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Los Angeles

Musical *Dandyisme*: Aestheticism and Orientalism in *fin-de-siècle* France

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Musicology

by

Zarah Sophia Ersoff

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Musical *Dandysme*:

Aestheticism and Orientalism in *fin-de-siècle* France

by

Zarah Sophia Ersoff

Doctor of Philosophy in Musicology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Mitchell Morris, Chair

This dissertation explores some of the ways in which *fin-de-siècle* French composers negotiated the boundaries between masculinity, aestheticism and Orientalism in their music. *Dandysme* – in English, dandyism – refers to the philosophy and practices of the dandy, an individual (usually male) who places particular importance upon physical appearance and mannered elegance, who lives his life with an air of cold indifference, and above all, according to Charles Baudelaire, strives to elevate aesthetics to a living religion. I examine musical *dandysme* as a form of sonic self-fashioning through a close examination of three composers and patrons: Robert de Montesquiou, Reynaldo Hahn, and Maurice Ravel. These men were dandies in multiple senses of the word: they were deeply concerned with fashion, manners and physical appearance, but they also strove to treat their lives as Works of Art, inflected by their aestheticized approach to composition.

While most studies of dandyism have examined it primarily as a literary and social phenomenon, my research illuminates the many ways in which Montesquiou, Hahn and Ravel incorporated the aesthetics of *dandysme* into their musical performance and pedagogy. More specifically, this project uses the historical figure of the French dandy-composer to theorize “posing” as a form of musical imitation. I suggest that the dandy’s aestheticism can be experienced in his music through particular forms of stylization, or poses, present in the artwork itself. Whether a type of ornament or a nostalgic recollection, these poses of musical *dandysme* are present throughout the works of Montesquiou, Hahn and Ravel. These composers used their music to *pose* both as French and as exotic subjects, thus situating themselves in relation to the temporal and geographical present of *fin-de-siècle* France. For example, at Montesquiou’s 1894 party “*Une fête littéraire à Versailles,*” theatrical and musical performance fashioned a pose of nostalgia, restaging the *ancien régime* for contemporary tastes at Montesquiou’s Versailles villa. In compositions like Ravel’s *Shéhérazade* (1903) and Hahn’s *L’Île du rêve* (1898), the exotic poses of musical Orientalism allowed rich alignments and nuanced combinations of notions: of sexuality, gender, *ethnos*, or nation, to name only the most salient. Using these three men as case studies, this project develops a model of musical *dandysme* in order to examine the transition between late Romanticism and early Modernism in *fin-de-siècle* French music, from approximately 1890 to 1912.

The dissertation of Zarah Sophia Ersoff is approved.

Olivia Bloechl

Raymond Knapp

Jann Pasler

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2013

In Memory of Jeff Ersoff

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although completing a dissertation is an often-solitary process, I could not have completed this project without the support of many individuals. This dissertation has its roots in Tamara Levitz's graduate seminar on "Uncanny Modernism," which first sparked my interest in Ravel, biography and posing in 2005. My gratitude goes first and foremost to my advisor, Mitchell Morris, whose generous spirit and intellectual curiosity has continually helped me understand the musical dandy in new and creative ways. He has repeatedly gone above and beyond what is expected of an advisor and mentor, in terms of both academic and personal support. I look forward to joining the Sunday brunch club of his former advisees at AMS.

I also thank each of my committee members, who contributed to this project in novel and meaningful ways. I am grateful to Olivia Bloechl's support in the form of an early independent study on French song in which we studied Debussy's *Fêtes galantes* and Ravel's *Chansons madécasses*. Her attunement to both musical detail and the possibilities of signification in vocal performance has shaped my second and third chapters in particular. To Raymond Knapp, I am grateful for many things, but especially to his discussions about the writing and revision process as an anchor through difficult times. His emails and several meetings in March and April 2013 proved crucial to my completion of the dissertation during a challenging period in my life. I only wish I had had more time to include more musical examples, which I know he would have loved. Finally, I am grateful to Jann Pasler, for being very generous with her feedback on this project, especially as it neared its final form. Her careful reading of several drafts of the manuscript helped point me in the direction of "music as public utility" and also helped me to connect my observations about the dandy to the broader French musical culture at the *fin de siècle*.

My deepest thanks goes to Barbara van Nostrand, whose careful stewardship of departmental finances enabled me to receive a fellowship during Winter 2013, a crucial time for the completion of my Ph.D. Barbara and Robert Fink (Musicology Department Chair from 2010-2013) made a fierce team.

Thanks also to Sam Baltimore, Alexandra Apolloni, Jill Rogers and Lindsey Johnson, for always being ready for mornings of hiking in Runyon Canyon, afternoons of writing at the West Hollywood library, and evenings of playing games at each other's apartments. To Marcus Desmond Harmon and Graham Raulerson, for their close friendship and support, and for showing me that my own completion of the Ph.D. was both imminently and immanently possible. To Yetta Howard, for being a role model academic, in terms of both intellectual creativity and drive, and for reminding me to be fiercely independent and true to myself, even in a difficult job market. Thank you for believing in me.

I am also grateful to Lauren Steely, for being a compassionate, patient partner, about to embark on her own journey into graduate school. Her unconditional love and support has helped me persevere through this process from beginning to end. I only hope I can be as good as source of support for her during graduate school as she has been for me. Thanks to my mother, Caroline Davenport-Ersoff, and my sister, Rachel Ersoff, for their continuing encouragement from afar, commiserating on the phone, and wonderful gifts of massages and gorgeous regalia.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my father, Jeffrey Alan Ersoff, who was my first role model both as an academic and as a music lover. His lifelong commitment to learning, mentoring and advising lives on in both of his daughters.

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INTRODUCTION

Composing the Dandy

This dissertation, “Musical *Dandysme*: Aestheticism and Orientalism in *fin-de-siècle* French Music,” explores some of the ways in which *fin-de-siècle* French composers negotiated the boundaries between masculinity, aestheticism and Orientalism in their music. *Dandysme* – in English, dandyism – refers to the philosophy and practices of The Dandy, an individual (usually male) who places particular importance upon physical appearance and mannered elegance, who lives his life with an air of cold indifference, and who, above all, according to Charles Baudelaire, strives to elevate aesthetics to a living religion. I examine musical *dandysme* as a form of self-fashioning through a close examination of three composers and patrons: Robert de Montesquiou, Reynaldo Hahn, and Maurice Ravel. More specifically, this project uses the historical figure of the French dandy-composer to examine “posing” as a form of musical imitation. Following the dandy’s aestheticist imperative to treat his Life as a Work of Art, I argue these composers used their music to *pose as French*, harnessing their compositions as a tool to articulate their relationship to the French musical establishment.

The dandy first emerged in England in the late eighteenth century as a figure whose high social status was not inherited but rather constructed through the art of self-cultivation. The dandy was an aristocratic “impostor” – an outsider who made his way into higher classes through his impeccable manners, dress and attitude. The most notorious dandies were authors and poets – Lord Byron, Charles Baudelaire, and Oscar Wilde. The dandy is a historical figure who makes his life a work of art, turning graceful living into the highest occupation. But what of the dandy’s art? How does the dandy’s aestheticism translate into the music, writing, and paintings he creates or assembles and curates? In this dissertation, I

argue that the dandy's aestheticism can be experienced in music through certain forms of stylization, or poses, present in the artwork itself. Whether a type of ornament or a nostalgic recollection, these modes of musical *dandyisme* are present throughout the works of Montesquiou, Hahn and Ravel. Furthermore, they are found in other art forms besides music, such as painting, poetry, and even handwriting. In their elegant sprawl across the arts, the dandy's poses evoke the *sprezzatura* of sixteenth-century Italy as well; the fastidious retrospectivity of the conclusion to Pater's *Renaissance* is a resonant English parallel here, especially in its lush paean to the centrality of music in the life aesthetic.

The musical dandy is obsessed with modes of deflection and distancing, whether through musical masks, exotic poses (the subject of my second chapter), or ancient or antique stylization. Locating his musical subjects perpetually in historical or exotic locales, the musical dandy separates his artworks from the bourgeois present.¹ Ironically, the dandy is as much a product of middle-class society as any ordinary shopkeeper. He constructs himself dialectically against it, acquiring the pose of high society without necessarily having the (once) necessary birthright or parentage. The dandy's disdain for ordinary "work" is captured in the epigraph which proceeds Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (1911) "...le plaisir délicieux et toujours nouveau d'une occupation inutile" ("the delightful and always novel pleasure of a useless occupation"). This quotation, taken from Henri de Régnier's 1904 novel *Les Rencontres de Monsieur de Bréot*, affirms the enjoyment of deliberately useless art, evoking Theophile Gautier's maxim of "art for art's sake." According to Gautier, "When something becomes useful, it ceases being beautiful... It is no longer freedom, luxury, the

¹ See Michael Puri's excellent discussion of Vladimir Jankélévitch and the "three alibis" of Ravel's *pudeur* (modesty): naturalism, exoticism, and pastiche. Puri effectively argues that these three alibis fail to distance the composer from the dialectics of Decadence, with its layering of concealments and poses as a standard mode for the decadent dandy. Michael Puri, "Jankélévitch and the Dilemma of Decadence," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65:1 (Spring 2012): 245-250, especially 249-250.

blossoming of the soul in idleness.”² As Jann Pasler has argued, Ravel and de Régnier were responding to a prevalent embrace of the moral utility of the arts by French Republicans after 1870.³ For the French dandy, art was best when it served no means other than the enjoyment of experience. If Art’s purpose was to be found in its own beauty, then what better way to experience its useless beauty than through the empty pleasures of imitation? The dandy is above all a *poseur*, turning the imitation of others into its own art form. In the following section, I examine the concept of posing in detail, beginning with its grammatical constructions in both English and French and continuing with a brief consideration of the possibilities offered by the dandy’s “posing in sound.”

A Typology of Posing

*C'est en imitant qu'il innove, car il n'a aucune prétention à créer ex nihilo.
It is by pretending that he innovates, for he has no pretension to create ex nihilo.*

-Roland-Manuel on Ravel⁴

My reflections on posing commence with a definition, courtesy of Merriam-Webster:

Pose

1. (transitive verb)
 - a. to set forth or offer for attention or consideration
 - b. put or set in place, to place (as a model) in a studied attitude
2. (intransitive verb)
 - a. to assume a posture or attitude usually for artistic purposes
 - b. to affect an attitude or character usually to deceive or impress

² Théophile Gautier, Preface to *Albertus* (1836), in id., *Emaux et camées* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981). As quoted by Jann Pasler in *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009): 64-5.

³ See Jann Pasler, “Use, the Useful, and Public Utility: A Theory of Musical Value” in *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009): 53-93, especially pp. 53-4 and 65.

⁴ Quotation attributed to Alexis Roland-Manuel, from Edward Lockspeiser’s article “Roussel and Ravel,” *Music & Letters* 19:3 (July 1938): 249.

Why do I begin the theoretical core of this chapter – arguably its most important and far-reaching section – with a clichéd rhetorical gesture? In fact, the self-conscious and ironic nature of posing very nearly demands it. This rhetorical gesture is a joke: before I assume the mask of sophisticated theorist, I pose as an amateur, “unmasking” my authority before I even begin.

But the dictionary definition of “posing” is also quite a serious matter. In the following analysis, the word’s first definition – “to set forth or offer for attention or consideration” – shapes my own analysis of its subsequent three meanings: “to put or set in place” (transitive), “to assume a posture or attitude” (intransitive) and “to affect an attitude or character usually to deceive or impress” (also intransitive). I deliberately bracket off discussion of the noun definitions of “pose,” because I am interested in privileging the verb, actions that unfold in time, over nouns, objects which remain static.

However, most often in this project I use the gerund form of pose – “posing” – in order to denote a productive tension between posing’s verbal and noun definitions. By definition, the gerund enables a verb phrase (posing) to serve the function of a noun (pose) while simultaneously retaining some of the word’s active, verbal qualities. The implication is thus that “posing” is both a doing and a being, both an action that unfolds over time and a relatively stable object. My subsequent discussions of musicality and theatricality necessitate an emphasis on connections of posing with performance and performativity. In the specific case of the *fin-de-siècle* dandy, I am interested in how the musical pose unfolds through decadent formulations of time and memory, particularly in relation to the historically contingent constructs of gender, race, and sexuality.

As a verb, “pose” can function both transitively and intransitively, depending on whether the object that the verb takes is a separate object (in which case “pose” is transitive)

or if the object taken by the verb is identical to the subject (in which case “pose” is intransitive). In French, the verb “poser” operates similarly as in English, possessing the same productive tension between transitive and intransitive verbs. Grammarians thus categorize “pose” as an *ambitransitive* verb with an optional object, meaning that the word can function both as both a transitive and intransitive verb. This ambitransitive property seen in both languages opens the verb up to all sorts of delicious theoretical dilemmas. For instance, what about an example in which the distinction between the subject (the Self) and the object (the Other) is not so clear?

To illustrate potential ambiguities of the ambitransitive, let’s return to my three definitions of “pose.” The first, transitive meaning, “to put or set in place, to model,” may be exemplified by the sentence “The photographer *poses* a subject.” A second, intransitive meaning, “to assume a posture or attitude for artistic purposes” may be illustrated by the subtly contrasting sentence: “The subject *poses* for a photograph.” The third and final meaning I consider, “to affect an attitude or character usually to decide or impress,” could be summed up by the sentence “The graduate student *poses* as a viable job candidate.” According to Merriam Webster this third meaning is intransitive; however, I would argue that it’s more complex. In my final example, the graduate student’s internalized impostor syndrome convinces her that she is pretending to be a legitimate candidate on the competitive academic job market. This graduate student believes she is deceiving herself as well as the members of the search committee. In this instance, a successful performance means that the graduate student must “fake it until she makes it” – i.e. “pose” as a viable job candidate until she actually has the skills necessary to become the real thing – a “real job candidate.” Was she faking it all along? When does she become a real professor? The lack of delineation between those two states, as well as the fact that any determination of the job

candidate's "realness" or "fakery" is subjective, means that the boundary between the last two definitions of posing is murky. Is she a "real" candidate or a "fake" one? The ambiguities of posing allow it to signify both of its intransitive meanings.

In *Faking It*, Ian Miller provides a similar example: a young female student who accepts a position as at a law firm after passing the bar. In the eyes of the state she is a lawyer, but without experience, she feels like a faker, questioning her every decision and move with clients. However, after working for the law firm for six years, she "feels" like a lawyer. Experience enables her to become what she was pretending to be all along.⁵ Miller describes this process as the merging of the public persona with the private self; I call it a paradox of performing social roles: one must fake it in order to become real. This is similar to the process through which children learn from adults, by mirroring their behavior.

Here's another way posing functions ambiguously. Consider the case of a photographer looking at himself in the mirror, arranging his body for a self-portrait. In this example, does the pose function transitively or intransitively? Does the photographer pose himself or does he pose his body as a separate object? Is his body identical to himself? In fact, the distinction between the body as Self and the body as Other is not at all clear, as Craig Owens points out. What if the Self is being deliberately molded and arranged like a still life, as in the case of the photographer arranging himself in the mirror? Can a body's exterior surface become separated from its originary subject? Owens reminds us that posing belongs to a special category of verb called the "middle voice or diathesis (literally dis+poistion)" which "indicates the *interiority of the subject* to the action of which is it is also the agent."⁶ Thus,

⁵ William Ian Miller, *Faking It* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2003): 118-120.

⁶ Craig Owens, "Posing" in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1992): 214.

posing muddles the distinction between the body as Self and the body as not-Self and just as in the prior example, posing signifies doubly: both transitively and intransitively at once.

Posing in Sound

*All Art is at once Surface and Symbol.
Those who go beneath the Surface do so at their peril.
Those who read the Symbol do so at their peril.⁷*

In this project, I investigate posing as a form of musical imitation, using the *fin-de-siècle* dandy-composer as a case study. The musical pose, or the art of sounding like another, acts as a hinge through which the performance of one musical idea renders audible a second, partially concealed idea (which may exist either within or outside the piece). However, this second, “veiled” idea – the *secret* – does not reveal any stable truths about the piece’s musical subject. Rather, the act of musical posing destabilizes the concept of a stable, core musical identity in and of itself, by creating a dialectical relationship between the piece’s musical surface and its underlying secret. In the act of posing, the musical subject is asserted indirectly through strategies of distancing and deflection, through the use of historical and exotic tropes. I identify two primary modes of posing in music, the nostalgic and exotic, as deliberate efforts to make the music not of the present time and place.

Following the dandy’s aestheticist imperative to treat his Life as a Work of Art, I argue these composers used their music to *pose as French*, harnessing their compositions as a tool to articulate their relationship to the French musical establishment. As outsiders (Montesquiou was a monarchist, Hahn was born in Venezuela and did not become a French citizen until 1911, and all three men were sexual minorities), dandy-composers reacted against the popular belief in music as public utility held by French republicans of the Third

⁷ Oscar Wilde, *The Preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1998): xxiv.

Republic. French republicans “understood music – an art, a form of sensibility, a kind of knowledge, and a practice – as able to contribute to the *mise en forme* and the *mise en scène* of the new society.”⁸ According to Jann Pasler, republican political leaders saw music as contributing to the success of the Third Republic in four principle ways: by disciplining private desires and internalizing public virtues, by connecting diverse classes and peoples despite heterogeneity, by helping people “negotiate conflict and imagine new identities,” and by “encourag[ing] consensus amid uncertainty.”⁹

In contrast, the dandy’s style of musical composition espouses a deliberately useless art, as an extension of Theophile Gautier’s “l’art pour l’art.” The musical dandy’s elitism does not generally accord well with republicans’ belief in the social utility of music, its ability to bring classes closer together and solve the “social problem” of class divisions. If, as Pasler asserts, music “became part of French political consciousness” and if “[t]he concept of utility thus allows us to get at a mechanism that permits music to connote,” then the deliberate uselessness of the dandy’s music was itself a political statement.¹⁰

In formulating the issues central to posing in music, I have drawn upon the hermeneutic concept of question-spaces.¹¹ As Jann Pasler eloquently states, “[q]uestion-spaces open up a range of issues embedded in and around music that take us beyond the sounds and people who made them to the ways they were understood and the uses they

⁸ Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 83.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 84-92.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹¹ For an introduction to the concept of question-spaces, see Jann Pasler, “Boretzian Discourse and History,” *Perspectives of New Music* 2 (2005): 177-191, as well as Pasler’s *Writing Through Music: Essays on Music, Culture, and Politics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2008): 8-14.

served.”¹² The question spaces posed by a particular intellectual project are often more productive than the specific answers in and of themselves. The key is to choose questions that are answerable or at least able to be explored through appropriate methodologies. There are three key question spaces guiding this study: first, that which surrounds the complex dialectics of performance and identity; second, that found in the nodes of discourse and practice that historically constitute specific representations of difference, especially as they frame understandings of France's Others; and third, the spaces that define the assumptions and goals that guide technical musical analysis and its connection to broader fields of significance.

The question space of performance and identity in this study relates specifically to the concept of posing in music. I ask how where and when does posing occur, both within a piece and outside of it? And who decides where the borders of a piece end and begin?

The second question space, organized around the representation of France's Others, ponders the relationship between musical discourses of d/Decadence and musical discourses of Orientalism and exoticism.¹³ To what extent are musical Decadence and musical Orientalism distinct and discrete phenomena? How might the various representations of difference in music relate? Do they intersect, overlap, merge, or connect in some more elusive way? How can exotic stereotypes, usually criticized as distorted, coercive, reductive, and false, nevertheless also function positively, to the benefit of those under pressure?

Finally, we come to the third, and possibly most important, question space of this entire study: the vexed (and vexing) relation between musical analysis and wider frames of

¹² Pasler, *Writing Through Music*, 8.

¹³ Following Michael Puri in *Ravel the Decadent*, I capitalize Decadence and Decadent when referring to the specific historical movement of the 1880s and use the lowercase “d” when describing the broader concept of decadence, which refers to the “process of falling away or declining; decay; impaired or deteriorated condition.” Definition from the OED online.

meaning. This study looks at musical ornaments, particularly the arabesque, as both historically and aesthetically contingent. German idealists such as Emmanuel Kant viewed the ornament as a marker of abstract beauty, signifying nothing outside of itself. Curiously, Eduard Hanslick organized his famous assertion that the “content of music is tonally moving forms” around the central metaphor of the arabesque in visual art.¹⁴ Hanslick’s definition is a major turning point in the history of musical aesthetics, as Hanslick is the first critic to write that the content of music is nothing but sound itself. Ironically, however, he retreats to a visual metaphor in order to define a music that supposedly represents nothing outside of itself. The arabesque thus becomes a crutch, its lack of signification a handy metaphor for the critic’s need to find a non-representational art form. More generally, my analysis demonstrates the extent to which the very possibility of a *musical* arabesque is itself grounded in nineteenth-century history and culture.¹⁵ I use an enquiry into the notion of the arabesque to link this work to a broader conversation in the fields of musicology and music theory about the role of society and culture in musical analysis and aesthetic formalism.¹⁶

French Decadents of the *fin de siècle* largely defined themselves in opposition to the prevailing politics of mainstream Republican France. Decadence was in many ways a reaction against the Industrial Revolution.¹⁷ Decadent authors often claimed that in the blur

¹⁴ Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1986): 29. Translated by Geoffrey Payzant. See my first chapter for a more in-depth analysis of this passage and the role of the arabesque in nineteenth-century visual arts and culture.

¹⁵ In so doing, I draw upon Gurmindar Bhogal’s excellent work on ornament in French music, particularly her dissertation *Arabesque and Metric Dissonance in the Music of Maurice Ravel (1905-1914)*, and I eagerly anticipate her first book, *Details of Consequence: Ornament, Music, and Art in Paris, 1890-1925*, forthcoming from Oxford UP.

¹⁶ See, for example, Martin Scherzinger’s article “The Return of the Aesthetic: Musical Formalism and Its Place in Political Critique” in *Beyond Structural Listening?: Postmodern Modes of Hearing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004): 252-278. Edited by Andrew Dell’Antonio.

¹⁷ For further background on the relationship between Decadence and Industrialization, see Richard Gilman, *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979): 73-84. For more on the

of mass production, space for individuality was lost. In some cases, the notion of decadence also framed and supported a general stance by the weakening aristocracy against the newly powerful *nouveau riche*, who were enjoying unprecedented political influence in the Third Republic. Politically, Decadents tended towards either the extreme left or right, being either royalists (for the reinstatement of the French king) or anarchists (for the dissolution of Parliament altogether). Many Decadents shifted suddenly from one political extreme to the other, even over a course of a few years. They aligned themselves almost unilaterally against the dominant political party of France in the late 1870s and 1880s, the Republicans. It is no accident that many first editions of Decadent novels were decorated with the *fleur-de-lis* (from the white flag of the antedated French monarchy), as opposed to the Republican tricolor flag, adopted in 1877.¹⁸

The Decadent dandy's relationship to sincerity and honesty was at best troubled. Charles Baudelaire, whose 1863 *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne* formed the basis for models of Decadent dandyism, had his own troubled relationship with French Republicanism. Like many dandies, Baudelaire tended to alternate between the radical Left and conservatism. This tendency is a hallmark of Baudelaire's elitism. Instead of valuing fraternity and equality, Baudelaire was an elitist who believed in the value of a select few (male) individuals. We see similarities in Baudelaire's idea of the dandy as ideal man in Sâr Josephin Peladan and his Rosicrucian cult. Baudelaire's youthful passions for the Revolutions of 1848 were eventually replaced by aloofness and distance under the reign of Napoleon III. Baudelaire's refusal to engage – his active disengagement – was itself a self-conscious political act:

history of the Decadent movement in France, see Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1987): 151-224.

¹⁸ See Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1996) for more background on the flag's adoption by the Decadents.

As for me, when I agree to be a republican, I do evil knowingly. Yes! Hurrah for the Revolution! Always! In spite of all! But me, I am no dupe, I have never been a dupe. I cry *Hurrah for the Republic* the way I would cry: *Hurrah for Destruction! Hurrah for Expiation! Hurrah for Punishment! Hurrah for Death!*¹⁹

While Baudelaire would delightedly play the victim, he would also willingly play the torturer, “in order to feel the Revolution in both manners.” The republican spirit, he concluded, was a “kind of infection, flowing in modern veins like smallpox or syphilis.”

The Decadent desire to live “against the grain” of urban life found fruition in many strange and eccentric works of fiction. In *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne*, Baudelaire praises the work of artist Constantine Guys for its “barbarousness”: “What I mean [by “barbarousness”] is an inevitable, synthetic, childlike barbarousness, which is often still to be discerned in a perfected art, such as that of Mexico, Egypt or Nineveh, and which comes from a need to see things broadly and to consider them above all in their total effect.”²⁰ By equating “barbarousness” with “childlikeness,” Baudelaire both idealizes and simplifies the “perfected art” of the Orient. Furthermore, by hailing “barbarousness” and childlike *naïveté* as aesthetic virtues, Baudelaire places value on simplified, systematic and fully knowable forms of artistic creation, something that links his Decadent aesthetics with Orientalism. If Oriental art is virtuous because it is fully knowable, does this not echo the Orientalists’ desire for a “fully knowable” Orient?

Following in Baudelaire’s stead is novelist Joris-Karl Huysmans. His 1884 *À rebours* (translated variously as *Against Nature* or *Against the Grain*) offers its readers a fictional escape from the ills plaguing modern society, such as mass production, over-consumption and restrictive social conformity. The novel’s Decadent hero, Des Esseintes, the last remaining

¹⁹ Charles Baudelaire, as quoted by Jerrold Seigel in *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986): 107.

²⁰ Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, translated and edited by Jonathan Mayne (London and New York: Phaidon Publishers, 1965), 15.

descendant of an inbred aristocratic family, has squandered most of his family's fortune and decides to retire to the French countryside far away from modern Paris. Objects of Orientalist fantasy are what most captivate Des Esseintes in his library of possessions. He drinks tea from tiny cups of Chinese porcelain, reads Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* and Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Les Diaboliques*, and gazes for days on end at Gustave Moreau's two paintings of *Salomé*. Perhaps most tellingly, he is captivated and delighted by his large tortoise, which he does not view as a pet but instead as an ornament purchased as decoration for his "shimmering Oriental carpet."²¹ He has the tortoise studded with an immense number of exotic jewels, and when the tortoise dies, unable to bear the weight of the dazzling splendor upon it, its shell becomes a perfect ciborium. The tortoise symbolizes Des Esseintes' own existence: in separating himself from modern society as well as the natural world, he is slowly burying himself in a beautiful crypt.

As the fictitious Des Esseintes illustrates, some of France's most infamous consumers – and producers – of Orientalism were aristocratic Decadents, who catalogued and created enormous private libraries of Oriental possessions. Yet Orientalism is not a simple unidirectional system, in which the Western consumer collects Orientalist objects. Edward Said, Orientalism's most influential theorist, describes how Orientalism "comes to exert a three-way force, on the Orient, on the Orientalist, and on the Western 'consumer' of Orientalism."²² More generally, Orientalism may be defined as an intellectual system designed to organize and control information about racial "Others." During the early modern period, Islamic forces were both the nearest and the most threatening foreign

²¹ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, (London and New York: Penguin, 2003): 35. Translated by Robert Baldick.

²² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979): 67.

presence that Europe encountered. The Oriental system of knowledge resulted from the West's need to contain this menacing, unfamiliar Other. One extreme example of Orientalist cataloguing was Barthélemy d'Herbelot's seventeenth-century *Bibliothèque orientale*, a text that sought to contain all possible information about the Orient.²³ The Orientalists' intense, library-like cataloguing of all the knowledge of the East has as its implicit goal to make the East fully knowable through the discourses of the West. Thus, the West transforms the East into the fully knowable "Orient."

Distinguishing between Orientalism and the related but more general concept of exoticism presents an important challenge. While originally the Orient referred only to the "Near East" – North Africa, the Middle East, and Turkey – the term "Orientalism" has been used to apply to Western representation of any non-European country which came under Western colonial rule. While Orientalism is a system of representation and codes and a means of cataloguing and studying the Other, exoticism tends to be both less systematic and less focused on power. In contrast to musical Orientalism, Ralph Locke identifies musical "exoticism" as a more general concept of music that is "coming from or referring to a place other than here."²⁴ The term "exotique" is found more often than "Orientale" in late nineteenth-century French writing, although both words were in wide circulation. The difference between them is one more of connotation than absolute distinction. In music, theater, and opera, the "exotique" often served the dual functions of escapism and insulation from reality.²⁵ While Orientalism relies on the anxious repetition of colonialist stereotypes, musical exoticism often provided justification for Western musical innovation and

²³ Ibid, 65.

²⁴ Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2009): 1.

²⁵ Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 425-36.

experimentation in timbre, scale, texture, ornament, and rhythm. However, the distinction between the two terms is neither fixed nor absolute. Hahn himself describes an “ancient song” found at the Turkish archaeological site of Smyrna as “Oriental,” thus conflating geographic and temporal distance and describing as “Oriental” something I would call “exotic.”²⁶

In this dissertation, I use “Oriental”/“Orientalist” when referring to specific stereotypes of non-Western Others, and “exotic”/“exoticist” when referring to a more generalized desire for escapism and separation from the present time and place. Thus, my references to musical distance and distancing are related to the concept of exoticism. However, aspects of both exoticism and Orientalism may be found in the same piece. For example, in my second chapter, on Hahn’s opera *L’île du rêve* (*The isle of dreams*), I describe Hahn’s opera as exoticist, because it is set in Tahiti and represented as a languorous, escapist fantasy, typical of what Locke calls the “exotic style” paradigm.²⁷ In contrast, I identify gestures of both submerged exoticism (via the arabesque) and overt Orientalism (augmented melodic seconds) in Ravel’s song cycle *Shéhérazade* (1903).²⁸

The related concepts of ornament and pose are brought into view in exoticist works such as Gustav Moreau’s painting *Salomé Dancing Before King Herod* (1876). (See below.) This immense painting, which took Moreau seven years to complete, is marked by prototypical elements of the Decadence: highly detailed minutiae (such as the details on Salomé’s dress) are juxtaposed with Salomé’s highly unnatural gestures. There is no way she could actually rest on top of her toes weightlessly, as she appears to in the painting. Furthermore, although

²⁶ Reynaldo Hahn, *On Singers and Singing: Lectures and an Essay* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1990): 35. English translation by Leopold Simoneau. Originally published in French by Editions Gallimard in 1957 as *Du Chant*.

²⁷ Locke, 48.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 214-21.

the painting supposedly depicts the eroticism of Salome's dance, the image is marked by a sense of stasis, overwhelmed by small ornaments which stifle any residual motion in the image. More broadly, Moreau's tendency to privilege detail over the whole is a hallmark of the Decadent style.



Figure 1.1: Gustav Moreau's *Salomé* (1876)

Moreau's *Salomé* also appears in Huysmans' *À rebours*, as it is revealed to be one of Des Esseintes' most beloved paintings. In a lengthy, multi-page description, Huysmans characterizes Moreau's *Salomé* as

the symbolic incarnation of world-old Vice, the goddess of immortal Hysteria, the Curse of Beauty supreme above all other beauties by the cataleptic spasm that stirs her flesh and steels her muscles — a monstrous Beast of the Apocalypse, indifferent, irresponsible, insensible, poisoning.²⁹

Moreau's *Salomé* would become the *femme fatale* prototype for Wilde's 1894 play (performed by Sarah Bernhardt) and, later, Richard Strauss's 1905 opera. Indifference and cruelty

²⁹ Huysmans, 46.

characterize her dangerous eroticism. Located in both the past and in the Judea of King Herod, Salome is a doubly exotic character.

Chapter Summaries

Each of the three subsequent chapters of my dissertation explores the relationship between a musical aesthete and his stylized musical and literary compositions. My first chapter, “Montesquiou’s Arabesque and the Pose of Aristocracy in “*Une fête littéraire à Versailles*,” is a close reading of an elaborate social and musical performance orchestrated by aristocrat and poet Robert de Montesquiou at his private villa in Versailles in 1894. This chapter introduces the concept of nostalgic posing as mode of modernist performance, through the revival of an archaic, eighteenth-century genre – the *fête galante* – and a related form of ornamentation, the arabesque. I locate the *fête galante* and the arabesque in Montesquiou’s party and in two related musical compositions of the early 1890s, a *melodie* by Hahn and a monodrama composed collaboratively by Hahn and Proust. Ultimately, I suggest that the arabesque’s emphasis on form over content provided a way for *fin-de-siècle* aristocrats to express melancholic desires for a monarchical past during the *ralliement*, a period when bourgeois Republicans were politically dominant.

My second chapter, “Exotic Poses in Hahn’s *L’Île du rêve*,” demonstrates how Hahn’s first opera engaged in the practice of “exotic posing” – heavily stylized theatrical performances of exotic difference which, I argue, held particular appeal for Hahn and other homosexual dandies involved in this 1898 production. While Satie created music which mocked major institutions such as the Paris Opéra, Hahn operated more conservatively during the same period, using his music as a more subtle means of establishing artistic legitimacy. For Hahn, posing emerges as both a technique of musical composition and a

means of social incorporation and assimilation. For example, in Hahn's 1898 opera *L'Île du rêve* (*The Isle of Dreams*), I draw parallels between Decadent art and literature and the opera's narrative stasis and musical structure that privileges ornament and detail at the expense of the whole. I illustrate how Hahn's music itself enabled *poses étranges* ("strange" or "exotic" poses, to quote Baudelaire) to flourish on the stages of the Opéra-Comique through the use of nasal timbre qualities and the bifurcation of gendered vocal parts. Through a focus on colonialist Tahitian imitation, Hahn's opera renders visible his own sexual and ethnic difference through the musical performance of Tahitian racial difference.

Exotic posing continues to be an important theme in my third and final chapter, "Succumbing to the Orient": Homoerotic Orientalism and the Arabesque in Ravel's *Shéhérazade*, in which I consider the homoeroticism implicit in both Ravel's 1903 song cycle and other French translations and reinterpretations of *1001 Arabian Nights* popular at the *fin de siècle*. Ravel's song cycle manifests discourses of the stereotyped Arabian sexuality through musical techniques of the arabesque, quotation and allusion. I argue that in "consuming" *Shéhérazade*'s Orientalist gestures, some of Ravel's listeners undoubtedly used this music to listen to their own differences, allowing these aural and performative spaces to refashion their sense of self in relation to an exotic Other. These intimacies – sexual and musical, real and imaginary - between the East and West complicate their power relations. Therefore, exotic posing may be understood as a technique of *fin-de-siècle* musical performance, functioning both as a strategy of distancing and deflection – a means of separating the musical self from the present time and place – and as an intimate expression of sexual and emotional desires which might not have otherwise been given voice.

The dissertation concludes with a brief epilogue, "Camping the Dandy," in which I discuss, using an analysis of two pieces on dandiacal subjects by Erik Satie and Hahn, how

the early twentieth-century musical dandy functioned as a proto-camp figure. “Camp,” a twentieth-century queer means of creating and interpreting one’s world, likely derives its meaning from the French concept of “se camper” – or posing in an ostentatious fashion. Camp derives its pleasures from the “irreducible disconnect between how a thing appears and what it is *supposed* to mean” – the distance between a thing’s surface and its interior – or at least the interior which it is supposed to possess.³⁰ In this conclusion, I illustrate how the *fin-de-siècle* dandy’s musical poses anticipate this aspect of camp aesthetics, by functioning as a means of achieving intimacy through distance.

