“L’art d’évoquer les minutes heureuses”

Mélodie and Memory in the *Année terrible*

Emily Kilpatrick

The legacy of the *Année terrible* permeated the creative practice of the Belle Époque, and the shaping of a collective cultural memory exercised artists across all disciplines. When composers and their peers reflected on the events of 1870–71, the creation and performance of art song (*mélodie*) often assumed a key narrative and symbolic function. This study investigates the ways by which composers and their colleagues drew on song, and song performance, to engage with post-1871 dialogues of memory, memorialisation, and artistic renewal. It surveys *mélodies* that were composed in direct response to political and artistic imperatives, and others whose creation was subsequently reimagined in the shaping of historical narratives. Through composers’ creative practice, and their subsequent accounting of it, the study examines how the *mélodie* was deployed both to express and contextualise traumatic experience, and to access discourses of cultural memory and musical identity.

Vous n’avez pas d’idée de tout ce qu’évoquent pour moi les 3 ou 4 pages de cette petite *Invitation au Voyage*, écrite pendant le siège: d’abord elles font repasser devant les yeux du cœur—qui sont meilleurs que ceux du corps—toutes les chères figures aujourd’hui disparues, et avant tout celle de mon maître bien-aimé César Franck, que je revois avec une incroyable précision tantôt à son orgue de Ste Clotilde, tantôt assis à son piano, m’enseignant le peu que je sais. (van Elst 57)

So wrote Henri Duparc to the singer Marie Trélat in 1910, forty years after composing the best-loved of his *mélodies*, and a quarter of a century after crises of physical and mental health had brought his creative career to a tragically premature end. His setting of Baudelaire’s poem had been made during a brief period of leave from his military unit early in the Siege of Paris. A letter sent by the composer’s mother to his grandmother (9 Oct. 1870) records, “Il a complètement oublié dans quelle situation nous sommes [. . .] Henri en a profité pour faire une ravissante mélodie, sans plus de souci de la guerre que s’il n’en avait jamais été question” (Escobar 116n). Music initially composed as an act of forgetting was to become a portal to memory, a powerful encapsulation of nostalgia and loss.

Reckonings with the triple catastrophe of war, siege, and civil war infused the visual and literary arts of the Belle Époque. From Victor Hugo's *L'Année terrible* (1872) to Émile Zola's searing *Le Débâcle* (1892), and from the vivid contemporaneous paintings and sketches of James Tissot and Édouard Manet to the later, more stylised representations of Édouard Detaille and Ernest Meissonier, writers and painters became active participants in the shaping of cultural memory. Their endeavours, together with their attendant political concerns, have been the subject of extensive scholarly enquiry. François Robichon considered the construction of memory in depictions of the Franco-Prussian War exhibited in the Salons from 1872 until 1914, while Bernard Tillier's *La Commune de Paris: révolution sans images?* documents the intertwining of memory and artistic enterprise across the political landscape of the 1870s. Others have inverted the scholarly lens, focusing not on memory but the notion of *forgetting*. Albert Boime (*Art and the French Commune*) argued for mingled narratives of renewal and erasure in the post-1871 Impressionist paintings of the city and its surrounds, while Colette Wilson (*Paris and the Commune: The Politics of Forgetting*) explored the vilification and obliteration of Communard *lieux de mémoire* (to borrow Pierre Nora's term) in the literature and reportage of the 1870s.

Unlike the writers and painters alongside whom they worked, composers seemed largely disinclined to revisit the *Année terrible* in their creative practice. Although the symphonic poem flourished at the Société nationale de musique across the 1870s and 1880s, nobody offered an orchestral account of the Commune or the Siege, and there was seemingly little appetite for transforming *Le Débâcle* into an operatic libretto. Perhaps as a result, the role of music and musicians in the discourses of cultural memory remains largely unexamined. Delphine Mordey ("Auber's Horses") considered French musical historiography across the half-century that

followed the *Année terrible*, interrogating the narrative of scorched-earth musical renewal promulgated by musical critics and historians. However, little attention has been paid to composers' own responses, both to immediate political circumstance, and through the subsequent negotiation of traumatic memory. This lacuna reflects not just the relative lack of musical works of lasting significance that emerged from or make reference to the *Année terrible*, but also a paucity of documentation. With few extant sources that testify directly to composers' experiences, the historian is largely dependent on recollections and reflections from the decades that followed. "Oh! Mon pauvre ami, combien de fois cette guerre n'a-t-elle pas ramené mes pensées à ton sujet à l'autre, celle de 70!", wrote André Messager to his old friend Gabriel Fauré in November 1914 (*F-Pn*, NLA-3(168)). "Ton départ en Voltigeurs! et Clignancourt et la Commune et tout le reste! Et penser que tout cela n'était qu'une plaisanterie à côté de ce que nous voyons depuis quatre mois!"

