

Temps rythmés:
Rhythmic and Metrical Design in Debussy's Songs

by

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Professor of Music Theory, University of Zagreb, 1989
M. A. in Music Theory, University of Regina, 2002

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Requirements for the Degree of

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University of Victoria

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Abstract

The music of Claude Debussy moves in mysterious ways. As we unwind while listening to his compositions, we often find ourselves floating through time, not quite able to tap our feet to the music. Although Debussy specifies meter in his compositions, the synchronization between the notated time signature and the musical content is frequently either modified or altogether abandoned, leaving our feet in the air.

Debussy's *mélodies* brim with rhythmic, metrical and hypermetrical effects. Although Debussy scholars have noted these effects and have discussed them as isolated occurrences, the specific compositional techniques involved in their making have not yet been fully explored. Moreover, there have been very few attempts to examine the use, impact, and text-expressive role of Debussy's metrical devices within the context of the overall rhythmic and metrical design of his songs.

By investigating the development of Debussy's metrical devices throughout his song oeuvre, this study not only confirms a trajectory from lyrical to declamatory style (already noted by many scholars), but also establishes that with respect to rhythmic and metrical patterning, the transition is characterized by a progression from periodicity to aperiodicity. Accordingly, the study introduces a theory of aperiodicity in music, investigates the phenomena of periodicity and aperiodicity in Debussy's songs, while describing and illustrating various metrical devices based on these two basic states. Numerous samples drawn from his 101 songs showcase Debussy's distinctive declamation, his use of metrical dissonance and irregularity, his sophisticated arrangement of lyrical and declamatory passages, as well as his associations of poetic content with specific metrical choices. These devices infuse his *mélodies* with an abundance of metrical idiosyncrasies that destabilise the ongoing metrical flow, with profound expressive impact.

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List of Abbreviations and Indications Related to Prosody and Debussy's Settings of Text

In poetic lines:

- SA = Secondary Accent, indicated in **bold** font
- LDA = Line-Demarcative Accent, indicated in **bold** font
- PDA = Phrase-Demarcative Accent, indicated in **bold** font

In a musical setting:

- a syllable in **BOLD** (and capitalized) font indicates its placement on a downbeat;
- a syllable in **bold** font represents its placement on any other **accented** beat;
- a syllable in brackets (**bold**) indicates an accented *e muet*;
- a syllable in capital font, i.e., BOLD, indicates a durational accent due to a syncopation.

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No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.

- Aesop

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Dedication

To my parents, Judita and Milivoj Körbler,

to my brothers, Radovan and Brano Körbler,

to my husband, Paul H. Fudge, and my step-children, Marion and Simon.

Temps rythmés:
Rhythmic and Metrical Design in Debussy's Songs

Chapter One

Introduction: Debussy's 'Rhythmicized Time'

Instances of metrical conflict and ambiguity occur in the music of all major composers. However, in the oeuvre of Claude Debussy, a composer who expressed his idea of music as “rhythmicized colours and time,” their occurrence is consistent and extraordinary.¹ Following standard musical practice, Debussy specifies a time signature in his compositions, thus implying an alignment between the meter and the flow of musical content. Quite frequently, however, the implied synchronization is modified or altogether abandoned, producing audible effects of metrical dissonance, irregularity, and ambiguity.

Perhaps the most striking displays of metrical disruption in Debussy's music, involving masses of sound, can be heard in his orchestral compositions. A live performance of *La Mer* is among those exhilarating experiences during which attentive listeners might find themselves puzzled: in what way are the conductor's metrical gestures related to the music that emanates from the orchestra? While the beat is clearly indicated, the sonorities appear to *unfasten* themselves from the regular pulse of the baton and sculpt waves of orchestral sound independently, as if unfolding within a different metrical continuum. Such effects create “[a] sort of discontinuous musical discourse,”² infused by passages in which the listener loses not only a

¹ Debussy's frequently quoted expression, as found in a letter written to Jacques Durand (dated September 3, 1907), reads: “Elle [la musique] est de couleurs et de temps rythmés.” François Lesure and Denis Herlin, eds., *Claude Debussy: Correspondance (1872-1918)* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005): 1030. The sentence has been translated by Roger Nichols, as follows: “It consists of colours and of rhythmicized time.” François Lesure and Roger Nichols, eds., *Debussy Letters* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), 184. Hepokoski argues that Nichols's translation is not entirely correct, because the plural form of the word “rythmés” in the sentence applies to both colour and rhythm. Accordingly, the sentence should read: “It consists of [or “It is about”] rhythmicized colours and time.” James Hepokoski, “Clouds and Circles: Rotational Form in Debussy's ‘Nuages,’” *Dutch Journal of Music Theory* 15, no. 1 (2010): 1.

² William Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1989), 87. The observation is in reference to Debussy's ballet *Jeux*, and the *Études* for piano.

sense of meter, but also a sense of pulse. While one can clearly see bar lines in the conductor's gestures, where are the bar lines in the music?

On a smaller scale, manifestations of metrical instability or “metrical non-commitment” can also be found in Debussy's piano works.³ The interesting features of his *Prélude* no. 4 (Book I), “Les Sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir,” are that the notated three-four time signature does not start to materialize audibly until m. 9, and that the lack of alignment between the notated meter and the musical content in the first eight measures produces such an internal conflict that any perception of the three-four waltz is unattainable, even in retrospect. For the performer, these measures characterize an opening in which the musical content takes time to sculpt itself into the specified meter, and the crafting of this ‘process of becoming’ (in the prescribed moderate, *harmonieux et souple* tempo) presents a challenge. For the listener, however, the metrical grid of the *Prélude* is just simply fluctuating. As every new rhythmic gesture introduces a new metrical framework and dissolves the meter of the preceding gesture, the overall metrical design comes across as spontaneous and ephemeral.

The fluidity of a metrical grid strikes the listener while listening to performances of Debussy's *mélodies* as well. Although clearly perceptible at certain times, the notated meter is often conflicted, modified, or entirely inaudible. Considering that the songs are settings of exclusively French poetry, the question arises whether these metrical idiosyncrasies are a side effect of the poetic meter and rhythm—i.e., are they imposed by the prosody—or does Debussy create them as a means of expression or as a structural element in the music?

³ Michael Oravitz, “Meter Patterning and Its Effects on Phrasing and Form in Selected Debussy *Préludes*” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2005), 182. The quoted observation has been coined by Oravitz, in his analysis of Debussy's *Prélude* “Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir,” from Book I.

In his 1989 analysis of Debussy's song "Les Ingénus" from the second cycle of *Fêtes galantes*, Richard Parks ascertained "many correspondences among metrical grouping, formal partitions, and text."⁴ Furthermore, a 1994 article on "Rhythmic Consonance and Dissonance" by Harald Krebs observed that "Debussy's song [*Les Angéhus*] demonstrates the expressive potential of metrical consonance and dissonance," and thereby suggested a direct correlation between the metrical design of the song and the expressive meaning of the poem.⁵ *Les Angéhus* and "Les Ingénus" remain the only two songs analyzed with regard to metrical conflict, thus unveiling a research gap in this area and motivating a thorough study of Debussy's songs from the perspectives of rhythm and meter.

Representing perhaps a lesser-known portion of his oeuvre, Debussy's songs are a centerpiece of his output and of the vocal literature. A list of his compositions by genre shows that songs alone outnumber his works for piano (solo and four-hands combined). With the inclusion of works for unaccompanied choir and for voices accompanied by orchestra, vocal compositions constitute a significant majority within his output.

Debussy composed songs throughout his working career, more precisely, from 1879 to 1915. This time period echoes, perhaps with a ten-year delay,⁶ a period of change in French poetry, namely, the transition from the *vers mesuré* of the Romantic period,⁷ through the *vers libéré* of Symbolism, to the *vers libre* of modern poetry. Moreover, Debussy's selection of

⁴ Richard Parks, *The Music of Claude Debussy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 290.

⁵ Harald Krebs, "Rhythmische Konsonanz und Dissonanz," *Musiktheorie* 9, no. 1 (1994): 36.

⁶ For instance, publication dates of Verlaine's poems precede Debussy's settings by ten years. Verlaine's *Fêtes galantes* collection was published in 1869, and set to music by Debussy three times: (1) in 1882 as *Fêtes galantes pour Madame Vasnier* (five songs), (2) in 1891-92 as *Fêtes galantes, série I* (three songs), and (3) in 1904 as *Fêtes galantes, série II* (three songs); his *Romances sans paroles* were published in 1874, and set by Debussy in 1885-87 as *Ariettes oubliées* (six songs), revised in 1903; Verlaine's *Sagesse* was published in 1881, and set by Debussy in 1891 as *Trois Mélodies de Paul Verlaine*.

⁷ The term is found in Mathurin M. Dondo, "Vers libre: A Logical Development of French Verse" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1922), 40-45.

poetry reflects this transitional period: he composed settings of poems written in formal verse, settings of poems in the form of *vers libéré*, as well as settings of *proses lyriques*. As the vast majority of Debussy's songs is set to Symbolist poems—and twenty-nine of these songs are settings of seventeen poems by Verlaine alone—it is conceivable that Debussy's compositional approach was guided by the principles of *vers libéré*, the primary goal of which is to liberate the rhythm from the strictures of the predetermined metrical framework.

Focusing on the question, “What is the role of metrical conflict and irregularity in Debussy's songs?” this study aims to identify, analyze and interpret the function of metrical phenomena in this segment of his oeuvre. Under the guiding premise that the metrical idiosyncrasies, so prevalent in his *mélodies*, grew both out of Debussy's novel treatment of prosody and out of his exceptionally attentive reading and interpretation of poems, my aim is to show that the rhythmic and metrical design in Debussy's songs arises out of his effort to emulate and project the principles of *vers libéré* in his music. Furthermore, the study will demonstrate that this very aspiration, the desire to ‘unfasten’—or *libérer*—the rhythm from meter urged innovations in his compositional devices and in his style. Finally, it will become apparent that the principles of *vers libéré* penetrated the crafting of Debussy's compositional technique so deeply that the stages of its evolution echo the course of nineteenth-century French verse.

Debussy's passion for French poetry has been well documented by scholars working in the field of musicology. A chronology of his choices of poets and the variety of their poems, however, has not been discussed in great detail (see Appendix A1). Debussy begins his pursuit of poetry with the *lyrisme romantique* of Alfred de Musset (1810-1857). In the next ten years (1879-1889), he explores works of thirteen different poets. Interestingly enough, ten of these poets, namely Banville, Valade, Leconte de Lisle, Gautier, Verlaine, Cros, Renaud, Bourget,

Mallarmé and Baudelaire had their poems published in *Le Parnasse contemporain* volumes of 1866, 1869 or 1876, and were, at least initially, considered to be Parnassians.⁸ In 1882, Debussy turned his attention to Verlaine and set five of his poems to music.⁹ By 1884, he narrowed down his choice of poets to the four who spearheaded the Symbolist path (Verlaine, Bourget,¹⁰ Mallarmé and Baudelaire), and whose technique of *vers libéré* paved the way towards open poetic forms and *vers libre*. Debussy stepped beyond using only their poems for his *mélodies*, and ventured into writing his own *vers libre*. This plunge into working with *proses lyriques* represents the step furthest removed from his initial use of Parnassian verse and creates a climax in Debussy's departure from *vers mesuré*. Upon his return to the genre of *mélodie* in the first decade of the twentieth century, Debussy revisited the poems of Paul Verlaine (1844-1896), but then delved into the early French poetry of Charles d'Orléans (1394-1465), François Villon (c. 1431-after 1463) and Tristan l'Hermitte (c.1601-1655). His final statement as the erudite doyen of *mélodie moderne* is captured in the settings of three poems by Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), where he displays the pinnacle of his craft.

Different stages emerge from this chronology: (1) the early period, from 1879 to 1884, by which time Debussy has set to music verses of eleven poets; (2) the Symbolist stage, from 1884 to 1890, in which he focused solely on the poetry of Paul Verlaine, Paul Bourget, Stéphane

⁸ The Parnassians derived their name from the anthology to which they contributed, namely, *Le Parnasse contemporain: Recueil de vers nouveaux*, ed. Alphonse Lemerre (Paris: L. Toinon, 1866; Paris: T. S. Benoit, 1869; and Paris: T. S. Benoit, 1876). All three volumes are available from Bibliothèque nationale de France: https://gallica.bnf.fr/services/engine/search/sru?operation=searchRetrieve&version=1.2&collapsing=disabled&query=%28dc.title%20all%20%22Le%20Parnasse%20contemporain%22%29%20and%20arkPress%20all%20%22cb32833277h_date%22&rk=21459;2#resultat-id-3. Parnassians were a group of 19th-century poets who, as a reaction against the emotionalism and verbal imprecision of the Romantics, focused on restraint, objectivity, technical perfection and precise description. The group was headed by Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle, whose poems Debussy set to music, as well.

⁹ The five poems are "Fantoches," "Pantomime," "En Sourdine," "Mandoline," and "Clair de lune," and they are published in *Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy: Mélodies, Série II, vol. 2*, ed. Marie Rolf (Paris: Durand, 2016).

¹⁰ According to Ian Dalrymple McFarlane, "[Bourget] was working towards an aesthetic that one might broadly call symbolist." I. D. McFarlane, *Australian Journal of French Studies* 6, nos. 2-3 (1969): 376.

Mallarmé and Charles Baudelaire; (3) the exploratory stage, from 1890 to 1899, in which, while still preoccupied with settings of Verlaine's and Bourget's poems, Debussy expanded his circle of poets (Hyspa, Girod and Le Roy) and delved into settings of his own *Proses lyriques* as well as those of Pierre Louÿs; (4) the late period, from 1903 to 1915, marked by a review of *Ariettes* (to be published as *Ariettes oubliées*)—the settings of Verlaine's poems, then a turn to some poetry of the distant past (d'Orléans, l'Hermite, Villon), and completed with settings of Mallarmé's poems and a *mélodie* to his own text ("Noël des enfants," 1915).

The described trajectory of Debussy's interests in relation to poets, as well as his choices concerning types of poems, reveals a course of development, a progression that has been observed by many scholars studying his music. Denoted as a transition from lyrical to declamatory style, it continues to be perceived throughout Debussy studies, but is not discussed in detail with respect to rhythmic and metrical patterning.¹¹ So, what does it actually mean?

Katherine Rohrer, a scholar who has written about poetic and musical meter in Purcell's music, has provided definitions of the lyrical and declamatory style that are the most relevant to this study. Rohrer describes lyrical style as

a song or aria style, one in which musical values are favoured over textual ones. It features relatively regular harmonic rhythm, melodic phrase lengths and pace, that is, the rate at which stressed syllables in the text are unfolded in the rhythmic structure of the music. Musical repetition and repetitive structures such as sequence are hallmarks of the lyrical style.¹²

¹¹ "[...] There is no simple trajectory here from lyrical fullness to declamatory sparseness [...]," writes Julian Johnson, "*Vertige! Debussy, Mallarmé, and the Edge of Language*," in *Debussy's Resonance*, eds. François de Médicis and Steven Huebner (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2018), 376. David J. Code remarks on Debussy's "song style [that is] oriented more towards 'declamation' than traditional 'singing'," in David J. Code, *Claude Debussy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 45. In his discussion about Debussy's "four-measure phrase segments" present in the Love Duet (Scene 4) from *Diane au bois*, John Clevenger recalls "the same sort of choppy phraseology that characterizes Debussy's other early lyrical efforts," thus associating 'early' with lyrical and 'later' with declamatory, or, in Clevenger's words, with "heavy doses of phraseological decomposition." John Clevenger, "The Origins of Debussy's Style" (PhD diss., Eastman School of Music, 2002), 1265.

¹² Katherine T. Rohrer, "Poetic metre, musical metre and the dance in Purcell's songs," in *Purcell Studies*, ed. Curtis Price (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 210.

The lyrical mode of writing is, therefore, characterized by dance-like features: there is a characteristic rhythmic gesture whose more or less modified repetitions create a sense of metrical unfolding, thus relaying a sense of regularity, uniformity, and predictability.

Rohrer defines declamatory style as follows:

Declamatory style, by contrast, is an expressive recitative that focuses attention on the text: musical repetition is avoided, and harmonic rhythm, pace and phrase lengths are distinctively irregular. In Purcell's music especially, declamatory style involves an effort to mirror speech rhythms, which in turn produces a high level of rhythmic variety in the vocal line.¹³

Accents in the declamatory mode of writing are, therefore, not "unified" around specific beats to generate a regular patterning of meter, but they are rather "dispersed," so that their unfolding emulates the unpredictability of the spoken word.¹⁴

The described difference has a particular manifestation in Debussy's scores. A simple comparison of two *mélodies*, "Madrid" from the beginning and "Éventail" from the end of Debussy's career, not only visually reveals the differences between the lyrical and declamatory style, but also makes palpable the magnitude of the transition. Although both poems are written in octosyllabic verse, Debussy's treatment of their structure, his handling of their poetic rhythm, as well as his resourcefulness with the piano part shows, in the case of the former, how the many nuances of a poem can be assimilated by its (hyper)metrically governed piano accompaniment, and, in the case of the latter, how the poem through its imagery, prosodic and emotional content can inspire the sculpting of its unique and autochthonous piano surrounding.

With regards to the structure of the poems, the octosyllabic lines of "Madrid" are organized into sextains (8 8 8 8 8 8), whose rhyme scheme, *abccb*, produces a *sextilla*, a

¹³ Rohrer, "Poetic metre, musical metre and the dance in Purcell's songs," 210.

¹⁴ The terms "unified" and "dispersed" are adopted from Joel Lester, *The Rhythms of Tonal Music* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 31.

Spanish stanza form (see Appendix B1).¹⁵ In “Éventail,” Mallarmé’s stanzas are in the form of octosyllabic quatrains (8 8 8 8), featuring the *abab* rhyme scheme (see Appendix G1). As the syllable count in both poems remains constant and their stanzas are of equal length, both display an obvious opportunity for a lyrical setting: the consistency of the poetic meter invites a steady musical meter; the length of poetic lines, as signaled by rhyme (if not also delineated by punctuation), suggests a distribution of syllables over a fixed number of musical measures recurring in a more-or-less repetitive pattern; and the sequential and periodic structure of the stanzas evokes a correspondingly organized strophic setting.¹⁶

In his setting of “Madrid” (see Appendix B2), Debussy is highly responsive to the structural features of the poem. The octosyllabic meter translates into a steady three-four meter; each poetic line unfolds over six beats, creating a recurring two-measure pattern; and the stanzaic structure of the poem is corroborated by the strophic setting of the song. However, as each line of the sextain translates into a two-measure pattern—thus construing a twelve-measure long musical strophe—Musset’s stanza is two lines short of facilitating a hypermetrically balanced sixteen-measure strophe that contains two eight-measure phrases. To make up for this shortage of text, Debussy repeats certain lines and turns Musset’s sextains into octaves whose returns generate hypermetrically regular strophes. The number of strophes, however, is not indicated in Debussy’s manuscript, implying that the setting might be shorter than the original poem (see Appendix B3 and the related footnote).

¹⁵ “The Spanish *sextilla* usually has eight syllables [...]. It options [*sic*] two rhyme schemes: *abccb* or *abbacc*.” Edward Hirsch, *A Poet’s Glossary* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 569.

¹⁶ “Stanzas are sequential [...] [and] periodic, guiding the reader alternately through a sojourn in their organized lines [...]” Theresa Krier, “Stanza,” in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics*, 4th ed., ed. Roland Greene and Stephen Cushman (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1357.

Having established the meter in the introductory two measures of the piano part, Debussy secures a high level of rhythmic consistency in the vocal part, as well. Above the continuous unfolding of the piano accompaniment, syllables are laid out in eighth-note values, while those ending a poetic line are given quarter notes. As the rhythmic pattern remains consistent in its repetitions, the natural accentuation of syllables is either supported by their placement in the three-four measure, or disrupted. Such an approach subjects Musset's poetry to a formulaic treatment and, in the service of a lyrical setting, it surrenders the featured rhythmic nuances of each poetic line to the accompanying music.¹⁷

Debussy's setting of "Éventail" is radically different (see Appendix G2). There are no repeats of text and all stanzas are used. Although the lines of Mallarmé's octosyllabic quatrains could translate into a strophic hypermetrically balanced form, Debussy's rendition is not motivated by this type of symmetry. The *mélodie* is a through-composed setting of the five stanzas, but its overall form is puzzling: on one hand, each new stanza is accompanied by different music (mm. 1-12, 12-24, 25-36, 36-46, 47-65), signaling an ABCDE form; on the other hand, the opening gesture (mm. 1-3) returns (in mm. 12-14 and 47-49), thus suggesting an asymmetrical ternary form whose internal structure might be perceived as $A + A^1BC + A^2$; yet based on the sudden and distinctive appearance of the cry "vertige" (at mm. 25-26), the sections of the song might be perceived as groups of $AA^1 + BC + A^2$. Nevertheless, the presentation of text comes across as a soliloquy whose phrases are draped by music.

With regards to rhythm, Debussy's choice of note values in the vocal line of "Éventail" is not as limited as in "Madrid": it includes sixteenth-, eighth-, quarter- and half-note values,

¹⁷As Claire Croiza has put it: "Too bad for the words. The musical phrase reigns first." Catherine Mary Schwab, "The *mélodie française moderne*: An Expression of Music, Poetry, and Prosody in *fin-de-siècle* France, and its performance in the recitals of Jane Bathori (1877-1970) and Claire Croiza (1882-1946)" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1991), 246.

eighth-note and quarter-note triplets, as well as extended (five-quarter) note values. The variety of durations captures the length and the pace of syllables much more truthfully than in “Madrid” and, as such, aims to convey the rhythm of the text as accurately as possible. Here, Debussy’s focus is not on the poetic line as delineated by rhyme, but on the declamation of poetic segments, while the surrounding “rhythmicized” music—whose melodic and harmonic language is now firmly in the twentieth century—wafts in fragments of sound.

Contrary to “Madrid,” in “Éventail” each octosyllabic line unfolds over a different number of beats. Rather than being constricted within a metrical mold, the lines of the opening quatrain, for example, are distributed over 4 + 3 + 6 + 4 beats respectively. Such an arrangement is partially due to punctuation (which, in “Madrid,” was overridden by Debussy’s lyrical setting). In “Éventail,” though, Debussy is particularly responsive to the fragments delineated by punctuation marks. He captures them through a variety of phrase lengths and echoes their richness in the surrounding music.

Debussy’s treatment of Mallarmé’s poetic rhythm is so refined and delicate that, through its unfolding, the musical meter, in the sense of a predetermined arrangement of accents, is obscured. The eighth-note pulse that is discernible at the opening of “Éventail” (mm. 1-3) becomes disguised with ensuing suppressed downbeats under the *Rubato* tempo marking (mm. 4-6). The entry of the text further complicates the passage. The short segments of the poem’s opening line, although unfolding over a single measure each, are delivered somewhat erratically: the choice and arrangement of the pertinent note values displaces accents in such a way that even the pulse, let alone the notated meter, remains an enigma for the listener. The ensuing insertion of a single measure of three-four time (m. 7) does not actually offer an extra beat, but rather shortens the expected four-beat-long unfolding of the second line to three beats, thus hastening

the phrase “pour que je plonge // Au pur délice sans chemin” towards the word “Sache” (m. 8). Such an approach not only resembles natural spoken-word patterns, but also subjugates the musical meter to the rhythmic intricacies of the text. The piano part surrounds the poem, creating an environment whose seemingly capricious and unpredictable unfolding is, nevertheless, notated to the finest detail. For the listener, however, the notated meter surfaces and submerges throughout the rest of the song as Debussy deems necessary, but its function as the regulator of accents in a measure is largely lost.

Nothing like this could ever be said about “Madrid,” simply because “the rate at which stressed syllables in the text are unfolded”¹⁸ is regular, uniform and predictable. Furthermore, in the piano, the beats are equally spaced, the downbeat is clearly discernible and the constant repetition of the opening rhythmic gesture guarantees “relatively regular harmonic rhythm, melodic phrase lengths and pace.”¹⁹ Debussy’s setting of “Madrid” is, therefore, the perfect representative of the lyrical style. This is confirmed further by the ease with which the listener can detect the pulse, the bar lines and the notated three-four meter.

The aforementioned transition from lyrical to declamatory style essentially denotes a progression from a periodic to an aperiodic unfolding of music. The term “periodicity” has been used, and the phenomenon analyzed, by a number of scholars who, in their explorations of musical time, have defined it in various ways in their theories of meter and rhythm. A theory of aperiodicity in music, however, has not yet been written. Germane to the field of physics, the term has neither been used among music scholars, nor explored in terms of its application to music. Consequently, the aim of this study is also to define and introduce the basics of aperiodicity in music, by using examples from Debussy’s *mélodies*.

¹⁸ Rohrer, “Poetic metre, musical metre and the dance in Purcell’s songs,” 210.

¹⁹ Rohrer, 210.

A chapter on existing scholarship will be followed by a chapter in which I offer a survey and explanation of relevant theories of poetry and music, including my own theory of aperiodicity. The main body of the study is divided in two parts, namely, periodicity and aperiodicity. It features analyses of simple to complex metrical structures in Debussy's songs, identifying states of: (1) metrical regularity (Chapter 4), as a broader form of metrical consonance, where instances of conformance with the notated meter are shown and their building of hypermetrical regularity explained; (2) metrical dissonance (Chapter 5), where examples of conflict between the notated meter and "antimetrical layers" are explored;²⁰ (3) metrical neutrality (Chapter 6), as a type of periodicity that provides a pulse, but lacks the organizing layers essential for a sense of metrical accentuation; (4) metrical and hypermetrical irregularity (Chapter 7), where an organization of accents interrupts the established periodicity; and (5) metrical ambiguity (Chapter 8), as an absence or dissolution of pulse, where fragments with no perceptible pulse are featured. Whenever possible, each metrical state is explained through a metrical and hypermetrical analysis of a single song that is, for one reason or another, a clear representative of the state in question. As there are no songs by Debussy that are metrically neutral or ambiguous throughout, the relevant chapters feature fragments from songs that exemplify such states, however brief they might be. A concluding chapter synthesizes the previous chapters, categorizes the composer's metrical techniques, and draws conclusions about the expressive function in the analyzed songs.

With regards to the meter and rhythm in Debussy's *mélodies*, it is important to point out that aperiodicity brings on a dichotomy between the performer's and the listener's perception of meter. The performer comprehends the meter as it is notated in the score and, with the help of

²⁰ Antimetrical layers are defined by Harald Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 31.

bar lines, configures metrically ambiguous passages. The receptive listener, however, is not privy to the notated time signature or the bar lines. Unless the audible arrangement of accents clearly conveys the notated meter, the listener may be exposed to successions of what would appear to be erratic or randomly produced rhythmic structures whose content and unfolding suggest the absence of meter.

These thoughts parallel Joel Lester's account of his own experiences as the performer of Babbitt's *Composition for Four Instruments* (1948), and as the listener of his ensemble's recorded performance of the work months later.²¹ Noting "the disparity between the metric notations of such scores and their sound," Lester recalls practicing the rhythms against "the silent metric grid,"²² which, as the listener, he could no longer reconstruct. Realizing that, in the process of listening, "a rhythmic-metric structure of crystalline clarity had become thoroughly opaque" and that "seemingly erratic pulses dominated the soundscape," Lester explores the score from the listener's point of view.²³ Discerning the dichotomy in the perception of the notated meter, he states, "I defy any listener who has never seen the score [...] to re-create the barring [...] after as many hearings as he or she wishes."²⁴ Remarkably enough, there are passages in the music of Debussy that epitomize the described sentiment. Although the meter is notated in each and every *mélodie*, the presence of the bar line, the downbeat, or even the pulse, is often suppressed by the musical content.²⁵

In order to reveal to the reader what the listener is hearing, in other words, which metrical state is emanating from a particular section, I occasionally remove the bar lines from selected

²¹ Joel Lester, "Notated and Heard Meter," *Perspectives of New Music* 24, no.2 (Spring-Summer 1986): 116-128.

²² Lester, "Notated and Heard Meter," 117.

²³ Lester, 117.

²⁴ Lester, 126.

²⁵ The dichotomy is addressed further by Harald Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces*, 47, and will be discussed later in this study.

examples.²⁶ As will be seen, such an approach takes the reader's attention away from the notated downbeat, and makes us focus on the sounding downbeat. In other words, erasing the bar lines converts the reader into the listener. The absence of the metrical grid causes the structures of sound to become more apparent and open: as they reveal their makings and arrangements of accents, one cannot but start examining the role of the bar line in Debussy's *mélodies*.

²⁶ Many of Satie's piano scores are written without the bar lines (*Gnossiennes*, *Le Fils des étoiles*, *Sonneries de la Rose + Croix*, *Pièces froides*, and *Véritables Préludes flasques*, to mention a few), making this approach concur with, at the time, the already published practice. Erik Satie, *Gymnopédies, Gnossiennes and Other Works for Piano* (1887-1913; repr., Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 1989).

Chapter Two

Relevant Recordings, Scores and Studies of Debussy's *Mémoires*

To date, not all of Debussy's hundred-and-one *mémoires* have been published as music scores. Fortunately, they have been recorded, and it is the CD recordings that became my key source for this repertoire, for tracking the scores, and for identifying the unpublished songs. Accordingly, the ensuing review addresses the recordings first, the scores second, and then focuses on the relevant studies of Debussy's *mémoires*, on the pertinent scholarly work about French prosody, and on the related theories of musical meter and rhythm.

In 2012, the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of Debussy's birth, *Deutsche Grammophon* released *The Debussy Edition*, a collection of recorded performances of Debussy's works that included seventy-four *mémoires* sung by Véronique Dietschy.¹ This was soon followed by the first complete recording of Debussy songs. Entitled *Claude Debussy: Intégrale des mémoires*, the set was released by the *Ligia* label in November of 2014.² Prepared and edited by Denis Herlin, the collection brought to light a total of one-hundred-and-one *mémoires*, and in addition to providing debut recordings of some of the newly discovered manuscripts, the piano parts were rendered on Debussy's own *Blüthner* piano. Four years later, at the one-hundredth anniversary of Debussy's death, Denis Herlin facilitated another complete release, but this time of all of Debussy's compositions (except for "the orchestral version of an *Intermezzo* composed in June 1882").³ Released by Warner Classics, the collection *Claude Debussy: The Complete Works*

¹ Claude Debussy, *The Debussy Edition*, with numerous performers, Deutsche Grammophon 00289 479 0056, 2012, CD.

² *Claude Debussy: Intégrale des mémoires*, with Liliana Faraon and Magali Léger (sopranos), Marie-Ange Todorovitch (mezzo-soprano), Gilles Ragon (tenor), François le Roux (baritone), and Jean-Louis Haguenaer (piano), Harmonia mundi/Ligia LIDI 0201285-14, 2014, CD.

³ Denis Herlin, "Editorial Notes," in *Claude Debussy: The Complete Works*, with numerous performers, Warner Music 0190295736750, 2018, CD, 6.

came out as a boxed set of thirty-three compact discs, featuring a selection of classic and recent recordings of the same one-hundred-and-one *mélodies*, thus confirming the number of Debussy's songs known to date.⁴ In addition, the songs were presented in a more or less chronological order, which assisted this study in a significant way.⁵

Another complete, or rather, almost complete set of *mélodies* has also been released by the Hyperion record label. The individual volumes that came out in 2003, 2012, 2014 and 2018 feature selections of songs starting from the well-known to those of the more recently discovered manuscripts.⁶ Aside from ten songs that the *Ligia* release presented in duplicate (or even in triplicate) versions,⁷ the settings that are missing are “Madrid” and “Berceuse sur une vieille chanson poitevine.” The project was researched by Roger Nichols, while the recorded performances presented by a different singer (or a few) on each disc, are in the safe hands of the pianist Malcolm Martineau.

Among recordings that predate these complete editions, there are a few others that have aided this study of Debussy's *mélodies*. One of them is the digitally remastered 1980 release of *Claude Debussy: Intégrale des mélodies* on three compact discs. It features sixty songs

⁴ *Claude Debussy: The Complete Works*, with numerous performers, Warner Music 0190295736750, 2018, CD.

⁵ “The numbering of the works is taken from the second edition of the catalogue compiled by François Lesure, as published at the end of his critical biography, *Claude Debussy: Biographie critique; suivie du Catalogue de l'œuvre*, Paris, Fayard, 2003, pp. 461-588.” Denis Herlin, in *Claude Debussy: The Complete Works*, CD, 6. The referenced critical biography by Lesure has been translated to English and recently published, with revisions and many updates, by Marie Rolf. François Lesure, *Claude Debussy: A Critical Biography*, ed. and trans. Marie Rolf (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2019).

⁶ Claude Debussy, *Debussy Songs*, with Christopher Maltman (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67357, 2003, CD; *Debussy Songs 2*, with Lorna Anderson and Lisa Milne (sopranos), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67883, 2012, CD; *Debussy Songs 3*, with Jennifer France (soprano), Jonathan McGovern (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA68016, 2014, CD; *Debussy Songs 4*, with Lucy Crowe (soprano), Christopher Maltman (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67075, 2018, CD.

⁷ The missing duplicate versions in the four CD releases by Hyperion are Debussy's earliest settings of Bourget's poems “Paysage sentimental” and “Voici que le printemps,” as well as Verlaine's “Colloque sentimental” and the early *Ariettes* (six, plus another version of “Chevaux de bois”).

performed by five different singers, all joined by Dalton Baldwin at the piano.⁸ In addition, the recording *French and Spanish Songs* by mezzo-soprano Nan Merriman and pianist Gerald Moore from 1955 (digitally remastered in 1998) has provided some insights into the featured songs by Debussy,⁹ as has the recording *Forgotten Songs* by soprano Dawn Upshaw and pianist (and conductor) James Levine, among others.¹⁰ Last but not least is the treasured compact disc *Claude Debussy – The Composer as a Pianist*, put together by the Pierian Recording Society and featuring recorded performances of Debussy at the piano.¹¹ Aside from the fourteen Welte-Mignon piano rolls recorded on Nov. 11, 1913, the release also includes four short 78-rpm sides with soprano Mary Garden (the first *Mélisande*), recorded at the Paris G&T studio in 1904; these are the “*Mes Longs Cheveux descendent*” aria from Debussy’s opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and three of six *Ariettes oubliées*, namely “*Il pleure dans mon cœur*,” “*L’Ombre des arbres*” and “*Green*.”

The publishing of Debussy’s song scores, however, has not kept up with the recordings. Among the four volumes of *mélodies* planned by Durand as part of the *Claude Debussy Œuvres Complètes* Série II edition, only the second volume—*Claude Debussy Mélodies (1882-1887)*—has appeared.¹² Edited by Marie Rolf, it features the complete *Chansons [Recueil Vasnier]* collection of thirteen songs, “*Séguidille*,” “*Apparition*,” the first set of six *Ariettes*, another setting of “*Mandoline*” (in addition to that in the Vasnier collection), “*Paysage sentimental*” and

⁸ *Claude Debussy: Mélodies*, with Elly Ameling, Mady Mesplé, Michèle Command and Frederica von Stade (sopranos), Gérard Souzay (baritone), and Dalton Baldwin (piano), EMI FRANCE: L’Esprit Français CMS 7 64095 2, 1990, CD. (Original release by EMI FRANCE, 1980.)

⁹ Nan Merriman, mezzo-soprano, *Nan Merriman Sings French & Spanish Songs*, with Gerald Moore (piano), Testament SBT 1134, 1998, CD. (Original release by EMI, 1955.)

¹⁰ Dawn Upshaw, soprano, *Forgotten Songs: Dawn Upshaw Sings Debussy*, with James Levine (piano), SONY Classical SK 67190, 1997, CD.

¹¹ Claude Debussy, *The Composer as a Pianist*, with Mary Garden (soprano), and Claude Debussy (piano), Pierian PIR0001, 2000, CD. (Re-release of 1904 and 1913 piano rolls).

¹² Claude Debussy, *Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy: Mélodies*, Série II, vol. 2, ed. Marie Rolf (Paris: Durand, 2016).

“Romance (Voici que le printemps).” The Appendices section features versions of a number of the same songs, as transcribed from additional manuscripts. For instance, Debussy composed two settings of “En Sourdine.” The 1882 setting (which was never published during Debussy’s lifetime) exists in five manuscripts, three of which appear in this volume.¹³ The 1890 setting exists in two manuscripts, plus the first edition published in 1903.¹⁴ The latter settings are not included in this volume. The Appendices also include another two versions of “Mandoline,” an additional version of “Paysage sentimental,” an alternative ending to “Fantoches,” as well as second versions of five (of the six) *Ariettes*. The remaining volumes of Debussy *mélodies* are still to appear in print.

Notwithstanding additional versions found in the Appendices of *Œuvres Complètes* volume 2, this study has focused on the one-hundred-and-one songs as released in 2014 by the Ligia label as the corpus to be studied. For analyses, the scores of the first editions have been used whenever possible, in addition to the volume described above. The more or less recent publications of *Nuits blanches*¹⁵ and *Quatre nouvelles Mélodies (1882)*¹⁶ as edited by Denis Herlin, of *Three Songs for Madame Vasnier*¹⁷ edited by Nigel Foster, as well as individually published songs “Les Papillons”¹⁸ and “Séguidille”¹⁹ edited by Marie Rolf have also been consulted. However, as nine songs still remain unpublished, I have obtained copies through the

¹³ See Marie Rolf, “Critical Notes,” in *Œuvres Complètes*, 186-187.

¹⁴ Detailed information can be found in Marie Rolf, “Debussy’s Settings of Verlaine’s ‘En Sourdine,’” in *Perspectives on Music: Essays on Collections at the Humanities Research Center*, ed. Dave Oliphant and Thomas Zigel (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas at Austin, Humanities Research Center, 1985), 205-233.

¹⁵ Claude Debussy, *Nuits blanches*, ed. Denis Herlin (Paris: Durand, 2000).

¹⁶ Claude Debussy, *Quatre nouvelles Mélodies (1882) pour voix et piano: L’Archet, Le Matelot qui tombe à l’eau, Romance (Non, les Baisers d’amour), Les Elfes*, ed. Denis Herlin (Paris: Durand, 2012).

¹⁷ Claude Debussy, *Three Songs for Madame Vasnier*, ed. Nigel Foster (London: London Song Festival Publications, 2013). The included songs are “Caprice,” “Rondel Chinois,” and “La Fille aux cheveux de lin.”

¹⁸ Claude Debussy, *Les Papillons*, ed. Marie Rolf (New York: The New York Public Library, 2004).

¹⁹ Claude Debussy, *Séguidille pour voix et piano*, ed. Marie Rolf (Paris: Durand, 2014).

generous help of Denis Herlin, Editor in Chief of the *Œuvres Complètes*. It is with his permission as well that a few songs appear in this study.

The aforementioned recordings and scores reveal that Debussy's *mélodies* are settings of eighty-six poems selected from the works of twenty-three French poets. Thirteen poems exist in multiple settings (including "Chevaux de bois," in triplicate), and an identical setting of [François] Tristan l'Hermite's poem "La grotte" is used in two collections: first, in *Trois Chansons de France*, and then again in *Le Promenoir des deux amants*. While the poems range from those written in medieval times to the works of Debussy's contemporaries—including poems authored by the composer himself—the oeuvre of certain poets is visited more often than others.

Although Debussy named Baudelaire as his favourite poet²⁰ and also faithfully attended Mallarmé's Tuesdays,²¹ it is his settings of Verlaine's poems that outnumber all others. Debussy set seventeen of his poems to music, but as eleven of these exist in multiple versions, the total number of Verlaine settings amounts to twenty-nine. Théodore de Banville is in second place, with thirteen of his poems set to music. Nine poems by Paul Bourget produced eleven settings, because two of them exist in duplicate versions. Debussy's own lyrics inspired seven *mélodies*, and, finally, come five settings of Charles Baudelaire's poems and four settings of Stéphane Mallarmé.

²⁰ "On 16 February 1889, [Debussy] filled out a questionnaire, in English, that was then circulating round the ranks of Parisian artists [...]. To the question of 'favorite [*sic*] poets' Debussy replied in the singular: Baudelaire." Denis Herlin, *Claude Debussy: Intégrale des mélodies*, with Liliana Faraon and Magali Léger (sopranos), Marie-Ange Todorovitch (mezzo-soprano), Gilles Ragon (tenor), François le Roux (baritone), and Jean-Louis Haguenauer (piano). Harmonia mundi/Ligia LIDI 0201285-14, 2014. CD, 185. Also in David Code, *Claude Debussy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010): 42. For a reproduction of Debussy's completed questionnaire, see Roger Nichols, *The Life of Debussy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 70.

²¹ Debussy's attendance of Mallarmé's Tuesdays is discussed at length by Rosemary Lloyd, "Debussy, Mallarmé, and 'Les Mardis,'" in *Debussy and His World*, ed. Jane F. Fulcher (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001): 255-270.

Poems of six poets—Alfred de Musset, Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle, Théophile Gautier, Pierre Louÿs, [François] Tristan l’Hermite and François Villon—inspired three settings each; poems of Maurice Bouchor and Charles d’Orléans inspired two settings each; and nine poets, namely Marius Dillard, Léon Valade, Charles Cros, Armand Renaud, Vincent Hyspa, André Girod, Grégoire Le Roy, René Peter, and Paul Gravallo, are each represented with a single poem. Although outnumbered in comparison to the work of the Symbolists, each and every poem selected from the oeuvre of these poets presented Debussy with a novel and unique challenge that inspired him to develop his craft and raise the quality of his response to the text.

Debussy’s relationship with his poets has been well documented. Arthur Wenk’s 1976 book *Debussy and the Poets*, written by a musicologist and scholar well-equipped as both music theorist and literary expert, is the first comprehensive study of Debussy’s relationship with contemporaneous poets.²² Wenk’s study explores not only the poetry of Banville, Verlaine, Baudelaire, Debussy, Louÿs, and Mallarmé that Debussy set to music, but also delves into each poet’s doctrine within the overall literary context of Paris in the Belle Époque. The author translates the poems that Debussy selected for his *mélodies*, and studies them in detail prior to analyzing the musical settings. Wenk’s approach, therefore, not only elucidates the cause before the effect, but also foreshadows decisions that the composer has made in the process. Both the quantity and the quality of Wenk’s research into Debussy’s circles within the Parisian turn-of-the-century milieu, as well as the detail and the depth of his approach to Debussy’s songs continue to make his book—some forty-seven years after its publication—an invaluable starting point.

²² Arthur B. Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

A recent publication by Siglind Bruhn, *Debussy's Vocal Music and Its Poetic Evocations*, focuses on Debussy's seminal song cycles written between 1885 and 1915.²³ Providing her own translations, plenty of context and background information (including relevant readings and paintings), as well as musical analyses and interpretations using numerous examples, Bruhn sheds some light on the relationship between the poetic rhythm and structure on the one hand, and its musical setting on the other, drawing parallels with either the overall formal or harmonic design. Bruhn's list of Debussy's *mélodies*, however, as presented in the "Overview of Debussy's Vocal Music" at the end of the book, lacks acknowledgement of the aforementioned recently published scores of Debussy *mélodies* (including the 2016 Durand publication of the second volume of *Claude Debussy Mélodies (1882-1887)* of Série II of the *Œuvres Complètes*), as well as of the preceding release of *Intégrale des mélodies* recording. Nevertheless, both the provided context for Debussy's vocal music and Bruhn's interpretation of his songs represent a noteworthy contribution.

With regards to translations, the more recent publications related to Debussy's *mélodies* still continue to consult Margaret Cobb's book *The Poetic Debussy*, published in 1982 and revised in 1994.²⁴ Cobb provides texts and translations (by Richard Miller) of eighty-eight poems, duplicates excluded,²⁵ meaning that her collection also includes poems of settings whose manuscripts have not been located to date.²⁶ Each of the poems is followed by notes, in which

²³ Siglind Bruhn, *Debussy's Vocal Music and Its Poetic Evocations* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2018), 10.

²⁴ Margaret G. Cobb, *The Poetic Debussy: A Collection of His Song Texts and Selected Letters* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1982); Margaret G. Cobb, *The Poetic Debussy: A Collection of His Song Texts and Selected Letters*, Rev. ed. (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1994).

²⁵ Cobb provides a list of ninety-two poems. However, three of these Debussy has set to music twice, while l'Hermite's "La Grotte" (or "Auprès de cette grotte sombre" when listed by its opening line) is the same poem, existing in two of Debussy's trilogies, namely *Trois Chansons de France* and *Le Promenoir des deux amants*.

²⁶ My comparison of Cobb's 1982 list of poems and the list of Debussy's *mélodies* made available in the *Intégrale des mélodies* recording reveals that three poems are missing from Cobb's list. The first is Banville's "Les Baisers," the omission of which is corrected in the 1994 revised edition of Cobb's book. The other two are Debussy's own texts for *Nuits blanches*: the poem that is printed in Cobb's book must be an older version of what Debussy had in

Cobb supplies the date, the title of the publication in which the poem appeared, the location of the manuscript (if available), the name of the publisher (if available), as well as comments pertinent to the song. The aforementioned 2014 recording *Intégrale des mélodies* as well as some newly published scores rely on Miller's translations in Cobb's book.

A French Song Companion put together by Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes is not only notable for supplying a useful chapter titled "The History of the *Mélodie*: A Pocket Introduction," but also for Stokes's translations of many poems that Debussy set to music.²⁷ Provided online by Oxford Lieder,²⁸ as well as printed in the Hyperion complete release of Debussy's songs,²⁹ Stokes's delicate and insightful translations come as a result of his effort to observe the French line-order, while rendering "the sense and tone of the poem without any slavish adherence to the original rhymes and metre."³⁰ The present study benefits from both Stokes's and Miller's translations.

A number of books have focused on Debussy's songs with singers in mind. In her *Nineteenth-Century French Song: Fauré, Chausson, Duparc, and Debussy* published in 1980, Barbara Meister includes "every published song for solo voice and piano" by Debussy, with the aim of "increase[ing] performers' and listeners' understanding and appreciation of this

mind for the second of his two songs, because the existing (and published) setting uses the last five lines of the poem for its opening. The text for the first song of *Nuits blanches*, however, is not in Cobb's book at all. This omission is also corrected in the revised (1994) edition of the book.

²⁷ Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes, *A French Song Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁸ Richard Stokes's translations are also available at the Oxford Lieder website: Richard Stokes, "Richard Stokes," in *Poets*, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/poet/238>. They include seventy-eight poems set by Debussy, of which "En Sourdine" and "Fantoche" are in duplicate.

²⁹ Richard Stokes, trans., *Debussy Songs*, with Christopher Maltman (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67357, 2003, CD; *Debussy Songs 2*, with Lorna Anderson and Lisa Milne (sopranos), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67883, 2012, CD; *Debussy Songs 3*, with Jennifer France (soprano), Jonathan McGovern (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA68016, 2014, CD; *Debussy Songs 4*, with Lucy Crowe (soprano), Christopher Maltman (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67075, 2018, CD.

³⁰ Johnson and Stokes, *A French Song Companion*, xviii.

literature.”³¹ Providing her own translations—as well as helpful discussions on pronunciation—for each poem, Meister focuses on “the meaning of the original words rather than their meter.”³² The poetic lines weave through her mostly harmonic analysis of each song, facilitating emphasis of some special effects and formal divisions, while providing useful connections to works of other composers, poets and even philosophers.

Published the same year, *The Singer’s Debussy* by Marie-Claire Rohinsky concentrates on the French pronunciation and diction in an effort to “help the singer [...] interpret the text of Debussy’s fifty-nine published songs.”³³ Through a chronological organization of songs based on François Lesure’s and Margaret Cobb’s previously published catalogues, Rohinsky provides a short but informative introduction to each poem and its setting, the original text of each poem with her own translation, as well as her transcription of the text into the International Phonetic Alphabet. Rohinsky’s detailed pronunciation and diction guide has been a useful tool in what has turned out to be my fairly comprehensive study of prosody and its conversion into musical rhythm and meter.

In order to identify and explain rhythmic and metrical characteristics of pertinent poems as well as relate them to Debussy’s songs, an understanding of prosody has been essential to this study. A 1904 book by Louis Brandin and W. G. Hartog proves to be an informative period source, with the most detailed explanations of French versification.³⁴ Pierre Guiraud’s classic, *La Versification*, covers the issue thoroughly, addressing everything from poetic meters, rhythms, and accents, issues with rhyme and grammar, harmony and expressivity, to the evolution of

³¹ Barbara Meister, *Nineteenth-Century French Song: Fauré, Chausson, Duparc, and Debussy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980): vii. Fifty-seven songs by Debussy are included in the book.

³² Meister, *Nineteenth-Century French Song: Fauré, Chausson, Duparc, and Debussy*, viii.

³³ Marie-Claire Rohinsky, ed. and trans., *The Singer’s Debussy* (New York: Pelion Press, 1987), v.

³⁴ Louis M. Brandin and W. G. Hartog, *A Book of French Prosody with Specimens of French Verse from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day* (London: Blackie and Son, 1904).

French verse.³⁵ Through his many books, chapters and articles, Clive Scott delves into the inner logistics of poetics, supplying scansion, comprehensive analysis and comparisons of poems.³⁶ His explanations and commentaries have contributed immensely to my understanding of French poetry, and have built a scaffolding required for this analytical study. Following in the path of Scott's expertise, David Hunter's book *Understanding French Verse: A Guide for Singers* provides a summary of rules for deciphering poetic meter and rhythm, along with a few scansion.³⁷ Hunter's interpretation of "En Sourdis," for instance, has been the most enlightening for my analysis of meter and rhythm in Debussy's multiple versions and settings of Verlaine's poem.

Consulting *The Oxford Companion to Literature in French*³⁸ as well as *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics*³⁹ has been necessitated by the types and complexity of poems that Debussy chose for his settings. Whether the poems are of a lyrical or perhaps a more narrative genre, whether they display a type of stanzaic or of stichic structure, or are written in a fixed form or not, the exceptional comprehensiveness of both sources has been incredibly helpful. In addition, praise has to be voiced for *A Poet's Glossary* written by the celebrated poet Edward Hirsch.⁴⁰ The book is an international compendium of the poetic traditions of the world, in which the author presents a compilation of literary forms, devices, rhetorical terms, aesthetics

³⁵ Pierre Guiraud, *La Versification*, 3rd ed. (Vendôme, France: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978).

³⁶ Clive Scott, *French verse-art: A study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); *The Riches of Rhyme: Studies in French Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); *Vers libre: The Emergence of Free Verse in France, 1886-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); *Poetics of French Verse: Studies in Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); "État présent: French Verse Analysis," *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* 60, no. 3 (July 2006): 369-376; "French Versification: A Summary" in *Nineteenth-Century French Poetry: Introductions to Close Reading*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 243-255.

³⁷ David Hunter, *Understanding French Verse: A Guide for Singers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³⁸ Peter France, ed., *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). Published Online, 2005. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780198661252.001.0001/acref-9780198661252;jsessionid=7BDBA571A60C376B114F867B7AB36879>

³⁹ Roland Greene and Stephen Cushman, eds., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics*, 4th ed. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012). [Hereafter, *The PEPP*]

⁴⁰ Edward Hirsch, *A Poet's Glossary* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014).

and movements. Approaching each entry as a craftsman with a lifetime of scholarship behind him, Hirsch enriches the reader's understanding and vocabulary by including definitions and expressive examples from writings of his predecessors and contemporaries. While not as comprehensive and detailed as the various theorists' entries in *The Princeton Encyclopedia*, Hirsch's *Glossary* grants the reader both the knowledge and the tools of "the inner circle": through conveying his understanding of literary topics through his personal favourites, he imparts the undeniable authority of a practising poet.

A number of Debussy scholars have looked closely at issues of prosody as reflected in Debussy's settings of the text. As early as in 1967, Roger Nichols compared two settings of Verlaine's poem "Clair de lune," the 1882 setting discovered in the aforementioned *Chansons* collection for Mme Vasnier, and the 1892 setting as published in *Fêtes galantes*.⁴¹ Drawing attention to the difference in musical meter, namely three-eight in the former and nine-eight in the latter, to the vocal part having "a far more flexibly articulated line than the accompaniment," and to "the way in which the phrases and individual words are handled," Nichols concludes that "we can see something of the progress Debussy made in the years between these two versions."⁴² While "the less tortuous [earlier] setting [...] is dull, and destroys the music of the poem," in the later version Debussy shows "greater sensitivity both to details and to the overall atmosphere of the poem, in his scrupulous word-setting [...] and in the use of rhythm as a unifying element."⁴³

Susan Youens has explored prosody as well.⁴⁴ Her analyses of Debussy's treatment of the text, focusing mostly on the vocal line alone, are nevertheless detailed and informative. In an

⁴¹ Roger Nichols, "Debussy's Two Settings of 'Clair de lune,'" *Music & Letters* 48, no. 3 (Jul., 1967): 229-235.

⁴² Nichols, "Clair de lune," 231, 232, 234, 235.

⁴³ Nichols, "Clair de lune," 235.

⁴⁴ Susan Youens, "Words and Music in Germany and France," in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 460-99.

exploration of Debussy's settings of Villon's ballades, Youens concentrates on the placement of poetic stresses within a musical measure.⁴⁵ In her own words, the discovered mismatches in some of his early songs, as well as in the 1910 ballades, speak to "Debussy's difficulties in finding and 'striking' the right meter in his Villon settings."⁴⁶ In her exploration of the *Chansons de Bilitis* (1897-98) Youens concentrates on Louÿs's "word-music" of consonants and vowels in his poem "La Flûte de Pan."⁴⁷ Having analyzed Debussy's setting in detail, she praises the composer's "prosodic ease" by stating that "if one compares the prosody of [this setting] with passages from Debussy's settings of verse in traditional French forms, one can only conclude [...] that the prose element of Louÿs's texts was [...] a factor."⁴⁸

Marie Rolf's explorations of Debussy's response to poetic rhythm are initiated in her comparison of the two settings of Verlaine's "En Sourdine" and their unusual number of manuscripts.⁴⁹ As was mentioned, there are five versions of the 1882 setting and two of the 1890 setting of the song.⁵⁰ Comparing the placement of three poetic lines in an earlier and a later setting, Rolf points out that "the later version shifts the most important words to stronger metric positions."⁵¹ In her later and more detailed study of Debussy's settings of Mallarmé's "Apparition" and "Soupir," Rolf recognizes "Debussy's respect for the structure of Mallarmé's poem" in the first song, noting his compliance with "all [...] enjambements [*sic*]" (except for

⁴⁵ Susan Youens, "From the Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth: Considerations of Musical Prosody in Debussy's *Trois Ballades de François Villon*," *The Journal of Musicology* 2, no. 4 (1983): 418-433.

⁴⁶ Youens, "Musical Prosody in Debussy's *Trois Ballades de François Villon*," 431.

⁴⁷ Susan Youens, "Music, Verse, and Prose Poetry: Debussy's *Trois Chansons de Bilitis*," *Journal of Musicological Research* 7 (1986): 69-94.

⁴⁸ Youens, "Debussy's *Trois Chansons de Bilitis*," 91.

⁴⁹ Marie Rolf, "Debussy Settings of Verlaine's 'En Sourdine,'" in *Perspectives on Music: Essays on Collections at the Humanities Research Center*, eds. Dave Oliphant and Thomas Zigal, 205-233 (Austin, Texas: Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, 1985), 233.

⁵⁰ Rolf, "En Sourdine," 206-207.

⁵¹ Rolf, "En Sourdine," 233.

one) and the related “irregular phraseology.”⁵² Moreover, in the study of the second song, she identifies Debussy’s focus “on the issue of grammar and syntax, taking great pains to unravel Mallarmé’s convoluted sentence.” Revealing a number of Debussy’s “musical analogues” in the rendering of Mallarmé’s “level of poetic abstraction,” Rolf acknowledges that “Debussy’s ‘Soupir’ is fundamentally more attuned to Symbolist ideals than is his setting of ‘Apparition’.”⁵³ As a large part of my study has focused on the cause-and-effect relationship between the poem’s metrical and rhythmic intricacies and its musical setting, the described association between enjambments and the “irregular phraseology” endorses the presence of a particular technique that Debussy was using to interrupt the periodicity within the overall metrical design. In addition, Rolf’s comparison of his settings of “Apparition” and “Soupir” pointed out that Debussy’s rhythmic and metrical techniques continued to evolve from 1884 to 1913 in an increasingly “Symbolist” manner—in other words, towards a liberation of the rhythm of a musical phrase from the notated or established metrical framework.

