EMILY KILPATRICK

# FRENCH ART SONG

## History of a New Music, 1870–1914

# French Art Song

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# French Art Song

## History of a New Music, 1870–1914

Emily Kilpatrick

University of Rochester Press

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For Rosie and Felix,
musicians and explorers

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# Preface

One winter Sunday early in 1870, the twenty-four-year-old organist of the Basilica of Saint-Sauveur in Rennes arrived for morning service in white tie and tails. He had come directly to church from his previous engagement: a ball given at the local Préfecture the night before. The *curé* had already had cause to speak with the young organist about his habit of slipping out to smoke in the porch during the sermon. The tails were the last straw. Gabriel Fauré was discreetly dismissed, and departed for the capital.[1]

Fauré had been offered the post in Rennes as he was completing his studies at the École Niedermeyer in 1865. Now he was returning to Paris not as a schoolboy or student, but an independent professional. After four years' exile in the provinces, he threw himself wholeheartedly into the musical life of the city. As well as attending operas and concerts, he soon became a regular participant in the musical soirées of his former piano teacher, Saint-Saëns: on Monday evenings, at 168 rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré, he came to know Emmanuel Chabrier, Henri Duparc, Édouard Lalo, César Franck, and Alexis de Castillon.[2] Through the good offices of Saint-Saëns, Fauré quickly found a new job as organist at Notre-Dame de Clignancourt. This post too was to be short-lived, his commitment being half-hearted at best. As he recalled half a century later: 'I didn't get along with those upon whom my job depended, and my departure was prompted by an escapade [*une fugue*] I'd long planned: I left Clignancourt because I'd been to hear *Les Huguenots*!'[3] The loss of a second job does not appear to have troubled Fauré unduly: he was young, he had just seen his music in print for the first time (two songs, *Le papillon et la fleur* and *Dans les ruines d'une abbaye*, were published by Choudens in 1869), and he was rapidly developing the social and professional connections he needed to make his way in the city.

On 30 March 1870 the twenty-two-year-old Henri Duparc failed his licence examination for the law. University records show no subsequent attempt to retake the examination.[4] It seems that with this failure, Duparc—who had by then been studying harmony and counterpoint with Franck for almost three years—decided to commit himself to a career in music. He too had ushered his first works into print in 1869, a set of five pieces for piano,

*Feuilles volantes* (op. 1), and five songs (op. 2). That spring Duparc was frequently in company with his friend Vincent d'Indy, whom he had probably met through their mutual acquaintances, the MacSwiney family. Both young men were smitten with Ellie MacSwiney, then aged twenty-three and a fine singer: together, all three studied new music, went to concerts, and haunted the Conservatoire. They also attended the soirées of the Parnassian poet Robert de Bonnières, who lived in the same apartment building as d'Indy and the MacSwineys, at 7 avenue de Villars. Among the other regulars at the Bonnières salon were Saint-Saëns, Castillon, and Massenet; by the early 1870s this circle would include Paul Bourget, Anatole France, and Stéphane Mallarmé.

In June 1870 Emmanuel Chabrier set to music Charles Baudelaire's poem 'L'invitation au voyage'. This was the first song setting of Baudelaire by a major composer. Although there is nothing to suggest that the two ever met—Chabrier was entering Parisian salon and café circles just as Baudelaire was on his way out of them—by the end of the 1860s Chabrier was close to several of the poet's friends and colleagues, including Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Catulle Mendès, and Édouard Manet. His *L'invitation au voyage* includes a part for obbligato bassoon, seemingly written for another friend, the bassoonist (and occasional composer) Désiré Dihau, of the Opéra. Around this time both Dihau and Chabrier were featured in a well-known painting by their mutual friend Edgar Degas, *L'orchestre de l'Opéra* (ca. 1870; Fig. P.1). Dihau appears front and centre, in the concertmaster's place, while Chabrier, the only visible auditor, peers from the box at the top left corner of the painting.

By the autumn of 1870 two more Baudelaire *mélodies* had followed. Duparc, too, had set 'L'invitation au voyage', while Fauré had chosen 'Hymne'. This seems a curious coincidence. No 'serious' composer had previously attempted to set Baudelaire: why should three now turn to his words almost simultaneously, and why should two of them set the same 1855 poem?

This book seeks to understand how and why composers took up Baudelaire's 'invitation', and the new worlds 'là-bas' to which it led. It is a history of one of the most radical, exploratory art forms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: French art song, or *mélodie*. Across the decades between that summer of 1870 and the First World War, song emerged as a genre of serious musical endeavour and experimentation, a crucible in which ideas could be tempered, and the limits of harmonic, notational, and performing convention tested. Indeed, in the *mélodie* of this period we may often sense a compositional response so vital and urgent that it left the occasional ragged edge or gaping seam, rips and gauzes through which all manner

Figure P.1. Edgar Degas, *L'orchestre de l'Opéra* (ca. 1870). Oil on canvas. © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski.

of stylistic and philosophical imperatives are revealed. This, then, is a history of those concerns, and of their working-out on the musical page and in performance; a map of the musical preoccupations and literary prompts, the critical narratives, and creative collaborations that shaped the *mélodie*. It is a reconsideration and an elevation of song in the wider dialogues of late nineteenth-century French musical practice, and a survey of the nexus of relationships that constituted one of the most significant generative forces of the era. Although it is not a social history, this book is, as my starting point suggests, a sociable one, a study in which the essentially collegial art of song speaks to the fellowship of composers in the Belle Époque.

The impetus for this book emerged in part through a decade-long project to prepare the first complete critical edition of Fauré's *mélodies* (for Edition Peters). In the course of that research, my co-editor Roy Howat and I explored the songs in workshops, lectures, masterclasses, concerts, and innumerable conversations, with students, teachers, concert artists, and coaches. We sought to understand the challenges performers faced in tackling French song—not just the problems occasioned by the often confusing state of the musical sources, but also those engendered by ambiguities and idiosyncrasies of musical notation, and through the flawed transmission of performing traditions. This book develops those concerns, viewing artistic and aesthetic debates through the prism of lived musical experience. I explore places of performance, institutions, societies, and organisations, and some of the singers who played critical roles in shaping a performance practice—and, in some cases, the repertoire itself. I consider how composers communicated their intentions, what they demanded of performers, and the challenges the repertoire poses for the twenty-first-century interpreter. I document the circumstances and exigencies of publication, pursuing questions of editions, editorial amendments, transpositions, and 'original' keys: such discussions are intended both to address long-held perceptions (and misperceptions) of composer intent and performance practice, and, most importantly, to offer both counsel and reassurance to performers.

This book is not a repertoire survey; it does not attempt to deal with everyone and everything.[5] The songs I chose to examine presented themselves via several overlapping criteria. I was drawn to certain poets, and to *mélodies* that engaged in interesting, innovative ways with the setting of text and the integration of musical and poetic forms. With an eye to practical musicianship, I wanted to highlight songs that bear on questions of performance practice. I also chose to juxtapose core repertoire works (*La bonne chanson*, *Trois chansons de Bilitis*, *Histoires naturelles*) with some lesser-known

works by major figures (Fauré's Baudelaire settings, for example), as well as a selection of songs by composers who have largely slipped from view: Augusta Holmès, Ernest Cabaner, André Caplet, Gabriel Fabre, Germaine Corbin.

Most of all, I was interested in *mélodies* that emerged from or throw light on relationships both personal and creative: between composers and their colleagues, composers and performers, composers and poets, composers and critics. This determination engendered some omissions (and inclusions) that might surprise the reader. Reynaldo Hahn, for example, is a minor figure in this history. Like his teacher Massenet, Hahn found a niche and filled it impeccably, but his songs played a secondary role in the creative cross-currents pursued in these pages, and the social and musical circles in which Hahn most often found himself had little overlap with those with which this study is primarily concerned (though chapter 6 explores some of them). For the same reasons, Massenet is likewise given rather short shrift. While his colleagues admired his business acumen, few of them found his songs (or, indeed, his operas) particularly stimulating: 'I can't bring myself to be very interested in Massenet', Fauré admitted in 1887.[6] On the other hand, Pierre de Bréville emerges as one of the more intriguing figures of his generation, as a chronicler and companion as well as composer; and chapter 11 concludes with Rita Strohl's settings of Pierre Louÿs's *Les chansons de Bilitis*, which make a thought-provoking counterpart to Debussy's much more famous triptych.