³⁰ Michael Trask, *Camp Sites: Sex, Politics, and Academic Style in Postwar America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2013): 7.

7. Italics mine.

CHAPTER ONE

Montesquiou's Arabesque and the Pose of Aristocracy

in "*Une fête littéraire à Versailles*"



Figure 2.1: Antoine Watteau's *Mezzetin* (1718-20)

A lone musician sings and accompanies himself on the mandolin. His only audience is a female statue, her stony back turned to his song. Her rigid pose contrasts with the soft greenery that surrounds her and the lush, pink drapery of the musician's cap and cloak. The affective distance between the performer and his stony audience marks the scene with a sense of melancholy typical of Antoine Watteau's *fête galante* style. Does the Mezzetin's song resound differently because only a statue is listening to him? How might have Watteau's *Mezzetin* resounded differently during the era of the Decadent dandy, the era of author Marcel Proust, musician Reynaldo Hahn, and poet and patron Robert de Montesquiou?³¹

This chapter examines the revival of the eighteenth-century *fête galante* in the era of the Decadent dandy through two discrete musical performances: the first is “*Une fête littéraire à Versailles*,” an elaborate party held by aristocrat and poet Robert de Montesquiou-Fézensac at his Pavilion des Muses on May 22nd, 1894; the second is “Antoine Watteau,” a collaborative piece which Proust and Hahn composed together about a month after Montesquiou's party. These two performances are linked not just through the historical figures involved – Proust serves as author for both, and Montesquiou and Hahn play important roles in the creation of both– but also through their melancholic evocation of desire for the days before the French Revolution. Both Montesquiou's party and “Antoine Watteau” function as *fin-de-siècle* restaging of the *fête galante*, marked by the presence of the arabesque and nostalgia for the *ancien régime*.

More broadly, this chapter explores the relationships forged between Montesquiou, Proust and Hahn during the middle 1890s. These three men were self-professed dandies whose lives became intertwined in 1890s Paris. Proust and Hahn were lovers for three years

³¹ For a reading of the political subversiveness of Watteau's *fête galantes* during the eighteenth century, see Georgia Cowart's *The Triumph of Pleasure: Louis XIV and the Politics of Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

in the mid-1890s, expressing their love through artistic collaboration such as *Portraits des peintres* (1894-6), and assisting each other with producing their first novels and operas. As a wealthy, older patron, Montesquiou introduced both Hahn and Proust to many important society figures and offered his parties as venues for the display of their early compositions. My project considers the relationships forged between these men during this period both socially and through their artistic and musical collaborations.

Each of these men enacted strategies of posing to maintain a delicate balance between concealing and revealing their private identities. Posing, whether on stage or in everyday life, enabled these men to treat their lives as a kind of continuous theatrical display – echoing the Wildean proposition that Life should imitate Art, and not the other way around. Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fézensac (1855-1921) was born into the House of Montesquiou, one of the oldest aristocratic families in Europe. A notorious dandy, the Count was famous for the elaborate parties and performances he held at his various homes in the 1880s, 1890s and 1900s. He was as well-known as a patron of the arts as much as a poet and author in his own right. His ostentatious clothing and affectations became immortalized in a number of literary texts, becoming the basis for characters as memorable as Des Esseintes in Joris-Karl Huysmans' *À rebours* (mentioned in my introduction) and the flamboyant Baron Charlus in *À la recherche du temps perdu*.

In the era of the “dance craze” of the 1880s, when costume parties were already popular, Montesquiou became famous for throwing elaborate parties in which he and his guests were required to dress as Renaissance courtiers, Japanese geishas and samurai, or Muslim Turks inside a harem.³² In the 1890s, he transformed the lawn of his Versailles villa into a kind of fantasy performance space. He enlisted famed actresses Sarah Bernhardt and

³² For more background on the eighteenth-century dance craze of the 1880s, see Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 501-507.

Julia Bartet, pianist and composer Leon Delafosse and others to perform music, read poetry (including Montesquiou's, of course!), and seduce their audience into imagining themselves eighteenth-century aristocrats and royalty in this Watteau-esque setting. On these occasions, Montesquiou even insisted that his guests call him the "Sun King." Such posing was not only entertaining, but it also enabled Montesquiou to become anyone or anything that he imagined, at least for the duration of the party.

Proust also contributed to these occasions of great posing, but in a decidedly literary manner. As a young author, he first established himself by writing short articles and reviews for Parisian newspapers such as *Le Gaulois* and *La Presse*. In announcing and later reviewing events such as Montesquiou's private parties, Proust enabled a broader Parisian public to engage in fantasies of their own. These early writings also served as a means of currying favor from more well-established friends and acquaintances. For example, his article "*Une fête littéraire à Versailles*" contains numerous, flattering references to the performances of Delafosse, Bernhardt, and Montesquiou himself. In positioning himself as publicist for the Count and his friends, Proust secured a place for himself in a major literary and artistic circle.

In the same month (May 1894) that Montesquiou threw his "*fête littéraire*" and Proust publicized it, Proust also had occasion to meet the young composer Reynaldo Hahn, who would prove a great influence upon him. At the party of society hostess Madeleine Lemaire, Hahn entertained guests by singing Montesquiou's poetry, set to music by Delafosse. Hahn's elegant tenor voice and dark complexion enchanted Proust, who soon learned that they also shared half Jewish/Catholic ancestry and a mutual love of the music of Gabriel Faure, the novels of Pierre Loti, and the poetry of Paul Verlaine.



Figure 2.2: Jacques-Émile Blanche's 1891 portrait of Proust. This painting, along with his first publication *Pleasures and Days*, cemented his early reputation as being “délicat et fin” – an aesthete not to be taken seriously as a creative artist.



Figure 2.3: Painting of Reynaldo Hahn by Lucie Lambert (1907)

Proust once said “everything I have ever done is thanks to Reynaldo,” and indeed, the tender relationship forged between these two men was notable for the great sense of artistic exchange and generosity which characterized it. They spent the first few years of their relationship collaborating on artistic projects such as the monodrama *Les portraits des peintres* (in which a speaker is accompanied by piano), which formed a portion of Proust’s first novel *Plaisirs et Jours (Pleasures and Days)* from 1896. The title character from *Jean Santeuil*, another early novel by Proust, is modeled on Hahn. Perhaps their collaboration worked so well because they both respected and enjoyed the other’s artistic medium: Proust’s literature is filled with remembrances and echoes of music, such as “la petite phrase” of the Vinteuil violin sonata (believed to derive from the Saint-Säens violin sonata), and the musicality of his prose flows and crests not unlike the sway of a violin. In a complementary manner, Hahn believed that in songs, the melody should never distract too profoundly from the words. This belief is part of a long tradition in French art song, and is typified by the *mélodies* of Gabriel Fauré, with whom Hahn studied at the Conservatoire. In a 1913 lecture on singing, Hahn said that “The genuine beauty of singing consists in a perfect unison, an amalgam, a mysterious alloy of the singing and the speaking voice, or to put it better, the melody and the spoken word.”³³ In other words, the speaking and singing voice should blend and sound as one – an uncanny unity that transcends the divisions between speech and song, prose and melody. Through more than three decades of friendship, correspondence, and artistic collaboration, Proust and Hahn achieved great artistic and emotional intimacy by emphasizing the overlaps and resonances of meaning between their ostensibly separate fields of literature and music.

³³ Reynaldo Hahn, *On Singers and Singing: Lectures and an Essay* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1990): 27. English translation by Leopold Simoneau. Originally published in French by Editions Gallimard in 1957 as *Du Chant*.

In such works we encounter the phenomenon of nostalgic posing – the melancholic, re-performance of the past – as a technique which the Decadent dandy-composer used, both in music and everyday life, to escape from the 1890s Republican present. One supreme example of nostalgic posing is Montesquiou’s “*fête littéraire*.” Reassembling the party’s cast of characters – consisting principally of Proust, Montesquiou, Bernhardt and Delafosse – and considering what the party might have meant to these individuals in the context of *art nouveau* and the *ralliement*, I interpret “*Une fête littéraire à Versailles*” as a Decadent *fête galante*, an aristocratic eighteenth-century pastoral party which is mediated through the trauma of the French Revolution. I continue with a close examination of other Decadent performances of the *fête galante*, exemplified by Verlaine’s poetic cycle and its musical settings by Faure, Debussy and Hahn. Worth special attention is the melancholic relationship between Hahn’s setting of “Mandoline,” (1892) from Verlaine’s *Fêtes galantes*, and “Watteau” from Hahn and Proust’s *Portraits de Peintres* (1894-6).

The Event

On May 31st, 1894, Marcel Proust, then an unknown writer, published a description of a spectacular party in the Parisian daily newspaper *Le Gaulois*.³⁴ Proust characterized the event as “*Une fête littéraire à Versailles*” (“A Literary Feast at Versailles”), as it inaugurated the Pavillon Montesquiou, the new Versailles villa of Count Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac. Proust proudly asserted that “all of Paris” was in attendance, and indeed, nearly half of his article is taken up by mentions of the party’s 300+ influential guests and their elaborate costumes. This occasion was a feast for the ears as much as the eyes, filled with musical

³⁴ Marcel Proust, “*Une fête littéraire à Versailles*.” *Le Gaulois*, May 31 1894. Translation by Chris Taylor. <<http://www.yorktaylor.free-online.co.uk/fete.htm>> Accessed May 6 2012.

performances by the Count's friends and recitations by the actresses Sarah Bernhardt, Jeanne Bartet and Suzanne Reichenberg. Notably, young pianist and composer Léon Delafosse was also featured prominently on the program, playing not only a “Liszt rhapsody” and a “Bach gavotte,” but also some “little compositions” based on poetry by Montesquiou.



Figure 2.4. Le Pavillon Montesquiou at Versailles
La Revue illustrée (August 1st, 1894)



Figure 2.5. Montesquiou Posing at His Pavillon, c. 1894
Reproduced by Philip Thiébaud, *Robert de Montesquiou ou l'art de paraître*, RMN, 1999, p. 66.

Proust had also announced Montesquiou's party in advance on May 13th in *La Patrie*. The notice had been published quickly in the "Bloc Notes Parisien" (Parisian Notebook) section of *Le Gaulois*, but unfortunately Proust was horrified by some of the errors it contained.³⁵ Yet Proust's narrative still retains a great detail of important information about the party, as much through its style as its content. His language unfolds in arabesques, lengthy passages which describe Montesquiou as the "Sun King" and captures the nostalgic affect of the party. Proust also published society notices in *La Patrie*, *La Presse* and *Le Figaro*, retaining the important function as Narrator of the event.

Proust frames the event as ephemeral, temporary, a *dream* – the party guests are *dreaming of Versailles* but must return to Paris once the celebration is over. He describes the setting as a temporary stage set up just outside the Versailles Theatre. It was deliberately designed as a replica of a stage built in 1770 on the occasion of the marriage of the future King Louis XVI to Marie-Antoinette. Montesquiou's taste for the *ancien regime* was anticipated by the "dance craze" of the 1880s, in which aristocratic parties featured a revival of dances and costumes from the era of Louis XIV.³⁶ Furthermore the stage is ephemeral, just like King Montesquiou's reign for the evening. In order to please Montesquiou with his description, Proust is careful to mention certain guests – such as poet Henri de Régnier and author Maurice Barrès – and not mention others – such as Gabriel d'Yturri, Montesquiou's faithful companion and lifelong lover, who was later buried next to the Count in Versailles.

The evening's performances commence with a "discreet little bell." An orchestra is hidden behind the stage. Poems recited include Verlaine's *Mandoline*, Montesquiou's own *Mennet*, as well as François Coppée's *Mennet*. There are also several piano pieces by Bach, a

³⁵ William C. Carter, *Marvel Proust: A Life* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2000): 168-70.

³⁶ See, for example, d'Indy's *Suite dans le style ancien* (1886). Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 501-7.

Rubinstein barcarolle, fantasias by Chopin and Liszt. All of these pieces are given great attention in the article because they were performed by Leon Delafosse, a young pianist whose career Montesquiou had recently begun to promote. Proust had wisely introduced Delafosse to Montesquiou just a few months earlier, at a party hosted by Madeleine Lemaire. Embedded within Proust's description are the important social functions each person involved performs. While Montesquiou acts as an arbiter of social management, his friend Sarah Bernhardt modeled the role of acting and reading. Delafosse performed the role of musician, while Proust himself acts as Narrator. Even the setting takes on a performative quality. Proust is careful to note that the party's decorations, plants, dresses, and architecture all have a subtle, refined quality, featuring the organic delicacy of the arabesque so popular during the era of art nouveau. The arabesque propagates all over Proust's narration, as his descriptive sentences don't merely begin and end, but extend themselves organically, moving from one guest to another with capricious elegance. He begins the article in the following imaginative fashion:

The gilded ironwork railings are opened onto the large Avenue de Paris which leads directly to the Versailles theatre. Supported by the extremity of part of the railings, a stylish tent has been erected; a large red carpet is spread out over the sand, before the entrance; flowers and roses are scattered over the path. On the threshold, pleasant, smiling and kindly, the Lord of this tranquil abode receives the friends he has invited. An orchestra concealed within a grove murmurs sweet music.³⁷

Proust also uses the arabesque later on in the article to describe the guests in attendance. Of course, Montesquiou is the first person mentioned in the article, indirectly named as "the Lord of this tranquil abode." The guest list begins with an elegant description of the outfit worn by Montesquiou's cousin, the Countess Greffulhe. Proust then continues to go over the guest list, using almost 500 words in a single sentence!

³⁷ Proust, "Une fête littéraire à Versailles." Translated by Chris Taylor. First published in *Le Gaulois* on May 31, 1894. <<http://www.yorktaylor.free-online.co.uk/fete.htm>>

Mme la comtesse Greffulhe, delightfully dressed: her dress is made of pink lilac silk, trimmed with orchids, and covered with silk muslin of the same shade, her hat adorned with orchids and overlaid with lilac-coloured gauze; Mlle Geneviève de Caraman Chimay, comtesse de Fitz-James, black and white poplin, blue parasol, encrusted with turquoises, Louis XV jabot; comtesse de Pourtalès, pearl-grey taffeta, sprinkled with dark flowers, pale cuffs, her hat topped with a yellow aigrette, the duc de Luynes, comtesse Aimery de La Rochefoucauld, heliotrope crêpe de Chine with black ruche, heliotrope hat; marquise de Hervey de Saint-Denis, white crêpe, straw hat with white rice and white feathers, alpaca cape with grey embroidery; comtesse Pierre de Brissac, in a dress with white and yellow stripes, black hat with roses...³⁸

Proust clearly takes great pleasure in ornamenting the details of the outfits worn by Montesquiou's guests, giving more attention to those guests who deserved it – at least in the opinion of his master Montesquiou. More interesting to me, however, are the ways in which the form of Proust's sentences – their organic, unfurling quality – actually mimics the shape of the arabesque which decorates Montesquiou's rococo villa. In using the arabesque to ornament both his description as well as the stage upon which the performance was held, Proust capitalizes on the signifying potential of the arabesque as a nostalgic ornament. The arabesque, in itself, represents a desire to return to the days of Louis XIV.

Nostalgic Posing as Melancholic Modernism

"The time is past when time did not matter." – Paul Valéry³⁹

I define nostalgic posing as a modernist mode of art and performance which evokes the past in order to both preserve and recreate it for contemporary purposes. This displacement from the past is itself a profoundly modern experience. As Jonathan Flatley comments, "to be modern is to be separated from the past."⁴⁰ Peter Frizsche reads nostalgia as a product of modernism's keen awareness of history and its sense of a discontinuous

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Paul Valéry, quoted by Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Harvard UP, 2008): 29.

⁴⁰ Flatley, *Affective Mappings*, 29.

past.⁴¹ This separation itself could produce feelings of nostalgia – a sense of loss and dislocation that results from the modern subject’s internalized sense of distance from her own past. As Svetlana Boym argues, “the spread of nostalgia had to do not only with dislocation in space but also with the changing conception of time.”⁴² Nostalgic poses may be enacted through performances – such as costume parties, music, acting, dandyism – or created as physical objects through the visual arts – photography, poetry, painting, drawing. I have identified two key types of nostalgic phenomena – the gesture of the arabesque and the concept of the *fête galante* – which populate Montesquiou’s “*fête littéraire*.” The arabesque, a type of ornament featuring undulating curves which stir a purposeless sense of pleasure, is an example of the nostalgic pose in the medium of visual art, while the *fête galante* exemplifies the nostalgic pose as a mode of performance. The second half of this chapter is devoted to an examination of the arabesque and *fête galante* as nostalgic phenomena. Now, however, I turn to the more general idea of nostalgic posing at the *fin de siècle*, briefly considering posing in relation to Bernhardt’s acting style and nostalgia through Svetlana Boym’s conception of “melancholic modernity.”

The pose acquired new meaning in the era of photography. Rather than sitting still for a painting for hours, the photographic subject was required to pose for mere seconds; by the 1870s, exposure times were reduced to just a 1/25 of a second. By creating the illusion of capturing a single moment in time, the camera enabled the subject to acquire a new relationship to temporality, memory and the past. The photograph creates the illusion of reproducing a specific moment in the past on film. Proust’s own relationship to memory in his novels is arguably tinged by the precision of the photograph, and his relationship with

⁴¹ Peter Fritzsche, "Specters of History: On Nostalgia, Exile and Modernity." Published in *The American Historical Review* 106: 5 (December 2001), 2.

⁴² Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (Basic Books, 2001): 7.

the photographer Nadar is revealing. As the photographer Brassai wrote of Proust, “In his [Proust’s] battle against Time...it was in photography, also born of an age-old longing to halt the moment, to wrest it from the flux of *durée* in order to ‘fix’ it forever in a semblance of eternity, that Proust found his best ally.”⁴³

Sarah Bernhardt was famous for both the contoured shapes into which she could mold her body on stage and how adeptly she could reproduce these poses for the camera. Dubbed “the queen of posture” by playwright Edmond Rostand, Bernhardt was a true mistress of physical postures. Her striking poses served as inspiration for Alphonse Mucha’s 1895 poster for *Gismonda*, which is itself heralded as the first illustration of the Art Nouveau movement. (See figures 5 and 6 below.) According to Théodore de Banville in *La Lanterne magique*, Bernhardt’s technique owed a good deal to the art of the sculptor, introducing into the theatre an aesthetic dimension: “She exploited marvelously the effects of the draping of costumes to freeze a single moment in a pose marked by harmony and nobility.”⁴⁴ These qualities of harmony and nobility are more befitting an objet d’art than a human being. Furthermore, Banville’s comment that she could “freeze a single moment in a pose” suggests the technology of the photograph. Photography, a medium in which Bernhardt excelled, was also the pose’s perfect objectification, converting Bernhardt’s theatrical performance – which exists in time – into a temporally stable, consumable object.

⁴³ See Brassai, *Proust in the Power of Photography* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001): xi.

⁴⁴ Robert Horville, “The Stage Techniques of Sarah Bernhardt” in *Bernhardt and the Theatre of Her Time*, edited by Eric Salmon (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984): 49.



Figures 2.6 and 2.7: Alphonse Mucha's poster for *Gismonda* and Sarah Bernhardt as *Gismonda*, 1895 and 1896, respectively.

Deval as Zaccaria, Sarah Bernhardt as Gismonda and De Max as l'Eveque Porphyre in 'Gismonda' by Victorien Sardou, at Theatre de la Renaissance (Director - Sarah Bernhardt) SB: French stage actress 1844 - 1923. VS: French dramatist 1831 -1908. Photograph by Nadar.

Bernhardt's photographic poses were highly stylized, capturing a moment in time on camera for the spectator to savor later. In these pictures, she is usually posing in character as a historical figure who is further dislocated from the present. Thus Bernhardt's poses are deliberately modernist, in the sense of the modern being separated from the past.

I contend that a truly nostalgic relationship to the *ancien regime* became possible only after the concept of monarchy became politically untenable in France – during the *ralliement* of the 1890s, a period of unprecedented Republican power and security during the Third Republic. After over a century of political turmoil and unrest since the French Revolution,

Republican power had been unstable, insecure, easily swept away by Monarchists and Church officials. However, during the *ralliement* (1890-98), Monarchists were forced to align themselves with conservative Republicans for the first time, effectively giving up the dream of the restoration of a monarchy.

Posing as the Ancien Regime

In considering the late nineteenth-century French nostalgia for the *ancien regime* I particularly note the importance of the era of Louis XV (1710-1774). The *ancien regime* took on new significance during the *ralliement* period of the 1890s, when restoration of the monarchy became political untenable. This was a very different mode from the nostalgia for the *ancien regime* which emerged during the Second Empire, when the rule of Emperor Napoleon III made the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy a very real possibility. Following the failed Revolution of General Boulanger in the late 1880s, the *ralliement* was a period in which Catholics and former monarchists began to align themselves with conservative Republicans, and compromises were necessary in order for these groups to achieve their political goals. A central figure of the *ralliement* was Charles Maurras, founder of the conservative nationalist group the *Action française*. His nationalist group was characterized by xenophobia and a belief in the exclusion of four social classes – Jews, Freemasons, Protestants, and *metics* (foreigners) – from political involvement. Maurrasian nostalgia for the *ancien regime* was very particular brand of nostalgia, marked by a desire for a return to order, reason and classicism, as the desire was for a regime based on authority.

Both officially and within private circles, France's Second Empire (1852-1870) was a period of major rococo revival.⁴⁵ Emperor Louis-Napoléon's official endorsement of the industrial arts led to the re-emergence of an eighteenth-century form of craft embellishment.⁴⁶ Furthermore, Empress Eugénie grew so infatuated with the eighteenth century that she instigated a veritable court craze for the *fête galante*, holding numerous masked balls during which she appeared in costume as both Marie Antoinette and Madame de Pompadour.⁴⁷ (See Figure 2.) The Empress's posing as Marie Antoinette is especially worth noting, as an antecedent of Montesquiou's calling himself Louis IV during the "*fête littéraire*."



Figure 2.8: Empress Eugenie Posing as Marie Antoinette
Portrait of the Empress Eugenie dressed as Marie Antoinette, Franz Xaver Winterhaller (1854)

⁴⁵ For further background, see Deborah Silverman, "Chapter One: The Brothers Goncourt between History and the Psyche" in *Art Nouveau in fin-de-siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1992): 17-42.

⁴⁶ Silverman, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Hauteceur, *Historie de l'architecture*. As quoted in Silverman, 19.

Another important antecedent for Montesquiou's "*fête littéraire*" is provided by the Brothers Goncourt. In the 1880s and early 1890s, Montesquiou became close friends with Edmond de Goncourt, a writer and aesthete who formed one half of the pair of brothers. Edmond and his brother Jules were active as socialites and authors during the Second Empire, keeping a journal from 1855 until Edmond passed away in 1896. Jules, the younger brother, had died in 1870, just one year after they retired from the center of Paris to a spacious mansion in Auteuil, on the outskirts of the city. As Silverman puts beautifully, their house was "[a]t once the place of work and rest for the brothers...conceived as a sealed fortress where the Goncourts could live completely surrounded by vestiges of a lost aristocratic culture."⁴⁸ It is a similar reconstruction of aristocratic culture from the *ancien regime* that Montesquiou intended to create for himself at his own villa at Versailles in 1893.

Silverman interprets the Goncourt Brothers' home as a sealed "aristocratic fortress," intended to exclude undesirable elements of Paris, in the form of a beautiful reconstructed eighteenth-century world of private interiors. In 1860, Edmond wrote of his disgust for the increasing public-ness of Parisian life, and, in particular, of his distaste for the "new boulevards, lacking in all curves, implacable axes of the straight line. It makes me think of some American Babylon of the future."⁴⁹ Appropriately, the Goncourts' home – which Edmond commemorated in his influential 1880 text *La Maison d'un artiste* – was decorated with unique *objets d'art* and artisanal furniture celebrating nature's irregular rhythms and undulating curves. In their house, "claimed Edmond, 'all harsh and rebellious matter was subordinated to the supple caress of the artisan.'"⁵⁰ The "supple caress of the artisan" is

⁴⁸ Silverman, 20.

⁴⁹ As quoted by Silverman, 20.

⁵⁰ Edmond de Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste*, I: 188. As quoted by Silverman, 21.

none other than the arabesque, an undulating figure with eclectic roots in German Idealism and Islamic architecture. In the next section I will discuss the arabesque's origins and function as a "nostalgic ornament" in greater detail. For now let it suffice to say that the arabesque appealed to the Goncourt brothers because of its connection to artisanal skill and craftsmanship. The irregularity of the arabesque made it unique, hard to reproduce in a factory, and thus far more beautiful to the brothers.

In other published writings, the Goncourts brothers emphasize the exoticist, escapist dimensions of eighteenth-century art, by painters such as Watteau, Fragonard, and Boucher. Attention to detail was necessary to evoke the beauty of the idyll and reconstruct the pastoral mode in art. In *L'Art du dix-huitième siècle* (1873-4), a collection of previously published works on eighteenth-century art, the brothers champion Watteau and his *fête galantes* precisely for their ability to romanticize indolence, languor and idleness. For the Goncourts, Watteau's appeal lay in the effortless grace and charm that he bestowed upon his female subjects... "All the fascination of women in repose: the languor, the idleness, the abandonment... the indolence..."⁵¹ Tellingly, the Goncourts describe Watteau's *fête galante* as a dream world, without the pressures of modern time or productivity. Their evocation of "languor... idleness... indolence" has uncanny echoes of exoticist literature from the period. The brothers also mention the patterns of Arabic tapestry, such as those from *Thousand and One Nights*, which decorate the romantic backdrop for Watteau's imaginary work of theater. However, romantic love, "the light of this world," is framed as pure, chaste, free of sexual desire and appetite – as a lover's casual glances have "no fever in them."⁵²

⁵¹ Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *French Eighteenth-Century Painters* (London: Phaidon Press, 1948): 1-2. English translation and introduction by Robin Ironside. Originally published as *L'Art du dix-huitième siècle* in 1873.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 7.

Watteau's *fête galantes* are appealing precisely for how they represent an escape from the present-day modernity, offering instead a *Champs-Élysées* of timelessness:

These are the Elysian Fields of a master painter-- and beneath that cottage roof on the horizon, Time lies sleeping. In some fortuitous and uncharted spot, there exists, beneath the trees, an eternal indolence... It is a dream in which there is nothing to do but listen to one's heart and leave free utterance to one's mood.⁵³

Yet this indolent idyll is itself a pose, a pretension, a mask. For the *fête galante* is also marked by an overwhelming melancholy which reveals itself underneath the casual laughter of the lovers who populate Watteau's dream world:

It is indeed true that in the recesses of Watteau's art, beneath the laughter of its utterance, there murmurs an indefinable harmony, slow and ambiguous; throughout his *fête galantes* there penetrates an indefinable sadness... The man impregnates his art; and it is an art that we are made to look upon as the pastime and the distraction of a mind that suffers, as we might look, after its death, upon the playthings of an ailing child.⁵⁴

According to the Goncourts, the "indefinable sadness" of Watteau's art – its "slow and ambiguous" harmony – is created through the artist's own suffering. Watteau then uses this sadness to "impregnate his art," which is compared to the "playthings of an ailing child" which remain after the child dies. Watteau's sadness murmurs, penetrating like sound throughout his paintings. The Brothers also describe the melancholia of the painter himself in musical terms:

Or, rather, let us look for him in his work: that figure with the eyeglass or that flute-player-- it is Watteau. His eye rests negligently upon the entwined lovers, whom he diverts with a music to whose flow of notes he gives no heed. His silent glances follow the embraces, and he listens to the love-making, listless, indifferent, morose, consumed by languor, and weary, like a violin at a marriage of the dances it directs, and deaf to the sound, to the song of his instrument.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 9.

Here the Goncourts compare the melancholic Watteau to a wedding musician indifferent to the sounds of his own instrument, who creates beautiful music which he cannot hear. His deafness is in marked opposition to the beautiful sounds he produces on his “instrument” – the joyous *fête galante*.

While some of Goncourt’s descriptions sound identical to Montesquiou’s backdrop at Versailles (“a bucolic theatre with a green drop-curtain and flowers for footlights”), their evocation of Watteau’s pastoral landscape as being without control or an authority figure differs significantly from Montesquiou’s “*fête littéraire*.”⁵⁶ In Proust’s rendering of Montesquiou’s party, authority is centralized in the Count – as stated previously, he wore the costume of the Louis XIV and even required his party guests to call him Sun King. No wonder the Sun King himself, like Watteau, also attracted a great deal of literary attention from the Goncourt brothers.

Like the Goncourt Brothers, Montesquiou lived alone and never married. Unlike the Goncourt brothers, however, he lived openly as a homosexual, open and frank in his expressions of his flamboyant and novel personality. A snob until the end, Montesquiou was buried at Versailles at the *Tombeau de Montesquiou au cimetière des Gonards*. Sir William Rothenstein once met Montesquiou at an all-von Weber concert wearing a mauve suit with a shirt to match and a bunch of pale violets at his throat in place of a necktie “because,” he explained, “one should always listen to von Weber in mauve.” His fascination with colors expanded to his first apartment, which included one room which was entirely gray and another known as the “Peacock Room.” He preferred to meet his guests dressed to match the colors of his rooms – for example, wearing the ensemble depicted below to meet guests in his all-gray sitting room.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 3.



Figure 2.9: Giovanni Boldini's 1897 portrait of Montesquiou

In their journals, the Goncourts devote a great deal of attention to describing the Count's first apartment,

A ground-floor apartment in the Rue Franklin, with tall windows fitted with little seventeenth-century panes of glass which give the house an old-world look. A place full of a medley of heterogeneous objects, old family portraits, horrible pieces of Empire furniture, Japanese kakemonos, Whistler etchings.

One original room: the dressing room, with a tub consisting of a huge enamel Persian tray next to a gigantic kettle in beaten copper from the Far East, all enclosed within screens of coloured glass rods; a room in which the hortensia (or hydrangea - ed.) ... is represented in every sort of material and in every form of painting and drawing. And in the middle of the dressing-room, a little glass show-case revealing the delicate colours of a hundred or so ties, underneath a somewhat homosexual photograph of Laroche Foucauld, the gymnast at the Molliet circus, taken in tights displaying to advantage his handsome ephesian figure.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ "Diary entry from 7 July, 1891," *Pages from the Goncourt Journal*, translated by Robert Baldick (London: 1962): p. 366.

The Goncourts, who were themselves quite taken with elaborate designs of their own home as sanctuary and escape from the outside world, were quite bemused by the younger gentleman, who took home decoration to an entirely new level. The new dandy favored a self-indulgent collection of assorted Chinoiserie and other Asian objects: fans, umbrellas, paper lanterns, tubs, black lacquer screens, bonsai trees. This enabled Montesquiou to construct himself as a kind of Otherness, a projection of his sexuality and feelings of difference. As contemporary artist Richard Hawkins observes rather colorfully, Montesquiou's

leanings toward attenuated, grotesque forms and lavish, exotic colorings seem more uncanny recognition than discovery, more portrait than landscape, more identification with than objectification of, as if the dragons and pagodas and grottoes of the Orient were the arabesque sufferings and outrageous nature of the sexual alien, of the outcast soul, of the spiritual transplant.⁵⁸

I agree with Hawkins that Montesquiou's attraction to the exotic and artificial seems to be a deliberate "identification with" rather than a simple "othering" or form of objectification. But what if Montesquiou was also objectifying himself, rather than subjectivizing the other?

Montesquiou was also a prolific poet, whose large inheritance enabled him to fund the production of several elaborate publications. Most impressive among these was his 1894 *Les Chauves-Souris (The Bats)*, which included a title-page illustration by Whistler and was bound in bat-motif embroidered silk. Though the poems are quite conventional and use numerous Symbolist-type tropes, in bats Montesquiou found the perfect analogy for his troubled interior and impervious exterior, of nocturnal habit and twilight encounters, of self-deprecation coupled with extreme egoism, of outrageous behavior and the duplicity of its revelations. This nearly autobiographical collection was Montesquiou's favorite, and it was those poems which were celebrated at his "*fête littéraire*" in May 1894. In the invitation, we

⁵⁸ Richard Hawkins, *Montesquiouiana* (1992-1996). <<http://hawkinsology.org/mntsq/mntsq2.html>> Accessed April 10 2013.

see not only Montesquiou’s *chauves-souris* but also his beloved Leon Delafosse featured prominently, as well as the Count’s characteristic swirling, ornamental handwriting.



Figure 2.10: Invitation to Montesquiou’s “*Une fête littéraire à Versailles*”

The Arabesque as Nostalgic Ornament

For aristocrats like the Goncourt brothers and Montesquiou, the arabesque represented an important link between eighteenth-century aesthetics and the *fin-de-siècle* style of *art nouveau*. In this section, I provide a history of the arabesque and its diverse array of meanings and then outline the arabesque’s numerous appearances in and connections to “*Une fête littéraire à Versailles*.” The arabesque, a recurring theme in the party, functions in part as a performance of longing for the *ancien régime*. This ornament acts as a nostalgic figure for Montesquiou’s aristocratic party guests, because it was a popular feature of French eighteenth-century decorative arts and would have reminded them of the design of their inheritance – both literal (furniture, rugs, silver and other bibelots) and metaphorical (taste, ancestry) – from that period. Ultimately, I suggest that the arabesque’s emphasis on form

over content provided a way for *fin-de-siècle* aristocrats to express melancholic desires for a monarchical past indirectly during a period when bourgeois Republicans were politically dominant.

Although the arabesque has a wide range of possible meanings, these definitions are linked through their mutual emphasis on form over content. Etymologically, the term “arabesque” simply means “Arab-like.” The earliest usage of this term dates from 16th-century French and Italian decorative styles influenced by Middle Eastern architectural design. Nevertheless, the complexity of the arabesque’s origins should not be underestimated. For centuries, the abstract patterns on Islamic mosques were believed to be the origin of these abstract, scrolling designs of leaves, flowers and geometric figures, until excavations of Greco-Roman temples revealed even earlier predecessors.⁵⁹ The arabesque derived from an intense interaction between Greco-Roman, Byzantine and North African sources during the heyday of Islamic power in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. The stylized, abstracted forms of Kufic (the early Islamic script preferred for Koranic inscriptions and calligraphy) were then incorporated into abstract designs on the walls of mosques. At these sites arabesques served as decorative alternatives to writing and other kinds of pictorial representation, which were forbidden in mosques because they risked being interpreted as iconography.⁶⁰ The arabesque thus decorated while appearing to signify nothing outside of itself, creating the illusion of an indifferent beauty contingent on no social factors.

⁵⁹ Roger Harold Benjamin, “The Decorative Landscape, Fauvism, and the Arabesque of Observation” in *The Art Bulletin* 75: 2 (June 1993): 309.

⁶⁰ A. H. Christie, “The Development of Ornament from Arabic Script,” *Burlington Magazine*, XL, 1922, 287-292 and XLI, 1922, 34-41.

