

Maurice Ravel and the Poetics of Originality, 1907–14

BY EMILY KILPATRICK*

[Edgar Allan Poe] undoubtedly had great genius, and more inspiration than anyone—if by ‘inspiration’ we mean energy, intellectual enthusiasm, and the capacity to keep one’s faculties alert. But he also loved work more than others did: he constantly reiterated—he, the consummate original—that originality was something learned—which is not to say that it could be taught.

Charles Baudelaire

‘I have often written of [Ravel] as an artist endowed with very great gifts. But I have always regretted that the most obvious of those gifts is that of imitation. I have no reason to alter this opinion.’¹ Thus concluded the critic Pierre Lalo in the Parisian daily *Le Temps*, on 7 May 1907. Seven weeks earlier, Lalo had devoted his regular column to an unrestrained demolition of *Histoires naturelles* and *Une barque sur l’océan* (in Ravel’s orchestral transcription). Elaborating on the charges of *debussysme* he had previously levelled against *Pavane pour une Infante défunte*, the String Quartet, and *Miroirs*, he had taken aim not just at Ravel’s œuvre and aesthetic, but his professional conduct. ‘Facile and mediocre’ young composers, he wrote, had not only poached the mantle of *debussysme*, but had grown so arrogant as to consider Debussy himself already *passé*.² Ravel responded in an open letter, in which he angrily distanced himself from the views that Lalo attributed to the ‘younger generation’:

<EXT>M. Lalo does not name the ‘young musicians’ that he so readily accuses. However,

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¹ Lalo, ‘La Musique’, *Le Temps*, 7 May 1907: ‘Je vous ai souvent parlé de lui comme d’un artiste pourvu de dons fort heureux. Mais j’ai toujours regretté que le plus apparent de ces dons fût celui de l’imitation. Je n’ai nulle raison de changer d’avis.’

² Lalo, ‘La Musique’, *Le Temps*, 19 Mar. 1907; see Manuel Cornejo and Dimitra Diamantopoulou, ‘Maurice Ravel et Pierre Lalo: Une lettre oubliée de Maurice Ravel au directeur du *Temps* (Avril–Mai 1907)’, *Cahiers Maurice Ravel*, 12 (2009), 22–43.

as my name is cited rather frequently in the course of the article, it could create a regrettable confusion, and unsuspecting readers might think that it is about me. . . . I do not care whether those who know my works only through reviews think me a shameless plagiarist. I will not, however, even by those sorts of people, be taken for an imbecile.³<.EXT>

<no indent>On 9 April Ravel's letter was published in *Le Temps*. Incorporated within Lalo's column, it was repurposed as fodder for a more strident and personal assault. Lalo reproduced alongside it an extract from a note that Ravel had sent him after his blistering review of *Miroirs* a year earlier, observing that at the time of *Jeux d'eau* Debussy's only published piano music of note was *Pour le piano*—'works for which my passionate admiration goes without saying, but which, from a *purely pianistic* point of view, contained nothing really new.'⁴ Lalo's publication of this private letter was an ethical breach that Ravel considered unforgivable (it contributed substantially to the growing estrangement between him and Debussy). On 7 May *Le Temps* published his furious demand that Lalo limit himself to musical criticism and refrain from libellous mischief-making. His letter was again printed within Lalo's column: this time, Lalo bluntly accused Ravel of dishonesty, described his rebuttal as 'the fantasy of a young musician too imbued with his own importance' ('l'illusion d'un jeune musicien trop pénétré de son importance'), and ended by dismissing any pretences to his 'originality' in the words quoted above.

If Ravel publicly maintained an air of outraged dignity, in private the distress occasioned by Lalo's assault on his integrity was plain. Romain Rolland observed in his journal that the rift with Debussy was clearly troubling him,⁵ while Ravel himself wrote to the critic and impresario Georges Jean-Aubry, 'I want to tell you how touched I am by your interest in my works. At the moment, in particular, so many people are trying to prove to me that I'm deceiving myself, or rather, that I'm trying to deceive others. I cannot help but feel a certain frustration [*agacement*] about this.'⁶ As Jean-Aubry himself noted, this was a

³ 'La Musique', *Le Temps*, 9 Apr. 1907: 'M. Lalo ne nomme pas les « jeunes musiciens » qu'il accuse aussi légèrement. Mais mon nom se trouvant cité assez souvent dans le courant de l'article, il pourrait s'établir une confusion regrettable, et des lecteurs non avertis pourraient croire qu'il s'agit de moi. . . . Il m'est indifférent d'être, pour ceux qui ne connaissent mes œuvres que par la critique, un plagiaire impudent. Il ne me sied pas de passer, même auprès de ceux-là, pour un imbécile.'

⁴ Ravel, *L'Intégrale*, ed. Manuel Cornejo (Paris, 2018): 'œuvres pour lesquelles je n'ai pas besoin de vous dire mon admiration passionnée, mais qui, au point de vue *purement pianistique*, n'apportaient rien de bien neuf'.

⁵ Roger Nichols, *Ravel* (New Haven and London, 2011), 92.

⁶ Ravel, *L'Intégrale*, 157: 'Je veux vous dire combien je suis touché de l'intérêt que vous portez à mes œuvres. On s'efforce tellement, ces derniers temps surtout, de me prouver que je me trompe, ou mieux, que j'essaie de tromper les autres ! Je ne puis m'empêcher d'en éprouver parfois un certain

remarkable confession from an artist who typically strove to conceal his private struggles, particularly those caused by anything other than a temporary breakdown of the compositional ‘machine’.⁷ The scars would go deep: twenty years later Ravel would mount a vigorous public defence of Honegger, Milhaud, and Marcel Delannoy against Lalo’s vitriol, directed now at this younger generation at it had once been aimed at him.⁸

Lalo’s campaign was likely a factor in a major compositional decision Ravel took in April 1907: to set aside his projected opera on Hauptmann’s *La Cloche engloutie* in favour of Franc-Nohain’s *L’Heure espagnole*. While he was also motivated by his father’s rapidly failing health, in relinquishing the five-act symbolist drama for a Spanish-themed farce Ravel was surely attempting to forestall further allegations of *debussyste* plagiarism.⁹ By the spring of 1908, however, the completed *L’Heure espagnole* was languishing at the Opéra-Comique with no immediate prospect of performance, and Ravel was turning his attention to new projects. On 17 July he confided to Ida Godebska, ‘After lengthy months of gestation, *Gaspard de la Nuit* is about to see the light. . . . It’s been the devil in coming, *Gaspard*, which makes sense since He is the author of the poems.’¹⁰

This study contends that *Gaspard de la Nuit* marks a turning point in Ravel’s musical thought. The Lalo *affaire* had brought to a climax to the allegations of derivativeness and *debussysme* that had dogged him since 1899, when Henry Gauthier-Villars (as ‘L’Ouvreuse’) had memorably described his *Shéhérazade* overture as ‘Rimsky fiddled with by a *debussyste*’, dismissing the composer as ‘a mediocly gifted debutant’.¹¹ By 1907,

agacement.’

⁷ *Ibid.*, 157 n. 5, quoting a 1941 memoir. The affair was further publicized by elements of the musical press, pursued most notably through a series of articles in *La Revue musicale de Lyon* (as ‘l’affaire Ravel’: see the issues of 10 Feb., 17 Mar., 14 Apr., 1 May, and 15 June 1907, viewable via www.gallica.fr). In a letter of 19 Apr. to Émile Vuillermoz, Ravel asked for clarification as to where certain material had appeared, so that he could ensure he was correctly informed in his own statements (*ibid.* 159).

⁸ Roland-Manuel, ‘Maurice Ravel et la jeune musique française’, *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 233 (2 Apr. 1927), 1–2 at 2 (Ravel, *L’Intégrale*, 1508).

