Debussy and Stravinsky:

Friendship and interaction, 1910-1918

Dissertation submitted for the degree of PhD

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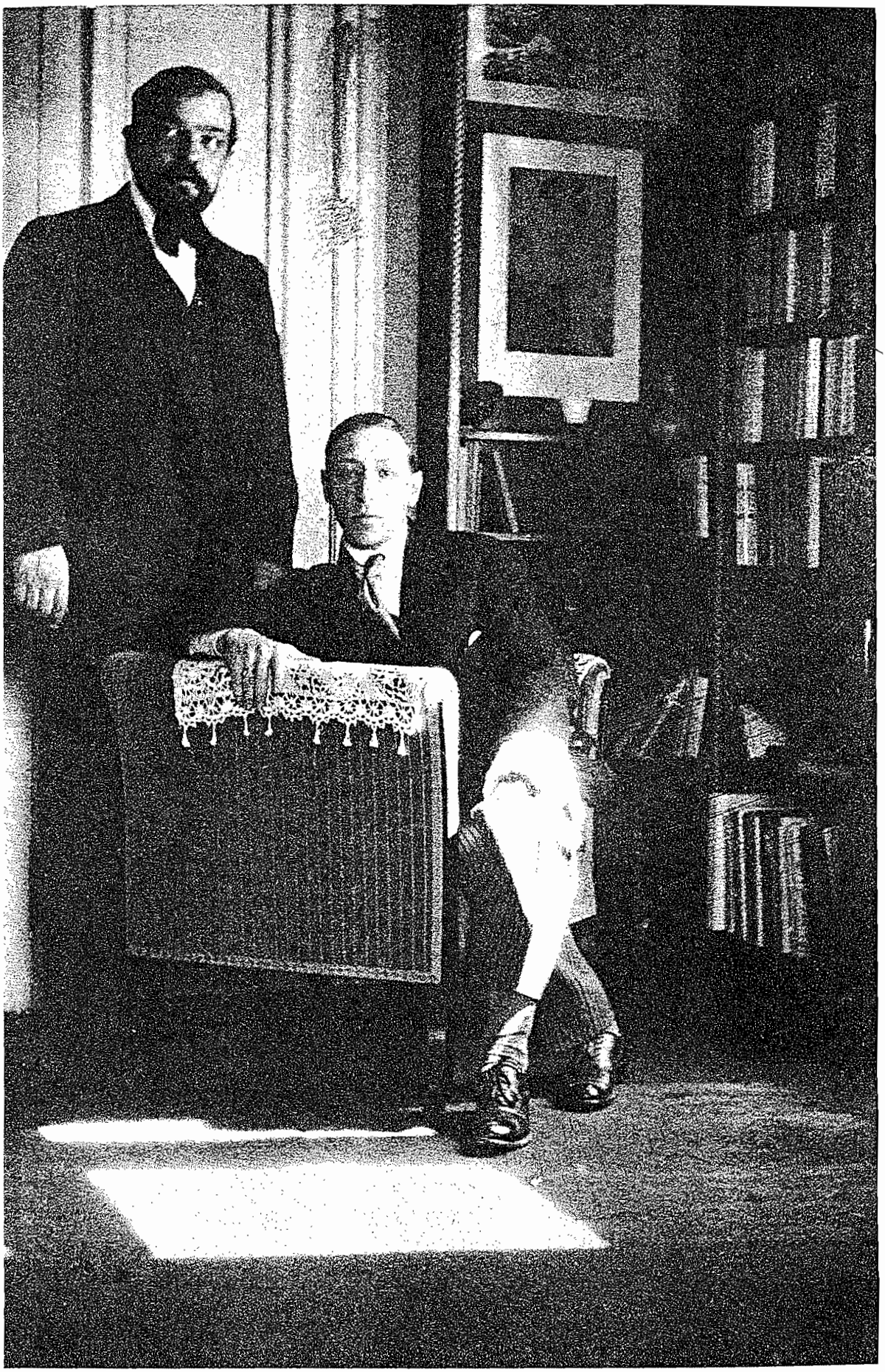

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Introduction

This dissertation began as an enquiry into the friendship and interaction between Claude Debussy (1862-1918) and Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971). I had noted to my surprise that the reciprocal exchange between these two composers had attracted comparatively little attention from scholars, despite the fact that the pieces they wrote at the time of their personal friendship make up the most influential corpus of early twentieth-century music outside the German traditions. Initially, I set out to seek evidence of influence from one to the other in works written *ca.* 1910-1918. As soon as I began my preliminary studies, however, it became clear that there were many reasons for the widespread avoidance of the topic.

1. MUSIC 'IN TRANSITION'

The primary difficulty in any assessment of the Debussy-Stravinsky interaction is surely the very nature of the musical works themselves. Debussy's late works and Stravinsky's 'Russian' period works raise some of the thorniest historical and analytical questions in the history of Western music because they are vexed by a continual tension between radical innovation and the continuity provided by techniques and idioms carried over from earlier compositional practices. Our prevailing historiography for much of this music is still built around the idea of an historical process of change, of music 'in transition'.[1] Unsurprisingly, the concomitant analytical issues which underpin our understanding of this music are also problematic. Most notable are the scholarly disagreement over how pieces such as *The Rite of Spring* actually 'work', particularly the controversy over how we interpret the pitch content of music which does not fall readily into tonal and atonal categories,[2] and whether it is appropriate to invoke notions of unity and coherence as criteria in the analysis of early modernist music.

[1] Discussed by Jim Samson in *Music in Transition: a study of tonal expansion and atonality, 1900-1920* (London: Dent, 1977).

[2] Exemplified by the debate between Allen Forte and Richard Taruskin, triggered by Taruskin's review of Forte's *The Harmonic Organisation of the Rite of Spring* (New Haven, 1978) in *Current Musicology* 28 (1979), 114-129. The debate was re-ignited with Forte's article 'Pitch Class Set Analysis Today', *Music Analysis* 4 (1985), 29-58 and their subsequent correspondence in *Music Analysis* 5 (1986), 313-320, 321-337.

2. THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF 'INFLUENCE'

For many years it was generally agreed that Debussy's influence could be discerned in Stravinsky's *The Faun and the Shepherdess* Op. 2, *Pastorale* for soprano and piano, the first act of *Le Rossignol*, *Deux Poèmes de Verlaine* Op. 9, parts of *Zvezdoliki* and the introductions to the two parts of *The Rite of Spring*.[3] One researcher, David Belinfante, undertook a systematic assessment of Debussy's influence on Stravinsky, drawing many points of comparison by examining discrete musical parameters (harmony, melody, formal procedures, rhythmic devices, and techniques of orchestration) in these and other works.[4] However, in recent years it has become clear that many of these connections are debatable - is Debussy's influence *really* discernible in *The Firebird*, for example? The kind of comparative analysis which underpins such assertions is heavily dependent on how much repertoire an individual scholar knows, and it is only within the last two decades that the music of Stravinsky's Russian predecessors has become better known. Richard Taruskin, for example, has opened our ears to many neglected Russian works of the mid- to late-nineteenth century and has questioned the extent of French influence on Stravinsky by offering a more convincing range of sources within the Russian traditions.[5] Even in Stravinsky's *Deux Poèmes de Verlaine*, where direct points of contact with European traditions are incontrovertible, Taruskin has argued persuasively that the French element is of limited significance because it was such a fleeting and experimental *cul-de-sac* for Stravinsky, at that stage still a highly impressionable composer.

In maintaining a sceptical stance towards the extent of French influence on Stravinsky in spite of Stravinsky's own assertions to the contrary, Taruskin has entered a fraught theoretical debate about the nature of 'influence'. Following developments in literary criticism over the last twenty-five years, many musicologists are now deeply suspicious of what composers say about their own music, to the extent that when a composer lays claim to a particular tradition or acknowledges a debt to a specific predecessor, as Stravinsky did

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[3] Various accounts cover this familiar ground: see François Lesure, 'Debussy e Stravinski', *Musica d'Oggi*, nuova seri, II/6 (giugno 1959), 242-244; André Souris, 'Debussy et Stravinsky', *Revue belge de musicologie* XVI, 1-4 (1962), 45-56; Eric Walter White, 'Stravinsky and Debussy', *Tempo*, 61-62 (Spring/Summer 1962); Jeremy Noble, 'Debussy and Stravinsky', *Musical Times* cviii (January 1967), 22; Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* (London: Hutchinson, 1978), 61-66; André Boucourechliev, *Stravinsky*, trans. Martin Cooper (London: Victor Gollancz, 1987), 53-6; Robert Craft, *Stravinsky: Glimpses of a Life* (London: Lime Tree, 1992), 370-371; François Lesure, *Claude Debussy: Biographie Critique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1994), 450-451.

[4] David Belinfante, 'The Influence of Debussy on Stravinsky', (unpublished MA dissertation, U. of Wales, 1980).

[5] Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through* Mavra, 2 vols. (Oxford: OUP, 1996).

(retrospectively) to Debussy, scholars immediately sense a smoke-screen hiding a deeper, jealously-guarded influence. At the simplest level, this has resulted in a tendency to ignore or subvert the composer's own assertions while probing elsewhere - generally to predecessors denied or undisclosed - for the truly significant sources of influence. But the new critical climate for investigating matters of influence has also had a more profound effect by making traditional comparisons look terribly unimaginative. As Harold Bloom put it in his seminal theoretical exposition *A Map of Misreading*:

> Poetic influence, in the sense I give to it, has almost nothing to do with the verbal resemblances between one poet and another [...] the anxiety of influence more frequently than not is quite distinct from anxiety of style.[6]

To speak of an 'anxiety of influence' is to invoke a Bloomian context, which opens up a complex dialogic interaction between artworks. The presence of an earlier work in a later work might be conspicuous by 'surface absences', or the later work might be sensed as an 'implicit force' in the earlier. In other words, a Bloomian exegesis of influence is not interested in surface similarities; instead, a common-sense interpretation of how an artwork might shape its successors is replaced with something suspicious, interrogative, and altogether more startling.

I am generally sympathetic to Bloom's claim that the most interesting aspect of influence has little to do with style or 'verbal echoes'. In Chapter 1 I unveil an argument which will do just this for Debussy's influence on Stravinsky, suggesting that the conventional frame of reference in which *Debussyist* traces are found in Stravinsky's youthful music misunderstands Debussy's historical and aesthetic position and consequently seeks unimportant 'echoes'. Stravinsky was not interested in Debussy for compositional techniques which he could have found in Rimsky-Korsakov, and I argue that the most interesting points of contact between the two men are evident in compositional techniques not readily associated with *Debussyism*. But in other contexts, particularly with regard to Debussy's admiration for *Petrushka*, supposedly naïve surface similarities become important because they raise such problematic historical questions. Why might a mature first-rate master such as Debussy suddenly start to use fancy piano sonorities borrowed from a young upstart such as Stravinsky? What might Debussy's appropriations suggest about his state of mind and artistic evolution? How might his borrowings be contextualised within the broader changes in

[6] Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: OUP, 1975), 19-20.

musical style and means of expression explored by composers at the beginning of the twentieth century?

The undeniable importance of surface similarities indicated by the early stages of my research suggested that Bloomian theories of poetic influence would be inappropriate tools of enquiry for the Debussy-Stravinsky interaction. Moreover, my biographical study of the composers' friendship made it clear that the dynamics of their interaction changed continually during this period. In 1910 Debussy was a fully mature composer, confident in his own compositional voice and secure in his reputation as the leader of the Parisian *avant-garde*, while Stravinsky was inexperienced, 'on the make' and painfully conscious of his provincial origins (Prince Peter Lieven recalled in later years that 'Stravinsky was St. Petersburgian to the minutest fibres of his being').[7] Yet by the outbreak of the First World War, Debussy was artistically incapacitated, literally unable to compose, bitterly disappointed by the cold reception of *Jeux*, crushed by financial pressures and severely weakened by illness; Stravinsky, meanwhile, had acquired rapid fame as the composer of three phenomenally successful ballets and was fêted by the *avant-garde*. As I remark at the opening of Chapter 4, Debussy was wrestling with a successor, not a predecessor - a threatening son rather than an overbearing father. Thus despite the fact that both men were 'strong' musicians and built on each others' music in innovative and often surprising ways, I decided that the contemporary and reciprocal nature of their artistic relationship would be poorly served by theoretical approaches developed primarily with dominating, canonised historical predecessors in mind. There is consequently no attempt to use literary theories of influence in this study.

3. A SHARED ANCESTRY

Taruskin's study of *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* has drawn attention to a third problem inherent in studying the relationship between Debussy and Stravinsky. As he shows in his rebuttal of 'French legends', many of the alleged *Debussyisms* to be found in the young Stravinsky's music can be traced to an earlier Russian source common to both composers - often Rimsky-Korsakov or Musorgsky. The Russian ancestry shared by Debussy and Stravinsky makes for interesting but dangerous navigation through the historical currents of Franco-Russian musical relations, so at each juncture in this dissertation - whether the matter at hand is concerned with realism, folklorism or octatonic pitch structure - I have tried to be

[7] Prince Peter Lieven, *The Birth of the Ballets Russes*, trans. L. Zarine (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1936/R New York: Dover, 1973), 301.

as even-handed as possible in assessing the balance of contributing factors when identifying exactly what Debussy offered Stravinsky that no other composer could, and *vice-versa*.

The list of possible objections to this study might seem formidable. Yet the fact that Debussy had developed an individual path derived at least in part from the same *kuchkist* Russian background that Stravinsky himself had inherited surely encouraged the sense of affinity that Stravinsky developed with the Frenchman's music - the sense that someone else had already encountered the same problems that he was now facing and could offer unusual models with which to circumvent them. This is why I do not think Stravinsky was re-writing his own history (as he did on so many other occasions) when he suggested that he was released from the "St. Petersburg Conservatory's formalism" under Debussy's influence.[8] As Lockspeiser put it,

> Stravinsky was the one composer of that time who was aware of the far-reaching significance of Debussy's aesthetic and technical conquests. For a time, therefore, they were happy to travel together, and points of resemblance in their works are clear enough.[9]

Lockspeiser's idea of "travelling together" forms a central part of this dissertation. It will be obvious, however, that I have oriented my work around Debussy rather than Stravinsky. Readers aware of the extraordinary impact that Taruskin's monumental seventeen-hundred page study had when it was first published in 1996 will understand why this has been necessary.[10] Just as I began research, this synthesis of more than two decades' work on Stravinsky and his predecessors appeared, rehabilitating Stravinsky's debt to the Russian traditions, vigorously opposing 'French legends' about Debussy's influence, quashing inaccuracies accumulated over many years and demolishing what little credibility remained in Stravinsky's voluminous memoirs. Although it will become clear that I do not agree with all of Taruskin's conclusions, I have found it more productive to base the bulk of my own work around **a reading of Debussy's later music in the light of his relationship with Stravinsky** - which provides a slightly different focus than that suggested by my working title.

* * *

[8] Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (London: Faber, 1959), 48.
[9] Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, 2 vols. (London: Cassell, 1965), II, 186.
[10] Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions.*

An Analytical Preface

No-one can write a dissertation today purporting to demonstrate critical insights into a musical work without encountering problematic issues in analytical methodology. Debussy is a particularly complex case because his music is notoriously anti-systematic, despite the existence of many regular routines and techniques. I find that academic approaches predicated on theory - especially the rigid kinds of model constructed around repertories of very different syntactical construction, such as the music of Webern - often fall into entirely fanciful note-by-note accounts when applied to Debussy's music. Furthermore, much analysis tends towards incompleteness in offering a graphical depiction of musical structure as a *fait accompli* while disregarding the most interesting aspect of the enquiry, which is to use such insights in conjunction with history and criticism to deepen interpretative richness.

In the course of my research I have tried many different analytical methods, including Schenkerian techniques and pitch class set analysis. However, with the exception of Fig. 2.1(b), which provides a voice-leading graph elicited from a deep structural level to make a deliberate point about 'Parfums de la nuit' as compared with *Khamma*, no formal or theoretically-grounded analytical techniques are used in this dissertation. This is not because I subscribe to a notion of 'authentic' moral authority which proscribes the application of anachronistic methodologies to music, but because day-to-day experience of working with the music has led me to believe that an unashamedly empirical approach yields a more fruitful set of observations. Of course, empiricism, in which truth value is derived from experience, underlies all analysis, even theories presented with pseudo-scientific abstraction and rationalist detachment. But if one is honest about one's epistemological starting point in musical analysis, even the faintest gloss of objectivity cannot be sustained: the starting point has to be the aural experience, even if subsequent enquiries go beyond what can be heard immediately. Consequently, throughout this dissertation my analyses seek to reveal structural, harmonic or motivic features in order to provide points of departure for the main discussion in the text: they lie at the heart of my interpretations, but are present as a means to an end rather than as an end in themselves and I make no claims for their transferability into other contexts.

By resisting pre-existent analytical frameworks for this enquiry, I am aware that my dissertation has been left open to accusations of being under-theorised. Yet my aim has been

to provide a close reading of the music in conjunction with biographical and source materials in order to write music *history*; I do not wish to write a metacritical dissertation primarily concerned with analytical discourse, rewarding though such studies have been in the past.[11] As Reinhard Strohm has pointed out, music analysts have their own distinct goals: music historians 'should develop types of analysis that answer *our questions*'.[12] In the case of the interaction between Debussy and Stravinsky, those historical questions are clear. What did Debussy's music offer Stravinsky in 1910 that no-one else's could? How did Debussy respond to the young Russian's early ballets in his second book of Préludes and his ballet, *Khamma*? How are we to understand *Jeux* and its reception in the context of Debussy's other works? Is Stravinsky's impact on Debussy responsible for any discernible changes in his idiom - for example, in the *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*? What makes *En blanc et noir* so 'difficult' and so special in Debussy's output? How do Debussy's 1915 sonatas establish their extraordinary cultural and emotional resonance?

There are other reasons for resisting mainstream analytical techniques. The analyst Richard Parks has concluded that Debussy's music rarely contains more than three architectonic levels, which to my mind renders Schenkerian approaches of limited use, particularly for this kind of study where the other side of the equation - Stravinsky's 'Russian' period music - is also poorly served by Schenker.[13] Pitch class set analysis, on the other hand, is foxed by Debussy's method of motivic variation: the intervallic and harmonic changes inherent in Debussy's developmental processes mean that even the most sensitive segmentations of the music can throw out odd or unhelpful results. I have found in most cases that it is more useful to work within the French tradition of harmonic and motivic analysis. René Lenormand's *Étude sur l'harmonie moderne* of 1913 - although excoriated by Debussy as the kind of analysis which helps 'untrained hands [...] destroy beautiful butterflies' - is useful in this respect.[14] Lenormand's reductive technique defines harmony primarily in terms of vertical sonority and speaks of auxiliary notes and mixtures over a figured bass. Progressions are often described in terms of pedal points in the melodic line or in an inner voice (the re-harmonisation of a note-in-common to provide two juxtaposed chords was part of the French pedagogical tradition of the time, termed the 'litanie'), as well as in the bass. Particularly important is Lenormand's conception of scale patterns as the primary means of structuring

[11] E.g. Anthony Pople's Oxford DPhil dissertation, published as *Skryabin and Stravinsky, 1909-1914* (New York and London: Garland, 1989).
[12] Reinhard Strohm, 'Musical analysis as part of music history' in Raffaele Pozzi (ed.), *Tendenze e metodi nella ricerca musicologica atti del convegno internazionale* (Florence: Olschki, 1995), 81.
[13] Richard Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989).
[14] René Lenormand, *Étude sur l'harmonie moderne* (Paris, 1913), trans. by Herbert Ancliffe as *A Study of Modern Harmony* (London: Joseph Williams, 1915).

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[13] Richard Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989).
[14] René Lenormand, *Étude sur l'harmonie moderne* (Paris, 1913), trans. by Herbert Ancliffe as *A Study of Modern Harmony* (London: Joseph Williams, 1915).

pitch resources: after stripping away melodic ornamentation he invariably finds certain kinds of underlying scales, whether conventional, modal, 'Oriental' or 'Turkish'.[15] Thus in my analysis of octatonicism in *Khamma* (Chapter 2), for example, I have avoided the methods of pitch class sets and pcs genera adumbrated by Allen Forte and Richard Parks and instead have chosen to seek underlying octatonic scale patterns on a more intuitive basis.

Basing analyses wholly on my own subjective listening experience rather than on a theoretical model still opens up difficult questions of criteria for segmentation. The fact that readers will detect the influence of semiological approaches in the conceptual framework and graphical design of some of my analyses makes the issue even more acute, since one of the most powerful critiques of the Nattiez/Ruwet method insists that distinct epistemological paradigms should be separated; the conflation of the distributional and the perceptual is generally deemed to be weak. Craig Ayrey, for example, has made me reconsider the validity of the grounds on which I establish relationships between musical ideas in a recent essay on Debussy's 'significant connections'. Ayrey gets himself into quite a semantic tangle by deconstructing Jakobson's distinction between the associative/paradigmatic/metaphorical and contiguous/syntagmatic/metonymic, but his conclusion about the spectre of analytical coercion is quite clear:

> What is often regarded as unfathomable ambiguity in Debussy is produced by the tension of the accidental in the creation of tropes and the appearance, even illusion, of inevitability when they are elaborated by the analyst as 'structure'. The difficulty of discussing such free play [in melodic structure] is eased by the application of a more sophisticated model than the traditional opposition of paradigm and syntagm, although this remains the essential ground of the model.[16]

Only when the desire to fit music to a pre-ordained trope stretches intuitive credibility beyond its limits does the analyst falls into Ayrey's trap of creating the 'illusion' of inevitability in elucidating musical structure. But although an attempt to define 'intuitive credibility' might seem in order, I would argue that we need not strive to replace the empirical component of analysis with rationalist strategies. I suspect that it is the freedom offered by 'intuitive' empiricism for which Ayrey is really striving. If it is accepted from the start that any one analysis is just one of many and that any single delineation of a series of

[15] E.g. Lenormand, *Ibid.*, 87.
[16] Craig Ayrey, 'Debussy's significant connections: metaphor and metonymy in analytical method', in Anthony Pople (ed.), *Theory, analysis and meaning in music* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 151.

tropes does not claim to define *the* hegemonic structure for the work, then I see little problem in presenting the kinds of analysis that will be found on A3 sheets throughout this dissertation. At a time when musicology is riven by analytical solipsism on the one hand and an equally solipsistic refusal to engage with the score for fear of 'coercive' appropriation on the other, I hope that such an approach is sensitive and timely.[17]

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[17] For an eloquent rejection of these extremes and a defence of 'hermeneutic' close reading, see Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (New Jersey: Princeton, 1997), xviii-xxxi.

Summary

In **Chapter 1** I suggest that for all the extravagant and unsubstantiated claims made by scholars for Debussy's influence on Stravinsky, the most crucial influence of all - the sense of liberation released by incorporating popular musical materials using novel procedures of juxtaposition and montage rather than an overarching, symphonically-conceived structure - has gone unnoticed. My re-evaluation of this initial phase of the composers' interaction is centred on a comparative analysis of *Ibéria* and *Petrushka*. I investigate the nature of Debussy's aesthetic of 'réalités' as it relates to these formal innovations and compare his attempts at extra-musical representation with Stravinsky's daring manipulation of the tension between realist and anti-realist expression in his depiction of the puppets and the human crowds in *Petrushka*.

Chapter 2 turns the focus onto Debussy's reception of Stravinsky by discussing how the Frenchman responded to *The Firebird* and *Petrushka* in his ballet *Khamma* and the second book of piano *Préludes*. An analysis of *Khamma* shows precisely how Debussy's post-1910 use of octatonicism can be distinguished from his earlier utilisation of 'Russian' pitch resources, incontrovertibly demonstrating that Stravinsky's music drew out tendencies already latent in *Pelléas*. The second book of *Préludes* is examined for the presence of Stravinsky's bitonal 'black-and-white' sonorities, although I try to identify what makes Debussy's treatment of bitonality truly distinctive.

Chapter 3 creates a new perspective on the points of common ground found in *Jeux* and *The Rite of Spring* by other scholars. I show that, for all the points of purely structural similarity that can be traced between these two works, Debussy and Stravinsky were exploring radically different means of expression: there are no aesthetic points of contact between *Jeux* and *The Rite* in the way that *Ibéria* and *Petrushka* share expressive aims. Thus I provide a new reading of *Jeux* which tries to go well beyond previous structuralist analyses by mediating between the ballet's structural and hermeneutic aspects, showing:

i) that the ballet had a precursor in the form of a smaller-scale structural model, *Gigues*, which emphasises the continuity in Debussy's compositional process

ii) that the structure of the music cannot be fully understood without reference to extra-musical qualities of allusion and suggestiveness in the ballet scenario.

By reading the work in this way I draw attention to the old-fashioned aesthetics of the work, which helps to explain why, following the tepid reception of *Jeux*, Debussy was thrown into crisis by the competitive and increasingly alien cultural environment in which he found himself - the modernist environment, represented most disturbingly by Stravinsky. I cite an important but little-known interview of 1913 in which Debussy admits to the artistic problems besetting him.

In **Chapter 4** I suggest that Debussy met his crisis of originality head-on by composing a ballet - *La boîte à joujoux* - whose scenario and musical substance clearly reveals the influence of Stravinsky. By writing an unassuming ballet for children, however, I argue that Debussy subverted *Petrushka* and avoided some of the critical comparisons that might have been made had he tried to exorcise *Petrushka's* influence in, say, another high-profile ballet for Diaghilev. I also analyse the *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* in depth and suggest that, after his crisis of confidence over *Jeux*, Debussy was working towards a new idiom partially based on innovations which can be traced to Stravinsky's cultivation of formal and harmonic polarities.

Chapters 5-7 rejoin Debussy in 1915 during the last flowering of inspiration before his final physical decline. I try to balance the extent to which he had assimilated the ramifications of Stravinsky's music with his apparent reaction against the *avant-garde* trends of contemporary European music, and I develop a new assessment of his melancholy search for the sanctuary of a unique, personal but distinctly anti-*Debussyist* clarity of expression in the music of the French past. Only in the works of 1915, I suggest, is there real evidence that Debussy found the 'new idiom' he had been trying to develop since the summer of 1913. I re-examine his relationship with Stravinsky, by now an increasingly distant figure due to the two men's geographical and artistic separation, and note that Debussy urged Stravinsky to follow his own war-time example - to write music untainted by 'the detestable German *Modernstyl*'. I point out the unhappy paradox that although Stravinsky was writing precisely the original 'Russian' music that Debussy wanted him to, Debussy could only hear the modernist syntax of Stravinsky's post-*Rite of Spring* idiom and found it too Schoenbergian. Consequently, I conclude, Debussy - like so many musicians after him - fundamentally misunderstood Stravinsky's radical relationship to the Russian traditions.

Statement

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration. All published and unpublished sources of knowledge used while preparing this dissertation are listed in footnotes to the main text and in the bibliography on pages 229-241. No part of this study has been, or is concurrently being, submitted for any other qualification at any other University.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, without whom…

Ben Davies

Cambridge, September 1999

Chapter 1

The true nature of Debussy's influence on Stravinsky

I

Seeking points of contact

Of the many articles and monographs concerned with Debussy or Stravinsky, virtually all ignore or merely touch upon the interaction between the two men. This absence is particularly notable in Debussy scholarship (the biographies by Dietschy and Vallas are two striking examples) and reflect an assumption that Debussy, as the older, established composer in full maturity, would naturally be less susceptible to new influences than the young Stravinsky.[1] Stravinsky's own assertion that Debussy's music did not change as a result of their contact has compounded a widespread reluctance to examine the Frenchman's late works in the light of Stravinskian influence.[2] It is thus unsurprising that the only extended study of the interaction between the two composers chooses to seek Debussy's influence on Stravinsky.[3]

PERSPECTIVES IN EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP

Stravinsky scholarship embraces the issue with rather more specific points of contact simply because French influence has always been heard in some of the young Russian's earliest works - ever since Rimsky-Korsakov, in fact. Stravinsky himself complained that his *Faune et la Bergère*

> must have irritated Rimsky-Korsakov's conservatism, however, incredible though that may now seem. He found the first song suspiciously 'Debussy-ist'. 'There, you see', he said to me after the performance, 'I have heard it, but if I were to hear it again in a half-

[1] Marcel Dietschy, *A Portrait of Claude Debussy*, ed. and trans. William Ashbrook and Margaret Cobb (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Léon Vallas, *Claude Debussy: His Life and Works*, trans. Maire and Grace O'Brien (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933, reprinted New York: Dover, 1973). The early Debussy biographies tend to be the least likely to discuss Stravinsky at all: see, for example, André Suarès, *Debussy* (Paris: Emile-Paul, 1922).
[2] Stravinsky/Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (London: Faber, 1959), 48.
[3] David Belinfante, 'The Influence of Debussy on Stravinsky' (unpublished MA dissertation, U. of Wales, 1980). Jann Pasler's 1981 dissertation on the role of the Ballets Russes in bringing together the two composers is an honourable exception and will be discussed presently.

> hour I would have to make the same effort of adjustment all over again.' At this time, Rimsky's own 'modernism' was based on a few flimsy enharmonic devices.[4]

This assertion is backed up by Yastrebtsev's 1907 comment that Rimsky was gloomy about 'the decadent-impressionist influence under which Stravinsky had fallen'.[5] Since then, many commentators have pointed out obvious surface similarities between the music of Debussy and Stravinsky. To my mind, such obvious connections lead to observations of limited interest. Unless similarities draw attention to a deliberate quotation (a situation which raises far more taxing questions), explicit borrowings merely reflect the first flushes of influence rather than a fully assimilated, creative response. But recently even analysts who have probed below the musical surface for common patterns and compositional techniques have become sceptical about the effect of this 'decadent impressionism' on Stravinsky. Pieter van den Toorn, for example, concluded:

> As for any substantive influence Debussy's music might have had on Stravinsky, we remain largely unconvinced. True, both composers had by 1914 created languages which, implicating pitch collections and/or orderings other than that of the familiar diatonic C-scale or major scale (e.g. Debussy's famed - and symmetrically defined - whole-tone scale; Stravinsky's symmetrically defined octatonic scales), defied the familiar tonal C-scale conceptions of harmonic progression, modulation definition of key, cadence, and formal design. But apart from this defiance or break with tradition - and apart from some early and rather obvious borrowings (e.g., in *Faune et bergère*, 1906; in the early Act 1 of *The Nightingale*, 1909, with its reminiscence of *Nuages* from Debussy's *Nocturnes*, 1890; at No. 26 in the Kastchei section of *The Firebird*, 1910; and, possibly, in the Introduction to Part II in *Le Sacre*), these "languages" are more striking for the dissimilarity they project than for any apparent likeness. And it is perhaps specially the rhythmic-metric aspects that seem so conspicuously at odds. [...] Consequently, Stravinsky's acknowledged - but unspecified - debt to Debussy ("The musicians of my generation and I myself owe the most to Debussy") may have been primarily philosophical or psychological in nature. For like Stravinsky, Debussy was a rebel and an anti-academic, and the example Debussy had so forcefully set as a composer charting his own, independent, inimitable course, together with the encouragement so thoughtfully

[4] Stravinsky/Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (Berkley & Los Angeles: U. of California Press, 1960), 59. For Stravinsky's other recollections of Rimsky, see amongst others *Conversations*, 39.
[5] V. V. Yastrebtsev, *N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov. Vospominaniya* [Recollections], 2 vols. (Leningrad, 1960), quoted by Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinsky: His Life, Works and Views*, trans. Martin Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 33.

> provided in regard to *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *Le Sacre*, must have afforded Stravinsky a powerful stimulus.[6]

Allen Forte, in the course of an evaluation of Debussy's use of octatonic pitch materials, ends up questioning the very significance of seeking musical connections between Debussy and Stravinsky. Their relationship, Forte suggests, is unusually complex because they were both indebted to the same Russian sources:

> I do not find strong evidence that Debussy was influenced by Stravinsky later in his life. [...] It seems highly unlikely that Debussy, with his own procedures fully developed at that time, would have adopted harmonic ideas from the two ballets in the second volume of preludes and in the complex music of *Jeux* which he began composing about the same time. Certainly there are no obvious and direct correspondences to indicate that that was the case. It is quite possible, on the other hand, that Stravinsky was influenced by the older composer, whose published works he would have had the opportunity to study over a period of many years. Nevertheless, this issue may never be resolved in a satisfactory way, which of course may bring into question its ultimate significance. One thing is clear, however: if Debussy and Stravinsky share a common octatonic ancestor, that individual is Musorgsky.[7]

Several points emerge from this. First, as I will show, Debussy's own procedures were certainly not 'fully developed' by 1910. His style was still evolving rapidly throughout this period of contact with Stravinsky and, although his later music is shaped by a complex assortment of personal and artistic forces, the music of the young Russian undoubtedly leaves its trace on Debussy's music. Second, truly fruitful points of contact between creative artists rarely yield 'obvious and direct correspondences': the processes of assimilation and response are generally more reflective, often revealing themselves in a decidedly oblique manner. Third, it takes a rather detached, analytical frame of mind to resist the seductive historical and aesthetic questions which emerge from the meeting of these two great musicians, particularly when broader considerations concerning early modernism, realism, and nationalism are taken into account. However, Forte is right to emphasise their 'common octatonic ancestor', Musorgsky, and accurately identifies this shared ancestry as the single biggest obstacle to a clear assessment of their interaction. The openings of *Nuages* and *The Nightingale* and their common source in one of the songs in Musorgsky's *Sunless* cycle

[6] Pieter van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (Yale University Press, 1983), 145-6.
[7] Allen Forte, 'Debussy and the Octatonic', *Music Analysis* 10/1-2 (March/July 1991), 158-59.

represents a typical example.[8] The complexities of untangling whether Stravinsky was influenced by Musorgsky or Debussy - or the possibility that he knew both - mean that many musicians have considerable sympathy for Forte's dissatisfaction with the entire enquiry. Debussy, as is well known, was immersed into Russian musical culture during a highly formative period in his life and has often been anointed as the natural heir of the Rimsky-Balakirev school.[9] Yet no existing studies have approached his interaction with the Russian school with the comprehensiveness required: historical musicology cries out for a monograph on *Debussy and the Russian Traditions*.[10]

Renewed life was injected into the issue by Richard Taruskin as part of his revisionist project to uncover the extent to which Stravinsky's music was grounded in 'the Russian Traditions'.[11] Seizing on the point of a 'common ancestry', Taruskin questions exactly when Stravinsky began to respond 'seriously and creatively to modern French music' by assessing the French repertory he might have heard in St. Petersburg. Rebuffing the composer's own (retrospective) assertions, Taruskin argues that the 'home-grown Russian brand of coloristic harmony' and Rimsky's 'flimsy' devices were in fact crucial to Stravinsky during his Parisian career. By demonstrating the extent to which late-nineteenth century Russian 'fantastic' harmonies (such as whole-tone and octatonic collections) became sources for both Stravinsky *and* the modern French school, Taruskin proves that Stravinsky had little need to turn to Debussy's music for exotic scales and beautifully-textured orchestration because he could find models of such writing first-hand in the inheritance handed down by the Russian traditions. Even when a link between French composers and Stravinsky seems incontrovertible, the interwoven nature of Franco-Russian music was such that the Russian traditions - even if mediated through Western Europe - continued to exercise their hold. For

[8] The song is 'Okoncen prazdnii, sumnii den' (1874) ['Finished now is the idle, noisy day']; the relevant passage starts in the piano accompaniment at bar 17.

[9] Cocteau, predictably, remarked that 'Debussy missed his way because he fell from the German frying pan into the Russian fire [...] Debussy transposes Claude Monet *à la Russe*'. Jean Cocteau, *Cock and Harlequin* (1918), trans. Rollo Myers (London: Faber, 1926), 17. The best account of Debussy's early years in Russia is now Lesure's *Claude Debussy avant 'Pelléas', ou les années Symbolistes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1992).

[10] See André Schaeffner, 'Debussy et ses rapports avec la musique russe', in Pierre Souvtchinky (ed.), *Musique Russe*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1953), I, 95-138; Jules Kremlev, 'L'influence de Debussy: Russie', in Edith Weber (ed.), *Debussy et l'évolution de la musique au XXe siècle* (Paris: Centre National de la recherche scientifique, 1965), 215-318; Vladimir Fédorov, 'Debussy vu par quelques Russes', Weber (ed.), *ibid.*, 199-211; Edward Lockspeiser, 'Musorgsky and Debussy', *Musical Quarterly* XXIII (1937), 421-427. Gossipy though it is, the best eyewitness account of the reception of Russian music in France at this time is M. D. Calvocoressi's *Musicians Gallery: Music and Ballet in Paris and London* (London: Faber, 1933); see esp. pages 39-40, 86, 140-226.

[11] Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through Mavra*, 2 vols. (Oxford: OUP, 1996).

example, Taruskin draws attention to the fact that one of Stravinsky's most remarkable orchestral effects in *Firebird*, a series of string glissandi in harmonics which was ostensibly stolen from Ravel's *Rapsodie espagnole*, was in fact found in Rimsky's *Christmas Eve* which Ravel himself had heard in 1907, just six months before completing his *Rapsodie*.[12]

Why, then, did Stravinsky describe Debussy as his 'father in music'?[13] What did he mean when he told Robert Craft that 'the musicians of my generation and I myself owe the most to Debussy'?[14] Was this just retrospective bluff, part of Stravinsky's re-writing of history to replace his provincial origins with a more glamorous and cosmopolitan background? Or can we trace alternative perspectives, whether philosophical (as van den Toorn suggested) or more concretely technical, to illuminate points of fruitful contact?

The reason I have pursued the Debussy-Stravinsky interaction in the face of so much scholarly disapprobation is that I believe that their relationship is far more significant than has previously been assumed. This dissertation sets out to prove not only that Debussy exerted an influence on Stravinsky in ways that have been hitherto misunderstood, but also that within just a couple of years Stravinsky himself had a reciprocal and powerful effect on the direction of Debussy's late music.

PETRUSHKA'S STARTLING INNOVATIONS

The complexities of the issue mean that it is easier for me to lay out my hypotheses immediately, using analysis to show exactly which features I believe circumscribe the precise points of contact between the two men. Only then can a supporting historical context be provided to support observations about compositional technique that might otherwise seem to be in danger of appearing merely fortuitous.

I begin with a familiar problem: how are we to explain the huge differences distinguishing *The Firebird* of 1909 from those of *Petrushka* (written during the following year)? Although van den Toorn and others have noted that 'block writing'- that most Stravinskian of techniques - is first found in *The Firebird*, it is *Petrushka* that really embodies those features

[12] Taruskin, 'A French Legend', *Russian Traditions*, 311-314.
[13] In a interview given in Montreal later in life, quoted by Robert Craft in *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*, 63.
[14] Stravinsky/Craft, *Conversations*, 48.

of the *russkiy slog* (the 'Russian manner') which became so influential on the subsequent development of music.[15] Commentators have generally focused on three qualities:

(i) the bold, vivid interpolation of folk melodies to create 'street music' of unprecedented vitality;

(ii) *Petrushka's* remarkable rhythmic-metric inventions;

(iii) the disposition of musical materials using techniques of ostinato and montage in which short, contrasting musical ideas are repeated, superimposed or juxtaposed against one another rather than worked through in a systematically linear, 'organic' manner.

Taruskin, in the most searching commentary to be published in recent years, shows that *Petrushka* is pervaded by mechanisms and features borrowed from earlier Russian art music, revealing facets of the ballet that have been undervalued for years by Western music historians. He pays particular attention to the concepts of

- *uproshcheniye* - simplification
- *drobnost'* - the quality of 'splinteredness'; that which is formally disunified or considered as a 'sum of parts'
- *nepodvizhnost'* - immobility or stasis, the quality of being non-developmental or non-teleological.

Each concept arguably stands in opposition to prevailing 'European' aesthetic tenets; together, they underpin Stravinsky's 'Turanian' approach to composition.[16] As Jonathan Cross has recently elucidated, these three elements not only underpin the anti-Teutonic, 'non-developmental', 'oppositional' writing which feeds straight from Musorgsky to Debussy, but in turn feed directly into the 'mainstream' of musical modernism via Stravinsky.[17] Thus while *Petrushka* emerges from a specific Russian art-music tradition, it lies on the cusp of early modernism and should be regarded as a remarkably novel and fresh score. Taruskin describes the ballet's creative history as the 'witness to Stravinsky's self-discovery' and shows how the young composer radically transgressed the 'academic' nationalism of his nineteenth-century Russian predecessors. The impetus for this transgression, Taruskin argues, came from the studies of folk music produced by the new school of musical ethnographers in Russia, who produced sources of motivic material free from the 'normalising' editorial interventions found in earlier transcriptions. These ethnographic sources inspired Stravinsky to break away from the tenacious grip of Rimsky-Korsakov's routine methods of generating and developing

[15] Van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky*, 26. My use of Russian terms here (and subsequently) is based on Taruskin's glossary in *Russian Traditions*, 1677-9.
[16] For a definition and discussion of 'Turanian' as the imaginary *ur*-Russia, see Taruskin, *Russian Traditions*, 1127-1136.
[17] Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), esp. 9-12.

folk-like musical materials; their liberating outcome is particularly evident on the rhythmic innovations in *Petrushka*. The daring rhythmic and textural dislocations in the variations on the 'Song of the Volochobniki' in the First Tableau, for example,

> [mark] the first time that folklorism and modernism coincided in Stravinsky's music. The quality of the rhythmic periods here - static, additive, non-developing ostinati of variable length that continually break off and start up again - is unprecedented in Russian art music. It is instantly recognisable as Stravinskian: it is, in fact, one of his trademarks, and one of his most influential innovations. Its origins, as we see, lie in an attempt to render faithfully an aspect of folk reality.[18]

Thus for all that Stravinsky was clearly indebted to Rimsky-Korsakov, Serov and others, Taruskin argues that it was folk music, not art music, that was most crucial in setting Stravinsky on a new course, stimulating him to explore a 'neo-nationalist' agenda with which to match the fresh departures being explored in the visual and plastic arts.

Taruskin's link between *Petrushka*'s unprecedented freedom in rhythmic patterning and the newly-available ethnographic sources of folk materials is utterly convincing and I see no reason to refute it. However, unlike Taruskin, I am not convinced that Stravinsky's great transformation of 1909-10 could have been brought about solely by an encounter with musical ethnography. I find it hard to believe that Stravinsky could have put together these diverse scraps of source material into a half-hour ballet of such sophistication without a model, a point of departure to help him make the leap towards radical evocations of 'folk reality'. The sheer momentum of Taruskin's virtuoso thesis has led to an emphasis on the dominance of the Russian traditions at the expense of a crucial catalyst: the impact of French music on Stravinsky. As Stephen Walsh has cautioned,

> One [needs] to read [Taruskin's] musical examples carefully to reassure oneself that, whatever general or even technical ideas Stravinsky may have lifted from the Serovs and Dargomïzhskys, he certainly did not owe them anything significant in the matter of style, systematic technique or expressive range.[19]

Without Paris - and particularly without Debussy - I suggest that the melting pot of Russian sources which Taruskin has put together so convincingly might have taken far longer to engender a work like *Petrushka*.

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[18] Taruskin, *Russian Traditions*, 713.
[19] Stephen Walsh, review of Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* in *Music and Letters*, 453.

A FORGOTTTEN RADICAL

In May 1910, Stravinsky arrived in the French capital for the première of *The Firebird* and immersed himself in modern French music and all the other excitements of pre-war Parisian life. After the first performance, Stravinsky later recalled, Diaghilev introduced Debussy, who 'came onto the stage and complimented me on my score. That was the beginning of friendly relations which lasted to the end of his life'.[20] Debussy, by 1910 unquestionably the major figure in contemporary French music and at the height of his international career, had just had his latest work premièred. *Ibéria*, part of the orchestral triptych *Images*, was given its first hearing in Paris on 20th February 1910 and was repeated subsequently throughout the year; it undoubtedly remained a novelty during Stravinsky's first and most impressionable period abroad. We cannot be sure that Stravinsky heard the work in 1910, but he would have had ample opportunity in the concert hall or during his personal encounters with Debussy, Ravel and others.[21]

It is easy with hindsight to miss the radical freshness in *Ibéria*, overshadowed as it is by a number of louder and more dissonant contemporaries. At the time, all three *Images* were considered quite daring, as a brief survey of their reception history reveals. In one of the earliest reviews of *Ibéria*, for example, Henri Malherbe remarked on the evocative power of the score:

> These are real pictures, in which the musician is bent on translating for the ear impressions made on the eyes. To make them more intense he tries to combine the two forms of sensation. As the painter delights in contrasting tonalities, in the play of light and shade, so the composer enjoys the clash of unforeseen dissonances and the blending of rare sonorities.[22]

Pierre Lalo, a prominent critic and Ravel's *bête noir*, complained about Debussy's 'nasal' woodwind writing and described the brass as the rasping of 'une voix de polichinelle' (unwittingly foreshadowing *Krik Petrushki*!).[23] Ravel, angry at the hostile and conservative

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[20] Stravinsky, *Chronicle of my Life* (1936), 55.
[21] For details of the reception of *Ibéria* in 1910, see François Lesure, *Debussy: Biographie Critique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1994), 319-321.
[22] Quoted in Martin Cooper, *French Music: from the death of Berlioz to the death of Fauré* (London: OUP, 1951), 144.
[23] Pierre Lalo, *Le Temps* (26 February 1910), cited in Lesure, *Biographie critique*, 320. *Krik Petrushki* ["Petrushka's shout"] was the initial title of Stravinsky's *Konzertstück* from which the ballet developed. For details of Petrushka's traditionally kazoo-like voice and its relationship to Stravinsky's trumpet writing, see Taruskin, *Russian Traditions*, 667-669.

reception with which the *Images* were met by most critics, wrote a defensive retort specifically naming Lalo, Gaston Carraud and Camille Mauclair. Emphasising Debussy's 'original and delicate harmonic richness' and 'intense musicality', Ravel spoke of being 'moved to tears by the flowing quality of *Ibéria* [and] the profoundly moving "Les Parfums de la nuit"'.[24] Manuel de Falla was awed by the brazen confidence with which Debussy incorporated folk idioms into *Ibéria*, and in later years recalled that Spanish composers themselves had 'neglected, even despised as barbaric', the spontaneous effects that Debussy managed to create in order to evoke Andalusia.[25] In 1913 the music critic of *Le Ménetrel* described the *Images* as 'very difficult pieces'.[26] Constant Lambert, still sensitive to the triptych's freshness two decades later, argued that the *Images* created a synthesis of Debussy's earlier technical experiments in which he managed to rid himself of his former mannerisms with a new drive for purity and freedom of expression, exhibiting 'a far greater liveliness and variety of texture than the early works'.[27] Before it settled into the repertoire, *Ibéria* was a truly avant-garde work.

II

Towards a re-evaluation of the nature of Stravinsky's debt to Debussy

When we stand back and allow the evidence provided by the reception of *Ibéria* to enhance our understanding of its novel qualities, a surprising conclusion emerges. Strange as it may sound, I contend that the most important aspect of French influence on Stravinsky was not the familiar soft sensuousness of *Debussyism*, as appropriated by Stravinsky for his two Verlaine settings.[28] Rather, it was the harsh, radical freshness with which Debussy incorporated folk and quasi-folk materials into his own musical idiom, specifically in *Ibéria*, where he presented a daring blend of sophisticated modernism and bold, popular thematic material. There need be no paradox in this so long as we resist the lingering perception that Debussy's range of musical expression was limited to vague and hazy impressionism. The chronologies of *Ibéria* and *Petrushka* dovetail convincingly, and as I will show, there are plenty of points of technical and aesthetic similarity to draw *Petrushka* into *Ibéria*'s sphere of influence.

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[24] Ravel, 'L'art et les hommes: à propos des *Images* de Claude Debussy', *Les Cahiers d'aujourd'hui* (February 1913), 135-38, translated as 'Regarding Claude Debussy's *Images*' by Arbie Orenstein in *A Ravel Reader*, 366-368. The article is a marvellous source for an appreciation of the partisan nature of French musical politics at this time.

[25] Manuel de Falla, 'Claude Debussy and Spain', *Revue Musicale* (December 1920), reprinted in Federico Sopeña (ed.), *Manuel de Falla on music and musicians*, trans. David Uronan & J.M. Thomson, (London: Marion Boyars, 1979), 45.

[26] Quoted in Lesure/Smith, *Debussy on Music*, 280.

[27] Constant Lambert, *Music Ho!* (London: Faber, 1934, 3rd ed. Penguin, 1948), 24.

[28] On this, see Belinfante, 'The Influence of Debussy on Stravinsky', 26, 30.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF *IBÉRIA* AND *PETRUSHKA*

Fig. 1.1 is a graphical representation of the finale of *Ibéria*. In this movement, Debussy takes a point of departure from his extra-musical context - 'le matin d'un jour de fête' - and explores techniques of musical montage to an unprecedented extent in order to evoke the changing sensations provoked by various events and scenarios. My diagram is constructed to scale, with 1cm = 4 bars. Debussy uses seven main blocks of motivic material in the movement, which I have listed down the left-hand side of Fig. 1.1, together with a reference to where that particular motif was first heard (the inter-movement connections in *Ibéria* are established with meticulous care, a remarkable feature which I will discuss later). The juxtaposed blocks represent the occurrence of each particular motive, or a derivation from that motive, at particular points in the work. The harmonic type or combination of types underpinning each block is outlined underneath:

DIA	diatonic
DIA/PENT	diatonic, with emphasis on the pentatonic subset
CHROM	chromatic
W-T	whole-tone
$G^{\#4}$	tonal axis about G, with strong emphasis on the tritone interval created by C# (not necessarily whole-tone, but normally part of the 8-17/18/19 complex[29])

Bar numbers appear above the appropriate block.

What is striking about this diagram is the extreme delineation between blocks, showing how each motivic group is presented independently: each block is essentially self-contained, not worked through in an organically 'symphonic' manner. Occasionally, different motifs are superimposed, as at bar 72. The music seems to cohere primarily by means of tonality. Despite the prevalence of tritone relationships on the musical surface of the work (i.e. in the motivic and melodic materials themselves), the underlying harmonic structure of the movement is unusually clear-cut for Debussy, although he avoids the establishment of tonal tension across the entire span of the movement. E*b* appears to be the tonic at the beginning, counteracted by C at bar 29; G, which appears at bar 66, is followed by the extraordinary repetition (accentuated by instrumental contrast) of the same motivic blocks in G*b* and then

[29] On the 8-17/18/19 complex in Debussy's music, see Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy*. Such pitch-class set classifications tend to be applied far too systematically: however, Parks's suggestion that virtually all Debussy's non-diatonic, tritone-based materials (excluding the whole-tone genus) can be accounted for within the 8-17/18/19 complex is a useful heuristic observation, and one which I will refer to elsewhere in this study.

Derivation And Montaging Of Blocks In Iberia, Third Movement

Source

II, 127
III, 1
II, 27
II, 82
I, 2
II, 114
I, 178

end II | III

5 7 11 15 21 29 33 38 45 49 53 57 58 61 66 72 74 76 80 84 88 92 96 100

F# DIA/PENT
E♭ DIA
F DIA/PENT
E♭ DIA
⟶ W-T
W-T
G-C# axis
C DIA
G DIA
C DIA
Octatonic
C DIA
E♭m/G♭ DIA
C DIA
G♭ DIA
C CHROM/DIA
G DIA/CHROM
G DIA
G(#4)
G CHROM
G CHROM

104 107 111 119 123 127 135 144

II, 127
III, 1
II, 27
II, 82
I, 2
II, 114
I, 178

G DIA
G(#4) G(#4)
E♭ CHROM
E♭ DIA
⟶ G DIA

PAN-A3 18 STAVE

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G, without any intervening efforts at modulation. The recapitulation of the first movement material in E*b* at bar 123 further distances G's claim on the tonal axis, while even the final twist into G at 138, although a strong move, is presented as accidental rather than inevitable. The tension set up here is interesting: if motivic material recurs, the tonality diverges suddenly; but if new motivic material is spliced into the texture, Debussy takes care to link the juxtaposed blocks by harmonic means. The avoidance of conventional points of structural articulation - notably the absence of both an opening tonic and a period of dominant prolongation - denies the fulfilment of tonal expectation. It is this unorthodox means of articulating structure, together with the liberal juxtaposition of motivic blocks, which gives the music the fluidity and unpredictability it requires to ensure a truly novel means of expression.

Many more conclusions will be drawn from this diagram, but first let me establish the principal point of comparison by presenting the opening 250 bars of *Petrushka* in the same manner (see Figure 1.2, displayed at the same scale as Figure 1.1 with 1cm = 4 bars). Like Debussy, Stravinsky uses a number of contrasting themes which undergo similar patterns of disposition. Although four out of Stravinsky's eight themes in this section are taken from ethnographic sources,[30] the materials appear to have been chosen for intervallic qualities through which they can be made to fit together. The result is a collection of loosely related motives not unlike Debussy's group (which appear to have been freely-composed, without concern for ethnographic verisimilitude). Thus the opening cries (motif 1) are based on a rising fourth, as is the Song of the Volochobniki (motif 2) and its three derivations (motives 3-5). Motives 6-8 were also clearly chosen for their congruence given Stravinsky's decision to let them run in turn polymetrically against each other between rehearsal nos. 12 and 17.
The patterns of disposition in the two works are strikingly similar. Each composer accentuates rather than softens the contrasts in order to delineate the juxtaposed blocks and preserve their distinct character. There are, of course, some important differences in technique. Stravinsky usually repeats material quite strictly: there isn't much motivic variation and the repetitions are always repeated at the same pitch rather than transposed. He also uses ostinato technique to create links across the juxtapositions: the accompanying ostinato on D heard at the very opening, for example, remains virtually unbroken until rehearsal number 5. There is a danger of monotony in this relentless motion which is entirely

[30] First noted by Frederick Sternfeld, 'Some Russian Folk Songs in Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*', *Music Library Association Notes* II (1945), 98-104, reprinted in Charles Hamm (ed.), *Stravinsky: Petrushka* (New York and London: Norton Critical Scores, 1967), 203-215. Also see Taruskin's comprehensive list in *Russian Traditions*, I, 696-7.

MONTAGE: IN PETRUSHKA, FIRST TABLEAU

opening

2

3+3

7

6

9+2

12+1

15-1

1 2 2+3 3 3+2 5 6 7 8 8+4 9 9+2 10

11 11+5 12 13 14 15 16+1 17 18 19 20 22 23 23+4 24 24+4 25 26

16+2

(...)

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absent from Debussy's interacting harmonic complexes, but Stravinsky sustains interest by rhythmic-metric dislocations and by emphasising the textural and instrumental contrasts. For example, the rippling ostinati of reh. 4 are suddenly replaced by relentless homophony at reh. 5, and the contrasts brought about by orchestration in voices (string vs. woodwind) rather than a more conventional 'mixed' instrumentation reinforces the separation of some blocks (e.g. between reh. 7 and 8). Register also helps: the flute/high cello motifs at reh. 1 are swiftly contrasted with the low, 'liturgical' scoring (in thirds) of the Volochobniki theme at reh 2.

Debussy's blocks are not delineated as rigidly because his harmonic juxtapositions create additional means of distinction. Stravinsky prefers metrical dislocation derived from his 'real' folk sources, and it is notable that *Ibéria* exhibits very little of the angular, additive figurations and ambiguous metrical dislocations of Stravinsky's opening 'Song of the Volochobniki', for example. However, Debussy prefigures Stravinsky's interest in dramatic changes in orchestral texture. His intercutting between strings and woodwind in bars 52/53, 56/57 & 58/59 reinforces the harmonic distinctions between each block, and the extraordinary *libre et fantasque* violin phrase in bars 66-67 is interrupted by a brittle woodwind-percussion texture in bar 69. The fact that Debussy's texture here sounds so Stravinskian with its dissonant seconds and tritones should alert us to the sense of freedom and unusual expressive qualities that Stravinsky would have found in *Ibéria*. *Petrushka's* remarkably pure diatonicism and relentless ostinato textures should also provoke us to make a connection with Debussy's *Ibéria*.

So from where does Debussy's vivid technique of using folk-like materials and bold juxtapositions come? [31]

A QUESTION OF AESTHETICS

It is well known that Debussy used popularly-inspired materials in works written before *Ibéria* - particularly in his Spanish pieces - but never before had he used such frankly commonplace material in such a prominent manner. *Ibéria* contains tambourines, castanets, trombone glissandi, street marches and gypsy violins; in the third movement there is even a

[31] I will provide a largely historical account here. Descriptive accounts of the technical mechanisms of juxtaposition technique can be found in Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne Mitchell and Wesley Blomster (London: Sheed and Ward, 1973), 188; Katherine Russell Covington, 'A Study of Textural Stratification in Twentieth-Century Compositions' (PhD diss., University of Indiana, 1982), 21-27; Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy*.

stage instruction requesting the violinists to strum their instruments under their arms *Quasi Guitarra* (bar 29). The sheer physicality and unadulterated vulgarity of some of these materials makes an obvious point of contact with the 'trash' out of which *Petrushka* was fashioned.[32] Furthermore, Debussy's unusual recourse to pure diatonicism and apparent simplicity in striving to create folkloristic 'réalités', most evident in the third movement, creates an unequivocal precedent for *Petrushka*, whose ostinato-driven diatonicism was considered so 'subversive' in the context of pre-1914 *fin-de-siècle* decadence. Jacques Rivière, for example, in his review of the première in *La nouvelle revue française*, insisted that Stravinsky's achievement in *Petrushka* was one of simplification in the face of a continual drive towards further complication in the work of his contemporaries.[33]

For both composers, the innovative use of musical material is rooted in an awareness that the extra-musical import of their music demanded a different method of musical argument from one dictated by predominantly 'intramusical' concerns. In a letter to Durand of March 1908 (i.e. during the composition of *Ibéria*) Debussy wrote

> The *Images* won't be quite complete by the time you get back, but I hope to play you a large part of them ...I'm trying to write 'something else' - *realities*, in a manner of speaking - what imbeciles call 'impressionism', a term used with the utmost inaccuracy, especially by art critics who use it as a label to stick on Turner, the finest creator of mystery in the whole of art![34]

Réalités is a fascinating concept, but there is little record of what Debussy understood the terms *impressionisme* or *réalités* to mean, except he disliked any form of label to be attached to his music. His letter to Durand does not appear to be a rejection of impressionism as an artistic ideal, but rather a critique of the mistaken connotations that had become attached to it. A fuller explanation of what 'réalités' might signify is supplied by an exchange between Debussy and an interviewer from the *Daily Mail* published in May 1909:

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[32] The phrase was Andrey Rimsky-Korsakov's. See Craft/Stravinsky, *Expositions and Developments*, 135.

[33] 'Subversive' is Taruskin's word: see *Russian Traditions*, I, 736. Jacques Rivière's review appeared in *La nouvelle revue française* (September 1911); an excerpt is printed in Charles Hamm, 'The Genesis of Petrushka', *Petrushka* (New York: Norton, 1967), 10-11.

[34] Undated letter [March 1908], in *Lettres á son éditeur*, 58. 'J'essaie de faire "autre chose", en quelque sorte, des réalités - ce que les imbéciles appellent "impressionisme", terme aussi mal employé que possible.' This translation from Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 188.

> [Debussy, in response to a question about the lack of choruses in *Pelléas*:]
>
> "A chorus is a very difficult thing to compose. It is the voice of a crowd; a voice that must be spontaneous and instinctive [...] The voice of the crowd is made up of a thousand different expressions and various shades of feeling. The musician must aim at giving an impression sudden and vivid, yet subtle and mysterious. Only an impression: never more than that."
>
> "You are an impressionist, M. Debussy."
>
> "I have been called the 'Whistler of music.'" And he added whimsically, "They have dubbed my friend Maeterlinck the 'Belgian Shakespeare.' People love such pompous names [...] So far as I am concerned, I can only say that my one engrossing ambition in music is to bring it as near as possible to a representation of life itself."[35]

Debussy's oblique avoidance of the label 'impressionism' in this exchange is entirely characteristic. Like Monet, Debussy despised academic impressionism, especially when it seemed to spring from a dilution and adulteration of his own principles; it was precisely the derivative *Debussyist* appropriation of his early style by second-rate imitators which encouraged him to explore what Louis Laloy dubbed a 'new manner' from around the time of *La Mer*. [36] Laloy claimed to see a true paring down (*dépouillement*) in Debussy's music as early as 1904, based on a desire for naturalness, *simplicité* and a newly expressive clarity. It was precisely this *dépouillement*, Laloy argued, which separated Debussy from his imitators as he strove to move away from the voluptuous sensuousness of his earlier music towards a new and essentially anti-*Debussyist* clarity.

With the benefit of hindsight, Debussy's *dépouillement* can be seen to develop from two main strands which run concurrently throughout his life's work. There is the *dépouillement* of French classicism, first evident in works such as the 'Passepied' of the *Suite Bergamasque* (1890) and which culminates in the three late sonatas. Simultaneously, although acquiring prominence in different works, Debussy's music exhibits *dépouillement* as part of what I will describe here as his aesthetic of *réalités*. This emerges first in *Fêtes* (from the *Nocturnes*), blossoms with renewed vigour in *La Mer* and culminates in the third movement of *Ibéria*. The classicism in some of Debussy's early works is largely suppressed after *Pelléas*, to be

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[35] R. de C., 'The newest music: an explanation from M. Debussy', *The Daily Mail*, Friday 28 May 1909, 4. This interview is more readily available in French translation as 'La musique contemporaine' in Lesure (ed.), *M. Croche et autres écrits* (rev. ed., 1987), 291. Like all interviews, this can hardly be taken as gospel truth, but the interviewer's care in recording Debussy's oblique answer to the suggestion that he might be an 'impressionist' suggests that no wilful invention is present here.

[36] Louis Laloy, 'La simplicité en musique', *La Revue Musicale* 4 (15 février 1904), 106-111; 'La nouvelle manière de Debussy', *La Grand Revue* (10 février 1908), 530-5; also see, with specific reference to the *Images*, 'C. Debussy et le debussysme', S.I.M. (août-septembre 1910).

rediscovered years later under the pressure of war; I will discuss this aspect of his music in Chapter 7.

THE MUSICAL SOURCES OF DEBUSSY'S *RÉALITÉS*

Debussy's aesthetic of *réalités* grows out of his eventual rejection of his youthful passion for Wagner and the Russian school. Michel Calvocoressi, a relatively reliable eyewitness source for this period, noted that Russian music came as a 'revelation' to French composers such as Debussy and Ravel. He emphasised that the sources of inspiration most responsible for enriching the music of French and Russian composers during the late-nineteenth century were folk idioms and poetic programmes. In this respect, Calvocoressi specifically noted the music of: Balakirev, who was widely considered by the French to be the leader of the modern Russian school (especially after his symphonic poem *Tamara*, completed in 1882); Rimsky-Korsakov (especially the orchestral works such as *Antar* and *Shéhérazade,* but not the operas, which remained virtually unknown until Diaghilev's arrival in Paris); Borodin and Musorgsky (primarily the songs).[37] Calvocoressi also stressed the mediation of Debussy's former teacher, Bourgault-Ducoudray, whose interest in the free rhythms and modal qualities of folk and early church music helped to pave the way for the proper recognition of the Russian masters.[38] But Debussy quickly discovered that the Russian composers had their own limitations, uncovering but not resolving problems of form that he would have to face alone. An astute polemic written under his journalistic *alter ego,* M. Croche, reveals the precise nature of these constraints:

> The young Russian school has endeavoured to give new life to the symphony by borrowing ideas from popular melodies; it has succeeded in cutting brilliant gems; but are not the themes entirely disproportionate to the developments into which they have been forced? [...] Simple tunes, plucked from the mouths of hoary peasants, find themselves, to their consternation, trimmed with harmonic frills. This gives them an appearance of pathetic discomfort, but a lordly counterpoint ordains that they shall forget their peaceful origin.[39]

In short, Debussy recognised that folk music could not simply be integrated into contemporary musical language without incurring inevitable strains of stylistic fracture. This

[37] Calvocoressi, *Musicians Gallery*, 39-41; 136-165.
[38] L.A. Bourgault-Ducoudray published some startlingly odd transcriptions and harmonisations of non-Western music, prefaced by some interesting discussions of scale types: see, for example, his *Trente mélodies populaires de Grèce et de Orient* (Paris: Henry Lemoine, 3rd ed. 1897).
[39] *Monsieur Croche the Dilettante Hater*, reprinted in *Three Classics in the Aesthetic of Music*, 18.

was particularly true of the generation following Glinka, who - as Taruskin puts it - tried to reconcile 'Glinka's innovatory procedures [as in *Kamarinskaya*] with the canons of "German symphonism"'.[40] For example, the sonata model employed by the youthful Balakirev in his *Overture on Three Russian Themes* of 1857-8 was still integral to his music half a century later, as in his Second Symphony in D minor of 1900-1908 (which also incorporates folk melodies). Despite the undeniable increase in sophistication with which Balakirev manipulates large-scale form in his later works, his approach was at root the same as it had been in the late 1850s. Even those composers who were able to avoid the sonata principle and explore more episodic approaches, such as Rimsky-Korsakov, found themselves trapped in symphonically-proportioned modes of development. Rimsky's *Overture on Liturgical Themes* Op. 36, for all its modal harmonic inflections and free pentatonic cadenzas, remains repressed by routine techniques of sequential repetition. To an even greater extent, his *Sinfonietta on Russian Themes* creaks under the strain of too much mechanistic repetition, resulting in an overall harmonic-thematic complexion bound rigidly by periodic phrase structures which fail to provide sufficient structural interest or expressive diversity to keep the work alive.[41]

Debussy drew a comparable conclusion from his studies of Wagner, in whose operas he found a direct conflict between the implications of form and the requirements of an independently-paced dramatic discourse:

> Making the symphonic development responsible for the dramatic action is a dead end that has only been of use to Wagner and the German school of thought. In adopting such a style our [French] emphasis on clarity only succeeded in weakening and eventually drowning it.[42]

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[40] Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (New Jersey: Princeton, 1997), 123.

[41] I should add that, in exploring Debussy's critique of the formal difficulties encountered in these works, this account provides a one-sided depiction of undeniably interesting and attractive music. These works, of course, *did* have a great deal to offer subsequent composers. Taruskin has demonstrated the importance of the harmonic innovations in several of these pieces, drawing particular attention to the principle of modulatory rotation by thirds [*Russian Traditions*, 261]. Furthermore, the two Balakirev works mentioned use folk songs which reoccur in *Petrushka* (in the *Overture* at letter E and in the *Second Symphony* during the Trio), and parts of Rimsky's overture reappear in *Petrushka* [Taruskin, *Russian Traditions* I, 720-1]; Rimsky's pentatonic violin cadenzas even resurface as Vaughan Williams's utterly English lark.

[42] Debussy, SIM review of the Concerts Colonne of 15 May 1913, trans. from *Debussy on Music*, 288. For discussion, see Joseph Kerman, 'Opera as Sung Play' and 'Opera as Symphonic Poem' in *Opera as Drama* (Knopf, 1956), 140-177; and for a revisionist perspective, see Carolyn Abbate, 'Opera as Symphony, a Wagnerian Myth', in Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker (eds.), *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 92-124.

As Jann Pasler and others have argued, only one composer offered Debussy the realist aesthetic he needed to invoke a non-symphonic model for building form: Musorgsky.[43] Debussy learned from Musorgsky's ability to compose solely according to the demands of dramatic context rather than as part of an abstract symphonic process. A letter of Musorgsky's, sent to Rimsky-Korsakov in 1868, outlines an anti-Teutonic stance wholly in agreement with Debussy's sentiments quoted above:

> In short, *symphonic development in the technical sense* is just like German philosophy - all worked out and systematised [...] When a German thinks, he *reasons* his way to a *conclusion*. Our Russian brother, on the other hand, starts with the conclusion and then might amuse himself with the reasoning. [...] When an artist revises, it means he is dissatisfied. When he revises although satisfied, he is *germanizing*, chewing over what has been said. We are not cud-chewers, but omnivores.[44]

Like Musorgsky, Debussy resisted cud-chewing: both composers' materials tend to be based on short harmonic, melodic, or rhythmic cells.[45] Pasler argues that these materials take on the character of "formulae": frameworks or outlines that remain fixed while the context in which they appear changes. By elevating *context* over the internal, abstract formal requirements of the musical process, a musical narrative can encompass remarkably subtle inflections in characterisation and dramatisation in order to express the flux of a particular person's feelings over time or in different situations. *Pelléas* remains the most consummate example of this, but Debussy's experimentation in the opera inevitably affected his non-dramatic work by releasing music from purely formal requirements, ensuring that the formal shape of the work could be determined primarily by poetic impulse. Pasler concludes:

---

[43] Jann Pasler, 'Debussy, Stravinsky, and the Ballets Russes: The Emergence of a New Musical Logic' (PhD diss., University of Chicago 1981). We are now aware of the extraordinary extent to which Debussy was indebted to Wagner as well as Musorgsky. The two major Debussy-Wagner studies were published around the same time as Pasler's dissertation and her discussion presumably could not incorporate their insights. See Robin Holloway, *Debussy and Wagner* (London: Eulenberg, 1979) and Carolyn Abbate, '*Tristan* in the Composition of *Pelléas*', *Nineteenth-Century Music* V/2 (Fall 1981), 117-141.

[44] Musorgsky to Rimsky-Korsakov, 15 August 1868, translation by Taruskin in Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin (eds.), *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents* (New York: Schirmer, 1984), 396.

[45] Such repetition can lead to static music, strangely devoid of conventional structural tension, and it is surely this sense of 'static harmony' that André Souris argued Stravinsky took from Debussy. See Souris, 'Debussy et Stravinsky', 45-56.

> By repeating rather than developing his musical ideas, Debussy found himself free to experiment with all the various contexts, moods, colours, and accents of which the same idea was capable.[46]

Such experimentation is first evident to a significant extent in the *Nocturnes*, where Debussy extended the idea of varied repetition to encompass juxtaposed 'block-like' writing. This triptych, Pasler suggests, was seminal for ideas which were to blossom in the later works of both Debussy and Stravinsky. She cites *Fêtes* as the earliest example in which a relentless use of ostinati and vivid juxtaposition is evident, arguing that motives recurring in different contexts create coherence for the whole work while ostinati fix the listener's attention on 'the instant', building an homogenous unit which relates or contrasts to its surroundings. In this way, for example, Debussy manages to depict a passing procession by interpolating a clearly distinct section into the middle of the piece (see *Fêtes* between rehearsal nos. 10 and 14).

Pasler's emphasis on music drama as the source of Debussy's juxtaposition technique helps to explain why dramatic breaks in the texture are first incorporated into instrumental works to fulfil extra-musical demands (hence the 'seminal' status of the *Nocturnes*). Only much later did Debussy use the technique for purely formal reasons. It is especially pertinent for this discussion of the sources of *Ibéria* that Debussy's most conspicuous and daring explorations into montage are linked to programmatic rationales of a distinctly Spanish complexion.

THE SPANISH CONNECTION: DEBUSSY'S FORMAL TRANSGRESSIONS

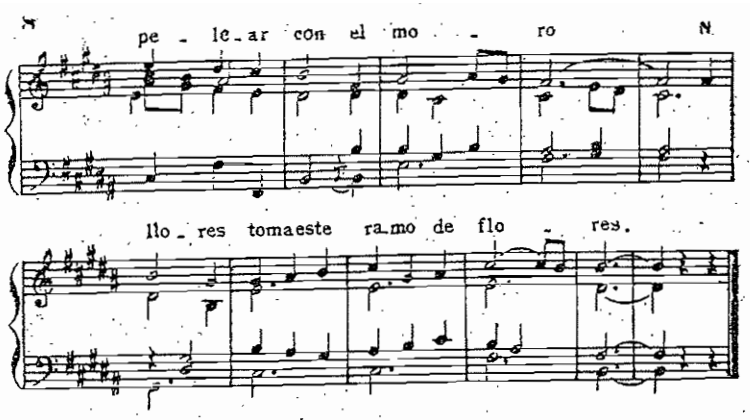
Why might Debussy's Spanish pieces contain such striking examples of juxtaposition technique? The question broadens the range of musical sources for *Ibéria* from the Russian school to include Debussy's French predecessors, particularly those interested in writing 'exotic' Spanish works. As James Parakilas has recently pointed out, a curious Franco-Russian exchange occurred between 1880 and 1900.[47] Before this period, a French work like Bizet's *Carmen* (1875) conjured up a wholly exotic Spain deliberately written with Parisian audiences in mind, whereas Russian composers such as Glinka actually travelled to Spain and wrote works such as the *Jota Aragonesa* as part of a strategy for introducing themselves to a foreign audience. Towards the end of the century, this distinction was reversed in many works. Under the influence of what Parakilas calls Russia's increasing 'geopolitical eminence', composers such as Rimsky-Korsakov felt increasingly 'empowered' to create

[46] Pasler, 'New Musical Logic', 285.
[47] James Parakilas, 'How Spain got a Soul', in Jonathan Bellman (ed.), *The Exotic in Western Music* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 137-193.

exotic appropriations of Spain from imported books of folk melodies explicitly written for a domestic audience (as he did for his *Capriccio espagnol [Capriccio on Spanish Themes]*). On the other hand, Chabrier started a new French tradition (closer to Glinka) by actually travelling to Spain to transcribe his own sources at first-hand. Chabrier's evocations of Spain, notably *Aubade* (1883), *Habanera* (1885) and *España* (1885) were based around themes which he heard on his travels; he also wrote a closely-observed piano piece, *Mauresque* ("In Moorish Style").[48] Furthermore, increased tourism to Spain and the huge Paris Exhibitions increased the appetite of French audiences for authentic Spanish gypsy musicians and flamenco dancers, who were by now highly self-conscious of their exportable 'exotic' qualities. As Parakilas puts it, 'in France exoticism had taken a turn for the realistic'.[49] The stereotypes of *Carmen* were no longer sufficient.

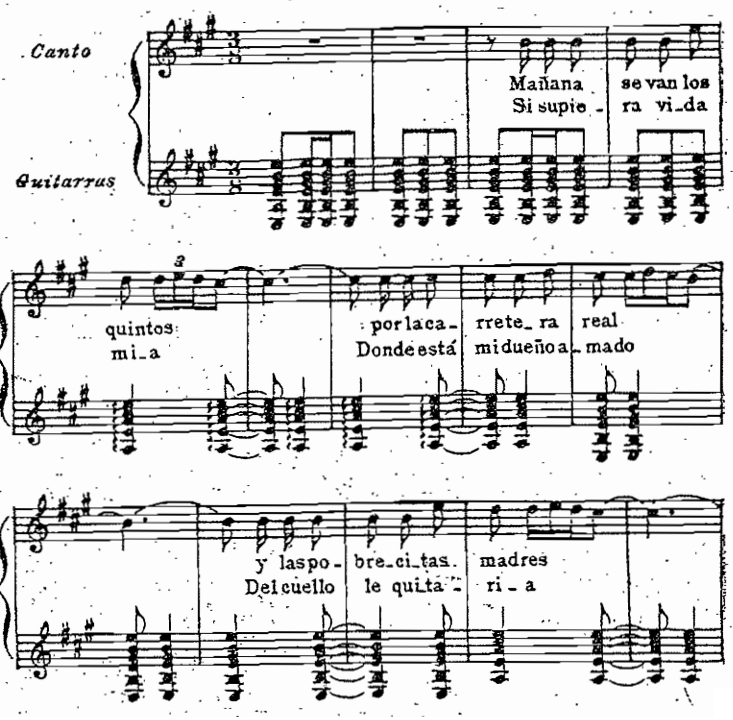
By the time Ravel and Debussy came to maturity, a long and diverse Franco-Russian tradition of exoticising Spain stretched behind them, from Glinka and Rimsky to Bizet, Lalo and Chabrier, all of whom offered a range of evocations from the purely exotic to the realistically-inspired. The richness of this tradition, combined with the inspiration supplied by 'direct imports' of gypsy musicians from Grenada, allowed Debussy and Ravel to create what Parakilas describes as a Spanish music 'unprecedented in the layers of memories it brought together; even Falla would have to travel to Paris to learn from them how to fashion a musical Spain so deep with memories - so rich in history - before he could return to Spain to figure out how to de-exoticise it'.[50] Debussy had very little first-hand experience of Spain: his themes seem merely to allude to the changing figments of his imagination and have no specific powers of reference.[51] Yet his evident interest in synthesising a highly evocative

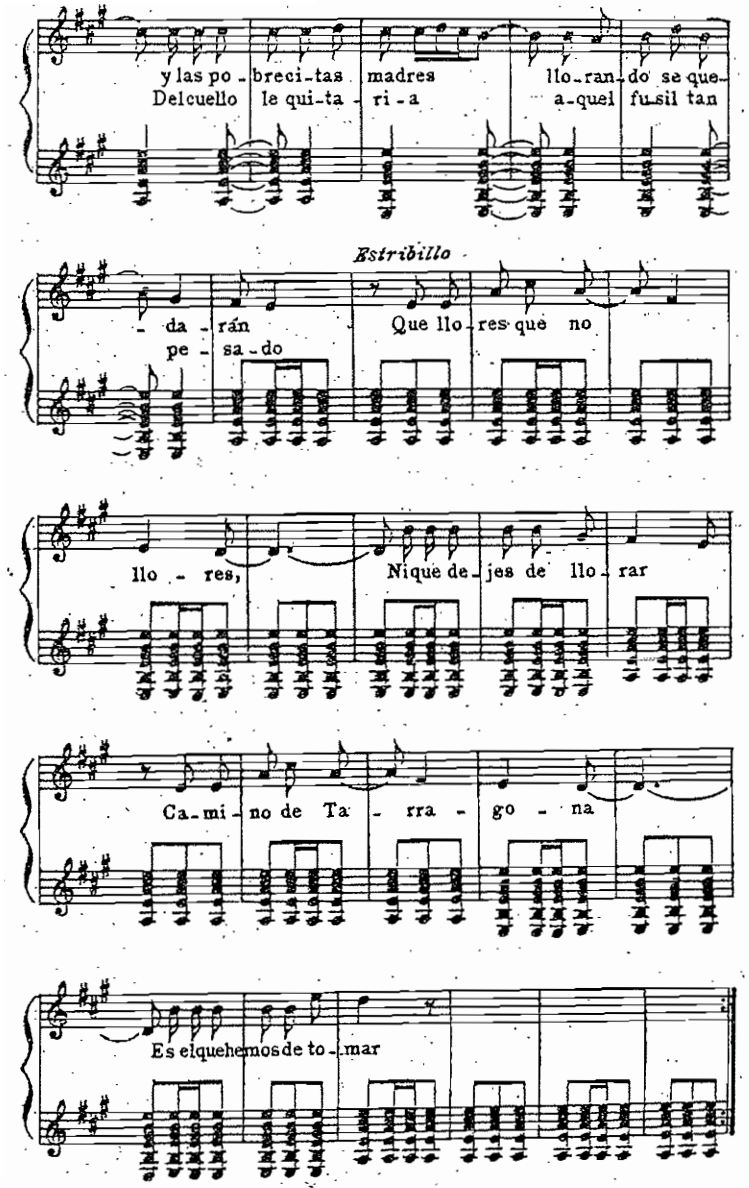
[48] On Chabrier's Spanish travels, see Rollo Myers, *Emmanuel Chabrier and his Circle* (London: Dent, 1969), esp. 38-51.
[49] Parakilas, *ibid.*, 168.
[50] Parakilas, *ibid*, 172.
[51] The question of whether Debussy used Pedrell's folksong collections has not yet been settled. Regrettably, Martha Minor avoids any detailed enquiry into Debussy's Spanish sources in her 'Hispanic Influences on the works of French composers of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', (PhD diss., U. of Kansas, 1983). Lockspeiser reports an account given by Maurice Emmanuel, who said that Debussy 'carried around Pedrell's collection of Spanish folk-songs' during the 1900s. Pedrell's principal collection of folk materials, vols. 1 and 2 of *Cancionero Musical Popular Español* (Valls: Eduardo Castells, 1918-22, 2/1936) was obviously published too late to be of use to Debussy. Lockspeiser suggests Pedrell's *La Canço Popular Catalana* (Barcelona, 1906) [see *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, II, 259-260]. But neither collection contains music which could be reasonably suggested as a 'source' for *Ibéria*, although the spacing and rhythmic patterning of Pedrell's transcriptions of the guitar accompaniment for 'Otra', no. 184 in vol. 2 of *Cancionero* (pp. 8-9: copy enclosed here as Fig. 1.3) provides a possible parallel with the string strumming in *Le matin d'un jour de fête*. Debussy could have easily found this kind of writing in earlier folksong sources: editions of Spanish folksongs which included music transcriptions began to appear in the 1870s, by Ocón and others. Debussy might well have had access to José Inzega's *Canto y bailes populares de España* (c. 1884), used by Rimsky for his *Capriccio espagnol*. In the absence of concrete evidence, all that can be said is that Debussy may have

Fig. 1.3

184)

Otra

Tortosa (Tarragona)





'Spanish' idiom from the inherited Franco-Russian traditions seems to have led him to investigate a way of mixing conventionally 'Spanish' materials such as Habanera rhythms and 'Moorish' scales with an experimental juxtaposition technique. In his first Spanish work, *Lindaraja*, Debussy was clearly experimenting under the influence of Ravel's 1895 *Habanera* and his juxtaposition technique is not especially remarkable. In 'Soirée dans Grenade' from the *Estampes* (1903), though, he was far bolder. The opening Habanera pattern is set against a 'thrumming guitar' motif, interspersed at bars 17-20 and creating what Frank Dawes described memorably as 'a kind of counterpoint of subject-matter in one and the same piece'.[52] The most radical juxtapositions in this piece occur towards the end, however, where Debussy separates out several distinct blocks, indicated by tell-tale double barlines. Distinct in time signature, key signature and tempo, these sections evoke for Dawes 'what must surely be the sounds of far-off castanets at *leger et lointain*'.