Each of the three parts of this book turns on a decisive creative exchange: composers' encounters with Baudelaire's poetry, against the backdrop of the *Année terrible* of 1870–71; an influential performer's navigation of the social and musical contradictions of song in the early 1890s; and the diversifying audience that met and shaped the *mélodie* in the first years of the twentieth century (particularly around 1904–5). This narrative of 'critical moments' (albeit longish ones) makes space for depth and complexity, for the nuanced examination of personal and artistic relationships that spurred and shaped certain bodies of work. Over the course of these four and a half decades, art song emerged as a genre with a history and an aesthetic, and as a lens through which critics and scholars of the early twentieth century could draw broader conclusions about the trajectory of French musical thought. The three sections of the book—*poet*, *singer*, *public*—reflect these expanding horizons, from the testing of ideas among the musical and intellectual avant-garde of the late 1860s and early 1870s, to the probing of the boundaries between private and public space in the society salons of the 1890s, and the eventual accession of *mélodie* to the concert stage, and an established place in the critical discourse. Each section places the titular

interchanges in different contexts, across multiple songs and composers, and an expansive cast of supporting figures.

The two Interludes, chapters 4 and 8, refocus the themes of the preceding section around single composers, particular songs, and certain poetic catalysts. In probing the compositional process more deeply, these chapters distil the book's argument for the creative force with which composers invested the *mélodie*, and its centrality in the musical thought of the Belle Époque. The intellectual vigour and imagination that characterises French art song also derives, in part, from the parallel poetic discourse that sought and interrogated a utopian 'fusion' of words and music, and with which the history of the repertoire is inexplicably intertwined: Ravel and Debussy (among others) explicitly argued that new ways of conceiving musical structure could be found not just in French poetry, but in the language itself. These artistic conversations, whose foundations are established in chapter 1, are pursued across the Interludes and into the Postlude. Serving as chronological bridges, they offer a parallel narrative of musico-literary communication and innovation that arches across the span of the book.

In June 1870 Fauré wrote to his friend Julien Koszul, promising to send him 'the little *mélodie* you asked for. I'll add a copy of my *romance*, *S'il est un charmant gazon*'.[7] That nonchalant distinction between *romance* and *mélodie* offers an obvious point of departure for this history, falling as it does at a watershed in French political and cultural history. In 1918 the musical historian Julien Tiersot hailed 1870 as 'une ligne de démarcation entre deux âges': Berlioz dies in 1869 and a new generation of composers emerges; the decadent rule of Louis-Napoléon falls to the modernising Third Republic; the strophic *romance* of the Second Empire gives way to the more developed *mélodie*.[8] Like many such divisions it is, of course, too pat, and too reductive. In his ground-breaking *French Song from Berlioz to Duparc*, Frits Noske made no break at 1870; more recently, Katherine Bergeron traced the 'idea' of the *mélodie* from the 1830s to its flowering (as many critics and historians of the early twentieth century were to assert) with Fauré.[9] Stephen Rumph explicated the compositional sophistication of Fauré's Victor Hugo settings of the early 1860s, arguing convincingly for a fusion of elements of *mélodie* and *romance* in these earliest of his songs, and a more nuanced evolutionary perspective; and Delphine Mordey confronted the 'apocalyptic narratives' that

conflate the catastrophic end of the Second Empire with a scorched-earth renewal of French musical production in general.[10]

The first section of this book, however, argues that the year 1870 *does* have real significance for French art song, less in terms of nomenclature than as a moment of generational and perceptual change. That case has already been sketched in my opening paragraphs. 1870 marked the musical coming of age of a group of young composers, whose friendships developed and solidified at exactly this time, and the point at which those composers became deeply engaged with the dialogues of poetry and song that are threaded through the artistic discourse of the era. The events of the *Année terrible*, I argue, catalysed these elements. The Franco-Prussian War, the Siege of Paris, and the Commune were indeed a 'ligne de démarcation' for those who lived through them; much of the art and culture of the decades that followed was inflected by the lived experience of trauma and loss. In practical terms, the composers with whom this study is primarily concerned were at the beginning of their professional careers in 1870, and whether or not their aesthetic priorities were jolted by political events—and this study argues that they were—that year marked a meaningful shift in the opportunities available to them thereafter.

Chapters 1–3 thus follow the *mélodie* through the period immediately before, during, and after the *Année terrible*. They argue that Baudelaire's words enabled composers to access the musico-poetic discourse that exercised the writers of the 1860s, the 'correspondences' of sound and sensation and what the poet termed the 'inevitable translation' of one art into another. These chapters suggest that in their Baudelaire settings Chabrier, Duparc, and Fauré were placing themselves in the vanguard of French musical and literary discourse, in an act of—surely conscious—artistic convergence and innovation.

Chapter 1 explores those ideas against the backdrop of the salons and cafés in which they were mooted, and through the musical encounters that saw them instantiated in a work that tests the very nature and bounds of the *mélodie*, Chabrier's *L'invitation au voyage*. As the summer of 1870 moved towards an ever-bleaker autumn, composers also found in song a language through which to refract the traumatic experiences of war and siege. From *mélodies* that respond directly to catastrophic circumstance to accounts of musical creation *in extremis*, chapter 2 explores constructions of loss, memory, and renewal through the prism of song, and the poetry of Baudelaire. Chapter 3 moves into the immediate post-war period, and the rebuilding of the professional and social networks that the events of the *Année terrible* had

so shaken. With Fauré's three Baudelaire *mélodies* of 1870–71 at its centre, this chapter surveys the role of song in the shaping of compositional careers, moving from the newly formed Société nationale de musique to the opportunities and limitations of the salons, and the pursuit of publication and critical response. Where might song seek a place in the broader narrative of French musical endeavour, and what held it back? And as composers strove to leave the *Année terrible* behind them, how could Baudelaire's articulation of a new poetic language resonate in musical practice, and in the burgeoning art of the *mélodie*?

The first Interlude (chapter 4) moves forward to consider the earliest songs of Ernest Chausson. Composed as he was taking his own first steps into professional circles in the late 1870s, they reflect an engagement with literary and musical ideas that was, as yet, largely self-directed and self-contained. In Chausson's sole Baudelaire setting, *L'albatros*, composed in 1879 and left unpublished, we can read the convergence of many strands of literary and musical impetus. This chapter twines Chausson with Baudelaire, Byron, and Heine, with Fauré, and above all with Robert Schumann, whose influence on the *mélodie* has never been sufficiently examined. It finds in song a guidebook to the artistic preoccupations and professional aspirations of the young composer.

*L'albatros* was composed weeks after Chausson's return from his first hearing of Wagner's operas in Germany, a trip on which he met and befriended d'Indy. The musical and social resonances of that excursion find an echo in chapter 5, which views the *mélodie* through the relationships and artistic explorations fostered through musicians' 'voyages à Bayreuth' in the late 1880s. If the first part of this book offers a commentary on the Baudelaire-led championship of Wagner among the 1860s avant-garde, part 2 begins at the height of the all-consuming 'second wave' *wagnérisme* of the 1880s. It argues that the *mélodie* then stood at a crossroads, poised uneasily between the shadow and the lure of Wagner, and the commodification of the salon and amateur musical markets. If song was construed in some quarters as a way out of the Wagnerian impasse, in others—as Chausson was to lament—it felt little more than a pernicious dead-end.

The point of departure for this second section (spanning chapters 5–8) is a February 1889 concert of the Société nationale de musique. One of those oh-to-have-been-there evenings, it featured premières of songs by Chausson, Fauré, and Debussy, all performed by the tenor Maurice Bagès. There could be no better figure through which to understand the *mélodie* of these years than Bagès, who was both the foremost exponent of contemporary song

and one of the leading amateur Wagnerians of his age. Bagès was typically referred to as a *ténor mondain*, or 'society tenor': although by 1900 he was sufficiently distinguished to appear at the Concerts Lamoureux, most of his career unfurled in the private or semi-public arena of the salons. Bagès's music-making offers a fascinating snapshot of the city's musical life in the 1890s, laying bare the ambiguities and tensions between the expectations and practices of the salon and the concert hall, the amateur and professional, Wagnerian ambition and the intimacy of song.

