SYMBOLISM AND CATHOLICISM IN FRENCH MUSIC AT THE TIME OF
THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE (1888-1925)

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Abstract

This dissertation concerns an overlooked and misinterpreted connection in French aesthetics between Symbolist art and the age of Secularism. I argue that as the government separated church from state, erasing Catholic prayers and religious figures from schools and pulling state funds from church budgets, the stakes of representing religion changed. Whereas religious music had been the sole purview of maîtres de chapelle crafting conservative works in line with official doctrine, an increasing number of artists in all fields began to experiment creatively with religious tropes. In music, for example, Gabriel Fauré composed the Requiem, op. 48, while not contractually obliged to do so, and he actually faced criticism for introducing new repertory and for the music’s style. I demonstrate that this music was in line with the poetics of Symbolism, as it grappled with decay, memory, and a spiritual but not orthodox au delà. In five case studies of such religious anxiety, I show that composers were not expected to create Catholic music, and in many cases they personally rejected the religion, but yet they were still inspired by its symbols—saints, religious artifacts, and hieratic atmosphere—and forms—masses, psalms, mystery plays, and prayers. In addition to Fauré’s Requiem, the project comprises chapters on Saint-Saëns’s Psalm CL (1907), Debussy’s Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien (1911), Satie’s Les avant-dernières pensées (1915), and André Caplet’s Le Miroir de Jésus (1924).

Tying the case studies together are the themes of the religion of art, independent spirituality, and a rejection of rigid Catholic orthodoxy as the hegemonic faith institution. The philosophy of Henri Bergson and Vladimir Jankélévitch enlighten musical analyses.
A search for spirituality was integral to modernist aesthetics in music, as the independent approach to spirituality inspired idiosyncratic adaptations of musical language. In the final chapter, I argue that Classicism is closely linked with the crisis of faith that birthed Symbolism, and these aesthetic approaches referred to order and the mystery that kept it in balance.
Contents

Abstract . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . iii
Contents . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . v
Musical Examples and Tables . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . vi
Acknowledgements . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . viii
Introduction: Divine Inspiration? Catholic Imagery and the Avant-Garde . . . . 1
1. Symbolist Aesthetics in Fauré’s Requiem . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 27
2. Saint-Saëns, Catholicism, and Criticism, and Psalm CL . . . . . . . . . . . . . 84
3. The Mystery of Debussy’s Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien. . . . . . . . . . . . . . 128
4. Avant-dernières pensées, Humility, Humor, and Satie’s Religion . . . . . . . . . . . . . 195
5. Reflection, Representation, Religion: André Caplet’s Le Miroir de Jésus . . . . . . . . . . . . . 262
Works Cited . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 324
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ex.</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gabriel Fauré</td>
<td>“Spleen,” mm. 4-6 and 26-7</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Paul Verlaine</td>
<td>Romances sans paroles, “Il pleure dans mon cœur”</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gabriel Fauré</td>
<td>Missa pro defunctis, “Introitus”</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Gabriel Fauré</td>
<td>“Clair de lune (menuet),” mm. 27, 29, and 30</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gabriel Fauré</td>
<td>“Clair de lune (menuet),” mm. 48-9</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gabriel Fauré</td>
<td>“Clair de lune (menuet),” mm. 54-6</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Gabriel Fauré</td>
<td>Missa pro defunctis, “In paradisum”</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Gabriel d’Annunzio</td>
<td>Virgin of Erigone and Virgin Mary’s songs</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Claude Debussy</td>
<td>Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien I, Prelude, mm. 31-43</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Claude Debussy</td>
<td>Le Martyre I.2, mm. 1-5</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Claude Debussy</td>
<td>Le Martyre I.2, rehearsal 10</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Claude Debussy</td>
<td>Le Martyre II.2, mm. 1-4</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Gabriele d’Annunzio</td>
<td>Virgin of Erigone and Virgin Mary’s songs</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Claude Debussy</td>
<td>Le Martyre II.3, mm. 1-4</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Claude Debussy</td>
<td>Le Martyre III.1, mm. 1-3</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Claude Debussy</td>
<td>Le Martyre III.3, mm. 5-8</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Claude Debussy</td>
<td>Le Martyre III.4, mm. 54-6</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Claude Debussy</td>
<td>Le Martyre III.4, mm. 88-95</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Claude Debussy</td>
<td>Le Martyre III.4, mm. 77-80</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Erik Satie</td>
<td>Avant-dernières pensées, “Idylle”</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Erik Satie</td>
<td>“Idylle,” o. 12-16</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Satie, *Avant-dernières pensées*, “Aubade” . . . . . . . . 230
Satie, *Avant-dernières pensées*, “Méditation” . . . . . . . . 234
Intervallic symmetry in “Méditation,” mm. 23 and 31 . . . . . 236
Ex. 16 Satie, “Idylle,” o. 5-7 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 248
Ex. 17 Satie, “Idylle,” o. 27-9. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 249
Ex. 18 Satie, “Méditation,” o. 7-8 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 250
Ex. 19 Satie, “Méditation,” o. 3-6 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 250
Ex. 20 Debussy, “Rondel,” mm. 1-2 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 253
Ex. 21 Debussy, “La Grotte,” mm. 3-5 (accompaniment only) . . 255
Ex. 22 Paul Dukas, “Alla Gitana,” version for B♭ Clarinet, mm. 3-11 . 256
Ex 23 Debussy, *La Damoiselle Élue*, mm. 49-50 . . . . . . . . . . 268
Ex 23a André Caplet, *Le Miroir de Jésus*, mm. 1-2 . . . . . . . . 268
Ex 24 Caplet, *Le Miroir*, Prelude to “Miroir de joie,” mm. 16-21, harp solo. 269
Ex 26 Caplet, *Le Miroir*, Prelude to “Miroir de joie,” mm. 115-20 . . 272
Ex 27 Caplet, *Le Miroir*, Prelude to “Miroir de peine,” mm. 2-5 . . 273
Ex 28 Caplet, *Le Miroir*, Prelude to “Miroir de peine,” mm. 11-2 . . 274
Ex 29 Caplet, *Le Miroir*, Prelude to “Miroir de peine,” m. 43 . . 275
Ex 30 Caplet, *Le Miroir*, “Agonie au jardin,” mm. 2-7, bass and cello duet . 275
Ex 31 Caplet, *Le Miroir*, “Portement de croix,” mm. 1-2, bass and cello duet 276
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Introduction

Divine Inspiration? Catholic Imagery and the Avant-Garde

Alfred Bruneau made his establishment operatic debut in 1891 with *Le rêve*, a stage version of Émile Zola’s 1888 novel of the same name. The opera takes up the story of Angélique and her côteřie in the book’s second chapter. We find the adolescent orphan girl in a studio overlooking the Église Saint-Laurent in Beaumont-sur-Oise, a small city approximately 25 miles north of Paris, neglecting her needlework to sit with Jean de Voragine’s *La légende dorée* open on her lap. Engrossed in her reading, she pauses to give ear to heavenly voices singing a refrain. “May innocence perfume the dreams of your spirit. A star shines in the blue sky and your cool garden is in bloom. In order to charm your pure soul, Virgin, all nature smiles!” Against the choir’s uplifting message, Angélique feels overwhelmed by stories of brutal martyrdom in de Voragine’s medieval hagiography, and she deliriously cries out with the names of saints who were burned and whipped as punishment for their faith. She marvels at Saint George, who fought a fire-breathing dragon in the name of God, and she admires Saint Agnes who, despite having her throat pierced with a sword, still managed to sing praise to the Lord.

The girl’s dream is momentarily interrupted by a visit from the bishop, whose new chasuble sits neglected under her book. While the bishop tells a story about his family’s history, the girl hears the heavenly voices resonate with a significant image, this time accompanied by harps. They sing, “And as soon as he touched them, with only his lips, the sick were suddenly healed!” The girl sighs aloud at the beauty of this healing

power, and the bishop observes that she must have been reacting to some otherworldly sound, without himself hearing it.

Bruneau and Zola’s opera is not a Catholic pageant, nor is it recognized as part of the Symbolist movement, which saw many works inspired by a so-called decadent approach to religious sources. The scene may not be as immediately recognizable as it was when the work premiered in 1891: critics responding to the Opéra-Comique’s latest production remarked that the story was so familiar that a synopsis of the opera was barely needed in their reviews. Now, however, only specialists know the story, since the work is rarely performed. The plot hangs on intense encounters between individuals with incredible destinies: the orphan Angélique who was adopted by Hubert and Hubertine, master embroiderers who agree to teach her the craft; the Monsignor who became a priest after his young wife died; and Félicien, his handsome and wealthy son. Angélique and Félicien fall in love, but the Monsignor forbids them to marry—he renounced romantic love at his wife’s death and intends his son to join the priesthood. Angélique, very devout, hears heavenly voices that inspire her to become a martyr. She succumbs to a fever and dies in the name of her pure love for Félicien and for Christ, at the very moment she and Félicien share their first kiss as husband and wife. Her suffering and fidelity had aroused the Monsignor’s sympathy, and his blessing of their marriage was the sign of his change in heart.

The pair of reviews that appeared in Le Figaro the day after the première, June 19, 1891, both mention the popularity of Zola’s novel and its wide readership. Similarly, Victor Wilder, in his review for Gil Blas, on June 20, 1891, notes, “there is almost no need to recall the subject of the piece, because everyone has read Zola’s beautiful novel.” “Il est à peine besoin de rappeler le sujet de la pièce, car tout le monde a lu le beau roman de M. Zola.”

The most recent performance to date was given by the French Maison de la Radio in a concert version on March 15, 2003. A recording is available through The House of Opera, operapassion.com, CD 5056. Accessed April 15, 2015.
Musicologists most often describe this work as “naturalist,” the term Zola ascribed to the working method he used to write his 20-novel project, les Rougon-Macquart. Named after the two families whose history it traces, the project aimed at presenting a view of contemporary French society complete with scientifically rigorous descriptions of medical conditions, geographically accurate accounts of village life, and precise accounts of various professions typical of different social classes. In it, Zola attempted to break with the overly sentimental interiority of Romantic literature. From Bruneau’s side, the opera is considered Naturalistic, or Realistic, because of the contemporary setting and its allegiance with a work of popular modern fiction. The music is rarely analyzed for its naturalism, as this has not been much theorized. But Bruneau is credited with successfully applying Wagnerian leitmotivic technique to a new subject, drawing his inspiration from urban, present-day France rather than long-forgotten legends from the north. Critics appreciated his attempt to mimic speech in his text setting, especially working with Gallet’s libretto that “proscribed” arioso and cavatina. Victor Wilder, however, a translator of Wagner’s operas and critic for Gil Blas, had a less

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4 Stephen Huebner calls the work’s fictional tone “romance” and locates it on a spectrum between myth and realism, terms borrowed from Northrop Frye. “Naturalism and Supernaturalism in Alfred Bruneau’s ‘Le Rêve’,” Cambridge Opera Journal 11, no. 1 (1999), 78.
5 The most significant recent research on Zola is the three-volume biography by Henri Mitterand, Zola (Paris: Fayard, 1999).
7 Carl Dahlhaus proposed a theory of realism, noting that the simple connection between an opera to realist literature by way of its libretto is not sufficient to categorize the work as “realist.” In his study, he approaches works that are sometimes called “naturalist” or “verismo” all under the rubric of realism. Realism in Nineteenth-Century Music, trans. Mary Whitall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 12.
8 Huebner, French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Nationalism, Wagnerism, and Style (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 400. In its time, too, Ernest Reyer grappled with the work’s debts to Wagner, asserting at the end of his critique in the Revue des deux mondes that it was not “une œuvre wagnérienne.” Cited in Favre, 48.
9 This is the judgment of Ernest Reyer, a noted Wagnerian, writing for the Fueilleton of the Journal des débats politiques et littéraires on the Sunday following the 1891 premiere, June 21, 1891.
enthusiastic response. While he approved of the work in general, he still noted Bruneau’s “affectation,” hardly a term associated with naturalism.

Wilder hit on a critical fault line in Le Rêve’s aesthetic allegiances: the work is a paradox. On the one hand, the rhetoric of both its creators and its audiences identify it as a work of naturalism. This term is a shorthand that was easy for Zola and the people responding to his work to throw around in critiques and letters. It signified modernist values both formal and thematic, including a confrontation with quotidian or even derelict imagery. But, on the other hand, the ideology of naturalism predates fin-de-siècle modernity, stretching back to Enlightenment philosophers Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Denis Diderot. For thinkers of their day, naturalism was synonymous with materialism, signaling non-traditional religious beliefs, either atheism or pantheism. Zola himself wrote vehemently against the use of spiritual or mythical sources in modern art. He critiqued Gustave Moreau’s paintings especially harshly for their depiction of


11 Wilder opined, “One could imagine that the nervous worry to sink into banality pushed [Bruneau], despite himself, into fussiness and even affectation.” “On peut supposer encore que la crainte nerveuse de choir dans la banalité l’a poussé, malgré lui, dans la recherche et parfois même dans l’afféterie.” In the same review, he contradicts Reyer’s belief that Bruneau has dispensed with closed operatic forms, describing the music’s tendency to fall back on cavatinas in the fourth and fifth tableaux.

12 Recently scholars interested in the aesthetic debates between Zola and Joris-Karl Huysmans have investigated Zola’s pronouncements about the dirty side of life. See for example François Luebert, “Le symbolisme à travers le naturalisme: Huysmans, Zola et la peinture de Moreau,” Excavatio: Émile Zola and Naturalism 9 (1997): 64. For a study on Zola’s defense against charges that his reliance upon images of the working class revealed his socialist politics, see Pedro Paolo Garcia Ferreira Catharina, “Huysmans critique de Zola,” Excavatio: Émile Zola and Naturalism 14, no. 1-2 (2001): 244-54.

13 Manfred Kelkel cites this definition of naturalism, from the 1865 edition of Larousse’s dictionary, as an important cultural precondition to the emergence of naturalism as a literary style. See Naturalism, Vérisme et réalisme dans l’opéra (Paris: Librarie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1984), 12.
Christian topics, which he saw as archaic, irrelevant to contemporary urban life. He used the specific term *symbolism* as a denigrating epithet to characterize Moreau’s use of characters whose presence triggered associations beyond the visible world.

The opera does not merely make drama of a girl who thinks she hears heavenly voices. It presents those voices to the audience, using theatrical conventions to convince spectators that the angelic choir, which they can hear, is audible to some but not all of the characters. In this way the opera becomes something other than its naturalist source. Bruneau and Gallet did not decide immediately to give an audible voice to the “visions” in Angélique’s mind, but once they did, Zola did not object. By hearing the voices that are merely evoked in the novel, the audience becomes complicit in the experience of mysticism and thus more fully engaged in the opera, which is never truly realistic, which generally shuns verisimilitude.

At the same time, these heavenly voices themselves signal a rupture between *Le Rêve*—opera and novel—and its purported naturalism, since it verges dangerously close to the archaic practice Zola critiqued in Moreau’s work, engagement with mythological or Christian symbols. Then as now, references to Christianity aroused suspicions about a work’s status: if it uses Christian characters in such a way that was openly critical of the Church, the work might risk censure by ecclesiastic authorities. If it seemed too sympathetic, however, it might be judged naive, or perceived as proselytizing. The key to

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15 Huebner carefully analyzes many instances of the offstage choir, making reference to Carolyn Abbate’s discussion of the *acousmêtre* in *Unsung Voices*: (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). He argues, “the work of Bruneau provides a foil for the accomplishments of Debussy in the theatre. Despite the fundamental conservatism of composers such as Bruneau and Charpentier in many areas, Symbolist art did not have the *sole* rights to musical modernism in this period, nor even to ineffability, which (paradoxically) could be articulated within a naturalist aesthetic.” See “Naturalism and Supernaturalism,” 100. This analysis betrays a lack of the broader social relevance of the Symbolist project and also denies the overlap between *Le Rêve* and aesthetic movements other than naturalism.
understanding this work is that it testifies to the prevalence of mystical thinking in 1890s France. The musical treatment of heavenly voices with harps accompanying them, and the grand orchestra with its frequent echoes of the vocal motifs points the project away from direct representation, toward phantasmagoria. By engaging this topic, Bruneau and Zola demonstrated fascination with the spiritual activity of their time, fractured to be sure, but also pervasive.

Zola and Bruneau each brought their own motivations to this paradoxical work, but they converged around sacred images decontextualized from religious practice (both from the point of view of the characters—Angélique turns her religious fervor into desire for physical love—and from the point of view of the audience—the saints and cathedral put on display are not for the audience’s devotion but are rather meant to evoke a given dramatic setting). Zola may have aimed to keep his political views separate from his art, and Bruneau may never have spoken publicly about his religion (the fact that he composed a Requiem mass, along with a handful of Latin sacred motets suggests that he was Catholic), but they nevertheless can be understood as placing a stake in the tangle of ideology, religion, and aesthetics that the Parisian art scene had become in the decades after the Franco-Prussian War. The example of Le Rêve opens a discussion on the individualized ways musicians responded to an art community that had called its religion, whether through heritage, identity, or affinity into question. These individual responses cannot be easily grouped together, nor do they fall neatly within perceived boundaries between schools or the many “-isms” of the period.

This era saw incredible social division over the question of religion’s role in society. During the period of institutionalized secularization, religious discourse was
perhaps equally as tumultuous as it was during the crusades or the present moment, although it was expressed with less violence. But the relative peacefulness of responses to the social question belies a certain amount of anxiety about spirituality and how a democratic political body makes decisions about its theological identity as it battles with the relevance of a superstitious and restrictive—but also beautiful and historical—religious order. Religion had become an important part of French politics, as Catholicism was tied up with an older, pre-Revolution sense of nationhood.

The history of politics in the Third Republic of France has been well told elsewhere, but it bears repeating that as Republicans ran for the Chambre des députés, the arm of the Assemblée nationale elected by universal suffrage, they gained a majority and were able to support a republican president as well. Their political agenda involved among other projects a slow but steady dismantling of the Catholic Church’s “temporal” power in France, which extended over the economic and territorial security of its own

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16 Public violence during this time more often erupted from anarchist camps, whose economic interests led them to disturb cafés and concert halls. Both Symbolists and others were involved in the actions and comments on them. For examples of recent work on this topic, see Eduardo Feebles, *Explosive Narratives: Terroirs and Anarchy in the Works of Émile Zola* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), Richard Shylock, “Becoming Political: Symbolist Literature and the Third Republic,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 33 no. 3-4 (2005): 385-398, and Erin M. Williams, “Signs of Anarchy: Aesthetics Politics, and the Symbolist Critic at the Mercure de France, 1890-95” *French Forum* 29, no. 1 (2004): 45-68. The political debate surrounding the role of religion in defining French identity was especially charged around the Dreyfus Affair. See below.


18 In particular, Catholicism was associated with monarchism, a political goal espoused by the aristocracy that could see its privilege, both financial and social, slipping away as democratic reforms were enacted. Ties between Church and State in France are shown to date to the early 16th century and continue through the 18th century, when “Bishop Jacques-Bénigne Basset, aristocrat and powerful intellectual, had made the theological case for the divine right of kings.” Ibid., 2.

buildings and the priests, monks, and nuns who lived and worked in them. The Church had maintained this power since 1801, when Napoléon co-signed with Pope Pius VII the Concordat. Along with this dismantling of Church authority, republican politicians planned ways to shape the new social and moral order of their country, instating new holidays to celebrate heroism and patriotism, sponsoring awards for notable cultural creations that honored the patrie, and experimenting with new curricular models to teach citizens who would represent their ideal of democratic progress.

The centralized French government envisaged its cultural reforms in part as a way to unify the country. Life in the provinces differed markedly from that in Paris: people spoke many regional languages other than French, prioritized industry and commerce differently from Parisians, were less invested in degrees and formal education, and had a more fervent belief and practice of Catholicism. While urban residents of Paris attended church less frequently and completed fewer sacraments of initiation, numbers of rural French Catholics grew. Visible practices of faith also expanded, such as participation in pilgrimages to sacred sites and the construction of monuments and churches. Part of the governmental reforms included secularizing laws that discouraged these traditionalist and

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20 For a detailed study on these laws, see Acomb, *French Laic Laws (1879-1889)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941).
21 In musicology, Jann Pasler has argued that these measures were particularly reliant upon music, both art music and popular music. She states, “Serious music did not have to be a luxury associated only with elites; republicans wanted all citizens to have access to the kind of deep experiences music can stimulate.” *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Unity in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 88.
22 Ralph Gibson points out that the geographical diversity in the French practice of Catholicism was probably established during the period of the Revolution, and he offers a map drawn by Canon Boulard as a reference for observing the fervency of Catholic practice by region. See *A Social History of French Catholicism 1789-1914*, 9 and 171.
23 The 19th century in France saw an unprecedented number of pilgrimages and the engagement with holy objects by lay people. For example, the popular belief in the miraculous apparitions of the Virgin Mary at Lourdes, defied all secularizing political trends. See Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (London: Penguin, 1999), especially 10-11.
superstitious practices by making attendance at public schools mandatory and by limiting
the number of religious people—monks, nuns, and priests—who could teach in those
schools. Major cities such as Dijon, Lyon, and Toulouse were exceptions in the
landscape of provincial France, but it can still be said that Catholicism and its symbols
dominated French culture outside of Paris. Even in the capital, the major public building
project of Sacré-Cœur demonstrates the continued relationship between the Catholic
Church and French identity. We take for granted that Catholicism was a symbol of
Western European culture, but if we imagine the same kind of project—a major religious
building that would be visible from all parts of a city, built with public support—carried
out in support of a minority religion, we begin to realize the extent of Catholicism’s
social and civic presence in late-nineteenth-century France.

Secularizing political reforms were couched as a continuation of the
Enlightenment project. The appeal to France’s great moment of social change was seen in
literature, too, in Zola’s adoption of the term naturalism as a way of signing his name to
the list of philosophers—Diderot, Rousseau—who’s atheist, materialist beliefs originally
defined the term. This philosophical program had in view a democratic society that would
be created through the universal education of the people in science and art, using
rationalism as the foundation of its non-religious curriculum. Whatever the political
success of this initiative in France, its philosophical impact was significant, and
philosophers through the end of the nineteenth century continued to develop a rationalist

24 Acomb, 174-7.
Artistique de la Ville de Paris, 1995) and Claude Baillargeon, “Construction Photography and the Rhetoric
26 See Phyllis Stock-Morton, Moral Education for a Secular Society: the Development of a morale laïque in
worldview. Most famous today are Hippolyte Taine and Auguste Comte, whose positivist methods spread from philosophy to the sciences to the arts, especially literature. But Taine and Comte’s ideas are not the revival of ideas from the previous generation uninfluenced by the changes taking place around them. They are a reaction to romanticism, an attempt to incorporate new scientific discoveries into their methods of inquiry.

Auguste Comte radically opposed traditional religion, but in his arguments for more rational epistemology, he did not avoid old dogmatic ways of describing authority and group membership. He advocated for a “religion of humanity,” which, far from dismissing the reliance on an explicit social order with a moralistic code of behavior, actually perpetuated the very same structures. Rather than teach individuals to think for themselves in order to understand the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, the religion of humanity suggests that mystical properties separate the masses from their objects of veneration, namely the political and social structures that keep the nation afloat. Comte’s approach put less stock in the individual’s ability to understand specific knowledge than in the formation of a citizenry imbued a shared sense of pride and duty.

The religion of humanity was a late invention; Comte published his treatises on it during the final years of his life, 1851-1854, as his last philosophical project. Much better known is his theory of positive philosophy, which asserts the need for the human race to enter into its final phase of knowledge. Comte proposed three eras: theological, metaphysical, and positivist, that naturally occur in the course of human development,

27 See Mitterand.
and he clearly asserted his belief that society is capable of achieving progress in its mode of thinking—progress that is desirable and necessary in order to advance an understanding of and thus control over the environment through technological advancements in engineering. Taine was viewed as Comte’s inheritor. His treatises on aesthetics provided artists and art critics alike with a language to justify their allegiance with things of this world or things of another world.\(^{30}\)

Scholarly work on French fin de siècle aesthetics has made tacit distinctions between what can be roughly identified as three groups of composers: conservative, positivist, and avant-garde. A composer’s perception as belonging within one of these categories depends on reception history or critical tradition, often but not always informed by his or her social and professional allegiances. The categories in turn can determine the approaches brought in to explain a composer’s career or interpret individual pieces of music, and they strongly influence the questions asked about a works’ poetics. Simply put, questions about spirituality can most freely be asked of the conservative composers, those Catholics who often composed liturgical music such as Vincent d’Indy, Charles Gounod, or César Franck. The middle group, those influenced by positivism, such as Bruneau, Charpentier, or Saint-Saëns, may engage with religious tropes, but when they do so it is assumed to be within the realm of objective observation; we do not look for metaphysics in their aesthetics. The final group, avant-gardists such as Debussy, Chabrier, Fauré, or Satie, are known to have metaphysical proclivities, but

these are interpreted as safely within the atheist or pantheist mode, and any passing reference to Christian signs is taken as ironic, or a lapse, or overlooked completely.

In the past few decades, studies on politics in fin-de-siècle French music have suggested that political motivations can be traced in works across these boundaries, with the aesthetic of a work revealing the kind of political policy its composer promoted.\textsuperscript{31} Turning attention to the sometimes politicized, but always personal domain of spirituality, it is clear that the signs and structures of France’s erstwhile official religion also attracted composers who espoused varying systems of belief. The example that opened this introduction, of an opera theoretically inspired by the scientific, atheist ideas of Comte, but still enacting religious mysticism, suggests that we consider the wider import of Catholic imagery as a topic for art during this period, rather than as a social tool for influencing thought or behavior.

One major source of validation for the three categories of fin-de-siècle composers has been the way each responds to Richard Wagner, whose commitment to idealist philosophy separated him from efforts to incorporate scientific methods into art. Wagner was more than a polarizing figure; his contemporaries and followers, especially in France, often violently disagreed about the extent of his originality and influence.\textsuperscript{32} Now we know that he was almost inestimably influential, making impressions on musical style and form, ideals of aesthetic unity and artistic interdisciplinarity, and the scope, scale,

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\textsuperscript{31} Fulcher, Pasler.
\textsuperscript{32} Saint-Saëns and Jules Écorcheville exchanged public critiques of each other’s responses to Wagnerism in the \textit{Revue de Paris}. Georges Servières published a book on reactions to Wagner in France, \textit{Richard Wagner jugé en France} (Paris: Librairie illustrée, 1887), and the \textit{Revue wagnérienne} was the journal that published extensive criticism in praise of Wagner, but with rare references to religion.
and social function of art.\textsuperscript{33} But Wagner’s interest in religion and spirituality, as evidenced in both the subjects of his operas (\textit{Lohengrin} and \textit{Parsifal} both drawing from Christian mysteries about the holy grail) and his many writings about music (especially, but by no means limited to, the essay “Religion and Art”), caused division amongst his followers and has turned discussions of the French attitude toward him superficial.\textsuperscript{34} Nietzsche famously broke with him over what he perceived to be Wagner’s over-dependency on religion and his pandering to religious followers.\textsuperscript{35}

Indeed, Wagner’s \textit{Parsifal} was seen by many to be the ultimate drama.\textsuperscript{36} But for conservatives amongst Wagner’s French followers, the work showed a new, specifically Christian, direction for their own operas. d’Indy believed that the Christian faith could be expressed purely in opera, and he devoted his theatrical efforts to producing his own, distinctly French, version of that story of mystical faith and the symbolic power of sacrifice and ritual.\textsuperscript{37} D’Indy’s commitment to Wagnerian depictions of Christianity made him all the more firmly supportive of his compositional system, too.\textsuperscript{38} Leitmotivs and religious sentiment became closely entangled. Although many also dismissed

\textsuperscript{33} Studies documenting Wagner’s influence on both musical composition and musical discourse in France are far too numerous to list here in detail, but Huebner gives an overview of the most important studies in \textit{French Opera}, 11n31.

\textsuperscript{34} Roger Scruton’s recent book on \textit{Tristan and Isolde} highlights the topicality of religion in that and others of Wagner’s operas. See \textit{Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), especially chapter 1, “Wagner and Religion.”


\textsuperscript{36} It is well known, for example, that it was Debussy’s favorite of Wagner’s operas. Edward Lockspeiser writes eloquently about the work’s lasting influence on the composer in \textit{Debussy: His Life and Mind} (London: Cassell, 1962) I:95. Lesure points directly to Debussy’s own words to demonstrate how much he appreciated that work in particular. \textit{Debussy: une biographie critique} (Paris: Fayard, 2003), 448. Fauré, too, called it the most supreme expression of drama and music, and he said it is impossible to speak about it, only to listen and watch. See his article in \textit{Le Figaro} from January 2, 1914, cited in Nicole Labelle, “Fauré: Music Critic for \textit{Le Figaro}” in \textit{Regarding Fauré}, ed. Tom Gordon (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Gordon and Breach, 1999), 25. d’Indy’s attachment to the opera hardly needs mentioning.


Wagner’s brand of Christianity as decadent and overly erotic, his grandiloquence and practice of sacralizing his own art made him a religion unto himself. A positivist composer like Bruneau responded to Wagner on a literal level (*Le Rêve* incorporates leitmotivs, but not in the complex psychological way Wagner used them, and its story has obvious parallels with *Tristan und Isolde*), never going so far as to repeat the more philosophical self-aggrandizements of his criticism. Avant-garde artists such as Debussy made public renouncements of Wagner, although the spiritual, mystical qualities of their works seem to be cast in the mold of Wagner’s overarching program, even if they no longer bear his signature. Because the connections between himself, his art, and religion were at the same time both glaringly visible and far from straightforward, the question of how or why French composers at the *fin-de-siècle* responded to these themes when they responded to his work as a whole has not yet been fully answered.

Religion appears again and again in the subjects, forms, and language of turn-of-the-century French art. For conservatives, this religion was strictly doctrinal, following the pope’s teachings, as it was for Charles Bordes, d’Indy’s colleague at the Schola Cantorum. Bordes, d’Indy, and the other administrators of that school brought doctrine into art in unprecedented fashion, publishing forums on the state of religious music in their journal, *La Tribune de Saint Gervais*. Since Bordes directed a very popular choral group, the Chanteurs de Saint Gervais, and because d’Indy was so active in concert series and programming at the opera, the school’s activities and its publication were widely read.

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40 See in particular the referendum on liturgical music during 1907, the year of the papal encyclical *Paschendi Dominici Gregis*, *La Tribune de Saint Gervais* 13 no. 4 (1907): 91-5.
in France, even by non-Catholics. D’Indy and Bordes had very different musical goals, but they brought their differences together under the banner of music motivated by theology. They became a force to be reckoned with, and by supporting César Franck, they pushed their Christian agenda even further into the view of mainstream music audiences.

The Schola’s pedagogical mission assured that its influence could inflect composers’ fundamental tools for making music. D’Indy ensured the continuation of his interest in Catholicism through a hierarchical and meritorious structure, modeled on the official, positivist Conservatoire. The latter trained both composers who maintained their scientific ideas, such as Bruneau, and those who rejected them, like Debussy, but it generally rewarded those who maintained its values with careers and continued honors. By the time the Schola opened in 1894, secularizing laws had already led to reduced budgets for organist positions at churches, so even organists with specific training in liturgical repertory could not expect to find full-time employment as titularies of parish organs. The best known students of the Schola were therefore composers whose developed aesthetics inflected with spiritual or religious priorities.

One such student who was attracted to the Schola not for the possibility to become an organist was Erik Satie, who famously enrolled at the age of 40 in 1905. Pierre-Daniel Templier, Satie’s first biographer, calls Satie’s decision to “start again from

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41 Debussy is known to have been attached to these concerts, see Richard Langham Smith, Debussy on Music (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 31 and 110, and Botstein, 177n44.
43 Gail Hilson Wildau clarifies that in 1894, the Schola Cantorum changed its focus; it had existed before as a school solely for the training of church musicians, and had now expanded its pedagogical mission to include history and composition. The change did nothing to undermine the thoroughly Christian ideology at the school, however. “Debussy, Fauré, and d’Indy and the Conception of the Artist,” in Debussy and His World, 236.
the beginning” at the Schola “courageous and humble.” He observes that Satie abhorred the state-sponsored manufacture of musical practice at the Conservatoire, which, and here he cites Satie, “leads to the most odious vulgarity.” But while humility was a feature of Satie’s personality, the decision to enroll at the Schola was probably more desperate than courageous. We can observe, for example, in Satie’s cahier d’exercices the rapid fading of his enthusiasm to acquire skills. His teacher Albert Roussel recognized the decidedly un-humble attachment to the musical style he had already acquired in his resistance to complete counterpoint assignments according to instructions. This refusal to apply the rules he had supposedly sought to master suggests that Satie felt attracted to something at the Schola other than the promise of technical mastery. Since the school’s reputation was founded equally on its religious orientation and its curriculum, it would not be far-fetched to imagine that Satie was drawn there because of a desire to attain some mystical knowledge about the language of religious music.

It is often repeated that during his youth, when he could have been assiduously studying the rules of harmony, Satie instead dropped out of the Conservatoire and became involved with a group of esoteric artists who experimented with Christian symbols and forms. Generally grouped in the Montmartre neighborhood of Paris, the group was characterized by a loosely woven web of creative people—artists, writers, and publishers. Edmond Bailly’s shop was a gathering place, as was the cabaret Le Chat Noir, where influential writers like Jules Bois and Joséphin Péladan staged performances of

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45 Ibid.
46 Many of these are preserved at Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS Mus 193, Series II A, no. 14.
their works.\textsuperscript{48} The relationship between these figures and Satie has been thoroughly examined.\textsuperscript{49} What has been less fully appreciated is the extent of their influence as social catalysts, bringing together artists with ultimately distinct professional and aesthetic trajectories. Jules Bois, for example, collaborated with many visual artists and musicians.\textsuperscript{50} His sacrilegious use of Christian themes sparked interest from a wide variety of turn-of-the-century artists who are today not associated with religion.

Péladan launched his career in the early 1880s with his essay on the 1883 \textit{Salon} and the publication of his first novel, \textit{Le vice suprême}, in 1884.\textsuperscript{51} He saw himself as the initiator of an aesthetic revolution, and many composers who are now thought of as avant-garde had some connection with him. He proposed a return to ideals of the renaissance and a refocusing of attention on morality and spirituality. He specifically used the term “Ideal” to refer to the higher meaning he believed artists should invest in their work. He was principally interested in literature, and especially admired Barbey d’Aurevilly and Paul Verlaine.\textsuperscript{52} But his relative inexperience with the visual arts did not keep him from criticizing the most basic assumptions of current academic art on display at the 1883 salon: neoclassicism and Impressionism. In his view, both styles lacked meaning, and he advocated strongly for a change in content, and an attempt to push all ideas toward sublimity, “carried to its furthest points of harmony, of intensity, of

\textsuperscript{48} Roger Shattuck, \textit{The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I} (Salem, NH: Ayer, 1985), 120.
\textsuperscript{49} See Whiting, 130-163.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 39.
Like Wagner, but on a much smaller scale, artistic responses to Péladan also involve a reckoning with religious symbols, in ways that varied depending on aesthetic goals.

Critiques of the scientific positivism he perceived as driving the Impressionist works so favored at the official salon, coupled with a full engagement with Catholic mysticism and occultism, led Péladan to found his own order of Rosicrucianism. Beginning in 1892, he celebrated this brotherhood each year with a salon of art sympathetic to his avant-garde ideas. These salons attracted artists from many schools, even those radically opposed to each other. Moreover, the salons were multimedia events, with not only visual art on display, but also performances of plays and music, old and newly composed. With so many artists present, felicitous connections were sure to be made. One such connection, an example of mysticism’s wide appeal, was between Zola and the illustrator Carlos Schwabe, who designed the first salon’s famous poster. Schwabe shared Péladan’s fervor for artistic means of representing thoughts beyond one-to-one pictorial representation. Schwabe is credited with refining an aesthetic in the visual arts of sinewy depictions of anthropomorphized emotions, such as hope and greed, as young women. The year after this first salon, when Zola’s publisher Flammarion wanted to make a deluxe illustrated edition of his novel *Le rêve* and proposed Schwabe to create the images, Zola enthusiastically agreed, having already seen his work. Although the project took longer than expected and was not fully completed as Schwabe would have liked, the result was an instant classic and—crucially—aroused Zola’s interest in

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54 Ibid., 102-3.
less literal, more figurative means of evocation. He was impressed by Schwabe’s ability to pick ideas and themes from his novel that were not explicitly stated.

Thus the Rose+Croix salons of the early 1890s were a fertile ground for spreading aesthetic ideas, not just within the avant-garde scene but also across conservative and positivist boundaries. The religious aura was not fully the result of Péladan’s idiosyncratic interests—it was also a symptom of the climate of spiritual anxiety in the French capital. Artists could not avoid signs of Catholicism, although they did not always know how to respond to them. Even the impressionist painters that Péladan critiqued so harshly for their vapid materialism sometimes took religious—specifically Catholic—objects as their subject, notably Monet in his many paintings of the Rouen cathedral, which he made during the period of the Rose+Croix salons. At the same time, Gabriel Fauré was giving performances and working on the orchestration of his Requiem, using his church space for the development of his personal expression. Fauré was also attempting a collaboration with one of Péladan’s favorite authors, Verlaine, whose Catholicism had also attracted a large following because of its vivid and personal depictions of traditional symbols connected with experiences of strong emotions.

The aesthetics of a writer, Paul Verlaine demonstrate the relevance and complexity of a study on non-orthodox use of Catholic symbols at the fin de siècle, the time of secularization. Criticism and interpretation of his poetry is mired in biographical

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56 These works are studied by Ronald R. Bernier, Monument, Moment, and Memory: Monet’s Cathedral in fin-de-siècle France (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007).
57 For more on this, see chapter 1, below.
58 This collaboration never came to fruition, but it was scheduled to be an opera, sponsored by the Princesse de Polignac. See Jean-Michel Nectoux, Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life, trans. Roger Nichols, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 170.
concerns, as the verses are marked by a confessional quality, and his sonnets in particular
display the traditional features of personal love poems. But the reception of a collection
of his poems, Jadis et naguère (which can be translated literally as “long ago and
recently”), published in 1884, though some were written much earlier, marked his style as
a reference point for avant-garde artists. Such a frenzy for his poetry broke out that he
was considered the founder of a school, Symbolism, and both serious and more mocking
attempts to mimic his style followed.

We are comfortable discussing the synaesthetic or inter-artistic qualities of
Verlaine’s poetry, and these are well known. Additionally, the homoerotic imagery of his
poetry has been considered, especially because of its biographical significance vis-à-vis
his relationship with Rimbaud and subsequent imprisonment. The Catholic images have
been less consistently taken up. But these should not be dismissed as idiosyncrasies, since
they not only follow from a tradition begun with Balzac and carried on through
Baudelaire, but they also make way for continued aesthetic engagement with Catholic
tradition as a way to reckon with faith and existence, as seen in Stéphane Mallarmé and
his followers.

Verlaine is an important link in the connections between not only different art
media but also artists with differing aesthetic agendas. The popularity of his poems led to

Manchester University Press, 1974, Louis Marvick, “Aspects of the fin-de-siècle Decadent Paradox.” Clio
221, no. 1 (1992): 1ff., Claire Masurel-Murray, “Conversions to Catholicism among fin-de-siècle Writers:
60 Even the most recent scholarship still clings to biography, see Jeffrey Meyers, “The Savage Experiment:
61 See Stephan, 119.
décennie du symbolisme (1885-1895).”
63 Meyers.
also Richard Griffiths, The Reactionary Revolution: The Catholic Revival in French Literature, 1870-1914
personal relationships with many different artists, among them Péladan and Fauré. These increased his fame and in turn increased his following. Even artists who are not commonly associated with symbolism, like Saint-Saëns, were drawn to Verlaine’s poetry. The nostalgia for pure faith conveyed in Verlaine’s work betrays the complicated stakes of affirming belief in a religion that not only was losing its political privilege, but was also proving intransigent in the face of modern science and the changing religious demographics of a country that saw a dramatic increase in its Jewish population during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The Catholicism evidenced in Verlaine’s work is not doctrinal, nor does it constitute an artistic validation of contemporaneous theological trends. Rather, Verlaine addresses crises of faith, calls upon Catholic symbols, and borrows language from the Christian tradition, notably using the Bible as an intertext. If other artists were drawn to his means of representing religious feeling, it was not because they saw him as a religious leader. Verlaine did not inspire other artists’ conversions, and I do not argue here that any of the composers I study were Catholic; their actual faith is outside the question of this study. In an attempt to wrest some works and topics of turn-of-the-century art from a recent scholarly tradition that mimics, in method and rhetoric, the three perceived aesthetic camps of the day, I propose an approach that focuses on the individual use of Catholic symbols, perhaps upsetting the stable historical order. Each time Catholic images appear, I ask how they reflect or challenge such dominant social realities as


66 Cholvy and Hilaire, 52.
Wagner’s religion of art (and his art of religion), the changing political status of the Church, and avant-garde poetics.

In what follows I closely examine five major works by composers who have entered the canon as representative of the secularizing impulse considered to be one of the defining traits of modernism. But secularizing does not mean unconcerned with religion. In fact, its very struggle points to the continuing influence of Catholicism and other religions as cultural patrimony, national identity, and topic of political and social debate. I focus on the points of contact between composers with an emergent sense of modernism, those with a strong commitment to contemporaneity, and those who sought to maintain or restore traditional practices of faith in their country. My work is rooted in the many studies of fin-de-siècle aesthetics in France that have already offered a rich and complex view of the interrelatedness of music with other arts, politics, and French culture and society. In addition to the many discoveries already made about the relationship between life and art at the turn of the century in France, I aim to demonstrate the pervasiveness of the religious question.

More broadly, I consider that for this turn of the century period the history of aesthetics of the spiritual should not be overly concerned with camps, allegiances, or cliques. The works I have chosen for case studies were mostly conceived after the official Separation. Their composers were personally familiar with each other and maintained professional relationships both through positions at music schools and connections via their patrons and publishers. Fauré and Saint-Saëns, the composers of the first two works, maintained a rather close relationship, which can be readily examined in their published

68 Already cited are Pasler, Fulcher, and Huebner, Kelly, but there are many other fine studies on more specific topics within the fin-de-siècle moment.
correspondence. He saw himself as a mentor to both composers.

I have purposefully limited my studies to the aesthetics of composers who were familiar and even intimate with each other. These relationships add coherence to a group of works distinct in their genre, style, and function. The bonds of friendship and mentorship amongst them are neither incidental nor determinate to my study. In this first attempt to sustain an inquiry into musical aesthetics of religious anxiety, I want to suggest that kinship was real for these figures and has also become a part of the grand narrative of music history. At the same time I want to insist that these composers cultivated and fought hard for their individuality. I consider the approaches to spiritual music aesthetics that I investigate to be fully independent, the result of independent thinking.

This dissertation is a study of the musical aesthetics of religious anxiety. It seeks to know what composers valued in Catholic topics such as mass parts, Latin prayers, saint hagiographies, and devotional practice. What beauty was there in elements of a tradition that for so long were merely instruments of an institution with more than spiritual power? What was it that, as Catholicism’s institutional power faded, drew composers and the other artists they knew its symbols and structures, encouraging them to consider them afresh, rather than discarding them altogether? The study draws together ideas and reactions to them that have either been pushed apart by time or were never able to be considered simultaneously in the first place.

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One notion of history sees the French avant-garde as particularly attuned to the problem of religious belief as it was tied to artistic representation. In this paradigm, Stéphane Mallarmé, one of the French poets with whom Debussy was most closely associated, can be understood as using his art as a response to problems raised by Nietzsche. These problems were specifically modern, and concerned the definition of morality in the face of a decaying language that for too long had been controlled by a decaying Church. For Nietzsche, good and evil were terms that had been coopted and corrupted by Christianity, pushed off their moral foundations. In many of his philosophical works, he looks for a way to throw off the weight of old idols, traditions, and language in favor of independence, a will for power that does not draw from an institutionally-defined divinity. His critique of religion is thus always at issue in his critique of language, as in his critique of Wagner, who had exploited Christian symbols in order to gain popularity. Nietzsche’s critique of language can be encapsulated as a question of agency in speech, “Who defines our terms?” When Mallarmé answers, by erasing himself and suggesting that the words themselves speak, we must consider this also a critique of religion. Avant-garde poets such as Mallarmé can thus be seen as filling the space left open by anti-theological philosophy. Mallarmé’s technique of erasing himself from his poetics fulfills Nietzsche’s prophesy that both man and God have died.

71 Foucault, The Order of Things (New York: Vintage), 305.
72 Ibid., 306.
Self-erasure can be considered a defining trait of Symbolism.\(^73\) We see that in its historical moment, the motivation for self-erasure was entangled with the rejection of Christian religion as the only entryway into spirituality, and the resulting vacuum in the spiritual realm. Turn-of-the-century French composers expressed their spirituality and worked through anxiety about the divine and the mysterious by reinterpreting Christian signs.\(^74\) While the church’s symbols still held currency as markers of national heritage, their meaning, just as the meaning of words in language, had vanished. As Henri Bergson demonstrates in his secular, moral philosophy, traditional religious models had yet to be stripped away.\(^75\)

The means of weaving sacred images into secular works are different from composer to composer and project to project. But when sacred, Christian, images appear in seemingly incongruous contexts, they are sincerely appreciated and respected, if not in the strictly religious way their appearance had previously demanded.\(^76\) The composers I study here, and many others from their time, approached the materials of Catholicism with Symbolist sympathies, also adopting the technique of self-effacement. At the moment when the French State was most effective at decreasing the official power

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\(^{73}\) Stefan Jarocinski’s work on musical symbolism in Debussy’s music suggests that the practice of using music as symbol puts a divider between the composer’s self and his musical expression. The references to non-musical sounds are a means of self-erasure, especially in the sense that musical language always denies specific semantic meaning. *Debussy: impressionisme et symbolisme*, trans. Thérèse Douchy (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970), 39-42.


\(^{76}\) Michel Faure has indicated the potential interest of a study that would investigate either the ideological or political investments behind projects that incorporated such “more or less Christian mysticism.” In his opinion, this is exemplified in the work of Saint-Saëns, as well as Bonald, Claudel, Wagner, and Gustave Moreau. See *Musique et société du second empire aux années vingt: autour de Saint-Saëns, Fauré, Debussy et Ravel* (Paris: Flammarion, 1985), 58-9.
structure of the Catholic Church, French artists set about redeeming spirituality through its own negation of institutionalized religion and its dogma.
Chapter 1

Symbolist Aesthetics in Fauré’s Requiem

Introduction

Gabriel Fauré’s musical career—one of the most auspicious in French history\(^1\)—began in a thoroughly humble way, when as a young boy he took an interest in the church music played in the small village where his parents had sent him to be nursed. The story of his departure from the village, and eternal obscurity, has been recounted many times since the first biography of Fauré appeared, perhaps because it involved an extraordinary visit from Louis Niedermeyer.\(^2\) The director of a new and innovative school for religious music in Paris traveled 450 miles to the provincial town of Pamiers to audition Gabriel, aged nine at the time. Impressed by the boy’s talent, Niedermeyer offered him a full scholarship to cover tuition, room, and board, nearly guaranteeing lifelong employment as a church organist.\(^3\) Fauré’s nanny believed that he would answer a clerical vocation and become a bishop. She had watched her charge spend entire days at the church and did not expect that he would instead become one of the most famous musical composers of

\[^1\] A narrative of Fauré’s unjust obscurity has been popular since his death in 1924. Recent attempts to establish his prominence in French \textit{fin-de-siècle} aesthetics include the book \textit{Regarding Fauré}, ed. Tom Gordon (Amsterdam: Gordon & Breach, 1999) and the 2015 Fauré: Effable and Ineffable Conference held at the University of Washington. Additionally, Stephen Rumph’s recent article on Fauré, Vladimir Jankélévitch, and Henri Bergson proposes a new hermeneutic frame for understanding—and better valuing—Fauré’s melodies. See “Fauré and the Effable: Theatricality, Reflection, and Semiosis in the melodies,” \textit{Journal of the American Musicological Society} 68, no. 3 (2015): 497-558.

\[^2\] Early biographers do not actually agree on the visit; some attest that the director was already in the southwest, in Foix, for a concert tour and so was able to audition Gabriel. See Charles Koechlin, \textit{Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)}, trans. Leslie Orry (London: D. Dobson Ltd., 1945), 1, and Norman Suckling, \textit{Fauré} (Westport, CT: Hyperion, 1979), 12, Others recount that the future composer traveled to Paris with his father, where Louis Niedermeyer would hear him for the first time and immediately take him under his special protection. See Claude Rostand, \textit{L’Œuvre de Fauré} (J. B. Janin, 1945), 40, Émile Vuillermoz, \textit{Gabriel Fauré}, trans. Kenneth Schapin (Philadelphia: Chilton Book Co., 1969), 2-3, and Jessica Duchan, \textit{Gabriel Fauré} (London: Phaidon, 2000), 6.

\[^3\] Katherine Ellis outlines the history of this school, created with state funds, describing it as “one sign of Napoléon III’s building of bridges with the Catholic church, whose various arms flourished during his reign.” \textit{Interpreting the Musical Past: Early Music in Nineteenth-Century France} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71.
his time. She certainly could not have anticipated that he would eventually renounce—in spirit if never explicitly—the structure and dogma of the Catholic Church. To her, it seemed that music and religion were indissolubly linked. Fauré learned the principles of harmony, counterpoint, and musical form from the most experienced church organist in the region where he grew up. And like many composers of the time, his most reliable prospects for employment were in churches with organs and a need for someone to play them. Yet from an early age, vainglory comeling with the calling to humble servitude as a church music minister. Fauré’s colleague Alfred Bruneau narrated the composer’s childhood dream of becoming an organist: “The organ! Obtaining an organ was their highest ambition. To have before oneself the instrument with one hundred voices, this orchestra with a thousand colors, to be close to it, to become its master, to confide in it one’s joys and pains, to sublimate those joys and pains in the storm or serenity of obedient keyboards, what a dream for a great musician!” Although growing up Fauré

4 The question of dogma had become a serious public intellectual concern by the turn of the twentieth century in France. Édouard Le Roy, a student and friend of Henri Bergson, published a public letter asking what is dogma? And later a book reprinting the article, along with many more reflections based on critiques and challenges he received after the article’s initial publication. He contended that dogma, as unprovable postulation, was incompatible with scientific reasoning, which provided evidence for each stage of a theorem. See Dogme et critique (Paris: Bloud, 1907).

5 Fauré’s son Philippe Fauré-Fremiet recounts the family’s attitude towards the professional training offered by the École Niedermeyer in his biography of his father: “He didn’t for one instant imagine that his little boy could become a great musician but he thought it right to cultivate his gifts, to direct him toward a career aligned with his tastes. He knew that the École Niedermeyer placed almost all of its students in positions as chapel master or organist. These were honorable jobs that afford a good life when supplemented by giving lessons. If the student fails, the child would not be destitute. Beyond the musical education, he would receive at the school a fairly complete general instruction: in history, geography, literature, and Latin. Musician or not, Mr. Niedermeyer would make him a cultivated man.” “Il [Toussaint-Honoré Fauré, the father of Gabriel Fauré] n’imagine pas un instant que son petit garçon puisse devenir un grand musicien mais il trouvait juste de cultiver ses dons, de l’orienter vers une carrière conforme à ses goûts. Il sait que l’École Niedermeyer assure à la presque totalité de ses élèves, un poste de Maître de chapelle ou d’organiste. C’est une position honorable qui permet de bien vivre en donnant des leçons. En cas d’échec, l’enfant ne sera pas démuni. Outre l’éducation musicale, il recevra à l’école une instruction générale assez complète : histoire, géographie, littérature, latin. Musicien ou non, Mr Niedermeyer fera de lui un homme cultivé.” Philippe Fauré-Frémiet, Gabriel Fauré (BNF Rés. 2735): 37-8.

6 “L’orgue! Obtenir un orgue était leur [de Fauré et d’Eugène Gigout] ambition suprême. Avoir devant soi l’instrument aux cent voix, cette sorte d’orchestre aux mille couleurs, s’en approcher, s’en emparer, lui
knew nothing of music outside of the religious sphere, he cultivated more of an interest in music’s expressive power than in its institutional uses.

As a consequence of Fauré’s bifurcated musical education, his career was similarly divided between service to the Church and to the state. Although it is only coincidence that Fauré became the director of the Paris Conservatory and ended his post at the Madeleine Church in 1905, the year of the law of separation of Church and state, the coincidence is not without meaning. Once at the Conservatory, Fauré never again composed or wrote about religious music, and spent both professional and creative energies on refining a new approach to form and harmony. Fauré ultimately composed 10 times more non-religious works than religious ones. Yet his Requiem, op. 48, the work most emblematic of Fauré’s in the contemporary popular imagination, was originally destined for church use. The work bears traces of Niedermeyer’s tutelage, but it also suggests a less orthodox approach to church music. Caught in between the expectations of the religious milieu and a new spiritual approach to art, Fauré’s Requiem constitutes a site of contested, paradoxical, and above all opaque meaning.

7 His earliest period of composition shows a stark delineation between sacred and secular music. The early melodies are all set to highly materialist poetry, while the religious works are a testament to school requirements. Fauré’s first interest as a young composer was in chamber music.
8 Fauré also left many works unpublished during his lifetime and thus, although we may be familiar with them now, he did not ascribe an opus number to them. If we include all of his “works without opus” in Philips’ list, the proportion of religious to non-religious works rises slightly, from just under one tenth to one in seven. See list of works in Edward R. Philips, Gabriel Fauré: A Guide to Research (New York: Garland, 2000): 8-26.
9 Surely musical connoisseurs and Fauré initiates have their own preferences, but the sheer number of recordings of the Requiem attests to its status as Fauré’s principal work. See for example Gramophone’s recent list of the best British recordings of the work, http://www.gramophone.co.uk/feature/faur%C3%A9s-requiem accessed 13 June 2016.
I examine the personal investment of the composer in this work and the formal traits that define it as religious, anti-theatrical, attic, and sincere, as authors have variously labeled it.\textsuperscript{10} As part of a study on the reaction of different composers to the separation of Church and state in France, this chapter focuses on Fauré’s particularities and investigates why he undertook this composition and what motivated him to have it performed and published. I argue that Fauré’s interest in the Symbolist poetry of Paul Verlaine shaped the aesthetic of the work and determined the way he would use musical form to create meaning. Although it would be impossible without knowing fully what sources inspired the work, or what he took out of it as aesthetic affect, the \textit{Requiem} can figure as a memorial to lost faith, Fauré’s in particular, and more generally that of the generation to which he belonged.

\textit{Sources and Contexts? Scholarly Approaches to the Requiem}

Responding to the \textit{Requiem} as an unorthodox and innovative work of church music, listeners and scholars have marshaled it as evidence of its composer’s personal attitude about religion. In a seminal study of aesthetics and reception, Carlo Caballero argued that Fauré experienced a progressive decline in Catholic sentiment throughout his life, moving from a stage of pious devotion as a child through harried ambivalence in his mid life, to a pantheistic belief system that veered toward atheism in his old age.\textsuperscript{11} This claim for Fauré’s atheism is the result of a probing, disinterested stance towards religion; no previous biographer of Fauré qualified the composer as an unbeliever, and this is

\textsuperscript{10} On this topic, Carlo Caballero’s \textit{Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) has been the most profound contribution, but he bases his line of inquiry on the work of scholars before him, including Susan Richardson, “Fauré’s Requiem as Religious Ideology.”

\textsuperscript{11} Caballero, \textit{Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics}. 
because such authors as Philippe Fauré-Fremiet, Michel Faure, and Jean-Michel Nectoux had overly personal stock in the question. But atheism is not the most relevant or precise way to define turn-of-the-century spirituality; nor is devout belief or practice. Rather it is the critical distance, the skepticism, and the aesthetic approach toward religion apparent in the French schools of decadence and Symbolism that can be heard in Fauré’s music. He composed the piece when he was first encountering the poetry of Paul Verlaine. He agreed to large-scale public performances and a huge concert orchestration that belie its origins as parish ceremony music. And after it was complete, Fauré never began another sacred work. The Requiem’s composition, performance history, and intellectual kinship within the avant-garde Paris culture suggest a highly nuanced context for better understanding it.

Under normal circumstances, it would not make sense to speak of the first performance of the Requiem, when it was played for a funeral mass in January 1888, as a premiere. It was just service music, and at the time it was incomplete as far as mass settings go, including only five of the seven movements that would make up the 1901 published version. This Mass, however, was something of a performance in that Fauré

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12 Ibid., 197. He is referring to Nectoux’s devotion, over the course of a long career, to understanding and promoting the composer, a mission he carried out with the help of Fauré’s sons and surviving family. Nectoux has published extensively on Fauré, but his major work on the composer, summarizing thirty years of research, is Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life, trans. Roger Nichols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Michel Faure introduced Marxist criticism to the study of Fauré’s music, first in the short article “L’époque 1900 et la résurgence du mythe de Cythère,” Le Mouvement social no. 109 (1979): 15-34, and later in Musique et société, du second empire aux années vingt (Paris: Flammarion, 1985). However, to call Fauré a “pantheist” is also a liberal or perhaps personal interpretation: pantheism is a distinct belief system with its own precepts, not merely an individualized sense that all life is infused with divinity. For a complete theory of pantheism, see Michael P. Levine, Pantheism: A non-theistic concept of deity (London: Routledge, 1994).

13 See discussion on the versions of Fauré’s Requiem in Mutien-Omer Houziaux, A la recherche ‘des’ Requiem de Fauré ou l’authenticité musicale en questions, Société Liégeoise de Musicologie T. 15-16 (2000), 7-17. Houziaux does not agree that the originary concept was for only five movements; he believes
invited friends of his—not of the deceased—to hear it. He wrote to the lawyer and arts patron Paul Poujaud, “The Requiem will not begin tomorrow until 4:30. Ask our friends not to sit together so that it does not look like a PERFORMANCE!!! It must seem as though they are all there by chance.” By asking them not to give the appearance of attending a performance, Fauré implies that his friends will be doing just that. About six years after this and a handful of other early uses of the Requiem at the Madeleine, the Société Nationale de Musique gave a “premiere” of the “Libera Me.” Eager to describe the event as a serious, disinterred, and abstract performance, Nectoux mentioned only just enough details to invest the work with the aura of monumentality it would later attain. He recounts the concert: “In its final version for solo, choir and orchestra, (including three trombones) it was heard separately in a concert given under the auspices of the Société Nationale in the church of Saint Gervais on 28 January 1892, with Louis Ballard as soloist. In all probability, despite the claims made on the programme that this was a first performance, the Libera Me had already been heard at the Madeleine as the parts were

that it is proper to speak of the work’s composition in three stages (‘étapes’) and only two versions, both of which include all seven movements.

This action resonates with the protagonist of a short story by Balzac in which a nonbeliever finds himself often drawn to the liturgy at Saint Sulpice church for its extreme beauty. See Honoré de Balzac, La Messe de l’athée, ed. Marie-Bénédicte Diethelm (Paris: Éditions Manucius, 2013), was first published in the review Chronique de Paris on 3 January 1836.


By the time of this Requiem, there was already a strong tradition of decontextualized, or concerted, Requiems. See, for example the concert reception of Mozart’s Requiem in England, Rachel Cowgill, “‘Hence, Base Intruder, Hence’: Rejection and Assimilation in the Early English Reception of Mozart’s Requiem,” in Europe, Empire, and Spectacle in Nineteenth-Century British Music, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Julian Rushton (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 9-27. Other Requiems requiring large forces far beyond those of any church include Berlioz’s Messe des morts and Verdi’s Missa da Requiem. Neither of these composers considered their requiems as testaments to their personal faith. Verdi himself was vocally anticlerical and viewed his Requiem as part of Italian national heritage. See David Rosen, Verdi: Requiem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 1-2.
The Saint Gervais Concert, however, was no ordinary public performance. It was an attempt at collaboration between the SN and Charles Bordes’s fledgling project Les Chanteurs du Saint Gervais. This was an amateur choir made up of musically trained parishioners from the Église Saint-Gervais. The choir served Bordes’s needs as a music historian, as he was able to teach the 16th-century polyphonic repertory he prized. It also served a proselytizing role for both music and religion, training a new crop of singers in a religious repertory that would have increasing prominence as a style reference and source of inspiration for a generation of modernist composers. This concert in particular occupied an unusual liminal place between sacred and secular uses of art. The program was composed entirely of religious works, their performance framed a Catholic ceremony of adoration of the Eucharist, and it was held in a church. But the secular concert group, the SN, organized it as part of their normal series, and a host of unaffiliated composers and others filled the audience. Fauré’s work figured on the program with other religious pieces by César Franck, Théodore de Banville, and Ernest Chausson. The 1892 concert demonstrates the continued affiliation of Fauré and his Requiem with a circle of composers who would eventually be known, unlike Fauré, primarily for their devout religious compositions.

17 Nectoux, A Musical Life, 117.
19 Ellis, Interpreting the Musical Past, 105-7.
21 Jann Pasler has studied this concert program, see Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 616-17.
22 For a facsimile of the program, see Ibid., 618.
23 The history of d’Indy’s religious rhetoric, especially as it influenced the relationship between politics and aesthetics, has been extensive studied. See Jane Fulcher, French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), Stephen Huebner, French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Nationalism, Wagnerism, and Style (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
Later, on the eve of the work’s publication, two major performances outside of church show that the *Requiem*’s significance had moved far beyond church music into the realm of abstract art music. First, the work was programmed as part of the concerts of French music during the World Exposition of 1900, an event fashioned to project an image of a culturally modern and authoritative France.\(^2^4\) Finally, the grand première of the full orchestral version in Brussels in the fall of 1900 marked the affirmation of the *Requiem* as a concert piece.\(^2^5\) On top of all this, Fauré’s constant preference for women interpreters of the ‘Pie Jesu’ also demonstrates the distance between the piece and its church context, since at church he was obliged to use a boy soprano.\(^2^6\)

Hamelle finally published the orchestral score and parts for the *Requiem* in 1901, marking the conclusion to over a decade of negotiations and contracts. Fauré first approached Hamelle with the work in 1890 after he had used it at the Madeleine a number of times. But the publishing firm told him that they would delay production of

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\(^2^4\) The *Requiem* premiered in its version for symphony orchestra in Paris at the Trocadéro on 12 July 1900 under the direction of Paul Taffanel. Nectoux, *Correspondance*, 241n.1. Jane Fulcher has examined the complex nationalist politics that were involved in programming and promoting the concerts for the World Exposition in Paris, 1900. See French Cultural Politics & Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 38-9. It is possible, as Sylvia Kahan has argued, that Fauré did think a career more focused on religious music was an option for him, as evidenced by his work on the incidental music for *La Passion*, a play by Edmond Haraucourt about Jesus’ death. See “Fauré’s Prelude to *La Passion* (1890): A Re-Examination of a Forgotten Score,” in Regarding Fauré, 239-72, esp. at 243.

\(^2^5\) On that occasion, the *Requiem* appeared on a concert program aimed toward music-lovers and shooting for sensational success, since it included such major works as Puccini’s *La Bohème* and Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*. See Houziaux, 141-4.

\(^2^6\) Fauré’s letters attest to the early preference for a female soprano; see for example letter 128 to Eugène Ysaïe, in which Fauré recommends that he seek out Mlle Torrès for an upcoming concert, Nectoux, *Correspondance*, 241. Nectoux himself has suggested Fauré’s preference for women singers of the *Pie Jesu*, writing “A desire for authenticity leads people to give this difficult solo to a young boy, but we should bear in mind that this was the only option available to the composer since the clergy of the Madeleine, in traditional fashion, excluded any female presence from the choir. It seems, on the other hand, that in all the concert performances given during his lifetime, Fauré entrusted the Pie Jesu to a female soprano; when, that is, he could escape the jurisdiction of the Madeleine clergy. It is therefore an act of misplaced authenticity to give this solo to a boy treble.” Nectoux, A Musical Life, 122.
the commercial parts until Fauré had expanded the orchestration, making it suitable for a more conventional musical ensemble. Fauré’s initial aesthetic motivations for writing the piece with the unusual scoring for a string ensemble with two viola parts and no violin, accompanied by a few horns without a full wind section, may never be clear. Yet we know that he did not rush to complete the conventional orchestration, waiting many years after his initial contract with Hamelle to do so. Moreover, Nectoux and Houziaux have hypothesized that Fauré did not even finish the orchestration himself but rather contracted a student of his. The final version still confounds notions of balanced ensemble scoring. Unfortunately we do not yet have many details surrounding the terms and conditions of the contract, or much evidence as to what Fauré thought of the editorial process for this work. However, his unhurried approach to publishing seems significant, especially since the final outcome was a symphonic version that calls for more instruments and more soloists than any church would have invested for any one Mass that was not a holiday. The budgetary records for the Madeleine in particular, a notably affluent parish, show payments for only one soloist every two months or so, usually for the feasts of Easter, Pentecost, All Saint’s Day, and Christmas.

The publication of the Requiem has been a sticky question in Fauré scholarship because the process necessitated so many changes to the score. Mutien-Omer Houziaux attempted to thoroughly document the stages of the Requiem’s composition. However,

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27 Houziaux gives the date of the first contract with Hamelle as 16 September 1890, notes a letter from the composer to his editor from August 1898 specifying that the parts should be complete soon, and marks the date of the new contract as 12 September 1899, Houziaux 11-12.
28 Nectoux notes that the flutes and clarinets play for “precisely twelve bars.” A Musical Life, 118.
29 At the present moment, Éditions Leduc, which now owns the repertory previously published by Éditions Hamelle and Heugel, holds proprietary rights over the extant contracts and correspondence between Fauré and his publisher. The historian there has declined to share the contracts even for the sake of research.
30 See, for example, in carton 2E for the Église de la Madeleine at the Archives de l’Archevêché de Paris, “Journal des recettes et dépenses, 1886-1894.”
without access to key contracts and correspondence owned by the publisher, he was unable to demonstrate the motivation for changes in instrumentation. With encyclopedic knowledge of Fauré’s works, Nectoux, had more insight into instrumentation preferences. He inferred that it was not the particular cadre of the Madeleine church building to which the composer remained faithful in the process of editing, expanding, and securing performances of his Mass but rather his ideal sound. He made, for example, special arrangements to have extra violas on hand at both the symphonic première in Brussels and at the Universal Exposition performance. Although the process of publication remains shrouded in mystery, it is clear that Fauré not only eagerly sought public, secular recognition for his composition, but also that he lacked concern for the specific considerations normally given to church music.\(^\text{31}\)

Once the *Requiem* had transitioned from church music to concert piece, Fauré more or less abandoned all concern for the liturgical, pragmatic, and dogmatic concerns of the Church. He did compose one more sacred motet, a “Tantum Ergo” (1904) for the wedding of Elisabeth de Greffulhe’s daughter held at the Madeleine.\(^\text{32}\) In the short, strophic motet, Fauré makes use of parsimonious voice leading in the accompaniment part to create mild chromatic tension in the second half of each verse before neatly closing the phrase with an imperfect cadence whose resolution is the beginning of the next verse. Although it is listed as a work for soloist and choir, the printed edition indicates only a “unison ad libitum” choir part based on the written keyboard part; it is only half-


finished. Without any details that could distinguish this piece from the 15 other religious motets Fauré composed, the piece betrays its origin as a routine commission offered by a wealthy society friend. But the friends, members of the Greffulhe family, represent a significant aesthetic connection between this sacred motet for a Catholic Mass and Fauré’s own, more personal approach to the musical representation of it. The Greffulhes were a motor behind many Symbolist productions. They valued art with a spiritual dimension, not simply beautiful in itself. The conditions that brought forth Fauré’s final Catholic devotional work tie it to an aesthetic tradition outside of the conservative orthodoxy. The music’s conventional, not entirely new or personal style suggests all the more that by 1904, Fauré had no personal feelings left toward the Church and its liturgical strictures.