JUXTAPOSITION IN 'SOIRÉE DANS GRENADE', bb. 109-end

Double barline	**Key signature**	**Time signature**	**Trope**
109	3 sharps	3/4 (speed doubles)	Castanets
113	6 sharps	2/4 (original tempo)	Habanera
115	3 sharps	3/4 (speed doubles)	Castanets
119	3 sharps	2/4 (original tempo)	Habanera
122	3 sharps	2/4 *Mouvement du début*	Moorish melody returns

Whether one hears castanets and guitars is not the central point at issue (although a purely formalist explanation would seem to miss the point of the interpolations). The nature of the thematic materials is no more startling than Debussy's early exploration of guitar allusions in several of his early songs, most notably *Mandoline* and *Chanson espagnole*; indeed, it has been argued that the guitar had almost become a symbolist trope by 1900, like bells or water.[53] More crucial is the bold nature of the juxtapositions by which these materials are

found inspiration by reproducing some of the gestural character of these folksong snippets. There is no evidence to suggest that he used motives or incorporated authentic aspects of their unusual scale patterns or rhythmic dislocations beyond the conventional 3/4-6/8 opposition or other 'orientalising' Spanish gestures already familiar from French music of the mid-to-late nineteenth century (particularly Chabrier's, which, as we are well aware, was composed in the light of first-hand experience anyway).

[52] Frank Dawes, *Debussy Piano Music* (London: BBC, 1969), 8, 27.

[53] For discussion see Stefan Jarocinski, trans. Rollo Myers, *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism* (London: Eulenberg, 1976), 120.

presented: the 'castanet' motif appears as if from nowhere, a superficially random, poetically-inspired idea spliced into a form already distinguished by its innovative argument between two distinct groups of material.

If Debussy's juxtaposition technique served only a suggestive extra-musical purpose in the *Estampes*, by the time of the Prélude 'La sérénade interrompue' (1909), he was confident enough to use 'block writing' technique to weave a true narrative - to tell a story. [54] Here, more explicitly than before, the formal innovations of horizontal juxtaposition are a direct result of a programmatic rationale, depicting the repeated interruption of a frustrated serenader (rather like Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger* - one wonders whether Debussy had a second Wagner parody in mind to follow his *Tristan* interpolation in the *Golliwogg's Cake-Walk*). For a deliberately 'narrative' ploy to work effectively - even as part of an unassuming little scenario - the proximity of montaged sections has to be intensified dramatically, and here the brutal disruptions are accentuated by registral, textural and dynamic means. The nature of the juxtapositions is such that four separate blocks of material can be readily distinguished from one another, revealing a structure that is really quite simple:

JUXTAPOSITION IN *LA SÉRÉNADE INTERROMPUE*

Bars	**Preludizing** *(number of bars)*	**Introductory**	**Serenade**	**Interruptions**
1-18	18			
19-23		5		
24-31	8			
32-40			9	
41-45		5		
46-49				4
50-53	4			
54-72			19	
73-79		7		
80-84				5
* 85-86		2		
87-89				3
90-97		8		
98-124			27	
125-128	4			
129-137	9			

[54] For imaginative hermeneutic readings, see E. Robert Schmitz, *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy* (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1950, reprinted New York: Dover, 1966), 152-155, and Siglind Bruhn, *Images and Ideas in Modern French Piano Music: The Extra-Musical Subtext in Piano Works by Ravel, Debussy and Messiaen* (Stuyvesant: Pendragon, 1997), 124-129.

There are four main elements. The 'preludizing', the introduction and the serenade melody itself are all based on the same 'Moorish' scale, based on the Phrygian mode and occasionally altered to accommodate an orientalising "augmented second" inflection, F-G*b*-A-B*b* like Debussy used in other Spanish pieces such as *Soirée dans Grenade*. In contrast to this scale, the first interruption is based on tritone and minor ninth dissonances, and the second and third are wholly diatonic - quoted, incidentally, from the last movement of *Ibéria*. Thus the contrast in emphasis is brought about both by articulation and pitch-class materials in the blocks. The piece is constructed with a conventional concern for formal proportions and tonal centricity. The serenade melody occurs three times (presumably intended to represent the three stanzas of the song) and each time is allowed to sing for longer in an approximate arithmetic pattern, 9, 19 and 27 bars. The preludizing material is also heard three times, each time at the same pitch. Thus while the tonality remains ambiguously situated around either F or B*b* and vexed by chromatic inflections, the overall sense of pitch centricity is unequivocal. Debussy even incorporates one of his most familiar structural designs, the Golden Section (marked * above), which occurs just at the point that the serenader finally loses his temper at the interruptions, marked 'Rageur' in the score.[55]

The *Préludes* mark a new stage in Debussy's *dépouillement*, well-known for their unprecedented compression of thematic material. What Adorno described as the 'atomization of the motif' in Debussy's music was echoed by Roger Nichols, who observed that the composer's 'avoidance of tunes around 1911-1913 might have been due to the difficulties in reconciling them with his intricate structural procedures'.[56] It is plausible that the attenuation of musical ideas is linked with an increasingly disjunct presentation of those ideas, leading to an unparalleled terseness of expression. It is also logical to see this as a further extension of what Debussy drew from his early studies of Musorgsky. Like Musorgsky, Debussy seems to have transferred the qualities of terseness and disjunction first tested in his miniatures into larger-scale music in order to elicit astonishingly vivid and evocative music. Juxtaposition technique thus goes to the heart of Debussy's aesthetic of *réalités*.

'RÉALITÉS' IN *IBÉRIA*

Consider, for example, the famous 'transition' section between the second and third movements in *Ibéria* in which increasingly swift processes of juxtaposition are explored in

[55] Counting in quaver beats to accommodate the changes in time signature: total length of piece 417 beats, G.S. occurs at 257.7 (i.e. bar 85). On the Golden Section in Debussy's music, see Roy Howat's comprehensive study, *Debussy in proportion: A musical analysis* (Cambridge: CUP, 1983).
[56] Roger Nichols, *Debussy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 78.

order to evoke the end of the night and the breaking of morning on the day of the fête. [57] I have already shown in Fig. 1.1 how Debussy uses montage to portray with unprecedented vividness all the different sights and activities to be encountered during the fête itself. The transition section, however, is unusually subtle, revealing a highly sophisticated use of block writing. It is quite clear what kinds of *réalités* Debussy intended his transition to evoke, since he wrote to André Caplet with considerable pride:

> You can't imagine how naturally the transition works between 'Parfums de la nuit' and 'Le matin d'un jour de fête'. *It sounds as though it's been improvised...*The way it comes to life, with people and things waking up...There's a man selling water-melons and urchins whistling, I see them quite clearly.[58]

Debussy had depicted a comparable transition before, in *Fêtes*, where the passing procession was marked by a single interpolated section. Here, however, he uses *repeated* 'disruptions' to reflect the interpenetration of night and day, switching adventurously between contrasting elements in a manner that builds on the innovations he made in the *Estampes* and *Préludes*. A table provides an outline of how this intercutting works:

[57] The exact chronology of *Ibéria* and 'La sérénade interrompue' is unclear, although it seems that Debussy worked on the two pieces contemporaneously. In an undated sketchbook now in the Robert Owen Lehman collection (on deposit at the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York), fragments of the first book of *Préludes* occur among sketches for the orchestral *Images*. Roy Howat has reported that a fragment resembling 'La Cathédrale engloutie' appears in short score as the transition linking the last two movements of *Ibéria*. Only later, it seems, did Debussy rework *Ibéria's* transition section using the interrupting material from bars 80-84 and 87-89 in 'La sérénade interrompue'. See Roy Howat, introduction to *Claude Debussy, Préludes, Book 1: The Autograph Score* (New York: Dover, 1987), *vi* and *xi* [fn. 11], a facsimile of the MS in the Robert Owen Lehman collection (on deposit at the Pierpont Morgan Library). The *Images* suffered a particularly prolonged genesis, suggesting that Debussy found it far from easy to cultivate his *nouvelle manière*.

[58] Letter to Caplet, 25 February 1910, in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 217-8.

JUXTAPOSITION IN *IBÉRIA*

Movement II

bars to 123	tritone-based over an F# pedal
bars 124-6	pentatonic over F# pedal
bars 127-8	whole-tone (F, G, A, B, C#, D#)[59]
bars 129-131	pentatonic over F# pedal

attacca

Movement III

bars 1-4	diatonic, E*b* major
bars 5-6	pentatonic over F# pedal
bars 7-10	diatonic, E*b* major

To show how these juxtapositions work in more detail, I have borrowed Edward Cone's elegant method - developed for the analysis of Stravinsky's music - of presenting distinct sound complexes as stratified layers.[60] Figure 1.4 reveals three layers, each contrasted by timbre, harmonic type and sensibility. The top layer shows the mysterious nocturnal material from the second movement, made up of fragmented motifs of sinewy rhythmic character drenched in Debussy's characteristic whole-tone harmony. The bottom layer is the music of the distant guitars in the third movement, heralding the early morning with strongly diatonic, strictly metrical strumming in the strings. The intermediate layer is the mechanism by which the poetic transition from darkness to light is brought about: a pedal point is fixed on F# to link bars 123-4, and the voice-leading is constructed smoothly: the falling D#-D in the oboe (top layer, bars 122-3) points to the violin/flute C# in the middle layer (bar 125):

[59] In some early songs and *Pelléas et Mélisande,* Debussy used the whole-tone collection to evoke darkness. The collection's extra-musical resonances date back to conventions of mid-nineteenth century music by Liszt and, of course, the Russian *kuchkists*.

[60] Edward T. Cone, 'Stravinsky: Progress of a Method' in Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone (eds.), *Perspectives on Schoenberg and Stravinsky* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968).

IBÉRIA • THE TRANSITION

Ben Davies / Debussy and Stravinsky.

II MOUVEMENT

122 oboe

124

127 bells, brass, strings

129

solo violin + flute

solo violin + flute

III MOUVEMENT.

strings

5

7 bells W-T

9

11

15 W-T etc.

17 4 BARS 21

22 horn 23

24 bells etc

2 BARS 29 bells

flute

strings

2 BARS 4 BARS etc.

W-T etc...

4 BARS

flute + oboe

strings

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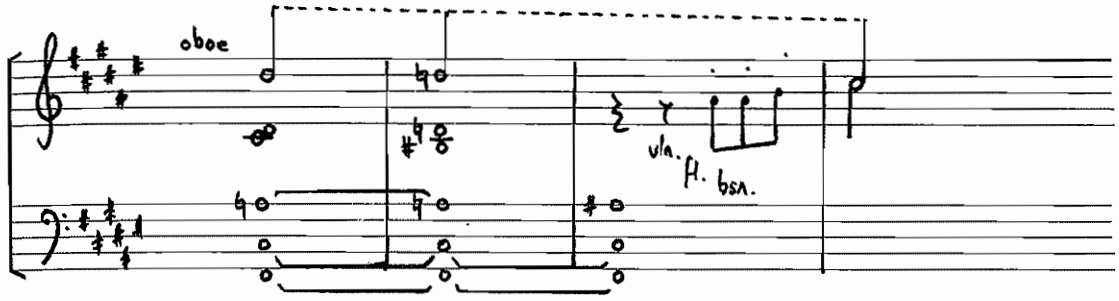
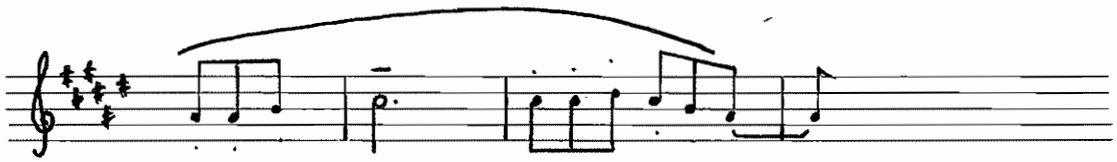
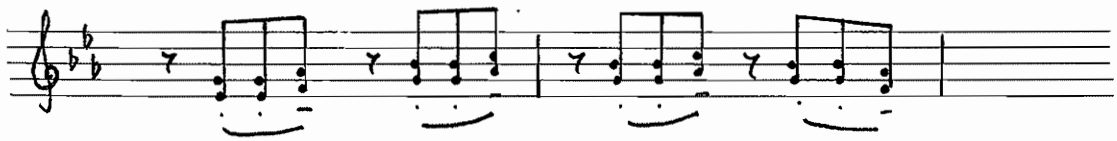
Refining montage technique, *Ibéria,* II, bb. 122-5

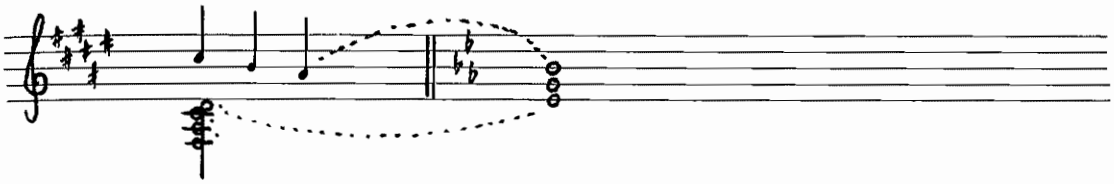


Moreover, the motivic material in bars 124-5 provides a glimpse of the material to come in the first bar of the last movement.

Motivic interconnections: *Ibéria,* II, bb. 124-5

Ibéria, III, opening

These motivic connections are underpinned by a carefully-mediated harmonic relationship between F# (bars 124-5, 129-131 and 5-6 of the last movement) and E*b* major (bars 1-4 and 7-11). This utilises the so-called 'litanie', a thread connecting contrasting *harmonic* complexes by using a note-in-common to both blocks. This conceptually simple procedure can be traced to the pedagogical tradition of French harmony teaching, in which a single note is re-harmonised several times.[61] Here, the intercutting is helped by the existence of a D#, the added sixth of the pentatonic collection on F# which is re-harmonised to become the E*b* root:

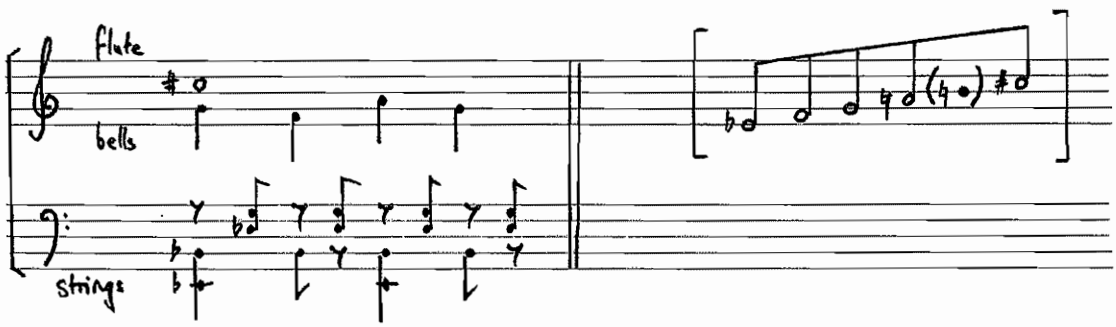
[61] I am indebted to Professor Alexander Goehr for information about the *litanie*. The technique is briefly described in his *Finding the Key: Selected Writings of Alexander Goehr*, ed. Derrick Puffett (London: Faber, 1998) 241.

The litanie, *Ibéria,* II, bb. 131 - III, b.1



As the third movement progresses, Debussy's subtlety allows the shadows of night to linger into day (see Fig. 1.4 again). After the march has been played for the first time, the flute echo of the transition passage is truncated to two bars (5-6) and the melodic line lands on a C# instead of an A# as previously. This otherwise insignificant detail takes on a rather poetic effect when combined with the re-appearance of the bells, which are always heard at the same pitch (presumably for reasons of *réalité*), since together they create a whole-tone sonority:

Lingering whole-tone shadows, *Ibéria,* III, bar 7



The whole-tone, of course, sustains the lingering resonances of the preceding movement (see the top layer of Fig. 1.4). So not only do we hear *successive* juxtaposition of sound complexes, but also the beginnings of *simultaneous* superposition. This sense of simultaneity intensifies at the enharmonic change from E*b* to D# in bar 15, where Debussy reintroduces the whole-tone material derived from the motif heard earlier in the bells (II, bar 127). This passage then builds an increasingly aggressive tritone confrontation between the pitch classes of G and C# (III, bars 22 & 24-27). The G is heard in relation to the march music, while the C# is the shadow cast from the previous movement. The whole-tone confrontation intensifies until a moment of tension about the axis of G (bar 28) before a resolution onto a entirely diatonic C major with the return of the strumming guitars at bar 29.

In effect, the disposition of the bells marks the progress of the transition and shows how Debussy has turned a potential limitation (fixed pitch *cloches*) to his advantage. At the end of the second movement (bars 127-8) the bells sound explicitly whole-tone; at bar 7 they are heard in the context of E*b* major and thus (together with the violin/flute C#) cast whole-tone

shadows on an otherwise diatonic 'block' by incorporating the tritone, A natural; and at the resolution onto C major in bar 29 they are situated entirely diatonically. Such technique also indicates how repetition need not be merely repetitive: *context* is elevated over *development*, providing a small example of how Debussy circumvented the problems of form encountered by the Russians. By bringing 'folk' materials into direct confrontation with his own idiom using unusually brash juxtaposition, he allowed the quasi-folk materials to breathe freely and create their own harmonic/textural space, rather than being smothered by assimilation into symphonically-conceived harmonic structures.

III

Ibéria as a source of inspiration for *Petrushka*

In writing his music along these lines, Debussy paradoxically followed the four-pronged trajectory that the musical critic Vladimir Stasov had proclaimed to be distinctively Russian. In 1882, Stasov had summarised the factors which he considered to be responsible for the 'unique outlook and peculiar characteristics of the New Russian School':

- a music which was 'unfettered by the long chain of European scholastic traditions'
- a 'striving for national character', based on the centrality of folksong to the art music tradition
- a 'conspicuous role' for the 'Oriental' element
- an 'extreme inclination towards programme music'.[62]

Stasov, it is widely accepted, was a highly partisan critic who described the New Russian School in exactly the terms they wished to see themselves. The fact that Debussy's *Ibéria* can be seen so squarely as a projection out of this peculiarly Russian vision helps us to understand why Stravinsky would have found Debussy's work so liberating.[63] This is not to say that the existence of a precedent in which folk-like thematic materials are incorporated into a sophisticated, modern musical idiom detracts from Stravinsky's achievement. Rather, *Ibéria* simply pinpoints an element of originality that came from *within* the Russian traditions, but - crucially - was also mediated through Debussy and the French traditions. It is this unique blend which Stravinsky found so fruitful, and which clarifies his otherwise

[62] Vladimir Stasov, 'Our Music', in *Twenty-five years of Russian Art* (1882), translated by Richard Taruskin in Weiss and Taruskin, (eds.), *Music in the Western World*, 390-394.
[63] Taruskin complains that the French reception of Musorgsky (as propounded influentially by Debussy) needs considerable revision. See *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1993), 13.

puzzling claim to be indebted to Debussy's art. Mikhail Druskin alluded to this when he wrote that Stravinsky's encounter with Debussy opened up a way

> to extract from Debussy's music the hidden 'Mussorgskian' element that served him as motto in his search for a means to emphasize the 'Russianness' of his own music, something that at this stage of his career was of primary importance. Hitherto we have been discussing the influences under which Stravinsky's early style was formed, but it was Russian folk-song that came to him as a revelation; and he penetrated its essence the more deeply the more powerfully he felt the fascination of Debussy.[64]

Although Druskin's assertion effectively vindicates Taruskin's emphasis on the extent of Russian influence on *Petrushka* by putting a different spin on the issue - a Debussyan influence which was itself 'Russian' at one remove - the crucial point is that Debussy liberated Stravinsky from what he [Stravinsky] would retrospectively describe with miserable ingratitude as 'the St. Petersburg Conservatory's formalism'.[65] The fact that Debussy's own suitability for this role was predicated on his own indebtedness to the Russian traditions does not invalidate the fact that Stravinsky needed a catalyst from outside Rimsky's circle.

How might more precise points of contact between the two scores be elicited? Debussy's letter to Caplet cited earlier, which described the sources of his inspiration in highly visual terms, is strikingly reminiscent of accounts of the genesis of *Petrushka* by Stravinsky and Benois - not just in terms of a common desire to evoke 'authentic' or quasi-authentic detail, but in the way in which the listener is envisaged as an observer whose attention is diverted from event to event and from sensation to sensation. The almost cinematic way in which *Ibéria*'s spatial and harmonic complexes are cut, juxtaposed and interweaved is extremely similar to the changing events in the crowd scenes of *Petrushka*'s outer tableaux. For the ballet, of course, Stravinsky wanted to co-ordinate aural perspectives with the stage action and used different thematic materials to articulate *specific* events according to the ballet scenario; in addition, many of his ethnographically-derived materials had pre-existent texts so that (depending on the audience's background) there was an additional underlying network of

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[64] Druskin, *Stravinsky*, 34-35; see also 3, 8-10, 122-138.

[65] In response to Craft's question of whether Stravinsky 'owed the most' to Debussy in *Conversations*, 48: 'I was handicapped in my earliest years by influences that restrained the growth of my composer's technique. I refer to the St. Petersburg Conservatory's formalism, from which, however - and fortunately - I was soon free. But the musicians of my generation and I myself owe the most to Debussy.' Compare this, however, to Stravinsky's admission in *Expositions and Developments*, 66: 'Sitting in the dark of the Mariinsky theatre, I judged, saw, and heard everything at first hand, and my impressions were immediate and indelible [...] St. Petersburg in the two decades before *The Firebird* was a very exciting place to be'. 1910 was clearly the first major turning point.

semantic allusions.[66] Debussy was not writing a ballet score, and so his music did not need to 'collaborate' with a detailed scenario (although in later years Diaghilev apparently considered making a ballet out of *Ibéria*). But the principle of using montage to depict a busy outdoor scene full of simultaneous events is the same, providing structural and expressive parallels between the two works which demonstrate an unambiguous alignment of compositional strategies.

I also believe that *Ibéria* offered Stravinsky more than a one-off technical model of montage because Debussy's score evokes so much more than a series of vivid extra-musical representations. Consider Fig. 1.4 again. I have already discussed how Debussy keeps returning to whole-tone and other tritone-based harmonic complexes in the last movement of *Ibéria*, casting shadows from the evocative nocturnal middle movement across the gaiety of the fete. The confrontation here is not just between night and day, but between Debussy's own material (from the atmospheric second movement) and the 'folk' materials of the march. By using this kind of block juxtaposition, Debussy demonstrates an ability to invest popular musical materials with some of the qualities of serious art music. The careful contrast he draws between the different idioms not only establishes a critical distance from the quasi-folk materials, but permits an intermingling of mystery with commonplace reality. *Jeux*, with its mixture of luminosity tinged with bathos, is comparable, as is *La Mer*, which mixes highly evocative, even mimetic writing with complex psychological states of terror, anticipation and exhilaration. Debussy's aesthetic of *réalités* is enormously rich, echoing the fine balance between vivid evocation and *mystère* that he found in Turner and Whistler (and thus transcending the tired categorisations of the impressionist-or-symbolist debate).[67]

Why might this particular quality of *Ibéria* influence *Petrushka*? There is, at a simple level, an obvious point of contact. Debussy's interpolation of whole-tone collections is directly comparable with Stravinsky's utilisation of another symmetrically-defined scale, the octatonic, to maintain the inner drama of the puppets in *Petrushka* in sharp contrast to the

[66] It is questionable how many of Stravinsky's folk references would have recognised by a Russian, let alone a Parisian audience, and in some cases it is even unsure whether the composer himself fully understood their significance. See Taruskin, *Russian Traditions,* 698.

[67] The link between 'réalités' and Turner comes from Debussy's letter to Durand, cited previously (March 1908, in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 188). Turner has traditionally been associated with *La Mer*: see Christopher Palmer, *Impressionism in Music* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), 18-20, who writes: 'But if *La Mer* gives an incomparably more 'realistic' impression of the sea than, say, Rubinstein's 'Ocean' Symphony, it remains, paradoxically, the stuff of dreams. How could it be otherwise?'. On Debussy and Turner, see Lockspeiser, *Life and Mind* (vol. II) and Lockspeiser, *Music and Painting* (London: Cassell, 1973), esp. 49-66. Also see chapter 4 of Simon Tresize's CUP handbook *Debussy: La Mer* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 'The invisible sentiments of nature'.

ostinato-driven diatonicism of the 'real world' crowd scenes. Both Debussy and Stravinsky represent an outer world with strongly diatonic 'folklore' materials, and an inner world of feelings and sensations with tonally ambivalent materials based around a tritone axis - i.e. music written at the forefront of contemporary musical language. Yet although such a distinction might separate *Ibéria* from other Spanish inventions of the French musical imagination such as Chabrier's vibrant *España*, Stravinsky's Russian predecessors had explored a comparable diatonic *vs.* chromatic/octatonic dichotomy for years in order to distinguish the human from the fantastic in opera. So in what way can *Petrushka*'s dichotomous use of material be compared with *Ibéria*'s?

CREATING 'RÉALITÉS' IN *PETRUSHKA* AND *IBÉRIA*

As Taruskin has pointed out, the great irony is that *Petrushka* is 'profoundly anti-realistic'. Although the ballet uses the conventional fantastic/realistic opposition by linking diatonic folklore with the human element and octatonic fantasy with the non-human, the actual treatment of these materials subverts these expectations. The people are faceless, mechanistic, generalised and corporate, while Petrushka and the Blackamoor are given 'real' emotions and act spontaneously, selfishly, humanly.[68] The tension between what is real and what is a deliberately 'created reality' distinguishes *Petrushka* from its Russian predecessors. As Daniel Albright has suggested, *Petrushka* was the first of many works by Stravinsky to explore the 'deep equivalence of the natural and the artificial'.[69]

There is an 'inner' and an 'outer' in *Ibéria*, too. The day of the fete seems obviously 'real', while *Parfums* seems to be a *mystère*, the product of a dream. But Debussy's finale, like *Petrushka's* outer tableaux, is only a created reality. The reason for this is that for all the roughly-hewn juxtapositions and raw musical materials, the third movement is worked, intensively and scrupulously, out of materials first heard in the preceding movements. Nor does this consist of just occasional re-working. Remarkably, *all seven* types of motivic material are first heard in the previous two movements of the triptych. (See Figure 1.1, which, as I mentioned earlier, reveals the sources of the thematic materials for the third movement on the left hand side of the graph). The return at bar 119 to material first heard in the first movement is quite obvious, but the re-appearance at bar 21 of a theme from the second movement provokes a less immediate association. Even bars 45-48, which do not

[68] Taruskin, *Russian Traditions*, 735-737.
[69] Daniel Albright, *Stravinsky: The Music Box and the Nightingale* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1989), 4, 9-13. Also see Stephen Walsh's discussion in *The music of Stravinsky* (London: Routledge, 1988), 24-33, esp. footnote 7 (p. 278).

readily provide *motivic* recollections to previous movements, create a specific *harmonic* association with the second movement: these bars are the only point in the third movement to be saturated by octatonic harmony, and the only point in the second movement at which octatonic collections are similarly used in such an exhaustive manner (bars 80-81 & 83-4) is also the point at which the shape of the main theme of the third movement is first prefigured, in the violin/bassoon solo. The inter-movement connections - both motivic and harmonic - are thus extremely subtle in a way that no single analytical diagram can fully elucidate.

A more comprehensive overview of the motivic working across the entire triptych can be gained by examining Figure 1.5, which shows how the principal motif from the first movement not only undergoes variation within the movement, but also creates associations by interval and gesture with the main material of the second movement, and hence the third. Read together, Figures 1.1 and 1.5 show how *Ibéria* maintains a holistic sense of integration by allusions and transformations in the motivic process. Of course, such spinning of motivic inventions had been part of Debussy's compositional technique for many years: Richard Parks, for example, has claimed that *L'après-midi d'un faune* 'consists of a series of seventeen passages based on the same fundamental shape'.[70] More pertinently for *Ibéria*, Jean Barraqué suggested that *La Mer* exhibited 'open form', by which he meant that Debussy collapsed the traditional distinction between exposition and development to create a novel generative process in which presentation of new material and re-working of familiar material could 'coexist in an uninterrupted surge'.[71] What is unusual in *Ibéria* is that the music retains its improvisatory quality, despite the richness of the re-working: a 'created reality' indeed, in which the ostensible literalism is tempered by *la mise-en-scène*.

IV
Conclusion

Having drawn Debussy and Stravinsky together so closely, it might seem untimely to pull them apart again. Yet the apparent convergence between the two men's aesthetic aims is deceptive. Only at this particular stage during their interaction can it be said that their

[70] Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy*, 36. For discussion about the possible formal plans which *L'après-midi* could support, see Parks's article 'A Viennese arrangement of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*: orchestration and musical structure', in *Music and Letters* 80/1 (February 1999), 66, fn. 29.
[71] Jean Barraqué, '*La Mer* de Debussy, ou la naissance des formes ouvertes', *Analyse Musicale* 12 (juin 1988), 15.

Motivic Threads in Debussy's 'Iberia'

I

b.2 strings

Theme

b.8, clarinet

b.20, clarinets

b.20, oboe

etc

(whole-tone)

b.30, vla + cor a.

b.55, horns

b.61, clt, bsn

b.70 cello, cor anglais

b.91

etc

b. 98, violins, cello

b. 102, woodwind

etc.

b. 106, cor a., bsn

and at b. 122

(whole-tone)

b. 153, oboe, viola

b. 178, horns

II

b.1, oboe

b. flute, violin

III

b. 2, violas

b.62

etc.

b. 123, oboe + clarinet

b. 141

ff

sff

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technical similarities were a direct result of common expressive goals. Neither composer ever tried to re-create 'outdoor street crowd' effects in the same way again, not even Stravinsky in *Les Noces*: as Debussy predicted, he had 'progressed far beyond *Petrushka*' by this stage.[72] Only in *Ibéria* and *Petrushka* were the men linked by an interest in expressing similar extra-musical conceptions with an unparalleled vividness.

In fact, as soon as the connections are pursued further, the carefully-constructed point of contact between Debussy and Stravinsky seems to be increasingly fortuitous - a matter of two independent trajectories meeting tangentially. Stravinsky never used Debussy's technique of motivic variation: both *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring* are highly episodic, and his work is not marked by a continual fascination with either *réalités* or *mystère*, as is Debussy's. Nor did he share Debussy's unshakeable roots in the French traditions. As Taruskin has shown, Stravinsky remained uniquely Russian during this period of friendship with Debussy, despite his 'cosmopolitan' experiments.

I have already traced the musical sources for *Ibéria* through the complexities of late nineteenth-century Franco-Russian exchanges, and Taruskin has produced a comprehensive survey of *Petrushka*'s musical and aesthetic Russian ancestors. Where, however, might *Ibéria*'s aesthetics come from?

DEBUSSY, THE PAINTER OF MODERN LIFE

Debussy's music does not reflect the realism of the Flaubert-Zola tradition, although it is clear that *Ibéria* shares their distinctive vitality and interests in fresh, honest portrayals of life. Nor do his *réalités* align exactly with modern movements in painting, even though his music shares the 'call to modernity' evident in the departures from tradition created by the novel interest in, and unusual treatment of, contemporary subject matter in Manet, Pissarro and Seurat. But Debussy's implied link between *réalités* and impressionism was independently backed up in 1925 by Camille Mauclair, who emphasised that elements of realism survived into the impressionist aesthetic:

> [Impressionism] was a word devoid of significance [...] some totally different term might have been employed to describe the general tendency of artists whose efforts, while

[72] See letter from Debussy to Stravinsky of 13 April 1912 in Nichols/Lesure, *Debussy Letters*, 258.

> originating in realism, were directed towards presenting scenes of modern everyday life in the light of atmospheric colour effects.[73]

The congruity of this with *Ibéria* is immediate. But Debussy avoided aiming for direct imitation: he was sanguine to Caplet about the extent to which people could 'see' the whistling urchins and water-melon sellers that he himself envisaged in *Ibéria*. 'Not everybody finds it so obvious' he remarked dryly. 'Some people thought it was a serenade'.[74] As Stefan Jarocinski pointed out, Debussy was unimpressed with the term *impressionisme* because he never hoped to see and reveal the 'truth' of everyday life.[75] Rather, being aware that all a person could do is experience truth, Debussy strove only to *suggest* the nature of that experience. He tried to create a 'sentimental transformation of what is "invisible" in Nature - what he described as the "mysterious correspondences which link Nature and the Imagination"'.[76] This goal brought him closer to the aesthetics of the symbolists, most notably Mallarmé, whose well-known formulation put it thus:

> *Nommer* un objet, c'est supprimer les trois quarts de la jouissance du poème qui est faite de definer peu à peu: le *suggérer*, voilà le rêve.[77]

Thus Debussy's aesthetics grew out not of a single movement, but of a mingling of elements from realism, impressionism, and symbolism. Depending on the work in question, certain facets of these three movements take on a particular prominence, so that, for example, it would seem inaccurate to deny that many aspects of *Ibéria* reflect what the Fauve painter Raoul Dufy repudiated as 'impressionist realism'. To say that Debussy inherited and developed so many different strands from the nineteenth-century French traditions might seem absurdly general. There is a common thread, however: Baudelaire and his conception of *modernité*. Even as late as *Ibéria*, and for all the talk of *réalités*, Debussy had not really rejected a concept of modernity dating back to Baudelaire's famous definition: 'By modernity, I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable.'[78] This definition, and Baudelaire's other writings (particularly on Poe and Wagner) open up a rich spectrum of artistic aesthetics based on a

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[73] Camille Mauclair, trans. J. Lewis May, *Claude Monet* (London, 1925), quoted by Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, II, 18.
[74] Letter to Caplet, 25 February 1910, *Debussy Letters*, 218.
[75] Jarocinski, *Impressionism and Symbolism*, 59.
[76] Jarocinski, *Impressionism and Symbolism*, 96.
[77] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor et G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), 869.
[78] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in Jonathan Payne (trans.), *The Painter of Modern Life and other Essays* (New York: Phaidon, 1964), 13.

duality between present reality and the ideas, conventions and ordering principles which made up an ahistorical component, the 'timeless' essence of expressive art.

Later critics have found an irreconcilable tension in this duality. Calinescu has argued that 'since Baudelaire, the aesthetics of modernity has been consistently an aesthetics of imagination, opposed to any kind of realism',[79] which leaves an insuperable paradox because Baudelaire explicitly stated that if the transitory, sensuous present was neglected, the artist 'cannot fail to tumble into the abyss of an abstract and indeterminate beauty'.[80] But Debussy continued to write music in a manner untroubled by abstraction: he did not have to distinguish *modernité* in the sense of a celebration of the experiences of contemporary life from an as-yet untested twentieth-century Modernism posited on technical considerations of autonomy and formalism. In *Ibéria*, it seems clear that Debussy is able to sustain both the transitory (through his vivid juxtaposition technique) and the immutable (through his ability to distil the 'mysterious beauty of human life'). *Ibéria* is thus best seen as a late manifestation of Dufy's 'impressionist realism', growing out of the Bohemian ideals of Baudelaire.

Baudelaire stressed that modern art was not inherently modern, but only acquired its modern status in context. The use of 'street sounds' and crowd music in the concert hall was an obvious example of this, as a fleeting consideration of *Ibéria*'s most prominent predecessors - all stage works - attests, from *Benvenuto Cellini, The Power of the Fiend* and *Boris Godunov* to the opening of Act II of *La Bohème*. Because modernity was defined comparatively, however, what was modern in 1890 could be passé by 1900 and virtually historical by 1910. In fact, given the speed of change in the arts in the immediate pre-War period, the modern music of 1910 could have faded significantly by 1915. That, as Debussy was to find out, was to become a problem, as increasingly the new contenders for his leadership of the avant-garde such as Stravinsky had no need and no loyalty to the ideals of the French tradition. Soon, Baudelaire's modernism- and with it, the avant-garde status of Debussy's art - was to be held under threat by the hard, unyielding modernism of the post-*Petrushka* Stravinsky.

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[79] Matei Calinescu, 'Baudelaire and the paradoxes of aesthetic modernity', 48, 54-55, in *Five Faces of Modernity* (2nd ed., Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 46-58.

[80] Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', 13. Walter Benjamin criticised Baudelaire's theory of modern art for its dependence on Poe - which to my mind merely confirms its appropriateness for Debussy's music. See Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1997), 78. Benjamin's discussion of the ultimate Baudelaire stereotype, the *flâneur*, surely merits a comparison with Debussy-as-bourgeois-voyeur in *Ibéria* for those sympathetic to sociological readings of music.

The residual issue is one of exoticism. What if Debussy had written an *Image* using advanced techniques of juxtaposition in order to evoke modern Parisian life rather than the Spanish exotic - would it have been considered much more 'modern' by twentieth-century reception history? Could he have met Stravinsky on different ground? The answer, as we know from Debussy's French *Image*, *Rondes de Printemps*, is no. Although *Rondes* is in many ways a bold and experimental piece, it avoids the modernist grit of the city in favour of a sweeter, folksong-saturated idiom (and thereby Debussy's music concurs with Stasov's 1880s Russian aesthetic once again). *Rondes* shows that, despite Debussy's radical innovations in compositional technique, he was happy to follow aesthetic traditions he had cultivated and extended all his life. To be sure, he made many changes of direction within that broad nineteenth-century French trajectory. But truly radical change was not on his agenda, which was why he suffered such a terrifying crisis of confidence when the full ramifications of early twentieth-century modernism were finally brought home to him by Stravinsky in 1913.

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Chapter 2

"Travelling together": Stravinsky's influence on Debussy

I

A new friendship, 1910-1912

According to what we can glean from the surviving documentary evidence, Debussy and Stravinsky appear to have been on the warmest terms after their first meeting in 1910. As Lockspeiser put it, for a time the two composers were 'happy to travel together', both artistically and personally.[1] Stravinsky arrived in Paris in May 1910 for the Ballets Russes' première of *Firebird* on 25 June and the two composers met for the first time after the performance, as Stravinsky mentioned in 1936:

> I recall that on the first night Debussy came onto the stage and complimented me on my score. That was the beginning of friendly relations which lasted to the end of his life.[2]

Stravinsky subsequently provided further details of the meeting in *Expositions & Developments*:

> I was called to the stage to bow at the conclusion, and was recalled several times. I was still on stage when the final curtain had come down, and I saw coming toward me Diaghilev and a dark man with a double forehead whom he introduced as Claude Debussy. The great composer spoke kindly about the music, ending his words with an invitation to dine with him. Some time later, when we were sitting together in his box at a performance of *Pelléas*, I asked him what he had really thought of *The Firebird.* He said: 'Que voulez-vous, il fallait bien commencer par quelque chose'. Honest, but not extremely flattering. Yet shortly after the *Firebird* premiere he gave me his well-known photograph in profile with a dedication: 'à Igor Stravinsky en toute sympathie artistique.' I was not so honest about the work we were then hearing. I thought *Pelléas* a great bore as a whole, and in spite of many wonderful pages.[3]

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[1] Lockspeiser, *Debussy: Life and Mind,* II, 186.
[2] Stravinsky, *Chronicle of my Life*, 55. In 1936, few of Debussy's letters had been published and Stravinsky could not have been aware of the Frenchman's hostile attitude towards him after *The Rite* - what he later called Debussy's 'duplicity'. The duplicity is particularly evident (as will be discussed later) in Debussy's letters of 1915-16 to his lifelong *confidant*, Robert Godet.
[3] Stravinsky/Craft, *Expositions and Developments*, 131.

It was with this photograph before him on the desk that Stravinsky reportedly began *Petrushka*.[4] Shortly after this (it is unsure exactly when), Stravinsky visited Debussy at home, presumably for dinner as suggested above.

> The first time I visited him in his house, after *The Firebird*, we talked about Musorgsky's songs and agreed that they contained the best music of the whole Russian school. He said he had discovered Musorgsky when he found some of the music lying untouched on Mme von Meck's piano. He did not like Rimsky, whom he called 'a voluntary academic, the worst kind'. Debussy was especially interested in Japanese art at that time. I received the impression, though, that he was not especially interested in new things in music; my own appearance on the musical scene seemed to be a shock to him.[5]

The desires of hindsight are much in evidence here. All the contemporary evidence marshalled by Taruskin in *The Russian Traditions* suggests that Stravinsky did not consider Musorgsky's songs to be 'the best music of the whole Russian school' in 1910; this was a retrospective fib designed to align his early trajectory with Debussy (who certainly did elevate *The Nursery* above Rimsky). Stravinsky's assertion that Debussy was 'shocked' by his appearance is also a retrospective conflation of events. Until the tumultuous reception of *The Rite of Spring* some three years later, Debussy's public and private responses to Stravinsky never seem to be tinged with anxiety. A couple of weeks after the premiere of *The Firebird*, Debussy wrote to Durand remarking on Stravinsky's music and the daring innovations of the Ballets Russes productions:

[8 July 1910]

> You haven't said anything about *The Firebird*... It's not perfect, but, in certain respects, it's an excellent piece of work nonetheless because the music is not the docile slave of the dance...And every now and then there are some extremely unusual combinations of rhythms! When you consider that French dancers would never have agreed to dance to music like that... So, Diaghilev is a great man and Nijinsky is his prophet, unless that role has been taken by Calvocoressi.[6]

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[4] Interview with Janet Flanner, *The New Yorker*, 5 January 1935, quoted by Craft in *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*, 61.

[5] Stravinsky/Craft, *Expositions and Developments*, 139. Stravinsky's comment on Debussy's interest in Japanese art is reflected by the portrait taken of the two composers in Debussy's house on the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne: Hokusai's swirling waves can be seen in the print behind the two men (see the frontispiece to this study). For a clear reproduction of this well-known photograph, see François Lesure, *Claude Debussy: Iconographie musicale* (Geneva: Editions Minkoff, 1975), 125.

[6] Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 221.

It is easy to forget that Stravinsky was initially just a part of a bigger enterprise with which Debussy was already involved, having planned a project of his own with Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in 1909 (the ill-fated *Masques et bergamasques*), well before Stravinsky came to Paris. The following year the idea of choreographing his *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* was first mooted, and by the time that the *Faune* ballet eventually came to fruition under Nijinsky in 1912, Debussy was planning a third project with Benois called *Les Fêtes*, presumably based on the *Nocturnes*.[7] There was therefore a very tangible sense in which Debussy and Stravinsky were travelling together, although the contrast between Stravinsky's inexorable rise and Debussy's lengthening list of uncompleted projects which was to become so awkward in later years is already evident.

Their mutual admiration deepened between 1910-12. In the spring of 1911, Debussy declared publicly that

> Last year a young man composed for his debut a ballet, *The Firebird*...Well, this work was an exquisite and original piece.[8]

The Firebird certainly had an effect on Debussy's music, particularly on *Khamma*, as I will show. But it was *Petrushka* that really seized his attention, and the two men seem to have become even closer after the Théâtre du Châtelet première on 13 June 1911. Stravinsky recalled 'a luncheon at Debussy's shortly after the first performance of *Petrushka*, and with particular pleasure'; on 4 November he wrote to Debussy expressing the 'infinite admiration I hold for you and your creative genius'.[9] There appear to have been several opportunities for contact, discussion, and reciprocal perusal of scores during this period. On 18 December, Debussy wrote to Robert Godet:

> Did you know that quite near you, in Clarens, there's a young Russian composer: Igor Stravinsky, who has an absolute genius for colour and rhythm? I'm sure you'd like both him and his music...And 'he's not all tricks'. He writes directly for orchestra, without any

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[7] Further details of Debussy's projects can be found in Robert Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), 149-159. Orledge suggests that Diaghilev might have had *Ibéria* in mind for *Les Fêtes* - and what a ballet it might have made.

[8] *Excelsior*, 9 March 1911, quoted in Vera Stravinsky & Robert Craft (eds.), *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* (London: Hutchinson, 1978), 58.

[9] Cited in Lesure, *Biographie Critique*, 352 as 'Pensez à l'admiration infinie que j'ai pour vous et pour votre génie créateur' [my translation]. When Lockspeiser tried to cite this letter in the mid-1960s, Stravinsky suppressed its publication (presumably because of its sycophancy): see Lockspeiser, *Life and Mind*, II, 179. The letter still remains in private ownership, although there is a photocopy of the original in the archives of the Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel. For further details, see Appendix.

> intermediate steps, and the outline of his music follows only the promptings of his emotion. There are no precautions or pretensions. It's childish and savage. Even so, the organisation [la mise en place] is extremely delicate. If you have the opportunity of meeting him, don't hesitate.[10]

In late 1911/early 1912 Debussy took Stravinsky to hear *La Mer*, which was apparently the first time the young Russian had ever heard the work.[11] They also went to hear that 'great bore', *Pelléas*, about which Stravinsky was far more polite in 1936 than in 1959:

> It was in that year [1912], while seated, by Debussy's invitation, in his box at the Opéra Comique, that I heard for the first time another great French work, *Pelléas et Mélisande*. I was seeing a good deal of Debussy, and was deeply touched by his sympathetic attitude towards me and my music. I was struck by the delicacy of his appreciation, and was grateful to him, among other things, for having observed, what so few had then noticed, the musical importance of the pages which precede the juggling tricks in *Petrushka* immediately before the final dance of the marionettes in the first act.[12]

Debussy had indeed singled out the 'magic trick' for particular praise in a letter to Stravinsky of 13 April 1912:

> Cher Ami,
> Thanks to you I've spent a lovely Easter holiday in the company of Petrushka, the terrible Moor and the delightful ballerina. I imagine you too must have spent some incomparable moments with these three puppets...and I know few things as good as the passage you call 'le Tour de Passe-Passe'... There's a sort of sonorous magic about it, mysteriously transforming these mechanical souls into human beings: it's a spell which, so far, I think you are alone in possessing. And there are orchestral certainties such as I have encountered only in *Parsifal* - I'm sure you'll understand what I mean! You'll progress beyond *Petrushka*, of course, but you can still be proud of what the work stands for.[13]

It is unclear how this letter should be read. Most scholars have assumed that it shows that Debussy liked the parts in *Petrushka* which seem to owe most to his own music, or that he didn't like the outer tableaux. Taruskin, for example, argues that the most innovative aspect

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[10] Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 250.
[11] Stravinsky/Craft, *Expositions and Developments*, 59.
[12] Stravinsky, *Chronicles*, 65-66. Apropos *Pelléas*, Stravinsky was quite blunt in the 1950s and his overall assessment of Debussy became considerably sharper than in the rather sycophantic *Autobiography*.
[13] Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 256-8.

of *Petrushka* - 'the gaudy interpolation of street music' - was the one which affected Debussy least and which played the greatest role in undermining his position as leader of the modern French school. However, as I suggested in Chapter 1, Debussy's *Ibéria* provided one of the most important sources for *Petrushka's* radical use of diatonicism and street music. The reason Debussy appeared to be 'unaffected' was that he himself had already explored such means of expression and knew full well where those novel techniques of collage and juxtaposition had come from. In any case, only hindsight reminds us that *Petrushka's* innovations fed into a much larger inter-war aesthetic, beginning with Satie's *Parade* in 1917. In 1911-12 there would be little sense of *Petrushka's* street music opening up a new aesthetic trajectory.

Why else might Debussy have been so fascinated by Stravinsky's 'Magic Trick'? His response to *Petrushka* makes an interesting comparison with the letter he sent the previous spring to Caplet about *Ibéria*.[14] Just as he neglected to mention the outer tableaux of *Petrushka* to Stravinsky, he chose not to emphasise his radical collage techniques or the novel incorporation of street music and gypsy violins in the last movement of *Ibéria* to Caplet. Rather, Debussy drew attention to his own 'mysterious transformation', the 'transition' passage linking the last two movements. It seems that Debussy was attracted to the magical, almost supernatural elements in Stravinsky's 'Tour de Passe-Passe'. Not that there is any evidence to suggest that Debussy considered this passage to be a piece of Debussyist *mystère* writing. On the contrary, his letter seems to suggest that he found the sonorities novel, exciting, exotically *Russian*; as I will show, it appears that he paid a great deal of attention to Stravinsky's 'Russian' octatonicism. The 'Magic Trick' is important because the tables had finally been turned in the Debussy-Stravinsky interaction: for the first time, Stravinsky had shown Debussy a new way of expressing a sensibility that the Frenchman had been interested in exploring before in a different idiom - a true point of artistic contact.

Debussy's fascination with Stravinsky's early ballets manifested itself in two inter-related ways, which together will form the central focus for the rest of this chapter. First, he seems to have become interested in the 'active tritone axis' which forms such a distinctive part of Stravinsky's 'genius for colour' and 'sonorous magic'. The active tritone axis is particularly evident in Debussy's ballet, *Khamma*, but is also apparent in the second book of *Préludes*, where he experiments with *Petrushka*'s novel 'black and white' piano writing, boldly

[14] Letter to Caplet of 25 February 1910, cited and discussed extensively in Chapter 1. See Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 217.

juxtaposing chords a tritone or a semitone apart. Second, Debussy seems to have become increasingly tolerant of blatant formal juxtapositions. In part this is undoubtedly related to his experiments with harsher dissonances on the surface of the music, but it is interesting to see how a freer juxtaposition technique leads to a sense of form in which the musical argument can be delineated by juxtaposed statements rather than a more traditional conception of the organic growth of musical materials.

These features are, of course, to a certain extent pre-existent in Debussy's idiom. I have already commented at length on Debussy's juxtaposition technique in his 'pre-Stravinsky' music. Novel sonorities, including bitonality and the use of octatonic collections, are also evident in Debussy's music before 1910. Consequently, as in Chapter 1, my exegesis will avoid drawing conclusions that have not been measured against his earlier works. Only then can it be clarified exactly what Stravinsky offered Debussy that nobody else could in 1910-1913.

II

Khamma

KHAMMA'S GENESIS

Khamma was commissioned by Maud Allan in September 1910 and Debussy was supposed to have completed the score by the following February. However, the collaboration with Allan became increasingly tense, creating some of Debussy's most corrosive correspondence and culminating, as Robert Orledge as shown, in threats of lawsuits.[15] Since these inauspicious beginnings, *Khamma* has remained one of Debussy's least-known works. Some of the neglect is deserved, since the ballet cannot be said to be one of Debussy's most inspired creations. But posthumous factors, not least of which is the continued unavailability of the full orchestral score, have not helped its cause: the piano 'reduction', giving only the barest outline of the work, does not do it justice.[16] The orchestration, completed by Koechlin under Debussy's close supervision, enriches the texture, fleshes out the thematic ideas and clarifies the dramatic scenario, without which Debussy's music seems strangely anaemic.[17]

[15] Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre*, chapter 5 (pp. 128-148).

[16] Orledge comments on the description of the 1912 Durand piano score as 'partition pour le piano, réduite par l'auteur', noting that as a full score hadn't even been completed by this time, the piano score could hardly be a 'reduction'. Like other musicians, I have not been able to obtain access to a full score, but have been aided by orchestral recordings. A new edition of the ballet is currently being prepared for the *Oeuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy*, Série V, Volume 7.

[17] Koechlin orchestrated *Khamma* from bar 79. However, he is known to have visited Debussy's house regularly for consultations and it is clear that the composer paid close attention to his assistant's work,

The scene for the genesis of *Khamma* is set largely by Debussy's correspondence, from which we know that he was profoundly dissatisfied with the Allan/Courtenay scenario. In a letter to Godet of 6 February 1911, he related that he had had to postpone work on the two Poe stories and described *Le Martyre de St. Sébastien* favourably as 'much more lavish than the poor little Anglo-Egyptian ballet'. The plot of *Khamma*, he said, 'would fit into a baby's hand and is typically devoid of interest', [18] adding ominously, 'Plots of another kind have pushed me into writing it, as well as reasons of domestic economy'.

A brief synopsis of the plot will have to suffice here (with bar numbers in brackets). After an ominous *Prélude*, scene 1 opens on an overcast afternoon in an Egyptian city under siege by its enemies (24). In the temple of the Sun God Amun-Ra, a high priest prays for deliverance (64). No answer is given (82), but the priest has an intuition that Khamma, a dancer, may hold the secret of victory (88). In scene 2 Khamma enters (112). She is initially frightened (123), but as moonlight floods the temple she prostrates herself before the statue of the Sun-God (168). She then embarks on three dances to try to persuade the God to deliver his people from their troubles (179, 244, 301). Suddenly, the statue begin to move (353); Khamma takes this as a propitious sign and begins a fourth dance 'of joy, love and devotion' (371). At the climax of the dance she falls to the ground, dead (407). In the final scene, the high priest (409) and the newly-saved people go to the temple with cries of victory (419). The doors of the temple are opened and the High Priest enters (427), but is shocked to discover Khamma's body (441). His final act is to bless her corpse (445).

Debussy must have found it frustrating to abandon his beloved (but as we now realise, essentially self-delusive) Poe projects for such a slender tale. In a letter to Caplet at the end of the year, he bewailed the state of progress on the Poe stories and seemed to be struggling under an acute anxiety of influence, presumably (in the context of the letter) from his own *Pelléas*.

[22 December 1911]

> I can't finish the two Poe stories. Everything is as dull as a hole in the ground. For every bar that has some freedom about it, there are twenty that are stifled by the weight of one particular tradition; try as I may, I'm forced to recognise its hypocritical and destructive

making amendments in several places. For discussion of source materials, see Myriam Chimènes, 'Les vicissitudes de *Khamma*', *Cahiers Debussy* 2 (1978), 11.

[18] Debussy to Godet, 6 February 1911, trans. in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 235. Orledge translates this as '[the scenario] is childishly simple and without the interest that it ought to have'.

> influence. The fact that this tradition belongs to me by right is hardly relevant...it's just as depressing, because whatever masks you wear, underneath you find yourself.[19]

Even as the short score was nearing completion in January 1912 Debussy seems to have developed little empathy for the ballet, writing to Durand with heavy sarcasm:

> Have you considered the influence a ballet scenario might have on a ballerina's intelligence? In *Khamma* - which I hope to play for you soon - one feels a curious vegetation invading the brain, so the dancers are forgiven.[20]

The background to *Khamma* is one of frustration and embarrassment brought about by Debussy's untimely opportunism. Yet the score shows many signs of careful thought, as if Debussy were trying to invest the music with more subtlety than the scenario would allow. Orledge cites the appearance of Khamma's theme at bar 88 - before she even appears on stage (112) - as an example of this subtlety. The premonition of her theme represents the High Priest's intuition that divine deliverance will be granted, and thus defines Khamma from the outset as the instrument by which the city will be saved.[21]

KHAMMA'S PRECURSORS

The establishment of these kinds of associations across the work cannot fail to invoke the model of *Pelléas*, in which Maeterlinck's use of densely symbolic language is entwined with, and enriched by, intricate musical associations. Even aside from the circumstantial evidence which suggests that Debussy was labouring under the weighty shadow of his operatic masterpiece and struggling with the protracted Poe projects at the same time as he was working on *Khamma*, the sheer morbidity of the Allan/Courtenay plot links the ballet with his darkest works. The music of *Khamma* is saturated with a brooding sense of impending doom, using muted trumpets to explore ideas of menace and the presence of sinister and supernatural forces; the result is comparable only with the most ominous passages in *Pelléas* and his surviving work on *The Fall of the House of Usher*. By 1911 the mixture of eroticism and exoticism also dates the work markedly; it is not a period piece, but - sad to say - the belated manifestation of an exhausted genre.

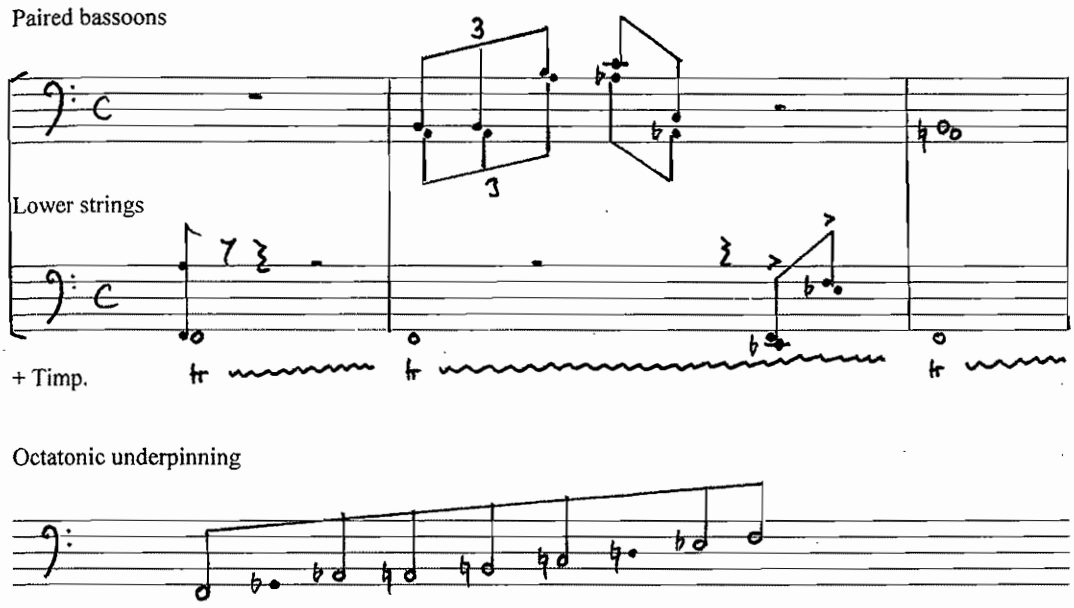
[19] Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 252.
[20] Undated letter to Durand of January 1912, trans. from Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 255.
[21] Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre*, 145.

Khamma also reveals the influence of Stravinsky's first two ballets. It should be remembered that by the time Debussy eventually started serious work on *Khamma*, *Petrushka* was fresh in his mind (he had attended the premiere at the Théâtre du Châtelet on 13 June 1911) and Stravinsky had just sent him the newly-printed score of *The Firebird* (on 16 June).[22] Several points of direct resemblance between Debussy's score and Stravinsky's ballets have already been pointed out by scholars. Myriam Chimèmes has pointed out a 'peculiar relation' between bars 158-163 [the end of the section entitled 'La peur de Khamma'] and reh. 51 in *Petrushka* (1911 version), while Robert Orledge has suggested that bars 79-80 and, more generally, the juxtaposition of triads in the trumpet fanfares, are indebted to Stravinsky.[23] Orledge also highlights the similarity between two closely-related celesta figures and draws attention to two letters from Debussy to Durand and Stravinsky, confirming that Debussy was studying the score of *Petrushka* in the very same week that he was working on the orchestration of *Khamma*.[24]

It is problematic for Debussy's interaction with Stravinsky that *Khamma's* darkness comes about through use of low registers, distant muted trumpets, murky sonorities (much bassoon and double-bass writing) and use of octatonic collections, since all these features were already evident in *Pelléas*. For example, the interlude between the first two scenes, which explores the same menacing sound world for comparable expressive reasons features a passage containing pungent seconds in bassoons and lower strings, a deep timpani roll, and unambiguous use of the octatonic collection:

[22] Dates from André Souris, *Debussy et Stravinsky*, 44.
[23] Myriam Chimènes, 'La Chimie Musicale de *Khamma*', *Cahiers Debussy* 12-13 (1988-89), 131; Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre*, 145-148.
[24] i.e. the week of 13 April 1912. See Orledge, *ibid.*, 146; for Debussy's letter to Stravinsky, see the extract cited earlier in this chapter re: the 'Magic Trick' (in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 256); for Debussy's letter to Durand, see *Lettres à son éditeur*, 109.

Pelléas et Mélisande, 28 bars before end of Scene 1 (p. 94, full score)



We are immediately faced with the problem of trying to distinguish elements already in existence in Debussy's compositional resources from those elements that could have only come from Stravinsky. The distinction is rendered less problematic, however, if we dissolve the rather rigid delineation and consider whether Stravinsky's music might have drawn out latent tendencies in Debussy's earlier music which simply needed a catalyst in order to flourish. Thus although parts of *Pelléas* are indeed, as Allen Forte has argued, 'thoroughly octatonic',[25] we should go beyond the mere occurrence of octatonic collections and see whether any substantial conclusions can be drawn from the various ways in which Debussy utilises them.

The nub of the issue is harmonic context. It is well-known that *Pelléas* operates within a symbolic framework determined by different keys and scale types: Richard Langham Smith has shown how Mélisande's role as the agent through which 'light' might be attained is complemented by a harmonic 'striving' towards F# major, whereas the other pole of the dark/light symbolic framework is drawn using whole-tone and other tritone-based materials (including the octatonic).[26] The most striking large-scale use of the whole-tone collection in order to evoke menace and darkness, for example, is the subterranean scene (Act 3, Scene 2) in which Golaud drags Pelléas down into the castle vaults - a scene, Debussy said, 'full of

[25] Forte, 'Debussy and the Octatonic', esp. 125-133, 141-143.
[26] Richard Langham Smith, 'Tonalities of Darkness and Light' in Roger Nichols and Richard Langham Smith (eds.), *Pelléas et Mélisande* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 107-139.

impalpable terror'.[27] The general principle involved in *Pelléas* was possibly derived from the diatonic/tritone-based-non-diatonic polarities drawn in the 'fantastic' harmony of much late nineteenth-century Russian music and therefore touches upon the same trajectory that Stravinsky was following in his early works. But the manner in which Debussy uses octatonic collections in *Pelléas* is relatively spontaneous, and has little in common with Rimsky's routines for generating materials out of well-worn octatonic mechanisms. As Allen Forte has concluded, 'the way in which [Rimsky-Korsakov] uses the octatonic, almost always in its 'ordered' form, is quite unlike the French composer's sophisticated and subtle usages'.[28] Taruskin concurs with Forte (for once), concluding that 'the Russians alone had worked out a rigorously systematic approach to the use of the same novel harmonies the Westerners applied by chaotic intuition'.[29] Thus although it seems likely that Debussy's octatonicism initially came from Russian music, he used it within a framework mediated through a non-Russian tradition. This tradition, I propose, was Wagnerian; compare, for example, the unsystematic but unmistakable depiction of sorcery in *Parsifal*, in which Klingsor's chromatic (often diminished-triadic) harmony is clearly set against the diatonicism of the Grail and the Good.

By 1910, the conventions were fundamentally unchanged as far as Debussy was concerned; at this stage, he was unlikely to extract fresh sources of inspiration from Rimsky's music. But Stravinsky's music was a different matter. Even though Stravinsky's systematic use of octatonic collections in the Second Tableau of *Petrushka* was indebted to Rimsky, as both van den Toorn and Taruskin have shown, Stravinsky differed from his Belyayevets predecessors in giving the octatonic the status of a stable point of reference, enabling it to function structurally as a 'key' in the sense that it could determine the hierarchy of pitches. Taruskin even argues that in parts of *Petrushka* the octatonic complex is a more stable referent than any of the transient diatonic tonalities with which it interacts.[30] The most

[27] Letter to Henri Lerolle, 28 August 1894, in *Debussy Letters*, 73. With regard to this scene, Debussy remarked in a letter to Durand of 1909 that 'The days pass in a grey, humid, heavy atmosphere, enough to make an oak tree depressed. In *Pelléas*, it's expressed as follows: [two whole-tone chords follow]. You'll agree, no one can live with those harmonies in his ears every day!'. [26 June 1909, in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 202-203.] Nichols points out that Debussy's letter quotes from the beginning of the following scene, when Golaud and Pelléas emerge from the castle vaults and Pelléas remarks 'The air down there is damp and heavy like a leaden mist, and the dense shadows are like a poisoned broth'. It is immediately noticeable that the chords are whole-tone, confirming that Debussy associated the whole-tone collection with darkness, heaviness, even morbidity.

[28] Forte, 'Debussy and the Octatonic', 157.

[29] Taruskin, *Russian Traditions*, 315. On Rimsky's use of octatonicism, see Taruskin, 'Chernomor to Kaschei: Harmonic Sorcery, or Stravinsky's "Angle"', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 38 (1985), 72-148 and *Russian Traditions*, 272-306.

[30] Van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky*; Taruskin, *Russian Traditions*, 737.

famous example of this new status of the octatonic collection is the '*Petrushka* chord'. Taruskin has emphasised that this tritone-based sonority was novel because it was envisaged and presented as an active polarity between C and F#. He provides a voice-leading reduction showing that the famous piano cadenza in Ravel's *Jeux d'Eau*, which explores a very similar sonority by mixing major triads on C and F#, is not analogous to the *Petrushka* chord because it functions as part of a prolongation - a surface embellishment of the entirely conventional harmonic structure of the piece.[31] Similar arguments can be made for octatonic occurrences in Debussy's pre-Stravinsky music because although Debussy does not follow the functional implications of the diatonic system as classically as Ravel, his most stable referent is almost invariably diatonic. Even the subterranean scene in *Pelléas* is not an exception: its effect is striking precisely because it is set within a harmonic discourse polarised for reasons of dramatic comprehension between the diatonic (light) and the tritone-based (dark).

In *Khamma*, uniquely, this is not the case. The central polarity in the harmonic language is not between diatonic and tritone-based materials, but is actively constructed around a series of tritone axes. These axes are familiar from Debussy's earlier music: a G-C# axis is prolonged by the whole-tone collection underpinning 'Parfums de la nuit' from *Ibéria,* for example. But 'Parfums', like the subterranean scene in *Pelléas*, is situated within a larger harmonic context - the G major of the outer panels of the *Ibéria* triptych. *Khamma* is thus exceptional at this stage in Debussy's output because there is no surrounding context or established tonal hierarchy for these tritone polarities. Even when diatonic chords or passages appear, they do so in an invariably transient manner.

To illustrate this, it is useful to compare the harmonic structures of 'Parfums de la nuit' and *Khamma*. Figure 2.1(a) is a harmonic analysis of 'Parfums'. At the very opening of the movement, the G/C# axis is brought about by the saturation of the texture by whole-tone materials. Only at bar 17 does the tritone axis weaken and the first hint of harmonic motion appear. At bar 21 a C# *litanie* from the preceding chord establishes a pedal note, which underpins a long prolongation of C#7 until bar 41. Following an ambiguous diminished seventh, G#m7 emerges at bar 48, but only fleetingly: the whole-tone G/C# axis returns between 52-67. Then, at bar 67, the G#m7 reappears, this time as part of the first conventional cadential pattern in the entire movement: a basic ii-V-I formula resolves into F# major at bar 75. This moment of diatonic respite from the tritone is swiftly displaced by the ostinati at bars 80-1 and 84-5, which use an octatonic texture based around the B-F tritone

[31] Taruskin, *Russian Traditions*, 772.

A: Harmonic Analysis

'Les Parfums De La Nuit'

Bar: 1 9 13 17 21 29 30 33 37 41 43 48 52 55 61 67 69 75 79

Réduction

strings — oboe — T — cor anglais — violins — cellos + basses — T — T — oboe — horn — [repeat] — flute

Harmonic Type: ⊢ W-T "active tritone" G – C# axis ⊣ | A 9-8 C# pedal | C#7 | 8-17/18/19 amplex | C#7 | dim7 | B | G#7 ⊢ W-T G-C# axis ⊣ | [G#M7] F#: :: V vi IV V I

80 82 84 86 88 89 92 96,98 99 103 107 110 112 (cf. b. 21) 118 124 127 129 III resonant

bassoon — violins — bassoon — violins — violins — horns, cellos — trumpet — Flute — cello — oboe — flute — etc.

⊢ Octatonic B-F tritone axis ⊣ | F#: vi ii V7 I | Repeat | C#7/I | I | ⊢ W-T G-C# tritone axis ⊣ | F#: I ⊣⊢ Eb: I ⟶

B: Background Structure

N — 1̂ — N — 1̂

1 21 52 67 69 75 80 86 88 89 92 127 129

Tritone axis G – C# unfolds into F# major via upper neighbour-note relationship.

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(compare the double-bass B to the harp's E#/F). Although the harmonic progression sounds startling, Debussy uses another *litanie* to link the major seventh of the F# major passage with the F of the octatonic. The cadential formula ii-V-I returns in bars 88-91, and the final resolution onto F# major at bar 92 lasts until the end of the movement some 39 bars later, supported by an F# pedal throughout. The return of the whole-tone at 127 casts shadows through the 'transition' into the next movement.

The deep harmonic structure (see my reduction, Fig. 2.1(b)) is therefore realised in terms of the tonic, F# major:

bars 1-16	tritone axis G-C#, giving way to
bars 21-51	prolongation of dominant pedal, C#
bars 52-66	tritone axis G-C# returns
bars 69-79	first cadential formula ii-V-I confirms F# goal at bar 75
bars 80-85	new tritone axis, B-F, challenges the preceding diatonic arrival
bars 88-91	ii-V-I cadential formula onto F# reappears
bars 92-end	F# pedal underpins tonic resolution; subsequent local chromaticism and tritone sonorities always heard with reference to the more stable tonic

So the disturbing 'tritone' that the G makes with the C# at the opening eventually turns out to be a neighbouring Neapolitan relationship to the tonic of F# major. The tonic, in turn, is related to the overall *Ibéria* tonality of G (the progression, via E*b* major, is made using several *litanie* links at the opening of the third movement, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter).

The languid effect of 'Parfums' is obviously dependent upon the deep structural processes of harmonic tension and release evinced by these long sustained pedal points and the remarkably slow harmonic rhythm. The comparison with *Khamma*, in which there is no underlying pattern of tension and release, could not be greater. There are very few moments of diatonic respite from tritone-dominated sonorities in *Khamma*: the first successful exorcism of the tyrannical tritone does not happen until the first dance at bar 179, nearly two-fifths of the way through the ballet. The only other predominantly diatonic passages occur at bars 311 and 338, when two short appearances of a cycle-of-fifths pattern provide an oasis of sweetness and transient stability amongst the darkly chromatic/tritone-bound harmony. Thus 'Parfums' exhibits a directed long-range sense of tonality - and hence a formal clarity - to which the relatively episodic *Khamma*, being a scenario-driven score, simply does not aspire.

Fig. 2.2 provides an outline of how octatonic and tritone-based sonorities are used in *Khamma*.

FIG. 2.2. *KHAMMA*: DOMINANCE OF THE C/G*b* AXIS

bars 1-20	octatonic ostinato
bars 26-29	High Priest's theme is an octatonic construction, outlining C-F#
bars 30-32	octatonic ostinato
bars 41-44	octatonic ostinato
bars 45-51	G*b*-C bass pedal point
bars 66-76	C major dyad pedal, quasi-whole-tone melody outlining G*b*-C
bars 77-81	trumpet fanfares outline C-F# over C major dyad pedal: explicit triadic octatonicism
bars 82-83	disruptive G*b*-C pedal, despite diatonic E*b* melody
bars 97-99	C^7-G*b* superposition
bars 100-101	C-G*b* in diminished seventh *frisson*
bars 106-107	High Priest's thene returns, again outlining C-F#
bars 132-133	bass ostinato reveals G*b*-C axis (sequentially repeated as E-B*b* in bb. 134-5)
bars 142-150	sustained G*b* bass pedal under whole-tone ostinato (B*b* and C):
bars 158-163	explicit triadic octatonicism: C-F# 'fight'
bars 168-178	whole-tone prevalent (exhaustively in bb. 176-178)
[bars 179-214	respite from tritone sonorities for first dance: diatonic and pentatonic collections prevail]
bars 225, 227, 231, 232	"La panique":[32] C-G*b* 'fight' reappears
bars 240-300	second dance, based around systematic [0 3 6 9] segmentation of octatonic collection III (the two tritone axes are C-F# and D#-A)
bars 302, 304	third dance: brief octatonic occurrences, but is largely based around other sonorities, including a C#-G ostinato between bars 324-333
bars 345-349	High Priest's theme in variation: same G*b*-C octatonic collection, including G*b* in bass
bars 353 360	'ladders of thirds': systematic octatonicism
bars 371-3, 380-383	areas of exhaustive octatonicism in the fourth dance, based on Khamma's theme
bars 409-418	return of High Priest's octatonic theme, with octatonic harmony underneath

Debussy was fascinated by both *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*, as we have seen from his letters, and I embarked on an analysis of *Khamma* in the hope that it might reveal ways in

[32] This scenario indication comes from Chimènes's documentary research and is not printed in the piano score (p. 17)

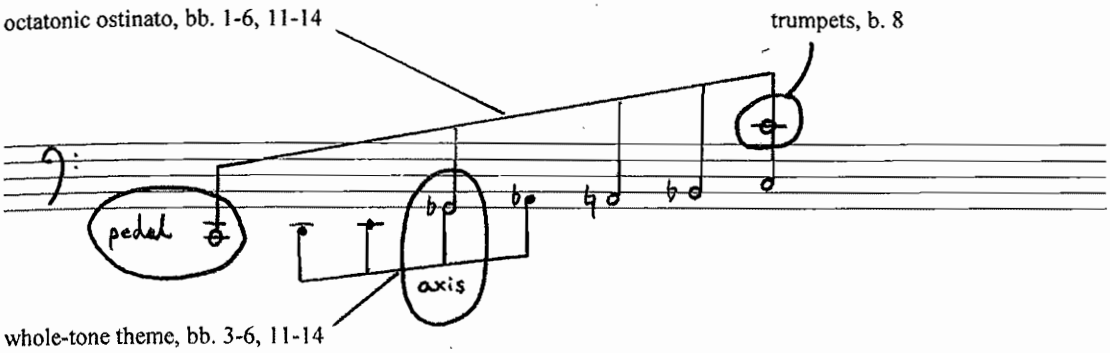
which his use of octatonic collections might establish a strong and hitherto unrealised point of contact between the two composers. Even with this opening hypothesis, however, I was still surprised to discover the extent to which the octatonic collection pervades the texture of *Khamma*. Entire segments of the ballet are thoroughly octatonic: the Prélude is an obvious example (Fig. 2.2 reveals that the C/G*b* axis is present throughout the first 170 or so bars - in fact, in all the introductory music before Khamma's first dance - and much of this tritone material is octatonically-based, as I will show). Moreover, the disposition of the octatonic collection in *Khamma* is unprecedented in Debussy's music. By contrast with Debussy's earlier usage in *Pelléas*, *Khamma* resembles Stravinskian technique in two respects: by segmenting the collection so as to emphasise diminished sonorities and then rotating the musical material sequentially around a [0 3 6 9] axis (as in *The Firebird*); and by segmenting it into two triads superimposed a tritone apart (as is so often the case in *Petrushka*). [33] The manner in which this is sometimes done - with a systematisation unusual in Debussy's music - even raises the question of whether the octatonic had an *a priori* status as a pre-determined referential collection in Debussy's mind, exhibiting, as van den Toorn said of Stravinsky, an 'in-the-act awareness' on the part of the composer.

KHAMMA: ANALYSIS

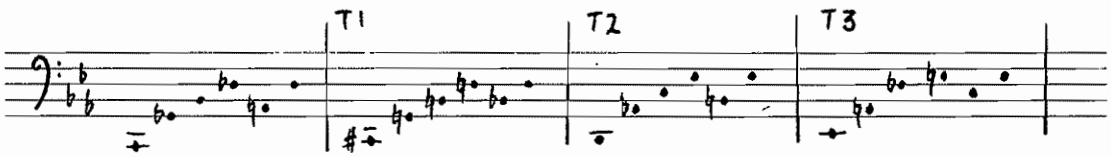
At the very opening of the *Prélude* Debussy's music consists of a low, wholly octatonic ostinato and an even lower 'theme', exclusively whole-tone. The two collections intersect around F#/G*b*, creating a pitch centre. Moreover, because of the metrical emphasis of the ostinato with C occurring on the strong beats of the bar, C acts like a pedal point. The resulting combination is an axis around C and F# in which neither has priority. The tritone axis is further accentuated by the entry of the distant trumpets on C in bar 8.

[33] This is not to suggest that diminished octatonic segmentations or the *Petrushka* chord were new as isolated sonorities in Debussy's music; but the harmonic context and function of such occurrences is of paramount importance, as I will demonstrate. For a representative sample of early occurrences of the 'Petrushka' chord in Debussy's music, see the listings of the 6-30 set class in Forte's list of octatonic passages in 'Debussy and the Octatonic', Appendix (pp. 165-169); also footnote 48, p. 164. His samples include several occurrences in *Pelléas* and date back to a song from 1885, *Chevaux de bois.*

Interpenetration of whole-tone and octatonic about the G*b*/C axis at the opening of *Khamma*

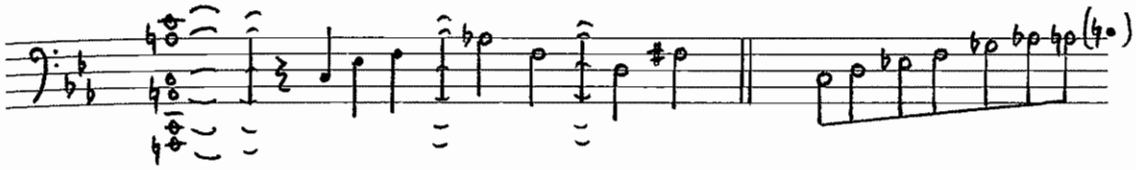
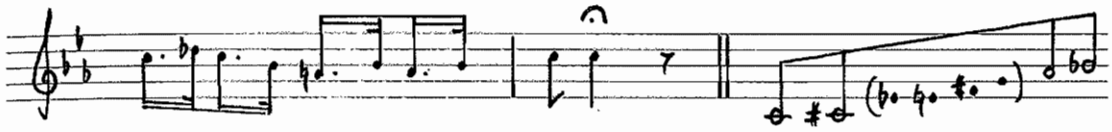


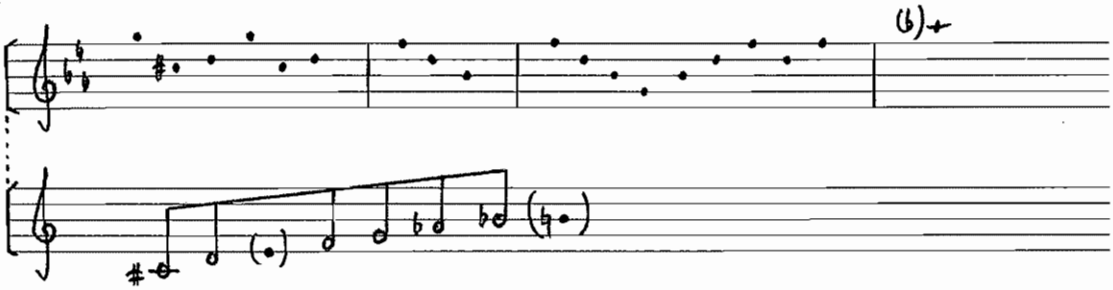
The apparent chromaticisms of bars 7, 9, 15-17 all turn out to be sequential transpositions of the same octatonic ostinato pattern, rising by a semitone on each occasion:

Sequential transposition of octatonic sonorities, b.7 and *passim*.

