MUSIC AND LITERATURE

ROUTLEDGE

Erik Satie: Music, Art and Literature

Edited by

Caroline Potter

An **Ashgate** Book

ERIK SATIE: MUSIC, ART AND LITERATURE

Je me dédie cette œuvre. E.S.
[I dedicate this work to myself. E.S.]

Erik Satie: dedication of *Prélude de la Porte héroïque du ciel* (1894)

Erik Satie: Music, Art and Literature

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Matthew Mendez is an independent scholar specialising in the study of contemporary music. A graduate of Harvard University, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in music, he also holds Master's degrees from the University of Edinburgh and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. He is active as a composer, having studied with Julian Anderson and Brian Ferneyhough.

Helen Julia Minors is Senior Lecturer in Music at Kingston University. She completed her PhD on Paul Dukas at Lancaster University and is a musicologist with interests in music at the turn of the twentieth century, especially music theatre, music and the other arts, music and dance, and criticism in France. She has published book chapters in *Bewegungen zwischen Hören und Sehen*, edited

by Stephanie Schroedter (2012) and *La musique française: esthétique et identité dans le processus de transformation 1892–1992*, edited by Pascal Terrien (2012).

Robert Orledge is Emeritus Professor of Music at the University of Liverpool and is one of the world's leading experts on Satie. Author of *Satie the Composer* (1990) and of numerous articles on Satie, and editor of *Satie Remembered* (1995), he has also completed and published several unfinished works by the composer.

Caroline Potter is Reader in Music at Kingston University, London. An established specialist in French music since Debussy, she has published books on Henri Dutilleux and the Boulanger sisters and is co-editor, with Richard Langham Smith, of *French Music since Berlioz* (2006). In April 2010 she convened a conference 'Erik Satie: His Music, the Visual Arts, His Legacy' hosted by Gresham College.

Christine Reynolds studied French and Spanish at King's College, University of London, then taught for many years. As a mature student she took a degree in music at the University of Liverpool, also studying History of Art for two years. She subsequently ran the north-west branch of a national music charity while working with Professor Robert Orledge on a PhD thesis about the ballet *Parade* which brought together her love of the French language, art and music.

Simon Shaw-Miller is currently Professor of History of Art at Bristol University. He studied at the Universities of Brighton and Essex and previously held positions at the Universities of St Andrews and Manchester. In 2005 he was made an Honorary Research Fellow and in 2007 an Honorary Associate of the Royal Academy of Music, London. He is the author of many works on the relationships between music and art, including the books *The Last Post: Music after Modernism* (1993) and *Visible Deeds of Music: Art and Music from Wagner to Cage* (2002). His co-edited collection of essays *Samuel Palmer Revisited* was published in 2010 and his new book *Eye hEar: The Visual in Music* is due to be published in 2013 by Ashgate.

Howard Skempton is a composer, teacher, performer and adjudicator. He studied in London with Cornelius Cardew, who helped him to discover a musical language of great simplicity. Since then he has continued to write undeflected by compositional trends, producing a corpus of more than 300 works – many pieces being miniatures for solo piano or accordion. He calls these pieces 'the central nervous system' of his work.

Preface and Acknowledgements

Erik Satie (1866–1925) was a quirky, innovative and enigmatic composer whose impact has spread far beyond the musical world. As an artist active in several spheres – from cabaret to religion, from calligraphy to poetry and playwriting – and collaborator with some of the leading avant-garde figures of the day, including Jean Cocteau, Pablo Picasso, Serge Diaghilev and René Clair, he is one of the few genuinely cross-disciplinary composers. His artistic activity, during a tumultuous time in the Parisian art world, situates him in an especially exciting period. His friendships with Claude Debussy, Igor Stravinsky and others place him at the centre of French musical life; more importantly, so does his music. His manuscripts and correspondence testify to his talent for calligraphy, and his drawings, usually in black or red and usually created for himself, show that he was an artist gifted in several media.

This book originated in a Study Day, 'Erik Satie: His Music, the Visual Arts, His Legacy', convened by the editor and hosted by Gresham College on 16 April 2010. This event was greatly over-subscribed and Gresham's philosophy – to make their talks accessible to a wide audience – means that the papers are available online and as podcasts on iTunes. Four of the speakers at this event are contributing chapters to the book. The chapter authors are a mixture of well-established and emerging scholars of French music and culture. Orledge, perhaps the world's leading Satie expert, is an *éminence grise* for many younger researchers, having supervised their PhD research (Reynolds) or provided essential advice and materials for their projects.

Much material on Satie has been published by Ornella Volta in French (e.g. Satie's complete correspondence and writings, *Satie et la Danse*, *L'Ymagier d'Erik Satie*), though the primary aim of these works is to document his output rather than interpret it, and little of this work has appeared in English. In 1985 selected correspondence was published in an English translation (*Satie Seen Through His Letters*, trans. Michael Bullock) and selected writings by Satie were translated by Antony Melville and published as *A Mammal's Notebook* (1997). The most important scholarly work has focused on music analysis and Satie's working methods (Robert Orledge's *Satie the Composer*, 1990; Alan Gillmor's *Erik Satie*, 1988); the connections between his work and the Paris cabaret scene (Steven Moore Whiting's *Satie the Bohemian*, 1993); or a brief biographical overview (Mary E. Davis' *Satie*, Reaktion Critical Lives series, 2007). A recent French book, Jean-Pierre Armengaud's *Erik Satie* (2009) discusses Satie's work and psychological make-up.

This book explores many aspects of Satie's creativity to give a full picture of this most multi-faceted of composers. It can be roughly divided into four parts:

Satie's philosophy and psychology revealed through his music (Chapters 1–3); Satie's interest in and participation in artistic media other than music (Chapters 4–5); Satie's collaborations with other artists (Chapters 6–8); and Satie's impact on later composers and artists (Chapters 9–10). Inevitably, some of Satie's works are discussed by more than one author, though each contributor offers his or her own distinct perspective and contextualisation.

One message recurs throughout: Satie was a unique figure whose art is immediately recognisable, whatever the medium he employed. His music can draw equally on an unremembered past and present reality (medieval cathedrals and cabaret songs), sometimes within the same work. Satie's drawings, hundreds of which were discovered in his filthy Arcueil room after his death, include meticulous pen-and-ink images of imaginary castles and their floor plans (as if he were a twelfth-century estate agent), and far more contemporary phenomena such as airships. Parody, often in the form of what Raymond Queneau would term 'exercices de style', is another recurring Satie theme. Ann-Marie Hanlon's chapter shows that musical parody was a rich source of humour, and in Chapter 4 I show that Satie wrote poetry modelled on courtly love verse.

In one of his most intriguing works, *Sports et divertissements* (1914), we see Satie playing with the frontiers of media: is this a piano work, poetry collection or set of illustrations (by Charles Martin), or some novel combination of the three? Both Helen Julia Minors and Simon Shaw-Miller investigate this most multi-faceted work. His collaboration with Martin appears to have been unproblematic, perhaps because the two artists do not seem to have contacted each other. After working with Cocteau, Picasso, Massine and Diaghilev on *Parade*, Satie wrote to his friend Valentine Gross on the topic of *Socrate*, for which he set Plato's words in a nineteenth-century translation by Victor Cousin. He said: 'Plato is a perfect collaborator, very gentle and never importunate. A dream, you know!'[1] As a rule, he found living collaborators to be difficult and argumentative, though he got on well with Picasso. John Richardson, in the third volume of his magisterial biography of Picasso, notes that the great painter attended Satie on his deathbed, even changing his sheets; in Richardson's words: 'It is a measure of his regard for Satie that Picasso was able to overcome his fear of illness.'[2]

In his prefaces, Satie sometimes attempted to dictate the terms of reception of his work. The most notorious example of this is his preface to *Heures séculaires et instantanées* (1914), a triptych of short piano works with elaborate textual commentary, one of around 60 texted piano pieces he composed in the period 1912–16. Here, Satie states that the performer is forbidden to read out the in-score texts: he is communicating with the performer in a private language which

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[1] Letter of 18 January 1917; Ornella Volta (ed.), *Erik Satie: Correspondance presque complète* (Paris: IMEC, 2003), p. 277: 'Platon est un collaborateur parfait, très doux & jamais importun. Un rêve, quoi!'

[2] John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso, Vol. 3: The Triumphant Years, 1917–1932* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), p. 275.

is not to be shared with the public. Or was he joking? This intimate quality of Satie is explored by Howard Skempton in Chapter 10. Equally notorious is the performance instruction at the head of *Vexations* (1893), a work whose singular impact on the experimental artistic scene is investigated by Simon Shaw-Miller and Matthew Mendez.