Of course, the variation in styles of arabesque across cultures reveals that the aesthetics of the arabesque are in fact culturally contingent, but the desire to remain free of culture remains transcultural. It's almost as if the arabesque serves as a container across cultures for a site of pure beauty à la Kant. Fascinatingly, this emphasis on the beauty of the arabesque's abstract form over the literal meaning of words remains a unifying theme across the arabesque's diverse array of other, more recent definitions.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the arabesque's definitions expanded to carry a wider range of meanings which are diverse yet interrelated. Beside referring to the scrolling decorations on the walls of Islamic mosques and a type of ornamental pattern in Italian and French art, the arabesque also refers to the ballet pose in which one leg is lifted off of the ground and extended behind the body, turning the body into the shape of an arc. In the nineteenth century, the arabesque also began to refer to a genre of writing or a genre or ornament in music. In all of these media, the arabesque figures as something which privileges form (the shape and contours of sound) over content (verbal syntax and musical harmonies).

In aesthetics, the arabesque acquired a whole new set of meanings in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. German Idealists such as Immanuel Kant singled out the arabesque in architecture and praised it for its tendencies towards abstraction and self-sufficiency. For Kant the arabesque was a form of artistic expression that stirred a purposeless sense of pleasure, without content or external motivation, and thus approached his ideal of the beautiful.⁶¹ The arabesque emerged as a new genre in both music and

⁶¹ Ralph Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009): 217-222. For more on the arabesque in music, see David Grayson, "Bilitis and Tanagra: Afternoons with Nude Women." in *Debussy and His World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001). For an excellent primary source reading, see Claude Debussy's article 'Musique: Vendredi Saint'. *La revue blanche* (1 May 1901) pp. 67-9; translated in *Debussy on Music*, 26-8.

literature. Edgar Allen Poe's *Arabesques* (1840) and Robert Schumann's *Arabeske* (op. 18, 1839) were both inflected by the concept of form over content, a drive to separate the formal pleasures of music and literature from other types of signification. Thus the arabesque gradually came to represent a paradigm of aesthetic autonomy.⁶²

The arabesque achieved an even closer tie to the aesthetics of musical autonomy through the influential writings of German music critic Eduard Hanslick, best known for his 1854 text *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (*On the Musically Beautiful*) which theorizes instrumental music as being about nothing but sound, in and of itself. In the treatise's most influential passages, Hanslick defines the "content of music [as] tonally moving forms." Hanslick continues by connecting these "tonally moving forms" to the visual metaphor of the arabesque:

How music is able to produce beautiful forms without a specific feeling as its content is already to some extent illustrated for us by a branch of ornamentation in the visual arts, namely arabesque. We follow sweeping lines, here dipping gently, there boldly soaring, approaching and separating, corresponding curves large and small, seemingly incommensurable yet always well connected together, to every part a counterpart, a collection of small details but yet a whole. Now let us think of an arabesque not dead and static, but coming into being in continuous self-formation before our eyes. How the lines, some robust and some delicate, pursue one another! How they ascend from a small curve to great heights and then sink back again, how they expand and contract and forever astonish the eye with their ingenious alternation of tension and repose! There before our eyes the image becomes ever grander and more sublime.⁶³

Thus, in Hanslick's theorization, music is a form of pure abstraction structured through the visual pleasures of shape, rather than merely existing as sound in and of itself (which is how the concept of "absolute music" is often misinterpreted). The arabesque's architectural

⁶² For further background on the arabesque's connection to aesthetic autonomy, see pp. 33-114 of Gurminder Bhogal's dissertation *Arabesque and Metric Dissonance in the Music of Maurice Ravel, 1905-1914* (Diss. University of Chicago, Department of Music, 2004); as well as Bhogal's article "Debussy's Arabesque and Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*" published in *twentieth-century music* 3:2 (September 2006): 171-199.

⁶³ Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1986): 29. Translated by Geoffrey Payzant.

shapes and tendency toward organic, curving growth are not merely a metaphor for Hanslick, but actually function as a means of conceiving of music outside of its mimetic functions (which was how music was primarily understood in the eighteenth century). Rather than being a form of imitation, the lowest form of the arts, music becomes something in and of itself. Surprisingly, according to Hanslick, music is like the arabesque in being “actually a picture, one whose subject we cannot grasp in words and subsume under concepts. Music has sense and logic – but musical sense and logic.”⁶⁴ For Hanslick, the arabesque does not merely function as a visual metaphor for music in space but rather becomes the pictorial embodiment of music, signifying within a closed system of signs in a “kind of language which we speak and understand yet cannot translate.”⁶⁵

In the second half of the nineteenth-century, the arabesque came to be represented in musical through specific qualities, which Caroline Potter describes in the following ways: melodies which are “undulating, soothing, and full of curved lines,” “continuously evolving, growing organically rather than being divided into periodic phrases,” and characterized by “irregular rhythm and dissonant meter.”⁶⁶ In a more extended study, Gurminder Bhogal examines the analytical functions of the arabesque in the *fin-de-siècle* compositions of Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and similar French composers. Arguing that the arabesque is an ornament which can disrupt musical narrative and form on deeper structural levels, Bhogal observes that the Shéhérazade figure in Rimsky-Korsakov’s 1887 ballet suite – a descending triplet pattern representing Shéhérazade herself – is an arabesque which shapes the flow of drama, much like the character Shéhérazade controlled the narration of the *1001 Arabian*

⁶⁴ Ibid., 30.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Caroline Potter, “Debussy and Nature” in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, Simon Trezise, ed. (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge UP, 2003): 144.

Nights, stopping and restarting her stories every evening to delay her death at the hands of the King.

I find the arabesque present throughout the characters who populate “*Une fête littéraire à Versailles*” – in the undulating curves of Sarah Bernhardt’s body, in Robert de Montesquiou’s handwriting, in the art nouveau architecture and design of the gardens at Versailles. The popularity of the musical arabesque in the 1890s corresponds with contemporaneous artistic currents in the visual arts, particularly Art Nouveau and Jugendstil. Intriguingly, Bernhardt’s acting style and bodily poses were frequently described in terms which evoke the arabesque. For example,

The lady sought to please, even seduce, her audiences with famous smiles, serpentine movements, flowing gowns... As in pantomime, Sarah’s spectacular effects—increased after leaving the Comédie—were a blend of opposing traditions: classical and melodramatic. She was especially famous for what may be called “appropriately costumed attitudes” animated by an “S” curve resulting from turning her shoulders in one direction while turning her hips in another.⁶⁷

This “S” curve is none other than the arabesque. Other critics commented on the eerily still effect she achieved using props like canes and costumes, which made the actress resemble a painting or even a statue.

⁶⁷ Margeurite Coe, *Bernhardt and the Theatre of Her Time*, Eric Salmon, editor (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984): 71.



Figure 2.11: Bernhardt’s “S” curve – an arabesque-like pose. Photograph by Nadar.

When acting as an exotic or Orientalist character, Bernhardt was able to position her body in such a way that she objectified her own body, posing as a beautiful objet d’art. For example, of her performance of Theodora, critic Robert Banville wrote of Sarah that “[s]he seems motionless, revered, a Byzantine saint laden with jewels, surrounded by incense.”⁶⁸ According to Banville, Bernhardt’s ability to pose without motion – effectively objectifying herself – also lent her acting a quality of “asceticism” which was “sometimes accompanied by overelaborations of form hidden beneath surface appearance”⁶⁹ The restrained stillness of her posing both made her appear statue-like and allowed room for the spectator to savor the details of her costume and body, moving seductively underneath her costume. Through restrained movements and statuesque posing, Bernhardt’s acting style physically embodied the Decadent aesthetics of the arabesque, with its emphasis on elaborate details at the expense of the whole.

⁶⁸ Banville, 49.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Montesquiou's handwriting was itself inflected by an emphasis on style over content. Elegantly and meticulously crafted, Montesquiou's handwriting was profusely ornamented and curly. Pierre Loti recalled his first impression of Montesquiou was actually that of his handwriting: On the day of his marriage Loti found:

a pink envelope, of an adorable pink, resembling a flower-petal. Its edges – not scalloped as was then the fashion – looked like mother-of-pearl that one could snap. On it there was writing unlike anything one had ever seen before; at first one would have said that it was cufic (the ancient ornamental form of Arabic writing); however, if one looked closer one could see that it was, in fact, French, with my name and address inscribed. Who then, with such laborious research, had learned to change our vulgar writing into such harmonious twirls and figurations?...⁷⁰

Montesquiou thus presents himself as an ornament, intertwining an important part of his identity (his letterhead and penmanship) with the tendencies towards the exotic and the abstract. Gaze below for two lovely examples of Montesquiou's arabesque-like handwriting.

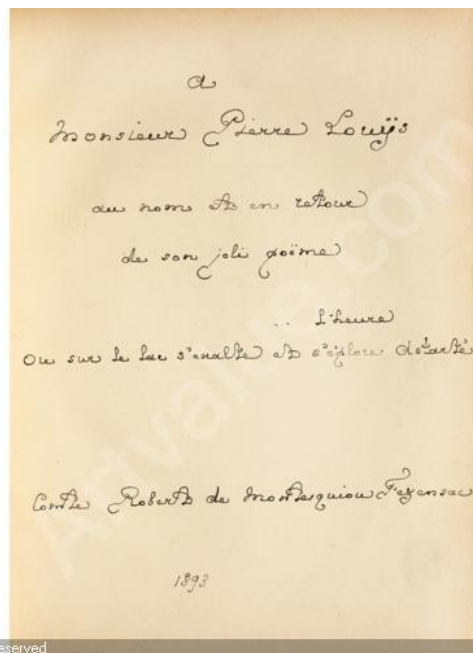


Figure 2.12: Montesquiou's dedication to poet Pierre Louÿs (1893)

⁷⁰ Pierre Loti, *Memoirs*. As quoted by Phillippe Julian in *Robert de Montesquiou: un prince 1900* (Paris: Perrin, 1965): 150. English translation by John Haylock and Francis King as *Robert de Montesquiou: Prince of Aesthetes* (New York: Viking Press, 1968): 105.

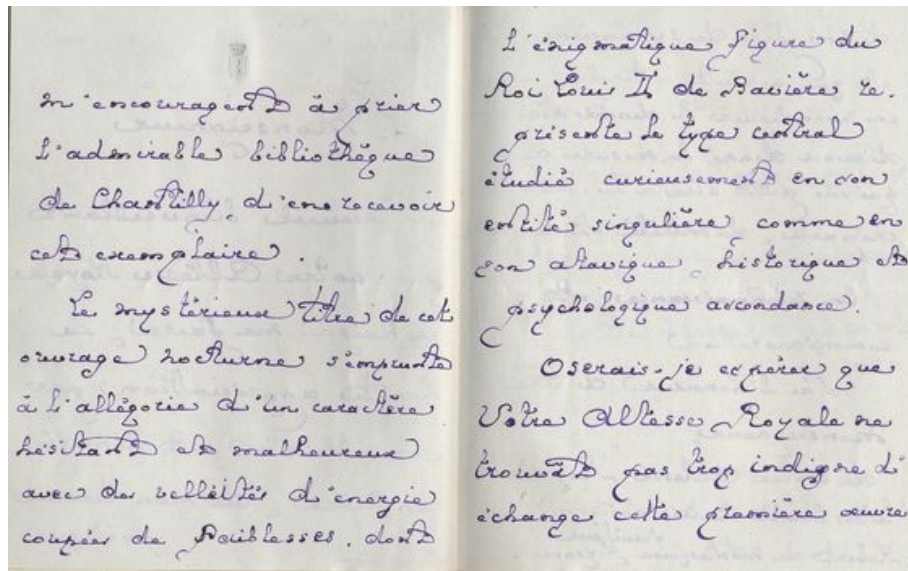


Figure 2.13: Montesquiou's Arabesque-like Handwriting (date unknown)

Montesquiou also brings to mind Hanslick's comparison of the arabesque to the kaleidoscope of colors in the following vignette. As noted earlier, the Count was memorialized as the effête aristocrat Des Esseintes in Joris-Karl Huysmans' Decadent novel *À rebours*. In the novel as well as in real life, Montesquiou was notorious for creating a visual arabesque when he encrusted his pet tortoise with semi-precious jewels to better bring out the colors and designs of his living room as it crawled around on his Oriental carpet. In a similarly ridiculous vein, Jules Goncourt described Montesquiou as

“The eccentric who had this idea (the idea in question - as portrayed in Huysmans' *À rebours* - being that, in order to better bring out the details in an Oriental carpet, of encrusting a tortoise with precious jewels and having it crawl around thereon -ed.) was brought to see me today by Heredia. It was young Montesquiou-Fezensac, who had put on a pair of trousers made in the tartan of a Scottish clan to see me and had prepared 'an ad hoc state of mind' for the occasion: a crank, a literary lunatic, but endowed with the supreme refinement of *an aristocratic race on the verge of extinction*.”⁷¹

The fact that Montesquiou's class – the aristocracy – was on the verge of extinction is of extreme importance in this passage. As Montesquiou's cousin, the Comtesse Greffulhe,

⁷¹ Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Pages from the Goncourt Journal* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1962): 274. Translation by Robert Baldick.

commented, “One no longer exists in a time such as ours except by one’s own personality. Our caste no longer exists.”⁷² She posited as an alternative the cult of the personality and the idea that exceptional taste were factors separating the bourgeoisie from true aristocrats. I will continue to explore this concept of aristocratic melancholy in the following section, which deals with another nostalgic figure from the eighteenth century: Watteau’s *fête galante*. I view Montesquiou’s party as a restaging of the *fête galante*, a doubly nostalgic performance which encapsulates Watteau-esque desires for ancient Greece and Italy within the frame of *fin-de-siècle* desires for the mid-eighteenth century.

The fête galante as melancholic Decadence

The term *fête galante*, which literally translates as “gallant party,” dates from the early eighteenth century, when the balance of power at Versailles was thrown into disorder following the death of Louis XIV in 1706. The *fête galante* is both a type of pastoral party, in which eighteenth-century French aristocrats dressed up as peasants and imagined themselves to be living an idealized country life, and a genre of painting by artists such as Watteau, Boucher, and Fragonard which further idealizes these celebrations. In both of its meanings – the historical party and its representation in art, the *fête galante* functions as an idealized escape from the present, using techniques of both temporal and physical distancing. The courtly aristocrats sought to escape the chaos at Versailles after Louis XIV’s death, and did so by relocating themselves – if temporally – to the country for an afternoon. Watteau invented the pastoral genre of the *fête galante* in painting, idealizing the beauty of these events, further popularizing them among aristocrats, and introducing elements of Italian *commedia*

⁷² Jann Pasler, “The Comtesse Greffuhle as Entrepreneur.” In *Writing Through Music: Essays on Music, Culture, and Politics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 317.

del'arte and the Greek Arcadian tradition to further idealize and distance his paintings from any sense of the present. The *fête galante* is closely related to the *fête champêtre*, the “country party” which Marie Antoinette popularized with her small villa in the French countryside and which she attempted to use to escape from the growing discontent amongst the actual peasants and city folk who lived under her reign.

After the French Revolution, the *fête galante* no longer represented an escape from Versailles in the same way it had before the Revolution. When monarchical rule at Versailles no longer existed, the *fête galante* came to symbolize a throwback to the period of monarchical power. Another way to think about this: the French Revolution brought the *ancien regime* into existence. As Boym comments, “Outbreaks of nostalgia often follow revolutions...In France it is not only the ancient regime that produced revolution, but in some respect the revolution produced the ancient regime, giving it a shape, a sense of closure, and a gilded aura.”⁷³

André Chénier’s “Ode à Versailles” is a poem which marks this profound affective shift in historical consciousness after the French Revolution, towards nostalgia for monarchical rule and its “gilded aura.” Composed on August 10th, 1792, when Chénier was imprisoned outside of Versailles, this piece represents the author’s desire to escape the bloodshed of the French Revolution and instead return to an era of relative peace under monarchical rule. At Montesquiou’s party, this poem was recited jointly by the three actresses in attendance, Bernhardt, Bartet and Reichenberg. According to Proust, their performance marked the peak of the festivities. Proust even quotes sections of the poem in his article to capture its effect. According to Proust, even Chénier himself withdrew from the struggle and “departed to dream of Versailles”:

⁷³ Boym, xvi.

*Ó Versailles, ô bois, ô portiques,
Marbres vivants, berceaux antiques,
Par les dieux et les rois Élysée embelli,*

*À ton aspect, dans ma pensée,
Comme sur l'herbe aride une fraîche rosée,
Coule un peu de calme et d'oubli.*

*Oh Versailles, oh woods, oh porticos,
Living marbles, ancient bowers,
Elysium adorned by gods and kings,*

*To your countenance, in my thoughts,
Like cool dew on parched grass,
A little calm and oblivion flows.⁷⁴*

Montesquiou's own *Aria*, recited at the party by the great Bernhardt, was also characterized

by themes of death, dreams, and Kings:

*...Tout ce qui fut diaphane
Et délicat - et se fane:*

*Ombrages de tendelets
Squelettes de roitelets...*

*Opacité des feuillages,
Fumée aux toits des villages.*

*Moins d'épanouissements
Que d'évanouissements...*

*Mais surtout, du haut des ormes,
Les reflets, échos des formes.*

*Mais encore, au fond des bois,
Les échos, reflets des Rois.*

*...All that is diaphanous
And delicate - and fades:*

*Canopies' shades
Skeletons of wrens...*

*Opacity of foliage,
Smoke from village roof-tops.*

*Not so much opening out
Rather fading away...*

*But above all, from the tops of elms,
Reflections, echoes of forms.*

*But again, from the depths of the woods,
Echoes, reflections of Kings.⁷⁵*

Both Proust's society notice and Montesquiou's poetry reinforce the idea that there was no *ancien regime* before the French Revolution. The Revolution was both what created the dream of an idyllic *ancien regime* and what brings this dream to a bloody end. Thus the French Revolution marks both the construction and destruction of a dream. As Proust writes at the conclusion of his notice,

⁷⁴ All poetry in this section excerpted from Proust's "Une fête littéraire à Versailles." Translation by Chris Taylor. First published in *Le Gaulois*, 31 May 1894. <<http://www.yorktaylor.free-online.co.uk/fete.htm>> Accessed May 6 2012.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

C'est fini. Le rêve est terminé. Il faut revenir à Paris, où l'on parle de déclaration ministérielle, d'interpellations et autres choses semblables. Avec quel délicat souvenir et avec quel regret nous quittons Versailles, la ville royale, où, pendant quelques heures, nous crûmes que nous vivions au siècle de Louis le Grand!

It is the end. The dream is over. We must return to Paris where the talk is of ministerial announcements, Parliamentary questions and other such things. But with what exquisite memories and with what regret do we leave Versailles, the royal residence, where, for a few hours, we believed we were living in the days of Louis XIV!⁷⁶

As Proust writes in his note for *Les Gaulois*, Montesquiou's party guests, much like Chénier himself, return to Versailles only to "dream of Versailles" – the Versailles that existed before the Revolution. It follows that we may consider this party as a melancholic performance of the past, a nostalgic pose: a performance of memory in which pastiche – the imitation of another's style – functions as a means to recreate an imaginary, idealized past.

Recall that the Goncourt brothers focused on Watteau in their 1873 book on *Eighteenth-Century French Painters*. They were particularly drawn to the *fête galante* genre for its melancholic affect, particularly the figure of the sad clown, as well as its performative relationship to time and modernity. The *fête galante* was always outside the present, always observing from a distance. Walter Pater similarly admired the *fête galante* for its distancing gestures, immortalizing the genre for its tendencies towards the masquerade and the pastoral imaginary. In an "imaginary portrait" of 1887, Pater described Watteau as "A Prince of Court Painters." In the following passage, Pater reimagines the aesthetics of Watteau's *fête galante* from the perspective of a blonde youth (which I argue in chapter three may have been the subject of Watteau's painting *L'Indifférent*):

That charming Noblesse—can it be really so distinguished to the minutest point, so naturally aristocratic? Half in masquerade, playing the drawing-room or garden comedy of life, these persons have upon them, not less than the landscape he composes, and among the accidents of which they group themselves with such a

⁷⁶ Ibid.

perfect fittingness, a certain light we should seek for in vain upon anything real. For their framework they have around them a veritable architecture—a tree-architecture—to which those moss-grown balusters; terms, statues, fountains, are really but accessories.⁷⁷

Indeed, this description could just as easily be one of Montesquiou's party as a work of fiction. Written seven years before Proust's description in *Le Figaro*, this passage has a queer resonance with Montesquiou's "*fête littéraire*."

The *fête galante* came to be immortalized in words as well as painting when, in 1869, Paul Verlaine published his second book of poetry, *Fêtes galantes*. They are marked by the indifferent purity of Parnassian aesthetics, of Theophile Gautier's vision of "L'art pour l'art" (a pure beauty without underlying political intent or usefulness). Furthermore, as Taylor-Horrex notes, Verlaine's poetry has a tendency towards distancing, treating the *fête galante* as a mask, a historical genre which conceals Verlaine's present-day desires and feelings. At Montesquiou's party, Proust notes that Verlaine's "Mandoline" (the sixth poem from Verlaine's *Fêtes galantes*) was recited by Mlle. Reichenberg, one of the three famed actresses in attendance. By the time of Montesquiou's party, that poem had already been set to music by numerous composers, including Claude Debussy, who composed a setting in 1882 which was published in 1890, and Gabriel Faure, whose 1891 setting (op. 58 no. 1 from *Cinq mélodies* "De Venise") was a favorite of both Proust's and Hahn's. Hahn has also composed a setting of "Mandoline" in 1892, before he met Proust, under the more general title "Fêtes galantes." In the following section, I examine the melancholic relationship between Hahn's "Fêtes galantes" and Proust and Hahn's collaboration on "Watteau" from *Portraits de peintres*, a monodrama which they composed together during the summer of 1894, in the months immediately following Montesquiou's "*fête littéraire*." A musical quotation from the piano part of Hahn's "Fêtes galantes" which appears in "Watteau" may be taken as a Proustian

⁷⁷ Walter Pater, *Imaginary Portraits* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1900): 31-32. Originally published in 1887.

reminiscence, a *moment bienheureux* which colors the melancholic relationship that exists between the two pieces. I argue that the relationship that exists between the two pieces is itself a nostalgic pose, much like Montesquiou's party.

In his *fête galante* paintings, Watteau frequently drew upon the cast of characters from Italian *commedia dell'arte*. The characters to appear most frequently are Pierrot, the sad clown, and his musician counterpart, Mezzetin, the sad musician. Fittingly, Hahn's song "Fêtes galantes" of 1892 captures much of this ironically happy melancholia, echoing lightly as a sweet musical trifle that only partially conceals the narrator's internal sadness. Hahn dedicated this song to Charles Levadé, whom he knew from the Paris Conservatoire and who was a fellow composition student of Jules Massenet. The song's text derives from "Mandoline," ("Mandolin"), the sixth poem from Paul Verlaine's *Fêtes Galantes* cycle of 1869. Hahn altered the song's title to the more general "Fêtes galantes," perhaps because there were already several popular settings of "Mandoline," including Gabriel Faure and Claude Debussy. Hahn's version, while barely two minutes in length, captures the melancholic *insouciance* of the age.

Hahn was familiar with Verlaine's poetry and, by 1892, had already composed nine settings of Verlaine's poetry.⁷⁸ He would have also been familiar with the sad story of Rimbaud and Verlaine's ill-fated love affair of the early 1880s. Verlaine's dualistic status as a figure of French national pride and shame would have been familiar to Hahn – and later Proust, with whom Hahn would rework the song. See below for Hahn's version of "Mandoline," and how its Parnassian tendencies toward the distancing and sublimation of erotic desire (into pure motion of the dancers) allow the *fête galante* to function as a poetic mask, concealing the poet's interior sadness.

⁷⁸ Of these nine settings, seven are found in *Chansons Grises*, a song cycle which Hahn named after Verlaine's first published book of poetry.

“Mandoline” from Verlaine’s *Fêtes galantes*

English Translation (Emily Ezust)

*Les donneurs de sérénades
Et les belles écoutenses
Échangent des propos fades
Sous les ramures chanteuses.
C’est Tircis et c’est Aminte,
Et c’est l’éternel Clitandre,
Et c’est Damis qui pour mainte
Cruelle [fait]¹ maint vers tendre.
Leurs courtes vestes de soie,
Leurs longues robes à queues,
Leur élégance, leur joie
Et leurs molles ombres bleues,
Tourbillonnent dans l’extase
D’une lune rose et grise,
Et la mandoline jase
Parmi les frissons de brise.*

*The givers of serenades
And the lovely women who listen
Exchange insipid words
Under the singing branches.
There is Thyrsis and Amyntas
And there’s the eternal Clytander,
And there’s Damis who, for many a
Heartless woman, wrote many a tender verse.
Their short silk coats,
Their long dresses with trains,
Their elegance, their joy
And their soft blue shadows,
Whirl around in the ecstasy
Of a pink and grey moon,
And the mandolin prattles
Among the shivers from the breeze.*

Hahn’s music reshapes Verlaine’s text into a melancholic mask, a marker of exteriority that conceals an internal sadness. The piano’s accompaniment is extremely high, voiced in the upper registers of the piano, sounding much like a music box or other childhood toy. The cheerful and charming accompaniment is extremely consonant, perhaps suspiciously so. It is chirping, dance-like, very light and tinny. The implied frivolity and highly decorated surface of the opening and concluding piano part neatly frames the song with sounds of a carousel or music box, the sounds of childhood.

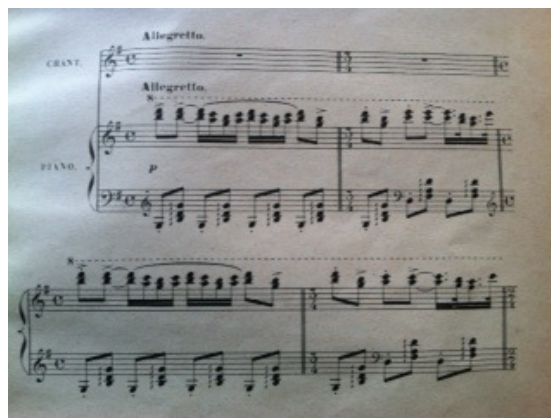


Figure 2.14: Opening of Hahn’s “Fête galante”

The piece's few moments of uncertainty and self-doubt are revealed in moments of harmonic instability and subtle dissonances in the ternary song's middle section, during which the opening motif reappears, no longer in G major but voiced in first D major (mm. 13-15) and then A minor (mm. 23-26). In general, the piano and voice work very closely together, and the bright, light piano part is so chipper and high that it steals attention from the singer. The vocal line extends and emphasizes certain words from the text, not so much for a particular word's literal meaning as for how it sounds. In other words, Hahn's vocal part emphasizes the pleasures embedded in the sound of the words themselves:

écouteuses/chanteuses, ramures (branches). Some word pairs emphasize the simple pleasure of their rhyme (e.g. *sérénades/fades, extase/jase, grise/brise*), while other words are used to bring out cool, elegant open vowel sounds (e.g. *mandoline, parmi*). These internal rhymes are just as important as the simple, naïve end rhymes that mark Verlaine's poem. Interestingly, while Hahn's piece does not shy away from the faux-naïve simplicity of Verlaine's rhyme scheme, the other two best-known settings of "Mandoline" by Gabriel Faure and Claude Debussy do conceal its simplicity, by giving the poem a more speech-like setting. Hahn's choice to emphasize the immediacy of Verlaine's text (and also to change the title of his song from "Mandoline" to the more general "Fête galante") marks a break with these older, more well-established composers. Ostensibly designed as a gesture of generalization, Hahn's setting and title choice also function to separate him from the settings by more famous composers that preceded his.

Hahn's piano part envoices the motion of Watteau's dancing peasants, as their skirts whirl with pure, indifferent elegance. Their motion is mechanical, like a wind-up toy box. The automatic nature of their motion gives it a kind of cruelty – the "cruelle" ("heartless women") of Verlaine's verse. It is cold and sweet and terrifying in the context of Proust's

word painting. This musical counterpart to Verlaine's poetic evocation is naïve, youthful – befitting the eighteen year-old Hahn who composed it. When, two years later, Hahn returns to this piece through the lens of his relationship with Proust, he views its cool indifference from a far different perspective. No longer afraid of love, Hahn is now ready to frame his love from a melancholic distance, using a musical-literary technique that anticipates Proust's own literary experiments with memory, time, and nostalgia in *À la recherche du temps perdu*.

Proust and Hahn's *Portraits de Peintres* is an ekphrastic experiment in the relationship between poetry and music. Hahn and Proust composed the monodrama as a collaborative project from summer 1894 through fall 1895, during the period in which they were lovers. It was later published in June 1896 as part of *Plaisirs et Jours*, Proust's first book which did not sell well due to its high cost (four times the usual price of a book) and eccentric approach to poetry and music. The monodrama, a type of melodrama for one voice, is a now-outdated genre that consists of a speaking voice reciting text over a piano accompaniment. The pacing of the speaker, along with the undulating quality of his voice, blur the lines between speech and song. In *Portraits de Peintres*, however, Proust's text is often overshadowed by Hahn's unpredictable, fanciful piano line, which interjects affective shifts unexpectedly and sporadically. The monodrama consists of four movements, each dedicated to a different painter of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries: Albert Cuyp, Paulus Potter, Anton van Dyck and Antoine Watteau. For the purposes of this chapter, this Watteau movement is of greatest interest. Most notably, the Watteau movement includes a quotation from Hahn's "fêtes galantes" in its fifth and sixth lines. I analyze this moment as a musical parallel to the Proustian reminiscence, as an anticipation of what Proust would later do in the *Recherche*.

Antoine Watteau” from *Portraits des Peintres*
(Proust, 1896)

*Crépuscule grimant les arbres et les faces
Avec son manteau bleu, sous son masque incertain.
Poussière de baisers autour de bouches lasses...*

*Le vague devient tendre et le tout près lointain.
La mascarade, autre lointain mélancolique,
Fait le geste d’aimer plus faux, triste et charmant.*

*Caprice de poète, ou prudence d’amant,
L’amour ayant besoin d’être orné savamment,
Voici barques, goûters, silences et musique.*

English Translation of “Antoine Watteau”
(Ersoff, 2013)

*Twilight dabbling in trees and faces,
With a blue coat, under an uncertain mask.
The dust of kisses surrounding weary lips...*

*The uncertain is softened, the close made distant.
The masquerade, another distant melancholy,
Makes love’s gesture sadder, falser, more charming.*

*Be it poet’s whim, or the prudence of a lover,
Since love has need of knowing decoration,
Here come skiffs and delicacies, silences and music.*

Hahn and Proust’s “Watteau” movement can be read autobiographically, as an homage to their love for both each other and the eighteenth-century painter. Proust wrote the poem “Watteau” in June or July of 1894, within two months of meeting Hahn and initiating their romantic relationship, which they developed through artistic collaboration, particularly through the interplay between music and literature. Proust’s poetry does not evoke Watteau himself so much as the painter’s extraordinary powers of imagination. The interaction between Proust’s text and Hahn’s piano part recreates an imaginary *fête galante*, much like Montesquiou’s extravagant party. This *fête galante*—beautiful, queer, empty, vacant—can never be created in reality. Even more ephemeral than Montesquiou’s “*fête littéraire*”, the subtle erotics of the pianistic and vocal interplay produce a melancholic desire for a queer romance that exists only in the world of poetry and masquerade (the imagination).

In particular, Proust’s text calls to mind the Decadent aesthetics of the Verlainian *fête galante*. The first word we hear is *crépuscule* (twilight) – the most decadent time of day, when the sun has reached the end of its reign and is slipping away behind the trees. (Alas, even the Sun King must sleep!) The scene is established: now, just at the end of a delightful country

romp, our aristocratic “peasants” have lain down underneath “les arbres,” the setting sun casting flicking light and shadows upon their faces. This evening is a feast for the senses: a blue coat, an “uncertain mask” with a soft dusting of kisses across leisurely lips.

*La mascarade, autre lointain mélancolique
Fait le geste d'aimer plus faux, triste et charmant*

*The masquerade, another distant melancholy,
Makes love's gesture sadder, falser, more charming.*

In the following stanza (quoted above), the mask is returned to the lover's face and our two mock peasants leave the trees for the evening's main activity: a masquerade. The words with the most emphasis – and painfully beautiful musicality – in the second stanza are “distant,” “melancholy” and “charmant.” How might we interpret the scene's shift from intimate leisure to a semi-public activity? The apparent contradictions of the masquerade: its “sadder” “falsar” yet “more charming” all at once – make sense once they are understood from an autobiographical perspective. The masquerade is quite literally made melancholic by the distance induced between the lovers with the return of the mask. But Hahn and Proust had to hide their love, even in the semi-public spaces of a social gathering. The sad charms of the masquerade were undoubtedly familiar to them. Every social gathering required a mask.

In a recent article, Michael Puri analyses the parallel ways memory works in Proust and Ravel, suggesting that the moment of recall which occurs in Ravel's opening to *Daphnis et Chloé* functions much like a Proustian *moment bienheureux*, or the “felicitious moment.”⁷⁹ I have located a much earlier example of this same phenomenon in the “Watteau” movement of *Portraits de Peintres*. The third section of the movement contains a quotation of the opening piano motif from Hahn's song “Fêtes galantes,” instantiated through the text “la

⁷⁹ Michael Puri, “Memory, Aestheticism, and Pastiche in Ravel and Proust” in *Ravel Studies*, ed. Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010): 122-152.

masquerade.” Indeed, the quotation functions much like a masquerade, recalling earlier musical poses by Hahn as well as one of his most memorable opening melodies. While “Watteau” is in F# Major, the “fête galante” quotation is in E Major, the bVII of the piece. In the context of the section of the movement immediately preceding the quotation (harmonized in D-flat Major/B-flat minor), the “fête galante” quotation in E-major is a distant #II. In Hahn’s original song, the opening piano motif appears five times, modulating from G Major to D Major to A minor, then a partial reappearance in D# minor/C# minor, before reappearing in G Major for its final, most stable appearance. In the “Watteau” movement, the appearance of the “Fête galante” theme in Eb major may be heard in relation to its appearance in G Major in Hahn’s original song. Hahn’s modulation thus establishes a melancholic, bVI relationship between the theme’s original appearance and its reworking in the context of “Watteau.”



Figure 2.15: Quotation of “Fêtes Galantes” in the piano part of “Watteau”

The piano performs the mask through a direct quotation of Hahn’s earlier song, “*Fête galante*.” Proust’s text, on the other hand, provides certain words with special emphasis:

crépuscule, lointain, mélancolique, charmant, caprice, savamment. A noticeable tension exists between the piano and narrator, where the free undulations of the speaking voice contrasts sharply with the controlled, virtuosic ornamentation of the piano. In general the piece carries a much darker, more melancholic quality than “Fêtes galantes,” as it desires an impossible return to a fantasy world that can never be recreated. The intensification on the word “*goûters*” (“tastes”) evokes a different form of nostalgia, the experience of recalling the past through a sensory experience that is inherently Proustian. The piece’s concluding words – *goûters, barques, silence, musique* – are given special emphasis by the Narrator, set apart from the rest of the text and given space to breathe and resound in silence, without piano accompaniment.

The silence around Proust’s final words of “Watteau” is a highly dramatic gesture. *Silence, musique...* these words gain their power ironically, through the use of silence and restraint which is so characteristic of the 1890s *mélodie*. This shift towards *pudeur*, concision, and restraint in self-expression was well-established in French vocal music by 1894. Debussy famously wrote instructions to his singers to conclude “La Flûte Enchantée” “*preque sans voix*” – “with almost no voice at all.” Katherine Bergeron argues that to be without voice produces a more sincere and natural diction, a more affecting (but not affected?!) delivery.⁸⁰ I agree with her observation that restraint in expression and sometimes, even silence can be used as means to increase the intensity of feeling. In a letter to Ernest Chausson in 1893, Debussy wrote “I’ve found myself using... and quite spontaneously too, a means of expression which I think quite unusual: namely, silence. (Don’t laugh!)”⁸¹

⁸⁰ Bergeron, 200-1.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 201.

