Symphonic Culture in Paris, 1880-1900: The Bande à Franck and Beyond

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ABSTRACT

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Parisian musical life underwent a tectonic shift in the late nineteenth century. Throughout the 1800s, and particularly during the Second Empire (1852-70), opera and other forms of theatrical entertainment had dominated the French musical scene. In the final decades of the century, however, a generation of French composers devoted considerable efforts to large-scale symphonic forms. A driving force in the advancement of orchestral music was the “Franck circle” or bande à Franck—a group of more-or-less young composers mentored by an unassuming organ professor at the Paris Conservatoire. In their symphonic works, these musicians challenged the longstanding Austro-German dominance of serious instrumental genres and cultivated a distinctly French musical voice.

This dissertation explores the burgeoning symphonic culture of Paris circa 1880-1900 by examining four representative compositions by prominent members of the Franck circle: Augusta Holmès’s Les Argonautes (1880), Ernest Chausson’s Viviane (1882-83, revised 1887), César Franck’s Psyché (1886-87), and Vincent d’Indy’s Istar (1896). Each of these pieces, the subject of an individual chapter, offers a study in the relationship between compositional practice and cultural identity. The critical success of Les Argonautes catapulted Holmès to national prominence and established her reputation as one of the most progressive composers in France. Chausson’s extensive revisions to Viviane, his first major orchestral work, reveal his evolving attitudes about descriptive
music and Wagner—the composer who cast the longest shadow in fin-de-siècle France. Although Franck based Psyché on a legend from Greek antiquity, his approach to musical signification allowed his disciples to interpret the piece variously as a Christian allegory or as absolute music. D’Indy’s polemical stances on genre, artistic influence, and morality belie the ideological complexities and paradoxes in his Istar.

In addition to illuminating these works through reception history, musical analysis, manuscript studies, and the composers’ own writings, the dissertation will address three interrelated topics in each chapter. First, I explore how the bande à Franck understood the concept of “serious” music, and how this conception shaped Third Republic attitudes about orchestral genres, absolute music, and program music. Second, I examine how French composers responded to the legacy of Wagner in non-theatrical genres. Finally, I discuss how these four musicians fashioned a cultural, national, and personal identity through—and sometimes in tension with—their orchestral works.
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For Patricia
CHAPTER ONE
SYMPHONIC CULTURE IN PARIS, 1880-1900: AN INTRODUCTION

The disasters of the war in 1870 regenerated the nation’s artistic spirit. Music felt its effect immediately…. A new generation was growing up… a generation that was serious and thoughtful, that was more attracted by pure music than by the theatre, that was filled with a burning desire to found a national art.

- Romain Rolland, Musiciens d’aujourd’hui (1908)

Parisian musical life underwent a tectonic shift in the late nineteenth century. Throughout the 1800s, and particularly during the Second Empire (1852-70), opera and other forms of theatrical entertainment had dominated the French musical scene. In the final decades of the century, however, a generation of French composers devoted considerable efforts to large-scale symphonic forms. A driving force in the advancement of orchestral music was the “Franck circle” or bande à Franck—a group of more-or-less young composers mentored by an unassuming organ professor at the Paris Conservatoire. In their symphonic works, these musicians challenged the longstanding Austro-German dominance of serious instrumental genres and cultivated a distinctly French musical voice.

This dissertation explores the burgeoning symphonic culture of Paris circa 1880-1900 by examining four representative compositions by prominent members of the Franck circle: Augusta Holmès’s Les Argonautes (1880), Ernest Chausson’s Viviane (1882-83, revised 1887), César Franck’s Psyché (1886-87), and Vincent d’Indy’s Istar (1896). Each of these pieces offers a study in the relationship between compositional practice and cultural identity. The critical success of Les Argonautes catapulted Holmès

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to national prominence and established her reputation as one of the most progressive composers in France. Chausson’s extensive revisions to *Viviane*, his first major orchestral work, reveal his evolving attitudes about Wagnerism and descriptive music. Although Franck based *Psyché* on a legend from Greek antiquity, his approach to musical signification allowed his disciples to interpret the piece variously as a Christian allegory or as absolute music. D’Indy’s polemical stances on genre, artistic influence, and morality belie the ideological complexities and paradoxes in his *Istar*. Viewed together, these compositions also demonstrate how the *bande à Franck* exemplified a “serious and thoughtful” mindset, as Romain Rolland characterized this generation in his 1908 study. *Les Argonautes* and *Psyché* are ambitious, hour-long works for large orchestra and chorus. *Viviane* and *Istar*, while more modest in scope, engage with the ideals of absolute music in ways that reveal a similar seriousness of purpose.

A few remarks about my choices of repertoire are in order. The four pieces examined in this dissertation are rarely performed today, if at all. *Les Argonautes*, as with most of Holmès’s oeuvre, has been all but forgotten. Other French symphonic works from this time period have proven more resilient: Chausson’s *Poème* (1896), Franck’s Symphony in D Minor (1886-88) and *Le Chasseur maudit* (1882), and d’Indy’s *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français* (1886) immediately come to mind, not to mention works by Camille Saint-Saëns, Paul Dukas, Emmanuel Chabrier, Édouard Lalo, Gabriel Fauré, and the young Claude Debussy. Nonetheless, the compositions discussed in this study were frequently performed and highly influential during the Third Republic. More importantly, they offer promising focal points for exploring the major aesthetic
issues and preoccupations that French composers of orchestral music encountered in the
final decades of the nineteenth century.

One such preoccupation was the significance of genre. For many composers in the
Third Republic—particularly those affiliated with the Franck circle—the purely
instrumental symphony represented the pinnacle of instrumental composition, and several
French musicians made lasting contributions to the genre. However, I have chosen to
focus on other types of works in order to highlight the fluidity of generic boundaries
during these decades. The compositions I address in the following chapters—Holmès’s
symphonie dramatique, Chausson’s poème symphonique, Franck’s symphonic poem with
chorus, and d’Indy’s variations symphoniques—reflect the variegated landscape of
orchestral writing during the Third Republic. The programming of the Société nationale
de musique, one of the most important performance forums for young French composers,
exemplifies this generic eclecticism. As Michael Strasser has documented, symphonies

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2 The French symphony at the fin de siècle has been the subject of several excellent musicological
studies, including a thoughtful essay by Ralph Locke, a book-length survey and numerous articles
by Brian Hart, and most recently, a dissertation and forthcoming book by Andrew Deruchie
which examines seven of the best known efforts in the genre. See Ralph P. Locke, “The French
Symphony: David, Gounod, and Bizet to Saint-Saëns, Franck, and Their Followers,” in The
War,” in A. Peter Brown, The Symphonic Repertoire, vol. 3 part B: The European Symphony
from ca. 1800 to ca. 1930: Great Britain, Russia, and France (Bloomington, IN: Indiana
University Press, 2008), 529-725; and Andrew Deruchie, “The French Symphony at the Fin de
Siècle: Style, Culture, and the Symphonic Tradition” (PhD dissertation: McGill University,
2008). Much of Hart’s research has focused on the French symphony in the early twentieth
century. See, for instance, “Vincent d’Indy and the Development of the French Symphony,”
Identity in Early Twentieth-Century France,” in French Music, Culture, and National Identity,
University of Rochester Press, 2008), 131-48; and “Wagner and the franckiste ‘Message-
Symphony’ in Early Twentieth-Century France,” in Von Wagner zum Wagnerismus: Musik,
Literatur, Kunst, Politik, ed. Annegret Fauser and Manuela Schwartz, Deutsch-Französische
only represented a small fraction of the Société’s orchestral programming in its early years. In fact, performances of symphonies or movements of symphonies declined from seventeen in the Société’s inaugural decade (1871-81) to eight in its second (1881-91). In contrast, performances of symphonic poems, overtures, and excerpts from dramatic works became more frequent over the same period.³

Pieces with a theatrical or programmatic element held pride of place at the major Parisian concert societies as well. Félicien David’s first *ode-symphonie*, *Le Désert* (1844), for orchestra, male chorus, tenor solo, and narrator, was perhaps the most influential French symphonic composition from mid-century. Hector Berlioz’s *La Damnation de Faust* (1845-46) enjoyed sustained popularity in the 1870s and 1880s and became a signature item of Édouard Colonne and his orchestra. Such works for chorus, vocal soloists, and orchestra were a fixture of concert life in Paris through the end of the century. Many, including *Les Argonautes*, were produced with the support of government subventions. Élisabeth Bernard has suggested the public taste for these compositions may have been fueled by the conservative programming at theatrical institutions; since the Paris Opéra rarely premiered works by living French composers, listeners had to turn to Parisian orchestral societies to hear the latest dramatic music.⁴ By examining hybrid works like *Les Argonautes* and *Psyché* alongside purely instrumental compositions by Chausson and d’Indy, I hope to convey something of the diversity of French approaches to orchestral composition at the *fin de siècle*.


This diversity notwithstanding, there are several threads that link these four pieces together. All of my case studies exemplify a high-minded aesthetic, engage with German musical precursors (Wagner in particular), and bring the personal and cultural identity of their authors into sharper focus. In light of these commonalities, this dissertation will address three interrelated topics in the following chapters. First, I will explore how composers understood the concept of “serious” music in the Third Republic, and how this conception shaped attitudes about orchestral genres, absolute music, and program music. Second, I hope to provide a clearer understanding of how French symphonic composers responded to the legacy of Wagner. Finally, I will discuss how these four musicians fashioned a cultural, national, and personal identity through—and sometimes in tension with—their orchestral works. Before addressing these points further, a brief sketch of symphonic life during these decades is in order.

**Prospects for Orchestral Composers**

A common perception during the Third Republic was that there were few opportunities for symphonic composers in Second Empire Paris. This belief was fueled in part by statements from composers themselves. Berlioz famously struggled to arrange performances of his music, bitterly observing in his *Mémoires* that “the composer who would produce substantial works in Paris outside the theater must rely entirely on himself.”

In an 1885 essay, Saint-Saëns reflected:

> It wasn’t so long ago—fifteen years perhaps—that a French composer audacious enough to venture into the field of instrumental music had no other means of

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having his works performed than to give a concert himself and invite his friends and the critics. As for the public, the true public, he could not even think about them; the name of a composer both French and living printed onto a program had the effect of putting everyone to flight.⁶

According to the conventional wisdom, the real path to success as a composer at mid-century was in the theater. Charles Gounod stated in his autobiography that “there is only one road for a composer who desires to make a real name—the operatic stage,” even though “religious and symphonic music no doubt rank higher in the stricter sense, than dramatic composition.”⁷ In an article from 1878, Oscar Comettant suggested that instrumental music had long been overshadowed by opera:

For many long years all musical interest in France was concentrated on the three musical theaters of Paris: the Grand-Opéra, the Opéra-Comique, and the Théâtre-Italien. Only from time to time did some renowned virtuoso pianist or violinist have the power to attract the attention of dilettantes to private concerts where an orchestra was rarely found. As for symphonies, oratorios, chamber music, and all grand musical works conceived to be played by numerous performers outside the theater, there was not even a question among the public. Only the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire had taken on the task of acquainting its patrons with the grand instrumental conceptions of the German masters, notably Beethoven.⁸

Prospects for symphonic music improved in the final decades of the century.

Many in the Third Republic attributed the change to two seminal events: the country’s

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⁶ “Il n’y a pas encore bien longtemps, quinze ans peut-être, un compositeur français, qui avait l’audace de s’aventurer sur le terrain de la musique instrumentale, n’avait d’autre moyen de faire exécuter ses œuvres que de donner lui-même un concert et d’y convier ses amis et les critiques. Quant au public, au vrai public, il n’y fallait pas songer; le nom d’un compositeur, à la fois français et vivant imprimé sur une affiche avait la propriété de mettre tout le monde en fuite.” Camille Saint-Saëns, “La Société nationale de musique,” in Harmonie et mélodie (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1885), 207.


humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) and the founding of the Société
nationale de musique (1871) by Saint-Saëns and Romaine Bussine. Rolland, for instance,
argued that the disasters of the war had led to an “awakening” that “recreated French
music.” More recent observers have continued to posit a causal relationship between the
events of “l’année terrible” (terrible year), the establishment of the Société nationale, and
the proliferation of symphonic music at the fin de siècle. Carl Dahlhaus wryly notes that
the Société was established “a few days before the Prussian army marched down the
Champs Elysées.” Richard Taruskin makes a similar claim that the Société arose in
“nationalistic response” to the war. The motto of the fledgling society, after all, was
“Ars Gallica”—“French Art.”

Without question, the Franco-Prussian War and the founding of the Société
deserve a central place in any historiography of fin-de-siècle French music. Many French
attributed their country’s defeat not only to military shortcomings, but also to the frivolity
and decadence of the Second Empire. For a generation of French intellectuals, the
humiliation of the war demanded a shift towards a more serious culture, which would in
turn catalyze a national renewal. Among French musicians, “serious” music was usually
synonymous with large-scale instrumental works. The Société, whose stated purpose was

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9 Rolland, Musicians of Today, 246.

10 Carl Dahlhaus, Nineteenth-Century Music, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley and Los

University Press, 2005), 775.
to “further the production and popularization of all serious musical works” by French composers, played a critical role in the advancement of this repertory.¹²

Yet the fixation on the events of 1870-71 obscures other realities about symphonic music in nineteenth-century France, and the importance of these years as a watershed has perhaps been overstated. In truth, the programming of Parisian concert associations changed little in the decade after the war. The most prestigious orchestra in the city, the Société des concerts du Conservatoire, continued to focus on older repertory, especially works by Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Weber.¹³ At other performing organizations, the most frequently performed compositions were colorful and programmatic and nature, as was the case before the war; orchestras rarely programmed sober, large-scale works by modern French composers.¹⁴ There were other commonalities with Second Empire musical culture as well. Jeffrey Cooper has characterized the 1860s as “a decade when new and highly varied concert series appeared and disappeared with alarming rapidity, but lively years, leading directly, save for the interruption of the Franco-Prussian War and consequent events, to the alleged renaissance of concert activity in 1871.”¹⁵ Indeed, a number of performers and institutions promoted orchestral music

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¹⁴ See Strasser, “Ars Gallica,” 236.

both before and after the war. Jules Pasdeloup (1819-87), for example, premiered symphonies by Saint-Saëns and Gounod with the Société des Jeunes Artistes (1852-61) and brought French orchestral works before large audiences with his Concerts Populaires (1861-84). In her study of the early music revival in nineteenth-century France, Katharine Ellis observes that a resurgence of early French music occurred across the latter part of the Second Empire and the beginning of the Third Republic, and for this reason she avoids 1870 as a “historical caesura.” More recently, Delphine Mordey has argued that the notion of a rupture in French music after “l’année terrible” was retrospectively constructed by Third Republic critics dissatisfied with existing musical culture.

The emphasis by scholars on the events of 1870-71 poses a more obvious chronological problem for a study of symphonic culture. With the notable exception of Saint-Saëns, who wrote several symphonic poems in the 1870s, few French composers made lasting contributions to the orchestral repertory in the decade after the Société nationale was established. The four composers at the center of my project wrote most (if not all) of their symphonic works in the 1880s or later, their earlier compositions and ties to the Société notwithstanding. What accounts for the time lag between ideology and practice?

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16 After the orchestra disbanded in 1884, Pasdeloup attempted to revive the organization several times before his death in 1887. For more on Pasdeloup’s career and the Concerts Populaires, see Élisabeth Bernard, “Jules Pasdeloup et les Concerts Populaires,” *Revue de musicologie* 57 (1971): 150-78.


In the case of the Société nationale, the reasons were practical. It took several years before the organization could muster the resources and money to mount performances of large-scale orchestral works. Even then, the Société could not meet their members’ demand for symphonic performance opportunities. As Saint-Saëns observed in the above-quoted essay, the group’s administrators had difficulty finding enough material for its chamber music concerts, but received far more orchestral scores for consideration than could ever be performed.\textsuperscript{19} Moreover, the Société’s programming only reached a limited audience. Strasser has estimated that the average attendance at the Société’s concerts was at most 200 listeners, and somewhat more for orchestral programs.\textsuperscript{20} For these reasons, Strasser has concluded that the Société’s role in introducing new orchestral music has been somewhat overemphasized by other commentators.\textsuperscript{21}

The proliferation of symphonic composition in the 1880s may be better understood in light of other cultural and institutional factors. Foremost among these was a change in government policy toward the arts. The republican government of the late 1870s and 1880s promoted ambitious orchestral works through a number of composition competitions. Beginning in 1878, the Conseil municipal de Paris administered the City of Paris Prize, a biennial contest with a cash award of 10,000 francs, for a new “symphony with soloists and chorus.” Holmès’s \textit{Lutèce} (1878) and \textit{Les Argonautes} and d’Indy’s \textit{Le Chant de la cloche} (1885) owe their existence to this competition.\textsuperscript{22} In addition, the

\textsuperscript{19} Saint-Saëns, \textit{Harmonie et mélodie}, 214.
\textsuperscript{20} Strasser, “Ars Gallica,” 208.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 289.
\textsuperscript{22} For more on the City of Paris Prize, see chapter 2.
Académie des Beaux-Arts began to sponsor several awards during this time, including the Rossini Prize and the Cressent Prize. The former, for large choral-orchestral works, was established through a provision in Rossini’s will that took effect after the death of his widow in 1878. The inaugural prize was awarded in 1881, and beginning in 1884, the winning entries were performed by the Société des concerts du Conservatoire—an orchestra that seldom played music by living composers. The Cressent Prize, funded through a bequest by the lawyer Anatole Cressent (d. 1870), was a triennial competition for dramatic works “with choruses and an overture.” From 1904 onward, the prize was awarded to purely symphonic compositions.

More broadly, Jann Pasler has linked the growth in Parisian concert culture to a shift toward more open commercial activity. She notes: “Musical life exploded at the end of the century in part because in the 1880s the government, which had previously focused on individual arts initiatives, turned to economic liberalism and the encouragement of large business interests.” Orchestras, like the major fashion retailers, were competitors in a marketplace, with each organization marketing itself to different audiences by virtue of its programming, ticket prices, and venue choices. The concert societies competed not only for listeners, but also for state funds. In the early 1870s, the vast majority of public financing for music went to the major state-subsidized theaters, with only token

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support given to concert music organizations. This situation began to change in 1878, when the Assemblée nationale instituted a new budget category under the heading “annual performances of symphonic and choral works by living composers” (auditions annuelles des œuvres symphoniques et chorales des compositeurs vivants).

These changes in public arts policy occurred in parallel with the establishment of new, more popularly oriented concert societies. In addition to the Société des concerts du Conservatoire (founded in 1828) and Pasdeloup’s Concerts Populaires (a fixture since the 1860s), two new orchestras in particular deserve mention. In 1873, with the support of music publisher Georges Hartmann, conductor Édouard Colonne (1838-1910) founded his Concerts Nationaux (later renamed the Association Artistique des Concerts Colonne), popularly known as the Concerts Colonne. Between 1873 and 1903, the orchestra gave more than 800 concerts and performed works by almost 150 French composers. In 1881, the conductor Charles Lamoureux (1834-99) established the Société des Nouveaux Concerts, commonly known as the Concerts Lamoureux. Lamoureux’s programming was more progressive and varied than most other Parisian orchestras. He regularly featured Wagner on his concerts, as well as contemporary French composers like d’Indy, Lalo, and Chabrier. Both series, like the Conservatoire orchestra and Pasdeloup’s ensemble, performed weekly concerts on Sunday afternoons: Colonne at the Théâtre du Châtelet (after 1874), Lamoureux at the Théâtre Château d’Eau (1881-85), Eden-Théâtre (1885-87), and the Cirque des Champs-Elysées (1887-99).

For a representative list of annual grants to instrumental music organizations, see “Nouvelles diverses,” Le Ménestrel, 12 March 1876, 118.

For more detailed discussion of these performing organizations, see Strasser, “Ars Gallica”; Cooper, The Rise of Instrumental Music and Concert Series in Paris, 1828-1871; Bernard, “Le Concert symphonique à Paris entre 1861 et 1914”; Annegret Fauser, Der Orchestergesang in
Government leaders hoped that subsidizing these orchestras would encourage the development of new French music. In 1878, the year that the Assemblée nationale instituted a separate budget category for symphonic and choral works by living composers, Pasdeloup’s orchestra received a subvention of 20,000 francs and Colonne received 10,000 francs, an amount he would continue to receive through the early 1880s.\(^{28}\) The *Journal officiel* suggested that government leaders would leverage their financial support in order to promote contemporary music: “Your commission, after having examined the qualifications of Messieurs Pasdeloup and Colonne, thinks it suitable to first impose on the directors of the popular concerts certain responsibilities, particularly as concerns the performance of symphonic works by living composers and especially young composers.”\(^{29}\)

At first, the strategy had some success. From his orchestra’s founding through the 1880-81 season, Colonne programmed works by thirty-nine contemporary French composers. New music was represented in similar numbers at Pasdeloup’s concerts.\(^{30}\) In practice, however, opportunities for young composers—particularly members of the *bande à Franck* and others who exhibited “advanced” tendencies—remained scarce. By the early 1880s, the bulk of Colonne’s and Lamoureux’s programming consisted of Wagner, Berlioz, and earlier composers. Of the composers featured in this study, Colonne presented only one work by Franck (selections from *Les Béatitudes*), one by d’Indy (*La

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\(^{29}\) *Journal officiel*, 28 November 1878, 11135-36, cited and translated in ibid., 167.

\(^{30}\) Strasser, “Ars Gallica,” 233.
Chevauchée du Cid), and none by Chausson or Holmès between 1880 and 1884. In the same time period, Lamoureux only gave one performance of a piece by one of these composers, Franck’s Les Éolides.\footnote{I have compiled these performance statistics from Bernard, “Le Concert symphonique à Paris entre 1861 et 1914,” vols. 2 (Programmes) and 3 (Analyses des programmes).}

Chausson summed up the situation in an 1883 letter to d’Indy: “There is no longer a place for the young at the Sunday concerts; Colonne and Lamoureux do not exist for us. Pasdeloup, our last hope of salvation, will die off soon.”\footnote{“Il n’y a plus de place pour les jeunes dans les concerts du dimanche; Colonne et Lamoureux n’existent pas pour nous. Pasdeloup, notre dernière plance de salut, va disparaître.” Chausson to d’Indy, 26 April 1883, cited in La Revue musicale 7 (1 December 1925), numéro spéciale on Ernest Chausson, 131.} Chausson’s proclamation about the Concerts Populaires proved prophetic. Pasdeloup had performed many works by the Franck circle, including Franck’s Rédemption and Le Chasseur maudit, Holmès’s Les Argonautes, Irlande, and Pologne, d’Indy’s La Forêt enchantée and La Mort de Wallenstein, and Chausson’s Viviane. But unable to adapt to the competition from Colonne and Lamoureux, who were demonstrably better conductors, Pasdeloup’s organization folded in 1884.\footnote{Bernard attributes the public’s desertion of the Concerts Populaires to Pasdeloup’s deficiencies in execution. She notes that in the early years of the Concerts, there were few negative critiques of Pasdeloup’s musical abilities in the press, but criticisms began to surface once listeners could compare him to Colonne and Lamoureux. Ironically, the proliferation of orchestral culture that Pasdeloup helped initiate in the 1850s, and the ensuing musical education of the public, was the main culprit in his eventual demise. See Bernard, “Jules Pasdeloup et les Concerts Populaires.”} Later in his letter to d’Indy, Chausson proposed mounting a concert of his own with Henri Duparc, André Messager, and Camille Benoît. This was not Chausson’s only attempt to come up with performance opportunities. In 1882, Chausson and Holmès, together with several other prominent musicians, established the Union des jeunes compositeurs, a short-lived organization intended to redress the scarcity
of outlets for new orchestral music. In later years, the bande à Franck fared better at the major concert societies. For instance, Colonne programmed works by Holmès fifteen times between the 1887-88 and 1893-94 seasons, and Lamoureux’s orchestra performed d’Indy’s works approximately twenty times in the 1880s and thirty times in the 1890s.

By the turn of the century, the heady years of creativity for the bande à Franck gave way to new developments. Franck and Chausson died in 1890 and 1899, respectively—the former from complications arising from an automobile collision, the latter in a cycling accident. Holmès spent her final decade in relative obscurity after the disappointment of her opera La Montagne noire (1895). Although d’Indy remained an influential figure well into the twentieth century, his aesthetic and political positions began to ossify around the time of the Dreyfus Affair. His later large-scale works, notably the Symphony No. 2 in B-flat (1902-03), the “anti-juif” opera La Légende de Saint-Christophe (1908-15), and the Symphony No. 3 (Sinfonia brevis de bello gallico) (1916-18), encode a more entrenched and polemical ideology than his nineteenth-century compositions.

34 See Le Ménestrel, 14 May 1882, 191. Strasser discusses the Union des jeunes compositeurs in “Ars Gallica,” 555ff.

35 See Bernard, “Le Concert symphonique à Paris entre 1861 et 1914.”

36 Although d’Indy cultivated a reputation based on opposition, particularly in the final decades of his career, Jann Pasler has suggested that his politics were more fluid in the years before 1900. See Pasler, “Deconstructing d’Indy, or the Problem of a Composer’s Reputation,” 19th-Century Music 30, no. 3 (Spring 2007): 230-56. Perhaps not coincidentally, 1900 was the year that d’Indy assumed the leadership of the Schola Cantorum, the tradition-oriented music school he had founded in 1894 with Charles Bordes and Alexandre Guilmant.

The Bande à Franck and the Reversed Economy of “Serious” Music

During the Second Empire and in the decades thereafter, many French artists and public intellectuals expressed their discontent with Parisian cultural life under Napoléon III. Gustave Flaubert’s quasi-autobiographical novel *L’Éducation sentimentale* (1869), for instance, presented a blistering portrait of an unsophisticated bourgeoisie in moral decline. The author understood his work as a morality tale, and in the devastating aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War, he remarked to Maxime Du Camp: “If people had understood *L’Éducation sentimentale*, none of this would have happened.” Among musicians, a generation of composers—particularly those affiliated with the Société nationale—repudiated what they perceived as the vapid commercialism of Parisian musical culture. Rather than seeking fame or quick monetary success by writing for the stage, they cultivated a more “serious” aesthetic through rarefied instrumental compositions.

Many of these progressive-minded musicians gathered every Monday evening at the home of Saint-Saëns, where they would show each other their latest scores and discuss one another’s work. The Société nationale members in regular attendance at these weekly soirées included Franck—who was almost always the oldest musician present—d’Indy, Holmès, Bussine, Jules Massenet, Georges Bizet, Henri Duparc, Alexis de...

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38 “…au mois de juin 1871, comme nous étions ensemble sur la terrasse du bord de l’eau [the Seine], que nous regardions la carcasse noircie des Tuileries, de la Cour des Comptes, du Palais de la Légion d’honneur et que je m’exclamais, il [Flaubert] me dit: ‘Si l’on avait compris *l’Éducation sentimentale*, rien de tout cela ne serait arrivé.’” Maxime du Camp, *Souvenirs littéraires*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1892), 341-42.
Castillon, and Charles-Marie Widor.\textsuperscript{39} Although Franck had not yet achieved the wider public recognition he would enjoy in later years, he was always treated with respect by his younger colleagues. In a sign of the esteem in which he was held, the Société nationale’s inaugural concert in the fall of 1871 began with one of Franck’s piano trios.

The following February, Franck was appointed organ professor at the Paris Conservatoire upon the retirement of François Benoist. While Franck’s class did address the technique of organ playing, in practice it functioned more like a composition seminar. His lessons emphasized, in the formulation of Andrew Thomson, “the fundamental importance of tonal architecture and the clear deployment of themes.”\textsuperscript{40} Franck’s activities as a teacher caused some annoyance among the actual composition faculty, who considered the organ professor’s methods at odds with their own. The Conservatoire’s primary function was to groom students for careers in opera—either as singers, instrumentalists, or composers—whereas Franck promoted instrumental music and abstract forms like fugue. Ambroise Thomas, the former professor of composition who directed the Conservatoire from 1871 to 1896, staunchly opposed adding orchestral composition to the curriculum. When a committee for reforming the institution proposed such a curricular change in 1892, Thomas replied: “But what composer of value would


want to debase himself to teach symphonic music?" The director made no secret of his personal dislike for Franck, either. Franck had made clear that he aspired to be named to one of the three composition professorships, but Thomas passed him over several times in favor of more theatrically oriented composers. In 1878, Massenet was appointed to fill the composition professorship vacated by François Bazin. Two years later, Victor Massé retired and was replaced by Ernest Guiraud, and the post vacated upon the death of Henri Reber was filled by Léo Delibes.

Although Franck’s teaching post only paid a few hundred francs per year, it accorded him a new measure of prestige and visibility. Many new pupils sought him out, eager to work with a mentor affiliated with both the Conservatoire and the Société nationale. Several of Franck’s earliest students actively recruited members to their teacher’s studio, most notably Duparc and Arthur Coquard. At the former’s urging, d’Indy began attending Franck’s organ class in the fall of 1872. Other converts to the \textit{bande à Franck} in the early 1870s included Castillon and Albert Cahen. Chausson attended Franck’s class as an \textit{auditeur libre} (unregistered student) from 1880 to 1883.


\footnote{For a discussion of Franck’s circle in the late 1860s and early 1870s, see Laurence Davies, \textit{César Franck and his Circle} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 113-15.}

\footnote{Jean Gallois, \textit{Ernest Chausson} (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 118-21. Chausson had also attended Massenet’s composition class at the Conservatoire—first as an auditor in 1879, and then as an official student in 1880. Gallois notes that there was a strong tendency in Franckiste circles to downplay Chausson’s studies with Massenet as an intermediate step before his studies with Franck, but Massenet was Chausson’s only official teacher at the Conservatoire. Nonetheless,}
Still more young composers studied with Franck privately. Holmès, who claimed to have met Franck in Versailles before 1870, most likely began formal lessons in 1875 or 1876.\(^{45}\)

It was not merely because of his institutional affiliations—or his seniority within the Société nationale—that many promising composers became devotees of César Franck. To these earnest young musicians, the humble organist at Sainte Clotilde—“Père Franck” to them—embodied all that was virtuous in art. He avoided publicity and worked in the relative obscurity of the organ loft. Instead of writing flashy works for the theater, he pursued a more ascetic ideal, devoting most of his energy to religious works or “pure” instrumental music. In his temperament, Franck seemed the very personification of humility, piety, and virtue. D’Indy’s characterization typifies the language Franck’s students used to describe him:

If Franck was an arduous and determined worker… his motive was neither glory, money, nor immediate success. He aimed only at expressing his thoughts and feelings by means of his art, for, above all, he was a truly modest man. He never suffered from the feverish ambition that consumes the life of so many artists in the race for worldly honor and distinction. It never occurred to him, for instance, to solicit a seat in the Institute; not because—like a Degas or a Puvis—he disdained the honor, but because he innocently believed that he had not yet earned it.\(^{46}\)

Gallois goes on to note that Chausson had much more of a spiritual and aesthetic kinship with Franck than with the author of *Manon*.

\(^{45}\) Gérard Gefen corroborates this date by pointing to a dramatic change in Holmès’s compositional technique from 1876 onward, whereupon she acquired a new mastery of thematic development and orchestration. Conflicting accounts by d’Indy have muddied this chronology. In his 1906 biography of Franck, d’Indy dates Holmès’s studies with Franck to 1872, but in a 1920 letter, he retracts this statement and dates the association to 1885. Circumstantial evidence, however, indicates that Holmès began her studies in the mid-1870s. See Gefen, *Augusta Holmès, l’outrancière* (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1987), 148-49; and d’Indy, *César Franck*, 253.

\(^{46}\) D’Indy, *César Franck*, 59. For other representative recollections of Franck’s character by his students, see Arthur Coquard, *César Franck* (Paris, 1890), reprinted in *Le Monde musical* (1904); Pierre de Bréville, “Les Fioretti du père Franck,” *Mercure de France* 46 (1935): 244-263; 47
The composers who sought out Franck’s mentorship were usually cast in a similar mold: serious by disposition, intellectually and morally rigorous, and uninterested in easy fame or success. It helped that many of Franck’s students could afford to eschew monetary gain by virtue of their wealth and social privilege. D’Indy and Castillon came from well-heeled aristocratic families; each could lay claim to the title of vicomte. Chausson, by virtue of his extreme fortune, had the freedom to pursue composition as an avocation.47

The Franckistes’ rejection of commercial success and public acclaim accords with a phenomenon sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has described as an “economic world reversed.”48 According to Bourdieu, networks of artistic production are structured by an opposition between the “field of restricted production” (what we typically think of as “high” art) and the “field of large-scale cultural production” (“mass” or “popular” culture). The former, whose creators normally disavow economic profit, is marked positively in the cultural field, whereas the latter, driven by financial considerations, is marked negatively. Bourdieu elaborates:

Works produced by the field of restricted production are “pure,” “abstract” and “esoteric.” They are “pure” because they demand of the receiver a specifically aesthetic disposition in accordance with the principles of their production. They are “abstract” because they call for a multiplicity of specific approaches, in contrast with the undifferentiated art of primitive societies, which is unified within an immediately accessible spectacle involving music, dance, theater and song. They are “esoteric” for all the above reasons and because their complex

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47 Davies, César Franck and His Circle, 114.

structure continually implies tacit reference to the entire history of previous structures, and is accessible only to those who possess practical or theoretical mastery of a refined code, of successive codes, and of the code of these codes. ⁴⁹

In his analysis of French literary culture in the nineteenth century, Bourdieu identifies Symbolist poetry as an example of this sort of “art for art’s sake”—intended for other producers and a small cultural elite—in opposition to “middle-brow” dramatic works for the bourgeois theaters. Similarly, the bande à Franck’s orchestral works belong to the field of restricted production. They are geared toward a rarefied audience, eschew easily comprehensible spectacle, and—in contrast to the light theatrical entertainments that still dominated Parisian musical life in the early Third Republic—place greater intellectual demands on the listener.

In practical terms, the four works I examine in this dissertation encode these ideals through their composers’ approaches to genre. For Holmès, the medium of Les Argonautes was dictated by the guidelines for the City of Paris Prize. As I discuss in chapter 2, the competition’s organizers consciously sought to promote a serious aesthetic; entrants were required to submit a “symphony with soloists and chorus” on a subject that would address “feelings of the highest order.” Émile Perrin, one of the committee members who established the award, noted that the term “symphony” signified “the purest, the most abstract, the strongest of the diverse expressions of musical genius.” ⁵⁰ He went on to reason that grandiose orchestral works with vocal parts—in the tradition of

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⁵⁰ “Sans doute, le mot de symphonie exprime à lui seul la plus pure, la plus abstraite, la plus forte des manifestations diverses du génie musical.” “Le Prix de 10,000 francs,” Le Journal de musique, 11 November 1886. Ironically, Perrin was a theater impresario who directed the Comédie-Française and formerly led the Paris Opéra.
Handel’s *Messiah*, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, or more recently, Félicien David’s *Le Désert*—would exemplify this ideal better than purely instrumental symphonies. Thus *Les Argonautes*, along with Holmès’s other large-scale choral-orchestral works, explicitly expresses the quality of gravitas alluded to by Perrin.\(^5\)

In the remaining three chapters of the dissertation, I discuss how the Franckistes’ valorization of “pure” music over “descriptive” music—in their rhetoric if not always in their compositional practice—reveals their serious intentions. *Viviane*, *Psyché*, and *Istar* are all based on extramusical narratives—from Arthurian lore, Greek myth, and Mesopotamian legend, respectively. Yet Chausson, Franck, and d’Indy downplayed the programmatic significance of these works, highlighting instead their abstract musical logic. (To be more precise, it was not Franck so much as his devotees—d’Indy chief among them—who promoted a revisionist interpretation of *Psyché*.) Chausson made extensive revisions to *Viviane* in the mid-1880s—a time when he was becoming increasingly disillusioned with “descriptive” composition—that recast the work more closely in line with sonata form principles. Several of Franck’s students denied the erotic subtext of *Psyché*, shrouding the piece instead in the discourses of religion and absolute music. D’Indy described *Istar* as a set of “symphonic variations,” thus emphasizing the work’s formal ingenuity rather than its colorful pictorialism. In each of these cases, the Franckistes framed their programmatic works in the esoteric language of abstraction. By doing so, they sought to portray themselves as a rarefied cultural elite in the vanguard of artistic developments.

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**Wagnerism in Third Republic Culture**

The idea of musical progress in France in the 1880s and 1890s was linked not only to a serious aesthetic, but to specific individuals as well. For many, one composer’s name more than any other was synonymous with the avant-garde: Wagner. Even after his death in 1883, the German musician’s legacy loomed large in the French imagination.

Conservative commentators tended to label all composers with advanced tendencies as “Wagnerian,” without regard to the specifics of each musician’s work. Yet Wagnerism was no singular, monolithic phenomenon; different composers appropriated different aspects of Wagner’s aesthetics or compositional practice. As Anya Suschitzky has observed: “What mattered was not whether a French composer (or organization) was influenced by Wagner—everybody was—but rather in what ways, and to what extent the engagement with Wagner’s legacy contradicted or enhanced the cause of French identity as it was understood at the time.”

While French Wagnerism has been a focus in opera studies in recent years, its impact on symphonic culture remains comparatively underexplored. Another common thread I will trace through my case studies, then, is how individual members of the *bande à Franck* responded to the legacy of the *maître de*...

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Bayreuth (the “master of Bayreuth”—a common French appellation for Wagner), both in their rhetorical orientation and in their compositional practice.\(^{54}\)

Since Wagner’s reception in France has been amply documented by cultural historians and musicologists, it will be summarized only briefly here.\(^{55}\) After several disappointing attempts to establish a career in Paris—a sojourn from 1839 to 1842 proved unfruitful, and an 1861 production of Tannhäuser at the Opéra was disastrous—Wagner gained a foothold on concert programs in the 1860s, most prominently at Pasdeloup’s Concerts Populaires, where excerpts from his operas were programmed dozens of times.\(^{56}\) His reputation suffered a setback when war broke out in 1870. With the country reeling from defeat, Wagner added insult to the proverbial injury: his malicious satire Eine Kapitulation (written in 1870, published in 1873, and translated into French in 1875) mocked the plight of Parisians during the Prussian siege of the city. The offense

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\(^{54}\) Throughout the dissertation, I try to avoid statements like “Wagner influenced the bande à Franck (or d’Indy, or Chausson).” As Michael Baxandall has observed, such grammatical formulations reverse the true sense of which artist is the active agent and which is the passive one. Rather than stating that X influenced Y, it is more accurate—and more descriptive—to say that Y reacted to (or emulated, appropriated from, elaborated on, subverted….) X. See Baxandall, Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 58-62.


alienated many of the composer’s supporters, and his name virtually disappeared from French concert programs for several years.

By the 1880s, attitudes toward Wagner began to soften. Victor Dolmetsch, a critic for *Le Ménestrel*, commented in 1881: “It is curious to observe the change of opinion that is taking place in Paris in favor of the works of R. Wagner.” Pasler has framed this shift in a political context, suggesting that the republican government’s embrace of diversity and eclecticism created a welcoming environment for the composer’s partisans. Strasser attributes the change to competition among the major concert societies for increasingly spectacular musical experiences.

Whatever the cause, conductors began to program Wagner’s music in the concert hall with unprecedented frequency. (Complete staged productions of the operas were still virtually nonexistent in France.) After avoiding his music entirely during the 1870s, Colonne began to feature Wagner regularly on his performances. At Lamoureux’s concert society, founded in 1881, works by the maître de Bayreuth were almost ubiquitous. Of the 212 performances the conductor gave in the first ten seasons of the Société des Nouveaux Concerts, 183 included at least one Wagner excerpt. Of the 29 performances that did not, 13 were dedicated to performances of a single large-scale work by a French composer, such as Berlioz’s *La Damnation de Faust* or d’Indy’s *La Chant de la Cloche*.

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58 Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 394.

59 Strasser, “Ars Gallica,” 505.

60 Ibid., 508.
Wagnerism infiltrated French culture in other aesthetic, social, and political manifestations as well—for instance, in the work of the Symbolist poets. The wildly successful premiere of *Lohengrin* at the Opéra in 1891, along with the triumphant return of *Tannhäuser* in 1895, cemented Wagner’s place in the public consciousness.\(^{61}\)

Despite the growing popularity of Wagner’s music, the composer remained an intensely controversial figure. Some French audiences opposed his work on nationalistic grounds; conservative musicians considered his innovations too radical. The craze for Wagner even created fissures within the progressive ranks of the Société nationale. Saint-Saëns resigned from the organization in 1886, largely because he believed that his Franckiste colleagues—d’Indy chief among them—had grown too enamored of the German composer. It was an ironic reversal: in the 1870s, Saint-Saëns had praised Wagner’s innovations and derided Wagnerphobia as a “disease.”\(^{62}\) A decade later, he reassessed his position, arguing: “Wagnerphobia has lost much of its virulence, and Wagnermania has developed—in France at least—in the most alarming fashion.”\(^{63}\) D’Indy, on the other hand, argued that the rejuvenation of symphonic culture in the 1880s was a direct result of Wagner’s legacy.\(^{64}\) Several of Wagner’s most important stylistic

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63 “La wagnérophobie a perdu beaucoup de sa virulence; et la wagnéromanie s’est développée—en France du moins—de la façon la plus inquiétante.” Ibid., 307.

innovations, including new developments in harmony, the employment of leitmotives, and a referential use of tonalities, were widely adopted in the Franck circle.

Even the most ardent Wagnerians in the Third Republic, however, wrestled with how to appropriate the German composer’s ideas while remaining true to their French character. In an often-disseminated interview with the writer and art critic Louis de Fourcaud, Wagner himself allegedly urged French composers to seek out native sources of inspiration for their dramatic works. Catulle Mendès, founder of the Wagnerian Revue fantaisiste (and the father of Holmès’s five children), urged artists to adopt Wagner’s ideology while distancing themselves from the specifics of his style—to “borrow neither the color nor the quality of his melody … [neither] his harmonies nor his instrumentation.”

Nonetheless, the bande à Franck drew inspiration from Bayreuth in quite focused ways; the four works I examine in this study all contain specific musical or dramatic reminiscences of Wagner’s œuvre. Third Republic critics identified some of these intertextual resonances—for instance, echoes of Der fliegende Holländer and Lohengrin.

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65 The first account of Fourcaud’s exchange with Wagner appeared in Le Gaulois, 5 January 1880. Over the next decade, Fourcaud published alternate versions of this interview in Le Ménestrel and the Revue wagnérienne. One of the more comprehensive of these accounts is reprinted as “Richard Wagner et l’Opéra français (entretien avec Louis de Fourcaud),” in Gustave Samazeuilh, ed., Richard Wagner: vues sur la France (Paris: Éditions Mercure de France, 1943), 54-61. See Maynard, “The Enemy Within,” 341-49. While Fourcaud’s articles about his encounter with the maître de Bayreuth had a profound impact on French Wagnerism, Marie-Hélène Benoit-Otis has cast doubt on the accuracy of the author’s recollections. She has suggested that Fourcaud may have falsely attributed certain statements to Wagner in order to advance his own ideas. See Benoit-Otis, “Louis de Fourcaud and Richard Wagner: An Imaginary Interview?”, paper presented at the Spring Meeting of the Greater New York Chapter of the American Musicological Society, Columbia University, 20 April 2011.

in Les Argonautes. Other parallels I consider—thematic resemblances to Die Walküre and Parsifal in Psyché, and an extensive but veiled reworking of Tristan und Isolde in Istar—have only been discussed by more recent commentators. In some cases, the composer’s response to Wagner was conscious and deliberate. Chausson, for instance, expressed open admiration for the elder composer early in his career. By the mid-1880s he reversed course, lamenting that he had become too indebted to Wagnerian models and resolving to “dewagnerize” himself. In chapter 3, I consider the implications of this proclamation by tracing how Chausson suppressed moments of Wagnerian mimicry in his revisions to Viviane.

Ultimately, however, my purpose in discussing these Wagnerian echoes is not to divine the Franckistes’ intentions. In the absence of corroborating statements—or even when they are present—it is impossible to verify whether a reminiscence is a deliberate quotation, a subconscious reworking, or mere coincidence. Hence, I prefer to frame my explorations in the language of intertextuality rather than of influence.67 Put another way, I am less interested in tracing the patternings from one musical text to another (i.e., whether piece X borrows from piece Y) than in considering how a work may have been received (whether listeners could reasonably perceive such a relationship). It matters not only that Holmès may have drawn inspiration from Der fliegende Holländer, but also that her contemporaries perceived her as a Wagnerian—for reasons that may or may not be grounded in textual parallels.

