuscript for the poem.
sadness as the text progresses. This persona is therefore another example of a lover whose mood shifts from pleasure to sadness over the course of the poem.

“Recueillement”

Sois sage, ô ma Douleur, et tiens-toi plus tranquille.
Tu réclamais le Soir; il descend; le voici:
Une atmosphère obscure enveloppe la ville,
Aux uns portant la paix, aux autres le souci.

Pendant que des mortels la multitude vile,
Sous le fouet du Plaisir, ce bourreau sans merci,
Va cueillir des remords dans la fête servile,
Ma Douleur, donne-moi la main; viens par ici,

Loin d’eux. Vois se pencher les défuntes Années,
Sur les balcons du ciel, en robes surannées;
Surgir du fond des eaux le Regret souriant;

Le Soleil moribond s’endormir sous une arche,
Et, comme un long linceul traînant à l’Orient,
Entends, ma chère, entends la douce Nuit qui marche.

[Be wise, oh my Sadness, and keep yourself quieter.
You were asking for the Night; it descends; it is here:
An obscure atmosphere envelops the city,
To some bringing peace, to others worry.

While the multitude of vile mortals,
Under the whip of Pleasure, this torturer without mercy,
Go to gather remorse in the slavish festival,
My Sadness, give me your hand; come here,

Far from them. See the past Years bending down,
On the balconies of the sky, in outdated robes;
[See] Regret, smiling, arise from the depths of the water;

[See] the dying Sun fall asleep under an arch,
And, like a long shroud dragging to the Orient,
Hear, my dearest, hear the sweet Night that approaches.]
Like “Le Jet d’eau,” “Recueillement” was not included in *Les Fleurs du mal* by Baudelaire, although it did appear as the first of the supplemental poems added to the posthumous third edition. This poem and the final Baudelaire selection are the only two sonnets that Debussy chose to set. “Recueillement” again displays the alexandrine verse form of twelve syllables per line. As will be discussed below, however, Baudelaire’s placement of the caesura is less conventional in this poem than in “Le Balcon.” In addition, the rhyme scheme for the poem, which deviates slightly from the traditional sonnet rhyme scheme, is as follows: *abab / abab / ccd / ede*. This pattern provides a considerable amount of sound repetition throughout the poem.

The title of the poem does not demonstrate an immediately clear connection to the text itself. The word “recueillement” is usually translated as a gathering or collection. An alternative translation is “meditation,” although with religious connotations of abandoning profane thoughts for pious ones. Baudelaire’s choice of this title is appropriate in both instances, because reminiscence serves as a central image of the poem, and because the poem as a whole relies on contrast between the speaker and the outside world. The title demonstrates a possible connection to “Harmonie du soir,” in which the heart collects memories of the past (line 14).

The poem gives no clue as to the speaker’s gender. Baudelaire does provide, however, a relationship between the speaker and an addressee: the speaker’s own sadness. Throughout the poem the speaker offers sadness comfort in language that would conventionally be reserved for a lover, such as addressing the sadness as “my dearest” or holding her hand.

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This fourth poem is once again set in the evening, and as the poem progresses, time passes from evening to night. The fourth line contains the first instance of contrast in the poem, in this case contrast between those who are calmed by the coming of the night and those who are made anxious by it. The second stanza elaborates on this contrast to show a distinction between the speaker and the rest of the world. As the world is “slavishly” seeking pleasure, the speaker is embracing sadness. This thought carries over into the sestet through a striking enjambment. Baudelaire placed the caesura of line 8 after the eighth syllable and carried the rest of the line into the sestet, where the caesura of line 9 appears after only two syllables. The fact that the enjambment comes at this particular point in the poem makes it especially striking, because the ninth line, known as the volta, traditionally signaled a shift in thought or emotion. If the poem were read aloud, the words “viens par ici, / Loin d’eux” would form their own group of six syllables, the conventional syllabic grouping within a line of the alexandrine.

The sestet continues with a metaphor comparing the sunset and the speaker’s memories of the past. As the sun sets, or “bends down,” the speaker is aware of regrets but is not distressed by them. Rather, the notion of regret smiling shows that for the speaker, pleasure is in the past and not in the present happiness that the rest of the world seeks. The sunset continues in the final tercet, which introduces images of death (the dying sun, the night approaching like a shroud). These images show both the finality of the end of day and the prominence given to the nighttime, that is, day has died, but night continues to thrive. Night’s arrival, which the speaker’s sadness had been requesting (see line 2), brings a new kind pleasure to both the speaker and sadness.

41 Ibid., 106.
Throughout the poem Baudelaire capitalized certain nouns to personify them as characters. This personification emphasizes the importance of these words in the text. “Douleur,” the speaker’s sadness, is the metaphorical beloved in this poem. Both “Soir” and “Nuit” are characters that bring peace and calm to the speaker and addressee; the dying “Soleil” also symbolizes the arrival of the night. Both “Regret” and “Années” represent the past, the source of the speaker’s happiness. All of these nouns perform actions associated with people, such as arriving, smiling, bending down, dying, and falling asleep. “Plaisir” is a clearly defined character, a merciless torturer, providing contrast between the desires of the speaker and those of humanity. Thus, these nouns take on a more important role than mere images; they perform actions and act as characters.

In this poem the persona gives no indication of being in a love relationship at any time. The reader infers that life’s events have made the speaker embrace sadness rather than seeking happiness in the world; however, those events are merely part of the past and not an explicit narrative. The beloved for the speaker is sadness itself, as evidenced by the language used to address her. Thus, the persona in this poem is a lover, but a lover of sadness, and a figure who lives in the past and apart from the rest of the world.

“La Mort des amants”

Nous aurons des lits pleins d’odeurs légères,
Des divans profonds comme des tombeaux,
Et d’étranges fleurs sur des étagères,
Écloses pour nous sous des cieux plus beaux.

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42 “Orient” is not included in this list because it is a proper noun. Crépet and Blin (356) note that in the manuscript, this word is not capitalized.
Usant à l’envi leurs chaleurs dernières,
Nos deux cœurs seront deux vastes flambeaux,
Qui réfléchiront leurs doubles lumières
Dans nos deux esprits, ces miroirs jumeaux.

Un soir fait de rose et de bleu mystique,
Nous échangerons un éclair unique,
Comme un long sanglot, tout chargé d’adieux;

Et plus tard un Ange, entr’ouvrant les portes,
Viendra ranimer, fidèle et joyeux,
Les miroirs ternis et les flammes mortes.

[We will have beds full of light odors,
Couches deep as tombs,
And strange flowers on shelves,
Blossoming for us under more beautiful skies.

Using their last warmth to the fullest,
Our two hearts will be two vast flames,
That will reflect their double lights
In our two spirits, these twin mirrors.

One night made of rose and mystic blue,
We will exchange a single flash,
Like a long sob, full of goodbyes;

And later an Angel, half-opening the doors,
Will come to reawaken, faithful and joyous,
The tarnished mirrors and the dead flames.]

“La Mort des amants” is the first poem in the section of *Les Fleurs du mal* entitled “La Mort.” This final poem of Debussy’s work is, as mentioned above, the second sonnet in the set. In this case the lines are decasyllabic rather than alexandrines. The poem has a repetitive rhyme scheme identical to that of “Recueillement”: \textit{abab} / \textit{abab} / \textit{ccd} / \textit{ede}.

The speaker of this poem describes the events that will happen at the death of the lovers, of whom the speaker is one. Lines 1 through 11 encompass this description. The poem contains language that evokes sexual ecstasy, including the lovers’ beds (line 1), the comparison
of the lovers’ hearts to flames (second quatrains), and the exchange of a “single flash” (line 10). Throughout the description the images are vivid and sensual, encompassing the scents, colors, and objects that make up the setting of the poem. The first tercet also points out that the death of the lovers will occur at night. As in the other poems that Debussy chose, night is the catalyst for the central point of the poem.

Of the five poems, this one is most directly a narrative, although the speaker describes future events rather than past ones. After the first quatrains establishes the scene, the second begins the series of events as the speaker describes the joining of the lovers. Here their hearts are made equal to the two flames, which are reflected in the mirrors that represent their spirits. The “narrative” continues in the sestet, as the speaker tells how the lovers will die. In the closing tercet an angel reawakens the lovers’ spirits (“tarnished mirrors”) and hearts (“dead flames”) in the afterlife. The angel represents sudden and mystical events, and its presence provides the opportunity for occurrences that cannot be explained by physical laws. The angel allows the lovers to be revived and opens the possibility for future, undescribed events that follow their death.

For Katherine Bergeron the death of the lovers is metaphorical, a representation of sexual ecstasy described as death. Certain elements in the poem reinforce this idea; for example, in line 2 the speaker describes their beds as being “deep as” tombs, not actual tombs. Additionally, the first tercet does not identify anything that serves as a physical cause of death. In the context of the preceding sections of Les Fleurs du mal, however, where death is

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43 Katherine Bergeron, “The Echo, the Cry, the Death of Lovers,” 19th-Century Music 18 (Fall 1994): 142.
44 Ibid., 140.
ultimately the ideal, it seems plausible that Baudelaire intended to describe an actual death. It is important to note, however, that the speaker does not die over the course of the poem; if that were the case, no one would survive to utter the final stanza. As stated above, the narrative foreshadows future events.

Although the speaker of this poem is one of the lovers to whom the text refers, the persona in this case assumes a role separate from that of the speaker. This situation places “La Mort des amants” in a position that contrasts the other poems chosen by Debussy. The persona provides the speaker with future knowledge of what will happen to the lovers, knowledge that the speaker would not otherwise possess. The persona also describes an account of sexual pleasure and refers implicitly to the positive view of death held by Baudelaire. The persona, therefore, is aware of the idea that death can bring happiness and uses that viewpoint as a metaphor for happiness in love. A persona who would speak metaphorically and provide the words for the speaker of the poem must be considered to be a poet, although the persona should not be conflated with the figure of Baudelaire himself.

Paul Verlaine

Verlaine and the Romances sans paroles

Paul Verlaine was born in the city of Metz, in northeastern France, in 1844. He was the only child of a French army officer who moved his family several times before settling in Paris in 1851. In 1862 Verlaine began studying law at the École de Droit, but in 1863 he left school and entered the civil service. He spent his days first working as a clerk at an insurance company and then at the City Hall; in the evenings, however, he socialized with the literary circles in Paris and wrote poetry.
Verlaine’s first poem to be published was “Monsieur Prudhomme,” which appeared in *La Revue du progrès moral, littéraire, scientifique et artistique* in August 1863. His first published collection of poetry, *Poèmes saturniens*, appeared in 1866. These poems were followed in 1870 by the *Fêtes galantes*; that same year Verlaine married the seventeen-year-old Mathilde Mauté, who came from a well-off bourgeois family. Although Mathilde’s father was described by Edmond Lepelletier as a retired solicitor, Mathilde stated that he had no career but rather supported his family from the inheritance he had received from his parents.45

Soon after Verlaine and Mathilde married, the poet was called to serve in the Franco-Prussian War. After France’s defeat he sided with the Commune, a rebellious group who seized power from the Prussians but eventually suffered defeat in May 1871. Out of fear of retaliation, Verlaine then left Paris with his pregnant wife; they stayed in hiding for approximately three months.

In September 1871 Verlaine received a letter that forever changed his life and his marriage: a request from the younger poet Arthur Rimbaud for help in getting established in Paris. Verlaine invited Rimbaud to come to Paris and stay with him and Mathilde; by the following year the two poets had established an extremely close, although stormy, relationship. They frequently parted ways, only to be reunited shortly thereafter. In July 1872 Verlaine and Rimbaud began a year spent traveling together, primarily in London and Brussels. Their relationship continued to be precarious, and as a culmination, when Rimbaud threatened to leave in July 1873, Verlaine shot him, wounding him in the wrist. He was arrested and spent eighteen months in prison, first in Brussels and then in Mons.

While he was in prison, Verlaine’s wife obtained legal separation. He had never wanted to abandon Mathilde completely, despite his closeness to Rimbaud. Verlaine was released from prison in January 1875, and with the end of both his marriage and his relationship with Rimbaud, he found himself alone. After spending two years teaching French in England, he returned to France in 1877 and divided his remaining years between the French countryside and in Paris. He continued to write and gain literary recognition, including being named France’s “Prince des poètes” upon the death of Leconte de Lisle, the previous holder of the title. His daily life, however, was characterized by drunkenness and debauchery, and in 1896 he died in poverty at the home of a prostitute. Despite his destitute state at the end of his life, the French celebrated his memory with a large public funeral.

The collection entitled *Romances sans paroles* had a fairly long and complicated evolution. It is not known exactly when all the poems—a total of twenty-three—were written. Two of the future “Ariettes oubliées” were published in *Renaissance littéraire et artistique*: “C’est l’extase” on 18 May 1872, under the title “Romance sans paroles,” and “Le piano que baise un main frêle” on 29 June 1872, entitled “Ariette.” About two-thirds of the poems were probably completed by September 1872. On 24 September 1872 Verlaine sent a letter to the future publisher of the work, Edmond Lepelletier, stating that he wished to publish a collection of poems entitled *Romances sans paroles*. He did not indicate how he chose the title, the standard French translation of Mendelssohn’s *Songs without Words*. The concept of poetry without words seems oxymoronic but evidently alludes to the symbolist ideal of suggestive

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verse. As Gretchen Schultz states, “Verlaine abandoned the search for meaning in words and gave himself free rein to explore the most musical aspects of poetry, sound and rhythm.”

Verlaine completed all of the poems by April 1873, but Romances sans paroles was not published until almost a year later. While he was in prison, Verlaine sent repeated letters to Lepelletier asking for information about publication of the poems. Despite his urgent requests that they be printed, they did not appear until late in March of 1874 (the exact date is not known). Verlaine had requested that the work be dedicated to Rimbaud; he knew, however, that Lepelletier would object to this dedication, and in fact the publisher removed it.

Lepelletier encountered difficulty in publishing the Romances sans paroles. Contact with multiple publishers in Paris found no one willing to print the work. He resorted to printing the poems on the press at the underground newspaper Le Peuple souverain, for which he wrote. Consequently, the edition, as Verlaine remarked, resembled a political or medical pamphlet. The three hundred exemplaires that made up the first printing were not offered for public sale. Rather, Lepelletier sent copies of the printed work to friends of Verlaine, famous authors such as Victor Hugo and Théodore de Banville, and several journals and critics. Despite Lepelletier’s endeavors, the poems achieved little recognition for their author, who was the object of moral

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48 Hillery, Romances sans paroles, 1, 12, 16.
50 Hillery, Romances sans paroles, 17.
prejudice because of his imprisonment and his homosexual relationship with Rimbaud. In 1887 Léon Vanier published a second edition, which had much greater popular appeal; twice as many copies were printed as of the first edition. Upon publication of the second edition, Lepelletier wrote in an article in *L’Echo de Paris* (1 August issue) that *Romances sans paroles* was “one of the most curious and most charming books that exist.”

**The Structure and Character of *Romances sans paroles***

As of early December 1872, the work included four sections: “Romances sans paroles,” “Paysages belges,” “Nuit falote,” and “Birds in the Night” (titled in English by Verlaine). By the time of publication Verlaine had altered the structure. The first section became the “Ariettes oubliées”; it was followed by “Paysages Belges,” but “Nuit falote” had disappeared from the work, with the exception of the sixth “Ariette,” which came from that rejected section. “Birds in the Night” became the third section, and the work ended with the new section of English-influenced poetry entitled “Aquarelles” (Watercolors).

In its final form, the section entitled “Ariettes oubliées” contains nine numbered poems. These were probably completed by June 1872.

The reason for Verlaine’s choice of title may be explained by a letter written to Rimbaud on 2 April 1872, in which he thanked Rimbaud for sending a piece of music: “It is charming, the *Ariette oubliée*, in words and music! . . . Thank

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54 Zayed, 33. “. . . un des livres les plus curieux et les plus charmants qui soient.”


56 Ibid., 104.
you for this thoughtful delivery!” Pierre Brunel suggests that this piece may have been an ariette by Favart from the opéra comique “Ninette à la cour.” This ariette, which appeared in an 1822 collection of opéra comique excerpts found among Rimbaud’s possessions, and it contains the words that form the introductory epigraph of “C’est l’extase.” As titles, both Romances sans paroles and “Ariettes oubliées” come from musical contexts, which is consistent with the nature of the work as a whole. In addition to frequent musical references within the poems themselves, the title “Birds in the Night” also had a connection to music, as the title of a popular cradle song by Arthur Sullivan, although Verlaine left no explanation as to why he chose this title for the section.

These poems possess a pervading air of sadness, with many references to love, the heart, and the soul. The atmospheric, suggestive quality of Verlaine’s symbolist style is prevalent throughout the “Ariettes oubliées.” Hillery calls these poems “poetry of sensation”; in other words, they are not meant to express philosophical meaning or moral lessons, only “fleeting moments of feeling.” As a way of amplifying the mood of the poems, four of the “Ariettes” use epigraphs as introductions, as mentioned earlier in the case of “C’est l’extase.”

The six poems in the section “Paysages belges” were written in the summer and fall of 1872, while Verlaine and Rimbaud were traveling together in Belgium. The mood of these poems is decidedly happier, and the imagery resembles that of romantic poetry rather than


58 Ibid., 19–20.


60 Hillery, Romances sans paroles, 43.
symbolism (as was the case in the “Ariettes” section). The reader has the impression that the poems form a travelogue, a description of what the two poets may have seen on their journeys. Likewise, when compared with the “Ariettes,” these poems generally have simpler sentence structures and shorter line lengths, characteristics that contradict typical symbolist stylistic features.

Verlaine wrote “Birds in the Night” in September and October of 1872. “Birds in the Night” is actually a single poem divided into seven sections, each with three stanzas. Charles Chadwick characterized “Birds in the Night” as an autobiographical reflection on Verlaine’s marriage and his relationship with Rimbaud, and other critics and scholars have generally agreed. David Hillery dismisses this section as oversentimental and self-centered, its apparent primary goal being to exonerate Verlaine from blame in the failure of his marriage.

The seven “Aquarelles” were written in early 1873, during Verlaine’s travels with Rimbaud in England. The title of the section (Watercolors) seems to indicate that Verlaine wanted to emphasize suggestion in these poems, and in fact some of them resemble the symbolist style of the “Ariettes.” The other poems in the section, however, mirror the descriptive manner of the “Paysages belges.” For example, the first two poems, “Green” and “Spleen,” present atmosphere and emotion in a suggestive way, while other poems, such as “Streets” and “A Poor Young Shepherd,” return to the simpler imagery and style of the Belgian poems. Verlaine alluded to English influences on these poems (most evidently in the titles); the lighter poems in this section parallel the travelogue quality of the “Paysages belges,” which may indicate the

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61 Chadwick, 41–43.
62 Hillery, Romances sans paroles, 94.
relationship between England and the texts. The poem “Child Wife” follows in the same vein as “Birds in the Night,” as a similar attempt to deny fault in his failed marriage. Thus, this section contains a mixture of description and emotional expression.

Unlike Les Fleurs du mal, scholars have not described Romances sans paroles as having any narrative or dramatic qualities. Although the poems could be grouped into three general categories based on their mood and style (suggestive/symbolist; descriptive/travel-related; and reflective/autobiographical), Verlaine compiled a collection rather than a dramatic whole. The poems are not connected in any way other than similarities of character or emotion.

**Poetic Analysis**

“C’est l’extase” (Ariette I)

C’est l’extase langoureuse,
C’est la fatigue amoureuse,
C’est tous les frissons des bois
Parmi l’étreinte des brises,
C’est, vers les ramures grises,
Le chœur des petites voix.

O le frêle et frais murmure!
Cela gazouille et susurre,
Cela ressemble au cri doux
Que l’herbe agitée expire . . .
Tu dirais, sous l’eau qui vire,
Le roulis sourd des cailloux.

Cette âme qui se lamente
En cette plainte dormante,
C’est la nôtre, n’est-ce pas?
La mienne, dis, et la tienne,
Dont s’exhale l’humble antienne
Par ce tiède soir, tout bas?

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63 Ibid., 99.
Here is languorous ecstasy,
Here is amorous fatigue,
Here is all the shivering of the wood
Among the embrace of breezes,
Here is, toward the gray branches,
The choir of small voices.

Oh the frail and fresh murmur!
That babbling and whispering,
That resemblance to the sweet cry
That the agitated grass breathes out,
You would say, under the water that swells,
The muffled rolling of pebbles.

This soul that complains
In this sleeping lament,
It is ours, isn’t it?
Mine, say, and yours,
Out of which the humble antiphon is breathed
Altogether softly, in this warm evening?

This poem, the first in the *Ariettes oubliées*, follows a strophic form, like all of the other poems in the *Romances sans paroles*. In this case the poem is composed of three stanzas of six lines each. Each line contains seven syllables, an example of Verlaine’s use of the *impair* (i.e., poetic lines with an odd number of syllables), mentioned in Chapter 1. The rhyme scheme is *aabccb* in each stanza.

“Thisestone” begins with the epigraph “Le vent dans la plaine / Suspend son haleine” ("The wind in the plain suspends its breath"), taken, as mentioned above, from a song by Favart. The relationship between the epigraph and the poem is found in the presence of sounds and specifically words related to wind or breath. The poem contains numerous examples, including breezes, murmurs, babbling, whispering, rolling pebbles, the breath of the grass, and exhalation. Frequently these words include /s/ sounds, as in “frissons” and “susurre,” which resonate with the many other /s/ sounds in the text. These and other repeated sounds maximize the aural
quality of the text and exemplify the symbolists’ emphasis on the sounds of words themselves, in this case as onomatopoeia.

Symbolist techniques also appear in the poem’s vague approach to meaning. Verlaine provided no setting in terms of place or time, until the mention of “soir” at the end of the poem. The beginning of the poem leaves open the subject of the poem, and the presence of speaker and addressee is equally unclear. The opening line, “Here is languorous ecstasy,” highlights the poem’s ambiguity; the word “here” indicates no setting and no specific characters observing the atmosphere that Verlaine describes. The sense of ambiguity continues until the third stanza, favoring evocative language over definite meaning.

The first stanza establishes a mood of calm and relaxation by equating love and ecstasy with the rustling of leaves in the wind and other sounds of nature. In the second stanza the speaker compares the murmur of the wind to other natural sounds: the breath of the grass (also a reference to the wind) and pebbles rolling in a stream. The speaker first mentions the addressee in this stanza, stating that “You” would compare the wind to the rolling pebbles. The addressee does not actually do so; the speaker merely presumes that the addressee would agree with the comparison of the wind to these other natural elements.

In the third stanza the poem’s meaning becomes clearer. The sounds of the wind and nature become the lament of a soul that belongs to the speaker and the addressee (“ours, mine, and yours”). As the soul exhales its antiphon (a musical term), the reader connects the sadness of the soul with the whispering of the wind. Thus, the poem nearly reaches its conclusion before the meaning of the opening line becomes clear. The speaker realizes the depths of the soul’s sadness only as the lines are being spoken, creating a moment of revelation and surprise.
The persona of the poem is difficult to pin down. If the soul belongs even in part to the speaker, then the persona must share in the sadness heard in the lament. However, Verlaine provided no other information about this person. We do not know the speaker’s gender, nor do we know anything regarding any events that would have brought about the soul’s lament. The only inference to be made is that the speaker and the addressee are linked in some way so that they share a soul as well as its sadness. Thus, the persona is a figure who shares in a relationship and has just realized that the sad sounds of the surrounding natural setting actually represent the sounds of a lament coming in part from the persona him/herself.

“Il pleure dans mon cœur” (Ariette III)

Il pleure dans mon cœur
Comme il pleut sur la ville,
Quelle est cette langueur
Qui pénètre mon cœur?

O bruit doux de la pluie
Par terre et sur les toits!
Pour un cœur qui s’ennuie
O le chant de la pluie!

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Il pleure sans raison
Dans ce cœur qui s’écœure.
Quoi! nulle trahison?
Ce deuil est sans raison.

10

C’est bien la pire peine
De ne savoir pourquoi,
Sans amour et sans haine,
Mon cœur a tant de peine!

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64 At some point before publication of Debussy’s song setting, the word “chant” was changed to “bruit.” See Marie Rolf, “Des Ariettes (1888) aux Ariettes oubliées (1903),” Cahiers Claude Debussy 12–13 (1988–89): 39. Rolf states that Debussy changed the word, but when the change took place is unknown. The only surviving manuscript shows text that matches Verlaine’s. The 1888 edition, however, includes the changed word. See additional discussion in Chapter 5.
[It weeps in my heart  
Like it rains in the city.  
What is this languor  
That penetrates my heart?]

Oh sweet sound of the rain  
On the earth and on the roofs  
For a heart that is bored  
Oh the song of the rain!

It weeps without reason  
In this heart that feels disheartened.  
What! no betrayal?  
This bereavement is without reason.

It is indeed the worst pain  
Not to know why,  
Without love and without hatred,  
My heart is suffering so much.]

“Il pleure dans mon cœur” is a four-stanza poem with a symmetrical form. Each stanza contains four lines. Within the rhyme scheme abaa in each stanza the first and last lines of each stanza end with the same word.

Like the first poem, this one begins with an epigraph, which reads: “Il pleut doucement sur la ville” (“It rains sweetly on the city”). The published edition lists the author of this epigraph as Rimbaud, although the exact source of the text is not known. The epigraph poses the question of whether Verlaine meant to imply that the two poets’ relationship impacted the poem; although this connection is certainly possible, nothing in the poem confirms such a connection. The subject of the epigraph, however, has a clear relationship to the poem, which compares the actual rain to the sadness “raining”—as tears—in the speaker’s heart. To form this comparison Verlaine juxtaposed the verb pleurer (to weep) with the verb pleuvoir (to rain), creating a strong visual image for the speaker’s sadness.

65 Hillery, Romances sans paroles, 76.
The speaker’s heart, which directly or indirectly serves as the focus of the action in each stanza, is the central character in the poem. The sound of the word itself appears several times, in the multiple statements of the word “cœur,” as the root of the word “s’écœure,” and in the rhyming words “pleure” and “langueur.” In the first stanza “cœur” is the last word of the first and last lines, and it thus frames the stanza as the location of the metaphorical rain and the penetrating languor. The second stanza focuses on the rain as a source of comfort for a bored heart, which, by indirect reference, the reader infers to be the speaker’s heart.

The third stanza brings a shift of mood, as the speaker questions why the heart is sad. The speaker states that the sadness is senseless; the heart simply appears bored rather than betrayed. The final stanza concludes that suffering is worse when one does not know its cause. Thus, the unexplained sadness simply provides an atmospheric context that contrasts the speaker’s lack of emotion. This poem takes place in a moment when the speaker’s heart experiences no feeling at all—as the poem states, without love and without hate. At first sadness appears to be the primary emotion of the poem, but in fact the heart’s unexplained languor arises more from boredom and bewilderment than from emotion.

This poem represents a true lyric moment—a description of the speaker’s mood with no element of a narrative. The speaker does not know what caused the sadness and therefore does not describe events that could have led to these emotions. The speaker’s heart is also isolated from other characters, with no addressee present in the poem. The persona experiences a specific mood—sadness—without an explanation of its cause. The emotion seems to be atmospheric, a parallel to the rain.

“L’ombre des arbres” (Ariette IX)

L’ombre des arbres dans la rivière embrumée
Meurt comme de la fumée,
Tandis qu’en l’air, parmi les ramures réelles,
    Se plaignent les tourterelles.

Combien, ô voyageur, ce paysage blême
    Te mira blême toi-même,
Et que tristes pleuraient dans les hautes feuillées
    Tes espérances noyées!

[The shadow of the trees in the misty river
    Dies away like smoke,
While in the air, among the real branches,
    The turtle doves complain.

How much, oh traveler, this pallid landscape
    Reflected your own pallor
And how sadly used to weep in the high boughs
    Your drowned hopes!]

“L’ombre des arbres,” with its total of eight lines, is the shortest poem in the “Ariettes oubliées.” Verlaine frequently employed lines of varying lengths within a single poem; in this poem lines of twelve and seven syllables alternate. Each stanza employs the aabb rhyme scheme.

Again Verlaine introduced his poem with an epigraph. In this case he chose a longer excerpt from the *Lettres satiriques et amoureuses* of Cyrano de Bergerac: “Le rossignol, qui du haut d’une branche se regarde dedans, croit être tombé dans la rivière. Il est au sommet d’un chêne et toutefois il a peur de se noyer” (“The nightingale, who looks down from high in the branches, believes he will fall in the river. He is at the top of an oak tree and is always afraid of drowning”). The epigraph not only employs parallel imagery—the bird, the river, the tree—but also expresses a mood of melancholy that corresponds to the mood of the poem.

Rather than focusing on the emotions of the speaker, Verlaine centered this poem around the addressee. He provided little information, however, about this figure. The text indicates
that sadness dominates the mood of the poem; the atmosphere established by the first stanza’s mist and shadows and the lament of the turtle doves reflects this emotion. In the second stanza the addressee is described as a traveler and as one who has experienced a profound sadness that mirrored the mood established in the first stanza.

The poem creates a conundrum in terms of its tenses. The present tense in the first stanza indicates that the speaker is describing a scene in its current state. The address to the traveler, however, takes place in past tenses (passé simple and imparfait). The text implies that the speaker and the traveler have visited the same place more than once, and at some point in the past the atmosphere of that place reflected the traveler’s ongoing sadness.

The speaker of the poem is someone who knows of the traveler’s experiences. Thus, the persona may be an acquaintance or companion of the traveler, or perhaps the traveler is the persona, addressing himself. Since Verlaine wrote this poem while traveling with Rimbaud, the unhappy experiences of Verlaine’s life seem to have influenced the mood of this lyric persona. Therefore, the persona of this poem reflects on the experiences of the traveler in poetic form, whether the speaker is the traveler or his or her acquaintance.

“Chevaux de bois”

Romance sans paroles version

Tournez, tournez, bons chevaux de bois,  
Tournez cent tours, tournez mille tours,  
Tournez souvent et tournez toujours,  
Tournez, tournez au son des hautbois.

Le gros soldat, la plus grosse bonne  
Sont sur vos dos comme dans leur chambre;  
Car, en ce jour, au bois de la Cambre,  
Les maîtres sont tous deux en personne.

Sagesse version

L’enfant tout rouge et la mère blanche  
Le gars en noir et la fille en rose  
L’une à la chose et l’autre à la pose,  
Chacun se paie un sou de dimanche.
Tournez, tournez, chevaux de leur cœur,
Tandis qu'autour de tous vos tournois
Clignote l’œil de filou sournois,
Tournez au son du piston vainqueur.

C’est ravissant comme ça vous soûle,
D’aller ainsi dans ce cirque bête!
Bien dans le ventre et mal dans la tête,
Du mal en masse et du bien en foule.

Tournez, tournez, sans qu’il soit besoin
D'user jamais de nuls éperons
Pour commander à vos galops ronds,
Tournez, tournez, sans espoir de foin.

Et dépêchez, chevaux de leur âme:
Déjà, voici que la nuit qui tombe
Va réunir pigeon et colombe,
Loin de la foire et loin de madame.

Tournez, tournez! le ciel en velours
D'astres en or se vêt lentement.
Voici partir l'amante et l'amant.
Tournez au son joyeux des tambours.

[Turn, turn, good wooden horses,
Turn a hundred turns, turn a thousand turns,
Turn often and turn always,
Turn, turn to the sound of the oboes.

The fat soldier, the fattest maid
Are on your back as in their room;
For, on this day, in the Bois de la Cambre
The masters are both themselves.

Turn, turn, horses of their heart,
While around all your turning
Flickers the eye of rascal cunning,
Turn to the sound of the conquering piston.

It is ravishing how it intoxicates you
To go like that in this nonsensical circus!
Good in the stomach and sick in the head,
Sick in the crowd but well in the mob.

Turn, turn, without ever needing
To use any spurs,
For urging on your circular gallops,
Turn, turn, without hope of hay.

C’est étonnant comme ça vous soûle,
D’aller ainsi dans ce cirque bête!
Rien dans le ventre et mal dans la tête,
Du mal en masse et du bien en foule.

Tournez, dadas, etc.

Et dépêchez, chevaux de leur âme:
Déjà, voici que sonne à la soupe
La nuit qui tombe et chasse la troupe
De gais buveurs que leur soif affame.

L’église tinte un glas tristement.

The child all red and the mother white,
The lad in black and the girl in pink,
One doing his thing and the other one resting,
Each spends a Sunday’s pennyworth.
And hurry, horses of their soul:  
Already, see that the night that falls  
Is going to reunite the pigeon and dove,  
Far from the fair and far from the mistress.

Turn, turn, the velvet sky  
Of golden stars dresses slowly.  
See the lovers departing.  
Turn to the joyous sound of the drums.

The church sadly rings a knell.

For his songs Debussy chose only “Chevaux de bois” from the “Paysages belges” section. He first composed the song using the Romances sans paroles version but later revised it using a version of the poem that appeared in Verlaine’s later poetry collection Sagesse (1880). This analysis will highlight the ways in which the altered text affects the meaning of the poem; the musical consequences of this revision will be discussed in Chapter 5. This poem, with stanzas of four nine-syllable lines, uses a semi-refrain form. The subject of the stanzas alternates between the horses on the merry-go-round and the events that happen nearby. Each stanza that features the horses begins with the words “Tournez, tournez,” with the exception of the fifth stanza, where Verlaine eventually replaced the second “tournez” with the word “dadas,” a child’s word for horses, in the later version. This repetition creates a turning effect that mirrors the text of the poem. In some cases Verlaine intensified the effect, as in the first stanza, where each line begins with “Tournez.” Each stanza has four lines of nine syllables each, and the rhyme scheme in each stanza is abba.

The poem begins with an epigraph from the second stanza of Victor Hugo’s 1828 poem “Le Pas d’armes du roi Jean”: “Par Saint-Gille, / Viens-nous-en, / Mon agile / Alezan” (“By

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60 Rolf, “Ariettes,” 29. The analysis in this study does not take into account two additional stanzas that Verlaine added, between the original fourth and fifth stanzas. Debussy chose not to incorporate them into his song, perhaps because their overtly political content would have drastically altered the tone of his song.
Saint Giles, come along, my agile Alezan”). Joanna Richardson states that Verlaine wrote this poem based on a merry-go-round that he saw in a fairground in the Brussels suburb of Saint-Gilles. The Bois de la Cambre mentioned in the poem, a park in Brussels that still exists, seems the likely location for the merry-go-round. A second connection between the epigraph and the poem emerges in Hugo’s use of the word “Alezan,” which describes a tawny-colored horse.

The first stanza adopts a more straightforward and less symbolist style than the poems in the “Ariettes oubliées” section, and this manner of description will continue throughout the poem, as the speaker describes the people encountered at the merry-go-round. In the second stanza of the Sagesse version Verlaine replaced the description of two lovers with a more innocent description of children and their parents spending a Sunday in the park.

The third stanza returns to the circular motion of the horses, with a reference to the indecent activities that occur in the fairgrounds. The fourth stanza describes the dizziness created by the merry-go-round. These stanzas serve to elaborate on the scene of the poem.

The fifth stanza contributes to the turning motion of the poem in its vivid description of the constant and involuntary movement of the mechanical horses. In the sixth stanza the speaker introduces an element of narrative, as the horses become a parallel for the souls of the crowd. As night falls, the people leave the merry-go-round for other activities. Here Verlaine made the pigeon and dove a metaphor for the lovers; in the later version he again changed the reference to the lovers to describe instead the crowd going home for dinner.

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67 Richardson, 93. Verlaine dated the poem “Champ de foire de Saint-Gilles, août 1872.”
In the final stanza Verlaine discontinued the alternation of subjects; the introductory “Tournez, tournez” now refers not to the horses but to the night sky. The tone of this stanza adds a romanticized quality that the rest of the poem lacks. In the *Sagesse* version Verlaine replaced the final mention of the lovers in line 27 with a sad church bell. This alteration brings a hint of emotion that had not been present in the poem up to that point. As David Hillery observes, the first version of Verlaine’s poem remains emotionally detached and even mechanical, with a rather blunt description of the lovers and their activities. The later version introduces a greater depth of feeling with this single line. The sadness of the church bell is incongruous when followed by the “joyous drums,” whose presence Verlaine does not explain. The two sound images and emotions contradict each other, providing an open-ended conclusion to the poem.

The persona of this poem is not a participant in the action being described; he or she merely observes the scene and comments on it. Because the persona seems to be able to cause the horses to turn, however, as evidenced by the repeated use of the imperative, the persona of the first version appears to be the carousel operator, who observes the events around the carousel throughout the workday. To this figure the observed action would serve as a metaphor for the world as a whole—life as it occurs in the park resembles life in general. In the *Sagesse* version, the persona is more naïve and almost childlike in the style of description, and Verlaine added merely the subtlest emotional element at the close of the poem. In this case there is evidence, including the use of the word “dadas,” that the persona is a child observing the carousel. Primarily, however, this child speaks in a poetic voice, without the cynicism seen in the first version’s persona.

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“Green”

Voici des fruits, des fleurs, des feuilles et des branches,
Et puis voici mon cœur, qui ne bat que pour vous.
Ne le déchirez pas avec vos deux mains blanches
Et qu’à vos yeux si beaux l’humble présent soit doux.

J’arrive tout couvert encore de rosée
Que le vent du matin vient glacer à mon front.
Souffrez que ma fatigue, à vos pieds reposée,
Rêve des chers instants qui la délasseront.

Sur votre jeune sein laissez rouler ma tête
Toute sonore encore de vos derniers baisers;
Laissez-la s’apaiser de la bonne tempête,
Et que je dorme un peu puisque vous reposez.

[Here are fruits, flowers, leaves, and branches,
And then here is my heart, which beats only for you.
Do not tear it with your two white hands
And may this modest gift be sweet to your beautiful eyes.

I arrive fully covered in dew,
Which the morning wind freezes on my forehead.
I beg that my fatigue, resting at your feet,
May dream of the dear moments that will refresh it.

On your young breast let my head roll
Still resounding with your last kisses;
Let it be soothed from this good storm,
And let me sleep a little while you rest.]

Among the Verlaine poems that Debussy chose to set, “Green” is the only one to employ
the alexandrine. Although critics often stress Verlaine’s experimental approach to form, he
regularly used the alexandrine. This poem comprises three stanzas, each with the rhyme
scheme abab, making “Green” a rather conventional poem. Even the placement of the caesuras

Hillery (Music and Poetry, 48–57) describes Verlaine’s use of the alexandrine in detail. His handling of the
alexandrine was not always conventional; in fact, in 1896 various critics writing in La Plume assessed Verlaine as
having “liberated” the alexandrine (57).
in the lines, which for Baudelaire was an opportunity to reject the traditional approach, does not depart from the usual pattern of 6 + 6 syllables in each line. The poem thus displays an overall more romantic aesthetic than most of Verlaine’s poetry, although the suggestive character maintains the poem’s symbolist quality, as well.

This poem and the next, “Spleen,” are the first two in the “Aquarelles” section of the Romances sans paroles. As mentioned earlier, Verlaine ascribed an English influence to this section of poems, most noticeable here in the titles. No geographic or cultural references in either of these poems mark them as particularly English. The title “Green” perhaps refers to the objects from nature mentioned in the first line of the poem.

In both form and subject matter “Green” resembles Baudelaire’s poetry more than the symbolists’. The first stanza establishes a speaker, an addressee, and the presence of a love relationship. In line 2 the speaker mentions “mon cœur,” the heart that beats only for the addressee. This stanza contains an element of pleading, especially in line 3, which may show the influence of Verlaine’s relationship with Rimbaud. The poem itself gives no indication of the gender of the speaker, although the addressee could be characterized as feminine, based on imagery such as the white hands, the beautiful eyes, and the young breast. Regardless of gender, the close relationship between the two characters is evident.

In the second stanza the speaker “arrives,” apparently after the storm mentioned in the third stanza. The storm presumably serves as a metaphor for a difficult period in the lovers’ relationship. Throughout the poem the comparison between nature and love expresses the speaker’s feelings in the aftermath of this storm. In the second stanza the speaker shows lingering signs of the metaphorical storm and seeks comfort from the addressee, presumably in a place sheltered from the storm.
In the third stanza the speaker appeals to the addressee in a way that again suggests rest and comfort after the storm. The recent kisses indicate that, unlike the lovers in most of the Baudelaire poems, these lovers are happy. In this case the persona is a lover who has found happiness with the beloved now that the couple’s suffering in the relationship has passed.

