

Formulaic Openings in Debussy

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By now it comes as no surprise that much of what may at first strike us as innovative in Debussy's music was in fact carried out within the framework of historical precedent and established convention. Indeed, tracing the emergence of his personal style from the early works, with their explicit reliance on existing models, to the later works, where the models or conventions are more tacit, is an issue of fundamental musicological importance. Perhaps no composer of this *fin-de-siècle* era exemplifies more clearly the expressive tension that results from the forging of a creative language that simultaneously works within a received tradition and strives for radical originality.

The question of the composer's development is particularly complex, because his music

grows from not merely one, but several syntactical conventions. On the one hand, Debussy perceived the language of Wagner as the most progressive available style, with its motivic organization and transformation, harmonic and formal freedom, aperiodic construction, and explicit seriousness of purpose.¹ On the other, he inherited by culture and education the set of languages of such French contemporaries and immediate predecessors as Gounod, Saint-Saëns, Fauré, Duparc, Chabrier, Franck, and Massenet—languages not untouched by the example of Wagner (and Liszt), but ones more conservative in their melodic emphasis and periodicity, even while they admitted considerable harmonic experimentation, particularly in the area of modality. Debussy's early works blend in differing proportions the existing German and French late-nineteenth-century conventions: appropriate responses from a student and young composer searching for a distinctive

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voice.² Gradually, as he matured, he was able to permit original material to rise in importance to the point where it disguises—in some instances, annihilates—the existing models.

Debussy's reliance on syntactical models in generating his own style is nowhere more evident than at the beginnings of his works. He habitually returns to the same initial gestural patterns—involving distinctive treatments of phrasing, melody, texture, and harmonic syntax. These recurring patterns, whose primary purpose is to move from silence to a world of musical motion, may be located within the language options available to him as he began to compose; they have demonstrable historical antecedents. Debussy's openings are often formulaic, in the general sense of the *OED*'s first definition of a formula: "A set form . . . in which something is defined, stated, or declared, or which is prescribed by authority or custom to be used on some ceremonial occasion."³ The most frequent of the formulas are readily recognizable, and they may easily be grouped into families, bearing in mind that Debussy often deviates from the "ideal" convention for expressive purposes.

This study raises more questions of taxonomy than I shall attempt to deal with here. My present concern is merely to introduce the general idea of formulaic openings in Debussy—to advance the concept without pretending to exhaust all of its particulars. Further ramifications of the idea may be pursued within deeper studies of individual works. I shall begin by presenting a summary description of the formulaic categories with brief exemplifications (I), move onward to a consideration of the aesthetic and conceptual function of the formulas within a basically Symbolist environment (II), and conclude by looking more closely at the openings of three representative pieces (III).

I

A. *The Monophonic Opening*. This category covers beginnings that pass through three gestural phases, the second of which seems to define the formula most clearly.

1. The silence preceding the opening notes. This is by no means an inconsequential component; Debussy sometimes replaces the silence with a preliminary pedal point, as in *Gigues* from the orchestral *Im-*

ages, where the stillness of the pedal functions as a kind of metaphor for the more typical initial silence.

2. An unaccompanied melodic line breaking the silence. Typically, the melodic line begins with a relatively prolonged initial pitch, *piano* or *pianissimo*, and glides gracefully into more active rhythmic motion in a manner that is not emphatically metrical. The line is often undular, returning at points to its initial pitch in a supple curve, and it generally implies a rather weak tonic, because of the use of pentatonicism, chromaticism, modality, gapped scales, or other such devices. This line leads directly into:

3. Either chordal confirmation or nonconfirmation of the implied tonic. If confirmation, the line expands to a multivoice texture and either establishes the tonic at once (as in *Hommage à Rameau* from the piano *Images*) or passes through one or more precatinal harmonies before arriving at a clear and resonant tonic (as in *La Fille aux cheveux de lin* from the *Préludes*). If nonconfirmation, the line moves directly into a chord (or set of chords) that functions to unsettle the tonality implied in the initial melodic material (as in *Printemps* of 1887).

Many examples besides those indicated above may be mentioned. Those with confirming chords—the larger subdivision—include the early *Pantomime*, *Le Faune* and, in an ambiguous, whole-tone situation, *Colloque sentimentale* from *Fêtes galantes II*, the *Danse sacrée*, *Bruyères* from *Préludes*, book II, *Ballade que Villon fait à la requeste de sa mère pour prier Notre-Dame* from the *Trois Ballades de François Villon*, *Soupir* from the *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*, and *Pour invoquer Pan* from the *Six Épigraphes antiques*. *L'Isle joyeuse* and *Pour un Tombeau sans nom* from the *Six Épigraphes antiques* extend the confirming principle to the whole-tone scale, as does *Voiles* from *Préludes*, which also thickens the monophonic line into a succession of parallel major-third dyads.

Those with nonconfirming or contradictory chords include *Spleen* from the *Ariettes oubliées*, *Prélude à "L'Après-midi d'un Faune"*, acts II and V of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Crois mon conseil, chère Climène* from *Le Promenoir des deux amants*, *Jimbo's Lullaby* (whose ambiguous major-second dyad in m. 4 effects a momentary shift from B \flat to F pentatonic) and *The Little Shepherd* from *Children's Corner*, *La Danse de Puck* from book I of the *Préludes*, *Prélude: Le Sommeil de la boîte* from *La Boîte à joujoux*, and the *Etude pour les 'cinq doigts'*. A number of closely related examples are less strictly for-

Très modéré

pp *p* *pp*

pp

un poco rall. *a tempo* *p* *sf*

pp

Example 1a: *Printemps*, mm. 1–14.

mulaic because of the presence of extraneous material, such as relatively static opening chords or accompanying pedal points, as mentioned above with *Gigues*: these include *L'Enfant prodigue*, *Harmonie du soir* from the Baudelaire songs, *En sourdine* and *Claire de lune* from *Fêtes galantes* I, act III of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Dialogue du vent et de la mer* from *La Mer*, the *Première Rapsodie* for clarinet, and many other such openings.

Consider a clear instance: the monophonic opening of *Printemps* of 1887 (ex. 1a, mm. 1–8). The opening *pianissimo* dynamic seems intimately related to the preceding silence or, better, to grow in crescendo out of it—a *creatio ex nihilo*. The single melodic line flows gracefully with a smooth, elegant shape: the Debussian arabesque.⁴ It is static, undular, and revolves around a central pitch, here a mediant axis, A#, and suggests in mm. 4–5 a merging back into its

Example 1b: *Printemps*, mm. 23–32.

beginning. The opening monophonic phrase implies a tonality, pentatonic on F#, or “black-note” pentatonic. The chord that appears in m. 5, F#⁹, suggests with its minor seventh that F# might not be the tonic. This is a contradiction, or at least the introduction of an ambiguity, and it works to unsettle the presumed tonic. This unsettling proceeds as the first chord changes into a second in m. 8, an unexpected Eb⁹. Most listeners would hear the Eb⁹ chord as an embellishing sonority, not a functional one: it emerges out of the preceding chord by holding the enharmonic common tones A# and C#. V⁹/ii, enharmonically, is not its immediate point. More likely, it strives simply for a dreamy, tonal remoteness.