The techniques in question and—even more generally—Debussy’s treatment of meter and rhythm have, however, not been frequent topics of discussion among scholars working in the fields of music theory and musicology. A few metrically intricate excerpts from Debussy’s music can be found in an often-cited book, *The Rhythmic Structure of Music*, by Grosvenor Cooper and Leonard B. Meyer.⁵⁴ In their discussion of “Rhythms on Lower Architectonic Levels,” the authors show excerpts from Debussy’s *Nocturnes for Orchestra*, namely from “Fêtes” and “Nuages,” pointing out the iambic and trochaic organization of accents at the underlying metrical

⁵² Marie Rolf, “Semantic and Structural Issues in Debussy’s Mallarmé Songs,” in *Debussy Studies*, ed. Richard Langham Smith, 179-200 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 187-188.

⁵³ Rolf, “Mallarmé Songs,” 196 and 199.

⁵⁴ Grosvenor Cooper and Leonard B. Meyer, *The Rhythmic Structure of Music* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1960).

level.⁵⁵ Furthermore, their section on “Rhythmic Vagueness” focuses on Debussy’s *Prélude* “Des pas sur la neige,” particularly on the ambiguous “grouping” of the ostinato and the superimposed treble melody.⁵⁶

It is only in the past two-and-half decades (or so) that more scholars have begun to explore instances of metrical conflict in Debussy’s music and to investigate their function. In the *Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, Simon Trezise has summarized and reviewed the existing scholarly research on the treatment of metrical ambiguities in Debussy’s music.⁵⁷ Highlighting analyses by Richard Parks,⁵⁸ Aysegul Durakoglu,⁵⁹ and Christopher Hasty,⁶⁰ Trezise further explores rhythm and meter through a selection of Debussy’s works. A brief survey of metrical design in the first book of *Préludes* is followed by analyses of rhythmic structure, meter and hypermeter in two selected piano pieces, namely “Jardins sous la pluie” and “Des pas sur la neige,” the “Gigues” movement from the orchestral *Images*, and *Etude* no. 3, “Pour les quarts.” Finding intricate moments of “rhythmic play” that result in pauses, interruptions, and diversions of meter, Trezise sees rhythm “as a vital element in the Debussyan analytical cosmos,” thus inviting further research.⁶¹

Michael Oravitz’s examination of “metrical non-commitment”⁶² in Debussy’s piano music and the subsequent analysis of four *Préludes* explores “the symbiotic relationship of

⁵⁵ Cooper and Meyer, *The Rhythmic Structure of Music*, 48 and 57, respectively.

⁵⁶ Cooper and Meyer, 171-174.

⁵⁷ Simon Trezise, “Debussy’s ‘Rhythmicised Time,’” in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. Simon Trezise (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 232-255.

⁵⁸ Richard S. Parks, “Meter,” in *The Music of Claude Debussy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989): 280-302.

⁵⁹ Aysegul Durakoglu, “Contrapuntal Lines and Rhythmic Organization in Selected Debussy Piano *Études*: A Structural Analysis with Performance Implications” (PhD diss., New York University, 1997).

⁶⁰ Christopher F. Hasty, “Just in Time for More Dichotomies—A Hasty Response,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 21, no. 2 (Autumn, 1999): 275-293.

⁶¹ Trezise, 255.

⁶² Michael Oravitz, “Meter Patterning and Its Effects on Phrasing and Form in Selected Debussy *Préludes*” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2005), 182.

meter, phrasing, and form.”⁶³ Recognizing Debussy’s “subtle metrical palette,”⁶⁴ his “metric dynamism,”⁶⁵ in other words, his tendency to present musical content through “successive changes in metric orientation within brief spans of time,” Oravitz focuses on tracking the “quickly-changing orientations” on both metrical and hypermetrical levels.⁶⁶ Grounding his study on the conceptions of meter developed by Harald Krebs and, in particular, Christopher Hasty, Oravitz illustrates the influence of metrical fluctuations on phrasing as well as the formal design of each of the selected *Préludes*.⁶⁷

The presence of metrical conflict and irregularity in compositions of major composers has been demonstrated by scholars working in the field of music theory. Among earlier contributions, the volume *The Rhythms of Tonal Music* by Joel Lester (1986) has provided a grounding with regards to further explorations of meter and rhythm.⁶⁸ His taxonomy of accents, his differentiation among multiple metrical levels (including hypermeter), as well as his categorisation of various types of metrical phenomena, such as regularity, irregularity, and ambiguity, have inspired a multitude of studies that focus on some component of his array of metrical topics.

In his book, *Phrase Rhythms in Tonal Music*, William Rothstein has focused on a differentiation between phrase rhythms and hypermeter, a matter initially addressed by Lester.⁶⁹ Rothstein, however, explores the issue of hypermeter further and provides his own taxonomy. As

⁶³ Oravitz, “Meter Patterning,” vi.

⁶⁴ Oravitz, 9.

⁶⁵ Oravitz, 104.

⁶⁶ Oravitz, vi.

⁶⁷ Oravitz, 297.

⁶⁸ Joel Lester, *The Rhythms of Tonal Music* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986).

⁶⁹ William Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythms in Tonal Music* (New York and London: Schirmer Books, 1989). Lester discusses the relationship in the chapter entitled “Hypermeter, Meter, and Phrase Rhythms.” Lester, 157-194.

his work has been tremendously useful to this study, it will be discussed and often referred to in the ensuing pages.

Since the publication of Harald Krebs's *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann*,⁷⁰ researchers have successfully applied Krebs's models for the analysis of metrical conflict not only to studies of music by Schubert, Brahms, Wolf, Fauré, Debussy and Schoenberg, but also to studies of electronic dance music,⁷¹ rock,⁷² and other styles and genres. Having enticed a new generation of scholars into researching instances of metrical conflict in various styles of music, Krebs's analytical approach is proving its pliability in a much broader context than that of nineteenth-century music. As Debussy's *mélodies* often include metrical conflict, Krebs's analytical models have been crucial in identifying not only instances of such conflict, but also of various other antimetrical effects. Krebs's taxonomy and methodology have provided the basis and the starting point for my analysis of Debussy's *mélodies* and, as such, will be explained and employed in many chapters of this dissertation.

Another recent and important contribution to the field of meter and rhythm has been made by Christopher Hasty, whose approach focuses on the concept of meter as being projected by rhythm.⁷³ Approaching the theory of meter essentially from the listener's point of view, he introduces a type of notation that enables analysis by ear, 'on the go,' without the score. His analytical model, demonstrated also in his analysis (published two years after the book) of the opening twenty-seven measures of the first movement of Debussy's Violin Sonata, proves useful

⁷⁰ Harald Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁷¹ Mark J. Butler, "Hearing Kaleidoscopes: Embedded Grouping Dissonance in Electronic Dance Music," *Twentieth Century Music* 2, no. 2 (September 2005): 221-243.

⁷² Patrick Sailings, "Metrical Transition and Resolution in the Music of Blindside" (M. M. thesis, University of Arkansas, 2012); Nicole Biamonte, "Formal Functions of Metric Dissonance in Rock Music," *Music Theory Online* 20, no. 2, June 2014, accessed October 14, 2014, <http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.14.20.2/mto.14.20.2.biamonte.php>.

⁷³ Christopher Hasty, *Meter as Rhythm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

in describing metrical and hypermetrical disruptions that, as sometimes happens in Debussy's music, occur during a change of tempo.⁷⁴ An example of such a disruption will be featured later in this study, in my exploration of Debussy's setting of "En Sourdine."

Significantly, however, conflicts of rhythm and meter in Debussy's *mélodies* are not discussed in any of these studies. This is to say that, aside from the aforementioned analysis of "Les Ingénus" by Richard Parks and *Les Angélus* by Harald Krebs, the meter and rhythm in the songs has remained largely unexplored. The gap has motivated the present study of Debussy's songs from this perspective.

With regards to the issue of periodicity, a significant number of scholars have used the term in relation to metrical unfolding, particularly Christopher Hasty in his aforementioned book. Another invaluable source is also Roger Matthew Grant's doctoral dissertation entitled "Four Hundred Years of Meter: Theories, Ideologies, and Technologies of Musical Periodicity Since 1611."⁷⁵ In an effort to fill "a conspicuous gap in studies of meter,"⁷⁶ Grant tackles "a three-pronged investigation," in which "theories, ideologies and technologies of musical periodicity shape four central case studies in the history of meter from the seventeenth century to the present day."⁷⁷ Having interpreted and discussed the aspects of scholarly work in this field from Agostino Pisa through to Martin Clayton, Grant points out that "since antiquity, music theory has grappled with the nature of temporal periodicity in music, continually re-casting and re-writing the concept of meter," thus anticipating further discourse.

⁷⁴ Christopher Hasty, "Just in Time for More Dichotomies—A Hasty Response," *Music Theory Spectrum* 21, no. 2 (Autumn, 1999): 275-293.

⁷⁵ Roger Matthew Grant, "Four Hundred Years of Meter: Theories, Ideologies, and Technologies of Musical Periodicity Since 1611" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2010).

⁷⁶ Grant, "Four Hundred Years of Meter," ix.

⁷⁷ Grant, 15.

The phenomenon of periodicity has also been studied by Rosemary Mountain, in her doctoral dissertation entitled “An Investigation of Periodicity in Music, with reference to three twentieth-century compositions: Bartok’s *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, Lutoslawski’s Concerto for Orchestra, and Ligeti’s Chamber Concerto.”⁷⁸ Acknowledging that “periodic elements can occur at different levels in music, from the rearticulation of a note in a tremolo figure to the recurrence of a chorus in a song,” Mountain sets out to “discover the array of factors which contribute to our varied response to periodic events, and to examine the typical functions and manifestations of periodicities in musical works.”⁷⁹ Although the focus of her study is on the unfolding and perception of sections that are periodic, Mountain calls attention to “non-periodic events,” “non-periodic aspects,” “non-periodicity,” “non-periodic contexts,” and “non-periodic elements.”⁸⁰

In relation to specifically Debussy’s music, however, perhaps the earliest mention of periodicity is in the 1922 article by Leonid Sabaneev, as translated for publication in 1929 by S. W. Pring.⁸¹ Describing Debussy’s rhythms as “elusive, vacillating, quavering, fluid as it were,” and his “whole world of new, free, rhythmical tone sensations, changing fantastically and capriciously like columns of smoke blown by the wind,” Sabaneev declares that “all [of Debussy’s] music is a living negation of the clear-cut German rhythms.”⁸² In his words, Debussy’s “pulsating, elastic vitality cannot be contained with the framework of four-square constructions, and he boldly breaks, not only with them, but often with periodicity in general,

⁷⁸ Rosemary Mountain, “An Investigation of Periodicity in Music, with Reference to Three Twentieth-Century Compositions: Bartok’s *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, Lutoslawski’s Concerto for Orchestra, and Ligeti’s Chamber Concerto” (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 1993).

⁷⁹ Mountain, “Periodicity in Music,” 2-3.

⁸⁰ Mountain, 11, 71, 206, 224, and 225, respectively.

⁸¹ Leonid Sabaneev, *Claude Debussy [Клод Дебюсси]* (Moskva: Rabotnik Prosveshcheniya, 1922), trans. S. W. Pringle and published in *Music & Letters* X, no. 1, (January 1929): 1-34.

⁸² Sabaneev, *Claude Debussy*, 14.

which in music is frequently regarded as rhythmical life. One rhythmical cloud gives place to others, different, sometimes curiously similar.”⁸³

Charles Frederick Frantz has also used the term periodicity in his comparative analysis of Emile Galle’s glass work—a vase—entitled “Iris,” and Debussy’s piano composition “Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut” from the second set of *Images*.⁸⁴ In his description of Debussy’s “continual shifting of the metrical focus,” Frantz discerns three passages within a five-measure segment of the composition’s A section: (1) a passage where the “motion created by the preceding surface metric periodicity” is “arrested” by the *cédez* tempo marking, (2) a passage with “the apparent lack of barline-level [*sic*] meter [...] [that] contrasts to periodicity,” and (3) a passage containing “the rhythmic configuration of parallel pitches [that] creates temporary metric periodicity.”⁸⁵ Pointing out that “fragmentation or mixing the ‘sequences of events’ is [also] evident in the large-scale structure” of the composition, Frantz acknowledges Debussy’s “techniques” that “thwart long-range momentum,” or in other words, disable periodicity.⁸⁶

In his more recent analysis of two of Debussy’s piano *Préludes*, Oravitz too refers to metrical periodicity.⁸⁷ Looking at the “metrically ambiguous profile” of the *Prélude* “Danseuses de Delphes,” he observes “the lack of any clear periodic contour within the bass harmonization” in a particular fragment of the composition. Later in the analysis, he points out an instance of metrical dissonance in a “metrically [...] periodic and stable” passage. Although instances of

⁸³ Sabaneev, 14.

⁸⁴ Charles Frederick Frantz, “‘Le Décor Symbolique’: Claude Debussy and Emile Gallé,” *Music in Art* 29, nos. 1-2 (Spring-Fall 2004): 171-187.

⁸⁵ Frantz, “‘Le Décor Symbolique’,” 184.

⁸⁶ Frantz, 185.

⁸⁷ Michael Oravitz, “Meter as a Formal Delineator in Two Debussy *Préludes*,” *Res Musica* 7 (2015): 69-83.

“irregular phrase lengths,” “irregular hypermetric events,” and “ambiguous metric orientation” are frequently pointed out, the matter of aperiodicity is not introduced.

Delving into the phenomenon of aperiodicity, therefore, emerges as a necessary task for this study. In order to identify, analyze and interpret the fluidity and function of Debussy’s metrical designs, a discussion about aperiodic layers—or strata—in the form of aperiodic rhythms, meters and hypermeters has to be initiated. For this purpose, I have analyzed meter and rhythm in all of the one-hundred-and-one *mélodies*; studied the relevant poems and examined Debussy’s setting of the text in question; investigated the relationship between Debussy’s setting of the text and the rhythmic and metrical content of the piano part; and, finally, related the prosody, the narrative and the emotional content of the poem to Debussy’s overall metrical design of each song. In cases where there was more than one version (or setting) of a particular song, as well as more than one manuscript to examine, all have been taken into account and compared. In the majority of such situations, it is the last version of a particular song that has been considered as *the* version to be discussed—the version that displays the most sophisticated instances of Debussy’s use of metrical dissonance, metrical and hypermetrical irregularity, as well as metrical ambiguity.

Chapter Three

Theories and Terms

In my exploration of the relationship between poems and Debussy's musical settings, I have focused on meter and rhythm, specifically on the ways in which the musical setting reflects prosody. In other words, following the footsteps of many scholars before me, I have considered the poem to be the cause, and its musical setting the effect of the composer's application of various antimetrical devices and states. Although Debussy's inspiration for creating rhythmic and metrical irregularities is, on the one hand, keenly related to issues of prosody and poetic structure, it is, on the other hand, also associated with the imagery and the emotional content of the poem in question. Consequently, I have undertaken a comprehensive study of poetry in order to identify and interpret Debussy's rhythmic and metrical procedures. In this chapter, I summarize relevant concepts from poetic theory, describe the process of setting words to music, and then proceed to a summary of relevant musical theories. Lastly, I introduce a theory of aperiodicity that will be useful in later chapters.

3.1 Aspects of French Poetry

Poetic form, according to Edward Hirsch, "refers to the shape and structure of a literary work, the manner in which it is made."¹ The term is often used to "designate the genre or type of a work (lyric form, epic form) or the pattern of metrical lines and rhymes,"² thus enabling us to differentiate between stanzaic or "strophic organization, where the lines are patterned in stanzas," and stichic or "astrophic" organization, where the poem is "composed as a continuous

¹ Edward Hirsch, "Form," in *A Poet's Glossary* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 241.

² Hirsch, "Form," in *A Poet's Glossary*, 241.

sequence of lines without any division.”³ Among stanzaic poems in general, there exist a few fixed forms, such as the ballade, the sonnet, and the triolet. However, a large number of poems consists of sequences of stanzas that are structured as couplets, tercets, quatrains, etc. While in certain cases a sequence of sextains—depending on its rhyme pattern—creates the specific form of a Spanish *sextilla*, in others a succession of sextains, or octosyllabic quatrains for that matter, remains just that. The majority of poems selected by Debussy are stanzaic in form. In most cases, this form suggests lyrical poetry; the ballade, which is of narrative character, is an exception. Debussy’s selections also include poems in stichic verse, thus demonstrating his interest in the poetry of narrative character.

The poetic line, perceived as a rhythmical and structural unit, is observed visually and comprehended aurally. In the French verse, its end is signaled by rhyme and distinguished by a linguistic pause in recitation that is, more often than not, indicated by a punctuation mark.⁴ In the French language, the rhyme can be feminine or masculine: the difference is in the added *e muet*. According to Clive Scott, “many commentators feel that masculine and feminine rhymes have different expressive tonalities too: masculine rhymes are abrupt, peremptory, hard, uncompromising, while feminine rhymes are gentle, melting, yielding, evanescent.”⁵ Debussy responds to these tonalities as well and is, at times, particularly attentive to the *e muet* of the feminine rhyme, finding ways of supplying it with individual and expressive resonance.

³ Hirsch, “Stichic,” in *A Poet’s Glossary*, 610.

⁴ “It is often argued that rhyme was treated as indispensable to French verse, until the end of the 19th century, because it had a metrical or near-metrical function: the structural recurrence of rhyme is exploited to mark the end of the syllabic string, and the acoustic foregrounding that accompanies rhyme intensifies the line-terminal accent, reinforcing both the boundary and the intonational shape of the line.” Clive Scott, “Versification,” in *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, ed. Peter France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995): 832-835. Published Online, 2005. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780198661252.001.0001/acref-9780198661252;jsessionid=7BDBA571A60C376B114F867B7AB36879>

⁵ Clive Scott, “French Versification: A Summary,” in Appendix to *Nineteenth-Century French Poetry: Introductions to Close Reading*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 251.

In French versification, the poetic meter is established by a syllable count, which is guided by a considerable number of strict rules. The rules fall into two main groups: first, those that direct the pronunciation and the counting of the *e muet*, and second, those that control the treatment of contiguous vowels.⁶ In general, the *e muet* located within a poetic line is counted when followed by a consonant, but elided when followed by a vowel. The elision in counting is applied also in the making of the feminine rhyme. For instance, while the lines “Ma-drid, prin-ces-se des Es-pag-(nes)”⁷ and “Ta lè-vre pa-reil-(le) à des fleurs”⁸ count nine syllables each, the elisions of *e muet* (shown in brackets) make their meter octosyllabic. With regards to the counting of contiguous vowels, certain vowel groups are always monosyllables (for example, the “ai” in “paix” and the “ie” in “chrétien”) while other are disyllables (for example, the “oè” in “poème” and the “ya” in “hyacinthe”).⁹ As both of these rules strictly apply only to the writing of poetry but not necessarily to its recitation, Debussy regularly assigns a note value to the *e muet* of the feminine rhyme in his settings, thus giving the penultimate syllable its resonance. Occasionally, a mid-line *e-muet* receives a notehead as well,¹⁰ and certain disyllables reduce to monosyllables.¹¹ Present only in the early songs, such variances disclose some distinctive characteristics of Debussy’s own declamation and speech patterns.

⁶ As the counting of syllables does not rely on the pronunciation of spoken prose or colloquial French, some liberties might be expected in the treatment of the *e muet* in instances where it would not count as a syllable. In other words, although the rules for counting syllables in a verse are strict, certain freedoms in its reading are expected. This is pointed out in both Louis M. Brandin and W. G. Hartog, *A Book of French Prosody with Specimens of French Verse from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day* (London: Blackie and Son, 1904), 7; and David Hunter, *Understanding French Verse: A Guide for Singers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10.

⁷ The line is from “Madrid,” a poem by Alfred de Musset. M. Alfred de Musset, “Madrid,” in *Contes d’Espagne et d’Italie* (Paris: A. Levasseur; Urbain [M.] Canel, 1830), 171-173.

⁸ The line is from “Les Baisers,” a poem by Théodore de Banville. Théodore de Banville, “Les Baisers,” in *Améthystes. Nouvelles odelettes amoureuses composées sur des rythmes de Ronsard* (Paris: Pulet-Malassis, 1862).

⁹ Brandin and Hartog, *A Book of French Prosody*, 8.

¹⁰ For example, in the settings of the lines “Avec la ros(e) Aminthe rivalis(e)” and “Dans le soleil qui s’irrit(e) et qui jou(e)” from Théodore de Banville’s “Fête galante,” both instances of *e muet* receive a note head.

¹¹ Words such as “di-a-mants” (in Banville’s “Les Baisers”), “ir-ra-di-é” (in Banville’s “Les Lilas”), and “l’alou-ette” (in Leconte de Lisle’s “La Fille aux cheveux de lin”) lose a syllable in Debussy’s setting of these poems.

With regards to the poetic meter, the majority of poems chosen by Debussy are isometric, meaning that the meter launched with the first line remains the same throughout the poem.¹² Debussy also set to music some poems whose stanzas are heterometric: their lines are of varying lengths, while maintaining a particular rhyming pattern.¹³ In Debussy's own *proses lyriques* [lyrical prose], however, rhyme—and, with it, the uniformity of poetic meter—is mostly absent. Such is the case also in *Trois chansons de Bilitis* by Pierre Louÿs. According to literary theorists, heterometric poems that follow the principles of *vers libre* “abandon the principle of syllabism, by making the number of syllables in a line either irrelevant or indeterminable or both.”¹⁴ The poetic rhythm in such poems is, therefore, open to interpretation, inviting Debussy's innovative approach to text-setting.¹⁵

A poetic line consists of syntactic segments or word groups, whose sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables creates poetic rhythm.¹⁶ Clive Scott tells us that “the metrical rules for French verse are in fact minimal: the final syllable in the line must be accentuated, as must the final syllable of any unit (half-line) created by a caesura.”¹⁷ Accordingly, Scott differentiates between “obligatory accents,” namely, the “line-demarcative” accent (hereafter, LDA, shown in boldface and underlined in my quotations of poetic excerpts) and the hemistich accents, pertinent to alexandrines, and “secondary” accents (hereafter SA, shown in boldface). Revealing the presence of syntactic groups, the secondary accents are “both mobile and optional,” and,

¹² T. V. F. Brogan and Stephen Cushman, “Isometric,” in *The PEPP*, 4th ed., ed. Roland Greene and Stephen Cushman (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 734.

¹³ T. V. F. Brogan, “Heterometric,” in *The PEPP*, 4th ed., ed. Roland Greene and Stephen Cushman (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 626-7.

¹⁴ Clive Scott and David Evans, “Vers libre,” in *The PEPP*, 4th ed., ed. Roland Greene and Stephen Cushman (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1517.

¹⁵ The chronological list of poems in Appendix A1 also displays the poetic meter of each poem, thus making the differentiation among isometric, heterometric, and free-verse poems possible.

¹⁶ Scott, “French Versification: A Summary,” 243-245.

¹⁷ Scott, “Versification,” in *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, 833.

depending on the meter, a poetic line might contain a few of them.¹⁸

When literary theorists write about poetic rhythm, their focus is on the location of secondary accents and the resulting formation of syntactic groups. For example, David Hunter's scansion of the poem "En Sourdine" by Verlaine shows three different patterns within the first quatrain: the septasyllabic line "Calmes / dans le demi-jour" consists of two syntactic groups, namely, 2 syllables + 5 syllables, thus showing a two-accent pattern; the line "Que les bran/ches hau/tes font" displays a three-accent pattern, 3 + 2 + 2, while the last two lines, "Pénétrons bien / notre amour" and "De ce silen/ce profond," both fall into a two-accent pattern, 4 + 3 syllables.¹⁹ Rhythmic details like these find a parallel in Debussy's rendering of Verlaine's text, as his multiple settings of this poem in particular demonstrate.

Punctuation plays an important role in the unfolding of poetic rhythm. It signals "a syntactic juncture or pause between phrases or clauses" and thus creates a caesura.²⁰ A caesura "refers to the place in a line of verse where the metrical flow is temporarily 'cut off.'"²¹ Typically, we find it at the end of a poetic line, but poets "often placed several caesuras in a line—or no caesuras in a line—to alter the rhythms of the meter, which would otherwise be as monotonous as the ticking of a metronome."²² Since a punctuation mark brings about an elongation of the preceding (pen)ultimate syllable,²³ it is only natural that "a poet deliberately places a caesura in a line to break up the metrical flow of verse and to prevent monotony."²⁴ For example, the opening alexandrines of Baudelaire's sonnet "Recueillement" contain quite a few

¹⁸ Scott, "French Versification: A Summary," 243-244.

¹⁹ David Hunter, *Understanding French Verse: A Guide for Singers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 89.

²⁰ T. V. F. Brogan and Henry Hart, "Caesura," in *The PEPP*, 4th ed., ed. Roland Greene and Stephen Cushman (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 174.

²¹ Brogan and Hart, "Caesura," *The PEPP*, 174.

²² Brogan and Hart, 174.

²³ Whether it is the penultimate or ultimate syllable will depend on the presence or absence of *e muet*.

²⁴ Brogan and Hart, "Caesura," *The PEPP*, 174.

commas and semi-colons:

Sois sage, ô ma Douleur, et tiens-toi plus tranquille.
Tu réclamaï le Soir; il descend; le voici:
[...]²⁵

They not only slow down the declamatory pace, but also aid our perception of syntactic groups and create rhythmic variety.

The absence, or transfer of a comma to a different part of a stanza creates an enjambment. Described by Hirsch as “the carryover of one line of poetry to the next without a grammatical break,”²⁶ and by Clive Scott as “the run-on of a syntactical unit from one line to the next,”²⁷ enjambments influence poetic rhythm within a stanza: adding to the length of a poetic line, they create a poetic phrase, whose end carries its own accented syllable. In order to differentiate between the **LDA** and the final accent of an enjambed phrase, I will refer to the latter as the phrase-demarkative accent [**PDA**; to be shown in boldface, italics, and underlined]. For instance, in the opening stanza of Valade’s poem “Tragédie,” lines 2-3 and 3-4 are enjambed, as follows:

02 Une nuit d'avril a **surpris**
03 Leurs calices **bleus**: sous le **giv**(re)
04 Ils sont **morts**, ils se sont flé**tris**.

While each poetic line still contains a SA and, by definition, ends with its LDA, each enjambed phrase forces a run-on to its PDA—the words “bleus” and “morts” respectively—thereby overpowering the LDAs.

Among the poems that Debussy chooses, enjambments can be found as early as in the medieval poetry of François Villon (c. 1431-after 1463).²⁸ Early nineteenth-century poets use

²⁵ Charles Baudelaire, “Recueillement,” in *Les Fleurs du mal* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1868. Reprint, 1896): 239.

²⁶ Hirsch, “Enjambment,” in *A Poet’s Glossary*, 204.

²⁷ Scott, “Enjambement” [sic] in *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, 281.

²⁸ For instance, in Villon’s “Ballade à s’amy,” the opening line of the second stanza is enjambed: “Mieux m’eût valu avoir été crier // Ailleurs secours: c’eût été mon bonheur.” *Œuvres Complètes de François Villon publiées d’après les manuscrits et les plus anciennes éditions*, ed. Auguste Longnon (Paris: Lemerre, 1892).

them too, but as enjambments become one of the main preoccupations of the Symbolists in their pursuit of *vers libéré*, they flourish under the pens of Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarmé. As will be seen, Debussy takes full advantage of caesuras and enjambments in order to destabilize the periodic unfolding of musical content in his songs; the uneven lengths of enjambed poetic phrases and the related placement of demarcative accents find an original response in his settings.

3.2 Words into Music

The transferring of poetic rhythm into a musical setting necessitates three steps. First, each syllable—including the *e muet* of a feminine rhyme—receives a notehead. Second, note values are assigned based on syllable lengths. In Debussy's early songs, the conversion is simple in that short syllables receive eighth notes, and long syllables (such as SA, LDA, or PDA) receive quarter-, or longer note values. While the assortment of note values is much more varied in the songs of Debussy's exploratory and late period, stressed syllables of a poetic line or phrase can still be easily detected either by their extended note values, or by the ensuing rests. Third, the resulting arrangement of note values—a rhythmic strand that represents a setting of a syntactic group, poetic line or phrase—is then placed into measures. Long note values—i.e., those corresponding to stressed syllables—either align with downbeats or other metrically accented beats, or cause a mismatch of stresses. Although such mismatches have been noticed by scholars, many have not been explained: at times, for instance, Debussy purposely displaces a poetic line in its musical setting, giving its weak poetic stresses accented metrical positions. As such settings produce an effect that is contrary to the natural rhythm of the French language, I will refer to

them as *counter-rhythmic*. However brief, such passages play a specific role in Debussy’s rendering of the poem and cannot be ignored.

Occasionally, Debussy takes a rhythmic strand fashioned from the text and turns it into what I call a *prosodic signature*. Used as a rhythmic mold for setting the majority of poetic lines of the given poem to music, and, therefore, recurring formulaically, the strand becomes the governing rhythmic prototype of the vocal part. For example, in my discussion of “Madrid,” one of Debussy’s earliest known *mélodies*, it will be shown that Debussy fashions the rhythm of the vocal part from the declamation of a single poetic line and sets the majority of the poem to that rhythm (see Example 3.1).

Example 3.1. “Madrid” (1879), mm. 3-4²⁹

3

1. Ma-drid, prin - ces - se des Es - pag - nes, Il court par tes mil - le cam - pag - nes,
 2. Ma - drid, Mad - drid, moi, je me rail - le De tes da - mes à fi - ne tail - le,
 3. Or si d'a - ven - ture on s'en - quêt - te Qui m'a va - lu tel - le con - quêt - te,

There are instances, however, in which the prosodic signature is not featured in the vocal part, but recurs in the piano. Debussy’s setting of Verlaine’s “L’Ombre des arbres” showcases a fine example of such a rhythmic subtlety. The rhythm of the opening syntactic group, “l’ombre des arbres” (“the shadow of the trees”), reappears most delicately in the piano right hand throughout the song (see Example 3.2, mm. 2 and 4).

²⁹ At present (May 2023), the song is unpublished. Preparations are in process for its publication in Claude Debussy, *Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy: Mélodies*. Série II, Vol. 1, eds. Denis Herlin and Marie Rolf (Paris: Durand, forthcoming). It is with kind permission of Dr. Herlin that his transcription of the song is reproduced in this study.

Example 3.2. “L’Ombre des arbres” (1903), mm. 1-4³⁰

Lent et triste

pp L'ombre des ar - bres dans la ri - vière embrumé - e

[L'ombre des ar-bres] [L'ombre des ar-bres]

A rhythmic strand, whether developed from the poetic rhythm or created to portray imagery, can also become a *rhythmic gesture*: transferred into the piano part and subjected to repetition (however modified harmonically or otherwise), it will activate a cyclical unfolding of a pulse—i.e., periodicity—and, given the required accentuation, contribute to the perception of meter. These are not, however, the only types of rhythmic gestures at work in Debussy’s *mélodies*. Many of them fulfill requisites of the homophonic texture, supplying harmonic accompaniment to the vocal line by the use of some form of solid or broken chords. In any case, the main task of a rhythmic gesture is to propel the pulse by the means of repetition, and generate a metrical layer through appropriate accentuation, all in order to relay a sense of regularity, uniformity and predictability.

³⁰ Claude Debussy, “L’Ombre des arbres,” in *Ariettes oubliées* (Paris: Fromont, 1913), 10-11.

3.3 Aspects of Musical Meter and Rhythm

The parallel between the lyrical style in music and periodicity in physics, and between the declamatory style and aperiodicity respectively has already been drawn in the introductory chapter to this study. To reiterate, lyrical style, as defined by Rohrer, assumes “musical repetition and [the presence of] repetitive structures” that generate “regular harmonic rhythm, melodic phrase lengths and pace.”³¹ Her explanation describes a type of recurrence that Hasty has termed “periodicity of meter,” and defined as “the repetition of durational quantity.”³² While Hasty’s emphasis in this context is on the reiterations of a particular time interval, in other words, on the horizontal aspect of metrical unfolding, it is important to point out that the “quantity” itself also implies a vertical aspect of that unfolding: within the given time interval, the alignment of accents is congruent with the meter that is to be produced, and is therefore empowered to generate and sustain, through repetitions, the downbeat and adjoining beats of the meter in question. Therefore, meter relies on an interaction of two elements, namely, repetition and vertical alignment of accents.

Accent is a central concept in most theories of meter. Joel Lester’s book *The Rhythms of Tonal Music* contains a useful taxonomy of accent types. He states, for instance, that “longer durations following shorter durations are accented.”³³ Such durational accents, in his words, “often help us locate basic metric units [...] and when durational accents do not agree with the meter, the result is a form of syncopation [...].”³⁴ Among accents created by so-called “new events,”³⁵ Lester defines three main accents, one of them being the harmonic-change accent. As

³¹ Katherine T. Rohrer, “Poetic Metre, Musical Metre and the Dance in Purcell’s Songs,” in *Purcell Studies*, ed. Curtis Price (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 210.

³² Christopher Hasty, *Meter as Rhythm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 6-7.

³³ Joel Lester, *The Rhythms of Tonal Music* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 18.

³⁴ Lester, *The Rhythms of Tonal Music*, 18.

³⁵ Lester, 21-38.

the pace of chord changes produces the so-called harmonic rhythm, he acknowledges that “changes in the harmonic rhythm can give rise to durational accents [...] especially [...] at ends of phrases, where an acceleration in the rate of harmonic change often precedes a relatively long final harmony. The durational accent in the harmonic rhythm then supports the arrival of the cadential goal.”³⁶ Accents generated by a change in harmonic rhythm, particularly those intensified by a long note value, occur often in Debussy’s *mélodies*, especially as his attention turns to enjambments.

Lester identifies two additional types of accents related to “new events,” namely, pitch-change and textural-change accents. In relation to the former, he also recognizes pattern-beginning, and change-of-contour accents, while articulation accents arise with placements of slurs. Among the textural accents, Lester includes changes of density and register, as well as the entrance of a voice. Last but not least, a dynamic accent can make a particular moment more noticeable, especially if used at an unexpected part of a measure.

Acknowledging that “not all accent-producing factors operate with equal importance,” Lester considers “accents [...] involving only pitch or duration [to be] more deeply embedded in a musical structure than accents produced by other factors.”³⁷ In his discussion of meter as a hierarchy of pulse levels and pulse groupings, he defines “metric hierarchy [...] as a grid [...] not unlike a graph on which an object can be located on a plane surface.”³⁸ Through a study of interactions between “the primary metric level”³⁹ or meter (as a grid) and rhythms (as the position of durational “objects” within that grid), Lester demonstrates the presence of “other

³⁶ Lester, 21.

³⁷ Lester, 40-41.

³⁸ Lester, 52.

³⁹ Lester, 50.

accentuations, often out of synchronization with the meter,”⁴⁰ offering an exploration of metrical conflict and ambiguity.

Lester’s classification of accents is at the basis of Krebs’s theory of metrical dissonance. Defining meter as “the union of all layers of motion (i.e., series of regularly recurring pulses) active within it,” Krebs differentiates between three classes of layers, namely, the pulse layer, as “the most quickly-moving pervasive series of pulses,” micropulses, as “the more quickly moving layers [...] woven into the metrical tapestry [...] as coloristic embellishments,” and interpretive layers, as “series of regularly recurring pulses that move more slowly than the pulse layer” and organize “its pulses into larger units.”⁴¹ Through analyses of Robert Schumann’s compositions, Krebs identifies interpretive layers formed by dynamic, durational, density, and registral accents, as well as those formed by accentuation of harmonically dissonant events, changes of chords, melodic ornaments, slurs and beams. He points out that “various accent types generally work together [...] to form interpretive layers.”⁴²

Among interpretive layers, metrical layers are “the nested layers that form the normative metrical consonance of a work.”⁴³ Metrical consonance, therefore, is the state of maximal alignment, existing “when each pulse of each interpretive layer coincides with a pulse of every faster-moving layer.”⁴⁴ As this state requires “only one interpretive layer [to be] imposed on a pulse layer,”⁴⁵ and as this single interpretive layer functions as the most prominent layer in the work, the listener perceives it as the primary metrical layer, i.e., the composition’s meter. In

⁴⁰ Lester, 262.

⁴¹ Harald Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 23.

⁴² Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces*, 25.

⁴³ Krebs, 30.

⁴⁴ Krebs, 29.

⁴⁵ Krebs, 29.

general, the primary metrical layer is designated by the time signature, but this is not always the case.⁴⁶

An antimetrical layer is an interpretive layer that conflicts with at least one metrical layer and produces metrical dissonance. Krebs differentiates between two main types of metrical dissonance, namely grouping dissonance and displacement dissonance.⁴⁷ The former “arises from the association of nonequivalent groups of pulses,”⁴⁸ such as a combination of the 3- and the 2-layer (1=8th) in a hemiola: when bars containing six eighth notes are notated in six-eight time, the 2-layer is the antimetrical layer, but when such bars are notated in three-four meter, the 3-layer is the antimetrical layer. Krebs labels the interaction of the metrical and antimetrical layers in question as G3/2 dissonance regardless of the notated meter, because the conflict is caused by the noncongruent groupings of the 3- and the 2-layer. A lower-level grouping dissonance results, for example, from a superimposition of a duple-eighth- and triple-eighth-note layers, or even more complex combinations of regular and irregular subdivisions, which occur frequently in Debussy’s songs.

Displacement dissonance depends “on the different positioning of congruent layers.”⁴⁹ For example, the two layers in question can be rhythmically identical, but while the first aligns with the accentuation of the notated meter, the second is out of phase by some relatively small duration. As the two “can never meet [,] each pulse of the metrical layer is contradicted by a pulse of the antimetrical layer.”⁵⁰ If, for example, the notated meter is six-eight, and there is a layer displaced by one eighth note, Krebs labels the resulting displacement dissonance as D6+1

⁴⁶ “Primary metrical layer: the most prominent metrical layer in a work, generally (but not always) the layer designated by the upper integer of the time signature and rendered visually apparent by the bar lines.” Krebs, 254-255.

⁴⁷ Krebs, 31-36.

⁴⁸ Krebs, 31.

⁴⁹ Krebs, 33.

⁵⁰ Krebs, 34.

(1=8th), thus conveying the exact time interval—i.e., the specific note value—by which the layer is displaced. If the antimetrical layer is delayed by two eight notes, the appropriate label would be D6+2 (1=8th), and so forth.

To establish a metrical dissonance, even in its simplest form, a minimum of three layers must be present: the pulse layer and two interpretive layers—usually the metrical layer and an antimetrical layer. Additional antimetrical layers create a compound dissonance, in which the conflict may involve a combination of grouping dissonances, displacement dissonances, or both. Sophisticated combinations of such devices can at times produce metrically quite puzzling passages, a number of which can be found in Debussy's *mélodies*.

Debussy's metrical structures also require terminology related to phrases and hypermeter (meter beyond the level of the bar line). Discussed by Lester in his chapter on "Hypermeter, Meter and Phrase Rhythms,"⁵¹ the topic finds its continuation in Rothstein's study of *Phrase Rhythms in Tonal Music*. Focusing on the relationship between phrase rhythm and hypermeter, Rothstein points out that although both are "hierarchical in nature," one does not determine or even necessarily coincide with the other.⁵² His discussion of hypermetrical regularity and, more aptly, of various types of hypermetrical irregularity and of the specific techniques that create it, is particularly applicable to this study of Debussy's *mélodies*: as vocal phrases and subphrases are renderings of either poetic lines or their syntactic groups or enjambed phrases, their lengths vary. Often marked out by harmonic inflections or cadences, successions of such unequal phrases and subphrases generate a limping effect,⁵³ "irregular phraseology,"⁵⁴ or, in other words,

⁵¹ Lester, *The Rhythms of Tonal Music*, 157-194.

⁵² William Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythms in Tonal Music* (New York and London: Schirmer Books, 1989), 13.

⁵³ A term used by Justin London in "Rhythm," *Grove Music Online*, 2001; Accessed 12 Feb. 2023. <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000045963>.

⁵⁴ A term coined by Marie Rolf in "Semantic and structural issues in Debussy's Mallarmé songs," in *Debussy Studies*, ed. Richard Langham Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 188.

create interruptions in periodicity of meter and hypermeter. Such hypermetrical irregularities produce a type of aperiodic unfolding frequently found in Debussy's *mélodies*. As will be shown, there is more to what Rothstein has described as the “discontinuous musical discourse” in Debussy's music; Debussy creates aperiodicity at more than one level.⁵⁵

Thus far, I have isolated four distinctive states pertinent to Debussy *mélodies*—the states of metrical consonance and dissonance, as introduced by Krebs, and the states of hypermetrical regularity and irregularity, as introduced by Rothstein. As there exist a number of other metrically intricate structures in Debussy's *mélodies*, and as they seem to arise mainly from characteristics of the spoken word—or, more correctly, from the declamation of poetry—it is necessary to venture into some fundamentals of aperiodicity in order to propose additional states.

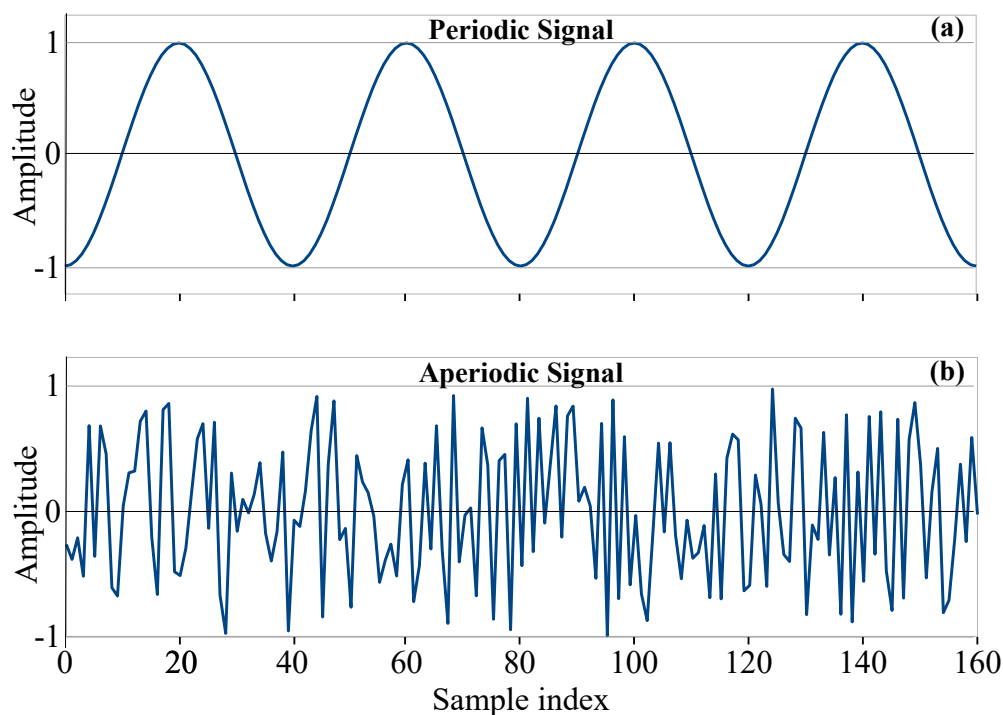
3.4 Periodicity and Aperiodicity

Periodicity and aperiodicity are terms and phenomena germane to the field of physics and, more specifically (but not exclusively), to that of acoustics. When depicted visually, the difference between their unfolding is obvious (see Example 3.3): a periodic signal completes a pattern (a cycle) within a measurable time frame (a period), and repeats that pattern over identical subsequent periods. An aperiodic signal, on the other hand, forms a wave in which subsequent patterns vary and do not repeat themselves (either individually or as a group) over a period.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music*, 87.

⁵⁶ Example made by Dr. Nadja Simão Magalhães, Associate Professor, Physics Department, Federal University of São Paulo.

Example 3.3. Periodic and Aperiodic Signals



In the featured example, the periodic signal is a sine or a cosine wave with a defined frequency, i.e., a specific pitch, while the aperiodic signal is a wave without a defined frequency, such as a fragment of speech or a moment of noise.

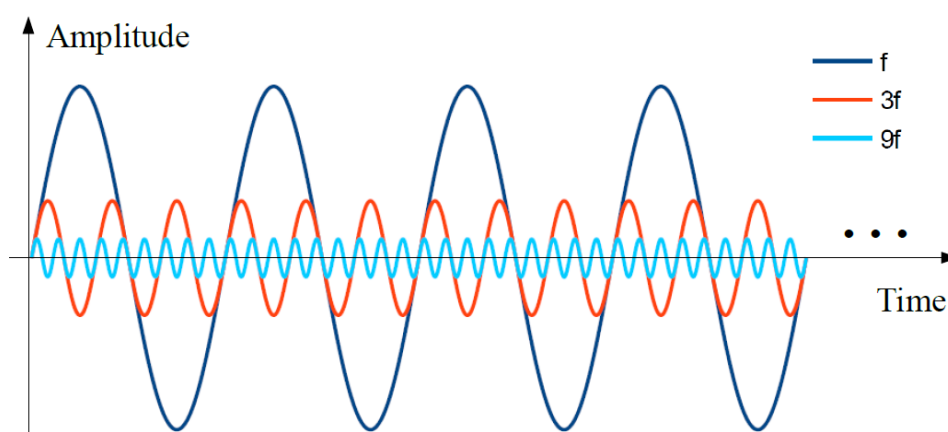
When applied to music, a parallel between periodicity and lyrical style on the one hand, and aperiodicity and declamatory style on the other, is obvious. Produced by a rhythmic gesture—a rhythmic cycle—that continuously repeats, the concept of lyrical style is symbiotic with the concept of regular metrical unfolding and, as such, evokes dance music. The declamatory style, on the other hand, lacks successive repeats of a rhythmic cycle: it is a succession of “durational quantities,”⁵⁷ to use Hasty’s term, whose length and structure is (more

⁵⁷ Hasty, *Meter as Rhythm*, 5.

or less) uneven. Unpredictable in its unfolding, the declamatory style imitates the aperiodicity of speech patterns, which rationalizes its use in recitative.

A periodic signal can be simple or composite. The sine wave in the above example is simple, while the wave shown in the example below (Example 3.4) is composite: it consists of multiple sine waves, moving at different frequencies.⁵⁸

Example 3.4. Composite Periodic Signal



The example is a good depiction of metrical consonance: a single cycle of the (dark-blue) wave with the highest amplitude also includes three cycles of the (red) wave with the medium-high amplitude, as well as nine cycles of the (light-blue) wave with the lowest amplitude. The cycle repeats, thus generating meter: the dark blue wave is our durational quantity—for instance, a measure; the red waves, nested within the largest durational quantity, delineate pulses—therefore, beats of a triple meter; while the light blue waves parse each beat into three micropulses, suggesting the nine-eight time signature. On a higher level, the periodicity of

⁵⁸ Example made by Dr. Nadja Simão Magalhães, Associate Professor, Physics Department, Federal University of São Paulo.

groups of measures will produce hypermeasures and result in hypermeter. Subsequently, further iterations may accumulate into a hierarchically-built symmetrical form.

The comparative analysis of “Madrid” and “Éventail,” as presented in the introductory chapter, benefits from the graphs shown above. What has been perceived aurally is now confirmed visually. The periodicity of the former song grows out of a single gesture that repeats, thus mounting a sixteen-measure section, whose repetitions produce a strophic form. The main sections of the latter song are inherently more complex. Although discernable, the main sections of “Éventail” display successions of dissimilar structures. While some of the structures rely on periodicity, the composer’s focus seems to be on creating irregular, if not full-fledged aperiodic passages.

In light of the aforementioned definition of aperiodicity, I differentiate between aperiodic and irregular structures. An aperiodic series of note values is a progression in which subsequent durations vary and do not repeat (either individually or as a group) over the given period of time. Accordingly, a series of 3 + 2 + 6 + 5 + 4 (etc.) eighth notes is aperiodic, as is a series of 2 + 3 + 2 + 5 + 2 + 6 (etc.) quarter notes. An irregular series of note values, however, is a progression in which there is a repeat of either a duration, or of a pattern within the series. Therefore, a passage of 2 + 3 + 3 + 5 + 5 half notes is considered to be irregular, as is a passage of 2 + 4 + 5 + 4 + 5 sixteenth-note values.

Aperiodicity can be transient or persistent. In the field of physics, “a transient [aperiodic] sound is defined as one that occurs just once, briefly,” while a persistent [aperiodic] sound is “one where the pressure at each moment is random and does not depend on the previous moment.”⁵⁹ Debussy creates different kinds of aperiodic effects in his *mélodies* and, although they

⁵⁹ Ahmed Qadoury Abed, “Periodic and Aperiodic Sounds (2),” Slideshare, Last modified December 22, 2012. <https://www.slideshare.net/ahmedqadoury/periodic-and-aperiodic-sounds-2>.

generally fall under the two aforementioned types (transient and persistent), their structure demands additional classification.

Before I delve into aperiodicity and introduce other metrical states, it is necessary to revisit the concepts of metrical consonance and dissonance as introduced by Harald Krebs. As explained above, Krebs differentiates between three classes of layers, namely, the pulse layer, micropulses, and interpretive layers. A layer of motion is defined as a “series of *regularly* recurring pulses”⁶⁰ [my emphasis], which is to say that all layers of motion—the pulse, micropulses and interpretive layers—must be periodic.

Metrical consonance requires “only one interpretive layer [to be] imposed on a pulse layer.”⁶¹ As this single interpretive layer organizes pulses into groups that are equally large, the combination of the two layers is perceived as the unfolding of meter. In more general terms, it could be said that metrical consonance is periodicity at work (see Example 3.5).⁶²

Example 3.5. Metrical Consonance in Quadruple Time
--

Pulse																			
Metrical																			

Although the composer may choose to make the pulse layer inaudible in the composition by emphasizing the downbeat but not revealing the remaining beats of the measure, the performer will interpret the lapsing of pulse from the notated time signature. Respectively, the receptive listener will intuit the pulse layer as well, due to the ensuing repetitions of the given

⁶⁰ Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces*, 23.

⁶¹ Krebs, 29.

⁶² Meter can be regular (2/2, 3/4, 6/8, etc.) and irregular (5/2, 7/4, 11/8, etc.). Repetitions of either regular or irregular cycle, as established by a single measure—i.e., the durational quantity—produces periodicity.

durational quantity.⁶³ The perception of a pulse layer, whether explicitly articulated or not, is therefore certain for both the performer and the listener.

As the state of metrical consonance includes only two layers—a pulse and a metrical layer—the arrangement of accents in these layers is metrically predestined. In other words, there is no room for antimetrical accents by definition, however weak or infrequent they may be. Considering that the majority of rhythmic strands in Debussy’s *mélodies* is not predetermined purely by the accentuation of a notated meter, the unfolding of such musical content—the content that is still prevalently consonant—requires a broader term. In my view, a state that embraces occurrences of occasional antimetrical accents while maintaining periodicity can be termed *metrical regularity*. Therefore, metrical regularity is not purely consonant, as it admits some antimetrical phenomena. Accordingly, songs or passages that include sporadic antimetrical accents will be referred to as “metrically regular.”

As Krebs has established, metrical dissonance requires a minimum of three layers, namely, a pulse layer, a metrical layer and an antimetrical layer (see Example 3.6). When the antimetrical layer is of the same structure as the metrical layer (i.e., quadruple in the example below), but displaced by a single pulse from the downbeat of the notated meter, a displacement dissonance occurs, in this case D4+1 (1= ¼ note). The pulse layer may be either articulated, or merely implied by the context, but in either case, it is easy to intuit its presence.

Example 3.6. Metrical Dissonance: Displacement Dissonance D4+1 (1= ¼ note)

Pulse																			
Metrical	■				■				■				■				■		
Antimetrical		■				■				■				■				■	

⁶³ Hasty defines projection “as a process that involves two beginnings.” In other words, the listener is able to anticipate—i.e., project—the unfolding of pulse or meter after two lapses of a durational quantity have been heard. Hasty, *Meter as Rhythm*, 108.

Grouping dissonance also requires a minimum of three layers (see Example 3.7). In this case, however, the antimetrical layer organizes beats into groups of three, thus superimposing a different interpretive layer on that of the notated meter (which is here assumed to be in quadruple time). Again, regardless of whether the pulse layer is audible or not, its periodicity is detectable.

Example 3.7. Metrical Dissonance: Grouping Dissonance G4/3 (1= ¼ note)

Pulse	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Metrical	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□
Antimetrical	■	□	□	■	□	□	■	□	□	■	□	□	■	□	□	■	□	□	■

There are instances of metrical dissonance in which the metrical layer is notated in the score (as a time signature), but concealed in the performance. Krebs terms such dissonances as “subliminal.”⁶⁴ The most audible layer is the antimetrical layer and, when occurring in the pattern of displacement dissonance, it is perceived as a series of evenly-spaced accents that has, so to speak, fallen out of synchronization (see Example 3.8).

Example 3.8. Metrical Dissonance: Subliminal Displacement Dissonance D4+1 (1= ¼ note)

Pulse	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Metrical	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Antimetrical	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□

Grouping dissonance can occur subliminally, as well. If the metrical layer is inaudible while the antimetrical layer prevails, the receptive listener might detect a change of meter or, more specifically, a metrical modulation (see Example 3.9). As the dominating presence of the antimetrical layer alters the periodicity established by the notated meter, the unfolding of the

⁶⁴ Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces*, 46.

musical content transitions from one form of periodicity to another—from one type of metrical consonance to another.

Example 3.9. Metrical Dissonance: Subliminal Grouping Dissonance G4/3 (1 = ¼ note)

Pulse																			
Metrical																			
Antimetrical																			

Krebs acknowledges such transitions by noting that “subliminally dissonant passages can easily take on the semblance of consonances.”⁶⁵ He suggests, however, that “it is the performer’s duty to ensure that this does not occur. [...] The longer the subliminal dissonance lasts, the harder the performer must work to convey to the listener a sense of conflict and tension.”⁶⁶ There are *mélodies* by Debussy that feature a subliminal metrical dissonance quite poignantly; Krebs’s recommendation will resonate within my later discussions of such dissonances.

Combinations that include a pulse layer, a metrical layer, and a minimum of two antimetrical layers create a compound metrical dissonance.⁶⁷ Both antimetrical layers could be displaced, both could involve groupings incongruent with the metrical layer, or they could be one of each type (see Example 3.10). Their interaction can produce a variety of metrically intricate passages that, although notated within the given meter, might come across as metrically puzzling.

⁶⁵ Krebs, 47.

⁶⁶ Krebs, 47.

⁶⁷ Krebs, 59-60.

Example 3.10. Compound Metrical Dissonance: A combination of D4+1 and G4/3 (1= ¼ note)

Pulse	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Metrical	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□
Antimetrical	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□	□	□	■	□
Antimetrical	■	□	□	■	□	□	■	□	□	■	□	□	■	□	□	■	□	□	■

Thus far, the layers that form the states of metrical consonance and dissonance—the pulse, the metrical and the antimetrical layer—have been considered as “a series of regularly recurring pulses” and therefore regarded as periodic. Debussy’s *mélodies*, however, particularly the later ones, contain sections that feature irregular, even aperiodic rhythms, or include passages that unfold irregularly, or aperiodically. If we defined layers more broadly than Krebs—as a series “in which subsequent” note values “vary and do not repeat themselves,” or simply, as a series of unequal durations—then a layer could be aperiodic as well as periodic. Accordingly, in combination with other layers, periodic or not, the presence of aperiodic layers will generate a number of novel metrical states.

Since each layer can be periodic (P), aperiodic (A), or inaudible (Ø), there are twenty-seven possibilities to consider (see Example 3.11). In the first series of nine combinations, I consider the pulse to be inaudible; in the second series, to be periodic; and in the third series, to be aperiodic. Superimposed on the pulse layer are a metrical and antimetrical layer, each given one of the possible three options (P, A and Ø). As many of these combinations have not been introduced yet, I offer terms only to the those that I have encountered in Debussy’s *mélodies*.