Even with the appearance of a different tritone (D-G#) in the bass in bars 18-20, the same octatonic collection still encompasses all the material (*i.e.* the ostinato, the new tritone and the fanfares on C; all of bars 17-20).

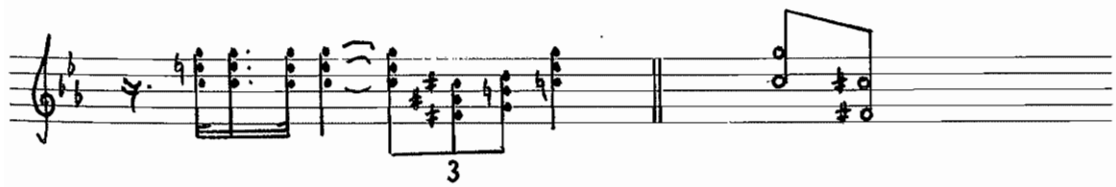
With the arrival of the High Priest at bar 26, the first real 'theme' appears. The main themes in *Khamma* are, unusually for Debussy, specifically leitmotivic. All three of the *motifs générateurs* that Myriam Chimènes [34] has identified in *Khamma* turn out on closer inspection to be completely octatonic; in addition, the third is based around a tritone-related C-F# triads. Moreover, when the three themes reappear in variation (as happens throughout the work) they tend to retain their octatonic qualities.

[34] Chimènes, 'La Chimie Musicale de *Khamma*', 126, 128, 130, 132, 135-7. Orledge [*Debussy and the Theatre*, 142] suggests that the themes are treated 'symphonically'. I do not agree: Chimènes's analyses suggest that the process in *Khamma* is entirely comparable with the 'endless variation' developmental processes in *La Mer* and *Jeux*. The important distinction to draw is that *Khamma's* themes are treated as leitmotifs.

Octatonic basis of the High Priest's theme (first heard at bar 27)

Octatonic basis of Khamma's theme (first heard at bar 88)

Octatonic basis of fanfare melody, bb. 21-24



Because the third *motif générateur* usually appears in a tritone-saturated harmonic context, it is not heard in terms of a C major diatonic tonality (i.e. leading note-V-I [F#-G-C]), as might be expected. Rather, there is an active tritone polarity between the F# and the C.

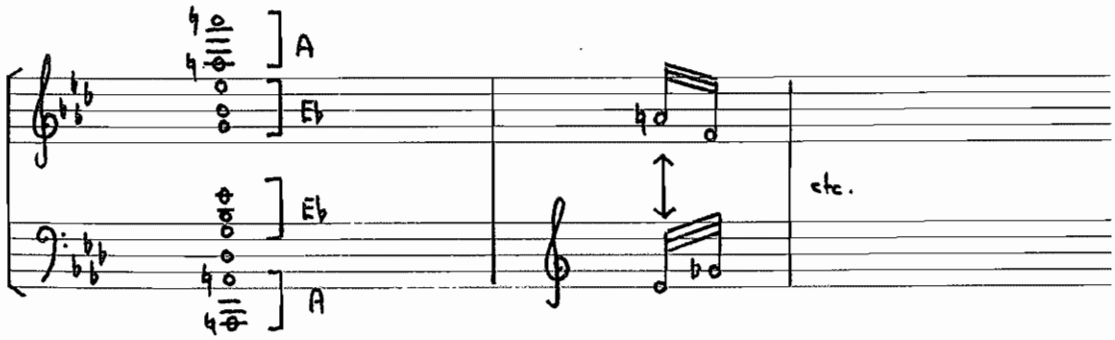
bar 21

At bar 158, as Chimènes has pointed out, the stage direction 'Les bruits au dehors' culminates in a frantic C-F# superposition together with trumpet fanfares, exactly as at reh. 51 in *Petrushka*. The resemblance to Stravinsky's 'genius for colour', as Debussy put it to Godet, is irresistible. As Fig. 2.2 shows, the C-G*b* axis does not remain in force throughout the work: the first dance drives out the tritone axis completely, leaving primarily diatonic and pentatonic musical materials. Khamma's second dance, however, is densely octatonic and seems to offer evidence that the octatonic collection was a pre-compositional element. From the emergence of the main second dance theme at bar 239 (itself a variation of the High Priest's theme), Debussy's melodic arabesque is drawn entirely from Collection III all the way to bar 256, achieved by transposing the figure through a [0 3 6 9] axis. In addition - and

it is this point which seems to suggest that there was a conscious design behind the octatonic design - virtually every single note of the accompaniment in bars 240-256 is also drawn from Collection III (see Fig. 2.3: notes outside the octatonic collections are circled).

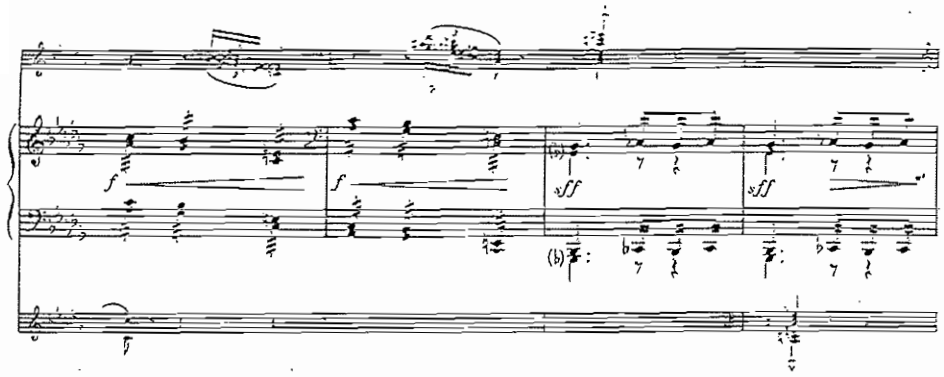
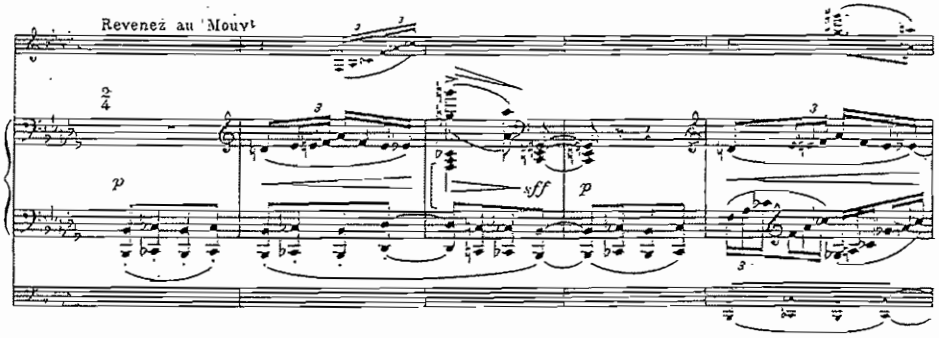
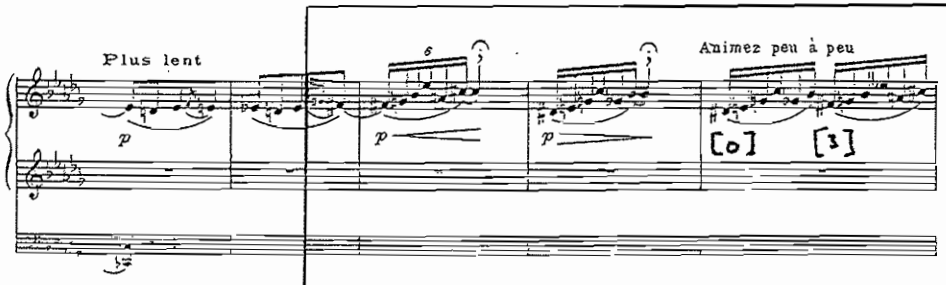
The music becomes more chromatic from bar 260 onwards, but the principal arabesque theme always maintains the purity of its octatonic source set (e.g. in bars 260, 269, 270, 274, 276-7, 292) and the varied melodic material from bar 262 continually circumscribes a tritone or is underpinned by tritone-based harmony. The fact that Debussy's material is always transposed sequentially (e.g. 276-277) suggests that he realised octatonic purity could be maintained by transposition through [0 3 6 9].

The tritone conflict becomes explicit in bars 282, with a crashing E*b* triad surrounded by octave As in both high and low registers, followed by a truly 'active' *Petrushka*-induced polarity in bar 284:

active tritone polarities in bars 282-284

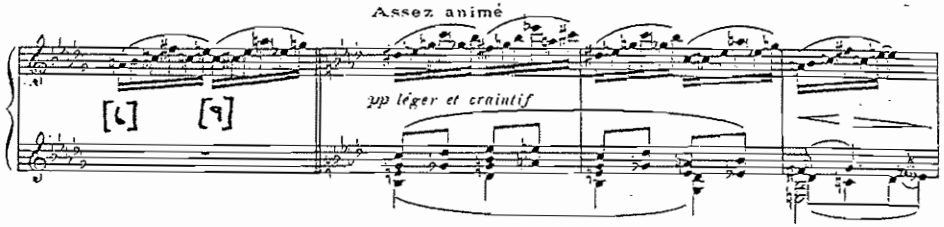


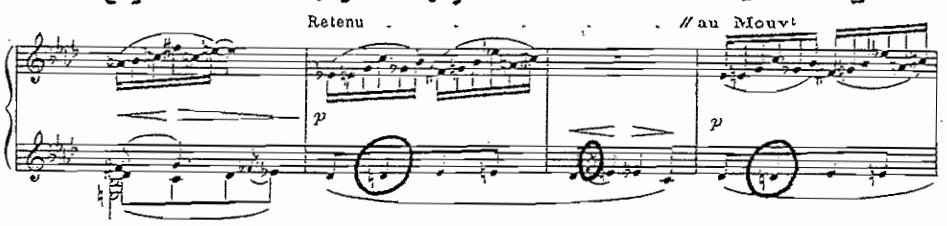
The third dance is based largely around the whole-tone collection (as can be seen in bars 317-323), but offers occasional moments of diatonic respite (e.g. bars 311-314). The third dance also enriches the tritone axis with extra chromaticism (e.g. bars 324-334, with a C#-G tritone pedal enriched with a B-E# frisson). Whether by calculation or accident, the integration of these two tritone axes results in a series of vivid sonorities entirely referable to a single octatonic collection:

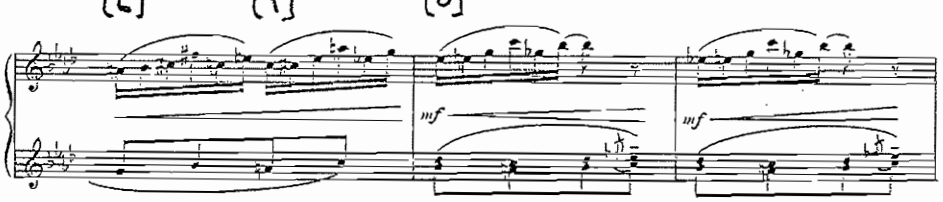
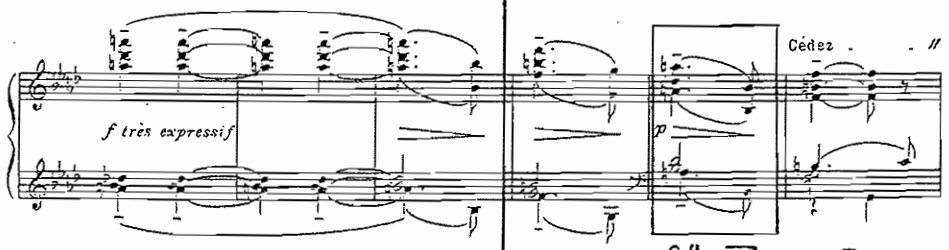
Octatonic Coll. III



[0] [3] [0] [9] [6]

II^e Danse

Assez animé

[6] [0] [3] [0] [3]

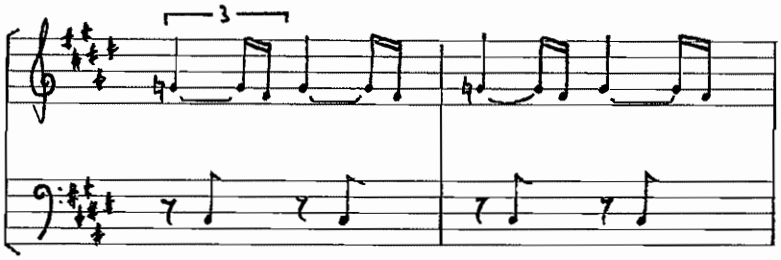


[6] [9] [0]



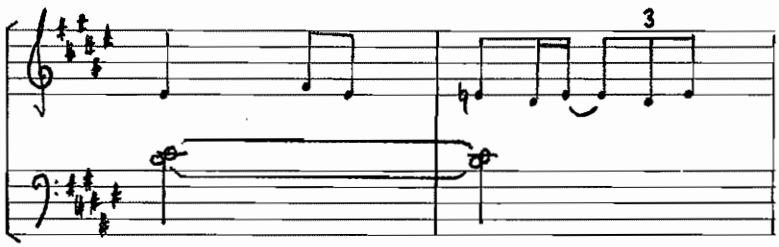
G^7 Coll. III G^7

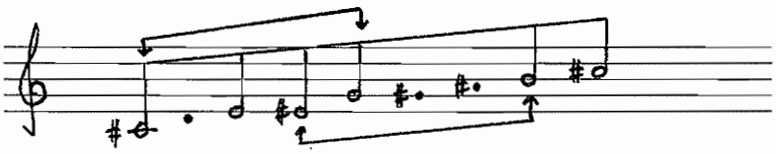
Fig. 2.3

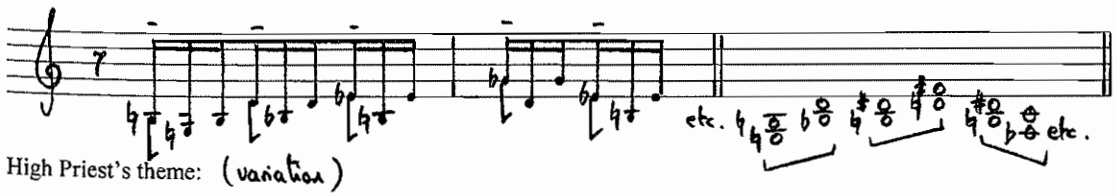
Integration of tritone axes to produce octatonic complex, bars 324-334 (minus chromatic passing notes)

C#-G tritone pedal

plus

B-E# axis

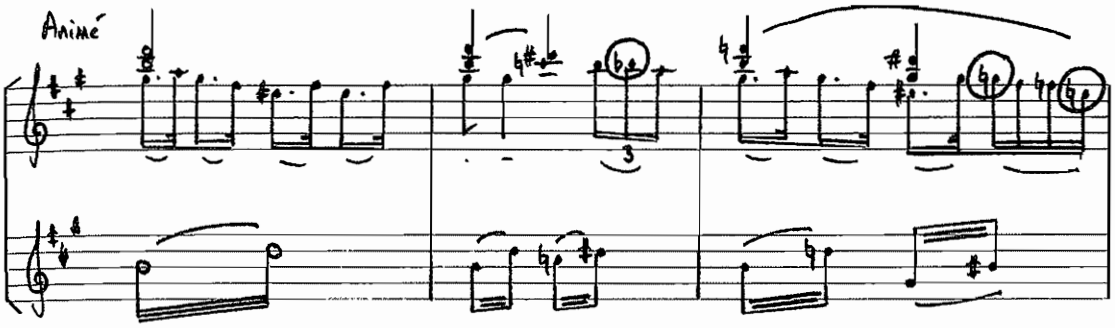


Octatonic Coll. I

The passage from bar 353 also has a curiously 'Russian' ring about it. The reason from this emerges from a close reading of the pitch structure, which reveals that the passage is a variation on one of Rimsky-Korsakov's beloved ladders of thirds. Debussy ornaments the High Priest's theme with broken major thirds: the resulting mélange consists of pairs of major thirds related by a minor third. This provides an association with paired triads such as those at bars 33/35 (which subsequently develop into the fanfares at 37/39); it also echoes a distinctly Russian tradition of building sequences using octatonic pairs.

"Russian" octatonicism, bars 353-354/357-358

High Priest's theme: (variation)

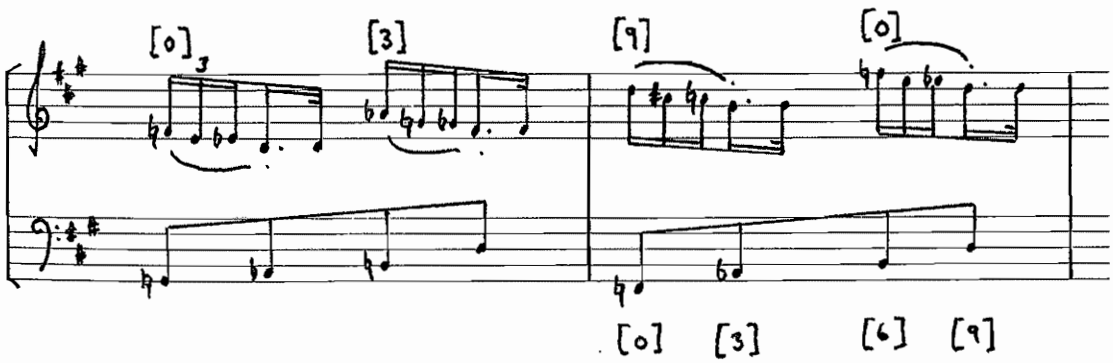
The beginning of the fourth, ecstatic dance at bars 371-373 and 380-382 uses the octatonic collection II throughout the texture (except for the descending passing notes):

The fourth dance, bb. 371-373 (repeated at 380-2); notes outside collection are ringed



Although the build up towards the climax of the work at Khamma's death becomes more densely chromatic, the underlying structure is always tritonic with additional ornamental chromaticism, reinforcing the sense that tritone-based collections are the referential sonorities. Consider, for example, the all-pervasive E-A# tritone in bars 385-388 and the vivid sequential movements in bars 387-390, progressing by minor thirds [0 3 6 9]. This is reinforced by the bass movement through F-A*b*-B-D in bar 390 (explicitly outlining the [0 3 6 9] rotation).

Octatonic rotation through [0 3 6 9] axis, bb. 389-390

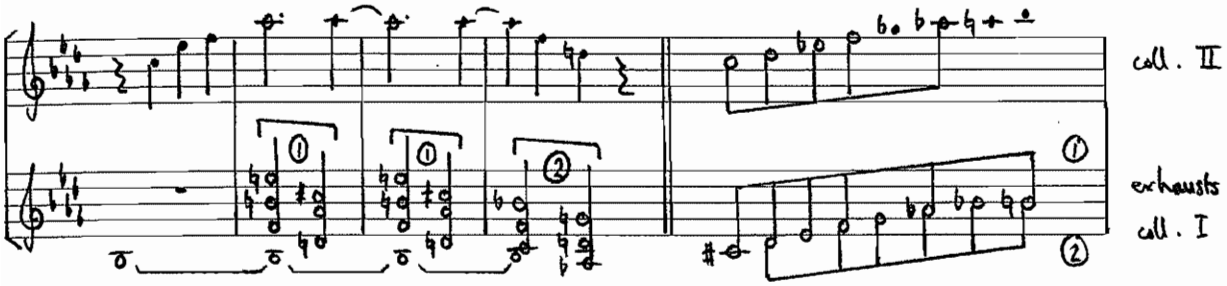


At bar 400 the High Priest's octatonic theme returns at its former pitch (thus outlining a C-G*b* tritone), only this time supported by an A*b* pedal and accompanied by densely chromatic clustered chords. Pure octatonic constructions are thus subsumed within a more free-wheeling chromaticism; the sense of tight control evident over pitch structure in the rest of the work is fleetingly abandoned for an orgiastic manner very unusual in Debussy's music. Given that Maud Allan seems to have conceived of *Khamma* as a re-run of her scandalous success with the 1908 *Vision of Salomé*, such wildness in the culmination of Khamma's most ecstatic dance seems eminently appropriate.[35]

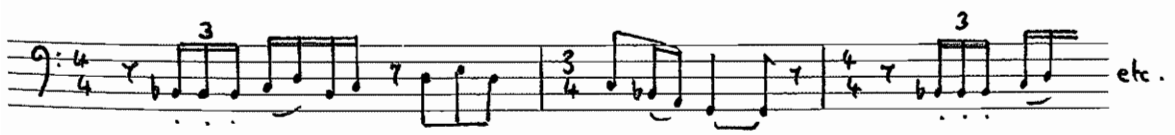
[35] Allan originally wanted seven dances in *Khamma*. Her *Salomé* had attracted the censor's attention in several parts of Europe and America, and Orledge suggests that this 'may have prompted her to seek an equally exotic and sensational alternative' in *Khamma* [*Debussy and the Theatre*, 131]. Debussy was

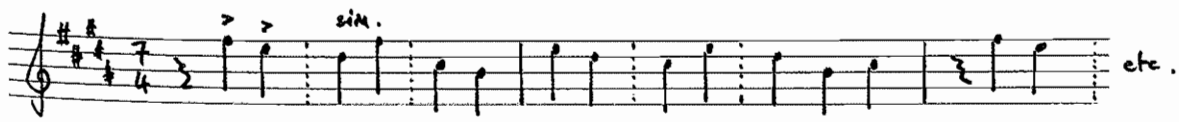
At Khamma's collapse, the dance dissolves onto a low B*b* which tolls ominously under a recapitulation of the Priest's theme (409), once again maintaining its octatonic collection II purity: Debussy invariably retains the octatonic pitch structure, no matter how else this theme is varied. The harmony also reverts back to the octatonic: each pair of oscillating chords make up a subset of collection I, and together the two pairs exhaust the collection:

Return of strict octatonic pitch structure at bars 409-418



Between bars 419-440, tritone-based sonorities are largely displaced by diatonic groups (A*b* major-minor inflections), but the ambiguity brought about by the use of B*b* and E natural in the seven-beat celebration theme (first heard in the trumpet in bar 420 and more fully in bar 429) renders any sense of tonal direction or resolution wholly unsatisfying - G minor with a Dorian sixth, perhaps? The reason for this harmonic uneasiness is made clear following the subsequent discovery of Khamma's corpse (441), which renders these celebrations distinctly hollow. The rhythm here is also a point of interest: Orledge plausibly suggests a Stravinskian influence on Debussy's unusual seven-beat construction, and it is indeed rare to find metrical switching between 3/4 and 4/4 of this nature elsewhere in Debussy's music. I suggest that the ending of *Firebird* was a likely precursor:

Khamma, final theme, bb. 429-430 and *passim*

The Firebird (1910), final theme, fig. 203 and *passim*

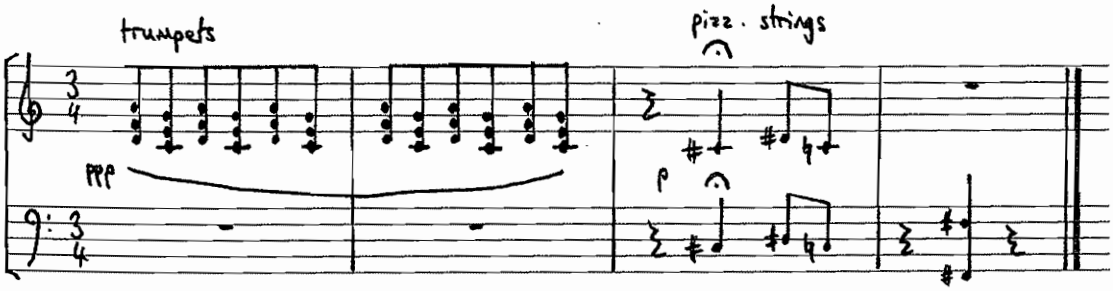


familiar with Strauss's *Salomé*: he borrowed the score from Sylvain Dupuis in January 1907 and saw a production at the Châtelet on 17 May. 'I don't see how anyone can be other than enthusiastic about this work - an absolute masterpiece,' he told Astruc. See letters of 8 January and 23 May 1907 in Lesure-Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 175-6, 179. Although I do not suggest that Strauss had any influence on *Khamma*, the unusually frenzied nature of Debussy's writing here creates a rare point of contact with the sensibility of Strauss's music.

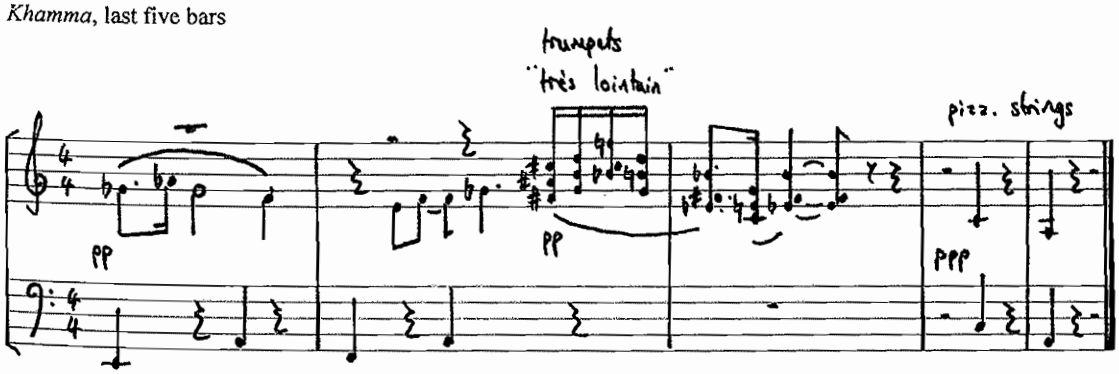
The subsequent ambivalence of the ending, centred around thanks to Amun-Ra for deliverance but stricken with sorrow for Khamma, is reflected in a final, definitive re-working of the tritone relationship: bars 445-448 alternate E*b* minor and A minor triads, but this time the disproportionately weighty orchestration of the A minor chord leave no doubt that A minor has come into focus as the central pitch. The active tritone axis appears to be resolved by bars 449-453, but the tonality does not settle here. A rather startling solo viola fragment and distant reminder of the trumpet fanfares reappear in bars 454-6, and even in the last two bars, when A minor is finally confirmed, the last two unison pizzicatos seem very close to *Petrushka*'s inconclusive ending (this is also true of *Jeux*, of course).

The resemblance between the endings of *Khamma* and *Petrushka* go deeper. Both works create a deeply 'retrospective' atmosphere in the last few bars with which to reflect on the death of the protagonist; furthermore, by using distant echoes of familiar trumpet sonorities entangled with reminisces of other themes, Debussy brings back two variations on Khamma's own theme (bars 445, 454) in exactly the same manner that Stravinsky intersperses Petrushka's ghostly trumpet fanfares with the soft wheezing of the barrel organ, first heard in the street scenes and subsequently transmuted into the driving ostinati of the Fourth Tableau:

Petrushka, last four bars



Khamma, last five bars



Orledge describes the ending on A as 'a tribute to Debussy's skilful tonal planning', but *Khamma* ends inconclusively, if not quite on a hiatus. The comparison with the ending of

Petrushka, which ostensibly sounds very similar, is crucial. Analysts have shown that the ending of *Petrushka* is formulated entirely systematically with reference to the rest of the piece: an octatonic complex previously segmented along [0 3 6 9] axes (incorporating the famous C/F# opposition) is now, from reh. 132, segmented with the *other* relationship (between D major in the wind and F minor in the trumpet fanfare) with which the entire referential collection is exhausted.[36] No such systematic conception is evident in *Khamma*.

CONCLUSIONS

Such an observation is not of merely abstract significance, but provides us with a succinct view of the nature and extent of Debussy's debt to Stravinsky at this stage. It will be readily apparent by now that Debussy, lacking Stravinsky's grounding in Russian harmony, appropriated Stravinsky's octatonicism in a rather superficial fashion. Debussy was not interested in using octatonic collections as a generative constraint (i.e. as a mechanism for organising the development and control of large-scale pitch structure). Rather, Debussy uses the octatonic in conjunction with other tritone-based materials for their overall *vertical* sonority. This is not to assert that he lacked an 'in-the-act awareness' of the octatonic collection. The purity of some of his octatonic passages (i.e. those not admitting additional chromatic notes 'alien' to the set) implies a conscious design: Khamma's second dance, for example, suggests that Debussy's use of the octatonic collection was deliberate. Compare Debussy's pre-*Khamma* music, in which it would not be unreasonable to suggest that the occurrence of the octatonic collection in is a relatively incidental side-effect, created by adding chromatic inflections to an underlying whole-tone conception in order to elicit novel sonorities.

Are the features I have noted specifically Stravinskian, or could they have come from other Russian music? Debussy became newly interested in the music of the Russian school from 1907, when Diaghilev presented his first displays of Russian music in Paris. Debussy's letters to Astruc show that he attended several of the Russian concerts, which ranged from Rimsky's *Ivan the Terrible* (i.e. *The Maid of Pskov:* Diaghilev astutely renamed it for the Parisian market) to *Boris Godunov* and the ballet *Le Festin* (with music by several Russian composers). Calvocoressi, who had just made a new edition of *Le Coq d'Or,* sent Debussy the score in 1909, and received a characteristic reply: *Le Coq*, Debussy observed, 'is the

[36] For full details of this remarkable construction, see van den Toorn, *The Music of Stravinsky*, and Taruskin, *Russian Traditions*.

music of an old conjuror who was very good once and remembers the fact'.[37] It is therefore important to remember that a considerable amount of Russian music was to the forefront of Debussy's mind during Diaghilev's Parisian seasons. But I hope to have shown in my analyses that Debussy appropriated the distinctively Stravinskian type of octatonic segmentation in which the tritone tension is conceived in 'active' terms rather than as part of a larger harmonic framework. This, together with highly suggestive points of resemblance between *Khamma's* opening (compare *Firebird*), final peroration (compare the seven-beat theme in *Firebird*) and ending (compare *Petrushka*), provides an adequate foundation for my conclusion. In fact, I would go further and argue that *Khamma* seems to be rather too heavily indebted to Stravinsky's first two ballets for comfort. It is not the appropriation of the mechanisms themselves that weakens Debussy's score, but his *partial* appropriation of Stravinskian techniques. The octatonic rotations in the Prélude and the second dance which recall the opening of *The Firebird*, for example, lack the rhythmic impetus and dazzling orchestral colour which sustain Stravinsky's saturated harmonic texture and invest his music with its remarkable sense of shape and directed motion.

Why did Debussy lean so heavily on Stravinsky's music in *Khamma*? The simple matter of proximity accounts for much: Stravinsky's music was new, unusual, fresh, and - at certain stages during the composition of *Khamma* - was literally ringing in Debussy's ears. But there is a more specific factor which identifies precisely what Debussy found to be new in Stravinsky's music: the mixture of sinister forces and exoticism, depicted through the use of octatonic sonorities. It is noticeable that 'darkness' and the 'exotic' had not been blended in Debussy's music before *Khamma*. The tritone-based exoticism of 'Parfums' is dark, it is true, but the movement is primarily an evocation of nocturnal darkness - dreamy, languid and erotic rather than menacing. Debussy's exotic music was normally part of an escapist orientalism - pagodas, gamelans, Moorish songs, Spanish folk guitars - whereas the *real* darkness tended to appear in non-exotic sources, most notably in the foreboding and unremitting gloom of Materlinck or Poe from whom Debussy drew such profound inspiration.[38] The fact that Debussy was relatively unfamiliar with the exotic-gloomy mixture

[37] To Calvocoressi, 3 August 1909; to Astruc, 23 May 1907 and 12 June 1909, trans. in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 211, 179, 202.

[38] *Khamma* is a classic case of 'orientalism' in which Debussy seems content to conflate Egyptian with 'Oriental' and underpin the unholy mixture with sinister Russian harmony. Glenn Watkins has shed light on this by noting that Russia was often 'perceived as a kind of Orient' through European eyes, particularly at the time of Diaghilev's Russian musical showcases in the early 1900s. Watkins doesn't mention *Khamma* at all, and I believe it would enrich his discussion. See his *Pyramids at the Louvre: Music, Culture, and Collage from Stravinsky to the Postmodernists* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap-Harvard UP, 1994), 32.

might help to explain why *Khamma* suffers from a problem that is rarely found in Debussy's other scores: a sense that the exotic element is not smoothly assimilated into his own idiom, but remains as a distinct layer, worn as fancy dress. It is notable, for example, that the 'Stravinskian' (i.e. largely octatonic) elements of exotic foreboding in *Khamma* are sharply distinct from the fleeting reminiscences of Debussy's own music which occur throughout the ballet. Consider, for example, the echoes of *Pelléas* (*cf. Khamma*, bars 449-453); 'Parfums de la nuit' (compare its rising whole-tone theme with bars 66-78 in *Khamma*); *La Mer* (*cf. Khamma*, pentatonic figuration, 184-185); even the ostinato-driven climaxes in *Gigues* and *Jeux* which drive onto a point of dramatic collapse (bars 405-408: *cf. Gigues*, 162, and *Jeux*, 429).

Debussy's idiosyncratic appropriation of the octatonic collection in order to create an atmosphere of exotic foreboding is entirely characteristic of his anti-systematic manner. But if Taruskin's illustration of the extent to which Stravinsky relied on Rimsky's models seems surprising, it is even more startling to find Debussy latching on to similar techniques under the influence of *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*, albeit without the formality and rigorous sense of mechanism to which the Russians adhered.

* * *

III
Préludes, Book 2

The first set of *Préludes* was written before Debussy knew any of Stravinsky's music. Consequently, a comparison of the two books of *Préludes* not only reveals details about Debussy's evolution in the years between 1909-10 and 1912-13, but opens up ways of discerning Stravinsky's influence on Debussy's piano writing. This issue becomes particularly acute when we realise that virtually all the movements in the second book were written after Debussy had heard *The Rite of Spring*, which he had played through in an early version alongside Stravinsky at Laloy's house on 9 June 1912.[1] Of the twelve movements in the second book of *Préludes*, only *Brouillards* (for which an early draft exists, dated December 1911) is likely to have been written before this date.[2] In this discussion, I will follow Robert Orledge's suggestion that most movements in the second book were notated between 10 October 1912 and the second week of 1913.[3]

FANTASIES ON *PETRUSHKA*

In the middle of this intense period of composition, Debussy wrote to Stravinsky:

[5 November 1912]

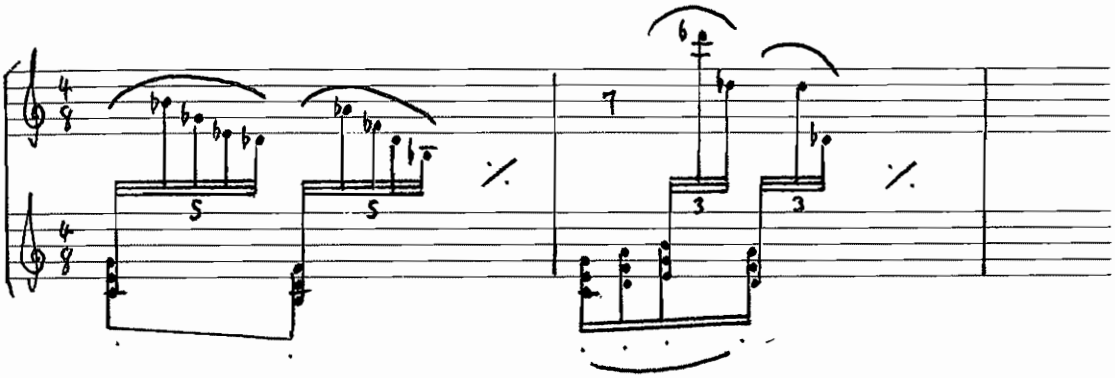
> [...] The good news is that here your name is mentioned once a day - at least - and your friend Chouchou has composed a fantasy on *Petrushka* which is enough to make a tiger roar...For all the punishments I threaten her with, she still goes on claiming 'you'd find it excellent'. So how can you imagine we're not thinking of you?
>
> I still think of the performance of your *Sacre du Printemps* at Laloy's house... It haunts me like a beautiful nightmare and I try in vain to recall the terrifying impression it made. That's why I wait for the performance like a greedy child who's been promised some jam.[4]

Chouchou was not the only one who had been composing fantasies on *Petrushka*. One of the most striking differences between the two books of *Préludes* is Debussy's post-*Petrushka* preoccupation with 'black-and white' piano writing, in which one of the pianist's hands is

[1] In his *La musique retrouvée* (Paris, 1927), 213, Laloy incorrectly dates their performance to the spring of 1913.
[2] It is, of course, impossible to speculate on how long music had been gestating in Debussy's mind before being committed to paper. For discussion and dates based on source materials, see Roy Howat (ed.), *Debussy, Oeuvres Complètes: Préludes* (Série 1, Vol. 5), xv-xvi.
[3] Robert Orledge, 'Debussy's piano music: some second thoughts and sources of inspiration', *Musical Times* cxxii, no. 1655 (January 1981), 21-27.
[4] Trans. from Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 265.

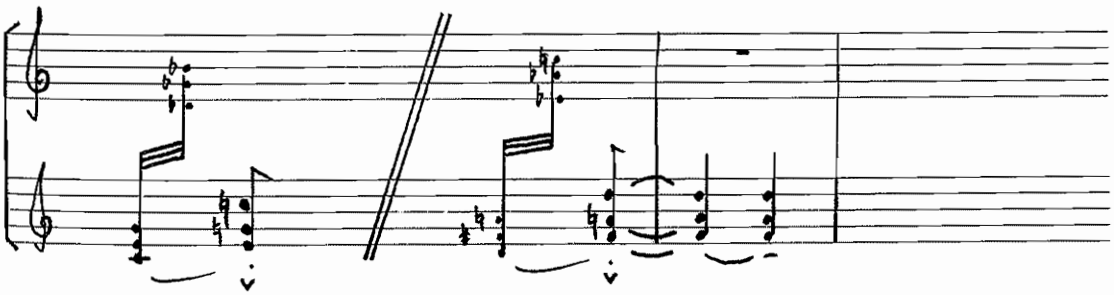
allocated black-note configurations and the other hand a series of white-note groups.[5] A plausible source for such writing is this passage near the beginning of the second Tableau of *Petrushka* (see attached excerpt).[6] The sense of competing tonal centres embodied in Stravinsky's flourishes underpins several of Debussy's *Préludes* II. *Brouillards*, for example, has been described by Taruskin as 'a veritable study in *Petrushka*-esque 'bitonality',[7] an observation which is clarified at the very opening of the work when the two hands are separated so that the right takes the black notes, the left the white-note triads:

Brouillards, bb.1-2



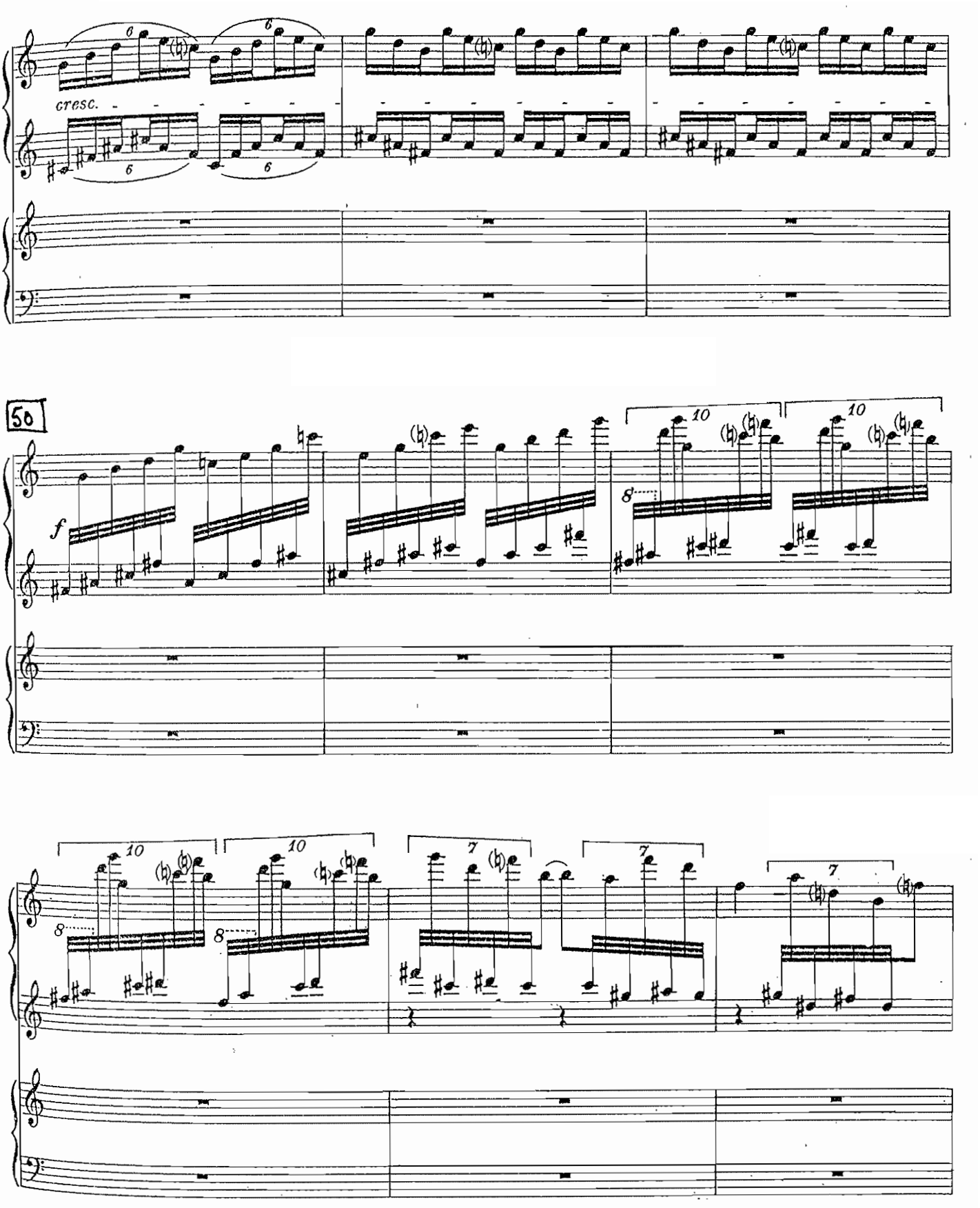
At bar 10, the black *vs.* white writing continues, as an F# major melody, accompanied by an ostinato of pentatonic tetrachords on F# is set against G major triads. Eventually the opposition culminates onto two *Petrushka* chords:

Brouillards, bb.29-30



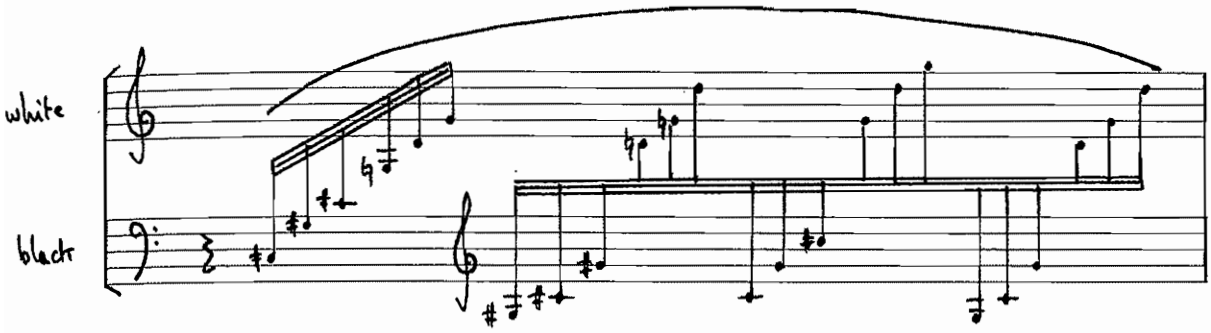
[5] Stravinsky provided several recollections of the initial inspiration for his unusual piano writing in *Petrushka*. In 1928 he spoke of a puppet, 'exasperating the patience of the orchestra with diabolical cascades of arpeggios'; by 1936 the puppet had become 'the musician or poet of Romantic tradition [who] rolled incongruous objects on the keyboard'. See Florent Fels, 'Un entretien avec Igor Stravinsky à propos de l'enregistrement au phonographe de *Pétrouchka'*, *Nouvelles littéraires* (8 December 1928), reprinted in François Lesure (ed.), *Stravinsky: études et témoignages* (Paris: Éditions Jean Claude Lattès, 1982), 248; also Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, 11.

[6] In a period before recorded sound, the two-piano score of *Petrushka* would have been Debussy's primary point of access for private study. The Edition Russe de Musique four-hand piano reduction of 1913 from which this excerpt has been taken is conveniently available in a Dover reprint (New York, 1990).

[7] Taruskin, *Russian Traditions*, 771-3.

cresc.
50
f

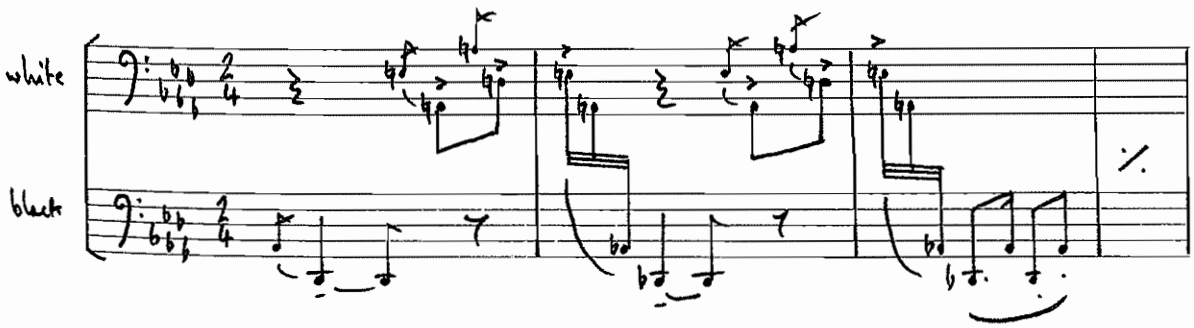
From bar 32, a diminished melody outlining D-F-D-B is surrounded by glittering G#-D# ornamentation, creating a lengthy D-G# tritone superposition. Similarly, the cadenza in bar 40 articulates a very Stravinskian C#-G opposition between the two hands:

Brouillards, bar 40



The 'active' nature of the black/white opposition helps create the tonal rootlessness so often observed in the piece, even though there is more overall centricity (around C) than in the tritone-saturated contexts of *Khamma*.[8] Surprisingly, tonal ambivalence is also evident in *La Puerta del Vino*, even though the entire piece is reliant on a prolonged D*b*-A*b* 'tonic' pedal. The existence of a pedal might seem to make any comparison with the specially 'active' nature of Stravinsky's tritone axis quite problematic. But the marking *avec de brusques oppositions d'extrême violence et de passionnée douceur* ensures that the sense of a polarisation between extremes is not underplayed; in fact, the piece accentuates the active nature of the central tritone opposition between D*b* and G by dislocated rhetorical gestures more characteristic of Stravinsky's music:

La Puerta del Vino, bb.1-4

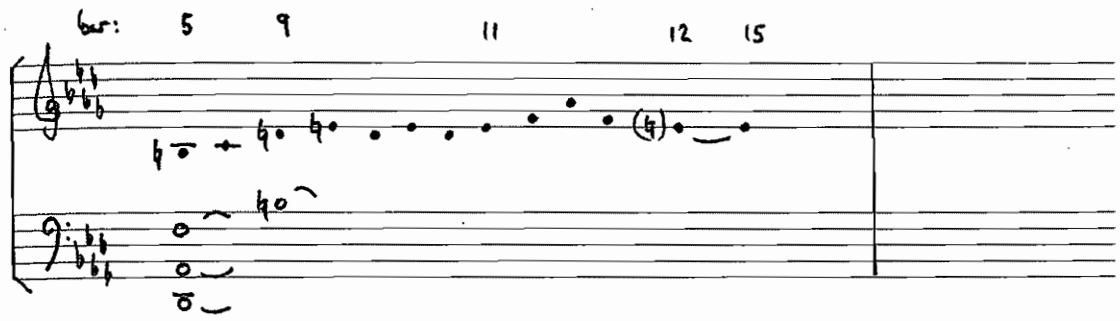


The aggressive black *vs.* white opening of the piece is softened at the appearance of the Habañera melody (bar 5) which emphasises B and E naturals, initially creating a seventh

[8] See, for example, Dieter Schnebel, 'Brouillards - Tendencies in Debussy', *Die Reihe* 6 (1960, English translation 1964), 33: 'There is: no theme, no development; no traditional form; no counterpoint, but no so-called harmony either [...] neither definitely diatonic tonality nor chromatic tonality'.

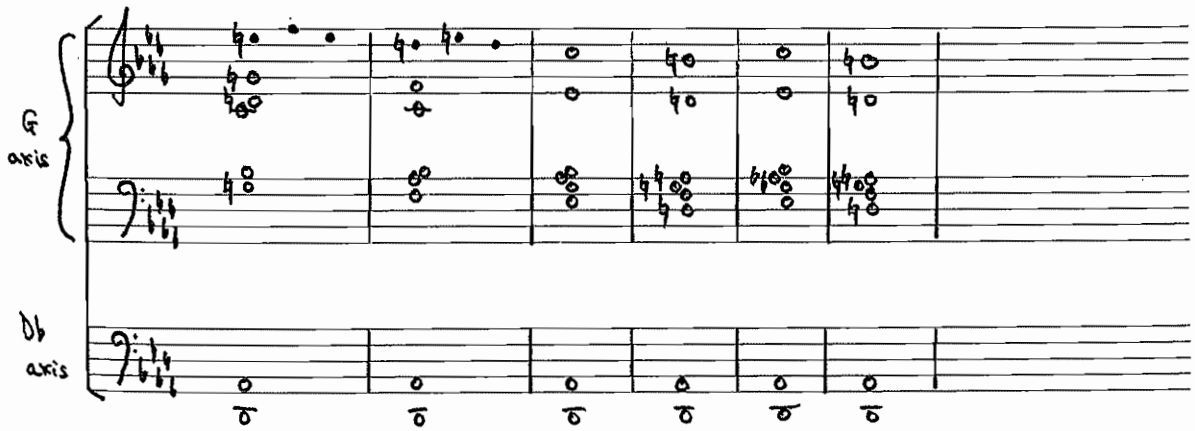
sonority implying a prolonged dominant on D*b* rather than a continual tritone polarity. But as the melody rises, its true bitonality becomes apparent.

La Puerta del Vino, bb. 5-16 (reduction of white-note melody and black-note bass ostinato)



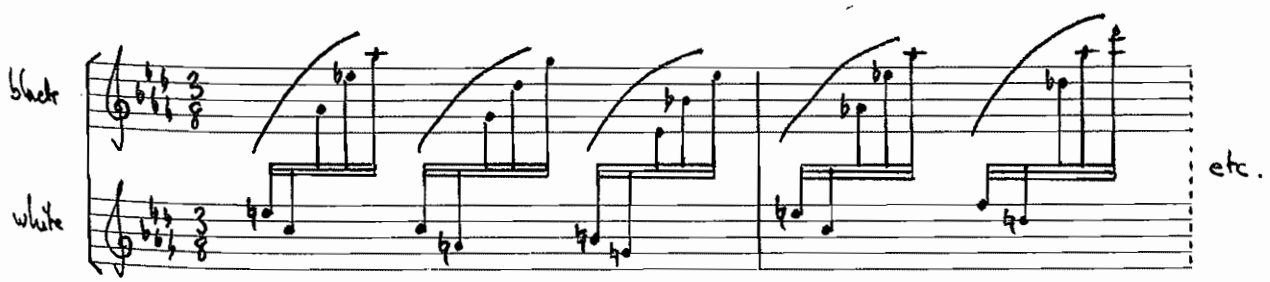
The D*b*-G axis returns throughout the movement and is presented in blatant juxtaposition at bar 21 (and in variant forms between 25-30). No lasting reconciliation between the tonal planes is admitted until the end of the piece, where the D*b* presaged in bars 77 and 82 is finally confirmed in bar 85.

La Puerta del Vino, bb. 25-30 (reduction)

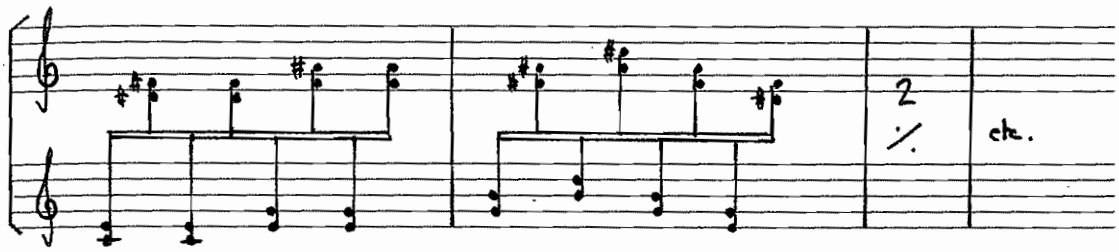


Other movements in *Préludes II* exhibit comparable musical materials based on the idea of black *vs*. white writing.

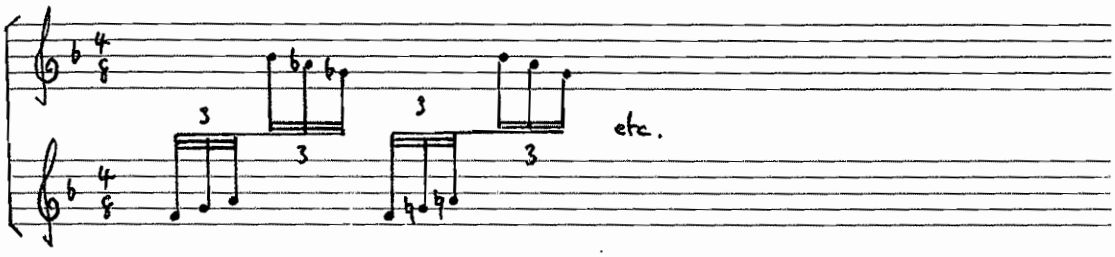
Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses. bb.1-4 (and *passim*. from bar 101)



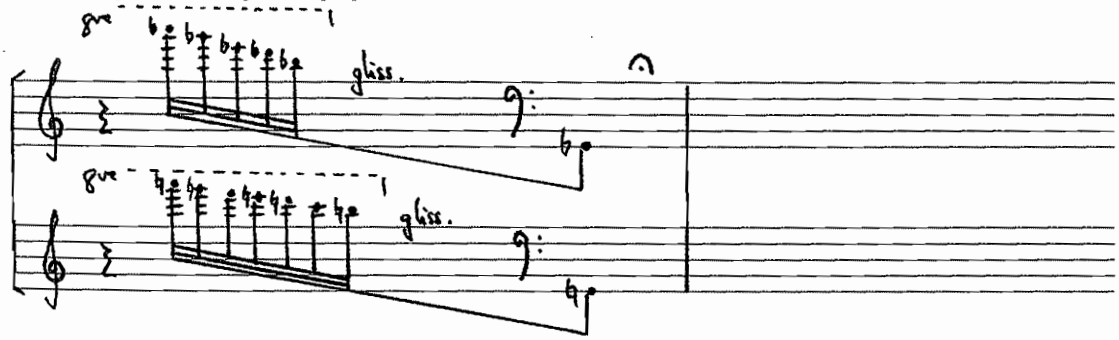
Les Tierces alternées, bb.34-39



Feux d'artifice, ostinato from b.1 onwards

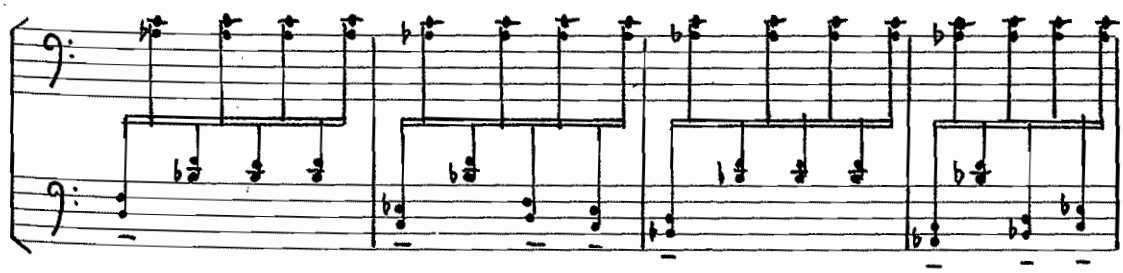


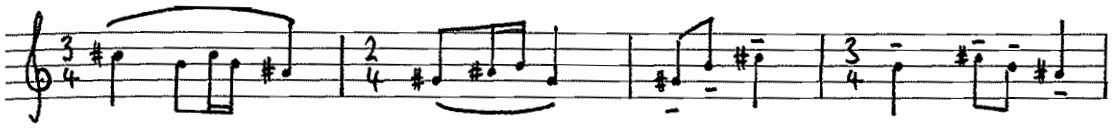
Feux d'artifice, b.87, explicit superposition of black and white



In addition to these resemblances, Roy Howat has pointed out that there is a strong possibility that Debussy quotes Stravinsky in *Les tierces alternées*. In a concealed but seemingly deliberate manner, Debussy uses articulation markings to bring out fragments of melody from the dazzling texture to reveal a melody from 'The Ritual Action of the Ancestors' in *The Rite*:

Les tierces alternées, bb.75-80



The Rite of Spring, 'The Ritual Action of the Ancestors'. This excerpt from the 1914 four-hand piano score: in the 1947 revised edition, see fig. 132.

Koechlin, who visited Debussy for consultations about the orchestration of *Khamma* at the beginning of 1913, recalled that the composer was keen to describe all the 'strange novelties' that would be found in *The Rite*, particularly 'certains passages d'une bitonalité inouïe' (i.e. 'unprecedented' or 'unheard-of' bitonality).[9] It is clear from the examples above that 'black and white' writing presaged true bitonality for Debussy. Furthermore, I would suggest, his *bitonalité inouïe* in the second book of *Préludes* should be understood in terms of Stravinsky's influence precisely because he replaces a single tonal axis with two antagonistic tonal centres, allocating different voices distinct tonal planes and maintaining their independence even though they are presented simultaneously. In this respect, Debussy's 'black and white' sonorities are surely fantasies on *Petrushka*. Having said that, Debussy's use of bitonality in the second book of *Préludes* is distinct from Stravinsky's in at least one crucial respect, as I will show. It is also important to remember that Debussy himself had already begun to explore bitonality before Stravinsky arrived in Paris.

THE DISTINCTIVE NATURE OF DEBUSSY'S BITONALITY

My commentary up to this point has implied that several of Debussy's *Préludes II* embody a Stravinskian conception of form as a process of dialogue between polarities. But while Debussy was undoubtedly attracted to what we would now consider to be a 'modernist strategy' in which the fragmentation of both texture and tonality is celebrated, it is important to remember that this is only true at the local level: none of Debussy's works could be said to remain fragmented holistically. Stravinsky, of course, was also interested in establishing a point of convergence at which his polarities could be drawn together. However, unlike Stravinsky, Debussy still relied on a 'tonal' ending as the primary means of drawing a work's divergent aspects together, rather than (as in *Petrushka*) relying on the exhaustion of a referential octatonic collection. This is even true of Préludes which are ostensibly based on a 'Stravinskian' polarity. For example, *La Puerta del Vino* and *Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses* are permeated by 'black and white' writing, but both pieces eventually converge on D*b* in spite of their otherwise dichotomous tonality. In *La terrasse des audiences du clair*

[9] Charles Koechlin, 'Souvenirs sur Debussy', *Cahiers Debussy* 7 (1983), 6.

de lune the G natural remains as a dissonant element from the first bar to the penultimate (where it lingers as a jarring minor ninth), but at the very end it decays into the underlying F# major triad. *Ondine* reflects a fundamental dichotomy between diatonic and octatonic/chromatic collections (and sometimes explicit bitonality, as represented by the superimposed triads of D and F# major on the final page), but resolves onto a D major chord which has been prepared by a supporting tonic pedal in the last ten bars.[10] *Les tierces alternées* resembles the sound-world of *Petrushka* in an unusually pure manner (notably from bar 34, with clear-cut black *vs.* white stratification), but even this Prélude - the odd one out in the set due to its abstract 'pre-*Étude*' qualities - converges on a C major dyad at the very end. Preparations for this white-note conclusion are laid by the quasi-rondo refrains at bars 11, 65 and 125. These form-defining elements of the piece draw attention to the fact that the main recurring material is centred

around a white-note axis, and as a consequence the music is based on an audible concept in which the white-note groups are more stable than the black, even though conventionally-functional harmonic preparation is wholly absent and a hierarchy of 'tonalities' is not established.

The broader conclusion from these examples suggests that Debussy manages to strike a balance between a new conceptual framework in which the simultaneous presentation of competing keys becomes the central musical idea to an entire movement, and a more traditional preoccupation with the principles of closure. Even Debussy's notation reflects this balance. It has been widely observed that the second book of *Préludes* is notated across three staves instead of the conventional two, as in the first book. Consider, for example, the cultivation of linear strata at the opening of *Brouillards* where a 'discourse of oppositions' between black and white is made absolutely clear by the two staves. When the opening material returns towards the end of the movement (bar 43) *three* staves are now present: 'black', 'white', and a 'white' pedal note on C. This apparently minor re-working of the opening using a new pedal note helps to create the overall C-centricity that I remarked upon earlier; the appearance of a third stave where formerly there were only two calls attention to the fact that Debussy provides a focal point of convergence for his two polarised extremes. And this is just one example of many in the second book of *Préludes*: it is often the case that the additional stave will simply articulate a pedal note, indicating a point of tonal divergence or convergence as required.

[10] For an account of this piece privileging set-theoretical and interval-content analysis over a more intuitive approach see Michael Friedmann, 'Approaching Debussy's "Ondine"', *Cahiers Debussy* 6 (1982), 22-35.

The distinction between Debussy's and Stravinsky's black and white writing so evident at a technical level is also discernible within the expressive realm. For Stravinsky, *Petrushka*'s polarised interplay was an additional resource for heightening the tormented state of the puppet, but Debussy seems to have alighted on black and white writing almost as a new 'grammar', rather in the sense of a new set of conventions. In an old-fashioned, almost anthropomorphic manner, Debussy often delineates black from white for reasons of extra-musical signification. The mot obvious example of this in the second book is *Feux d'artifice*. As David Lewin has pointed out in a detailed exegesis of the movement, the piece is an elaborate exploration of the separation of strata on C and D*b*.[11] Lewin questions whether the strata integrate and by what means their interaction can be seen as providing a generative element for the musical material. He argues that one of the most important relationships between the main musical idea and the material generated from it (the 'transformational basis' of the main idea, in his theory) is transposition, by which he tries to account for the myriad kinds of inflections used by Debussy to transform and develop his musical material. Lewin concludes that an intricate pattern of inversions, retrograde motions and transpositions underlies the way that the inter-relationships between C and D*b* provide coherence to an otherwise highly varied musical structure in which there are three episodes and a bewildering array of key-signature changes. But even a formalist analyst such as Lewin feels able to propose hermeneutic readings of the music: he suggests that the explicit superposition of black and white at bar 87 marks the final 'bomb' of the fireworks against the night sky, and thus the subsequent dissolution onto D*b* (bars 90-end) confirms that night envelops everything. He also suggests that the remote 'out of tune' fragment of the Marseillaise reminds the audience that the contemporary festivities are a celebration of the older ideals of the French Republic: the naïvety of Debussy's naturalism in *Feux d'artifice*, Lewin concludes, 'conceals the emotional depth of the idea' behind it.[12]

This combination of naïve naturalism with emotional depth was to re-surface in Debussy's *En blanc et noir* of 1915. As I will show in Chapter 5, *En blanc et noir* is laden with allusive war-time references: the fireworks of *Feux d'artifice* are re-envisioned in terms of the bombardment of Paris, and the tiny fragment of *La Marseillaise* which breaks out in C major (over the concluding D*b* pedal in bar 91) re-appears in various thematic guises as a French call to arms. A 'battle' is constructed through highly self-conscious techniques of

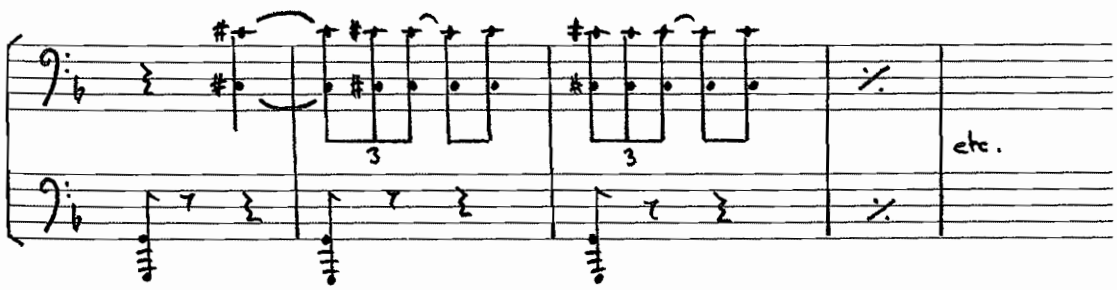
[11] Lewin, 'A Transformational Basis for Form and Proportion in Debussy's "Feux d'artifice" ' in *Musical Form and Transformation: Four Analytic Essays* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1993), 97-159.
[12] Lewin, 'A Transformational Basis', 159.

stratification. Yet the poetic sensitivity evinced by Debussy's black and white writing in *Préludes II* and *En blanc et noir* reminds us how far he really was from Stravinsky's detached, 'non-representational' bitonality, particularly that of *The Rite*. Debussy chose not to treat bitonality as a new aesthetic point of departure: the boldness of his attempts to write vividly mimetic music clearly renders *Feux d'artifice* as an 'impressionist' work. The culmination of Debussy's black-and-white writing in *Feux d'artifice* and the second movement of *En blanc et noir*, I suggest, was nothing to do with meeting Stravinsky on a new path towards abstraction and dissonant modernity, but the final gasp of his decidedly nineteenth-century aesthetic of *réalités*.

DEBUSSYAN PRECEDENTS FOR 'STRAVINSKIAN' POLARITIES

One other matter remains to be settled: the question of bitonality in Debussy's music before the appearance of Stravinsky. As I suggested in Chapter 1, Debussy's Spanish pieces offer useful comparisons because they reflect his most Stravinskian tendencies, most notably the use of abrupt juxtapositions and dissonant tritone sonorities. *Lindaraja*, for example, provides an interesting foil for *La Puerta del Vino*, composed a decade later. Like *La Puerta*, *Lindaraja* is a *habañera* which relies heavily on pedal points and tritone sonorities. The tritone sonorities are initially evident as part of two isolated whole-tone passages (bars 47-50 and 55-58); they re-appear from bar 117 onwards, culminating in a C# continually repeated over a static G pedal between bars 127-147 and from 162-end:

Lindaraja, bars 162-165 (second piano)



Such an occurrence helps to set limits for any point of contact with *Petrushka*-induced writing, reminding us that not all explicit tritone superpositions in Debussy come from Stravinsky. Yet distinctions can be readily drawn between the Debussy of 1901 and 1912. Despite the two-piano scoring which might seem to invite the strongly polarised kind of writing so characteristic of *En blanc et noir*, and despite this tritone-saturated passage, *Lindaraja* is a supple, graceful dance unsullied by adverse dislocations and firmly based in D

minor or modal variants on D. The work opens modally in unadulterated D-Aeolian; the 'tritone axis' G-C# only appears from bar 117. The tritone axis continues right up to the last four bars of the piece (bar 181), but at bar 170 the opening material is recapitulated in D-Aeolian and placed in direct superposition with the tritone ostinato. By doing this, Debussy provides a new, functional context for the tritone axis: the C#s become sharpened sevenths and the Gs underpin a plagal cadence. Thus the previously antagonistic axis, far from remaining polarised, becomes smoothly subsumed into a harmonic minor scale on D, actually contributing to the stability of the tonal conclusion rather than undermining its centricity. Compare *La Puerta del Vino* of 1912, where Debussy makes far fewer concessions by refusing to blend the biting sonorities and deliberately setting up an antagonistic opposition as the driving force behind the entire piece. The distinction between the Debussy of 1901 and 1912 can be accounted for by Stravinsky's promotion of the status of the tritone opposition from its former Lisztian/Ravellian role as a diverting sonority within a wider harmonic context to the realm of a truly independent element.

It is possible, of course, to stratify tonal materials not related by semitones or tritones (i.e. not based on those bewitching piano-based black *vs.* white superpositions). Thomas Warburton, for example, has suggested that *Canope* 'develops two levels in tandem', D minor and C mixolydian.[13] So is it possible to discern whether Debussy was smitten with the principle of stratification, or whether he was enticed in a more specific fashion by Stravinsky's separation of strata at the tritone and semitone?

TRAVELLING TOGETHER

The difficulty here is that Debussy's fascination with the Stravinskian principle of stratification can be traced to his own earlier practice. As Jim Samson and others have pointed out, a mixture of diatonic and modal collections is found throughout Debussy's mature music, giving the music its shape and sense of direction in the absence of more conventional harmonic patterns of tension and release. [14] Crucially, however, this mixture operates through mediation between different harmonic types, a *linear* process in which certain notes suddenly disappear from the texture in order to 'mutate' a diatonic collection into a pentatonic sonority, or chromatic inflections are used to change the prevailing mode. In

[13] Thomas Warburton, 'Bitonal Miniatures by Debussy from 1913', *Cahiers Debussy* 6 (1982), 11. For a different interpretation, see David Lewin, 'Parallel voice-leading in Debussy' [on 'Canopes' and others], *19th-Century Music* XI/1 (Summer 1987), 57.

[14] Jim Samson, *Music in Transition*, 38-39. See also Arnold Whittall, 'Tonality and the whole-tone scale in the music of Debussy', *The Music Review* 36/4 (November 1975), 261-271.

Ibéria I showed that the interactions between different harmonic types were brought about temporally, in succession. Consequently, though Stravinsky's first experiments in linear juxtaposition were indebted to Debussy's earlier practice (as I suggested in the previous chapter), his superposition of conflicting tonal centres was a departure that Debussy himself had not countenanced. The major/minor triads in *Zvezdoliki*, the tritone-related major triads in *Petrushka* and the independent planes of *bitonalité inouïe* in *The Rite* all embodied a *simultaneous* interaction of different harmonic types, eliminating the techniques of 'mediation' found in Debussy's earlier music, such as the use of the *litanie* I observed in *Ibéria*. [15] Even in *Gigues*, which is explicitly bitonal in places and heavily reliant on techniques of stratification, Debussy still mediates between harmonic types very carefully (this work will be covered in depth in the next chapter). To find simultaneous 'bitonal' juxtapositions in Debussy's music therefore provides strong evidence for reciprocal influence between the two men. Uniquely amongst his contemporaries, Stravinsky managed to draw out the latent or attenuated features in Debussy's music, which in turn emboldened the older composer to experiment in new directions. It is precisely because the two men shared this comparable point of departure that they continued to 'travel together' until the fallout from the première of *The Rite of Spring* in May 1913.

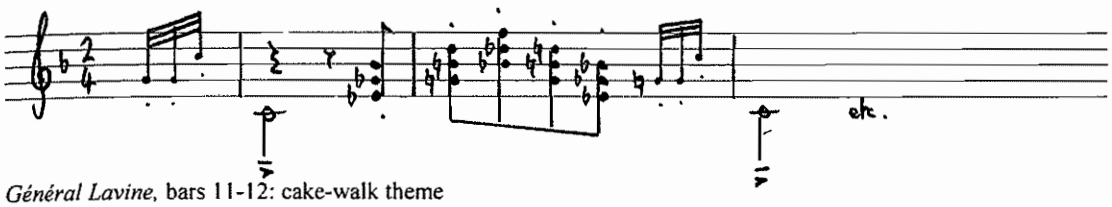
This sense of 'travelling together' can be summed up with reference to music which combines Debussy's 'original' juxtaposition technique (i.e. that developed independently of Stravinsky) with Stravinsky-induced black-and-white writing. For example, *Général Lavine...excentric* features a juxtaposition technique developed from *La sérénade interrompue* (1909) as well as a series of conflicting tonal planes. At the simplest level, *Général Lavine* bears comparison with *La sérénade interrompue* because the unpredictable linear juxtapositions of different musical materials are present for extra-musical reasons - they render the quirky eccentricities of the clown.[16] The outline analysis below in fig. 2.3 is very similar to that which I presented in Chapter 1 for *La sérénade interrompue*. Both works

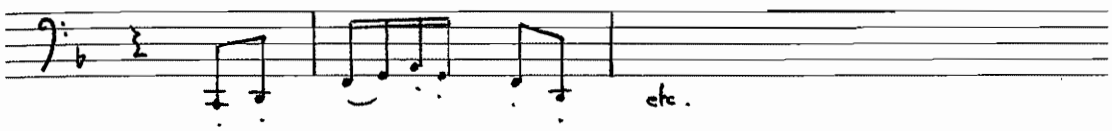
[15] Stravinsky's 'bitonal' superpositions in *The Rite* have induced a great deal of argument amongst analysts. The sharpest exchange (in every sense) is to be found between Richard Taruskin and Allen Forte: see Forte, *The Harmonic Organization of the Rite of Spring* (New Haven: Yale, 1978), Taruskin, review of Forte, *ibid.*, in *Current Musicology* 28 (1979), 114-129; Forte, 'Pitch-class set analysis today', Music Analysis 4/1-2 (1985), 29-58; Taruskin, 'Letter to the editor', and Forte, 'Letter to the editor in reply to Richard Taruskin', *Music Analysis* 5 (1986), 313-320, 321-337.

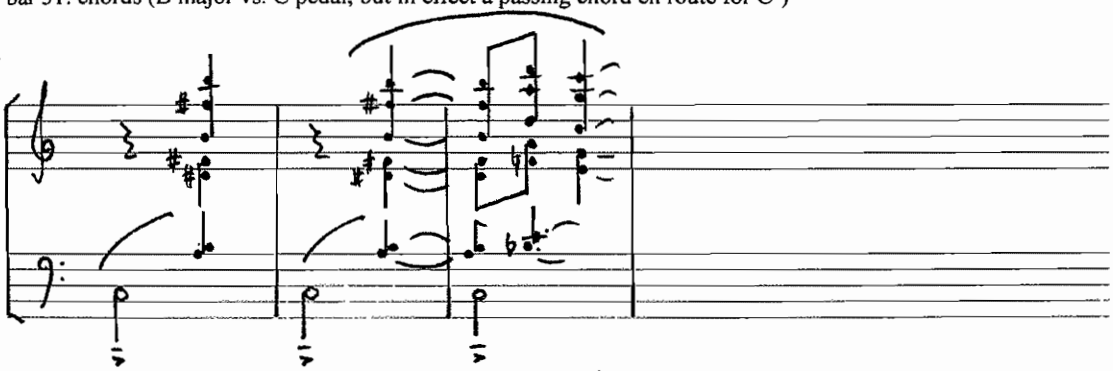
[16] For background information on the American clown Edward Lavine, who appeared at the Théâtre Marigny in the summer of 1910, see Bruhn's imaginative reading of this Prélude in her *Images and Ideas*, 118-121. She reads the work on three layers: "an intentionally comic dance of black American origin, parodied by a white American performing clown, in the musical representation of a French composer". Apparently one of Lavine's special tricks was to play the piano with his toes. Also see Schmitz, *The Piano Works of Claude Debussy*, 42, 172-175.

can be readily grouped into rigidly delineated blocks of opposing material which are presented in isolation, juxtaposed as blocks rather than through-composed organically:

Général Lavine, bars 1-3: militaristic gesture & triads



Général Lavine, bars 11-12: cake-walk theme

bar 31: chords (B major vs. C pedal, but in effect a passing chord en route for C^7)



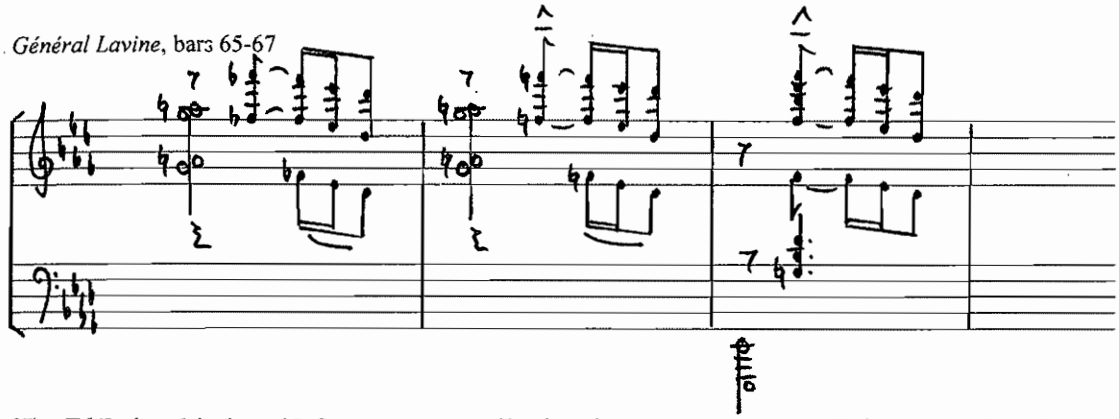
Considered thus, the structure can be described as a series of juxtaposed blocks:

FIGURE 2.4: JUXTAPOSITION IN *GÉNÉRAL LAVINE*

	Bars	**Military gesture/triads** (number of bars)	**Cake-walk theme**	**Chords**
A	1-10	10		
	11-16		6	
	17-18	2		
	19-30		6+4+2	
	31-34			4
	35-42		8	
	43-44	2		
	45	1 (pause)		
B	46-69	24 (in variation)		
A'	70-75		6	
	76-77	2		
	78-81		6+4+2	
	90-93			4
	94-101		4+3	
	101-end	2+7		

The piece is shaped as an introduction, a theme (A), a re-working of familiar materials (B), a point of culmination (bars 65-67) and a recapitulation (A'), followed by a codetta drawing the materials together (bar 99-end). The diagram is admittedly a little crude in ignoring the fact that Debussy draws his diverse thematic materials together throughout the piece. This is first presaged by gestural connotations at the first point of culmination (bars 65-67) which recall the chords of bars 11-14 and 31-34:

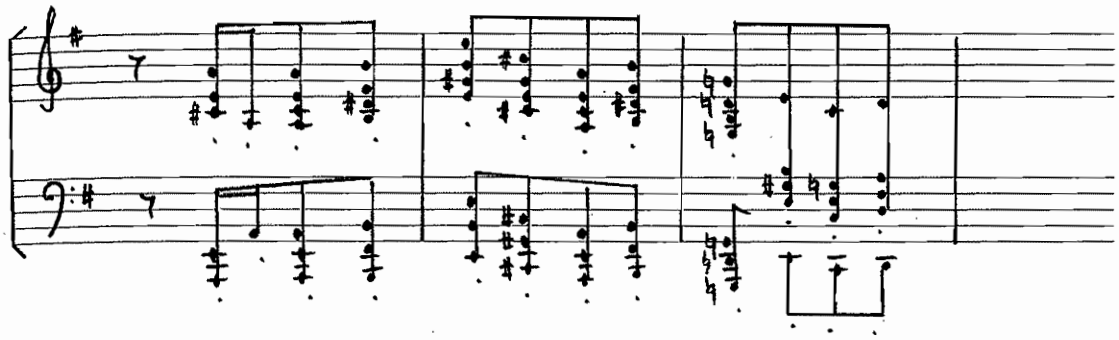
Général Lavine, bars 65-67



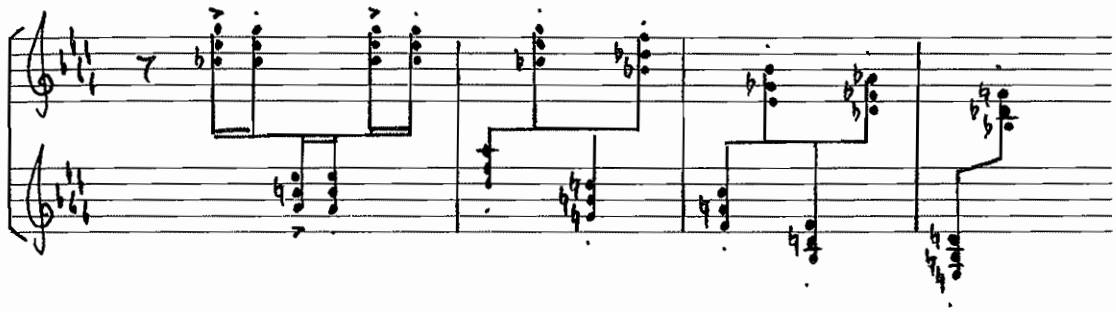
The E*b*7 chord in bar 67 does not reconcile the elements tonally, but is juxtaposed with the F major of the recapitulation. Only at the elision of the cake-walk theme in its last appearance at bar 100 are moves towards convergence made. At the *Animez* (bar 99) Debussy smoothly integrates a fragment of the cake-walk theme into a legato version of the opening triads; then at bar 103 he draws together the opening militaristic gesture with the chords, which now prepare for a tonal resolution onto the tonic of F. In many ways, therefore, the conception and structure of *Général Lavine...excentric* does nothing more novel than *La sérénade interrompue*.