Predecessors or models for the monophonic opening formula are abundant, particularly from the mid-nineteenth century onward. The clearest and most consistent models of which I

am aware are six of the twelve principal symphonic poems of Liszt: strings in octaves in *Tasso* and *Les Préludes*; percussion in *Festklänge* and *Héroïde funèbre*; other solutions in *Hungaria* and *Hunnenschlacht*. Perhaps even more influential were the Wagnerian music dramas. The prelude to *Tristan and Isolde* is archetypal here—monophonic opening leading to an ambiguous or rich chord—as are the prelude to act III of *Die Meistersinger* and the prelude to *Parsifal*. Nor are French models lacking. One need only recall the single-line openings of Franck’s *Les Béatitudes*, *Rébecca*, *Le Chasseur maudit*, and *Rédemption* (with pedal point), Chabrier’s *La Sulamite* (a model for Debussy’s *La Damoiselle élue*), and several examples from French opera ranging from Meyerbeer (*Robert le diable*, acts II and V, *Le Prophète*, act II, *L’Africaine*, act III) to Massenet (*Hérodiade*, act I, sc. 2), and so on.

B. *The Modal/Chordal Opening*. After the initial silence, this formula begins, in its simplest form, with a statement of four quiet chords in equal time values—chords with a “mysterious” modal quality to suggest, according to the designated context, primeval times, ecclesiastical austerity, quasi-mystical reverie, or uncommon experience in general. In the most characteristic instances the four separate chords comprise only three sonorities: one chord is sounded twice. The four chords often close back on themselves and are repeated at least once before proceeding onward to something different. Once again, as in the first category, the effect is of a swaying, static circularity, a gentle rotation around a central axis.

The *locus classicus* in Debussy is probably *La Damoiselle élue*, but act I of *Pelléas et Mélisande* would serve equally well, as would a number of songs: the early *Nuit d'étoiles*, *Beau Soir*, and *De Fleurs* from *Proses Lyriques*. Piano pieces avoid the more strictly formulaic types of the modal/choral opening, although openings such as those in the Sarabande from *Pour le piano*, the three chords of the *Danseuses de Delphes*, and the floating, circular chords of *Canope* are doubtless progeny of this formula, as are the orchestral openings of *Nuages* and *Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien*. Openings with two chords, not four, are also found: for instance, in the songs *L'Ombre des arbres* from *Ariettes oubliées* and *De Rêve* from *Proses Lyriques*, and at the beginning of the Violin Sonata.

The opening of *La Damoiselle élue* (ex. 2, mm. 1–4) illustrates the formula in its purest state. The first measure contains four chords from three sonorities, e-d-C-d, with “archaic” parallel fifths in the lower staff. Phrygian interpretations are possible here, as is a pandiatonic reckoning in a weak C major (the key in which the work concludes), within which the chords would be construed as the unusual, “modal” iii-ii-I-ii succession. Debussy strives here to break the expectation of strong root movement and functionally harmonic syntax. The four chords move after repetition to a nonconfirming chord, not unlike the procedure discussed in the first category. In *La Damoiselle élue* we have two statements of the Phrygian (or vague C-major) chords before plunging onto a B \flat -major chord

with fluctuating fifth and sixth above the root—a chord contradicting either prior interpretation of the tonic, modal or major. This B \flat moves by fifth to an E \flat -major chord with fluctuating fifth and sixth in m. 4. In the entire first phrase only the E \flat chord is prepared by its upper fifth, and that E \flat contradicts the tonal implications of the first two measures. The point, once again, is ambiguity.

The most obvious historical antecedent of the “magical” four-chord introduction is Mendelssohn's Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but, doubtless, two-chord examples, such as one finds at the beginning of *Götterdämmerung*, served as models as well. Debussy's parallel fifths in the *Damoiselle* are not unprecedented: the opening recalls a passage from the interior of an early, but celebrated *ballade* of Saint-Saëns, *Le Pas d'armes du Roi Jean* (1852), a work orchestrated by Saint-Saëns, and almost surely known to Debussy. This music (ex. 3) evokes the funeral cortège of a soldier, with chanting clerics and the tolling of bells. Debussy's *Damoiselle* opening also evokes things religious, austere, and funereal. Curiously, a similar texture is also found at the beginning of Massenet's *Hérodiade*, act I (1881), where it depicts dawn at Jerusalem.

C. *Introductory Sequences/Expansions*.⁵ This procedure works in conjunction with one of the first two formulaic openings: it is a method of extending the earlier formulas by varied phrase repetition or expansion—of linking together two or three varied, but still formulaic, phrases. The entire procedure serves either as a separate introduction to contrasting material or as introductory material that finally “blossoms” into more ongoing, less formulaic music. In either case its character is emphatically introductory. After the initial silence, the phases of the procedure are as follows:

1. A phrase of the monophonic or modal/chordal type (henceforth the α phrase). This leads to:
2. A fermata or grand pause: the arresting of ongoing motion, a return to the initial silence, now perceived as genuinely palpable and structural.
3. A varied repetition (the β phrase) growing out of the second silence. The variation may be accomplished in a number of ways—a simple sequence, a

Lento e tranquillo

pp molto sostenuto

3 7 7

4

5 *pp*

7 7 7

8 *ppp*

Example 2: *La Damoiselle élue*, mm. 1–8.

The image displays three systems of musical notation. Each system consists of a vocal line (bass clef) and a piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs). The lyrics are: "Moi- nes, vier- ges, Por- te- ront De grands cier- ges Sur son front; Et dans l'om- bre Du lieu som- bre, Deux yeux d'om- bre". The piano accompaniment features block chords and arpeggiated figures. The first system is marked *pp sempre*. The second system includes a fermata over the piano accompaniment. The third system also includes a fermata over the piano accompaniment.

Example 3: Saint-Saëns, *Le Pas d'armes du Roi Jean* (1852), mm. 141–65.

harmonization (or reharmonization) of the opening, an expansion in length, etc. Its repetitive and expansive character, however, is never in doubt; one senses that α has branched out or grown into β . In a few instances of the formula prior to Debussy, this phrase can move directly into more ongoing music. More typically, it leads to:

4. Another fermata or grand pause, and:

5. Either the beginning of contrasting material, usually in more periodic phrases (with a sense that the introduction is over and the main narrative of the piece is now beginning) or another varied repetition (the γ phrase, if it exists), exemplifying further, and now decisive, growth and expansion. When γ is present, it establishes a more energetic pulse or a clearer harmonic drive and proceeds into the remainder of the piece, thus launching it and setting its tone.