Example 3.11. Combinations of Layers

Combination no.	11	21	31	41	51	61	71	81	91
Pulse layer	Ø	Ø	Ø	Ø	Ø	Ø	Ø	Ø	Ø
Metrical layer	Ø	P	A	P	P	A	A	Ø	Ø
Antimetrical layer	Ø	Ø	Ø	P	A	P	A	P	A

Combination no.	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Pulse layer	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Metrical layer	∅	P	A	P	P	A	A	∅	∅
Antimetrical layer	∅	∅	∅	P	A	P	A	P	A

Combination no.	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Pulse layer	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Metrical layer	∅	P	A	P	P	A	A	∅	∅
Antimetrical layer	∅	∅	∅	P	A	P	A	P	A

In combination no. 1, the pulse, the metrical and the antimetrical layer are inaudible. On one hand, the result is silence. On the other hand, considering that a sound (a pitch or a chord, a trill or a tremolo) might last without developing a pulse, metrical or antimetrical layer, the prolongation of a sound itself could also belong to the same category. As Debussy uses prolonged chords effectively to dissolve the listener's perception of pulse and meter, it is a metrical device that needs to be discussed.

In combination no. 2, the notated meter is audible and periodic, while the pulse layer is inaudible. Considering that the presence of a metrical layer renders the beats (and, possibly, their subdivisions) perceptible, this combination relates to the combination no. 11. Furthermore, as both combinations result in periodicity in which the pulse layer is either articulated or not, both convey the state of metrical consonance, as defined by Krebs.

In combination no. 3, the notated meter is aperiodic. As per aforementioned definitions of aperiodicity, I am not referring to an irregular meter such as five-eight meter, which becomes periodic through its repetitive unfolding, but rather to a *truly* aperiodic situation, in which the number of beats changes with every measure of the composition (see Example 3.12). While the pulse layer is inaudible in this combination, it is important to point out that whether the pulse is articulated or unarticulated—in other words, whether it is there to help the listener interpret the

sequence of durations or not (see Example 3.13)—the unfolding of the passage is aperiodic. Therefore, combinations nos. 3 and 12 relate to each other, and both represent instances of *explicit aperiodicity*.

Example 3.12. Explicit (Unarticulated) Aperiodicity

Pulse																			
Metrical	■			■						■								■	
Antimetrical																			
	3		2		6					5							4		(etc.)

Example 3.13. Explicit (Articulated) Aperiodicity

Pulse	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Metrical	■			■						■								■	
Antimetrical																			
	3		2		6					5							4		(etc.)

As Debussy's *mélodies* do *not* feature this type of notated meter at all, the combinations that involve aperiodic metrical layers as an option can be disregarded for now. Therefore, in addition to nos. 3 and 12, combinations nos. 6, 7, 15, 16, 21, 24 and 25 will not be discussed in this study.

In combination no. 4, the periodicity of the notated meter implies the periodicity of the pulse, which makes this combination closely related to combination no. 13. The presence of the periodic antimetrical layer creates the state of metrical dissonance, as defined by Krebs. Both the displacement and grouping dissonance belong to this category and, as Debussy uses these techniques in his *mélodies*, they will be discussed in this study.

The presence of a metrical and an aperiodic layer in combination nos. 5 and 14 relates these instances to each other. They exemplify a novelty, because their antimetrical layer unfolds like the spoken word; hence, there is no duration or a combination of durations that repeats successively (see Examples 3.14 and 3.15). When heard within a notated and periodic meter, the

aperiodic layer comes across as an enigma: incongruent with the metrical layer and, consequently, detached from the unfolding of the remaining musical content, it presents itself as an independent event. As these combinations (nos. 5 and 14) include a single conflicting layer carrying out a progression of unequal durations that might be hardly noticeable against the notated meter, I have termed this combination as *discretely aperiodic*.

Example 3.14. Discrete (Unarticulated) Aperiodicity

Pulse																			
Metrical	■				■				■					■					
Aperiodic	■			■		■					■					■			
	3			2		6					5					4			(etc.)

Example 3.15. Discrete (Articulated) Aperiodicity

Pulse	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Metrical	■				■				■				■				■		
Aperiodic	■			■		■					■					■			
	3			2		6					5					4			(etc.)

Combination no. 8 is a case of a subliminal metrical dissonance, as defined by Krebs. Here, the metrical layer is inaudible (see Examples 3.8 and 3.9). While in conflict with the notated meter, which the performer should make discernable, the pacing of the antimetrical layer discloses a pulse layer—the pulse layer that is shared between the notated meter and the antimetrical layer. As a result, this combination relates to combination no. 17.

As in instances of subliminal metrical dissonance, in combination no. 9, the notated meter is inaudible, thus leaving the aperiodic series of durations to be the only clearly perceptible layer (see Example 3.16). Since every aperiodic series can be interpreted by a periodic pulse layer (Example 3.17), combinations nos. 9 and 18 are related. While in the latter, the aperiodicity of the antimetrical layer is *articulated*, in the former it is *unarticulated*, thus making the deciphering

a challenge for the listener. As there is no audible metrical layer to guide the listener in either of these combinations, they will be termed as *explicitly aperiodic*, as was the case with combinations no. 3 and 12.

Example 3.16. Explicit (Unarticulated) Aperiodicity

Pulse																			
Metrical	/			/			/			/			/			/			
Aperiodic	■			■		■				■					■				
	3			2		6				5					4				(etc.)

Example 3.17. Explicit (Articulated) Aperiodicity

Pulse	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Metrical	/			/			/			/			/			/			
Aperiodic	■			■		■				■					■				
	3			2		6				5					4				(etc.)

What becomes apparent from the Examples 3.13, 3.15 and 3.17 is that there is always a pulse layer at some subordinate level that will make sense of an aperiodic series of durations. In other words, every aperiodic series of durations—or a superimposition of a number of such series for that matter—can be decoded via a periodic pulse sublayer. This implies, therefore, that the pulse layer itself cannot be aperiodic, because there will always be a micropulse at some subordinate level that will interpret the aperiodicity, however complex. Consequently, one may conclude that the pulse layer can only be periodic, and with that in mind, it would appear that the third group of layer combinations, nos. 19-27, is to be disregarded.

In Debussy's *mélodies*, however, there are passages where the musical content unfolds as a series of unequally-long beats, triggering an impression of the so-called additive meters (but without a pattern that repeats). Such an effect occurs because the pulses or micropulses of the notated regular (simple or compound) meter are tied, thus producing an irregular or aperiodic

progression. In other words, aperiodicity can occur at the level of a beat and be decoded at a pulse or micropulse levels. As in Debussy's songs the pulse or the micropulse layer is frequently unarticulated, this type of aperiodicity is also perceived as explicit.

Finally, combination no. 10 features only the pulse layer, which is audible and, naturally, periodic. This structure is suggestive of repetitions of a rhythmic gesture that generate the unfolding of the main beat, while suppressing the downbeat and, thus, concealing the meter. Passages that display this type of unfolding will be termed *metrically neutral* (Example 3.18).

Example 3.18. Metrical Neutrality

Pulse																			
Metrical																			
Antimetrical																			

The possible twenty-seven combinations reduce to only seven devices that can be detected in Debussy's *mélodies*. They are:

1. No. 1 = Silence, or a prolonged duration of sound;
2. Nos. 2 and 11: Metrical Consonance;
3. Nos. 4 and 13: Metrical Dissonance;
4. Nos. 5 and 14: Discrete Aperiodicity (articulated or unarticulated);
5. Nos. 8 and 17: Subliminal Metrical Dissonance;
6. Nos. 9 and 18: Explicit Aperiodicity (articulated or unarticulated); and
7. No. 10 = Metrical Neutrality.

In addition to these, however, Debussy ushers in passages with more than three layers, producing intriguing instances of compound metrical dissonance, as introduced by Krebs. As Debussy uses

compound dissonance to conceal the pulse layer and create moments of metrical uncertainty, compound dissonance, as a device, will be demonstrated and discussed in this study, as well.

To conclude, a passage is metrically *neutral* when the recurring rhythmic gesture creates a single beat (or less) and the repetitions of its accentuation produce only a pulse layer. A state of *metrical regularity*, which is to be explored in the absence of impeccable metrical consonance from the majority of Debussy's *mélodies*, is the state that admits some antimetrical phenomena while maintaining periodicity. A repetition of a rhythmical gesture generates not only a pulse layer, but also emphasizes the downbeat, as the determining factor in the perception of meter.

Metrical dissonance is a powerful device in Debussy's hands with regards to producing passages that are metrically unstable or uncertain. Example 3.8 shows, for instance, that the moment of change from a consonance to a subliminal displacement dissonance—i.e., the moment in which the notated meter becomes inaudible and the displaced antimetrical layer carries on—might create successive downbeats and trigger an interruption of periodicity. Depending on the context, the resulting shifted downbeat⁶⁸ might initiate a longer (or shorter) measure and be heard as if a needle on a record player had skipped a groove. I term such a transient glitch in periodicity of meter a *metrical interruption*. Its occurrence has a cumulative effect in that it creates an interruption at the level of meter and hypermeter as well, thus producing a brief metrical and hypermetrical interruption. When such interruptions occur successively, the result is either *irregularity* at metrical and, consequently, hypermetrical level, or aperiodicity that is either explicit or discrete.

Finally, at the extreme side of the metrical spectrum, Debussy creates passages that either do not produce a pulse layer at the outset—at least not convincingly—or that dissolve the

⁶⁸ The term “shifted downbeats” has been used by Norman Wick, “Shifted Downbeats in Classic and Romantic Music,” *Indiana Theory Review* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 73-87.

established pulse layer. Given that the forming or the continuation of the pulse layer is disguised, these passages come across as “immobile,” perhaps even static, thus creating the state of *metrical ambiguity*. Depending on the context, irregular or explicitly aperiodic passages might be perceived as metrically ambiguous as well, simply because the pulse layer is suppressed.

Regardless of the impression of discontinuity that Debussy’s songs leave with the listener, his notated changes of meter are infrequent, but so diverse that there is a need to differentiate among the various types. A change from a larger to a smaller number of beats per bar (within either compound meter or simple meter, e.g., from 12/8 to 9/8) will be termed a metrical contraction; a change from a smaller to a larger number of beats per bar (within either compound meter or simple meter, e.g., from 6/8 to 9/8) will be termed a metrical elongation. The change of meter from compound to simple or vice versa, where the duration of the main beat remains the same (e.g., from 12/8 to 4/4, or 3/4 to 9/8), will be called a metrical mutation. Lastly, the change from compound to simple meter or vice versa, where the duration of the subdivided note value remains equal, is already known as a metrical modulation.⁶⁹ It is in the nature of metrical modulation to cause a change of tempo: as the common value between 12/8 and 4/4 time, for example, is not the main beat, but the duration of an eighth note, an increase of tempo (or decrease, if modulating from 4/4 to 12/8) will ensue.

In addition to the mentioned instances, there are songs in which Debussy notates two time signatures, simple and compound, to be unfolding simultaneously. Having declared, “Rhythms are stifling. Rhythms cannot be contained within bars. It is nonsense to speak of ‘simple’ and ‘compound’ time. There should be an interminable flow of both,” Debussy puts his

⁶⁹ According to David Schiff, the term “tempo modulation” was used by Elliott Carter. David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 23.

words into practice.⁷⁰ As such notation of meters prescribes a presence of at least a single conflicting pulse layer, it signals a destabilization of the metrical consonance.⁷¹ When such a superimposition of meter is notated in the score, I refer to it as metrical simultaneity. When it is not, it is an instance of a grouping dissonance. Example 3.19 shows Debussy's notation of metrical simultaneity, as found in six of his songs, namely, "Le Matelot qui tombe à l'eau" composed in 1882, to Debussy's last song, "Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maison," dating from 1915.

⁷⁰ "On étouffe dans les rythmes. Rythme n'égale pas Mesure. Mesures simples et mesures composés – quelle baliverne! . . . interminables series des unes ou des autres; sans qu'on cherche à varier les figures rythmiques." Claude Debussy's words, as stated in Arthur Hoérée, "Entretiens inédits d'Ernest Guiraud et de Claude Debussy; Notés par Maurice Emmanuel (1889-1890)," in *Inédits sur Claude Debussy; Collection Comœdia-Charpentier* (Paris: Les Publications Techniques, July 25 1942): 30. The translation is from Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents* (Belmont, CA: Schirmer Cengage Learning, 2008): 355.

⁷¹ Although the simultaneity of simple and compound meter implies a concurrence of only two conflicting pulse layers, Debussy's subdivisions also include quintuplets and sextuplets at times, therefore deepening the conflict.

Example 3.19. Metrical simultaneity in “Le Matelot qui tombe à l’eau (1882),⁷² “Apparition” (1884),⁷³ “Le Jet d’eau” (1889),⁷⁴ “Recueillement” (1889),⁷⁵ “Le Son du cor” (1891)⁷⁶ and “Noël des enfants qui n’ont plus de maisons” (1915)⁷⁷

“Le Matelot,” “Apparition,” “Le Jet d’eau,” “Recueillement,” “Le Son du cor,” “Noël”

mm. 41 ——— 56

In the songs, Debussy’s attempts towards irregular and aperiodic unfolding are first noticeable at the level of hypermeasure or larger units—the type that has been termed as hypermetrical irregularity by Rothstein—then at the level of a measure and, lastly, at the level of a beat. As will be demonstrated, Debussy’s strategies for achieving these effects are versatile: whether it is the elongation or elision of hypermeasures, measures, or beats; the use of metrically unaccented—originally known as feminine⁷⁸—cadences; or the technique referred to as a

⁷² Claude Debussy, “Le Matelot qui tombe à l’eau,” in *Claude Debussy: Quatre nouvelles Mélodies (1882) pour voix et piano*, ed. Denis Herlin (Paris: Durand, 2012), 6-7.

⁷³ Claude Debussy, “Apparition,” *La Revue musicale* (1^{er} mai, 1926): 18-23.

⁷⁴ Claude Debussy, “Le Jet d’eau,” in *Cinq Poèmes de Charles Baudelaire* (Paris: Durand, 1904), 17-25.

⁷⁵ Claude Debussy, “Recueillement,” in *Cinq Poèmes de Charles Baudelaire* (Paris: Durand, 1904), 27-31.

⁷⁶ Claude Debussy, “Le Son du cor,” in *Trois Mélodies* (Paris: J. Hamelle, n.d. [1901]; repr., New York: Dover, 1981), 94-96.

⁷⁷ Claude Debussy, “Noël des enfants qui n’ont plus de maisons” (Paris: Durand, 1916), 1-7.

⁷⁸ Among English-speaking scholars, the terms “feminine and masculine” are frowned upon nowadays, although it is the sheer existence of feminine and masculine words (nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and certain verb forms) in certain European languages—including French—that instigated the analogous use in music. In Debussy’s *mélodies*, feminine cadences often support feminine endings. Therefore, the term is helpful not only in associating cadences with feminine and masculine words, but also in acknowledging “the why” in cadences that have an extra beat.

polyphonization of parameters,⁷⁹ they all play an important role in both the creation and the perception of irregularity and aperiodicity.

The metrical states listed in the chapter will be investigated in turn and illustrated with examples from Debussy's *mélodies* in the ensuing chapters. In Part One of this study, the focus is on the states the unfolding of which is based on periodicity, such as metrical and hypermetrical regularity, metrical dissonance and metrical neutrality. In Part Two, however, the investigation turns towards states that reveal aperiodic unfolding, namely, the states of metrical and hypermetrical irregularity, as well as metrical ambiguity. Each one of them plays a special role in Debussy's rendering of the poem.

⁷⁹ "Polyphonization of parameters" is a term introduced to me by Ruben Radica (1931-2021), who was a Croatian composer and full-time professor of music at the Music Academy, University of Zagreb. He taught compositional techniques of 20th-century music in his course "Aspects of 20th-Century Music." A student of a number of prominent European composers, Radica was also a student of Messiaen at the Conservatoire, in whose course on "Meter and Rhythm" Debussy's music was studied in detail.

Part I: Periodicity

Part I: Periodicity

Chapter Four

Metrical and Hypermetrical Regularity

The most prevalent metrical states in Debussy's *mélodies* typify periodicity. As explained in the previous chapter, such states include that of metrical consonance—or more broadly, metrical regularity—metrical dissonance, metrical neutrality, and, at the supra-level, the state of hypermetrical regularity. In this chapter, the focus is on the state of metrical and hypermetrical regularity. First, I isolate a few passages from Debussy's *mélodies* that come the closest to Krebs's definition of metrical consonance. Second, I offer a metrical and hypermetrical analysis of Debussy's first song, "Madrid," which I consider to be the most straightforward example of regularity at both levels. Third, I analyze and discuss Debussy's setting of the text and the relation of his placement of poetic lines to the song's metrical and hypermetrical structure. Finally, I visit passages of metrical regularity in a few other songs, in order to determine its function.

With the exception of Debussy's "Berceuse sur une vieille chanson poitevine," composed for a solo voice, there are no instances in Debussy's songs where periodicity is created solely by the vocal part. It can be concluded, therefore, that periodicity in his *mélodies* is primarily established by the piano. Whether featured throughout a song, or heard only in specific fragments, metrical regularity is easy to detect even when the bar lines are removed.¹ Durational, pattern-beginning and harmonic-change accents synchronize at main beats—with particular

¹ As already explained, the removal of bar lines from Debussy's scores makes the listener's perception of the musical content apparent. In addition, considering that my study, in the manner of Debussy's *mélodies*, proceeds from periodicity to aperiodicity, i.e., from Debussy's early lyrical to the later declamatory style, the removal of bar lines will also be helpful in displaying this transition.

emphasis on the downbeat—so that the unfolding of the musical content clearly conveys the intended meter to the listener.

In “Aimons-nous et dormons,” Debussy’s setting of Banville’s poem, the pedal fifth in the left-hand part marks out the downbeats, and its duration establishes the length of a measure (Example 4.1).² The quarter notes underpin the changes of chords, thus amplifying the pattern-beginning accent of the sixteenth-note groups, and launching the pace of the main beat. As the arrangement of accents repeats, the listener—who is not privy to the score and the notated bar lines—delineates measures at every repeat of the pedal fifth and settles into a regular unfolding of the simple triple meter, the meter occurring most frequently in Debussy’s *mélodies*.³

Example 4.1. “Aimons-nous et dormons” (1880),⁴ mm. 1-3: bar lines removed⁵

The image shows a musical score for the first three measures of "Aimons-nous et dormons" by Debussy. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The vocal line (soprano) has lyrics "Ai-mons-nous et dor-mons". The piano accompaniment features a prominent pedal point (fifth) in the left hand, marked "mf", and sixteenth-note groups in the right hand. The bar lines have been removed, as indicated in the caption.

² Théodore de Banville, “Aimons-nous et dormons” (“Let us love and sleep”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 3*, with Jennifer France (soprano) and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA68016, 2014, CD, 9-10. The translation is also available online: Théodore de Banville, “Aimons-nous et dormons,” trans. Richard Stokes, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2777>.

³ Arthur B. Wenk, “Appendix C: Debussy’s Choice of Meter in His Songs,” in *Claude Debussy and the Poets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 292-294. Wenk’s list displays meter in 59 songs, showing 28 songs in triple meter, and 31 in duple meter (which includes quadruple meters, as well). However, Wenk takes into account the meter as notated at the beginning of each song. Consequently, “Recueillement,” “La Flûte de Pan,” and “De Rêve” for instance are listed under duple meter, although three-four meter (notated later in these songs) is predominant. My updated list of Debussy’s meters is provided in Appendices A1 and A2. They show the opening time signatures and the notated changes of meter in 101 songs. As I differentiate between songs in which the opening meter is also the predominant meter and those in which it is not, “Recueillement,” “La Flûte de Pan,” and “De Rêve” are counted under triple meter.

⁴ Dates of songs as per *Claude Debussy: The Complete Works*, with numerous performers, Warner Music 0190295736750, 2018, CD, 29-35.

⁵ Claude Debussy, “Aimons-nous et dormons” (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1933), 2-5.

The opening of Debussy’s setting of Bourget’s *romance* “Silence ineffable” similarly leaves no doubt as to what its meter might be (Example 4.2). The quarter notes in the left-hand part articulate the pacing of the main beat, the eighth notes in the right hand reveal the basic pulse layer, and the repetition of the initial rhythmic gesture confirms the placement of the downbeat. The meter is unquestionably duple, this being the second-most frequent meter in Debussy’s songs.

Example 4.2. Romance “Silence ineffable de l’heure”⁶ (1883), mm. 1-4: bar lines removed⁷

The musical score shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the first four measures. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 2/4. The vocal line begins with a whole rest, followed by a quarter note G4, and then eighth notes A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, and F5. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a quarter-note pattern in the left hand. Dynamics include *pp* for both parts and the instruction *très soutenu* for the piano part.

In some of the later songs too, such as “Fleur des blés” (a setting of a poem by Girod), the arrangement of quarter-note values in the piano part establishes the pacing of the main beat (Example 4.3). The most revealing ingredient of metrical accentuation here is not only the musical content of the opening gesture, but also—and more importantly—its repetition: the

⁶ Paul Bourget, “Romance: Silence ineffable de l’heure” (“Romance: Ineffable silence of the hour”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 3*, with Jennifer France (soprano), Jonathan McGovern (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA68016, 2014, CD, 6. The translation is also available online: Paul Bourget, “Romance: Silence ineffable,” trans. Richard Stokes, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2797>.

⁷ Claude Debussy, “Romance: Silence ineffable de l’heure,” in *Claude Debussy: Chansons d’après le manuscrit inédit, conserve à la Bibliothèque nationale de Paris*, ed. Arthur Hoérée (Paris: Salabert, 1983), 17-19.

recurrence of its four-beat melo-rhythmic model confirms the placement of the downbeat, and discloses the notated four-four meter to the listener.

Example 4.3. “Fleur des blés”⁸ (1891), mm. 1-4: bar lines removed⁹

The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of the song "Fleur des blés" by Claude Debussy. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes two triplet markings. The piano accompaniment begins with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The lyrics are: "Le long des blés que la bri - se Fait on - du - ler puis dé - fri - se En un dés - or - dre co - quet,". The score is presented with bar lines removed, as indicated in the caption.

To confirm Rohrer’s aforementioned statement, “repetition and repetitive structures” are instrumental for the construction of hypermetrical regularity in Debussy’s songs as well.¹⁰ Based

⁸ André Girod, “Fleur des blés” (“Cornflower”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs*, with Christopher Maltman (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67357, 2003, CD, 9. The translation is also available online: André Girod, “Fleur des blés” (“Flowers of Wheat”), trans. Richard Stokes, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2770>.

⁹ Claude Debussy, “Fleur des blés” (Paris: Girod, 1891), 1-3.

¹⁰ Katherine T. Rohrer, “Poetic Metre, Musical Metre and the Dance in Purcell’s Songs,” in *Purcell Studies*, ed. Curtis Price (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 210.

on the examples shown, a three-, two-, or four-beat opening rhythmic model is followed by a (more or less modified) repeat, thus establishing a two-bar model. At the hypermetrical level, a repetition of the model generates a four-bar hypermeasure that, if reiterated, would mount an eight-bar hypermetrical group, and so on. Repetitions, therefore, are necessary for the construction of periodicity and metrical consonance, for developing hypermetrical regularity, and for inducing a higher level of formal hierarchy.

4.1 “Madrid” and Metrical Regularity

Repetition is the main component of Debussy’s setting of “Madrid.” Composed in three-four meter, the song unfolds without any disturbances in periodicity of meter or hypermeter, and is therefore perceived as metrically and hypermetrically regular. Its opening gesture consists of three elements whose combination and repetition impose a dance-like rigour to the song (see Example 4.4). The rhythmic pattern in the piano right-hand part sounds like a simplified simulation of the castanets, played in the style of a dance known as *jota*: typically in three-four or six-eight meter, and often vacillating between the two, the *jota* is danced by couples, who raise their hands above their heads to play the castanets.¹¹ Their dancing is customarily accompanied by various guitar-like instruments, which are portrayed in Debussy’s setting by the broken chords in the left-hand part, joined by other chord tones in the right hand. Both the clicking of the castanets and the regular interchange of broken tonic and dominant chords unfold

¹¹ “Jota = A lively dance in triple time from northern Spain, accompanied by a guitar and castanets,” Alison Latham, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Music*, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) DOI: 10.1093/acref/9780199579037.001.0001; “Jota = A quick dance from northern Spain performed in 3/8 time. A dance for couples who play castanets, it is accompanied by someone who sings and plays the guitar. A notable theatrical example of the jota can be found in Massine’s and de Falla’s *Three-Cornered Hat*,” Debra Craine and Judith Mackrell, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); A notated music example of the Jota displaying the rhythm replicated in “Madrid” can be found in Lucile Armstrong, “Notes on the Dances of Southern Spain,” *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* 4, no. 3 (Dec. 1942): 104.

above the pedal tone A2, the long-short rhythmic pattern of which propels the dance forward.¹²

Although minutely altered in m. 10 and later simplified in mm. 15-18, the two-measure model perseveres as the primary source of the song's rhythmic drive.

Example 4.4. "Madrid" (1879), mm. 1-4¹³

Voice

1. Ma - drid, prin - ces - se des Es - pag - nes,
 2. Ma - drid, Mad - drid, moi, je me rail - le
 3. Or, si d'a - ven - ture on s'en - quê - te

Piano

Debussy's setting reveals a hierarchical organization of sections that build into a symmetrical and well-balanced whole: a repeat of the opening melo-rhythmic gesture creates a duple hypermeasure whose repetitions accumulate into a group of four and eventually eight measures, ending with a half cadence. The antecedent phrase is then followed by another group of eight measures, whose ending is also on the dominant. The repeat signs return the listener to the introductory two measures and the opening tonic chord. As a new beginning is launched, the listener realizes in retrospect that the sixteen-measure structure accommodates a single stanza and that the two-measure introduction plays a dual role: it not only provides a break in the

¹² The harmony is not as simple as is implied here: the I chord (with "sixte ajoutée") lasts a whole measure, after which the II chord is implied for two beats, and then V⁷ for a beat. That is, the harmonic rhythm is more active than that implied by the pedal A2.

¹³ At present (May 2023), the song is unpublished. Preparations are in process for its publication in *Claude Debussy, Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy: Mélodies. Série II, Vol. 1*, eds. Denis Herlin and Marie Rolf (Paris: Durand, forthcoming). Dr. Herlin's transcription of the entire song is reproduced in Appendix B2, by his kind permission.

succession of stanzas, but it also secures a resolution into the tonic chord. After the final stanza is completed, the half cadence of m. 18 receives its harmonic closure in a three-measure ending, with a fermata above the last chord. Evidently, the succession of duple hypermeasures proceeds seamlessly in its mounting of a hierarchically organized form and, following the introductory two measures, creates a sixteen-measure long hypermetrical structure:

$$\begin{array}{c} (2+2) + (2+2) + (2+2) + (2+2) \\ (4 + 4) + (4 + 4) \\ (8 + 8) \end{array}$$

The overall form of the song is strophic, and Debussy's setting of this poem in the style of a *jota* is, by definition, lyrical. Its periodicity is not only the motor that keeps the dance going, but it is also the means to accumulate measures and hypermeasures into a perfectly square sixteen-measure strophe, bookended by a two-measure introduction and a three-measure ending.

A closer look at the setting, however, reveals a few liberties in Debussy's treatment of the poem. First, the original text is corrupted by repeated lines. As the *sextilla* cannot supply the composer with the necessary number of poetic lines [8] to easily fit a sixteen-measure hypermetrical mold, certain lines of the original text have to be repeated. Debussy chooses to pursue repeats after the first four lines of the poem have been heard: the fifth line—as the rhyming pair of *c*—is repeated, as is the closing line, the rhyming pair of *b* (see Appendix B3). The reason for these repeats does not appear to be rooted in a desire to emphasize the meaning of the last two poetic lines, but rather to supply the material necessary for the unfolding of a symmetrical dance form and its hypermeter. The procedure is successful in creating the hierarchical sense of regularity in the song, but in doing so, it transforms the structure of the *sextilla*.

Second, the mid-stanza caesuras, suggested by punctuation marks and confirmed by the rhyme scheme *aab.ccb*, are not captured in the musical setting. The punctuation marks—a period and a semicolon—that subdivide Musset’s *sextilla* into tercets are not merely ignored, but effectively “run over” by the harmonic and melodic features of the song’s opening antecedent phrase (see Example 4.5). The period ending the third line of the text (m. 8) does not receive a cadence, but rather finds itself in the middle of a harmonic momentum that leads into the first tonicization of the dominant seventh-chord (from I – vi⁷ – ii⁷ – V⁷, in mm. 7-10). Moreover, the words “yeux noir” that precede the end of the period are not only given the highest pitch of the entire song (E5), but this note is also the dissonant seventh of the underlying vi chord, creating a rising tension that resolves two measures later (m. 10). Here, the main elements of the musical punctuation, namely the placement of a cadence, the harmonic content and the arrangement of pitches in the melodic line, do not synchronize with the punctuation of the text, thus revealing another discrepancy between the poet’s intention and Debussy’s realization.

Example 4.5. “Madrid” (1879), mm. 7-10

7

Bien des yeux bleus, bien des yeux noirs. La blan-che ville aux sé-ré-nades,
 Qui chaus-sent l'es-car-pin é-troit; Car j'en sais u-ne par le monde
 C'est l'al-lure de mon che-val; Un com-pli-ment sur sa man-tille,

Third, the rhythmic subtleties of individual poetic lines are not captured in the vocal part of the song. Certain syllables do not receive the expected accentuation, while others resonate too

prominently. Such a mismatch of poetic and musical accents seems to result from the presence of a recurring rhythmic pattern in the music that, fashioned from the text itself, becomes the governing rhythmic prototype of the vocal part—its prosodic signature.

There are two defining characteristics to this song’s prosodic signature: its rhythmic content, and its placement in a measure of the notated three-four meter. As shown below, all syllables (and single-syllable words) leading up to the last syllable of the poetic line are given an eighth-note value, while the end-stopping, or the line-demarcative syllable [LDA] is given a quarter-note value (Example 4.6). In addition, poetic lines ending with feminine rhyme, namely, lines 1-2 and 4-5 of each stanza, feature another quarter note for their *e muet*.¹⁴

Example 4.6. “Madrid” (1879), mm. 3-4: syllables and the assigned note values



The described arrangement of note values adds up to five and half quarter notes, thus fitting comfortably into two measures of the three-four meter.

In Debussy’s setting, this rhythmic strand is placed so as to begin after the opening eighth-note rest (Example 4.7). While such a placement accommodates the accentuation of the words “Ma-**drid**” and “prin-**ces-se**” in the first measure, it also assigns the downbeat—and the heaviest accent—of the following measure to the word “des.” Subsequently, the LDA, found in the word “Es-**pag-nes**,” is jolted forward, onto the second beat, thus losing some of its natural and expected stress.

¹⁴ In this song, the closing *e muet* is treated inconsistently in that it receives its own quarter note in lines 1 and 2 (mm. 3-4, 5-6), but is left unpronounced in lines 4 and 5 (mm. 9-10, 11-12, 13-14).

Example 4.7. “Madrid” (1879), mm. 3-4: vocal part only

3

1. Ma - drid, prin - ces - se des Es - pag - nes,

As Debussy repeats the pattern throughout the song (mm. 3-6 and 9-18 of every strophe), the rhythm of almost every poetic line (except for line 3 of each stanza that is set to a different rhythm) is subjected to the same three-four-meter accentuation. More often than not, the combination produces counter-rhythmic effects. For example, instead of “Il **court** par tes **mil**-le cam-**pag**-nes,” we hear “Il **court** par **tes** mil-|**LE** cam-**pag**-nes.”¹⁵ Also, “De tes **da**-mes à **fi**-ne **tail**-le” becomes “De **tes** da-**mes** à |**FI**-ne **tail**-le.” In the place of “**Or** si d’a-**ven**-**tur**(e) on s’en-**quê**-te,” we hear “Or **si** d’a-**ven**-tur(e) |**ON** s’en-**quê**-te.” Incidentally, feminine rhyme is affected too: a mid-line *e muet* in line 17 ends up being placed on the downbeat (mm. 12 and 14: the word “bru-|**NE**” from “Que jamais ni brune ni blonde”), while a mid-line *e muet* in the third stanza is not accounted for at all, although it is followed by a consonant (m. 7, the word “l’al-**lur**(e) de”).

Exceptions to the noted counter-rhythmic effects can be found in the poetic accents of the first stanza’s fourth and fifth lines: notwithstanding the displaced LDA in “La **blan**-che **vill**(e) aux |**SÉ**-ré-**nad**-(es)” (mm. 9-10) and “Il **pas**-se **par** tes |**PRO**-me-**nad**-(es)” (mm. 11-12), these lines fit more comfortably into the mold of the three-four measure, because the placement of syllables within the three-four measure corresponds more truthfully to the spoken-word accentuation. The persistent displacement of the LDA, remains an enigma, but as its quarter-note

¹⁵ I differentiate between stresses in poetic lines and their placement in the musical setting: in the poetic line, accents other than the LDA are shown in bold, while the LDA is shown in underlined bold; in a musical setting, the capital bold indicates a placement of a syllable on the downbeat, while the bold font represents other accented beats.

value creates a metrical dissonance in the second measure of the hypermetrical pair (mm. 3-4, 5-6, 9-10 and henceforth), it compels a further investigation of the piano part, with the bar lines removed.

A closer look at the simulated rhythm of the castanets in the piano right-hand part reveals a very weak durational accent on the second quarter note, namely a D6+2 (1=8th) dissonance (see Example 4.8).

Example 4.8. “Madrid” (1879), mm. 1-4

(1=8th)

1. Ma - drid, prin - ces - se des Es - pag - nes,
 2. Ma - drid, Mad - drid, moi, je me rail - le
 3. Or, si d'a - ven - ture on s'en - quê - te

Harm.

rhythm: I ----- V⁷ ----- I ----- V⁷ -----

When the three-beat rhythmic gesture repeats, the D6+2 is met by a pitch change in the left hand, which confirms a chord change: occurring after a lengthy tonic, the dominant chord—although suggested on the downbeat of the repeated gesture—is clarified on the second beat, resulting in a weak D12+8. At the repeat of this six-beat model, the vocal part launches its prosodic signature: the expected accentuation in the word “Ma-**drid**” aligns with the D6+2 of the castanet simulation, while the LD syllable in “Es-**pag**-nes” corroborates the castanets and the D12+8

elucidation of the dominant harmony in the piano. As the combination of these elements recurs throughout the song—in other words, more than three times—we hear the recurring presence of a weak D6+2 displacement dissonance, resulting from both the rhythmic and harmonic-change patterns of the dance and Debussy's handling of Musset's poetry.

The aforementioned perpetual displacement dissonances, however, do not distract from the metrically regular unfolding of the song. Also, they do not seem to play a particular role, aside from the obvious: the D6+2 is a characteristic of the *jota* dance rhythm, while the D12+8 results from Debussy's placement of lyrics over the successive measures of the notated meter. Whether the former inspired Debussy to create the latter (in support of the *jota*'s characteristic rhythm) is hard to confirm, because both the displacement of the LDA and the resulting type of dissonance occur often in the vocal parts of Debussy's songs. It is clear, however, that the form of the dance and, by definition, the repetitiveness of its rhythm impelled such a mechanical setting of the text.

The most enlightening and, as it turns out, forward-thinking moment in "Madrid" is related to the D12+8 dissonance and its connection to the LDA. The overall pace of the dance is enabled by the pedal tone A2, whose half-and-quarter-note rhythm not only propels the notated meter of the *jota*, but also, over the length of a duple hypermeasure, cradles the subtle harmonic unfolding from I to V⁷ (see Example 4.9). Such a combination of elements reinforces the periodicity in the song's unfolding and confirms its lyrical style. There is no doubt in the listener's (or the dancer's) mind as to what to expect (or how to proceed): after hearing the first two measures, the triple meter and its downbeat are established.

Example 4.9. "Madrid" (1879), mm. 1-4: piano only, bar lines removed

Harm.

rhythm: I ----- V⁷ ----- I ----- V⁷ -----

In m. 10, however, Debussy changes the established rhythm of the bass by reversing the order of note values. The half note follows the quarter note and is matched with a harmonic arrival to the dominant chord (see Example 4.10). This alters the harmonic pace and gives the second beat of the measure even more emphasis.

Example 4.10. "Madrid" (1879), mm. 9-10: bar lines removed

9

La blan - che ville aux sé - ré - nades,
Car j'en sais u - ne par le monde,
Un com - pli - ment sur sa man - tille,

Harm.

rhythm: I II V

The resulting II – V progression, in which the II-chord is given a quarter note, and the V-chord a half note, creates a metrically unaccented half cadence. Here, Debussy reaffirms the rhythm of his own setting of the text, but, more remarkably, he also responds to Musset’s rhyme: by supporting the LDA and the resultant D12+8 dissonance with the entry of the V chord on the second beat, he matches the feminine rhyme with the feminine cadence. Moreover, considering that the poem describes the city of Madrid as a woman, and that four out of six lines of Musset’s *sextilla* end in feminine rhyme, it is conceivable that Debussy’s placement of the lyrics too was conditioned by the feminine endings: the LDAs found in words such as “Espagnes,” “campagnes,” “sérénades,” and “promenades” are consistently placed onto the second, i.e., less accented beat of the three-four measure, thus associating the feminine rhyme with what would have been considered feminine accentuation in a measure. Had the bar lines been drawn in front of every LDA in order to place it on the downbeat of the three-four measure, words with feminine rhyme would have been matched with the masculine placement.

The instances in which the prosody is not preserved are created by two conditions, namely, the permanently stationed accented beats of the three-four meter that present a mold into which the poetic meter and rhythm are being poured, and the constant recurrence of the aforementioned prosodic signature. While the former is an identifying element of the *jota* dance and it can accommodate octosyllabic meter very well, the latter is derived from the poetic rhythm with special attention to the feminine rhyme. The combination of these elements produces a number of conflicts between the text and the notated meter, a few of which receive support, albeit subtle, in the rhythmical movement of the piano accompaniment—the aforementioned castanets and guitar-like broken chords.

It appears, therefore, that the substratum for the metrical regularity in “Madrid” is the *jota* dance, and that all other accents are either arranged to support it, or to surrender to it. Yet the governing periodicity does not only reflect the dance, but also some of the structural elements of Musset’s poem. In other words, what is preserved through the metrical regularity of the dance is, first, the poem’s octosyllabic meter, as captured in both the six-beat length of the prosodic signature and the corresponding three-four meter; second, the poem’s isometric structure, as echoed in the repetitiveness of the prosodic signature, in the constantly recurring duple hypermeasure, and in the steady meter; and, third, the periodicity of stanzas, as reflected in the strophic form. What is emphasized in Debussy’s setting of the poem through his use of the weak metrical dissonance, however, is the characteristic accentuation of the *jota* dance—its slight emphasis of the second beat—as well as the poem’s feminine rhyme. What is surrendered or, rather, sacrificed to the rigour of the *jota* dance is the inner structure of stanzas, as well as the poetic rhythm: Musset’s *sextilla*, his carefully crafted organization of syntactic groups, his use of punctuation and the related enjambed phrasing are all overridden by the repetitiveness of the song’s prosodic signature. As there are many discrepancies between the poet’s intention and Debussy’s realization, a number of which are quite successfully veiled by the overall periodicity of his lyrical setting, one can clearly see why Debussy started to pursue a path towards a more supple, declamatory style, a style that avoids musical repetition and that, as a result of its attentiveness to the rhythms of the text is irregular or even aperiodic.

Before tackling any of Debussy’s more challenging metrical states, it is important to point out that while “Madrid” and the three other settings briefly mentioned at the beginning of this chapter are primarily periodic, the state of metrical regularity often appears only as a short passage within Debussy’s overall metrical design of a song. An early example can be found in

his setting of Banville's poem "Triolet à Philis," also known as "Zéphyr." It features a single-measure gesture in the piano part, whose arrangement of accents reestablishes metrical regularity within a context that is predominately irregular (see Example 4.11, mm. 7-8). Here, the downbeat and the third beat of mm. 7 and 8 receive appropriate melodic and durational accents in the piano, and the stresses (SA and LDA) of the single poetic line are placed in the respective measures to emphasize the downbeats, as expected.

Example 4.11. "Zéphyr" (1881), mm. 6-8¹⁶

In this short passage, the lyric "I" imagines what he would do if he, like Zéphyr, could secretly approach the woman of his desires. As the lyric "I" states, "I would possess the key to these veils," Debussy underscores the text with metrical regularity, implying that the yearnings of the lyric "I" would be fulfilled and the desires satisfied.

Later in the song, the regularity is established again and lasts four measures, encompassing two lines of Banville's triolet (see Example 4.12). The longer note values in the vocal line match the poetic SAs and LDAs, but their placement is prioritized, so to speak: the

¹⁶ Claude Debussy, "Zéphyr" (Mainz: Schott, 1932), 2-3.

LDAs (“Pour qui je brû-**lais**” and “dans la **cou**-che”) are placed on the downbeats, while both SAs (“Près des **seins**,” and “Je me glis-se-**rais**”) are pushed forward, i.e., onto the second beat of the measure.

Example 4.12. “Zéphyr” (1881), mm. 11-14

11

p

Près des seins, pour qui je brû - lais, Je me

p

13

glis - se - rais dans la cou - che.

In these measures, the lyric “I” continues to imagine what he would do if he were Zéphyr: “I would slide into your bed, // Nestling against the breasts that inflame me.”¹⁷ Debussy establishes

¹⁷ Théodore de Banville, “Zéphyr,” (“Zephyr”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 3*, with Jennifer France (soprano), Jonathan McGovern (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA68016, 2014, CD, 15. The translation is also available online: Théodore de Banville, “Zéphyr,” trans. Richard Stokes, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2774>.

the state of metrical regularity in order to depict the closeness, the intimacy, the kind of relationship that the lyric “I” desires and would find satisfactory and pleasing.

In these passages, the duple hypermeasure is at the basis of the resulting regular unfolding, as it carries out a single poetic line. This durational quantity, however, is not also at the basis of the song’s form, which is to say that it does not mount a hypermetrically regular composition. There is much more to this song, as will be revealed in later chapters of this study.

In Debussy’s complex metrical designs, such as in his setting of Baudelaire’s “Recueillement,” moments of periodicity are established promptly, but often do not last longer than two measures (see Example 4.13). After a passage that features rhythmic groups with a number of conflicting accents (mm. 27-28), Debussy launches periodicity in the accompaniment (mm. 29-30). The quarter notes articulate the beats of the triple meter, while the eighth notes parse eighth notes of a compound meter.

Example 4.13. “Recueillement” (1889), mm. 27-32

27

poco cresc. e animando

tels la mul - ti - tu - de vi - le, Sous le fouet du Plai -

poco cresc. e animando

30

mf

sir, ce bour-reau sans mer - ci, Va cueil-lir des re -

sf

mf

As the ensuing measures confirm (mm. 31-32), the presence of metrical regularity is fleeting: underscoring Baudelaire’s line “*Sous le fouet du Plaisir, ce bourreau sans merci*” (“Lashed by Pleasure, that pitiless tormentor”),¹⁸ the establishment of regularity here portrays, perhaps, a momentary sense of satisfaction that “*des mortels la multitude vile*” (“the vile multitude of mortals”)¹⁹ experience(s) in relationships fueled by pleasure. Hence, partnering the sense of satisfaction with metrical regularity is not accidental.

Another brief moment of metrical regularity can be heard in the midst of metrically fluid measures of “*La Flûte de Pan*,” a setting of text by Pierre Louÿs’s (see Example 4.14). In between measures notated in four-four time (mm. 12 and 17), Debussy inserts an episode of four measures in three-four meter (mm. 13-16), of which only the first two are metrically regular (mm. 13-14). Highlighting the opening phrases of the third stanza, “*Nous n’avons rien à nous dire, tant nous sommes // près l’un de l’autre*” (“We have nothing to say, so close are we one to

¹⁸ Charles Baudelaire, “Recueillement” (“Meditation”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs*, with Christopher Maltman (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67357, 2003, CD, 13. The translation is also available online: Charles Baudelaire, “Recueillement,” trans. Richard Stokes, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2282>.

¹⁹ Baudelaire, “Recueillement,” trans. Stokes, in *Debussy Songs*, Hyperion CD, 13.

another”²⁰), the short moment of metrical regularity depicts the couple’s closeness, the mutual experience of their intimacy, and the concurrence of their affection for each other. Once again, therefore, Debussy creates the state of metrical regularity to express the consonance—i.e., the harmoniousness and the oneness—experienced in a close relationship.

Example 4.14. “La Flûte de Pan” (1897), mm. 11-18²¹

11

pei - ne. *a Tempo 1* Nous n'a-vons

Rit. *pp* 3 3 6 6 3 3

13 *p* 3 3 3 3 *p*

rien à nous di - re, tant nous som-mes près l'un de l'au - tre; mais nos chan-

²⁰ Pierre Louÿs, “La Flûte de Pan” (“The Flute of Pan”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 2*, with Lorna Anderson and Lisa Milne (sopranos), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67883, 2012, CD, 10. The translation is also available online: Pierre Louÿs, “La Flûte de Pan,” trans. Richard Stokes, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2841>.

²¹ Claude Debussy, “La Flûte de Pan,” in *Trois Chansons de Bilitis* (Paris: Fromont, n.d. [1899]), 2-5.

15 *più p* *pp* *Rit.*

-sons veu - lent se ré - pon - dre, et tour à tour nos bou - ches s'u - nis-sent sur la

17

flû - te. Il est

pp *sempre pp*

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a vocal and piano setting. The first system (measures 15-16) features a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes triplets and sextuplets. The second system (measures 17-18) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment, with a time signature change to 3/4. The piano part continues with sextuplets and triplets. Dynamics include *pp* and *sempre pp*.

Instances of metrical regularity play a significant role in Debussy's settings of poems. In "Madrid," Debussy's priority is to set Musset's poem to a rhythm of a dance and to mold the text to that rhythm. The fragments of regularity in "Zéphyr," "Recueillement" and "La Flûte de Pan," however, have nothing to do with a dance. They express the closeness of lovers and the harmonious bond between them. In other words, the presence of regularity, however brief, is never accidental: it is always related to the narrative or the emotional content of the poem.

Chapter Five

Metrical Dissonance

The examples studied thus far have shown that the launching of metrical regularity requires a certain type of periodicity: as a rule, Debussy creates a measure-long rhythmic gesture that repeats and thus propels the regular unfolding of a song or its passage. The gesture contains an arrangement of accents that articulates the downbeat and the beats of the notated meter, and its repetition creates at least a brief state of metrical regularity (even if not quite a state of metrical consonance). In the aforementioned examples, Debussy uses metrical regularity to portray intimate closeness, moments of pleasure and contentment that stem from a settled emotional state between lovers and from their harmonious relationship. There are songs, however, in which the state of metrical regularity portrays the steady spinning of a carousel (“Chevaux de bois”) or the flamboyant performance of a puppet show (“Fantoches”). Debussy portrays different types of “alignment” by using the state of metrical regularity, namely, a flawless performance of a mechanism in the former, and the “ensemble” of a sound music performance in the latter.

More often than not, the unfolding of a regular metrical state in Debussy’s songs includes some sort of a conflict between the musical content and the notated meter. Inspired by the poem’s narrative, poetic rhythm, imagery, or emotional content, Debussy weaves in antimetrical layers or even just short rhythmic strands whose accents are either displaced from the expected alignment, or grouped to imply a different time signature. When such displacement or grouping of accents occurs consecutively and at least three times in a row, the created state is that of metrical dissonance.

For metrical dissonance to occur, a metrical layer has to be present within the given work (though not necessarily articulated—recall the possibility of subliminal dissonance, during which the metrical layer is suppressed). “Madrid” is a good example of a song in which the periodicity of the three-four meter is coupled with pervasive, though relatively weak displacement dissonance. With regards to the piano part, the D6+2 is intrinsic to the *jota* dance, while the D12+8 in the vocal part aligns with the poem’s LDAs. In addition to “Madrid,” the aforementioned Examples 4.3, “Fleur des blés” and, before that, 4.1, “Aimons-nous et dormons” show different instances of displaced accents within periodic unfold 5ding, and suggest that such instances are triggered by the poetic rhythm, and not only by the LDA.

At the opening of “Fleur des blés” (Example 4.3), the SA of the line “Le long des **blés** que la **bris(e)”** is given a quarter-note value which, in the opening group of four quarter notes, emphasizes the third beat.¹ The same accentuation recurs within the second slur, where the SA of the poem’s third line, “En un dés**ord**re **coquet,”** is also assigned a quarter note. In addition, both SAs are matched with a change of harmony. The LDAs, although associated with a shorter note value, are placed on the downbeats. In this case, the combination of the two, namely, the placement of the SA’s quarter note and the placement of the LDA on the downbeat, produce the inherent accentuation of the four-four meter, reinforcing its two most prominent beats. Consequently, the arrangement of stresses in the vocal line is instrumental here in the construction of the metrical consonance.

If we look back to Example 4.1, however, we will notice that Debussy’s setting of the opening line “Ai-mons-**nous** et dor-**mons”** is a bit more complex. First, the choice of note values

¹ A reminder: SA indicates a secondary accent (shown in boldface), while the LDA indicates a line-demarcative accent (shown in boldface and underscored).

constructs two eighth-eighth-quarter-note groups, suggesting duple meter; the first quarter note is given to the SA, and the second to the LDA. In addition, the order of note values in the vocal part emphasizes the quarter notes, thus implying a bar line in front of them, in effect a beat later than the pedal fifths in the piano part would suggest. Debussy's setting of the song in three-four time creates two conflicts: the grouping dissonance G6/4 (1=8th note) formed by the rhythm of the vocal line and the waltz rhythm of the piano part, as well as a hint of the displacement dissonance D6+2, created by the placement of the voice's durational accents.

There are songs in which metrical dissonance involves a group of measures. In Debussy's first published song, "Nuit d'étoiles" (Example 5.1), the succession of arpeggiated chords at the opening displays a swelling of accentuation towards the third chord, simply because there is a melodic ascent and, in the right hand, a leap towards it (i.e., a registral accent). Shown without bar lines, the pattern-beginning accent suggests a grouping of four chords in a measure and, therefore, a compound quadruple time signature, within which the third beat receives a small emphasis.

Example 5.1. "Nuit d'étoiles" (1880): the opening, bar lines removed²

In Debussy's score, however, six-eight is the notated meter (see Example 5.2). Within its metrical framework, the downbeats of mm. 1 and 2 receive equal emphasis, but within the two-

² Claude Debussy, "Nuit d'étoiles" (Paris: Bulla, 1910), 1-4.

bar hypermeasures created by the four-chord pattern, the gentle swelling towards the third chord produces a subtle D12+6 dissonance (1=8th).

Example 5.2. “Nuit d’étoiles” (1880), mm. 1-8

(1=8th)

Allegro

mf
Nuit d'é-

una corda
pp
12

12

12

5

toi - les, Sous tes voi - les, Sous ta

12

12

The swelling receives a response in the vocal part. Banville’s opening line “Nuit d’é-**toi-**les, sous tes **voi-**les” includes an SA as well as an LDA. Debussy captures both of them by associating them with a durational accent (a quarter note with an eighth-note melisma) and by placing them on the downbeats of respective measures. In addition, his choice of pitches echoes the melodic swelling heard in the accompaniment: the first syntactic group (ending here with a

comma) shapes into an arch, while the second mirrors the first with an inverted arch. The counterpoised unfolding of this ebb and flow is anticipated by the piano, whose accentuation, therefore, stems from Debussy's setting of the text. The exchange of these undulations ensures equal accentuation on consecutive downbeats within the total texture, at least at the outset.

The tendency towards granting a secondary beat of a measure, or a weak hyperdownbeat, a special emphasis emerges as one of the most prominent traits of Debussy's text-setting. In some songs, it reinforces the inherent accentuation of the notated meter and thus clarifies the features of its periodicity, while in others its presence reveals a weak form, or a hint, of metrical dissonance. In general, one could say that displacement dissonances, present in many of Debussy's songs, appear to arise from the poetic rhythm, while grouping dissonances are more often related to the poem's imagery or emotional content.³

My exploration of Debussy's use of metrical dissonance in this chapter begins with his use of displacement dissonance in his setting of Valade's "Tragédie." Subsequently, I focus on the use of grouping dissonance in his setting of Bourget's "Regret." As effects of subliminal dissonance are present in both the composer's setting of Banville's "Le Lilas" and Le Roy's "Les Angé-lus," sections of both of these songs are presented thereafter. Finally, Debussy's novel counter-rhythmic technique (it being a form of displacement dissonance) is explored in his setting of Verlaine's "En Sour-dine," where its combination with compound dissonance creates a stirring moment. With regards to periodicity, it will be interesting to find out what effect Debussy's use of metrical dissonance has on periodic unfolding of a song or sections of a song.

³ As, in the later songs, Debussy's commitment to revealing the notated meter recedes to the point where even the main beat is obscured, the mismatches between the poetic and musical accents frequently do not involve a sufficient number of attacks to form an antimetrical layer. Therefore, these misalignments are not full-fledged metrical dissonances, but simply individual antimetrical accents.

5.1 “Tragédie” and Displacement Dissonance

In Debussy’s setting of “Tragédie,” one of Léon Valade’s *Nocturnes: Poèmes imités de Henri Heine*,⁴ a different displacement dissonance characterizes each section of the song: D6+4 (1=8th) is present in the piano part of the A section, D6+1 characterizes the accompaniment of the B section (mm. 15-23), and D6+2 resonates through the A¹ section. The metrical design of the song clearly involves a *metrical progression*, a term introduced by Krebs to describe successions of metrically different sections.⁵ In Debussy’s setting of “Tragédie” (which is metrically dissonant almost in its entirety), the dissonances are coordinated with the three stanzas of the poem, thus progressing with the narrative.

The displacement dissonance D6+4 (1=8th) is introduced within the first bar, where the left hand presents a three-beat rhythmic gesture characterized by a pair of dotted-eighth-and-sixteenth-note groups followed by a quarter note (see Example 5.3). The durational accent resulting from the quarter note creates the antimetrical layer of D6+4. Immediately thereafter, the vocal part enters with “Les pe-ti-tes **fleurs**”; as the last syllable of this syntactic division (or word group) receives a longer note value, thus amplifying the D6+4 in the piano, the listener realizes in retrospect that the two fragments relate to each other: the piano part anticipates the rhythm of the lyrics, in which four short syllables are followed by a lengthened, accented word.

⁴ Léon Valade, “Tragédie, II,” in *Nocturnes: poèmes imités de Henri Heine* (Paris: A. Patay, 1880), 35. The original text of the poem and a translation by Richard Stokes are in the Appendix C1.

⁵ Harald Krebs, “Metrical Progressions and Processes,” in *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 82-114.

Example 5.3. “Tragédie” (1881), mm. 1-3⁶

(1=8th)

Andantino (Avec un sentiment de tristesse)

Les pe - ti - tes fleurs n'ont pu vi - vre

Piano et Sourd

The dissonance D6+4 in the piano returns a few measures later (mm. 8-9). Its return is amplified by a delayed entry of the vocal part, which resumes (after an enjambment) with the words “sous le” on the third beat of m. 8 (see Example 5.4).

Example 5.4. “Tragédie” (1881), mm. 7-10

(1=8th)

sous le gi - vre Ils sont morts,

⁶ At present (May 2023), the song is unpublished. Its first publication is being prepared by Denis Herlin, Editor in Chief of the *Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy*, for *Mémoires*, Série II, Vol. 1 (Paris: Durand, forthcoming). Dr. Herlin’s transcription of the song is reproduced in Appendix C2 by his kind permission.

During the first two of the final four measures of the A section (mm. 11-12), the dissonance is intensified in the piano by dynamic accents notated in both hands (Example 5.5).