Chapter 5 explores the ways in which Fauré, Chabrier, Chausson, and Debussy responded to Wagner, *wagnérisme*, and the changing climate of song creation around this pivotal year of 1889. It threads compositional explorations with the musicianship of Bagès, a performer through whom composers found and expressed new hope in the possibilities of song. Bagès was also the long-term partner of Pierre de Bréville, and his personal as well as professional life demanded a continual negotiation of public and private space. Chapter 6 adopts this frame in surveying the complex mores and musical practices of the Parisian salons. The chapter explores the ways in which the composition and performance of *mélodie* emerged from and crystallised the pull between artistic innovation and pretension, amid the social mazes of the 1890s.

Throughout this period Bagès worked particularly closely with Fauré, giving the first performance of more of his songs than any other singer (including almost all his settings of the poetry of Paul Verlaine). Their collaborations represented the first time that Fauré had worked so closely, over an extended period, with a particular performer. It was perhaps the single most influential professional relationship of his career: as chapter 7 explores, much of Fauré's vocal output across this richest of decades appears to have been written with Bagès's voice echoing in his ears. This circumstance was later to cause some complications, as the composer refashioned material written for one exceptional performer in order to make it more accessible to others—a rare occurrence in the output of an eminently practical musician. Through the collaborative origins of the songs of this period, the chapter moves to consider larger questions of performance practice, particularly concerning transposition and authorial intervention.

To end part 2, our second Interlude (chapter 8) brings the contradictory forces shaping the *mélodie* to bear on an exploration of Debussy's three sets of *Fêtes galantes*, which date respectively from 1882–83, 1891–92, and 1904. Tracing the exploration and subversion of romantic tropes of the poet/singer in Verlaine's verse and Debussy's songs, it addresses the creation of *mélodie* in

a more fundamental sense: who sings, who listens, and what happens to song when poetry fails? Closing with a structural appraisal of the two mature *Fêtes galantes* triptychs, the chapter advances our narrative to 1904, and the 'critical moment' around which the last section of the book revolves.

These final chapters are constructed around not a single personage, but rather the nebulous notion of the 'public'. This more diffuse conceptualisation, serving both as noun and adjective, reflects the passage of song from the private to the public sphere in the first years of the twentieth century, and its navigation of new audiences, from the concert hall and the musical press to the staff and students of the Conservatoire, and to interlocutors outside of France. This 'public' is an active one, heterogenous, restive, and fascinatingly synergistic: in mapping the many faces of the early twentieth-century *mélodie*, we encounter composers, critics, professors, concert organisers, vocal students and performers, as well as listeners. Chapter 9 considers song in the gaze of the musical press, tracing the growing recognition of not just a new genre, but also a new way to focus French musical criticism. The chapter explores how critics sought to weave song, along with poetry, into the construction of musical history, during a period in which historiography and the narratives of national identity exercised many aspects of French cultural life. It scrutinises the weighting and nuances of terminology—*mélodie*, *lied*, *chanson*—and the spaces between the theorising of a musical aesthetic and the practical acts of composition and performance.

In chapter 10 I examine how this reshaping of the landscape of the *mélodie* intersected with pedagogy at the Conservatoire de Paris after Fauré's appointment as the institution's Director in the summer of 1905. I consider Fauré's reforms to the vocal school, exploring the junction of internal machinations with public messaging around the teaching of song. Here our audience is, again, not just that lively body of the Parisian critics and concert-goers, but also the students and professors in whom Fauré sought to instil the techniques and aesthetics of the *mélodie*. Chapter 11 places song firmly in the public domain, its narrative directed through the women who became the foremost exponents of the genre in the pre-war decade. Exploring the many facets of practical collaboration, it traces singers' relationships with composers and their vital role as advocates not just for song but for contemporary French music in general, a role of special importance amid the decade's surging tide of *debussysme*.

The Postlude draws together the threads of the whole study, weaving back through songs and poetry from Ravel's *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* (1913) towards our Baudelairean starting point. With Edgar Allan Poe's essay

'The Philosophy of Composition' to hand, the Postlude reflects on the tenets of compositional practice and musical performance that defined the *mélodie* across a transformative half-century.

The final chapter of Katherine Bergeron's fascinating monograph *Voice Lessons: French* Mélodie *in the Belle Époque* is titled 'Farewell to an Idea'. There, the author sets out a conception of the *mélodie* that she finds 'hard to imagine . . . being sustained much beyond 1912': with Fauré's short cycle *Mirages* (1919) Bergeron takes leave of 'a beautiful idea of song—one whose time had already come and gone', transitory and elusive as the visions of the title.[11] And yet in *Mirages* Fauré set the just-published poetry of Renée de Brimont, who was to host one of the liveliest of the interwar Parisian salons, her regular guests including Paul Valéry, Marie Laurencin, Natalie Clifford Barney, and the Princesse de Polignac. And two years after *Mirages* Fauré composed one final set of songs, on words by a poet of Poulenc's generation, Jean de la Ville de Mirmont. 'Car j'ai de grands départs inassouvis en moi' (For I have great, unfulfilled voyages within me), ends *L'horizon chimérique*: few song composers have taken their departure so eloquently. Carlo Caballero suggests that these words may have been what drew Fauré not just to this poem but to Mirmont's poetry *in toto*, so powerfully does the song—indeed, the whole cycle—spiral towards this culminating line.[12]

We might find in those words an equally apt metaphor. The changing landscapes of literary stimulus and musical inspiration, the emergence of a new generation of composers, and the re-negotiation of the places and means of song performance (notably through the rapid development of recording technology) combine to drive the narrative of the post-war *mélodie* beyond what can be encompassed here. Thus, my history concludes before Fauré's mesmerising final cycles; it excises not just Ravel's *Chansons madécasses* and *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée* but the many later songs of his contemporaries Roussel and Koechlin; and it makes little reference to the decades of vigorous advocacy (and many recordings) that lay ahead for performers such as Jane Bathori and Claire Croiza. But in the final lines of *L'horizon chimérique* we can read not an ending but a passing of the torch, and a promise of what, for the *mélodie*, was yet to come.

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# *Part One*

# Poet

Chapter One

# Baudelaire's Invitation to Composers

If, in the spring of 1870, one had asked Gabriel Fauré, Henri Duparc, or Vincent d'Indy their professions, Fauré would probably have replied that he was an organist, while Duparc and d'Indy would have claimed the law. Nor had Emmanuel Chabrier, as yet, considered 'embracing the career of a [professional] composer', as Victorin Joncières later explained. '"Music", he said to me, "is not a profession; it doesn't earn you drinking water. While at the Ministry [of the Interior] . . . I'll soon be pulling in one hundred francs a month—and besides, one retires at sixty."'[1] Although their aspirations to compositional careers were only just beginning to be articulated, however, the three younger members of this quartet were on the cusp of profound decisions about their professions and their personal lives. Had that same question been posed a year or so later, it would almost certainly have elicited a different response.

As the opening paragraphs of the Preface set out, the spring and summer of 1870 marked a period of intense social and artistic activity, a cradle of both friendships and ideas. Within a few years these young composers had become, in d'Indy's words, 'a small, inseparable group: Chabrier, [André] Messager, Fauré, d'Indy, [Pierre de] Bréville'.[2] In so doing, they seemed to discover and articulate some sense of shared artistic purpose: they had begun to form, if not a school—not even, yet, a Franckist one—then some kind of alliance. By February 1871 their association would crystallise around the formation of the Société nationale de musique (SNM). But perhaps the more interesting testament to their interactions is that in the space of a few months, across the summer and autumn of 1870, Chabrier, Duparc, and Fauré had all made their first settings of Baudelaire's poetry. Within another year or so Fauré had completed an apparent triptych (discussed in chapter 3), following *Hymne* (1870) with *La rançon* and *Chant d'automne* (ca. 1871).

These early Baudelaire settings arguably mark a musical watershed, a point at which French composers began to reckon more boldly and more consciously not just with the structures and rules of poetry, or how they could 'transpose' them (a verb Ravel liked) into music, but also with the debates that were swirling around the very nature and purpose of song.