As a whole the three phases may be taken as a metaphor for the process of generation or—particularly when considered with the interpolated pauses—for meditative respiration: multiple breaths.⁶ Classic instances in Debussy include *Pantomime*, *Printemps* (see exs. 1a and 1b), *La Damoiselle élue* (ex. 2), the preludes to acts I, II, III, and V of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and the *Prélude* to *La Boîte à joujoux*. Varied examples occur in the *Prélude* à “*L’Après-midi d’un Faune*”, the third movement of *La Mer*, and *Pour invoquer Pan* and *Pour la Danseuse aux crotales* from *Six Épigraphe antiques*.

Historically, the most direct models are

found in Wagner. The *Parsifal* prelude, the proximate model for the opening of Debussy's *Printemps* and *La Damoiselle élue*, opens with two arching double-phrases (each a monophonic opening with enriched—harmonized and re-scored—immediate repetition) with α in A \flat major and β in C minor. These are initiatory sequences and expansions that move onward into the "Grail" and "Faith" motives. *Götterdämmerung* begins similarly, but with three initial gestures, not two. Each gesture—here of the type that I am calling modal/chordal in Debussy—consists of two chords, the second of which is enriched by prolongation and rich scoring.⁷ The prelude to *Tristan* is another triple-gesture opening: each phrase is a sequence of the first, and the third moves into more uninterrupted music after bursting onto the rich *fortissimo* in mm. 16–17.

Non-Wagnerian antecedents also exist, mostly dating from mid-century and later. Liszt's symphonic poems appear to be the earliest consistent use of the device. Nine of the twelve principal symphonic poems begin with unequivocal examples of introductory sequences/expansions. Seven open with double gestures (*Tasso*, *Orpheus*, *Prometheus*, *Festklänge*, *Héroïde funèbre*, *Hungaria*, and *Hamlet*) and two with triple gestures (*Les Préludes* and *Die Ideale*).

And once again, there are French examples. Franck's *Rébecca* begins with a clear triple-gesture formula, and similar sequential/expansive openings may be found in his symphonic poems *Le Chasseur maudit* and *Rédemption*, and in the influential third of Chabrier's *Trois Valses romantiques*. And one may cite such closely related operatic occurrences as the introduction to Gounod's *Faust*, along with its entr'acte before act III, the opening of act III of Bizet's *Carmen* (here the double-gesture formula is compressed to a mere four measures), the preludes to Delibes's *Jean de Nivelle* and (perhaps not quite so clearly) *Lakmé*, and the overture to Massenet's *Le Cid* (1885). A few early instances also exist, for example, the Prelude to Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*—strictly speaking there are more than three gestures here—and, more obviously, the introduction to act II of the same opera. Tracing the numerous appearances of the model through the mid- and late-nineteenth

century would take us far afield, as would the location of earlier antecedents, like Mozart's C-Minor Fantasia, Weber's *Oberon*, and Chopin's *Fantasia*, op. 49 (or the provocatively varied later instances, such as Strauss' *Also sprach Zarathustra* and Stravinsky's *The Firebird* and *The Rite of Spring*).

II

Almost equally complex and difficult to address adequately is the question of the aesthetic function of these openings. Why and to what effect does Debussy employ the formulas? And why is this primarily a mid- to late-nineteenth-century phenomenon?

Here the recent work of Carl Dahlhaus with the nineteenth-century Germanic repertoire provides several clues.⁸ In brief, Dahlhaus has argued that mid-nineteenth century composers, guided by the "unquestioned aesthetic doctrine"⁹ of originality, sought alternatives to the prevailing periodic syntax: the classical, rhetorically balanced antecedents and consequents, and so on, in which the quality and idiosyncrasy of the individual parts had been subordinated to the proportioned and balanced effect of the whole. This earlier language of "schematic" or "architectural" form¹⁰ had issued from Enlightenment thought and rationalism—indeed, it seems inseparably bound with it and required modification only when faith in rationalism began to falter.¹¹ Wagner, in particular, came to view foursquare or "quadratic" syntax as a false, rational limitation on the essentially irrational, truth-bearing medium of music, and on the new aesthetic principle that "every part or detail is supposed to be an original idea or the consequence of an original idea."¹²

The four-square, periodic phrase was under attack. As Wagnerian ideas began to seep into France in the 1870s and 1880s the standard French practice of two- or four-measure thematic periods or phrase chains (Gounod, Massenet, Saint-Saëns, Franck, etc.) was particularly vulnerable.¹³ French music, while rather bold harmonically (especially modally), remained syntactically antiquated with its symmetrical periods. Such a syntax was "in touch," one might argue, with the positivistic/rationalistic culture—the liberal patrons of the opera and ballet, the "scientifically" organized peda-

gogy of the Conservatoire, etc.—that dominated France during those years.

Debussy rejected that culture, as did many of his generation, and with his rejection he gradually filtered out a reliance on explicit periodicity from his musical style in favor of techniques that stress persistent originality and remain more open to non-rational, mysterious interpretations. We know that in the 1880s his mind teemed with new aesthetic ideas: Wagnerism, Pre-Raphaelitism, and Symbolism. These three aesthetic movements, though differing in particulars, agreed to the extent that the proponents of each advocated a flight from the world of “normal” experience. Materialistic reality, they all argued, was a real threat, an illusion: the artist’s task is to withdraw into a higher world of art—to create an alternative world of truer meaning. Wagner claimed in *Beethoven* (1870) and *Religion and Art* (1880) that art should ceremonially fulfill the truth functions that religion could no longer convey: “One could say that where religion is becoming artificial it is for art to salvage the nucleus of religion by appropriating the mythic symbols, which the former wished to propagate as true, for their symbolic worth, so as to reveal the truth buried deep within them by means of ideal presentation of the same.”¹⁴ The essentially hierophantic tendencies of Pre-Raphaelitism were indicated as early as 1885 by F.W.H. Myers in his *Rossetti and the Religion of Beauty*. More recently, the Rossettian religion of art, based on faith in irrational, inner experience, has been discussed by Graham Hough, Oswald Doughty, and John Heath-Stubbs (1974),¹⁵ and, within the field of musicology, Richard Langham Smith has demonstrated the relationship of the Pre-Raphaelite silence, stillness, and otherness to the early aesthetic of Debussy.¹⁶