Conclusion – the Ancien Regime as Exoticist Fantasy

Montesquiou's poetry carries with itself a belated quality – for example, his “Aria” from his enormous 1892 collection, *Les Chauves-souris (Bats)*. In this poem, the sound of Versailles echoes in the memory of Bernhardt's performance. It also becomes associated with death during her recitation of “Coucher de la morte.”

I conclude this chapter with another example of Montesquiou's poetry, “Ancien Regime,” the final poem (out of 166) in *Les Chauves-Souris*. Unexpectedly, this poem does not refer to France's *ancien regime* but rather the idea of the *ancien regime* in French Polynesia. Montesquiou's lengthy poem narrates the process through which Ta'aroa, the Tahitian god of all creation, created the Earth, its five moons, and the rest of the Universe. The poem is a paraphrase of the Tahitian story of Creation. The first two stanzas of the poem's twenty-one are translated below:

CLXVI (166): “Ancien Regime”

*Occidit quidem Luna.—Sappho
Tacitae per amica silentia Lunae. - Virgile*

*Cinq Lunes autrefois se partageaient les cieux;
Des charmes descendaient de leurs faces pâlies,
Et ceux qui les osaient regarder dans les yeux
Étaient pris de folies.*

*Ta'aroa se mit donc à les conjurer;
Lors dans l'immensité leurs disques s'agitèrent,
Et d'une voix lointaine et plaintive à pleurer,
Les cinq Lunes chantèrent.*

“Ancien Regime” (Translation mine)

*Indeed killed the Moon. -Sappho
Quiet under the friendly silence of the Moon. -Virgil*

*Five Moons once shared the heavens
Charms descending on their pale faces
And those who dares to look into their eyes
Were taken under their follies.*

*Ta'aroa therefore began to conjure;
When their discs in the vastness fluttered,
And a distant voice and plaintive cry,
The Five Moons sang.*

The idea of the five moons singing, as a story of origins, obviously resonated with Montesquiou, as he placed this poem at the conclusion of his most massive collection of

poetry. Almost 500 pages in length, *Les Chauves-Souris* is an enormous collection of poems which explore the themes which most interested the Decadent, ostentatious Count in the early 1890s. The second half of the collection's 166 poems is subtitled "Lunatiques" – is an extended meditation on the theme of moons (whether Grand, Simple, Kingly, Dark, White, or Old.)

Why is ancient Tahiti described as an *ancien regime*? I would like to suggest that the Decadent imagination constructed both pre-colonial Tahiti and pre-Revolutionary France as Lost Paradises, *ancien regimes* impossible to reach except through the melancholic, nostalgic performances of the past, exemplified by Montesquiou's "fête littéraire à Versailles" and Hahn's and Proust's *Portraits des Peintres*. In the following chapter I consider another side of the pose, the exotic pose, which is also marked by melancholic relationship to the past. Tahiti had recently come into the French colonialist imagination through the publication in 1880 of an enormously popular novel, Pierre Loti's *The Marriage of Loti*. By 1890, the novel had been reissued nine times and was the best-selling book in France after the Bible. Pierre Loti and Montesquiou were acquaintances who often sought to upstage each other, but even more importantly, they riffed on similar themes in their writing. The affective melancholic relationship between Tahiti and the *ancien regime* is my primary concern. Both Tahiti and pre-Revolutionary France are only approachable through the imagination and through performances that restage the past through a fantastic vision.

CHAPTER TWO

Les poses étranges of Hahn's L'Île du rêve

*The European, whose sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher... always ready for new examples of ... "bizarre jouissance." The Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness.*⁸²

Reynaldo Hahn's first opera, the 1898 "polynésienne idylle" *L'Île du rêve*, was a resounding disappointment, critically deplored for its inert plot and lack of musical innovation. The opera's static qualities stem from a particular treatment of exoticism popular in *fin-de-siècle* France that apparently did not translate successfully from novel to stage. Based upon Pierre Loti's immensely popular 1880 semi-autobiographical novel *Le Mariage de Loti*, the opera possesses an episodic, slow-moving quality typical of literary exoticism at the *fin de siècle*. As a result of the novel's popularity, Hahn's expectations were especially high for his first entry onto the Parisian stage. Unfortunately, the Opéra-Comique production was widely panned by critics and closed after only nine performances.⁸³ What can we learn from the opera's critical and popular failure? Privately, Hahn claimed the press misunderstood his composition: "They hold all of the best qualities of the work against me, that's to say, its languor, grace and lack of action."⁸⁴ Why might Hahn have seen these qualities as virtues rather than flaws?

While other scholars have examined *L'Île du rêve* in terms of its depiction of the "evanescent exotic" (Huebner, 2009) and the influence of Hahn's teacher Jules Massenet

⁸² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1979): 103. The full quotation is as follows:

"The Orient is watched, since its almost (but never quite) offensive behavior issues out of a reservoir of infinite peculiarity; the European, whose sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher, always ready for new examples of what the Description de l'Égypte called "bizarre jouissance." The Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness."

⁸³ See *Livre de bord de l'Opéra-Comique*, 1897-8 (without call number).

⁸⁴ In a letter dated April 1898 to Spanish artist Coco de Madrazo, as quoted in *The Translation of Memories*, 67.

(Blay and Lacombe, 1993), I interpret the opera's music, costumes and set design as a "living tableau of queerness" – a langorous, exoticist tableau vivant marked by a mixture of strangeness and nostalgia.⁸⁵ I draw this expression from Edward Said, who described the fictitious Orient as being metaphorically constructed as a "living tableau of queerness" in the Western imagination. Literalizing Said's declaration that the Orient is "the stage upon which the West performs its fantasies about the East," I interpret *L'Île du rêve* through the role which exotic posing plays within the opera itself, influenced by the theatrical genre of tableau vivant. The tableau vivant was itself decadent by the late nineteenth century, past its prime in popularity in France and soon to become embroiled in an infamous scandal, one with which Hahn would himself be rumored to be associated.

Drawing upon biographical and archival sources, I connect Loti's novel and Hahn's opera to the important role that exotic posing played in their own lives, arguing that these practices held special appeal for sexual minorities. Intriguingly, in a 1913 lecture on singing, Hahn commented that when performing Oriental song, it was imperative that the singer "become an Oriental, indolent, dreamy, still."⁸⁶ The composer's assumptions are two-fold: first, that being Oriental is to be passive, without time, and "dreamy"; and second, within the frame of musical and theatrical performance, that *it is possible to become Oriental simply by posing as Oriental*. Loti shared Hahn's investment in the exoticist pose – the possibility of becoming the Other simply through theatrical imitation. Loti was so obsessed with the "Orient" that he reconstructed his living room into a Turkish harem and spent a small fortune on his collection of outfits and artworks from the Middle East and Japan. He held elaborate

⁸⁵ See Said's *Orientalism* and Ali Behdad's *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* for further discussion of the concept of belated temporality.

⁸⁶ Reynaldo Hahn, *On Singers and Singing: Lectures and an Essay* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1990): 35. English translation by Leopold Simoneau. Originally published in French by Editions Gallimard in 1957 as *Du Chant*.

costume parties on various themes (Turkish, Ottoman, Egyptian) and hired photographers to document his and his guests' transformations. Loti and Hahn engaged in exoticist posing in very different ways: Loti's performances were personal and for pleasure, while Hahn's vocal posing was a crucial component of his career as a composer, singer, and Opera director. However, at the heart of both Loti and Hahn's exoticist poses lies the same troubling question of appearance versus reality: whether is it actually possible to become something one is not – simply by posing as it. It is this ontological question that the opera *L'Île du rêve* explores as well.

To state the case bluntly, *L'Île du rêve* makes sense only when interpreted in light of the Decadent movement's particular investment in melancholic constructions of the Orient. Exoticist fantasies are often tinged by the East's imagined stasis, lack of productivity, indolence, resistance to progress, and excessive and perverse sexuality. However, *L'Île du rêve*'s aesthetics differ from those of other exoticist operas in its tendency towards melancholia, a form of sublimated mourning for the loss and impermanence of youth. Michael Puri connects this melancholic state to musical Decadence, and many pieces by Hahn (including *Portraits des Peintres*, discussed in the prior chapter) engage in similarly Decadent constructions of melancholic desire.⁸⁷ Rather than representing action directly, most events in the opera are acts of remembering, nostalgia, grief, and anxiety about impending loss. The opera is itself an idyll, a genre which Puri identifies as the melancholic counterpart to the overtly erotic bacchanal in Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ See Michael Puri's *Ravel the Decadent* (Oxford, UK and New York: Oxford UP, 2012) for a discussion of the relationship between melancholia and musical Decadence, especially the Introduction and Chapter 5: "Epilogism in the *Valses nobles et sentimentales*."

⁸⁸ See Puri's Chapter 4, "Idylls and Bacchanals" from *Ravel the Decadent*.

This chapter explores the relationship between the music of Hahn's opera and the aesthetics of exotic posing, suggesting that discourses of Decadence and Orientalism are closely intertwined in this musical performance. How does Hahn's setting reinforce or undermine the static qualities of Loti's libretto? How does his music construct Tahiti, Rarahu, and the opera's other Oriental objects of desire? How does it produce an aestheticist, symbiotic relationship between Art and Life?

During the Second Act, the opera's French protagonist Loti adopts both the visual and musical costume of the Tahitian natives so flawlessly that he "passes" as Tahitian to his love interest Mahenu. While "going native" was a common occurrence in late nineteenth-century opera (think of *Lakmé's* Gerald or *Madame Butterfly's* Pinkerton), *L'Île du rêve* was unique in allowing its French protagonist to experience such a degree of intimacy with the exotic that the opera's musical distinctions between West and East become dangerously, if temporarily, blurred. The opera's narrative stasis and exotic poses thus function as a (failed) experiment in experiencing the "indolent, dreamy, still" time of the exotic Other.

Setting the Stage: A Critical Disappointment

Most criticisms of *L'Île du Rêve* stemmed from the perception that it was simply too long, slow-moving, and dull. One of the opera's harshest critics, *La Plume's* Lelio, noted that "Ses trois acts se déroulent sans action, dans une monotonie désespérante." ("Its three acts unfold without action, in an exasperating monotony.")⁸⁹ Lelio also warned other young

⁸⁹ The full quotation, from the March 24 1898 issue, is as follows:

Au demeurant, M. Reynaldo Hahn, qui module parfois d'agréables romances, ne se doute pas un seul instant de ce que doit être une pièce de théâtre; ses trois actes se déroulent sans action, dans une monotonie désespérante. Comme partition, ce ne sont que romances juxtaposées: à vrai dire ce n'est pas une oeuvre musicale. Jeunes auteurs, qui vous laissez séduire par le charme si particulier des chefs-d'oeuvres littéraires de M. P. Loti, gardez-vous bien de leur infliger *pareille mutilation* en vue du théâtre.

composers against letting themselves be “seduced by the charms” of Loti’s exoticism and producing similar theatrical “mutilations.” For Lelio, the trend towards exoticism also presented a danger to other young (presumably naive and impressionable) composers, who were at risk of being seduced by its captivating but ultimately vacant charms. The opera’s slow pacing was ultimately an unproductive “mutilation” of the traditional flow of theatrical action. Conductor and composer Alfred Bruneau suggested more tactfully that the opera would have been more likely to succeed had the libretto been reduced from 3 acts to 2, as was common practice.⁹⁰ In Bruneau’s opinion, Hahn’s opera took too much time, moving at a pace that bored modern Paris audiences.

Unsurprisingly, Hahn was defensive about the poor reception of his first opera, responding that the press failed to appreciate the exotic effects he had sought to achieve. In a private letter to Coco Madrazo he observed that “the press were not able to subdue my heroine with their blows, nor trample on my little Polynesian flowers with their dirty, clumsy feet...”⁹¹ His personification of his press as bumbling and crude suggested they were not able to understand the subtlety and elegance of his work. Later in the same letter he contrarily asserted “they [the critics] hold all of the good qualities of the work against me, that’s to say, its languor, grace and lack of action...” Intriguingly, all of these qualities relate to the pacing and flow of action within time in the opera.

[Although Reynaldo Hahn, who has composed some pleasant songs, does not doubt for an instant that he can make a good piece of theater; these three acts unfold without action, in an exasperating monotony. As a score, it is only juxtaposed songs: To tell the truth, it is not a musical work. Young authors who are seduced by the particular charms of the literary masterworks of M. P. Loti, watch well that you do not inflict *this kind of mutilation* in sight of the theater.]

⁹⁰ Alfred Bruneau, writing in *Le Figaro* on Tuesday, March 24th, 1898:

“Le livret de Gondinet...languissait en suite, s’allongeait de regrettable manière. Ses trois actes ont été habilement réduits à deux par M. Philippe Gille et, sous cette forme, la pièce et la partition obtiendront sans doute le succès, qu’elles n’avaient pu avoir jusqu’ici.”

⁹¹ In a letter to Spanish artist Coco de Madrazo, as quoted by P. F. Prestwich in *The Translation of Memories: Recollections of the Young Proust* (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 1998), 67.

Indeed, the plot structure of *L'Île du rêve* is slow and stilted for a specific aesthetic reason. The opera finds its beauty in *stasis*: tableaux of gorgeous waterfalls with bathing Tahitian girls, palaces of royal ceremony and choruses of "ancient Tahitian voices." There is no continuous flow of action; rather, its limited plot is motivated by minor episodes in which non-Tahitian characters – French soldiers and Chinese merchants – disrupt the Tahitians' idyllic lifestyle. Plot action thus functions negatively, by pulling the Tahitians into the problems of modernity rather than allowing them to remain in archaic Tahiti, their Garden of Eden. Just as in Genesis, action does not resolve problems; it creates them.

For example, in Act II the Tahitians sing together with Loti, mourning the death of Roueri, his older brother. Their act of communal mourning is interrupted by Tsen Lee, an ungainly Chinese merchant, who “comically” attempts to rape Mahenu, Loti's Tahitian love interest. I analyze this scene, along with two others from the opera in greater musical detail in this chapter's penultimate section. For now it will be sufficient to mention that Lee's disruption of Tahitian song serves at least two functions. First, this exchange was probably intended to add an element of comic relief, although the supposed humor of Lee's attempted rape has not aged well. Second, and more importantly, the scene differentiates musically between two types of “Others”: the opera's virtuous Tahitian characters and its greedy, brutish Chinese merchant. In contrast to the slow, archaic gestures of Tahitian song, Tsen Lee sings in upbeat, diatonic phrases that belie his malevolent intentions towards Rarahu. A juxtaposition between Lee's surface (happy, upbeat) and his interior (darker, lustful) is thus further invoked. We cannot trust Lee's musical posturing.

In this scene, the opera establishes a dialectical relationship between idyllic stasis – represented musically by the opera's gorgeous introductory tableaux, arias and the vast majority of musical numbers sung by Loti, Mahenu and the other Tahitians – and temporal

disruption – represented by certain moments of recitative and ironically tinged songs usually performed by French soldiers and Chinese merchants. The vast musical distinction between these two types of characters signals that the opera exists simultaneously in two temporal worlds: a melancholic, ancient paradise, in which the Tahitians reside; and the 1890s French present, to which the opera’s French and Chinese characters belong.

The Tahitians exist in a fantasy space far outside the French present, located in an ephemeral space of “belated melancholia.” By this I refer to what Said describes as “a sense of acute loss,” an overwhelming melancholia that was perhaps in response to the number of military defeats the French had suffered and their lack of a colonial presence in the Orient at the *fin de siècle*. In discussing travel writing from the late Colonial period, Ali Behdad expands Said’s discussion of French melancholia, reading both Nerval’s *Voyage en Orient* and Flaubert’s *Notes de voyages* as fragments of a belated Orientalist’s discourse. Nerval’s language is indefinite, marked by a lack of discursive finality as he struggles to reconcile his desire to sustain the Oriental fantasy and his own inability to realize the fantasy. In describing Egypt “as a vast grave,” Nerval also links Orientalist desire to death – a desire that can never be realized, but always deferred, always located where the subject is not present.⁹² Flaubert was simultaneously horrified and obsessed with the filth and sexual excess he saw inside Egyptian harems, struggling to reconcile his Orientalist fantasy with the abjection he experienced. Thus the “melancholy traveler loses himself in the Orient and then mourns his loss...And yet there is no room for bereavement and loss in the symbolic field of Orientalist discourse, Orientalism begins with the negation of loss, with a will to discovery.”⁹³ Nerval

⁹² Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1994), 29.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 70-1.

and Flaubert's experiences underscore the ways in which Orientalist desires are always deferred, always elsewhere, and must logically conclude in death.

In the Orientalist imagination, the Orient always exists in an unfamiliar time and place. The Orient is not merely distant, but completely unreachable, both in terms of its temporal and geographical location, remaining impossibly distant yet perfectly mapped out in the "imaginary geography." Time serves as a means of understanding the passage of both day-to-day existence and the larger scale of history. In the West, time is usually constructed as either clock time (the Greek *chronos*) or as a series of events (*kairos*), each with a beginning, middle, and end (past, present and future). Oriental time is queer time, time that runs "against the grain" of Western clock time and event time. Yet to fix the "Other" permanently in the past is to treat the "Other" as an entirely controllable and knowable historical subject. Fixed permanently in an unfamiliar temporality, yet always immanently knowable, the temporal location of the exotic subject is an aporia.

Unsurprisingly, exotic constructions of time characterize Pierre Loti's second novel, the 1880 semi-autobiographical *Le Mariage de Loti*. Set in 1870s French Tahiti, the novel traces the emergence and eventual dissolution of a romantic relationship between the French naval officer "Loti" and the fourteen-year old native girl "Rarahu." The novel is marked by a sense of stasis, as it is constructed as a series of loosely-connected events interspersed with long passages describing Tahiti's pristine beauty. The novel's alternately episodic and static nature is related to French decadent literature of the period: *À rebours*, for example, Huysmans' 1884 decadent manifesto, is filled with passages whose ornate descriptions grow so involved that they dissolve the narrative into a sensuous celebration of language itself. The languid prose and temporal stasis of both novels create an aura of Decadence – the sense of lateness, exhaustion, and morbidity that characterized much art produced at the *fin de siècle*.

Loti originally made his career as a naval officer, spending over 40 years of his life to a number of French colonies and military outposts such as Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Thailand, Japan, and Tahiti. His first naval assignment was to Papette in 1871, when he was in his early twenties. Loti had dreamed of going to Tahiti ever since his older brother Gustave Viaud had gone there on military assignment when Loti was only ten. Tragically, Loti's brother passed away during this trip, and Tahiti had held a special appeal, both alluring and terrifying, for Loti ever since.

Le Mariage du Loti is written as a series of episodes in the life of "Loti," a young naval officer stationed at the Tahitian capital Papete, interspersed with lengthy descriptions of the island and its people. The protagonist "Loti" is based closely upon the author's own experiences as a seventeen-year old naval officer in Tahiti during the 1870s. In retrospect, the author looked back wistfully upon this period in his life. Both Loti the character and Loti the author struggled with the impossibility of returning to that Edenic period of their youth.

Hahn's own relationship to *L'Île du Rêve* was tinged with youthful melancholia. His protectiveness about this opera was in part due to the fact that he completed it in the summer of 1893, when he was 18, and had then struggled to find an audience for it for nearly 5 years. Originally, in 1890 Hahn's teacher Massenet had been offered the libretto by André Alexandre and Georges Hartmann (who, under Loti's guidance, had arranged the novel for opera). However, after becoming too busy to compose the opera himself, Massenet subsequently recommended the libretto to his young and promising 16 year-old pupil Hahn. Author Alphonse Daudet provided another hearty recommendation of Hahn to Loti.⁹⁴ Hahn remembered the period of *L'Île du rêve's* composition (the summer of 1890 through the summer of 1893) as being a particularly fraught and emotionally vulnerable time.

⁹⁴ Depaulis, 40.

While composing the opera, Hahn claimed to have been “in a state of amorous exaltation such as I hope never to experience again. There are things in this score that I could never write again because they have a naïve tenderness, a youth, a poetry, that my spirit has lost.”⁹⁵

Indeed, shortly following his completion of the score for *L'Île du rêve*, Hahn met and fell in love with Marcel Proust, who soon after became his lover and, eventually, a life-long friend. Young Proust and Hahn collaborated on several artistic projects during their three-year relationship (some of which I discuss in the prior chapter). The young Proust also attempted to use his limited influence to get Hahn's opera premiered, but to no avail.⁹⁶ *L'Île du rêve* finally had its premiere in March 1898, almost eight years after Hahn began work on the score. Unfortunately, Proust had had a falling out with Hahn in January 1898 and did not attend the premiere. Looking back on the period of the opera's composition, twenty-three year old Hahn must have sensed a vast psychological gulf between his current state and the state he had been in when he composed it as a teenager. Proust is said to have once written that “The only true paradise is the paradise we have lost.” In other words, paradise does not exist but in recollection. In this instance, art imitates life, as the lost paradises of the novel *Le Mariage du Loti* and the opera *L'Île du rêve* mirror Hahn's own melancholia for his lost youth and Loti's impossible desire to return to his life as a naval officer in Tahiti.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Loti's Exotic Poses

L'Île du rêve's slow pacing was strongly influenced by the novel upon which it was based, *Le Mariage du Loti*. While Loti's novel was extremely popular in 1880s France, by modern literary standards it seems curiously dated.⁹⁷ Loti's overt exoticism tends to be viewed today as a *fin-de-siècle* embarrassment marked by Decadent excess, and his writing has been largely ignored by twentieth-century French literary scholarship.⁹⁸ Only recently has Loti begun to get the attention he deserves as the best-selling author of France in the 1880s and 1890s.

Loti began writing novels based upon his travel-writing and correspondence when he was about thirty. His first novel, *Aziyade* (1880), was the most overtly homoerotic of his works, as the protagonist maintains his closest relationships with two men: Soloman, his youthful male servant and Harry Grant, the English friend to whom he writes all of his letters. *The Marriage of Loti* (1882) was similar to *Aziyade* in its epistolary and semi-autobiographical format but centers overtly on the protagonist's heterosexual desire for a single Tahitian girl. Loti admitted later in life that despite the novel's overtly autobiographical quality (the protagonist is a young British naval officer named Loti), Rarahu was not based on any one woman, but rather the composite of a number of Tahitian women with whom he engaged in illicit affairs during his station in Tahiti from 1871-4.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Martyn Lyons, *Reading Culture and Writing Practices in Nineteenth-Century France* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University Toronto Press, 2008): 34.

⁹⁸ Beginning in the 1990s, there has been a minor resurgence in literary scholarship on Loti, but nothing in proportion to his popularity during the *fin de siècle*.

⁹⁹ Edward B. D'Auvergne, *Pierre Loti: Romance of a Great Writer*. London: Kegan Paul Ltd (2002): 41. Auvergne refers to a letter by Loti dated February 24th, 1879. Auvergne's text was written in the 1926 but not published until 2002.

Loti's colonial travels during the 1870s, 80s, and 90s took him to Japan, Senegal, Turkey, Morocco, India, and Algiers, in addition to French Polynesia. During his travels, Loti purchased a number of possessions such as artwork, furniture, costumes, and rugs, using them to decorate his home and body when he returned to France.¹⁰⁰ Such exotic posing became a signature for Loti throughout his life. He held elaborate costume parties with Turkish, Japanese and Renaissance themes and incorporated elements of Oriental costume into his daily attire. He was so enthusiastically flamboyant in his embrace of the exotic that he reportedly managed to upstage Sarah Bernhardt at their first meeting by being carried in to meet her on a bearskin rug, wearing an outrageous Arabian costume.¹⁰¹



Figure 3.1: Pierre Loti in his living room in Rochefort, c. 1890.

¹⁰⁰ Loti's home in Rochefort is now a museum, the *Maison Pierre Loti*.

¹⁰¹ This tale of certain origins is recounted in D'Auvergne's *Pierre Loti: Romance of a Great Writer*, 85.

On *L'Île du rêve*'s opening night Loti's appearance was especially distinctive. Hahn's cousin Marie Nordlinger recalled meeting Pierre Loti for the first time that evening: "He was in naval uniform and I was immediately impressed by the charm and sincerity of his eyes, but quite taken aback to find that the face of the author, whom we all more or less idolized, was very much made up and that he was wearing high, very high heels!"¹⁰² Loti's play with make-up and heels was perceived as outrageous not just because of cross-gender associations with sexual identity and gender, but also because he included his naval uniform in costumed displays of theatrical performance, juxtaposing the official costumes with the feminine. Such suggestions of cross-dressing and theatricality connect to his novel's semi-autobiographical quality, in that both take the aestheticist position of blurring the relationship between Life and Art.

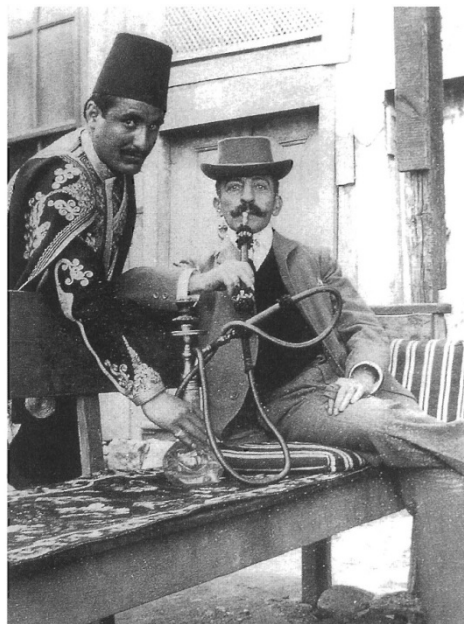


Figure 3.2: Loti poses with a hookah and friend

¹⁰² As quoted in *The Translation of Memories*, 67. Proust also refers to Loti in *Time Regained*, with Dr. Cottard's appearance at Mme. Verdurin's parties "in a colonel's uniform which might have come out of Loti's *L'Île du rêve* (it bore a striking resemblance to that of a Haitian admiral and at the same time, with its broad sky-blue ribbon, recalled one of the "Children of Mary"!)

In a discussion of French lesbian performance in the 1890s, Emily Apter has hypothesized that “part of what allowed turn-of-the-century sexuality to perform itself... was its mediation by the culturally exotic *stereotype*.”¹⁰³ In other words, the sexual Other (the Western homosexual) used the racialized Other (the colonized native) to articulate difference. Apter frames the pose as a possible hinge between “doing” and “being” upon which gender performance is predicated (a central problem unaddressed by both Butler and Sedgwick). All stereotypes (including those related to gender and sexuality) are themselves dependent on performance and their legibility through repetition. *Exotic stereotypes, mapped out upon a performing body through costume and gesture, signify both the performer’s distinction from and possible affinities or resonances with that difference.*

More specifically, in the case of Loti, exotic posing (as evidenced above in his living room stylized as Turkish mosque, replete with a costumed servant lighting his hookah) enabled him to construct his private life as a fantasy world of sexual ambiguity. Loti was not openly homosexual; he enjoyed a lifelong marriage and there is no record of his ever having had a male lover. However, his obsession with posing, gender and self-image is reflected through his elaborate photographic records. These include images of himself nearly naked, in an acrobat’s costume, flaunting his lean, muscle body in a manner that anticipates 1940s muscle magazines, as well as the slightly more subtle but provocative image of Loti smoking a hookah, while he and his friend – who is lighting Loti’s pipe – stare back at the camera with a single, startlingly direct gaze. (See Figure 2.) Sometimes a pipe isn’t just a pipe.

The act of posing, of freezing time into a single gesture, was one strategy by which Loti could enter the belated time of the exotic and explore alternative forms of gender and

¹⁰³ Emily Apter, “Acting Out Orientalism” in *Continental Drift* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999): 133.

sexual expression. Of course, Loti was not alone in his investment in the theatrical potential of the exotic pose. He was undoubtedly influenced by Sarah Bernhardt's acting style, as the following visual comparison indicates:



Figures 3.3 and 3.4: Pierre Loti and Sarah Bernhardt as exotic poseurs

In Figures 3 and 4, Loti poses as the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II and Bernhardt poses as Cleopatra, a role she first played in 1890. Both figures hold a prop appropriate for their character which suggests a certain gesture (Loti opening his clocks, and Bernhardt inhaling her flower). Both are archaic and highly stylized. Both also position their bodies in curves which bend to the right, although the feminine softness of Bernhardt's posture contrasts with the rigidity of Loti's pose. Tellingly, narrow bands of gold wrap around Bernhardt's upper arm and hand, representing snakes. Cleopatra's ornaments tell us more about her inner nature than her clothing.

In his memoir of Bernhardt, Hahn comments on Bernhardt's acting style in great detail, observing that

Her entrance alone is one of the most beautiful things in the world that it is possible to see; for all that which is purest and most elegant in *sculpture* is combined here with the bodily ravages which the torments of love can inflict on a human being; it is Beauty beautified by Suffering.¹⁰⁴

In describing Bernhardt as a sculpture, Hahn does not merely objectify the actress by comparing her body to a work of art, but further renders her as a figure of abstraction. For Hahn, Bernhardt is the Ideal of "Beauty" made more beautiful "by Suffering." Hahn thus reveals the masochistic quality inherent in this process of objectification.¹⁰⁵ Posing thus functions both as a form of publicity and masochistic self-abstraction in the figure of Bernhardt. This tendency towards the abstraction of the self as the Ideal – rendered in sculpture no less – is a continuation of the Decadent legacy of the "exotic pose" first articulated by Charles Baudelaire in his poem "L'Idéal."

The expression "une pose étrange" has a cameo in Baudelaire's enormously influential *Les Fleurs du Mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*).¹⁰⁶ While the collection was censored and considered extremely controversial during his lifetime, Baudelaire's collection is now hailed as a groundbreaking work anticipating both the Symbolist and Decadent movements.¹⁰⁷ Its one-hundred poems are organized into five thematic sections: *Spleen et Idéal*, *Fleurs du mal*, *Révolte*, *Le Vin*, and *La Mort*. One of the most well-known poems from *Les Fleurs du Mal* is

¹⁰⁴ Reynaldo Hahn, *Sarah Bernhardt: Impressions* (London: E. Mathews & Marrot, Limited, 1932), 46. Originally published in French as *La Grande Sarah: Souvenirs* (Paris: Hachette, 1930).

¹⁰⁵ For more on posing as a form of objectification and its connection to sculpture, see my extended discussion of "exotic poses" in chapter two.

¹⁰⁶ "L'Idéal" from Charles Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil*, Oxford and London: Oxford UP, 1993. This edition is translated with notes by James McGowan and includes an introduction by Jonathan Culler.

¹⁰⁷ Following the original publication of *Les fleurs du mal* in 1857, Baudelaire was fined 300 francs and six poems were removed. These censored poems were later published during Baudelaire's lifetime in Belgium as *Les Epaves* (*The Scraps*).

“Correspondences,” which describes the the synesthetic overlap between multiple sensory experiences in nature:

...Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se repondent.
Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies...

...Perfumes, colors and sounds respond to each other.
There are perfumes fresh as the flesh of children,
Sweet as the sound of oboes, green as pastures...¹⁰⁸

According to Baudelaire, the artist must gather fragments of the fallen and broken spiritual world on earth in order to reconnect them and reconstrue them, correcting and reordering Nature’s chaos. In other words, it is the artist’s responsibility to arrange and *pose* sensory experience in order to create meaning in Art, which does not imitate Nature but rather transcends it. Posing is thus framed as a technology of the artist in response to a godless natural world.

The original 1857 collection also contains fifteen uses of the French noun “pose” and its variants (e.g. the verb “poser,” the present participle “posant”), describing subjects ranging from the refreshing contours of an eighteenth-century water fountain to the erotic undulations of the Narrator’s dusky harem lover.¹⁰⁹ All of these references, however, connect back to the idea of the arabesque and curving lines more generally as a key concept in Decadent formulations of eroticism and pleasure, whether it is sublimated (e.g. the water fountain) or overt (e.g. the Narrator’s lover).

The specific phrase “une pose étrange” appears in the concluding stanza of “L’Ideal,” the nineteenth poem in the 100-poem collection, in which Baudelaire describes

¹⁰⁸ Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*, “Correspondences,” (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1993): 18-19. Translation with notes by James MacGowan.

¹⁰⁹ I made this determination by performing a keyword search on the Project Gutenberg version of *Les Fleurs du Mal*: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/6099/6099-h/6099-h.htm>

Michelangelo's sixteenth-century sculpture *Night* as being calmly wrung out in “une pose étrange.” Both exotic and the bizarre, unnatural and grotesque, the original phrase “une pose étrange” carries a range of connotations that cannot be captured fully in a single translation. This phrase is sometimes translated as a “strange” or “monstrous” pose, but I prefer the translation of “exotic” pose, because it implies both “strange” and “foreign,” like *étrange* itself. I have reproduced both Michelangelo's sculpture and Baudelaire's poem below.¹¹⁰ What does Baudelaire's “Ideal” look, sound, and feel like?

Baudelaire finds his Ideal not in the clichéd tropes of easily accessible art and literature (Gavarni, pale roses, pretty vignettes), but rather in the darker forms of Lady MacBeth and Michelangelo's *Night*. Baudelairean aesthetics are grotesque, gothic, evil – a meditation on the splendor of sickliness and the perversion of Nature. *Night* reclines in a position not often found in either sculpture or nature. Her androgynous body bends uncomfortably forward, displaying powerful thighs and heavily muscled shoulders. A small, feminine head and neck at the top of the statue scarcely seem to belong to the same body.



Figure 3.5: Michelangelo's *Night* (c. 1530)

¹¹⁰ Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*, “L'Idéal,” (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1993): 18-19. Translation with notes by James MacGowan.

Charles Baudelaire, “L’Idéal”

*Ce ne seront jamais ces beautés de vignettes,
Produits avariés, nés d'un siècle vaurien,
Ces pieds à brodequins, ces doigts à castagnettes,
Qui sauront satisfaire un coeur comme le mien.*

*Je laisse à Gavarni, poète des chloroses,
Son troupeau gazouillant de beautés d'hôpital,
Car je ne puis trouver parmi ces pâles roses
Une fleur qui ressemble à mon rouge idéal.*

*Ce qu'il faut à ce coeur profond comme un abîme,
C'est vous, Lady Macbeth, âme puissante au
crime, Rêve d'Eschyle écloso au climat des autans;*

*Ou bien toi, grande Nuit, fille de Michel-Ange,
Qui tors paisiblement dans une pose étrange
Tes appas façonnés aux bouches des Titans!*

“The Ideal” (1857)

*It will not be these beauties of vignettes,
Poor products of a worthless century,
Feet in half-boots, fingers in castanets,
Who satisfy the yearning heart in me.*

*That poet of chlorosis, Gavarni,
Can keep his twittering troupe of sickly queens,
Since these pale roses do not let me see
My red ideal, the lover of my dreams.*

*I need a heart abyssal in its depth,
A soul confirmed in crime, Lady Macbeth,
Aeschylus' dream, storm-born out of the south,*

*Or you, great Night of Michelangelo's,
Who calmly twists in an exotic pose
Those charms he fashioned for a Titan's mouth!*

At first, the tight, twisting contours of Michelangelo’s statue may appear far removed from the homoerotic narcissism of Loti’s photographs. However, I locate a certain queer affinity between them, particularly in their relationship to time. The statue is frozen in time, trapped within its exotic pose forever. It is the static, lifeless version of Baudelaire’s gothic Ideal. In contrast, Loti’s exotic poses were once live performances, both when he was posing for the camera and when he posed in the costumes of everyday life. Loti chose to freeze his own image through the camera lens, capturing himself on film and producing a static representation of himself that never changes.