## Baudelaire's 'Inevitable Translation'

In January and February 1860 Richard Wagner had visited Paris to conduct three performances of a concert comprising excerpts from his operas *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, and the newly completed (but not yet staged) *Tristan und Isolde*. In response, on 17 February Charles Baudelaire sent Wagner what was to become a famous letter. 'It seemed to me', he mused, 'that I knew this music already, and later, when reflecting on it, I understood how this impression had been created: it seemed that this music was *my own*.'[3] Mary Breatnach writes that Baudelaire's emphasis here suggests that 'he is attempting to articulate a belief in an identity at some deep, ontological level, not only between Wagner's creation and his own, but between the creative, aesthetic and imaginative world inhabited by Wagner and the poetic world he himself inhabits.'[4] Baudelaire's critical writings often drew attention to artistic method as well as the finished work, using the tools of his own art to respond to the creations of others. His 'Salon de 1846', for example, quotes 'certain lines from M. Henri Heine that explain Delacroix's method rather well', and concludes that the most effective response to an artwork is through translation or transformation: 'the best critique of a painting might be a sonnet, or an elegy.'[5] Fourteen years later, in claiming Wagner's music as his own Baudelaire was asserting an affinity of process as well as aesthetic, one artist answering another in the language of their craft.

A year after posting that letter, Baudelaire published a much longer essay on *Tannhäuser* and Wagner's creative practice. This appeared in *La Revue européenne* on 1 April 1861, in the wake of the opera's disastrous Parisian première. Responding both to the music and to Wagner's writings (particularly the *Lettre sur la musique*, first published—in French—in 1860), Baudelaire attempted to explain and defend Wagner's vision to an as-yet unappreciative French audience. Articulated through a narrative of his own response to the music—a process that he describes as an 'inevitable translation' (la traduction inévitable)—Baudelaire explores the synthesis of creativity and criticism in Wagner's output and again, by implication, his own.[6] Like Edgar Allan Poe's

'The Philosophy of Composition'—an essay that Baudelaire had himself translated into French (and to which the Postlude of this study returns)—this is a text that does not simply explicate the compositional process, but simultaneously enacts it. Thus, Baudelaire writes, 'It became impossible [for Wagner] not to conceive in a double fashion, poetically and musically, not to see his ideas in both forms at once, each of those two arts taking up its role at the limits of the other.' He then follows his assertion that 'what would really be surprising is that sound *could not* suggest colour, that colours *could not* inspire a melody, and that sound and colour should not be used to translate ideas' with the quatrains of his own sonnet 'Correspondances'.[7] The second quatrain, in particular, represents an unequivocal 'translation' of what he has just argued:

> La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
> Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
> L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
> Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.
>
> Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
> Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
> Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
> Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.
>
> (Nature is a temple, in which living pillars / Sometimes give voice to faint words; / Man passes there, through forests of symbols / Which observe him with a knowing gaze. // As long echoes mingling in the distance / In a shadowed and profound unity, / As vast as the night and the daylight, / Perfumes, colours and sounds answer one another.)

Baudelaire's 'Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris' quickly became and has remained a cornerstone of French literary and aesthetic discourse, one of the key texts in the 'coherent tradition' Peter Dayan establishes in his sparkling study *Music Writing Literature*: 'Born at the time of George Sand, between 1830 and 1850 . . . [it] grew to maturity through a style of writing that refused to recognize clear boundaries between the literary, the critical, and the musical. It was simultaneously literary and musical (since it defined literature as music, and heard music as poetic), and a critical reflection on the literary and on the musical.'[8] In the third quarter of the nineteenth century, however, this 'style of writing' gathered itself into a wave that at times threatened to swamp actual artistic production. As Laurence Porter has

argued, through these years first Baudelaire, then Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé, all grappled with the nature of poetry itself—what it was, what it could achieve, where its limits lay—and its intersection with the other arts. How closely could music and poetry be melded, and what facets of each art remained unreachable to the other?[9]

'It is the musician who allows one to hear clearly what is not said,' wrote Wagner in the conclusion of the *Lettre sur la musique*, 'and the infallible form of his echoing silence is the *infinite melody*.'[10] In French literary discourse of the 1860s, music came to serve as a metaphor for art and for emotion, as the purest form of human communication and the ultimate symbol. As Théodore de Banville put it in the opening pages of his *Petit traité de poésie française* (first published in 1872), 'Verse is human speech, given rhythm that it might be sung, and, properly speaking, no poetry and verse can exist without Song [*le Chant*].'[11]

Baudelaire's essay and Banville's treatise would be followed by Verlaine's poem 'Art poétique' ('De la musique avant toute chose . . .'); see the present pp. 219–20), Mallarmé's 'La musique et les lettres', and a host of other texts that sung the synthesis of music and poetry. Yet almost all of these—a point so obvious that it is seldom made—were written by writers, poets, critics; artists who deliberately turned writing about art into art itself.[12] Largely absent from this conversation are the voices of (French) musicians. In 1911 the journal *Musica* asked various composers and writers to respond to a series of questions about the sorts of texts that were most conducive to being set to music ('good verse or bad, poetry or prose?'). A remarkable number of composers simply refused the gambit, effectively mocking the writerly habit of assigning aesthetic value to musical judgements, and arguing everything out in words, and at length. Dukas explicitly refuted a Wagnerian aesthetic, writing bluntly, 'Let us not mistake the matter: *one does not set poems in music* [*on ne met pas les poèmes en musique*]. One provides the words with an accompaniment, and that's quite a different thing. The first concept effectively assumes a *fusion*, the second observes a *parallel*.'[13] Reynaldo Hahn was even brusquer: 'It is impossible to answer these questions in a few words, and above all to encapsulate the history of vocal music in a short paragraph.'[14]

Yet as Annegret Fauser writes of the 1870 generation, 'As poets laid claim [after Baudelaire's *Tannhäuser* essay] to the musical dimension of language, it became vital, therefore, for French musicians to reclaim the sonic dimension of poetic lyricism, lest they lost the aesthetic justification for song composition entirely.'[15] But, Banville asks, 'What is lyricism? It is an expression of the spiritual [*surnaturel*] within us, of that which surpasses our material and

earthly desires, in a word, of all our feelings and all our thoughts that can only be truly expressed in Song.'[16] Faced with this sort of exhortation, the absence of composers' voices from much of this discourse is hardly surprising: music cannot remain a Platonic ideal for those who can see the levers being pulled (the 'Tristan' chord is a standard half-diminished seventh; what matters is how you get there, and how you leave it). Few composers would lay claim to *Lyrisme*, in Banville's definition, or, for that matter, *le Chant*. How then were they to respond? And how, in particular, were they to compose songs to meet this artistic moment?

In the opening pages of his *Petit traité*, Banville offered some thoughts on contemporary musical practice too. Much of the verse that is sung in 'those dramatic compositions termed operas has really nothing to do with what song used to be, in the ages of poetry', he wrote. Both rhyme and rhythm are faulty, for 'these lyrics [*paroles*] are not poetry, and, if they were, the noisy music that gets attached to them can do nothing to express their accent and their soul, since music is self-sufficient, independent of all poetry. What purpose does poetry serve? To sing. To sing, moreover, a music whose expression is lost to us, but which we hear within ourselves, and which, alone, is Song [*le Chant*].'[17] As Helen Abbott reflected, 'In order to overcome the power that music seemed to be gaining over poetry, poets became increasingly interested in the idea that their poetry might, somehow, *become* music, and in the process, transform music itself into something new.'[18]

An oddly apposite response to and elaboration of Banville's argument was made over a decade later by Saint-Saëns, in his 1885 treatise *Harmonie et mélodie*. Lamenting what he considered poetry's cannibalisation of music, he declared, 'Poets had long held music in disdain, even detestation . . . Thus music and poetry, originally inseparable, became rivals and soon enemies. Poems, according to the poets, contain their own music, and need no musician.'[19] But, Saint-Saëns argues, poetry's abandonment of actual music was entirely understandable, and here the Banvillian echoes are plain: 'Musicians, for their part, have done everything to rouse the animosity of the poets. Caught up in their own art . . . they have treated poetry like a conquered territory, breaking the rhythms, destroying the lines through useless repetitions, additions, or shocking omissions, destroying even the rhyme itself through the displacement or substitution of words!'[20] Saint-Saëns goes on to argue that composers of the 1850s and 1860s had shown such disregard for poetic rhythms and rules that it became impossible to hear the actual words of a song, so distorted was the poetic metre. He calls out operetta as being particularly insidious, damaging to both poetry and music; and

he drives his point home by citing a few examples from the most renowned Second-Empire exponent of this frivolous form, Jacques Offenbach.[21]