The Symbolists, to whose aesthetics Debussy’s are most clearly indebted, similarly elevated art to the level of a theophany through the sensual. Nowhere is the symbolists’ credo more explicit than in Arthur Symons’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, of 1899. Here Symons writes of French Symbolism as a “revolt against exteriority, against rhetoric [that is, against standardized, rational, or symmetrically balanced artistic procedures], against a materialistic tradition.” Now, according to Sy-

mons, all of art “in speaking to us so intimately, so solemnly, as only religion had hitherto spoken to us . . . becomes itself a kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual.”¹⁷

The quintessential symbolist aesthetician and high priest, Stéphane Mallarmé, was personally acquainted with the young Debussy during the period when the latter’s musical style was in the process of formation and consolidation.¹⁸ As a poet Mallarmé envied the ceremonial qualities he perceived in music, particularly in the ritual of concert attendance—ideas that could not have been unknown to Debussy. As a point of simple observation, Mallarmé acknowledged the public concert as a modern community-religious experience, the inbreaking of mysterious “truths,” all presided over by the conductor as celebrant. For instance, in the 1893 essay, *Plaisir sacré* Mallarmé notes, not without irony or envy:

These days the note signalling the reopening of the capital is given by the opening (*ouverture*) of public concerts . . .

A wind—or the fear of missing something demanding their return—drives people from the horizon into the city when the curtain is about to rise on the desertlike magnificence of autumn . . .

The conductor awaits a signal . . .

The élite is there: the usual artists, wordly intellectuals and so many sincere lesser types. The true music enthusiast, although very much at home, recedes in importance. [Here] it is not a matter of aesthetics, but religiosity.

But the temptation will be to understand why what began as an effusion of art acquires, by that quiet power, another motif. Because in effect—official celebrations [like these] aside—Music promises to be the last complete human cult . . .

That multitude . . . finds itself face to face with the Unutterable or the Pure—poetry without words!¹⁹

Similarly, from Mallarmé’s *Catholicisme* (1895):

The miracle of music is this reciprocal penetration of myth and the concert hall. . . . The orchestra floats, fills—and in so doing, the [musical] action separates itself from us and we remain [mere] witnesses: but from each seat, through the bursts and pangs, we take turns being the hero. . . . A play, a [holy] office.²⁰

To what extent did Debussy share these views? William Austin is right to protest that

“surely Debussy was no mere disciple of Mallarmé, or translator of his ideas into the language of music.”²¹ Nor does the composer appear to have been a “mere disciple” of Wagner’s theories—or anyone else’s, for that matter. Still, that the ideas of Wagner or Mallarmé (and the Pre-Raphaelites and the other Symbolists) provided the immediate intellectual context for his early work is beyond doubt. We know too much of Debussy’s early literary and musical enthusiasms to suggest that he wished to remain even moderately immune from their influence.

His embrace of the details of any particular aesthetic system was probably never complete; this seems especially true of the Wagnerian system, whose Teutonic seriousness and lofty transcendental claims find little explicit echo in his own writings on music. But while Debussy, neither an original nor a profound philosophical thinker, was little concerned with validating the axiom of the metaphysical content of music,²² he does seem to have been attracted to the “feel” of Wagner’s (and Mallarmé’s) theories and the ways that their spiritual textures affected his own imagination. He could thus appropriate as his own the importance of music as something mysterious, the exalted position of the artist, and the unfolding of music as though it were something sacred. This is a lightened or “demythologized” Wagnerism—and to some it may appear to provide the husk without the kernel—but it helps to explain why Debussy can construct so much of his earlier music along quasi-Wagnerian lines without becoming a transcendental idealist himself, or accepting fully what he later was to call (in 1909) Wagner’s “lofty artificial theories.”²³

By embracing the shiver of music’s mystery as a worthy goal in itself—and apparently caring neither to elaborate nor to inquire very much further—Debussy could treat much of his music as ceremonial, as something sacralized, without being obliged to proclaim his allegiance to any ultimate truth content within the created work. He could remain a skeptic and still claim the right to create art as a “believer.” This seems very nearly to have been his position, and it helps account for the sometimes startling juxtaposition of luscious indulgence and cold-eyed cynicism that is met with in his music and writings. Debussy frequently de-

scribed art as a wonderful dream, a mystery pursued for mystery’s sake (not for the sake of access into ontological reality, as in Wagner), the conveyor of the unutterable by means of pure imagination, an alternative world opposed to the shabby, merely realistic world:

Music is a dream from which the veils have been drawn! It’s not even the expression of a feeling—it is the feeling itself. . . . All of which gives one courage to go on living in one’s own dream, to go on seeking the inexpressible which is the aim of all art [1892].²⁴

Art is the most beautiful deception of all! . . . Ordinary people, as well as the élite, come to music to seek oblivion: is that not also a form of deception? . . . Let us not disillusion anyone by bringing too much reality into the dream. . . . Let us content ourselves with more consoling ways: such music can contain an everlasting expression of beauty [1902].

Although music was never meant to confine itself solely to the world of dreams, it doesn’t gain anything by concerning itself too much with everyday life. It is weakened by trying to be too human, for its primary essence is mystery [1903].²⁵

But if art might be no more than a dream or a deception—as the world is ultimately a deception—why treat it as something sacralized? One presumes that Debussy adhered to a view similar to an early position of Mallarmé, in which art is justified as an escape from normal social existence and its concomitant miseries and injustices, for which there is no legislative remedy. According to this view, art is a benevolent drug that protects us from the constant threats of the outside and, to some extent, hides the ugliness of the existing world.²⁶ Even though it remains a deception, art as benign escape, our only refuge from squalor, can acquire a kind of secular holiness: it can become “the Sunday washing away of banality.”²⁷ And if the world thus fled is crude, false, and demeaning, the artist is free to insist that the alternative world of the aesthetic *frisson* must be truer and more vital—a conclusion easily achieved in the swirling midst of the Wagnerian and Pre-Raphaelite currents. Imagination and mystery may properly be treated by the artist as if they were sacred, even though the issue of ultimacy need not be squarely faced.

This brings us back to the Debussian formulaic, non-periodic openings, for they fulfilled in a

concise and thoroughly French way what Symons called the “responsibilities of the sacred ritual” within a now-sacralized aesthetic. These curious, static openings function ritually, as thresholds linking secular and sacred/aesthetic space—linking the “normal” (but sadly banal and unclean) world with the purer world of enchantment and art. Once art has thus been sacralized, even as an aesthetic fiction, the mode of entry into a work suggests *ipso facto* a corridor or vehicle of passage from one experiential realm to another. As Mircea Eliade has shown, ritualized entrances into presumed new modes of being bear the double burden of exorcising the old world and creating a new one: they are “solutions of continuity” that help to bridge the essential “nonhomogeneity” of profane and sacred experience, “the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible.”²⁸ Musical openings within a sacralized aesthetic become entrance rites. They become cosmogonic, and any opening with a *creatio ex nihilo* structure becomes symbolically and ritualistically significant.