After all, the “Wagnerian” label often had less to do with emulation than with broader political and social considerations. To borrow a page from recent scholarship on fin-de-siècle Vienna, Margaret Notley has argued that Bruckner became the standard bearer for Viennese Wagnerism after 1883 because both his supporters and his critics “had an interest in presenting him unidimensionally…. In several important respects the image of Bruckner was purified, and the ideological filters through which it passed were Wagnerian.”68 Amanda Glauert has made a similar claim about Hugo Wolf. Because Wolf was socially and financially dependent on Wagnerian circles in Vienna, his allegiance to the elder composer was sometimes taken for granted, but Glauert claims that Wolf’s musical explorations in fact “represented some of the most potent criticisms of Wagner’s music and the claims made for it.”69 In the following chapters, I hope to contribute to our understanding of Wagnerism in the Third Republic—both as it was manifested in compositional practice and rhetoric, and as it was understood by the public.

**From National Identity to Personal Identity**

My final aim in this study is to illuminate how composers in the Franck circle articulated a sense of individual or national identity through their symphonic utterances. Third Republic writers and recent scholars have already devoted considerable attention to the relationship between music and broader political concerns. The idea that an orchestral composition could encode “Frenchness”—and that it might be desirable to do so—


reflected the prevailing civic discourse in the early decades of the Third Republic. As historians Robert Tombs and Eugen Weber have noted, the advent of compulsory military service and French-language education (replacing instruction in regional dialects) during the 1880s contributed to a growing sentiment of French nationhood during this time. The notion of an “imagined community” of Frenchmen—to adopt a term from Benedict Anderson’s work on nationalism—filtered not only through political life, but cultural life as well. It was only natural for commentators like Rolland to suggest that France’s musical character in the Third Republic was forged in the crucible of the nation’s conflict with Germany.

Recent musicological literature on late nineteenth-century France has also focused on the relationships between music, politics, and cultural identity. At one end of the spectrum, Jane Fulcher has argued that music at the fin de siècle was “invaded” by politics to such an extent that virtually all musical expression was motivated by politicized sentiment or ideology. Other writers, adopting a more measured stance, have explored how French musical identity was shaped by broader cultural and political contexts. In contrast to Fulcher, who discusses the politicization of music, Steven Huebner has considered how the fin-de-siècle nationalist debate was aestheticized by

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questions about what form French music should take. Anya Suschitzky’s research on Wagner and French opera at the end of the nineteenth century explores similar questions: what was the relationship between musical and political utterance? How did composers reconcile nationalistic fervor and musical practices that seemed to contradict it? And how did music from this time reflect broader, non-musical debates about the French nation? My project addresses a similar constellation of questions within the specific context of symphonic music. After all, the mere act of writing an orchestral work in Paris in the years after the Franco-Prussian War could be considered an ideological statement, and a challenge to the long-standing German dominance of symphonic genres.

Beyond considering how the four compositions at the center of this study reflect collective concerns about the French nation, I discuss each work on more individualized terms: what do these pieces tell us about the composers who wrote them? Recent book-length studies on the individual members of the Franck circle have tended to focus on life-and-work issues. My intent is somewhat different: I use my case studies to explore the tensions between each composer’s public image and his or her artistic output. As Karen Henson has noted, the tendency to conflate life and work has been particularly

73 Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle.*

74 Suschitzky, “The Nation on Stage.”

acute in studies of Holmès because of the composer’s gender. I argue that *Les Argonautes* challenges conventional Third Republic notions about female authorship: both through the “virility” of Holmès’s idiom, and because Holmès relegates the women in her *symphonie dramatique* to outsider status. Chausson was regarded by his contemporaries as a Wagnerian acolyte, but his private correspondence and the traces of his compositional process suggest a more ambivalent stance towards his forebear.

Although Franck was lionized by his disciples as a devout, almost mystical, composer of religious and absolute music, the sensuality of *Psyché* reveals a more earthy sensibility. D’Indy was easily the most polemical of the Franckistes, issuing sharp proclamations about aesthetics, politics, and morality. *Istar*, however, reveals the composer’s complex and often paradoxical attitudes about genre, programmaticism, and his artistic debts. Viewed together, these four pieces exemplify the complexities for French symphonic composers in negotiating a personal and collective artistic identity at the *fin de siècle*.

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In 1890, Camille Saint-Saëns published the following poem, which he dedicated to his friend Augusta Holmès:

À Madame Augusta Holmès

Il est beau de passer la stature commune;  It’s fine to go beyond the common frame;
   Mais c’est un grand danger:         But danger’s lurking there:
Le vulgaire déteste une gloire importune The crowd detest an unexpected fame
   Qu’il ne peut partager.         In which they cannot share.

Tant qu’on a cru pouvoir vous tenir en lisière And while they think they’ve got you on a lead,
   Dans un niveau moyen,         A harmless popinjay,
On vous encourageait, souriant en arrière Encouragement and smiles are what they feed
   Et vous disant: c’est bien!     You, saying, “Good! Hooray!”

Mais quand vous avez eu le triomphe insolite, But when your triumph, so surprising, comes,
   L’éclat inusité,             And glory unforeseen,
Cet encouragement banal et vain bien vite This empty, drab encouragement becomes
   De vous s’est écarté;          A distant smithereen;

Et vous avez senti le frisson de la cime And then you feel the wind around the peak
   Qui, seule dans le ciel,       That in the sky, alone,
N’a que l’azur immense autour d’elle, l’abîme Stands firm in space, eternally a bleak
   Et l’hiver éternel.          Redoubt of ice and stone.

On craint les forts; celui qui dompte la chimère Men fear the strong; who, bloody but unbow’d,
   Est toujours détesté.             Wins through, is always spurned.
La haine est le plus grand hommage: soyez fière Hate is the greatest homage: so be proud,
   De l’avoir mérité.          My dear, of what you’ve earned.1

Saint-Saëns describes Holmès’s career trajectory, from her breathtaking ascent to her final isolation, with uncommon prescience. In the 1870s, she began to establish a

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reputation as a composer of serious, large-scale works for chorus and orchestra. Holmès’s renown grew considerably over the following decade, attracting the support of many influential musicians and political leaders. By the time of Saint-Saëns’s poem, she had just reached the pinnacle of her career. Her *Ode triomphale en l’honneur du centenaire de 1789*, composed for the Paris Exposition universelle, was the biggest musical event of the 1889 season. An hour-and-a-half long spectacle for 300 instrumentalists and 900 singers, the *Ode* was performed five times before capacity crowds in the 22,500-seat Palais de l’Industrie. Critics championed Holmès as France’s “Muse” and a musical “Marianne,” the allegorical symbol of the Republic.

Holmès also won acclaim by fostering an image as an advocate of other nations’ causes. She composed the symphonic poem *Irlande* (1882) during a period of political turmoil in her ancestral country. Biographer Gérard Gefen suggests that Holmès may have written the piece out of sympathy for Charles Parnell, the leader of the Irish Home Rule Movement, who was imprisoned between October 1881 and May 1882. *Pologne!* (1883) was inspired by Tony Robert-Fleury’s 1866 painting of the Warsaw Massacres, the brutal 1861 suppression of Poles protesting Russian rule. In 1890, fresh off the success of the *Ode*, Holmès was commissioned to write the music for a festival celebrating Italian women and commemorating the 600th anniversary of the death of Dante’s Beatrice. Her *Hymne à la paix (Inno alla pace in onore della Beatrice di Dante)*,

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3 Saint-Saëns himself characterized Holmès as a “Muse” in his review of the *Ode*, in *Le Rappel*, 12 September 1889.

which received its premiere in Florence in May 1890, was the most unambiguous success of her lifetime. Holmès was treated with the highest regard throughout her stay, and she marveled to friend that a queen would not have been better received.  

After the triumphs of the Ode and the Hymne à la paix, however, Holmès’s fortunes suffered a rapid reversal. Her health and reputation declined precipitously after the 1895 failure of La Montagne noire at the Paris Opéra. By the time of her death in 1903, Holmès had fallen into relative obscurity, and she had no students or followers to perpetuate her legacy. Most of her compositions, except for a few songs, have since disappeared from the repertory.

**From Work to Image, Image to Work**

With her music largely forgotten, writings from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have tended to focus on Holmès the woman, devoting particular attention to her temperament and gender. In his entry on Holmès in *The New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* (1994), Hugh Macdonald claims: “The impact of Holmès’ music was

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6 Few of Holmès’s orchestral compositions were published in full score during her lifetime, and her last will and testament forbids the publication or performance of works that remained unpublished at the time of her death. This interdiction is stamped in many of Holmès’s autograph manuscripts, which were bequeathed to the Paris Conservatoire and are now housed at F-Pn. For a discussion of La Montagne noire and Holmès’s late career, see Karen Henson, “In the House of Disillusion: Augusta Holmès and La Montagne noire,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 9, no. 3 (1997): 233-62.

7 The only recent monograph that discusses Holmès’s music in detail is a study of her songs, the one genre where her works have remained in modest circulation. See Brigitte Olivier, *Les mélodies d’Augusta Holmès: C’est son âme que l’on montre* (Arles: Actes sud, 2003).
less striking than that of her personality.” Ronald Harwood’s historical novel *César and Augusta* (1978) imagines the composer in a fictitious love triangle with Franck and Saint-Saëns. French-language monographs on the composer by Gefen (1987) and Michèle Friang (2003) have presented straightforward biographical accounts. The very titles of their books highlight Holmès’s gender: Friang labels her a “woman composer” (*femme compositeur*) and Gefen invokes a moniker used by Saint-Saëns, “the extreme woman” (*l’outrancière*).

Issues of personality and gender have continued to dominate recent musicological studies of the composer. Karen Henson (1997) has examined the tension between Holmès’s image and work, using *La Montagne noire* as a starting point for discussing the effects of female authorship. While pre-performance publicity emphasized *La Montagne*’s themes of nationalism and politics, the opera also plays on common nineteenth-century tropes of the exotic seductress and the “Otherness of femininity.”

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10 See notes 4 and 5. For Saint-Saëns’s usage of the term, see his review of *Les Argonautes*, from *Le Voltaire*, c. 1881, reprinted in idem., *Harmonie et mélodie* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1885), 225-39, here 228. The gendering of the term “l’outrancière” is a necessary condition of French grammar, since all nouns and adjectives in French are gendered. Thus “l’outrancière,” while a provocative label, would have been the grammatically correct way for Saint-Saëns to refer to a woman of this temperament. Moreover, there has been considerable debate about how to refer in French to women who are composers. Some scholars advocate the designation “compositrice.” See, for example, Florence Launay, *Les Compositrices en France au XIX siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2006). Others, like Friang, prefer “femme compositeur.” Still others simply say “compositeur,” *tout court*, but this approach downplays the difference of women in a field that has been dominated by men.

11 Henson, “In the House of Disillusion.”
raising questions about the significance of Holmès’s gender for a reading of the work. Jann Pasler (1998) offers the closest thing to a survey of Holmès’s large-scale compositions. In a study of the “virility” of Holmès’s image and idiom, Pasler demonstrates that the composer negotiated the politics of gender with strategic self-awareness. Annegret Fauser devotes a chapter to the Ode triomphale in her book on the 1889 Exposition universelle (2005). While critical reception of the piece was divided along political lines, Fauser notes that the press was “more unified in their keen interest in the sex of the author of such a large-scale work.”

Because her contemporaries were so keenly interested in her sex, and yet so consistently described her music as “virile,” an examination of Holmès will naturally involve matters of gender and identity politics. Henson, Pasler, and Fauser have undertaken invaluable studies of these topics. They have also brought Holmès’s compositions, notably the Ode triomphale and La Montagne noire, before a wider musicological audience, serving to bridge the gap between image and work that Henson has identified. My aim in this chapter is to further explore the relationship between Holmès’s reputation and her compositional practice. I am particularly interested in how the public perception of Holmès’s “virility” is manifested in her work. How does her

12 Ibid., 234.


14 Fauser, Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair, 129.
music embody gendered characteristics? How are the sexes portrayed in her dramatic compositions? And what is the nature of the relationship between Holmès’s biography—or more simply, her gender—and her work?

My point of entry for this study is *Les Argonautes*, Holmès’s submission for the 1880 City of Paris prize in composition. The work is a promising locus for a discussion of gender representations because both its music and libretto challenged conventional nineteenth-century notions about female authorship: the former through Holmès’s robust compositional idiom, the latter through her unsympathetic portrayals of women. A symphonie dramatique in four parts, *Les Argonautes* recounts Jason’s quest for the Golden Fleece. In addition to five vocal soloists and orchestra, Holmès employs a mixed chorus to portray townspeople and the guardians of the Fleece, a men’s chorus of Argonauts, and a women’s chorus that represents the Sirens and Medea’s attendants. Part One, “Jason,” introduces the heroes as they prepare to embark on their search. In Part Two, the Argonauts encounter a storm on the rough sea and resist the calls of a group of Sirens. In the following section, Jason encounters Medea and her attendants. Medea’s initial aggression turns to desire, and she offers to betray her people to help Jason in his quest. Holmès changes the myth in the concluding section. Rather than escaping with Medea and the Golden Fleece, Jason must choose between love and renown. Spurning Medea, he renounces his earthly loves and captures the Fleece. A general chorus

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15 My discussion of *Les Argonautes* expands on several topics that Pasler explores in “The Ironies of Gender,” 17-19.
proclaims that Jason has achieved “clarté” [clarity], “la science du vrai” [the knowledge of truth], and “la beauté toujours belle” [eternal beauty].

Les Argonautes was one of Holmès’s earliest works to attract widespread attention and critical acclaim. In many respects, the piece is representative of her mature idiom. As with most of her large-scale vocal compositions, Holmès wrote both the text and music. The writing is technically demanding, with singers often at the top of their range. Her “progressive” musical language features heavy brass writing and extensive chromaticism. Above all, Holmès’s contemporaries perceived the music of Les Argonautes as “virile.” For better or worse, critics associated these characteristics with Wagner, and reviews of Les Argonautes commented on this connection more consistently than any other topic—even Holmès’s gender.

While the phenomenon of French Wagnerism has been explored by a number of recent writers, Holmès’s relationship to the maître de Bayreuth deserves further exploration. In the first part of this chapter, I use Les Argonautes as a case study for exploring Holmès’s debts to Wagner, and what “Wagnerism” meant for her French

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16 A piano-vocal score of Les Argonautes was published by the Parisian firm Léon Grus in 1881. The manuscript of the full score, which remains unpublished, is held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la musique (henceforth abbreviated as F-Pn), Ms. 16766 (1-4). For another study of Les Argonautes, see Rebecca L. Rockwood, “Augusta Holmès: Les Argonautes and La Montagne Noire” (MMus thesis: Rice University, 2002).

contemporaries. Although some nineteenth-century writers employed the label monolithically, with little regard for the specifics of the German composer’s style, aesthetics, or œuvre, others offered detailed, thoughtful analyses. The most frequent comparisons of Holmès’s works to Wagner’s invoked *Der fliegende Holländer* and *Lohengrin*, two of the most important Wagnerian intertexts in the early 1880s. For a woman, such comparisons to Wagner carried additional resonance. Since many critics associated Wagner with a distinctly masculine idiom, Holmès’s appropriations of the elder composer’s musical language were perceived not only as evidence of her progressive inclinations, but also as a manifestation of her virility.

In the second part of this chapter, I consider how Holmès engages with gender stereotypes on a dramatic level. The portrayal of women in *Les Argonautes* complicates the tendency, prevalent among Holmès’s contemporaries, to conflate the composer’s life and work—or more precisely, to read a woman’s work as the work of a woman. In other compositions, Holmès could easily be mapped onto one of her central characters: the allegorical figure of La République in the *Ode triomphale* (sung by a contralto, the same voice type as Holmès), or Yamina, the mezzo-soprano heroine of *La Montagne noire*.18

In *Les Argonautes*, by contrast, Holmès is complicit in the Othering of her gender. She depicts women as either dangerous seductresses or exotic sorceresses, and encodes their difference through musical style. Although Medea sings in an assertive, declamatory idiom, suggesting that her nature is similar to Jason’s, she is ultimately dispensable; Jason abandons her in the name of glory. Many critics noted that this alteration of the myth was all the more striking coming from the pen of a woman. I argue that *Les

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18 For more on this tendency for Holmès’s contemporaries to conflate the composer’s life with her characters, see Henson, “In the House of Disillusion,” 239.
Argonautes demonstrates that women as well as men could participate in the apportioning of otherness. Before proceeding to a discussion of the piece, however, some background on its origins and reception are in order.

“Expressions of Musical Genius”

On 9 August 1875, the Conseil municipal de Paris voted to establish the City of Paris Prize, a biennial contest in composition. One of several competitions the republican government instituted in the 1870s to promote the arts, the award was intended to rival the Prix de Rome in stature: the winner would receive 10,000 francs and a state-sponsored performance of his or her work.19 The guidelines for the contest were drafted by a committee that included, among others, the composer Félicien David; Auguste Vaucorbeil, director of the Paris Opéra; and Émile Perrin, general administrator of the Comédie-Française and former director of the Opéra. Entrants had to submit a “symphony with soloists and chorus” on a subject that would “apply the most complete developments of their art while at the same time addressing feelings of the highest order.”20 Unlike the Prix de Rome, the choice of subject was left to the competitors, who were free to write their own text, collaborate with a librettist, or draw on existing literary

19 An additional 10,000 francs was allotted for the performance, which was to take place within six months of the jury’s verdict. For a discussion of these competitions, see Pasler, “Arts Policy and the Utility of Competition,” in Composing the Citizen, 268-83. On the City of Paris prize, see ibid., 273-75, and idem., “Deconstructing d’Indy, or the Problem of a Composer’s Reputation,” 19th-Century Music 30, no. 3 (Spring 2007): 235-39.

20 “…il devra se préoccuper de choisir un sujet qui, en se prêtant aux développements les plus complets de son art, s’adresse en même temps aux sentiments de l’ordre le plus élevé.” “Le Prix de 10,000 francs,” Le Journal de musique, 11 November 1886. See also, in the same journal, “Nouvelles de Partout,” 4 November 1886, and “Un rapport de M. de Chennevières,” 25 January 1879.
works. Sacred and theatrical pieces were ineligible, as were compositions of an
“essentially political” character. Works that had already been performed or published
were also excluded. The jury would be composed of twenty members, half chosen by the
prefect of the Seine, half elected by the competitors themselves.

The committee held extensive discussions to determine the genre of the
compositions. One member suggested that the entries should simply bear the label
“symphony.” In his report to the Conseil municipal, Perrin noted that the term connoted
“the purest, the most abstract, the strongest of the diverse expressions of musical
genius.”21 However, the committee concluded that an instrumental work would not
completely satisfy the wishes of the Conseil. Perrin continued:

Indeed, if the masters of the last century and of the first years of ours left
immortal models of purely instrumental symphonies, didn’t they also frequently
add the resources of the human voice to the orchestra? Haven’t contemporary
composers, who have made the title of symphonist their most glorious title,
widened the cleared path and created new effects from this alliance? It is
precisely these compositions, grandiose in their conception, numerous in their
means of execution—from Bach’s Passion; Handel’s Alexander’s Feast or the
Messiah; Haydn’s The Seasons; Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony; to Félicien
David’s Le Désert, Christophe Colomb, and Eden—which seem the best models
to recommend and the best definition of the competition’s wishes.

Whatever name is given to these musical works (in which the composer
remains master of his subject, plan, and proportions, and expresses only his
ideal)—Symphony, Oratorio, Cantata, Ode-symphonie, Symphonie dramatique,
Légende, Symphonie fantastique, etc.—all these designations can be summed up
in this simple, clear and precise designation that your subcommittee offers to
you: Symphony with soloists and chorus.

[En effet, si les maîtres du siècle dernier et des premières années du nôtre ont
laissé des modèles immortels de symphonies purement instrumentales, n’ont-ils
pas aussi souvent adjoint à l’orchestre les ressources de la voix humaine? Les
compositeurs contemporains, qui se sont fait du titre de symphoniste leur plus
beau titre de gloire, n’ont-ils pas élargi le chemin frayé et tiré des effets
nouveaux de cette alliance? Ce sont précisément ces compositions, grandiose

21 “Sans doute, le mot de symphonie exprime à lui seul la plus pure, la plus abstraite, la plus forte
des manifestations diverses du génie musical.” “Le Prix de 10,000 francs,” Le Journal de
musique.
dans leur conception, multiples par leurs moyens d’exécution, depuis la Passion de Sébastien Bach; l’Alexandre ou le Messie de Händel; depuis les Saisons, d’Haydn; la Neuvième symphonie, de Beethoven; jusqu’au Désert, au Christophe Colomb, à l’Éden, de Félicien David, qui sembleraient les meilleurs modèles à proposer et la meilleure définition du desideratum du concours.

De quelque nom que se soient successivement appelées ces œuvres musicales, dans lesquelles le compositeur reste maître de son sujet, de son plan, de ses proportions, et ne relève absolument que de son idéal: Symphonie, Oratorio, Cantate, Ode-symphonie, Symphonie dramatique, Légende, Symphonie fantastique, etc., toutes ces dénominations peuvent se résumer dans cette dénomination simple, claire et précise que vous propose votre sous-commission:

Symphonie avec soli et chœurs.

Perrin’s report indicates that the Conseil wished to promote music of a serious, elevated nature. The committee devised the genre of the submissions with this in mind. In the years after the Franco-Prussian War, many French intellectuals and artists were preoccupied with the advancement of serious culture. As Michael Strasser has noted, some musicians, particularly those associated with the Société nationale de musique, turned to German artistic models in search of a national cultural renewal. In these circles, “serious” music usually meant large-scale instrumental genres. In this spirit, Perrin’s committee acknowledged the merits of the purely instrumental symphony, even describing “symphonist” as the “most glorious title” for a composer. The committee’s remarks suggest that the cultivation of serious art was not just a goal for musicians, but a concern among Third Republic political leaders as well.

22 Ibid. Saint-Saëns, in his review of Les Argonautes, complained that the category “Symphonie avec soli et chœurs” was an “incorrect designation which one day must be changed” (“Dénomination vicieuse, qu’il faudra changer quelque jour”). He argued that the winning entries from 1878 and 1880 were oratorios in all but religious subject matter, and not symphonies in the least. Harmonie et mélodie, 230-31.

Examples by Gounod and Saint-Saëns notwithstanding, a robust symphonic tradition would not develop in France until following decade.\textsuperscript{24} In comparison, composers like Berlioz or David, whose works were cited by the committee, offered native examples of ambitious, text-driven orchestral works. It also bears noting that the seismic events of 1870-71 had not fundamentally altered the programming of Parisian concert societies.\textsuperscript{25} As in the 1860s, most orchestral performances featured a variety of genres, including vocal selections. Symphonies did not necessarily hold pride of place on orchestra programs, and opera continued to dominate musical life. It stands to reason, then, that the prize organizers would solicit vocal, plot-driven compositions—and not purely instrumental symphonies—as the most suitable genre for a prestigious, high-profile competition.

The Conseil municipal unanimously approved the committee’s recommendations and funded the prize in October 1876. For the inaugural competition in 1878, Holmès submitted \textit{Lutèce}, her first major work to attract widespread attention.\textsuperscript{26} Théodore


\textsuperscript{25} In \textit{The Rise of Instrumental Music and Concert Series in Paris, 1828-1871} (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), Jeffrey Cooper observes that musical trends in the 1870s had largely been established in the preceding decade. Similarly, Katharine Ellis has noted that a resurgence of early French music began in the latter part of the Second Empire and continued through the Third Republic. For this reason she avoids 1870 as a “historical caesura.” Ellis, \textit{Interpreting the Musical Past: Early Music in Nineteenth-Century France} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
Dubois’s *Le Paradis perdu* and Benjamin Godard’s *Le Tasse* tied for first prize after a series of votes failed to produce a single winner. Holmès placed second. A *symphonie dramatique* in the tradition of Berlioz’s *Roméo et Juliette*, *Lutèce* is cast in three parts and scored for four soloists, narrator, multiple choruses (including a children’s chorus), and large orchestra. As with almost all of her vocal compositions, Holmès wrote the scenario and text. Lutetia, the Gallic forerunner of modern Paris, is under attack and falls to the Romans—an allegory for the recent siege of Paris and the country’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. The narrator makes the connection between past and present explicit at the piece’s outset, imploring: “O sons of the defenders of old Lutetia, listen to them, to live and die like them.”

Although Holmès occasionally resorts to hackneyed gestures to depict battle and strife—chromatic runs, diminished and augmented chords, and extended sequences—*Lutèce* also foreshadows the composer’s mature style. Reflecting her Wagnerian sympathies, Holmès employs a system of leitmotives, including a pungent figure with clashing minor and augmented seconds that underscores the image of Gaul “sous le pied lourd de l’étranger” [under the heavy foot of the foreigner] (Ex. 2.1). The vocal writing is demanding, and the chorus sings for extended periods near the top of its range. In the final chorale, Holmès calls for the tenor section to sing a high B, first softly (she indicates “voix de tête,” or head voice), then fortissimo. The parts for the children’s chorus include

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26 Holmès composed several stage works in the 1870s, including *Astarté*, *Lancelot du lac*, and *Héro et Léandre*. With the exception of brief excerpts from *Astarté* and *Héro et Léandre*, these pieces went unperformed, and none were published. For another discussion of *Lutèce*, see Pasler, “The Ironies of Gender,” and Seto, “The Choral Music of Luigi Cherubini and Augusta Holmès.”

27 The winning composers, protégés of Gounod and Massenet, exemplified very different compositional styles. As Pasler notes, “That the jury awarded prizes to both works suggests that music could embody French values in quite different ways.” *Composing the Citizen*, 275.
rapid chromaticism and challenging leaps, with a range spanning nearly two octaves. As many critics have noted, *Lutèce* also exhibits a duality between sensual lyricism (in the love duet between two young Gauls) and patriotic virility—a juxtaposition that characterizes many of Holmès’s later works.²⁸

**Ex. 2.1. Lutèce, Part 1, “Sous le pied lourd de l’étranger”**

Holmès composed *Les Argonautes* for the second City of Paris competition in 1880. Although the work impressed everyone on the jury, it only placed second, losing to Alphonse Duvernoy’s *La Tempête* by nine votes to eleven.²⁹ The panelists who voted for Holmès included several notable musicians: Saint-Saëns, Franck, Massenet, Godard, Perrin, Lamoureux, Colonne, Octave Fouque, and Antoine Lascoux.³⁰ Voting for *La

²⁸ See Gefen, *Augusta Holmès, l’outrancière*, 163; Pasler, “The Ironies of Gender,” 9-17; and Henson, “In the House of Disillusion.”

²⁹ The breakdown of the jury’s vote was recounted in an interview with Holmès, reprinted in Gefen, *Augusta Holmès, l’outrancière*, 164. The complete list of panelists is listed in *Le Ménestrel*, 21 November 1880.
Tempête were Ambroise Thomas; Léo Delibes; Ferdinand Hérold, the prefect of the Seine and a friend of the Duvernoy family; and members of the city council who, in accordance with the guidelines of the competition, had been appointed to the jury by Hérold himself.\textsuperscript{31} Seventeen of the twenty panelists voted to award Holmès an honorable mention, but many observers considered her loss to Duvernoy an outrage.\textsuperscript{32} In his report to Hérold, Perrin strongly recommended that Les Argonautes be presented in public once the performance of La Tempête had taken place. He declared: “That which is good in this work is of a superior quality, and its effect on the audience will be very great.”\textsuperscript{33}

When conductor Jules Pasdeloup indicated that he was willing to program the piece at his Concerts populaires, Holmès appealed directly to the president of the Budget Commission for the extra funds necessary to mount a performance. Along with her

\footnotesize{30} Fouque was a composer and musicologist who would go on to write a study of Wagner in 1882. See his obituary in Le Ménestrel, 29 April 1883. Lascoux was a magistrate and amateur musician who established one of the first Wagnerian salons in Paris, “Le Petit Bayreuth,” in 1876. See Myriam Chimènes, “Les salons parisiens et la promotion des musiciens étrangers (1870-1940),” in Capitales culturelles, Capitales symboliques: Paris et les expériences européennes, ed. Christophe Charle and Daniel Roche ([Paris:] Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002), 374.

\footnotesize{31} Hérold’s ties with the Duvernoy family are noted in Friang, Augusta Holmès ou la gloire interdite, 60.

\footnotesize{32} See Ernest Reyer, “Revue Musicale,” Journal des débats, 29 April 1881; H. [Henri] Lavoix fils, “Musique,” Le Globe, 25 April 1881; and Friang, Augusta Holmès ou la gloire interdite, 60-61. One of the jury members had even suggested putting two names on the ballot to avoid relegating Les Argonautes to second place, but this proposition was voted down on the grounds that it was contrary to the spirit of the prize. See Georges Bath, “Les Femmes Artistes,” Le Droit des Femmes, c. 1880 or 1881, Recueil d’articles de journaux sur Augusta Holmès, 1866-1888, F-Pn 4 B 391 (hereafter abbreviated as Recueil Holmès). Many of the reviews of Les Argonautes cited in this chapter, particularly those without complete bibliographic citations, are drawn from this scrapbook of press clippings that Holmès kept.

\footnotesize{33} “Je suis l’interprète du jury en signalant à votre attention le mérite de cette œuvre, et il serait bien à désirer qu’elle pût être exécutée en public, après que l’audition solennelle de la Tempête aura eu lieu. … Ce qui est bien dans cette œuvre est de qualité supérieure, et l’effet en serait très grand sur le public.” Perrin’s report is quoted in part or in full in several reviews of the work, including Reyer, “Revue Musicale,” Journal des Débats, 29 April 1881; and Adolphe Jullien, “Revue Musicale,” Le Français, 2 May 1881.
petition, she included letters of support from several prominent composers, including Gounod, Saint-Saëns, Franck, and Godard. Her request for 6,000 francs was granted, and Pasdeloup premiered *Les Argonautes* on 24 April 1881 at the Cirque d’hiver (Fig. 2.1). Mezzo-soprano Renée Richard and soprano Thérèse Panchioni won acclaim for their portrayals, respectively, of Medea and a Siren; Pierre-Marie Laurent created the role of Jason. Most of Paris’s musical elite was in attendance, including Thomas, Delibes, Lamourey, Ernest Reyer, Ernest Guiraud, and Victorin Joncières. It was Holmès’s first major triumph as a composer. According to one reviewer, the ovation following the performance lasted longer than twenty minutes. The audience called out for Holmès to take a bow, but she chose not to appear. Commentators interpreted this response in gendered terms. Some reviewers attributed her behavior to feminine modesty. Adolphe Jullien claimed that Holmès “wisely” declined to acknowledge the public, noting: “A man would have yielded with no fear of ridicule, as ten others have already done: a

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35 In “The Ironies of Gender,” 5, Pasler includes a table of Holmès’s performances that states that an additional presentation of *Les Argonautes* took place on 26 March 1881. However, all the documentation I have encountered indicates that the 24 April performance was the premiere. The additional date was most likely included in error, since the next piece in the table, *Irlande*, was premiered on 26 March 1882.


39 See, for example, ibid.
woman foresaw the trap and was careful not to fall in.⁴⁰ Others rumored that Holmès could not acknowledge the audience because she was dressed in a pantsuit.⁴¹ As Pasler has noted, around 1885 Holmès masculinized her appearance—like the femmes nouvelles of the period—through her clothing and short hairstyle.⁴² The reviews of Les Argonautes suggest that Holmès had begun to dress similarly to a man in earlier years as well.

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⁴⁰ “M. Benjamin Godard était venu saluer le public après le Tasse, et M. Duvernoy ne manqua pas d’imiter ce bel exemple après la Tempête. Mlle Holmès a sagement fait de ne pas se prêter à semblable comédie lorsque ses amis et les musiciens de l’orchestre l’appelaient à grands cris sur l’estrade. Un homme aurait cédé sans peur du ridicule, ainsi que dix autres l’ont déjà fait: une femme a deviné le piège et s’est gardée d’y tomber.” Jullien, “Revue Musicale,” Le Français, 2 May 1881.


Fig. 2.1. Program from the first performance of *Les Argonautes* (Reprinted from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la Musique)
While the concert was well received by critics and the audience, the box office receipts were disappointing: *Les Argonautes* had cost 10,000 francs to perform, but ticket sales netted only 2,700 francs. Convinced that it was his “duty” to introduce the piece to the public, Pasdeloup requested another 5,000 francs from the Conseil municipal to repeat *Les Argonautes* the following season. His request was granted, and a second performance took place on 26 February 1882.

A “Virile, Daring New Score”

In part because of the “scandal” of Holmès’s second place finish in the City of Paris prize, *Les Argonautes* garnered extensive attention in the press; more than three dozen reviews appeared in 1881 and 1882. While assessments of the musical execution were mixed—Saint-Saëns lamented that the performance at the premiere “left much to be desired,” and many critics found Laurent inadequate for the demanding tenor role of Jason—most writers responded favorably to Holmès’s work. Charles Darcours of *Le

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43 In his letter to the préfet of the Seine, Pasdeloup attributed the sparse box office receipts for *Les Argonautes* to the public’s suspicion of unfamiliar names. By way of comparison, Pasdeloup noted that a recent Concerts Populaires performance with baritone Jean-Baptiste Faure had yielded 10,700 francs at the same ticket prices. Pasdeloup’s letter is reprinted in “Nouvelles diverses,” *L’Art musical*, 12 May 1881. See also “Paris et départements,” *Le Ménestrel*, 8 May 1881.

44 Most of these reviews are preserved in the Recueil Holmès.

45 “Par malheur, l’exécution a laissé beaucoup à désirer...” Saint-Saëns, “Les Argonautes,” *Harmonie et mélodie*, 227. See also *L’Art musical*, 28 April 1881, and the reviews cited in note 35. According to a report from *L’Événement*, the part of Jason was intended for Jean-Alexandre Talazac, the preeminent light tenor who created the roles of Gérald in Delibes’ *Lamké*, Des Grieux in Massenet’s *Manon*, and, in February 1881, the title role of Offenbach’s *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* at the Opéra-Comique. Léon Carvalho, the director of the Opéra-Comique, did not want his star tenor to take on a fatiguing role outside his theater, so Jason was premiered by Laurent instead. When *Les Argonautes* was performed a second time in 1882, Talazac sung the
Figaro claimed it was “definitely one of the most original and most interesting compositions produced in several years.” A number of writers declared Les Argonautes superior to the work that won the City of Paris prize, La Tempête. Edmond Bazire of L’Intransigeant noted that while Duvernoy had received the award, “the supreme jury, the audience,” had effectively overturned the official verdict. Jullien described La Tempête as “a pleasantly done work of marquetry by a musician who has neither ideas of his own nor firm ideals,” whereas Les Argonautes was “the work of an artist of conviction who knows what she wants to do and attempts to do so with firmness, without deviating from the path she has chosen.”

Several observers framed the comparison between the two composers in gendered language. Speculating on the jury’s rationale, Henri Lavoix fils of Le Globe reasoned: “The judges who crowned M. Duvernoy’s agreeable, feminine, melodic, and tender work, who rewarded this skilled and careful composer who knew to stay within the limits of convention without descending into banality, could not crown the virile, daring, new part to great acclaim. See Charles Darcours [Charles Réty], “Notes de musique,” Le Figaro, 1 March 1882; and reviews in L’Indépendante and Le Voltaire in the Recueil Holmès.

46 “C’est assurément une des compositions les plus originales et les plus intéressantes qui se soit produites depuis plusieurs années.” Darcours, “Notes de musique,” Le Figaro, 27 April 1881.


49 “Avec la Tempête, on avait un travail de marqueterie agréablement fait par un musicien sans idées propres ni idéal fixe et qui tournait à tous les vents; avec les Argonautes, on a l’œuvre d’une artiste de conviction qui sait bien ce qu’elle veut faire et qui s’y essaye avec fermeté sans dévier du chemin qu’elle a choisi.” Jullien, “Revue Musicale,” Le Français, 2 May 1881.
score by Mlle Holmès.” The reviewer from an English-language periodical noted that “the Tempête betrays rather the ability we more generally expect to find in the work of a female composer, whilst the Argonautes evinces a grasp of conception and a power of treatment which has hitherto been the prerogative of man alone. Mlle. Augusta Holmès may, therefore … well challenge comparison with the highest of living masters.” The writer from L’Indépendant mused that “a good many men would envy” the virility of Les Argonautes.

Many critics felt compelled to comment on the fact that a woman had written in such a virile idiom. The reviewer from Gil Blas described Les Argonautes as a “virile work, written nevertheless by the delicate pen of a woman.” An article in La Clairon claimed that the piece “has such virile qualities that, in the fabricated classifications of male geniuses and female geniuses, one could hardly know where to place Mlle Augusta Holmès.” Several of these writers, while nominally receptive towards Holmès, expressed a patronizing attitude about her gender. Joncières, the pro-Wagnerian


51 Unlabeled clipping from the Recueil Holmès.


54 “Au reste, le musicien consommé qui a écrit la sinistre danse magique, le duo d’amour et la seconde partie du récitatif final de Jason—lequel nous a paru sans conteste le morceau le plus puissant de l’œuvre—a des qualités si viriles, que dans la classification inventée des génies mâles et des génies femelles, on ne saurait presque où placer Mlle Augusta Holmès.” M. Crespel, La Clairon, 28 April 1881.
composer and critic for *La Liberté*, suggested that Holmès rose above the mediocrity that typified women’s music:

Most women who make music only produce works that, in general, are rather mediocre; the most talented write what are called “very pretty things.” They are graceful, elegant, of a sufficiently poetic bourgeois ideal to merit the praises of the well-bred people in their circle. But from the viewpoint of great lyric art, they lack any significance whatsoever and do not exceed the level of the amateur flights of fancy that one applauds in the salons.

Mlle Augusta Holmès is an exception to the rule. Her music has a vigor, a virility, an enthusiasm that deserves better than the banal praise that one usually grants to women composers.

Another writer claimed that Holmès’s work could almost pass for a man’s:

This is an extremely remarkable work that could be signed by the hand of a man because it has nothing of the effeminate, even though it was composed by a woman. One will no longer be able to say now that woman is incapable of conceiving important and vigorous musical works, as *Les Argonautes* is there to victoriously prove the opposite.

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56 [Byline illegible], *Le Bulletin Musical*, c. 1881 or 1882, Recueil Holmès.
The critic from *L’Heure de la Loire* expressed amazement that a woman had written a symphony and vowed not to dwell on the challenges Holmès had to overcome to achieve her goals. In the very same sentence, however, he proceeds to reinscribe the same chauvinistic attitudes that Holmès had faced, through incidental remarks about her physical appearance and women’s general lack of fortitude:

Mlle Augusta Holmès is a tall and beautiful person, thirty to thirty-two years old [sic], with strong, well designed features, of an appearance that is more virile (not “mennish”) than effeminate (not “feminine”)… I will not tell you what difficulties this woman, who has the misfortune of being pretty, had to overcome in order to make herself known and to have her work played. Two words will be worth more than four volumes of narration: A woman and a symphony! A thousand other [women] in her circumstances would have killed themselves or given up. She held out and she triumphed.

Victor Wilder, another critic with Wagnerian sympathies, argued:

This score is obviously a very remarkable work and reveals a rare musical temperament. If one sometimes senses the hand of a woman, it is less due to the grace of the melodic thoughts than due to the exaggerated effort towards force

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57 Spiridion, *L’Heure de la Loire* [this is a handwritten attribution in the Recueil Holmès which is difficult to read], 3 March 1882.
and power. One feels that the author’s constant concern is to mask her sex by putting on a parade of virile energy that she would find more easily, I believe, if she were less obstinate in searching for it.

[Cette partition est évidemment une œuvre très remarquable et révèle un tempérament musical rare. Si l’on y devine parfois la main d’une femme, c’est moins par la grâce des pensées mélodiques que par un effort exagéré vers la force et la puissance. On sent que la constante préoccupation de l’auteur est de faire oublier son sexe en faisant parade d’une énergie virile qu’elle trouverait plus aisément, je le crois, si elle mettait moins d’opiniâtreté à la chercher.]\(^{58}\)

Saint-Saëns expressed a nearly identical sentiment in more general terms:

Women are strange when they become seriously involved in art: above all they seem preoccupied with the need to make us forget that they are women and to show a boundless virility, without realizing that it is just this preoccupation that reveals the woman. Like children, women know no obstacle, and their will opens the way. Mademoiselle Holmès is very much a woman; she is an “extreme woman.” In her music, the brass explode like fireworks; keys collide, modulations clash with the din of a storm; the voices, panicked, lose all notion of their natural registers and jump from the highest to the lowest notes, at the risk of breaking; all the timbres of the orchestra, subjected to a sort of intensive breeding environment, produce the maximum possible effects, and the violins, regardless of being in tune, launch rockets before which even the piano would shrink; the bass drum, the cymbals, the harp dance a mad round, and even the ophicleide takes part. This is what she wishes!

[Les femmes sont curieuses quand elles se mêlent sérieusement d’art: elles semblent préoccupées avant tout de faire oublier qu’elles sont femmes et de montrer une virilité débordante, sans songer que c’est justement cette préoccupation qui découle la femme. Comme les enfants, les femmes ne connaissent pas d’obstacle; et leur volonté brise tout. Mademoiselle Holmès est bien femme; c’est une “outrancière.” Dans sa musique, les cuivres éclatent

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\(^{58}\) Victor Wilder, review in *Le Parlement*, reprinted in “Les Argonautes de Mme Augusta Holmès au Concert Populaire,” *Le Ménestrel*, 7 May 1881. It is worth noting that Holmès did not include any articles about *Les Argonautes* from specialist music journals such as *Le Ménestrel* and *L’Art musical* in her scrapbook of press clippings. These two publications were among the most conservative music periodicals in Paris at the time, with anti-Wagnerian critics dominating their staffs. The editorial stance of these journals may have been shaped by commercial interests. *Le Ménestrel* was the journalistic arm of the publishing company of Jacques Heugel, a prominent anti-Wagnerian; *L’Art musical* was the house magazine of Léon Escudier, the French publisher of Verdi’s operas. For a discussion of the French musical press, see Ross, “Crisis and Transformation,” and Jess Bennett Tyre, “The Reception of German Instrumental Music in France between 1870 and 1914” (PhD dissertation: Yale University, 2000). Both volumes include appendices with notes on nineteenth-century French periodicals. On Léon Escudier and *L’Art musical*, see also Strasser, “The Société Nationale and its Adversaries,” 242ff.
comme des boîtes d’artifice; les tonalités se heurtent, les modulations s’entrecroisent avec un bruit de tempête; les voix, affolées, perdent toute notion de leurs registres naturels et se précipitent des tons les plus aigus aux tons les plus graves, au risque de se briser; tous les timbres de l’orchestre, soumis à une sorte de culture intensive, donnent le maximum des effets possibles, et les violons, au mépris de toute justesse, lancent des fusées devant lesquelles le piano même reculerait; la grosse caisse, les cymbales, la harpe dansent une ronde folle, et l’opercle lui-même se met de la partie. Elle le veut![59]

When the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire performed a portion of Les Argonautes in 1885, the influential conservative critic Arthur Pougin echoed the attitudes of Wilder and Saint-Saëns, opining that Holmès was “wrong to want to force her feminine nature and to search out vigorous effects above all when tenderness and grace seem to be particularly favorable to her.”60 As Pasler has observed, Holmès could pursue one of two stylistic options, and both had their pitfalls. Stereotypically charming, “feminine” work risked dismissal as second-rate fare, but a woman who tried to sound like a man was accused of betraying her gender. This dilemma fits into a larger cultural phenomenon of women performers and composers who have been trained to suppress traces of female authorship, as Susan McClary discusses in her landmark study Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality. McClary contends that generations of female musicians in the European classical tradition have “learned not to let themselves ‘sound like women,’” but instead “have learned how to perform or write (how often have we gloried in this compliment!) with balls.”61 What did it mean to “sound like a man” in late nineteenth-


60 “il me semble qu’elle a tort de vouloir forcer sa nature féminine et de rechercher surtout les efforts de vigueur, alors que la tendresse et la grâce paraissent lui être tout particulièrement favorables.” Arthur Pougin, Le Ménestrel, 11 January 1885.

century France? For many critics in Holmès’s milieu, the idea of masculinity incarnate could be summed up in the work of one composer: Wagner.