## 'The least illiterate of musicians'

And thus we come to Emmanuel Chabrier, who spent many of his leisure hours in the 1860s writing never-published operettas to libretti by Paul Verlaine, while frequenting the most avant-garde of the literary and musical salons. Many of Chabrier's early songs are essentially unorchestrated numbers from putative *opérettes*: *Couplets de Mariette* (1862), for example, adopts the 'couplet' form popular in operetta; the instrumental indications on the composer's manuscript imply that he at least considered orchestrating it. The 'grand valse' *Ivresse*, of 1869, probably written for a café-concert, combines the casual grace of the waltz with unabashedly ridiculous lyrics and occasional operatic flourishes. Roger Delage observes that the song 'should not surprise us, coming from the pen of the author of *Fisch-Ton-Kan* and *Vaucochard et fils 1er*' (the two Verlaine operettas).[22] The poet of *Ivresse*, Léon Labarre, freely admitted that he was 'just a song-writer—my words are inseparable from their beloved (but sometimes demanding) sister Music: you have to sing them, they gain nothing from being read.'[23] They might demand song, but the verses of *Ivresse* hardly qualify as Banville's *Chant*.

Yet alongside all this, as early as 1862 Chabrier had become just the second major composer to set the poetry of Banville himself (following Gounod's *L'âme de la mort* of 1860); in the same year he began a long friendship with Catulle Mendès, and seemingly copied out at least some of the score of *Tannhäuser*. By 1863 his acquaintances included the poets Jean Richepin, Villiers, and Verlaine, and by the middle of the decade he was a regular presence in the capital's most brilliant intellectual circles, frequenting the salon of the Goncourt brothers and the Parnassian gatherings *chez* Leconte de Lisle and the Marquise de Ricard.[24] Louis-Xavier de Ricard, poet and editor of *Le Parnasse contemporain*, wrote of his family's salon:

> The great thing was always to read and listen to poetry and prose, as well as to discuss aesthetics, and to abuse, with the greatest good nature, 'official' or officious literature, complaisance, routine or the daily grind, which is precisely what the Parnassian revolution was directed against. . . . What distinguished the soirées at the boulevard des Batignolles from other Parnassian salons was the absolute freedom that we felt to give voice to all our ideas, even those that seemed most paradoxical. . . . We would alternate speeches, recitations, discussions,

> music, and dance. Often we were lucky enough to have Emmanuel Chabrier at the piano, kneading the keys with terrifying energy, so that the poor instrument's strings would moan and beg for mercy. Chabrier was not then the master that he was to become—rather late, indeed, for his reputation grew slowly—but we all recognised the mastery in him.[25]

After the death of the Marquis de Ricard in 1868, the locus of Parnassian poetry shifted to the salon of Nina de Villard (also known as Nina de Callias), in the rue Chaptal.[26] Among the regulars there were the poets Charles Cros, Sully-Prudhomme, François Coppée, Anatole France, and Léon Valade, as well as Mendès, Verlaine, and Villiers; Manet, Marcellin Desboutin, and other painters; and musicians such as Ernest Cabaner (of whom more in chapter 2). Edmond Lepelletier, Verlaine's friend and biographer, wrote, 'it was said, among the young poets, artists, painters, journalists, Montmartre politicians, from the Café de Madrid, or the Café de Fleurus: *Allons chez Nina*!'[27] In the rue Chaptal, too, Chabrier was the regular pianist, a role he shared with his good friend Charles de Sivry (who was soon to become Verlaine's brother-in-law). The Villard circle was strongly pro-Wagner, at a time when this position was still very much *en marge*, and Nina herself was a passionate Wagnerian (as were Villiers and Mendès). In the late 1860s she composed a poem on *Tristan*, which appeared in the second collection of *Le Parnasse contemporain* (1869–71); Charles de Sivry recalled struggling through a four-hand version of the *Tristan* Prelude with her around 1868.[28] In general, though, if the denizens of the Villard salon wanted to listen to swathes of that opera (and they did), it would most often have been Chabrier, unquestionably the finest musician there, who was at the piano.

Chabrier thus spent the decade deeply entangled in circles in which the fusion of music and poetry was often celebrated and sometimes mocked, by artists whose musical literacy was mostly negligible at best. Baudelaire's letter to Wagner and his *Tannhäuser* essay both freely admit to a lack of musical knowledge and a narrowness of experience. In his letter, having laid claim to Wagner's music, the poet continues, 'To anyone but a man of intelligence, this phrase would seem completely ridiculous, particularly when written by someone who, like myself, *is not adept in music* [*ne sait pas la musique*], and whose education is limited to having listened (with great pleasure, to be sure) to a few fine extracts of Weber and Beethoven.'[29] His essay unhesitatingly passes informed musical discussion of the opera to more competent hands: 'I must therefore limit myself to a more general survey.'[30] The Goncourts, meanwhile, made no attempt to conceal their lack of appreciation for music:

in 1862 they record a conversation on that subject with Théophile Gautier, who claimed in response, 'I am exactly like you, I prefer silence to music.'[31] As David Hillery has pointed out, the general lack of musical literacy in the poetic circles of the 1860s and afterwards engendered a tradition of literature and criticism that endured from Baudelaire's time to the mid-twentieth century, too often tinged with what he sturdily terms 'woolly-mindedness': 'No Symbolist poet—Villiers apart—gives the impression that he possesses or even desires to possess an adequate knowledge of musical technique.'[32]

Did Chabrier sometimes weary of the passionate oratory of those who could wax lyrical about the power and perfection of music, but who lacked the skill, knowledge, and even the inclination to engage with that art—his own—at anything more than the vaguest conceptual level? We certainly sense this disconnection in Edmond Lepelletier's depiction of him at the Ricard salon: 'Chabrier would seat himself at the piano and, with his chords and arpeggios, subsume the voices of the poets discussing metrical questions in a corner. He had written some original, colourful music on Victor Hugo's ballad *Le pas d'armes* [*du roi Jean*]. He sang it often, isolated, at the piano, without concerning himself with us.'[33]

Amid this strange cocktail of aestheticism, frivolity, and pretension, it might seem surprising that Chabrier, just a few months after composing the exuberant *Ivresse*, should turn his hand to Baudelaire, a poet whom none of his more established composer colleagues had considered setting. The only Baudelaire song then in print was Jules Cressonnois's light-hearted waltz *L'invitation au voyage* (Ex. 1.1), which appeared in his anodyne *Harmonies* of 1863. The purpose of this collection—as after-dinner fare for young ladies—emerges clearly from the critic Joseph d'Ortigue's recommendation in the *Journal des débats*: 'Do you truly love music? Do you have a pretty voice? Are you capable of accompanying yourself? If you fulfil these three conditions, then I recommend to you M. J. Cressonnois's *Harmonies*.'[34]

The lack of any more serious musical attention is doubtless explained in part by Baudelaire's notoriety: most publishers would have held reservations about issuing songs on the words of a poet who had fallen so publicly foul of the censor's pen.[35] As late as 1895 the critic Georges Servières was to write that Debussy's *Cinq poèmes de Charles Baudelaire* 'appalled' publishers, 'as much for their choice of subjects, which were hardly appropriate to young girls, as for the manner in which they are set'.[36] Given the contested reputation of *Les fleurs du mal* and its author, it would not have been surprising if younger composers who wanted their music to find a publisher thought twice about setting Baudelaire.

Example 1.1. Jules Cressonnois, *L’invitation au voyage*, bars 10–17

pp
Mon en - fant, ma sœur, Son - ge à la dou - ceur
[pp]
14
D’al - ler là – bas, vi - vre en - sem - ble!