I am now reminded of Loti’s contemporary Oscar Wilde and Wilde’s 1890 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Recall the novel’s primary conceit: after the young, beautiful Dorian poses for a painting, he no longer ages – the painting does instead. As Dorian grows older and more corrupt, his exterior surface remains perfect and polished, concealing his inner turmoil. This inversion of surface and depth is at the heart of the exotic pose.

Christopher Craft has interpreted *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a response to technology of the

photograph; I read Loti's photographic poses similarly, as a critique of photography's supposed verisimilitude. All three aesthetic objects – Wilde's novel, Loti's photographs, and Michelangelo's statue – are themselves rendering of the *pose étrange*, frozen through the technology of their time. Each object, in its own way, troubles the divide between interior and exterior, the natural and unnatural. As Wilde himself cautions his readers in the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril."¹¹¹

Que(e)rying Hahn

How might the concept of posing play out in the oeuvre of Reynaldo Hahn? It is worth considering that Hahn in some ways had to "pose" in his everyday life in order to achieve success on the French music scene, and that he presented a concept of "vocal posing" in his approach to vocal pedagogy.

Hahn's reception in the musicological canon has been at best sparse. His works have attracted the most notice from singers specializing in the music of the French salon, such as Susan Graham and Felicity Lott. The only Anglophone musicologist to give him any sustained scholarly attention is Katherine Bergeron, who admits she became enamored of the composer when practicing his songs as an undergraduate voice major.¹¹² Yet Hahn's reputation for being a composer with a "natural" musical talent for effortlessly composing piano miniatures and insouciant songs is also, of course, immensely restrictive. It means his associations with other musical genres, especially larger, more "serious" forms such as opera and the symphony, are by extension weakened. In this respect, Hahn acts as a French counterpart to Franz Schubert, who also became known as a talented composer of lieder as a

¹¹¹ Oscar Wilde, (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1998): xxiv.

¹¹² Katherine Bergeron, *Voice Lessons: French Melodié in the Belle Époque* (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP: 2010): ix.

youth. Both Hahn's and Schubert's current canonical status has been diminished by the double-edged sword of "effortless lyricism" that implicitly calls into question their ability to compose in larger genres.

However, Schubert and Hahn's reception histories differ in two important respects. First, while Schubert's reputation as a composer of symphonies has been rehabilitated and even monumentalized in the musical canon through the efforts of Viennese nationalist biographers since the 1860s, Hahn's operas have received no such reintegration into the musical canon.¹¹³ Second, while Schubert struggled during his lifetime to get any of his symphonies and expensive, large-scale compositions performed, Hahn did achieve a substantial measure of critical and personal success during his lifetime. During the second half of his life, Hahn maintained a reputation as an influential teacher, critic and conductor, as well as a composer of popular operettas such as *Ciboulette* (1923) and *Mozart* (1926). He served as a music critic at *L'Excelsior* in 1919 and then the major Parisian daily *Figaro* in 1934. He was appointed as a teacher at the Conservatoire in 1913 and even served as director of the Paris Opéra during his final years (1945-7).

L'Île du rêve, Hahn's first attempt at composing an opera, was of course *not* one of his great theatrical successes. In 1898 Hahn had yet to make a substantial mark on the French music scene. At the time of its premiere, his reputation was built on little more than a few charming melodies, such as "*Si mes vers avaient des ailes*," composed when he was only fourteen, and for having charmed Princess Mathilda (Emperor Napoleon III's lesbian cousin) by playing the piano in her salon when he was only six. Furthermore, the young composer had to negotiate a number of conflicting identities, which made his integration into the social milieu of 1890s Paris quite challenging. He was born in Caracas, Venezuela in

¹¹³ For more on Schubert's posthumous revival and commemorization, see Scott Messing's *Schubert in the European Imagination*, Volume 2 (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2007).

August 1874 to a Basque mother and a German-Jewish father. His family moved to Paris when Hahn almost four, and Hahn began music studies at the Conservatoire in 1885. Unlike Pierre Loti, Hahn was not a French citizen by birth, and he was half-Jewish. These qualities called his loyalty to the French government into question, especially during the Dreyfus Affair, which began in 1894 and came to a head in January 1898, just two months before *L'Île du rêve's* premiere, when Zola published *J'accuse*.

As a result, Hahn's own relationship to posing was far more complex and less overtly theatrical than Loti's. Hahn had to pose – as French, as heterosexual, as a citizen – in his daily life merely to make his way in the French music scene. (Hahn and Proust, in fact, were both children of German Jews who emigrated to France after the French Revolution. The decree of September 27, 1791 conferred all the rights and advantages of citizenship to “all men who take the oath of citizenship, and undertake to fulfill all the duties imposed by the Constitution.” For most of the nineteenth century, France remained the only European country in which Jews could be recognized as citizens.) When Hahn was growing up in Paris during the 1880s, anti-Semitic resentment grew stronger, due to the unprecedented success of a relatively small population of French Jews in finance, the art, medicine, law, and journalism. Assimilation was the path taken by most French Jews, not wishing to disrupt the status quo. More than just integration into French culture, assimilation also meant “social fusion, an ambition that included the reform of Jewish religion to bring it into the orbit of French modernity.”¹¹⁴ Furthermore, to be a French Jew in the late nineteenth century brought with it a certain set of consequences: “The desire to be above all else and at all times French had another consequence: the tendency of French Jews to minimize the importance

¹¹⁴ Louis Begley, *Why the Dreyfus Affair Matters* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2009): 72.

of anti-Semitism, remain passive, and avoid speaking out against outrageous behavior.”¹¹⁵ Thus, while a number of Hahn’s closest friends, including Proust, Sarah Bernhardt, and Anatole France, were outspoken Dreyfusards, Hahn remained quiet on the subject, evading the possible limelight. Indeed, at the time of *L’Île du rêve*’s premiere, Hahn was not a French citizen but rather a Venezuelan Jew. Notably, Hahn did not achieve any major theatrical or operatic success until *after* he became a naturalized French citizen in 1909. Furthermore, performances of his works were banned during the Nazi occupation of France from 1940-44, because of his paternal German-Jewish ancestry. Hahn’s multiple stigmas – Jewish, Venezuelan, homosexual – practically demanded that he become a virtuosic social performer in order to integrate into the highly contentious French music scene. And indeed he was. As Proust scholar Frank Rosengarten observes, Hahn “had the cool demeanor and aplomb of a polished performer, even at an extremely young age. *He had the ability to make a difficult task seem effortless, thus putting his audiences at their ease and virtually guaranteeing himself several encores and repeat performances.*”¹¹⁶ Read in the context of social actor theory, such a quotation acquires an entirely new meaning.

As Robert Park points out in his classic study *Race and Culture*, individuals are not born persons. Park marks a useful distinction between the sociological concepts of the individual, character, and person, saying “We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons.”¹¹⁷ To the advantage of my discussion Park supports his thesis by the etymological connection of the word person to a mask, arguing it is

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 73.

¹¹⁶ Frank Rosengarten, *The Writings of the Young Marcel Proust (1885-1900)* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001): 65. Italics mine.

¹¹⁷ Robert Ezra Park, *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950), 250. As quoted by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Random House, 1959): 20.

It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role... It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves.

In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves—the role we are striving to live up to—this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be. In the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our personality.¹¹⁸

As Erving Goffman points out in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, individuals must manage their public selves (which he calls a “front”) by organizing and managing both appearance and manner. “Appearance” refers to “those stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer’s social statuses.” “Manner” refers to interaction role. It requires a certain coherence of front to become integrated into society, and those individuals occupying more familiar roles have patterns of fronts that are well-established. Thus it is easier to establish a front for a familiar social role, such a teacher or student, than one that is less common.

I read Hahn’s dandyism as a mode of impression management (to borrow Goffman’s phrase), a pose that the composer adopted to produce a front that was socially respectable and coherent in the face of many competing pressures. Goffman mentions that if individuals involve their ego in an “identification with a particular part, establishment and group” the self-conceptions around which his personality has been built may become discredited.” He calls these events performance disruptions.¹¹⁹ Here I think of Hahn’s experience with the failure of his opera, something he had invested years of work and which represented to him in some ways a major arrival of his onto the Parisian scene. Hahn would

¹¹⁸ Park, 249. As quoted by Goffman, 19.

¹¹⁹ Goffman, 243.

have to wait years until finally gaining the broad social acceptance and musical success he had hoped to achieve with *L'Île du rêve*.

Someone like Hahn had to negotiate the closet, which requires that “paradoxically, the more the individual is concerned with the reality that is not available to perception, the more must he concentrate his attention on appearances.”¹²⁰ Goffman divides the individuals into two components: the “performer” (who stages the performance) and the “character” (the part the performer plays).¹²¹

Furthermore, Hahn was homosexual, an erstwhile lover and lifelong friend of Marcel Proust. Hahn’s ambivalence around his own sexual difference mirrors that of Proust's: he never directly attributed it to himself, and he made disparaging remarks about "public homosexuals." He rarely acknowledged his own sexual proclivities openly, but neither did he closet himself. Rather, Hahn lived following the model of the "open secret," managing his reputation by neither denying nor revealing his homosexuality, and simply letting his sexual proclivities be known without referring to them directly.¹²²

However, Hahn has enjoyed a small but significant afterlife as a queer icon. Take, for example, the following magical realist painting by Paul Cadmus.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 249.

¹²¹ Ibid., 252.

¹²² Alan Sinfield, “Private Lives / Public Theatre: Noël Coward and the Politics of Homosexual Representation” *Representations* 36 (1991): 43-63.

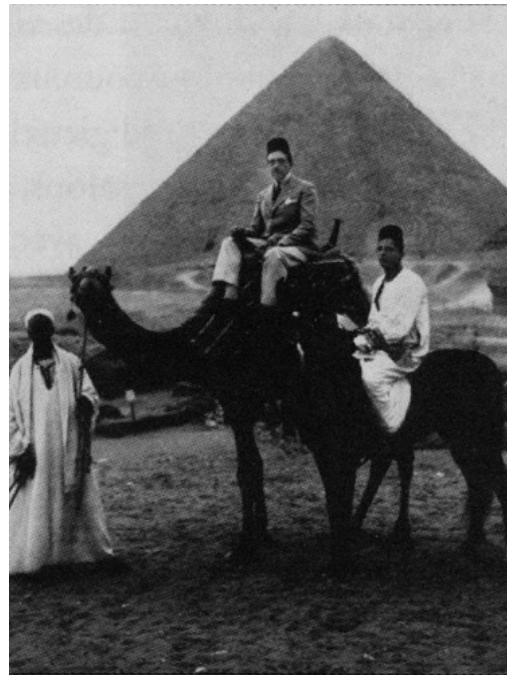


Figure 3.6: Paul Cadmus, *Le ruban dénoué: Une Homage de Reynaldo Hahn* (1962)

This painting, named after Hahn's 1914 collection of 12 Waltzes for 2 Pianos, aptly captures the eroticism of piano four-hands.¹²³ Indeed, four hands do reach out to touch and caress the composer in Cadmus' painting. Its title, *Le ruban dénoué* (*The Untied Ribbon*), is rendered through the luxurious folds of an infinitely long satiny ribbon which cascades across the frame. Reading the painting from left to right, we see that the ribbon forms a narrative of sorts across the page. It begins as a slender pale blue thread emanating from the crescent moon on the far left of the canvas and curves around the sky, slowly widening and deepening in color to a meter-thick sky blue strip of cloth, held up across the composer's back by an angel of the moon. The other side of the untied ribbon is a lusty tomato red, which folds over and drapes seductively across the lap of a faun. While the moon fairy chastely kisses Hahn on the lips, the faun operates from below. Our faun is permanently erect (ithyphallic), his head and arm reaching upwards towards Hahn's rear. These two

¹²³ See Philip Brett's article "Schubert's Piano Four-Hands and the Performance of Gay Male Desire" in *Nineteenth-Century Music* 21:2 (Autumn 1997): 149-176.

mythical figures, the faun and the fairy, embody two sides of artistic and sexual desire, the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Hahn sits in between the two dialectically opposing characters, composing music which flies off of his lap on white sheets of paper. Hahn's compositional process is thus rendered as the product of two conflicting forms of desire, suggesting his music is inspired by both the Dionysian and the Apollonian drives. Significantly, the composer is also positioned as a bottom with respect to both mythical figures, submitting to their drives rather than directing them or integrating them into his own purposes.



Figures 3.7 and 3.8: Hahn during his 1930 trip to Turkey and Egypt



Figure 3.9: French Orientalist Tableau Vivant, c. 1888

Five years after *L'Île du rêve*'s premiere, Hahn is rumored to have become involved with a musical-theatrical production of a far more scandalous sort. According to historian Will H.L. Ogrinc, Hahn may have served as the composer-in-residence for a series of homoerotically-charged *tableaux vivants* performed by school boys at the home of Baron Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen.¹²⁴ The tableau vivant, as in the example pictured above in Figure 9, is a nineteenth-century genre in which a famous painting or scene is brought to life by real people in costume as characters from the scene. Thus it is itself a performance of posing.

While the genre has its origins as a parlor game, it also acquired a certain stigma in

¹²⁴ Will H. L. Ogrinc, "Frère Jacques: A Shrine to Love and Sorrow (1880-1923)," *Le seminaire gai*, 2006. Also see Nancy Erber's "Queer Follies: Effeminacy and Aestheticism in fin-de-siècle France, the Case of Baron d'Adelswärd Fersen and Count de Warren" in *Disorder in the Court: Trials and Sexual Conflict at the Turn of the Century* (New York: New York UP, 1999):186-208.

France during the late nineteenth century, due to its associations with English dance hall and the unsavory elements of society. Hahn is named by Ogrinc as well as by Adelsward-Fersen himself in letters as having composed the incidental music for these tableaux vivants. However, no firm evidence of this interaction has yet to be discovered. After being suppressed for a century in order to protect the names of the prominent individuals involved, the police dossier and trial records were finally made available in 2003. These two files, available at the Archives de France in Paris, as well as two letters held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Site Richelieu, from Adelswärd-Fersen to Robert de Montesquiou, dating from December 1908 and January 1909, may provide further evidence of Hahn's involvement in this scandal.

Before 2003, the primary record of the tableaux vivante trial was a 1959 novel of historical fiction by Roger Peyrefitte, *The Exile of Capri*. Peyrefitte, clearly a huge fan of the Count, fabricated numerous details about the Count's life in order to create a more sensational novel, also creating a fabulous testament to mid-century fantasies about early twentieth-century queer identity. Peyrefitte mentions Hahn in his fictional recreation of the tableau vivants but provides little description of his musical contributions to the ones that were actually staged.¹²⁵ The novel also contains a foreword by Jean Cocteau that describes the Baron as the leader of not the Black but rather the Pink Mass! This rumor about Hahn's involvement is significant not because it is true, but because it is conceivable that Hahn would secretly become involved in something so sensationally queer. We want to imagine Hahn, the elegant poseur, as having secretly composed music for such an illicit event. In contrast, is it even imaginable that someone like Debussy would write music for an illicit

¹²⁵ Roger Peyrefitte, *The Exile of Capri* (London: Secker & Warburg: 1961): 35. English translation by Edward Hyams. Originally published in 1959 by Ernest Flammarion.

salon performance like this? What is worth paying attention to is how our particular investments in a composer allow us to imagine – or foreclose – the possibility of his involvement in a sensational scandal.

Vocal Posing and the Question of Sincerité

I heard him [sing] only once, in Annales, too little to speak of him at length, enough to be entranced. Was it beautiful? No, it was unforgettable. The voice was nothing exceptional....a fine baritone voice, not very large, flexible as grass, ruled with a marvelous intelligence, a reflective divination. An interminable cigarette dangled from the line of his lips, not as a “pose” but out of habit. He sang as we breathe, out of necessity.¹²⁶

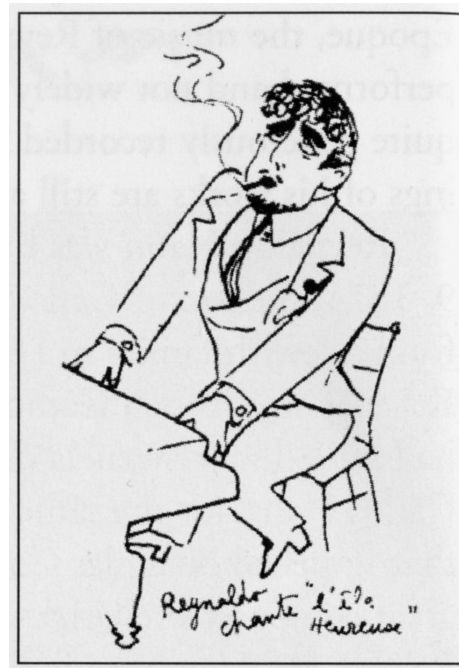


Figure 2.10. Jean Cocteau, *Reynaldo chante “L’Île heureuse”* (1935)

The cartoon above, published by Jean Cocteau in 1935, is both an homage and an inside joke.¹²⁷ It depicts Hahn accompanying himself as he sings one of Emmanuel Chabrier’s most famous melodiés, “L’Île heureuse” (“The Joyous Island”). In this

¹²⁶ Bernard Gavoty, *Reynaldo Hahn: le musicien de la Belle Époque* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1997): 57. Italics Gavoty’s.

¹²⁷ Jean Cocteau, ‘Reynaldo chante “L’Île heureuse.”’ *Portraits-souvenir*, 1935. Hahn also made an early recording of singing this song while accompanying himself.

performance Hahn displays his characteristic habit of smoking while singing, which, according to Hahn's biographer Gavoty, was most assuredly *not* "a pose" or affectation, merely a "habit." However, I read Cocteau's poem as joke because Chabrier's song requires a great deal of vocal leaps and pronunciation. I imagine it would be incredibly difficult to smoke while singing this song, even for the most seasoned performer such as Hahn. Yet Hahn appears most relaxed and comfortable in Cocteau's portrait. Thus the cartoon is both a testament to Hahn's ability to sing while smoking and a portrayal of what Rosengarten describes as Hahn's "ability to make a difficult task seem effortless."¹²⁸ Hahn's vocal virtuosity did not lie in the quality of his voice itself, but rather in his gift to conceal the effort which singing requires.

Hahn often referred to smoking as his "vice." This nickname has added meaning if we recall that "le vice" was also British slang for homosexuality. Katherine Bergeron asserts, however, that Hahn's "vice" brought with it unexpected virtues: "To keep the cigarette in one's mouth – even in the midst of that performance – showed a certain mastery of diction: it proved that he barely moved his lips. All the real work took place, as Grammont asserted – *à l'intérieur*."¹²⁹ Hahn's control of his diction reveals his mastery over the internal workings of his vocal palette. Thus Hahn's exterior surface reveals nothing of the interior labor he undergoes, a perfectly dandiacal formulation. As Baudelaire reminds us, the dandy aspires to be sublime without interruption. The dandy's perfection is always at risk.

In his 1913 lectures on singing, Hahn confessed in 1913 that he used a declamatory singing style – one that was "deliberately anti-vocal." And "even later he remained persuaded that good singing required little more than good speaking habits – the ability to *bien dire*, to

¹²⁸ Rosengarten, 65.

¹²⁹ Katherine Bergeron, *Voice Lessons*, 199.

use the French expression. For Hahn, the point is singing lay not in vocal purity but verbal sincerity, not in the artifice of the *chanteur* but the truth of the *diseur*.” But this formulation of sincerity is itself problematic.

Bergeron contends that we cannot separate Bernhardt from singers in her song-like performances of speech (187), and that the origins of the word *dire*, which meant both “sing” and “say” in Old French (185). This dual connotation remains, blurring the lines between speech and song. This elusive space is what Barthes calls the grain of the voice. It is for Barthes everything that hovers around expression, particularly the melodious sound of words – “where Melody actually works on language” - “the diction of language.” (186) Bergeron describes this as “language experienced through performance” – the art of speech amid vocalists who were children during the arrival of the new French school - “the new breath” (“*le souffle nouveau*”) - of the reformed educational system. Indeed, the French language was immensely important in the regeneration of France post-1870.

How does Bergeron's idea of language experienced through performance connect to my thesis about vocal posing? Vocal posing is the flip side of “language through performance.” The French concept of sincerity is a historical construction, social performance, and even while it fluctuates it retains sediments of its earlier figurings, with real historical impact on the teaching of French and the language’s dissemination across the country and empire. Consider, as an example, the following extended quotation from Hahn on how a singer should perform the earliest known song, discovered at a Turkish archaeological site by composer Louis-Albert Bourgault-Ducoudray. Hahn’s conflation of the “Orient” and the ancient is worth noting:

How old is this song? I do not know. Bourgault-Ducoudray found it at Smyrna. It is powerfully evocative; it is impossible to listen to it without catching a glimpse, as if through a haze of gold dust, of minarets and scintillating cupolas, a grand mirage of the Orient. But the impression would be infinitely less vivid if I sang this song with a Western voice. If I wish, with the first measure, to

*transport you there, I must sing the song as it was sung by the prince or the beggar-poet who created it... Not only is it imperative that I “see,” that I have before my eyes all that I wish to show you; not only is it imperative that I become an Oriental, indolent, dreamy, still (all this is the mental, psychical work of singing), but I must also be able to control the vocal mechanisms that permit me to portray an Oriental voice.*¹³⁰

Hahn’s writing on the aesthetics of singing provides insight into how the opera might deal with the question of posing through musical gesture. In his treatise on the aesthetics of singing, Hahn commented that while performing exotic song, it was imperative that the singer not sing a song with a “Western voice” but instead “*become* an Oriental, indolent, dreamy, still.”¹³¹ Hahn’s assumptions in this sentence merit a closer reading. First, he reveals an investment in the stereotype that Orientalist people are marked by passivity and indolence. More radical in potential, however, is Hahn’s comment that within the frame of performance, a singer should *become* Oriental, through the act of *posing* and physically embodying such stereotypes. Hahn’s ideas about performance recall Apter’s notion of “acting out Orientalism.” I assert that Hahn offers *posing as a strategy to get around the problem of “being” versus “doing” in theatrical and musical performance*. Hahn’s notion of the exotic stereotype parallels perceptions of Tahiti and the South Pacific as being static, dreamy, undeveloped places. In framing exotic song as ancient, Hahn also spacializes time: he treats the East’s physical distance from the West (a geographical function) as a function of time, imagining the exotic space to be located in the Western past. Tellingly, Hahn also instructs his readers to *listen* stereotypically – to listen for and to enact a stereotype through their listening.

In the instance in which a singer must perform not themselves but a character, and not just any character but an exotic one, an oriental one, The Other, Hahn still believes that the singer must become that which he performs. What does it mean to become something

¹³⁰ Hahn, *On Singers and Singing*, 48.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

which you are not through vocal performance, especially when the concept of sincerity and “good taste” are so much at stake? That is where I locate the concept of vocal posing – in the dialectical relationship between sincerity and performance, the negotiation between self and other, speech and song. And this offers a useful context for Loti's work.

Colonialist Melancholia in The Marriage of Loti

She was a touching and sad little personification of the Polynesian race, which is dying out in contact with our civilization and our vices, and before long will be only a memory in the history of Oceania.

– Pierre Loti, on his Tahitian lover Rarahu¹³²

Loti's critical treatment of the French military in *The Marriage of Loti* reflects his growing misgivings with the French colonial presence in the South Pacific. Set in 1870s Tahiti, the novel traces the development and eventual dissolution of a romantic relationship between the French naval officer “Loti” and the fourteen-year old native girl “Rarahu.” Their relationship is limited by the uncertain length of Loti's station in Tahiti (which ends up lasting a few years) and their inability to overcome cultural differences (particularly language). The innocence of both Rarahu and her Tahitian culture are destroyed by their new relationships with the more sophisticated – and disgustingly corrupt – Western intruders. The novel makes apparent both Loti's emerging anti-colonialist views as well as his ambivalence about his participation in France's colonialist project. Thus, Loti's melancholic depictions of both Tahiti and his fictitious Tahitian lover Rarahu in *The Marriage of Loti* carry an underlying political intention.

Loti's years as a naval officer in the Pacific during in the 1870s and 1880s had served as a period of a political awakening for him. Although he dramatized and eroticized Tahitian

¹³² Pierre Loti, *The Marriage of Loti*, 117.

exoticism in his novels, he also became an active opponent of French colonization. In fact, his novels often implicitly argue that a European military presence destroys the supposed innocence and purity of the Colonized. Believing that the French “mission civilatrice” had failed in the Far East, in 1883 Loti came under fire for several letters published in *Le Figaro*. In them, he criticized the brutal force of the French navy’s attack upon Annam (northern Vietnam), which he inadvertently witnessed firsthand.¹³³

Loti’s resistance to colonization stemmed from his belief that the intrusion of French civilization and Western Christianity was ruining Tahiti’s pristine, uncorrupted beauty. Loti was not alone in the belief that the colonies possessed a special beauty and innocence that deserved protection from the corrupting influence of French modernity — this was usual among anti-colonialists of the period. Yet held in common among the French, colonialist and anti-colonialist alike, was the belief that France could find spiritual and artistic salvation (as well as monetary and industrial renewal) from her colonies.

Before Loti, Tahiti had been perceived as a colonial site of sexual liberation and erotic exploration for over a century. When French explorer Louis Antoine de Bougainville first encountered Tahiti in 1767 during his global circumnavigation, his soldiers were shocked by the Tahitians’ sexual practices of freely exchanging sexual partners.¹³⁴ Later Spanish and French missionaries tried to civilize the Tahitians through conversion and the practice of Christian marriage (as opposed to the Tahitians’ much looser, non-monogamous approach to marriage).

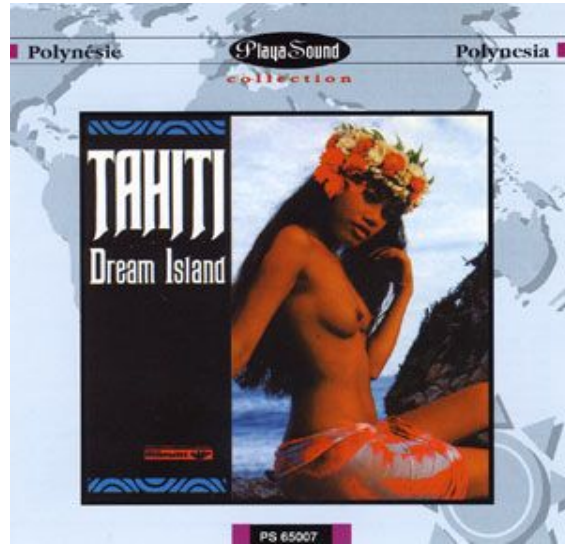
¹³³ B. D’Auvergne, 97-103.

¹³⁴ See Alexander H. Bolyanet, *Pacific Romanticism: Tahiti And The European Imagination* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004): 40.

Tahiti has maintained its reputation in the West as an “isle of dreams” ever since it was colonized by French missionaries in the late eighteenth century. The missionaries were concerned by the free sexual practices and apparent laziness of the natives who lived on “breadfruit” (which, although a fruit, was a form of nourishment which French missionaries described as bread which could be plucked from a tree without the labor of grain being sown, milled or baked). Tahitian natives lived without a custom of marriage and with relatively free, open sexual relationships, practices which alarmed missionaries' Christian sensibilities and which undoubtedly made their colonizing work more difficult. Of course, the island's reputation as a site of limitless leisure and sexual freedom also gave the island a certain allure for visitors like Loti, and the island had a well-developed market for sex tourism by the late nineteenth century.¹³⁵

The clichéd notion of Tahiti as a "dream island" has persisted throughout the twentieth-century and can be found in the contemporary marketing of the island as a tourist destination. Moorea, Tahiti's smaller sister island located about nine miles to the northwest, currently features a beach resort called “Dream Island.” Music, food, drink, and other forms of sensual and bodily pleasure are linked to Tahiti in a contemporary travel economy which advertises the island as a fantasy site liberated from Western, Christian moral codes and work ethics. The following example demonstrates, by means of visual comparison, exactly how little the island has changed in the Western imagination ever since Loti declared Tahiti to be an “isle of dreams” in 1880.

¹³⁵ See Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 2012) for excellent, comprehensive study on the topic of sexual tourism and same-sex desire in relation to colonialism. Rudi Bley's *The Geography of Perversion: Male-to-male Sexual Behavior Outside the West and the Ethnographic Imagination* (New York: NYU Press, 1995) and Aldrich's *The French Presence in the South Pacific, 1842-1940* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990) provide further, more specialized discussions of same-sex ethnographic behavior in Tahiti.



Figures 3.11 and 3.12: Mahenu’s costume from *L’Île du rêve*, designed by Marcel Mutzer, and the cover of the 1994 CD *Tahiti: Dream Island*

The stereotype of Tahiti as an erotic “island of dreams” has persisted through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As a brief example, consider the similarities between the two images above: Rarahu’s costume in *L’Île du rêve* and the grossly exoticist cover art of the album *Tahiti: Dream Island*, released by PlayaSound in 1994. Both Tahitian ladies are sexually available, wearing little besides draped, gauzy fabrics and floral headdresses. They turn their heads coquettishly to one side, lifting one arm to pose suggestively and offer themselves to the colonizers’ gaze. Intriguingly, both use the image of a Tahitian femininity in order to market exoticist representations of Tahitian music.

Artistic representations of Tahiti also reflect the stereotypical laziness of Tahitian natives. In his vocal treatise, Hahn comments upon the apparent slowness of exotic natives in his description of the Oriental voice as “indolent” and “dreamy.” In Loti’s novel, however, the stereotype of Tahitian passivity plays out in the novel through the very structure of the plot itself. The novel is marked by a sense of stasis – very little actually happens, and there is no continuous action. Following Loti’s anti-colonialist politics, Tahiti is framed as an Eden

just before its tragic fall.

Loti is clear throughout the novel that his relationship with “Rarahu” can never be a “real” marriage, because she has no concept of what Western marriage entails - lifelong commitment and monogamy. However, he is also haunted by a persistent sadness – a sort of colonialist melancholia – which he cannot seem to shake. Both the islands and the girl are being destroyed by his presence, and Rarahu ultimately dies at the end of the novel from her sadness at being abandoned by him. This mirrors the initial death of Loti’s brother, who died because he could not survive in Tahitian culture (ostensibly due to cross-cultural illness). Thus, this sadness can be interpreted temporally, as a kind of dualistic mourning for Loti’s lost brother as well as Rarahu’s and Tahiti’s lost innocence.

Three themes relating to melancholia emerge from the novel and remain central to Hahn’s operatic adaptation: East-West musical encounters, Tahitian languor and torpor, and the construction of time. The two most common forms of musical representation in the novel, Rarahu’s exotic singing voice and the Western piano, are put into contact, intrigue each other, but ultimately cannot comprehend each other. Like Loti and Rarahu’s marriage, these two forms of music remain in union yet fundamentally separate from one another. One particularly memorable scene involving music takes place in the palace of Queen Pomare V, the last ruler of Tahiti before it came under French imperial control in 1880. The palace houses a piano, on which is placed the piano-vocal score to Meyerbeer’s *L’Africaine*. Rarahu listens rapturously at the strange tones of the piano in a kind of reversed exoticism. Huebner characterizes this scene as a kind of “doubled exoticism – the West within the East within the Western imagination.”¹³⁶ Yet Rarahu’s voice in turn transfixes and perplexes Loti, possessing the captivating quality of exotic performance that Hahn attributes to the exotic voice. Such

¹³⁶ Steven Huebner, “‘Addio fiorito asil’: The Evanescent Exotic”, edited by Arthur Groos and Virgilio Bernardoni, in *Madama Butterfly: L’Orientalismo di fine secolo, L’approccio Pucciniano, La Ricezione* (Firenze): 94.

stillness is also endemic to Loti's descriptions of the landscape itself.

The second quality, Tahitian languor and torpor, is a common element of representations of the exotic. Note the seductive, languorous construction of time in the following quotation, embedded even within the sentence construction itself:

It was around noon, on a hot, still day, that for the first time in my life I caught sight of my little friend Rarahu. The young habitués of Fautaua stream, overcome with drowsiness and heat, lay about on the grass, dangling their feet in the clear cool water. The still shadow of the thick foliage fell straight down upon us; large butterflies, velvet-black with great lavender eyes, fluttered slowly by, or alighted on us as if their silky wings had become too heavy to support them; the air was laden with languorous and unfamiliar perfumes. Gradually, I abandoned myself to this indolent existence; I gave myself over to the charms of Oceania. (18)

This scene, fittingly described as a tableau, mirrors the ways in which our protagonist would eventually also give himself over to the charms of Rarahu. The description unfolds slowly, heavily decorated with sumptuous imagery and sensuous adjectives, almost as if the reader was letting her eyes gaze across a scene that was otherwise still and unchanging. The language envelops and seduces the reader into an alternative perception of temporality. This scene resembles a *tableau vivant*, or living picture, in which living things possess an animated presence but do not change or develop teleologically. Furthermore, Loti's sumptuous use of verbal textures seduces the reader into an all-enveloping present, rather than developing the novel's plot or characters.

L'ILE DU RÊVE



Phot. Paul Boyer.

Cliches du Photo-Programme. Reproduction interdite.

1^{er} Acte. — LE BAPTÊME DE LOTI.

15

Figure 3.13: Loti is Baptized at the Waterfall Tableau

In Tahiti's scenic tableaux, Rarahu and Loti are able to coexist and grow together, eventually being married at the wish of Pomare V. But they are fundamentally different, and despite their marriage, theirs is an imperfect union:

Yet between us there were gulfs, terrible barriers, never to be surmounted. She was a little savage; between us who had become one flesh remained the radical distinction of race, the divergence of elementary concepts about all things. If my ideas and my conceptions were unfathomable to her, hers were likewise so for me. My childhood, my country, my family, and my home—all of that would remain forever incomprehensible and unknown to her. I recalled the statement she had made to me one day: "I am afraid it was not the same God who created us." Indeed, we were children of two separate and very different natures, and the union of our souls could only be transient, incomplete, and tormented. (112)

Loti's attempt to assimilate into Tahitian life failed just as his Tahitian marriage and baptism failed to replicate the spirit of their Western originators. His exotic poses could not permanently overcome difference. Mirroring this failed union were the ways in which Loti

interpreted colonial encounters between Tahiti and the French. Following a modified version of Rousseau's noble savage, Loti constructed the Tahitians as located temporally in the past, functioning as a kind of proto-ancestor to the French people. Yet through their vulnerability and destruction at the hands of colonist modernity, Loti is also able to mourn their destruction through a kind of anticipatory melancholia.