Wagnerism and the Aesthetic of Virility

Despite Wagner’s notoriety, his works only gained a foothold on the Parisian stage in the 1890s, beginning with a run of *Lohengrin* at the Opéra in 1891. A production of *Tannhäuser* at the Opéra in 1861 was disastrous, and Charles Lamoureux canceled a production of *Lohengrin* at the Eden-Théâtre in 1887 after one performance because of intense controversy. Nonetheless, by the early 1880s Parisian audiences had become well acquainted with Wagner’s music through concert excerpts. Pasdeloup performed Wagner dozens of times in the 1860s, presenting the overture to *Der fliegende Holländer* as early as 1864. Wagner’s name largely disappeared from French programs in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War and the composer’s scathing farce *Eine Kapitulation* (written in 1870, published in 1873, and translated into French in 1875), but by the late 1870s, his works returned to the repertory with even greater frequency. Pasdeloup gave a concert version of the first act of *Lohengrin* in 1879. In 1881, Lamoureux founded his Société des Nouveaux Concerts and featured Wagner regularly on his programs. In one notable


example, he presented the first act of *Lohengrin* on four consecutive performances in 1882, each time before a full audience.\(^{63}\)

At the time *Les Argonautes* premiered, then, listeners had ample basis to compare Holmès’s music to Wagner’s. Some writers associated Holmès with the *maître de Bayreuth* for the most general of reasons: both composers were musical “progressives” who wrote their own libretti.\(^{64}\) As Strasser has noted, conservative musicians in the early years of the Third Republic had a tendency to “paint all members of the new generation with the broad brush of Wagnerism,” regardless of each composer’s individual characteristics.\(^{65}\) Even a number of sympathetic critics in France regarded Wagnerism as a monolithic phenomenon, using the term to connote any sort of modernist tendency. In this spirit, several reviews of *Les Argonautes* described Holmès as a Wagnerian without further elaboration.\(^{66}\) However, most reviewers went further, identifying traces of Wagner’s musical language or dramatic ideas in Holmès’s work. Following this line of reasoning, Holmès was not just a woman who sounded like a man; she sounded like a specific man, one associated with the most grandiose and ambitious—in other words,

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\(^{63}\) For a listing of Parisian concert programs, see Élisabeth Bernard, “Le Concert symphonique à Paris entre 1861 et 1914: Pasdeloup, Colonne, Lamoureux” (PhD dissertation: Université Paris I-Sorbonne, 1976), vol. 2.

\(^{64}\) See, for example, reviews in *La Clairon*, 28 April 1881, and *L’Heure de la Loire*, 3 March 1882. On the same basis, a number of critics claimed that Holmès also followed in the tradition of Berlioz. See Charles Darcours, “Notes de Musique,” *Le Figaro*, 27 April 1881, and Jacques Hermann, *Le Constitutionnel*, 26 April 1881, where the author describes Holmès’s treatment of the orchestra as “de l’école de Berlioz, de Wagner et de ses disciples.”


\(^{66}\) See, for instance, reviews by G. Bésardi in the *Indépendance Belge* and André Wormser in *L’Indépendante*, c. February or March 1882.
masculine—artistic ideas in the late nineteenth century. In the eyes of her contemporaries, the virility of Holmès’s idiom was inextricably connected to her affinity for Wagner.

Observers most often justified this comparison by identifying musical similarities between the two composers. As several commentators noted, Holmès, like Wagner, employed leitmotivic techniques, a complex harmonic language, and extended, non-periodic melodies. Jullien, who argued that Holmès “admires Richard Wagner exclusively,” wrote: “she borrows his characteristic motives, his recollections of emblematic phrases, his interweaving melodies for strings, his arrangements of overdrawn harmony, his heroic brass calls.” A representative sample of Holmès’s harmonic language, from the opening of Part Four of Les Argonautes, is reproduced in Ex. 2.2. The Guardians of the Fleece proclaim that those who seek supreme truth must “marcher dans la route amère vers sa chimère” [march along the bitter path towards their chimera]. Holmès conveys this struggle through an insistent triplet rhythm and contrary semitonal motion in the outer voices. As theorist Robert Gauldin notes, this sort of

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67 This is not to discount several important feminized strains of Wagner reception in the 1880s. Wagner figured prominently in the German discourse on decadence, notably in Friedrich Nietzsche’s The Case of Wagner (1888). As Joseph Horowitz chronicles in Wagner Nights: An American History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), the majority of Wagner enthusiasts in New York City in the 1880s and 1890s were women. Rather than signifying an “iconoclastic modernism,” Horowitz contends that American Wagnerism was “absorbed within the dominant genteel tradition” (214). For a different gendered context, see Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Wagner Androgyne: A Study in Interpretation, trans. Stewart Spencer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

68 See, for instance, reviews by Victorin Joncières in La Liberté.

“chromatic wedge progression” was a hallmark of Wagner’s compositional technique from *Tristan* onwards.\textsuperscript{70} For French listeners, Holmès’s use of such harmonies might have aligned her as a Wagnerian, but this passage also displays some original touches. In fact, she uses two wedge progressions: the first wedge prolongs a dominant sonority on B-flat, and then Holmès pivots to a misspelled dominant chord on E by means of a tritone substitution in the bass. This new chord functions as a German sixth which resolves to an a\textsubscript{b}\textsuperscript{6} chord in the following measure, whereupon a new sequence of chromatic chords in contrary motion begins. These two consecutive wedge progressions, joined by a tritone substitution, allow Holmès to traverse an extraordinary range of harmonies in a short four measures.

**Ex. 2.2. Les Argonautes, Part 4, “Et marcher dans la route amère”**

Critics also linked aspects of Holmès’s style to Wagnerian characteristics that, either explicitly or implicitly, were gendered as masculine. The writer for *Le Bulletin Musical*, for instance, praised *Les Argonautes* before proceeding to offer “friendly criticism” of the work’s more bombastic attributes, which he associated with Wagner:

…excessive use of brass instruments; it is good to have vigor, but not too much. A few too many soundings of the trumpets becomes trying. A few too many high notes for the soloists, especially in the tenor part. A few too many tremolos and chromatic scales in the orchestra. All these are the faults of a master for whom Mlle Holmès professes great admiration: Richard Wagner.

[…l’emploi trop fréquent des instruments de cuivre, il est bon d’avoir de la vigueur mais pas trop n’en faut. Un peu trop de sonneries de trompettes, cela devient fatigant. Un peu trop de notes élevées pour les solistes, surtout dans le rôle du ténor. Un peu trop de trémolos et de gammes chromatiques dans l’orchestre. Tout cela ce sont les défauts d’un maître pour qui Mlle Holmès professe une grande admiration: Richard Wagner.]\(^71\)

Ernest Reyer articulated many of the same aspects of Holmès’s style and noted that her “virile” idiom was honed through visits to Bayreuth:

[I]f one can correct a certain inexperience in the art of writing for voices, the abuse of modulations, changes of time and disrupted cadences, the too frequent usage of the same effects, of the same sonorities—brass fanfares, trumpet calls, and strokes of the bass drum imitating the howling of waves—one finds on the other hand a vigor of tone, a magnitude of form, a freshness of ideas, a wealth of colors…

Mlle Holmès is a great admirer of Richard Wagner. She must have gone to Bayreuth; she will return there. And why not? … If Mlle Holmès went to Bayreuth, she strengthened certain aspects of her talent there and did not succumb to the ecstasy of perpetual adoration. She came back to Paris, bringing back the melodic charm of her inspirations and the very virile, albeit very feminine, style of her poetic imagination, of her interesting personality.

[si l’on peut y reprendre une certaine inexpérience dans l’art d’écire pour les voix, l’abus des modulations, des changements de mesure et des cadences rompues, l’emploi trop fréquent des mêmes effets, des mêmes sonorités: fanfares de cuivre, appels de trompettes et coups de grosse caisse imitant le mugissement des vagues, on y trouve par contre une vigueur d’accent, une ampleur de forme, une fraîcheur d’idées, une richesse de coloris …

Mlle Holmès est une grande admiratrice de Richard Wagner: elle a dû aller à Bayreuth; elle y retournera. Et pourquoi pas? … Si Mlle Holmès est allée à Bayreuth, elle y a fortifié certains côtés de son talent et ne s’y est point oubliée dans l’extase d’une adoration perpétuelle. Elle est revenue à Paris, y rapportant le charme mélodique de ses inspirations et le cachet très viril quoique très féminin aussi de sa poétique imagination, de son intéressante personnalité.]\(^72\)

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\(^{71}\) [Byline illegible], *Le Bulletin Musical*, Recueil Holmès.

A number of sympathetic observers went so far as to call Holmès one of the most ardent Wagnerians in France. Writers supported this claim largely on the basis of musical correspondences, most often with Der fliegende Holländer and Lohengrin. Lavoix noted:

Of all the composers of the truly modern school, Mlle. Holmès is the one in France who is incontestably the most openly Wagnerian. The use of a phrase with well-designed contours, capable of tirelessly supporting the development of different situations, the frequent usage of very distant or very close intervals (the resemblance lies in the contrast), the handling of sonorities, the musical phraseology itself—this all reveals in the composer a continual communion of ideas with the Wagnerian oeuvre, particularly with Der fliegende Holländer and Lohengrin. We are far from speaking of plagiarism: there is the inclination and not the encounter; several recollections of the French school only serve to further emphasize the general spirit of the work.

Although Lavoix defends Holmès against the charge of plagiarism, the echoes of the two Wagner works in question were suggestive enough to elicit commentary from several writers. In the case of Lohengrin, critics heard resemblances in several passages. Jullien compared the moment where Medea first spots Jason coming ashore to Lohengrin’s arrival on a swan-drawn boat. Jacques Hermann, the reviewer for the Constitutionnel, heard echoes of Wagner’s opera in the fourth part of Les Argonautes, during Jason’s

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74 “Le moment où Médée aperçoit Jason sur la mer rappelle assez exactement l’arrivée du chevalier Lohengrin…” Jullien, Le Français, 2 May 1881.
monologue recounting the trials he faced in his quest for the Golden Fleece.\textsuperscript{75} Others suggested that Jason and Medea’s duet in Part Three recalled the love music for Elsa and Lohengrin.\textsuperscript{76}

A number of critics agreed that Holmès owed a more explicit debt to Wagner in her recollections of \textit{Der fliegende Holländer}. Hermann argued that the trumpet fanfare that opens \textit{Les Argonautes} “so reminds one of the savage brass calls from the overture to \textit{Der fliegende Holländer} that it’s hard to tell them apart.”\textsuperscript{77} Indeed, the beginning of Holmès’s \textit{symphonie dramatique} bears a strong musical and dramatic resemblance to the opening sequence from Wagner’s opera. Like the overture to \textit{Der fliegende Holländer}, \textit{Les Argonautes} begins with a tempestuous Allegro in compound meter; the setting is the stormy shore of Iolcos as the Argonauts prepare to set sail. Ominous timpani rolls and diminished-seventh chords punctuate cascades of chromatic string runs (ex. 2.3a). The first vocal entrance in Holmès’s piece—the Argonauts’ anapestic exclamations of “Eïao!”—recalls both the brass interjections in Wagner’s overture (ex. 2.3b) and the

\textsuperscript{75} “Dans un grand récit chanté, où le souvenir du \textit{Saint-Graal} et de \textit{Lohengrin} reparait un peu, toutes les modulations, toutes les phrases types wagnériens, toute son esthétique surtout, triompient complètement.” Jacques Hermann, \textit{Le Constitutionnel}, 26 April 1881. “Saint-Graal” may be a reference to \textit{Parsifal}; Wagner finished the libretto for his final music drama in 1877, but only completed the score in 1882. Charles Darcours from \textit{Le Figaro} and the reviewer from \textit{Le Voltaire} also compared a portion of Jason’s monologue favorably to the “Ride to the Abyss” from Berlioz’s \textit{La Damnation de Faust}; the latter writer marveled of Holmès’s work, “il y a là un souffle de génie.”

\textsuperscript{76} “Quant au duo d’amour, trop prolongé, entre Jason et Médée, et qui a été taillé sur le patron de celui de \textit{Lohengrin}…” Unknown publication in the \textit{Recueil Holmès} by the Marquis de Thémines (Achille de Lauzières de Thémines).

\textsuperscript{77} “Les souvenirs même des modulations wagnériennes ont été un peu trop vivaces chez l’auteur, car dès le début la phrase de trompettes qui désigne la présence du héros Jason rappelle, à s’y méprendre, l’appel sauvage des cuivres dans l’ouverture du \textit{Vaisseau-Fantôme}…” Hermann, \textit{Le Constitutionnel}, 26 April 1881. See also Jullien’s article in \textit{Le Français} and reviews in \textit{Le Voltaire}.
sailors’ wordless cries as the stage action begins in *Der fliegende Holländer* (ex. 2.3c).

Saint-Saëns complained that this depiction of the furious sea allowed Holmès to flaunt her compositional skill but had little dramatic justification. “Usually one chooses to set sail in calm weather,” he sarcastically noted, “but you had to imitate *Der fliegende Holländer* a little, isn’t that so, dear colleague?”

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78 “La première partie nous montre le départ des Argonautes levant l’ancre, ou plutôt, comme dit l’auteur, arrachant l’ancre par une mer furieuse. D’ordinaire, on choisit, pour s’embarquer, un temps calme; mais il fallait bien imiter un peu le Vaisseau-Fantôme, n’est-ce pas, cher confrère?” Saint-Saëns, “Les Argonautes,” in *Harmonie et mélodie*, 233-34.
Ex. 2.3a. *Les Argonautes*, Part 1, mm. 1-12: “Eião!”
Ex. 2.3a (continued)
Ex. 2.3b. Der Fliegende Holländer, Overture, mm. 1-19
Ex. 2.3b (continued)
Ex. 2.3b (continued)
Ex. 2.3c. *Der Fliegende Holländer*, Act 1, No. 1, first vocal entrance: “Hojohe! Hallojo!”
By evoking the storm music from *Der fliegende Holländer*, Holmès not only established her Wagnerian credentials; she also aligned herself with a strain of Wagnerism that had strong associations with masculinity. Critics in the generations after Beethoven’s death often interpreted the first and second themes of a minor-mode sonata form in gendered terms, as a dialectic between “negativity” (the tormented masculine, in minor mode) and “redemption” (the feminine intercessor, in the major). The overture to *Der fliegende Holländer*, with its respective representations of the Dutchman and Senta, was a paradigmatic example of such gendering.\(^79\) Thus observers who heard echoes of the Dutchman’s music in *Les Argonautes* would have associated Holmès not just with Wagner, but with Wagner at his most virile.

Reviewers also aligned Holmès with the elder composer on dramaturgical grounds, comparing Jason’s quest for the Golden Fleece to the epic struggles of Wagner’s protagonists—specifically, his male protagonists. The critic from *Le Gaulois* noted that while *Les Argonautes* contained numerous Wagnerian musical reminiscences, the dramatic resonances were even more compelling:

Such a subject must have tempted such a fervent disciple of Wagner like Mademoiselle Holmès. It contains, together with the works of the master, a profound and philosophical meaning. If one sometimes finds obvious reminiscences of *Tristan* and the *Niebelungen* in the music, the poem is even more infused, more imbued with Wagner’s own thoughts. As Siegfried captures Brünnhilde through the fire, Jason, through all the dangers and the seductions of the sea and of the earth, after having struggled against bulls, against men born of dragon’s teeth, and against his own heart, alas! he reaches the possession of supreme good, of the ideal, of the truth—a Buddhist and Indian conclusion to a Greek poem.

Un tel sujet devait tenter une aussi fervent adepte de Wagner que l’est Mlle Holmès. Il contient, ainsi que les œuvres du maître, un sens profond et philosophique, et si l’on retrouve ça et là, dans la musique, des réminiscences évidentes de Tristan et des Niebelungen le poème est encore plus pénétré, plus imprégné de la pensée même de Wagner. Comme Siegfried conquiert Brunnhilde à travers le feu, Jason, à travers tous les dangers et les séductions de la mer et de la terre après avoir lutté contre les taureaux, contre les hommes nés des dents du dragon, et contre son propre cœur, hélas! arrive à la possession du suprême bien, de l’idéal, de la vérité; - conclusion bouddhiste et indienne d’un poème grec.]  

Musing on the libretto, the reviewer from *La Clairon* conjectured that Holmès “has surely read Schopenhauer, the favorite philosopher of her master Wagner.” Lavoix connected *Les Argonautes* to both the philosophical and stylistically progressive strains of Wagnerism, contending that the subject had “a certain high modern mysticism.”  

Finally, critics described Holmès’s approach to vocal ensembles and large-scale structure as Wagnerian. In passages with multiple soloists, such as the love duet between Jason and Medea, the vocalists only declaim text simultaneously when the situation requires it. The critic from *Le Voltaire* described this writing style as “à la moderne,” while Jullien attributed this practice to Wagner and a succession of earlier dramatists. Jullien also noted that *Les Argonautes*, like Wagner’s music dramas, proceeds in an uninterrupted stream of action without arias, recitatives, or other musical set pieces:


81 “Mlle Holmès a surement lu Schopenhauer, le philosophe favori de son maître Wagner.” M. Crespel, *La Clairon*, 28 April 1881.


83 “Le duo entre Jason et Médée, écrit à la moderne, c’est-à-dire sans ensembles, est une page capitale, j’allais dire capiteuse—et le mot serait exact.” *Le Voltaire*, undated review in Recueil Holmès.
She exactly observes the principle formulated by Grimm and Rousseau before Wagner of having two voices sing together only rarely, when the situation demands it. Finally, she has made each of the four parts of her composition a complete work, in which the diverse episodes and motives are welded together and flow without an evident stopping point where one could applaud; here again is a precept established by Wagner, and a precept which absolutely conforms to real life, to drama, where the arrival and departure of various characters never marks an absolute break point.

[Elle observe exactement le principe formulé par Grimm et Rousseau avant Richard Wagner, de ne faire chanter deux voix ensemble que très rarement et lorsque la situation l’exige. Enfin, elle a fait de chacune des quatre parties de son œuvre un tout absolument complet, dont les divers épisodes et motifs se soudent et s’enchaînent sans point d’arrêt sensible où l’on puisse applaudir; c’est là encore un précepte établi par Wagner, et un précepte absolument conforme à la vie réelle, au drame, où l’entrée et le départ des divers personnages ne marquent jamais un point d’arrêt absolu.]

Thus on the basis of musical and dramatic correspondences, from the most specific to the broadly general, critics of all persuasions saw fit to associate Holmès with Wagner, and often with a specifically masculine strain of Wagnerism. Whether reviewers interpreted this allegiance as good or bad did not necessarily hinge on their own ideological predilections. Victor Wilder, the Wagner enthusiast who criticized Holmès for her “exaggerated effort towards force and power,” found this shortcoming most apparent in the moments where she sounded the most like the *maître de Bayreuth*. Wilder singled out Part One of *Les Argonautes* as a section where “Mme Holmès strives to plagiarize the technique of Richard Wagner and borrow all of the superficial characteristics of his work, without trying to penetrate the essence of his principles.”

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85 See note 57. “On sent que la constante préoccupation de l’auteur est de faire oublier son sexe en faisant parade d’une énergie virile qu’elle trouverait plus aisément, je le crois, si elle mettait moins d’opiniâtreté à la chercher. Ce défaut est sensible surtout dans la première partie des *Argonautes*, où Mme Holmès s’efforce de plagier la technique de Richard Wagner et lui emprunte tout l’appareil extérieur de ses procédés, sans essayer de pénétrer dans l’essence de ses
The reviewer from *Le Bulletin Musical* lamented: “If only Mademoiselle Holmès would free herself from the heavy influence of Wagner, if she would give free reign to her imagination without trying to imitate anyone, if she would not let the system suffocate her inspiration, she would occupy in no time a brilliant place among contemporary musicians.”

For the most part, however, critics argued that Holmès retained her own personality even as she drew inspiration from Wagner. The reviewer from *L’Indépendant* wrote that Holmès built on the best aspects of Wagner, namely, his dramatic expression and orchestral power, while disregarding his “commonplace formulas.” Saint-Saëns declared that Holmès had “bitten from this apple [of Wagnerian ideas] more than anyone else,” but she maintained her originality nonetheless. He reasoned: “Even when she tries to imitate Wagner, Mademoiselle Holmès is herself, as Mozart remained Mozart when he wrote in the style of Handel.” Jullien argued that Holmès only appropriated the most general of ideas, and compared her favorably to Duvernoy in this respect:

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86 “Que Mlle Holmès se dégage de l’influence pesante de Wagner, qu’elle donne libre cours à son imagination sans chercher à imiter personne, qu’elle ne laisse pas le système étouffer l’inspiration et elle occupera sous peu une place brillante parmi les musiciens contemporains.” *Le Bulletin Musical*, Recueil Holmès.

87 “On dit Mlle Holmès fort enthousiaste de Wagner: on prétend qu’elle est une de ses admiratrices passionnées. Cela nous inquiète peu. En effet, si elle s’est assimilé quelques procédés familiers au compositeur allemand, elle s’est gardée de copier servilement ses obscurités, d’exagérer ses extravagances. Elle s’est approprié, et c’est là un beau titre de gloire, pour l’auteur des *Argonautes*, - les côtés par lesquels Wagner est réellement musicien de grand mérite, c’est-à-dire le récit large, mesuré, s’encadrant dans la symphonie et n’ayant rien de commun avec la formule poncive dont nos oreilles sont rebattues; elle s’est approprié l’expression dramatique, la puissance orchestrale, mais elle s’est gardée d’une cuite, aveugle et fanatique qui porte à exagérer les défauts du modèle et à annihiler la personnalité de l’auteur.” [O.] Crouzet, “A travers la musique,” *L’Indépendant*, c. 1881 or 1882, Recueil Holmès.
When I say that Mademoiselle Holmès is directly inspired by Richard Wagner, I speak of a general inspiration, not of these exact reminiscences which abound in the work of musicians without individual talent. Thus one finds under the pen of Duvernay a large quantity of phrases or musical snippets literally borrowed from composers of all schools; with Mlle Holmès, on the contrary, one perceives indisputably a superior influence, but one never runs into measures or passages literally copied from one place or the other…

[Quand je dis que Mlle Holmès s’inspire directement de Richard Wagner, je parle d’une inspiration générale, non de ces réminiscences exactes qui abondent chez les musiciens sans talent personnel. Ainsi l’on retrouvait sous la plume de M. Duvernoy quantité de phrases ou de bribes musicales empruntées littéralement aux compositeurs de toutes les écoles; chez Mlle Holmès, au contraire, on perçoit une influence supérieure indiscutable, mais en ne se heurté pas à des mesures, à des passages copiés littéralement de droite et de gauche…] 89

Perhaps the most thoughtful meditation on Holmès’s relationship to Wagner came from the pen of Jacques Hermann in Le Constitutionnel. Hermann begins by critiquing the tendency of many writers to label as a “Wagnerian” any composer who writes in anything other than an old-fashioned, characteristically French idiom. He continues by noting that those musicians who draw inspiration from Wagner each do so in their own fashion, and concludes that Holmès’s Wagnerism, fervent as it is, neither adds nor detracts from her considerable artistic merit. Hermann’s article is worth quoting at some length:

“…Mlle Holmès has long been described, among both her admirers and enemies, with the epithet “Wagnerian.” She shares this honor with many others. When, what is already a long time ago, several French musicians introduced new forms in their songs or their compositions and apparently dared to do differently than their predecessors, people immediately strove to find a model for them. They were first called Germans, then more specifically Wagnerians. Without a doubt,


89 Jullien, “Revue Musicale,” Le Français, 2 May 1881. See also Reyer, Journal des Débats, 29 April 1881; and reviews in Le Voltaire and Le Soir, both preserved in the Recueil Holmès.
the author of *Tristan und Isolde* vastly modified the processes of instrumentation and the forms of singing. Also, without a doubt, the truth of most of his theories has mostly struck open, intelligent, and audacious spirits. But, for all that, modern French musicians who do not write like Halévy, Auber or Adolphe Adam are not necessarily Wagnerian. This word, as I understand it, must annoy several of our young masters, because it seems to say: imitator of Wagner. As for the audience, to which this idea is suggested when bad music in modern form is played, it says: it is Wagner, which is to say, it is boring. So that with the French obsession to categorize everything, to define everything, there are only Germans or Italians, partisans of the *Ring* tetralogy or of *Le Comte Ory*. This is false. And then, among our young masters, those who are the most fervent disciples of the Wagnerian school do so each in their own way, and sometimes so little! Reyer is called Wagnerian, but he is also a Berliozist, and Gluckist, and Mozartist, therefore, because all the great masters, well before Wagner, dreamed of the perfect union of drama and music, the color of instrumentation, and the truth of expression. And Saint-Saëns: Wagnerian. Not so much as people think. He loves and admires Wagner’s beautiful works, like any intelligent musician who knows his art ought to love and admire them. But as a composer, it lessens him considerably to always think of him as working from a model. Saint-Saëns is himself, and *Samson et Dalila*, no more than *Etienne Marcel*, are Wagnerian works only in the search for grand principles of truth which Wagner devoted his life to as an artist. And Gounod and Massenet? Nothing Wagnerian in their musical temperament, no more than they have anything of Berlioz or Gluck; this does not prevent them from following, from afar, the path of which Gounod himself said: “The path where this man walks is a furrow of fire.”

Be that as it may, let us not abuse words. But since it is common to wonder when one speaks of a new musician, “is he a Wagnerian?”, I will say in turn that the author of *Les Argonautes* seems to me to have the most Wagnerian musical temperament that exists in France. And this neither removes nor adds anything to her true talent.

[…il y a longtemps que Mlle Holmès est désignée, et parmi ses admirateurs, et parmi ses ennemis, sous l’épithète de wagnérienne. Elle partage cet honneur avec bien d’autres. Lorsque, il y a longtemps déjà, quelques musiciens français introduisirent dans leurs mélodies ou leurs compositions de nouvelles formes, et qu’ils parurent oser faire autrement que leurs devanciers, on s’ingénia aussitôt à leur trouver un modèle, et on les appela d’abord allemands, puis plus spécialement wagnériens. Sans doute, l’auteur de *Tristan et Iseult* a considérablement modifié, les procédés d’instrumentation, les formes du chant. Sans doute aussi, la vérité de la plupart de ses théories, a frappé plus ou moins les esprits ouverts, intelligents et audacieux par eux-mêmes. Mais pour cela, tous les musiciens français modernes qui n’écrivent pas comme Halévy, Auber ou Adolphe Adam, ne sont pas nécessairement des wagnériens. Ce mot, je le conçois, doit finir par agacer quelques-uns de nos jeunes maîtres, car c’est un peu comme si l’on disait: imitateur de Wagner. Quant au public, à qui l’on souffle cette idée, lorsqu’il entend de la mauvaise musique aux formes modernes, il dit: C’est du Wagner; c’est-à-dire, c’est ennuyeux. De sorte qu’avec la manie française de tout parquer, de tout circonscrire, il n’y a plus que des Allemands ou des Italiens, des partisans de la tétralogie des *Niebelungen*, ou des partisans du *Comte Ory*. C’est faux. Et puis, parmi nos jeunes maîtres, ceux qui sont le plus des disciples de l’école wagnérienne, le sont chacun à sa manière, et quelquefois
si peu! M. Reyer est dit wagnérien, mais il est aussi berlioziste, et gluckiste, et mozartiste, alors, car tous les grands maîtres, bien avant Wagner, ont rêvé la parfaite union du drame avec la musique, le coloris de l’instrumentation et la vérité de l’expression. Et M. Saint-Saëns: wagnérien. Pas autant qu’on le pense. Il aime, il admire les belles œuvres de Wagner, comme tout musicien intelligent, et qui sait son art, doit les aimer et les admirer. Mais, comme compositeur, c’est l’amoirdir considérablement que de le représenter sans cesse les yeux sur un modèle. M. Saint-Saëns est lui-même, et Samson et Dalila, non plus qu’Etienne Marcel ne sont des œuvres wagnériennes, autrement que par la recherche des grands principes de vérité, auxquels Wagner a consacré sa vie d’artiste. Et MM. Gounod et Massenet? rien de wagnérien, ceux-là, dans leur tempérament musical, pas plus qu’ils n’ont celui de Berlioz ni de Gluck; cela n’empêche pas qu’ils ont suivi aussi, de très loin, le chemin dont M. Gounod disait lui-même: “Le chemin où marche cet homme est un sillon de feu.”

Quoi qu’il en soit, n’abusons point des mots, mais puisqu’il est en usage de se demander, quand on parle d’un nouveau musicien, est-ce un wagnérien? je dirai à mon tour que l’auteur des Argonautes me paraît le tempérament musical le plus wagnérien qu’il y ait en France. Et cela n’ôte ni n’ajoute rien à son réel talent.]

If one accepts Hermann’s premise that Wagnerian appropriation was a highly individualized phenomenon, most critics would have agreed that Holmès’s particular brand of Wagnerism was marked by its masculinity. Reviewers tended to conflate her stylistic influences and her gendered characteristics, perhaps more so because she was a woman: for many of Holmès’s contemporaries, then, her Wagnerism and her virility were one and the same.

Of Sirens and Sorceresses

Beyond gendering Holmès’s musical idiom as masculine, many critics also suggested that the dramatic arc of Les Argonautes conveyed a male-oriented subjectivity. Understandably, the heroes of the piece are Jason and his band of sailors, but Holmès does little to develop—or engender sympathy for—the work’s female characters. With

90 Hermann, Le Constitutionnel, 26 April 1881.
the exception of two young girls who encourage the protagonists on their journey at the piece’s outset, the women in *Les Argonautes*—the Sirens in Part Two, Medea’s attendants in Part Three, and Medea herself—represent little more than diversions (at best) or dangers (at worst) in Jason’s quest for the Golden Fleece. In this final portion of the chapter, I will consider how Holmès represents each group of women in *Les Argonautes*, and how these portrayals shaped public perceptions of her virility.

The first extended passage for women’s voices occurs shortly after the outset of Part Two, “Le Voyage.” The Argonauts have encountered a storm on the high sea (with more musical recollections of *Der fliegende Holländer*), and out of the tumult a single soprano voice emerges. It is a Siren, urging the sailors to abandon their journey. Her repeated entreaties of “Oubliez!” [forget], accompanied by murmuring string tremolando and woodwind trills, feature coy semitonal neighbor motion away from the A-flat tonic (ex. 2.4a). The music shifts to the remote key of F-sharp major and she and her companions (represented by a women’s chorus) declare in a lithe chromatic line: “L’or fuit, l’amour trahit, la gloire est éphémère! Moi, je suis l’immortel Plaisir!” [Gold flees, love betrays, glory is fleeting! Me, I am immortal Pleasure!] (ex. 2.4b).
Ex. 2.4b. Les Argonautes, Part 2, “L’or fuit, l’amour trahit...”
The Sirens’ lyrical, chromatic music stands in pointed contrast to the diatonic, rhythmically square idiom that characterizes the male characters. The Argonauts’ first texted entrance of the piece, for instance, features an angular, pentatonic melody that avoids leading functions (ex. 2.5a). After the Sirens’ final exhortation, the Argonauts catch sight of land and express their gratitude in a reverent chorale, “Oui, voici la rive promise” [Yes, here is the promised shore], characterized by functional triadic harmonies in a homophonic texture (ex. 2.5b).
Ex. 2.5b. *Les Argonautes*, Part 2, “Oui, voici la rive promise”
Ex. 2.5b (continued)
Several reviewers commented on the pronounced shift in style between the Sirens’ music and the Argonauts’ chorale. André Wormser, the writer for *L’Indépendante*, was one of the few critics who favored the latter. Wormser found the Sirens’ harmonies “morbid and irritating,” likening their song to “the subtle perfume of poisoned flowers.” He preferred the “simple and triumphant” chorale of the Argonauts, in which he heard echoes of Félicien David. Most writers held the opposite opinion. Hermann found the Argonauts’ final chorale “commonplace, almost vulgar,” and lamented that Holmès had momentarily abandoned the “essentially modern temperament” that she demonstrated in the Sirens’ music. Octave Fouque, one of the City of Paris Prize panelists who had voted for *Les Argonautes*, praised the Sirens’ song as “sweet, sultry, intoxicating.” Bazire gave special mention to Thérèse Panchioni’s execution of the solo part, suggesting she seduced not only the Argonauts, but also the listeners in the audience:

Suddenly a pure, crystalline voice breaks forth from the tumult. It is the siren seductress who attempts to exercise her cruel fascination. The aria, charmingly seductive and marvelously detailed by Mademoiselle Panchioni, transports the entire room. The sailors are enticed. Who wouldn’t be? They will give in.

91 “Mais de l’apparition et du chant des Sirènes se dégage un charme pénétrant, comme le parfum subtil de fleurs empoisonnées… Après les harmonies morbides et énervantes du chœur des sirènes, c’est le chant simple et triomphant de l’âme humaine en fête; c’est bien une apothéose dans le bleu.” André Wormser, *Feuilleton de l’Indépendante*, c. February or March 1882.


[Tout à coup une pure voix cristalline s’échappe du tumulte. C’est la sirène séduisante qui tente d’exercer sa fascination cruelle. L’air d’un charme exquis, et merveilleusement détaillé par Mlle Panchioni, soulève toute la salle. Les matelots sont attirés. Qui ne le serait? Ils vont succomber.]

Bazire implies that a transference has occurred between the symphonie dramatique and real life; the listeners, like the sailors, want to succumb to Holmès’s seductive, intoxicating strains. Even reviewers who expressed reservations about the piece, including Victor Wilder and Victor Dolmetsch of Le Ménestrel, singled out the Sirens’ passages for praise. Although these critics disagreed in their judgments, all perceived a striking difference in Holmès’s portrayal of female and male characters.

Holmès brings this difference into even sharper focus in Part Three of Les Argonautes, “Médée.” The section opens with a “magical dance” on the deserted shore of Colchis; the moon illuminates the night sky. Medea’s attendants perform the rites of Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft. An extended orchestral introduction sets the otherworldly tone. Solo woodwinds exchange serpentine, altered-scale runs above a hypnotic, static bass line. Triangle and cymbals, conventional signifiers of the Orient, punctuate the texture (ex. 2.6a). The first vocal entrance, by the contraltos singing in unison, features an exotic raised fourth scale degree (ex. 2.6b).

95 See Le Ménestrel, 7 May 1881 and 5 March 1882.
96 Although Les Argonautes was intended for concert performance, the score and published libretto include “staging” indications of this sort.
Ex. 2.6a. Les Argonautes, beginning of Part 3

En Calchide. Une rive déserte. La nuit. Médée et ses compagnes accomplissent les rites du culte d'Hécate. La lune brille.

DANSE MAGIQUE.

All'to un poco ritenuto \( \text{\( \text{d'88} \)} \)
Holmès’s use of exoticist signifiers in the *danse magique* is unique in her oeuvre; in no other mature large-scale concert work does she employ Orientalist techniques.\(^{97}\)

Reviewers marveled at the unusual quality of this music, and a number of writers described Holmès’s techniques in considerable detail. Édouard Durranc of *La Justice* recounted:

> The third part begins with a magical dance, which greatly interested us because of the deliberate strangeness of its design. Here color abounds. There is a true erudition to the orchestration. Mlle Holmès has taken the most disparate timbres and maliciously combined them to play a trick on the ear. From time to time, a cymbal stroke breaks the measure on the offbeat. It is diabolically bizarre.

[La troisième partie commence par une danse magique, qui nous a beaucoup intéressé par la bizarrerie voulue du dessin. Ici la couleur abonde. Il y a là une]

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véritable science d’orchestration. Mlle Holmès a pris les timbres les plus
disparates, et les a malicieusement associés pour jouer un tour à l’oreille. De
temps en temps, un coup de cymbale coupe la mesure à contre temps. C’est
bizarre en diable.]

Marcel Girette from *Le Télégraphe* made similar observations:

The magical dance that opens the act begins with strange, delightful orchestral
effects for the wind instruments. The winds perform scales and trills with the
most pleasing effect. The chorus that follows, “Gather the hellebore and the
wormwood,” with its accompaniment of arpeggiated chords, the contraltos’ slow
vocalise, and the strange fall from A-sharp to E, is both graceful and sinister.

[La danse magique qui ouvre l’acte débute par des effets d’orchestration bizarres
et délicieux pour les instruments à vent. Les bois exécutent des gammes et des
trilles du plus heureux effet. Le chœur qui suit, “Cueillez l’ellébore et
l’absinthe,” avec son accompagnement d’accords arpégés, la vocalise lente des
contraltos et la chute bizarre du la dièze [sic] au mi, est à la fois gracieux et
sinistre.]

A series of abrupt chords introduces Medea’s solo invocation to Hecate. Unique
among the women of *Les Argonautes*, she sings in an authoritative style marked by
assertive declamation, sharp dotted rhythms, and angular leaps. A number of critics heard
echoes of Gluck in this passage. Medea’s authority befits her status as the daughter of a
king and granddaughter of Helios, the god of the sun. As Pasler observes, her aggressive
music suggests that Medea and Jason are similar in character and that the sorceress
perhaps embodies Hecate herself. Following the invocation, Medea’s attendants launch

100 See reviews by Lavoix and Fouque. Hermann specifically recalls “la scène dramatique de la
haine d’Armide.”
101 Pasler, “The Ironies of Gender,” 18. Medea was the niece of Circe, a minor goddess of magic.
By most ancient accounts, Circe was the daughter of Helios, but other sources suggest she was
the daughter of Hecate, in which case Medea might have been Hecate’s granddaughter.
into a feverish *Allegro feroce* in 6/8. At the climax they exclaim: “Égorgez la brebis bêlante! L’offrande sanglante calme la soif du fer! Frappez la cymbale sonore!” [Cut the throat of the bleating ewe! The bloody offering calms the blade’s thirst! Strike the sonorous cymbal!] (ex. 2.7a) The insistent trochaic accompaniment with chromatic motion against a tonic pedal recalls Méphistophélès’s aria “Le Veau d’or”—a celebrated excerpt from Gounod’s *Faust* whose sinister overtones would have resonated with many Parisian listeners (ex. 2.7b).
Ex. 2.7a. Les Argonautes, Part 3, “Egorgez la brebis bêlante”
Ex. 2.7b. Faust, “Le Veau d’or”
Even though *Les Argonautes* was performed without staging, the savage nature of the sorceress and her attendants was not lost on the audience. Holmès’s music elicited striking visual descriptions from critics. Bazire recounted: “A frenzied dance is unleashed, impassioned, wild, like a whirlwind, only brought to an end by the dawn that shines in the distance.”102 Fouque imagined the women dancing around their slaughtered victims.103 Another writer described the women as “half-naked, disheveled, magnificent.”104

Holmès conveys the insidious charm of the Sirens and the savage allure of the sorceresses—in a word, their difference—through coded signifiers of femininity: sinuous, lyrical melodies and non-functional chromaticism. Moreover, she represents Medea’s attendants with standard nineteenth-century tropes of musical exoticism, conflating their gender difference with cultural difference.105 The portrayal of these women stands in stark contrast to the prevailing virile idiom of *Les Argonautes*. Put another way, Holmès overdetermines the gender of the Sirens and sorceresses, signaling their femininity with received notions of how women ought to sound. By “writing like a man” except when she portrays groups of women, Holmès participates in the Othering of her own gender.


104 “demi-nues, échevelées, superbes.” Unsigned article in *La Ville de Paris*, 27 February 1882.

Paradoxically, she perpetuates conventions for representing women that, as McClary notes, have largely been constructed by men:

There is … no traditional women’s voice. Worse yet, there is a bogus tradition of “how women sound” in European classical music—a code developed and transmitted by men, in which women are either docile and passive (Monteverdi’s Euridice, Bizet’s Micaëla, Mozart’s Pamina) or else man-devouring harpies (Monteverdi’s Poppea, Mozart’s Queen of the Night, Bizet’s Carmen, Strauss’s Salome).

McClary’s characterization of “man-devouring harpies” is apt for the sorceresses, and arguably fits their leader even better. After all, Medea cries at one point in her incantation: “Du sang! du sang! Hécata veut du sang! Arrachez le cœur des victimes…” [Blood! blood! Hecate wants blood! Rip out the hearts of the victims…]

On the other hand, Medea’s commanding vocal idiom in this passage could suggest that she serves as a proxy for the composer herself, implying a more sympathetic reading of the character. Because Holmès’s contemporaries so often conflated her persona with her works—usually as a champion of nationalistic causes, but more fundamentally as a strong, “virile” woman—Medea’s assertiveness hints at a convergence between the character’s mezzo-soprano utterances and Holmès’s authorial voice. It is worth remembering that Holmès was herself a gifted mezzo who often performed in private settings.

The remainder of Part Three appears to offer traces of a female authorial presence. When the sorceress first encounters Jason, she is suspicious of his motives and continues to sing in her characteristic declamatory manner. But she eventually succumbs to Eros and volunteers to assist the Argonauts in their quest for the Golden Fleece,

106 McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 114.
knowing full well this constitutes a betrayal of “mon peuple, et mes dieux, et mon père” [my people, my gods, and my father]. Medea offers an ironic commentary on her destiny when Jason finally asks her identity:

**Jason:** Toi qui m’aimes, qui donc es-tu?
**Médée:** Je fus Médée! Pour toi je ne suis plus qu’une femme au cœur doux!
   Vois! celle qui tombe à genoux
   Fut la fille d’un roi par l’enfer même aidée!

[Jason: You who love me, who are you then?
Medea: I was Medea! For you I am now only a gentle-hearted woman!
Look! The one who falls to her knees
Was the daughter of a king aided even by hell!]

Medea’s use of the past tense (“Je fus Médée”) and Holmès’s indication to sing “avec mépris” [with scorn] reveal that the sorceress will not relinquish her agency without protest. No sooner has Jason accepted her aid that she launches into a diatribe of self-loathing and regret:

**Médée:** O remords! o terreurs! o trahison infâme!
   Vile lacheté de la femme
   Qui livre tout l’honneur pour une heure d’amour!
   Mon père en cheveux blancs!
   O Colchos! ma patrie!

[Medea: Oh remorse! oh terrors! oh despicable betrayal!
Vile cowardice of the woman
Who sacrifices all honor for an hour of love!
My white-haired father!
O Colchis! my homeland!]

Holmès captures Medea’s internal conflict by juxtaposing two musical ideas: an *agitato* chromatic figure that descends in two-note bursts, and a lyrical, diatonic motive representing love. The Sorceress then hears voices foretelling her downfall:

**Médée:** J’entends déjà dans l’herbe qui murmure,
Dans le vent qui s’enfle et grandit
En longs gémissements sur ma coupable tête,
La voix des noirs démons crier:
“arrête! arrête! Ton amour est maudit!
Profanatrice des mystères,
Ton amour sera profané!
L’homme a qui ton cœur s’est donné
Oubliera tes baisers en des bras adultères!
Toi qui fuis, l’amour te fuira;
Traîtresse, tu seras trahie!
Reine qui possédas les secrets de la vie,
Tu vas les partager, et ton âme mourra!”

[Medea: I already hear in the murmuring grass
In the wind that swells and grows
In a long whimper above my guilty head
The voice of black demons crying:
“Stop! stop! Your love is cursed!
Profaner of mysteries,
Your love will be profaned!
The man to whom you have given your heart
Will forget your kisses in adulterous arms!
You who flee, love will flee from you;
Traitress, you will be betrayed!
Queen who possessed the secrets of life,
You will share them, and your soul will die!”
]

Jason allays Medea’s fears, promising that the two will reign together. Leaping up to a high B, sung pianissimo in head voice, he declares: “Mets dans ma main ta main qui tremble, et fais de tes cheveux ma couronne de roi!” [Put your trembling hand in mine, and make from your hair my king’s crown!] (ex. 2.8) Citing the “Flower Song” from Carmen, “Mon cœur s’ouvre à ta voix” from Samson et Dalila, and “Près des flots” from La Montagne noire, Henson suggests that quiet singing at the high end of the tenor range “perhaps indicates submission” in its vulnerability. But here the paradigm is reversed. Instead of the heroic tenor submitting to the femme fatale, it is Medea who succumbs to Jason’s treacherous charms. The final word of Jason’s proclamation aligns with a perfect

107 Henson, “In the House of Disillusion,” 249.
authentic cadence in E major, the same key as the Dutchman and Senta’s love music at the conclusion of Act II of *Der fliegende Holländer*. This harmonic resolution—the first definitive arrival point in the scene—provides a sonic manifestation of Medea’s acquiescence. The remainder of Part Three is dedicated to an extended love duet.

**Ex. 2.8. Les Argonautes, Part 3, “Mets dans ma main ta main qui tremble”**
In Part Four, “La Toison d’or” (The Golden Fleece), the two protagonists encounter “Les Gardiens du trésor” (The Guardians of the Treasure) in a sacred forest.

Medea now suffers the consequences of Jason’s seduction; with the Golden Fleece at hand, Jason abruptly and cruelly abandons the sorceress. Here the apparent convergence of composer and character becomes more tenuous. Medea is no longer the strong personality from Part Three, but a helpless, spurned woman. When the Guardians ask Jason, “As-tu vaincu ton cœur?” [Have you conquered your heart?], he responds: “Je n’aime que la gloire!” [I love only glory!] Medea is incredulous:

Médée: Et moi? d’hier déjà s’efface la mémoire!
Se peut-il que déjà mon sort soit accompli,
Qu’au seuil de l’avenir je sois abandonnée?
Que de mon front trop tôt pâli
L’on arrache déjà la guirlande fanée?
Quoi! j’aurai tout donné,
Beauté, pudeur, savoir,
J’aurai fui lâchement mon père et ma patrie,
Violé mes autels et trahi mon devoir
Pour n’obtenir de toi que l’amertume et l’espoir
Par mon crime suis-je trahie?