Through evocative silences, gentle, repetitive gestures, and metaphors of growth and expansion, Debussian formulaic openings strive to condition the listener to the newer and truer world within. The openings aim to affect processes within us. They exorcise the expectation of the conventional world by defying traditional periodic syntax, (a mode of the now-discredited rationalism) by blunting the expectation of functional harmony in favor of vague, tonal suggestion, and, quite often, by negating the presumption of the forward thrust of time itself through their emphasis on circularity and return.²⁹ They evoke the free-floating dream, relatively unattached to the emphatic, unambiguous statement and explicit linear time which characterize normal, secular experience.

Not surprisingly, Debussy’s openings are psychologically modern and particularly rich in “progressive” harmonic and phrasal techniques. In his early years they are important seedbeds for his ultimate contribution to twentieth-century musical thought. Curiously, they are often richer than much of the interiors of the works they begin. The radical thresholds often lead directly to

more predictable music. More traditional melodic patterns, for instance, are found after the openings of *Printemps* (the main theme beginning fourteen measures after rehearsal number 2 suggests a modified double-period structure), *La Damselle élue* (e.g., the periodic, C-major “third theme” beginning in m. 35), the *Faune* (the central melodic section, while not explicitly periodic, is notoriously underpinned with functional harmonies), and so forth. It would appear that the young Debussy believed that more traditional musical activity could be pursued once the listener had been conditioned or initiated into the new, vaguer world. It follows that one aspect of Debussy’s stylistic growth is his gradual suppression of inherited structures within the interior of a work. Our concern here, however, is the formulaic openings themselves, for they, too, can be examined as indicators of a growing stylistic maturity.

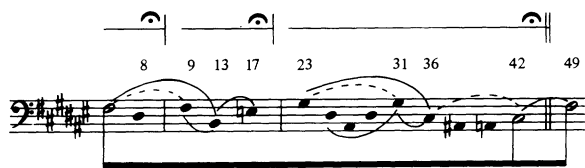
III

The opening of *Printemps* (1887) combines a monophonic opening with the triple-gesture version of the formula of introductory expansions. As usual, the triple-phrase elements proceed from concise (α , mm. 1–8) to elaborate (γ , mm. 23–48): each is longer than its predecessor. Debussy mentions his poetic intent for the whole piece in a letter to Emile Baron of 9 February 1887. Debussy also includes the customary, fashionable disavowal of a program, but only after insisting that *Printemps* does indeed have a poetic subject, that of a “human” springtime: “I should like to express the slow and sickly [*souffreteuse*] genesis of beings and things in nature—then their blossoming, their ascending, and their finally ending in a burst of joy at being born into a new life, so to speak.”³⁰ The language here includes sacralized (cosmogonic) imagery—genesis, blossoming, ascending, being born into a new life—and these images guide the structure of the entire piece.

The triple-gesture opening (exs. 1a and 1b), according to this interpretation, mirrors the image of genesis (a reawakening from the death or profound sleep of winter). The more periodic melodic material (beginning fourteen measures after rehearsal number 2), development (three measures before number 4), and reprise of the melodic material (seven measures before num-

ber 9) correspond to the blossoming and ascending. The entire second movement, based on themes from the first, corresponds to the idea of being reborn into a new life with a burst of joy.

The structural and harmonic content of *Printemps'* tripartite opening is shown in ex. 4, a plotting of the bass line and root movements within the α , β , and γ elements, here separated by barlines. The triads implied in the graph are almost all blurred with sevenths and ninths, or prolonged by means of embellishing chords, and the harmonic rhythm moves extremely slowly. The first element (α), for instance, juxtaposes only two chords, $F\sharp_{17}^9$ and $D\sharp_7^9$, by means of common tones in the manner of Franck or Grieg.³¹ The entire triple-gesture formula is bound together on a deeper structural level by functionally harmonic means. The α and the β phrases encompass a motion down the circle of fifths. Measures 1–16 (α and most of β : ex. 1a) arpeggiate the lower fifth of the $F\sharp$ tonic ($F\sharp-D\sharp-B\flat$): the subdominant chord, that is, B major, which becomes $V/\flat VII$ and resolves in m. 17 onto its lower fifth, $E\flat$ (with seventh), thus “missing” the tonic $F\sharp$ and landing instead on the subtonic, $E\flat$. A much more expanded, third element (γ ; ex. 1b) encompasses a motion similar to that of mm. 1–16, i.e., down a fifth, but this time beginning on $G\sharp$ in order to arrive at $C\sharp$, the “proper” V of $F\sharp$ major—to which it resolves in m. 49 (with new melodic material) after γ closes on the dominant in the preceding measure.



Example 4: *Printemps*, mm. 1–49.

More specifically, γ begins in $G\sharp$ minor in m. 23 and reinforces that temporary tonic with chords borrowed from the parallel major, enharmonically respelled: without considering inversions or nonharmonic tones, V^7 (m. 28), V^7/V (m. 29), and V^7 (m. 30). The expected $G\sharp$ -minor cadence in m. 31 is blurred by a sensuous 9–8 suspension and by the introduction of a chord-seventh, $F\sharp$, which initiates a set of coloristic shifts over the $G\sharp$ bass. Thus we hear the $g\sharp^7$ (now anticipating its properly functional role as ii^7 of $F\sharp$, the tonic we must regain) in mm. 31 and 33 and an embellishing chord, comprising the notes of an $E\flat_9^9$ above the $G\sharp$ bass in mm. 32 and 34–35 (the two chords thus furnishing enriched versions of the shift from a \flat_3 minor chord to an embellishing \flat_6 above the bass). The $G\sharp$ bass moves to $C\sharp$ in m. 36 (no. 2), V^9 of $F\sharp$. That $C\sharp$ is embellished by several common-tone chords, notably the $a\sharp^{07}$ throughout most of mm. 38

and 39, and the prominent $A\flat^9$, *très ralenti*, in mm. 40–41, before regaining its true identity as V^7 of $F\sharp$ in m. 42 and being purified of its seventh in the succeeding six measures.

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Throughout all three elements of the opening, the embellishing chromatic surface activity masks a simple harmonic motion. Thus Debussy unites the three opening gestures in a traditional way, even though the surface of the music remains richly colored, hazy, and blurred. The blurring, the slowness, the foreground richness, the triple-gesture, circular ritual itself—all of these work as local solvents to the underlying tonic-dominant structure to initiate the listener into a new, sacralized aesthetic world.