Satie is very far from being simply a *farceur*. It is clear that he was extremely well read and curious about contemporary events and scientific inventions. Christine Reynolds' chapter on *Parade* shows that even a road name could be a source of unexpected extra-musical inspiration: 6 rue Huyghens, in the 14th arrondissement of Paris, was the space used by the Lyre et Palette society who mounted events combining music, art exhibitions and poetry readings in the mid-1910s, and Reynolds demonstrates that the Dutch scientist Christiaan Huyghens (1629–95) left his own mark on *Parade*.

The starting point of Robert Orledge's chapter, 'Satie's Musical and Personal Logic', was a statement by Madeleine Milhaud, who knew the composer as well as anyone could. She said that 'everything Satie did was logical … It was logic carried to an extreme. Look at it coldly and it makes sense'. This chapter aims to do precisely this, exploring and seeking answers in such areas as: Satie the impoverished, uncompromising professional composer; his hypermorality; his changes in outward persona; his religious paranoia in the 1890s and his desire for publicity in this insecure period; his sense of humour; his habitual intransigence; and his financial incompetence. It shows Satie as a paradoxical composer with his roots in a medieval French past while being an iconoclast who looked to the future in his music and ideas, yet who had a surprising lack of interest in technological advances. Satie's painstaking calligraphy suggests that much might be explained by his being a higher-order dyslexic or imagist, alongside Pablo Picasso, Hans Christian Andersen and Lewis Carroll, all of whom he greatly admired. This led him to view everyday objects and situations in a different way and he seems to have been fascinated by his own creative processes, by mirror imagery, and by a three-dimensional, architectural approach to music. The chapter ends with a detailed analysis of the genesis of the song 'Adieu' (1920), showing how Satie turned a simple cafe-concert waltz into a quirky and sophisticated art song by systematic, yet unpredictable means.

While every writer on Satie acknowledges that humour is a central facet of his modus operandi, Ann-Marie Hanlon goes one step further, putting Satie and the meaning of the comic in its historical and artistic context. Erik Satie was undoubtedly the leading exponent of humour in high-art music, a predilection which impacted significantly upon the reception of his music and his reputation as a composer. In 1911–15, Satie purposely cultivated a humorist persona through his musical compositions and journalistic writings. Highly motivated by a desire for attention, humour also served as a critical medium though which he could comment upon contemporary events and criticise individuals and institutions. The backlash of Satie's comic self-promotion became pronounced in the post-war years as he moved into a more serious phase of composition and audiences and

critics continued to laugh at works that were not comic in intent. This chapter explores the various types, methods of creation and functions of humour in Satie's public career, with a specific focus on the 'humoristic' piano works. In *Le rire*, Henri Bergson reveals much about Modernist attitudes to the comic and its low status within the arts. Situated on the boundary between art and life, Bergson considers the comic a gesture of impertinence laden with social import. Laughter is its corrective. With reference to Bergson, this chapter further addresses the ramifications of a comic approach on Satie's reputation in Modernist discourses.

Grace Wai Kwan Gates explores some of Satie's more esoteric productions in her chapter on his Rose-Croix piano works (1891–4). Satie's attraction to the medieval and esoteric can be traced from his earliest characteristic work, *Ogives* (1888), through his role as the founder of the Metropolitan Church of Art, and even to his work in cabarets with fashionable imitation Gothic decor. Numerology fascinated him, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, and Gregorian chant and medieval illuminated manuscripts were key influences on his music and visual art. The chapter focuses on Satie's *Ogives* and *Prélude de la Porte héroïque du ciel*, both of which have no bar lines (probably for visual reasons) and eccentric indications to the pianist. Gates, a pianist herself, concludes with a brief discussion of the problems encountered by performers of these pieces, which may well not have been written to be performed in public. Satie seemed to revel in opposites: writing cabaret songs and accompanying them in public, while at the same time writing private, esoteric works for the church of which he was the sole member.

Caroline Potter's study in Chapter 4 of Satie as poet, playwright and composer focuses on the particularly rich creative period of 1913–14, when his increasing public profile and increasing confidence provoked an upsurge in creativity in several media. While Satie wrote many songs, only one set, the tiny *Trois poèmes d'amour* (1914), features his own texts, a parody of the sixteenth-century 'poésie courtoise.' This chapter explores the cod-medieval style of the vocal lines, the close links between the three songs (a Satie trait), the unusual poetic form and, most importantly, the stylistic connections between poetry and music. Satie's only extant play, *Le piège de Méduse* (1913), is generally viewed as a harbinger of surrealism or Dada. The composer provided seven tiny dances to be performed on prepared piano and to serve as accompaniment to a dancing stuffed monkey. The mechanistic aesthetic at the heart of much of Satie's music will be investigated through these barrel-organ-like dances, an aesthetic also apparent in the behaviour of several characters in the play. Satie's art is viewed through multiple perspectives (cultural history, textual and music analysis, style analysis) and the essential unity of his art is highlighted.

Simon Shaw-Miller takes as his starting point Satie's statement that 'painters … taught me the most about music'; he proclaimed in a sketchbook annotation that 'musical evolution' was 'always a hundred years behind pictorial evolution'. His painstaking calligraphy and the complexity of pattern in his music (often more apparent to the eye than the ear) show the importance of the visual dimension. But his interest in the visual arts is more profound than just notation or presentation.

In part, his musical aesthetic is founded on a perceived common ground with art. His aim was to create an atmosphere, rather than an emotional journey; to reduce music to a backdrop, to see it as a framed object; to flatten musical space, to reduce its emotional colours, to celebrate repetition. This chapter provides an overview of Satie's artistic tastes, considers the significance of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the Satiean context and outlines the importance of the visual arts in his music through an exploration of works including *Vexations*, *Parade*, *Entr'acte* and his furniture music. Satie's impact on American composers of the twentieth century (especially Cage, Feldman and Wolff), focusing on the crucial influence of visual artists on their music, is also outlined.

Helen Julia Minors' chapter focuses on *Sports et divertissements*, a multi-art collage in which images by Charles Martin are co-presented with Satie's humorist piano miniatures published in a facsimile of his own calligraphy, superimposed with his own narrative text. This chapter offers a fresh analysis of the multi-art processes at play between Satie's music and text which is interpreted in dialogue with the images. How can one mediate the experience of *Sports*? In what ways can we interact with the work? There are many components to interpret, from the images to the visual presentation of both text and music. In order to appreciate the multi-art nature of this work, we must search the piece to become aware of its many attributes. As in Apollinaire's *Lettre-Océan*, water is one of many representative issues in *Sports*: this chapter focuses on *Le Bain de mer*.

Christine Reynolds' chapter on *Parade*, Satie's collaboration for the Ballets Russes with Cocteau, Picasso and Massine, outlines why Cocteau had the idea for *Parade* in the first place, what his expectations were of Satie's score and how his work with Massine on the choreography (in the later stages) was underpinned by his realist philosophy. He was certainly the driving force behind the idea of achieving a new type of theatrical realism within the existing French realist tradition. When Picasso came along, Cocteau's basic ideas were considerably enhanced, not, to begin with at least, overturned in any way. In fact, Picasso's designs for the Red Curtain and the decor underpinned Cocteau's original ideas of inside/outside the fairground tent (another aspect of the realist philosophy). It was not until late in the preparations for *Parade* that some of the ideas close to Cocteau's heart were omitted, though not through any fault of Picasso. Yet Picasso's input dramatically changed the course of Satie's music in a cubist (i.e. realist) way, as well as forcing a new type of choreography because of the cumbersome costumes/carcasses that the Managers had to wear. In spite of his disappointment that *Parade* had not followed all his ideas, Cocteau was nevertheless very proud of having instigated what he saw as the beginnings of a new French realism.

The major works of Satie's final creative years (1923–4) are all collaborations; these are explored by Pietro Dossena, who focuses initially on Satie's recitatives for an *opéra comique* by Charles Gounod, *Le Médecin malgré lui* (1858), commissioned by Diaghilev. Although this work has seldom been investigated, it is the longest composition Satie finished during his last years and shows the composer dealing with both stylistic and dramaturgical issues that would have an

influence on his later production. First, the chapter recalls the origin of Diaghilev's commission and Satie's reaction to it, and then focuses on Satie's problems dealing with music by another composer. His final stylistic solution envisaged a compromise between Satie and Gounod's musical languages: a case study (including a plausible reconstruction of meetings between Satie and Diaghilev) investigates the genesis of a short passage of the opera (from Act 3, Scene 7).