Fauré never turned again to religious texts, forms, or occasions in his composition after the Requiem. He composed the bulk of his important instrumental works once he was employed at the Conservatory, and while there he gained more recognition and more regular opportunities for his works to be performed. After leaving the Madeleine he no longer sought to develop a sacred musical language. At the same time, the flirtation with religious imagery that Fauré pursued in his composition of La chanson d’Ève reveals a distinctly un-Christian worldview. Fauré composed minimally for the organ and for the

35 The somewhat paradoxical relationship between the aristocracy of Third Republic France, the Catholic Church, and independent spirituality is a tricky issue. Particularly suggestive is the case of Prince Edmond de Polignac, who clung to a highly idealized, aesthetic Catholicism, which he expressed in a handful of pseudo-religious compositions. See Sylvia Kahan, Music’s Modern Muse (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 64-98, especially at 70-1.
36 See Caballero, 198. Katherine Bergeron has also discussed the imagery in La Chanson d’Ève, contending that the composer chose the poems for the narrative they told about the origin of song. See Voice Lessons: French Mélodie in the Belle Époque (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 16-17.
liturgy. He did not follow Saint-Saëns’s lead in imagining ways to use the organ other than for ritual improvisation.\(^{37}\) Even today, musicians at the Madeleine lament that he left such little music for the cult. They jest that since the tradition of improvisation is his only legacy, the current organist, François-Henri Houbart represents the full extent of the existing church music by Fauré.\(^{38}\) While the lack of compositions in itself does not indicate a lack of desire or motivation to compose, an additional lack of commentary on religious music in his letters supports the intuition that Fauré had little interest in this type of expression.

1887 was a big year for Fauré. If his interest in religion was waning, it is because he invested himself elsewhere. The salon milieu had long been a critical outlet for Fauré, providing much-needed encouragement for his talents that were often taken for granted at the Madeleine. It also brought supplemental income through appearances and commissions.\(^{39}\) In 1887, one of Fauré’s most important salon patrons, the Countess Elisabeth Greffulhe, introduced the composer to Count Robert de Montesquiou, infamous poet and tastemaker.\(^{40}\) The two sparked each other’s imaginations instantly. De Montesquiou tutored Fauré in the contemporary avant-garde, providing him with a

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\(^{38}\) Private interview with M. François-Henri Houbart, organist at the Église de la Madeleine, on 8 September 2013.

\(^{39}\) Nectoux recounts Fauré’s “wretched” living conditions that continued into 1892, as evidenced by Fauré’s letter to Marcel Girette, at the Conservatory, in which he described why the job of Inspector of the regional Conservatories was important to him. See *A Musical Life*, 224-5.

literary syllabus of the Symbolist movement. The arrangement fueled collaboration. The *Pavane* op. 50 began as both salon music, perhaps for dancing (it would eventually give life to a masked ball held by the Greffulhes and feature in the *Ballets Russes*’s repertoire as the music for the choreography called *Las Meninas*), and a channel for Fauré to set de Montesquiou’s verse. Behind the work lurked de Montesquiou’s ambition to be recognized as a major poet and lyricist. A painting also came of their friendship: de Montesquiou’s friend Jacques-Emile Blanche fashioned a debonair portrait of Fauré, anchoring the composer’s membership in the aristocratic berceau of early modernism. De Montesquiou also used his social network to introduce Marcel Proust to Fauré’s music. Proust, whose attention to art’s influence on the senses and its power to give life meaning, was fascinated by music. No doubt some of his description of the composer Vinteuil in his *A la recherche du temps perdu* match Fauré’s personality, and the sonata bears comparison with Fauré’s approach as well. And Proust could hardly have resisted admiring Fauré, who described the goal of his art as “to convey human feeling in, if possible, surpa-human accents.”

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43 De Montesquiou courted many composers with the aim of having his words set to music. He even reached out to Camille Saint-Saëns with this intention. See letters of 13 and 26 April 1913 between de Montesquiou and Saint-Saëns in Médiathèque de Dieppe, Dossier de Montesquiou.
44 Jullian describes de Montesquiou’s relationship with Blanche and their eventual falling out, *Robert de Montesquiou*, 117-120.
45 Nectoux downplays the significance of this connection by suggesting that Proust and de Montesquiou both characterized Fauré’s music in highly conventionalized decadent language. *Gabriel Fauré: His Life Through Letters* (London: Marion Boyars, 1984), 208n.3.
Fauré was no pawn of the upper class, however. He used his connection with de Montesquiou to his own ends, finding inspiration in the new poems he sent. In particular, the works of Paul Verlaine caught his fancy, and Fauré made his first setting of a Verlaine poem, “Clair de lune (menuet)” in 1887. Many more settings of Verlaine would follow—“Spleen” (1888), *Cinq Mélodies de Venise* (1891), *La Bonne chanson* (1894), and “Prison” (1894). Fauré would also try his hand at musique de scène for Maeterlinck’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and two song cycles of verse by the Belgian Symbolist Charles Van Lerberghe.

Fauré had become jaded by his experiences working as a lay member of the church hierarchy, but he still sought, through his music, to break through the material world in search of “supra-human accents.” This search was a popular one in fin-de-siècle France. Verlaine in particular used his poetry as an intermediary between human feelings and the beyond. Influenced by a handful of literary peers after reaching a complete material fallout, Verlaine converted to Catholicism and used Catholic imagery freely to express his own very human suffering in the 1881 collection *Sagesse*. This collection has not been canonized to the same degree as Verlaine’s other works, but it was

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48 Fauré began composing the Requiem in 1887, as Nectoux has argued and Houziaux has affirmed. However, the earliest extant sketch for the requiem is for the Baritone solo “Libera me,” contained in a sketchbook from 1877. See Orledge, *Fauré*, 204-5.

49 A Conference and subsequent book publication have addressed Verlaine’s spiritual side, pointing out that even before his conversion, the poet was interested in spirituality, which infuses all his works. See *Spiritualité Verlainienne, Actes du colloque international de Metz*, ed. Jacques Dufetel (Paris: Klincksieck, 1997).

50 Rimbaud, the most famous and poetically gifted of the numerous young men who had affairs with Verlaine, may have sparked the older poet’s interest in religion after Rimbaud famously pulled a pistol on him in a moment of jealous desperation. See for example the discussion of Verlaine’s evolving poetic language toward Christian themes in Jean-Nicholas Illouz, *Le Symbolisme* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2004), 25. Lawrence Porter has also aligned Verlaine’s biography with his stylistic choices; see *The Crisis of French Symbolism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 82-3.
significant in gaining critical attention and visibility for his other poems.\textsuperscript{51} When

Romances sans paroles was first published in 1874, it passed virtually unmentioned through the literary scene.\textsuperscript{52} A decade later, though, after Verlaine had become more famous, this and other volumes were re-issued.\textsuperscript{53} By the time Fauré had encountered him, Verlaine was already a huge star, venerated après-coup as a decadent and a Symbolist.\textsuperscript{54} His early work in particular earned praise for its sincerity and intense emotions; writer Léon-Paul Fargue, who was closely associated with Les Apaches, remembered Verlaine’s writing as “pathétique, but also simple and clear like the choir of children fading away from school in the evening,” a “text of snow and tears.”\textsuperscript{55} A renewed interest in idealist philosophy influenced critical discourse in art of all kinds—poetry, theater, literature, and music.

During the spiritually turbulent time of the turn of the century in Paris, religious symbolism had come to play a larger role in poetic language than it had in the previous decades of romanticism. New attitudes about Catholicism came from many directions,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[52] Verlaine was already in prison in the Belgian city of Mons when it reached the press. See Favre, preface to \textit{Romances sans paroles}, in Verlaine, \textit{Œuvres complètes}, 76.
\item[53] In addition, literary scholars have discerned significant stylistic connections between \textit{Romances sans paroles} and \textit{Sagesse}. See, for example, J.-S. Chaussivert, “Fête et jeu verlainei,” in \textit{La Petite musique de Verlaine. “Romances sans paroles, Sagesse”} (Paris, Sedes, 1982).
\item[55] Léon-Paul Fargue, who knew Verlaine near the end of the poet’s life, praised the emotions of Verlaine’s writing: “This pathétique text, but just as simple and clear as the choir of children fading away from school in the evening, this text of snow and tears, where not a single word ventures into ink before having known blood, is so overwhelming for me that I hear my memory open wide, like a door opening into the night, and I see Verlaine enter into my twentieth year, even though he was living through exactly all the mud, clear skies, stumbling blocks, and hopes that he recounts.” “Ce texte pathétique, mais aussi simple et clair que le chœur des enfants qui s’évapore de l’école du soir, ce texte de neige et de larmes, où pas un mot ne se risqué dans l’encre avant d’avoir connu le sang, est si bouleversant pour moi que j’entends mon souvenir s’ouvrir tout grand, comme une porte que donne sur la nuit, et je vois entrer Verlaine dans mes vingt ans, alors qu’il vivait précisément toutes les boues, les éclaircies, les rechutes et les espérances qu’il raconte.” “Verlaine,” in \textit{Portraits de famille} (Cognac: Fata Morgana, 1987), 38.
\end{footnotes}
not least of which the continued public debate about the religion’s place in French culture.\textsuperscript{56} After nearly a century of aesthetic and intellectual skepticism, a new wave of thinkers turned to Catholicism for its mystical power, pillaging the religious symbols to re-encode them for modern life.\textsuperscript{57} Among these thinkers were many associated with the Decadence.\textsuperscript{58} The style is characterized by ornate language, exoticism, disruption, paradox, and self-referentiality, using art as a subject for art. Romanticism may have always had a spiritual element, but decadent artists sought out the most esoteric elements of Catholicism, a religion replete with morbid imagery and elaborate rituals.\textsuperscript{59} Paul Verlaine can be viewed as one of the earliest exemplars of decadence; the brutal disjunction between his images of erotic homosexuality and pious objects of devotion has

\textsuperscript{56} Stephen Schloesser, who has written extensively on the resonances between politics, culture, and society of the religious climate in turn-of-the-century France, has suggested that anxieties about experience, realism, and determinism led to serious theological questions within the Church that rippled outward. “Setting the Roman Catholic Modernist Crisis as a particular subplot within this larger intellectual and cultural drama—a drama catalyzed by widespread anxieties about experience, realism, and determinism—puts the formerly marginal and particular ecclesiastical crisis firmly in the center of the most pressing issues of its day. Put simple: Roman Catholic concerns were catholic concerns—concerns shared universally with the major intellectual currents of that era. Moreover, they are perennial concerns, recurrent throughout the centuries, inflected in a particularly ‘modernist’ language around the year 1900.” “A Propædeutic to this Collection,” in \textit{The Reception of Pragmatism in France & The Rise of Roman Catholic Modernism, 1890-1914}, ed. David Schultenover (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 25.

\textsuperscript{57} There were so many authors converting to Catholicism, or experimenting with its forms, that the period has been called the “reactionary revolution.” Fauré, if anything, goes in the opposite direction of what literary critic Richard Griffiths asserts as “primarily a religious movement,” \textit{The Reactionary Revolution: The Catholic Revival in French Literature 1870-1914} (London: Constable, 1966), 98. But his interest in the Catholic form of the liturgy, if not its ceremonial or dogmatic nature, still seems related to another definition of the movement, “a reaction against positivism, materialism and naturalism… [and] the question of an \textit{au-delà} which, in different manners, it was poetry’s duty to seek out and portray, […] culminating in certain cases in a religious involvement. Religious symbolism became one particularly evocative, if over-stylized, form of poetic symbolism.” Ibid., 3. Additionally, recent historians of modernism have considered that the origin of modernist style is precisely in the tension between reason and faith, or the idealist reaction to positivist science. “Modernists consciously sought to restore a sense of higher purpose, transcendence and \textit{Dauber} to a spiritually starved modern humanity condemned by ‘progress’ to live in a permanent state of existential exile.” Roger Griffin, preface to Ben Hutchinson, \textit{Modernism and Style} (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), xi.

\textsuperscript{58} For the most probing recent work on decadence and its relationship to the Catholic religion, see Ellis Hanson, \textit{Catholic Decadence} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 7-9.
sometimes struck critics as a mark of insincerity.\textsuperscript{60} Literary historian Ellis Hanson, however, reads the paradox as illustrative of a new way of thinking, since, “like most decadents, [Verlaine] embraced the Church rather suddenly in a moment of emotional desperation, and his faith was mystical rather than philosophical or doctrinal.”\textsuperscript{61} The abrupt conversion to Catholicism, rather than a studied and reasoned one, leaves space for the creative liberties that Verlaine and other decadent poets took with even the most sacred Catholic images.

Fauré turned to Verlaine’s early decadent poems precisely when he began composing the \textit{Requiem}, a work often viewed with skepticism by church officials, and which signaled the end of the composer’s conventional reverence toward religion and its symbols. Verlaine is today considered representative of the Symbolist movement, and he was cited as an exemplar of the style during his own time, in Jean Moréas’ “Manifaste du symbolisme” of 1886.\textsuperscript{62} Decadence was a more explicit cousin of Symbolism, transitioning between the blind faith of earlier artists and the rejection of all faith, including faith in language’s ability to communicate meaning, most strongly expressed by Mallarmé.\textsuperscript{63} For my purposes the distinction is not critical, especially since Fauré came to this poetry for a short time only and after the term Symbolism had become common currency. What is critical is that Fauré turned to Verlaine’s poetry at the precise

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 64.
\item Although it is commonplace to note Mallarmé’s distrust in language as a communicative system, Heather Williams has demonstrated that Mallarmé’s very use of language in his poetry demonstrates the “context-bound” nature of words and their meanings. “Mallarmé and the Language of Ideas,” \textit{Nineteenth-Century French Studies} 29, no. 3/4 (2001): 302-17.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
moment when Verlaine was coming into vogue as an exemplar of a new spiritual
aesthetic and Fauré was experiencing a quiet decline in faith. But if neither were
orthodox or bore the approval of Church authority, both sought to invoke spirituality or
the beyond in their art. As a thought experiment in the aesthetic consequences of
intellectual biography, comparing musical devices and structures in Fauré’s Verlaine
mélodies and certain parts of the Requiem is historically and aesthetically relevant,
despite the distance separating the two genres In fact, however, the large-scale religious
work and the salon miniatures will be seen to stand on common ground.64

The conditions of Fauré’s decision to compose, arrange performances, and
publish his Requiem point to the work’s significance beyond the liturgy. Recent
scholarship on literature and the “crisis” of Symbolism has argued that the new uses of
language represent a “loss of faith” in the ability of language to convey specific
meaning.65 Cultural theorists have similarly argued for a view of the fin-de-siècle period
in France as one characterized by a hierarchical instability and a general malaise in the
thought systems that structured society.66 It is time to critically question the church music
of their time. To do so we must do the uncomfortable work of putting it in dialogue with
secular art. Fauré’s Requiem, composed at the height of the French decadence, is
emblematic of the thoroughly intermingled spirit of his modernist contemporaries. The

64 It has been noted, after all, that the Requiem is more similar to a collection of funeral motets—analogous
to a song cycle—than to a Mass in the traditional style. Oliver, op. cit.
65 Porter, op. cit. See, for a reference to the wider cultural significance of this literary movement, Porter’s
argument in the Introduction: “I argue that the poetry of the first third of the nineteenth century in France
was a form of Neoclassicism that revived and refined traditional genres; that the middle third of the century
was the true Romantic period, when the inherited codes and contexts of poetry were called into question;
and that the overlapping latter half of the century was shaped by the crisis that erupted when the Symbolists
questioned the linguistic vehicle of poetry and the very act of communication. A loss of faith in the ability
of language to signify threatened the existence of poetry in the minds of the people who were creating it”
(ix-x).
66 See in particular Michel Foucault, The Order of Things, and Julia Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic
Language.
intermingling comes from a corrosion of unquestioning faith within the religious sphere and at the same time the inflection of religious notions—transformation, redemption, or humility—into secular art by artists from outside the cult. Fauré’s Requiem staged its own revolution in the musical language of liturgy. In it, Fauré refused to respond to the demands both from parishioners for music in the dramatic style of the Opéra and from the clergy for the conservative plainchant demanded by the series of reactionary popes from the 1890s through the turn of the century. Fauré’s ingenuity in the work is revealed by the fact that his renouncement of Catholic doctrine passed nearly unperceived. To be sure, some commentators called attention to the inappropriate mood and to some of the inconsistencies between its text and the ones officially sanctioned by the Pope. But in the end, Fauré quietly got away with this symbolic burial of his faith. Perhaps the fact that the work gained fame through its performance at the World’s Exposition 1900 and its publication in 1901, as mentioned above, should have pointed out long ago the fundamental a-religiosity of its musical form and meaning. Then again, the definition of a religious musical language has never come easily to either church leaders or composers. It is not the listeners’ fault that in hearing Fauré’s Requiem, in either church or concert hall, they have unwittingly fallen prey to Fauré’s charm. By enriching the picture of Fauré’s working habits and aesthetic values in the late 1880s and 1890s, this work will emerge more clearly as anathema to an orthodox Catholic setting,

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67 Since Schopenhauer, art was viewed as redemptive, aesthetic experience as metaphysical. “Schopenhauer […] inaugurate[d] the privileging of the aesthetic that is characteristic of modernism, the doctrine that Nietzsche will encapsulate in his statement that ‘only as an aesthetic phenomenon is existence and the world eternally justified.’” Hutchinson, Modernism and Style, 52

68 Katherine Ellis, The Politics of Plainchant in fin-de-siècle France (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013).

69 Although the Medieval period saw many challenges to novel and advanced musical techniques being used in church, the most famous controversy over the appropriate musical language for Catholic liturgical use is, of course, the Counter-Reformation rejection of polyphonic mass settings. On this, see Edith Weber, Le Concile de Trente et la musique (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1982).
particularly because of technical similarities with the lyric style Fauré was developing
during the period when he composed it.

_Fauré and Symbolism_

Fauré’s new interest in Paul Verlaine’s poetry is significant not only because it
means that Fauré had developed a taste for a more avant-garde, critical poetic movement,
but also because it accompanied—likely even instigated—a shift towards a new maturity
in his vocal pieces. Whereas Fauré’s first songs use repetitive forms such as strophic
(AAA), bar form (AAB), and ternary form (ABA), already “Clair de lune” has an
original organizational structure. Indeed, the straightforward repetition of regular
sections, in addition to the smaller-scale organization through regular phrases contributed
to a certain redolence of salon convention in Fauré’s earlier songs. In their lyrics, these
favored tropes of spring and young love, and although nascent modal mixture technique
had appeared—now famously in “Lydia”—the mark of Fauré’s distinct elegance is but a
faint trace on his early songs “Mai” (1862), “L’aurore” (1870), and “Après un rêve”
(1877). Vladimir Jankélévitch cherished the innovation of “Clair de lune,” suggesting
that on the day Fauré wrote it, “something new entered into music.”

Fauré’s first two settings of Verlaine poems share a collage-style sectional
approach to their composition, in addition to an incessant piano texture that evokes the
poem’s atmosphere by creating a sonic landscape inspired by the musical potential of

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70 “The idea of the through-composed song, like Chant d’automne and La Rançon, does not seem to have
interested Fauré greatly in his first period and is only followed up in the second volume in Toujours (op.
21/2). Robert Orledge, Gabriel Fauré (London: Eulenberg Books, 1979), 52-3. For a general stylistic
analysis of the songs of Fauré’s so-called first period, 1870-85, see ibid., 50-55.
71 “On peut bien le dire maintenant : le jour heureux de Clair de lune, ‘quelque chose de nouveau est entré
dans la musique’.” Vladimir Jankélévitch, Gabriel Fauré et ses mélodies (Paris: Plon, 1938), 98.
each poem’s setting. Carolyn Abbate has probed the idea of sonic landscape with respect
to musical symbolism in Claude Debussy’s music. She takes special note of the sonic
landscape of Verlaine’s poem “Mandoline” and questions how imagined sound relates to
real sound.72 Marie-Noëlle Masson and François Mouret, a literary critic and
musicologist, have mapped the sectional construction of Fauré’s “Clair de lune” through
a side-by-side structural analysis of Verlaine’s poem and Fauré’s mélodie.73 They observe
that the piano part, whose melody dominates the vocal line, bears the structure of a
minuet with two trios, which, occurs in non-coincidence with the poetic text.74 The
melodic and harmonic material is further grouped into smaller cells whose recurrences
only appear within the minuet or trio sections, respectively. Louis Aguettant describes
this effect poetically: “while the madrigal unfolds its melancholy grace, the slow gestures
of a minuet, beneath the tall trees bathed in blue ash, the disabused and charming couples
mingle, coming and going as in a dream.”75 Fauré’s setting of the poem responds to the
sentiment, all the while introducing an unexpected combination of musical and metric
forms.

Similar in construction to “Clair de lune,” “Spleen” also has a piano part whose
internal repetitions do not bear a strict relationship to the structure or words of the poem,

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and 87.
73 See Marie-Noëlle Masson and François Mouret, “Verlaine/Fauré, Clair de lune: Les interactions du texte
et de la musique dans la segmentation de l’œuvre vocale ou la problématique du sens,” Musurgia 1, no. 1
74 Ibid., 26.
75 “Tandis que le madrigal effeuille sa grâce mélancolique, les gestes lents d’un menuet, sous les hauts
arbres baignés de cendre bleue, mêlent les couples charmants et désabusés qui vont et viennent comme en
“Il pleure dans mon cœur.” The piano part in this latter song comprises three distinct textures, each of which is primarily defined by its rhythm. Although these three textures provide structural framing for the song and certainly contribute metonymic representations of the doubly significant falling water in Verlaine’s poem (both rain in the city and tears in the poet’s heart), the textures however do not interact with the poetic images of the text in a line-by-line manner. The piano’s textural sections do not correspond with the poem’s strophic breaks, and the melodic pattern of the voice line is through-composed but also features motivic reminiscences. For example, when stanza three begins in m. 26 b.3 with the words “Il pleure sans raison dans mon cœur…” the melodic profile strongly recalls that of the opening line in m. 4 b.3 “Il pleure dans mon cœur”. The two are compared in Example 1.

At one moment in the mélodie, the repetitions in the vocal line and piano accompaniment do correspond, just as they do in one place only in “Clair de lune (menuet)”.

In “Spleen,” this repetition begins in m. 31, where both the piano and voice return to musical events from m. 8. (Note however that although in m. 31 the texture makes its first appearance since the beginning of the piece, the repeat here does not constitute a full

76 Graham Johnson has noted that Fauré erroneously chose the title for this poem, which belongs to a different verse by Verlaine. See Gabriel Fauré: The Songs and their Poets (London: Ashgate, 2009): 200.
77 See Masson and Mouret, “Verlaine/Fauré” p. 26 for a paradigmatic analysis of “Clair de lune” that demonstrates the unique moment of coincidence between melody and rhythm.
repeat of the beginning, since the first seven measures do not return. Mm. 8-14 does not repeat in a rondo-like way, since the repetition does not serve the same function as its original appearance.) The piano features dominant and applied dominant sonorities that lead to different resolutions. In the first instance, the dominant of the dominant, E Major, resolves without preparation to the tonic key, d minor, in m.15, and in the repeat, the same chord of E Major, articulated in exactly the same way until the final two notes in the right hand of the piano part, moves instead to the dominant, A Major, in first inversion in m. 38. The melody features slight changes in its rhythm because of the setting of different numbers of syllables, but it maintains the profile that leads it to the highest note in the vocal line, e’.

Paul Verlaine, “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” Romances sans paroles, 1874

| Il pleure dans mon cœur        | In my heart it is crying                  |
| Comme il pleut sur la ville ; | As it is raining in the city              |
| Quelle est cette languueur    | What is this langorous sighing            |
| Qui pénètre mon cœur ?        | That into my heart is prying?             |
| Ô bruit doux de la pluie      | Oh sweet noise of the rain                |
| Par terre et sur les toits !  | On the ground and on the roofs!           |
| Pour un cœur qui s'ennuie,     | For a heart of emotion drained,           |
| Ô le chant de la pluie !      | Oh the song of the rain!                  |
| Il pleure sans raison         | It rains for no reason                    |
| Dans ce cœur qui s'écœur.     | In this heart that loses heart.           |
| Quoi ! nulle trahison ?...     | What! No treason?                         |
| Ce deuil est sans raison.     | This loss has no reason.                  |
| C'est bien la pire peine      | It is definitely the worst fate           |
| De ne savoir pourquoi        | To not know why                           |
| Sans amour et sans haine      | Without love and without hate             |
| Mon cœur a tant de peine !    | My heart feels pain so great!             |

By bringing about this double repetition in this already monotonous setting of a monothematic poem, Fauré was pointing out the central problem for the poetic speaker.

In the poem, the persona describes his emotional state, sadness, in comparison to an
environmental condition, rain. And yet in the first stanza, the poet asks himself—perhaps anticipating the reader’s question—what might be the cause of his sadness. By recalling the motifs (pianistic and vocal) that musically conveyed this question at the moment of the question’s answer, Fauré demonstrates the relatedness, even to the point of identity, of the two. Asking himself why he is sad is almost the same as the poet telling us that he has no reason for being sad. Additionally, the differing dynamic markings in mm. 11 and 34, analogous measures in the repetition, point out the perfunctory nature of the poet’s second question, which is already posed in the negative and with a specific referent. In the first question, the phrasing is open and ambiguous; the poetic persona has not yet given away the lack of rationale for his emotion. In the second question, which not only is formed in the negative but also specifically names the most common reason for heartache—betrayal—the poetic persona has amplified his rhetoric. Fauré’s dynamic change from \( mf \) to \( f \) at the moment of interrogative articulation—the jump to the higher register reflects the speech pattern of intoned questions—obviously asks the singer to convey an increase in emotional conviction.

The comparison with rain is a doubly significant one: while the conjugated verb forms of crying and raining have a similar sound in French (\( pleure \) and \( pleut \)), in the poem they also have similar causes: the unknown. Rain comes of course from specific atmospheric conditions, but as far as an average city dweller is concerned, the rain comes and goes without a plan, signifying nothing. Through analogy the poetic persona implies that sadness as an emotional state comes and goes without reason; through its connections with the heavens, climate imagery easily becomes symbolic for metaphysical
ideas such as happiness or hope. When Fauré set the poem to music, he further solidified the connection by using repeated musical motifs.

These details about a text that is not at all religious demonstrate Fauré’s thoroughgoing interest in the structure and images of Verlaine’s Symbolist poetry. They also serve as a baseline of musical techniques that Fauré was developing at the time he composed the earliest movements of the *Requiem*: “Introït et Kyrie,” “Sanctus,” “Pie Jesu,” “Agnus Dei,” and “In Paradisum.” Comparative musical analysis will show the association between this religious work and the religiously troubled Symbolist movement. Musical resonances between Fauré’s Symbolist songs and his liturgically flawed Mass that have gone unnoticed will contextualize the latter, making plain the fact that its very composition was Fauré’s subtle renouncement of the history and doctrine

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78 According to literary scholar Anne Holmes, Verlaine “moved poetry away from its identification with an individual voice and recorded mood and atmosphere through the lens of an anonymous subject.” As he widened his lens, the impersonal became the universal, all of humanity. See “Verlaine’s Creation of ‘Suspens’ in *Romances sans paroles*,” *The Modern Language Review* 104, no. 2 (2009), 390.

79 Jankélévitch remarked upon the shifting textures, noting their rhythmic natures, and he was especially interested in the possibility that they interacted with the text, in particular that two of the textures seem to correspond to the tears and the rain, respectively. *Fauré et l’inexprimable*, 103.

80 Louis Aguettant, a critic who interviewed Fauré multiple times, reflected that his initial engagement with Verlaine’s poetry marked the beginning of a new style. “His encounter with Verlaine, who was more akin to his soul than romantic or Parnassian poets, was a decisive stage in the voyage to self-knowledge. It inspired the immortal mélodies that opened French music onto a new domain…Which period resembles an apogee more than that which begins with the 2nd Quartet and the Requiem, and is exemplified by *La Bonne chanson, Clair de lune, Parfum impérissable*, and those magnificent poems for piano: *Thème et variations*, the 5th *Barcarolle*, and the 6th and 7th *Nocturnes*?” “Sa rencontre avec Verlaine, plus fraternel à son âme que les poètes romantiques ou parnassiens fut une étape décisive dans ce voyage à la recherche de lui-même. Elle lui inspira les immortelles mélodies qui ouvrirent à la musique française un domaine nouveau. Et voici l’ère de la grande maîtrise. Quelle période ressemble plus à une apogée que celle qui débute par le 2e *Quatuor* et le *Requiem*, et s’illustre de *La Bonne chansons*, du *Clair de lune*, du *Parfum impérissable* et de ces magnifiques poèmes pour piano: *Thème et variations*, la 5e *Barcarolle*, les 6e et 7e *Nocturnes* ?” Louis Aguettant, “Sur la mort de Gabriel Fauré,” in *Les Amitiés littéraires*, 93.

81 Houziaux lists these five movements as the ones that were more or less completed, in limited orchestration, by the time of the earliest performances of the *Requiem* at the Madeleine church; his chronology owes much to Nectoux’s, printed in the “préface” to his 1994 edition of the work’s 1893 version. See Houziaux, “A la recherche,” 10-13 and Nectoux, “Préface” in Gabriel Fauré, *Requiem, Op. 48 pour solo, chœur et orchestre de chambre*, version 1893, *éditée par Jean-Michel Nectoux et Roger Delage* (Paris: Musica Gallica, J. Hamelle & Cie. Éditeurs, 1994).
that formed the basis of his formal musical education and his first four decades of employment.

To be sure, the texts of the *Missa pro defunctis* do not function anything like the poetry of Paul Verlaine or any other nineteenth-century poet whose works could be considered symbolist. Yet before delving into the text’s particular characteristics, let us reflect upon Fauré’s choice of the Requiem Mass during his Verlaine period. Fauré’s son Philippe once suggested that Fauré composed the Requiem for the intention of his deceased parents; his father, Honoré-Toussaint Fauré died on 25 July 1885, and his mother, Hélène Fauré died on 31 December 1887; arguing that “the idea of death was inside” the composer. Due to the inaccuracies in Fauré-Fremiet’s dating, in addition to Fauré’s lack of any comment in support of the view, the idea that the *Requiem* has any particular dedicatee has been abandoned. It remains, then, to hypothesize why Fauré might have chosen to set the text. I propose to see this veritable religious text as addressing the qualities of fading, withering, and expiring that Verlaine explored in his poems. Consider this classic description of Verlaine’s aesthetic by literary critic Jean-Pierre Richard: “It is essentially towards those objects deprived of an interior radiance that turns Verlaine’s predilection: they must possess a fairly weak power, such that the sensation that grabs the spirit’s attention is only that of an indication of an existence ready to expire, perhaps already dead at the moment when the self receives the

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82 “Depuis longtemps, sans doute, la suprême prière le hante, comme elle a hanté Mozart et Berlioz. Voici que l’idée de la mort est en lui. Son père n’est plus, sa mère touche aux limites de la vie. Entre deux deuils, en 1886, Gabriel Fauré écrit sa messe de Requiem. Sans doute, le *luceat eis* est tout naturellement murmuré en faveur de ceux qui l’ont bercé, et qu’à son tour, il voudrait pouvoir bercer dans l’au-delà mystérieux.” “For a long time, undoubtedly, the supreme prayer haunted him, like it haunted Mozart and Berlioz. Thus the idea of death was in him. His father lives no longer, his mother is reaching the end of her life. Between two periods of mourning, in 1886, Gabriel Fauré writes his Requiem Mass. Without doubt, the *luceat eis* is naturally murmured for those who cradled him, and whom, at his turn, he would like to cradle in the mysterious beyond.” Fauré-Fremiet, 83.
impression of it.”

Perhaps unconsciously, then, while immersed in this poetry of death and dying, Fauré felt that a setting of the liturgy for the dead could be an appropriate and worthwhile project. Fauré claimed that he wrote the Requiem for nothing, or for “pleasure,” which is an invitation to consider it as part of the aesthetic of decay, decadence, and death that incited Symbolist reflections on the beyond.

The biblical origins of the liturgical texts for the mass of the dead are some of the most esoteric of the Catholic faith; for example, the refrain “Requiem aeternam,” comes from the Second Book of Esdras, which comprises part of the Biblical Apocrypha. It is unlikely that Fauré himself would have had much knowledge about the origins or history of the Requiem texts, but it is useful to look the ones he did set and notice how their literary features differed from Verlaine’s poems. The text of the Introit of the Missa pro defunctis is:

| Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine et lux perpetua luceat eis. | Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and may perpetual light shine upon them |
| V. T decet hymnus, Deus, in Sion, Et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem. | V. In Zion a hymn is fitting to You, O God, A vow is paid to You in Jerusalem. |
| V. Exaudi orationem meam, ad te omnis caro veniet. | V. O hear my prayer: all flesh shall come to Thee. |

Grant them eternal rest…

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83 “C’est en effet aux objets privés de rayonnement intérieur que va la prédilection de Verlaine : ils doivent être dotés d’un pouvoir assez amoindri pour que la sensation qui les signale à l’esprit lui apporte seulement l’indication d’une existence prête à s’éteindre, peut-être même déjà morte au moment où le moi en reçoit l’impression.” Poésie et profondeur (Paris: Seuil, 1995), 167.

84 In a letter to Maurice Emmanuel, offering some details for a concert program. See letter 67 in Fauré, Correspondance, 139.

85 2 Esdras 2: 34-5 “Therefore I say to you, O nations that hear and understand, "Await your shepherd; he will give you everlasting rest, because he who will come at the end of the age is close at hand. Be ready for the rewards of the kingdom, because the eternal light will shine upon you for evermore."” (New Revised Standard Version)


Fauré’s interaction with this text has already been the source of some discussion. Historical precedent of textual repetitions—in, for example, polyphonic mass settings—makes their mere presence in the Requiem not noteworthy. But as a stylist, Fauré handled these repetitions in a personal way. He repeated the refrain twice before either of the verses, and he did not repeat it in between the two verses or after them. He set the refrain for tenor solo after giving it to the full choir in a haunting homophonic setting.

The tenor solo section begins with a drastic shift in mood at m. 18 following a fermata over a half note rest, i.e. a generous two beats of silence. The passage is comprised of cells; both the orchestra and soloist’s parts are made up of two-measure units that repeat verbatim a certain number of times—twice in the orchestra and once in the tenor—before giving way to variation. The cells recall those textural cells that Fauré employed in the piano accompaniment for “Spleen;” their repetition creates a circular pattern evoking a static atmosphere. The atmospheric nature of the motivic repetition is essential for the Symbolist project of representing time as physical—moments seem to be places that can be revisited during the act of remembrance.

In the tenor solo beginning at m. 18, the orchestra’s cells have a harmonic component, alternating between the tonic minor and the dominant in a mixed mode. Since, unlike in “Spleen,” the text for the Requiem Introit refrain contains no aural imagery, Fauré’s accompaniment has no sound to represent through musical metonymy. Instead, the upper accompaniment voices, notably the violas, contribute a foreground

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88 See above, n. 87.
sonic environment that suggests a very slow rocking, swinging, or pendulum motion with the overlapping nature of the motive’s repeats giving equal length to the two sustained notes, A and F. At the same time as this gently swaying viola line, the organ plods out a more traditional stepwise accompaniment figure. The plodding bass outlines the harmonic oscillation between the tonic d minor, and the mixed mode dominant, a major/minor.

Voice line and bass accompaniment are independent from each other in the Introit, but not in the same way as in “Spleen.” In the mélodie, the independence was striking because it suggested the coexistence of two forms in one piece. The voice and accompaniment do not agree on points of rest, and they align only once. in the Introït, the tenor soloist and small orchestra have mostly coordinated parts, at least at the beginning. Once the orchestra has put its two-measure motif into action, the tenor enters and respects the repetition scheme by also stating a two-measure motif that repeats without change immediately after it concludes. The firm establishment of this unified structure serves to anchor the motif as representative of the constancy of God throughout the history of mankind, but in a Symbolist musical context, operating in a shorter history of Western art music, the repetitions also serve to prepare the motivic invention to come.\(^{90}\)

The localized repetition of these interrelated motifs at the beginning of this section fixes the sound in the listener’s mind in such a way that when the same motifs are used to introduce the “Kyrie eleison” section beginning in m. 63, the two prayers are connected. The connection between the two prayers in the Requiem mass, and in other

\(^{90}\) Leonard Meyer pointed out that, in music, pattern formation serves more to prime the listener for change rather than to make him expect to continue to hear repetitions of the same motif. “…after a melodic fragment has been repeated several times, we begin to expect a change and also the completion of the fragment.” See Emotion and Meaning in Music (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 26.
cyclical mass settings, is a part of musical tradition. It is not necessarily a Symbolist tool of a piece with the connection between “Quelle est cette langueur” and “Quoi, nulle trahison” in “Spleen.” And yet, both Saint-Saëns’s and Gounod’s Requiems, the motivic material remains constant from the beginning of the Introit refrain through to the end of the Kyrie. In contrast, Fauré’s two sections differ greatly, sharing only the introductory measures to each section (in verbatim repetition excepting the difference between the Introit’s solo and the Kyrie’s choir). By connecting the refrain “Requiem aeternam, dona eis, Domine” and “Kyrie eleison,” Fauré demonstrates their roots in a common praying subject: one supplicating God for both rest and pardon on behalf of “those” deceased souls. And by not maintaining a single complete melody for the texts of the two parts of the prayer, Fauré allows them to function separately, thereby giving an even greater significance to their connection through identical introductions.

Each movement of the Requiem features only a limited number of melodic and textural motives that are repeated in periodic fashion such that the overwhelming impression is that of continuity. Unlike the contemporaneous songs, there is no significant disjuncture between the structure of the accompaniment and the vocal line. Rather than organize the four voice parts and multiple orchestral sections into interlocking but not identical patterns, Fauré used the opportunity to work with a relatively familiar text to give novel significance to motivic repetitions and to set a foundation for expanding the harmonic experimentation he practiced in the Verlaine songs. In the Requiem, he wrote vocal lines that could serve as archetypes for the medium: the range is always limited to within one octave, leaps never go beyond a third.

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except for in particularly significant moments, and the periodic phrasal construction facilitates performance by amateur singers by reducing the total number of melodic patterns to learn. Likewise, the accompanimental figures almost trope the standard accompanimental textures, rarely straying beyond the rhythmically straightforward walking bass pattern often deployed by the organ, the celestial sound of arpeggios played in sixteenth note rhythms either evoking the harp (e.g. “Sanctus,” m. 1) or actually played by it (e.g. “In Paradisum,” m. 1), or the slightly more elaborate melodic figure given to the orchestra in “Agnus Dei” m. 1. In common with his symbolist songs, the ensemble textures in Fauré’s Requiem are neither straightforwardly homophonic (as one might expect for a Mass setting popular even at the time of its composition with amateur chorales\(^92\)) nor truly contrapuntal.

The surface-level conventionality of the vocal melodies and accompanimental textures belies the more complicated relationship between these two. Their interaction witnesses to a more complex temporality reliant upon evocations, echoes, and memories. Music’s temporality has long been a subject of interest to musicologists, and recently Karol Berger’s engaging study on the differing musical representations of time between the Baroque period—exemplified by Bach’s music—and the Classical—represented by Mozart—has directly engaged the question of spirituality’s role in how composers navigate their way through humanly perceptible and divinely ordered time.\(^93\) In his study, Berger’s particular interest is in the fundamental, even diametric, shift in the conception of time from eternal to limited; he proposes a sea change at the beginning of the modern

\(^92\) See Houziaux, who notes a performance by Lille amateur orchestra and choir on 6 April 1900. A la recherche, 12.
era, marked by the emergence of Enlightenment thinkers and summarized in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s philosophy. By the turn of the twentieth century, however, the multiplicity of metaphysical positions precludes any such stark and simplistic understanding of time. Recently, Steven Rings has published work on temporality in French music of this period, demonstrating how the recurrence of a micro motive in a piano piece by Debussy functions as a symbol for time and memory. In the Requiem and the contemporaneous songs, the vocal and orchestral sections coordinate in time through antiphonal motivic treatment that articulates the music’s structure.

Of Fauré’s two late 1880s settings of Verlaine poems, “Clair de lune,” has a much more rigorous organization of motifs, as Masson and Mouret have demonstrated in their formal analysis. The limited number of short phrases that are patchworked together to create the piano’s minuet have an inherently pianistic quality that comes from their stop-and-start rhythmic patterns that often alternate the arrangement of two sixteenth-notes and one eighth-note within a given beat, either sixteenth-sixteenth-eighth or eighth-sixteenth-sixteenth. This kind of rhythmic jostling works well with the percussive performance method on the piano but does not lend itself to easy vocal execution. When the voice enters, it becomes immediately clear that the singer will not be supported by a voice in the piano doubling its part. The seemingly mutually exclusive textures, then, give the impression that the two might not comment on each other in a readily appreciable way. Yet as the song progresses, there are a few moments of contact and one brief antiphonal expression that establish some dialogic meaning. On beat 2 of mm. 27,

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94 See in particular “Interlude; Jean-Jacques contra Augustinum: A Little Treatise on Moral-Political Theology” in ibid., 131-176.
95 Rings, “Temporality and Transformation.”
96 Masson and Mouret, “Verlaine/Fauré.”
29, and 33, corresponding to the first, second, and third lines of the second stanza, the voice sings the sixteenth-sixteenth-eighth-note rhythm simultaneously with the piano. Although they are not convincingly adapted into the character of the voice’s part (and they do not return after this stanza), they signal a shared stake in the expression of the song’s content.

Example 2 “Clair de lune (menuet) mm. 27, 29, and 30

Once the voice and piano have shown their ability to coordinate, the same technique of alignment of vocal and piano fragments occurs in mm. 48 and 49. Here the singer utters, “sangloter d’extase les jets d’eau,” one of the most memorable images of the poem for its anthropomorphism and its nearly illicit description of heightened emotion. This time the voice does not appropriate a truly pianistic fragment but rather singles out a particularly singable excerpt from an otherwise piano-oriented phrase—the quick, percussive re-articulation of the f’ on beats 1.75 and 2 would be hard to sing. The voice skips this figure and uses instead the fourth leap and the descending stepwise motion that follows.
The piano fragment in question has been prominent in the minuet, occurring in mm. 5, 6, 7, 13, 14, 15, 34, (m. 35 has the same rhythm but with an ascending melodic line where the original form of the motif descends), 36, 46, and 47 before occurring simultaneously with the voice in mm. 48 and 49. The appearance of this solo piano motif so many times before the voice joins it has anchored it into the fabric of the piece as a part of the natural environment. (The repetition of this motive thus shares the atmospheric quality of the repetitions in the “Introït,” discussed above.) Yet when the voice finally performs the same motive, it almost seems as though its singable quality was always waiting for words and breath. Either the piano has foreshadowed the vocal line or the voice has recalled the piano, but either way, a transference has occurred, and one that happens through memory. The piano’s coming to life through the singer’s voice is a symbol for the water fountains that come to have the human ability of sighing or wailing. This ensemble exchange relies on both memory and instrumentation in order to reveal the symbolic connection in Verlaine’s poem between the Watteau-inspired landscape and the soul’s state of ecstasy.

The final moment of ensemble coordination that performs a special, meaningful purpose occurs at the end of the poem, in the voice’s antepenultimate measure, 54. This final example has the dialogic character that was the topic of this section, and once it
arrives we understand that the two previous textural connections between the singer and pianist were in fact driving to this slightly different and more reflective moment. In this measure, the voice climbs with some difficulty to its highest note of the mélodie, an f’’. The approach to this notoriously high note\textsuperscript{97} contrasts with its two other occurrences, in mm. 26 and 35. In both of these places, the line is written such that the singer leaps up to the f’’ by a perfect fourth. Although the leap demands a certain degree of technical facility, it does not emphasize the challenge of rising to the top note; the leap appears graceful and elegant. In the final approach, m. 54, the singer must quickly attain each note of the scale before climbing higher, and since this ascent is broken up by the prosody, the singer thus performs the only back-to-back melismas in the entire mélodie, whose style had been based in straightforward syllabic text declamation. Thus, when the singer stretches out the word “parmi,” (among), he or she is engaging in something greater than a metonymic musical depiction of the idea of moving past and around objects arranged in a garden, which could be one possible localized reading of the figure. Fauré here adds detail onto detail in order to make this moment meaningful.

\begin{example}{"Clair de lune (menuet)\textsuperscript{a}}, mm. 54-6\end{example}

\textsuperscript{97} It is well known that Fauré preferred to avoid passages that required extended technical proficiency, including high notes. A recent scholarly introduction to singing styles for voice students notes Fauré’s tendency to write for a medium range and “wrote most of his songs in keys that avoided operatic high notes.” See Martha Elliot, \textit{Singing in Style: A Guide to Vocal Performance Practices} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006): 197.
The details keep piling up: first, the piano drops out entirely for three beats, creating a moment of stillness unique both in this *mélodie* and in Fauré’s songs. Second, when the piano takes over its music-box role again, restarting the first minuet motive from m. 1, it is now as an echo to this vocal climax in m. 54. The first three notes are in fact the exact notes in pitch and rhythm as the singer had used to create the final release of tension. And yet the piano has played those three notes nine times already (plus four additional times in rhythmic diminution, m. 23) as perhaps its single most memorable motive. But now, placed in this new, salient position as a response to the vocal performance of it, the motive has changed its quality from one of emotional purity and objectivity to one inflected with melancholy and nostalgic humanity. The interchange between the piano solo context and vocally mediated one has deep semiotic effect, and Fauré continued to refine this dialogic technique in his second Verlaine setting and in his *Requiem.*

Since the piano and voice do not articulate their section breaks at the same locations in “Spleen,” Fauré distributed the vocal line into one of the piano’s voices throughout, likely to make it easier for the singer to pick out his or her notes when giving the kind of salon performances where many of Fauré’s *mélodies* were known and that were put together, if not on the fly, at least in haste. But he also articulated the vocal

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98 The silence in the piano at the beginning of “Chanson du pêcheur (Lamento)” is a stylistic borrowing from recitative or other dramatic declamation forms. “notre amour” also features a brief unaccompanied moment for the singer, nearing the final melodic climax. Here, however, it is only the ascent to the top note and not the whole phrase that is unaccompanied, making the moment feel quite different from that in “Clair de lune” in terms of energy.

99 Although little is known about the specific preparations that singers and pianists made in advance of salon appearances, we do know that Fauré tended to place little trust in his nonprofessional collaborators and in particular preferred to play the piano himself at salons. Additionally, one of his preferred interpreters, Emma Bardac, was appreciated specifically because of her proficiency in sight-reading. See Nectoux, *Correspondance*, 194.
line in the piano in an exposed way in one place that does not serve to guide the singer. The singer’s last phrase, beginning with the pick-up to m. 47, descends from a’ to d’ in stepwise motion, tracing the bottom fifth of a minor scale and enacting a classic lament motif. Once the singer has finished his part, the piano gives some concluding ideas, which are actually recycled from just before the voice’s final phrase, mm. 45-6, and then gives the final conclusion by playing a rhythmically simplified version of the voice’s descending minor pentachord.

By repeating the figure first without the voice and then a second time without the voice, Fauré communicates two things musically. First, he cements the association between the descending scale motif and the poetic line “mon cœur a tant de peine,” stripping away the specific words but maintaining the feeling of grief that they conjured. Second, in the double repetition, Fauré sends his scale motif back into the general realm of Western classical musical topics, pointing out that the preexisting connection between a descending minor scale and lament was the reason in the first place that the motive so convincingly sounded like a lament. Since until this point there had been no antiphonal interactions between the vocal and piano lines, the reservation of the technique until the conclusion of the brief song is poignant. The underscoring of the final verse gives a reading of the poem on the emotional or categorical level. Although Fauré conveyed both

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100 Robert Hatten describes a “conventional lament pattern” as “an extended sigh descending by step from 1 to 5” and thus a descent of the other half of the scale is not as conventional, but it is still recognizable as an interpretation of that expression of grief. See Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004): 156.

101 The principle of topic theory in understanding classical music is that many musical gestures what became conventionalized derived from resemblance associations with both musical and non-musical sounds outside of the specific realm of the piece at hand. Leonard Ratner did the pioneering work in this field and was followed by Kofi Agawu, Elaine Sisman, Robert Hatten, and more recently many other scholars including Melanie Lowe. As Raymond points out, a topic does not carry emotional meaning in itself, but rather a given topic “carries a ‘literal’ meaning, together with a cluster of associative meanings.” See *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 3.
the sound of the rain in the piano’s frantic texture and the confusion of lovesickness through the wavering harmonic shifts, he suggested that these elements of the poem are secondary to the poetic persona’s pain. Fauré prioritizes the most primal emotion by withholding melodic-accompaniment exchange until the final line. Fauré’s setting exemplifies the Symbolist musical project as defined by Vladimir Jankélévitch in his introduction Stefan Jarocinski’s discourse-defining book on Symbolism in music, that in contrast to an impressionist aesthetic, the “essence” of Symbolist music is “the universal correspondence of qualities by the intermediary of associations and memories.”102

Returning to the *Requiem*, we should now be better able to see the use of melodic-accompaniment exchanges as a specifically Symbolist technique that replaces more conservative structures in liturgical music. In the “Introït et Kyrie,” Fauré used such an ensemble exchange to highlight a shift from linguistic specificity to musical generality. He drew an almost archetypal emotional depth from a simple, rational text. In one case, the eminently singable melodic motif (falling fifth D-A followed by a falling fourth C-A) that the tenor soloist sings at his entrance in m. 20 echoes back from the first violas in m. 28-9. This fragmented repeat, which decontextualizes the sung falling intervals into a more hollow-sounding, instrumental plaint, fills the two-measure pause that the soloist requires in order to catch his breath without making the organ’s stepwise “vamp” progression. Additionally, it announces the repeat of the first phrase with, however, an already defined difference. In contrast to the tenor’s first line, mm. 20-8, “*Requiem aeternam, dona eis, Domine: et lux perpetua luceat eis,*” in which only one voice, played

by the organ, doubles his part, the second phrase, mm. 30-8 “Requiem aeternam dona,
dona eis, Domine: et lux perpetua luceat eis,” has the first violas doubling his line in the
same register beginning in m. 22. This doubling emphasizes the once familiar and now
estranged line, which is composed of nearly identical elements (the rhythms are the least
changed) whose order have shifted in order to break up their monotony and provide the
space for the addition of a second “dona,” or “give,” which adds more personality and
immediacy to the delivery of the liturgical text.

In “Sanctus,” the movement that would have directly followed “Introït et
Kyrie” in all performances until 1893, the sectional construction through the use of
differentiated textures resembles that of “Spleen.” The “Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus” is a
part of the Mass Ordinary, and the liturgical text reads:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus</th>
<th>Holy, Holy, Holy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominus Deus Sabaoth.</td>
<td>Lord God of Hosts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleni sunt caeli et terra Gloria tua.</td>
<td>Heaven and earth are full of your glory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosanna in excelsis.</td>
<td>Hosanna in the highest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.</td>
<td>Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosana in Exclesis.</td>
<td>Hosana in the highest. 103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The text itself has structural repetition, where the penultimate line, which concerns the
human manifestation of God as Jesus, is enclosed by a repeated line of exaltation,

“Hosana in the highest.” Fauré omits the penultimate line and instead sets “Hosanna in
excelsis” four complete times, setting “in excelsis” alone, as an echo, two additional
times. Moreover, his choral antiphony (distinct from the voice-piano dialogues I analyzed
in the contemporaneous songs) doubles many of the above lines, completely obscuring

103 I take this text from the Liber Usualis, ed. Benedictine Monks of Solesmes (New York and Tournai, Belgium: J. Fischer & Bro., 1938). Solemes was the French monastery that motivated important liturgical reforms. The Liber provides many chants for this text, but the text itself never changes. See pp. 11-94 for “The Ordinary Chants of the Mass,” especially, 18, 21, 24, 27, 30, 33, 36, 38-9, 42, 45, 47, 50, 52, 55-6, 58-9, 61, 63, and 86-7 for the many Sanctus chants.
the original structure of the text. Fauré’s text looks like this with all the repetitions included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sanctus, Sanctus,</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctus, Sanctus,</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctus Dominus</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctus Dominus</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominus Deus</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominus Deus</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deus Sabaoth</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deus Sabaoth</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctus Dominus Deus</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deus, Deus Sabaoth</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleni sunt coeli et terra</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria, gloria tua</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosanna in excelsis</td>
<td>A’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosanna in excelsis (in excelsis)</td>
<td>A’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosanna in excelsis</td>
<td>A’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In excelsis</td>
<td>A’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctus</td>
<td>A’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The line breaks designate the changing voices that sing the text; the change most often is alternation between Sopranos and Tenors/Basses. In his repetition scheme, Fauré has nearly created an ABA’ form in the sense that the A section is defined by verbatim repetitions of each line. Here the original A includes four different lines (each repeated once), while A’ exhibits textual isoform (one line repeated three times). Significantly, this form is not reflected in Fauré’s setting, either in the melodic patterns or in the accompanimental textures. Thus Fauré’s “Sanctus” is another example of the composer’s attempt to avoid traditional forms while at the same time using repetition and ensemble interaction to signal meaning, in terms of connection between words and musical sounds, one musical structure’s associations as it continues to appear in a given piece, and the emotional highlight of both the text and the music.
There is no neat way to represent the music of the Sanctus in a table; there are at least 22 changes in harmony, texture, or orchestration, and at least five distinct musical sections. Text and texture do not change in sync with each other. Although the multiple textures do not interact in the same patchwork style as in “Spleen,” they still determine the emotional atmosphere at any given point in the piece. There are five major distinctive textural elements, but the changes in these textural elements do not occur in cooperation with the section breaks in the text. When the melody switches from the duple feeling to triple, at m. 19, this does not coincide with a change in the text, since the shift from the highly repetitious A section to the more diversified B section had already occurred in m. 15. Similarly, the orchestra’s switch away from the constant arpeggios to the marked quarter-note rhythm in m. 42 takes place seven measures prior in m. 35. These two textural changes are the most salient of this movement, and it is significant that they share the structural quality of delaying the musical reflection of the text’s sectional change. Moreover, the occurrence of these two sectional markers once each in the two major ensemble parts (choir then orchestra), furthers Fauré’s reworking of periodicity. The Sanctus is pieced together through a series of shifts rather having a block-by-block construction.

Fauré creates a climax in this movement that privileges the sole spatial description in the liturgical text. As in the contemporaneous symbolist songs, Fauré develops a dialogue between the voice and organ in order to focus attention on what becomes an extended moment of arrival. Throughout this movement, the organ supports the vocal melody (as the piano does in “Spleen”), reflecting both the metric feeling (duple or triple) and the pitches. At only two points does the organ (or cello section) not
play the choir’s moving parts, and at only one point does the organ play moving quarter notes out of sync with the choir. These moments are the subtle structural details that emphasize a text that otherwise has a fairly uniform emotional tone. The first time the organ or violas leave the voices without accompaniment is in mm. 18-20, which is also the first time the melody has a triple rather than duple metric character. This phrase also includes the first dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, a significant rhythm since it occurs only three times in the movement and adds a jolting quality to the otherwise placid rhythmic motion. As in the two contemporaneous songs, this phrase, as well as its parallel in mm. 35-37, show Fauré adding detail upon detail, in a manner reminiscent of the decadent aspects of symbolism, to create a nuanced—but unmistakable—moment of heightened emotional significance. Here, the final special element is the sopranos’ high note, an f’’ that is the highest of all the melodic pitches so far. Fauré has linked these two phrases as he linked phrases using alterantives to large-scale formal models in his early Verlaine settings. Finally, the one moment of the organ’s anticipating the vocal line follows the phrase ending at m. 37. This is a unique moment in the movement because it is the only place at which a single voice part sings two consecutive phrases. As if to substitute for the alternation of the two voice parts, the organ plays the sopranos’ next entrance in transposition, a perfect fourth below their pitch.

In the “Sanctus,” the abstract language of a Holy Lord can mean the same thing as a God of Hosts in the highest heavens. And since the connection between

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104 Paul Stephan’s historical and analytical study on Verlaine and decadence addresses the relationship between the veneration of or delight in decay—as evidenced by the focus on appearances, fashion, and jewelry—and the wider Symbolist interest in the fluidity of representation. See in particular op. cit., Chapter 6, “The Poetry of Decadence,” 99-123.
differing lines of this liturgical text is perhaps not as evocative as that in a poem about a tortured love, we can see this motivic link as a evidence of the composer’s intervention on the text’s structure. The first time the unaccompanied phrase with the high note and dotted quarter note rhythm occurs, it is at the return of the first word of the prayer, rearranged now with the prayer’s second and third words, uncharacteristically—both for the original text and Fauré’s setting of it here—without repetitions. This distinctive musical moment is thus paired with a distinctive line of text. Thus, when the distinctive musical elements return in m. 35, they point to the distinctiveness of the text at that moment as well. This text, “Hosanna in excelsis,” appears exactly as it does in the Roman missal. Its special character is that Fauré can easily depict it metonymically in music—of all music’s associative meanings, the connection between pitch and height is one of the most solid.

By first using the organ as support for the vocal melody and then silencing it at structurally significant moments, Fauré has signaled that the relationship between these two parts bears meaning and is not born of convention governing the roles of melody and accompaniment. He also raises the listener’s awareness to the interaction between these two parts, which becomes dialogic in the way of the Verlaine mélodies just as the tension mounts to the climax of the movement. In m. 38, the cellos, bass, and organ have moving quarter notes while the voices do not, at the midpoint of the longest section without antiphonal interaction between the sopranos and tenors & basses. The anticipation of the sopranos’ melody adds to the sense of immanent arrival that happens at the coincidence of a major harmonic cadence (V-I in E♭ Major, the first and only of its kind in the movement), the highest note in the piece, g’’, and the first repetition of the spatial image
of “God in the highest.” The dialogue does not mark the movement’s conclusion, as it does in “Spleen” and in “Clair de lune,” but its use as a tool of formal organization in those songs is worth considering. Since the text of this has such consistency of spatial orientation and emotional tone, and furthermore is suggestive of an eternally unchanging temporal scheme (through the use of the present tense in the line “heaven and earth are full of your glory”), Fauré’s choice of breaking his existing ensemble strategy is striking. It is in this moment that the illusory nature of the celestial musical realm is temporarily exposed. The organ, cello, and bass motion in m. 38 is a call from below, a passing disturbance to the recently asserted “highest” region that the soprano voices have hailed as God’s domain.

We can hear and understand the low-register motion in m. 38 as a compositional solution to a problem of asymmetry: up to this point in the movement Fauré has alternated his vocal scoring equally between the sopranos (boys in the Madeleine church and women in more recent concerted performances) and the men. The exchange—an effect that Fauré could not achieve in his songs for solo voice—creates a utopic realm of perfect equilibrium, and while the singers do not enact the text in dramatic fashion, the alternation between high and low registers subtly recalls the description of God’s glory filling the earth (low voices) and skies (treble voices). But when Fauré ceases to repeat each line of the text, he traps himself in a puzzle of imbalance. When the treble voices sing two complete phrases in succession, Fauré rearranges the normal ensemble order. He allows the lower instruments a brief turn lest the seraphic treble voices overwhelm the atmosphere. Of course, setting the second iteration of “Hosanna in excelsis” in the men’s voices rather than in the treble was not
attractive to Fauré, who chose instead to end with the same sort of symmetry as in the
beginning of the piece. Thus, working backwards from his choice to end with a pair of
matched phrases, and with the decision to introduce a new rhythmic intensity in the
men’s voices—which gives the interpreters a greater chance of convincingly performing
the aggressive anacrusis, which in turn is emphasized through the ff dynamic marking and
the accent on the downbeat—Fauré had to score the second “Hosanna” for the treble
voices.

The m. 38 accompanimental movement may have been a technical answer to a
technical problem: it deemphasizes the extra-long treble phrase. But even in this case, in
the absence of sketch sources, we should remember Fauré’s clarity of scoring and his
regularity in phrasing. This bass instrument movement is not collateral damage—Fauré
would not have allowed such an imperfection to result from carelessness. If the motion is
contingent, it is because so is God’s almighty power. The dominant sonority of the
measure, moreover, helps the motion sound like the lowering action that precedes the
moment of aerial launch. The clarity of this dominant is emphasized by the harmonic
listlessness in the previous phrase (the ensemble composition of which is also skewed in
comparison with the other phrases in the movement—this is only one of two phrases, the
other mm. 18-20, during which the voice moves without note-by-note support from the
accompaniment) and by its uniquely dialogic character. This sole measure of orchestral
assertiveness is nothing other than a symbol of the earthly mediation of the religious
experience, or in other words, doubt.

The grounded, earthly interpolation resituates the celestial character of this
movement into a skeptical mood representative of the symbolist worldview and decadent
aesthetic. All is not well in the too-placid soundscape dominated by the gently strumming harp arpeggios and sweetly rocking violin melody. After having disturbed the heavenly symmetry (perhaps this very symmetry inspired critics to call the work attic and neoclassical), Fauré continues to expose the artificiality of heavenly ideal he himself has musically depicted. In the “Agnus Dei,” the idealized landscape is pastoral, honoring the Biblical metaphor of Christ as the Lamb of God. The triple meter, \textit{andante} tempo, major mode, simple melody featuring eighth-note motion and sixteenth-note embellishments, accompanied a low bass (although not a drone as in a true pastoral topic of the 18\textsuperscript{th}-century) together evoke the simplicity and innocence of the tender baby animal that was commonly depicted as a sacrificial offering in the Old Testament.\footnote{For more information on the 18\textsuperscript{th}-century pastoral topic, see the extensive literature on topic theory, some representative examples I cite above, n. 178.}

Yet these pastoral elements do not define the character of the whole movement. Instead, in a similar way to that in which the voice introduces a more troubled mood in the \textit{mélodie} “Clair de lune,” the autonomous and somewhat long orchestral introduction to “Agnus Dei” is checked by the tenors’ entrance in m. 7. While the orchestra continues to play its triple-feel and gracefully flowing melody, the tenors sing a metrically displaced phrase beginning with a four-beat figure that gives way to a triple-feel melody. The triple organization of the tenors’ line, however, does not align with the orchestra’s repeating phrase, giving the passage from m. 7 through m. 18 a warped character, not unlike the moonlit scene in Verlaine’s poem wherein the figures “don’t seem to believe in their own happiness.”

This slight misalignment in the first two phrases with both voice and orchestra in the “Agnus Dei” does more than show a rift in the idyllic pastoral fabric, however. It
heralds the stylistically heterogeneous juxtaposition of block-like sections. If Fauré eschewed such stark shifts in texture, harmony, and ensemble in the earlier movements of the *Requiem* in favor of the subtle transitions he employed in his symbolist songs, here in the “Agnus Dei” the emotional weight of the double imagery of mercy, both towards sins—something immediately perceptible—and towards the eternal fate of the deceased souls—which is unknowable to humans—leads Fauré to choose a more dramatic structure for his musical ideas. Indeed, the large-scale repetition of entire sections, simultaneously in the voice and orchestra, is itself the drama of this movement. As previously noted, Fauré turned away from straightforward binary, ternary, and strophic musical forms at about the time when he began to read Verlaine’s poetry and then compose his *Requiem*. In the “Agnus Dei,” however, Fauré not only repeats entire sections within this movement (the first half could be described as ABA form), he repeats a section from another movement, too, significantly the setting of “Requiem aeternam” from the “Introït et Kyrie.”

Occurring at this point in the *Requiem*, repetitions—both of entire sections within one movement and across disparate movements—puzzle the interpreting mind. For, despite the commonplace nature of the repetitions of sections within one movement, the lack of precedence within Fauré’s works for the technique already makes it significant. But the repetition of the “Requiem aeternam” section stands out in a different way. There are multiple ways to understand this repetition: as a metaphor for the inescapability of death or for the unchanging nature of rest in contrast to the more hectic variety of active states, as a trace of compositional fatigue that compelled Fauré to recycle musical material, as a demonstration of the cyclical worldview in which death is
likened to the prenatal condition. Within this comparative analysis, however, the repetition eludes reference. Even in comparison with the two Requiem Masses by Saint-Saëns and Gounod, the repetition in Fauré’s finds no rationale. Neither of those composers repeats musical material at the moment in the Agnus Dei when the Introit text is repeated. Nothing could prepare the listener for the reprise of material from the Introit, especially since such a repetition would, outside of Fauré’s music, occur as a framing device linking the beginning and end; since the Agnus Dei is not the end of Fauré’s Requiem, either in the 1893 version or in the 1900/1 version, such an expectation would not have been prepared. Moreover, once the listeners hear the repeated section in its entirety, they know that it does not even conclude the Agnus Dei movement, which instead closes with the introductory orchestral material recycled as a coda.

The repetitious form of the “Agnus Dei” is thus deeply troubling. On the one hand, it seems natural and reflective of ecclesiastical thought or even of the philosophy of Henri Bergson that insists upon the continuousness of experience and the impossibility of separating present moments from past memories. On the other hand, Fauré notably eschews forms that can easily be segmented, favoring subtle shifts in texture, ensemble, and harmony paired with almost mechanical repetition of short melodic fragments. We might be tempted to infer that the structure of this liturgical text simply overwhelmed Fauré. In fact, although no sketches for the Requiem exist, the autograph manuscript of the work attests to compositional indecision. The “Agnus Dei” includes more changes to

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106 In Matière et mémoire, Bergson develops a theory about time and memory that describes the two as having a spatial as well as a temporal dimension, which resonates well with the formal response to the textual repetition, which reappears as if it were a memory. Vladimir Jankélévitch has already suggested that Fauré is the composer whose music most closely embodies Bergsonian thought. See his Introduction to Jarocinski, Debussy: Impressionisme et symbolisme, 14.
the final draft than any other extant movement. Fauré’s indecision concerning orchestration and harmony could attest to broader compositional concerns or dissatisfaction. On the other hand, since the manuscript served as a performance copy for many years, the changes and strike-throughs may simply give witness to changing performance conditions.

Despite the movement’s anomalous form, one stylistic feature can be traced to Fauré’s compositional experiments in his early Verlaine settings: the sopranos’ unaccompanied entrance in m. 45. This single held c’’ is preceded by a brief section on the dominant, CM, m. 40-44. These are the first measures in which the dominant makes an appearance except for the unique perfect authentic cadence, mm. 29-30. Fauré’s avoidance of the dominant makes for a harmonically slippery idiom in which movement by thirds replaces that by fifths and sense of resolution is rarely felt. Such an idiom suits the symbolist aesthetic as defined by Jarocinski, since by denying music’s traditional harmonic syntax, it challenges the culturally-entrenched assumption that harmonic progressions can reliably communicate fixed meaning.