We find that the same extra-musical point of departure evokes a similar sensibility in *Minstrels*, another of Debussy's pre-Stravinsky works. However, there are some important distinctions between the musical language of *Minstrels* and *Général Lavine* which clearly seem to spring from his *Petrushka* obsession. *Minstrels*, although spiky, humorous and with a relatively disjointed texture, is never as dissonant as *Général Lavine*. Compare these two points at which Debussy's parallel triadic working is determined by the melody above, not by properly 'harmonic' considerations:

Minstrels, bb. 55-57



Général Lavine, bb. 51-55



Both passages consist of *staccato* juxtaposed triads and are essentially rather similar. Why, then, does *Général Lavine* sound so much more 'Stravinskian' than *Minstrels*? [17] I suggest that *Petrushka's* 'black and white' writing is important even here, where the planes are not stratified with the conceptual consistency or notational clarity of, say, *Brouillards* or *Feux d'artifice*. In the *Minstrels* passage there is no contradiction in the harmony at all because the chords are functionally meaningless, even though the melodic line suggests two tonal planes, A major (bars 55-56) and C major (bar 57). In *Minstrels*, the hands move in parallel, and there is no sense of antagonism between competing tonal elements. Rather than being a single tonal axis, there is no axis at all. The only centricity is that which the listener gleans from the context of the surrounding bars, and even here the tonality of each juxtaposed block is always distinct: A*b* in bars 51-53, G in 54-55, a pedal D (with C# *frisson*) in 58-62. But in *Général Lavine* there is a black *vs.* white tonal axis, even though the notation underplays the dichotomy: the sequence of triads between bars 51-55 is

[17] Paul Roberts plausibly suggests that the melody under this series of juxtapositions in 'General Lavine' is Stephen Foster's *The Camptown Races*, 'one of the most celebrated songs of minstrelsy [...] vaudeville slapstick conveyed, paradoxically, through the most refined art'. See *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1996), 224.

right hand	C*b*		C*b*		C*b*		B*b*m		E*b*m	
left hand		A*b*		D*b*		G		F		B*b*

---

right hand	D*b*m		B*b*m			B*b*m		D		D
left hand	G			D	G		A*b*		A*b*	

The black *vs.* white element is confirmed by the A*b*-D ostinato that follows in bars 54-57. Thus even in a work which seems close to Debussy's idiom in the first book of *Préludes* because (taken as a whole) its tonality is unambiguous, glimpses of Stravinsky's influence are still in evidence.

A reason why a minor Stravinsky influence might have manifested itself in *Général Lavine* emerges from a commentary on Debussy's fascination with 'minstrels, music hall and the circus ring' by Paul Roberts.[18] Roberts suggests that several of Debussy's works present a metaphorical image of the artist as an outcast by invoking a Baudelairean image of 'Le vieux saltimbanque' [The ageing acrobat]. In this reading, familiar Debussy characters such as the rejected street musician or the clown are situated in a broader context, that of Pierrot and the Commedia dell'Arte. It is well known that the Commedia was a lifelong preoccupation for Debussy, from his early encounters with the poetry of Verlaine and Jules Laforgue to *La boîte à joujoux* and the harlequinade movements of the cello and violin sonatas and, although Stravinsky was not as familiar as Debussy with Baudelaire's writings, there is every probability that Debussy would have made an independent connection between the vexed triadic writing of *Petrushka's* victimisation and his own evocations of artist-as-outcast. There is no sense of 'quotation' here; but the *Petrushka* association provides a gloss on our understanding of Debussy's portrayal of Lavine by opening up the possibility that Debussy sought a humane, sympathetic tribute to the clown rather than a straightforward (and rather exploitative) representation of his stage eccentricities.

* * *

In this chapter it has been necessary to create a distinction between Debussy's pre- and post-*Petrushka* use of tritone sonorities in terms of an 'active' polarity. It is, of course, impossible

[18] Roberts, *Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy*, Chapter 9, esp. 218-228.

to say whether Debussy would have developed the increased complexity and dissonance of the second book of *Préludes* without the impact of *Petrushka*. Nevertheless, even if one attaches great significance to the occurrence of tritone sonorities in his earlier music, it seems clear that Stravinsky's music opened up Debussy's latent tendencies which were already moving away from his gentler *Debussyist* weakening of harmonic centricity towards a harder-edged, more dissonant subversion of conventional pitch structure.

* * *

Chapter 3

Towards the point of crisis: competition and imperatives of originality

We really did stagger the world.

Alexandre Benois on the 'invasion of Paris' by the Ballets Russes[1]

I

The barbaric and the civilised

I noted in the introduction to Chapter 1 that few of the earliest commentators remarked on anything more than superficial points of comparison between Debussy and Stravinsky. Around 1930, however, following the English translation of Leonid Sabaneev's article on Debussy in *Music and Letters*, a new perspective on their interaction was opened up. Sabaneev reminded European readers that Debussy's influence had been felt very acutely in Russia, and that this influence was, as he put it, 'the repayment of a debt, the return of that which he had received from Musorgsky'. He concluded:

> Stravinsky is another of Debussy's captives. His creative work is the living echo of his conquerings, but they are refracted in a psychology dramatically the opposite of Debussy's. Stravinsky is a barbarian, Debussy is a culture dying of superfluity. That which, in the case of Debussy, resounded with the harmonies of an ebbing, age-long culture, became with Stravinsky the barbarous bellowings of a lusty warrior. The culture of taste was transformed into an elementary assertion of tastelessness, the culture of refinement into the cult of harshness.[2]

Constant Lambert, writing just after Sabaneev, also drew Debussy and Stravinsky into the same frame of reference, based on what appeared to be a largely intuitive comparison:

> The garish and overloaded orchestration, barbaric rhythms and savagely applied discords of Stravinsky's ballets temporarily numb the critical faculties, and prevent one from realizing that however different the texture may be Stravinsky is using sound in the same

[1] Alexandre Benois, *Reminisces of the Russian Ballet* (London, 1941), 284-5.
[2] Leonid Sabaneev, 'Claude Debussy', *Music and Letters* X/1 (January 1929), 33, trans. S.W. Pring.

> way as Debussy. Barbaric impressionism has taken placer of super-civilised impressionism - that is all.[3]

It was not until Adorno's Stravinsky critique, however, that the possibility that Debussy and Stravinsky were 'using sound in the same way' was investigated with any degree of detailed insight. Adorno - unwittingly echoing Rimsky's claim that he had to 'adjust' his hearing every time he listened to Debussy - argued that

> The ear must be re-educated if it is to understand Debussy correctly, seeking not a process of obstruction and release, but perceiving a juxtaposition of colours and surfaces such as are to be found in a painting. The succession simply expounds what is simultaneous for sensory perception: this is the way the eye wanders over the canvas. Technically, this is accomplished at first by "functionless" harmony [...] The tensions of step-progression are not executed within the key or by modulations; instead harmonic complexes relieve each other. These complexes can be ether static or exchangeable in time. The harmonic play of forces is replaced through the exchange of forces.[4]

Using a characteristically dialectical formulation, Adorno concluded that Stravinsky's debt to Debussy resided in his extension of this 'technique of complexes', but the means by which he appropriated the technique turned out to be a negation of what Debussy's music had been trying to express:

> Stravinsky directly adopted the conception of music involving spaciousness and surface expanse from Debussy; and his technique of complexes as well as the make-up of his atomised melodic models also illustrate Debussy's influence. [Stravinsky's] innovation actually consists only in the severance of the connecting threads and the demolition of remnants of the differential-dynamic procedure. The partial spatial complexes stand in harsh contrast to one another. The polemic negation of the gentle reverberation is fashioned into the proof of force, and the disconnected end-product of dynamics is stratified like blocks of marble. What earlier had sounded congruent unto itself now

[3] Lambert, *Music Ho!*, 26.
[4] Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* trans. Anne Mitchell and Wesley Blomster (London: Sheed and Ward, 1973), 188.

> establishes its independence as an anorganic [*sic.*] chord. The spatial dimension becomes absolute: the aspect of atmosphere, in which all Impressionistic music retains something of the subjective experience of time, is eradicated.[5]

SIMILARITIES AND DISSIMILARITIES BETWEEN *JEUX* AND *THE RITE OF SPRING*

Following this train of thought, Jann Pasler wrote a full length study showing how certain scores by both Debussy and Stravinsky exhibit Adorno's 'technique of complexes'.[6] Pasler sought to explain her observations by suggesting that internal stylistic developments were shaped by wider cultural forces. She dates the most dramatic point of development in the use of the 'technique of complexes' - and the closest point of contact between Debussy and Stravinsky - to the 1909-1913 period, when both composers converged on this technique under the collaborative stimulus of the Ballets Russes. Because Diaghilev's production teams aimed to invest the stereotyped conventions of nineteenth-century ballet with a new sense of drama by depicting scenarios with unprecedented vigour and freshness, a high level of communication between the arts was required. This in turn enforced an unusually close collaboration between the artists responsible for staging, choreographic gesture and music. Pasler's study shows how composers responded to these collaborative demands by creating instant associations between musical and visual phenomena - hence the deployment of an increasingly radical juxtaposition technique. The result, she argues, was the development of a 'new musical logic'.

One of the central examples she examines in order to show the 'new musical logic' at work is a comparative analysis of *The Rite of Spring* and *Jeux*. Pasler compares the two scores alongside contemporary choreographic indications, showing how abrupt juxtapositions of musical ideas were used to underline the progress of the scenario by focusing the audience's

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[5] Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 192. 'Anorganic' is the translators' invention for the German word 'anorganischer', meaning the detached nature of something that is not part of the organic whole. 'Strawinsky hat die räumlich-flächenhafte Konzeption der Musik von Debussy geradewegs übernommen, und die Technik der Komplexe ebenso wie die Beschaffenheit der melodischen Atommodelle ist Debussystisch. Die Neuerung besteht eigentlich nur darin, daß die Verbindungsdrähte zwischen den Komplexen durchschnitten, die Überreste differential-dynamischen Verfahrens abgebaut werden. Hart stehen die räumlichen Teilkomplexe gegeneinander. Die polemische Negation des weichen laisser vibrer wird zum Beweis von Kraft gemacht, das Unverbundene, Endprodukt der Dynamik, geschichtet wie Marmorblöcke. Was ineinander tönte, verselbständigt sich als gleichsam anorganischer Akkord. Verräumlichung wird absolut: der Aspekt der Stimmung, in dem alle impressionistische Musik etwas von subjectiver Erlebniszeit festhält, ist beseitigt.' Adorno, *Philosophie der Neuen Musik* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1958), 177-178.

[6] Pasler, 'New Musical Logic'. Many of her dissertation conclusions are summarised in her article 'Music and Spectacle in *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*' in Jann Pasler (ed.), *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 53-81.

attention on different characters, changing events or conflicting feelings. For example, she shows that in the 'Ritual of the Rival Tribes' (*The Rite*, reh. 57) the close alternation of motives mirrors the visual confrontation between the two villages, so the stage action and the music synchronise and reinforce one another. She suggests that

> Distinctive stylistic characteristics of Stravinsky's music such as prolonged ostinati, systematic presentation of ideas first as fragments, abrupt juxtapositions, and implausible superimpositions can be understood as results of attempts to create an intimate correspondence between the music and the events on stage.[7]

Pasler's thesis is a gigantic vindication of Lambert's assertion that Debussy and Stravinsky were 'using sound in the same way'. Moreover, of all the music that could be chosen for a comparative analysis, few pieces illustrate his extremes of the barbaric and the super-civilised as obviously as *The Rite of Spring* and *Jeux.* But it is precisely this contrast - perhaps I should say *incompatibility* - between the barbaric and the civilised which begins to pull Debussy and Stravinsky apart. The proximity of these two productions in the spring of 1913 suddenly made it clear that the two composers were using comparable techniques under the same collaborative stimuli for the attainment of very different aesthetic ends. Without an appreciation of how significant this distinction was at the time, the next step in the Debussy-Stravinsky interaction cannot be elucidated.

AESTHETIC ASPIRATIONS

In this chapter I will start from the premise that, although it is tempting to alight on any examples which seem to show that Debussy and Stravinsky are using sound in the same way, ready comparisons between the two composers' music are not always helpful in understanding the complexities of their relationship, and in certain cases can obscure as much as they reveal. In Chapter 1 this was not a problem. I concluded that although Debussy and Stravinsky were developing different trajectories from distinct (but linked) traditions, a comparative structural analysis of *Ibéria* and *Petrushka* could be defended on hermeneutic

[7] Pasler, 'Music and Spectacle', 56. In her thesis, she extends this observation to develop a full kinaesthetic interpretation of the Ballets Russes productions, suggesting that 'watching characters on stage while listening to the music not only makes these sudden juxtapositions plausible but introduces one to a new way of listening'. In coming to this conclusion, she vindicates both Rimsky and Adorno. See 'New Musical Logic', 186. Notwithstanding Pasler's conclusions, it is interesting how soon after *The Rite* Stravinsky claimed to have rejected this approach. In June 1914 he told Calvocoressi that 'I can write music to words, *viz.* songs, or music to action, *viz.* ballets. But the co-operation of music, words, and action is a thing that daily becomes more inadmissible to my mind.' M.-D. Calvocoressi, 'M. Stravinsky's Opera: *The Nightingale*', *The Musical Times* (1 June 1914), 372.

grounds because of the unambiguous aesthetic congruence between the two works - the evocation of *réalités* and vivid depictions of street music. *The Rite* and *Jeux*, however, stand poles apart from one another in many important ways, not least in the sense that they embody a head-to-head confrontation between the barbaric and the civilised.

What I propose is not meant to replace the points of similarity which Pasler sees in the two composers' techniques of juxtaposition. Her historical-phenomenological perspective is elegantly argued, constructed around convincing analyses and supported by a fine study of the cultural background; I will even add supporting evidence to her thesis where appropriate. Rather, I will treat *Jeux* dialectically, not only elucidating its novel creative strategies and seeking connections with Stravinsky's music, but creating a more complex perspective in which the work is seen to be rooted in older elements of Debussy's compositional practice. My aim is to emphasise that despite the remarkable 'Stravinskian' innovations of non-linearity in *Jeux*, the aesthetic aspirations of Debussy's score are profoundly dissimilar to Stravinsky's. Ultimately, I hope to demonstrate that this irreconcilable tension was directly responsible for the French composer's crisis of confidence in 1913.

There is another aspect to my interest in *Jeux's* historical and aesthetic context. Several scholars have pointed out that although *Jeux* was mercifully rescued from oblivion by the post-1945 avant-garde, composers such as Boulez, Stockhausen, Ligeti and Eimert treated Debussy's score in an ahistorical, formalist manner as a source for their own creative interests at the expense of the original conception.[8] John McGinness's revision of *Jeux*'s unusual reception history has revealed the extent to which our contemporary appreciation of the work has been shaped narrowly around the 'exemplary modernist credentials' accredited to it in the 1950s, when, he suggests, the ballet was considered to be 'untainted by the accumulated "personal history" that had become attached to *Jeux's* infamous contemporary, *Le Sacre du Printemps*'.[9] My emphasis on the ballet's place within Debussy's oeuvre is intended to take part in this recent re-evaluation of the partisanship with which *Jeux's* history has been written.

[8] Claudia Zenck, 'Form- und Farbenspiele: Debussy's *Jeux'*, *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 33 (1976), 28-47.
[9] John McGinness, 'From movement to moment: issues of expression, form and reception in Debussy's *Jeux*', *Cahiers Debussy* 22 (1998), 51-74. He compares the reception of *The Rite* with that of *Jeux* on p. 68.

II

Jeux and its predecessors

The dancer Serge Lifar reported that Diaghilev intended *Jeux* to be a 'modern' ballet to set alongside his 'primitive' ballet, *The Rite*.[10] There was to be no obvious historical or social context in *Jeux*, no cast of colourful bystanders, watermelon sellers or dancing bears.[11] But for all the high-vogue window-dressing - tennis clothes, crashing aeroplanes - *Jeux* was never going to be anything other than a reworking of Debussy's preoccupations of the 1890s.

Laurence Berman has drawn attention to the similarities in imagery and atmosphere between *Jeux* and *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, which Nijinsky had just recreated as a ballet for Diaghilev's 1912 Paris season.[12] The commission for *Jeux* arrived a matter of weeks after the *Faune's* scandalous success, and Mallarmé's poem was undoubtedly fresh in the minds of both Nijinsky and Debussy. Berman boldly proposes that *Jeux* can be seen as Debussy's second attempt to create a *Faune*: 'It is as if Debussy, twenty years after his first effort, finally realized in musical terms the open shapes and modifications of imagery that Mallarmé had worked out in his own art form'.[13] *Jeux* also 'manifests a kind of *Parsifal*-identification', as Robin Holloway has pointed out:

> Such an identification, however, though implicit in the music, is no longer brought into being by the subject matter and its music in Wagner having a specific effect on the same things in Debussy, as had been the case hitherto. In *Jeux* nothing is direct, every influence is latent, suggested, sublimated.[14]

I shall return to the significance of Debussy's decidedly old-fashioned aesthetics later. First, I wish to demonstrate that a rather surprising piece turns out to be crucial for *Jeux*. It is not an 'obvious' predecessor because its aesthetic preoccupations or subject-matter found no expression in Debussy's final score. It has no set scenario, portrays no love-triangle, and expresses no interest in the unambiguously sexual shenanigans of the *Faun* or the

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[10] As reported by the dancer Serge Lifar in his *Diaghilev*, 199.
[11] On the scenario, see Nijinsky, The *Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*, trans. Romola Nijinsky (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963, R. London: Quartet Books, 1991), 123, and Richard Buckle, *Nijinsky* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971; 2nd ed. Penguin Books, 1980), 339-346.
[12] Laurence Berman, '*Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* and *Jeux*: Debussy's Summer Rites', *19th-Century Music* III/3 (March 1980), 225-238.
[13] Berman, *ibid.*, 227. He also suggests (p. 236) that Rimsky's *Scheherazade*, performed as a ballet by Diaghilev's company in 1910, could be considered as a source of musical imagery for *Jeux*.
[14] Robin Holloway, *Debussy and Wagner* (London: Eulenberg, 1979), 166.

flowermaidens from *Parsifal*; yet it offered a remarkably close structural model. *Jeux* is borne above all from Debussy's recent experience with *Gigues*.

GIGUES: CHRONOLOGY

Establishing a chronology for *Gigues* and *Jeux* provides a useful starting point. The short score of *Gigues* bears two dates, 4 January 1909 and 10 October 1912. From Debussy's letters, however, we can surmise that he left the work unfinished in 1909-10, only returning to it at the end of 1911, completing the piano score in January 1912, working on the orchestration during the summer and finally completing the work in October. The first performance did not take place until 26 January 1913.[15] Thus although parts of *Gigues* date back to 1908 (or possibly before), by the time he was putting the finishing touches to the orchestration four years later he had already begun to work on *Jeux*.[16] Debussy's letters reveal that the two pieces competed for his attention during 1912: on 2 July he wrote to his editor, Durand,

> So far I've heard nothing from the smooth Diaghilev except a telegram promising the scenario for *Jeux* by the end of last week. I'm concentrating on *Gigues* as well as the *Préludes* [second book] and some other things...[17]

On 9 August there was further procrastinating to Durand:

> Thanks to *Jeux* I've had to interrupt the orchestration of *Gigues*. Don't be too cross with me, I'll get back to it soon and it won't take long to finish.[18]

It appears that Debussy was true to his word, and returned to the orchestration of *Gigues* as soon as the piano reduction of *Jeux* was finished in September 1912.[19] It is thus unsurprising to find that *Jeux* is heavily indebted to Debussy's experiments with the motivic processes of presentation, interaction, unification and dissolution in *Gigues*.

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[15] For dates and discussion see Nichols, *The Life of Debussy*, 128; Vallas, *Claude Debussy: His Life and Works*, 204; Dietschy, *A Portrait of Claude Debussy*, 173.
[16] It has now been ascertained from Bibliothèque Nationale MS 1010 that Caplet did not assist Debussy with the orchestration of *Gigues*: see Robert Orledge, review of Lesure's *Debussy: Biographie Critique* in *Music and Letters* 77/1 (February 1996), 133.
[17] Debussy to Durand, 2 July 1912, trans. in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 259.
[18] Debussy to Durand, 9 August 1912, trans. in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 261.
[19] I have taken the *Jeux* dates from Pierre Boulez and Myriam Chimènes (eds.), Preface to the new edition of *Jeux*, in *Oeuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy* Série V, Vol. 8 (Paris: Durand-Costellat, 1988), xvii.

MOTIVIC GAMES IN *GIGUES*

Fig. 3.1, a graph intended to emphasise the music's tendencies towards fragmentation, shows how two contrasting themes are initially played off against one another. The first is the 'jig' motif in 2/4 (derived from a folk-song from the North-East of England called 'The Keel Row') and a Dorian/Aeolian melody in 6/8, played by the oboe d'amore. The borrowed melody appears to be present solely to represent specifically national music within the *Images* triptych and does not invest the piece with textual significance.[20]

The jig motif undergoes continual variation by manipulation of either its distinctive dotted figure or its equally memorable intervallic character. Despite the apparent dominance of the jig motif and its variants, the liveliness of the piece is disrupted by plaintive fragments of the oboe melody. This discursive interplay, present right from the start and articulated by textural and harmonic oppositions, eventually leads to confrontation with the superimposition of the two elements at bar 59. At bar 71 the two themes are heard simultaneously. The conflicting metres and strong tendencies towards bitonality create a biting intensity rare in Debussy, and from this point the intercutting between contrasting blocks of material becomes increasingly taut, emphasised at two-bar intervals by Debussy's manner of orchestrating blocks in distinct timbral groupings (see the juxtapositions in Fig. 3.1 at bars 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, 82, 83, 85, 89, 91, 93, 95).

For all the discontinuous surface juxtapositions, the variations of the jig theme are continually reworked to provide new but related themes, as at bar 79. Figure 3.2, intended to establish connections between the motivic transformations by linking rhythmic or intervallic inflections, shows how the organic or 'vegetative' nature of this clearly perceptible process

[20] It is unclear whether Debussy considered *The Keel Row* to be an English or Scottish melody. One of the most widely-disseminated written sources for the song from the later nineteenth century lists it in a Scottish collection as a Border song, providing two different settings of the melody. See J. Pittman, Colin Brown and Charles Mackay (eds.), *The Songs of Scotland: A Collection of One Hundred and Ninety Songs* (London: Boosey and Co., 1877), 186, 187. It seems most plausible that Debussy intended it as a Scottish song, since *Gigues* itself has an obvious predecessor, the *Marche écossaise* (4-hand piano version 1891). This work, based on the 'Earl of Ross's March' due to the unusual requirements of the commission, contrasts the dotted rhythm of the main theme against a lyrical, plaintive cor anglais theme in a 'Calme' middle section. Although the *Marche écossaise* shows nothing of the structural or harmonic subtlety of *Gigues*, its broad contrast between the jig and the melancholic sensibility of the cor anglais line, and its metrical 3/4-6/8 play in the coda, clearly foreshadows the later work. Again, chronology reinforces the connection: although Debussy had begun to orchestrate the *Marche écossaise* in 1894-6, he returned to complete the orchestration in 1908, just as he began working intensively on *Gigues* (the first date on the short score of *Gigues*, as I noted previously, is 4 January 1909). On the commissioning of the *Marche*, see David Cox, *Debussy Orchestral Music* (London: BBC, 1974), 56-57.

GIGUES: THEMATIC JUXTAPOSITION

w-T

bsn.

obse

fl+ob.

etc

strings

clt.

fl.

ch

new variation

horns

clarinet

[2]

wind, strings

wind

strings

strings

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stands in tension with the swift intercutting and apparent non-linearity of the opposing juxtapositions shown in figure 3.1. The graph reads from left to right [notes in square brackets are my reductions]: the spatial separation is present in order to highlight the two contrasting themes. In spite of the apparent proliferation of new material, it is striking how much is in fact carefully wrought from the initial ideas. Eventually, as figure 3.2 reveals, the jig motif and the oboe melody which have been held for so long in an uneasy tension are brought together into a synthesis. This is not the same kind of 'bringing together' as the superposition at bar 71, an aggressive piling-up which only serves to highlight the differences between the two themes. Rather, Debussy manages to lay out a motivic process in which the jig theme and the oboe d'amore theme contribute equally to an entirely new and uniquely 'constructed' theme. This theme grows out of the oboe d'amore melody of bar 105, but isn't allowed to blossom fully until bar 121.

The thematic association with the opening is implicit rather than overt because it creates an association based on a underlying shape common to the two contrasting themes: compare the shape of the melody of bar 121 to the transformed jig motif in bar 111 and the underlying shape of the oboe d'amore theme at bar 21. Interestingly, this process of 'unification' is not a contrapuntal synthesis based on a symphonic rhetoric of opposing materials, but simply forms the point at which the work's melodic inspiration first takes flight. The construction sounds effortless and understated rather than contrived. Nor is this synthesis the end of the process of continual variation. From bar 164, a process of interlock builds up in which all the motivic strands in the piece are worked together into a complex edifice, increasingly intense and driven by an ostinato machine.[21] The reduction of bars 177-180 in figure 3.2 untangles some of these strands. The sheer diversity of material brought together at this point of interlock, however, produces an edifice too unstable to last any length of time and the music collapses onto a point of hiatus at bar 186. The work never recovers from this dissolution: the magnificently-crafted illusion of 'togetherness' is dispersed, the original pair of themes are separated once again and allowed to crumble into fragments encased in the whole-tone sonorities from the very beginning of the piece (the emphasis on E naturals in an A*b* major context is primarily responsible for this return: see Fig. 3.2 again). This quasi-cyclic completion is also part of the continual variation process since the materials are not recapitulated in a completely familiar form, but reappear in a new context in which the structural associations are established by reworking old motives within a familiar whole-tone context.

[21] In the sense described by Derrick Puffett in 'Debussy's Ostinato Machine'.

GIGUES : NOTIVE TRANSFORMATION AND SYNTHESIS

bb.5, 13 flute

b.43 bassoon

b.47 flute / oboe

b.66 flute

b.71

b.73 wind

b.77 lower strings

b.79 lower wind

b.82

b.89 clarinet

b.99 strings

b.101

b.111 first violins

b.121

b.21, oboe d'amore

b.58, strings

ob. d'a.

clt.

b.88

b.105

b.115

bb.164 – 185 INTERLOCK

b.177 piccolo, violins / flute, bass clt, cor ang.

bb.186 - 199 DISINTEGRATIONS ... AND SEPARATION

b.200

b.213 bassoons + xylophone

b.215

b.220 cor anglais + cello

b.231

E♭ in final cadence

switching

pizz.

Horn

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GIGUES AS A STRUCTURAL MODEL FOR *JEUX*

The compositional idea behind *Gigues*, tracing the interaction between pre-existent themes, seems at first hearing to be completely different from *Jeux*, in which the generative process - the building of the main themes themselves from small motivic cells - is of central importance. Moreover, the themes in *Gigues* are inspired by popular music and are instantly memorable, whereas considerable familiarity is required before listeners can find their way through *Jeux's* fragmentary motivic network. The qualities of non-linearity are also more complex in *Jeux* because of the dramatic demands of the ballet scenario. The narrative is based on flirtation and unfulfilled desire, and the swiftly-changing nuances and inflections which are so crucial to the atmosphere of tantalising eroticism mean that the work is regularly shot through by surface discontinuities and unresolved harmonic complexes. Nevertheless, *Gigues* and *Jeux* share a conceptual framework. Both are framed by a highly atmospheric cyclic return, created by a texture saturated in whole-tone collections; both exhibit advanced techniques of juxtaposition, superposition and collage which show Debussy's formal processes at their most adventurous; and both share a point of dramatic dissolution during which a climax, driven towards an expected diatonic resolution by a relentless ostinato pattern, collapses into tritone-saturated ether (compare bars 186-200 in *Gigues* with bars 429-455 in *Jeux*: see Figs. 3.3, 3.4).

MOTIVIC GAMES IN *JEUX*

This assertion is strengthened further by the fact that the way in which Debussy draws out a shape common to the two themes at bar 121 in *Gigues* is akin to the 'wave-shape' uncovered in *Jeux* in a celebrated figurative analysis by Herbert Eimert, published in 1959. Eimert revealed one of the principal unifying tendencies in the ballet by showing that virtually all the main themes in the ballet could be reduced to a single all-encompassing, 'associative', shape. By describing the process of working-out within this globalising conception, he pinpointed the structural role of what Elliott Carter once described as Debussy's 'method of continuous development' - Eimert's term was *endless variation*.[22] So despite the variety of its surface contours, *Jeux* can be seen to embody another underlying scheme, an enormous process of interlock similar (although more spectacular in ambition) to the synthesis in *Gigues*. Thus the non-linear surface of the ballet, by which isolated sections of music seems to drive towards a

[22] Elliott Carter, 'The Late Sonatas of Claude Debussy' (1959), reprinted in Jonathan Barnard (ed.) *Elliott Carter: Collected Essays and Lectures, 1937-1995* (University of Rochester Press, 1997); Herbert Eimert, 'Debussy's *Jeux*', *Die Reihe* 5 (1959, English translation 1961), 3-20.

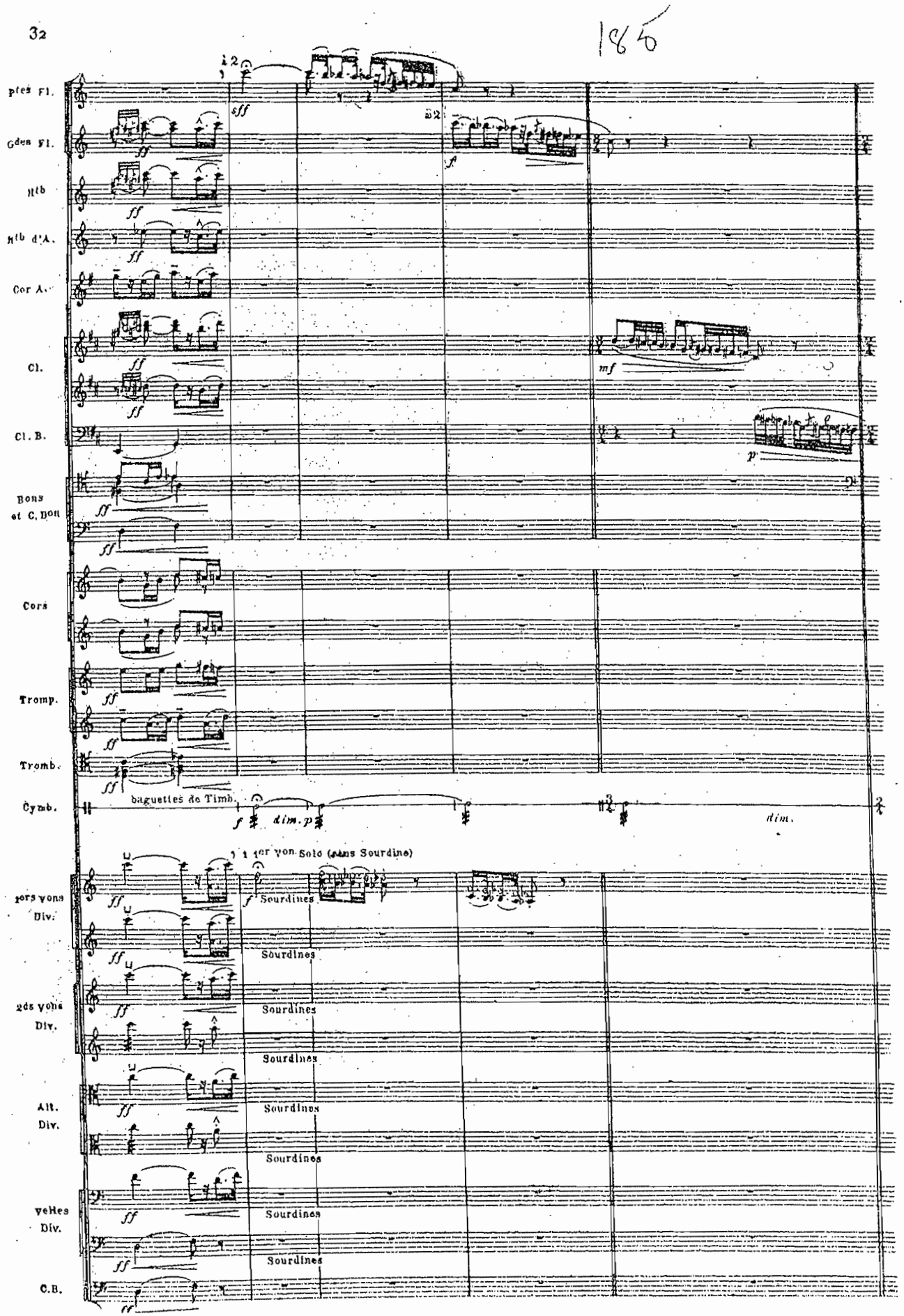
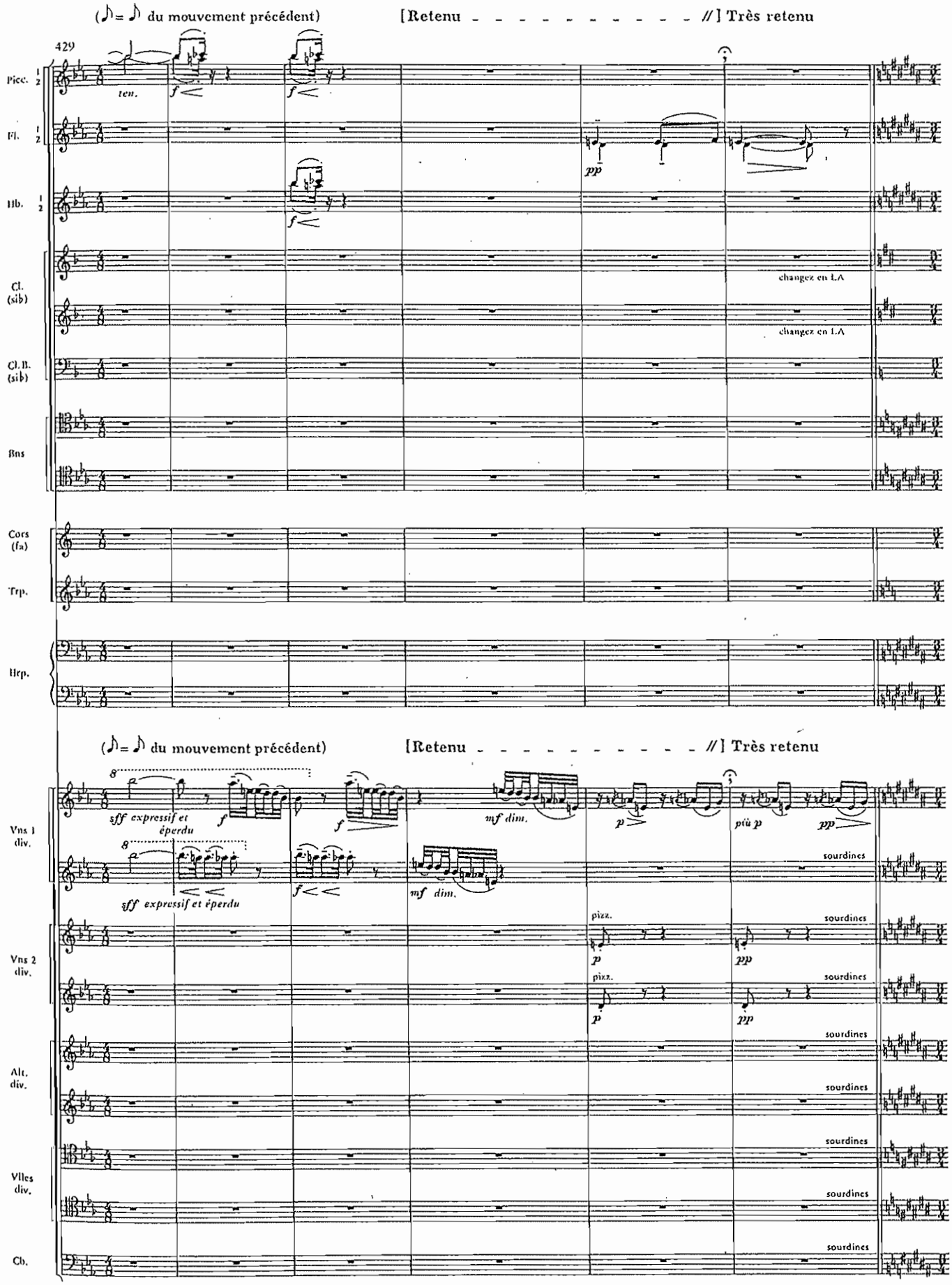
Fig. 3.3

32
185
ptes Fl.
Gdes Fl.
Htb
Htb d'A.
Cor A.
Cl.
Cl. B.
Bons et C. Bon
Cors
Tromp.
Tromb.
Cymb.
baguettes de Timb.
dim.
1er von Solo (sans Sourdine)
Sourdines
1ers vons Div.
2ds vons Div.
Alt. Div.
Vcles Div.
C.B.

Fig. 3.4

Dans l'emportement de leur danse, ils n'ont pas remarqué l'attitude d'abord inquiète, puis chagrine, de la première jeune fille qui, tenant son visage entre ses mains, veut s'enfuir. Sa compagne essaie en vain de la retenir : elle ne veut rien entendre.

resolution that is not immediately forthcoming, is ultimately undermined by a process of convergence at a deeper structural level.

III

Jeux: entwining the structural and the hermeneutic

The elegance of this conception is particularly apt for the ballet because it is justified by the scenario. The three characters, having endured evasive and frustratingly tentative encounters, eventually dance together, first in an uneasy *pas de trois* (bar 515), then in a freer, happier dance (bar 565) which becomes increasingly frenzied (bar 611) before consummation in the triple kiss (bar 677). The sense of interlock thus entwines both music and scenario. It should be acknowledged here that Debussy refuses to use a crude leitmotif system in which three themes representing the three characters are piled up in a contrapuntal conceit. Rather, the ballet's subtlety comes from the open-ended generative process in which repeated listening and increased familiarisation reveals a loose but carefully textured pattern of interconnections. The richness of the score unquestionably lies in this profusion of associations, lying across a spectrum of suggestiveness from the implicit to the disarmingly tenuous. Debussy's great achievement is to allow elements from seemingly unrelated parts of the score to come together without recourse to literal symbolism.

Having said that, in the last decade scholars have begun to realise the extent to which the qualities of extra-musical representation embodied by the tentative interactions of the ballet's protagonists are intimately involved in its formal innovations. The auction of part of Serge Lifar's estate in 1984 uncovered a manuscript piano reduction of the score used in rehearsal by Nijinsky.[23] The MS contains annotations by both Nijinsky and Debussy, revealing that the composer worked from a more detailed scenario than the one sketched in any of the published scores. John McGinness, who has studied the MS, concludes that the directions omitted from the published score show that Debussy composed in a much more collaborative manner than has previously been recognised. He also suggests that some of the annotations imply a scandalous subtext of lesbianism between the two girls in addition to their *horreurs* with the young man. His reading concurs with Nijinsky's assertion that the original all-male scenario - 'the life of which Diaghilev dreamed' - had to be changed because 'love between

[23] Stephen Roe, *Ballet Material and Manuscripts from the Serge Lifar Collection* (London: Sotheby's, 1984), sale catalogue of 9 May 1984, entry 149. This early version of the score [*ca.* September 1912?] has a loud conclusion, ending on a *fortissimo* A major chord. The MS is now in the Frederick P. Koch Foundation Collection, on deposit at the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

three men could not be represented on stage'.[24] Nijinsky's Russian annotations on the MS remain unpublished and the extent to which Debussy knew about the homosexual intrigue remains a point of contention. However, Debussy's annotations can now be found in the critical commentary of the new edition of *Jeux* in the *Oeuvres Complètes*, permitting a more detailed reconstruction of the scenario from which he worked. [25]

Figure 3.5 shows the main threads of the intricate network of motivic associations in *Jeux* up to the primary point of interlock, which starts with the *pas de trois* at bar 535. The analysis reveals a dense pattern of continuous evolution, comparable to the kind of working which Barraqué found in *La Mer*, although exhibiting many more connections.[26] Barraqué's notion of 'open form' (in which the traditional distinction between exposition and development is collapsed, resulting in a form that is continuously evolving) seems particularly appropriate here, reminding us that *Jeux* was not an isolated experiment, but a culmination of techniques explored in earlier works.

Although Debussy avoids leitmotifs, the motivic groups at the beginning do reveal a degree of characterisation which is strengthened by harmonic context and orchestration. The group of falling figures on the right-hand side of Figure 3.5 is associated with the boy:

his first appearance on stage	b. 75
as he first comes out of hiding and stops opposite the girls	b. 206
'il commence à danser'	b. 230
his first request for a kiss, associated with the barcarolle rhythm	b. 254

The group of figures on the left, derived from the rising semitone of the very opening and usually combined with a hemiola pattern, is associated with the two girls and reflects the development of their interaction:

[24] Nijinsky, *Diary*, 123; McGinness, 'From movement to moment', 62-67.
[25] Boulez/Chimènes, *Jeux* [*Oeuvres Completes*, Série V, vol. 8], 136-137. Sometimes Debussy's annotations contradict the published score slightly; I have preferred his MS annotations in these cases.
[26] Jean Barraqué, '*La Mer* de Debussy, ou la naissance des formes ouvertes', *Analyse Musicale* 12 (juin 1988).

JEUX: SELECTED MOTIVIC WORKING

b.1 W-T b.5 b.9 (b.13) b.30

b.69 b.54 b.75

b.84 b.110 b.118

b.142 b.172 b.174 b.182

b.196 b.206

b.214 W-T b.224 b.230

b.237 b.241 b.245 b.251

b.270 b.276 b.309

b.340

b.357 etc.

b.371 b.377 W-T and 8-17/18/19 complex b.386 trumpets etc. b.403 etc.

b.429 disintegration: W-T + 8-17/18/19 complex b.459 b.473 b.477

b.489 b.503

b.507 b.515 trumpets

PAN-A3 18 STAVE

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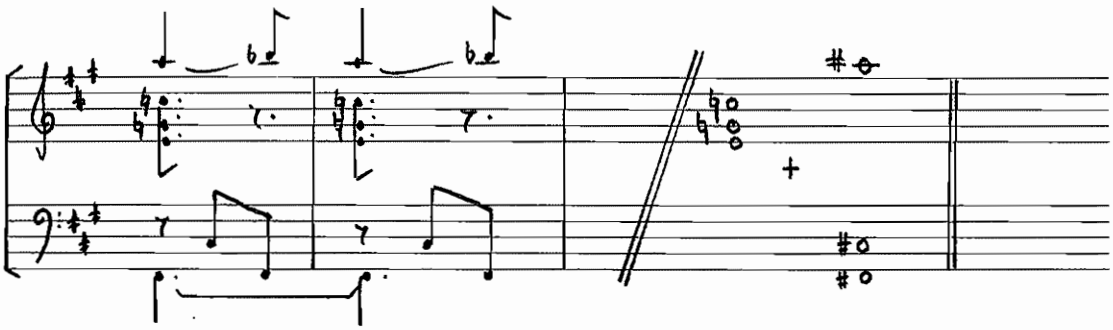
the first girl appears, 'craintive et curieuse'	b. 84
'sharing secrets'; the first girl timidly resists the second girl's offers to dance	b. 110
'the second girl dances alone'	b. 142
'the other dances in turn', to the same theme	b. 157
still dancing, with increasing confidence: girls come together	b. 172

The harmony at bar 84 sets a precedent for most of the subsequent music associated with the girls' anxiety and uncertainty. C major in the woodwind is set against an F# bass pedal and an appoggiatura to B*b* in the violin theme. The result is a familiar C major/F# major superposition.

Appearance of the first girl, "craintive et curieuse" [curious and timid], bar 84

The associations which such tritone-based sonorities set up are used throughout the scenario in conjunction with the motivic working, since the differentiated harmonic blocks become crucial in creating the appropriate emotional context for a recurring or developing theme. For example, whole-tone areas are present for the mysterious beginning and closing of the work, as well as for the times when Debussy needs to evoke the girls' uncertainty (such as bars 214-219, when the girls try to flee from the encroaching boy). Diatonic collections are used for the carefree moments of dancing, as at bar 566 onwards.

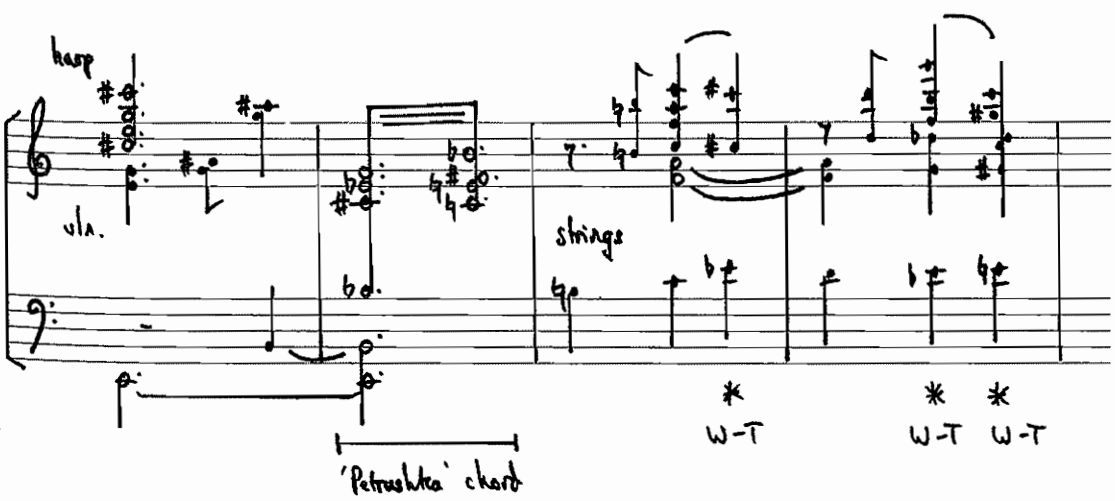
The boy's exploratory flirtations, heralded by the 'invitation' motif at bar 196, open up considerable interplay between the two groups of figures, as suggested by the interconnections outlined in Figure 3.5. This interaction between the motivic types in the central part of the ballet is combined with rapid cutting between distinct sections of music; together, these techniques seem expressly designed to mirror the changing emotions on stage, as Pasler has described.[27] Intercutting allows Debussy to inflect the music swiftly according to the change of mood required. The invitation motif itself (196) grows out of the main dance

[27] See her 'kinaesthetic' readings of this central section in 'New Musical Logic', 221-230. Debussy's MS annotations (unobtainable at the time of her work) generally strengthen her conclusions, even though occasional details differ.

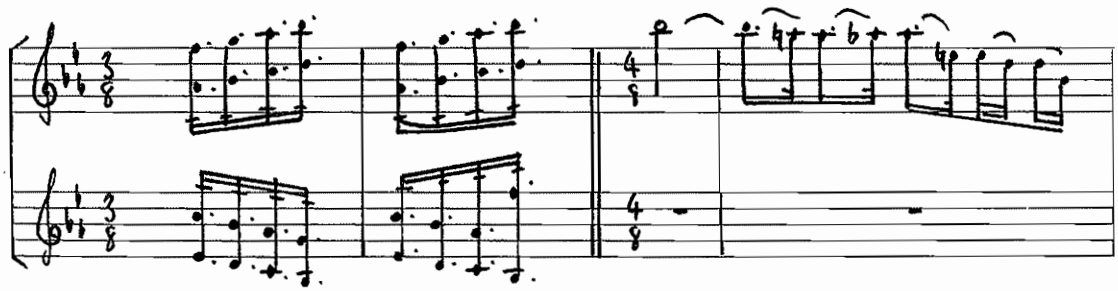
theme (48), while the alternation between different characters is achieved by setting a 'boy' motif (falling figure, 206) against a 'girl' motif (using the whole-tone association, bar 214). Also compare the delineation of blocks at bars 224, 230 and 237: each blocks is made distinct by harmonic and orchestral means, while the motivic materials are clearly differentiated with respect to associations established earlier in the work. Pasler describes such rapid juxtaposition as Stravinskian, noting how the two composers used the interplay of visual elements on stage to inspire relationships between musical ideas. The pungent parody of the jealous girl (309), 'ironique et moqueuse', is another example of how the re-working of a motif (from 224, 245) can portray the development of the scenario: that which was formerly harmonised with parallel major triads is now subjected to parallel seventh chords, expressed in a nasal timbre by the oboes and cor anglais.

As the boy and the second girl become carried away with their dance from bar 340 ('C'est ainsi que nous danserons') and 357 ('Ils dansent ensemble'), Debussy starts to bring some of the previously disparate musical materials together, and the work becomes truly melodic for the first time. Yet the integration is not particularly strong, reflecting the second girl's uncertainty. At 371, the mounting tension in the rising chromatic line, together with the return of parallel seventh chords, reflects the direction 'their dance becomes more affectionate'. But the dance collapses at 377 as she escapes the boy's clutches, and in the MS, Debussy details changes in the scenario almost bar by bar. The confident diatonic E*b* major harmony of the section beginning at 357 is replaced with tritone-based sonorities, including an explicit 'Petrushka' chord in 378 ('the young man shakes the branches' of the tree to which the girl has escaped), followed by two bars of whole-tone saturation ('the first girl becomes sad at being alone'). The melodic flow seizes up, and dislocated fragments of motif return.

First dissolution, bars 377-380 (repeated up a minor 3rd at bars 381-4).



As the boy suddenly re-appears at bar 387, still chasing the second girl, the running semiquavers of the dance material return, this time saturated with the whole-tone sonorities now associated with her uncertainty. During bars 387-395 these disturbing tritones are purged, paving the way for a return to the diatonic E*b* when she finally agrees to dance again (396) to a richer and more confident version of the material from 357. But once again, Debussy frustrates the sense of arrival with a sudden dislocation at 403, superimposing a chromatic melody around A over an A*b* bass pedal, creating a huge minor ninth dissonance ('En animant progressivement'). The tension created thereby intensifies the excitement of the dance, but only at bar 429 are we made fully aware of the reason for this disruptive element: the first girl, by now feeling totally abandoned, tries to run away, and the ecstatic dance of the other two dissolves dramatically.

Second dissolution, bars 427-431

The expected resolution onto E*b*, set up so convincingly by the dominant preparation of the preceding ostinato, is subverted. The orchestral texture collapses and whole-tone sonorities return. This passage seems particularly indebted to the sonorous world of the Tour de Passe-passe in *Petrushka*, particularly the use of paired clarinets in a quasi-octatonic context, created by the intersecting major dyads on B and D at bars 435 and 439, create Stravinsky's beloved major/minor triad, B-D-D#-F#.[28]

Given the scrupulous care Debussy takes to integrate his music with the action throughout the ballet, it is unsurprising that he withholds the principal points of structural interlock until the scenario provides an appropriate opportunity. Unlike *Gigues*, therefore, in which the main process of convergence occurred at bar 121 (before the dissolution), in *Jeux* Debussy expands his structural model to incorporate three significant dissolutions (bars 377, 429, and the final

[28] Stravinsky claimed that Debussy consulted him on matters of orchestration during the composition of *Jeux*, but it is unclear how this consultation might have manifested itself in Debussy's score. Despite the attractive parallel with *Petrushka's* 'magic' music, it seems unlikely that Debussy needed advice on pairing clarinets. See Stravinsky/Craft, *Expositions and Developments*, 50.

cyclic return at 689). The starting point for Debussy's interlock emerges with the reconciliation of the three characters (from 455). The main theme from bar 49 returns (459), and the former momentum builds up again rapidly. Structural interlock starts at bar 515, where Debussy annotates the MS: 'comme *le triomphe de Nijinsky* [...] les deux jeunes filles sont comme de petites Baccantes ivres'. The main point of convergence only begins when the three characters finally abandon their preferences and jealousies and decide to dance *à trois*. Between bars 535 and 637 - the *pas de trois* itself - there are no stage directions at all in the published score, and so the choreography is left to its own devices. Even without Debussy's MS additions, a great deal of significance can be gleaned from the music because the previous connections established between the scenario and certain motivic figures/harmonic contexts find renewed resonance without being crassly obvious. Each strand of the interlock has a set of associations simply by virtue of its previous location in the scenario (compare Figures 3.5 and 3.6). The descending triadic figures in bars 517-8 establish a connection with bars 224 (the point at which the boy makes his overtures to the girls) and 245 (when he dances with the first girl). The *rhythmic* reworking of these triads recalls the yearning string interjections of bar 237 (from the boy's second invitation) and the more amorous transformations of the same motif (bars 270 and 276), when the first girl accepts the invitation. These recollections remind us that rhythmic subtleties in *Jeux* are particularly important, as even small four-note patterns are used very distinctively and hence acquire structural significance. The parallel triads in the trumpets at bars 515-6 echo the triadic trumpet figure at bar 396, the point at which the boy dances with the second girl ('ils dansent de nouveau tous les deux').

The start of the *pas de trois* itself invokes familiar motivic and harmonic contexts. The accompanying rhythmic and gestural pattern is taken from bar 403, the point of greatest tension and excitement in the dance between the boy and second girl; this association is further strengthened by the re-occurrence of a held A*b* pedal in the bass. The recurring D natural against the pedal A*b* provides a constant reminder of the tritone-saturated contexts in other parts of the ballet, associated both with the whole-tone opening of the work and with the girls' uncertainty and nervous excitement. This re-casting of the mysterious and slightly threatening harmonic environment which frames the work is also motivic, since the melody of the *pas de trois* is derived from the bass line at the very beginning of the ballet (bar 9: see my reduction in Figure 3.6). Debussy re-orders the six intervals available from the initial motif to emphasise the wandering, uncertain nature of the melodic line: the total absence of seconds, fourths, sixths or sevenths restricts the line to a lumpy, unpredictably inelegant

Jeux : Interlock

[from b.403]

b.535

W-T

(b.9)

5

b.535 (Melody)

etc.

T 5 ½ 1 T 3+ ½ 3- 3- ½ 3+ ½ 3- 3+

b.543

T 5 ½ 1 T 3+ ½ ½ 1 ½ 3+ ½ 1 1

b.547

1 from 233

melodic shape from 340

b.565

integration of b.49 motif

b.585

etc.

b.627

associated with both girls (b.84) and boy (b. 230)

b.635

b.639 flute

b.645

associated with the girls (bb. 110, 142)

crystallization of rhythmic motif from b. 233 and melodic shape of b. 49 motif

b.677

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motion.[29] Only when the three characters have danced together for a little while (and presumably become a little more confident and rather less clumsy) does a recognisable 'dance' motif begin to form at bar 547. This rising figure offers a glimpse of the full flowering of the melody to come at bar 565, one of Debussy's most lyrical inventions. Its curiously 'constructed' nature, formed by the combination of two contrasting elements, suggests a strong conceptual parallel with the construction at bar 121 in *Gigues*. The shape of the melody comes directly from the running clarinet solo at bar 340/357/396 (itself derived from the main dance motif at 49, 118 and 182 and linked with the boy's overtures to the second girl). The 'barcarolle' rhythmic component of the line comes from bar 234, where it is associated with the boy's initial overtures to the girls or - perhaps more appropriately - from its repeat at 254, when it is associated with his request for a kiss. Even more pertinently, the unusual breadth of Debussy's line here, combined with the barcarolle rhythm, recalls *L'isle joyeuse*: for a few moments the three protagonists are, as the scenario suggests, 'transported' by their dance - to Cythera, perhaps? Bar 585, a repeat of this lyrical theme, is marked 'Nijinsky seul' while two bars later, as the main dance theme returns superimposed in thirds above Nijinsky's theme, Debussy adds 'les deux jeunes filles'. The characterisation of the music is irresistibly clear at moments such as this.

It would be a mistake to seek too specific an association in each allusion, especially one based on the benefit of a close reading of the score and its annotations. Debussy's 'interlock' does not have pretensions to narrative storytelling, but simply refers back to the fleeting series of past encounters. The hemiola patterns from bar 635, for example, recall the girls' initial hesitance at the hemiolas of bars 110, 142, and 172, but the sense of restraint these counter-metrical dislocations enforce on the increasingly relentless galloping of the 3/8 ostinato merely inject a note of caution into the excitement, a sense (presumably coming from the girls) that the bacchanal could spiral dangerously out of their control. Understanding the music depends essentially on references within the work itself: this self-referentiality restricts the power of connotation and demands that the audience takes an active role in interpreting the gestures and harmonic contexts unveiled by Debussy with such careful pacing.

One moment at which an association with an earlier part of the piece is surely intended to be recognisable is at the point of 'consummation', the triple kiss at bar 677. The release of pent-up tension accumulated throughout the work, while avoiding a *Tristan*-scale peroration, is nevertheless powerful because the 'internal' musical processes converge with the 'external'

[29] Fig. 3.6 shows the derivation of bar 535 from the intervals of the bar 9 motif. ½ denotes a semitone, 1 a tone, 3- a minor third, 3+ a major third, T a tritone, and 5 a perfect fifth.

scenario. Take motif, for example: the triple kiss consists of the opening notes of the main dance motif while its rhythmic gesture is taken (once again) from the cell from bar 254 marking the boy's first request for a kiss. It doesn't seem an extravagant interpretation to see in this that the boy's requests for both a dance and a kiss have been fulfilled (the four-note triple kiss motif is repeated three times). Furthermore, the triple kiss is set in the slow, 'hemiola' pacing (3/4 rather than 3/8). Up to this point, virtually all the hemiola patterns have been associated with the girls' tension and uncertainty, and have consequently been underpinned by tritone-saturated harmony. At the triple kiss, the tritone harmony is replaced by a diatonic complex, and the earlier tension is dissipated: the girls' sense of concern, even danger, that prevailed elsewhere in the ballet is lost, to return only with the arrival of the mysterious tennis ball at 689. Debussy completes his rich tapestry of allusions with scrupulous care.

IV

Ramifications: Context and Competition

DEBUSSY'S CRISIS

I have tried to show that the structural and the hermeneutic are entwined in *Jeux* to such an extent that 'the music itself' should not be considered in isolation from its broader signifying function. I have demonstrated that that signifying function is extremely subtle, possessing the power to suggest a range of connotations based on the associative network set up across the ballet. The allusions are merely suggestive; their open and fluid nature makes it entirely plausible that they may be re-envisaged by different listeners. Through its mediation between structure and signification, I believe that the music of *Jeux* is unequivocally permeated with the aesthetics of symbolism. This, combined with the connection I have drawn with *Gigues* and the parallels other scholars have drawn with *Faune* and *Parsifal*, place *Jeux* at the heart of Debussy's oeuvre as an eminently characteristic score, not an avant-garde novelty.

To understand why these conclusions have ramifications for the wider concerns of this study, it is necessary to enrich the historical and biographical context, seeking insights into Debussy's state of mind during this period. One of the richest sources of evidence comes from a little-known exchange between Debussy and Maggie Teyte, who interviewed the

composer during the summer of 1913.[30] She asked him whether he intended to write anything in the near future.

> His reply was astonishing. "I shall produce nothing more of the kind that I have been writing", he said, calmly. [...] "I have reached the limit of the idiom in which I have chosen to write. There is a limit to all things. We try all possible variations, and after that, we fall back on wearisome repetition."
> "But is your form of expression really so limited?" I asked, incredulously.
> "Yes," he answered simply. "It is that which makes it so distinctly different. It is not a system that I deliberately invented. It is a necessity which has forced itself upon me. Now that I have reached its limits, I am forced to give it up, and turn to something else."
> "But you are not ashamed of anything you have done, so far?"
> "By no means. I think I have escaped the repetition of myself, so far. But imitation on the part of others had made much of my work seem uninspired and monotonous. They do not know what I am trying to express. They only know that I am different. And by being different themselves, they hope to equal my reputation. Really, they are only harming me without helping themselves. I refuse to take any responsibility for the so-called Debussyisms of modern composers".
> "But how do you know that you have reached your limit?" I insisted.
> "In two ways," he answered, readily. "First, through the fact that I have several times of late begun a composition which I quickly realised would be a plagiarising of myself, as a consequence of which I have invariably given it up. In the second place, I have found it impossible to express certain new thoughts of mine in the idiom to which I have become accustomed, and have, therefore, decided that I must find a new language or stop composing altogether."

Debussy's artistic crisis of 1914, when he really did stop composing for months on end, is clearly foreshadowed here. The assortment of problems he lists, however - competition from second-rate imitators, attempts to express 'new ideas' by deploying a new idiom - were not in themselves new. He had been in comparable situations before, as early as 1903-4, when there is strong evidence that he found difficulties in finding a new path after *Pelléas*.[31] In 1907

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[30] The undated interview took place at some stage during the summer of 1913. Maggie Teyte, 'Bearding the Lion', *Opera Magazine* (New York), May 1914, reprinted as Appendix C in Garry O'Connor, *The Pursuit of Perfection: A Life of Maggie Teyte* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1979), 292-294. Despite the occasional complaint, Debussy seems to have liked Teyte, as we can tell from his letters to Bathori and Durand of April and June 1908; she was the second Mélisande at the Opéra-Comique in 1908 and premièred the third of the Villon settings in 1910. Thus although the conversation is obviously paraphrased, this is as reliable a source of evidence as interviews ever produce.

[31] E.g. Debussy's letter to André Messager, 12 September 1903 re: *La Mer*: 'Those people who are kind enough to expect me never to abandon the style of *Pelléas* are well and truly sticking their finger in their eye.' Also to Messager, 19 September 1904: 'I feel nostalgia for the Claude Debussy who worked

there were whisperings that Debussy was artistically exhausted: the music critic Jean Marnold, for example, told Ravel that Debussy was 'bitterly conscious' of being 'played out'.[32] March 1907 also marked the publication of Lalo's notorious article 'Ravel et le Debussysme' which exacerbated Debussy's problems with the notion of a 'Debussy school'; a year later Lalo published another article suggesting that *Pelléas* itself had become tainted by *Debussysme*.[33] Puccini, echoing the Teyte interview, was convinced that Debussy had been 'assailed' by *Debussysme* throughout his later years because his innovations had become so devalued that they no longer held their qualities of surprise. 'To their creator the field seemed closed', Puccini wrote, 'and I know how restlessly he sought and desired a way of exit'.[34]

After *Pelléas*, as Laloy pointed out, Debussy turned towards a harder-edged idiom, first evident in works such as *La Mer* and extended, as I have shown, in *Ibéria*. One of Debussy's means of 'exit' at this early stage might have been via Ravel. Jankélévitch suggested that the hardening of Debussy's idiom in the *Images* and *Jeux* was largely accomplished under Ravel's influence, because 'with the younger composer at his heels, [Debussy] seems to have hurried to become anti-*Debussyist*'.[35] Martin Cooper noted a similarly new astringency in Fauré's music from around 1907, suggesting that Debussy was moving with a broader current of stylistic metamorphosis.[36] But why *now* in mid-1913, years after this problem first surfaced, did Debussy face such a challenging imperative to search for a new language that it actually threw him into crisis?

STRAVINSKY AS ANTI-*DEBUSSYIST*

The answer, although it is not at all explicit in what Debussy told Maggie Teyte, lies in the fact that the Russian Ballet's production of *Jeux* was a flop, and that just two weeks later his

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so hard on *Pelléas* - between ourselves, I've not found him since, which is one reason for my misery, among many others'. Both letters in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 141, 149.

[32] Rolland, diary entry of 22 May 1907, in Rollo Myers (ed.), *Richard Strauss and Romain Rolland: Correspondence, Diary & Essays* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1968), 149. On the extraordinarily polarised reception of *Pelléas*, see Jann Pasler, '*Pelléas* and Power: The Reception of Debussy's Opera', in Joseph Kerman, ed., *Music at the Turn of Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 129-150.

[33] Pierre Lalo, 'Ravel et le Debussysme', *Le Temps*, 19 March 1907; Lalo's *Le Temps* article of 24 March 1908 and Debussy's response to it in a letter to Durand, are cited in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 188-190 (see fn. 3).

[34] Giacomo Puccini, 'Debussy', *The Musical Times*, vol. 59, no. 905 (1 July 1918), 326.

[35] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Ravel*, trans. Margaret Crosland (London: John Calder, 1959), 154-5.

[36] Cooper, *French Music*, 142.

music was completely overshadowed by the première of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*.[37] By including *Jeux* and *The Rite* in the same season, Diaghilev - ever the showman - had placed Debussy and Stravinsky head to head in competition for the first time. Although most reviewers were horrified by *The Rite* and its choreography, some influential critics acclaimed Stravinsky's success specifically at Debussy's expense. Jacques Rivière, in an important and high-profile review, argued that the great novelty of *The Rite*

> is its renunciation of "sauce". Here is an absolutely pure work [...] Nothing is blurred, nothing is diminished by shadows; no veils or poetic sweeteners; without a trace of atmosphere. [...] Without violence, without ingratitude, but very clearly, Stravinsky has freed himself from *debussysme*.[38]

In what must have seemed like an unfortunate re-run of the comparisons that critics had once made between Debussy and Ravel, a handful of critics now seemed to be creating new headlines by exacerbating artistic rifts in the avant-garde. The battle-lines were already being drawn up for what Rivière would describe to Stravinsky in 1919 in one single all-encompassing breath as 'the anti-impressionist, anti-symbolist and anti-Debussy movements that are becoming more and more precise and threatening to take the form and force of a vast new current'.[39]

What did Debussy really make of Stravinsky's music? There is precious little evidence, although it is clear that he seemed interested and absorbed by *The Rite*. Louis Laloy's account of the meeting of Debussy and Stravinsky in June 1912, when the two composers played through an early four-hand piano version of *The Rite*, emphasises the sense of surprise and shock that was felt by all present - although how much of Laloy's account was embroidered retrospectively will always be open to question.[40] Debussy described his own impression of the work to Stravinsky in vivid but ambivalent terms: 'I still think of the performance of your *Sacre du Printemps* at Laloy's house...It haunts me like a beautiful nightmare and I try in vain to recall the terrifying impression it made. That's why I wait for

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[37] *Jeux* was premièred on 15 May 1913, *The Rite* on 29 May. In addition to artistic pressures, we should include external factors contributing to Debussy's problems, most notably his recurring illness and his perpetual financial worries: see the begging letter to Durand for 'one or two thousand francs' of 3 September 1913 in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 278.

[38] Jacques Rivière, 'Le Sacre du Printemps', *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (1 novembre 1913), 706-7 [my translation].

[39] Rivière, letter to Stravinsky of 6 April 1919, in Stravinsky/Craft, *Conversations*, 59.

[40] Laloy's account of their playthrough [9 June 1912] can be found in his *La musique retrouvée* (Paris, 1928), 213 (where it is misdated); a translation may be found in Nichols, *Debussy Remembered*, 240.

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the performance like a greedy child who's been promised some jam'.[41] On the evening of the première itself, 29 May, Debussy seemed to be reeling from the sheer impact of the performance, telling Caplet that '*Le Sacre* is extraordinarily wild...As you might say, it's primitive music with all modern conveniences!'.[42] Two days after the première, Debussy invited the Stravinskys to dinner, 'since good traditions should not be lost'.[43] But by 9 June Debussy had only complaints about the Ballets Russes. There can be little doubt that Stravinsky's overpowering presence and Nijinsky's Dalcrozian gymnastics, which ruined both *Jeux* and *Faune* for Debussy and created such a scandal in *The Rite*, are the objects of this diatribe, sent to Robert Godet:

> [9 June 1913]
>
> On reflection I think I'd rather leave Paris than see you here. At the moment it's what they call 'La Grande Saison'. You can't have any idea to what extent that increases the number of idiots one comes across. Not content with mangling the French language, they bring along with them artistic ideas they believe to be modern but which are already giving off a smell of putrefaction: a bad taste even more blatant than our own. And we're so overwhelmed, we don't have the strength to resist.[44]

It is not that Debussy seemed suddenly disturbed by the newness and savagery of *The Rite* - he had had more time than most to assimilate Stravinsky's innovations, after all. Rather, the tone of the letter speaks volumes about his jealousy. Debussy could not have failed to see the parallels with the controversy at the première of *Pelléas* - a comparison which would have reinforced Debussy's sense of being left behind, perhaps even as someone who was living off past successes.[45] By 9 November 1913 - maybe Debussy had just read Rivière's review, published a week earlier - he seems to have accepted that he had lost his leadership of the avant-garde, since in a rueful letter to Stravinsky (sent to thank the young Russian for his gift of the score of *The Rite of Spring*, appropriately enough), he wrote

> For someone like me, who is on his way down the other side of the hill but still in possession of an ardent passion for music, there is a special satisfaction in declaring how

[41] Debussy to Stravinsky, 8 November 1912, trans. in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 265.
[42] Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 270.
[43] *Pneumatique* of 31 May, translated in *Stravinsky, Selected Correspondence* III, 5.
[44] Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 272.
[45] Ravel, in a letter of March 28 1913, had even predicted (privately, of course, this being the ever-diplomatic Ravel) that the première of *The Rite* would turn out to be as important an event as the première of *Pelléas*. See Orenstein, *A Ravel Reader*, 134.

> much you have enlarged the boundaries of the permissible in sound. Pardon these rather grandiloquent words, but they express my thoughts precisely! [46]

The reasons behind Debussy's crisis seem clear. Stravinsky might have been 'enlarging musical boundaries' with each new work, but - as the Teyte interview revealed - Debussy found his own means of expression limiting to the extent that he was in danger of 'plagiarising' himself. Or perhaps he was increasingly brooding over the danger of plagiarising *other* people's music, a sensitive issue which he hadn't had to face to any significant degree since his encounters with the music of Wagner and Ravel. Although Debussy must have been aware that *Ibéria* had exerted an important influence on *Petrushka*'s fresh, ostinato-driven diatonicism and incorporation of street music, he must have been equally aware that the recently-completed second book of *Préludes* was full of *Petrushka*-induced sonorities. *Khamma* had also been saturated by influences from Stravinsky's first two ballets, as I suggested in Chapter 2.

From a mid-1913 perspective, then, the reciprocal nature of the Debussy-Stravinsky interaction looks less than helpful. While Debussy had offered the young Stravinsky liberation from the clutches of Rimsky-Korsakov's mechanisms - a genuine escape route - Stravinsky's success merely hemmed Debussy in. On the one hand, Debussy was under continual pressure to renew his idiom and stay several steps ahead of the *Debussyists*; but in exploring new idioms, he had found himself borrowing to a rather uncomfortable extent from his young rival's music. Combined with his ambivalence towards the direction which Stravinsky seemed to be taking in *The Rite*, it is understandable why Debussy actively sought a new idiom from the summer of 1913 onwards.

THE BARBARIC AND THE CIVILISED REVISITED

At this stage, no-one perceived Lambert's retrospective connection between Stravinsky's 'barbaric' and Debussy's 'civilised' impressionism. The two composers were simply separated into the new and the *passé*. Casella confirmed this division by remarking that Debussy 'felt aversion for the new anti-Impressionist tendencies. Thus, while he was very fond of Stravinsky's *Petrushka* he cordially abhorred the same composer's *Rite of Spring*.'[47]

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[46] Letter of 9 November 1913, translation from Craft (ed.), *Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence*; another translation may be found in *Conversations*, 52-3. Rivière's review was published a week earlier.

[47] Alfredo Casella, 'Claude Debussy', *The Monthly Musical Record* (January 1933), 1-2, reprinted in Nichols, *Debussy Remembered*, 97.

By creating a crude Debussy/anti-Debussy dichotomy, critics such as Rivière misunderstood the extent to which *Jeux* and *The Rite* shared compositional techniques, but in fact there was considerable truth in the distinction as far as aesthetics were concerned. Although Debussy initially considered the scenario of *Jeux* 'idiotic', the fact that he actually completed the commission (unlike so many of his other projected theatrical works) suggests that he eventually embraced the ballet with genuine enthusiasm; the fact that the ballet score turned out to be a masterpiece confirms that he developed a true affinity with the scenario. Here, surely, is the nub of the issue. With its voluptuous textures, suggestive naughtiness and veiled layers of allusion, *Jeux* represented the final gasp of the aesthetic of the 1890s. Nijinsky's description of *Jeux* as 'the vindication of the plastic man of 1913' was well wide of the mark. 'What the work stood for' was decidedly out of place by 1913, neither comfortably familiar nor scandalously novel. (A comparable fate met Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe* in 1912, another Diaghilev vehicle for Nijinsky's marketable sexuality which was upstaged because of its indebtedness to the 'old' aesthetic.[48]) At the time, few people realised that *Jeux* was the most eloquent and brilliantly accomplished work of its type, a true culmination - like *Daphnis* - of a long-standing tradition. The critical comparisons made with Stravinsky's latest works forced Debussy to accept that he could no longer pursue his familiar and most deep-rooted sources of inspiration in the manner to which he had become accustomed because they appeared to have nothing new to offer. Debussy's idiosyncratic cultural tastes and delicate sensibility - sources of his greatest strengths - threatened to consign him to a back seat. The barbaric and the civilised represented intrinsically different approaches; there was no way of getting round the fact that the two composers were fundamentally at odds with one another. As Laurence Berman has recently asserted:

> In Debussy's work, primal energy comes in the form of near-silence; it is essentially suggested, contained mainly beneath the surface. In *The Rite of Spring*, the power is overt, blatant, there is no escaping it. There is no escaping the fact, either, that the last vestige of Romantic rapture has disappeared. Has the sweet harmoniousness of Romantic sonority no longer a place in Primitivist works because the premise of the serene/sublime has ceased to have any hold over the imaginations of these artists? Debussy carried on an ambivalent relation with Wagner all his life and never entirely freed himself from the "ghost of old Klingsor". Stravinsky, on the other hand, is the young composer who fell asleep at Bayreuth, impervious from the start to Klingsor's charms.[49]

[48] On the Janus-faced archaism/modernism in *Daphnis* (and its *fin-de-siècle* exoticism) see Lawrence Kramer, 'Consuming the Exotic', in his *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 201-225.

[49] Laurence Berman, *The Musical Image: A Theory of Content* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), 319. Lockspeiser draws a similar conclusion in *Debussy: Life and Mind*, II, 187-188.

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Thus although Stravinsky was not solely responsible for provoking Debussy's crisis of 1913-1914, he seems to have been the primary catalyst. It was under Stravinsky's impact that Debussy belatedly realised that his own aesthetic was now considered to be outdated; and it was under the resultant duress that Debussy brought into effect several crucial changes. First, the lingering resonances of Wagner's presence were effectively purged from all the music Debussy composed after *Jeux* (consider the Mallarmé settings, *La Boîte à joujoux*, the three sonatas, *En blanc et noir*, and the *Etudes* in comparison to *Jeux* and *Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien*). Second, he tried once again to strip down his music to a fundamentally anti-*Debussyste* clarity of expression - a tendency first observable in the Mallarmé settings, and later in his sonatas as part of a return to what he believed to be the traditional values of French classicism. Third, despite a tortuously protracted struggle, he never completed his two darkly symbolist projects on stories by Edgar Allen Poe, perhaps finding them too close to earlier projects in terms of genre and sensibility.

THE WIDER CONTEXT

It is unfortunate that Debussy did not realise the extent to which Stravinsky was unsure about his *own* direction following the chaotic reception of *The Rite*. Writing to Benois in the autumn of 1913, Stravinsky revealed sentiments not dissimilar to Debussy's:

> This last offspring of mine even now gives me not a moment's peace. What an incredible storm of teeth-gnashing rage about it! Seryozha [Diaghilev] gives me horrible news about how people who were full of enthusiasm or unwavering sympathy for my earlier works have turned against this one. [Compare Casella's recollection of Debussy.] So what, say I, or rather think I - that's how it ought to be. But what has made Seryozha himself seem to waver about *Le Sacre*? - a work he never listened to at rehearsals without exclaiming "Divine!" ...To tell the truth, reviewing my impressions of his attitude toward *Le Sacre*, I am coming to the conclusion that he will not encourage me in this direction. This means that I am deprived of my single and truest support in the matter of propagandizing my artistic ideas. You will agree that this completely knocks me off my feet, for I cannot, you understand, I simply cannot write what they want from me - that is, repeat myself - repeat anyone else you like, only not yourself! - for that is how people write themselves out. But enough about *Le Sacre*. It makes me miserable.[50]

[50] Stravinsky, letter to Benois of 20 September/3 October 1913, cited and translated by Richard Taruskin, 'A Myth of the Twentieth Century: *The Rite of Spring*, the Tradition of the New, and "The Music Itself", *Modernism/Modernity* 2/1 (1995), 17.

Both men were facing uncharted waters - and Saint-Saëns was still the most popular composer in Paris![51] Stravinsky's letter provides a timely reminder that potentially intractable difficulties dogged many composers during this period. In fact, 1913 was a comparatively late date for a composer of the first rank to face up to the challenges of the New Music. As James Hepokoski has pointed out, composers who came from the German tradition were disturbed by the loss of triadic writing far earlier than this, opening up a now-familiar conflict between composers of the early modernist period and the progenitors of the New Music. [52] Debussy, predictably, was an exception: as I have emphasised throughout this study, he had already developed his own innovative harmonic and structural strategies as a rejection of Russian *kuchkist* and Wagnerian practice. He was utterly uninterested in Schoenberg's break with tonality and had never found symphonically-conceived composition to be a positive force in his own work. Stravinsky, however, had met him on his own ground. Debussy had engaged personally with the man and genuinely esteemed his music; they had felt free to 'travel together' with *Petrushka*. The mutual respect underpinning the early years of their interaction must have made Debussy's encounter with Stravinsky's 'musique nègre'[53] far harder than his earlier, readily avoidable encounters with German New Music.

As well as the dissimilarities in background and sensibility, there was one other factor likely to pull Debussy and Stravinsky apart: the generation gap. Even a brief comparison between Debussy and the greatest members of his generation who were forced to make crucial mid-career decisions suggests that none of them (those who flourished *ca.* 1890-1914, say) embraced the revolutions of either Schoenberg or Stravinsky. Strauss (b.1864) made a sideways move into *Rosenkavalier*; Sibelius (b.1865) produced two utterly polarised works, the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies; Mahler (b.1860), though responsive to the trajectory set up by Schoenberg's early works, was spared the dilemma by dying prematurely.[54] Only Ravel (b.1875), situated in the middle of the Debussy-Stravinsky generation gap, travelled further. 'He was the only musician who immediately understood *Le Sacre du Printemps*', Stravinsky claimed in later life - but even Ravel drew the line at *Mavra*.[55]

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[51] François Lesure quotes calculations which suggest that between 1902 and 1913 Debussy's works accounted for 204 performances in Paris: compare Fauré (137), Massenet (98), d'Indy (49), Ravel (46) and Strauss (32). Saint-Saëns clocks in at a massive 279. See Lesure, *Biographie Critique*, 374.