“Spleen”

Les roses étaient toutes rouges,
Et les lierres étaient tout noirs.

Chère, pour peu que tu te bouges,
Renaissent tous mes désespoirs.

Le ciel était trop bleu, trop tendre,
La mer trop verte et l’air trop doux.

Je crains toujours,—ce qu’est d’attendre!—
Quelque fuite atroce de vous.

Du houx à la feuille vernie
Et du luisant buis je suis las,

Et de la campagne infinie
Et de tout, fors de vous, hélas!

[The roses were all red,
And the ivy was all black.

Dear, if hardly you move,
All my despairs are reborn.

The sky was too blue, too tender,
The sea too green and the air too sweet.

I still fear,—this is what waiting is!—
Some cruel escape on your part.

Of holly with its polished leaves
And of the shiny boxwood I am weary,
And of the endless countryside,  
And of all, except you, alas!]

Like “Green,” “Spleen” is a twelve-line poem, but in this case Verlaine arranged the lines into six two-line stanzas with a rhyme scheme of ab / ab / cd / cd / ef / ef. Each line has eight syllables.

The title of the poem implies that the speaker suffers from ennui. The first stanza describes elements of nature in a way that suggests permanence; Verlaine used the imparfait to show the unchanging character of the roses and the ivy. The second stanza reveals the speaker’s despair and fear of abandonment by the addressee. The third stanza returns to a description of nature in the imparfait, followed by a new assertion of the speaker’s fears in the fourth stanza. The speaker’s emotions have intensified by this point in the poem, so that the lover’s abandonment appears inevitable, as if the speaker fears waiting for that moment more than the doubt that it will indeed come.

The true ennui appears in the fifth and sixth stanzas; the speaker is bored with nature and the countryside, and in fact with everything but the beloved. Thus, the spleen of the poem is associated not with the addressee but the surroundings. The ennui contrasts the fear of abandonment, which would lead not to monotony but to despair.

Verlaine’s relationship with Rimbaud may well have been an influential factor in the poem, because of Verlaine’s documented fear of Rimbaud leaving him. In the poem it is evident that the addressee is female, for the speaker calls her “Chère.” Some scholars have debated whether Verlaine wrote this poem based on Mathilde or a feminized Rimbaud. This

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70 Hillery, Romances sans paroles, 96.
point of clarification is unnecessary in order to discuss the persona of the poem, whom we need understand only as a lover who fears abandonment by a female—or feminine—beloved.
CHAPTER 3
DEBUSSY AND SYMBOLISM

Debussy’s Poetic Experiences

Throughout his life Debussy was deeply interested in poetry. During his days at the Paris Conservatoire he often read poetry; a classmate, Paul Vidal, noted that he used a portion of the money he earned by teaching lessons to purchase the newest books. His favorite poets at the time were the Parnassians. The poets Théophile Gautier, Théodore de Banville, and Charles-Marie Leconte de Lisle, all of whom were significant within the Parnassian movement, provided the texts for many of the songs that Debussy composed during his years at the Conservatoire. Raymond Bonheur, Debussy’s friend and fellow Conservatoire student, recalled seeing the sixteen-year-old Debussy carrying a book of Banville’s poetry. Marcel Dietschy suggests that these poets were a source of escape for a young man who was not doing well in school and was feeling confined by the requirements of his academic setting.

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The years of Debussy’s study at the Conservatoire also found him entering the literary circles of Paris. He accompanied singers at the Chat Noir, where he met, among others, Paul Bourget, another of the poets whose works are featured in Debussy’s early songs. By spending time at one of the centers of the Parisian literary world, Debussy established friendships that would lead to encounters with some of the most important French poets and authors of his day. At the Chat Noir he became friends with the poet and playwright Maurice Vaucaire, through whom Debussy later met the poet René Peter. Peter eventually became one of the composer’s closest friends; Debussy even attempted to further Peter’s writing career in 1899 by sending his work to Pierre Louÿs for publication. Through Vaucaire Debussy also met Robert de Montesquieu, who would serve as a patron for a later performance of *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

Debussy’s exposure to modernist and symbolist poetry began with Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Baudelaire. After winning the Prix de Rome in 1884, Debussy resided in that city (as was required) from January 1885 until 5 March 1887. While in Rome, he frequently wrote to his friend Emile Baron, a Parisian bookseller. Baron was responsible for sending Debussy the latest French literary works, especially the most recent symbolist writings by Verlaine and other poets, to read while at the Villa Medici. Debussy’s well-documented misery—he complained about the weather, his lodgings, his colleagues, and his boredom and inability to compose there—was apparently eased by reading, since his letters to Baron always included requests for reading.

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4 Wenk, 2.

5 Dietschy, 106. For his anecdotes Dietschy relies heavily on the 1931 biography of Debussy written by Peter.


7 Jarocinski, 83; Wenk, 2.

materials. In one letter he asked for Rabbe’s translation of Shelley’s complete works, two works by Moréas, the Japanese edition of Huysmans’s *Croquis Parisiens*, and the most recent works by Jouet, Morice, and Vignier. He apparently read the works of Baudelaire while in Rome, as well.

Debussy often requested the most recent issues of literary journals. In a letter dated 9 February 1887 he asked Baron for the latest issue of *La Revue indépendante*, and his request for *La Vogue* substantiates his interest in the symbolists, around whom both of these publications centered. Other journals that Debussy requested were *La Vie moderne*, which featured the most progressive artists, such as Seurat; and the single issue of *La Nouvelle revue*, which contained sonnets by Bourget.

In his letters to Baron, Debussy showed himself to be informed about the latest literary events in Paris. In the 9 February letter he requested a copy of the play *Francillon* by Alexandre Dumas fils, which would not be premiered for another eight days. Another example is a letter of 23 December 1886, also to Baron, in which he discussed Henry Becque, a popular playwright; the novelists Jean Richepin and Georges Ohnet; and the “philosophical drama” of Ernest Renan. Becque, Richepin, and Ohnet were part of the naturalist tradition, and each enjoyed considerable popularity. Renan was best known for his work in philosophy and religious history, although he wrote several philosophical plays.

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10 Jarocinski, 85.


12 Jarocinski, 85–86.


14 Ibid., 18, 20.
After his return to Paris from Rome, Debussy continued to frequent the gathering places of literary figures. A letter to his friend Robert Godet, dated 25 December 1889, describes a visit to the Café Vachette, where the symbolist poet Jean Moréas was a regular. In the same letter Debussy mentioned a gathering at the home of Henry Mercier, who read from his partial translation of Keats’s *Endymion*. Although Debussy does not mention who attended this event, Mercier was a friend of Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Bouchor, and he was clearly a member of the important artistic circles in Paris.

Debussy also spent time at the Librairie de l’Art Indépendant, where he could have encountered Verlaine or Mallarmé. Another member of this circle was Louÿs, whom Debussy may have met at this time. Louÿs’s poetry resembled that of the symbolists in language and form, although he emulated the ancient Greeks as the Parnassians had. He even changed the spelling and pronunciation of his name—originally Louis—so that it would look and sound Greek. Louÿs had his first collection of poems published by the Librairie, and he may have encountered an early exemplar of Debussy’s Baudelaire songs that was housed there. Georges Jean-Aubry suggests that Debussy and Louÿs met in 1893 at a cabaret, the Auberge du Clou, where both visited regularly; by late 1893 their letters indicate that they had developed a close friendship.

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15 Ibid., 26, 28.
16 Wenk, 3.
19 Ibid., 8–9.
Another center for literary circles was the Taverne Weber, a popular hangout for journalists and writers, where Debussy went nearly every night, often with Peter and Louÿs. Eventually Debussy became one of the regular attendees of Mallarmé’s *mardis*, where Parisian intellectuals would come to listen to Mallarmé speak. On any given night Debussy might have sat with writers such as Verlaine, Louÿs, Moréas, Maurice Maeterlinck, Paul Valéry, or Gustave Kahn, or painters such as Renoir, Monet, Degas, Whistler, and Gauguin. Clearly Debussy was associating with the literary elite of fin-de-siècle Paris, and the influence of these figures on his music cannot be overestimated.

**Debussy’s Opinions of Literature**

Debussy’s correspondence reflects the composer’s deep interest in literature, moving beyond mere references to works to his opinions and attitudes. On 24 October 1893 he wrote to Ernest Chausson about the problems of contemporary music and its ornateness, modeled after Wagner:

One would gain more, it seems to me . . . by finding the perfect design for an idea and only going as far as necessary with ornamentation. . . . Look at the scarcity of symbol concealed in some of Mallarmé’s last sonnets, where nevertheless the artful skill is taken to its outer limits, and look at Bach, where everything works fantastically toward highlighting the main idea, where the lightness of the inner parts never absorbs the principal theme. . . .

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20 Ibid., 6, 112; Jarocinski, 88.

21 Jarocinski, 89–90.

22 Debussy, *Lettres*, 58. “On gagnerait, il me semble, à trouver le dessin parfait d’une idée et de n’y aller alors que juste ce qu’il faudrait d’ornements . . . Regardez la pauvreté de symbole cachée dans plusieurs des derniers sonnets de Mallarmé, où pourtant le métier d’ouvrier d’art est porté à ses dernières limites, et regardez Bach, où tout concourt prodigieusement à mettre l’idée en valeur, où la légéreté des dessous n’absorbe jamais le principal. . . .”
For Debussy literature, and specifically symbolist literature, was the perfect model for his aesthetic ideals and for how music should be composed. He found his influences in the writers of his day rather than the musicians, instead looking to composers of earlier eras, such as Bach and Rameau.

He provided further evidence of his views on poetry in an article published in the journal *Musica* in March 1911. In this article both Debussy and Louÿs explained their opinions about the relationship between poetry and music. Debussy wrote: “The relationship between poetry and music? I haven’t thought about it. I occupy myself with music very little. . . . [M]usicians who understand nothing about poetry cannot set it to music. They can only spoil it. . . .” In these statements Debussy showed first of all that he preferred poetry to music, and second, that one must understand a text in order to create an effective setting of it. By implication, he must have felt that his own grasp of poetry was sufficient for him to compose such a large number of songs and other works based on literature.

Debussy praised the literary works he admired and sharply condemned those he did not. He spoke highly of Louÿs’s *Aphrodite*, a work Louÿs dedicated to Debussy, in a letter to Louÿs dated 10 April 1896 upon the work’s publication: “I myself simply find it to employ an incredibly supple art; I also find there a way of describing gestures that seems to me to be unique, one that finds the way to be very human while at the same time being deliciously

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24 Reprinted in Debussy, Louÿs Correspondence, 197. “Les rapports du vers et de la musique? Je n’y ai pas pensé. Je m’occupe très peu de musique. . . . les musiciens qui ne comprennent rien aux vers ne devraient pas en mettre en musique. Ils ne peuvent que les gâcher. . . .”

25 Ibid., 75; see the plate following p. 144 for a reproduction of the title page.
harmonized; . . . it has the sorts of beginnings or endings of chapters, which depict or suspend sentimental or colored arabesques, that enrapture me.\footnote{Ibid., 74. “Moi je trouve simplement cela d’un art prodigieusement souple, j’y trouve aussi une notation de gestes qui me semble unique, ça trouve le moyen d’être très humain tout en étant délicieusement harmonisé . . . il y a de tels commencements ou fins de chapitres, qui décrivent ou suspendent les arabesques sentimentales ou colorées qui me ravissent.”} Even to his friends, however, Debussy was not always so positive in his remarks. On 24 October 1898 he wrote to René Peter about one of his friend’s recent plays (the work discussed has not been identified): “First of all, your play’s relationship to the genre of theater that I loathe the most is for me a reason to deplore it. . . . the characters are of a design that is a bit colorless; everything in it is hurried and dry, and the style contains pretty details that don’t seem sufficiently dramatic to me; . . . You can and must do better than that.”\footnote{Debussy, \textit{Letters}, 102–3. “Tout d’abord, la parenté de ta pièce avec le genre de théâtre que j’exècre le plus, m’est une raison de la déplorer. . . . les personnages sont d’un dessin un peu falot; tout cela est hâtif, sec, le style tout en contenant de jolis détails ne m’en paraît pas suffisamment théâtral; . . . tu peux et dois faire mieux que cela . . .” (Debussy, \textit{Lettres}, 96).} It should be noted that Debussy’s comments were meant as constructive criticism; whether positive or negative, however, he showed himself to have strong opinions about literary works. He obviously read carefully and critically, no matter what the material was.

Less extended references to literature appear in many of Debussy’s letters. He mentions not only French authors but also those who wrote in English, most frequently Edgar Allen Poe. At his death Debussy left unfinished two operas based on Poe’s writings: \textit{La Chûte de la Maison Usher} and \textit{Le Diable dans le Beffroi}. He was working on the former as early as 1889, and some sketches of the latter date from 1903.\footnote{Debussy, \textit{Letters}, 54, 139.} A letter from Debussy to Chausson dated 3 September 1893 indicates that the composer read Baudelaire’s translation of \textit{The Fall of the House of Usher},
as he uses the phrase “mes journées sont fuligineuses, sombres et muettes,” paraphrasing Baudelaire’s “journée fuligineuse, sombre et muette.”

Two other authors of English works are mentioned in Debussy’s correspondence. The first is Joseph Conrad, whose name appears in a letter to Debussy’s publisher Jacques Durand, dated 8 July 1910. Debussy wrote, “Have you followed, in the paper Le Temps, the novel of J. Conrad entitled The Secret Agent? In it is a collection of quite cheerful scoundrels, and the ending approaches the sublime. It’s described in the most calm, detached manner and it’s only after having reflected that one thinks: ‘But all those people are monsters’ . . . In any case, it’s extremely personal.”

The second English author mentioned by Debussy is G. K. Chesterton, to whom Debussy refers in one of his late letters to Godet (11 December 1916). The book in question is The Napoleon of Notting Hill, and although Debussy’s reference to it is brief, he praised its “charming imaginative touches.” These examples of literary references show not only that Debussy was well read, but also that he was deeply involved with literature until very late in his life. Approximately fifteen months after this letter was written, Debussy died of the cancer that had been advancing for several years.

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29 Ibid., 54.


31 Claude Debussy, Lettres à deux amis, ed. Robert Godet and Georges Jean-Aubry (Paris: José Corti, 1942), 165. “. . . il y a des choses d’une fantaisie charmante.”
Debussy began writing songs using the poetry of the symbolists while he was still a student at the Conservatoire. He first set Verlaine’s poems to music in 1882 and 1883, and he composed “Apparition” to a text by Mallarmé in 1884. The set *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* from 1913 are among the last songs that he composed. His only settings of Baudelaire are the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*, which he composed between 1887 and 1889.

Of all the poets who influenced Debussy, Verlaine’s presence is the strongest. In all Debussy composed twenty songs using texts by Verlaine. He also used two of Verlaine’s titles, “En bateau” and “Cortège,” as the names of movements in the 1889 *Petite Suite*, and he borrowed “Clair de lune” from Verlaine for the title of the third movement of the 1905 *Suite Bergamasque*. In a letter to Durand from 30 June 1915 Debussy expressed his desire to work again with Verlaine’s *Fêtes galantes*; in a footnote Durand explains that he dreamed of writing a theatrical work based on these poems. This may be the same work to which Arthur Wenk refers, a 1913 collaboration with Louis Laloy, a musician and scholar of antiquity and Debussy’s first biographer, to compose an opera-ballet (*Crimen Amoris*) on the *Fêtes galantes*. The works of Verlaine thus permeate Debussy’s compositions more than those of any other writer.

Debussy’s unusual manner of quoting or paraphrasing literary works within his letters also displays his admiration for literature, especially poetry and the works of Verlaine. The Baudelaire reference described earlier is an example of this practice: Debussy borrowed a phrase from Baudelaire and used it to refer to his own life, showing his thorough knowledge of the original work. Other such quotations appear throughout his correspondence. Verlaine’s poems

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33 Wenk, 23.
represent a frequent source of quotations, especially the poems that Debussy set to music. On 9 June 1904 he began a letter to his future second wife, Emma Bardac, with the quotation, “Il pleut fortement sur la ville,” which clearly relates to Verlaine’s “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” in that it appears to be a paraphrase of the poem’s epigraph by Rimbaud (“Il pleut doucement sur la ville”). A second Verlaine reference appears in a letter dated 25 August 1910, written to Durand, where a discussion of performance venues caused Debussy to borrow the phrase “les belles écouteuses” from the poem “Mandoline,” one of his earliest Verlaine settings. Verlaine’s poems, and most likely other poets’ works as well, remained in Debussy’s mind long after they inspired his songs. Such references clearly demonstrate a lifelong love of poetry.

### Symbolist Poetry in Debussy’s Music

#### Vocal Music

Debussy’s early experiences with poetry, while he was a student at the Conservatoire, led him to focus on the Parnassian poets for his earliest songs. Between 1879 and 1884 he composed forty-one songs. Of these, twelve used texts by Banville; nine set those of Bourget; three, Leconte de Lisle; and two, Gautier. Other poets included Debussy’s friend Bouchor, the symbolist poet Charles Cros, the romantic poet Alfred de Musset, Debussy’s later publisher André Girod, and a few authors whose fame has not lasted to today. (See Table 3.1 for a complete listing of Debussy’s songs.)

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34 Debussy, *Lettres à son éditeur*, 146.
35 Ibid., 224.
Table 3.1  Chronological list of Debussy’s songs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song Title</th>
<th>Poet</th>
<th>Date of Composition</th>
<th>Date of Publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballade à la lune</td>
<td>Musset</td>
<td>ca. 1879</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caprice</td>
<td>Banville</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuit d’étoiles</td>
<td>Banville</td>
<td>ca. 1880</td>
<td>1880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleur de blés</td>
<td>Girod</td>
<td>ca. 1880</td>
<td>1891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madrid, princesse des Espagnes</td>
<td>Musset</td>
<td>1880 (spurious)</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Souhait</td>
<td>Banville</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zéphyr</td>
<td>Banville</td>
<td>Nov. 1881</td>
<td>1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aïmons-nous et dormons</td>
<td>Banville</td>
<td>ca. 1881</td>
<td>1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierrot</td>
<td>Banville</td>
<td>ca. 1881</td>
<td>1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Séguidille</td>
<td>Gautier</td>
<td>ca. 1881</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tragédie</td>
<td>Valade/Heine</td>
<td>ca. 1881</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Leconte de Lisle</td>
<td>1881 or 1882</td>
<td>1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rondel chinois</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>ca. 1881–82</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eglogue (duet)</td>
<td>Leconte de Lisle</td>
<td>ca. 1881–83</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fête galante</td>
<td>Banville</td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandoline</td>
<td>Verlaine</td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>1890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantoches (1)</td>
<td>Verlaine</td>
<td>8 Jan 1882</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flots, palmes, sables</td>
<td>Renaud</td>
<td>6 Feb 1882</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le lilas</td>
<td>Banville</td>
<td>4 Dec 1882</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les roses</td>
<td>Banville</td>
<td>ca. 1882</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rêverie</td>
<td>Banville</td>
<td>ca. 1882</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sérénade</td>
<td>Banville</td>
<td>ca. 1882</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rondeau</td>
<td>Musset</td>
<td>ca. 1882</td>
<td>1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clair de lune (1)</td>
<td>Verlaine</td>
<td>ca. 1882</td>
<td>1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En sourdine (1)</td>
<td>Verlaine</td>
<td>ca. 1882</td>
<td>1944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pantomime</td>
<td>Verlaine</td>
<td>ca. 1882</td>
<td>1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La fille aux chevaux de lin</td>
<td>Leconte de Lisle</td>
<td>1882–84</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musique</td>
<td>Bourget</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paysage sentimental</td>
<td>Bourget</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>1891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanson espagnole (duet)</td>
<td>Musset</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coquetterie posthume</td>
<td>Gautier</td>
<td>31 Mar 1883</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romance (“Silence ineffable”)</td>
<td>Bourget</td>
<td>Sept 1883</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleur des eaux</td>
<td>ca. 1883</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanson triste</td>
<td>Bouchor</td>
<td>ca. 1883</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beau soir</td>
<td>Bourget</td>
<td>ca. 1883</td>
<td>1891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’archet</td>
<td>Cros</td>
<td>ca. 1883</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romance (“Voici que le printemps”)</td>
<td>Bourget</td>
<td>Jan 1884</td>
<td>1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La romance d’Ariel</td>
<td>Bourget</td>
<td>Feb 1884</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regret</td>
<td>Bourget</td>
<td>Feb 1884</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apparition</td>
<td>Mallarmé</td>
<td>8 Feb 1884</td>
<td>1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les baisers</td>
<td>Banville</td>
<td>ca. 1884</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barcarolle</td>
<td>Guinand</td>
<td>ca. 1885</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariettes oubliées</td>
<td>Verlaine</td>
<td>1885–87</td>
<td>1888; 1903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deux romances (’L’âme évaporée and “Les cloches”)</td>
<td>Bourget</td>
<td>1886?</td>
<td>1891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire</td>
<td>Baudelaire</td>
<td>1887–89</td>
<td>1890; 1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La belle au bois dormant</td>
<td>Hyspa</td>
<td>July 1890</td>
<td>1902</td>
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Table 3.1, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song Title</th>
<th>Poet</th>
<th>Date of Composition</th>
<th>Date of Publication</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Les angélus</td>
<td>Le Roy</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>1891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clair de lune (2) in <em>Fêtes galantes I</em></td>
<td>Verlaine</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>1903; 1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En sourdine (2) in <em>Fêtes galantes I</em></td>
<td>Verlaine</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>1903; 1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantoches (2) in <em>Fêtes galantes I</em></td>
<td>Verlaine</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>1903; 1924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trois mélodies</td>
<td>Verlaine</td>
<td>Dec 1891</td>
<td>1901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proses lyriques</td>
<td>Debussy</td>
<td>1892–93</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chansons de Bilitis</td>
<td>Louys</td>
<td>1897–98</td>
<td>1899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuits blanches</td>
<td>Debussy</td>
<td>1899–1902</td>
<td>Unpublished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dans le jardin</td>
<td>Gravollet</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>1905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trois chansons de France</td>
<td>d’Orléans/Lhermite</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>1904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fêtes galantes II</em></td>
<td>Verlaine</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>1904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Promenoir de deux amants</td>
<td>Lhermite</td>
<td>1904, 1910</td>
<td>1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trois ballades de François Villon</td>
<td>Villon</td>
<td>May 1910</td>
<td>1910, 1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé</td>
<td>Mallarmé</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noël des enfants qui n’ont plus de maison</td>
<td>Debussy</td>
<td>Dec 1915</td>
<td>1915</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Parnassian poets virtually disappeared from Debussy’s song compositions after 1884, although he did base his first *envoi* for the Prix de Rome on Banville’s *Diane au Bois* (completed in 1886). Debussy’s choices of poets gradually shifted in the years between 1882 and 1885. In 1882 Banville is represented in five songs, but in this year Debussy also composed five settings of Verlaine’s poetry. Of the nine songs written in 1883, Bourget dominates with four songs, and the rest include Musset, Gautier, Bouchor, and Cros. The year 1884 saw the composition of three songs using texts by Bourget, the first Mallarmé song, and the last Banville song, and in 1885 Debussy began work on the songs that would become part of his *Ariettes oubliées*. After this time Verlaine and Mallarmé represent the only poets utilized by Debussy early in his career to continue to appear in his song œuvre, with Verlaine’s poems used most often (fifteen songs between 1885 and 1904).
At the same time that Debussy’s taste in poets was changing, his style of song composition was evolving, as well. A brief discussion of some of the Parnassian settings will serve as a comparison for Debussy’s style in his symbolist-inspired songs, a style that was solidified with the *Ariettes oubliées* and *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*.

One of the first songs using a text by Banville was “Nuit d’étoiles” of 1880. This song was Debussy’s first published work, and it represents the style of his early songs. Banville, who was interested in music himself, based this poem on a waltz that was thought at that time to have been the last composition by Carl Maria von Weber. Debussy does use a dancelike style in his setting, although Wenk names it a siciliano rather than a waltz because of the 6/8 meter. The form is a rondo, using an ABACA scheme. The individual phrases are also highly structured in two ways. First, with few exceptions the phrases comprise four measures each. Second, the melodic lines are lyric in nature and are unified by rhythmic motives such as a quarter note followed by an eighth note, and a dotted quarter followed by three eighth notes (see Example 3.1). The harmony of the song is diatonic throughout: each refrain clearly establishes E♭ major, and the two contrasting sections highlight the key areas of F♯ major and D major.

Other songs set to romantic or Parnassian texts display similar stylistic features, although Debussy’s progressiveness appears occasionally in the earliest songs. Wenk cites the pentatonic passages in “Zéphyr,” and “La Belle au bois dormant,” which uses a text by Vincent Hyspa, contains frequent ninth chords. Overall, however, these indications of Debussy’s later

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36 Wenk, 10, 12. The poem’s original title was “La Dernière Pensée de Weber.” The waltz was later shown to have been composed by C. G. Reissiger, who succeeded Weber as Kapellmeister at Dresden.

37 Ibid., 14.

38 Ibid.
style are a small part of the general character of the songs as a whole. The early songs are thus fairly consistent with the style of the French *mélodie* that was popular in the late nineteenth century: lyrical melodies, structured forms, and diatonic harmony.

As Debussy turned toward the symbolist poets, the “debussyste” style became more prominent. “Mandoline,” composed in 1882 to a text by Verlaine, represents the early evolution of Debussy’s characteristic style. This song begins with a “plucking” sound that depicts the mandolin, followed by a pianistic imitation of fast strummed chords. When Debussy combined a lyric melody with this chordal pattern, he created a passage that evades a sense of tonic; the key of C major is not heard until m. 6, and it quickly disappears into parallel chromaticism in mm. 11–12. The harmonic progression across the whole of the song highlights third relationships, moving from B♭ major to G major to E major, and finally back to C. Example 3.2 shows a reduction of the principal key areas. The song ends with an extended madrigalistic “la la” passage that prolongs the tonic; the reappearance of the plucked G makes the song circular and also creates an ambiguous ending.

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Example 3.1 “Nuit d’étoiles,” mm. 4–11 (melody only)

![Example 3.1 “Nuit d’étoiles,” mm. 4–11 (melody only)](image)

Example 3.2 “Mandoline,” reduction of mm. 13–40

One of the most traditional elements in “Mandoline” is its ternary form. The song comprises primarily two-bar groups; however, the exceptions are more numerous than in “Nuit d’étoiles.” Frequently Debussy added one or two measures to the groupings, making the metric structure fairly irregular. An example is mm. 15–21, where a three-bar phrase is followed immediately by a phrase of four bars (see Example 3.3). Rhythmic ambiguity is also created in passages such as the opening of the song, where the piano’s chords (despite their notation) sound as three sets of two eighth notes under the vocal line’s division of the 6/8 meter into two sets of three eighth notes, as shown in Example 3.4.

The Mallarmé song from 1884, “Apparition,” demonstrates other aspects of Debussy’s maturing style. In this song the form is surprisingly one of the most progressive elements. The musical material in mm. 13–16 recurs with alterations in mm. 41–44, but no other large-scale repetition occurs in the song. The music unfolds in a through-composed manner, including the frequent key signature changes that are common in Debussy’s later songs. This approach to form is seen in some of the Baudelaire songs, especially “Le Balcon” and “Harmonie du soir,”
which feature repeated lines of text that use similar music surrounded by through-composed material for the remaining words.

The harmonic character of “Apparition” also resembles the Baudelaire songs. As mentioned previously, the key areas shift frequently, sometimes through changes in key signature but at other times via accidentals. In mm. 7–9 the tonal center changes abruptly from B♭ major to D major, then, following a chromatic passage, a new key signature (G♭ major) is introduced in m. 13 (see Example 3.5). This high degree of harmonic instability resembles the constant shifting of key areas found in the Baudelaire songs. What makes this Mallarmé song
Example 3.5 “Apparition,” mm. 7–13

Voice:

dougs, dans le calme des fleurs Vapo-ru-ses,

Piano:

ti-raient de mou-ran-tes vi-o-les De blan-ses san-

Fièvreux:
glots glis-sants sur l'a-zur des co-rôl-les. C'é-tait le
different is that in most cases the shifts retain tonal grounding; by the time Debussy wrote the
Baudelaire songs, he included more passages that established no tonic at all.

For comparison to these early works, the examination will now turn to Debussy’s last
songs using Verlaine’s poetry, the *Fêtes galantes II*, composed in 1904. In these songs his
mature style is evident in several ways. Each song contains examples of Debussy’s innovations
in harmonic language: “Les Ingénus” includes whole-tone scales in its melodic phrases, as well
as instances of chord streams; “Le Faune” uses frequent ninth and eleventh chords; and the
middle section of “Colloque sentimental” uses a pedal tone on middle C that lasts thirty-two
measures. Harmonic ambiguity is a significant feature, as well. Not only does each song end
without establishing a tonic key—the first song, with its final augmented triad, is the most open-ended of the set—but also none of the songs ever tonicizes a key for more than a few measures.

These songs are also progressive in terms of their form. None of the songs in the set has
a form even as regular as ternary. Instead Debussy unified their structures through techniques of
repetition, more specifically by utilizing a short recurring figure. In the first and third songs a
one-measure motive serves as the basis for much of the musical material. The repetition is most
striking in “Le Faune,” which has an ostinato bass that remains constant for the entire song. The
vocal line does not participate in the repetition at all but rather moves in its own direction. The
result is a seemingly free form that is still cohesive because of the steady motion of the left hand.
A representative passage is shown in Example 3.6.

In other ways these songs are representative of Debussy’s later style. “Colloque
sentimental” displays similarities to *Pelléas et Mélisande*, his only opera, especially in its use of
recitative and sudden shifts in style to represent the dialogue in the middle section of the song.
The opening melody of “Le Faune” is usually characterized as flutelike, and in fact Debussy
Example 3.6 “Le Faune,” mm. 14–23

Example 3.6 “Le Faune,” mm. 14–23

Voice

Piano

Un vieux faune de terre cuite Rit au centre des boulingrins,

Pré-sa-geant sans doute une suite Mauvaise à ces instants se reins.
instructed the piano to play “ainsi qu’une flûte.” The similarities between this melody and the opening flute solo of the Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune are obvious. These later songs show marked differences from the earliest Verlaine settings, but even in the 1880s the markers of Debussy’s mature style were already present.

Debussy based his opera Pelléas et Mélisande on Maeterlinck’s symbolist drama of the same name. He began composing the opera in 1893, at which time he sought Maeterlinck’s permission to continue. His friend Henri de Régnier served as an intermediary between the composer and the playwright, via a letter from early August 1893, in which Régnier spoke favorably of what Debussy had written thus far and asked for Maeterlinck’s consent. The playwright responded on 8 August with his permission and gratitude to Debussy for undertaking the project. Work on the opera continued, and in November 1893 Louÿs accompanied Debussy on a visit to Maeterlinck to discuss cuts that Debussy wished to make in the play. In a letter to Chausson from December 1893, Debussy described the success of the visit, in which Maeterlinck approved Debussy’s cuts and even suggested some of his own, which Debussy found “very useful.”

One of the overriding principles in the style of the opera’s composition was Debussy’s desire to be anti-Wagnerian. As discussed in Chapter 1, Wagner’s presence in France was strong in the late nineteenth century. Debussy expressed his feelings about Wagner’s influence in a letter to Chausson dated 2 October 1893: “I was hurrying to boast of my success with Pelléas et

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41 Ibid., 26.

42 Debussy, Lettres, 60, “. . . très utiles . . .”
Mélisande, for, after a sleepless night, that which brings counsel, I had to admit that it was not successful at all. It resembled a duet by M. So-and-so, or no matter who, and above all the ghost of old Klingsor, alias R. Wagner, appearing at the bend of a measure, so I’ve torn it all up, and then went back to the search for a more personal mixing of phrases. . . .

Clearly Debussy felt the anxiety of influence not only from Wagner, but from other opera composers, as well. Debussy was highly critical of opera, especially as it related to Wagner and French composers. In a lengthy letter to André Poniatowski from February 1893, he decried the latest works in French opera:

We have had a Werther by Massenet, where one could note in it a curious talent for satisfying all the foolishnesses and the poetic and lyric needs of the dilettantes at a cheap rate! Everything in it contributes to mediocrity, and what’s more, this deplorable custom that consists in taking something that is good in itself and distorting its spirit with facile and pleasant sentimentalities: it’s always the story of Faust bled white by Gounod; or Hamlet quite inopportune disturbed by Monsieur Ambroise Thomas. . . . Also on the musical horizon is rising a young star named Gustave Charpentier, who appears to me destined to a glory as fruitful as it is unaesthetic.

With Pelléas et Mélisande Debussy was attempting to move in the opposite direction from the prevailing French style and Wagnerian excesses. The symbolist style of Maeterlinck’s verse certainly influenced the musical result.

43 Debussy, Lettres, 55. “Je m’étais dépêché de chanter victoire pour Pelléas et Mélisande, car, après une nuit blanche, celle qui porte conseil, il a bien fallu m’avouer que ce n’était pas ça du tout. Ça ressemblait au duo de M. Un Tel, ou n’importe qui, et surtout le fantôme du vieux Klingsor, alias R. Wagner, apparaissait au détour d’une mesure, j’ai donc tout déchiré, et suis reparti à la recherche d’une petite chimie de phrases plus personnelles. . . .”

44 Ibid., 39–40. “. . . nous avons eu un Werther de Massenet, où l’on peut constater une curieuse maîtrise à satisfaire toutes les niaiseries et le besoin poétique et lyrique des dilettantes à bon marché! Tout là-dedans est le collaborateur du quelconque, en plus, cette déplorable habitude qui consiste à prendre une chose, bien en soi, et à en travestir l’esprit en de faciles et aimables sensibleries, c’est toujours l’histoire de Faust égorgé par Gounod; ou Hamlet dérangé bien malencontreusement par M. Am. Thomas. . . . Il se lève aussi à l’horizon musical un jeune astre du nom de Gustave Charpentier, qui me paraît destiné à une gloire aussi productrice qu’inesthétique.”
Debussy stated in 1902 that he was attracted to Maeterlinck’s “evocative language whose sensibility might find its counterpart in the musical and orchestral décor.”\(^{45}\) Debussy’s desire to have the characters’ thoughts, rather than their actions, be the primary focus of the drama parallels Maeterlinck, as well. In the play the internal “action” of the characters’ thoughts governs their words and physical gestures.\(^{46}\) Additionally, Maeterlinck’s approach to dialogue has a musical counterpart in Debussy’s opera. Richard Langham Smith notes the lack of conversation between the characters and the way that they, especially Mélisande, avoid answering questions directly; often the presumed answer has nothing to do with the question.\(^{47}\) Debussy mirrored this technique in his music by abruptly shifting tonality or mood as the “dialogue” moves from one character to the other.

In his 1893 letter to Chausson mentioned earlier, Debussy described one of his musical innovations in the genre of opera: “I made use, completely spontaneously besides, of a method that appears to me rather rare, that is to say silence (don’t laugh), as an agent of expression and perhaps the only way of asserting the emotion of a phrase, for if Wagner has used it, it seems to me that it’s only in an entirely dramatic way. . . .”\(^{48}\) Interestingly, Maeterlinck also expressed at length his beliefs about the expressivity of silence. In an 1895 essay entitled “Le silence,” he wrote: “Speech is of time, silence is of eternity. . . . thought will not work except in silence.”

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\(^{45}\) Jarocinski, 129.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 130.


\(^{48}\) Debussy, *Lettres*, 55. “. . . je me suis servi, tout spontanément d’ailleurs, d’un moyen qui me paraît assez rare, c’est-à-dire du silence (ne riez pas), comme un agent d’expression et peut-être la seule façon de faire valoir l’émotion d’une phrase, car si Wagner l’a employée, il me semble que ce n’est que d’une façon toute dramatique. . . .”
used silence in his text, through unanswered questions or the omission of information, to express what the characters do not explain in words. Debussy and Maeterlinck thus held a similar view of silence: through silence the idea, whether it is musical or literary, comes to its fullest expression.

Another musical innovation in *Pelléas et Mélisande* is Debussy’s use of recitative. The opera is performed almost entirely in recitative, and the style of the music is never modeled on lyrical, romantic-opera melody. Instead the characters’ lines mirror the inflection of the text through constantly changing rhythmic patterns. The highly flexible and free vocal style results in a continuous sequence of vocal lines that do not seem bound by meter, key, or conventional forms (see Example 3.7).

The opera as a whole has the appearance of an experiment in pure sound. The skeletal plot is clearly not the focus; the characters’ emotions are the source of the drama. To create that drama Debussy combined unusual harmony with the flexibility of rhythm and the original palette of tone colors for which he became known, especially flute and harp. *Pelléas et Mélisande* thus in several ways effectively renders Maeterlinck’s version of symbolism in music. Debussy identified with Maeterlinck’s aesthetic, with his goal of focusing on thought rather than action, and with the freedom of structure and sound that the words provided.

**Instrumental Music**

Symbolist poetry also had an effect on Debussy’s instrumental works, most notably the *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*. Its inspiration was Mallarmé’s 1876 eclogue “L’après-midi...
d’un faune,” an extended poem with the free structure, evocative images, and vague meaning characteristic of the symbolist style. An account by Debussy indicates that he never intended to set the poem to music literally:

The music of this Prélude is a very free illustration of Mallarmé’s beautiful poem. It does not claim to be merely a synthesis of it. It is rather the successive scenes through which the desires and the dreams of the faun are driven in the heat of this afternoon. Then, tired of pursuing the fearful flight of the nymphs and the naiads,
he relaxes in intoxicating sleep, full of dreams finally realized, of total possession in universal nature.  

Although Debussy indicated that his piece is related to Mallarmé’s poem, the exact character of that relationship is open to question. Some scholars, such as Arthur Wenk and David J. Code, have linked specific lines of poetry to corresponding musical elements, even showing parallels in structure between the two works. A common observation is that the poem uses 110 alexandrines and Debussy’s piece contains 110 measures. The possibility of such a link being a coincidence is small, but the real connection between the works is not found in their structures. The crucial point is that Debussy held a similar aesthetic position in his compositions to that of Mallarmé’s poetry, and he attempted to write music that expressed meaning in similar ways.

Both of the “Faune” works are free in structure, as Mallarmé frequently used enjambment to disguise the ends of the poetic lines, and Debussy composed melodies that appear flexible, even improvisatory, due to their chromaticism and free rhythmic character. Mallarmé’s distinctive approach to poetic syntax and combination of sonorities is more important than the semantic meaning of his words. Similarly, Debussy’s Prélude emphasizes shifting meter and polyrhythm instead of clear metric divisions, and his chromatic, modal, and whole-tone scales contribute to the openness of the work’s tonal language.


The unaccompanied flute passage that opens the piece is perhaps the best example of how Debussy adopted the symbolist style into music. The choice of this instrument is particularly appropriate, for Mallarmé’s faun plays a flute in several sections of the poem. Debussy’s flute melody, shown in Example 3.8, is highly chromatic, eliminating the possibility of defining a tonic by outlining a tritone between the highest and lowest notes in the first two measures. The melody has little rhythmic definition, blurring the written barlines and triple beat pattern with tied notes. Debussy also created rhythmic ambiguity in mm. 63–70, where the melody in the strings is based on a triple-meter pattern that is contradicted by the cross-rhythms in the wind instruments (see Example 3.9). Thus, numerous instances of “symbolist” techniques in music appear in this work, making the Prélude one of the clearest examples of how Debussy related his instrumental music to poetry, even without any sung text. The Prélude effectively mirrors the nuance of Mallarmé’s poetry by establishing a similar mood and by creating musical parallels to symbolist literary techniques.

Debussy’s friendship with Louÿs led to three different musical works based on the Chansons de Bilitis, which Louÿs claimed to have translated from ancient Greek poems but actually wrote himself. Debussy first composed the three songs that he grouped together under

Example 3.8 Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune, mm. 1–4, flute
the same title, *Chansons de Bilitis*, in 1897. Next he was approached by Louÿs to compose incidental music to accompany a recitation of twelve of the poems, none of which duplicates the 1897 songs. This work was written between 1900 and 1901 and performed with mime at the Salle des Fêtes of *Le Journal* on 7 February 1901.² Finally, in 1914, long after his friendship with Louÿs ended, Debussy adapted the earlier incidental music into six piano pieces entitled *Epigraphes antiques*.