Fauré departed significantly from his symbolist harmonic progression, as he had from the similarly symbolist formal procedure of shifting textures and ensembles, when he set the image of “eternal light,” “Lux aeterna.” Perhaps, though, the fact that C Major is the dominant of the movement’s tonic key F Major is secondary to the purity associated with C Major, in addition to its long association with light. Fauré did not shy away from music’s metonymic properties. The C Major moment, a microcosm of the rest of the movement and more consistent with the other movements, features localized

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107 Houziaux includes a detailed chart of all extant parts and drafts, “A la recherche,” 15.
108 See Jarocinski, 59.
motivic repetition in the accompaniment, although the vocal part, which is also made up of one melodic cell repeated once, aligns its repetition with the accompaniment’s. Moreover, the motive is strongly reminiscent of the setting of the same words, “sempiternam requiem,” in “Pie Jesu,” mm. 27-8—the motive has been inverted and the melodic range has shrunk from a whole step in between the pitches in “Pie Jesu” to a half step in “Agnus Dei.”

The exposed vocal part, however unusual its harmony, can be linked with Fauré’s setting of “Clair de lune,” in which the melody reaches its climax on an unaccompanied phrase. Despite the fact that “Lux aeterna” does not emerge as the highpoint of the melody in “Agnus Dei,” it is still useful to think of the moment as deriving some of its emotional impact from Fauré’s first experiment with the texture. It is similar to the dramatic reprise of the “Requiem aeternam” section in m. 75 of “Agnus Dei.” This held orchestral sonority (a sustained D in multiple octaves) is again a response to the voice. Although the connection may lack some of the salience (through the distinctiveness of sonorous parameters) that could make it apparent to a listener on a first hearing, the fact that such moments of dialog occur so rarely and at such textually significant instances suggests that they do play a communicative role. The communicative potential of this seemingly un-Fauréan—even anti-Fauréan—choice is thus met only with an insider’s knowledge of Fauré’s compositional preoccupations at the time he composed the Requiem. The simplicity of the message, that eternal rest can equally be described as eternal light, could be mapped in the same way that Mouret and Masson depicted linguistic equivalences in “Clair de lune.”
The final movement of Fauré’s *Requiem*, “In Paradisum,” comes from the liturgy for the burial mass. Although its use is not doctrinal for funeral masses inside of a church, Fauré’s decision to include it, as well as his elegant setting, has influenced a later generation of French composers to include it in their Requiems.¹⁰⁹ The movement derives its character from an admixture of many of the restrained and contemplative musical features prevalent in the earlier movements. For example, its ensemble texture, with its prevalent ostinato arpeggios in both organ (and harp, beginning in m. 28) recall those that dominate the more tranquil sections of “Agnus Dei.” Additionally, as in the movements prior to “Agnus Dei,” “In Paradisum” does not possess a block-like structure featuring dramatic and sudden changes in mood. Instead, in a manner reminiscent of the partial melodic repeats in “Spleen,” the melody is here through-composed with only slight references to earlier material (and some references to other movements, such as the prominent perfect fourth leap from “Pie Jesu”).¹¹⁰ The fact that none of the accompanimental voices doubles the melody also draws this movement stylistically closer to many of the others in the *Requiem* as well as “Clair de lune.” Finally, the andante triple meter lends “In Paradisum” some of the pastoral mood evoked in the orchestral introduction to “Agnus Dei.” With respect to Fauré’s Verlaine settings, this mélange technique is significant because he uses it again in “C’est l’extase,” the final song of *Cinq mélodies ‘de Venise’*, his 1891 cycle of songs to poems from Verlaine’s *Fêtes galantes* and *Romances sans paroles*. Fauré wrote to Winnaretta Singer, the cycle’s dedicatee, to describe the form of the last song:

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¹¹⁰ Boyd noted this melodic connection in his analytical sketch, op. cit.
I’ve tried out a form which I think is new, at least I don’t know anything like it…

After the opening theme, which doesn’t recur, I introduce for the second stanza a return of ‘Green,’ now calm, and restful, and for the third one a return of ‘En soudine,’ now a cry of frustration, ever deeper and more intense right up to the end. It forms a kind of conclusion and makes these five songs into a sort of Suite, a story.\(^{111}\)

Although the explicitness of the quotations from or allusions to the other songs in *Les cinq mélodies* may have been new, Fauré was likely working on techniques of coherence for some time. The final movement of the *Requiem* was a training ground for the synthesis Fauré attempted in another work of his series of engagement with Verlaine’s symbolist aesthetics.

Yet despite these motivic and structural similarities between “In Paradisum” and the rest of the *Requiem* and Fauré’s Verlaine settings, this final movement stands apart, together with “Pie Jesu,” for its lack of dramatic tension.\(^{112}\) Partly because of the text’s epilogic origin and partly because of its imagistic coherence, the liturgical text of the In Paradisum, when appended to a Requiem Mass, gives closure. Although the text is phrased in the subjunctive mood, it contains no explicit references to a fate other than rising to heaven in the company of angels that could trouble this final prayer.

| In paradisum deducant te Angeli; | May angels lead you into paradise; |
| in tuo adventu suscipiant te martyres, | upon your arrival, may the martyrs receive |
| et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Jerusalem. Chorus | you and lead you to the holy city of |
| angelorum te suscipiat, | Jerusalem. May ranks of angels receive you, |
| et cum Lazaro quondam paupere | and with Lazarus, once a poor man, |
| aeternam habeas requiem. | may you have eternal rest. |

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\(^{112}\) Although the “Pie Jesu” is the most performed movement of the whole *Requiem*, I choose not to offer a critical reading here because it does not evidence the many Symbolist musical techniques I have outlined.
The textual repetitions in Fauré’s setting, however, together with his harmonic language, create a narrative of tension that insists upon the only images a human could comprehend. Prayer’s mediated nature is again at the fore, as in “Introït et Kyrie” where melodic repetition singled out the praying subject. Here, Fauré repeated the word “Jerusalem,” a city on earth that symbolized God’s promise to deliver his people from Egypt. He also repeated the line “et cum Lazaro quondam paupere,” which references a human from the New Testament whom Jesus saved from death. These images are distinct from the others in the text, such as “paradise” and “angels,” and the contrast between “poor,” which describes Lazarus, and “holy,” pointing out Jerusalem’s symbolic significance, is also marked from the human, material point of view.  

Fauré created the first harmonic tension of the movement at the repetition of “Jerusalem,” mm. 21-29. Pausing for a moment on the subdominant before making a chromatic shift to avoid a plagal cadence in m. 23, eventually coming to a destabilized second-inversion tonic D Major in m. 25, he traced his way through the major and minor mediant before finally resolving with an authentic cadence, mm. 28-9. The warmth expressed in this cadence provides the listener with a chance to retroactively appreciate the harmonic variation explored in the preceding section. Moreover, Fauré only rarely exploited dominant-tonic cadences and did so at the most structurally or emotionally

113 By focusing on the holy city of Jerusalem, Fauré implicitly denies the authority of the Church in Rome, one of the most explicit signs of Catholicism as an institution. After the First World War, Paul Valéry reflected on Rome’s cultural impact as tied to the spread of Christian culture. It was not really from Christianity but rather Roman culture that came the idea of “a common law, a common God: one and the same temporal judge, and one and the same Judge in eternity.” “The European,” in History and Politics, The Collected Works of Paul Valéry, trans. Denise Folliot and Jackson Matthews, X (New York: Pantheon, 1962), 318.
significant moments. In this case, he emphasizes an earthly city rather than the City of
God.\textsuperscript{114}

The only other authentic cadence in “In Paradisum” occurs in mm. 48-9, at the
conclusion of the other passage of harmonic tension that underscores the other section of
repeated text. Since harmonic instability was already associated with human experience,
as soon as the E sharp sounds on the downbeat of m. 36, Lazarus appears not in his
resurrected or heavenly state but rather as a human with whom we can identify. The exact
harmonic progression here might not recall those of the early Verlaine songs. But the
technique he developed for them, using a subtle musical repetition to point out the text’s
symbolic connections, works at the end of the \textit{Requiem}. Musical symbolism makes a
skeptical reading of the liturgical text legible, one that insists upon the here and now, as
we perceive it, rather than the manufactured beyond, proclaimed from inaccessible
realms of church hierarchy.

\textit{Conclusion}

A year after Fauré’s, death, amongst the many biographies and memorials
published was one by Alfred Bruneau. Bruneau was Fauré’s colleague at the
Conservatoire, and although he was highly respected in his time, he is all but forgotten
today, remembered primarily by musicologists interested in his naturalist operas,
collaborations with Émile Zola.\textsuperscript{115} But Bruneau was in many ways similar to Fauré, or
perhaps the kind of composer Fauré would have become if he had been trained in opera

\textsuperscript{114} St Augustine’s notion of the \textit{City of God} explicitly demanded separation of Church affairs from state
politics.
\textsuperscript{115} See Introduction, as well as “Naturalism and Supernaturalism in Alfred Bruneau’s ‘Le Rêve’,”
composition at the Conservatoire, and had not become so engaged with the salon milieu, skepticism, and self-doubt. Bruneau was a religious person, choosing his operas often on themes touching on the mystical or Symbolist worldview. He composed a Requiem of his own, little known now but a major work nonetheless. His position as critic for major Parisian dailies such as *Gil Blas, Le Figaro*, and *Matin* gave his ideas exposure, and he published many books besides. In his book on Fauré, he appreciated the *Requiem*, suggesting both its ambivalence toward faith and its connection with literature. “The poet’s soul that Fauré possessed, refusing the terror and furor that shook Hector Berlioz when he treated the subject, brought itself back to antiquity and, becoming enraptured with the Ideal, gave ineffable accents to those happy shadows gathered on the marvelous Elysian fields. It is sure enough Paradise that these dream voices open up for us, Paradise where we like to think that Fauré joined Mozart.”

Nothing here suggests that Bruneau associated Fauré’s *Requiem* with Church doctrine or the *motu proprio*. Everything in his description points to a relationship between Fauré and the contemporary idealist, Symbolist, poetics.

For Fauré, composing the *Requiem* was an opportunity to explore an aesthetic motivated by both personal and self-effacing impulses. Although he did use the work for professional duties, he had his choice of other repertory; the fact of composition testifies

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118 “L’âme de poète que possédait Fauré, se refusant à la terreur et à la fureur qui secouèrent Hector Berlioz quand celui-ci traita le même sujet, se reporta aux temps antiques et, s’enivrant d’idéal, prêta aux ombres heureuses groupées en des Champs Élysées merveilleux d’ineffables accents. C’est bien le Paradis que nous ouvrent ces voix de rêve, le Paradis où il nous plaît de croire que Gabriel Fauré alla tout droit retrouver Mozart.” Alfred Bruneau, *La vie et les œuvres de Gabriel Fauré* (Paris: Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1925), 23.
to aesthetic volition.\textsuperscript{119} The particular musical techniques he used to structure the work as a whole and to express individual lines of text were akin to those he developed for use in the songs he wrote at the same time on Verlaine poems. These songs exhibited a new fragmentation of structure through their motivic treatment and their ensemble scoring. They also took an utterly Symbolist approach to word-painting: while Fauré often evoked the sound worlds suggested by his texts, he did so in an empty way, exposing the meaninglessness of their rote repetition. The harp sounds prevalent in the \textit{Requiem} as well as the lament bass are two such examples that harken to his pithy musical representation of rain on city streets in “Spleen.” But these techniques served only to illustrate their own futility. Since they offer only the most approximate suggestion of actual sonorous reality, they break down at climaxes and do not persist in their attempt to sound like something they are not.

In his \textit{Requiem}, Fauré tests Symbolism’s applicability beyond the salon’s limits by drawing some of its principles into a work with a wider cultural function—a liturgy for the dead that was to be used at a conservative Catholic parish in Paris. Or put another way, he brought the Church milieu into the salon, as in a 1902 performance \textit{chez} the sculptor Edmond de La Heudrie, where Fauré could be seen “languidly trailing amongst the social waves the smiley contentedness of an ancient Olympian whose senses are dulled by incense.”\textsuperscript{120} It was after this salon performance that the composer defended

\textsuperscript{119} The Symbolist program, modified and inherited from the Parnassians, who were closely associated with the phrase “l’art pour l’art,” prized aesthetic thought over practical or pragmatic policy. Fauré was also interested in the Parnassian moment, setting verse by Hugo, Leconte de Lisle, and Armand Silvestre. See Zoltan Roman, “Gradus ad Parnassum: Selected Early Songs in the Socio-Cultural Context of His Time,” \textit{Studia Musicologica} 48, no. 1/2 (2007): 5-44, especially n.14-15.

\textsuperscript{120} “Le Fauré que je vis ce soir-là, c’était le Fauré des salons, traînant languisamment parmi les remous mondiaux une satiété souriante de vieil Olympien blasé d’enscens.” Aguettant, “Entretiens avec Gabriel Fauré,” in \textit{Amitiés littéraires}, 81.
the lack of fear expressed in his *Requiem*. He compared himself to Gounod, to the side that Saint-Saëns also valued, the personal expression of religious thought.\(^\text{121}\) And he declared himself more independent thinker than dogmatic believer, asking the question “Must we not accept the nature of an artist?”\(^\text{122}\) Through his choice of movements and his subtle manipulation of the text, for example excluding the Dies Irae, Fauré set the stage for a Symbolist drama: he pointed to death without depicting it directly. And conversely, by including In Paradisum, he afforded himself the chance to work with a magical realm where the dead convene, but a place where no human has ever been and thus no human could recognize its sounds.

\(^{121}\) See for example Saint-Saëns’s article on Gounod’s religious music, notably his pagan and Christian sides, “Gounod,” originally published in *Portraits et Souvenirs*, reprinted in *Regards sur mes contemporains*, ed. Yves Gérard (Arles: Bernard Coutraz, 1990), 111-152.

Chapter 2

Saint-Saëns, Criticism, and Catholicism

The gods die: their empty temples
Are like the arid deserts
Where once there trembled the wrinkles
Of the great disappearing oceans;

But Art has preserved the image
Of god whom the mage venerated
Et whom the madman and the sage
Came to adore, trembling:

It is no longer the god that we adore;
It is his ever-living form,
It is Beauty, divine aura
Going out, pure, from the white marble!\(^1\)

Introduction

In discussions of fin-de-siècle French musical aesthetics, Camille Saint-Saëns’s name most often appears in connection with the Société Nationale de Musique.\(^2\) This independent group charged itself with the mission of increasing the performance and composition of chamber music by French composers, an incontestably precious goal in the year following the French’s embarrassing military defeat in the Franco-Prussian

\(^{1}\) “Les dieux meurent : leurs temples vides/Sont comme ces déserts arides/Où frissonnaient jadis les rides/Des grands océans disparus ;/Mais l’Art a conservé l’image/Du dieu que vénérât le mage/Et que le fou comme le sage /Venaient adorer en tremblant;/Ce n’est plus le dieu qu’on adore ;/C’est sa forme vivante encore,/C’est la Beauté, divine auréole/Sortant, pure, du marbre blanc !” Final stanzas of Camille Saint-Saëns, “La Statue,” in Rimes Familières (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1891), 104-5.

Not long after spearheading the group’s creation, Saint-Saëns resigned. In a gesture that musicologists interested in institutional politics have interpreted as chauvinist, and ultimately aesthetically reactionary, he absconded from directorship because of an inability to quell pressure from Vincent d’Indy that the group include music by non-French composers on their programs. The creation and renunciation of the Société Nationale have additionally been conflated with Saint-Saëns’s involvement in the Ligue Pour la Défense de la Musique Française, a group created for the promotion of French music during the First World War. These politicized actions together have become synecdochical of Saint-Saëns’s conservatism. The term is reinforced through his status as a member of the Institut de Beaux-Arts, the official government guardian of Republican aesthetics. This institution long excluded music or at least failed to support the innovative experiments of composers who critiqued the establishment, such as Debussy. History books don’t exactly leave Saint-Saëns out, but they tend to reduce him and his music to representatives of the boring nineteenth-century aesthetics that exciting and forward-thinking twentieth-century artists upended for the progress of all.

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4 The scandal surrounding the 1905 Prix de Rome competition, which left Ravel as runner-up, provided the opportunity for a reflection on the conservative aesthetics of this group. See Gail Hilson Woldu and Sophie Queniet, “Au delà du scandale de 1905: Propos sur le Prix de Rome au début du XXe siècle,” *Revue de musicology* 82, no. 2 (1996): 245-267. Additionally, there was a time in the 1870s when the Institut acknowledged its tendency to leave music to the wayside, and it created a prize, modeled on the annual prizes awarded for paining. See Jann Pasler, “Deconstructing d’Indy, or the Problem of a Composer’s Reputation,” *19th-Century Music* 30, no. 3 (2007), 235-6.

5 A case in point is Roger Nichols’s treatment of Saint-Saëns in *The Harlequin Years*. This book treats the avant-garde musical scene during the inter-war period in Paris. At the beginning of the chapter on composers, Nichols mentions that he will not profile Saint-Saëns, who was active during the period, because the War left no discernible traces on his compositional aesthetic. *The Harlequin Years: Music in Paris, 1917-1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 209
The reduction of Saint-Saëns’s 75-year career into one brief administrative debate, and the total equation between that mostly bureaucratic affair and musical aesthetics is at the least the result of history of French music that has judged the composer on his intractability at the end of his life, and at the worst, a scholarly project of self-aggrandizement. The interpretation of this argument as a nexus of political and aesthetic ideas emblematic of a historical period demonstrates critical prowess: a critic who achieves this superstructural level of thinking has not been duped by the impressive image of a successful composer who wrote prolifically, achieved official recognition, and earned popular favor. Instead, the critic has shown, through the unveiling of a hidden ideological program, that this success is due to pedestrian ideas, facile musical forms, and racist motivations.

But the reductive view of Saint-Saëns also prohibits a more sensitive and humanist reading of the composer and his works. Not all of the composer’s music directly reflects the anti-German sentiment that he famously expressed, when in response to political situations he begged the musical community for a unified cultural front akin to a military front. It is true that during times of war Saint-Saëns considered that musical programming could be a kind of weapon. Additionally, not all of Saint-Saëns’s writings about music or compositions exclusively concern French national identity. The composer published over a thousand pages of criticism including essays on music—opera, church music, and famous composers—and a wide range of other subjects—astronomy, sports, politics, travel, and the natural world. Durand’s catalogue of his works includes 170

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6 Jane Fulcher in particular touts her own critical acumen, in contrast to the naïve interpretation of Carlo Caballero, that allows her to interpret a single event not in the context of a composer’s statements about it but rather the larger ideological and historical power structures at work. See The Composer as Intellectual: (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 336, n. 119.
numbered opuses, in addition to 13 operas, stage music for at least 20 plays, and over 50 pieces of religious vocal music, ranging from large works such as his 1854 Messe, the Oratorio de Noël, and Requiem, to dozens of settings of small motets for soloists and ensembles.

Our understanding of Saint-Saëns’s religious music has been shaped by the pervasive image of Saint-Saëns as a political adversary of d’Indy. The head of the Schola Cantorum, champion of César Franck, and author of multiple operas about Christian faith, d’Indy’s name has become synonymous with Catholicism in the musical scene of turn-of-the-century France. For this reason, some scholars express surprise at compositions that reference Catholicism written by composers outside of d’Indy’s circle. The prevailing view is that reactionary, conservative Catholicism was the only legitimate kind in turn-of-the-century France, and so composers with professional or personal circumstances that did not resemble d’Indy’s did not have the authority to write Catholic music. In the particular case of Saint-Saëns, there has been a tacit understanding that spirituality was not at issue. In the introduction to the most recent book-length study of the composer, Jann Pasler finds a suggestive way imply that Catholicism had little affect on his musical activity: “Early in life, he turned away from religious belief to embrace rational logic.” She does not say that he did not compose religious music, and she does not say that spirituality held no sway over him. But the contrast between belief and

7 In the most recent single-author study of the composer, the idea of agnosticism is plainly stated. Jean Gallois describes the composer’s reaction to Parsifal in terms that recall Nietzsche’s; the composer apparently rejected the sacred aura of the work: “Seconde reproche [by Saint-Saëns against Parsifal]: l’orgueil de Wagner et sa prétention à offrir sur scène un ‘service sacré.’ Prétention inadmissible, estime Saint-Saëns, chez qui l’agnosticisme ne cesse de croître.” Charles-Camille Saint-Saëns (Sprimont: Mardaga, 2004), 235.
reason, as well as the bodily metaphor, suggests a categorical division with no possibility for synthesis.

Because of this tacit belief, we are left with no adequate way to account for, consider, or contextualize the religious music Saint-Saëns did write. What did it mean to him? How did others perceive it? Was Saint-Saëns’s religious musical aesthetic symptomatic of the broader cultural moment? In this chapter, I confront Saint-Saëns as a composer of religious music. I consider one work in particular, his “Psalm CL.” This was a massive double choir setting, in English of the final poem in the Old Testament book of Psalms, in which musical instruments are enlisted as the means of praising God. This work is an ideal case study because Saint-Saëns composed it independently from any immediate performance situation or professional obligation; he dedicated it to the American architect Whitney Warren, a foreign correspondent to the Institut’s Académie de Beaux-Arts who was among the composer’s hosts during his first trip to the United States in the fall of 1906. In addition to the music, I analyze Saint-Saëns’s critical writings for evidence of his taste in religious music. Next I consider newly published letters between Saint-Saëns and a priest, the Abbé Renoud.9 This priest fervently supported Saint-Saëns and commended his religious music. By pressing the composer on exactly how the musical style is born of personal thought, he elicits a candid reflection on the genesis of religious music, the emotion it expresses, and its what it can do for its listeners. Finally, I consider why the composer’s writings play a larger role in musicological studies than his music, a historiographical question whose answer has its roots during Saint-Saëns’s lifetime. By considering these sources that have been left

unquestioned for a century, I uncover a new side of Saint-Saëns that was not all public antagonist or stiff reactionary. In his candid moments, Saint-Saëns expressed ambivalence towards an omnipotent divinity and renunciation of the Church establishment, but still a longing for spiritual release and the joy of what he saw as naïve belief.

To be sure, institutions—the government, the Church, concert societies, the aristocracy—defined the landscape of elite musical life of turn-of-the-century France. But these institutions still invited individual responses from artists and intellectuals who acted with complex personal and professional motivations and restrictions. Recent musicological methods too forcefully oriented toward these institutions, seeking to erase Romantic notions of genius composers, still miss part of the picture. In focusing on Saint-Saëns without foregrounding his role in the functioning of concert societies, by reading his criticism, letters, and music sympathetically, I give him the opportunity to speak to us about his anxieties and goals. Saint-Saëns had lots to say about the fissure between religion and spirituality, both in music and in words. He may not have continued to practice Catholicism in his later life, but he never stopped thinking about it.

Saint-Saëns and/on Catholicism

Catholicism polarized Saint-Saëns’s thoughts, alternately offering a reliable code of ethics to his family life and creative pursuits and throwing him into despair and

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10 The long fascination with these institutions is revealed through the copious literature on the subject, for example Jann Pasler, Composing the Citizen, Steven Huebner, French Opera, Jane Fulcher, French Cultural Politics and Music, Duchesneau, L’avant-garde musicale, and many others. Recently, Mark Everist has argued that political control over institutions exerted force on Parisian Opera during the Second Republic as well. See Journal of the American Musicological Society 67 no. 3 (Fall 2014): 685-743.
cynicism.\textsuperscript{11} Raised Catholic by his mother,\textsuperscript{12} the composer found employment through the Church as organist and as composer of sacred music. His first major work, the Mass op. 4, was performed regularly at St Merri and was a favorite liturgical work of the Abbé Gabriel, its dedicatee.\textsuperscript{13} Saint-Saëns composed many liturgical works that became repertory pieces, including the Oratorio de Noël, op. 12 (1858) and the Requiem, op. 54 (1878). Despite his contributions to religious art, however, he had little faith and was not committed to Church doctrine.\textsuperscript{14} He continued to support church musicians, especially his peer Charles Gounod, and he publicly voiced his opinion on Pope Pius X’s \textit{Motu Proprio}, which urged liturgical planners to incorporate more plainchant into their regular services.\textsuperscript{15} Yet, like his student Gabriel Fauré, once he gave up his post as organist at the Madeleine, Saint-Saëns never again made composing or performing church music a regular part of his creative ambition.

When Saint-Saëns was a young man, primary musical education in France almost always took place in the choir loft of a Catholic church. Boys were brought to Mass by their parents and were recruited into the choir or taken on as students and later apprentices to the organists in charge of arranging and playing the music for the liturgy. France was experiencing a decline in religious fervor at the time the composer was first brought to church, but his mother’s piety more than made up for the general lassitude. His early religious education equipped him with knowledge of the Bible and of the ethos

\textsuperscript{11} Studd considers Saint-Saëns’s vehement expressions of atheism in his poetry of the 1880s to be a direct response to the death of his mother. See p. 175.
\textsuperscript{12} Studd, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{13} As an expression of gratitude for the dedication, the Abbé accompanied Saint-Saëns on a trip to Rome. Gallois, 57, Studd, 34.
\textsuperscript{14} Examples of his rejection of Catholicism abound, but his pamphlet \textit{Problèmes et mystères} (Paris: Flammarion, 1894) is the longest and most audacious critique of religion in Europe.
\textsuperscript{15} Gallois, 343-4. See “Music in the Church.”
of religion, and these laid the groundwork for his career as a composer and performer.

From his early work as organist to his first opera *Samson et Dalila* to his job teaching at the École de musique classique et religieuse (École Niedermeyer), Saint-Saëns mastered both the content and the spirit of Catholicism during his time. He came of age when French laypeople across the country were searching for immanent faith. Pilgrimages, special Marian devotions, and the renewal of mystical traditions all testify to the increased cultural significance of Catholicism from the late 1840s through the Franco-Prussian War. Saint-Saëns himself left little record of his religious beliefs at the time other than his musical compositions. These were meant to model the style he encouraged other French composers to adopt: sober, grand, and without unnecessary demands on technique. Already harboring a love for things classic and antique, he rejected the romantic style of church music that was indistinguishable from dramatic music. Unlike dramatic music, in his view, religious music should not depict scenes or emotions in vivid detail. He shared Liszt’s belief that liturgical music should inspire devotion and the contemplation of paradise.

An essay on Gounod, focusing on his personal inclination toward holiness in music, shows that Saint-Saëns was aware of religious music’s sentimental dimension without explicitly exposing his own religious beliefs. Gounod had two complementary personalities: Christian and pagan. The pagan side was most often expressed in Gounod’s theater music and the Christian side in his church music, but they can coexist within

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16 Byrnes suggests, “One great movement—perhaps the great movement—in defense of religion was the revival of pilgrimage during the second half of the nineteenth century,” *Catholic and French Forever*, xx.

17 Studd, 33.

individual works, too. Saint-Saëns did not describe what he means by “pagan,” but he did suggest that Gounod used human emotions as a way to approach divine love, an “altogether new feeling.” In theology, the interrelationship between human and divine emotions is far from new; it was the program of Counter-Reformation Church leadership and, some have argued, the foundation of Baroque art: spiritual immanence. Likewise, pagan sensibility characterized humanist thought during the renaissance, epitomized in the poetry of Petrach and later, in France, that of Ronsard. Beyond this, human feeling mixed with divine power is the essential mode of the Christian religion: God made himself a man in order to experience the suffering and sin of humanity and ultimately redeem the race.

There was nothing actually unique about Gounod’s approach to emotion in his Christianity, but Saint-Saëns pointed it out because he admired it. This emotional novelty was included in a list of innovations that Gounod brought to Church music, all things that

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19 Ibid., 111.
22 One popular history of Christianity begins, “From the very first we are thrown into the midst of a mystery, the mystery of Christian life: the revelation of Christ to the Church, primitive and historic.” The author goes on to note that the precise significance of Jesus’ life relative to the Christian religion has been the source of disagreement. “The theories as to the meaning and intention of Jesus vary, yet the historical reality of the Church seems to by-pass the theories. Many recent critics, from Adolf Harnack through Rudolf Bultmann, argue that Jesus did not intend to found a church; as Alfred Loisy put it: ‘Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, but it was the Church that came.’ The Catholic Christian, on the other hand, insists that Jesus came expressly to found the Church.” Martin E. Marty, *A Short History of Christianity* (Cleveland, OH: Fontana Books, 1959), 15-16.
improved the then current—and lamentable—state of liturgical music in France. Saint-Saëns lauded Gounod for his contributions:

Also [in the Church], he was a hardy innovator, having brought to religious music not only his unusual approach to orchestral sonorities, but also his preoccupations about the truth of declamation and the correctness of expression, not usually applied to Latin lyrics, all of which was combined with a scrupulous concern for vocal affect and a wholly new feeling bringing together divine love and earthly love, under the protection of grandeur and purity of style.²³

Gounod expressed his “new feeling” by the technical means of sonority and text-setting. Saint-Saëns was particularly sensitive to correctness in Latin text setting, having also praised Liszt for his proficiency in this area. This concern reflects a separation between the composer and the music’s liturgical function, since the text-setting is a mechanical procedure easily related to non-religious music, such as theater works or art songs. Additionally, the practice of seeking out new sonorities was for Saint-Saëns a sign of personal investment in music as well as a way to distinguish the creative artist from his uncultured audience. In the same essay on Gounod, after he describes the composer’s technical means, he recounted an anecdote about his famous “Ave Maria” set to Bach’s C Major prelude. In detailing the way the piece changed over the course of its performance history, he revealed an important dialectic between composer and audience. This work took on grander proportions and more conventional instrumentation—an offstage choir that originally provided the harmony was replaced by a harmonium, and the simplicity of

²³ “Là encore, il fut un hardi novateur, ayant apporté dans sa musique religieuse non seulement ses curieuses recherches de sonorités orchestrales, mais aussi ses préoccupations au sujet de la vérité de la déclamation et de la justesse d’expression, appliquées d’une façon insitée aux paroles latines, le tout joint à un scrupuleux souci de l’effet vocal et à un sentiment tout nouveau rapprochant l’amour divin de l’amour terrestre, sous la sauvegarde de l’ampleur et de la pureté du style.” “Gounod,” 125.
a violin and piano accompaniment was traded for a full string and percussion sections, including a bass drum and cymbals—as it gained success with audiences. Women took up the habit of fainting while it was performed, and the instrumentalists would exaggerate the affective dimension. While these elements all turned the short setting of Ave Maria into a trite character piece, the piece's popularity drew a wider audience to the rest of Gounod's music, ultimately a deserved triumph, in Saint-Saëns's opinion.²⁴

The church milieu had an irresistible power over Saint-Saëns, and he remained fascinated by service music for many years. He admired college choirs and praised the English choirs he observed on a trip in 1878 for their casual camaraderie and their approach to faith that was more concerned with participating in the community than following the doctrine of faith to the letter. When he composed Samson he did not anticipate the popular rejection of the work for its biblical topic, but indeed the Opéra refused to stage it because of the potential for it to be seen as blasphemous.²⁵ For Saint-Saëns, choosing a story inspired by the Old Testament was merely part of his cultural background. Many composers in nineteenth-century France lacked a thorough, formal literary education, so the stories of the Bible were for them an ideal entry point for the intensely erudite practice of choosing an opera libretto. When he looked back on the long intermediary period between the composition of Samson and its staging in Paris, he compared himself to Rameau, who had also been mistrusted for composing a dramatic work on a religious theme.²⁶ Saint-Saëns experienced a more turbulent relationship with

²⁵ Studd explains that it was Ferdinand Lemaire’s idea to write Samson as an opera rather than an oratorio, “a bold idea as operas based on biblical texts were rare and likely to be frowned upon by theatre managers ever conscious of audience (and censor) sensibilities,” 68.
²⁶ Dukas mentions this lineage in his essay on Samson, specifying that Rameau’s libretto came from Voltaire, and it was still censored for its religious content despite Voltaire’s incorporation of Greek
Catholicism than his musical ancestor did, however, and whether it was for personal reasons or a broadening of his cultural and scientific knowledge, Saint-Saëns came to fully reject the principles of religion, even though he was powerless to forget all the texts and traditions.

Saint-Saëns wrote little about his religious beliefs when he was young, and he kept his faith a matter of private discussion throughout his life. Private as they may be, letters in which he attests to his waning interest in religion as a socially beneficial institution reveal his pointed opinions. In letters to two different correspondents, he uses the expression, “I have replaced my need to believe with the need to know.” He first used the phrase in a 1908 letter to the scientist Gustave Le Bon, a proponent of evolutionary theory who had likewise fully rejected faith in God in favor of a non theistic, science-based approach to knowledge.27 Saint-Saëns was in contact with him about the theory of evolution, to which Le Bon had contributed prize-winning studies on the development of the human cranium.28 Interest in evolution did not necessarily contradict Catholic doctrine, as the Church never made an official renunciation of the theory.29 It did, however, signify a proactive search for an explanation of life on earth—a line of questioning naturally associated with the Catholic Church, a self-styled “universal” Church that offered believers both a reason and a way of living.

29 For more on the Church’s response to evolutionary theory, see Negotiating Darwin: The Vatican Confronts Evolution, 1877-1902, eds. Mariano Artigas, Thomas Glick, and Rafael Martinez (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).
The pair of phrases “need to believe” and “need to know” also appear in Saint-Saëns’s letters to Romain Rolland of 1910. In this year, Rolland was writing his novel Jean Christophe, based on a fictional composer with a strong resemblance to Beethoven. The novel and the preliminary research that informed it, a pamphlet called “Beethoven,” had embroiled him in a religion-themed debate about the purpose of art with Vincent d’Indy. Contrary to d’Indy, Rolland considered Beethoven a champion of the secular spirit who through sheer will was able to turn suffering into joy. As he had in Le Bon, Saint-Saëns likely found in Rolland an example of the analytical, positivist method he increasingly espoused in both music composition and scientific observation. Rolland, the pioneer of positivist music history in France, was a key figure for Saint-Saëns to align himself with as he became more assured of his choice to renounce Catholicism. The composer thus professed to him his conversion from the faith in Christ to the faith in reason.

Already by the end of the previous decade, Saint-Saëns had begun to publish critical essays revealing that his viewed religion as a harbor for superstition and meaningless signs. In Portraits et souvenirs, his essay “Liszt” included an appraisal of the composer’s religious music that betrays Saint-Saëns’ view that the Church offers ample material for creative invention without providing anything of real spiritual value. He praised Liszt’s technique and his propriety, leaving a conspicuous absence where he

30 In two letters Saint-Saëns redresses a comment Rolland made about him in Musiciens d’aujourd’hui. Where Rolland characterized Saint-Saëns as opposed to virtue, Saint-Saëns maintains that he has nothing against virtue but rather thinks it an inappropriate subject for art. Clarifying his personal beliefs, he claims that he has felt no bitterness in renouncing all systems of faith. “C’est de la paix et la joie que j’ai trouvées en abandonnant toute croyance; ce besoin de croire, qui tourment tant de gens, me semble chimérique; il est remplacé chez moi par le besoin de savoir.” In Jean Bonnerot, “Saint-Saëns et Romain Rolland,” Revue de Musicologie 40, no. 116 (1957): 200.

could have commented on church leaders’ or congregations’ response to his liturgical music:

It is with consummate art that Liszt makes the most of the voices, it is with perfect propriety that he treats the Latin prosody, which he studied in depth. This composer of fantaisies is an impeccable liturgist. The perfumes of incense, the prisms of the stained glass windows, the gold of the sacred decorations, the incomparable splendor of cathedrals are all reflected in his Masses, which have deep feeling and persuasive charm. The Credo of the Mass of Gran, with its magnificent order, its beautiful harmonic shadows and its powerful colorfulness, its dramatic effect that is in no way theatrical, this special kind of drama that can rank the composer with the highest level of great poets in music. The one who misses all this is blind!32

Saint-Saëns presented this view because he considered that it is controversial. The final insult, added as a tease for a hypothetical critic, presupposed hostility to his view of Liszt as an author of serious religious music. But the description is full of contradictions that deepen the rift between art music and religion. To say that Liszt’s Latin prosody responds perfectly to the inherited rules does not assert that the declamation is effective or devout. To enumerate the inspiration for the sounds with a list that only includes material decorations of churches does not convey belief in the Church’s spiritual

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teachings. The description does point out, however, that the Church relies on many material, aesthetic elements to draw in the faithful and display its power, and it includes sensuous music as one of these things.

The Church was particularly concerned about liturgy at the turn of the century; Pope Pius X famously issued the *Motu proprio*, which defined Gregorian chant and 16th-century polyphony in the style of Palestrina as the preferred music for Mass.\(^{33}\) This decree caused quite a stir in Paris, where church music ministries were anchored by famous organists and each church had its own choir and music library. Saint-Saëns, who had been a high profile organist in Paris for 20 years, was among the many composers who penned public responses to this decree.\(^{34}\) In particular, *Le Figaro* solicited an extended essay from him about the matter, as a counterpoint to the position given by Charles Bordes.\(^{35}\) The two articles were published two weeks apart, each on the front page as the lead story for the day. Bordes, as the head of the Schola Cantorum at the time, recounted an interview with Pius X, conducted during a private audience with the pontiff at the Vatican Library. He recounted a meeting of the minds, two men who shared long-held and deeply reasoned opinions about chant. In contrast, Saint-Saëns took a pragmatic and historical perspective. Agreeing with the principle aims of the encyclical, he presented the practical side of the matter, pointing out that it would take many years to change people’s expectations, and that over time, the old habits would return. To prove

\(^{33}\) Katherine Bergeron lists this canon law as one of the more important restrictions that defined the chant revival at Solesmes, *Decadent Enchantments*, 129-30. Others mark it as an important turning point for all French religious music, not just those interested in chant. See *Musique, art et religion dans l’entre-deux guerres*, ed. Sylvain Caron and Michel Duchesneau (Lyon: Symétrie, 2009), 5-6.

\(^{34}\) For example, he responded to a survey alongside Fauré, G. Houdard, and Alexandre Guilmant, See *Le Monde musical* 16, no. 3 (15 February 1904): 34-5.

his point, he compared the current reform with the one from a decade earlier that ordered
the French to adopt the Roman Rite for the funeral mass, which excised the *Dies irae*.
Although the French initially complied with the rule, “they started by putting the words
of *Pie Jesus* to the tune of *Dies irae* and introduced it as a motet; then they slipped one
stanza of the prohibited text, then two, then three; and finally, the *Dies irae*, restored bit
by bit to its entirety, was sung as it had been before.”\(^{36}\)

Saint-Saëns showed himself, unlike Bordes, to have a difference in opinion from
the pope on how to improve Church music. He thus gave many recommendations for
how to effectuate a reform. He suggested that the clergy be introduced to art history and
music appreciation in the seminary. Additionally, he added that music not written to
sacred texts, music with Latin words by composers who do not know Latin, and the
works of J. S. Bach be excluded. But he insisted that restrictions were not the way to
improve the mediocrity of church music in France. He took up the pope’s restriction
against instruments, critiquing the outright rejection of instruments that appear in
religious iconography and that can be used in many ways. In defense of this idea, he cites
the psalms. “The more we examine the question, the more we realize that there is no
reason to distance from the divine service instruments considered profane excepting the
organ. If it were to come to that, we would have to remove from the liturgy the psalm
where it is recommended to praise the Lord on stringed instruments, trumpets, and even
cymbals!”\(^{37}\) He concluded the essay by promoting freedom of expression. If it were up to

\(^{36}\) Saint-Saëns, “Réforme de la musique religieuse.”
\(^{37}\) “Plus on examine la question, plus on s’aperçoit qu’il n’y a aucune raison pour éloigner du service divin
les instruments prétendus profanes, à l’exception de l’orgue. Si l’on en vient là, que l’on supprime alors de la
liturgie le psaume où il est recommandé de louer le Seigneur sur les instruments à cordes, les trompettes et
même les cymbales !” Ibid.
him, people would be given “complete liberty to sing the praises of God as it pleases them.”

Expressing Joy: Praise ye the Lord!

Only a few years after writing this extended reflection on music in the church, Saint-Saëns created a piece exercising the complete liberty to praise God as it pleased him. This was the “Psalm CL,” or “Praise ye the Lord!,” for double choir, orchestra, and organ. The work is often considered a souvenir of his first trip to the United States, since it bears a dedication to the American Whitney Warren, its text is in English, and the American based published G. Schirmer published it, in two editions, including a ten-copy limited run. But as a souvenir, the work was not complete until 1908, when it was privately performed in the salon of Martine de Béhague, the Comtesse de Béarn. This wealthy Parisian arts patron had recently had an organ installed in her home, and hosting a performance of this piece allowed her to put the instrument on display without risking too strict of a connotation with the reactionary aesthetics of the church. The piece was eventually performed in the US: The New York Times reported that the Oratorio Society presented “Praise Ye the Lord” on a concert with César Franck’s Béatitudes. The article devotes six paragraphs to Franck’s work and only one to Saint-Saëns’s, limiting appraisal to the circumstances of composition: “This work is a souvenir of the venerable

38 “Je laisserais à tout liberté complète de chanter les louanges de Dieu comme il leur plaît.” Ibid.
39 The score is rare, but it is available for download at http://imslp.org/wiki/Praise_Ye_the_Lord_Op.127_%28Saint-Sa%C3%B8ns_Camille%29, accessed August 21, 2015. The two Schirmer publication numbers are 21138 for the vocal score with piano reduction and 20887 for the 10-copy print of the full orchestral score. The latter is available on gallica, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52000847s/f1.item, accessed January 22, 2016.
composer’s visit to America in 1906. It is dedicated to Whitney Warren of New York.” No mention is made of the musical style or the quality of the Oratorio Society’s interpretation of it. The piece seems to have been misunderstood, or not appreciated, as there is no record of a repeat performance.

“Praise ye the Lord” is unique in genre, divided into six movements each representing a different image from psalm 150 of the Old Testament. It imitates most closely the oratorio in its many sections, but without a dramatic arc, or characters, it is not an oratorio. Instead the work is scored for an eight-voice double choir that Saint-Saëns used to create alternating sections of homophony and fugal elaboration of simple themes. The first and last movements are the longest, with the chorus singing extended passages of melodic imitation; these each encompass two verses of the total six verses of the psalm. The middle four movements divide the two middle verses of the psalm so that each distinct poetic image is worked out in its own musical idiom. Saint-Saëns uses the musical instruments of praise listed in the psalm—harp, organ, cymbals, tambourines—as the inspiration for character pieces showcasing each instrument in its turn by exaggerating its typical rhythms and figures. The overall affect is of power and classicism, but the middle movements suggest humor in both their brevity and their simplistic transpositions of musical tropes into serious content.

In its humorous approach to set pieces, the psalm reminds the listener of the famously jocular Carnaval des animaux, written in 1886. The composer prohibited publication of this work during his lifetime, fearing that it would mar his reputation as a
serious composer. But this work has proven, if anything, to secure Saint-Saëns’s reputation as a master of musical atmosphere, and later critical reaction to it attests to the progressive scientific theory behind it. If Psalm CL bears comparison with the Carnaval des animaux, it is in the two works’ unusual approach to set-pieces. In each, short vignettes suggest the sounds or attitudes of specific real things. But a critical difference is in the imaginative distance between the music and its object of representation. In Carnaval, there is almost nothing to suggest music in the animals’ actions. Swans, lions, aquariums, and tortoises do not make much noise or have particularly rhythmic demeanors. More obviously musical members of the carnival test the limits of what constitutes an animal, such as pianists and fossils. Here the joke is that the fossils make more engaging music than the pianists who merely practice scales. The whole piece is fanciful, depending on an agreement between composer and interpreter that fun will be had.

On the face of it, imagination and fun are precisely what separate the Carnaval from Psalm CL. But the psalm needs fun, too, in order to work. While the outer choral movements have a somewhat austere quality in their point of imitation style, the inner movements bounce with the levity of imaginative play. In the second movement, which calls upon the trumpet, one characteristic horn call rhythm asserts the trumpet’s presence. The first trumpet plays the rhythm four times during the first four four-measure phrases, marking a neat order and hierarchy. Just after the solo trumpet is joined by a brass choir to play the rhythm for the fifth time, though, the strings break the phrase and chime in

42 This has long been known; Bonnerot included as an appendix to the revised edition of his biography of the composer an except from his will permitting the posthumous publication of Carnaval des animaux. See Camille Saint-Saëns, 221.
with a response. The string choir plays the rhythm three times, preparing a modulation as the trumpet choir patiently takes the accompanimental role. The final developmental section features more rhythmic and phrasal instability between the solo trumpet and string choir, and finally the string choir finishes the movement with the trumpet’s emphatic rhythm. This is a fun enactment of the admonition for praise with a trumpet: the string instruments praise with the trumpet’s melody, *faute de mieux*. The exact verse text requires only that those listening “praise Him with the sound of the trumpet,” making the transfer of the rhythm from the actual trumpet to the rest of the orchestra all the more obvious as a play on words of the most innocent kind.

The Psalm includes a dance as the fourth movement, per the text’s instructions, “Praise him with the timbrel and dance.” The movement is in f-sharp minor and 3/4 time, offering only a few possibilities for dances within the traditional suite. Saint-Saëns seems to play on a sarabande, with the traditional quarter—dotted-quarter—eighth—quarter rhythm freely embellished by the clarinet in the first measure. This dance is in irregular nine-measure phrases, with a rounded binary form that is slightly unusual for a sarabande. The dance-like flourishes alternate between ternary and duple groupings, using the natural minor mode for its somewhat exotic character. Percussion instruments are added for a simultaneously fanciful and literal enactment of the text. Two tambourines are the modern equivalent of the Bible’s timbrel, and a triangle completes the exotic sound of this dance. Tambourine and triangle parts are restrained, but even so they are subversive and fun. In the B section, when the triangle enters for the first time, it plays the opposite rhythm of the melody instruments. Where they play accents on the off-beats, the triangle accents the downbeat. Where they have a sustained note followed by a
quick rhythmic pattern, the triangle has a quick rhythmic pattern followed by a sustained note. In the reprise of the A section, tambourines and triangle fall in line rhythmically with the rest of the wind band, the triangle playing downbeats with the trombones and the tambourines playing eighth notes with the trumpets. Ten measures from the end, tambourines and triangles play in unison for two measures, highlighting the shift in the bass from a dominant pedal to the tonic in m. 41. After the flutes play their last ascending and descending run leading into the short coda, the tambourines let loose, playing a sustained tremolo for the final two measures while the triangle articulates the final six beats of the movement with the oboes and bassoons that reinforce the f-sharp minor resolution. Much like the individual pieces of Carnaval des animaux, this movement of Psalm CL is crafted to achieve stunning perfection through simplicity. Saint-Saëns creates a praise dance that is mysterious in its exotic quality and free in its lightness of touch.

The unusual text of Psalm 150 invites an unusual response. It is repetitive, like many liturgical texts, but its litany. In addition to listing all the instruments of praise, it repeats the significant command form “praise the Lord.” This direct address is the precise reason that Saint-Saëns does not reach far beyond the realm of human perceptions in his vignettes. The entire text concerns only the people who praise God and the means they use to do it, never God himself nor his reaction to the praise. The psalm practically demands such a lighthearted and exuberant display of reverence, and by writing it down, Saint-Saëns confronts the harsh austerity proposed by Pius X in his Motu Proprio. Rather than focusing on an unseen, unseeable kind of spirituality, the actions suggested in Psalm 150 are visible, audible, and material. There is no atmosphere Saint-Saëns must create
through metonymy in Psalm CL, no reflection of an internal emotional state with an external environmental condition. Instead there is just exuberance, an expression of naive joy for God possible for Saint-Saëns only through music.

The Psalm CL is thus both a response to Papal authority and a personal expression of freedom, as Saint-Saëns described the act of praise in his 1904 article on church music reform. For some, this relationship between the personal and the institutional has seemed impossible. The two are so incompatible that either the religious music must be ironic or the composer still harbored belief after all these years. One priest set out to test this theory, by engaging Saint-Saëns in a correspondence that lasted seven years, from the beginning of the First World War until the composer’s death. Begun as a response to the recently published article against German music, the correspondence became friendly, intimate, a site of exchange both aesthetic and intellectual.

In a series of articles in L’Echo de Paris that first appeared in September 1914, Saint-Saëns outlined his position that after the German nation caused such tremendous devastation in France, German culture has no need to be celebrated there. He was here re-hashing earlier objections to Wagner, converting his denunciation of the Wagnerian craze into a forceful call for the total ban of performances of his work. During his long career as a critic, he wrote many, many essays about Wagner. His most famous until the War was the 1899 “L’Illusion wagnérienne,” in which he spoke out against all followers of Wagner who consciously or unconsciously elevated him to the status of a god.

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43 The first of the series appeared on September 21, 1914. Eventually Saint-Saëns would authorize the publication of these articles as a pamphlet, Germanophilie (Paris: Dorbon, 1916).
44 Beginning with a series about his first trip to Bayreuth to see the Ring, in its second performance. These are all reprinted in Écrits sur la musique et les musicien.
45 In the short preface to the article, Saint-Saëns clarifies that the essay is not about Wagner or his music but rather “tout autre chose.” Later, he explains: “Wagnerian exegesis begins with a principle totally
argument was simple: Wagner was a creative genius, but he was still only an artist, not a messiah. He cites Dante, Shakespeare, and Aeschylus as examples of creative geniuses in art, all dramatists whose engagement with spiritual mystery put them and their art as a crossroads between secular and religious thought. His rhetoric was directed against those of Wagner’s fans who had transposed their enthusiasm for the music into a worship of the man. And such worship, he felt, was not only misplaced because of Wagner’s human status, but also because “the time for gods [had] passed.” Saint-Saëns objected to the deification of Wagner not just for aesthetic reasons, but also because of his personal opposition to religion. This personal opinion crept into the argument when he claimed that not only is Christianity a passé religion, but that humanity had outgrown its need for all gods, in the way that a child outgrows its various stages of development.

“The time of gods has passed” brings to mind a contemporary philosophical maxim, “God is dead” or the title of an epic music drama, “Twilight of the gods.” But Saint-Saëns was hardly looking to Nietzsche or Wagner for philosophical inspiration, rather they were all products of similar schools of thought. What Nietzsche and Wagner shared with Saint-Saëns was a reverence for antiquity; all three admired ancient Greek and Roman culture for what they perceived as its purity, love of art, and search for

different [from Hugo’s idea that we can only equal, never surpass, geniuses, and we do that by distinguishing ourselves from them]. For this system, Richard Wagner isn’t only a genius; he is a Messiah.” Saint-Saëns, L’illusion wagnérienne, in Regards sur mes contemporains, ed. Yves Gérard (Arles: Bernard Coutraz, 1990), 85 and 90.
46 Ibid., 90.
47 “Le temps des dieux est passé.” Ibid., 93.
48 Here Nordau’s observation and critique of the degenerate art world obsessed with deformed views of Christianity, worship of Wagner as if he were divine, and similarly esoteric or obscure trends seems relevant. Although his broad characterization of French culture as declining would seem to exclude Saint-Saëns, who stayed far from the cult of personality, we see here that Saint-Saëns was not immune to an admiration of and association with the very unhealthy phenomena afoot. Degeneration, translated from the second German edition (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), see especially Book I, “Fin-de-siècle.”
wisdom.49 But Saint-Saëns diverged from his German contemporaries insofar as they had been influenced by Idealist philosophy. What had initially drawn Nietzsche to Wagner was the composer’s quest for transcendence through art, and what pushed him away was the decadence, or self-satisfaction, that in his opinion had ultimately limited the ethical potential of the music drama.50 Saint-Saëns was not concerned with transcendence through art. His writings evince only limited critiques of the spiritual side of art through superficial remarks about the presence of spiritual feeling instead of an investigation into how or why artists convey their metaphysics.

His anti-Wagnerian attitude became symbolic of more than personal taste at the start of World War I, when Saint-Saëns called for a ban on performances of all German music in France. Wagner had to go, too. When he began speaking out, he received many responses, but one reaction in particular led the composer to reflect more deeply on the place of the spirit in his music. This was an unsolicited letter from Abbé Gabriel Renoud, a country priest and church organist in the village of Ars, 275 miles southeast of Paris. Renoud wrote with a double purpose: first to congratulate Saint-Saëns, expressing his sympathy with the composer and love of his music. Second, he voiced concern about the composer’s faith: “people have told me that you are, or nearly, a non-believer—but, here you have converted, since a long time ago, to the nation; would that you soon could be


50 In The Case of Wagner, Nietzsche opens by marking the approach to decadence as a primary distinction between himself and Wagner: “I am no less than Wagner, a child of this time; that is, a decadent: but I comprehended this, I resisted it.” See idem, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 155.
converted to God, and to the Virgin Mary!”51 The abbé associated the French nation with Catholicism, and he saw the conflict with Germany as primarily a religious dispute over the differences between Catholicism and Lutheranism. When he mentioned Saint-Saëns’s patriotism, then, he was implying alignment with the Church.52

Composer and priest maintained a lively correspondence until the composer’s death. They continued to exchange thoughts about musical style and personal faith. The abbé wrote longer letters than the composer, and he tended to probe his thoughts more deeply. But Saint-Saëns, even in his terseness, articulated startlingly lucid reflections on what motivated him to compose. He critiqued liturgical music, claiming that very little of it was suitable for practical use, either because of an improper sentiment, or a problem with timing—organ pieces were almost always too long or too short to accompany any particular part of the Mass53—and this was why he preferred to improvise when he was organist at the Madeleine. As for his own religious compositions, the abbé took them as proof of Saint-Saëns’s faith. “There are Christian fibers in you that tremble marvelously. They deliver the secret of your religious works; they bring to life the deep feeling that you have of the meaning of church music. Your feelings on the matter, if they make good sense, are even more Christian; this also explains why people do not listen to you, because what organists are usually missing is sometimes taste, but more often faith.”54

52 See Guillot, “Introduction: de la Wagnerophobie à la théophilie,” in Musique, foi et raison, 14.
54 “Car, il y a en vous des fibres chrétiennes qui tressaillent merveilleusement. Elles livrent le secret de vos œuvres religieuses; elles animent ce sentiment que vous avez si profond du sens de la musique d’église. Votre sentiment là-dessus, s’il est de bon sens, est encore plus chrétien; cela explique aussi qu’on ne vous écoute pas, car ce qui manque souvent aux organistes, c’est quelquefois le goût, mais plus souvent la foi.” Renaud to Saint-Saëns, 1 April 1915, in Ibid., 56.
Saint-Saëns protested abbé’s supposition about his latent faith. But he did so by way of describing his method for composing religious music. He explained that he used to be blindly religious, with deep fervor for mysterious church teachings that no priest or scholar could properly untangle. He gave up his faith in favor of reason, the result of a “terrible crisis.” Yet, he claimed, he “voluntarily” re-assumed “this vague state of religiosity in which most of the faithful live” when he wrote religious music, allowing him “to write it in all sincerity.”55 According to Saint-Saëns’s way of seeing it, the freedom and simplicity we hear in the Psalm CL are not the mocking irony of a cynical non-believer but rather the uncomplicated joy of his personal prelapsarian past.

Critiquing Saint-Saëns’s Criticism

Reaching such a level of candor, and a degree of nuance in thought, was only possible for Saint-Saëns and Renoud to do because of their personal relationship. In their dialogue, they were able to exchange ideas in a way characteristic of the Heideggerian model of thought through conversation.56 Absent this sympathy, this patient and persistent contact, they would never have remained where they started, that is, with Renoud assuming that Saint-Saëns had religious faith because of his commitment to his country. And despite the many close friends with whom he exchanged in this way, Saint-

55 “Cet état de religiosité vague dans lequel vivent la plupart des fidèles, je m’y mets volontairement quand j’écris de la musique religieuse, ce qui me permet de l’écrire en toute sincérité, et si vous entendiez mon Psaume ‘Cæli enarant,’ je crois que vous y trouveriez un reflet des sentiments qui vous sont chers.” Saint-Saëns to Renoud, 7 April 1915, in Ibid.

56 In particular, as Heidegger describes it in his poetry, “The Thinker as Poet,”: “We never come to thoughts. They come to us./ That is the proper hour of discourse./ Discourse cheers us to companionable reflection. Such reflection neither parades polemical opinions nor does it tolerate complaisant agreement. The sail of thinking keeps trimmed hard to the wind of the matter.” In Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).
Saëns’s ideas and music have been judged consistently from the outside, by musicologists primarily interested in his published criticism.

Well-preserved and frequently re-edited, the composer’s criticism has been scanned over, translated for Anglophone readers, and re-arranged in order to offer more coherent pictures of the various parts of musical life that interested Saint-Saëns. But these critical writings do not stand for themselves, and the reason they continue to speak to us has less to do with their status as interpretive tools for understanding Saint-Saëns’s music than with their early reception. Some of the first work published by the Société française de musicologie, a learned society founded in Paris after the First World War had led the international branch of the Musik Gesellschaft to close its doors, was on Saint-Saëns’s critical writings. Julien Tiersot took up the task of cataloguing these and even re-printing and annotating the composer’s first series of articles, written for a poetry journal called the Renaissance littéraire et artistique. When Tiersot stepped down from the presidency of the Société française de musicologie after three years in the position—the society’s by-laws stipulated that its president could serve no longer than three consecutive years—he cited his work on Saint-Saëns as demonstrative of the society’s breadth of scholarly interest. Together with an evening dedicated to César Franck, Tiersot’s study on Saint-Saëns’s writings exemplified the desire to take up subjects “fairly close to ourselves.” Moreover, Saint-Saëns’s articles were worthy of study because they “touch on musicology.”

57 See Roger Nichols and Jann Pasler’s review of Nichols. Likewise, Many other collections of Saint-Saëns’s writings have been edited, including the monumental, recent Écrits sur la musique et les musiciens, ed. Marie-Gabriel Soret (Paris, Vrin, 2012).
59 Ibid.
Tiersot betrays two attitudes here that have become entrenched in the scholarly imagination. First, Saint-Saëns and Franck were both part of the recent history and thus close but not-too-close to the current moment. This was important to Tiersot, who took pains to describe the academic ideology of the Société as both dispassionate and yet still highly engaged: “We have avoided the danger of throwing ourselves in the mêlée of contemporary questions; but we have not been left to feel unconcerned by anything that art has presented to us with a certain amount of remove, and sometimes we have not feared to take on very modern subjects.”

This was to say that Saint-Saëns, who had passed away three years before Tiersot gave this speech, the year he took over the presidency of the Société, and Franck, who had died thirty years prior, were of the same chronological remove. This reveals Tiersot’s position on Saint-Saëns as a rearguard composer, whose ideas were not relevant to “contemporary questions.” Second, he presented Saint-Saëns’s criticism as related to the nascent field of musicology. Many other composers also wrote criticism and articles about historical composers, but none of this work was considered “musicological” at the time. It seems that Tiersot tasked himself with commenting on Saint-Saëns’s criticism in order to assess its claims, and perhaps even to refute them, as a means of weighing the scales against the conservative branch of aesthetics in the favor of more progressive attitudes.

As the continued interest in critical activity at the turn of the century in France demonstrates, however, the ideological rifts between various individuals, and occasionally the “camps” with which they were aligned, are not always easy to perceive. Historiographical efforts to trace the roots of reception tropes involve the comparison of

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various critics’ writings and the evolution, if any, of opinions and values over time. Such attention to the representation of composers and their works—both self-representation and critical interpretation—can show that the invisible biases of music history are often the result of scholarly amnesia or willful ignorance of received notions. Tiersot, for example, offered a “complete” list of musicological appraisals of Saint-Saëns “interest in various works” from 1897 through the inter-war period, all before the composer’s death.61 Because he did not cite the opinions expressed in the work of his colleagues Rolland, Servières, Séré, and Aubry, however, he glossed over the nuances distinguishing each of these critical assessments. By giving only the titles of histories of contemporary French music, he gestured vaguely at a general appreciation of Saint-Saëns that placed him among the ranks of important French composers without singling out the defining elements that each critic valued or denounced.

Tiersot dwelled on one of these, *Echos de France et d’Italie* by the critic Camille Bellaigue. Making no mention of the book’s title, notably less academic than the rest of the works under the same heading, Tiersot indicated that the personal relationship between critic and composer made it possible for Bellaigue to include excerpts from letters exchanged between them. “In [these letters], Saint-Saëns defend[ed] one of his pet theses, that *form* is the essential *raison d’être* of all art, music and plastic arts alike, and that with sensibility and expression the seeds of decadence and death is introduced.”62

The condescending tone—signaled by the belittling adjective “pet”—here indicates the

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62 Tiersot, “Saint-Saëns écrivain,” “L’article consacré à Saint-Saëns dans ce volume offre cet intérêt particulier qu’il contient (pp. 94 et suiv.) le texte, au moins fragmentaire, de plusieurs lettre inédites écrites au critique, dans lesquelles Saint-Saëns soutient une de ses thèse favorites, à savoir que la forme et la raison d’être essentielle de tout art, la musique comme les arts plastiques, et qu’avec la sensibilité et l’expression s’y introduit le germe de la décadence et de la mort.” 125.
sense of superiority Tiersot drew from his position as scholar. He suggested that he was not blind to the need for expression in art, and that any artist who had so thoroughly convinced himself that form should take precedence over content had been led astray. Since Saint-Saëns was far from the modernists who argued for the dissociation between music and its evocative uses, he had, in Tiersot’s view, gotten charmingly caught up in his own self-contradictory polemics.

In the mid-twentieth century, Jean-Michel Nectoux perpetuated the view of Saint-Saëns as limited by his own predispositions, equally without demonstrating the historiographical awareness of the origins of this perception. He began his first comparative study between Fauré and Saint-Saëns by reciting a received image of the older composer without identifying his source: “Saint-Saëns passes for an academic composer, but we forget that he was one of the first in France to know and disseminate Wagner, whom he met precisely in this year 1861 [when he began teaching piano at the École Niedermeyer and met Fauré].”63 Nectoux investigated the reciprocal influences the two composers had on each other, and he gave special consideration to the divergence in their aesthetic goals. But since he was motivated to bolster Fauré’s scholarly reception (he was fresh from completing a dissertation on Fauré as well as a short book on the composer for Éditions du Seuil, and he had taken over administrative roles in the Société des amis de Gabriel Fauré), his primary aim in the article is to establish Fauré’s modernism vis-à-vis the conservatism of his teacher.64 More than once in the article, he

delighted in writing that Saint-Saëns, at a certain point in his life, stopped being able to understand Fauré’s music. Fauré had outstripped Saint-Saëns’s capacity for growth, and this was for the double reason that he was a true relic from another era and that Fauré possessed a higher degree of musical intelligence or intuition. Nectoux took issue with the critical reception of Saint-Saëns at the end of his life, which he perceived as overly eulogistic and not in step with the current work he had been doing. As the defender of Fauré, it was injurious to read “flattering” accounts of Saint-Saëns from the same period when Fauré was treated with “incomprehension” and “reprobation.”

Nectoux’s mission of showing productive divergence between the paths of student and teacher is not rooted in a documentary consultation of just how Saint-Saëns established his fame and reputation. More recently in Fauré studies, Carlo Caballero has made a similar gloss over Saint-Saëns’s ideology, taking some parts of his personality for granted. He writes about Fauré’s introduction to G. Jean-Aubry’s contemporary history of music Les Musiciens français d’aujourd’hui. His focus on the politics expressed in Fauré’s comments causes him to overlook the context of Jean-Aubry’s book within the expanding field of French musicology. War had certainly raised the stakes of criticism, as he points out. But additionally, the efforts of individual critics to make a name for themselves and possibly earn extra income by publishing their existing articles into a volume likely played a role in the profusion of such texts. Moreover, the plurality of critical texts on contemporary history attests to competing views of the relative

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65 Nectoux, “Correspondance,” 76, 77, 78, 80, 88.
importance of the diverse crowd of French composers in the first two decades of the twentieth century. As Caballero points out, Jean-Aubry was close friends with Debussy, and therefore read his criticism and used it to inform his own definition of true French music.\textsuperscript{68} But other critics had equally strong relationships with composers; Jean-Aubry was not the only critic who was an occasional mouthpiece, wittingly or not, for musicians’ opinions on their own art.

The speech Tiersot gave to the Société Française de musicologie attempted to establish the group’s academic work as the natural result of disinterested, but passionate, intellectuals with wide-reaching yet never inappropriate research interests. Again, he referenced his work on Saint-Saëns as a means to establish his credibility: he could work on topics in near-contemporary music. The subtext, of course, was that despite the quasi contemporaneity of many of Saint-Saëns’s critical writings with Tiersot’s study of them, the attitudes those writings expressed were stale and no longer held sway in current aesthetic or political debates.

But perhaps Tiersot also harbored other motivations. He was not the only critic of his day to consider Saint-Saëns’s essays as having real scholarly applications. Romain Rolland, in his \textit{Musiciens d’aujourd’hui}, cited the composer as an authority on contemporary music history. “‘Before 1870,’ wrote Mr. Camille Saint-Saëns in his book \textit{Harmonie et mélodie}, ‘a French composer who was crazy enough to risk himself in the field of instrumental music, had no other method to hear his works performed than to organize a concert for himself, and to invite his friends and the press.’” His in-line citation of the book and not just the opinion piece as it originally appeared, gave weight

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 605.
to the reference, making it appear like the reasoned work of a professional historian. The rest of Rolland’s account of the Société Nationale also drew heavily from Saint-Saëns’s writings about it, despite the loss of objectivity suffered by staying too close to the source.

Rolland was primarily interested in music’s history and its potential to offer listeners a moral or ethical means to rise above their current social conditions. In the opening to his essay on music in France since 1870, he cast a bittersweet light on what he perceived as the era that saw the most important development in French musical art since the seventeenth century. On the one hand, it showed true promise for the French people, who through their “faith and energy recreated French music.” On the other hand, this veritable renaissance had yet to produce a substantive body of works: “in a general sense, the works—save two or three—are worth less than the effort [it took to compose them].” His support for French composers was solid but not unconditional. His appreciation for Saint-Saëns, who was his close friend, offers one way to understand Rolland’s musical values. Rolland went to some lengths to specify that despite Saint-Saëns’s excellent use of forms and methods drawn from German composers, he was nonetheless truly French because of his clarity. And yet, pushing him beyond national boundaries, he argued for Saint-Saëns’s eternal and universal rarity, or excellence. His recitation of the many genres in which Saint-Saëns succeeded, and his specific description of Saint-Saëns’s disinterest in critics and public opinion, served to classify the

69 Rolland, Musiciens d’aujourd’hui, 209.
70 Ibid., 210.
composer as “rare for all times, and certainly for our time, when the power of opinion is tyrannical, and especially in France, where the artist is more social than elsewhere.”

The difference between French and German characters came with values in Rolland’s writing. The two races—not just styles—gained personalities through Saint-Saëns and Richard Strauss. Unlike “the frenetic torrent Strauss, who rolls pell-mell from mud to ruins to genius,” Saint-Saëns’s “Latin art… stands tall, ironic and serene.”

Rolland used his two images of Saint-Saëns, the one existing outside time and place, the other embodying classical French values, to create a vision of France and Frenchness as surpassing time and place, safeguarding eternal values for humanity. Rolland was therefore motivated by more than musicological or music-historical methods to employ Saint-Saëns’s writings as scholarly documents with academic authority. By using Saint-Saëns as a figure of France, his writings became the record of French aesthetics. In turn, these were universal aesthetics: clarity, peace, purity. By making an exception of Saint-Saëns, he was paradoxically also able to use him as a representative of Frenchness.