By 1870, however, the posthumous rehabilitation of the poet’s legacy and standing was already underway. In 1868 Albert de La Fizelière and Georges Decaux had published a detailed bibliography of Baudelaire’s writings, with an accompanying biographical essay and critical study. The following year Baudelaire’s close friend Charles Asselineau published a sympathetic biography, the first of its kind. Most importantly, between 1868 and 1870 the Parisian publisher Lévy issued the seven volumes that comprised the *Œuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire*. These volumes decisively asserted Baudelaire’s place in the canon; in his new preface to *Les fleurs du mal*, Théophile Gautier vigorously and explicitly upheld his departed colleague’s character, reputation, and artistry. The publication of the *Œuvres complètes* served two crucial purposes: it dignified and defended Baudelaire’s œuvre; and it made it widely accessible for the first time. This, above all, was surely the most practical and compelling prompt for composers.

Chabrier also had more specific and personal reasons to look towards Baudelaire. His friend Villiers de l’Isle-Adam had himself created a setting of the well-known sonnet ‘La mort des amants’ in the late 1860s.[37]

Although it was unpublished and seems to have been quasi-improvisatory, this had plainly gained currency in Villiers's circles. As Helen Abbott has documented, by 1869 it was so well-known that Verlaine and Léon Valade had even concocted a parody version: titled 'La mort des cochons' ('Nous reniflerons dans les pissotières, / Nous gougnotterons loin des lavabos, / Et nous lècherons les eaux ménagères / Au risque d'avoir des procès-verbaux . . .'), the manuscript text is annotated 'Paroles de Baudelaire (Musique de M. le Comte Auguste Mathias Villiers de l'Isle-Adam)'.[38] This spoof in turn appears to have been popular among the group of young poets and artists—most of them also *habitués* of the Villard salon—calling themselves the Vilains bonshommes: Verlaine mentions it in a letter to François Coppée of 18 April 1869, in a context that makes it clear it was already familiar.[39] Chabrier, well acquainted with many of the Vilains bonshommes, must by then have known Villiers's *La mort des amants*, which the poet appears to have performed *chez* Nina and at the homes of various other friends; he is highly likely to have known Verlaine's parody too.[40] Perhaps these efforts—and even Cressonnois's jovial waltz—prompted him to contemplate a more serious attempt to set this rich poetry.

The fourth volume of the *Œuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire*, issued in 1869 and edited by Banville and Asselineau, included the first publication of *Le spleen de Paris (Petits poèmes en prose)* as a unified collection, most of the contents having been published piecemeal between 1857 and 1864. *Le spleen de Paris* carries a famous preface, in the form of a letter to Arsène Houssaye—poet, novelist, art historian, critic, and journal editor—in which Baudelaire sets out his ideal: 'Who among us has not dreamed, in his ambitious moments, of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical, without rhyme or rhythm, and sufficiently supple and striking as to bend itself to the lyrical movements of the soul, to the whims of the imagination, to the somersaults of consciousness?'[41]

These lines were to resonate through French music for decades. Debussy quoted them directly in an 1885 letter, in which he explains that his 'symphonic ode' *Zuleima* (his first *envoi* from Rome, never published and now lost) is 'not anything like the sort of music that I want to write, I want a music that will be sufficiently supple and striking to shape itself around the lyrical movements of the soul, to the whims of the imagination.'[42] It was surely Baudelaire's entreaty that prompted the 'prose poétique' of Debussy's *Proses lyriques* (the very next paragraph of the poet's preface evokes the necessity of finding 'une prose lyrique'). These songs, composed to Debussy's own texts, were to occupy him after he had completed his *Cinq poèmes de Charles*

*Baudelaire*. We also hear a distinctly Baudelairean echo in Ravel's response to that above-mentioned 1911 questionnaire on text-setting: 'It seems to me that in dealing with things that are truly experienced and felt, free verse is preferable to regular verse', he writes, describing Jules Renard's prose-poems *Histoires naturelles* as 'delicate, rhythmic, though rhythmic in a completely different way from classical verse'.[43]

By this stage the reader will not be surprised to learn that Chabrier also knew Arsène Houssaye: their earliest documented interaction dates from the 1880s, but given their multiple shared acquaintance it seems highly probable that they met in the Parnassian salons of the 1860s.[44] Whatever inspiration Chabrier took from Baudelaire's preface, however—and it seems he did take some, as we will see—it was in the eighteenth of the 'petits poèmes' that he would have come across an explicit call to action. In this 1857 prose reworking of his poem 'L'invitation au voyage', Baudelaire writes, 'A musician [Weber] has written *L'invitation à la valse*; where is he who will compose *L'invitation au voyage*?'[45]

## *Tristan* at the Café-concert: Chabrier's *L'invitation au voyage*

In its original verse form, Baudelaire's 'L'invitation au voyage' is unusual in both formal and metric terms. Each of its three twelve-line strophes alternates pentasyllabic couplets with single heptasyllabic lines, and is followed by a famous heptasyllabic refrain:

> Mon enfant, ma sœur,
> Songe à la douceur
> D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble!
> Aimer à loisir,
> Aimer et mourir
> Au pays qui te ressemble!
> Les soleils mouillés
> De ces ciels brouillés
> Pour mon esprit ont les charmes
> Si mystérieux
> De tes traîtres yeux,
> Brillant à travers leurs larmes.
>
> Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
> Luxe, calme et volupté.[46]

> (My child, my sister, / Think of the rapture / Of living together there! / Of loving at will, / Of loving till death, / In the land that is like you! / The misty sunlight / Of those cloudy skies / Has for my spirit the charms, / So mysterious, / Of your treacherous eyes, / Shining brightly through their tears. // There, all is order and beauty, / Luxury, peace, and pleasure.)

Abbott observes that both the metres and refrain suggest a nod to popular song.[47] Elsewhere, she argues that the contradictory qualities of the form—the apparent metric flexibility both masking its underlying strictness and offset by the lulling repetition of the refrain—were surely part of the poem's appeal for composers.[48] To this we might add certain thematic 'hooks' to capture the musical imagination: the imagery of a journey to faraway lands would have resonated in a city whose opera houses were filled with the heavy scents of 'la splendeur orientale' (to use Baudelaire's own phrase, from the poem's second strophe). Moreover, while it never explicitly mentions the sea (though the prose-poem does), the invitation to a 'voyage' offered an easily communicable musical atmosphere with which to surround the text. Henri Duparc's 1870 setting—to which chapter 2 returns—takes the latter prompt most clearly, with its ostinato ripples that spread into great waves at the climax. If Chabrier's *L'invitation au voyage* is not obviously pictorial in the same way, an 1878 letter sent from Vaucottes, on the Normandy coast, evokes Baudelaire in a way that suggests that he did perhaps respond to this aspect of the poem:

> the sea, my beloved sea, is always there, and you know how I adore it. It's completely ridiculous, but I stay there for hours looking at it, as if in ecstasy. This vastness prompts a thousand thoughts, these sunrises, these gold- and violet-toned sunsets, these little distant boats, these majestic, Prudhomme-esque mists drifting from Le Havre . . . This sea that blends all the colours of a palette . . . with these sparkles, these unexpected outlooks, this phosphorescence, these metallic reflections that would make Monet swoon or exhaust even Baudelaire's goodwill, dare I say![49]

If he was not thinking of his own song there, Chabrier must surely have had another Baudelaire poem in mind, 'La musique': 'La musique souvent me prend comme une mer! / Vers ma pale étoile, / Sous un plafond de brume ou dans un vaste éther, / Je mets à la voile.' (Music often seizes me, like the sea! / Towards my pale star, / Beneath a ceiling of sea-mist, or in the vastness of the air, / I set my sail.)

On the programme for its eventual première in 1874, Chabrier's *L'invitation au voyage* figures as a *scène chantée*, an appellation that suggests that although the genre of *mélodie* was then in a rather malleable infancy, it nevertheless could not be stretched to contain Chabrier's creation. The song moves from a recitative-like opening to an echo of the café-concert waltz—fleeting and dreamlike, quite different from the extroverted *Ivresse*—that suggests a compositional acknowledgement of the *chansonnier* elements of Baudelaire's poem; it ends with a glimpse of operatic fireworks. It is by some measure Chabrier's most adventurous song to that point, by its inclusion of obbligato bassoon, its sheer scale—if all three verses are sung it takes around nine minutes to perform—and its many changes of tempo and texture, as well as its harmonic language.[50] From the first bars of the piano introduction (Ex. 1.2) we are on unstable tonal ground: what were to become some of Chabrier's signature gestures—added ninth harmonies, major/minor interchange, and upwards resolution of the sharpened fourth degree—here emerge for the first time, mysterious and unsettling.