The recitatives for *Le Médecin malgré lui* influenced Satie's approach to the 1924 ballets *Mercure* and *Relâche*. Gounod's opera, with its traditional division into separate 'numbers', invited a very meticulous organisation of the work on Satie's part: he divided his 'scènes nouvelles' into nine numbers, and prepared preliminary rhythmic and tonal plans before drafting the score. The following year he would apply similar procedures to *Mercure* and *Relâche*, for which he wrote detailed structural and tonal plans. The dramaturgical suppleness of numbers allowed Satie to provide an effective musical counterpart to Picasso's ironically detached 'poses plastiques' (*Mercure*) and to Cendrars and Picabia's striking 'ballet instantanéiste' (*Relâche*). It should be noted that neither *Parade* (1916–17, 1919) nor *Socrate* (1917–18) were planned as a series of short numbers, each set in a specific tonality: the music-hall swiftness of *Mercure* and *Relâche* owes more to the light-hearted number opera *Geneviève de Brabant* (1899–1900) and to musical miniatures such as *Sports et divertissements*; but the concern for tonal centres and neoclassical lightness are likely to have been directly suggested by the Gounod pastiche.

Erik Satie is typically viewed as music's first 'anti-art' figure, the composer who did the most to unburden the medium of the heavy spiritual commitments it had accrued in the wake of Wagnerism's rise and the theorisation of *Kunst-religion*. First gaining currency during the 1910s, this interpretation was fundamental to the post-war revival of interest in Satie's work among experimental practitioners, for whom the elder Frenchman was alleged to have provided a straightforwardly proto-Dadaist precedent. Yet this interpretation was always a selective, equivocal one, for by necessity it completely ignores the formative role that the esoteric Christian, Rosicrucian circles of 1890s Montmartre played on Satie's artistic development. Many accounts consider the ahistorical, 'amnesiac' qualities of Satie's work to be symptoms of his agnostic musical critique, yet these qualities could just as easily be traced back to the millenarianism of his pre-Arcueil milieu. Indeed, when we consider the social and ideological exigencies motivating many of the key figures of the post-war Satie revival, taking Satie's 'spirituality' seriously would seem a task particularly worthy of our attention. Matthew Mendez's chapter does just that, examining the role the notion of 'healing through spirituality' played in the work of some of Satie's most loyal disciples, namely John Cage, Joseph Beuys and, to a lesser extent, Dick Higgins. For these individuals, the Satie legacy was by no means flippantly anti-idealist, but rather suggested that, by way of a homeopathic, characteristically Rosicrucian procedure, 'forgetting' could serve as a reprieve from the loss of belief and meaning seemingly characteristic of modernity. However, whether this strategy could ever actually overcome these maladies remains an uncertain question.

The British composer Howard Skempton, a lifelong Satie admirer, explains Satie's continuing importance to composers in Chapter 10. This chapter originated in a conversation with the editor which took place in Kingston on Friday 17 February 2012, and like all the best conversations, it ranged far beyond the initial remit of the chapter. Skempton focuses on Satie's impact on English experimental composers (including himself), but also gives penetrating insights into Satie's psychology and offers a novel explanation of the title of *Trois morceaux en forme de poire*. Adventurous readers may wish to begin this book with Skempton's overview of Satie's personality.

The book ends with a comprehensive guide to research and catalogue of Satie's works compiled by Robert Orledge; it is an updated and considerably expanded version of the catalogue published in his *Satie the Composer* (1990).

I would like to thank Gresham College and the Institute of Musical Research, especially Barbara Anderson, Dawn Fulks, Katharine Ellis and John Irving, for their financial and logistical support of the research day which was the starting point of this book. Roy Howat, Emily Kilpatrick, Jane Manning, Paul Archbold, James Nye and Michael Parsons, as well as several students from the Royal Academy of Music, also contributed greatly to the success of this event. For assistance during the production of this book, I would like to thank John Ferguson, Leonardo Liccini, Caroline Rae and everyone at Ashgate, especially Heidi Bishop, Laura Macy and Jon Lloyd.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the enormous contribution Robert Orledge has made to this book and to thank all the authors for their patience and unswerving commitment to this project. Simon Shaw-Miller's and Helen Julia Minors' help with illustrations was much appreciated. All Satie scholars owe a debt to Ornella Volta, whose numerous publications are cited frequently in this book; the collection of the Fondation Erik Satie is now housed in the Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC), l'Abbaye d'Ardenne (http://www.imec-archives.com/imec.php). All translations from French sources have been made by the chapter authors unless otherwise indicated.

Caroline Potter
Surbiton, 2013

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Chapter 1
Satie's Personal and Musical Logic

Robert Orledge

Over the past quarter of a century, I feel I have come to know the strange phenomenon that is Erik Satie quite well through my research. The sad thing is that if I had been alive at the same time as he was and had known as much about him then, I don't think I would have wanted to meet him. At his least attractive, he was a sponging, irascible alcoholic who refused to speak to his supportive brother Conrad for over seven years, supposedly because he would not have a drink with him after their father's funeral in December 1903. Conrad undoubtedly feared beginning what would have been an extended binge at his expense, laced (in that period) with religious paranoia. And Satie, it has to be said, often appeared to cut off his nose to spite his face, here putting filial love above present-day reality. Before Satie returned to learning at the Schola Cantorum in 1905, he felt particularly insecure and uncertain of his musical direction. And even after graduating there as a composer of proven competence in 1912 after his courses with Albert Roussel and Vincent d'Indy, he imagined personal slights where none were intended and usually remained intransigent towards their supposed perpetrators for long periods of time.

Thus, as late as February 1924, he severed relations with Auric and Poulenc when he discovered about the backstage goings-on at Diaghilev's Monte Carlo opera season the previous month, and their association with his lifelong enemy, Louis Laloy (who had omitted Satie's name from the official programme, even as the composer of the new recitatives for Gounod's *Le Médecin malgré lui*). Whereas he had congratulated Poulenc for his success with *Les Biches* on 11 January, he told Milhaud a few weeks later that the ballet was 'the lowest of the low' and that Auric's *Les Fâcheux* 'had lost all its charm due to the lassitude of its author'.[1] And he refused to see either composer on his deathbed the following year, even if he remained devoted to Milhaud, perhaps because he never criticised him behind his back.

On a smaller scale, a similar thing happened to Henri Sauguet when he was summoned to turn pages for Satie as he accompanied Jane Mortier in a performance of *Socrate* at the Salle Gaveau on 20 June 1923. Although Satie disliked playing in public, Sauguet says 'he played well but in a very studied

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[1] Ornella Volta (ed.), *Erik Satie: Correspondance presque complète* (Paris: IMEC, 2003), p. 585. Letter of 5 February 1924: '*Les Biches* sont au-dessous de tout; les *Fâcheux* ont perdu tout leur charme, grâce à la veulerie de leur auteur.'

manner', in this instance 'rigid, with his pince-nez set for battle'.[2] Being spaciously printed, the La Sirène edition had lots of pages and, according to Sauguet, Satie kept wanting him to turn too early, keeping up a low, yet undoubtedly audible commentary as follows: 'Turn … No, not immediately … come on … let's go … No! Well, what are you waiting for? Now's the time!'[3] After the (applauded) performance, Satie furiously turned on Sauguet, crying: 'You are a cretin, worse than Durey.'[4] The mild-mannered Sauguet, although it was not his fault, valued Satie's friendship and help in his career, and apologised by letter for his apparent shortcomings. And, for once, Satie apologised two days later himself and subsequently introduced Sauguet to Diaghilev. This might seem a fit of pique brought on by nervousness, but the logical explanation is that Satie wanted to be at one of Diaghilev's rare revivals of *Parade* on the same night and was anxious to get through *Socrate* so that he could get there in time, perhaps even just to take his onstage applause at the end. Whether he speeded up *Socrate* in the process Sauguet does not say, and the fact that he gave the performance testifies to the importance he attached to his latest compositions. But he wrote twice to Diaghilev on the day before the concert reminding him to reserve a box for himself and his friends and to tell Ernest Ansermet (the conductor) to take the ballet a bit faster, especially the 'Prélude du Rideau rouge', as he had found his interpretation 'Flabby and too slow' (presumably at the final rehearsal).[5] So he had an artistic as well as a personal reason to get to the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées that evening.