⁹ That *L’Heure espagnole* does indisputably respond to *Pelléas et Mélisande*, as well as *Tristan und Isolde* and Bizet’s *Carmen*—the quintessential Parisian operatic triumvirate of 1907—is a marker of Ravel’s deliberation in jousting with the operatic idols and norms of his time, in ways that mirror the compositional preoccupations explored below. I have explored this in detail elsewhere: see Kilpatrick, *The Operas of Maurice Ravel* (Cambridge, 2015), ch. 8 (‘The “calling-cards” of *L’Heure espagnole*’); this chapter also builds on the analysis of Steven Huebner, ‘Laughter: In Ravel’s Time’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 18 (2006), 225–46.

¹⁰ Ravel, *L’Intégrale*, 188: ‘Après de trop longs mois de gestation, *Gaspard de la Nuit* va voir le jour. . . . Ç’a été le diable à venir, *Gaspard*, ce qui est logique puisqu’il est l’auteur des poèmes.’

¹¹ *L’Écho de Paris*, 30 May 1899: ‘Rimsky tripatouillé par un débussyste . . . ce débutant

Ravel plainly felt compelled to declare not just a compositional strategy, but a professional one too. In his 2011 essay ‘Ravel’s Poetics’, Steven Huebner argued that Ravel’s ‘literary affinities played an important role in defining [his own creative space] relative to Debussy’, though he observes that there was anxiety inherent even here as Ravel shared so many of his colleague’s literary tastes, notably a reverence for Edgar Allan Poe.¹² The grounds for a defensible and nuanced independence lay, in part, through Aloysius Bertrand’s *Gaspard de la Nuit: fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot* (a text mentioned only briefly in Huebner’s essay). Through his response to a collection that probes the borderlands between classicism and romanticism, the avant-garde and retrogressive, originality, imitation, and pastiche, Ravel’s lifelong fascination with the musical past was transmuted into a conscious reflection on artistic innovation and exchange.¹³

In establishing the impulses behind Ravel’s piano triptych, this essay looks equally towards their implications for his subsequent practice. The opening literary and musical discussion of *Gaspard* is thus followed by a brief reflection on the ways Ravel’s aesthetic imperatives manifested themselves in two subsequent piano works: *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (1911), whose title nods to two collections conceived in the same decade as Bertrand’s *Gaspard* (Schubert’s *Valses nobles* and *Valses sentimentales*); and *À la manière de...* (1913), which explicitly claims the same referential framework as Bertrand’s subtitle. The closing portion of the study reframes these musical interrogations of history and tradition through Ravel’s pre-war musical criticism. His small and sharply entertaining corpus of articles, I argue, constitute not just a cogent extrapolation of the priorities and aesthetic dialogues established in part through *Gaspard* and its afterlives, but also an unsparing rebuttal of Lalo *et al.*

In tracing a line through the piano music and critical writings of the years between 1907 and the First World War, this study offers a reconsideration of some of the themes that have shaped discussion of Ravel and his œuvre from his time to our own. These topoi, of imitation and originality, inspiration and cool deliberation, would emerge in sharp focus during the last fifteen or so years of Ravel’s life, promulgated through the words of friends and advocates, as well as in interviews given by the composer himself.¹⁴ Closer reading of

médiocrement doué’.

¹² Steven Huebner, ‘Ravel’s Poetics’, in Peter Kaminsky (ed.), *Unmasking Ravel: New Perspectives on the Music* (Rochester, NY, 2011), 9–40 at 10.

¹³ Barbara Kelly surveys this aspect of Ravel’s compositional practice, ‘History and Homage’, in Deborah Mawer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge, 2000), 7–26.

¹⁴ Of particular importance to this essay was Kelly’s study of the construction and refraction of the tropes of ‘imposture’, artifice, and originality, by Roland-Manuel and others, during and

Ravel's pre-war criticism establishes foundations and continuities for his later pronouncements on art and artistry. In his negotiation of principle and practice, in words and in music, I position the composer as a more active agent in the construction of his own public persona.

PRECURSOR, PARADOX, *PASSÉ*: BERTRAND'S *GASPARD DE LA NUIT*

'This book of my sweet predilections, in which I have tried to create a new sort of prose.'¹⁵

—Aloysius Bertrand to David d'Angers, 18 September 1837

Compiled between the late 1820s and mid-1830s, *Gaspard de la Nuit: fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot* was published only in 1842, Aloysius Bertrand having failed to secure its publication during his short lifetime (1807–41). Few literary works better epitomize the Gothic imagination: there are sabbats, gibbets, and hands of glory, salamanders and alchemists, minstrels and monks, fateful ondines and demonic dwarves. But these *fantaisies* do more than merely inhabit their flamboyant tropes: folded within terse, unmetred lines of prose-poetry, they externalize a fundamental tension between expression and form. If this fertile opposition can be related more broadly to contemporaneous discourses of the *classique* and the *romantique*, discussed below, it also foregrounds and problematizes the question of their 'originality'.

The posthumous first edition of Bertrand's *Gaspard* was prefaced with a biographical and critical study by Sainte-Beuve, whom the poet had come to know in Paris at the end of the 1820s. The temporal disjunction between conception and publication is emphasized from Sainte-Beuve's first paragraph, which places *Gaspard* squarely within 'le mouvement poétique de **1824–1828**' (dates are set in bold type throughout Sainte-Beuve's essay)—that is, already nearly two decades earlier. Although he recognized the 'almost geometric precision' of his colleague's language, Sainte-Beuve otherwise offered little hint of the later discourse that would establish *Gaspard de la Nuit* as a harbinger of poetic modernity; if anything, he places it within an already vanished past.¹⁶ Nevertheless, his deployment of the terms 'caricature', 'drôleries', and 'jeux gothiques' makes clear that elements of *Gaspard*

immediately after Ravel's lifetime: 'Re-presenting Ravel: Artificiality and the Aesthetics of Imposture', in Kaminsky (ed.), *Unmasking Ravel*, 41–62.

¹⁵ Bertrand, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Helen Hart Poggenburg (Paris, 2000), 900: '*Gaspard de la Nuit*, ce livre de mes douces prédilections, où j'ai essayé de créer un nouveau genre de prose'.

¹⁶ Sainte-Beuve, 'Notice' to Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit* (Angers, 1842), pp. i and xiv: 'la précision presque géométrique'.

were deliberately situated on the cusp of parody, and recognized as such from the outset.¹⁷ When Ravel later described his own *Gaspard de la Nuit* as a ‘caricature of Romanticism’, he was thus echoing a context intrinsic to the collection itself.¹⁸

The 1842 print run of *Gaspard de la Nuit* was tiny, and the work long remained largely unknown outside literary and bibliophile circles. Its rediscovery and subsequent renown were due in part to Mallarmé, who vigorously advocated its republication during the 1860s; and above all to Baudelaire, who would famously establish Bertrand as a model for his own *Petits poèmes en prose (Le Spleen de Paris)*.¹⁹ In an 1862 letter to the critic and art historian Arsène Houssaye, Baudelaire declared, ‘It was while browsing, for at least the twentieth time, through Aloysius Bertrand’s famous *Gaspard de la Nuit* (a work known to you, to me, and to a few of our friends; isn’t that sufficient to term it *famous*?) that the idea came to me to attempt something similar’.²⁰

That address was reprinted as the preface to the first complete edition of *Le spleen de Paris*, edited by Charles Asselineau and Théodore de Banville and published in 1869, as the fourth volume of the posthumous *Œuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire*. It appeared on the heels of a revised and expanded edition of *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1868), likewise edited by Asselineau, who wrote in his preface that Bertrand’s collection, ‘More completely and explicitly than any other, represented one of the fundamental aspirations of the literary revolution of forty years ago: stylistic innovation, or rather reform; a reconfiguration of the tools of the art of writing, and of the means of expression.’²¹ This positioning would soon be echoed in various studies of literary romanticism. In 1889 Charles Morice wrote that ‘Romanticism invented a malleable prose, of which the masterpiece is that unobtainable *Gaspard de la Nuit* of Aloysius Bertrand.’²² The same year, a study of François Coppée by

¹⁷ See Katherine Slott, ‘Bertrand’s *Gaspard de la Nuit*: The French Prose Poem as a Parody of Romantic Conventions’, *Francofonia*, 8 (1995), 69–92.