[And me? The memory of yesterday already disappears!
Is it possible that my fate is already realized,
That at the threshold of the future I am abandoned?
That from my forehead, too soon faded
The withered garland is already torn off?
What! I would have given everything,
Beauty, modesty, knowledge,
I would have shamefully fled my father and my homeland,
Desecrated my altars and betrayed my duty
Only to obtain from you bitter despair
For my crime am I betrayed?]

But Jason frames his decision as a choice between earthly pleasures and immortal transcendence:

Jason: Esprits! accordez-moi le courage cruel
De m’arracher du cœur cet amour qui m’enchaîne!
Qu’un amour immortel anéantissoye en moi toute faiblesse humaine!
J’ai vaincu les plaisirs, les terreur et la mort
Je vaincray l’amour de la femme!
Que ce suprême effort
Affranchissez à jamais mon âme!
Gloire, apparaîs!

[Spirits! Grant me the cruel courage
To tear from my heart this love that chains me!
May an immortal love crush all human weakness in me!
I conquered pleasures, terror, and death
I will conquer woman’s love!
May this supreme effort
Free my soul forever!
Glory, appear!]

Jason renounces Medea with a final declaration: “O pauvre femme! Je ne t’aime pas!”

[Oh poor woman! I do not love you!] The only response she can muster is “Ah! grands
Dieux!” [Ah! Great Gods!] Thereafter she falls silent. The Guardians of the Treasure summon Jason to “viens et sois roi” [come and be king], and a concluding general chorus proclaims his success.

Many reviewers expressed surprise that Holmès altered the conclusion of the legend to accord Medea less importance. Crespel observed: “She is no longer the magician by whom the enterprise succeeds, but rather a last obstacle that Jason finds on his quest.” Jullien rationalized this change by noting that the sooner Jason betrays Medea, the sooner she is punished for betraying her father. Saint-Saëns remarked that Jason’s renunciation of love parallels themes in the Ring cycle and in Grail lore. He found the work’s conclusion all the more remarkable coming from a female composer:

Treating mythology a little in the manner of the painter Moreau, the author has transformed her subject: her Golden Fleece has become similar to the Rheingold and the Grail, a symbol of the ideal, “renown forever pure,” an inaccessible absolute. To conquer it, as to seize the Rheingold, one must damn love. The true idea of the poem is that he who aims for the highest ideal must sacrifice all that makes ordinary souls happy… It has almost been the rule in poetic works to sacrifice everything for love. It is curious that a woman has done the opposite. It is a lesson given to man by woman from which man will not profit.

[Traitant la mythologie un peu à la façon du peintre Moreau, l’auteur a transfiguré son sujet: sa Toison d’or est devenue quelque chose dans le genre de l’Or du Rhin et du Graal, un symbole d’idéal, un “renom toujours pur,” un absolu inaccessible. Pour la conquérir comme pour s’emparer de l’Or du Rhin, il faut maudire l’amour. L’idée vraie du poème est que celui qui vise à un idéal très élevé doit tout lui sacrifier de ce qui fait le bonheur des âmes vulgaires… Il était presque de règle, dans les œuvres poétiques, de tout sacrifier à l’amour. Il est

108 “Elle n’est plus la magicienne par qui l’entreprise réussit, mais bien plutôt un dernier obstacle que Jason trouve sur sa route, avant de pénétrer jusqu’au Bois Sacré et à la Toison d’Or.” Crespel, La Clairon, 28 April 1881.

109 “C’était le droit strict de Mlle Holmès de modifier une histoire aussi peu historique à sa volonté. Plus tôt Jason trahit Médée et plus tôt Médée est punie de sa trahison filiale; ainsi, Mlle Holmès venge la morale outragée et flétrit Jason adulte; on ne peut que l’en féliciter.” Jullien, Le Français, 2 May 1881.
Most critics understood the same message: in order to achieve true greatness, one must forgo things that ordinary people enjoy. By this logic, Jason’s abandonment of Medea is not only justifiable, but necessary; she represents the last test to determine if Jason is worthy of the Golden Fleece. Alternatively, Medea’s cruel fate could serve as a morality tale about the perils of succumbing to passion, or of betraying one’s homeland. In either case, the sorceress’s unceremonious denouement consigns her to the same peripheral status as her attendants. Like the other women of Les Argonautes, Medea is, in the final assessment, an outsider.

* * *

Critics in Third Republic France justified their assessment of Les Argonautes as a “virile” work on both musical and dramatic grounds. Holmès employs an assertive idiom that many listeners associated with Wagner, and by extension, with masculinity. She portrays the women characters as expendable (Medea) or threatening (the Sirens), encoding their difference through a conventionalized language of femininity. Although some observers criticized Holmès for betraying her feminine nature, the virility of Les Argonautes may ultimately have been a key to the success of both the work and the composer—at least through the 1880s. Reviewing La Montagne noire in 1895, Jullien lamented that Holmès’s later compositions—Ludus pro patria, the Ode triomphale, and

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most of all, her opera—abandoned the virile aesthetic of her earlier works in favor of a more feminized, “sickly sweet” (douceâtre) conception. Of *La Montagne noire* he wrote:

If this purported work of the theater is visibly one made up of several other operas, the music—and this is the most distressing—does not reveal the least originality in Mlle Holmès. She could have shown instead the rather personal charm and almost masculine vigor that distinguished her first works; these qualities gradually weaken as the author composes longer and thirsts for quick success. It is certain that her dramatic poem *Les Argonautes* … and her symphonic poems *Pologne* and *Irlande* revealed a very real and energetic talent with nothing of the feminine in them.

[Si cette prétendue pièce de théâtre est, visiblement, un composé d’une quantité d’autres opéras, la musique, - et c’est là le plus fâcheux, - ne décèle pas la moindre originalité chez Mlle Holmès. Elle montrerait plutôt que les qualités de charme assez personnel et de vigueur presque masculine qui distinguaient ses premiers ouvrages, vont s’affaiblissant à mesure que l’auteur compose davantage et qu’il a soif de succès plus rapides. Il est certain que son poème dramatique des *Argonautes* … et ses poèmes symphoniques de *Pologne* et d’*Irlande* décelaient un talent très réel, très énergique et qui n’avait rien de féminin.]

While Jullien lauded the virility of these early compositions, his categorical statement that *Les Argonautes* had “nothing of the feminine” about it fails to give due credit to Holmès’s thoughtful balance of gendered characteristics. In fact, the sensual love duet that ends Part Three was, by many accounts, the most favorably received portion of the work. And Holmès appears to have had a fondness for the music of the women of *Les Argonautes*. Following the piece’s success in 1881 and 1882, she attempted to secure a performance of the piece by the most prestigious orchestra in Paris, the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. In a letter to the Société des Concerts from January 1884, Holmès declared that a performance would be an “immense honor.”

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noted that if the orchestra could not present her *symphonie dramatique* in its entirety, Part Two or Three would suffice—the very sections that focused on female characters.  

Although the Société des Concerts rarely programmed works by living composers, it presented “Médée” on two programs in January 1885. Holmès also chose to program Part Three of *Les Argonautes* on a special concert of her music in Rouen in 1896. Holmès’s own appraisal of the piece, then, suggests a complex approach to gender that resists categorization in absolute terms. Although she embraced a virile idiom that won her critical acclaim, the most compelling moments in her *symphonie dramatique* may, in the final assessment, ultimately transcend labels of masculinity and femininity.

113 Pasler, “The Ironies of Gender,” 4n.

114 In March 1888, the orchestra premiered Holmès’s *ode-symphonie Ludus pro patria*. This was the first time the Société des Concerts premiered a composition by a woman.

115 See *Le Ménestrel*, 14 June 1896.
CHAPTER THREE
ERNEST CHAUSSON’S Viviane, “DÉWAGNÉRISATION,”
AND THE PROBLEM OF DESCRIPTIVE MUSIC

The greatest shortcoming of my drama [Le Roi Arthus] is no doubt the resemblance of its subject to that of Tristan. That wouldn’t be so bad if I could manage to dewagnerize myself. Wagnerian in the subject and Wagnerian in the music, isn’t that too much at the same time?

[Le plus gros défaut de mon drame est sans doute l’analogie du sujet avec celui de Tristan. Cela ne serait rien encore, si je pouvais arriver à me déwagnériser. Wagnérien par le sujet et wagnérien par la musique, n’est-ce pas trop à la fois?]¹

Chausson wrestled with Wagner’s legacy throughout his career. He made no secret of his veneration of the elder composer; during a trip to Munich in 1879, he praised Tristan und Isolde as a “sublime” work, and his review of the premiere of Parsifal described Wagner’s final music drama as “one of the most astonishing works of modern genius.”²

When Chausson married Jeanne Escudier in 1883, the newlyweds even spent a portion of their honeymoon at Bayreuth. (Jeanne’s opinion about the honeymoon locale has not, to my knowledge, been recorded.) Yet Chausson’s admiration for Wagner did not translate into facile emulation of his music. Chausson’s correspondence and writings from the 1880s and 90s reveal a consistent preoccupation with Wagner’s influence. As early as 1884, he complained to his friend Paul Poujaud of “this red specter of Wagner which does not release me. I’ve come to detest it.”³ Chausson wrote on several occasions of the

¹ Ernest Chausson, letter to Paul Poujaud, dated “Cannes, 1886,” reprinted in La Revue musicale 7 (1925), special issue on Ernest Chausson, 155.

need to “dewagnerize” himself. His appropriations of the maître de Bayreuth were also scrutinized by contemporaries. The poet Maurice Bouchor, who collaborated with Chausson on several occasions, opined that the composer’s magnum opus Le Roi Arthus (King Arthur) made little advance on Wagner and that it “must have seemed, even in its composer’s eyes, the work of an epigone.”

The relationship between Chausson and Wagner has continued to dominate modern-day studies of the French composer, most recently in Marie-Hélène Benoit-Otis’s study of Le Roi Arthus. Yet several questions deserve further exploration: what precisely did Chausson mean when he spoke of “dewagnerization”? How did this declaration translate, if at all, into a shift in Chausson’s musical language? Steven Huebner’s work on French Wagnerism, and on Chausson in particular, has done much to nuance our comprehension of a stylistic phenomenon that, until recently, has often been described in generalized terms. Meanwhile, other topics, such as Chausson’s attitudes toward musical

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narrative and programmaticism, remain comparatively underexplored. In this chapter, I hope to contribute to our understanding of Chausson’s aesthetics by exploring questions of influence and signification in parallel. My examination will center on the symphonic poem *Viviane*, op. 5, a little-known work from early in the composer’s career that shares Arthurian subject matter and musical material with *Le Roi Arthus*. The symphonic poem, which Chausson dedicated to his wife, opens with a love scene between Viviane (known as “Nimue” or “the Lady of the Lake” in some Arthurian sources) and the wizard Merlin. When Merlin attempts to rejoin King Arthur’s entourage, Viviane thwarts his departure by ensnaring him in an enchanted hawthorn blossom. Chausson began work on *Viviane*—his first composition for orchestra—in 1882, and it was premiered the following year at a concert of the Société nationale de musique under the direction of Édouard Colonne. Chausson made substantial revisions to the piece in 1887, and the published score from 1893 contains further changes.

This decade of work on the symphonic poem is coeval with several notable developments: a shift in Chausson’s attitude towards Wagner (he first spoke of “dewagnerization” in 1886); new ideas about orchestral composition and program music; and the bulk of the composition of *Le Roi Arthus*. Thus, the material record of sketches and revisions of *Viviane* offers a glimpse of Chausson’s evolving aesthetics during a formative time in his career. In the first part of this chapter, I will discuss the source materials for *Viviane* and trace how Chausson highlighted (in the case of Franck) or suppressed (in the case of Wagner) evidence of stylistic influence over the course of his revisions. While Chausson excised moments of obvious Wagnerian mimicry, *Viviane*
ultimately became more beholden to certain Wagnerian dramaturgical ideas. Then, I will explore other ways that Chausson’s idiom evolved, from his handling of orchestration to architectural concerns. In the course of his revisions, Chausson brought Viviane more closely in line with sonata procedures, inviting the listener to appreciate the work on its purely sonic merits at a time when the composer was becoming less sympathetic to the idea of “descriptive music.” Finally, I will discuss the connections between Viviane and Le Roi Arthus and explore how the symphonic poem may shed light on issues of influence and signification in Chausson’s opera.

Initial sketches

Preliminary sketches for Viviane appear in two of Chausson’s sketchbooks (F-Pn ms. 8837, vols. 1 and 2). The complete symphonic poem exists in three manuscript sources: a short score on four staves from 1882 signed and dated “Etampes 16 Septembre / Paris 8 Décembre / EC” (F-Pn ms. 8774); an orchestral version signed and dated “Paris, 23 février 1883 / Ernest Chausson” (F-Pn ms. 3943); and an orchestral revision with the annotation “Heiden, 23 Juli 87” at the beginning and signed “Paris, 15 Novembre 87 / EC” (F-Pn ms. 8775). (See Appendix 1 for further details.) Chausson made significant changes to the piece at each of these stages, and the score published by Bornemann in 1893 reflects further alterations. The sketch materials and initial drafts suggest that Chausson was aware of his stylistic debt to Franck and Wagner and actively sought to remove traces of the latter composer’s influence.

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The earliest material for *Viviane* is a sketch of a trumpet call from the middle of the symphonic poem, when King Arthur’s envoys search the forest for Merlin. This melody appears in Chausson’s sketchbook with the annotation “Cri d’une marchande des rues, à Marseille” (Cry of a street merchant in Marseilles) (Ex. 3.1). Chausson’s biographer Jean Gallois dates this notation to a voyage to Cannes in 1879. The melody appears on the same folio as sketches for *Hylas*, an unfinished work for solo vocalists, chorus, and orchestra, upon which Chausson labored in 1879 and 1880. The *Hylas* sketches include a number of variants on a harmonic progression with double chromatic neighbor motion similar to the opening of *Viviane* (Fig. 3.1). In light of Chausson’s simultaneous work on these sketches, it is conceivable that he knowingly transplanted this progression from the abandoned vocal work into the symphonic poem. At the least, the *Hylas* sketches suggest that Chausson had begun to develop a consistent harmonic idiom by this time.

Ex. 3.1. “Cri d’une marchande des rues, à Marseille.” *F-Pn* ms. 8837, vol. 1, p. 3

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Fig. 3.1. Sketches for *Hylas*. *F-Pn* ms. 8837, vol. 1, p. 3 (Reprinted from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la Musique)
Chausson began work on *Viviane* in earnest in the summer of 1882. He works out the melody Gallois labels the “love theme” or the “fairy’s call” (*appel de la Fée*) in a sketch signed and dated “Paris—Vincennes / Juillet 82.” Another sketchbook—the same volume that holds the 1879 trumpet melody—contains twelve additional pages of material, dated “Etampes / Aout-Septembre 82.” At the beginning of these sketches (f. 24) Chausson outlines a preliminary structure for the piece:

### Plan de Viviane

| (?)       | Forêt enchantée (Prélude) |
| A =       | Phrase de Viviane         |
| B =       | Phrase de Merlin (plus passionné) |
| C =       | Marche d’Arthus [based on a “vieux chant populaire breton” which Chausson notates at the top of the page] |
| D =       | Reprise de A et B, plus vite, très agité |
| E =       | Enchantement de Merlin et fin très calme |

This outline bears little resemblance to the work’s eventual program. Sections A through D have no clear analogue in the completed score, and the theme for Arthur’s march does not appear in any later materials. Yet this early plan affirms the programmatic significance of the two sections that remained unchanged from Chausson’s original conception. The introduction evokes the magical forest of Brocéliande, and the conclusion—derived from the opening music—depicts Merlin’s enchantment by Viviane.

Interspersed through the following pages in the sketchbook are annotated quotations of works by other composers, revealing possible sources of inspiration and points of comparison during the symphonic poem’s gestation. On folio 31 of the sketchbook, Chausson writes out an excerpt from “Freyschütz” (presumably Weber’s

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8 *F-Pn* ms. 8837, vol. 2, p. 28.

9 *F-Pn* ms. 8837, vol. 1, p. 24-35.
opera) whose melodic contour resembles a passage in the 1882 and 1883 versions of
*Viviane*, but which Chausson removed from later versions. Other quotations reveal a debt
to Franck, whose organ class at the Conservatoire Chausson attended as an *auditeur libre*
between 1880 and 1883.\(^{10}\) On one page, Chausson writes out a section from a “Franck
*Agnus Dei*”\(^{11}\), and on another (fig. 3.2), he notates a three-chord progression beneath the
annotation “Éolides”—a reference to a seminal thematic complex from Franck’s first
mature symphonic poem, *Les Éolides* (1875-76).\(^{12}\) The latter quotation is in a different
key and deviates slightly from the original, suggesting Chausson was reconstructing his
teacher’s composition from memory (ex. 3.2). In *Les Éolides*, Franck moves away from
the initial A major tonic triad through opposing chromatic neighbor motion away from
the fifth scale degree. The first violins move from E up to F natural, and an octave below,
the violas move from E down to D#. The resulting chord—A, C#, D#, F-natural—has a
hazy whole-tone coloration. Chausson’s version makes one chromatic modification.
Whereas Franck holds the third of the tonic chord constant, Chausson moves the third of

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\(^{10}\) Gallois, *Ernest Chausson*, 118.

\(^{11}\) *F-Pn* ms. 8837, vol. 1, p. 27. I have not been able to identify the source of this quotation. It
does not correspond to the *Agnus Dei*—or any other movement—from Franck’s one complete
setting of the Mass, the *Messe in A*, op. 12, which was first performed at St. Clotilde under the
composer’s direction in April 1861. Franck also composed a “Messe solennelle: O salutaris” in
1858, but this would not have been a complete setting of the Mass Ordinary. In his foreword to
the Carus edition (1989) of the *Messe in A*, editor Wolfgang Hochstein notes that the *Credo*
and *Agnus Dei* were “later revised or even completely rewritten” prior to the work’s publication in
1872. It is thus conceivable, if improbable, that Chausson could be recalling an earlier version of
the Franck Mass. Chausson is more likely referring to an unpublished work or an improvisation,
which seems quite plausible given the close contact between the two men in the early 1880s.
Alternatively, Chausson could have misremembered the source of the quotation.

\(^{12}\) Franck had written one earlier symphonic poem, *Ce qu’on entend sur la montagne* (after a
poem by Victor Hugo), between 1845 and 1847. Franz Liszt, who is often credited with inventing
the genre, began composing his first symphonic poem—inspired by the same Hugo work—in
1847.
an F major chord down to sharp-2, from A to G#. The alteration results in a German sixth sonority—spelled up from the bottom, F, B-natural, G#, D-flat—which sounds more functional than the original Franck progression. Further down the page, Chausson uses this misremembered progression at the beginning of a nine-measure sketch for the opening of *Viviane* (ex. 3.3). While a composer’s intentions and the patterning of influence can be notoriously difficult to prove, Chausson’s explicit invocation of *Les Éolides* suggests a knowing awareness and emulation of the elder composer.

**Ex. 3.2.** Chausson’s quotation of *Les Éolides*; Franck’s original

**Ex. 3.3.** Chausson’s first sketch for the opening of *Viviane*, *F-Pn* ms. 8837, vol. 1, p. 25
Fig. 3.2. Sketches for *Viviane*, *F-Pn* ms. 8837, vol. 1, p. 25 (Reprinted from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la Musique)
Another compositional influence runs throughout these pages—one just as significant as Franck, yet much more fraught—and perhaps for this reason, one that goes without explicit acknowledgment. I refer, of course, to Wagner. Several of Chausson’s sketches bear a strong resemblance to themes from *Parsifal*. One idea (f. 25) recalls Wagner’s “sorcery” leitmotif in its rhythm, contour, and chromaticism. Another (f. 26), while obviously patterned on the “Franck Agnus Dei,” also seems like an amalgamation of the opening measures of the *Parsifal* prelude and the Dresden Amen (ex. 3.4). Wagner’s final music drama was certainly on Chausson’s mind at the time he drafted these ideas. Chausson, like many French musicians and artists (such as Vincent d’Indy, Catulle Mendès, Judith Gautier, and Léo Delibes), traveled to Bayreuth in the summer of 1882 to attend the premiere of *Parsifal*. He published an extensive laudatory review of the work in *L’Art musical* that August—the very same month he sketched the material for *Viviane*.

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13 Chausson, “*Parsifal*,” *L’Art musical* 21, no. 32 (10 August 1882); 21, no. 33 (17 August 1882); 21, no. 34 (24 August 1882).
Wagnerism reconsidered

When Chausson worked the drafts for Viviane into a short score later that fall, he excluded the sketch materials with obvious Parsifalian echoes, but other traces of Wagner’s influence remained. The most striking sonic parallels are with Tristan, a work that Chausson had in his ears during the preparation of Viviane. In a letter to Vincent d’Indy from 1883, he writes, “this morning I have to correct the copies of a symphonic poem that I have the presumptuousness to present at the Société [nationale de musique], and beforehand, I would like to play several pages of Tristan. That’s legitimate, right?”

14 “Il faut ce matin que je corrige les copies d’un poème symphonique que j’ai l’outrecuidance de présenter à la Société, et, auparavant, je voudrais jouer quelques pages de Tristan. C’est légitime, n’est-ce pas?” Letter dated “Paris, mercredi matin [1883],” La Revue musicale 7 (1925): 129-130. The symphonic poem in question is certainly Viviane, since it was Chausson’s only orchestral composition to date.
Several moments at the opening of *Viviane*—the only section of the piece that Chausson left relatively intact through the revision process—bear notable resemblances to iconic moments in Wagner’s drama. A haunting unison passage for unaccompanied low strings echoes the pitch sequence, instrumentation, and mood of the closing measures of the *Tristan* prelude (ex. 3.5). A sequence several measures later seems to mimic the Tristan chord and its resolution. As in Wagner’s prelude, Chausson moves from a half-diminished sonority (m. 31) to a less dissonant, but still unstable chord (the D major chord in first inversion in m. 33), led by a chromatic ascent in the upper voice. Echoing the opening of *Tristan*, this progression is immediately repeated a third higher, and eventually settles on an extended dominant chord (the G₉ in m. 37) (ex. 3.6).

**Ex. 3.5. Viviane** (final version), mm. 21-25; *Tristan und Isolde*, end of Prelude to Act I

**Ex. 3.6a. Viviane** (final version), mm. 31-37

**Ex. 3.6b. Tristan und Isolde**, opening; mm. 16-17
Later in the 1883 version of the piece, the violas and cellos play two rising four-note gestures (E-flat, F, F#, G; D-flat, E-flat, E natural, F) whose rhythm and chromatic shape strongly echo Wagner’s “desire” motive (ex. 3.7). This incidence of mimicry occurs at the first moment when the 1883 orchestral version differs from the 1882 short score, with mm. 127-129 in the 1883 manuscript replacing six unrelated measures in the earlier version (see fig. 3.3). Chausson’s decision to replace this passage suggests that he devoted particular attention to these measures and may strengthen the possibility that he was aware of the resulting similarity to Tristan. When Chausson made more substantial revisions to the piece in 1887, he removed this section in its entirety. Since the later changes were coincident with Chausson’s goal of “dewagnerization” in the mid-1880s, the suppression of the “desire” motive echo—arguably the most explicit sonic invocation of Tristan in the 1883 version of Viviane—suggests that Chausson took pains to avoid the most obvious quotations of the elder composer.

Ex. 3.7. Viviane (1883 version), mm. 128-131
Fig. 3.3. Structural revisions to *Viviane*\(^{15}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1882 short score (MS 8774)</th>
<th>1883 orchestral score (MS 3943)</th>
<th>1887 revised score (MS 8775)</th>
<th>1893 published score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37-55. Opening music continued</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>56-126. Allegro (1882)/Animé (1883), loosely based on opening themes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Replaced by 127-129. (See ex. 7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>[6mm.]</td>
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<td>130-137</td>
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<tr>
<td>138-155. Plus lent (1882)/Un peu plus lent (1883), A major.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>47-64. Love theme played by vla/vc in C major (V); functions as 2(^{nd}) theme (S).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>156-190. Love theme continued</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>203-212. New material, A major, 2/2, Con moto (notated in tuplets, 1882)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>[1½ pp. crossed out]</td>
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<tr>
<td>233-328. Animé. Develops themes from m. 56ff. and m. 138ff.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>124-219. 2/2. Allegro. “Development,” reworks trumpet call, love theme, etc. [2mm.] = 1m. (131) [4mm.] = 2mm. (138-139)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>329-346. 6/8</td>
<td>220-227. 2/2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>fff climax on G half-diminished 7(^{th}) over C pedal, winding down to a low bare C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>347-355. Beaucoup plus lent, 6/8</td>
<td>228-236. Lent, 4/4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Retransition” over C pedal. 1887/1893 versions add trumpet theme echo</td>
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<tr>
<td>356-376</td>
<td>237-257</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Recapitulation” (cf. 1893 m. 25) in opening key (F major), meter, and tempo</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>377-392</td>
<td>258-267</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Transformation of love theme. Mm. 378-383 in 1883 version is deleted in 1887/1893.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>393-413</td>
<td>268-288</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic cadence in F major (functions as essential structural closure). Final statements of 1(^{st}) and 2(^{nd}) themes.</td>
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</tbody>
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\(^{15}\) My sonata terminology is adapted from James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
Beyond surface patternings, however, Wagner remained a powerful dramaturgical model. The resonances arguably became even more pronounced when Chausson revisited *Viviane* in 1887, a year after beginning work on *Le Roi Arthus*. The symphonic poem and the opera have broad parallelisms with *Tristan und Isolde*, including in the origins of the subject matter: the Tristan legend, like Chausson’s characters, has roots in Arthurian lore.\(^{16}\) As Gallois notes, Chausson was almost certainly aware of this connection because of his long-standing interest in Arthurian legend.\(^{17}\) Moreover, as Wagner’s music entered the Parisian musical mainstream in the 1880s, concert promoters took pains to note the French origins of several of Wagner’s works in order to defuse potential opposition on nationalist grounds. When the Concerts Lamoureux presented the prelude to *Tristan* in November 1886, for instance, the program notes indicated that the story was borrowed from French myths from the Middle Ages. In preparation for a performance of *Lohengrin* later in the 1886-87 season, Lamoureux’s annotator noted: “the myth of Lohengrin belongs to the legendary cycle of poems of the Holy Grail, and it is therefore of French origin.”\(^{18}\)

With respect to plot, *Viviane* resonates strongly with Act II of Wagner’s drama. Chausson’s protagonists, like Tristan and Isolde, rendezvous in seclusion. Both Wagner

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\(^{18}\) “…le mythe de *Lohengrin* appartient au cycle des poèmes légendaires du Saint-Graal, et qu’il est par conséquent d’origine française. [Dans le poème originaire, le chevalier qui en est le héros porte le nom d’Élie ou d’Hélie, et son origine se rattache à la généalogie fabuleuse de la maison d’Anjou.]” Program of the Concerts Lamoureux, 28 November 1886. The program notes for Lamoureux’s concert on 7 November 1886 open with this sentence: “La légende de *Tristan et Yseult* est empruntée au cycle des mythes français du moyen âge.”
and Chausson cast private romance in tension with public duty and fealty to the crown. Tristan is torn by his bond to King Marke; Merlin hears the summons of King Arthur and desires to serve. Chausson reinforces this Tristanesque subtext in the 1887 revision by placing the private/public opposition in sharper relief. He does this through a simple change in the work’s program and in the musical realization of this modification. The original scenario for Viviane, as printed in the concert program at the 1883 premiere, reads as follows:

Viviane and Merlin in the forest of Brocéliande. Love scene.
King Arthur’s envoys ride through the forest in search of Merlin.
Merlin hears them and wishes to join them.
Viviane, after trying in vain to keep him, locks him up forever in an enchanted hawthorn bush in bloom.

[Viviane et Merlin dans la forêt de Brocéliande. Scène d’amour.
Les envoyés du Roi Arthus parcourent la forêt à la recherche de Merlin.
Merlin les entend et veut les rejoindre.
Viviane, après avoir vainement essayé de le retenir, l’enferme à jamais dans un buisson enchanté d’aubépines en fleurs.]

This synopsis differs slightly from the one in the published score, which places greater emphasis on Merlin’s sense of duty:

Viviane and Merlin in the forest of Brocéliande. Love scene.
Trumpet calls. Envoys of King Arthur ride through the forest in search of the Enchanter. Merlin remembers his mission; he wants to flee and escape Viviane’s arms.
Scene of Enchantment. To keep him, Viviane puts Merlin to sleep and encloses him in a hawthorn bush in bloom.

[Viviane et Merlin dans la forêt de Brocéliande. Scène d’amour.
Appels de trompette. Des envoyés du Roi Arthus parcourent la forêt à la recherche de l’Enchanter.

19 Programs of the Société nationale de musique, 1871-1928, F-Pn Rés. 2483 (1-5). At the time of Viviane’s premiere, concert programs of the SNM typically included the scenarios of programmatic works (as they appear in the scores, where applicable) but no further commentary or explication.
Merlin se rappelle sa mission; il veut fuir et s’échapper des bras de Viviane. 
Scène de l’Enchantement. Pour le retenir, Viviane endort Merlin et l’entoure d’aubépines en fleurs.]

Chausson also adds a new detail to the revised program, making explicit mention of the trumpet calls that announce King Arthur’s envoys. This modification corresponds to a significant change in the dramatic structure of the symphonic poem. In the 1883 version, the trumpet calls (m. 191ff.) are first stated after the love scene finishes. The melody closely corresponds to the street merchant’s tune that Chausson had notated in his sketchbook some years earlier, and the accompaniment—a bare tremolo in the low strings—is minimal. Chausson preserves a similar statement of the trumpet call in the revision (m. 113ff.), but he now precedes it with a slow, dreamlike version played offstage during Viviane and Merlin’s love music. It is as if the melody were filtered through the lovers’ subjectivity, or introduced as a hazy premonition of the rupture to come. Following this statement, Chausson reprises the love theme proper one more time. Then the trumpet calls sound in tempo, as in the original version, and Merlin’s struggle begins.

By casting King Arthur’s summons against the backdrop of the love scene, Chausson’s revision frames the offstage trumpet call as an explicit interruption of the tryst. The scenario recalls Brangäne’s offstage warning about the impending daybreak in Act II, Scene 2 of Tristan: “Habet acht! Bald entweicht die Nacht.” In both cases, an invisible voice signals the intrusion of the public sphere into the private, presaging an end to blissful calm. The parallels with Wagner extend to the musical setting: the hushed string accompaniment, pulsing in syncopated, slow-moving harmonies, are a powerful sonic evocation of Tristan and Isolde’s love scene (ex. 3.8). The 1887 manuscript reveals
that Chausson originally wrote this passage in 4/4 meter and later modified the rhythmic values to remove one beat from each measure (fig. 3.4). In the published score, the first full measure of the melody (m. 93) remains in 4/4, but the rest of the passage is in triple meter—a shift that strengthens the music’s similarity to Tristan. While Chausson excised certain moments of facile Wagnerian mimicry throughout the composition and revision of Viviane, the most significant programmatic change in the 1887 revision results in a more Wagnerian scenario. The aural echo alone may be subtle, yet the overall effect is more compelling because the musical and dramaturgical parallels to Tristan reinforce one another.

Ex. 3.8a. Viviane (final version), mm. 92-96

Ex. 3.8b. Tristan und Isolde, Act II, Scene 2, Mässig langsam
Fig. 3.4. Viviane, 1887 manuscript (F-Pn ms. 8775), p. 10r (Reprinted from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la Musique)
A maturing orchestral idiom

Chausson’s revisions to *Viviane* were also motivated by concerns other than Wagnerism. Although he expressed satisfaction with the work’s premiere in 1883, Chausson conceded to d’Indy that there was room for improvement: “As for the details, I believe some would do well differently orchestrated. It isn’t clever… The next time I hope to do better.”

Chausson took this self-criticism to heart. By the time *Viviane* was published in 1893, he had completely reworked the piece, excising more than 200 measures and leaving only the opening and closing sections relatively intact. Of the material that remained, Chausson made significant changes to the texture and orchestration. Most of these alterations were finalized in the 1887 “brouillon de la réorchestration” (draft of the reorchestration), but the published score contains other minor adjustments. Chausson acknowledged the magnitude of these alterations in a letter to Robert Godet in 1888. In typically self-deprecating fashion, he dismisses *Viviane* as an immature work whose fundamental character cannot be changed, even by extensive rewriting:

> If you go to Lamoureux’s concert on Sunday, please excuse Viviane’s program. It is a work from my youth that I have redone in its entirety, in its composition and orchestration, but the core couldn’t change. Allow it for this one time; I will not write any more program music.

> [Si vous allez dimanche chez Lamoureux, excusez le programme de Viviane. C’est une œuvre de jeunesse que j’ai complètement refaite, comme composition et comme orchestre, mais le fond ne pouvait pas changer. Passez-le-moi pour cette fois-ci; je ne ferai plus de musique avec programme.]

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20 “Je ne vous cache pas, sans fausse modestie, que j’ai été très content de l’ensemble. Quant aux détails, il y en a bien qui gagneraient, je crois, à être différemment instrumentés. Ce n’est pas roublard. […] La prochaine fois j’espère faire mieux.” Ernest Chausson to Vincent d’Indy, dated “Paris, 26 avril 1883,” *La Revue musicale* 7 (1925), 130.

21 The letter is simply dated “Vendredi,” but since *Viviane* was performed at the Concerts Lamoureux on 29 January 1888, the letter presumably dates from 27 January. Reprinted in Ernest
While unduly modest, Chausson’s assessment of the two versions of *Viviane* was vindicated by the musical press, which was more favorable towards the latter version. (Chausson composed another symphonic poem towards the end of his life, but this does not mean he reneged on his promise to stop writing “musique avec programme,” for reasons I will explore later.) The one extant review of the 1883 premiere described the symphonic poem as “not clumsy, but young.” However, the author of this review acknowledged that the piece was well received by the audience and declared that Chausson had promise as a composer.²² When *Viviane* was performed for a wider audience at Jules Pasdeloup’s Concerts Populaires the following year, the critic from *Le Ménestrel* made light of the work’s program, declaring: “We heard a *Viviane* who could have been a Lénore, and a *Lénore* [by Henri Duparc] who could have been a *Viviane*.”²³ The reviewer from *La République Française* criticized Chausson’s attempts at musical narrative as well as his perceived indebtedness to Wagner: “It was with difficulty that we followed the twists and turns indicated in the program. There is certainly talent in this

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²³ “Nous avons entendu une *Viviane* qui aurait pu être une Lénore, et une *Lénore* qui aurait bien pu être une Viviane…” H. B., “Nouvelles diverses. Concerts et Soirées,” *Le Ménestrel* 50, no. 19 (6 April 1884): 151. The reviewer is most likely Hippolyte Barbedette (1827-1901), one of the more conservative, anti-Wagnerian critics who contributed to *Le Ménestrel*. 
piece, but the author seems more concerned with implementing certain methods of Wagner than in serving us a dish of his own making!”

After Chausson reworked the piece four years later, the work’s public reception improved. A reviewer from *L’Art musical* noted that the first performance of the revised version by Charles Lamoureux in 1888 “earned M. Chausson a fine success.” The critic for *Gil Blas*, most likely the Wagner enthusiast Victor Wilder, singled out the work for praise and spoke favorably of the work’s revisions:

On M. Lamoureux’s beautiful program, two pieces inspired particular interest in critics: a symphonic piece by M. Ernest Chausson, entitled *Viviane*; and Isolde’s *Liebestod*, the striking conclusion of *Tristan*, the admirable music drama by Richard Wagner.

Despite descriptive tendencies that I do not like, but from which it is easy to abstract oneself, the symphonic piece by M. Chausson pleased me greatly. In my opinion, it is the best composition by this young musician, whose personality has not yet fully emerged. The piece’s ideas are poetic and the instrumentation is of a charming color. *Viviane* is not a new piece; it was previously heard at M. Pasdeloup’s Concerts-Populaires; but, for this new hearing, the author had reworked it and developed it as perfectly as his talents allow.


Malgré des tendances descriptives que je n’aime pas, mais dont il est aisé de s’abstraire, la pièce symphonique de M. Chausson m’a fait grand plaisir. C’est à mon sens, la meilleure composition de ce jeune musicien, dont la personnalité n’est pas encore bien dégagée. Les idées en sont poétiques et l’instrumentation est d’une couleur charmante. *Viviane* n’est pas absolument un morceau inédit; on l’avait autrefois entendu aux Concerts-Populaires de M. Pasdeloup; mais, pour

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In the work’s new guise, *Viviane* won such popularity that by 1895 Chausson could boast to d’Indy: “This *Viviane* is really irrepressible. It’s a hit in the provinces and abroad. And now it’s caught on again in Paris!”27 The critical and popular enthusiasm for the revised symphonic poem was well-founded. The 1887 version of *Viviane* is better crafted and more effective than its predecessor with respect to counterpoint, orchestration, and large-scale architecture.

Chausson’s treatment of the love theme demonstrates his increasing fluency with chromatic lines. During the opening statement of this melody (mm. 138-147 in the 1883 version; mm. 47-56 in 1887/1893), the theme has a homophonic accompaniment of slow-moving wind chords. For the second phrase, Chausson originally set the melody against a simple violin figuration of sixteenth notes moving back and forth in chromatic neighbor motion (1883: mm. 148-151; fig. 3.5a). In the 1887 manuscript, Chausson worked out two alternatives to this figuration (1887: mm. 57-60; fig. 3.5b): the first is nearly diatonic and retains the basic oscillations of the original, with a few more variations in the contour. The second, definitive version was added later, notated on a blank staff at the bottom of the page and continuing on the reverse side of the folio. This final version incorporates the best aspects of Chausson’s first two attempts, melding silky

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chromaticism with a sweeping profile. The result is a much more distinctive and fitting accompaniment to the love theme.
Fig. 3.5a. *Viviane*, 1883 manuscript, pp. 23-24 (Reprinted from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la Musique)
Fig. 3.5a (continued)
Fig. 3.5b. *Viviane*, 1887 manuscript, two versions of mm. 57-60 (pp. 5r, 5v, 6r)  
(Reprinted from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la Musique)
Fig. 3.5b (continued)
Beginning on the next folio of the 1887 manuscript, Chausson makes further revisions *in situ* that demonstrate an increasingly imaginative approach to orchestral texture. Following the statement of the love theme, Chausson loosely reprises the material that opens the piece (mm. 71-85). The original orchestration of this passage, notated on the recto sides of folios 7-9, is rather pedestrian (fig. 3.6). The violins, violas, and celli dominate the texture with a unison statement of the principal melodic line. Apart from a low pedal tonic in the basses, timpani, and horn, harmonic support is limited to the repetitive, undulating figures of a pair of clarinets and a single flute in its low register. This unremarkable orchestration would likely have resulted in balance problems, with the string melody overwhelming the textural and harmonic underpinning provided by the three woodwinds.
Fig. 3.6. *Viviane*, 1887 manuscript, pp. 7r, 8r (Reprinted from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la Musique)
Chausson must have recognized the shortcomings of the passage because he crossed out these measures and wrote an alternate version on the verso sides of the folios. (From the manuscript alone, it cannot be determined whether he made these changes before or after hearing the first version played by an orchestra.) Chausson’s second orchestration, which he carried over to the published score, marks an immeasurable improvement (fig. 3.7). Violin tremolos and horns add color and fill out the harmony; flutes double the melody but break it up with octave displacements; the clarinet figures are more chromatic and unpredictable; and, in the masterstroke, the violas contribute a timbral and rhythmic sheen with arpeggiated pizzicato quartuplets. The combination of these layers creates a sensual, coloristic effect, prefiguring the shimmering textures that would become a hallmark (and a cliché) of French impressionism in later generations.
Fig. 3.7. *Viviane*, 1887 manuscript, pp. 7v, 8v (Reprinted from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la Musique)
Fig. 3.7 (continued)
Musique descriptive, musique pure

Chausson’s most significant revisions, however, were structural. As noted above, the programmatic changes Chausson made in 1887 affected the ordering of certain thematic events. Chausson also streamlined the narrative by deleting several passages from the original version whose dramatic significance was unclear. At m. 56 in the 1883 version, for instance, Chausson had begun an extended section in a faster tempo, marked “Animé.” The thematic material is based on the opening music, implying an extension of the love scene, but the affect is incongruously lively. After the trumpet calls sound (mm. 191-202), Chausson introduces a new, agitated theme marked “Con moto” (mm. 203-212). The written program might suggest that this represents Merlin’s attempt to join King Arthur’s subjects, but Chausson cuts off the melody and begins another series of trumpet calls (mm. 213-232), immediately followed by a reprise of the love theme (m. 233ff.). If this section is supposed to depict Merlin’s struggle, it is difficult to tell based on the themes being used.

By removing these ambiguous sections and replacing others, Chausson clarified Viviane’s program and tightened its structure. These dramatic and musical considerations are mutually reinforcing; the definitive version of the piece conveys the program more effectively and is also more architecturally satisfying. Whereas the original score moves discursively between themes and key areas, the final version has a clear trajectory, apparent even to a listener unfamiliar with the work’s program.

Chausson attains this coherence by placing Viviane’s structure in dialogue with the principles of sonata process. In its final incarnation, the symphonic poem is not a sonata form in the strictest sense of the term, but the similarities are extensive enough to
yield a productive comparison.\textsuperscript{28} The three major programmatic segments—the love scene, Merlin’s attempt to escape, and Viviane’s enchantment—correspond loosely to the tripartite sequence of exposition (mm. 1-123), development (mm. 124-236), and recapitulation (mm. 237-288). The outer sections share key, mood, and thematic material, creating musical and programmatic symmetry. The middle section fragments and reworks themes from the opening and is set apart in tempo, meter, and character.

Sonata principles are evident on a local level as well. The sections that Chausson preserved from the original score (opening, love theme, climax, and scene of enchantment) are recast as guideposts in the form. If the opening music serves as a primary theme, the first new passage in the 1887 score (mm. 37-46) functions as a transition, modulating to the dominant and ending with a half cadence in the new key area (the $G_5^6$ chord in m. 46). The “appel de la Fée” (m. 47ff.) plays the role of second theme both in key (in C major, the dominant) and in character (lyrical, “feminine”). After the second theme in a normative sonata form, one might expect a cadence in the new key and a closing theme. Chausson provides neither, eliding the structural “deformation” with a programmatic rupture: it is at this point that the trumpet call intrudes.

The next time Chausson returns to material from the original version occurs at the climax of the piece (m. 220), a shattering $fff$ tutti punctuated by the only entrance of cymbals and bass drum in the entire work. The harmony begins with a strident $G$ half-

diminished seventh chord over a C pedal and winds down to a bare C in the low strings and timpani (mm. 224-227). This dominant pedal continues through the following section (mm. 228-236), which functions as a retransition by preparing the arrival of F major. The final third of the piece (mm. 237-288) exhibits all the salient hallmarks of a sonata form recapitulation: a reprise of the principal theme, a recomposition of the secondary theme that cadences in the tonic, and a valedictory codetta that reaffirms the work’s tonality.

In recasting Viviane’s structure, why did Chausson (consciously or not) turn to sonata form—the quintessential procedure of absolute music, not to mention of the Austro-Germanic symphonic tradition? Perhaps these architectural changes reflected Chausson’s long-standing ambivalence about programmatic and descriptive music. As a twenty-year-old man, before he had committed to a career as a composer, Chausson confessed in his journal that he preferred the ineffability of music to the specificity of text or poetic ideas: “I cannot make up my mind to speak, to express in words what I feel. Symphonic music is a purer, more profound language and it is the only one I could use well. I have always abhorred words.”\(^{29}\) As noted earlier in this chapter, Chausson vowed after revising Viviane that he would “not write any more program music.” While traveling in July 1886—a year before revising the symphonic poem—Chausson expressed his distaste for “descriptive music” and outlined a different approach to musical signification, which he planned to implement in a series of new orchestral works. His views, detailed in a letter to Paul Poujaud, offer a fascinating aesthetic manifesto and are worth quoting at some length:

\(^{29}\) “Je ne peux me décider à parler, à exprimer par des mots ce que je sens. La musique symphonique est une langue plus pure, plus profonde et c’est la seule que je pourrais bien employer. J’ai toujours eu horreur de la parole.” Entry in Chausson’s journal, dated 17 October [1875], reprinted in Chausson, Écrits inédits, p. 42.
I haven’t told you about the country because I’ve hardly looked at it, although I have admired it and felt it a lot. I should even be very grateful to it, because it has just provided me with an idea that I’ve long searched for in vain. You know my antipathy for descriptive music. However, I’ve felt incapable of writing pure music like Bach and Haydn. So it was necessary to find something else. I’ve found it. The only thing left is to see if I will have the strength in me to express what I feel. As long as I’m only thinking about it, I’m full of confidence; once the pencil is in my hand, I find myself reduced to a small boy. Yet I’ve begun. In the winter I will show you a symphonic poem that is scarcely an attempt. It is already rather far along; the sketch would even be finished if I hadn’t been stopped about a week ago due to an idiotic practical difficulty: I have to write about thirty measures to reach the end, which I’ll write rather quickly, I think. Regarding the title, I haven’t found one that suits me. At the moment, I’m calling it Dans les bois [In the Forest], but I would like to find something better. Especially since this doesn’t at all depict what I want to express, and, in that case, it might be better not to include a title.