The *La Damoiselle élue* opening (ex. 2) is at once simpler, cleaner, and more progressive. Here we have a modal/chordal beginning with a “Parsifalian” opening double gesture. In *Damoiselle* the stepwise quasi-modality serves to evoke ecclesiastical connotations and to disorient the listener from the world of functional harmonic practice. Here the pattern is not so much one of florification and growth (α and β are of equal length, although β is slightly more elaborate), but one of the evocation of stasis, calm, and mystery. As in *Printemps*, the opening phrases are bound together by an overarching plan of voice-leading. The plan of *Damoiselle*, however, is less conventional than that of *Printemps*: we have a slow, whole-tone descent from E to E an octave lower (ex. 5). This represents an “advance” over the more functional plan of *Printemps* and shows Debussy moving toward a more intrinsically ambiguous language. Still—and characteristically—the whole-tone descent is permeated with digressing interpolations of root movement by fifth, and the E-prolongation implicit in the entire opening descent functions structurally as V of A major—the A major that appears with a new “Parsifalian” motive in m. 9.



Example 5: *La Damoiselle élue*, mm. 1–8.

Both *Printemps* and *La Damoiselle élue* furnish “classic” instances of formulaic openings. The first thirty measures of *Prélude à “L’Après-midi d’un faune”* illustrate one of Debussy’s many modifications of the formula—another “advance.” Here the composer combines the monophonic and triple-gesture expansion formulas. Each of the three phrasal gestures is roughly of equal length (ten measures long, but with internal time-signature changes), but each is richer and more harmonically complex. The florification is not horizontal (a matter of increasing length), as in *Printemps*, but vertical—a growing-inward in thickness and complexity.

The first gesture, α (mm. 1–10), consists of an implicitly E-major monophonic entrance with all of the earmarks of the formula: a *piano* entrance, *doux et expressif*, growing out of silence; a prolonged initial pitch; a static, circular melodic line that returns more than once to the first pitch; and a rather weakly felt tonality. The opening arabesque in the flute leads directly into a formulaic “nonconfirming” chord in m. 4. In this instance Debussy expands the contradictory chord into two chords, a \sharp^7 half-diminished (at first suggesting vii^7 half-diminished/V in E major) transmuting into Bb^7 (dominant seventh sound), an equivocal succession that could be forced into D \sharp minor (with Bb^7 as enharmonic V 7) or G \sharp minor (with Bb^7 as enharmonic V 7 /V).³² The aesthetic point, of course, is not to explain away these ambiguities, but to savor them as part of a musical language of unclarified possibilities.³³ Somewhat unexpectedly, the usual formulaic pause after the contradictory chord (m. 6) does not signal the end of α . Instead, it leads to a repetition of the A \sharp -B \flat contradiction: a lazy, luxurious embrace of the ambiguity. Thus we have an expansion or circular repetition within α itself: monophonic opening–contradiction–repetition of contradiction.

β (mm. 11–20) is essentially α recomposed with a thicker, more involuted texture. The monophonic opening is now harmonized: it is delicately colored with a D 7 chord, a major-major seventh chord built on the presumed subtonic, which further obscures the initially implied E major. Notice, however, that the D 7 is harmonically “prepared” by the preceding Bb^7 chord, which may be reinterpreted as a German sixth chord. The D 7 oscillates lazily with its own coloristic embellishment on the third beat of mm. 11 and 12 before moving toward E major in m. 13. It is only in m. 13 that we realize that the D(m. 11) and D \sharp (m. 13) in the bass have been double chromatic neighbors to the tonic, E, which now emerges clearly. But the A \sharp “contradiction” follows immediately on the second beat of m. 14 (now sounded as dominant seventh, not as half-diminished seventh) and is explicitly regained in mm. 17–18 after a brief digression. The ensuing mm. 19–20, strictly speaking, are a repe-

tion of sounds spun off from the A \sharp dominant seventh: the reiteration of an $\text{e}\sharp^7$ half-diminished chord (which can be heard as a harmonic expression of the upper fifth of the preceding A \sharp chord) oscillating with its own common-tone embellishment, a C \sharp dominant seventh. Thus we have once again, but in a more complex manner: opening–contradiction–repetition or elaboration of the contradiction.

The γ phrase (mm. 21–30), typically the decisive member in a multiple-gesture formula, recomposes α and β , but reverses an important structural procedure in the earlier gestures. The principle of inner repetition (which had been the exclusive property of the contradiction in α and β) is now applied to the opening melodic material, i.e., to what had been the initial monophonic line. This opening material, now repeated, appears three times within the γ gesture, in mm. 21, 23, and 26 (over basses on E, B, and E: tonic, dominant, tonic). These three appearances form miniature α , β , and γ gestures: involution or recursion, wheels within wheels. This much accomplished, γ , as usual, continues more decisively. This time, logically enough, the original contradiction (A \sharp) is reinterpreted as the third of a functional V 9 /V chord in m. 28: this is the moment of the sudden breaking-out, *forte*, into a strongly functional harmony and the resultant cadence in the dominant in m. 30. Put another way, with the principle of inner repetition now applied to the opening of γ , the contradictory A \sharp is now liberated to become functional. A change in the psychology of structural repetition, that is, unblocks the tonal path to permit more clearly directed harmonies to ensue, and this change is expressed with an explicit, satisfying cadence. A simplified plan of the chordal motion of these opening thirty bars is provided in ex. 6.

Example 6: *Prélude à “L’Après-Midi d’un Faune”*, mm. 1–30.

This modification of the opening formulas is more sophisticated than the corresponding plans of the earlier two pieces. Debussy’s style is maturing. In the *Faune* he created an eloquent musical analogue to the prevailing Decadent and Symbolist ideal of interior, rather than exterior, growth. This is a musical counterpart of the centripetal subtlety and ambiguity of Mallarmé in the *Faune* poem, the sealed-off, private luxury of Des Esseintes’s house in Huysmans’s *A Rebours*, the exotic, interior vegetation of the

Maeterlinckian hothouses or *serres chaudes*. The mysterious florification in Debussy's *Faune* is all vertical, inward, involuted, like the closed mind feeding on itself—producing, in γ , repetitions of the whole fundamental pattern in miniature, static circles within circles, as the inner foliage grows thicker, not spatially longer, as in earlier *Printemps*. Here in the opening ritual of the *Faune*, one finds a legitimate translation of the Symbolist aesthetic of interiority, a sacralized aesthetic carried out within a context of sensual pleasure.