Example 5.5. “Tragédie” (1881), mm. 11-13

(1=8th)

The musical score shows three measures of music. The vocal line (top staff) begins with a whole rest in measure 11, followed by a quarter note in measure 12, and a half note in measure 13. The piano accompaniment (middle and bottom staves) features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The piano part is marked 'Un peu animé' and 'Un peu ritenuto'. The lyrics 'ils sont flé - tris.' are written below the vocal line.

The dissonance D6+4 is not persistent in the piano part of this section; it fades in and out, as the lyrics of the first stanza reveal the poet’s observation about “the little flowers [that] could not survive. // An April night caught their blue calyxes // by surprise: beneath the hoar-frost // they died, they withered.”⁷ In the vocal line, Debussy adds a couple of displaced durational accents to the overall presence of the dissonance D6+4. In m. 2, the voice’s quarter note aligns with the D6+4 in the piano part, whereas, in m. 5, the vocal part supplies the missing D6+4 that is overridden in the piano by the thematic development of the principal rhythmic gesture. Therefore, while it is interrupted at times, the D6+4 is the prevailing dissonance in the A section of the song.

⁷ Léon Valade, “Tragédie” (“Tragedy”), trans. by Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 4*, with Lucy Crow (soprano), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA68075, 2018, CD, 6.

Measure 3, however, introduces another displaced syllable: the location of the first LDA of the feminine rhyme, the syllable “vi-(vre)” creates a durational accent on the second beat, which is then echoed in metrically unaccented—i.e., feminine—cadences in the piano part of mm. 7 and 10. The effect of the LDA placement, however, really comes to life in the vocal part of the B section. There, the opening lines of the second stanza feature SAs on their third syllables and, when captured in the musical setting as D6+2, they anticipate the prevailing dissonance of the A¹ section.

The B section (mm. 15-23) opens with a single measure of introduction in the piano. Its rhythm is distinguished by the strong dissonance D6+1 (see Example 5.6), its intensity arising from the use of a dynamic as well as a durational accent on the second eighth note.

Example 5.6. “Tragédie” (1881), mm. 15-17

(1=8th)

15

Un peu plus vite

Deux en - fans s'ai-maient d'a-mour ten - dre.

Unlike the aforementioned dissonances D6+4 and D6+2, the dissonance D6+1 does not seem to be related either to the poetic rhythm or to Debussy’s setting of it. However, its playfulness infuses this section with a sense of innocence that—with the dissonance itself—

evaporates in the last two measures of the section. It is here, in the second stanza, that the listener finds out what the poem is really about: “Two children fell tenderly in love,”⁸ and in a pursuit of their life together, they left their home and their country without their parents’ consent. At the singer’s uttering of the text “Que père ou mère eût consenti,” Debussy stops the light-hearted dissonance (Example 5.7). The B section ends with the D6+2 in the vocal part, fortified by a metrically unaccented harmonic resolution of a suspension in the piano (m. 23).

Example 5.7. “Tragédie” (1881), mm. 22-23

(1=8th)

The A¹ section is launched by a return of the dotted rhythmic gesture in the piano that is familiar from the opening of the song (mm. 24-25). It is developed over the bar line and charged with the dissonance D6+2 (Example 5.8). The dissonance, though not present in every bar, is fairly prominent, because its durational accent is supported by a harmonic resolution that alludes to a metrically unaccented (feminine) cadence in m. 25. The vocal part enters above this cadence, carrying out the first line of the stanza. The placement of its LDA (“va-ga-**bon**-de”), along with the associated durational accent, continues the dissonance D6+2 in m. 26, in support of which the

⁸ Valade, “Tragédie” (“Tragedy”), trans. by Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 4*, CD, 6.

piano part reinstates its cadential fragment. In this moment, the bond between the vocal and piano part strengthens through the use of D6+2.

Example 5.8. “Tragédie” (1881), mm. 24-26

(1=8th)

24

Animez et Crescendo

Par - tout leur fui - te va - ga - bon - de

6

6

Moreover, as the piano anticipates the two-bar-long rhythmic strand of the vocal part, their combination produces an effect of imitative (or echoing) metrical dissonance—the effect already introduced by Debussy at the very beginning of the song with the use of D6+4—which is then reinstated in a transposed form over the ensuing three measures (Example 5.9).

Example 5.9. "Tragédie" (1881), mm. 27-29

(1=8th)

27

C'est but - tée à de mau-vais sorts;

6 6

The closing measures of the song, however, bring back the dissonance D6+4 in the piano part (as a subtle reminiscence of the opening), alongside the metrically consonant declamation (Example 5.10).

Example 5.10. "Tragédie" (1881), mm. 32-35

(1=8th)

32

p (SA) *pp* (LDA)

Ils se sont flé - tris, ils sont morts!

p *pp*

6 6 6 6

The tragedy resulting from the children's decision to leave home is the focus of the last stanza, as rendered in the closing A¹ section. The presence of the metrical dissonance D6+2 for the greater part of this section, as well as the brief return to the D6+4 in mm. 32-34 might be loosely connected to the narrative. As the poet tells us that "everywhere they wandered and fled // they met with misfortune; // they found no happiness in the world," the D6+2 is present. To underscore the last line, "they withered, they died," however, the D6+4 returns, as if recalling the flowers described in the first stanza.⁹ Be that as it may, the poetic rhythm of this line is exactly the same as that of the poem's opening three lines, which points out, yet again, that the source of these two metrical dissonances appears to be related to the prosody and Debussy's setting of the text.

Valade's poetic rhythm is not consistent throughout the poem.¹⁰ Over the three stanzas, the SA fluctuates between the third and fifth syllabic position, opening up various rhythmic options for Debussy's vocal rhythm.¹¹ The assigned note values correspond to Valade's distribution of stresses most of the time in that both the LDAs and SAs receive quarter- or longer-note values, while the remaining syllables are given eighth notes. Debussy's diligence in assigning these note values renders the suppleness of the SA perceptible as well, however curious its designation might be at times.

In the third stanza, however, only the LDAs of lines 8 through 11 (mm. 22-31) receive a longer note value, while SAs are overlooked. The reason for that might lie in the fact that the bi-accentual pattern of Valade's poetic line is not as strictly pursued from that point on, and that the

⁹ Valade, "Tragédie" ("Tragedy"), trans. by Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 4*, CD, 6.

¹⁰ See Appendix C3.

¹¹ Clive Scott explains: "Much of the rhythmic ambiguity and fluidity of the octosyllabic line derives from its lying between the three-accent-per-line norm of the decasyllable and the two-accent norm of the hexasyllable: it thus frequently invites both a two-accent and a three-accent reading." "French Versification: A Summary" in *Nineteenth-Century French Poetry: Introductions to Close Reading*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 250.

organization of syntactic groups is becoming more fluid. Nevertheless, Debussy's arrangement of short and long note values does not perturb the original arrangement of stresses. Rather, it is his placement of these rhythmic strands into the three-four measure that produces the aforementioned displacement dissonances. As Valade's poetic rhythm changes, Debussy's metrical dissonances progress with it.

In comparison to "Madrid," therefore, Debussy's setting of the lyrics in this *mélodie* is by no means formulaic. The poem's stanzaic structure is mirrored through the song's ternary rather than strophic form. While each stanza is equally long, each section of the setting not only consists of an unequal number of measures (A = 14mm, B = 9mm, A¹ = 12mm), but two of the three sections are also hypermetrically irregular.¹² Although the isometric lines are set within the steady meter, Debussy's treatment displays the broad variety of rhythmic placements within the three-four measure that octosyllabic lines and their punctuation can inspire. Overall, Debussy's approach to setting a poem to music is becoming more attentive to the prosody and responsive to the subtleties of the text.

5.2 "Regret" and Grouping Dissonance

Grouping dissonance is present in a number of Debussy's songs. As already mentioned, a hint of it can be seen in the vocal part of "Aimons-nous et dormons" (Example 4.1) where a couple of anapests with the characteristic short-short-long arrangement of stresses creates a rhythmic group of two beats ("Ai-mons-**nous** / et dor-**mons**"). Its placement within a duple hypermeasure creates a conflict with the notated three-four meter.

¹² Hypermetrical irregularity is to be discussed in Chapter 7.

Similar groupings can be found in Debussy's setting of Armand Renaud's poem, "Flots, palmes, sables" (see Example 5.11). In measures 43-44, instead of regular eighth notes, the two-beat groupings involve eighth-note triplets. The same rhythm recurs later in the song, in the setting of the line "Ton sépulcre par moitié!" (mm. 52-53).

Example 5.11. "Flots, palmes, sables" (1882), mm. 43-44¹³

The musical score for Example 5.11, measures 43-44, is presented in a three-staff format. The top staff is the vocal line, the middle staff is the piano right hand, and the bottom staff is the piano left hand. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. Measure 43 begins with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The vocal line starts with a quarter note G4, followed by an eighth-note triplet (A4, B4, C5), a quarter note D5, and another eighth-note triplet (E5, F5, G5). The lyrics "Où le so-leil est sans pi-tié;" are written below the vocal line. The piano accompaniment in the right hand features a quarter note G4, a quarter note B-flat4, and a quarter note D5. The piano accompaniment in the left hand features a quarter note G3, a quarter note B-flat3, and a quarter note D4. In measure 44, the vocal line continues with a quarter note G4, followed by an eighth-note triplet (A4, B4, C5), a quarter note D5, and another eighth-note triplet (E5, F5, G5). The piano accompaniment in the right hand features a quarter note G4, a quarter note B-flat4, and a quarter note D5. The piano accompaniment in the left hand features a quarter note G3, a quarter note B-flat3, and a quarter note D4.

Such repetitions of antimetrical rhythmic groups appear frequently in vocal parts and may pass unnoticed, but instances of grouping dissonance in the piano part are far more apparent.

Debussy's setting of Bourget's "Regret" opens with a grouping dissonance in the piano (see Example 5.12).¹⁴ The regular ticking of a compound duple meter is established by dotted half notes that punctuate the pace of chord changes, and by single eighth notes in the left hand that add a chime after each chord. Although the eighth-note pulse in the right-hand part is

¹³ At present (May 2023), the song "Flots, palmes, sables" is unpublished. Its first publication is being prepared by Denis Herlin, Editor in Chief of the *Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy*, for *Mémoires*, Série II, Vol. 1 (Paris: Durand, forthcoming). By kind permission of Dr. Herlin, selected measures from his transcription are reproduced here.

¹⁴ Paul Bourget, "Regret," in *Les Aveux* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1882), 44. This particular edition is also available on Internet Archive website: <https://archive.org/details/lesaveuxposies00bouruoft/page/44/mode/2up?view=theater>. The poem and its English translation by Richard Stokes are in Appendix D1.

beamed to conform to the expected three-plus-three grouping, this pulse is grouped into twos by pitch repetition, thus revealing a conflict with the notated meter articulated by the left hand. This is a clear instance of $G3/2$ ($1=8^{\text{th}}$).

Example 5.12. “Regret” (1884), mm. 1-2¹⁵

($1=8^{\text{th}}$)

The musical score shows two measures of music. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melody of eighth notes, with a '2' above each pair of notes, indicating a binary division. The left hand (bass clef) plays a bass line with a '3' above the first eighth note of each measure, indicating a ternary division. The piece is marked 'ppp' (pianissimo).

The vocal part enters at m. 3, conforming to the compound duple time (Example 5.13). Carrying longer note values, its syllables and words delineate the two main beats of the six-eight measure. At m. 5, however, the vocal rhythm changes: eighth-note duplets enter above the already established conflict in the piano accompaniment. While reinforcing the two main beats of the measure and, thus, turning the listener’s attention away from the established $G3/2$ dissonance, the duplets contradict the inherent ternary partitioning of the main beat by initiating a binary division and hinting at a diminution of the initial $G3/2$ to $G1.5/1$ (the dissonance between the “normal” and the duplet eighths).

¹⁵ Claude Debussy, “Regret,” in *Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy: Mélodies*. Série II, Vol. 2, ed. Marie Rolf (Paris: Durand, 2016), 61-63.

Example 5.13. “Regret” (1884), mm. 3-6

(1=8th)

The simultaneity of the metrical and antimetrical layers, namely the three-eighth-note against the two-eighth-note, and the duplet eighth-note against the “normal” eighth-note layer, forms a compound metrical dissonance. Were the time signatures notated accordingly, measures like this one would have been an example of polymeter: six-eight time would have been notated in the left-hand, three-four time in the right-hand, and two-four time in the vocal part.¹⁶

While the constant presence of the G3/2 dissonance characterizes both the opening A (mm. 1-18) and the closing A¹ (mm. 40-50) sections of the song’s ternary form, a progression from the G1.5/1 to a metrical consonance distinguishes the B section (mm. 19-39). The aforementioned brief occurrence of duplets in m. 5 foreshadows their prominence in the middle section of the song. Hence, in comparison to “Tragédie,” where the ternary form was delineated by the use of different displacement dissonances, in “Regret,” it is Debussy’s organization of grouping dissonances that delineates the form.

¹⁶ The same combination of dissonances occurs in mm. 23-24, and 42 of the *Œuvres Complètes* edition, but not in Salabert’s edition of “Regret.” For more information, see Appendix D2 and the pertinent footnote.

The displacement dissonances D6+2 and D6+4 that govern, respectively, the unfolding of the A and A¹ sections in “Tragédie” are related to Debussy’s setting of the text. In “Regret,” however, the dissonance G3/2 does not seem to emanate from the poem, or at least, not from the way Debussy sets the text to music. Considering that there is no syntactic group in the song whose syllables are delivered in the form of a trochaic or an iambic trimeter—although a potential for the latter can be found at the outset, in “De-vant le ciel d’é-té”—the poetic rhythm itself is not the source for this grouping dissonance. Instead, its presence seems to be inspired by the emotional content of the poem: since the poem expresses feelings of “faithful regret”¹⁷ over an ended relationship, it is likely that the conflicting emotions experienced by the lyric “I” have motivated Debussy to use G3/2 pervasively.

The G1.5/1 layer, however, might arise from the text, or rather, Debussy’s own declamation of it. As the word “tiède” in line 1 is usually pronounced slightly longer, as are the syllables of the word “calmé,” Debussy captures these elongations by introducing duplets (m. 5). They are brought back at the opening line of the second stanza with the words “Les astres brilleront” (mm. 19-20) and, in the ensuing measures (mm. 21-30), take over the left hand’s chime effect. Accompanying the entire second stanza, the duplets, therefore, permeate the first part of the song’s middle section as well (mm. 19-30). At first, they corroborate the poetic rhythm of the text (mm. 19-20), adding a glistening sheen to “les astres” in the text and making the conflict with the right-hand’s G3/2 (mm. 23-24) a bit more pronounced. As they persist in the piano part from there on (mm. 21-30)—and, being duplets, chime more frequently within each measure than the earlier left-hand notes—their presence instils a swelling of emotion and an

¹⁷ Paul Bourget, “Regret” (“Regret”), trans. by Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 3*, with Jennifer France (soprano), Jonathan McGovern (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA68016, 2014, CD, 7. The translation is also available online: Paul Bourget, “Regret,” trans. Richard Stokes, *Oxford Lieder*, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2806>.

increase in tension. Running alongside the triple subdivision of the beat in the right hand, they also successfully arouse the listener's awareness of the underlying sixteenth-note layer, which then rises to the surface with the last words of the stanza (m. 30).

The third stanza is brought on breathlessly: its opening line immediately follows the last eighth note—the last syllable—of the second stanza (mm. 30-31), thus anticipating a fervent outpouring of emotion. The chiming duplets of $G1.5/1$ are eliminated as of m. 31. Instead, the left-hand “tenor” line conforms to the notated meter by initiating a doubling of the vocal melody that continues in m. 32 with the octaves in the right-hand part (mm. 31-37). The delivery of lyrics is accelerated through an outburst of sixteenth notes that, aided by the highest pitches in the soprano part, brings on the emotional climax (m. 37).

While bearing the heaviest emotional load of the song, Debussy's setting of the poem's final stanza in the song's middle section (mm. 31-39) is metrically consonant, until its very last word “toi” (mm. 38-39). There, the grouping dissonance $G3/2$ returns, reinstating the conflict and commencing a metrically unresolved close. In mm. 40-47, Debussy brings back the opening two lines of the first stanza and delivers them over the continuing dissonance $G3/2$, thus suggesting a resignation to an unsettled emotional state (Example 5.14). The chiming duplets of $G1.5/1$ replace $G3/2$ in the last four measures of the song, recalling the second stanza and the sincere regret over lost love.

Example 5.14. "Regret" (1884), mm. 40-50

(1=8th)

40 1.5 1.5 1.5. 1.5

De - vant le ciel d'é - té, tiè - de et cal - mé, Je

44

me sou - viens de toi com - me d'un son - - -

47

ge.

3 3 3 etc.

1 1 1 1 1 1 etc.

1.5 2 1.5 1.5 1.5 1.5 1.5 2 1.5 1.5 1.5 1.5 1.5 1.5 2 1.5

In “Regret,” the persistent metrical dissonances enrich the unfolding of the notated meter. While the two grouping dissonances elevate the blood pressure, so to speak, and reveal an unsettled emotional state, neither of them is supported enough to modify the periodicity and suppress the governing presence of the six-eighth time signature. As their ticking aligns either with the downbeat (the 6-layer), or with the three-eighth-note layer of the notated meter, they preserve the song’s periodic unfolding.

5.3 “Le Lilas,” “Les Angéus” and the Subliminal Grouping Dissonance

Remarkable instances of grouping dissonance can be found in the piano part of one of Debussy’s early songs, “Le Lilas,” a setting of a poem by Banville (see Example 5.15). In the notated six-eighth time, we expect each eighth note to be divided into two sixteenths. At the opening, Debussy’s repetition of a descending arpeggiation, however, results in three-sixteenth groups, which he highlights with his beaming. The dissonance we see in the score is $G3/2$ ($1=16^{\text{th}}$). In the left hand, pedal fifths are followed by higher-pitched chords establishing $D12+4$ ($1=16^{\text{th}}$). With regards to the six-sixteenth-note layer, the placement of the chords also alludes to a grouping of four sixteenth notes, and to $G6/4$. Meanwhile, the vocal part, with its arrangement of eighth-note and longer values, as well as its placement of melodic leaps, clearly expresses the metrical layers expected in the notated six-eighth time.

Example 5.15. "Le Lilas" (1882), mm. 1-4¹⁸

(1=16th)

O flo - rai - son di - vi -

- ne du - li - las,

etc.

etc.

etc.

The left-hand accompaniment changes in the ensuing four measures (see Example 5.16), now moving in eighth-note duplets.

¹⁸ Claude Debussy, "Le Lilas," in *Sept Poèmes de Banville pour soprano léger et piano* (Paris: Jobert, 1984), 12-16.

Example 5.16. "Le Lilas" (1882), mm. 5-8

(1=16th)

5

Je te bé - nis, pour si

8

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

2 12 2 12

12 12

7

etc.

peu que tu dures!

etc.

etc.

etc.

2 2

These align with the metrically dissonant sixteenth-note groups, thus emphasizing $G_{3/2}$ (1=8th) in the first half of the measure, while the chord is shifted to the middle of the bar, thus corroborating the typical subdivision of six-eight time. The voice continues to align with the notated meter as well.

Measures of metrical consonance follow (mm. 10-16) in which the unfolding of the six-eight meter is clearly audible, regardless of the notated beaming, but as the song continues, G_{3/2} (1=16th) returns via a new sixteenth-note accompaniment pattern that persists for most of the remainder of the song (mm. 17-41). Listeners are downright tricked by this passage (see Example 5.17): for them, it is the vocal part that appears to be out of alignment with a perceived compound quadruple meter, and not the other way around.

Example 5.17. “Le Lilas” (1882), mm. 17-19

(1=16th)

The musical score for Example 5.17 shows three measures (17-19) in 6/8 time. The vocal line (top staff) has lyrics "En - fin l'ou - bli gué -" and is marked with "2" above it. The piano accompaniment (bottom staves) features a complex sixteenth-note pattern with "3" above it and "12" below it. The score is written in G major and 6/8 time.

Debussy leaves the most deceptive moment for the end (mm. 46-48), for the three crucial measures that lead to the last chord in mm. 49-50. Here (see Example 5.18), the duplets in the left hand corroborate the accentuation of the G_{3/2} sixteenths in the right hand, thus confirming the perceived compound quadruple meter. Again, it is the vocal part that comes across as metrically dissonant, although its rhythm continues to corroborate the notated six-eight time.

Overall, the strong and persistent presence of the metrical dissonance G_{3/2} in the piano causes an utter metrical confusion for the perceptive listener: regardless of the resolutions into metrical consonance (mm. 10-16 and mm. 43-46)—which in the given context sound like brief

changes of meter—the listener is left convinced of the song’s overall compound quadruple time. In relation to the narrative of Banville’s poem, the presence of metrical dissonance might be explained by the dichotomy of emotions that the lyric “I” expresses in the poem—the contradiction between the sorrowful memories and the exuberance instilled by the fireworks of colour brought on by the spring. The final image of trembling air and fluttering white doves might be another factor that inspired the “trembling” metrical dissonance.

Example 5.18. “Le Lilas” (1882), mm. 46-50

(1=16th)

46

Et l'air fré - mit, blanc des

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

12 12

2 2 2

48

vols de co - lom - bes.

2 2 2

3 12

12

The presence of metrical dissonance in this song draws the listener's attention to the antimetrical layer. As the primary layer is suppressed in the piano for the most part, the antimetrical layer emerges as the driving force and alters the expected periodicity of the notated meter. This is, therefore, an instance of subliminal grouping dissonance. Although the vocal part adheres to the primary (notated) metrical layer, the voice alone can seldom make the presence of the meter explicit.

Another powerful and thought-provoking example of a subliminal grouping dissonance is the one found in Debussy's setting of le Roy's poem "Les Angé-lus," as analyzed by Harald Krebs.¹⁹ "The first section (mm. 1-16) begins, as far as the surface is concerned, with metrical consonance," Krebs writes. "The eighth-note pulses are grouped into fours by the recurrence and sustention of the low C#s" and "the consonance [that they form] obviously conflicts with the notated [three-four] meter[.] [T]he song therefore begins with concealed dissonance—concealed because the notated meter has not yet been made explicit."²⁰ When the bar lines are removed, and the musical content is revealed the way it comes across to the listener, it becomes visible that the eighth-note groupings are not heard as a dissonance (see Example 5.19). It is only "as the voice enters," Krebs explains, that "the dissonance becomes audible," simply because Debussy's setting of the poetic rhythm, that is, the placement of durational accents given to SAs and LDAs begins to unveil the three-four meter.

¹⁹ Harald Krebs, "Rhythmische Konsonanz und Dissonanz," *Musiktheorie*. Vol. 9, no. 1 (1994): 27-37. (Translated by Harald Krebs.)

²⁰ Krebs, "Konsonanz und Dissonanz," 32.

Example 5.19. “Les Angélus” (1892): the opening [mm. 1-10]²¹

(1=8th)

(SA)

Modéré. (*avec un douceur triste*)

p

Clo-ches chre-tiën - nes pour le ma-

pp

(*Ped. sourd.*)

4 4 4 (etc.)

(LDA) (SA) (LDA)

ti - nes, Son - nant au coeur d'es-per-rer en - co - re!

dim.

The durational accents of the ensuing two poetic lines, namely the placement of their SAs and LDAs, however, start to foreshadow a change of meter (see Example 5.20, mm. 13-16). They begin to align more often with pattern-beginning accents, thus bringing forth a metrical consonance. The progression is confirmed by the ensuing change of meter to two-four time.

²¹ Claude Debussy, “Les Angélus” (Paris: J. Hamelle n.d. (1893); repr., New York: Dover, 1981), 63-65.

Example 5.20. "Les Angé-lus" (1892), mm. 11-16

(1=8th)

11 (LDA)

An - ge - lus an - ge - li - sés d'au - ro - re!

14 (SA) (SA) (LDA) *retenu. - - -*

Las! où sont vos pri - è - res ca - li - nes?

pp

The B section of the song is notated in the latter (two-four) meter, meaning that the eighth-note figure is now embraced by a metrical consonance (see Example 5.21). The changes of pitch in the vocal part also articulate this meter, although the placement of syllables is counter-rhythmic.

Example 5.21. “Les Angélu” (1892), mm. 17-21
--

17 **Même mouv^t**

Vous é - tiez de si dou - ces fo - li -

Text

p

The closing A¹ section is delineated in the score by Debussy’s return to three-four meter, in which the G6/4 dissonance persists subliminally until the final few measures. There, as the song approaches its closure (mm. 47-53), the three-four meter is finally established. The song’s metrical design, therefore, features a progression from a dissonance to a consonance to a dissonance, which Krebs relates to the text. In his words, “one could [...] suppose that the tendency of the music to introduce duple consonance is linked to the striving of the poet to return to a happy past and to grasp a fleeting hope. The fact that the lines that most directly refer to the past are coordinated with the duple consonance (see the beginning of the middle section), supports this hypothesis. The dissolution of the duple consonance at the end may suggest the fact that the poet’s striving is futile.”²²

There are similarities between the narrative of le Roy’s “Les Angélu” and Paul Bourget’s poem “Regret” that Debussy set to music eight years earlier. Both express a sense of longing for a lost love, to which there is no return. In addition, analyses of the two songs’

²² Krebs, “Konsonanz und Dissonanz,” 36.

metrical design show that Debussy's use of metrical dissonance and consonance in "Les Angélu" finds something of a twin in "Regret."

In both songs, progressions of metrical states unfold in the same order. They are, however, achieved differently. The metrical consonance in the middle section of "Les Angélu" is created by the notated change of meter, namely, from three-four to two-four, and thus it embraces, so to speak, the persisting G6/4 dissonance with its inherent meter. The eighth-note grouping, therefore, that "happens" to be a dissonance in both A and A¹ sections of "Les Angélu," reaches home in the middle section. In "Regret," however, the notated meter does not change. Metrical consonance is achieved through the elimination of dissonance, i.e., through reconciling the musical content with the notated meter. In both cases, the passages reminiscing about the times when the two lovers were together are portrayed by the metrical consonance, and their separation along with the resultant longing and discontent, by metrical dissonance.

With regards to periodicity, the preceding analyses demonstrate that Debussy creates two types of grouping dissonance: the one illustrated in "Regret," where the periodicity of the notated meter remains unaltered despite the antimetrical layers that continually conflict with its unfolding; and the other exemplified in "Le Lilas" and "Les Angélu," where the antimetrical layers impose a mode of periodicity that is different from the notated meter. In the case of "Regret," the metrical layer is audible and maintained, while in the latter two songs, the notated meter becomes inaudible, or "unarticulated" to use Krebs's term, thus galvanizing the antimetrical layer and creating the aforementioned state of subliminal metrical dissonance.

As the subliminal dissonance might be unnoticeable for the listeners—they would be perceiving an entirely different meter from that which is notated or, in the case of changes of periodicity, the effect of a metrical modulation—it is imperative to return to the

recommendations provided by Krebs in his discussion about subliminal metrical dissonance. Rather than perform such passages as if they were new metrical consonances, Krebs suggests that “the performer can subtly stress a heavily contradicted and otherwise unarticulated primary metrical layer.” In his words, while “strongly stated antimetrical layers will certainly remain audible, [...] the performer’s gentle reminders of the suppressed metrical layer will create a perceptibly dissonant effect.” Krebs’s direction voices the efforts of composers who “so tortuously notated such conflicts,” and who “surely did not mean them to be a secret between themselves and the performer, but rather wished performers to communicate them. The performer must encourage listeners to join him or her in sensing a subliminal metrical dissonance instead of simply giving themselves over to the new and different state of consonance that the musical surface suggests.”²³ As demanding an achievement as this may prove to be in performance of Debussy’s “Le Lilas” and “Les Angéus,” it is worth the effort, as the composer himself was, indisputably, aware of the metrical and rhythmic assumptions associated with the chosen—and notated—time signature(s).

5.4 “En Sourdine,” Counter-Rhythmic Text-Setting, and Compound Metrical Dissonance

Among antimetrical devices that destabilize metrical consonance, there is a particular type of displacement that Debussy uses for text-expressive reasons: in his setting of a poetic phrase, line or a fragment, he positions the succession of syllables in such a way that the weak poetic stresses align with accented metrical positions, thus producing what I have termed as a counter-rhythmic effect. Although instances of displaced syllables were already included in his first *mélodie*, “Madrid,” it is important to point out that they resulted there from a formulaic

²³ Harald Krebs, “Metrical Progressions and Processes,” in *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 47.

setting of the text. In songs where the text does not adhere to an established dance rhythm, the counter-rhythmic technique emerges as an expressive device.

A very early example can be found in Debussy's setting of Banville's "Caprice" (Example 5.22). There, the placement of the fragment "me re-pous-sant de tes bras" creates a brief counter-rhythmic effect, resulting in the declamation "me re-pous-sant |DE tes bras."

Example 5.22. "Caprice" (1880), mm. 13-14²⁴

13

Et, me re - pous - sant de tes bras, Tu

The meaning of the text in the first stanza reveals the reason for Debussy's decision:

Quand je baise, pâle de fièvre,
Ta lèvre où court une chanson,
Tu détournes les yeux, ta lèvre
Reste froide comme un glaçon,
Et, me repoussant de tes bras,
Tu dis que je ne t'aime pas.

When, pale with fever, I kiss your lips
From which a song sounds forth,
You avert your eyes, your lips
Remain as cold as icicles,
And, thrusting me from your arms,
You say that I do not love you.²⁵

The counter-rhythmic positioning of the fragment "thrusting me from your arms" bolsters the act

²⁴ Claude Debussy, "Caprice," in *Three Songs for Madame Vasnier*, ed. Nigel Foster (London: London Song Festival Publications, 2013), 10-12.

²⁵ Théodore de Banville, "Caprice" ("Caprice"), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 3*, with Jennifer France (soprano), Jonathan McGovern (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA68016, 2014, CD, 14-15.

of being pushed away by the lover, as experienced by the lyric “I.”

This is not an isolated instance of Debussy’s use of this technique in a portrayal of a rejection that is either expressed physically, or is felt as such by the lyric “I.” For example, his multiple settings of “En Sourdine” demonstrate that he creates such a counter-rhythmic effect deliberately in order to highlight the decisive moment of the poem’s narrative. To demonstrate this aspect of Debussy’s technique, I will revisit a few poetic lines from the two originally published settings of Verlaine’s “En Sourdine,” and focus on a single rhythmic alteration found in the second setting, whose location, in the light of the song’s other rhythmic and metrical events (to be discussed below), reveals its expressive purpose.²⁶

A comparison of “En Sourdine” from the collection *Recueil Vasnier* (1882)²⁷ and the later setting of the song, as published in *Fêtes galantes I* (1903), shows that Debussy’s settings of the text differ substantially from each other. In the earlier song, there are quite a few curious instances of his treatment of the poetic rhythm that are corrected in the later setting. In the first stanza of the first setting, line 4 is placed counter-rhythmically, “de |**CE** si-len-**ce** pro-|**FOND**,” and then corrected in the later setting into “de **ce** si-|**LEN**-ce pro-**fond**,” thus aligning the SA and LDA of the line with metrically accented beats (see Example 5.23).

²⁶ As mentioned in the review of sources, Marie Rolf has compared text settings from the many manuscripts and the originally published editions of “En Sourdine,” in Marie Rolf, “Debussy Settings of Verlaine’s ‘En Sourdine,’” in *Perspectives on Music: Essays on Collections at the Humanities Research Center*, eds. Dave Oliphant and Thomas Zigel, 205-233 (Austin, Texas: Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, 1985). My analysis, however, provides additional information.

²⁷ Claude Debussy, “En Sourdine,” *Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy: Mélodies (1882-1887)*, Série II, vol. II, ed. Marie Rolf, (Paris: Durand, 2016), 7-10.

Example 5.23. “En Sourdine”: Debussy’s settings of line 4²⁸

8
Vasnier 1882



De ce si-len-ce pro-fond.

8
pbd. 1903



De ce si - len - ce pro fond.

In the third stanza, parts of the first line are set counter-rhythmically, and so is the opening of the third line: “|**FER**-me tes yeux à de-|**MI**,” and “|**ET** de ton cœur en-dor-|**MI**.” Their placement is improved in the later setting, as well: “|**FER**-me tes yeux à de-|**MI**,” and “et de ton |**COEUR** en-dor-|**MI**.” Again, Debussy aligns SAs and LDAs of the two lines with accented beats (Example 5.24).

Example 5.24. “En Sourdine”: Debussy’s settings of lines 9 and 11

19
Vasnier 1882



Fer - me tes yeux à de - mi

18
pbd. 1903



Fer - me tes yeux à de - mi

23
Vasnier 1882



Et de ton cœur en - dor - mi

²⁸ Claude Debussy, “En Sourdine,” in *Fêtes galantes I* (Paris: Fromont, 1903), 2-5.

22
pbd. 1903

Et de ton cœur en - dor - mi

Detailed description: This musical score is for the published 1903 version of 'En Sourdine'. It shows a single line of music in treble clef, key of D major (two sharps), and 3/4 time. The melody consists of six notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), and A4 (quarter). The lyrics 'Et de ton cœur en - dor - mi' are aligned under the notes.

It is important to notice that in the earlier version of the song, these lines, paired by their rhyme endings, are set to the same rhythm. In the published version, however, Debussy does not impose the rhythm of the first line on that of the third: their rhythms are individualized.

A similar situation is found between lines 2 and 4 in the fourth stanza: the word “souffle” is given a peculiar placement in the measure, “au souf-**fle** ber-**ceur** et |**DOUX**,” and the fourth line, mirroring its “partner in rhyme,” is set counter-rhythmically, “les on-**des** de **ga**-zon |**ROUX**.” Debussy’s elongations of the syllables “souf-” and “on-” give them durational accents, however, that in his effort to portray the wind and the waves of grass to some extent counteract the odd placement of these syllables. Both are refined in the later setting, as Debussy places the accented syllables to stronger metrical positions, as follows: “au |**SOUF**-fle ber-**ceur** et **doux**,” and “les **on**-des **de** ga-zon |**ROUX**” (Example 5.25).

Example 5.25. “En Sourdine”: Debussy’s settings of lines 14 and 16

28
Vasnier 1882

Au souf - fle ber - ceur et doux

27
pbd. 1903

Au souf - fle ber - ceur et doux

Detailed description: This block contains two musical scores. The top score is for the 1882 version by Vasnier, showing a line of music in treble clef, key of D major, and 3/4 time. The melody is: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), and A4 (quarter). The lyrics are 'Au souf - fle ber - ceur et doux'. The bottom score is for the published 1903 version, also in treble clef, key of D major, and 3/4 time. The melody is: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), and A4 (quarter). The lyrics are 'Au souf - fle ber - ceur et doux'. A triplet of eighth notes (B4, C5, B4) is marked above the notes for 'ber - ceur'.

32
Vasnier 1882

Les on - des de ga - zon roux

30
pbd. 1903

Les on - des de ga - zon roux

Detailed description: The image shows two musical staves in 3/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The top staff, labeled 'Vasnier 1882' and measure 32, shows a melody for 'Les on - des de ga - zon roux'. The notes are: G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (half). The bottom staff, labeled 'pbd. 1903' and measure 30, shows a melody for 'Les on - des de ga - zon roux'. The notes are: G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (half). A triplet of notes (B4, C5, B4) is marked above the 6th, 7th, and 8th notes.

Contrary to these refinements, however, a comparison of the two settings reveals an instance of Debussy’s deliberate weakening of the previously created alignment: the first two syllables of the line “Qui |**VIENT** à tes **pieds** ri-|**DER**” in the fourth stanza, although congruent with the natural accentuation in the earlier version, are set counter-rhythmically in the later setting, “[**QUI** vient à tes **pieds** ri-|**DER**.” Furthermore, Verlaine’s ensuing enjambment—the line “les **on-des** de **ga-zon** **roux**” that originally mirrored the rhythm of line 2 and resulted in a counter-rhythmic setting—is now hastened in the music: “les on-**des** de **ga-zon** |**ROUX**” becomes “les **on-des** **de** ga-zon |**ROUX**” (Example 5.26).

Example 5.26. “En Sourdine”: Debussy’s settings of lines 15 and 16

30
Vasnier 1882

Qui vient à tes pieds ri - der Les on - des de ga-zon roux

37
pbd. 1903

Qui vient à tes pieds ri - der Les on - des de ga-zon roux

Detailed description: The image shows two musical staves in 3/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The top staff, labeled 'Vasnier 1882' and measure 30, shows a melody for 'Qui vient à tes pieds ri - der Les on - des de ga-zon roux'. The notes are: G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (half). The bottom staff, labeled 'pbd. 1903' and measure 37, shows a melody for 'Qui vient à tes pieds ri - der Les on - des de ga-zon roux'. The notes are: G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (half). A triplet of notes (B4, C5, B4) is marked above the 6th, 7th, and 8th notes.

In combination with the preceding line, “[**QUI** vient à tes **pieds** ri-|**DER** les **on-des** **de** gaz-on |**ROUX**,” the length of this counter-rhythmic passage might be signalling a commotion, a

shakeup, or even a confrontation. But, if so, why? What is hidden in between the lines of this poem that would inspire such a displacement of text?

It is clear that the scene features two lovers, in a setting that appears to be idyllic: we find the couple under the lofty branches of a tree, enjoying the last moments of the daylight together, before the evening sets in. The lines in question, “qui vient, à tes pieds, rider // Les ondes des gazons roux” refer to a gentle breeze, which creates waves in russet grass, rippling towards the other lover’s feet. But surely the reason for Debussy’s counter-rhythmic setting could not have been the breeze alone! As we read on, we sense a change in the mood with the words “solennel” (“solemnly”), “chênes noirs” (“dark oaks”), and “notre désespoir” (“our despair”), and we wonder whether the song of the nightingale announces something more significant than just an ending to the day and to the lovers’ quiet moment together.

A closer look at the score of the second version reveals that the initial austerity of the first stanza, as set in the slowly unfolding simple triple meter, is livened up in m. 11 by a subtle change in tempo and by the relatively fast-paced dissonance D3+1.5 (1=triplet 8th)—a dissonance present from the beginning of the song, suggesting a prominent part of the song of a nightingale.²⁹ The antimetrical layer of this dissonance is emphasized, as at the opening, by *tenuto* markings in the piano. In m. 14, the dissonance ends with the nightingales “chirrup,” which leads into the dissonance G9/6 in the piano (the antimetrical 6-layer is created by a repetition of two-chord progressions); this slow-paced dissonance seems to be Debussy’s portrayal of “the hazy languor of arbutus and pine.”³⁰ The third stanza is launched with the entry

²⁹ The song of the nightingale includes repeated sustained notes similar to those that Debussy writes here.

³⁰ Paul Verlaine, “En Sourdine” (“Muted”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 2*, with Lorna Anderson and Lisa Milne (sopranos), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67883, 2012, CD, 5. The translation is also available online: Paul Verlaine, “En Sourdine” (“Muted”), trans. Richard Stokes, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2825>.

of triplets in the piano accompaniment of m. 18, which invigorates the pace, and initiates more frequent, however brief instances of conflict with the duple eighth-notes, i.e., the dissonance $G1.5/1$.

In m. 24, Debussy begins to group the triplet eighth-notes into pairs, resulting in the new dissonance $G3/2$ (see Example 5.27). As we enter the fourth stanza in m. 26, the added intervals in the right hand make this $G3/2$ more prominent. Here, the interaction between the duple eighth-notes in the voice and the triplet eighth-notes in the piano (i.e., $G1.5/1$) is presented as an open contradiction of pulses and, interlaced with the duple grouping of triplets (i.e., $G3/2$), it produces a compound metrical dissonance.

Example 5.27. “En Sourdine” (1890), mm. 24-27

(1=triplet 8th)

24

sein.

pp

2 2 2 2 2

3 3 3 3 3

9 9

26 $1.5 \quad 1.5 \quad 1.5 \quad 1.5 \quad 1.5 \quad 1.5$
Intimement doux

Lais - sons - nous per - su - a - der Au

2 2 2 2 2
 9 3 3 3 3 3

This rhythmic structure is repeated in m. 29, but now the counter-rhythmic organization of accents in the line “|**QUI** vient à tes **pi**eds, ri-**DER**” adds another level of metrical instability to this measure (Example 5.28). With the ensuing enjambment in m. 30, the rest of the lyrics rush in, and as the last word of the stanza peaks on the dotted half-note of m. 31—the highest vocal pitch so far—the simultaneous entry of duple eighth-notes in the bass under the now syncopated triplets (resulting in D3+2), forms a palpable two-against-three conflict, amplified by the displacement caused by the ties.

Example 5.28. “En Sourdine” (1890), mm. 29-32

(1=triplet 8th)

29

1.5 1.5 1.5 1.5 1.5 1.5 1.5 1.5 1.5 1.5 1 1 1

Qui vient à tes pieds ri - der Les on - des de ga - zon

Poco cresc.

31 **Un peu plus lent**

roux.

1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 6

3 3 3 3 3 1.5 1.5

1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1

3 3 3 3 3 3 3

The interaction of these devices, reinforced by the underlying change of tempo, is experienced as a profound contrast to the established pace: an abrupt metrical disruption is followed by a prolonged metrical ambiguity, both of which produce a sweeping change in the metrical course of the song. As one can hear in Nan Merriman’s recording,³¹ the metrical

³¹ Claude Debussy, “En Sourdine,” on *Nan Merriman Sings French & Spanish Songs*, with Nan Merriman (mezzo-soprano) and Gerald Moore (piano), Testament SBT 1134, 1998, CD. (Original release by EMI, 1955.)

ambiguity—the moment in which we can neither decipher the pace nor anticipate whether the original tempo is ever going to be re-established—is eventually followed by the establishment of the simple triple meter (m. 37), but in a somewhat hesitant, almost incapacitated state.

The elements of the upcoming metrical disruption are introduced gradually, but the culmination is ultimately pursued at the entry of the fourth stanza (at m. 33), with a duel between the duple eighth notes of the voice and triplet eighth notes of the piano part. The counter-rhythmic treatment of the text further intensifies this conflict, but it is with the entry of the duple eighth-notes in the piano left-hand, under the syncopated triplets (m. 31), that the disruption is launched: the superimposed layers here instil a sensation of disintegration, ‘breakdown,’ ‘falling apart’, one might say, and it seems as if the ensuing time, helped by the notated slowing down, is passing by in a sense of uncertainty while the content is being ‘pulled back together’ into some form of meter. There is a sense of drama in this moment, a profound change of emotion, which compels further exploration of the poem.

In the aforementioned *Guide for Singers*, David Hunter supplies an analysis of “En Sourdine” in which he rationalizes Verlaine’s prosodic technique. He explains that the heptasyllabic meter in which this poem is written “was [...] used deliberately by poets such as Verlaine to suggest unbalanced, even anxious states.”³² Proclaiming that, in this poem, “we are in Verlainian erotic discontent [...],” Hunter points out that the masculine rhymes imply not a two-person conversation, but “an insistent, even wheedling male voice [that] tries to impose its own vision of erotic satisfaction on a partner, whose response, were she (or he) given the chance to answer, might not be positive.”³³ In addition, he reveals that the organization of the rhyme within stanzas is structured as if “the speaker has to constantly invent new arguments to support

³² David Hunter, *Understanding French Verse: A Guide for Singers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 90.

³³ Hunter, *Understanding French Verse*, 91.

his position.”³⁴

Hunter’s interpretation of the role of Verlaine’s poetic devices sheds light on the purpose of the described metrical breakdown in Debussy’s setting: the created sense of ‘falling apart’ might be a portrayal of a feeling of letdown caused by the lover’s rejection. This notion would be supported by the song of the nightingale that is mentioned at the end of Verlaine’s poem, signifying (according to another literary theorist, Clive Scott) “a song of lost love.”³⁵ Hunter’s and Scott’s insights into the poem provide a context for both mm. 29-30 as a precipitation, and for mm. 31-32 as a culmination and impact, and place them at the pinnacle of an emotional drama. Furthermore, these insights support the notion that the function of Debussy’s counter-rhythmic treatment of poetry, along with the metrical dissonance created in the music, is to express the emotions arising abruptly from rejection.

The comparison of lines 15 and 16 in the two versions of “En Sourdine,” revealing that the regular distribution of accents is rendered in irregular form in the later setting, confirms that Debussy’s counter-rhythmic distribution of syllables is deliberate. Moreover, the purely musical context of this effect—the delicate metrical and rhythmic compositional procedures that surround it, and their correspondence to the narrative of the poem—indicates that the location of this prosodic irregularity is premeditated, too: it is created to foreshadow or even precipitate the upcoming metrical dissonance, disruption and ambiguity in the music, and thus reinforce the emotional content of the poem. Therefore, Debussy’s ultimate objective was not merely to depict, but rather to *release* the actual emotion of the lyric “I” through music and have the listener *experience* it.

Looking back to the earlier rendition of “En Sourdine,” one may question whether all

³⁴ Hunter, 91.

³⁵ Clive Scott, *The Riches of Rhyme: Studies in French Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 250.

counter-rhythmic settings found in it, as well as in Debussy's other early songs, were premeditated. As the distortion of poetic rhythm has been found in the songs of composers that preceded Debussy, his early—what we have assumed to be 'awkward' attempts—might have been aimed at expressing the content of the poem, but with a different device: it is plausible that the counter-rhythmic settings of “|**FER**-me tes yeux à de-|**MI**,” in the first rendition was the device chosen to launch, with this poetic line, a sense of the lover's disapproval, a sense of resistance, perhaps even a struggle that resulted in the lyric “I” being pushed away from the lover's arms. Debussy's launching of the triplets in the piano part of the later version of “En Sourdine,” however, creates a more stimulating and energizing moment. By choosing a more suitable location for the counter-rhythmic effect, prolonging it with the hastened enjambment, and following it with a number of rhythmic and metrical dissonances, Debussy induced the drama in the later setting in a more masterly way. As the described, sophisticated procedures are found only in the later rendition of “En Sourdine,” they reveal a change in his own understanding of the poem.

Instances of the same type of text displacement that result in its counter-rhythmic setting occur in a number of Debussy's later songs, too. For instance, in “Dans le Jardin” by Paul Gravallet, the fragment “je m'égratignais” (“I scratched myself [on the thorns]”³⁶) is set counter-rhythmically (see Example 5.29). Again, this setting captures a physically unpleasant moment. While “peer[ing] into the garden, furtively, through the hedge,” the lyrical “I” experienced physical and then emotional discomfort: “My fingers bled from the mulberries, and my suffering was divine.”

³⁶ Paul Gravallet, “Dans le Jardin” (“In the Garden”), trans. Richard Miller, in *Debussy: Intégrale des mélodies*, Harmonia mundi/Ligia LIDI 0201285-14, 2014, CD booklet, 141.

Example 5.29. “Dans le Jardin” (1903), mm. 22-23³⁷

(1=triplet 16th)

Analogously to the counter-rhythmic lines from “En Sourdine,” the fragment is superimposed on triplets in the piano, thus creating an additional conflict—that of duple and triple sixteenth notes, G1.5/1 (1=triplet 16th). Furthermore, the eighth note placed on the second beat of these two measures creates a durational accent, thus forming the displacement dissonance D9+3. The simultaneity of these dissonances produces compound dissonance, which enhances the impact of a physically unpleasant experience.

In the setting of “Nuit sans fin,” the first of the two *Nuits blanches* poems written by Debussy himself, the composer displaces the last part of the line “Cœur rompu, // Fièvre du sang // **ryth-mant les dou-ces syl-la-bes de son nom**” (“Broken heart, // the fevered blood // that beats out the sweet syllables of her name”).³⁸ While the sixteenth notes in the vocal part are congruent with the notated quadruple meter and further supported by the accompaniment, the eight-note

³⁷ Claude Debussy, “Dans le Jardin” (Paris: J. Hamelle, 1905), 20-24.

³⁸ Claude Debussy, “Nuit sans fin” (“Sleepless Nights”), trans. Richard Miller, in *Claude Debussy: Intégrale des mélodies*, Harmonia mundi/Ligia LIDI 0201285-14, 2014, CD, 138.

triplets woven into the piano right-hand part create $G1/0.75$ (1=triplet 8th) with the already displaced text. Through the counter-rhythmic accentuation of the parsed word fragments, Debussy portrays the body of the lyric “I” in a feverishly agitated state, the consequence of being rejected by the beloved. The added metrical dissonance produces quite a remarkable sense of distress in this passage, enhanced further by a decrease in tempo (see Example 5.30).

Example 5.30. “Nuit sans fin” (1898), mm. 4-5³⁹

(1=triplet 8th)

Très retenu

4

Cœur rom-pu, Fiè-vre du sang ryth-mant les dou-ces syl-la-bes de son nom

Très retenu

pp doux et caressant

12

.75 .75 .75 .75 .75 .75 .75 .75 .75 .75 .75 .75

3 12 3 3 3 3

Even Debussy’s last *mélodie*, the setting of his own “Noël des enfants qui n’ont plus de maison,” features counter-rhythmic effects. For example, the fragment “**les en-ne-mis ont tout PRIS**” (“The enemies have taken everything”) is displaced (m. 6), thus conveying a disapproval through the voices of children (see Example 5.31). In addition, the vocal part, notated in duple eighth notes and 4/4 time, is superimposed on the triple eighth-note groups of the 12/8 time in

³⁹ Claude Debussy, “Nuit sans fin,” in *Nuits blanches*, ed. Denis Herlin (Paris: Durand, 2000), 1-3.

the piano. The simultaneity of the two meters creates the metrical dissonance G1.5/1, which according to Wheeldon, “adds an element of urgency” to the song.⁴⁰ Through these elements, Debussy expresses his own resentment towards the violence of war.⁴¹

Example 5.31. “Noël des enfants qui n’ont plus de maison” (1915), mm. 6-7

(1=8th)

The musical score for Example 5.31 consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in 4/4 time and begins at measure 6 with the lyrics "Les en - ne - mis ont tout pris,". The piano accompaniment is in 12/8 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and sixteenth notes. The score is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes measure numbers 6, 12, and 12.

Debussy’s counter-rhythmic portrayal of the aforementioned poetic lines and fragments represents a technique with which he portrays a physical resistance. Whether it is experienced by the lyric “I” as a rejection of an embrace (as in “Caprice”) or of an intimate encounter (as in “En Sourdine”), as a reaction to a bodily injury (as in “Dans le Jardin”), to a state of distress (as in “Nuit sans fin”) or to the horrors of war (as in “Noël”), Debussy’s inspiration for creating

⁴⁰ Marianne Wheeldon, *Debussy’s Late Style* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009): 33.

⁴¹ Marianne Wheeldon’s discussion of the song supports this interpretation by pointing out that “Debussy’s words, which are far from subtle” voice “general patriotic fervor rather than the sentiments of young children.” See Wheeldon, *Debussy’s Late Style*, 30-31. Debussy’s sentiment is further confirmed in his response to Henri Büsser who asked for permission to orchestrate this song: “No, no, I have already refused it to André Caplet. [...] Not a word must be lost, inspired as it is by the rapacity of our enemies. It is the only way I have to fight the war.” Wheeldon, *Debussy’s Late Style*, 36. (Wheeldon’s translation is taken from Cobb, *The Poetic Debussy*, 177.)

counter-rhythmic effects is rooted deeply within the poem's narrative. Without it, such subtle revelations would remain hidden between the lines.

A substantial number of Debussy's *mélodies* features an array of metrical dissonances. While some of the dissonances are juxtaposed within metrical progressions, others are superimposed to produce compound dissonance. Based on the aforementioned songs, it would be true to say that Debussy uses metrical progressions to portray the stages in the gradual unfolding of the poems' narratives. As the three stanzas of "Tragédie," for example, convey a tripartite experience, Debussy's tripartite progression of metrical dissonance comes as a direct response to the poem's stanzaic structure. Such is the case not only with the three stanzas of "Tragédie" and "Les Angéus," but also with the five stanzas of "En Sourdine."

With regards to periodicity, in "Tragédie" and "Regret," the described metrical progressions (whether involving simple or compound dissonances) do not have an effect on the periodic unfolding of the notated meter, because the metrical layer remains articulated in the piano part throughout each song. In the described sections of "Le Lilas" and, particularly so, in "Les Angéus," however, the metrical layer—upheld mainly by the organization of accents in the vocal part—is largely inaudible. As a result, the progression from subliminal grouping dissonance to metrical consonance and vice versa alters the periodicity of metrical unfolding, communicating a change of meter to the receptive listener. While the performers may put every effort into maintaining the metrical dissonance rather than succumbing to what might sound as a metrical modulation, the audibility/discernibility of specific parts of the music score (vocal versus piano, for instance), as well as the organization of accents within them, might not always facilitate the desired result.

With regards to superimposed or compound dissonances, however, their simultaneity can influence the ongoing notated meter in a more obstructive way and, by doing so, create novel and metrically intricate effects. An interruption, or even a momentary loss of periodicity (owing to a compound dissonance combined with a change of tempo), is present in “En Sourdine,” following the counter-rhythmic setting of the text. There, the compound dissonance is used only for a moment in order to enhance the impact of a specific event within the metrical progression that unfolds along with the narrative. As will be seen, there are *mélodies* in which passages of compound dissonance result in even more surprising effects, those that interrupt, obscure, or even arrest the established periodicity.

Chapter Six

Metrical Neutrality

Metrically neutral passages are devoid of accents that reveal the downbeat. Their recurring rhythmic gesture is at most a beat long and, as it repeats, it generates only the pulse or a micropulse, as opposed to slower-moving interpretive layers. Consequently, the rhythmic gesture acts as a metronome, leaving the listener in anticipation of a downbeat.

When framed by a metrical grid, such a passage may instill a sense of downbeats: aware of bar lines and the various accents on which they are based, the performer may, by force of habit, choose to emphasize the downbeat of the relevant gesture. Depending on the context in which a metrically neutral passage is situated, such traditional reactions might not always be appropriate in the performance of Debussy's songs. The examples below will speak for themselves.

The metrically neutral passages in Debussy's *mélodies* are invariably brief. Depending on where they occur in a song, however, they can either dissolve an already present metrical layer, or, by concealing the downbeat, they can prevent the meter from emerging. Accordingly, metrically neutral passages introduced well after the beginning might not necessarily be perceived as such, because of the listener's projection of an established metrical layer that carries on the downbeats from the preceding measures. When placed at the beginning of a song, however, a metrically neutral passage can "set the wheels in motion," as it were, by maintaining the pulse layer until other layers join in to create a sense of meter.

The Verlaine setting “Il pleure dans mon cœur” opens with a metrically neutral passage.¹ Debussy supplies reiterated broken major thirds in slurred groups of four sixteenth notes (see Example 6.1). One may be tempted to argue that, by definition, the bar line itself implies a heavier accent on the downbeats, but Debussy’s instructions *triste et monotone* and *con sordini* imply an even repetition of equally quiet and subdued pitches, conveying a sad and somewhat monotonous mood. In addition, Debussy’s own 1904 recording of the song confirms the absence of accents.² He plays the opening thirds so quickly that, aside from barely being able to perceive the pulse layer, one also wonders whether a few extra thirds have unnoticeably been added without anyone noticing (and whether it actually matters). In the context of the poem, this metrically neutral passage “imitate[s] the falling rain, and the nearly constant appearance of sixteenth notes throughout the song reflects the rain’s importance for Verlaine’s text.”³

Example 6.1. “Il pleure dans mon cœur” (1887 and 1903), mm. 1-6⁴

Modérément animé (*triste et monotone*)

The musical score shows the first six measures of the piece. The piano part consists of a continuous stream of broken major thirds (F#-A, C#-E, G#-B) in the right hand, slurred across measures. The left hand is mostly silent, with a few notes in the final measure. The tempo is marked 'Modérément animé' and the mood is 'triste et monotone'. Dynamics range from *pp* to *p*.

¹ Although this song was published twice (in the collection *Ariettes*, Paris: V[eu]ve E. Girod, 1888; and in *Ariettes Oubliées*, Paris: Fromont, 1903), the opening measures discussed here are identical in both publications.

² Claude Debussy, *The Composer as a Pianist*, with Mary Garden (soprano), Claude Debussy (piano), Pierian PIR0001, 2000, CD. (Re-release of 1904 and 1913 piano rolls).