Tiersot’s focus on Saint-Saëns’s writings as having musicological importance can be understood as an attempt to dismantle the authority Rolland subtly ascribed to them. Before taking over the presidency of the Société Française de Musique, Tiersot published his own history of contemporary French music, a widely practiced genre at the time. His chapter on Saint-Saëns accorded him no less a status within French music than Rolland’s had, but he never edged beyond the limitations of his goal of accounting for

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71 Rolland, Musiciens d’aujourd’hui, 85.
72 Tiersot, Un demi-siècle de musique française; entre les deux guerres, 1870-1917. Paris: Alcan, 1918.
what had happened musically in France in the previous 50 years. While he compared certain elements of Saint-Saëns’s career or music to specific references outside French music—his prodigious performing ability was equaled only by Mozart, the style of his Oratorio de noël showed traces of Bach and Carissimi—he never suggested that Saint-Saëns’s stature had anything to do with universal or eternal values. While he mentioned the composer’s worldwide fame achieved through the success of Samson et Dalila, this was not an excuse to force an interpretation of the composer’s influence in other places. Tellingly, when he delved into an analysis of symphonic poems, he offered as a corollary to the inspiration Saint-Saëns drew from Liszt, that of Couperin, whose role in symphonic writing had been less widely considered. Unlike Rolland, when Tiersot reinforced Saint-Saëns’s inherent French qualities, he did so with the goal of keeping him within a continuous French tradition that had debts to other musical cultures but was neither derivative of them nor staunchly opposed to them.

When Tiersot assumed the presidency of the fledgling Société Française de Musicologie, Rolland had already left Paris to take up residence in more remote locations among the Alps. Rolland was thus no longer present to participate in the scholarly

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73 He introduces the chapter by offering a summary of his life: “par quelque côté qu’on le considère, [Saint-Saëns’s life and works] apparaît comme l’honneur de l’art de son pays et de son temps!” This clearly restrains the composer’s significance to France in the pre-war period. Tiersot, Un demi-siècle, 84.
74 “D’une précocité qui semble n’avoir eu d’égale dans l’histoire que celle de Mozart, il composait, à l’âge de cinq ans, des airs de danse et de petites mélodies.” Tiersot, Un demi-siècle, 84.
75 “[With the] Oratorio de noël, ce n’est plus aux classique de la symphonie que le compositeur demande les formes extérieures dans lesquelles il veut faire couler le flot de sa musique; il remonte jusqu’à des maîtres qui n’étaient alors connus que de bien peu de gens: non seulement à Bach, mais aussi à ceux qui n’ont pas dédaigné de subir l’influence vivifiante du chant italien, comme Haendel [sic], et aux pure italiens eux-mêmes, comme Scarlatti.” Tiersot, Un demi-siècle, 94.
76 “l’ouvrage qui a le plus puissamment contribué à propager sa renommée à travers le monde, Samson et Dalila…” Tiersot, Un demi-siècle, 89.
77 Tiersot first compares the titles of Saint-Saëns’s symphonic poems with titles of Couperin’s pièces de clavecin, adding “Et si la musique des poèmes diffère par son développement et ses caractères extérieurs de celle des pièces de clavecin, c’est qu’elle a profité des progrès accomplis par l’art en cent cinquante ans et plus; mais elle coule certainement de la même source.” Un demi-siècle, 98.
community of the society, even though he had been an active member of the pre-war French branch of the Internationale Musik Gesellschaft. In his opening speech as president, given July 2, 1920, Tiersot implored his fellow members not to engage in disputes or scholarly battles such as the pedant Trissotin was wont to do in Molière’s play *Les Femmes savantes*. André Schaeffner, giving an account of the speech fifty years later and no longer knowing the reasons for Tiersot’s warning, guessed that it must have had something to do with Tiersot’s project of writing incidental music for Molière’s plays, a territory he felt obliged to guard from others. But the idea of pedantry, encapsulated in Trissotin, has to do with disinterred criticism. Molière modeled Trissotin on the abbé Charles Cotin, a priest and theologian who spoke out against libertine satire, while his own publications, for example, his translation of the Canticle of Canticles, betrayed the influence of wealthy salon patrons more than eternal Church teachings. Moreover, Tiersot’s reference to scholarly battles could be tied to his and Rolland’s diverging portrayals what kind of musicology Saint-Saëns symbolized, and how a given scholar’s interpretation of the composer reflected his scholarly prerogatives. The concern over professionalization was nascent in the discipline of music history at this time, as an increasing number of schools established music history programs and were awarding degrees in the field. Did one need a degree in order to publish on musicological topics? Rolland had a degree in Music History but Tiersot did not. When he referred to Saint-Saëns’s writings as “relating to musicology” in his 1924 speech, he alluded to a more

79 Cotin (1604-1681)’s writings include a Meditation on the Lamentations (1634), a satire against Gilled Ménage, and a work called *La Critique désintéressée sur les satyres du temps* (1666), among others. The reaction of Molière against Cotin has been explored by Elisabeth Lapeyre, “Les Femmes Savantes: une lecture aliénée,” *French Forum* 6, no. 2 (1981): 132-9.
pointed argument about their scholarly worth. On the one hand, he wanted to protect
musicology from the emotionally driven essays of a figure who was not disinterested. On
the other hand, he considered that these at the very least “touched on” the discipline,
which he demonstrated by publishing no fewer than five of his own essays about them.

Discussing the philosophical essay *Problèmes et mystères* by Saint-Saëns, he
defended the composer’s right to offer his thoughts on a subject outside of music,
empathizing with his own stated feeling that such ideas “concern everyone.”

Tiersot added a jab at the practice of music criticism: “In terms of the competence he could have
[in the matter of philosophy and metaphysics], besides for the fact that he never
pretended to instruct the learned, does one not believe that it is at least equal to that
which, in another area, possess all the amateurs who write about music? And these,
however, are almost all the critics!” At the same time that he mocked the loose
credentials of many contemporary music critics, he begged his reader to acknowledge
that it was common practice for those without professional training in the matter to write
music criticism.

Tiersot’s appreciation of Saint-Saëns’s writing can be thought of as a way to
assert his own scholarly method, formed through practice and experience in the field
rather than abstract reflection in a university, against that of Rolland. By establishing his
own method as particularly viable, he is better placed to make persuasive arguments. The
one he held most dear was the advancement of the more radical composers of the

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80 Julien Tiersot, “Bibliographie: Camille Saint-Saëns: *Divagations sérieuses* 1 vol. in-12, Flammarion,
1922.—*Au courant de la vie*, 1 vol. in-8°, Dorbon aîné, 1914.—*Les Idées de M. Vincent d’Indy*, 1 vol. in-
81 “Et quant à la compétence qu’il a pu avoir, outre qu’il n’a jamais prétendu faire la leçon aux savants, croit-on qu’elle n’est pas au moins égale à celle que, dans un autre genre, ont tous les amateurs qui écrivent sur la musique? Ces derniers, cependant, sont presque toute la critique!” Tiersot, “Bibliographie,” 138.
generation after Saint-Saëns. It would be important for him, then, to praise the older composer as the example of French composers of the second half of the nineteenth century without overstating his importance to a more universal or eternal level. Saint-Saëns’s conservatism would not make him the model for others to follow. His value is rooted in his time and place, and Tiersot’s status as a legitimate musicologist affirms this view. It is the writings of Saint-Saëns that most directly and obviously communicate his old-fashioned attitudes, and by exposing the composer’s opinions through his own analyses, Tiersot is able to entrench a reputation that had already begun to form but that Rolland had challenged with his compellingly glorious assessment of the composer. As an active member and then president of the Société Française de Musicologie, Tiersot’s vision is the one that got pushed into posterity.

It may be that Tiersot did not need to insist so heavily on the double nature of Saint-Saëns’s essays on music—their validity as musicological and their encapsulation of the composer’s fundamentally past- and present-mindedness that spelled his fixed reputation as an exemplification of his own time and place. Other writers were aware of just this duality and even those who most unconditionally supported Saint-Saëns at the time of his death cite his articles as both having a scholarly bent and representing the essence of his musical milieu.

Saint-Saëns’s printed works will long be read with profit; they have a place assigned to them in every musical library, no less than have his engraved works, side by side with those of his friend Berlioz, whose stimulating and pleasurable

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82 Steven Huebner has noted that Tiersot’s diehard republicanism shaped his music criticism, specifically in his biography of Beethoven, whom he characterizes as a musical incarnation of the ideals of the Revolution. See “D’Indy’s Beethoven,” in French Music, Culture, and National Identity, 1870-1939, ed. Barbara Kelly (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 98.
qualities they share; and they are no less characteristic of an epoch than are the Berlioz feuilletons, for their author might well claim, to use his own words, that he ‘had a certain right to the prevention of knowing something of the hidden springs and motive forces of an art in which he had had his being, from infancy on, like a fish in water’.\(^{83}\)

This estimation, presented by Jean-Georges Prod’homme, explains, with less anxiety, the image that would become standard through to our days. The writings are entertaining, copious, and pass on the spirit of their age like a time capsule.

Beyond offering us a chance to explore the critical biases of early twentieth-century authors who charted the course for a century of reception history, this reflection on the place of Saint-Saëns’s essays in musicology can also help us clarify the composer’s relationship with fin-de-siècle ideas of what and how music expresses.

Studies on the transitional aesthetics between Romanticism and Modernism have highlighted the shift in perspective from the creator’s sincere, fundamentally self-reflective approach to a more objective, even ironic distance between self and expression. The shift is far from a strict dichotomy, and from an artist’s perspective it is likely no more than a fallacy, but recent historiographical approaches have highlighted the critic’s role in creating the appearance of such a shift and developing a listening market for the new objective style.\(^{84}\)

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84 In particular, Carlo Caballero’s study on “sincerity” as a major value of critics in the fin-de-siècle period shows the persistence of the Romantic aesthetic of sentimentality. See Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics. Similarly, Noel Verzosa’s work on aesthetics of the absolute, seek to position critics as central to packaging Debussy and Satie’s music for audiences craving novelty. See “The Absolute Limits: Debussy, Satie, and the Culture of French Modernism, ca. 1865-1920,” Phd diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2008.
But even composers whose aesthetic views are as coldly calculated as Saint-Saëns’s can have personal stakes in both the kind of music they compose and how it is used, especially in a religious setting, to bring the initial topic of this chapter back into view. As a suite to Tiersot’s persistent lobbying for the musicological validity of Saint-Saëns’s essays on music, he published a brief review of the second—definitive—edition of Jean Bonnerot’s biography of the composer.\(^{85}\) The one-paragraph assessment of the book served two purposes: publicity for Bonnerot and completion of the Saint-Saëns bibliography Tiersot had put out in the previous issue of the *Revue de musicologie*.\(^{86}\) And this second purpose was just as ideologically driven as the bibliography, along with all Tiersot’s other articles on Saint-Saëns as a writer, had been. He cited exactly one addition to the biography, a note the composer left in his will concerning the music for his own funeral: he forbade the “*Pie Jesu*” known as the air by Stradella.” Failing to cite the page number, Tiersot also left out the context of the remark, supplying instead his own commentary: “Thus, even beyond the grave, Saint-Saëns shows that he is a conscientious musicologist, disallowing his funeral to be consecrated with a piece of music passed off as Baroque, that he knew to be a fake!”\(^{87}\) In the biography, Bonnerot supplied no reason for Saint-Saëns’s opinion about the *Pie Jesu*, including it as one of two directions the composer left about his funeral: “If [it] is religious, I wish it to be short, and I forbid that they play the *Pie Jesu* known as the air by Stradella.”\(^{88}\) What Bonnerot selected to quote

\(^{85}\) This was published in Durand’s series of studies of the life and works of contemporary French composers, including Chennevière on Debussy, Roland Manuel on Ravel, and Louis Vuillemin on d’Indy. Jean Bonnerot, *C. Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) Sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris: Durand, 1923).


\(^{87}\) T., “Review,” 188.

\(^{88}\) Bonnerot, *C. Saint-Saëns*, 217.
from Saint-Saëns’s will for documentary purposes Tiersot turned into evidence of not only musical taste but also scholarly motivation.

Was Tiersot correct in constructing Saint-Saëns as a musicologist because of his rejection of the “fake” piece? The melody in question was found in many compendiums of easy church organ music in 19th-century France, under the title “air d’église” and without words.\(^{89}\) Fauré made an arrangement of this piece for use at the Madeleine, for which he expanded the instrumentation from organ to soprano and cello duet with chamber orchestra accompaniment.\(^{90}\) At least one of the many transcriptions of this piece does acknowledge uncertainty over its author: in 1910 Hamelle published a version for voice and piano arranged by Sylvan Saint-Étienne with the subheading “Music attributed to Stradella”. Moreover, the tradition of this aria, perhaps long since forgotten by the time Saint-Saëns wrote his will, involved François-Joseph Fétis’s “discovery” of the piece and later Niedermeyer’s incorporation of it into an Opéra-Comique about Stradella’s exciting and tragic life.\(^{91}\) Indeed, the fact that there were so many editions suggests that Saint-Saëns banned it for its popularity more than for doubts about its authenticity.\(^{92}\) There is

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\(^{90}\) See BnF, Département de musique, MS- 25662. See also Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré: Les voix du clair-obscur*, 170, n. 26.

\(^{91}\) For the history of this opera and the aria’s role in it, with some guesses as to the work’s actual authorship, see Sarah Hibberd, “Murder in the Cathedral? Stradella, Musical Power, and Performing the Past in 1830s Paris.” *Music & Letters* 87, no. 4 (2006): 551-579. In particular, Hibberd cited Weckerlin’s 1877 article on the piece that asserts the general opinion that the air was written either by Rossini or Niedermeyer. See p. 558, n. 21.

\(^{92}\) In her history of the various early music revivals in 19th-century France, Katharine Ellis mentions this aria as a popular standard of liturgical concerts. Ellis takes for granted our current knowledge that the piece was forged, but does not comment on the views of 19th and early 20th-century musicians. See *Interpreting
little evidence to support the idea that Saint-Saëns objected to the inauthenticity of the piece. He did critique, in his 1916 article “Music in the Church”, a school of composers who “imitated” Palestrinian polyphonic style.\(^9^3\) But the imitation he referred to there was not the same as here, with the work of a contemporary composer passed off as actually written by a historical figure rather than simply in his style. The wish to exclude Stradella’s *Pie Jesu* does not demonstrate a musico-historical, much less a musicological, anxiety on his part.

Then again, the question of Saint-Saëns’s musicological credentials can be invoked with reference to religious music. In the same 1916 article, he took a stand against the current transcription and performance practice of Gregorian chant, which stripped the music of its original functional character in order to increase its sense of hieratic mystery. In particular, the transposition of the singers’ range from high to low, the addition of a “useless” drone accompaniment, and the adjustment from modes to “modern tonalities” all erased the music’s historicity.\(^9^4\) Making these criticisms was a way of demonstrating familiarity with the chant revival in France, a musicological enterprise of its own.\(^9^5\) Insofar as the musicology practiced by the Jesuit monks of Solesmes had doctrinal as well as scholarly interests, the entire question of a composer’s attitude toward religious music was a meeting point between belief and knowledge. In his review of Bonnerot’s biography, Tiersot’s focus on the scholarly prerogatives of the funeral music program reveals this meeting point’s displacement. The passage that both

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\(^9^4\) “Music in the Church,” 20-21.

\(^9^5\) See Katherine Bergeron, *Decadent Enchantments* and Katherine Ellis, *The Politics of Plain Chant.*

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Bonnerot and Tiersot cite from Saint-Saëns’s will expresses an idea other than the opinion about the *Pie Jesu*. It conveys ambivalence about the funeral’s religious status.

**Conclusion**

When put to the task of lining Saint-Saëns’s writings about other composers’ music and his own against our current view of turn-of-the-century criticism and aesthetics, Saint-Saëns becomes something of a problem. His works project the distant, often ironic, tone associated with early twentieth-century French modernism, but his technical innovations lag behind those of his peers. Likewise, his writings reflect the distance we associate with critics, but not that which we expect from composers. In his religious-themed works, especially the Psalm CL, the appropriation of Christian symbols does not lead to the projection of an alternative spirituality. Saint-Saëns reflected on dogma in his *Problèmes et Mystères*. Despite the sometimes scathing criticisms of Christianity in the book, it still shows equivocation in Saint-Saëns’s attitude toward the religion.96 According to Saint-Saëns, “It is with affirmation that we make a lasting work; negation could only ever be sterile.”97 People of advanced societies long for individual liberty and free thinking, but they must not remain at the stage of pure negation—atheism—but rather should assert a positive belief. The problem of interpreting Saint-Saëns’s position in the turn-of-the-century musical landscape in which an increasing number of composers were reinterpreting Catholic signs to suit their own spiritual beliefs

96 In Part V of his text he renounces the illogic of the Bible and the marked difference in lifestyle between contemporary Christians and the way of life Jesus practiced,. The criticizes the Church for giving a liberal interpretation of the Gospel that ultimately favors the spread of the religion rather than the precepts Jesus taught. See Saint-Sains, *Problèmes et mystères*, 55-65.

97 “C’est avec des affirmations que l’on fait œuvre qui dure; la négation ne saurait être que stérile.” Saint-Sains, *Problèmes et mystères*, 48.
can thus be solved through thought, the result of dialogue. Saint-Saëns’s views on religious music might defy modern logic, but they show us that religious expression may always need to be sincere, but it need not always be serious. Sometimes it takes a lapse of religious practice to show that religion can be liberating and joyful.
Chapter 3

The Mystery of Debussy’s *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*

*Introduction*

There is more than one kind of mystery in Claude Debussy’s score for *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*. Because the work failed to charm audiences during its first run in May 1911, it remains one of the composer’s least known, despite its grand scale. Having little or no direct experience with the work in performance, many scholars have been mystified by Debussy’s decision to compose a score for a neo-gothic mystery play by Italian poet Gabriele d’Annunzio, then residing in France.¹ Most commonly, they have attempted to de-mystify the composer’s motivations by emphasizing the generous salary he received for the work, since they were unwilling to accept that Debussy found inspiration in the play’s outwardly religious subject.² But those closest to Debussy at the

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¹ D’Annunzio wrote the play just in time for Debussy to compose the music; the play was published first in the theater journal *Le théâtre illustré* during the week before the premiere, and later that summer in a separate book edition by the editor Calmann-Lévy.

² Scholarly reception of the work has been dismissive at best and derisive at worst. In the most extended published study on *Le Martyre*, Robert Orledge has repeated Debussy’s financial motivations for the project, remarking, in particular, “The Catholic writer Charles Péguy described the charismatic d’Annunzio as ‘capable of miracles,’ but it was a financial rather than religious one that tempted Debussy.” *Debussy and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 217-36. Here he is repeating the position put forth by Edward Lockspeiser: “It is impossible to believe that for this gaudy work Debussy could have agreed to supply an immense score for any other than material reasons.” In *Debussy: His Life and Mind* vol. II (New York: MacMillan Company, 1965), 157. Before him, French musicologist Marcel Dietschy lamented the whole project, supporting Debussy’s efforts but insisting that the work was a failure and that Debussy himself was deeply disturbed by the sacrilegious nature of the scandalous dances. See *La Passion de Claude Debussy* (Neuchâtel: Baconnière, 1962), 214-220. Yet a few years earlier, after seeing a revival of the work in Orange, France in 1948, musicologist Victor Seroff accounts for the work as “breathtaking spectacle,” and his summary of Debussy’s motivations is sympathetic. *Debussy: Musician of France* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1956), 290-302, esp. 302. Biographer Marcel Dumensnil paints Debussy’s interest in the project as sincere, and a serious challenge to his health, *Claude Debussy: Master of Dreams* (New York: Ives Washburne, 1940), 272. More recently, Denis Herlin has defended Debussy’s commitment, in ““Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien,” in *Opéra et religion sous la IIIe république* (Saint Étienne: Publications de l’Université de Saint-Étienne, 2006), 220. In the most recent biography of Debussy, Eric Jensen merely perpetuates the composer’s financial motivation, separating the project from the many aborted ones after *Pelléas*: “Of the many proposed and contemplated collaborations during these years, Debussy completed only two in their entirety: *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*, and *Khamma*. It can
time he wrote the score did not question his sincerity of purpose. Debussy’s editor Jacques Durand, who of all people was aware of the composer’s dire financial straits, insisted that he in fact had “personal,” “profoundly original” ideas about the drama. The musical nature of those ideas has until now remained a mystery. Debussy’s ideas were rooted in Symbolism, specifically in the desire to convey spirituality in a direct, non-doctrinaire, and idealized manner.

At its premiere at the Théâtre du Châtelet on Monday, May 22, 1911 Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien consisted of five acts of dramatic declamation in French verse; orchestral preludes for each act by Debussy; various musical interventions during the course of the action, including solos for seraphic female voices, unaccompanied choruses redolent of renaissance polyphony, and brass fanfares; and an ecstatic dance over hot coals performed by Ida Rubinstein, who had made her Paris début in 1909, during the Ballets Russes’s inaugural season. Reception was mixed and accounts of the audience’s response vary. While Henri Bidou for the Journal des débats claimed that people were whispering about a failed work, Alfred Bruneau writing for Le Matin praised the work beyond measure. Pierre Lalo captures a general feeling by asserting that while the

be no coincidence that they were the only collaborations that promised to pay well.” Debussy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 224.


4 For a critical edition of this score, see Claude Debussy, Le Martyre de saint Sébastien, ed. Eiko Kasaba and Pierre Boulez, Œuvres complètes vol. 6, no. 4 (Paris: Musica Gallica, 2009).


crowds loved the performance, he found the music very good without demonstrating
development in Debussy’s art. More recently, scholars interested in reception history
point out the mixed reaction to this “succès d’estime.”

The basic plot of the mystery play aligns with fifteenth-century French sources:
Sebastian, an actual martyr from the turn of the fourth century in Rome, is the lead archer
in the imperial regiment. He intervenes on behalf of numerous persecuted Christians and
demonstrates his faith through miraculous acts. When the emperor Diocletian discovers
Sebastian’s religious beliefs, he attempts to dissuade the young and beautiful athlete by
tempting him with riches. Sebastian publicly denies the emperor, enacting Jesus’ passion
and inciting Diocletian to sentence him to death by the cohort of archers he had once
commanded. When the archers carry out the sentence, the women of Biblos lament his
death with a grand funeral procession. Sebastian’s soul finally arrives at the gates of
heaven where choirs of angels greet him and he proclaims the joy of the resurrection.

Inspired by numerous sources from Catholic literature, this religious story was
offensive to official doctrine in everything from its source materials to its actors and their
performances. In fact, the religious tension around the premiere became so fraught that
it prevented many potential admirers from attending any performances. The most obvious
point of contention was the casting of Rubinstein, a Jewish woman, in the role of

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8 In his survey of the press response, Léon Vallas cites the critic for La République française, who called
the music “morceaux détachés, sans aucune suite et, la plupart du temps, sans aucun rapport avec la scène
9 The historian Gustave Cohen claims that he himself accompanied d’Annunzio to the Bibliothèque
Nationale, department of manuscripts, in December 1910, to read 15th-century saint stories. He describes
this event in “Gabriele d’Annunzio et Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien,” La Revue musicale special issue on
10 In her University of Paris Master’s Thesis, Inés Elvira Gomez scrupulously attributes many details of
d’Annunzio’s play to certain biblical passages and to Jacques de Voragine’s indispensable La Légende
Dorée, but also to mythologies from ancient Greece and Egypt. See part II of “Le Martyre de Saint
Sebastian. Her involvement in the project was fundamental: her androgynous physique inspired d’Annunzio to write the script he had been imagining for decades, and she financed the production. At the beginning of the collaboration, she brought on Gabriel Astruc, a theater director also involved with the Ballets Russes. Astruc was aware of the possible difficulties of interpreting a religious subject and urged d’Annunzio to make press releases as early as January 1911 stating the project’s purity of intention. Moreover, the aura of religious ambiguity had already driven away prospective musical collaborators, especially Roger Ducasse, from whom Rubinstein had originally solicited a score; he politely declined but privately admitted that the aesthetico-religious concept made him uneasy. Ultimately, since d’Annunzio ignored Astruc’s recommendations, gossip about the work’s sacrilegious nature directed the Archbishop of Paris to ban Catholics from attending performances and led to d’Annunzio’s complete poetic works being put on the Papal Index, the official Catholic register of banned books. Even Maurice Barrès, to whom d’Annunzio dedicated the play, abstained from attending performances in deference to the Archbishop.

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11 See note 46 below.
13 Roger-Ducasse compared d’Annunzio’s project to a homoerotic literary scandal of the time surrounding André Gide’s novel Corydon. See Roger-Ducasse’s letter of 8 November 1910 to André Lambinet cited in Jacques Depaulis, “Quelques précisions nouvelles sur le Martyre de Saint Sébastien,” Revue de la Société liégeoise de musicologie 6 (1996): 14-16. One other prominent composer’s name to have been suggested by Rubinstein was Florent Schmitt.
14 Upon receiving the dedication to Le Martyre, Barrès wrote to the poet, “Annunzio, you have expressed desire well but the gift of the heart poorly. The play remains pagan…I do not want to go where the fevers are. I like health.” Quoted in Raphaël Cuttoli, “Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien: Création et reprises” La revue musicale no. 234 (February 1957): 16.
critics alike tacitly knew that the work was not Catholic. It was some distortion of Catholic symbols.

Debussy was aware of these problems, acknowledging them from the start, but his keen interest in the play’s connection with Symbolism—specifically Symbolist theater—outweighed his initial reservations. His music for the project conveys awe toward sacred mysteries, even if many critics have disparaged the wide variety of styles.\textsuperscript{15} Debussy’s working method also attests to his sincerity of purpose. For example, he kept to himself and was in a heightened state of emotion for the three intense months of composition.\textsuperscript{16} And, according to two different accounts, Debussy was moved to tears upon hearing the music, an emotional display that was far from his habit.\textsuperscript{17} The work continued to spur creative and critical conversations after its inauspicious premiere. Debussy and d’Annunzio, both still inspired by the topic, discussed on multiple occasions the possibility of adapting the work as a lyric drama; Debussy apparently worked toward this

\textsuperscript{15} Guy Tosi, the editor of Debussy and d’Annunzio’s correspondence, which also includes the first and only major study on the origins of \textit{Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien}, describes the reviews as being a mix of indifference from snobbish audiences and passionate enthusiasm from critics. See \textit{Debussy et d’Annunzio: Correspondance inédite} (Paris: Les Éditions Denoël, 1948), 30-40. Reviews in the Paris press were published in \textit{Le Temps}, \textit{Comœœdia}, \textit{La Grande revue}, \textit{La Nouvelle revue française}, \textit{Gil Blas}, \textit{Journal des débats politiques et littéraires}, \textit{Le Figaro}, \textit{Le Gaulois}, \textit{Courrier musical}, \textit{l’Éclair}, and \textit{La République française}.

\textsuperscript{16} Durand reports that Debussy worked as if in a fever during this time. “Debussy écrivit cette admirable partition dans l’exaltation…Debussy s’adjoignit, pour ce travail d’écriture [des parties d’orchestre], André Caplet, qu’il appréciait beaucoup. Ils travaillèrent jour et nuit.” \textit{Quelques souvenirs d’un éditeur de musique}, 2e série (1910-1924) (Paris: Durand, 1925), 22.

\textsuperscript{17} Two sources attest to Debussy’s emotional response to the music he composed. First, Durand reports that the composer burst into tears while playing the music for the dance of the Passion on piano. (“J’eus aussi une satisfaction intense lorsqu’il me fit entendre \textit{Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien}. Arrivé au magnifique passage de la ‘Passion,’ Debussy, au piano, sanglotait, tandis que j’en faisais autant dans mon fauteuil.”) Jacques Durand, \textit{Quelques souvenirs d’un éditeur de musique} (Paris: Durand, 1924), 124. Another anecdote relates Debussy’s outburst at the dress rehearsal in response to the act-five music of Paradise. “Debussy ne parut que le jour où l’on donna, au foyer du théâtre une répétition d’ensemble à l’italienne. Exécution d’une qualité inégalable. Le compositeur en fut ému au point de pleurer.” Vallas, \textit{Claude Debussy}, 370-1.
end with Louis Laloy in 1915 and 1916. In 1922, after the composer’s death, d’Annunzio and Rubinstein joined many of the original collaborators in a grand presentation of the work—with an abridged text but the same costumes, sets, and music as the 1911 production—in its premiere at the Opéra. Le Martyre was further revived in new productions at the Opéra in 1957 and 1969, each with newly revised versions of the script but always the original score. The symphonic version of the score, without the choral and vocal numbers, became a standard part of the repertory just one year after the theater premiere, in 1912. Throughout these various reincarnations of Le Martyre, Debussy’s music itself has provided the thread of continuity and proven to be the essence of this work, expressing the fullness of its spiritual drama.

Sebastian performs his first miracle as a sign of a sign, shooting an arrow into the sky that never falls. Two levels of meaning of this action, its significance as a reversal of the rules of physics and its iconicity as the essential function of a symbol—something that points to something else, often yet unknown or forever unknowable—tie both the

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18 Herlin addresses this project, citing letters from Debussy to his friend Robert Godet and his editor Jacques Durand. See “Le Martyre,” 224-5. The projects for converting the work into a lyric drama. According to Durand, Debussy began work on one attempt in 1914 when Jacques Rouché, the director of the Opéra who eventually staged Le Martyre in 1922, first envisioned including it in his inaugural season. The project was scrapped because of the potential problems finding an audience, following the Archbishop’s ban. See Jacques Durand, Quelques souvenirs d’un éditeur de musique (Paris: Durand, 1924): 24. The idea was also raised in 1916, as Debussy writes to Godet on 3 December of that year asking his opinion on the matter. See Letter 1916-125 in Debussy, Correspondance (1872-1918), ed. François Lesure and Denis Herlin (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 2052-3.

19 This performance was undertaken, as mentioned in the above note, by Jacques Rouché, and involved many of the original collaborators, including d’Annunzio, Rubinstein, Leon Bakst, and André Caplet. Caplet renounced the production the evening before the dress rehearsal and officially withdrew as conductor the day before the premiere. For more on this event, see Denis Huneau, André Caplet, debussyiste indépendant (Weinsberg: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 2007), 750-773.

20 The first non-theatrical performance of the music for Le Martyre took place under the direction of Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht at the Société Musicale Indépendante on 14 June 1912, and later André Caplet, whose involvement in the composition and orchestration of the original version is still the source of some questions, assembled the Four Symphonic Fragments, which Edgar Varèse premiered on 4 January 1914. The score for these is now available in a critical edition prepared by Kasaba and published by Musica Gallica in 2012.
action and Sebastian, and the whole play, to the project of Symbolism. The Catholic setting of the martyrdom is itself a ritual offering, an element of French modernist reality that is sacrificed on the altar of free thinking and personalized spirituality. The production of *Le Martyre*, including script, score, and other more ephemeral details, is a culmination of French and Russian Symbolist movements. It thematizes representation, pulling its drama from Sebastian’s saintly impulse to make his life into a simulacrum of Christ’s. It deconstructs the possibility of Symbolism by exposing the aesthetic similarity between the traditional, institutional symbols of Catholicism and the heretical, folk symbols of multiple pagan cosmologies. Debussy’s music for this project has a story waiting to be told; its mystery is born from a close association with the parts of the text most directly evocative of Symbolism. The score witnesses a lingering interest in symbols of the spirit as modern incarnations of metaphysical yearning.

*Origins of Le Martyre: Collaboration and Contention*

If the musical expression of the mysterious and uplifting martyrdom story proved to be the most lasting contribution to the 1911 premiere, the work would not have been possible without d’Annunzio’s vision. Gabriele d’Annunzio was, by the time of *Le

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21 Morrison’s argument about Rimsky-Korsakov’s *The Invisible City of Kitezh*—that the religious syncretism defining element of Russian Symbolism and that certain of Rimsky’s musical devices are drawn from a symbolist manner—finds a parallel example in this work. Op. cit., 14-15.

22 In a recent attempt to redress past misinterpretations of *Parsifal*, William Kinderman has put forth a similar argument vis-à-vis Wagner and Christianity: “Here, as elsewhere, Wagner was not subservient to a single religious framework in his shaping of the text and music.” Kinderman cites Wagner’s 1880 essay, “Religion and Art” as a testament of the composer’s willingness to mix various religious signs and mysteries as a way to vivify spirituality. *Wagner’s Parsifal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5-6.

Martyre, an internationally renowned writer; his novels L’Innocente, Il trionfo della morte, and Forse che sì, Forse che no had been published in Italy and abroad. He earned a literary reputation as heir to the Symbolist tradition; critics cited Ibsen, Maeterlinck, and Baudelaire as resonant voices in his style. Through his charismatic personality he befriended important artists of his day, including Robert de Montesquiou, a major figure of the decadent movement. In addition to being famous for his writing, d’Annunzio was infamous for his extravagant lifestyle, and it was his propensity to live beyond his means that had necessitated his relocation to Paris in 1910, where he was avoiding Italian creditors. There, his decision to openly live with his mistress Donatella Cross, who had translated his most recent novel (Forse che sì, forse che no, a fictionalized account of d’Annunzio’s passionate affair with her), was only the first of many social indiscretions. During his first month in Paris, he lived recklessly and vigorously, meeting through de Montesquiou countless other elegant women.

Work on Le Martyre began when d’Annunzio first witnessed one such elegant woman, Ida Rubinstein, dance the title role in Cléopâtre. Her slender physique reminded him of the renaissance iconography of Saint Sebastian as an androgynous denuded adolescent. The collaboration between Rubinstein and d’Annunzio was mutually beneficial: she possessed the funds he needed to finance both a spectacular theater

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24 For example, d’Annunzio’s first play, La citta morta, has been described as owing a great debt to Maeterlinck, as well as Wagner. In his classic biography of d’Annunzio, Philippe Julien describes d’Annunzio as participating in the international vogue for goodness, characterized by “the universal love preached by the Russians, the compassion of Verlaine, the naïvité of Maeterlinck.” D’Annunzio, trans. Stephen Hardman (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 88. Likewise, English Symbolist poet Arthur Symons gives d’Annunzio as an example of a Symbolist author. The Symbolist Movement in Literature (London: L. Heinemann, 1899).
25 For more on d’Annunzio, see Dominique Lormier, Gabriele d’Annunzio en France 1910-1915 (J & D Editions, 1997).
26 D’Annunzio’s liaison with Cross, whose real name was Nathalie de Goloubeff, began in Rome in 1908; it and the novel it inspired are briefly summarized by Giovanni Gullace, Gabriele d’Annunzio in France, A Study in Cultural Relations (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1966), 38-9.
production and his private luxuries, and he was willing to craft a leading role specifically for her. With the title role filled and the budget acquired, d’Annunzio began writing the script, leaving Paris for the remote villa Saint Dominique in Arcachon, near Bordeaux. There he assumed the pseudonym Guy d’Arbres and kept the company of Adolphe Bermond, an elderly Catholic man whose pure faith must have inspired discussions on spiritual topics with a candor unthinkable in the Parisian salons he had frequented.  

While he set to work, Rubinstein likewise got busy assembling the production team. Because she had performed with the Ballets Russes, she was able to attract its cohort of artists: Gabriel Astruc as the director, Léon Bakst as the set and costume designer, and Michel Fokine as the choreographer. The final recruit for the creative team would be the composer.

Rubinstein and d’Annunzio chose Debussy only after failing to enlist Roger Ducasse, Henri Février, and Florent Schmidt, and once he agreed to write the music, the group had to work quickly. The formal contract, signed by Debussy with Éditions Durand in December 1910, committed the project to premiere on May 20 of the following year in the Saison artistique at the Théâtre du Châtelet, leaving only five months for the preparations. The agreement stipulated the specific musical pieces he was to contribute and assured the music’s place within the dramatic concept: under no circumstance was the play to be performed without the score. It also required Debussy to prepare dance

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28 De Cossart describes the cooperation of so many artists associated with the Ballets Russes as “alarming” to Diaghilev, op. cit., 12.
30 “Contract with Durand Publishers,” signed by d’Annunzio, Debussy, and Durand on January 11, 1911, Letter 1911-15 in Correspondance, 1376. The premiere was later pushed back to May 22.
music for three important solos by the end of February, a deadline he would later ignore. The main players accomplished their work in distant locales, so d’Annunzio and Debussy exchanged numerous letters in order to sort out aesthetic goals. The poet delayed his schedule, and after much anxiety he hand-delivered the text for the first completed act, Act III, to Debussy on January 11, 1911. The next act was finished one month later, and the entire script had been drafted by the end of the first week of March, when a reading was arranged at Astruc’s home.

One mystery of the work’s creation resides in Debussy’s working method and how he was able to complete his work in such a short time. The composer avows in many letters, to d’Annunzio, Astruc, Durand, and other friends, that the timeline made him feel extraordinarily rushed. His quip to Edgar Varèse, “I would need two years [to write the music], and naturally, I have barely two months!” has become famous. To add to the pressure, Debussy had to pause his composition work for a few days in February to supervise rehearsals for a production of Pelléas, leaving him even fewer days to devote to Le Martyre. He called upon André Caplet for orchestration help, as he had already done

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31 Orledge discusses the contract as it reflects the stakes for Debussy, d’Annunzio, and Rubinstein in Debussy and the Theatre, 220-1.
32 This correspondence was the first aspect of Le Martyre to receive scholarly treatment, and the analysis of it in Tosi, Debussy et d’Annunzio remains a valuable resource.
33 D’Annunzio sends a telegram to Debussy from Arcachon on January 9, 1911, stating that he will bring the script for act three to Debussy himself. See Letter 1911-11 in Correspondance, 1372. Two days later, he writes a letter announcing his “arrival,” presumably in Paris, and telling Debussy that he will find the manuscript of the third act in his “box.” See letter 1911-13 in ibid., 1375.
35 Debussy, letter 1911-31 in Correspondance, 1389. Orledge cites this letter, Debussy and the Theatre, 221.
36 Several of Debussy’s letters refer to this project, see letters 1911-35 through 1911-39 in Correspondance, 1393-6.
for “Gigues,” from the *Images* suite. What Caplet contributed in terms of actual music is impossible to discern. First, he and Debussy worked side by side during the final two months, so there are no written traces of their plans for dividing the labor. Second, the only surviving score is a holograph. This is partially in Debussy’s hand and partially in Caplet’s, but the division of handwriting cannot be used to attribute authorship. Each musical number is copied in one hand only, which does not reflect the division of labor suggested by contemporary sources. Debussy worked quickly and decisively, whatever Caplet’s contribution.

After running on enthusiasm for the aesthetic novelty of the concept, the collaborators all faced disillusionment during the final weeks of preparations. Rubinstein and Fokine became frustrated that the dance music was not ready for rehearsals as early as they had hoped. One of Astruc’s greatest apprehensions, that the work’s subject would attract attention—and condemnation—from religious authorities proved well founded. Even audience members had their hopes of previewing the performance dashed when mourning in the capital over the death of a government official in an aviation accident on May 21 menaced the scheduled dress rehearsal. Back inside the theater, chorus conductors Emile Vuillermoz and Marcel Chadeigne panicked when set designer Armand Bour separated some choir members from their voice parts on stage in order to make a

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37 This was a significant project and was prepared with Caplet using a skeleton score that Debussy had given him. Debussy was satisfied with the Caplet’s ability and would not fail to call on the younger composer many times in later years for similar assistance.
more stimulating visual effect with their costumes. Finally, Debussy himself had misgivings about the set designs, which struck him as void of the special ambiance he had in mind when he composed. In particular, he vehemently complained to Astruc about the paradise scene, insisting that it be truly resplendent, with moving decorations rather than a static backdrop.

*Le Martyre’s* premiere left audiences with mixed reactions; critics and socialites were either enthused or exasperated depending on their tastes. Those who loved the trendy Russian ballets found Rubinstein’s performance marvelous and the set decorations sublime. Most defenders of Debussy reveled in the score but lamented the disproportional division between spoken word and musical numbers. More conservative critics and audience members complained that the entire project was overly ambitious, unnecessarily complicated, lacked talented performers (in particular many people bemoaned Rubinstein’s voice and French pronunciation), and was too long. The scheduled run of ten performances was shortened to only nine, and the show closed without extra comment from the artistic community.

The preparations and premiere were chaotic though hardly unusual for independent works appearing in Paris at the turn of the century. The principle collaborators’ rhetorical and emotional engagement in the process, however, goes beyond trendiness. Religious topics had already begun to make a stir in avant-garde circles. D’Annunzio may have counted on censorship by Catholic authorities as a source of

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41 Émile Vuillermoz, *Claude Debussy*.
42 Debussy describes his vision for the finale in a letter from early May 1911 to Gabriel Astruc, Tosi, 74-5, in Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre*, 224-6.
43 Contemporary scholars of dance have perpetuated this reaction, see for instance de Cossart, op. cit., 12-13.
publicity. Recent outrage over the licentiousness of Salome performances in London as well as the Church’s categorical stance against dramatic representations of sacred topics in profane venues made such a ban foreseeable. Still, d’Annunzio insisted that he had felt drawn to the subject of the play since his youth, when he “was struck with love for this bleeding adolescent transfigured by the Christian myth, from the image of Adonis, of the beautiful god wounded, whom the women of Biblos laid to rest on an ebony frame, draped in purple, on the spring equinox.” For another, Rubinstein must have asked Debussy for the music since he was at the height of his fame and would later contribute to other such independent spectacles. In fact, before accepting the offer, he wondered whether he was pigeonholing himself as a composer of music for dance, at the time considered lowbrow entertainment. But the initial exchange between Debussy and d’Annunzio highlights their unique connection as admirers of the esoteric author Gabriel Mourey. They thus shared a special and long-standing interest in Symbolist thought and

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44 This incident is well known and at the time, a British critic remarked that the censorship of Salome was both “perfectly ridiculous” and “absolutely inevitable.” William Archer in J. P. Riquelme, “Shalom/Solomon/Salomé: Modernism and Wilde’s Aesthetic Politics,” Centennial Review 39, no. 3 (1995): 575.
45 In his public letter, the Archbishop states that he had already set the precedent for censoring dramatic interpretations of religious subjects presented to commercial audiences. “Mgr l’archevêque de Paris rappelle à cette occasion qu’au cours du dernier Congrès diocésain, il a instamment recommandé aux catholiques de s’abstenir d’assister à des représentation offensives pour les consciences chrétiens.” “Communiqué de l’archevêché de Paris,” La Croix 32 no. 8639 (May 18 1911), 1.
46 In an interview with Raoul Aubry published alongside the appearance of the script of Le Martyre in the theater journal Le théâtre illustré, d’Annunzio avows his long-time interest in the story of Saint Sebastian, claiming, “Mon culte pour saint Sébastien date de ma première jeunesse, de ma période d’humanisme. C’est alors que me vint l’amour de cet adolescent sanglant transfiguré par le mythe chrétien, à l’image d’Adonis, du beau dieu frappé, que les femmes de Biblos déposaient sur un catafalque d’èbène, drapé de pourpre, à l’équinoxe du printemps.” L’illustration théâtrale y. 7 no. 181 (17 May 1911), inside back cover.
47 He writes on December 3, 1910 to Emma Debussy “Cette histoire ne me dit rien qui vaille ; et puis, j’aurai l’air de tenir une spécialité pour danseuses ! – Il ne faut pas oublier Miss Maud Allan…Khamma (thoustra !)” Letter 1910-153 in Correspondance, 1344.
48 For the brief but still authoritative account of D’Annunzio’s connection with Debussy’s circle, see Lockspeiser, II: 157-167. Debussy was still in contact with Mourey at the time of Le Martyre, composing a piece for solo flute based on the writer’s Psyché.
were motivated by a common philosophical interest rather than a shallow desire for press coverage. The poet and the composer did not know each other before *Le Martyre*, but their expressions of reciprocal admiration are more than platitudes in their first letters, and they remained on friendly, even affectionate terms until the end of Debussy’s life.49

The exchanges in which the poet and composer develop their vision for the project and communicate their feelings about it bring to light essential connections between the ostensible Catholicism of *Le Martyre* and Symbolism. D’Annunzio first opens the door to this area of interest on January 23, about two weeks before providing Debussy with the text for Act I. He claims to have seen a vision of a cluster of 18 grapes that tempted Sebastian. The cluster led him to write verses with decadent contrasts of sun and shade, sweet and sour, and so on. D’Annunzio revels in these contradictions, and his particular use of language marks his reference as decadent. He contrasts “ambre” (amber) with “béryl,” (beryl) the chemical compound whose name is not as common as that of the gemstones in which it is found—in particular, emeralds—but that featured in Joris-Karl Huysmans’ second novel about a sacrilegious devil-worshiping priest, *Là-bas*.50 By using this marked word, and by insisting on temptation as a positive impetus to creation yielding success when one gives in to it rather than as an evil force that must be overcome through resistance, d’Annunzio frames his concept of the project within the occult. The verses’ rhymes are complemented by an allusion to symbolist poetry: the sounds of language become like music. Finally, D’Annunzio incites Debussy to

49 Tosi’s *Debussy et d’Annunzio* makes a strong case for this.
50 The *Trésor de la langue française*, the official dictionary of French compiled and maintained by the Académie de France, offers only one literary example for the use of the word “béryl,” and it comes from this novel: “Pour lui [Dr. Johannès], l’améthyste guérit bien l’ivresse, mais surtout l’ivresse morale, l’orgueil; le rubis enraye les entraînements génésiques, le béryl fortifie la volonté, le saphir élève les pensées vers Dieu. Huysmans, *Là-bas*, t. 2, 1895, p. 216.” [http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/beryl](http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/beryl) Accessed 28 February 2014.
composition by suggesting that the grapes’ power to tempt Sebastian symbolizes the verses’ power to tempt Debussy. According to the poet, a composer must be tempted by the opportunity to express ideas that words cannot convey. Here d’Annunzio confesses to Debussy that he has been unable to find certain “sublime accents” within human language and thereby challenges him to find them in music.  

In his response, Debussy invokes the same inability to express ideas but frames it as a personal challenge rather than a friendly, competitive one. He even makes it appear as though the creative block is a mere quotidian hurdle to get over when he confides, “it is not without a bit of terror that I watch as the moment when I will actually need to begin writing approaches,”  

But the rest of the letter offers a Symbolist context for that line, turning the personal challenge of writing into a metaphysical struggle. Debussy describes his impression of the scenes that d’Annunzio has sent to him thus far. He first mentions his reaction to d’Annunzio’s letter from a week prior, 23 January 1911, in which “one hears something like the trumpet calls of a march toward glory.”  

In Symbolist fashion, he eschews direct reference by making a comparison. Then he decries the impression’s deleterious affect on his motivation, for “any music now seems to me useless next to the constantly renewed splendor of your imagination.”  

His complaint should not be read as a sign of discouragement. Rather the opposite is true: Debussy expresses conflict over the effort he will put into musically capturing d’Annunzio’s poetic images. For while his

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51 “Saint Sébastien fut tenté; et vous allez donner à son combat invisible les accents sublimes que je n’ai pas pu trouver dans le langage humain. Or je vous tente; je vous expose à la tentation!” See letter 1911-17 of 23 January in Ibid., 1378.
52 Orledge quotes just this passage in “Debussy’s Orchestral Collaborations,” 1030.
54 “Et voilà maintenant que toute musique me semble inutile à côté de la splendeur, sans cesse renouvelée, de votre imagination.” Ibid.
assignment was to engage and even bring to life the concrete details of the Saint Sebastian myth from d’Annunzio’s script, Debussy saw greater artistic promise in the spiritual images. For Debussy, the approach to symbolism in music that he absorbed in his youth—conveying ideals more than objects and senses more than words—was still the motor of his inspiration. In the following paragraph, Debussy adds that the measure of his success will not be his ability to write music that captures the splendor of d’Annunzio’s imagination. He acknowledges, “this worry [over whether the musical language will open realms of expression that words have kept closed] is perhaps healthy, for one must not penetrate the mystery, which is armed with a vain pride.”

By confronting the connection between music and the au delà, Debussy implicitly responds to d’Annunzio’s occult reference as well. The composer was conversant in that field, having spent at least a decade socializing and collaborating with the figures of Parisian esoteric and occult spirituality. One symbolist review in 1892 even published an article stating Debussy’s involvement in a project to produce a play titled The Marriage of Satan at the Théâtre d’Art. This play, by Jules Bois, is an example of the global, almost pastiche, approach to spirituality popular amongst a group of artists active in Montmartre at the end of the nineteenth century. Its characters, including Satan, Psyche, Mephistopheles, Faust, Adam, Eve, Cain, and “the Ineffable Voice,” are a parade—even a parody—of the archetypal representatives of good and evil, temptation and morality, Christianity and paganism, timeless faith and the mundane here and now. Léon Guichard

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55 See below.
56 “Cette crainte est peut-être salutaire, car il ne faut pas pénétrer le mystère, cuirassé d’un vain orgueil.” Correspondance, 1381.
58 For more on this movement, see Frantisek Deak, “Théâtre d’Art,” chapter in Symbolist Theater (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 134-183.
studied the social connections linking Debussy to Bois and the other artists he knew, including Erik Satie, Huysmans, and Edmond Bailly, whose firm printed editions of Debussy’s own *La damoiselle élue* as well as the *Chansons de Bilitis*. To be sure, this group’s aims were never fully realized and its already disorganized and ad hoc existence seemed to evaporate as various members lost respect for each other over time. Yet the goals were already those of the later, more serious works that Debussy undertook, including the *Martyre*. For one, the name of the character “Ineffable voice” points directly to the awareness of a slippage between the means and the objects of representation. Moreover, critics familiar with the movement were well aware of its goal of giving expression to ideas that normal language fails to capture. Therefore, the question is not how explicit the lineage between d’Annunzio and these earlier esoteric writers or between the musical language in *Le Martyre* and that with which Debussy was still experimenting in *La damoiselle élue* and other pieces of that period. More significant are the continuity of aesthetic aim and the shared theme of Christian spirituality reinterpreted.

In the letters from the early stages of work on *Le Martyre*, we find a direct account of Debussy’s engagement with mystery, a side of his creative agenda that is often probed but rarely understood. For example, in considering the entirety of Debussy’s œuvre, Vladimir Jankélévitch has noted that the symbol and mystery are, not surprisingly, at the forefront of the creative process. In a recent rebuttal to Jankélévitch, Steven Rings argues with—and against—Jankélévitch that in Debussy’s music, the mystery cannot be uncovered and explicated in the same way as a secret. Unlike a

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secret—an intentionally hidden message, which can be decoded with enough information—a mystery captivates us and proposes questions we might ask, but it can never be fully explained. In a mystery, Jankélévitch emphasizes, the key to understanding is forever lost.61 Rings reads both local musical gestures and large-scale form in Debussy’s piano prelude Des pas sur la neige as implying multiple possible narratives. In doing so, he contests Jankélévitch’s claim that mysteries are unknowable. In Rings’s view, Debussy tells a story through his music, polyvalent though it might be, so the aura of mystery must be only a shroud of secrecy, or really there is no difference between mysteries and secrets.

In Le Martyre, the “secret” is actually the “mystery” in Jankélévitch’s terms. In other words, the specific hidden meaning is nothing more than a kind of arrow pointing towards a realm of ideals. The connections with Symbolism and occult literature that drew Debussy and d’Annunzio closer together belong to the category of “esoteric” knowledge that is distinct from mystery but suggest its presence.62 This esoteric aesthetic has been overlooked because of the veneration traditionally paid to Christian subjects; since the entire project was executed with artistic integrity and emotional sincerity, it is possible that most critics have found the idea of penetrating the Christian surface too bold.63 Those who have ventured to do so have restrained their critiques to d’Annunzio’s play. But any complaints about doctrine should equally be directed at the music, since

62 Stefan Jarocinski describes the origins of Symbolism within various religious and mystical beliefs that include any worldview not defined principally by reason. Debussy, impressionisme et symbolisme, trans. Thérèse Douchy (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970), 42.
63 In particular, Henri Ghéon was enraged by the impiety found with respect to Christianity within Le Martyre, which d’Annunzio attempted to pass off as inoffensive. His essay review of the work focuses on the script. “M. d’Annunzio et l’Art” appeared in the reactionary La Nouvelle revue française 3 no. 31 (July 1911): 5-16.
Debussy and d’Annunzio together conceived of *Le Martyre* as a late expression of Symbolism, as the correspondence cited above demonstrates. Explaining the Symbolist aesthetic of the piece will do much to make an anomalous work more culturally accessible, but it will never unravel the mystery that resonates with the condition of life.

*Invisible and Inaudible: Symbolist Stage Directions in Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien*

D’Annunzio and Debussy were together the nexus of creative activity on *Le Martyre*, despite Ida Rubinstein’s eagerness to stage the work. To be sure, Debussy was under contract to write the music, and from December 1910, the main collaborators had already agreed which pieces he was to compose. And yet Debussy did not comply with the contract’s terms, specifically the number of dances he should write and the schedule for submitting their scores. The only one who seemed to complain was Rubinstein, who had no real power over the situation. The contract thus was not as rigid as it might have seemed. While it listed the musical numbers, these were hashed out in the script, where d’Annunzio took an unusual approach, using rubrics in a different ink color from the rest of the text to signal music cues. These rubrics, “Magister Claudius sonum dedit” (Master Claude will give sound to this) in the end functioned as suggestions. D’Annunzio goes so far as to tell Debussy, at least with respect to one musical number, that the composer has free reign to set a particular passage to one melody, select only a few lines from the passage, or to cast the whole thing aside.64 A comparison of the list of numbers stipulated in the contract with the markings referring to Magister Claudius shows that Debussy did

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64 "Cette vie diverse, toutes ces images tendres ou fortes, claires ou sombres, frémissent dans les contours d’un seul dessin mélodique. Mais vous pouvez aussi choisir, prendre de la grappe double quelques grains savoureux. Vous pouvez aussi tout jeter.” D’Annunzio to Debussy, January 13, 1911, Letter 1911-17 in *Correspondance*, 1378.
not follow them to the letter, and furthermore that he manipulates the text, omitting phrases and sentences as it suits him. In composing the music for Le Martyre, Debussy was at once inspired by and worked independently from d’Annunzio’s directions; poet and composer were equal partners.

As a result of d’Annunzio’s hermetic working method, he and Debussy seem to have met face-to-face infrequently as they prepared the premiere. Letters and the script itself, which contained vivid descriptions of the play’s setting, facilitated their exchange of ideas. All accounts indicate that Debussy waited to begin composing until he received the first parts of the script, which he used as a guide to composition. In one letter, he asks for clarification of the musical part of a scene. He needs to know exactly where d’Annunzio requires music. The reason for his uncertainty is the discursiveness of the stage direction describing the action, which is so loosely structured as to be disorienting. The stage direction’s density relates it to the many others in d’Annunzio’s script, which as a whole convey a modernist theatrical sensibility. Debussy calls the stage direction a “note for the painter and musician resembling an enchanted forest, full of images—in which sometimes I am like Le Petit Poucet.”

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65 Boulez and Kasaba have remarked that Debussy did not always respond to these messages. See “Établissement du texte,” “Notes critiques,” in Debussy, Le Martyre, 300-1.
66 “Voulez-vous m’indiquer, de la façon qui vous prendra le moins de temps, le moment exact où commence la danse des charbons ardents. [sic] Il y a des paroles dites pendant cette danse ; n’est-pas ?” Correspondance, 1387.
67 Few efforts have been made to theorize stage directions more generally, but clearly their role has shifted throughout the course of theater history, and in the twentieth century they became increasingly suggestive, specific, and even impossible to represent. For an attempt to typologize stage directions, see Marvin Carlson, “The Status of Stage Directions,” Studies in the Literary Imagination (1991): 37-48.
68 Excusez-moi, mais quand vous êtes là, près de moi, j’écoute la musique que me suggèrent vos paroles, et, tout de même il me faudrait des points de repère pratiques—Vos Notes pour le Peintre et pour le Musicien ressemble à une forêt enchantée, pleine d’images—dans laquelle je suis quelquefois comme ‘le petit Poucet.’” Correspondance, 1387.
sounds—music playing, voices singing, various natural noises—d’Annunzio was
addressing the composer when he wrote them.

As much as they communicate what the sets should look like and what the actors
should do, the stage directions in *Le Martyre* also demand creative solutions: throughout
the play, d’Annunzio uses them to record descriptions of inaudible sounds and ineffable
beauty. Since no artist could make a physical representation of these ideas, in order for
them to make use of the details at all, they would have to interpret them in an evocative
rather than literal manner. No matter what the collaborators were able to achieve through
their respective media, d’Annunzio still had the means to convey his vision to spectators.

When the script of the play appeared in the journal *L’illustration théâtral* five days after
the premiere, the stage directions were printed in full, allowing the audience to encounter
d’Annunzio’s vision of Sebastian’s world in addition to experiencing the collaborative
work that his production team created. They are inherently liminal, between word and
act. Likewise, their content traffics in ideas on the border of the real and the ideal. Many
critics acknowledged that, as overwhelming as the stage production was, the play would
be enjoyable as a piece of literature, read at home. Likewise, Debussy wrote to thank
d’Annunzio for his copy of the script in published form, specifying that he had “reread all
of it,” an experience of “pure joy” that he enjoyed even more than the performances,
characterized by “the heavy presence, the contradictory voices, all the false noise.”

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69 This is the conclusion of one review: “pour apprécier justement ce poème de Gabriele d’Annunzio il faut
le lire—et même le relire.” “In order to justly appreciate this poem by Gabriele d’Annunzio, one must read

70 “Quel beau livre...! et quelle belle œuvre! vraiment! J’ai tout relu et avec une joie pure, que ne venait plus
contrarier la presence lourde, les voix contradictoires, tout le bruit faux que fait le théâtre autour d’une belle
chose...” Debussy, letter to d’Annunzio (19 June 1911), Letter 1911-99 in *Correspondance*, 1431.
If d’Annunzio’s aesthetic vision for *Le Martyre* involved a Symbolist staging, he surely designed the oblique references to that movement in his letters to Debussy as an indication that he should draw upon the creative resources he had already developed in his earlier theater projects. Debussy’s preoccupation with depicting unheard sounds was unique amongst composers, even within the context of the voguish artistic obsession with representing the unrepresentable. His manner of approaching these unheard sounds as music is authentic to his personality. The draw towards this novel relationship between sound and music also recalls his dream for outdoor music, motivated by the desire to merge composed, musical sounds and natural ones. The specific aesthetic problem that d’Annunzio introduces in his stage directions spoke to the composer’s core artistic goals. Debussy had habitual anxiety towards symbolic representation. He tended to confront the problem of the symbol—as the container for both form and idea—with a negative attitude that confined him to leave the act of expression incomplete.

Debussy first encountered d’Annunzio’s script on January 11. A few days before, the poet sent this telegram, informing the composer of what to expect: “I thought [it] necessary [to] give you [the] third act, the one with the most music, in its complete and definitive form. I’m sending it to the copyist today. I write to you at the same time. You

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73 This is exactly Lydia Goehr’s argument, after Abbate and in defense of Debussy against Adorno’s unfavorable critical response to *Pelléas et Mélisande* in her article, “Radical Modernisms and the Failure of Style: Philosophical Reflections on Maeterlinck-Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*,” *Representations* 74, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 55-82.
are always close to me.”  

When he received the freshly-copied act, Debussy would have read the following stage directions:

Intermittently, the spirits of music rise above him and fold him like the river saturates the reed and the willow. He remains this way, curved or turned upside-down, still like a child of Niobe, while the melody alone reaches unspeakable summits. After, he stands up and is transfigured. He is paler than marble and ivory statues, more resplendent than the moon on the forehead of Isis. His metallic voice is transmuted by the flame of the deep heart. […]

The choir fades. And a solitary voice seems to surge from an infinite depth, having traveled across the whole body of suffering as the breath travels across the lung.

In the first description, Sebastian has just completed his dance representing Christ’s Passion. Like the letter d’Annunzio would send a few days later, this one is full of comparisons, especially between bodies and nature. Music plays a pivotal role, first at the opening, when music is embodied by spirits. In the middle, a strong but unclear image of melody attaining tall summits raises the question of which melody in particular and where the summits are, before rendering the question obsolete with the typically Symbolist adjective unspeakable or indescribable. At the end of the passage, Sebastian’s (singing) voice takes on more human sound than before. This is significant for many reasons, the most important being that the voice, the only truly human sound, is converted through Sebastian’s temporary identification with Christ, the God-made-man.


75 “Par intervalles, les esprits de la musique le surmontent et le ploient comme le fleuve ploie le roseau et le saule. Il reste ainsi, courbé ou renversé, immobile comme un enfant de Niobé, tandis que la mélodie seule atteint les sommets indicibles. Ensuite, il se redresse et se transfigure. Il est plus pâle que les marbres et les ivoires, plus resplendissant que la lune sur le front d’Isis. Le métal de sa voix est transmué par la flamme du cœur profond.” D’Annunzio, Le Martyre, stage direction between vss. 3296 and 3297 219.

76 Debussy memorably sets this word in the final mélodie of Fêtes Galantes II, “Colloque sentimental.”
emphasizing a particular facet of the Christian myth likely to captivate a Symbolist thinker.\(^77\)

The second direction is pointedly ambiguous through and through. It is unclear whether the actual sound of the choir fades or if the choir visually fades into the background of the set. As the short description continues, the meaning becomes even more indeterminate, and the possibility of creating the image becomes less likely. The ideas of solitude, infinity, and comparison between an anthropomorphized metonymical crowd and a natural bodily function are all typical of Symbolism.\(^78\)

By sending Debussy Act III, “Le concile des faux dieux,” first, d’Annunzio focuses attention on the dramatic scene of the Passion, the intensity of which masks the particular fascination with Christianity’s foundation in pagan traditions of the Mediterranean, most notably Greek mythology. Multiple spiritualities are prominently combined in this passage. Christianity, always at issue in the play, is represented first by the word “transfigured,” which appears in the New Testament chapters immediately following Christ’s resurrection and later by the oblique reference to the sacred heart of Jesus. The pallor of marble and ivory statues as well as the allusion to the mythical character Niobe draws Hellenic antiquity into the scene. By comparing Isis’s moonlight glow to the Greek statues, d’Annunzio calls upon Egyptian imagery, which may have

\(^{77}\) In particular, Russian symbolists had grappled with Nietzsche’s influence over the power of divinity over human thinking and the need for a modern culture to overturn comparisons between God and man as a way to conceive of an ideal ethics. The artistic team for Le Martyre, who had all been involved with Diaghilev and his journal Mir Iskusstva, openly struggled with their religious heritage. See Avril Pyman, A History of Russian Symbolism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 131-9.

\(^{78}\) Solitude and infinity are both implicated in the generalized crisis of language out of which the Symbolist movement in France was born. Jean-Nicolas Illouz also points out the contemporaneity of the nascent psychoanalysis movement with the emergence of symbolism, suggesting that the two have in common the new awareness of the problem of the subject. See Le symbolisme (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2004), 11-12.
appealed to the team of costume and set designers fresh from their work on Cleopatra. Debussy’s previous work shows little susceptibility to open artistic engagement with religious concepts of any kind, but even he may have been captivated by the idea of moonlight, which figures prominently in the many symbolist poems he set as melodies.

Abounding in discursive stage directions, the script yields examples of the Symbolist worldview in each act. The opening stage direction for Act V describes Paradise, into which Sebastian’s soul gloriously enters. The note must have struck Debussy strongly, since he had formed an image of paradise before he saw Bour’s set and complained to Astruc that the staging fell short of his expectations.79

We discover the garden of light and beatitudes, at the beginning of the East that creates every sunrise. Amongst the trees in the garden, there are some that resemble transparent sleet, others that resemble an undulating wave, and others that resemble a cluster of living water. One finds every kind of beautiful thing there, which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, which do not rise to the heart of man, and which God has ready for those who love him. One can see tabernacles of shimmering metal, clothing of light, diadems of beauty. There are also flaming lances, sparkling shields, swords, javelins, and darts of rays, spikes, and leaves of fire. There, too, are luminous crosses, monstrances, and incense holders made of gold, sapphire, jasper, chalcedony, topaz, amethyst, and sardonyx. There, one can only distinguish the blessed by the number and color of the sparks that fly forth from them when they open their mouths in praise of the Most High. There one can identify, by the number of their wings and the sound of their voices, the different ranks of angels. The first are the angels of Face, the only ones who can stand the light of the face of God; next come the Angels of divine service, the Thrones, the Dominions, the Lords, the Ardent Ones, the Powers, the Myriads, the Princes, and many others. As before, their praises are each distinct. There are three kinds who say “Saint,” three who say “Praised,” three who say “Blessed” and three who say that which mortal ears cannot hear.80

79 See note 338 above.
80 “On découvre le jardin des clartés et des béatitudes, à l’orée de l’Orient qui produit tous les levers de soleil. Parmi les arbres du jardin, il y en a qui ressemblent à la grêle transparente, d’autres qui ressemblent à un vent ondoyant, d’autres qui ressemblent aux grappes des eaux vives. On y trouve toutes sortes de belles choses, que l’œil n’a jamais vues et que l’oreille n’a jamais entendues, qui ne montent pas au cœur de l’homme, et que Dieu a préparées pour ceux qui l’aiment. On y voit des tabernacles de pyrope, des vêtements de lumière, des diadèmes de beauté. Il y a aussi des lances flamboyantes, des boucliers étincelants, des épées, des javelots et des dards de rais, des haches et des frondes de feu. Là aussi sont les croix lumineuses, les ostensoirs et les encensoirs d’or, de saphir, de jaspe, de calcédoine, de topaze,
As in the stage direction from Act III quoted above, here the Christian imagery falls in
the category of traditional symbolism associated with Biblical texts and liturgical
practice. References to the Beatitudes, parables, the various paraphernalia used to
decorate churches and perform essential actions within Catholic rituals all situate the
passage within a recognizably Christian context. The precious stones that form these
religious objects all appear in the description of heaven given in the Bible, Revelation 21:
18-21. The slight functional difference between the Biblical stones—part of the very
structure of the city of God—and d’Annunzio’s stones—adornments of more covetable
objects—suggests more an aesthetic approach to religion than an orthodox one. The list
even calls to mind the two stones that d’Annunzio uses to give life to his sensuous
description of the grape cluster in his letter to Debussy from January 23. The multiple
adjectives and verbs used as synonyms for descriptions of shining light also contribute to
the trance-like atmosphere of suspended action. The passage loses its parallel with
Revelation in its inventory of weapons: the biblical source lists weapons only in the
narrator’s experiences before he gains access to paradise, explicitly excluding any
instrument of pain from heaven. By using the Bible as an intertext, d’Annunzio proposes

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81 “The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the
city were adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire; the third agate, the
fourth, emerald; the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz,
the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls,
each one of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass.” (New
Revised Standard Version—NRSV)
82 op. cit., n. 51 above.
his art as a replacement for religion and suggests that singing and dancing are a more real way to gain transcendence than prayer and service.

Act V consists entirely of sung choruses; *Le Martyre* presents paradise as an exclusively musical sanctuary. But the only stage direction in the act, quoted above in its entirety, avoids specifically mentioning music. The indirect references include the acknowledgement of the angels’ differing voices and the general word “praise,” which has musical connotations but could indicate any means of expressing respect and gratitude. Beginning the passage is an allusion to another book of the Bible, 1 Corinthians, in the famous passage “eye has not seen, ear has not heard.” As with the list of precious stones that has biblical origins but Symbolist associations, this passage, directly related to the Bible, could also be interpreted along Symbolist lines. Both the Russian and French Symbolists had, as part of their rebuttal of realist aesthetics, questioned just how far paradoxes could contribute to emotional expression. Ruminating over a mystery such as an invisible sight or an inaudible sound afforded authors experimenting with Symbolism a chance to retreat into interior spaces. Within the theater of the mind an inaudible sound becomes a symbol of perfect sonorous beauty, untainted by physical restrictions and preserved against cynicism. By setting the stage for paradise using a modified New Testament prophesy subtly framed within a piquant discourse that Debussy would have recognized, d’Annunzio completes his script in an aesthetically meaningful way. While maintaining the inoffensive appearance that he

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83 But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.” 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NRSV).