¹⁸ Vlado Perlemuter and Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, *Ravel d’après Ravel* (Aix, 1989), 38.

¹⁹ Marvin Richards, ‘Famous Readers of an Infamous Book: The Fortunes of *Gaspard de la Nuit*’, *The French Review*, 69 (1996), 543–55 at 546–8.

²⁰ Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, 146: ‘C’est en feuilletant, pour la vingtième fois au moins, le fameux *Gaspard de la Nuit*, d’Aloysius Bertrand (un lire connu de vous, de moi et de quelques-uns de nos amis, n’a-t-il pas tous les droits à être appelé *fameux* ?) que l’idée m’est venue de tenter quelque chose d’analogue.’

²¹ Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, ed. Asselineau (Paris, 1868), p. i: ‘Il représente en effet plus complètement, plus manifestement que nul autre, une des prétentions cardinaux du programme de la révolution littéraire d’il y a quarante ans: innovation ou plutôt rénovation dans le style; révision du matériel de l’art d’écrire et des moyens d’expression.’

²² Morice, *La Littérature de tout à l’heure* (Paris, 1889), 151: ‘[Le romantisme] inventa la prose plastique, dont le chef d’œuvre est cet introuvable *Gaspard de la Nuit* d’Aloïsius Bertrand.’

Adolphe Lescure included an anecdotal account of an evening *chez* Catulle Mendès in 1865, in which Coppée drew attention to the presence, on Mendès's shelves, of the 'extremely rare *Gaspard de la Nuit* by Aloysius Bertrand, this father, this inventor of the *poème en prose*'.²³

By the later nineteenth century *Gaspard* had thus consolidated a somewhat paradoxical reputation. While it had come to be seen as the progenitor or precursor of the French prose-poem in general, and of its apotheosis *Le Spleen de Paris* in particular, it also remained deeply obscure. Flickering in and out of the literary press, the collection developed a chimerical aspect, a vehicle for the projections of writers who mostly knew it more by renown than by substance. It was typically introduced by adjectives which, like Coppée's and Morice's texts, stressed its inaccessibility; very few excerpts were reprinted in journals, studies, or collected volumes.

But if even the 1868 re-edition had failed to draw *Gaspard* into the mainstream, cameo appearances in two important publications demonstrate that it was nevertheless seeping into the groundwater of French literary conversation. The opening pages of Théodore de Banville's seminal *Petit traité de poésie française*, first published in 1872, invoke *Gaspard* in order (ironically) to prove the very impossibility of the *poème en prose*. 'Despite Fénelon's *Télémaque*, Baudelaire's admirable *Poèmes en prose*, and Louis Bertrand's *Gaspard de la Nuit*, it is impossible to imagine a prose, no matter how perfect it might be, to which, through a superhuman effort, nothing whatsoever could be added or retouched', Banville declared: his lack of context there assumes that readers would at least know of Bertrand's collection.²⁴

Gaspard is also cited in Joris-Karl Huysmans's 1884 novel *À rebours*, a work in which, Ravel would later write, 'my entire generation found itself'.²⁵ *À rebours* offers a compendium of his youthful literary obsessions: the lodestars of the protagonist Des Esseintes include Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Poe, and Barbey d'Aurevilly (whose essays on

²³ Lescure, *François Coppée: L'Homme, la vie et l'œuvre* (Paris, 1889), 45: '[le] rarissime *Gaspard de la Nuit*, d'Aloysius Bertrand, ce père, cet inventeur du poème en prose'.

²⁴ Banville, *Petit traité de poésie française* (Paris, 1891), 8: 'Non, il ne peut pas y en avoir, malgré le *Télémaque* de Fénelon, les admirables *Poèmes en prose* de Charles Baudelaire et le *Gaspard de la Nuit* de Louis Bertrand; car il est impossible d'imaginer une prose, si parfaite qu'elle soit, à laquelle on ne puisse, avec un effort surhumain, rien ajouter ou rien retrancher.' That Ravel in turn was familiar with Banville's well-known treatise is suggested by some of his early choices of song texts: his *Deux épigrammes de Clément Marot* set Banville's exemplars of the *huitain* ('D'Anne jouant de l'espinette') and the *dizain* ('D'Anne qui me jecta de la neige').

²⁵ Ravel, 'Mes souvenirs d'enfant paresseux', *La Petite Gironde*, 12 July 1931 (Ravel, *L'Intégrale*, 1445): 'je crois que toute ma génération s'est retrouvée dans *À rebours*'.

dandyism Ravel and Ricardo Viñes were studying in the mid-1890s). Towards the end of the novel, Des Esseintes concludes a meditation on Mallarmé's *L'Après-midi d'un faune* by placing his copy of the poem on a side table, and turning to an anthology of prose-poetry he has had specially bound. In this 'little shrine', extracts from *Gaspard*—'by that capricious [*fantasque*] Louis Bertrand, who transferred the techniques of Leonardo [da Vinci] into prose'²⁶—appear alongside Baudelaire, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Leconte de Lisle, and Mallarmé. 'Of all literature, the *poème en prose* was des Esseintes' favourite', it emerges:

<EXT>How often had des Esseintes meditated upon this perplexing problem, of how to write a novel that, while concentrated within a few phrases, yet contained the distilled essence of the hundreds of pages devoted to setting the scene, painting the characters, and accumulating a stock of observations and facts. The chosen words would thus be so firmly fixed as to supplant all others; the adjectives placed in so ingenious and so definitive a fashion that they could not legally be dispossessed.²⁷</EXT>

<no indent>If Des Esseintes there offers an almost verbatim response to Banville, the passage also suggests a clear echo of the rigorous methodology of choice that Poe had delineated in 'The Philosophy of Composition'—an essay that Huysmans, like Ravel, would have read in Baudelaire's translation (as 'Genèse d'un poème'). Indeed, the chapter ends with a nod to 'the quintessence' of Baudelaire and Poe.

By the time Ravel encountered *Gaspard*, then, it was (as the Sunday literary supplement of *Le Figaro* put it on 23 March 1895) as a text both 'unobtainable', and 'celebrated in the annals of Romanticism, and which the young *litterati* of today share through hand-copied fragments'.²⁸ It was at once a work of visionary iconoclasm, whose author had sought to free poetic expression from the rigorous *règles* of French verse; a late, extravagant flowering of the Gothic imagination; and a Holy Grail of bibliophiles and aesthetes. Few volumes were more likely to appeal to the young composer, assiduously

²⁶ Huysmans, *À rebours* (Paris, 1968), 243: 'ce fantasque Aloysius Bertrand, qui a transféré les procédés du Léonard dans la prose'.

²⁷ Ibid. 244–5: 'Bien souvent, des Esseintes avait médité sur cet inquiétant problème, écrire un roman concentré en quelques phrases qui contiendrait le suc cohobé des centaines de pages toujours employées à établir le milieu, à dessiner les caractères, à entasser à l'appui les observations et les menus faits. Alors les mots choisis seraient tellement impermutables qu'ils suppléeraient à tous les autres ; l'adjectif posé d'une si ingénieuse et d'une si définitive façon qu'il ne pourrait être légalement dépossédé de sa place.'