In the light of the Poulenc-Auric-Laloy incident cited above, it can be seen that Satie was, in reality, hypermoral. His tempestuous affair with Suzanne Valadon, which lasted between 14 January and 20 June 1893, probably made him thus, especially as she then went straight off with a banker, Paul Mousis, whom she later married. His only known relationship found Satie calling on the police for protection and composing the nine *Danses Gothiques* in March to restore his peace of mind 'and the greater tranquillity of my soul'.[6] As he told the wife of his brother Conrad, who asked in 1912 why he had never married:

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[2] Henri Sauguet, 'Quelques extraits des souvenirs', in Pierre Ancelin (ed.), 'Henri Sauguet: L'homme et l'œuvre', *Revue musicale* 361–3 (1983), p. 243: 'Il jouait bien, d'une façon très appliquée, raide, le lorgnon en Bataille.'

[3] Ancelin (ed.), 'Henri Sauguet', p. 243: 'Tournez … Non, pas tout de suite … allez-y … allons … Non! Eh bien qu'attendez-vous? Alors c'est maintenant!'

[4] Ibid. Louis Durey was a member of Les Six, with whom Satie had fallen out earlier because of his admiration for Ravel: 'Vous êtes un veau, pire que Durey.'

[5] See Volta (ed.), *Correspondance*, pp. 542–4: 'C'était mou & trop lent.' Satie preferred the interpretatations of Félix Delgrange. The second Diaghilev letter (p. 544) also shows that he did not like Cocteau's extraneous 'noises' in *Parade*: 'We have before us a likeable maniac' ('Nous avons devant nous un aimable maniaque').

[6] 'Neuvaine pour le plus grand calme et la forte tranquillité de mon âme' (see BNF MS 10048), composed between 21 and 23 March 1893.

'Quite simply, the fear of being horribly cuckolded … And I would have deserved it: I am a man that women do not understand.' The same day, he added to his then friend, Roland-Manuel: 'Besides, men don't understand me any better. Some of them, I should say.'[7] Yet Satie enjoyed the company of young women, christening Germaine Tailleferre 'his soft and gentle "*daughter*"'.[8] He also preferred women pianists to men, telling Henri-Pierre Roché that he would like one as his 'accomplice' to perform *Parade* with him in America – finding 'female pianists [like Marcelle Meyer] decidedly more intelligent than men [like Ricardo Viñes]'. He also wanted Roché 'to find me a female virtuoso with *enormous* malice' for his piano solos![9] After 1911, he contented himself with visiting his early interpreter, Paulette Darty (now Mme Edouard Dreyfuss), on Sunday afternoons at her luxurious country chateau in Luzarches, where Jacques Guérin remembers 'Paulette sitting on a folding-stool and casting a line into the stream' on the estate. 'Satie, in quiet and genuine admiration, stood behind her, commenting on her successes.'[10] A first-rate free lunch was also a good logical reason to be there, and in this case his devotion never wavered, even if Paulette now resembled a plump mother hen.

Despite his somewhat suspicious enthusiasm for the activities of salt-of-the-earth characters like working-class truck drivers, Satie disapproved strongly of the homosexual circle he found himself drawn into through his later commissions, as we have seen. He disliked Cocteau, kicking him under the table at dinner parties, and subsequently wrote libellous articles and letters waging war against 'Omoplates' and 'Homogènes' like Poulenc and Auric (in Auric's case erroneously). He envisaged all sorts of homosexual and drug-taking activities in Monte Carlo in 1924, as well as despising the *arrivisme* of his previous protégés from Les Six. And he had already distanced himself from this group in 1923, transferring his allegiance to Sauguet and his Ecole d'Arcueil in his desire to maintain his position as godfather of the most extreme avant-garde. Another gripe was that both Poulenc and Auric came from wealthy backgrounds, and for this reason (alone it would seem) he did not admire the music of Lord Berners. He told his young Belgian

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[7] See Volta (ed.), *Correspondance*, p. 175. Letters of 14 September 1912: 'La peur d'être horriblement cocu, tout simplement … Et ce serait mérité: je suis un homme que les femmes ne comprennent pas./Les hommes ne me comprennent pas mieux, du reste. Quelques-uns, devrais-je dire.'

[8] 'Ma douce & gentille "*fille*"', as he dedicated her piano duet copy of *Parade.*

[9] Letter of 1 December 1918 in Volta (ed.), *Correspondance*, p. 347. Sadly, the American tour Roché and Satie planned never came off. It was to have included *Socrate*, his 'œuvre maîtresse', as its climax, performed by 'four sopranos (two high and two mezzo)': 'les femmes pianistes décidément plus intelligentes que les hommes./me trouver une virtuose d'une *énorme* malice'.

[10] Jacques Guérin, 'Erik Satie. "Un Dimanche à Luzarches"', *L'Optimiste* 2 (June–July 1992), p. 8: 'Paulette parfois prend un pliant et, assise au bord du ruisseau, lance une ligne. Satie debout derrière elle, commente les coups heureux. Il est docile, il l'admire vraiment.'

friend E.L.T. Mesens in 1921 that his fellow eccentric was 'a professional amateur. He hasn't understood'.[11]

Many aspects of Satie's strange personal logic, which sometimes ventured towards the paranoid, stemmed from his own position as an impoverished, uncompromising professional composer. As such, he never took on any other form of paid employment and survived ignominiously on the generosity of friends like Dukas, Milhaud, or his brother Conrad. In the summer months, when his wealthier acquaintances were sunning themselves on the Riviera, matters often became desperate. This was especially true during the war, and his celebrated letter to Valentine Gross in August 1918 shows things at their nadir. For once, he admitted that 'I loathe this 'beggar's' life … I *shit* on Art: it has cut me up too often'.[12]

And this was shortly after his substantial commissions for *Parade* and *Socrate*, for Satie was also financially incompetent. When he had money, he spent it almost immediately. Besides being over-generous to his friends, it also explains the many new umbrellas, handkerchiefs, shirts and wing collars found in his otherwise filthy Arcueil apartment after his death. The logic behind these was that Satie was making provision for future periods of poverty and the preservation of his carefully controlled public images. The same logic undoubtedly applied to his prodigious appetite, for his brother Conrad testified that he 'can eat 150 oysters'[13] at one sitting, and Mme Geng, the proprietress of an Arcueil café, describes a meal in 1905 when she and her husband, and principally Satie, consumed enough mussels for 20 people.[14]

From a home that no one was ever allowed to enter (apart from the stray dogs he took pity on, for he loved animals) and which had no running water or heating, Satie managed to emerge immaculate each day, emerging 'into the world as an actor steps out from the wings', as Roger Shattuck so eloquently observed.[15] Madeleine Milhaud, who apprehensively packed his suitcase for his final departure to the Hôpital Saint Joseph in February 1925, was shocked to discover how little he had. As she recalled:

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[11] Quoted in E.L.T. Mesens, 'Le souvenir d'Erik Satie', *Revue musicale* 214 (June 1952), p. 150: 'C'est un amateur-professionnel. Il n'a pas compris.'

[12] Volta (ed.), *Correspondance*, p. 334. Letter of 23 August 1918: 'Cette vie de "mendigot" me répugne … J'*emmerde* l'Art: je lui dois trop de "rasoireries".' At this point, Satie even considered a paid job, and Gross contacted a Monsieur Lebey, who proposed that Satie create a new teaching course. Satie proposed 'The Modern Aesthetic', but the plan never came to fruition. He had also briefly considered taking a position in April 1892 (see Volta (ed.), *Correspondance*, pp. 29–30).

[13] From notes taken after a walk around Montmartre with his brother on 30 September 1914, now in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center in Austin, Texas: 'Il peut manger 150 huîtres.'

[14] See the letter to Louis Lemonnier of 13 November 1905 in Volta (ed.), *Correspondance*, p. 120. According to Conrad, Satie could also consume an omelette made of 30 eggs at a single sitting!

[15] Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years* (London: Faber, 1959), p. 142.

> I asked Braque, the painter, who was a big, tall man, to stand between the bed and the suitcase, and so I was able to pack because Satie couldn't see. Then, when we arrived at the hospital, the nun who was supposed to take care of Satie asked for the soap, and I had to tell her that he didn't have any, because in fact he never washed with soap. He scrubbed his skin very carefully with pumice stone and his skin was as soft as it can be. It seems that the ancient Chinese did that, at least that's what he said.[16]

Later, Madeleine had to collect his laundry from his concierge in Arcueil 'and Satie blew up again because there were only ninety-eight handkerchiefs when it seemed that he had given ninety-nine or a hundred to the laundry'.[17]

The process of impoverished deception and everyday continuity began with the famous seven identical dun-coloured velvet corduroy suits. Satie purchased these at La Belle Jardinière department store in 1895, either from a small legacy or, more likely, with the assistance of the wealthy Le Monnier brothers from his native Honfleur. With these he created his second persona as 'The Velvet Gentleman' and he was anxious that all his suits should all be preserved in as near-identical a condition as possible. The clue as to how he achieved this comes from the painter and art historian Francis Jourdain, who asked Satie to join him one evening for the dress rehearsal of the melodrama *The Fatal Card*: 'He was wearing a hat, coat and shoes of velvet corduroy, and he asked me to let him go back home and change. He returned wearing a suit and an overcoat identical to those he had taken off, only with the velvet in very slightly better condition.'[18] And protecting his umbrellas under his coat when it rained is explained both by his desire to keep them new and by the fact that Satie loved rain but hated sunshine. He told his brother Conrad that the 'sun was his personal enemy, [it was] brutal and said bad things about him'[19] and in Verrières 'the owner of a wine shop would always say to his wife, whenever the weather looked bad: "Today, it will rain all day; doubtless we shall see the gentleman of Arcueil." At noon, Satie would appear with his umbrella.'[20] Besides, carrying umbrellas at all times was a family trait, as his friends discovered at his

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[16] Interview with Roger Nichols in Paris, 9 December 1993. Cited in Robert Orledge, *Satie Remembered* (London: Faber, 1995), p. 212.