[52] James Hepokoski, *Sibelius: Symphony no. 5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1-9.

[53] Stravinsky claimed that Debussy spoke of *The Rite* as 'une musique nègre'. See *Expositions and Developments*, 142n.

[54] For further discussion, see Hepokoski, *Sibelius: Symphony no. 5* and Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 330-339.

[55] Craft/Stravinsky, *Conversations*, 62. Poulenc claimed that Ravel disliked *Les Noces* [in *Moi et mes aims* (Paris, 1963); Eng. translation in Roger Nichols (ed.), *Ravel Remembered* (London: Faber, 1987), 117-118], but Ravel's letters to Stravinsky ["so beautiful"] offer a different perspective. See letter of 26

In this light, Stravinsky's retrospective suggestion that Debussy 'was annoyed at his incapacity to digest the music of the *Sacre* when the younger generation enthusiastically voted for it' can be read a little more carefully.[56] The statement's ambiguity lies in a crucial distinction between Debussy disliking the music, and disliking the fact that the music was acclaimed by the younger generation. Stravinsky surely realised that it was the critics' Debussy *vs*. Stravinsky polarisation as much as his *nègre* music itself that compounded Debussy's broader spectrum of problems and brought the Frenchman to the point of crisis.

* * *

June 1923 in Orenstein (ed.), *A Ravel Reader*, 244. For Ravel's views of *Mavra* and *Apollon musagète*, see *ibid.*, 482.

[56] *Conversations*, 48.

Chapter 4

Debussy's new idiom

I

Departures old and new

TWO SURPRISING CONTEMPORARIES

Either during the period of the Teyte interview or shortly afterwards, Debussy embarked on two new works, *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*, written during the summer of 1913, and *La Boîte à joujoux,* composed between July and October. The two works reveal the influence of Stravinsky in utterly different ways and, on first hearing, the differences in their musical language and syntax are so pronounced it seems extraordinary that they could be contemporaries. The Mallarmé set, Debussy's last collection of songs, seems to vindicate the apparent confidence with which he told Maggie Teyte he would 'find a new language'. The three songs represent a genuine move towards a new idiom in which his readiness to accentuate contrast by juxtaposing diverse thematic and pitch materials creates a musical surface of unprecedented fragmentation and harmonic complexity. In contrast, the delightful *La Boîte à joujoux* is a far more obvious response to Stravinsky, at times sounding like the idiom of *Children's Corner* mediated through *Petrushka* and Dukas's *L'apprenti sorcier.*[1]

If, on the basis of the Teyte interview, it is accepted that Debussy was worried about plagiarising Stravinsky's ballets as well as his own music, it might seem odd that he chose to engage with *Petrushka* head-on by writing a ballet centred around a love triangle between a doll, a polchinelle and a soldier. There are no shades of *Jeux's* tantalising *horreurs* here, but plenty of *Petrushka's* raw clarity: *La Boîte à joujoux* is one of Debussy's most diatonic scores and exhibits an unusually episodic layout. The music contains leitmotifs which represent the three characters (listed at the front of the score: see attached excerpt) and is full of Stravinsky's seductive sonorities, particularly the tritone-saturated material of the wicked Polichinelle - so close in idiom to Petrushka's shrieks.[2]

[1] See, for example, Debussy's 6/8 on page 5, compared to the Dukas at reh. no. 7. All page number citations for *La Boîte* refer to the (unbarred) Durand piano score of 1913.
[2] For further commentary see Orledge, *Debussy and Theatre*, 177-185.

PERSONNAGES

Mouvt de Valse.

Prima

Sentiment militaire

For all its seeming triviality, the *Toybox* ballet embodies a preliminary move towards Debussy's anti-*Debussyste* goal outlined in the Teyte interview. Yet I wonder whether the 'help' provided by the ballet's Stravinskian predecessor merely exacerbated Debussy's crisis of originality. Stravinsky's influence on *La Boîte à joujoux* is disconcertingly acute, to the extent that we become rather uncomfortable with the idea that the mature Debussy could be diverted so readily.

It is tempting to depict this rather edgy relationship between the two works (after Harold Bloom) as a misreading, in a manner not unlike Mark Evan Bonds's treatment of Brahms's notorious allusion to Beethoven 9 in the finale of his first symphony.[3] Debussy's appropriation of Stravinskian sonorities, relatively unselfconscious in the second book of *Préludes*, becomes so problematic in *La Boîte à joujoux* that it is possible to suggest that Debussy 'misread' *Petrushka* in a subversive manner as part of a defensive effort to work the ballet's influence out of his system. 'Misreading' might seem a harsh concept for what is, after all, just an unassuming children's ballet. Debussy's score could be seen as a simple 'fantasy on *Petrushka*' for Chouchou, and there appears to be nothing subversive about his music: quite the opposite, in fact. Furthermore, Debussy was wrestling with a successor, not a predecessor - a threatening son rather than an overbearing father - and a pattern of mutual interest and reciprocal encouragement turning to straightforward rivalry does not fit the Oedipal battle of Bloom's theories satisfactorily.[4] But - Bloom aside - I suggest the fact that Debussy chose to embrace Stravinsky's influence head-on in a *children's* ballet is particularly significant - a true subversion of *Petrushka*. In a charming work for children, listeners would be far more indulgent towards infelicitous 'borrowings' than they would be in an ambitious orchestral work or - most dangerously - another ballet for Diaghilev. Or, more slyly, there might have been an implication that Stravinsky's music, although playful and colourful, wasn't exactly 'grown-up': we recall Debussy's early letter to Godet about Stravinsky, in which he described the young Russian's music (presumably *Petrushka*, given

[3] On Beethoven 9 and Brahms 1, together with a discussion of Bloom's theories, see Mark Evan Bonds, *After Beethoven: Imperatives of Originality in the Symphony* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 1-27, 138-174. *Cf.* Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: OUP, 1973) and *A Map of Misreading* (New York: OUP, 1975). I have also benefited from Peter de Bolla's commentary, *Harold Bloom: Towards historical rhetorics* (London: Routledge, 1988).

[4] It must also be said that musicology's appropriation of Bloom's theories has met with mixed success. See Richard Taruskin, 'Revising Revision', in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 46 (1993), 114-138, in which he praises (with qualifications) Kevin Korsyn's 'Towards a New Poetics of Musical Influence', *Music Analysis* 10 (1991), 3-72 but slates Joseph Straus's *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard UP, 1990).

the date) as 'childish and savage'.[5] Whatever the unfathomable intention behind Debussy's engagement with Stravinsky in *La Boîte à joujoux*, the ballet score provided a timely opportunity for a public exorcism of *Petrushka's* influence.

It is more significant, though, that the serious side of his compositional interests during this period also reflects the impact of Stravinsky's music, albeit in terms of a far more subtle, attenuated assimilation. Although Debussy's Mallarmé songs are by the very nature of their texts part of the 'old' symbolist aesthetic,[6] his tolerance of dissonance and terseness of expression clearly reflect the discreet influence of the harmonic and formal polarities in *Petrushka* and *The Rite*. There are other possible sources of Stravinskian influence by this date, too, although it is not possible to confirm whether Debussy had heard Stravinsky's *Three Japanese Lyrics* before embarking on the *Trois Poèmes*. The chronology is plausible enough: Stravinsky had completed his *Japanese Lyrics* at Clarens while working with Ravel on Musorgsky's *Khovanshchina* in the spring of 1913, while Debussy did not send Durand's engraver Choisnel the manuscript of his Mallarmé songs until 25 July.[7] But Debussy was unaware of Ravel's Mallarmé settings (which were also written in the spring at Clarens) until the unfortunate *contretemps* with Mallarmé's heirs later in the summer.[8] Nor is there any evidence in Debussy's correspondence of the period that he was aware of Stravinsky's latest composition. Unless Stravinsky sent him a pre-publication score, it seems most likely that Debussy completed the Mallarmé settings well before he heard the *Three Japanese Lyrics*.

Why did Debussy return to old "1890s" territory when he had suggested in his interview with Maggie Teyte that he was about to explore fresh paths in the search for a new musical idiom? It is generally accepted that the publication of a new edition of Mallarmé's *Poésies* was an important catalyst for him, as it was for Ravel.[9] More important, perhaps, was the fact that Debussy's recent engagements with ambitious or exotic stage projects (most notably *Khamma* and *Jeux*) had proved unsuccessful. A return to French symbolism might have been an attractive proposition after this series of failed or aborted stage projects; in embarking on a

[5] Debussy, letter to Godet of 18 December 1911, trans. in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 249-251.
[6] Mallarmé's aesthetics make a fascinating comparison with Wagnerian aesthetics, particularly with respect to the possibilities of synthesis, or *rapports*, between music and *poésie*. For commentary, see Suzanne Bernard, *Mallarmé et la musique* (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1959), esp. 9-35.
[7] *Lettres de Claude Debussy à son éditeur*, 115.
[8] Ravel had also (independently) set three poems by Mallarmé. Much to Debussy's chagrin, Ravel had also chosen *Soupir* and *Placet futile* as the first two songs in his set (potentially opening up another feast of unfavourable critical comparisons). See letter to Durand of 8 August 1913 in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 277.
[9] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Poésies* (Paris: Editions de la nouvelle revue française, 1913): see pp. 24, 18-19, 93-94.

setting of three poems by an idol from his youth, perhaps Debussy was actively seeking respite from the prescriptive, fickle demands of collaborative commissions. In the light of the Teyte interview, we might even speculate that he wanted to prove, both to himself and to his public, that symbolism did not have to be equated with *Debussyism*. Most pertinently, though, a return to Mallarmé shows that Debussy was realistic about re-inventing his idiom. Whenever devoid of inspiration in his later years, he had always returned to his earliest sources of inspiration: I have already noted that shadows of *Faune* and *Parsifal* were cast over *Jeux,* and that *Pelléas*'s morbid atmosphere of foreboding had been re-created in *Khamma*. Hence in 1913 it is interesting to find Debussy toying with the idea of re-setting Mallarmé's *Apparition*, which he had first set some twenty-nine years previously.[10] What is most interesting about the final form of the Mallarmé set, however, is that Debussy seems to have reversed his dependence on elements from past works by seeking fresh means of expressing a familiar sensibility rather than (as in *Khamma*) desperately seeking inspiration in older works in order to fill the empty staves of burdensome new commissions.

II

Debussy's *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*

The appearance of the *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* at such a critical moment of change helps to explain why the set does not sit comfortably alongside any other group of Debussy's works. Debussy wrote few songs during his later years and the closest relations of Mallarmé settings in terms of genre and sharpness of dissonance are the *Trois Ballades de François Villon* of 1910. But, as Susan Youens has pointed out, the hard edge in Debussy's setting of the *Ballades* (especially the first, 'Ballade de Villon à s'amye') is a direct response to the caustic bitterness of Villon's poetry.[11] Debussy himself remarked of the Villon settings that:

> Good poetry has a rhythm of its own, which makes it very difficult for us [composers]. [...] It is very difficult to follow and to cast the rhythms [of the poetry] in a suitable mould, still preserving one's inspiration. If one cheats and is content with a mere

[10] The second setting of *Apparition* never came to fruition: evidence emerges only from studies of Debussy's sketch materials, as reported by Margaret Cobb in *The Poetic Debussy: A Collection of his song texts and selected letters* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1982, 2nd ed. 1994), xvi.

[11] Susan Youens, 'From the fifteenth century to the twentieth: Considerations of musical prosody in Debussy's *Trois Ballades de François Villon*', *Journal of Musicology* II/4 (Fall 1983). The exceptional nature of the Villon settings is reinforced by comparison with the sweetness of Debussy's contemporary love songs on texts by Tristan L'Hermite, 'Crois mon conseil' and 'Je tremble en voyant ton visage', nos. 2 and 3 of *Le promenoir des deux amants* of 1910.

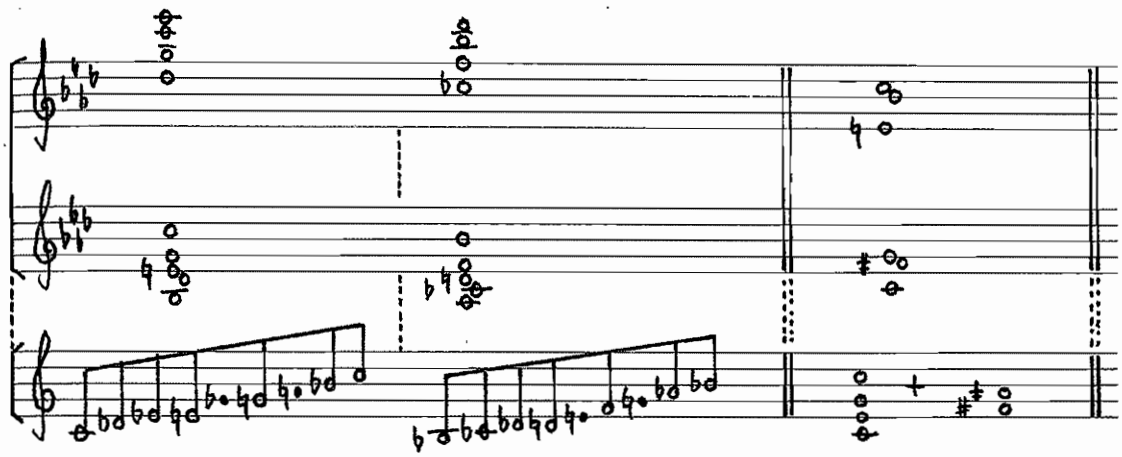
> juxtaposition of the two arts, it is not too difficult, but is it worth the trouble? Classic poetry has a life of its own, an 'interior dynamism', as the Germans would say.[12]

Mallarmé's suggestive texts certainly have a life of their own, but do not provide a point of departure comparable to the emotional world of the Villon poems. The difficulty with setting Mallarmé to music is that there is no single point of departure, only a delectable palate of allusive options through which the 'interior dynamics' of the poetry can exert their force. The very best settings of Mallarmé, exemplified by those by Ravel and Debussy from 1913, preserve a balance between proposing a single reading (in which the rich ambiguity of the poetic imagery is suppressed) and a totally open-ended reading (in which case the composer appears to have nothing interesting to say about the poetry and perhaps - as Debussy suggested - shouldn't have taken the trouble in the first place). The fact that there is no obvious point of departure in Mallarmé means that the composer has to work hard to supply an 'active' set of readings: a musical setting of Mallarmé without offering any gloss on the text would be pretty dull. Consequently, the changes in Debussy's harmonic and textural resources observable in these settings can be said to reflect the development of his new idiom as much as the specifically poetic demands pertinent to the triptych, if only because the musical idiom leans much more heavily on an internal response to suggestive imagery than to more traditional demands of literal or metaphorical text-setting.

The obvious way in which Debussy was influenced by Stravinsky at this stage is in the cultivation of higher dissonances. Take, for instance, two of the richest and most prolonged dissonances in the first song, *Soupir*:

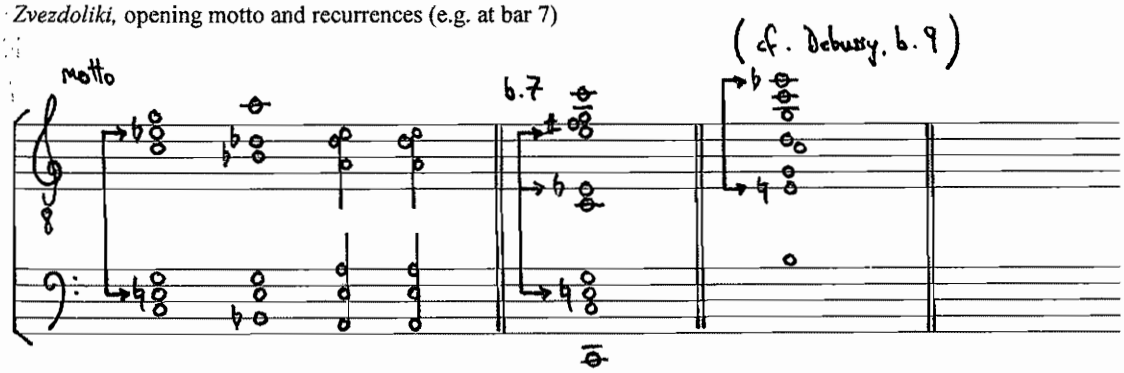
[12] Debussy as reported by Fernand Divoire, 'What should one set to music: good poetry or bad poetry, free verse or prose?' *Musica*, March 1911, this translation from Lesure/Smith, *Debussy on Music*, 250-251.

Soupir, bars 9 and 10 Bars 27 and 28



Although both are isolated selections, the two sets of chords betray an awareness of the vertical use of octatonic sonorities. In bars 27-28 a re-creation of the familiar C-F# opposition alternates with a whole-tone chord, while bars 9-10 reveal a more complex cluster: an octatonically-derived chord, moved stepwise in parallel motion. The 'Stravinskian' sound of this chord derives from the E*b*-E clash: it is none less than the octatonically-derived major-minor clash so exhaustively explored in *Zvezdoliki* (as well as in *The Rite*). Debussy had received the dedication and score of Stravinsky's 'cantata for planets' at the same time that he was working on the Mallarmé songs - the belated acknowledgement was sent on 18 August 1913.[13]

Zvezdoliki, opening motto and recurrences (e.g. at bar 7)



The coincidence might seem to stretch a point, so in the absence of more revealing evidence I make no greater claim for Stravinsky's influence on the syntax of the Mallarmé settings other than that Debussy had played *Zvezdoliki* and *The Rite* through on his piano and absorbed their extraordinary harmonies through his ears and fingers, developing a new tolerance for their

[13] Debussy's thank-you letter to Stravinsky, describing Zvezdoliki as a 'cantata for planets', is translated in *Expositions and Developments*, 51.

disorienting bitonality.[14] However, there is evidence of a rather deeper assimilation of Stravinskian polarities in Debussy's Mallarmé settings in the realm of *form*.

*

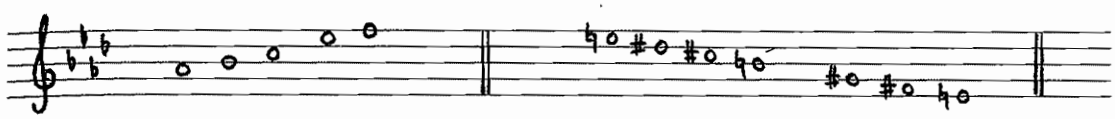
During my discussion of the second book of *Préludes* in Chapter 2, I remarked that Debussy alighted on Stravinsky's emerging conception of form as the product of a logical discussion between musical materials, and suggested that he could have found this notion particularly attractive because it was at root a re-working of the principles which helped to make his own music sound so distinctive - namely the balancing of contrasting harmonic forces without reference to conventional rules of classical tonality. If we also recall that Debussy's earliest songs are remarkable for their differentiation of ideas (consider, for example, the independence of the vocal line from the rest of the texture in *Fleur des Blés* of 1879), it becomes even more likely that the increasing autonomy of tonal planes in Stravinsky's music would have been of interest to Debussy.[15]

Stravinsky's 'discussions' between musical materials are different from Debussy's only in terms of degree: rather than mediating between conflicting harmonic materials or using the *litanie* to connect juxtaposed blocks, Stravinsky breaks them apart completely; as well as nurturing successive engagements between materials, he engages his sonorities in simultaneous ('*Petrushka*-chord') discussion. Stravinskian polarities, Debussy seems to have realised, offered all sorts of useful new resources for harmony and form and so, following his initial fascination with stratified black-and-white writing, he began to experiment with more sophisticated and individual kinds of stratification. Nowhere is this more evident in *Soupir*, in which he sets out two conflicting pitch-class collections at the opening of the song. The first 8 bars (opening 10 bars in the voice part) are all based around a pentatonic collection on A*b*, which is then set against the pure E major of the singer's descending line in bars 11 and 12:

[14] Some analysts will wince at the use of the term 'bitonal' for these sonorities, but it is often clear from nothing more complex than the distribution of chords over the hands on the piano that both composers regularly treat pitch class set aggregates at a combination of 'conflicting' triads - even if, as is often evident in Stravinsky's music, the aggregate is referable to a single octatonic collection. See, for a much-discussed example, the chord from the 'Augurs of Spring': the 1914 *Edition Russe de Musique* piano reduction (a version of which is all Debussy would have had to work from at this stage) clearly distinguishes F*b* major in the left hand, E*b*7 in the right. For scholarly discussion, see the Forte/Taruskin controversy in *Music Analysis* I cited earlier.

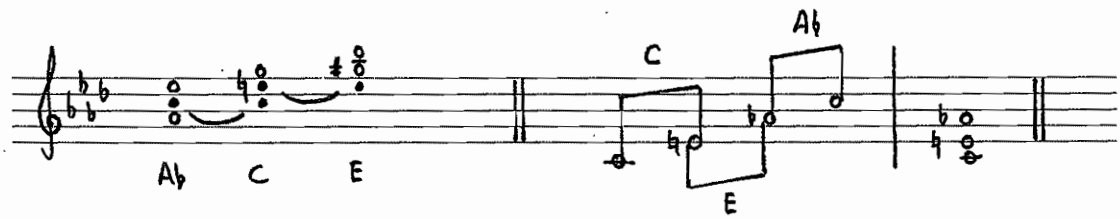
[15] For further discussion of the early songs, see John Ringgold, 'The Linearity of Debussy's Music and its Correspondence with the Symbolist Esthetic: Developments before 1908', (PhD diss., U. of Southern California, 1972), esp. 53-93.

Pentatonic collection in *Soupir*, bars 1-8 E major collection, bars 11-12



The interplay between these two collections opens up a newly complex harmonic language and their 'discussion' underpins the conception behind the entire song. The two have several properties in common through which they can be linked harmonically using Debussy's familiar principle of the re-harmonising *litanie*: by major third relations using an intermediary, C major, or by an aggressive juxtaposition/superimposition through which they are brought into contact more vividly by means of a whole-tone triad. Note that (i) produces the E*b*/E collision:

Properties of Debussy's two pitch-class collections:
(i) related by major third (ii) related by whole-tone triad



By his careful disposition of the A*b* and E elements, Debussy proposes a subtle reading of the poetic structure of the song. To comprehend why such techniques of stratification prove to be disarmingly effective in setting Mallarmé's *Soupir* to music, it is necessary to engage with the poetry and its contexts.

III
Soupir

As countless commentators have pointed out, Mallarmé, like Baudelaire, turned away from reality and sought refuge in an ideal world. The attainment of the ideal became very problematic for Mallarmé, however, and much of his work reflects an obsession with the gap between reality and the ideal.[16] What we might describe as the metaphysics of this obsession

[16] See, for example, Charles Chadwick, *The Meaning of Mallarmé* (Aberdeen: Scottish Cultural Press, 1996), 1-11, to whom this discussion is indebted. This attitude of escape, partially inherited from Romanticism, has also been attributed to personal factors: Mallarmé's mother and sister both died during his childhood, and his father re-married early. See Gordon Millan's biography *Mallarmé: A Throw of the Dice* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1994).

- the question of how to give poetic form to an immaterial world - haunted Mallarmé throughout his life. His solution, in which he turned to indirect allusion so as to avoid being tied too closely to the 'objects' of reality, led him towards a complex hermeticism that renders much of his poetry virtually untranslatable. *L'Azur* of January 1864, in which he describes his own failure to write poetry evocative of the ideal world - his 'Muse of Impotency', as Michaud put it - is an excellent example of this problematic tension between reality and ideal.[17] *L'Azur* is a disturbing poem, opening with an account of the poet's sterility in the face of the overwhelming 'l'eternel azur', which literally means 'the eternal sky' but here (and in many other poems) becomes associated with that which is out of reach and unattainable: the ideal.[18] The poet tries to flee from the sky, which looks into his 'empty soul', and he invokes the fogs to help him 'build a ceiling' (another Mallarmé metaphor used elsewhere) to enclose him away from the sky and hence away from the demands of his vocation as a poet. Unlike his earlier poem *Fenêtres*, in which he aspired to fulfil the promise-filled *Azur*, Mallarmé now tries to forget about the Blue altogether: he longs to join the happy herd of ordinary humans. If this happens, 'Le Ciel est mort' (verse 6): the sky/ideal is dead, and the poet can drag himself towards an 'obscure death'. But his efforts are in vain (verse 8): the sky actually triumphs, thundering through the mists that Mallarmé had hoped would insulate him from his creative agony and he is left as before, haunted by *L'Azur*. The iterations of the last line sum up his torment with great intensity:

> Je suis hanté. L'Azur! L'Azur! L'Azur! L'Azur!

Once the initial analogy in structure between the internal and the external has been established, Mallarmé's taut ellipsis and metaphorical leaps become less obscure. The sun, for example, becomes associated with the poet's spirit, so if the sun is yellowing the spirit itself is understood to be decaying. Furthermore, the same repertory of images is established for several different poems and, although Mallarmé is presumably the only one able to unlock the intended meaning behind his dazzling superimposition of images, an awareness of the threads which link his poems together aids comprehension immeasurably. The yellowing sun in *L'Azur*, for example, can also be read in the light of Mallarmé's *Plainte d'Automne*, in

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[17] Guy Michaud, *Mallarmé*, trans. Marie Collins and Bertha Humez (London: Peter Owen, 1966), 27. For the poem and a translation, see Mary Ann Caws (ed.), *Stéphane Mallarmé: Selected Poetry and Prose* (New York: New Directions, 1982), 14-17. A different translation can be found in Chadwick, *The Meaning of Mallarmé*, 24-27.

[18] 'Azur', 'Blue', 'sky' are of course all *correspondances* in post- Baudelairean sense. For an interesting perspective on this, see Walter Benjamin's commentary on Proust's reception of Baudelaire's 'reminiscences' in *Charles Baudelaire*, 142.

which the beams of the dying sun take on an even greater resonance, that of the dying art of poetry.

L'Azur helps to open up a particularly rich perspective on *Soupir*, which dates from the same year, 1864. The poems share much of their imagery: the yellowing sun (again), the sky, aspiration towards the unattainable, autumnal gloom, lifeless water, death. Yet in *Soupir* the poet is now reconciled to his fate: no longer does he try to flee, but recognises that he has no real option other than to define his ideal world through poetry.

> Mon âme vers ton front où rêve, ô calme sœur,
> Un automne jonché de taches de rousseur,
> Et vers le ciel errant de ton œil angélique
> Monte, comme dans un jardin mélancholique.
> Fidèle, un blanc jet d'eau soupire vers l'Azur!
> -Vers l'Azur attendri d'Octobre pâle et pur
> Qui mire aux grands bassins sa langueur infinie
> Et laisse, sur l'eau morte où la fauve agonie
> Des feuilles erre au vent et creuse un froid sillon,
> Se traîner le soleil jaune d'un long rayon.[19]

It would be presumptuous to read too much into Debussy's decision to set this poem. Nevertheless, at the very least it should be suggested that a depiction of an artist previously haunted by an ambition he is powerless to achieve, but now resigned to fact that he must compose even if his spirit is decaying, may well have had special resonance for Debussy in 1913.

The infinitive *soupirer* can connote a sigh of both aspiration or resignation, and Mallarmé exploits this ambivalence in the poem. In the first half of the poem, all the poet's verbal gestures strive to ascend: 'towards your brow', 'towards the sky', ultimately 'towards the Blue' - in other words, the poet endeavours to reach an ideal state. From the mirror point of the poem between lines 5 and 6 (vers l'Azur! - Vers l'Azur) the sighs of aspiration become sighs of resignation: in the second half of the poem the water is 'dead', the leaves lie 'in tawny anguish', and the sun 'crawls on in one long ray'. Debussy's setting generally adheres to Mallarmé's pattern of aspiration and resignation, although the return of the opening motif

[19] Translations available in Caws, *ibid.*, 19, Chadwick, *ibid.*, 35 and elsewhere.

in the last two bars very end offers a second glimpse of aspiration, perhaps suggesting the process of hope and disappointment will start all over again.

The opening twelve bars are crucial in laying out the associative links with which Debussy provides his gloss on the text. There are four elements: a pentatonic piano introduction (bars 1-5); the opening unaccompanied vocal line (6-8); a series of higher dissonances in the piano (9-10); and a second unaccompanied vocal line (11-12). The piano introduction encourages a sense of tonal ambivalence between A*b* and E*b* major by studiously avoiding any leading notes for either tonal axis (there are no occurrences of G/G*b* or D/D*b* here). The first concrete suggestion of A*b* as tonic only arrives in the voice on the first beat of bar 8, where the word 'front' is set to a leading-note, G. This seemingly small concession is critical, since by confirming an association between A*b* major and the first line of text, Debussy links the A*b* materials with Mallarmé's rising sigh of aspiration (in addition, a more conventional allusion is provided by the ascending shape of both his vocal and piano gestures). In bars 9-10, the dissonant harmonic complexes invoked by Debussy's octatonic chords suggest that the 'autumn dreams freckled with russet scatterings' are not linked with the sigh of aspiration, but foreshadow something rather darker (they are, of course, a premonition of the autumnal second half of the poem). The subsequent entry of the vocal line in bars 11-12, again unencumbered by accompaniment, creates the third tonal association, this time between the E material and the words 'towards the sky'. The full significance of this association does not emerge until bars 13-17, where the oscillating E natural octaves which disturb the musical texture so profoundly are used to evoke the motion of the fountain (bar 16) by straightforward *mimesis*. What appears to be rather naïve text-setting in alluding to the rising and falling of the water turns out to possess deeper resonance, as it becomes apparent that Debussy is stratifying his pitch materials in order to delineate the associations Mallarmé creates between

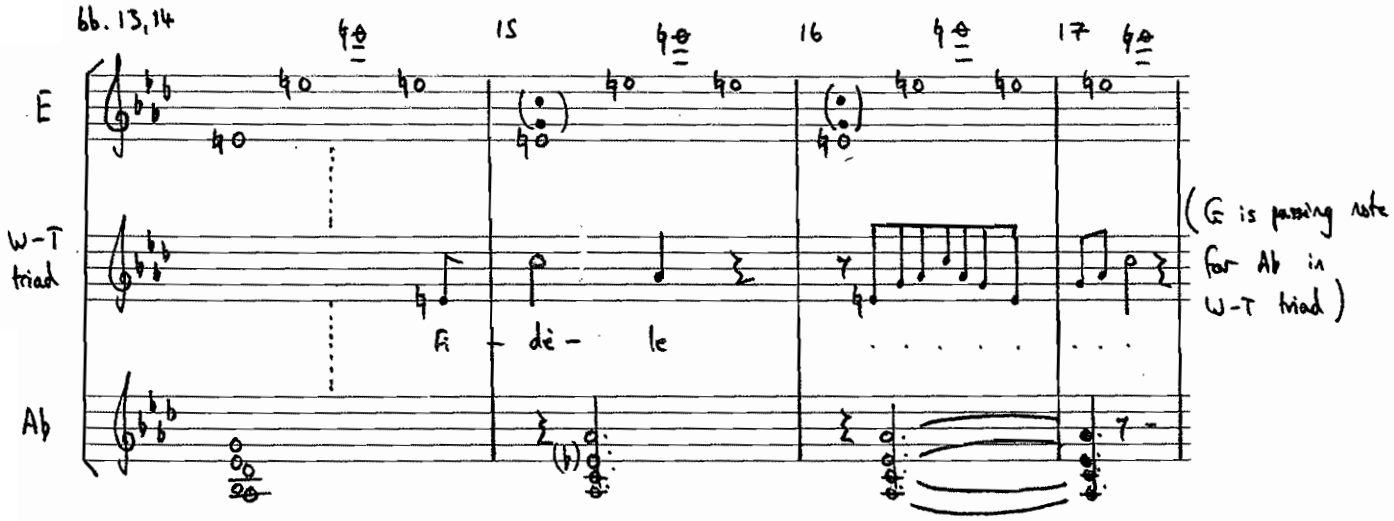
vers ton front (line 1)
vers le ciel (line 3)
vers l'Azur (line 5)

by linking them with separate harmonic areas. Mallarmé's central conceit here is to use the fountain as a simile for the soul: just as the fountain strives towards *l'Azur* - the Blue, the unattainable sky - the soul seeks an abstract but similarly unattainable, idealistic state. This simile is reflected by Debussy's distinction between the soul's aspirations towards something

realistic ('towards your brow' - A*b*) and something unattainable ('towards the sky' - E). Since in conventional tonal terms the E remains out of reach for the A*b*, this passage (bars 13-17) evokes the unattainable nature of the soul's aspirations, mirroring Mallarmé's simile using pitch.

The reason Debussy manages to control these stratified pitch materials so effectively is that his choice of A*b* and E allows him to exploit the intermediary layer of C: the juxtapositions can be controlled by the whole-tone triad, allowing Debussy to control the changing harmonic complexion - the 'light and shade' of his setting - with enormous subtlety, as is evident from the vocal line between bars 15-17. For example, while this passage is generally dominated by the disturbing E, the triad of C major is allowed to ring diatonically true - temporarily - on the word 'Fidèle'.

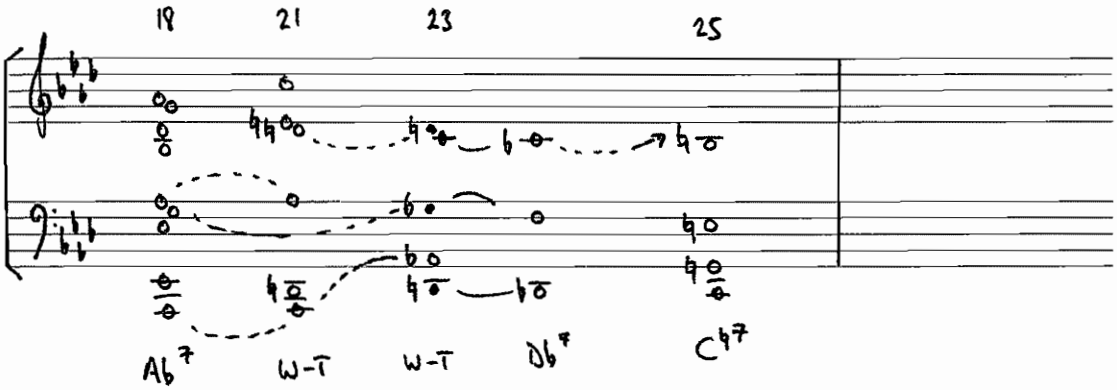
Soupir, harmonic reduction showing stratification of pitch materials, bars 13-17



At the beginning of the second half of the poem (*En animant peu*, bar 18), aspiration takes over once again and the presence of the unattainable is temporarily forgotten, as at the opening: the D*b* major vocal line and the anchor provided by a low A*b* pedal are left undisturbed by the E material. But as the last lines of text (from 'Qui mire' in bar 20) begin to shatter the illusion that the ideal will ever be reached, chromatic inflections deflect the harmony towards the whole-tone. These whole-tone chords allow Debussy to use the E again (see the whole-tone chords in the piano part, 21-22). In bars 23-24 the oscillation between whole-tone and D*b*7 harmony around the A*b* pedal reflects the stagnant, static quality of *l'eau morte*, drawn in contrast with the flowing fountain of bars 13-17. Where previously the voice sang of aspiration, in bars 23-24 the fountain and the E - and thus the promise of the

unattainable - are no longer present: just 'la fauve agonie' remains. Debussy then uses a *litanie* to link the B of the D*b* seventh chord of bar 24 with the C maj7 chord of bar 25, assimilating the E into the harmonic texture as part of a middleground unfolding of the major-third A*b*-C-E relationship seen more prominently in the musical foreground. Crucially for Debussy's reading of the text, the E is merely integrated fleetingly (as earlier, at the word *Fidèle*), accepted passively rather than being 'attained', just as the poet resigns himself to the inevitability of his vocation in striving for the unattainable.

Soupir, harmonic reduction, bars 18-26



The E then lingers in the accompaniment's texture as an alto pedal note throughout bars 27-29, even though the voice returns to the pure A*b* material. Only in the last two bars does the E 'resolve' onto both E*b* and F, creating the pentatonic sonority of the final flourish over A*b*. The nature of this resolution helps to create the ambivalence of the ending. On one hand, as the harmonic tension disappears, so does the sense of striving towards the unattainable: the purging of the dissonant E in the last few bars suggests that the aspiration has come to nothing. On the other hand, the opening gesture returns, suggesting some kind of cyclic conception in which the dreamy aspiration could recur again and again. Thus Debussy, like Mallarmé, leaves the question of whether the sigh is a *final* sigh of resignation ambiguously unanswered.

IV

Placet futile

Princesse! à jalouser le destin d'une Hébé
Qui poind sur cette tasse au baiser de vos lèvres,
J'use mes feux mais n'ai rang discret que d'abbé
Et ne figurerai même nu sur le Sèvres.

Comme je ne suis pas ton bichon embarbé,
Ni la pastille, ni du rouge, ni jeux mièvres
Et que sur moi je sais ton regard clos tombé,
Blonde dont les coiffeurs divins sont des orfèvres!

Nommez nous... toi de qui tant de ris framboisés
Se joignent en troupeaux d'agneaux apprivoisés
Chez tous broutant les vœux et bêlant aux délires,

Nommez nous... pour qu'Amour ailé d'un éventail
M'y peigne flûte aux doigts endormant ce bercail,
Princesse, nommez nous berger de vos sourires.

Placet futile is written as a petition by a lover who can barely bring himself to address his lady, so greatly is he besotted with her. 'Nommez nous...', he repeats twice, lamely, before finally getting the words out: 'Make me the shepherd of your smiles'. He is drolly modest - 'no higher than a curate and unlikely to be featured nude on porcelain' - while she is invariably addressed with almost preposterous adulation: 'Blonde whose divine hairdressers are goldsmiths!'. (Mallarmé often used gold to signify the ultimate ideal, as in *Ses purs ongles*, for example.)

Mallarmé is sympathetic as well as ironic in his treatment of the lover's futile petition, sweetening the sharp humour with what Wenk has dubbed 'eighteenth-century props', from lapdogs, porcelain, and *pastille* to the appearance of Love, winged with a fan and (in suitably pastoral/Arcadian form) with flute in hand.[20] For Michaud the 'charming rococo' of *Placet futile* represents 'the other Mallarmé', the poet of grace and precocity, and he points out that *Placet* shares imagery and its eighteenth-century tone with *Petite laveuse blonde* [Little blond

[20] Arthur Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 256. 'Sèvres' refers to the town renowned for its fine porcelain.

laundress], a description of a pleasant dream in which the girl is turned simultaneously into a fauness and a marquise, waving a fan bathed with foam amid roses and gladioli made of the finest gold.[21]

Debussy respects the playfully formal and retrospective elements of Mallarmé's petition by constructing an unexpectedly clear structural framework. Figure 4.1 maps out the entire song, drawing attention to Debussy's strong sense of structural definition by showing the relocation of particular materials in new contexts. As in previous analyses, the graph is structured so that reading across to the right shows the appearance of new material, while falling to the line immediately below signifies recurrence. Other points of association are linked with dotted lines. Much of the textural clarity of the music in this song comes from unison writing and doubling between voice part and accompaniment; such passages are also marked.

One of the most striking features of Fig. 4.1 is the headmotif which appears no fewer than seven times (bars 1, 7, 8, 19, 24, 29 and in variation at the climax of the song at 22-23). Five of its seven appearances recur at the same pitch, thus providing tonal stability around the axis of G (properly, we should speak of pitch stability rather than harmonic stability since Debussy embraces a wide collection of harmonic types based around G, most notably Phrygian, Dorian, and pentatonic). The stratification so pervasive in the outer songs is therefore not present here; nor are whole-tone collections much in evidence, except for a prominent occurrence in bars 14-15 to mark the point at which the lover stops dreaming and realises that his princess may not reciprocate his affections: 'Et que sur moi je sais ton regard clos tombé'.

Debussy also takes into account Mallarmé's principal points of structural articulation. The first two occurrences of the entreaty itself, 'nommez nous', are sung unaccompanied in a rhetorical, declamatory manner (19 & 24). Both times, the declamation follows a passage in which the lover's imagination has become carried away and his vocal line has soared in register: after the 'divine hairdressers' (17-18) and the extended metaphor likening his lady's laugh to the bleating of lambs (22-23). When the lover begins his final entreaty (29-31), Debussy returns to the formality of the opening before lightening the sincerity of the request with a rather flippant gesture, a swiftly ascending pentatonic scale which presumably reflects the futile nature of the request.

[21] Michaud, *Mallarmé*, 87, 115.

'PLACET FUTILE' from Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé

R1

R1

UNISON

UNISON

UNISON

UNISON

W-T

UNISON

UNISON

UNISON

UNISON

[b.3]

W-T

pentatonic

pentatonic

PAN-A3 18 STAVE

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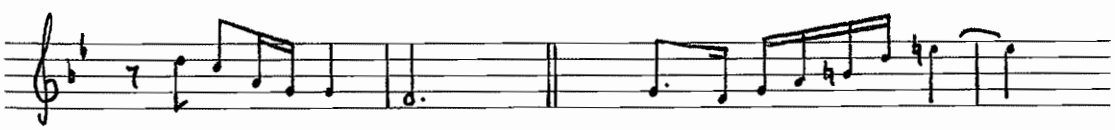
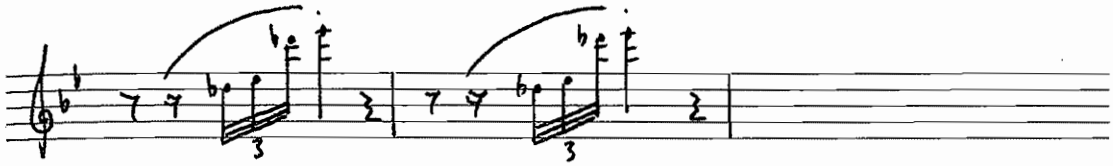
By its very nature, Fig. 4.1 lays particular emphasis on Debussy's techniques for ensuring that his music coheres, whether through motif, pitch or harmonic association (e.g. the whole-tone segments of 14-15 and 25-26, or the pentatonic collections of 27-28 and 32-34 highlighted in boxes). It should be noted, however, that he exhibits great confidence in forcing disparate materials together without intermediary working. This is particularly evident in bars 10-19, when all sorts of musical materials proliferate. The unpredictability of harmonic motion and motivic gesture here is heightened by contrast with the regularity of the headmotif's appearance, and so despite the initial appearance of structural simplicity, Debussy deliberately exacerbates the tension between the forces of integration and the forces of dissociation. A similar strategy underpins his treatment of the 'nommez-nous' gesture. Because it appears twice and Debussy clears a great deal of textural space for its declamation, the singer cannot fail to articulate the phrase strongly, emphasising it as a kind of rhetorical axis from which other materials diverge. As Fig. 4.1 suggests, 'nommez-nous' remains an isolated gesture, appearing only as a moment of juxtaposition through which to re-introduce the headmotif.

One aspect of Debussy's unifying design eludes my graph: the interval of a sixth. The initial source for this is in the piano line headmotif at the very opening, swiftly mirrored by the ascending figure in the second bar. The connection is strengthened by the dactyl rhythm shared by both (marked R1 in the graph), but the most important association with the interval of a sixth is created by the tumbling contour of the entreaty itself, 'Princesse!' (bar 3). Thus the two pentatonic sections towards the end of the song (bars 27-28 and 32-33) are revealed as an inversion of this initial gesture:

Placet futile, bars 1-3, and in inversion, bars 32-33

This final gesture, for all its throwaway connotations, therefore draws several strands of the song together. The sixth even re-appears at a deeper structural level, since the only strong perfect cadence in the song (bar 13) defines E*b* major very strongly in relation to the overall tonal axis of G. A comparable observation was made in the first song, linking third relations at the foreground with a third relation in the deep middleground, which suggests that Debussy's desire for a tightly-integrated structure stimulated unusually rich working.

The 'throwaway' gesture at the end also has other resonances. As a gesture, it is linked with the ascending flourish of bar 25 where the text pre-empts the appearance of the fan in *Éventail* with the words 'Amour ailé d'un éventail':

Placet futile, gestures, bars 25-26

Nommez nous... pour qu'Amour ailé d'un éventail
M'y peigne flûte aux doigts endormant ce bercail,

[Make me...so that Love, winged with a fan
Will paint me there, flute in hand, to lull this fold]

The gesture re-appears at the most dramatic point of fracture in the entire song, the sudden break between bars 28-29, where the G*b* major flourish is left on a pause - a true hiatus. Although Debussy recaptures its pentatonic qualities in the final cadential flourish and as a gesture it is provided with a counterbalance, it is not resolved harmonically until the following song, *Éventail*, which opens with a similar pentatonic gesture on G*b*, a 'completion' of the gesture that was previously left hanging (in futility, one presumes):

Placet futile, bar 28 *Éventail*, bar 1

Given the textual association of the fan in both songs, it is hardly fanciful to suggest that this gesture is intended as an allusion to the opening and closing of a fan. By projecting across the two songs, these subtle associations also create room for the listener to develop other associations from Debussy's readings of Mallarmé's intensely rich and allusive texts.

V

Éventail

Although *Éventail* is formal, rhyming verse like the other two poems in Debussy's set, Mallarmé's associative network of allusions and connotations is extremely enigmatic. The central idea of the text is an expression of the poet's love for his daughter Geneviève, articulated through a speaking fan. This poem, properly titled *Autre Éventail - de Mademoiselle Mallarmé*, was a gift, originally written onto a fan (Mallarmé also addressed a poem to his wife in this form, *Éventail - de Madame Mallarmé*). The ambivalence between reality and imagination that runs throughout Mallarmé's *oeuvre* is thus reconstructed in a rather disorienting manner, as the fan effectively speaks the first verse:

O rêveuse, pour que je plonge	O dreamer-girl, if you'd have me plunge
Au pur délice sans chemin,	Into pure pathless delight,
Sache, par un subtil mensonge,	Manage, through a subtle lie
Garder mon aile dans ta main.	To keep my wing in your hand. [22]

Robert Cohn elucidates the verse thus:

> The fan-poet is requesting a "subtle" gratification: "do this thing for me (if I am to plunge - and you too - into delight): hold my "wing" captive even as you cause its (inner) flight (of ecstasy); which is, of course, a (fatherly) fiction, or *mensonge*". By implication, the girl is also stirred into happiness. In the following strophes, it is her reactions which are featured.[23]

Debussy's motivic-gestural connection between *Éventail* and the fan of the preceding *Placet futile* finds resonance in the sense that the sound of 'aile' relates to éventail', reinforcing the visual image of the fan as a wing and its associated emotional bond through purely abstract poetic means. Debussy evidently found this allusive kind of text stimulating, although he also took advantage of more conventional points of departure (for example, he explores some word painting at bar 26, where 'Vertige!' is marked by a dizzy octave descent). But the otherwise oblique nature of the poem seems to have encouraged him to stretch the limits of his music to extremes of obscurity, both in the piano part, which is spartan in the extreme

[22] This translation from Robert Cohn, *Toward the Poems of Mallarmé* (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 1965), 113-116 (with excellent commentary). For different translations see Caws (ed.), *Stéphane Mallarmé: Selected Poetry and Prose*, 42-43; Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 317; Margaret Cobb, *The Poetic Debussy*, 190-191.
[23] Cohn, *Toward the Poems of Mallarmé*, 113.

during the first verse, and in the voice, which is primarily declamatory as opposed to 'melodic'. This feature in itself is not a new departure, but merely an extension of Debussy's earlier tendency to differentiate ideas by separating the voice from the accompaniment; in *Éventail* he uses the technique to blur Mallarmé's formal verse structure of five stanzas of four lines each, so that verse 2 starts during the recurrence of the piano headmotif (bar 14) while verse 3 starts in bar 25 with a gesture which stands apart from the texture accompanying the bulk of the verse (from bar 27). This makes the points when the voice and piano suddenly come together in unison or near-unison especially striking, as at bars 11-12, 22-23, 25-26, 54, 59-end.

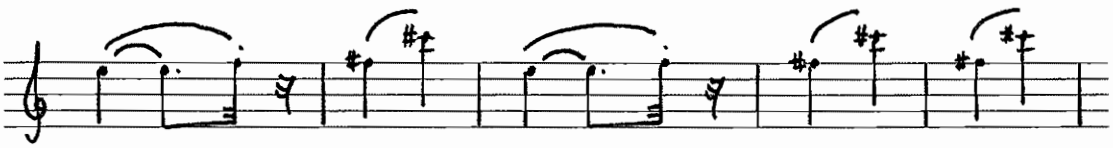
In *Éventail*, even more so than in the other two settings, Debussy's idiom reflects the kind of purity and freedom of expression that he outlined in an article published a couple of months after the completion of the Mallarmé songs:

> [November 1913]
>
> Let us purify our music! Let us try to relieve its congestion, to find a less cluttered kind of music. And let us be careful that we do not stifle all feeling beneath a mass of superimposed designs and motives: how can we hope to preserve our finesse, our spirit, if we insist in being preoccupied with so many details of composition? We are attempting the impossible in trying to organise a braying pack of tiny themes, all pushing and jostling each other for the sake of a bite out of the poor old sentiment! If they are not careful the sentiment will depart altogether, in an attempt to save its skin. As a general rule, every time someone tries to complicate an art form or sentiment, it is simply because they are unsure of what they want to say. [24]

The paradox here is quite striking. In striving for simplicity through terseness of expression, Debussy pares down his normally short-winded materials to their very essence, leaving tiny cellular constructs and a series of gestures linked by fleeting textural and harmonic associations. Although the resultant motivic working is quite free and seems to embody true spontaneity, it is combined with a highly ambiguous tonal structure which merely exacerbates the complexity of *Éventail*. Structural coherence in Debussy's music is usually brought about through his idiosyncratic use of tonality and meticulously-tailored motivic working. Here, however, there are only a few points of pitch centricity (the recurrent piano motif always appears at the same pitch) and moments of tonal repose (most strikingly onto F major at bar

[24] Claude Debussy, SIM 1 November 1913, trans. from Langham Smith (ed.), *Debussy on Music*, 297. The original French may be found in *M. Croche*, pp. 241-242.

40). Unlike the other two songs in the set, there is no key signature and even the (Stravinsky-inspired?) dichotomy between whole-tone and diatonic materials leads to a stratification which is far more complex than that in *Soupir*. Moreover, there seems to be an extravagant quantity of different materials for such a short song.

Fig. 4.2 shows how much 'new' material is in fact derived from earlier music, and calls attention to several points of structural articulation. The opening piano gesture acts like a headmotif by returning between verses one and two, and four and five, and provides the strongest thread of continuity in the whole song. Careful listening elicits another recurrent motivic element, based on a rising fifth and first heard in the piano at bars 19-23:

This returns in variation at bar 36 and again at bar 40, and is reconstituted as a rising tritone at the very end, from bar 56. (Its appearance in this form also suggests a fleeting connection by retrograde with a motive heard in the piano headmotif, marked M1 on the analysis, which tightens the structure further.) At a more local level, other points of stability are evident. G*b*/F# is an important referent at the beginning of the work; it is established as a piano pedal through much of verse 1 and is prominent in the voice part at the end of the first verse and the beginning of the third. In verse 3 itself, where the chromaticism seems to meander, internal phrase repetition gives much-needed definition: the four-bar pattern in the piano during bars 27-30 is based on two bars of whole-tone sonorities plus two bars of fifth-based sequence which is then repeated a minor third lower in bars 31-33. Furthermore, the meandering chromaticism of the left-hand piano line in bars 27-30 contains a disguised recurrence of the singer's initial declamation in bars 5-9: the intervallic integrity of the line is maintained quite strictly. The repeat of this phrase in bars 31-33 is foreshortened, however, and the phrase is elided into a cadential pattern in bars 34-35 (clearly recognisable due to the bass motion, despite the surrounding whole-tone materials). This cadence, prepared for the arrival of F major, doesn't resolve immediately, but is delayed until bar 40. In the gap between preparation and resolution (bars 36-39), Debussy elicits a slight sense of convergence with the return of the piano melody from bar 19, a reminiscence of the sonorities in the headmotif (the seventh chords marked with an asterisk in Fig. 4.2), and a descent in the voice part of almost an octave (bars 37-8) which recalls the opening shape of the previous verse (bar 26).

'ÉVENTAIL' from Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé

verse 1

vocal line transferred to piano l.h.

verse 2

W-T contrat

verse 3

W-T vocal line

WHOLE-TONE COLLECTION

(E7)

M1

verse 4

rising melodic motif

harmonic resolution

W-T

Pure PENTATONIC

verse 5

WHOLE-TONE

WHOLE-TONE

rising motif + whole-tone saturation

M1 retrograde

W-T

W-T contrat

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The kind of spatial and textural separation of contrasting scale-types heard in the cadential preparation at bars 34-35 - a simultaneous deployment of a diatonic bass, whole-tone inner voice and pentatonic melody - is evident throughout the song and used to shape slight nuances in the music according to the text or desired point of expression. Verse 4, for example, is the crux of the poem, during which the distraction of the allusive imagery is swept away and the poet poses a (relatively) direct question. Debussy picks up on the sweetness of sensation evoked by Mallarmé here, and the pentatonicism of the vocal line previously heard in the cadential preparation is given rare licence to flow melodically and is finally joined by the harmony in the piano accompaniment (bars 40-43):

Sens-tu le paradis farouche	Do you sense the fierce paradise
Ainsi qu'un rire enseveli	Like a buried laugh
Se couler du coin de ta bouche	Flow from the corner of your mouth
Au fond de l'unanime pli!	Deep into the unanimous fold!

[The fan is held closed (the folds in "unanimity") with its tip at the corner of Geneviève's mouth, 'a typically coquettish girlish gesture'.[25]]

The complete voice-and-piano harmonic complex achieves a rare stillness by slowing the harmonic rhythm and alighting on a point of tonal rest for four bars; in a gesture which recalls Debussy's earlier structural strategies, bar 40 marks the point of Golden Section for the entire song. But this momentary respite is swept away by the return of the headmotif at bar 47, leading into the fifth and most enigmatic of all the verses, made distinctive primarily due to Mallarmé's intense imagery of colour.

Le sceptre des visages roses	The sceptre of pink shores
Stagnants sur les soirs d'or, ce l'est,	Stagnant on golden evenings, this it is,
Ce blanc vol fermé que tu poses	This closed white wing you place
Contre le feu d'un bracelet.	Against the fire of a bracelet.

['The implication of *sceptre* is that this privileged maiden is nature's Princess', Cohn suggests.[26] Perhaps if *Soupir* was addressed to Debussy's Muse and *Placet futile* written as a playful tribute to Emma, *Éventail* was set with Chouchou in mind?]

[25] Translation and commentary from Cohn, *Toward the Poems of Mallarmé*, 115.
[26] *Ibid.*, 115-116.

Bars 50-58 are harmonically rootless since the chromatic voice line is underpinned with whole-tone chords, recalling earlier points of disorientation. The only point of definition here comes from the phrase repetition in the piano at bars 50/54. The song comes to rest on an E minor triad with added seventh, but at no stage does this feel inevitable or even prepared structurally. The pitch structure of the final few bars undoubtedly centre on E, but incorporates a five-note whole-tone pattern which retains the sense of unprepared conclusion right through to the end (see Fig. 4.2). The whole-tone/diatonic polarity is never resolved, which seems to reflect Michaud's conclusion that

> the poem closes in on itself. Its white and shuttered flight keeps its secret in its unanimous fold: an ideal site, a mysterious rosy paradise, reposing on golden evenings of inspiration as a folded fan rests against the sparkle of a bracelet.[27]

The 'open' nature of Debussy's music, leaving so many diverse elements frankly unconnected and ignoring the range of potential for working out ideas, can be rationalised in various ways. Perhaps the most obvious way is via the two principal thematic ideas which run throughout the work, the unifying headmotif and the rising fifths first heard at bars 19-20, as shown in Fig. 4.2. Alternatively, the whole piece could be understood as being shaped by an intervallic musical process in which the opening tritone G*b*-C, re-emphasised in bars 12-13, is set against the melodic fifth of bars 17-24; subsequently, verse 3 plays out the interaction between tritone and fifth, seemingly coming to rest on the pentatonically-situated fifth at bars 40-43, but ultimately displaced by the whole-tone tritone relations which dominate the final verse. Or the song could be heard in terms of the seventh chords which dominate the vertical sonorities in the song, most obviously as the re-ordered dominant seventh chords in bars 2 to 3 (marked with asterisks in Figure 4.2). These return in the piano part throughout bars 13-18, arrive in relatively pure E7 form at bar 24 and for the cadence in bars 34-35, and return to their original re-ordered state in bars 36-38 and 42-43 before recurring finally at the last hearing of the headmotif in bar 48.

But none of these interpretations explains the conclusion of the work, and it would be foolish to try to rationalise a piece which resists concrete interpretative strategies. The result is a song which can be heard in several different ways, but the complexity of each perspective requires that the separate interpretations remain relatively distinct: it would be stretching aural comprehension to its limits to expect a listener to trace the three intersecting but

[27] Michaud, *Mallarmé*, 112.

contrasting forces of organisation - thematic recurrence, intervallic design and vertical sonority - simultaneously. Thus the tendency noted in Debussy's *Préludes* towards increasing terseness in thematic materials and restriction of working out which allows an extravagant proliferation of diversity, is here given additional and radical inspiration by the unique and anti-systematic constructions of Mallarmé. The song also stands in sharp contrast to its predecessor *Jeux*, in which there is one relatively clear route, based on motivic development and sonorous-harmonic associations, by which Debussy lays his musical argument before the listener. The small scale of each song and the ambiguous semantic input provided by the text means that the music for the Mallarmé poems does not have to accommodate the listener's need for narrative coherence as closely as it had needed to in *Jeux*. Perhaps surprisingly, given their ostensibly high-modern credentials, congruent sensibility and close proximity, these two works are very distinct in idiom: the miniature is pushed to extremes of fragmentation while the organisational rationale behind the orchestral work is made much clearer, in spite of its greater textural complexity and more ambitious scale.

VI

Debussy's new idiom?

Although the Stravinsky-inspired tonal and formal polarities help to distinguish the clarity and hard-edged syntax of the Mallarmé settings from much of Debussy's other music, the songs are still encompassed by a post-Baudelairean aesthetic which held that

> Music translates in its own way and uses means which are proper to it. In music, just as in painting and even in the written word, which is nevertheless the most positive of the arts, there is always a lacuna which is filled in by the listener's imagination.[28]

Debussy's Mallarmé settings are particularly interesting because they are produced by an interaction between older aesthetics and the beginnings of a 'new idiom'. In all three songs, it is clear that Debussy develops new ways of responding to the enigmatic allusions and often fanciful tangents which enrich and mystify Mallarmé's poetry without returning to the soft, 'impressionistic' haze often associated (however thoughtlessly) with his earlier songs. Crucially, this re-working of the symbolist ideal is brought about by the evocation of ambiguity through formal rather than textural means.

[28] Charles Baudelaire, 'Richard Wagner and Tannhäuser in Paris', in *The painter of modern life and other essays*, 113-114.

At first, such an assertion might seem surprising. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 reveal that Debussy made great efforts to ensure his structures were tightly integrated: an A*b* pedal sounds in at least one voice for more than half the total length of *Soupir*, while in all three songs a headmotif of sorts appears at the same pitch, twice in *Soupir*, thrice in *Éventail* and no fewer than seven times in *Placet*. His use of literal rather than continually-varied repetition of motifs appears to be part of a broader strategy to define clear points of structural articulation, to distinguish his new music both from his earlier works and from the vague meanderings of second-rate *Debussyste* imitations. 'Let us purify our music...', Debussy had asserted.[29] Moreover, by returning so often to a central pitch axis he establishes a hitherto unexplored clarity of harmonic structure. Such features hardly seem to reflect the allusiveness of Mallarmé's poetry. But such factors are undermined by the prodigious diversity of musical ideas in these short songs. The proliferation of barely-related materials creates tension between the forces of integration and dissociation, part of a destabilising element embodied within the formal rationale of each song in order to evoke an appropriate complexity for Mallarmé's obscure texts. Furthermore, by establishing a strong pitch centre Debussy offers himself the opportunity to juxtapose seemingly-unrelated vertical sonorities suddenly without eliciting total bewilderment; almost paradoxically, the technique permits a rich spectrum of interpretative strategies to be opened up. In other words, his 'new' harmonic complexity is not the extravagant decadence normally associated with *fin-de-siècle* music, but a crystallisation of harmonic structure within which unpredictable digressions can be easily controlled - even if control mechanisms like the *litanie* are rooted in his earlier compositional practice.

Debussy's settings therefore display a complex dialectic, supporting a range of fluid, open-ended commentaries on the poetry while simultaneously exhibiting a rigorous structure brought about through an intricate attention to detail. His ability to gauge this seemingly paradoxical balance between free association and strict compositional control defines the novelty and accomplishment of these songs. With hindsight we can see that these qualities mark an important point of transition in Debussy's idiom, since they foreshadow the tension between structural tautness and the apparent 'improvisatory' nature of expression that characterises the two 1915 sonatas. Yet although the war-time works build on all his achievements to a certain extent, including some of the features of the Mallarmé settings, Debussy did not pursue the highly attenuated syntax and complex dissonances of the songs any further. As I will explain in subsequent chapters, when his 'new idiom' finally appeared

[29] Claude Debussy, SIM 1 November 1913, in *M. Croche*, pp. 241-242 [cited earlier].

in 1915 it blossomed in different ways, for very interesting reasons. The very nature of being 'in transition' to nowhere means that the Mallarmé settings do not fully represent Debussy's 'new idiom'. Essentially, they are the product of a language in crisis.

* * *

Chapter 5

L'automne des idées

Voilà que j'ai touché l'automne des idées,
Et qu'il faut employer la pelle et les râteaux
Pour rassembler à neuf les terres inondées
Où l'on creuse des trous grands comme des tombeaux.

Et qui sait si les fleurs nouvelles que je rêve
Trouveront dans ce sol lavé comme une grève
Le mystique aliment qui ferait leur vigueur?

Baudelaire, *L'Ennemi*

Baudelaire's portrayal of autumnal decline resonates unhappily with the collapse which early commentators saw in the music of Debussy's last years. Camille Saint-Saëns, hostile to Debussy's music ever since *Pelléas*, felt that the new piano pieces *Noir et blanc* [*sic*] were 'unbelievable [...] atrocities fit to stand next to cubist paintings'.[1] Even generally sympathetic critics such as Ernest Newman, Nadia Boulanger and G.M. Gatti, writing shortly after Debussy's death, argued that the composer's artistic and intellectual interests had become increasingly narrow during the war years. Newman, for example, spoke of a 'lamentable restriction of resource, not the expansion we are familiar with in the later styles of men of genius'.[2] Today, although Debussy's last works are evaluated with a more generous understanding, there is still a sense that his last years were beset by great physical and artistic struggles and that his output became highly uneven. Although it seems unduly wishful (or evangelical) to ignore the tragic trajectory of illness and decline that assailed Debussy so relentlessly in his last years, in this chapter I will contend that the works of 1915 reflected a sudden blossoming of inspiration which resulted in precisely the expansion that Newman found to be missing in the composer's expressive range and technique.

I will also argue that the complexity of Debussy's creative/psychological life during 1915 needs to be drawn in as broad a context as possible. The changes perceivable in his work from this period have often been accounted for solely in terms of extra-musical pressures,

[1] Camille Saint-Saëns to Gabriel Fauré, letter of 27 December 1915; translation (modified) from J. Barrie Jones (ed.), *Gabriel Fauré: a Life in Letters* (London: Batsford, 1989), 166.
[2] Ernest Newman, 'The Development of Debussy', *The Musical Times*, 1 May 1918, 199. See also G.M. Gatti, 'The piano works of Claude Debussy', *The Musical Quarterly* 7 (1921), 418-460, and Nadia Boulanger, 'Lectures on Modern Music: Debussy: The Préludes', *The Rice Institute Pamphlet*, XIII (April, 1926), 153-177.

such as the war and his illness. In this enquiry I am keen to open up other factors underlying Debussy's conscious attempt to modernise his idiom, with special attention to the notion of how his music relates to the new, unquestionably 'modernist' developments propagated so influentially by Stravinsky.

I

Emergence from crisis

The last weeks of 1913 and the first half of 1914 were taken up with tours to Russia (1-16 December), Rome (18-23 February), Holland (26 February - 2 March) and Brussels (April). Although tours were lucrative, Debussy found them exhausting and resented the fact that they distracted him from composition and took him away from Emma and Chouchou.[3] He toyed with music for the ballet *No-ja-li*, but managed to produce very little.[4] On his return to Paris in May he set about re-working his incidental music for Pierre Louys's *Chansons de Bilitis* (originally written in 1901) into a suite for piano, the *Six épigraphes antiques*.[5] His work was continually constrained by tiredness, however: on 14 July Robert Godet received a letter from a Debussy in distress:

> For a long time now - might as well confess it! - I've been losing ground, I feel frightfully diminished! Ah, where is the magician in me you loved? There's nothing left but a morose tumbler who will shortly break his back doing a final pirouette, devoid of beauty.[6]

A month later, shortly after the outbreak of war, Debussy told Durand that composing was 'almost impossible', and on 21 September he reported that he 'hadn't written a note for two months, nor touched the piano'.[7] Thus the situation was to remain until the following summer. The protracted period of silence was evidently painful: by New Year's Day 1915 he had only managed to produce the *Berceuse héroïque* for a wartime charity, and admitted to Godet miserably that:

---

[3] Letters and cards to Emma and Chouchou were sent daily during each tour: see Pasteur Vallery-Radot (ed.), *Lettres de Claude Debussy à sa femme Emma* (Paris: Flammarion, 1957), 99-145.

[4] Only a few sketches survive. See the commentaries by Robert Orledge, 'Debussy's second English Ballet: *Le Palais du Silence*, or *No-ja-li*', *Current Musicology* 22 (1976), 73-87, and *Debussy and the Theatre*, 186-205.

[5] *Lettres de Debussy à son éditeur*, 122. Debussy eventually managed to complete two versions of the *Six Epigraphes*, for piano solo and piano duet. Durand published both in 1915.

[6] Translation from Margaret Cobb, *The Poetic Debussy*, 239, who suggests that the last line is a reference to the last stanza of Banville's poem *Le Saut du tremplin*.

[7] Letters of 18 August and 21 September in *Lettres de Debussy à son éditeur*, 125, 126 [my translation].

> As for music, I confess that for months I no longer knew what it was; the familiar sound of the piano had become something hateful.[8]

From January 1915 onwards, Debussy turned his mind to editing the Chopin *Etudes* for Durand, and although he told Vallery-Radot that he had 'slowly' begun to write music again, there is little evidence of original composition throughout the first half of the year.[9] His mother died on 23 March, compounding a dreadful Spring. By June, Durand - presumably having given up all hope of receiving new compositions from Debussy - offered the composer a new editing opportunity, Bach's sonatas for violin and clavier. Debussy replied unexpectedly, announcing that he had started work on 'morceaux pour deux pianos et des Fêtes Galantes', adding that he felt oppressed in Paris and needed to leave.[10] Two weeks later the family departed for the seaside resort of Pourville, an excellent choice of location full of happy memories for the composer.[11] Freedom from the war-time capital together with a fortuitous respite from illness seems to have released Debussy from his prolonged period of creative difficulty, and progress on *En blanc et noir* was swift.[12] Inspiration had been momentarily regained, although Debussy seems to have known from the outset that this was only a temporary respite. As he put it when apologising to Durand for delaying the completion of his edition of the Chopin *Polonaises*, 'the Muse who is visiting me at the moment has taught me not to rely on her constancy and I'd rather hold on to her than have to run after her'.[13]

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[8] Translation from Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 294-295.
[9] Pasteur Vallery-Radot, *Tel était Claude Debussy* (Paris: René Juillard, 1958), 140. Debussy's editing can be traced in letters to Durand of 27 January, 24 February, and 7 March in *Lettres de Debussy à son éditeur*, 130-133; the February letter is translated in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 296.
[10] Letter to Durand of 30 June 1915, in *Lettres de Debussy à son éditeur*, 134. *Fêtes galantes*, a ballet (with voices) inspired by Verlaine, never came to fruition. See Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre*, 206-216.
[11] Debussy had eloped with Emma to Pourville in July 1904; see the photos in Lesure (ed.), *Claude Debussy: Iconographie musicale*, 96-99. For a biographical commentary on the months spent at Pourville in 1915, see Dietschy, *A Portrait of Claude Debussy*, 177-8.
[12] Letters of 7, 14, 16 and 22 July, in *Lettres de Debussy à son éditeur*, 135-140.
[13] Letter to Durand of 5 August, in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 298-299.

II

War, modernism and Stravinsky: the second movement of *En blanc et noir*

The Durand letters are invaluable for the Pourville period, since they allow us to trace Debussy's revival through his regular reports of music started, re-worked or completed. From the information contained in the letters, we know that he thought the second piece of *En blanc et noir* was the most successful of the three and that he revised it several times before sending his publisher the final version. The letters also reveal the programmatic rationale, without which the sudden juxtapositions of dark and light and the pounding, utterly anti-*Debussyste* articulation seem perplexing. Léon Vallas was unequivocal on the centrality of this programme: 'The middle piece of the series is war music. Everything points to this: its inscription, its dedication, its musical contents'.[14] Debussy's intention is indeed quite clear: the inscription is from *Ballade contre les ennemis de la France* (attributed to Villon) and the dedication is to Lieutenant Jacques Charlot, Durand's nephew, who was killed in action on 3 March 1915.[15] Evidently, the war element is of paramount significance for any interpretation of the second movement of *En blanc et noir*. But the very *raison d'être* of this piece means that the 'intra-musical' issues of stylistic change are inextricably linked with the wider socio-cultural content. Although we are well aware that the war encouraged the crystallisation of Debussy's deep-rooted adherence to French values, it is important to question whether the powerful extra-musical subjectivity in *En blanc et noir* marks a new stage in Debussy's engagement with modernism.

WAR MUSIC

Debussy's relationship with modernism is ambiguous. Consider, for example, Robert Morgan's suggestion that a modernist means of expression is brought about when a crisis in musical language accompanies a 'profound change in human consciousness'.[16] On the one hand, Debussy stands well apart from his European contemporaries. *En blanc et noir* is the product of a distinctively French aesthetic of understatement far removed from the neurotic, expressionist explorations of German modernism. Any perceivable 'crisis in musical language' in *En blanc et noir* is no more pronounced than in the three Mallarmé settings; in fact, Debussy's representation of the French-German battle in which he sets the *Marseillaise* against *Ein' feste Burg* is unusually literal and certainly does not reflect a crisis-ridden turn to

[14] Vallas, *Debussy: His Life and Works*, 256.
[15] Charlot was also the dedicatee of the 'Prélude' from Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1917).
[16] Robert P. Morgan, 'Secret languages: the roots of musical modernism', *Critical Inquiry* 10/3 (March 1984), 444.

abstraction. Nor can there be any sense that this work was a significant part of the modernist revolution, since it had minimal impact at the time of publication and languished in obscurity until after the Second World War. Yet on the other hand, if we avoid comparing Debussy in 'Zeitgeist' fashion with works such as *Erwartung* and evaluate his music within the confines of his own expressive world, it is clear that he stretched all the resources at his disposal to create novel means of expressing his anger at the war and to vent his frustration at being unable to take part. After all, none of his French contemporaries had turned to 'modernist' compositional strategies in order to create an artistic portrayal of the human condition, even by 1915. *En blanc et noir* is undeniably innovative and *does* reflect a change of consciousness in its use of musical form and syntax, if only to an extent limited by Debussy's distaste for the heart-on-sleeve aesthetics of contemporary German music.

To uncover the precise nature of Debussy's change of consciousness, 'external' pressures in the form of nationalism have to be related to the 'internal' demands of stylistic development. It is clear that Debussy wanted to express sentiments that he had never attempted before: his nationalist impulses resulted in war-time music of unprecedented aggression for which heightened effects of musical expression were required. Familiar idioms were replaced with untested new alternatives. But where could models (non-Germanic, obviously) be found for this kind of writing? Stravinsky is the obvious candidate. Debussy himself had already acknowledged that the Russian had 'enlarged the boundaries of the permissible in sound', transforming the available range of resources and setting a powerful precedent for violent and disturbing music.[17] The bold, harsh textures and stratified polarities of Stravinsky's works set a clear precedent for Debussy's 'war music'.

STRAVINSKY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

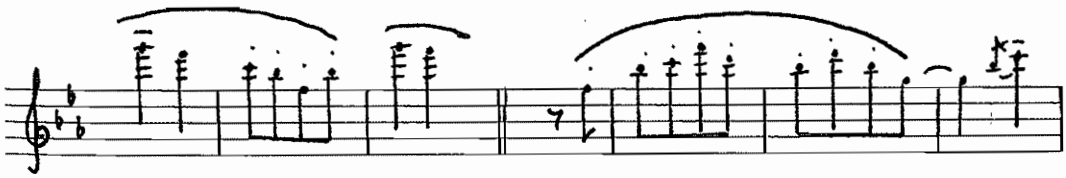
Nowhere is Stravinsky's precedent more obvious than in Debussy's incorporation of the Lutheran chorale *Ein' fest Burg* in the second movement of *En blanc et noir*. Debussy's setting has little in common with his utilisation of folk materials in recent compositions such as *Ibéria, Gigues* and *Rondes de Printemps*. No longer does the melody provide a source for a host of motivic variations; instead, it is broken up into short, recognisable fragments and superimposed onto a tonally remote texture: a daring dismemberment of the mighty fortress. The resulting dissonance is due to Debussy's stratification technique, in which a strongly diatonic melody is underpinned by chords with different harmonic implications. On the basis

[17] Debussy, letter to Stravinsky of 9 November 1913, translation from Craft/Stravinsky, *Conversations*, 52.

of the chronology mapped out in this dissertation, I suggest that the distinction between Debussy's montage techniques in *Ibéria* and *Gigues* and his treatment of the chorale in *En blanc et noir* is not part of the internal dynamics of his own stylistic development. It may be traced more convincingly to Stravinsky, and in particular to the treatment of folk melodies in *The Rite of Spring*.[18]

This assertion can be defended by reference to Figure 5.1, which presents a reduction of the central 'battle' scene in which the chorale makes its successive appearances (starting at bar 73). Debussy stratifies seven different types of material here, which I have labelled on the analysis as follows:

- **ostinato**: mechanistic ostinato textures propelled by low dissonances in the bass
- **seconds**: neurotic, rhythmically complex figures made up of seconds
- **turbulence**: running semiquaver passages, first heard swelling up and down at bar 65 before the battle
- **'La Marseillaise'**. It is not clear at first that this figure, which makes its initial appearance at bar 69 (marked 'plaintif'), alludes to the French national anthem. However, on closer examination its intervallic shape can be seen to derive by retrograde from the famous theme, a connection which is only made fully explicit after victory has been attained at bar 162-170, when the intervals are re-ordered into a more recognisable guise.[19]

'La Marseillaise', bars 69, 83, 91 and re-ordered at bar 162

[18] Debussy's radical dismemberment of the chorale here creates an interesting point of comparison with Stravinsky's more 'traditional' presentation of his Petit and Grand Chorales in sarcastically-complete four-voiced counterpoint in *Histoire du Soldat*.

[19] Jonathan Dunsby argues that 'it is not at all clear which bit of musical material here may be deemed *Marseillaise*-like'. Moreover, he reports that he delivered a paper concerning this work at the 1993 American Musicological Society Annual Meeting, after which the ensuing discussion concluded that Debussy's 'pre-Marseillaise' (see the letter of 22 July I cite overleaf, fn. 20) was not to be found at all. I would argue that the intervallic structure and (crucially) the extra-musical context prove the point; the ambiguity is simply the result of Debussy's reluctance to make the resemblance crassly obvious. See Jonathan Dunsby, 'The poetry of Debussy's *En blanc et noir*' in Craig Ayrey and Mark Everist (eds.), *Analytical Strategies and Musical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 164, footnote 28.

'The Battle' from En blanc et noir, II, bb. 73 - 129

BAR: 73 77 79 83 87 89 91 93

ostinato
seconds
turbulence
Marseillaise
Chorale
Guitare
Disintegration

BAR: 95 98 103 107 109 115 117 125 127 129

ostinato
seconds
turbulence
Marseillaise
Chorale
Guitare
Disintegration

Joyeux

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The occurrence of the Marseillaise appears to have been a critical element in the optimistic outcome Debussy intended for his music. In a letter of 22 July to Durand accompanying the completed manuscript of the first version of this movement, Debussy described the interaction between the French and German materials in unambiguous terms:

> You will note that Luther's chorale has been duly "reprimanded" for having strayed imprudently into a French-style "Caprice". Towards the end, a modest carillon sounds a pre-Marseillaise; do excuse me this anachronism, it's permissible in an age when the very cobblestones of the roads, the trees in the forests, are vibrant with unending song. I don't see things dressed in black, as you do...In my humble opinion, the Austro-Boches are firing their last arrows of rotten wood.[20]

• **The chorale**. Debussy breaks up the chorale melody, separating its constituent phrases by presenting each one as a distinct statement and interspersing it with fragments of different music. The fragmented layout of the melody can be readily viewed by tracing the chorale line through Fig. 5.1: compare with the chorale version in a contemporary Lutheran hymnbook (see attached excerpt).[21] On each occasion Debussy elides the chorale into the next phrase with inconsiderate brutality, as at bars 83, 89 and 98, opening up a discourse of oppositions with both the *Marseillaise*-derived material and the • **Fanfares** of the French army (which were initially heard at bar 7); glimpses of these fanfares foreshadow victory over the German chorale at bar 129.

• **Disintegration**. The chorale eventually comes into direct conflict with the fanfares at bars 94-97 and 103-106 as simultaneous superposition replaces successive juxtaposition. The fight is intensified at bars 109-114 as the next line of the chorale theme - still dogmatically bound in E*b* major - continues in the midst of a dramatic tritone confrontation between A*b* and D (in truly polarised, 'active' Stravinskian fashion) and again at 117-124 within a C-F# confrontation. I have described Debussy's destruction of the rhetorical battle as a moment of disintegration because he reaches a point at which the themes can jostle for position no longer: the only way to intensify the dramatic power of the music is by dissolving the contrapuntal texture into an active tritone polarity. He continues the fragmentation of the chorale theme by jumping (at bar 117) to the last line of the melody, but the end is never reached. The expected cadence at bar 125 collapses, to be replaced by a turn to pure E major at bar 129 in which the victorious French fanfares can ring out unsullied and in full.

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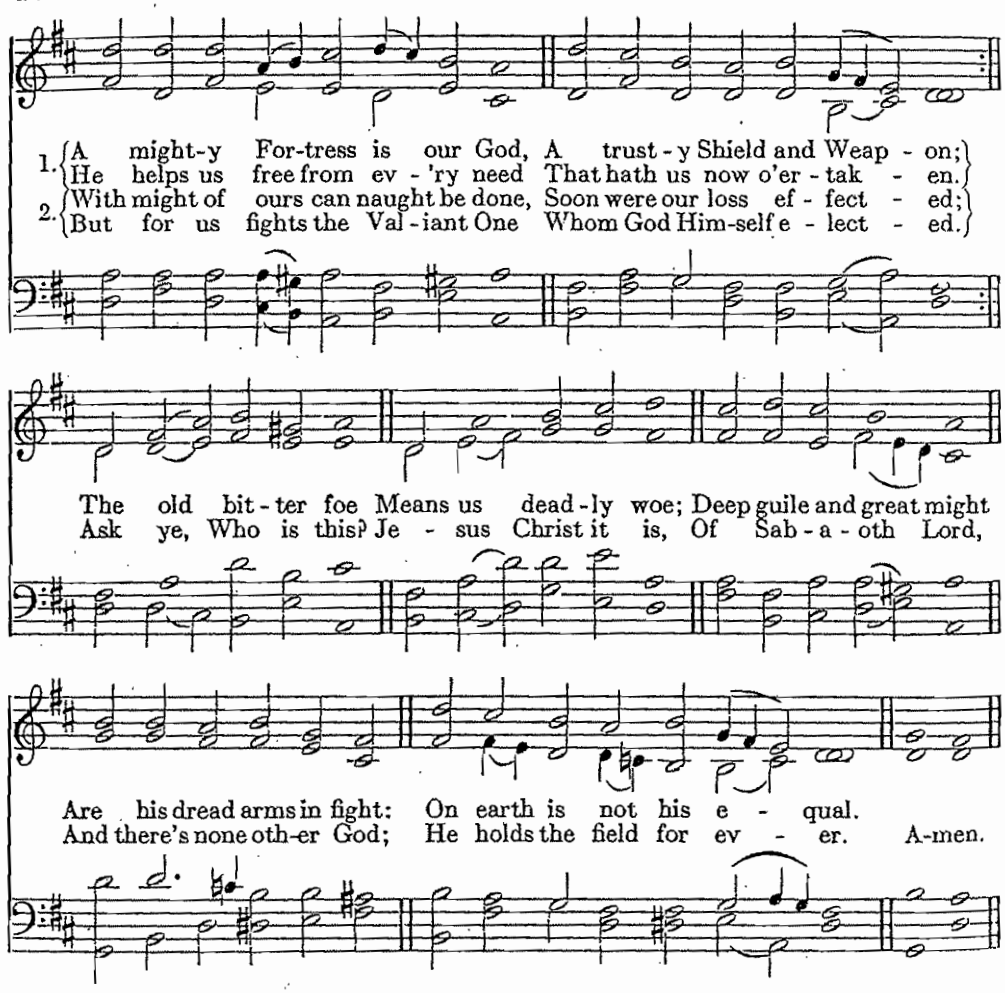
[20] Letter of 22 July, translation (slightly modified) from Cobb, *The Poetic Debussy*, 241.
[21] *The Common Service Book of the Lutheran Church* (London, 1917), 204.