²⁸ Jules Huret, 'Petit chronique des lettres', *Le Figaro*, 23 Mar. 1895 (heralding a forthcoming new edition, the first since 1868): 'un ouvrage devenu introuvable, célèbre dans les fastes romantiques, et dont les jeunes littérateurs d'aujourd'hui se passent des fragments copiés à la main'.

cultivating a dandified persona, and, by the autumn of 1895, grappling with his first serious rejection by the musical establishment, in his dismissal from the piano and harmony classes at the Paris Conservatoire. In November of that year Ravel would identify a copy of *Gaspard* that Ricardo Viñes had picked up in London as ‘very rare’. Which edition, one wonders? The Asselineau volume—or the *rarissime* first edition? In any case, the literary acuity of the twenty-year-old composer is strikingly demonstrated in his early awareness not just of *Gaspard* but of its history.²⁹

When Ravel read Poe, whose writings crucially influenced this same foundational period, he did so in Baudelaire’s and Mallarmé’s translations, and accompanied by their prefatory essays: it was with an inherent understanding of intellectual dialogue, of refraction and exchange.³⁰ His understanding of Bertrand’s prose-poems was similarly buttressed by his recognition of its contexts and legacies, as filtered *inter alia* through Baudelaire and Huysmans. When he came to ‘translate’ three poems into music in 1908, it was in the knowledge of this rich inheritance, and in the consciousness of his own relationship with the narratives of history and artistic identity.

THE FANTASIES OF M. GASPARD

Bertrand’s *Gaspard de la Nuit* is prefaced by a long account of its purported origins. Seated on a park bench in Dijon, the author, signing himself ‘Louis Bertrand’, is joined by a mysterious figure, ‘a poor devil’ wracked by coughs ‘whose appearance suggested nothing but misery and suffering’. A conversation ensues, in which ‘Louis Bertrand’ repeatedly demands of the evasive Gaspard, ‘What is art?’ ‘Art is the science of the poet’, Gaspard initially returns, before launching into a series of set-piece divagations that Bertrand periodically and frustratedly interrupts. ‘Et l’art?’, he asks again and again, before eventually trying a different tack:

²⁹ The following September Ravel and Viñes spent an afternoon together reading *Gaspard*; Ravel took Viñes’s copy home with him and had to be pestered to return it some fifteen months later. Nina Gubisch, ‘Le Journal inédit de Ricardo Viñes’, *Revue internationale de musique française*, 1 (1980), 154–248 at 189 and 193.

³⁰ On Ravel, Poe, Baudelaire, and Mallarmé, see Erin Helyard, ‘Poe and Ravel: *Mécanisme intérieur*’, *Contemporary French Civilisation*, 42 (2017) 97–111; Jessie Fillerup, ‘Ravel and Robert-Houdin, Magicians’, *19th-Century Music*, 37 (2013), 130–58 at 137–44; Michael Lanford, ‘Ravel and “The Raven”’: The Realisation of an Inherited Aesthetic in *Boléro*’, *Cambridge Quarterly*, 40 (2011), 243–65; Emily Kilpatrick, ‘Ravel’s *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*: A Philosophy of Composition’, *Music & Letters*, 101 (2020), 512–43; and Steven Huebner, ‘Ravel’s Perfection’, in Deborah Mawer (ed.), *Ravel Studies* (Cambridge, 2010), 9–30 at 19–24. Huebner’s essay is a vital companion piece to his ‘Ravel’s Poetics’.

<EXT>‘And the devil?’

‘He doesn’t exist.’

‘And art?’

‘It exists.’

‘But where, then?’

‘In the breast of God!’ And as a tear starts in his eye, Gaspard declares, ‘All of us, sir, are nothing but copyists of the Creator’.³¹</EXT>

<no indent>The mysterious stranger then pushes his manuscript into Bertrand’s hands and departs. Only later, searching for the elusive poet, is Bertrand informed that he had been talking not just with ‘some poor devil’, but with the devil himself. ‘If Gaspard de la Nuit is in hell, let him roast there. I’ll print his book’, he concludes.³²

Reviewing Ricardo Viñes’s first performance of Ravel’s *Gaspard* in January 1909, Louis Laloy would suggest:

<EXT>Never, perhaps, have composer and performer [*interprète*] found themselves in more perfect accord than M. Ravel and M. Viñes: these meticulous pieces, in which every detail has its own importance and must be delineated, demanded the sensitive fingers, the intelligent hands, and even the smile concealed beneath the moustache, which unites the performer with the mischief of the composer.³³</EXT>

<no indent>Laloy there echoes Bertrand’s collapsing of the spaces between ‘creator’ (Gaspard himself?) and ‘interpreter’, or mediator (Louis Bertrand?), a device that tacitly

³¹ Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit: Fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot*, ed. Max Milner (Paris, 1980), 59, 61, and 75: « un pauvre diable dont l’extérieur n’annonçait que misères et souffrances. . . . Qu’est-ce que l’art ? » « L’art est la science du poète. » . . . « Et le diable ? Il n’existe pas. » « Et l’art ? » « Il existe. » « Mais où donc ? » « Au sein de Dieu ! » Et son œil où germait une larme, sondait le ciel. « Nous ne sommes, nous, monsieur, que des copistes du créateur. »

³² Ibid., 78: ‘Si Gaspard de la Nuit est en enfer, qu’il y rôtisse. J’imprime son livre.’

³³ Laloy, ‘La Musique. Société nationale: *Gaspard de la Nuit*, trois poèmes pour piano de M. Maurice Ravel’, *La Grande Revue*, 25 Jan. 1909, 395–8 at 395–6: ‘Jamais peut-être un compositeur et son interprète ne se trouvèrent en plus parfait accord que M. Ravel et M. Viñes: à ces ouvrages fouillés, où chaque détail a sa valeur et doit se détacher, il fallait ces doigts nerveux, ces mains intelligentes, et jusqu’à ce sourire enfoui sous la moustache, qui associe l’exécutant à la malice de l’auteur.’

gestures to the more fundamental concern with which Bertrand's preface teases his readers. That opening dialogue plainly responds to the Romantic obsession with the nature and origins of art—a trope underlined in Bertrand's epigraph to 'Le Gibet', drawn from Goethe's *Faust* (in Gérard de Nerval's 1827 translation). The same cultural concern was simultaneously playing out in musical aesthetics: the writing of *Gaspard* overlaps precisely with the period in which critics were beginning to use Faustian language to describe the technical wizardry of Niccolò Paganini.³⁴ When Ravel applied himself to *Gaspard*, therefore, it was as a text from the age not just of Hoffmann and Poe, but also of Paganini, Liszt, and Berlioz (whose *Huit scènes de Faust*, inspired by Nerval's translation, date from 1828).³⁵ In his expressed intention to create a work harder than Balakirev's *Islamey*³⁶—with which Viñes was then astonishing concert audiences—Ravel wrote himself into the history of the virtuoso, shading its affiliations with the otherworldly, the devilish, and the macabre.

Ravel's dances with history, in *Gaspard*, are thus more than textual: they are patently embodied in the figure of the artist-performer. It is surely not coincidental that while many of Bertrand's poems open with evocations of sound, just three of them begin with verbs of *listening*, and these were the three that Ravel selected. The first of his chosen poems, indeed, makes the verb a command: 'Écoute!' ('Listen!'). Printed on the verso facing the first music page, it suggests an injunction to the pianist (*listen* to the song you are conjuring); even more surely, Ravel intended it for the audience: *Listen to this. Listen to me*. The siren song, moreover, is woven through a texture whose inherent pianistic tension sets it apart from the fluid figurations of Liszt's *Légendes* (often cited among Ravel's models for his 'water' pieces). The rapidly repeated *ppp* triads are both fiendishly hard to maintain without strain, and intensely 'mechanical' in their exploitation of the double escapement. This paradoxical lack of fluidity might suggest a subtle response to Bertrand's equally contradictory language: as Valentina Gosetti observes, his unattractive, incongruous descriptions—notably 'l'eau coassante' ('the croaking water')—are deliberately ironic.³⁷

³⁴ As Mai Kawabata has documented, the terms 'Hexensohn', 'Mephistopheles', 'Dr Faustus', 'Satan', and 'Devil's Spawn'—among others—were all first attached to Paganini between 1828 and 1833 (Kawabata, *Paganini: The 'Demonic' Virtuoso* (Woodbridge, 2013), 32).