[17] Interview with Roger Nichols, cited in Orledge, *Satie Remembered*, p. 213.

[18] Francis Jourdain, *Né en 76* (Paris: Les Editions du Pavillon, 1951), p. 245 (translated by Roger Nichols in Orledge, *Satie Remembered*, p. 39): 'Etant coiffé, vêtu et chaussé de velours à côtes, il me demande de lui donner le temps de rentrer se changer. Il revient vêtu d'un complet et d'un pardessus identiques à ceux qu'il avait quittés, mais d'un velours un tout petit peu plus fin.'

[19] Conversation of 21 October 1914, now in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Ccnter in Austin, Texas: 'Son ennemi personnel, brutal, dit du mal de lui.'

[20] Pierre-Daniel Templier (trans. E. and D. French), *Erik Satie* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969), p. 57: 'A Verrières, à une certaine époque de sa vie, un marchand de vins disait à sa femme, lorsque le temps était couvert: "Aujourd'hui, c'est l'eau pour la journée, nous

funeral. And they also fitted with his final persona as an anonymous professional notary, which he adopted around the time he entered the Schola Cantorum. This persona also allowed him to go straight from the bars he loved around the Gare St Lazare (like Chez Graff) or Montparnasse (like Le Lion or La Rotonde) to the high society events that he was increasingly invited to after the *succès de scandale* of *Parade* in 1917.

As with his earlier frequented bars in Arcueil and Montmartre, he did much of his composing there. Pierre de Massot says that he wrote much of *Parade* in Le Lion in 1916–17,[21] though he wrote his articles and copied out his neat scores in Arcueil. How a score like *Relâche* remained immaculate amidst the accumulated detritus of a quarter of a century remains a mystery. But Satie never composed in restaurants, because eating was a far more important activity, and he preferred simple and substantial dishes cooked well. No one ever saw him drunk, though his capacity for alcohol of all types and for mixing his drinks was legendary. His one lament was that 'the bars are full of people quite happy to offer you a drink. But none of them ever thinks of lining your stomach with a sandwich'.[22]

Some aspects of Satie's logic, however, require more explanation. Whilst he was a musical iconoclast, he had no interest in modern innovations like recording, or the telephone and the radio. Recordings during his lifetime were rare and he had nothing to do with the first one in 1912.[23] As to recording his own piano music, as Debussy and Fauré did, he was probably never asked, and he would have been even more nervous about doing so than they were. He is only known to have listened to the Radiola[24] once (which he called the 'sémaphore auditif'),[25] when he heard a broadcast by Milhaud at the apartment of his friends, the Henriquets, at 7.30 pm on Monday 3 March 1924. Similarly, he only ever mentions using the telephone once, when he rang the Comtesse de Beaumont on 22 March 1922.[26] He asked friends to take the phone off the hook when he visited them, and presumably he only rang the Comtesse because she was a wealthy patron and because he was excited about the new concept of choreography he had devised with André Derain, in which the movements were to come before the music rather than deriving from it. But this logical concept was sadly never put into practice, even in the tiny private divertissement

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verrons sans doute le monsieur d'Arcueil." A l'heure du déjeuner, Satie apparaissait avec sa parapluie.'

[21] Pierre de Massot, 'Quelques propos et souvenirs sur Erik Satie', *Revue musicale* 214 (June 1952), pp. 125–6.

[22] René Lanser, 'Notes et souvenirs – Erik Satie', *Matin d'Anvers* (9 July 1925): 'On trouve dans tous les bars des gens disposés à vous offrir un verre. Aucun ne songera à vous lester d'un sandwich.'

[23] The song *La Diva de l'Empire,* recorded for Pathé by Adeline Lanthenay.

[24] An early name for the radio in France.

[25] See the letter to Milhaud of 3 March 1924 in Volta (ed.), *Correspondance*, p. 596.

[26] Volta (ed.), *Correspondance*, p. 475.

La Statue retrouvée produced for the Comtesse by Cocteau, Picasso, Satie and Massine the following year, when Massine was the last to join the team.

In passing, Satie did not even trust the post and put letters and packets whose content he was uncertain of unopened into one of his two grand pianos, perhaps fearing an unpleasant surprise or even a bomb. This happened with the Christmas gift that Milhaud's mother sent him in 1922. On 19 December, he told Milhaud that: 'I have received a package signed G. Milhaud and coming from the Colonial Exhibition in Marseilles. This package has not yet been opened. What is it?'[27] It turned out to be chestnut fondants, for which Satie thanked her in his usual, charming manner on New Year's Eve.

While Satie wrote for the future and lived very much in the present, his roots were in the past – in plainsong, Gothic architecture and the history of medieval France. Such paradoxes abound in his strangely logical world, and what the inventor of the prepared piano (for *Le Piège de Méduse*), total chromaticism (*Vexations*), minimalism (*Gymnopédies*), and the first coordinated film score (*Entr'acte*) was most concerned about was the 'exteriorisation' of his musical thought in print. Hence the barless, but regularly metered piano pieces of 1913, without repeated clefs, and with those wonderful but mostly irrelevant comments to amuse the performer that had begun with the *Gnossiennes* in 1890.[28] The music appeared bizarre to the public (who mostly didn't buy it), but it was utterly logical for Satie to want his music to look as striking as literary or artistic publications, and to want to combine music, poetry and art as he did in the *Sports et divertissements* of 1914. In this instance, Stravinsky refused the fee offered by Lucien Vogel because it was too small, whereas Satie rejected it because it was too large. Illogical? No, because Satie was in awe of Stravinsky and would never have imagined him to be so mercenary. And his bizarre texts and programme notes for *Le Guide du concert*, which begin with a true statement and then launch into whimsy, arose from the same desire to amuse and be different, with a self-deprecation that begins with the *3ème Gymnopédie* 'which is now to be found underneath every piano', as he told readers of *Le Chat Noir* journal in 1889.[29] A typical example of an explanation by Satie can be found in his preface to the *Sports et divertissements* in 1914 (cited in Chapter 5, p. 101).

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[27] Volta (ed.), *Correspondance*, p. 508: 'J'ai reçu un paquet signé G. Milhaud & venant de Marseille (Exposition Coloniale). Ce paquet n'est pas encore ouvert. Qu'est-ce?'

[28] Perhaps the classic example of this is the last of the *Heures séculaires et instantanées* of July 1914, entitled 'Affolements granitiques' ('Granitic distractions'). The Harvard sketches (b ms Mus 193 (39)) show this regularly barred in 3/4 time with the ending notated in F major. All the fake chromaticism was added later for publication.

[29] *Le Chat Noir* VIII/369 (9 February 1889), at the end of an advertisement for the *Ogives*: 'Sa *Troisième Gymnopédie,* actuellement sous tous les pianos.' This had been printed privately in red ink with Gothic titles by Satie in November 1888 and was available from his father Alfred's music store at 66 boulevard Magenta.

Satie's concern for the aesthetic marriage of music and prose led him to invent all lower case type for *uspud* in 1892, for which he made his own musical woodblocks, which had sudden changes of clef and stave to 'distance Stupid people'[30] from his score, an attitude that persisted throughout his career. Similarly, he invented 'punctuation form' in Rosicrucian works like the *Prélude du Nazaréen*, in which recurring cadences of various lengths act as commas or full stops in the repetitive cells from which the music is constructed.