But if we approach a musical accounting of the *Année terrible* thus, through memory and memoir, a remarkably cogent narrative can be discerned. Again and again, recollections evoke not the patriotic orchestral concerts that were the most public face of music-making during the Siege and Commune (and which have been examined by Mordey and Jess Tyre), but instead a more private, reflective art: that of art song, or *mélodie*. Duparc, Saint-Saëns, and Massenet were all to place *mélodie* at the heart of their later reflections on the Siege; Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's lament for his friend Henri Regnault turns around song performance; and Charles de Sivry's vivid pen-portrait of the Christmas of 1870 centres the creation of both song and poetry.

Jürgen Thym has explored the intertwining of song and memory in nineteenth-century Lieder, tracing a path from Beethoven to Mahler through works that recount or reflect on past events. In the songs he examines, memory is intrinsic to the musical work, temporal distance

evoked through specific compositional techniques (texture, melody, form, and so on). But what if we turn this on its head, and consider the role that song might play in the construction of memory itself?

In this study, I am less concerned with compositional process than with the remembered creation of song—or better, *création*, encompassing both composition and performance. I document the formation of what Maurice Halbwachs termed *une mémoire collective*, through which the experience of the *Année terrible* could be framed.[1] I demonstrate that composers were concerned with some of the same cultural discourses of memory, memorialisation, and artistic renewal that exercised the writers and painters of the epoch; and I explore the ways by which song might intersect with post-1871 narratives of French musical identity. Beginning with a *mélodie* by Fauré that unambiguously responds to political events, I move to consider several accounts of Regnault's death, in which song becomes a conduit for tropes of symbolic tragedy and cultural resurgence. Two more Fauré *mélodies*, a pair of Baudelaire settings likely composed in 1871, suggest an immediate response to those artistic imperatives. The final pages refocus this synthesis of creation and memorialisation through Sivry's 1898 "Souvenirs sans regrets." Baudelaire's poetry is at the heart of this tale too, and emerges as a common thread that binds together these diverse accounts of death, memory, and creative rebirth.

Singing Hugo's *Châtiments*

In late March or early April 1871, Gabriel Fauré fled Communard Paris. Carrying falsified papers, he passed through military lines, walked fifty kilometres south-west to Rambouillet, then made his way to Lausanne. Amid the chaos, it appears, he also made his last solo setting of the poetry of Victor Hugo, titling the resulting song *L'Absent*.

Fauré took his text ("Sentiers où l'herbe se balance") from Hugo's *Les Châtiments* of

1853. First published in furious response to Louis-Napoléon's coup d'état, these scathing poems—long banned in France as seditious—gained extraordinary currency during the Siege of Paris. In his popular history of the Siege, Francisque Sarcey recorded with astonishment: "On fermait jadis les portes pour la lire entre amis; les plus beaux morceaux et les plus violents furent récités en plein théâtre, à la Porte-Saint-Martin, devant trois milles spectateurs, et se répandirent ensuite dans tous les concerts et spectacles" (163). Recitations from *Les Châtiments* became a staple at all manner of concerts and theatrical events, including a benefit performance at the Opéra (196). On 13 November a Mme Lafontaine included "Sentiers où l'herbe se balance" in a programme of recitations at the Comédie française (Thierry 141), and in the ensuing fortnight the same poem was twice cited in *Le Rappel*. On 18 November, an anonymous writer reflects, "voici quatre mois que les Allemands ont quitté leurs foyers. Combien sont morts! Combien de familles en deuil que les victoires ne consolent pas! 'La maison est vide à présent / Celui qui venait ne vient plus!'" Nine days later, an article by Henry Maret described the abandoned Clamart district—"Pourquoi personne à ta fenêtre / Et pourquoi ton jardin sans fleurs?"

The surviving holograph of Fauré's *L'Absent* (*F-Pn*, Ms. 419b) is tied not to the Siege, however, but to the Commune: it is signed and dated "3 avril 1871." "Journée affreuse!" wrote Catulle Mendès in his *Les 73 journées de la Commune* (75–76): 3 April saw the first Communard sortie, in which three columns poured out of Paris in such disarray they left their cannon behind. The disastrous charge resulted only in the capture and death of Flourens, who became the first Communard leader to fall. 3 April was thus a significant date in the life of the Commune: it was arguably the moment at which it became clear that the enterprise was doomed to bloody and vicious disaster. If Fauré was then still in the city, it seems improbable that he spent the day working on a *mélodie*. If—as is perhaps more likely—he was *en route* to

Rambouillet (or Switzerland), it's equally hard to imagine him writing out a fair-copy manuscript by the roadside. Whether the song itself pre- or postdates 3 April, then, the autograph date suggests a conscious act of memorialisation, marking not the moment of composition but the grim future of the Commune and the city.