Think of the Fontaine aux lianes, by Leconte de Lisle. Ignore the exotic aspect (Indian flowers, etc.), and the semi-dramatic aspect (the dead man with his eyes wide open) and you can get a rough idea of the symphonic poem in question. I don’t know if I’m expressing myself clearly or if you understand me. I want a poem that I make only in my head and which I will give only a general impression of to the public; I want above all that it remain absolutely musical, so that the listeners who do not follow me entirely would be sufficiently satisfied by its musical aspect. There is no description, no tale; there are only feelings. [my emphasis] I am thinking of writing four or five symphonic poems of this sort, all at my leisure, among which there will be La Nuit, which I am obviously not in the processes of writing this summer. I am already thinking of a Printemps (Botticelli) and of a Chant de la terre. Do not speak about any of this and tell me what you think of it.
clairement et si vous me comprenez bien. Je veux un poème que je fais seul dans ma tête et dont je ne sers que l’impression générale au public; je veux par-dessus tout rester absolument musical, si bien que les auditeurs qui ne me suivraient pas entièrement puissent être suffisamment satisfaits par le côté musical. Il n’y a aucune description, aucune affabulation; il n’y a plus que des sentiments. Je pense faire quatre ou cinq poèmes symphoniques de ce genre, tout à mon aise, et parmi lesquels se trouvera La Nuit que je ne suis décidément pas en train d’écrire cet été. Je songe déjà à un Printemps (Botticelli) et à un Chant de la terre. Ne parlez pas de tout cela et dites-moi ce que vous en pensez.]

Chausson’s stance against programmatic music provides some context for his reformulation of Viviane. By recasting the work in dialogue with sonata principles, Chausson makes it less dependent on a narrative, and the listener can be “sufficiently satisfied by the musical” aspects of the piece. Coincidentally, an influential critic from *Le Ménestrel* raised similar concerns in his review of the revised version of *Viviane*, albeit in a less flattering light:

Concert Lamoureux.—The Ruy Blas overture, by Mendelssohn, was inspired, it is said, by Victor Hugo’s drama. But this information has no importance, because the work is purely musical, and its own merit suffices without the intervention of programmatic explanations, which are always a little questionable. For example, the program of the symphonic poem *Viviane*, by M. E. Chausson, although very short, can be all the more easily criticized because it is very explicit. With a little good will it is easy to find the programme’s promises fulfilled in the work, but the musician’s concern, description, has prevented him from giving his musical thought the necessary scope. The figurative effects are interesting, but they dominate to the detriment of the whole.

[Concert Lamoureux.—L’ouverture de Ruy Blas, de Mendelssohn, a été inspirée, dit-on, par le drame de Victor Hugo. Mais ce renseignement n’a aucune importance, car l’œuvre est purement musicale, et son mérite propre lui suffit sans qu’il soit utile de faire intervenir les explications d’un programme toujours un peu sujet à caution. Par exemple, celui d’un poème symphonique de Viviane, par M. E. Chausson, bien que fort court, peut être d’autant plus facilement critiqué qu’il est très explicite. Avec un peu de bonne volonté il est facile de retrouver dans l’ouvrage l’exécution des promesses du programme, mais la préoccupation du musicien, qui s’efforçait surtout de décrire, l’a empêché de

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30 Undated letter that Jean Gallois claims is “undoubtedly” from July 1886, *La Revue musicale* 7 (1925), 155-156.
As Chausson’s letter to Poujaud attests, the composer’s wariness about descriptive music was not at odds with his plans to write more symphonic poems. He merely believed that such works ought to be impressionistic rather than explicitly representational—as if the poetic inspiration should be sublimated during the compositional process.

Apart from *Solitude dans le bois* (the name Chausson eventually gave to the work he mentioned to Poujaud, but later destroyed), Chausson never managed to complete any of the other symphonic poems he envisioned in his letter. However, his intention of conveying “no description… only feelings” is evident in the orchestral works he did compose. In 1897 and 1898, Chausson wrote his final symphonic poem, *Soir de fête*, op. 32. As Jean Gallois notes, the work contains “no description, no story strictly speaking in the manner of a genuine symphonic poem, but only the search for a musical evocation of felt sentiments.”

Chausson’s most celebrated work, the *Poème*, op. 25, for violin and orchestra (1896), exhibits a similar distillation of feeling. Although inspired by “The Song of Triumphant Love,” a novella by Ivan Turgenev, the piece does not attempt to narrate the story, but only capture its atmosphere. Just as in the scenario outlined to Poujaud, Chausson has a poetic idea in mind but only reveals a general impression to the audience. The successive titles that Chausson gave to the work epitomize this process of

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31 Amédée Boutarel, “Concerts et Soirées,” *Le Ménestrel* 54, no. 6 (5 February 1888): 47-48. When Boutarel reviewed *Viviane* again two decades later, his judgment was kinder, declaring the piece “graceful, pleasant, simple and fresh.” [*Viviane, poème symphonique d’Ernest Chausson, est une musique de conte de fée, gracieuse, agréable, simple et fraîche.*] “Revue des grands concerts,” *Le Ménestrel* 74, no. 13 (28 March 1908): 100.

abstraction: he originally christened the piece *Le Chant de l’amour triomphant: poème symphonique pour violon et orchestre*, then shortened the title to *Poème pour violon et orchestre*, and in the end simply labeled it *Poème*.\(^{33}\)

**From Viviane to Arthus**

As Chausson’s only orchestral composition built around an explicit narrative, *Viviane* is an outlier in the composer’s œuvre, difficult to square with his later proclamations about programmaticism. Perhaps it is fitting, then, that *Viviane* took on a second life in the most representational of genres. In 1886, the same year that he spoke of his distaste for descriptive music, Chausson drafted a scenario for *Le Roi Arthus*, a project that would occupy him on and off until 1895. The opera continues Chausson’s exploration of Arthurian legend and draws on the backstory and imagery of *Viviane*. Arthus (King Arthur) is betrayed by his wife, Geniève (Guinevere), and his favored knight, Lancelot. In the opera’s central episode, the distraught king summons Merlin to his aid. Chausson describes his initial conception of the encounter in a letter to Paul Poujaud:

[…] Ah! if Merlin were there, he who had supported [Arthus] so often, who had helped him establish his kingdom. He disappeared one day and none since knows what became of him. Arthus calls for his aid.

A hawthorn bush in blossom suddenly appears, in the middle of a very soft, greenish glimmer. The bush parts and we catch a glimpse of Merlin on the ground, seeming to be asleep. He is entirely surrounded by flowers and seems to be one with the shrubs. (See the figure of Botticelli’s *Prin temps*.) He speaks without opening his eyes. He replies to each question enigmatically and in few words. However, he must announce, in sufficiently clear terms, the impending destruction of their common work and the mysterious death of Arthus. Arthus presses him with more and more precise questions, and as, by the end, Merlin no longer wants to reply, Arthus, becoming violent, moves towards him with a threatening gesture, but immediately everything disappears. Then he remembers Viviane who loved him and whom he rejected; is she not taking revenge? He

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 442.
moves away sadly, with slow steps, while he hears joyous horn fanfares in the distance.

[Ah! si Merlin était là, lui qui l’a soutenu si souvent, qui l’a aidé à fonder son royaume. Il a disparu un jour et nul depuis, ne sait ce qu’il est devenu. Il l’appelle à son secours.

“Un buisson d’aubépines en fleurs apparaît soudain, au milieu d’une lueur verdâtre, très douce. Le buisson s’entrouvre et l’on aperçoit Merlin couché et qui semble dormir. Il est entouré de fleurs et paraît ne faire qu’un avec les arbustes. (Voir la figure du Printemps de Botticelli.) Il parle sans ouvrir les yeux. A chaque question, il répond en peu de mots et d’une façon énigmatique. Il doit pourtant annoncer en termes suffisamment transparents l’anéantissement prochain de leur œuvre commune et la mort mystérieuse d’Arthus. Arthus le presse de questions de plus en plus précises, et, comme à la fin Merlin ne veut plus répondre, Arthus devenu violent s’avance vers lui avec un geste menaçant, mais, aussitôt tout disparaît. Il songe alors à Viviane qui l’aimait et qu’il a repoussée; n’est-ce pas elle qui se venge? Il s’éloigne tristement à pas lents, tandis qu’on entend dans le lointain de joyeuses fanfares de cors.]³⁴

Chausson’s description of the magician replicates the scenario of *Viviane* almost word for word. Merlin appears amidst a hawthorn bush in blossom, encircled by flowers, suggesting that the action of the symphonic poem has already taken place. It is notable that Chausson invokes the image of Flora, the goddess of flowers and spring in Botticelli’s *Primavera*, since he also envisioned the painting as the basis of a forthcoming orchestral work. Thus *Le Roi Arthus* resonates with symphonic poems both completed and yet to be written. At the conclusion of this letter, Chausson muses about his return to old subject matter:

The appearance of Merlin tempts me greatly. You may well think that the old *Viviane* is going to rise from the ashes and become a virgin once again. One could object that this scene hasn’t been well prepared, but because of the way it occurs, I think it can be defended.

[L’apparation de Merlin me tente beaucoup. Vous pensez bien que l’antique *Viviane* va renaître de ses cendres et se refaire une virginité. On pourra objecter

³⁴ Chausson, letter to Paul Poujaud, dated “Cannes, 1886,” *La Revue musicale* 7 (1925), 152-153. In this preliminary sketch, the encounter between Arthus and Merlin occurs in Act II, Scene 1. Chausson eventually moved this episode to the second half of Act II.
The exchange between Arthus and Merlin marks the wizard’s only appearance in the opera. Hence Chausson anticipates that the scene might be criticized for an apparent lack of preparation. As Huebner notes, though, Merlin’s appearance can be perceived as justified because of the epic nature of the Arthurian subject: “Merlin emerges from a past long before the beginnings of Le Roi Arthus and predicts a future long after its conclusion.”

In its final form, Arthus echoes both the scenario and the music of Viviane.

Documentary sources suggest that Chausson decided to recycle musical material from the symphonic poem at a later stage in the opera’s gestation. In 1892 he wrote to Henry Lerolle, his wife’s brother-in-law:

Do you want me to tell you about Arthus? I’m working at the moment on the scene change. I’ve even just written to Vidal to find out from the stagehands at the Opéra how many minutes they will need to set the secluded courtyard where Merlin has to appear. If it’s more than four or five minutes, I’ll be very unhappy. That would require an enormous piece of music.

Speaking of the appearance of Merlin, I’ve made a change in the text. At first, I had Merlin appear asleep and speak without opening his eyes. But Arthus, too, has to seem to sleep, at the end of the third act. It’s too much! I see now, the future usher will joke that it’s my music that puts all my interpreters in that state. So I’ve gotten rid of Merlin’s slumber, I’ll permit him to open his eyes, but all manner of gesture will remain forbidden for him.

What would you say if the trees parted, at the moment of the appearance, to the chords from the beginning of Viviane? I feel like doing it. I think that that would be lovely. And besides, if I look for other chords, there’s a good chance that what I find will be less good. I’m not quite there yet. There is Arthus’s big solo scene, important and difficult...

[Tu veux que je te parle d’Arthus? Je travaille en ce moment au changement de décor. Je viens même d’écrire à Vidal pour qu’il me sache par les machinistes de

35 Ibid., 155.

36 Huebner, French Opera at the Fin de Siècle, 363.
l’Opéra combien il faut de minutes pour planter la cour cloîtrée où doit apparaître Merlin. S’il faut plus de quatre ou cinq minutes, je serai très malheureux. Ça devient un énorme morceau de musique.

A propos de l’apparition de Merlin, j’ai fait un changement dans le texte. Merlin devait apparaître endormi et parler sans ouvrir les yeux. Mais Arthus, lui aussi, doit paraître endormi, à la fin du troisième acte. C’est trop! Je vois d’ici, la plaisanterie de la future ouvreuse, que c’est ma musique qui met tous mes interprètes dans cet état. Je supprime donc le sommeil de Merlin, je lui permets d’ouvrir les yeux, mais toute espèce de geste lui demeure interdit.

Que dirais-tu si les arbres s’entr’ouvaient, au moment de l’apparition, sur les accords du commencement de Viviane? J’ai envie de le faire. Je crois que ça me donnera quelque chose de joli. Et, de plus, si je cherche d’autres accords, il y a bien des chances pour que je trouve moins bien. Je n’en suis pas encore là. Il y a la grande scène d’Arthus seul, importante et difficile…]

The *Viviane* music frames Merlin’s 12-minute scene and recurs at key moments in his exchange with Arthus. The king summons the magician with an impassioned plea:

“Viens! Où donc es-tu? Merlin, entends ma voix!” [Come! Where are you? Merlin, hear my voice!] Against a prevailing tonality of C minor, the orchestra punctuates Arthus’ entreaty with a dramatic $F_4$ chord, setting up the expectation of a cadence on F—the tonality of *Viviane*. The trees part and Merlin appears, accompanied by the *Viviane* chords, but Chausson recasts the quotation in the remote key of F# major. Two subtle timbral changes reinforce the otherworldly character of the scene: the strings play tremolo instead of bowing out the chords (as they do in the symphonic poem), and “cymbales froissées” rustle softly in the background (ex. 3.9).

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37 Undated letter, *La Revue musicale* 7 (1925), 176-177.

38 The piano-vocal score (Paris: Editions Salabert, 1995) mistakenly has an $F_4$ chord at this point (Act II, 2 measures before figure 80). The orchestral score, reproduced in manuscript facsimile (Munich: Musikproduktion Höflich, 2008), has the correct minor sonority.

39 This unusual percussion effect, literally “crumpled cymbals,” produces a soft metallic buzz similar to a roll on an open hi-hat. One player holds a pair of crash cymbals horizontally, and almost touching, while a second player rolls gently on the top cymbal. The distance between the two cymbals determines the volume and timbre of the buzz. The effect is also found in Bartok’s *Miraculous Mandarin*. My thanks to Jeffrey Milarsky for this explanation.
Ex. 3.9. *Le Roi Arthus*, Act II, 4 before rehearsal 80 to 12 after 80


Au moment de l'apparition de Merlin, Arthur fait face aux spectateurs et ne s'aperçoit de sa présence que lorsque celui-ci l'appelle.
Subsequent recurrences of the *Viviane* music highlight the wizard’s mysticism. The chords return as Merlin cryptically declares: “Pommiers verts, pommiens prophétiques, qui révélez les mots magiques, sous votre feuillage profond combien de siècles s’écoulèrent!” [Green apple trees, prophetic apple trees, which reveal the magical words, under your deep foliage how many centuries have gone by!] The same harmonies sound as Merlin pleads silence. Alluding to his enchantment by Viviane, he implores: “Ne m’interroge plus, ô Roi! Ma langue doit rester muette. J’ai quitté ma prison secrète pour te dire, résigne-toi!” [Question me no more, oh King! My tongue must remain silent. I left my secret prison to tell you, accept your fate!] Merlin foretells that Arthus will soon depart this life (“Tu vas bientôt quitter la terre”) but is destined for a glorious return. As he makes this final proclamation, the uppermost chromatic line from the *Viviane* progression—which has underpinned the entire prophecy—joins in counterpoint with a brilliant brass statement of one of the opera’s central motives which Gallois labels “le grand thème d’Arthus” (ex. 3.10).

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40 Jean Gallois notes that apple trees have spiritual resonances in Celtic tradition, symbolizing knowledge and the choice between earthly and spiritual existence. *Ernest Chausson*, 397.

Arthus is sanguine about his fate, but presses Merlin about the crime that threatens his kingdom. He asks (Chausson indicates “avec hésitation”): “Genièvre, n’est-ce pas, Genièvre et Lancelot sont innocents?” [Genièvre … Genièvre and Lancelot are innocent, aren’t they?] Merlin does not respond. Arthus becomes increasingly agitated and declares: “Songe que ton silence les accuse! Merlin, je suis ton Roi! Parle, parle, je l’ordonne!” [Know that your silence condemns them! Merlin, I am your King! Speak, I command you!] Yet Merlin remains mute. The trees close up, the vision of Merlin disappears, and the Viviane music sounds for a final time. As Arthus suggests, Merlin’s silence implicitly confirms the lovers’ adultery. But instead of voicing his accusation, Merlin allows the orchestra to speak for him. The episode can be read, then, as a metaphor for Chausson’s aesthetic of musical signification. Pure sound can convey what words—and voices—are unwilling or unable to express.
The Merlin scene in *Le Roi Arthus* has symbolic importance for another reason. The illicit affair between Lancelot and Genièvre has obvious parallels to the legend of Tristan and Isolde, and the resonances with Wagner have dogged the work’s reception ever since its premiere. Chausson was acutely aware of these similarities throughout the composition of *Arthus*; the letter quoted as the epigraph of this chapter dates from his first year of work on the project. He seems to have made his peace with the opera’s thematic similarities to *Tristan* (“That wouldn’t be so bad…”), but he continued to wrestle with the *maître de Bayreuth*’s musical legacy (“…if I could manage to dewagnerize myself”). The Merlin scene, which comes near the end of Act II, marked a turning point in this struggle. From this point on, Chausson found a more confident and individualized musical voice. In 1893 he confided to Claude Debussy:

I’ve resumed, without too much trouble, my third act. I am rather pleased with what I am writing at the moment. It seems to me that it is becoming clearer and dewagnerized. My wife, for whom I played the first scene, told me she hardly recognized me. But I suppose that she is exaggerating. Otherwise, you would see me obliged to redo the first two acts once again!

[Moi, j’ai repris, et sans trop de peine, mon troisième acte. Je ne suis pas mécontent de ce que j’écris en ce moment. Il me semble que ça se clarifie et déwagnérise. Ma femme a qui j’ai joué la première scène m’a dit qu’elle ne me reconnaissait presque pas. Mais je suppose que c’est tout de même exagéré. Sans cela, me voyez-vous obligé de refaire encore une fois les deux premiers actes!]^{42}

Chausson’s contemporaries also acknowledged this stylistic shift. When *Le Roi Arthus* received its posthumous premiere at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels in 1903, critics agreed that the opera’s Wagnerian tint, while notable at the beginning,

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^{42} This undated letter is in response to Debussy’s letter from 24 October 1893. Reprinted in *La Revue musical* 7 (1925), 123.
becomes less pronounced over the course of the work. For instance, Gabriel Fauré criticized the opera’s similarity to Tristan, but limited the comparison to the first two acts of Arthus.\textsuperscript{43} Several writers singled out the Merlin scene for special praise. While acknowledging the correspondences between Tristan and Act I of Arthus, Charles Joly claimed that Chausson “freed himself from all influence” in the second act and noted that the composer’s personality “becomes more pronounced with an elegiac charm especially in the splendid evocation of Merlin.”\textsuperscript{44} Gustave Samazeuilh’s review in Le Guide musical describes the Merlin episode as an “exquisite scene where Chausson’s lyricism manifests itself in full.” Samazeuilh notes that the encounter demonstrates greater dramatic strength than the opera’s first act, “but it is incontestably in the final two scenes of the drama that the musician, now aware of himself and having found his true way, soars and surpasses himself.”\textsuperscript{45} Pierre Lalo praised the Merlin episode’s “singular and profound emotion,”

\textsuperscript{43} “Its similarity to the drama of Tristan and Isolde is such, at least in the first two thirds of the work, that it is not necessary to say more… As for the score, its resemblance is no less obvious.” [Sa similitude avec le drame de Tristan et Yseult est telle, au moins dans les deux premiers tiers de l’ouvrage, qu’il n’y a pas lieu de la préciser davantage… Quant à la partition, sa filiation est non moins indéniable.] Review of Le Roi Arthus, Le Figaro, 1 December 1903, 4.

\textsuperscript{44} “D’autre part, dès le magnifique prélude du deuxième acte, avec la chanson qui fait entendre un laboureur durant que Lancelot attend Guinèvre, avec le monologue de Lancelot et la scène dramatique qui suit, la personnalité d’Ernest Chausson se dégage de toute influence; elle s’accuse surtout avec un charme élégiaque dans la splendide évocation de Merlin, où nous retrouvons les délicieuses harmonies entendues dans Viviane, le poème symphonique de Chausson, joué jadis chez Lamoureux.” Charles Joly, “Le Roi Arthus,” Le Théâtre 122, January 1904 (II), 14.

\textsuperscript{45} “Puis tout s’apaise peu à peu, et nous voici dans le palais d’Arthus, où le roi, doutant de la fidélité de Lancelot et inquiet de l’avenir de la Table Ronde, évoque Merlin, le compagnon d’arme et de gloire, l’ami des grandes luttes d’autrefois. D’abord sombre et tragique, la musique se fait bientôt haletante, angoissée, puis tout à coup des harmonies d’une ensorcelante douceur résonnent aux cordes divisées au moment où l’enchanteur paraît au travers des arbres baignés de soleil; et c’est alors, en un ruisseaulement infini de lumière sonore, l’entrevision de l’avenir, la prophétie de la fin d’Arthus et de l’apothéose qui couronnera l’œuvre. Après cette scène exquise, où le lyrisme de Chausson se manifeste tout entier, le chœur mouvementé des chevaliers et la vigoureuse apostrophe d’Arthus terminent le deuxième acte, où la vigueur dramatique du
attributing the scene’s poignancy to its personal resonance with Chausson. “If the musician is so eloquent here,” Lalo writes, “it is because herein his innermost voice finds expression.” In the Merlin scene from Le Roi Arthus, then, Chausson resolved two challenges that had vexed him throughout his career. He recast Viviane, his only programmatic work, in a setting where representationalism was not a liability, but an asset. And by staying true to his “innermost voice,” Chausson transcended the legacy of Wagner and forged a sound that was uniquely his own.


“Certaines scènes, certains personnages, certains sentiments s’accordaient pleinement avec son caractère; d’autres lui convenaient de façon moins parfaite. Et, par une rencontre singulière, mais qui n’est point sans bonheur, les parties d’Arthus qui correspondent les mieux à la nature intime d’Ernest Chausson sont aussi celles qu’il produisit lorsqu’il était sorti vainqueur de la crise et de l’épreuve, sûr de lui et de son art. C’est une double raison pour que, si toute la partition est digne d’intérêt, il y ait des tableaux et des actes dont la beauté soit particulièrement émouvante. […] la générosité d’Arthus, sa bonté, sa foi en l’idéal, comme aussi le repentir sincère de Lancelot, étaient des sentiments qui se trouvaient en harmonie avec les qualités de son âme; et il leur donnait sans effort l’expression la plus pénétrante et la plus vivante. Lorsqu’au second acte, Arthus appelle à son aide Merlin, et que Merlin apparaît dans la lumière et dans les fleurs, la douceur de cette vision, si différente des ordinaires apparitions qui se font dans les abîmes et les ténèbres, le dialogue grave et fraternel des deux personnages, la tristesse amie, la mélancolie tendre et discrète du chant et de l’orchestre, tout cela est d’une émotion singulière et profonde; et si le musicien a ici tant d’éloquence, c’est que ses voix intimes s’expriment en lui.” Pierre Lalo, review of Le Roi Arthus, Le Temps, 22 December 1903, 3.
In a tranquil square in the seventh arrondissement of Paris, across from the basilica of Sainte Clotilde, lies a monument to César Franck (fig. 4.1). It is a fitting place for a tribute. The musician was the organist at the adjacent church from 1858 until his death in 1890. The sculpture, by Alfred-Charles Lenoir, depicts the composer seated at the organ console, an angel perched over his shoulder. The angel whispers in Franck’s ear and shields him with outstretched wings. Streaming from the angel’s hand is a ribbon that lists some of the musician’s most celebrated creations. Pride of place goes to the biblical works: *Ruth*, *Rédemption*, *Les Béatitudes*. Franck’s head is bowed and arms are crossed; his feet rest tentatively on the pedals. Perhaps he is about to launch into one of his celebrated improvisations, but in this moment he seems lost in his own private meditations, with no other cares beyond his faith and his art.
This is the image of Franck that has endured in the popular imagination: devout, unassuming, indifferent to worldly cares. In the most literal sense, this image was the creation of Franck’s admirers. The committee that supervised the construction of Lenoir’s statue—a group that included Jules Massenet, Ernest Reyer, Gabriel Fauré, Gabriel Pierné, and Charles Tournemire—was organized by Vincent d’Indy, the most prominent of the Franckistes. But in other respects, as well, Franck’s devotees played an outsized role.


2 D’Indy formed the committee in 1898. The Paris city council contributed 500 francs to the project, and the statue was dedicated in October 1904. See Julien Tiersot, “Inauguration du
role in promoting the musician’s mystical reputation. His students affectionately addressed him as Père Franck or Pater seraphicus, a reference to St. Francis of Assisi.

After seeing a draft of Les Béatitudes, Alexis de Castillon marveled to fellow pupil Henri Duparc that Franck “makes me think of Fra Angelico. People have written that Fra Angelico painted with his soul, and the same can be said of Franck: he has the soul of a seraph.”

Franck’s seraphic reputation assumed even greater proportions in the years after his death, fueled by the hagiographic accounts of early biographers and former pupils.

Gustave Derepas (1897) linked Franck’s earnest spirituality with his French temperament, comparing the composer favorably to Wagner:

César Franck’s mysticism is the direct expression of the soul, and leaves him full consciousness in his aspirations towards the divine. The human being remains intact amid the accents of love, joy, or grief. This is because the God of César Franck has been revealed to him by the Gospel, and is as different from Wotan in the “Nibelungen” as midday from the pallid twilight. Franck leaves to the Germans their nebulous dreams; he clings to that part of the French temperament which, perhaps, we do not value sufficiently: good sense, clear reason, and moral equilibrium.

monument César Franck,” Le Ménestrel, 30 October 1904; and Rollin Smith, Playing the Organ Works of César Franck (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1997), 51.

3 “il m’a souvent fait penser à Fra Angelico; on a écrit que celui-ci peignait avec son âme; on pourrait dire la même chose de Franck, qui a une âme de séraphin.” Letter from Henri Duparc to Pierre de Bréville, 31 May 1923, quoted in Léon Vallas, La Véritable histoire de César Franck (1822-1890) (Paris: Flammarion, 1955), 203; translated as César Franck by Hubert Foss (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), 160.


D’Indy’s biography of Franck (1906) is filled with fawning proclamations like the following:

Franck was undoubtedly a believer, like Palestrina, Bach, or Beethoven before him; confident in a life to come, he would not lower his art for the sake of fame in this one; he had the ingenuous sincerity of genius. Therefore, while the ephemeral renown of many artists who only regarded their work as a means of acquiring fortune or success begins already to fall into the shadow of oblivion, never again to emerge, the seraphic personality of “Father” Franck, who worked for Art alone, soars higher and higher into the light towards which, without faltering or compromise, he aspired throughout his whole life.  

As Andrew Deruchie has observed, d’Indy wrote his biography of Franck a year after the Third Republic established state secularism in France. Since d’Indy was an ardent Catholic and outspoken political conservative, “[h]is image of Franck as a fundamentally Catholic composer transparently served his own interests.”

Franck’s public image as a devout, spiritual composer persists in some circles. The musician figures prominently in a recent Christian publication entitled *The Spiritual Lives of the Great Composers*. His best known works today are either sacred (Les Béatitudes, the Panis Angelicus) or absolute (the Symphony in D Minor, the Violin Sonata, the organ works). Religious interpretations of the instrumental works are not uncommon. The pianist Stephen Hough, for instance, has described Franck’s *Prelude,  

6 D’Indy, *César Franck*, 69.


Chorale, and Fugue (1884) as “a profoundly moving musical journey from darkness to light,” analogous to the spiritual journey of Advent.  

Other writers, in contrast, have approached received clichés about Franck with a measure of skepticism. Among the earliest to do so were Alfred Cortot (1925) and Maurice Emmanuel (1930).  

Léon Vallas addresses d’Indy’s mythologizing head-on in the preface to his study of Franck (1951). Describing d’Indy’s volume as “a work of devotion, informed as much by hagiolatry as by the true history of the man,” Vallas writes: “It is our hope that this book will establish without any distortion the complex picture of César Franck and make known to all, in place of the pretty d’Indyist legend, the true history […].”  

In similar fashion, Ronald Harwood takes pains to construct a more fleshly portrait in his historical novel César and Augusta (1978).  

While acknowledging Franck’s reputation as a virtuous milquetoast, Harwood imagines an inner life for the composer marked by ardent—even illicit—passion.  

Joël-Marie Fauquet’s

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11 Vallas, César Franck, 5.


13 The climactic scene of the novel occurs at the premiere of Franck’s Piano Quintet at the Société nationale de musique. In Harwood’s reimagining of the performance, all of the principal characters—including the composer’s wife, Félicité, and the work’s dedicatee, Camille Saint-
biography (1999) offers the most comprehensive and balanced contemporary study of the musician.\textsuperscript{14}

While this last group of writers has presented a more nuanced picture of Franck, the relationship between the musician’s compositional output and his public image deserves further attention. Most of Franck’s oeuvre—the sacred works, the essays in purely instrumental genres—accords neatly with his reputation as an abstemious \textit{Pater seraphicus}. This congruence between work and image may explain the persistence of the biographical clichés. One particular composition, however, is difficult to reconcile with Franck’s prudish reputation: the symphonic poem \textit{Psyché} (1886-87) for orchestra and chorus. Inspired by the legend of Eros and Psyche from Apuleius’s \textit{Metamorphoses}, the \textit{poème symphonique} is the last, longest, and most enigmatic of the composer’s efforts in the genre.\textsuperscript{15}

Franck’s choice of a mythical subject—and an erotic one, at that—caused a stir among many of his admirers. Julien Tiersot noted: “It was a great surprise—almost a minor scandal—for those who had believed in the illusion that Franck’s mission was a religious one when they learned that he had borrowed the legend of Psyche from pagan antiquity for one of his new works.”\textsuperscript{16} Guy Ropartz conjectured that Franck, a “Christian Saëns”—immediately recognize the work as Franck’s impassioned declaration of love for Augusta Holmès.

\textsuperscript{14} Joël-Marie Fauquet, \textit{César Franck} (Paris: Fayard, 1999).

\textsuperscript{15} For a recent annotated edition of the legend, see Apuleius, \textit{The Tale of Cupid and Psyche}, trans. Joel C. Relihan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009).

mystic,” may have been out of his element working with a pagan subject. The composer’s wife, Félicité, considered the piece too sensual and objected to it on moral grounds. According to the couple’s granddaughter, Félicité often berated César about the work, criticizing certain harmonic progressions in particular; on one occasion, she intentionally mislaid her ticket to a performance of the work to avoid hearing it.

Recent commentators have tended to concur with Félicité’s perception of sensuality in *Psyché*, if not with her value judgment. Fauquet identifies several intertextual links that support an erotic reading of the program. Kurt Masur, one of the few conductors currently active who has performed the complete symphonic poem, has observed: “In the garden of Eros section, Franck is trying to let you smell the flowers, the scents. It’s like taking drugs. You are made ready for falling in love.” Bernard Holland, reviewing one of Masur’s performances of *Psyché* with the New York Philharmonic, is more blunt: “Great tuttis appear suddenly and then back away, sometimes as climax,

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17 “… il semble pourtant que Franck, mystique chrétien, s’y soit senti hors de son élément, aux prises avec la beauté païenne, et Psyché ne peut être comparée, à mon sens, aux autres compositions orchestrales pour lesquelles j’ai dit toute mon admiration.” Guy Ropartz, “César Franck,” *La Revue internationale de musique*, 1898, 461.

18 Vallas quotes a direct communication from Franck’s daughter, Mme Chopy: “Ma grand-mère n’appréciait pas *Psyché*, notamment en ce qui concerne certaines harmonies, et c’est maintes fois qu’elle est intervenue auprès de César Franck à ce sujet.” *Le Véritable histoire de César Franck*, 258.

19 Fauquet, *César Franck*, 713.

sometimes more like coitus interruptus. Any musical person in the mood for sex is going to respond to ‘Psyche.’”

The symphonic poem’s erotic subtext posed a challenge to the Franckistes who sought to perpetuate the image of an ascetic Père Franck. Thus several of the composer’s devotees promoted a desexualized interpretation of Psyché, one more in line with Franck’s devout reputation. D’Indy, the work’s dedicatee, argued that the poème symphonique “has nothing of the pagan spirit about it … but, on the contrary, is imbued with Christian grace and feeling, recalling the frescoes in the Arena of Padua or the Fioretti of St. Francis of Assisi.” Derepas understood Psyche’s fall from grace and subsequent redemption as a spiritual parable. In effect, the composer’s acolytes sublimated the eroticism of Psyché, reading the work instead as Christian allegory.

The Franckistes’ advancement of this counter-narrative—Psyché not as erotic tale, but as a salvation narrative—underscores a peculiarity of the composer’s reception amidst the cultural politics of the fin de siècle. Franck’s reputation, perhaps more than that of any other composer of his generation, was manipulated by devotees who had ideological motivations for presenting his personality—and by extension, his music—in a certain light. But moral values were not the only reason that d’Indy and like-minded critics resisted the erotic subtexts of Psyché. Their motivations were also aesthetic: many


22 D’Indy, César Franck, 173-74.

23 Derepas, César Franck, cited in d’Indy, César Franck, 174-76.
of Franck’s admirers prized his abstract instrumental works over his theatrical or narrative compositions. In part, this preference reflected the prevailing wisdom about the composer’s relative strengths. More broadly, French musicians affiliated with the Société nationale de musique—d’Indy chief among them—embraced a self-consciously serious approach to composition in the early decades of the Third Republic. As a result, some Franckistes shrouded *Psyché*—not only a programmatic work, but one with a sung text—in the discourse of absolute music.

*Psyché*’s early reception history, then, is a story of two layers of sublimation. First, d’Indy and his circle rejected an erotic reading of the piece in favor of spiritual allegory. Beyond that, some critics sought to minimize the importance of the work’s program entirely. These two strands of reception gained prominence because of political and ideological considerations; they were made plausible by Franck’s own approach to signification, narrative, and text.

The Genesis of *Psyché*

“I have started to work again, as I do every year when I am on vacation. I am writing a *Psyché*. I have been thinking of doing so for several years.” So Franck reported to his student Arthur Coquard in the fall of 1886. Franck had written most of the symphonic

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poem that summer in Combs-la-Ville-Quincy, at the same time as the composition of the Violin Sonata. Annotations on the manuscript indicate that Franck worked quickly. “Le Sommeil de Psyché” is dated 9-13 August; “Psyché enlevée par les Zéphyr” from 14 August; and “Les Jardins d’Éros” from 18 August. On 5 October Franck asked Ernest Chausson to hear what he had written, adding, “you are one of the first to whom I would most like to show my work.” He noted that the piece was not entirely finished, but that he had sketched the last movement. Franck completed the final section, “Souffrances et plaintes de Psyché,” in Paris on 23 October, and he orchestrated the piece in the summer of 1887.

The Société nationale de musique presented the premiere of Psyché under Franck’s direction on 10 March 1888 at the Salle Érard. Édouard Colonne conducted the first performances of the piece by a major Parisian concert organization, his Concerts du Châtelet, on 23 February and 2 March 1890. For the latter performances, Franck added a part for harmonium and adjusted the sequence of choral and orchestral passages in accordance with Colonne’s suggestions. According to Pierre de Bréville, Colonne’s performances of Psyché represented a belated triumph for the composer:

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26 Fauquet, César Franck, 704. The manuscript sources for Psyché are held in a private collection.

27 “Je comptais moi-même vous écrire pour vous demander d’entendre ma Psyché car vous êtes un de ceux à qui j’aime le mieux faire connaître d’abord ce que je fais. … Je n’ai pas entièrement fini mais je suis au dernier morceau qui est ébauché.” Franck to Ernest Chausson, Paris, 5 October 1886, reprinted in Fauquet, César Franck: Correspondance, 163.

28 In a letter to Pierre de Bréville from the summer of 1887, Franck indicated, “Je suis attelé à l’orchestre de Psyché.” Reprinted in ibid., 170.

29 In a letter to Colonne from early February 1890, Franck noted: “J’ai fait une partie d’orgue qui fera bien je pense, et j’ai suivi une fois de plus votre avis en faisant alterner le grand orchestre avec le chœur toutes les fois que celui-ci se taira. Cela s’enchaînera admirablement et commodément.” Reprinted in ibid., 215.
In 1888, [Franck] had generously forgotten everything and, having finished a new work [*Psyché*], he offered it to those who could perform it. Again he was rejected, and with such brutality that he felt tears well up in his eyes.

It is hard not to remember and to forgive these tears!

However, having belatedly discovered, after the performance of 10 March 1888 at the Société nationale, that certain backstage choral effects had an effect on the audience, and having moreover understood that it would be prudent to trust his instinct recognizing the work’s future, at the beginning of 1890 Colonne asked the master for his score to *Psyché*, which he performed with success on 23 February and 2 March. (Franck did not conceal his joy at this “reversal,” the only indirect reference to his past suffering which he did not wish to remember.)

Franck’s source material, the tale of Eros and Psyche, goes as follows. Aphrodite, jealous of the beauty of a mortal named Psyche, asks her son Eros to cast a spell on the woman that will make men avoid her. Eros complies, but while casting the spell he accidentally pricks himself with one of his golden arrows and falls in love with Psyche himself. When Psyche is unable to find a husband, her parents consult an oracle for advice. Since no man will marry her, the oracle instructs her parents to leave Psyche on the nearest mountain, noting that her beauty is so great that she is meant for a god.

Psyche heads for the mountain, whereupon Zephyrus, the west wind, carries her to a magnificent palace. Upon nightfall, her promised bridegroom arrives and their marriage

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is consummated. Psyche’s new husband is a true and gentle lover, and he demands only that she never ask who he is or look upon his face. The husband, of course, is Eros himself. After some time, Psyche’s jealous sisters persuade her to discover her lover’s identity. Psyche raises a lamp to Eros’s face while he sleeps, but he startles awake and flies off when Psyche realizes who he is. Psyche is cast out of the palace for disobeying her order and is condemned to wander the earth aimlessly. Psyche appeals to Aphrodite for help, and the goddess responds by giving Psyche a series of impossible tasks. In the end, Zeus intervenes, and Psyche and Eros are reunited in eternal marriage.

Apuleius’s legend was a popular subject in nineteenth-century literature, art, and music, and Franck likely drew inspiration from recent adaptations of the story. Among musical settings, Franck expressed his admiration for Ambroise Thomas’s 1857 opéra-comique Psyché. Psyche’s injunction from asking her lover’s identity, and her fall from grace when she disobeys, also resonates with Elsa’s plight in Lohengrin—a parallel that Charles Baudelaire noted in his influential 1861 essay on Wagner reception in Paris. Many artistic treatments of Apuleius’s tale assumed allegorical or philosophical dimensions. By virtue of their names, Psyche and Eros could be understood as


32 Fauquet, César Franck, 702. Thomas revised his Psyché for the Opéra in 1878; Franck attended a performance of fragments of the opera at the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire on 23 March 1890.


personifications of the soul and of love, respectively. Alternatively, they could represent humankind and the divine. In one strand of interpretation popular among pre-Romantic and Romantic artists, the relationship between Psyche and Eros was characterized less by eroticism than by what Jean H. Hagstrum refers to as a kind of “delicacy”: a “self-contained or homogenous love in its subtle and perverse and beautiful manifestations.”

Readings of this kind have been understood as “‘spiritual,’ ‘mystical,’ ‘immaterial,’ ‘Platonic,’ ‘exalted,’ and ‘ennobling’.” Hagstrum also notes that Psyche has been referred to as “creatura gentil—vaga angioletta,” an appellation “which was used obsessively for over a century to describe a woman too rarefied for sexual desires.”

Victor de Laprade’s epic Psyché (1841) treats the subject as Christian and Platonic allegory; the heroine’s desire for knowledge leads to her ruin, but she finds redemption in the human soul’s union with God. By the time Franck wrote his poème symphonique, the Psyche legend had become a favorite topic of Symbolist writers.

Whereas Franck’s earlier symphonic poems were inspired by contemporary French poetry—works by Victor Hugo for Ce qu’on entend sur la montagne (1845-47) and Les Djinns (1884), and Charles Marie Leconte de Lisle’s “Les Éolides” for the piece by the same name (1875-76)—Psyché was not based on one specific literary text. In fact,


36 Ibid., 531.

the authorship of Franck’s libretto is uncertain. (A translation of the text appears in appendix 2.) The programs at the Société nationale premiere in 1888 attributed the poetry to “MM. Sicard et L. de Fourcaud.”  

It is unclear if Louis de Fourcaud (1851-1914), a prominent writer and art critic who contributed to *Le Gaulois* and the *Revue wagnériène*, actually had a part in writing the text, and the identity of “Sicard” remains a mystery. Even d’Indy, to whom the work was dedicated, did not know the source of the poetry for certain. In a letter to Hugues Imbert from 1901, d’Indy admitted: “I never found out who wrote the poem of Franck’s *Psyché. I believe*, however, that it was written by Georges Franck (the Master’s son) and put into verse by one of Franck’s students who attends the École Normale Supérieure and whose name I do not know.”

Gustave Derepas believed that the author was Charles Grandmougin, the librettist for Franck’s opera *Hulda*. Joël-Marie Fauquet has speculated that “Sicard” was an invention and that Georges Franck may have written the poem; Fourcaud, a supporter of the composer, may have agreed to put his name on the libretto in order to enhance the work’s prestige.

The scenario of Franck’s symphonic poem dispenses with all but the two principal characters and modifies the ending: after Psyche’s transgression and suffering, Eros

38 Programmes of the Société nationale de musique, 1871-1928, *F-Pn* Rés. 2483 (1-5).

39 For a biographical sketch of Fourcaud, see Kelly Jo Maynard, “The Enemy Within: Encountering Wagner in Early Third Republic France” (PhD dissertation: University of California, Los Angeles, 2007), 322-25.

40 “Je n’ai jamais su de qui était le poème de *Psyché* de Franck. Je crois cependant qu’il a été écrit par Georges Franck (fils du Maître) et versifié par un normalien, élève de Franck, dont j’ignore le nom.” D’Indy to Hugues Imbert, 4 February 1901, quoted in Vallas, *Le Véritable histoire de César Franck*, 256.

41 Derepas, *César Franck*, 46.

42 Fauquet, *César Franck*, 704.
offers his forgiveness and the couple reunites. Franck conveys some elements of the story through the chorus’s text, and the libretto includes prose descriptions that are not verbalized in performance. Yet Franck reserves the key dramatic moments in Psyché for the orchestra alone. The wide range of programmatic interpretations that observers have mapped onto the piece has been possible precisely because of the polysemous nature of Franck’s non-vocal writing. A discussion of the musical procedures in Psyché will help illustrate this claim.

An Analysis of Psyché

Franck’s music has been the subject of several important works of scholarship in recent years, notably by Peter Jost, Christiane Strucken-Paland, and Andrew Deruchie.43 However, the musicological literature on Psyché remains limited. Only two authors in the past thirty years, Angelus Seipt and Joël-Marie Fauquet, have devoted substantial attention to the piece, and Anglo-American scholarship on Psyché is virtually non-existent.44 Moreover, despite its considerably popularity around the turn of the twentieth century, Psyché is rarely performed in its entirety today. The complete orchestral score was never published, and for the better part of the past century, the piece has usually been represented in the concert hall by four free-standing orchestral excerpts: “Le Sommeil de

43 See Peter Jost, ed., César Franck: Werk und Rezeption (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2004); Christiane Strucken-Paland, Zyklische Prinzipien in den Instrumentalwerken César Francks, Kölner Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft, ed. Christoph von Blumröder and Wolfram Steinbeck, vol. 7 (Kassel: Gustav Bosse Verlag, 2009); and Deruchie’s chapter on the Symphony in D Minor in “The French Symphony at the Fin de Siècle.”