² Dietschy, 110.
The incidental music for the *Bilitis* poems is the only work of its kind in Debussy’s œuvre, and it represents a particular type of reaction to a set of poems. The primary difference between this work and the others based on symbolist poetry lies in its structure. Rather than being an extended piece on a single poetic work, the incidental music contains a series of short musical segments, each of which evokes the mood of the poem that accompanies it. Debussy created these varying moods by giving each section of music a style appropriate to the text. The first poem, “Chant pastoral,” uses the flute for its invocation of Pan, with a melody whose arabesque character resembles Debussy’s other flute or flutelike lines. The rapid passagework of the third and fifth excerpts, for the poems “Les contes” and “La partie d’osselets,” match the descriptions of running children and the game of jacks, respectively.

Because the work uses only two flutes, two harps, and celesta, it served as a source for experimentation with scoring. The flutes are often featured, sometimes as unaccompanied soloists and sometimes accompanied by the other instruments. Some sections deviate from this standard scoring, however. In no. 6, “Bilitis,” the flutes trade arpeggios and glissandos with the first harp and celesta. (Example 3.10 shows the first four measures of this movement.) The result is a stronger evocation of atmosphere than in the more tonal and regularly metric sections such as nos. 3 and 5. No. 9, “L’eau pure du bassin,” has an unusual scoring for the work in that it features the harps prominently, while the flutes are omitted from the score. The repeated octave E’s in the second harp reflect the “miroir immobile” of Louÿs’s text.

In these short segments of music Debussy did not set the thoughts of the characters, as he did in *Pelléas et Mélisande*. This work focuses instead on establishing mood and atmosphere. The tone colors of the instruments that Debussy chose are quite different from each other, and they are among the instruments that he favored most. Their timbres make this music easily
Example 3.10 “Bilitis,” mm. 1–4

recognizable as Debussy’s. In the most evocative sections, such as “Bilitis,” whole-tone scales and glissandos obscure the sense of tonic. Frequent metric changes, whether notated, as in no. 7 (“Le tombeau sans nom”) or implied by phrase structure, as in “Chant pastoral” or “L’eau pure
du bassin,” make these atmospheric segments of the work rhythmically ambiguous. Both of the instrumental works discussed in this section thus show the same kinds of experimental techniques, and both succeed in matching the traits of the poetry to the musical style.

Conclusion

The works discussed in this chapter highlight compositional innovations that Debussy used in many of his works, not only those inspired by symbolist poetry. Although one should not assume that the symbolists influenced every aspect of Debussy’s compositional career, his output of songs is closely tied to his connections to the literary world. Most of his songs were composed before 1900, when he was immersed in Paris’s literary environment and felt the influence of the literature of the day more strongly than the music.

The traits illustrated here are widely discussed in terms of Debussy’s style as a whole, but there are obvious parallels between his compositions and the works of the symbolist poets. The symbolists moved away from the structure of the alexandrine and the regular poetry favored by the Parnassians; Debussy discarded traditional forms in favor of structures based on repetition or loosely bound ternary forms. Poets such as Verlaine were more interested in the effect of the sound of the words they wrote than in the meaning; this interest in the aural quality of poetry is often compared to music, which was certainly one of the most favored art forms of the symbolists. Likewise, Debussy experimented with sound in combinations of tone colors and in his original approach to harmony. He was known to have argued with his teachers because he wanted to combine sounds in unorthodox ways.53

53 Dietschy, 25.
Perhaps the strongest link between symbolist poetry and Debussy’s music is the ambiguity found in both. For the symbolists meaning was merely suggested, and they avoided writing about traditional poetic ideas in traditional ways. For Debussy the traditional elements of music—functional harmony, conventional forms (e.g., sonata), and regular meter—that had defined the character of a work for his predecessors (and most of his contemporaries) were the antithesis of what he wanted to express. The harmony moves quickly from one key to the next, or it is based on nondiatonic scales that blur a sense of key; the rhythmic patterns cross bar lines and defy categorization into duple or triple; and the melodies often display freedom of direction rather than rigid structure. His music is thus well matched to the symbolist aesthetic, even for compositions not derived directly from symbolist poetry. Not only did Debussy move in the same circles and visit the same locations as the symbolist poets; he also shared their aesthetic goals. The connections between the composer and the poets whom he admired thus influenced his works, whether or not they set symbolist texts.
CHAPTER 4

CINQ POÈMES DE BAUDELAIRE

Background

The *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* were first published in February 1890 by the Librairie de l’Art Indépendant, a bookshop owned by Edmond Bailly, which served as one of Debussy’s literary haunts. Bailly only printed 150 copies of the edition, which he sold on a subscription basis. The songs appeared in the same order, reedited but with no changes by the composer, in a 1902 edition published by Jacques Durand.

The Bibliothèque Nationale de France holds an autograph manuscript for each of these songs. Markings in the manuscripts indicate that Durand used them to prepare his 1902 edition. Durand’s markings generally appear in blue pencil; they fall into two categories: corrections to the manuscripts and markings to prepare for engraving. An example of the latter is the numeral pairs denoting the number of measures on each printed page (9/1 [nine measures on page 1], 12/2, 12/3, etc.). The covers of all five manuscripts also contain Durand’s indication of the order of the songs, indicated by the numerals 1 through 5 on the corresponding manuscript. Two factors confirm that these markings were in fact made by Durand. First, the indicated layout of measures per page matches that of the printed 1902 edition. Second, the handwriting and pencil

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of the corrections match various marks on letters that Debussy had sent to Durand (now housed at the Bibliothèque Gustav Mahler in Paris).

Although in both editions the songs appear in the same order, Debussy may not have held that order sacred, as would be the case in a song cycle. On 19 June 1913 Debussy accompanied the violinist Gaston Poulet in performances of three of the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*, in the following order: “Harmonie du soir,” “Recueillement,” and “Le Jet d’eau.” The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas holds a copy of the program for this event, a gala held at the Comédie des Champs-Elysées in Debussy’s honor. Debussy obviously sanctioned this performance, which, without sung words, may have diminished the songs’ poetic impact. We have no comments from the composer about this performance, however, and should not assume that the poetry was insignificant to him.

In fact, a reference from Debussy himself proves that Baudelaire’s words, and also the poet’s approach to writing, figured significantly into his compositions. As Rosemary Lloyd points out, Debussy adapted a quotation from Baudelaire in one of his own letters. In reference to his prose poems, Baudelaire wrote that he wanted to create “a poetical prose, without rhythm or rhyme, supple and chaotic enough to adapt itself to the lyrical movements of the soul, to the undulations of reverie, to the leaps of the conscience.” Debussy, in a letter to Eugène Vasnier dated 19 October 1885, wrote that he wanted his music to be “supple and chaotic enough to adapt itself to the lyrical movements of the soul, to the caprices of reverie.”

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2 Debussy, *Letters*, 274, 276. At the same event Mlle Ninot Vallin sang Debussy’s *Proses lyriques* and *Le Promenoir des deux amants*, performances that Debussy applauded in a letter to Caplet dated 23 June 1913.

Debussy’s paraphrase of Baudelaire occurred too early to apply to the *Cinq poèmes* in particular, this attitude must have informed his later compositions from *Les Fleurs du mal*. Indeed, as the subsequent analysis will show, Debussy carefully derived his songs from the texts’ poetic content and formal structure, treating Baudelaire’s words with utmost importance.

One aesthetic issue that arises in connection with the Baudelaire songs relates to Debussy’s attitude toward Wagner and how that attitude manifested itself in Debussy’s music. This issue is a problematic one, because, as mentioned in Chapter 3, Debussy himself spoke of trying to avoid a Wagnerian style. During the mid- to late 1880s, however, Debussy professed his admiration for Wagner’s music, although after his visits to Bayreuth in 1888 and 1889 he reversed his position. The *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* frequently appear in discussions of Wagnerian influence on Debussy’s compositions. Robin Holloway notes in particular the Wagnerian harmony of “Le Balcon” and “Harmonie du soir,” and he suggests several passages in “Recueillement” that parallel sections of *Tristan*. The presence of Wagnerian elements, in Holloway’s opinion, places these songs outside of the development of Debussy’s overall style.

Regardless of Debussy’s quotations of the music of “old Klingsor,” the important issue to consider here is the triangular association that his influence creates among Debussy, Wagner, and Baudelaire. As discussed in Chapter 1, Baudelaire was one of the first to help popularize Wagner’s music in France in the 1860s, and he admired Wagner’s philosophies on the nature of art. Thus, at some level, Wagner’s aesthetic permeates both the poetry and music. In the present

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study, however, the primary question is not how Wagner influenced the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* but rather how Baudelaire’s aesthetic position did. While acknowledging the role that Wagner must have played, this examination will focus on the interaction between the poetry and the music and consider what aesthetic issues come into play between those two modes of expression.

"Le Balcon"

**Source Material**

Debussy wrote the first song in his Baudelaire set in January 1888, after he had returned from Rome. He inscribed this date on an autograph manuscript now housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale (Ms. 1017). The manuscript contains numerous corrections, but, as noted above, they were made by Durand and do not provide any clues to Debussy’s compositional process. They comprise inserted accidentals, added dynamic indications and other expression markings, and rhythmic clarifications, such as inserting a “3” over a triplet.

Another autograph manuscript of this song is housed at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University (Ms. KD 1354). This manuscript is part of the Frederick R. Koch collection and was purchased at auction in Paris on 16 December 1988. Like the Bibliothèque Nationale manuscript, this autograph bears the date January 1888. For the most part the Koch manuscript is very clean. It contains no editorial corrections, as the Bibliothèque Nationale manuscript does. It does, however, show pencil corrections in Debussy’s hand. These corrections are of a similar nature to Durand’s in the Bibliothèque Nationale manuscript, in this case added accidentals and inserted clef changes.
In comparing the Yale manuscript with the Bibliothèque Nationale manuscript, one notices several differences between the two. Some of the changes made by Durand do appear in the Yale manuscript, sometimes as corrections and sometimes written originally by Debussy. For instance, in m. 117 the Bibliothèque Nationale manuscript shows sharps inserted on the octave D’s in the last triplet in the right hand; in the Yale manuscript, these sharps were written in by Debussy as part of the original autograph. Not all of Durand’s changes match this manuscript, however, nor do the original readings in the two manuscripts match exactly. Discrepancies are most evident in the area of dynamics, for there appear numerous dynamic markings that Durand added to the Bibliothèque Nationale manuscript but that do not occur in the Yale manuscript, and occasionally vice versa. Therefore, it does not seem possible that one manuscript influenced the other, at least not decisively. The musical content, however, varies little between the two manuscripts, indicating that they probably date from the same period of the song’s evolution.

**Musical Analysis**

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the harmonic and motivic structure of “Le Balcon.” The first stanza opens and closes in the song’s tonic, C major. Overall this stanza contains stable harmonies with little chromaticism. In the middle lines of the stanza the key changes briefly to E major (m. 11) and F major (m. 13). With each change the chromatic bass line, first heard in the piano left hand in m. 1, moves up to establish the modulations. The fourth line (mm. 16–19) prepares for the return of C major, however, and the stanza closes with an authentic cadence in the tonic.
**Table 4.1  Harmonic and motivic overview of “Le Balcon”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Tonal Center/Harmony</th>
<th>Motive(s)*</th>
<th>m.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[piano introduction]</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>1, 2, 3a</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses,</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>3b, 2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O toi, tous mes plaisirs! ô toi, tous mes devoirs!</td>
<td>E♭ (as V/C), B⁹</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu te rappelleras la beauté des caresses,</td>
<td>E → F</td>
<td>1, 2, 3a</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La douceur du foyer et le charme des soirs,</td>
<td>F, D⁹</td>
<td>1, 2, 3a</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses!</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2, 3b</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les soirs illuminés par l’ardeur du charbon,</td>
<td>g → chr** → F♯⁷</td>
<td>3c</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et les soirs au balcon, voilés de vapeurs roses,</td>
<td>e♭⁹ → B♭³</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que ton sein m’était doux! que ton cœur m’était bon!</td>
<td>g → A♭⁴</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nous avons dit souvent d’impérissables choses</td>
<td>D → G</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les soirs illuminés par l’ardeur du charbon.</td>
<td>G¹ → chr → D⁷</td>
<td>3c</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[piano interlude]</td>
<td>D⁹ → F♯⁷</td>
<td>3c</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que les soirs sont beaux dans les chaudes soirées!</td>
<td>B, F♯⁹</td>
<td>1, 3b, 2a, 2, 3c</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que l’espace est profond! Que le cœur est puissant!</td>
<td>F♯⁹</td>
<td>3c, 1</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En me penchant vers toi, reine des adorées,</td>
<td>E♭</td>
<td>3a, 2, 1, 3b</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je croyais respirer le parfait de ton sang.</td>
<td>A♭⁷ → F♯⁹</td>
<td>3a, 2 frag., 1</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que les soirs sont beaux dans les chaudes soirées!</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>3b, 3a</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[piano interlude]</td>
<td>e⁰⁷ → F</td>
<td>1, 3a</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La nuit s’épaississait ainsi qu’une cloison,</td>
<td>F → a♭♭⁶</td>
<td>1, 3a</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et mes yeux dans le noir devinaient tes prunelles,</td>
<td>g, a♭♭⁶, G⁹</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et je buvais ton souffle, ô douceur! ô poison!</td>
<td>A, B♭</td>
<td>1 frag.</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et tes pieds s’endormaient dans mes mains fraternelles.</td>
<td>C♭⁹(♭⁷)</td>
<td>1, 3a, 1 frag.</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La nuit s’épaississait ainsi qu’une cloison.</td>
<td>F → B♭</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[piano interlude]</td>
<td>§</td>
<td>1 frag., 1</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je sais l’art d’évoquer les minutes heureuses,</td>
<td>A → chr → C♯³</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et revis mon passé blotti dans tes genoux.</td>
<td>b, A⁷</td>
<td>(3b)</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car à quoi bon chercher tes beautés langoureuses</td>
<td>F♯, F⁷</td>
<td></td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ailleurs qu’en ton cher corps et qu’en ton cœur si doux!</td>
<td>B♭, D⁷</td>
<td></td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je sais l’art d’évoquer les minutes heureuses!</td>
<td>A → chr → E⁷</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[piano interlude]</td>
<td>E⁷ → e⁰ → A</td>
<td>1, 3a</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ces serments, ces parfums, ces baisers infinis,</td>
<td>D → G♯⁷</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renaîtront-ils d’un gouffre interdit à nos sondes,</td>
<td>A → B</td>
<td>[1]†, 3a, 2, 3b</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comme montent au ciel les soleils rajenius</td>
<td>E → F</td>
<td>3a, 1</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Après s’être lavés au fond des mers profondes?</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>3b, 1, 3a, 4</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Ô serments! ô parfums! ô baisers infinis!</td>
<td>chr/C⁷/chr/D⁹</td>
<td>3b, 4</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[piano closing]</td>
<td>G⁷ → C</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates order of motives’ appearance, but not necessarily the number of times they are heard.

**chr = chromatic passagework

§For a description of this progression, see the discussion on page 157.

†Motive 1 appears in the piano just before this line of text.
By this point in the song, most of the motivic material has already appeared. The first three motives actually begin in the song’s first moments, in the piano introduction. Example 4.1a shows these motives: a dotted quarter/eighth-note figure (motive 1), heard simultaneously with a triplet/quarter note pattern (motive 2) and followed, after a leap of (usually) a ninth, by the third motive, marked by its eighth note/triplet combination. This motive will be labeled “3a,” because in m. 4 the voice performs a related figure, motive 3b. In this version the suspension disappears, while the descent more completely outlines the tonic triad. In the music that follows, the first stanza includes several iterations of motives 1–3a. With each repetition of the chromatic bass line, Debussy transposed the motives accordingly and retained them in their original sequence.

In his song setting Debussy mirrored Baudelaire’s formal scheme, where the last line of each stanza reprises the first line. Debussy’s repetitions never imitate the first line of the stanza literally, but some element(s) is (are) always retained. The amount of music that returns changes from stanza to stanza. In the first stanza mm. 4–6 return as mm. 16–19 (see Example 4.1b); the repetition partially duplicates the accompaniment, changing the C# minor ninth chord (m. 6) to an E# diminished seventh chord, which serves as preparation for the final authentic cadence in C major (m. 19). Debussy also altered the end of the melody so that the vocal line coincides with the cadential movement in the piano. In addition, motive 2 occurs more frequently in the returning phrase; in m. 16 this figure appears in three octaves, whereas m. 4 lacked any motivic material in the piano. The increased activity in the accompaniment provides the high point for the rising tension brought about by the ascending chromatic bass line and sequential key changes. Likewise, the emotion of the stanza intensifies as the speaker’s memories of evenings spent with the beloved grow stronger. At the end of the stanza, however, the intensity subsides as the music turns in a new direction.
Example 4.1  “Le Balcon,” first stanza

(a) mm. 1–6

Allegro con moto

(b) mm. 16–19
The second stanza contrasts the mood and style of the first stanza. In this stanza the text focuses on intimate memories of the evenings that the couple spent together, and the images create a mood of coziness through the glowing coal, the misty atmosphere, and the lovers’ closeness. Baudelaire relied on past tenses (imparfait and passé composé) to make clear that these evenings took place in the past. The song’s purpose at this point, therefore, is to evoke memory and emotion.

For this stanza Debussy created atmospheric music that reflects the mood of the text. The vocal recitative style in this section contributes to the music’s evocative character. Additionally, this stanza further develops the song’s motivic material (see Example 4.2a). First, in m. 22 Debussy introduced a third variant of motive 3 (motive 3c); this figure retains the characteristic triplet rhythm and descending motion, while compressing the pitches into a narrower range. Second, while the voice continues to sing in recitative, the right hand introduces the final motive of the song, motive 4. This figure is represented by a sextuplet group that is motivic in rhythm only.

The evocation of memory also arises from the frequently changing harmonies. Several descending chromatic passages blur the initial G-minor tonal center (mm. 20–21). The first line of text is supported by another chromatic descent of inverted seventh chords, which leads to an F# dominant seventh chord in m. 23. This chord prepares a pivot to E♭ minor (via enharmonic modulation on A♯/B♭), thus avoiding any cadential motion for the end of the phrase. As the stanza continues, so does its contemplative mood and harmonic instability. The initial descending chromatic line ends on an E♭ minor ninth, immediately followed by another chromatic descent in the bass and inner voices of the piano (mm. 24–25). The subsequent short-lived tonal centers of E minor (mm. 28–30), D major (m. 32), and G major (m. 37) allow the
Example 4.2 “Le Balcon,” second stanza

(a) mm. 20–27

Les soirs il-lum-i-nés par l’ar-deur du char-bon,

Et les soirs au bal-çon, voi-lès de va-peurs ro-ses,
music to approximate the way memory meanders through selected images of the past. When the stanza’s opening line returns, it begins over a G minor ninth with C in the bass, obscuring the phrase’s actual tonic.

The reprise of mm. 21–23 in mm. 39–42 (see Example 4.2b) eliminates any trace of melody from the voice part. This change results in greater focus on the piano’s material, which will prove to be important in the next stanza. Although Debussy altered the harmony, he
retained the right hand’s music and the chromatic descent of seventh chords (with some revoicing). Like the initial phrase, this section ends on F#, here a major ninth. In order for this final line of the second stanza to prepare for the third, this F# chord becomes V of the next section’s new tonic (B). The transition to the third stanza builds on motive 3c, a figure that will also prove important in the next section.

As stanza 3 begins, it provides a striking contrast with stanza 2 (see Example 4.3). While the second stanza provided new motivic material, the third stanza reprises, in its first two measures, the motives from stanza 1: motives 1 and 3b in m. 45, and motives 2 and 3a in m. 46. In addition, two statements of motive 3c, introduced in stanza 2, follow the previous motives. Motives 1–3a then return in m. 49 for two appearances each, first beginning on g and then on b. This motivic pattern is followed by two statements of motive 3a in Ab, as the voice and piano right hand lines ascend to F# octaves in an upper register (mm. 53–54). The triplets in these last two measures appear to have been influenced by motive 2, based on their chromatic nature. This version of motive 3a thus represents a melding with motive 2. These figures also represent a rare instance of the voice and piano joining melodic lines.

The third stanza thus returns to the intensification of emotion heard in the opening stanza. By reprising the earlier motives, raising the pitch for their sequential treatment, and fragmenting these figures under a soaring vocal part, Debussy gradually built the musical tension through the stanza’s fourth line. The increasing emotion in the music corresponds to the shift in the speaker’s memory from elements of the environment to the beloved herself. As in the first stanza, the music relaxes after the surge of tension (m. 56). Here the repeated line serves as a dénouement, as if the memories of the beloved were so intense that they forced the speaker to focus on less emotional aspects of the past. The juxtaposition of motives in this stanza also
Example 4.3 “Le Balcon,” mm. 45–55

Que les soleils sont beaux dans les chaussures soles!

rées! Que l’espace est profond! Que le cœur est puissant!

En me penchant vers toi, reine des adoucissants.
Example 4.3, continued

highlights the overall significance of some of these figures. Specifically, the instances where motive 3c has appeared thus far—in fact, it makes no further appearances—point to the importance of the sun, and its associated light and warmth, in this song. The motive’s entrances in mm. 22 and 41–44 include part of the text phrase “Les soirs illuminés par l’ardeur du charbon.” In the third stanza this motive follows the text “Que les soleils sont beaux par les chaudes soirées!” Although motive 3c does not coincide with this new text, the close proximity
of another line that describes light and warmth draws an association between the triplet phrase and this textual idea.

The reference to the sun is strengthened by another feature of the third stanza. Tracing the motives points out a characteristic of motives 1 and 3a: motive 3a is almost always heard following motive 1. The third stanza contains one exception, in mm. 56–57. This passage, which is part of the repetition of the stanza’s first line, eliminates motives 1 and 2, which were part of the original line in mm. 45–46. This striking change also takes place with the text “Que les soleils sont beaux par les chaudes soirées!” Thus, the image of the sun coincides with motivic manipulation and provides hermeneutic significance to it. As we will see by the song’s conclusion, motives 3a and 3b continue to highlight the importance of the sun as a symbol in “Le Balcon.”

The fourth stanza, which begins in F major in m. 62, resembles the second stanza in its evocative mood (see Example 4.4). It opens with a piano interlude that leads to another vocal line resembling recitative. The fourth stanza is dominated by motive 1, although the overlay of some 12/8 measures requires a change in the rhythm:

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{\textfrac{12}{8}} \\
\text{♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♫♫}
\end{array} \]

The first two appearances of this figure are followed by motive 3a (mm. 62–65), where the key begins to shift away from F major. After two occurrences of motive 1 (mm. 65–68) the motive begins to fragment into a shorter rhythmic cell (mm. 70–73):

\[ ♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♫♫ \]

After this fragment is heard twice, the voice trades the rhythm with the piano. Also in mm. 70–73 the piano right hand plays chromatic triplet figures that derive from motive 2.
Example 4.4  “Le Balcon,” mm. 62–77

Voice

Andantino

Motive 1

Motive 3a

Piano

pp

Motive 1

La nuit s'épais-sait ainsi qu'ne cloi-son,

Motive 3a

Et mes yeux dans le noir devaient tes pru-nelles,

Motive 1

ppp

m.d.
Example 4.4, continued

Et je buvais ton souffle, ô douceur!

ô poison! Et tes pieds s'en dormaient dans mes mains frater-

nelless.

Motive 1 frag. Motive 1 frag. Motive 1 frag.

Motive 3a

Motive 1

Motive 1 frag.

Motive 1 frag.
In mm. 74–77 motives 1 (or fragments of motive 1) and 3a prepare for the return of the stanza’s opening line, which brings back motive 1 in its original form. The atmospheric opening of the fourth stanza gives way to another escalation of tension. This stanza begins by describing the increasing darkness, accentuated by the low register of the corresponding music in m. 62. Although the stanza opens in a stable F major, the augmented sixth chord in mm. 66 and 68 foreshadows greater chromaticism to follow. Likewise, the A-major tonal center (m. 70) first slips up to B♭ major then dissolves into seventh and ninth chords, leading back to F major through an enharmonic modulation. In the third line of the stanza (mm. 70–73) the speaker’s emotion becomes heightened in a moment of ecstasy intensified by the fragmented motives in this section. When the returning line occurs in mm. 78–80, the music relaxes, as the third stanza also did for its final line. Thus, as the speaker focuses on the coming night, calm momentarily replaces tension.

In the fourth stanza this returning line echoes the original melody verbatim but alters the final harmony. Whereas the first phrase ended with an augmented sixth chord, here the harmony is based on the plagal relationship between F and B♭. The ensuing transition to the fifth stanza, however, resurrects the character of the middle of the fourth stanza (see Example 4.5). Fragments of motive 1 alternate between the left and right hands, as the harmony moves through a highly chromatic progression:

\[
{b}^7 \rightarrow g^\#_6 \rightarrow E^9 \rightarrow g^\#_{6(9)} \rightarrow D \rightarrow C^\# \rightarrow D^\#_7 \rightarrow E [V/A] \rightarrow A
\]

Although the fifth stanza begins in A major, the chromatic nature of the piano interlude carries over into this section. The d^#_6 on the last eighth note of m. 88 introduces a series of seventh chords, in which the outer voices form two parallel rising chromatic lines, recalling the
Example 4.5 “Le Balcon,” mm. 82–87 (motive 1 fragments circled)

stepwise bass pattern that opened the song (see Example 4.6). The music that follows (mm. 90–97) evades any prolonged tonal center. A series of V–I progressions in mm. 91–94 (A–D, C♭–F♯, F–B♭) provides some continuity to the passage, but chromaticism prevails until the transition to the sixth stanza (mm. 100–103).

Overall, the fifth stanza shows a striking lack of motivic structure. Motive 3b appears in two different forms in m. 91 (with contrasting rhythms in the voice and piano parts), and the dotted rhythm of mm. 90–91 pervades the texture of the stanza. The earlier motives are absent, however. Without motivic activity the stanza focuses on its chromatic sonorities instead of recalling previous music.
The speaker’s memories again bring about an intensification of emotion through the chromatic lines. This is the final stanza in which the speaker focuses on memory; therefore, the musical tension, which reaches its climax in this stanza, indicates that the memories come to a head. When the transition to the final stanza arrives, motives 1 and 3a also reappear, and the churning dotted rhythms give way to another relaxation of tension. In a further evocation of memory, the motives return the focus of the song to the material that came before—the “minutes heureuses” of the past.

The final stanza (see Example 4.7) begins with yet another recitative passage in the vocal line (m. 104), interrupted by the piano’s seventh-chord progressions borrowed from the previous stanza (mm. 89 and 99). The relationship between these two lines is most clear in m. 107 (“ces baisers infinis”), which mirrors the earlier progression. In hindsight the earlier entrances of the chromatic triplet figure can be considered related to motive 4, because the triplets take place in a relaxed tempo compared to the faster sextuplets.
In this final stanza Debussy juxtaposed all but one of the song’s motives, especially evident in mm. 107–11, where they appear in succession (4 – 1 – 3a – 2 – 3b). For the remainder of the song, motives 1, 3b, and 4 make up a significant portion of the musical material. Successive iterations of motive 3b are interrupted by motive 1 in m. 113 and motives 1 and 3a in m. 117. Motives 1 and 4 take over for the next five measures, then motive 1 disappears and motive 3b returns, alternating with motive 4 until the end.
Harmonically, the last stanza alternates between chromaticism, which coincides with or resembles motive 4, and simpler textures and sonorities, especially in the extended passages that resurrect the C-major tonic (mm. 116–22 and 128–31). The text of this stanza primarily focuses not on memory but on the question of whether the past happiness will continue into the future. Thus, for the speaker the emotion of the text is replaced by calm, punctuated by an occasional spike of chromatic tension.

The image of the sun, as previously mentioned, again plays an important role in m. 116 (see Example 4.8). This measure’s right-hand material includes motives 3b and 3a, the latter in a version that bears a striking resemblance to the vocal line in m. 46, the earlier phrase “Que les soleils sont beaux par les chaudes soirées!” The text in m. 116 describes the rising of the sun (mentioned by name in mm. 114–15), “Après s’être lavés au fond des mers profondes.” The repetitions of the other versions of motive 3 thus come to be associated with the sun (or its associated light and heat) as motive 3c was earlier. This text in this stanza represents the crucial issue of the poem: Will the beloved return to the speaker, as the sun will rise again in the morning?

Whereas Baudelaire’s poem leaves this question unanswered, the song provides resolution. Before bringing back the stanza’s first line, the preceding phrase ends with an authentic cadence in the tonic, C major, in m. 122. While questions in a text often provide an opportunity for an open-ended musical conclusion, this question coincides with one of the most conclusive cadences in the song. The music thus indicates that, in contrast to Baudelaire’s poem, in the song the answer to the speaker’s question has already been decided.
The chromatic harmony returns in m. 123 with the repetition of the stanza’s opening line (see Example 4.9). The repeated line contains significant alterations—more than in any other stanza. The accompaniment again consists of seventh chords, but these chords are now rhythmically augmented to last two to three times as long as those in the stanza’s opening phrase.
In addition, the voice joins in the chromaticism, abandoning its previous pitches for the first two groups of words (mm. 123–26) and thereby forming a unison where there had been none. These changes intensify the speaker’s emotions and correspond to Baudelaire’s text alterations in the poem—“ces serments” to “ô serments,” and so on—which also served to heighten emotion. The statement of motive 4 mirrors the original, with octave revoicing. The stanza ends on a D dominant ninth chord—a change from the earlier G♯ dominant seventh—which serves as V⁹/V in the original tonic, C, and prepares the strong tonic cadence that closes the song.
Because memory plays such a large role in the meaning of the poem, musical representations of memory are equally important for identifying the song’s persona. The pervasive motives constantly recall previous musical moments, making memory central to the song, as well. The frequently returning motives provide constant references to what came before, and the sixth stanza serves as a summary, when several motives return in succession in mm. 107–11. Motives 1, 2, and 4, however, contribute most strongly to the representation of memory’s pervasiveness. For example, Debussy used fragments of motive 1 for a “dialogue” between the voice and piano in several instances in the fourth stanza. As in a development section of a sonata, the harmonic and motivic tension in the music increases and thus heightens the speaker’s anxiety in dealing with these memories. Several of the motives relate to the speaker’s emotions, because of the role they play in heightening the intensity of the music, through either chromaticism or fragmentation. Throughout the song the speaker’s memories serve as the context for expression of emotion, allowing music that refers to emotion to refer to memory at the same time.

Of all these figures motive 4 refers to memory most directly. At first this motive appears to be inconsequential, taking on significance only later in the song. Its first occurrence comes with the text “Et les soirs au balcon,” the central image of the text—the reason for the poem to exist at all. Eventually motive 4 joins with the chromatic triplet figure from mm. 89 and 99, which, as stated earlier, also relates to motive 4. This phrase also highlights the important text “Je sais l’art d’évoquer les minutes heureuses,” a direct reference to memory. Later, in m. 107, motive 4 appears with its original rhythm to the text “ces baisers infinis,” with the addition of the chromaticism that appeared earlier in mm. 89 and 99. By connecting these infinite kisses to the preceding references to the nights on the balcony and memory of the happy past, this motive
takes on a primary role. As mentioned previously, motive 4 figures significantly in the ending of
the song, with its final occurrence corresponding to the text “ô baisers infinis!” This figure thus
represents specific memories of the beloved and her past with the speaker.

Throughout “Le Balcon” the voice and piano perform, for the most part, separate musical
material. The fact that the piano and voice join during the appearances of motive 4 is therefore
significant. Their coming together at these times strengthens the role of memory in the song; the
speaker’s experiences of memories, described by the motives in the piano, become a part of the
present as well as the past.

The final motive to be explained is motive 3b. Although, along with the other versions of
motive 3, this figure represents the sun, motive 3b in particular holds a deeper significance
across the song. An examination of this motive’s appearances helps to explain its expanded
meaning. First, the beginning of the vocal line featured this motive on the word “Mère,” one of
the symbols representing the beloved. An additional (though rhythmically modified) entrance of
this motive, in m. 51, corresponds to the text “reine des adorées,” another clear reference to the
beloved. The two versions of the figure in m. 91 refer to her indirectly, in that the speaker
frames the past within her body. Finally, motive 3b occurs prominently at the end of the song,
where it eclipses the other motives. The appearances of this motive indicate that somehow the
beloved is present at the end of the song. She is not depicted as a character or agent, however,
but only as a part of the speaker’s memories. Thus, in addition to its representation of the sun,
light, and warmth, motive 3b gradually takes on greater significance for the outcome of the song.

Through its two symbolic realms, motive 3b ties all the central ideas together: the
speaker’s memory of the beloved and their times together, the images of warmth and light that
become primary in Debussy’s setting, and the speaker’s hope for the future. As Baudelaire
wrote the poem, the speaker focuses on the past. The speaker’s memories of the beloved control the action, and the text takes place in a remembrance of moments that no longer exist. In Debussy’s song the recurring presence of the sun, with whose light the hope for happiness rests, makes the content the future as much as the past. At the end of the song this central image of light and warmth returns, through the appearances of motives 3a and 3b, to conclude the piece. Because motive 3b also represents the beloved, the reliance on this figure gives the speaker an indication that his or her fate rests with the beloved, and that the beloved is present at the song’s conclusion. The answer to the speaker’s question “Will we be reunited?” is “Yes.”

A reunion between the speaker and the beloved also deepens the meaning of motive 4, during which the two characters join musically. The “minutes heureuses” and “baisers infinis” associated with motive 4 no longer belong only to the past—they also symbolize the present and future. In retrospect stanza 5 becomes the turning point of the song. The motives that represented memory disappear in this stanza, while the material that will help to establish the beloved’s presence takes over the primary role. When the earlier motives return in the final stanza, they occur in a new context—as the basis from which the speaker’s future happiness is understood.

**Persona and Aesthetic Position**

In Baudelaire’s poem the persona was the unhappy lover controlled by memories of happier times with the beloved. As already mentioned, the poem leaves the persona’s fate undecided, without indicating whether the lovers’ relationship will be rekindled. In the song the persona’s knowledge of events surrounding the poem’s characters differentiates this figure from the speaker, at least in time, if not also as a distinct person. For “Le Balcon” as a poem, the
persona holds the emotional position provided in the text and then expresses that emotion. Motivically, however, the song indicates that the persona knows the speaker’s fate, specifically the future of the speaker’s relationship with the beloved. The persona may or may not be the same figure as the speaker; we know only that the persona uses the speaker’s words to reflect on memories of the past and an uncertain outcome for which time has provided the answer.

To understand how this integration of speaker (in the past) and persona (in the present) might occur, one could imagine the persona as someone reading a diary. The entire song can be viewed in such a context, because it establishes the centrality of memory from its opening, when the piano introduces the first of the motives. Throughout the song the surges of intense emotion resemble what one might feel in reliving a written description of experiences that affected the writer deeply. The speaker’s emotions intensify through chromaticism or increased rhythmic activity, in conjunction with the highly charged text. For this persona the words of the text, written during an earlier period of sadness, contrast with the happy resolution, framed by the constant reference to memory. In this way the persona of the song places the poem in a new context by elaborating musically on events that the text itself does not resolve.

The persona of this song places its aesthetic within the realm of romanticism. In its progressive harmonies and dense textures, “Le Balcon” relies on a late romantic style for its musical aesthetic. In addition, the highly personal lyric voice of the speaker, who experiences a series of emotional intensifications, shifts from focusing on the past and its memories to the hope for the future with the beloved. Whereas the poem allowed the ending to remain ambiguous, the song resolves the ambiguity. A symbolist approach to the song might have characteristically exploited the text’s unresolved ending, but the romantic persona uses the formal and motivic structure to explain fully the relationship between the emotional memories of the past and the song’s hopeful outcome.
“Harmonie du soir”

Source Material

“Harmonie du soir,” the second song in this set, was composed a year after “Le Balcon.” The Bibliothèque Nationale autograph manuscript, Ms. 1018, is dated “Janvier 1889” in Debussy’s hand. This manuscript also contains markings by Durand similar to those in “Le Balcon” (added accidental, expression marks, and dynamic indications).

Musical Analysis

“Harmonie du soir” comprises sixteen phrases, which coincide with the sixteen lines of the poem. The song’s form mirrors Baudelaire’s pantoum form: Each repeated line of text uses repeated music, although the two phrases are never identical. The repetitive form could have resulted in a song with a “two steps forward, one step back” motion. In this composition, however, Debussy created smooth transitions from new material to old, and he unified the song through various compositional devices. Three aspects of this song contribute to its continuity: the use of motivic figures; the harmonic structure; and repeated elements that occur outside the confines of the pantoum form.

The song’s two motives first appear in the opening four measures (see Example 4.10a). Motive 1 comprises a single whole-step upper-neighbor tone that appears in a variety of rhythms throughout the song, in both the piano and voice parts. Motive 2, which only the piano performs, includes a descending triplet rhythm over an interval of some species of fourth.

Table 4.2 summarizes the appearances of the motives, which are listed along with the corresponding text.

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Example 4.10  “Harmonie du soir,” motivic material

(a) mm. 1–10

Andante tempo rubato

(b) mm. 20–23

Animando poco a poco
Example 4.10, continued
(c) mm. 28–30

Table 4.2  Harmonic and motivic overview of “Harmonie du soir”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Tonal Center/Harmony</th>
<th>Motives*</th>
<th>m.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[piano introduction]</td>
<td>c#</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voici venir le temps où vibrant sur sa tige</td>
<td>A7 → F♯9 (V)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaque fleur s’évapore ainsi qu’un encensoir;</td>
<td>B (I) → B♭ → G♯ (V/C♭)</td>
<td>2, 1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir;</td>
<td>c♯ → B → A (V/D)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!</td>
<td>D♭</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaque fleur s’évapore ainsi qu’un encensoir;</td>
<td>B♭2 → c</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu’on afflige;</td>
<td>D♭7 → B♭ → a♭[♭9]</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!</td>
<td>E♭7 → D♭ (V/G)</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir.</td>
<td>GM7 → C</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu’on afflige,</td>
<td>C♭ → e♭/♭/♭/♭</td>
<td>2, 1</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir!</td>
<td>E♭7 → A♭7 → e♭7</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir;</td>
<td>F♭7 → B♭/♭/♭</td>
<td>2, 1</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le soleil s’est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.</td>
<td>F♭</td>
<td>2, 1</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,</td>
<td>f♭6/F♭7 → B♭ (V/E)</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige!</td>
<td>E♭9 → A♭9 → E♭9 [d♭7]</td>
<td>2, 1</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le soleil s’est noyé dans son sang qui se fige . . .</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensoir!</td>
<td>e♭9 → G♭ → B (I)</td>
<td>2 (altered)</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[piano conclusion]</td>
<td>B → G♭7 → E♭9, (F♭) → B</td>
<td>1, 2, 1</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates order of motives’ appearance, but not necessarily the number of times they are heard.
and harmonic structure of each line. Throughout the first stanza motive 1 appears quite prevalently but motive 2 only twice. In the second stanza motive 1 disappears, while motive 2 takes over the texture, especially in mm. 21–23 and 28–29, which contain successive iterations of the triplet figure (see Examples 4.10b and c).

In contrast, the third and fourth stanzas allow the motives to overlap, as shown in Example 4.11. In mm. 44–47 (Example 4.11a) motive 1 is prominent in both the piano’s right hand part and the voice, while motive 2 appears three times, each time rising in register. The reiteration of this text, “Le soleil s’est noyé . . .” (mm. 59–61, shown in Example 4.11b), provides a similar overlap, though less dense than that of the first statement. The two motives actually join in mm. 69–70 (Example 4.11c), where motive 1 leads directly into motive 2 in augmentation. Thus, both motives remain part of the texture until the end of the song, and

Example 4.11 “Harmonie du soir,” overlapping motives

(a) mm. 44–47
Debussy unified the composition by bringing the two motivic figures together for the song’s conclusion.

The harmonic motion in the song provides both continuity and a sense of constant movement. Example 4.12 summarizes the harmonic structure in reduced form. The tonic, B major, rarely appears throughout the song. This tonality is not evident in the song’s opening, apart from the key signature, until m. 7. The piano’s introduction begins on a C♯-minor triad, which leads to a dominant seventh built on A and eventually to an F♯ ninth chord, V in B major.
Example 4.12 Reduction of “Harmonie du soir”
The harmony quickly departs from the tonic, however, and this key will not return until the song’s final lines.