³⁵ Marvin Richards notes that in addition to its debts to Musset, Nodier, Goethe, and Rabelais, Bertrand's 'Un Rêve' suggests a parodic echo of the fourth movement of *Symphonie fantastique* (*Without Rhyme or Reason: Gaspard de la Nuit and the Dialectic of the Prose Poem* (Lewisburg, PA, 1998), 100) – though the first and last movements (respectively 'Rêveries—Passions' and 'Songe d'une nuit du sabbat' might suggest a more obvious titular connection; my thanks to Benedict Taylor for pointing this out.

³⁶ Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York and London, 1975), 58.

³⁷ Valentina Gosetti, *Aloysius Bertrand's Gaspard de la Nuit: Beyond the Prose Poem* (Cambridge

A related interplay of subject and creator characterises ‘Scarbo’, the third of Ravel’s chosen poems and his most colourful exploitation of transcendent, Lisztian virtuosity. The diabolical dwarf Scarbo almost literally haunts the third section of Bertrand’s *Gaspard*, ‘La Nuit et ses prestiges’, figuring in the first four poems. (Ravel’s ‘Scarbo’ responds to a fifth poem, relegated to the appended ‘Pièces détachées’.) Scarbo makes a final appearance in the next section (‘Chroniques’), slipping into the poem ‘La Poterne du Louvre’ as an unnamed ‘dwarf’ (variously ‘nain’ and ‘nabot’) whom a guard eventually accuses of being the devil in disguise. With his name suggesting a literal diminutive through its common assonances, Scarbo functions as a smaller, wilder version of Gaspard himself. The ‘interprète’ conjuring him at the piano is thus also ‘playing’ Gaspard, who is himself at once creator and creation.

Bertrand’s construction (or deconstruction) of the artist-creator is achieved in part through the Preface’s artful distancing, a play of mirrors that culminates in Gaspard’s assertion that ‘all artists are copyists’ of a Dieu-*Créateur*. The composer who had recently battled through the *affaire Lalo* could hardly have failed to miss the irony of that statement, the crux of an argument that plays out not just through the Preface but in the expressive strata of the whole collection. Bertrand’s subtitle makes his own inheritance plain, in its acknowledgment of two visual artists (Rembrandt and Callot), and its explicit echo of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Phantasiestücke in Callots Manier* (published in French in 1829 as *Fantaisies à la manière de Callot*).³⁸ His dense web of influence and inspiration is further signposted in the epigraphs drawn largely from the writings of his colleagues and friends; as Gosetti, Kathryn Slott, and many others have demonstrated, it is also deeply embedded in the poetry itself.³⁹ ‘No other poet lies in such danger of becoming the victim of his own search for sources’, wrote Max Milner; Marvin Richards stressed that one reason for the

and Abingdon, 2016), 110.

³⁸ Bertrand’s debt to Hoffmann is traced *inter alia* in Angelika Corbineau-Hoffmann, ‘Les Formes du fantastique: Pour une comparaison entre E. T. A. Hoffmann et A. Bertrand’, in Francis Claudon (ed.), *Les Diableries de la nuit: Hommage à Aloysius Bertrand* (Dijon, 1993), 35–64; and Stéphanie Lelièvre, ‘*Gaspard de la Nuit*: Des fantaisies à la manière de... Hoffmann?’, in Steve Murphy (ed.), *Lectures de Gaspard de la Nuit de Louis (Aloysius) Bertrand* (Rennes, 2010), 135–51. Concerning the incalculable influence of Hoffmann on the generation of Bertrand and Berlioz more broadly, see Francesca Brittan, ‘Berlioz, Hoffmann, and the *Genre fantastique* in French Romanticism’ (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2007).

³⁹ The ancestors of Bertrand’s ‘Ondine’, for example, include not just the obvious source of de la Motte Fouqué, but Loève-Veimars’s translated anthology *Ballades, legends, et chants populaires d’Angleterre et de l’Écosse* (1825), particularly ‘Le Chant de Naïade’ but also ‘Chant des nymphes’ and ‘La Sirène de Galloway’, together with Hugo’s ‘Le Sylphe’; see Bertrand, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Poggenburg, 326 n. 5; Gosetti, *Beyond the Prose Poem*, 104–12; and Kathryn Slott, ‘Le texte e(s)t son double: *Gaspard de la Nuit*: Intertextualité, parodie, auto-parodie’, *French Forum*, 6 (1981), 28–35.

marginalization of *Gaspard* within the canon lies ‘precisely’ in its ‘unoriginality’.⁴⁰ But in calling into ‘existence’ an art contingent on the dialogues between ‘creators’ and ‘copyists’, *Gaspard de la Nuit* also attests to Bertrand’s intense engagement with the literary dialogues of his epoch. Gosetti observes that ‘issues of originality and imitation were at the centre of the animated debate between the *classiques* and the *romantiques*’,⁴¹ citing an 1825 article by the critic Jean-Jacques Ampère. ‘Prompted’, as he explained, by the perceived schism between the *classique* and the *romantique*, Ampère concluded that originality and imitation could coexist within the same literary work, for ‘having models does not prevent an author from creating something novel and unique.’⁴²

The dialectic of the *classique* and the *romantique* offers another gloss on Bertrand’s appellation *fantaisies*. While the semantic resonances between noun (*fantaisie*) and adjective (*fantasque, fantastique*) were obviously intentional and Hoffmannesque, Bertrand’s usage arguably elevates form above content.⁴³ Reading *fantaisie* in a formal sense invokes a musical context complementary to those of the literary and visual arts inherent in his subtitle, one whose intentionality is perhaps borne out in the plethora of musical evocations in the text itself.⁴⁴ The 1835 dictionary of the Académie française defined the *fantaisie* as existing ‘in music and art, above all, a work in which one prioritizes the caprices of the imagination above artistic convention, while not completely abandoning the latter.’⁴⁵ This Romantic re-imagining of an older musical form, with its play of ‘caprice’ and ‘convention’, would, would soon find apotheoses in Schumann’s C major *Fantasy* op. 17 (1836, rev. 1839) and Chopin’s op. 49 *Fantaisie*, composed in the year of Bertrand’s death.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Milner, ‘Préface’ to Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, ed. Milner (Paris, 1980), 38–9 (‘nul poète ne risqué autant que lui d’être victime de la recherche des sources’); Richards, *Without Rhyme or Reason*, 14.

⁴¹ Gosetti, *Beyond the Prose-Poem*, 3.

⁴² Ibid., paraphrasing Ampère, ‘Essais sur la littérature romantique (I)’, *Le Globe*, 9 July 1825.

⁴³ Gosetti likewise suggest that ‘the denomination *fantaisie* could indeed refer generally to the formal and thematic freedom of [Bertrand’s] compositions and to the absence of strict rules, rather than being related to specific content’ (ibid. 80–1).

⁴⁴ Gaspard declares in the Préface that he had tried ‘many instruments’ in search of the ‘pure and expressive note’ for his *fantaisies*: His titles include ‘La viole de gamba’, ‘La sérénade’, and ‘La ronde sous la cloche’; the first poem of the collection, ‘Harlem’, features a mandoline and a Rommelpot; later we encounter lutes, guitars, choirs of children, the monotonous song of a nurse, many bells, and the occasional cuckoo and rooster; and alongside the pervasive *chanter* Bertrand also employs less common verbs such as *tambouriner* and *psalmodier*.

⁴⁵ ‘*Fantaisie* se dit aussi, surtout en termes de Peinture et de Musique, Des ouvrages où l’on suit plutôt les caprices de son imagination que les règles de l’art, mais sans abandonner tout à fait ces dernières.’