On another level, the absence of any coordination between music and stage in all of his early theatre works arose not from Satie's inability to match their often violent, exotic or esoteric action in musical terms, but from a desire that the piece should itself be self-sufficient and should not fall into the Wagnerian tradition of descriptive, hyperexpressive music which he despised. Besides, an anonymous though stylistically identifiable score could be used for other occasions. The same concern for self-sufficiency amid theatrical chaos can be found as late as the final ballet *Relâche*, in which Satie fashioned the two halves around René Clair's film to be precisely proportioned mirror images of each other.[31] This was even more true of *Parade*, in which everything originally revolved around the central Steamboat Ragtime, everything was at the same pulse, and yet the work has no definitive form – there being different endings for the concert hall and the stage.

Another aspect of Satie's Rose+Croix music that seems weird and illogical until you know the reasoning behind it springs from his desire for publicity during this early period of relative obscurity. This was his aim in challenging (and actually arranging) a duel with Eugène Bertrand (then the director of the Paris Opéra), as it seemed to be the only way to persuade him even to look at his score for *uspud* in December 1892. Publicity also accounts for his hilarious performances of *uspud* with harmonium at the Auberge du Clou, because he knew full well that a composer like Debussy would nevertheless be able to understand the seriousness of purpose behind the 'scenic backcloth' of the music. And in the Rose+Croix piece *Fête donnée par des Chevaliers Normands*, Satie, with what he saw as his limited technical means at the time, set out to prove that a viable piece could be constructed from a simple musical system based on intervals, though this was the only occasion (of many) in which the sensitive composer did not take over from the logician during the construction process.[32]

If we turn now towards Satie's writings and drawings, we find that they are, without exception, meticulously neat and painstaking. Only the musical sketchbooks reveal signs of untidiness and what was surely at times the white heat of inspiration. This can be at least partially explained by a theory first put to me by Sarah Nichols. This includes Satie in a group of distinguished creators

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[30] See copy no. 16 (of 100) of the large *uspud* brochure (Paris, 1892), p. 8, now in the private collection of Johny Fritz, Luxembourg: 'pour l'éloignement des Stupides'.

[31] See Robert Orledge, *Satie the Composer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 180.

[32] See ibid., pp. 186–9.

alongside Picasso, Lewis Carroll and Hans Christian Andersen, all of whom were higher-order dyslexics or imagists and all of whom Satie admired. Typically, his exceptional intelligence and different logical approach made him frequently frustrated with what he saw as the inadequacies of others (especially music critics), and this led to frequent 'explosions'. He was as fascinated with his own thought processes as Lewis Carroll was, and he too explored them deliberately. Similarly, he only made progress with *Parade* after the like-minded Picasso joined the team and gave him ideas he could work with (unlike Cocteau). So, with Satie, periods of elated bonhomie (often exacerbated by drink and little food) alternated with others of almost embarrassing shyness and timidity (hence his often-repeated and rather feeble jokes at society gatherings). He was anti-authoritarian and very much in favour of the young, seeing himself as coming 'into this world very young in a very old age'. Underneath he was sensitive to others yet volatile whenever he felt himself threatened.

Most importantly, he seems to have conceptualised his ideas, which made the two-dimensional concept of writing extremely laborious ('it took him a good twenty minutes to write a six-line postcard', according to Jean Wiéner).[33] As such, he masked his shortcomings in his slow and conscious calligraphy, which means that the many little drawings he made of everything from spaceships to advertisements for medieval sorcerers must have happily filled many lonely hours in a run-down industrial backwater like Arcueil. At the same time, the higher-order dyslexia would have given him a spatial approach to music (which explains his fascination with Cubism and sculpture) and made him attracted to transformational thinking, magic and the potentials of formal mirroring. A particular case of this is the original concept of the *Gymnopédies* with the first two as a mirroring pair. Both were constructed in two halves and the first originally had a four-bar introduction and no balancing coda, whereas the second had a coda and no introduction. And in the first there are only four bars that vary between the two balancing halves, whilst in the second it was the melody in the *first* half that Satie revised. However, the rule of three took precedence in the end, with Satie adding an introduction to the *Second Gymnopédie* for its later publication in 1895 to make it seem like the others. On this rule of three, incidentally, Satie said of the *Aperçus désagréables* in 1913 that 'before I compose a piece, I walk round it several times, accompanied by myself',[34] and if the second and third pieces in a set were as good as the first, it was 'the absolutely new form' he had invented that 'was good in itself'.[35] This was

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[33] Jean Wiéner, 'Un grand musicien', *Arts* 1/25 (20 July 1945), p. 4: 'il faut vingt bonnes minutes pour rédiger un pneumatique de six lignes'.

[34] At the end of a publicity document for his publisher Eugène-Louis Demets, cited in Ornella Volta (ed.), *Satie Ecrits* (Paris: Le Champ Libre, 1981), p. 143: 'Avant d'écrire une œuvre, j'en fais plusieurs fois le tour, en compagnie de moi-même.'

[35] Reported by Paul Collaer in *La musique moderne* (Brussels: Editions Meddens, 1963), p. 136: 'J'ai inventé une forme absolument nouveau … si [les autres pièces] sont encore bonnes, c'est que la forme que j'ai imaginée est bonne en elle-même.'

rather like viewing the same sculpture by his friend Brancusi from three different angles, and shows a truly three-dimensional, almost architectural approach to music.

Satie was obsessed with making lists (like Marcel Proust) as much as with devising compositional systems and numerology (like Schoenberg and Berg), and these lists would have struck him as funny in their fantastical concepts. Like many higher-order dyslexics, his frustration with early learning led to reports of idleness and lack of progress at the Paris Conservatoire in the 1880s, where he was good at dictation but poor at sight-reading. In fact, the edition of Mendelssohn[36] that he practised from shows him to have been more interested in working out a definitive form of his signature on the cover than in the virtually pristine piano pieces themselves. His dislike of playing or even discussing his music in public follows on from his early experiences. While the spelling difficulties we normally associate with dyslexia were more the province of his friend Debussy, this hypothesis explains so much that it deserves serious credence in Satie's case and is in no way meant to be condescending. Besides, his ability to see things differently from others made him a connoisseur of modern art. He considered his friend André Derain (who had an equally scurrilous sense of humour) to be 'the greatest painter of the Fauvist period'. After 1912, it was his encouragement that kept Derain going when he thought his career was over, and he told friends that 'it was Satie who saved me as a painter'.[37] Equally, Picasso's mistress from 1904 to 1912, Fernande Olivier, said that 'The only person that I heard argue clearly and sensibly about Cubism was Erik Satie',[38] and in a fast-changing world of multiple -isms riddled with charlatans, Satie's uncanny ability to spot the good from the bad could have made him a fortune.

As far as important innovative ideas were concerned, Satie's logic proved faultless with the benefit of hindsight. He was the first to see the overwhelming need for French music to remain French in the face of the obsession with late Beethoven and Wagnerism in nineteenth-century Paris. He never shared Debussy's love-hate relationship with the master of Bayreuth, and though he was bowled over by Debussy's achievement in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, he felt he had prepared the way by warning him near the outset of their long friendship in the early 1890s that 'we need our own music – without sauerkraut if possible. Why not make use of the representational methods of Claude Monet, Cézanne, Toulouse-Lautrec, and so on? Why not make a musical transposition of them? Nothing simpler. Are they

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[36] Now in the collection of James Fuld in New York. The Peters Edition dates from c. 1881.

[37] Related by Satie to Robert Caby from his hospital bed in 1925 and passed on to me in an interview in September 1987.

[38] Ornella Volta, *L'Ymagier d'Erik Satie* (Paris: Editions Van de Velde, 1979), p. 65: 'L'unique personne que j'ai entendue raisonner clairement et simplement du cubisme ce fut Erik Satie.'

not expressions too?'[39] Satie himself flirted briefly with so-called 'Impressionism' in *The Dreamy Fish* in 1901, but soon discovered it was not his province. But the pared-down new 'modern fugue', which he perfected while at the Schola Cantorum, was. Typical examples of these, with their repetitive subjects, loose episodes and lack of obvious contrapuntal tricks, can be found in *En habit de cheval* (1911), which, perhaps unsurprisingly by now, refers to what the horse, rather than the rider, was wearing. Also to emerge around the time of *Socrate* was Satie's compositional aesthetic, in which he distils the essence of his restrained and logical art. The key elements are as follows:

> A melody does not imply *its harmony,* any more than a landscape implies its *colour*…
>
> Do not forget that the melody is the Idea, the outline; as much as it is the form and the subject matter of the work. The harmony is an illumination, an exhibition of the object, its reflection.
>
> One cannot criticise the craft of an artist if it follows a plan. If there is form and a new style of writing, there is a new craft.
>
> The Idea can do without Art.
>
> Let us mistrust Art: it is often nothing but Virtuosity.[40]

And after all, Satie was a man of ideas, a creative spirit whose influence and example lives on in the present century and has proved more lasting than the concept of serialism, which he anticipated in *Vexations* in 1893 but wisely did not pursue.