The Church

195

EIN' FESTE BURG. 8 7, 8 7, 5 5 5 6, 7 — MARTIN LUTHER, 1529



3 Though devils all the world should fill,
All watching to devour us.
We tremble not, we fear no ill,
They cannot overpower us.
This world's prince may still
Scowl fierce as he will;
He can harm us none:
He's judged, the deed is done,
One little word o'erthrows him.

4 The Word they still shall let remain,
Nor any thanks have for it;
He's by our side upon the plain
With His good gifts and Spirit.
Take they then our life,
Goods, fame, child, and wife,
When their worst is done,
They yet have nothing won:
The Kingdom ours remaineth.

Martin Luther, 1529
Tr. Composite, 1866

INTERPRETATION: DEBUSSY'S FORMAL JUXTAPOSITIONS

The pounding articulation and use of low registers in the second movement of *En blanc et noir* result in a relentless heaviness unprecedented in Debussy's music. The chorale is forced to compete against a highly dissonant G-A*b* pedal and an F-G*b*-G-A*b* ostinato cluster at bars 79, 85, 94 and 103, a manner of piano writing unheard of in French piano music and indebted to Stravinsky: compare, for example, the bass clusters in the highly dissonant 'Procession of the Oldest and Wisest One' (which makes an even more extraordinary sonorous impact in the four-hand piano reduction - Debussy's primary point of access to Stravinsky's music). Very few specific associations can be drawn with *The Rite of Spring*, but the end of the Introduction to Part 1, just before the reprise of the bassoon solo, or 'The Ritual Action of the Ancestors', provide precedents for the emphatic, incessant ostinato textures Debussy uses for his war music. The chorale texture, with its preponderance of seconds and chord clusters, is equally indebted to Stravinsky's treatment of folk melodies: Debussy muddies the texture of the melody by adding parallel seconds at bars 94 and 103, making the fanfares in the upper register seem even purer. Comparison with the last half of Stravinsky's 'Augurs of Spring' is apt here, especially when the four-hand piano version is used.[22]

See accompanying extracts

Fig. 5.2 Stravinsky, 'Augurs of Spring', page 100

Fig. 5.3 Debussy, *En blanc et noir* II, bars 89-101

From the extracts, it can be seen that:

(i) Both composers treat their chosen theme with laboured articulation and create what François Gervais has described (in a different context) as 'chord melodies' - chords which move in parallel with the theme but have no harmonic function.[23]

(ii) Both composers surround the theme with three sets of static, non-developing ostinati which flesh out the register and texture, although in the outer registers Stravinsky's ostinati, being sustained across a broader canvas than Debussy's, are varied by polymetric phrasing which cuts across the underlying 2/4 metre. Debussy's ostinato phrasing, being part of an altogether shorter passage, retains a much more regular metrical sense.

[22] Page numbers (there are no bar numbers in the edition) refer to the reprint of the 1914 two-piano reduction by Editions Russes de Musique of *Igor Stravinsky: Petrushka and The Rite of Spring for Piano Four Hands or Two Pianos* (New York: Dover, 1990).

[23] François Gervais, 'La notion d'arabesque chez Debussy', *Revue musicale* 241 (1958), 14-15.

Fig. 5.2

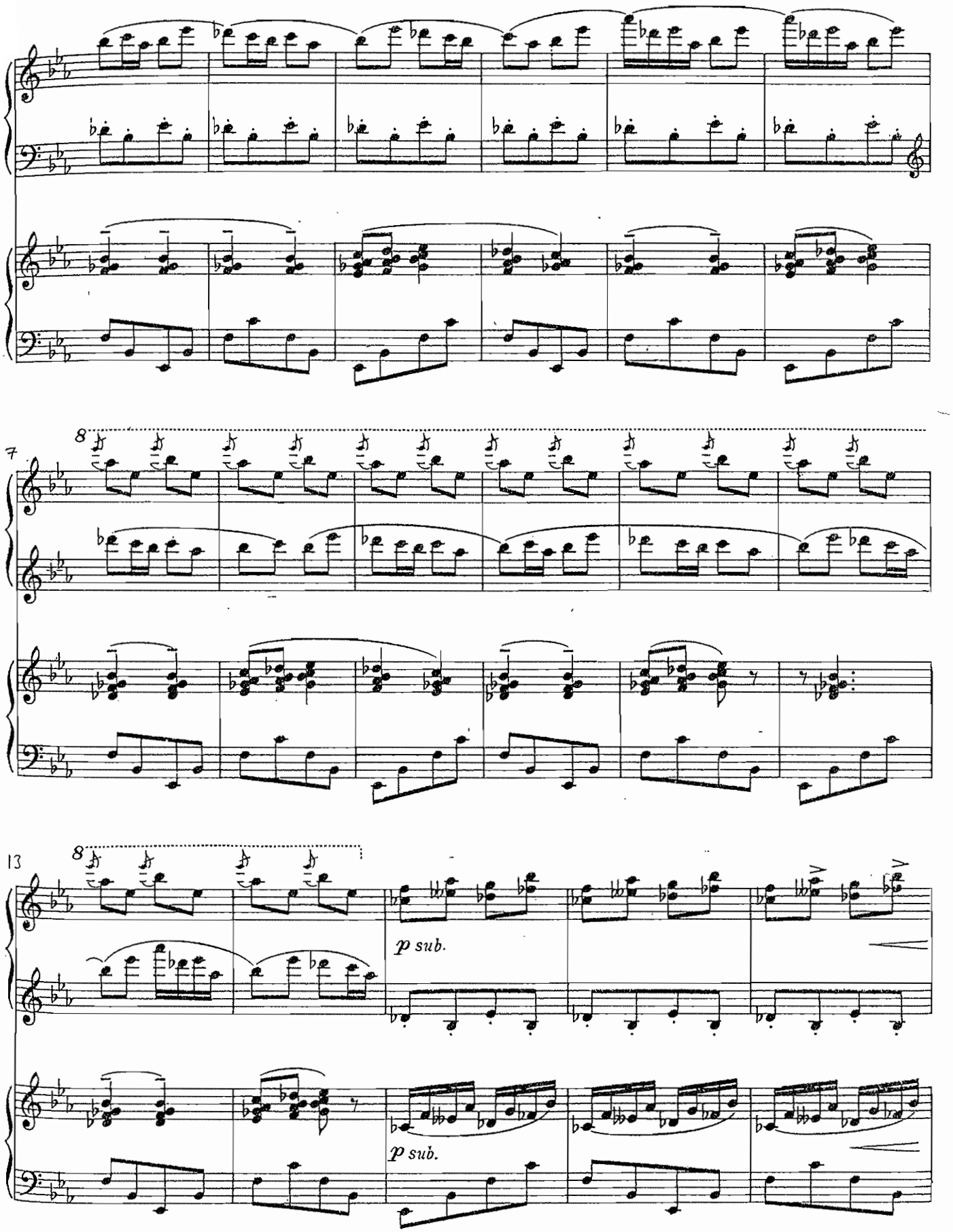
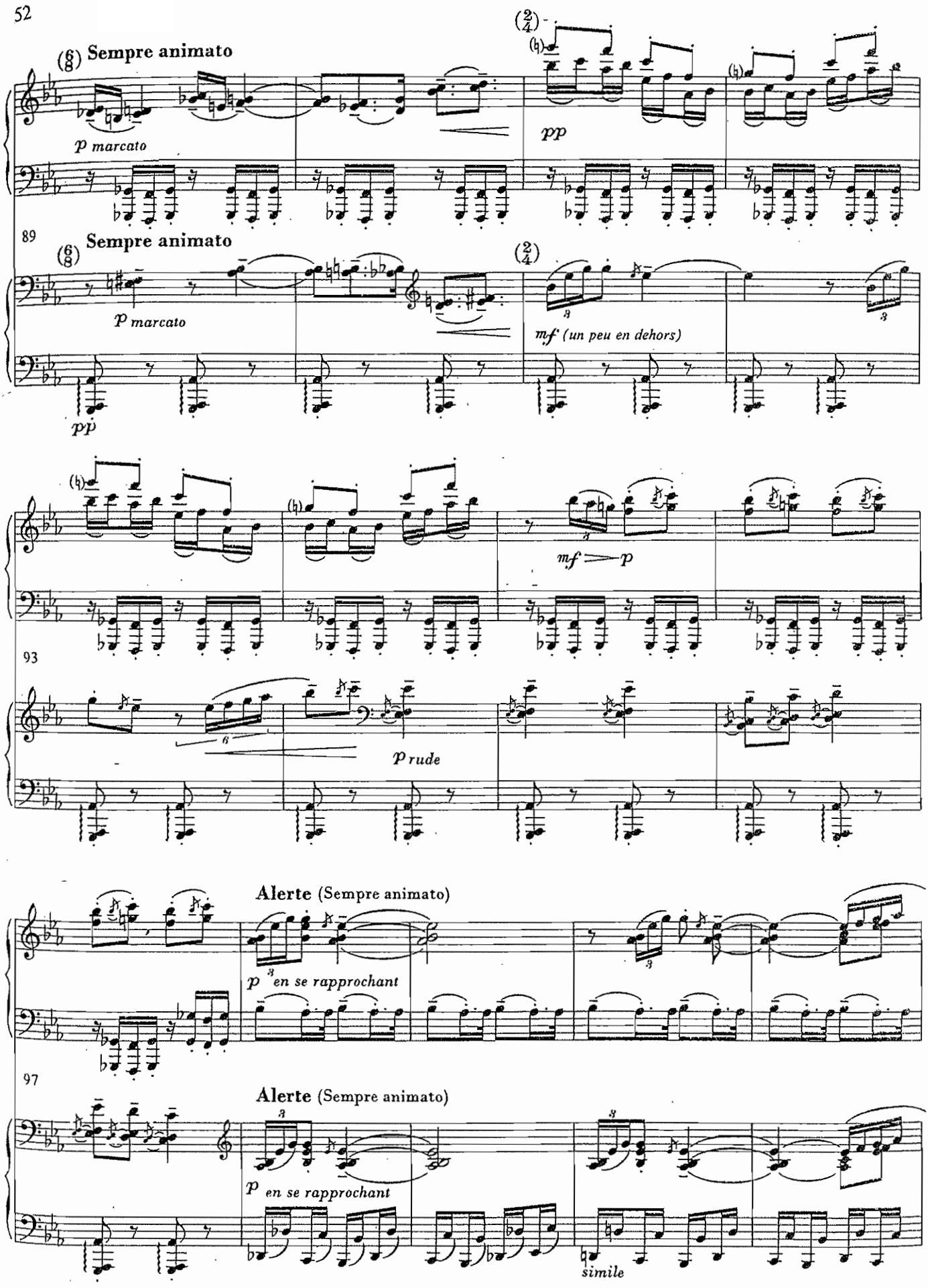



Fig. 5.3

52
(6/8) Sempre animato
p marcato
(2/4)
pp
89
(6/8) Sempre animato
p marcato
pp
(2/4)
mf (un peu en dehors)
93
mf — p
p rude
Alerte (Sempre animato)
p en se rapprochant
97
Alerte (Sempre animato)
p en se rapprochant
simile

(iii) Just as Stravinsky retains the diatonic/modal line of his melody, Debussy's chorale theme remains strictly in E*b* major throughout: in bar 112 he takes pains to include the raised leading note to the dominant (as in the original chorale), even though by this stage the defeated melody is buried in a A*b*-D tritone-based triadic opposition in which any sense of leading-note or tonal axis is left unheeded.

(iv) Sudden juxtapositions are evident in both extracts, despite the continuity of texture provided by the ostinati: a different thematic block is inserted at bar 15 in the Stravinsky extract, while Debussy switches between blocks at bars 91, 94 and 97.

The block-like structures of Fig. 5.1 bring attention to the unprecedented aggression by which Debussy juxtaposes his materials. There is no *litanie* evident here, no re-harmonisation to soften the angle of demarcation between opposing materials or smooth voice-leading to set up points of expectation across blocks as in *Ibéria*. Instead, as befits the underlying rationale of the music, the oppositions are deliberately heightened by textural and harmonic means, helped by the ostinato which accentuates the distinctions between blocks by appearing or disappearing so unpredictably at bars 83, 87, and 89. Even when the ostinato continues across the block structure, it cannot be said to set up a *litanie* because it merely establishes momentum, not a point of enharmonic connection. By shearing his texture with *complete* ruptures in order to heighten the force of their impact, Debussy differentiates his sound-complexes more clearly than in any of his previous compositions. The musical result is startlingly Stravinskian: as Adorno pointed out, Stravinsky's extension of Debussy's juxtaposition technique 'actually consists only in the severance of the connecting threads'. [24] Thus to find Debussy freeing his own juxtaposed blocks from their connecting threads is to find Stravinsky shaking Debussy loose from the conventions of his own compositional practice.

MUSICAL CINEMATOGRAPHY

Debussy's exploration of discontinuities is so brazen that Jonathan Dunsby has suggested that

> anyone who cares to make an analysis of *En blanc et noir* by analogy with film-cutting techniques in the emergence of black and white cinema can have a field day. It is entirely

[24] Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne Mitchell and Wesley Blomster (London: Sheed and Ward, 1973), 192. I quote the full passage (in the original German and in translation) near the opening of Chapter 3.

> plausible that Debussy took his conception of programme music [...] to be a cinematographic scene captured in music.[25]

Dunsby's suggestion reminds the modern scholar that cinematography was a tremendously exciting innovation in 1915, and broadens the range of possibilities influencing Debussy's juxtaposition technique. To some musicians, cinematography was perceived as the next logical step for musical form after the kinaesthetic productions of the Ballets Russes, and it seems that Debussy's own interest in film as a source of renewal for musical form seems to have been sincere. His well-known article of November 1913 is full of sardonic jibes within the context of contemporary musical politics, but it does reveal his awareness of the new possibilities:

> There remains but one way of reviving the taste for symphonic music amongst our contemporaries: to apply to pure music the technique of cinematography. It is the film - the Ariadne's thread - that will show us the way out of this disquieting labyrinth. M. Léon Moreau and Henry Février have just supplied the proof of this with great success. Those hordes of listeners who find themselves bored stiff by a performance of a Bach *Passion*, or even Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, would find themselves brought to attention of the screen were to take pity on their distress. One could even provide a film of what the composer was doing while composing the piece. How many misunderstandings would then be avoided! [26]

By embracing cinematography on these terms, Debussy actually betrays one of his older preoccupations with musical form. Although he was evidently drawn to the exciting parallels between non-linear musical surfaces and film's ability to juxtapose images, his emphasis on the fact that film maintained its own 'Ariadne's thread' shows that he still conceived of the brave new world of discontinuity on the same principles of overall coherence that he had always brought to bear on the matter of form. We recollect his praise of Musorgsky's 'mysterious thread' or his criticism of Grovlez's music, which 'didn't always succeed in

[25] Dunsby, 'The poetry of Debussy's *En blanc et noir*', 165.
[26] Debussy, *SIM*, 1 November 1913, translation from Lesure/Langham Smith, *Debussy on Music*, 298. Precisely what Debussy thought about music's relationship with cinematography is ambiguous because his writings are located within polemics containing a heavy layer of irony. François Lesure has pointed out that Debussy's acclamation of cinematography may be intended as a riposte to D'Indy, who had dismissed 'cinematographic' music as 'sensorial', music in which 'all musical form is banished, as if worn out or old'. See Vincent D'Indy, *SIM*, February 1913, quoted by Lesure in *Debussy on Music*, 261-3. For more details on the context of Debussy's interest in cinematography, see Richard Langham Smith, 'Debussy and the Art of the Cinema', *Music and Letters* LIV (January 1973), 61-70.

covering up the disparity between so many juxtaposed spots of colour', or his complaint to the conductor Gabriel Pierné that, in his performance of *Jeux*,

> I felt the various episodes lacked homogeneity! The link between them may be subtle but it exists, surely? [27]

The only difference between his preoccupation with connecting threads in *Jeux* and the war music of 1915 is one of means, not ends. The underlying principle of coherence is the same, whether the music is entwined with Nijinsky's choreography or embedded in a film-inspired narrative. Whether the second movement of *En blanc et noir* was intentionally cinematographic or not, it never loses its unifying link because the juxtapositions create the desired meaning by virtue of their very location within a *linearly*-perceived structure. Without such blatant fragmentation, there would be less conflict and hence a weaker battle narrative: paradoxically, therefore, the discontinuities hold the piece together. So although Debussy was encouraged to explore techniques of discontinuity by Stravinsky for expressive ends, even in this particular movement he avoided the radical extremes of Stravinsky's challenge to the conventional model of linear coherence in *The Rite of Spring*.[28]

There is another way in which Debussy's two-piano work establishes an unambiguous relationship with Stravinsky's music: harmony.

[27] Letter of 5 March 1914, following Pierné's performance of *Jeux* with the Colonne Orchestra on 29 February. Translation from Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 288. The point about Grovlez's music was made by Debussy in SIM 1 March 1914; this translation from Lesure/Langham Smith, *Debussy on Music*, 316.

[28] On Stravinsky's discontinuities, see two articles by Jonathan D. Kramer: 'Moment form in twentieth-century music', *The Musical Quarterly* LXIV (1978), 177-94 [his comments on the reception of Debussy and Stravinsky by the Darmstadt school on p. 189 are particularly pertinent]; and 'Discontinuity and proportion in the music of Stravinsky', in Pasler (ed.), *Confronting Stravinsky*.

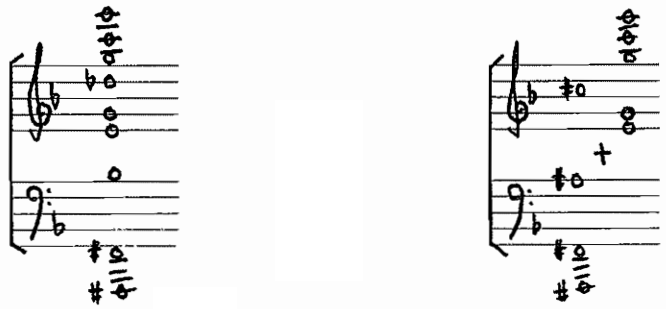
A STRAVINSKIAN DARKNESS

In Debussy's own words, the second movement of *En blanc et noir* is extremely dark. As he told Durand on 14 July, he reworked entire passages of the piece in order to make

> a slight change in the colour of the second of the Caprices; it was too profoundly black and almost as tragic as a "Caprice" by Goya!'.[29]

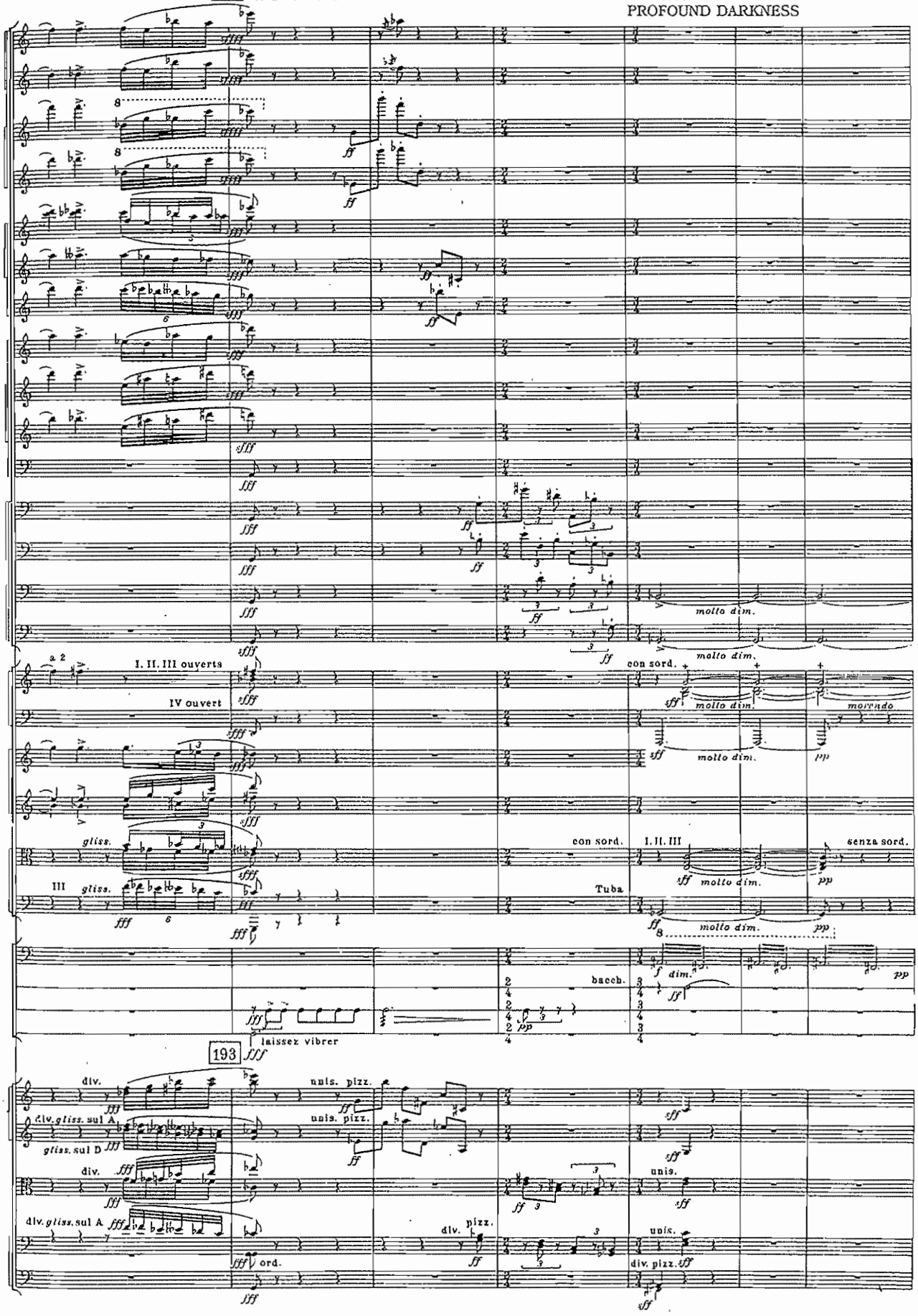
Unusually for Debussy, the darkness in this movement is expressed through novel harmonic means - particularly tritone-related triads - and rarely through utilisation of the whole-tone scale. Given that the whole-tone collection had been Debussy's lifelong point of departure for expressing darkness and morbidity, its almost total absence in the second movement of *En blanc et noir* is initially surprising. But if we try to explain this absence with reference to the Teyte interview of 1913, in which Debussy admitted how worried he was about his own music being rendered ineffective through the overuse (both by himself and by others) of its most distinctive characteristics, it seems plausible that he would have sought a more powerful replacement for the whole-tone scale. We do not have to look far, since Debussy borrows a Stravinskian technique. Consider the exact moment of 'profound darkness' in *The Firebird* after the death of Kastchei. The harmony at this critical stage of Stravinsky's ballet is a low F#-A# dyad in the timpani and bass, crowned with a blaring C major triad on brass. Compare Fig. 5.4 (an excerpt from the original 1910 score, three bars after fig. 193) with:

En blanc et noir, II, bar 5, bar 15 (and *passim.*)



Because these sonorities are more familiar as *Petrushka* chords, scholars have been misled in interpreting their occurrence in *En blanc et noir*. Jonathan Dunsby asks directly, "Is *En blanc et noir* a fantasy in white and black notes on *Petrushka*?", while Richard Taruskin describes the movement as a 'dirge for a fallen friend [...] the *Petrushka* chord [is] treated as a stable harmony to be moved, like any Debussyan consonance, in parallel, providing the harmonic

[29] Translation from Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 297.

Fig. 5.4

Picc.
Fl.
Ob.
C. ingl.
Cl. p.
Cl.
Cl. b.
Fag.
C-fag.
Cor.
I. II. III ouverts
IV ouvert
Tr-be
Tr-ni e Tuba
III
gliss.
Timp.
P-tti
Cassa
T-t.
laissez vibrer
Archi
div.
unis.
pizz.
ord.
molto dim.
con sord.
senza sord.
I. II. III
Tuba
bacch.
morendo
193

substance of the exordium'.[30] But rather than producing a fantasy or a dirge, I think that Debussy had simply been *compelled* to embrace the new resources opened up by Stravinsky's 'enlargement of the boundaries of the permissible in sound'.[31] I would argue that the whole-tone scale had been so cheapened by second-rate imitators, its emotional and connotative powers so diluted for Debussy that he had to strive for a more effective way of creating a dissonant, menacing darkness appropriate for the horrors of death during wartime. As I have suggested in other contexts, it is entirely possible in this instance that an expansion in Debussy's musical language had been brought about by Stravinsky

A CONCLUSION, BY MEANS OF A DIVERSION

Circumstantial evidence lends weight to this conclusion. In 1913, René Lenormand published a study of modern harmony, a reductive description of contemporary methods of harmonic writing in France.[32] Lenormand diligently traced (in sequential, quasi-teleological fashion) the extension of the triad to chords of the seventh and ninth, the extended use of discords, mixtures, pedal points and unresolved appoggiaturas, followed by descriptions of modal, 'Turkish' and 'Oriental' scales. He ended his text with a discussion of the whole-tone scale, noting that 'the modern school draws from the whole-tone scale curious successions of the chords of the augmented fifth', and quoted several examples from the music of Saint-Saëns, Koechlin, Bruneau and Debussy's *Pelléas*. Lenormand awarded Debussy many platitudes as the 'chief of the new school', the composer who strove 'to free himself from the laws of the older technique without having any other guide save the intuition of a new idea of beauty'. But Debussy was mortified about the entire project and sent the author gentle words of caution:

> You are sometimes ruthless in divorcing your [musical] quotations from their context, because then they lose almost all their 'curiosity value'. You should consider the untrained hands that are going to fumble their way through your book, using it only to finish off all those beautiful butterflies that are already a little bruised by analysis.[33]

[30] Dunsby, 'The poetry of Debussy's *En blanc et noir*', 153; Taruskin, *Russian Traditions*, I, 776.
[31] Debussy's own words, from a letter to Stravinsky of 9 November 1913, translation from *Conversations*, 52.
[32] René Lenormand, *Étude sur l'harmonie moderne* (Paris: Le Monde Musicale, 1913), translated by Herbert Ancliffe as *A Study of Modern Harmony* (London: Joseph Williams, 1915).
[33] Debussy, letter to Lenormand of 25 July 1912. Lenormand had asked several composers for their opinions on harmony, which were to be included in the book. Translation from Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 259-260.

Debussy's delicately cultivated sonorities were now codified into a system and exhibited like museum pieces alongside the music of *Debussystes* and (*mon Dieu*!) Saint-Saëns. What better incentive to turn away from the whole-tone scale? Stravinsky's sonorities, on the other hand, were way ahead of Lenormand. There was no 'Russian' scale listed (what we would today call octatonic), no *Petrushka* chords derived from the French sixth or examples of bitonal, superimposed triads. Stravinsky's harmonic butterflies had eluded the net, remaining fresh and unsullied. It is little wonder that Debussy turned to his young colleague with interest and respect - and a greedy appetite for new resources. Based on the evidence supplied by the second movement of *En blanc et noir*, the conclusion is irresistible: Stravinsky was responsible for a significant re-shaping of Debussy's harmonic language.

*

The central dramatic tableau of the second movement of *En blanc et noir* (what I have described as 'the battle') is framed by music of great sensitivity and emotional depth; without this frame, the ugly impact of the battle would be greatly reduced. Much of the surrounding material is extremely concentrated, part of a taut aesthetic of suppression shared with the fragile world of the 1915 sonatas. Here, as in the sonatas, the music is permeated by haunting qualities of remembrance, offering fleeting echoes of earlier works or borrowing older, more allusive symbolist tropes now detached from their original contexts. The pedal notes on C in bars 3-11, for example, evoke the funereal tolling of the pedal B*b* throughout Ravel's *Le Gibet* in *Gaspard de la nuit*.[34] Glimpses of the forthcoming fanfares of the battle are offered in bars 7-11, while crashing 'Petrushka' chords express the gravity of the impending darkness with far more pungency than whole-tone sonorities alone could supply. The contrast between the single line (bars 18 and 30) and the triadic material (24, 37) recalls two rather different portrayals of night-time in earlier works by Debussy. The single line - indeed, most of the entire edifice of the outer frame of the work - recalls the stark intensity of 'Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut' (from *Images* II), also music stripped of all ornament and softness of texture by homophonic textures, parallel chords and unison melodic lines. On the other hand, the sudden appearance of D major triads at bar 22 provide momentary respite from this unremitting evocation of ruin and desolation: the delicate spacing and register of the triads and their languid rhythmic gestures recall *Au clair de lune* (e.g. bars 15-16), a more nostalgic evocation of moonlight from a period when darkness harboured delight rather than menace.

[34] Ravel, perhaps, took this idea from the slow movement of Chopin's Piano Sonata Op. 35.

The resonances of Debussy's earlier nocturnal works are merely allusive and never concrete. But the very nature of Debussy's juxtaposition technique holds the secret of how he harnesses each image's latent power. By detaching individual elements from their original context but preserving their emotional resonances, the stratification results in a series of tensions: one layer will reflect on the tragedy with tolling bells or dissonant crashes; the next will offer hope in the form of fanfares; another recalls happier times in the past. The result is true *dépouillement*, a succession of bleak images in which the strident juxtapositions scar even the most fleeting glimpses of beauty. Debussy's juxtaposition technique makes us bitterly aware of how much has been lost or deliberately stripped away.

The fragmentation in the outer frame of the second movement turns out to be as radical as that of the central battle. Fig. 5.5 maps out bars 3-52 and 145-end in the same manner as Fig. 5.1 in order to reveal the stratification of the different materials. Unsurprisingly, the disposition of material in these parts of the piece is just as much a part of the narrative as the battle itself. The tolling bells, the chorale and the crashing 'Petrushka' chords of darkness at the beginning of the work are purged completely from the music following the battle; thus although the contemplative, brooding pre-battle mood is recalled at bar 153, fleeting images of the fanfares recur and the victorious Marseillaise makes three barely-disguised appearances.

III

Foreshadowing the turn to sonata: the first movement of *En blanc et noir*

The first movement is more problematic than the second in that there is no comparable 'hermeneutic window' onto the musical structure.[35] Although the theme of 'black and white' is common to all three movements, the expressive act in this movement is abstract: unusually for Debussy, the musical idea revolves around an intra-musical rather than an extra-musical point of departure.

Fig. 5.6 shows how the movement falls into three sections, an exposition-development (it would be foolish to try to separate them) and two recapitulations. The first recapitulation is a false reprise (being in the wrong, 'noir' key) and the second a 'real' return, in the 'blanc'

[35] The phrase is Laurence Kramer's, taken from his *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 9: 'In recognising and reflecting on an expressive act, we empower the interpretive process; we open what I [call] a hermeneutic window'.

En Blanc Et Noir, II : Stratification of musical materials framing 'the battle'

3 5 7 9 11 12 15 18

to b. 174

22 24 30 34 37 39 41 47 49 51

+ 6 bars

etc. (6 bars)

'The Battle'

bb. 53 – 14

145 149 153 157 162 171

+ 4 bars

from b. 15, now transformed

175 177 179

(+ 2 bars)

tonic of C major. My use of terminology usually associated with sonata forms is deliberate, since the structural techniques pre-empt Debussy's radical re-envisaging of 'sonata' which was evidently fermenting in his mind at this stage and would come to fruition just over a month later.

Fig. 5.6: *En blanc et noir*, structure of first movement

Exposition	A1	A2	B					
	A1			C	D			
				C		E		
	A1					E	E'	
First recap	A1			C	**B**			F
Second recap	A1	A2		C				
Codetta	A1							

This is by necessity an oversimplified diagrammatic layout. The more detailed analysis in Fig. 5.7 shows that Debussy strives to establish additional associations between the different types of material. For example:

(i) the falling sixth of A2 comes directly from the interval outlined by the first phrase in A1, which tumbles from E to G.[36]
(ii) the sudden change at bar 55, accentuated by dynamic contrast, is provided with a *litanie* since the melody rises to the D as before (bar 6), even though the harmony moves away towards B*b* and there is a change of character, *Sans rigeur*.
(iii) the end of the C material at bar 97 is worked intervallically so that the strident fourths and fifths of A2 reappear (the intervals also allude to material heard earlier, at bar 79); in turn, this material then leads smoothly into the 'new' theme E, at bar 103.
(iv) the falling sixths from bar 152, although very different in texture and rhythmic identity, are derived from the repeated falling sixths at bar 17.

At the conceptual level of 'black versus white', the movement shares a strategy with the second movement. The 'white' C major material of the opening is challenged by more

[36] For clarity, key or pitch designations remain as A, B*b*, C, whereas my labels for the different thematic materials are underlined, i.e., A2, B, C.

En Blanc et Noir : Structure of First Movement

Exposition

'False' Recapitulation

'Real' Recapitulation

b.1 A1 — b.6 — etc

b.14 A2 — etc

b.37 B — etc

b.49 A1 — b.55

b.59 C

b.73 D

b.83 C — [repeat] b.97

b.103 E

b.109 A1

b.111 E

E'

b.135 A

b.143 C

b.152 A2 — B

F

+b.158 — b.164

b.190

b.194 A1

b.207 A2

b.211 C

b.223 A1

CODETTA

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chromatic material (see, most notably, the abrupt switching between E-A-E materials at bars 103/109/111). The C major theme is reinterpreted wholly in the black at bar 135, where it reappears on C# (in tonal terms this is really the dominant of F# because of the prevalence of the flattened seventh, B natural). The black and white are brought together in the F material at bar 158, which is made up from a mixture of

- B, the scherzando material from bar 37
- an ostinato variation derived from A2 (the falling sixth pattern), now in F# [later G*b*] major
- a new fragment of material, a fanfare in C major which foreshadows the C major triadic fanfares in the second movement (bars 7-8 and *passim.*)

Between bars 156 and 194, the noir *vs.* blanc materials interact in a manner akin to the battle of the second movement, culminating in a direct confrontation between clusters of C and F# (the Stravinskian sonority *par exellence* yet again) at bars 190-193. At 193 the F# material appears to gain the upper hand, but the 'noir' is suddenly swept away by the real recapitulation in C major at 194. Then the materials appear in a re-ordered form: the B material is excluded, presumably having been defeated in the previous 'battle', and the A section is pushed directly into a variation on the C melody at bar 211.

Debussy's ability to weave associations between juxtaposed blocks by playing on resemblances in motivic shape rather than more conventional re-workings of thematic material was part of a sophisticated technique which he had used before - throughout *Jeux*, for example, as I have already demonstrated - and was to use again (a few weeks later, in the first movement of the Trio Sonata, the technique was to attain its most accomplished apotheosis in conjunction with a subtle use of the *litanie*). But the re-ordering of blocks of material as part of an established structural paradigm was a new feature in Debussy's mature music. The presence of a sonata design seems unambiguous, at least in principle: material first heard at the opening undergoes development by opposition and interaction with contrasting materials, and is eventually recapitulated in the tonic, even reappearing as a codetta. Meanwhile, the eccentric 'puppet general' element (the B material) is exorcised from the reprise.

Debussy's return to a more traditional principle seems to contradict his life-long antipathy to any composer 'engaged in listening modestly to the voice of tradition which prevents him

from hearing the voice that speaks within him'.[37] Such a polemical assertion might seem to preclude any rapprochement with older formal principles, and indeed, his apparent return to older modes of organisation has attracted critical censure and misunderstanding in equal measure.[38] Characteristically, however, Debussy was engaged in reformulation, not regression. His 'return' to the sonata almost seems to grow out of his pre-existing technique of cyclic return, evident in so many of his works, rather than appearing as a desperate strategy for maintaining formal discipline. Having accepted Stravinsky's delineation of independent blocks and taken on board the increasingly episodic nature of his writing in which the competing claims of many diverse materials were allowed to proliferate, Debussy sought *additional* means by which to integrate his structures. In other words, a radical willingness to juxtapose disparate sections, leading to fragmentation of the linear flow of the music, demanded a compensatory return to clearer points of structural articulation and the tightening of the work's overall cohesion, a rediscovery of tonal centricity and unambiguous points of repetition.

IV

... à mon ami Igor Stravinsky: the last movement of *En blanc et noir*

I have discussed how Debussy provides countermeasures designed to ensure formal stability in the first movement of *En blanc et noir* by rationalising his juxtapositions with conventional means of structural control such as recapitulation and tonal centricity. In the second movement, it was evident that his aggressive juxtaposition technique was bound to an extra-musical scenario, so the structural peculiarities of the piece were made entirely referable to an external agency. But the third movement is more perplexing than the first two because it lacks an extra-musical point of departure and does not conform to the kinds of formal expectations seen elsewhere in Debussy's late music. Structurally, the piece is one of the most fragmented that he ever composed because of the proliferation of so many diverse musical materials and the apparent absence of a clear rationale behind their disposition. Sometimes these materials recur in a readily recognisable form, and sometimes they reappear in a totally disguised way so that the associations between different parts of the movements become ambiguous, even arbitrary.

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[37] Quote from 'The Symphony', in *M. Croche the dilettante-hater* (1962 Dover reprint), 18-19.
[38] Ill-considered labels such as 'neoclassicism' in Debussy's late works are assessed in the following chapter.

An outline of the movement's structure is provided below. (My labels for the motivic groups need explanation, which will follow shortly.)

Fig. 5.8: *En blanc et noir*, structure of last movement

Chromatic flourish bar 1	Chords bar 2	Staccato material bar 3	Diatonic theme bars 7-8	'Yver' motif bars 13-15	'Firebird' theme bar 25	New material
1	2	3				
4	5	6	7-8			
	9	10	11-12	13-18		
	> 19-24 <				25-28	
					29-34	
					35-38	
					39-44	
	> 45-48 <		49-52 *new variation*			
			53-55 *new variation*			
						56-60 (from bar 1?)
						61-69 (from bar 1?)
						70-75
						76-83
RECAP			84-85			
	86	87	88-89	90-95		
				96-99 *new variation*		
						100-109 (+ fragments from 'Yver' motif)
		110-111 *new variation*				112-116
						117-120 (from b. 57?)
						121-124
					125-128	
				129-130 *new variation*		
		131-132 *new variation*				
				133-135 *in augmentation*		
		135-139 +*new chords*				
						140-141 (from 70?)
						142-143 (from bar 1?)
						144-147

Occasionally, points of structural articulation recall some of the techniques Debussy explored in his Mallarmé settings. There are several points of obvious repetition, for example - the *Firebird* theme is heard five times - and the 'diatonic' theme is recapitulated in a conventional sense in the same key. But approaching the piece in this manner does not prove to be particularly enlightening. Fig. 5.8 shows that the ostensible 'recapitulation' occurs very early (bar 84), after which the music continues to proliferate into new variations, making it

very hard to schematise the music in a traditional formal sense. But although this in itself is not rare in Debussy, it is equally difficult to produce a graph demonstrating a process of endless variation. Unusually, Debussy's 'new variations' elicit materials which do not seem to be linked to music heard elsewhere in the movement except by the most intangible motivic or pitch-class derivations, or by loose associations established through congruent textures. An attempt to connect some of these variations to the 'source' materials is provided in Fig. 5.9.

The fact that it proves so difficult to accommodate all the new material within an overall scheme suggests that the analytical method might be striving too hard to find the kind of musical processes found in Debussy's other music, and confirms an intuitive sense that this piece is rather unusual. Debussy is unquestionably at his most experimental in this movement. He sets up structural and tonal expectations, only to subvert or abandon them: so, for example, although the diatonic theme appears at the same pitch each time it recurs, this is only just sufficient to suggest an F major tonal axis for the work. Even at the end, when we might expect (given the precedents set by Debussy's other music) a sense of culmination, there appears to be no motivic working or tonal resolution to integrate the whole. In the last three pages (from the final *Au Mouvement*, bar 121), the thematic materials are still delineated independently: the *Firebird* theme recurs (bars 125 -128), followed by an incipit derived from what I will call the 'Yver' motif of bar 13 (bars 129-130), a variation on the oscillating semitones of bar 3 (bar 131), the return of the original diatonic melody from bar 7 in augmented note values (bars 133-135) and then a sudden incursion of the staccato material from the very opening underneath an odd series of juxtaposed triads. Then a plain fifth over a D pedal appears (bars 140-141) followed by a few octatonic flourishes, and the movement comes to a close on an augmented triad (plus seventh) - more like a hiatus than a conclusive tonal ending, despite the prolongation of the pedal on D. So what is Debussy's structural plan? Where is the rigor and control we see in most of his other late works?

One answer might be provided by the fact that several inter-textual references are to be found in the piece, which open up the possibility that the music is not as abstract as it might at first seem. First, of course, there is a well-known allusion to the theme from the end of Stravinsky's *Firebird*, which initially appears at bar 25. The homage, reflected in the dedication *à mon ami Igor Stravinsky*, seems to be somewhat light-hearted, although the melody is put through decidedly unprepossessing chromatic and rhythmic distortions.

'EN BLANC ET NOIR', III

CHROMATIC

ascending

descending

CHORDS

STACCATO

DIATONIC THEME

'VUER'

'FIREBIRD'

b.1

b.2

b.3

b.7

b.13

b.25

b.70

b.19

b.53

etc.

b.76

RECAP. b.84

etc.

b.96

b.110

b.125

b.129

b.133

b.135

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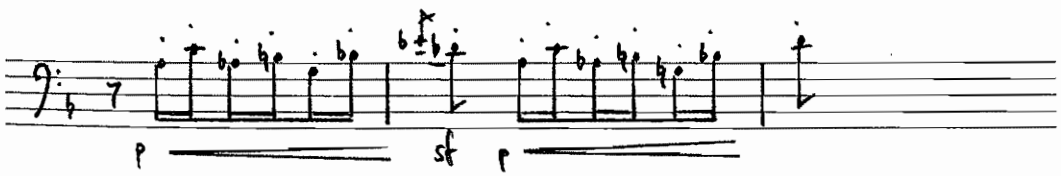
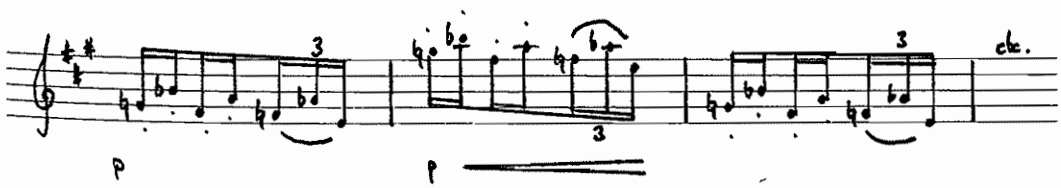
Jonathan Dunsby has identified additional, self-reflexive, quotations.[39] Taking his cue from Debussy's inscription 'Yver, vous n'este qu'un villain', Dunsby ingeniously suggests a connection with Debussy's setting of these words in the third of his *Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orléans* (1898, published 1908). In that song, there is a particularly memorable moment when the voices enter in imitation on a motif based around an ascending minor third to the words 'Mais vous, Yver' (bars 34-36). Dunsby tenuously postulates that the similar rising third at bar 13 in the third movement of *En blanc et noir* is, if not exactly a quote, a point of inter-textual reference. In addition, Dunsby draws attention to the fact that the figuration of bars 23-34 resembles 'Le vent dans la plaine' from the first book of *Préludes*. From here, it is a short extension to hear the sweeter diatonic passages as a deliberate contrast to the bleaker images of winter (and war).

Such connections are entirely plausible - a musical allusion to the Charles d'Orléans settings helps to explain Debussy's inscription, while the 'winter wind' can be readily accepted as part of Debussy's substantial artillery of extra-musical allusions. But where do the allusions stop? To my mind, for example, the descending chromatic figure first heard at bar 15 is exactly the same as the figure which features so prominently in the main dance theme of *Jeux* (bar 53 and *passim*).

En blanc et noir III, bars 15-16

Jeux, bar 63-69, woodwind



The musical connection is quite striking - even the articulation is the same. But it seems meaningless - why *Jeux*? Is the allusion intended to have any meaning, or is the resemblance purely coincidental?

[39] Dunsby, 'The poetry of Debussy's *En blanc et noir*'.

As I struggled to comprehend Debussy's strategy for this movement, I became convinced that Saint-Saëns was closer than he probably intended when he likened *En blanc et noir* to Cubist painting. If we try to explain Debussy's music with recourse to familiar points of reference - structural repetition, tonal or pitch centricity, motivic working - the movement remains ambiguous. But what if Debussy's enigmatic allusions to the *Chansons de Charles d'Orléans*, the *Préludes*, *Jeux*, *Firebird*, *Petrushka*, *The Rite*, were all deliberately Cubist in the sense of a formalist structure made up of whatever litter or debris happened to come to mind? To the extent that the listener is presented with several successive, disparate appearances of a series of individual images, Debussy's music seems to offer rich parallels with the unstable and disconcerting complexity of Cubist pictures. Unlike *Ibéria*, in which Debussy continually keeps casting new light on his themes in order to evoke *réalités* sustained by a poetic rationale, the chopping and changing in *En blanc et noir* III is far more arbitrary, continually frustrating the expected logic of the movement. *En blanc et noir* seems radical even when compared with the obscure syntactical complexity of the 1913 Mallarmé settings.

Some of the changes in Debussy's aesthetics between 1910 and 1915 reflect changes in the artistic world at large, particularly those innovations that had been mediated through Stravinsky's music. Despite the fact that Debussy and Stravinsky embodied different attitudes and were separated by an unbridgeable generation gap, they shared a wide-ranging interest in non-musical matters: Benois reported that, in the early Paris years, Stravinsky was 'deeply interested in painting, architecture, and sculpture. Although he had no grounding in these subjects, discussion with him was very valuable to us, for he "reacted" to everything for which we lived.'[40] Neither composer would have remained unaware of the strong parallels being drawn between Cubist painting and Stravinsky's music. Maurice Touchard, for example, in his 1913 review of *The Rite*, had asked categorically:

> Has Stravinsky given in to a tendency [...] to call attention to himself through harmonic excesses, through a kind of musical *cubism*?'.[41]

[40] Alexandre Benois, *Reminiscences of the Russian Ballet*, trans. Mary Britnieva (London: Putnam, 1941), 302.
[41] Maurice Touchard, 'Ballets russes et français', *La Nouvelle Revue*, 8 (1 July 1913), 116-125, quoted by Glenn Watkins, *Pyramids at the Louvre*, 233.

By 1915 Cubism was already well established and highly fashionable; Glenn Watkins has pointed out that 'in the early teens Cubism was perceived not only as avant-garde but as *the* quintessential artistic discovery of a new age'.[42] Several high profile exhibitions had been held, and the theoretical tract by Gleizes and Metzinger, *Du Cubisme,* had been published in 1912. Interestingly, the two artists argued in their tract that although Impressionism had run its course, its logical successor was Cubism because

> no energy can set itself in opposition to the general impulse on which it is based. We must not consider Impressionism as a false departure [...] The only difference between the Impressionists and ourselves is a difference of intensity, and we do not wish it to be otherwise.[43]

The parallels with Stravinsky, who had taken Debussy's novel formal techniques and stretched them to new extremes of intensity, are striking. Moreover, in words that echo Debussy's polemics against orthodox form, the authors questioned the nature of 'the integration of the plastic consciousness', noting that 'to discern a form is to discern a pre-existing idea, an act that no one, save the man we call an artist, can accomplish without external assistance'.[44] The way was thus open for all arts to break away from established preconceptions, reformulating the relationship between artistic structures and what they were attempting to express or represent. In common with many superficially plausible parallels between the visual arts and music, however, Cubism provides a problematic set of analogies, not least how a truly 'Cubist' approach can be distinguished from the techniques of montage already in play by 1910. As I have demonstrated, Debussy had already created multiple spatial perspectives on a single theme through techniques of montage, stratification and developing variation in his music for *Ibéria*; how, then, might a Cubist approach be identified as a *new* compositional strategy?

A helpful distinction is provided by Roger Shattuck, who drew attention to the fact that the juxtapositions of true Cubism - what Apollinaire dubbed the abruptness of *surprise* - differed from earlier 'arts of transition' when two elements were set together without a connective.[45] Consequently, Mallarmé's multi-layered juxtapositions in *Un coup de dés* are not properly

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[42] Watkins, *Pyramids at the Louvre*, 259.
[43] Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, *Du Cubisme* (Paris, 1912), anon. Eng. transl. as *Cubism* (London, 1913), 14.
[44] Gleizes and Metzinger, *Cubism*, 48, 22.
[45] Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Arts in France, 1885-1918* (London: Faber, 1955), 256-262.

Cubist because the train of discursive thought is never lost: the poem works in a linear sense as well as on other levels of understanding promoted by the typographical layout.[46] Thus the 'Cubist' credentials of Debussy's wilful dismemberment of the Lutheran chorale *Ein' feste Burg* in the second movement of *En blanc et noir* are ultimately undermined by the linearity of the narrative underpinning his juxtapositions. But the unpredictable switching and fleeting, enigmatic images of the third movement are far more akin to Stravinsky's radical episodic challenges to conventional musical coherence. Compare, for example, the initial aural impression of Debussy's music with Glenn Watkins's conclusion that *The Rite of Spring*

> [...] exhibited an interest in the manipulation and reduction of ingredients to their essence - involving in this instance the technically adroit use of metrical dislocation and polytonal juxtaposition of diatonic scraps fragmented from Russian folktunes. Unlike the melodies in *Petrushka*, however, these were now so partial or reconstituted that Stravinsky in later years was able to deny their origins altogether. In their fleeting resemblance to familiar material as well as in their incompleteness Stravinsky promoted a direct analogy with the collage assemblages of the Cubists; and in his flagrant shearing of prior definitions of musical space and time, he proclaimed a new and joltingly ambiguous terrain demonstrably akin to the reassessment of the visual plane.[47]

Were Debussy's enigmatic and fleeting allusions in *En blanc et noir* part of a comparable strategy? If so, Debussy and Stravinsky were competing head-to-head once again at the most experimental cutting edge of musical composition. In the third movement of *En blanc et noir*, there is evidence for the first time that Debussy renounced his lifelong cultivation of a post-Baudelaire aesthetic, rejecting the richly-suggestive *realités* of Baudelaire's modernism in favour of the hard, unyielding modernism of the twentieth-century. It is surely appropriate that he dedicated his most experimental music to Stravinsky.

V

Conclusion

By this stage, of course, Debussy was barely in the running. Stravinsky was already working on *Les Noces* - raw, radical and powerful - whereas Debussy chose to make subsequent departures in a manner more characteristic of the rest of his *oeuvre*. Rather than pursuing the

[46] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (1895). For a translation of both preface and poem, see Caws, *Mallarmé: Selected Poetry and Prose*, 103-127. Apollinaire himself, of course, also strove for great freedom in typography and syntax.
[47] Watkins, *Pyramids at the Louvre*, 234. I have benefited greatly from chapter 10 of *Pyramids*, 'Stravinsky and the Cubists', pp. 229-274.

episodic skittishness of his *En blanc et noir* finale, Debussy returned to the techniques of his earlier years with exquisite originality. In the three late sonatas his lifelong concern with 'Ariadne's thread' is revisited: the *litanie* returns, and the novel experiment with sonata paradigms undertaken in the first movement of *En blanc et noir* becomes central to his approach.

In 1915, as in earlier years, Debussy and Stravinsky were brought together by their interest in comparable technical innovations but ultimately separated by their different backgrounds and sensibilities. To take a clumsy but illuminating contemporary comparison, Stravinsky was to Debussy what Picasso was to Braque. The sheer violence and energy of the outsiders - Picasso and Stravinsky - distinguish them from Debussy and Braque, inheritors of the reflective and intellectual French tradition. As Braque 'explored landscape and still life as a means to pictorial rather than emotive ends', [48] Debussy returned to the French traditions, seeking respite from the war and from chaos through a return to an engagement with pure sonority and fleeting images of the pastoral - a return exemplified by the stark contrasts in the second movement of *En blanc et noir*.

* * *

[48] Robert Rosenblum, *Cubism and Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1966, 2/1976), 13-107. Comparing the Debussy of *En blanc et noir* with Braque is certainly more effective than with late Monet.

Chapter 6

'Re-learning about music'

I

Introduction

En blanc et noir could be seen as an extension of Debussy's earlier concerns with an aesthetic of *réalités*. This is particularly true of the extraordinary literalism of parts of the second movement. Yet although I have taken great pains in this dissertation to stress the continuity across Debussy's *oeuvre*, my conclusions from *En blanc et noir* suggest that 1915 heralded several new departures. The 'battle' scenario of the second movement is unusual when considered in the light of Debussy's earlier music, since the allusive, suggestive means of expression so distinctive even in his most *réalités*-oriented moments is displaced by a programmatic structure of unprecedented transparency. Ambiguity is precisely *not* the point, which forces this movement into a category of its own.

The outer movements of *En blanc et noir* feature two major points of departure which presage the music composed later in 1915. Debussy's renewed concern for clear formal structures, as reflected in his veiled appropriation of the sonata principle in the first movement, is one crucial departure; the other is the remarkable freedom of his juxtaposition technique, most evident in the final movement. It is normally a symptom of biased historiography to speak of a piece of music as being 'in transition', but I believe that these contrasting tendencies in *En blanc et noir* represent Debussy's first attempts at opening up the tension between fantasy and form that is so characteristic of the late sonatas. While *En blanc et noir* emphasises clarity of form in the first movement and free juxtaposition in the third, the form-fantasy tension in the sonatas is cultivated *within* individual movements. In Chapter 7 I will discuss the precise mechanisms by which Debussy maintained this dichotomy in his sonatas, and explore the musical and cultural reasons why his music exhibits these qualities at this particular stage in his development. In this chapter, however, I will explore the *Études*, which also embody an exploration of the balance between form and freedom within individual movements. [1] Debussy had found his new idiom, and was able to take it in several different directions.

[1] The *Études* were written before Debussy embarked on the sonatas, but largely after the completion of *En blanc et noir* (written between 4 June - 20 July). Claude Helffer suggests that the *Études* were written between 23 July and 29 September. See his introduction to the new edition of the *Études* in *Debussy: Oeuvres Complètes*, Série 1 vol. 6, xv - xvii. Helffer's conclusions are based on notes

FORM AND SENSATION

The *Études* have long been held up as models of 'pure sonority': Alfred Cortot spoke of Debussy's 'gamut of pianistic sensations, all the more striking and original because the suggestion of a literary idea no longer comes in to explain or attenuate their novelty'.[2] But few commentators have emphasised the extent to which this freedom comes hand-in-hand with a new concern for clarity of large-scale structure. Many of the *Études* exhibit ternary structures, suggesting that Debussy became increasingly concerned with the principle of return in the manner of the first movement of *En blanc et noir*. This is particularly noticeable in studies II, IV, V, VI, VIII, XI and XII. In addition, familiar Debussy techniques for cultivating 'diversity within unity' re-appear, having been displaced by more experimental motivic working in the Mallarmé settings, and by straightforward leitmotif technique in *La boîte à joujoux*. The 'endless variation' motivic working so characteristic of his earlier works is much in evidence in studies I, III, VII, IX, and X.

Thus the *Études* reflect Debussy's concern for holistic integration simultaneously alongside his willingness to juxtapose contrasting thematic or harmonic materials in close proximity - bar by bar in places. Harmony is perhaps the most striking feature, as Debussy himself recognised in a letter sent to Inghelbrecht following the completion of the *Études*:

> The reason I haven't written before is that I'm re-learning about music [...] The emotional satisfaction one gets from putting the right chord in the right place can't be equalled in any of the other arts. Forgive me. I sound as if I've just discovered music. But, in all humility, that's rather what I feel like.[3]

Debussy's emphasis on his ability to 'put the right chord in the right place' reminds us that his concern for readily comprehensible formal structures is inseparable from his desire for a new clarity of harmonic structure. Rather than using the whole-tone or other tritone-segmented scales, Debussy's harmony becomes much more triadic, emphasising points of tonal definition very strongly while simultaneously pointing up the extent of tonal digressions through juxtaposition. Instead of mediating carefully between different scale types, the harmony takes on a far more delineated sense of 'discourse' in which triads or finger patterns

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Debussy made on his copy of 'The Novel Lover's Calendar for 1915' (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale: Music Department, W. 54).

[2] Cortot, *The piano music of Claude Debussy*, 23.

[3] Letter of 30 September 1915, in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 302. The remark about 'putting the right chord in the right place' was obviously not a passing phrase: it was also sent, word-for-word, to Bernardo Molinari in a letter of the following week (6 October, trans. in *ibid.*, 303).

representing totally different keys are set against one another. The boldness with which this is done - the sudden twist into unexpected harmonic regions - reflects the element of fantasy, but the underlying centricity of a single tonal axis is so strong that Richard Parks has managed to produce a series of structural reductions for each of the *Études* at the middleground and *Ursatz* levels. [4] Although one might rebuff such analysis with Debussy's sardonic comment of 1915 that 'we're still in the age of "harmonic progressions" and people who are happy just with beauty of sound are hard to find', it is symptomatic of Debussy's new desire for tonal clarity - at least at the holistic level - that such an activity can be undertaken at all.[5]

In some respects, the special nature of the *Études* arises from their very *raison d'être*. The whole point about a study is that there is a single form- or texture-giving element which unifies the entire piece, a pianistic point of departure which inevitably has an effect on the musical substance of the work, be it a sequence of thirds or a pattern of opposing sonorities. Just as Debussy sought a classical discipline in the sonatas, therefore, the notion of an *Étude* provided him with a constraint within which his daring juxtaposition technique and free enjoyment of 'the beauty of sound' could be controlled. The reasons why these constraints became so important to Debussy are explored fully in the next chapter with respect to his nationalist, anti-*Debussyste* and 'anti-anarchic' concerns in the sonatas. The absence of such discussion here does not deny the pertinence of these factors for Debussy's concern for formal clarity in the *Études*, but 'extra-musical' concerns are far more prominent in the sonatas. Consequently, the following discussion will reflect what I consider to be the crucial element of the *Études* - Debussy's focus on purely musical issues of form, technique and expression. Though I am personally convinced that the later *Études* harbour extra-musical war-time resonances, I can find little incontrovertible evidence to help defend this interpretation and therefore prefer to defer this part of the discussion to the next chapter.

[4] Richard Parks, 'Organizational Procedures in Debussy's *Douze Études*' (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1973).
[5] Debussy, letter to Molinari of 6 October 1915, from Pourville. Trans. in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 303.

II

The *Études*: Sources

DEBUSSY AND CHOPIN

The obvious stimulus for the *Études* is provided by Chopin, since Debussy undertook a great deal of editing work on Chopin's piano music for Durand during the first half of 1915.[6] Chopin was clearly an attractive figure for Debussy at this stage in his career because his work embodied a distinctly non-German quality which had already been assimilated by the French traditions via Fauré, Franck and Saint-Saëns. His music had contributed to the French tradition as a stimulus and was not remotely akin to the nineteenth-century 'Austro-German miasma' which Debussy had found to be 'spreading over so much of French art'.[7] Chopin also seems to have elicited a *personal* response from Debussy: like Bach, Chopin offered Debussy a model of the balance he was trying to strike between fantasy and discipline in his attempt to formulate a new idiom.[8] As Debussy stated in the preface to his edition of Chopin's *Valses*:

> If [Chopin's] formal freedom has fooled his critics, we nonetheless must recognise the degree to which everything is in its place and carefully organised.[9]

Chopin prefigures Debussy in many ways.[10] For example, he was an influential pioneer in the use of pure modal harmony - consider the *religioso* section from bar 89 in the *Nocturne* Op. 15/3 - and his subtle use of variation technique shares an affinity with Debussy's endlessly developing motivic streams. More significant, perhaps, was his replacement of older notions of synthesis and formal reconciliation with music based around what Anthony Newcombe has called (in a different context) a 'plot archetype' - music ultimately rooted in the denouement of a dramatic struggle in which the formulaic applications of conventional

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[6] During the war, Durand commissioned editions of music embargoed by the war with Germany. Saint-Saëns worked on Mozart, Fauré took on Schumann and Debussy chose Bach and Chopin. The political motivations behind Durand's war-time project are reinforced by a small detail: on the inside back cover of Debussy's 1915 edition of Chopin's *Nocturnes*, there is a notice advertising other publications from the firm of Durand. The text of the advert is presented in five languages, French, English, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese. German is conspicuous by its absence. See F. Chopin, ed. Claude Debussy, *Oeuvres complètes pour le piano: Nocturnes* (Paris: Durand, 1915) [Durand no. 9704].

[7] Debussy, letter to Stravinsky, 24 October 1915, in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 308.

[8] Debussy did not complete his edition of Bach's 6 sonatas for violin and clavecin and 3 sonatas for piano and cello until 1917 (published by Durand in 1923).

[9] Debussy, preface to F. Chopin, *Oeuvres complètes pour le piano* (Paris, 1915), *Valses*, ii. This translation from Roy Howat, 'Chopin's influence on the *fin-de-siècle* and beyond', in Jim Samson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), 260.

[10] For other connections between Debussy and Chopin, see Howat, 'Chopin's influence on the *fin-de-siècle*', 246-283; also see Marie-Cécile Barras, 'La présence de Chopin dans la musique de piano de Debussy', *Cahiers Debussy* 20 (1996), 41-60.

structural designs have little part to play. A magnificent example of this is the interplay between the waltz, nocturne and barcarolle genres in the fourth *Ballade*, foreshadowing the eclecticism and originality of Debussy's forms with their widely divergent sources of inspiration.

When their *Études* are directly compared, the similarities between the two composers become far closer. Each piece is based around the working-out of a singe pattern or motif; just as in Chopin's Op. 10 and Op. 25 sets, Debussy writes individual movements which focus on a single idea, providing a constraining discipline on the possible patterns of invention.

In 1918, Robert Godet suggested the following comparisons:[11]

Pattern of invention	**Chopin,** *Études*	**Debussy,** *Études*
Five fingers	Op. 10/4	I
Running thirds	Op. 25/6	II
Sixths	Op. 25/8	IV
Octaves	Op. 25/9, 10	V
Chromatic writing	Op. 10/2	VII
Broken chord figurations	Op. 25/1	XI
Chords	Op. 10/11	XII

Debussy was pleased to announce that '*pour les degrés chromatiques* gets something new out of this rather tired idea',[12] but admitted that certain ideas were used up faster than others, reporting to Durand that the first six studies to be written

> are almost *en mouvement*; rest assured, there will be some calmer ones! I began with these because they are the hardest to write and vary... - the best combinations of the idea get used up quickly.[13]

[11] Table adapted from 'Chopin-Debussy par Robert Godet', ed. François Lesure, *Cahiers Debussy*, old series no. 3 (1976), 11-13.
[12] Debussy to Durand, 12 August 1915, *Lettres de Debussy à son Éditeur*, 145 [my translation]. Lockspeiser misattributes this comment to 'Pour les agréments' in *Debussy: Life and Mind*, II, 212.
[13] 'Si j'ai commencé par elles, c'est que ce sont les plus difficiles à écrire et á varier... - le parti-pris *obligé* use vite les plus adroites combinaisons'. Debussy to Durand, 28 August 1915, *Lettres de Debussy à son Éditeur*, 148 [my translation]. Different trans. in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 300.

Not all the movements take a conventional pedagogic point of departure. Neither an *Étude* in fourths nor a study for 'opposed sonorities' was in Chopin's thematic/figurative vocabulary, but Debussy delighted in the opportunities for sonorous invention opened up by these ideas. Debussy's only perceivable debt to Chopin in such movements is a shared, open-minded approach to experimental writing, which reinforces the fact that detailed points of similarity between the two composers can quickly become contrived; the most pertinent comparison is one of *ethos*. As Roy Howat has noted, 'the avoidance of surface similarity makes them [Debussy's *Études*] appear all the more a creative response to Chopin'.[14] It is well known that Chopin differed from his predecessors of the early nineteenth century such as Reicha, Cramer, Clementi, Czerny and Moscheles by treating the technical problem of each *Étude* as a point of departure for the discovery of new inventions rather than as an end in itself.[15] In using the Étude as a genre for experimentation, therefore, Chopin not only provided a model for Debussy's set, but offered a true source of inspiration in the best sense of the word - a liberating precedent for novel departures.

Nevertheless, Debussy was at pains to point out to Durand that 'these *Études* conceal a rigorous technique under their flowery harmony (*sic*)',[16] and that 'you will notice that the patience of a monk is evident in the handwriting - not to mention the music, which did not come to me by my listening to the song of the pebbles shifted by the sea'.[17] Debussy was unusually proud of the intellectual and creative efforts which went into his *Études*, and evidently wanted to draw attention to this rigor. Perhaps he foresaw attitudes that proved so fatal to the reception of his late works in the inter-war period, like Jean-Aubry's suggestion in the very year of Debussy's death:

> In his last works, in the piano *Études*, in the *Sonate pour violoncelle*, we no longer discover those qualities of sensitiveness which lend a charm to the major portion of his works; yet we must remember that the malady which was fated to carry off Claude Debussy when he had no more than reached his fiftieth year, no longer allowed him to exercise the self-control which had always been a hall-mark of his art.[18]

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[14] Howat, 'Chopin's influence on the *fin-de-siècle* and beyond', 266.
[15] For further details see Simon Finlow, 'The twenty-seven etudes and their antecedents', in Samson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, 50-77.
[16] 'Ces "Etudes" dissimulent une rigoureuse technique sous des fleurs d'harmonie (sic)'. 'Debussy to Durand, 12 August 1915, *Lettres de Debussy à son Éditeur*, 145 [my translation].
[17] 'A le lire, vous verrez la patience de bénédictine qu'en représente le graphique, sans parler de la musique, qui n'est pas venue en écoutant la chanson des galets remués par la mer.' Debussy to Durand, 19 August 1915, *Lettres de Debussy à son Éditeur*, 143-147 [my translation].
[18] G. Jean-Aubry, 'Claude Debussy', trans. Frederick Martens in *The Musical Quarterly* IV/4 (October 1918), 552.

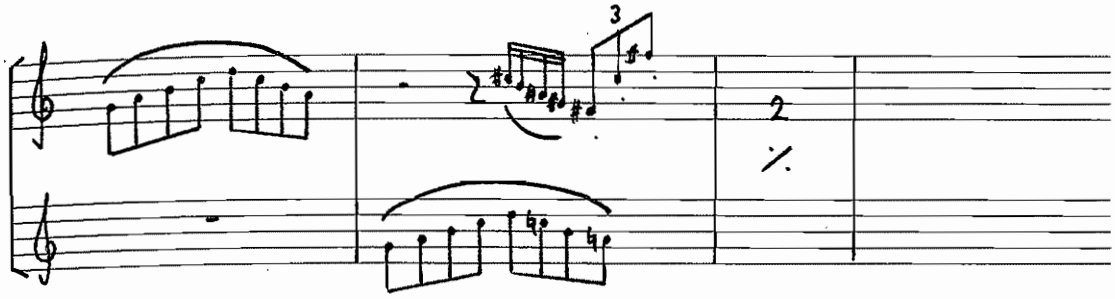
OTHER SOURCES

It is known from his letters that Debussy had difficulty deciding whether to dedicate his *Études* to Chopin or Couperin: 'I have the greatest respect for the two masters, such admirable "diviners",' he wrote to Durand on 19 August.[19] Unlike Debussy's late sonatas, however, the *Études* betray little influence of French classicism: Chopin is their principal locus.[20] Yet shadows from other composers also fall across the genre. By including the inscription *après M. Czerny* for the first *Étude*, Debussy situated his set in a long tradition of didactic works. Claude Helffer draws particular attention to the use of C major figurations to open Bach's *Das Wohltemperierte Clavier, Inventions, Sinfonies*, Chopin's Op. 10 and Op. 25 sets, Liszt's *Études Transcendentes*, as well as Debussy's own 'Dr. Gradus ad Parnassum' from *Children's Corner*.[21]

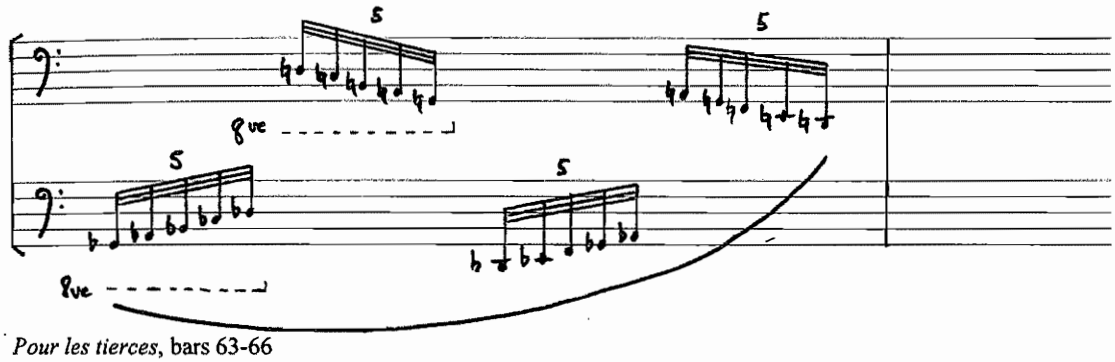
It is rather puzzling that Debussy chose to embark on a set of twelve studies - a true 'monument' for his work-list - given that he had consistently evaded historically weighty genres throughout his life. He was especially concerned that having set himself alongside Chopin, 'my contemporaries will not fail to compare us to my disadvantage'. [22] It is possible that he wanted to write a series of monuments while the Muse was 'still visiting', to seize the moment and write a set of works to put alongside the two books of *Images* and *Préludes*. Perhaps, in the light of his intention also to complete a set of six sonatas, the new lease of life he found at Pourville gave him unprecedented confidence to lock horns with giants from the past in a manner that he had not dared to do so openly in previous years. Indeed, it may be that the very process of engaging with Chopin (and, in the sonatas, French classicism) helped Debussy to turn away from away from his crisis over Stravinsky's modernism and to recapture the impetus for further development on his own terms. One of the most interesting features of the *Études* is that Stravinsky's influence on Debussy's piano writing is extended no further than in the second book of *Préludes*. The same flashes of black-and-white writing are evident, but there is no evidence of assimilation of newer developments. Consider, for example:

[19] Letter to Durand, 19 August 1915, in *Lettres de Debussy à son Éditeur*, 146 [my translation].
[20] Scholars have proposed various connections and resemblances between the *Études* and music by other French composers: see Roy Howat, 'Chabrier "par" Debussy', *Cahiers Debussy* 19 (1995), 79-91, and José Eduardo Martins, 'La technique pianistique et les doigtés dans les *Études*', *Cahiers Debussy* 19 (1995), 53-68.
[21] Helffer, *ibid.*, xviii.
[22] Letter to Durand of 28 August 1915, in *Lettres de Debussy à son Éditeur*, 148 [my translation].

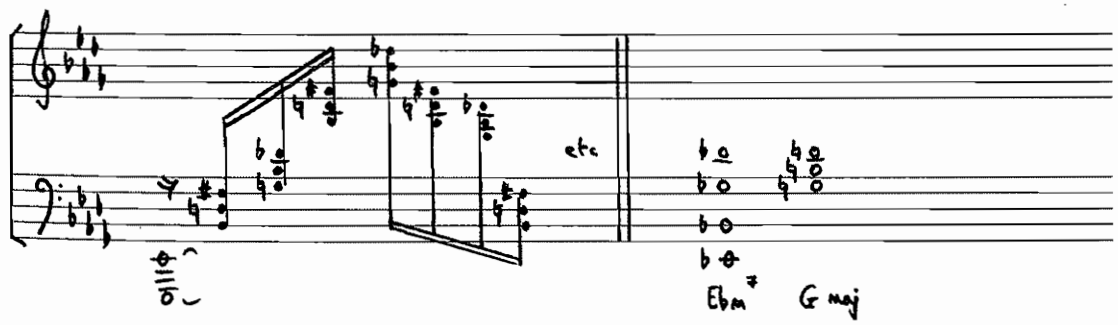
Pour les "cinq doigts", bars 11-14



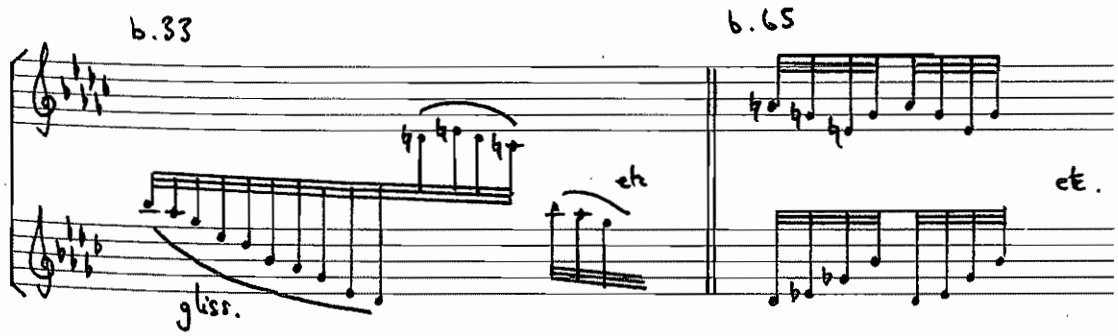
Pour les "cinq doigts", bars 90-96 e.g. b.91



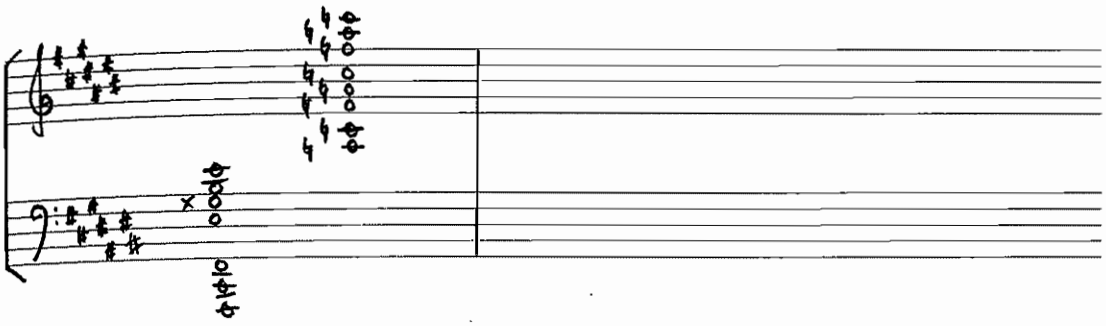
Pour les tierces, bars 63-66
explicit bitonality used with unflinching articulation:



Pour les huit doights: permeated by hand-over-hand black vs. white juxtapositions, but see esp. bars 33-41 and 60-66:



Pour les sonorités opposées: Stravinskian sense of 'polarity' throughout, most explicitly at bars 53-55:



Although these sorts of comparisons reveal Debussy's indebtedness to Stravinsky's piano writing, the *Études* betray the lingering effects of *Petrushka* rather than any of Stravinsky's newer works. Debussy seems to have taken nothing beyond what I have already observed in the second book of *Préludes* and *En blanc et noir*. In other words, the 'Stravinskian influence' on the *Études* suggested by the resemblances cited above was now three years old; moreover, in the interim period the surface characteristics of black-and-white writing had become so deeply assimilated into Debussy's idiom that it would be mindless to pursue an independent vein of Stravinskian influence in the *Études*.

The same is not quite true of Debussy's juxtaposition technique in the *Études*, which might at first seem tied to his earlier engagement with Stravinskian polarities. In fact, the *Études* represent a considerable departure: take *Pour les cinq doigts*, for example. Superficially, a familiar scenario *en blanc et noir* emerges. White-note C major material is unquestionably the tonal focus, and the crux of the musical argument is a dramatic black *vs*. white battle (bars 90-96, just before the final theme appears at bar 97.) But on a more local scale, Debussy's juxtaposition technique reveals a series of dialogues in which successive blocks are freed from their 'conventional' responsibilities to their adjacent neighbours, allowing them to stand independently in a truly stratified fashion or to interact in a non-linear manner:

- At the opening, six bars of the 'five-finger' figure material, which I will label A (*Sagement*, bb. 1-6, 11-16) enter into dialogue with *Animé* material (bb. 7-10, 17-27). The sub-metre of each block is also distinct, alternating 4/4 with 6/16.
- Bar 28: B theme prefigured, which flourishes fully at bar 35
- Bar 48: new section, C, 'en noir' (key signature changes to seven flats)
- Bar 56: C now 'en blanc' (no key signature: F#s and G pedal: effectively a long dominant preparation for the arrival onto C at bar 67)
- Bar 65: works in material first heard at bar 24, leading to

• Bar 67: confirmation of C major and return of B in variation, but soon interrupted (bar 72) by 'five-finger' figure derived from A.

• Bar 75: Ostinato ensues, underpinning new scherzando material, but A keeps breaking in with juxtapositions (bars 79, 83, 85). From 85 the A material is woven into a continual ostinato, culminating in intense five-finger confrontation on a black *vs.* white basis between 91-96.

• Bar 97: Final theme emerges, based on the 'victorious' A theme. Now, however, A is set in dialogue with B material (compare bar 99 with 28), invoking a now-familiar sub-metrical switch between 2/4 and 12/16:

A: 97-98	B: 99-100
A: 101-102	B: 103, extended to 110

• Coda: 111-112, juxtaposed flourish of the 'noir' material in the form of a huge D*b* major scale before final resolution onto C major at 113.

Debussy's formal processes in this movement open up several intersecting polarities: *metrical*, using the interchange between duple and triple subdivisions of each bar; *tonal*, through the black and white interchange; and *thematic*, by the juxtaposition of blocks of different material. Debussy's notation makes it clear that one or any combination of polarities can change at any time: double-bar lines are used to distinguish the important thematic blocks, and changes of key signature are used for as brief a period as two bars (e.g. 111-112). Yet rather than embracing a Stravinskian use of polarity to produce taut forms riven by antagonism, Debussy cultivates a series of polarities in order to sustain a sense of structural freedom. Unlike Stravinsky, Debussy counteracts the opposing forces by making the large-scale tonal underpinning clear, with plenty of V-I cadential patterns and none of the tension created by the 'active tritone polarities' of *Khamma*. In addition, what we might describe as the main idea of the thematic working - the principle that five-finger patterns should underpin each main theme - also contributes to the overall integration of the piece. This process is part of Debussy's familiar technique of establishing diversity in unity through motivic re-working. For example, the final theme of bar 97 is motivically derived from the scale of the very opening, but is also elevated to the status of a peroration largely due to the preceding harmonic black-and-white destabilisation.

When the works are examined in more detail, it becomes obvious that the rigor of the *Études* is part of Debussy's reaction against what he considered to be modernist anarchy. This was not just a reaction against Stravinsky, of course - there was too much 'detestable German *modernstyl*' around for that - but Stravinsky was the only modernist composer whose music

Debussy had previously respected.[23] Much more detail will be provided to back up this assertion in the next chapter; the purpose of mentioning it here is to suggest that by 1915 Stravinsky had exerted all the influence he was ever going to on Debussy. With the *Études*, the two composers' period of fruitful interaction and reciprocal exchange effectively drew to a close, and a strong sense of *reaction* against avant-garde trends becomes apparent in Debussy's music.