What a mysterious destiny is that of these Polynesian tribes, who seem the forgotten remnants of the primitive races, who live there in immobility and contemplation, who are gradually dying out in contact with civilized races, and whom another century will probably find to have disappeared. (Loti, 84)

Tahiti, represented as caught in the past, is destroyed by being brought into contact with the Western present. Furthermore, Rarahu's death (which occurs when she dies from grief at Loti's departure) stands in as yet another metaphor for Loti's own belief in the necessary tragedy of East-Western contact.

Sounding Exotic Difference

How are these three elements – music (especially the Tahitian voice), temporal melancholia, and exotic difference – translated from novel to opera? The opera contains three Acts, the first of which centers around the first meeting of Loti and Rarahu (now named Mahenu in the opera). Loti is now named Georges Kerven and is a French soldier rather than British. This update made the opera's critical treatment of colonialism factually accurate for French audiences. (Tahiti had come under French control by 1898). The Second Act, "The Case of Mahenu," is drawn from an episode early in the novel in which Loti rescues Mahenu from the advances of Tsen Lee, an aggressive Chinese merchant, while in costume as a Tahitian native. However, Loti's "native" period is greatly abbreviated from its extended treatment in the novel. Skipping over most of Loti's actual marriage to and relationship with Mahenu, the Third Act consists primarily of large choral numbers by

Tahitian and French choruses and a tragic love duet between Loti and Mahenu which underscores their unbridgeable difference.

Music functions within the opera to locate characters and races within a particular time and space, through key signature and tonal language. This process of identification works primarily through juxtaposition, as pairs of characters and races are scored immediately after one another. The most obvious division is the musical contrast of the Tahitian chorus and soldiers at the beginning of Act III. A Tahitian chorus, consisting of sopranos, altos and tenors, frames the third Act. The opera, set in E-flat major, opens this Act with five flats (D-flat major). The Tahitians chant on syllables in 2/4 time (which bear only an imprecise resemblance to Tahitian phonology and none at all to the grammar or lexicon) “Ti hi urea té lé/Ite vai toe toé.”

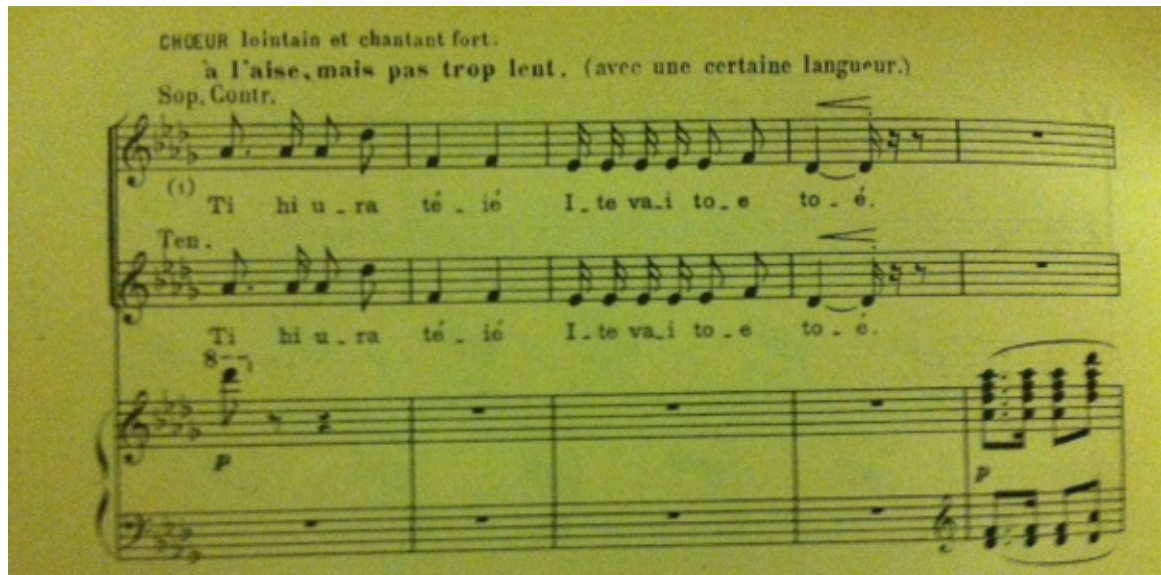


Figure 3.14: The Ancient Tahitian Chorus sings “avec une certain langueur”

34 measures into the chorus, Mahenu sings a melismatic solo above them, calling for Loti to come to her. This disjuncture between the Tahitian chorus and Mahenu’s solo is marked both linguistically and musically, as Mahenu sings both in French and in the elaborately decorated style of a coloratura soprano (spanning a twelfth), while each Tahitian

vocal part maintains the narrow range of a fourth or fifth.¹³⁷ However, near the end of the scene, she joins the chorus in singing the faux “Tahitian” text, alternating between the fabricated “voice” of her people and the language belonging to the man she loves. She is torn, both stylistically and textually, between two sonic worlds.

When the soldiers enter the act, the score abruptly modulates to A major, a shift of 8 sharps upwards, to the flat six. As Susan McClary has argued in relation to Schubert, modulations to the flat six often represent a traumatic harmonic shift, a moment pulling the composition away from its home key and into an uncertain, unstable new reality.¹³⁸ Intriguingly, this unstable new reality of the opera is the French present, as performed by its French soldiers. The Frenchmen sing a duet mourning their eminent departure from the “island of dreams.” Shifting to 3/4 time, the soldiers sing of their sadness in a slow-moving, French Baroque style replete with double-dotted rhythms.

Consistently throughout the opera, the Tahitians are oriented towards darker, flatter sounds, while the French colonialist army is always cast in C major or sharper keys. These sharper keys represent an intrusion upon the E-flat stasis of the island. Pulling the opera into a sharper key disrupts the island. Fittingly, when Mahenu dies in the opera’s finale, she sings in D major, the only time a Tahitian native sings in a key with more sharps than F major. Singing in a sharper key metaphorically places Mahenu into the French sonic world and much closer to the key most strongly associated with Loti’s character (F# minor). Loti’s first appearance in Act I presents him as a figure of mourning, longing for his dead brother. Even

¹³⁷ See James Parakilas, “The Soldier and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of Racial Encounter Part I” in *The Opera Quarterly* 10:2 (1993): 33-56, for more on the coloratura style at the universal language of love.

¹³⁸ For more on the significance of modulating to the flat-sixth, see two articles by Susan McClary, “The Impromptu That Trod on a Loaf; or How Music Tells Stories” *Narrative* 5:1 (Jan 1997): 20-35; and “Pitches, Expression, Ideology: An Exercise in Mediation,” *Enclitic* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 76-86.

his three love duets with Mahenu are in sharp minor keys (F#, C#, and B minor, respectively).

The opera premiered in the heat of the Dreyfus Affair, and most of Hahn's friends (such as Marcel Proust, Sarah Bernhardt, and Loti himself) were adamant Dreyfusards. Yet the most insidious threat presented in the opera is a Chinese character, Tsen Lee, who takes on many anti-Semitic stereotypes. As an individual Tsen Lee is more comical than scary, but his failed attempt to rape Mahenu in Act II stands in for a much more serious critique. In his attempt to seduce her with pretty baubles and trinkets, Tsen Lee allegorically represents the Chinese merchants who (in Loti's estimation) rob the island of its innocence by introducing money and modern commerce into its economy. Interestingly, Tsen Lee is represented musically *not* through pentatonic scales or other conventions of Chinese exoticism, but rather through the opera's most catchy, simple diatonic tunes. In other words, his music sounds like a French popular song or even an advertising jingle. His tunes feature scalar runs, arpeggios, and other repetitive patterns, suggesting that his character is simple and unsophisticated.

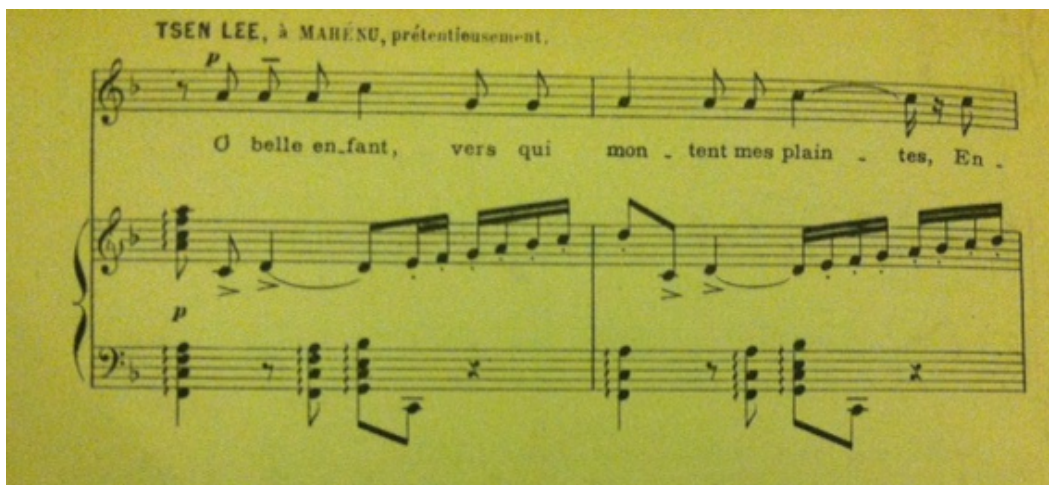


Figure 3.15: Tsen Lee's deceptive diatonicism

Furthermore, Tsen Lee's costumes (designed by noted costume designer Marcel Moltzer) echo anti-Semitic stereotypes, placing Tsen Lee in a loose robe, carrying conspicuously large bags of money, wearing a small cap on his head (like a Yarmulke) with narrow, slanted eyes. The connection between Jewishness and the Chinese merchants (who had established trade relationships with Tahiti during the eighteenth century) is fitting primarily because of Jews' historical associations with usury, the merchant class, and economic abuse.

While this connection may be more suggestive than definitive in the opera, it is clear that temporally, Tsen Lee belongs to the corrupt present of capitalist modernity, not the innocent past of the Tahitians. The Chinese and Tahitians are marked, both musically and through their costumes, as fundamentally different types of racial Others. While the Tahitians are located in the exotic past, the Chinese represent the crass and unscrupulous modernity of capitalist consumption. Furthermore, the Chinese presence on the island enables the opera to locate blame for the Tahitians' corruption even further from French colonialism. No longer the fault of the colonial army, now the ruin of Tahitian innocence occurs at the hands of the Other's Other.

Thus the opera represents various characters, races and places musically in ways which suggest not just their intrinsic qualities but also their relationship to modernity and temporality more broadly. While both the Tahitians and Tsen Lee are little more than Orientalist stereotypes (one brutish, one idealized), Tsen Lee's music is more conventional because he belongs to the present. In contrast, the Tahitians belong to a melancholic, temporal space which never existed in reality and which can only be brought into existence through the "exotic pose" of the stage. In other words, the only way to manifest the Tahitian's paradise is through the power of imagination and performance.

Conclusion: Gauguin Meets Loti

Those critics who found fault with *L'Île du rêve* for its passive, inert plot and lack of dramatic action were themselves perpetuating an exotic stereotype. Such a treatment of Tahitian exoticism worked quite well for readers in Loti's novel *The Marriage of Loti* but not so successfully for Parisian opera goers eighteen years later. The passive, static fantasies of the Tahiti produced in both Hahn's *L'Île du rêve* were perhaps themselves belated by 1898, out of fashion and soon to be replaced with a kind of primitivism anticipated by Paul Gauguin's own Tahitian paintings. Indeed, Gauguin's masterwork *D'où Venons Nous/ Que Sommes Nous/ Où Allons Nous* (*Where Do We Come From?/ What are We?/ Where are We Going?*) was finished during the same year as *L'Île du rêve*'s premiere and deals with many similar questions about the relationship between Tahitian exoticism and the French past. Gauguin said that painting is generally interpreted from left to right, representing different stages in life, from infancy to adulthood to old age. Rather than being tinged by colonialist melancholia, the painting looks forward more optimistically, mapping Christian imagery and neo-impressionist techniques that represent the Tahitians not as a disappearing race, but as markers of France's own ancestry. Yet in looking at the Tahitians, the French were still asking fundamental questions about their own search for origins. The spacialization of time persisted even as new forms of representation of racial Otherness emerged.

Gauguin's biographical similarities to Hahn are worth noting. Also the child of a German Jewish father, Gauguin was born in Argentina. He negotiated many of the same challenges of incorporating himself into French culture as Hahn did. Yet Gauguin's disidentification with French culture pushed him in the opposite direction as the composer. Instead of working on incorporating himself into the culture, Gauguin left – spending the eight last years of his life outside of France. To escape to the exotic provided a useful means

for Gauguin to get away from a dominant culture to which he could not acclimate.



Figure 3.16: Gauguin's *D'où Venons Nous/Que Sommes Nous/Où Allons Nous* (1898)

Edmund de Goncourt once commented that “Savagery is necessary every four or five hundred years in order to bring the world back to life. Otherwise the world would die of civilization.”¹³⁹ With savagery thus comes a kind of temporal and cultural rebirth, a break from the past and the freedom of a new beginning free from the stifling weight of modernity. (Verlaine's famous line "*Je suis l'Empire au la fin de la décadence*" is also relevant here.) In *The Marriage of Loti* and *L'Île du rêve*, the “acting out” of exotic poses enabled Loti and Hahn to explore new modes of musical and textual expression, framed within the space of belated temporality. Yet Loti and Hahn also infused their art with a sort of regretful melancholia, a longing to protect and pay tribute to the “trampled little flowers” of their youth: Hahn’s nostalgia for his first years as a composer on the one hand, and Loti’s longing to an impossible return to pre-colonial Tahiti, on the other.

Such stereotypes about Tahitian indolence, languor and torpor actually served a useful function within Hahn’s opera, communicating a fantasy about exotic time. As we

¹³⁹ Edmond de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt. Entry dated September 3, 1855. Edited by Robert Baldick. From *Pages from the Goncourt Journal*. New York (The New York Review of Books, 2007): 17.

move from just before 1900 to a few years after the turn of the century, consider the transition from *L'Île du rêve*'s exotic posing to *Shéhérazade*'s homoerotic orientalism (1902). In this next chapter, I consider the role of the arabesque, a sophisticated ornament, which I read as a visual posture of music – that mediates musical eroticism through sublimation and redirection of desire. Temporality still plays an important role, but rather than being about the motionless sense of musical time in Tahiti, *Shéhérazade*'s musical time is redirected and subverted by the arabesque. Exotic time is always a construction of the Western imagination, and sometimes even figured as a key to the future, a response to Adolf Loos's infamous association of ornament with decadence and corruption. Why might the Oriental need to be passive in order to be appealing? Because it can be known, contained, possessed. Yet it must also remain unprocessed, unknown, mysterious in order to be desired (two sides of the same lustful coin). My chapters on Hahn's *L'Île du rêve* and Ravel's *Shéhérazade* explore these two related portrayals of the Orient, the first as passive, inert and staged, and the second as mysterious, uncontrollable and unknown.

CHAPTER THREE

“Succumbing to the Orient”: Homoerotic Orientalism and the Arabesque in Ravel’s *Shéhérazade*

Shéhérazade où l’influence, au moins spirituelle, de Debussy est assez visible, date de 1903. La encore, je cède à la fascination profonde que l’Orient exerça sur moi dès mon enfance.

[*Shéhérazade, in which Debussy’s influence, at least spiritual, is rather evident, dates from 1903. Once again, I succumbed to the profound fascination which the Orient has exerted upon me since childhood.*]

– Maurice Ravel, on composing the song cycle *Shéhérazade*¹⁴⁰

Et mon esclave rasé massera d’une savante main ton corps fin, ton derrière puissant et ton sexe lourd
[*My shaved slave will massage your delicate body, powerful rear and heavy sex with a knowing hand.*]

– Tristan Klingsor, excerpt from his poetic cycle *Shéhérazade*¹⁴¹



Figure 4.1. Ravel at his home in Montfort, c. 1928.

¹⁴⁰ As dictated to Alexis Roland-Manuel in a 1928 interview for the Aeolian Company. First published by Roland-Manuel as “Une Esquisse autobiographique de Maurice Ravel” in *La Revue musicale* (December 1938), 20. Translation by Arbie Orenstein as “An Autobiographical Sketch of Maurice Ravel” in *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, ed. Arbie Orenstein (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003; orig. ed., New York: Columbia UP, 1990), 30.

¹⁴¹ Tristan Klingsor, “Poème LXXVI: L’Étranger” in *Shéhérazade* (Paris: Amiens, 1926), 126-7. . First published in Paris in 1903 by the Société du Mercure de France. Translation mine, with suggestions from Andrew Deruchie.

Why might Maurice Ravel have very nearly apologized in 1928 for composing *Shéhérazade*? Certainly, the song cycle is an anomaly in the composer's oeuvre. This composition differs dramatically from Ravel's instrumental works from the same period: piano pieces like *Jeux d'eau* (1901) and the *Sonatine* (1905), as well as his *String Quartet* (1903). In contrast to the compact forms and restrained textures of these instrumental works, *Shéhérazade* sonically envelops listeners with chromatic harmonies and a lush, almost Wagnerian style of orchestration.¹⁴² Ravel's song cycle betrays Debussy's influence, particularly that of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1894) and *Pelleas et Melisande* (1902). In fact, Ravel had been so inspired by *Pelleas*'s premiere in 1902, that he and a group of friends created the artistic group *Les Apaches* (the Apaches or "hooligans"), in part to defend *Pelleas* from the opera's conservative critics.¹⁴³ When reflecting back on *Shéhérazade* in his "Autobiographical Sketch," Ravel admitted that he had "succumbed" to the influences of both Debussyism and Orientalism popular at the *fin de siècle*. In other words, he criticized his song cycle *Shéhérazade* for being unoriginal – drawn instead from the clichéd sounds and imagery circulating in Paris around 1900.¹⁴⁴

Although Ravel may have found them clichéd, *Shéhérazade*'s Orientalist gestures also perform a form of erotic alterity. The third and final song in the cycle, "L'Indifférent,"

¹⁴² Ravel originally composed these songs for solo voice with an orchestral accompaniment in 1903, but shortly thereafter arranged them for piano accompaniment. See the New Grove Online entry "Maurice Ravel: Works," written by Barbara Kelly. The orchestral version premiered on May 17, 1904, when the work was sung by the soprano Jane Hatto in a concert of the Société Nationale de Musique conducted by Alfred Cortot.

¹⁴³ For further background on *Les Apaches*, see Jann Pasler's articles "A Sociology of les Apaches: Sacred Battalion for Pelléas," *Berlioz and Debussy: sources, contexts and legacies*, ed. Barbara Kelly and Kerry Murphy (London: Ashgate, 2007), 148-166; and "Stravinsky and the Apaches," *Musical Times* (June 1982): 403-407.

¹⁴⁴ This notion of the "cliché" or stereotype will become important in my later discussion. The exact quotation in question is "*Shéhérazade* où l'influence, au moins spirituelle, de Debussy est assez visible, date de 1903. Là encore, je cède à la fascination profonde que l'Orient exerça sur moi dès mon enfance." From *Esquisse autobiographique de Maurice Ravel*. By Roland-Manuel. 20. *Revue Musicale* (Hommage à Maurice Ravel à l'occasion du 1st Anniversaire de sa mort (28 December 1938) special issue of 350 pages with numerous illustrations and a musical supplement.

describes a “*jeune étranger*” – a “young stranger” who is seductive and effeminate, teasing the narrator with his “feminine gait” and “eyes soft like a girl’s.” Although the cycle is written for soprano, the narrator’s desire for this androgynous figure is distinctly queer. What else might Ravel’s “succumbing to the Orient” suggest?

In two words: homoerotic Orientalism. Ravel’s music provides a lens through which to view the ways “Other” sexualities were permitted to flourish under the imprint of Orientalist aesthetics. In examining Tristan Klingsor’s poetry and an associated translation of *1001 Arabian Nights*, I have discovered an interconnected web of homoerotic discourses which use the Orient to suggest not just racial difference, but also sexual difference and the possibility of various sexual perversions and pleasures. Orientalism, a European intellectual and political project related to colonialism – acts, in Edward Said’s words, as “the stage upon which the West performs its fantasies about the East.”¹⁴⁵ For Ravel, Klingsor and many other Western sexual minorities, Orientalism served as a means to imagine not just exotic, far-away places, but also the possibility of alternative formations of the self. In other words, the Orient offered a space in which to “exist *otherwise*” – to be different, strange, and “against the grain” of social norms.¹⁴⁶ Orientalist clichés afforded particular freedom to those who needed to speak in codes, to articulate desire indirectly or even render it as dandiacal indifference. For composers who identified as dandies like Ravel, Satie and Hahn, Orientalism emerges as a compositional interface through which they may defer or displace the musical articulation of desire, or, in the psychoanalytic terminology recently invoked by Michael Puri, as a strategy of “sublimation.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1979): 63.

¹⁴⁶ In most cases a fantasy about the Orient was nothing more than a Western projection of the self – a fantasy of what oneself could become once freed of the limitations that shackled man in Western society.

¹⁴⁷ Michael J. Puri, *Ravel the Decadent: Memory, Sublimation, and Desire* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011), 84-86.

This chapter examines the relationships Ravel, Klingsor and others forged through their art, literature, and music around 1900, using discourses of Orientalism – specifically, those around the arabesque and Arabian sexuality – to perform sexual difference through the lens of racial difference. The notion of the Arab man as androgynous and sexually perverse made him an ideal figure for the suggestion of homosexuality in poetry, art and music. The arabesque gesture in the visual arts, music and poetry served as one means to communicate queer desires otherwise impossible to translate into words. Furthermore, the stylization of the arabesque renders it both infinitely flexible and fluid as an apparatus of musical composition, but it also linked musical subjects to clichéd, stereotyped gestures. Ravel’s *Shéhérazade* bears the imprint of these queer, racist discourses, even as the musical work moderates and conceals them through textual and performance changes.

One challenge of discussing same-sex desire around 1900 is the fact that contemporary models of sexuality (both heterosexual and homosexual) were just emerging. A single, clearly-defined model of “homosexuality” did not yet exist. Rather, there were competing models and possibilities available for sexual identification, ranging from André Gide’s Grecian-inspired pederasts to Marcel Proust’s invert model that posited the homosexual as a “third sex.”¹⁴⁸ The instability of homosexuality as an identity category around 1900 meant that representations of same-sex desire were immensely creative and diverse.¹⁴⁹ There is no evidence that Klingsor or Ravel identified as homosexual or engaged in same-sex intimacies. However, their art reflects a preoccupation with Orientalist

¹⁴⁸ For background on sexology from this period, see Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge* (New York: Vintage, 1980). For writing on the intersection between scientific racism and homosexuality, see Siobhan Somerville’s *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2000).

¹⁴⁹ For further background and some intriguing case studies, see both Peter Cryle and Christopher E. Forth’s collection *Sexuality at the Fin de Siècle* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2008) and Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky’s collection *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

homoeroticism, a discourse which – as I will briefly discuss at the conclusion of this chapter – continues to inflect contemporary formations of queer identity.

Mardrus' Homoerotic Orientalism

In discussing the *fin de siècle* in France, Tristan Klingsor observed that “the Orient was in the air, through Bakst, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Doctor Mardrus, who translated the *Thousand and One Nights*.” Indeed, Klingsor was himself inspired to write his *Shéhérazade* poems by the popularity that *1001 Arabian Nights* enjoyed during this period. While *The Nights* had been available in French translation since the beginning of the eighteenth century, the stories underwent a revival at the *fin de siècle*. Beginning in 1899, Dr Joseph Charles Mardrus published a sumptuous sixteen-volume translation through the Symbolist journal *La Revue blanche*.



Figure 4.2: Shéhérazade with King Shahryar (Illustration from Mardrus' translation)

Mardrus' translation was vastly influential, admired by authors like Proust, Gide, and Joyce. He dedicated the entire collection to Paul Valéry, and each of the sixteen volumes to

other significant French literary figures such as Gide and Robert de Montesquiou. Mardrus' translation was also the primary inspiration for Klingsor's *Shéhérazade* cycle. In fact, some of Klingsor's poems (including "L'Indifférent", which was the third song in Ravel's song cycle) also appeared in the Symbolist journal *La Revue blanche*, alongside sample stories from Mardrus' translation before either volume was published in full.

Despite its influence, this translation was not the first time *the Nights* had been brought from the Arabic into French. The earliest translation into a European language was Antoine Galland's early 18th-century French translation. In his version of *The Nights*, Galland inserted new stories (which he presumably made up) that have today become some of the most famous stories from *A Thousand and One Nights*; the tales about "Aladdin" and "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" did not exist before Galland's 18th-century translation.

Mardrus followed Galland's practice of reinventing and reworking *The Nights* to make it more palatable to French audiences. Ironically, at the time of its appearance, Mardrus's translation was hailed for its careful, word-for-word accuracy. Mardrus was born in Cairo in 1868 and grew up in an Arabic-speaking environment, and his fluency with the Arabic language was part of what lent his translation a scholarly veneer. British army officer and author T. E. Lawrence (better known as "Lawrence of Arabia") praised Mardrus' translation highly, noting in 1923 that "the correctness of Mardrus can't be bettered."¹⁵⁰

However, while Mardrus' translation was far more literal than those which preceded his, it also contained a number of inaccuracies beyond the merely stylistic. To lend his translation additional authority, Mardrus claimed he had based his translation on a seventeenth-century North African manuscript of the *Nights*, but it is clear that this

¹⁵⁰ Robert Irwin, *An Arabian Nights Companion*, 39. Lawrence even briefly attempted his own translation of Mardrus' version into English, but after he gave up, E. Powys Mathers finished the job.

manuscript never existed.¹⁵¹ Under the guise of this fictitious manuscript, Mardrus added numerous embellishments to the original story, embroidering the original Arabic and inserting new stories. Mardrus did not just merely copy the words directly from the Arabic, rather, he “took elements which were there in the original Arabic and worked them up, exaggerating and inventing, reshaping the *Nights* in such a manner that the stories appear at times to have been written by Oscar Wilde or Stéphane Mallarmé.”¹⁵² Although Mardrus inserted anti-Semitic commentary to some of the stories, the majority of his literary interpolations were erotic, including new details emphasizing the sexual practices of Arabs. In numerous instances in his translation, characters engage in adultery, sex out of wedlock, and sex with both male and female slaves. Robert Irwin describes Mardrus’s interpretation of the Arabian tales as a “belated product of *fin-de-siècle* taste, a portrait of a fantasy Orient, compounded of opium reveries, jeweled dissipation, lost paradises, melancholy opulence and odalisques pining in gilded cages.”¹⁵³ In his translation, Mardrus recreated the *Nights* to suit the decadent tastes of himself and his audience, thrilling his dedicatees and readers such as Montesquiou, Gide, Klingsor, and Ravel.

Mardrus was not alone in adapting the *Nights* to suit *fin-de-siècle* tastes. In his own 1885 translation of *1001 Arabian Nights*, English archeologist Sir Richard Burton appended a “Terminal Essay” which proposed a geographical model for homosexuality. Burton’s essay was in part responding to stories in the *Nights* featuring pederastic practices, particularly those about the character Abu Nuwas. Nuwas was a raffish hero and real historical figure who served in the court of Harun al-Rashid, as well as a poet famous for his verses in praise

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 35-6.

¹⁵² Ibid., 37.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 37-8.

of wine and beautiful boys.¹⁵⁴ All homoerotic love presented in the *Nights* is pederastic, featuring the erotic relationship between a younger boy and an older man. Thus, Burton was responding to actual material in the *Nights* when he included his “Terminal Essay” on the Sotadic Zone at the end of his translation of the *Nights*.

Taking its name from the 300 B.C. Greek-Egyptian philosopher Sotades, Burton’s Sotadic Zone reimagined pederasty to be endemic to hot climates close to the equator, focusing on Greece and the Middle East in particular. Burton’s climate-based geographic mapping of sexuality attempts to locate homosexual practices to regions safely outside northern Europe, France and the United Kingdom. Although Burton claimed his theory was not based upon race but rather upon differences of climate and geography, observe how narrow the Sotadic Zone grows near Europe, as compared with the region’s width in East Asia and especially the Americas.

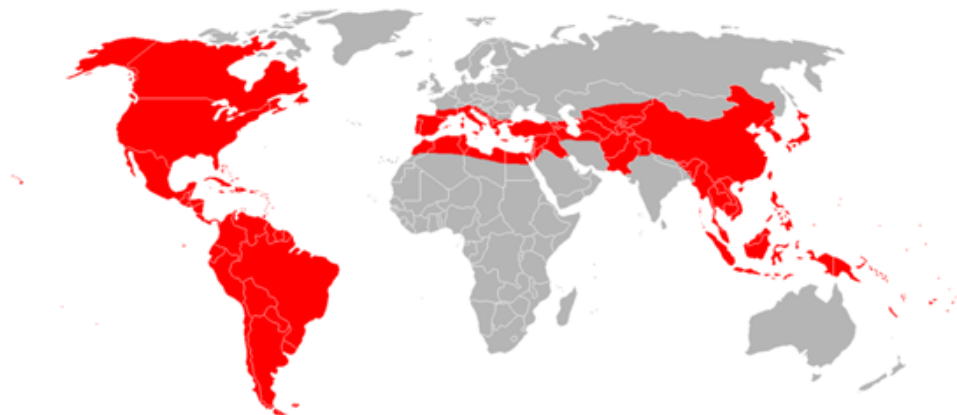


Figure 4.3: Map of Burton’s “Sotadic Zone.” Red areas correspond to regions where pederasty was supposedly prevalent.

Burton is ultimately unable to contain the Sotadic Zone: by the end of his essay, the territory has expanded to cover all the Americas and most of the Far East. Although he

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 170-1.

asserts that outside the Sotadic Zone, pederasty is “sporadic” rather than “endemic,” Burton also admits “the Vice” is subject to period outbreaks in urban regions.¹⁵⁵ He even confesses that *le vice* is found in “our modern capitals, London, Berlin and Paris.” As Joseph Boone observes, “what Burton labels a ‘popular and endemic’ Sotadic practice might more properly be called a ‘popular and endemic’ stereotype of Eastern perversity, one firmly wedged in the dominant imaginary.”¹⁵⁶

On the surface, Burton’s fantasy of a “Sotadic Zone” served at least two purposes: it located homosexuality outside of Europe, and it also made homoerotic practices containable, observable, and knowable in a pseudo-scientific manner. Reframed as an exotic, Eastern practice, the Western concept of pederasty was rendered suitable for Western consumption as an object of intellectual study. Burton’s “scientific” writings, and the art, literature and music that was inspired by it, could thus be consumed by respectable Europeans through the burgeoning academic field of “Orientalism.”

However, “le vice” was not merely a theoretical experience for Burton, and herein lies a third underlying purpose of his Sotadic Zone and its dislocation of homosexuality. Burton, along with numerous other French and British authors like Gide, Pierre Loti and Joseph Conrad participated in the sexual tourism trade in North Africa and the Middle East, where native youths were often paid participants. In turn, these authors, painters and other artists often used Arabs to represent their own forbidden sexual desires, inflecting the Arab with the stigma of sexual deviance. As Said notes, what these authors and artists often looked for:

was a different type of sexuality, more libertine and less guilt-ridden... In time “Oriental sex” was as standard a commodity as any other available in mass culture,

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 93.

¹⁵⁶ Joseph Boone, “Vacation Cruises, or the Homoerotics of Orientalism.” *PMLA* 110:1 (Jan 1995): 91.

with the result that readers and writers (and I would add, musicians and listeners) could have it without necessarily going to the Orient.¹⁵⁷

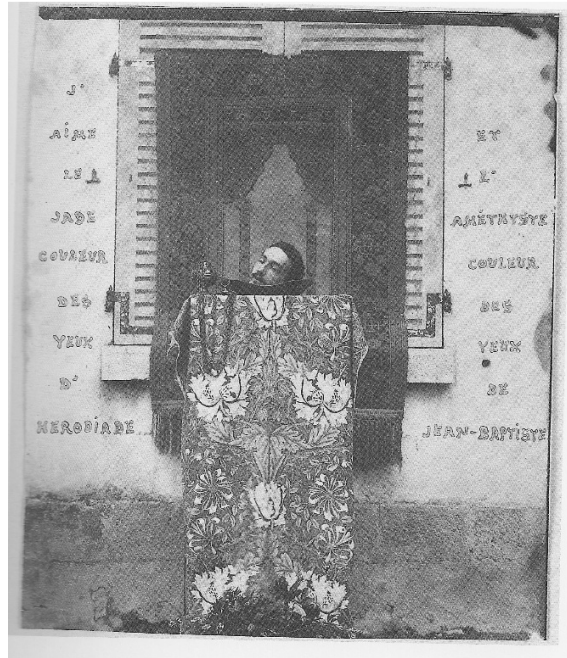
Said's allusion to "Oriental sex" as a European commodity glosses over sex tourism, a common practice of European colonists.¹⁵⁸ While he suggests the presence of sexual alterity in the Orient, he never acknowledges exactly who engages in these practices and what these "different type[s] of sexuality" are. Boone takes Said to task by examining how European authors and travelers inscribe the Arab male with both the promise and threat of homosexuality. The Arab's imagined sexual availability, ostensibly a commentary on the sexual perversion supposedly widespread in Arab cultures, is actually a reflection of Western colonizing anxieties and fantasies around homosexuality. It is crucial to remember that homosexuality as an identity formation and discourse (as opposed to the practice of same-sex intimacies) did not exist in Arabian cultures, except as Western colonizers brought it there.¹⁵⁹

What might homoerotic Orientalism look like? I have included below some revealing photographs of Count Robert de Montesquiou, a dedicatee of Mardrus' translation and the star of the second chapter. These illustrate some of the various forms that homoerotic Orientalism took during the era in which Mardrus and Burton produced their translations. Note in particular the number of consumable goods (costumes, instruments, jewelry) and the high degree of ornamentation in these images:

¹⁵⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 207.

¹⁵⁸ For further information about the history of sex tourism in the colonies, see Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality*; Rudi Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion*; Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*; and Laura Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*.

¹⁵⁹ Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 2007).



Figures 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6: Photos of Robert de Montesquiou in costume as Prince Hussein from *1001 Arabian Nights*, as John the Baptist from *Salomè*, and third, a close-up on Montesquiou's rings (anticipating *Liberace*)

All three photographs are stunningly prescient in the way they present a relationship between Orientalism, material consumption and the theatricality of desire. In the first image, Montesquiou styles himself as a prince from *1001 Arabian Nights*, wearing a Arabian tunic

patterned with a repeating lotus that scrolls up and down his entire body. He holds a lyre (specifically a nineteenth-century French lyre-guitar) in his left hand and an absurdly large pansy, approximately the size of his head, in his right.¹⁶⁰ In the second photograph, Montesquiou comically embodies (or shall I say “be-heads”) the character of John the Baptist, after his head has been severed from his body at Salomé’s request. Note that in the second picture, the same textile that draped Montesquiou’s body in character as Prince Hussein is re-used to cover the mantle concealing his body when he performs as a severed head. Thus the Oriental tapestry serves two, contradictory functions: decorating and ornamenting his body and concealing its presence. Montesquiou can domesticate the Oriental by purchasing it and consuming it in the form of a tapestry; in turn the Oriental tapestry veils his body and enables him to engage ironically, at a distance, from the erotic materials he consumes. This is metaphorical of the function that Orientalism serves in relation to homoerotic desire: it conceals the queer Western subject at the same time that it enables his articulation of desire.