Curiously, Fauré's holograph shows a second poetic text pencilled above the vocal line, seemingly by the composer himself, comprising extracts from Louisa Siefert's "À ce qui n'est plus":

> Pourquoi revenez-vous creuser mon souvenir,
> Ô jours trop tôt perdus, ô trop chères pensées,
> Images que le temps doit avoir effacées,
> Mots que mon cœur jaloux ne peut contenir,
> [. . .]
> J'avais promis l'oubli qui console et qui tue,
> L'oubli muet et calme, aux flots profonds et lourds.
> Les heures ont passé, je me souviens toujours.
> [. . .]

Siefert's poem appeared in the second collection of *Le Parnasse contemporain* (1869/71), where it bears an epigraph from Baudelaire's "Le Balcon," "Je sais l'art d'évoquer les minutes heureuses." That poem in turn opens with an appeal to memory: "Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses . . ." The manuscript of *L'Absent* appears to have remained in Fauré's possession until his death, and it is unclear when the scrawling pencilled text was added (the legible passages suggest his post-1890 hand). Whatever the circumstances and intention, Siefert's poem overlays the painful immediacy and directly political context of Hugo's with what we might read as an echo of the post-war political narrative that sought to repudiate and erase Communard *lieux de mémoire*. Siefert's nod to Baudelaire in turn suggests a more distant, reminiscent sorrow, one to which we will return.

“La Mort des artistes”: Henri Regnault and the memorial *mélodie*

Fauré’s holograph of *L’Absent* is one of a group of four manuscripts held under the same *F-Pn* catalogue reference (Ms. 419), comprising two autographs and two non-autograph hand copies. The other holograph is that of *Seule!*, a setting of an untitled poem by Théophile Gautier (“Dans un baiser, l’onde au rivage”): the manuscript is the same paper type as *L’Absent* and shows a near-identical calligraphic presentation, suggesting that the two songs were composed—or at least copied out—in close proximity. Below the composer’s signature, *Seule!* bears the simple date “1871”—a vagueness that highlights the more precise ascription of *L’Absent*.

“Dans un baiser . . .” is separated by one poem, in Gautier’s *Poésies complètes*, from “La Fuite,” which in turn was set by Duparc “at the end of the siege” (according to the composer’s later recollection; van Elst 57). Both composers were likely drawn to Gautier for the same reasons that had attracted Fauré to *Les Châtiments*: he was a popular, indeed heroic national presence, whose vivid *Tableaux de siège* were widely read during and after the *Année terrible*. Duparc dedicated his duet *La Fuite* to the memory of a close family friend, the painter Henri Regnault. Twenty-seven years old at the time of the Siege, Regnault was already recognised as one of the most gifted of French artists. He had won acclaim—and the 1866 Prix de Rome—for his academic paintings, but subsequent travels to Spain and North Africa had brought to his work a far bolder handling of composition, colour, and texture: his luminescent *Salomé* caused a sensation at the Salon of 1870. In addition to the Duparcs, Regnault’s friends included Saint-Saëns and Augusta Holmès: it was the then nineteen-year-old Holmès who had modelled for his Prix de Rome-winning canvas (*Thétis apporte à Achille les armes forgées par Vulcain*), and Holmès who composed a *Hymne au soleil* intended—wrote Regnault’s fiancée, Geneviève

Bréton—to serve as his wedding march.[2]

Regnault was also an excellent amateur tenor—"Le plus musicien de tous les peintres que j'ai connus," declared Saint-Saëns (354)—whose Parisian studio had served not as a formal "salon" but rather a centre of spontaneous, casual music-making. In 1872 Duparc's brother Arthur wrote:

> l'art y était aimé et cultivé sous toutes ses formes, et la musique avait ses heures comme la peinture. Que de fois brosses et couleurs furent soudain abandonnées quand entrait un ami musicien ! Nous nous groupions autour du piano, écoutant une sonate de Beethoven ou une partition de Wagner, magistralement exécutées par Saint-Saëns; nous unissons nos voix pour chanter en chœur les grandes scènes de l'*Orphée* de Gluck, ou bien encore nous nous taisions pour laisser Regnault, de sa voix douce et si pénétrante, nous dire quelque mélodie nouvelle ou quelque cavatina italienne. (38)

On the night of 18 January 1871 Regnault was visiting Holmès, together with Mendès and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. Villiers later recalled:

> Regnault, qui avait une jolie et chaude voix de ténor, enleva, brillamment, à première vue, un hymne guerrier [*Vengeance!—décembre 1870*], sorte d'*arioso* d'un magnifique sentiment, que M[lle] Holmès, dans un moment de farouche "vellédisme" venait d'écrire au bruit des obus environnants. Tous les trois nous portions un casque de soldat: Regnault portait la sienne, dans Paris, pour la dernière fois. Chose qui, depuis, nous est bien souvent revenue vivante dans l'esprit! Il nous chanta, vers minuit, une impressionnante mélodie de Saint-Saëns, dont voici les premières paroles. "Auprès de cette blanche tombe / Nous mêlons nos pleurs." [. . .] Et Regnault la chanta d'une manière qui nous émut profondément, nous ne savions pourquoi. Ce fut une sensation étrange, dont les survivants se souviendront, certes, jusqu'à leur tour d'appel. (71–72)