III

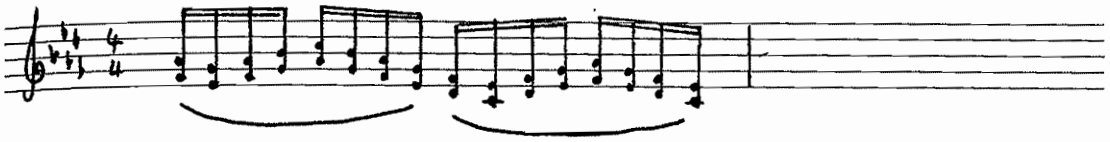
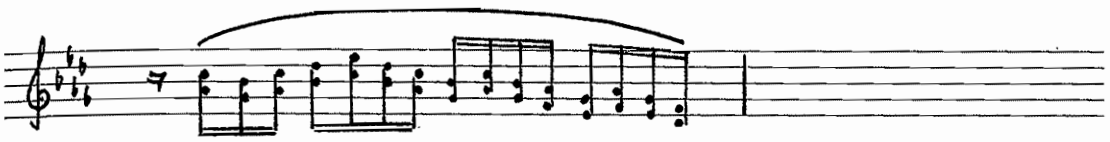
Douze Études: some points of discussion

Although a principle of continual growth also underpins *Pour les tierces*, the piece works in a slightly different way. The proliferation of new motives found in *Pour les cinq doigts* is replaced by a series of less intricate re-workings of two basic thematic types. Both themes are based on third patterns, as expected.

A	1-12
B	13-14
A'	15-58 (with new rhythmic pattern at 15 and new grouping in threes at 39)
A''	59-66
B	67-76

As Debussy admitted, the options for re-working chains of thirds are quite restricted. Consequently, the developmental processes of most interest in this movement are rhythmic and harmonic rather than motivic. It is notable, for example, that the first reprise of A at bar 15 re-harmonises the opening with a B*b* pedal, but where the opening was pervaded by A naturals, here Debussy emphasises A*b*s. Moreover, the rhythmic pattern is shifted by a semiquaver so that the melodic contour of the phrase is now different with respect to its metrical emphasis:

[23] The case of Richard Strauss is complex, since Debussy left contradictory comments on his music. Although dazzled (like so many) by Strauss's technical achievements, Debussy could obviously resist his intensely German aesthetics. Bartók is also interesting in this context, but by 1915 was only just coming into the picture for Debussy.

Pour les tierces, bar 1

Pour les tierces, bar 15

The A/A*b* inflections present throughout the piece create a tonal ambivalence between D*b* major and B*b* minor. Whether, as Parks seems to suggest, the third is *deliberately* present at all structural levels is a moot point (he finds that the *Ursatz* arpeggiates a triad).[24] I find it more interesting to note that the tonality is ambiguous rather than polarised, suggesting that while in earlier works Debussy mediated between harmonic types by chromatic inflection to it a veiled or ambiguous atmosphere, here the ambivalence is primarily present so that he keep a sense of forward motion going to counteract the potential exhaustion of the natic re-working.

A natural turns out to be the touchstone for Debussy's manipulation of this tonal ivalence. The transition passage in bars 21-24 over the tonic pedal (itself sustained ughout bars 15-27) deliberately plays on the A/A*b* indecision, and at the second reprise of opening material at bars 45 and 48 the A returns, jarring against the expected firmation of D*b* major. At bar 59 the opening material returns for its final reprise, but it is ftly swept away by an explicit point of bitonality at bars 63-66 where an augmented triad D is superimposed over an E*b* major triad. Then the B material returns (67), transformed a D-E*b* bass line which drags the tonality firmly away from D*b* major. Eventually, in spite ore disorienting tonal motion (this time via the whole-tone in bars 71-72), the music alls onto B*b* minor in the last bar - not an inevitable arrival given the extent of es towards D*b* major.

Organizational Procedures in Debussy's *Douze Études*', 114.

Pour les quartes is based on a series of linked gestures exploiting the sonorities elicited from superimposed and juxtaposed fourths. For all the apparent freedom and improvisatory pacing of the movement, the underlying structure is really very cohesive. Fig. 6.1 outlines the main materials in play (marked A1, A2, A3, B, C, D) and traces the manner of their disposition. The A materials are all related quite closely, both in terms of gesture and harmonic underpinning. The registral high and low points of the sweeping opening gesture make up a distinctive tetrachord (marked in the reduction on Fig. 6.1) which re-occurs throughout the piece. Moreover, Debussy utilises the sequence of fourths in order to emphasise the pentatonic collection, so when A2 - a motivic variant of the opening gesture - appears in bar 7, its pentatonic underpinning clearly establishes a connection. This is strengthened by the first appearance of the tetrachord in bars 8-9, which crystallises the sonority implied in bar 1. At A3 (bar 18) the pentatonic is fleshed out into a full diatonic collection and underpinned with a plagal cadence, confirming the tonic of F for the first time.

New material, B, appears at bar 20, utilising F*b* to evoke an 'oriental' scale with which to complement the 'music box' timbres of the pentatonic sonorities (one can speculate whether each *Étude* is as abstract as Debussy implied by the phrase 'I've written only "pure" music'); this scale collection is then re-used in a more lyrical melody in bars 25-28. Before introducing further new material, Debussy returns fleetingly to A3 (bar 29) before opening up a longer-winded melody, based on the fluidity provided by a triplet/dotted-rhythmic figure. This melodic material is juxtaposed with the A1 material (bars 37, 40), reinforcing the boldness with which Debussy is content to juxtapose discrete blocks of music. Although C tries to flourish once again from bar 46, sustained melodic flight still proves elusive and the final motif, D, appears *scherzandare* [*sic.*] at bar 49. Only now does the music gain momentum as ascending sequential repetition at 2-bar intervals and a prolonged ostinato (also based on a fourth) drives the music forward from 53 to 64. Finally, at bar 65, A1 returns: the tetrachord, characteristically moved in parallel, underpins a return of a fragmented version of the opening pentatonic gestures (now in F) until A3 is spliced into the texture at bar 74. Debussy adds one further return to previously-heard material in bars 75-76, whose pitch materials are drawn from the 'oriental' scale of bar 20. As the movement's materials are re-worked, tonal convergence seems to be increasingly unlikely. Dissonant elements, particularly the D*b* and E*b* derived from superimposed fourth patterns, distort the recapitulation of the A3 material: fourths become tritones (bar 79) and the underlying return to F major pentatonic collections is blemished by unexpected pitches, to the extent that although F major is implicit as tonic, it is in no way confirmed. The ending is enigmatic,

Pour Les Quartes

reduction

A1 A2 A3 B C D

pentatonic coll. | pentatonic | F major diatonic | Ab M Dorian

[also with Fb inflection]

etc. (+ repeat)

melody:

[+ 1 bar]

+ sequential repetition
+ extension

* some fourths become thirds *

reduction:

F - pentatonic
for semi-semiquaver gestures

'disturbing' elements ... derived from superimposed fourths.

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seemingly dictated by Debussy's delight in improvised pure sonority. Only with an appreciation of how much care Debussy took to re-work materials from earlier in the piece, as shown in the analysis, can his remarkable balance between freedom and form be gauged.

Pour les sixtes exhibits a much clearer thematic process.[25] Debussy appears to have worked consciously with an arch-form design:

	A	B	C	B'	A'
bar:	1	21	27	38	46

Like *Pour les tierces*, *Pour les sixtes* opens with an A*b*/A dichotomy which runs throughout the piece, investing its tonality with the bitter, slightly uneasy twist of a false relation. Debussy told Durand that

> For a long time the continuous use of sixths reminded me of pretentious young ladies sitting in a salon, sulkily doing their tapestry work and envying the scandalous laughter of the naughty ninths...So I wrote this study in which my concern for sixths goes to the lengths of using no other intervals to build up the harmonies; not bad! (Mea culpa...).[26]

This was indeed 'not bad' - Debussy succumbed to an extraordinary compositional constraint worthy of Josquin in its austerity. But by restricting his harmony in this way, Debussy must have found his material problematic to vary - more so than the chains of thirds in *Pour les tierces* - which probably explains why he maintained the acute tonal ambivalence between the A/A*b* inflections right up to the very end. The A natural of bars 55-56, which jars against the A*b* pedal in the bass, finally gives way to A*b* in bar 57, although the tonic, D*b*, is left (appropriately) with an added sixth in the last chord.

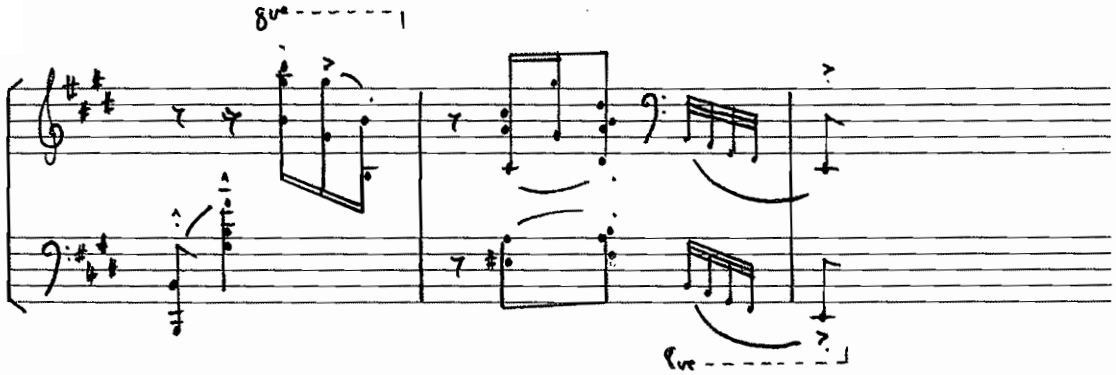
[25] Howat suggests two thematic resemblances between *Pour les sixtes* and Chopin's *Étude* in A*b*. See 'Chopin's influence on the *fin-de-siècle* and beyond', 265.
[26] Debussy, Letter to Durand, 28 August 1915, in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 300.

Pour les octaves also exhibits a straightforward thematic structure:

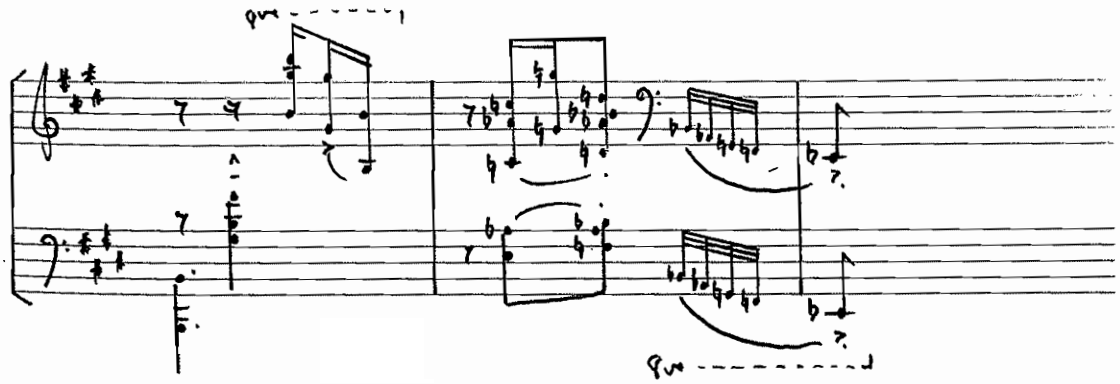
A	B	A	coda	+A
1	49	83	109	119-121

Strong points of tonal definition coincide with the thematic structure: bars 1-10 outline E major, as do bars 83-90 and the opening and closing of the coda at 109 and 119. (The third-relationship created by the opening of the B section in D*b* is one reason why I am less convinced than Parks that the middleground third-relationships in *Pour les tierces* are especially significant.) But Debussy also makes some astonishing juxtapositions: compare bars 1-3 with 21-23, for example:

Pour les octaves, bars 1-3



Pour les octaves, bars 21-23

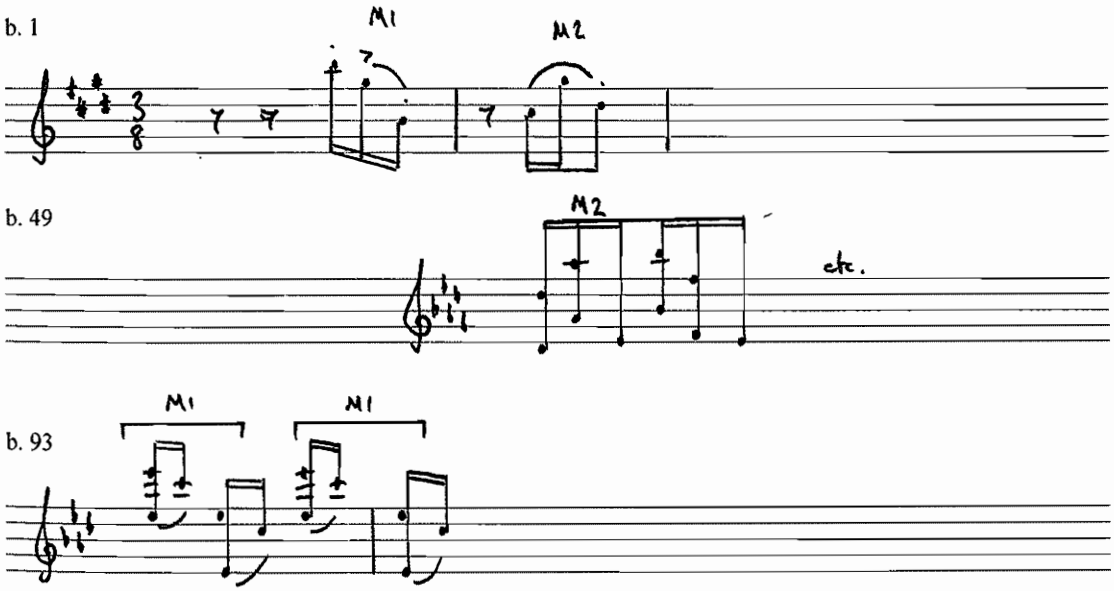


The sudden twist into E*b* major is not achieved by chromatic inflection in the cadential preparation, but by juxtaposition. Thematic juxtapositions also create a different perspective on the formal ABA coda scheme: the interpolation of bars 29-32, distinguished by staccato and emphatic articulation, seems haphazard - a wild-card element, reflecting the loss of 'self-control' that Jean-Aubry sensed in the *Études*. Counterbalances to these elements of sheer freedom are provided by tonality or motivic working. Normally when a new or loosely-

derived theme appears, the tonality will be used to create a strong association with another part of the piece, but where a dramatic point of tonal departure is effected, the thematic material will be more recognisable. My examples so far have exemplified this: the sudden thematic departure of bar 29 hides the fact that in tonal terms bars 29-30 simply articulate the global dominant, B; the sudden twist onto E*b* major at bars 22-23, however, is inflicted on a direct repetition of the opening motif.

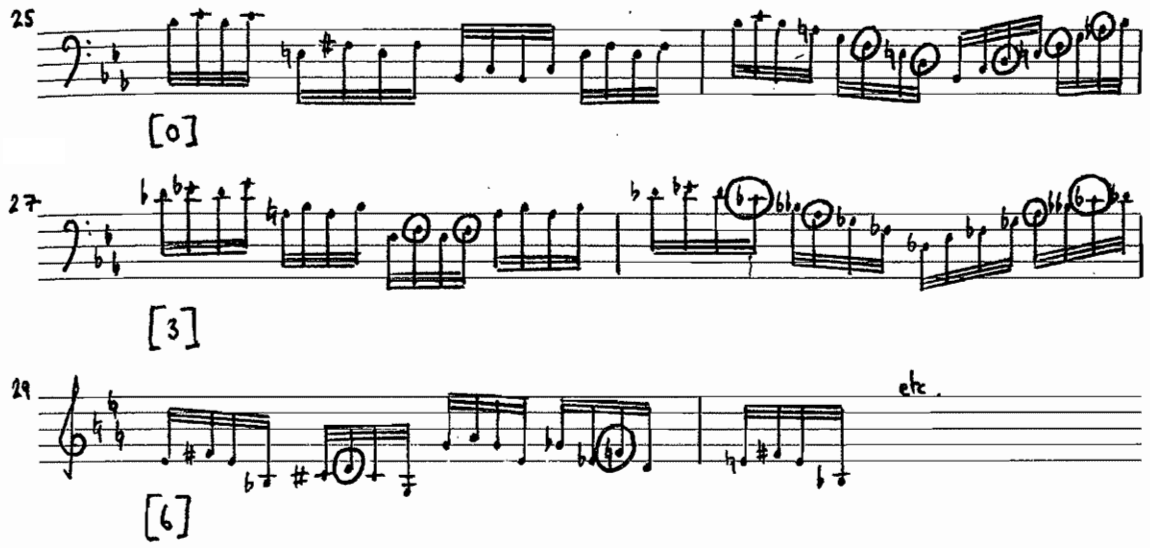
There are several points along this spectrum where Debussy effects a tonal and a thematic departure simultaneously - as at the beginning of the B section, for example. But here older techniques of motivic re-working come to the fore: the thematic material from bar 49 is derived from the opening two bars. This is also true of the *Poco meno mosso* at bar 93, the final point of respite (*pp subito*) spliced into the texture:

Pour les octaves, derivation of 'new' thematic material



Pour les huits doigts is another movement *en blanc et noir*. Black and white materials are stratified successively (as in bars 2-4) or simultaneously (as at bar 40-41 and 65-66), and underpin the entire piece. Unusually, the piece features an exact reprise of bars 1-12 at bar 42, probably because the materials possess little thematic character and consequently require a more obvious means of return than motivic re-working might permit. The strongly Stravinskian sonorities in the few bars (25-32) before the black and white fantasy itself at 33-

41 are loosely octatonic and are rotated through a [0 3 6] axis, although the fluid nature of the finger-work means that no attempt at octatonic purity can be maintained:

Pour les huits doigts, bb. 25-32. Notes outside octatonic collection are ringed:

*

Pour les degrès chromatiques presents five statements of the main melody, at bars 11, 25, 43, 63 and finally, *lointain*, 78. This is Debussy's variation technique at its simplest, enabling him to 'get something new out of this rather tired idea' by writing such rhythmically characteristic motifs. Almost paradoxically, the materials surrounding the repeated statements of the theme are mere passage-work, even though they are the ostensible *raison d'être* for the piece.

*

Paul Roberts suggests that *Pour les agréments* is a homage to Couperin, although Debussy himself spoke of the study as 'a Barcarolle on a slightly Italian sea'.[27] The work certainly reflects the conventional 6/8 metre and lyrical flow of a Barcarolle, and the role of the sea as a source of inspiration for Debussy during this period seems to have been crucial. Recalling her intensive war-time studies with Debussy, Marguerite Long remarked that

[27] Roberts, *Images*, 302; Debussy, letter to Durand, 12 August 1915. Incidentally, Chopin's *Barcarolle* Op. 60 was a lifelong favourite of Debussy's, as reported by Gérard de Romilly, 'Debussy professeur par une de ses élèves', *Cahiers Debussy* 2 (1978), 6. Debussy had requested an original edition of Chopin's *Barcarolle* in February 1915 as part of his editing work for Durand: see letter to Durand, 28 August 1915, in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 296.

> After a depressing period of stagnation, he was revived in the summer of 1915 by what he called his vital element, the sea. He would say, 'I mean the infinite sea'. Thus he regained his faculty for thought and work. It was then that the *Études* were born: they were his last message for his instrument.[28]

Reporting on his day's work on *Pour les Agréments*, Debussy told Durand that he had been 'meditating on the sea during these last few days. Today it is beautiful beyond all comparison'.[29] The fluidity of some of Debussy's oscillating ostinato textures takes on an almost mimetic effect (from bar 11, for example): as Debussy told Durand, 'a little charm never spoilt anything - Chopin proved that'.[30] However, like many of the *Études*, *Pour les agréments* is formally fragmented by constant ruptures in the texture and subversions of the expected harmonic progressions. More so than the other studies, *Pour les agréments* also features a huge range of thematic material:

***Pour les agréments* : structure**

Material:	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**D'**	**E**	**F**	**F'**	**F''**
	1	7	9	12	17				
				24	27	30	33	35	37
								39	
	42	48							
		50 [*cadenza variation*]							

[28] Marguerite Long, *At the piano with Debussy*, translated by Olive Senior-Ellis (London: Dent, 1972), 41. The correspondence Debussy sent from Pourville substantiates Long's assertion that he drew extraordinary rejuvenation from the sea. As soon as he arrived at Pourville, Debussy wrote to Durand, noting with pleasure that at the top of the garden at *Mon Coin* 'you come across a fine expanse of sea, enough to make you think there's more beyond - that is, the sea of infinity' (14 July). Comparable expressions of regret at having to leave are found at the end of his stay. 'Farewell silence! Farewell the incomparable noise of the sea, with its stern advice not to waste one's time!', he wrote to Inghelbrecht on 30 September. On 6 October he described Pourville to Molinari as 'a little spot by the sea, where I've come to try and forget the war'. To Godet, he wrote that 'I've just been staying by the sea [...] There I rediscovered my ability to think in music, which I'd lost for a year' (14 October), and to Stravinsky he admitted that 'It's only in the last three months, staying in the house of friends by the sea, that I've been able to think in music once again' (24 October). All letters in translation in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 297-309.

[29] Letter to Durand of 12 August 1915, in *Lettres de Debussy à son Éditeur*, 143 [my translation].

[30] Debussy, letter to Durand, 28 August 1915, in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 300.

This *Étude* would seem to be distinguished by the fecundity of inspiration: the variation technique found so frequently in Debussy's music seems to be absent, offset only by the exact nature of the recapitulation. Parks even suggests that the tonality is unusual, noting that the underlying '*Ursatz* [is] devoid of progression'.[31]

In fact, there are a surprising number of links between the different materials in this *Étude* if features other than obvious points of motivic connection, pitch centricity and harmonic progression are sought. Instead, associations are created between sonorities by using the same harmonic type. This cannot quite be shown using pitch class set analysis - the intervallic changes bought about by Debussy's motivic and chromatic inflections strip such an approach of its power - but an intuitive reduction, as in Fig. 6.2, helps to explain how Debussy's diverse materials are encouraged to cohere. The secret is in using the same 'harmonic type' - usually pentatonic collections - for different thematic materials. Thus bar 1 is based on a pentatonic collection on F; bar 9, with a different motif, is based on a pentatonic collection on G*b*; bar 12, with another motif, fleshes out the pentatonic collection into a full diatonic major collection on C. At bar 17 the running ostinato is inflected anew with the change of key signature, but the 'new' melody which appears in the bass is not only made up from a pentatonic collection, but seems to be a transposed re-ordering of the intervallic pattern of bar 1 (see fig. 6.2). The rising three-note motif of bar 30 foreshadows the flowering of a much more important theme at bar 37. Bar 31 re-integrates the pentatonic collection, now on C. The Barcarolle melody in bars 33-34 is in effect a diatonic progression in E major. Even the final coda is a re-working of the stretto material of bar 7.

*

Pour les notes repétées is a Harlequinade, sharing the sensibility (and offering glimpses of the material) of the cello sonata. Two main elements can be discerned, the introductory motif A at bar 1, and the more lyrical melody B at bar 28; they enter into dialogue, as below:

[31] Parks, *ibid.*, 334.

Pour Les Agréments

A B C D D' E

Bars: 1 7 9 12 17

Fre

etc.

etc., as ostinato

F - pentatonic

Gb - pentatonic

C - diatonic major

A - pentatonic (bass melody); A - diatonic major (top)

20

etc., as ostinato

chromatic: fleeting bitonality

transferred to inner voice

24 27 30

ostinato

ostinato

etc.

M1

C - diatonic major

A - pentatonic

F F' F''

33 34 35 37

etc

etc

etc.

M1 M1

B - pentatonic

B - major diatonic

Recap.

46 48

etc

F - pentatonic

50 52

coda/cadenza

etc.

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Bar	Material	Comments
1	A1	introductory
9	A1	in full
19	A2	new variant derived from bar 2
25	A2	repeat of new variant, but it is not allowed to flourish
28	B	chromatic melody in bass line
34	B	repeat starts, but is curtailed by
37		C major/minor opposition; swift juxtapositions lead to
39		fragments of variant derived from bar 2
49	A'	another variation, now in triplet figures
55	B'	melody recurs at same pitch, with sextuplet monotone ostinato
58	B''	melody transferred to soprano, now underpinned with local V pedal
62	B'''	melody returns to original pitch classes, but now transfigured up an octave
66	A''	another variation
70	A'''	another variation
75	coda	including humorous 'written out mistake' in bar 77

The development of each group of materials once again recalls Debussy's familiar technique of motivic variation: this is particularly true of his use of different rhythmic patterns to distinguish statements of the same theme. The freedom in this movement comes not so much from Debussy's formal juxtapositions (although these are crucial in passages such as bars 37-49), but from the erratic movement of the musical materials at a local level through unexpected chromatic deflections: there is little *harmonic* stability here. Rather, Debussy uses *pitch* centricity as a form-giving element: the A material nearly always recurs by starting on and revolving around a C#, while the melody of the B material (although not the ostensible focus of the study) also recurs on the same pitch classes at 28, 34, 55 and 62.

*

On 5 August 1915, a couple of weeks after starting the *Études*, Debussy wrote to Durand:

> I think of the youth of France, wantonly mown down by those Kultur merchants, and of its contribution to our heritage, now for ever lost to us. The music I'm writing will be a secret homage to them.[32]

Pour les sonorités opposées is one of the most likely *Études* to be part of this 'secret homage'. Debussy's expressive markings are sufficiently revealing on their own: *dolente*; *expressif et profond*; even *lointain, mais clair et joyeux* at bar 31 for the distant E major fanfare. This movement, more than any of the others, seems to re-enact a scenario familiar from the second movement of *En blanc et noir*, due to its central idea of opposition and the nature of the musical materials used to express that opposition: stripped, terse, static blocks of sound are set against fanfare materials which seem to herald the faint glimmer of victory.

Four principal motivic groups are presented in *Pour les sonorités opposées* and are listed across the top stave in Fig. 6.3. G#, used as a *litanie*, not only links all four groups, but actually provides the main pitch focus for the entire movement: in my reduction I have isolated G# as a distinct layer. Parks stresses the importance of neighbour-note motion in this movement, and it is undeniable that the sense of opposing sonorities emerges as much from local dissonances away from G# (such as the upper neighbour note A at the very opening or the black/white superposition at bar 53) as from the broader scale of opposing blocks (most notably between the stark rigid chords of bars 1-14, the flowing chromatic lines from bar 15, and the fanfare motif at bar 31).

As with the *cloches* in *Ibéria* and the fanfares in the middle movement of *En blanc et noir*, each occurrence of the fanfare appears at the same pitch, outlining E major without chromatic inflection (bars 31, 36, 59, 68, 70). Given that virtually all the other materials are also harmonically static, the primary means of shaping the tonal direction of the movement is supplied by a prominent low bass note underpinning each fanfare: at bar 31 - G#, at 59 - F#, then at 68 and 70 - C#. Debussy's tonal planning here is ingenious, as it preserves the ambivalence between C# minor and E major opened up by the use of G# as the main pitch axis. Throughout the piece, the question of whether the G# is a third relation or a dominant pedal for the global tonic goes unanswered - and this is even true at the enigmatic conclusion at which a seventh chord on C# minor appears. Two harmonic turning points are particularly

[32] Trans. from Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 298-299.

Pour Les Sonorités Opposées

Gt.

Gt.

etc.

+3 bars

2 bars [repeat, varied]

[+7 bars]

16ve

[G#]

[F#]

[E]

[61]

re-creates opposition of opening: A4/G#

opposition row 'transfigured'

→ E major resolution not forthcoming

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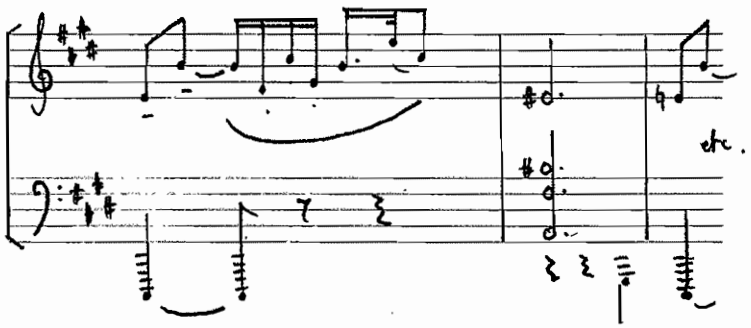
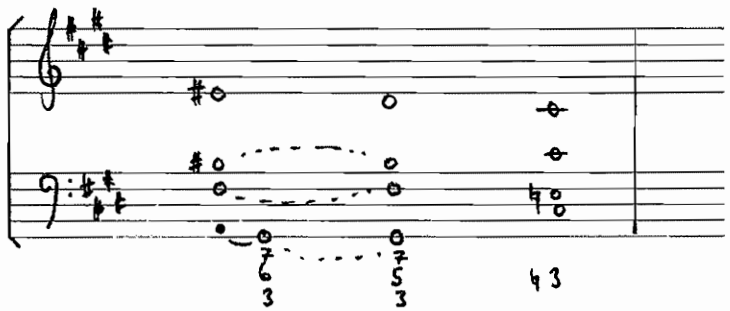
worthy of comment here. The first is the interruption of the fanfare at bar 69 by Debussy's interpolation of a surprising chord. Ostensibly, this chord is a re-creation of the G#-A neighbour-note opposition from the very opening of the piece:

bars 68-69

Debussy's distortion, however, is at root a disguised cadence in C#, exploiting the major-minor (E#-E) dichotomy:

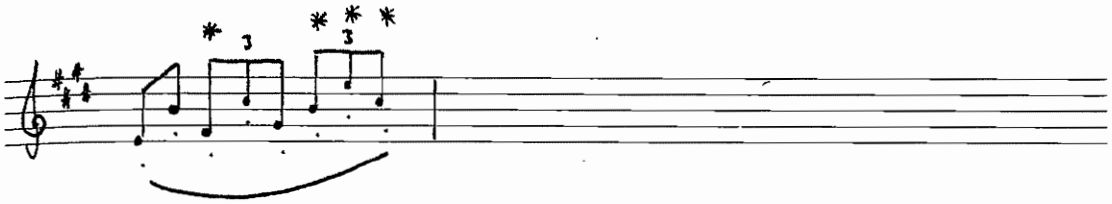


This cadential suggestion is counterbalanced by the final series of opposing sonorities in the last five bars. A series of parallel triads, G - A - C - D- D#, set against the E-B dyad of the fanfare. The leading note quality of the D# might seem to lead onto E major, but Debussy refuses to sanction any resolution and the final E major chord appears over the C# pedal that has already undermined the two previous occurrences of the fanfare, at 68 and 70. Thus the least conspicuous of the various sets of opposing sonorities in this movement, E major and C# minor, remain opposed even at the very end.

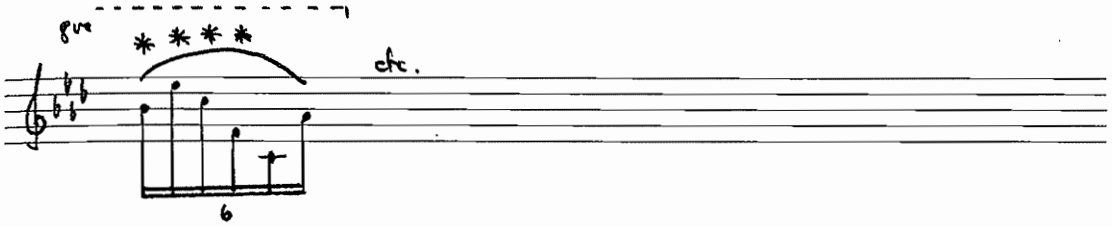
*

Pour les arpèges composés ingeniously opens with a recollection of the fanfare from the previous movement:

Pour les sonorités opposées, b. 70



Pour les arpèges composés, b. 1



Debussy also exploits the same kind of tonal ambiguity he had cultivated in *Pour les arpèges composés*, using G*b* (e.g. in bar 2) to turn the prevailing A*b* major towards D*b*, rendering the prominent A*b* pedal of bars 3, 4, 6, 7, 9 less harmonically restricting than it might otherwise be. The reliance on linear fourths as part of what in other contexts might be considered a 'water topic' also recalls *Pour les quartes*, particularly because the metrical emphasis draws attention to the pentatonic collection. There is tonal resolution here, however, with a strong sense of convergence onto A*b* major in the last six bars. The various different strands of the movement are also drawn together thematically: in the recapitulation (from bar 50) elements from the A (bar 1) and B sections (bar 31) are juxtaposed, revealing a structure which may be effectively modelled thus:

***Pour les arpèges composés* : structure**

Material:	**A1**	**A2**	**A3**	**A4**	**B**
	1	7	12		
	16	20		25	31, 34
					40 [B']
			46		
RECAP	50				58 [B''+A2]
	62 [A1+A2]				

The marked thematic differences between the A and B materials are lessened through harmony, since both rely on strong allusions to pentatonic collections: B at bar 31 is based around an added sixth chord on E major, for example, and B' at bar 40 is based on a B major

pentatonic collection. Debussy does not underplay or try to mediate between the contrasting nature of each gesture, however, so when different elements are drawn into close proximity during the last ten bars, his abrupt juxtapositions point up the diversity of character: the *scherzando* nature of B, the virtuoso flourish of A2, and the delicate oscillations of A1.

*

Pour les accords is based around a simple ternary structure:

	A	B	A
bar:	1	80	127

Despite the disorienting juxtapositions of triads such as F minor and A major which invest the outer sections with their pungent harmony, Debussy's constant hemiola patterns are equally responsible for the dislocation and unusual stridency of the music.[33] Even more striking is the remarkable contrast between the outer and middle sections. The B material is devoid of the regular pulse so essential to the outer sections, and the emphasis seems to be on free improvisation of attractive sonorities - Cortot's 'gamut of pianistic sensations'. But the B material is based around the same pianistic point of departure - the idea of chordal piano writing - and the opening gesture (bar 80) recurs throughout the middle section at the same pitch: see bars 82, 87, 89, 96, 98). Echoes of earlier extra-musical preoccupations are also plausible, particularly at the integration of the A material before the full return of the opening material at bar 127: the submerged, menacing motif at 105 is marked *lointain* and is temporarily displaced by a pure C major dyad at 111-112, an unexpected moment of respite before the return. The entire sequence recalls the disruptions of 'pure music' in *En blanc et noir*.

*

[33] Howat draws a comparison between *Pour les accords* with the Scherzo of Chopin's B*b* minor Sonata, Op. 35. See 'Chopin's influence on the *fin-de-siècle* and beyond', 264-265.

IV

Conclusion

The *Études* have already attracted a substantial amount of analytical exegesis, which is why I have been fairly selective in my approach here.[34] I have tried to be more even-handed than most analysts by emphasising Debussy's balance between form and freedom, resisting what Alan Street has described as 'the authoritarian hegemony of organicist thinking':[35] after all, the cultivation of diversity and evident enjoyment of free sonority is our main reason for considering the *Études* so interesting and imaginative today. Nevertheless, I hope that my maintenance of this balance does not undermine the overriding historical-aesthetic point at issue: Debussy's re-assertion of the priority of unity over disunity. The *Études* do not follow on from his setting of Mallarmé's *Éventail* in a smooth, diachronic development: his music does not become 'more modern' in a teleological sense between 1913-1915. Rather, as I hope to have shown in this discussion, I think that the historical issue is double-pronged. The diversifying techniques brought about by juxtaposition and the unifying tendencies ensured by motivic working and a return to clear points of pitch or harmonic centricity embody an expansion of earlier tendencies, but the manner in which these principles are re-formulated into a 'new idiom' is a truly original point of departure.

The motivations behind Debussy's re-formulation are still to be uncovered, however. Crucial to a comprehensive understanding of his late work, they are most readily elicited from a close study of the two sonatas of 1915.

* * *

[34] Notably Richard Parks's unpublished PhD dissertation, *op. cit.*
[35] Alan Street, 'Superior myths, dogmatic allegories: the resistance to musical unity', *Music Analysis* 8/1-2 (1989), 77-124.

Chapter 7

A private world of methods

> We as civilised men must conceal our anxiety and work for that beauty
> the people instinctively need, people who are stronger for having suffered.
>
> Debussy to Durand, 22 July 1915[1]

> The last works of Debussy, three sonatas for different combinations of instruments, represent both a summation of the principles of his earlier works and a new departure. [...] One of the most interesting features of the music is its extreme sense of freedom, its high degree of intuitive taste which keeps all the elements, from harmony to form, on the same level of divergence from conventional usages. It might, I think, be viewed as though in a private world of methods continually changing from work to work.
>
> Elliott Carter[2]

Why might Debussy, having written no significant 'pure' music since the String Quartet of 1893, suddenly embark on a set of chamber sonatas in 1915?

I

The interwoven strands of aesthetics and patriotism

A simple answer was provided by Jacques Durand, who reported that

> at the Concerts Durand, [Debussy] heard again the Septet with trumpet by Saint-Saëns and his sympathy for this means of musical expression was reawoken. He admitted the fact to me and I warmly encouraged him to follow his inclinations. And that is how the idea of the six sonatas for various instruments came about.[3]

While this might explain Debussy's unexpected choice of genre, it has little to contribute to an understanding of the unusual 'Janus-headed' nature of his music. The sonatas raise many complex aesthetic questions, as Elliott Carter pointed out in 1959. Carter heard the sonatas as a reaction against New Music and argued that they were written as a deliberate rejection of the perceived 'anarchy' in the contemporary works of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Satie and the Italian futurists. Debussy, he suggested, was questing 'for a more rigorous yet suitable kind

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[1] Letter and translation from Cobb (ed.), *The Poetic Debussy*, 240-243.
[2] Elliott Carter, 'The Three Late Sonatas of Debussy' (1959, rev. 1994), in Jonathan Barnard (ed.), *Elliott Carter: Collected Essays and Lectures, 1937-1995* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1997), 122.
[3] Jacques Durand, *Quelques souvenirs d'un éditeur de musique*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1924-25), II, 77. This translation from Nichols (ed.), *Debussy Remembered*, 242.

of unity' as part of an effort 'to find a homogenous method that would not rely on borrowed forms'. Thus the three late sonatas embodied a 'crystallisation and clarification of intent' in the sense that they were a summation of Debussy's work, representing his most accomplished attempt to solve 'the problem of musical logic' through a 'private world of methods'.[4] Such a perspective pinpoints Debussy's remarkable ability to achieve a balance between music which rebuts the more destructive tendencies of early modernism while steering clear of a retrogressive return to the past. (It is not without significance that, in seeking to resolve this potential contradiction, Debussy unwittingly foreshadowed Stravinsky's reinvention of himself in the late 1920s as 'the dictator of the reaction against the anarchy into which modernism degenerated'.[5])

For Carter, Debussy's music offered a viable, *living* alternative to New Music as it had developed in the interwar period. But the reception history of the sonatas during the 1920s and 1930s - before the post-1945 *avant-garde* began to advocate Debussy's late works - reveals that commentators were primarily interested in the sonatas' relationship to the French past. Léon Vallas, for example, stressed that the horrors of war convinced the composer more deeply than ever before of the necessity of re-inventing musical art within specifically *national* traditions.[6] Wilfred Mellers, writing in 1938, also drew attention to the sonatas' role in establishing Debussy's position as a central figure in the French tradition, arguing that the composer had 'no intention of effecting a 'revolution' in music history. "Nous ne sommes pas modernes," [Debussy] said explicitly.'[7]

These contrasting perspectives suggest that two interwoven strands should run throughout a comprehensive evaluation of the late sonatas: Debussy's reaction against the contemporary state of music; and his intention to establish a new relationship with older French music. The two strands are complex and inseparable because it is impossible to distinguish Debussy's purely aesthetic distaste for what he saw as the 'detestable German *modernstyl*' and the 'musique nègre' of Stravinsky from his patriotic desire to rehabilitate a truly French tradition.[8]

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[4] All quotes from Carter, 'The Three Late Sonatas of Debussy'.
[5] The phrase is Arthur Lourié's, quoted by Richard Taruskin in 'Back to Whom? Neoclassicism as Ideology', *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 297.
[6] Vallas, *Debussy: His Life and Works*, 260.
[7] Wilfred Mellers, 'The later work of Claude Debussy', *Music & Letters* (1938), revised in his collected essays, *Studies in Contemporary Music* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1947), 43.
[8] Letter to Barczy of 19 December 1910, trans. from Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 232-3: 'There's too much German influence in France and we're still suffocated by it. Don't you go the same way, don't let yourself be taken in by false profundity and the detestable German 'modernstyl'.'

To focus on one aspect alone, as many French commentators have done, undermines the multi-faceted complexity of these works. Debussy's vexed relationship with early modernism is clearly as important for music history as his war-time nationalism.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEBUSSY'S WAR-TIME AGENDA

It is not hard to find a window into Debussy's 1915 world; his letters and writings are full of intentions, prejudices, agendas and declarations. His laconic humour can be misleading at times, but his statements generally support Carter's description of the late sonatas as a 'summation' of his earlier tendencies. Source materials dating back to the time of *Pelléas* hint that the aesthetic aims crystallised in the late sonatas as part of a deliberately anti-German stance date back to the beginning of his maturity, albeit with a less provocative political component.[9] As far back as 1902, Debussy replied to the question, 'Is it possible to predict what the music of tomorrow will be [...] Where do we go from here?' in terms which remain familiar over a decade later:

> Contemporary dramatic music embraces everything from Wagnerian metaphysics to the trivialities of the Italians - not a particularly French orientation. Perhaps in the end we will see the light and achieve conciseness of expression and form (the fundamental qualities of French genius). Will we rediscover that abundant fantasy of which music alone is capable? [10]

The writer Paul Landormy recalled in 1904 that Debussy exclaimed that

> French music is clarity, elegance, and declamation, both simple and natural. Couperin and Rameau are those who are truly French![11]

Debussy's nationalism (as opposed to his innate 'Frenchness') was only nascent at this stage. In common with his Symbolist contemporaries, he evaded the idea that art should form part of social discourse, preferring to retreat into a private world through private methods. The prevalence of poetic and illustrative titles in his pre-War music undoubtedly emphasises this. Even as late as November 1913, French musical models were elevated primarily for their

[9] Lesure has also stressed that Debussy's nationalism predated the war. See his *Debussy: Biographie Critique*, 432-3.
[10] Claude Debussy, 'The Orientation of Music', *Musica*, October 1902, translation from *Debussy on Music*, 85.
[11] Messing, *Neoclassicism*, 11. Debussy's words date from an interview with Landormy in *La revue bleue*, 26 March 1904, although a week later he wrote to Laloy claiming a certain degree of fabrication on his interviewer's part. See Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 144.

aesthetic values. (Here, as ever, Debussy's writings reveal as much about his own music as about the ostensible subject of his criticism.)

> We can certainly do without the naïve aesthetics of Jean Jacques Rousseau, but all the same we can learn great things from the past. We should think about the example of Couperin's harpsichord pieces set us: they are marvellous models of grace and innocence long past. Nothing could ever make us forget the subtly voluptuous perfume, so delicately perverse, that so innocently hovers over the *Barricades mystérieuses*.[12]

Only after the outbreak of war did Debussy engage fully in his political role as *musicien français* by sending correspondents details of his hopes and fears for non-Teutonic music. In October 1915, Stravinsky, whom Debussy considered was tending 'dangerously towards Schoenberg', received this call to arms:

> My dear Stravinsky, you are a great artist! It's a fine thing to belong to one's country, to be attached to the earth like the humblest of peasants! [...] During these last few years, when I've felt the Austro-German miasma spreading over art, [I wish I had] issued warnings about the danger we're heedlessly running into. How could I not have foreseen that these men were plotting the destruction of our art, just as they had planned the destruction of our country? [13]

Aesthetics and patriotism, previously linked in an informal manner, became irrevocably entwined. Debussy told Godet that he had been

> [...] re-fashioning, as far as my strength allowed me, a little of the beauty these 'men' are destroying, with a meticulous brutality that is unmistakably 'Made in Germany'. [14]

But from where might this re-fashioning start? Godet was left in no doubt:

> So what about French music? Where are our old harpsichordists who produced real music in abundance? They held the secret of that graceful profundity, that emotion without epilepsy which we shy away from like ungrateful children...

[12] Debussy, SIM (1 November 1913), trans. Lesure and Smith (eds.), *Debussy on Music*, 296.
[13] Letter to Stravinsky, 24 October 1915, trans. from Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 308-9.
[14] Letter of 14 October 1915, trans. in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 305.

Clarity, concision, elegance, simplicity, graceful profundity, emotion without epilepsy... Debussy's values are unambiguous and presuppose equally clear antitheses: for clarity, obscurity; for concision, prolixity; for elegance, turgidity; for graceful profundity, false profundity; we might add, for Debussy's *Pelléas*, Schoenberg's (whose extravagantly opulent score was 'a shocking inflation of his reticent Symbolist source',[15] in the words of a recent scholar). Debussy's late sonatas seem to exemplify such antitheses. The quiet understatement of the first two movements of the Trio Sonata, for example, seems self-consciously resistant both to the publicity-seeking clamour of his competitors' work and the tumultuous noise of war - the defensive product of a man who fled to Pourville to escape the terrible noise of the guns outside Paris. It is clear that Debussy genuinely considered his goal to be the refashioning of that which others were bent on destroying, a striving for beauty in the face of brutality. Art should give *plaisir*, not in a facile manner, but as a bastion against ugliness.

The binary oppositions might seem crude, but with hindsight it is easy to see how attempts to formulate a post-romantic aesthetic could be constructed in terms of a dichotomy between German decadence (whether late-Romantic or modernist) and French classicism. Yet Debussy did not fall into mindlessly nationalistic statements: not all German music was to be tarred with the same brush. In 1908, he freely acknowledged Bach as the 'one great master' who 'lives, breathes and pulsates today',[16] and in November 1913 he contended that the 'severe old critics' of nineteenth-century music failed to realise that 'no one could go further than Bach, one of their judges, toward freedom and fantasy in both composition and form'.[17] Compare this with Roger Nichols's (coincidental?) paraphrase of Debussy in his description of the values underpinning *L'après-midi d'un faune* in *The New Grove*:

> The first fruit of [Debussy's] search for a music that was precisely imagined yet fluid and untrammelled by rules was *L'après-midi* [...] Debussy recognised in the writings of Baudelaire, Verlaine and especially Mallarmé not only a fantasy and a freedom that were missing from contemporary music, but also a concentration of feeling.[18]

The concepts of freedom and fantasy lie at the heart of Debussy's classicism, identifying a set of values that were so attractive to Debussy throughout his life that they could be elevated

[15] Butler, *Early Modernism*, 47.
[16] Emily Bauer, 'Debussy talks of his music', interview in *Harper's Weekly*, 29 August 1908, reprinted in *Debussy on Music*, 233.
[17] Debussy, SIM 1 November 1913, trans. in *Debussy on Music*, 296-7.
[18] Roger Nichols, 'Debussy', *The New Grove Dictionary*, 307.

above the concerns of nationalism, even during wartime. It was the hegemony of the nineteenth-century German repertory and its oppressive influence on French music that Debussy resisted, not German music *tout court*. Consequently, a one-dimensional, nationalistic perspective on the late sonatas does them a great disservice. The fascinating complexity of Debussy's music is only revealed through an appreciation of its inherent conflicts - the tensions elicited by a desire to say something new and unique within a set of values inherited from a selective, personal and essentially classicizing sense of tradition while resisting the entrapments of detestable *modernstyl* or nostalgic historicism.

AN ANTI-MODERNIST REACTION

Whether the late sonatas embody an anti-modernist reaction depends, of course, on one's definition of modernism. Consider Debussy's declaration of October 1915 to the young Francis Poulenc: 'This is a time when we should be trying to regain a hold on our ancient traditions: we may have let their beauty slip from us, but it has not ceased to exist'.[19] From the Marxist angle - one of the most influential perspectives in early modernism - Debussy's attempts to sustain a traditional ideal of *beauty* would be in danger of enslaving art to the tastes of a bourgeois 'salon' culture.[20] And there can be no doubt that there *was* a social component to Debussy's relationship to modernism. After his marriage to Emma, he replaced his formerly Bohemian lifestyle with something altogether more grand; however much he missed the fresh and ready inspiration of his earlier years, he chose to live in a different world from the *Apaches*.[21] Consequently, if it is accepted that a crucial aspect of early modernism was its potential for destabilisation outside purely artistic spheres, Debussy's own social position must have some bearing on his attitudes towards art - if only because his apparent conservatism reflects a more predictable conflict based on age, class and family ties. To take a simple example, Debussy invested increasing amounts of creative time and effort writing music dedicated to and inspired by Emma and Chouchou, while Stravinsky wooed the fickle Parisian market energetically, dedicating music to the liveliest of his colleagues: Ravel, Schmitt, Delage, and members of the Ballets Russes circle. More crucially, perhaps, the generation gap delineated what each man considered radical. Debussy's ideals were

[19] Letter of 23 October 1915, trans. from Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 307.
[20] See, for example, Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 129-133. For commentary on music and 'bourgeois' taste, see Max Paddison, *Adorno's aesthetics of music* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), Chapter 5, esp. 207-213, 221-223.
[21] Ravel used to make fun of Debussy's mid-life bourgeois trappings, such as his employment of a driver who held the car door open for him, and one cannot imagine Debussy sharing a bed with Stravinsky when a hotel was full, as Ravel did in Italy in 1913, or sending friends a postcard featuring a photo of himself naked. See Stravinsky, *Conversations*, 62; and on Stravinsky's 1912 postcard to Schmitt, Delage and others, see Taruskin, *Russian Traditions*, 649.

predicated on a set of values first articulated in the liberating context of the 1880s and 1890s; like Impressionist paintings, however, such values soon lost their disturbing edge through devaluation by second-rate imitations. Their displacement by the alienating 'anti-audience' tendencies of the 1900s presaged far more threatening socio-political forces, creating a rift which inevitably separated the two composers' ideological attitudes towards music's relationship to society, audience and tradition.[22]

NEW CLASSICISM AND 'THE OLD FRENCH STYLE'

(Debussy to Molinari)

> For the last three months I've been able to work again. When I tell you that I spent nearly a year unable to write music...after that I've almost had to re-learn it. It was like a rediscovery and it's seemed to me more beautiful than ever! Is it because I was deprived of it for so long? I don't know. What beauties there are in music 'by itself', with no axe to grind or new inventions to amaze the so-called dilettanti ... The emotional satisfaction one gets from it can't be equalled, can it, in any of the other arts? This power of 'the right chord in the right place' that strikes you ... We're still in the age of 'harmonic progressions' and people who are happy just with beauty of sound are hard to find. [...] I haven't written much orchestral music, but I have finished: Douze Etudes for piano, a Cello Sonata, and another sonata for flute, viola and harp, in the ancient, flexible mould with none of the grandiloquence of modern sonatas. There are going to be six of them for different groups of instruments and the last one will combine all those used in the previous five.[23]

(Debussy to Stravinsky)

> I've actually written nothing except 'pure' music: twelve *Etudes* for piano; two sonatas for various instruments in the old French style which was kind enough not to ask for tetralogical efforts from its listeners.[24]

A more complex aspect of Debussy's Janus-headed music is the concept of his war-time 'classicism'. Having read Debussy's invocation of the 'old French style' and an 'ancient and flexible type of sonata', Lockspeiser suggested that the 'later works looked forward to the neo-classical manner of the post-war period'.[25] Although it seems undeniable that Debussy

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[22] For a critique of overtly political interpretations of the art of this period, see Butler, *Early Modernism*, esp. 268-279.
[23] Letter to Bernardo Molinari of 6 October 1915, trans. in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 303-304.
[24] Letter to Stravinsky of 24 October 1915, trans. in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 309.
'Tétralogique' presumably refers to the total absence of German monumentality in the music (i.e. a pun on Wagner's 'Tetralogy').
[25] Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind* , II, 187.

rejected the nineteenth century tradition by returning directly to a sonata conception in which the formal principles of musical processes had not yet become fossilised into pre-determined structural designs, I think that Lockspeiser failed to define these 'neo-classical' tendencies with sufficient clarity. Further investigations reveal that the attempt to return to a specifically national tradition was widespread in France well before the outbreak of war, primarily because of a desire to undermine the hegemonic status of German music. To this end, the French embarked on a double-pronged attack by rejecting both avant-garde and historicist tendencies in German music. Schoenberg and Strauss were viewed with extreme distaste,[26] while (as Scott Messing has pointed out) before 1914 French critics reserved a term - *néoclassicisme* - specially for the perceived pedantry of German composers who perpetuated the forms of older instrumental music.[27] The woefully misunderstood music of Brahms was a particular target for this criticism.

Within such a politicised context, it is crucial to understand precisely what kind of classicism Debussy's sonatas embody. Pre-War use of the term *néoclassicisme* overlaps with what we might now consider as the pejorative element in musical 'historicism', with its connotations of innate conservatism and suggestions of an unimaginative employment of archaic techniques of composition. 'Neo-classicism' in this French 'Brahmsian' sense would thus be antithetical to every recorded comment Debussy made on the matter of form. But our modern usage of the term neo-classicism is also singularly unhelpful for Debussy's late music because it commonly denotes the ironic tendencies of the 1920s aesthetic (exemplified by Stravinsky, Cocteau and *Les Six*). By focusing on elements of parody,[28] modern understanding of the term is sullied by the suspicion that the composer has fallen back onto pre-existent props. Scores such as *Pulcinella* have always struggled to cast off the stigma of

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[26] See, for example, Romain Rolland's diary entry for 22 May 1907: 'But if the independents, like Ravel and Debussy, have sufficient intelligence and good faith to recognise (and perhaps envy) Strauss's power, all the Schola [Cantorum], as a whole, has risen against him.' From Rollo Myers (ed.), *Richard Strauss and Romain Rolland, Correspondence, Diary, Essays* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1968), 150. For source materials on the contemporary reception of Schoenberg in France, see Lesure (ed.), *Dossier de Presse: Pierrot Lunaire d'Arnold Schoenberg* (Geneva: Minkoff, 1985).

[27] Scott Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music: From the Genesis of the Concept through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic* (Ann Arbor & London: UMI Research Press, 1988), 14. The discussion here is indebted to his work.

[28] For this aesthetic see, most notoriously, Jean Cocteau, *Coq et l'Arlequin* (1918), trans. Rollo Myers (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1926). Also see Nancy Perloff's extensive description of the anti-Impressionist movements of the post-1918 period in her *Art and the Everyday: Popular entertainment and the circle of Eric Satie* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). Terminology is rather neater in German: Stephen Hinton has distinguished the 'Klassizmus' (Stravinsky, who 'used classical models in a manneristic way') from 'Klassik' (Schoenberg, 'who not only subscribed to Classical aesthetics [...] but demanded a place for himself in the pantheon of Austro-German classics'). See Hermann Danseur (ed.), *Die klassizistische Moderne in der Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts: Internationales Symposium der Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel 1996* (Winterthur: Amadeus Verlag, 1997), 116.

the 'meta-work' and have even been accused of being ultimately reducible to the status of 'music about music', as Adorno put it. Such implications are both historically and aesthetically inappropriate for Debussy.

A more pertinent description of Debussy's sonatas is encompassed by *nouveau classicisme*, a term used by *fin-de-siècle* French musicians to describe a distinct pre-1914 aesthetic of renewal in France. This new, liberating classicism was drawn along national lines, carefully distinguished from the academic *néoclassicisme* attributed to Germany. Messing argues that pre-war *nouveau classicisme* was not only a rejection of Brahms and Mahler, but was stimulated in the broadest sense by 'dissatisfaction with *fin-de-siècle* pessimism and decadence' and by a desire to exorcise Wagner's endemic influence on French music. Encouraged by the fruits of the newly-flourishing discipline of musicology, many French musicians acquainted themselves with their pre-nineteenth-century heritage. Crucially, editions of early music were not only produced by the academicians of the Schola Cantorum, but were also made by composers. Debussy himself contributed to these endeavours in 1908 by working on Rameau's opera *Les fêtes de Polymnie* for Durand.[29] As the general editor's introduction to Debussy's edition makes clear, the modern and the antique were expected to co-exist fruitfully:

> Sous la haute direction de Camille Saint-Saëns, la revision du texte et la réalisation de la basse chiffrée ont été faites par un des maîtres de la jeune école française, M. Claude Debussy, chez qui le talent si personnel et le sentiment si moderne n'excluent d'aucune façon la connaissance et l'admiration des ouvrages du passé.[30]

Given that this was in all probability penned by the curmudgeonly Saint-Saëns (general editor of the Rameau Edition) who was invariably critical of Debussy's 'atrocious' music,[31] one begins to realise that the French goal of a new classicism brought together a remarkably diverse range of composers who were otherwise totally opposed to one another. Their

[29] Of the other Rameau works, D'Indy edited *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1900), *Dardanus* (1905) and *Zaïs* (1911), Dukas edited *Les Indes Galantes* (1902) and *La Princesse de Navarre* (1906), Alexandre Guilmant edited *Les Fêtes d'Hébé* (1904) and *Le Temple de la Gloire* (1909), Georges Marty edited *Platée* (1907), Reynaldo Hahn edited *Les Fêtes de l'Hymen et de l'Amour* (1910), and Henri Büsser took on *Pymalion, Les Surprises de l'Amour, Anacréon* and *Les Sybarites* (1913).

[30] From the 'Avant-Propos par les éditeurs', in Claude Debussy (ed.), Rameau: *Les fêtes de Polymnie* (Paris: Durand, 1908).

[31] Saint-Saëns to Fauré in a letter of 27 December 1915 re: Debussy's *En blanc et noir*, as quoted in a previous chapter. See J. Barrie Jones (ed.), *Gabriel Fauré: a Life in Letters* (London: Batsford, 1989), 166.

common aims were formulated well before 1914, and it only took the outbreak of War itself for truly nationalist sentiments to be ignited.

Messing suggests that most of the actual music produced by the older French generation failed to embody the ideals expounded by the polemicists. Although composers such as Saint-Saëns and d'Indy aspired to the creation of a new French classicism in their choice of titles and genres, and often used gestures and harmonic techniques derived from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources, their music was still indebted (paradoxically) to the very object of their nationalistic polemics: nineteenth-century German music. Emily Bauer recorded that Debussy himself concurred with this in an interview of 1908: 'While Debussy firmly believes that his own music is purely French, he observed that that which is known as French music is quite as much German as it is French, which is to him a cause of regret as far as the purity of the French school is concerned'.[32] Even with the increasing availability of older French music after 1900, Messing argues that 'the treatment of pre-nineteenth century compositions was still subject to the congeniality of the material within the composer's personal style' - a personal style largely mediated through a pedagogical and performing tradition dominated by Germany.[33]

Messing suggests that before 1900 even Debussy found models of the French classical tradition largely through the works of his contemporaries, not from early music itself. Only after scholarly publications of early music appeared did he draw on more specific aspects of French baroque style, to the extent that direct borrowings from Rameau - particularly from *Les fêtes de Polymnie,* with which Debussy was so familiar - can be traced in the two 1915 sonatas.[34] Messing also draws several surprisingly close parallels with works by Couperin. But a mere handful of comparisons is of limited applicability. There is no question that Baroque sources of inspiration offered Debussy models of compositional technique, even if it is without doubt that he drew on his 1908 editing project during the last decade of his life in order to find a point of departure for certain musical gestures.

What, then, can be said about the special nature of Debussy's classicism?

[32] Emily Bauer, 'Debussy talks of his music', *Harper's Weekly*, 29 August 1908, reproduced in Lesure & Smith (eds.) *Debussy on Music*, 233.
[33] Messing, *Neoclassicism*, 36.
[34] Messing, *Neoclassicism*, 45-48.

DEBUSSY'S CLASSICISM

In Chapter 1, I linked Debussy's post-*Pelléas* aesthetic of *réalités* with what Laloy described as *dépouillement*, but noted that a concurrent strand of *dépouillement* is also evident in Debussy's oeuvre in the form of classicism before and after the main period of experimentation with *réalités* (*ca.* 1903-1912). Debussy's classicism is therefore perhaps rather broader in scope than Messing has allowed for. I suggest that Debussy's music contains two main ideas of what it might mean to be 'classic'. There is the familiar strand of French classicism, evident in works such as *Pour le Piano* of 1894-1901 which incorporate movements entitled Prélude, Sarabande and Toccata. There is also the slender strand of 'real' antiquity in Debussy: the Greek ideal, shared with Ravel and probably inherited from what Robert Orledge has described as 'Fauré's much-vaunted Hellenism', itself part of a wider classical revival in France.[35] As Orledge points out, the later nineteenth-century revolt against Romanticism, particularly Wagnerism, stimulated the Alexandrine revival and the rise of the Parnassian poets. The French understanding of Hellenic times as an era in which the cultivation of beauty rose far above the commonplace concerns of everyday life eventually fed into several early modern movements, particularly symbolism.

Debussy, Marguerite Long reported, considered the French musical genius to be the 'incarnation of fantasy and sensibility',[36] and it is perhaps this sensibility which distinguishes the 'period costume' of French classicism - which at its extreme embodies highly nostalgic, Watteau-inspired affectation - from the stark, denuded severity of antique classicism with its suppression of nostalgia. Although the anti-Romantic element common to both French and antique classicism renders a rigid distinction between the two of limited use, it can open up a series of interesting comparisons. For example, from the piano music of the 1880s/90s we might set Chabrier's *Ronde champêtre*, *Paysage* or *Menuet Pompeux* alongside Satie's *Sarabandes* or *Gymnopédies*. On the one hand, there is the French tradition: 'We have just heard something extraordinary: this music links our time with that of Couperin and Rameau', César Franck said of Chabrier's *Pièces pittoresques*.[37] Satie's music, in comparison, is an extreme case of Classical *dépouillement* written directly as a reaction against the prevailing obsession with Wagner. The *Gymnopédies* are nothing if not severe, ritualised, 'antique' waltzes.

[35] Robert Orledge, *Gabriel Fauré* (London: Eulenberg, 1979), 153.
[36] Marguerite Long, *At the piano with Debussy* (London: Dent,1972), 29.
[37] Quoted by Roy Howat in his introduction to *Chabrier: Works for Piano*, xi.

Such distinctions can be discerned in Debussy's early music. 'Chabrier' classicism is present from the *Suite Bergamasque* (1890) which, as Alfred Cortot remarked in 1920, 'already contains that slightly affected mixture of the modern and the antiquated which will characterise a number of later pieces in which are invoked the delicate shades of the harpsichordists, those chosen ancestors of Debussy'.[38] Even the title makes a connection with Verlaine's world of *Masques et bergamasques*, as Dawes has pointed out.[39] On the other hand, 'antique' classicism also surfaces in Debussy's music under Satie's influence. Compare, for example, the unornamented *Gymnopédies* - which Debussy orchestrated - with Debussy's own *Danse Profane* for harp and strings, particularly at the *A Tempo* 22 bars before fig. 4. It is easy to forget in the light of the highly vocal support of Milhaud's generation that Satie's early music had direct issue well before post-1918 developments.[40]

In Debussy's later music the distinction becomes less useful. His *Hommage à Rameau* from the first set of piano *Images* (1905), for example, engages with French classicism without rosy nostalgia, replacing the Verlaine-inspired sensibility of the *Suite Bergamasque* with a ritualised severity that echoes Satie's antique *dépouillement*. I have to agree with Frank Dawes, who argued that the *Hommage* was devoid of pastiche:

> Rather, it is in the great tradition of the *tombeau*, a belated funerary offering to one great composer written entirely in the idiom of another. In the main it has an impressive austerity; there are even a few traces of Satie-like plainness in the solemn tread of triadic chords. But, as so often in the pieces that look back to the time of the *clavecinistes*, there is a feeling of emotional commitment expressed through chromatic harmony of considerable warmth.[41]

In the finest compositions of Debussy's maturity the distinction tends to dissolve because of the sheer richness of inspiration. *Jeux*, for example, might seem particularly 'French' alongside its exact contemporary, Fauré's Hellenistic *Pénélope*. The contrast is between the voluptuous and the chaste, between a work which embodies a process of proliferation (as I

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[38] Alfred Cortot, *The Piano Music of Claude Debussy* (London: Chester, 1922), 6 [an offprint of the article in the Debussy memorial volume of *La Revue Musicale* (December 1920), translated by Violet Edgell].

[39] Dawes, *Debussy Piano Music*, 20-21.

[40] See, for example, Darius Milhaud, 'La musique française', *La revue musicale* 308/309 (Paris, 1978), 120-121 [part of a special issue devoted to 'Le retour au classique' and reproduced from Milhaud's *Études* (Paris, 1927)]. On the complex relationship between Debussy and Satie, see Robert Orledge, *Satie the Composer* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 39-67.

[41] Dawes, *Debussy Piano Music*, 30. Dawes also compares the 'extraordinarily chaste classicality' of *Danseuses de Delphes* with 'the vaguely Grecian world of Satie's *Gymnopédies* and *Gnossiennes*' [*ibid.*, 37]; *Canope* is offered a similar antique ancestry [*ibid.*, p. 49].

have shown in Chapter 3) rather than divestment. Yet there is an antique element in *Jeux* that feeds off the unmistakable presence of the Alexandrine element in *Faune*, evident even without the encouragement of Nijinsky's 'Grecian-urn' choreography. *Faune* and *Jeux* are devoid of nostalgia or French mannerism, sharing their classic qualities with Debussy's spurious but self-consciously antique *Bilitis* settings.

Daphnis et Chloe is an even better example. Although explicitly antique in subject-matter, *Daphnis* was, just as Ravel claimed, 'less thoughtful of archaism than of fidelity to the Greece of my dreams, which identifies quite willingly with that imagined and depicted by late eighteenth-century French artists'.[42] Here, perhaps, Ravel acknowledged the crucial element in distinguishing the lively, invigorating classicism of the greatest composers from the dead-letter classicism of Saint-Saëns and d'Indy. Classicism could be an element of true enrichment, its cultural resonance deriving from the generous eclecticism of its sources of inspiration in which Watteau could rub alongside the antique, the modern and the exotic. Consequently, a deeply-assimilated, plural conception of classicism was a sign of strength against conservatism and pure historicism as well as the more familiar targets of Romanticism and Teutonic modernism.

It is this very eclecticism that is the hallmark of Debussy's late sonatas. At one extreme, the presence of historicism is unmistakable in Debussy's deliberate alignment of his music with the classical French tradition. A well-known illustration of this is supplied by the front covers of the first editions of his sonatas, which were produced in exactly the same format as the engraved frontispieces of the early eighteenth century (e.g. *Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp*, copy attached).[43] Yet even this overtly historicist feature suggests an affinity which stretches beyond obvious similarities in presentation. Compare this with the title page of François Couperin's *own* homage to his national tradition, *Apothéose de Lully* (copy attached).[44] Couperin, brought up with the music of Lully and Corelli, fashioned an individual stylistic language out of the music of the contemporary French and Italian idioms, and in many ways his relationship with the preceding French tradition was as acutely self-conscious as Debussy's. The *Apothéose* in memory of Lully was, in Couperin's own words, a 'homage ... rather than a musical eulogy'[45] and, like Debussy, he was fully aware of the rich diversity of

[42] Ravel, 'An Autobiographical Sketch', in Orenstein (ed.), *A Ravel Reader*, 29-37.
[43] Reproduced from the first edition (Paris: Durand, 1915-16).
[44] Title page of the 1725 edition of *Apothéose de Lully* reproduced from *Oeuvres Complètes de François Couperin*, IV, *Musique de Chambre* 4, ed. Anédée Gastoué (Monaco: Éditions de l'Oiseau-Lyre 1933/R eds. Kenneth Gilbert and Davitt Moroney, 1992).
[45] Gastoué, Gilbert and Moroney (eds.), *Oeuvres Complètes de François Couperin*, 7.

SIX SONATES

POUR DIVERS INSTRUMENTS

Composées par

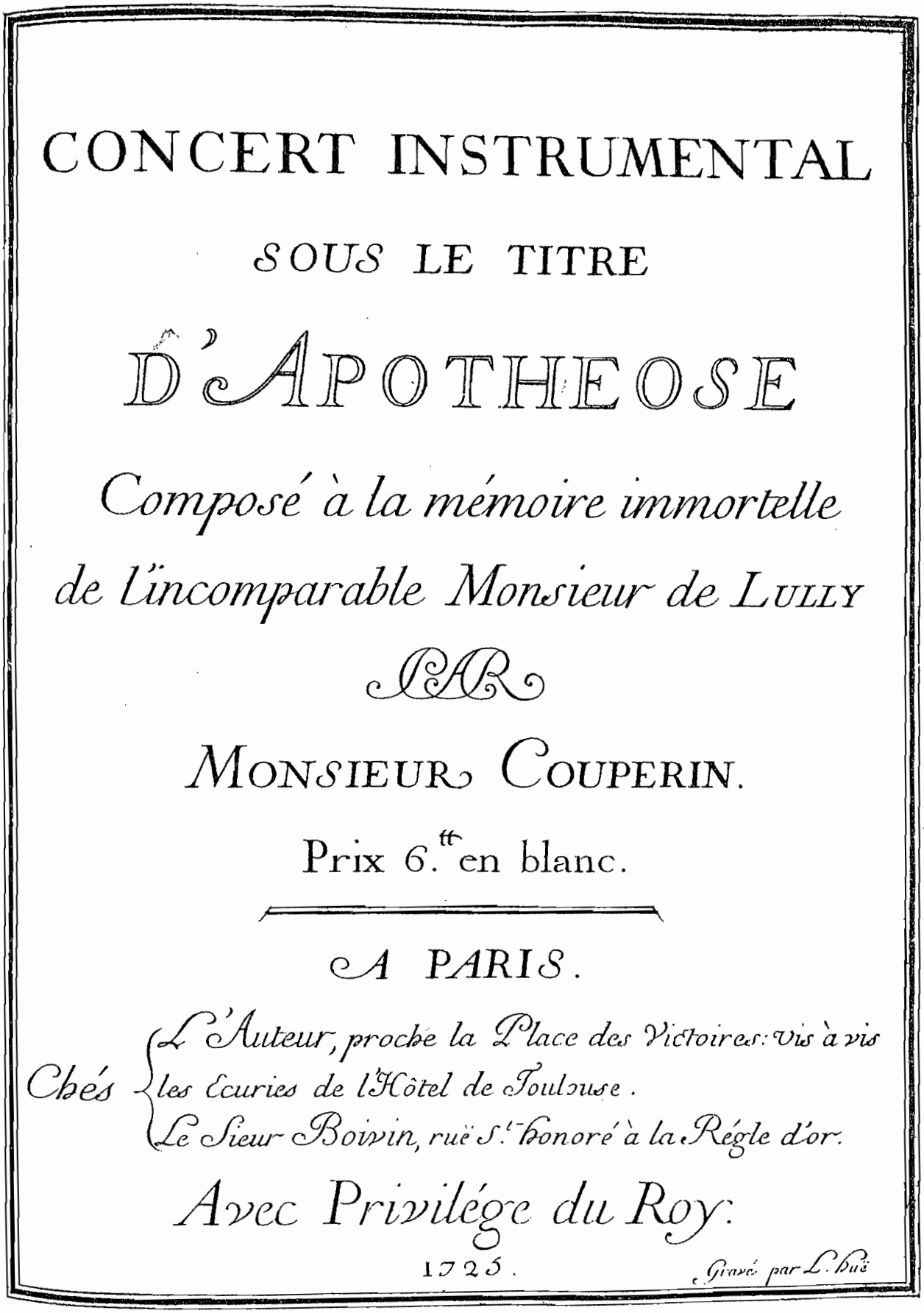
CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Musicien Français

La Deuxième pour Flûte, Alto et Harpe.

A PARIS

Chez { *les Editeurs* DURAND ET Cie
Maison sise au N.o 4, Place de la Madeleine
proche des grands boulevards.



Title page of *Apothéose de Lully*, 1725 edition

tradition. It was surely the richness of French classicism itself which attracted Debussy to Couperin in the first place.

At the other extreme, there are the folk-like thematic elements in the finale of the Trio sonata, fresh, expressive and unquestionably modern in idiom. But between this extreme and Debussy's historically-authentic frontispieces there is an entire spectrum of cultural resonance. There is a broadly nostalgic element, which encompasses everything from quasi-historicist passages of pure modality (the opening of the cello sonata, say, or the clavecin allusion at bars 85-91 of the Interlude from the Trio Sonata which echoes the pure modality of the *Danse sacrée* of 1904) to the 'modern', brittle Harlequinades inspired by Verlaine's Pierrot (the middle movements of the cello and violin sonatas, which embody Debussy's definition of French music as the 'incarnation of fantasy and sensibility'). Then there is the obvious understatement of much of the late music, reflecting the kind of *tombeau* austerity found in the *Hommage à Rameau*, or the refined antique simplicity which evoked such expressive intensity in *Flûte de Pan* (later renamed *Syrinx*). 'How much has to be discarded before one reaches the naked flesh of emotion,' Debussy declared to Godet, and it is in these late sonatas that the colour and freely sensuous manner of his early manner and the post-*Pelléas* aesthetic of *réalités* is pared away most drastically. It is striking in this context that Debussy reworked his 1901 Bilitis settings into six *épigraphes* in 1914: this act, although not as creative as the composition of a new work, presumably helped him to rediscover the antique classicism that had been so fruitful in the past as part of his search for an anti-*Debussyste*/anti-modernist means of expression. The ultimate extreme of this tendency towards *dépouillement* is the ghostly 'presence of absence' in some of the late music, that sense of immensely-controlled suppression most noticeable in the Trio sonata, where Debussy presents a Minuet barely able to muster the faintest echo of a true dance movement. The 'naked flesh of emotion' is therefore revealed by what is missing, purged, or suppressed. Clearly, Debussy cultivated a classical French aesthetic that was consciously developed as an exact inversion of the contemporary German aesthetic of expressionism.

This rest of this chapter will endeavour to provide a close reading of the late sonatas, seeking ways of understanding how these fragile vehicles can accommodate such an extraordinarily rich collection of elements. The layers of tradition and experience that I have suggested lies behind these works makes my initial starting point - the dialectic between Debussy's reaction against the contemporary state of music and his intention to establish a relationship with a specifically French past - more problematic than ever. But the diversity of Debussy's

classicism provides a timely reminder that in one sense he never found a 'solution' to the difficulties he encountered in trying to mediate between the demands of tradition and innovation. The successes of 1915 were the products of his ability to harness the creative tension between the all these different strands and to keep them in a state of continual flux.

When it comes to making a close reading of the music along these lines, it becomes extremely hard to maintain a truly fluid approach in which elements from the past can be kept in play even while they are being re-interpreted as sources of inspiration for new ideas. I have found that a useful strategy for critical commentary can be found in the recreation of the patriotism/anti-modernism interplay as a dialectic between form and freedom. Debussy's reaction against the anarchic elements in modernist music, for example, seems to be manifested in his rigorous concern for formal discipline. Most notable is the incorporation of sonata elements, cyclic returns, and his use of tonality. On the other hand, his freedom of expression and ready willingness to depart from formal expectations into a world of fantasy expressed through cadenzas and arabesques can be seen as part of his attachment to the freedom he valued most in his chosen canonic tradition. This dialectic is all-pervasive. Consider tonality, for example: although the outer movements of all three sonatas all begin and end in the appropriate tonic key, intra-movement digressions are often extraordinarily daring.

The dialectic is also truly dialogic: the two strands could be reversed just as convincingly, where formal discipline and tonal clarity embody Debussy's alignment with the French traditions while his freedom of expression becomes an anti-modernist reminder that there could be more than one route to musical progress in 1915. Re-reading Debussy's letter to Molinari of 6 October (quoted earlier) brings home the fluidity of this dialectic. He stresses the 'beauties of music "by itself", with no axe to grind or new inventions to amaze the so-called dilettanti' - tartly rebuffing the politicised and opportunistic extremes of some modernist innovators - and emphasises the importance of being 'happy just with beauty of sound'. The 'ancient' mould for the sonata was also the 'flexible' mould - but scrupulous design was as important as ever - 'this power of "the right chord in the right place"'.

*

Figs. 7.1 - 7.6 comprise a series of graphical representations designed to provide points of departure for discussion rather than free-standing analyses.[46] Each figure is laid out in a manner which reveals the main structural ideas, so the designs for individual movements tend to work in slightly different ways. In each case, the layout is intended to open up the dialectic interplay between form and freedom. For practical reasons of presentation, more attention is paid to motivic structure than harmony, so the scores should be read alongside my graphs.

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[46] Several bar-by-bar accounts of all three sonatas already exist. Reasonably detailed exegesis may be found in: Istvan Kecskeméti, 'Claude Debussy, *Musicien Français*: His Last Sonatas', *Revue belge de musicologie* XVI (1962), 117-149; Raymond Roy Park, 'The Later Style of Claude Debussy', (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1967), 253-268.

II

Sonata for Cello and Piano

FORM AND FREEDOM

Fig. 7.1 shows how the tension between form and freedom in the first movement of the cello sonata might be construed. The six main areas clearly correlate to the familiar structural paradigm of the sonata principle:

Layout of Fig. 7.1

CELLO SONATA

I

Exposition:

First subject group (b. 1) — Second subject group (b.8)

[Episode (bb.16-28)]

Recap of first subject (b. 29) — **Recap** of second subject (b. 39)

Coda, based on material from first subject (b.45)

Debussy's large-scale harmonic structure reflects this thematic discipline. *Both* subjects, at bars 1 and 8, are based in the tonic key of D minor (more accurately, D-Aeolian, with subsequent chromatic modifications). The second theme never modulates, returning at bar 39 in the tonic. Even the free ostinato of the episode turns out to be conceived within a very strict conception of pitch structure - every note in bars 21-23 is exclusively drawn from a single octatonic collection. The underlying structure of an interlocking pattern of diminished triads exhausts the available pitch resources in a truly Rimskian manner: order within chaos indeed. Yet Debussy strove for an 'ancient, flexible form' in which there is considerable deviance from conventional expectations, and the proliferation of melodic material into the realms of fantasy counterbalances his unusual recourse to the sonata principle and a virtually monothematic design. The cello arabesques are allowed to flourish with extravagant virtuosity in the first subject group, and the harmonic twists are often surprising (the cello's move onto B*b* in bar 6, for example, seem to shift the tonality up a semitone into E*b* minor, even retaining the preceding plagal allusions by incorporating A*b* in the bass).

CELLO SONATA / I

piano

cello [variation]

b. 35

cello

b. 39

V IV I

EPISODE

C♮ - C♯

M1

bb. 21-23 exhaust octatonic coll.

ostinato

C♯ - C♮

E♮ - F♭

F♯ - F♮

E♭ - E♮

D♭ - D♮ - D♭

[+ 2 bars]

cadenza

8(b)

f. b. 5

E♭ - E♮ etc

[quasi cadenza]

RECAP

[F:]

piano

F♮ - F♯ - F♮

- F♯

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Debussy largely avoids 'modulation' in the conventional sense. Rather, one of the most intricate techniques of his private world of methods springs from a quasi-medieval ability to effect chromatic inflections, altering the mode and thus the character or mood of a particular moment. The technique is not dissimilar to hexachordal mutation, except Debussy's materials are not based on an interlocking set of hexachords but a series of modal, diatonic, pentatonic and octatonic scales.[1] Chromatic inflections allow him to invest the music with shape and direction within an otherwise un-dynamic tonal framework. The interaction between B*b* and B between bars 2 and 3, for example, provide a means of opening up new harmonic areas: bar 3 remains in D-Aeolian, until the last beat, when the ascending figure onto C (via a B-natural leading note, with a descent to G in the bass) opens up the possibility of a turn to C major. Only with the return to B*b*'s in bar 5 is the inflection returned to D-Aeolian, and the momentary inflection heard as an Aeolian-Dorian inflection within D. To pick apart such fleeting changes might seem excessive, but the principle of 'mutation' underpins much of the moment-to-moment cultivation and shaping of phrases. This technique, so subtle compared to the music of many of his contemporaries, seems to exemplify Carter's observation that Debussy's 'inexplicable' methods seem remote from common practice.