84 In his analysis of the French Symbolist movement, which he calls a “crisis,” Lawrence Porter argues that the movement was predicated on a loss of affih in language’s ability to communicate anything specific. As such, expression was most often drawn from a constellation of multiple art forms as well as elements of Catholic ritual. See *The Crisis of French Symbolism*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), ix-x and. 19.
desired for his work, he undercuts reverence to doctrine by distilling the Christian content into the ideas most engaging to sympathetic peers.

_Sounds Mysterious: Debussy’s Music for Le Martyre_

The musical character of _Le Martyre_ is a complex of styles and moods that adds a rhythmic superstructure to the play’s blank verse. Its sound world and irregular frequency of intervention, which Debussy carefully coordinated with d’Annunzio in alignment with his aesthetic objectives, is cumbersome and does not fit into neat categories. To start, as in his other works, in _Le Martyre_ Debussy avoids traditional forms and functional harmony, leaving instead an idiosyncratic aesthetic project as a key to unlock his seemingly impenetrable fortress of subtlety. Next, unlike in conventional opera or ballet, the musical numbers are not dispersed with any obvious relation to the drama, and, moreover, d’Annunzio’s play lacks dramatic logic. Debussy’s music intervenes according to his own interest, namely his compulsion to embellish the musical elements of the Christian-pagan practices parading through the long script. Significantly, Debussy engaged with the parts of the play that evoke transcendence—especially that which occurs through or is accentuated by powerful music.

Debussy composed a total of 18 numbers for _Le Martyre_, including a prelude for each of the five acts. This number is twice the figure initially agreed upon for the contract with Gabriel Astruc on December 9, 1910. At that early stage, the paradise scene was yet to be called Act V, and the creative team had envisaged only a prelude and one dance for

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85 Previous studies that have considered the musical style of _Le Martyre_ have been limited to brief comments on isolated motives, or, in one case, to a single Prelude. See Emily Pickett, “The Gateway to Sainthood: Sacred Relics in _Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien_,” chapter in “Images of the Sacred in Select Works of Debussy, 1910-1913,” PhD diss., Yale University, 2008, 129-202.
the first three acts and a musical lamentation for the fourth act. By the time Durand had prepared the contract for the music strictly speaking, the concept had perhaps become more general; there is no longer an enumeration of the musical numbers, only the phrase “incidental music accompanying the Martyre de Saint Sébastien, not only in its current form, but also with all future changes that could be made by its authors” to describe the work under contract. Debussy hinted in some letters and promotional interviews that he had intended to write more music than time allowed. In the end, the musical numbers represent the most emotionally charged aspects of the play, with actors possibly declaiming the text over the orchestra during critical scenes.

In the first act, Debussy’s music accompanies Sebastian’s realization—and the crowds’—that he has performed a miracle: he shoots an arrow and watches as it soars out of sight, never returning to the ground. Next, Sebastian dances over hot coals, his second miracle, as the orchestra plays an ecstatic dance. In the second act, the two musical numbers are songs performed by mysterious women, gatekeepers of a magical door. The third act, which contains the most music in the final form and from the beginning of the project, includes six musical numbers. A fanfare bolsters Sebastian’s courage so that he can affirm to Diocletian his Christian faith, and a bellicose male choir asserts its admiration for Sebastian as a hero of the pagan order. At the center of this act, Sebastian enacts the story of Christ’s Passion through dance, turning to song at the point when

86 “Musique de scène accompagnant le Martyre de Saint Sébastien, non seulement dans sa forme actuelle, mais aussi avec tous les changements qui pourraient y être introduits par les auteurs par la suite,” “Contract with Durand Publishers,” signed by d’Annunzio, Debussy, and Durand on January 11, 1911, Letter 1911-15 in Correspondance, 1376.

87 The recent critical edition integrates the spoken text into the orchestral script, giving both cues for the beginning of the pieces and suggestions for the alignment of text and music. Op. cit. In a private interview on August 8, 2014, Eiko Kasaba explained that the alignment was mostly suggested by Pierre Boulez, who has conducted the piece multiple times.
Christ dies. Various choirs of religious followers, both pagan and Christian, react in desperation when the acting, which has seemed real to them, concludes with the end of Jesus’ life of the flesh. When they acknowledge that his spirit has risen from the dead, they sing a jubilant refrain. The third act concludes with a Syrian choir singing a funeral hymn in honor of the mock dead body. For the penultimate act, which includes Sebastian’s actual death by a squad of archers, the first musical number is atmospheric music to accompany the dream-like apparition of the Good Shepherd, whom Sebastian witnesses briefly. As the third act, this one concludes with a funeral hymn, now sung for Sebastian, who has died in the presence of crowds who admired him. The fifth act is entirely sung, with stylistic subdivisions distinguishing the music that the angels sing to welcome Sebastian into paradise from the soul of Sebastian’s response to his arrival from the final song of praise to God on high.

Throughout the play, music belongs to the martyr himself and to the crowds but never to the emperor. Nor does it represent any other religious temptations or idols. Similarly, the numbers most often punctuate the dramatic climax of a scene rather than aiding in the development. Music is never used to elaborate dialogues, which tend instead to have rational, linear organization. Within this work, Debussy limits music to emotional highpoints and sacred reflections. Debussy’s score privileges the idea of mystery and transcendence regardless of the specific religious referent.

**Mystery and Duality in Act I**

Act I, “La Cour des Lys,” begins with reticent silence. The notation of two full beats of rest draws dualism, and paradox, into the score from its outset. Silence and sound
are normally opposed to each other, but here they are equally part of music, itself newly defined by its focus, intention, and demands on performers and listeners alike. Other dualisms in the play, particularly the struggle between Christianity and paganism, will likewise receive a musical treatment that recasts their differences in the service of art.

While the orchestra plays this opening prelude, a fat emperor sits languidly on a throne under a fan, watching hot coals slowly burn in wait for twins who are bound to columns at the edge of the court. The first musical sounds to rise out of the silence are sinuous, slow-moving parallel lines coming from the woodwinds: flutes, English horn, clarinets, bass clarinet, and bassoons. Their first fragmentary motive raises a question: two ascending leaps bring the line from an E-flat minor chord up to its minor dominant, B-flat. As if recoiling from their bold gesture, the woodwinds pause, then answer the question with a truncated phrase, falling from E-flat to B-flat. They reverse the direction of their tessitura but keep their pitches the same, in essence rephrasing their opening question as a statement. The winds next make an elaborated scalar statement, still without clear-cut harmonic orientation. The sound world of the emperor’s court is becoming familiar, paradoxically defined by the shifting interval between first and second scale degrees, sometimes major, sometimes minor. From the earliest measures, tonal and modal coexistence foretell the cooperation between Christianity and paganism in the play.

Not a true overture, the prelude to act one still has a wide-reaching scope that presents themes both musical and ideological with significance for the drama to come.

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88 Silence is an important compositional tool for Debussy, sometimes constituting a musical symbol. See Morrison, 13. The idea of silence and music as interrelated for Debussy is reflected in the title of Jankélévitch’s book on Debussy, De la musique au silence.
The prelude comprises multiple shifts in instrumentation, melodic motives, texture, and one distinct change in key area. The introductory material sets the stage for the first 30 measures or so, limited to the woodwinds that play even-tempered, unaccented melodic lines in parallel thirds, like Erik Satie’s pseudo-Catholic work, *Ogives*, from 1886. That piece shares its concern for architectural details with this prelude and is emblematic of the community of esoteric thinkers that first inspired Debussy’s engagement with metaphysics. Later shifts will put more emphasis on solo instruments, a rising imitative motive, and singers.

Several small shifts in instrumentation, beginning at with the imitative horn entrances in m. 27, lead to a distinctly different section in which the modal ambiguity of the opening is dramatized through dueling soloists. These entrances suggest a kind of abstracted horn call, playing on the fourth-fifth relationship exploited in the opening antecedent-consequent phrases. The call is abstract because of its languid rhythm and its leaps by fourth rather than fifths. Debussy evokes a musical horn call topic but distorts it. By inverting the interval of the leap, he suggests that this call is an Ideal version of the real one, or vice-versa. The two are the sides of a single coin, seemingly opposite yet always bound to each other. The call initiates a change in energy. While its slow pace and unaccented rhythm preserve the solemn mood of the opening, its staggered entrances and accumulation of notes to form chords lend a new focus on vertical harmony.

Additionally, once the harp enters in m. 29, its consistently repeating run figure adds an instantly mysterious ambiance created by its circular motion around the pitch B-flat. The additional B-flat centric motive in the English horn enriches the landscape, attracting

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attention that it then passes to the soloists who enter next. Oboe and flute provide the main drama in this section by trading solo passages. In their first phrases, mm. 31-34 and 35-37, they present opposite approaches to chromaticism. The oboe dutifully avoids it while the flute’s two descending scale fragments are both chromatic, the second extends the technique of the first. The opposition adds to the dualities suggested in the opening of the prelude. Throughout the score, many such dualities will become prevalent, most often working as false binaries. From opposition, oboe and flute briefly join in m. 38, and when the flute plays the closing motif to the oboe’s solo in m. 42, lowering the octave of the final note, it becomes clear that the two are sympathetic partners.

![Example 5 Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien I, Prélude mm. 31-43](image)

When they repeat their drama, they expand it with a re-instrumentation of the horn call that becomes more inclusive, leading to a full orchestra passage in the same homophonic style as the beginning, affirming the B-flat centricity initiated by the harp and English horn in m. 29 with a strong arrival in m. 49. From here, the orchestra’s presence fades as instruments gradually exit, and the low strings play a menacing refrain that leads to a harmonically and tonally unprepared A major eleventh chord. The expectant sound of this chord served perhaps to accompany the opening of the curtain or the full
illumination of the stage lights. In m. 62 the eleventh, D-sharp, resolves downward to C-sharp, leaving the normalized A major chord to decay in the strings. The prelude does not end here, but its strict purpose qua prelude does, since its final section corresponds to the start of the play.

Debussy fulfills d’Annunzio’s request for a musical setting of the script’s first verses, “Brother, what will become of the world unburdened by all our love?” According to the stage direction, Marc and Marcellien, tied to columns, throw their heads back to face the sky, and their voices carry over the din of the crowds. The simplicity of this section belies Debussy’s creative engagement with both d’Annunzio’s and his own metaphysics. Their unaccompanied entrance instantly recalls Debussy’s writing in his early cantata, La damoiselle élue. In that work, each new vocal entrance is preceded by a thinning out of the orchestral texture leading to a complete rupture. Here the twins sing in unison for the first part of their phrase and in counterpoint for the second. Debussy employs the phrase as a refrain since it recurs in d’Annunzio’s text. His choice actually overrides poetic form; its repetitions appear in non-analogous positions in the multiple stanzas of the opening verse. Additionally, Debussy allows the twins to take turns speaking, a choice not prescribed by the script. This technique is especially marked in mm. 87-93, corresponding to verses 9-10, where the text alternates between first and second person, as the twins presumably make a comparison between themselves (the two share one mind and heart) and Christ, the ideal of divine love. Debussy makes use of the change in narrative voice to trade lines between the two singers, at once

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90 “Frère, que sera-t-il le monde, allége de tout notre amour ?”
91 “Une tourbe de plus en plus nombreuse et houleuse envahit le lieu de l’audience. Le chant des jumeaux domine le sourd grondement. Attaché aux colonnes, face à face, pâles et enivrés, ils renversent la tête pour chanter vers le ciel.”
recalling the flute/oboe duet from earlier in the prelude and establishing a structural theme of duality.

As many dualistic principles as Debussy has introduced already in only 99 measures of music, the lines that immediately follow the twins’ song raise the stakes of aesthetic binarism. The crowd of gentiles attempts to wake the drowsy emperor and urges him to take action against the captives because of their insolent song. Cheers of indignation are shouted from every corner. The gentiles make a double accusation while expressing their shock, associating the Christian hymns with pagan practice: “But, if they sing, they acknowledge Apollo.”92 Debussy knew that this project would never be taken seriously as Catholic art. At the same time, the music for the story confronts head-on the problem of Christian restraint and pagan exuberance. Debussy writes music for Christian and pagan characters alike, sidestepping the charge these gentiles makes by pointing to the foundational similarities between believers of both religions. He aims particularly to amplify the mystery of faith, the inexplicability of a willful adoption of any worldview encompassing both visible and invisible worlds. When choosing scenes to set to music in Le Martyre, Debussy picks those that convey material impossibilities; his music intervenes between the real and the ideal.

Debussy leaves the scenes following the opening without music, skipping d’Annunzio’s next rubric addressing “Magister Claudius,” beginning at verse 524. The poet had notified Debussy about the need for hymns in this section in late January. After describing the nature of the verse—quatrains composed of five- or six-syllable lines, in the rhyming pattern ABBA—he sets the scene. Two groups, one of young girls and one  

92 “Mais, s’il chantent, ils reconnaissent/ Apollon.” D’Annunzio, Le Martyre, vss. 23-4.
of young boys, come to convince Marc and Marcellien to make sacrifices of animals to
the emperor and his pantheon instead of giving their own lives as martyrs. Each group
sings nine choruses, amounting to 233 verses, a sizeable amount of material for Debussy
to work with. In his letter from January 23, d’Annunzio gives a clear impression of his
attachment to the choruses, at the same time insisting that Debussy pick the verses to set
as he pleases. In the end, Debussy sets none. Nothing in the refrains themselves
explains Debussy’s omission of them from his score, but a conspicuous absence from the
stage directions may provide an explanation. Before the choirs sing, d’Annunzio
describes their appearance, from their age to their attitude. He includes banal descriptions
of the sacrificial animals: “a male goat with golden horns, a female goat with a poplar
branch around its middle.” He does not, however, describe the effect of their song, nor
does he suggest the sound of their voices. As Debussy’s motivation to compose for *Le
Martyre* is mystery, the focus on the exterior in this section leads him to leave these lines
to the side.

The orchestra is fully silent for over 1,000 verses. It is not musically silent, as at
the beginning of the prelude, but rather disengaged from the character development
centered on the twins and their mother, characters with no potential to reach spiritual
heights. It is not until an actual height is invoked that Debussy adds his touch. Again it is
in response to d’Annunzio’s leading stage directions, this time noting the reaction of the

93 “Young girls—among them are the sisters of the twins attached to the columns—sing these rondels
together. Young men respond to the virginal choir with more ardent voices. This diverse life, all these
tender or strong, light or dark, images, shivering in the contours of a single melodic design. But you may
also choose, take from the double cluster a few savory seeds. You may also throw everything away.” “Des
jeunes filles—parmi lesquelles sont les sœœurs des gémeaux [sic] attachés aux colonnes—chantent ensemble
ces rondels. Des jeunes hommes répondent au chœœur virginal par des voix plus ardentes. Cette vie diverse,
toutes ces images tendres ou fortes, claires ou sombres, frémissent dans les contours d’un seul dessin
mélodique. Mais vous pouvez aussi choisir, prendre de la grappe double quelque grains savoureux. Vous
pouvez aussi tout jeter.” *Correspondance*, 1378.
crowds of bystanders who have observed Sebastian shoot an arrow into the sky that miraculously flies upwards to heaven. “Behind the men’s cries, one believes one can hear other voices, singing voices, sparse divine echoes in a faraway space, diffuse in the immensity of the celestial miracle. Everything here—the perfume of lilies, the smoke of ‘oliban,’ the heat of the coals, the tension of souls, the silence of Vespers—everything becomes a mysterious melody.”

Debussy precipitates to write music for this ideal melody. In contrast to the previous passage that d’Annunzio had earmarked for musical accompaniment, this one possesses the combination of a sonically impossible music with its spiritual association.

This music is familiar, repeated from the central section of the prelude with its horn calls and wind dialogue. The false binaries, suggestive of the real and the ideal in the prelude, are here attached to text, and their meaning becomes even more ambiguous. The horn call, a combination of heraldry and lethargy, is recast as the choirs’ call to Sebastian. It is unclear whether the call is an admonition or an expression of admiration. The air feels heavier around the choirs than it had around the horns because of an increased orchestral presence. The harps and basses pulse a low B-flat, and the horns, as if approving of the vocal interpretation, reinforce the arrival of the call at m. 4, shown in ex. 2. Continuing with the adapted orchestration, the passage that had been a duet for oboe and flute becomes a solo for first violin, played with deep emotion. Where oboe and flute had played out a dualism evocative of the symbolic program of the play, the violin takes over both parts in a sweeping style denoted by the marking “profoundly

expressive."⁹⁵ The mystery of this music’s affect comes to the fore in the orchestration, which gradually adds string parts to each repetition of this solo, first including a solo cello in m. 15 where the flute’s part had begun in the prelude. Where the whole passage restarts in m. 19, more violins join and the cello peels off. The increased number of similar voices draws attention away from the individual toward the group, emphasizing the solidarity found amongst a community of believers. All the while, the full orchestra has been busy filling the air with overlapping strains; the English horn plays the

⁹⁵ This performance note is unusual for Debussy, who wrote most notes in French, but still preferred more restrained notes. In particular, the adverb “profoundly” strikes one as exuberant coming from this composer.
Example 6 I.2 mm. 1-5
perfunctory entrance it had made in the prelude, this time looped and reinforced by the second violins playing in tremolos. Flutes add deliberate and short ascending scales, clarinets sustain triads that suggest modal rather than tonal function, and harps contribute atmospheric fragments. The choirs persist in their refrain, humming their part while the violin solo has the central role. Debussy’s manner of writing for the ensemble captures “the sparse, divine echoes” that can barely be heard.

Debussy takes creative license with d’Annunzio’s text for this passage, as he did for Marc and Marcellien’s song. He primarily modifies the text by repeating the choirs’ refrain of “tu es témoin,” giving himself the occasion to represent musically the group’s gradual retreat. To begin, he sets the calls made by the Archers of Emesa to Sebastian,
verses 1440-1, to music even though these come before the “Magister Claudius” rubric. Later, the “Sparse Voices Everywhere” that call “Sebastian, Sebastian, you are witness!” in lines 1460-1 have more resonance in the score than in the script with their lines duplicated multiple times. The stage direction following verse 1461 observes, “It seems that the invocation of the admirable name is made by an angelic choir, near and far.”\textsuperscript{96} To evoke this spatial idea, Debussy sets the refrain four times, the first two marked \textit{mf}, the next marked \textit{p}, and the final marked \textit{pp}. Beyond this, he indicates that the basses, who sing the final line without the rest of the voice parts, should sing “while distancing themselves.” The line “you are witness” is set in multiple ways, all sharing the even half note rhythm in the first three syllables. The first two settings feature a unison progression on the first three notes that opens into a chord for the final note: the first time, the chord is A-flat major that has a mysterious coexistence with the B-flats in the orchestra, and the second time, the choir sings a minor third, G-flat—B-flat. The third and fourth times, the choir simply holds their note for the whole phrase, first G-flat and then D-natural. The final statement of the refrain, barely a whisper, is followed by a sustained chord in the strings and horns with the ethereal sound of the violins’ harmonics hovering above. The dual use of one musical idea—as orchestral prelude and dramatic choral refrain—in Act one of \textit{Le Martyre} brings that idea’s internal binaries into focus. The distinctions between tonality and modality, diatonicism and chromaticism, fourths and fifths fade into an atmosphere where ambiguity trumps clarity. All eyes are on Sebastian, peaceful warrior who is the emperor’s favorite, but also his enemy.

\textit{Act II Virgins’ Songs}

\textsuperscript{96} “Il semble que l’invocation du nom admirable soit portée par un chœur angélique, près et loin.” D’Annunzio, \textit{Le Martyre}, 94.
In the second act of *Le Martyre*, Sebastian finds himself locked in a chamber filled with religious figureheads from many pagan traditions. Debussy is locked with him, confronted by one after another of d’Annunzio’s cartoonish representations of pagan priests and mystics. Sebastian meets many female characters whose spirituality impresses him, but Debussy gives music to only two of these. Compared with each other, the songs these two women sing have distinctly oppositional qualities and suggest contrasting ways of constructing virginal innocence. But taken together, they stand apart from the other women because they are hidden from view. Their invisible bodies make their voices all the more moving—the Heavenly Voice physically breaks chains and opens the locked door. Moreover, d’Annunzio describes the two women’s voices in the stage directions. The Virgin of Erigone sings with “the golden crystal of a virginal voice that curves over the soul like the August sky.” Both voices “rise, suddenly, from beyond the impenetrable threshold.”

The two soprano solos in the second act share some stylistic features, including the ensemble scoring for high strings and sparse winds favoring the upper reeds with no percussion. But otherwise they diverge in the soprano’s range, the rhythmic intensity, and the sense of drama created by the melodic profile. The Virgin of Erigone sings as a foil to the Heavenly Voice, using song convention and recognizable style to communicate exoticism without otherworldliness. The flute duet introduces her melody: the initial pentatonic descent, starting from F#, is rhythmically charged so that the beginning note is

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97 “C’est le cristal doré d’une voix virginale qui se courbe sur l’âme comme un ciel d’août.” Ibid., stage direction between verses 1796 and 1797, 248.
98 “Soudain, un chant pur se lève au delà du seuil infranchissable.” And “Soudain, la porte étant encore close, un chant se lève au delà du seuil infranchissable.” Ibid., stage direction between verses 1788 and 1789, 248 and stage direction between 2923 and 2924, 263.
99 A good example of the kind of “orchestra without feet,” or “orchestra with wings” that Debussy idealized in Wagner’s later music, especially *Parsifal*, and which he describes in letters to Caplet.
sustained before giving way to the rest of the falling line in even sixteenth notes, creating a lilt that evokes a child’s improvised song.

Example 8 II.2 mm. 1-4

The straightforward ascent back to the top of the scale also in even sixteenth notes gives the line a rhythmic drive. When the singer’s second phrase continues, now in a two-against-three hemiola in mm. 9-11, the first and second violins take over the flute duet’s role, but through their less focused timbre and the erasure of the initial dotted eighth note they abstract the pentatonic scale into an element of the musical space. Both the melody and the accompaniment vary slightly from verse to verse, but the fundamental elements of pentatonicism, the near constant presence of ascending and descending scales, sustained notes in the strings (usually in octaves), and the characteristic dotted-eighth note followed by three falling notes of a pentatonic scale create the placid, childlike, and somewhat exotic character of this solo.

In fact, the ascending and descending scales with an easygoing half-lilted rhythm are not merely characteristic of this one solo in Le Martyre but are rather somewhat of a trademark in Debussy’s pastoral style. The pentatonic scale in a full lilted rhythm comprises the opening of the melody of “La fille aux cheveux de lin” from the first book of Préludes of 1908. It also appears in some of the later piano pieces, including “Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent et d’été” of the Six épigraphes antiques of 1914. Its most well known appearance is in the flute’s refrain in Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune (1894), where it becomes clear that the rhythm and scale suggest the activity of idly playing on a
set of reed pipes. The circularity of these gestures set them apart from the many descending scales that color Debussy’s motivic imagination—Jankélévitch understands the frequent pull towards the bottom of the scale as a sign of depression and anticipation of death. Unlike those pure descents, the ones that climb back up, as in the Virgin of Erigone’s song, “La fille aux cheveux de lin,” and Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune signal a lighter spirit, one of hopeful dreams. By incorporating one of his common tropes into the virgin’s song, Debussy draws on a chain of associative meaning and prepares himself compositionally to tackle the song of the heavenly voice, a trope he engaged with less frequently.

At the end of the second act, d’Annunzio indicates that Debussy would compose music for both the dialogue between two saints who comment on the faith of the “Girl Afflicted with Fevers” and the words sung by the heavenly voice, whose song emanates from behind the closed doors. Debussy ignores d’Annunzio’s indication, as was his wont, and adds music only to the heavenly voice. It would have been hard for Debussy to resist the chance to create music that would cause Sebastian to be “ravished…as in a dream without beginning and without end.”

The heavenly voice of the Blessed Virgin sings words decidedly more authoritative—motherly—than the childish ones of the Virgin of Erigone:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virgin of Erigone</th>
<th>Vox Cœlestis (Virgin Mary)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I used to cut the blade of wheat,</td>
<td>Who is crying over my child so sweet,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgetful of the asphodels;</td>
<td>My lily in bloom in pure flesh?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My soul, under the clement sky,</td>
<td>He is luminous on my lap,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the sister of the hummingbird;</td>
<td>He is without stain and without injury.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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100 Debussy et le mystère, 44-68.
101 “Ravi par la Voix, comme dans un songe sans commencement et sans fin, le Saint monte les degrés, franchit le seuil; et, la tête renversée, les yeux levés vers le Croissant, s’abîme dans l’extase circulaire.” D’Annunzio, Le Martyre, stage direction following verse 2931, 263.
My shadow was like a wing for me
That I let drag in the grains.
I was the virgin, faithful
To my shadow and to my song.

See. And in my hair
All the stars praise His light.
His face gives light to
My sadness and the summer night.\(^{102}\)

The Virgin of Erigone sings only about herself in imperfect past tense and nostalgic mood. She compares herself to a hummingbird, the least consistent, most hyperactive of birds, and her reference to the figurative dragging of her shadow in the grains suggests carelessness. In contrast, the Virgin Mary references herself rarely, only in the sense of using her subjectivity to relate to the wider creation. Her maternal nature first becomes observable when she asks who is crying; she frames her story as a consolation to the one who cries. Then she makes explicit reference to her identity as the mother of Jesus; she suggests a medieval image of Mary with the infant Jesus on her lap not as a helpless baby but as a sentient miniature person, sitting upright, confident and beaming with the light she references. Paradoxically, Mary speaks of her own hair, her feeling of sadness, and her body where the child sits, but her message does not seem selfish. Instead she points outward towards all those who depend upon her.

Musically, Debussy’s characterization of Mary projects calm assurance, shrouded in mystery. The pianissimo flute invocation, a one-measure fragment of a B-flat Phrygian scale repeated once and all slurred, played at a slow tempo (modéré), and supported by the static and fragile sustained high B-flat in the violas and second violins, creates a meditative aura of expectation.

\(^{102}\)“Je fauchais l’épi de froment,/Oublieuse de l’asphodèle ;/mon âme, sous le ciel clément,/était la sœur de l’hirondelle ;/mon ombre m’était presque comme une aile/que je traînais dans la moisson./Et j’étais la Vierge, fidèle à mon ombre et à ma chanson.” Ibid., vss. 1789-1796. “Qui pleure mon Enfant si doux,/mon Lys fleuri dans la chair pure/?Il est tout clair sur mes genoux,/Il est sans tache et sans blessure./Voyez. Et dans ma chevelure/tous les astres louent Sa clarté./ Il éclaire de Sa figure/ma tristesse et la nuit d’été.” Vss. 2924-2931.
When the voice of Mary enters on the B-flat, almost still hovering even though the instruments have released it, the Phrygian half-step between the first and second degrees of the scale give her melody a plaintive tone that mimics the crying she asks about. Mary’s empathetic delivery is enhanced by the fact that she sings unaccompanied: she comes alone, to comfort, not to impress in a flourish of grandeur. When the orchestra reenters in m. 9, the singer sheds the Phrygian half step and momentarily lacks a tonal center, until the temporary arrival on A-flat Major in m. 12. The A-flat becomes an important melodic pitch, marking a high point reinforced by the words that Mary sings on it: “see,” and “stars.” The scoring continues to be notable for its balanced alternation between wind accompaniment and strings, the winds lending an ethereal quality to the verses describing Jesus and the strings grounding the phrase about Mary herself.

Mary’s unaccompanied singing recalls Mélisande’s famous hair-braiding scene in Act III of Pelléas et Mélisande. The texts of the two songs speak to each other: like Mary, Mélisande references Christianity—she gives a litany of Saints Daniel, Michael, and Raphael, and she specifies Sunday as the day of her birth. Like Mélisande, the Virgin Mary sings about her hair. But Debussy uses unaccompanied song to different
metaphysical effects in the opera and his incidental music. Mélisande’s song is hyper-real because of its intimacy and immediacy: we see her, she performs a quotidian activity. She becomes a more complete symbol of lost agency and radical alienation in the opera because of this moment when she acts not as an ephemeral shadow figure but as a real person.\(^{103}\) In *Le Martyre*, the Virgin Mary’s song is hyper-real only for a moment; her first phrase is the only unaccompanied part of her longer solo, and the staging requires her absence from view as a *voix acousmatique*.

Debussy creates the conditions for the listeners to enter into the musical atmosphere and attend to the dramatic unfolding of the structure almost as if they were creating the music themselves. The sparse accompanimental texture, slow tempo, shifting emphasis on modal and tonal pitch organization, and the rhythm in the vocal part that gradually morphs from the even-keeled eighth notes or quarter notes with an occasional dotted quarter note to a more vital, emotionally insistent phrasing that concludes with triplet quarter notes all leave the listening experience open, drawing the audience into the creative process. By not repeating any of the musical material within Mary’s solo, Debussy contrasts it with the Virgin of Erigone’s music, which is more repetitive phrase to phrase and also across the whole form, repeating the opening motifs at the end.

Debussy pays special heed to Mary’s words, choosing to repeat them after the chamber has been transformed and Sebastian climbs the stairs to the previously uncrossable threshold. Leading up to this re-entry the music’s organization is more tightly and overtly controlled, and the increase of energy into the frenzy beginning in m.

\(^{103}\) Mn. 18-31 of Act III. Mélisande sings “My long hair descends to the threshold of the tower. My hair waits for you throughout the length of the tower and throughout the day. Saint Daniel and Saint Michael, Saint Michael and Saint Raphael, I was born on a Sunday, a Sunday at noon.”
36 depicts positive change. From m. 20, where the heavenly voice’s solo ends, to m. 40, where the tempo slows again, Debussy makes a deliberate change in the rhythm and scoring each two measures. Each change adds another layer of rhythmic complexity until the frenetic energy of m. 36 is reached: here the reeds and brass play a pentatonic motif in a slurred quarter note rhythm while the strings play tremolos on an eighth-note pattern of the same pentatonic collection, both ascending and descending, upper winds play sixteenth notes on the same scale pattern as the strings, and the three harps play descending pentatonic scales on quicker triplet sixteenth-note and quintuplet patterns. The effect is of a swirl of regular wide intervals, and the crescendo and ritardando in m. 39, the fourth consecutive measure of this raucous noise, intensifies the tension. In m. 40, when the cellos and contrabass enter with a sustained tone, grounding the rhythmic energy and slowing it down, the low brass introduce a hymn-like melody. The brass play this melody twice before the texture clears abruptly in m. 44 to prepare Mary’s re-entry. By dramatically thinning the orchestral texture, Debussy makes his score illustrate the scene change from the pagan magic chamber to what d’Annunzio describes as a “fabulous simulacrum of the new Heaven and the antique Ether.”

As with other dualisms in this score, the separation between these two virgins can be seen as two sides of a coin, joined in their innocence and their connection to death. Although dramatically, Mary’s song achieves the task of opening the door, musically the

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104 “On entend, tout à coup, tomber les chaines qui enchaînent aux cippes les sept magiciennes planétaires. Les vantaux de la porte d’airain s’entrouvrent laissant échapper une lumière éblouissante. Hassub, Jardaner, Ilah et Phéroras montent les degrés aux sept couleurs et poussent les vastes vantaux qui sur leurs gonds résonnent comme une multitude de cymbales et de sistres. Dans une lumière éblouissante, la Chambre magique apparaît, avec tous ses signes, tous ses cercles, tous ses orbes, comme le simulacre fabuleux du nouveau Firmament et de l’antique Éther.” Ibid., 262.
satisfaction of hearing two peaceful, pastoral female solos is Debussy’s will. He writes simple spirituality into both songs.

*Pagan Style, Christian Style in Act III*

The third act is the dramatic highpoint of the play, centering on the clash between Diocletian’s expectations for his favored archer and Sebastian’s own convictions of faith. Musically, the act is less a highpoint than a continuation. Debussy focuses, as in the first act, on Sebastian and the crowds’ attempt to access the spiritual realm. Sebastian goes through physical experiences akin to those Jesus suffered during his final trials, and Diocletian tempts him as if he were the devil. The pagan crowds praise Sebastian, ambivalently: it is unclear whether they celebrate him for his faith in Christ specifically or more for his courage in defying the emperor. As in the first act, Debussy distinguishes between the pagan crowds and Sebastian as a Christian through the former’s consistent use of chromatic sonorities and the latter’s modal orientation. But this superficial technique is only part of the Symbolist storytelling, which privileges depth over surface.

The third act has the most music of all five acts, as d’Annunzio stated from the beginning. Debussy responded to the demands with a collection of orchestral, choir, and solo pieces that exploit—and move beyond—the script’s near-caricatural distinctions between the Christians and the pagans. The music is divided into six numbers, the first of which is the fanfare prelude. The triumphant quality of the rising fifths played by horns and trumpets recalls the triumph of Sebastian’s miraculous dance on hot coals in the first act, but unlike the fifths sung by the choir, which are contained within a diatonic key and thus require a transposition (the first fifth is G-D, and the second is an inversion, D-G,
but still ascending, so as to echo the first without leaving the tonal center of G), the ones at the opening of the third act play unequivocal perfect fifths, leaping unbounded from B-flat to F and then rise a step and leap from G to D.

Example 10 III.1 mm.1-3
When the rhythm changes slightly to sixteenth-note triplets, the sixth created by the echo (B-flat—G) is incorporated into a single instrument’s gesture, as it makes a fifth leap and immediately continues up a step to the sixth. The echo effect gives way to a homophonic, unison choir texture in m. 6 that continues through to the end of the phrase in strong, imposing fashion. Beyond the reminiscence of the first act’s fifth leaps, the character of this prelude is unique in Le Martyre and serves to illustrate the self-aggrandizement typical of the masculine gods in the sanctuary at Diocletian’s court. In contrast to the reticent, subdued depictions of Christianity in the score, this pagan sound is primitive, bellicose, repetitive, and not mysterious.
Similarly, the pagan chorus that Diocletian orders to sing Sebastian’s praise has an uncomplicated, homophonic, mostly unison texture.

Unlike almost all of Debussy’s melodies, in this work and elsewhere, the melody of the “pagan” chorus sung by the Citharèdes does not repeat motifs. The accompaniment, however, has multiple repeated phrases (mm. 1-2 repeat as mm. 7-8, and mm. 9-10 immediately repeat as mm. 11-12), contributing to the conventionality and tedium of the chorus. Moreover, even in its through-composition, the vocal line’s rhythmic and melodic profiles are extremely regular, square, and unsubtle. The irregular 5/4 meter is the most unconventional element of this chorus, and in its unchanging, unaccented nature it becomes banal. It is somewhat ungainly, especially because of the phrases in mm. 7-12 that each last eight beats, leaving one beat at the end and one at the beginning of each measure open, in brutish ignorance of the reigning meter.

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105 The premise that Debussy’s style is founded upon repetition of nearly every motif grounds the recent analytical study by Sylveline Bourion, *Le style de Claude Debussy: duplication, répétition et dualité dans les stratégies de composition* (Belgium: Vrin, 2011).
One other pagan musical sound fills out the music of the “council of false gods” (the title of this act has a Christian agenda), the chorus of onlookers at the court, including the women of Byblos and the Syrian choir. The first entrance of this pagan choir occurs when Sebastian’s hallucination of Christ’s passion reaches the moment of death: as he begins to feel that his life is over, to the steadily decaying sound of the orchestra that had been accompanying him, the choir emits a *forte* sigh tracing a vigorous descending chromatic scale.

![Example 12 III.4 mm. 54-6](image)

As mentioned above, the tendency toward descending lines in Debussy’s music was for Jankélévitch a calling card of his macabre worldview.\(^{106}\) Here the descending line enacts its classic role in Debussyan music: the entonation of a sensual death, sung by an erotic choir of seductive women. In other works this motif is most often associated with water, but the strength of the “subterranean” pull is here emphasized in the final stanza of the Syrian chorus, “He descends toward the dark doors./Everything that is beautiful, morose Hades/takes away. Turn over the torches,/Eros! Weep!”\(^{107}\) The women’s text doubly reinforces the connection between sexual attraction and death, first through the reminder that the Greek (pagan) god of the underworld takes all beautiful things, and then through the demand that the Greek god of love weep in mourning.

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\(^{106}\) Jankélévitch, “La descente dans les souterrains,” 31-142.

On the other side of the pagan/Christian confrontation in the third act is Sebastian, who has a holy vision of Christ’s death while Diocletian tempts him. He committed to representing his grief through dance, and so the entrance of the choir paves the way for disembodied voice to convey his emotions through song. Once again, the stage direction that d’Annunzio wrote to introduce the text for the solo voice combines the necessary elements to challenge Debussy’s creative drive: “The choir fades. And a solitary voice seems to surge from an infinite depth, having traversed the entire mass of suffering like the breath traverses the lung.”

This voice, labeled differently from Sebastian’s other songs—usually referred to in the libretto/score as “anima Sebastiani”—is called only the “Vox sola.” The initial text that this voice sings is then de-personalized; the solo voice quotes the text rather owning it, beginning with “I suffer,’ he shuddered.” But as the narrative impulse surges ahead, the voice stops attributing the words to someone else and uses the first person singular to give the impression of the direct expression of a single person’s sentiment.

The literary technique d’Annunzio has used fuses on the one hand Sebastian with Christ and on the other hand the dancing, acting body with the singing one. Debussy nearly ignores this poetic conceit, seamlessly conjoining the direct quotations with the narrative frame. This solo recalls the two soprano solos in act two in its three unaccompanied sections, but its restrained range and technical requirements make it more

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108 “Le Chœur s’éteint. Et une voix solitaire semble surgir d’une profondeur infinie, ayant traversé toute la masse de la souffrance comme le souffle traverse le poumon.” Ibid., stage direction between verses 3328 and 3329, 270.
109 Ibid., verse 3329, 270.
110 Kasaba and Boulez note that the first run of performances had Ida Rubinstein cast as Sebastian and two singers dividing the solo soprano roles: Rose Féart sang Vox sola and Amina Sebastiani, and Eugénie (Ninon) Vallin sang the Vox célesteis and the Voice of the Virgin of Érigone. Thus even the casting reinforces the identification between Sebastian and this solo voice in act 3. See “Forward” to Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien, xxi.
sober and direct. Unlike the pagans’ sensual chromaticism, the solo voice (of Sebastian? Of Christ? Of some more mysterious heavenly being?) has a D-flat Lydian modal orientation that a clarinet duo quietly affirms and that gives shape to the vocal melody only toward the end, when the singer realizes the meaning of her suffering. The phrasing of this solo tenderly reflects the emotional trajectory of the text, which begins with the expression of pain: “I am suffering and bleeding. My torment makes the world red.”

Example 13 III.4 mm. 88-95

These verses trace the descending profile noted so often in Debussy’s music, with the tonally ambiguous opening repeated the second time that the voice says “I suffer.” The next phase of the soliloquy is panic: the solo voice surges with guilt, “What did I do?” and then disoriented terror: “Who struck me?” The musical setting of these questions sounds like their interrogative speech patterns, with the melody moving in leaps of descending thirds and ascending fourths. The second question follows, sequencing up a step and adding to the intensity by speeding up the rhythm, from eighth notes to triplet eighth notes.

Whatever Debussy’s personal anti-Catholic stance, at this moment in the third act he achieves a musical language signifying holiness, through the means of narrative development and extra-musical associations. The voice accepts mortality, stating simply, “I expire, I die,” using thirds as in the previous phrase but changing the emotional affect by extending the rhythm and lowering the register. The final phrase expresses a central
element of Christian doctrine, the belief in eternal life after death. The voice affirms, “O beauty, I die, but to be reborn never to perish again.” This phrase ascends steadily, tracing an octave from D-flat to D-flat, moving still by thirds in the two halves of the phrase (first G-B-flat, then B-flat to D-flat). The reversal of melodic direction from the beginning of this solo to the end, the moments of unaccompanied singing that Debussy has already associated in this work with sacredness, and the stark tonal contrast between this solo voice and the choirs of pagan women together create a coherent atmosphere of reverence.

The Individual and the Crowd in Act IV

In the fourth act, Debussy tells a story about constancy in religious belief. Sebastian’s final task is to convince his archers, now led by Sanaé, to execute him. The archers are inclined to spare Sebastian out of loyalty to him, so he urges them to proceed with the death sentence as a way to demonstrate love. Sebastian believes, after Christ, that bodily death will give his soul eternal life, but Sanaé, a pagan, does not believe in the resurrection. He asks if Sebastian is like Hérile king of Praeneste, a pseudo-immortal son of a Roman god who can come back to life after death because he was born with three souls.111 Sebastian clings to this reference, taking advantage of the multiply reinterpreted symbolism of dying and rebirth in the service of his own mission toward self-sacrifice. The pagan association of Sebastian’s prophesy of life after death with a figure in their

111 Joseph François Michaud and Louis Gabriel Michaud, Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne, ou, histoire par ordre alphabétique, des personnages des temps héroïques et des divinités grecques, italiques, égyptiennes, hindoues, japonaises, scandinaves, celtes, mexicaines, etc. (Paris, L.-G. Michaud, 1832), 393. It is interesting to know, and one might wonder whether this is coincidence or intentionally symbolic, that the modern name for the ancient city of Praeneste is Palestrina, since the preeminent composer of the Counter-Reformation was born there.
pantheon provides the final conditions for Sebastian’s execution to take place and evinces the play’s fundamental denial that the pagan and Christian worldviews are different. In order to complete his martyrdom as a Christian saint, Sebastian must agree that his soul shares qualities with a pagan idol. In his music for this act, Debussy brings out the fundamental similarities of the two faith systems that draw crowds of followers.

To this end, as in the third act, Debussy uses the descending chromatic scale fragment for the lament sung by the women of Byblos and the Syrian choir. The pitch content is identical; “Pleurez, ô femmes de Syrie, criez: hélas, ma Seigneurie” beginning m. 27 of Act IV no. 3 features a chromatic descent from A-flat to B-natural as in the phrase sung to “Voyez le bel

Example 14 III.4 mm.77-80

Adolescent couché dans la pourpre du sang” beginning at measure 77 in Act III no. 4.

The repetition, across two different acts, of the same choral figure serves two purposes. First, it reinforces the superficially simplistic character of the pagan musical idiom. Secondly, it brings to life d’Annunzio’s stage direction that enacts a long procession: separated over the 31 verses and many stage directions indicating Sebastian’s actual death by arrows, d’Annunzio makes four references to the approaching choir and the prolongation of their lament. Instead of using florid language, he makes the advance and continuation of their song a textual motif, and Debussy picks up on it (although not
specifically asked to do this until verse 3835, at the midpoint of these four choral references) by repeating the motifs he already presented in the previous act. By using the same music for lamenting over the death that Sebastian lived through his communion with Christ and his actual bodily death, Debussy points out the consistency of the crowds’ lamentation. They believed in Sebastian’s commitment to Christ’s mysterious death, even though their words convey the conflation between Sebastian and Adonis, whose cult of masculine beauty is well known. This symbolic polyvance captures Debussy’s religious ambivalence and his celebration of deep spiritual feeling.

Act V: Apotheosis and Choral Praise

As with the majority of preludes to the other acts, the one to “Le Paradis” is full of sustained notes, creating a still rhythm that suggests atmosphere rather than action. Like the other act-opening stage directions, the one for act five refers to much more than what the audience will apprehend when the curtain first goes up; recalling the direction quoted above, about half invokes visible elements of the set and the other half describes the singing of angel choirs. In turn Debussy’s prelude to the fifth act maintains a mysterious and foreboding quality, with tension present from the beginning in the major second sustained in the orchestra’s lowest register, cellos and basses. Similarly the falling seconds, E-flat to D-flat, that move through the orchestra, from the horns to the clarinets to the oboes and English horn give a rather more measured, even depressed impression of heaven than one might expect. Debussy perpetuates the mood of death from the end of the previous act, not giving away the surprise of heaven’s true nature. Just before the curtain rises at [1], however, the basses widen their second to a major third, F-A, and the
horns now ascend a major third. By inverting the direction of the sole motive up to this point, Debussy subtly indicates the reality of heaven. In fact, the next section begins abruptly despite the optimistic rising third; invigorating dotted rhythms jolt the next passage into C Major. The initial two-measure gesture repeats mm. 3-4, audibly confirming the triumphant ambiance that is still too dark to see. As the excitement builds, the orchestra releases itself from the controlled sustain of this repeated invocation: first the trumpets begin a semitone oscillation in triplet rhythm, and then the oboes, English horn, and clarinets join in the tremolo-like figure, persisting for a full measure in sixteenth notes that “radiate” like the rays of the sun emanating from the “garden of light and beatitudes” described in the stage directions.

This short prelude constituted a site of aesthetic conflict for Debussy; he resisted the idea that Paradise even have a place in this work. In a letter to Astruc sent only two days before the premiere, he jauntily suggests that the director “remove Paradise.” But the composer’s practical concerns reflect his metaphysics as well. For belief in paradise is a common defining element of most religions, and atheists or nature-lovers by definition reject the notion that the soul continues to exist after the body expires. Naturally, then, Debussy hesitated before depicting heaven; none of his other works feature apotheosis,

112 “Puisque le souci de la mise en scène s’arrête au seuil du Paradis, fort de l’idée que, comme il n’y a plus de musique on peut s’en aller : les uns chez Larue, les autres chez Zimmer— ou de moindres marchands de vin—il faudrait [sic] peut-être mieux supprimer le Paradis ?” Op. cit., see n. 338.

113 For an interesting, more explicitly ethical, continuation of the aestheticism and religion of art exhibited in this work, not only by its confrontation of religious subject matter in a secular mode of presentation, see Aldous Huxley’s early essay, “The Substitutes for Religion” in Proper Studies (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1928). For a response to this essay from a Buddhist scholar seeking to incorporate a rationale for art within that religion, see Sangharakshita, “The Religion of Art” in The Religion of Art (Glasgow: Windhorse, 1988).
release, or optimism toward a life after death.\textsuperscript{114} The stillness in the prelude to paradise finds its explanation in Debussy’s own reservations toward the project of celebrating Sebastian’s entrance into heaven.

Once the gates of heaven are finally opened, however, the Paradise act offers an unyielding portrayal of joy and praise unlike anything else in Debussy’s musical language. Here he leaves one interpretable trace of his request to borrow a score for Palestrina’s Missa Pape Marcellus. This mass was an object of near-cult devotion in the circle of esoteric artists Debussy frequented in the 1880s; Josèphin Péladan staged a performance of it at the first salon of the Rose + Croix on March 22, 1892.\textsuperscript{115} Moreover, early twentieth-century French music historians cite Palestrina as the self-effacing composer of impersonal expression \textit{par excellence}.\textsuperscript{116} Although there are few musical similarities between Palestrina’s Mass and Debussy’s setting of Psalm 150, the ethos of purity in the one probably inspired the other. The motion toward impersonal expression imbues Debussy’s music with a new kind of energy. Although the choruses throughout \textit{Le Martyre} present new musical ideas, in the finale they reach their fullest erasure of Debussyean traits, all the while still attempting to capture the “praise that no mortal ears can hear.” Debussy’s manipulation of the choirs attests to the attention he gave to a complete depiction of heaven as guided by d’Annunzio.

\textsuperscript{114} For example, \textit{Pelléas et Mélisande} ends with tragedy, his major symphonic work \textit{La Mer} is anti-narrative and eschews climax or positivity, and no concrete example of a reward for the righteous is to be found in any of his smaller works.

\textsuperscript{115} Steven Whiting, \textit{Satie the Bohemian} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 147. Additionally, Orledge cites Satie’s reverence for Palestrina, which we can assume he communicated (and perhaps shared) with Debussy. \textit{Satie the Composer} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 92.

\textsuperscript{116} Paul Landorny, for one, glosses over Palestrina in one sentence of his \textit{A History of Music}, pitting him as the representative of all Catholic music, which in contrast to the development of personal expression in German protestant music was by nature impersonal: “[The chorale in German music] was no longer the impersonal art of Catholicism, the art of Palestrina, for example, in which the individual does not appear, is not divined, unless it be to submit absolutely to the authority of the church, and communicate in heart and spirit with all its members.” Trans. Frederick H. Martens (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1923), 32.
Act V has no spoken dialogue and consists entirely of the angelic choirs’ praise of God and a central solo sung by the voice of Sebastian’s soul. D’Annunzio divides the praise amongst five choirs with different names: the Choir of Martyrs, the Choir of Virgins, the Choir of Apostles, the Choir of Angels, and the Entire Holy Choir. Debussy responds by setting the martyrs and apostles as men’s voices and the virgins and angels as women, while the entire holy choir is mixed. As earlier in the incidental music, a high soprano gives voice to Sebastian’s soul. The soul contrasts the heavenly choirs by calling upon quick-moving ornaments and asymmetric rhythms to express a personal rather than impersonal religious fervor. These choirs do not correspond to the opening stage direction, so d’Annunzio may not have meant for Debussy to portray the praise of the angels that mortals cannot hear. The text for the choirs also does not follow the stage directions’ evocation of heaven’s sonorous profile.

The “the praise that mortal ears cannot hear was no doubt an appealing compositional challenge for Debussy, and we can perceive it in the gaps between the Entire Holy Choir’s entrances in the third section of the piece. Structurally, this inaudible praise appears at the end of d’Annunzio’s stage direction, and if we consider Debussy’s approach to structure in pieces similarly contrived from but not corresponding directly to an accompanying text, it is feasible that Debussy could have worked in this sonic image in a parallel point in his musical structure, that is to say after all of the various audible choirs have sung their contributions. The last section is a twice-repeated mixed-chorus setting of d’Annunzio’s French adaptation of the Psalm 150 text, “Louez le seigneur dans
l’immensité de sa force/Louez le Seigneur sur le tympanon et sur l’orgue/Louez le Seigneur sur le sistre et sur la cymbale/Louez le Seigneur sur la flûte et sur la cithare/Alléluia!” When the unaccompanied choir sings the first line of this psalm, it introduces a new, energized melody, emphasizing God’s triumph through an ascending scale. The hopefulness of this ascent is bolstered by an alternating quarter- and eighth-note rhythm that projects a sense of group identity; the pure homophony erases the presence of any individuals, and the steady, square rhythm reinforces the metric pulse. The choir sings eighth notes to propel the melody up the scale, but it uses quarter notes on the structurally significant pitches E, B, and G-sharp, the constituent notes of the E Major triad.

This kind of unambiguous—from the perspective of tonality, rhythm, and timbre—writing is rare in Debussy’s style, and although it suits the text’s laudatory mood, it seems to leave no room for the portrayal of the more ephemeral choir that cannot be heard by mortals. Yet once the singers have concluded this phrase, a brass choir immediately intercedes with a homophonic fanfare flourish outlining a contracted, descending pitch range that is self-affirming through its repetition of the final chord. The ensemble scoring, rhythm, and harmony of this flourish match the choir’s mood and strengthen its already assertive character. But when the choir re-enters with a repetition of its first phrase, its tonal center seems new and distant. The choir of voices does not modulate, but the brass choir’s punctuating phrase manipulates the choir’s key and ends with E-flat as the new central pitch, just a half-step below the voices’ starting E. Debussy

118 “Praise the Lord in the immensity of his power/Praise the Lord with drum and organ/Praise the Lord with tambourine and cymbal/Praise the Lord with flute and harp/Alléluia!” Debussy, Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien, 281.
achieves this sleight of hand by overlapping the voice and brass choirs’ conclusion and entry on a unison D-sharp in the voice and an A-flat Major triad in the brass and strings; the enharmony of the voice’s final note with the fifth of the instruments’ new chord makes for a seamless transition. But the sonic effect is of an auditory blip when the singers re-enter the texture. In the one-beat rest separating the instrumental fanfare from the second choir entry the absence of sound alludes to the presence of some other musical force.

The powerful subtlety found in this juxtaposition of two tonalities at a moment that calls attention to our limitations as listeners matches Debussy’s ideas about music’s power to express when it is simply listened to rather than studied in score. Debussy was aware of the power of such a simple and surprising device as the tonal juxtaposition in the fifth act of *Le Martyre*.

We seek too much to write [music], we make music for paper, despite the fact that it is made for ears! We attach too much importance to musical writing, to formulas, and to the profession! We seek ideas inside of ourselves, but we should seek for them around ourselves. We combine, we construct, we imagine themes that express ideas; we develop them, we modify them in the meeting of other themes that represent other ideas, we make metaphysics, but we do not make music. The latter must be spontaneously perceived by the listener’s ear without him having to discover abstract ideas in the meanderings of a complicated development.  

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119 “On cherche trop à écrire, on fait de la musique pour le papier, alors qu’elle est faite pour les oreilles. On attache trop d’importance à l’écriture musicale, à la formule et au métier. On cherche ses idées en soi, alors qu’on devrait les chercher autour de soi. On combine, on construit, on imagine des thèmes qui veulent
Although this citation is undated, Léon Vallas, in his book on Debussy’s musical ideas, groups it with other comments about the need for simpler, purer music that Debussy made in the spring of 1911, during the composition of *Le Martyre*. The passage evinces a typically Debussyan rejection of doctrine in music composition, at the same time that it celebrates the individual listener. The relationship between the composer, the music, and the listener is one that comes into play in the fifth act of *Le Martyre* at the moment when the musical style seems most conventional.

**Conclusion**

The mysteries of *Le Martyre* should now be more clearly visible, if not fully resolved. The work is not only typical of widely recognized compositional habits and aesthetic preoccupations characteristic of Debussy, but it also conforms to his own statements regarding his motivation to compose the work and his estimation of his success in doing so. The composer made explicit statements about motivations and success in two interviews during 1911, one contemporaneous with the beginning of the compositional process and the other with the work’s premiere. In the first, Debussy raises polemic after polemic, asserting that he was attracted to the story of *Le Martyre* not just for its Christianity but for its admixture of “intense life and Christian faith” that he found exprimer des idées ; on les développe, on les modifie à la rencontre d’autres thèmes qui représentent d’autres idées, on fait de la métaphysique. Celle-ci soit être enregistrée spontanément par l’oreille de l’auditeur sans qu’il ait besoin de découvrir des idées abstraites dans les méandres d’un développement compliqué.” Claude Debussy, cited in Leon Vallas, *Les idées de Claude Debussy* (Paris: Editions musicales de la librairie de France, 1927), 30, and later in Stéfan Jarocinski, *Debussy: Impressionisme et symbolisme*, trans. Thérèse Douchy (Paris: Seuil, 1970), 112.
in it. He asserts his lack of Catholic faith, his disinterest in doctrines, and explicitly states his hope that his works will stir controversy for many years to come. In the second, he famously writes, as quoted above, that he composed in the final act everything he has thought about this idea of the Ascension (of Jesus) and that he completed the entire commission as though it had been destined for use in a church. As Debussy tells us in his own words, his music for Le Martyre is both of a piece and slightly distinct from the rest of his major projects:

Do you then think that I have, in my works, absolutely no religious precedents, if I may say so? Do you think you can enclose an artist’s soul, and can’t you easily conceive that a man who sees mystery everywhere could be tempted by a religious subject? I have no profession of faith to make to you, but although I am not a practicing Catholic or a believer, I had to make no great effort to elevate myself to the heights of mysticism that this poet’s drama attains.

The ‘heights of mysticism’ is a pun that Debussy exploited in his score, writing music for the upward shot of Sebastian’s arrow in Act I. Indeed, the score draws out the timeless themes of spirituality and conviction that are sometimes obscured by the play’s weighty script. Debussy puts forth in this interview a fragmentary and informal interpretation of

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121 At the end of the article, he states, “En vérité, le jour lointain——il faut espérer que ce sera le plus tard possible——où je ne susciterai plus de querelles, je me le reprocherai amèrement. Dans ces œœuvres dernières dominerait nécessairement la détestable hypocrisie qui m’aura permis de contenter tous les hommes.” Ibid., 303.
122 Claude Debussy, interview with René Bizet, Comœœdia, 18 May 1911 in Monsieur Croche, 304-5.
123 “Croyez-vous donc que je n’ai point, dans mes œœuvres, des précédents religieux, si je puis dire ? Prétendez-vous enfermer l’âme d’un artiste, et ne concevez-vous pas aisément que celui qui voit partout tant de mystères ait été tenté par un sujet religieux ? Je n’ai pas de profession de foi à vous faire, mais si je ne suis pas de pratique catholique ou croyant, je n’ai pas eu grand effort à faire pour m’éléver à la hauteur de mysticisme qu’atteint le drame du poète.” Ibid., 304.

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the religion of art. The fuller expression of his attitude toward the religion of art is embodied in the score. In *Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien*, the dramatic function and musical character of his contributions at once convey his own attitude towards faith and capture the atmosphere of a generalized religious anxiety.

Debussy’s score proved to have more staying power than the play, drawing one creative team after another to re-think the staging so as to use the powerful music to earn success with audiences. From the time he took over the directorship at the *Opéra* in 1914, Jacques Rouché eagerly planned a production of the work on that grand stage. He was unable to do so during Debussy’s life, as World War I interrupted performance schedules and limited funds for new productions, but he managed to reassemble the crew that premiered *Le Martyre* at the Châtelet for the first run at the *Opéra* in 1922. Much like the original run, this production was beset by difficulties. Working with an abridged score, from which the entire Act II had been excised, Ida Rubinstein revived her role, and Bour’s original sets and Baskt’s costumes reappeared. André Caplet was to conduct the orchestra and choirs, but despite his forethought in planning rehearsals, the musicians were underprepared. He judged the show unfit for performance, and he resigned from his contract 48 hours before opening night. Caplet’s defection from the show quickly

124 Peter Dayan has analyzed Debussy’s critical writings in an attempt to demonstrate the composer’s predilection for the non-articulation of meaning through music. Although his discussion does not focus explicitly on religion, his comparison of Debussy’s and Mallarmé’s aesthetics, as well as his conclusion that Debussy was interested in highlighting man’s inability to interpret many of the codes he encounters, does suggest sensitivity to the discourses of otherworldliness familiar to religion. See “Nature, Music, and Meaning in Debussy’s Writings,” *19th-Century Music* 28 no. 3 (2005): 214-229.


126 He had drawn up a schedule of choir rehearsals, although it is unknown whether these were held. BnF, NLA 272 (9), r.
turned into a press scandal, as he and Rouché traded statements in *Comœœdia*, arguing about whose actions better served Debussy’s memory and music.\(^\text{127}\)

Other performances of *Le Martyre*, relatively rare, saw new scenic concepts, as well as newly revised versions of the script, always abridged. In February 1957, Russian dancer Ludmilla Tchérina offered a performance of Sebastian inspired by Rubinstein’s in Henri Duvillez’s version of the play, performed at the *Opéra*. Surviving excerpts of this script suggest that Duvillez privileged action over metaphysical reflection. In his hands the first act becomes a skeleton of Sebastian’s miraculous actions, without a trace of the hesitancy that had previously come from all the characters supporting Sebastian. In the absence of fully developed foils, Sebastian’s purity lacks its sparkling quality. Performances of this version spurred a special issue of *La Revue Musicale* devoted to *Le Martyre* and highlighting both the 1911 premiere and the contemporary production.\(^\text{128}\)

Responses to the latter were favorable, but it was never revived.

In 1965-6, Henri Doublier made another attempt to shorten the script of *Le Martyre* and turn it into an international repertory piece. His adaptation, published by Durand, was originally performed at galas in Brazil, first in 1965 for the festivities of the 4th centenary of Rio de Janeiro, and then in 1966 for the opening of the *saison lyrique française* at the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires.\(^\text{129}\) His solution, like the 1922 one, cuts Act II while preserving the music, which requires a re-organization of the work into two large sections. Like the 1957 production, this adaptation is enthusiastically praised, but its success was limited, since it never again saw a major staging. To date, the most recent

\(^{127}\) Huneau cites this exchange in full, see op. cit., 720-775.


production of *Le Martyre* at the Opéra was in 1969, when Georges Wakévitch designed black and silver-hued costumes in a neo-gothic, yet apocalyptic style.\(^\text{130}\) It is unknown what version of the script was used then, but the dearth of testimonies about this production speaks to its slight affect on audiences.

The series of reinterpretations of *Le Martyre* demonstrates a defining characteristic of Debussy and d’Annunzio’s creation: that it is a work of art. Insofar as it continues to invite new reflections and aesthetic reimaginings, it earns the status the can only be applied to works of creativity that move their audiences to begin the cycle of creation again. This work, as any artwork that comprises more than one media, whether literally, as in opera, or figuratively, in forms such as ekphrasis, is inherently paradoxical: it was initially conveyed in its ideal medium and yet has a spiritual essence that transcends any medial representation.\(^\text{131}\) The music for *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* represents the mystery of faith—beyond any religion in particular—as Debussy conceived it, shaped by the tradition of Symbolism in literature, poetry, and theater. As much as it draws listeners in, it keeps them shut out of its sublime core.

\(^{130}\) The costume designs are still under copyright, but they are held at the BNF, Bibliothèque de l’Opéra, D. 216[115 (1-2)].

\(^{131}\) One contemporary theory of art that explores this phenomenon is Daniel Albright, *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), see especially 220.
Chapter 4

Avant-dernières pensées, Humility, Humor, and Satie’s Religion

Introduction

Satie’s personal religious experience, through its very uniqueness, demonstrates the historical traces of the one and a half centuries-long project of secularism in France that came to fruition in the twentieth century. In the first place, his parents’ Anglican-Catholic marriage recalls the conflicting national interests of the Enlightenment, when leaders of nations appropriated metaphysical philosophy for political purposes. Next, Satie’s lack of formal schooling is a reflects the education system in France prior to Jules Ferry’s famous 1881 laws to make primary schools free, obligatory, and secular. Furthermore, his fascination with the work of Viollet Le Duc epitomizes the societal captivation with the historical, especially Gothic, roots of the French nation.¹ In his twenties, Satie flirted with mysticism and the occult while under the influence of Josephin Péladan, typifying the mysticism favored by turn-of-the-century French youth culture. His later turn to the religious musical instruction offered at the Schola Cantorum constitutes a summary of the kinds of socially rebellious acts that were in vogue at the time by ironically defying his peers’ rigidly anti-establishment mentality. During the First World War, Satie’s work on Socrate elevated him and his religious persona to the status of archetype of the French modernist spirit: Henri Bergson traced roots of Christian ethics back to that Greek philosopher in particular. Finally, Satie’s deathbed Communion,

encouraged by Jean Cocteau and perhaps attended by Jacques Maritain indicates that he continued to position himself at the center of religious debate until the very end of his life. For all of these reasons, Erik Satie stands as a case to himself, simultaneously outside of and in the midst of the contemporaneously fashionable religious movements.

At the same time, framing Satie’s entire career within the dialectic between personal faith and institutionalized religion could attract criticism from those who see the twentieth-century avant garde movement as essentially secular, defined by its proponents’ rejection of organized religion. Indeed, much of Satie’s own writings seem to belie a blasphemous attitude; even his pronouncements about his own church cannot be viewed as religious in any straightforward sense. Additionally, many other factors such as urbanity, technology, and modernism contributed to Satie’s unique style and his musical persona. And yet the line between sacred and secular, particularly in music, cannot be drawn in indelible ink; only in 1770 did the term *musica sacra* emerge to distinguish music that was specifically “sacred” from that which was “secular.” In Satie’s own time, Pope Pious X articulated the problems of sacred music in his *Proprio Moto* that aimed at defining “sacred music,” a project that Gilles Routhier has recently problematized. Additionally, recent work in the field of ethnomusicology suggests that

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2 See n. 447 below.

3 In her recent study of the composer’s interactions with his age, Caroline Potter emphasizes the importance of Satie’s milieu for his compositions, in particular, “Satie showed a good deal of interest in modern technology, scientific discoveries and contemporary issues, even if he did not personally wish to engage with all of this new technology.” *Erik Satie: A Parisian Composer and his World* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2016), xv. In the many elements of the Parisian milieu she studies, however, she does not so much as consider the changing social tide of religion.

4 Routhier points out that by the turn of the twentieth century, the term “sacred music” was associated not with any particular musical style but rather with the texts and locus of performance. He signals that the problem of associating musical style solely with texts in this case is that during the Romantic period, Mass texts and some other religious imagery became popular as concert music and was thus consumed as something entirely other than as the devotional mediator it was intended to be. See “Restaurer l’ordre du
the ritualization of performance and pedagogical practices itself constitutes a certain degree of sacralization, even within the purely secular realm of the religiously neutral state. Moreover, late twentieth-century composers who have cited Satie as a source of inspiration, such as John Cage and Philip Glass, have openly confronted the connection between the musical and religious experiences, in the acts of both composing and listening. An expanded concept of the secular, as Margaret Jacob has suggested for the Enlightenment period and after in France, would help elucidate the latent religious character of even seemingly unreligious language and objects, the radical shifts in religious allegiances a composer such as Satie made, and ultimately paint a clearer picture of the relationship between society, art, and religion in early twentieth-century France.

I will first introduce this lesser-known work and address its place within Satie scholarship. I will then analyze discourse on Satie as a religious figure, highlighting in

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6 In *Silence*, Cage’s chapter on Satie juxtaposes Satie’s writings with Cage’s thoughts on composition and Satie’s influence. Cage quotes Satie about God: “I am bored with dying of a broken heart. Everything I timidly start fails with a boldness before unknown. What can I do but turn towards God and point my finger at him? I have come to the conclusion that the old man is even ore stupid that he is weak.” Immediately after this quote, Cage suggestively describes Satie’s compositional trajectory as defying musicological expectations, or failing, as Satie said of his work. *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 76-7.
7 In *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981), Jacob argues that by the mid-eighteenth century, the discourse of Enlightenment thinkers, especially as represented in the widely-circulated Traité des imposteurs had expanded to model new religions, in which nature was revered, on the older models of the Judeo-Christian tradition. She writes, “If the world of ordinary people and daily events is rendered, in effect, sacred then systems of government justifies by recourse to supernatural authority, even if reinforced by human contract, lose all validity. In this ‘secularism’—understood as another form of religiosity—to which pantheism inevitably leads, we have also taken a step closer to evolutionary theories of development, not only of plants and animals but also of men and institutions. By implication, people can impose or dispose of established authorities; by the logic of circumstances they can much more easily (than by recourse to providential design) justify revolutionary action” (224).
particular Vladimir Jankélévitch’s view and also drawing upon Bergson’s writings. Then I will focus on the music of *Avant-dernières pensées*, assessing the formal elements of music and text that make it indicative of the interrelationship between religion and non-religion for Satie. I will consider each movement’s status as a tribute to the composer to whom Satie dedicated it, and then I will question the piece’s aesthetic of humor, since the work has long been counted among Satie’s humoristic piano suites. Furthermore, I will probe the question of the connection between life and art in these and others of Satie’s compositions, engaging with a theory of the “autoportrait” in literature. I argue that the presence of humor, autobiography and personal history, religion, and commentary on the musical establishment in Paris coalesce in this short work not only as a legible expression of trends that musicologists have been accustomed to separating (namely the avant-garde and religion), but also that Satie’s combination of them is representative of a particularly modern sensibility.

What are the *Avant-dernières pensées*?