The "impressionnante mélodie" was one of Saint-Saëns' *Mélodies persanes*, a set of six songs composed "au début de la guerre" on texts by Armand Renaud (Saint-Saëns 354), each dedicated to a close friend and fellow musician. (The second song, "La Splendeur vide," was offered to Marie Trélat, to whom Duparc was to address his memories of his *L'Invitation au voyage* four decades later.) To Regnault, Saint-Saëns dedicated the most vocally dramatic song of the set, "Sabre en main," whose flamboyant unaccompanied vocalisations and vigorous top notes are a striking tribute to the painter's vocal prowess. "Sabre en main" was also inscribed to Regnault by

Renaud himself: the dedication appears in the first edition of the poems (published in 1870). In a prefatory note to the 1896 re-edition, Renaud wrote of the Siege of Paris, "ce fut pour [l'auteur] une suprême douceur dans ces jours d'épreuve, alors qu'il revenait des neiges, [. . .] de trouver un petit cercle d'amis devant lesquels le peintre Henri Regnault chantait de sa belle voix plusieurs poésies des *Nuits persanes*, mises en musique par Saint-Saëns" (iv–v). If Saint-Saëns's setting completes the progression from painting to poetry to song, Regnault's performances, sketched in turn by Renaud (and Villiers), bind all three arts into a spiral of shared inspiration and memory.

On this January night, though, it was not "Sabre en main" that Regnault performed, but the fifth song of the set, "Au Cimetière." Villiers's transcription of Renaud's text is not quite accurate: "Assis sur cette blanche tombe, / Ouvrons notre cœur!" Renaud wrote, but Villiers set down a more unambiguous, premonitory lament. The next day Regnault was killed, in the disastrously mismanaged sortie that became known as the Battle of Buzenval. His death sent shockwaves through the miserable city: Arthur Duparc wrote, "Paris se sentait faiblir devant la perte de ce jeune homme [. . .] Elle parut être le dernier rayon de gloire arraché à notre couronne, le dernier mot de nos malheurs" (4). A lengthy and heartfelt obituary in the *Journal officiel* (2 Feb. 1871) was penned by Théophile Gautier himself, and it immediately staked a claim for a national and enduring legacy: "la plus grand perte de la siège est la mort de Regnault," Gautier declared, and (not very presciently), "Avec Henri Regnault disparaît, pour la peinture, la possibilité d'un avenir nouveau.".

In the decades that followed, Saint-Saëns, like Villiers, retold the story of Regnault's final hours, his several accounts focusing the cultural narrative of symbolic tragedy through an account of his own grieving. Thus, he recalled watching Regnault hurriedly depart for guard duty

a few days before Buzenval, paintbrush literally exchanged for *chassepot* and an unfinished painting abandoned on his easel (355). He also reflected on experiences that he explained as presentiments of Regnault's death: the ghostly appearance of an odd shape on that last canvas, the hearing of unearthly music.[3] And like Villiers, he cited Renaud's words, opining (354), "Qui se serait douté, alors qu'il chantait: 'Aujourd'hui les roses / Demain les cyprès!' que cette prophétie dût sitôt se réaliser!" When he played the organ for Regnault's funeral, it was "Au Cimetière" upon which Saint-Saëns chose to improvise. In recreating this song without a singer, he both "realised" and sublimated the "prophecy" of Renaud's poem, transforming it in turn into an act of memory and homage.

"Au fond du gouffre": Massenet, Fauré, and the narrative of "le *nouveau*!"

In Marc Gotlieb's survey of the many representations of Regnault's demise through the canvases of the late nineteenth century, perhaps no example is more telling than Meissonier's *Le Siège de Paris* (c. 1884): Regnault appears at the centre of the tableau, slumped at the feet of Paris herself (108). The same themes are traceable in Villiers' account of Regnault's final evening: in centring musical performance, he juxtaposes an act of patriotic creation—Regnault's sight-reading of Holmès' newly composed "battle hymn"—with a poem that underscores Gautier's lament for the loss of an artistic future. We find similar associations in an article signed by Jules Massenet that appeared first in English in 1892; reprinted in French in 1896 to mark Massenet's retirement from the Paris Conservatoire, it bore the title "Comment je suis devenu compositeur." There, Massenet invoked the death of Regnault to symbolise not only the devastation of the *Année terrible*, but also a critical moment in his own artistic evolution:

> Vint le dernier effort, la dernière lutte à Buzenval, la mort de mon pauvre ami, le peintre Henri