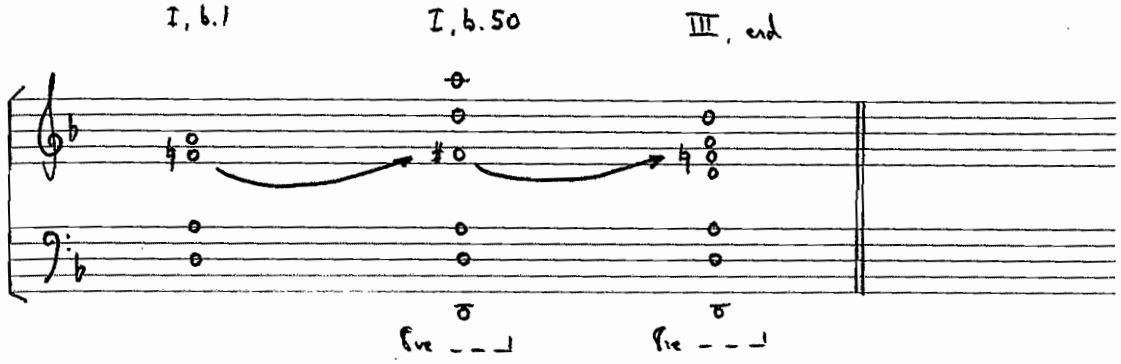
Similar strategies can be found throughout the movement: in the piano between A and A*b* in bars 12-13, for example, to switch ambiguously between F major triads and seventh chords on B*b*, and then at the end of bar 13 to turn towards the whole-tone collection by emphasising the combined cello/piano collection A*b*-B*b*-C-D-E; or bars 21-27, the point of greatest tension at which the close juxtaposition of conflicting pitches provide a point of dramatic instability (possibly for extra-musical reasons [2]). These chromatic inflections are given a wry touch in the coda where, just as the tonality seems to have settled onto the minor triad at bar 47, there is a sudden Picardy third in the last chord. Its presence has considerable resonance, not just as an archaic touch, but as a reflection of the chromatic workings that have underpinned the carefully-textured shaping of the movement as a whole. Indeed , just as the turn to the major is unexpected in the predominantly modal/minor Prologue, the finale (where a turn to the major seems most likely) ends firmly and abruptly in the minor. The sonata as a whole therefore reproduces the D minor-D major dichotomy contained within these last few bars of the first movement at the deepest structural level:

---

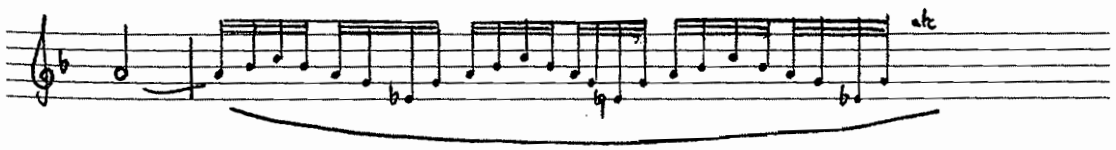
[1] For an explanation of the mechanisms and conventions of hexachordal mutation in early music, see Margaret Bent, 'Diatonic ficta', *Early Music History* 4 (1984), 1-48. On the 'interaction of harmonic types and the unambiguously tonal outcome of that interaction' in Debussy's mature music, see Samson, *Music in Transition*, 36-40.

[2] Kecskeméti suggests that the ostinato is a 'picture of Javanese gamelan music', a connotation which I cannot hear. See 'Debussy: His Last Sonatas', 125-6.

Cello sonata, I, II, III
Surface chromatic inflections reflected in minor/major mixture of background structure



'Form' in the sense of a force which provides a source of overarching structural coherence, is also supplied by the 'Ariadne's thread' of motivic working. The same two motifs are continually reworked in order to provide that quality of endless variation so distinctive in Debussy's music. Consider the recasting of first subject material at bar 31. Debussy spins a new gesture (in fact derived from the intervallic structure of the opening cello motif of bar 4) around a single note, G. The 'new' figure turns out to be crucial in sustaining the integrated nature of the whole sonata, since it is reborn in the third movement as a major element in the second group: compare III, bars 23, 49, 57, 63, 104, and - ultimately - at the point at which the cyclic nature of the entire work becomes unequivocal, bars 115-118. Similarly, the cello arabesque at bars 37 and 38, ostensibly a freely sensuous moment, disguises a purely formal function in that it decorates a dominant pedal in preparation for the recapitulation at bar 39. In this respect, it foreshadows the dominant pedal provided by the end of the second movement in preparation for the finale, not only in terms of function, but also motivically:

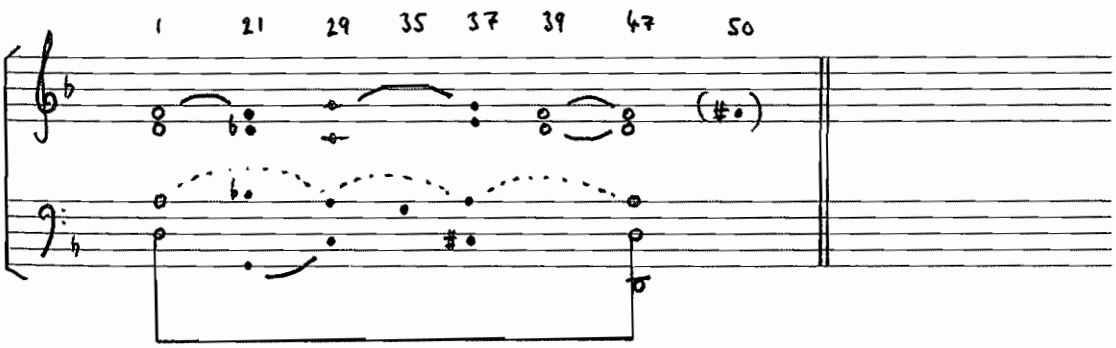
Structural dominant pedal 'concealed' as free arabesque
Cello Sonata, I, 37-8

Cello Sonata, II, 59-64

A further comparison may be made by aligning the arabesques of bars 5-7 with their cognates in the recapitulation, bars 35-37. Asterisked notes in Fig. 7.1 demonstrate how the two figures are related intervallically. Debussy simply recasts the same material in a more languid

triplet rhythm, and replaces the fantasy around top B*b* (as a potential point of harmonic departure, bars 6-7) with a virtuosic fantasy around top A (bars 37-38, the point of dominant preparation in advance of the 'real' recapitulation onto the tonic in bar 39).

Although I have described the 'development' section as an episode because there is little evidence of 'organic working', on closer inspection it does establish associations with other parts of the piece, despite the seemingly wild ostinato with its extraordinary metrical dislocations and pounding articulation. Not only does the cello ostinato motif (M1, bar 20) grow out of the descending arabesque line immediately preceding it, but it was prefigured in earlier arabesque lines (bar 5) and in the bass (bars 3-4), where it underpins a plagal cadence. This plagal quality runs throughout the movement, its archaic connotations providing one of Debussy's most tangibly 'retrospective' elements (the V-IV-I cadence at bar 15 being an obvious example). The presence of this M1 motif in the bass shows that surface features can recur with new functions by working at a different structural level. Moreover, not only does a surface feature grow out of a cadential bass line: the surface motif itself can also help to underpin the deeper structure. Consider the episode in relation to the monotonal harmonic areas in D around it. Due to its low register and stressed rhythmic character, the cello ostinato acts rather like a pedal note on G and as a consequence circumscribes a plagal relationship with the rest of the movement.

Background harmonic structure
Cello Sonata, I



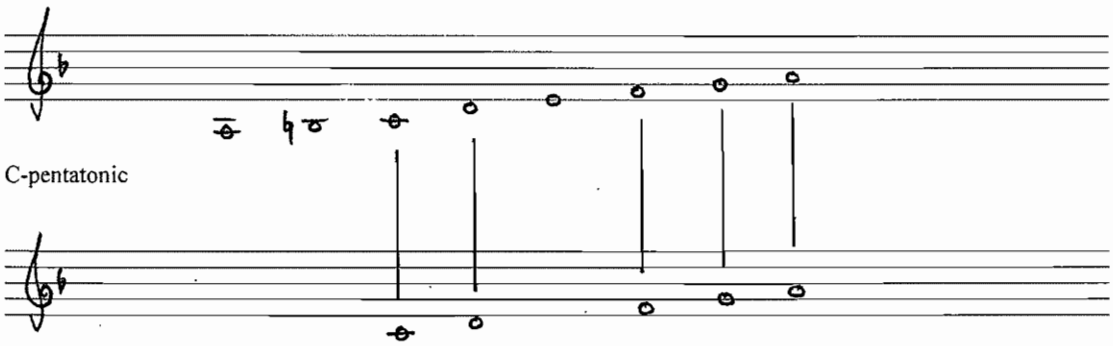
The re-appearance of features at different structural levels reinforces the richness of integration in Debussy's music. Characteristically, the 'artifice' with which these logical associations are created is concealed; stringency of conception need not exclude freedom and fluidity in the music's surface.

The background structure shown above doesn't explore fully the recapitulation of the first thematic group in the cello at bar 29. It is a particularly intriguing passage, continually

suggestive of harmonic progressions that are never fully realised. The tonic key does not accompany the recapitulation of the thematic material, but is delayed until the return of the second subject at bar 39. Instead, there is a modal mixture formed between a C major pentatonic collection and A-Aeolian material. C is supplied by the noble resonances of tolling bells in the piano (echoes of *La Cathédrale Engloutie*), underpinned by pentatonic lines in octaves and prepared by a perfect cadence. The cello line is a simple transposition of the initial bar 1 material from D-Aeolian to A-Aeolian. The mixture of the piano and cello scale collections is perfectly congruent, although Debussy combines the two so as to highlight ambiguity:

Harmony, bb. 29-30

A-Aeolian



C-pentatonic

B*b* inflections en route (bar 31) together with the C in the bass and leading notes in the tenor (the E in bar 32) pull suggestively towards F major (as later, at bar 44-45). But any stable modulation or confirmation of key is avoided, and the music settles in a non-committal manner back on C-pentatonic in bar 35, only to be swept away by the flurry of arabesque and E*b*-E inflections around the true dominant pedal, A, in bars 37-38. By being simultaneously suggestive and evasive with his harmony, Debussy manages yet again to achieve a balance, both alluding to conventions of the past and nurturing his own idiom, sustaining a stable (at times static) overall tonality while providing the meandering quality which invests the music with so much of its free fantasy.

PIERROT FACHE AVEC LA LUNE

Mit groteskem Risenbogen
kratz Pierrot auf seiner Bratsche.[3]

Et la mandoline jase
Parmi les frissons de brise...
La, la, la, la, la...[4]

The characters and scenarios of the Commedia dell' Arte offer a fascinating point of contact between Debussy and the French traditions. Couperin himself took great interest in the Commedia as a source of inspiration and stylization. Jane Clark, describing the popularity of 'Le Théâtre Italien' in the 1720s, suggested that one of the most famous harlequins ever, Evaristo Gherardi 'dit l'Arlequine', could have been the subject of Couperin's 'L'Arlequine' in the *Quatrième livre de pièces de clavecin* (Paris, 1730).[5] Couperin's volume contains other pieces inspired by the spirit of the Commedia: the festivities of *Les Tambourins*; the extraordinary percussive effects and diminished harmony of *Les Satires*, specifically marked 'Vivement, et dans un gôut burlesque'; and the parody and mimetic guitar allusions of *La Pantomime*. Particularly interesting comparisons include the burlesque of *Les Satires* (*Pièces de Clavecin*, book four), which features dissonant melodic leaps and the cultivation of a rather tormented texture, cultivated from an unusual reliance on low registers and cacophonous, percussive left hand chords (see, for example, bars 6-18 and 22-26). Points of musical contact can also be drawn between Couperin's evocation of 'affect' through his inventive explorations of the potential for restless, uneven rhythmic patterns and plangent chromaticism. But perhaps it is the overall sensibility which has the strongest resonances with Debussy's Cello Sonata. Wilfred Mellers suggested that Couperin's accomplished technique reconciled

> a mannered 'social' artificiality with a latently personal emotion, in which it is possible to trace some analogy with the painting of Watteau. Beneath the apparently passive acceptance of the courtly convention there is an intense apprehension of the loneliness of the individual consciousness.[6]

[3] 'With a bow grossly monstrous scrapes Pierrot on his viola.' From *Three Times Seven Poems* by Albert Giraud, from *Serenade*, the nineteenth movement of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*.
[4] 'And the mandolin chatters in the shivers of the breeze....', from Paul Verlaine, *Mandoline*.
[5] Jane Clark, 'Les Folies Françoises: Personalities in the music of Louis Couperin', *Early Music* 8/2 (April 1980), 163-69.
[6] Wilfred Mellers, *François Couperin and the French Classical Tradition* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1950), 208.

Debussy was familiar with most aspects of the French Commedia tradition, including the paintings of Antoine Watteau and Couperin's *Pièces de clavecin.*[7] But the Commedia was also part of a *living* tradition for Debussy. 'Pierrot' stories formed a significant part of French popular culture at the end of the nineteenth century, particularly in the many children's songs which Debussy would have been familiar with from his own childhood and through Chouchou. Weckerlin's *Chansons et Rondes Enfantines* (1889), for example, not only contained Debussy's favoured melodies 'Do, do, l'enfant do' and 'Nous n'irons plus au bois' (both melodies used in 'Jardins sur la pluie', *Rondes de Printemps* and elsewhere), but several Pierrot songs, including 'Au clair de la lune', 'Arlequin tient sa Boutique' ['Arlequin et Polichinelle'], and 'Polichinelle'.[8] Another collection of popular songs of the time contains additional Commedia material, 'Arlequin marie sa fille' and 'Le Petit Pierrot' as well as other familiar Debussy material such as 'Le Printemps', 'Les Cloches', and 'L'Enfant Prodigue'.[9]

The artistic aspect of this popular tradition was represented for Debussy by Verlaine, particularly the *Fêtes Galantes*, and his interest in the Commedia lasted from his earliest songs (*Pierrot*, *Pantomime*, *Fantoches* and *Clair de Lune*) to the summer of 1915, when he was still considering a *Fêtes Galantes* ballet project with Laloy and Charles Morice.[10] Specific points of contact between Debussy's earlier music and the cello sonata seem clear: the improvisatory qualities of the second movement of the Cello Sonata clearly recall the innovative 'stringed' textures in the piano accompaniment to his early Verlaine song *Mandoline*, the non-thematic 'preludising' of the guitar in 'La Sérénade interrompue' and the mimetic qualities of the violin strumming in *Ibéria.* There is even a deliberate quotation from the 'guitar' juxtapositions in bar 17-20 of *Soirée dans Grenade*: the resemblance is particularly clear when the guitar motif is echoed at the very end of the *Estampe* (bars 128-129):

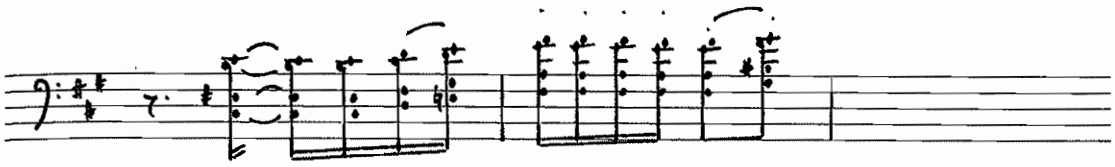
[7] E.g. Debussy wrote in SIM (15 January 1913): 'Why are we so indifferent to our own great Rameau? And towards Destouches, now almost forgotten? And to Couperin, the most poetic of our harpsichordists, whose tender melancholy is like that enchanting echo that emanates from the depths of a Watteau landscape, filled with plaintive figures?'. Trans. Lesure and Smith (eds.), *Debussy on Music*, 273.

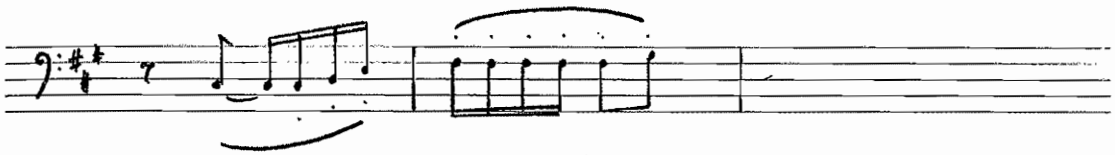
[8] J.-B. Weckerlin, *Chansons et Rondes Enfantines* (Paris: Librairie arnier Frères, 1889).

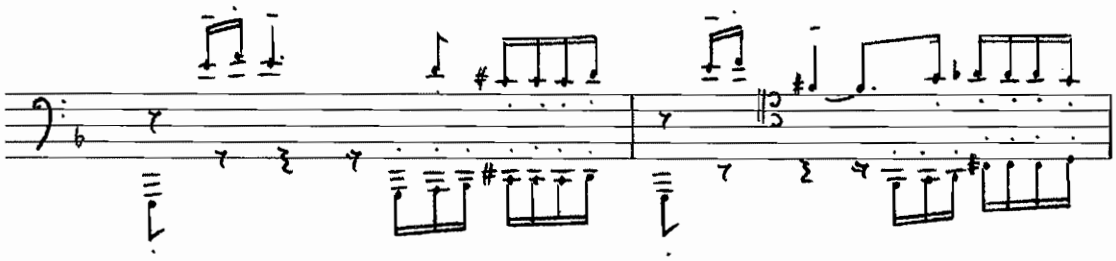
[9] All from V.-F. Verrimist's multi-volume collection *Rondes et Chansons Populaires Illustrées* [Nouvelle édition] (Paris: Lahure, 1890?).

[10] On *Crimen amoris* (later *Fêtes galantes*), which Debussy toyed with between 1912-15, see Orledge, *Debussy and the Theatre*, 206-216.

Soirée dans Grenade, bars 17-18



Soirée dans Grenade, bars 128-129

Cello Sonata II, bars 5-6



Many artists of Debussy's own generation found that the Commedia scenarios offered archetype characters outside specific cultural, social and historical settings with which to transcend realism. The tragi-comic farce plots, while of a popular nature, were amenable to a highbrow modernist aesthetic in which the 'alienation and fragmentation of the modern self' could be foreshadowed.[11] This probing of the human condition, a profoundly modern dimension, is seen in the melancholy solitude of Picasso's *Harlequin* of 1901, Stravinsky's volatile, intensely human *Petrushka* (1910-11), frustrated in a world of mechanistic ostinato and artifice, Schoenberg's expressionist masterpiece *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), and Busoni's *Arlecchino* (1913-16). Yet there is no doubt that Debussy maintained a decidedly French perspective on the Commedia. It is only coincidental that Schoenberg's nineteenth movement, a waltz entitled 'Serenade', opens with a relatively extensive introduction for cello and piano, and that the *Serenade* of the second movement of Debussy's Cello Sonata was originally to be subtitled 'Pierrot fâché avec la lune'. Debussy's Pierrot is, of course, that of Verlaine, not that of the 'detestable German *modernstyl*'. (His response to *Pierrot Lunaire* was cold, especially in comparison to the excitement shared by Ravel and Stravinsky.

[11] On the revival of the Commedia in modernist culture see Martin Green and John Swan, *The Triumph of Pierrot: the Commedia dell' Arte and the Modern Imagination* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), to which my discussion is indebted. Mellers, in 'The Later Work of Claude Debussy', also provides a sensitive discussion around Debussy's Commedia elements, pp. 52-54.

'Debussy, when I told him about it, merely stared at me and said nothing', reported Stravinsky.[12])

I suggest that the multi-faceted relationship between old and new in the Commedia of the 1900s offered Debussy a source of inspiration which could embrace the French traditions and the bitter melancholy of war-time France, as well as popular culture and the escapist world of childhood to which he had been increasingly attracted after Chouchou's birth. Moreover, Commedia elements enabled Debussy to balance the competing tendencies of fantasy and form, the freedom of the spiky *harlequinade* juxtapositions contrasting with his scrupulous handling of intervallic and structural processes. To ignore this interplay would be either to undermine the erratic strangeness of the music, or to neglect the elegance of his compositional technique.

Rather than accepting the deliberate fragmentation of the musical surface, one analyst has proposed an astonishingly reductive reading of this movement, claiming to uncover a scheme of intervallic working which foreshadows the abstract mechanisms of music from the mid-twentieth century.[13] His exegesis seeks a process of intervallic expansion isolated from all considerations of motif. Attractive though this might seem for analytical discourse, it appears fundamentally misguided when any discussion of Debussy's 'private world of methods' is at issue because it subsumes the neurotic dislocations and sudden contrasts into a rather desperate systematisation, as well as ignoring the underlying musical processes (which are primarily motivic in this case). I prefer to take as a point of departure Mellers' perspective, who argued that the music is 'extraordinary, frustrated [...] one of the most concentrated of Debussy's Harlequin pieces, and the most significantly modern'.[14]

Fig. 7.2 shows the interplay between form and fantasy, and helps to explain why the piece is so 'concentrated'. The graph reveals a fairly simple structure in which two groups of motivic material are independently developed. The materials first heard between bars 3-5 make up the first group, incorporating three motivic elements which are allowed to flourish until bar 27 and again from bar 54. The second group (bar 28) comprises another motif based on the

---

[12] Stravinsky, *Expositions and Developments*, 68. Whether Debussy ever heard *Pierrot Lunaire* or even saw a score is questionable.
[13] Robert Moevs, 'Intervallic procedures in Debussy: 'Serenade' from the *Sonata for Cello and Piano*, 1915' in *Perspectives of New Music* (Fall-Winter, 1969), 82-101. Teresa Davidian, following Moevs, has sought similar insights into the Prologue in her study, 'Intervallic Process and Autonomy in the First Movement of Debussy's *Sonata for Cello and Piano*', *Theory and Practice* 14/15 (1989-90).
[14] Mellers, 'The later work of Claude Debussy', 54.

CELLO SONATA / II

cello

piano

arco

etc

tritare ; ostinato

+ ostinato

pizz

(var.)

(tutta)

W-T tritare

distratto

attacca.

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'Moorish' intervals B-C-D# (heard elsewhere in Debussy's 'Spanish' pieces, *e.g.* the serenade melody in 'La Sérénade Interrompue').

Layout of Fig. 7.2

CELLO SONATA

II

Group 1 (bars 1-27) **Group 2** (bar 28-53)

Return to group 1 (bar 54)

Far from being 'essentially non-thematic', as the *New Grove* claims, all the music derives from these four basic motivic types, as can be seen by following their evolution in Fig. 7.2. Associations are created by isolating an interval (e.g. the tritone in bar 4, which is recast as an ostinato in bars 11-17, reappears in bar 23 and recurs at the very end, at bars 55 and 59), or a rhythmic gesture (e.g. the avoidance of the strong first beat of the bar by rests or ties, as at bar 5 and *passim*, exacerbating the nervous twitches of the idiom). To be sure, the motivic transformations are not as intricate or disguised as in Debussy's other music: the relative clarity of fig. 7.2 shows how readily the materials fall into the main paradigms. This is the whole idea, however, and the source of the movement's intensity: the concept of a frustrated improvisation of limited variety, going round in circles and never breaking free from the few basic motifs. This is particularly true of the second (b. 28) group, where the re-workings are quite obvious despite the music's continual attempts to develop beyond the paradigm. Melody is never allowed to take flight, and the unpredictable phrase structure helps to create a sense of spontaneity. Extreme contrasts, as at bars 48-49, suggest a programmatic interpretation: attempts to soar high in the cello's register end in chaos as the player suffers a technical collapse, brushing the open strings as the melody, already struggling in *flautando*, dissolves fleetingly. The immediate repeat in bars 50-51 is also terminated ignominiously; the quest for lyricism is abandoned, and the group 1 material returns.

If the focus on spontaneity is replaced by closer inspection of the two groups of themes, interconnections are revealed *between* them as well as between the materials which spring *from* them. The 'Moorish' theme at bar 28 derives its distinctive intervallic structure with the augmented second from the very opening bar, and thus the melodic line bar 37 is also related by virtue of its semitones and minor thirds. The triplet figure of the second group also recalls the pervasive triplets of the Prologue, especially bars 44, 46, 48 and 50. Formal discipline is

imposed on the free phrase structure by repetitions of materials at a familiar pitch. The pizzicato of bar 3, for example, always recurs at the same pitch (bars 19 and 54), the tritone material outlines D-A*b* at bars 4, 11-17, 20 and 55, while the guitar theme of bar 5 recurs on G at bars 6, 7, 21, 22, 56, 57. Thus rather than 'tonal' structure, Debussy chooses to cultivate coherence through a more casual method of pitch recurrence. The only crucial point of tonal definition arrives with the pedal A at the end of the movement (bars 59-64) and even then it is not immediately obvious that the note has a dominant function because of the E*b* tritones and surrounding whole-tone context.

FINALE

In fact, the 'dominant' qualities of the pedal point are only categorically confirmed in retrospect, since the third movement opens in D minor. As in the first movement, the tonic tonality wavers between the modal (D-Aeolian, bars 1-2) and the more conventionally diatonic (e.g. the dominant harmony underpinning bars 3-7 and 9-14). On a broader scale, the harmony tilts between the unequivocal (articulated by cadential patterns, long pedal points and strong lines of contrary motion between melody and bass), and the rhapsodic (blurred by sinewy melodic lines and elliptical, non-directional progressions). The two contrasting tendencies correlate with the thematic structure, which has strong allusions to sonata rondo form:

A B A A'/B A Cyclic return Coda

Layout of Fig. 7.3

CELLO SONATA

III

Presentation of the two thematic areas

A (bar 1) B (bar 23)

Return of A in C minor (bar 37)

Interplay between A' and B (bars 45, 49 etc.)

Return of A in tonic (bar 85) only certain elements of B recur (bars 104, 112)

Cyclic return, bar 115

Coda

CELLO SONATA / III

piano

A

1

cello

7

A1

14

A2

17

(var.)

piano / cello exchange (4)

37

41

(elision)

1' [riation]

45

cello

53

3

[+ bb. 64 - 84]

B

23

piano

2

cello (pizz.)

29

3

2

ctr.

35

cello (arco)

piano

49

57

3

63

piano

3

3

piano

cello

f

p

85

A

90

A1

95

A2

(elision)

100

no exchange this time

4

104

cello

106

110

CYCLIC RETURN: compare I, bb. 31-32

112

piano

cello

3

3

3

3

119

piano

cello

120

cello

(8va)

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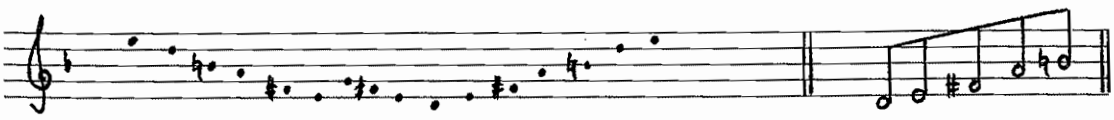
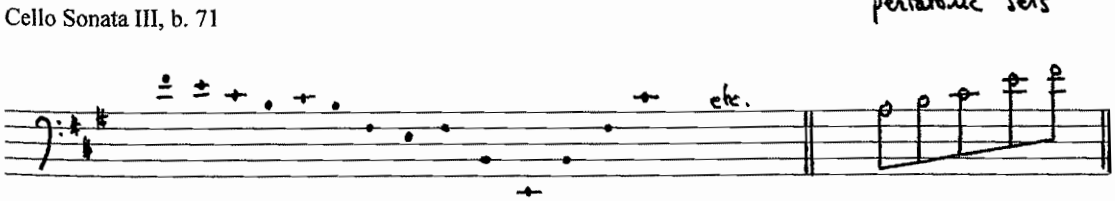
The two elements, A and B, are set up in a conventional fashion, with dynamic A material (bars 1 & 7, newly composed) contrasting with the more languid B material (bar 23, which, as I suggested earlier, is derived from bar 31 of the first movement and was also foreshadowed at the end of II, bars 60 & 62). Yet for all that sonata rondo elements are in evidence and are supported by conventional tonal strategies (such as the recapitulation of A in the tonic), it is Debussy's imaginative interplay between the two principal themes which distinguishes the quality of his musical argument. The traditional formal paradigm merely provides a point of departure from which he invents a freer structure. The A material returns first (37), transposed down a tone, but is curtailed by a new variation (A'), based on the same rising intervallic pattern (bars 45-48: compare bars 41-3). Then a section of dialogue begins, as A' is juxtaposed against 2-bar fragments of the B material. Despite the apparent conflict, A' and B are well integrated, but the tension between them is never resolved. A' remains as a rising, aspirational theme, while B creates intensity by holding back, intensifying the chromatic working. The dialogue is also passed between instruments, swapping from cello (57-62) to piano (63-64). The tension here underpins the broader engagements of thematic and arabesque elements, otherwise construed as form-defining and form-defying elements.

Bars 69-84 present a short virtuoso fantasy which possibly echoes the pentatonic intervals from the scherzando theme at bar 15. As on previous occasions, the connection is only made through common use of pentatonic collection and limited intervallic similarity, placing the material on a delicate edge between the familiar and the novel - another aspect of the form-freedom dialectic:

Cello Sonata III, b. 15, scherzando theme

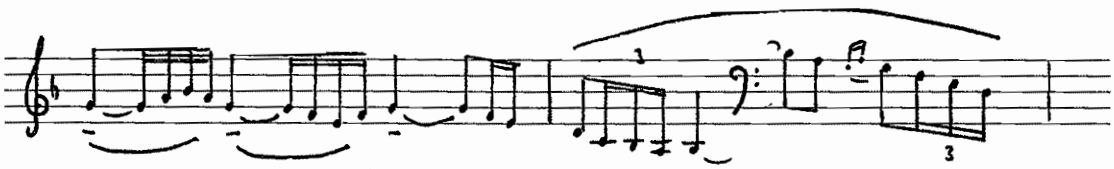
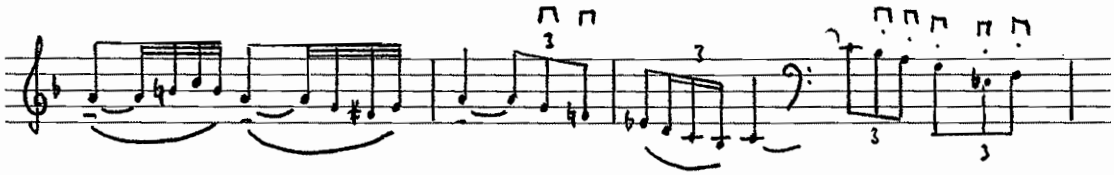


Cello Sonata III, b. 71



Then the initial material is recapitulated in the tonic, with some phrases shortened (e.g. compare bars 10-14 with 93-95) in order to provide formal concentration. Brief allusions to the B material recur at bar 104 and 112, with a heightened intensity of expression preparing for the cyclic return at bar 115. It is important at this stage to review Debussy's careful

disposition of the B material. His motivic unfolding is carefully designed so that only at the very end (bar 115) is the arabesque categorically linked with the exact shape and triplets of the phrase from the first movement:

I, bars 31-32
(Cello)

III, bars 115-118
(Cello)

By withholding this association - or at least, by unveiling it in stealthy fashion - the cyclic return takes on two significant structural roles. The first is obvious, to draw the entire sonata together into a holistic frame of reference: a formal measure designed to compensate for the plethora of digressions elsewhere in the work. The second is more original, because it is only in the light of bar 115 - the unequivocal point of cyclic return - that Debussy's connection between *all* the B material and the previous movements is revealed. In other words, the connections between bars 23, 49, 57, 63 and 104 and the Prologue is only likely to be made retrospectively, which is why the cyclic return marks a real moment of revelation for the finale. This explains the dramatic and rhetorical importance of these few bars, and also explains why the subsequent coda (bb. 119-123) can be so abrupt: what else is left to be said apart from the confirmation of the tonic? Debussy makes the coda as brief and concentrated as possible, presenting A in dramatic diminution (bar 119) and forgoing all unnecessary attempts at a drawn-out conclusion.

III

Sonata for flute, viola and harp

> Let us regain our freedom, our own style; for the most part they were our own invention, and thus deserve to be preserved, for there are none more beautiful.[15]
>
> Debussy (1916)

Of all Debussy's works to which this sentence could be applied, the Trio Sonata is surely the most apposite. His embrace of freedom in this work is extraordinarily liberal, to the extent of presenting a sonata exposition of six barely-related fragments and recapitulating them in the order 2 5 6 3 4 1 5 3 (as shown in Fig. 7.4). His recapture of 'our own style' is also uniquely effective in this sonata in that he alludes to a wide range of deliberately stylised materials without leaving a residual sense of stylistic fracture. Here, to a greater extent than in any other work, we encounter Debussy's private world of methods.

The instrumental combination of flute, viola and harp has no obvious historical connotations and the unique sound world created by Debussy's unusual blend provides a simultaneously retrospective and contemporary presence. Nichols suggests sensitively that the use of the viola (originally intended to have been an oboe) allowed Debussy to mediate between the plucked string and the woodwind, 'between the evanescent and the controlled sound', an observation which exemplifies Debussy's delicate sense for timbral effects. [16] This is particularly true of moments where he weaves a *litanie* between different instruments (as in the openings of the first two movements) and when he experiments with unison writing between unorthodox sonorous combinations.

PASTORALE: RADICAL RE-WORKINGS OF CONVENTION

Fig. 7.4 sketches the structure of the first movement. The exposition, consisting of Debussy's six main ideas, is laid across the top line. The second group, based on just one single idea (bars 26-49) is situated below, distinguished by square brackets. The recapitulation, a re-ordering of the expository fragments and one of Debussy's most original constructions, is situated below this, aligned vertically with the original sources in the top line. Dotted lines help to clarify the associations visually.

---

[15] Claude Debussy, 'Preface in the form of a letter to *Pour la Musique Française: Douze Causeries*' (December 1916). Trans. from Langham Smith, ed., *Debussy on Music*, 325.
[16] Roger Nichols, 'Debussy', *The New Grove*, 301.

TRIO SONATA / I

EXPOSITION

RECAP.

Fragment: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥

Bar: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 13 14 15 18 19 20

harp · fl. · flourish · aug. triad · vla. · M1 · M2 · etc · +2 bars · 8va

Identifying harmonic type: ① + ② aug. triad · ③ + ④ pentatonic · ⑤ diatonic F major · ⑥ Aeolian on A

26 vla. · fl. · M2

31 fl.

33 fl. · M2 · etc. · vla. · ostinato begins

39 harp

43 fl. + vla

48 fl. · cf. bb. 27-28 · vla.

50 ② fl. · Ab's:

54 fl. · Ab's:

57 ⑤ M1 · M2 · +4 bars

63 ⑥ vla. · 8va · fl.

65 (cont'd) ③ vla · ④ harp

72 ① fl. · (Ab + Eb)

74 harp · fl. + vla

75 (cont'd) ⑤ fl. + vla · M1 · 76 · 77 vla

78 fl. + vla

78 (cont'd) ③ fl. · harp

PAN-A3 18 STAVE

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The exposition is remarkable for its control over such differing materials, evoking a sense of unity in spite of diversity as opposed to the more familiar sense of diversity within unity. At first the motivic ideas seem quite dissimilar, as do the underlying harmonic types (displayed below the top line in Fig. 7.4). Debussy moves through a veritable kaleidoscope of harmonic colour, from augmented triad to pentatonic to diatonic to Aeolian.[17] The fact that each new musical idea presupposes an individual motivic and harmonic identity opens up the potential for juxtapositions of startling contrast. As Mellers points out, however, these are 'linked fragments', essentially self-contained elements within a loosely associative framework. On closer reading, it emerges that Debussy uses several techniques with which to mediate between the different ideas. Between the first two fragments, for example, he uses a type of *litanie* in which a single note-in-common to two contrasting chords provides a thread of continuity.

Between the second and third fragments, Debussy repeats a motif (marked M1 in the main analysis) to provide an unambiguous link across the change in harmony. Moreover, the notes in the pentatonic collection underpinning (3) were foreshadowed in the opening bars. (3) and (4) are also linked by a *litanie*: a bare fifth, F-C, emerges from the cadence onto F major in bar 9, from which Debussy can move to a chord of the 11^{th} on D, made up of two superimposed fifths. Fragment (5) returns to F major, filling out the remaining notes in the diatonic collection, and (6) builds on a straightforward third-relation between F major and A minor. Such connections, particularly the centrality of harmonic collections based around F, help to explain why the disjunct re-assembly of these materials in the recapitulation does not dislocate the texture as radically as it might otherwise do.

The second group (bars 26-48), which at first appears to be entirely new, reveals motivic connections with the exposition beneath its otherwise contrasting character. The opening intervals, spanning the octave E*b*-A*b*-E*b*, spring from bar 18 (as asterisked in Fig. 7.4), while the descending flourish in bar 29 disguises the underlying motif, M2, which also linked fragments 3 and 5. The rest of the second group is fluidly derived from the material of its opening bar, 26. As in the second movement of the Cello Sonata, the melody seems to be struggling in circles again, repeatedly trying to break away into free lyricism but each time

[17] For a pitch-class set analysis of the first movement of this Sonata, see Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy*, 125-131. I am doubtful whether his assertion that 'the motives are treated truly as unordered pc sets' in this movement has any useful historical significance. I also believe that his reduction of Debussy's harmonic collections to two varieties of pc set genera (the diatonic and the 8-17/18/19 complex) misses the whole point about the kaleidoscopic interaction of different harmonic 'colours', particularly the antique qualities of the modal passages.

(bars 28, 29 [flute], 31, 33, 39) returning to the initial bar 26 motif. Only from bar 39 does the melody proliferate freely, but by bar 47 even this attempt has been curtailed. Strangely, the material which eclipses it at bars 47-48 manages to recall the terse atmosphere of the exposition, even though its true motivic source is bars 27-28. This is a clear example of Debussy employing timbre as an independent structural agent. By using solo viola, as in fragment (2), the middle section can be brought to a close using thematic material exclusively of its own creation but with sonorous qualities which re-evoke the earlier atmosphere and can consequently lead into the recapitulation with great effect.

Debussy's apparent simplicity is disarming. Because the harmonic types of each fragment are so different, they provide sufficient interest and variety in themselves without having to support a dynamic long-range tonal structure. *All* the recapitulated material, for example, returns at the same pitch as in the exposition, even though the disposition of elements has been drastically re-ordered. F major prevails and the cadential points can be unusually strong, often plagal or perfect (relatively rare occurrences in Debussy's mature music, even in the late works). Yet within the recapitulation, Debussy chooses to make changes which clarify some of the 'assumptions' made in the fragmentary exposition. Compare, for example, the re-appearance of fragment (2) at bars 50 and 54. Initially, the fragment contains A*b*; subsequently, A natural, leading onto a cadence on the dominant (bar 56-7). This hitherto unrealised cadence inevitably takes on a role at a deeper structural level, preparing for the first unequivocal cadence in the recap onto the tonic at bar 58 and ultimately underpinning the focus on the global tonic.[18] Conventional markers of form-defining features are thus in evidence, but possess an unusually introverted elegance. Debussy simply inflects a single pitch in an otherwise exact repetition in order to transform the mood, clearing the shadowy augmented harmony with a move to the dominant which in turn foreshadows the diatonic major. In this way a 'private' technique is used to elicit allusions to an historically-established convention of tonality.

No mention has yet been made of the disturbing G*b*, first heard in an ambiguous role at the very beginning of the sonata and again at the recapitulation at 72 and 74. The disruptive nature of this G*b* becomes more obvious in the other two movements (important recurrences are boxed on the graphs Figs. 7.5 and 7.6). Each time it will be seen that the G*b* interrupts a lyrical moment (II, bb. 42, 49-51, 94 and III, bb. 43, 68).

[18] One analyst has described how Debussy's sonata 'refers to and transcends traditional tonality' while also 'charting its own disintegration and salvation'. See Judith Shatin Allen, 'Tonal allusion and illusion: Debussy's *Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp*', *Cahiers Debussy* 7 (1983), 38-48.

INTERLUDE: ECHOES FROM THE PAST

The direction *tempo di minuetto* is misleading: there is no dance in this movement, and even more strangely, hardly any sense of 3-in-a-bar. The opening could easily be re-barred in 2/4. So what is the musical idea behind the piece?

At first glance, a familiar late-Debussy pattern seems to emerge (see Fig. 7.5). The first group of ideas, based on a deeply melancholy theme (bars 1-21) is answered by more rhythmically invigorating material (bars 22-37). The two themes interact and show tendencies towards integration (bar 38, where the dotted figure from the second group is incorporated into a variation on the initial motif M1 from the very first bar). The plaintive melody then returns, with extra motivic working (M1', an inverted variant of M1, as at bar 49) which seems to wind itself round in a dizzy twist (bars 51-53) to a moment of near-exhaustion. It is at this point that the movement suddenly takes on an entirely fresh aspect. From this low point a new pentatonic theme - a carillon in the harp - sweeps away the melancholic atmosphere previously provided by the predominance of modal and minor harmonies. B major suddenly supplants F minor, the remotest possible move in conventional tonal discourse (so much so as to create an image of the unattainable, about which more will be said shortly). This is particularly vivid because the move is made without intermediate modulation: Debussy simply uses a D*b* - C# *litanie* to link bars 53 and 54. The B major material, interjected as a shaft of light through an otherwise darkly introspective movement, recurs four times (indented and highlighted by the arrows on the left of Fig. 7.5). Debussy makes each juxtaposition unambiguous in the score by changing the key and time signatures and separating the sections with double bar-lines. As well as sweetening the harmony, he also clears the claustrophobic texture of the preceding bars by allowing the instruments to re-occupy more comfortable registers.

The sonority of the harp in these passages creates a series of unusual associations. Such passages sound 'as if in quotation marks', like music quoted from memory. The resultant sense of historicised stylisation is unique to this movement and vindicates Debussy's claim to have written 'pure' music: first, in the sense that that he had finally broken free from music open to mimetic or programmatic interpretations; and second, in the manner in which his pure delineation of different harmonic types becomes more crystalline than ever before, with entire passages of unadulterated pentatonic, modal or diatonic pitch collections. Yet perhaps the most specific sense in which Debussy's music now seems 'pure' emerges in a rather formalist sense. The beauty of the movement resides in his juxtaposition technique: it is, after

TRIO SONATA / II

M1

harp

fl.

c.bb.17 + 61

+ 2 bars

vla

+ 1 bar

to b. 61

[+ fl. 8va]

M1'

+ 6 bars

+ 3 bars

[from b. 49]

(FM)

unison

unison octaves

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all, a source of absolute beauty that ethereal music can emerge out of such melancholy without transition; it is beautiful that the 'unattainable' B major simply appears, as unexpected as it was unsolicited. Form, Stravinsky once argued, was the logical discussion between musical materials. But here, there is no such 'logic' in that rational, Stravinskian sense; the interspersed material at bar 54 is more like a *deus ex machina* from out of the blue rather than an inevitable or even expected point of arrival. This opens up the question of why this extraordinary contrast is present.

An answer emerges as a result of my earlier discussion concerning the nature of French and antique classicism. Pure modality in Debussy's music is invariably associated with the poetics of escape - normally an antique ideal or something historically timeless. For example, several movements from *Les Chansons de Bilitis* (1901) are totally devoid of accidentals, including the entirety of *Chant Pastoral*, *Les Comparaisons* and *La Danseuse aux crotales*; the first seventeen bars of the *Danse sacrée* (1904) are also unblemished with accidentals, as is the recapitulation at figure 2; large blocks of the Préludes *La Cathédrale engloutie* (bb. 1-6, 22-32) and *Les collines d'Anacapri* display a similar purity. The fragile pastoral passages of the second 'war' movement of *En blanc et noir* should also be recalled in this context, even though they were 'bruised' for programmatic reasons by the occasional chromatic deflection (see bars 18-46).

The re-appearance of such purity in the Trio sonata *Interlude* is clearly nostalgic in the sense that it echoes Debussy's earlier music. It is also nostalgic in the sense that it embodies historicist connotations of a classical past. But context is paramount here. In 1901 it was unproblematic to evoke an antique aesthetic: the pastoral was just another selection from a range of exotic *fin-de-siècle* elements. What was readily attainable in 1901, however, looked decidedly utopian by 1915: a war-time evocation of a classical ideal was less concerned with the past than with the projection of a better future. 'We as civilised men must conceal our anxiety and work for that beauty the people instinctively need, people who are stronger for having suffered', Debussy told Durand in 1915. The juxtaposition between the plaintive melody of bar 1, which reappears throughout the movement at the same pitch (bars 1, 4, 8, 14, 16, 46, 85 and 107), and the radiantly 'pure' music (bars 54, 60, 75, 95) therefore emerges as the central musical idea of the piece. There is clear mediation through the French traditions: take bar 85, for example, where the harp takes on both melody and accompaniment, re-creating an allusion to the lute stop of a early-classical clavecin. This echo of the main theme, wrapped up in such an allusive timbral association, seems to add yet

more cultural resonance to the musical argument - interspersing the utopian with the melancholic in a manner with which Watteau would be familiar.[19]

This extra-musical subtext is why, unlike most of Debussy's other sonata movements in which the seeds of the musical argument are presented at the beginning, the true dichotomy in this movement is withheld until relatively late in the movement. Whereas the second movement of *En blanc et noir* embodied a head-on conflict, the purging of anxiety in the *Interlude* is painstakingly slow. Even when the means of reconciliation has appeared, the eventual return to the opening theme and the movement's inconclusive ending suggest that it might have been just a utopian mirage.

There is a suggestion, however, that the mirage might be attainable. As might be expected given what has already been observed of Debussy's compositional processes, the 'new' materials of the B major pentatonic sections are derived from music heard earlier in the work. Debussy's technique here goes to the very heart of the form-freedom dialectic, since the material appears to be derived with remarkable sensitivity to the maintenance of a balance between the familiar and the novel (or the remembered and the unexpected). Let us assume that most listeners will be transported by the harmonic transformation into B major, the replacement of minor and modal harmony with pure pentatonicism and the sudden timbral radiance. The flute melody at bar 61 will sound, in all probability, new, but it is in fact unambiguously derived from bar 17, from the pattern created by the falling intervals and the elegant, languid rhythm. (The tumbling demisemiquavers of bars 30-31 and 34-36 reflect a further recasting of this material.) It would also seem that the double-dotted figures (another historical allusion, surely to baroque French overture style) at bar 63 derive from the second thematic group at bar 22. The richly-worked strands of integration are there to be traced, but not displayed ostentatiously. The struggle, to be metaphorical once again, contains the seeds of the victory.

FINAL

It is hard not to see the structure of the *Final* as a battle between opposing themes, with one emerging victorious. The two themes are presented at the very opening in dramatic juxtaposition, the first in the flute and the second in the viola (as can be seen from their spatial separation in Fig. 7.6). Initially the two are 'developed' independently, the first theme

[19] The timbral mixture of oboe, horn and harpsichord in the projected fourth sonata may well have been intended to continue these historicising allusions.

TRIO SONATA / III

1 fl. [cont'd]

6 vla.

[9] fl. 10 + 5 bars

16 hp. + 3 bars

22 fl. + 2 bars

27 vla + 3 bars

33 harp

35 fl.

37 harp

39 fl.

41 harp 43 vla. fl.

45

47 vla. 50 fl. M2 + 2 bars 4. bars [repeat up 8ve]

→ + tibiae ostinato

58 fl. + vla 59 2 bars 2 bars 2 (var.) + 2 bars vla 68 + 7 bars

integration

76 fl. harp + 6 bars vla

[85] fl. + vla

96 [98] harp 99 100 + 8 bars 108 vla

109 harp fl. vla. pizz. CYCLIC RETURN

b. 50

112 fl. fl. + vla. d. b. 50 fl. 114 vla vla

harp M2 M2 M2 etc. → F cadence

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between bars 9-26, and the second theme from bar 27. For the development of the second theme, a third element is introduced (33) with which to set up a new point of conflict, the rapid intercutting of two bar phrases (bars 33/35/37/39/41). This culminates in an aggressive tritone juxtaposition (43, 45 and 47), which threatens the stability of the discursive form as outlined up to this point.

The interaction between tritone juxtapositions and the preliminary fragments of a fourth theme (44, 46) is reformulated when the new theme itself emerges at bar 50 over a subdued tritone ostinato. After being repeated up the octave, an animated variant of the theme takes over (bar 58, clearly related intervallically to M2: G-F-D-C-D). The new figure seeks the freedom to flourish lyrically but its ostinato motion is stopped dead by one of the perennial cyclic interjections on G*b* (68). As the ostinato restarts at 76, the main two themes re-appear back-to-back, as at the opening, tending towards a more integrated texture. This integration is not allowed to flourish, however, and the second theme tears itself away, *Agitato*, at 87. The tritone confrontation from 43 suddenly reappears, threatening to demolish the entire texture again (96). Yet in a move which recalls the magical transformations in the second movement, the harp emerges with a reworked version of the animated version of the fourth theme from bar 58 - seemingly endless variations! - and the movement begins to develop genuine lyrical breadth. As prefigured earlier (58-75), the ostinato is wound down (106-108) and displaced by a long, low viola note before any point of culmination can be reached (compare bar 108 with 68). Just as in the cello sonata, music from the first movement returns, casting a familiar shadow over the proceedings.[20] This time, however, the viola holds an A rather than the troublesome G*b*, so the cyclic return from the Pastorale appears transposed up a minor third. Finally the first theme appears, underpinned by fragments of the theme from bar 50 in the viola, and the descending fourths in the harp (M2) (which also recall the linear fourth, M2, of the first movement). The thematic and tonal integration is resolute, and the movement draws to an untroubled close.

*

Pierre Boulez reminds us that

> Debussy knows, yet at the same time rejects, inherited knowledge and pursues a dream of vitrified improvisation. He is repelled by those wretched construction kits which

[20] The violin sonata also features a cyclic return, but it is more structural in the Franckian sense (in that it supplies the material for the entirety of the finale). The 1915 sonatas feature a more fleeting cyclic element, a poetic resonance at the very end of the work.

> transform the composer into an infantile architect. For him form is never given; his entire life has been a quest for the unanalysable, for a kind of development which, in its actual workings, incorporates the surprises of the imagination. He distrusts architecture in the petrified sense of the word; he prefers structures which combine rigour with freedom.[21]

Much of what Boulez claims for Debussy rings true for this finale. It might be fair to emphasise that Debussy uses a fundamentally ternary structure and, as Kecskeméti suggests, that the cyclic return is in the 'grand tradition of romantic summaries'. As elsewhere in these late sonatas, however, it is Debussy's continual pushing of conventional boundaries which is most interesting and ultimately of greater significance. In the Pastorale there was a clearly recognisable 'sonata' form to help accommodate the sheer variety of materials in its exposition: the structure had to compensate for the freedom of the material. In the finale, the materials themselves are relatively restricted - just two themes dominate the first 40 bars, and feed into successive developments - so the structure can become far more experimental. The role of the intermediary theme at bar 50, for example, is intriguing: a new element, gradually teased out of the texture, supplants the central musical argument and takes on the most ambitious lyrical aspirations of any of the movement's themes. Each successive transformation opens up a new structural element (bars 50, 58, 76, 85, 98), leading to a freedom rooted, as Boulez would have it, in the 'surprises of the imagination'.

The technical facility with which Debussy maintains coherence within such eclecticism through his innovative motivic working and free juxtaposition technique can be readily traced, as in Fig. 7.6, but understanding the broader picture is harder. Kecskeméti suggests that the cyclic return might be considered as a meeting between antiquity (the Pastorale) and modern primitivism (the folk-inspired materials of the finale), an observation which opens up interesting questions about the significance of Debussy's allusions in other parts of the sonata.[22] *Are* the flute arabesques part of a deliberate invocation of antiquity ('Pan's flute')? If not, why is the first movement in a sonata of allegedly 'pure' music entitled *Pastorale*? What is the significance of the marking *Tempo di minuetto* for the Interlude, a piece far removed from the character of a dance? Why does Debussy compose in a quasi-historical voice for the 'clavecin music' at bar 85 of the second movement? And what is the listener meant to glean from the folk idiom in the finale themes in the context of the rest of the sonata?

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[21] Pierre Boulez, 'Corruption in the Censers', *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, ed. Paule Thévenin, trans. Stephen Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 22.
[22] Kecskeméti, 'Last three sonatas', 143.

In one sense, the eclectic streak in this finale is symptomatic of many pieces by Debussy; consider his appropriations of pitch patterns and sonorities from the gamelan in the *Fantasie,* his embrace of plainchant, or his cultivation of 'folk' idioms. In anthologies such as the *Préludes* or *Études*, such diversity can be accommodated because the individually-juxtaposed miniatures retain their own autonomy. In a larger-scale work, however, the 'surprises of the imagination' which Boulez identified - the sudden switching between diverse elements - potentially results in confusion. We are reminded of Bartók's complaint about the *Rite of Spring:*

> Under the influence of the short-winded structure of the Russian peasant melodies Stravinsky did not escape the danger of yielding to a broken mosaic-like construction which is sometimes disturbing and of which the effect is enhanced by his peculiar technique, monotonous as it becomes by repetition [...] it is not the Russian peasant music that we must blame for this, but the composer's lack of grasp and power of organisation.[23]

Bartók, hardly a conservative critic, reminds us that the 'rejection of inherited knowledge' and the 'distrust of architecture' [Boulez, cited earlier] were not necessarily features which drew composers together. Debussy, as I have repeated throughout this chapter, strove to strike a balance between formal discipline and liberation of expression, and seems to have found *The Rite* to be disturbing by its (apparent) lack of organisation.[24] His meticulously-proportioned movements and careful pacing of returns and transformations of familiar materials that have been discussed in this chapter deliberately recreate the values of the tradition against which the *Rite* seemed set. But Debussy's sonatas point beyond the attainment of a merely formal balance of 'structures which combine rigour with freedom'. Their importance and 'classic' status are rooted in his ability to pack an astounding variety of *cultural* elements - topics, ideas, allusions, connotations and sensibilities - without incoherence into a single work. The antique, the baroque, the ecclesiastical, and the borrowed are juggled with the classical, the contemporary, the folk, and the original. In this sense, his late style provokes an informal comparison with the late styles of Mozart or Beethoven, in which total control over formal resources resulted in the proliferation of extraordinary stylistic plurality, releasing as well as enriching the means of musical expression.

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[23] Bela Bartók, trans. Brian Lunn, 'The relation of folk-song to the development of the art music of our time', *The Sackbut* vol. II/1 (June 1921), 9. We are reminded of Debussy's criticism of Grovlez's juxtapositions [cited earlier] which 'no longer hold together'.

[24] Intimated largely from his 1913 correspondence, as discussed at the end of Chapter 3.

HIDDEN MEANINGS

Having identified Debussy's nostalgic and highly sensitive war-time aesthetic, it is startling to read the following:

A la fenêtre recélant
Le santal vieux qui se dédore
De sa viole étincelant
Jadis avec flûte ou mandore,

Est la Sainte pâle, étalant
Le livre vieux qui se déplie
Du Magnificat ruisselant
Jadis selon vêpre ou complie:

A ce vitrage d'ostensoir
Que frôle une harpe par l'Ange
Formée avec son vol du soir
Pour la délicate phalange

Du doigt que, sans le vieux santal
Ni le vieux livre, elle balance
Sur le plumage instrumental
Musicienne du silence.

Here, in verse, Mallarmé evokes the same aesthetic world as that suggested in Debussy's *Interlude*. In one long sentence, a single arching arabesque, Mallarmé provides in his own words 'a little melodic poem, composed especially with music in mind'.[25] The text offers a precious, melancholic evocation of the past, and its assorted props (stained glass, an old missal, the Magnificat, a pale Saint and her harp) contribute to a seraphic, pre-Raphaelite sensibility. The angel's wing is placed so that it appears to be touched by the hand like a harp, as in a 'flat' pre-Renaissance perspective, and the two appearances of 'jadis' reinforces the distant, remote antiquity of the images. For clarity, I quote the loose prose translation by Chadwick:

[25] Michaud, *Mallarmé*, 42. Cohn notes that the original 1865 MS bears the subtitle 'Chanson et image anciennes' (see *Toward the Poems of Mallarmé*, 91).

> In the old stained-glass window, the fading gilt of her sandalwood viola now scarcely visible, although once it sparkled beside a flute or a mandolin, sits the pale figure of Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of music. Open on her lap lies an old breviary which once glowed with light at the evening services of Vespers and Compline. So she sits in this altar window, brushed by the rays of the setting sun as if by the wing of the angel of dusk. These rays resemble not only the feathers of a wing, but also the strings of a harp lying beneath the delicate joints of Saint Cecilia's fingers so that, although the sandalwood viola and the old breviary have faded away, she nevertheless has the means of making music, of drawing sound from silence.[26]

Guy Michaud remarks that:

> This poem not only contains a supremely nostalgic evocation of the old Dream that had haunted [Mallarmé's] childhood and youth with its cherubim, its grazing wings and streaming gold, and its trace of a real complex about a maternal breast charged with mystical values. It also contains a sort of presentiment of the poet's future aesthetic and is the first attempt at transmuting his old dream into a poetry of silence and absence. The gold has vanished; there are no longer, as there once were, an old book, sandalwood; there is only the image of a Saint playing in silence upon the wing of the ideal.[27]

Mallarmé's verse explores his characteristic obsession with the unbridgeable gap between reality and ideal. The saint's viola - her literal means of making music - has faded away, like her missal, no longer to be heard in combination with flute or mandolin. Yet the ideal is present in the form of 'silent' music: the appearance of the harp in the sun's rays is portrayed almost as a mirage: the harp music, of course, represents the music of the ideal.

Like all Mallarmé's poetry, this succession of images can be read in many different ways and it would be foolhardy even to begin to speculate about Debussy's interpretation: anyway, there is no direct evidence to suggest that Debussy cultivated or even recognised the association between his music and Mallarmé's poem. The resonances between the Mallarmé and Debussy's music are undeniably strong, however: at the very least, the shared use of the unusual combination of viola, flute and harp is striking. The présence of Cecilia, guardian of music for all time, is also crucial, particularly when cast in characteristic Mallarmé imagery. For example, why *musicienne du silence*? The association of *vitrage d'ostensoir* - implying

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[26] Chadwick, *The meaning of Mallarmé*, 64-65; alternative verse translation by Hubert Creekmore available in Caws, *Mallarmé: Selected poetry and prose*, 40-41.
[27] Michaud, *Mallarmé*, 43.

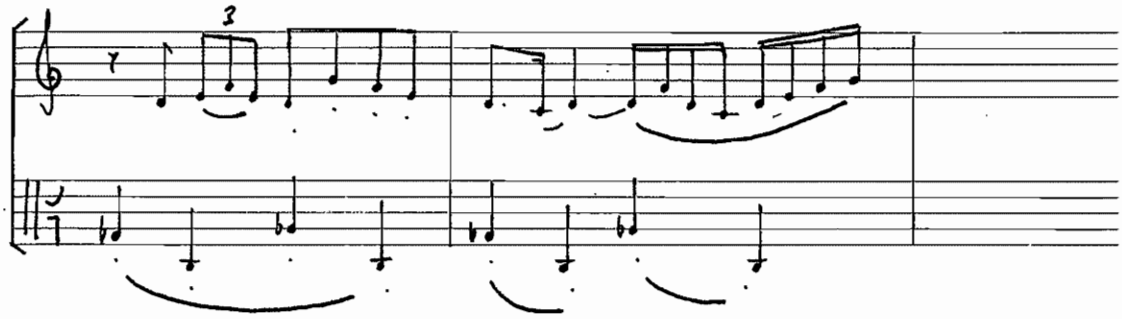
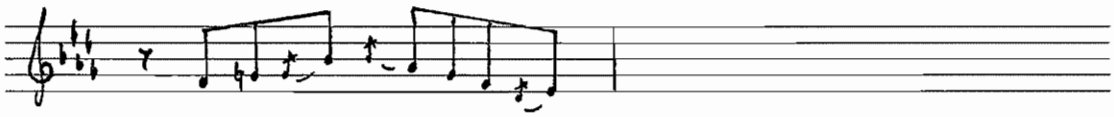
the rays of the evening sun[28] - with the harp might suggest that the Saint's music represents the last glimmer of a dying or even a lost tradition. As other values of the past become obsolete, like those represented by the fading Christian images, so the values of music from the past are also lost. It is not hard to see Debussy's war-time aesthetics expressed through this imagery.

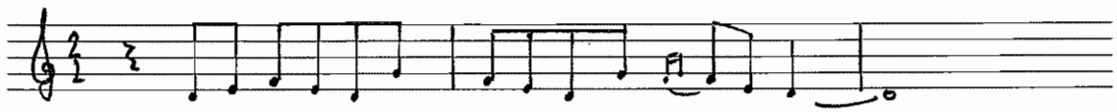
The resonances between poem and sonata become more suggestive when Fig. 7.5 is considered again. It is always the harp which sweeps away the melancholy (bars 54, 60, 75, 95). Could this be the music of silence, the rays of light opening up an ideal formed on the wing of an angel? Like Mallarmé, Debussy cultivated a 'poetry of silence and absence' in which the nostalgic remembrance of the ideal could be projected from the past into a utopian vision of the future.

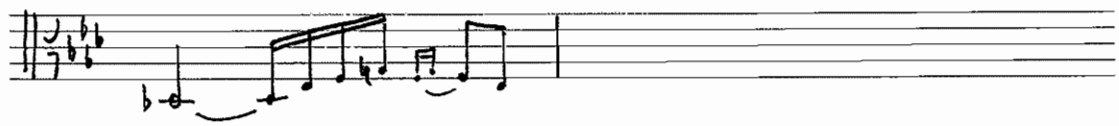
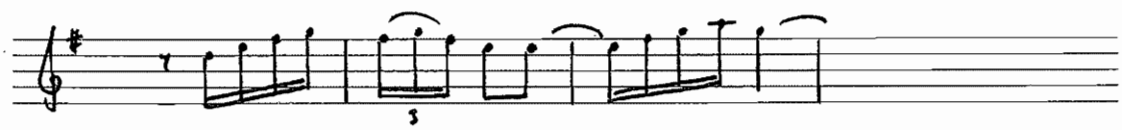
*

'With the completion of the *Préludes*, Debussy seems to have worked through his *Petrushka* obsession. In later pieces, Stravinskian echoes are attenuated and ambiguous, hard to pinpoint or prove. Nevertheless, vague resonances from all three of Stravinsky's early ballets haunt the late work of the French master, adding a poignant little chapter to the history of Franco-Russian exchange', concludes Taruskin.[29] It is true that specific points of contact between the two composers can be identified in the late sonatas without too much special pleading. Kecskeméti, for example, suggested that in the ostinato in the first movement of the Cello Sonata 'Debussy seems to approach for a few moments the motorism of Stravinsky'.[30] Add to this the rigid octatonic pitch-class structure based around ladders of diminished triads (see my Fig. 7.1) and a connection seems incontrovertible. Other resonances include the melody at bar 50 in the Finale of the Trio sonata, which not only echoes the woodwind fragment in Spring Rounds from *The Rite* but is underpinned by an oscillating tritone ostinato, sparse in its two-part texture and rigidly Stravinskian:

[28] See Cohn, *Toward the poems of Mallarmé*, 93.
[29] Russian Traditions, I, 773.
[30] Kecskeméti, 'Debussy: His Last Sonatas', 125-6.

Trio Sonata, bar 50

The Rite, fig. 49 + 4

Such occurrences merely represent Taruskin's 'vague resonances', however. There are plenty of occasions when Debussy's own music could provide just as plausible a source - for example, the opening of *La Boîte à joujoux* prefigures the melody above as much as *The Rite*:

La Boîte à joujoux, opening

Furthermore, as I have revealed in earlier works, Debussy sometimes seems to be *deliberately* self-referential. The submerged melody at bar 13 in this movement seems to have been lifted straight out of *Ibéria*:

Trio sonata, III, b. 13

Ibéria, I, b. 5

Whether the referential qualities implied by such connections are significant is questionable. The *Ibéria* 'quote' need not be an actual citation, after all; it need only reflect the thorough assimilation of folk idioms in Debussy's finale, and indeed, the idiom of the second theme at bar 6 seems to suggest neither Stravinsky nor the French traditions, but Bartók. This detachment of images and materials from their expected contexts recalls the 'Cubist' fragments of *En blanc et noir*, raising the question of whether the form/freedom dichotomy in the sonatas is ultimately reducible to an irreconcilable tension between Debussy's allusions to sonata principles and what might be described as an 'abstract eclecticism'. Debussy himself described the sonatas as 'pure' music, implying an idealistic autonomy that ostensibly might reflect the contemporary trends towards abstraction in early modernist art. But as I have shown in the second movement of the Trio sonata, the proliferation of eclectic imagery in his music is still rooted in a Symbolist frame of reference. The music's purported autonomy cannot conceal the fact that it is still an art of escape, albeit enriched with conservative elements of patriotism. If we compare the truly 'modernist' art of this period, in which formalist abstraction radically subverted ideas of beauty as part of a socially destabilising 'anti-bourgeois' critique, it becomes clear that Debussy's war-time music was a totally separate enterprise.

IV

The final separation

By 1915 the two composers were separated geographically, since Stravinsky was largely confined to Switzerland during the war.[31] They met again towards the end of the year, but the spark of mutual interest seems to have died out. Stravinsky's recollection of their intermittent meetings reflects the sense of duty to an old friend, rather than testifying to any revival of the fruitful interaction and reciprocal fascination of earlier years:

> I saw him rarely during the war, and the few visits I did pay him were extremely painful. His subtle, grave smile had disappeared, and his skin was yellow and sunken; it was not hard to see the future cadaver in him. I asked if he had heard my three pieces for string quartet which had just been played in Paris. I thought he would like the last twenty bars of the third piece, for they are some of my best music of that time. He had not heard them, however, and, indeed, he had heard almost no new music at all. I saw him last about nine months before his death. This was a *triste* visit, and Paris was grey, quiet, and without lights or movement. He did not mention the piece from *En blanc et noir* he had

[31] Stravinsky, *An Autobiography*, 55.

> written for me, and when I received this music in Morges, late in 1919, I was very moved by it, as well as delighted to see that it was such a good composition. I was moved, too, when I composed my *Symphonies* to the memory of my old friend and, if I may say so, they, too, are 'a good composition'.[32]

Debussy's private correspondence portrays outright hostility to his friend. 'Stravinsky himself is leaning dangerously towards Schoenberg', he complained to Godet in the autumn of 1915,[33] a comment generally understood as referring to the influence of *Pierrot Lunaire* on the *Three Japanese Lyrics*. (It is interesting to note, however, that both Ravel and Bartók were convinced that the later parts of *Le Rossignol* betrayed Stravinsky's greatest indebtedness to Schoenberg.[34]) Whichever pieces Debussy had in mind, it is clear that the post-*Petrushka* Stravinsky had come to represent the detestable *modernstyl* just as much as Schoenberg and Strauss; a former ally now produced music which actively nurtured the anarchy against which Debussy's sonatas were intended as a direct riposte.

After their meeting at the end of 1915, when Stravinsky had returned to Paris to conduct *The Firebird*, Debussy seems to have found the Russian increasingly conceited. He sent a vitriolic diatribe to Godet at the beginning of 1916:

> I've seen Stravinsky recently...He says, my *Firebird*, my *Sacre*, like a child saying, my top, my hoop. And that's exactly what he is - a spoilt child who, from time to time, cocks a snook a music. He's also a young savage who wears noisy ties and kisses the ladies' hands while treading on their toes. When he's old, he'll be intolerable. That is to say, he won't be able to tolerate any music; but, for the moment, he's amazing. He claims to be a friend of mine because I've helped him climb a ladder from which he can hurl grenades - not all of which explode. But, as I say, he's astonishing. You've had a close look at him and, what's more, you've analysed what makes him tick so implacably.[35]

The 'ladder' can be understood in career terms, since Stravinsky had recently asked Debussy to act as his sponsor into the Société des Auteurs.[36] In the light of what has been revealed in this study, however, the phrase also suggests that Debussy was well aware of how his own music had liberated Stravinsky from his pre-Paris environment, particularly how *Ibéria* had

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[32] Stravinsky, *Expositions and Developments*, 139. It is also odd that Débussy did not mention the dedication of the third movement to Stravinsky in his letter of 24 October 1915.
[33] Letter to Godet, 14 October 1915 in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 305-7.
[34] See Craft/Stravinsky, *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*, 120.
[35] Letter to Godet, 4 January 1916, in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 310-12.
[36] See the *postscriptum* of the letter from Debussy to Stravinsky of 24 October 1915, in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 309.

helped the young Russian in the biggest break of his whole career, towards *Petrushka*. But by 1915 the period of their mutual support had drawn to a close and their aesthetic outlooks were oriented in opposite directions. Even the competitive edge to their relationship had dissolved: Debussy was desperately ill by this stage, rendering him weak, morbid and uninterested in new developments.[37] Even so, Debussy's bitterness aside, it seems that he genuinely did not understand Stravinsky's radical relationship to the Russian traditions. 'The young Russian school [has] become as un-Russian as can be', he told Godet gloomily,[38] and sent a letter directly to Stravinsky urging him to follow his - Debussy's - own example:

> We shall have to kill this microbe of false grandeur, of organised ugliness, which we haven't always recognised as being no more than a weakness. You are, I know, one of those who can fight and win against this kind of 'gas', just as deadly as the other and against which we've had no masks to protect us.[39]

It is frustrating to compare Debussy's pleas for the maintenance of concision, clarity, elegance, natural declamation and suppressed non-Germanic emotion in music with Stravinsky's *Les Noces*. Here, surely, was a score to satisfy Debussy's ideals. Like Debussy himself, Stravinsky had travelled far beyond late-nineteenth century idioms of 'national' music while still adhering to a set of values which should (at least in principle) have satisfied Stasov himself, as Taruskin has pointed out.[40] The unhappy irony was that Stravinsky was as interested as Debussy in writing music which established brilliantly original relationships with his national tradition, but Debussy was unable to see far enough beyond the *modernstyl* syntax of the post-*Rite* music to realise that Stravinsky was in fact fulfilling exactly the role of 'great Russian artist' that Debussy had felt was being supplanted so invidiously by Germanic influence.[41] Had Debussy lived longer, he might have embraced Stravinsky's 'Turanian pinnacle' with genuine enthusiasm. Yet, tragically, without the benefit of a few additional years in which to hear and appreciate the remarkable achievement of *Les Noces*, Debussy simply became the first of many to misinterpret Stravinsky's unique relationship to the Russian traditions.

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[37] Debussy underwent an operation on 7 December and his physical decline seems to have been unavoidable after this. A letter to Durand of 11 January 1916 reports that he had recently seen three doctors for advice. For further accounts of Debussy's illness, see Louis Laloy, *La musique retrouvée* (Paris, 1928), 228, and Andre Suarès, 'Debussy', *ReM* 2 (1 December 1920), 123, both translated in Nichols (ed.), *Debussy Remembered*, 245-7.

[38] Letter to Godet of 14 October 1915, cited earlier. This trans. from Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 305-7.

[39] Debussy, letter to Stravinsky of 24 October 1915, in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 308-9.

[40] Taruskin, *Russian Traditions*, 1421-1422.

[41] See Debussy's letter to Stravinsky of 24 October 1915, in Lesure/Nichols, *Debussy Letters*, 308-9.

V

Postscript: Stravinsky's homage to Debussy

Stravinsky's homage to Debussy, the *Symphonies of Winds,* was started shortly after the Frenchman's death and first appeared as a chorale fragment in *Le Tombeau de Claude Debussy*, the set of ten short works published as a tribute by *La Revue Musicale* in 1920.[42] Stravinsky's chorale, together with Ravel's Duo and Satie's little song, seems to stand apart from the other contributions: compare the terse clarity of these three pieces to Dukas's 'La plainte, au loin, du faune...', for example, or Florent Schmitt's preposterously extravagant contribution, 'Et Pan, au fond des blés lunaires, s'accouda'. Rather than works of homage, the contributions from Ravel and Stravinsky seem on initial hearing to be eager to dance on Debussy's grave, reinforcing the 'anti-Debussyste' direction of post-1918 developments heralded so vociferously by influential critics.

On reflection, however, Stravinsky's *Symphonies* seems to be a highly appropriate tribute, and not only because (as Taruskin has suggested) the work can be heard in terms of the Russian Orthodox burial service.[43] Compare Edward Cone's suggestion, that the Stravinskian 'hallmarks' of juxtaposition and stratification are crystallised in the *Symphonies*, with my conclusions in Chapter 1 where I showed how Stravinsky appropriated and built on Debussy's radical formal strategies using precisely these same techniques. [44] Is it possible that one of the reasons Stravinsky used such techniques so explicitly in the *Symphonies* is that he was deliberately giving expression to what he found most interesting in Debussy's music? Whether intentionally or not, Stravinsky's homage undoubtedly pays tribute to the radical and liberating strategies which Debussy developed to face the post-*kuchkist* problems of form and expression the two men faced together. The *Symphonies* provides an astonishingly original answer to an ever-present compositional question, but one which was felt particularly acutely in the early twentieth century: having crystallised a musical idea, in what new ways can it be developed, extended, transformed, varied, and brought into contact with other materials, and to what large-scale ends of expression and structure can these various manipulations be put?

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[42] For the complete Tombeau, see *La Revue Musicale* no. 2 (1st December 1920), *Supplément Musical: Le Tombeau de Claude Debussy*. For an original version of the Symphonies, see the facsimile of a fair copy of the score in André Baltensperger and Felix Meyer (eds.), *Igor Strawinsky, Symphonies d'instruments à vent: Faksimileausgabe des Particells und der Partitur der Erstfassung* (Winterthur & Basel: Amadeus Verlag (for the Paul Sacher Stiftung), 1991).

[43] Taruskin, *Russian Traditions*, 1486-1499.

[44] Cone, 'Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method'.

To the extent that Debussy helped Stravinsky to find new solutions to this question during his most impressionable period, Stravinsky was not exaggerating when he claimed that Debussy was his 'father in music', even though to emphasise a fashionable parent at the expense of the decidedly *passé* Rimsky-Korsakov was little short of scandalous. But I hope that this study has revealed that the father-son angle of the Debussy-Stravinsky relationship is of limited interest. The truly important aspect of the relationship for music history is the *reciprocal* nature of their interaction: the expressive aims and technical proclivities that brought them together, albeit temporarily, and the intersecting threads of nationalism and modernism which ultimately - and paradoxically - tore them apart.

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Appendix

THE DEBUSSY-STRAVINSKY CORRESPONDENCE

The parlous state of Debussy's known correspondence is a source of considerable difficulty for scholars. David Grayson has drawn attention to the problems of tracing letters held in secretive private collections, and has also publicised the fact that the published Debussy correspondence contains significant errors and omissions.[1] Proper names and entire paragraphs are missing from several early editions (this is especially true of the 1927 publication of Debussy's letters to Durand).

The Debussy-Stravinsky correspondence fares particularly badly, and there is no single published collection of their exchanges. All the letters, cards and telegrams currently in the public domain are available from three secondary sources:

> Robert Craft et al., *Avec Stravinsky* (Monaco: Èditions du Rocher, 1958), 199-203 [includes facsimile]
> François Lesure (ed.), *Stravinsky: Études et Témoignages* (Minkoff, 1982).
> François Lesure (ed.), *Claude Debussy, Correspondance 1884-1918* (Paris, 1993).

English translations are available for the entire published correspondence from a combination of the following:

> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (London: Faber, 1959), 48-56.
> Robert Craft, ed., *Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence*, 3 vols. (Faber, 1982, 1984, 1985), III, 3-9.
> François Lesure & Roger Nichols, eds., *Debussy Letters* (London: Faber, 1987).

However, the published correspondence is one-sided because important letters from Stravinsky to Debussy still languish in unknown private collections. In 1933, during the sale of Debussy's estate by his wife at the Hôtel Drouot, two postcards and three letters from Stravinsky were sold in a lot of 29 letters and cards. They remain in unknown private

[1] David Grayson, *The Genesis of Debussy's* Pelléas et Mélisande (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), 2-4.

collections and their contents have never fully resurfaced in the public domain.[2] The Andrieux sale catalogue (p.34, item 180) lists

> 2 lettres dont une de 2pp in-4 très interessante, et 3 cartes illustrés écrites, de Igor Stravinsky, le grand compositeur russe.[3]

Tantalisingly, Lockspeiser noted that the text of one of the letters (dated 4 November 1911, from Clarens, and written on receipt of a dedicated score) had been communicated to him but that Stravinsky had forbidden its publication. Lockspeiser also recorded that an extract from the second, dated 11 October 1915 from Morges, together with an extract from one of the cards (dated 13 December 1912), could be found in the catalogue of the Alfred Dupont Collection (nos. 276-7).[4] The Dupont catalogue, frustratingly, has been unobtainable.

The Paul Sacher Foundation in Basle has a photocopy of the letter of 4 November 1911.[5] Likely private collections in which the letters might be held include that of the widow of the dancer Serge Lifar, Frau Ahlefeld of Lausanne.[6] Various items from the Lifar collection have emerged at auction over the past few decades, but the 1984 auction at which the re-emergence of the Stravinsky-Debussy letters seemed most likely did not, in fact, reveal any new correspondence.[7] Frau Ahlefeld is highly secretive and enquiries about the remnants of the Lifar collection are invariably returned with uncommunicative courtesy.

Below is as comprehensive a listing of the Debussy-Stravinsky correspondence as is realisable at the present time. It includes all the known correspondence between the two composers' wives.

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[2] See François Lesure, 'Élements de la bibliothèque de Debussy dans la vente de 1933' in *Cahiers Debussy*, n.s. 1 (1977), 38-40.
[3] G. Andrieux, *Catalogue of sale of all Debussy's possessions* [Paris, 30 November - 8 December] (Paris, 1933), 34.
[4] Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, II, 179.
[5] Information kindly communicated to me by Herrn Ulrich Mosch, Kurator dem Sammlung. Private correspondence, 23 September 1998.
[6] I should like to thank Dr. Roy Howat, Professor Robert Orledge and Dr. Stephen Roe for their help in attempting to trace these letters.
[7] See Stephen Roe and others, *Ballet Material and Manuscripts from the Serge Lifar Collection*, sale catalogue of Wednesday 9th May 1984 (London: Sotheby's, 1984).

THE DEBUSSY-STRAVINSKY CORRESPONDENCE

*4 Nov 1911	Stravinsky to Debussy	Letter
13 Apr 1912	Debussy to Stravinsky	Letter
8 Nov 1912	Debussy to Stravinsky	Letter
*13 Dec 1912	Stravinsky to Debussy	Postcard
1 Jan 1913	Debussy to Stravinsky	New Year Telegram
	Stravinsky to Debussy	New Year Telegram
15 May 1913	Debussy to Stravinsky	Note
31 May 1913	Debussy to Stravinsky	Pneumatique
[11 June 1913	Emma Debussy to Catherine Stravinsky	Letter]
[June 1913	Emma to Catherine	Letter]
? summer 1913	*Stravinsky to Debussy*	*Score of Zvezdoliki (+ letter?)*
	mentioned by Debussy in letter of 18 August	
18 Aug 1913	Debussy to Stravinsky	Letter
[Oct 1913	Emma to Catherine	Letter]
? autumn 1913	*Stravinsky to Debussy*	*Score of* The Rite of Spring
? early Nov	*Stravinsky to Debussy*	*Postcard*
	both mentioned by Debussy in letter of 9 November	
9 Nov 1913	Debussy to Stravinsky	Letter
17 Nov 1913	Debussy to Stravinsky	Postcard
30 Dec 1913	The Debussys to the Stravinskys	New Year Telegram
*11 Oct 1915	Stravinsky to Debussy	Letter
24 Oct 1915	Debussy to Stravinsky	Letter
[28 Mar 1918	Stravinsky to Emma]	Telegram

NB * indicates that the source is unobtainable, in an unknown private collection.

Sources in italics and prefaced by a question mark are referred to in other letters, but are presumed lost.

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