Satie wrote his *Avant-dernières pensées* in 1915 as three musico-poetic tributes for solo piano dedicated to Debussy, Dukas, and Roussel. Each movement bears its own title and distinct musical style, and the poetry of each treats different, but related subjects. The three movements are unified in their instrumentation, brevity, inclusion of accompanying texts, and formal elements including a continuously repeating ostinato in

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8 I agree with Potter’s preference for the term “texted piano works” instead of humorous piano pieces. See *Erik Satie: A Parisian Composer*, 98.
10 Robert Orledge specifies the date of the composition as 23 August–6 October 1915. See *Satie the Composer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 310.
one hand and a melody divided into short phrases in the other hand, the first phrase of which is always repeated as the final phrase. To Debussy, Satie wrote “Idylle” with a white-note ostinato pattern in even eighth notes; the poem presents visual images of the natural realm with a first-person narrator. “Aubade” for Dukas features a bitonal right hand ostinato reminiscent of an oom-pah-pah waltz figure and a left hand melody characterized by a rocking rhythm. Its poem describes the sounds of a lover’s voice in the second person imperative. In “Méditation” for Roussel, the ostinato’s triplet eighth notes create a ringing effect against which the melody enacts an otherworldly dialogue of pianistic characters. In the poem, Satie’s third-person narrative voice describes various physical and emotional sensations.

The stylistic diversity of the movements suggests that each one reflects Satie’s relationship with each of the composers and the impression each one left on Satie as friend and mentor. And yet the many shared qualities support a reading of the three as one concerted work. A turn-by-turn approach would be an appropriate way to understand the distinct personalities of Debussy, Dukas, and Roussel. But beyond these composers’ disparate natures is Satie’s mode of offering tribute to them; through it, we can learn about his worldview and stylistic goals. In this article I attempt to engage with the collection of movements holistically, considering Satie’s position as he wrote them.

Satie was suffering from his recent estrangement from Debussy and despair at the continuation of the War when he composed the Pensées. Yet he was still working within what is conventionally recognized as his humoristic phase, defined by works with absurd
titles and unusual directions to the pianist.\textsuperscript{11} *Sports et Divertissements* (1914), which both satirizes and glorifies aristocratic leisure activities, is the largest of these humorous works. Other pieces from this period make references to religion, personal emotion, and shared cultural experience.\textsuperscript{12} Many of the humorous contain quotations of or allusions to the music of Satie’s contemporaries. Yet, according to Steven Moore Whiting, Satie’s works after 1914 possess no “ironical quotation.”\textsuperscript{13} Thus the *Avant-dernières pensées* hold an ambivalent position within Satie’s consistently developing aesthetic. If the *Avant-dernières pensées* can indeed find a place within Satie’s humoristic period, it is because it conveys some sort of humorous view on their subject.\textsuperscript{14} Moreover, a primary concern will be the identification of musical quotation. Such quotation may not necessarily confirm the work’s position in Satie’s humorous phase, but it may, for example, demonstrate the continuing vitality of a collage aesthetic. The piece represents for Satie a

\textsuperscript{11} Orledge has engaged in a systematic analysis of the discourse concerning Satie’s compositional periods. Although he personally advocates for a view of Satie’s career as following one unbroken thread of creative experimentation, he does offer a tentative view for periodization into an absurdly high number, 11, which groups the *Avant-dernières pensées* within the humoristic period. See Ibid., 4-6. More recently, Mary Davis has reiterated the prevalence of the grouping of the *pensées* among Satie’s “humoristic piano suites,” which she attempts to redefine in terms of Satie’s approach of mixing high and low styles of music as well as his interest in merging “medievalizing and popular impulses” as well as “esoteric and everyday musical styles.” See *Erik Satie*, 83.


\textsuperscript{13} Steven Moore Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 408.

\textsuperscript{14} In his brief psychoanalytic interpretation of *Avant-dernières pensées*, Jean-Pierre Armengaud has argued that the piece is eminently sad, “Cette œuvre est triste comme la mort,” (494) and yet still argues that they are part of his humoristic period, as a type of dark and sad humor (498). Although most of the details he discusses point to sadness and not to levity, the tendency to read these works in the context of a longer project of nonchalant mockery is too strong for Armengaud to resist. See *Erik Satie* (Paris: Fayard, 2009).
deeply personal expression of his relationships with other composers. Much of Whiting’s approach centered on the assumption that Satie’s pieces offer a more intimate view into his experience than meets the eye, and I argue that the later pieces, like “the music that Satie wrote in the first flush of public success [were], paradoxically, private music; […] Satie’s ‘musique de placard’ implies both the poster and the closet.”\(^{15}\) The relationship between humor and religion in these pieces, especially how humor and humility inflect his spirituality, will come to light only if they are considered sincere and personal rather than ironic and nonsensical.

The fact of the dedications is not incidental; as others have argued, Satie’s dedications were often the signal of his engagement with the style of another composer, or of the social milieu of non-composer dedicatees.\(^{16}\) Satie’s dedications should be approached with caution, since much of his legacy consists of attempts to destabilize the serious artistic culture of his time, pointing out its hypocrisy, injustice, and superficiality.\(^{17}\) Satie made many dedications to serious composers, and these often insinuate meaning at the intersection between music, text, and dedicatee.\(^{18}\) In the case of the *Avant-dernières pensées*, Satie suggested some shared significance by grouping three

\(^{15}\) Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 395.


\(^{17}\) Orledge has attempted to create a taxonomy of Satie’s dedicatees; Orledge lists composers, patrons, supportive friends, and performers as the four main categories of Satie’s appreciations during the period from 1913 until the end of his life. Although the survey has the merit of thoroughness, it does not consider Satie’s motives in dedicating a piece to an individual. At the most, Orledge makes assumptions about a person’s importance to Satie by using the composer’s attitude about a piece to gauge the value of its dedication. But he never moves beyond immediate, uncritical hypotheses about the meanings that Satie invested in his dedications. See Ibid.

\(^{18}\) Indeed, Whiting takes for granted the pertinence of a dedicatee to Satie’s musical idiom or poetic ideas expressed in pieces with dedications. For a demonstrative example, see, in reference to the dedication of *Croquis et agaceries d’un gros bonhomme en bois*, *Satie the Bohemian*, 382.
composers together as the dedicatees of distinct yet related movements. The musical character of the three pieces comments on Satie’s perception of the three composers’ styles. Finally, the poetry can be read as a message about the composers, as a reflection on Satie’s personal relationship with them as well as the relationship they forged between the music they composed and the poetry they set. I will consider the level of music and text, the events that could be seen as direct catalysts to Satie’s composition, and the artistic and intellectual culture in Paris during the First World War. At that time, intellectuals were actively forging the shape of their modernism, one that was secular, estranged from nature, and preoccupied with both time and material culture. Satie found himself engaged with all sides of modernism; in addition to having performed in the popular milieu of vaudeville, he faced a public that was drawn to the avant-garde, and thus he had the opportunity to respond to the questions of religion, urbanity, chronology, and consumerism in his music.

Satie’s religion as philosophy

In the discussion of tribute as I frame it, the relationship between humility and humor is central to understanding Satie’s level of personal investment in his composition: can we take the Avant-dernières pensées as an artistic tribute to its dedicatees? Does Satie mean to honor Debussy, Dukas, and Roussel, or is he making a joke at their expense?

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19 Potter thought the work might be a birthday gift to the three composers since the composition dates for the first two movements are very close to Debussy’s and Dukas’s birthdays. Since the final movement is months off from Roussel’s, she has to abandon the theory. See Erik Sati: A Parisian Composer, 123.
Since I believe the question is not whether Satie alludes to the work of the piece’s dedicatees, we must consider instead the spirit in which he does.

In Vladimir Jankélévitch’s view, humility and humor were dialectical forces within Satie’s expression.²¹ His theory of Satie’s aesthetic program suggests that we celebrate the ambiguity inherent in this tribute that is at the same time a humorous critique. Moreover, similarly to Whiting, Jankélévitch took Satie’s personal documents and artistic creations as texts that provide mutual interpretive reinforcement. Although he wrote primarily about musical pieces, their titles, style, and texts, he also wove references to Satie’s letters and other experiences into his discussion with no warning of a shift in discursive mode. After presenting different types of Satie’s humor and irony, Jankélévitch turned his discussion to the theme of so many of his writings about French music of the early twentieth century, that music expresses the deepest mysteries of human existence.²² In Satie’s work, the locus of mystery is precisely the liminal space between humor and humility, or between irony and solitude. Jankélévitch points out, for example, that the “vieux poète” of “Méditation” likely felt bitterness not only because of a lost love as the text explicitly states. For the poet, as for Satie, constant professional failure and rejection were also a source of bitterness.²³

Jankélévitch also examined Satie’s relationship with the performers of his work, noting that he made a significant change in his compositional approach (however not necessarily to his aesthetic) after 1905.²⁴ Jankélévitch suggested that Satie imagined

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²⁴ Ibid., 53.
himself as one with the performer. Performance directions from Satie’s music ask the pianist to erase himself from the texture, letting the music and its inherent sentiment come to the fore.\textsuperscript{25} The identification between composer and performer (and perhaps poetic persona) has important interpretive ramifications, which will be addressed below. But in Jankéliévitch’s mind, these moments of transparency reveal Satie’s commitment to artistic purity and firm rejection of romantic aesthetics.

A self-portrait that demands the artist be erased from the portrait offers a paradoxical view of artistic purity. Another paradox, that of the dawn—daybreak when the sun has not yet rise—occurs in much of Satie’s music and can be easily interpreted in the \textit{Avant-dernières pensées} in “Aubade.” Throughout music history, the dawn song has related to the end of a sleepless night between impassioned lovers, the time at which they must bid each other farewell.\textsuperscript{26} At Satie’s moment in history however, the dawn song took on a different meaning. It was the call to wake up, to return to vigilance. According to Jankéliévitch, the dawn, as well as the dawn song, possessed qualities both of the night just past and the morning just arriving.\textsuperscript{27} The metaphorical dawn could be signaled at any time of day or night. Jankéliévitch approached Satie’s œuvre by suggesting that through his evocation of awakening, Satie embodied the philosophy of Socrates. Both Satie and Socrates valued vigilance of the soul, believing that one begins to perceive life’s mysteries only while fully awake. Jankéliévitch argued that Satie’s mystery was one of broad daylight, rather than an occult mystery shrouded in darkness.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{26} This tradition in Western music goes back to the 12\textsuperscript{th}-century troubador \textit{Albas}, or dawn songs. For the standard authority on this history, as well as other dawn song traditions, see A. T. Hatto, ed., \textit{Eos: An Enquiry Into the Theme of Lovers’ Meetings and Partings at Dawn} (The Hague: 1965).
\textsuperscript{27} “Satie et le matin,” 72.
Jankélévitch’s comparison between Satie’s and Socrates’s lives can easily be understood as an extrapolation of the identification between the artist and his subject. He eagerly engaged Satie’s *Socrate*, seeing in the depiction of the Greek philosopher a representation of Satie himself.\(^{28}\) Methodologically, he was unconcerned with Satie’s personal commitment to the project or with his identification with his source material. At the time Jankélévitch was writing, the theory of composer as poetic persona was not yet common currency; it was not obvious that he would compare Satie’s mode of self-expression with that of other composers.\(^{29}\) But an alternate source for the poetic connection between life and art that Jankélévitch describes could found in the writings of his mentor, Henri Bergson. Bergson’s intellectual influence reached widely in the first part of the twentieth century in France, and although his ideas lost visibility during the Second World War,\(^{30}\) his writings can serve as valuable co-texts for the music of this period. Furthermore, Jankélévitch’s debt to Bergson has yet to be fully explored, and the current musicological interest in Jankélévitch\(^{31}\) should extend to the development of his ideas. Sustained dialogue with Bergson will eventually provide access to some of Jankélévitch’s curious musical insights.

\(^{28}\) John Cage was also fascinated by *Socrate*, mentioning it as a work that is studied and forgotten by students looking for common-practice harmony and form. *Silence*, 78. Potter observes that “*Socrate* was a work which obsessed Cage” when she discusses Satie’s legacy and influence on later composers. *Erik Satie: A Parisian Composer*, 251.


\(^{30}\) Eric Matthews has noted that Bergson should be considered the founder of the twentieth-century school of French philosophy, despite the fact that “Bergson is little read nowadays, and that is hardly surprising in view of his tendency to verbosity and the very turn-of-the-century atmosphere of rather unfocused ‘spirituality’ and a belief in general progress which pervades many of his writings.” See *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996): 12-13.

In the case of Satie and Socrates, a fascinating web of allusions becomes visible when we read Bergson’s work more widely. Jankélévitch revealed a debt to his teacher when he declared that not only did Satie write a moving work about Socrates the man and philosopher, but also, and more significantly, that Satie embodied this thinker himself. In *Deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, Bergson outlined a theory of human moral behavior based on its societal and behavioral origins. As Bergson’s last work, written in 1932, it incorporated elements of many of his previous theories, including evolutionary theory and the dialectic of intellect and intuition. Bergson concluded by making predictions for the future of human morality, envisioning a more harmonious and less materialistic society. In the first part, “L’obligation morale,” Bergson discussed the social motivation for moral behavior. He saw a difference between activity that comes about because it is socially appropriate and that which is motivated by the creator’s personal emotional need to carry it out. He discussed art and science in the same way, stating that great art originates from a strong connection between the artist and his subject.32 This concept resonates strongly with Jankélévitch’s tacit assumption of unity between creator and creation.

Bergson continued his explication of emotional creation by arguing that faith and doctrine were only partially overlapping phenomena. Not all elements of faith find expression in the strictures of doctrine, and not all types of doctrinal religious practice are

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32 “L’œuvre géniale est le plus souvent sortie d’une émotion unique en son genre, qu’on eût crue inexprimable, et qui a voulu s’exprimer. Mais n’en est-il pas ainsi de toute œuvre, si imparfaite soit-elle, où entre une part de création ? Quiconque s’exerce à la composition littéraire a pu constater la différence entre l’intelligence laissée à elle-même et celle que consume de son feu l’émotion originale et unique, née d’une coïncidence entre l’auteur et son sujet, c’est-à-dire d’une intuition.” Bergson, *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, 47.
determined by faith. These poles, faith and doctrine, are analogous to intellect and instinct, the dialectical forces in Bergson’s theory of creative evolution. Moreover, the two can be opposed in the same way as “habits and aspiration, intuition and emotion.”

In the history of Western thought, Bergson argued, no single figure did more to valorize emotion over intuition than Socrates. It follows that the social origins of Christianity, the religion Bergson suggested has the most prominent influence on contemporary European society, are to be found in the pedagogical model practiced by Socrates. This man embodied the characteristics both of a religious devotee and a lover of reason. Paradoxically, although Socrates never let any uncritical opinion go unchallenged, he himself took up the vocation of philosophy because of the oracle at Delphes’ prediction. Indeed, the end of his life was determined by a demonic voice that always accompanied him; since he heard from this voice no command to challenge the political charges made against him, he chose to accept his death sentence. Overall, Bergson marveled at Socrates’ contribution to social organization. He believed that Socrates’s enthusiasm inspired early Christians’ religious fervor. He singled out Socrates’s reason, poverty, and commitment to popular expression as the elements of his character that distinguished him not as a common role model, but as a model specifically for religious thinkers.

When compared with Bergson’s description of Socrates, Jankélévitch’s profile of Satie as embodying the distinctive and admirable qualities of the great Greek mystic emerges as a clear recasting of his teacher’s material. In Jankélévitch’s words,

33 Ibid., 49-50.
34 Ibid., 63.
35 Friedrich Nietzsche similarly hailed Socrates as a model for Western Christian society, although his argument in “The Problem of Socrates” has more to do with the deleterious affect of Socrates’ model of reason. See Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize with a Hammer trans. By Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 162-166.
36 Bergson, Deux Sources, 61.
Satie, like Socrates, wears the sandals of poverty, in the spirit of humility, indigence, and renouncement. For Erik Satie is Mussorgsky’s brother in humility. One could not play the well-behaved melody of the first Nocturne or the scales of parallel fourths of the second or the exercises of the first Prélude flasque, this ‘Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum’ in the style of etudes, without imagining the old schoolboy of the rue Saint-Jacques humbly bent over his counterpoint homework and, from these studies to which Darius Milhaud introduced us, analyzing either a fugue by Bach, a motet by Palestrina, or even the Noël de jouets by Ravel. Satie, like Socrates, puts himself willingly in the school of others; like Socrates, he decides that he knows nothing and he enters the Schola in 1905 in order to learn to write chorales and fugues.37

Bergson’s outline of Socrates’s principal character traits are visible in the passage. The insistence on poverty, the language of the common musician (we know from Satie’s letters that a primary motivation for his decision to seek further instruction in composition were the negative critiques of his works that faulted him for not using a more mainstream musical language), and the humility of character immediately jump out at the reader attuned to Bergson’s appraisal of Socrates. Moreover, the constant allusion in this section to Satie’s religious works, even while Jankélévitch compared the composer to Socrates who is traditionally characterized as a figure of secular thought, betrays

37 “Satie, comme Socrate, chausse les sandales de la pauvreté, dans un esprit d’humilité, d’indigence et de renoncement. Car Erik Satie est frère de Moussorgski en humilité. On ne peut jouer la mélodie bien sage du premier Nocturne ou les gammes de quarts parallèles du second ou les exercices du premier Prélude flasque, ce ‘Docteur Gradus ad Parnassum’ en style d’études, sans imaginer le vieil écolier de la rue Saint-Jacques humblement penché sur ses devoirs de contrepoint et, de cette écriture appliquée que Darius Milhaud nous a fait connaître, analysant soit une fugue de Bach, soit un motet de Palestrina, soit même le Noël des jouets de Maurice Ravel. Satie, comme Socrate, se met volontiers à l’école des autres ; comme Socrate, il décide qu’il ne sait rien et il entre en 1905 à la Schola pour y apprendre à écrire des chorales et des fugues.” Jankélévitch, 51-2.
Bergson’s influence in the conception of Socrates as a figure of both religion and reason.  

It is doubtful that Jankélévitch’s description of Satie as being so much like Socrates comes from the direct comparison of life and work, or creator and creation. Although Bergson himself suggested that the greatest works of art come from the true source of an individual’s inspiration, causing him or her to create new forms of expression in which to encode new ideas, we see, too, that the relationship between Jankélévitch and Bergson may have encouraged the former to read Satie’s personal investment in his Socrate project as tending toward imitation, or simulacrum.

*Satie’s Religion as religion*

As previously mentioned, Satie’s engagement with religion seems, on the one hand, to be supremely idiosyncratic. On the other hand, however, the course of Satie’s expression of religious thought corresponds well to major trends in spirituality during his lifetime. What exactly were his religious beliefs and how did he manifest them in his musical compositions? To begin to answer this question, we must be aware that Satie’s personality tended towards the self-conscious failure to enact socially approved behaviors. For example, his self-imposed isolation in a suburb of Paris led to his eccentric perambulations and allowed him to convert his studio apartment into a cell that was one part monastic, one part penitentiary. Satie’s vision of himself as enacting his spiritual and philosophical ideals, both in his compositions and in the actions of his life is an early example of performance of self. I will engage with the phases of Satie’s religious

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38 As previously mentioned, Bergson was not the first philosopher to make such a connection, cf. Nietzsche, “The Problem of Socrates” in *Twilight of the Idols.*
evolution in order to have a basis for a comparative analysis of his life and work in terms of the social theory that emerged during his life.

In an early stage of his public career, from 1891 until 1895, Satie overtly associated himself with a discrete brand of mysticism, Catholic rosicrucianism. Although the history of Satie’s association with the Sâr Péladan and the occultist bookstores in Montmartre has been well documented, less has been written on Satie’s religion after the period during which he referred to himself as the “maître de chapelle de l’Église Métropolitaine d’Art de Jésus Conducteur.” Moreover, Satie’s sincerity with regard to his religious associations has never been questioned. Satie assumed the humble identity of “Monsieur le Pauvre,” and his brother, Conrad, supported him publicly in *Le Cœur*. But his behavior during the Rose + Croix period is open to interpretation as either iconoclastic or an expression of religious devotion. Satie’s open letter to all Catholics, written 15 October 1893, in which he established his new temple, took as its model the epistles of the New Testament, while at the same time proposed a rupture beyond the scope of any Pauline pronouncement. In the letter, Satie claimed that decadence and immorality presented a threat to Catholicism unrivaled by any it faced in

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39 Robert Orledge has identified this as one of Satie’s 11 “periods” in *Satie the Composer*, but Templier had already chosen these dates by the publication of his 1932 biography of the composer.
40 Beginning with Templier, 13-21 and later, Lajoinie, 59-79. Both scholars mention Péladan’s name somewhat incidentally, as leader of the Rose + Croix and as librettist for a handful of Satie’s works. Neither author goes into detail about the specifics of Satie’s contact with Péladan. More recently, Orledge has developed Satie’s connection with Péladan in the context of their mutual relationship with Debussy, noting that Satie’s interest in the Rose + Croix never went below the surface of the works he composed in the first half of the 1890s. See *Satie the Composer*, 41-45.
41 Templier recounts this story uncritically, although with a bias toward describing Satie’s artistic innovation as constant. See *Erik Satie*, 21-22.
42 This is because the Rosicrucian movement itself has been interpreted as both sincere and ironic. In a study of Péladan’s thought, Émile Dantinne has written, “The Catholicism of Péladan, who collaborated on many Catholic magazines, is incontestable.” “Le catholicisme de Péladan, collaborateur de plusieurs journaux catholiques, est incontestable.” *L’Œuvre et la pensée de Péladan: La philosophie rosicrucienne* (Brussels: Office de Publicité S.C., 1948). On the other hand, an anonymous writer of the introduction of Péladan’s most famous novel, *Le Vice suprême*, was certain that the whole religious attitude was tongue-in-cheek. See “Introduction: Les Pâmés,” in *Le Vice suprême* (Paris: Éditions des autres, 1979), 13-28.
its long history. He made no specific attacks against any particular composer or musical work in this letter, but in later documents Satie criticized composers’ irreverence, even going so far as to “excommunicate” those who offend his sensibilities.\textsuperscript{43} This “open letter” presents numerous interpretive challenges, not least of which being the Montmartre journal that published it, the fundamentally unorthodox (and thus un-Catholic) act of establishing one’s own “temple,” and the egotistical language of denouncement and “excommunication.” During the period in which he enacted the role of “parcier” of his own church, Satie simultaneously reinforced and mocked the strictures of religious dogma. His nearly monastic isolation and lifestyle of poverty are both proof of his commitment to religious life, while his outlandish displays of religious rhetoric undermine the seriousness of his actions.\textsuperscript{44}

Satie’s commitment to religion has been viewed as a passing phase during which he adopted a new style of dress and mode of composition.\textsuperscript{45} Yet I believe that this commitment can be seen as indicative of his fascination with religious expression, if not faith in the structure of an organized Church. Satie himself was an outsider, and his refusal to practice the Catholicism of his grandparents (or the Anglicanism of his parents) may have had less to do with the influence of the Sâr Péladan than with his own interest

\textsuperscript{43} Satie’s most famous excommunication is that of Willy, his adversary in the Parisian press. Templier writes about this and other excommunications, 21.

\textsuperscript{44} Péladan, in the proclamation he made upon establishing his Rosicrucian order, listed the restrictions that a devout follower should make on his life: “In addition to the capital sins, there are also seven abominations that the initiate must renounce: cafés, social clubs, newspapers, sports, and café-concerts, all of which provoke an atmosphere of immorality, imbecility, stupidity, brothels, and an affective state of the soul…But the initiate must elevate himself even higher, he must isolate himself from his neighbor until the day when he can offer himself as a sacrifice.” “Outre les péchés capitaux, il y a, dit-il, sept abominations auxquelles l’initié doit renoncer : le café, le cercle, le journal, le jeu, le sport, le lupanar, le café-concert qui tous provoquent une atmosphère d’immoralité, d’imbécilité, de niaiserie, un animique affectif…Mais l’initié doit s’éléver davantage, il doit s’isoler du prochain jusqu’au jour où il pourra se livrer en holocauste.” Dantinne, \textit{L’Œuvre de Péladan}, 51.

\textsuperscript{45} Mary Davis has suggested this theory in \textit{Erik Satie} (London: Reaktion, 2007).
in avoiding convention. During his lifetime, public opinion of organized religion was severely diminished in France. Education reforms were removing elements of Catholicism from public schools, the state gave decreasing funds to creeds of any kind, and in 1905 it successfully separated its actions from those of the Roman Catholic Church. Although this last act had more to do with the specific activities of that church, such as the appointment of Bishops, it carried significant symbolic weight as a message of secularism, an ideology that originated in France during the time of the Revolution and took over two centuries to come to fulfillment.\footnote{Much scholarship questioning and documenting this separation occurred at the centenary of the law. See, for example, the introduction to Jacqueline Lalouette, \textit{La séparation des Églises et de l’État: Genèse et développement d’une idée 1789-1905} (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1905). See also Gérard Cholvy and Yves-Marie Hilaire, \textit{Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine 1880-1930} (Toulouse: Privat, 1986).} The fact that Satie might have been critical of religion but unable to avoid it, then, is relatively easy to understand. When he enrolled as an adult composition student, he chose the overtly Catholic Schola Cantorum, further signaling that he had no deep mistrust for the Catholic faith.

Satie was interested in religion throughout his life. Although not much is known about his childhood, Satie’s first biographer accounted for many notable interactions with Christianity, beginning with his grandparents’ opposition to his mother’s Anglican faith.\footnote{Ibid., 8.} When she died in 1872, Satie was six years old; he moved back from Paris to his birthplace of Honfleur and had his Catholic baptism.\footnote{Ibid., 9.} During his time in Honfleur, Satie studied piano with the organist at the Église Sainte Catherine with Vinot, a former student at the École Niedermeyer, where Fauré had his training in religious music.\footnote{Ibid., 9.} During his teenage years, no longer in school, he spent innumerable hours at the archives.
of the Bibliothèque Nationale.\textsuperscript{50} There he studied the architectural restoration work undertaken by Viollet le Duc, the famous engineer and historian who was responsible for the romantic reinterpretation of the gothic structures at Notre de Dame de Paris and other major religious monuments of the medieval period. Later, when he made his connections with the Sâr Péladan and his cohort of mystics, Satie followed what was an idiosyncratic approach to religion; he did not simply prey to a social vogue.\textsuperscript{51} His engagement in the Rose + Croix lasted four years, from 1891 until 1895. Although Péladan’s activities have been painted as artistic opportunism rather than proof of religious sentiment,\textsuperscript{52} posters publicizing 1892 concerts at the Galérie Duran-Ruel, the “Soirées de la Rose + Croix,” for example, show that Satie’s suite \textit{Le Fils des étoiles} was performed in the same concert series as the famed Missa Pape Marcellus by Palestrina and other religious works by Wagner and César Franck.\textsuperscript{53} The seriousness of these works suggests that, despite the Rosicrucian movement’s iconoclasm, it may have had sincere aims.

If Péladan’s movement derived from a place of serious artistic aspirations and not just fashionable taste, Satie’s engagement with it similarly cannot be reduced so simply. Many have claimed that he became involved with the group because of his liaison with the model and painter Suzanne Valadon and ended precisely when they split up. But this relationship occurred in the middle of the period of Rose + Croix compositions, marking neither its beginning nor its end. Additionally, the receipt of a large inheritance in 1895,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 13.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Patrick Gowers, for example, has dismissed Satie’s seriousness in his Rose Croix works, arguing that since the movement was popular in Montmartre at the time Satie moved there, the composer acted out of an interest in society rather than some deeper source of personal motivation. “Satie’s Rose Croix Music (1891-1895), \textit{Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association} (1965): 23.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Christopher Macintosh gives a thorough description of the Sâr Péladan’s literary and religious activity, noting his tendency toward schism and his aggressive personality in \textit{Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011): 165-177.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Poster, item 110 in Houghton Library, Harvard University, collection of Satie papers, MUS 193.
\end{itemize}
which he used to purchase his famous seven identical suits, cannot be seen as motivation for abandoning his period of pseudo-monastic devotion.\textsuperscript{54} As the twentieth century advanced, Satie turned his attention to the popular waltzes and airs that earned him some money in performances with Paulette Darty and Vincent Hyspa. Yet even during this time, he clearly cherished the religious ideals of humility, monasticism, and ritual, all of which continue to appear as elements of his later works. And he was still a major presence in the social and charitable life of Arcueil, the suburb to which he had moved to pay lower rent and avoid the constant distractions of Paris.\textsuperscript{55} Obviously his master work \textit{Socrate} takes up the theme of religious devotion, but it does so in yet another encoded way, distinct from the Christian influences of his earlier periods.

At every turn, Satie’s interactions with religion seem to follow no orthodox path. For this reason, it is both difficult to argue that Satie had any particularly Catholic beliefs and yet impossible to deny his Catholic identity, confirmed by his early participation in sacraments and his deathbed reconversion, facilitated by Jean Cocteau.\textsuperscript{56} However, during Satie’s lifetime many legitimate theological movements, both in and outside of the Catholic Church, expressed a new interest in critiquing traditional dogmas, asking what place they had in modern society. Although no record shows what lectures Satie would have heard at the Collège de France during his teenage years when his father took him

\textsuperscript{54} Davis suggests that the gift was the reason for Satie’s loss of interest in the Rose + Croix aesthetic. She acknowledges that he spent some of the money he received on lavish editions of his works for the Église Métropolitaine, but she does not sustain her explanation, noting, “A considerable chunk of the money, however, went to wardrobe improvements: Satie headed to the middle-market department store La Belle Jardinière, where he purchased seven identical chestnut-colored corduroy suits with matching hats, thus establishing the uniform he would wear for the next decade.” \textit{Erik Satie}, 59.

\textsuperscript{55} Potter examines Satie’s life in Arcueil, tying his interest in poverty with his life in the Parisian banlieu and the communist political attitudes common there. See \textit{Erik Satie: A Parisian Composer}, 187-205.

\textsuperscript{56} Templier, 50.
there instead of enrolling him in a formal school,\textsuperscript{57} it is possible that Satie may have been exposed to some early promoters of Protestant liberalism and Catholic modernism. These movements stressed the inherently symbolic nature of religious discourse, pointing out that since God is unknowable, it follows that all language used to describe God is inherently symbolic, never attaining more than an analogous explanation of divinity.\textsuperscript{58} In denying the authority of Church traditions, especially the infallibility of the pope, religious movements such as liberalism and modernism reflected a cultural atmosphere that valued individuality: during the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the early part of the twentieth, France was home to burgeoning studies in psychology, memory, and naturalist literature, all of which focused on the singular experience of unique human subjects.\textsuperscript{59}

Satie, for his part, asserted a strong individual personality at the same time that he forged passing associations with established groups. One example of this contradiction can be found in his continued attempts to join the Académie des Beaux-Arts despite his general lack of interest in the aesthetics and performance conventions of the artists who belonged to it. Although he did not apply himself assiduously while a piano student at the Conservatoire, he later found himself supplicating the Conservatoire-affiliated professors who headed the Beaux-Arts. If Satie had applied for membership only once, perhaps the act could be viewed as a humorous example of his iconoclasm. But in fact he applied three times, and in doing so demonstrated his possibly authentic desire to gain

\textsuperscript{57} Davis, 18.
\textsuperscript{58} See Thomas Silkstone’s explanation of Auguste Sabatier’s writings, especially as they contrast with the theology of Thomist scholars, in \textit{Religion, Symbolism & Meaning} (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1968).
\textsuperscript{59} In \textit{Modernism and Style}, Ben Hutchinson examines the prerogative of modernist authors, inspired by the metaphysical philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, to develop unique modes of expression rather than simply new stories or characters. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
establishment approval. Even in this ambiguous sincerity, though, Satie veils his personal investment so thoroughly as to leave no clear trace of his values or expectations. He made his first appeal during his Rose + Croix period, and the language of his letter to Saint-Saëns is rich with his characteristic religious rhetoric. Yet the arrogance with which he criticizes Saint-Saëns’ judgment in no way represents a Christian theology, even one of the modernist movements that sought to strip away some of Catholicism’s dogmatic traditions.

Satie’s letter to Saint-Saëns, in which he first complains about being passed over for the vacant seat in the Académie de Beaux-Arts, displays a particularly forward attitude concerning Saint-Saëns’s immoral and preferential treatment. All the activity surrounding Satie’s “Église Métropolitaine” seems to go contrary to the established doctrine of the Catholic Church despite its formal mimicry of the same. Satie often raised himself haughtily in righteous self-defense, as he did to Saint-Saëns: “Let those of my colleagues to whom you have committed the same outrage humble themselves; Personally, I stand strong in my right to be considered, if only as existing.”

If at the height of Satie’s expression of his Catholicism, he engaged in such bizarre and unholy activities as condemning others for their wrongdoings and making a grand show of his acts of pardon, how are we to know whether this period was one of true devotion, and whether the spirit of Christianity continued to influence his relationships and artistic activity? One path to more fully understanding the way in which Satie maintained personal religious beliefs in the midst of social movements and religious

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60 Letter from Satie to Camille Saint-Saëns, 14 April 1896, Letter 50 in Volta, Correspondance, 72.
61 “Que ceux de mes concurrents à qui Vous avez fait le même outrage s’humilient; Moi je reste fort de mon droit d’être considéré ne fut-ce que comme existant.” In Volta, Correspondence, 52.
Doctrine is to trace reappearances of religious discourse in Satie’s letters and musical compositions written throughout his life, since his engagement with religion was not limited to only one period. I do not agree with Mary Davis, who suggested that Satie’s phases of religious engagement they had to do with the social cache he was striving for during a given period. For one thing, Satie continued to sign his letters with a double cross long receiving a large gift of money in 1895, and, moreover, still in 1900 Satie used his Église Métropolitaine d’Art de Jésus Christ Conducteur stationery for a letter addressed to Charles Malherbe. Satie’s religious persona ruffled more feathers than made him friends; I see no reason to believe that Satie saw any social advantage to referring to himself as a “poor monk,” “parcer,” or most humble “domestic servant.”

Once in his letters, Satie gave the appearance of breaking down the artifice of his performed religion. In a short message to his brother Conrad written July 1899, Satie openly asked what good such displays of religion can do for a person, and, further, for God. Declaring that he had too long suffered and put forward the impression of a devout and humble religious servant, he would do so no longer. Satie wrote, as if to reassure himself, “For that which you know my piety toward the Lord, there is no point in him taking up the charge of testing me; the mortifications to which I subject myself suffice, he must know; and I do not see by what right I have him always in my legs or on my back.

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62 Davis suggests this through her chapter titles dividing Satie’s life into a series of fashion statements; each chapter begins with a rundown of Satie’s financial situation. Only one chapter concerns Satie’s spirituality, and after that references to religion are piecemeal. It is significant that when she describes the Schola, no reference is made to its decidedly Catholic orientation: “in contrast to the Conservatoire, where technical skill and virtuosity were prized above all and nineteenth-century music was the focus, the Schola emphasized artistry and a broad slate of topics extending from medieval chant to contemporary music.” Erik Satie, 75-6.

63 Letter from Satie to Charles Malherbe sent on 5 August 1900, Letter 85 in Volta, Correspondance., 97.

64 Satie often signed letters as “Votre domestique,” for example in a letter sent to Grass-Mick in November 1897, Letter 63 in Ibid., 81.
Here Satie gave an explanation for the decreased religious language in his letters of the preceding months. He disavowed outward displays of religious conviction, arguing that he already kept private devotions, and, moreover, God could observe all of his actions anyway. Satie strongly articulated his ideal of valuing individuality over group mentality.

Satie’s Christian devotion became, decreasingly legible after this discouraged letter to Conrad. However, not all traces of his faith disappeared surreptitiously; Satie continued to use double crosses, make references to God, and even ask for prayers on his behalf. In 1901, he wrote that he had a habit of regular prayer that he “would not like to lose so early on.”

These fleeting references testify to an engagement with religious questions and a decision to obscure the evidence of his spiritual turmoil.

_Satie’s correspondence at the time of Avant-dernières pensées_

When Satie composed the _Avant-dernières pensées_, he was exchanging letters with Paul Dukas in an effort to secure financial assistance from groups that helped composers whose activities had been curtailed by the War. In various letters, Satie expressed his frustration with these groups; he received a pitiful one hundred francs from the “Beaux-Arts,” clearly a much smaller sum than he had anticipated. He implored

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65 “Pour ce que tu connais ma piété envers le Seigneur, il n’est pas utile qu’il se charge de m’éprouver ; les mortifications que j’offre à moi-même suffisent, il devrait le savoir ; et je ne vois pas de quel droit je l’ai toujours dans les jambes ou sur le dos à regarder bêtement ce que je fais.” Volta, _Correspondance_, 92.
66 Ibid., 102.
68 Satie, letter to Paul Dukas of 22 August 1915. “J’aurais voulu vous dire que j’ai touché cent francs des Beaux-Arts. Votre idée Cortot est certainement très bonne. Voudriez-vous lui écrire?” “I should have told you that I received 100 francs from the Beaux-Arts. Your impression of Cortot is certainly very good. Would you like to write to him?” Ibid., 214.
Dukas to use his more significant influence on the organization in order to secure more
funding.

Although many of the letters Dukas sent to Satie in 1915 seem to be missing from
Ornella Volta’s edition of Satie’s correspondence, the exchange published there shows
that Satie became increasingly embittered by Dukas’s cordial but indifferent treatment of
the situation. Dukas’s letters to Satie reflect both concern for the seriousness of Satie’s
finances and the powerlessness of any individual confronted with a bureaucratic
organization. Dukas explained rationally that, although one hundred francs represented
only a meager—symbolic—response, Satie was not likely to receive more funds within a
short period of the initial August 21 payment date. For his part, Satie sent Dukas letters of
a nonsensical nature, commenting on the weather, the state of Man (Satie mockingly
refers to mankind as an individual with an unlikeable personality), and a nagging cold.\textsuperscript{69}
When he brought up the issue of money, Satie consistently made an effort to draw
attention away from his need for it toward the more practical and physical means of
transferring and procuring it.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{69} Satie’s letter to Dukas from 5 October 1915 concerns almost entirely the sun’s habit of leaving cold
climates during the winter months. In his above-cited letter from 22 August 1915, Satie writes, “Croyez-vous que ‘l’homme’ comprend réellement son bonheur ! Enfin ! N’en parlons plus ! Que l’Homme s’arrange ! Il n’est pas très aimable, le pauvre, non plus que subtil.” “Do you think that ‘man’ really
understands his good fortune! Goodness! Let’s not talk about it anymore! Man should improve himself! He
isn’t very likeable, poor guy, and not subtle either.” Finally, presumably in response to a complaint Dukas
had made about his own health, on 14 and November 1915. Ibid., 217, 219-20.
\textsuperscript{70} When he asks Dukas to put in another good word for him with Alfred Cortot, Satie makes a joke about
clasping his “poor little hands,” begging Dukas to do this favor. Ibid. Next he jests about not being able to
save any part of the 100 francs he received, since he does not know how to play the “Caisse d’Epargne,”
making a pun using the French terms for savings account and bass drum. Ibid., 214. In reference to an
embarrassing gift of 25 francs he received from Ernest Bloch, Satie writes that it is at least something and
that Bloch could definitely not do any more. Ibid., 217. When Satie received his second 100-franc donation
from the Beaux-Arts, he praises the bill’s physical appearance and the quality of its paper and ink,
relocating the typical value of money away from its symbolic, spending power to its immanent character.
Ibid., 219. Finally, when he receives 20 francs from the President (Xavier(?) Leroux, likely the head of a
Parisian musical organization), he tells Dukas that he cannot imagine expressing his gratitude for fear that
In his correspondence with Dukas, Satie mixed humor with desperation and tragedy, a technique he employed to equal affect in the *Avant-dernière pensées*. Although he intermittently engaged with the wider community of intellectuals throughout his life, during the War very few of his works were aimed at a large audience before 1917 (*Parade*). In the early wartime years, he was more likely to see his compositional process as a private emotional outlet, only sporadically worrying about the wider social significance of his works’ themes and modes of expression. In the particular case of the *Avant-dernières pensées*, Satie did not envision a wide reception. Furthermore, Satie’s personal aesthetic involved a brand of humor that has often been read as an encoding of intimate memories into creative act. Satie never mentioned the *Avant-dernières pensées* in his letters to Dukas, but conversely some elements of the correspondence do appear in the poetry of the pieces, and thus it is not out of place to consider the truly personal nature of their significance to Satie.

*Bergson’s Le rire*

In order to gain perspective on the cultural significance of humor at the time that Satie was exploiting it, I turn to a comprehensive theory of laughter written by Bergson. This theory can aid in accessing Satie’s designs in the *Avant-dernières pensées* for

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he would be perceived as mocking. Again he writes that the small financial contribution cannot be Leroux’s fault. Ibid., 220.

71 After the start of the War, Satie’s compositional activity slowed drastically; he was down to one major work per year, when in 1913 and 1914, he had many more projects in view. For a catalogue of works with dates and occasions of their premieres, see the appendix to Orledge, *Satie the Composer*.

72 In the case of the *Croquis et agaceries d’un Gros Bonhomme en bois*, Jean-Pierre Armengaud has pointed out that Satie’s middle school was located on the “rue de l’Homme de bois” in Honfleur. Similarly, Satie’s compositions from his Rose + Croix period are reflected in the persona he took up in his correspondence from the time, in which he signed his letters as the holder of many of his church’s roles and addressed them from the “Abbatiale.” Armengaud, 447, 197-8.
multiple reasons, the first being the simple one that it is closely contemporaneous with Satie’s work, the second that it references some of the types of humor with which Satie engaged (i.e., vaudeville humor), and the third that Bergson’s influence shaped the reception of Satie’s music. Bergson routinely identified oppositional forces to explain ways of thinking and being (mechanical vs. vital, intellect vs. intuition, mind vs. body). Inevitably, these forces suggest dialectics, a resolution of the two extremes. Bergsonian philosophy encourages one to draw comparisons between different binaries, which must function similarly. For instance, Bergson’s opposition of mechanical repetition with living change—which suggests that through increasing degrees of distinction between the two they ultimately become different, mutually exclusive categories altogether—parallels the other dualities in Bergsonian philosophy. Thus mechanical and vital can be seen as analogous with faith and doctrine, a dialectic which I developed above. By sharing a function in Bergson’s descriptions, the analysis of mechanical and vital processes directly corresponds to analysis of doctrinal and faith-based approaches to spirituality, and therefore Satie’s manipulation of humorous processes can similarly be read within a Bergsonian system as an exploration of religious ideology. Bergson’s theory of humor, published in 1900, stipulated that one can only employ humor when in the role of disinterested observer. Thus, if we consider that Satie used humor in *Avant-dernières pensées*, we cannot regard the work as a diary in which Satie hastily recorded emotional reactions to the events of one day. Instead the piece is a snapshot of a distant realm from which he observed his own life. Indeed, the two-month gestation period for a piano piece that lasts under three minutes in performance suggests that Satie had time to work on this

piece with a sense of purpose and compositional aesthetic.\textsuperscript{74} So although the content of the work reflects events from his private life and therefore an investment of personal emotions, Satie distanced himself from his artistic material through revision and recomposition; this process offers the justification for reading humor, albeit dark and ironic,\textsuperscript{75} in the finished work.

Bergson’s \textit{Le rire} offers guidelines for recognizing and classifying elements of humor. The essay presents a theory of laughter as it relates to comedy, as well as Bergson’s belief that humor has a social function.\textsuperscript{76} He found overly mechanical, tense, or inflexible attitudes during situations that require elasticity and flexibility to be a major source of comic material. Overall, laughter arises from the observation of situations, people, or objects in which the form attempts to supplant the content.\textsuperscript{77} Bergson insisted that vitality and constant change are the defining characteristics of life. Unlike machines, living beings can never repeat exactly what they have done before. They can never redouble upon themselves or recreate scenes and situations once they have finished. Making a reference to contemporary society, he argues that a frequent vaudevillian comedic technique is to depict people in repetitive situations; this technique uses the opposite of organic life processes to entertaining effect.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{74} In contrast, Satie spent only about one to two weeks on each of the works he composed from 1912-13, according to Whiting, \textit{Satie the Bohemian}, 345.
\textsuperscript{75} Irony was a major byword of early twentieth-century aesthetics, especially characteristic of Maurice Ravel. See Stephen Zank, \textit{The Music of Maurice Ravel} (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2009), especially ch. 6, “‘Secrets of modernity’: Irony and Style.”
\textsuperscript{76} “Notre rire est toujours le rire d’un groupe.” (11) “Si franc qu’on le suppose, le rire cache une arrière-pensée d’entente, je dirais presque de complicité, avec d’autres rieurs, réels ou imaginaires.” “Our laughter is always that of a group… As candid as we believe it to be, laughter always hides a forethought of collaboration, I would say almost of complicity, with other laughers, real or imaginary.” Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{78} “Changement continu d’aspect, irréversibilité des phénomènes, individualité parfaite d’une série enfermée en elle-même, voilà les caractères extérieurs (réels ou apparents, peu importe) qui distinguent le vivant du simple mécanique. Prenons-en le contre-pied : nous aurons trois procédés que nous appellerons,
As Whiting has amply demonstrated, Satie spent a significant portion of his adult life in the cabarets and concert-halls of Montmartre, both of which specialized in vaudevillian humor. He assimilated many comedic techniques during his time as a cabaret pianist; mechanical repetition is a source for humor in his piano pieces from 1912 until 1915. In the Avant-dernières pensées, each piece is based on its own strictly unchanging ostinato accompanying the melodic lines. The ostinato’s mechanical repetition suggests the inexorability of fate while maintaining a lighthearted, even ironic, mood. When the ostinato’s repetition becomes noticeable, especially because it has fallen out of sync with the changing melodic phrases, the effect is humorous.

A Bergsonian reading and investigation of humor in Avant-dernières pensées

1. Tonal Humor in “Idylle

\[\text{si vous voulez, la répétition, l’inversion et l’interférence des séries. Il est aisé de voir que ces procédés sont ceux du vaudeville, et qu’il ne saurait y en avoir d’autres.} \]

\[\text{“Continual change of shape, irreversibility of phenomena, perfect individuality of a series closed upon itself, here are the external qualities (real or suggested, no matter) that distinguish the living from simple machines. Let’s take them in the other sense: we will have three processes that we will call repetition, inversion, and interference of a series. It is easy to see that these processes are the ones employed by vaudeville and that it couldn’t have any others.”} \]

\[\text{Ibid., 42.} \]

\[\text{Whiting, 355.} \]
In Idylle, the rhythmic variation of the melody speaks to the constant change characteristic of life forces in Bergson’s theory. In this piece, the ostinato is comprised of four continuous eighth notes that begin the piece and establish metric regularity, although their lack of accent eschews the firm establishment of any particular meter.\textsuperscript{80} The melodic profile of the ostinato, B-C-D-A, is tonally ambiguous, but it could suggest an Aeolian mode, Dorian mode, unresolved C Major or A minor, or more generally the “white-key” world of medieval music (in reference to the keys of a piano). Satie famously wrote that a melody does not suggest one harmony, but that for a given melody, an infinite number of harmonies could be imagined.\textsuperscript{81} In the case of the multiple tonalities suggested by the ostinato (which shares with melody monophonic texture), none is confirmed by the entrance of the first melodic phrase, which begins and ends on A but neither outlines the same pitch/tonal profile as the ostinato nor refutes it. The F\# in this phrase introduces a new collection of harmonic associations, including A Major, E Major, and G Major.

The descending E to E pattern, approximating an E Major scale without the seventh degree, D\#, that begins one eighth note after the 8\textsuperscript{th} iteration of the ostinato (hereafter o. 8), may serve a dominant function, helping to establish the A orientation of the ostinato. The arrangement of the descending scale pattern avoids certain tonal clashes with the ostinato but yields others. First, by starting the descent from E one eighth note off from the beginning of the ostinato, Satie maintains his nearly consistent pairing of melodic As with the B of the ostinato (i.e. at o. 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9). By making the E coincide with the C, he prepares a potentially dissonant clash of D\#, the following note of

\textsuperscript{80} Throughout this chapter, I will reference musical details by the iteration of the ostinato with which they correspond, using the shorthand O. 8, for example, to designate the beginning of the eighth iteration of the ostinato within a given movement.
\textsuperscript{81} From the aesthetic statement prefacing Socrate, cited by Orledge, Satie the Composer, 68.
an E Major scale, with the D of the ostinato. He potentially avoids this half-step clash by skipping the D#, yet the C# that arrives instead still produces a minor-second clash with the D of the ostinato; the clash would have occurred with or without the D# of the E Major scale, so the absence of the leading-tone serves no immediately apparent harmonic purpose. By examining the whole scale, however, the neat arrival on A at the beginning of the following ostinato points to one reason for the D#’s absence. By skipping over the D#, Satie is able to continue the pattern of cooperation between melody and ostinato present up to this point. The restful arrival of the E at the beginning of an ostinato pattern further emphasizes the gentle, harmonious connection between the melody and ostinato, since its consonance feels placid rather than agitated. Thus, through the end of the E Major scale, the only note of the ostinato that appears altered in the melody is a C#, and its appearance comes at the exclusion, or despite the absence, of a D#. Although the appearance of the C# can hardly be ignored as a threat to the upcoming disunity between melody and ostinato, it does not jar; rather it serves to maintain openness in the melodic intervals.

Although the “idylle”82 that Satie musically depicts up to this point is not that of any already known space, it does have the general characteristics of white-key nostalgia and regular rhythmic progression that establishes a soothing atmosphere. Furthermore, the two prime actors in the opening scene, the melody and the ostinato, coexist; neither poses a threat to the other. Although the ostinato does not accommodate the melody, the notes of the latter move with awareness of the former’s shape and character.

The places that create a humorous effect are those where the repetition of the ostinato no longer supports the melody but instead highlights its own rigidity. In the case of Idylle, the ostinato itself does not evoke any standard associations of mood or musical structure. Therefore, the moments when the melody outstrips it are funny because they point to the meaninglessness of the ostinato even as it continues unchanged. The ostinato finally becomes absurd. For example, the mezzo forte melodic phrase at o. 13 (the only complete phrase that has no accompanying text) begins on an anacrusis, unlike any of the other phrases.

Example 15 "Idylle" o. 12-16
More than rhythm and accent, however, the various phrases’ melodic profiles, which suggest harmonic associations, are in constant flux. The ostinato in Idylle falls out of sync with the constantly changing, dynamic, and vital melody in the context of these harmonic and tonal associations.

Indeed, the phrase at o. 13 is the most enigmatic of “Idylle,” and it creates the most dissonance with the ostinato, a tritone between the lowest note in the right hand, F, and the first note of the coinciding iteration of the ostinato, B. The dominant function of E is now dashed, as the F⁷ removes the trace of the characteristic whole step between the first and second degrees of the scale. That the F⁷ initiates a development away from the

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83 Although, as I will argue below, I do believe this ostinato makes reference to other music. See p. 59ff., below.
piece’s scalar content up to this point is signaled by the tritone it creates with the immutable ostinato.

To return to Bergson, language (he refers to French, but here I think the term applies equally well to music) can produce humor when a seemingly banal sentence betrays a gross grammatical or semantic error. As with the humor of repetition described above, this linguistic humor points to the structure of the language more than to its content. Absurdist linguistic humor can thus come from the re-creation of a correct structure with no semantic coherence or from the stringing together of words that are related in their meaning but that do not fulfill the structural categories needed for a complete sentence. Many music theorists have confronted the degree of relatedness between music and language; although no consensus has yet been reached, here I believe the parallel to be straightforward. In this case, the changing tonal context of the melody creates a musically agrammatical expression. The ostinato’s tonal stasis becomes absurdly funny when it ceases to provide the structural support that it previously had.

We can see the further effects of the morphing melodic line two beats later, in a tragicomic admixture. The phrase concludes with a sustained harmony in the right hand as the left continues with its ostinato. This time a tritone (B♭-E♭) can be found within the right hand’s own register; this dischord results solely from the right hand’s development. Yet the augmented octave (B♮ in the left hand and B♭ in the right) does result from the clash of the vital and the mechanical. Where the melody changes its inflection of the B,

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84 Bergson, 51.
the left-hand accompaniment steadfastly retains its original $B^\#$ with no acknowledgement of the other part.

2. Textural Humor in “Aubade”
All three movements of *Avant-dernières pensées* feature continuous, unchanging ostinati, but contrary to “Idylle,” in “Aubade” and “Méditation,” the arrangement between melody and ostinato is not the primary locus of humor. In fact, the number of humorous incidents seems to decrease as the piece progresses; the musical mood becomes more serious. In “Aubade,” the ostinato has the oom-pah quality of a music-hall waltz, a style Satie knew well, since he composed over sixty waltz strains during his career.  

Not only does the texture of this ostinato evoke a more specific musical idiom than that of “Idylle,” the harmonic context is also more precise: the downbeat of the pattern is a B minor chord, while the two upbeats are D Major, suggesting either two keys or a single key with two sharps (the mode is ambiguous; although the downbeat suggests the minor, the repetition of the major mode on the two upbeats lends a strong major character). As in “Idylle,” however, the mode suggested by the initial appearance of the ostinato is left unconfirmed by the melody, which in “Aubade” includes only natural notes and favors the fifth between G and D.

The harmonic disagreement between the ostinato and melody, as in the first “clash” in “Idylle,” between the ostinato D and the melody C#, is not harsh. In the first section, characterized by white notes and a rocking rhythmic alternation between half notes and quarter notes, two C#s nullify the melody’s participation in the two-sharp key established by the ostinato. They both fall on the D Major upbeats of the ostinato, during the oo. 6 and 8. As unaccented passing tones, they do not create an extended dissonance, and they serve mostly to demonstrate the melody’s white-note realm. In this piece, the

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86 Whiting, 219.
87 Vincent Lajoinie has analyzed the music in this way. See *Erik Satie* (Lausanne: Éditions l’Age d’homme, 1985): 297.
repetition of D in the melody coincides with the suggestion of D Major in the ostinato, so although the melody and harmony are not in the same key, the two still work well together.

The humor in “Aubade” concerns the texture: when the melody imitates, with too much insistence, the ostinato, we laugh at the misappropriation of the waltz character. At the o. 15, the melody abandons its rocking character and adopts an accelerated oom-pah pattern, alternating between an F♯₁ and a C♯-F♯ bichord. Here the melody takes up the suggestion of a two-sharp key, but it becomes hyper-active, reducing the waltz rhythm by one half. In order to maintain textural clarity, instead of repeating at a rate of two double-time oom-pahs per ostinato repetition, the second half of the ostinato is taken up by a thud on a C♯₁.

The melody mimics the ostinato’s texture three times in “Aubade,” each with a variation that distinguishes it from the others. The second oom-pah moment in the melody comes at o. 25, and if the first was hyper-active, this one is even more agitated. Instead of the waltz rhythm in diminution, this time the rhythm is a triplet with an added upbeat; the accelerated waltz pattern becomes a stumble. The harmonic associations of this second melodic waltz also separate it from the first: here a D on the downbeat alternates with a major third bichord, E-G♯; the whole step between the ostinato and the melodic pahs, as well as the added sharp, creates a momentary suggestion of bitonality. The final upbeat of the ostinato group is filled by a G♯₁ “thud” in the second melodic waltz. Compared with the first melodic waltz phrase, the second melodic waltz has a more compressed musical space and a higher pitch range, which, with its more cramped
rhythmic pattern, increases the urgency of the textural interjection. If this is comic, it is because the ostinato does not increase its speed, continuing unhurried as before.

In the final melodic interpolation of the waltz texture, at the 37th iteration of the ostinato, the regular duple eighth note divisions return, relaxing the mood. Furthermore, the new rhythmic change creates the most space out of the three melodic waltz sections: an eighth note "oom" on the downbeat of the ostinato is followed by an eighth-note plus a quarter-note rest before the two eighth-note "pahs." With this spacing, the waltz character is ambiguous; the two pahs are now followed immediately by the succeeding downbeat, converting the grouping into "pah-pah-oom," a less energetic figure because of its rhythm and its pitch profile: rather than leaping up from the low "oom" to the higher "pahs," this pattern allows a gentle fall: sometimes an octave from F₉ to F₉/₁, sometimes a fifth from F₉ to C₉. As Bergson described the comedic process born of mechanical repetition in Le rire, in "Aubade," the gently evolving—in both harmonic suggestion and rhythmic character—melody points out the silliness of the unchanging ostinato. The first time the melody diverges from the ostinato, it seems as though the melody itself has lost its way. But through its continued growth that passes through different moods, it proves that its direction is more purposeful than the ostinato, which continues almost thoughtless. In fact the ostinato has no thoughts at all but is rather a musical fragment, normally charged with emotion, acting as a mere repetitive mechanism.

3. Humor in “Méditation”

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88 A similar description of rhythmic patterns evoking gravitational forces can be found in William Rothstein, “Like Falling Off a Log: Chopin’s Prelude in A-flat Major (op. 28, no. 17),” Music Theory Online 11 no. (March 2005): 16-17. My thanks to Hamish Robb for this reference.
The ostinato in “Méditation” gives the effect of a ringing bell: the wide interval of a fourth is repeated both horizontally and vertically, from the a to the d₁ and from the d₁ to the g₁. Unlike the ostinati in the previous two movements, this ostinato features internal repetition. The perfect fourth occurs three times in two beats, and the combination of motivic repetition and rhythmic hemiola evokes the regularity of an alarm bell or other urgent signal. The attenuated humor in “Aubade” is even slighter in “Médiation,” which is hardly funny at all. The ostinato’s internal repetition is so quick that it creates an ambiance. Its repetition is characteristic of mechanical process because of its similarity to an alarm.⁸⁹ As in “Aubade,” the primary technique of interaction between the melody and ostinato is that of the melody’s appropriation of the ostinato’s rhythm. In “Méditation,” the eighth-note interjections are sweeping spans beginning with a wide interval, a fifth, and proceeding to alternate between fourths and thirds, in ascending and descending motion creating the effect of a swinging pendulum that requires an initial push of a great deal of force and then loses some of its weight towards the top.

Each time this swinging motion occurs, the pitch range changes slightly, demonstrating the principle of vital change over time that is characteristic of living forces in Bergsonian theory. The first time, beginning on o.7, spans one and a half octaves, from E₁ to A. The peak of the swinging action sounds two octaves above the top note of the ostinato at that moment, creating the harmonious coexistence between ostinato and melody that was present in “Aubade” and “Méditation.” The second and third swinging

figures, beginning at o. 23 and 31 respectively, are closely related because they follow symmetrical patterns of intervallic motion:

![Intervallic Pattern Diagram]

The final interval is one step wider than the initial one, forcing the tonal center of the section lower in a progression that defines the character of the piece. At o. 23, the swinging passage begins on D\textsubscript{1} and ascends to f. As the final step out of the swinging motion leads to the open fifth C\textsubscript{11}-G\textsubscript{1}, the swinging pendulum concludes its journey a bit lower than it began. The next swinging motion, at the O. 31, begins a third lower than the end of the previous one, this time on A\textsubscript{11} and reaches its peak on c. When it ends a step lower than it began (as the previous one did), its open fifth is G\textsubscript{11}-D\textsubscript{1}, and thus it has attained the same tonality as the one that the ostinato suggests. Unlike the textural engagement between the mechanically repeating ostinato and the organically developing melody in the other two movements, in “Méditation” the melody meets the ostinato. For a time, anyway, the more the listener’s attention is drawn to the relationship between ostinato and melody, the more the two are seen to reinforce each other. This reinforcement is affectively antonymic to humor. In Bergson’s terms, there is sympathy or identification between the two. Instead of pointing out the absurdity of the ostinato’s insistent repetition, the melody conforms to it, validating the ostinato’s purpose.

So the “Méditation” is not funny; as Armengaud has suggested, it is indeed a dark and ironic turn in Satie’s expression. The hysterical, urgent pendulum swing that mimics the alarm bell character of the ostinato has the humorous effect of stirring the listener and pointing out the silly contrast between the normally flowing, even pastoral, melody and
the more metallic ostinato. But, while the textural cues point to the kind of humor we encountered in the previous movements, here the thwarting of the mechanical is not as straightforward as it was earlier. Instead, the pendulum swing serves to interrupt what becomes throughout the piece an ostinato-like pattern of repetition within the melody itself. The opening melodic phrase, which first appears (as in the preceding two movements) at o. 3, occurs three times in “Méditation,” each time becoming increasingly out of place. By appearing an equal number of times as the pastoral melody, in addition to being supported by two other, shorter phrases that mimic the bell ringing rhythm (at oo. 17 and 27), the pendulum swing renders the flowing melody that opens and closes the piece anomalous. The pastoral melody is left standing outside of the textural context of the piece, and since the pastoral melody’s first entrance gave it the status of musical protagonist based on the expectation that the structures established in the first two movements would be repeated, we may struggle to distance ourselves emotionally from that motif in order to find its exclusion funny. As previously mentioned, Bergson insists upon the depersonalization necessary in the process of creating humor: we can more easily find situations funny when they happen to other people than when they happen to ourselves. Therefore, even without yet considering Satie’s intertexts—both musical and extramusical—the grave emotional character calls into question the piece’s humorous qualities.

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90 Bergson, 11.
Other Jokes (performance indications)

Before putting to rest any question of the humor within *Avant-dernières pensées*, I will consider the other elements of the work that poke fun at the dedicatees and their personal stylistic tropes. The strange performance indications—“Modéré, je vous prie,” “*La basse liée, n’est-ce pas?*” and “Ralentir aimablement”—reinforce the explicitly comical tone. These instructions fall into the category of linguistic humor, as, I argued, the musical language does. In these cases, the language repeats commonly used formulations from musical performance but adapts them to a new meaning. The French word “Modéré” is the equivalent of the standard Italian Moderato, and French composers often used it in place of the Italian. But the appositive “je vous prie,” or “I politely ask you,” draws attention to the convention by making it more than a rote repetition. Composers almost never use the first person when they mark their performance instructions, but here Satie does. The effect is disarming, but it also infuses the piece with the composer’s presence. By simultaneously referencing convention and controverting it, Satie creates humor, pointing out the stuffy practice of academic musical composition.

Generally speaking, the character of the performance directions mimics that of the music: as the humor becomes decreasingly boisterous through the three movements, so the performance instructions lose some of their overt jauntiness. In “Aubade,” the pianist meets direct, second-person imperative instructions, which this time mix modes of performance. The performer is instructed to “Chantez sérieusement,” or “sing seriously,” as if the piece were not for solo piano but rather for a confused singer who was unsure of the required emotion. “Aubade” also includes the play on words “léger, mais decent,”

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91 Potter has also discussed these. See *Erik Satie: A Parisian Composer*, xxx.
referring to the meaning in French of “léger” that applies to women with loose morals. This description applies to the first waltz interpolation in the melody, and it returns in the third one (the second waltz interpolation, with the turbulent triplet rhythm, has no textual performance indications, only staccato markings), slightly modified, “léger, comme devant.” This new instruction is full of ambiguity, since “devant” is a preposition that has no object. One would expect the instruction to read “léger, comme avant,” or “light, as before,” referring to the previous instruction.

Finally, in “Méditation,” Satie dispenses with the humorous performance instructions altogether. At least, the instructions he gives are ambiguous. He writes only two words, “sec” (dry) and “tendre” (tender, sweet); the second appears twice. These words, in their starkness, convey a degree of sincerity lacking in the performance directions in the earlier movements. Instead of pointing away from themselves toward the academic conventions of score-writing and performing, they describe the character of the music and the sensitivity with which the pianist should approach it. By stripping away syntax, Satie renders these instructions, the performer, and even himself, humble. Instead of creating a structure and hiding behind it, Satie applies the simple words “dry” and “tender” (and the contrast between them) to salient passages and thereby expresses most purely his affective goals.

*Texts and Intertexts*

The music of “Idylle” can be read as enacting the humorous juxtaposition of tension and elasticity described by Bergson, and the performance indications support this

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92 Recall Jankélévitch’s and Bergson’s use of the word humble, in association with asceticism and a lack of pretension.
reading. The poetry of the Avant-dernières pensées, however, reflects personal emotion. It provides a port of deeper entry into Satie’s representation of tribute by revealing what was personally at stake for him in his musical engagement with three composers who had by 1915 earned more prestige than him. I argue that both humor and humility, equal aspects of Satie’s poetic persona, are at work. Additionally, the role of memory in the poetic imagery will be at issue: how does Satie incorporate language that is apposite to each of his dedicatees? By looking closely at the poems and their intertexts, we will be able to move forward with analysis of the musical phrases they accompany.

1. Poetic form

Satie made a habit of writing poetry for inclusion in the score of his pieces for solo piano, especially during his humoristic phase. The poetry is not straightforward or traditional: it lacks rhyme, regular line lengths, predictability of accent, and other characteristics of poetic form. Moreover, Satie never published the poems separately, so the mise en page, normally important in poetic construction, is left ambiguous. The poems may receive their optimal layout as they are, interspersed with the musical lines and following the line breaks of the piano score. But since this is an unconventional presentation for poetry, a reader may be left wondering whether there could be an alternate arrangement. Add line breaks where capital letters appear in the texts of Avant-dernières pensées produces three poems:

93 Robert Orledge surmises, on the basis of a comment Satie made in reference to the poetry accompanying Heures séculaires et instantanées, that none of the poetry should ever be read aloud. Although this seems reasonable enough, given the lack of explicit rhythmic correspondence between the melodic notes and the poetic syllables, he does not substantiate his claim with further evidence. Since the instruction is printed in Heures séculaires, there is the possibility that Satie meant to refer to this work only. Satie the Composer, 213.

94 Peter Dayan has considered Satie’s texts as poetry in their own right. See “Erik Satie’s Poetry,” The Modern Language Review 103, no. 2 (2008): 409-423.
I. Idylle à Debussy

Que vois-je? Le Ruisseau est tout mouillé; et les Bois sont inflammables et secs comme des triques. Mais mon cœur est tout petit. Les arbres ressemblent à de grands peignes mal faits; et le Soleil a, tel une ruche, de beaux rayons dorés. Mais mon cœur a froid dans le dos.

La Lune s’est brouillée avecque ses voisins; et le Ruisseau est trempé jusqu’aux os.

[I. Romance, to Debussy/ What do I see? The stream is soaked; and the / Woods are inflammable and dry like sticks. / But my heart is very small. / The trees look like poorly made combs; / And the sun has, like a beehive, beautiful golden rays. / But my heart has chills. / The moon got into an argument with his neighbors; / and the stream is soaked to the bone.]

II. Aubade à Paul Dukas

Ne dormez pas, belle endormie
Ecoutez la voix de votre bien-aimé.
Il pince un rigaudon.
Comme il vous aime!
C’est un poète.
L’entendez-vous? Il ricane, peut-être?
Non:
Il vous adores, douce Belle!
Il repince un rigaudon et un rhume.
Vous ne voulez l’aimez?
Pourtant, c’est un poète, un vieux poète!

[II. Dawn Song, to Paul Dukas / Do not sleep, sleeping beauty / Listen to the voice of your lover. / He plays a rigadon. / How he loves you! / He’s a poet. / Do you hear him? He laughs, perhaps? / No: / He adores you, sweet beauty! / He replays a rigadon and catches a cold. / You don’t want to love him?/ Yet, he’s a poet, an old poet!]