> Regnault, puis la plus terrible épreuve de toutes, dont la réalité honteuse nous fit oublier le froid, la faim, tout ce que nous avions enduré,—l'armistice, qui, dans nos cœurs fatigués mais non résignés, sonna le dernier glas de notre juste colère. Oui, vraiment, durant ces jours sombres du siège de Paris, c'était l'image de mon pays agonisant qui saignait en moi, faible instrument que j'étais, quand grelottant de froid, les yeux aveuglés par les larmes, je composai la musique du *Poème du souvenir* sur les stances enflammées, écrites par mon ami, le grand poète Armand Silvestre: "Levez-vous, bien-aimés, aujourd'hui dans la tombe!" Oui, au double titre de citoyen et d'artiste, je sentais l'image de la patrie se graver dans mon cœur meurtri sous la douce et touchante figure d'une Muse blessée, et quand, avec le poète, je chantai: "Arrache ton linceul de fleurs!" je savais bien que, quoique ensevelie, la France sortirait aussi de son linceul, les joues pâlies peut-être, mais plus aimable et plus adorable que jamais! (Massenet 453)

In factual terms Massenet's account is almost entirely confected. Although he did attend Regnault's (very large) funeral and they moved in some similar circles, there is nothing to suggest that they shared any more than passing acquaintance. Massenet misrepresents the dating of *Poème du souvenir*, which was composed in 1868 (and published in 1869).[4] He also attributes words to Silvestre that appear nowhere in the poems or score, or anywhere in Silvestre's published œuvre: *Poème du souvenir* begins, "Lève-toi, chère ensevelie, / Déchire ton linceul de fleurs," but there is no equivalent to the potent "aujourd'hui dans la tombe." Massenet here goes markedly further than Villiers' reworking of Renaud's "Au Cimetière": he recasts an uncomplicated romantic lyric with a nationalistic gloss that recalls the "army of the dead" depicted in paintings such as Detaille's *Le Rêve* (1888). Massenet may simply have misremembered the date and text of his *Poème du souvenir* (whose title was certainly apt for his purpose), but the careful juxtaposition of poetry, music, and historical narrative points to a deliberate retrospective alignment. He focuses, elaborates, and narrates memory through poetry and song; and he explicitly interweaves the flowering of his career and creative thought with the *Année terrible*. By situating the composition of one of his first major works as a response to Regnault's death, Massenet unambiguously aligns that symbolic tragedy with a post-1871 rebirth of French art and artistic nationhood. The same twining of heroic death with cultural renewal was extolled in the first concert presented by the fledgling Société nationale de musique (motto:

Ars gallica), on 17 November 1871: the programme concluded with Saint-Saëns's *Marche héroïque*, dedicated to the memory of Regnault.

It was likely in that first post-war autumn that Fauré, by now back in Paris, made two settings of the poetry of Charles Baudelaire: *La Rançon* and *Chant d'automne* (a third Baudelaire *mélodie*, *Hymne*, probably dates from 1870).[5] An early non-autograph hand copy of *La Rançon* is held in the Bibliothèque nationale under the same catalogue reference as *L'Absent* and *Seule!* (Ms. 419d), on the same paper type, and almost certainly contemporaneous with the two holographs. Like Hugo's *Châtiments*, Baudelaire's "La Rançon" was written in direct response to Louis-Napoléon's 1851 coup d'état. A potent rationale for Fauré's choice of that poem also emerges from the word *rançon* itself, which took on new significance in the months that followed the French capitulation in 1871. In multiple publications, *la rançon* denoted the reparations France had committed to pay, and, still more powerfully, the loss of Alsace and Lorraine (which were depicted in some pamphlets and poems as being literally held to ransom). We might thus read, in Fauré's selection of "La Rançon," some kind of declaration of artistic intent: "L'homme a, pour payer sa rançon, / Deux champs au tuf profond et riche, [. . .] L'un est l'Art, et l'autre l'Amour." As the Société nationale de musique prepared for its first concerts, did *La Rançon* perhaps embody the notion that art, and artists, must lead the way towards reconstruction and redemption?

This context also prompts us to consider the historical and aesthetic implications of the companion *mélodie*, *Chant d'automne*. David Evans writes that this poem is one of several in which, through imagery of autumn and the setting sun, Baudelaire imagines, "with the death of the previous poetics, the advent of the new" (99n5). "Bientôt nous plongerons dans les froid ténèbres," the poem begins, imagery of sunsets on the sea ("Et rien [. . .] / Ne me vaut le soleil

rayonnant sur la mer") luring the traveller to a voyage into the shadowed unknown ("Ce bruit mystérieux sonne comme un départ") (56–57). Baudelaire's imagery there sails near to "Le *Confiteor* de l'artiste" (*Le Spleen de Paris*): "Que les fins de journées d'automne sont pénétrantes! [. . .] Grand délice que celui de noyer son regard dans l'immensité du ciel et de la mer!" (278). Similar language is also threaded through "Le Voyage," the long peroration that concludes the 1861 *Fleurs du mal*, in which the intertwining of death and renewal is made explicit: "Ô Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps! levons l'ancre! / [. . .] Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe? / Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau*!" (134)