There were many good sides to Satie's character too, another being his love of children, whom he took on country outings at his own expense in Arcueil around 1910 and taught about pitch using local drainpipes as examples. But children were

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[39] 'Claude Debussy', written 15–25 August 1922 in Arceuil for *Vanity Fair*, but never published. Cited in Volta, *Ecrits*, p. 69: 'Nous devions une musique à nous – sans choucroute, si possible./Pourquoi ne pas se servir des moyens représentatifs que nous exposaient Claude Monet, Cézanne, Toulouse-Lautrec, etc.? Pourquoi ne pas transposer musicalement ces moyens? Rien de plus simple. Ne sont-ce pas des expressions?'

[40] From BNF MS 9611, entitled 'Subject Matter (Idea) and Craftsmanship (Construction)' ('La Matière (Idée) et la Main d'Œuvre (Couture)'). See Orledge, *Satie the Composer*, pp. 68–9 for the full text: 'Une mélodie n'a pas *son harmonie*, pas plus qu'un paysage n'a sa *couleur*…N'oubliez pas que la mélodie est l'Idée, le contour, ainsi qu'elle est la forme & la matière d'une œuvre. L'harmonie, elle, est un éclairage, une exposition de l'objet, son reflet./…On ne peut pas critiquer le métier d'un artiste que si celui-ci continue un système. S'il y a forme & écriture nouvelle. Il y a métier nouveau./…L'Idée peut se passer de l'Art./Méfions-nous de l'Art: il n'est souvent que de la Virtuosité.'

very different from adults, and when the adult world discovered him (through Ravel championing his music at the Société Musicale Indépendante in 1911), he was, illogically, not pleased. However, his explanation to his newly forgiven brother Conrad on 17 January reveals that he felt confused by the enthusiastic reception for his early works by the young opponents of Vincent d'Indy, who found his recent music dull. Now the fruits of his supposed ignorance, which had led him to enrol at d'Indy's Schola Cantorum, were being acclaimed! Satie found this 'total nonsense',[41] even if he soon realised that it would create a demand for his subsequent compositions. For that is where his true interest always lay. In the same letter he also denounced his cabaret work as 'more stupid and dirty than anything'. But now, at last, he was able to give it up, and it is ironic that he soon fell out with his then admired benefactor Ravel initially because he wanted his new young protégé, Roland-Manuel, to take lessons with his old teacher, Albert Roussel, whereas Roland-Manuel preferred the more celebrated Ravel.

On the subject of changing views by the usually intransigent Satie, one can also cite the case of Alfredo Casella. In a rare example of frankly expressed musical opinion in 1918, Satie agreed with Henry Prunières in saying that 'in his music the form is generally lacking in sincerity and he switches too easily from the style of Fauré to the style of Stravinsky'. Even so, Satie found Prunières indulgent and thought he might have added 'that he is *always* lacking in intelligence. Is it intelligent to depict Latin visions with Slavic means; to confuse the sky of Italy with the sky of Russia; to dress Romans as Cossacks? That's what our dear Casella does'.[42] Above all, Satie would have disliked the absence of an authentic Italian voice in the Casella works he must have heard and, as we have seen, he was an unqualified admirer of Stravinsky. He also saw Casella as a poor pianist as well as a jack-of-all-trades (for he hated pastiche), probably because he had accepted an official post as professor of piano in Rome in 1915. Later, however, when Casella's style became more neoclassical and Italian in the 1920s, and he began to champion young Italian composers, Satie changed his views (no doubt assisted by Casella conducting a performance of *Socrate*). He then supported him in getting a commission from Rolf de Maré's Ballets Suédois with the folk-inspired *La Giara* in 1924, and this was performed shortly before his own ballet *Relâche* at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, where its success pleased Satie very much.

Before I give a detailed example of Satie's musical logic at work, I should like to cite two evaluations of Satie that tell us more about his logic and reinforce some

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[41] Letter to Conrad Satie of 17 January 1911, cited in Volta (ed.), *Correspondance*, p. 145: 'C'est à n'y rien comprendre … C'est plus bête et plus sale que nature.'

[42] Letter of 3 April 1918, cited in Volta (ed.), *Correspondance*, p. 324: 'Chez lui la forme manque généralement de sincérité qu'il passé trop facilement du style de Fauré au style de Strawinsky … vous pourriez ajouter que toujours il manqué d'intelligence. Est-ce intelligence de dépeindre des visions latines avec des moyens slaves; de confondre le ciel de l'Italie avec le ciel de Russie; d'habiller les Romaines en Cosaques? C'est ce que fait notre cher Casella.'

of my earlier observations. The first comes from Francis Picabia, with whom he collaborated on *Relâche*, his final 'instantanéiste' ballet in 1924:

> Satie's case is extraordinary … He's a mischievous and cunning old artist. At least, that's how he thinks of himself. Myself, I think the opposite! He's a very susceptible man, arrogant, a real sad child, but one who is sometimes made optimistic by alcohol. But he's a good friend, and I like him a lot.[43]

The second comes from Madeleine Milhaud, who knew him well and could still imitate Satie's chuckle with his hand to his mouth to perfection at the age of 100:

> He was a most lovable person: unpredictable, with a certain charm. His way of speaking was very spontaneous – the complete opposite of his writing … Satie never told a dirty story; I never met anyone so polite. But he could be very violent. As Cocteau said: 'Satie with never blows up without a reason.' Everything Satie did was logical, based on the fact that he was very sensitive and could be hurt by the slightest thing. It was logic carried to an extreme. Look at it coldly and it makes sense. He had no feeling for the mores of his time. He was extremely proud and he never showed his poverty to anyone. 'Poverty entered my room one day', he said, 'like a miserable little girl with [large] green eyes.'[44]

Satie's musical logic, which reveals a process of self-discovery with many experimental blind alleys, is traced through numerous detailed examples in my book *Satie the Composer*.[45] In this chapter I should like to concentrate only on the year 1920, and pp. 71–7 of *Satie the Composer* show how two very different

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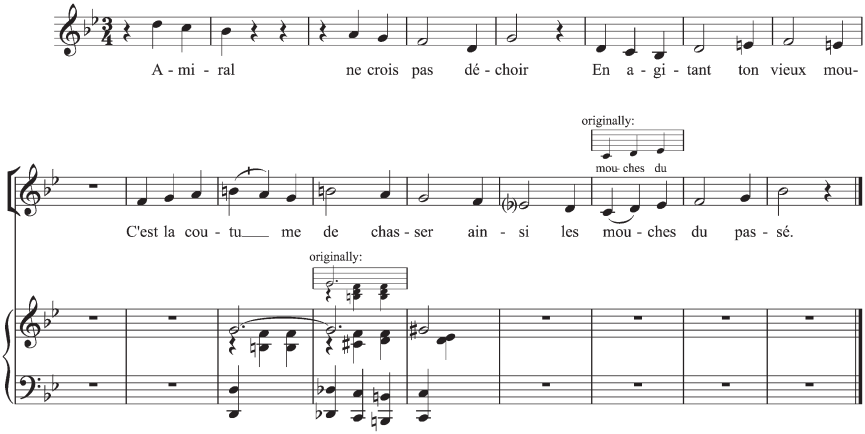
[43] From a letter to André Breton of 17 February 1922, just after Breton's 'trial' for anti-Dadaism at the Closerie des Lilas restaurant, at which Satie presided. He remained faithful to this movement and had no time for the automatic writing and dream visions of the Surrealists, led by Breton, whose quarrel came to a public head at the premiere of *Mercure* in 1924. Cited in Michel Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1965), p. 516: 'Le cas Satie est extraordinaire … C'est un vieil artiste malin et roublard. C'est du moins ce qu'il pense de lui; moi je pense le contraire! C'est un homme très susceptible, orgueilleux, un véritable enfant triste, mais que l'alcool rend par moment optimiste. C'est un bon ami que j'aime beaucoup.'

[44] From an interview with Roger Nichols at the Exeter Festival on 4 June 1987. The quote about poverty comes from the same letter to his brother Conrad of 17 January 1911, cited in Volta (ed.), *Correspondance*, p. 146. Cocteau's other *bon mot* about Satie was that composition for him was rather a process of 'decomposition' – his approach being so analytical and painstaking.

[45] Pietro Dossena has also undertaken further detailed genetic analyses focusing on key passages in Satie's compositions. His valuable discoveries about *Le Médecin malgré lui* can be seen in Chapter 8 and his article 'A la recherche du vrai *Socrate*' in the *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 133/1 (2008), pp. 1–31. He has also carried out extensive research into the *Sports et divertissements* and the *Messe des pauvres*.