After the ambiguous opening bars, the first vocal entry suggests a clearer tonal structure: shifting harmonies over a dominant pedal give way to a circle-of-fifths motion that tonicises the submediant at bar 11. But if the tonality is now clearer, the metre is deliberately, tantalisingly obscured. The text-setting in bars 5–8 undermines the notated $\frac{6}{4}$ with an effective $\frac{3}{2}$, while *sforzandi* on the fifth crotchets of bars 5 and 7 and the offset *arpa* piano chords of bars 5–8 conceal the downbeats. The irregular rhythms of the vocal line might appear gauche, even faulty in places, but in practice the song demands a declamation that prioritises the natural inflections of the spoken poem above the hierarchy of the musical beat. From the pen of a composer whose earlier songs generally emphasise regular metres and ostinato accompaniments, this surely represents a deliberate move in the direction of Baudelaire's 'poetic prose, musical, without rhyme or rhythm'.

Less obvious, but more interesting, is the relationship between poem, song, and one of the era's most noteworthy aesthetic tropes: the idealised evocation of the eighteenth century. Maxime Cutler notes the connection between Baudelaire's 'Luxe, calme et volupté' and the Goncourts' (slightly later) description of the age of Louis XV: 'L'idéal de l'amour au temps de Louis XV n'est plus rien que le désir, et l'amour est la volupté' (Nothing remains of the idealised love of the Louis XV era but a dream, where love is delight).[51] For the Goncourts as for Baudelaire (and later Debussy too), the defining visual marker of this era was the art of Antoine Watteau. Cutler argues that 'Watteau's art . . . reflects for Baudelaire an eighteenth-century

Example 1.2. Emmanuel Chabrier, *L'invitation au voyage*, bars 1–16

**Ben moderato**

*molto espressivo e rubato*

*sf* *sf* *sf* *pp*

Ped. ❋Ped. ❋ Ped.

5

*dolce* *sf* *sf*

Mon en-fant, ma sœur, Son-ge à la dou-

*fp* *fp* *fp* *poco cresc.*

Ped. Ped. Ped.

8

*cresc.* *vibr.* *dolce* *rit.*

-ceur D'al-ler là – bas vi-vre en-sem -

*fp* *sf* *vibr.*

*fp* *tranquillo* *mf* *suivez*

Ped. Ped.

—(*continued*)

Example 1.2—*concluded*

11

**Più lento**

-ble! Ai-mer à loi-

*espress.*

*f* *sf*

*più mosso*

*sf*

**Più lento**

*p*

Ped.

14

*f* *espress.*

-sir, Ai - mer et mou - rir

*f* *cresc.*

*sf*

*f*

*sf*

ideal', and that his 'evocation of an ideal *pays* in "L'invitation au voyage" . . . resembles the aesthetic image of the eighteenth century that fascinated poet-artists of the nineteenth century.'[52] Among the most significant markers of this intersection was the publication, in 1869, of a new volume of poetry by Chabrier's friend Verlaine: *Fêtes galantes* (to which chapter 8 returns) looks towards Watteau via Banville, Baudelaire, Houssaye, and the Goncourts.

In 1890 Banville was to link Baudelaire's 'L'invitation au voyage' explicitly with Watteau's famous *L'embarquement pour Cythère* of 1717 (a painting that in turn was to shade Debussy's *L'isle joyeuse*). The names he cites, with their shades of the Grecian pastoral via the seventeenth-century *galante* idiom, figure not in Baudelaire's poems but in Banville's own *Les cariatides* (1839–42), as well as Verlaine's *Fêtes galantes*:

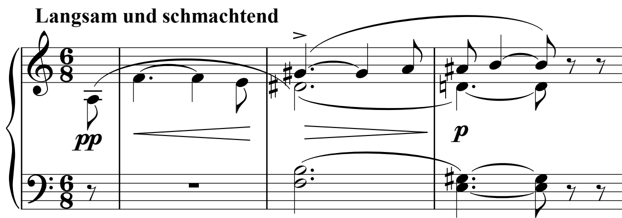
> Yes, departure! The most profound of all delights; but (there is always a *but*) it is the most resented by those who are not themselves destined to, and will not themselves depart. *Mon enfant, ma sœur, Songe à la douceur / D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble!* . . . Alas! Who cannot see it? the lovers will never set sail, and the land where *tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté* would be too beautiful ever to be inhabited by mortal beings. . . . And there . . . in the enchanted solitude, Watteau reveals to us, pale, young, charming, in love, profoundly sad, draped in silk and satin, the pilgrims of *L'embarquement pour Cythère* . . . And if they could reach the island dedicated to the glory of the Aegean Sea, they would see that the rose-trees and the myrtles are dead, that Venus herself is dead. . . . But this desolation will be spared them, and they will never know what Cythera has become: before they could depart, Silvandre, Myrtil, Lycas, Aminte, Eglé, Philis would have died of love, of languor, of joy and of sadness.[53]

Banville seems here to echo the spirit of Chabrier's song of twenty years earlier, with its first line that makes several attempts to cast off its minor-key anchor but keeps curling back downwards, its signature motif of a sighing seventh, its pull between eager and languorous tempi, and the haunting timbres of the bassoon. If Duparc's *L'invitation au voyage* evokes the fervour of departure, in Chabrier's we sense more clearly the pull between anticipation and nostalgia, luxurious enjoyment and sardonic regret, that colours Baudelaire's mature poetry.

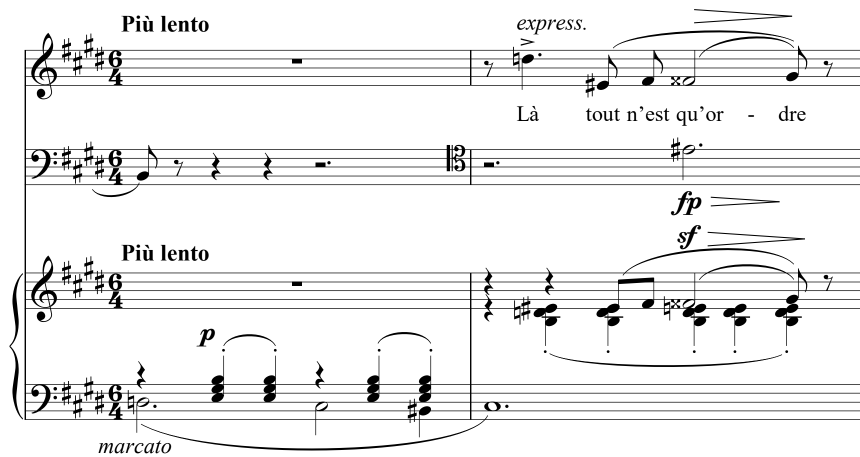
Banville's invocation of an isle or idyll beyond mortal reach is perhaps most vividly prefigured in a telling moment late in Chabrier's setting.[54] As the final strophe opens out into the coda, we hear a fleeting but unmistakeable quotation of *Tristan und Isolde* (Exx. 1.3a–b). The citation is so direct—the accents in bars 144 and 146 underline the distinctive on-beat

Example 1.3

a. Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Prelude, bars 1–3




b. Chabrier, *L'invitation au voyage*, bars 143–46



dissonance—and so strategically placed as to preclude coincidence and demand symbolic association. At this moment of harmonic and structural uncertainty, the rising chromatic line suggests both fleeting recognition of an *extase* that can be achieved only in death—there is perhaps a nod here to 'La mort des amants'—and, in musical terms, an invitation to depart for destinations unknown, beneath a banner bearing the arms of Wagner's prince. *Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté. . .*

Notably, what Chabrier emphasises here is not the 'Tristan' chord itself: the musical appropriation of that gesture, in symbolically charged contexts that unequivocally respond not just to Wagner but to *wagnérisme*, mostly came later.[55] Chabrier avoids the distinctive colour of the half-diminished seventh altogether, instead setting the motif within a fully diminished chord, over a dissonant bass. The four-step chromatic ascent of Example 1.3b is anticipated in each strophe, where it is introduced by the bassoon's echoing—at pitch, in the E major of the second and more final of the two autograph manuscripts—of the *f′-e′-d′*♯ of the *Tristan* Prelude (see Ex. 1.2 above, bars 13–15): there, as in *Tristan*, the gesture leads to a dominant seventh, though the voice-leading (via a German sixth) is not Wagner's.