IV

The patterns continue to undergo fascinating modifications in Debussy's later works. Very briefly, for instance, in act I of *Pelléas et Mélisande* one encounters a classic modal/chordal opening that unfolds by means of a germinating triple-gesture, γ proving decisive for the piece and flowing into Golaud's opening words: the *Götterdämmerung* model. The harmonic ambiguity here is most strikingly effected by the virtual renunciation of major-minor chordal syntax in favor of a more pervasive modality and its sharp contradiction by whole-tone harmonies—its fluctuation between scalar systems. Occasionally, a formulaic opening can constitute an entire piece: *The Little Shepherd* from *Children's Corner* consists only of a monophonic opening (with contradictory chord) expanded in three gestures. Here the formulaic in-

troductory has become self-sufficient, or has become a kind of wispy introduction to silence (cf., for example, *Pour la Danseuse aux crotales* from *Six Épigraphe antiques*).

And so on. Recognizing the underlying structural patterns can be crucial in determining what is innovative in Debussy's openings: the whole-tone middle-ground descent in the *Damoiselle*, for instance, and not its parallel fifths or quasi-modality; or the nature of the inner growth in the *Faune* opening. Such an approach helps to deal with these and other works within a context of living conventions and argues once again that any given piece derives much—though certainly not all—of its system of meaning from outside of itself: from patterns of thought and expectation derived largely from prior experience.

Finally, it might be mentioned that formulaic analysis of the kind proposed here intends not to stress the objective *what* of analysis—identification and taxonomy—but rather hopes to invite the questions of *how* and *why*. How and why do these works operate within a complex matrix of listener expectation, and how do the inner processes of the music and the listener give meaning to the work at hand—both purely “musical” (structural) meaning and poetic substance? Bringing to analysis more active (and riskier) models of inner and historical process and relation seems a desirable direction for future research.



NOTES

¹The most recent treatments of the Wagner issue in Debussy include Robin Holloway, *Debussy and Wagner* (London, 1979), who stresses poetic content and the technique of Wagnerian quotation and allusion; William W. Austin's reply to Holloway in “Debussy, Wagner, and Some Others,” this journal 6 (1982), 82–91; and Carolyn Abbate's deepening of the entire question through sketch evidence in “*Tristan* in the Composition of *Pelléas*,” this journal 5 (1981), 117–41.

²Cf. Debussy's confession to Ernest Chausson, 6 September 1893: “So the hour has chimed for my thirty-first year, and I am not yet very sure of my aesthetic.” Quoted in *Prelude to “The Afternoon of a Faun”* by Claude Debussy, ed. William W. Austin (New York, 1970), p. 133.

³Cf. Leo Treitler's definition of a formula in “‘Centonate’ Chant: *Übles Flickwerk* or *E pluribus unus!*,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 28 (1975), 15–17, which

we may generalize here to read: fixed or stereotyped material used by composers or performers at certain points in a composition (the assumption being that such material is found in several different, but related, compositions). In order confidently to assert that the composer (or performer) actually used a formula, Treitler stresses, one must establish sufficiently clear “boundary criteria” to distinguish an individual formula, even in its variants, from non-formulaic material.

The concept of formula in the present study stresses its manifestation as a sequence of ordered procedures rather than as stereotypical sonic material *per se*. Process and relationships are more decisive than the objective sound, and any two members of the same formulaic category may sound quite dissimilar.

⁴For the conceptual roots of the aesthetic of the arabesque in Schlegel, Hoffmann, Poe, Baudelaire, and Mallarmé, see es-

pecially Claudia Zenck-Maurer, "Arabesque," in *Versuch über die wahre Art. Debussy zu analysieren*, Berliner Musikwissenschaftliche Arbeiten (Munich, 1974), pp. 105–38. Cf. Françoise Gervais, "La Notion d'arabesque chez Debussy," *La Revue musicale*, no. 241 (1958), pp. 3–22.

⁵Perhaps a separate category, not discussed here, is the gradual production of a chord or cluster—and often a rhythm—from a fundamental bass tone. Like the first category, this is a gradual creation of sound from silence, and it may be found clearly in *Recueillement* from the Baudelaire Songs, *Pagodes*, the beginning of *La Mer*, and in highly stylized, artificial ways in *La Cathédrale engloutie* and even in *Jeux* (which tacks on a modal/chordal formula for good measure in the fifth bar). The historical sources of this formula, if one wishes to consider it as such, include the obvious: Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and Wagner's *Das Rheingold*.

⁶The airy, diffuse quality of these openings (and other portions of Debussy's music) has been apparent to more than one observer. Holloway in *Debussy and Wagner*, for example, speaks of *La Damoiselle élue* as beginning with "two wafts of sonority" (p. 24). Such metaphors are not as historically ungrounded as they might initially seem. Cf. Pierre Louÿs's letter to Debussy of 29 October 1896, which underscores this "spiritual" (in the sense of the Greek *pneuma*, "wind or spirit") quality of Debussy's music: "Music is the breathing in your Prelude to the Faun, it is the sudden breath of air as Pelléas emerges from the subterranean vaults. It is the wind from the sea in the first act." [Trans. in Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind* (London, 1962) I, 164.]

Debussy's idea of music as ideally moving and floating in free space, in open air (a concept probably borrowed from Mallarmé), is relevant here, and Debussy intermixes the concept with the florification metaphor. Cf. his remarks in *La Revue blanche* on 1 June 1901, "Music in the Open Air," in *Debussy on Music*, ed. by François Lesure, trans. and ed. Richard Langham Smith (New York, 1977), p. 41:

I envisage the possibility of a music especially written for the open air, flowing in bold, broad lines from both the orchestra and the voices. It would resound through the open spaces and float joyfully over the tops of the trees, and any harmonic progression that sounded stifled within the confines of a concert hall would take on a new significance. . . . [Music] could certainly be regenerated, taking a lesson in freedom from the blossoming of the trees. . . . Music and poetry are the only two arts that live and move in space itself.

Cf. Baudelaire's *Harmonie du soir*. For Mallarmé's dream of an open air theater see Paula Gilbert Lewis, *The Aesthetics of Stéphane Mallarmé in Relation to His Public* (Rutherford, 1976), p. 140.

⁷The *Götterdämmerung* opening, of course, restates a half step lower a portion of Brünnhilde's Awakening in act III of *Siegfried*. The restatement in *Götterdämmerung* is varied, however, in its γ phrase; here the initial chord, E \flat minor, instead of "growing" into a second chord, repeats itself and decays into the "Fate" motive and the Norns' music. Thus the music drama is launched in an atmosphere of entropic futility—a pointed contrast with the parallel passage in *Siegfried*.

⁸Dahlhaus, "Issues in Composition," in *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century* [1974], trans. Mary Whittall (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), pp. 40–78.

⁹Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 44, 59.

¹¹See also Dahlhaus' discussion of eighteenth-century concepts of taste and the correction and absorption of individual eccentricity and accident into the *sensus communis*, in his *Esthetics of Music* [1967], trans. William Austin (Cambridge, England, 1982), pp. 8–9.

¹²Dahlhaus, "Issues," pp. 44, 61.