As Example 4.12 shows, the harmonic structure consists of rapid key changes. Each line of the poem adopts a new tonal center, or more than one, so that no key area lasts as the tonic for more than a few measures. (In the reduction vertical lines between the measure numbers delineate the ends of phrases of text.) The recurring phrases do not usually return in their original keys; instead, they are prepared by the previous line and likewise prepare for the next key change. Each modulation is prepared by one of the following methods:

- A V or vii chord
- A common-tone modulation
- Altering one chord to form a new chord (e.g., adding a seventh, changing the mode)

Although the tonal centers move smoothly from one to the next, the harmonic reduction shows that some of the modulations utilize progressions that are not strong ways to establish a tonic. The ends of the first two lines of text close with authentic cadences, but the fourth line begins with a 4\(\,\frac{1}{2}\) chord, as does the seventh. As the second half of the song deepens in chromaticism, the tonal centers establish themselves even less definitively than in the first half. For the last nine lines of text (beginning in m. 28), only two phrases begin with a triad in the accompaniment; the others use some form of seventh chord, with one ninth chord in m. 53. Thus, the “tonal centers” serve not as cadential resting points but as part of a larger succession that continues throughout the song. In this way Debussy created a type of unstable harmonic structure that suits Baudelaire’s circular text.

The song’s chromatic passages tend to feature seventh chords, especially in the second and third stanzas and leading into the fourth. These seventh chords are frequently diminished or half-diminished, undermining any sense of tonic from these passages. Because seventh chords
appear so frequently, the tritone is a prevalent interval throughout the song, in both harmonic and melodic contexts. The use of both seventh chords and tritones contributes to the fluctuating harmony so important to this song.

Debussy used melodic tritones as part of both of the song’s motives. During the first occurrence of motive 1, the melodic highpoint of d♯2 makes a tritone against the A dominant seventh in the harmony (m. 3); the phrase “Le soleil s’est noyé . . .” contains a similar tritone in mm. 47 (F♯ – B♯) and 61 (E♯ – B), two additional instances of motive 1. Here the tritone appears not only vertically but also in a linear fashion, with the contour of the phrase outlining the interval. Motive 2 spans a tritone in one of its early appearances (m. 9), but the interval does not occur again within this motive until the “Le soleil” phrase. In mm. 44–47 motive 2 presents a tritone three times, first between A♯ and E, then with an F♯ – B♯ tritone that immediately follows the same pitches in motive 1. The return of this phrase in mm. 59–61 contains one tritone as part of motive 2, in m. 60. Because tritones are prevalent in the motives, as well as in the song’s nonmotivic features, these figures further unify the music and add to the instability of the harmony.

Nearly every phrase of “Harmonie du soir” uses some form of reprised music. The first two phrases present what will become the song’s motives. In the rest of the composition, other musical material returns in addition to the motives. Although the recurring phrases that correspond to the pantoum’s structure are the most obvious example, occasionally Debussy also reused material outside of the pantoum pattern. For instance, one repeated fragment occurs in the early part of the song: the syncopated rhythmic cell heard in the right hand of the piano part in m. 6.
This pattern serves as a rhythmic motive, because it occurs in some important places in the song. In its first entrance the syncopated figure appears in conjunction with motive 1; later occurrences of this pattern retain the interval of the second, even though they do not conform to the pitch sequence of motive 1.

One significant use of this rhythm occurs in mm. 30–31 and again in mm. 42–43, on the word “reposoir” (see Example 4.13a and b). The pattern’s conjunction with this word is

Example 4.13 “Harmonie du soir,” use of syncopated motive
(a) mm. 30–31

Example 4.13 “Harmonie du soir,” use of syncopated motive
(b) mm. 42–43
particularly interesting, since both places are preceded by authentic cadences within simple
textures, making the syncopated rhythm the focal point of each phrase. (The first of these
cadences, which can be considered representative of both, appears in its entirety in Example
4.10c.) The rhythmic cell returns in a striking way in mm. 65–67—the phrase that contains
another of Baudelaire’s sacred images, the “ostensoir” (Example 4.13c). Again, the rhythmic
pattern is audible above the arpeggiated G dominant seventh in the accompaniment, thus
connecting two phrases in the song with related texts, despite their distance from each other.

A second example of recurring material occurs with the phrase “Valse mélancolique . . .”
(see Example 4.14), which is accompanied by an arching, arpeggiated sextuplet pattern both
times it appears (mm. 14–16 and 24–25). In m. 17, for the return of the phrase “Chaque fleur
s’évapore . . .”, the sextuplet pattern continues in the accompaniment, replacing the simpler
accompaniment heard with the first appearance of this phrase (mm. 7–9). This technique serves
two purposes: It unifies the opening of the song while at the same time setting off the phrase “Le
violon frémit . . .”, which first occurs in between the phrases featuring the waltz’s sextuplets
Example 4.14  “Harmonie du soir,” mm. 14–25
Example 4.14, continued

(mm. 20–23). In mood and harmony this phrase contrasts the material that surrounds it, an observation that will be crucial to the hermeneutic analysis of the song.

The analysis of Baudelaire’s “Harmonie du soir” in Chapter 2 pointed out the significant references to music within the poem. Debussy depicted musically the “valse mélancolique”—not in a literal way, although the meter is triple, but in the circular motion of both the text and the music and in the flowing sextuplet accompaniment of the words “Valse mélancolique . . .”
themselves. Motive 2 also provides a self-reference to music within the song. The repetitions of
the motive in conjunction with the text “Le violon frémit . . .” suggest a connection between
instrumental music and motive 2. The motive is instrumental in nature; such fast-moving triplets
would not be appropriate for vocal music in this style, but one can easily imagine them being
played on a violin, and they suit the piano equally well. Indeed, this motive appears in the
accompaniment only, reinforcing its instrumental connections.

The chromatic style of the music that accompanies both references to the violin (mm. 20–
23 and 32–35) serves two purposes. First, the chromaticism strengthens the reference to music
already made explicit by mention of a particular instrument. Each of these passages contains a
series of diminished seventh chords, which sets them apart from the surrounding material and the
rest of the song; no other phrase contains music that is this chromatic. Second, chromatic music
effectively captures the speaker’s emotion at this point. The line of text that refers to the violin
also mentions the distressed heart, the primary character of the song. The chromaticism in the
accompaniment appropriately illustrates the mood of the speaker, to whom the heart belongs. As
the speaker’s emotion intensifies, so does the musical complexity. The second appearance of the
phrase “Le violon frémit . . .” coincides with a marked increase in the amount of motivic material
used. Thus, the entire song gives the impression of arising out of the speaker’s mood:
melancholy and contemplative. Likewise, the ethereal ending effectively captures the sacred
nature of the speaker’s memory of the beloved.

Persona and Aesthetic Position

The poetic persona of “Harmonie du soir” was equated with the distressed heart
mentioned in the text, so that the lyric voice comes from the unhappy lover who holds memories
of the beloved sacred. The poem serves as the inspiration for the song, but its influence reaches beyond the creation of a lyric mood piece. Various features of the song—the circular harmony, the motivic interplay, the references to music itself—draw attention to these purely musical elements as the song progresses, even more than to the words being sung. The speaker, represented by the singer’s voice, experiences the emotion of the text, but filtered through a musical language. Thus, this persona, a formerly happy lover, appears more specifically as a musician, who uses musical elements (such as the depiction of a violin playing a waltz) to express his or her emotions.

The expression of emotion through music was, as discussed in Chapter 1, an important aesthetic ideal for the symbolist poets. Reading the text of “Harmonie du soir” by itself, one could consider this work one of Baudelaire’s protosymbolist poems, based on its prevalent musical imagery, the repetition of only two rhyming syllables throughout, and the suppression of a clearly identifiable speaker. The similar way in which Debussy’s music evolves identifies the song’s persona as not only a musician but also a symbolist.

Three elements of the song point to this conclusion. First, the references to music were, of course, important to symbolist poetry. The focus on the waltz and the violin highlight the significance of music, and the song itself exploits those musical manifestations. Second, as discussed in Chapter 2, the poem’s speaker is suppressed for the most part, even though the reader identifies the emotions being described as belonging to the speaker. The music likewise establishes emotion without creating much characterization. Finally, the song establishes the same mood as the poem. Baudelaire’s writing focuses more on sound—such as the two repeated rhyming syllables—and on establishing a mood than on defining character. In the same manner the song uses musical features, such as harmony that never truly settles into a key and complex
motivic relationships, to focus attention on the sound of the music itself more than the meaning of the text. Thus, the text provides the reason for the song to be written, but the purpose goes beyond an expression of the speaker’s emotion. The ethereal music sets the correct mood and in this way treats the text in the traditional manner. What is not traditional, however, is that the music also shares the text’s poetic style—the song puts into music the same techniques that made poetry symbolist.

“Le Jet d’eau”

Source Material

The third Baudelaire song in Debussy’s set, “Le Jet d’eau,” was composed in March 1889. The Bibliothèque Nationale autograph manuscript (Ms. 1015) contains blue pencil markings by Durand. He added numerous corrections to the score, primarily dynamic and expression markings, slurs, accents, and accidentals. In addition, Durand occasionally added or corrected notes; inserted clefs, key signatures, or time signatures to indicate changes (Debussy frequently omitted these details from his scores); and altered rhythms by adding dots to notes or dividing a held note. Although these changes may seem potentially more interesting than the addition of slurs or accents, Durand’s melodic and rhythmic changes do not provide clues to Debussy’s compositional process but, again, merely take the form of necessary notational clarifications.

A few corrections in Debussy’s hand, written in red pen, appear in Ms. 1015. These corrections are minor ones, similar to those made by Durand. In m. 6 Debussy crossed out the word “poco” above the crescendo in the voice part, and in m. 7 he removed a flat on the first E in
the voice part. A third correction by Debussy appears in m. 45, where he added a sharp to the F in the voice part. Finally, Debussy made one additional change to the manuscript in m. 38. At this spot the score contains a pasted-in measure, which matches the printed score and completely covers most of what Debussy originally wrote. Only a low C in the piano left hand is visible, and this pitch does appear in the printed version. Whether the score originally contained substantially different material from the final version of the song, or whether Debussy was simply repairing what would have been difficult to correct directly in the score, could not be ascertained.

Also housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale is a two-page sketch of material for “Le Jet d’eau.” The sketch occupies the first two folios in a sketchbook known as the Meyer Sketchbook [Ms. 20632(2)]. Debussy left no date in this sketchbook, and the only other identified sketches provide no assistance in assigning a date to the sketch for “Le Jet d’eau.” The Meyer Sketchbook also contains sketches for the *Scènes aux crépuscule*, the work from which the orchestral *Nocturnes* originated, and a letter from Debussy to André Poniatowski dated 8/9 September 1892 states that the *Scènes aux crépuscule* are nearly finished. Because this is more than three years after the completion of “Le Jet d’eau,” however, these sketches cannot help date the sketchbook as a whole. Without a definitive date for when Debussy began the sketches for *Scènes aux crépuscule*, not even an educated guess can be made for the date of origin of the song’s sketch.

A transcription of the sketch for “Le Jet d’eau” appears as Example 4.15. Note for note the sketch does not match any of the music in the published song, but certain elements of the

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7 See Briscoe, *Debussy*, 20, for a brief description of the sketchbook. The name “Meyer Sketchbook” comes from the provenance; Briscoe identifies André Meyer as its former owner.
refrain are evident in preliminary form within the sketch. First, the rhythms of the sketch’s voice part resemble patterns that dominate in the published song’s refrain (see Example 4.16a–b). The pattern of a quarter note followed by four eighth notes occurs three times in the refrain, and the rhythm of the final lines of the sketch resembles the vocal line at the end of the refrain. Second, although the two melodies differ widely in pitch and contour, the text of the refrain fits the
Example 4.16  “Le Jet d’eau,” comparisons with sketch (bracketed segments indicate similar passages)

(a) mm. 22–25, vocal part

(b) mm. 30–33, vocal part

(c) mm. 26–27, piano part

(d) mm. 28–29, piano part

sketch’s melody almost exactly—only the final note is missing. The lines of the poem’s stanzas, which are longer, cannot be made to suit this melody. Third, the accompaniment in the sketch contains the quintuplets that are characteristic of the refrain in the published song and that will come to represent the fountain’s cascading water (see Example 4.16c–d). The fourth measure of
the sketch especially resembles the descending quintuplets in mm. 26–27 and 55–56 of the published song, and the rhythm of a quintuplet group followed by two quarter notes also appears frequently in the final version. Lastly, although the harmony of the sketch creates more puzzles than it solves, the pitches C and G hold an important place, as they do in the published song, especially notable in the sketch’s conclusion on an unresolved G dominant seventh chord.

The sketch divulges little in terms of Debussy’s compositional process for this song. Although the sketch relates to the refrain, the song contains many elements that simply do not appear in the sketch. In comparison to the sketch, the published song presents more variety in rhythm, more harmonic cohesion, and a smooth rhythmic contour. The sketch does show, however, that early in the composition of this song, Debussy was concerned with an appropriate setting of the text and a depiction of the poem’s central image—the fountain—in the accompaniment.

**Musical Analysis**

The final, published version of “Le Jet d’eau” reflects several ways in which Debussy brought the mood and subject of the poem into his music. Important expression markings—a tempo of *andantino tranquillo*, and the markings *languido* in the voice and *molto dolce* in the piano—help the music approximate the sensual and contented mood established by the opening stanza of text. The song’s depiction of the fountain will also be crucial in analyzing the music and its persona. One of Debussy’s “word painting” techniques, a short repeated figure that continues unchanged for a lengthy passage, appears in the opening of the song. The first nine measures contain a harmonic major second, played constantly in octaves by the right hand of the piano (see Example 4.17a). Such undulating figures occur frequently in the song; sometimes
Example 4.17 Musical depiction of water in “Le Jet d’eau”

(a) mm. 1–3

Voice
Andantino tranquillo

Piano
Andantino tranquillo

(b) mm. 43–46

Voice

Puis, elle s’épanche, mou-ran-te. En un flot de tris-te lan-gueur,

Piano

(c) mm. 20–21

Voice

Piano

pp
they include repetition of an open fifth or arpeggio, as in mm. 43–49 in the piano left hand (see Example 4.17b). Rapid figuration represents the rise and fall of the fountain’s spray through up-and-down motion. This depiction of water is unmistakable from the first entrance of this type of figure at m. 20 (see Example 4.17c). The association of such musical elements with water corresponds to Debussy’s use of similar techniques in later works about water, such as the “Sirènes” movement of the orchestral Nocturnes (1900) and La Mer (1905).

As in the songs already discussed, Debussy allowed Baudelaire’s formal scheme to dictate the form of the music. “Le Jet d’eau” thus follows a refrain form; the three refrains contain similar material, but the stanzas are essentially through-composed. Diagram 4.1 outlines the form of the song. As the diagram shows, each stanza is divided into two parts that display distinct musical characteristics. Although the stanzas change key from part 1 to part 2, brief

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**Diagram 4.1  Form of “Le Jet d’eau”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanza 1</th>
<th>Refrain 1</th>
<th>Stanza 2</th>
<th>Refrain 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 1</td>
<td>Part 2</td>
<td>Part 1</td>
<td>Part 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>E♭ B♭7 G♭7 C♭7</td>
<td>G♭7 C♭7 A♭ E♭ G♭7 C♭7</td>
<td>C♭7 C♭7 G♭7 B♭7 E♭ A♭ E♭ G♭7 C♭7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. 1</td>
<td>m. 12</td>
<td>m. 22</td>
<td>m. 34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanza 3</th>
<th>Refrain 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 1</td>
<td>Part 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e a♭7 d♭7 F G♭</td>
<td>g♭ E♭ A♭ D G♭7 C♭ F D♭ G♭9 (g♭ - F♭ - D♭) C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. 64</td>
<td>m. 73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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piano interludes and changes in musical texture also delineate the two halves. These musical divisions coincide with the midpoint of each stanza of text, so that each half of the stanzas uses four lines of the poem. Baudelaire’s poem suggests such a division of the text, because in each stanza the speaker focuses on the beloved in the first half and subjective emotion in the second half—a juxtaposition of external and internal viewpoints.

The languid beginning centers on the major-second clusters shown in Example 4.17a. This recurring pattern encompasses the first part of stanza 1. The vocal melody moves independently of the clusters, instead joining occasionally with the left hand. These two lines move in a similar contour, as the left hand features a steady dotted-quarter rhythm that gradually descends across four octaves.

When part 2 arrives in m. 12, the text mentions the fountain for the first time. The description of the chattering fountain matches the increased activity in the accompaniment. Although the clusters of seconds persist, they now take place within triplets over arpeggios in the left hand. The faster rhythms in the accompaniment, combined with frequent key changes, increase the emotional intensity of the music. Meanwhile, the vocal part changes little, intensifying slightly across the word “extase” but generally maintaining its languid character, a mood consistently expressed by the text of the first stanza. Only the accompaniment signals that the emotion within the song is in fact deepening, contrary to the words and vocal style of the speaker.

The transition to the first refrain (mm. 20–21) brings in the rapid figures that most literally represent the fountain, as shown in Example 4.17c. As the refrain progresses, the transition’s sixteenth notes become quintuplets and sextuplets that constantly flow into one another. By adding these rapid notes and increasing the tempo, Debussy continued the
intensification that began during stanza 1. The refrain also introduces a harmonic element that becomes a signature of this song: augmented sonorities. An augmented seventh chord built on G serves as both the opening chord for the refrain and the chord that prepares the refrain’s final C-major triad. Between these points, other augmented triads occur in mm. 28 and 32.

Stanza 2 (mm. 34–50) begins seamlessly out of the refrain by continuing the sextuplets and only shifting mode from C major to C minor. As the song moves toward the middle of the second stanza, the emotion intensifies again, the voice finally matching the drive of the accompaniment in its rising melodic line. Appropriately, the text at this point includes the words “S’élance . . . vers les vastes cieux.” The accompaniment likewise moves up in register, the sextuplets shifting the left hand into the treble clef. At the end of this section (m. 42) the harmony lands on a B dominant seventh chord, which prepares the modulation to E major that occurs in part 2.

This point marks the peak of both the text and the music. Textually the mood is about to shift from the happy memories of recent pleasure to the melancholy that follows. In stanza 2, part 2 (beginning in m. 43), the imagery centers on the sadness that descends into the speaker’s heart. The music reflects this change of mood in several ways. First, the tempo returns to the andantino tranquillo of the opening. Second, the music is at its most chromatic in this section. Although “Le Jet d’eau” overall uses more conservative harmonies than the songs discussed previously, some degree of chromaticism occurs in part 2, as the key slips down from E to Eb, followed by Ab and finally ending on an E ninth chord. The vocal line also descends from f#2 to f#1 over the course of these four phrases, so that the music moves downward just as the text describes the speaker’s descending sadness. Finally, the rhythmic texture moves away from the rapid sextuplets and back to the triplets heard in part 2 of the previous stanza.
The second half of stanza 2 is not purely tranquil, however. During all of part 2 the right hand of the piano repeats a turning figure borrowed from the first half of the stanza (see Example 4.18). As the music progresses, this cell gradually rises in pitch, spanning a total register of nearly two octaves. The continuity of this figure throughout stanza 2 allows the repeated cell to symbolize the speaker’s range of emotions, first the happiness inspired by the beloved, then the sadness that is left behind.

When the second refrain arrives, the texture reverses character somewhat, compared to the close of stanza 2. The quintuplets and sextuplets return, although at first they appear slightly less often than in the first refrain. By the third line of text, however, the second refrain nearly parallels the first. With this important change in mood the fountain demonstrates that its role is more than a character; it affects the speaker by connecting itself to the memory of the beloved. When, in the second refrain, the still cheerful, chattering fountain changes the speaker’s melancholy back to a happier mood, the fountain’s music takes on a significant role.

The final stanza (beginning in m. 64) again arises out of the refrain, as the second stanza did, although the key changes to E minor, the tempo relaxes with the marking *meno mosso*, and the earlier sextuplets slow down to become quintuplets. These slight alterations have the effect of increasing the melancholy mood. Whereas the emotion in the first half of stanza 2 gradually intensified, this final stanza does the opposite. The dynamic level becomes softer as the singer describes the beloved’s beauty. Even the fountain’s mood changes to become as melancholy as the speaker’s; as the text states, its former chattering has become sobbing, and the music depicts this change. At this point in the music (m. 71) the tempo slows further, and the quintuplets, which now occur in an extreme upper register, fade into the background. In the previous refrain the fountain’s emotion influenced that of the speaker, but now, in stanza 3, the reverse occurs.
Example 4.18 “Le Jet d’eau,” verse 2, borrowed cell (circled pitches)

(a) mm. 37–38

(b) mm. 46–50
The fountain makes a final assertion of its presence as the quintuplets bridge the transition to the second half of stanza 3, which resembles a reprise. In mm. 73 and 75 the left hand of the piano brings back a four-note descending pattern first heard in mm. 2 and 4, now under an arpeggiated G♭-minor chord, while the quintuplets continue in the right hand (Example 4.19a and b). After m. 75, however, when the fountain is mentioned for the last time (not...
including the refrain), an abrupt change occurs. The fourth note of the motive changes from D♯ to D♭, moving the music in a new direction. The harmony suddenly shifts to a ninth chord built on E, and the quintuplets disappear, to be replaced by open fifth triplets in the left hand.

Even these figures last only three measures, and as the speaker describes how the natural setting reflects his melancholy love, the harmony modulates to D major. Here the accompaniment brings back the descending motive, but now it has been transferred to the right hand with a melodic rather than harmonic function, as well as shortened to three notes (Example 4.19c). At the same time the left-hand chords contain a similar descent (in augmentation) in their highest pitches, leading up to the continuation of the motive in the bass line in m. 82.

The series of pitches contained in the three-note descending motive is particularly important. While the figure partially outlines the tonic triad (D major) and is eventually harmonized by that chord in m. 81, it begins on the sixth scale degree—a variation on the major second that figures so prominently throughout the song. In addition, the truncation of the four-
note motive into three pitches represents the speaker’s emotional change from pleasure to melancholy. The four-note motive, first heard while the speaker is still happy, is now fundamentally changed, replaced by the three-note version for the rest of the song, as the speaker’s mood is permanently changed from pleasure to sadness. In addition, for the motive’s first entrance it appeared in both the vocal part and in the accompaniment, but from m. 4 on, and as it is transformed from four pitches to three, the figure remains in the piano part only, symbolizing the disappearance of the speaker’s initial happiness.

The final refrain (mm. 83–97) contrasts the first two in several ways. First, the tempo is again andantino tranquillo instead of the refrain’s previously faster tempo. Second, although the last refrain still begins with the G augmented seventh chord, no further augmented sonorities appear in the remainder of the song. The harmony displays other alterations, as well. Where the earlier refrains modulated through A♭ and E, this final version moves through F major and D♭ major. Finally, instead of beginning with rapid quintuplets, the refrain’s accompaniment features a melodic and syncopated version of the descending motive, still in the three-note form (Example 4.20a). This change links the final refrain to the sadness of stanza 3 instead of to the happiness represented by the previous refrains. Two versions of the fountain’s passagework do appear: four measures of sixteenth notes (mm. 87–90) and a series of harp-like arpeggios (mm. 91–93). Because of the slower tempo, however, these passages do not have the same effect as they might at a faster speed.

The song closes in the tonic, C major, still highlighting major seconds, through the syncopated descending motive from the beginning of the refrain and through the addition of the sixth scale degree to the concluding chord (Example 4.20b). As the ending of the song demonstrates, the melancholy of the speaker has permanently changed the fountain’s emotional expression. Whereas in the first stanza the fountain reflected the speaker’s happiness, both in the
text and the music, by the end of the song the sound of the water changes to represent sadness, just as the speaker’s emotion changes over the course of the song.

Although the poem provides another potential character—the beloved, who is the poem’s primary addressee—this figure does not play a perceptible role in the song. Indirectly, however, the beloved is present not just as the addressee but also as the reason for the speaker’s emotional
shift from pleasure to sadness. The text does not explain why or how the beloved brings this melancholy mood into the speaker’s heart; rather, the speaker describes his or her emotion and implies that the beloved is the cause. Thus, one could trace the sadness present in the song as passing from the beloved to the speaker, then from the speaker to the fountain.

“Le Jet d’eau” demonstrates that music can add plotted events to a text that is primarily lyric. In Baudelaire’s poem the fountain is present but passive—it serves only as a reflection of the speaker’s emotions. The fountain’s role in the song is essentially the same as in the text, but through the music the fountain becomes active, or an agent. When in the course of the song the fountain influences the emotions of the speaker but in the end becomes changed itself, these are plotted events in which both the speaker and the fountain take part.

**Persona and Aesthetic Position**

Despite the presence of elements of plot, “Le Jet d’eau” remains for the most part a lyric piece. The speaker, and persona, of the poem represented a lover whose mood shifts from pleasure to sadness, for unknown reasons, over the course of the text. The song serves as a study of this speaker’s emotions, which change because of the fountain’s influence. For the speaker, who in this song is the same figure as the persona, the fountain represents past happiness. This emotion surfaces at various points, but ultimately sadness overtakes all the pleasant memories of the past. Through the music the persona elaborates on the emotional turmoil the beloved has caused. As the text changes from the external (the beloved) to the internal (the speaker’s subjective emotions) and back again, the music changes, as well. In addition, the music allows the fountain to take on an active role by affecting the persona’s emotional position, thereby broadening the depiction of his or her agitation. The song thus presents a more complete picture of this melancholy lover than that depicted in the text alone.
The importance of the interaction between nature and the human world in this song determines the presence of a romantic persona. The ways in which the music deepens the meaning of the text emphasize the role of subjective, personal emotion, especially as it affects and is affected by the agency of the fountain. Such a focus on individual experience and the role that nature plays in that experience represents a recognizable ideal of romanticism.

In addition, the element of form supports the romantic aesthetic in “Le Jet d’eau.” The song follows the poem’s refrain structure closely, in its division of the verse and refrain sections and in its use of recurring music for the refrains. The music also takes a flexible approach to that form, however, dividing the verses into two subsections based on the text and adapting the repeated musical material to reflect the emotion present in the words. This treatment of form reflects romanticism in its playing on the listener’s expectations in order to heighten the emotional effect of both the text and the music.

**Orchestrated Version**

In a letter to André Caplet dated 11 October 1912, Debussy wrote, “I have always refused to orchestrate my songs, with kindness, stubbornness, and ferocity; several great [female] singers—at least by their girth—have asked me to do so and my opinion remains the same.” Despite this strongly worded sentiment, Debussy did orchestrate a few of his songs.

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9 Debussy, *Lettres*, 232. “... j’ai toujours refusé d’orchestrer mes mélodies, cela avec gentillesse, obstination, et férocité; plusieurs grandes chanteuses,—au moins par la taille—, me l’ont demandé et mon avis là-dessus reste le même.” The letter continues with Debussy giving Caplet permission to orchestrate some of the *Ariettes oubliées*. Caplet orchestrated the first and fifth songs in the set, as well as other works by Debussy (primarily piano pieces). In addition, he revised Debussy’s orchestration of “Le Jet d’eau.” It is not known to which specific singers Debussy was referring, only that the word “chanteuses” indicates that they were women.

10 In 1901 Debussy orchestrated the second and fourth songs in the *Proses lyriques* (originally published in 1895). He also orchestrated his *Trois ballades de Villon* in 1910, the same year he composed the songs for voice with piano accompaniment. The orchestrations were published in 1911. See Debussy Letters, 265, and François Lesure’s *Catalogue de l’œuvre de Claude Debussy* (Geneva: Editions Minkoff, 1977).
them was “Le Jet d’eau,” the only song considered here that received such treatment from the composer. The manuscript for the orchestral version survives at the Bibliothèque Nationale as Ms. 1016. Its inscription shows the dates “1890–1907,” but at the end of the manuscript, where Debussy typically wrote the date when a work was completed, the date “Janvier 1907” appears. According to Marcel Dietschy the orchestration was one of several projects that Debussy undertook to satisfy Durand’s “editorial appetite.” Durand published the orchestrated song later in 1907. The song was performed at the Concerts Colonne on 24 February 1907; whether this performance took place before or after the publication of the song is unclear.

Debussy’s composition, which requires a full orchestra, calls for the following instrumentation:

- 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons
- 4 horns, 2 trumpets
- celesta
- 2 harps
- complete string section, divisi

This instrumentation represents a typical Debussy orchestra; for example, without the trumpets and celesta, the orchestra used in this song would be identical to that used in his Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune.

The song begins in a manner similar to the piano version, with sustained chords that approximate the piano’s repeated octaves through a hocket-like technique between the violas, violins, and flutes. For the orchestral version Debussy added a second measure of introduction, so that the repetition of the major second extends over two measures instead of one.

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11 Dietschy, 147.
Music representing the fountain provides the first significant departure from the piano version of the song. As the words first describe the chattering fountain in m. 13 (piano version, m. 12), the strings’ triplets resemble the original accompaniment, but Debussy made the depiction of water stronger by adding pizzicato chords in the first violins and flowing sextuplets in the clarinet (compare Examples 4.21a and b). The latter of these new effects, as a solo, gives the fountain a “voice” when it first enters. Musical water imagery takes on an even greater role as the stanza continues, when the sextuplets move to the flutes, now performed by two players instead of one, accompanied by string tremolos.

The first refrain continues to focus on representations of the fountain, as did the original, by placing the piano’s quintuplets in the first harp and adding trills and sextuplets in the flutes. During the text “Tombe comme une averse / De larges pleurs” comes the greatest change from the original’s first refrain. The sextuplets that appeared in the left hand in mm. 30–31 (mm. 31–
Example 4.21, continued

(b) Orchestral version, mm. 13–15
32 in the orchestral version) occur in the harps, but now the strings multiply that effect by performing layer upon layer of additional rapid notes (see Example 4.22). Intricate rhythmic relationships arising from the juxtaposed sixteenth notes and sixteenth-note sextuplets (such as those occurring in the first and second violins) strengthen the image of the rushing water.

The second stanza of the orchestral version retains the musical characteristics of the parallel music in the piano version. This stanza serves as a good example of the way in which Debussy brought the original music into his orchestration. In the orchestrated version of the passage shown earlier in Example 4.17b, every element of the original piano accompaniment appears in the new version. (The orchestrated passage is shown in Example 4.23.) The left-hand triplets transfer to the third cellos, while the right-hand material is divided among the instruments: the longer notes in the clarinets, bassoons, and horns, and the disjunct triplets in the flutes. Debussy embellished the original texture, however, by adding more disjunct octave leaps
Example 4.22, continued

(b) Orchestral version, mm. 31–33
Example 4.23  “Le Jet d’eau,” orchestral version, mm. 44–47
in the strings and echoing the flutes’ major seconds in the first violins (m. 45). This passage illustrates the type of orchestration technique that Debussy used for much of the song, where the original material forms the basis for the orchestra’s music, but with more instruments at his disposal, Debussy could multiply his musical effects.

Occasionally, however, Debussy added elements that have no origin in the piano version of the song. The second refrain provides two good examples (see Example 4.24). Debussy

Example 4.24 “Le Jet d’eau,” comparison of piano and orchestral versions

(a) Piano version, mm. 51–57
Example 4.24, continued

(b) Orchestral version, mm. 52–58 (voice and string parts only)
faithfully transferred the original chords and quintuplets to the woodwinds (not shown in the example) but added rapid repeated-note, *sul ponticello* triplets in the strings for the first four
measures of the refrain. The following two measures change the strings’ notes to thirty-second notes that descend across three octaves, alternating among the first and second violins and the violas, before the refrain returns to the character of the original. These new compositional elements intensify the presence of the fountain, again displaying how Debussy used instrumental effect to its greatest advantage for depiction of the song’s subject matter.

In the orchestrated version, from m. 58 on, the accompaniment strongly resembles the piano version. What the orchestra plays retains the same character as heard in the piano. To summarize the nature of the orchestral version, although the depiction of the fountain is multiplied in some passages with orchestral effects, the layout of motives and form duplicates that of the piano version. The fountain thus plays a slightly larger role, but the resulting song conforms to the persona of the emotionally transformed lover identified in the piano version, and it also retains that version’s romantic aesthetic. What is interesting about this orchestration is its demonstration of the way in which Debussy utilized the added instruments to intensify the effects that were already present in the original version of “Le Jet d’eau.”

“Recueillement”

Source Material

“Recueillement” is unusual in that two related manuscripts of this song survive at the Bibliothèque Nationale. The first, Ms. 1019a, contains a complete version of the song. This manuscript is labeled “première.” The second manuscript, Ms. 1019b, bears the label “2e rédaction” and includes passages where Debussy indicated that a certain number of measures should be inserted from the first manuscript. Neither manuscript is dated, although catalogs of Debussy’s works compiled by Lesure and Briscoe list the song’s date of composition as 1889.
Little evidence of Debussy’s compositional process appears within either manuscript alone. Both scores resemble the other autographs held at the Bibliothèque Nationale, with few changes in the composer’s hand. Debussy appears to have submitted the first manuscript to Durand, because editorial markings for layout are present in the score. The first manuscript’s cover presents an intriguing question: For the first version of “Recueillement,” the number on the cover was initially “5,” but it was at some point changed to “4.” The handwriting could not be identified for either numeral. The cover of the second version shows the number “4” in Debussy’s hand. This second manuscript also contains layout indications, which match the format of Durand’s edition. Neither manuscript for “Recueillement,” however, contains any of Durand’s characteristic blue pencil corrections. The fact that the Bailly and Durand editions resemble each other closely makes it impossible to determine when these manuscripts were written; perhaps the first manuscript shows that Debussy intended to revise the song, but later he reverted to the original edition, which Durand published as the final version.

The two manuscript versions strongly resemble each other, with only minor variations such as changes in rhythm or pitch. Rhythmic changes generally provide greater variety in the second version. For example, several passages in the published song contain combinations of eighth notes and triplets, where in the original manuscript the rhythm was made up only of eighth notes. In some cases the changes allow for more natural text setting, as shown in Example 4.25. The examples show that the revisions replace the hypnotic quality of the first version with more interesting vocal lines and better emphasis of important syllables. In the original version of m. 33, for instance, the even eighth notes give equal weight to each syllable, but Debussy’s revision allows the syllable “fê-” of “fête” to become the focal point of the measure. A similar alteration occurs with the syllable “-mir” of “s’endormir” in m. 54.
Example 4.25 “Recueillement,” revisions to rhythm and text setting

(a) mm. 32–35

First version

\[ \text{Va, cueil - lir des re - mords dans la fê - te ser - vi - le.} \]

Second version

\[ \text{Va, cueil - lir des re - mords dans la fê - te ser - vi - le.} \]

(b) mm. 53–55

First version

\[ \text{Le so - leil mo - ri - bond s'en - dor - mir sous une ar - che,} \]

Second version

\[ \text{Le so - leil mo - ri - bond s'en - dor - mir sous une ar - che,} \]

Another kind of rhythmic change occurs in mm. 34–35. In the piano part in the first manuscript, what corresponds to the final version’s m. 35 occurs over two measures instead of one. The final version contains pitches that are present in the first manuscript, but in his revision Debussy condensed the rhythm into a single measure, at the same time eliminating one note (see Example 4.26). In the second version the voice part also extends one extra measure so that the vocal and piano lines end at the same time.

Changes in pitch fall primarily into three categories: enharmonic respellings, revoicing of chords, and correction of accidentals (e.g., Debussy initially marked a sharp where a double sharp seems to have been intended). Occasionally, however, the composer made more
significant pitch alterations. Examples 4.27 and 4.28 show two such passages, both of which come from the piano part. First, in mm. 15–28 the original version of the song uses an accompaniment figure that relies solely on open fifths in the left hand (C – G and F – C). In his revision, however, Debussy used open fifths only for the first measure of the passage, thereafter varying the left-hand figuration by alternating between two triplet patterns (each using the pitches c/C, D, and G). A passage from this section appears in Example 4.27.

Second, in the final portion of the song, Debussy removed a series of rapid descending grace notes from the right hand, while at the same time adding a second-beat low octave in the
Example 4.27 “Recueillement,” revisions to mm. 15–22 (piano part only)

(a) First version

(b) Second version

*In the published version this direction was changed to *molto sostenuto.*
left hand (see Example 4.28). The slow, repeated chords provide a more appropriate musical texture for Debussy’s indication “Solennel” at this point in the music.

To summarize the evolution of “Recueillement” across these two manuscripts, Debussy’s first version had essentially captured the song’s final form. No changes were made to harmonic structure, tempo, or the general musical style. The final version, however, does possess greater rhythmic variety in the voice part and greater textural interest in the accompaniment, and in the case of the revision to the “Solennel” passage, the second version better reflects the mood of the text. While these changes do not fundamentally alter the song’s character, they must be considered improvements that Debussy achieved over his first version of the composition.

Example 4.28 “Recueillement,” revisions to mm. 56–58 (piano part only)
(a) First version
Solennel (Plus lent)
(b) Second version
Solennel
Musical Analysis

In several ways this song represents a significant departure from the previous ones in the set. “Recueillement” bears the tempo marking lento, making it considerably slower than the first three songs. In addition, the song begins in a more contemplative mood than the previous ones. The recitative with which the vocal line begins, the relatively sparse piano accompaniment, and the slow harmonic rhythm all contribute to the pensive quality of the music.

Another significant difference between “Recueillement” and the first three songs is that its musical structure does not follow Baudelaire’s sonnet form. Table 4.3 provides an outline of the structure of the song, including form, harmony, and motivic material. The braces to the left

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Tonal Center/Harmony</th>
<th>Motive(s)*</th>
<th>m.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[piano introduction]</td>
<td>C# (no 3rd) → E 7 → b 6 3</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sois sage, ô ma douleur, et tiens-toi plus tranquille.</td>
<td>b 6 3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu réclames le Soir; il descend; le voici:</td>
<td>D 7 → C</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Une atmosphère obscure enveloppe la ville,</td>
<td>C 7</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aux uns portant la paix, aux autres le souci.</td>
<td>F 7 → e 6 5 → b 6 4</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pendant que des mortels la multitude vile,</td>
<td>g#</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sous le fouet du plaisir, ce bourreau sans merci,</td>
<td>g# 6 5 → E → “B 7”</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Va cueillir des remords dans la fête servile,</td>
<td>C 0 → A 7 → d 6 5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma douleur, donne-moi la main; viens par ici,</td>
<td>C# (no 3rd) → E 7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loin d’eux [Vois se pencher les défuntes années,</td>
<td>E 7 → C 7 → c 7 5 → g 6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sur les balcons du ciel, en robes surannées;</td>
<td>e 7 6 5 → F 7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgir du fond des eaux le regret souriant;</td>
<td>D 7 → B 7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le soleil moribond s’endormir sous une arche,</td>
<td>G 7 → a 6 7 → “B 7”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et, comme un long linceul traînant à l’Orient,</td>
<td>C → a#</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entends, ma chère, entends la douce Nuit qui marche.</td>
<td>C# 6 5 (C 7, G 7) → B 7 → E → C#</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates order of motives’ appearance, but not necessarily the number of times they are heard.
of the text indicate the five sections of the song. Debussy used his music to connect the second quatrain to the first tercet—the place where Baudelaire included a striking enjambment. The song strays even further from the conventional form of a sonnet, however, by allowing the B and C sections to span the breaks between the quatrains and the tercets, respectively. This formal enjambment has its roots in the poem’s text, as will be demonstrated in this discussion.

“Recueillement” sets itself apart from the other songs in the set in one final way: its lengthy piano introduction. The first eight measures of the song appear in Example 4.29. This introduction establishes the mood of the song, as well as the prominence that chromatic material will receive. The opening C# sonority introduces the song’s tonal center, but its mode is uncertain due to the chord’s missing third. This ambiguity of key continues until m. 4, when a chromatic passage of parallel diminished chords leads to the voice’s entrance in m. 6.

The song’s two motives also derive from the piano introduction. Both of these figures are indicated by brackets in Example 4.29. Motive 1 is a rhythmic motive only, comprising a syncopated pattern of eighth and quarter notes. In some of its appearances this figure retains the arpeggiation heard in mm. 1–3, but not throughout the song. Motive 2 first appears in m. 6, beginning in the upper “voice” of the right hand; the conclusion of the motive then occurs in the left hand, repeating the first two notes in a lower octave. When the figure returns in mm. 8 and 10–11, the complete series of pitches occurs in the same range. Motive 2 exhibits flexibility in its rhythm and pitch, but its characteristic turning motion appears in each of its statements.