44 Seipt, César Francks symphonische Dichtungen (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse Verlag, 1981); Fauquet, César Franck.
Psyché,” “Psyché enlevée par les Zéphirs,” “Les Jardins d’Éros,” and “Psyché et Éros.” When performed in this fashion, Franck’s architectural conception and much of the narrative program are lost.

A good starting point for understanding Psyché in its totality is Franck’s own published guide to the piece. This “Notice analytique et thématique” reproduces portions of prose description from the libretto interspersed with musical examples and commentary. The composer distributed this guide to concertgoers at Colonne’s performances of the work in February and March 1890. As Jann Pasler has noted, many Parisian concert societies at this time—notably those of Colonne and Charles Lamoureux—provided detailed program notes in order to educate audience members.

In the years after Franck’s death, Léon Vallas and G. Huberti expanded upon the composer’s Notice, publishing more comprehensive analyses of Psyché in La Revue musicale de Lyon and Le Guide musical, respectively.

45 These four orchestral excerpts were published by the Parisian firm Le Bailly-Bornemann in 1898. Franck prepared a reduction of the complete work for piano four-hands and chorus. This arrangement was published by Louis Bruneau in 1889, but Bruneau’s firm closed the following year. A version for solo piano and chorus by Gustave Sandré was published by O. Bornemann in 1903. According to Fauquet in César Franck, Pierre de Bréville prepared a reduction of the complete score for two pianos, published by Hartmann in 1887, but I have not been able to locate independent evidence of this source’s existence.

46 César Franck [presumed author], “Notice analytique et thématique de Psyché” (Paris: Hamelle, 1889), reprinted in Fauquet, César Franck, 965-70.


48 See Léon Vallas, “Psyché de César Franck,” Revue musicale de Lyon 4 (1906): 321-26; and G. Huberti, “Psyché de César Franck,” Le Guide musical 48, no. 10 (9 March 1902): 219-21. The latter journal, based in Belgium, was a leading source of advocacy on behalf of Franck and his circle; the chief Paris correspondent was Camille Benoît, a Franck pupil who wrote under the pseudonym Balthazar Claes.
Franck’s symphonic poem is divided into three main parts. The first introduces Psyche; the second depicts the union of the two lovers; and the last chronicles Psyche’s punishment and redemption. Fauquet suggests that this structure corresponds to the ternary model of exposition, peripeteia, and catastrophe found in ancient Greek tragedy.\(^{49}\)

**Part One**

Part one consists of two movements for orchestra alone: “Le sommeil de Psyché” (Psyche’s slumber) and “Psyché enlevée par les Zéphirs” (Psyche carried off by the Zephyrs). Considered as standalone excerpts—the manner in which *Psyché* is most often heard today—these movements are more typical of the late nineteenth-century symphonic poem than the work as a whole: they are self-contained, purely orchestral pieces that express dramatic content.

“Le sommeil de Psyché” serves as an introduction to the work and frames the action to come. The libretto and Franck’s *Notice* give this description: “Psyche is asleep. Lightly rocked by her dream, her spirit at times foresees an absolute happiness which is not of this world, but of which she has a premonition.”\(^{50}\) This section is formally analogous to the first movement of a symphony. It is in clear dialogue with sonata form traditions, with the exposition (mm. 1-60) immediately followed by a freely expanded recapitulation and brief coda (mm. 61-112).\(^{51}\) The *Notice* identifies the movement’s two

\(^{49}\) Fauquet, *César Franck*, 709.

\(^{50}\) “Psyché est endormie… vaguement bercée par le rêve, son esprit entrevoit par instant un bonheur absolu qui n’est pas de ce monde, mais dont elle a comme le pressentiment.” Franck, “Notice analytique et thématique.”
principal themes. The primary theme (mm. 1-7, ex. 4.1), according to Vallas and Huberti, represents Psyche’s dream. These two authors describe the second theme (m. 26ff., ex. 4.2) as a depiction of “Psyche’s tender aspiration towards love”; other writers have interpreted the second theme as a representation of Psyche herself. The association of this melody with Psyche assumes additional resonance in light of normative post-Beethovenian sonata practices, since secondary themes were often gendered as “feminine.” Both of the movement’s principal themes—“Psyche’s dream” and “Psyche’s aspiration towards love”—recur at key points in the symphonic poem. Franck observes that the latter theme “will play an important role in the work.” It is the most important cyclic element in the piece, appearing both in literal repetition and through subtle transformation of its characteristic melodic contour: ascending thirds followed by descending stepwise motion. I will henceforth refer to this melody as Psyche’s theme (1).

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51 A classic example of this structure is the finale of Brahms’s First Symphony. Various names for this formal type include “amplified binary” (John Daverio), “sonata with displaced development,” and “Type 2 sonata” (James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy). For further discussion and bibliographic references, see Hepokoski and Darcy, Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth-Century Sonata (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 353-87.


54 “Ce morceau contient deux phrases capitales. La seconde aura dans l’œuvre un rôle important.” Franck, “Notice analytique et thématique.”
Ex. 4.1. Psyche’s dream. I, “Le Sommeil de Psyché,” mm. 1-7
Ex. 4.2. Psyche’s theme (1). I, “Le Sommeil de Psyché,” mm. 26-31
The second movement, “Psyché enlevée par les Zéphirs,” functions as a scherzo in sprightly 3/8 meter. Franck writes: “Suddenly the air trembles, filled with strange noises. Psyche, carried off by the Zephyrs, is transported into the gardens of Eros.”

Franck depicts this scene through conventional instrumental topoi: rustling triplet figures in the flute, chromatic string flurries, and harp arpeggiations. He also signifies through self-quotation. Both of the main themes in this movement are borrowed from Franck’s earlier symphonic poem *Les Éolides* (1876), based on Leconte de Lisle’s neoclassical poem about the daughters of Aeolus, god of the winds. The first theme of “Psyché enlevée par les Zéphirs” (mm. 135-141, and a more complete statement m. 151ff.) corresponds to the opening of *Les Éolides*, and the second theme (m. 171ff.) corresponds to m. 171ff. in the earlier work.

Franck’s *Notice* provides additional commentary about these themes in their new context. The first theme “only has a picturesque value”; the second foreshadows the love that Psyche will be the object of. Neither of these ideas recur in their entirety later in the piece, but Franck ends the movement with a significant juxtaposition. Returning to the slow tempo of “Le sommeil de Psyché,” Franck recalls Psyche’s theme (1) in the bass clarinet (mm. 229-38), and dovetails this with a final statement of the second theme of “Zéphirs” (mm. 237-47). The programmatic implication...

55 “Tout à coup l’air frisonne, rempli de bruits étranges… Psyché, enlevée par les zéphirs, est transportée dans les jardins d’Eros.” Ibid.

56 I number measures continuously within each of Psyché’s three main parts. Thus “Psyché enlevée par les Zéphirs” begins at m. 113 in part I. At the opening of parts II and III, I begin counting again from m. 1.

of this ending is clear: Psyche will soon be united with her love. This promise is fulfilled in part two of the symphonic poem.

Part Two

Part two of Psyché is divided into three sections: “Les Jardins d’Eros” (The Gardens of Eros), for orchestra alone; a choral section; and the instrumental movement “Psyché et Eros.” “Les Jardins d’Eros” depicts Psyche as she rests in the magnificent home of her soon-to-be bridegroom: “Psyche rests amidst flowers, greeted like a sovereign by Nature in celebration.” Franck identifies three principal themes in this movement, which recur later in the piece in connection with Eros. The first of these cyclic ideas, which I call “Eros’s garden theme (1)” (mm. 3-10, ex. 4.3), is a pentatonic figuration in undulating eighth notes. Against this, the horns play a slow, ascending arpeggiation of a D-flat major triad, reminiscent of the opening of Psyche’s theme (1). The movement’s second cyclic idea, “Eros’s garden theme (2)” (mm. 21-24, ex. 4.4a), features a syncopated rhythm and foursquare phrasing characteristic of Franck’s melodic writing; this melody bears a strong resemblance, for instance, to the second theme from opening movement of the composer’s Symphony in D Minor (ex. 4.4b). The scale-degree sequence 6—5—1 (8)—6—5 will recur in a different guise later in the piece. “Eros’s garden theme (3)” functions as a closing idea, commencing with the authentic cadence in m. 45. Its distinguishing feature is a series of descending fourths passed around the orchestra: F#-C#, D#-A#, B-F#, G#-D#. Like “Psyché enlevée par les Zéphirs,” this movement closes with a brief

58 “Psyché repose au milieu des fleurs, saluée comme une souveraine par la Nature en fête.” Ibid.
recall of Psyche’s theme (1). Franck indicates that the reappearance of this melody signals the “progressive realization of Psyche’s dream.”

59 “Pour terminer, et immédiatement avant le chœur des voix mystérieuses, reparaît la phrase n° 2 du sommeil. Elle indique la réalisation progressive du rêve de Psyché.” Ibid.
Ex. 4.3. Eros’s garden theme (1). II, “Les Jardins d’Eros,” mm. 1-10

LES JARDINS D’ÉROS

Petite Flûte
Flûtes
Hautbois
Cor Anglais
Clarinette Sib
Clarinette Bass en Sib
Cor en Fa
5° et 4°
Bassons
5° et 4°
Trompettes en Fa
Pistons en La
1° et 2° Trombones
3° Trombone et Bass, Tuba
Timbales
Sol & Si♭
Violons
PP
Altos
PP
Violoncelles
PP
Contrebasses
PP
Ex. 4.3 (continued)
Ex. 4.4a. Eros’s garden theme (2). II, “Les Jardins d’Eros,” mm. 21-24
Ex. 4.4b. Symphony in D Minor, I, mm. 129-36
Ex. 4.4b (continued)
Immediately after this recall, the chorus makes its first appearance in the work. Franck’s score calls for sopranos, altos, and tenors only; the absence of basses gives the vocal writing an ethereal quality. For Colonne’s performances, Franck placed the singers offstage at the suggestion of his son Georges, heightening the otherworldly effect of their voices. The chorus does not play an active role in the drama, nor does it narrate events in real time. Instead, it functions like a chorus in Greek tragedy, addressing the main characters and providing commentary. The Notice describes the singers as “esprits” [spirits] and as a “chœur des voix mystérieuses” [chorus of mysterious voices] who whisper in Psyche’s ear. Franck’s deployment of musical themes reinforces the chorus’s outsider status: the singers have new thematic material, while the orchestral accompaniment interjects ideas from earlier in the piece. For example, the chorus intones the opening line “Amour! Source de toute vie!” [Love! Source of all life!] in a neutral chorale setting, followed by a recollection of Psyché’s theme (1) in the bass clarinet (ex. 4.5). The next several phrases display the same pattern: new material for the chorus alternating with motivic reminiscences in the orchestra.

60 Unfortunately, the offstage placement of the chorus made it difficult for audience members to understand the words being sung. See d’Indy’s letter to Guy Ropartz, 27 November 1898, cited in Fauquet, César Franck, 706; and Georges Franck’s letter to Arthur Coquard, 30 November 1890, reprinted in Fauquet, César Franck: Correspondance, 234.
Ex. 4.5. “Amour! Source de toute vie!” II, mm. 141-53
This choral movement consists of three subsections, which Franck distinguishes through changes in key, tempo, and meter. In the first subsection (mm. 141-96), the chorus praises love’s power. The chorus’s term of address, “Amour,” suggests two layers of meaning—both a general paean to love and an invocation of Eros himself. Following this subsection is a brief orchestral interlude that recalls Psyche’s dream (mm. 196-212). In the second subsection (mm. 213-77), in a more flowing triple meter, the chorus addresses Psyche—“plus belle que la Beauté” [more beautiful than beauty itself]—and predicts that her bridegroom will soon come. This is followed by an orchestral reprise of Psyche’s theme (1) (mm. 278-87) and the promise, “vois pour toi s’entr’ouvrir les portes du palais” [for you the palace gates are thrown open] (mm. 288-91). In the final subsection, Franck breaks from the homophonic chorale texture of before. The sopranos, singing in arioso style, warn Psyche to remember the command she has been given: she must never look upon her lover’s face (mm. 292-310, ex. 4.6a). The vocal line in descending thirds (C, A-flat, F, D-flat) inverts the opening contour of Psyche’s theme (1), thus transforming the cyclic idea. Against this, the orchestra intones a stark sequence of chords: an F minor triad (i) and a B-flat half-diminished seventh (iv half-dim°7). The slow-moving sequence of chords suggests both a musical and a dramaturgical resonance with Lohengrin’s injunction to Elsa in Wagner’s opera (ex. 4.6b). Franck’s melodic-harmonic complex, which I label the “remembrance motive,” will return in part three.
Ex. 4.6a. Remembrance motive. II, mm. 292-300
Ex. 4.6b. Wagner, *Lohengrin*, Act I, Scene 3: “Nie sollst du mich befragen”

Part two concludes with the fourth and final free-standing orchestral movement, “Psyché et Eros.” Although Franck portrays this scene without recourse to sung text, the idea of the voice plays a critical role. In both the autograph score and the *Notice*, Franck indicates that the principal themes represent Eros and Psyche, respectively.  Of the movement’s opening, Franck writes: “The spirits have fallen silent: another voice already resonates, soft but penetrating: it is that of Eros himself.” Eros’s theme is a broad cantilena in the violas and celli whose range—C#3 to a single C5 at its apex—suggests a tenor voice rendered in instrumental color (mm. 327-50, ex. 4.7). Seipt observes that the

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61 Seipt, *César Franck symphonische Dichtungen*, 428.

orchestration and character of this theme is reminiscent of the opening of the “Scène d’amour” from Berlioz’s *Roméo et Juliette* and the prelude to Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*. The melody also resembles Psyche’s theme (1) in its triadic construction. After Eros’s theme, “Psyche responds, timidly at first.” This melody (mm. 374-81, ex. 4.8) is a direct transformation of Psyche’s theme (1), with a chain of rising thirds followed by descending stepwise motion. However, the new melody has a different character than its progenitor: sweet (Franck indicates *dolcissimo*), flowing, and played in the delicate high register of the violins. For this reason, I give this music a separate label, Psyche’s theme (2).

**Ex. 4.7.** Eros’s theme. II, “Psyché et Eros,” 327-50

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63 Seipt, *César Franck’s symphonische Dichtungen*, 430.

64 “Psyché répond d’abord timidement.” Franck, “Notice analytique et thématique.”
Ex. 4.7 (continued)
Ex. 4.8. Psyche’s theme (2). II, “Psyché et Eros,” 374-81

The association of this movement’s two themes with Eros and Psyche, respectively, accords with a convention of nineteenth-century sonata form that James Hepokoski has called the “gendered two-block exposition.”65 (For an outline of the movement’s form, see fig. 4.2.) In this type of movement, exemplified by Wagner’s Overture to Der fliegende Holländer (1841), the primary theme is gendered masculine and the secondary theme feminine. Wagner’s paradigm presents a stark opposition: brooding, stormy minor for the Dutchman, and a celestial major-mode chorale for Senta, his redemptive intercessor. While the contrast in “Psyché et Eros” is not as extreme—both themes are

lyrical and in major—Franck distinguishes the two themes through significant contrasts in register, rhythmic character, and tonality. Eros’s theme is in a tenor range, predominated by quarter note motion, and harmonically peripatetic: half-diminished and dominant sonorities predominate, and the only clear articulation of key occurs with an imperfect authentic cadence on F# major in m. 359. In comparison, Psyche’s soprano-range theme features flowing eighth notes and progresses through a series of clearly defined key areas: C# major, E major, G major, and B-flat major.

After Psyche’s theme has been presented, Franck depicts the climactic meeting of the two lovers. He portrays this union through three stages of increasing musical interconnection. In the first stage, the protagonists alternate phrases. Eros, represented by the violas and celli, begins a new theme (recalling Eros’s garden theme (3) in its descending fourths) in mm. 404-11; Psyche, portrayed by the flutes and first violins, responds with her original melody in mm. 412-19; and Eros echoes his new theme in mm. 420-23. In the second stage (mm. 424-46), the two characters—each recalling their respective themes from the beginning of the movement—begin to overlap phrases. The third stage (mm. 447-58) continues Eros’s theme, which Psyche (here, violins in octaves) now adopts in imitative polyphony, proceeding in near-canon at the measure. The reprise of Eros’s theme in stages two and three marks the beginning of a modified recapitulation; except for some changes in dynamics, the viola and cello parts in mm. 439-68 are an exact, at-pitch repetition of mm. 335-64. Franck’s technique of gradual reconciliation between the two voices in this passage—and the male voice’s dominant role in the encounter—bears a structural kinship to Don Giovanni’s celebrated duet of seduction, “Là ci darem la mano,” from Mozart’s opera about the inveterate womanizer.
A pedal point on F# (mm. 463-67) and a series of taut harmonies (C# major, French 6 of F#, G#₄₃) prepares the climax of the movement: an ecstatic, fortissimo statement of Psyche’s theme (2) by the entire orchestra over an A⁶₄ sonority (mm. 471-78, ex. 4.9a). This passage represents the continuation of the recapitulation into the second theme area, and it is the first definitive articulation of A major, the nominal key of the movement. This thematic reprise is also in dialogue with gendered nineteenth-century approaches to sonata form. The return of the secondary theme in the recapitulation often assumes a more triumphant guise, suggestive of the redemptive power of the feminine. This sort of procedure occurs, for example, in Weber’s Overture to Der Freischütz (1821) (ex. 4.9b). Moreover, Franck’s electrifying use of not one, but two colossal 6/4 sonorities (m. 471 ff., and in transposition up to C major in m. 479ff.) resonates with another Wagnerian locus classicus, Wotan’s farewell to Brünnhilde at the conclusion of Die Walküre (ex. 4.9c).
Ex. 4.9a. II, “Psyché et Eros,” mm. 469-87
Ex. 4.9a (continued)
Ex. 4.9b. Weber, Overture to *Der Freischütz*, 2nd theme comparison
Ex. 4.9c. Wagner, *Die Walküre*, Wotan’s Farewell
Franck’s description of this music, as Fauquet wryly observes, employs a prudish metaphor for the lovers’ union: “soon their souls merge… All is passion, all is light, all is happiness.” The fact that Franck scores this movement for orchestra alone, however, allows for a multiplicity of interpretations. Huberti, for example, describes the triumphant return of Psyche’s theme (2) as a “paroxysm of passion.” His reading of the movement’s trajectory has an erotic subtext: “Love, first hesitant, asserts itself; it has flights, returns to calm, torrents of passion, then moments of ecstasy.”

After the climax in m. 471ff., the music gradually returns to a state of repose. Franck ends the movement with a concise sequence of references: first to the music of the Zephyrs (mm. 522-23), then to Psyche (mm. 524-26), and finally the remembrance motive (mm. 527-30). The last of these statements, which occurs on a brief diversion into the minor mode, reminds the listener that Psyche’s bliss is conditional. As Franck writes in the *Notice*, “all is happiness… forever, if Psyche can remember.”

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67 “Le paroxysme de la passion semble pourtant réservé au thème 11 [Psyche’s theme (2)], car Franck, après l’avoir fait désirer, le ramène dans un grand déploiement de force orchestrale.” Huberti, “*Psyché* de César Franck,” 220.

68 “L’amour, d’abord hésitant, s’affirme, a des envelopes d’entraînement, des retours au calme, des torrents de passion, puis des moments d’extase.” Ibid.

69 “…tout est bonheur… éternel, si Psyché sait se souvenir.” Franck, “Notice analytique et thématique.”
## Fig. 4.2. Formal outline of “Psyché et Eros”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Key/harmony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>311-26</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>a# half-dim₇ and A₇ chords; no clear tonic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rotation 1 (exposition and development)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Key/harmony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>327-34</td>
<td>P₀: Eros’s theme (violas/celli), opening module</td>
<td>[A] →</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>335-42</td>
<td>P₁: Eros’s theme, main melody (Huberti: theme 9)⁷⁰</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>343-64</td>
<td>P₂: Eros’s theme, continuation (Huberti: theme 12)</td>
<td>IAC, F# major (359)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>365-73</td>
<td>TR: Transitional idea (tutti) (Huberti: theme 10)</td>
<td>C# major; half cadence on G#, 373 (medial caesura)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>374-89</td>
<td>S₁: Psyche’s theme (2), part 1 (Huberti: theme 11)</td>
<td>C# (374-81; PAC in 374); E (382-89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>390-403</td>
<td>S₂: Psyche’s theme (2), continuation</td>
<td>G (390-93); B-flat (394-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>404-11</td>
<td>CL: new theme for Eros (violas/celli) derived from Eros’s Garden Theme (3). Stage 1 in lovers’ encounter begins</td>
<td>B-flat (404-07; IAC in 404); G (408-11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>412-19</td>
<td>[S₁]: interpolation of Psyche’s theme (2)</td>
<td>E-flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>420-23</td>
<td>CL continued</td>
<td>F#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>424-38</td>
<td>Stage 2 begins: overlapping statements of P₂ and S₂ (developmental space)</td>
<td>[F#] → [A]; no cadential articulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rotation 2 (modified recapitulation)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Key/harmony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>439-46</td>
<td>P₁ reprised at pitch with violin countermelody based on S₂</td>
<td>[A] →</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>447-70</td>
<td>Stage 3: P₂ with imitation in violins (447-58); TR replaced with new chord sequence (468-70)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>471-86</td>
<td>S₁ (tutti) (Huberti: “paroxysm of passion”)</td>
<td>A₆/₄ (471-78); C₆/₄ (479-86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>487-500</td>
<td>S₂</td>
<td>E-flat (487-90); G-flat (491-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501-04</td>
<td>CL (shortened to 4 bars from 8)</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>505-08</td>
<td>[S₁] interpolation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>509-12</td>
<td>CL continued</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>513-17</td>
<td>[S₁] interpolation</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>518-21</td>
<td>S₂ fragment</td>
<td>A (IAC in 518)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Coda: Poco più lento**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Key/harmony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>522-23</td>
<td>“Psyché enlevée par les Zéphirs”</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>524-26</td>
<td>Psyche’s theme (1) incipit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>527-35</td>
<td>Remembrance motive (527-30) with cadential conclusion</td>
<td>a → A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Keys in [brackets] are implied, but not secured by cadence or a root-position tonic.

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⁷⁰ Huberti’s thematic labels are taken from his “Psyché de César Franck,” 220.
Part Three

Psyche does not remember the warning; she disobeys Eros’s command and discovers his identity. Her punishment and redemption form the basis for the third and final part of the symphonic poem, which Franck titles “Le châtiment—Souffrances et plaintes de Psyché—Apothéose” (The punishment—Psyche’s suffering and laments—Apotheosis). “Le châtiment” corresponds to an initial choral section; “Souffrances et plaintes de Psyché” is orchestral; and the apotheosis begins with chorus but ends with orchestra alone.

Franck does not depict the moment when Psyche discovers her lover’s identity. Instead, the chorus relates this event after it has passed: “Amour, elle a connu ton nom” [Love, she has learned your name]. The chorus proceeds to describe Psyche’s suffering and entreats Eros to forgive her. The orchestra supplements the text with a layer of musical signification; as Franck observes in the Notice, “Le châtiment” opens with an instrumental restatement of the i—iv half-diminished 7 sequence from the remembrance motive. Even before the voices enter in m. 3, this chord progression signals that the ensuing music will concern Eros’s previous injunction.

Franck uses the orchestra both to recall the past and to foreshadow upcoming events. First, he presents the two cyclic ideas from “Les Jardins d’Eros,” which provide a poignant counterpoint of reminiscence to the chorus’s description of Psyche’s current fate. At m. 28ff., Eros’s garden theme (1), now recast in F# minor, accompanies the text “la voici maintenant errante sur la terre” [here now she wanders about the earth]. Shortly thereafter (m. 41ff., ex. 4.10), the orchestra reintroduces Eros’s garden theme (2) while the chorus sings “Elle va sanglotant au regret du mystère…” [she sobs with regret at the
mystery…]. But the theme and its harmonization have been chromatically transformed to reflect Psyche’s despair. Franck notes that Eros’s theme now has a “sad character”; Huberti ascribes to the music a “tortured air.” This thematic recall simultaneously evokes Psyche’s former happiness, now lost, and prefigures the chorus’s imminent mention of Eros’s garden—“…des bleus jardins d’Eros,” in mm. 44-46.

Near the end of “Le châtiment,” Franck introduces two new orchestral motives that will acquire dramatic significance later in the piece (ex. 4.11). The instrumental melody in mm. 52-55, which I refer to as the motive of Psyche’s suffering, prefigures the upcoming orchestral section, “Souffrances et plaintes de Psyché.” In mm. 60-61, the orchestra states an idea that appears at first glance to be a rhythmic reworking of Eros’s garden theme (2), with the scale-degree contour 6—5—1 (8)—6—5. In the new rhythmic configuration, it will eventually accompany the text “Eros a pardonné,” so I label it the forgiveness motive.

Ex. 4.10. “Le châtiment.” III, mm. 41-48

Elle va sanglotant au regret du mystère

bleus jardins d’Eros et des parvis sacrés.
Ex. 4.11. “Le châtiment.” III, mm. 52-62
The ensuing orchestral section, “Souffrances et plaintes de Psyché,” depicts Psyche’s suffering and lamentation. Franck comments in the *Notice*: “Psyche weeps; she suffers infinite sorrows, because she has known infinite happiness.” The motive of Psyche’s suffering is first presented by a solo English horn, then goes through several transformations until a climactic tutti statement in F# minor at m. 152. Throughout this passage, the orchestra presents hints of earlier cyclic ideas. Eros’s garden theme (3) reappears in mm. 119-26, and the upward arpeggiation and downward scalar motion characteristic of Psyche’s theme (1) occurs in many melodic fragments, such as mm. 79-80, 84-85, and 111-12.

After the tutti statement of Psyche’s suffering motive, the orchestra effects the resolution of the entire symphonic poem: Eros forgives Psyche and the lovers are reunited (ex. 4.12). Franck conveys this critical moment in the narrative without recourse to sung text. The deployment of cyclic motives alone, in a carefully determined order and arrangement, signifies the extramusical content. First, the primary theme from “Psyché et Eros” is restated in the celli (mm. 179-85); Eros has returned. Then, material from “Les Jardins d’Eros” is successively reintroduced: the undulating garden theme (1) in m. 186ff., a fragment of garden theme (2) at m. 191, and a full statement of garden theme (2) in mm. 197-200. Franck comments in the *Notice*: “Éros va pardonner. … Le monde tressaille de joie.” At m. 201, the time signature shifts to 3/4 and garden theme (1) continues in the background. Against this, the low strings and woodwinds play the

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72 “Psyché pleure; elle souffre des douleurs infinies, car elle a connu l’infini bonheur. Elle meurt dans un douloureux et suprême élan vers cet amour idéal qu’elle a perdu à jamais, mais qu’elle espère toujours.” Franck, “Notice analytique et thématique.”

73 “Éros va pardonner. … Le monde tressaille de joie.” Ibid.
beginning of Psyche’s theme (1), mm. 201-4, at the same pitch class as it first appeared in “Le sommeil de Psyché.” Instead of continuing this phrase as it originally appeared, however, the orchestra completes the melody by recalling a portion of Eros’s theme, mm. 205-208. The two protagonists’ themes have merged into one. Seipt observes that this technique is similar to the synthesis of the “Last Supper” and “Grail” motives near the conclusion of Wagner’s Parsifal.74 Franck repeats this entire sequence of events, mm. 208-29, culminating in an ecstatic restatement of the transitional theme from “Psyché et Eros” over a brilliant C⁶, sonority. The dramatic implication of these musical events is clear: Eros and Psyche are reunited in the garden, and all is forgiven.

74 Seipt, César Francks symphonische Dichtungen, 439.
Ex. 4.12. “Souffrances et plaintes de Psyché.” III, mm. 179-208
Ex. 4.12 (continued)
What the orchestra has depicted the chorus now reaffirms. The final “Apothéose” (m. 241ff.) begins with the proclamation: “Eros a pardonné. Tressaillez, cieux et terre!” [Eros has forgiven. Heaven and earth quake with delight!] to the melody of the forgiveness motive. The contrasting verb tenses in the Notice and the vocal text are revealing. In his discussion of the preceding orchestral section, Franck refers to Eros’s pardon in the future tense; once all the cyclic themes have been combined, the chorus reports on a completed action. Franck reinforces the redemptive character of the choral entrance with an unexpected shift from C major to a brighter key area, E major, and two topoi normally associated with religious music: hymn-like vocal declamation and prominent use of harp arpeggiations.  

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75 Another plausible reading advocated by Seipt is that Franck’s use of these topoi suggests that he may have intended for this passage to have religious connotations. Ibid., 440.
After the chorus’s final proclamation—“Le miracle d’amour est enfin accompli” [The miracle of love is at last complete]—the poème symphonique concludes in pure instrumental sound. The orchestra reprises the forgiveness motive (m. 279ff.), working Eros’s garden theme (1) and Psyche’s theme (1) into the musical texture. The compound melody of Psyche’s theme (1) + Eros’s theme appears for a final time in mm. 345-60, now brilliantly orchestrated and triumphant. The symphonic poem ends with a slow, ascending arpeggiation of the E major triad in the brass against a background of shimmering triplets. This final gesture of ascending thirds represents the purest expression of the link between the two lovers; both of their respective themes, after all, are based on this melodic motion through thirds.

**Psyché and the Semantics of Genre**

*Psyché* belongs to a long tradition of secular French works for orchestra and chorus.

Among the most celebrated forerunners to Franck’s essay were Félicien David’s *ode-symphonie* *Le Désert* (1844) and Berlioz’s dramatic choral works: *Lélia* (1831-32), *Roméo et Juliette* (1839), and *La Damnation de Faust* (1845-46). In the 1870s and 1880s, Augusta Holmès composed a number of large-scale pieces for orchestra and chorus (discussed in chapter 2). Unlike his predecessors, however, Franck described his choral work as a *poème symphonique*—a term that had previously been reserved, at least in France, for purely orchestral works.77

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Franck’s invocation of this genre suggests a kinship with Berlioz and Liszt, the two figures usually credited with the development of program music. As the foregoing analysis of Psyché demonstrates, Franck relies on the orchestra alone to convey the most significant aspects of the work’s dramatic content, thereby aligning the piece with the aesthetics of these earlier composers. In his 1837 essay “De l’Imitation musicale,” Berlioz had argued that music is ideally suited “to reproduce the intonations of the passions and the emotions” and can express poetic ideas without recourse to words.78 Like Berlioz’s Roméo et Juliette—a symphonie dramatique that Franck surely knew—Psyché displays a bias towards non-vocal expression at climactic moments.79 Liszt had brought the symphonic poem, so named, to prominence in the mid-nineteenth century through a series of about a dozen works in the genre, all inspired by extramusical ideas. Franck’s transformation of programmatic themes echoes Lisztian symphonic procedures, exemplified best in the latter composer’s Faust-Symphonie. Franck’s use of recurring melodic ideas also owes a clear debt to Wagnerian leitmotivic technique. D’Indy made the link between Franckian cyclic form and Wagner’s practice explicit, proclaiming that

77 One important exception outside of France was Liszt’s Faust-Symphonie (1854-57), for which the composer wrote two endings—an original version for orchestra alone, and a revision with chorus. While many of Liszt’s friends found the choral version problematic, it has found widespread acceptance today. See Kenneth Hamilton, “Liszt,” in The Nineteenth-Century Symphony, ed. D. Kern Holoman, Studies in Musical Genres and Repertoires, R. Larry Todd, series general editor (New York: Schirmer, 1997), 142-62.


79 Roméo et Juliette was a staple of Parisian concert life in the 1870s and 1880s, and Colonne was particularly noted for his performances of the work. See Jann Pasler, “Building a Public for Orchestral Music: Les Concerts Colonne,” in Le Concert et son public: mutations de la vie musicale en Europe de 1780 à 1914, ed. H. E. Bödeker, P. Veit and M. Werner (Paris: Edition de la Maison des Sciences Humaines, 2002), 209-39.
“the cyclic theme in the symphonic realm and the leitmotive in the dramatic order are ultimately one and the same thing.”

At the same time, the cyclic procedures Franck uses in Psyché are analogous to structural features in the composer’s nominally abstract instrumental works. In the most striking parallel, the recall and combination of themes in “Souffrances et plaintes de Psyché” mirrors the cyclic finale of Franck’s Symphony in D minor—composed during the same years as Psyché. In the lead-up to the symphony’s climax (ex. 4.13), the violins and upper woodwinds bustle in rapid eighth-note figurations derived from the movement’s principal thematic material (mm. 296-99). Franck then modulates into a broad 3/4 time (m. 300) while retaining the violin figurations, now notated as sixteenth notes. Against this, the rest of the orchestra issues a forceful statement of the second movement’s opening theme. In discussions with students, Franck described how the thematic recollections in this movement built on the precedent of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony: “The finale, like that of the Ninth, recalls all the themes. But they do not appear as mere citations—I do something with them, they take on the role of new elements.”

Franck’s contrapuntal combination of two cyclic ideas, coupled with a shift into triple meter, bears a remarkable similarity to the redemptive moment in Psyché (ex. 4.12 above).


81 Franck’s explanation is quoted in a letter from Pierre de Bréville to Vincent d’Indy, printed in the Revue musicale S.I.M. [Société internationale de musique], 1 November 1913, 45, and cited in Brian Hart, “The French Symphony after Berlioz: From the Second Empire to the First World War,” in A. Peter Brown, The Symphonic Repertoire, vol. 3 part B: The European Symphony from ca. 1800 to ca. 1930: Great Britain, Russia, and France (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 596.
Ex. 4.13. Symphony in D Minor, III, mm. 292-309
Ex. 4.13 (continued)
Ex. 4.13 (continued)
The ubiquity of Franck’s cyclic procedure suggests that the thematic recalls of *Psyché* are not just motivated by the work’s dramatic content; they have an inner, “purely musical” logic as well.\(^\text{82}\) Franck’s hybrid approach to genre in *Psyché*—incorporating aspects of Wagnerian opera, the cyclic symphony, and the oratorio, in addition to the symphonic poem proper—perhaps accounts for its curious omission from d’Indy’s *Cours de composition musicale*. In his chapter on symphonic poems, d’Indy claims that Franck wrote only three essays in the genre: *Les Éolides*, *Le Chasseur maudit*, and *Les Djinns*. *Ce qu’on entend sur la montagne* (an early work) and *Psyché* go unmentioned.\(^\text{83}\)

**Critical Reception**

Initial responses to *Psyché* were mixed. *Le Ménestrel* reported that the premiere at the Société nationale de musique in March 1888 “received the warmest reception.”\(^\text{84}\) In the friendly confines of the Société, of course, the success of a new work written and conducted by the organization’s president would have been a foregone conclusion. In contrast, many orchestral musicians—contracted from outside the society—expressed open hostility towards Franck. Some found the score’s harmonic language bewildering. The composer Henri Maréchal recalled that during one rehearsal, a group of second violinists began to play the popular song “J’ai du bon tabac” during several measures.\(^\text{85}\)

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\(^{82}\) D’Indy would make this point a cornerstone of his historiography, arguing that the symphonic poems of Franck and his disciples differ from the models of Liszt in their adherence to principles of symphonic logic. See d’Indy, *Cours de Composition Musicale*, vol. 2, part 2 (Paris: Durand, 1948), 316.

\(^{83}\) Ibid., 324-25.

\(^{84}\) “…elle a reçu le plus chaleureux accueil.” “Concerts et soirées,” *Le Ménestrel*, 18 March 1888.
Observers gave conflicting accounts about the reception at Colonne’s performances in February and March 1890. Henry Gauthier-Villars, writing under the pseudonym *L’Ouvreuse*, described the scene as follows: “the audience was swept away, and Franck, the father of *Psyché*, glowing with happiness in his box, heard unanimous and prolonged ‘bravos’ greet his ‘Apotheosis.’”\(^{86}\) The reviewer from *L’Art musical* reported that the audience “listened with respect and applauded with sincerity.”\(^{87}\) On the other hand, Albéric Magnard, writing to Octave Maus the day after the performance, gave a more sober assessment. He concluded his report with a cynical, yet eerily prescient prediction about Franck’s posthumous reputation:

> Audience not hostile, but not friendly.  
> “Who on earth is that, Franck?”  
> “An organist.”  
> “Oh! Then it will not be very fun.”  
> Much along these lines before, during, and after the work. Curious looks at those who applaud.  
> It is not a success; the second performance has yet to happen. If the reception is not warmer, Franck is finished. Lamoureux, full of hatred; the press, grumpy; Colonne highlighting the risks already run. Then death, and several years later, an explosion of admiration, universal because fashionable.

[Public non hostile, mais non sympathique.  
“Qu’est-ce que c’est que ça, Franck?”  
“Un organiste.”  
“Oh! alors ça ne va pas être gai.”  
Beaucoup dans ce genre, avant, pendant, après l’œuvre. Regards curieux sur les mains qui applaudissent.  
Ce n’est pas un succès; reste la seconde audition. Si elle n’est pas plus chaude, c’est fini de Franck. Lamoureux, féroce-ment haineux; la presse


Reactions among critics were also split. *Le Ménestrel*, for example, ran contrasting reviews in two consecutive issues. Hippolyte Barbedette, one of the more conservative writers on the journal’s staff, attacked Franck for his “unending melody” and likened the composer’s metaphysical approach to Schopenhauer’s—arguments that demonstrate a clear anti-Wagnerian subtext:

With M. César Franck and his symphonic poem *Psyché*, we are surrounded by movement; continuous melody reigns in all its exaggerated presence. Through an uninterrupted series of outrageous harmonies, indecisive phrases wind, which, having no good reason for beginning, have none for ending. The orchestra moans and murmurs; the chorus, offstage, imitates the vague noise of aeolian harps hung on the branches of pine trees. M. Franck is the most mystical of our composers; he excels at depicting divine hypostases, celestial beatitudes, impalpable shapes, bottomless abysses, and limitless expanses. There is in him something of the *Pater extaticus* and the *Pater seraphicus* from the epilogue, in the heavens, of the second *Faust*. Like M. d’Indy, he likes to introduce listeners to the depth of his ideas: he circulated leaflets that explain the mysteries of his thought, just as Schopenhauer explained the mysteries of metaphysics by publishing *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*.

… Avec M. César Franck (poème symphonique de *Psyché*), nous sommes en plein dans le mouvement: c’est le règne de la mélodie continue dans toute son exagération. À travers une série non interrompue d’abracadabrantes harmonies serpentent des formules indécises qui, n’ayant aucune raison de commencer, n’en ont aucune de finir. L’orchestre gémit et murmure; les chœurs, derrière les coulisses, imitent le bruit vague des harpes éoliennes suspendues aux branches des pins. M. Franck est le plus mystique de nos compositeurs; il excelle à peindre les divines hypostases, les béatitudes célestes, les formes impalpables, les abîmes sans fond et les immensités sans limites. Il y a, en lui, du *Pater extaticus* et du *Pater seraphicus* de l’épilogue, dans le ciel, du second Faust. Comme M. d’Indy, il aime à initier ses auditeurs à la profondeur de ses conceptions: il fait distribuer des brochures qui expliquent les arcanes de sa pensée, comme Schopenhauer expliquait les arcanes de la métaphysique en pubilant la *Quadruple racine de la raison suffisante*.  

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Amédée Boutarel also expressed reservations about *Psyché* in a review the following week, but his overall assessment was more positive:

Melody abounds in *Psyché*, but it is a melody that does not involve radiant bursts of sunlight; it is better than that, the fanatics say, it is beautiful in its uniformity. We believe that beauty is made of shadows and light, and it is dangerous to forego composing in a musical work, even if only to direct the attention. *Psyché* is nonetheless a work of power and substance, unassailable in terms of melodic and harmonic structure, and of a noble and distinguished inspiration.

[La mélodie abonde dans *Psyché*, mais c’est une mélodie qui ne comporte pas d’éclaircies radieuses; c’est mieux que cela, diront les fanatiques, c’est l’uniformité dans la beauté. Nous croyons que la beauté est faite d’ombres et de lumière et qu’il y a danger à ne pas placer dans une œuvre musicale des points lumineux, ne fût-ce que pour conduire et diriger l’attention. *Psyché* n’en reste pas moins un ouvrage plein de force et de consistance, inattaquable au point de vue de la structure mélo-dique et harmonique et d’une inspiration noble et distinguée.]

When Colonne presented *Psyché* again on 30 November and 7 December that year, the critical responses were more favorable. Charles Darcours of *Le Figaro* proclaimed: “It is a great composition that contains parts of an ideal beauty. It would take many pages to analyze this superbly designed and often magnificently realized work.”

Georges Servières attributed the improved reception to a stronger performance by the chorus. Even Barbedette softened his previous position. Although he still criticized Franck for his impenetrable “*mélodie continue*”—a dig at the Wagnerian concept of

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91 “C’est une grande composition qui renferme des parties d’une idéale beauté. Il faudrait de longues pages pour analyser cette œuvre d’une conception superbe et d’une réalisation parfois magnifique.” Charles Darcours [Charles Réty], *Le Figaro*, 3 December 1890.

92 Servières, *La Musique française moderne*, 36.
unendliche Melodie—he acknowledged: “There is in Psyché a prodigious understanding of the orchestra; there are offstage choruses treated with extraordinary skill.” The shift in Barbedette’s tone may have been prompted by Franck’s recent passing; the composer had died a few weeks earlier on 8 November, after a cold he contracted in mid-October developed into pleurisy.

In the ensuing decades, the public’s regard for Psyché rose in parallel with the composer’s posthumous reputation. An 1895 article in Le Guide musical praised the symphonic poem as “surely one of the strongest works to appear in France since Berlioz.” Joséphin Péladan, writing in La Délivrance a decade later, mused: “I do not know a work of the nineteenth century that radiates mastery to the same degree as the symphony Psyché.” When the prestigious Société des Concerts du Conservatoire performed the piece in 1906, the critic from La Revue musicale not only assumed that the journal’s readership would be familiar with the composition, but that the merits of the score were self-evident:

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93 “Si le regretté César Franck eût vécu, il eût été ravi de l’admirable exécution de sa dernière œuvre, Psyché. César Franck était un musicien absolument sincère; il ne doutait pas que sa conception de la musique ne fût la vraie. Il y a, dans Psyché, une entente prodigieuse de l’orchestre, il y a des chevres dans la coulisse traités avec un art extraordinaire, mais il existe et il existera longtemps des esprits fermés à la conception de la mélodie continue; il paraît qu’il y a en elle des mystères profonds, des arcanes merveilleux, qu’il faut une intelligence tout à fait supérieure pour approfondir et comprendre. Je suis au nombre des esprits médiocres que la grâce n’a pas encore absolument touchés, et je me suis beaucoup plus à l’audition du ballet d’Hérodiade, qui m’a semblé très mélodieux, très chantant, et qui est fait pour complaire aux esprits de second ordre.” Barbedette, Le Ménestrel, 14 December 1890.


95 “Je ne sais pas une œuvre du dix-neuvième siècle qui respire la maîtrise au même degré que la symphonie de Psyché…” Joséphin Péladan, “Concert Colonne—Festival de César Franck,” La Délivrance 4, 19 October 1904.
It is a work too well known to warrant a new analysis here. Little understood at its appearance in 1888, this work seems luminous to us now. It never drags nor causes weariness. It has everything: the themes are charming, and I really cannot imagine that an ‘official’ critic could maintain the other day that he did not like *Psyché* without even bothering to tell his readers the reasons why he could not like this exquisite piece.

[C’est une partition trop connue pour qu’il y ait lieu d’en donner ici une analyse nouvelle. Peu comprise à son apparition, en 1888, cette œuvre nous semble maintenant lumineuse. Elle ne présente aucune longueur et ne donne nulle lassitude. Tout y est bien en place, les thèmes sont charmants, et vraiment je ne puis concevoir qu’un critique “autorisé” ait pu l’autre jour affirmer qu’il n’aimait pas *Psyché*, sans même prendre la peine de dire à ses lecteurs les causes pour lesquelles il pouvait ne pas aimer cette œuvre exquise.]

*Psyché* as Christian Allegory

As noted earlier in this chapter, the perceived eroticism of *Psyché*’s subject matter was a subject of intense debate among Franck’s circle. The pianist Alfred Cortot recalled a revealing conversation between the composer and one of his students: “As they discussed *Psyché* and the sweetly intoxicated ecstasy revealed on certain pages of the score, Franck, putting his hand on a copy of *Les Béatitudes*, remarked simply: ‘What I like about this piece is that there is not a sensual note in it.’” The remark tacitly acknowledges that *Psyché*, unlike *Les Béatitudes*, can be interpreted in an erotic fashion.