Example 1.1 Satie, 'Adieu': first version



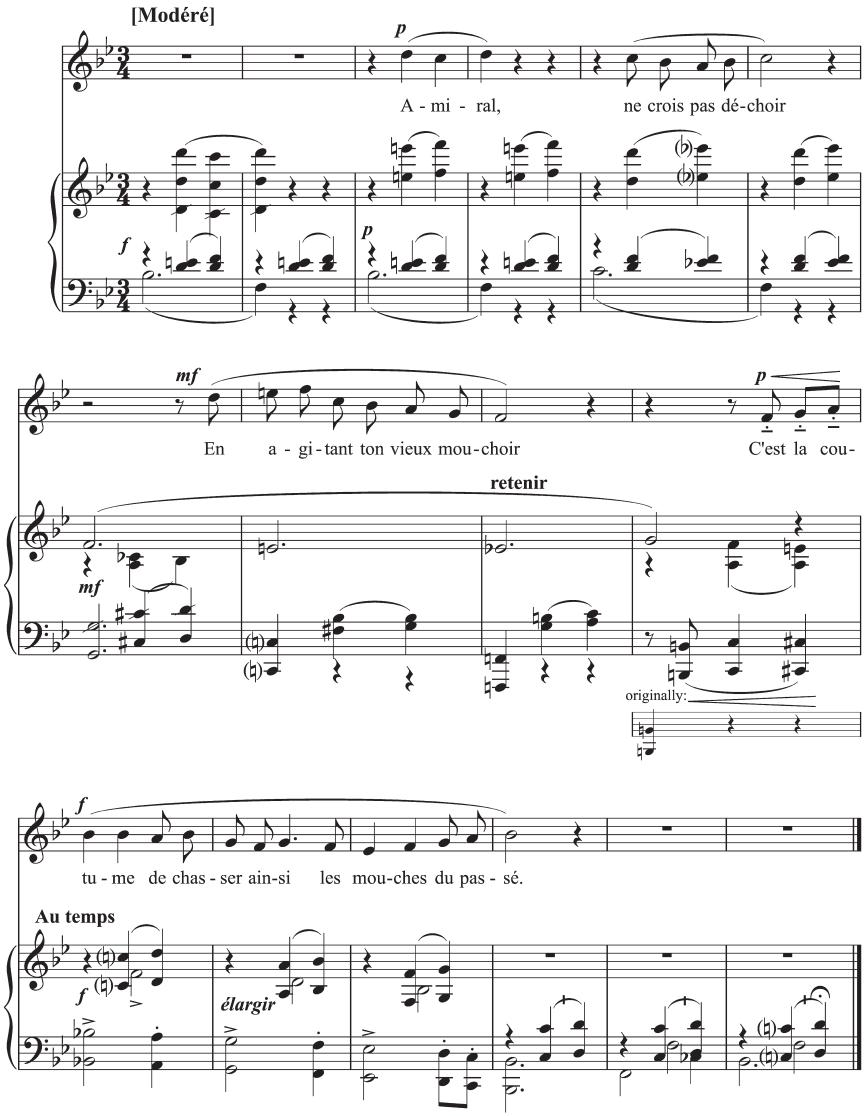
pieces emerged that autumn. The first is the *Elégie* for his lifelong friend Debussy, which began as a series of parallel fifths, bitonally exploiting the ambiguity between E and F minor as it unfolded chromatically, whilst never clearly asserting either key. This is followed by no less than 28 trials for the seemingly straightforward start of the 'Marche Franco-Lunaire' from *La Belle Excentrique*, which show how Satie was anxious to make a really striking, chic and Parisian initial impression in his final years. And in passing, Satie's afterthoughts were invariably his happiest inspirations. Like the strange, disembodied ending of *Socrate*, that seems to go on revolving into infinite space, but also comes back to the bass F sharp on which it began – who would have thought that Satie only added this at the proof stage and that several of his earlier trials resolved the long monotone passages (on A and B) telling of Socrate's death, neatly onto C?

The tiny song 'Adieu', the last of the *Quatre petites mélodies*, composed to words by Raymond Radiguet in November–December 1920, offers an excellent additional example. Its original title in *Les Joues en feu (Lettres d'un Alphabet)* was 'Mouchoir' and in the poem, an ageing Admiral is reassured that he will not lose face by waving his old handkerchief. How else does one get rid of the flies of the past?

One might well wonder why 16 bars of music lasting only 35 seconds occupied Satie for almost two months until one studies the four pages of sketches that begin the notebook known as BNF MS 9674. Satie began by creating a rather staid rhythm on a monotone that was, frankly, at odds with Radiguet's amusing mini-poem (Ex. 1.1).

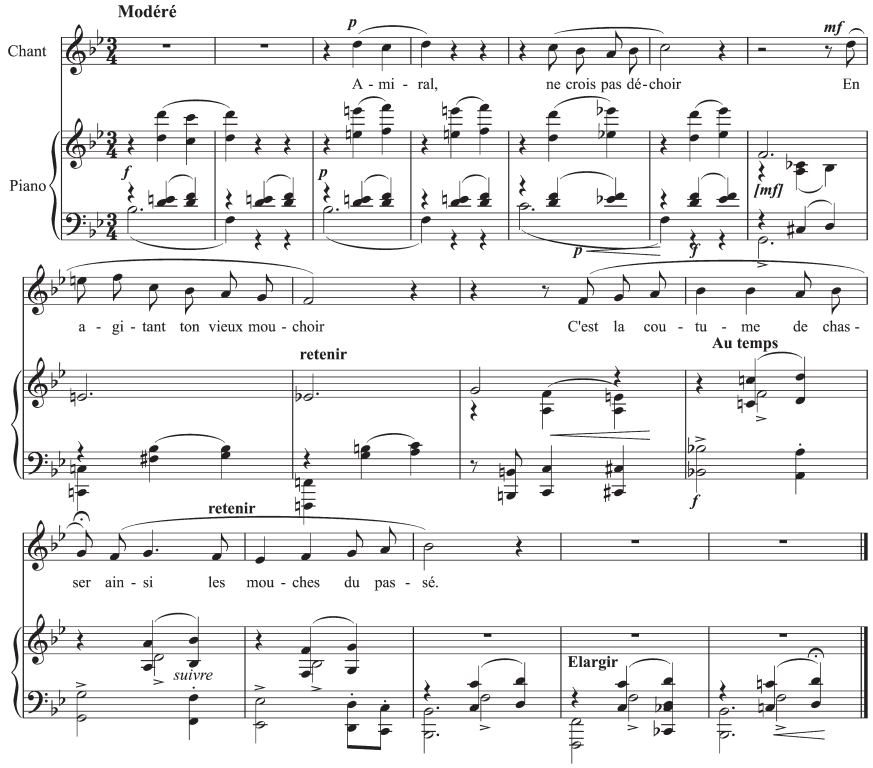
This led to his first attempt at a melody, beginning with the descending scale Satie was to use much more effectively to end the final version (compare Exx. 1.1 and 1.3). But it would have taken him some time to realise this. You can also see the first ideas for harmonisation in bars 10–12, at the point Satie knew would

Example 1.2 Satie, 'Adieu': second version



ultimately mark the turning point and climax of the song from his initial immersion in the poem (which, like Debussy, he almost certainly learned by heart first). The interesting thing is that his bassline in bar 11 is reversed in the final version in bar 10, and the rising figure in the upper part was to become a unifying feature of the final accompaniment. But both of these discoveries would again have taken some time to emerge.

Example 1.3 Satie, 'Adieu': final version



Then Satie made a second, more flexible monotone rhythmic setting over the first, which he erased, but which still remains visible in the manuscript. This was more responsive to Radiguet's poem and shortened the song, which he first set as bars 3–14 in the final version, changing the first two lines from descending scales to palindromes (see Ex. 1.2).

This seemingly tiny change was important, both because it gave the voice its own initial identity and because it still linked in with the rising accompaniment as an echo across bars 3–4. Lastly, Satie added a brief introduction and balancing coda, making what started out as a café-concert waltz into a quirky and sophisticated art song.

Then, sometime before the fair copy reached publication by the Editions de La Sirène in 1922, Satie added the bass octaves to the coda, added the pause and slow up in bars 12–13 and moved the *Elargir* marking from bar 12 to bar 15 to emphasise the coda (cf. Exx. 1.2 and 1.3).

This had the added benefit of balancing the introduction in which the treble octaves were initially pitched an octave lower (see Ex. 1.2). The miraculous thing,