³ Lori Seitz Rider, “Lyrical Movements of the Soul’: Poetry and Persona in the *Cinq Poèmes de Baudelaire* and *Ariettes Oubliées* of Claude Debussy” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2002): 261. Also, Arthur Wenk points out “the cessation of the rain in the accompaniment” in the second stanza. Arthur B. Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 61.

⁴ Claude Debussy, “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” in *Ariettes oubliées* (Paris: Fromont, 1913), 4-9.

4 *p*

Il pleu - - - re dans mon

As there is no commitment to a tonality, the opening passage is also harmonically neutral, neither clearly major nor minor, thus foreshadowing the poem’s message revealed in the last stanza: “The worst sorrow is not knowing why—without love and without hatred—my heart is so sad.”⁵

A metrically neutral passage also launches the setting of Debussy’s own *prose lyrique* “De Grève” (Example 6.2). The opening two-eighth-note gesture repeats six times without change. Again, while the pianist could add accents on the basis of the bar lines, Debussy’s instructions to the performers, *Très égal et très sourd*, discourage such efforts. As this passage portrays either the restless rippling of tiny waves (“petites vagues”) in an anticipation of a storm, or the rain as in Verlaine’s aforementioned poem—or a combination of both—Debussy creates an evenly ruffled texture for the seascape that he aims to paint.

⁵ Paul Verlaine, “Il pleure dans mon cœur” (“It Weeps in my Heart”), trans. Richard Miller, in *Claude Debussy: Intégrale des mélodies*, with Liliana Faraon and Magali Léger (sopranos), Marie-Ange Todorovitch (mezzo-soprano), Gilles Ragon (tenor), François le Roux (baritone), and Jean-Louis Haguenaer (piano), Harmonia mundi/Ligia LIDI 0201285-14, 2014, CD, 115.

Example 6.2. “De Grève” (1893), mm. 1-2⁶

Modéré (mais sourdement agité)

pp très égal et très sourd

The setting of Villon’s “Ballade des femmes de Paris,” one of Debussy’s late songs, provides another example of a metrically neutral passage. It follows a metrically irregular opening in unison (mm. 1-4) that, with its somewhat erratic and unpredictable rhythm, appears to be simulating the chatter of an individual. In m. 5, the role of the piano changes: it initiates an accompaniment pattern in which, although a single downbeat is articulated by this change of texture, only low-level layers—the sixteenth-, eighth-, and quarter-note layers—are clearly audible (see Example 6.3). It appears as if the chatter of an individual has grown into a murmur of a crowd. When the vocal part enters in m. 9, its declamation of the first seven syllables on D#5 does not give a clear indication of the meter either. Another downbeat is distinctly heard at m. 11: the change of pitch in the vocal part and the longer note value in support of the poetic line’s LDA (“lan-ga-giè-res”) are braced by the change of harmony in the piano, and reinforced by a tenuto and a dynamic accent on the first sixteenth note. The chord in the piano part changes on the second beat, under the *e muet* ending, thus delineating the second beat of the two-four measure. The duple meter is finally established.

⁶ Claude Debussy, “De Grève,” in *Proses lyriques* (Paris: Fromont, 1895), 9-15.

Example 6.3: "Ballade des femmes de Paris" (1910), mm. 1-11⁷

Alerte et gai

Alerte et gai

5

pp

9

Quoy qu'on tient bel - les lan - ga - giè - res

⁷ Claude Debussy, "Ballade des femmes de Paris," in *Trois Ballades de François Villon* (Paris: Durand, 1910), 11-18.

Again, it could be argued that the bar line should play a role here with regards to accentuation (and, to be sure, the pianists' approaches vary from recording to recording).⁸

Considering, however, the metrically neutral passages in the *mélodies* that were written prior to Debussy's setting of Villon's *Ballades*, as well as Debussy's increasing disregard for the bar line and the downbeat accentuation (to be demonstrated in later chapters), I consider it unlikely that such accentuation was the composer's intention here. It is apparent that the bar line carries no great weight in the first four measures: after the initial eighth-note rest, the pitches proceed in uneven rhythmical groups, or, at least, that is what the listener perceives (see Example 6.4).

Example 6.4. "Ballade des femmes de Paris" (1910), mm. 1-4: with serrated bar lines

(1=8th)

The musical score shows the first four measures of "Ballade des femmes de Paris" in G major. The tempo/mood is "Alerte et gai". The piece starts with a piano (p) dynamic. The notation consists of eighth notes and rests, with serrated bar lines. Below the staff, the rhythmic groupings are indicated as 1, 1, 3, 3, 1, 1, 3, 2.

Even if the listener aims to establish a metrical pattern in retrospect—namely, 1+1+3+3 followed by another 1+1+3+[3]—the repetitions of D#3 reduce to two eighth notes in total, thus curtailing the projected metrical pattern (1+1+3+3) from 8 to 7 pulses (1+1+3+2). Given that Debussy does not establish the meter in his depiction of chatter, but only the eighth-note pulse (mm. 1-4), and

⁸ For example, Dalton Baldwin accentuates downbeats, while Malcolm Martineau does not. Dalton Baldwin, pianist, "II Ballade des femmes de Paris," by Claude Debussy, track 13/disc 3, on *Debussy: Mélodies*, with Elly Ameling, Mady Mesplé, Michèle Command and Frederica von Stade (sopranos), Gérard Souzay (baritone), and Dalton Baldwin (piano), EMI FRANCE: L'Esprit Français CMS 7 64095 2, 1990, CD. (Original release by EMI FRANCE, 1980); Malcolm Martineau, pianist, "Ballade des femmes de Paris" by Claude Debussy, track 21, on *Debussy Songs*, with Christopher Maltman (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67357, 2003, CD.

that the ensuing depiction of a crowd’s murmur (mm. 5-10)—while transitioning the listener from metrical irregularity to the notated meter and thus also adding a quarter-note pulse to the established eighth-note pulse—is, by nature, non-metrical, the passage seems intended to be metrically neutral.

In Debussy’s setting of Verlaine’s “Fantoches,” a metrically neutral passage follows an interruption of the duple metrical layer (Example 6.5).⁹ Considering that the absence of perceptible meter does not last long, and that the listener, though possibly confused about the placement of the downbeat, is certainly continuing to project the clearly established quarter-note layer, the purpose of the passage seems to be to prolong the uncertainty for another brief moment, as if the pianist is “keeping the ball rolling,” so to speak, while waiting for the main protagonists to appear on stage.

Example 6.5. “Fantoches” (1882 and 1890) mm. 4-7¹⁰

The musical score for Example 6.5 consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a whole rest in measure 4, followed by the lyrics "Sca - ra - mouche et Pul - ci - nel - la" in measures 5, 6, and 7. The piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern with slurs and dynamic markings "dim." and "pp".

Debussy’s last *mélodie*, “Noël des enfants qui n’ont plus de maisons” after his own text, also features passages that suggest metrical neutrality. This setting, according to Marianne

⁹ I revisit this metrical interruption later in the study.

¹⁰ Claude Debussy, “Fantoches,” in *Fêtes galantes I* (Paris: Fromont, 1903), 6-9.

Wheeldon, is quite “unlike Debussy’s earlier songs, where the piano often assumed an artistic role equal to that of the vocal line. In the ‘Noël’, the piano writing is purely accompanimental. Even with its preludes and interludes, the piano does not shine forth as a solo instrument, but merely maintains the rhythmic pulse of the musical setting.”¹¹

The mentioned rhythmic pulse is established at the outset (see Example 6.6). In the opening three measures, the piano reiterates a broken A-minor chord. Played at a fast tempo and with a *léger et rythmé* character, the accompaniment instills a sense of restlessness. As Debussy “writes from the viewpoint of young children,” Wheeldon points out, “he imagines the ravages of war as seen through the eyes of his protagonists. The focus is not on countries, armies, or warfare, but on the disappearance of parents, homes, churches, and schools.”¹² Presumably, his focus is also on a portrayal of the trepidation and angst that such losses would have instilled in children during the First World War. Hence, the repetitions of the single-beat long gesture are to be performed seamlessly, without accentuation, in order to craft a metrically neutral opening that conveys the presence of a subtle but relentless emotion.

The voice enters on the second beat of m. 3. Considering that the vocal entry is generally perceived as an accented event, the listener might assume that this is the downbeat, since the existing state of metrical neutrality has not given any help toward downbeat identification. The first change of harmony follows at beat 3 of m. 3 and the ensuing resolution in m. 4 to the root-position tonic steers the listener to the true downbeat, as the bass line leaps onto the tonic and the A-minor chord is emphasized by a durational accent. From there on, the notated quadruple meter is clearly articulated.

¹¹ Marianne Wheeldon, *Debussy’s Late Style* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009): 33.

¹² Wheeldon, 31.

Example 6.6. “Noël des enfants qui n’ont plus de maisons” (1915), mm. 1-6

Doux et triste. (♩ = 144)

Doux et triste. (♩ = 144)

p léger et rythmé

pp *p*

Nous n'a-vons plus de mai- sons! Les en-ne-mis ont tout

A similar passage appears later in the song as a brief interlude (mm. 26-27). The chord is now changed to A major (see Example 6.7). As the passage is only two measures long, the listener continues to project the meter from the preceding measures. Also, there is a change in the chord position in the right hand at the downbeat of m. 27, which highlights that downbeat and reinforces the quadruple measure. Consequently, there is no obscuring of the meter in this instance; the notated time signature continues to be upheld.

Example 6.7. “Noël des enfants qui n’ont plus de maisons” (1915) mm. 26-27

26

lit! Bien sûr! pa-pa est

p *sempre p*

It is also important to notice that Debussy specifies twelve-eight time in the piano and four-four time in the vocal part. In other words, while the former is reserved for portrayal of trepidation, the latter, as Wheeldon correctly remarks, “mirror[s] the young narrator of the text.”¹³ While, in her words, “the perpetual motion of the piano accompaniment provides a backdrop of consistent energy to the song,” the simultaneity of the two meters, or what Wheeldon calls “the cross rhythms—the compound meter of the accompaniment [twelve-eight] against the common time [four-four] of the vocal line—add an element of urgency” to the song.¹⁴

Metrically neutral passages truly come to the fore at the beginning of a song: being just as indeterminate as the rain, “les petites vagues,” chatter, or as our feelings of melancholy, restlessness and trepidation, in Debussy’s songs they establish a component of the poem’s imagery or emotional content, or a combination of both. The aforementioned examples show that, as the song unfolds, Debussy introduces accents in other parts of the texture that become instrumental in presenting the downbeat and inducing the meter. Such was the case in “Il pleure,” in “De Grève” (albeit briefly), and in “Noël.” Consequently, it can be stated that when a

¹³ Wheeldon, 33.

¹⁴ Wheeldon, 31 and 33.

metrically neutral state opens a song, it often develops into a metrically regular state. The role of a metrically neutral state at the opening of a song is, therefore, to launch periodicity at low levels (though not at the higher levels that fully clarify the notated meter), to establish the “perpetual motion” (in Wheeldon’s words) that will provide, more often than not, a “consistent energy” to the song.

When a metrically neutral passage is inserted into the body of a song, it is there to provide a brief transition from one state to another. In “Ballade des femmes de Paris,” it forms a transition from a metrically irregular opening to a metrically regular state, and in “Fantoques,” it connects a metrical interruption to a metrically regular continuation. Therefore, such insertions “keep the motor running,” so to speak, until the new state is launched. Yet that is not all. In the “Ballade,” the function of the neutral passage is to convert the opening chatter of, possibly, a single person into the murmur of a larger crowd. The impression in “Fantoques” is that of a pianist waiting for the main character(s) to appear on stage. This is all to say that such metrically neutral passages, whilst dissolving the listener’s sense of meter, play an important role in the metrical structure of the given song, and in Debussy’s efforts to convey the details of the poem’s meaning.

Part II: Aperiodicity

Part II: Aperiodicity

Chapter Seven

Metrical and Hypermetrical Irregularity

Based on the examples presented so far, it has become apparent that in Debussy's *mélodies*, periodicity can be established (1) at the level of a pulse, (2) at the level of a measure, and (3) at the level of a hypermeasure or a larger section. The first type generates a state that is metrically neutral, while the other two types create a metrical state that is, in its making of the meter, by definition regular, either metrically or, on a larger scale, hypermetrically. By the same token, periodicity can be challenged at the same three levels as well.

In his *mélodies*, Debussy's earliest attempts at creating aperiodicity are at the level of the hypermeter. Accordingly, I revisit a few of the already discussed songs in a search for hypermetrical irregularities. As Debussy fairly frequently creates interruptions of meter in his songs, they are discussed next, and are followed by an examination of metrically irregular passages. Finally, I focus on his setting of a poem by Hyspa, "La Belle au bois dormant," as the song with the largest number of metrical and hypermetrical irregularities in the form of notated changes of meter.

7.1 Hypermetrical Irregularity

Among the *mélodies* discussed at length so far, the closest to an example of both metrical regularity and the resulting hypermetrically symmetrical form is "Madrid." Its core is a hypermetrically perfect sixteen-measure strophe (mm. 3-18), preceded by two measures of a piano introduction and followed, after all the stanzas have been sung, by a three-measure

postlude. “Madrid” is the only song of Debussy’s that displays such a meticulous mode of periodicity, the periodicity that grows out of a single measure and builds up a hypermetrically symmetrical whole.

After “Madrid,” there is no song that, in its entirety, displays such a hypermetrically square form. Even in “Nuit d’étoiles,” Debussy’s second song, the length of sections does not corroborate the sixteen-measure formula. The A section and its two reiterations count twenty measures each, while the B sections (mm. 25-37 and mm. 58-71) are, respectively, thirteen and fourteen measures long. The reason for the modified length does not lie in the structure of Banville’s octosyllabic quatrain or in the prosody, but rather in Debussy’s response to the text.

In the A section of the song, each poetic line of Banville’s quatrain is set to four measures, but because the last poetic line is repeated (“je rêve aux amours défunts”), every recurrence of strophe A in Debussy’s setting—i.e., the song’s refrain—contains five quadruple hypermeasures (mm. 5-8, 9-12, 13-16, 17-20 and 21-24). In section B, the declamatory pace accelerates, as each poetic line unfolds over two measures. Following two quadruple hypermeasures (mm. 25-28 and 29-32), a group of five measures ends the section. At m. 33, the beginning of the last hypermeasure is marked by a strong harmonic arrival on a root-position F-sharp triad. The chord lasts four measures (mm. 33-36), while the lyric “I” listens to “l’âme de ma mie” (“the soul of my beloved”) “*Tressaillir* [my emphasis] dans le bois rêveur” (“*quiver* in the dreaming woods”).¹ A quick transition to the returning tonic creates an extra measure (m. 37), thus elongating the last hypermeasure. Hence, what could have been an eight-measure

¹ Théodore de Banville, “Nuit d’étoiles” (“Night of Stars”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs*, with Christopher Maltman (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67357, 2003, CD, 9. The translation is also available online: Théodore de Banville, “Nuit d’étoiles,” trans. Richard Stokes, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2754>.

section—as well as a rhythmically formulaic setting of Banville’s octosyllabic quatrain—evolved into a thirteen-measure section.

In section B¹, the setting of the text is at first accelerated as well (mm. 58-61). Thereafter, however, as the poet speaks to his beloved and compares a rose to her breath (mm. 62-65) and the stars to her eyes (mm. 66-70), the pace of declamation decelerates to four measures per line, thus expressing the significance of the text. In m. 68, the word “yeux” (“eyes”) is met by the D-major chord, which is prolonged for another measure. A smooth harmonic transition ensues (mm. 70-71), leading to the home key of Eb major (m. 72). As a result, the B¹ section is fourteen measures long, thus contributing to the hypermetrically irregular structure of the song.

Among the *mélodies* analyzed in detail thus far, both “Regret” and “Tragédie” feature a hypermetrically symmetrical section. In the former, the opening A section is made up of four quadruple hypermeasures, each comprising a poetic line of Bourget’s heterometric quatrain (mm. 3-18, Appendix D2). They build a sixteen-measure section, which begins after two measures of introduction. The ending of “Regret” is also perceived as a hypermetrically regular section, although it counts eleven measures (mm. 40-50, Appendix D2). The text, which reiterates the beginning of the poem, is delivered over two quadruple hypermeasures. Yet under its final *e muet*, Debussy overlaps the first measure of the postlude’s four-bar hypermeasure, thus shortening what would have been a twelve-measure section to eleven measures. The closing hypermeasure of the piano accompaniment, however, is so similar to those heard earlier in the section that the subtle addition of the eighth-note duplets is not perceived as a major change. The duration of the last chord plays a role in the listener’s perception of the hypermetrical whole as well: often left resonating in performance, it compensates for the “robbed” time.

In “Tragédie,” a hypermetrically symmetrical section is placed in the middle of the song, where the four lines of the second stanza, each comprising a duple hypermeasure, add up to eight measures of the B section (mm. 16-23). The single piano solo bar that introduces the section (m. 15), though it inflates the section’s measure count to nine, does not result in a perception of irregularity. As William Rothstein argues, prefixed measures are an ‘extra’ to “the underlying phrase structure [...] and thus, in principle, detachable.”²

The overall structure of “Tragédie,” however, is not hypermetrically regular. The aforementioned B section comes after the thirteen-measure A section (which also commences after a single introductory measure), and is followed by a twelve-measure A¹ section.

The internal structure of these sections is apportioned unevenly as well. The four lines of the first stanza unfold over 13 measures, as follows: the first line takes a duple hypermeasure (mm. 2-3); the poetic phrase, created by the enjambment between the second line and a half of the third line, creates a quadruple hypermeasure, ending with a cadence (mm. 4-7); the remaining half of the third line, as enjambed with half of the fourth, occupies three measures to the next cadence (mm. 8-10), and the remaining half of the fourth line is inserted into a quadruple hypermeasure (mm. 11-14). A succession of such varying lengths has a direct effect on periodicity: unfolding in measure groups of 2 + 4 + 3 + 4, they make the hypermeter of this section of the song aperiodic.

Debussy’s apportioning of these segments seems to be directly related to Valade’s text. In the first stanza, each octosyllabic line comprises two syntactic divisions (see Appendix C3). In addition to the LDA (shown in boldface and underlined), there is an SA present (shown in boldface). Debussy grants both accented syllables longer note values, while the remaining

² William Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythms in Tonal Music* (New York and London: Schirmer Books, 1989), 70.

syllables, apart from *e muet*, receive eighth notes (see Example 7.1). Consequently, the opening three lines generate an identical rhythmic pattern, simply because the location of their SAs and LDAs is the same. As the poetic rhythm changes in the last line of this stanza, Debussy modifies the arrangement of note values accordingly.

Example 7.1. “Tragédie” (1881), mm. 2-13: Debussy’s assignment of note values to syllables

Les pe - ti - tes fleurs n'ont pu vi - vre.

U - ne nuit d'av - ril a sur - pris

Leurs ca - li - ces bleus: sous le gi - vre

Ils sont morts, ils sont flé - tris.

Debussy’s choice of note values is as limited as it was in his setting of “Madrid.” Their placement within the three-four measure, however, is remarkably different (see Example 7.2). The SA of the first poetic line creates the aforementioned D6+4—the dissonance emulated by the piano part—while the LDA is responsible for the durational accent that creates D12+8. The entry of the second line in m. 4 is pushed a beat forward by a rest and, although the placement of its SA conforms to the notated meter, its LDA creates a durational accent on the third beat of m. 5. The placement of the third and the fourth line is congruent with the three-four meter, but their unfolding is curious: the first syntactic group, “Leurs calices bleus,” is separated from its continuation by a long series of rests, while the second, “sous le givre,” is joined to the beginning

of the next poetic line whose first syntactic group, “Ils sont morts,” is again followed by rests. As the location of these rests matches punctuation marks, it is clear that Debussy responds to Valade’s caesurae in an effort to capture the stanza’s enjambments and reflect the poetic rhythm, or rather, the declamation, as specified by the poet.

Example 7.2. “Tragédie” (1881), mm. 2-13: the vocal part

2
Les pe - ti - tes fleurs n'ont pu vi - vre.

4
U - ne nuit d'av - ril a sur - pris

6
Leurs ca - li - ces bleus: sous le gi - vre

9
Ils sont morts, ils sont flé - tris.

The poem contains five enjambments, as implied by punctuation marks (see Appendix C3). The first two are found in the first stanza, lines 2-3 and 3-4; the third enjambment links lines 7-8, and the last two enjambments provide continuations from line 9-10 and 11-12. Debussy’s response to them is not consistent.

The first enjambment is not captured in the vocal line as “the run-on of a syntactical unit from one line to the next”³: Debussy interrupts the flow of the text with a quarter-note rest (m.

³ Clive Scott, “Enjambement” [sic], in *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, ed. by Peter France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 281.

6), perhaps with the intention to portray “a surpris” as a startling moment (see Example 7.3). However, the intended surge is instead depicted in the underlying piano accompaniment (mm. 5-6), where the dotted main gesture, thus far established as a recurring single-measure pattern, expands into the ensuing measure and, as its melodic contour continues to descend, reaches a cadence in B-flat major in m. 7. As a result, the initial duple hypermeasure, established by the opening poetic line (mm. 2-3), is elongated into a group of four measures that carries out the second line, and half of the third poetic line.

Example 7.3. “Tragédie” (1881), mm. 4-7

4 **Ritenuito**

U - ne nuit d'av - ril a sur - pris Leurs ca - li - ces bleus:

A new beginning follows, over a D major chord, bringing back the key elements of the original single-measure gesture introduced by the piano accompaniment (see Example 7.4). The poetic enjambment created between lines 3 and 4 takes priority now: it is captured in the vocal line, as well as reflected in the piano part. The ascending melody of the accompanying pattern is followed by a cadence in D major (m. 10), which aligns with a comma that partitions the fourth line of the text. A segment of three measures is created.

Example 7.4. “Tragédie” (1881), mm. 7-10

7

sous le gi - vre Ils sont morts,

The remaining half of the fourth line is heard after yet another new beginning in the piano (see Example 7.5), this time in the home key of G-flat major (mm. 11-12). After the initial repeat, a version of the opening gesture continues to develop over the two ensuing measures (mm. 13-14), thus unfolding over a quadruple hypermeasure that leads into the B section.

Example 7.5. “Tragédie” (1881), mm. 11-14

11

ils sont flé - tris.

Un peu animé *Un peu retenuto*

In the A section of the song, the distribution of the text is therefore irregular. Furthermore, as Debussy matches poetic caesurae—those that delineate the aforementioned enjambments—with cadences in the music, it appears that the irregular length of Valade’s poetic phrases instills not only a succession of irregular hypermeasures, but also a sequence of unequal musical phrases. Consequently, Debussy’s placement of cadences, which both shapes this song’s musical phrases as well as delimits three (of the four) hypermeasures, also surrenders the importance of hypermeasures to the prominence of phrases (rather than the other way around), thus granting the poetic and the mirroring musical phrases higher priority.

As has already been noted, the B section (mm. 15-23) is characterized by a consistent distribution of the text and a regular unfolding of the hypermeter. Such a setting suggests that the enjambment implied in the second stanza of the poem (mm. 21-22) receives no special treatment. Yet the extension of the diminished-seventh chord over the bar line into m. 22 suggests a modest recognition of the enjambment (Example 7.6).

Example 7.6. “Tragédie” (1881), mm. 21-23

21

sans at - ten - dre Que père ou mère eût con - sen - ti.

In the A¹ section (mm. 24-end), the enjambments implied by the poet remain unsupported. The distribution of the text maintains the recently re-established norm of two measures per poetic line and there is no harmonic surge, or change in the declamatory flow. The equally apportioned poetic lines, however, are contained within unequally structured hypermeasures. The first line is carried out via a three-bar hypermeasure (see Example 5.8). Its extra measure is generated by Debussy's imitative layering of the song's main rhythmic gestures in the piano and the voice—a device used earlier in the song and discussed in Chapter 5. The second poetic line is set to a transposed repeat of the triple hypermeasure (see Example 5.9), thus building a six-bar fragment. The hierarchical growth of the song's closing section is interrupted at this point, as the remaining two poetic lines unfold over a two-bar and a four-bar hypermeasure respectively. The resulting succession of measures in groups of 3 + 3 + 2 + 4 generates a hypermetrically irregular closing section, in which Debussy's polyphonic device plays an important role.

In comparison to “Madrid,” therefore, Debussy's setting of the lyrics in this *mélodie* is by no means formulaic. The poem's stanzaic structure is mirrored through the song's ternary rather than strophic form. Although each stanza is equally long, each section of the setting consists of an unequal number of measures. Even though the isometric lines are set within the steady meter, Debussy's treatment displays the broad variety of rhythmic placements within his three-four measure that octosyllabic lines and their punctuation can inspire. Accordingly, although each line is octosyllabic, it is not confined to a duple hypermeasure, but often expanded or elided. So, one cannot but ask, why such an effort to break up the periodicity denoted by the poem's octosyllabic quatrains?

In his discussion about “Duple vs. Non-Duple Construction,” Rothstein tells us that “most theorists, whatever their conceptual framework and vocabulary, have recognized that phrases of two, four, eight, and sixteen measures enjoy a privileged status in tonal music.”⁴ Among others, he refers to “early 19th-century writers such as Anton Reicha and Gottfried Weber,” who in their own writings awarded “a somewhat greater emphasis on the presumed virtue of ‘symmetry’” in comparison to the 18th-century theorists. “Gradually,” Rothstein continues, “asymmetrical phrases—especially those of odd-numbered lengths—came to be looked upon with something resembling moral disapproval [...]”⁵

Coincidentally, in “Tragédie,” Valade retells a story about the children’s love and their decision to pursue their life together without the parents’ consent. Fittingly, the poem itself contains a few enjambed, i.e., asymmetrical phrases. Debussy’s asymmetrical phrases, aside from mirroring Valade’s poetic rhythm, might suggest the children’s overstepping of the strict parental and societal regulations and moral disapproval to which their decision would have been subjected. Through the subtle treatment of Valade’s poetic rhythm and featured enjambments, through the created displacement dissonances and their progression alongside the poem’s stanza, as well as through the use of developmental and imitative techniques and the resulting hypermetrical irregularity, Debussy conveys the tension and restlessness of the narrative whose protagonists meet a tragic end.

Numerous songs of Debussy include elisions or expansions of hypermeter, as well as phrase overlaps (as observed in “Regret”) that produce irregular lengths of sections or subsections. While some occur as a result of word painting, others are closely tied to the poetic

⁴ Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythms*, 33.

⁵ Rothstein, 33.

rhythm. In the middle section of “Regret,” however, a delicate hypermetrical irregularity resulting from the acceleration in declamation demands a closer look.

Over its twenty-one measures, the B section houses two stanzas of Bourget’s poem (mm. 19-39, Appendix D2). The section’s overall design consists of five hypermeasures, organized into groups of 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 5 measures, respectively. The opening two lines of the second stanza at first assume the established four-bar pattern (mm. 19-22 and 23-26), but then, the delivery of lyrics accelerates through the use of short note values: the remaining lines of this stanza unfold over four measures in total (mm. 27-30), thus seemingly reducing the basic unit to a two-bar hypermeasure. Here, the brevity of the octosyllabic line aids the acceleration.

The ensuing three lines of the third stanza unfold within the established duple hypermeter (mm. 31-36), with declamation progressing at a greater speed than in the A section. The octosyllabic line, however, coinciding with the song’s emotional pinnacle and an immediate release of tension, spills into an extra measure (mm. 37-39), thus generating a triple hypermeasure, and appeasing the rhythmic and emotional surge. In retrospect, the two-bar hypermeasure established at the onset of the declamatory acceleration (mm. 27-28) and its repeat (mm. 29-30) amount to a four-bar hypermeasure. The ensuing three duple hypermeasures (mm. 31-32, 33-34 and 35-36) are galvanized by the aforementioned surge of lyrics, as well as by the harmonic, melodic and rhythmic content. The passage closes with a group of three measures (mm. 37-39), thus generating a nine-measure section and, consequently, altering the original hierarchical organization of hypermetrical units (4 + 4 and 8 + 8) established in the A section of the song.

As already described, a return to the decelerated distribution of the text follows in the final section, and the initially established hierarchy of four-bar hypermeasures returns. Following

a hypermetric overlap in m. 47, a final four-bar hypermeasure closes the song. The return to the original framework and the resulting slower declamatory pace restores a sense of composure, a resignation to the ended relationship, while the ever-present metrical dissonances maintain a sense of quiet but never-ending discontent.

While having a distinguishable effect on the song's overall form, interruptions of periodicity at the hypermetric level do not necessarily influence the perception of periodicity of meter. More successful in creating a sense of metrical interruption and irregularity are instances of aperiodicity at a smaller scale—those that produce an impression of a suddenly longer or shorter (than notated) measure, a measure with an added or subtracted beat. What I shall call “metrical interruption,” therefore, is a moment in the unfolding of music where the listeners find themselves metrically tricked; in one way or another, the downbeat is anticipated or delayed, duplicated or stifled, and the listener's projection of meter is interrupted. Multiple occurrences of such interruptions create what I shall term a state of “metrical irregularity.” In such instances, the projected downbeats are displaced more frequently, rendering the lengths of musical segments uneven and their unfolding unpredictable.

It would be logical to assume therefore that songs with notated changes of meter are precisely those that display metrical interruption or irregularity. While it is true that, at a particular stage, Debussy starts to notate changes of meter, it is also true that he chooses to avoid this practice in many of his later songs and, thus, to leave his aperiodic organization hidden within the notated, seemingly undisturbed meter. With that in mind, it is important to realize that although metrical interruptions and metrical irregularity are both perceived as changes of meter, these changes are not necessarily notated in Debussy's *mélodies*, but are rather implied by his various techniques.

7.2 Interruptions of Meter

We have observed that in “Tragédie” the hypermetrically irregular A and A¹ sections consist of groups of (1+) 2 + 4 + 3 + 4 (+1)⁶ and 3 + 3 + 2 + 4 measures, respectively (see mm. 1-14 and 24-35 in Appendix C2). These hypermeasures align with phrase lengths: delineated by cadences, they match Valade’s cesurae. More importantly, however, in many of them, the displaced (pitch-change or even durational) accents in the vocal part are supported by a harmonic resolution of a suspension in the manner that alludes to a feminine cadence (mm. 7, 10, 23, 26, 29, 31). They almost give a sense of a displaced downbeat and, accordingly, of a new bar line (represented by a serrated line in Example 7.7, where mm. 23 and 26 are shown). “Almost” is the operative word here, because the effect would have been much more emphatic had the pedal fifths also been displaced in these measures.

Example 7.7. “Tragédie” (1881), mm. 23 and 26: with the listener’s bar lines

Such an effect of a delayed downbeat arising from a feminine cadence is present in many of Debussy’s *mélodies*. For example, the setting of Banville’s “Les Baisers” features an authentic feminine cadence in m. 15, where the arrival onto the tonic chord on beat 2 sounds like a downbeat and thus causes the listener to intuit a bar (see Example 7.8). In spite of the notated

⁶ Bracketed numbers indicate measures of prefix and/or suffix.

and ongoing three-four meter, m. 14 comes across as four beats long, while m. 15 reduces to two beats.

Example 7.8. “Les Baisers” (1881), mm. 14-15⁷

Cadence:		V	I
Meter:	4		2
	4		4

Often it is the *e muet* of the feminine rhyme that receives the metrically weak harmonic resolution in these cadences. For instance, in the setting of Gautier’s “Les Papillons” (see Example 7.9), feminine endings are matched with authentic feminine cadences in mm. 3 and 7. The harmonic resolution to the tonic chord on beat 3 draws a bar line in the listener’s ear (see the serrated lines in the example), but because of the song’s quadruple meter, the impact of the shifted downbeat⁸ is softened and, in retrospect, the displayed cadences are identified as metrically unaccented.⁹ The effect is that of successive two-four measures.

⁷ At present (May 2023), the song “Les Baisers” is unpublished. Its first publication is being prepared by Denis Herlin, Editor in Chief of the *Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy*, for *Mémoires*, Série II, Vol. 1 (Paris: Durand, forthcoming). By kind permission of Dr. Herlin, selected measures from his transcription are reproduced here.

⁸ The term “shifted downbeats” has been used by Norman Wick, “Shifted Downbeats in Classic and Romantic Music,” *Indiana Theory Review* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 73-87.

⁹ Rothstein writes about the effect of, what he calls, “shifted meter.” In his words, “as several 18th-century theorists noted, the first and third beats in quadruple meters were often interchangeable; a measure of 4/4 could in many cases

Example 7.9. “Les Papillons” (1881), mm. 2-3 and mm. 6-7¹⁰

2

Les pa - pil - lons cou - leur - de nei - - ge

[F-sharp:] V I

6

Beaux pa - pil - lons blancs, quand pour - rai - - je

[C-sharp:] V I

A curious instance of a feminine ending in a poem being matched by a feminine cadence can be found in Debussy’s “De Grève” (see Example 7.10). In m. 8, the voice is supported by the first change of harmony thus far, namely, the (minor) subdominant, which is followed by a return to the tonic aligning with the *e muet* of the word “ef-fi-lé-e” (m. 9).

be understood as two 2/4 measures of nearly identical weight. As the century progressed, however, the quadruple meters tended to become more differentiated internally, with the third beat becoming less accented than the first.” Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm*, 126.

¹⁰ Claude Debussy, “Les Papillons,” ed. Marie Rolf (New York: The New York Public Library, 2004).

Example 7.10. “De Grève” (1893), mm. 8-9

Cadence: IV

I

In this part of the opening—the opening that also features the aforementioned metrically neutral state in its first few measures—the listener intuits more changes of meter than are notated in the score (see Example 7.11). When the score is shown without bar lines, it becomes even more apparent that the return to the tonic chord creates a convincing downbeat at the *e muet*, as marked by the serrated bar line. As a result, a four-beat segment is followed by a two-beat segment.

Example 7.11. “De Grève” (1893), mm. 8-9: modified

8

Soie blanche ef - fi - lé - - - e.

pp

Meter: 4 2
4 4

Detailed description: This musical score shows a modified version of the vocal line and piano accompaniment for measures 8 and 9 of 'De Grève'. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It begins with a rest, followed by a triplet of eighth notes (Soie, blanche, ef) and a half note (fi). The word 'lé' is written with a long dash, indicating a half-note duration. The vocal line ends with a half note 'e'. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp. It features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes, some beamed together. A dynamic marking of *pp* is present. A vertical dashed line separates measure 8 from measure 9. Below the piano part, the meter is indicated as 4/4 for measure 8 and 2/4 for measure 9.

Moreover, the LDA of the word “ef-fi-lé-e” is not only given a half-note duration, but is also emphasised by a slight inflection in the harmony, thus suggesting another, albeit “softer,” bar line (see Example 7.12).

Example 7.12. “De Grève” (1893), mm. 8-9: modified

8

Soie blanche ef - fi - lé - - - e.

pp

Meter: 2 2 2
4 4 4

Detailed description: This musical score shows a modified version of the vocal line and piano accompaniment for measures 8 and 9 of 'De Grève'. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It begins with a rest, followed by a triplet of eighth notes (Soie, blanche, ef) and a half note (fi). The word 'lé' is written with a long dash, indicating a half-note duration. The vocal line ends with a half note 'e'. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp. It features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes, some beamed together. A dynamic marking of *pp* is present. Two vertical dashed lines separate measure 8 from measure 9, and measure 9 from the end of the score. Below the piano part, the meter is indicated as 2/4 for measure 8, 2/4 for measure 9, and 2/4 for the final measure.

Hence, in addition to an emphatic plagal feminine cadence that, after a four-beat long subdominant harmony, closes on the second beat and effectively delays the projected downbeat, the long note value given to the LDA—the syllable also highlighted by a slight change of harmony—anticipates the notated downbeat, pulling the bar line forward. Consequently, a passage that is written as two measures in three-four meter is actually perceived as three measures in two-four meter, interrupting the flow of the notated meter.

A metrical interruption can also be heard in Debussy's setting of Verlaine's "Mandoline" (see Example 7.13). The song unfolds in the notated six-eight meter until Tercis and Aminte, *fête galante* characters, are introduced (mm. 15-17). It is Aminte whose appearance—or, rather, the singing of her name—jolts the unfolding of meter. By greeting her entry with a distinctive change of harmony and texture on the fourth eighth note of m. 16, Debussy anticipates the downbeat and, by stating the G-major chord henceforth through the use of G3/2 (familiar from the opening of the song), he creates a moment of subtle metrical uncertainty, as well. The interruption imparts two measures in a perceived nine-eight, as opposed to the notated three measures in six-eight time.¹¹

¹¹ Although this interruption might be inviting a label for metrical dissonance G9/6, it is important to notice that Debussy gives only a hint of the 9-layer. In other words, instead of the required three 9-segments, only one is present. Consequently, the example is a metrical interruption rather than an instance of metrical dissonance.

Example 7.13. “Mandoline” (1882 and 1890), mm. 15-17

15

C'est Tir - cis et c'est A - min - - - te,

p

Meter: 9 9
8 8

Another shifted downbeat occurs in m. 25 (see Example 7.14). There, the feminine ending of the adjective “ten-dre” is accentuated by a secondary dominant 6/5 chord (tonicizing E major), supplying another instance of a metrical interruption created by a feminine (half) cadence. It is debatable, perhaps, whether the downbeat is delayed or anticipated in this instance. A closer look reveals that the four measures that deliver these two lines of Verlaine’s text (mm. 22-25) are built from a duple hypermeasure (mm. 22-23) and its varied repeat (mm. 24-25) in which only the last of the four chords is modified and then prolonged into mm. 26-27. Consequently, the displaced downbeat in m. 25 can be classified as anticipated, because the listener would expect to hear it at the onset of m. 26. As the passage unfolds, the interruption creates a change of meter similar to the one already heard at mm. 16-17: instead of hearing four measures in the notated six-eight time, we hear two six-eight measures followed by two nine-eight measures, made even more irregular by the additional measure (actually notated as such) in three-eight time.

Example 7.14. “Mandoline” (1882 and 1890), mm. 22-27¹²

22 *p*

Et c'est Da - mis qui pour main - te Cru - el - le fait maint vers

p

Meter: 9
8

25

ten - dre.

sf

Meter: 9 + 3
8 8

The unfolding of meter in Debussy’s setting of Verlaine’s “Fantoches” features a peculiar type of interruption that successfully diverts the downbeat. The first two measures establish a sense of duple meter (see Example 7.15). Even with bar lines removed, the alignment of durational and harmonic accents is palpable. With regards to rhythm, the chromatically gliding

¹² Claude Debussy, “Mandoline” (Paris: Durand, 1905; repr., New York: Dover, 1981), 4-8.

six-four chords (initiated after a dotted-quarter note) proceed at an eighth-note pace into m. 3.

With regards to the harmonic plan, the progression of main chords, albeit embellished by passing or neighbour chords, unfolds at the pace of a half note. The latter pace is confirmed by the duration of the A-major chord in m. 1, and the placement of the G-major chord in m. 2.

Example 7.15. “Fantoche” (1882 and 1890), mm. 1-8: with bar lines removed

Allegretto scherzando

sf > p

A G G A B-flat ----- A-flat ----

dim. pp p

(A-flat) ----- A G (etc.)

Come m. 3—and, with it, the melodic and harmonic return to the A-major chord—the eighth-note pulse carries on, but as the second beat is a quarter note (extended by a tie), it receives a durational accent. The change in harmonies, however, does not follow this rhythm. The B-flat chord is already brought on by the sixteenth notes, but as it is not a passing chord, instead carrying on into the next measure, it anticipates the ensuing [dotted] quarter-note duration. Consequently, the accents of the rhythmic and harmonic dimension are not synchronized: the former creates a durational accent on the second beat, while the ascent to the B-flat chord, in retrospect, produces an accent on the second half of the first beat. Their combination produces an instance of “tripped” or “stumbled” unfolding, as if a needle on a phonograph record has skipped a groove. Even though the pacing of the main beat remains uncompromised, the effect of successive downbeats is produced, of which the second comes across as “louder.”¹³ Consequently, the listener momentarily loses confidence in the perception of meter: its periodicity has been interrupted.

¹³ The effect has been explored by Norman Wick in relevant excerpts from music of Mozart, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Chopin and Brahms and is, as already noted, termed “shifted downbeats.” Norman Wick, “Shifted Downbeats,” 73-87.

Example 7.16. “Fantoche” (1882 and 1890), mm. 1-7: the listener’s bar lines

> > > > > >

Allegretto scherzando

Beats: 1 2 1 2 1 1 2 1

> > > etc.

Sca - ra - mouche et Pul - ci - nel - la Qu'un mau - vais des -

Beats: 2 1 2? 1? 2? 1? 1 2 etc.

The simultaneity of musical elements whose accents are normally synchronized is interrupted in this measure. It is as if each of the involved elements “marches to its own drum,” contradicting not only the notated meter, but also each other. Normally allied in generating a metrical or antimetrical layer, the harmony and rhythm are now separated due to the disparity

between their respective durations (see Example 7.17). While the disparity in accents, therefore, makes each of these elements emerge as a single entity—a parameter¹⁴—their superimposition, subsequently, produces not a vertical, but a horizontal organization of accents—a polyphonization—which in this case brings about the formation of successive downbeats and the resulting effect of metrical interruption.¹⁵

Example 7.17. “Fantoche” (1882 and 1890), mm. 1-7: rhythmic and harm. parameter, separated

The image displays a musical score for measures 1 through 7 of the piece "Fantoche". It is organized into three horizontal staves. The top staff, labeled "Rhythm", shows a sequence of notes with dynamic accents (>) on the first, second, and fourth beats of measures 1, 2, and 4. The middle staff, labeled "Harmony", shows the corresponding harmonic structure with dynamic accents (>) on the first, second, and fourth beats of measures 1, 2, and 4. The bottom staff shows the chord progression: A (measure 1), G (measure 2), A Bb (measures 3 and 4), and A Ab (measures 5 and 6). Measure 7 is not explicitly shown with a chord.

Following the interruption, the return to the duple meter does not happen right away: the prolonged B-flat chord of m. 3 extends into m. 4, where the arrival on the dominant A-flat 4/2 chord occurs on the second beat as well (Example 7.15). As all accents are reunited on this second quarter note of the notated m. 4—and Debussy adds dynamic accents to both hands—the resulting second-beat accent is perceived as the next downbeat (see Example 7.16). From there

¹⁴ Musical parameters, their conformant relationships, as well as their congruence and noncongruence are explored in Leonard B. Meyer in *Explaining Music: Essays and Explorations* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973), p. 17 “Because the several parameters do not necessarily move in congruent fashion (with the result that harmony, melody, rhythm, and so on may each yield a different pattern of organization), it will at times be helpful to analyze the parameters separately in order to study their interrelationships. Often it is illuminating to “normalize” a passage—rewrite it in a simpler, archetypal form—in order to understand how the composer has modified a traditional schema.” For more about parameters, congruence and noncongruence, see “Chapter III: Conformant Relationships” (pp. 44-79) and “Chapter IV: Hierarchic Structures” (pp. 80-108), respectively.

¹⁵ As explained in Chapter 3, “polyphonization of parameters” is a term introduced to me by Ruben Radica (1931-2021).

on, the left-hand sixteenth notes “keep the motor running” by maintaining the A-flat chord, while the listener eagerly awaits the singer’s entry. When it occurs, denoting the duple meter while accenting the second beat (first with a registral, then with a durational accent), it still takes a full two measures for the piano accompaniment to “snap to its duty” and join the vocal part in the reestablishment of clear two-four meter. Accordingly, a convincing return to the duple meter is delayed until m. 8, at which point a quarter-note harmonic pace re-establishes a regular metrical state.

The introductory five-measure passage returns throughout the song. In mm. 18-21, it is reduced to a four-bar hypermeasure, the repetition of the A-flat 4/2 being omitted (Example 7.18). In its immediate restatement (mm. 22-25), Debussy reveals the source of its rhythmic content: the now familiar passage is matched with the lyrics “Cependant l’excellent docteur Bolonais,” showing that the characteristic rhythm—and the resulting jolted downbeat—were derived from this very poetic line.

Example 7.18. “Fantoche,” (1882 and 1890), mm. 18-21 and 22-25 (original)

18

The musical score for Example 7.18, measures 18-21, is presented in 2/4 time. It consists of three staves: a vocal line (treble clef) and two piano accompaniment lines (bass clef). The vocal line contains rests for all four measures. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of sixteenth notes in the right hand and quarter notes in the left hand. Dynamic markings include *sf > p*, a crescendo/decrescendo hairpin, and *dim.* The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

22

Ce - pen - dant l'ex - cel - lent doc - teur Bo - lo - nais

sf > p

With the exception of the opening syncopation in the vocal part—a modification that Debussy made in m. 22 of the 1892 revision of the song—the rest of the rhythm (as well as pitch content) corresponds to the left-hand part of mm. 1-4 and 18-21.¹⁶ Moreover, in m. 24, it becomes clear that the short syllables of the word “Bo-lo-nais” are responsible for both the sixteenth-note division at the second eighth note and the associated ascent to the Neapolitan chord. All three—the text, the sixteenth-note entry and the B-flat chord—receive additional emphasis in this measure by a dynamic accent above the syllable “**Bo-**.” The long note value given to the last syllable of the word “Bo-lo-nais”—i.e., the LDA of this poetic phrase—generates the aforementioned durational accent on the second-beat, with which the B-flat chord is confirmed. In comparison to mm. 1-4 and 18-21, not much is altered in this instance, except that in m. 25—the fourth measure of the group—the B-flat chord does not descend (via A) to an A-flat chord. Consequently, the original reiteration of the second-beat accent (heard in mm. 4 and 21) is omitted in this instance. The opening passage continues to return throughout the song (mm. 30-33, 34-35, 38-39, 60-63[-65], 66-67, 68-69), sometimes modified, shortened or

¹⁶ In the first version of “Fantoche,” the word “Cependant” starts on the downbeat (m. 22), which further confirms that Debussy’s setting of this poetic phrase is the source for the rhythm in the piano left-hand part. Claude Debussy, *Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy: Mélodies, Série II*, vol. 2, ed. Marie Rolf (Paris: Durand, 2016), 18-22.

fragmented, proving to be the song's governing gesture—its prosodic signature—acquired directly from the poetic rhythm.¹⁷

Successive downbeats in “Fantoches” create a brief but brusque interruption of meter. While the first downbeat in m. 3 is projected and expected, the second downbeat, in its emphases of the B-flat chord, is powerful enough to dislodge the established unfolding of meter. As a consequence, the 4-layer (1=8th) launched at the beginning of the song is thrown out of its two-four metrical grid, and pushed forward by a beat. In the opening measures of the song, its displacement continues for the next few measures, thus forming a displacement dissonance D4+2 (1=8th). In this instance, therefore, the interruption that results from a polyphonization of parameters triggers a displacement dissonance, which modifies the established periodicity of two-four meter.

Shifted downbeats, whether anticipated or delayed, modify the perception of meter as well. In Debussy's *mélodies*, metrically unaccented (feminine) cadences are often empowered by harmonic-change, durational and other accents to convincingly delay the downbeat. As a result, the receptive listener perceives a change in the periodicity of the established meter, simply because it appears that an extended measure is followed by a truncated measure. Anticipated downbeats, however, often arise from a sudden change of texture. Perceived as new and forceful beginnings, they impose a strong accent at an unexpected part of a measure and successfully alter the projected unfolding of meter.

¹⁷ This practice/technique of turning a poem's line into the song's governing gesture recurs in a large number of Debussy's songs, although his use of such a gesture is neither always as repetitive, nor its presence as governing.

7.3 Metrical Irregularity

In the discussed examples, Debussy uses a variety of techniques to create transient interruptions of periodicity. Feminine or metrically unaccented cadences, anticipated or delayed downbeats, and the polyphonization of parameters have all been shown to produce the effect of shifted or successive downbeats. When such instances occur continuously, they induce frequent changes of meter, thus giving rise to a state of metrical irregularity. In such passages, the aperiodic effect can become slightly more permanent, alluding to the declamatory style.

“Zéphyr” is the earliest among Debussy’s *mélodies* that features a passage indicative of the style of the recitative. Following a couple of introductory measures that, through the ringing of wind chimes, waft Zéphyr onto the scene, Debussy sets the first two lines of Banville’s triolet in a mainly declamatory manner (see Example 7.19). Expressing the lyric I’s desire, “Si j’étais le Zéphyr ailé // J’irais mourir sur votre bou-(che),” the composer articulates the pulse and, with it, the pace of declamation in this passage, while keeping the meter suppressed. A closer look at the score reveals that the arrangement of accents does not quite fit the notated meter (see Example 7.19).

Example 7.19. “Zéphyr” (1881), mm. 2-6

Accented syllables: SA SA LDA SA LDA *e muet*

2

Si j'é-tais le Zé-phyr ai-lé J'i-rai mou-rir sur vo-tre bou - che, Ces

The placement of the text in relation to the bar lines and their implied accentuation creates a somewhat unusual arrangement of stresses. In the opening line of the poem, “Si j’**é-tais** le Zé-**phyr** ai-**lé**,” the word “le” receives an accent: it is placed on the downbeat of m. 3, which is further emphasized by the projection of meter established in the introduction. The appearance of the $II^{4/2}$ chord gives it extra support, particularly because it emerges as a quarter note after syncopated eighths. Further down the line, the accented syllable of the word “Zé-**phyr**” is matched with a harmonic resolution to the V $6/5$ chord, making the second beat prominent, while the LDA of the line, the second syllable of the word “ai-**lé**,” falls on the third beat of the measure, thus receiving less than expected emphasis.

In the continuation of the setting, the poetic stresses corroborate the metrical grid. As the harmonic progression from the IV^6 chord (initiated on the fourth beat of m. 3) continues to unravel into the next measure, the SA from the second poetic line, “mou-**rir**,” lands on beat 3,

while the LDA in the last word, “**bou**-(che),” marks the beginning of m. 5. Debussy’s placement of the tonic chord under the *e muet* creates a feminine cadence and a perception of a new downbeat. A suspended ninth initiates a descent via quarter notes that spills over into m. 6, at which point, Debussy notates a change of notated meter, namely, from four-four to two-four.

Removing the bar lines reveals the usual pairing of accented syllables and note values (see Example 7.20). Debussy assigns a half note to each LDA (in the words “ai-**lé**” and “**bou**-(che)”), and to the SA of the first line, “j’**é-tais**.” The accented syllables of the words “Zé-**phyr**” and “mou-**rir**” obtain some prominence by the given melodic leap. The closing *e muet*, however, receives its own note value, and the ensuing rests reflect the punctuation that ends this poetic line.

The piano accompaniment corroborates the two LDAs, “ai-**LÉ**” and “**BOU**-(che),” not only with its longer note values, but also with harmonic inflections: while the former aligns with a descent to, what is to become the IV⁶ and then the II^{4/3} chord, the latter initiates a six-beat authentic cadence. As the feminine ending of the word “bou-(che)” is matched with the harmonic resolution to the tonic, the ensuing quarter notes—and rests in the vocal line—extend its notated value to a whole note. Consequently, the *e muet* receives the longest duration of all the syllables so far. In other words, a poetic caesura, demarcated by a period and ending with a feminine rhyme, is matched with the authentic feminine cadence, whose ending is elongated.

Example 7.20. “Zéphyr” (1881): declamatory passage (mm. 2-6)
--

Voice:	SA	LDA	SA	LDA <i>e muet</i>
Durational:	>	>	>	> (>)
Pitch-change:		>	>	

Piano:							
Durational longest:			>				>
Durational shorter:	>	>	>	(>)	>	>	
Chord changes:	>	>	>	>	>	>	>
Harmonic:		(II ^{4/2}	V ^{6/5})	IV ⁷⁻⁶	(II ^{4/3})	II	V - I ⁹⁻⁸ (6-5)
Combined:	?	*	*	*	*	*	*

Owing to a combination of accents and their arrangement, the passage is metrically puzzling for the listener. The harmonic arrivals, namely, to IV⁶ and to I suggest bar lines, but they cannot be drawn with certainty: the former might align either with “ai-lé,” or the ensuing quarter note, while the latter might be either at “bou-(che)” for a feminine, or “bou-(che)” for a masculine cadence. If one parses the passage according to the harmonic resolutions, i.e., places a bar line just prior to the IV⁶, at “ai-lé,” and the I chord, at “bou-(che),” three unequal segments result: a five-quarter-note long segment is followed by two six-quarter-note segments.

Yet the puzzle does not end there. The melodically accentuated syllables in the words “Zé-**phyr**” and “mou-**rir**” are also underpinned by the chord changes, thus receiving a bit more prominence. The first half note matching the stressed syllable “Si j’**é-tais**” creates a durational

accent, and the ensuing quarter-note chord under “le” emphasizes this article as well. The entry and the ensuing duration of the IV⁶ chord—as clarified by the octave doubling of the pitch “A” in the piano right hand—further complicates this passage. All in all, such an arrangement of accents—where only a few are synchronized with others—suppresses the meter. In the continuous procession of the quarter-note pulse, many of the detected accents are perceived as equally important, thus implying not only successive downbeats, but also continuous changes of meter and producing a metrically irregular passage (see Example 7.21).

Example 7.21. “Zéphyr” (1881): declamatory passage with potential bar lines

SA > > > > >

SA SA LDA SA LDA -e

Si j'é-tais le Zé- phyr ai-lé J'i-rai-s mou-rir sur vo-tre bou - che.

4 1 2 2 4

4 4 4 4 4

With regards to meter, the overall effect is that of an aperiodic unfolding, at least at the outset of the passage: what might be a four-beat measure is followed by a single beat, and then by another four-beat measure. After that, accents align more consistently, producing a duple meter. The unusual four-beat extension of the *e muet* has necessitated an additional two-four measure in Debussy’s notation, but as the feminine cadence—a logical response to the feminine ending—begins with the LDA “**bou**” and continues to unfold over the quarter-note descent, in

retrospect, the listener might intuit a bar line either just before the word “bouche” and, with it, a change to six-four meter, or at the *e muet*, with a change to four-four meter. The short aperiodic episode at the outset of the passage comes across as explicit, although its unfolding occurs along the articulated pulse layer, which helps the listener interpret the unequal durations of measures.

The technique that brings on the aperiodic unfolding in this passage is another type of polyphonization of parameters. In comparison to the polyphonization shown in “Fantoche,” it produces not merely successive downbeats, but rather an elaborate dispersal of accents. As the vertical alignment between the parameters is not quite established here, accents are scattered horizontally. In the melody, the poetic stresses that are given durational and pitch-change accents are not quite supported by the arrangement of durations and harmonic-change accents in the accompaniment. In addition, neither the vocal nor the piano part aligns perfectly with the notated four-four meter. The inevitable question is, of course, why this occurs. The fact that parameters are out of alignment or separated from each other, as it were, suggests that there is no agreement between the line that speaks and the body of music that is to harmonize with it. Therefore, one cannot help but wonder whether the absence of metrical consonance portrays the relationship—or, rather, the lack of it—between the lyric I and the desired lover.

The text in the passage reads, “Were I the winged Zéphyr, I would fly to your lips and die,”¹⁸ revealing that the desire to be Zéphyr is directly related to the desire to act secretly. As the *triolet* continues, the lyric I imagines the advantages to being Zéphyr: “I would possess the key to these veils, [...] I would slide into your bed, nestling against the breasts that inflame me.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Théodore de Banville, “Zéphyr,” (“Zephyr”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 3*, with Jennifer France (soprano), Jonathan McGovern (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA68016, 2014, CD, 15. The translation is also available online: Théodore de Banville, “Zéphyr,” trans. Richard Stokes, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2774>.

¹⁹ Banville, “Zéphyr,” (“Zephyr”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 3*, Hyperion CD, 15.

The disclosed reasons for wanting to be invisible, discreet, and unnoticeable suggest that the desired person is either unavailable or uninterested, or that there is no opportunity or even a permission for the described actions. As the *triolet* unfolds and the opening two lines return at the very end (see mm. 15-18 in Example 7.22), the answer to our question presents itself: the absence of changes in the arrangement of accents and, therefore, of resolution into a metrical consonance, suggest that there is no relationship between the lyric I and the desired lover.