The first entrance of the voice establishes the text’s direct address to the speaker’s sadness. Debussy used recitative to depict this speech in his music. The song, however, alters the exchange with sadness from unidirectional address to a dialogue. In the voice’s first six measures the speaker and piano alternate in their “statements.” Although strict dialogue appears
Example 4.29 “Recueillement,” mm. 1–8

Lento e tranquillo

Motive 1 (circled pitches)

Motive 2

Sois sa - ge, ô ma dou - leur,

end of motive 2
only in these opening lines, the formal structure continues the exchange between the two characters. Each A section represents the portion of the text where the speaker talks directly to sadness, and each of these passages reprises some element(s) of the same music. Additionally, the use of recitative is limited to the A sections only, corresponding to the speaker’s addresses to sadness.

When the first line of text ends in m. 10, the piano performs two successive repetitions of motive 2, followed by a change in musical style. In mm. 12–14 the accompaniment performs sustained block chords, as the speaker tells of the coming of night. These chords allow the listener to focus on the text, in which the night is a significant element.

In relation to the text of these first two lines, the piano introduction takes on greater significance. Because the piano comes to represent the speaker’s sadness, in retrospect the listener understands the sadness as beginning the conversation, and the voice as responding to it. The text reveals what the sadness may be expressing in the introduction: a longing for nightfall. When the speaker tells the sadness to be “quieter,” this provides further evidence that the first phrases of the vocal line are actually a response to what the piano already “spoke” in the first six measures.

Harmonically, section A remains rather static, a characteristic that suits the text of the opening lines. The speaker displays no emotion but rather delivers the recitative in a contemplative manner. During the recitative section Debussy provided little harmonic context; the sparse accompaniment for this section consists of diminished and dominant seventh chords that avoid tonal progression. When the block chords arrive in m. 12, their D# major tonic is the song’s first clear key area. The stability of this chord, however, soon gives way to a C dominant seventh chord as section B begins.
The division between the first two sections coincides with the speaker’s shift of focus from inward (addressing sadness) to outward (describing the outside world). This change in text is marked by a sudden and significant change in the music; Debussy abandoned the earlier sparse accompaniment for the patterns seen in Example 4.27b. As the left hand continues the triplets (first over C\(^7\) and then shifting to F\(^7\)), the right hand alternates between the syncopated rhythm of motive 1 and the circular pattern of motive 2, in a four-note version that resembles the right hand’s part in m. 6. The insistence of these repeated cells increases as the central pitch rises from C to F and then to G and finally G\(\#\) in the left hand, and as the motives appear doubled at the octave in mm. 24–27.

Debussy’s use of the two motives to accompany this change in textual focus indicates that the outside world has a negative emotional effect on the character of sadness. As the pitch rises and the music’s texture thickens, the emotion in the piano intensifies. The vocal line, however, displays no sign of agitation; the melodic line remains calm, as the text describes the events occurring in the surrounding city.

Abruptly, at m. 29, the music changes again, now reflecting an intensification of the speaker’s emotion (see Example 4.30). As the text in mm. 30–31 describes pleasure as a merciless torturer, the music grows louder and more animated in both the voice and piano. The accompaniment gives way to nonmotivic material, indicating a shift of focus from the emotion of sadness to the agitated activity of the outside world.

Harmonically, this section is equally unsettled. In mm. 29–30 the tonal center focuses briefly on G\(\#\) half-diminished and E-major sonorities but then shifts into a type of chromaticism that is characteristic of this song in two ways. First, the left hand and right hand move in contrary motion through a string of chromatic shifts, passing from a C ninth chord through another ninth on A before arriving at a D\(\#\) half-diminished chord. Second, the passage contains
three sonorities that represent a type of chord appearing frequently in this song. The central chord in m. 31 and the chords on the second beats of mm. 32 and 33 are “substitution” chords—that is, they conform to a particular harmony with the exception of one substituted note. In m. 31 the chord serves as a B dominant seventh, but a G is substituted for the F<. The substitution chord in m. 32 is a half-diminished seventh chord built on E, with an F# replacing the expected G. In the next measure the substitution chord, a seventh chord on Eb, would be a German augmented sixth if the B were flatted.
The first reprise of section A occurs at m. 37. This passage duplicates the first four measures of the piano introduction but adds a new vocal line, again in recitative style (see Example 4.31). The text in this passage serves to draw sadness back from the outside world, as the speaker takes sadness’s hand. By resurrecting the music from the song’s opening, Debussy turned the focus back on internal emotion and away from the external. At the same time, the feeling of sadness remains unchanged. The actions of the outside world have no lasting effect.

Example 4.31 “Recueillement,” mm. 36–40
The static harmony of section A’ ends on an E dominant seventh chord, preparing for section C’s arrival in m. 41 (Example 4.32 reproduces a portion of section C). This section displays two similarities to section B. First, the music again relies on repeated patterns of eighth notes and triplets, this time in the right hand. Second, the song’s two motives appear prominently in the accompaniment. Motive 1 occurs in mm. 42–43 and 46–47. In the former, the ties in the repeated chords produce a rhythm identical to the notated rhythm of this motive; in the latter, the syncopated rhythm is modified slightly to include a triplet. Motive 2 appears later, in mm. 49 and 51 in the left hand; as in section B, this version of the motive uses only four notes instead of six.

Although section C does contain both motives, their presence is not as pervasive as it was in section B. The decrease in motivic activity contributes to section C’s calmer emotional state, highlighting the contrast in textual focus between these two sections. While section B drew attention to the outside world, section C describes a different realm: the past and memories of it. The speaker urges sadness to turn away from the present and toward the past, which is described in a positive light.

Because the speaker uses these images of remembrance to comfort and calm sadness, the music displays less agitation than in section B. The dynamic level remains soft throughout, and the expression marking “dolce ed espress.” characterizes the mood of the passage. Beginning in m. 49, however, some elements of the previous anxiety return. The harmony becomes more chromatic when motive 2 enters. Section C ends with a passage (mm. 53–55) that resembles the end of section B harmonically in two ways. First, the passage closes with another instance of contrary motion between the two hands in the piano part. Second, Debussy concluded the section with a substitution chord, here a B dominant seventh chord with a G½ instead of the
Example 4.32  “Recueillement,” mm. 42–52

Vois se pencher les défuntes années,
Sur les balcons du ciel, en robes surannées;

Surgir du fond des eaux le regret souriant;

Motive 1

Motive 2
expected F♯ (the same substitution chord heard in m. 31). Thus, the second half of section C (mm. 49–55) bears a stronger resemblance to section B than the first half did. Although the memories of the past have comforted sadness somewhat, complete relief from the agitation of the outside world remains elusive.

Section A" begins with material not drawn directly from section A or A' (mm. 56–59; see Example 4.28b for the accompaniment from this section). Because the text does not begin by addressing the speaker’s sadness, this passage might not at first be considered a return of section A. It will not be heard as part of section C, however, because of the parallel endings of sections B and C. One piece of evidence in particular exists for considering this new material part of section A": the repeated block chords in the accompaniment. The only previous occurrence of such sustained chords was in section A (mm. 12–14), where the text described the descent of night. The return of block chords at this point corresponds to the text’s metaphor of the shroud, which Baudelaire used to describe night. A related point is that although Baudelaire capitalized several significant nouns in his poem, the only capitals that Debussy brought into the song’s text were “Soir” and “Nuit.” By setting these passages to music in a style that contrasts the rest of the song, Debussy allowed these images to stand out amid the song’s texture.

The final passage of the concluding A section begins in m. 60 (see Example 4.33). Here the music contains a highly chromatic chord succession, beginning in the song’s tonic, C♯. In this case Debussy included the third of the chord, thus clearly establishing the key as C♯ major. The harmony moves through three dominant seventh chords on C, G♯, and B; the last of these prepares for two measures in E major (mm. 63–64). To close the song in its tonic key, Debussy raised the E to E♯ and sustained C♯ major chords over the final two measures.

The relationship of this passage to the other section A material hinges on the text, which now contains an explicit address to sadness in the poem’s final line, and on motivic ties. In the
left hand of the piano part, under a slow four-note version of motive 2 in the right hand, motive 1 appears and reprises its initial arpeggio. By bringing back a version of motive 1 that resembles that heard in the piano’s introduction, Debussy created a strong relationship between the first and last A sections. The arrival of the night described in the text serves as a link between the beginning and end of the song; the music demonstrates that the song’s events have come full circle by granting sadness the fulfillment of its earlier request. At the same time, however,
motive 2 has been transformed over the course of the song, changing from six notes to four, and gradually shifting from relatively rapid rhythmic values to slower and more somber ones. This interpretation also explains the conspicuous disappearance of motive 2 in the A' section: reprising the motive in its original form would diminish its transformation.

The presence of the motives throughout the song shows that for the speaker, sadness is continuous and pervasive, but it is also an emotion to be dealt with, even embraced. The music rejects the agitation found in the surrounding city (depicted in sections B and C), instead turning inward (with the recitative and sustained block chords found in the A sections). In the end sadness and night, along with fondness for regrets from the past, bring a form of happiness and comfort to this speaker.

**Persona and Aesthetic Position**

Baudelaire’s poem established a relationship between two characters—the addressee (sadness) and the speaker (the persona), who embraced sadness and preferred to live in the world of memory rather than that of daily life. Although on the surface the music of “Recueillement” also provides two separate “characters”—sadness and the person experiencing it—the song joins these two disparate elements into a single musical persona. The text allows the speaker to separate himself or herself from sadness and address it objectively, but when these two voices join in the same song, we understand them to be two aspects of one persona. Sadness represents the emotional side of this figure, the part that reacts strongly to outside stimuli (night, the crowds outside, remembrance of the past). Meanwhile, the speaker gives voice to the persona’s rational side, which uses the images in the text to calm his or her emotions. These two aspects combine to give a picture of someone being transformed by emotion and memory. The persona in Debussy’s song remains faithful to the persona of the poem: a figure who is removed from the
outside world and finds happiness and comfort in a realm where most people do not. What the
song provides, however, is a complete picture of this persona’s emotional experience; the listener
perceives how the persona’s mood changes in the midst of the strong feelings evoked by the
text’s events. After shifting from calm to agitation and back again, the persona in the end
embraces sadness and finds pleasure in dwelling in the past rather than the present.

The aesthetic position of this persona falls not within a particular artistic movement or
style, but more generally in a modern aesthetic that is neither romantic nor symbolist. In light of
the text, the best word for the song’s aesthetic would be “Baudelairean.” One reason for this
assessment comes from the song’s approach to setting the text, its form in particular. Baudelaire
was known for expanding the range of formal structures in poetry, including the sonnet. In this
case, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the rhyme scheme is slightly irregular, but the greatest
innovation comes with the enjambment between the eighth and ninth lines. The song setting
builds on Baudelaire’s originality by crossing the breaks between each of the quatrains and
tercets in its formal organization. Additionally, the music moves beyond the speaker’s addresses
to sadness to create a lyric dialogue that takes place within the persona’s mind. This figure, then,
takes as progressive an approach to text setting as Baudelaire might have himself, and uses
musical means to put forth an innovative interpretation of this poem.

“La Mort des amants”

Source Material

The final song in the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*, “La Mort des amants,” was the first of
the five that Debussy composed. The autograph manuscript, Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. 1020,

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12 See Lloyd, “Baudelaire Sonneteer.”
bears the date December 1887. This manuscript carries very few corrections—only seven in Durand’s hand and none in Debussy’s. Durand’s alterations match the style of those in the other examined scores; in this song the changes include added slurs and accidentals, and slight rhythmic modifications.

Musical Analysis

Table 4.4 summarizes the harmonic and motivic structure of the song. Unlike the set’s other sonnet, “Recueillement,” this song’s form remains close to that of the text. Debussy provided musical changes that coincide with Baudelaire’s poetic structure. He also added musical elements that create continuity, however, including motivic sequences that bridge breaks between sections and a ternary form (although not a conventional one) that overlays the stanzaic musical divisions.

The song begins with a brief piano introduction (shown in Example 4.34). Although the first chord establishes G♭ major as the song’s key, the tonic chord appears in second inversion and quickly disappears within a chromatic succession of chords. What sounds like a secondary dominant on B♭ at the end of m. 2 moves not to the key of E♭ but to a series of seventh chords whose roots descend stepwise from B to F (the latter of which serves as vii7 in G♭), followed by the tonic cadence under the voice’s entrance.

The first three measures of the introduction represent a phrase that appears, in some form, a total of four times over the course of the song. Within this phrase occurs a cell (motive 1) that dominates the returning music each time it enters, and that will prove significant to the song as a whole. In its initial appearances, the motive comprises a three-beat pattern beginning with a characteristic sixteenth rest and eighth-note/sixteenth-note combination. Often a leap, either
Table 4.4  Harmonic and motivic overview of “La Mort des amants”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Tonal Center/Harmony</th>
<th>Motive(s)* m.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[piano introduction]</td>
<td>G b⁹ 4 → c b⁹ 6 5, B b⁹ 4, b⁷ 3, a⁰ 6, g⁰ 3, f⁷ 2 → D b⁷ 7</td>
<td>1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nous aurons des lits plein d’odeurs légères,</td>
<td>D b⁷ 7 → G b⁹ 6 → A b⁷ 7</td>
<td>1 2 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Des divans profonds comme des tombeaux,</td>
<td>A⁷ 7, D b⁷ 7 → G b⁹ 6 → A b⁷ 7</td>
<td>1 2 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et d’étranges fleurs sur des étages,</td>
<td>e b⁹ 7 7 1 → D b⁷ 7</td>
<td>2 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Écloses pour nous sous des cieux plus beaux.</td>
<td>[E b⁷ 1] → A b⁹ 9 → D b⁷ 1</td>
<td>2 2a** 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usant à l’envi leurs chaleurs dernières,</td>
<td>D b⁷ 7 → G b⁹ 6 → A b⁷ 7</td>
<td>1 2 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nos deux cœurs seront deux vastes flambeaux,</td>
<td>e b⁹ 7 7 13 → D b⁷ 7</td>
<td>2 1 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qui réfléchiront leurs doubles lumières</td>
<td>D b⁷ 7 → G b⁷ 7 → e⁰ 7 7 2</td>
<td>2 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dans nos deux esprits, ces miroirs jumeaux.</td>
<td>D b⁷ 6 7 → G g⁰ 7 2 1 → A b⁷ 7</td>
<td>2 2a** 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un soir fait de rose et de bleu mystique,</td>
<td>E⁶ 7 → B⁷ 7 → g⁰ 7 2</td>
<td>2a 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nous échangerons un éclair unique,</td>
<td>B⁷ 3 2 → E 2, 2b** 21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comme un long sanglot, tout chargé d’adieux;</td>
<td>E⁷ 7 → A⁷ 7 → d⁰ 7 2</td>
<td>2b 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[piano interlude]</td>
<td>C⁷ 4 2 → G⁹ 7 7 0 → E⁷ 7 → a 2b 2 → c⁰ 6 7 1 → D⁰ 9 2b 1 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et plus tard un Ange, entr’ouvrant les portes,</td>
<td>G⁷ 7 → E b⁷ 4 2 → B b⁹ 7 7 2 → G⁷ 7 7 → e⁰ 6 3</td>
<td>1, 2b 1 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viendra ranimer, fidèle et joyeux,</td>
<td>c⁰ 7 7 7 9 → F⁰ 7 7 → D⁰ 7 7 0 → A b⁹ 9 7 2 → D⁰ 7 7 0 → F⁰ 7 7 → B⁰ 9 7 1 2 36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Les miroirs ternis et les flammes mortes.</td>
<td>a b⁷ 4 2 b → G b⁷ 4 2 → D b⁷ 7 9 2 2 G b⁷ 4 2</td>
<td>1 2 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[piano conclusion]</td>
<td>G b⁷ 7 4 2</td>
<td>1 45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates order of motives’ appearance, but not necessarily the number of times they are heard.
**2a represents the first repeated pitch pattern associated with motive 2 and 2b the second repeated pitch pattern. Where these variants of motive 2 are listed separately from “2,” this indicates that in the same line of text, motive 2 also appears in rhythmic repetition with no repeated pitch relationship.
Example 4.34  “La Mort des amants,” mm. 1–12

Andante

Voix

Andante

Motive 1

Nous au-

Motive 1

Piano

$p$

Motive 1

dim.

Motive 1

rons des lits pleins d'oreurs lé-

Motive 1

gères, Des divans pro-

Motive 1

fonds com-

Motive 1

tre des tom-

Motive 1

beaux,

Motive 2

Et d'étran-

ges fleurs sur des étages-

gères,
ascending or descending, appears within the motive, but in each entrance of the motive the individual pitches vary.

In the first quatrain the text describes the setting that accompanies the lovers’ death. Likewise, the first twelve measures of music establish the song’s mood and introduce the characters. The music reflects this role by remaining harmonically static throughout the first quatrain. $G_b$ major remains the tonal center up to an authentic cadence in mm. 7–8, at which point Debussy introduced a ii–V–I cadence in $D_b$ major, concluding in m. 12.

As another aspect of the introductory nature of this section, both of the song’s motives enter in the opening measures. Motive 1 serves as a focal point, appearing nine times in mm. 1–12 (shortened from four pitches to three from m. 4 onward). What will become motive 2 occurs for the first time in m. 8, specifically the syncopated eighth-note pattern in the right hand of the piano part. Its isolated appearance here, however, does not yet show the importance that motive 2 will demonstrate later in the song.
The music that accompanies the second quatrain flows seamlessly from the D♭ chord in m. 12 (see Example 4.35). Although both motives return in this section, no other musical element repeats between these two quatrains, making the song through-composed up to this point. Motive 1 appears twice, in mm. 13 and 15, and motive 2 returns in mm. 14 and 16. Here this second figure is notated in two ways that sound identical:

\[ \begin{align*}
    &\text{\includegraphics{motive1.png}} \\
    &\text{\includegraphics{motive2.png}}
\end{align*} \]

In the second quatrain motive 2 is represented only by its rhythmic configuration, although later in the song two pitch patterns emerge in connection with this motive.

The text of the second quatrain describes, for the first time, the actions of the lovers through those of their hearts and spirits. As death approaches, indicated by the “chaleurs dernières” of the lovers’ hearts, the level of emotion in the music increases accordingly. The stability of the opening section lessens, due to a rising melody and rapid declamation of the text in the voice and a quicker harmonic rhythm with occasional chromaticism in the accompaniment.

Motive 2 begins to take on a more important role in this section, appearing more often than motive 1. The two motives are linked here; motive 1 occurs at the beginnings of two phrases that end with motive 2, allowing motive 2 to emerge as the dominant motive. In fact, the two instances of motive 1 in the second quatrain are the last we hear of this figure until the final section of the song.

Despite the increased harmonic activity in the second quatrain, this section retains a sense of tonality by anchoring most of the downbeats on D♭ and G♭ chords. The sonorities on subsequent beats in each measure introduce more chromatic and varied chords, including a
Example 4.35  “La Mort des amants,” mm. 13–18
thirteenth chord on A♭, but they remain within a tonal framework. At the end of this section, a somewhat chromatic succession beginning on D♭ (m. 17) leads to an A♭ minor ninth chord, which does not provide a clear tonal direction for the next section. Although Debussy could have used traditional root movement to return to D♭, instead he chose E major, which because of its tritone relationship is the furthest possible key from A♭. This shift in harmony, achieved by common-tone and neighbor-note movement, represents a critical event. By disrupting the expected cadence and moving to a foreign key, the music alerts the listener to a shift of mood in the song.

The beginning of this third section continues to focus on motive 2 (mm. 19–29, shown in Example 4.36). In these measures the motivic material bridges the harmonic break between the second quatrain and the first tercet; the motive moves from the right hand of the piano part to the left, but the repeated pitch pattern (M2a) remains constant until m. 22. In mm. 23–28, the repeated material retains the motive 2 rhythm but changes to a second pitch pattern (M2b) until m. 29. The importance of this rhythmic figure is now clear; some version of motive 2 appears in every measure except one (m. 22) from m. 16 until m. 31. In contrast, motive 1 does not occur at all in the first tercet.

Although the first three measures of this passage remain rather tranquil, they in fact lead to an extraordinary musical event at the end of m. 21. The voice soars to its highest point in the song as it sings the text “Nous échangerons,” so that the quasi-sexual climax for the lovers is a musical climax, as well. The quick ascent and descent of the vocal line, combined with the suddenness of the climax, represent the charged emotion of this moment. After the climactic measure, the music becomes immediately softer and continues to decrease in volume and tempo through m. 29.
Example 4.36  “La Mort des amants,” mm. 19–29

Un soir fait de rose et de bleu mystique, Nous échangerons un é-

clair unique, Comme un long sanglot tout chargé d'a-

dieux;

Motive 2a

Motive 2b

Motive 2b

Motive 2
In this section the harmony remains in E major through the climax, only then beginning to modulate in preparation for the song’s final section. The E major triad in m. 23 becomes an E dominant seventh in the next measure, leading to another dominant seventh chord, this time on A, in m. 26. Debussy disrupted this cadence with a tritone shift, as he did in the transition to this section, by moving quickly from the A\textsuperscript{7} chord to a diminished sonority on D\# on the second beat of m. 27. Like the previous tritone relationship, this surprising harmonic movement provides a break between the two sections. The brief piano transition also serves as a pause, where the gradually thinning texture and lower pitches prepare for the change that occurs in the next section.

When the introduction to the second tercet begins, the music represents both a reprise and a joining of disparate elements (see Example 4.37). Now in the key of C major—a tritone from the song’s opening tonality—the piano brings back the opening material. In this passage, however, the music contrasts mm. 1–4 in several ways. First, the harmony demonstrates greater stability than the chromatic piano introduction. As Table 4.4 shows, the chords in mm. 30–33 are functional, and most of them fit into the tonal framework of C major. Second, motive 2 now appears underneath motive 1, continuing the pitch contour that appeared in six repetitions in mm. 19–29. Third, as Katherine Bergeron points out, the reprise contains a bass line where the opening phrase did not, “transfiguring” the ambiguity of the first four measures.\footnote{Bergeron, 147–48.} Thus, Debussy created a sort of ternary form, but only in the loosest sense of the term. The reprise of the opening phrase provides a ternary framework, but the music that begins in m. 30 ultimately follows quite a different path from that of the opening section of the song.
Example 4.37 “La Mort des amants,” mm. 30–48
Example 4.37, continued

The return to the song’s opening material also provides a musical interpretation of the temporality of the poem’s second tercet. In the text the events of this last section are indicated as occurring “later” than the lovers’ death. Although music cannot effectively establish a temporal relationship between the events, the combination of the earlier “pause” in mm. 27–29 with the sudden shift in musical focus separates the lovers’ death from their resurrection. This division is
emphasized by the sudden shift to E♭ major in m. 34, which coincides with the reentrance of the voice.

After this abrupt harmonic change, in mm. 34–36 the piano repeats the same music heard in mm. 30–32, retaining the motivic relationships of the earlier phrase in the new key. As the music moves toward the second climax, where the lovers will be awakened, it displays intensification of emotion in several ways. The abrupt tonal shift in m. 34 already disrupted the harmonic sequence by turning away from the expected G–C cadence. In the succeeding measures (mm. 37–40) the harmony adds heightened chromaticism, including two tritone relationships: D and A♭ (mm. 37–39) and F and B (mm. 39–40). In retrospect it becomes clear that Debussy used tritone relationships to highlight the transitions to all of the song’s important moments—specifically the transitions to the first and second tercets, and now the preparation for the song’s final climax.

As this climax approaches, motive 1 also continues to play an important role. In mm. 37–40, when the text describes the resurrection of the lovers, the dynamic level grows gradually louder and the pitch rises, not only in the voice but also in the piano part, which moves to the treble clef in both hands. These musical effects prepare for the climax in m. 41, as do the three repetitions of motive 1 with wide register leaps and a corresponding rising pitch contour. Leading into the cadence, however, we hear not motive 1 but motive 2, a single time in a very high register. The music that follows flows directly from this motive.

An important reprise occurs in mm. 41–44, which elaborates on the phrase heard in mm. 22–23. As the latter was the song’s first climax, so too is this new section a high point, as the lovers are reawakened. This second phrase differs from the first in several ways. First, this phrase is two measures longer, a change achieved by developing the original triplet figure into an
extended cadence in G♭ over a stepwise descent in the bass line. Second, a related change is that
the first phrase used the triplet over what was then the tonic, E major, while the second places
this figure over the dominant seventh on D♭. Third, the vocal line begins differently in the
second version of this phrase, while the original vocal part is transferred to the right hand of the
piano. Later in m. 41 the voice and piano begin to share the melody, doubled in octaves.
Finally, and perhaps most significantly, motive 2 disappears—not only from this returning
phrase, but from the rest of the song.

“La Mort des amants” closes with another return to the music of the opening measures,
now back in the tonic, G♭ major. In this instance, however, only the first measure of the
repeated phrase appears, and as the end of the song approaches, motive 1 is shortened but also
heard in longer note values in a written-out ritardando. This cadential passage provides a
conclusive ending through its tonality, but at the same time the truncation and augmentation of
motive 1 draw out the cadence so that it seems suspended in time. The music provides the
impression that the lovers’ resurrection is an infinite one and that life and love have conquered
death.

By returning to G♭ major, the end of the song also provides harmonic closure. The three
appearances of the same musical material—in the beginning and ending in G♭, and in the middle
in C—complete the song’s overall movement to and from a tritone relationship. In m. 30 this
music serves as a reprise, but one that is transformed harmonically to the furthest degree
possible. When the same phrase returns at the song’s conclusion, in the original key, it serves as
further evidence of the transition from life to death and back to life.

Consideration of “La Mort des amants” as a whole reveals that the motives play a crucial
role in representing the victory of life over death. By the song’s end it is clear that motive 1

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symbolizes life for the lovers while motive 2 signifies their death. The evidence for this assertion can be found by tracing the relationship of the two motives section by section, in correspondence with the text.

The piano introduction and first quatrain, although in preparation for the lovers’ death, take place while the couple is still alive. Therefore, the music focuses predominantly on motive 1 at this point. Motive 2’s isolated entrance in this section presages what is to come, but this is only evident once we know the entire story. The relationship between the motives begins to reveal itself, however, in the second quatrain. As the lovers approach their death, motives 1 and 2 join, but the important motive is now motive 2, not motive 1. The two phrases in mm. 13–14 and 15–16 begin with motive 1, in its shortened form, in the right hand of the piano part, but each ends with motive 2, which then continues into mm. 17–18. Thus, this section represents the transition from life into death.

In the first tercet motive 2 begins continuously out of the second quatrain. The first three repetitions of the “death motive” in this section gradually add doubling in octaves, only to disappear at the song’s first moment of climax (m. 22). Immediately after the climax the pitch sequence of motive 2 changes dramatically, continuing with motive 2b for the next six measures and providing a seamless motivic transition into the final section of the song. Thus, the role of motives 2a and 2b, appearing before and after the climax, respectively, is to highlight the actual moment of death, when motive 2 is silent.

The last section demonstrates a reversal of the earlier transition from the dominance of motive 1 to that of motive 2. After motive 2 continues into this section out of the first tercet, it joins with motive 1 and then loses its importance as the lovers are brought back to life. In this last tercet motive 1 becomes the focus of development, allowing only one further entrance of
motive 2, the isolated appearance in m. 40. This final statement of motive 2 reminds the listener of the lovers’ conquest over death, and it also completes the symmetrical motivic structure, since motive 2 occurred only once in the first section of the song. The song ends with the return to the opening phrase, but only the first measure appears, and only in the tonic of \( G^b \). Thus, the music ends conclusively and asserts that life has triumphed over death.

**Persona and Aesthetic Position**

The final element to be discussed is the dramatic persona who tells this story to the listeners. The persona of the text alone took on a poetic role, providing the speaker with knowledge of future events. Additionally, the persona held the philosophical position of death as the ideal, where death brings only happiness. In the song the persona amplifies the sequence of events that appears in Baudelaire’s text. Throughout most of the song the voice and piano retain separate parts, not sharing melodic ideas or motives. The speaking lover’s voice comes through the singer, since the motives, which elaborate on the lovers’ story, appear only in the piano part. The persona, however, interweaves several musical elements to provide a detailed picture of what the lovers experience.

First, “La Mort des amants” builds on a foundation created by the text and its characters. Baudelaire’s poem provides the basis for the succession of events on which the song elaborates. Second, the harmonic relationships between and within sections prove crucial to an understanding of the song’s form and meaning. The harmony allows for both emotional intensification that corresponds to the text and a dramatization of the song’s events, especially the shifts between ideas that occur at the section breaks and the overall harmonic shape. Finally,
the song’s motives rely on musical development to establish their importance, which can then be traced back to the sequence of events created by the text.

By joining these textual and musical elements, the persona dramatizes the song’s story in real time; although the text describes the events as taking place in the future, the music allows the lovers’ experiences to unfold in the present. We observe the emotional intensification that leads to the poem’s climactic moment, followed by the affirmation of the lovers’ resurrection. Thus, in this song Debussy has created a fictive author—not a poet but a dramatist, who brings the poem’s story and characters to life.

The themes of this song’s text, the power of love over death and the supernatural element of the angel’s role in the drama, place it within a predominantly romantic aesthetic. In addition, while the poem draws attention to death as Baudelaire’s ideal, the song ultimately places the emphasis on the lovers’ relationship, which triumphs in the end, rather than on the moment of death itself. Throughout the song the music supports these romantic themes; the motives focus the structure of the entire song, in retrospect, on the lovers’ victory over death. Without the establishment of the transition from death to life, the meaning of the song’s conclusion could not be made clear. The presentation of the themes in this romantic way requires the dramatization of the text’s events to underscore how complete and final the lovers’ conquering of death truly is.
CHAPTER 5
ARIOETTES OUBLIÉES

Background

Debussy composed the six Ariettes oubliées between 1885 and 1888. These songs appeared in two editions, the first published in 1888 and the second in 1903. The first version, entitled simply Ariettes, was published by André Girod; in this edition each song formed a separate publication with its own cover. Each cover lists the number of the song, ordered in the same sequence that we recognize today, as well as “Paroles de P. Verlaine” and “Musique de Ach. Debussy” (referring to Debussy’s full name, Achille-Claude). The placement of Verlaine’s name first, as well as the presence in the music of Verlaine’s epigraphs (for the four poems that use them), indicate the value that Debussy ascribed to the poetry that inspired his songs.

1 On a copy of this edition housed at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, the “Ach.” on each cover was crossed out in blue pencil and replaced with “C.” The blue pencil suggests that possibly this copy was in Durand’s possession at some point, but no evidence exists to confirm this theory. The score contains no other blue pencil markings that would assist in identifying the handwriting as Durand’s. Such a correction could have been made by the library itself.

A possible former owner of this edition was Lucien Garban, who transcribed some of Debussy’s songs (such as “Romance”) for solo violin and piano. The name “Lucien” is written on the cover of each of the songs, with no other identification. Garban was at least an acquaintance of Debussy; according to Dietschy (108), Garban attended, with Raoul Bardac and Ravel, a piano-only performance of Pelléas et Mélisande by Debussy at his home on 5 August 1900. A second Lucien with whom Debussy was acquainted was Lucien Fontaine, a businessman and founder of a small amateur choir that Debussy conducted from 1893 to 1904 (Dietschy, 86; Debussy, Letters, 74). Fontaine seems less likely to have been the owner of this edition of songs.
Eugène Fromont published the 1903 edition, which contained all six songs (revised by the composer) under a single cover, this time attributed to “Claude Debussy.” For this version the title was changed to *Ariettes oubliées*, and the cover lists the songs only by number, not by individual title, in the following manner:

1. II. III. Ariettes oubliées.
2. IV. Paysages Belges.
3. V. VI. Aquarelles.

This form of reference, which gives the names of the sections of *Romances sans paroles* in which the poems appeared, again indicates the importance that the poetry had for the composer.

Debussy’s use of the titles *Ariettes* and *Ariettes oubliées* evolved during the process of composition and revision of the songs, although the composer left no documentation of the reasoning behind his choices. Autograph manuscripts for the first two songs in the set, which now reside at the Bibliothèque Nationale, were originally bound together; Debussy labeled the two songs “Ariettes oubliées” and numbered them 1 and 2. The title in this case must have come from Verlaine, since the section of *Romances sans paroles* from which these poems come is also titled “Ariettes oubliées.” When the Girod edition was published, however, the composer had not yet chosen to use that title for the entire set. The eventual change in title for the Fromont edition brings Verlaine’s poetry to the forefront, because while an *ariette* could be any little song, an *ariette oubliée* must be understood to come from Verlaine’s collection. With the final version of the title the link between the songs and Verlaine’s poetry would be unmistakable.

Debussy dedicated one copy of the Girod edition to Mme Marie-Blanche Vasnier, inscribed with the words “in grateful homage.” The Vasnier family provided friendship and

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2 Dietschy, 49; Rolf, “*Ariettes,*” 39. The dedication read, “A Madame Vasnier, hommage reconnaissant.” Rolf states that Debussy also gave a dedicated copy of this edition to his friend Paul Dukas and a dedicated copy of the second
financial support to Debussy in the years before he went to Rome in 1885. Mme Vasnier was a singer whom Debussy had met when he served as accompanist for the singing classes of Mme Marie Moreau-Sainti. Debussy accompanied Mme Vasnier in performances, and he composed twenty-four songs for her, including the thirteen in the Vasnier Songbook, which he dedicated to her. Paul Vidal wrote that “all he [Debussy] writes is for her and because of her.” Mme Vasnier’s exceptional vocal quality and agility in the upper range may account for the higher tessitura in these early songs than that found in Debussy’s later vocal writing. The composer himself commented on her vocal quality in his dedication of an unpublished song, “Les Papillons,” to Mme Vasnier, where Debussy wrote, “[she] alone has a voice light enough to sing songs about butterflies.”

Dietschy discusses Debussy’s love for Mme Vasnier and his separation from her as one source of his misery while he was in Rome. Marie Rolf finds several connections to Mme Vasnier within the Ariettes oubliées, including the theme of love and languor in “C’est l’extase” and “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” the lost hopes described in “L’ombre des arbres,” and the vulnerability of love expressed in “Green” and “Spleen.” Although these connections to

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5 Nichols, 22; Briscoe, “Debussy’s Earliest Songs,” 82.

6 Nichols, 15; Dietschy, 31.


8 Dietschy, 39, 41.


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Debussy’s emotions are plausible, James Briscoe disputes the assumption that Debussy and Mme Vasnier were ever lovers, based on the inconclusive character of the evidence.\footnote{Briscoe, “Debussy’s Earliest Songs,” 82–84. Letters cited by Dietschy (41, 47) as referring to Mme Vasnier do not actually mention her by name or give identifying features.} It is tempting to propose musical connections to Mme Vasnier for “Il pleure dans mon cœur” and “L’ombre des arbres.” The early versions of both songs contain passages in which Debussy later drastically lowered the tessitura, a possible result of the end of the composer’s relationship with the Vasnier family after his return from Rome.\footnote{Marguerite Vasnier, Mme Vasnier’s daughter, wrote, “When he came back for good, the former intimacy was no longer the same. He had changed, and for our part, so had we. We had moved, made new acquaintances. With his unsociable and touchy character, keeping to his habits, he no longer felt at home. Nevertheless, he still came often in the evenings to play for us what he had composed while he was away from us. . . . Then, bit by bit, having himself made new acquaintances, too, he stopped coming and we never saw him again” (“Quand il revint définitivement, l’intimité de jadis n’était plus la même. Il avait évolué, nous aussi de notre côté. Nous avions déménagé, fait de nouvelles connaissances. Avec son caractère sauvage et ombrageux, tenant à ses habitudes, il ne se retrouvait plus chez lui. Néanmoins, il venait encore souvent le soir nous jouer ce qu’il avait composé loin de nous. . . . Puis, peu à peu, ayant lui aussi fait de nouvelles connaissances, il cessa de venir et nous ne l’avons jamais revu”); “Debussy à dix-huit ans,” Revue musicale 7 (1 May 1926): 21–22.} Such biographical connections within the *Ariettes oubliées* are, however, conjectural and will not figure into the present discussion except in the rare cases where documented evidence exists.

“C’est l’extase”

**Source Material**

The first song in the *Ariettes oubliées*, “C’est l’extase,” was one of the last of the six that Debussy composed. According to Marcel Dietschy, Debussy sketched this song, along with “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” while he was still in Rome.\footnote{Dietschy, 43.} Although Dietschy provides no source information, and no known sketches survive for either song, his statement is plausible due to the
song’s date of completion and the fact that Debussy composed others of the *Ariettes* during his time in Rome. An autograph manuscript housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. 20695(1), provides a date of composition of March 1887, meaning that the song could have been completed in either Rome or Paris. Another manuscript, which is housed at the Bibliothèque François Lang at the Abbaye de Royaumont, bears no date. Manuscript evidence suggests, however, that the Royaumont manuscript dates from after the Bibliothèque Nationale manuscript. Printer’s markings on the Royaumont manuscript, including pagination and Girod’s publication number, indicate that Girod used this copy for preparation of his edition and thus suggest that it dates from 1887 or 1888. (The same is true of the three other *Ariettes* manuscripts housed at Royaumont, which will be discussed in turn.)

Debussy’s alterations to the manuscripts support dating the Royaumont versions after those housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale, because his changes often match what Girod and Fromont published in their editions. In the case of “C’est l’extase” Debussy’s changes fall into the categories of added or revised expression markings, minor rhythmic alterations, and slight changes to chords in the piano parts. Those alterations that are significant will be discussed in the course of the musical analysis in the following section.

**Musical Analysis**

Debussy’s music follows the stanzaic structure of Verlaine’s text, although the song is through-composed. The composer used changes in musical character to set apart not only the three stanzas but also the subsections within stanzas 1 and 2. Diagram 5.1 shows the formal and harmonic structure of the song.
As Verlaine used the first stanza of his poem to establish atmosphere and mood, so too did Debussy in his song. The opening measures (see Example 5.1) demonstrate several of Debussy’s methods. Harmonically, the first section gives the impression of being suspended in time by prolonging a dominant ninth sonority. This prolongation lasts eight measures before the first appearance of the song’s tonic, E major, in m. 9. The musical material, which relies predominantly on repetitions of a single phrase, also suspends time. Only when, in m. 9, the tonic arrives and the recurring phrase shifts to that key does the listener sense that the music is moving forward.

Debussy’s expression markings also contribute to the mood of the song. The tempo in his first manuscript was marked “Molto moderato, tempo rubato,” but he later revised it to “Lent et caressant,” a tempo appropriate for the “languorous” text, together with a specific indication of emotion. The singer receives a more specific direction from the composer: to sing in a “rêveusement” manner. Thus, the opening of the song is suspended in a dreamlike state.

As the first stanza continues (mm. 11–17), the music undergoes a change. A slightly faster tempo accompanies the text as it describes the shivering branches. The harmony of this passage begins on a tonic major seventh chord and moves briefly away, leading to a dominant
Example 5.1 “C’est l’extase,” mm. 1–10
seventh built on D in m. 17. Instead of moving into a new key, however, this chord leads, via a common-tone modulation, back to the dominant ninth chord that opened the song, along with a reprise of the piano’s recurring phrase. This circular motion of the first stanza again suspends time while also providing a transition to the second stanza.

In this section (see Example 5.2) the emotion within the text intensifies, which Debussy’s music reflects in several ways. First, as the song approaches the words “Cela ressemble au cri

Example 5.2 “C’est l’extase,” mm. 20–27

chromatic figure in contrary motion
doux,” Debussy marked the music “poco a poco animato.” Second, the voice leaps up an octave in mm. 23–24 to its highest point yet in the song, a musical representation of the cry described in the text. Finally, in mm. 24–27, although the harmony centers loosely around C♯ major and G♯ minor chords, the focal point is a chromatic figure that descends and ascends in contrary motion between the voice and the piano, respectively. The opposing chromatic movement undermines identification of a key for the end of this section, which contributes to the music’s level of anxiety. The result is an emotional intensification that depicts the agitation that the speaker ascribes to the grass. In the acceleration of the tempo and the rising melodic line, nature’s agitation spills over and affects the speaker, as well.