¹³Cf. Martin Cooper on a "typical" Massenet melody (the prelude to scene 2 of the oratorio *Eve* of 1875) in *French Music: From the Death of Berlioz to the Death of Fauré* (London, 1951), p. 24:

[It is] typical not only for Massenet himself but for a whole generation of French composers who came under his influence. The structure is consistently two-bar; each phrase ends with the slurred feminine cadence. The whole melody is short-winded—it has no breadth, no emotional drive to force it over the meagre two bars or to modulate from the tonic. It was unquestionably inherited from Gounod, and the perpetuation of the type in French music was unhappily assured when Massenet was made professor of composition at the Conservatoire in 1878.

See also Cooper's remarks on Massenet's "symmetrical, short-breathed" melodies that rely on "extensive repetition" in his article on that composer in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London, 1980), vol. 11, especially p. 805.

¹⁴Quoted in Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas* [1971], trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge, England, 1979), pp. 143–44. Dahlhaus refers to *Religion and Art* as "the philosophical complement to *Parsifal*" (p. 143).

¹⁵Hough, "The Aesthetic of Pre-Raphaelitism" (pp. 142–43); Doughty, "Rossetti's Conception of the 'Poetic'" (pp. 158–61); and Heath-Stubbs, "Pre-Raphaelitism and the Aesthetic Withdrawal," (pp. 166–85), all in *Pre-Raphaelitism*, ed. James Sambrook (Chicago, 1974). Heath-Stubbs, in particular, drives to the core of the prevailing socio-aesthetic problem within the predominantly liberal and scientific culture:

For most [artists] the foundations of traditional faith, which had sanctioned a more imaginative vision of the world, seemed irreparably shaken. In these circumstances the only course for the artist who sought to retain his integrity was a withdrawal from the confused and unintelligible reality which lay without. The subjectively apprehended reality of aesthetic experience could at least not be explained away by science. By concentrating upon this, a coherent vision might yet be attained (p. 169).

For a discussion of F. W. H. Myers on Rossetti, see Robert D. Johnston, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York, 1969), pp. 136–40 (cf. also pp. 16, 54–56).

¹⁶"Debussy and the Pre-Raphaelites," this journal 5 (1981), 95–109.

¹⁷Rpt. New York, 1958, p. 5. For a discussion of the social crisis within France after 1870–71 and the emergence of the Symbolist/Decadent response, see especially Koenraad Swart, *The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth-Century France* (The Hague, 1964).

¹⁸Details of Debussy's friendship with Mallarmé in the early 1890s may be found conveniently in Lockspeiser, I, 150–59; and Austin, ed., *Prelude*, pp. 9–16.

¹⁹Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. H. Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris, 1945), pp. 388–89. Mallarmé's daughter reported that before attending the Sunday Lamoureux concerts, the poet would announce to his family, "I am going to Vespers" (in Lewis, p. 72). Cf. Jean Lorrain's satire on Debussy's audiences in the early twentieth century ("Thanks to

these ladies and gentlemen, M. Claude Debussy became the head of a new religion, and during each performance of 'Pelléas' the Salle Favart took on the atmosphere of a sanctuary", in Léon Vallas, *Claude Debussy: His Life and Works*, trans. Maire and Grace O'Brien [1933] (New York, 1973), p. 147.

²⁰Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, p. 393. See also Lewis, pp. 45–85 ("The Function of Art"), and Wallace Fowlie, "The Poet as Ritualist," in *Mallarmé* (Chicago, 1953), pp. 21–49.

²¹Austin, ed., *Prelude*, p. 11.

²²Although we do know that he was at least aware of the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer by 1889. See Margaret Cobb, ed., *The Poetic Debussy: A Collection of His Song Texts and Selected Letters* (Boston, 1982), p. 187. See also Debussy's 1911 statement on religion, religious music, and "the mysteries of nature" in "M. Claude Debussy and *Le Martyre de Saint-Sébastien*" (interview by Henry Malherbe), *Debussy on Music*, pp. 247–49.

²³*Debussy on Music*, p. 247.

²⁴Lockspeiser, I, 171–72.

²⁵*Debussy on Music*, pp. 85, 155.

²⁶Lewis, pp. 45–47.

²⁷Mallarmé, *Plaisir sacré*, in *Œuvres complètes*, p. 390. The translation is that found in Lewis, p. 47.

²⁸Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* [1957], trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1959), pp. 24–26.

²⁹For the crucial importance of circularity, cyclical time, and eternal return in the aesthetics of Mallarmé, see Lewis, pp. 65–70.

³⁰*Claude Debussy: Lettres 1884–1918*, ed. François Lesure (Paris, 1980), p. 18. For some senses in which a program can be simultaneously affirmed and denied in the late nineteenth century, see Dahlhaus, "The Twofold Truth in Wagner's Aesthetics: Nietzsche's Fragment 'On Music

Words,'" in *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, pp. 19–39, and Dahlhaus, "Die Idee des musikalisch Absoluten und die Praxis der Programmmusik," in *Die Idee der absoluten Musik* (Kassel, 1978), pp. 128–39.

³¹John Trevitt, in the article on Franck in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 6, remarks on the influence of Franck's juxtapositions of unrelated chords on the early Debussy (p. 781). Trevitt also remarks that Franck attributed to F# major "a kind of cosmic joy" (p. 781), and Laurence Davies, in *César Franck and His Circle* (London, 1970), p. 103, refers to "the far-reaching sharp-keys" as representing "the light of Paradise" for Franck. Cf. the remarks on F# major in Vallas, p. 42. Whether such tonal associations guided Debussy in *Printemps* cannot be proven, but if light, joy, paradise, etc., are the immediate Franckian connotations of F# major, the *fiat-lux* quality of this creation formula is correspondingly underscored.

³²Within the context of the initially implied E major the two chords have multiple connotations. The Bb7 could be a common-tone embellishment of the a#7 half-diminished, the latter could be an appoggiatura chord moving to a functional Bb7 by holding two enharmonic common tones, G# and A#, or the A# in m. 4 and the stressed D# and Bb in m. 5 could be construed as evoking the defining pitches of one of Debussy's favorite synthetic modes of the period, the #4-b7 scale (lydian-mixolydian, here on E), which resonates elsewhere in the work.

³³The procedure is analogous to Mallarmé's verbal images in "L'Après-midi d'un faune," which remain capable of multiple interpretations. See, e.g., Wallace Fowlie's elucidation of the senses of the word "perpétuer" in the poem's first line in *Mallarmé*, p. 152. Cf. Mallarmé's famous remarks in "Sur l'Évolution littéraire" [1891]: "To name an object is to suppress three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem, which is made to be gradually discerned, little by little: to suggest it, there's the dream" (*Œuvres complètes*, p. 869).