Example 7.22. “Zéphyr” (1881), mm. 15-18

15

p

Si j'é-tais le Zé-phyr ai-lé J'i-rai-s mou-rir sur vo-tre bou-che.

p

pp

8va

In many of Debussy’s songs, a single change of meter is a hint that a metrical interruption is present. The measure in question is usually a measure that provides some extra time for a release of tension that was created by the interruption. In “Zéphyr,” for instance, the measure with the changed meter does not inject a prominent downbeat—which is what we would expect to hear—but rather appeases the spillover of beats produced either by the previously displaced downbeat or by successive downbeats.

Successive downbeats are a unique feature of a device known as written-out *ritardando*. As a sequence of progressively longer note values, a written-out *ritardando* encapsulates the concept of metrical irregularity. Depending on the featured note values and their placement within the metrical grid, a sequence of progressively longer durations can either aid in the unfolding of meter and help establish metrical regularity, or it can conflict with the ongoing meter and create metrical dissonance.

In “De Grève,” Debussy uses a written-out *ritardando* to prevent the meter from emerging. The metrically neutral two measures that open Debussy’s setting of “De Grève” have already been discussed (Example 6.2). What is of interest at this point, however, is the ensuing passage (mm. 3-4): it features the same accompaniment pattern as mm. 1-2, but is enriched by a superimposed right-hand melody (see Example 7.23). Its longer note values, namely, the dotted-eighth note, the ensuing quarter note, and the half-note duration (created by two tied quarters) each receive a durational accent and, thus, create a *ritardando* pattern. In such a pattern, each pitch is perceived as a potential downbeat. In this case, that is particularly true of the tied C#4 that is additionally amplified by a *crescendo*. While the perceptive listener is trying to decipher a meter whose potential downbeat is constantly shifting forward, the melody concludes with a group of four eighth notes that bring on the actual downbeat at m. 5.

Example 7.23. “De Grève” (1893), mm. 1-5

Modéré (mais sourdement agité)

pp *Très égal et très sourd*

2

4

In these measures, the successive downbeats of the written-out *ritardando* avoid clear commitment to a meter. As each oncoming longer note value interrupts or, more accurately, annuls the previous downbeat, it also counteracts the generation of meter. Here, the consecutive interruptions also instill changes of meter: additional (serrated) bar lines could be drawn in m. 3 at beats 2 and 3, thus changing the time signature at beat 1 to one-four, and at beat 3 to four-four time (see Example 7.24).

Example 7.24. “De Grève” (1893), mm. 1-5: modified

Modéré (mais sourdement agité)

pp Très égal et très sourd

Meter: 1 1 4
4 4 4

Meter: (4?) [3]
4 [4]

These measures present a good example of an instance where the meter is in the process of emerging. Adjacent to the initial metrically neutral measures, they act as a bridge to the launch of the downbeat in m. 5 and what turns out to be a fleeting moment of three-four meter. The successive downbeats cause consecutive interruptions and therefore create metrical irregularity.

Aperiodic episodes can be created by delayed downbeats. A couple of them are featured in the opening measures of Debussy's setting of Mallarmé's "Soupir." In m. 4 (see Example 7.25), the dominant pitch E-flat₂ is followed by the tonic. Because of the harmonic context presented in the preceding measures, and because of its durational accent, the A-flat₁ occurring on beat 2 overpowers the E-flat on the downbeat, and emerges (in the listener's perception) as the actual downbeat.

Example 7.25. “Soupir” (1913), mm. 1-8²⁰

Calme et expressif ♩ = 50

p doux et soutenu

pp

5

p très soutenu

Mon â - me vers ton front où rêve, ô cal-me

più pp

Hearing a bar line right at the tonic, the listener apportions an additional beat to the previous measure, and starts anew at beat 2 (see Example 7.26). Accordingly, m. 3 appears to contain five quarter notes. Measure 5, being identical to m. 4, also requires a bar line at beat 2, which, in retrospect, apportions four beats to m. 4. The ties that prolong the A-flat chord of m. 5 into m. 6 silence the notated downbeat of m. 6 and, with the word “mon” on the ensuing upbeat, create a five-four measure.

²⁰ Claude Debussy, “Soupir,” in *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* (Paris: Durand, 1913), 1-3.

Example 7.26. "Soupir" (1913), mm. 1-8: modified

Calme et expressif ♩ = 50

Meter: [2] [4] 5 4

 [4] [4] 4 4

p très soutenu

Meter: 5

 4

As shown, the meter fluctuates measure by measure. The ambiguous opening figure, which is interpreted in retrospect as belonging to, possibly, a two-four measure (as suggested above in the square brackets) is followed by measures in four-four, five-four, again four-four and five-four time. Although the listed succession of meters suggests a pattern of 4 + 5 beats, a

convincing metrical layer is not quite established. In addition, the sense of meter is challenged at the beginning of the vocal soliloquy, thus putting into question even the suggested five-four lead-in to m. 7. As in this passage the number of beats changes with each ensuing measure, it represents an instance of metrical irregularity. This state is achieved at the level of the measure and, considering that there are no other layers that interfere with it, the aperiodicity is explicit.

A delayed downbeat that opens Debussy's *mélodie* "La Flûte de Pan," on a text by Pierre Louÿs, sets in motion an extraordinary example of metrical irregularity (see Example 7.27). Quietly signaled by its dominant, the root of the G#-minor ninth chord touches down on the second eighth note of the initial four-four measure. An eighth note later, the rest of the chord is stated, below a gush of pitches in the Lydian mode scattered by means of irregular rhythmic groups. Debussy's direction *Lent et sans rigueur de rythme* might be taken as an open window to a profuse number of rhythmic fluctuations, yet the notated changes of time signature limit the possibilities to a quarter-note pace.

Example 7.27. "La Flûte de Pan" (1897), mm. 1-3

Lent et sans rigueur de rythme

At least, that might be the case for the performer. For the listener, however, the experience is entirely different (see Example 7.28). The entry of G-sharp² elucidates, in retrospect, the metrical placement of the preceding D-sharp²: as a pitch reached by a leap of a

descending fifth, G-sharp² draws a bar line in the listener's ear (shown as the first serrated line in Example 7.28) and causes D-sharp² to be interpreted as an anacrusis. The rest of the G-sharp chord, which appears an eighth-note later in support of the Lydian flourish and its impersonation of Pan and his flute, receives accentuation as new material, but because it lasts for a while, the root G-sharp² in the left hand secures itself as the likely downbeat.

Example 7.28. "La Flûte de Pan" (1897), mm. 1-3: metrically modified

Lent et sans rigueur de rythme

Meter:

4	3	2	4
4	8	8	4

The next downbeat is ambiguous: is it at the C-sharp-major chord, or at the return of the G-sharp-minor chord? The former receives a new-event accent because of the harmonic change, while the latter represents a return to the familiar—the tonic—and its duration is twice that of the C-sharp chord. In retrospect, one would say that the G-sharp-minor chord sounds like a downbeat, but then the C-sharp-major chord returns, briefly, before the B major chord touches down. The latter chord is a quarter note in duration, and is then repeated and expanded to a whole note.

The sequence of suggested measures in Example 7.28 shows an aperiodic unfolding: an upbeat eighth note is followed by a four-four measure, a three-eighth measure, and a two-eight measure. A repeat of the B chord ensues, above which the voice delivers the first poetic phrase. So, how long exactly *is* this B chord? For the listener, who hears the text performed with

Debussy's *Doux et soutenu* instruction in mind, it is impossible to tell: because of the vocal soliloquy, as was the case in "Soupir," the pulse goes adrift (see m. 3 in Example 7.29).

Example 7.29. "La Flûte de Pan" (1897), mm. 3-4

3 *p* *Doux et soutenu*

Pour le jour des Hy-a - cin- thies, il m'a don-né u-ne sy -

6 3 3

pp

If we look at the harmonic rhythm and the suggested meters a bit more closely, we realize that, first, it is the pace of harmonic change that creates a metrical irregularity here and, second, that the basic pulse at which the change of harmonies progresses is the eighth note. Accordingly, if we count the durations of chords in eighth notes, the following sequence appears:

1	+	7	+	1	+	2	+	1	+	2	+	8
D#		G#m		C#		G#m		C#		B		B

Such a succession of durations exemplifies deeper-level aperiodicity. Keeping in mind, however, that the pulse in question is not the main beat of the notated meter, but rather one-half of its value—a micro-pulse—we realize that durations of chords change so capriciously that framing them into some form of meter is impossible. The only durational pair (in eighth notes) that repeats is “1 + 2,” but since the last chord of the second pair changes from the initial G-sharp minor to that of B major, there is no perceptible repetition of a harmonic pattern that would

trigger periodicity. The aperiodicity in this fragment, therefore, is structured at the level of a micro-pulse and, as there are no other than aperiodic layers present, the aperiodicity is explicit.

The technique of delayed downbeats, as seen in “La Flûte de Pan” and “Soupir,” adds a duration to the preceding measure, thus, in retrospect, creating a perception of a changed meter. From this perspective, the effect of this device is somewhat similar to that of a metrically unaccented (feminine) cadence: in certain contexts, a harmonic resolution on a weak beat can suggest a downbeat, thus, in retrospect, apportioning an extension to the preceding measure.

The fact that Debussy does not notate bar lines at the delayed downbeats is intriguing. As both the listener and the performer perceive the interruptions of meter, as well as aperiodic episodes that he has fashioned, why not notate them? Since it makes no difference to the listener whether the changes of meter are written into the score or not, then it must make a difference to the performer. But if so, in what way? Why would Debussy make a decision to offset the downbeat by an eighth or quarter note?

Moving the tonic chord further down (or deeper into) the measure assures that its arrival will *not* be highlighted by a dynamic or durational accent conferred to the downbeat. As the appearance of the tonic chord is clearly perceptible no matter where it occurs in a measure, why then grant it additional emphasis by placing it on the downbeat? Not to do so might be a matter of taste, a matter of elegance, a matter of Debussy’s style, a matter of simply not wanting to ‘proclaim’ the tonic, but rather to accord it a quiet, subdued entry. The frequent occurrence of such displacements of the tonic chord—displacements that promise its dynamically restrained entrance—confirm that anticipations and delays of downbeats are one of Debussy’s basic rhythmic techniques. While a large number of them are related to the text, many of them exist for purely musical reasons.

It is perhaps too obvious and, therefore, unnecessary to point out that any and every instance of interruption of meter has an impact on hypermeter. Such is the case with episodes of metrical irregularity, as well. While metrical interruptions *trigger* changes of meter, various states of metrical irregularity *represent* them, and both will induce at least a transient hypermetrical irregularity, if not aperiodicity at the same level.

7.4 “La Belle au bois dormant” and Changes of Meter

Debussy’s setting of Vincent Hyspa’s poem “La Belle au bois dormant”—his only setting of this artist’s work—features the largest number of notated changes of meter in his song oeuvre.²¹ It is also the only song in which the changes are notated so thoroughly and in such detail. The initial (and prevalent) twelve-eight time signature is replaced by others no fewer than eight times. To make it even more intricate, the meter fluctuates between compound and simple time signatures, but the majority of the changes are single-measure excursions into closely or more distantly related meters (see Example 7.30, where numbers in brackets indicate the exact number of measures spent in each time signature).

Example 7.30. “La Belle au bois dormant” (1890): changes of notated meter

mm. 1-2, 3, 4-5, 6, 7-10, 11, 12-15, 16, 17-20, 21, 22-31, 32, 33-40, 41, 42-47, 48-55

The succession of meters reveals that single-measure excursions into different meters occur more frequently in the first half of the song. During the first twenty-one measures, they appear to tailgate two- and four-measure groups, but thereafter, a single measure follows a group

²¹ Extensive information about Vincent Hyspa and the poem can be found in Steven Moore Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian: From Cabaret to Concert Hall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 113-115, 387-389, 418.

of ten and eight measures, respectively. Such a reduction in the frequency of meter changes conveys an overall progression from an initial “limping” effect toward a sense of greater stability.

Example 7.30 also reveals that the first twenty measures are reserved for changes to compound meters, namely nine-eight and six-eight, while the rest of the song features changes to simple meters, such as three-four and four-four, alternating with compound meters. In other words, the four metrical contractions found in mm. 3, 6, 11 and 16, are followed by, possibly, four metrical modulations in mm. 21, 32, 41 and 48-55, the last of which closes the song in simple quadruple time.²² If metrical modulations are indeed to be present, then the simultaneity of the two progressions (from more to less frequent changes of meter, and from changes to compound meter to changes to simple meter) suggests that the effect of limping created at the outset does not necessarily stabilize towards the end, but is rather replaced by the (written-out) accelerations in tempo.

The question is, of course, how these changes relate to the poem. The overall structure of the poem suggests a ballade, a fixed poetic form of Provençal origin that was standardized in the fourteenth century by poets such as Machaut, Froissart and Deschamps, and then developed further by Charles d’Orléans, Villon and, later, La Fontaine. According to Clive Scott, the ballade, in its

commonest form is composed of three eight-line stanzas rhyming ababbcbC and a four-line *envoi* rhyming bcbC; as the capital letter indicates, the last line of the first stanza serves as a refrain, repeated at the last line of each stanza and of the *envoi* (which is the equivalent of the last half of one of the main stanzas). But there are several variations in

²² Among recorded performances of this song, only that of pianist Malcolm Martineau features audible metrical modulations. Malcolm Martineau, pianist, “La Belle au bois dormant,” by Claude Debussy, track 13 on *Debussy Songs 3*, with Jonathan McGovern (baritone), Hyperion CDA68016, 2014, CD.

length of stanza [...] and thus of *envoi*, and the *envoi* may be variously addressed to the ‘Prince’ [...], or to some other noble or lady [...] as homage or formula of leave-taking.²³

Many of the elements that would identify Hyspa’s poem as a ballade are modified: the poem is composed of five (instead of three) six-line (instead of eight-line) stanzas in octosyllabic meter; its isometric sextains end neither with an *envoi* (owing to its reduced length and rhyme pattern), nor with a refrain (considering that no lines are repeated), but with a constantly varying summary statement in couplets that Debussy turns into a “chorus” of sorts. Consequently, the poem’s overall rhyming pattern is also different from the norm (partially resulting from the shortened stanzas). Nevertheless, its lyrics do tell a story of medieval chivalry and the ending couplets are addressed to the lady, “la Belle au bois.” As some of the essential ingredients of the ballade are mimicked rather than strictly enforced, the poem appears to be intended as a parody, which is further confirmed by its narrative (see Appendix F1).

According to Steven Whiting, Hyspa’s poem “was but one of countless mock-chivalric poems.”²⁴ The poet

retells the old story of the sleeping beauty whom the gallant prince is to release from a magic spell. A vermillion [*sic*] ring flashes on her finger, as a symbol of the expected wedding. But the final strophe gives the tale a rude twist. The prince, who after many a battle has spurred on his steed with relentless urgency, decides upon arrival that he would rather steal the ring than marry the maid.²⁵

Such an ending to the well-known fairy tale explains Hyspa’s decision to depict the not-quite-a prince through not-quite-a ballade. Moreover, it is conceivable that the metrical modulation into a simple time at the end of the song—and the consequent increase in tempo—are Debussy’s way

²³ Clive Scott, “Ballade” in *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, ed. Peter France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 60. Also, restated in Clive Scott, “Ballade,” in *The PEPP*, ed. Roland Greene and Stephen Cushman (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 118-119.

²⁴ Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 418.

²⁵ Whiting, 113.

of portraying the “relentless urgency” with which the “gallant” prince scarpers into the dark of the forest with a pilfered ring in his pocket.

In his setting, as Whiting puts it, “Debussy enters into the ‘days of yore’ mood of the poem. In this (for him) relatively straightforward strophic setting with refrain, the prevailing accompaniment pattern suggests a troubadour harping, and the chord progressions are faintly modal.”²⁶ The mentioned “troubadour harping” is—as attested by the above succession of meter changes—not quite as regular as the word ‘harping’ might imply, and Debussy’s rendering of Hyspa’s text, though generally strophic, is not nearly as straightforward as Hyspa’s sequence of sextains would suggest. On the contrary, both the large- and the small-scale elements of the song’s structure display Debussy’s metrical ingenuity.

When the succession of meters is matched to the five strophes, it becomes apparent that no two strophes are hypermetrically structured in exactly the same way (see Example 7.31). The first three measure groups, namely (2+1), (2+1), and (4+1), which encompass the first strophe, just about contain the first stanza; the next two groups, (4+1) and (4+1), comprise nearly the entire second stanza; the (10+1) group represents almost the whole third stanza; the (8+1) group the fourth; and the last group (6+8) contains the fifth stanza. “Just about,” “nearly,” and “almost” are the operative words here, because the closing of each stanza—except that of the last one—extends into an additional measure where it overlaps with the introduction to the ensuing stanza.

²⁶ Whiting, 114.

Example 7.31. “La Belle au bois dormant” (1890): stanzas in relation to the changes of meter
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mm. 1-2, 3, 4-5, 6, 7-10, 11, 12-15, 16, 17-20, 21, 22-31, 32, 33-40, 41, 42-47, 48-55

(2 + 1) (2 + 1) (4 + 1) (4 + 1) (4 + 1) (10 + 1) (8 + 1) (6 + 8)

Strophes: 1 2 3 4 5

Stanzas: (mm. 2-12) (mm. 13-22) (mm. 23-33) (mm.34-42) (mm. 43-55)

= 11mm = 10mm = 11mm = 9mm = 13mm

As the five strophes of the song are joined by the means of phrase overlap (mm. 12, 22, 33, and 42), their beginnings and endings cannot be strictly delineated. Consequently, the brackets in the above example outline strophes, which are delineated with the help of piano accompaniment.

The measure numbers below these brackets (mm. 2-12, 13-22, 23-33, 34-42, 43-55) indicate the actual placement of lyrics in each stanza. Relying on the latter—in other words, skipping the introductory measure(s) but including the measure that contains the last word of each stanza—the stanzas are, respectively, 11, 10, 11, 9 and 13 measures long, thus revealing an aperiodic hypermetrical design. In addition, the above numbers reflect what the durations of strophes look like on paper. In performance, however, the notated changes of meter further alter their actual unfolding time.

The song opens with an introductory measure whose broken chords evoke the aforementioned “troubadour harping” and set the narrative in motion (Example 7.32). Characterized by a spirited melo-rhythmic gesture and its harmonically fluctuating repetitions, the introductory measure not only determines and controls the pacing of the main beat, but its returns on the tonic chord throughout the song signal the beginning of each new stanza.

Example 7.32. “La Belle au bois dormant” (1890), m. 1²⁷

Assez animé

The vocal part enters in m. 2 and delivers the six lines of the first stanza in couplets (see Appendix F2). Rounded-off and separated by cadences, lines 1-2 occupy three measures, while lines 3-4 and the refrain unfold over four measures each. The succession of 3 + 4 + 4 hypermeasures creates an irregularity that is further aggravated by the inserted changes of meter (mm. 3, 6, 11).

The first two metrical contractions²⁸ enter with the lyrics of lines 2 (“Un chevalier ...”) and line 4 (“Sous un casque”), respectively (mm. 3 and 6). Their final rhyming words, however, are given their own measure, which returns to the initial twelve-eight time. The third occurrence of the nine-eight meter begins with the word “l’anneau” (mm. 11-12), thus expediting the close of the refrain, whose last word also initiates a twelve-eight measure. The placements of these last words—which are the LDAs of lines 2, 4 and 6—are particularly interesting: as Debussy underpins “**bru**-ne,” “**lu**-ne” and “**doigt**” with cadences, namely, to a G chord (m. 4), D-flat major triad (m. 7), and E-flat major triad (m. 12) respectively, he essentially draws a bar line right in front of the LDA, thus cutting the previous measure short by a dotted-quarter beat. The aforementioned sense of limping arises as a consequence, with the aim, perhaps, of portraying a

²⁷ Claude Debussy, “La Belle au bois dormant” (Paris: Max Eschig, 1907).

²⁸ Terms related to Debussy’s changes of meter are explained in Chapter 3.

knight stumbling through a forest on his weary horse carrying the dust of battles on his shining armour.

The piano accompaniment consists of two main elements. The first is the aforementioned “troubadour harping,” while the second is a quotation of the well-known children’s song, “Nous n’irons plus au bois” (first occurrence in mm. 7-8). According to Whiting,

the quotation comprises the first phrase of the tune, to which any Frenchman would have known the text—‘Nous n’irons plus au bois, | Les lauriers sont coupés’ (We shall go no more to the wood, the laurels have been cut down)—and in addition to which the listener is invited [...] to imagine the continuation to the same melody: ‘La belle que voilà, | La lairons-nous danser?’ (the beauty [in the wood], shall we have her dance?).²⁹

As the fragment brings on the poem’s refrain, but in a lilting twelve-eight time rather than in the tune’s original simple meter, it “subtly anticipates Hypsa’s distortion of the tale, suggesting that there will be nothing to celebrate in the forest, that the knight will prove unworthy of the laurels that should have crowned him, and that the beauty will have little reason to dance.”³⁰

The final word of the refrain meets the tonic triad (of an authentic cadence) in the last measure of the strophe (m. 12). There, it overlaps with the now familiar harping, whose guitar-like broken chords recommence the narrative and propel it forward. Thus, while the accompaniment and the vocal line *each* occupy eleven measures, they are staggered, and, with regards to the first stanza, the measure of their overlap provides a pretense of a twelfth measure. The ensuing stanzas are brought on in a similar manner, but, in comparison to the first, their lengths vary.

The lyrics of the second stanza rush along the harping chords (mm. 13-22). The first couplet unfolds over two measures, and its last word, “**droit**”—the LDA of poetic line 8—is

²⁹ Whiting, 114.

³⁰ Whiting, 114.

treated differently from the LDAs of the opening strophe: although underpinned by a harmonic arrival on the C major triad, it is not given as prolonged a duration as the previous three LDAs. Instead, as the C chord becomes part of a metrically unaccented resolution, thus not requiring its own downbeat and a new measure, there is no metrical contraction.

The LDA of the ensuing couplet (“roi” at m. 17), however, receives both a long note value and—as part of an authentic cadence—a resolution to the D-flat major triad as a temporary tonic. Again, Debussy draws a bar line just before this harmonic arrival, thus shortening the previous measure by two beats. As a consequence, a measure-and-a-half-long delivery of this couplet is now extended by the lengthened LDA, under which the “Nous n’irons” passage returns in the accompaniment, adding another measure before the refrain. Although the couplet looks as if it is four measures long, its total number of beats adds up to three and a half measures of twelve-eight time.

The refrain is sung over four measures (mm. 19-22). This time, however, its third measure (m. 21) features a change of meter to a simple meter (three-four time). Contrary to many recorded performances of this song, the change to the three-four time signature here does not imply a metrical mutation with a single-beat contraction—i.e., a change into nine-eight time—but rather a metrical modulation.³¹ The duration held in common is not that of length of the main beat—as the duplets in m. 20 might suggest—but rather that of the single eighth note in twelve-eight meter. If Debussy’s intention were to create a mutation, the nine-eight time signature would have sufficed, as seen in m. 6, where duplets are used to divide the dotted-quarter beat into equal values. In m. 21, therefore, the notated eighth notes are meant to be shorter than duplets.³²

³¹ As performed by Malcolm Martineau, track 13 on *Debussy Songs 3*, Hyperion CD.

³² The three-four bar (m. 21) is a variation of m. 11, which is notated in nine-eight time and placed identically in the pertinent strophe with regards to the delivery of the text.

Debussy signals the accentuation of simple triple time early on. A comparison of m. 21 and m. 16 reveals a similarity: the stress pattern of the six syllables in both measures demarcates groups of two, thus forming the accentuation typical of three-four meter. In the case of m. 16, whose piano part is firmly in the six-eight time, the interaction of voice and piano forms the grouping dissonance $G3/2$ ($1=8^{\text{th}}$ in compound time). In the case of m. 21, in which the three accompanimental chords support the three-four time signature, there is a metrical modulation to the latter meter. Looking back, Debussy's setting of the line "Un chevalier va par la (brune)" in m. 3 already announces the duple layer of $G3/2$ within the unfolding of the metrically contracted nine-eight measure, which is to say that the hints in both mm. 3 and 16 foreshadow the metrical modulation to the three-four time in m. 21 and the related brief change in tempo.

From this point of view, Debussy's setting of the second stanza (m. 13ff) is perhaps the most interesting. As the lyrics approach the end of the first quatrain, Debussy brings on a change to the six-eight time, and, in wrapping up the refrain, modulates to three-four time. While the former change is notable for the severity of its contraction—the established twelve-eight measure is shortened by one-half—the latter is subtler and more surprising, as it increases the tempo.

The third stanza is ushered in the same way as the previous one: its first couplet resumes a two-bar duration (mm. 23-24), as it tells about the mountains and plains that the knight has crossed mounted on his large stallion. In contrast, the lyrics of the second couplet are delivered over the next four measures (mm. 25-28). The piano part assumes a new accompaniment pattern with a laborious-sounding stride, suggesting the breathless galloping described in these lines. After the (by now) expected entry of the "Nous n'irons" melody, the refrain unfolds over its usual four measures (mm. 30-33), and is very much like the one heard in the second stanza. The reinstated metrical modulation to the three-four time is not as surprising as when it was heard the

first time, but the hastening that it instills does not go unnoticed. The succession of phrases results in irregular hypermeter: the standard two-bar phrase is contained within a duple hypermeasure and is followed by a five-bar phrase within a quintuple hypermeasure, concluding with the four-bar phrase within the quadruple hypermeasure of the refrain (i.e., a triple plus the measure of overlap).

Although the third strophe counts the same number of measures as the first, it lacks the frequent changes of meter. If we compare mm. 23-24 to mm. 2-4, we see that the LDA, supported by a harmonic arrival on the G chord (m. 4), is given both a downbeat and the full duration of a twelve-eight measure. In m. 24, however, the G-major chord is placed on the third beat and extended by only one beat. Not only is the original harmonic progression curtailed here by a chord (the C minor chord of m. 3 is missing), but the arrival on the G triad, while lengthened in support of the LDA in the text, is also displaced by half a bar. The harmonic-arrival accent of the G major harmony does not elicit a bar line here, but is rather absorbed by a metrically unaccented (feminine) cadence.

Had Debussy given this LDA the same weight as in m. 3 and, consequently, broken the twelve-eight measure in half at the G major resolution, the resulting metrical contraction would have been notated as two six-eight measures. The new bar line would have placed the G-major triad on the downbeat of the new measure and turned a feminine cadence into masculine. As the narrative of the poem has moved on from its initial depiction of a weary knight, and the stanza rendered in this strophe tells about the knight's breathless and strenuous galloping, a stumble in the unfolding of meter—the effect that a change of meter would have produced—would have been inappropriate and misleading. Hence, Debussy supplies a more sophisticated response to the poetic pause at the end of the first couplet, taking a breath before starting a breathless gallop.

The quatrain of the fourth stanza spreads over five measures. Its first couplet is uttered over a group of two, while the second unfolds over three measures. The returning quotation from “Nous n’irons” ushers in the four measures of the refrain. The “rush” instilled by the familiar metrical modulation (m. 41) hastens the advancement to the last measure of the strophe which, in turn, completes the ninth measure of this, so far, the shortest strophe. Both the length of this section and the condensed delivery of lyrics suggest the fast motion described in the stanza.

The fifth strophe (mm. 43-55) is structured differently from all the preceding sections. Its thirteen measures (as notated in twelve-eight time) make it look like the longest, but as it features a change into four-four meter—and the aforementioned metrical modulation—its duration in performance is equivalent to five measures plus one beat in the original twelve-eight time. With regards to its structure, its opening two-bar hypermeasure (mm. 43-44) is followed by a five-bar hypermeasure (mm. 45-49). The refrain concludes the song with a six-bar hypermeasure (mm. 50-55), resulting in yet another asymmetrical strophe.

The words of the opening couplet of the final strophe are delivered at the pace encountered in the previous three strophes, namely, a measure per poetic line (mm. 43-44). The pilfering described in the lyrics is matched with a shift to the parallel minor, and told by duplets in the vocal part. The resulting G1.5/1 conflict with the piano forges an impetus towards the second couplet and, as the harmonic progression in the ensuing measure intensifies with the help of sixteenth notes in the bass, the LDA of the couplet (“**bru-**”) does not receive special attention here, but is skimmed over.

With the opening lyrics of the second couplet (m. 45), the growing momentum swells even further on the dominant of the “wrong” key (a chord that is, in effect, an enharmonic

version of the augmented six-five chord). A sense of relief follows, as the cadential six-four chord—an assurance of the upcoming closure—is sounded in the home key (m. 47).

The lines of this couplet unfold over four measures each, in other words, at half the pace of the preceding lines. However, the given context does not impart an impression of a deceleration. Each LDA of this couplet is given a long note value (“so-leil” and “lu-ne”), but while the first one is seized by the “wrong” dominant, the second is greeted by both the tonic in the home key and the final change of meter. At that moment, the tune “Nous n’irons” emerges for the last time and, for once, in its original time signature (m. 48). Accelerated by a metrical modulation to four-four meter, “it is no longer a *berceuse* but a *réveil*,” to use Whiting’s words.³³

The final rendition of the refrain ensues (mm. 50-55), with the lyrics “Ne dormez plus, la Belle au bois.” “As the last poetic line is declaimed (‘L’anneau n’est plus à votre doigt’),” Whiting concludes, “the folk tune bursts out [...] in the ‘wrong tonic’ [this is to say, in the Lydian mode], as if to clarify in retrospect its malicious import throughout the song.”³⁴ The closing is further distorted by triplets (mm. 52-53), which, because of the metrical modulation into four-four time, are shorter than the eighth notes of the original twelve-eight time. Both their arrangement and their placement in the respective measures supply the final caricature of the story’s moral, mocking the premises of a lullaby.

Debussy’s setting is a fascinating display of irregularity in the overall metrical design.

Following the introductory measure, the song’s structure is as follows:

Strophe 1 = 11 mm = 3mm + 4mm + 4mm
Strophe 2 = 10 mm = 2mm + 4mm + 4mm
Strophe 3 = 11 mm = 2mm + 5mm + 4mm
Strophe 4 = 9 mm = 2mm + 3mm + 4mm
Strophe 5 = 13 mm = 2mm + 5mm + 6mm

³³ Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 114.

³⁴ Whiting, 114.

Although the table reveals quite a close similarity among the strophes' respective first and third phrases, there are a number of subtle finesses—such as changes of meter—that make them quite different.

Debussy fashions musical phrases out of couplets, whose LDAs are most often supported by cadences. However, the length and the placement of both LDAs *and* the corresponding temporary tonic chords within a given measure is inconsistent. In a number of strophes, their combined presence induces a new bar line—a change of meter—thus generating shorter measures and irregular hypermeasures, while in others the LDA is simply skimmed over by the intensified harmonic development. As a result, each strophe's couplets fashion their own musical phrases, enriched additionally by the lilting reminiscences of the folk tune “Nous n'irons.”

Therefore, the unfolding of the poem's narrative is expressed through ever-changing metrical and hypermetrical irregularity. As the content of every successive strophe is quite different from that of the preceding ones, it is hard to defy an awareness of constant development. Yet, as the framework of the strophes is similar in that each one of them opens with the ‘harping’ and closes with the folk tune, one also perceives a sense of regularity as the story is told. With the latter observation in mind, Whiting's designation of the strophic form is correct. However, as this strophic form is so far removed from Debussy's setting of “Madrid,” for example, to suggest a strong influence of through-composed form would not be too extravagant, either.

There is a developmental character to the succession of time signatures in the song. First, the aforementioned changes of meter start with metrical contractions, and develop into metrical modulations, demonstrating a progression from compound to simple meters in the song. Second, what begins as a series of single-measure insertions of different meters, closes with an eight-

measure-long passage in a new time signature. Third, as the number of single-measure metrical interruptions decreases towards the end of the song, and the home meter (twelve-eight) becomes more prevalent, the initial portrayal of instability and adventure, depicted through frequent changes of meter, turns into a determined pursuit, represented by the increased presence of the home meter. Just as the narrative demands, the final outcome of this metrical pursuit is warped too, through a transition into simple four-four time. As this closure is brought on by the folk tune “Nous n’irons” whose recurrences in twelve-eight time have consistently unified the strophes and their varying refrains, Debussy resolves the misleading into the truthful by stating the tune in its original meter. Moreover, as a sequel to the brief ‘adrenaline rushes’ portrayed by metrical modulations, with this final acceleration in tempo he captures the knight’s final escape.

The discussed progression of odd- and even-barred hypermeasures is created by single-measure intrusions of meters that are either contracted by a beat or two in comparison to the preceding ones, or that are re-interpreted into metrical modulations. While the former sound like “limping,” the latter instill the effect of a sudden hastening: the duration of the main beat is shortened, hence the impression of an abrupt change of tempo. The persistent irregular phrases that influence the hypermetrical unfolding at the song’s opening might depict the appearance of an adventure-weary knight, but their presence might also express the aforementioned 18th- and 19th-century sentiments about “asymmetrical phrases—especially those of odd-numbered lengths—[that] came to be looked upon with something resembling moral disapproval.”³⁵ Considering that the basis of Debussy’s setting is Hyspa’s distorted version of the tale, “with its cabaret-style combination of tongue-in-cheek medievalism [and] wry musical quotation,”³⁶ it is conceivable that Debussy opted to render the poem’s regular couplets through asymmetrical

³⁵ Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm*, 33. Among the theorists who expressed this sentiment was Reicha.

³⁶ Whiting, *Satie the Bohemian*, 114.

musical phrases in order to subliminally imply the overall moral decay portrayed in the narrative. Looking back at the songs discussed earlier in this study, the presence of occasional asymmetrical phrases in “Tragédie” and even “Fantoques” might be triggered by similar undertones.

As was briefly mentioned earlier, there is a bit of a dilemma as to whether the last change of meter in “La Belle au bois dormant” (m. 48) is a metrical mutation or an actual modulation. Malcolm Martineau plays a metrical modulation on his Hyperion recording of the song and, as far as it can be determined, he is the only pianist who has made the decision to interpret the final change of meter in this way. There are a few points in support of his decision. First, the appearance of the four-four time signature is the single appearance of this meter in the entire song. Throughout the song, the only featured quadruple meter has been that of twelve-eight, and whenever the compound beat needed to be split in two in order to accommodate the text, Debussy notated eighth-note duplets in the vocal part. The last evidence of duplets is in the measure before this change of meter (m. 47), which is to say that Debussy could have effortlessly continued this practice into m. 48 and thereafter. Second, the chorus of each strophe ends with an acceleration: it is induced either by a metrical contraction, such as the change from twelve-eight to nine-eight time (mm. 10-11), or metrical contraction *and* modulation, such as the change from twelve-eight to three-four time (mm. 20-21, mm. 31-21, and mm. 40-41). An acceleration at the end of the last strophe is, therefore, anticipated. Third, the change of meter from twelve-eight to four-four does not include a metrical contraction, as is the case when changing from twelve-eight to three-four time. If an acceleration is expected, it can only happen through a metrical modulation. Fourth, as the narrative tells us, the knight in shining armour is no more than a thief in shining armour, and the moment he steals the ring, he dashes away. All things considered,

therefore, to play the notated change of meter as a metrical modulation is not only fitting, but also consistent with Debussy's strophic form in this song, and illustrative of the poem's narrative.

It is incredible how early Debussy starts to tackle periodicity. The majority of songs in this chapter come from youthful stages of his career and yet introduce a plethora of devices. Metrically unaccented (i.e., feminine) cadences in which Debussy matches *e-muet* with the tonic arrival prove to be an early device for tricking the listener into perceiving an elongated measure. Sudden changes of texture induce an anticipated downbeat and shorten the measure. Other types of displaced downbeats (as seen in "Soupir" and "La Flûte de Pan") also work well for fashioning an appearance of changes of meter. Successive downbeats created by a written-out *ritardando*, or by a polyphonization of parameters present a formula for producing irregularity or aperiodicity. They both result in a dispersal of accents, thus producing an irregular or aperiodic unfolding of musical content.

To create interruptions and irregularities at hypermetrical level, Debussy overlaps phrase endings with beginnings of new hypermeasures; he accelerates or decelerates the declamatory pace, thus impacting the unfolding of hypermeter; and he uses metrical contractions and metrical modulations. In addition, he luminously matches caesurae in the poem with cadences in his music, thus underscoring enjambed phrases with musical phrases and achieving "irregular phraseology," to use Marie Rolf's term. It is important to remember that however small the interruption at the beat or pulse level, it will resonate higher up, thus causing a stir at metrical and hypermetrical levels. In his later songs, Debussy deliberately digs deeper, thus creating ever more sophisticated interruptions in order to destabilize periodicity at all levels.

Chapter Eight

Metrical Ambiguity

Metrically ambiguous passages are those in which accents are organized in such a way that it is hard to determine the pulse layer, let alone any larger organization of it. In such instances, while the performer who is privy to the score establishes a pulse layer within the notated “silent metrical grid” in order to be able to perform along with it, the listener is simply exposed to rhythmic strands and gestures that are not only deliberately disassociated from a metrical layer, but also purposely arranged to conceal a pulse.¹ For listeners, such passages contain no music to which to tap their toe.

A momentary disguising of the pulse layer has already been observed in “En Sourdine” (Example 5.28, mm. 31-32). At the end of the fourth stanza—the turning point of the poem—the described G1.5/1 conflict is not only amplified by D3+2, but also reinforced by the underlying change of tempo. Impacted by the suddenly imposed adjustment in the pace of the metrical layer, the pulse evaporates, and metrical ambiguity ensues.

Such moments of standstill or aimless floating appear as a novelty in Debussy’s *mélodies*. Having no perceptible pulse, some of them appear as a specific colouring of sorts, a timbre, or a texture, while others resemble recitatives or soliloquies. As such segments have an effect on periodicity—to the point where they either disguise or dissolve the pulse—they are hereafter referred to as metrically ambiguous.

¹ As cited in the introductory chapter, the expression “silent metric[al] grid” is taken from Joel Lester, “Notated and Heard Meter,” *Perspectives of New Music* 24, no.2 (Spring-Summer 1986): 116-128.

8.1 Suppressed Pulse and Metrical Ambiguity

A modest and brief instance of metrical ambiguity opens Debussy's setting of Paul Verlaine's poem "Chevaux de bois."² The song begins with something of a drumroll. The opening trill puts out a call for attention, as the merry-go-round is about to start spinning (see Example 8.1). In a tempo of *Allegro non tanto*, and with the instructions *joyeux et sonore* in mind, the trill is to be performed *fortissimo*, and it is to remain unbroken. Considering that the trill is played continuously without accents or fluctuations in volume implied by the bar line, there is nothing here that could prompt a pulse layer, not to mention a meter. Therefore, the opening two measures are metrically ambiguous.

Example 8.1. "Chevaux de bois" (1885, 1888, 1903), mm. 1-9³

(1=triplet 8th)

Allegro non tanto (*joyeux et sonore*)

The musical score shows five measures of music. The first two measures are marked *ff* and feature a continuous trill in the bass clef. The last three measures feature a triplet of eighth notes in the treble clef and a triplet of sixteenth notes in the bass clef. The bass clef notes are marked with a '6' and an accent (>).

² Debussy revised this song a few times before its publication in the collection *Ariettes oubliées*. Its piano introduction, however, remained unchanged.

³ Claude Debussy, "Chevaux de bois," in *Ariettes oubliées* (Paris: Fromont, 1913), 12-18.

A fanfare-like rhythmic gesture enters in the right-hand part of m. 3, suggesting a downbeat. Its wavering between a triple and duple pulse, however, asserts neither compound nor simple meter. In addition, the order of eighth-note groups—a triplet followed by a duple pair—creates a slight durational accent on the second beat, thus hinting at displacement dissonance $D6+3$ (1=triplet 8th). As the pattern repeats (mm. 4-7), the slight changes of texture in the right-hand part of mm. 5 and 7 confirm the downbeat, and therewith the primary metrical 6-layer is established. Even the swaying effect in mm. 7-8, in which a repeated pair of chords is inserted into the established rhythmic pattern and complicated further by a tie, is not sufficient to destabilize the regularity of what is to mount into the spinning carousel. It depicts a momentary “wobble,” but it does not last long enough to alter the course. As the piano part picks up the speed with thirty-seconds in support of the lyrics “Tournez, tournez” (m. 9), the full force of the regularly spinning merry-go-round is established. In the opening measures of this song, therefore, the state of metrical ambiguity, followed by a weak metrical dissonance, rapidly transitions into a state of metrical regularity.

Verlaine’s poem “Le Faune” inspires an extraordinary *mélodie* in Debussy’s hands. Unfolding along a continuous pulse from m. 3 on, the song’s three-four meter is challenged on

occasion in its portrayal of the faun's dance by accents belonging to various antimetrical layers. In the opening three measures of the song, however, the pulse layer is not articulated (see Example 8.2).

Example 8.2. "Le Faune" (1904), mm. 1-3⁴

(1=8th)

The image shows a musical score for the beginning of Debussy's "Le Faune". It consists of two staves: a vocal line on top and a piano accompaniment on the bottom. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked "Andantino (Tempo rubato)". The piano part starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and the lyrics "ainsi qu'une flûte". The first measure has a fermata over it. The second and third measures contain eighth notes. The piano part ends with a fermata and the lyrics "più p". Below the piano part, there are numbers 1, 3, 4, 2, and 2+ indicating note durations.

The presented succession of note values in the prescribed *tempo rubato* conveys vagueness. Although durations in mm. 2-3 display an aperiodic sequence (shown in eighth notes as 1 + 3 + 4 + 2 + 2 with a fermata), the absence of a pulse layer makes the notated metrical irregularity unintelligible to the listener. Perceived as a simulation of an *ad libitum* passage, the passage effectively conjures up an image of the faun and his flute. The related sense of grotesque eroticism ensues, with Debussy's portrayal of the faun's dance.

Metrical ambiguity can be perceived also at the beginning of Debussy's setting of Baudelaire's "Recueillement." The song opens with a two-bar gesture, whose rhythm is syncopated enough to keep the pulse disguised (Example 8.3). In the tempo *Lent et calme* and in the notated four-four meter, the first measure is occupied by a series of displaced quarter notes. As the triplet-eighth pulse layer is not clearly articulated, it is the subliminal unfolding of D3+1.5 (1=triplet 8th) that creates uncertainty. The second measure, although insinuating a repetition of

⁴ Claude Debussy, "La Faune," in *Fêtes galantes II* (Paris: Durand, 1904-1906), 6-9.

what we have just heard, is rhythmically modified: the first eighth note is tied to a triplet (a hint of D12+4), which interrupts the projected pattern.

Example 8.3. “Recueillement” (1889), mm. 1-4

(1=triplet 8th)

Lent et calme

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

12 12

Measure 3 is a restatement of m. 1. Its pattern-beginning accent determines in retrospect the “durational quantity” of the notated bar, and the bass pitch—the third statement of the longest duration—starts to unveil contours of the concealed meter.⁵ In the listener’s mind, an awareness of a regular pulse begins to emerge at this point, the pulse whose length corresponds to the duration of each notated measure. With the opening syncopation and the clearly articulated triplets in m. 4, a meter emerges.

Measure 5—a restatement of m. 4—confirms the quadruple time signature, and the metrical momentum develops further into m. 6 (Example 8.4), where the arrangement of syncopations previously heard in m. 2 is brought back and metrically clarified. The tempo slows and the introductory section ends with a fermata. The metrical ambiguity at the beginning of

⁵ As cited in Chapter 3, the term “durational quantity” is adopted from Christopher Hasty, *Meter as Rhythm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 6-7.

“Recueillement,” therefore, develops into meter by gathering an increasing number of meter-defining accents in the ensuing measures.

Example 8.4. “Recueillement” (1889), mm. 5-6

The described instance of metrical ambiguity, as found in the song’s opening two measures, displays a particular treatment of durational accents: although notated as metrical dissonance, the syncopations—stemming from the duple division of the main beat—are not perceived as antimetrical events, simply because the meter has not been established yet. In addition, the proceeding of the subliminal dissonance is complicated by a tie to a group of triplets (m. 2), thus confusing the pace by a brief metrical mutation to a compound time. Such a wavering within a layer that cannot even be established as antimetrical yet, because the meter has not been able to emerge, results in metrical uncertainty. Consequently, the listener hears such passage as metrically ambiguous.

A metrically interesting passage can also be found at the outset of Debussy’s *mélodie* “Le Son du cor,” another poem by Verlaine. Debussy uses a type of written-out *ritardando* to create not a metrically irregular passage (as heard in “De Grève”), but a metrically ambiguous opening. In the notated triple meter—compound in the piano and simple in the vocal part—the sound of the horn (“le cor”) is signaled through the use of fifths in the left hand (see Example 8.5). The

increasing durations of the repeated fifths suggest the receding echo of the horn call. In the score, the created durational accents are displaced in relation to the notated nine-eighth meter. The tied note values generate a sequence of 2 + 3 + 3 + 5 + 5 eighth notes that would conflict with any consistent time signature. Consequently, the unfolding of a pulse layer is suppressed, making this opening not only irregular, but also metrically ambiguous.

Example 8.5. “Le Son du cor” (1891), mm. 1-4

(1=triplet 8th)

Lent et dolent.

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of three flats and a 3/4 time signature. The middle staff is a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of three flats and a 9/8 time signature. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of three flats and a 9/8 time signature. The score includes fingerings (4, 2, 2, 4, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2) and a sequence of note values (2, 3, 3, 5, 5, 9, 9) indicating the duration of the notes. The tempo is marked 'Lent et dolent.' and the dynamics are marked 'pp'.

At m. 2, the right hand brings in the sound of bells. The pitches of the upper voice unfold in groups of four eighth notes, while the pitches of the lower voice form groups of two eighth notes. Consequently, an eighth-note pulse layer is starting to form. The pitches of this layer, namely C4-E-flat4-D-flat4-G4 are not, however, committed to the notated meter. What they convey to the listener is two-four time, further reinforced by the pedal fifth below the pitch C4 of the second group of four eighths. As the nine-eighth-note metrical layer has not been activated and the bells, therefore, resonate in their own duple meter against a silent nine-eighth metrical

grid, this is an instance of subliminal grouping dissonances $G9/4$ and $G9/2$. For the listener, however, a non-metrical opening is followed by a brief episode in simple duple meter, whose unfolding dissolves in m. 3 through the increasing presence of long note values.

Although Debussy's notation of this passage implies metrical irregularity, i.e., successive changes of meter (from two-eight to three-eight to five-eight to the prevailing two-four time), his subtle use of syncopations (in the left hand) together with the subliminal grouping dissonance (in the right hand) produces an effect that, at the onset, equally conceals the changing meters and a sense of pulse. With the entrance of the bell motif in m. 2, both the pulse layer and the two-four meter are easily detected, but are subsequently dissolved. Such a juxtaposition and superimposition of sounds (the horn and the bells), with their distinctive pitches and rhythms, produces a unique soundscape—the type of subtly resonating imagery that only music can portray. The signaling and the reverberation of sounds is depicted as it happens in nature, by metrical ambiguity.

A fleeting state of ambiguity occurs in the later part of "Recueillement," where the previously established periodicity is challenged for a brief moment by a compound metrical dissonance (see Example 8.6). As of m. 15—the beginning of the B section—the meter changes to three-four time: eighth-note triplets enter the piano part *a tempo rubato* and, as they are grouped in twos, they form $G3/2$ (1=triplet 8th). Immediately thereafter, with the marking *sourd. et très soutenu* (muted and sustained), the left-hand assumes the dissonance $G9/6$ (the 6-layer being created by repetition of a six-triplet-eighth-note segment throughout mm. 16-20), while the right hand undertakes syncopations of duple eighth notes, i.e., $D3+1.5$ (m. 16). The simultaneity of these dissonances creates a conflict between the duple and triple subdivision of the beat, namely $G1.5/1$. A sense of pulse is lost for a moment, simply because the combination of

dissonances makes the pulse unintelligible. Although the quarter-note pulse of the main beat surfaces in m. 17, and the dotted-half-note pulse in the lowest voice of the right hand marks the metrical 9-triplet layer, the left hand's 6-triplet layer continues to stir a considerable conflict against the notated meter.

Example 8.6. "Recueillement" (1889), mm. 15-20

(1=triplet 8th)

15 **a tempo rubato**

sourd et très soutenu

ci:

sempre pp

18 *p*

Une at - mos - phère obs - cure en - ve - lop - pe la vil - le, Aux

The vocal part enters in m. 18, confirming the downbeat and reinstating the dissonance G.1.5/1 heard previously between the right- and left-hand parts. In its delivery of the text, “une atmosphère obscure enveloppe la ville” (“A dusky atmosphere enfolds the town”), the vocal line conveys the rationale for the metrical obscurity portrayed in the music.⁶ The placement of syllables is consistently congruent with the notated meter, and the matching of the poetic accents (expressed in longer note values) with the notated downbeats in the right-hand part brings some metrical clarity to the gloomy vagueness portrayed in the piano.

Debussy uses compound metrical dissonance to create a particular mood in the B section of this *mélodie*. Although the B section is characterized by the change to three-four meter, the notated micropulse is that of a triplet eighth note. With the presence of the duple- versus triple-eighth-note conflict, amplified by the G9/6 and D3+1.5 dissonances, Debussy, in his portrayal of Baudelaire’s “obscure atmosphere,” creates an opaque texture and challenges the listener’s perception of pulse and meter. The resulting metrical ambiguity portrays Baudelaire’s obscure atmosphere most suitably.

A similar effect of a momentary unintelligibility of pulse is present in mm. 4-5 of Debussy’s setting of “Nuit sans fin” (see Example 5.30). In the notated four-four meter, the combination of triplet eighths and sixteenth notes results in G1/0.75 (1=triplet 8th). The addition of D3+1 and the counter-rhythmic setting of the text makes the pulse indistinct for a moment. The appearance of such a transient episode of metrical ambiguity creates a brief stasis of sorts, a kind of a textural *tremolo*, which enriches the overall continuity of the composition with a novel type of interruption.

⁶ Charles Baudelaire, “Recueillement” (“Meditation”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs*, with Christopher Maltman (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67357, 2003, CD, 13. The translation is also available online: Charles Baudelaire, “Recueillement,” trans. Richard Stokes, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2282>.

The described instances of metrical ambiguity, although short, occur either at the beginning, or within the body of Debussy's *mélodies*. Ambiguous passages at the opening may depict sounds within a landscape, or they may introduce the main character of the song's narrative. The role of measures of ambiguity that are inserted into the body of a song, seems to be related to an emotional state: the impact of a rejection (in "En Sourdine"), a mood instilled by an obscure atmosphere ("Recueillement"), or a sensation of trembling ("Nuit sans fin"). Their function is, hence, closely related to the narrative or mood of the given poem.

8.2 Recitative Passages and Metrical Ambiguity

Recitative passages are by definition metrically confusing, because their unfolding is intended to imitate the spoken word. Traditionally, their performances have been tied to a flexibility of tempo, but in Debussy's scores, recitative passages are notated with the finest detail. Every duration is measured by the notated meter, i.e., fitted into the metrical grid, as Debussy rarely leaves declamations of text to chance.

Debussy's first attempts at recitatives or, more generally, declamatory metrical designs, can be heard in his settings of two of Banville's poems, "Zéphyr" (discussed in the previous chapter), and "Oh! Quand la mort" (which Debussy titled "Souhait").⁷ Both were composed during Debussy's Italian sojourn with the family of Madame von Meck—the latter in Florence, in autumn of 1881, and the former in Rome, in November of the same year.⁸ As both poems are isometric with regular rhyme patterns—"Souhait" in decasyllabic, "Zéphyr" in octosyllabic

⁷ "The sole manuscript of this work that has been preserved carries the title (invented by Debussy) of *Souhait* [...]" Denis Herlin, "The *Mélodies* of Debussy," in *Claude Debussy: Intégrale des mélodies*, with Liliana Faraon and Magali Léger (sopranos), Marie-Ange Todorovitch (mezzo-soprano), Gilles Ragon (tenor), François le Roux (baritone), and Jean-Louis Haguénauer (piano), Harmonia mundi/Ligia LIDI 0201285-14, 2014, CD booklet, 170.

⁸ Herlin, "The *Mélodies* of Debussy," in *Claude Debussy: Intégrale des mélodies*, CD, 171.

verse—the fact that they would inspire the 19-year old composer to deviate from straightforward lyrical settings is remarkable.

At the very opening of “Souhait,” Debussy’s indication of *Moderato (style d’un recitatif)*—the only instance of such a direction in all of his *mélodies*—suggests how the opening of the song is to unfold (Example 8.7). For the listener, the song begins with octaves in the right hand. Depending on whether the performer acknowledges the accent implied by the ensuing bar line or not, the metrical layer either starts to materialize with the downbeat of m. 2, or it remains camouflaged. At m. 3, however, the dotted half note in the low octaves of the left hand secures the downbeat, adding the root to the emerging F-sharp diminished triad.

From m. 3 on, the metrical unfolding is handed over to the vocal part, which, considering the aforementioned direction for recitative style, might be performed in such a way as to loosen the unfolding of the pulse. First, the timing of the vocal entry in m. 4 might be slightly delayed, thus slackening the possibly emerging triple layer. Second, while the arrangement of the first two durational accents in the vocal part clearly reveals triple meter, the actualization of its note values might also be somewhat relaxed. In order to uphold the poet’s caesurae in the opening line of the poem, “Oh! quand la mort,” (“Ah! when death”), Debussy assigns half-note values to the words “Oh” and “mort,” both of which might be extended in performance, in conformity with the requested recitative style of singing. Third, the second half of the opening poetic line (m. 6) continues after two unequal rests, which might further obscure the pulse. In other words, the exactness with which the vocal part’s soliloquy is notated will not necessarily be reflected in a performance. Consequently, what comes across to the listener is a metrically ambiguous passage.

Example 8.7. “Souhait” (1881), mm. 1-9⁹

(1=8th)

Moderato (style d'un recitatif)

Oh, quand la mort,

que rien ne sau-rait a - pai - ser, Nous pren - dra tous les deux dans un der - nier bai-

The eighth-note pulse layer starts to emerge more clearly in m. 6 of the vocal part. With the return of the piano in m. 7, the main quarter-note beat returns and leads into the ensuing metrically regular section. It is important to notice that while the F-sharp major six-four chord in m. 8 establishes the downbeat (as confirmed further in m. 9), and while the notated meter emerges as a result, the metrical unfolding is conflicted by a displacement dissonance, namely D6+2 (1=8th). This dissonance supports the lengthened LDA in m. 7 (“a-pai-ser”) and an SA

⁹ Claude Debussy, “Souhait,” in *Sept Poèmes de Banville pour soprano léger et piano*, ed. James R. Briscoe (Paris: Jobert, 1984), 9-11.

(“pre-**dra**”) in m. 8. The displacement resolves with a cadence in m. 10, and metrical consonance is maintained through the ensuing poetic line (mm. 11-14 in Example 8.8).

Example 8.8. “Souhait” (1881), mm. 10-14

10

ser Et jet-te-ra sur nous le man-teau de ses a - les,

The initial metrical ambiguity of “Souhait,” therefore, does not last long. It evolves into a metrically dissonant passage, which then resolves into a metrical consonance. It is through a progression of metrical states, therefore, that the meter materializes.

The metrical ambiguity in the opening measures of “Souhait” underscores the first line of the poem: the words “Oh! quand la mort, que rien ne saurait apaiser,” (“Ah! when Death, whom none can appease”) are delivered by the use of recitative, as if to render the sense of the unknown and the related sense of timelessness.¹⁰ The second line, “Nous prendra tous les deux dans un dernier baiser,” (“Takes both of us in one final kiss”), is joined by the dissonance D6+2, while the third line, “Et jettera sur nous le manteau de ses ailes,” (“And covers us with the cloak of its wings”), is conveyed through metrical consonance.¹¹ Similarly to the songs discussed in Chapter 4, here the resolution to metrical consonance also portrays the sense of togetherness, the

¹⁰ Théodore de Banville, “Souhait” (“A Wish”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 3*, with Jennifer France (soprano), Jonathan McGovern (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA68016, 2014, CD, 10.