In written reviews, however, most nineteenth- and early twentieth-century commentators suggested that Franck avoided carnal thoughts in *Psyché*. *Le Ménestrel*’s

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97 “Comme l’on parlait de *Psyché* et de l’extase doucement enivrée, décelée par certaines pages de la partition, Franck, posant la main sur un exemplaire des *Béatitudes*, observa simplement: ‘Ce qui me plaît dans ceci, c’est qu’il ne s’y trouve pas une note sensuelle.’” Cortot, “La Musique pour piano de César Franck,” 68.
account of the premiere praised the work for its “lofty and elevated sentiment.” Gaston Paulin, writing in *Le Guide musical*, claimed that Franck omitted any reference to “Psyche’s hour of happiness, freeing himself from the dread of the flesh” in favor of “an ideal of a chaste dream.” Statements of this kind were often intertwined with proclamations about the composer’s character. The reviewer from *L’Art musical*, making a pointed comparison to Massenet, invoked the common trope of Franck’s mysticism:

What M. Franck has depicted above all is the troubled chastity of Psyche, her suffering, her repentance; he has taken the poison out of Eros’s arrows, lightened his quiver, slackened the bowstring of his formidable Arc, expressing in poetic harmonies the *Before* and the *After*, disdainful of the *During* so meticulously calibrated by the author of *Esclarmonde*.

*Psyché* is a work conceived by a calm-blooded mystic and written by a sharp-minded savant.

Pierre de Bréville argued that Franck’s use of pagan source material was consistent with the composer’s identity as a “Christian artist.” Just as some Catholic churches in Italy had repurposed statues of ancient Roman gods, Bréville reasoned, so too had Franck

98 “C’est une composition de très vastes dimensions, dont l’intérêt va en grandissant d’un bout à l’autre et dont il faut louer non seulement la beauté de la forme et la superbe ordonnance, mais aussi le sentiment élevé et soutenu…” *Le Ménestrel*, 18 March 1888.


transformed his mythological source material into a Christian narrative. Bréville went on to claim that Franck had “banished all sensuality” in the duet of Psyche and Eros.101

Indeed, many observers interpreted *Psyché* as a spiritual allegory. Julien Tiersot understood the final scene as “a procession of the gods and of lost souls, throwing themselves fanatically towards the conquest of the Idea.”102 Coquard considered the piece the “worthy sister of those radiant angels, *Rédemption* and *Les Béatitudes.*”103 In his biography of Franck, quoted above, d’Indy argued that *Psyché* was a Christian work. He elaborated his position in a letter to Henri Rambaud from 1918:

… The Master’s eldest son was a university man and a schoolmaster at the Lycée Lakanal. He did everything in his power (if I may dare say so) to turn his father aside from the path of religion, which up to then he had followed, at least in all his compositions with verbal texts. Georges raved ecstatically about the beauties of the classical mythology and recounted the story of Psyche, providing his father with a sketch-plan for an opera on the subject. Franck was delighted with the legend itself, but had no desire to treat it dramatically; he therefore begged his son to reshape his text in a form suitable for a choral symphony. That was eventually done. All the same, César Franck (as you have observed as well as I) was incapable of seeing the subject from anything but a Christian point of view, and so treating the libretto as a mystical rather than an erotic poem. The result was indeed worthy of the composer of *Les Béatitudes*, and not at all what had been hoped by those who strove so hard towards the end of his life to deflect the Master from his religious inclinations…104

101 “Il n’est pas jusqu’au vieux mythe païen qu’il ne transforme sous cette influence chrétienne, - ainsi que dans certaines églises d’Italie sont devenues statues de saints celles qui figuraient jadis les dieux de la mythologie, - et on peut dire que volontairement il a fait du duo d’’Eros et Psyché, dont il a banni toute sensualité, ainsi que l’a remarqué d’Indy, presque comme dans l’’Imitation le dialogue de l’âme et d’un séraphin.” Pierre de Bréville, “Les Fioretti du père Franck,” 1 January 1938, 97.


103 “…Psyché est la digne sœur de ces anges radieux de *Rédemption* et des *Béatitudes* que le maître a entrevus dans une merveilleuse extase et dont il a surpris les divins concerts.” Coquard, *César Franck*, 12.

104 D’Indy to Henri Rambaud, 20 October 1918, quoted in Vallas, *César Franck*, 204-05.
Derepas believed the work’s Christian inspiration extended beyond the plot to its musical realization:

Even more than its libretto, the music of Psyché is quite modern and Christian in its inspiration. The choruses are developed in so pure and suave a polyphony, kept at so high a level in a region of shadowless radiance, that neither the chorus of angels in La Damnation de Faust nor L’Enfance du Christ evokes so clearly the idea of heaven. …

It is obvious that the entire work is impregnated with a breath of Christian mysticism. The sorrow of the exile on earth partakes of the accent of prayer. The exceedingly sustained harmony of the strings, the lines traced by the violins, the episodes allotted to the wind, never betray the least sign of sensuous preoccupations, but only express the highest desires of a heart penetrated by the Divine Spirit.105

It is significant that Derepas justified his religious interpretation of Psyché through Franck’s use of the orchestra. The most critical portions of the story, including the climactic meeting of Psyche and Eros, are rendered in purely instrumental music, allowing a range of hermeneutic possibilities. Derepas continues:

Eros and Psyche do not express themselves in words. Their emotions are interpreted by the orchestra, and for this reason: they are not personalities. Franck, forgetful of the mythical hero and heroine, makes them the symbols of the human Soul and of supreme Love. Pure music, without the association of words, is the most adequate medium of expression for these immaterial actualities, precisely because its notes convey no definite significance, nor its phrases a precise meaning. In this oratorio, therefore, there are no solos. The orchestra plays the most important part; it depicts Psyche’s transports, regrets, and final happiness, and the invisible but fruitful action of Eros. At the most, the chorus, anonymous and impersonal, sing here and there in a few words the movements of the drama.106

Derepas was not the only one of Franck’s contemporaries to single out “Psyché et Eros” for praise. Gauthier-Villars spoke of the “commendable bias with which the master

105 Derepas, César Franck, quoted in d’Indy, César Franck, 175-76.

106 Ibid., 175.
entrusted the task of representing Eros and his beloved to the orchestra alone."

Darcours claimed that this movement was “perhaps the most inspired page ever written by César Franck.” Boutarel considered the “réponse timide de Psyché” (ex. 4.8 above) one of the most beautiful themes in the work.

**Psyché as Absolute Music**

Beyond the widespread praise for “Psyché and Eros,” most critics—from the fin de siècle to recent years, and across a wide spectrum of aesthetic predilections—have agreed that the most effective parts of *Psyché* are the sections for orchestra alone. Indeed, Franck’s choral passages sometimes suffer from unwieldy prosody and an overreliance on homophonic textures. It is perhaps no coincidence that the only portions of the *poème symphonique* that have been published in full score are the free-standing orchestral movements.

The critical bias in favor of the instrumental passages in *Psyché* was paralleled by a broader pattern in Franck’s nineteenth-century reception: most of the Franckistes expressed a preference for the composer’s absolute music over his vocal and theatrical

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107 “…quel louable parti pris le maître confie à l’orchestre seul le soin de représenter Eros et son amante, pour leur conserver le caractère tout idéal que le rôle purement épisodique des voix ne fait qu’accentuer.” [Henry Gauthier-Villars], *Lettres de l’Ouvreuse*, 2 March 1890, 169-70.

108 “Nous l’entendrons encore, mais nous avons pu constater dimanche l’effet spontané de la deuxième partie, celle dans laquelle se trouve le poétique duo d’Eros et de Psyché, la page la plus inspirée peut-être qu’ait écrite César Franck.” Darcours, *Le Figaro*, 3 December 1890.


compositions. The assessment of Gauthier-Villars was typical. Although he praised *Psyché* as a “ravishing” work whose only shortcoming was an echo of Gounod in the “Apotheosis”—most likely a reference to the harp- inflected conclusion of *Faust*—Gauthier-Villars preferred Franck’s pure instrumental forms:

[...c’est ravissant, et pourtant, ô grande César! la plus menue de tes sonates ferait bien mieux notre affaire. Tu fus jeté sur la terre, garde-toi d’en douter, par décret nominatif du Tout-Puissant, non pour mettre en musique le Verbe et l’Action, non pour produire, avec la collaboration de l’avantageux Gilbert-Augustin-Thierry, des Ghika méro ou carlovingiennes, mais pour préluder, fuguer, symphoniser et quintettiser.]

This preference for the composer’s purely instrumental music was not simply a matter of taste, but also of ideology. Many of Franck’s disciples at the Société nationale, disdainful of what they perceived as the frivolous excesses of Second Empire musical culture, sought to cultivate a rarefied aesthetic by championing abstract, large-scale instrumental works. The Franckistes were fiercely dedicated to this goal, even though the students—d’Indy in particular—were the ones advancing this agenda, not the teacher.

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111 Coquard, who favored *Psyché* over the Symphony in D Minor, was an exception to the rule. “La Symphonie, que la Société des Concerts a magistralement exécutée, il y a deux ans, est une œuvre de grande envergure et d’une force de conception merveilleuse. … Nous avouons pourtant notre préférence pour *Psyché*…” Coquard, César Franck, 12. As Fauquet observes, this position did not endear Coquard to other members of the bande à Franck. Fauquet, César Franck, 726.

112 [Henry Gauthier-Villars], *Lettres de l’Ouvreuse*, 2 March 1890, 169.

113 Ibid., 23 February 1890, 154.
Franck’s own attitudes about absolute and program music were more equivocal. When Guillaume Lekeu asked his teacher’s opinion about the matter, Franck replied:

“It is a matter of little importance whether music is descriptive—that is to say, sets out to awaken ideas about a given external subject—or whether it limits its intentions to the expression of a state of mind that is purely internal and exclusively psychological. What is of the first importance is that a composition should be musical, and emotional as well.”\(^{114}\)

When Lekeu recalled this conversation some time later, he added the comment: “It seems to me that Franck the Master has not thought about the problem either very often or very deeply.”\(^{115}\) Franck’s equanimity notwithstanding, d’Indy and his cohort had transparent motivations not only for portraying their teacher as a Christian artist, but also as a champion of abstract instrumental music. To return to *Psyché*, the eroticism of piece’s subject matter wasn’t their only source of concern; the very existence of a narrative mythological program was something the Franckistes had to reckon with.

Many in Franck’s circle addressed the issue by couching their discussions of *Psyché* in the language of absolute music. In the conclusion to his analysis of the piece, Huberti stressed that the program he outlined was ultimately subordinate to the ineffability of Franck’s music. He cautioned: “it is important for the listener to surrender to the charm of Franck’s music—a charm as undefinable in words as the charm of eternal love which it serves to express.”\(^{116}\) Derepas referred to *Psyché* as an “oratorio”—a serious genre with explicit religious connotations—even though Franck himself called the

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\(^{114}\) Quoted and translated in Vallas, *César Franck*, 245-46.

\(^{115}\) Ibid., 246.

\(^{116}\) “…il est important pour l’auditeur de s’abandonner au charme de la musique de Franck, charme aussi indéfinissable à exprimer par des paroles que le charme éterel de l’amour, auquel elle sert d’expression.” Huberti, “*Psyché* de César Franck,” 221.
work a poème symphonique. Georges Servières resorted to a similar sleight of hand in La Musique française moderne (1897): he described Psyché as a “symphony,” implicitly linking the work with Franck’s Symphony in D Minor.\footnote{117 Servières, La Musique française moderne, 33.}

Servières’s biographical portrait of the composer exemplifies the Franckistes’ bias towards non-programmatic genres. Recounting Franck’s early forays into orchestral composition, Servières wrote that Franck “allowed himself to be tempted by the seductive, but dangerous, form of the symphonic poem.”\footnote{118 “Désireux de s’essayer dans tous les genres, l’artiste qui jusque-là n’avait pas écrit encore de compositions pour l’orchestre, se laissa tenter par la forme séduisante, mais dangereuse, du poème symphonique.” Ibid., 30.} He justified Franck’s use of the chorus in Psyché by noting that, as in Berlioz’s Roméo et Juliette, the vocal passages play only a subsidiary role to the “ineffable” music of the orchestra:

In writing Psyché, César Franck was careful not to personify the heroes of the ancient dramas of love. If Berlioz, a Shakespeare fanatic, voluntarily refused to prostitute the ineffable love scenes of Roméo et Juliette to the lines of a librettist, César Franck wanted even more so to avoid personifying divine beings who, in Greek myths, symbolize the ideal and the human soul. To present Eros and Psyche singing love duets would have reduced the gentle beauty of the ancient fable to the frivolity of opéra-comique. This is why, in a program explained by recitatives, it is the orchestra that depicts Psyche’s sleep, the Zephyrs’ abduction of the princess, the rejoicing of nature in the gardens of Eros, the love scene, the sufferings of Psyche after her disobedience, and finally the radiant apotheosis.

[En écrivant Psyché, César Franck s’est gardé de personifier les héros du drame de l’amour antique. Si Berlioz, fanatique de Shakspeare [sic], a volontairement renoncé à prostituer les ineffables scènes amoureuses de Roméo et Juliette à des vers de librettiste, César Franck a voulu, à plus forte raison, éviter de personifier les êtres divins qui, dans le mythe grec, symbolisent l’idéal et l’âme humaine. C’eût été ravaler à une bergerade d’opéra-comique la suave beauté de la fable antique, que de nous présenter Eros et Psyché chantant des duos d’amour. Voilà pourquoi, sur un programme expliqué par des récits, c’est l’orchestre qui peint le sommeil de Psyché, l’enlèvement de la princesse par les Zéphyrs, l’allégresse de la nature dans les jardins d’Eros; la scène d’amour, les souffrances de Psyché après sa désobéissance, enfin l’apothéose radieuse.]\footnote{119}
Servières concludes his chapter on Franck with an assessment of the composer’s oeuvre. As before, he finesses the question of genre, grouping *Psyché* with the religious and purely instrumental compositions: “it is not in his theatrical works that Franck’s true genius is revealed; it is in his oratorios, his symphonies, his chamber music. The Quartet, the Quintet, the Sonata for Piano and Violin, the organ pieces, *Psyché*, *Les Béatitudes*—that is the real Franck.”

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The reception of *Psyché* by the Franckistes involved two layers of sublimation. On one hand, d’Indy and his cohort resisted the piece’s erotic subtexts in favor of a spiritual reading. Alternatively, they described *Psyché* not as a narrative vocal work, but

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*119* Ibid., 34. The term “bergerade,” which I have translated as “frivolity,” could be a reference to the Folies Bergère. Alternatively, the word could refer to a sheep farm or the pastoral themes that come up in opéra comique. Not all observers considered Franck’s non-verbal narrative entirely successful. Amédée Boutarel’s review articulates a perceived shortcoming: “The musical form adopted in *Psyché*, the symphonic poem with chorus by M. César Franck, has allowed the composer to give free rein to his imagination and to treat each poetic episode with complete freedom. In compositions of this sort, the general tendency is to exaggerate the role of the orchestra and to entrust it with the task of translating feelings and thoughts which musical language is powerless to master. Hence a fatigue, as certain parts are not sufficiently highlighted and lack clarity. M. César Franck circulated a leaflet in which the unclear wording sometimes contributed to further confusing the listener.” [La forme musicale adoptée dans *Psyché*, poème symphonique avec chœurs de M. César Franck, a permis au compositeur de donner libre carrière à sa fantaisie et de traiter chaque épisode poétique avec une entière liberté. Dans les compositions de ce genre, la tendance générale est d’exagérer le rôle de l’orchestre et de lui confier la tâche de traduire des sentiments et des pensées dont le langage musical est impuissant à se rendre maître. De là une fatigue, provenant de ce que certaines parties ne sont pas mises suffisamment en relief et manquent de netteté. M. César Franck a fait distribuer une notice dont la rédaction confuse a contribué du reste à égarer parfois l’auditeur.] Boutarel, *Le Ménestrel*, 9 March 1890.

*120* “D’ailleurs, ce n’est pas dans ses œuvres de théâtre que se révèle le véritable génie de Franck, c’est dans ses oratorios, dans ses symphonies, dans sa musique de chambre. Le quatuor, le quintette, la sonate pour piano et violon, les pièces d’orgue, *Psyché*, les *Béatitudes*, voilà le vrai Franck…” Servières, *La Musique française moderne*, 52.
as an exemplar of the ineffable powers of instrumental music. While the notion of *Psyché* as a Christian parable carries little weight in recent criticism, the interpretation was plausible at the *fin de siècle* because the Psyche legend had been subjected to many allegorical treatments during the nineteenth century. More importantly, Franck’s approach to narrative, text, and form made a wide range of readings possible. He employs the chorus for commentary, but depicts the critical moments in the drama—the initial meeting of Psyche and Eros, and the final scene of redemption—with the orchestra alone.

The fact that the Franckistes chose to interpret *Psyché* as the rarefied work of a Christian artist is a testament to the religious, aesthetic, and political issues that were at stake in the construction of the composer’s legacy. While Franck was alive, his students encouraged him to compose large-scale instrumental works; after his death, they interpreted his music in ways that suited their ideological ends. Charles Bordes’s remark that “*Père* Franck was molded by his pupils” was as fitting during the composer’s lifetime as it was after.121 And just as Lenoir’s image of Franck enshrined in the seventh arrondissement was the product of devoted admirers, so too is his legacy as a mystical champion of absolute music.

121 “*Le père Franck a été formé par ses élèves.*” Quoted in Vallas, *Le véritable histoire*, 244.
CHAPTER FIVE
IDEOLOGY AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN VINCENT D’INDY’S ISTAR

I’ve churned out a devil of an orchestral piece (nearly 14 minutes!) which was enormously amusing to conceive and to write, but which no audience will comprehend... They are variations in reverse, in the sense that the theme only appears completely at the end of the piece, in a full orchestral unison, gradually breaking through the fog, the iridescence, and the derived melodies that the seven variations present. I am pleased with it... All the same, I laugh at the thought of what the music critics will be able to see in it, if they go to the trouble to come to the performance!

[J’ai pondu un grand diable de morceau d’orchestre (près de 14 minutes!) qui m’a énormément amusé à concevoir et à écrire mais auquel aucun public ne comprendra quoi que ce soit... Ce sont des variations à l’envers, en ce sens que le thème ne se présente que tout à fait à la fin du morceau, en un unisson de tout l’orchestre, perçant peu à peu à travers les brumes, les chatoyances et les mélodies dérivées que présentent les 7 variations. J’en suis content... C’est égal, je rigole à la pensée de ce que les critiques musicaux, s’ils se donnent la peine de venir à l’exécution, vont pouvoir voir là-dedans!]¹

So Vincent d’Indy wrote to the composer Pierre de Bréville in September 1896 about his recently completed Istar, Variations symphoniques, Op. 42. In several letters from the time, d’Indy commented on the “bizarre” construction of his latest composition.² The subject of the symphonic variations is no less remarkable. The piece depicts the descent of Istar (Ishtar), the Assyrian and Babylonian goddess of love and fertility, into the underworld to rescue her lover, Tammuz. Istar is led through a series of seven gates, and at each gate a guardian removes an article of her jewelry or clothing. First her tiara is


taken, and then, in turn, her earrings, necklace, breast ornaments, girdle, and wrist and ankle bangles. At the seventh gate, the final veil is removed from her body and Istar is brought naked before the Queen of the Underworld, Ereshkigal. Istar’s divestment is not a willing striptease. In the Assyrian legend, Ereshkigal proceeds to humiliate her further by striking her with sixty diseases on every part of her body. Later, Ereshkigal relents. Istar’s health is restored, her garments are returned, and she is reunited with her lover.3

D’Indy’s variations symphoniques abridge this narrative considerably. The musical setting focuses on Istar’s disrobement as she moves from gate to gate, and the end of the score alludes to her reunion with Tammuz:

Istar, fille de Sin est entrée au pays immuable,
elle a pris et reçu les Eaux de la Vie.
Elle a présenté les Eaux sublimes
et ainsi, devant tous, elle a délivré
le FILS DE LA VIE, son jeune amant.

[Istar, daughter of Sin, entered the immutable land,
she took and received the Waters of Life.
She presented the sublime Waters,
and thus, before all, she delivered
the SON OF LIFE, her young lover.]4

Taken out of context, Istar’s nudity becomes eroticized; she comes to resemble that other notorious woman whose striptease captivated the imagination of male artists at the fin-de-


4 The published score of Istar reproduces several verses from this so-called “Épopée d’Izdubar.” I have been unable to locate this text, but the lines cited by d’Indy are analogous to the myth as recounted in the sources in footnote 3.
D’Indy, however, was no Oscar Wilde. The composer was a devoutly religious man, described in Andrew Thomson’s biography as a “pillar of Catholic rectitude.” His setting of this overtly voyeuristic tale, then, points up an apparent contradiction between d’Indy’s musical and moral identity.

I will return to the issues of sexuality and pleasure at the end of this chapter. Until then, Istar will serve as a focal point for exploring two other contradictions in d’Indy’s artistic personality. First, the piece exemplifies the composer’s complex attitudes about programmaticism and genre. Although Istar depicts a narrative inspired by Assyrian legend, d’Indy took pains to describe the piece as a set of variations—not as a poème symphonique. By framing his commentary in the discourse of absolute music and encouraging commentators to do likewise, d’Indy reinscribes the Franck circle’s bias towards more abstract, “serious” forms of musical expression. Paradoxically, d’Indy’s approach to variation form—nominally an “absolute” procedure—encodes a subtext of nationalistic, anti-republican ideology in addition to Istar’s mythological program.

Second, I will discuss a more localized contradiction in the form of two references that occur at Istar’s climax: the first to Giacomo Meyerbeer’s final opera, L’Africaine, and the second to Wagner’s ubiquitous Tristan und Isolde. Like many of his French contemporaries, d’Indy was a committed Wagnerian, so his Tristan reference may come

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as little surprise. However, he was also a virulent anti-Semite who spoke of Meyerbeer in unequivocally disparaging terms. Echoing Wagner’s infamous essay “Das Judentum in der Musik,” d’Indy dismissed the Prussian-Jewish opera composer as “the king of eclecticism” whose art was motivated solely by a desire for profit. Around the time he composed Istar, d’Indy also oversaw the premiere of his Wagnerian opera Fervaal, which he immediately “began to shroud … in an anti-Semitic historiography.” The parallelisms between Istar, Tristan, and L’Africaine, then, suggest a more complex and problematic relationship between d’Indy’s compositional rhetoric and practice, and between his Wagnerism and anti-Semitism. The juxtaposition of seemingly antithetical


10 Suschitzky, “Fervaal, Parsifal, and French National Identity,” 261. Fervaal opened at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels on 12 March 1897; Istar had its first performance on 10 January 1897 in the same city.
intertextual references in *Istar* will serve as an entry point for my examination of d’Indy’s musical and cultural personality and, more broadly, matters of influence and French musical identity at the *fin-de-siècle*.

**Variation Form and Ideology**

D’Indy’s correspondence from September 1896 indicates that he originally intended to call his new composition *Istar*, “without further explanation.”¹¹ Within several months, however, the composer decided to add the designation *Variations symphoniques* to the title. The score published by Durand in 1897 bears both the name of the Assyrian protagonist and d’Indy’s generic appellation.¹² When the work was premiered by the Société symphonique des Concerts Ysaïe in Brussels that January, a reviewer from *Le Guide musical* referred to the piece not by the name of the eponymous heroine, but simply as a set of symphonic variations.¹³

Indeed, *Istar*’s unusual form was the aspect of the piece that attracted the most attention in the musical press.¹⁴ Many critics touted the work’s reverse variation structure as evidence of d’Indy’s knowledge and compositional craft. Noting *Istar*’s atypical

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¹¹ “Je crois cependant que ce ne sera pas embêtant à entendre, mais personne n’y comprendra rien (d’autant plus que ça s’appelle *Istar*, sans autre explication), mais, moi, ça m’a énormément amusé à écrire!” D’Indy to Guy Ropartz, 15 September 1896, cited in Vallas, *Vincent d’Indy*, 2:237. “Pour moi, j’ai fait cet été un très drôle de morceau d’orchestre dont je suis content, personne n’y comprendra rien, car ce sont des *variations à l’envers* où le thème ne se présente qu’à la fin, et, pour comble, cela s’appellera *Istar*, sans autre explication.” D’Indy to his father, 17 September 1896, reprinted in *Ma vie*, 548.


¹⁴ *Istar* received its first performances in Brussels on 10 January and 28 March 1897. The Colonne orchestra presented the first Parisian performances on 16 and 23 January 1898; Theodore Thomas conducted the United States premiere in Chicago on 23 April 1898.
construction, Amédée Boutarel proclaimed that the piece “bears the fingerprints of a
talent with lofty inclinations.”\textsuperscript{15} Few disputed d’Indy’s ingenuity and seriousness of
purpose, but several observers wished the form of the piece were easier to follow.\textsuperscript{16} The
writer from \textit{Le Monde artiste} noted: “I know that these are variations in reverse, but it is
still necessary that these variations permit the listener’s comprehension.”\textsuperscript{17} Hippolyte
Barbedette, in his uncharitable review for \textit{Le Ménestrel}, likened the task of discerning the
theme to looking for a cat in a blurry picture. “What’s funnier,” he continued, “is that the
theme does not resemble the variations at all. Beethoven would never have found it.”\textsuperscript{18}
Several critics conjectured that they would be able to appreciate \textit{Istar}’s form better after
another hearing.\textsuperscript{19} Not without reason. At the second performance in March 1897,

\textsuperscript{15} “Œuvre, en somme, d’une vitalité chancelante, qu’il était utile néanmoins de faire entendre
parce qu’elle est, musicalement, d’une belle tenue et porte l’empreinte d’un talent aux tendances
elevées.” Amédée Boutarel, \textit{Le Ménestrel}, 30 January 1898. See also “Ysaïe as a Conductor,”
\textit{The Musical Times}, 1 December 1900, 816-17; and Louis Laloy, “Vincent d’Indy,” \textit{La Revue
musicale}, 15 December 1903, 694-99, here 695.

\textsuperscript{16} In addition to the reviews cited below, see Hughes Imbert, “Concerts Colonne,” \textit{Le Guide
musical}, 23 January 1898, 75-76; and Boutarel, \textit{Le Ménestrel}, 30 January 1898.

\textsuperscript{17} “Je sais bien que ce sont des variations à rebours, mais encore faut-il que ces variations restent
1898, 53-54.

\textsuperscript{18} “J’avais oublié de vous dire, à propos des sept variations, que le thème ne les précède pas, mais
qu’il les suit; en attendant, il faut le chercher, comme dans les images confuses au bas desquelles
on lit: ‘Cherchez le chat.’ Ce qu’il y a de plus drôle, c’est que le thème ne ressemble pas du tout
aux variations. Jamais Beethoven n’aurait trouvé cela.” Hippolyte Barbedette, \textit{Le Ménestrel}, 23
January 1898.

\textsuperscript{19} Fernand Le Borne, \textit{Le Monde artiste}, 23 January 1898; Hughes Imbert, “Concerts Colonne,” \textit{Le
listeners understood the work better and showered d’Indy with “an explosion of bravos and an enthusiastic ovation.”

D’Indy’s own commentary suggests he considered Istar’s form more noteworthy than its poetic content. In his letters, he made several references to the piece’s unusual variation structure, but rarely mentioned its mythological subject. His discussion of the piece in the Cours de composition musicale deals exclusively with thematic, harmonic, and formal considerations; he only mentions Istar’s program in a brief footnote. The placement of d’Indy’s analysis within the Cours is also telling. The chapter on symphonic poems does not list Istar among d’Indy’s efforts in the genre. Instead, the piece serves as the final example of the “amplified variation” (variation amplificatrice)—the most complex and prestigious of d’Indy’s three subcategories—in the treatise’s chapter on variation form. This discussion immediately follows an analysis of Franck’s Variations.

20 “Mais ce fut, pour Istar, mieux exécuté encore que la première fois et mieux compris du public, une explosion de bravos et une ovation chaleureuse à Vincent d’Indy.” L’Art moderne, 4 April 1897. See also M.K. [Maurice Kufferath], Le Guide musical, 4 April 1897, 270-71.

21 See the composer’s letters to Bréville, Maus, Ropartz, and his father, cited above. That said, d’Indy had a clear affinity for ancient Assyrian culture. After a trip to the British Museum in 1887, he enthused to Hughes Imbert: “Me voici de retour de Londres, dans l’enthousiasme des sculptures assyriennes du British Museum: quel bel art et quel flagrant délit de vie et de vérité dans ces tableaux d’une civilisation qui valait bien la nôtre! … J’éprouve une impression bien plus grande et plus réellement artistique devant l’art assyrien du VIIIe siècle avant J.C. que devant celui de Péricles.” Cited in Vallas, Vincent d’Indy, 2: 238. Steven Huebner has argued that d’Indy’s attraction to Assyrian and Babylonian culture—an example of what the French call primitif—was consistent with his aesthetic project of valorizing historical, “spiritually grounded” art. See Huebner, “‘Striptease’ as Ideology,” Nineteenth-Century Music Review 1, no. 2 (2004): 3-25, here 22-23.

22 D’Indy, Cours de composition musicale, 2/1:484-6.

23 D’Indy classified variations into a strict taxonomy of three types: ornamental (where themes are elaborated with ornaments and passagework), decorative (where the melody remains recognizable but undergoes harmonic and contrapuntal changes) and amplified (where melodic or harmonic aspects of the theme precipitate new elaborations and expansions). Cours de composition musicale, 2/1:435-87.
symphoniques (1885) for piano and orchestra, another work that exemplifies an unconventional approach to variation procedure.\textsuperscript{24} The juxtaposition of these two compositions—that bear the same title, no less—invites the reader to draw a comparison between the efforts of teacher and student.

D’Indy’s decision to frame Istar in the language of absolute music may reflect his longstanding ambivalence about programmaticism. When his symphonic legend La Forêt enchantée premiered two decades earlier in 1878, the influential critic Adolphe Jullien had faulted the piece for having a program that was too precise.\textsuperscript{25} The same day that Jullien’s review appeared in Le Français, d’Indy sent the critic a defensive response in which he justified the composition of “descriptive music” on practical grounds:

If I write program music, it is only because the musical drama as I see it (and as you understand it also, I believe) is banned from our French stages, and what do you want? When one has a scenic temperament but has no success in trying one’s hand at the theater, it is necessary to write symphonic-dramatic music, namely, program music. That is my excuse and, as I believe we are in agreement about certain ideas, I hope it will absolve me from your accusation of descriptive music.

[Si je fais de la musique à programme, c’est uniquement parce que le drame musical tel que je le sens (et tel que vous le comprenez aussi, je crois), est banni de nos scènes françaises et, que voulez-vous? lorsqu’on se sent un tempérament scénique et que l’on n’a aucun aboutissement pour s’essayer au théâtre, il faut bien écrire de la musique symphonico-dramatique, scilicet de la musique à programme. Voilà mon excuse et, comme je crois que nous sommes un peu en communauté d’idées, j’espère qu’elle m’absoudra auprès de vous de l’accusation de musique descriptive.]\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 2/1:482.

\textsuperscript{25} Adolphe Jullien, Le Français, 8 April 1878.

\textsuperscript{26} D’Indy to Jullien, 8 April 1878, cited in Vallas, Vincent d’Indy, 1:236.
Whether or not d’Indy’s early forays into program music were indeed borne of necessity, his approach to musical narrative did evolve between La Forêt enchantée and Istar. Although Istar draws on a mythological subject, d’Indy privileges the work’s variation form over its poetic content. In fact, Jullien faulted the variations symphoniques for not being descriptive enough. He praised the composer as “an inquiring artist infatuated with novelty” and described Istar as “an extremely skillful composition and very interesting to follow for the informed listener,” but concluded that “the author, in spite of all his knowledge and the richness of his orchestral polyphony, would surely not have succeeded without explanatory comment to make understood what he wanted to express and describe.”

D’Indy’s designation of Istar as variations symphoniques rather than poème symphonique also sheds light on his historical conception of genres. For the composer, variation form and the symphonic poem exemplified two fundamentally different modes of musical expression. D’Indy classified musical genres according to a rigid taxonomy, teaching in the Cours that music is based on either the “rhythm of movement” (rythme du geste) or the “rhythm of speech” (rythme de la parole). The former, d’Indy believed, was the foundation for early secular dance music, whereas the latter was the driving impulse

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27 “C’était une idée très attrayante pour un artiste chercheur et épris de nouveauté comme l’est M. d’Indy, que d’adopter et de justifier la forme des anciennes variations symphoniques par une scène, un sujet, une légende. …de là, finalement, une composition extrêmement habile et très intéressante à suivre pour l’auditeur averti, mais où l’auteur, malgré toute sa science et la richesse de sa polyphonie orchestrale, n’aurait sûrement pas réussi, sans commentaire explicatif, à faire comprendre ce qu’il voulait exprimer et décrire.” Adolphe Jullien, Le Journal des débats, 23 January 1898. Not all commentators have taken this position, however. A Boston Symphony Orchestra concert program from 1920 notes that Istar “is so free as to resent technical analysis; but by following the poem, and noting the garment or ornament taken off, the listener can appreciate the composer’s poetic or picturesque suggestiveness in his music.” Programs of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, 1920, accessed 23 July 2011 at http://books.google.com/books?id=-smwAAAAIAAJ&dq.
behind early religious music. In turn, the rhythm of movement “gave rise to our
instrumental or purely symphonic music, while our contemporary dramatic music had as
its point of departure the rhythm of the recited and sung word.”28 Put another way, d’Indy
argued that “pure” or “symphonic” music (he uses the term “symphonic” here in the
broad sense of instruments sounding together) is governed solely by the aesthetic
grouping of sounds; dramatic music, on the other hand, expresses “a sentiment
determined by the actual or implied juxtaposition of a literary text with musical
sounds.”29 This bifurcation underpins the very organization of the Cours. The second
volume is devoted to symphonic forms based on the rhythm of movement, including
variations; the third is devoted to dramatic forms based on the rhythm of speech,
including symphonic poems (fig. 5.1).30 The decision to align Istar with the former rather
than the latter tradition is indicative of a distinction that, for d’Indy, was not merely
semantic.

28 D’Indy, Cours de composition musicale, 1:28 (emphases in original). The first volume of the
course has been edited and translated into English by Gail Hilson Woldu (Norman: University of
Oklahoma Press, 2010); the above quotation is from Woldu, 58.

29 “Quant au mot Drame, il a toujours été intimement lié à l’idée de spectacle ou de représentation
scénique. Toutefois, le qualificatif de dramatique s’applique souvent de nos jours, par extension,
toute espèce de musique ayant pour but l’expression d’un sentiment déterminé, par la
juxtaposition, effective ou sous-entendue, d’un texte littéraire aux sons musicaux.” D’Indy, Cours
de composition musicale, 2/1:7.

30 For more on d’Indy’s classification of genres, see Damien Ehrhardt, “Zwischen Symphonie und
Drama: Die Programmmusik und ihre Gattungen bei Vincent d’Indy,” in Pluralismus wider
Willen? Stilistische Tendenzen in der Musik Vincent d’Indys, ed. Manuela Schwartz and Stefan
Keym (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2002), 38-53; and idem., Les relations franco-
allemandes et la musique à programme, 1830-1914 (Lyon: Symétrie, 2009), 99-105.
Fig. 5.1. D’Indy’s classification of symphonic forms\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{31} D’Indy, \textit{Cours de composition musicale}, 2/1:13.
One manifestation of this distinction is that d’Indy described absolute music—more so than symphonic poems—in nationalized terms. He regarded Beethoven’s symphonies and variations as the epitome of *musique pure*, but believed that subsequent Austro-German composers had squandered Beethoven’s legacy of instrumental music. As Brian Hart has indicated, d’Indy dismissed late Romantic German symphonists as either uninspired imitators of classical form (e.g. Brahms) or impostors who relied on programmaticism to hide their creative shortcomings (e.g. Bruckner and Mahler).

Franck, in contrast, had “restored life to the mummified art of the symphony” by introducing cyclic procedures—which d’Indy regarded as “new and exclusively French”—to the genre. Thus French composers, and the Franckistes in particular, were the standard bearers of the symphonic tradition at the *fin de siècle*.

For d’Indy, cyclic procedures and variation form were intimately connected. In his analysis of Franck’s violin sonata, he observed:

> Between this last mode of construction [cyclic form] and the Variation, there are such affinities that a respective delineation is hardly possible. The *Cyclic Theme* which is transformed is indeed *varied* or even *amplified*; the *Variation* that runs through the component parts of a work has, for that very reason, a *cyclic* function.

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[Entre ce dernier mode de construction et la Variation, il y a de telles affinités qu’une délimitation respective n’est guère possible: le Thème cyclique qui se transforme est véritablement varié ou même amplifié; la Variation qui circule dans les pièces constitutives d’une œuvre a, par cela même, une fonction cyclique.] 35

Just as he scorned the symphonies of Brahms and Bruckner, d’Indy believed that his German contemporaries had failed to write any variations worthy of Beethoven’s mantle. He considered Beethoven’s Diabelli set and the variation movements from the late string quartets exemplars of the amplified variation, devoting several pages to them in the Cours. D’Indy also cited Franck’s Trois chorals and Variations symphoniques as paragons of the genre. But he thought little of efforts by his German contemporaries. D’Indy argued that in Strauss’s Don Quixote, “the dramatic and picturesque element dominates too much for the Variation to be perceived clearly.” Reger’s orchestral variations suffered from “Germanic heaviness” (lourdeur germanique). 36 “Thus,” d’Indy opined, “through César Franck and his school, it is in France—almost exclusively today—that the Beethovenian tradition of the Variation has been preserved.” 37 By showcasing Istar in the Cours as an example of the variation amplificatrice, d’Indy situated his own œuvre in this nationalized tradition.

As Steven Huebner and Andrew Deruchie have noted, variation form also provided a means for d’Indy to encode his conservative worldview. 38 D’Indy believed

35 D’Indy, Cours de composition musicale, 2/1:487.

36 Ibid., 2/1:487.

37 “Ainsi, par César Franck et son école, c’est en France que s’est conservée, à peu près exclusivement aujourd’hui, la tradition beethovénienne, en matière de Variation.” Ibid., 2/1:486.

38 See Huebner, “‘Striptease’ as Ideology”; and Deruchie, “Vincent d’Indy’s Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français.”
that the two principal tools for musical composition were what he termed “development”
and “amplification.” Development is teleological, whereas amplification—the primary
technique in Istar—is static. The composer explains in the Cours:

With development, indeed, a theme acts. It gets broken up and modulates; it is in
motion to arrive at another state or another tonality. With the Variation, on the
contrary, a theme becomes exposed. It can be completed and covered with new
ornaments, but these modifications, as extensive as they may be, do not put it in
motion. It remains in repos from the point of view of tonality, and this is the
reason why most Themes with Variations, even the most beautiful and the most
complex, stray very little from the principal key.

[Dans le développement, en effet, un Thème agit: il se démembre et module; il
est en marche pour arriver à un autre état ou à une autre tonalité. Dans la
Variation, au contraire, un Theme s’expose: il peut se compléter et revêtir des
ornements nouveaux; mais ces modifications, si profondes qu’elles soient, ne le
mettent pas en mouvement; il demeure en repos au point de vue tonal, et c’est la
raison pour laquelle la plupart des Thèmes avec Variations, même les plus beaux
et les plus complexes, s’éloignent très peu du ton principal.]

D’Indy thus understood variation form as recursive and cyclical, in contrast to
teleological, “developmental” processes like sonata form. This opposition had an
analogue in competing French notions of progress at the fin de siècle. As Jann Pasler has
documented, the republican model for progress was linear and evolutionary, whereas
conservatives viewed progress as a spiral that was contingent on maintaining a

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39 “Développement et amplification constituent donc, en définitive, pour la Symphonie comme
pour la Littérature, les principaux moyens mis en œuvre dans l’art de la composition.” D’Indy,
Cours de composition musicale, 2/1:448.

40 Ibid.

41 As Elaine Sisman has noted, variations, because of their paratactic nature, have traditionally
been cast in opposition to more “rounded” forms. See Sisman, “Variations,” in The New Grove
connection with the past. The curriculum that d’Indy enacted at the Schola Cantorum and in the Cours accords with the latter model. The composer insisted that his students have a thorough knowledge of music history and claimed they would be “better armed for modern combat … having assimilated the logical progression of forms from each epoch of artistic development in their natural order.”

A composition had to be conceived in light of historical precursors, appropriating or modifying past sources as needed to fit one’s ideology.

Because of its recursive nature, variation procedures could be used to rebut republican ideas about progress. Andrew Deruchie has argued that d’Indy’s Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français (1886), whose title alludes to theme-and-variations form, represents a response to the symphonic tradition—specifically, a critique of the progressive, republican ideals that many writers in the Third Republic ascribed to Beethoven. “Whereas the developmental cast of the Beethovenian heroic symphony


43 In his early twenties, d’Indy traveled to Weimar to meet Franz Liszt. The two talked at length over morning coffee, and from the elder composer d’Indy claimed to receive the idea of a musical pedagogy based on the historical evolution of musical style. See Thomson, Vincent d’Indy and his World, 28.

44 “Il en sortiront d’autant mieux armés pour le combat moderne, qu’ils auront vécu pour ainsi dire la vie de l’art et se seront assimilé dans leur ordre naturel les formes qui se sont logiquement succédé dans les diverses époques du développement artistique.” D’Indy, “Une École d’art répondant aux besoins modernes,” La Tribune de Saint-Gervais 6, no. 11 (1900), 306.

45 It should be noted that the writings mentioned above postdate the composition of Istar. As Huebner observes in a discussion of Fervaal, “In the enterprise of assigning ‘truth value’ in style criticism and/or hermeneutics it is extremely difficult to separate reception history—particularly that generated by the composer—from matter closer to the genetic process.” French Opera at the Fin-de-Siècle, 308.
embodies liberal bourgeois values,” Deruchie writes, “d’Indy’s variation-based procedure seems more consonant with his right-wing ideology.”  

A similar claim can be made about *Istar*—not only because he explicitly titles the piece as a set of variations, but also because the variations move in reverse. Huebner has argued that the successive episodes in *Istar* allude to progressively earlier styles of music, from a recasting of the lush sonorities of Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* back to a “late nineteenth-century chromatic analogue” to monophonic plainchant. Huebner notes: “To address historical process by going backward is to remind that the past should be kept steadfastly in view.”

D’Indy inscribes a progress-as-spiral narrative by circling back to the originating, unadorned musical idea. By structuring *Istar* as a set of variations, d’Indy encodes an ideological subtext that he could not have communicated through musical representationalism alone.

**Echoes of Wagner and Meyerbeer?**

In addition to d’Indy himself, a number of writers have discussed the musical material of *Istar*, including Léon Vallas, Norman Demuth, Peter Cook, Damien Ehrhardt, and Steven Huebner.  

Huebner’s thoughtful analysis covers the salient harmonic and structural aspects of the piece and does not need reprising here. Before we turn to d’Indy’s

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47 Huebner, “‘Striptease’ as Ideology,” 24, 25.

evocations of Wagner and Meyerbeer, however, a brief exposition of *Istar*’s musical elements is in order.

D’Indy identifies not one but three distinct thematic strands in *Istar*.49 His use of multiple thematic complexes is a point of commonality with Franck’s *Variations symphoniques*, which employs two constituent themes.50 The thematic elements in *Istar* cycle through the piece in roughly the same order, suggesting what James Hepokoski has described as a “rotational” structure. The circularity of this process engenders “connotations of unflinching inevitability, temporal stasis, and the flight from a linear into a mythic sense of time”—fitting associations for a composition based on a timeless legend.51

*Istar* begins with four measures for unaccompanied stopped horn, whose first three notes constitute the call motive (*motif d’appel*) (ex. 5.1). The horn solo suggests a nominal kinship with the opening fanfares of pieces such as Schubert’s Symphony No. 9 (“The Great”), Weber’s Overture to *Oberon*, or Brahms’s Second Piano Concerto. Yet d’Indy creates a much different effect. The first phrase’s tonal and metrical ambiguity, coupled with the horn’s distinctive *bouché* timbre, gives the music an exotic flair—an otherness layered atop a familiar opening. D’Indy does not specify what the call motive represents, although later writers have interpreted it as the gatekeeper’s music (Vallas) or *Istar*’s appeal to enter each gate in turn (Cook).52 The tonal indistinctness of the initial

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50 See d’Indy’s analysis of the Franck in ibid., 2/1:484.


G—F—D-flat turns out to be crucial to *Istar*’s compositional design; while the piece traverses a wide range of keys, the figure always appears at the same pitch level, harmonically recontextualized with each new tonal center.

**Ex. 5.1.** The call motive and its initial continuation, mm. 1-5. \(^{53}\)

The second element is the march motive, initially stated in the violas and clarinets and punctuated by woodwind chords (ex. 5.2). This music depicts Istar as she walks from one gate to the next. Here d’Indy establishes the tonality of F minor and a steady rhythmic pulse, with repeated stresses on the first and third beats of each measure. Stepwise, melismatic movement lends this idea a more vocal, sensuous quality, enhanced by the rich sound of doubled clarinets in their low chalumeau register. The tritone span from F to C-flat in mm. 3-4 mirrors the interval outlined by the call motive and enhances the music’s exotic color.