Fauré set four of the seven quatrains of "Chant d'automne," excising the final shift to the imperative voice, with its evocation of the impatient tomb, and closing instead with the setting autumn sun. He thus aligns his conception of the poem more closely with "Le Voyage" and "Le *Confiteor* de l'artiste": via the shared verb *plonger*, he too invites us to read *le gouffre* as the wellspring of *le nouveau*. Despite its bleak surface imagery, his *Chant d'automne* thus looks beyond mortality to a redemptive hope for the future, a vision perhaps reflected in the song's otherwise surprising major-mode ending.

These Baudelaire settings suggest that Fauré was grappling, in real time, with the tropes of death and creative rebirth that were to infuse the cultural landscape of post-war Paris. Mordey argues that in musical and historiographical terms these "apocalyptic narratives" were largely "constructed by contemporary critics dissatisfied with existing French musical culture, as a means of bolstering their demands for change: if the nation was to recover from defeat, she would have to change her ways, and that meant her music too" ("Auber's Horses" 215); that reading is perfectly encapsulated in Massenet's memoir. The political and aesthetic resonances of Fauré's Baudelaire *mélodies*, however, suggest that a more direct and immediate response was

sought by at least some composers "on the ground," the young men seeking to restart their fledgling careers amid the wreckage of the city and its cultural institutions.

Moreover, these songs did not emerge in isolation. Early in 1870 Fauré had returned to Paris after a four-year sojourn in Rennes. Among the new friends he made that spring (through the good offices of his former teacher Saint-Saëns) were Duparc and Emmanuel Chabrier—who himself composed a setting of Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au voyage" in June 1870, weeks before Duparc set the same poem. The immediate prompt for all three composers' Baudelaire settings was probably the recent publication of the posthumous *Œuvres complètes*. But the near-simultaneous appearance of these *mélodies*, together with Fauré's *Hymne*—the first settings of Baudelaire's poetry by "serious" composers—also suggests a meaningful and mindful undertaking, and potentially even a collaborative one (it's worth noting that a number of harmonic and melodic twists in *Hymne* echo Duparc's op. 2 songs of 1869). These early Baudelaire *mélodies* can be seen as a turning point in French musical thought, one that not just coincides with but was undoubtedly catalysed by the events of the *Année terrible*, and their contingent artistic reckoning. Beyond his urging to the artistic synthesis that became a touchstone of the age, Baudelaire also offered a poetic vision through which Fauré, in particular, could access the powerful imagery of death and rebirth with which the post-war landscape was charged.

"La Mort des amants": Sivry and Villiers, Duparc and Baudelaire

That vision inflects another musician's account of the *Année terrible*: a serialised memoir by Chabrier's close friend Charles de Sivry, pianist-composer of the Chat noir. Sivry's "Souvenirs," which appeared in the magazine *Les Quatr'z'arts* in the early months of 1898, offer some

intriguing parallels both of circumstance and narrative gloss. At their heart is an extended description of "le plus étrange Noël que j'aie vu jusqu'à présent" (6 Feb. 1898), the bleak Christmas of the Siege of Paris. Ernest Cabaner, the wildly eccentric café pianist and composer, had spent Christmas Eve with Sivry and his family, curled up in an armchair: he refused Sivry's mother's offer of a bed because his clothes were so threadbare and so meticulously draped that lying down or taking them off would, he claimed, leave him incapable of reassembling them. On Christmas morning, Cabaner was still fast asleep in his armchair when Villiers, who had wangled a day's leave, arrived:

> Bon Villiers, il avait—c'était l'usage alors—apporté son déjeuner. C'était un hareng saur [. . .] Les trois Cros arrivaient, apportant chacun leur pain et leur part de victuailles obsidionales. [. . .] Henry [Cros], le bon statuaire, extasié devant le beau hareng saur de Villiers et pour bercer le sommeil de Cabaner, avait attaché le poisson d'or à une très longue ficelle, et le faisait se balancer devant le musicien endormi. Cabaner s'éveilla. [. . .] Charles Cros était resté rêveur devant le balancement de l'étrange pendule. Il s'installa devant une feuille de papier et composa d'un seul jet le poème du *Hareng saur, sec, sec, sec!* qui est resté célèbre. Cabaner aligna de suite quelques notes sur la prose rythmée de Charles. [. . .] Villiers fut pris à son tour du démon de l'inspiration. Abandonnant sur son assiette une tremblotante confiture de groseilles (!!) faite de gélatine et sucrée de glucose, il se mit au piano et improvisa une délicate mélodie sur le beau sonnet de Baudelaire: "La Mort des amants." Je notai l'air au vol[.] (20 March 1898)