¹¹ Banville, “Souhait” (“A Wish”), trans. Richard Stokes in *Debussy Songs 3*, Hyperion CD, 10.

inseparability, the permanence of oneness that the lyric I imagines will be reached in shared death. As such thoughts represent the ultimate alignment between lovers and their souls that will be forever joined by the final kiss, metrical consonance expresses such a bond most suitably.

A metrical progression beginning with ambiguity can also be found in Debussy's lesser-known setting of Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle's ballade "Les Elfes."¹² The poem is one of three by Leconte de Lisle that Debussy set to music; the other two being "Jane" and "La Fille aux cheveux de lin." Counting 175 measures, "Les Elfes" is the second longest song that Debussy ever composed.¹³

Leconte de Lisle's ballade is fairly long, as well. Seven returns of the so-called *envoi* are interspersed by six sextains. Debussy does not set the entire ballade to music: only four and half sextains are selected to tell the story, while the *envoi*—a couplet in this case—recurs four times. The narrative of the poem is reflected in the setting as well, in that various stages of the plot are represented by a succession of metrically different sections.

The ballade depicts a knight riding "a black steed" on the way to his fiancée, who awaits his arrival in time for their wedding. The dancing elves surround him, trying to detain him. The knight declines the invitation to dance with them and leaves without delay. At m. 135, however, a stirring launch of recitative style arrests the song's metrical flow (Example 8.9). The continuous presence of sixteenth notes, sixteenth-note triplets and thirty-seconds heard thus far ceases in the accompaniment. Unlike in "Souhait," however, there is no directive from Debussy to initiate the style of a recitative. Aside from a fermata in m. 140, the notation of the passage in two-four time does not invite any deviations from the notated meter. Similarly, there are no

¹² The score is published in Claude Debussy, *Quatre nouvelles Mélodies (1882) pour voix et piano*, ed. Denis Herlin (Paris: Durand, 2012).

¹³ The longest *mélodie* is "Séguidille" (the poem by Théophile Gautier), counting 218 measures. Claude Debussy, *Séguidille pour voix et piano*, ed. Marie Rolf (Paris: Durand, 2014).

tempo changes from the opening *Allegretto*, suggested by the editor at the beginning of the song. Yet recorded performances present us with a metrically elastic rendition of this passage. The loss of pulse (and meter) is instantaneous, and the pitches are delivered with a certain rhythmic elasticity. A close comparison with the preceding section reveals that the recitative is aided by an almost unnoticeable decrease in tempo, which is not notated in the score. In mm. 137-138, even the accompanying half notes, underpinning the poetic line's SA and LDA, are heard as metrically uncertain, which allows singers to deliver the text at their own pace. The ensuing succession of short note values (mm. 139-140) denotes the slowed-down pulse somewhat flexibly in both parts, but with the length of the ensuing fermata (m. 140), even the slightest prospect of the continuation of the pulse disappears. In the remaining measures of the recitative passage (mm. 142-150), the rhythmic gestures in the piano part sound grotesque, as if consisting of unspecified note values. One presumes that this is all in portrayal of the narrative, but if so, in what way?

Example 8.9. "Les Elfes" (1882), mm. 135-150¹⁴

132

-ser__ ma belle aux doux yeux. O mon cher é-

¹⁴ Claude Debussy, "Les Elfes," in *Quatre nouvelles Mélodies (1882)*, ed. Denis Herlin (Paris: Durand, 2012), 11-22.

136

poux, la tombe é - ter - nelle Se - ra no - tre lit de

140

no - ce, dit-elle Je suis mor - te

144

Et lui, la voy-ant ain - si, D'an - goisse et d'a - mour

148

tom - be mort aus - si.

153

The knight is met by “a white form” who walks silently and extends her arms to him. As he utters his plea: “Elf, spirit, demon, do not stop me! Do not stop me, odious phantom! I am going to marry my beauty with gentle eyes,” the “white form,” who is the knight’s dead fiancée, is acknowledged by a diminished-seventh chord in the piano and responds through the recitative:

- “Ô mon cher époux, la tombe éternelle
Sera notre lit de noce,” dit-elle.
“Je suis morte!” - Et lui, la voyant ainsi,
D'angoisse et d'amour tombe mort aussi.

- “Oh, my dear husband, the eternal tomb
Shall be our wedding bed,” she said.
“I am dead!” – And he, beholding her thus,
Also dies with anguish and with love.¹⁵

¹⁵ Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle, “Les Elfes” (“The Elves”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 3*, with Jennifer France (soprano), Jonathan McGovern (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA68016, 2014, CD, 9. The translation is also available online: Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle, “Les Elfes,” trans. Richard Stokes, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2788>

At her words, “I am dead” (mm. 141-143), a fragment of the elfin dance is heard, implying their involvement in her death. The subsequent fall and death of the knight is portrayed in mm. 148-150, ending with the leaps into the lowest register of the piano (mm. 149-50), a variant of the leaps played by the left hand at the outset of the passage (mm. 135-136). The dance of the merry elves “crowned with thyme and marjoram” returns as the final *envoi* of the song.¹⁶ The periodicity is re-established, and the song approaches its final measures through a metrically regular section.

It appears that in “Souhait” and “Les Elfes” the recitative section is directly related to the topic of death. In the former song, the style of recitative is used to portray thoughts about death that are uttered right at the beginning: “Ah! When Death, whom none can appease, // takes both of us in one final kiss [...]”¹⁷ In the latter, allusions to the recitative are present whenever the knight speaks, but its most arresting and lasting instance is launched with the fiancée’s revelation of her death and continues long enough to portray the death of the knight, as well. As the most effective device in depicting such powerful moments are prolonged chords or rests, it appears that Debussy chooses to portray the absence of a heartbeat with the absence of a regular pulse in the music.

There are few additional instances in which the verb “mourir” is directly related to the absence of pulse. In “De Fleurs,” his own *prose lyrique* (Example 8.10), Debussy turns to a brief recitative in his rendering of the phrase “Mon âme meurt de trop de soleil!” (“My soul is dying of too much sun!”¹⁸). Here, however, in addition to lengthening a chord to dissolve the pulse

¹⁶ Leconte de Lisle, “Les Elfes” (“The Elves”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 3*, Hyperion CD, 9.

¹⁷ Banville, “Souhait” (“A Wish”), trans. Richard Stokes in *Debussy Songs 3*, Hyperion CD, 10.

¹⁸ Claude Debussy, “De Fleurs” (“Of Flowers”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 2*, with Lorna Anderson and Lisa Milne (sopranos), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67883, 2012, CD, 8. The translation is also available online: Claude Debussy, “De Fleurs,” trans. Richard Stokes, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2837>

layer, Debussy colours the E-flat minor chord with a *tremolo*, thus audibly capturing the trembling of the distressed flowers by employing a common recitative accompaniment. *Tremolo* chords also precede the appearance of the beloved in “Les Elfes” (mm. 133-4), depicting the knight’s shiver at the sight of his bride as a white ghost.

Example 8.10. “De Fleurs” (1893), mm. 61-63¹⁹

61 *f*

Mon â - me meurt de trop de so - leil!

ff *très dim.*

The most touching examples of passages alluding to the style of recitative, however, are found in Debussy’s setting of the “Ballade que Villon fait à la requête de sa mère pour prier Notre-Dame.” The ballade (in the sense of a poetic form, not a narrative poem) is a prayer in which every stanza ends with an *envoi*, “En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir” (“In this faith I wish to live and die”²⁰). As there are three stanzas, the *envoi* returns three times, and Debussy responds to it differently each time.

¹⁹ Claude Debussy, “De Fleurs,” in *Proses lyriques* (Paris: Fromont, 1895), 16-21.

²⁰ François Villon, “Ballade que Villon fait à requête de sa mère” (“Ballad made at his mother’s request for a prayer to Our Lady”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs*, with Christopher Maltman (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67357, 2003, CD, 18-19. The translation is also available online: François Villon, “Ballade que Villon fait à requête de sa mère,” trans. Richard Stokes, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2867>

With each ensuing stanza Villon draws more empathy from the reader. Portraying his mother as “a humble Christian” whose “worth has been as nothing,” Villon also declares that Saint Mary’s mercy “is much greater” than his mother’s sinfulness, and that “without it no soul can merit nor enter Heaven.” In the first statement of the *envoi*, the suddenly prolonged F-major triad underpinning the word “mourir” induces a loss of pulse (Example 8.11).

Example 8.11. “Ballade que Villon fait à la requête de sa mère” (1910), mm. 17-20²¹

17 **Pieusement**

En ces-te foy je vueil vivre et mou - rir. A vos-tre Filz

pp *pp*

In the second stanza, the mother asks of Saint Mary, “Say to your Son that I am his, // By him may my sins be pardoned.” She asks if she may be forgiven as was “the Egyptian woman²² // Or the clerk Theophilus,²³ // Who was acquitted and absolved by you, // Though he had made a pact with Satan.” Through the mother’s request, “Preserve me from doing such a thing,” it becomes clear that in comparison to the mentioned absolutions, she might not be asking for

²¹ Claude Debussy, “Ballade que Villon fait à requête de sa mère,” in *Trois Ballades de François Villon* (Paris: Durand, 1910), 6-10.

²² Sainte Marie l’Égyptienne was a prostitute “who was converted after a vision in the Saint Sepulcre Basilica in Jerusalem. She retired to Thebes in Egypt to repent from former life for forty-seven years.” Christopher Goldsack, “Debussy – Trois ballades de François Villon,” *The Mélodie Treasury*, footnote no. 5, 2020. http://www.melodietreasury.com/translations/song100_Trois%20ballades%20de%20Francois%20Villon.html?LMC
[L=agQt8M](#)

²³ “Lieutenant in the service of the Bishop of Adana who, upon losing his post, signed a pact with the Devil to regain it. After seven years he repented and was saved by the intervention of the Virgin Mary.” Goldsack, “Debussy – Trois ballades,” footnote no. 6.

much. Subsequently, at the second occurrence of the *envoi*, the F-major triad does not last as long: the following eighth notes pick up the pulse with the second half of the third beat and carry it into the next stanza, thus not quite losing the momentum, but reminding us of the previous instance (Example 8.12).

Example 8.12. “Ballade que Villon fait à la requête de sa mère” (1910), mm. 30-33

30 **Pieusement** **Doux et humble**

En ces-te foy je vueil vivre et mou - rir. Fem-me je

The text of the final stanza reads:

Femme je suis pauvrette et ancienne,
 Qui rien ne sais; oncques lettre ne lus.
 Au moutier vois dont suis paroissienne²⁴
 Paradis peint, où sont harpes et luz,
 Et un enfer où damnés sont boullus:
 L'un me fait peur, l'autre joie et liesse.
 La joie avoir fais moi, haute Déesse,
 A qui pécheurs doivent tous recourir,
 Comblés de foi, sans feinte ne paresse:
 En cette foi je veux vivre et mourir.

I am a poor old woman,
 Ignorant and unlettered.
 In my parish church I see
 A painted paradise with harps and lutes,
 And a bell where the damned are boiled:
 One fills me with fright, the other with joy and bliss
 Let me have that joy, high Goddess,
 To whom all sinners in the end must come,
 Full of faith, without hypocrisy or sloth:
 In this faith I wish to live and die.²⁵

²⁴ “Guillebert de Metz in 1434 describes l’Église des Celestins, a monastic church thought to have been Villon’s mother’s parish church, as having a painting of heaven and hell.” Goldsack, footnote no. 9.

²⁵ Villon, “Ballade que Villon fait à requête de sa mère,” trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs*, CD, 19.

The third return of the *envoi* closes the song, but the pulse continues to beat in the music, endorsed—and blessed—by the purity of the C-major triad (Example 8.13). In consideration of Villon’s text in the last stanza of the prayer, and the implied rise of hope for salvation, the continuation of the pulse in the closing measures emerges as Debussy’s stance towards granting Villon’s mother eternal life in heaven.

Example 8.13. “Ballade que Villon fait à la requête de sa mère” (1910), mm. 45-47

45 **Lent et recueilli**

En ces-te foy je vueil vivre et mou - rir.

pp

pp

In the aforementioned songs Debussy uses recitative, or brief segments that resemble the style of recitative, to portray the presence of death. Whether appearing as a thought (in “Souhait” and “De Fleurs”), as an actuality in the poem’s narrative (“Les Elfes”), or as a part of one’s concern in a prayer (Villon’s ballade for his mother), the presence of death seems to be regularly associated with a dying pulse. While, on the one hand, such episodes confuse the listener, on the other, they draw attention to the scene, which, in Debussy’s hands, instills moments of utmost poignancy.

It is noticeable that a recitative, or Debussy’s allusion to it, is often launched by the sudden appearance of prolonged note values. Depending on the given tempo, as well as the

preceding context, a long-lasting chord can successfully halt the established periodicity. Whether it occurs as a gradually-assembled, or a solid chord, with the customary *tremolo* colouring or without, its duration triggers a fading of the pulse layer in the listener's mind.

The fading is even more effectual when Debussy follows a prolonged chord by a declamation in the vocal part. In "Souhait," for instance (Example 8.7), having asserted the downbeat in the piano, Debussy passes the beat over to the singer, who enunciates the text (about death) with utmost sensitivity. As periodicity (implied by quarter notes that lead to the downbeat in m. 3) gradually dissipates, the listener's projection fades.

Debussy's late songs feature numerous instances of ambiguity initiated by a long chord and followed by what comes across as free declamation. These episodes do not address the topic of death. An already visited example occurs in his setting of "La Flûte de Pan," but in the measures that follow the metrically irregular opening discussed in Chapter 7. In m. 3 (Example 8.14), the B chord secures the downbeat, but the ensuing vocal line in duple and triplet eighth notes under the marking *doux et soutenu* is performed with more flexibility than notated. The pulse drifts away.

Example 8.14. "La Flûte de Pan" (1897), mm. 3-5

3 *p* *Doux et soutenu*

Pour le jour des Hy-a - cin- thies, il m'a don-né u-ne sy -

pp

5

rinx fai - te de ro - seaux bien tail - lé, u - nis a -

In measure 4, as the opening gesture returns, one expects a return of the pulse layer as well. Instead, the enunciation of the text is so arbitrary that even the accompanying slowly-progressing chords in the piano (in m. 5)—the same ones that generated metrical irregularity in m. 2—cannot resuscitate the eighth-note pulse layer. The fact that their rhythmic arrangement, or rather, the pace of harmonic change reinforces certain syllables does not make the metrical design of this passage any easier to comprehend.

Debussy's placement of the text reveals an expertly approach: his allocation of the longest note values reflects the poet's caesurae, and all of the shorter durations corroborate the natural accentuation of syllables. With regards to the placement of these values within measures, the first PDA, located at the end of the word "Hy-a-cin-*thies*," falls on a downbeat (of m. 4), while the second PDA, ending the word "tail-*lé*" (lengthened further by a fermata), settles on the third beat (of m. 5) and is, therefore, noticeably displaced. Unexpectedly, the quarter-note B triad that underpins this syllable is also displaced. Moreover, since Debussy's placement of the text accentuates syllables "[sy]-**RINX** fai-te **de** ro-seaux bien tail-**lé**,"²⁶ it becomes apparent that the

²⁶ A reminder: when applying musical accents to a text, syllables placed on the downbeat are in capital letters and in bold font; syllables placed on any other beat are in bold, and syllables placed on an accented subdivision of a beat are underscored. Thus "SAX-o-phone" implies the placement on beats **ONE two and**.

rhythmic arrangement of chords reinforces these naturally stressed syllables (see Example 8.15).²⁷ Therefore, the previously discussed metrical irregularity (as shown in Example 7.28) results from the poetic rhythm, or, more specifically, from Debussy's synchronization of the naturally accented syllables “-RINX,” “fai-,” “-seaux” and “-lé” with the piano chords. The created piano gesture, which recurs within the song, is sourced directly from the poem's prosody.

Example 8.15. “La Flûte de Pan” (1897), m. 5

The musical score for Example 8.15, "La Flûte de Pan" (1897), m. 5, is presented in a two-staff format. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line begins with a half note on a single pitch, followed by eighth notes. The piano accompaniment consists of chords, with a prolonged A-major triad in the first two measures. Vertical lines connect the vocal notes to the piano chords. A fermata is placed over the final note of the vocal line and the final chord of the piano accompaniment.

An ambiguous segment created by a prolonged chord and ensuing declamation follows the already studied opening measures of “Le Son du cor” (Example 8.16). Marking a downbeat at m. 5, the A-major triad extends over two measures. Above it, the vocal part, notated on a single pitch and in eighth notes until the opening line's LDA (m. 7), recites the words in the manner of soliloquy. Debussy's marking *doux et expressif* above the score plays a significant role in the metrical ambiguity of these measures. At the LDA of the poetic line, though, both parts convey a downbeat, in anticipation of a metrically regular passage.

²⁷ In addition to the aforementioned displaced PDA, the word “de” falls on the second beat, thus inviting more accentuation than it would normally receive. Debussy pacifies this protrusion most resourcefully, namely, by underpinning it with a tied chord. Such a solution allows the singer to suppress what might have become an inappropriately accented syllable.

Example 8.16. “Le Son du cor” (1891), mm. 5-7

5 *p doux et expressif*

Le son du cor s'af - fli - ge vers les bois

An episode in the style of recitative creates a brief standstill in the opening section of the song “Dans le Jardin” (Example 8.17). Following a metrically regular passage, the F-sharp ninth chord secures the downbeat at m. 6 and is therewith prolonged over the four ensuing measures of three-eighth time. The voice enters soon after the piano, carrying out the first two lines of the poem: “I peered into the garden, // Furtively, through the hedge.” Debussy’s choice of note values recognizes Grivollet’s caesurae (a comma after “jar-**din**” and “fur-**tif**,” and a semicolon after “**haie**”) by assigning longer durations to the preceding syllables. The placement of these lines into the notated three-eighth meter, however, is curious: the first LDA and the following PDA both fall onto the third beat of neighbouring measures (mm. 7 and 8), and are tied over the bar line, but the last LDA is placed on the downbeat (m. 10), supported by the beginning of a new passage. A number of syllables are displaced, and the recitation of the text is reminiscent of a patter. Although the passage is notated to the finest detail, a performance of its durations comes across as erratic and, therefore, disguises the pulse. The reason for that might lie in the narrative: surprised by seeing a girl in the garden and stunned by her beauty, the lyric I seems to be stopped

in his tracks, remaining motionless while stuttering the words, almost in disbelief, as he enjoys watching the beautiful child. Debussy's disguising of the pulse is, then, a suitable choice.

Example 8.17. "Dans le Jardin" (1903), mm. 6-10

6

Je re-gar-dais dans le jar-din__ Fur-tif__ au tra-vers de la haie;

p *pp*

The selected passages show that Debussy's recitatives share a specific method: they are launched either by a *tremolo* (as in "De Fleurs") or a prolonged chord (which is, at times, anticipated by a *tremolo*) and, more often than not, are followed by a declamation. The order of these devices successfully causes the previously established pulse layer to fade in the listener's mind, simply because between the absence of meter in a solid chord and singing in recitative style (which, by definition mimics the unfolding of the spoken word), there is no source from which a pulse could emerge. Metrical ambiguity, then, arises as a natural consequence.

With regards to the effect of a suppressed pulse, Debussy's use of subliminal metrical dissonance, compound metrical dissonance, as well as his superimposition of metrical dissonance and an aperiodic layer, successfully disguises the pulse. Particularly novel are those brief instances of compound dissonance that create a particular colouring to the narrative—a textural *tremolo* of sorts. As they are structured from incongruous pulse layers, such as a 2-layer

and a 3-layer, or a 3-layer against a 4-layer, the simultaneity of which is conflicted further by additional types of metrical dissonance, isolating a single layer over another is impossible for the listener.

The actual absence of a pulse as in a continuous trill, *tremolo* or a prolonged chord is quite similar to the absence of a pulse in silence, because silence, like a continuous sound, does not convey a pulse layer. With that in mind, episodes of what I would consider to be unaccompanied recitative—those that are launched by a single chord—resemble soliloquies, i.e., instances of pure declamation, regardless of the presence of a static chord in the accompaniment. Again, the combination of the two—a static chord and pure declamation—is a superimposition of two sources of ambiguity.

The passages presented in this chapter demonstrate Debussy's resourcefulness in the use of various devices—silence, static sounds, and combinations of multiple layers of incongruent pulses—to create metrical ambiguity.²⁸ They also demonstrate that he ingeniously employs this metrical state to reflect particular physical or emotional states described in the poetry.

²⁸ Debussy writes about his awareness of the expressive potential of silence in letters to Pierre Louÿs and Ernest Chausson. Marie Rolf cites these letters in her chapter "Symbolism as Compositional Agent in Act IV, Scene 4 of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*," in *Berlioz and Debussy: Sources, Contexts and Legacies*, eds. Barbara L. Kelly and Kerry Murphy (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 119 and 139.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion: All Roads Lead to the Poem

The songs investigated in this study represent all four stages of Debussy's composition of *mélodies*; thirteen songs are from the early period (1879-1883); eight are from the Symbolist stage (1884-1890); starting with Hyspa's "La Belle au bois dormant," eight songs are from the exploratory period (1890-1899); and, from Grivollet's "Dans le Jardin" on, seven songs are from the late period (1903-1915). The chronology of the songs reveals a few trajectories (see Appendix A1). Aside from the trajectory of poets whose works he set, presented earlier in this study, there is a trajectory from isometric to heterometric poetic structures, and then to *proses lyriques*. Also, there is a sense of broadening of Debussy's interests from stanzaic to stichic poems and, accordingly, from lyrical to narrative genres. Consequently, the various changes within the rhythmic and metrical design that occur in his settings are directly related to his own readings of the poems in question, his interpretation of their declamation, his portrayal of their imagery, and his expression of their emotional content. As his knowledge and understanding of poetry deepens, his settings become more refined, sophisticated and masterly.

The featured selections from Debussy's *mélodies* demonstrate the presence of a variety of metrical states. As I briefly review these states below, I mention examples of them within Debussy's second-to-last song, the setting of Mallarmé's "Éventail" (1913)¹ in order to demonstrate that he continues to work with the various metrical states until the end of his compositional career.

¹ Claude Debussy, "Éventail," in *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* (Paris: Durand, 1913), 8-12.

Metrical consonance, the state in which the vertical alignment of accents excludes conflicting stresses, does not occur very often. As there is rarely a passage without any antimetrical accents even in Debussy's early songs, a broader term—that of metrical regularity—needs to be used to describe passages that are periodic (at the level of meter), but not impeccably consonant. The state of regularity appears in each and every song by Debussy. Its presence, in general terms, depicts a circumstance of total alignment, of being in unison. Whether the portrayal is of an intimate and harmonious relationship between the lovers, or of an alignment of cogs and wheels in a mechanism that makes a carousel spin, instances of regularity contain either individual conflicting accents, or a very weak metrical dissonance.

“Éventail” includes metrically regular segments in the second stanza, which, in the words of Julian Johnson, is “grounded by a stronger sense of meter” than the rest of the song (mm. 15-24 in Appendix G2).² Underscoring the text “A twilight freshness // Reaches you at each flutter, // Whose captive stroke distances // The horizon delicately,”³ the “alternating chords,”⁴ or rather, the exchange of octaves in the right-hand and chords in the left-hand part “imitat[e] the to-and-fro movement of the fan. [...] With each in-stroke the fan brings cool air towards its holder, and with each out-stroke it delicately pushes away the horizon, like an extension of the inhaling and exhaling of the sigh.”⁵ The state of metrical regularity is, yet again, used most fittingly in the portrayal of this scene, because the equally spaced intervals between the movements of a fan (and between inhalations and exhalations) embody a sense of evenness, repetitiveness and predictability.

² Julian Johnson, “*Vertige!* Debussy, Mallarmé, and the Edge of Language,” in *Debussy's Resonance*, eds. François de Médicis and Steven Huebner (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2018), 371.

³ Stéphane Mallarmé, “Éventail” (“Fan”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 2*, with Lorna Anderson (soprano) and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67883, 2012, CD, 16.

⁴ Julian Johnson, “*Vertige!*” 371.

⁵ Johnson, “*Vertige!*” 371.

The state of metrical dissonance, resulting from more prolonged and perceptible conflict between an antimetrical layer and a primary metrical layer, conveys a sense of tension in Debussy's *mélodies*. He uses this state to portray a lyric I's discontent or, in more general terms, to underscore narratives that express a lack of alignment, an absence of accord. Whether the tension arises from an unfulfilled relationship between lovers (as in "Regret," Examples 5.13-5.14), or from a conflict between the desires of a young couple and dominating societal norms (as in "Tragédie," Examples 5.3-5.10), the sheer presence of an incongruence between layers signals to the listener a portrayal of a narrative infused with unrest. Passages from "Les Angélus" (Example 5.20), "En Sourdine" (Example 5.27-5.28), and "Noël" (Example 5.31) provide relevant instances, as well.

In "Éventail," a metrically dissonant passage supports the third stanza (mm. 27-36, Appendix G2). Following the cry "Vertige!" (mm. 25-26), durational accents on the second and fourth eighth notes of m. 27 initiate the dissonances $D8+1$ ($1=8^{\text{th}}$) and $D8+3$. With reinstatements of the pertinent duple hypermeasure, the dissonances recur in mm. 29 and 31. As of m. 33, however, the frequency of the antimetrical accents increases, thus tightening⁶ the dissonance into $D2+1$, which also recurs twice more (mm. 34-35). As the third stanza is, in Julian Johnson's words, "far more mercurial"⁷ than the second, Debussy's use of metrical dissonance responds most appropriately to the narrative, as it accompanies feelings arising from a moment of dizziness and unsettling thoughts.

In Debussy's *mélodies*, metrically neutral passages either initiate or prolong periodicity. When a metrically neutral passage opens a song, it launches a pulse or a micropulse in

⁶ Krebs explains and illustrates the process of tightening in Harald Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 104-108.

⁷ Johnson, "Vertige!" 371.

preparation for a beginning of a metrical or antimetrical layer (as in “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” Example 6.1, and “Noël,” Example 5.31), or for an aperiodic succession of durations (as in “De Grève,” Examples 6.2, 7.23 and 7.24). An occurrence of a metrically neutral passage within the body of a song either establishes a pulse layer (as in “Ballade des femmes de Paris,” Examples 6.3 and 6.4), or sustains its pace while giving an impression of “waiting” for main protagonists to appear on stage (as in “Fantoches,” Example 6.5). Whether located at the outset or within the body of a song, metrically neutral passages paint the ambience in which the narrative takes place. Hence, Debussy’s depiction of rain, or waves, of chatter, or of music that accompanies a performance of puppets, transfers the listener into the milieu of the poem.

A metrical interruption occurs when a downbeat appears to be displaced. In the relevant excerpts presented in this study, the downbeats leave the impression of occurring earlier or later than expected. Delayed downbeats often result from metrically unaccented (feminine) cadences (as in Example 7.8, from “Les Baisers,” Example 7.9, from “Les Papillons,” and Example 7.10, from “De Grève”). Anticipated downbeats are prompted either by a sudden change of texture or harmony (as in “Mandoline,” Examples 7.13 and 7.14), or they are created via a polyphonization of parameters (as in “Fantoches,” Examples 7.15-7.17). Displacements of downbeats come with a side effect: as they shift our perception of the bar line to a different part of a measure, they convey a sense of an unexpectedly extended, or shortened measure. Consequently, their presence tricks the listener into assuming a change of meter, thus creating a single instance of a metrical interruption.

Being essentially a contrapuntal technique, polyphonization of parameters can bring about a series of interruptions. When series of pitches, durations and chords, for example, are staggered, their arrangement might produce a dispersal of accents. The aforementioned excerpt

from “Zéphyr” demonstrates such a dispersal and, although Debussy places the parts into measures of regular meter, as if to imply the expected accentuation, neither the organization of accented syllables, nor the arrangement of the accompanying harmonies concur with the notated bar lines (Examples 7.20 and 7.21). The outcome is the state of metrical irregularity, in which changes of meters seem to be occurring continuously, and their succession does not feature a pattern that repeats more than once.

Metrically irregular passages also result from Debussy’s use of a written-out *ritardando*. Depending on the placement of the progressively longer note values within consecutive measures, every ensuing duration might sound like a new downbeat (as in “De Grève,” Examples 7.23-7.24). Such passages generate successive downbeats and, consequently, instill an impression of changing meters for the listener.

A delay of a harmonic resolution (as observed in metrically unaccented, i.e., feminine cadences) becomes a frequent occurrence in Debussy’s late *mélodies*. In the opening measures of “Soupir,” the tonic arrival is delayed by a beat (Examples 7.25-7.26), thus extending the given measure and creating a metrically irregular passage. At the outset of “La Flûte de Pan,” the tonic chord is delayed as well, albeit only for one-half of a beat (Examples 7.27-7.29). The recurrence of this gesture in m. 4 creates a stronger impact, because the delay—in retrospect—adds an eighth-note increment to m. 3. While in both “Soupir” and “La Flûte de Pan” Debussy’s device results in a succession of unequally-long measures, there is a slight difference between these instances.

Irregularity—as well as aperiodicity—may exist at the level of a pulse, at the level of meter and at the level of hypermeter. Irregular unfolding at the level of a pulse occurs when a single pulse—whatever its actual duration—is extended or elided by an increment. In other

words, when successive beats are of unequal durations, and when their sequence does not feature a pattern that repeats more than once, the unfolding of the pulse is irregular. The opening of “La Flûte de Pan,” therefore, demonstrates irregularity at the level of a pulse (Example 7.28).

In “Soupir” (and “De Grève” for that matter), an entire beat—not its increment—is added to a preceding or ensuing measure. Consequently, it is the measure, not one of its beats, that is extended or elided. The irregularity that occurs in these songs, therefore, is at the level of meter.

Irregularity at the pulse level, however, has a palpable bearing on the unfolding of both meter and hypermeter. Although Debussy notates a much simpler change of meter in “La Flûte de Pan” than is actually perceived by the listener (see Example 7.27), it is still obvious that a succession of unequal durations of pulse will have a profound effect on meter, as well. It cannot be ignored, therefore, that the intriguing opening of this *mélodie* has a cumulative effect: although the irregularity of its unfolding is activated at the pulse level, it results in metrical, as well as hypermetrical irregularity.

“Éventail” contains an interesting metrically irregular passage that serves as a lead-in to the final stanza (mm. 50-53). Durations of chords (prior to 64th-note triplets) produce a sequence of 3 + 6 + 3 + 4 + 1 + 1 + 3 (1=triplet 8th). At the first hearing, the succession is perceived as metrically somewhat ambiguous. Its second statement, however, underpins the words “Stagnants sur (les soirs d’or),” thus making the reason for this irregularity apparent: the tied quarter notes placed at the beginning of this passage not only paint the word “stagnant,” but also acquire a syncopation from the poetic rhythm for the musical rhythm. A similar example was identified in “La Flûte de Pan” (Example 8.15), where the chords underpin four accented syllables. Such passages epitomize Debussy’s efforts in setting a poem to music: in comparison to “Madrid,” his

compositional approach has changed drastically, namely, from fitting into a mold, to sculpting the mold.

Although episodes of metrical ambiguity are mostly short in Debussy's *mélodies*, their impact on the unfolding of a section or a song, however, is significant. In the opening measures of "Cheveux de bois," the pulse layer is unarticulated (Example 8.1), but as the primary layers start to emerge through hints of metrical dissonance, a metrical layer develops.

At the beginning of "Le Faune," ambiguity is produced by different means: although the note values are notated to the finest detail, the pulse is nevertheless unintelligible (Example 8.2). The aforementioned impression of *ad libitum* characterizes this passage, simply because there is no audible pulse layer that articulates the aperiodicity implied by durational accents. Debussy's use of a short written-out *ritardando* (mm. 2-3) further supports this instance of explicit (unarticulated) aperiodicity.

An extensive state of metrical ambiguity can be heard in "Éventail," immediately after the initial three measures. Starting with an eighth-note rest (which is a novel version of a delayed downbeat), the ensuing eight measures proceed under tempo *rubato* in support of the first stanza. In Johnson's words, the vocal line is "breathless, spoken rather than sung, and highly chromatic. Its rapid syllabic patter, marked by only occasional longer durations to emphasize certain words ("rêveuse," "sache")[,] is only faintly melodic."⁸ The rhythm of the piano part is highly erratic as well. The long pitches in the left hand, whose durations (from m. 4 through to m. 11) amass into an irregular succession of 3 + 8 + 5 + 1 + 4 + 4 + 5 + 1 + 1 + 1 (1=8th), are set against ornamental blotches of sound in the right hand that also occur aperiodically. "Taken together," Johnson

⁸ Johnson, "Vertige!" 369.

writes, “all these elements make for a vocal beginning that is elusive, insubstantial, and hard to grasp,”⁹ a beginning that is metrically ambiguous.

Elements of the style of recitative play an important role in Debussy’s attempts to dissolve an ongoing pulse. In settings of poems whose narrative is related to death and dying, a prolonged chord appears unexpectedly, somewhat arresting the ongoing pace (as in “Les Elfes,” Example 8.9, “De Fleurs,” Example 8.10, and “Ballade que Villon fait à la requête de sa mère,” Examples 8.11-13). It appears that the presence of death is depicted by the assertion of a long chord, and that the sudden absence of a heartbeat is portrayed by a sudden absence of pulse. Debussy creates metrical ambiguity by similar means also in songs whose narrative has nothing to do with death. The simultaneous presence of lengthened chords and *déclamation épurée*¹⁰ in “Le Son du cor” (Example 8.16) and “Dans le Jardin” (Example 8.17) makes our attention turn to the vocal part—the soliloquy—with which the sense of pulse drifts away.

Metrical ambiguity in Debussy’s songs also results from his resourceful use of metrical dissonance. As has been demonstrated, metrical dissonance is a versatile device, because it can maintain, alter, or suppress an established periodicity of meter. In certain songs, a continuous unfolding of a displacement or grouping dissonance along with the articulated metrical layer does not undermine the listener’s perception of meter (as in “Nuit d’étoiles,” Example 5.2, “Tragédie,” and “Regret,” Examples 5.13-5.14, to mention a few examples). When the metrical layer is unarticulated, however, the resulting subliminal metrical dissonance can overwhelm the notated meter (as in “Le Lilas,” Examples 5.15-5.18) and, depending on the performance, mislead the listener into an impression of a completely different meter (as in “Les Angélus,”

⁹ Johnson, 369.

¹⁰ A term coined by French critics to express “declamation without ornament, refined, sober, expressive and true.” Jann Pasler, “Mélisande’s Charm and the Truth of Her Music,” in *Rethinking Debussy*, ed. Elliott Antokoletz and Marianne Wheeldon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 62 and 70.

Example 5.20) and a change in periodicity. Both the composer's notation of such instances, as well as the performer's decision about whether to articulate the notated meter or not, play a significant role in the listener's ability to detect the presence of discontent thus portrayed in the song.

Subliminal dissonance can be a valuable device for suppressing the pulse layer, as well. Because of the periodicity of its antimetrical layer, this type of dissonance disguises the pulse only for a brief moment, as in the opening measure of "Recueillement" (Example 8.3). Consequently, its presence in the given context instills a sense of brief uncertainty.

The complexities of a compound dissonance create a state of ambiguity much more convincingly. Used as a device in the depiction of "une atmosphère obscure" in "Recueillement" (Example 8.6), as well as in the echoing of a horn and bells in "Le Son du cor" (Example 8.5), the combination of incongruent layers, given evenly balanced dynamics between the left- and the right-hand parts, effectively veils the pulse. The listener is subjected to an expression of mood or to an echoing sound, respectively, with no clear presence of a pulse layer.

The displacement of a poetic line within a measure, termed a "counter-rhythmic" effect, may portray a rejection of a physical contact. When it occurs within a metrically regular passage, a counter-rhythmic placement of the text does not influence the established periodicity in a significant way. When superimposed on the intricacies of a compound metrical dissonance, however, it can elicit a sense of ambiguity, namely, a stasis or a momentary loss of pulse, particularly when reinforced by a change of tempo. Excerpts from "Nuit sans fin" and "En Sourdine" shown in Examples 5.28 and 5.30 attest to the described phenomenon.

Periodicity, therefore, can be challenged by a plethora of devices. Furthermore, it can originate at different levels. As his *mélodies* demonstrate, Debussy dismantles periodicity, first,

at the hypermetrical level, second, at the metrical level, and finally, in his late songs at the level of the pulse.

Debussy's structuring of hypermeter becomes increasingly irregular as he becomes more attentive to the prosody, and to the narrative and the emotional content of the poems. Devices that create poetic rhythm are increasingly matched with devices that create musical rhythm. For example, in the early settings, short syllables are assigned eighth notes, while long syllables receive quarter notes. Gradually, however, Debussy's settings of the text become so sophisticated that the note values given to syllables vary to the finest degree. In "Éventail," for instance, the variety of durations used in the vocal line reveals an ear finely attuned to the nuances of pure declamation.

Furthermore, punctuation marks that create caesurae and enjambments are toned with the corresponding devices in music, such as rests, downbeats, harmonic inflections, and cadences. The choice and placement of chords within measures becomes increasingly intricate, all in an effort to complement the poem's rhythm, to twin the lengths of phrases *libéré* with corresponding musical phrases, and to create the most genuine response to the chosen poem. The expression "irregular phraseology"¹¹ comes to mind yet again in an effort to describe Debussy's fragmentation of hypermeter in as early a song as "Tragédie" and, later, in "La Belle au bois dormant." It is in the former that Debussy grants the poetic phrases and the mirroring musical phrases higher priority and surrenders the importance of hypermeasures to the prominence of phrases, thus making first significant steps towards achieving prosody-driven hypermetrical irregularity.

¹¹ Marie Rolf, "Semantic and Structural Issues in Debussy's Mallarmé Songs," in *Debussy Studies*, ed. Richard Langham Smith, 179-200 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 187-188.

There is, however, another distinctive device in Debussy's toolbox for creating what William Rothstein describes as the "discontinuous music discourse."¹² Debussy's setting of Banville's "Zéphyr," for instance, proves to be a truly intriguing early song, because the young composer's rendering of the poem unfolds through the use of three rhythmically and metrically different episodes. The first episode portrays the ringing of wind chimes, via a gesture that organizes accents into the notated four-four meter. The second episode is the aforementioned five-measure-long declamatory passage (Example 7.19), and the third is a metrically regular segment, also discussed earlier in this dissertation (Example 4.11). As the poem's narrative unfolds, we realize that Debussy's metrical design results from the juxtaposition of various metrical states: the metrically congruent chime motif is followed by a metrically irregular passage, which is then followed by metrical regularity. The chimes are heard again, to be followed by measures of metrical regularity, then by the declamatory, i.e., metrically irregular passage, after which the chimes close the song. "Zéphyr" is the earliest of Debussy's songs that features such a progression of metrical states. Chronologically, it is followed by a similarly discontinuous setting of "Souhait."

Progressions of different metrical states are featured in a considerable number of Debussy's songs, as implied in this study, but perhaps most prominently in those belonging to his late period. "Éventail" is definitely among them. Starting with a gesture that suggests the opening of a fan,¹³ the state of metrical ambiguity carries out the first stanza. The second opening of the fan heralds the second stanza, underscored by a state of metrical regularity. The exclamation "Vertige!" initiates the aforementioned metrically dissonant state that, in Johnson's

¹² William Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythms in Tonal Music* (New York and London: Schirmer Books, 1989), 87.

¹³ "The opening piano figure acts as a musical corollary for both the flicking open of the fan (mm. 1-3 and 12-14) and its closing (mm 47-49)." Johnson, "Vertige!" 369.

words, “reveal[s] an aerial passage in which the rapid *pianissimo* figures of the accompaniment buzz and whirr like electrical static, the quivering of the air of which the singer tells.”¹⁴ In the fourth stanza, where slightly metrically dissonant groups of duple hypermeasures frame the metrically regular *tremolo* colouring in the piano, Debussy conjures up “buried laughter” that “flow[s] from the corner of your mouth.” Following “the flicking shut of the fan,” metrically irregular measures ensue (mm. 50 to 55), after which the song “quite literally vanishes into thin air in its final measures: the closing of the fan is the closing of the poem, and with it the world it had momentarily opened.”¹⁵

The fluidity of Debussy’s overall metrical design in “Éventail” is extraordinary. The musical content either surrounds the declamation most delicately, or is completely in its service. Although the rhythmic intricacies are meticulously notated, the notated meter surfaces and submerges throughout the rest of the song as Debussy deems necessary, but its function as the regulator of accents in a measure is largely lost. The two-four time signature is an overlay—“a silent metrical grid” supplied to the performers in order to make sense of the musical content. While it enables an exact rendering of the words and sounds, its presence is, at times, completely hidden from the listener.

Through some thirty-four years that separate “Madrid” from “Éventail,” the trajectory of Debussy’s compositional approach to *mélodies* confirms that, for him, “the vocal line became intensified declamation.”¹⁶ The poem, as an embodiment of the spoken word and as an epitome of the most genuine emotions instilled by the narrative, was the source of innovations in his compositional devices and in his style. Arising out of the effort to emulate and project the

¹⁴ Johnson, 371.

¹⁵ Johnson, 371.

¹⁶ Kerry Murphy, “Words and Music” in *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, ed. Peter France. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995): 859.

principle of *vers libéré* in his compositions, Debussy's rhythmic and metrical design pioneered the kind of music that he was seeking, "a music that, in a sense, clothes the poetry, to convey the sensation of something truly lived."¹⁷

¹⁷ Claude Debussy, *Correspondance (1872-1918)*, ed. François Lesure and Denis Herlin (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 46, quoted in David Code, *Claude Debussy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 34.

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Appendices

Appendix A1

A Chronological List of Debussy *mélodies*

including the poets, the poetic meter, and the notated time signature(s) in Debussy's setting(s)

Song #	Year	Title	Poet	Poetic Meter	Debussy's Meter
L 1	1879	Madrid	Musset	8	3/4 (21 mm.)
L 2	1880	Nuit d'étoiles	Banville	7 or 8?	6/8 (91 mm.)
L 6	1880	Caprice	Banville	8	3/4 (43 mm.)
L 7	1880	Aimons-nous et dormons	Banville	(6-8-12-6-8-6-6) x3	3/4 (53 mm.)
L 9	1881	Les Baisers	Banville	8	3/4 (45 mm.)
L 11	1881	Rondel chinois	Dillard	8	2/4 (45 mm.)
L 12	1881	Tragédie	Valade, after Heine	8	3/4 (35 mm.)
L 13	1881	Jane	Leconte de Lisle	8	3/4 (54 mm.)
L 15	1881	La Fille aux cheveux de lin	Leconte de Lisle	8	2/4 (72 mm.)
L 17	1881	Rondeau	Musset	10	6/8 3/8 (in m. 14) 6/8 is predominant (37 mm.)
L 19	1881	Triplet à Philis (Zéphyr)	Banville	8	4/4 2/4 (in m. 6) C is predominant (20 mm.)
L 18	1881	Souhait	Banville	12	3/4 (47 mm.)
L 21	1881	Les Papillons	Gautier	8	4/4 2/4 (in m. 18) 4/4 is predominant (27 mm.)
L 26	1882	Fantoches	Verlaine	8	2/4 (80 mm.)
L 3	1882	Réverie	Banville	8	C (34 mm.)
L 31	1882	Fête galante	Banville	10	3/4 (47 mm.)
L 29	1882	Sérénade	Banville	10	2/4 (mm. 1-7: piano introduction) 3/8 (mm. 8-48 for <i>Fin I</i> , or mm. 8-50 for <i>Fin II</i>) (55 or 57 mm.)

Song #	Year	Title	Poet	Poetic Meter	Debussy's Meter
L 30	1882	Pierrot	Banville	10	2/4 (61 mm.)
L 28	1882	Les Roses	Banville	10	C (28 mm.)
L 36	1882	Le Lilas	Banville	10	6/8 (50 mm.)
L 22	1882	L'Archet	Cros	8	C (50 mm.)
L 24	1882	Le Matelot qui tombe à l'eau	Bouchor	(7-3-7-7-3) x2	voice 12/8 piano C (15 mm.)
L 23	1882	Romance: Non, les baisers d'amour	Bouchor	12	3/4 (43 mm.)
L 38	1882	Flots, palmes, sables	Renaud	5(4x) - 7(8x) 5(4x) - 7(8x)	3/4 (67 mm.)
L 25	1882	Les Elfes	Leconte de Lisle	10	2/4 (175 mm.)
L 34	1882	Il dort encore	Banville	10	C (mm. 1-7) 3/4 (mm. 8-53)
L 47	1883	Pantomime	Verlaine	8	2/4 (74 mm.)
L 43a	1882	Mandoline (Vasnier)	Verlaine	7	6/8 3/8 (in m. 28)
L 42	1882	En Sourdine (Vasnier)	Verlaine	7	6/8 3/4 (71 mm.) (36 mm.)
L 45	1882	Clair de lune (Vasnier)	Verlaine	10	3/8 (84 mm.)
L 44	1883	Séguidille	Gautier	8	3/8 (218 mm.)
L 50	1883	Coquetterie posthume	Gautier	8	3/4 (106 mm.)
L 49	1883	Chanson espagnole	Musset	(8-6-8-8-6, 5-5-5-5, 8-2-12) x3	3/4 (104 mm.)
L 53	1883	Romance: Silence ineffable de l'heure	Bourget	8	2/4 (39 mm.)
L 54	1883	Musique	Bourget	12	6/8 (49 mm.)
L 55	1883	Paysage sentimental	Bourget	12	3/8 (162 mm.)
L 56a	1884	Romance: Voici que le Printemps	Bourget	12	2/4 (86 mm.)

Song #	Year	Title	Poet	Poetic Meter	Debussy's Meter
L 58	1884	La Romance d'Ariel	Bourget	8	C 2/4 (in m. 17) C (42 mm.)
L 59	1884	Regret	Bourget	(10-10-10-8) x4	6/8 (50 mm.)
L 57	1884	Apparition	Mallarmé	12	*1926 edition: <u>voice 9/8 (3/4)</u> piano 9/8, changes to <u>3/4</u> (mm. 17-59) ¹ *2016 edition: <u>voice 9/8 (3/4)</u> piano 9/8, changes to 3/4 (mm. 17-24) and then returns to <u>9/8</u> in mm. 25-59 (59 mm.)
L 63a	1885	<i>Ariettes</i> : 1. L'Ombre des arbres	Verlaine	(12-7) x4	3/4 (31 mm.)
L 63a	1885	<i>Ariettes</i> : 2. Chevaux de bois	Verlaine	9	2/4 1/4 (in m. 34) 2/4 1/4 (in m. 46) 2/4 1/4 (in m. 58) <u>2/4</u> (102 mm.)
L 63a	1886	<i>Ariettes</i> : 3. Green	Verlaine	12	6/8 (58 mm.)
L 63a	1887	<i>Ariettes</i> : 4. C'est l'Extase langoureuse	Verlaine	7	3/8 (52 mm.)
L 63a	1887	<i>Ariettes</i> : 5. Il pleure dans mon cœur	Verlaine	6	3/4 (79 mm.)

Song #	Year	Title	Poet	Poetic Meter	Debussy's Meter
L 63a	1888	<i>Ariettes:</i> Chevaux de bois	Verlaine	9	2/4 1/4 (in m. 34) 2/4 1/4 (in m. 46) 2/4 1/4 (in m. 58) $\frac{2}{4}$ (102 mm.)
L 63a	1888	<i>Ariettes:</i> 6. <i>Spleen</i>	Verlaine	8	3/4 (34 mm.)
L 70	1888	<i>Cinq Poèmes de Ch. Baudelaire:</i> 1. <i>Le Balcon</i>	Baudelaire	12	C (mm. 1-61) $\frac{12}{8}$ (mm. 62-131) (131 mm.)
L 70	1889	<i>Cinq Poèmes de Ch. Baudelaire:</i> 2. <i>Harmonie du soir</i>	Baudelaire	12	3/4 2/4 (in m. 16) 3/4 2/4 (mm. 22-23) 3/4 2/4 (mm. 70-71) $\frac{3}{4}$ (73 mm.)
L 70	1889	<i>Cinq Poèmes de Ch. Baudelaire:</i> 3. <i>Le Jet d'eau</i>	Baudelaire	8	vocal $\frac{3}{4}$ piano 9/8 $\frac{3}{4}$ 3/4 (mm. 22-71) C (in m. 72) $\frac{3}{4}$ (mm. 73-97) (97 mm.)

Song #	Year	Title	Poet	Poetic Meter	Debussy's Meter
L 70	1889	<i>Cinq Poèmes de Ch. Baudelaire:</i> 4. Recueillement	Baudelaire	12	C $\frac{3}{4}$ (mm. 15-35) C (mm. 36-40) 3/4 (mm. 41-55) vocal $\frac{3}{4}$ piano 9/8 (mm. 56-59) C (mm. 60-66) (66 mm.) (48 mm.)
L 70	1887	<i>Cinq Poèmes de Ch. Baudelaire:</i> 5. La Mort des amants	Baudelaire	10	3/4 (48 mm.)
L 43b	1890	Mandoline	Verlaine	7	6/8 3/8 (m. 27) $\frac{6}{8}$ (70 mm.)
L 81	1890	La Belle au bois dormant	Hyspa	8	$\frac{12}{8}$ 9/8 (in m. 3) 12/8 9/8 (in m. 6) 12/8 9/8 (in m. 11) 12/8 6/8 (in m. 16) 12/8 3/4 (in m. 21) 12/8 3/4 (in m. 32) 12/8 3/4 (in m. 41) 12/8 C (mm. 48-55) (55 mm.)

Song #	Year	Title	Poet	Poetic Meter	Debussy's Meter
L 56b	1890?	Romance: Voici que le Printemps	Bourget	12	2/4 (77 mm.)
L 55b	1891	Paysage sentimental	Bourget	12	3/8 (150 mm.)
L 16	1891?	Fleur des blés	Girod	7	C 2/4 (in m. 16) C
L 81	1891	Beau Soir	Bourget	2	3/4 (41 mm.)
L 65	1891	Romance: L'Âme évaporée	Bourget	8	4/4 2/4 (in m. 25) 4/4
L 66	1891	Romance: Les Cloches	Bourget	(10-5-10-5) x3	C (41 mm.)
L 86	1890	<i>Fêtes galantes I:</i> 1. En Sourdine	Verlaine	7	3/4 2/4 (in m. 17) 3/4 C (in m. 36) 3/4
L 86	1890	<i>Fêtes galantes I:</i> 2. Fantoches	Verlaine	8	2/4 (43 mm.) (72 mm.)
L 86	1890	<i>Fêtes galantes I:</i> 3. Clair de lune	Verlaine	10	9/8 (32 mm.)
L 85	1891	<i>Trois Mélodies:</i> 1. La Mer est plus belle ...	Verlaine	5	C (40 mm.)

Song #	Year	Title	Poet	Poetic Meter	Debussy's Meter
L 85	1891	<i>Trois Mélodies</i> : 2. Le Son du cor s'afflige	Verlaine	10	voice 3/4 piano 9/8 6/8 (in m. 29) [3/4] 9/8 (39 mm.)
L 85	1891	<i>Trois Mélodies</i> : 3. L'Échelonnement des haies	Verlaine	7	3/4 (mm. 1-3) C (mm. 4-8) 3/4 (mm. 9-11) C (mm. 12-20) [3/4] (mm. 21-36) (36 mm.)
L 88	1892	Les Angélus	Le Roy	9	3/4 2/4 (mm. 17-32) [3/4] (53 mm.)
L 90a	1893	<i>Proses lyriques</i> : 1. De Rêve	Debussy	varies 5-13 FREE VERSE	12/8 (mm. 1-5) 3/4 (mm. 6-46) 12/8 (mm. 47-52) C (mm. 53-64) 12/8 (mm. 65-66) [3/4] (mm. 67-99) (99 mm.)
L 90a	1893	<i>Proses lyriques</i> : 2. De Grève	Debussy	varies 5-13 FREE VERSE	3/4 C (in m. 7) 3/4 2/4 (mm. 14-15) [3/4] (60 mm.)

Song #	Year	Title	Poet	Poetic Meter	Debussy's Meter
L 90a	1893	<i>Proses lyriques:</i> 3. De Fleurs	Debussy	varies 6-12 FREE VERSE	C 3/4 (mm. 46-51) <u>C</u> (79 mm.) (108 mm.)
L 90a	1893	<i>Proses lyriques:</i> 4. De Soir	Debussy	varies 6-12 FREE VERSE	[2/2]
L 97	1897	<i>Trois Chansons de Bilitis:</i> 1. La Flûte de Pan	Louÿs	varies FREE VERSE	C (in m. 1) 3/4 (in m. 2) C (mm. 3-4) 3/4 (in m. 5) C (mm. 6-7) 3/4 (mm. 8-11) C (in m. 12) 3/4 (mm. 13-16) C (in m. 17) 3/4 (mm. 18-25) C (mm. 26-28) <u>3/4</u> (mm. 29-30) (30 mm.)
L 97	1897	<i>Trois Chansons de Bilitis:</i> 2. La Chevelure	Louÿs	varies FREE VERSE	6/4 [3/4] (in m. 9, but not notated in the score) 6/4 9/4 (in m. 12) 6/4 3/4 (in m. 23) <u>6/4</u> (27 mm.)

Song #	Year	Title	Poet	Poetic Meter	Debussy's Meter
L 97	1898	<i>Trois Chansons de Bilitis</i> : 3. Le Tombeau des naiades	Louÿs	varies FREE VERSE	C 2/4 (in m. 8) C 2/4 (in m. 20) C 2/4 (in m. 24) ☐ (32 mm.)
L 101	1898	<i>Nuits blanches</i> : 1. [Nuit sans fin]	Debussy	varies FREE VERSE	C 6/4 (mm. 10-16) 3/4 (in m. 17) ☐ (20 mm.)
L 101	1898	<i>Nuits blanches</i> : 2. [Pourquoi?]	Debussy	varies FREE VERSE	6/4 3/4 (in m. 5) 6/4 C (mm. 25-30) ☐ (37 mm.)
L 100	1899	Berceuse sur une vieille chanson poitevine	Traditional: Peter	8	4/4 (71 mm.)
L 107	1903	Dans le jardin	Gravollet	8	3/8 (78 mm.)
L 63b	1903	<i>Ariettes oubliées</i> : 1. C'est l'Extase langoureuse	Verlaine	7	3/8 (52 mm.)
L 63b	1903	<i>Ariettes oubliées</i> : 2. Il pleure dans mon cœur	Verlaine	6	3/4 (79 mm.)
L 63b	1903	<i>Ariettes oubliées</i> : 3. L'Ombre des arbres	Verlaine	(12-7) x4	3/4 (31 mm.)

Song #	Year	Title	Poet	Poetic Meter	Debussy's Meter
L 63b	1903	<i>Ariettes oubliées:</i> 4. Chevaux de bois	Verlaine	9	2/4 1/4 (in m. 34) 2/4 1/4 (in m. 46) 2/4 1/4 (in m. 58) <u>2/4</u> (102 mm.)
L 63b	1903	<i>Ariettes oubliées:</i> 5. Green	Verlaine	12	6/8 (58 mm.)
L 63b	1903	<i>Ariettes oubliées:</i> 6. Spleen	Verlaine	8	3/4 (34 mm.)
L 115	1904	<i>Trois Chansons de France:</i> 1. Rondel "Le Temps a laissé son manteau"	d'Orléans	8	4/4 (32 mm.)
L 115 (L 129)	1904	<i>Trois Chansons de France:</i> 2. La Grotte	l'Hermite	8	3/4 2/4 (m. 20) <u>3/4</u> (24 mm.)
L 115	1904	<i>Trois Chansons de France:</i> 3. Rondel "Pour se que Plaisance est morte"	d'Orléans	7	4/4 (23 mm.)
L 114/3b	1904	Colloque sentimental	Verlaine	10	C (mm. 1-4) <u>3/4</u> (mm. 5-25) 2/4 (in m. 26) 3/4 (mm. 27-28) 2/4 (in m. 29) 3/4 (mm. 30-51) C (mm. 52-57) (57 mm.)