There are other echoes of *Tristan* too, less direct but plausibly traceable given this context. The inversion of the rising second into a falling seventh, which produces the song's most characteristic melodic gesture, also appears early in Wagner's Prelude, first in an E-major context that again anticipates the second of the two autographs: in Chabrier's bars 39–40 we hear the gesture exposed, at Wagner's pitch, though again he modifies the implicit 'Tristan' chord, this time into a more functional dominant ninth (Exx. 1.4a–b).

Chabrier's acquaintance with *Tristan* came through his fingers: like almost everyone else in Paris in 1870, he had not yet seen a staged performance, so his experience of the work was filtered through the piano score. Villiers de l'Isle-Adam later asserted that he and his salon companions had first come to know Wagner via Baudelaire's *Tannhäuser* essay; for years he thus read and listened to Wagner through an unequivocally Baudelairean lens.[56] Chabrier's song likewise acknowledges Baudelaire's *wagnérisme* through an opera that the poet himself never heard in full, in a song-setting that refracts his own kinetic as well as aural impressions of *Tristan*. He sets Baudelaire's words in Baudelaire's language, melding *Tristan*-esque gestures and aesthetics with the flexible rhythms and direct, expressive communication of the café-concert.

Chabrier's *L'invitation au voyage* thus emerges from and responds to the salon dialogues of the 1860s in complex, nuanced, but also thoroughly

Example 1.4

a. Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Prelude, bars 45–48

**a tempo**
*zart*
*dim.*
*p*
*p*

b. Chabrier, *L'invitation au voyage*, bars 35–40

*ff* *vibr.*
(Bril) lant à tra - vers leurs lar - - mes,
*ff*
*pp*
*ff*
*dim. poco*
*p*
*pp*

38
*ppp*
ah!
*sf*
*a piacere*
*sf*
*sf*
Ped.
Ped.

practical ways. Perhaps he composed it in part to achieve serious recognition among the poetic avant-garde; surely, he asserts his authority to engage with Baudelaire's poetry in the medium of which he alone among his literary friends was master. In his essay 'Du Parnasse contemporain' (*Mémoires d'un veuf*), Paul Verlaine wrote of evenings spent in the boutique of the publisher Alphonse Lemerre—champion of the Parnassians—in the passage Choiseul. Here, alongside poets such as Banville, Leconte de Lisle, and Silvestre, Verlaine wrote, one might meet

> Painters, musicians—fewer of these, their art kept them isolated, too much isolated . . . Among the most prominent were [Auguste] Feyen-Perrin, Manet, a little older than us . . . Cabaner, so original and so adroit; Sivry, inspiration (in the divine and rare sense of the word), energy and distinction made flesh, the soul of a poet with the wings of a bluebird; Chabrié [*sic*], happy as a lark and melodious as a nightingale; [these three] considered themselves our brothers in the lyre, and set our words to music, without damaging or prettifying them—a great act of beneficence, one acknowledged with the boundless gratitude and goodwill of those listeners who knew nothing of harmony but were well schooled in beauty in all its forms! . . . This fine alliance lasted until the war of [18]70.[57]

For the poets who had no intention of converting literary theory into musical practice, this straightforward translation of poetry into song was an entirely pertinent and meaningful response. Chabrier's *L'invitation au voyage* may well have been an attempt to respond to those endless dialogues of music and poetry in his own medium, to bring the circuitous aesthetic arguments to a point, a physical outcome in the form of notes on a manuscript page. It was also a reminder that the most effective answer to the questions of the inherent musicality of verse can sometimes be, simply, to sing it.

As Chabrier was revising his *L'invitation au voyage* in late June 1870, Henri Duparc was travelling to Munich to attend the première of Wagner's *Die Walküre*.[58] On the evening of 19 July, he arrived at Triebschen (Wagner's residence near Lucerne), one of a band of French pilgrims that also included Saint-Saëns, Villiers, Judith Gautier, and Catulle Mendès. 'Feelings of great embarrassment, though the dear people are friendly', Cosima Wagner noted in her diary. 'We make music.'[59] Earlier that day Napoléon III, outsmarted and vainglorious, had declared war on Prussia.

## Chapter Two

# Song and Memory in the 'Terrible Year'

> Our generation, too, had its hopes! And towards the end of the [Second] Empire, we believed ourselves to be within reach of the great spiritual surge for which we had spent a decade in preparation. Was it the fault of our generation if, at the very moment it took flight, its wings were crushed by the bludgeon-stroke of 1870?[1]
>
> —Louis-Xavier de Ricard

It is hard to overstate the trauma that Parisians lived through in the twelve months that followed the declaration of war in July 1870. These catastrophic events—the Franco-Prussian War, the Siege of Paris, and the Commune—have typically occupied little more than a couple of sentences in most biographies of the composers who lived through them. This is partly because few sources survive to document their movements, experiences, and memories; partly because the *Année terrible* prompted few compositions of lasting significance; and partly because the composers with whom this study is concerned were still so young, with the greater part of their career and output still well ahead of them. Yet the impact of this 'terrible year' cannot have been other than profound: most of them lived through the privations of the Siege; all lost friends and acquaintances; most served in military units; most fled the Commune; and all returned to a city devastated by fire, shelling, and the deeper and more permanent scars of a bloody conflict that had seen some twenty thousand residents killed by their compatriots.

These shared and overlapping experiences became part of the narrative forged by this group of composers, one that helped to define their relationships, their experience, and their sense of history in the years that followed. Decades later, in November 1914, Fauré received a letter from his old friend André Messager: 'Oh! My poor friend, how often this war has led my

thoughts to the subject of the other one, that of '70! Your departure in [the uniform of the] *voltigeurs*! And Clignancourt and the Commune and all the rest! And to think that it was all a bagatelle compared with what we've seen over the past four months!'[2]

In the summer of 1871 the composers who reconvened in Paris were no longer simply companions in an artistic voyage of discovery, but fellow survivors of extreme physical hardship and emotional distress. Intervening early in their acquaintance, the events of 1870–71 seem to have catalysed their friendship and group identity. The bonds forged in the 'terrible year' would be firm, generous, and long-lasting, inflecting composers' musical endeavours and artistic goals in the years that followed. 'The musicians who interest me most are my *camarades*,' Fauré was to write in 1887.[3] His choice of language is telling: although he uses the term *camarades* in its common sense, designating friends of shared experience, its first meaning and derivation (according to the 1873 *Dictionnaire de la langue française*) is companions-in-arms.

The public music-making of the *Année terrible* has been documented in several studies—the patriotic concerts, with their operatic extracts, stirring recitations, and heroic orchestral marches.[4] But what of song? While a handful of nationalistic *mélodies* and 'battle hymns' marked the year's events, for the most part these works were musically unremarkable, *œuvres de circonstance* that were quickly forgotten. (Fauré's last Victor Hugo *mélodie*, *L'absent*, is an exception, a more nuanced and poignant commentary on political—and even literary—circumstance, to which we will return.) As the great musical salons closed their doors and many of their hosts fled the city, the creation of song became, more than ever, a private and reflective art. And it is *mélodie* that emerges again and again as the vessel for composers' memories of the *Année terrible*: Duparc, Saint-Saëns, and Massenet were all to place song, and song performance, at the heart of their later reflections of the Siege, while Chabrier's close friend Charles de Sivry's vivid pen-portrait of the Christmas of 1870 turns around the creation of both song and poetry.

Jürgen Thym has explored the intertwining of song and memory in nineteenth-century German Lieder, tracing a path from Beethoven to Mahler through texts that recount or reflect on past events. He notes that such songs explored 'ingenious ways, through musical means . . . to give expression to the emotions—some soothing and healing, others conflicting and jarring—that memory can inflict on those who remember'.[5] In the songs Thym considers, memory is intrinsic to the musical construction, temporal distance evoked through specific compositional techniques (texture, melody, form,