These three photographs date from early 1885, before the translations of Mardrus and Burton, and before Oscar Wilde wrote his play *Salomé* that starred Montesquiou’s close friend Sarah Bernhardt. The backdrop for the second picture reads “J’aime le jade couleur des yeux d’Hérodiade... et l’améthyste couleur des yeux de Jean-Baptiste.” (“I love the green color of Herodiade’s eyes... and the purple color of the eyes of John the Baptist.”) From a decadent perspective, Montesquiou’s statement is dually perverse: it is an assertion of both bisexuality (his attraction to both Herodias, Salomé’s mother, and John the Baptist), and the eroticism of jealousy (Herodias’ “green eyes”) and necrophilia (the dead, “purple eyes” of John the Baptist’s decapitated head.) Most tantalizingly bizarre is a close-up on

¹⁶⁰ See Alison Syme’s *A Touch of Blossom: John Singer Sargent and the Queer Flora of Fin-de-siècle Art*, 281, note 39.

Montesquiou's bejeweled hands in the third photograph. The backdrop for this photograph is yet another Arabian textile, and foregrounded are his elaborately decorated hands, anticipating the style and spirit of American pianist and Vegas stage legend Liberace.¹⁶¹ This excessive ornamentation and figuration of these images anticipates my discussion of the arabesque in the following section.

I do not view homoerotic Orientalism as an instance of the West's "unproblematic intellectual (and I would add physical, economic, political) domination over a mythic East as an object of desire." Rather, the identity confusion that sometimes arose, especially through certain crises of masculinity (that of closed-off, individuated subject being threatened by internal perverse desires) proves itself to be "a source of troubling and unresolved identification and differentiation."¹⁶²

Interestingly, these encounters with Arab sexual Others implicate the Western travel writer as well – suggesting that he risks "being "unmanned" by the attractive yet dangerous lure of a polymorphous Eastern sexuality "*that exceeds representation* [and risks] ... in the face of such excess, never writing again."¹⁶³ Homoerotic encounters between white gay male subjects and their brown objects of desire induce a kind of identity crisis, one in which the boundaries between self and other become porous and unstable. Perhaps this is why the arabesque as an ornamental gesture frequently appears in the Western representations of the East, such as in Montesquiou's elaborately decorated hands, his tapestries, and, as we shall soon see, in Klingsor's florid and elliptical verse. The arabesque is itself functioned as a

¹⁶¹ For more background on ornamentation and consumption, see Rosalind Williams' book *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* and Lisa Tiersten's book *Marianne in the Market: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-siècle France*. For further connections between music and mass consumption, see Ralph Locke's *19th-Century Music* article "Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East."

¹⁶² Joseph Boone, 91.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 90. Italics mine.

means of attempting to communicate beyond the limits of verbal and pictorial representation, as a suggestion of “foreignness” and the erotic illegibility of strange sounds.

I am reminded here of Ravel’s own admission that he “succumbed to the Orient.” In composing his song cycle, Ravel did not actually “succumb” to the sounds of the East; rather, he succumbed to composing in a manner that in some ways conformed to popular Western stereotypes about musical exoticism. Ravel’s admission reveals his concern about losing his authorial voice and succumbing to a musical stereotype. Yet this potential loss of individuality is also linked with certain erotic pleasures – particularly those sumptuous, luxuriating musical delights which his song cycle allows. The arabesque is a structural device which enables many of these pleasures. In the following section, I examine another link in the connection between Ravel’s song cycle and homoerotic Orientalism, by looking at some of the ways in which the arabesque was used by Klingsor to communicate both queer desire and his own sense of alterity and (sometimes problematic) identification with Eastern mysticism.

Klingsor and the Arabesque

Ravel drew inspiration for his song cycle from the *Shéhérazade* poetry of his good friend Tristan Klingsor. Born Léon Leclère, Klingsor was (as his *nom de plume* rather urgently suggests) a decadent Wagnerian, an “amiable dilettante,” director of the French Symbolist magazine *La Vogue*, biographer, author, poet, and sometimes composer. Klingsor took his *nom de plume* from the two characters of Wagnerian opera whom he most admired: “Tristan,” the tragic, lovelorn knight from *Tristan und Isolde*, and “Klingsor,” the powerful, evil, Oriental magician from *Parsifal*. Tellingly, Klingsor’s first published volume of poetry was 1895’s *Filles-*

Fleurs, or the *Flower Maidens*, another *Parsifal* reference.¹⁶⁴ In a 1958 interview with French radio host Stéphane Audel, Klingsor denied he had chosen his pseudonym as a reference to Wagner, claiming instead to have been paying homage to the Arthurian legend with his name. However, I think the similarities between Wagner and Klingsor’s pseudonym and early poetry are too great to be taken purely as coincidence. It is far more likely that later in life, Klingsor looked back on his earlier years as a now-unfashionable Wagnerite with some embarrassment and decided instead to claim medieval legend as his primary influence.

Like Wagner’s magician, Klingsor viewed himself as a “sorcerer of language” who used his poetry to conjure up fantasies and transform the reality of his readers and listeners. In other words, he believed (like many Symbolist writers) in the performative power of his poetry.

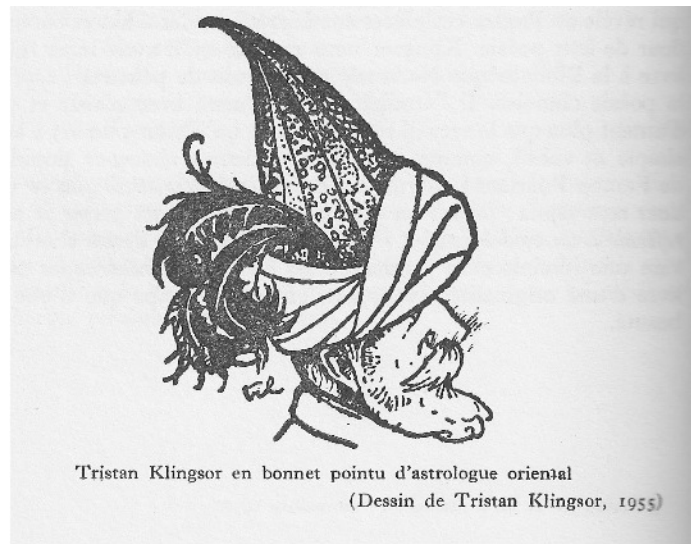


Figure 4.7: Klingsor’s caricature of himself as an Oriental magician

Klingsor met Ravel in 1902 during the first meetings of *Les Apaches* at the home of their mutual friend, the painter Paul Sordes. According to Klingsor’s biographer Lester Pronger, one of Klingsor’s first gifts to Ravel was an autographed copy of Oscar Wilde’s

¹⁶⁴ See “Deux Entretiens Inédits de Tristan Klingsor avec Stéphane Audel à propos de Maurice Ravel (1958);” transcrits, présentés et annotés par Malou Haïne; *Revue Musicale de Suisse Romande* 60:2 (Juin 2007): 47.

Picture of Dorian Gray, which Klingsor had received as a gift from Wilde after meeting him in 1890.¹⁶⁵ Klingsor may have written his *Shéhérazade* poems as a gift for Ravel, as the composer ardently admired Rimsky-Korsakov's 1888 symphonic suite and had abandoned a *Shéhérazade* opera project in 1898. Ravel was so inspired by Klingsor's poetry that he decided to write a song cycle using some of these poems. In order to write music that treated Klingsor's poetry with the utmost delicacy, Ravel asked the poet to read his poetry aloud while he composed their musical settings. In an interview from the 1950s, Klingsor describes how they spent several evenings together in the spring of 1903, while Ravel listened to Klingsor's recitations and then composed music that delicately reinforced the rhythmic utterances of Klingsor's text.

Klingsor's poetic style was highly musical, inspired by Symbolist poets such as Verlaine and Valéry. In 1897 he wrote:

my poems are like sketches ... A poem should be that already a point of departure for a song, or a melody... perhaps that is why I have had the good fortune to pleasure musicians. You see, I attempted not to be merely a rhymers, I attempted to be a rhythmicist. Rhythm, in poetry, music, and in painting, is the artist's foremost resource.¹⁶⁶

Like most Symbolist poets, Klingsor wrote in free verse, without the constraints of rhyming at the end of each line. Yet his poetry is carefully written to reinforce the *sound* of each syllable and the rhythmic relationship between clusters of syllables. Klingsor's preoccupation with rhythm bears a relationship not only to Symbolist poetry, but also to the Art Nouveau movement in architecture, furniture, and the decorative arts popular during the 1890s.¹⁶⁷ More specifically, the gentle inflections of his free verse suggest the arabesque as a

¹⁶⁵ L. J. Pronger, *La Poésie de Tristan Klingsor*, 45. Their mutual friend was Stuart Merrill.

¹⁶⁶ Pronger, 65.

¹⁶⁷ See Deborah Silverman, *Art Nouveau*, "Introduction." The arabesque in relationship to the Art Nouveau movement is discussed in more detail in the first chapter of this dissertation.

form of rhythmic ornamentation. In the visual arts, the arabesque describes the application of repeating, geometric forms. In Klingsor's poetry, the arabesque sounds as a weightless ornament, effortless, floating, free, nonlinear and curling outwards. Etymologically, the term "arabesque" simply means "Arab-like." The earliest usage of this term dates from 16th-century French and Italian decorative styles influenced by Middle Eastern architectural design. Thus, the aesthetics of the arabesque are themselves based in the slippery politics of Orientalism.

As discussed in chapter one, the arabesque derives its name from the decorations used in Islamic architecture, especially those inside of mosques. At these sites arabesques served as decorative alternatives to writing and other kinds of pictorial representation, which were forbidden in mosques because they risked being interpreted as iconography.¹⁶⁸ The arabesque thus decorates while appearing to signify nothing outside of itself, creating the illusion of a pure, indifferent beauty. Contrast the following three different depictions of the arabesque: its visual genesis in the mosque, its reincarnation in Art Nouveau advertising, and finally its musical rendering in Ravel's "La Flûte Enchantée."

¹⁶⁸ A. H. Christie, "The Development of Ornament from Arabic Script," *Burlington Magazine*, XL, 1922, 287-292 and XLI, 1922, 34-41. See my first chapter for more on the history of the arabesque.



Figure 4.8: Arabesque Design in an Islamic Mosque

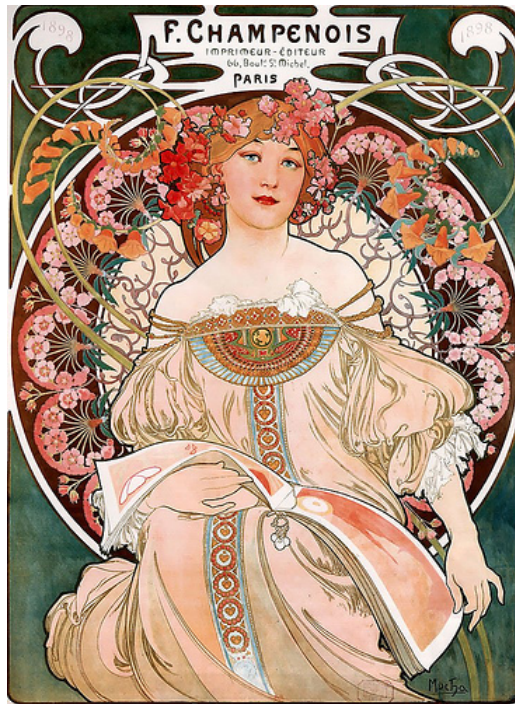


Figure 4.9: Arabesque in an Art Nouveau Advertisement (Alphonse Mucha, 1897)



Figure 4.10: Debussy's *Arabesque No. 1* (1888)

The image shows a page from Ravel's 'La Flûte Enchantée', featuring an 'Arabesque' section. It includes staves for 'CHANT' and 'PIANO'. The tempo is marked 'Très lent'. The piano accompaniment starts with a *pp* dynamic and includes a 'Ped.' (pedal) marking. The vocal line includes the lyrics 'L'ombre est douce et mon maître' and is marked 'très doux' and *pp*. A first ending bracket labeled '1' is present above the vocal staff. The piano accompaniment has a dynamic shift to *sf* and another 'Ped.' marking.

Figure 4.11: Arabesque in Ravel's "La Flûte Enchantée" from *Shéhérazade* (1903)

The arabesque thus functions as a multivalent sensory gesture, signifying aurally and textually as well as visually. Musical arabesques are so named as much for their visual as their sonic shape. For example, the score to Ravel's "La Flûte Enchantée" highlights the opening arabesque's visual as well as aural contours. An underlying rhythmic flexibility links all three of these renderings of the arabesque.

Klingsor, forever the “rhythmicist,” was himself obsessed with achieving the illusion of rhythmic fluidity in his poetry. Unsurprisingly, the arabesque makes several appearances in Klingsor’s *Shéhérazade* collection. Its first mention is at the end of its 23rd poem: “Le Pays Ensorcelleur,” a poem about a country of magical enchantments (Persia), which also names “Monsieur Galland,” the first translator of the *Nights* into French. However, the most noteworthy appearance of the arabesque in *Shéhérazade* appears near its conclusion. In “Arabesques,” the collection’s 96th poem, a narrator describes the scrolling shapes of his handwriting as arabesques: beautiful puzzles, “mysterious signs” for his beloved to decipher. Since his lover does not speak the language in which he writes, his calligraphy becomes arabesque for her, as the meaning of these “mysterious signs” is veiled from her comprehension. To understand him, his lover struggles to translate his writing into her own language, and their shared process of translation is characterized as intimate and playful.

XCVI: "Arabesques"

Tristan Klingsor, Shéhérazade

*Ces signes mystérieux que ma main
Dessine au bout de mon pinceau fleuri
Sur la feuille jaunie de parchemin,
Ces signes que tu t'amuses à déchiffrer
Comme une curieuse petite souris,
Ce sont des vers sur notre amour, mon adorée.*

*These mysterious signs which my hand
Draws with the tip of my flowery brush
On the yellow sheet of parchment,
These signs which amuse you to decipher
Like a curious little mouse,
They are verses about our love, my darling.*

*Ces signes fins que tu essaies de voir
Par-dessus mon épaule inclinée,
Ces signes fins comme des papillons noirs
Posés sur le papier velouté,
Ce sont les mensonges de nos jeunes années
Et les poèmes de ta beauté.*

*These fine signs which you are trying to see
Over my sloping shoulder,
These fine signs like black butterflies
Resting on velvety paper,
They are the lies of our youth
And the poems of your beauty.*

*Et je pense tristement qu'un jour peut-être,
C'est là tout ce qui restera de notre rêve,
Cette petite feuille froissée
Avec la jolie arabesque nette
D'une chanson brève
Que mon pinceau de soie aura tracée.*

*And I think sadly that perhaps one day,
All that will remain of our dream
Is this little crumpled paper
With a pretty, clear arabesque
Of a brief song
Which my silk brush once traced.*

With a mixture of sadness and irony, the narrator ultimately realizes that his calligraphy is more permanent than the relationship it records. The poem takes a darker turn in the second stanza, when the narrator describes his love poetry as the “lies of our youth.” These “black butterflies resting on velvety paper” become lies when they are converted from beautiful scrolling shapes into text with a fixed meaning that does not change, even after their relationship ends. This poem thus underscores writing as another kind of translation, one in which lines become words, and abstract shapes acquire literal, static meaning. Significantly, Klingsor’s poem emphasizes the pleasures of *not understanding* and the intimacy of their moments together before the narrator’s writing acquires literal meaning. It also suggests the communicative power – however fleeting – of calligraphy without language, of lines and shapes without verbal meaning. It implies that love and intimacy are found in shared moments and experiences, not in their recording. Once something has been translated into words and written down, the immediacy of experience is gone forever.

In Klingsor’s poem, the arabesque leads to action, intimacy, and experience. Its absence – or its translation into something literal and fixed in meaning – is associated with stasis, isolation and death. The following section illustrates how the arabesque functions similarly in the first two songs of *Shéhérazade*. Now rendered aurally as well as textually through the interaction of Ravel’s music and Klingsor’s poetry, they manifest as articulations of wordless desire. Despite their seemingly ornamental function, they provide structural unity for each piece.

The Arabesque in “Asie” and “La Flûte Enchantée”

Gurminder Bhogal distinguishes between “arabesques of action” and “arabesques of feeling” in her discussion of arabesque in Ravel’s *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912).¹⁶⁹ “Arabesques of action” are rhythmically complex and unsettling, inspiring the musical drama and pushing the action of the musical narrative forward, while “arabesques of feeling” are rhythmically simple, associated with characters in the ballet who disrupt the plot and inspire a mood of stasis and passivity. These two models will underscore my discussion of arabesque in “Asie” and “La Flûte Enchantée,” for the former song features primarily arabesques of action while the latter includes only arabesques of feeling.

The key areas of *Shéhérazade*’s three songs, “Asie”, “La Flûte Enchantée” and “L’Indifférent,” outline a tonal progression from Eb minor to B minor to E major. Besides moving from a flatter to a sharper tonal space, these three songs also pass from a mode of extroverted, annunciatory desire to a mode of subdued – but still intensely desirous – reflection. This shift from an affect of extroversion to one of introversion is also apparent in the move from arabesques of action to arabesques of feeling in the first two songs of the cycle. The arabesques of action in “Asie” push the song’s narrative forward, inspiring the narrator’s conquest of the Orient, while the more meditative arabesques of feeling which decorate “La Flûte Enchantée” reflect the narrator’s desire for her illicit lover to come serenade her at her bedroom window.

The first song of the cycle, “Asie,” is a lengthy expression (at almost 9 minutes) of the narrator’s desires to travel and experience *all* of the Orient. The expression “Je voudrais” (“I would like”) appears *twelve* times in the song, each time followed by a location, aspect or part of the Orient which the singer would like to experience during his travels: some

¹⁶⁹ Gurminder Kaur Bhogal, “Debussy’s Arabesque and Ravel’s *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912),” *twentieth-century music* 3:2 (2006): 185.

examples of what he would like to see include “îles de fleurs” (“isles of flowers”), “des yeux sombres d’amour” (“eyes dark with love”), and “beaux turbans de soie” (“beautiful silk turbans”). Timothy Taylor describes this song as a “fantasy through consumption,” reminding us of Rosalind Williams’ thesis that the Orient became an eminently consumable commodity at the Paris *fin de siècle*.¹⁷⁰

Notably, a specific arabesque figure appears in the high winds or violins each time the expression “je voudrais” is repeated. This arabesque is thus associated with the narrator’s desire to experience as much of the Orient as he can imagine. Furthermore, each appearance of the arabesque serves as a structural device, a recurring theme that listeners come to associate with the narrator’s quest to consume the Orient. I classify this gesture as one of Bhogal’s “arabesques of action,” since it spurs the narrator on in his journey of Orientalist consumption. Significantly, it contains a descending triplet figure that derives from Ravel’s 1898 orchestra suite *Shéhérazade*; the gesture is the primary link between the two pieces, composed five years apart.¹⁷¹



Figure 4.12: Introductory triplet figure from Ravel’s orchestral suite *Shéhérazade* (1898)

¹⁷⁰ Timothy L. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism*, 95.

¹⁷¹ See Roger Nichols on this topic in *Ravel*, 54.

Figure 4.13: Related triplet figure in m. 7 of “Asie” (1903)

Figure 4.14: Triplet figure anticipating “Je voudrais” in “Asie” (1903)

This descending figure reflects Rimsky-Korsakov's influence, as a similar gesture opens his 1884 *Shéhérazade* suite. Although the text and attendant arabesque repeat twelve times together, the textual utterance remains static, while the arabesque changes stylistically to suggest the changing objects of the narrator's desire. For example, in m. 86, the arabesque accompanies the narrator's declaration that "he wants to see Persia, and India, and then China..." As the narrator's urgent curiosity devolves into comments like "paunchy mandarins beneath parasols, and the princesses with delicate hands, and the scholars arguing...", the arabesque itself devolves into a form of pentatonic chinoiserie, an aural decoration which illustrates the narrator's racist sentiments.

In contrast to the sprawling, unwieldy epic poetic form of "Asie," "La Flûte Enchantée" is tightly organized around a central theme: the narrator's desire for her lover to serenade her with a flute. A female narrator, perhaps Shéhérazade herself, awaits her illicit lover while her old husband sleeps.

Text to "La Flûte Enchantée"

*L'ombre est douce et mon maître dort,
Coiffé d'un bonnet conique de soie
Et son long nez jaune en sa barbe blanche.
Mais moi, je suis éveillée encor
Et j'écoute au dehors
Une chanson de flûte où s'épanche
Tour à tour la tristesse ou la joie,
Un air tour à tour langoureux ou frivole
Que mon amoureux chéri joue,
Et quand je m'approche de la croisée,
Il me semble que chaque note s'envole
De la flûte vers ma joue
Comme un mystérieux baiser.*

Translation (Orenstein)

*The shade is soft and my master sleeps,
Wearing a conical bonnet on his head
His long yellow nose buried in his white beard
But I, I am still awake
And I listen
To a flute song outside expressing
sadness and joy in turn
A melody languid and frivolous in turn
Which my dearly beloved plays,
And when I approach the casement
I feel as if each note flies away
From the flute to my cheek
Like a mysterious kiss.*

Fittingly, the song's orchestration is much lighter than "Asie," and all *arabesquerie* is given to a solo flute. However, the arabesques that glitter in the texture serve a similar structural function as they did in "Asie." The flute arabesque which opens "La Flûte Enchantée" is the literal embodiment of her lover's serenade. It functions much like the arabesque at the opening of Debussy's *Prélude de l'après-midi d'un faun*, as an ornamental device turned structural. Like Debussy's arabesque, Ravel's opening arabesque serves as the primary theme of the piece. The solo flute frames the piece with identical opening and closing arabesque gestures. Rather than disrupting the form, the arabesque shapes the formal structure by engaging in a call-and-response with the singer.

<u>Appearances of the Arabesque Motive in "La Flûte Enchantée"</u>		
m. 2-3	original	solo flute
m. 8-10	original	solo (follows first vocal entrance)
m. 11-15	developmental play	with voice taking lead
m. 19-21	"teasing variation"	with voice
m. 22-27	descending variation (up an octave)	with voice
m. 31-33	original	solo (identical)

After an opening flute solo, the voice and flute alternate for the first ten measures, before becoming erotically intertwined in measure 11. The developmental play which occurs in mm. 11-15 is most like Bhogal's description of "arabesque of feeling." It represents a rhythmic simplification of the motive, reducing it to repeating patterns of whole steps alternating with perfect fourths and fifths. This is the first time the arabesque motive is heard with the singer, and the simplified gestures allow the singer to take the lead as she describes the pleasure which hearing her lover's enchanted flute gives her. Furthermore, this "arabesque of feeling" becomes representative of the narrator's obsessive desire for her lover, as she eventually cannot sing without the haunting presence of his flute.

Each subsequent return of the flute arabesque (except for the closing arabesque, which serves as a framing device) accompanies the singer, implying that musically they have grown interconnected. The narrator can no longer sing without the intertwining flute melody. The poetic narrative reflects this, as the narrator shifts from watching her husband sleep indoors to listening outside to the lush solos of her lover. Lying silently in bed, the narrator's desire for her lover is only consummated aurally. In the final stanza, she observes that listening to her lover's flute is the aural equivalent of his kiss. Her obsession with him intensifies at this instant, as her final note is marked by a modified Tristan chord, inserted by the winking Ravel as much for irony as for romantic emphasis.

In the final song of *Shéhérazade*, "L'Indifférent," the narrator is in a similar predicament, haunted by his/her desire for an elusive lover. However, in "L'Indifférent" the narrator attains no consummation of these desires. How does the arabesque mediate between aural eroticism and unfulfilled desire in "L'Indifférent"? Before considering this question, we shall take a brief detour from the eroticism of the arabesque to explore the vast array of meanings that the term "indifference" had acquired by the time of Klingsor and Ravel's composition.

Towards a Genealogy of Indifférence

"L'Indifférent," the third song in Ravel's cycle, refers to the poem's title character, an aloof and androgynous youth who resists the narrator's advances. Literally translated as the "indifferent one" or the "indifferent lover," the term carried with it a number of exotic and homoerotic connotations in *fin-de-siècle* French society. In this period, the androgynous adolescent boy, poised on the cusp of sexual maturity, "personified a fleeting moment of

liberty and of dangerously attractive innocence.”¹⁷² Such liminal figures found voice in numerous period texts, from Wilde’s *Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) to Renée Vivien’s poetic alter-ego San Giovanni (who appears in her poetry from 1902 to 1909). I view the “indifférent” figure as one important subtype of the *fin-de-siècle* androgyne, a character which was largely inspired by a 1717 Rococo painting by Antoine Watteau.¹⁷³ The following section examines how Watteau’s painting traversed nearly two centuries and crossed the English Channel twice in order to shape Klingsor and Ravel’s depiction of “l’Indifférent” in *Shéhérazade*. In the 1880s and 1890s, the renewed popularity of Watteau’s painting of an androgynous youth inspired several further artistic creations in diverse literary and musical genres: a 1887 “Imaginary Portrait” by Walter Pater, a 1892 poem by “Michael Field”,¹⁷⁴ a novella published by Marcel Proust in 1896,¹⁷⁵ and of course Klingsor’s poem and Ravel’s song.

¹⁷² Martha Vincinus, “The Adolescent Boy: *Fin-de-siècle* Femme Fatale?” in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, edited by Richard Dellamora, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 83.

¹⁷³ Jean-Antoine Watteau, *L’Indifférent (The Casual Lover)*. c. 1717. Oil on canvas. Louvre, Paris, France.

¹⁷⁴ Michael Field, *Sight and Song* (London: E. Matthews and J. Lane, 1892). “Michael Field” was actually pseudonym used by English authors and lovers Katharine Harris Bradley and Edith Emma Copper.

¹⁷⁵ Marcel Proust, *La Vie Contemporaine* March 1896. Republished by Philip Kolb in 1979.



Figure 4.15: Antoine Watteau, *L'Indifférent* (c. 1717)

Watteau completed *L'Indifférent* during the most productive phase of his career, when he was perfecting the *fête galante* genre after nearly two decades of labor. Pastoral and idyllic in nature, the painting is prototypical of the style discussed in Chapter 2. Watteau's *L'Indifférent* is above all a dancer. He manifests his “indifference” in coy shyness and teasing gestures – the indirect pleasures of suggestion and deferral. The youth's soft eyes gaze back at the viewer with an indirect stare, his head tilted demurely to the left. His left arm, draped provocatively in a red silk cape, extends with his fingers in an inviting upwards curl, offering to take the viewer's hand in a dance. His calves, the most overtly sexualized part of his body, turn out from his hips balletically, showing off the fine curves of the front of his legs and a seductive hint of his right calf muscle.

Despite its sensual quality, the painting carries an air of subtle melancholy, stemming from our knowledge that the boy's shyness and youth are fleeting. The transience of the boy's youthful innocence as well as his flirtatious gestures are preserved – seemingly forever – on this canvas. The tension between the passing of youth and the eternity of its artistic representation is a common theme in Watteau's *fête galante* paintings, a genre perpetually stuck in an imaginary, idealized past. In part because of this tension, *L'Indifférent* remained one of Watteau's most popular paintings at the *fin de siècle*, and inspired no less than three recreations in other artistic formats: poetry, novella, and song.

How did Watteau's painting traverse nearly two centuries to reach Klingsor and Ravel? The answer requires a journey across the English Channel. Walter Pater discovered Watteau by reading the Goncourt Brothers' influential art history text *L'art du dix-huitième siècle* (1859-1875).¹⁷⁶ The Goncourt Brothers place Watteau at the beginning of their lengthy study, which sought to single-handedly rescue the Rococo painter from the scorn of Neoclassical art critics. Pater treated Watteau with similar importance, also locating the painter at the beginning of his 1887 *Imaginary Portraits*. Pater's book, a unique genre of historical fiction written in diary format, opens with an account of Watteau in "A Prince of Court Painters." This chapter consists of a series of fictive journal entries written by a blonde, unnamed English youth who describes his twenty-year relationship with "Anthony Watteau" from 1701 through 1721. In an entry dated "September 1717," the youth laments that he was the subject of a painting that Watteau abandoned in 1714 and that the painter's assistant John-Bapiste must finish it. The description of a young blonde boy, "wearing a gown of particular silken stuff, falling into an abundance of small folds" is strikingly similar

¹⁷⁶ Jules and Edmond de Goncourt, *French Eighteenth-Century Painters*, trans. Robin Ironside (Oxford: Phaidon, 1948). Originally published as *L'art du dix-huitième siècle* in twelve parts by Parisian publisher E. Dentu between 1859 and 1875.

to the image of the youth depicted in *L'Indifférent*.¹⁷⁷ Since the painting was finished in late 1717 or 1718, this implies that Pater may have meant for this blonde narrator to be interpreted by readers as the model for *L'Indifférent* itself.

A major theme in Pater's account of Watteau is the transience of youth, painting and poetry – a sense that all is lost through time, except that which is preserved through art. The boy describes, with great sadness, how Watteau tends to abandon his sketches and leave them unfinished. The theme of transience, loss and unreturnability of the past is an aesthetic current linking Watteau's painting and the artistic creations it helped inspire. Such a sense of melancholic longing, a more general characteristic of Watteau's *fête galante* genre, pervades Ravel's song "*L'Indifférent*" as well. This sense of belatedness (of having arrived too late to the party, of composing in a genre past its prime, of coming to the Orient after it has been spoilt by too many tourists) is a common theme throughout all recreations of "*L'Indifférent*."

Pater was not alone in his admiration for Watteau's melancholic paintings. In 1892, in part inspired by Pater's *Imaginary Portraits*, collaborative poets and lovers Katharine Harris Bradley and Edith Emma Copper published a collection of 31 poems entitled *Sight and Song* under the joint pseudonym "Michael Field." For this collection, they invented a new genre called "picture-poems" which attempt to translate visual experience into textual form. Each poem is based on and named after a painting Bradley and Copper viewed during their travels to European art galleries, including the Louvre, the Dresden Gallery and the National Gallery. Most of the poeticized paintings were by Italian Renaissance Masters, but three of the collection's poems (including its first and last poems) are based upon works by Watteau.

¹⁷⁷ Walter Pater, *Imaginary Portraits* (1887), 37-9.

For the collection's opening poem, Field chose *L'Indifférent*, reinterpreting Watteau's poem against the grain of Pater's aesthetic subjectivism. Like Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* and the Goncourt Brothers' *L'art du dix-huitième siècle*, *Sight and Song* opens with an account of Watteau, this time focusing on *L'Indifférent* as an emblem of aesthetic objectivity. Michael Field use¹⁷⁸ the painting to mark both their indebtedness to and difference from Pater: while celebrating Watteau like Pater, Field demanded the spectator adopt an "indifferent" attitude to consume and experience art and understand these verbal translations of pictures.

According to the Preface,

The aim of this little volume is, as far as it may be, to translate into verse what the lines and colours of certain chosen pictures sing in themselves; to express not so much what these pictures are to the poet, but rather what poetry they objectively incarnate. Such an attempt demands patient, continuous sight as pure as the gazer can refine it of theory, fancies, or his mere subjective enjoyment.¹⁷⁹

The goal of Field's project was to "develop an epistemology of sight intrinsically related to poetry" as both a response to and departure from Walter Pater's theories of aesthetic experience as essentially subjective.¹⁸⁰

While both Pater and Field were drawn to Watteau's painting because of its depiction of an androgynous young boy, Field used the boy to assert the superiority of objective "indifference" as an aesthetic stance. The boy does not succumb; in fact, the pleasures and torment of lust and desire are completely foreign to his nature. Rather than focusing exclusively on the narrator's desire for the young boy (as does Pater in his story and Klingsor in his poem "L'Indifférent"), the boy's objective actions direct the poetic narrative. This poem, like several others in Field's collection, celebrates the beautiful transience of youth.

¹⁷⁸ I use plural pronouns for "Michael Field," in order to keep the pseudonym and his dual authorship in mind.

¹⁷⁹ Field, v.

¹⁸⁰ Ana I. Parejo Vadillo, "Sight and Song: Transparent Translations and a Manifesto for the Observer" in *Victorian Poetry* 38: 1 (2000): 16.

However, in their poem the boy reverses Field's gaze, creating a sense of instability. Not only is Field's indifferent one keenly aware of being watched, he also defiantly looks back. In this poem, observe the presence of dialogue between its multiple implied narrators. These two narrators' converse together in a mutually constituted dance, longing for the indifferent boy to return their affections in a literary *menais-a-trois*:

*Michael Field, "L'Indifférent"*¹⁸¹

*He dances on a toe
As light as Mercury's:
Sweet herald, give thy message! No,
He dances on; the world is his,
The sunshine and his wingy hat;
His eyes are round
Beneath the brim:
To merely dance where he is found
Is fate to him
And he was born for that.*

*He dances in a cloak
Of vermeil and of blue:
Gay youngster, underneath the oak.
Come, laugh and love! In vain we woo;
He is a human butterfly;—
No soul, no kiss.
No glance nor joy!
Though old enough for manhood's bliss,
He is a boy,
Who dances and must die.*

In the poem's opening lines, the narrators debate the boy's interest but soon realize that instead of addressing them, he sadly "dances on." The poem itself becomes a dance through their conversation, mirroring the poses of Watteau's youth. As Paul Valéry reminds us, "the poem is a dance."¹⁸² Yet the poem is tinged with as much melancholy as Watteau's original painting. The boy ignores the narrators, giving them no message and ignoring their request for a kiss. This indifferent one was born to dance but nothing else, "old enough for manhood's bliss" yet chastely denying the narrators' attempts to woo him.

Field's poem reads Watteau's painting through an aesthetic of queer indifference. The boy acts queerly through his refusal to be seduced, his aloof gestures and insistent

¹⁸¹ Field, 1-2.

¹⁸² Paul Valéry, "Remarks on Poetry" in Denis Walder, ed., *Literature in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), p. 140. As quoted by Ana I. Parejo Vadillo, 34, footnote 25 .

celibacy. Ironically, the boy's sexual purity stains him: his indifference towards eroticism manifests as a marker of sexual difference. The boy's chaste movements become a dance of death, as he will not grow old and he will not reproduce. The similarity in themes between Field's poem and Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* (which Klingsor gave as a gift to Ravel in 1902, as noted earlier) is striking. In both narratives a beautiful, blonde youth, preserved forever on canvas, will never grow old. The non-reproductive, inwardly-focused, narcissistic aestheticism of Field's "L'Indifférent" suggests the aesthetic of art for art's sake. The poem's dandiacal undertones are decidedly queer.

In the Preface, Michael Field state that the aim of this new genre is "to *translate* into verse what the lines and colours of certain chosen pictures *sing* in themselves."¹⁸³ Field's ekphrastic project thus uses *sound* as a crucial, objective link between image and word. If the poet is to do his/her job of "translating... certain chosen pictures" into verse, he/she must listen closely to what such images "sing" through their arrangement of various lines and colours. But how can we hear this sound so essential to the image? How can images "sing in themselves"? This image of "singing lines and colours" is suggestive, above all, of Hanslick's concept of the musical arabesque: a kaleidoscope of colors moving in time – a dizzying display of dancing images and light, sound in color.¹⁸⁴ Perhaps then, the connection between "sight and song" is actually the physical, bodily connection between the dance of images across a canvas and the lyrical song of Field's verse.