The ellipsis dots in the text (m. 27) indicate a pause, which Debussy provided by changing the nature of the music slightly. In the song’s final version he altered the vocal part in mm. 27–28, so that the music contains a longer pause. The earlier versions show the vocal line continuing over the piano part in m. 28, but in the Fromont edition the voice stops abruptly at the end of m. 27 (see Example 5.3). Also, the Royaumont manuscript contains an “a tempo” indication in m. 28, which demonstrates that Debussy did intend to make the two sections musically distinct, even though this marking disappeared during the revision process.

The last two phrases of the second stanza (shown in Example 5.4) continue to build on the chromatic figure first heard in m. 24. In this passage, however, the motive’s chromaticism appears within a clearer tonal context. Measures containing the chromatic figure alternate with chords built on the local tonic, D major. In m. 32, when the voice joins in the chromatic passages, the strong G in the bass allows these measures to be heard in a tonal framework, specifically in a plagal relationship to D. Debussy used the chromatic figure in mm. 32–33, here expanded to six sixteenth notes in the voice, to depict the rolling pebbles described in the text.
Example 5.3 “C’est l’extase,” mm. 27–28

(a) Bibliothèque Nationale manuscript

(b) Royaumont manuscript/Girod edition

(c) Fromont edition
Debussy’s expression marking of “Sempre dolcissimo” for the voice—which originally read “murmuré” in the Bibliothèque Nationale manuscript—indicates a change from agitation to calm with the beginning of this section. This line of text is also the first mention of the addressee in the poem. The addressee’s presence is recognized through the transformation of the chromatic motive. The words “Tu dirais” (“You would say”) introduce the comparison between the wind
moving through the grass and the sound of water rolling over pebbles. With the altered context for the chromatic figure—changed both harmonically and melodically—the motive now gives voice to the addressee as it puts his or her comparison into music.

The song’s final stanza begins in m. 36 with another shift in musical mood (see Example 5.5). At this point Debussy introduced a new motive, a “sigh” figure, which derives from the first two notes of stanza 1’s recurring phrase. The sigh is also present in the bass line, in augmentation. Such a motive fits the text in this stanza, which describes the lamenting soul. Until m. 44 the sigh figure provides the only motivic material for the third stanza. Because this figure derives from another significant musical element, it symbolizes the changing emotions that occur throughout the song. The complete phrase, as heard in the beginning, represented only the languorous mood described in the first stanza. This phrase, however, disappeared in the midst of the chromatic motive that dominates the second stanza, and its return in such a fragmented form demonstrates the progression of emotion from languor to anxiety to sadness.

As the text speaks to the addressee and the speaker realizes that the lamenting soul belongs to the two of them, the music leads toward the song’s second climax. A gradual acceleration and crescendo drives the music toward the peak of the vocal line in mm. 43–44. The harmony supports the intensification of emotion by moving from one unstable seventh chord to another, finally returning in m. 44 to the dominant ninth on B that opened the song.

The musical elements occurring from m. 44 onward play a crucial role in the analysis of “C’est l’extase.” As the song’s opening chord returns, so does the descending phrase heard in the first stanza. This time, however, the voice sings the phrase, which was previously heard only in the piano. In the next two measures (mm. 46–47) the piano reprises the chromatic motive from the second stanza, coinciding with a return to the E major tonic. Finally, the song concludes with a solo piano passage that brings back the sigh motive over a chord succession of
Example 5.5 “C’est l’extase,” mm. 36–52

Voice

Piano

sigh in augmentation

recurring phrase from 1st stanza

n'est-ce pas? La mien-ne, dis, et la tien-ne, Don't s'ex-ha-le l'humble an-

tie-ne Par ce tii-de soir, tout bas?

molti rit. e morendo
two first-inversion minor seventh chords and the tonic triad. The stepwise descent in the bass can be considered an extension of the augmented sigh motive heard in mm. 36–39.

The reason for the juxtaposition of the song’s three motivic passages arises from the text. The first stanza, whose role was to establish the song’s atmosphere, focused on its recurring descending phrase. Likewise, the second stanza developed its own motive that first symbolized the agitation of nature and then provided a voice for the addressee. Finally, the third stanza introduced the sigh motive to represent the lamenting soul and complete the speaker’s emotional transformation. As the speaker realizes that this soul belongs to both him or her and the addressee, the laments of nature and of the addressee (described in stanzas 1 and 2) become linked with the soul mentioned in the third stanza. The speaker’s moment of realization occurs in the measures leading up to the climactic point when the voice begins the series of motivic reprises in m. 44. Its performance of the original phrase cements its relationship with the sigh motive, with the text “Dont s’exhale l’humble antienne” (emphasis added) helping to link the two roles of this phrase. Despite its reappearance, however, the opening phrase has been
permanently altered; it never returns in the piano. Instead, the song’s conclusion focuses on the sigh figure, demonstrating that the prevailing emotion, in the end, is the sadness heard in the soul’s lament.

**Persona and Aesthetic Position**

The poetic persona was identified as a figure who shares a relationship with the poem’s addressee, and these two characters both participated in the text’s lament. Overall Debussy’s music mirrors the poem very closely. Images that establish the poem’s atmosphere do the same in the song, depicting the natural setting through the evocative music. Likewise, the music reflects the rise and fall of emotion contained in the text; melodically and harmonically, the intensifications occur at the places where the speaker’s emotion increases. The form also follows that of the poem, with changes in musical style coinciding with the stanzaic text. Finally, the speaker in the song realizes at the same moment as the speaker in the text that the soul heard lamenting in nature is the soul shared by the speaker and addressee.

The close connection between textual and musical elements in “C’est l’extase” demonstrates that the persona is a poetic figure, but one who amplifies the images and emotions already present in the text. Specifically, the musical persona intensifies the relationship between nature and the lamenting soul. A musical landscape can vividly depict the sounds of nature and the implicit emotion of a sigh, and the persona’s linkage of these elements through motivic relationships intensifies these roles. In addition, the song provides a voice for the addressee, who is mentioned in the poem but does not participate. Finally, the song elaborates on the speaker’s emotional state, using the motives to depict the transformation from languorous ecstasy to agitation and finally to sadness. Whereas the poem implies the speaker’s sadness at the end of the poem, the use of the sigh motive makes that emotion explicit at the song’s conclusion.
The aesthetic of this song actually combines elements of two distinct artistic positions: romanticism and symbolism. Verlaine’s text, in its onomatopoetic patterns of sound, its limited subjective viewpoint, its evocative language, and its \textit{impar} structure, exhibits the techniques of the symbolists. In contrast, the heightened expression of emotion in the song suggests a romantic influence. While the symbolists brought emotion into their works, it was only through suggestion, not explicit statements of one’s feelings. This is Verlaine’s approach in “C’est l’extase.” In the song, however, the sigh motive, through association with the lament, brings sadness to the forefront and identifies the figure to whom it belongs. In addition, the other motives draw natural elements into the depiction of emotion in a romantic manner. Nevertheless, the music relies on compositional devices that closely parallel symbolism. The song’s opening passage exhibits a suspended, circular character in its prolongation of a single chord and recurring musical cells that mirror the symbolists’ fascination with repeated sounds. Other musical repetition occurs in subsequent sections, where each stanza focuses on a single motive that returns in ever changing contexts. Harmonically, the music avoids tonal definition through techniques of chromatic passagework and constantly shifting seventh chords. Therefore, while the persona may take on elements of a romantic aesthetic, the predominant style of this song remains within the realm of symbolism.

\textbf{“Il pleure dans mon cœur”}

\textbf{Source Material}

The exact date of composition for “Il pleure dans mon cœur” is not known. The Bibliothèque Nationale holds a manuscript, Ms. 20695(2), that was originally bound together
with the manuscript for “C’est l’extase” housed at the same library. Even though the manuscript for “Il pleure dans mon cœur” bears no date, Marie Rolf assumes that the two songs were probably composed at approximately the same time. Nothing, however, would rule out the possibility that Debussy composed the song earlier and then recopied it into the same folio with “C’est l’extase.” The manuscript itself bears no markings or corrections of any kind.

A comparison with the printed editions shows the evolution of the song’s final version, although no sources have survived showing when Debussy made his changes. First, the Girod edition contains two passages (shown in Example 5.6) in which Debussy revised the vocal line

Example 5.6 “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” comparison of Girod and Fromont editions (voice only)
(a) mm. 24–27

Example 5.6 (continued)
(b) mm. 59–63

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for the Fromont edition. Both of these changes could be considered shifts in tessitura that might suggest a connection of the earlier version to Mme Vasnier’s high vocal range. These changes suggest pure musical considerations more strongly, however. The original vocal line relates to the piano part, which contains the same chromatic descent seen in these altered passages. In fact, as Example 5.7 shows, in mm. 19–22 the piano plays the exact melody that appears in the Girod edition’s vocal part in mm. 59–61. Thus the original vocal material more closely echoed what still remains in the piano part. Another revision occurred in mm. 55–56, where the song’s motto appears inverted. This change will be addressed in the next section.

Finally, as Marie Rolf points out, Debussy’s song contains a word change from Verlaine’s original text. In the last line of the second stanza, Debussy’s text reads “O le bruit de la pluie!” instead of “O le chant de la pluie!” Rolf credits the change to Debussy himself, which is likely a correct assumption. The change in text appeared in the Girod edition, and the composer would have been able to remove the alteration for the second edition, if he had

Example 5.7 “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” mm. 19–22 (piano interlude)

\[\text{Example 5.7 “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” mm. 19–22 (piano interlude)}\]

\[\text{\^{\text{\textsc{\textcopyright}}} 14 Ibd., 39.}\]
wanted to do so. When the change took place is unknown, however, because the only surviving manuscript shows Verlaine’s original text. Debussy’s altered line provides an additional rhyme between “bruit” and “pluie,” as well as recalling the word “bruit” in the first line of the second stanza, although the meaning of the poem remains essentially unchanged. One wonders why Debussy would choose to replace a musical term with a nonmusical one; perhaps, since the word “chant” may have caused confusion between the song being sung and the metaphorical song mentioned in the text, he preferred the “song of the rain” to come only from his music.

**Musical Analysis**

When Debussy set “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” he incorporated both the imagery and the mood of Verlaine’s text into the music. The repeated sixteenth notes heard in the piano’s opening measures imitate the falling rain, and the nearly constant appearance of sixteenth notes throughout the song reflects the rain’s importance for Verlaine’s text. Example 5.8 shows the first eighteen measures of the song.

The directions that accompany these opening measures help establish the song’s mood. The words “triste et monotone” point to both the text’s theme of sadness and the pervasiveness of that mood within the music. A further direction in m. 3, that the pianist should play “en peu en dehors,” indicates that the piano’s melody should be heard as if from a bit of a distance. This musical instruction allows the piano to establish the song’s atmosphere by depicting the rain “outside.”

This piano melody serves as a motto for the entire song. The motto actually contains two parts that sometimes appear separately; the first half is lyrical while the second half comprises a chromatic line that simply descends across two measures. Table 5.1 traces the
Example 5.8 “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” mm. 1–18

Voice

Modérément animé (triste et monotone)

Piano

Il pleure dans mon cœur

First half of motto

Il pleure dans mon cœur

First half of motto, continued

Second half of motto

Second half of motto

Comme il pleut sur la ville
Example 5.8, continued
Table 5.1  Formal, harmonic, and motivic overview of “Il pleure dans mon cœur”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Tonal Center/Harmony</th>
<th>Motto*</th>
<th>m.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[piano introduction]</td>
<td>g#</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il pleure dans mon cœur</td>
<td>g#</td>
<td>1 (voice &amp; piano)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comme il pleut sur la ville,</td>
<td>g# → E9</td>
<td>1 (piano)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quelle est cette langueur?</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1 (piano)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qui pénètre mon cœur?</td>
<td>A → D7</td>
<td>1 (piano)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[piano interlude]</td>
<td>g# (chromatic)</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O bruit doux de la pluie</td>
<td>g#</td>
<td>1 (piano)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Par terre et sur les toits!</td>
<td>g# → g#6 → C9</td>
<td>1 (piano)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pour un cœur qui s’ennuie</td>
<td>F# → F7</td>
<td>“A7” → d</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O le bruit de la pluie!</td>
<td>F7</td>
<td>2 (piano)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il pleure sans raison</td>
<td>B7 → G9</td>
<td>1 (piano)</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dans ce cœur qui s’écœure.</td>
<td>G9 → C7 → A9</td>
<td>2 (piano)</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quoi! nulle trahison?</td>
<td>Bb/bb b → “F7”</td>
<td>2 (piano)</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ce deuil est sans raison.</td>
<td>“A7”</td>
<td>A9</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[piano interlude]</td>
<td>g#6 → E7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*A 1 or 2 indicates which half of the motto appears in the passage.

**The second appearance of the motto in this interlude occurs in inversion.

appearances of the motto within the song, as well as the harmonic and formal structure of the song. In the course of the first stanza, the motto is established as the basis of the song’s ternary form. In mm. 11–16 the music demonstrates the close relationship between the voice and the piano in this song. The piano echoes the vocal melody twice, allowing the “penetrating languor” so central to the text to appear in multiple layers within this passage and to depict the connection of the speaker’s weeping heart to the falling rain outside.

Other elements in this opening stanza reflect the song’s languorous mood, as well. The presence of the recurring melodic material and the constant sixteenth notes unify the first section.
under a single emotion. Additionally, the harmony remains relatively static, focusing exclusively on the tonic, G♯ minor, for the first eight measures. A turn to the Neapolitan, A major, occurs in mm. 11–17, but, via a common-tone modulation, the stanza ends on a D♯ seventh chord and prepares for the tonic’s return in the next section.

During the first part of the B section (mm. 19–30) the text describes the sound of the rain outside, and the music continues to depict the rain as it did in the first stanza. The piano begins with a brief interlude (mm. 19–22, shown in Example 5.7) that includes a complete version of the motto, followed by the beginning of the second stanza in the voice (m. 23 on). Other musical elements in this passage, however, show that Debussy was beginning to move the song in a new direction by altering material from the A section. For the first time the voice sings part of the motto; its first half appears in the voice and piano together (mm. 23–24). This phrase contrasts with the opening of the song, however, in that the chromatic descent begins to disappear. Whereas earlier uses of the motto linked the two halves seamlessly, now only a hint of the chromatic passage enters in mm. 27–28. The harmony in this section also signals a change, as the music begins to move away from the tonic. The G♯ minor chord in mm. 25–26 shifts to a G♯ diminished sonority in m. 27, followed by a C♯ ninth chord in m. 29.

This new sonority leads smoothly into the F♯ chord in m. 31, at which point the emotion in the music begins to intensify (see Example 5.9). After the voice’s entrance, the first half of the motto appears in the piano, the first of a series of occurrences of this phrase. Now the chromatic segment of the motto disappears completely, as the music develops only the lyrical half. This phrase appears six times in direct succession within shifting key areas. For the remainder of the second stanza, F♯ remains the tonal center (first as a triad, then as a ninth chord); by the end of the stanza (m. 37) the motto has shifted to an upper register in octaves.
Example 5.9 “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” mm. 31–46 (motto [first half only] in brackets)
Example 5.9, continued

In mm. 37–38 Debussy created a significant departure from Verlaine’s stanzaic form. Where Verlaine provided a pause between stanzas 2 and 3, Debussy eliminated the break and instead continued the B section across the stanzas. The F♯ ninth chord serves as V of the next key area, B major, in m. 39; this chord, a B dominant seventh, moves smoothly to the next chord, a ninth on G in m. 41, by adding the root and shifting F♯ and D♯ down to F♮ and D♮. Meanwhile, the motto continues to change register, moving back and forth between the left and
right hands of the piano part in an unsettled manner. The increasing level of emotion in this passage reflects a change of focus in the text. In the first stanza the poem’s two primary images, the rain and the speaker’s heart, are essentially equal in importance. Verlaine put them on the same level through the use of a simile, which allows the sad mood to penetrate the speaker’s heart as falling rain permeates the landscape. The B section of the song begins by focusing only on the rain, but as the text and music progress, the heart becomes the main image (see lines 7–10 of the poem and mm. 31–46 of the song). The constantly shifting music depicts the speaker’s restlessness and frustration with the heart’s continual weeping.

Harmonically, the B section ends in an unpredictable way, contrasting the conventional chord successions heard thus far. The G ninth chord in m. 41 serves as preparation for a seventh chord on C in m. 43, but the B♭ in m. 44 slips down to A, forming a diminished seventh chord on A in m. 45. As the right hand moves down to a lower register, the left hand also descends slightly so that the B section ends on a diminished seventh built on F♯. Thus, the concluding harmony continues to depict the speaker’s unsettled emotions that dominated this section.

The midpoint of the third stanza marks a sudden musical departure from what leads up to it (see Example 5.10), interrupting the formal sequence and pausing to amplify the speaker’s emotions. Debussy changed the vocal style to recitative, which effectively sets off the exclamation “Quoi!” in the text. Likewise, the tempo slows and becomes freer, while the harmony abruptly jumps to a B♭ sonority, shifting from major to minor and back again (mm. 46–48). At this point the speaker has just realized that the restless emotions of languor and sadness depicted in the music are unfounded, and the interpolated recitative section shows the shock and surprise of this moment.
Example 5.10 “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” mm. 47–56

Plus lent

Voice

Quoi! nul' le tra - hi - son?

Piano

Ce douil est sans rai - son.

pp

Second half of motto

pp

First half of motto

(Start of motto)

pp

First half of motto in inversion
The next line of text, beginning in m. 50, seems to end the recitative section in D minor, but suddenly, following a brief chromatic descent in the left hand, the G♯ diminished sonority heard earlier returns in m. 53, accompanying the lyrical half of the motto. This return of the tonic and the reversal of the motto’s components (i.e., the chromatic half in mm. 51–52 leads to the melodic half in m. 53) signal the transition to the reprise of the A section, as does the gradual acceleration to the original tempo. The transitory passage ends on an E dominant seventh (mm. 55–56), with the inversion of the motto mentioned earlier. Debussy’s revision of this interlude changed what in his early manuscript version had originally echoed mm. 53–54 into a passage that only partially mirrors the first phrase. By altering the material that forms the end of the transition, Debussy heightened the effect of the reprise in m. 57, because contrasting music immediately precedes the return of the full motivic phrase in the tonic key.

The song’s final section (A’) resembles the A section in several ways (see Example 5.11). For the most part the music of both sections focuses on the same key areas (G♯ minor, E7/E9, A9, and D♯7). Debussy also reprised the melodic material of the opening section; in mm. 57–66, which parallel mm. 3–12, most of the original melodic elements are retained in some way. The first phrase heard in the voice (mm. 4–7), however, is replaced here by the first half of the motto, which in the opening had been in the piano part, and the piano plays only repeated sixteenth notes under this figure.

In m. 59 the voice and piano exchange roles again: The chromatic descent returns in the piano, now expanded from a single line to a series of parallel sonorities (always with the interval of a minor seventh between the top and bottom notes of the piano part), and the voice abandons the motto. The succeeding passage then mirrors the original material (compare mm. 7–10 and 61–64). In the following measures (mm. 65–67) the voice completes the reprise of its earlier
Example 5.11  “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” mm. 57–80

C'est bien la pi - re pei - ne De ne

sa - voir pour - quoi, Sans a - mour et sans

Second half of motto, continued

moto rall.

hain - ne, Mon cœur a tant de
Example 5.11, continued
melody, allowing for a significant textual and musical parallel between the two A sections. The
two instances of this passage occur to the words “Quelle est cette langueur” (mm. 11–13) and
“Mon cœur a tant de peine” (mm. 65–67), asserting that the penetrating sadness of the first
stanza has continued throughout the song and into the final stanza.

The speaker’s perpetual sadness is also confirmed by the occurrences of the motto in the
vocal line. First the voice sings the phrase at the beginning of section B; the second appearance
occurs in a similar passage at the start of the second A section. Although the voice does not
finish the motto in either case—in the first instance the chromatic half is absent, and in the
second the piano takes over from the voice—its participation in performing the motto shows that
the speaker also participates in the emotion of the song.

It is interesting to note that when Debussy revised the melody that opens the final section,
as shown in Example 5.6, he removed the chromatic descent from the voice, leaving it in the
piano alone. Thus, the voice never sings the chromatic half of the motto in the song’s final
version. This part of the motto comes to be associated with the falling rain rather than the tears
falling in the speaker’s heart. First, the chromatic descent coincides with the text “. . . comme il
pleut sur la ville,” and later in the song, where the heart serves as the primary focus (mm. 31–
46), the piano features only the melodic half of the motto. The singer/speaker thus uses the
melodic segment to express the emotion of the text in first person, while the piano has sole
responsibility for depicting the falling rain. Viewed in the context of the entire song, however,
the two halves of the motto combine throughout to allow a complete expression of the song’s
pervasive sadness.

In preparation for the song’s conclusion, the music departs from the material of the initial
A section with a series of sustained chords that lead to the piano’s closing passage. In these final
measures the piano presents the complete melodic half of the motto twice (mm. 71–75). The harmonic framework for the motto also changes—from a static G# minor tonic to a series of major chords. This chord succession resembles the chromatic half of the motto in its overall contour and its primarily stepwise motion, although that part of the motto is not strictly heard in its original form. Nevertheless, this is the only case where the motto’s lyrical half appears concurrently with such a chromatic descent.

The song ends with two fragments of the motto, each containing four pitches. In the second of these fragments the rhythm slows, elongating the figure in a manner that matches the overall gradual decrease in musical activity throughout this passage. The tempo gradually slows with increasingly soft dynamics, and the sixteenth notes move to a single repeated pattern before disappearing entirely. Harmonically, the closing returns to G#, but in the end the sonority is an open fifth. This indefinite conclusion suits the text, in which the speaker never receives an explanation for the heart’s suffering and sadness.

The primary source of emotional content within the song comes from the motto and its place within the formal structure. In the first stanza the motto helps to depict the falling rain with its chromatic descent, but in combination with the general atmosphere of the song and the images in the text, the motto also represents the weeping within the speaker’s heart. As the emotion increases in the second and third stanzas, so does the motivic activity. Although the motto is absent during the recitative passage—the moment when the speaker acknowledges that the sadness has no cause—the return of the motto in the song’s final section asserts that this sadness continues for the speaker, even though its presence is unexplained. The confluence of the two halves of the motto near the end of the song amplifies the feeling of sadness even further.
**Persona and Aesthetic Position**

Like “C’est l’extase,” “Il pleure dans mon cœur” displays a poetic persona. In this case the persona elaborates on the poem by allowing the speaker to participate in the emotion of the text. As discussed in Chapter 2, the persona of the poem alone, while expressing the heart’s sadness, remained more bored than sad; the heart’s unexplained sadness simply provided atmosphere with which to contrast the persona’s ennui. In the song, however, the speaker shares in the motivic activity and thus in the sadness of the text, as well. The song’s persona uses the layers of music to intensify the level of emotion felt by the speaker, to a point that goes far beyond what Verlaine’s text expressed by itself.

This song reflects a symbolist aesthetic in the same ways that the poem represents symbolism. First, the music contains the same thematic elements as the text: the pervasive sadness, the sound of the rain, the boredom within the speaker’s heart. Second, as much as the poem relies on repeated sounds, so does the song, in its use of the motto within different musical contexts and its nearly constant sixteenth-note rhythms. In two areas the song expands on the character of the poem: the emotion of the speaker and the formal structure. As already mentioned, the song moves beyond the boredom the speaker expresses in the text. Formally, the music appears to diverge significantly from that of the poem, but actually the song simply redistributes what was already present. The recitative section beginning in m. 47 breaks into the middle of a stanza, but the exclamation “Quoi!” had that effect in the text by itself. The song uses music to connect the lines of text that relate to the same subject, thus amplifying a division that the text contained but disguised with its stanzaic form. Thus, this persona remains a symbolist poet, although one who takes a freer approach to form than Verlaine did.
“L’ombre des arbres”

Source Material

Debussy composed his first *Ariette oubliée* before he left Paris for Rome. The manuscript of “L’ombre des arbres,” which is in the Koch Collection of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University (Ms. KD 713), is dated “Paris le 6 = 1. 85,” or 6 January 1885. This manuscript is remarkably clean, with only minor changes entered by Debussy at the same time the manuscript was copied. For example, in m. 16 in the voice part, the composer crossed out a D♯ half-note and changed it to a quarter-note–eighth-note pattern on the same pitch.

While the manuscript contains few corrections, it frequently differs from both of the published editions. The significance of these differences varies from missing accidentals, to changes in dynamics, to substantive musical alterations. In the manuscript the tempo indication reads “Andante (dans un sentiment du tristesse rêverie).” This instruction changed to the simpler indication “Lent et triste” in the two published versions of the song, but, as will be demonstrated, the influence of the dream remains in “L’ombre des arbres.”

One substantial musical change occurred between the 1888 and 1903 editions. As Example 5.12 shows, in mm. 23–26 Debussy significantly altered the final phrase of the vocal line (although he retained the original accompaniment). As mentioned earlier, this passage suggests a possible connection to the end of the composer’s relationship with Mme Vasnier, because Debussy’s revisions lowered the overall tessitura of this line. On the whole, however, the altered line is significant not for issues of range but for its expressive quality. The Girod edition shows an intermediate stage in the revision process, where Debussy reversed the earlier
Example 5.12  “L’ombre des arbres,” mm. 23–26

(a) KD 713 version

(b) Girod version

(c) Fromont version

tempo and dynamic indications. The final version confirms and adds to the earlier revisions, where the soft dynamics and the replacement of the sequential melodic fragment with a linear phrase make the phrase less urgent and less insistent than the original. For the most part, however, the version of “L’ombre des arbres” published in 1903 retains the music and the mood of the original manuscript’s version.

Musical Analysis

As a whole, “L’ombre des arbres” follows a modified strophic form, as shown in Diagram 5.2. The first stanza of “L’ombre des arbres” demonstrates consistency with the two *Ariettes oubliées* already discussed, in that Debussy directly translated the mood of the text into
his music. The text in the first stanza serves to establish the poem’s setting through vivid visual and aural imagery, and the music illustrates this text in several ways. The tempo marking, “Lent et triste,” instructs the pianist to bring the sad mood of the poem into the song, and the vocal line, in its flexible style that sometimes approximates recitative, suggests a dreamlike emotional quality that reflects the atmosphere of the misty landscape. Example 5.13 shows the first ten measures of the song.

Throughout the first stanza the music avoids definition in its rhythmic and harmonic character. In addition to the recitative-like rhythms in the voice part, the frequent triplets disguise the ostensible duple division of the beat. This is especially effective in mm. 2 and 4, where the combination of triplets and straight eighth notes blurs the expected metric division. The key signature indicates C# major, and although the song’s first chord is built on C#, Debussy used a dominant seventh chord (introduced by a lower appoggiatura) rather than a tonic triad. Further obfuscation of the tonic occurs when the harmony moves immediately to another dominant seventh, this time on G♯—a tritone away from the initial chord. In m. 6 the first tonic-like sonority enters with the arrival of G♯ minor. This key remains the tonal center until m. 9, where a series of seventh and ninth chords leads to a cadence on D major in m. 10—again a

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Example 5.13 “L’ombre des arbres,” mm. 1–10

L’om-bre des ar-bres dans la ri-vière em-bu-mé-e

Meurt com-mé de la fu-mé-e, Tan-dis qu’en l’air, par-

mi les ra-mu-res ré-el-les, Se plai-gnent les tour-te-rel-les.
tritone away from the previous tonal center. The two pairs of tritones in these initial measures allow the music to avoid conventional progression and thus to remain static.

Stasis also arises in the first ten measures from repetition of musical material. The short phrase that appears in mm. 1–2 dominates most of the first stanza, in one way or another, and it continues to serve as a motto for the rest of the song. After its first occurrence, the motto repeats under the voice’s entrance in mm. 3–4. A measure of transition occurs with the cadential preparation in m. 5, leading to another instance of the motto in m. 6. In this case, however, only its first measure appears (with one pitch modification), now over the G♯ minor sonority. This version of the motto returns in m. 8. When compared with m. 5, the cadence in m. 9 forms the final musical parallel of the section; both cadences use the same bass line and similar chord movement in the right hand. Thus, nearly every measure in this section echoes or relates to another measure. The static character of the opening effectively depicts the constant sadness that establishes the atmosphere and mood of this song.

The second stanza begins by echoing the first almost exactly (see Example 5.14). Debussy retained the motto in the accompaniment, the same outline of pitches in the vocal line, and the C♯–G tritone in the harmonic progression. Another parallel to the first stanza occurs in mm. 16 and 18, where a slightly varied version of the first half of the motto serves as the accompaniment in two identical measures.

Although the two stanzas begin with similar music, their respective texts differ from each other in their focus. The text of the second stanza centers on the relationship between human emotion and the setting that the first stanza described, based on the experiences of the song’s two characters. One of these characters is explicit—the traveler whose emotions are reflected in the landscape’s sadness—and one is implicit—the speaker who addresses the traveler. On its own,
Example 5.14  “L’ombre des arbres,” mm. 11–20
the text had explained how the addressee’s emotions relate to the natural setting; through the musical events of the succeeding measures, the speaker’s role will also become clear.

The music of the second stanza eventually diverges from that of the first, to allow the song to reflect development within the text. The changes begin in m. 17, where Debussy interjected a new idea between the iterations of the motto in mm. 16 and 18. Beginning in m. 19, this new musical idea serves as a temporary motive; the cell is repeated twice, increasing in pitch and volume (mm. 19–20).

While the first stanza remained emotionally static, the music here displays intensification of emotion as the speaker describes the traveler’s sadness. The deepening emotions are reflected in the harmonic language of the phrase, which grows increasingly chromatic as the pitches rise. In mm. 17–20 the new musical material drives the harmony away from G♯ minor and toward more chromaticism, especially marked by a series of half-diminished seventh chords built on E♯.

This chromatic passage leads to another abrupt musical shift in m. 21, as Example 5.15 shows. Here the chromatic progression gives way to a new tonal center, F♯ major, that lasts through m. 23. When m. 23 repeats the accompaniment of m. 21, the music appears stable. In mm. 24–26, however, for the words “Tes espérances noyées,” a series of diminished and half-diminished seventh chords, gradually moving upward in pitch, leads to a second, though more subtle, emotional climax. Although the dynamic level in this passage decreases, the chromatic harmony, the syncopated and repeated chords in the piano part, and the rising pitch allow the emotion to continue to intensify. The unison A’s at the end of m. 26 serve as preparation for the song’s closing passage.

“L’ombre des arbres” ends with the piano alone (mm. 27–31), beginning with the final reprise of the song’s motto. From its entrance, however, this version differs from the previous
Example 5.15 “L’ombre des arbres,” mm. 21–31

Voice

Piano

et que tristes pleuraient dans les hautes feuilles

espérance noyées!

très retenu sempre dolcissimo e morendo

Second half of motto
statements. Here a dominant seventh chord on G forms the initial harmony of the phrase, so that the original C# disappears. The shift to the G7 one measure earlier leaves the triplet portion of the repeated phrase without harmonic support. The music then takes one further sudden turn in m. 28, showing that the deceptive reprise of the repeated phrase will lead the final measures in a new direction. The right hand of the piano plays a series of octaves that sound like bell tones, all on the pitch E#. These bell tones appear in increasing note values, while below them repeated chords shift up in half steps. Harmonically, the song ends with a long-awaited authentic cadence in the song’s tonic, C# major. By removing the C# sonority from the beginning of this phrase, Debussy delayed and thereby heightened the effect of this key’s role as tonic. Additionally, the closing of the song reverses the tritone relationship heard in the opening section; here the motto begins harmonized by G7, but moves to C# for the final chords.

Two elements of this song frame its lyric expression within the context of a dream. The first is Debussy’s original tempo indication, which identifies the song as taking place in a dreamlike state. Even though the word “rêverie” was removed from the performance indication before the song was published, the music remains for the most part unchanged, and thus the dream within the music persists. The second element comes in the song’s final moments, in the form of the bell tones. This striking conclusion, which disrupts the sad reverie in an almost jarring manner, separates the sadness of the dream from the reality of the moment of awakening.

The changes in the song’s motto support this interpretation. Within the dream the motto remains consistent in its depiction of sadness. As the music progresses from the first stanza to the second, the speaker’s emotions intensify, still within the frame of the dream. In the final appearance of the motto, however, it displays transformation in its harmonic context. The dream is coming to an end, together with its pervasive mood of sadness, as is evidenced by the abandonment of further recurring material in favor of the bell tones.
Persona and Aesthetic Position

Attributing the expression of sadness within the dream to a particular character requires consideration of the relationship between the poem and the music. In the text alone, the speaker described only the emotions of the traveler, not those that come from subjective experience, so that the speaker and addressee had the potential to be two distinct characters. In the music, however, the speaker—as represented by the voice—shows considerable emotion, in conjunction with the accompaniment. Therefore, in the song the speaker and addressee are in fact the same person. The emotions experienced by the addressee are also those of the speaker, and the corresponding emotion heard in the accompaniment represents the way that the landscape reflects the speaker’s experience.

If, in the song, the speaker expresses emotions that occur within the dream, the overall persona is the dreamer who awakens at the conclusion of the song. Whether the emotions of the dream carry over into waking life is beyond the scope of the song to address. The listener merely observes a persona who expresses extreme sadness within a dream of an equally sad atmospheric landscape.

The dream exists within a symbolist aesthetic, as the music demonstrates. In the opening section of the song, several elements suggest symbolist techniques: the repetition of short cells of music; the voice’s recitative style; the ambiguous, chromatic harmonic landscape; and the constantly shifting metric divisions. These characteristics combine to create a static and circular passage that recalls symbolist poetry, and the song continues to feature similar techniques in the remaining sections. Additionally, the atmosphere of the music matches the evocative text, and the world of dreams provides a source of mystery and nuance appropriate for symbolism.

Within the bounds of the dream, the speaker expresses strongly felt emotions of sadness and anxiety; the music depicts in great detail the rise and fall of these emotions. At the same
time, the persona contemplates the emotional experiences of the speaker that took place within the dream from which the persona just awakened. Outside of the dream, however, the persona expresses no emotion at all. Only the bell tones and the supporting harmony provide clues to the persona’s aesthetic position. The bells, which represent a call to awakening, and the strictly functional final cadence in the bass show this persona to hold a purely objective stance. While the speaker’s expression of emotion can easily be classified as symbolist, it is more difficult to characterize the objective position of the persona. The abrupt way in which the bell tones interrupt the motto indicates a realist persona who rejects the dream, instead embracing waking reality and a distinct lack of emotional content.

“Chevaux de bois”

Source Material

“Chevaux de bois,” which was composed in January 1885, forms a pair with “L’ombre des arbres,” composed at approximately the same time. Although Debussy initially wrote the song before leaving for Rome, a three-stave sketch of the song, dated “Roma, juin 1885,” shows that Debussy was revising the song while he was there. Paul Vidal remembered hearing Debussy perform the song at the home of Ernest Hébert, the Villa Medici’s director.

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15 Guy Cogeval and François Lesure (eds.), Debussy e il simbolismo (Rome: Fratelli Palombi, 1984), 49. This sketch is described as belonging to a Mme Giuffré of Rome and was unavailable for examination. (The sketch’s current location is unknown.) According to Marie Rolf (personal communication), the sketch contains approximately ten measures of music on hand-drawn staves, including the piano introduction and the first line of text.

Debussy revised “Chevaux de bois” more extensively than any of the other *Ariettes oubliées*. Three autograph manuscripts survive, in addition to the Rome sketch. The first belongs to the Koch Collection of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (Ms. KD 1138) and bears the date 10 January 1885. Unfortunately, at some point this manuscript was burned, destroying some pages’ first staves and obscuring sections of both the vocal line and the accompaniment. The second manuscript is housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale (Mus. Rés. Vma. Ms. 33) and is dated Paris 1885. This version is often called the “Bachelet” manuscript because of its provenance; Debussy gave it to Alfred-Georges Bachelet, a friend and classmate from the Conservatoire. Because Debussy was en route to Rome by 27 January 1885, the two manuscripts must date from approximately the same time, and it is impossible to judge which was first. Musically, the two versions resemble each other closely, with differences only in tempo markings, slight alterations of the rhythm and placement of rests in the vocal line, and minor pitch variants in the accompaniment.

The final manuscript, which is not dated, resides at the Bibliothèque François Lang. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Girod’s edition was based on this manuscript, suggesting a date of 1887 or 1888. Comparing this manuscript to the presumed earlier versions indicates that Debussy significantly revised “Chevaux de bois” between January 1885 and the time of the Royaumont manuscript. One important difference is that Debussy had changed the text from the *Romances sans paroles* version, which he used first, to the *Sagesse* version, except for the two

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17 Rolf, “Ariettes,” 40.

18 A letter to Eugène Vasnier bearing this date shows Debussy writing from Marseilles, with reference to his upcoming arrival in Rome. See Debussy, *Letters*, 4.

19 In subsequent references to the song’s three manuscripts, I will refer to them (as Rolf did) by their provenance or location (Koch, Bachelet, and Royaumont).
new stanzas that Verlaine had added. The earlier manuscripts use the second stanza of the *Sagesse* version, but the rest of the text matches Verlaine’s original poem. In fact, Debussy left no evidence that he ever used the original second stanza in his song. The Royaumont manuscript shows that Debussy had adopted all of Verlaine’s revisions except one: the word “Bien” in the third line of stanza 4. Since the Girod edition uses the revision “Rien” in this passage, the manuscript’s inclusion of the older word may have been an oversight. Unfortunately, nothing survives explaining why Debussy adopted Verlaine’s revised text. Regardless of his reasons, the final version of the song suits the later text well, as will be described below.

Debussy’s revisions to the music itself range from inconsequential to significant. The revisions will be discussed here by comparing the Koch and Bachelet manuscripts to the Royaumont manuscript, as well as to the Girod and Fromont editions. Revisions of lesser importance fall into the categories of filling out the accompaniment; altering the vocal rhythm slightly (e.g., from eighth notes to a triplet or vice versa); adding rests to (or removing them from) the vocal line; and changing the wording of tempo indications (e.g., changing an indication from French to Italian but retaining the same meaning). Several more interesting revisions occurred within both the accompaniment and the vocal line; some of these passages went through more extensive changes than others.

First, the melody appearing in mm. 65–68 varies between the earlier and later versions of the song (see Example 5.16). The reason behind the change clearly lies in Debussy’s adoption of Verlaine’s revised text, which required a different rhythmic pattern to suit the new words. The two melodies are essentially the same, with the penultimate note extended so that the last word fills two measures of music.
The next important revision occurred in mm. 72–78. This section includes two different revisions, one to the melody and one to the accompaniment. As Example 5.17 shows, the Koch manuscript presents a static melody that lasts only four measures and leads directly into the final stanza, which begins in m. 77. In the Royaumont manuscript, and thus the Girod edition, the text reflects Verlaine’s revisions, and Debussy likewise updated the melody. In fact, the new melody duplicates the upper voice of the left hand in the piano, which in mm. 73–74 repeats a phrase that had been heard twice already, beginning in m. 69. The extension of this phrase allowed Debussy to create a new interlude with what had been the accompaniment in the Koch version; this passage now becomes mm. 75–78, so that the later version of the song is two measures longer than the original. Finally, for the Fromont edition, Debussy added greater variety by composing a new melody so that the accompaniment would no longer be duplicated; he also shortened the phrase so that “affame” ends before the piano interlude begins. This revision allows the
Example 5.17 “Chevaux de bois,” revisions to conclusion of sixth stanza

(a) Bachelet and Koch manuscripts, mm. 72–76
Example 5.17, continued

(b) Royaumont manuscript/Girod edition, mm. 72–78
Example 5.17, continued

(c) Fromont edition, mm. 72–78

De gais buveurs que leur soif affaime.

molto dim. e rit. te

Tournez,
interlude to have a stronger effect, because it is heard as a true interlude between stanzas and not as a partial end to the sixth stanza.

The last group of significant revisions occurs at the end of the song. Again, these involve both the vocal melody and the accompaniment. The melody shown in Example 5.18 (mm. 85–88 in the early versions, mm. 87–90 in the published versions) represents another instance where Debussy changed the music in connection with adopting the Sagesse version of the text. With his first revisions, as seen in the Royaumont manuscript and the Girod edition, he retained the first two measures of the original melody, while lowering the tessitura and slowing the rhythm to suit the “glas tristement” of the revised text. In the version published by Fromont, Debussy further intensified the mood of this line by narrowing the melodic range and slowing the rhythm of m. 88 to match the previous revision.