⁴⁶ Regarding the formal design of Chopin’s Op. 49 see Nicholas Kennedy, ‘A Fantasy about

Ravel—who had presented Schumann’s *Fantasy* for the Conservatoire piano examinations in 1894—could hardly have failed to notice the musical invitation implicit in Bertrand’s subtitle. Crucially, his own *Gaspard de la Nuit* is poised on the same fulcrum of the *classique* and the *romantique*: Olivier Messiaen was the first to observe that a shadowy sonata form lurks beneath the watery surface of ‘Ondine’.⁴⁷ Roy Howat, subsequently elaborating on Messiaen’s analysis, mounted the case for similarly concealed sonata forms in ‘Le Gibet’ and ‘Scarbo’. Describing ‘Scarbo’ as the most ‘explicit’ sonata form of the three pieces, Howat argued for a ‘development’ merging into the ‘recapitulation’, with some formally ambiguous elements that suggest at times elements of an arch or sonata-rondo.⁴⁸ In his review of the 1909 première of *Gaspard*, Jean Marnold would emphasize the fusion of past and present in his praise for the triptych’s ‘formal cohesion’ and ‘architectural eurhythmy’ (harmonious proportions), ‘in the service of a fantastic and delightful Romanticism of 1830, three compositions of the most audacious modernity’.⁴⁹

Notwithstanding its patently Lisztian virtuosity, the aesthetic canvas of Ravel’s *Gaspard* lies closer to Bertrand’s near-exact contemporary Chopin, particularly in this remoulding of sonata templates. As Anatole Leikin put it, writing on Chopin’s B flat minor Sonata (op. 35) in words that could apply equally to *Gaspard*, ‘different forms coexist in a single composition, overlapping, intertwining, and even at times suppressing each other.’⁵⁰ Curiously, it is this turbulent second of Chopin’s sonatas that perhaps informs *Gaspard* more directly than any other single work, the structural resonances underlined by certain affinities of gesture and affect.⁵¹ The musical vanishing of Scarbo, in the snuffing of a candle flame or

Sonata Form: Re-examining Chopin’s *Fantasy*, op. 49’, *Chopin Review*, 3 (2020), 88–111.

⁴⁷ Olivier Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod, *Analyses des œuvres pour piano de Maurice Ravel* (Paris, 2003), 25–9: they describe the emergence of the D sharp pedal from b. 24 as preparing the ‘second subject’ that arrives in G sharp major (the overall dominant) at b. 33, and sketch an overall formal structure of exposition, development (containing a third subject), recapitulation, and coda.

⁴⁸ Roy Howat, ‘Ravel and the Piano’, in Mawer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, 71–96 at 81–4. Jessie Fillerup and Peter Kaminsky have both offered alternative structural readings of ‘Le Gibet’, based on a two-part structure whose hinge comes at b. 28, though Fillerup, like Howat, emphasizes the importance of ‘motions of classical sequence’ that are repeatedly foiled; see Fillerup, ‘Eternity in Each Moment: Temporal Strategies in Ravel’s “Le Gibet”’, *Music Theory Online*, 19 (2013); Kaminsky, ‘Ravel’s Approach to Formal Process: Comparisons and Contexts’, in Kaminsky (ed.), *Unmasking Ravel*, 85–111 at 97–108.

⁴⁹ Jean Marnold, ‘Musique: La Nationale’, *Mercure de France*, 77 (Feb. 1909), 546–52 at 548: ‘au service d’un fantasque et délicieux romantisme 1830, fut trois compositions de la plus audacieuse modernité’.

⁵⁰ Anatole Leikin, ‘The Sonatas’, in Jim Samson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin* (Cambridge, 1992), 160–87 at 161.

⁵¹ Howat argues similarly, also linking ‘Scarbo’ with the Fourth Ballade, Second Scherzo, and *Tarentelle*: see Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier* (London

the swish of a curtain, surely nods to Chopin's whispering, disconcerting finale. More directly, the tolling B<fl>s of the 'Marche funèbre' must echo in the ostinato chimes of 'Le Gibet', illuminating the sophisticated intertextuality inherent in Ravel's fusion of musical and poetic rhetoric.⁵²

The syntactic rationale for that remorseless bell lies in the poetic repetition of the questioning 'Serait-ce', which launches every strophe but the last. Obviously pictorial, Ravel's chimes give away the 'answer' even before the 'question' is posed: only in the last line of the poem do we learn that the sound whose source we seek is 'la cloche qui tinte aux murs d'une ville...' ('the bell ringing from the walls of a town'). But the B<fl>s are a 'question' too, the musical/rhetorical equivalent of the insistent 'Serait-ce'. Functioning as the dominant of the never-realized tonic E flat minor, they literally hold the musical discourse suspended (like the unfortunate occupant of the gibbet?). Each time the bell tolls, the tonal kaleidoscope is turned a little further, an inexorable shifting of harmonic colour around the fixed point. The B<fl>s are thus cast in multiple harmonic lights—just as a 'pauvre diable' can be revealed as the devil in truth. 'This bell does not dominate, it *is*, it tolls unwearyingly', Ravel reportedly told the pianist Henriette Faure.⁵³ Perhaps the play on words (the verb *dominer*, the musical *dominante*) was deliberate; more directly, Ravel offered Faure another strand of poetic 'translation' by likening the effect of that ostinato to the 'Nevermore' of Poe's grim raven.

If Bertrand's prose-poems rework well-worn themes from the inside out, reinvigorating them through his sideways, sardonic glance, his taut phrasing, the exteriorization of known models, and their formal reconfiguration, then so too do Ravel's. As Baudelaire would argue his 'Salon de 1859', 'originality' may declare itself through the manipulation of existing formal tools:

and New Haven, 2009), 78. He offers a different Chopinian template for 'Ondine', which he casts as a parody, in the classical sense, of Chopin's A flat Étude Op. 25 no. 1, evoking by comparison Manet's parodies of Goya (both artists whom Ravel adored). The textural affinities between the two pieces, Howat notes, are reinforced by a fleeting but direct quotation of the climax of the Étude at that of 'Ondine' (b. 30 in the former, b. 66 in the latter); both subsequently subside into 'quietly echoing octaves' followed by a 'sudden flurry of arpeggios that equally suggest a ripple of laughter and a shower of spray' (ibid. 79).

⁵² The deliberation of Ravel's nod to Chopin is reinforced by a telling moment in *L'Heure espagnole*: at Fig. 31, Gonzalve's declaration that he is confining himself in his clock 'as if in a coffin' is accompanied by an obvious spoof of the 'Marche funèbre'; see Kilpatrick, *The Operas of Maurice Ravel*, 163.

⁵³ Faure, *Mon maître Maurice Ravel* (Paris, 1978), 61: 'cette cloche ne domine pas[,] elle est, elle tinte inlassablement'.

<EXT>rhetoric and prosody are not arbitrarily constructed tyrannies, but rather a collection of rules required by the very organization of the intellectual being. And never have prosody and rhetoric prevented originality from proving itself clearly. On the contrary: it would be infinitely more accurate to declare that they have helped originality to flower.⁵⁴</EXT>

<no indent>That passage in turn offers an ironically close echo of Poe's strictures on originality in 'The Philosophy of Composition'. 'The fact is that originality (unless in minds of very unusual force) is by no means a matter, as some suppose, of impulse or intuition. In general, to be found, it must be elaborately sought', Poe writes, explaining that 'each of these lines taken individually has been employed before, and what originality the "Raven" has, is in their combination into stanza; nothing even remotely approaching this has ever been attempted'.⁵⁵ Baudelaire would circle around the same argument once again in his translator's preface to 'The Philosophy of Composition', likewise first published in 1859 (as quoted in the epigraph to the present study). Crucially, in both essays he twines Poe with existing French discourses of originality, dialogues that are likewise instantiated with playful brilliance in Bertrand's *Gaspard de la Nuit*.⁵⁶

Following the première of Ravel's *Gaspard*, even some of the composer's most hostile critics would remark on what they perceived as a decisive move towards a more 'original' voice. Gaston Carraud, in the course of an otherwise harsh review, began with an acknowledgement of 'an effective effort' to 'move definitively away' from Debussy'.⁵⁷ Jean Chantavoine expanded on that theme, reflecting that

⁵⁴ Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, 399: 'Il est évident que les rhétoriques et les prosodies ne sont pas des tyrannies inventées arbitrairement, mais une collection de règles réclamées par l'organisation même de l'être spirituel. Et jamais les prosodies et les rhétoriques n'ont empêché l'originalité de se produire distinctement. Le contraire, à savoir qu'elles ont aidé l'éclosion de l'originalité, serait infiniment plus vrai.'