III. Méditation à Albert Roussel

Le Poète est enfermé dans sa vieille tour.
Voici le vent.
Le Poète médite, sans en avoir l’air.
Tout à coup,
Il a la chair de poule.
Pourquoi?
Voici le Diable!
Non, pas Lui : c’est le vent, le vent du génie qui passe
Le Poète en a plein la tête, du vent !
Il sourit malicieusement, tandis que son cœur pleure comme un saule.
Mais le Génie est là ! qui le regarde d’un mauvais œil : d’un œil de verre.
Et le Poète devient tout humble et tout rouge.
Il ne peut plus méditer :
Il a une indigestion ! une terrible indigestion de mauvais vers blancs et de Désillusions amères !

[III. Meditation, to Albert Roussel] The poet is locked up in his old tower. / Here’s the wind. / The poet meditates, without seeming to. / Suddenly, / He has goose bumps. / Why? / Here’s the Devil! / No, not him: it’s the wind, the wind of Genius that passes by / The poet has had enough wind! / He smiles maliciously, while his heart weeps like a drunkard. / But the Genius is there! it looks at him with a bad eye : a glass eye. / And the poet becomes humble and flushed. / He can no longer meditate: He has indigestion! a horrible indigestion of bad blank verses and / bitter disillusionment!]

Themes of nature, hesitancy and rejection provide a consistent emotional tone. The poems present a progressively more distanced narrator (moving from first to third person) while depicting a progressively more intimate, or enclosed, setting (from the wide expanse of the outdoors to a small court where poet woos lover to the enclosed space of the old tower).

Formally, the poems are entirely in blank verse, except for one line of twelve syllables that recalls the alexandrine form central to French poetry.95 This exceptional line, which describes a fight between the moon and its neighbors, can easily be read as a comment on the falling out between Satie and Debussy. In 1911 and 1912, when Satie was earning some public recognition for his compositions, Debussy projected a cold stance rather than warm acceptance. Satie’s famous quip, “Why won’t he allow me a very small place in his shadow? I have no use for the sun.”96 comes to mind with the image of

95 Dyan has identified this line, in “Idylle”: “La Lune s’est brouillée avecque ses voisins.” He argues that this line indicates Satie’s intention to give the text of the piano pieces a self-consciously poetic character, since he has added “-que” to the end of “avec,” solely to create an extra syllable so that the line would conform to standard alexandrine length. Dayan, 422.
96 Quoted in Whiting, 389. This phrase appears in a letter to Satie’s brother Conrad, on 11 April 1911, a few weeks after the premiere (on 25 March) of Debussy’s orchestration of the Gymnopédies. Two days
cosmic bodies in “Idylle.” Moreover, the image of the moon itself fighting recalls the subtitle to the sonata for cello and piano that Debussy was composing at the time that Satie wrote this movement, “Pierrot fâché avec la lune.”97 Since the moon normally is not anthropomorphized (except insofar as it is occasionally through synecdoche with the “man in the moon”), it is notable that Satie uses not only an image of an anthropomorphized moon, but especially a moon that has gotten into an argument, just as Debussy’s moon must have done with Pierrot.

2. Symbolism

Other notable poetic images in “Idylle” are the “dry and inflammable woods” and the “trees that resemble poorly made combs.” Although such vague descriptions could conjure any number of personal recollections of Debussy and Satie perhaps strolling through the Bois de Boulogne, the wooded park to the west of Paris where Debussy often spent his afternoons,98 they evoke more forcefully the vain mission of Symbolism, the vivid comparison of disparate objects especially through desemanticized word sounds. Indeed, one of Debussy’s earlier songs, from his “Arriettes oubliées,” sets a poem by the symbolist Paul Verlaine in which a verse with descriptions of plants is directly juxtaposed with an image of the heart: “Here are fruits, flowers, leaves, and

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after the premiere, Satie mentions Debussy as being the focus of the event but gives no description of his performance or of his attitude towards Satie. In the April 11th letter, however, Satie’s account of Debussy’s displeasure with the whole affair becomes more personal and biting. He writes that it is Debussy’s fault for being upset at the new “Satistes;” or followers of Satie. Satie tells his brother that Debussy and he will have a weekly lunch at Debussy’s home, and that he does not resent Debussy’s feelings. However, Satie belies his annoyance with Debussy’s disapproval by writing the remark about the sun and Satie’s own position relative to him, in the shadows.

97 Jane Fulcher has addressed Debussy’s late-life identification with Pierrot, the sad clown figure, as well as his choice to use this character in the title of his potentially politically-charged Sonate. See The Composer as Intellectual, p. 61.

98 Debussy and his second wife, Emma Bardac, moved to 80, avenue du Bois de Boulogne in October, 1905. See Roger Nichols, The Life of Debussy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 117.
In the original poem, the natural images are given a musical dimension through their consonance—three of the four plants begin with the letter f—and the melodic progression of vowel sounds from the closed [i] of “voici” to the open [a] of “branches.” Yet in Satie’s text, the arrangement of the words is perfectly artless: the vowel sounds are placed haphazardly, and the only significant consonant repetition comes in the harsh sounds [s] and [k]. These sound repetitions, the primary musical quality in Verlaine’s poetic language, since they highlight the togetherness of the plant images, here are mundane. The [s] begins the words “sont” (are) and “sec” (dry), thus having nothing to do with the predominant images of nature, and the [k] doubles up at the juncture between “secs” (dry) and “comme” (like/as), producing an awkward, stuttered elision that is immediately reinforced by the end of the word “triques.” Rather than glorifying nature by depicting it musically through poetry, Satie rendered it ugly and banal.

The entire project of depicting images in language (and in music, as I demonstrate below) is here called into question. Satie uses the verb “ressembler” in his comparison between trees and combs, and the facile signifier of simile “comme” in his description of the woods being like sticks. The symbolist poets Debussy favored shunned linguistic crutches such as these. Indeed, by making apparent his attempt to attach the meaning of one thing to another (combs to trees and sticks to the forest), Satie rejects the sleight of hand favored by poets who constructed syneasthetic modes of understanding. Lawrence Porter, in his investigation of Symbolism as constitutive of a literary “crisis,” asserted

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that the symbolist aesthetic was fundamentally influenced by a growing lack of faith in language’s ability to communicate specific ideas amongst people.\textsuperscript{100} Indeed, Verlaine in particular, upon whose work we may say that part of the text of “Idylle” is modeled, experienced a deep crisis of faith that recalled, according to Porter, the Romantic opposition between matter and spirit.\textsuperscript{101} Verlaine moved beyond this dialectic, forging a new one between matter and emotion, and robbing the dialogue of its social context. Thus Verlaine scorned religion even more strongly than the Romantics had, and thereby refused to offer a message or something “useful for humanity” in his poems.\textsuperscript{102} The Symbolist identification between objects and emotions, or sights and sounds, is predicated on the belief that regular language cannot distinguish between them. The need for locally constructed metaphor is eradicated because of the more global refutation of language’s communicative power. When Satie inserts the words “comme” and “ressembler,” he makes \textit{gauche} metaphors, knowingly simulating a naïve, pre-Symbolist faith in language’s semantic status.\textsuperscript{103}

3. Debussy’s \textit{Trois chansons de France}

In addition to making allusion to Verlaine’s “Green,” the images in “Idylle” recall some of those in the poem by Charles duc d’Orléans, “Le temps a laissé son manteau,” which Debussy set as the first of his \textit{Trois chansons de France.}\textsuperscript{104} This poem, unlike the

\textsuperscript{101} For more on Verlaine’s crisis of faith and his poetry of Catholicism, see ch. 1.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{103} Furthermore, the very images he compares are mundane, and the comparisons are obvious. A forest looks like sticks because sticks come from trees, which make up the forest. Observing that trees look like combs is far from saying anything about emotional states or the soul.
\textsuperscript{104} Poem by Charles, Duc d’Orléans (1394-1495): “Le temps a laissé son manteau/ De vent de froidure et de pluie,/ Et s’est vêtu de broderie,/ De soleil luisant clair et beau./ Il n’y a bête ni oiseau/ Qu’en son jargon ne chante ou crie:/ ‘Le temps a laissé son manteau/ De vent de froidure et de pluie.’”// Rivière,
Symbolist poems Debussy typically favored, maintains its focus on the external world, especially the appearance of things as they are untouched by man in nature. The mild anthropomorphizing of weather, through the description of its first wearing a heavy coat and then an embroidered garment, is typical of the tendency in 15th-century French poetry to give human characteristics to intangible phenomena. Satie’s text parallels this poem by referencing both the sun, “soleil,” and the stream, “ruisseau.” As in the Duc d’Orléans’s poem, the sun in Satie’s text is described with the generally unremarkable adjective beautiful, “beau,” which in “Idylle” makes it the only favorably described image. Moreover, in “Le temps a laissé son manteau,” the stream (along with the river and fountain) is depicted as being covered in drops of silver, presumably water reflecting the sun. Satie picks up on this trite portrayal of bodies of water decorated with even more water when he describes the stream as being wet, even soaked down to its bones. In his text, then, Satie seems to be clearly playing with poetic conventions, rendering them absurd through exaggeration, translation into plain language, and banal repetition.

If Satie was alluding to Debussy’s Trois chansons de France by invoking choice images from the first song of that collection in the first movement of his piece, it stands

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105 Moreover, Hélène Basso has recently suggested that Charles d’Orléans’s particular use of allegorical figures is related to his attempts to express his own identity in his poems. Any such attempt, Basso argues, forces the poet into utilizing multiple and conflicting voices to portray the paradoxical conflicts within his own character. She adds that the personalities of “Danger” and “Fortune” add to this effect. See “Les mots comme monde. Le lyrisme de Charles d’Orléans entre art d’écritre et manière de vivre,” in Être poète au temps de Charles d’Orléans (Avignon: Université d’Avignon, 2012): 152-207, in particular 165-6.

106 Roger Nichols has suggested that Satie’s text in “Idylle” is full of inside jokes between him and Debussy, although his intertextual explications are limited, and his interpretation is couched in the facile comparison between opposing or complementary aesthetic approaches. “Within fifteen seconds or so [of playing the Avant-dernières pensées], the thoughtful pianist is brought to consider the relationships between practicing and the final, poetic result, between banal words and unbanal tune, between Satie and Debussy, and between styles generally known as Impressionism and Neoclassicism.” The Harlequin Years: Music in Paris, 1917-1929 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002): 218.
to reason that the texts of *Avant-dernières pensées* are similar the other poems Debussy selected for his 1904 work. Some resonances can be found between the second of the *Trois chansons*, “La grotte,” poem by Tristan l’Hermite François (1601-1655) and “Aubade,” most significantly the suggestion of slumber (which in Tristan’s poem comes at the end and in Satie’s text at the beginning) and the evocation of dawn (Satie’s title and Tristan’s description of light struggling against shadow). But the textual parallels between the third section of the two works show a stronger connection and affirm that Satie may in fact have had Debussy’s *Trois chansons de France* in mind when he wrote the texts of his *Avant-dernières pensées*. The third poem of Debussy’s work, another one by Charles d’Orléans, broods in the same somber mood as Satie’s “Méditation.” Although the direct correspondences between the two texts are not as explicit in the reappearance of words from the poem by Charles d’Orléans in the text by Satie, still the notion of disillusionment that Satie so poignantly expressed in his last line echoes the fifteenth-century poetic persona’s feeling that pleasure has actually died.

4. Music & Text (mimesis)

Satie’s manner of fitting his texts with his music appears on the whole to be straightforward. That is, he associated a musical motif with a textual reference, creating correspondences between the two that at times verge on musical mimesis. To take “Idylle” as an example, we see that the ruisseau has a musical theme associated with it; the association is created first through context—the ruisseau appears exclusively with one particular phrase, first at o. 5 and later at o. 39.
Example 16 "Idylle" o. 5-7
But the phrase itself has something of an aquatic character, with the A and E (spaced at the distance of a perfect fourth) evoking the crests and troughs of the ripples of a gently flowing stream. Furthermore, the asymmetrical rhythm evokes the movement of water, which seems to pause at its crest, while each new ripple comes at a constant pace. A similar moment of musical mimicry of an image in the text comes in the ascending chromatic scale beginning at o. 27, where the ascending scale can readily be interpreted as a rising, radiant sun.

Example 17 "Idylle" o. 27-9
Text and music similarly correspond in literal ways in the two following movements. In “Aubade,” the regular alternation between the rhythmically elongated waltz pattern (consisting, generally, of a half note and a quarter note, although the quarter note is sometimes replaced with a pair of eighth notes) and the more accelerated version (three eighth notes, occupying one and a half beats, followed by an eighth-note rest and a
quarter note) is a musical rendition of the text’s alternating focus on the sleeping beauty and her poet lover. The slow rhythm that first appears at o. 3 is languorous, with its drawn-out half notes, compared with the constant pecking of the eighth-note waltz ostinato. The melodic motif that corresponds to the poet, which first appears at o. 15, does not follow the duple pattern of a seventeenth-century rigaudon, as the text suggests. But it does have a marked dance character that evokes the idea of a poet performing a dance tune without literally quoting the type specified in the text.

Finally, in “Méditation, the strongest surface-level interaction between text and music occurs in the association between the wind and the interjecting arpeggios. This association is double as it was in the text-music relationships of the preceding movements—the connection is made both through concurrence of the motive with the words and the sense of musical mimicry.107 As with “Aubade,” “Méditation” features two oppositional principal characters: the poet and the evil spirit that torments him. In contrast to the evil spirit’s roar of an arpeggio,

107 Although many twentieth-century composers (notably Stravinsky and Schoenberg) disavowed making such attempts to make musical images like madrigalisms or hypotyposis, Mary Davis’ analysis of Sports et divertissements assumes that such musical depictions of non-musical elements was part of Satie’s aesthetic project.

The musical components of Satie’s score further complicate the relationship between text and visual art. Adding a level to the illustration of the narrative, his compositions explicitly represent images of the text in sonic and graphic terms. In Le Golf; for example, the ‘trembling holes’ are evoked by use of a descending chromatic scale; an ascending flourish based on unusual quartal harmonies and emphasized by a fortissimo dynamic marking provides a striking musical image of the breaking club. Satie meticulously coordinates these musical gestures to coincide with the corresponding bits of text, creating notation that provides a visual metaphor both for the shaking holes and the club breaking in the air.

Although Davis does not situate this text-music connection within the long history of musical rhetoric, she does note that it plays a part in Satie’s characteristic wit, which is also emphasized by his quotations of popular songs, and, in one case, a double quotation of the song “Claire de la lune,” which Debussy also quoted. See Classic Chic: Music, Fashion, and Modernism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 77 and 87.
the poet is associated with a skipping and sinking melody that Satie subtly manipulates, adding complex shades of meaning that suggest the darker mood announced by the text, “he can no longer meditate.”

Satie dedicated this work to three composers, but up until now, I have dealt most explicitly with Satie’s reactions to Debussy and Dukas. This is a facile move, since much more has been written about them than about Roussel. Moreover, Satie left traces of his continued interaction with both Debussy and Dukas in his letters to his brother, he sustained a correspondence with Dukas about financial aid to artists during the war, and he had written to Debussy’s wife occasionally in 1914.\footnote{On 6 September 1914, Satie writes to Raoul Bardac acknowledging his recent contact with Emma Debussy regarding her ex-husband, Letter 272 in Volta, \textit{Correspondance}, 205.} For Roussel, on the other hand, there is no trace of a continued relationship between him and Satie after Satie left the Schola, except for a brief exchange about the possibility for Roland Manuel, who was
Jewish, to enter that Catholic institution. As Satie’s counterpoint teacher, Roussel was a sympathetic figure, writing appreciations on Satie’s exercises that praised their musicality all the while stressing their harmonic, rather than contrapuntal—and therefore somewhat unsuccessful—quality. In the public musical realm, Roussel was apparently a mercurial figure whose compositional style underwent a drastic change after the First World War. When he returned from his military service, he stripped away outside influences and sought purity and clarity, shifting his image from that of an “impressionist” to a “neoclassicist.” According to Roger Nichols, Roussel adopted a more austere stance toward composition and the public, since, similarly to Ravel, his experiences in battle had rendered “the caressing sounds of Impressionism irrelevant.” But to use accounts of Roussel’s postwar aesthetic change to inform our understanding of Satie’s attitude towards Roussel, especially his motivations for dedicating a piece to him and thus his expressive project, would be anachronistic. We have no evidence of contact between Roussel and Satie during the war, and thus we can only speculate about Satie’s knowledge of Roussel’s revised musical taste. However, Roussel’s letter to his wife on 3 January 1916, only three months after Satie dated “Méditation,” directly indicates the sentiment of isolation that Satie implies in his text about the poet enclosed (or locked-up) in his old tower. Roussel writes, “It is true to say of the composer, even more than of the

109 This exchange took place in 1911, as evidenced by letter 164 in Volta, Correspondance, 153. Note that the last reference Satie makes to Roussel in his surviving letters is in 1915, in a biographical notice, in which he states that he studied under Roussel at the Schola. Ibid., 209.
110 In Composition book no. 1, Satie’s Cahier deContrepoint No. 2, dated 22 January-22 October 1905, Roussel leaves extended commentary on two exercises, found on 14v and 16v. In the first, he gives four guidelines for future exercises, summarizing with “All of this is too much harmony and not enough counterpoint.” In the second, he begins writing “All of this has too harmonic of a profile.” At the end, he adds congenially, “In any case, it’s very musical.” Harvard Houghton Collection MS Mus 193.
112 Nichols, The Harlequin Years, 219.
poet, that he is completely isolated in the world, alone, with his more or less incomprehensible language.”

Either Roussel had voiced this opinion about musicians before leaving for war, or Satie had a premonition about Roussel, or he must have heard news from him, directly or through an intermediary.

**Musical Allusion and Quotation**

As much of the intertextual references within the poetic component of the *pensées* can be traced to verbal exchanges that occurred between Satie and his three dedicatees, one wonders what musical allusions this piece may contain. Despite the prevailing belief that Satie’s works after 1914 contain no musical quotations (unlike his works from 1912-14, which are rife with them),

I argue that Satie drew the musical basis for these three movements from work by their dedicatees. In the first place, the choice of certain literary images (the ruisseau, bois, cœur) were accepted during Satie’s time as evidence that he was mocking Debussy and the nature fixation he shared with the Symbolist poets.

Yet I have argued that many of these references point to one work by Debussy in particular, with a text not by a symbolist contemporary of his but rather by a fifteenth-century French poet, Charles Duc d’Orléans. The first poem of Debussy’s *Trois chansons de France* actually provides a model for the organization of Satie’s poetic images. It is not

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114 Whiting has argued, “The main difference between these [the humoristic pieces written after 1914] and the earlier humoristic works is that Satie seems to have dispensed with ironical quotation. In the pieces of 1912-13, it is rare to find a piece without quotation. Some of the miniatures in *Sports* include quotations, but most do not. No quotations at all have been identified in either the *Heures* or the *Trois Valses*; if they are there, Satie has covered his tracks well.” 408.
115 According to Nichols, Cocteau recognized the reference to the “ruisseau” in “Idylle” as a jab at Debussy’s fascination with water. *The Harlequin Years*, 218.
surprising, then, that the music for “Idylle,” in particular the piano ostinato, can be seen to have its model in the same song.

Example 20 Debussy, "Rondel," mm. 1-2
Much as with his earlier manipulations, Satie contorts the eighth-note pattern from his source, first by inverting it, and then by changing the interval between the third and fourth notes so that instead of leading to the next scale degree in a descending sequence, it moves one step below the initial pitch, creating a repetitive loop.116 Satie slows the tempo to draw more attention to the smooth connection between the notes in the interlocking ascending scales, as compared to his source, in which the eighth-note motion drives ahead. These changes of melodic direction (ascending rather than descending), tonal implication (static rather than shifting), and tempo (moderate rather than allegro) are on a par with the kinds of modifications that Satie made in his slightly earlier texted piano pieces.

Satie also borrowed some of the form and feeling of the first of Debussy’s Trois chansons—Debussy’s eighth-note pattern occupies two measures of introduction before the vocal melody enters, and Satie uses the same vamp-style of introduction. Hs “Idylle” similarly has two ostinato units of eighth-note vamp before the right-hand melody enters.

116 Satie’s fascination with loops in Parade and Relâche has been explored by Daniel Albright, “Loop” and “Loop, Again,” chapters in Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
Moreover, although Debussy does not treat the eighth-note pattern as a mechanically repeating ostinato throughout, he does use its near-constant presence\textsuperscript{117} to create a unified texture much in the same way that Satie’s ostinato lends this movement a unified character in opposition to the other two units that make up his pensées. Finally, Debussy’s choice of a rondeau for the text gave him a structure for his musical language. He chose to repeat the melodic figure associated with the first appearance of the refrain, “le temps a laissé son manteau” (with slight modifications), upon the second and third appearances of it. The repetition in a rondeau form normally established a connection between text and melody in the refrain. The repetition structure in Satie’s Avant-dernières pensées is a modified forme fixe. Moreover, in this instance of borrowing, Satie showed he was willing to appropriate a musical technique into a new context. The poem for “Idylle” is the only one of the pensées that does not feature a narrative development, which allows for a simplistic return of the opening melody. But Satie’s decision to use a rondeau for his compositional model (extending through his three movements) explains the repetition of a melody in the later movements despite the changed emotional content of the associated text.

Satie incorporated elements of Debussy’s songs into all of his pensées, despite the fact that only the first is dedicated to Debussy. The music of “Aubade” owes a debt to Debussy’s song “La Grotte.” Although subject to enough adjustments so as to be scarcely recognizable by ear, the left-hand rocking motion that begins in m. 3 of Debussy’s “La Grotte” features a similar circularity of motif to Satie’s, returning to the originary note

\textsuperscript{117} The eighth note serves as the constant pulse throughout “Le temps a laissé son manteau,” underlining every beat except for the third and fourth beats of m. 2, mm. 3-5, mm. 8-9, and beats 3-4 of m.30 through the end of m. 32, the final m. of the piece.
(Debussy: E-sharp, Satie D) after intervening notes one-half its value make wide leaps
away from it (in Debussy, a total of a major sixth below, and in Satie first a perfect fourth
above and then a perfect fifth below).

![Example 21 "La Grotte," mm. 3-5 bt. 2 (accompaniment only)](image)

Additionally, Debussy built the texture for his piece on a recurring motif (a thirty-second
note followed by a tied thirty-second note and dotted eighth note) that is found on nearly
every beat of the piece, with varying pitches. Of course, Satie’s “Aubade” is based on an
unchanging ostinato, but one can see the similarity between that avant-garde technique
and Debussy’s more subdued but still experimental approach. Finally, the triple meter in
“La Grotte” is echoed in “Aubade’s” ostinato.

There is at least one trace of a composition by Dukas in “Aubade.” The repeated
ascending scale figures (at oo. 6, 8, 21-22, 30-32, 35, and 46) recall the pervasive
ascending scales in Dukas’s *Vocalise-étude* “Alla gitana” of 1909.
Although this piece is performed widely today on woodwind instruments, Dukas originally composed it for voice, so it fits within the song genre upon which Satie seems to have largely depended for his quotations as a model for the pensées. Other musical traces from Dukas’s works are unlikely to surface, given that Dukas left the majority of his works unpublished (if he did not destroy them), and, since Satie and Dukas were not personally acquainted, it is doubtful that Satie would have had the occasion to study Dukas’s scores.

As for the final dedicatee, nothing in Roussel’s pre-war chansons appears to have served as a model for the pensées. Although he composed over a dozen such works, none of them bear any similarity to “Méditation,” either in the subject matter of the text, 

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the form of the piece, or the texture in the piano accompaniment. This disconnect between Roussel’s songs and the movement Satie dedicated to his teacher could perhaps be due to the fact that the character of Roussel’s melodies is distinct from the strict contrapuntal style he taught at the Schola; although analysts have described his melodies as giving witness to both harmonic and contrapuntal technique, the counterpoint in them “rejected the rigid structure of scholastic rules, only to retain a principle of both balance and infinite flexibility.”120 It is thus possible that Roussel kept his work at the Schola separate from his compositional activity as a creator of chansons; maybe Satie was unaware of his teacher’s works for voice and piano.

Conclusion: Meditation on the Autoportrait

Although there is no way to know for sure whether Satie was ignorant of Roussel’s songs, the more likely explanation for his decision not to quote any of them is that Satie’s principal engagement with Roussel was as his student. This logic may seem obvious, but in the within a discussion on the Avant-dernières pensées, it is important to recall that the work, as a combination tribute, positions Satie’s personal memory at the forefront of his plan. That is, rather than attempt to portray his dedicatees (or at least their musical styles) in his work, Satie used the pensées as a moment of self-reflection, even in the extreme sense of “autoportrait” as theorized by Michel Beaujour. According to Beaujour, authors have long exploited an amorphous genre of autoportrait—not to be confused with autobiography, the more straightforward chronicling of events in the life of the author—as a way to address the question of “who am I?” not by recounting “what

have I done?” but rather “what do I think?”121 In this sense, the *Avant-dernières pensées* may take their title from an allusion to Blaise Pascal’s famous *Pensées*, a collection of his reflections on God and life.122 It seems to me that in his solitude, lacking the professional network that would earn him a publication contract, a paid performance, or even the social stimulation that he would encounter a short time after he completed the work, Satie used his *pensées* to take stock of his own position vis-à-vis music composition. He chose as his dedicatees figures with whom he had a personal relationship but whom he also viewed as bearers of power within the musical sphere. To start, Debussy was one of his oldest friends, and by 1915, he had earned international renown for his compositions and had even spurned Satie for the latter’s rising star. Next, although Satie’s correspondence with Dukas was always perfunctory, his bitterness at the end of their exchange betrays his initial hope for a more-than-symbolic offer of help; Dukas was publicly associated with the financial assistance groups established for needy artists during the war.123 Finally, Roussel’s instruction was clearly of great value to Satie, but Roussel himself also


122 Recent scholarship has made explicit connections between Rousseau’s *Méditations*, one of the works profiled in depth by Beaujour, and the *Pensées*, in particular as to the nature of self-deception in the process of committing immoral acts. Additionally, Pascal’s favoring of solitude as the only way to deepen one’s relationship with God invites a comparison with Satie’s semi-hermetic way of life. Moreover, one of the main theses of Pascal’s *Pensées* is that rational thought cannot lead to an understanding of God; only immediate sensory perception of the Divine can do this. In this way, Satie’s title may suggest the notion that thinking is the next-to-last step in making a spiritual conversion. For recent analyses of Pascal’s moral philosophy, see Harvey Mitchell, “Reclaiming the Self: The Pascal-Rousseau Connection,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54 no. 4 (1993): 637-658; Jacob Meskin, “Secular Self-Confidence, Postmodernism, and Beyond: Recovering the Religious Dimension of Pascal’s *Pensées*,” *The Journal of Religion* 75, no. 4 (1995): 487-508; Ann Delehanty, “Morality and Method in Pascal’s *Pensées*,” *Philosophy and Literature* 28, no. 1 (April 2004): 74-88; and William Wood, “Axiology, Self-Deception, and Moral Wrongdoing in Blaise Pascal’s *Pensées*,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37 no. 2 (2009): 355-84.

123 It is interesting to note that the modifier “penultimate” to Satie’s title turns out to have had a prescient significance: a few months after their initial exchange and the composition of this piece, Satie received a further 100 francs from the Beaux-arts, in recognition of which he sent Dukas a fully sincere letter of gratitude. The work is then the next-to-last opinion about Dukas that Satie would express. See letter 313 in Volta, *Correspondance*, 231.
represented Satie’s regret towards his engagement with the institutional approach to music composition. All the dedicatees filled a the same role in Satie’s social order. Each one had a more complex relationship with Satie than suggested by the label Ornella Volta used for them, “impressionist friend.”

Indeed, Satie’s *Avant-dernières pensées* responds to much more than impressionism, or Symbolism, for that matter. They are, effectively, Satie’s personal way to assert his individuality—his independence—vis-à-vis an otherwise unrelated group of his high-profile peers. Satie uses the *Pensées* as a statement of his own habits of mind, reflecting upon who he is, instead of whom Debussy, Dukas, and Roussel are.

Satie’s mode of expression in the *Avant-dernières pensées* is that of spiritual “autoportrait,” in Beaujour’s sense, rather than sarcastic, ironic, or mocking as has been presumed. Although we may never fully work out the meaning of the title, it is strange that in the sense of being unresolved thoughts, they do represent a meditation on his solo lifestyle just before gaining a new social identity as he once again became a collaborator with poets and painters. The fact that the text, an important element for any thorough interpretation of the *Pensées*, can only be apprehended by the solo performer him- or herself, therefore excluding any potential audience, demonstrates Satie’s inability at the time to put stock in collective spiritual and moral structures. This suggests that his spirituality was of a different *kind* rather than *degree* from Catholicism, a distinction

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124 Volta describes Satie’s three dedicatees in this way, Ibid., 207.

125 My thinking here is influenced by the Faulkner scholar Theresa Towner’s argument about Faulkner’s inability to perceive social morality in the sense of de facto racism in the mid-century American south. Towner writes, “Faulkner’s own distrust of group action and behavior sabotaged his lifelong attempts to describe group behavior’ and to admit that ‘he was often a clumsy commentator on cultural phenomena because he believed, at base, only in individual reality.’” Towner, *Faulkner on the Color Line: The Later Novels* (Oxford, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2000): 127, in Catherine Gunther Kodat, “Faulkner and ‘Faulkner,’” *American Literary History* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 194.
Bergson makes in the beginning of *Deux sources de la morale et de la religion*. After Satie composed this piece, his social world opened up, and he came into contact with the dynamic and avant-garde community of fashionable artists involved with the *New French Spirit*. This collaborative mode of creative work and socializing continued until the end of his life. But his next-to-last period, this one of true isolation and disillusionment, is encapsulated in his “next-to-last thoughts.” Before moving on to work on commissions (especially *Socrate*, which, while a personal work, was commissioned by the Princesse de Polignac who specified the choice of text127), Satie composed a snapshot of himself in the guise of vignettes dedicated to other composers. For while each movement contains some trace of its dedicatee’s style (in the musical language, text, or sentiment), the piece as a whole is nothing other than eminently Satiean. Continuing with the idiosyncratic form of piano miniatures that he had developed in the preceding years, he incorporated quirky and humorous formulations into private pieces. Furthermore, he erased barlines as he had been known to do since his earliest mystical and religious compositions, especially *Ogives* and *Gnossiennes*. And, although Satie has long been associated with wit and humor, the continuity between his musical persona and his personal life is so complete that it would be impossible to dissociate the two. Satie was a self-stylist who never let

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126 Bergson describes the difference between familial and social obligations as being different enough in their degree so as to be of a different kind: “But it [a social obligation] is incomparably stronger. When one size is so much bigger than another that the latter is negligible in comparison, mathematicians say that it is of another order. Thus it is for the social obligation. Its pressure, compared with that of other habits, is such that the difference of degree equals a difference in kind.” “Mais c’est une obligation incomparablement plus forte. Quand une grandeur est tellement supérieure à une autre que celle-ci est négligeable par rapport à elle, les mathématiciens dissent qu’elle est d’un autre ordre. Ainsi pour l’obligation sociale. Sa pression, comparée à celle des autres habitudes, est telle que la différence de degré équivaut à une différence de nature.” Bergson *Deux Sources*, 12.

127 Although there is as of yet no conclusive evidence as to who chose the topic of the work, from the beginning *Socrate* was destined for the Princesse de Polignac, and Satie expressed his devotion to the project, as well as his delight in Victor Cousin’s translations of Plato’s text, in a letter to Valentine Gross of 6 January 1917, letter 411 in Volta, *Correspondance*, 273-4.
down the veil of his personality, and thus his humor is something we should take seriously. In the *Avant-dernière pensées*, the mundanity of the ostinato, coupled with the personal significance of the musical quotations (in the sense that quotation was a hallmark of his unique style), are the marks of a personal confession. For Satie, the next-to-last thoughts are not only about major musical personalities, but also about how he interacted with them. As an expression of French musical aesthetics during the First World War, they demonstrate the importance of the self, the feeling of isolation, the prominence of collage, and the shiver of religion.
Chapter 5
Reflection, Representation, Religion: André Caplet’s *Le Miroir de Jésus*

*Introduction*

André Caplet’s religious anxiety was of a different brand than Fauré’s or Saint-Saëns’s, who turned away from faith; Debussy’s, who expressed disinterest in religion at the same time as intense interest in spirituality and the Ideal; and Satie’s, who devised his own religion and later traded as a nihilist. For Caplet, Catholicism was enough. Caplet experienced neither a crisis nor a lapse of faith, as other composers did. But Caplet did not learn about music in a church, and he did not play the organ. Instead, he studied piano and violin as a young boy in Le Havre, his father advocated for him to receive instruction in music theory there, and he entered the Conservatoire de Paris. There his talent and general good work ethic earned him many first prizes, including the coveted Prix de Rome, in 1901 upon his second attempt. His early career saw him conducting in theaters, both in Le Havre and Paris, and it is rumored that he left his pension at the Villa Medici to study German orchestral conducting technique. He profited from this course both for his own profession—he was for years a conductor, first at the Boston Opera Company, then with various ensembles in Paris, including the Concerts Pasdeloup—and to write a short treatise on conducting, one of the first of its kind in French.¹ His connection with the Church was never instructional, never professional, and never mercenary.

Caplet composed a significant amount of religious music, including a Mass, motets, an unfinished *Sonata da chiesa*, and two larger concert works, *Épiphanie* and *Le miroir de Jésus*. But he was not viewed as a religious composer, and these many religious works

¹ For a very detailed study on Caplet’s life and career, focused on his connection with Debussy, see Denis Huneau, *André Caplet (1878-1925): Debussyste indépendant* (Weinsberg: Lucie Galland, 2007).
had ecumenical appeal that brought many modernist “-isms” together. Caplet’s compositions are relatively unknown to contemporary scholars, and the most recent mention of his style focuses so closely on the composer’s connection with Debussy that *Le Miroir* is taken as a “relatively rare religious contribution within his circle” and a work that speaks to a specifically post-war Catholicism à la Jacques Maritain. But Caplet’s circle valued, wrote, listened to, and performed music with a religious aura. This includes, of course, Debussy, whose thoroughly atheist worldview did not prevent him from taking up religious topics, explained in chapter 3. Caplet was more or less independent in his artistic and social life. He was well connected, and some considered him to have been a member of Les Apaches, since he knew Ravel, Schmitt, and Henry Février from his time at the Conservatoire. This group had a reputation, in fact, for bridging the aesthetic differences between the Conservatoire and the Schola, and many people associated with it wrote religious music of some kind, whether small cantiques and motets or larger dramatic works. But Caplet was not partisan in his criticism, conducting repertoire, or choice of performers, nor was he interested in polemics. In his lifetime, Caplet was viewed as an exemplary composer but by no means an anomaly.

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3 Jane Bathori names him as a member of this group, although Dmitri-Michel Calvocoressi does not mention Caplet among the members of the musical circle that met first at Ravel’s home and later at the Godebskis’. See Bathori, “Conférence sur André Caplet.” *Textes de conférences, RTF 1948*, BnF, département de la musique, Rés Vma. 334. In contrast, Michel-Dmitri Calvocoressi describes the group as having an inclusive spirit. See *Musicians Gallery: Music and Ballet in Paris and London* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1933), 64-5.

within the Parisian musical milieu. While there was no strong consensus on whose
religious style his own most closely resembled, it says much about his circle’s interest in
religious music to know that he was compared to Fauré, Debussy, and Arthur Honegger,
among others.⁵

Yet even though Caplet so peacefully and confidently side-stepped the political and
controversial nature of musically representing religion in the newly secular French
Republic, his music attests an aesthetic of religious anxiety. His interest in religious
topics such as the Mass, prayers, saints, and the rosary, and the creations his interest
inspired, are fraught with a mixture of avant-garde, reactionary, and popular musical
styles. He was at the same time a follower of: Debussy, specifically Debussy’s expansion
of tonality and rejection of traditional form⁶; Schoenberg’s 12-tone system of
composition and other innovations such as Sprechstimme; and the medieval tradition of
Gregorian chant, which he studied during immersive retreats at the infamous abbé de
Solesmes.⁷ These influences are all audible in his Miroir de Jésus and betray a certain
hesitation, a resistance to the prevailing notions—inspired by the 1903 Motu proprio and
trumpeted by Vincent d’Indy—of how contemporary religious music ought to sound.

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⁵ In his view of Le Miroir de Jésus, Theodor Lindenlaub described the work as a “touching younger sister of Fauré’s Requiem.” “La parution de la nouvelle œuvre de M. André Caplet est une jeune sœur émouvante du Requiem de Fauré.” See Le Temps, 27 May 1924. Likewise, André Cœuroy compares the two in his essay “Les formes actuelles de la musique religieuse,” La Revue musicale 6, no. 8 (June 1925): 233. Maurice Imbert claims that the Miroir de Jésus could make one think that Debussy had been reincarnated. See his review of the work in Le Courrier musical 27 no. 1 (January 1924), 16. Jacques Pillois contends that although the two use different stylistic means, Caplet and Honegger, in writing Le Miroir and Le Roi David, have joined in a singular trend. See La Revue Musicale 5, no. 8 (June 1924): 251-2.


⁷ Caplet’s interest in Debussy is witnessed by their friendship as well as Caplet’s orchestrations of Debussy’s works such as Gigiues, Children’s Corner, and La Boîte à joujoux. He left a trace of his interest in Schoenberg’s music in the concert of new Austrian music he conducted, reviewed by Louis Vuilemin, “Les Concerts Métèques,” Courrier musical (1 January 1923). Finally, Yvonne Gouverné made the first public acknowledgement of Caplet’s interest in the chant revival, in a lecture “André Caplet et Solesmes,” La Revue Grégorienne (1925), Rés. VM Dos 201 (6, 8).
In this chapter I hope to accomplish a double task. First, I will situate *Le Miroir de Jésus* with respect to Caplet’s own works and those his peers were creating, in order to expose a side of Caplet as creative artist that is little known in contemporary American scholarship. Second, by demonstrating the links between Caplet and his contemporaries, and the enthusiastic response to his music—*Le Miroir* in particular was lauded as Caplet’s masterpiece by countless critics—I hope to reveal a deeper truth about musical practice in early twentieth-century France, one that will destabilize our understanding of the spiritual side of art and its role in modernist aesthetics. Caplet was no Holy Roller. Far from living a monastic life of converted bliss, he struggled with doubts about his spirituality, his physical strength—vastly diminished after he suffered gas strikes in the War—, and his gifts as a composer. His private journals attest to a deeply troubled soul, one all the more troubled after experiencing four years of wartime trauma. But this religious strife ultimately yielded mature religious works of great depth and feeling, which in his day were “not widely enough known in Catholic milieux.” By drawing inspiration from Debussy’s brand of Symbolist mysticism, the pre-20th-century chant restoration project at Solesmes, the French nationalist program of Classicism, and more recent converts such as Henri Ghéon, Caplet’s *Le Miroir de Jésus* is an important example of continuity between pre- and post-WWI spirituality in art. With no professional obligation to properly serve a congregation’s doctrinal or liturgical needs, and with no social allegiances confining him to produce music with the imprint of a specific stylistic mold, Caplet was free to assimilate his interests. He makes an ideal case study for understanding how the post-war revival of Catholic spirituality amongst artists

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and intellectuals in France shows strong connections with the fin-de-siècle religion of art attitude. The very anxiety that led Caplet to search for a personal, new musical language of devotion is what will lead to a reorientation of scholarly assumptions about modernity and secularism. That Caplet was not alone in a search for a new spiritual art, but that he did so independently of others, shows the strength of independent spirituality, an inheritance of the end of the nineteenth century, well into the twentieth.

*Caplet’s religious musical language and Le Miroir de Jésus*

*Le Miroir de Jésus* defies genre, school, and tradition. Some have called it an oratorio, others a sacred drama. More similar to a song cycle, in *Le Miroir* Caplet sets 15 poems to music, sung originally by Claire Croiza, the first woman singer in France to specialize in recitals of intimate *mélodies* and Lieder. The mezzo soprano soloist is supported by a string orchestra, harps, and a small choir of women. The poems focus on the Biblical character of Mary, the Virgin mother of Jesus. She appears in the poetry as a normal woman observing the extraordinary life of her son and experiencing divine intervention through the presence of angels and her own journey to heaven. Henri Ghéon wrote the poems in 1918, and he organized them into three groups of five, each called a “mirror,” each referring to one of the mysteries of the rosary. These are the three themes that persons praying the rosary are instructed to contemplate, and they focus on events of Jesus’ life. The joyful mysteries group miracles from the beginning of his life (visitation by the archangel, visit from Mary to Elizabeth, Jesus’ birth, his presentation at

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10 They were published multiple times, including an illustrated edition with engravings by Maurice Denis. Ghéon, *Le Miroir de Jésus* (Paris: L’Art catholique, 1920), and Ghéon, *Chants de la vie et de la foi* (Paris: Jouve, 1936).
the Temple, and Jesus teaching in the Temple). Jesus’ passion and death comprise the sorrowful mysteries; events of his resurrection, as well as Mary’s assumption into heaven, fill the joyful mysteries.\(^{11}\) Caplet sets each poem as its own song, and he adds three instrumental preludes, one to introduce each *Miroir*. Not destined for performance as a piece of liturgical music, and not even incorporating organ, the church instrument *par excellence*, in the work Caplet avoids the grandeur of official Catholicism. He communicated that the work had more in common with Symbolist spirituality by insisting on Croiza as soloist, since she was best known for her interpretations of Fauré’s and Debussy’s songs.\(^{12}\) In choosing a cycle of poetry written by a recent convert and layperson, rather than a traditional Church scripture or text by a priest, Caplet opts for the side door into a musical representation of faith. And since the poems focus on Mary rather than Jesus, the side door shows only a glimpse of the Christian savior, through a mirror as it were, rather than confronting the face of God directly.

The opening has attracted much attention for its artificial self-referentiality: the women’s choir begins the piece by singing the title and the names of its author and composer.\(^{13}\) The *a capella* entrance of the women’s choir, singing in open fifths, recalls the choir’s first phrase in Debussy’s *La Damoiselle Elue*, which opens on a major triad

\(^{11}\) For more on the history of the tradition, see “Rosary,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 2\(^{nd}\) edition, vol 12 (Detroit: Gale, 2003): 373-76.


\(^{13}\) In their reviews of the work, Lindenlaub, Dézarnaux (*La Liberté*), Coeuroy (*La Revue musicale*), Yves-Marc, (*La Revue Française*), André George (*Les Nouvelles Littéraires*), and Maurice Brillant (*Le Correspondant*) all mention that the choir sings the titles.
voiced similarly with the octave in the outer voices, also (by chance, because it is also the first line) with the title of the piece.

![Example 23 Debussy, La Damoselle Elue, mm. 49-50](image)

But *La Damoselle Elue* is not the only piece to ask its performers to present its title; *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* also has a prelude (non-musical) in which an actor recites the name of the piece and the authors. Additionally, roughly contemporaneous with *Le Miroir*, Darius Milhaud wrote musical stage directions in *La Brebis égarée*. A letter from Milhaud to Caplet specifying the loge where Milhaud has reserved a seat for Caplet attests that Caplet knew the work. Additionally, other genres occasionally set some paratextual information, such as Victoria’s setting of the Holy Saturday Lamentations, which includes musical settings of the illuminated letters at the beginning of each section.\(^{14}\) Caplet’s musical titles place *Le Miroir* within the tradition of religious works composed for non-sacred performance contexts.

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Although some have written about unity in *Le Miroir*, the musical language is so new that any unifying traits are idiosyncratic: there is no conventional tonal scheme, repetition of sections as a formal frame, or cyclic motivic recall.\(^{15}\) One document preserved in the Fonds André Caplet at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, a rhythmic sketch of the work’s prosody, suggests that attention to the text was at the heart of the project, and the melody and harmony came later.\(^{16}\) According to letters he wrote to his wife in summer 1923, Caplet composed the instrumental preludes to the three miroirs last, after he had completed all 15 poetry settings.\(^{17}\) They orient the listener tonally, they introduce some of the musical ideas, and, critically, they provide a kind of musical exposition.

Setting the musical stage, the first prelude invites the listener into the pastoral, sensuous garden where the archangel visits Mary in *Le Miroir*’s first poem.\(^{18}\) The harp plays the first solo instrument motif after the women’s choir has sung the title. It suggests the musical practice of both classical garden nymphs or Apollo’s lyre and celestial bodies who strum harps. In addition, it delineates tonal space and rhythmic playfulness in mm. 16-21.

Example 24 *Le Miroir de Jésus*, Prelude to "Miroir de Joie," mm. 16-21, harp solo

\(^{15}\) For example, Robert Brussel in *Le Figaro* (5 May 1924), Joseph Baruzi in *Le Menestrel* (June 1924), and Maurice Brillant in *Le Correspondant*.

\(^{16}\) BNF MS 20093, Département de la Musique.

\(^{17}\) These are collected in NLA 271 (1-59). The first one concerning *Le Miroir* is letter no. 11 of July 25, 1923.

\(^{18}\) For a reading of this poem, see below, p. 279.
Its melodic leaps of perfect fourths become the sound of peace, while the rhythmic acceleration—and shift from duple to triple subdivisions—creates the characteristic fluttering sensation for the prelude. This musical effervescence is essential to Caplet’s sensuality, his resistance of austere church aesthetics. Finally, the landing pitch of this harp solo, the E, grounds the prelude with a central tone that recurs at structurally significant moments, providing the sense of tension and repose when it is reinforced or challenged. The short exchange between choir and string quartet mm. 23-29 grows out of this E natural, with parallel motion in the choir and quartet built on the E as a reference pitch with a sensual trichord built around it by the outward motion of the upper and lower voices, to D-E-F♯.
Caplet uses silence to delineate sections in this prelude, bringing the music to a full, dramatic stop before slightly changing tact for a different rhythmic or tonal setting. In the prelude, this happens many times, for example at m. 117, just after the midpoint. The
energy completely inverts, moving from the frenetic clash of rhythms and close harmonies of the first section to a fully homophonic passage full of traditional major triads (that nonetheless move in tonally surprising ways).

Example 26 Prelude to "Miroir de joie," mm. 115-20

Silence comes to have symbolic meaning in Le Miroir: in the first song, “Annonciation,” a silent pause marks the angel’s arrival and the sudden change he brings. In m. 20, after a first section framed by a perfectly homophonous contrapuntal passage in the string quartet (mm. 2-3 and mm. 16-17), one stark beat of silence clears space through the plodding struggle for a triumphant ascending harp glissando. The harp continues to glissando upward, seven times while the singer proclaims the final three lines of the poem: “Today it is all Love and all Joy that the Master sends you!” The singer has switched roles: no longer narrating, now she embodies the angel. The harp, which had previously played ascending glissandi that were not prepared by a grand pause, becomes the heavenly presence. In m. 8, when it plays its first ascending glissando, it enters with the choir singing a text that Caplet added: “Ave Maria.” Caplet theatricalizes the music, adding an angelic atmosphere he imagines to the garden the poem describes. The choir
and harp play a fantasy role, helping enliven the third-person narration of the poem’s opening. But it is silence that signals the shift, the silence itself symbolizing transformation from narration to direct discourse, or from the material to the spiritual.

As a reader of poetry, Caplet does more than present characters and highlight dramatic exchanges; he also creates evocative emotional vignettes. In this way, his approach to the form of Le Miroir is not dissimilar from Debussy’s in Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien: the preludes for the five acts of Le Martyre eschew the overture’s traditional function of introducing characters’ themes in favor of setting a mood. In the prelude to the “Miroir de Peine,” Caplet channels the ambiance of Debussy’s Prelude to act 2 of Le Martyre, “la Chambre Magique.” Briefly, a harp arpeggio, first in sixteenth notes and then in sixteenth note triplets invokes the idea of mirroring.

![Example 27 Prelude to "Miroir de peine," mm. 2-5](image)

It mimics the act of reflection in its mirror-image ascent and descent, but its rhythmic diminution suggests that reflection subtly changes the original. Moving further into the prelude, Caplet writes a monophonic, plaintive lament.
Laced with half-step motion and surprising leaps, the melodic figures consistently descend, contrasting the constant upward motion of the “Miroir de Joie” prelude. A refrain orders the four sections, the most timid, downtrodden refrain possible. Over two measures, the string quartet plays in unison three long low A♭s and then ascends a step to a sustained B♭. This refrain does not have a melodic counterpart in the five poems that follow, but it contributes to the weighty atmosphere of personal pain that Caplet creates.

The *Miroir de peine*, or painful mysteries, in Caplet’s world revolve around two ideas: the stillness of this refrain, and a deliberately plodding walking bass line, a reference to the traditional descending tetrachord but mirrored through inversion. Caplet hints at this motive, at [44] stylizing and syncopating it (against nothing, so that the syncopation is less of a jazzy metric conflict and more a floating metrical ambiguity).
He also fragments it so that a large leap (first by augmented 6th and then by octave) breaks up its predictable motion. This fragmented motive is picked up in the beginning of the first poem, “Agonie au jardin,” where the contrabass and harp together outline a mostly stepwise descent from Bb to Eb, then expanding to an octave C-C.

The lament motive makes another appearance in the most doleful of the painful mysteries, “Portement de Croix.” Throughout the previous poems, Mary contemplates the stages just before Jesus will be crucified. She thinks about his time in the garden of Gethsemane, herself at home looking out on her own garden. The scene of Jesus’s whipping is reflected in Mary’s memories of protecting him from harm when he was a
child. When he wears the crown of thorns, she wonders how it relates to the crowns of flowers she made for him; she contemplates the respective places of humility and poverty compared to sin and blasphemy. Finally, when Jesus carries the cross, Mary is present at the event, no longer trapped in her house or lost in her memory. But this is the most painful experience of all, because although she is now with Jesus, seeing him on his path, she knows she can do nothing. Caught between her recollections of raising the child-savior and accepting her role as the mother of all, in “Portement de Croix” Mary realizes that others will help Jesus on his way. Caplet captures the dread of this moment by setting the opening of “Portement de croix” with the lament motive, in inversion. This is a mirror image of lament, conveying the idea that Mary’s pain is only a fraction of Christ’s.

Example 31 "Portement de Croix," mm. 1-2, bass and cello duet

The motive underlines most of the song, until Mary directly confronts her own situation. When she says, “And as for me,” the accompaniment ends. The stillness and dread are complete, the voice is left alone, as first a cry and then a stunned monologue, trailing off into a monotone recitation of the final phrase on a low C, the lowest note of the piece, and a unifying pitch for the joyful mysteries, because it is the final note also of “Agonie au jardin” and “Flagellation.” At the end of this poem, the inverted lament motive flips through the mirror again to descend to the final note, confirming the identity of the ascending stepwise pattern as a reflection of the archetypal descending one.
In the last of the 15 poems, the poet interjects to reflect on the act of narrating, claiming that he will no longer write a poem since he cannot understand the vibrations of heaven. This is where his story has taken him, to the moment when Mary receives a heavenly crown from her son. In a creative mirroring of Mary’s realization of her impotence during the “Portement de Croix,” just like at that moment, Caplet sets the singer’s text as an unaccompanied recitation. He writes a long introduction to give this final poem more weight, balancing the entire work. The introduction is simpler—with less counterpoint, less dissonance—than the short introductions to each of the other poems, and it is more similar to the preludes to each of the three Miroirs. The choir sings an angelic line at the top of the texture. Between the choir, a soaring melody in the viola, and constant harp glissandi, Caplet builds a very large ensemble sound, which comes to a crashing halt to contrast all the more distinctly with the singer’s lowliness. The brilliance of Caplet’s setting of this poem resides not only in the texture, but also in the gradual increase in the size of the ensemble from the total liquidation of energy through to the spectacular climax at the final phrase, “the mother whose son crowns her.” Caplet uses the choir as an ensemble instrument, giving them first the oscillating sextuplets that the strings played in the effervescent prelude to the Miroir de Joie and, at the end, the scalar figures that, in the harps, signaled the transition from material to spirit. At the end of the piece, Caplet tells us in music that Mary has become the full reflection of Jesus through sanctification. Where the poet stops short, Caplet as the composer steps in to give a fleeting but powerful sound of Mary’s heavenly glory.

Creating a personal style and genre unlike anything in either the religious or secular repertory, Caplet frees himself from tradition while also challenging himself to create
musical meaning. Although he avoids quoting from plainchant, he sets *a capella* passages for the choir that immediately suggest medieval Church music, as many critics intuited after the first public performance. Although he disavowed tonality and functional harmony, he strategically used pitches to emphasize significant moments of the story as he interpreted them. By choosing an idiosyncratic chamber ensemble, he had the opportunity to use instruments in a pictorial but not clichéd way: the harp lent itself to the imagery of the mirror that the text always suggests but never names. Finally, Caplet does not shy away from the technique of melodrama, asking his singer to speak instead of sing. In these moments he infuses his work with a sense of realism, while at the same time contributing to a personalized reading of the poetry that connects the poet and Mary through their shared impotence.

*Ghéon and Poetry, Caplet and Poetry*

As a reader of poetry, and one who found personal meaning in an existing text, Caplet was not engaged in a direct collaboration with the poet. The texts for *Le Miroir* comes from a 1918 collection by Henri Ghéon, an author who converted to Catholicism after the harrowing trauma of the Great War. By the time Caplet undertook the project five years later, Ghéon’s works had garnered sympathetic attention in Catholic literary circles. He himself was active in promoting Catholic art, and he was on the board of contributors, along with critic Maurice Brillant and theologian Jacques Maritain, of the literary journal

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Les Cahiers Catholiques.\textsuperscript{20} The journal was devoted to theater in particular and even had its own censorship board, approved by the Archbishop of Paris, in order to issue recommendations in favor of and against new works with Catholic subjects.\textsuperscript{21} This journal published resounding endorsements of Ghéon’s plays, including one by the Chanoine Alfred Bros, heartily recommending the works because of their literary merit, their wide diversity of saintly types portrayed, and the rich characterization that allows audiences to feel personal connections with the protagonists.\textsuperscript{22}

Bros’s estimation of Ghéon’s writing can easily extend to his poetry in Le Miroir. In this collection, Mary appears as a person, tangible, with distinct emotions. The first poem in the cycle, “Annonciation,” focuses not on the archangel from Gospel stories but rather on Mary, as an ordinary girl. “What does this messenger want from you? / And for whom this basket? / You have asked for nothing / But to stay forever the same, / Chaste, well-behaved, and each day / Content with little love, / Resigned to little joy…”\textsuperscript{23} We do not simply see Mary as she was before becoming the mother of Jesus, but we see her as if she were never to accept such a vocation. Mary becomes a much more human figure in this presentation, which denies her the destiny known to us now. Ghéon leaves out the filigree of medieval gothic angels and also the distinct exoticism of historically accurate

\textsuperscript{20} This was a bi-monthly review published by an independent firm, Founded in 1919 by Jacques Debout and continued until 1939. The year it closed, the journal offered a tribute to its founder, Hommage à Jacques Debout (Paris: Cahiers Catholiques, 1939).

\textsuperscript{21} This group was listed just below the Director, Secretary, and General Administrative staff in the journal’s frontmatter: “Ecclesiastic censors designated by the Archbishopric for the Cahiers Catholiques: M. le Chanoine Dupin, Director of the “Semaine religieuse,” M. L’Abbé Touzard, Professor at the Institut Catholique.”

\textsuperscript{22} See Bros, “Le théâtre de Ghéon et la vie des saints,” Les Cahiers Catholiques no. 110 (June 1924): 2977-81.

\textsuperscript{23} “Que vous veut ce messager ? / Et pour qui cette corbeille ? / Vous n’avez rien demandé / Que de demeurer pareille, / Chaste, sage, et chaque jour / Contente de peu d’amour, / Résignée à peu de joie…” Ghéon, “Annonciation.”
depictions of the Holy Family in the Middle East. Her values are those of average pious women, her hopes and dreams those of modest girls.

In the pages of *Les Cahiers Catholiques*, Bros notes that Ghéon is a neoclassicist, a follower of André Gide. He makes reference to the austerity of Ghéon’s verses as well as the clarity of emotions he portrays, adding that he “perceives a certain rejection of eloquence, but not of poetry.” Ghéon was, by the time Caplet set to work on *Le Miroir*, widely recognized as part of the circle of avant-garde Catholic artists orbiting around Maritain. But classicism, as the historian Stephen Schloesser has investigated, was a contested part of Catholic aesthetics in the postwar period. For some, Classicism invoked the pure formalism favored by the art-for-art school. For others, it was associated with the renaissance masters whose pompous attitude placed them outside of the religious sphere. In music, Classicism experienced a shifting valuation, from critics’ wholesale rejection of it during the fin-de-siècle period that favored avant-garde shock to their embrace of it after Cocteau’s postwar call to order. As Schloesser has shown, Maritain’s legacy to the world of religious art was to break apart the classicists’ monopoly over Catholicism. He supported all those rebellious spirits who may not have chosen to take up religious subjects directly but instead used their religious spirit to infuse their art with a Christian message of salvation or redemption.

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24 The connection between Ghéon and Gide would become a source of torment for both of them after Ghéon’s conversion. They bonded over a homosexual experience at the country home of Francis Jammes, and they kept up a hearty correspondence for over a decade. After Ghéon converted, the two never fully reconciled or attained their previous level of friendship and intimacy. See Ghéon, *Correspondance* (Paris, Gallimard, 1976), especially the introduction, 1-17. See also Jacques Reynaud, *Henri Ghéon 1875-1944, étude et bibliographie* (Paris: Association des amis d’Henri Ghéon, 1960).
25 Ibid.
26 See *Jazz Age Catholicism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).
27 See Ibid., Chapter 6, on the changing valuation of the painter Henri Rouault, 213-244.
28 In some ways this is a foundational argument of Maritain’s *Art et Scolastique*. 

Even before his conversion, Ghéon himself was sensitive to the distinction between topic and tone in art. In a lecture given at *La Libre esthétique* in Brussels, for example, he lambasted all those critics who foolishly grouped together the many poets of Symbolism as fellow travelers. “We can call it a grouping if we want, but it is a grouping of consciously individualist writers who do not share a special aesthetic, an art of their own without past or future, but who rally around creative art and human art, around total art, and against formalism and empiricism.”

At that time, he favored a future of literature founded on the technical advancements of Gustave Flaubert. This perfectionistic author treated many of the same themes as the decadents, but he did so without deforming language. Ghéon wrote many times in the years before the War about Classicism, critiquing both Jean Moréas and Gabriele d’Annunzio for their improper attempts to turn French language back to an era before cosmopolitanism. He applauds their interest in the French classics like Racine, Pascal, and La Rochefoucauld, but he critiques their sloppy application of Classical attitudes, their slavish respect of forms without integrating their content, their imperfect selection of material appropriate to Classicism.

His own poetry models the ideal of Classicism he had developed through his critical practice. But for this reason, it is hard to understand what drew Caplet to *Le Miroir*.

Classical proportion was not always present in Caplet’s previous works. Instead, writing

29 “Quel fou osa jamais grouper sous quelque nom générique d’école, des esprits aussi différents, aussi contraires, que ceux de Verlaine et de Mallarmé, de Vielé-Griffin et de Verhaeren, de Henri de Régnier et de Jules Lafargue, de Jean Moréas et de Gustave Kahn, pour ne citer ici que les aînés. Groupement si l’on veut, mais groupement d’individualités conscientes qui s’élevèrent non point au nom d’une esthétique spéciale, d’un art à eux, sans passer et sans lendemain, mais au nom de l’art créateur et de l’art humain, au nom de l’art total, et contre le formisme et contre l’empirisme.” Ghéon, “Réalisme et poésie, conférence fait à la Libre Esthétique de Bruxelles, 6 mars 1901,” in *Nos directions* (Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française, 1911), 24.

30 For example in *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (1874), *Trois Contes* (1877), which include *Hérodias*, *Saint Julien l’Hospitalier*, and *Un Cœur simple*.

31 See essays on Moréas and d’Annunzio in Ghéon, *Nos directions*. 
Le Miroir may have introduced Caplet to a fold of Catholics who practiced Classicism as a style to save religious aesthetics from the taint of prewar Symbolism, which had, at least since Baudelaire’s Les Fleurs du Mal, exploited Catholic imagery as a means to express anxiety toward the changing intellectual status of Catholic thought. As a composer who came of age during the peak of Symbolist activity in French music, and especially having worked closely with Debussy, whose personal and artistic affinity for artists and works of this movement determined his style, classicism does not seem like a natural orientation for Caplet. Indeed, like Debussy, he took an interest in Edgar Allen Poe, writing a Conte Fantastique based on the story of Poe’s Mort de la masque rouge.

In 1923, when he was writing Le Miroir, Caplet was still inspired by Baudelaire, setting his “La Cloche fêlée.” A sonnet composed in alexandrines, with 12-syllable lines and a caesura, it is pristine and proportioned. But its subject—sentimentalized nostalgia, regret, death—is more typical of late Romantic aesthetics. In its languor and stillness it evokes lassitude, a lost struggle against formal control. A church bell is the primary image, the symbol of a fading religion that represents memory more than the present.

The poetic persona compares the weak, but persistent, sound of the tolling bell to the cries of a faithful soldier, keeping watch at night. The metaphor is enriched when the poetic persona’s own soul is compared not with the strong soldier but with a weak and

32 Myriam Wattheé-Delmonte has explored these allusions, judging that Baudelaire refers to the Bible for cathartic purposes, demonstrating to Christians that the image of their God is founded on the fundamentally evil human, and to atheists that human evilness has no bounds. See “L’intertextualité biblique chez Baudelaire et Verlaine: le contre-type du “grand code,’” Lettres romanes 63, no. 1 (2009), 61. See also Porter, The Crisis of French Symbolism, 10-11.
injured one who has been left for dead on a bloody battlefield. Baudelaire innovates, but subtly, in this poem, by mixing the senses. A fire palpitates like a heart, a memory is something we listen to like a song. Baudelaire’s persona asks us to hear a landscape, which has a bell but no church, a pool of blood but no battlefield, a fire but no hearth.

Caplet was closely tied with singers such as Croiza who were championing the mélodies of Fauré and Debussy. In “La cloche fêlée” he creates a twentieth-century homage to their style. The intense chromaticism of the opening section recalls Debussy’s Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire, and the incessant piano texture refers the listener to Fauré’s piano writing in his melodies. Caplet’s through-composed setting does not lean on the poem for its structure; the first key change occurs before the first stanza break. Instead, the affect, tortured throughout, changes with the pivotal word “me,” which marks the beginning of the sestet. Four measures of piano interlude allow the energy built up from the high point on “tente” to the self-reflexive reference. This interlude maintains a dissonant but tonally ambiguous sonority that starts as a diminished seventh chord on F# (enharmonic with the song’s opening harmony of Gb) that is reduced to the augmented fourth C-F#. Although the new softer, stiller section introduces a Bb, the dissonant mode is maintained with the melody outlining an augmented fifth, Bb-F#. Caplet preserves the proportions of Fauré’s and Debussy’s melodies, but he updates them with a subtler sense of form. The sestet of the poem is musically cast in an ultra-soft, dépouillé texture so contrasting with the setting of the octave as to seem to belong to a different song entirely. There is nothing particularly classical about this setting, from the choice of poetry to the musical references, to the modernization of style. Unlike Ghéon and the classicists of the
renouveau catholique, Caplet unabashedly embraced his immediate artistic heritage and created personal ways of pushing forward for a new, rather than derivative, art.

**Caplet and Classicism: Le Tombeau de Ronsard**

Even though Caplet was invested in the modernist style forged by Debussy, he was not opposed to Classicism. The history of French aesthetics growing from Romanticism to Modernism is intricately woven with an appreciation for the Gallo-Roman conception of Mediterranean culture and its veneration of Latin classicism. And if the term “Neoclassicism” did not enter the discourse until 1923 as a way to distinguish between the aesthetics of Stravinsky and Schoenberg, the idea of reviving Classical forms, archetypes, drama, and imagery was prevalent in 19th-century French arts. The French concept of Classicism was itself a kind of *mise en abîme*, where classical proportions of Greek drama, sculpture, and architecture, were treated by 16th-century French authors such as Corneille and Molière and re-examined and reincarnated by contemporary artists. This Hellenist vogue for the Classicism of Greco-Roman antiquity inspired literary and academic studies, such as the 1828 work by Sainte-Beuve that reconsidered Pierre de Ronsard as one of the most important French classical writers of the 16th-century. It was after this seminal study, an early-twentieth-century French literary historian contended,

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35 Although Tamara Levitz acknowledges the deep connection between Classicism and Modernism in the introduction to her recent monograph about Stravinsky’s *Perséphone*, she sees them as antagonistic. She considers that vis-à-vis Stravinsky, Neoclassicism had two problems: “how neoclassical composers related to the past, and whether such retrospectivism could be reconciled with the project of modernism,” and “how neoclassicism reflected nationalist ideology.” *Modernist Mysteries: Perséphone* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 13-4. Kelly is more receptive to the idea that modernism and classicism are inherently linked: “I show that the secular gaiety of the [1920s] is only part of the story, and that a strain of religious thinking pervaded and sustained the period, working with the collective sense of post-war trauma and infiltrating into what we often term neoclassical thinking about the nature and purpose of the work of art and the role of the artist.” *Music and Ultramodernism*, 188-9.

that his popularity grew among scholars and poets.\textsuperscript{37} By the end of the nineteenth century, musicologist Julien Tiersot had also become interested in the poet. He published a collection of settings of poems by Ronsard, as part of his ongoing project of collecting French folk songs to demonstrate the musicality of French patrimony.\textsuperscript{38} Heugel republished the scores he prepared for this study as a proper musical edition in 1924, the 400\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Ronsard’s birth.\textsuperscript{39}

The Heugel edition was a commercial re-print of a scholarly study Tiersot had completed more than 20 years prior. As an advocate of the rigor and objectivity associated with modernist ideas, as well as the avant-garde aesthetics of his time, Tiersot turned to Ronsard as a precious representative of renaissance thought. In his poetry and in other writings, such as a letter to King Charles IX in defense of music, Ronsard heartily advocated for a restoration of classical aesthetics. He argued that in order to restore to contemporary France the glory that poetry had attained for ancient Greek culture, it needed to become “lyric” again, that is, allied with music. This alliance would need to be thorough, meaning that both the creation of poetry—its meter, rhyme, form, and subject—and its performance or declamation would need to be done with a musical sensibility. If modern scholarship showed a revived interest in Renaissance thought as a precursor to Enlightenment ideas and as a source of Gallic pride, Ronsard was a perfect case study for musicologists. For, like the post-Wagnerian critics and creators of the early


\textsuperscript{38} Julien Tiersot, “Ronsard et la musique de son temps,” Breitkopf & Härtel, 1889. In a recent article, Sindhumathi Revuluri argues that Tiersot’s folk song project was part of not only nationalist musicological work but also an active construction of the French provinces as the site of historical France. See “French Folk Songs and the Invention of History,” \textit{19\textsuperscript{th}-Century Music} 39, no. 3 (2016): 248-271.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Chansons de Ronsard, reconstituées et transcrites par Julien Tiersot} (Paris: Heugel, 1924).
20th century, he advocated and even practiced the fusion of arts in support of a deeper means of personal expression.