Example 5.18 “Chevaux de bois,” revision to stanza 7, line 3
(a) Bachelet/Koch manuscripts, mm. 85–88*

(b) Royaumont manuscript/Girod edition, mm. 87–90**

(c) Fromont edition, mm. 87–90

*The Koch manuscript replaces the first note of the triplet in m. 88 with a rest.
**The Girod edition has an eighth rest on the downbeat of m. 87, with an eighth note for the syllable “L’é-” of “L’église.”
Debussy also significantly altered the piano passage that closes the song (mm. 95–102) between the earlier and later versions (see Example 5.19a–d). Initially, in the Koch and Bachelet manuscripts, Debussy accomplished the final drawing out of the closing passage by slowing the tempo (indications of “en s’éloignant” and “morendo,” respectively) and changing to softer dynamic levels. Also, the Bachelet manuscript shows the final chord as doubled in length. By the time of the Girod edition, Debussy had written out a slowing of the trill and indicated both “morendo” and a rallentando. Finally, as shown in Example 5.19d, the process of slowing down is completed in the Fromont edition when Debussy elongated the motivic figure in mm. 98 and 100. Thus, as the composition of the song progressed through these different versions, the concluding piano passage gradually became longer and intensified the effect of slowing down until the final chord.

As the preceding examples show, Debussy completed some of these revisions to “Chevaux de bois” between the time of the Girod and Fromont editions. Only the change shown in Example 5.17c—the revised vocal melody in mm. 73–76—has a known source. A copy of the Girod edition, housed at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of

Example 5.19  “Chevaux de bois,” revisions to closing passage
(a) Koch manuscript, mm. 93–99
Example 5.19, continued

(b) Bachelet manuscript, mm. 93–100

\[\text{morendo}\quad \text{Lent}\quad p\quad \text{pp}\quad p\quad \text{pp}\]

(c) Girod edition, mm. 95–102*

\[\text{mp}\quad \text{ren}\quad \text{ppp}\quad \text{Rall.}\]

*The Royaumont manuscript corresponds to this version.
Example 5.19, continued

(d) Fromont edition, mm. 95–102

Texas, displays corrections in Debussy’s hand. Among these is the revision to this passage, which Debussy wrote into the score in purple ink.

Of the six songs in the set, this one bears the strongest biographical connection to Mme Vasnier. The Rome sketch gives the following tempo indication: “Mouvement de musique de Foire de St. Cloud.” Mme Vasnier’s daughter Marguerite recalled time (presumably circa 1880) that her family spent at the St. Cloud fair with Debussy, which would suggest that Debussy may have had Mme Vasnier and/or her family in mind when the song was composed. None of

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20 Vasnier, 19. The title of the article indicates that it describes Debussy at age eighteen, which would imply the year 1880 or thereabouts. Marie Rolf (“Ariettes,” 31) mentions that Debussy’s godfather Achille Arosa also lived in the St. Cloud region, which could have increased his familiarity with the area.
the autograph manuscripts shows a tempo indication like this one, calling the date of the sketch and its implicit reference to the Vasnier family into question. The only musical revision with a possible connection to Mme Vasnier is the initial revision shown in Example 5.18, where Debussy lowered the tessitura of the melody. Thus, if Debussy did intend a reference to her by either of these elements, it was removed early on in the compositional process, and the biographical connection does not affect our understanding of the song’s meaning.

Musical Analysis

The opening section of “Chevaux de bois” manifests several ways in which this song differs from the first three Verlaine songs discussed here. The source of the character of the music, however, remains Verlaine’s text. With “Chevaux de bois” Verlaine wrote a highly pictorial text containing a series of concrete scenes, a characteristic that does not usually belong to symbolist poetry. Using this text, Debussy composed a cheerful song whose form, melody, harmony, and texture display a simplicity not heard previously in the Ariettes.

The song is a rondo (see Diagram 5.3), a formal construction more regular than that of the previous songs. In this rondo form, alternating stanzas from the poem (beginning with the first stanza) serve as the refrains, and the intervening verses are through-composed. Melodically, portions of the song, especially the refrain, contain a lyricism that hearkens back to some of Debussy’s earlier songs, such as “Nuit d’étoiles” and “Mandoline,” whereas the vocal lines of the first three Verlaine songs resemble recitative.

As Diagram 5.3 shows, the harmony of this song is more functional than the other Ariettes discussed thus far. The key changes are, for the most part, prepared by secondary
Diagram 5.3  Form of “Chevaux de bois”

Intro R1 Verse 1 R2 P Verse 2 P R3 Verse 3 P R4  K

E: V  I → G  I → IV → ii → B  I  F iv  I → D  D’  G  B b7, g, B b, F #  B  \[E: V \]

C: V  E → V  B  \[E: V \]

M 1a M 2a M 2b M 2c M 2c M 1b

1  9  17  27  35  39  47  51  61  75  79  95

R = Refrain; P = Piano interlude; K = Closing; M = Motive

dominants that close the previous sections, and chromaticism figures into the harmony only rarely.

In its texture the song demonstrates its simplicity in two ways. First, unlike many of the other songs studied, the voice and accompaniment often share melodic material, so that the music contains less activity and less density of sound than the first three songs. Second, the song contains only two motives, which play a significant role in the song’s interludes but on the whole appear infrequently. The importance of these figures will be discussed subsequently.

As shown in Example 5.20, the song begins with eight measures of piano introduction, which present the original form of motive 1 (M 1a). The motive, a one-measure figure heard four times in succession, contributes to the depiction of the carousel starting to turn as the chords gradually thicken and shift from mid- to low register, at first slowly and then with every other note. These opening measures establish the song’s key of E major by implying a prolongation of its dominant, B, during the introduction.

Following the introduction we hear the first refrain, beginning in m. 9. Each of the song’s refrain sections is marked by the word “Tournez,” which Verlaine used at the beginning

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Example 5.20 “Chevaux de bois,” mm. 1–16

Allegro non tanto (joyeux et sonore)

Voice

Piano
of alternating stanzas. Thus, the refrains in general place their focus on the turning of the carousel horses, but in the first refrain the horses serve as the sole image. Appropriately, the accompaniment under the tuneful melody changes from the trills of the introduction to incessant thirty-second notes, illustrating that the carousel is now turning at full speed. The subsequent refrains use the same melodic and accompanying material, albeit in different keys, until the final refrain, which will be discussed below.

The first refrain ends on a G-major chord (m. 16) to prepare for the first verse to begin in C major (see Example 5.21). While the melody of the refrain was tuneful and lyrical, this verse’s
Example 5.21 “Chevaux de bois,” mm. 17–26

Voice:

L’enfant tout rouge et la mère

Piano:

pp

blanche Le gars en noir et la fille en

cre - scen - - do

rose L’une à la chose et l’autre à la

cre - scen - - do
vocal phrase emphasizes repeated pitches and static motion rather than an arching melodic line. The children who serve as the subject of the text also influence the music, in its simple, sing-song melody. Meanwhile, the thirty-second notes continue in the accompaniment as the carousel keeps turning. Beginning in m. 17 the music consists of three nearly identical measures that alternate between C major and B\(_b\) major chords, followed by a transitional measure leading to three parallel measures (with the rhythms altered to accommodate the declamation) using chords
built on F major and E major (mm. 21–23). After that sequence and two measures based on a D minor seventh chord, the harmony moves to B♭ to prepare the key of the next refrain, E♭.

The text of this refrain (mm. 27–35) gives a slightly more detailed description of the setting, especially seen in the speaker’s reference to the “eye of rascal cunning” that represents the actions of the fairgoers. Despite this change in textual emphasis, however, the music essentially duplicates the first refrain. After this section Debussy inserted a piano interlude (see Example 5.22), which introduces the first version of the second motive (M2a). This figure, in its first appearance, comprises a two-measure pattern, heard twice in direct succession and characterized by its downward motion. The descent of the motive outlines a ninth chord built on F♯, which prepares for the second verse in the key of B major (m. 39).

As in verse 1, the melody for verse 2 (mm. 39–48) avoids the lyricism of the refrain. In this case the sometimes disjunct melody features leaps of a tritone in the second half of the verse, over an accompaniment consisting of trills and chromatic motion. Although the key center of this verse is B, the half-step movement in all parts disrupts the tonal stability, as do the tritones in the vocal line. The chromaticism and declamatory melody suit the text of the verse, which describes the way in which the excitement of the fair causes intoxication and malaise.

In m. 45 the chromaticism ends on an F♯ major chord. When the next piano interlude begins in m. 47, the F♯ chord becomes a D augmented triad via a common-tone shift. As was the case in the previous interlude, the harmony here is outlined by the interlude’s motivic material. In this case the motive used is the second version of motive 2 (M2b), which differs from the original version of motive 2 in two ways. First, although M2b uses the rhythm of M2a, the pitch does not carry over from the motive’s initial form. Second, as the pitches change, so does the contour of the line. Where M2a was marked by a sudden leap downward, M2b reverses
Example 5.22  “Chevaux de bois,” mm. 35–50

C'est é-ton-nant com-me ça vois soû-le,  D'al-ler aîn-si dans ce cir-que bê-te!

Rien dans le ventre et mal dans la tê-te,  Du mal en masse et du bien en
that motion and leaps upward; similarly, the first version gradually descended over two octaves, but apart from the upward leap, the second version remains in the same register throughout. These changes intensify the mood of the music and prepare for the entrance of the third refrain (mm. 51–60), which continues the emotional shift heard in this interlude.

Because the third refrain, which appears in the key of G major, occurs within the highest vocal register heard thus far, the turning motion is more frantic and insistent than in previous refrains. This emotional intensification fits the text, which describes the incessant turning of the horses. As will be seen shortly, however, this refrain represents the peak of the song’s activity, and after this point the music begins to move toward its conclusion.

The next section, verse 3 (see Example 5.23), begins in m. 61. Instead of focusing on the activities surrounding the carousel, this verse describes the participants as they begin to move away from the fair and turn to their nighttime activities. In the earlier versions of the song (as seen in the Koch and Bachelet manuscripts), the text describes lovers who will be reunited as
Example 5.23 “Chevaux de bois,” mm. 61–78

Et dépêchez, chevaux de leur...

Déjà, voici que sonne à la...

soupe La nuit qui...
Example 5.23, continued

tombe et chasse lad troupe

De gais bu-

veurs que leur soit af fa me.

moltodim.

Tour nez,

Motive 2c
night falls; in the later versions (from the Royaumont manuscript onward) the supper bell calls to
the fairgoers. As in the poem, this section of the music begins the process of transition from day
to night. Although the accompaniment establishes continuity between the third refrain and the
third verse, the melody in this section appears to contrast the rest of the song. It distinguishes
itself from the other verses by its arched shape, whereas the prior verses’ melodies were disjunct
or static. It also differs from the refrains, however, in its longer note values—quarter notes and
eighth notes instead of the eighths and sixteenths that dominated previously. This melody draws
attention away from the accompaniment, which maintains a pedal point of thirty-second notes on
essentially the same pitches (with enharmonic respellings) throughout the verse. The harmonies
subtly shift underneath, from B♭7 to G minor (the relative minor of B♭) in m. 65, to F♯ major in
m. 69, but none of this activity takes focus away from the vocal line.

The third verse is followed by another interlude (mm. 75–78), which serves as a
transition to the final refrain. In this interlude we hear the second motive, but only a fragment of
it (M2c). This segment imitates the first four notes of M2a (spanning a fifth instead of a fourth),
extracted to become a self-contained figure. The truncation of motive 2 signifies that the
carousel is preparing to slow down as the end of the day approaches. To emphasize this, the
music slows down in tempo, suggesting that the final section of the song will bring about a
change. Harmonically, this interlude also prepares for the fourth refrain by moving from the F♯
major chord of the previous section to a dominant seventh chord built on B, the dominant of E
major, which returns for the song’s closing.

The fourth and final refrain confirms the shift from day to night by focusing not on the
turning horses but rather on the night sky. The mood of this stanza is also more somber than the
previous text, especially because of the reference to the death knell in the stanza’s third line.
Consequently, the mood of the music shifts, signaling the arrival of night by contrasting the other refrains in several ways (see Example 5.24). First, the tempo is slower: Debussy indicated that it should be twice as slow in this section. Second, the melody bears a greater resemblance to that of the third verse than to that of the other refrains; the longer note values, in this slower tempo, continue the process of lengthening that began in the previous section. Debussy also changed the pitches of the melody; after m. 82 it bears no resemblance to the original. This change appears strongest in the song’s final version, because the revisions to mm. 87–90 better fit the character of the rest of the refrain. Third, the harmony here is less strongly established than in previous refrains. Although the melody demonstrates that the harmony has returned to the tonic, the accompaniment’s chords serve as \( IV^6 \) and iii, chords that do not draw attention to E major. In addition, in m. 85 the harmony shifts to D\# minor and then to an F dominant seventh chord in m. 91, so that the E major tonic does not return permanently until m. 97, when only six measures are left in the song.

This last refrain also includes a second appearance of one of the motive 2 variants (M\(_{2c}\)). This figure plays a significant role at this point in the song. In the final interlude this truncated motive represented the carousel slowing down, and now, in an even slower tempo, the reintroduction of the same form of motive 2 further depicts the lessening of the carousel’s movement.

The end of the vocal line (shown in Example 5.25) represents an unusual moment in the song. For the phrase “Tournez au son joyeux des tambours” (mm. 91–96), Debussy resurrected the faster tempo and the musical character of the melodies heard in verses 1 and 2 (a contour favoring repeated pitches over lyricism and faster note values). He also brought back trills in the left hand, which could in this case suggest the actual rolling of the “joyous drums,” and which,
Example 5.24 “Chevaux de bois,” mm. 79–90

Voice

Piano

Tournez, tournez! le ciel en velours D’astres en...
Example 5.25  “Chevaux de bois,” mm. 91–102
along with thirty-second notes, represent the carousel throughout the song. Thus, this style better suits the description within the text than the slower music would have.

After the voice completes the phrase, the piano performs the written-out trills that gradually slow down before the marking “Lent” in m. 97. Within the context of the song as a whole, the faster phrase serves as a temporary interruption of the gradual slowing of the music. Thus, the end of the song foreshadows that although the present day is ending and the carousel is coming to a stop, tomorrow it will turn again. Debussy’s addition of another statement of the word “tournez” at the end of the last line of text temporarily helps to direct the listener’s attention to the carousel’s restarting the next day, rather than its slowing down at the end of this one.

The song closes with a six-measure phrase (mm. 97–102) that features motive 1 in varied form (M_{1b}). Here the motive borrows the melodic contour and relative pitch of the original figure, while elongating the note values in this slower tempo and completing the extended transition from day to night. As has been demonstrated, over the course of the song’s composition Debussy’s revisions increased the effect of the music’s slowing down, especially through the altered version of motive 1. The return of the motive here also allows its two appearances to serve as parallels, where M_{1a} represents the carousel starting up and M_{1b} its slowing down at the end of the day. The moment when the carousel stops moving appears quite literally in the music, when the second iteration of M_{1b} ends without completing the motive.

Several elements within this song demonstrate the correspondence between the turning of the horses and the circularity of the music. In terms of form, the rondo structure turns as it moves back and forth between refrain and verse, and shifts from key to key. The ending,
because of its parallel nature to the beginning, appropriately brings back the motivic material and the original tonic key.

**Persona and Aesthetic Position**

As was the case in the poem alone, the song’s persona is a figure who observes the carousel and the activity surrounding it. While the two versions of the poem provided two different observer personae—a cynical carousel operator and a naïve, emotional, and poetic child—the song adopts neither of these figures. Nor does the song retain the poem’s philosophy, where the activity surrounding the carousel serves as a microcosm of life in general. Rather, Debussy’s final version of “Chevaux de bois” combines the observation of the poetic persona with the heightened emotion of the second version of Verlaine’s text, resulting in a persona who sees the carousel’s turning as a metaphor for the cyclical nature of life. This concept is most clearly shown in the song’s depiction of the passage of time. The persona knows that one day’s end leads to the next day’s beginning. Additionally, the persona takes a philosophical approach to the cyclical nature of life. Debussy’s manner of setting the last two lines of text indicates that for the persona, the turning carousel symbolizes the constant cycle of life and death. As the carousel slows down, a death knell is ringing for someone; at the same time, however, the persona knows that tomorrow the carousel will turn again, just as life continues in the constant face of death. Appropriately, the mood of the joyous drums symbolizes the hope that each new days brings. Thus, when compared to the text alone, the song’s persona expresses a deeper symbolism of the image of the carousel, and in turn he or she takes a stronger philosophical position.

Chapter 2 discussed how the poems in the “Paysages belges” section of *Romances sans paroles* contrast Verlaine’s typical symbolist style. Likewise, the concrete imagery of the song
and the music’s character of simplicity contradict the symbolist aesthetic, but no true elements of romanticism are evident, either. This song uses musical and textual imagery to express a position that is best described as didactic or pedagogical. The persona explains the metaphor of the carousel in such a way that a child, or anyone else, can learn about the nature of life from the song. In light of these considerations, the aesthetic of the song might best be labeled as realist, although the philosophical message remains the most important element, rather than any single aesthetic position.

“Green”

Source Material

“Green” was composed in January 1886, while Debussy was in Rome. According to Marie Rolf, the location of the manuscript bearing that date is unknown, although François Lesure mentions it in his catalog. A second manuscript is housed at the Bibliothèque François Lang; this manuscript corresponds to the Girod edition, with only a few pencilled corrections by Debussy.

Comparison of the Girod and Fromont editions shows that the most interesting differences occur in the area of indications of emotion, where the earlier edition includes several markings that do not appear in the final version. In m. 5 of the Girod edition Debussy instructed the singer to perform in a “joyeux et tendre” manner, although the final version carries no instruction here at all. In the Fromont edition the initial tempo marking appears as “Joyeusement

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21 Rolf, “Ariettes,” 30, 38. See Lesure, Catalogue, 60. Lesure states that the manuscript was sold first by a M. Kra in May 1927 and then at the Hôtel Drouot on 11 February 1958, but he does not provide a current location.
animé,” whereas in the Girod edition the song begins simply marked “Allegro moderato.” Another such indication appears in m. 50 of the earlier edition, where the inscription reads “d’une voix sommeillante” (“in a sleepy voice”), which fits the languorous mood of the text and the reference to sleep in the poem’s last line. Although the indication does not appear in the final version of the song, the slow tempo and recitative-like melody in that section shows that the music retains the “sommeillante” character.

**Musical Analysis**

In “Green” the form plays a significant role in determining meaning. For this song Debussy placed the three-stanza text within a ternary framework, with each stanza corresponding to one section of the form. As the reduction in Example 5.26 shows, this song also utilizes fairly conventional harmonic progressions, especially in comparison with the later Baudelaire songs.

The first stanza (shown in Example 5.27) begins with four measures of piano introduction. These measures consist of two statements of a single two-measure phrase; this same material continues in the piano until m. 8, the end of the first vocal phrase. The melody resembles an older, more romantic musical style than most of the songs discussed here; in fact, lyrical, arching melodies appear throughout this song. In this case, the romantic character suits the text of these two lines, which depict the speaker presenting gifts to the beloved—first gifts of nature, followed by the speaker’s own heart. The themes of nature and love appropriately reflect the romantic musical style of the opening vocal phrases. At the same time, the predominant rhythms of each part—triple beat divisions in the piano against duple in the voice—reflect the underlying tension arising from the unresolved state of the two lovers’ relationship.
Example 5.26 Reduction of “Green”
Example 5.27 “Green,” mm. 1–20

Joyeusement animé

Voici des fruits, des fleurs, des feuilles et des branches,

Et puis voici mon cœur, qui ne bat que pour vous.
Although the key signature indicates G♭ major, the music begins in A♭ minor. The first trace of G♭ comes in mm. 10 and 12, where the piano plays a G♭ ninth chord. Immediately following, however, the harmony grows more chromatic, alternating between seventh chords on A and E♭ in mm. 13–16. The vocal line over these harmonies features a chromatic pattern combining whole tones and half-steps, for the moment removing the lyrical character of the
previous two phrases. Such a musical treatment is appropriate to the text, in which the speaker entreats the beloved to be gentle with the heart. The added chromaticism intensifies the urgency of the speaker’s request.

In m. 17 the chromaticism ends as abruptly as it began, over a sustained A♭ major chord. The text in this section shows the speaker asking the beloved to accept the gift of the speaker’s heart. As the text becomes more tender, the tempo slows slightly, and the A♭ chord leads to D♭ in m. 19 before the opening music returns (at the original faster tempo) in mm. 20–23, this time in G♭ major. Here, then, is the first extended material in the tonic key. The repeated music serves as a ritornello that both frames the opening section and forms the transition to the second stanza.

The B section, which encompasses the second stanza (see Example 5.28), utilizes contrasting music. The accompaniment is more active, with sixteenth notes and sweeping figuration depicting the wind described in the text. The speaker has endured some sort of storm, whose effects are still visible on his or her face. Although the mood of the text remains constant between the first and second stanzas, the intensification of the accompaniment heightens the emotion of this section.

When, midway through stanza 2, the subject shifts from the weather to the speaker’s request that the beloved cure his or her fatigue, the music changes, as well. The tempo holds back slightly, and the motion in the accompaniment slows (mm. 32–35) and then stops (m. 36). At this point Debussy instructs the singer to be tender, for the text “Rêve des chers instants qui la délasseront.” The arching, romantic melody with which Debussy set these words suits the emotion in this phrase.
Example 5.28  “Green,” mm. 24–39
Example 5.28, continued

Harmonically, the B section begins in D♭ major, which is closely related to both A♭ (the starting tonic) and G♭ (the preceding tonic); then in mm. 30–32 the music modulates via a B♭ sonority to a seventh chord built on E♭₇. That chord in turn leads to A♭ in m. 35, which then shifts to a half-diminished seventh chord on D. Finally, this sonority, which is in second inversion, shifts by common tones (A♭ → G, C → B) to the G⁹ in m. 36. At this point Debussy
introduced another tritone relationship, when in m. 38 the harmony changes to a seventh chord built on D♭.

This harmonic shift signals the beginning of the transition to the reprise of the A section. The tempo slows even more and the dynamics grow softer in m. 38 to prepare for the piano’s reintroduction of the song’s opening music in m. 40. Because the underlying harmony is D♭, the end of stanza 2 would seem to be preparing for the A’ section to begin in the tonic, G♭. Instead, by raising the D♭ to D♮, the chord becomes a D diminished seventh, which prepares for a return to A♭ minor in that the D♮ serves as a “leading tone” to the fifth of the A♭ chord.

The first nine measures of stanza 3 (mm. 40–48; see Example 5.29) duplicate the music of mm. 3–11, thus again framing the stanzas and defining their beginning and ending points. In this section, however, the mood differs from the earlier version in the A section. Debussy introduced the word “caressant” over the vocal line in m. 42, and he also indicated (by marking “andantino”) that the tempo of this section should be slower, compared to the tempo of “Joyeusement animé” for the opening section. Thus, the mood is more tender than urgent or insistent in the third stanza.

Beginning in m. 50, the tempo slows further, and instead of the chromatic shift to A7 heard in m. 13, the harmony moves to C♭ major (prepared by the G♭7 chord in the previous measure). The vocal line also becomes more recitative-like and less lyrical, which allows the piano to assume greater prominence in m. 52. In several ways the piano melody here bears a striking resemblance to the vocal phrase in mm. 36–39. First, the two lines share the same arch shape, although the piano version covers a wider range. Second, the melodies begin with the same rhythmic pattern, and both consist entirely of duplets. Finally, both phrases contain a leap in the middle of the line; in the piano’s version of the melody, the leap occurs later in the phrase,
Example 5.29  “Green,” mm. 40–58

Andantino

P caressant

Sur votre jeune sein laissez rouler ma tête
Tou-te so-nore en-co-re

de vos derniers baisers;
Laissez-la s'apaiser de la bonne tem-

P

m.g.

pp

pp

pp
as part of the preparation for the final cadence. The harmony outlined by the piano’s melody is first $E_b$ minor, followed by an $A_b$ minor seventh chord and a dominant seventh on $D_b$, preparing for the final cadence, which is at last in the key of $G_b$.

In the third stanza the speaker continues the request for comfort that began in the second stanza. Now that the complete text has been presented, we understand that “Green” describes two lovers who have weathered a storm in their relationship, and the natural storm is a metaphor.
for the emotional one. The first two lines of the second stanza suggest that the storm took place recently; Debussy even depicted the natural elements in his music at that point in the song. "Green," however, would not be described as "stormy" in its character. The beginning of stanza 2 represents the storm's aftereffects, as the dew symbolizes the lingering emotion that resulted from the storm, but this song focuses on the resolution of the lovers' relationship after the storm, rather than the storm itself.

Several musical elements point to this conclusion. The piano's melody in mm. 52–57 serves as the song's turning point. From the text of the first two stanzas, we know that the outcome of the lovers' relationship is not made clear at the start. In fact, throughout the entire poem the speaker only makes requests of the beloved; the fulfillment of those requests does not occur within the text. Musically, however, these two characters and their roles can be linked. This crucial melodic phrase, heard first in the voice and then in the piano, provides the source for the connection between the characters and thus resolves the relationship. The successive entreaties from the speaker lead to this final moment, when the beloved, as represented by the piano's melody, takes over the primary role within the music, recasts the earlier melody into a new context, and resolves the tension with a strong cadence in the tonic. The piano melody thus confirms that the dreams mentioned in the text in mm. 36–39 will take place.

A comparison between the first two sections and the final one provides further clues that the lovers' relationship has been resolved happily. First, the persistence of the speaker's questions can be seen in the regular return of the opening piano music. As long as this music continues to frame the stanzas, the state of their love remains open-ended. In the end, however, the song comes to a calm conclusion that no longer needs to be framed by the earlier music; the piano's melody at m. 52 in effect replaces the previous material. Second, while stanzas 1 and 2
both contained sections that juxtaposed harmonies a tritone apart (mm. 13–16 and 36–38, respectively), the third stanza displays no such harmonic tension within its music, now that the question of the lovers’ relationship has been resolved. Finally, the rhythm in the song’s conclusion almost exclusively features duple divisions of the beat, thus eliminating the rhythmic tension that had characterized most of the song.

**Persona and Aesthetic Position**

The poetic persona of “Green” took part in the story as the speaker, a lover who has survived the “storm” in the relationship described in the text, and who now experiences happiness with the addressee. Examining the song, however, shows that the music features a poetic persona rather than a lover. On the whole, several elements point to a romantic position for this figure. We have already considered the lyrical melodies that Debussy used in several important sections. The text itself owes much to earlier romantic poetry, such as its conventional alexandrine form and its use of imagery from nature, especially the storm as a metaphor for the couple’s emotional experiences. In the song these features translate into a fairly regular ternary form, largely functional harmonies, and a brief depiction of nature within the generally romantic-sounding music. Although the poem suggests emotion through its imagery, the song more fully depicts the feelings of the characters by setting the text to romantic melodies over an accompaniment that hearkens back to an earlier musical style.

The combination of the musical resolution to the speaker’s requests of the beloved and the romantic nature of the song indicate that the persona is not only a poet, but a romantic poet. The song begins with the text as Verlaine wrote it but then expands on the emotions of the characters and the resolution of their relationship, neither of which the poem accomplishes on its
own. Moreover, the explanation of the characters’ emotions of tenderness and love, as portrayed by their respective melodic lines, indicates that the poet takes a romantic approach rather than a symbolist one.

“Spleen”

Source Material

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the date of composition for “Spleen” is not known, although it is generally assumed to have been composed around the same time as “Green”—January 1886. Only one manuscript survives for this song; it is housed at the Bibliothèque François Lang. Debussy made very few changes between this manuscript (which corresponds to the Girod edition) and the 1903 version. Most frequently, he altered the duration of pick-up notes, inserting or removing rests to change the notes’ durations. Additionally, the earlier version shows the performance instruction “sombre” in m. 18, but this word was removed before the final version. Because of the explicit mood of the text, the presence or absence of this word does not significantly affect meaning. Debussy made one further revision involving the end of the vocal line; this change will be discussed in conjunction with the analysis of that section.

Musical Analysis

As shown in Example 5.30, “Spleen” begins with a piano introduction. The first two measures feature an unaccompanied melody, which is then supported by chords in mm. 3–4. As the song progresses, this four-measure phrase takes on the role of a motto, unifying the through-composed song. (Diagram 5.4 shows the form of this song.) Although the key signature shows
Example 5.30 “Spleen,” mm. 1–8

Diagram 5.4 Form of “Spleen”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intro</th>
<th>Stanza 1</th>
<th>Stanza 2</th>
<th>Stanza 3</th>
<th>Stanza 4</th>
<th>Stanza 5</th>
<th>Stanza 6</th>
<th>K</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G♭ → C♭maj7</td>
<td>b♭alt Chr. C♭maj7/e♭maj7</td>
<td>F♭maj7/A♭7</td>
<td>G♭ → e♭maj7</td>
<td>B♭♭ → f, D♭maj7</td>
<td>G♭♭, E♭maj7, B♭♭, “D♭maj7”, C</td>
<td>C → f</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motto</td>
<td>Frag.</td>
<td>Frag.</td>
<td>Motto*/frag.</td>
<td>Motto*</td>
<td>Motto*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*First half only

K = closing; frag. = fragmentation of motto; chr. = chromatic passage
four flats, the opening of the song features a solo melody that alone cannot clearly establish a
tonal center. The song’s first chord, G♭ major, appears in m. 3, but this chord quickly gives way
to a flatted ninth chord built on C.

When the voice enters at the end of m. 4, its first two phrases, which correspond to the
first stanza of the poem, demonstrate the ennui that the song’s title indicates. The music displays
stasis by remaining on the same pitch throughout this section, and the unaccompanied, recitative
style focuses all of the listener’s attention on the mood of the text.

For stanza 2, the voice introduces greater melodic range and rhythmic variety, but the
primary melody in this section, the motto, still resides in the piano (see Example 5.31). In mm.
9–10 the beginning pitches of the motto match the original version, but because the harmony in
this section is B♭ minor, the second iteration takes place in a new context. In addition, the end
of the phrase serves as a transition to the next section, when the final dotted figure repeats at a
higher pitch.

By this point, however, the music surrounding the motto has also taken on an emotional
significance. As the speaker shifts from describing the ennui of the natural setting to the
emotional relationship between the speaker and the addressee, the increased vocal range and
faster rhythms match the speaker’s feelings of despair. Within the accompaniment the
chromaticism and the turbulent thirty-second note patterns in the left hand demonstrate the depth
of the speaker’s emotions. The harmony also supports the intensity of feeling by moving
through a chromatic passage ending on an E diminished seventh chord in m. 13.

In the next section (mm. 14–17) the speaker’s anxiety subsides, as demonstrated by the
music’s return to stability. The harmony in this section alternates between two seventh chords
built on F♯ and A, illustrating the text’s resumption of the subject of ennui (specifically related
Example 5.31 “Spleen,” mm. 9–17

con moto

Chère, pour peu que tu te bouges, Re- nais - sent

P mais en peu en dehors

first half of motto

continuation of motto

12

pp

Tous mes dés-es-poirs. Le ciel é-tait trop

conclusion and extension of motto

sf poco string.

fragmentation of motto

pp

bleu, trop ten-dre, La mer trop verte et l'air trop doux.

fragmentation of motto (continued)
to the natural surroundings. Within the piano the left hand continues the fragmentation of the motto that began in the previous stanza, by repeating the dotted rhythm of the second half two times. Although the motto thus undergoes a transformation to some extent, the fragmentation does not advance the song’s emotion but merely maintains the status quo (the feeling of ennui).

Initially the fourth stanza (see Example 5.32) prolongs the emotional character that the third stanza’s music established. By using the first half of the motto in its original form and key (mm. 18–19), the music maintains the state of ennui heard at the beginning of the song. Quickly, however, the music changes dramatically, reflecting the agitation in the text. This stanza provides crucial information regarding the speaker’s state of mind, specifically the fear of abandonment by the addressee. Consequently, the music shows a second emotional intensification in mm. 20–21, where the thirty-second notes resemble those heard in mm. 12–13. In addition, this second peak uses the same motivic fragment heard in the earlier phrase, and it outlines the same harmony, a diminished seventh chord built on E. The right hand in mm. 20–21 picks up the motto and further fragments the dotted figure into only the dotted eighth note/sixteenth note segment. This motivic development heightens the emotion of the speaker’s second expression of anxiety, as do the higher pitches in the vocal line.

Previously Debussy had made the stanzas musically distinct, but in this case there is no break between the fourth stanza and the fifth (mm. 22–25). The E diminished chord heard in mm. 20–21 leads to the pitch F, which is part of the B♭ major chord that forms the primary harmony of stanza 5. In the accompaniment the frenetic thirty-second notes of the fourth stanza make way for another version of the motto’s first half (again heard twice in succession). This time, however, the motto occurs at a different pitch level from the original, the first clue that the
Example 5.32 “Spleen,” mm. 18–34

Voice

Piano

motto

fragmentation of motto

motto

molto mosso

first half of motto with extension
ennui represented by the text is no longer being experienced by the speaker in the same way as before.

Despite the alteration to the motto, this stanza remains stable until m. 25, when two further changes occur. First, the B♭ harmony disappears, replaced by a chord succession (d⁷, g⁹, A♭6⁵) in which function is difficult to determine. Second, the repetition of the motto
(mm. 24–25) contains an altered final beat, which propels the music into repeating the motto’s pitches a minor third higher in m. 26. Thus, as the stability of mm. 22–24 recedes, the fifth stanza leads directly into the sixth. This ending confirms that the lassitude described in stanza 5 does not reflect the speaker’s true emotion. In addition, the prominence of anxiety, which also dominates the final stanza, unifies the second half of the song under the same emotional character.

The first harmonic center of the sixth stanza is F minor, which corresponds to the key signature and enters here for the first time. It does not figure prominently, however, nor does it give the impression of permanence. The passage in F minor leads into the song’s climax in m. 28, and the climax’s arrival in the key of G♭ major, which began the song, confirms that harmony’s prominent status. Likewise, the first half of the motto enters, in its original form and pitch, but unlike the motto in m. 18 this entrance does not emphasize ennui. Although the notes and the key are the same, the context in which the motive now appears has been so drastically altered that it no longer signifies the speaker’s boredom. Rather, it serves as a means of comparison to show how much the dominant emotion has changed.

The text here reaches an emotional high point equal to that of the music. The addressee is the only thing left for the speaker to care about, and we already know of the speaker’s fears that the addressee will leave. Thus, the addressee remains firmly connected to the speaker’s anxiety throughout the song. In the poem, stanzas that feature ennui (as related to the natural setting) alternate with stanzas that refer to the addressee, and the music corresponds to these two subjects. Stanza 5, however, represents an exception to this scheme, in that the music, as already discussed, maintains some level of anxiety even though the addressee is not mentioned in the
text. The addressee remains implicitly present as the cause of the speaker’s anxiety, continuing to exert an influence even when absent from the text.

Immediately after the climax the music moves down in pitch and dynamic level. As the tempo begins to slow, the right hand plays the first half of the motto again; this melody accompanies the voice’s final utterance, “hélas!” At this point (m. 31) comes the song’s most surprising moment. Although the harmony moved through a somewhat chromatic series of chords in mm. 30–31, nothing in these chords detracts from the G♭ major tonic. In fact, the second chord in m. 31 serves as a D♭ dominant seventh (with B♭ substituted for A♭) and would seem to be leading back to G♭. For the last beat of the measure, however, Debussy suddenly shifted the harmony to C major. This change results in an interruption of the motto and the vocal line as the song moves toward its conclusion. Debussy revised the end of the vocal line between the Girod and Fromont editions (see Example 5.33) so that the final version amplifies the effect of interruption by delaying the word “hélas” until just before the harmonic shift.

In the song’s final measures, the C major chord shows itself to be the song’s true dominant as the final cadence in F minor approaches. The soft, sustained character of the music eliminates the feeling of anxiety, and the arrival of F minor proves that at last some resolution has been achieved. The nature of this resolution, however, requires a summary of the events that led to the song’s conclusion.

The two elements of “Spleen” that combine to elucidate the song’s meaning are the use of the motto and the music that represents the speaker’s anxiety. As the song progresses, the motto undergoes more and more fragmentation, making its presence continually less confident and secure. Meanwhile, the music alternates between ennui and anxiety, with the former gradually giving way to the latter. At the song’s climactic moment in m. 28, the anxiety reaches
Example 5.33 “Spleen,” revision to mm. 29–31

(a) Royaumont manuscript and Girod edition

its peak, and the motto, which had served to reinforce the presence of ennui, is now too much transformed to signify the speaker’s boredom. After the climax the music slows, and the motto thins out from unison octaves to a single melodic line. This passage would appear to serve as the
song’s resolution, but its deceptive character emerges as the true resolution, the final three measures in F minor, arrives. After the anxiety has passed, the speaker’s uncertainty about the outcome has likewise been resolved. If the music that represents anxiety appears in conjunction with discussion of the addressee, and that anxiety is now gone, we can infer from the song’s resolution that the addressee is gone, as well. The sparse character of the final chords implies that this sudden change in mood symbolizes the speaker’s resignation to his or her fate, not the relief that would have come if the addressee had provided a happy resolution to the anxiety in the song. Knowing the outcome removes the speaker’s fears, but the new emotional context, represented by the sudden change in tonality and musical character, is not one of happiness.

**Persona and Aesthetic Position**

In the text alone, the persona of “Spleen” expressed two emotions: the ennui indicated by the title, and the fear of abandonment by the beloved. These emotions elided with each other, and the speaker’s anxiety did not reach a heightened or frantic state. The persona of the song, however, elaborates on the emotional experience of the speaker. This figure allows the speaker’s emotions of ennui and anxiety to be distinct from each other, by virtue of the music that corresponds to each emotion. This distinction in turn emphasizes the dominance of anxiety over boredom at the song’s climax, and the eventual disappearance of anxiety when the song reaches its resigned conclusion.

In addition, the false resolution shows that the persona is manipulating the speaker’s emotions. In the passage leading up to and following the climax, the music seems to be moving toward an expected resolution in G\(₃\), strengthened by the appearance of the motto’s original first half. With the C major chord in m. 31, however, the music suddenly changes direction and
evades the resolution that the speaker would have expected; in fact, the surprising key change and disappearance of the motto make the ending the opposite of what appeared to be the conclusion. The persona then completes the song by providing the actual resolution in the unexpected key of F minor.

A persona who would both amplify and manipulate the emotions of the song’s speaker is a poetic figure, but a somewhat malevolent one. The musical devices used in the song elucidate how the speaker feels at each moment; at the same time, however, the persona hides the outcome from the speaker until the song’s final seconds, even allowing the speaker—and the listener—to expect a different conclusion. The poetic persona thus plays with poetico-musical techniques to first heighten the speaker’s anxiety, and then to resolve that anxiety, as musical deception gives way to the speaker’s being abandoned.

The song’s aesthetic likewise reflects the manipulative actions of the persona. In the opening measures, the music adopts a style that can only be described as symbolist, featured in the ambiguous harmony of the piano’s first phrase and the monotone recitative line in the voice. As the song proceeds the harmonic context continues to shift, moving through several progressions of seventh chords and avoiding prolonged focus on any one key. Additionally, the passage in mm. 14–17 includes frequent cross-rhythms, blurring the metric divisions within each measure.

In m. 22, however, the music begins to change its aesthetic position. This section focuses on the speaker’s building anxiety, and the intensification relies on traditional techniques of modulation and gradually increasing volume and tempo. Finally, when the song reaches its conclusion and resolves the speaker’s fears of abandonment, the music comes to a deliberate, if unhappy, end. The resulting aesthetic lies in the area of realism rather than symbolism, because
the song has examined the anxieties of the speaker and then brought the events causing those anxieties to an all-too-real conclusion. In effect, the persona takes on a symbolist aesthetic in order to perpetuate the manipulation of the speaker’s emotions, but in the end the realist perspective dominates, as the feared outcome actually occurs.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION: STYLISTIC AND AESTHETIC ISSUES

This chapter brings together what the preceding chapters have shown about the style and aesthetic of the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* and *Ariettes oubliées*. Consideration of the poetry, the music, the personae, and the aesthetic positions of these songs in relation to each other enables a synthesis whereby each factor’s contribution to Debussy’s musical style in these compositions comes into focus. The chapter’s final section considers several overarching issues that arose from this study, including cyclicity, the relationship between poetry and music, the place of these songs within Debussy’s overall treatment of the *mélodie*, and Debussy’s role in the development of music history as compared to that of Baudelaire and Verlaine in the world of literature.