Sivry's account does not entirely stand up to historical scrutiny, at least as it concerns "La Mort des amants": as Helen Abbott has retraced in fascinating detail, Villiers' semi-improvised musical rendering of that poem was well known among the circle of poets and artists calling themselves the Vilains bonshommes (and including Charles Cros, Sivry, and Verlaine) by the late 1860s (84–102). By 1869 it was so well-known that Verlaine—who became Sivry's brother-in-law in August 1870—and Léon Valade had even concocted a parody version: titled "La Mort des cochons," the manuscript text is annotated "Paroles de Baudelaire (Musique de M. le Comte Auguste Mathias Villiers de l'Isle-Adam)." Inscribed in the *Album zutique* in the immediate post-war period, that text is preceded there by a parody of Victor Hugo's "Le divin Mahomet . . ." (*La Légende des siècles*), addressed to "le divin Cabaner."[6]

It is possible, from a distance of nearly thirty years, that Sivry—like Massenet—simply misremembered some detail: maybe Villiers improvised on another poem, or Sivry conflated the occasion with his first hearing of *La Mort des amants*. Or perhaps—and again, perhaps more likely—his narrative represents another deliberate assemblage, a re-casting of events in a way that consciously centres the creative art of Cros, Cabaner, and Villiers. In a preceding instalment of his "Souvenirs" (5 Mar. 1898), Sivry had reproduced a sonnet by Cabaner himself, which includes language so similar to that of Baudelaire's "La Mort des amants" that it must be considered at least an indirect response:

> Dans notre chambre, un jour, les fenêtres bien closes,
> Si tu veux, tous les deux seuls, nous allumerons
> Deux grands cierges de cire et nous reposerons
> Sur un grand oreiller, mol et blanc, nos deux fronts.
> Et sans avoir recours au parfum lourd des roses,
> Rien qu'avec les senteurs funèbres que ton corps
> Répand lorsque la nuit il livre ses trésors,
> Nous nous endormirons et nous resterons morts.
> Et nous resterons morts ayant de chastes poses,
> Afin qu'on puisse dans les plus grands pudiques temps,
> Raconter cette mort aux tous petits enfants
> Et nous représenter dans nos apothéoses
> Couchés l'un près de l'autre et sans être enlaces,
> Comme une épouse et son doux Seigneur, trépassés.

Any reader who noticed the Baudelairean imagery there would be primed for Sivry's *coup de grâce*, the recreation of "La Mort des amants" as the centrepiece of a wartime Christmas. His emphasis on that sonnet may contain an element of jest, given the satirical context of *Les Quatr'z'arts* and the Cercle zutique: Cabaner's peculiar sleeping habits surely suggest a mischievous twist on Baudelaire's "lits pleins d'odeurs légères, / Des divans profonds comme des tombeaux." But equally, we might read here a more serious reflection on the closing tercet:

“Et plus tard un Ange, entrouvrant les portes, / Viendra ranimer, fidèle et joyeux, / Les miroirs ternis et les flammes mortes.” Abbott writes that this conclusion could be interpreted as evoking poetry itself, revived through performance, as “faithful, willing readers [. . .] breathe new life into his poem” (39). Sivry’s memoir suggests a different reading, one specific to the context of his memoir, for by 1898, Villiers, Cros, and Cabaner were all dead, all too young. Baudelaire’s Angel must here become a symbol of revivifying memory, and the setting down of Villiers’ song (it appeared, in Sivry’s transcription, in *Les Quatr’z’arts* on 3 April 1898) a conscious “reanimation” of the “lifeless flames.”

Let us return to the composer with whom we began, Henri Duparc, whose response to the tribulations of war was also the composition of a Baudelaire *mélodie*, and whose understanding of that poet was profoundly shaped, according to his early biographer Charles Oulmont, by “son cher Villiers de l’Isle-Adam”: “n’est-ce pas lui qui lui donna l’idée de mettre en musique *la Vie Antérieure* [1884] après la lui avoir récitée un soir d’un air mystérieux et, ajoutait Duparc à son fils, un peu inquiétant?” (73, 75). That description echoes François Coppée’s evocation of Villiers’ *La Mort des amants*: “une vague et mystérieuse mélopée qui accompagne, en en doublant l’impression troublante, le beau sonnet de Charles Baudelaire” (78–79; he locates this performance in Mendès’ apartment in 1865). To the singer Jeanne Raunay in 1909, Duparc described *La Vie antérieure* in intriguingly similar terms: “[elle] n’est pas à proprement parler une mélodie mais plutôt une sorte de poème chanté où j’ai essayé de traduire musicalement la pensée et les admirables vers de Baudelaire” (Stricker 60).