If Sainte-Beuve’s treatment of Ronsard was a watershed for some Ronsard scholars, others considered that the critic’s approach was too “timid.” Indeed, some historiographical discussions of the Renaissance, after the First World War, were the occasion for self-reflection on how academic study can bear identifying traits of those who produce it. Tiersot accomplishes this subtly, presenting Ronsard’s qualities in terms of his own values. Exemplifying nationalism, he was the “French poet par excellence;” representing modernity he effectuated a “literary revolution” all without denigrating the existing tradition; in accordance with Hellenism he “willingly” drew inspiration from Greek and Roman antiquity; and he had to overcome physical struggles in order to create his art: “he was deaf—like Beethoven!”40 Tiersot justifies his study primarily by arguing that Ronsard was the last great representative of the era when poetry and music were considered two parts of the same art. But he also ascribes to the poet extra qualities that would appeal to readers sympathetic to Tiersot’s own intellectual predilections. Similarly Gustave Cohen, whose book-length study of Ronsard also appeared in the year of the poet’s 4th centenary, offers a historical view of Ronsard as of a kin with modern writers. He quotes Pierre de Nolhac, another historian, who recounts the difference in approach between modern and romantic scholars: “We smile on their hesitations and reservations, and our admiration no longer restrains itself to choosing from Ronsard’s immense œuvre a few little odes and some sonnets. We want to take stock of the entire monument and examine all the details… nothing about this effort, out of which comes all modern French

poetry, leaves us indifferent.” This mission statement, albeit borrowed, testifies to the grandeur of the modernist scholarly ego. Twentieth-century scholars position themselves against romantic scholars in both aim and aptitude. They describe themselves as better equipped to take stock of their subjects. Like Tiersot, Cohen via de Nolhac identifies with Ronsard, who is the father of the very modernity that made his scholarly method possible.

Early twentieth-century scholars thus did more than due diligence by devoting studies to Ronsard’s aesthetic at the time of a major anniversary. They were also enriching their own origin story, looking for more proof that their interests were not sui generis but rather organically related to a rich tradition. Cohen in particular, who wrote about all of Ronsard’s poetry, not just the few sonnets, odes, and Chansons that were published with musical settings during the poet’s life, considered his wider intellectual heritage. In a chapter about the *Hymnes*, written in 1555-56, Cohen addressed French renaissance cosmology, misunderstood by 20th-century readers owing to revisionist tampering. For at least a century, critics positioned the renaissance as a proto-Enlightenment, when intellectuals had already thrown off the mantle of medieval Christian dogma. Cohen argued that it would be anachronistic to consider any renaissance thinker an atheist, however tempting it may be. Ronsard’s poem about Hercules, for example, makes him a forebear of Christ, with his twelve tasks predicting the twelve apostles of Jesus or the 12 stations of the cross. Protestant scholars vigorously disputed Ronsard’s Christianity. Pierre Champion claimed that the temporal distance separating the renaissance from his own era makes knowing the mentality of the age particularly difficult, especially because

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Ronsard’s life was, like the turn of the twentieth century, a time when religion had become a political tool in France. The wars of religion ravaged the kingdom in the 16th century, when a succession of kings from Charles IX to Henri III rejected Catholicism in favor of an a-religious loose morality inspired by Italian renaissance humanists and later embraced the Huguenot brand of Protestantism. Thus in Champion’s view, Ronsard cannot truly be considered Christian. Protestant scholars aligned him with Protestant aesthetics while Catholic scholars took him as an example of stalwart Catholicism (during a time of theological upheaval), because Ronsard himself changed his religious beliefs. “He put most of his talent if not in the service of tolerance, at least in service of the queen who sought to calm the factions, and always in service of his country.” It is hard not to read this correction as yet another example of a scholar holding Ronsard as a mirror of his own time, and unlike Cohen, Champion devotes very little of his book to the philosophical and theological resonances of Ronsard’s writing. Whichever religious beliefs Ronsard witnessed in his poetry, it is clear that by the 20th century, he was often used as a cipher for the aesthetic or intellectual program promoted by an author.

Ronsard had become a popular object of artistic engagement, and that same year, the Revue musicale published a special issue devoted to Ronsard and music. In addition to articles by Louis Laloy, Henry Prunières, André Schaeffner, and André Coœur concerning Ronsard’s musicality, relationship with the court, connection to the “chanson française,” and his predecessors, the Revue also published a Tombeau de Ronsard in its “supplément musical” with eight new pieces commissioned for the occasion. The

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45 *Revue musicale* 5 no. 5 (May 1924).
supplément includes eight songs to words by Ronsard, with music by Paul Dukas, Maurice Ravel, Albert Roussel, André Caplet, Louis Aubert, Arthur Honegger, Maurice Delage, and Roland-Manuel. This list can tell us much about the place of French Classicism in the interwar musical scene. These composers were not only eminent, but also largely avant-garde in their orientation. Only one member of Les Six, Honegger, is included, but the majority were founding members of, or frequent collaborators with, the Société Musicale Indépendante.\textsuperscript{46} Roussel, something of a marginal figure, if still well regarded as a composer, was closely associated with Classicism, especially in his post-War works.\textsuperscript{47} Ravel, too, often took up Hellenic or Classical topics and forms in his music. Moreover, these composers were connected through friendship; the time of the SMI’s creation was one of rich artistic collaboration that saw frequent intimate soirées, notably at the home of Maurice Delage, one of the contributors to the Tombeau.

For the Tombeau, the eight composers chose poems from Ronsard’s second published collection, Les Amours de P. de Ronsard.\textsuperscript{48} Here the question of religiosity is not openly at issue. Ronsard writes sonnets of love, in what Sainte-Beauve identified as a Petrarchian vein.\textsuperscript{49} Caplet set one of the most famous of Ronsard’s love sonnets, “Doux fut le trait.” The sonnet was chided by 20th-century critics who found the neologisms too precious: within 12 lines there are four different words constructed from the word “doux”

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\textsuperscript{46} Duchesneau, L'avant-garde musicale à Paris.
\textsuperscript{47} See Oincherle, Albrert Roussel (Geneva, 1957).
\textsuperscript{48} Ronsard’s principal works were: Les Odes (1550-1552), Les Amours (1552, 1555, 1556, and 1578), Les Hymnes (1555-6), Les Discours (1562-1563), and La Franciade (1572).
\textsuperscript{49} Sainte-Beuve declares that although Ronsard’s poetry might not have much inherent value, it is worthy of acclaim because of Ronsard’s innovation of making poetic imitations of ancient masters. He considers this a significant contribution to French letters. The first master Sainte-Beuve names among Ronsard’s sources of inspiration is Petrarch. See Tableau historique, 67.
(soft or sweet), occurring 11 times. Yet it is well-suited to musical setting, since it evokes a lover’s song: she sings the poet’s verses while accompanying herself on the lyre. The poet describes his soul leaving his body when he hears his love’s voice and enjoys her bodily approach to the stringed instrument, which is “enlivened by her thumb.” The lover is equated with the goddess of love, and hearing her song is the only way to learn the sound of pleasure’s call. The sense of sound draws the poet and his lover together as the laugh, voice, and song all lead the lover to his sweet death. This sweet death, such a common trope in Italian humanist love poetry, is the frame of “Doux fut le trait,” which begins with cupid making his fatal shot and ends with the poet dying next to his love.

Although his is not the only setting in the Tombeau to use an instrument other than piano to accompany the singer, Caplet’s “Doux fut le trait” is the only one to use a stringed instrument, recalling the lute or lyre of Ronsard’s musical imagination. Caplet chooses the harp, as he did frequently, in works such as Le Miroir, Les prières, and Conte fantastique. Tonality functions freely in the sonnet; at times the orientation seems modal, or atonal, before a progression of tone clusters built on fourths or fifths, native to the harp, provide some inventive orientation. The vocal writing challenges the singer, who moves in leaps through a wide range that in the first two measures alone already spans an eleventh. Unlike the 16th-century settings of Ronsard’s poems that Tiersot critiqued for their rigid strophic form, Caplet’s sonnet, like all the pieces in the Tombeau, uses through composition to highlight the emotional twists and turns of the text more than the

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50 For example, Marie-Joseph Lagrange suggests that Ronsard’s repetition of the word “doux,” although probably a device he learned from the classic literature, runs the risk of becoming mannerist. Epître aux Romains: Saint Paul (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1931), 1.
strictures of the *forme fixe*. Melodic difficulty is a hallmark of Caplet’s mature style, extending even beyond vocal melodies, for example, to the solo part of *Epiphanie*, which reviewers unanimously judged too difficult for even many professionals to play, notwithstanding its stunning and unique beauty.\(^5\) Caplet seemed to care little for the practical commercial side of getting music performed as a way to see his star rise. Or, he had little concern for the current state of affairs, refusing to write to the median skill level and preferring to choose his performers carefully in order to ensure that his works would come to life as he imagined them. And his vocal exercises in *Le Pain quotidien* testify to his aspiration that the repertory could find (through fashioning) interpreters with the skill to tackle the new sounds and shapes of contemporary music.

The vocal part of “Doux fut le trait” leaves little much room for error or approximation. The first note itself, on a high F sung *mp*, demands intense focus and preparation from the singer. By comparison, the seven other songs of the *Tombeau* begin on pitches between F and A, within a comfortable speech range. The whole opening phrase of “Doux fut le trait” requires a perfect technique that can navigate the exposed syllabic line including a sudden octave leap on an off-beat. The pressure does not let up until m. 4 when the singer completes the phrase by sustaining the starting pitch, supported, as on the first note, with the same pitch in the harp. Awkward leaps abound in this sonnet, for example the ascending seventh leap in m. 10 on the words “Doux est son ris,” which Caplet expects the singer to accomplish in a *piano* dynamic. Unlike the first leap, this one does not have the accompaniment’s support on the arrival tone, and the

\(^5\) Maurice Imbert, for example, noted the newness of the piece both in form and technique. He added that the only critique he could make is that the piece is “extremely difficult to perform.” Florent Schmitt considered the work very new and very secular, and that contained “difficulties of the most frightening variety.” *Le Courrier musical* 26, no. 4 (15 February 1924), 69.
singer is left to find the leading tone herself. Another leap of a seventh, this time minor, five measures later, has an even more ambiguous tonal placement, and nothing but pure intervallic control can help the singer attain it. This moment raises the stakes of accuracy further because the text concerns the very act of singing currently underway: “Chantant mes vers.” As the voice continues its somewhat mountainous journey through the laughing and singing scene, certain recurring pitches (A, E, F) help reinforce the directionality. Without reinforcing these pitches, Caplet could never expect a singer to “sweetly laugh” on the ascending seventh in m. 25 or to “sweetly sing” the minor ascending seventh leap in the following measure, which emphasizes tonal shift away from b-flats begun after the first stanza, in m. 7. Although he eschews so many conventions of the turn-of-the-century song style, Caplet does provide a melodic climax on the word “sing,” the musical point of fusion between the poet’s lover and the goddess of love. He indulges in a final act of tone painting in m. 27 when the poet arrives at his death, which the singer illustrates with a descending seventh leap. These musical interpretations of the text—always subtle in Caplet’s writing—create a sense of return and unity in the sonnet. Where other composers would use tonality to mark new sections, returns, or shifts of mood, Caplet creates his own way, having already rejected simple tonality.

His is not like German atonality; it is neither cast in a rigorous twelve-tone style nor willfully dissonant. Instead there is a tonal freedom, where intervals like the fourth or fifth are used just as often as the second or sixth. There are no instances of triadic harmony to suggest key. Instead, certain pitches recur frequently enough at textually significant places as to become guides. In this sonnet, E has primacy over the other
pitches, despite the opening’s insistence on F. Three of the four vocal phrases end on E, as does the piece itself. The one phrase that concludes on a different pitch lands on the fifth, B, which in this non-tonal yet tonally referential space still affirms the centrality of E. Caplet’s treatment of the harp contributes to this fluid tonal environment: since the harp is ill-suited to a resonant articulation of a fundamental bass, rarely does the harp clearly state the primary pitches. Instead it takes up a near perpetual motion at the beginning, which evinces the metric ruffles Caplet so elegantly displays in the preludes to Le Miroir. Over the course of the sonnet, as the tempo increases, the harp becomes more engaged, performing more and more glissandos, first as descending flourishes only. In m. 25, when the singer should be sustaining a high E achieved through a difficult leap, the harp plays an ascending and descending glissando starting on A. This suggests the direction of the singer’s next difficult note, the high A climax in m. 26. As the piece comes to a close, the harp repeatedly plays a tremolo between D and E, performing a tonal ambiguity which it ultimately anchors rather than erases in the final measure, when one low D supports a high register tone cluster of E-F#-B. Thus even the end has nothing of the trite or perfunctory salon style. In his short contribution to the Tombeau de Ronsard, Caplet extends his own compositional aesthetic to the 16th-century French poet’s lighthearted Classicism, where music and poetry mutually support each other.

Ghéon and Caplet, Mirror Images in Poetry and Music?

By making this detour into Caplet’s approach to classical aesthetics just before and just after he composed Le Miroir, I mean to demonstrate that we cannot make a simple assertion about his position on the contested aesthetic value of Classicism. Since his
approach to Classicism is not dogmatic, there is no simple way to assess an aesthetic kinship with Ghéon on this point, or at least Ghéon's prewar views. Literary scholar Jean Tipy has called Caplet and Ghéon "kindred spirits" on the basis of their presentation of spirituality in *Le Miroir*. He writes, for the benefit of an audience likely unfamiliar with Caplet, that the composer had "the same limpid and tender soul [as Ghéon] that aspires only for the joy of God through the love of his creations."\(^{52}\) And, as I will recount below, Caplet's personality was composed of an important measure of simplicity, tenderness, and humility. But very much unlike Ghéon, his attitude towards the composition of religious works was personal, not evangelical.

Ghéon cuts a more typical figure of the postwar *renouveau catholique*. A staunch atheist in his youth, he was closely allied with André Gide and Jacques Rivière at the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, where he was more concerned with the formal direction of poetry than the specific ethical message of its verses. He and Gide confided their homosexuality: their sexual orientation, demonized by contemporary Catholics, made their resistance to the religion all the more personal. For the prewar Ghéon, “Classicism” indicated purity of form that needed no model, historical or religious, but that could be captured in an unmediated approach to nature, celebrated rather than restricted, immediate rather than transcendent or eternal. The story of his conversion is the stuff of 20\(^{\text{th}}\)-century cliché: while serving as a medical volunteer in the First World War, he met a Catholic lieutenant whose honor and bravery he deeply respected. He imagined that the man's character had been shaped in some way by his faith. When he learned, a few months after meeting him, that he had been killed in an airstrike, he was deeply affected,

and he considered converting to Catholicism as a tribute to him. But, as he wrote Gide, he was unwilling to sacrifice his sexual activity as the religion required. He capitulated, however, and by the end of 1915 Ghéon had made his confession and converted to Catholicism. At the war's end, the poet returned to creative work with a renewed vigor and sense of purpose. Concerns about form, Classicism, and free verse had stifled his creativity to some degree before the War, and he wrote more criticism than original work. But becoming Catholic changed his energy entirely. Not only did his writer's block end, he also devoted his writing specifically and exclusively to Catholicism and evangelizing. In particular, he devoted himself to theater, which had the double role of spreading the gospels and drawing communities together around performances. His plays were understood as a special kind of art, profoundly religious, accessible to the masses, and yet also refined, worthy of consideration even outside a confessional context.

Ghéon devoted limitless energy to writing and seeing his plays performed, never seeking

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53 Boschian-Campaner, Henri Ghéon.
54 Ghéon, Correspondance.
Ghéon and Jammes, Correspondance. 55 Ghéon and Jammes, Correspondance.
56 Before the War, Ghéon was primarily a critic, first for L'Ermitage and later for the Nouvelle Revue française. He developed a theory of drama, studying principally Jacques Copeau and Jacques Rouché. His biographer Jacques Reynaud describes Ghéon's disillusionment with modern theater: “Jusqu'à l'avènement du théâtre bourgeois, tous les dramaturges sont des poètes, non pas parce qu'ils écrivent en vers—voyez Molière—mais parce qu'ils transposent la réalité sur un plan d'ordre, d'harmonie, de simplification, de sublimation, de beauté rythmique, de beauté plastique, j'ajouterais : de gratuité, qui la met en valeur et lui confère une noblesse qu'elle n'a pas à l'état brut. Dans la tragédie, dans la comédie. Chez les Grecs, chez nos Classiques. Pour toucher un public, on le dépayse ; avec un recul calculé dans le temps ou l'espace, on lui propose des exemples particuliers de la plus grande généralité humaine, mais selon l'esprit de son temps. La scène est un miroir où il se voit non dans son apparence passagère, mais dans son fonds permanent, éternel. Non photographié, mais non plus déformé : transfiguré, si j'ose dire.” Henri Ghéon, 10. Reynaud also describes the change in creative energy after the conversion, noting that “lui qui peinait, des jours et des semaines, pour fixer un poème de quelques vers, et de vers libres encore ; lui qui n'était jamais satisfait de la fidélité du vers à son rythme intérieur, dont l'expression, comme un miracle, le fuyait au moment même où il croyait le tenir, il est libéré de ce labeur harassant.” Ibid., 16.
57 La Revue fédéraliste devoted a special edition to Ghéon, no. 95 (1927) in which many prominent writers, including Jacques Maritain, wrote appreciations of his œuvre as a whole and particular plays or poems.
recognition for them, but unequivocally describing his aims to friends and fellow writers. 58

This concept of religious art separates Ghéon from Caplet, supposed “kindred spirits.” Unlike Ghéon, Caplet never imagined that his career as a composer involved priestly or pastoral care. He never described the process of composition as a step towards spreading Church teachings. And when he arranged performances, he did not seem to have a preference for religious contexts that would create a more profoundly spiritual experience for the audience. In fact, unlike Ghéon, Caplet cared little about audiences, not once betraying in his correspondence apprehension over how a work would be received. Similarly, he had few if any contacts with priests before composing Le Miroir: his trips to Solesmes, his pilgrimage to Sienna and Rome, the promotion of his works by other Catholic artists all began after that work made its way to the Paris stage. Caplet did not consider himself foremost a composer of religious music. His participation in a 1924 survey on contemporary music for Le Courrier musical instructs us about his creative mission. His response about the direction of musical technique has nothing to do with the ideas expressed through music. He fashioned himself as an innovator, working to expand the purely sonorous potential of music.

Music, which has a practically unlimited horizon, could be considered quite behind the times amongst the arts. It is slower to set itself in motion than painting in particular, which is accounted for by its special difficulties of "realization" and also by the fact that the composer is at the mercy of performance, and thus music evolves through its own means and its own possibilities. One could say that in this evolution, music has taken only its very first few steps. At the present moment, it is very difficult to provide any details whatsoever. What we seek is to extend, by all the methods in our power, the field of its aesthetic action. It is necessary, too, that little by little the ear becomes accustomed to the attempts of modern innovators, and especially that informed people, who have an undeniably splendid mission to fulfill,

58 Reynaud, Henri Ghéon, 27.
do not reject the rich experiments of those who seek to extend the domain of our art beyond the limited boundaries of that which has already been heard.\textsuperscript{59}

His friends and colleagues Florent Schmitt and Roland-Manuel also contributed to the survey, and like them, Caplet sees the state of music as at a point of critical transition. And like them, he worries more about the sound of music than the subjects composers treat. He charges audiences to welcome the era’s new sounds rather than “reject” them, and he speaks about experimentation, fully acknowledging that composers have not yet solidified the new aesthetic. Caplet’s desire that informed audiences not reject new art echoes Schmitt’s concern, articulated more bitterly, about the critical response to new music.

On one side, men of great talent, and men of great astuteness on the other, here artists, there insolent charlatans. This has, by the way, existed in every age and would not otherwise be of any importance if a loyal distinction between artists and charlatans remained: today, not only the vulgar masses in the audience, but also “connaisseurs,” the “informed” the divine snobs themselves, in other times shocked if presented with true art, mingle in the general stupidity and conclude, abetted by criminal card-counters, by confusing the former with the latter. Which, in the past, had established an undeniable distinction between art and knock-offs, that is to say at least the honesty of the profession, is at present nothing but a fiction, an expired value, blackened paper amongst other blackened papers.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{59}“La musique dont l’horizon est pratiquement illimité peut être considérée comme assez retardataire parmi les arts. Plus lente à se mettre en mouvement que la peinture, notamment, ce qui tient pour beaucoup à ses difficultés particulières de réalisation et aussi à ce que le compositeur se trouve à la merci des exécutions, elle évolue dans ses seuls moyens et dans ses seules possibilités. L’on peut dire qu’en cette évolution, elle n’en est encore qu’aux tout premiers pas. Si bien qu’à l’heure actuelle, il est très difficile d’apporter des précisions quelconques. Ce que nous cherchons, c’est d’étendre, par tous les moyens en notre pouvoir, le champ de son action esthétique. Il faut, en outre, que peu à peu l’oreille s’accoutume aux efforts des novateurs modernes, et surtout que les esprits avisés, lesquels ont indéniablement une splendide mission à remplir ce faisant, ne rejettent pas les tentatives fécondes de ceux qui cherchent à étendre le domaine de notre art hors des frontières restreintes, du déjà entendu.” André Caplet in “Consultation sur la musique contemporaine,” \textit{Le Courrier musical} 26 (January 1924): 11.

\textsuperscript{60}“Des hommes de grand talent d’un côté, des hommes de grande astuce de l’autre, ici des artistes, là d’insolents mercantis. Ce qui exista d’ailleurs de tout temps et n’aurait pas autrement d’importance s’il restait entre les artistes et les mercantis une délimitation loyale : aujourd’hui, non seulement la masse grossière du public, mais les ‘connaisseurs,’ les ‘avertis,’ les divins snobs eux-mêmes, jadis et comme maugrées si déboursé au véritable art, pataugent dans la niaisère générale et en arrivent, aidés de criminels brouilleurs de cartes, à confondre ceux-ci avec ceux-là. Ce qui, autrefois, établissait un criterium irrécusable entre l’art et le bluff, à savoir tout au moins l’honnêteté de métier, n’est plus à présent qu’une fiction, une valeur périmée, du papier noirci parmi d’autre papiers noircis.” Florent Schmitt, in Ibid., 16.
Caplet and Schmitt both worry about the way intelligent audiences respond to new art, and they seem to speak from experience that their best efforts have been grouped together with the lazy work of posers.

At the end of the 52 survey responses, including those from foreign composers such as Alfredo Casella and Arnold Schoenberg, the editor in chief of Courrier musical Charles Tenroc provides what he calls a summary but is really his own view. He introduces a new term, “Modernism,” that had been absent from the majority of opinions, including Caplet’s and Schmitt’s. Presenting this word as a catchall for a multitude of contemporary styles grouped together by the desire for newness and distinction, he mocks those artists who are most concerned with new sounds. “In music, [to be modern] is to fight for an aesthetic whose goal is to transform the language of sounds for the benefit of ideas that are as old as the world. Beyond opportunists, neo-moderns, and revolutionaries, pre-moderns praise themselves for preceding the people of their era.”

Tenroc contends that modernism is an attitude that has existed for a long time, and in every age it simply means to be part of one’s age. And, he concludes, being part of one’s age by entering into petty battles over style is the surest way to never create great art, to always be stuck in one-upmanship. As if to summarize the arguments of all the composers consulted, he claims that national pride will only become more pronounced if artists seek great results prematurely, by slavishly obeying the dictates of stylistic relativism. Modernism, then—synonymous with sound experiments—will not in fact

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61 “En musique, c’est lutter pour une esthétique dont l’objet est la transformation du langage des sons au profit d’idées vieilles comme le monde. Au delà des opportunistes, des néo-modernes, des révolutionnaires, les pré-modernes se glorifient de précéder les gens de leur époque.” Tenroc, signed as “La direction,” in Ibid., 17.
advance any universal values in music but will rather simply perpetuate the partisanship
that led to vicious competition during the war. Suddenly the aesthetic stakes of the survey
have changed. Instead of asking the composers—as composers—what challenges and
rewards they face with respect to the present, it becomes clear that the journal was asking
its questions to representatives of partisan schools. Caplet’s focus on the expansion of
sonorous possibilities in music places him in the camp of trendy innovators, people who
placed the search for something new ahead of the search for the beautiful. Tenroc’s
editorial position consigns Caplet to the ranks of flashy stylist.

Curiously, in the same issue of *Courrier musical* as this survey, an announcement
promotes a musical supplement by Caplet himself, a pedagogical piece to train singers for
the new sounds of modern music. The ad is doubly curious, because while it gives only
faint praise, as the preceding discussion on newness and beauty might suggest, it acts as
an endorsement of a work already two years old, boosting the prominence of vocal
exercises that had already been performed in public. The journal’s description of the
collection emphasizes its challenges without specifying whether of technical or aesthetic
nature: “*Le Pain Quotidien*, intimate vocalizes in 15 exercises, summarizes in condensed
and complete fashion all the difficulties of harmonic aggregates that modern music can
present the singer, both from the point of view of acquaintance with certain dissonances
and of the generally difficult sounds that modern music includes.”62 The author of this ad
turns the *Pain quotidien* into more than an exercise by choosing the verb “summarizes”
to describe the piece rather than a verb associated with musical performance. To

62 “*Le Pain Quotidien*, intimités vocales en 15 exercices, résume d’une façon condensée et complète toutes
les difficultés que peuvent présenter au chanteur les agrégats harmoniques de la musique moderne, tant au
point de vue de l’accoutumance à certaines dissonances, que des intonations généralement difficultheuses
qu’elle renferme.” Ad for “Nos suppléments musicaux,” *Le Courrier musical* 26 (1 January 1924), 7.
summarize is to give a global appreciation, not an initiation through rote entrainment. This word signals ambivalence toward the new sounds of modern music. Its subtext is that singers learning these exercises do not merely get their voices habituated to intervals or new melodic constructions that are difficult because unfamiliar, but they also get their ears accustomed to the sounds of these intervals and melodies, difficult by nature of their affront to the typically beautiful.

In contrast to suggesting socio-aesthetic consequences for the exercises’ technical initiation, when Roland-Manuel presents the same work in the preface to its 1922 Durand edition, he focuses on Caplet’s contribution as a positive personal and artistic achievement. Roland-Manuel, a composer who also popularized and promoted art music, sees these vocal pieces as part of a tradition of preparing singers for professional careers. He and the author of the *Courrier musical* ad agree that the collection introduces singers to modern music and thus equips them with skills to master its difficulties. He sees this as a natural part of music training, an updated version of “the vocal exercises of Rossini, which usefully prepare [singers] for the interpretation of classical masters.” Playing on the title’s reference to bread, he elevates its status from staple food to a “fine delicacy”—one can never eat one’s fill of it. And once he has elevated the point of reference, he elevates the music itself, esteeming the exercises to be a “work of art.” He praises the efficacy of the piece, which will certainly stimulate

singers’ knowledge and desire to become familiar with the new technique. Roland-Manuel’s language is not partisan, and he suggests that Caplet’s *Pain Quotidien* possesses the rare quality of bridging gulfs between tradition and innovation, theory and practice, and obligation and choice.

Reflecting Society: Promotion of *Le Miroir* as Catholic Art

Caplet was making his mark on the contemporary scene. In order to increase his renown and seek opportunities to have his music performed, he had to become savvy about promotion. After the premiere of *Le Miroir*, the Catholic journalist Maurice Brillant approached Caplet with a plan to increase the work’s visibility amongst Catholic listeners by writing about it in his new magazine *La Vie Catholique*. Caplet collaborated on this initiative, but it is important to note that he did so by responding. When Brillant writes in *La Revue musicale*, for example, that Caplet's work is not sufficiently known in Catholic circles, he voices not the composer's desire but rather his own proselytizing agenda. Brillant’s letters to Caplet reveal a clear interest in generating material for his magazine. While he may have been taken with *Le Miroir*, his goal in reaching out to Caplet was to put the piece to work, filling up columns in his newly launched publication to secure its readership. As a journalist, his mission was not simply to give accounts of events that happened in Paris’s Catholic community. He actively intervened on behalf of potential actors, ensuring that advance notice of concerts went strictly to sympathetic critics. In a letter shortly after the first public performance of *Le Miroir* in 1924, he opens by asking if the composer would send tickets to “M. Jean de Valois, 33 rue de

Bourgogne, Paris (7e), specialist in religious music, who intends to devote a long article to *Le Miroir*. He continues, in a parenthetical aside, to mention that he will “spread word about the work to other Catholic writers [he] might know.” In all his letters to Caplet, his primary goal is to obtain details about upcoming performances for the express concern of gathering a quorum of critics. One letter attests to a more personal connection with *Le Miroir*: Brillant wrote a program note for its December 1924 performance with the Concerts Colonne. He summarized his approach, though not the note’s contents, to Caplet. By remarking musical traits that are “very simple” and pointing out “details that would be blindingly obvious and more than visible to the naked eye,” he does not exactly lead Caplet to believe that the general public can understand a deeper level of the work’s significance.

Brillant very likely drew material for this program note from a review of *Le Miroir* he had published in *Le Correspondant* in May of the same year. In it, he uttered not a single harsh word toward Caplet or his work, and he framed the works’ significance within the “history of our religious music.” He could indeed have been describing this review when he told Caplet he had made only very simple remarks about the work, things that would be “blindingly obvious.” In this case, Brillant comments on nothing more than the ensemble, the division of the work into multiple sections, and the careful balance Caplet

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66 “Comptez-vous toujours donner une audition du Miroir de Jésus le dimanche 18? Dans ce cas, voudriez-vous [ou voudrez?] faire envoyer une place à M. Jean de Valois, 33, rue de Bourgogne, Paris (7e), spécialiste de la musique religieuse, qui a l'intention de lui consacrer un long article.” Maurice Brillant to André Caplet, letter of 11 May 1924, BnF NLA-269 (94), in Huneau, 374.

67 “D'autre part, comme il est important que l'on en parle dans les revues spéciales de musique religieuse — pour la propagande — je vais faire de la réclame auprès des rédacteurs de ces revues que je puis connaître.” Ibid.

68 Maurice Brillant to André Caplet, letter of 11 December 1924, BnF NLA-269 (98).

had achieved between creating a distinct mood for each of the different emotions while still creating a harmonious unity for the whole. Brillant’s most erudite reflections concern aesthetics of religious art.

In creating a religious work, Caplet practices first of all renouncement… But let us be reassured: he does not go as far as artistic puritanism, and he is too much of a poet, and has too much taste, to deprive us of the ‘portion of voluptuousness’ championed by Maurice Denis, that is at least as necessary in music as in painting, and which gregorian chant itself is far from repudiating. I only mean that, desiring to produce a heightened emotion and a religious emotion, he renounces a certain sumptuousness (a very delicate one) that would perhaps trouble the birth of ineffable feelings, as well colorful and titillating refinements that are more appropriate for purely decorative art.70

The description takes stock the creative process and stylistic goals as well as the qualities of Caplet’s finished product. Brillant’s proselytizing mission, so clearly stated in his letters to Caplet, leads him to describe how Caplet’s work resonates with other works of religious art. To articulate this, Brillant compares Caplet’s affects to those known from other religious artists. Brillant compares Caplet’s approach in *Le Miroir* to Maurice Denis’s style. In the above-cited passage, he attests that Caplet provides the voluptuousness Denis’s work is known for, even in its spirit of restraint. Elsewhere in the article, Brilliant summarizes Caplet’s careful balance between emotion and intellect as

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70 “Créant une œuvre religieuse, Caplet pratique d’abord le renoncement… Mais rassurons-nous : il n’ira point jusqu’au puritanisme artistique et il est trop poète, comme il a trop de goût, pour nous ravir cette “part de volupté,” réclamée par Maurice Denis, qui est au moins aussi nécessaire à la musique qu’à la peinture, et que le chant grégorien lui-même est fort loin de répudier. Je veux dire seulement que, désirant produire une haute émotion et une émotion religieuse, il renonce à une somptuosité (d’ailleurs fort délicate) qui gênera peut-être l’éclosion des sentiments ineffables, et à des raffinements multicolores et chatoyants, qui conviennent mieux à un art purement décoratif.” Ibid.
“ordered beauty.” “This art corresponds, in music and with specifically musical
procedures, the art that Maurice Denis practices in painting, with strictly pictorial
procedures.” Later, he again invokes Denis as a point of reference for Caplet’s ability to
create a unified style despite the diversity of colors he uses to reflect the variety of
emotional nuances in the three “miroirs.” Already using a visual metaphor, stimulated by
the work’s title, Brillant refers yet again to Denis, who “‘orders’ the colorful riches,
interprets a thousand things suggested by impressionism.” By aligning Caplet with
Denis, Brillant strongly states his belief in Caplet’s modernism, but also in his deep faith.
Maurice Denis was admired for the freshness he brought to religious art. His gentle,
arresting images convey a welcoming spirituality, one that understands the modern life.
Instead of showing Christ and the saints as gruesome, punishing characters who demand
greater sacrifices than the bourgeois dwellers of modern cities are prepared to make, he
presents peaceful images of harmony and tranquility. Moreover, Denis frequently and
willingly collaborated with non-religious artists. His was not an exclusive or judgmental
faith. He was an ideal Christian artist whose beliefs in Catholic dogma never wavered but
who still succeeded in innovating his technique rather than perfecting the realist,
neoclassical style the academy championed throughout the nineteenth century in France.

In order to fully situate Caplet’s achievement in the realm of religious art, Brillant
needed to refer to music, too, not just painting. But after decades of the Schola’s

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71 “Cet art correspond, en musique et avec des procédés spécifiquement musicaux, à l’art que pratique
Maurice Denis en peinture, et avec des procédés strictement picturaux.” Ibid.
72 “Et je pense encore à Maurice Denis, ‘ordonnant’ les richesses colorées, lisant les mille frissons de
l’impressionisme.” Ibid.
73 Although he was closely linked with the Lerolle family, and through them d’Indy and the Schola circle,
he also collaborated with non-religious artists such as Debussy, on the cover to La Damaisselle élue and
Gabriel Astruc, on the paintings for the cupola of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées. See Gerard Vaughan,
tyrannical control over Catholic music style, choosing a contemporary, avant-garde frame of reference for Caplet’s “musical procedures,” as he calls them, was a tricky issue. So Brillant evades the question and relates Caplet’s music instead to Gregorian chant. And even in this comparison, indirect and made in passing, Brillant does not stress the point. He holds up Gregorian chant as a venerable musical tradition, that, like Caplet’s *Miroir*, still has its share of voluptuousness that makes art, even religious art, enjoyable. But the comparison to Gregorian chant was not without its own associative problems. Unlike the more mainstream Catholic composers of his generation, Caplet did not receive instruction in religious music while in school. Never having studied the organ, church modes, or the large-scale canonical works by Bach, Beethoven, or César Franck, Caplet was something of an outsider to the orthodox religious community. He became interested in Gregorian chant, but only the year he composed *Le Miroir*, and just a few months after Brillant wrote this review. At that time, Caplet traveled to the famous Solesmes monastery to study chant theory with Dom Mocquereau.75

The very desire to make Caplet more well-known in Catholic circles shows that the composer's interest in religious art was self-driven, not due to the influence of his peers. After the first performances of *Le Miroir*, Maurice Emmanuel wrote to Caplet to express his admiration for the composer’s religious feeling, unique in the musical scene of their day. Emmanuel, who was deeply interested in religious music but was unable to make a full career as a composer, saw Caplet as finding the kind of independent success he had

75 See Yves-Marc, “André Caplet et Solesmes,” and letters from to Jean-Hébert Desrocquettes to Caplet, of later summer 1924 and February 1924, BNF MS NLA-269 (240-2).
hoped to achieve. Emmanuel wrote to Caplet on multiple occasions to congratulate him on performances. In February 1925, he gave a brief autobiographical prelude to his lauds. He recalls that his interest in religious music, specifically medieval Church modes, made him estranged from the Conservatoire and condemned by his composition teacher Leo Delibes.76 Snapping out of his nostalgia, he explains himself: “Why would I tell you this! Because I am overjoyed to see an artist of your worth, so personal, welcomed, young, like he deserves to be. Because I congratulate you for escaping the bitterness that I have known and in which my philosophy is stuck. Because I am happy for your successes and I wish for their growth with all my heart.”77 Although Caplet’s career path was markedly different from Emmanuel's because of the official recognition he received, Emmanuel still considered Caplet as a kindred spirit. And importantly, he accentuates Caplet’s staunch independence from aesthetic schools by drawing himself in to the mix.

Returning to Brillant, who so ardently wanted to make Caplet into a specifically religious figure, we should consider the way he draws Caplet's personality into Le Miroir. It was not enough that the work uses as text poems by a recently converted Catholic or that these treat the explicitly Catholic devotion of the mysteries of the rosary. Brillant makes a supposition about Caplet’s creative process: he imagines that the composer sought to create heightened, or religious, emotion. And yet even this brief commentary draws Caplet and his work into a realm of expression that we cannot take for granted.

76 Maurice Emmanuel went on to write many music history books and had a special interest in medieval music. His major works was a two-volume study of tonality, *Histoire de la langue musicale* (Paris: Laurens, 1911). He was also a close friend of the Debussy family.
77 “Pourquoi vous dire cela! Parce que je me réjouis de voir un artiste de votre valeur, si personnelle, accueilli, jeune, comme il mérite de l'être. Parce que je vous félicite d'échapper aux amertumes que je connais et dont ma philosophie ne s'émue plus guère. Parce que je suis heureux de vos succès et que je souhaite de tout mon cœur leur accroissement.” Maurice Emmanuel, letter to André Caplet, 4 February 1925, BnF MS NLA-269 (300).
What any composer desires to create through his music is already a shadowy notion that can be understood only partly, and through extensive study of his or her plans, impressions of the creative process, appreciation of his or her efforts, and responses to critical reactions. But in the case of a work that uses religious imagery and topics for non-liturgical purposes, outside of a professional religious context, the idea of his or her intended emotional expression becomes all the more fleeting. What was a “religious emotion” for Caplet, how did he intend to produce it, and did he succeed?

“Who’s the Fairest?”: Claire Croiza, privileged performer of Le Miroir

In order to answer this question, Caplet's own account of his creative process and goals may prove useful. This he provides in a series of letters to Claire Croiza, a singer with whom he worked for many years and who became, by the early 1920s, Caplet's most trusted interpreter of his works. In the first extant letter in which Caplet mentions Le Miroir, he describes the work as being specially conceived for her: "

I am non-stop huddled over the "Miroir de Jésus"—I'm happy about it, because I have never felt myself to be in such a strong disposition for writing music. I think that, out of all that I have written for you, nothing will have been as well suited to your nature, to your means, and that, one another we will attain a very high zenith! What pride, no? ‘Self confidence’ builds me up and I feel that I will soon burst with pretension!”

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78 “Je suis sans cesse penché sur le "Miroir de Jésus"—Je m'y complais, car jamais je ne me suis senti en aussi bonnes dispositions de procréation musicale. Je crois que, parmi tout ce que j'ai écrit pour vous, rien n'aura été aussi adéquat à votre nature, à vos moyens, et que, l'un par l'autre (1) nous arriverons à atteindre un sommet très élevé ! Quel orgueil, n'est-ce pas? Le "confiance en soi" s'infiltre en moi et je sens que bientôt je vais éclater de prétention !” Letter from Caplet to Croiza, 3 April 1923, BNF MS Supplément LA-Caplet André-52.
Caplet introduces the work to Croiza above all as a vehicle for her talents. He talks about personal pride, success, achievement. None of these are related to the tender "religious emotion" Brillant supposed was at the heart of the composition. In the same letter, Caplet goes on to describe his intentions. "My intentions, did I tell you? Are to use as accompaniment: string quartet and harp; to precede each group of Mysteries (of joy—of pain—of glory) with a little prelude only for strings and to use a group of women's voices (9 voices only) to complement as a sonorous backdrop for the joyful and glorious mysteries." Of course, Caplet uses the word "intention" here in a very literal sense, just to describe his plan for instrumentation, but this is significant with respect to the gravitas Brillant projected onto the creative process. The "intention" in his composition was to create a work that people would like and that Croiza could sing well. To cement the idea of intention as a concrete goal, he uses the word one final time in this letter, referring to his plan to complete the work and prepare a performance by the beginning of summer vacation.

Caplet wrote to Croiza regularly for the next two years, each time referencing Le Miroir, either its continued gestation, Croiza’s interpretation of it, plans to have it performed, and details for specific concerts. But rarely did Caplet trade his down-to-earth and project-oriented chatter in order to address the more spiritual side of his composition. In August 1923, shortly before he would write the date of composition on the manuscript for Le Miroir, he inquired about an accident that left Croiza with an injured arm. In this

79 “Mes intentions, vous l'ai-je dit ? Sont d'utiliser comme accompagnement : le quatuor à cordes et la harpe ; de faire précéder chaque groupe de Mystères (de joie—de peine—de gloire) d'un petit prélude confié aux seuls instruments à cordes et d'utiliser un group de voix de femmes (9 voix seulement), pour agrémenter comme fond sonore, les mystères joyeux et les mystères glorieux.” Ibid.
80 “Ma tâche et mon but sont d’achever ce ‘Miroir de Jésus’ et mon désir et que nous réalisions l’exécution (pour nous) avant le départ pour les grandes vacances. Ces bonnes intentions vous agréent-elles ?” Ibid.

308
case he remembers the music’s divinity to the singer: “Above humans there is music.. There is… my music—or at least that which I have just written for you. My fifteen poems are completed, copied. I only have 3 little preludes to get on their feet—which, by the way, give me trouble and torment. Therefore you can not—I think—remain indifferent in front of these flowers that were ‘planted, grown, and picked’ for you.”

The music, in its sacredness, should have the power to draw Croiza back to Caplet, who was anxious that she had not responded to his previous letter. But still, the sentiment and emotional content of *Le Miroir* did not possess the power that the composer hoped would work in his favor. The comparison to flowers brings the work back into the realm of secular, sentimental affection. Caplet’s insistence that the work is specifically for Croiza suggests that, at least as far as vocal art was concerned, *Le Miroir* was more about friendship and mutual artistic admiration than an eternal “religious emotion.”

Nevertheless, elsewhere in his letters to Croiza Caplet juxtaposes his faith with his compositional endeavors. For example, in a letter written during his return trip from his summer vacation in September 1923, still before Croiza had heard the work or seen the score, he mentions to her his desire to have the premiere in special circumstances, “other than the “ordinary concert” because we must try to give the work all its meaning.” He gives no other details here, certainly not specifying the location of the eventual performance in a church or other sacred space. The work was eventually given in unusual circumstances, and only once in a church during Caplet’s life. More than the religious

81 “Au dessus des humains il y a la musique… il y a… ma musique—ou du moins celle que je viens d'écrire pour vous. Mes quinze poèmes sont achevés, recopiés. Il ne me reste plus que 3 petits préludes à mettre sur pied—lesquels, du reste, me donnent mal et tourment. Donc vous ne pouvez pas—je suppose—rester indifférente devant ces fleurs ‘ensemencées, cultivées et cueillies’ pour vous.” Caplet to Croiza, letter of 8 August 1923.

82 “J’aimerais que ce fût dans des conditions autres que le “concert ordinaire” car il faudrait tâcher de donner à l’œuvre toute sa signification.” Caplet to Croiza, letter of 18 September 1923.
atmosphere of the performance venue, Caplet was likely alluding to the need to prepare
the work with adequate rehearsals, the lack of which he lamented throughout his career,
often leading to cancelled concert engagements. In other letters, Caplet praises Croiza
for her performances, making it clear that she met the high expectations he laid out for
her. After a performance of *Le Miroir* in Lyon, he congratulates her: "You were
marvelous—admirable and you should be proud of yourself and happy with me."
Caplet attests that the solo part is the biggest technical challenge of the piece, along with
the choirs. The orchestra hides behind the soloist. For this, and because of the warm
reception the work saw in Lyon, Caplet is hopeful that the work will become popular, and
he concludes his letter with the same personal sentiment he invoked from the beginning
of the project. "I am very happy and I want to see you share my joy. I say thank you from
the bottom of my heart, dear Croiza. Thank you for what you have done—and the way in
which you have done it…Thank you for everything." The significance of the work for
Caplet is really between him and his singer.

Around the same time as the Lyon performance, much effort was put into planning
the next concerts of *Le Miroir* in Paris. From the looks of the Caplet-Croiza
correspondence, Croiza was Caplet’s primary sounding board for organizational ideas.
Croiza at one point suggested arranging a concert at the Conservatoire, which never took

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83 Caplet’s career is full of these; he had a reputation for being unusually and unflinchingly exigent. He
resigned from conducting a revival of Debussy’s *Le Martyre*—its premiere at the Opéra—two nights before
the opening. Around the same time, he quit his position as assistant conductor at the Orchestre Pasdeloup
84 "Vous y avez été merveilleuse—admirable et vous devez être fière de vous et contente de moi." Caplet
to Croiza, letter of 26 February 1924, BNF MS Supplément LA-Caplet André-104.
85 "Moi je suis très content et je voudrais vous voir partager ma joie. C’est du plus profond du cœur
que je vous dis merci chère Croiza. Merci de ce que vous avez fait—de la façon dont vous l’avez fait…
Merci de tout.” Ibid.
place. Not hearing any more details about this prospect, Caplet throws out another idea: “find a rich American who could guarantee an advance payment.”  

86 This idea was pushed forward; Madame Frédéric Moreau hosted a performance of the work in her salon on March 27, 1924. With respect to this performance, Caplet expressed much concern over the number of performers and the arrangement of rehearsal space, but remained absolutely silent on the work’s sacred nature or the kind of emotion he would be able to elicit during a private concert in an elegant Parisian home.

The preparations for the private salon performance of *Le Miroir* were carried out via mail because Caplet was absent from Paris in March 1924. He writes to Croiza from Sienna, where he was taking in the atmosphere needed for his new “Drame sacré” (he used quotation marks himself when mentioning the genre) about the life of Saint Catherine of Sienna. What exactly he did in Sienna is unknown, and the work was left incomplete upon Caplet’s death. But we know, from the same letter and a card Caplet sent two weeks later, that after his stay in Sienna the composer visited Rome before returning to Paris. In the March 1 letter, Caplet mentions that he will visit Rome “where [his] heroine, Catherine of Sienna, played such a big role vis-à-vis the head of the Church.” Following this cryptic explanation for his itinerary, the composer reveals the extent of his commitment to tracing Saint Catherine’s life: if she played an important role

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87 Huneau, 381.
88 “Pour le moment je suis à Sienne, essayant de fixer musicalement l’atmosphère dans laquelle les personnages de mon ‘Drame sacré’ vont évoluer. Avant de regagner Paris je passerai par Rome où mon héroïne, Catherine de Sienne, a joué un si grand rôle vis-à-vis du chef de l’Eglise.” Caplet to Croiza, letter of 1 March 1923.
89 “Je passerai par Rome où mon héroïne, Catherine de Sienne, a joué un si grand rôle vis-à-vis du chef de l’Eglise.” Ibid.
towards the pope, Caplet would need to know the head of the Church himself. “I received
an audience with the Pope.”90 Caplet undoubtedly explained the details of this visit—how
it was arranged, what entailed, the impressions it made on him—to other people, and in
person, but he does not explain himself here. He elaborates to Croiza, but just as with his
composition of Le Miroir, he makes it all about her. Absent are any deeper, more general
thoughts about his religious emotion. “As I know that all souls, all being that one holds in
one’s heart receive the benediction of the gentle Christ of the earth, I kissed the Holy
Father’s ring while thinking of you.”91 This ultra-personal, extremely intimate confession
does not exclude Caplet’s more general devotion and reverence for the Church’s
hierarchy or its doctrine that teaches that each pope continues a direct line of church
fathers through to Saint Paul and Jesus himself.92 And yet the image of Caplet thinking
specifically of his favorite singer while in the pope’s presence, in order for her to receive
a holy blessing, is a radical one, striking for its candid admixture of religious, friendly,
and artistic devotion.

Caplet considered Croiza an integral part of Le Miroir. He frequently mentions the
impossibility of performing it without her. For example, he was invited by Jean Gay, a
friend from Solesmes, to conduct the work as part of a modest provincial concert series in
Angers. Not possessing a large budget, the arrangements were made cheaply and Caplet
agreed to accept a cachet significantly smaller than his normal fee.93 The concert was
important for Caplet from many perspectives. Not only was it a chance to have his work
performed, and also to do a favor to his friend, it was also an opportunity to demonstrate

90 “J’ai été reçu en audience par le Pape.” Caplet to Croiza, BnF MS Suppl-Caplet-110.
91 “Comme je sais que toutes les âmes, tous les êtres que l’on porte en son cœur reçoivent la bénédiction du
doux Christ de la terre, j’ai baisé l’anneau du Saint Père en pensant à vous.” Ibid.
92 New Catholic Encyclopedia, 495-6.
93 See Letter from Jean Gay to Caplet, BnF MS NLA-269 (354).
to Durand that publishing the score would be a fruitful enterprise. When he explains the
division to Croiza in the summer of 1924, he does not mention her participation one
way or the other. He assumed she would stand by him, performing if he accepted the
invitation, and understanding him if he declined. Since she was apparently on a concert
tour, she did not respond quickly to Caplet’s inquiry, nor did she respond when Gay
contacted her himself. This caused Gay much worry, because he could not conceive of
the concert without Croiza, knowing that she was Caplet’s interpreter par excellence. In
at least four letters from the summer into the fall, Caplet reminds Croiza to tell him or
Gay directly if she would be able to perform in the concert. Gay, writing to Caplet, first
seems doubtful of the composer’s presence in the concert: “I have only accepted to
propose your work [Le Miroir] to the committee on the condition that you conduct it.
Without you, we would have to abandon the project and ask Croiza to sing something
else, assuming that she would be willing.” Later, once Caplet has confirmed that he
would participate, Gay transfers the weight of the concert’s feasibility to Croiza: “The
committee has only accepted to give your “Miroir” on the condition that Croiza is the
soloist. If she quits now, after having written to you that she had accepted, there would be
nothing left to do.” This concert in Angers was ultimately a gamble that paid off for
Caplet, and Croiza participated as he expected.

Another concert he had planned with Croiza’s collaboration, however, never came
to pass. Caplet, a founding member of the Société de Musique Indépendante, had recently

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94 See undated letter from Caplet to Croiza, BnF MS SUPPL LA-CAPLET-63 (117).
95 “Je n’ai accepté de proposer votre œuvre au Comité qu’à la condition que vous la dirigeriez. Sans vous il
faudrait donc abandonner ce projet et demander à Croiza de chanter autre chose, en admettant qu’elle
veuille bien venir.” Jean Gay to Caplet, letter of 17 September 1924, BnF MS
96 “Le Comité n’a accepté de donner votre “Miroir” qu’à la condition que Croiza en serait l’interprète. Si
elle fait défection maintenant : après vous avoir écrit qu’elle acceptait, il n’y a plus rien à faire.” Gay to
Caplet, letter of 28 September 1924.
premiered *Le Pain quotidien* at the SMI after years of inactivity with the group. Re-accepted into their modernist fold, he had arranged for a performance of *Le Miroir de Jésus* under the society’s auspices in the Salle Erard in early 1925.97 When Croiza pulled out of the concert, explaining that since it was not a true premiere the performance would serve her career more than Caplet’s, the whole event was canceled.98 The SMI did not even accept Caplet’s offer to pay for the rental fees for the Salle Erard (presumably so he could arrange his own concert), and instead planned a new event. Other singers had by this time undertaken to study the work, and even perform it in front of limited audiences, so it must not have been the case that the concert planners canceled the date because they had too little time to find a new singer. Instead, there was a sense that she was essential to the work—if she were not performing, it would not be performed.

*Intimate Reflections: Le Miroir as Personal achievement*

As much as Croiza’s voice was a driving element of the composition and performance of *Le Miroir*, Caplet ascribed other significance to this work as well. If he wrote to the singer from time to time in the summer of 1923, this was a mere fraction of the letters he sent to his wife Geneviève, during the same period. Caplet was able to focus completely on composition that summer because he was isolated from his family. He had proposed to do the same thing the year before, when he wanted to devote time to a project with Vallery-Radot, but nothing came of this.99 At this stage in his career, Caplet felt that he had yet to compose any great works, or any works at all, and that he had no

97 See Kiesgen and Delaet to Caplet, letter of 21 December 1924, BnF MS, Rés Vm dos-201 (17)
98 See letter from E. Kiesgen and E.-C. Delaet to Caplet, with enclosed letter from Croiza to Kiesgen and Delaet, BNF MS Rés Dos-201 (19-20).
99 Caplet to Geneviève Caplet, undated letter, no envelope, of 1922. NLA 271 (7).
sustainable patterns for working, no habits to increase his productivity. It was not because
of a plan, however, but because of his son’s fragile health that Caplet had his family’s
house in Neuilly to himself during the summer of 1923. Geneviève and their servant
Anne-Marie accompanied Pierre to the beach. Pierre would take sun and salt air, and
Caplet would tap into his ability to concentrate to produce a new work. “While both of
you progress, my dearest loves, on the path to good health, I will penetrate the 15
mysteries of the Rosary, such that at the end of our shared troubles, we will find the joys
of creation. As such the sacrifice seems light.” In this letter of July 25, 1923, Caplet
makes it clear that although the separation was born of troubling circumstances, the result
would be positive. Reflecting on the truly pragmatic nature of this artistic solitude, he
reminds Geneviève that they could do nothing but bear the distance, since there are no
suitable “family guest houses” for all three of them on the coast.

For the rest of the summer, Caplet writes regularly to his wife to update her on his
progress. More than anything, he describes his goals in terms of completion and
production rather than craft or musical emotion. Geneviève was not a musician—a fact to
which Caplet alludes more than once in his letters to her—so it is normal that he would
spare her the details of his process or his concept. But he also leaves out any explicit
account of the religious inspiration for the project. For example, the day after he writes to
console Geneviève over their separation, he announces that he has completed the first of
the 15 poems. He begins by painting a biblical scene: “Yesterday evening—midnight, or

100 Caplet to Geneviève Caplet, letter of July 25, 1923. NLA 271 (11)
101 “Pendant que vous progresserez tous deux, mes amour adorés, sur le chemin de la bonne santé, moi je
pénètrerais les quinze mystère du Rosaire, de sorte qu’au bout de nos malheurs réciproques nous trouverons
les joies de la création. Le sacrifice alors paraîtra léger.” Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 For one example, Caplet writes, “Même sans pouvoir comprendre le langage musical tu aurais eu de la
almost, the Virgin Mary ascended to Heaven…” But he follows this well known image, presented here as a narrative of fact without sentimental elaboration, with a practical description of its significance: “put another way, Geneviève my adored:

‘L’Assomption’ is finished, including the sketch for quartet and harp.”

Throughout his process, he refers to the project only in terms of the progress he has made and how happy he will be when he has completed it. In one update he admits to a fixation on finishing:

“The Mysteries advance. There are two or three new ones that are almost finished… I am terribly… anxious! I would like to know now the exact date when I will put the finishing touch.”

Rather than appreciate the sense of work, the journey from inspiration to results, he only thinks of the product, explaining “As I age I feel that I have developed a taste for ‘conscious and methodical organization.’ (I would like to have many gifts!…)”

This organization, he makes clear, is a bureaucratic list-keeping that reveals an egocentric orientation towards his own career. He becomes nearly obsessed by the idea of progress, making lists of the poems he has completed (with the dates of completion) and the number of poems left to write. Caplet’s focus on production is apparent in his refrain “I would ask that everything be finished quickly and finished very well!” Such a plea is not a humble supplication of an artist who pours his soul or his religious emotion into his art but rather the frustrated cry of a worker who looks forward to seeing the completed construction of his handiwork. Caplet is aware that finishing

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104 “Hier au soir—minuit, ou presque, La Vierge Marie montait au Ciel…” Caplet to Geneviève Caplet, letter of July 26, 1923, NLA 271 (12).
105 “Autrement dit, ma Geneviève adorée : “L’Assomption” était terminée, y compris le dispositif sonore pour quatuor et harpe.” Ibid.
106 “Les Mystères avancent. Il y en a deux ou trois nouveau qui sont sur le point d’être achevés…” Caplet to Geneviève Caplet, letter estimated to be from 20 July 1923, NLA 271 (13).
107 “En vieillissant je sens que je prends goût à “l’organisation consciente et méthodique.” (Je voudrais avoir beaucoup de génie! …)” Ibid.
quickly is an obsession, one that is fueled “a bit by the fear of ‘not finishing’ and by the idea of going to join you sooner at Douardenez.” He never suggests that finishing quickly has anything to do with being able to spread a religious vision with his audience.

In his letters to Geneviève from summer 1923, Caplet suggests personal identification with only one aspect of Le Miroir. “Le Portement de Croix” appears again and again as a poem that gives Caplet more trouble than the rest. “Oh irony!” Caplet sighs when he mentions on 12 August that this is the only poem not yet in draft stage. He suggests that this poem is his cross to bear, a difficult task that will eventually kill him, either in itself or for what it represents. Elsewhere he mentions that he would like to write something in that poem that would please Jesus: “Speaking of this good Mr. Jesus Christ, I am ‘stuck’ in front of ‘Le Portement de Croix.’ I would like to make something of it that is not too unworthy of our Savior… Up to now I have struggled… but with satisfactory results!” This surprising candor, a direct reference to Jesus, is not only rare in Caplet’s letters, but is also not fully sincere. He writes “speaking of” because he had just compared himself to Jesus—far from a humble gesture—with respect to the Cross of the Legion of Honor, an award Caplet had just received. Having only heard about this through the grapevine, he maintains a humorous distance from the honor: “If it’s true [that I have been named to the Legion of Honor], there has not been a cross better placed

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108 Caplet to Geneviève Caplet, undated letter [1923], NLA 271 (14).
109 “Ce sont les premières copies (piano et chant) tous les autres Mystères sont encore en “brouillon” (à part le “Portement de Croix”—ô ironie !—qui, lui, n’est pas encore venu).” Caplet to Geneviève Caplet, letter of 12 August 1923, NLA 271 (19).
110 “A propos de ce bon Monsieur Jésus-Christ, je suis “en arrêt” devant le Portement de Croix. Je voudrais faire quelque chose qui ne soit pas par trop indigne de notre Sauveur… Jusqu’alors, j’ai peiné… mais résultat satisfaisant!” Caplet to Geneviève Caplet, letter of 10 August 1923, NLA 271 (18)
since the one of Mister Jesus Christ—all proportions maintained, of course.“ Caplet
treats Jesus as a literary figure, a trope that he can creatively adapt to his purposes. On
other occasions, Caplet repeats his struggles with “Le Portement,” for example on 12
August, when he exclaims again that he would like to be finished, and 18 August, when
he is “still stuck” on the piece. The idea of being “stuck,” or “accroché” in French, is
another pun in quasi-blasphemous taste. While to be “accroché” is used commonly
enough as figurative language in the realm of work projects, it also describes how
paintings are hung on a wall. In other words, Caplet says he is nailed to the piece, as
Jesus would be hung from or nailed to the cross. Finally, when Caplet announces that he
has finished the first draft of “Portement,” it is without special mention of the emotional
release of creation. “Today, Saturday. I came to a stopping point (provisional) for le
Portement de Croix. There are things that I like a lot. Others… not… I do not understand
how, with such a clear vision of what I would like to achieve, I am not able to define it
well.”

Lists of completed poems appear more and more frequently towards the end of
August, as Caplet senses the end of his project. On the last day of the month, he sends
Geneviève two messages, one in the morning and one in the evening. The first includes a
little tableau to show which poems are drafted. The next includes the same tableau, with
the final empty space filled in to witness the day's work. Here he finally expresses
unmitigated joy. He observes that he still need to write “3 little préludes—quick—

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111 “Après échanges téléphoniques j’appris que “Le Temps”—journal sérieux, n’est-ce pas ?—annonçait
mon élévation au grade de Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur. Si c’est vrai, il n’y a pas eu en somme de
croix mieux placée, depuis celle de Monsieur Jésus-Christ—toutes proportions gardées bien entendu.” Ibid.
112 “Je suis encore accroché au “Portement de Croix…” Caplet to Geneviève Caplet, letters of 12 and 18
August, NLA 271 (19) and (20).
113 Caplet to Geneviève Caplet, undated letter of August 1923, NLA 271 (20).
114 Caplet to Geneviève Caplet, letters of August 30, 1923, NLA 271 (25).
incisive—charming!… then the title of each Mystery (one measure, each one, sung by the choir). It will only take 3/4 of an hour...”

And when he has completed the last poem, he promises to give the manuscripts to his wife. “I will have my manuscripts recopied, these are for you, my dear Geneviève. Durand will not get them.” Here lies the deep personal significance of the work. For professional reasons, Caplet stressed for the whole summer about creating, producing, leaving a quantity of work. But as he sees the project take shape, he becomes more open, more generous about what it means to him. He explains that writing his music takes him out of the petty daily affairs (like fretting over money, the maid’s inattentiveness, his attempt at cutting his own hair): “All it takes is for me to write on the chart: ‘such-and-such mystery complete’—so that...material things don’t matter any more.” He notes that he will dedicate Le Miroir to Geneviève, and that Epiphanie, the cello concerto he had recently composed, would be for their son Pierre. “Basically, these two works are my first works—it is thus normal that I would dedicate them to my loves.”

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115 “Il me faudrait maintenant 3 petits préludes—rapides—incisifs... charmants !... puis le titre de chaque Mystère (une mesure, chaque, chanté par le chœur). Ça c’est l’affaire de 3/4 d’heure...” Ibid.
116 “Je ferai recopier mes manuscrits, lesquels sont à toi, ma Geneviève adorée. Durand ne les aura pas.” Ibid.
117 “Il suffit que j’inscrive au tableau : “tel mystère achevé”—pour que... les choses matérielles ne comptent plus.” Caplet to Geneviève Caplet, letter of August 20, 1923, Ibid.
118 “Au fond, ces deux œuvres sont mes premières œuvres—Il est donc normal que je les dédie à mes amours.” Ibid.
The egocentric attitude towards the composition of *Le Miroir*, expressed as Caplet’s obsession with completion and personal achievement, is put into relief by Caplet’s approach to Christianity. Caplet visited Italy in early spring 1924 in search of inspiration for his next project, an opera about Saint Catherine of Siena. Two society women organized the trip, Mercédès LeFer de la Motte and Mercédès de Gourant. Caplet needed these wealthy patrons who took an interest in his new religious works. And they needed him—a composer who tackled devout themes with flair. He nicknamed them “les Saintes Femmes,” mocking their holy aspirations. One week of traveling with them left him with a palpable annoyance, a sense that his faith differed from theirs. His primary concern was the outward displays of wealth that the women were so comfortable making: they wore diamonds and jewels.\(^{119}\) Caplet humorously describes his attempt to do as they do: “In this royal atmosphere, I feel very uneasy, because in order to fit in, I feel that I am only able to hold up a cardboard or balsa wood scepter! Thankfully, they do not lack pity, and they put up with my poverty with patience and indulgence.”\(^{120}\) Obviously the references to royalty push this remark into the humorous side of overstatement. Even his gratitude is humorous, as he narrates their tolerance through a caricature of their perspective. But he goes on, adding a darker tone: “To them I am ‘full of charm’—‘full of modesty’—‘full of humility’—All of this is true, but I have no worth because at the bottom of myself there is nothing but pride. Without my deep ignorance and my infirmities (cerebral and verbal) I

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\(^{119}\) Caplet to Geneviève Caplet, letter of 7 March 1924, NLA 271 (39).

\(^{120}\) “Dans cette royale atmosphère, je me trouve très mal à l’aise, car pour faire figure, je sens que je ne puis élever qu’un sceptre de carton ou de bois blanc! Heureusement, la pitié ne leur manquant pas, elles supportent ma pauvreté avec patience et délices.” Ibid.
would be the most prideful of men.”  

Self-reflexivity of this kind is the mark of a thoughtful person, one who is not swayed by the superficiality of social life. But at the same time that Caplet is aware of his distaste for special displays of reverence, he does not repent, does not seek to improve his own faults. He mocks the Saintes Femmes’s prayers for the way they infantilize Jesus and bother God with their petty requests. In a characteristically introspective move, he admits that he does not understand the significance or magnitude of Christ’s sacrifice. But instead of making recourse to theologians, contemporary or historical, he brushes the issue aside in exasperation: “I should have lived a century or two before J.C.!”

After exploring Catherine’s city (where he was slightly horrified by her preserved head), he and his traveling companions proceeded to Rome. There, they witnessed the ordination of a friend of the Saintes Femmes and meet the pope. With complete nonchalance, Caplet wrote a note to Geneviève the morning of his papal audience, insisting more than anything on his imminent return to France. But, as he recounts on another sheet enclosed in the same envelope, he forgot to send that message in the mail. He promises to tell her in person about the Vatican, the papal visit, the bust of Saint Catherine, and the rest of his trip. In the meantime, he gives a private look into his state of mind when he encountered the Pope. “Despite my ‘nonbelief’ I convinced myself to admit that the pope’s blessing has real value. It is said that all beings that one holds in one’s heart receive the blessing of the ‘gentle Christ of the earth.’ So, with such a special attention, I placed you, Pierre and yourself, on beautiful stools, covered with red velvet!

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121 “Je suis “plein de charme”—“plein de modestie”—“plein d’humilité”—Ca c’est vrai, mais je n’ai aucun mérite car le fond de moi-même n’est qu’orgueil. Sans mon ignorance foncière et mes infirmités (céphalique et oratoire) je serais le plus orgueilleux des hommes.” Ibid.
122 “J’aurais dû vivre un siécle ou deux avant J.C. !!” Ibid.
Next came the family, friends, the Holy Father passed, I kissed his ring and I asked internally that our life continue to be blessed.” Caplet says no more about the Pope or the Vatican in his letters, but the description he gives to Geneviève matches very closely that he wrote to Croiza. He described himself as an outsider who felt alienated by the pope’s wealth and power. That he described in no uncertain terms his hesitance to see the pope, his difficulty believing in the sanctity or spirituality of the man, suggests a deep ambivalence towards the symbols and practices of organized religion.

**Conclusion**

Caplet’s *Le Miroir de Jésus* occupies an uncomfortable place in French musical history. To the critics and press of its time, it was a unified masterpiece, a modern achievement, and a work of religious beauty. For music historians writing now, it defies easy classification. On the one hand it is couched in Catholic language and imagery and evidences medieval aesthetics, but on the other it is thoroughly new, tied to modernism. Caplet himself had mixed feelings about the work’s significance as religious art, just as he had mixed feelings about religion. Even as he bristled at the “Saintes Femmes” judgment of him as humble, the prayer he made in the presence of the pope, as he described it to his wife and to his friend Croiza, reflects sheer humility. To ask for continued blessing is at once to acknowledge the blessings one has and at the same time to leave the path open, without expectation for what those might be. This side of Le

123 “Malgré mon “incrédulité” je me suis “suggestionné” pour admettre que la bénédiction du Pape avait une valeur réelle. Il est dit que tous les être que l’on porte en son cœur reçoivent la bénédiction du “doux Christ de la terre”. Alors, avec une attention combien spéciale, je vous ai installés, pierre et toi, sur de beaux tabourets, recouvert de velours rouges ! Venaient ensuite la famille, les amis, les Saint Père est passé, j’ai baisé son anneau et j’ai demandé intérieurement que notre vie continue d’être bénie.” Caplet to Geneviève Caplet, letter of 17 March 1924, NLA 271 (43).
*Miroir* is deeply personal. But as a mirror, the personal side of Caplet’s intimate correspondence is reflected in the work’s public life. This was not a work for a specific group or for a prestigious theater. Caplet’s attempts to have it performed at the Société Musicale Indépendante were halfhearted. Writing it did not bring him favor with Church leaders. Instead, it is a small trace of an open-ended, personal spirituality sought by so many of the artists he admired—Debussy, Baudelaire, Ronsard. *Le Miroir de Jésus,* mysteries of the rosary, preserves the private mystery experienced in the closed realm of the self.
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