⁵⁵ Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Philosophy of Composition', *Graham's Magazine*, 28 (Apr. 1846), 163–7 at 166.

⁵⁶ In an important 1895 essay in *La Revue hebdomadaire* titled 'La Musique et l'originalité' (impelled by contemporaneous reckonings with *wagnérisme*), Paul Dukas joined Mallarmé in reading 'The Philosophy of Composition' as (in Carlo Caballero's words) 'exuberantly paradoxical' (Caballero, *Fauré and French Musical Aesthetics* (Cambridge, 2001), 80). Caballero's discussion of Dukas's essay, especially relative to Ravel's teacher Fauré, provides the basis for an important discussion of the notion and construction of originality in French musical aesthetics around the turn of the century: see especially pp. 78–85. Unlike Dukas, however, Ravel remained convinced (as he wrote in 1931) that 'Poe indeed wrote his poem *The Raven* in the way that he indicated': see Kilpatrick, 'Ravel's *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*', 542.

⁵⁷ Carraud, 'Les Concerts. Société Nationale', *La Liberté*, 12 Jan. 1909, 3: 'un effort efficace pour s'écarter définitivement de M. Debussy'.

<EXT>These three pieces, I believe, mark a new stage in Maurice Ravel’s artistic career. . . . His *debussyste* obsession had threatened to distort his personality entirely. . . . M. Ravel has never written anything so precise and brilliant, but this is also more substantial, and the dangerously seductive phantasm of M. Debussy appears to me to have loosened its grip upon him.⁵⁸</EXT>

<no indent>That phantasm Chantavoine plainly conceived as an ‘Ondine’; he might alternatively have cast it as a Scarbo, a looming shadow that had filled the artist’s room. Ravel himself, however, would doubtless have framed it in more Baudelairean terms. The poet’s 1862 letter to Arsène Houssaye concludes with a meditation on what doing ‘something similar’ to Bertrand, in his *Le Spleen de Paris*, might mean:

<EXT>As soon as I had begun work, I realized that not only did I remain far from my mysterious and brilliant model, but that I was indeed making something else again (if it can indeed be called ‘something’), something singularly different, an accident in which anyone but me would doubtless have rejoiced, but which could only serve to humiliate profoundly a mind convinced that the greatest honour of the poet is to achieve precisely what he set out to do.⁵⁹</EXT>

<no indent>Baudelaire’s theatrically false modesty was surely a ruse—and one that he expected his reader to rumble. It represents a deliberate separation of his work from its model, drawing the lines of inheritance on one hand while severing them with the other. As Richard Sieburth argues:

<EXT>By referring to Gaspard as his ‘mysterious and brilliant model’ while at the same time underscoring his ‘accidental’ deviation and distance from that model, Baudelaire in effect deconstructs the distinction between imitation and originality, thereby subverting the relation of model to copy, source to derivation into one of sheer, irreducible

⁵⁸ Chantavoine, ‘Chronique musicale’, *La Revue hebdomadaire*, 13 Mar. 1909, 245–62 at 261: ‘ces trois pièces marquent, je pense, une étape dans la carrière artistique de Maurice Ravel. . . . l’obsession debussyste menaçait d’altérer gravement sa personnalité. . . . M. Ravel n’a jamais rien écrit de plus brillant et de plus choisi ; mais elle a gagné en signification, et le fantôme dangereusement séduisant de M. Debussy me paraît s’éloigner de lui.’

⁵⁹ Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, 146: ‘Sitôt que j’eus commencé le travail, je m’aperçus que non seulement je restais bien loin de mon mystérieux et brillant modèle, mais encore que je faisais quelque chose (si cela peut s’appeler quelque chose) de singulièrement différent, accident dont tout autre que moi s’enorgueillirait sans doute, mais qui ne peut qu’humilier profondément un esprit qui regarde comme le plus grand honneur du poète d’accomplir juste ce qu’il a projeté de faire.’

difference.⁶⁰

Even Asselineau, pointing out Baudelaire's homage to Bertrand in his preface to the 1868 edition of *Gaspard*, did so to assert the younger poet's difference: 'the author of *Les Fleurs du mal*, more human, and more impassioned, must have rapidly burst the bounds of the measured strophes of *Gaspard de la Nuit*'.⁶¹ In his sympathetic biography of Baudelaire, published the following year, Asselineau would describe *Le Spleen de Paris* as 'an original work, conceived in imitation—or, better, emulation—of Louis Bertrand's *Fantaisies*, but in which the particular genius of the disciple soon swept away any hint of imitation'.⁶²

While it is Baudelaire's initial invocation of Bertrand, in his letter to Houssaye, that offers the most obvious link to Ravel's *Gaspard*, his closing paragraph is perhaps more significant still, inviting both local and longer-term implications for his compositional thinking. Most obviously, Ravel would echo Baudelaire almost verbatim in his 1931 reflection on *Boléro* as 'the work in which he had most completely attained his specified purpose'.⁶³ The same passage also suggests a key source for some of the composer's later pronouncements on originality and the use of 'models'—at least, as they would be memorably enshrined by Roland-Manuel, who would write in 1939 that his teacher had 'ceaselessly' stressed the role of imitation in the development of an independent voice: 'If you have something to say, that something will emerge most distinctly in your unwitting infidelity to your model.'⁶⁴ At the time of *Gaspard* Ravel was not yet able to mount such an

⁶⁰ Sieburth, 'Gaspard de la Nuit: Prefacing Genre', *Studies in Romanticism*, 24 (1985), 239–55 at 239.

⁶¹ Bertrand, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, ed. Asselineau, p. iv: 'l'auteur des *Fleurs de mal*, plus humain et plus véhément, devait bien vite forcer la mesure des strophes tenues de *Gaspard de la Nuit*'.

⁶² Asselineau, *Charles Baudelaire: Sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris, 1869), 80: 'œuvre originale, commencée à l'imitation ou mieux à l'émulation des *Fantaisies* de Louis Bertrand, mais à laquelle le génie particulier de l'émule enleva bientôt tout caractère d'imitation'.

⁶³ Pierre Leroi, 'Quelques confidences du grand compositeur Maurice Ravel', *Excelsior*, 30 Oct. 1931 (Ravel, *L'intégrale*, 1557): « l'œuvre qu'il a pleinement réalisée et qui lui a permis d'atteindre tout à fait le but qu'il s'était proposé. » Michael Lanford identifies another crucial instance of Ravel explaining his compositional process by echoing Baudelaire explicating Poe (in this case, Ravel's 1928 lecture on 'Contemporary Music' relative to Baudelaire's 'New Notes on Edgar Poe'); see Lanford, 'Ravel and "The Raven"', 249.