Poetic Styles and Themes

The development of the symbolist movement occurred gradually in the course of the evolution of French poetry following romanticism. The Parnassian movement of the 1860s, an objective, impersonal reaction against romantic poetry, helped to establish the careers of young poets such as Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé. Later, these poets and others of their
generation became the foundation of the decadent style, which took as an influence the morbid and pessimistic themes of Charles Baudelaire. In 1886 those who would call themselves symbolists split from the decadent circles, soon becoming the dominant force in French poetry. They became known for the primary characteristics of their writing: suggestion rather than explicit statement of emotion, ambiguity, plurality of meaning, and musicality. The symbolist poets regarded music as the ideal art form with which to express emotion; they were also great admirers of Wagner, whom Baudelaire had helped to promote in France in the 1860s. Additionally, symbolist poetry is replete with musical imagery, especially notable in the works of Verlaine.

The eleven poems studied here provide examples of Baudelaire’s and Verlaine’s relative positions in the evolution of French poetry. Baudelaire often relied on traditional forms, such as the sonnet, but he brought an individualistic approach to these poems by ignoring conventional practices for their composition. He also experimented with forms, including the pantoum and other configurations that involved frequent repetition of entire lines, that represent innovative approaches to French poetry. In the case of “Harmonie du soir” he foreshadowed the kinds of sound patterns that the symbolists would come to favor. On the other hand, Verlaine utilized the symbolist techniques of musicality and sound repetition, along with the impair, which featured an odd number of syllables in poetic lines. At the same time he incorporated older styles in works such as “Chevaux de bois” and “Green.” Both of these poems rely on structured, traditional forms (the latter uses the alexandrine in a conventional manner), and both feature concrete imagery that hearkens back to earlier poetic styles more than the suggestive quality of symbolism.
Comparison of the five Baudelaire poems shows three common themes that at least some of the poems share. The first and most obvious parallel is that all five poems take place in the evening or night. The meaning of the night varies from one poem to the next, but in every case the night brings or accompanies a change of some kind. The first four poems show a shift in mood between day and night, with the arrival of night bringing pleasure for the speaker. In “La Mort des amants,” the change coincides with the death of the lovers, which will occur with nightfall.

A second connection among three of the Baudelaire songs lies in the realm of memory. For the speaker of “Le Balcon” memories of the beloved comprise the majority of the poem, and recalling the evenings on the balcony provides the only source of happiness and hope for the future. “Harmonie du soir” also places importance on memory, where the speaker recalls the “luminous past” and equates memories of the beloved with sacred objects. Finally, in “Recueillement,” whose title itself invokes memory, the speaker rejects the present and embraces the past, which brings happiness for this figure, as well. An additional connection between “Harmonie du soir” and “Recueillement” lies in the verb recueillir (to collect or gather), which appears in the former in reference to the heart’s collection of memories. In each case, memory serves as a central image, one that plays a crucial role in determining the poem’s meaning and outcome.

The final similarity is the position of the speaker (and/or persona) as a figure experiencing sadness, usually because of love. This applies to all but “La Mort des amants.” The personae of “Le Balcon” and “Harmonie du soir” both express the viewpoint of a lover who experiences sadness in a relationship, where once there was happiness. “Le Jet d’eau” also involves a sad persona, although the mood begins with pleasure from a recent sexual encounter.
and then changes to sadness as the text progresses. Additionally, the fountain’s chattering gradually turns to sobbing, reflecting the persona’s sadness. The persona of “Recueillement” addresses sadness directly, preferring to retreat inward and reject the outside world. This poem gives no evidence of a relationship other than that between the persona and sadness, but when the speaker talks to sadness as if it were the beloved, this poem exhibits similarities with the previous poems. In “La Mort des amants,” the speaker takes the role of one of the poem’s lovers, but in this case the emotion is purely pleasure, even in death. Meanwhile, the persona of this song uses the story of the lovers’ death to express the viewpoint that death can bring happiness. This philosophical position coincides with that of Baudelaire, who identified death as the only way to seek the ideal. Baudelaire’s idéal remained elusive in the previous sections of Les Fleurs du mal, and the placement of “La Mort des amants” within the work as a whole explains the lack of sadness in that particular poem.

The six Verlaine poems display a few threads of connection, although none appears uniformly in all of the texts. Unlike the Baudelaire poems, for example, no continuity of setting or time of day is evident. Sadness serves as a prevailing emotion in four of the poems, excepting “Chevaux de bois” and “Green.” “C’est l’extase” focuses on the lament of the souls of the speaker and addressee, so that the persona indirectly takes on sadness through this relationship. In “Il pleure dans mon cœur” the heart’s weeping is the central theme; the sadness is intensified because the persona knows no reason for it. “L’ombre des arbres,” through its evocative language, establishes a melancholy atmosphere that matches the traveler’s loss of hope. “Spleen” also creates a dark and melancholy setting that highlights the persona’s fear and despair; as the title would suggest, however, ennui is the central mood of the
poem. Ennui figures prominently in “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” as well, where the speaker’s heart—and thus the persona—suffers from boredom amidst the poem’s sad atmosphere.

Nature provides the most prominent link among the poems, as may be evident from its relationship to the sadness that appears so frequently. In all but “Chevaux de bois,” the persona identifies with nature or uses nature as a metaphor for his or her emotions. “C’est l’extase” describes a soul’s lament echoed in multiple sounds of nature. “Il pleure dans mon cœur” uses rain as a parallel for the speaker’s unexplained sadness. In “L’ombre des arbres” the misty landscape provides a direct reflection of the traveler’s despondent mood, so that the persona, who may be addressing himself, uses nature as a metaphor for sadness. “Green,” in addition to its mention of several elements of nature, compares a storm to an unsettled period in the relationship of the speaker and addressee; now that the storm has passed, the persona expresses happiness with the beloved. Finally, “Spleen” contrasts natural surroundings, with which the persona is bored, with the emotional “landscape” of fear and sadness. The persona of “Chevaux de bois,” while not describing nature specifically, uses the observations of the fairground that surrounds the carousel as a metaphor for the world at large, with cynicism in the first version and childlike naïveté in the second.

In summary, while neither grouping of poems contains sufficient continuity to suggest that they form a cycle, the common imagery and similarities among personae serve as connections among the poems and provide a source of unity for both song collections. In addition, the poems serve as good examples of the respective aesthetic positions of Baudelaire and Verlaine and thus form the foundation for understanding how those aesthetics translate into Debussy’s music.
Source Materials and Compositional Process

All of the songs considered here survive in at least one extant manuscript, although some of these are fairly clean autographs that contain only minor corrections by Debussy himself or by the editor. In addition, the Verlaine songs underwent revisions, some more extensive than others, between their two published editions. Those songs that allowed an in-depth study of multiple sources offer some insight into Debussy’s compositional process in the mélodie.

First, for “Le Jet d’eau,” the surviving sketch shows that for Debussy, setting the text was important from the beginning. Although the actual music in the sketch differs greatly from the final version of the song, the sketch shows that he depicted the fountain in a way that strongly resembles the end result. Also, the orchestral version of this song indicates that Debussy used orchestral textures and timbres to multiply the effects he had achieved in his piano version. The persona remains the same in both cases, with the orchestral instruments adding depth and complexity without altering the song’s meaning. Thus, Debussy remained focused on setting the text pictorially throughout the evolution of this song, including when he had greater orchestral effects at his disposal.

The next Baudelaire song, “Recueillement,” demonstrates a similar evolution in its two manuscripts. The second version of the song retains the character of the first while at the same time improving the rhythmic variety and text declamation in the music. In addition, Debussy’s revisions to the “Solennel” passage leading to the poem’s last line provide an example of musical changes that serve to reflect the text more effectively. In this case, the revised passage better suits the solemn mood of the poem at that point, showing that Debussy consistently kept the needs of the text at the forefront in his compositions.
Two of the songs in the *Ariettes oubliées*, “Il pleure dans mon cœur” and “L’ombre des arbres,” show similar kinds of revisions. Both include passages where Debussy later removed the high tessitura from some melodies, prompting the possible (but undocumented) connection between these revisions and the end of the composer’s contact with Mme Vasnier. Also, in the case of the first of these two songs, Debussy’s changes to the music offer greater variety in the musical texture by removing a melody that duplicated the accompaniment. In “L’ombre des arbres” the revisions better express the text; Debussy gradually decreased the dynamic level to correspond with the lower tessitura, which creates less urgency and allows a greater range of expressivity.

Of all the songs discussed in this study, “Chevaux de bois” underwent the most extensive revision process. Some of these changes relate to the adoption of Verlaine’s later version of the poem, specifically rhythmic modifications to reflect the new text. Other revisions, however, affect the song’s meaning, usually also tied to the second version of the poem. Two changes to the end of the song serve as examples. Debussy modified the melody to reflect better the mood of the “glas tristement” that Verlaine added to his revised text. In addition, Debussy gradually enhanced the effect of the carousel slowing down in the accompaniment, both by elongating and slowing the rhythmic figures and by lengthening the final relaxation of the tempo. These changes represent significant connections to the text; without these revisions, the song would not have provided the same philosophical position regarding the cyclical nature of life.

The last song, “Spleen,” contains one significant revision, in which Debussy changed the voice’s final phrase. Delaying the last two notes that the voice sings increased the effect of the sudden change of mood and direction by placing the word “hélas!” immediately before the music shifts. Thus, when the unexpected resolution arrives, the result is that much more surprising.
In general, comparison between the manuscripts and editions for these songs shows that Debussy may have revised them shortly before their publication. Unfortunately, the surviving sources sometimes create more questions than they solve. What these sources unequivocally demonstrate is that the text remained of utmost importance throughout Debussy’s compositional process. He thus consistently retained his approach to song setting where the music serves the poetry, reinforcing his belief that one could not effectively set a text to music without first understanding the poem itself.

**Intersections of Poetry and Music**

Debussy’s regular participation in the Parisian literary circles and his lifelong fascination with literature lead to the expectation that the texts played an important role in his approach to song composition. The relationship between words and music manifests itself in several ways, including reflection of the mood, the imagery, and the characters of the text; translation of the poem’s form into music; harmonic interpretation of what the text is expressing; and motivic structure (or other musical repetition) that reflects or explains the text’s characters or events.

In the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* no single technique emerges for depiction of the common themes of night, love, memory, and sadness. Rather, each text receives its own treatment based on the combined elements of the poem. These five songs have in common their translation of the text’s mood into music. In general, each song interprets the emotion of the poem, especially in that the music supports moments when the emotion of the text intensifies. In some songs, however, Debussy interpreted specific aspects of the texts, such as a concrete image, in significant ways. For example, “Recueillement” reflects the two contrasting moods of the
text: contemplative for the speaker’s dialogue with sadness, agitated when describing the activity of the outside world. In “Le Jet d’eau” Debussy brought in the character of the fountain, both in music that illustrates the water and in the important emotional role that the fountain plays. Similarly, “Harmonie du soir” features motives and self-references that draw attention to music specifically, reflecting the importance of musical imagery within Verlaine’s poem.

These songs sometimes transfer Baudelaire’s poetic form to the music quite faithfully. In “Le Balcon” musical repetition approximates the form of the text by associating repeated poetic lines with recurring music in each stanza. In addition, the through-composed stanzas correspond to the division that Baudelaire provided. Likewise, “Harmonie du soir” reflects the poet’s use of the pantoum form, with large-scale repetition that creates a circular motion matching that of the text. This circular pattern appears in the music itself, through compositional devices such as motivic and other musical repetition and harmonic structure.

The remaining three songs take a more flexible approach to form in relation to Baudelaire’s poetry. “La Mort des amants” appears conventionally stanzaic on one level, where divisions of the musical sections coincide with the poem’s stanzas. Overall, however, the music falls into a ternary form, based on the appearance of recurring music. This form plays a crucial role in establishing the story arc of the song. “Le Jet d’eau” also treats its form somewhat freely, in that each stanza is divided into two subsections based on the text; these divisions highlight the speaker’s focus first on the external world and then on the subjective, internal realm of emotion. Finally, “Recueillement” represents the most progressive form within the collection, in that the subject matter of the text, not its sonnet structure, determines where the musical divisions occur. Debussy amplified the enjambment that Baudelaire had already provided between the second quatrain and the first tercet, but the song takes its experimental form even further by dividing the
four text sections into five musical segments, which allows the music to differentiate the passages where the dialogue between the speaker and sadness occurs.

In these songs harmony generally ties into the overall depiction of the song’s mood and events. In “Le Balcon” the dense and chromatic harmonic language reflects the deeply held emotions of the speaker; specifically, the most chromaticism corresponds to the moments of highest anxiety for the speaker. The tonal movement in “Harmonie du soir” contributes to the circularity of the pantoum form by rapidly shifting tonal centers and employing tritones that keep harmonic stability at bay. “Le Jet d’eau” uses the major second in various contexts to illustrate the undulation of the water, as well as harmonic shifts to signal changes in emotional direction. In “Recueillement” the contrast between functional harmony and chromaticism emphasizes the speaker’s changes in emotion, where movement further away from harmonic stability indicates anxiety. Harmony plays a critical role in the arch shape of “La Mort des amants,” where the overarching tritone (moving from the tonic, G♭ major, to C major and then back to G♭) supports the move from life to death and back to life.

Each of these songs relies on motivic structure to depict some aspect of the text, whether it be the emotional content, a significant concept, or the series of events. The motives in “Le Balcon” symbolize the text’s images of memory, the sun/light/warmth, and the beloved, and in the end these motives elucidate what happens to the song’s characters. “Harmonie du soir” uses motives in two ways: harmonically, to provide instability through their prominent tritones; and to establish, through their repetition, the importance of the sacred images in the text. In “Le Jet d’eau” the transformation of the song’s motive from four notes to three shows the changing mood of both the speaker and the fountain from pleasure to sadness. In “Recueillement” the motives show both the pervasiveness of sadness and the transformation of the speaker’s mood,
portrayed through the motivic relationships from one section to the next. Finally, in “La Mort des amants” the appearances of the motives create the song’s arch shape, which peaks with the lovers’ death, then reverses itself to show how love has conquered death.

The *Ariettes oubliées* rely on similar compositional techniques in interpreting Verlaine’s poems. These six songs translate moods and imagery into music in much the same way as the Baudelaire songs; the *Ariettes* display parallel types of emotional intensification corresponding to the texts. For example, “L’ombre des arbres” and “Spleen” reflect throughout the prevailing emotions of their texts (sadness and ennui/anxiety, respectively). Other techniques, however, also come into play. “C’est l’extase” mirrors the poetic language in its languorous mood that makes the music seem suspended in time. Additionally, the music depicts specific imagery of the wind moving through the grass and water rolling over pebbles. In “Il pleure dans mon cœur” the music features a vivid depiction of the rain, which creates the appropriate atmosphere for the perpetual sadness that has penetrated the speaker’s heart. The carousel in “Chevaux de bois,” which serves as the central image, appears in the music itself through nearly constant sixteenth notes. Similarly, “Green” uses rapid passagework to depict the metaphorical storm through which the poem’s lovers have recently passed, in the midst of an overall happy mood that reflects the positive outcome for the song’s characters.

As was true for the Baudelaire songs, some of the *Ariettes* remain closer to Verlaine’s concept of form than others. In this collection, however, the modifications to form vary less from the text than, say, in “Recueillement.” Of the six songs “Green” displays the most conventional form, a ternary structure that matches the poem’s organization. “L’ombre des arbres” demonstrates a straightforward modified strophic form, in which the second section develops the song’s musical material to a greater degree than the first. The song “Chevaux de
bois” places the text, which implies a verse/refrain structure, into a rondo form that illustrates the turning of the carousel horses, as well as the human activity described in the poem. The through-composed “C’est l’extase” divides the music into three sections that coincide with the poem’s stanzas; although Debussy divided the first two stanzas into two parts each, the motivic material in each stanza provides musical continuity between these subsections. “Spleen” takes a similar approach, in that the through-composed music divides at the same points as the six stanzas of text, but with smooth transitions between stanzas 4, 5, and 6. Finally, “Il pleure dans mon cœur” departs from Verlaine’s form to the greatest degree. Its ternary form is fairly conventional, but the B section bridges the second and third stanzas in order to make four sections of text into three musical parts. In addition, the exclamation “Quoi!” and the music that follows represent an interruption in the form, highlighting the moment when the speaker realizes that the permeating sadness is without cause.

Harmony in these songs again functions as a support to the emotion and events within the text. In “C’est l’extase” the opening section uses a lengthy harmonic prolongation to allow the music to appear suspended in time. Also, the unstable chromatic passagework blurs tonal definition while at the same time expressing the speaker’s anxiety. “Il pleure dans mon cœur” remains harmonically static at the beginning, in order to depict the atmosphere of the text, but in other sections the rapidly shifting tonal centers illustrate emotional changes. The chromatic harmonies of “L’ombre des arbres” explore the sadness that its speaker describes. The music progresses through a symmetrical tonal structure centered around a tritone (C♯7 → G7 → C♯ major), which delays a strong tonic cadence, and hence the final resolution, until the song’s end. The thick, chromatic texture of “Spleen” projects the atmosphere of its text, as the music alternations between ennui/harmonic stability and anxiety/chromaticism. “Chevaux de bois”
contrasts the other songs in its harmonic simplicity, which reflects the style of Verlaine’s poem. Likewise, the romantic harmonic language of “Green” mirrors its conventional text in its abundance of functional chord progressions.

Like the Baudelaire songs, the *Ariettes oubliées* rely on motivic relationships and other musical repetition to establish emotion and persona. “Green” does not use any motivic material *per se*, but parallel melodies between the voice and piano illustrate that the lovers remain united.

“C’est l’extase” uses three individual motives to represent each of the song’s sections, so that in the end their coming together in sequence demonstrates the speaker’s emotional transformation. The “sigh” motive especially brings the lament of the text to the forefront. “Il pleure dans mon cœur” uses a motto, which undergoes development in order to reflect the speaker’s emotions, thus illustrating the song’s pervasive sad mood. “Chevaux de bois,” through repetition and transformation of its motives, depicts the movement of the carousel from its beginning to turn in the morning to its slowing down at night. In addition, the music foreshadows that the carousel will keep turning the next day, even as the music comes to a close. “L’ombre des arbres,” in its development of repeated musical material, initially projects the static mood of the text. At the same time, however, the song’s motto undergoes transformation so that in the end, when it disappears in favor of bell tones that bring the dream to an end, the listener understands the shift from the dream to waking reality. Finally, the constant fragmentation and evolution of the motto in “Spleen” shows the progression of the speaker’s moods through ennui, fear, and anxiety; the sudden departure from the motto at the end of the song helps to illustrate the unexpected resolution to the speaker’s dilemma.

These works show that Debussy brought the texts of his songs into the music in multiple, complex ways. The poetry influences every aspect of the composition, from form to harmony to
emotion and meaning. These traits then combine to create the persona and the aesthetic of the songs. In each case, however, Debussy considered the individual text rather than the poet’s general style in creating the aesthetic of the song, so that a poem by Baudelaire or Verlaine did not necessarily imply the use of one musical trait over another.

**Types of Musical Persona**

These two sets of songs display a wide range of personae, ruling out the possibility that either set is organized cyclically. As is true of songs in general, the musical personae here expand the meaning of the text. Each song begins with the emotion and events portrayed in the text, but the persona in some way explains, enlarges, or changes what the poem’s persona initially expressed. In addition, this musical persona may or may not coincide with the persona (the speaker) of the poem; in fact, the majority of these songs exhibit contrasting figures between the two art forms.

Three of the Baudelaire musical personae retain many of the characteristics of their respective poetic personae. In each case, however, the song’s persona adds to or expands the poem’s subjective viewpoint. In “La Mort des amants” the poetic and musical personae resemble each other in that both represent a figure who possesses knowledge about the lovers’ death and who uses the speaker’s words to explain what will happen in the future. In the song, however, the persona specifically functions as a dramatist, who allows the lovers’ experiences to take place in the present.

In “Harmonie du soir” the poetic and musical personae both represent a formerly happy lover whose heart dwells on memories of the past. At the same time, however, the persona of the
song is identified as a musician. Throughout the song the persona draws attention to musical elements of the song and the text, especially with the references to the violin, which is depicted by idiomatic passages that suggest instrumental music. This song therefore broadens the image of the persona to include aesthetic characteristics as well as emotional ones.

The persona of “Le Jet d’eau” also mirrors the poem’s persona: a lover whose mood shifts from pleasure to sadness. Whereas the poem gave no reason for the change in emotion, the song illustrates that its persona’s mood comes under the fountain’s influence, and vice versa. Initially the fountain brings the persona back to happier emotions, but in the end the persona’s emotion affects the fountain, as well, as the fountain’s chattering turns to sobbing. Thus, the musical persona expands the emotional range of the text, providing a more complete understanding of the persona’s experience and giving the fountain a larger role in the poem’s events.

The remaining two songs display personae who contrast that of their corresponding texts. “Recueillement” exhibits a persona who, in contrast to the poem, encompasses both the speaker and the speaker’s sadness in the same figure. In keeping with the poem, however, in the end this figure rejects the anxiety of the outside world and embraces sadness and memories of the past. Because the musical dialogue explains that the song presents two aspects of the same figure, the music presents a more complete picture of the persona’s emotional experience.

The persona of “Le Balcon” represents a separate figure from the speaker, because the persona possesses knowledge that the speaker does not have. While the speaker wonders if the relationship with the beloved will be rekindled, the persona knows that the resolution will be a positive one. In the song the persona uses the speaker’s words to express the emotion in the text, while at the same time informing the music with the known outcome. This persona speaks as if’
reading a diary and remembering the past, elaborating on what was written sometime previously with the knowledge that time has provided.

One partial similarity exists between the persona of this song and that of “La Mort des amants”: Both possess knowledge of events that lie outside the world of the text alone. In the former, the persona uses that knowledge to expand on previously unexplained past events, while in the latter the persona (who is the same as the speaker) dramatizes events that the text describes as taking place in the future. The crucial difference between the positions of these personae is that the poem “La Mort des amants” contains complete information about these events, whereas the text of “Le Balcon” leaves the speaker’s questions unanswered. In “Le Balcon” only the musical persona knows what the outcome will be, because he or she speaks from a position of reflection on the past.

The personae of the *Ariettes oublées* generally take a different stance from those of the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire*. None of these songs contains a persona who resembles that of the text alone. In four cases the persona is a poetic figure who represents an authorial position outside the events of the text. Each of these personae significantly alters or expands on the poems in question in some way. The poetic persona in “C’est l’extase” strengthens the images and emotions found in the text. The song duplicates the poem’s stanzaic form and imagery, and the speaker realizes at the same time in the music and text that the lament is coming from the speaker’s and addressee’s shared soul. In the song, however, the persona intensifies the relationship between nature and the lamenting soul by bringing emotion to the forefront. Whereas the poem implied the speaker’s emotions, the music makes them explicit with motives that illustrate the speaker’s changing emotional state.
In the case of “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” the poem’s persona described sadness as a source of atmosphere only; the speaker’s emotions never intensified beyond ennui. In the song, however, the poetic persona participates in the music’s motivic activity, which contributes to the intense emotions expressed by the speaker. The development of the motto over the course of the song shows that the speaker’s sadness pervades the entire work.

“Green” presents a poetic persona who confirms a happy outcome for the couple in the poem. The text focuses exclusively on the speaker’s requests of the beloved without clarifying whether these requests are met with a positive response. On the contrary, the music uses two instances of a characteristically lyrical melody, first in the piano and later in the voice, to demonstrate that the addressee responds to the speaker’s requests affirmatively. Thus, the musical persona more fully expresses, in a poetic manner, the characters’ emotions in this song.

The persona of “Spleen” diverges from its text the most, taking on a poetic yet manipulative and malevolent character in order to elaborate on the speaker’s emotional experience. Whereas the poem elided the speaker’s emotions of ennui and anxiety, the musical persona makes the two distinct by using different styles of music. The separation of these two emotions emphasizes the importance and the subsequent disappearance of anxiety. Without the musical association for the speaker’s agitation, the surprise ending could not be achieved. Once the emotion of anxiety has disappeared, the unexpected resolution shows how the persona manipulates the speaker, who is suddenly abandoned by the addressee. The song’s persona uses musical elements both to explain the speaker’s emotions and disguise the true outcome of the song.

The personae of the remaining two songs also alter the expression of the text by itself, but these figures take a participatory role rather than an authorial one. The persona of “L’ombre des
arbres” is a dreamer who expresses the speaker’s emotions within the dream. In the poem, the speaker and the traveler (the addressee) may or may not be the same figure, because the speaker’s descriptions of emotions come only from the perspective of the traveler. The song removes this ambiguity by placing the emotion within the dream. If the dream contains the expression of emotion, then the speaker and the persona must be the same person.

In comparison with the poem, the musical setting of “Chevaux de bois” changes not only the persona but also the persona’s philosophy. The musical persona combines the act of observing the carousel with a greater degree of emotion, resulting in a figure who views the carousel as a metaphor for the cyclical process of life. The motivic structure of the song provides the primary evidence for this interpretation, because while the music shows the carousel gradually slowing down at the end of the day, the end of the song also foreshadows that the carousel will turn again the next day.

Despite the divergent types of figures seen in these songs, all of the musical personae reflect that the text serves as the primary influence on the music’s expression of meaning. Although the music often expands on the events or emotions of the poem, the song never contradicts or undermines the characters, imagery, or mood of the text. These personae also relate closely to the songs’ aesthetic positions, so that the figure behind the music also affects how the style of the music is perceived.

**Musical Adaptation of Poetic Aesthetic**

The persona in each of these songs functions within a particular aesthetic or, more rarely, within a combination of aesthetic positions. Comparing the music itself with the poem, the way
it approaches the text, and the style of the poetry provides insight into what aesthetic controls the song. Often the prevailing aesthetic mirrors that of Baudelaire’s or Verlaine’s poetry, but in some cases the music takes a contrasting approach.

The predominant aesthetic of the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* can be classified as romantic, which characterizes the odd-numbered songs. The aesthetic of “Le Balcon” reflects late romanticism in its harmony and dense texture, which resembles the layers of symbolic imagery present in the text. The romantic aesthetic also suits the poem’s fairly conventional treatment of the alexandrine. Musically, the song illustrates Baudelaire’s innovative form by reprising passages (at least in part) where the poem repeats lines of text. In addition, the aesthetic of romanticism appears in the text’s complete explication of the outcome of the lovers’ relationship; if the music had taken a symbolist approach, one would not expect the song to make such details explicit.

In “Le Jet d’eau” the music mirrors the romantic elements of the text—the extended exploration of the speaker’s emotion and, at the end of the poem, the parallel between the natural setting and the speaker’s feelings of melancholy. The song amplifies the interaction between the human and natural worlds, in the form of the persona’s and fountain’s reciprocal influence, and the importance of personal, subjective emotion, lending an equally romantic aesthetic to the music. In addition, the song applies the romantic technique of flexible form in that the modifications to the refrain play on the listener’s expectations for a strophic song.

The romantic aesthetic of “La Mort des amants” appears in its themes of the supernatural and the power of love over death. In this case the music directly translates these images from the text into the song. The latter of these themes receives constant emphasis, due to the motivic and harmonic structures, which draw the focus of the entire song to the arc of life and love
conquering death. Thus, the romantic dramatist persona of the song places the focus on the relationship rather than on the ideal of death, as Baudelaire’s text did.

The remaining songs present contrasting aesthetic positions. “Harmonie du soir” embodies a symbolist aesthetic; just as the poem incorporates protosymbolist characteristics such as dense repetition (of both words and sounds), the music features several techniques that reflect the symbolist style. The importance of musical imagery gives the “valse mélancolique” and the violin significant roles, expressed in the song through idiomatic musical elements. Also, the text demonstrates the suppression of a personal viewpoint that typified symbolist poetry, as well as some of Baudelaire’s poems. In addition, the music’s atmospheric character, unsettled harmony, and circular motivic relationships create an evocative and ambiguous mood in this song.

The combination of stylistic features in “Recueillement” presents a model of a uniquely “Baudelairean” aesthetic. The modern style of this song cannot be classified as definitively romantic or symbolist. Baudelaire’s experiments with the sonnet structure serve as the foundation for the song’s aesthetic, in which the music rejects conventional form even more strongly than Baudelaire’s text did. In addition, the song elaborates on the text’s subjective emotion by depicting the dialogue that takes place in the speaker’s mind.

The majority of the *Ariettes oubliées* (four out of six) generally fall within a symbolist aesthetic. This aesthetic position, however, sometimes emerges as a hybrid with another aesthetic or in the end gives way to the persona’s true position. “Il pleure dans mon cœur” reflects the only purely symbolist aesthetic among these songs, mirroring the technique of Verlaine’s poem. In this song the device of sound repetition arises out of the frequent appearance of the motto and the nearly constant sixteenth-note rhythms, both of which contribute to the atmosphere of the music. The musical persona takes a freer approach to form than
Verlaine did, redistributing the form so that lines of text that treat the same subject appear within the same section of music.

“C’est l’extase” combines aspects of both romanticism and symbolism, but symbolism serves as the prevailing aesthetic. The music includes romantic elements of emotion (represented by the sigh motive) and the explicit depiction of images from the natural world. In its compositional devices, however, the song assumes the character of symbolist poetry, which the poem itself also represents. The techniques of symbolism appear throughout the song and are evident from the opening passage. The suspended and circular nature of the first section derives from its repetition of musical cells and the avoidance of tonal definition, characteristics that typify the aesthetic of this song.

The persona of “L’ombre des arbres” combines two distinct aesthetics. The persona’s dream takes place within a symbolist aesthetic, indicated by the frequent use of short, recurring musical cells, a monotone recitative vocal line, harmonies that elude tonal definition, and shifting metric divisions. These techniques combine to create both static and circular music. The persona, however, takes a realist view once awakened from the dream; the bell tones and the strictly functional cadence show the persona to hold an objective, unemotional aesthetic position. Thus, the realist persona rejects the dream, thereby contradicting the symbolist aesthetic that is present in the poem.

The aesthetic of “Spleen” displays remarkable similarities to that of “L’ombre des arbres.” Initially the music coincides aesthetically with its text in that both reflect symbolist values. The music embodies symbolism in its opening ambiguous harmony that avoids establishing a tonal center, the monotone vocal line that begins the song, and its frequent seventh-chord progressions and cross-rhythms. When the speaker’s anxiety begins to build, the
aesthetic starts to shift away from symbolism, as the techniques of modulation and emotional intensification become more conventional. By the song’s conclusion, the aesthetic of realism has replaced that of symbolism, especially seen in the deliberate ending that reflects the speaker’s resignation toward being abandoned.

In its aesthetic “Green” differs significantly from the four songs discussed thus far. The music reflects a romantic style, which suits the traditional treatment of the alexandrine and the conventional images of nature in Verlaine’s text. In addition, the metaphor of the storm represents a typical romantic theme. The song features generally functional harmonies, a fairly regular ternary form, and arching lyrical melodies over a conventional accompaniment. Together these elements express the emotions of both of the characters in a manner that approximates romanticism.

Finally, “Chevaux de bois” stands alone in that it defies classification into a single aesthetic position. Both the poem and the song reflect an equally concrete and simple poetic/musical style, in comparison with Verlaine’s other poems in this set. The best approximation of the aesthetic is perhaps a realist stance, but the philosophical position of the persona takes precedence over any one style. Specifically, the song emphasizes the pedagogical nature of the persona’s philosophy, which serves to instruct a child, and hence the listener, about the nature of life.

The analysis in this study attempted to incorporate every musical and textual element that contributes to an understanding of these songs—from imagery to formal structure to harmonic language and finally to voice and persona. In the end, each of these elements reflects the ways that the poem and the music combine to create the aesthetic position(s) at work in each song. In
turn, examining the aesthetic of these songs allows consideration of how the style of Baudelaire and Verlaine influenced the music that Debussy composed using their texts.

**Perspectives on the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* and *Ariettes oubliées***

**The Presence or Absence of Cyclicity**

One of the initial questions that led to this study was whether either or both of these sets of songs could be considered a song cycle. While the common themes within the poems suggested the possibility, the musical analysis did not bear that conclusion out. The strongest argument against cyclicity comes from the diverse personae and aesthetic positions observed within each set of songs. Because the viewpoint changes from one song to the next in a way that prevents continuity, neither set can be understood as coming from a single voice in its entirety.

In addition, the songs lack the musical connections that would typically indicate a cycle, such as motivic fragments or phrases that appear in more than one song, or an overarching harmonic plan from the beginning of the cycle to the end. Knowledge of Debussy’s intentions when he composed these songs might enlighten the consideration of cyclicity, but at this point no known evidence discussing his approach to the songs exists. Without any statements to the contrary, the present conclusion must be that both the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* and the *Ariettes oubliées* are collections of songs rather than cycles.

**The Influence of Baudelaire’s and Verlaine’s Styles on Debussy’s Music**

What the analysis undertaken in this study has demonstrated in considerable detail is that, in keeping with his biographical background among the Parisian literati, Debussy brought
literary elements into these songs in several different ways. The music bears out the conclusion, based on statements from Debussy himself, that in these songs the poetry played an importance as great as, if not greater than, that of the music. Considering how significantly the poems of Baudelaire and Verlaine differ from each other, it is worth pursuing whether Debussy’s settings of these poems display such a contrast within the music itself. Even a brief hearing of representative songs from these collections suggests that they do reflect the different poetic aesthetics, as the analysis has already shown. The reasons behind this interpretation, however, deserve a more detailed examination.

At the most basic level, the differences between the Baudelaire and Verlaine songs present themselves in the style of the music. For some scholars the connection between Baudelaire, Wagner, and Debussy provides one explanation for the contrasts between them. Robin Holloway attributes the approach to motivic development in the *Cinq poèmes* to Wagner’s influence. In addition, he notes that the “sparseness and brevity” of Debussy’s later songs bear little resemblance to the density of harmony and texture and the length of the Baudelaire songs.¹ The place of these songs with Debussy’s song œuvre will be discussed at greater length in the next section.

In addition, it is helpful to consider the types of personae evidenced in these songs. For the Baudelaire texts, the resulting musical personae predominantly take some part in the personal expression of the emotion, even in the case of “Harmonie du soir,” which approaches a symbolist aesthetic. The drama of “La Mort des amants” remains the exception, in which the persona takes on an authorial role. In contrast, four of the six personae for the Verlaine songs represent poetic

¹ Holloway, 42–43.
figures. The source of this difference again lies in the aesthetics of the texts. For the symbolists the personal viewpoint was secondary to the suggestion of emotion, resulting in greater atmosphere but less explicit subjectivity. This change in focus automatically draws more attention to poetic technique, since meaning often plays a secondary role, as well. A persona participating in this type of musical expression emphasizes the ways that the aesthetic translates into music over the reasons why an emotion might be expressed. Thus, the musical personae arising from Baudelaire’s texts tend to take part in the story, while those in the Verlaine songs generally take an authorial position.

**The Baudelaire and Verlaine Collections in Relation to Debussy’s Later Songs**

In general the style of the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* sets itself apart from Debussy’s subsequent song compositions. Indeed, no other Debussy song approaches the length of “Le Balcon,” and while songs such as the *Chansons de Bilitis* and *Fêtes galantes II* certainly display a level of complexity far different from “Mandoline”—Debussy’s earliest song using a text by Verlaine—the evolution of Debussy’s songs retains characteristics of symbolism rather than the Wagnerian approach of the Baudelaire settings. The later songs treating Verlaine’s poetry, for example, give the effect of a prolonged exploration of one harmonic and/or motivic area at a time, which mirrors the ways in which the symbolists exploited the characteristics of repeated sounds. The dense motivic development heard in the Baudelaire songs, on the other hand, does not continue to be characteristic of Debussy’s compositions.

Because Debussy never chose to set to music any other texts by Baudelaire, it should not be surprising that they remain set apart stylistically from his other compositions. If we
understand Debussy to have approximated Baudelaire’s aesthetic within his music, that style of composition would not have applied to works that treated other poetry.

Since Debussy continued to express compositional interest in the works of Verlaine long after he composed the Ariettes oubliées, we can consider how these songs might have influenced other works involving Verlaine’s texts. Their dates of composition, falling between the earliest Verlaine settings and the Baudelaire songs, place them in a transitory position in terms of Debussy’s evolving style. First, in comparison with earlier songs such as “Mandoline,” only “Chevaux de bois” and “Green” share any stylistic characteristics with Debussy’s first Verlaine settings. These two songs feature the predominantly regular phrases and lyrical melodies that typify Debussy’s earlier works. Juxtaposed with the symbolist settings from the set, such as “L’ombre des arbres” or “Spleen,” the differences between the styles are quite striking. This change in style has no purely chronological course of development, however, because Debussy composed “L’ombre des arbres” and “Chevaux de bois” within a few weeks of each other. Such dramatic differences between these songs suggests that Debussy considered the aesthetic position of each text in composing his music. In general, compared to his earliest songs, the Ariettes display thicker textures, with greater reliance on motivic structure and a more complex harmonic language.

Comparing the Ariettes oubliées to the Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire underscores a few details that elucidate how Debussy’s style continued to develop over this time. Aside from any Wagnerian influence, the Baudelaire songs enrich the density of texture that began with the Ariettes. In addition, the harmonies increase in chromaticism, and as pointed out earlier, motivic development takes on a primary role.
Debussy did not return to Verlaine’s poetry until 1891, after the Baudelaire songs had already been published. During that year he completed two sets of songs with texts by Verlaine: the *Fêtes galantes I*, which contained revised and rewritten versions of songs initially composed for Mme Vasnier, and the *Trois mélodies*. Interestingly, “En sourdine,” from the first set, bears several similarities to the *Ariettes oubliées*. It begins with a solo piano phrase that takes on the role of a motto; it employs a recitative style in the vocal line; and it explores ambiguous harmonies throughout. This song also features compositional traits that come to characterize the later Verlaine settings, however. The middle section of “En sourdine” contains two lengthy passages that develop a single cell in the accompaniment, while the voice performs a melody that approximates a midway point between lyrical melody and recitative. Among the *Ariettes*, “C’est l’extase” and “L’ombre des arbres” employ this type of technique, but the passages are brief and form only one segment within a larger scheme of motivic development. In contrast, this type of music comprises the entire song for “Clair de lune” in the *Fêtes galantes I*, and it predominates in the *Trois mélodies*, as well.

By the time of Debussy’s final Verlaine songs, the *Fêtes galantes II* of 1904, Debussy had solidified this symbolist style of composition. Such an aesthetic appears not only in the songs, but also in other works. For example, the selections from *Pelléas et Mélisande* and the incidental music for the *Bilitis* poems discussed in Chapter 3 display similar use of recurring accompaniment figures. In summary, the *Ariettes oubliées* hold a dual role in Debussy’s evolution as a song composer. They exemplify the ways in which his style adapted the music of his earliest songs, but they also foreshadow techniques that were to play a significant role in later compositions, both the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* and later works that utilize symbolist poetry.
The Poets’ and the Composer’s Places in the History of Their Art Forms

Finally, let us consider once more Debussy’s aesthetic position in relationship to poetry, and to Baudelaire and Verlaine specifically. His long history of associations with literature has proven that he identified with the aesthetic principles of these poets, as well as many other literary figures. Another parallel exists, however, between Debussy’s role in the evolution of music and the importance of these two poets in particular. Both Baudelaire and Verlaine contributed to the development of modern poetry: Baudelaire as a precursor and acknowledged influence on later poets such as Mallarmé, and Verlaine as a significant member of the decadent and symbolist circles at the time of their creation and their greatest effects on subsequent poetic style. Debussy’s career is significant for his connection to the poetic sphere, but in addition, he played a similar role in the evolution of modern music. When Debussy adopted a musical style in which conventional rules no longer applied, and one that affected the ways in which future music would be composed, he formed aesthetic parallels both with Baudelaire, who bridged the transition between romanticism and the younger generation of poets, and with Verlaine, who helped codify a style of poetry that began to usher in modernism.
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