Watteau's *L'Indifférent* found yet another *fin-de-siècle* rendering in the writing of Marcel Proust. Proust, a contemporary of Ravel's whose writing explores many similar themes –

¹⁸³ Field, v. Emphasis mine.

¹⁸⁴ See both my discussion of the arabesque and Watteau in chapter two and a brief discussion of the arabesque in relationship to Klingsor's poetry earlier in this chapter.

memory, loss, pastiche and aestheticism – as the composer’s music, greatly admired Watteau.¹⁸⁵ Like Field, Marcel Proust had engaged in a collaborative, ekphrastic and homoerotic project celebrating Watteau with his friend and lover Reynaldo Hahn. Their *Portraits des Peintres* (begun in May 1894, published in 1896) is an example of the now-outmoded genre of the monodrama, a collection of four poems designed to be recited aloud with piano accompaniment. The fourth poem, a musico-literary portrait of Watteau, is discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

However, Proust paid homage to the painter more indirectly in the fall of 1894, when he wrote a brief, gossipy novella entitled *L’Indifférent*, which presumably took its name from Watteau’s painting. Proust’s story narrates the sad tale of Madeleine, a young society woman who realizes she has fallen in love with Lepré, an aloof aristocrat who is completely uninterested in her advances – aka her “indifferent” lover. She approaches him shyly but repeatedly at the Opéra to no avail, only later learning that he is afflicted with a terrible vice: he cannot love any woman of his own class but instead prefers lower-class women, urban prostitutes and provincial whores. Proust probably based Lepré upon Montesquiou (also named earlier in this chapter as a dedicatee of Mardrus’ translation). Proust found a model for Madeleine in Montesquiou’s cousin, the Comtesse Greffulhe, whom the author had met at a costume ball in spring 1893.¹⁸⁶ It was a matter of gossip and common knowledge that, despite being married, Greffulhe was madly in love with Montesquiou. Although the two remained great friends, Montesquiou never returned Greffulhe’s romantic interests, as he

¹⁸⁵ For more background on their relationship, see Michael J. Puri, “Memory, Pastiche, and Aestheticism in Ravel and Proust,” in *Ravel Studies*, ed. Deborah Mawer (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 122-152.

¹⁸⁶ Greffulhe also later became one of the models for Proust’s Duchesse de Guermantes in *À la recherche du temps perdu*.

was completely uninterested in women sexually.¹⁸⁷ The link to Lepré's indifference is strengthened further by the fact that one of the Count's favorite paintings was Watteau's *L'Indifférent*. A great collector of art, he was reputedly furious that he could not purchase the painting for his own private collection and would frequently visit the Louvre to gaze at the portrait of the young, shy boy.¹⁸⁸

However much the real Lepré may have admired Watteau's painting, the two fictional characters are extremely different: contrast Watteau's youthful, dancing "indifferent lover" with Proust's vice-ridden and secretive Lepré. The only thing the two men appear to have in common is their apparent "indifference" towards women, which manifests itself as bashful naïveté by Watteau's subject and apathetic coldness in Proust's Lepré. Watteau's youthful figure appears shy and innocent rather than uninterested, and his graceful dancing and curving gestures are emblematic of Watteau's *fête galante* style, which restages the provincial parties of 18th-century French aristocrats on canvas.

The gentle curves of Watteau's youth are invoked also by Klingsor's poem "l'Indifférent," whose "soft eyes" and delicately curving face provoke the ardent admiration of the poem's narrator. Klingsor's poem describes how the indifferent stranger saunters by the Narrator, then waving goodbye with a "final graceful gesture" straight out of Watteau's painting. In both cases, the curving lines of the boy's body suggest the arabesque, an architectural gesture which simultaneously invokes the Rococo and the exotic.

¹⁸⁷ William C. Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2002): 154.

¹⁸⁸ Phillipe Julian in *Robert de Montesquiou: un prince 1900* (Paris: Perrin, 1965): 310. English translation by John Haylock and Francis King as *Robert de Montesquiou: Prince of Aesthetes* (New York: Viking Press, 1968): 114.

“L’Indifférent” as the Eroticism of the Arabesque

Several of Klingsor’s 100 *Shéhérazade* poems describe a “*jeune étranger*,” an androgynous foreigner whose elusiveness is undoubtedly part of his appeal. “L’Indifférent”, the 60th poem in Klingsor’s *Shéhérazade* cycle, is the third of four poems in which the character of *l’étranger* appears and teases the Narrator. The *étranger*’s aloofness introduces a kind of erotic distance into “L’Indifférent,” creating a desire that is heightened through its continual denial and deferral. The narrator desires but cannot possess the young stranger, watching helplessly as the curving lines of the boy’s body move past. The boy’s swaying hips, the soft line of his face, the curve of his lips and eyes are all reminiscent of the arabesque.¹⁸⁹ His countenance is composed of curving ornaments that extend across his body and tease the narrator’s eyes.

The narrator’s only gift from the stranger is his voice. The stranger speaks in an unknown, intoxicating language, so that the narrator cannot understand the literal meaning of his words. The narrator can hear only the surface of the stranger’s speech, the sound of his syllables like a music “off-pitch.” For Klingsor the sonic and visual surfaces of a foreign language undoubtedly invoked the arabesque. Recall that in the 96th poem of *Shéhérazade*, entitled “Arabesques,” Klingsor describes foreign calligraphy as arabesques, “mysterious signs... like black butterflies resting on velvety paper.” Language is liquidated of its literal meaning; in the truest form of Symbolist aesthetics, words are reduced to the pleasures of pure sound.

¹⁸⁹ The “indifferent” lover of Klingsor’s poem is likely an allusion to the episode “adolescentes ou Jouvenceaux” with the specific story “le parterre fleuri” (the flowering terrace). This story uses similar language to describe an attractive, androgynous adolescent. For example, the boy’s soft beard is called a “shading of down” three times. From the 7th volume of Mardrus’ translation (the volume he dedicated to Henri de Regnier, another Apache and close friend of Ravel’s), *Mille Nuits et Une Nuit*, 235-46.

Text to “L’Indifférent”

*Tes yeux sont doux comme ceux d’une fille,
Jeune étranger.
Et la courbe fine
De ton beau visage de duvet ombragé
Est plus séduisante encor de ligne.
Ta lèvre chante sur le pas de ma porte
Une langue inconnue et charmante
Comme une musique fausse.*

*Entre!
Et que mon vin te réconforte...*

*Mais non, tu passes
Et de mon seuil je te vois t’éloigner
Me faisant un dernier geste avec grâce
Et la hanche légèrement ployée
Par ta démarche féminine et lasse...*

Translation (Orenstein + Levitz corrections)

*Your eyes are soft like a girl’s,
Young stranger.
And the delicate curve
Of your beautiful face shadowed with down
Has a line that is even more seductive.
Your lips sing on my doorstep
in an unknown, charming language
Like music off-pitch.*

*Come in!
And let my wine refresh you...*

*But you, you walk by
And from my threshold I see you move away
Addressing a final graceful gesture to me,
Your hips slightly bent
By your feminine, languid gait.*

In “L’Indifférent,” ellipses in the second and third stanzas of the poem (“que mon vin te réconforte...”, “ta démarche féminine et lasse...”) indicate the narrator cannot fully articulate his thoughts and experiences through the language of poetry. In these pregnant silences, heavy with the narrator’s desire for the *étranger*, so much has been left unsaid. The narrator’s invitation “Come in!” does not succeed in luring the stranger to his doorstep. In these moments, language fails, but what about Ravel’s music? What information might the composer give us about the narrator’s relationship to the stranger? How might Ravel envoice the young stranger’s indifferent poses?

Though the stranger remains completely silent in Klingsor’s poetry, in Ravel’s song, the *étranger* instrumentally mesmerizes and overwhelms the texted voice of the song’s French narrator. In “L’Indifférent” the young stranger is enunciated through high wind instruments: plaintive flute, oboes, and clarinet – which imitate the singer’s melodic lines and then teasingly pull away. Lloyd Whitesell describes this as a tendency towards “erotic ambiguity” in Ravel’s music, which he

interprets as responding to the poem through strategies of ironic detachment and distancing.¹⁹⁰

During the piece's first eight measures (before the singer enters) the winds are separated metrically from the strings, existing in a duple (2/2) space while the strings undulate slowly in triple time (6/4).

Lent (la noire du $\frac{6}{4} = 60$) **1^o Solo**
p très expressif

2 GRANDES FLÛTES

2 HAUTBOIS

1 COR ANGLAIS

2 CLARINETTES en LA **1^o Solo**
p très expressif

2 BASSONS

2 CORS chromatiques en FA
Sourdines

1 HARPE

CHANT

Lent (la noire du $\frac{6}{4} = 60$) **Div.**
Sourdines *pp* Unis

VIOLONS **Div.**
Sourdines *pp*

ALTOS **Div.**
Sourdines *pp*

VIOLONCELLES **Div.**
Sourdines *pp*

CONTREBASSES

Example 4.16: Opening five measures of “L’Indifférent”

¹⁹⁰ Lloyd Whitesell, “Erotic Ambiguity in Ravel’s Music” in *Ravel Studies*, edited by Deborah Mawer (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2010): 74-91.

When the narrator enters, she mediates between these two temporal worlds, dividing 6/4 measures into dotted quarter notes, which reinforce the wind line. Initially the narrator and high winds are linked both metrically and melodically, as they share pitches, pulling together on important lines of text like “ligne” (line) and “musique fausse” (false music). Tellingly, the narrator is abandoned by all instrumental accompaniment on the lines “Mais non, tu passes.” This silence implies the stranger (envoiced by the orchestra, especially the winds) has declined the narrator’s invitation.

Harmonically, the stranger also has the upper hand in his musical exchange with the narrator. All tonal resolution in this song is given to the orchestra. The piece’s introduction and conclusion are its most harmonically stable sections. By the time the narrator enters in m. 9, the piece has already modulated away from the tonic of E Major. The song then undergoes a series of modulations and does not definitively return to E Major until after the narrator’s vocal part concludes in m. 31. Finally, the narrator is never allowed to participate in cadential resolution—the only perfect authentic cadence in the piece occurs in m. 34 (the third measure from the end of the piece). Furthermore, the stranger teases the narrator harmonically, evading a cadence in m. 16 which had been prepared by a dominant seventh chord in the previous measure. The narrator’s pleasure – and our own – is deferred.

Rather than pushing relentlessly forward, the arabesque enables Klingsor’s poetry and Ravel’s music to float free, without the constraints of clock time or beat time. “L’Indifférent” is an early example of the arabesque as a kind of rhythmic treatment in the composer’s oeuvre. As Bhogal explains, these ornaments continually undermine the direction of the form, disrupting and delaying important points of arrival and creating the impression that the music is without a sense of forward motion. In “L’Indifférent”, the arabesques in the orchestral accompaniment embody the youth’s indifference toward the narrator’s willful advances. In other words, these aural arabesques create an

alternative formulation of temporality – one in which time floats, rather than advances. The accompanimental music as well as the young stranger both float by the narrator, who attempts to press forward – to lure the youth across the threshold.

The piece’s most notable musical arabesque is a descending six-note theme appearing in the clarinet and flutes in mm. 20 and mm. 29. This is actually a quotation of the primary theme from Ravel’s *String Quartet*, also composed in 1903.¹⁹¹ Interestingly, there is a biographical connection between these two pieces: Ravel dedicated his *String Quartet* to his beloved teacher, Gabriel Fauré and “L’Indifférent” to soprano Emma Bardac, Fauré’s former lover. Ironically, less than a year after *Shéhérazade*’s composition, Bardac would leave her husband Sigismond Bardac for Debussy, proving herself to be the “indifferent” one yet again.¹⁹²

a) “L’Indifférent,” m. 20.



b) “L’Indifférent,” m. 29



c) *String Quartet*, I, m. 1

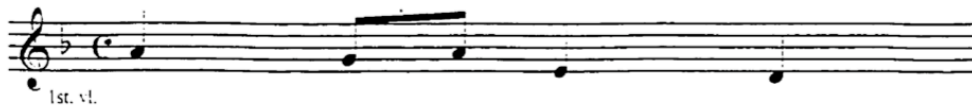


Figure 4.17: Quotation from String Quartet

¹⁹¹ This has also been observed by Andrew Deruchie. See p. 92 of his M.A. thesis. The exact dates of Ravel’s composition of *Shéhérazade* is unknown, but he composed the *String Quartet* in April 1903.

¹⁹² Graham Johnson, *Gabriel Fauré: The Songs and Their Poets*, 243-44. Johnson even adds “it is said” that Ravel dedicated the song to Bardac after she attempted – and failed – to seduce him after meeting him in her salon, but the author does not provide citation for this bit of tantalizing bit of gossip.

In a discussion of Ravel's early compositions, scholar and biographer Roger Nichols recently commented that "it is hardly possible to imagine a greater contrast in aesthetic aims than that between the intellectual rigor of the Quartet and what comes across as the indulgent hedonism of the song-cycle *Shéhérazade*."¹⁹³ What might Ravel have been trying to accomplish by linking these radically different pieces, and reconfiguring a structurally important theme (the subject) as an ornament? Tellingly, the two appearances of the theme from Ravel's string quartet are associated with arabesque-like text: the narrator's descriptions of the musicality of the stranger's voice and the movements of his hips: "une langue inconnue et charmante, comme une musique fausse" ("a language unknown and charming, like music off-pitch") and "me faisant un dernier geste avec grâce" ("making one final, graceful gesture to me"). Synchronized with Klingsor's concept of foreign language as an arabesque (words evacuated of literal meaning and reduced to the contours of pure sound) and the lilting contours of the *étranger's* farewell gesture (an evocation of the arabesque in bodily motion) is Ravel's rendering of the arabesque in music, a primary theme repositioned as an ornament. The subject of Ravel's String Quartet has become the periphery, a decoration of his exotic cycle. Might the principal theme from the String Quartet suggest Ravel himself? This is where we might begin to hear Ravel in relation to the musical and textual narrative of "L'Indifférent."

From Locating Ravel to Locating Ravel's Listeners

By quoting himself in his own work, Ravel personalizes the piece. This is one reason why two former Apaches, Émile Vuillermoz and Dimitri Calvocoressi, describe this song as particularly revealing, even confessional. Calvocoressi, a music critic of Greek descent, active in French journals until World War I, wrote the following about Ravel's relationship with *Shéhérazade*:

Once, in response to a question of mine, [Ravel] said that if he himself had to point out, in his music, passages in which the direct expression of emotion... had been deliberately

¹⁹³ Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale UP, 2010): 54.

attempted, he would begin by selecting the opening of “Asie,” then “L’Indifférent” from the same set of songs...¹⁹⁴

According to Calvocoressi, at least, Ravel recognized the unusual directness of his *Shéhérazade* cycle. Tellingly, both the opening of “Asie” and “L’Indifférent” are lushly orchestrated musical confessions of unfulfilled desire. They are fantasies of consumption, in which perversely the Western Narrator (the consumer) loses control and loses himself in the Orient. Such fantasies were common, as Joseph Boone reminds us.

Curiously, Ravel himself was described as an “indifférent” by fellow Apache Émile Vuillermoz, who, when discussing Ravel’s biographical relationship with his music, singles out “L’Indifférent” as an example of exceptional expressiveness and personalization in the composer’s oeuvre.

When one has heard of what has been called the sexual enigma of Ravel, who was also an *indifférent*, one is left perplexed by all the delicate mystery which hovers over this small text, and one becomes aware that this page is one in which the musician has revealed one of the most hidden and best aspects of his sensitivity. He abandons his usual timidity to give way to a kind of discreet but impressive lyrical effusiveness which makes it, more than any of his other works, a confession.¹⁹⁵

It is notable that Vuillermoz, a music critic who was one of Ravel’s classmates in Fauré’s composition class, waited until after Ravel’s death in 1937 to publish this very intimate assessment.

A queer tension exists between Vuillermoz’s dual claims that Ravel was an “indifférent” (one who is unmoved) and his claim that the piece functions as a kind of “confession.” Recall Ravel’s own admission that he “succumbed” to the Orient while composing this piece. How might Ravel’s succumbing operate as a kind of confession? Where might we locate Ravel in relation to this piece? Do we read him as an “l’indifférent” – the youth walking by the narrator, seductively aloof and

¹⁹⁴ D. Calvocoressi, *Musicians’ Gallery: Music and Ballet in Paris and London* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1933), 51-2.

¹⁹⁵ As translated in Victor Seroff, *Maurice Ravel* (Freeport: NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1953), 69. Originally published in Émile Vuillermoz, “L’œuvre de Maurice Ravel,” in *Maurice Ravel par quelques-uns de ses familiers*, ed. Roger Wild (Paris: Éditions du Tambourinaire, 1939), 65.

unmoved? Or is he the Narrator, confessing his desires for the *étranger*? Perhaps Ravel simultaneously occupies *both* subject positions in a kind of dialectical tension: that of the one desired and the one desiring, the aloof *étranger* and the unfulfilled French narrator. The problem of locating Ravel in the piece is certainly one of its most seductive qualities. Vuillermoz's statement seems to imply Ravel simultaneously occupies both subject positions of the desired and the desiring, the indifferent exotic Other and the unrequited Western Self. Perhaps in this piece, Ravel did not "succumb" merely to the Orient, but also to his desires for a direct articulation of the erotic. The Orient serves as a lens through which Ravel can figure his own experiences of eroticism, however deferred, denied or veiled.

Thus far, I have avoided using gendered pronouns to describe the narrator of "L'Indifférent." The gender of the narrator of Klingsor's poems changes from poem to poem. Some poems, such as "Asie," imply a male narrator, as it is unlikely that a woman would smoke a pipe or talk so frankly about her shaved slaves. Other poems, like "La Flûte Enchantée," clearly had a female narrator in mind. Historically, Ravel's song cycle has eliminated this ambiguity through performance. The cycle has traditionally been sung by a soprano, and Ravel even asked Klingsor to change the word from "pipe" to "cup" to make the "Asie" appropriate for Jeanne Hatto to perform in 1904. Tellingly, Ravel also dedicated each song to a different female friend.

However, the cycle has also attracted the attention of some male singers. In a 1965 letter to Arbie Orenstein, tenor Martial Singher claimed to have once:

remarked to Ravel that the texts of these songs were almost certainly meant for a man. [Ravel] confirmed ... that he had had in mind a male voice when writing them, but that only women singers, with strong musical backgrounds had been interested by them...I have always regretted to have failed giving him the joy to hear them sung as he had originally planned.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Letter from Martial Singher to Arbie Orenstein, Sept 3, 1965 (reprinted in Arbie Orenstein's *Ravel Reader*, 506-8):
Would it be interesting for you to know that, to the best of my knowledge, I have been the first male singer to perform the three *Chansons madécasses* as well as "Asie" from *Shéhérazade*, at an all Ravel recital that I gave jointly with the pianist Gisèle Kuhn in the spring (late spring?) of 1938 at the Salle Gaveau (programs could probably

Singher continues his letter by asserting that he was probably the first man to perform *Shéhérazade*. What might have Singher's performance meant for gay men in his 1938 audience? Might they have heard Ravel's *Shéhérazade* differently, as a startling and direct articulation of their most private desires? I wish to reimagine this song cycle as an event that enabled the staging of forbidden desires through the protective lens of Orientalism.

Could Ravel's dual concerns about his music's lack of originality and its Decadent Orientalism be related? In other words, how might the song's homoerotic Orientalism be connected to its use of Debussyan musical clichés? We might recall Emily Apter's hypothesis (discussed in greater detail in the second chapter) that "part of what allowed turn-of-the-century sexuality to perform itself... was its mediation by the culturally exotic *stereotype*."¹⁹⁷ In other words, the sexual Other (the Western homosexual) used the racialized Other (the colonized native) to articulate difference. Could the *stereotype* of the Arab androgyne necessitate a kind of stereotyped music? While I would hesitate to call Ravel's music in "L'Indifférent" particularly "clichéd" in its usage of Oriental motifs, earlier songs in the cycle, particularly "Asie," arguably fall into the trap of the overtly Orientalist cliché. The composer's extensive use of high winds (particularly the oboe) as well as the arabesque as a musical gesture both constrain the entire cycle by means of the Arabian stereotype. This prescribed sound – both timbrally prescribed and exquisitely flexible in its rhythmic unfolding – paradoxically enables certain pleasures of expressive freedom.

Timothy Taylor has written that we might best understand this song cycle as a "fantasy through consumption" – what he calls "a relationship objectifying France's Others in new ways that

be found). I had remarked to Ravel that the texts of these songs were certainly meant for a man. He confirmed (this must have happened about 1935) that he had had in mind a male voice when writing them, but that only women singers, with strong musical backgrounds had been interested by them. By the time I felt strong enough to sing them, Ravel was dead, and I have always regretted to have failed giving him the joy to hear them sung as he had originally planned.

¹⁹⁷ Emily Apter, *Continental Drift*, 133.

nonetheless preserved the European sense of superiority, simultaneously facilitating a new closeness to Otherness that had not been possible before.”¹⁹⁸ In contrast, I would suggest the power relations are not quite so straightforward. In “consuming” *Shéhérazade*’s Orientalist gestures, some of Ravel’s listeners undoubtedly used this music to listen to their own differences, allowing these aural and performative spaces to reshape their subjectivities. This intimacy between the East and West complicates their relations.

In Philip Brett’s posthumous examination of queer musical Orientalism, he concludes that “Orientalism can no longer be tolerated in any context” as it is an aesthetic that can never escape the slippery politics of colonialism.¹⁹⁹ I offer an alternative reading. While prior studies of musical Orientalism have understandably tended towards a critique of its problematic power relationships, a complete dismissal of Orientalist music is neither aesthetically fruitful nor historically accurate. In performing the temporal and erotic strangeness of the young stranger, decadent Orientalism gave voice to sexual Others who could not otherwise speak so directly about their desires. Yet this Oriental veil also comes at a cost – the price of misrepresenting racial Others and inflecting the androgynous Arab – not the Western self – with the stigma of sexual perversion.

I am struggling to establish my own political relationship to the works of Klingsor, Ravel and Mardrus. In using the Arab to articulate homoerotic Orientalist fantasies, they engaged in racial appropriation and reinforced the problematic power relations of Orientalist theater. Yet they also created resolutely gorgeous art that remains embedded in contemporary discourses of homosexuality – a discourse so intimately familiar to me that I recognized it in my own closeted gay great uncle, an archeologist whose immense collection of North African sculptures and Japanese painting was the primary way I *knew* (even at the tender age of 14) that he was gay. I cannot entirely reject something

¹⁹⁸ Timothy L. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism*, 95.

¹⁹⁹ Phillip Brett, “Queer Musical Orientalism.”

from my own history that has sometimes acted – if problematically – as the primary way one might safely enunciate sexual difference.

Ravel's cycle performs a complex politics of homoerotic Orientalism, one that articulates individual desires through cliché and renders audible some oppressed voices at the expense of silencing others. Yet I hope this chapter serves as an imperative not to stop listening to musics like Ravel's, but rather to listen more closely to their multivalent, bittersweet dissonances. Rather than simply denouncing this art as racist or shameful, it is crucial to listen and learn from it. As Heather Love and Judith Halberstam have both recently written, the shame, failures and pain of queer lives are as much a part of its history as its pride and successes. We cannot begin to connect with our complex pasts by sanitizing or obscuring its racist discourses.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ See Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007) and Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Camping the Dandy

As this dissertation began with an introduction on “composing the dandy,” so it closes with a parallel discussion on “camping the dandy.” Embedded within the introduction’s title “composing” is the main idea of this project: *posing*. Posing is a highly theatrical concept, a way of acting out an identity or assuming an appearance that may or may not bear a relation to one’s own. In the context of gender performance, posing acts as the hinge between doing and being for all socially recognizable and legitimated identities. In other words, it is necessary to pose as something in order to become it.

Using the historical figure of the Decadent dandy-composer in *fin-de-siècle* France, specifically Montesquiou, Hahn and Ravel, I have articulated a theory of posing in sound as a mode of musical self-fashioning. In posing, the musical subject is asserted indirectly through strategies of distancing and deflection, through the use of historical and exotic tropes. Rather than being an original subject, the “posed” subject is created through the imitation and parody of an Other. I have identified two modes of posing in music, the nostalgic and exotic, which function to distance musical compositions temporally and physically from the present. As outsiders (Jews, monarchists, sexual minorities), dandy-composers reacted against the use of music as public utility by the French Republican political majority of the 1890s. The dandy-composer instead espoused a deliberately useless art, an extension of Theophile Gautier’s “l’art pour l’art” or “art for art’s sake.”

For example, in my chapter on Montesquiou’s “*fête littéraire*,” I illustrated how the party’s performances enabled its guests to escape to pre-Revolutionary Versailles, imagining themselves eighteenth-century aristocrats. The party’s nostalgic poses assumed the form of Watteau’s *fête galante*, an idyllic, outdoor gathering which distanced its guests both physically and temporally from the contemporary politics of the *ralliement*. The *fête galante* found further voice in Verlaine’s poetry, and

when Proust and Hahn envoiced the painter Watteau in their *Portraits des Peintres*, he spoke through quotation and imitation – specifically the nostalgic recollection of Hahn’s earlier song “*Fêtes galantes*.”

While musical posing is certainly not restricted to practitioners of dandyism, the dandy-composer is an excellent case study because of the way he makes a virtue out of posing. As a counterexample, recall the young lawyer discussed in my Introduction, who only felt herself to become a lawyer after six years of experience, during which time she felt herself to be “faking it.” While in the eyes of the state she became a lawyer after passing the bar, psychically she became a lawyer only after years of pretending to be one. The internalization of such identities is not neutral, of course. The subject’s femaleness and youth are both social markers of weakness that conflict with the authority usually given to the social role of lawyer. Thus, it may take more effort – more psychic work – for a young woman to internalize the identity of lawyer than for a middle-aged man. As a result, the young woman may feel she is “faking it” for longer simply because of the stigmas attached to her age and gender.

The dandy himself is a figure who, like the young, female lawyer, is troubled by the concept of “posing,” but who instead inverts the stigma and turns “faking it” into a virtue of his aestheticism. The dandy-composer, like Ravel, assumes a multiplicity of identities through his compositions, becoming a virtuous – and virtuoso – poseur. The musical pose functions like a mask, as an artificial and coded style (stereotype) of musical performance and composition. This strategy of the Decadent dandy anticipates the camp aesthetics of the early twentieth century.

What is camp, and how does it relate to musical dandyism? Camp is best described as a sensibility that shapes the creation and interpretation of film, theater, music, literature and other art forms. Camp emerged in the early twentieth century as part of gay male culture as a strategy for making popular art meaningful on a subcultural level. It enabled the production of doubled or hidden meanings accessible only to spectators “in the know,” those able to find and appreciate both the

gravity in frivolity and the frivolity in gravity. According to the OED online, the word "camp" was first used in written English in 1909 to denote "actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis." Early twentieth-century author J.R. Ware observed that the word tended to be used by individuals of "exceptional want of character."²⁰¹ Although the precise etymology of camp is unknown, the slang term likely derives from the French word "se camper" – "to pose in an exaggerated or ostentatious manner." Thus, the concepts of gesture and posing are central to camp's origins. In fact, camping – to camp something up – is arguably a type of posing involving exaggerated gestures and overacting.

The twentieth-century dandy is essentially a camp figure, one who publicly poses in an ostentatious manner. The dandy is a poseur above all else, calling into question the relationship between appearance and reality and creating tension between surface and depth. Camp is a way to pose a relation to an artistic object, a situation, even another person, such that one may comment on it and yet remain uninvolved. It permits the simultaneous experience of aesthetic enjoyment and remove – a position very much in line with the aloof dandy. In 1963 Susan Sontag brought camp to the (straight) mainstream in her influential essay "Notes on Camp." While Sontag's essay has been rightfully criticized for downplaying the centrality of camp to queer subcultures, her description of camp aesthetics is both accurate and clever. In particular, Sontag's characterization of camp's artificiality and theatricality – its love of androgyny, eighteenth-century rococo, and Art Nouveau – resonates strongly with the Decadent dandy's aestheticism. In fact, Sontag suggests that the twentieth-century dandy may have found his new home in camp aesthetics: "Camp is the answer to

²⁰¹ "Camp, adj. and n." in *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Quotation is from J.R. Ware, *Passing English of the Victorian Era: a Dictionary of Heterodox English, Slang, and Phrase*. (London & Co., 1909).

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/26746?rskey=TBfFXO&result=6&isAdvanced=false#eid>>
Accessed June 24th, 2013.

the problem: how to be a dandy in the age of mass culture.”²⁰² Sontag’s “modern dandy” delights in the vulgarity of mass culture, rather than looking down upon mass culture with disdain.

Although the emergence of camp was tied to early twentieth-century artistic practice, little has been written about the relationship between camp and music. Christopher Moore has recently convincingly argued for camp’s relevance to some of Francis Poulenc’s interwar ballets.²⁰³ Michael Puri also briefly gestures toward the connections between camp and Ravel’s dandyism in an analysis of *Daphnis et Chloé*.²⁰⁴ Otherwise, relatively little work has been done in Musicology connecting camp aesthetics to twentieth-century French music.

I locate camp aesthetics in the early twentieth-century works of both Hahn and Erik Satie, another French dandy-composer of approximately the same generation as Hahn and Ravel. The final part of this conclusion will briefly consider how camp aesthetics are useful in interpreting two compositions by Hahn and Satie. A comparison of Satie’s and Hahn’s musical *dandyisme* in Hahn’s operetta *Brummell* (1931) and Satie’s *Les trois valse distinguées du précieux dégoûté* (1914) reveal four key elements of camp – humor, theatricality, aestheticism, and distance – both in the pieces themselves and in the listeners’ and performer’s relationship to the compositions. In particular, Satie’s piece requires its pianist to assume the pose of the dandy as she performs.

Both of these pieces concern themselves explicitly with dandyism, but only after Hahn and Satie no longer styled themselves as dandies. Satie’s “Velvet Gentleman” period concluded around 1905, with the demise of his last brown corduroy suit and when he began studies with Vincent D’Indy at the Schola Cantorum. Hahn’s break with dandyism was not as pronounced as Satie’s, but

²⁰² Susan Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp’” in *Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader* edited by Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999): 63 (notes 45-48).

²⁰³ Christopher Moore, “Camp in Francis Poulenc’s Early Ballets” in *The Musical Quarterly* 95 2-3 (Summer-Fall 2012): 299-342.

²⁰⁴ Michael Puri, *Ravel the Decadent: Memory, Sublimation and Desire* (New York: Oxford UP, 2012): 114-115.

there is a notable shift in his dress after World War I: in pre-War photographs Hahn usually wears velvet vests and smoking jackets, while after the War he is almost always depicted in somber dark suits. It is crucial that Satie waited to comment upon dandyism musically until it was itself a Decadent concept, no longer a part of their everyday worlds but rather a quaint relic of the *fin de siècle*. The outmodedness of the dandy in the early twentieth century produces a disconnect between audience and artwork that is arguably itself campy.

How did Satie look back on dandyism after it was no longer in vogue? The three movements of Satie's *Les trois valses* refer to the body and adornment of the dandy in question: I. *Sa taille* (his size), ii. *Son binocle* (his monocle), and iii. *Ses jambes* (his legs). In the score for "Sa taille," an opening quotation by Bruyère chastises those who criticize others to protect their own reputations: "*Ceux qui nuisent à la réputation ou à la fortune des autres, plutôt que de perdre un bon mot, méritent une peine infamante.*" ("Those who harm the reputation or fortune of others, rather than losing a good word, deserve an infamous punishment.") While the opening quotation discourages vanity, Satie's performance instructions encourage it, advising the performer to play "*Pas vite (il se regarde)*" – "Not quickly (he looks at himself)." Thus even the performer is asked to perform self-consciously, monitoring herself much like the vain dandy of Satie's waltzes. Each of the three waltzes is accompanied by a text, visible only to the performer, which creates an inside joke between performer and composer. This technique is something Satie had been using in his piano scores since the 1880s, but in this case the underlying text narrates a story of a vain dandy, who (in the second waltz) loses the case to his beloved golden monocle. The faux tragedy of the dandy's lost monocle case is reminiscent of Proust's "*Pastiche de Pelléas et Mélisande*," which itself parodies the lost ring incident in *Pelléas* by having a character mourn the tragic loss of his hat.²⁰⁵ Through parody, repetition, and irony, Satie's *Trois valses* resonate with many aspects of camp humor. All three pieces are brief – under a minute, even

²⁰⁵ Proust, "Pastiche de Pelleas et Melisande." Excerpted in Michael Puri's article "Memory, Pastiche, and aestheticism in Ravel and Proust" in *Unmasking Ravel*, 61.

when they are performed *pas vite*, schizophrenically jump from one register to another on the piano. I detect a slight jab at Ravel in the first *Valse*, when the third theme introduced (on the third line of the unmeasured score) is a dissonant parody of the main theme from the second movement of Ravel's *Sonatine*. Satie's addition of tone clusters and reduction of the themes to the bare minimum takes Ravel's famous concision to ridiculous heights. Yet in the second movement, Satie is probably poking fun at an earlier version of himself, as he was famous for wearing at a monocle. Dry wit, inside jokes, and self-referentiality help make Satie's *Trois Valses* resound with campy significance.

Hahn's 1931 operetta *Brummell* is, by contrast, a fairly conventional piece, lacking the experimental elements of Satie's *Trois Valses*. Yet the production attains a certain camp element through its very adherence to convention. Hahn creates distance through both time and place (Regency England) as well as its musical tropes (overly stylized dotted rhythms and lilting lines). The operetta features a large, all-male chorus – “*les dandys de Brummell*” – who provide both visual and aural spectacle with a homoerotic tinge. The plot revolves around a fairly conventional love triangle, between Peggy, Brummell and Jim. In the finale Peggy and Jim are joined together and Brummell is joined with his true love – himself. Perhaps the highlight of the entire piece was for me the Act I finale, when Brummell – after a long delayed appearance, sings amorously about his exciting new cotton chamber robe. In what should be a love duet with Peggy, Brummell sings about himself rather than his feelings for her. Peggy realizes she's in love with the “*fantoche appelé Brummell*” (“the fantasy called Brummell”) rather than the actual man, and she is thus free to return Jim's advances. The true star of the show is of course Brummell, whose visual and vocal spectacle is aptly captured by Figure 5.1 (the Frontispiece of the piano-vocal score for *Brummell*).



Figure 5.1: The Pose of Caractre:
Frontispiece for Hahn’s 1930 operetta *Brummell*

Future studies of musical dandyism might consider in more detail both the origins of the dandy in music as well as his transfiguration in the twentieth century into a camp figure. Erik Satie also deserves more discussion, particularly his Rosacrucian period during which time Satie posed as a dandy-priest. In this conclusion, I have illustrated how the *fin-de-siècle* dandy’s musical poses anticipate this aspect of camp aesthetics, by functioning as a means of achieving intimacy through distance. By sounding like something one is not, whether Louis XIV or a Tahitian princess, the musical dandy articulates otherwise unspeakable or unrecognizable desires. Furthermore, the dandy’s use of outrageous poses or gestures in his music (exemplified by Satie’s *Les trois valse distinguées du précieux dégoûté*) anticipates elements of camp humor, by bewildering the listener and creating a closed space in which performers are initiated into secret codes of meaning, available only to those able to interpret the score.

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