The sonnet “La Vie antérieure” seems to gaze on “L’Invitation au voyage” as if from the opposite shore, its evocation of impossible luxuries quietly recalling the earlier poem through the evocation of “les voluptés calmes,” which gives way to the catastrophic final admission of “Un

secret douloureux qui me faisait languir." That mirroring perhaps prompted several commentators around the turn of the century to read "L'Invitation au voyage" as if pre-emptively shaded by "La Vie antérieure," a poem less of anticipation than of sorrowful memory. In 1890 Théodore de Banville wrote:

> Oui, partir! c'est la plus complète de toutes les félicités ; mais (il y a toujours un *mais*) elle est surtout ressentie par ceux qui ne sont pas destinés à partir, et qui ne partiront pas. *Mon enfant, ma sœur, Songe à la douceur D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble*! [. . .] Hélas! qui ne le voit? les amants ne partiront jamais, et le pays qui n'est qu'ordre et beauté serait trop parfait pour être jamais habités par des figures mortelles. (279–80)

A quarter of a century later again the music critic Jean-Aubry, writing amidst the chaos of the First World War, found a more poignantly direct response, in which Baudelaire's poetry seems to stand for the passing of an epoch: "il y a en effet un mot qui contient toute l'âme de Baudelaire, tout son génie et tout son cœur [. . .] ce mot-là, c'est: *nostalgie*. [. . .] Et qui pourrait évoquer la nostalgie en parlant de Baudelaire sans que de soi-même monte aux lèvres le titre évocateur et mélancolique de *L'Invitation au Voyage*?" (219, 223). It is that nostalgia that we read in Duparc's letter of 1910, quoted at the head of this essay, in which his own *L'Invitation au voyage* brings to "les yeux du cœur" the figures of friends and teachers, invoked through his memory of artistic creation in a moment of crisis. "Souvenirs sans regrets," Sivry titled his memoirs, looking nostalgia in the face and turning away, even as he quotes "La Mort des amants."

Most of the memoirs excerpted here were set down decades after the events they describe. Some were carefully constructed literary narratives; others were expressed informally, in private correspondence. Some were contrived for a certain audience, or with particular intent: Sivry was writing for his friends in the Montmartre cabarets of the 1890s; Massenet, approaching his retirement, was engaged in legacy building. All these stories, however, show composers and

their peers attempting to set lived experience within the cultural landscape of trauma and loss, through the medium of song. All of them were attempting to make sense not just of historical events but also artistic evolution: they were all concerned with creativity *in extremis*, and they were all to cast the *Année terrible* as in some sense a generative force, exemplified in the creation of *mélodie*. In Massenet's memoir, indeed, we find an origin story for the music of the Belle Époque writ large: if that grandiose claim echoed some historiographical clichés, it is more quietly foreshadowed in Fauré's *La Rançon* and *Chant d'automne*. These accounts offer something of a counterpart to the more substantial and public reckonings with memory and memorialisation that infused the literary and visual arts of the period. With Baudelaire as companion and guide, and in recollections that turn on the composition and performance of song, the composers who lived through the *Année terrible* found their own way to meld musical works and musical thought in the construction of collective memory.

Royal Academy of Music, London

Notes

1. Halbwachs's *mémoire collective* is cogently summarised by Wilson (14) as "a continuous current of thought that remains in the consciousness of a given group and is, by definition, only of relevance to that group."
2. Bréton 220 (14 Feb. 1871): "Été entendre chez Thétis [Holmès], ma, *notre marche nuptiale*, oh, mon Dieu, cet hymne au soleil qui devait être notre cantique de Bonheur. Je l'ai entendu seule avec sanglots! comme le 'requiem de mon Amour perdu'—Oh, mon Dieu. Elle chantait et moi je pleurais[.]"
3. 355, also see Studd 80–81.
4. Two 1907 articles in *Le Guide musical* confirmed the pre-1870 dating of Massenet's *Poème du souvenir* and drew attention to the chronological inexactitude of his memoir (Torchet, Servières).
5. In addition to the manuscript copy of *La Rançon* in *F-Pn*, the 1871 dating of both this song and

Chant d'automne is supported by close motivic correspondences across Fauré's three Baudelaire settings (see Howat and Kilpatrick), which strongly suggest that they were composed within a fairly short period. Although *La Rançon* and *Chant d'automne* were published only in 1879, *Hymne* was issued (together with *Seule!*, *Lydia*, and *Mai*) by Hartmann towards the end of 1871. Fauré also tended to focus on particular poets in turn, moving from Hugo to Baudelaire, Silvestre, Verlaine, Albert Samain, and, later in life, Charles van Lerberghe.

6. Whidden 78. Verlaine mentions the poem in a letter to François Coppée of 18 April 1869, in a context that makes it clear that it was already known in that circle (158). The *Album zutique* was a collection of poetry and sketches compiled by the members of the Cercle Zutique, its first entries dating from September or October 1871. Many of the former Vilains bonshommes were among the *zutistes* but the two circles do not wholly overlap, the political upheaval having driven wedges between certain elements: Pia writes that the Cercle Zutique was more hard-left and combative (*Album* 15).

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