Song #	Year	Title	Poet	Poetic Meter	Debussy's Meter
L 114	1904	<i>Fêtes galantes II:</i> 1. Les Ingénus	Verlaine	12	3/8 (53 mm.)
L 114	1904	<i>Fêtes galantes II:</i> 2. Le Faune	Verlaine	8	3/4 (39 mm.)
L 114	1904	<i>Fêtes galantes II:</i> 3. Colloque sentimental	Verlaine	10	3/4 2/4 (in m. 8) $\boxed{3/4}$
L 126a	1910	<i>Trois Ballades de François Villon:</i> 1. Ballade de Villon à s' amye	Villon	10	4/4 2/4 (in m. 4) 4/4 2/4 (in m. 21) 4/4 2/4 (in m. 26) 4/4 2/4 (in m. 38) $\boxed{4/4}$
L 126a	1910	<i>Trois Ballades de François Villon:</i> 2. Ballade que Villon fait à la requeste de sa mère pour prier Notre- Dame	Villon	10	4/4 2/4 (in m. 9) 4/4 2/4 (in m. 15) 4/4 2/4 (in m. 23) 4/4 2/4 (in m. 39) 4/4 2/4 (in m. 44) $\boxed{4/4}$ (49 mm.) (47 mm.)

Song #	Year	Title	Poet	Poetic Meter	Debussy's Meter
L 126a	1910	<i>Trois Ballades de François Villon:</i> 3. Ballade des femmes de Paris	Villon	8	2/4 (122 mm.)
L 115	1910	<i>Le Promenoir des deux amants:</i> 1. La Grotte	l'Hermite	8	3/4 2/4 (in m. 20) $\boxed{3/4}$ (24 mm.) (35 mm.)
L 129	1910	<i>Le Promenoir des deux amants:</i> 2. Crois mon conseil, chère Climène	l'Hermite	8	2/4 (24 mm.) (35 mm.)
L 129	1910	<i>Le Promenoir des deux amants:</i> 3. Je tremble en voyant ton Visage	l'Hermite	8	3/4 (25 mm.)
L 135	1913	<i>Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé:</i> 1. Soupir	Mallarmé	12	4/4 2/4 (in m. 6) 4/4 5/4 (in m. 12) 4/4 3/4 (mm. 25-26) 4/4 5/4 (in m. 28) 3/4 (in m. 29) $\boxed{4/4}$ (31 mm.) (34 mm.)
L 135	1913	<i>Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé:</i> 2. Pjacet futile	Mallarmé	12	3/4 (31 mm.) (34 mm.)

Song #	Year	Title	Poet	Poetic Meter	Debussy's Meter
L 135	1913	<i>Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé:</i> 3. Éventail	Mallarmé	8	2/4 3/4 (in m. 7) 2/4
L 147a	1915	Noël des enfants qui n'ont plus de maison	Debussy	varies 5-15	voice 4/4 piano 12/8 (65 mm.) (84 mm.)

¹ In the 1926 publication of "Apparition," (Paris: *La Revue musicale*, 1926), the notated meter changes in m. 17 from 9/8 to 3/4 in the piano part and stays the same through to the end. In the 2016 edition, as published in *Œuvres Complètes* (pp. 76-80), the editor suggests a return to 9/8 meter in m. 25 of the piano part. Consequently, 3/4 is the predominant meter in the former publication, whereas 9/8 is the predominant meter in the latter edition.]

Appendix A2
 A Summary of Debussy's Choice of Meter in his *mélodies*

Duple meters:

12 songs entirely in 2/4 time: “Rondel chinois”

“La Fille aux cheveux de lin”

“Fantoches” (*Vasnier* version)

“Pierrot”

“Les Elfes”

“Pantomime”

“Romance: Silence ineffable de l'heure”

“Romance: Voici que le Printemps” (1st version: 1884)

“Romance: Voici que le Printemps” (2nd version: 1890?)

Fêtes galantes I: 2. “Fantoches”

Trois Ballades de François Villon: 3. “Ballade des femmes de Paris”

Le Promenoir des deux amants: 2. “Crois mon conseil, chère Climène”

+ 1 song entirely in 2/2 time: *Proses lyriques*: 3. “De Fleurs”

+ 6 songs entirely in 6/8 time: “Nuit d'étoiles”

“Le Lilas”

“Musique”

“Regret”

Ariettes: 3. “Green”

Ariettes oubliées: 3. “Green”

19 songs entirely in duple meters

+ 7 that feature changes of meter, but measures in duple meter are predominant.

Among them:

3, in 6/8, with a single insertion of 3/8 (“Rondeau,” “Mandoline”)

1, in 2/4, with a single insertion of 3/4 (*Trois poèmes de Mallarmé*: 3. “Éventail”)

1, in 2/4, with multiple insertions of 1/4, but 2/4 prevails (“Chevaux de bois”)

1, in 6/4, with insertions of 3/4 and 9/4 (“La chevelure”)

1, in 6/4, with an insertion of 3/4 and a short section in C (*Nuits blanches*: “Pourquoi?”)

26 songs in duple meters

Excluded from duple meters:

“Sérénade”: piano introduction in 2/4; transitions to 3/8, which is predominant.

Triple meters:

24 songs entirely in 3/4 time: “Madrid”

“Caprice”

“Aimons-nous et dormons”

“Les Baisers”

“Tragédie”

“Jane”

“Souhait”

“Fête galante”

“Romance: Non, les Baisers d’amour”

“Flots, palmes, sables”

“En Sourdine” (*Vasnier* version)

“Coquetterie posthume”

“Chanson espagnole”

Ariettes: 1. “L’Ombre des arbres”

Ariettes: 5. “Il pleure dans mon cœur”

Ariettes: 6. “Spleen”

Cinq Poèmes de Ch. Baudelaire: 5. “La Mort des amants”

“Beau Soir”

Ariettes oubliées: 2. “Il pleure dans mon cœur”

Ariettes oubliées: 3. “L’Ombre des arbres”

Ariettes oubliées: 6. “Spleen”

Fêtes galantes II: 2. “Le Faune”

Le Promenoir des deux amants: 3. “Je tremble en voyant ton Visage”

Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé: 2. “Placet futile”

+ 8 songs entirely in 3/8 time: “Clair de lune”

“Séguidille”

“Paysage sentimental”

Ariettes: 4. “C’est l’Extase langoureuse”

“Paysage sentimental”

“Dans le Jardin”

Ariettes oubliées: 1. “C’est l’Extase langoureuse”

Fêtes galantes II: 1. “Les Ingénus”

+ 1 song entirely in 9/8 time: *Fêtes galantes I*: 3. “Clair de lune”

+ 1 overlap of 9/8 (in piano) and 9/8—3/4 meters (in voice); consolidates into 3/4 time,
which remains until the end (“Apparition”)

34 songs entirely in triple meters

+ 13 that feature changes of meter, but measures in triple meter are predominant.

Among them:

1, piano introduction in 2/4; transitions to 3/8 time, which predominates (“Sérénade”)

1, piano introduction in C; transitions to 3/4 time, which predominates (“Il dort encore”)

- 1, piano introduction in C; changes to 3/4 time, which predominates, despite another change to C, and the song's ending in C
(*Cinq Poèmes de Ch. Baudelaire*: "Recueillement")
- 1, with piano introduction in C; changes to 3/4; insertions of 2/4 and C, and ending in C; but 3/4 is predominant ("Colloque sentimental," 1st version)
- 1, with piano introduction in 12/8; changes to 3/4; returns to 12/8; an insertion of C; a return to 12/8; ends in 3/4, which is predominant
(*Proses lyriques*: "De Rêve")
- 1, opens in C, but frequent changes to 3/4; the latter is predominant
(*"La Flûte de Pan"*)
- 1, with an insertion of 2/4, but 3/4 is predominant ("Les Angélus")
- 1, with an insertion of 2/4, but 3/4 is predominant ("La Grotte")
- 1, with an insertion of 2/4 (*Fêtes galantes II*: 3. "Colloque sentimental")
- 1, with three insertions of 2/4, but 3/4 is predominant
(*Cinq Poèmes de Ch. Baudelaire*: "Harmonie du soir")
- 1, with an insertion of 2/4 and C, but 3/4 is predominant
(*Fêtes galantes I*: "En Sourdine")
- 1, with insertions of C, but 3/4 is predominant
(*Trois Mélodies*: 3. "L'Échelonnement des haies")
- 1, with insertions of C and 2/4, but 3/4 is predominant (*Proses lyriques*: "De Grève")

+ 2, with simple- over compound-triple meter overlap and changes of meter:

- 1 overlap of 9/8 or 3/4 (in piano) and 3/4 (in voice), consolidating to 3/4 time, which, after an insertion of C, stays until the end
(*Cinq Poèmes de Ch. Baudelaire*: "Le Jet d'eau")
- 1 overlap of 9/8 (in piano) and 3/4 (in voice), changing to 6/8, returning to the overlap
(*Trois Mélodies*: "Le Son du cor")

49 songs in triple meters

Quadruple meters:

6 songs entirely in C time

“Rêverie”

“Les Roses”

“L’Archet”

“Les Cloches”

Trois Mélodies: 1. “La Mer est plus belle”

“Berceuse sur une vieille chanson poitevine”

+ 2 songs entirely in 4/4 time

Trois Chansons de France: “Rondel: Le Temps a laissé son manteau”

Trois Chansons de France: “Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte”

8 songs entirely in simple quadruple meter

+ 3, with simple- over compound-quadruple meter overlap, but no changes of meter:

Among them:

1, with voice entirely in 12/8, over piano entirely in C

(“Le Matelot qui tombe à l’eau”)

1, with a change from the opening 4/4 to 12/8 4/4 in the piano and 4/4 in the voice

(*Cinq Poèmes de Ch. Baudelaire*: “Le Balcon”)

1, with 4/4 (in voice) over 12/8 (in piano) throughout the song (“Noël des enfants”)

11 songs entirely in quadruple meters

+ 12 that feature changes of meter, but measures in quadruple meter are prevalent:

3 in C, with a single-measure insertion of 2/4 time

“Zéphyr”

“La Romance d’Ariel”

“Fleurs des blés”

1 in C, with a change to 12/8, a section in 3/4 and a return to C, where C is predominant

Proses lyriques: “De Fleurs”

1 in C, with three insertions of 2/4, but C is predominant

Trois Chansons de Bilitis: 3. “Le Tombeau des naïades”

1 in C, with a section in 6/4, an insertion of 3/4, and a return to C; C is predominant

Nuits blanches: 1. “Nuit sans fin”

2 in 4/4, with a single insertion of 2/4 time

“Les Papillons”

Romance: “L’Âme évaporée”

1 in 4/4 with frequent (4) insertions of 2/4, but 4/4 is predominant

Trois Ballades de François Villon: 1. “Ballade de Villon à s’amyé”

1 in 4/4 with frequent (5) insertions of 2/4, but 4/4 is predominant

Trois Ballades de François Villon: 2. “Ballade [...] à la requête de sa mère”

1 in 4/4, with insertions of 2/4, 5/4, 3/4, 5/4, 3/4 and return to 4/4

Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé: 1. “Soupir”

1 in 12/8, with insertions of 9/8, 6/8, and 3/4, and ending in C, where 12/8 is predominant

“La Belle au bois”

23 songs in quadruple meters

Excluded from quadruple meters:

“Il dort,” with piano intro in C; transitions to 3/4, which is predominant (counted in 3/4)

“Recueillement,” with piano intro in C; transitions to 3/4, which is predominant
(counted in 3/4)

“Colloque sentimental,” with piano intro in C; transitions to 3/4, which is predominant
(counted in 3/4)

“La Flûte de Pan,” starts in C; frequent meter changes to 3/4, which is predominant
(counted in 3/4)

Appendix B1
“Madrid”
 by Alfred de Musset (1810-1857)

Line	Rhyme	Meter	“Madrid” ¹	“Madrid” ²
01	a	8	Madrid, princesse des Espagnes,	Madrid, princess of all Spain,
02	a	8	Il court par tes mille campagnes,	Many are the blue eyes and the dark eyes
03	b	8	Bien des yeux bleus, bien des yeux noirs.	That teem through your vast campañas.
04	c	8	La blanche ville aux sérénades,	White city of serenades,
05	c	8	Il passe par tes promenades	Many are the small feet that pass
06	b	8	Bien des petits pieds tous les soirs!	Each evening along your promenades.
07	a	8	Madrid, quand tes taureaux bondissent,	Madrid, when your bulls charge,
08	a	8	Bien des mains blanches applaudissent,	Many are the white hands that applaud,
09	b	8	Bien des écharpes sont en jeux:	Many are the scarves that wave.
10	c	8	Par tes belles nuits étoilées,	In your lovely starry nights,
11	c	8	Bien des senoras long-voilées	Many are the señoras in long veils
12	b	8	Descendent tes escaliers bleus!	Who descend your blue staircase.
13	a	8	Madrid, Madrid, moi, je me raille	Madrid, Madrid, I for one scoff
14	a	8	De tes dames à fine taille,	At your thin-waisted ladies
15	b	8	Qui chaussent l'escarpin étroit;	In their narrow slippers;
16	c	8	Car j'en sais une par le monde,	For I know one unequalled in all the world
17	c	8	Que jamais ni brune, ni blonde,	There is no blonde or brunette
18	b	8	N'ont valu le bout de son doigt!	Who is worth the tip of her finger!
19	a	8	J'en sais une, et certes la duègne	I know one, and the duenna
20	a	8	Qui la surveille et qui la peigne	Who watches over her and combs her hair
21	b	8	N'ouvre sa fenêtre qu'à moi:	Opens her window for me alone;
22	c	8	Certes, qui veut qu'on le redresse	Of course, if you're looking to be rebuffed,
23	c	8	N'a qu'à l'approcher à la messe,	You need only try to approach her at mass,
24	b	8	Fût-ce l'archevêque ou le roi.	Be you archbishop or king.
25	a	8	Car c'est ma princesse andalouse!	For she is my Andalusian princess!
26	a	8	Mon amoureuse! ma jalouse!	My lover, my jealous one!

¹ M. Alfred de Musset, “Madrid,” in *Contes d’Espagne et d’Italie* (Paris: A. Levasseur; Urbain [M.] Canel, 1830), 171-173, Bibliothèque nationale de France: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b86184013/f9.item>. The punctuation corresponds to the published poem, as made available online the BnF.

² The translation is by Richard Miller, as published in *Claude Debussy: Intégrale des mélodies*, with Liliana Faraon and Magali Léger (sopranos), Marie-Ange Todorovitch (mezzo-soprano), Gilles Ragon (tenor), François le Roux (baritone), and Jean-Louis Haguenaer (piano). Harmonia mundi/Ligia LIDI 0201285-14, 2014, CD, 85. Miller’s translation for the release of this recording is taken from Margaret G. Cobb, *The Poetic Debussy: A Collection of His Song Texts and Selected Letters*, Revised edition (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1994). Richard Stokes has translated “Madrid” as well, but only stanzas nos. 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7, as set to music by Pauline Viardot. His translation is available on the *Oxford Lieder* website: <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/4998>

27	b	8	Ma belle veuve au long réseau!	My beautiful widow in her long lace veil!
28	c	8	C'est un vrai démon! c'est un ange!	She is a demon, an angel!
29	c	8	Elle est jaune comme une orange,	She is golden as an orange
30	b	8	Elle est vive comme un oiseau!	And lively as a bird!
31	a	8	Oh! quand sur ma bouche idolâtre,	Ah! When she swoons against my adoring
32	a	8	Elle se pâme, la folâtre,	mouth like a mad thing,
33	b	8	Il faut voir, dans nos grands combats,	You should see how, in our struggles,
34	c	8	Ce corps si souple et si fragile,	Her supple and fragile body
35	c	8	Ainsi qu'une couleuvre agile,	Becomes and agile snake,
36	b	8	Fuir et glisser entre mes bras!	Fleeing and sliding within my arms.
37	a	8	Or si d'aventure on s'enquête	Now, if anyone should happen to ask
38	a	8	Qui m'a valu telle conquête,	What won me such a conquest,
39	b	8	C'est l'allure de mon cheval;	I owe it to the appeal of my horse,
40	c	8	Un compliment sur sa mantille,	To a compliment about her mantilla,
41	c	8	Puis des bonbons à la vanille	And to the vanilla bonbons
42	b	8	Par un beau soir de carnaval.	On a fine carnival evening.

Appendix B2
“Madrid”
 by Claude Debussy (1879)³

Madrid

Poetry by Alfred de Musset

Music by Achille-Claude Debussy

The first system of the musical score consists of a voice line and a piano accompaniment. The voice line is in a treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 3/4 time signature. It begins with a whole rest for two measures, followed by a quarter rest, and then a melodic phrase starting on a quarter note. The piano accompaniment is in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with the same key signature and time signature. It features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes with grace notes.

1. Ma - drid, prin - ces - se
 2. Ma - drid, Mad - drid, moi,
 3. Or, si d'a - ven - ture

The second system continues the musical score. The voice line begins with a measure number '4' above the first note. The lyrics are written below the voice line. The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern as the first system.

des Es - pag - nes, Il court par tes mil - le cam - pag - nes
 je me rai - le De tes da - mes à fi - ne tai - le
 on s'en - quêt - te Qui m'a va - lu tel - le con - quêt - te,

³ At present (May 2023), the song is unpublished. Preparations are in process for its publication in Claude Debussy, *Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy: Mélodies*. Série II, Vol. 1, eds. Denis Herlin and Marie Rolf (Paris: Durand, forthcoming). It is with kind permission of Dr. Herlin that his transcription of the song is reproduced in this study.

7

Bien des yeux bleus, bien des yeux noirs. La Blan-che ville aux
 Qui chau-ssent l'es - car - pin é - troit; Car j'en sais u - ne
 c'est la - llure de mon che - val, Un com-pli-ment sur

10

sé - ré-nades, Il pas - se par tes pro - me - nades
 par le monde, Que ja - mais ni bru - ne ni blonde,
 sa man-tille, Puis des bon-bons à la - va - nille,

13

Il pas - se par tes pro - me - nades Bien des pe - tits pieds
 Que ja - mais ni bru - ne ni blonde N'ont va - lu le bout
 Puis des bon-bons à la - va - nille, Par un beau soir de

16 rit.

tous les soirs,
de son doigt,
car - na - val,

Bien des pe - tits pieds tous les soirs.
N'ont va - lu le bout de son doigt!
Par un beau soir de car - na - val.

19

rall.

ad lib.

Ped.

Appendix B3

"Madrid"

The Poem and Debussy's Setting of the Text⁴

Line	Rhyme	Meter	"Madrid"	Debussy's setting of the text ⁵
01	a	8	Madrid, princesse des Espagnes,	Ma-drid, prin-ces-se DES Es-pag-(nes),
02	a	8	Il court par tes mille campagnes	Il court par tes mil- LE cam-pag-(nes)
03	b	8	Bien des yeux bleus, bien des yeux noirs.	Bien des yeux bleus , bien des yeux noirs .
04	c	8	La blanche ville aux sérénades,	La blan-che ville aux SÉ -ré-nades,
05	c	8	Il passe par tes promenades	Il pas-se par tes PRO -me-nades
06	b	8	Bien des petits pieds tous les soirs.	Il pas-se par tes PRO -me-nades Bien des pe-tits pieds TOUS les soirs . Bien des pe-tits pieds TOUS les soirs .
07	a	8	Madrid, quand tes taureaux bondissent,	
08	a	8	Bien des mains blanches applaudissent,	
09	b	8	Bien des écharpes sont en jeux.	
10	c	8	Par tes belles nuits étoilées,	
11	c	8	Bien des senoras long voilées	
12	b	8	Descendent tes escaliers bleus.	
13	a	8	Madrid, Madrid, moi, je me raille	Ma-drid, Ma-drid, moi, JE me rail-(le)
14	a	8	De tes dames à fine taille	De tes da-mes à FI -ne tail-(le)
15	b	8	Qui chaussent l'escarpin étroit;	Qui chau -ssent l' es -car- pin é-troit;
16	c	8	Car j'en sais une par le monde	Car j'en sais u -ne PAR le monde
17	c	8	Que jamais ni brune ni blonde	Que ja -mais ni bru- NE ni blon -(de)
18	b	8	N'ont valu le bout de son doigt!	Que ja -mais ni bru- NE ni blon -(de) N'ont va -lu le bout DE son doigt! N'ont va -lu le bout DE son doigt!
19	a	8	J'en sais une, et certes la duègne	
20	a	8	Qui la surveille et qui la peigne	
21	b	8	N'ouvre sa fenêtre qu'à moi;	
22	c	8	Certes, qui veut qu'on le redresse,	
23	c	8	N'a qu'à l'approcher à la messe,	

⁴ The manuscript of "Madrid" contains Debussy's notation of music, but it is void of the poem's text. Claude Debussy, "Madrid/Madrid, princesse des Espagnes," in Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/12273648>. Consequently, it is unclear how many stanzas Debussy has set to music: the unpublished score (received from Dr. Denis Herlin) includes the shown three stanzas, but the booklet of "*Intégrale des mélodies*" CD, as well as the recording of the song, feature all seven stanzas.

⁵ A reminder: in a musical setting, a syllable in **BOLD** font indicates its placement on a downbeat; a syllable in **bold** font represents its placement on any other accented beat; a syllable in bold and brackets (**bold**) indicates an accented *e muet*; a syllable in capital font, i.e., **BOLD**, indicates a durational accent due to a syncopation.

24	b	8	Fût-ce l'archevêque ou le roi.	
25	a	8	Car c'est ma princesse andalouse!	
26	a	8	Mon amoureuse! ma jalouse!	
27	b	8	Ma belle veuve au long réseau!	
28	c	8	C'est un vrai démon! c'est un ange!	
29	c	8	Elle est jaune, comme une orange,	
30	b	8	Elle est vive comme un oiseau!	
31	a	8	Oh! quand sur ma bouche idolâtre	
32	a	8	Elle se pâme, la folâtre,	
33	b	8	Il faut voir, dans nos grands combats,	
34	c	8	Ce corps si souple et si fragile,	
35	c	8	Ainsi qu'une couleuvre agile,	
36	b	8	Fuir et glisser entre mes bras!	
37	a	8	Or si d'aventure on s'enquête	Or si d'a-ven-ture ON s'en-quê-(te)
38	a	8	Qui m'a valu telle conquête,	Qui m'a va-lu tel- LE con-quê-(te),
39	b	8	C'est l'allure de mon cheval,	C'est l'a--llure de mon cheval,
40	c	8	Un compliment sur sa mantille,	Un com-pli-ment sur SA man-tille,
41	c	8	Puis des bonbons à la vanille	Puis des bon- bons à LA va-nille
42	b	8	Par un beau soir de carnaval.	Puis des bon- bons à LA va-nille Par un beau soir de CAR -na-val. Par un beau soir de CAR -na-val.

Appendix C1
“Tragédie”
 by Léon Valade (1841-1883)

Line	Rhyme	Meter	“Tragédie” ⁶	“Tragedy” ⁷
01	a	8	Les petites fleurs n'ont pu vivre.	The little flowers could not survive.
02	b	8	Une nuit d'avril a surpris	An April night caught their blue calyxes
03	a	8	Leurs calices bleus: sous le givre	by surprise: beneath the hoar-frost
04	b	8	Ils sont morts, ils se sont flétris.	they died, they withered.
05	a	8	Deux enfants s'aimaient d'amour tendre.	Two children fell tenderly in love.
06	b	8	Un beau jour le couple est parti:	One fine day they departed;
07	a	8	Parti du pays! sans attendre	departed their country—without awaiting
08	b	8	Que père ou mère eût consenti ...	their fathers' or mothers' consent.
09	a	8	Partout leur fuite vagabonde	Everywhere they wandered and fled
10	b	8	S'est buttée à de mauvais sorts;	they met with misfortune;
11	a	8	Ils n'ont eu nul bonheur au monde	they found no happiness in the world,
12	b	8	Ils se sont flétris, ils sont morts!	they withered, they died.

⁶ A footnote under Valade's “Tragédie: II” reads: “Vieille chanson populaire d'Allemagne, que Heine a recueillie et intercalée dans ses propres vers.” (An “old German popular song that Heine has taken and converted into his own verses.”) Léon Valade, “Tragédie: II,” in *Nocturnes: Poèmes imités de Henri Heine* (Paris: A. Patay, 1880), 35. <https://books.google.ca/books?id=C38OAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>. In a translation of Heine's original, a footnote reads: “A genuine folk song; heard by Heine on the Rhine.” Heinrich Heine, “Es fiel ein Reif in der Frühlignacht,” in *Poems of Heinrich Heine*, trans. Louis Untermeyer (New York: Brace Harcourt, 1916): 241. https://archive.org/stream/poemsofheinrichh00heinuoft/poemsofheinrichh00heinuoft_djvu.txt

⁷ The translation is by Richard Stokes, as published in Claude Debussy, *Debussy Songs 4*, performed by Lucy Crow (soprano), and Malcolm Martineau (piano). Hyperion CDA68075, 2018, CD, 6. The translation for the release of this recording is taken from Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes, *A French Song Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). It is not available on the Oxford Lieder website.

Appendix C2
“Tragédie”
 by Claude Debussy (1881)⁸

Tragédie

C. Debussy

Andantino (Avec un sentiment de tristesse)

Piano et Sourd

Les pe - ti - tes fleurs n'ont pu vi - vre

4

U - ne nuit d'av - ril a sur - pris Leurs ca - li - ces

⁸ At present (May 2023), the song is unpublished. It is being prepared for publication in Claude Debussy, *Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy: Mélodies, série II, vol. 1*, ed. by Denis Herlin and Marie Rolf (Paris: Durand, forthcoming). It is with kind permission of Dr. Herlin that his transcription of the song is reproduced in this study.

7

bleus: sous le gi - vre Ils sont morts,

11

ils sont flé - tris.

Un peu animé *Un peu ritenuto*

14

Deux en - fants s'ai-maient

Un peu plus vite

17

d'a-mour ten - dre. Un beau jour le coupl est par - ti: Par -

20

ti du pays! - sans at - ten - dre Que père ou mère eût

23

con-sen - ti *Animez et Crescendo* Par tout leur fui - te

26

va - ga - bon - de S'est but tée à de

29

mau - vais sorts; Ils n'ont eu nui bon - heur au mon - de

32

p Ils se sont flé - tris, *pp* ils sont morts!

Appendix C3

“Tragédie”

The Poem and Debussy’s Setting of the Text

Line	Rhyme	Meter	“Tragédie”	Debussy’s setting of the text
01	a	8	Les pe-ti-tes fleurs n'ont pu <u>vi</u> -vre.	LES pe-ti-tes fleurs N’ONT pu <u>vi</u> -(vre).
02	b	8	U-ne nuit d'av- ril a sur- pris	u-ne nuit d'av- RIL a sur- pris
03	a	8	Leurs ca-li-ces bleus : sous le <u>gi</u> -vre	leurs ca-li-ces BLEUS : sous le <u>GI</u> -(vre)
04	b	8	Ils sont morts , ils se sont flé- tris .	ILS sont MORTS , ils sont flé- TRIS . ⁹
05	a	8	Deux enfants s'aimaient d'amour <u>ten</u> dre.	DEUX en- fants s' ai -maient D’A -mour ten -(dre).
06	b	8	Un beau jour le couple est <u>par</u> ti:	UN beau jour le couple EST par- ti :
07	a	8	Parti du pays ! sans <u>at</u> endre	Par- TI du pays ! SANS at- ten -(dre)
08	b	8	Que père ou mère eût <u>con</u> sen-ti ...	Que pè -re ou mè -re eût CON -sen- ti .
09	a	8	Partout leur fuite vagab <u>on</u> de	Par- tout leur fui -te VA -ga- bon -de
10	b	8	S'est buttée à de mauvais sorts ;	S'est but -tée à de MAU -vais sorts ;
11	a	8	Ils n'ont eu nul bonheur au <u>mon</u> de	Ils n’ont eu nul bon- HEUR au mon -(de)
12	b	8	Ils se sont flé- tris , ils sont morts !	Ils se sont flé- TRIS , ils sont MORTS !

⁹ Debussy omits the word “se” in his setting.

Appendix D1
“Regret”
 by Paul Bourget (1852-1935)

Line	Rhyme	Meter	“Regret” ¹⁰	“Regret” ¹¹
01	a	10	Devant le ciel d'été, tiède et calmé,	Beneath the summer sky, warm and becalmed,
02	b	10	Je me souviens de toi comme d'un songe,	I remember you as in a dream,
03	b	10	Et mon regret fidèle aime et prolonge	And my faithful regret loves and prolongs
04	a	8	Les heures où j'étais aimé.	The hours when I was loved.
05	a	10	Les astres brilleront dans la nuit noire;	The stars will shine in the black night;
06	b	10	Le soleil brillera dans le jour clair,	The sun will shine in the bright day;
07	b	10	Quelque chose de toi flotte dans l'air,	Something of you hovers in the air,
08	a	8	Qui me pénètre la mémoire.	Penetrating my memory.
09	a	10	Quelque chose de toi qui fut à moi:	Something of you that was mine:
10	b	10	Car j'ai possédé tout de ta pensée,	For I once filled all your thoughts,
11	b	10	Et mon âme, trahie et délaissée,	And my soul, betrayed and abandoned,
12	a	8	Est encor tout entière à toi.	Is still entirely yours.

¹⁰ Paul Bourget, “Regret,” in *Les Aveux* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1882), 44, Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/lesaveuxposies00bouruoft/page/44/mode/2up?view=theater>

¹¹ Paul Bourget, “Regret” (“Regret”), trans. by Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 3*, with Jennifer France (soprano), Jonathan McGovern (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA68016, 2014, CD, 7. The translation is also available online: Paul Bourget, “Regret,” trans. Richard Stokes, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2806>.

Appendix D2
“Regret”
 by Claude Debussy (1884)¹²

Poème de Paul Bourget

Claude Debussy

Andantino *pp*

De - vant le ciel d'é - té,

ppp

5
tiè - de et cal - mé Je me sou - viens de toi, com - me d'un

¹² Claude Debussy, “Regret,” in *Œuvres Complètes de Claude Debussy: Mélodies, Série II, Vol.2*, ed. Marie Rolf. (Paris: Durand, 2016), 61-63. An earlier publication of the song can be found in Claude Debussy, *Chansons d'après le Manuscrit inédit, conservé à la Bibliothèque nationale de Paris*, ed. by Arthur Hoérée (Paris: Salabert, 1980), 29-31. With regards to rhythm, the two publications of “Regret” differ, because of a few incomplete measures in the manuscript: Claude Debussy, “‘Regret, poésie de P. Bourget...’, musique de Claude Debussy, pour 1 voix et piano (manuscript autographe),” score, 1884, Bibliothèque nationale de France, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b72005055/f1.item.r=Regret%20Regret>

9

son - - ge, Et mon re - gret fi - dèle, —

13

ai - me et pro - lon - ge Les heu - res où j'é - tais ai - mé

17

où j'é - tais ai - mé. Les as - tres bril - le - ront,

21

dans la nuit noi - re; Le so leil bril-le - ra, dans le jour

25

clair; Quel - que cho - se de

28

toi, flot-te dans l'air, Qui me pé - nè - tre la mé-moi - re. Quel-que cho-se de

32

toi, qui fut à moi, — Car j'ai pos-sé-dé tout, de ta pen-sé - e, Et mon â-me tra-

36

hie, et dé-lais-sé - e, Est en - cor tout en ti-ère à toi. —

40

De - vant le ci - el d'é - té, tiède et cal - mé, — Je

44

me sou - viens de toi, com - me d'un son - - -

47

ge.

Appendix D3

“Regret”

The Poem and Debussy’s Setting of the Text

Line no.	Rhyme	Meter	“Regret”	Debussy’s setting of the Text
01	a	10	Devant le ciel d’été, tiède et calmé,	DE-vant le CIEL d’été, tiè-de et cal-MÉ,
02	b	10	Je me souviens de toi comme d’un songe,	Je ME sou-viens de TOI com-me d’un SON-(ge),
03	b	10	Et mon regret fidèle aime et prolonge	ET mon re-GRET fi-dèle AI-me et pro-LON-(ge)
04	a	8	Les heures où j’étais aimé.	Les HEU-res où j’ é-TAIS ai-mé, où j’ é-tais ai-MÉ.
05	a	10	Les astres brilleront dans la nuit noire;	Les as-tres BRIL-le-ront DANS la nuit NOI-(re);
06	b	10	Le soleil brillera dans le jour clair,	LE so-leil bril-le-RA dans le jour CLAIR,
07	b	10	Quelque chose de toi flotte dans l’air,	QUEL-que cho-se de TOI flot-te dans L’AIR,
08	a	8	Qui me pénètre la mémoire.	Qui me pé-NÈ-tre la mé-moi-re.
09	a	10	Quelque chose de toi qui fut à moi:	QUEL-que cho-se de TOI qui fut à MOI,
10	b	10	Car j’ai possédé tout de ta pensée,	Car j’ai pos-sé-dé TOUT de ta pen-sé-e,
11	b	10	Et mon âme, trahie et délaissée,	ET mon â-me, tra-HIE et dé-lais-sé-e,
12	a	8	Est encor tout entière à toi.	EST en-cor tout en-tiè-re à TOI.
				DE-vant le CIEL d’été, tiè-de et cal-MÉ, Je ME sou-viens de TOI com-me d’un SON-(ge),

Appendix E1
Fêtes galantes: 1. “En Sourdine”
 by Paul Verlaine (1844-1896)

Line	Rhyme	Meter	“En Sourdine” ¹³	“Muted” ¹⁴
1	a	7	Calmes dans le demi-jour	Calm in the half-light,
2	b	7	Que les branches hautes font,	Made by the lofty branches,
3	a	7	Pénétrons bien notre amour	Let us permeate our love
4	b	7	De ce silence profond.	With this deep silence.
5	a	7	Fondons nos âmes, nos cœurs	Let us mingle our souls, our hearts
6	b	7	Et nos sens extasiés,	And our entranced senses,
7	a	7	Parmi les vagues langueurs	Among the vague murmurings
8	b	7	Des pins et des arbousiers.	Of the pines and arbutus trees.
9	a	7	Ferme tes yeux à demi,	Half close your eyes,
10	b	7	Croise tes bras sur ton sein,	Fold your arms across your breast,
11	a	7	Et de ton cœur endormi	And from your sleeping heart
12	b	7	Chasse à jamais tout dessein.	Banish all thought forever.
13	a	7	Laissons-nous persuader	Let us be wooed
14	b	7	Au souffle berceur et doux	By the lulling and gentle breeze
15	a	7	Qui vient, à tes pieds, rider	That wrinkles at your feet
16	b	7	Les ondes de gazon roux.	The waves of russet grass.
17	a	7	Et quand, solennel, le soir	And when, solemnly, evening
18	b	7	Des chênes noirs tombera	Descends from the dark oaks,
19	a	7	Voix de notre désespoir,	Voice of our despair,
20	b	7	Le rossignol chantera.	The nightingale will sing.

¹³ According to David Hunter, “this poem was first published in the magazine *L’Artiste* in July [01] 1868 and was subsequently included in the first full edition of Verlaine’s *Fêtes galantes*, which appeared the following year” [Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1869]. David Hunter, *Understanding French Verse: A Guide for Singers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 90.

¹⁴ The translation is from Marie Rolf, “Debussy’s Settings of Verlaine’s ‘En Sourdine’,” in *Perspectives on Music: Essays on Collections at the Humanities Research Center*, ed. by Dave Oliphant and Thomas Zigal (Austin, Texas: Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, 1985), 228-229.

Appendix E2
Fêtes galantes I: 1. "En Sourdine"
 by Claude Debussy (1890, pbd. 1903)¹⁵

Paul Verlaine

Claude Debussy

Rêusement lent

pp *Doux et espressif*

p

Cal - mes dans le

5

pp

p

de - mi - jour Que les bran - ches hau - tes font, Pé - né trons bien not - re a -

¹⁵ Claude Debussy, "En Sourdine," in *Fêtes galantes* (Paris: E. Fromont, 1903): 2-5.

8

mour De ce si - len - ce pro - fond

Toujours très doux

11

Peu à peu animé

p

Fon - dons nos â - mes, nos cœurs Et nos sens ex - ta -

14

rit. **1er Mouvt**

p

siés Par - mis les va-gues lan-gueurs Des pins et des ar-bou-siers.

p *più p* *pp*

17 **En animant un peu**

Fer-me tes yeux à de - mi, Croi - se tes

p Délicatement

20

bras sur ton, sein, Et de ton coeur en - dor -

p *poco cresc.*

23

mi Chasse à ja - mais tout des - sein.

Molto dim. *pp*

26 *Intimement doux*

Lais - sons - nous - per - su - a - der Au

28 *Poco cresc.*

souf - fle ber - ceur et doux Qui veient à tes pieds ri -

Poco cresc.

30 **Un peu plus lent**

der Les on - des de ga-zon roux.

mf Dim. *p*

33

Et quand so - len - nel, le soir, Des chô - nes

più p

35

Lent *Doux et espressif*

noirs tom - be - ra Voix de no - tre dé - ses -

pp

37

poir, Le ros - si - gnol chant - te - ra.

più pp

40

En se perdant

m.d. *m.g.* *m.d.* *m.g.* *m.g.* *m.d.*

Appendix E3
Fêtes galantes: 1. “En Sourdine”
 The Poem and Debussy’s Setting of the Text

Line	Rhyme	Meter	“En Sourdine”	Debussy’s Setting of the Text
1	a	7	Calmes dans le demi-jour	CAL-mes dans le DE -mi-jour
2	b	7	Que les branches hautes font,	Que les BRAN -ches hau -tes font,
3	a	7	Pénétrons bien notre amour	Pé-né-trons BIEN notre a-MOUR
4	b	7	De ce silence profond.	De ce si- LEN-CE pro- fond .
5	a	7	Fondons nos âmes, nos cœurs	Fon-dons nos Â -MES, nos cœurs
6	b	7	Et nos sens extasiés,	Et nos SENS ex- ta-SIÉS ,
7	a	7	Parmi les vagues langueurs	Par- mis les va -gues lan- gueurs
8	b	7	Des pins et des arbousiers.	Des pins et DES ar- bou-siers .
9	a	7	Ferme tes yeux à demi,	FER -me tes yeux à de- MI ,
10	b	7	Croise tes bras sur ton sein,	Croi- se tes BRAS sur ton SEIN ,
11	a	7	Et de ton cœur endormi	Et de ton CŒUR en- dor-MI
12	b	7	Chasse à jamais tout dessein.	Chasse à ja-mais tout des- SEIN .
13	a	7	Laissons-nous persuader	LAIS -sons- nous per- su-a-DER
14	b	7	Au souffle berceur et doux	Au SOUF -fle ber- ceur et doux
15	a	7	Qui vient, à tes pieds, rider	QUI vient, à tes pieds , ri- DER
16	b	7	Les ondes de gazon roux.	Les on-des de ga- zon ROUX .
17	a	7	Et quand, solennel, le soir	Et quand, so -len- NEL , le soir
18	b	7	Des chênes noirs tombera	Des chê -nes NOIRS tom- be-ra
19	a	7	Voix de notre désespoir,	Voix de no -tre dé -ses- POIR ,
20	b	7	Le rossignol chantera.	Le ros -si- GNOL chan- te-RA . ¹⁶

¹⁶ In the 1882 *Vasnier* setting, Debussy repeats the last two lines of the poem.

Appendix F1
“La Belle au bois dormant”
 by E. Vincent Hyspa (1865-1938)

Line	Rhyme	Meter	“La Belle au bois dormant” ¹⁷	“The Sleeping Beauty” ¹⁸
01	a	8	Des trous à son pourpoint vermeil,	A knight with holes in his bright red doublet
02	b	8	Un chevalier va par la brune,	Travels through the dusk,
03	a	8	Les cheveux tout pleins de soleil,	With his hair gleaming with sunlight
04	b	8	Sous un casque couleur de lune.	Beneath a moon-coloured helmet.
05	c	8	Dormez toujours, dormez au bois,	Sleep on, sleep in the wood,
06	c	8	L'anneau, la Belle, à votre doigt.	Beauteous One, the ring on your finger.
07	a	8	Dans la poussière des batailles,	In the dust of battles
08	b	8	Il a tué loyal et droit,	He has killed, loyal and steadfast,
09	a	8	En frappant d'estoc et de taille,	Laying about him with might and main,
10	b	8	Ainsi que frapperait un roi.	Like a king.
11	c	8	Dormez au bois, où la verveine,	Sleep in the wood, where verbena
12	c	8	Fleurit avec la marjolaine.	Flowers with marjoram.
13	a	8	Et par les monts et par la plaine,	And over mountains and across plains,
14	b	8	Monté sur son grand destrier,	Mounted on his great charger,
15	a	8	Il court, il court à perdre haleine,	He gallops, gallops breathlessly,
16	b	8	Et tout droit sur ses étriers.	Standing upright in his stirrups.
17	c	8	Dormez la Belle au Bois, rêvez	Sleep, Sleeping Beauty, dream
18	c	8	Q'un prince vous épouserez.	That a prince will wed you.
19	a	8	Dans la forêt des lilas blancs,	In the forest of white lilac,
20	b	8	Sous l'éperon d'or qui l'excite,	Goaded by golden spurs,
21	a	8	Son destrier perle de sang	His charger spatters the white lilac
22	b	8	Les lilas blancs, et va plus vite.	With drops of blood, and gallops more swiftly.
23	c	8	Dormez au bois, dormez, la Belle	Sleep in the wood, sleep, O Beauteous One,
24	c	8	Sous vos courtines de dentelle.	Beneath your curtains of lace.
25	a	8	Mais il a pris l'anneau vermeil,	But he has taken the bright red ring,
26	b	8	Le chevalier qui par la brune,	The knight with his sun-flecked hair,
27	a	8	A des cheveux pleins de soleil,	Riding through the dusk
28	b	8	Sous un casque couleur de lune.	In his moon-coloured helmet.
29	c	8	Ne dormez plus, La Belle au Bois,	Sleep no longer, Sleeping Beauty,
30	c	8	L'anneau n'est plus à votre doigt.	The ring is gone from your finger.

¹⁷ The poem has never been published, except as a *mélodie*, i.e., as already set to music by Debussy.

¹⁸ E. Vincent Hyspa, “La Belle au bois dormant” (“The Sleeping Beauty”), trans. by Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 3*, with Jonathan McGovern (baritone), and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA68016, 2014, CD, 11-12. The translation is also available online: E. Vincent Hyspa, “La Belle au bois dormant,” trans. Richard Stokes, Oxford Lieder, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/2818>.

Appendix F2
“La Belle au bois dormant”
 by Claude Debussy (1890)¹⁹

Poetry by E. V. Hyspa

Claude Debussy

Assez animé

p léger

2

p

Des trous à son pour-point ver-meil,

3

Un che-valier va par la

¹⁹ Claude Debussy, “La Belle au bois dormant” (Paris: Société nouvelle d’éditions musicales, 1903). Also, Claude Debussy, “La Belle au bois dormant” (Paris: Max Eschig, 1907). Debussy’s manuscript is available on the International Music Score Library Project website: <https://vmirror.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/0/0b/IMSLP740462-PMLP38841-114395.pdf>

4

bru - - - - ne,

5

Les che - veux tout pleins de so - leil,

cresc.

6

Sous un cas - que cou - leur de

dim.

7

lu - - - - - ne.

p

più dim.

8

Dor - mez tou-jours,

p

dim. beaucoup.

pp

10

dor - mez au bois, L'an - neau, la Belle, à vo - tre

p

pp

12

doigt.

p

13

Dans la pous - sière - re des ba - tail - les

14

Il a tu - é lo - yal et droit

15

cresc.

En frap - pant d'es - toc et de tail - le, Ain - si que frap - pe - rait un

cresc.

17

f

roi.

f *dim.* *più dim.*

19

Dor - mez au bois, où la ver - vei - ne Fleu - rit a - vec la mar - jo -

pp *toujours pp*

22

lai - - ne,

23

Et par les monts et par la plai - ne, Mon -

24

té sur son grand des - tri - er, Il

25 *p* animez e cresc.

court, il court à per - dre ha -

p animez e cresc.

26

lei - - ne, Et tout droit sur ses é - tri -

f

28

ers.

dim.

30 **a Tempo.**

pp

Dor - mez la Belle au Bois, rê - vez Qu'un prin-ce vous é-pou-se-

pp

33

rez.

p

34

p

Dans la fo - rêt des li - las

p

35 Animez peu à peu.

blancs, Sous l'é - pe - ron d'or qui l'ex - ci - te,

36 *cresc.*
Son des - tri - er per - le de sang

37
Les li - las blancs. et va plus

38

vi - te. Dor - mez au bois,

p

dim.

pp

40

dor - mez la Bel - le Sous vos cour - ti - nes de den -

pp

42

tel - - le.

p

43 *p*

Mais il a pris l'an - neu ver - meil,

44 *cresc.*

Le che - va - lier qui par la bru - ne,

45

A des che - veux pleins de so -

46 *molto cresc.*

leil,

molto cresc.

47

Sous un cas - - que cou-leur de lu - ne,

f

49 *mf un peu plus lent*

Ne dor - mez plus,

dim. *mf*

51

più f

la Belle au Bois, L'an - neu n'est

più f

53

plus à vo - tre doigt.

ff

Appendix F3
“La Belle au bois dormant”
The Poem and Debussy’s Setting of the Text

Line	Rhyme	Meter	“ <u>La Belle au bois dormant</u> ”	<u>Debussy’s Setting of the Text</u>
01	a	8	Des trous à son pourpoint vermeil,	Des trous à son pour -point ver- meil ,
02	b	8	Un chevalier va par la brune,	UN che-va- lier VA par la BRU -(ne),
03	a	8	Les cheveux tout pleins de soleil,	LES che- veux tout pleins de so- leil ,
04	b	8	Sous un casque couleur de lune.	SOUS un cas -que cou -leur de LU -(ne).
05	c	8	Dormez toujours, dormez au bois,	DOR -mez tou- jours , dor- mez au bois ,
06	c	8	L'anneau, la Belle, à votre doigt.	L'an- NEAU , la belle , à vo-tre DOIGT .
07	a	8	Dans la poussière des batailles,	DANS la pous- siè -re des ba- tail -les,
08	b	8	Il a tué loyal et droit,	IL a tu- é lo- yol et droit ,
09	a	8	En frappant d'estoc et de taille,	EN frap- pant d'es- toc et de tail -le,
10	b	8	Ainsi que frapperait un roi.	Ain- SI que frap -pe- rait un ROI .
11	c	8	Dormez au bois, où la verveine,	DOR -mez au bois , où la ver- vei -(ne),
12	c	8	Fleurit avec la marjolaine.	Fleu- RIT av- ec la mar -jo- LAI -(ne).
13	a	8	Et par les monts et par la plaine,	ET par les monts et par la plai -ne,
14	b	8	Monté sur son grand destrier,	Mon- TÉ sur son grand des- tri -er,
15	a	8	Il court, il court à perdre haleine,	Il COURT , il court à per -dre ha- LEI -(ne),
16	b	8	Et tout droit sur ses étriers.	Et tout DROIT sur ses é -tri- ERS .
17	c	8	Dormez la Belle au Bois, rêvez	DOR -mez la belle au bois , rê -vez
18	c	8	Q'un prince vous épouserez.	Q'un PRIN -ce vous é - pou -se- REZ .
19	a	8	Dans la forêt des lilas blancs,	Dans la fo- rêt des li -las BLANCS ,
20	b	8	Sous l'éperon d'or qui l'excite,	Sous l' é -pe-ron d'or qui l'ex- ci -te,
21	a	8	Son destrier perle de sang	SON des- tri -er per- le de sang
22	b	8	Les lilas blancs, et va plus vite.	LES li-las blancs , et va plus VI -(te).
23	c	8	Dormez au bois, dormez, la Belle	DOR -mez au bois , dor- mez , la bel -(le)
24	c	8	Sous vos courtines de dentelle.	Sous VOS cour- ti -nes de den- TEL -(le).
25	a	8	Mais il a pris l'anneau vermeil,	MAIS il a pris l'an- neau ver- meil ,
26	b	8	Le chevalier qui par la brune,	LE che-va- lier qui par la bru -ne,
27	a	8	A des cheveux pleins de soleil,	A des che- veux pleins de so- LEIL ,
28	b	8	Sous un casque couleur de lune.	SOUS un cas -que cou -leur de LU -(ne).
29	c	8	Ne dormez plus, La Belle au Bois,	NE dor- mez plus , la bel -le au bois
30	c	8	L'anneau n'est plus à votre doigt.	L'an- NEAU n'est PLUS à vo-tre DOIGT .

Appendix G1
“Éventail”
 by Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898)

Line	Rhyme	Meter	“Éventail” ²⁰	“Fan” ²¹
01	a	8	Ô rêveuse, pour que je plonge	O dreamer, that I may plunge
02	b	8	Au pur délice sans chemin,	Into pure pathless delight,
03	a	8	Sache, par un subtil mensonge,	Contrive, by a subtle deception,
04	b	8	Garder mon aile dans ta main.	To hold my wing in your hand.
05	a	8	Une fraîcheur de crépuscule	A twilight freshness
06	b	8	Te vient à chaque battement	Reaches you at each flutter,
07	a	8	Dont le coup prisonnier recule	Whose captive stroke distances
08	b	8	L'horizon délicatement.	The horizon delicately.
09	a	8	Vertige ! voici que frissonne	Vertigo! See how space
10	b	8	L'espace comme un grand baiser	Shivers like an immense kiss
11	a	8	Qui, fou de naître pour personne,	Which, mad at being born for no one,
12	b	8	Ne peut jaillir ni s'apaiser.	Can neither burst forth nor abate.
13	a	8	Sens-tu le paradis farouche	Can you feel the wild paradise
14	b	8	Ainsi qu'un rire enseveli	Just like buried laughter
15	a	8	Se couler du coin de ta bouche	Flow from the corner of your mouth
16	b	8	Au fond de l'unanime pli.	Deep into the unanimous fold!
17	a	8	Le sceptre des rivages roses	The sceptre of rose-coloured shores
18	b	8	Stagnants sur les soirs d'or, ce l'est	Stagnating over golden evenings—such is
19	a	8	Ce vol blanc fermé que tu poses	This white furled flight which you set
20	b	8	Contre le feu d'un bracelet.	Against a bracelet's fire.

²⁰ The poem was first published in 1884 in *La Revue critique* and then in Stéphane Mallarmé, *Les Poésies de Stéphane Mallarmé* (Paris: Éditions de La Revue Indépendante, 1887), 20. It was republished the year after Mallarmé's death, in Stéphane Mallarmé, *Poésies* (Bruxelles: Edmond Deman, 1899), 83.

²¹ Stéphane Mallarmé, “Éventail” (“Fan”), trans. Richard Stokes, in *Debussy Songs 2*, with Lorna Anderson (soprano) and Malcolm Martineau (piano), Hyperion CDA67883, 2012, CD, 16. The translations featured in this CD booklet are taken from Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes, *A French Song Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Stokes's translation is not available on the Oxford Lieder website.

Appendix G2
“Éventail”
 by Claude Debussy (1913)²²

Stéphane Mallarmé

Claude Debussy

Scherzando ♩ = 76 (Délicat et léger)**Rubato**

The piano introduction is in 2/4 time. The treble clef staff contains a melodic line with a fermata over the first two measures. The grand staff shows the piano accompaniment with dynamic markings: *p legg.* in the first measure, *più p* in the second, and *pp* in the third. The bass clef staff provides harmonic support with chords and single notes.

5

The vocal entry begins at measure 5. The vocal line is in 2/4 time and includes the lyrics: "O rê-veu se, pour que je plon ge Au pur dé-li - ce sans che min,". The piano accompaniment is in 2/4 time and features a *pp* dynamic marking. The score includes a key signature change to D major and a time signature change to 3/4 for the final measure.

²² Claude Debussy, “Éventail,” in *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* (Paris: Durand, 1913), 8-12. Debussy’s manuscript is available on the BnF website, Claude Debussy, *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*, score, Bibliothèque nationale de France, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55009613t>. Also, it is available on the International Music Score Library Project website: https://vmirror.imslp.org/files/imgnks/usimg/1/10/IMSLP410843-PMLP21109-Trois_poèmes_de_mallarmé.pdf

8

Sa - - che, par un sub - til men - son - ge,

pp

11 **Mouv^t**

Gar - der mon ai - le dans ta main.

p *legg.* *più p*

14

U - ne fraî - cheur de cré - pus - cu - le Te vient à cha - que bat - te -

pp *pp* *pp*

18

ment Dont le coup pri - son - nier re - cu - le L'ho - ri -

più pp *p* *p*

22

Serrez //

zon dé - li - ca - te - ment.

p *p* *p*

25 **Rapide** **Mouv'**

Ver - ti - ge!

mf *dim. molto* *pp sempre legg.*

le chant doucement en dehors

28

voi - ci que fris - son - ne L'es - pa - ce

30 Cédez un peu - - - - - //Mouv^t

comme un grand bai - ser Qui,

32

fou de naî - tre pour per - son - ne,

34

Ne peut jail - lir ni s'a - pai -

36

ser — Sens - tu le pa - ra - dis fa - rou - che

p doux et expressif

p

8^{va}

3

40

Ain - si qu'un rire en - se - ve - li Se cou - ler du coin de ta bou - che

più p

3

3

44 Cédez, très peu - - - - - //Mouv^t

Au fond de l'u - na - ni - me pli!

47

50 En retenant peu à peu
jusqu'à la fin

Le scep - tre des ri -

8^{va}

pp doux et lointain

53

va - ges ro - - - - ses Stag - nants sur

8va
pp

56

Toujours en retenant

les soirs d'or, ce l'est, Ce blanc vol fer-

(8)
p
pp

61

Serrez - - - //Retenu - - - //

mé que tu po - ses Con - tre le feu d'un bra - ce - let.

più pp
à peine

3

Appendix G3

“Éventail”

The Poem and Debussy’s Setting of the Text

Line	Rhyme	Meter	“Éventail”	Debussy’s Setting of the Text
01	a	8	Ô rêveuse, pour que je plonge	Ô rê-VEU-se, pour que je plon -ge
02	b	8	Au pur délice sans chemin,	Au pur dé- li -ce sans che- min ,
03	a	8	Sache, par un subtil mensonge,	SA -(che), par un sub -til men- SON -(ge),
04	b	8	Garder mon aile dans ta main.	Gar-der mon ai -le dans ta MAIN .
05	a	8	Une fraîcheur de crépuscule	U -ne fraî- CHEUR de cré -pus- CU -(le)
06	b	8	Te vient à chaque battement	Te VIENT à cha -que bat-te- MENT
07	a	8	Dont le coup prisonnier recule	Dont le COUP pri-son- NIER re- CU -le
08	b	8	L'horizon délicatement.	L'ho -ri- ZON dé- li - CA -te-ment.
09	a	8	Vertige! voici que frissonne	Ver- TI -ge! Voi- ci que fris- SON -ne
10	b	8	L'espace comme un grand baiser	L'es- pa -ce COM -me un grand bai- SER
11	a	8	Qui, fou de naïtre pour personne,	Qui , FOU de naî -tre pour per- SON -(ne),
12	b	8	Ne peut jaillir ni s'apaiser.	Ne peut jail- LIR ni s' a -pai- SER .
13	a	8	Sens-tu le paradis farouche	Sens - TU le pa -ra-dis fa- ROU -(che)
14	b	8	Ainsi qu'un rire enseveli	AIN - SI qu'un ri -re en-se-ve- LI
15	a	8	Se couler du coin de ta bouche	Se cou- LER du coin de ta BOU -(che)
16	b	8	Au fond de l'unanime pli.	Au fond de l'u- NA -ni-me pli !
17	a	8	Le sceptre des rivages roses	LE SCEP -tre des ri- VA -ges ro -ses
18	b	8	Stagnants sur les soirs d'or, ce l'est	STAG -nants sur LES soirs d'or , ce l'est
19	a	8	Ce vol blanc fermé que tu poses	Ce blanc vol fer- MÉ que tu po -ses
20	b	8	Contre le feu d'un bracelet.	CON -tre le feu d'un BRA -ce- LET .