**Ex. 5.2.** The march motive, mm. 5-9.

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Third is the theme and set of variations proper. Istar passes through seven gates, and d’Indy writes seven variations. The variations proceed “in reverse,” from complex to progressively simpler textures as Istar’s nudity is gradually revealed. The first variation, for example (mm. 19-32), is entirely figurational and harmonic, with no trace of melody. Pierre de Bréville heard in this “floating” music a “simple harmonic fragrance where one can hardly discern the theme.”^54 Over the course of the variations, the theme begins to emerge and the orchestration thins. Variation six is scored for strings in four voices, and in variation seven d’Indy pares the texture down to a single flute line with a violin counterpoint.

After this last variation, the full orchestra reenters with a fortissimo statement of the call motive, and then d’Indy finally presents the theme, in unison, without accompaniment (ex. 5.3). The whimsical contours and sly chromaticism of this melody suggest an erotic representation of the female form. Léon Vallas has described the theme as a depiction of the human body, albeit one he pejoratively characterizes as “a long phrase of minute elements, complicated intervals, uncertain contour, vague physiognomy, and, to put it bluntly, a monodic cadaver.”^55 The theme falls into three phrases. The first, mm. 206-216, begins with the intervals described by the call motive. The timpani rolls lightly on F for the first measure and a half, providing a context for the listener to hear the theme in F major. The second phrase, mm. 216-224, provides dynamic and harmonic

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^54 “La première [variation]… est la plus flottante, simple effluve harmonique où se pourrait à peine deviner le thème qui, se précisant peu à peu, n’éclate qu’à la fin en sa simplicité, dégagé de tout voile, nu.” Bréville’s commentary is quoted in Louis Laloy, “Vincent d’Indy,” La Revue musicale, 15 December 1903, 695.

contrast, as the melody moves to the Neapolitan key area, G-flat. This tonal shift may seem ambiguous in the unaccompanied theme, but d’Indy consistently moves to flat-II at the analogous point in each variation. The final phrase, beginning m. 224, returns to F major and echoes the opening of the theme. This time the melody is an octave higher, and it diverges from the first phrase with a climactic push to a high A in m. 229.

Ex. 5.3. The theme, mm. 206-232 (2 after rehearsal R to U)

D’Indy’s orchestration is also noteworthy; strings lend the theme its primary color, with violins, violas, and cellos playing at the same octave. Unison strings had feminine associations throughout the nineteenth century. In his *Traité d’instrumentation et d’orchestration*, Berlioz describes the particular sweetness of a violin section playing in unison:

This is the orchestra’s truly feminine voice, at once passionate and chaste, heart-rending and gentle, able to weep and moan and wail, or sing and implore and dream, or break out in joy as no other instrument can. A slight movement of the
arm, an imperceptible nuance of feeling which would have no visible effect in the hands of a single violinist, these can generate a magnificent and irresistible flow of feeling when multiplied by a cluster of unisons, and strike to the heart of one’s very being.  

D’Indy offers a huskier version of this voice in a mezzo-soprano register, reinforced with selected woodwinds and brass (including trombones playing ppp). By putting all instruments in the same register, d’Indy takes another page from Berlioz, who notes that the effect of strings playing in unison is “incomparably stronger and finer” than a melody doubled in octaves.

The contour, orchestration, and dramaturgy of this theme bear an uncanny resemblance to an operatic passage that thrilled Parisian audiences in the final third of the nineteenth century, the so-called prodigieuse ritournelle of Meyerbeer’s last opera, L’Africaine (ex. 5.4). Karen Henson and Gabriela Cruz note that this ritournelle elicited a hyperbolic response at the Paris Opéra and remained in the public consciousness long after the work’s posthumous premiere in 1865. In fact, these sixteen measures were published shortly after the premiere as “Le dernier pensée musicale de Meyerbeer” (The Last Musical Thought of Meyerbeer). Sélika, the African woman of the opera’s title, has fallen in love with the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, but her affections go

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unrequited. In the final tableau, the “Grande Scène du Mancenillier,” she decides to take her own life by retiring to a deadly manchineel grove, whose scent induces ecstasy followed by death. The scene opens with Meyerbeer’s seventeen-bar ritournelle, and for the first ten measures, the stage remains empty. At m. 11, Sélika appears, “pale,” “dreaming,” and subjected to the audience’s gaze as she makes her way downstage.\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{Ex. 5.4.} Meyerbeer, \textit{L’Africaine}, “Grande Scène du Mancenillier,” mm. 3-19

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{ex_5_4.png}
\caption{Meyerbeer, \textit{L’Africaine}, “Grande Scène du Mancenillier,” mm. 3-19}
\end{figure}

Whether or not d’Indy intentionally sought to reference the \textit{ritournelle} in the unison passage of \textit{Istar}, he certainly would have been familiar with \textit{L’Africaine}. As a young man, he idolized Meyerbeer’s operas, once musing in a letter to his cousin that other works might exhibit “greater flashes of genius, but I still find \textit{L’Africaine} more beautiful at the end of the day.”\textsuperscript{60} On another occasion, d’Indy drew up a list of classic works.

\begin{refnote}
\textsuperscript{59} The staging instructions in the \textit{livret de mise-en-scène} were based on indications in Meyerbeer’s autograph orchestral score, which Henson discusses in “La dernière pensée musicale de Meyerbeer,” 25.

\textsuperscript{60} “Il y a peut-être de plus grands éclairs de génie, mais je persiste à trouver \textit{L’Africaine} plus belle d’un bout à l’autre.” Vincent d’Indy to Edmond de Pampelonne, 5 April 1870. D’Indy, \textit{Ma vie}, 109.
\end{refnote}
pieces that “a musician cannot go without knowing.” The section on opera lists four composers—Gluck, Weber, Mozart, and Meyerbeer—and includes the last named figure’s Robert le Diable, Les Huguenots, Le Prophète, and L’Africaine. Moreover, Meyerbeer’s final opera was still in Parisian ears in the years before d’Indy composed Istar. L’Africaine was given at the Paris Opéra 471 times (including 36 times from 1890-1893) before a warehouse fire destroyed the sets in 1894, precluding further performances at that venue until 1902. And the ritournelle continued to be singled out for praise, at least on one notable occasion. The Paris Opéra staged a gala performance in honor of Meyerbeer’s centenary in November 1891 whose program included a prelude from Act V of L’Africaine—most likely the ritournelle. While the orchestra performed the passage, M. Mounet-Sully recited a poem by the librettist Jules Barbier and a bust of Meyerbeer was crowned with a laurel wreath.

Regardless of whether d’Indy attended any of these performances, the similarities between Istar’s theme and the ritournelle are unmistakable. The most immediate parallel is one of sonority. In both passages, the ensemble plays a sustained, unaccompanied

61 “Il y a des choses qu’un musicien ne peut pas ne pas connaître.” Vincent d’Indy to Edmond de Pampelonne, 25 March 1871. Ibid., 130-1.


64 This staging was very similar to scenes that took place immediately after Meyerbeer’s death. At the L’Africaine premiere, the ritournelle was repeated at the very end of the work, as the curtain was raised to reveal a bust of the composer. See Henson, “La dernière pensée musicale de Meyerbeer,” 28-30; and Cruz, “Meyerbeer’s Music of the Future,” 198.
melody in an alto register. Meyerbeer’s passage is scored for unison strings without basses, fortified by clarinets and bassoons; d’Indy adds just a few additional winds and brass to the combination. There are similarities in tonality and phrasing as well.

Meyerbeer moves away from tonic at the end of his first phrase (mm. 3-10) and the beginning of the consequent phrase (m. 11ff.) suggests D minor, or ii of C major. D’Indy likewise moves off-tonic in his first phrase and moves to a supertonic of sorts—the Neapolitan, G-flat major. Both melodies build to climactic high points in their final measures—Meyerbeer to a high C in m. 16, d’Indy to an A in m. 229—where the previously cantabile lines become punctuated with accents. Lastly, there are broader points of correspondence between L’Africaine and Istar. Both works employ Orientalist topics; both passages occur at climactic moments near the ends of their respective pieces; and the protagonists of both works are exalted figures (Sélika a queen, Istar a goddess) shorn of the comforts of civilization, laid bare either emotionally or physically, and subjected to the gaze in their final moments.65

Before discussing these points further, I would like to turn my attention to the passage in Istar immediately following the unison theme. Sweeping string runs herald a final statement of the call motive in a lush orchestral texture (ex. 5.5). On previous occasions, the call has been hesitant or foreboding, and tonally ambiguous. This time, the horns and trombones proclaim the motive in valedictory fashion; Istar has been

65 There is another similarity between the two works that d’Indy could not have predetermined: just as L’Africaine’s public reception was largely shaped by the overwhelmingly enthusiastic response to the ritournelle, d’Indy later observed that the popular success of Istar could be primarily ascribed to its unison passage. Thomson, Vincent d’Indy and his World, 132. For a discussion of appropriation and Orientalism in France, see Jann Pasler, “Race, Orientalism, and Distinction in the Wake of the ‘Yellow Peril’,” in Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 86-118.
successful in her quest. The passage can be divided into three subphrases. In the first two
groupings, measures 237-240 reprise mm. 233-236 with subtle variations. The harmony
alters between a ii\(^6\) sonority with suspensions (i.e. mm. 233-4 and 237-8) and tonic
(mm. 235-6 and 239-40), a progression highlighted by arpeggiation in the harps every
two measures. The timpani holds an F through the first two measures of each grouping,
underscoring the tonic even though it is the dissonant pitch in the minor seventh chord. In
the upper register, strings and woodwinds play a soaring melody whose incipit derives
from the same three-note motive as the call. Disregarding the octave adjustment in m.
234 and 238 (i.e., the upward leap of a seventh rather than a stepwise descent), the
melody’s contour features downward motion through the first three measures and an
upward swoop in compound or triplet rhythm in m. 236 and 240. The middleground
chromatic passing motion between the fifth and sixth scale degrees in this ascent—from
C through C# to D (mm. 236-7 and 240-1)—is, as Richard Taruskin notes, a semiotic
code for Orientalism or sexuality employed by many late-nineteenth-century
composers.\(^{66}\) In the third subphrase, mm. 241-244, the upper winds and strings play three
variants of the call motive at successively higher pitch levels in a drive to secure
cadential closure in F major, which occurs in m. 245.

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\(^{66}\) Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press,
Ex 5.5. The final call, mm. 233-245 (rehearsal U to V)

Here again is a strong link to a well-known opera first staged in 1865, this time Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*. As noted in chapter 1 of this dissertation, Wagner’s reputation in France had undergone dramatic swings through the second half of the nineteenth century. His works were seldom performed in the years immediately after the Franco-Prussian War—a consequence not only of nationalist sentiment, but also the insult of Wagner’s scathing farce *Eine Kapitulation*. By the 1880s and increasingly through the 1890s, however, Wagnerism was again on the rise, both in concert life and in other aesthetic and political manifestations. Edouard Colonne and Charles Lamoureux

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made Wagner a staple of the symphonic repertoire, the latter presenting selections from *Tristan* at his orchestral concerts between 1887-1891.\(^68\)

Many fin-de-siècle composers wrote works influenced by Wagner’s music or dogma, though there was considerable controversy about how to appropriate his ideas while maintaining a distinctly French identity.\(^69\) Thus some composers, d’Indy included, came under fire for their use of a “pastiche wagnérien” that vaguely evoked Wagner’s musical language.\(^70\) *Tristan*’s hyperchromaticism and sensuality made for a particularly rich source of inspiration, with echoes in works such as Chabrier’s *Gwendoline* (1886) and Chausson’s *Le roi Arthus* (1886-95).\(^71\) The final call of *Istar*, however, conjures a celebrated passage from *Tristan* in decidedly specific fashion, down to details of phrasing, harmony, orchestration, and melody. I refer to the climax of Isolde’s *Liebestod*, or “love-death” (ex. 5.6).


\(^{70}\) Suschitzky, “*Fervaal, Parsifal*, and French National Identity,” 265.

Ex. 5.6. Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde, Liebestod*, mm. 61-68

At the time of *Istar*’s composition, Parisian audiences had yet to witness a complete, staged version of *Tristan und Isolde*; the opera was first performed in France in Aix-les-Bains in 1897 and had its Paris premiere at the Nouveau Théâtre on 28 October 1899. Nonetheless, the work held special significance for d’Indy. Hearing of Wagner’s death in 1883, d’Indy wrote that he and Henri Duparc “played from *Tristan* all morning with a deep pang in the heart.” D’Indy traveled to Bayreuth several times in the next decade to hear the opera performed, and he discusses it at length in his *Cours de*

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73 “…le matin où nous avons appris cette nouvelle, j’étais chez Duparc et nous avons joué toute la matinée du *Tristan* avec un profound serrement de cœur.” D’Indy to Ernest Chausson, February 1883. *Ma vie*, 369.
His thorough assimilation of Wagner’s score is evidenced in Istar’s call. The *Liebestod* passage breaks down into the same three-part phrase subdivision as d’Indy’s—mm. 61-62 are reprised in mm. 63-64, and mm. 65-67 reiterate a localized descending gesture at increasingly higher pitch levels. The *Liebestod*, like *Istar*, features a harmonic progression from ii\(^6\) to I articulated by timpani and harp, and a similar melodic contour with triplet chromatic motion through scale degrees five and six. More generally, the two passages are the apotheoses of their respective works, the culmination of a heady *mélange* of love and death. While Wagnerism descended like a fog on *fin-de-siècle* France, often indeterminate in its referents, *Istar*’s parallels with *Tristan* are concretized through meticulous specificity.

**Theorizing Intertextuality**

My aim is not to demonstrate categorically that d’Indy intentionally referenced Meyerbeer or Wagner in *Istar*. Indeed, I have avoided the term “allusion” in my discussion precisely because it connotes intentionality. Even if we could establish d’Indy’s intentions, that would miss the point. Charles Rosen’s reflections under similar circumstances apply here. He writes: “the rules of evidence that enable us, on circumstantial grounds, to convict a writer of having been influenced are of no use to us in this case—and it is precisely this case which is the most interesting kind.”\(^{75}\) Raymond Knapp, in his study of allusions in Brahms, states this idea more forcefully; he contends

\(^{74}\) Hirbbrunner, “Vincent d’Indy zwischen Wagner und Debussy,” 269. For d’Indy’s discussion of *Tristan*, see especially *Cours de composition musicale* 2/1:232-3.

\(^{75}\) Charles Rosen, “Influence: Plagiarism and Inspiration,” *19\(^{th}\)*-Century Music* 4*, no. 2 (Fall 1980), 87.
that intention is “notoriously hard to prove and often spectacularly useless in providing analytical insight.” The point is that, whether d’Indy intended to or not, his *variations symphoniques* invite comparisons to *L’Africaine* and *Tristan*. A reference to Meyerbeer evokes an aesthetic of multimedia opulence and visual spectacle. Wagner has historically been associated with an antithetical ethos, a pure, almost metaphysical expression of profound inner truth. (These are essentialized binarisms, of course, which I will move beyond momentarily.) Then there’s the matter of d’Indy’s documented commentary on Meyerbeer. Like Wagner, d’Indy championed Meyerbeer early in life, only to later repudiate him in vicious anti-Semitic rhetoric. Like Wagner, d’Indy disavowed Meyerbeer’s influence on his own compositions, but the parallels in their music are demonstrable. Lastly, d’Indy was a confirmed “Wagnerian” who appropriated a German’s musical language to promote a French nationalistic agenda. The obvious question arises: what are we to make of the seemingly paradoxical juxtaposition of references in *Istar*? I would like to propose three points in response to this issue.

First, d’Indy’s statements about Meyerbeer and Wagner shed light on his cultural politics, but ultimately reveal little about his aesthetic debts. Composers make history, but their attempts to write history may be clouded by ulterior motives. Harold Bloom, who has famously written about the “anxiety of influence,” observes: “more than ever, contemporary poets insist that they are telling the truth in their work, and more than ever they tell continuous lies, particularly about their relations to one another, and most consistently about their relations to their precursors.” The denial of influence is, after

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all, a means of asserting one’s originality. Applying Bloom’s theory to a discussion of Stravinsky, Taruskin notes, “acknowledged debts are the easy, discountable ones”—we confess our “easy debts precisely in order to hide the hard ones.” D’Indy acknowledged his debt to Wagner. Granted, this may not have been “easy” given the heated polemics of the fin-de-siècle. But perhaps it did obscure a more problematic anxiety of influence, to the Prussian-Jewish composer of grand opéra whose thrilling dramas had captivated d’Indy’s imagination as a youth.

Second, the presumption underlying my question is that analysts tend to conceive of musical works as monologic subjects. At some level, we are uncomfortable with the notion that elements in a piece may exist in tension with one another. Hence when David Lewin identifies intertextual references to Mozart and Beethoven in a string quartet by Brahms, he argues that they form a “dialectic synthesis of musical contradictions.”

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79 Taruskin, “Revising Revision,” 137.

Difference is collapsed into sameness, the dialogic into the monologic. This approach has been challenged by Kevin Korsyn, who draws on the theories of Derrida, Kristeva, and Bakhtin to propose a dialogic approach to analysis. Responding to Lewin, Korsyn writes, “the stratified musical languages in the quartet do not merge, do not coalesce; instead, Brahms creates a plurality of unmerged voices. The listener, as a result, undergoes a process of decentering.” In the parlance of intertextuality, Korsyn views works not as autonomous objects but as “networks or relational events.”

To apply this line of thought to Istar, we could say that d’Indy’s score evokes the musical languages of both Meyerbeer and Wagner. These languages stand in conflict with each other, but the non-convergence of their discourses is perhaps more important than any resolution or unification of musical style. Moreover, the list of intertextual relations need not—and should not—be limited to the two I have discussed, particularly since my investigation has focused on a relatively small segment of the piece. As noted above, Huebner has suggested that the successive variations evoke a variety of repertoire, from Debussy to medieval chant. An ancient story about an alluring woman who removes seven items of clothing in a ritualized divestment could equally have invited comparisons to the literature, music, and visual art of the Salome craze that abounded in the late nineteenth century. Toni Bentley has suggested that the biblical figure’s “Dance

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82 Ibid., 64.

83 Ibid., 56.

84 Huebner, “‘Striptease’ as Ideology,” 24.
of the Seven Veils”—which had never been referred to by that name prior to Oscar Wilde’s 1893 play—may even have been inspired by the Assyrian legend.85 And d’Indy himself once suggested a kinship between Istar and Erda, the earth goddess of Wagner’s Ring cycle.86 Yet I would stop short of the stance of deconstructionists who, in Taruskin’s words, “see intertextuality as unbounded and indeterminate, and give themselves up with gusto to the hermeneutic of infinite regress.”87 Instead, I would like to stake out a middle ground between relativism and linear teleology. Istar may have closer intertextual ties to L’Africaine than to, say, Monteverdi’s Orfeo, but to hierarchize these correspondences is not to suggest that they are fixed in number, much less restricted to one single precursor.

Third, the binarisms I alluded to earlier—Meyerbeer as showman, Wagner as metaphysical dramatist—fail to capture the complexities of their musical thought or the commonalities between the two composers. A number of recent writers have challenged the conventional bifurcation of grand opera and music drama, suggesting the genres have more in common than sometimes thought. In her examination of L’Africaine, Henson problematizes the notion that Meyerbeer was eclipsed by operatic “moderns” such as Wagner and Verdi. The ritournelle’s use of an “empty stage and a strange sonority,” she argues, “reveals Meyerbeer participating in a shift we usually think of as overwhelming and obscuring him,” away from an aesthetic of spectacle towards one that resonates more with Wagner’s notion of Wirkung.88 Cruz makes a similar argument in her study of

85 Bentley, Sisters of Salome, 31-32.
86 “En tout cas, je te charge de toutes les amitiés de cette excellente Istar pour sa bonne petite cousine Erda que tu vas voir là-bas.” Vincent d’Indy, letter to Octave Maus, 12 August 1896. Ma vie, 543.
87 Taruskin, “Revising Revision,” 114-5.
Meyerbeer’s final opera, in which she presents the work as a modernist turn towards a “new musical poetics of sensation and perception.”\textsuperscript{89} She draws an explicit connection between the \textit{ritournelle} and Isolde’s \textit{Liebestod}, noting that there is “something powerfully Wagnerian, or more specifically Tristanesque,” about Meyerbeer’s sixteen measures.\textsuperscript{90}

Other scholars have framed the parallels between Meyerbeer and Wagner more broadly. Mary Ann Smart, in her study of gesture in nineteenth-century opera, underscores Wagner’s debt to the dramaturgy of French grand opera. She claims that the music dramas represent a “pivot between … two modes of representing the body.”\textsuperscript{91} On one hand is the metaphysical, transcendental critique of the physical world we usually associate with Wagner; on the other is a type of musical expression that “spring[s] from the physical and the gestural,” in the outwardly mimetic fashion of Auber or Meyerbeer.\textsuperscript{92} Thomas Grey has also argued that Wagnerian music drama and classic grand opera share fundamental similarities.\textsuperscript{93} Although Wagner sought to define his creative identity in opposition to Meyerbeer, Grey notes that “Wagner’s confrontation with French grand opera—a deeply conflicted one, artistically and psychologically—was

\textsuperscript{88} Henson, “Meyerbeer’s Last Musical Thought,” paper presented at “French Opera from Gounod to the Ballets Russes,” Beinecke Library, Yale University, 17 April 2004.

\textsuperscript{89} Cruz, “Meyerbeer’s Music of the Future,” 170.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 194.

\textsuperscript{91} Mary Ann Smart, \textit{Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 166.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 30.

a life-long affair.” Even *Tristan*, arguably the closest Wagner got to an antithesis of grand opera, betrays a Meyerbeerian influence. According to Grey, the love scene between Tristan and Isolde in Act II echoes the “grand duo” in Act IV of Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots*, and the end of Act I transforms a basic trope in grand opera dramaturgy, as Wagner “reinterprets the pointed juxtaposition of private (amorous) and public (political) spheres so fundamental to many classic opera finales.”

Wagner’s *Liebestod* and Meyerbeer’s “Grande Scène du Mancenillier” share another intertextual link in their intertwined themes of love and death. The title characters of Wagner’s opera cannot fulfill their love in this world; after Tristan dies, Isolde undergoes a transfiguration (“Verklärung”) and collapses in ecstasy by her lover’s corpse. In the Meyerbeer, Sélika ends her own life when her love for Vasco da Gama goes unrequited. Henson notes: “the ‘Grande Scène du Mancenillier’ is, after all, a kind of love-death, where a delirious, love-crazed woman dies in a spectacle created entirely by her voice and the orchestra.”

D’Indy’s invokes love and death in *Istar* as well, but the profound differences in his setting are suggestive of the technique Bloom describes as “misreading.” Mortality looms at the outset, as Istar descends into the underworld to retrieve her already deceased lover. Through devotion, faith, and love, she triumphs over death and rescues Tammuz—a resurrection not given explicit musical portrayal, but conveyed in the poetic source d’Indy quotes in the preface to his score. The “Épopée d’Izdubar” refers to Istar’s lover as the “SON OF LIFE”—as Huebner notes, an

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94 Ibid., 322.
95 Ibid., 337-8 and 340.
96 Henson, “Meyerbeer’s Last Musical Thought.”
appellation with messianic overtones.\textsuperscript{97} Meyerbeer’s Vasco da Gama, in comparison, is something of an imperialist brute who renders Sélïka’s sacrifice futile. As for Tristan, Wagner’s Schopenhauerian conception of eternity probably held little appeal for the devoutly religious d’Indy. The implicit moral of d’Indy’s misreading is that delirious sexual excess leads to grave consequences, but true devotion and faith hold the power to redeem.

\textbf{Prudishness vs. Pleasure}

On some level, then, Istar may have been a conservative reaction against the sexualized theatrics of Wagner and Meyerbeer. But d’Indy’s \textit{variations symphoniques} are hardly ascetic. No doubt Istar’s divestment offers the possibility of pleasure for the mind’s eye, and the very sonic fabric of d’Indy’s variations appeals to the senses as well. Many observers commented on the composer’s beguiling use of the orchestra. Maurice Kufferath noted that Istar “abounds in charming orchestral details,” and Hughes Imbert praised the piece as “very colorful.”\textsuperscript{98} For Jean d’Udine, the work’s aural surface—particularly at the moment the unison theme is revealed—was intertwined with its sensuality:

…the orientalism suggested in this work is not, as it would be in Rimsky-Korsakov’s \textit{Scheherazade}, the supreme pleasure of our ears. Here these beams of light and glimmers and silky and light rhythms are only the charming accessories that a feverish hand adds one by one, vexed by any impediment. It hardly waits, for refinement’s sake, for the delicate beginnings of sensual delight. Under the

\textsuperscript{97} Huebner, “‘Striptease’ as Ideology,” 23.

colors that play in the fusion of the timbres, the melodic shape continues to define itself more and more. And when the entire orchestra shivers splendidly in tight unison, tense, frenetic, and embraces hermetically the contours of the main theme, stretches itself in rough, smooth and slender sinuous lines, free from all blemish like the flesh of a Tyrian courtesan, under the long monodic cry, one involuntarily thinks of this joy “that is more passionate than the possession of an empire” promised by the Queen of Sheba to Saint Anthony’s frightened lust…

[...l’orientalisme réalisé dans cette œuvre n’est-il pas, comme dans tel ouvrage de Rimsky-Korsakow, Shéhérazade, par exemple, le suprême plaisir de nos oreilles. Ces coruscations et ces chatoiements, ces rythmes soyeux et légers ne sont ici que les accessoires charmants qu’une main fiévreuse fait tomber un à un, impatiente de tout obstacle, et s’attardant à peine, par raffinement, aux délicates prémices de la volupté. Sous les couleurs qui jouent dans le conflit des timbres, la forme s’accuse sans cesse davantage, et davantage encore; et quand splendidement l’orchestre entier frémit dans un unisson serré, tendu, frénétique, épouse hermétiquement tous les contours du thème dominateur, s’étire en sinuosités drues, lisses et fuselées, nettes de tout accident comme la chair d’une courtisane tyrienne, sous le long cri monodique on songe involontairement à cette joie “plus véhément que la possession de tout un empire,” promise à la concupiscence apeurée de Saint-Antoine par la Reine de Saba…]99

The work’s first and fourth variation, where Istar removes her tiara and breast ornaments, respectively, exemplify d’Indy’s luxuriant approach to timbre. The former, which Huebner likens to Debussy’s Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune, is opulently scored with shimmering string tremolandos, chromatic woodwind runs, and harp glissandi (ex. 5.7). The latter, in the bright key of F# major, features iridescent woodwind figurations in a high register punctuated by cymbals, triangle, and string pizzicati (ex. 5.8).

Ex. 5.7. *Istar*, mm. 19-20
Ex. 5.8. Istar, mm. 81-85
The sonic opulence of *Istar* suggests another point of tension with d’Indy’s aesthetics. The composer believed that the purpose of art was to instruct and nourish the soul, not to stimulate the senses. In the introduction to the *Cours*, he defined art as “a way of life for the soul,” going on to note: “Without Faith, there is no Art.”

For this reason, d’Indy disapproved of music that appealed too much to aural pleasure at the expense of spiritual and intellectual enrichment. The worst perpetrators of this misguided approach, in the eyes of d’Indy, were the *debussystes* who privileged sumptuous timbres and harmonies over formal content. While he recognized the talent of Debussy himself, d’Indy reserved harsh judgment for his younger compatriot’s imitators, opining that Debussy’s aesthetic “is an aesthetic of sensation, and this is a principle hardly compatible with the true purpose of great art.”

Deruchie has speculated that d’Indy responded to the growing ranks of *debussystes* in the next major orchestral work he completed after *Istar*, the Symphony No. 2 in B-flat (1902-03). The “predominantly ascetic and harsh orchestral sound” of the Symphony, Deruchie writes, could have been a reaction against what d’Indy “saw as debussysme’s excessive appeal to corporeal pleasure.” The sound world of *Istar*, by contrast, is as pleasing to the ear as anything d’Indy ever wrote, suggesting a disjunction between d’Indy’s compositional practice and his moralizing rhetoric.

Of course, *Istar* appeals to the visual senses as well. The Assyrian goddess’s passage through the underworld cries out for scenic—and sexy—representation. In fact,

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100 D’Indy, *Course in Musical Composition*, vol. 1, trans. Woldu, 40, 41.

101 “Son esthétique est un esthétique de sensation, et c’est là un principe peu compatible avec le but véritable du grand art.” D’Indy, *Cours de composition musicale*, 3:231.

the work was repeatedly staged as a ballet in later decades, often with d’Indy’s active participation. In May 1911, with the composer’s blessing, the dancer Natalia (a.k.a. Natasha) Trouhanova gave the first choreographic performances of *Istar* at a “Concert de danse” at the Théâtre du Châtelet, accompanied by Pierre Monteux conducting the Colonne orchestra. The following year, Trouhanova included *Istar* in a critically and popularly acclaimed production that Huebner describes as “a landmark event in the history of French ballet.” The 1912 program also included Florent Schmitt’s *La Tragédie de Salomé* and two premieres: Paul Dukas’s *La Péri* and Maurice Ravel’s *Adélaïde, ou le langage des fleurs*, an adaptation of his “Valses nobles et sentimentales.”

Ivan Clustine, the principal ballet master of the Paris Opéra, was the choreographer; the Lamoureux orchestra performed; and each composer conducted their own work. By far the most famed Istar was Ida Rubinstein, who danced the title role at the Paris Opéra on numerous occasions throughout the 1920s, including at a gala performance for veterans of World War I. Rubinstein’s biographer Michael de Cossart notes wryly that her performance was a “fitting tribute” to “those national heroes whose war experiences did not prevent from appreciating Ida’s high-class striptease act.”

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103 The performances took place on 3 and 9 May 1911. Trouhanova danced opposite Robert Quinault. The production was advertised in *Le Courrier musical*, 15 April 1911, and was the subject of a lengthy pre-performance writeup in the same periodical by Robert Brussel, “Préambule pour deux concerts de danse,” 1 May 1911, 310-11.


As Lynn Garafola has documented, Trouhanova and Rubinstein were among the most celebrated female soloists in France in the years before the war. The two performers, veterans of Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, cultivated an exotic mystique: “Both were Russian, expatriates who offered themselves to the public as Salomés and exotic creatures of mystery. No one knew who they were or what they had done in Russia, that strange, distant country they had all but abandoned.”

Garafola’s invocation of Salome is not coincidental; the role was central to both dancers’ careers. Trouhanova performed the “Dance of the Seven Veils” from Strauss’s opera in a triumphant 1907 production that established her reputation in Paris. The following year, in her professional debut in St. Petersburg, Rubinstein performed the dance from Wilde’s play to choreography by Mikhail Fokine. Rubenstein repeated the piece in London and Paris, and it became a staple of her concert repertory. The parallels between the “Dance of the Seven Veils” and Istar’s ritualized denuding—performed by the same luminaries of the French stage, no less—could not have escaped d’Indy’s notice.

*Istar* thus underscores the complicated nature of d’Indy’s morality. Despite the composer’s professed rectitude, the piece undoubtedly has hedonistic overtones. Perhaps d’Indy was not as prim as he wanted others to believe. Another possibility raised by Thomson is that Istar’s striptease could be “a coded statement about sexual repression in respectable bourgeois society.”

Thomson invokes Roland Barthes, who writes that “striptease—at least Parisian striptease—is based on a contradiction: Woman is desexualized at the very moment when she is stripped naked.” A glint of sexuality only

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106 Garafola, “Soloists Abroad,” 149.


108 Ibid., 113.
serves to insulate the viewer from the real thing: “evil is advertised the better to impede and exorcize it.”

Perhaps Istar’s nudity is supposed to be sexy; perhaps not. Like Salome, she serves as what Lawrence Kramer describes as “a focal point for the representation of a bundle of instabilities produced by the fin-de-siècle gender system.”

Istar is subjugated by the gaze, a nominally patriarchal institution. But she also commands the gaze and subverts the traditional power order; she demands that the audience conjure her nudity in the visual imagination. What we fail to see in a concert performance—and there were many in the first half of the twentieth century—is perhaps all the more alluring when left to the recesses of the mind.

This thought raises a related issue of female authority. Is Istar the symphonic equivalent of Carolyn Abbate’s “musical écriture feminine,” a “female authorial voice that speaks through a musical work written by a male composer”? Or is she portrayed as being at a distance, as something foreign? D’Indy’s musical characterization seems generous enough, but one must remember that she is also a vaguely Semitic, vaguely exotic “other.” The Mesopotamian goddess of fertility is “Ishtar” in Semitic legends, “Inanna” in Sumerian ones. And Rubinstein, the most celebrated of Istars, came from a wealthy Jewish family. Steven Wilson notes that Judaism was often associated with lust and salaciousness in d’Indy’s milieu: “Fear and hatred of Jews was a way of expressing


112 Cook, “Vincent d’Indy’s Istar,” 238.
fear and hatred of sexuality.” As the century turned, d’Indy’s Scholists became increasingly suspicious of exoticism, which they linked to the “impressionist” tendencies of composers at the Conservatoire. Whether d’Indy’s representation of Istar and similar appropriations of otherness at the fin-de-siècle are sympathetic to their subjects is a question that resists an unequivocal answer.

The tensions I have explored in this chapter—between absolute music and program music, between Wagnerism and Meyerbeerism, and between prudishness and pleasure—illuminate the complexities and contradictions in a musician who has often been reduced to essentialisms. Jane Fulcher, for instance, has portrayed d’Indy as a reactionary xenophobe committed to a one-dimensional ideological agenda. In French Cultural Politics and Music, she makes a great deal out of d’Indy’s anti-Semitism, but her discussion skews towards works that fit her politically-motivated thesis (such as La Légende de Saint-Christophe), with little to no discussion of more progressive, ideologically ambivalent compositions like Istar. Steven Huebner, for one, believes that d’Indy’s portrayal of the Semitic goddess is ultimately sympathetic—as do I. As other critics have noted, Fulcher’s cursory musical analyses sometimes render her arguments unconvincing. Andrew Thomson, on the other hand, begins with the


\[\text{\textsuperscript{114} Pasler, “Race, Orientalism, and Distinction,” 92.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{115} See especially Fulcher, French Cultural Politics and Music, 64-74.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{116} Huebner, email correspondence with author, 23 September 2005.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{117} Robert Orledge, review of French Cultural Politics and Music, Notes 56, no. 2 (December 1999), 413.}\]
assumption that d’Indy has been unfairly maligned. Thomson’s biography is a welcome counterbalance to Fulcher, but he swings too far in the other direction and fails to provide enough context for a nuanced assessment of d’Indy’s ideology. He rightly points out that anti-Semitic views, reprehensible as we may find them today, were not uncommon in d’Indy’s time. As Eugen Weber has blithely remarked, “Anti-Semitism in nineteenth-century France was as French as croissants.” But Thomson represses crucial bits of information. He mitigates d’Indy’s repugnant views by claiming, in effect, that the composer didn’t know any better: “Such was the spell of Wagner’s personality that the impressionable d’Indy could swallow this racialist conspiracy whole.” Thomson mentions d’Indy’s youthful admiration for Meyerbeer, but there is scant discussion of d’Indy’s anti-Semitic rhetoric in the Cours or other later writings. He, like Fulcher, dwells on half the story.

Happily, other writers have begun to portray d’Indy’s artistic identity in its rightful complexity. As Jann Pasler has documented, d’Indy’s reputation as an ultra-conservative belies the ambiguities and paradoxes in his political and aesthetic thought. Despite his reputation of opposition to the liberal establishment, the composer’s ideology was more fluid than he and his disciples chose to acknowledge, particularly in the years before 1900. As for d’Indy’s relationship to his forebears, Anya Suschitzky rejects the portrayal of French Wagnerism as a monolithic unity, with composers either “wholly pro-

118 Weber, France, Fin de Siècle, 130.

119 Thomson, Vincent d’Indy and his World, 49.

or wholly anti-Wagner.”¹²¹ The relevant matter, she argues, is not whether composers were influenced by Wagner, but the manner in which musicians engaged with his legacy in the service of constructing a French identity. Unpacking the implications of d’Indy’s avowed “Wagnerian” status, then, is no simple task. The same for his anti-Meyerbeer proclamations. Ideological subtleties, after all, are often too complex to be collapsed into dialectical syntheses.

* * *

My hope in this dissertation has been to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the bande à Franck’s musical and cultural identity by examining a series of apparent paradoxes. The Franckistes championed the ideals of absolute music in their rhetoric, yet continued to write programmatic works. Moreover, they used nominally abstract processes—sonata procedures, variations, and cyclic forms—to encode concrete aesthetic, political, or moral viewpoints. Holmès captured the nation’s imagination in part because she was a woman, but adopted an idiom that listeners perceived as masculine. Despite their apparent prudishness, Franck and d’Indy penned works of an unabashedly sensual—even hedonistic—nature. All of the composers examined in this study drew significant inspiration from Wagner in the service of constructing a distinctly French musical identity.

The works I have discussed in this dissertation also shed light on aesthetic considerations specific to each composer. Holmès’s embrace of an ambitious, virile idiom defined her contemporaneous reception in gendered terms. In addition, her

portrayal of female characters in *Les Argonautes* demonstrates that women could participate in the othering of their own gender. Chausson’s revisions to *Viviane* offer a glimpse of one artist’s path towards maturity and refinement of an aesthetic credo. By completely overhauling his symphonic poem, he set out on a new course away from descriptive music. The competing interpretations of *Psyché*—as erotic tale, spiritual allegory, or absolute music—reveal the extent to which Franck’s reputation was shaped by his followers. Despite indications in his music and biography to the contrary, the Franckistes had ideological motivations for portraying their mentor as a devout champion of abstract symphonic forms. The tangle of contradictions in *Istar*—between diverging points of inspiration, between absolute music and program music, and between rectitude and sensuality—underscores the complicated relationship between d’Indy’s polemical rhetoric and his compositional practice.

Much work remains to be done to illuminate the symphonic culture of fin-de-siècle Paris. In addition to the four composers examined here, many other Franckistes wrote symphonic works deserving of further study, including Henri Duparc, Alexis de Castillon, Emmanuel Chabrier, and Guillaume Lekeu—not to mention musicians with looser ties to the Franck circle, such as Camille Saint-Saëns, Paul Dukas, and Gabriel Fauré. Indeed, one might say that this generation of musicians ushered in a continuous tradition of ambitious French symphonic composition—a tradition that endured and found further expression in the work of younger artists such as Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and their contemporaries.

Future studies might also flesh out the historical continuities between the figures examined in this dissertation and the subsequent generation of composers that coalesced
around Debussy. To be sure, there has been no shortage of Debussy scholarship in recent
generations. Yet as Boyd Pomeroy has noted, the majority of this literature has been more
cconcerned with Debussy’s supposed radicalism—for instance, as a “proto-avant-gardist”
to take another example, Edward Lockspeiser argues in his landmark biographical study that
Debussy’s La Mer (1903-05) represents the antithesis of “Germanic,” “developmental”
form.\footnote{123}{Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy: His Life and Mind, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978).}
A number of writers, including Brian Hart, Simon Trezise, and Roger Nichols,
have suggested that Debussy owes a debt to Franckian cyclic procedures, but have not
elaborated this idea through close reading.\footnote{124}{See Brian Hart, “The symphony in Debussy’s world: A context for his views on the genre and early interpretations of La mer,” In Debussy and his World, ed. Jane F. Fulcher (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 181-201; Simon Tresize, Debussy: La mer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Roger Nichols, The Life of Debussy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).} I hope that the present study will open new
avenues for scholarship on Debussy’s engagement with his recent musical past, allowing
us to position him as a nineteenth-century composer as much as a twentieth-century one.
APPENDIX ONE
SOURCE MATERIALS FOR CHAUSSON’S VIVIANE

1. Sketchbooks with material for Viviane. The trumpet melody appears on p. 3 of vol. 1 with the annotation “Cri d’une marchande des rues, à Marseille.” [Gallois 1994 (p. 154) dates this to EC’s trip to Cannes in 1879.] A series of pages devoted to Viviane (among other things), starting on I/24, is dated “Etampes / Aout-Septembre 82.” Vol. 2, p. 28, works out the theme Gallois labels the “love theme.” It is signed and dated “Paris—Vincennes / Juillet 82 / EC.” F-Pn Ms. 8837, vol. 1, pp. 3, 24-35; vol. 2, p. 28.

2. Short score version (version préorchestrale), signed and dated at the end: “Etampes 16 Septembre / Paris 8 Décembre [1882] / EC.” F-Pn Ms. 8774


5. Published orchestral score, “op. 5,” Paris: O. Bornemann, 1893. F-Pn Vm7. 7951. (Kalmus reprint.)
APPENDIX TWO
LIBRETTO OF FRANCK’S PSYCHÉ

PART ONE
Psyche’s Slumber [Sommeil de Psyché] (orchestra)
Psyche is asleep. Lightly rocked by her dream, her spirit at times foresees an absolute happiness which is not of this world, but of which she has a premonition.

Psyche Carried Off by the Zephyrs [Psyché enlevée par les Zéphyrs] (orchestra)
Suddenly the air trembles, filled with strange noises. Psyche, carried off by the Zephyrs, is transported into the gardens of Eros.

PART TWO
The Gardens of Eros [Les jardins d’Eros] (orchestra and chorus)
More beautiful than beauty itself, Psyche rests among flowers, greeted like a sovereign by Nature in celebration: voices whisper in her ear of the power of Love. She awakens, gently touched. The voices sing again, and speak of the invisible bridegroom who approaches. Delighted, she listens, she waits. The voices still sing, but more seriously: “Remember,” they say, “you must never know the face of your mystery lover… Remember!”

Chorus:
Love! Source of all life!
Young, strong god with the strength to conquer!
Hail, O hallowed power,
Hail, O charming ruler of hearts!
You fill everything with holy joy,
In your wake the furrows turn fertile.
Mother Earth produces with rapture
When the ineffable kiss
From the brightest sun, her bridegroom, beams down on her.
O white sister of the lily, gentler than the dawn
And more beautiful than beauty itself,
Do you not long to feel a sweet desire bursting open
In your tormented breast?
Listen to the invisible lyres in the distance
Sighing gently on the melodious air!
Your mysterious bridegroom is coming,
To your innocent breast, to share this divine ecstasy.
For you the palace gates are thrown open.
But, Psyche, remember that you must never
Look at the face of your mystery lover.
Obey without understanding your ever virtuous fate.
Psyche! Remember.
Psyche and Eros [Psyché et Eros] (orchestra)
The spirits have fallen silent: another voice already resonates, soft but penetrating: it is that of Eros himself. Psyche responds hesitantly… soon their souls merge… All is passion, all is light, all is happiness… forever, if Psyche can remember.

PART THREE

The Punishment – Psyche’s Suffering and Laments (orchestra and chorus)
Psyche did not remember! “The punishment begins,” the voices declare, but she weeps. Eros will forgive her, perhaps.
Psyche weeps; she feels infinite sorrow, because she has known infinite happiness. Consumed by impotent desires, she visits the earth to suffer, and to die with a sorrowful and supreme fervor for the ideal love which she has lost forever, but which she still hopes for…

Chorus:
Love, your secret is known. [Literally: She has learned your name.]
Woe on her!
Among the sweet mystery, and pure happiness,
Her heart was filled with an eternal youthfulness. [Doubt has taken the heart of the young immortal.]
Her punishment begins and its pain is cruel.
Far from the gardens and sacred temples of Eros, [Love, your secret is known. Woe on her!]
She wanders aimlessly,
On paths that are rough under her bruised feet.
A lonely traveler on a sad journey,
Sobbing with regret at the mystery of
The blue gardens and sacred temples of Eros.
And the dark night grows even deeper,
And the wind alone hears her hopeless cries!
There is no glimmer of hope.
Love, Psyche has discovered your secret, and yet she weeps.
Take her back to the blue gardens and sacred temples.

Apotheosis (orchestra and chorus)
Eros has forgiven, the mysterious choir announces, and the whole world rejoices. Rest, poor Psyche! Your desire, which outlasts your death, is lifted up to God and God descends to you; his mouth repeats the same love, Nature sings the same revelry. And here in the arms of her immortal bridegroom, Psyche leaves the world in triumphant glory!

Chorus:
Eros has forgiven. Heaven and earth quake with delight!
Psyche, lift up your pallid forehead.
Let the pain of your first mistake
Be forgotten for ever.
Heavenly couple, soar into the light.
The miracle of love is at last complete.

Attributed to “Sicard and Fourcaud”
(Narrative translations mine; choral translations by Mike George)
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