⁶⁴ Roland-Manuel, 'Des Valses à *La valse*', in *Maurice Ravel par quelques-uns de ses familiers* (Paris, 1939), 141–52 at 145: 'Si vous avez quelque chose à dire, ce quelque chose n'apparaîtra jamais plus clairement que dans votre involontaire infidélité au modèle.' Roland-Manuel's 1925 article 'Maurice Ravel, ou, l'esthétique de l'imposture' offers a more florid response to the same proposition, in its assertion 'there's not a work by Ravel that didn't begin as a pastiche. He works "on a theme", like a painter. He installs himself before a Mozart sonata or a Saint-Saëns concerto, like a

argument so explicitly. Nevertheless, in tackling a piano triptych on Bertrand's *Fantaisies*, in the wake not just of Lalo's polemics but of Debussy's paired triptychs of piano *Images*, the mastery of Baudelaire's Preface offered the composer of 1908 a model for the drawing of critical distance.

VALSES NOBLES ET SENTIMENTALES, À LA MANIÈRE DE, AND THE 'INEVITABLE TRANSLATION'

Three years after *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Ravel would again probe the liminal space between the *classique* and the *romantique* in his *Valses nobles et sentimentales*. The impulse behind Aloysius Bertrand's homage to Hoffmann was surely echoed in Ravel's titular elision of Schubert's *Valses nobles* and *Valses sentimentales*. Like Bertrand, Ravel explicitly invokes a dialogue with artistic predecessors; in both works, creative ownership is asserted in the fusion of multiple strands of 'influence', implying a whole greater than the sum of the parts: Rembrandt *and* Callot; noble *and* sentimental. But Ravel's elegant play of adjectives also serves as distancing and diversion. His historical 'conversations' lie less with Schubert than with Schumann: *Carnaval*, with its waltzes, its fusions and disjunctions, its portraits and homages (including a 'Valse noble' and tributes to Paganini and Chopin), and its recapitulatory finale, is the most obvious ancestor of Ravel's sole piano 'cycle' in the Schumannian manner.⁶⁵

An intriguing practical instance of Ravel's 'distancing' may be discerned in his fifth waltz. Headed 'Presque lent—dans un sentiment intime', it shares the gently restless four-sharp key signature, circle-of-fifth motions, spine-tingling chromatic sideslips, and sharp side/flat side contrasts of Chopin's single Prélude op. 45, its melodic motion circling around the same g<sh>" and stressing similar on-beat appoggiatura gestures. Ravel plainly had a soft spot for this Prélude: one of the few individual works he had cited in a 1910 article on Chopin's piano music, it would serve as a textural canvas for his own single Prélude, composed in 1913 as a Conservatoire sight-reading test piece.⁶⁶ In *Valses nobles et*

landscape artist before a cluster of trees. The work completed, it is usually impossible to find any trace of its model.' *La Revue musicale*, 6 (1925), 16–25 at 18: 'Aucune œuvre de Ravel qui n'ait été premièrement un pastiche. Il travaille « sur le motif », comme un peintre. Il s'installe devant une sonate de Mozart ou devant un concerto de Saint-Saëns comme un paysagiste devant un bouquet d'arbres. L'œuvre achevée, il est généralement impossible de trouver trace du modèle.' See Kelly, 'Re-presenting Ravel', 45–9, and Michael Puri, 'Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales* and its Models', *Music Theory Online*, 23 (2017), 4.

⁶⁵ Puri mounts a detailed and compelling argument for Ravel's legacy to Schumann's early piano cycles in *Valses nobles et sentimentales*; see Puri, 'Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales*'.

⁶⁶ Like Op. 45, Ravel's Prélude makes a feature of offset left-hand arpeggio figurations and ninth

sentimentales, Ravel's critical distance comes both in the refraction of one genre (the prelude) through another (the waltz), as well as through the characteristically astringent verticalization of Chopin's structural dissonances.⁶⁷ Carine Perrett argues that 'imitation', in *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, 'permits the juxtaposition of his own language with that of his source, to which he brings his own perspective. . . . In the manner of Edgar [Allan] Poe, [Ravel] facilitates a distancing from his reappropriated source material.'⁶⁸ Like Bertrand's invocation of Hoffmann and Baudelaire's of Bertrand, Ravel's homage to Schubert allowed him to draw the lines of inheritance on his own terms.

Ravel's next work for solo piano, by contrast, confronts its musical ancestors directly. Composed in the autumn of 1913, his two *À la manière de...* pastiches are more homage than parody, offered to two of the composers whose influence on his own development he unhesitatingly acknowledged.⁶⁹ 'À la manière de Borodine' unfurls from the 'Sérénade' and appended 'Scherzo' of Borodin's *Petite suite*, with passing echoes of the Scherzo of the String Quartet no. 2 and the Polovtsian dances from *Prince Igor*. 'À la manière d'Emmanuel Chabrier' adds an additional layer of intertextual exchange, weaving its plethora of quotations through a reworking of the 'Jewel Song' from Gounod's *Faust*. The direct prompt for these pieces came from Ravel's friend Alfredo Casella, whose six-piece *À la manière de...* of 1911 opened with the inevitable mock-*Tristan* 'Einleitung' and proceeded via Brahms and Strauss ('Sinfonia molestica') to Fauré, Debussy, and Franck. Ravel's pieces were concocted for Casella's second collection, where they would sit alongside spoofs of d'Indy and Ravel himself: the latter morsel, 'Almanzor, ou, le mariage d'Adélaïde' blends elements mostly of 'Scarbo', 'Le Gibet', and the first of the *Valses nobles et sentimentales*. Both composers, however, were also responding to a well-

chords: see Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music*, 78. In a neat piece of historical circularity, Chopin's Prélude was itself a *tombeau*, composed in 1841 (the year of Bertrand's death) for an *Album-Beethoven* compiled by the publisher Mechetti, as a fundraiser towards the erection of a Beethoven statue in Bonn. Among the other works offered to that cause was Schumann's Op. 17 *Fantasy*. See Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, 'Chopin and "la note bleue": An Interpretation of the Prélude op. 45', *Music & Letters*, 78 (1997), 233–53.

⁶⁷ The seventh waltz betrays a more transparent Chopinian legacy, the cross-rhythms in the central passage obviously recalling the Op. 42 Waltz (observed by Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music*, 78).

⁶⁸ Perrett, 'Le romantisme ravélien, un héritage choisi', *Musurgia*, 13 (2006), 17–32 at 19–20: 'l'imitation lui permet également de confronter son propre langage avec le langage d'emprunt dont il donne sa propre vision. . . . À la manière d'Edgar Poe, il opère une distanciation par rapport au matériau de l'emprunt qu'il se réapproprie.'

⁶⁹ Michael Puri argues similarly; see 'Memory, Pastiche, and Aestheticism in Ravel and Proust', in Mawer (ed.), *Ravel Studies*, 56–73 at 62.

manière de Rembrandt et de Callot.⁷⁰

Of Bertrand's construal of *à la manière de*, Helen Hart Goldsmith argued that the poet 'created the illusion of painted pictures or engraved plates without necessarily borrowing the artist's techniques or obeying the logic incumbent on the painter.'⁷¹ However, Des Esseintes' reflection, in *À rebours*, that Bertrand had 'transferred the techniques of Leonardo [da Vinci] into prose' points to an alternative reading. In drawing together music, painting, and literature, his subtitle can also be read as a cogent unification of form (*Fantaisies*), method (*à la manière de*), and content (*Rembrandt et Callot*).⁷²

This premise, of the transferral of artistic process, was also expounded by Baudelaire, who postulated in his 'Salon de 1846' that 'the best critique of a painting might be a sonnet, or an elegy', quoting as evidence 'certain lines from M. Henri Heine that explain Delacroix's method rather well'.⁷³ Baudelaire would famously take his own advice in his 1861 essay on *Tannhäuser*, employing the tools of his own art—as critic as well as poet—to respond to Wagner's methods, a process of self-examination that he termed an 'inevitable translation' (*traduction inévitable*).⁷⁴ Ravel, who several times used the verbs *traduire* and *transposer* to describe his musical engagement with literary works, surely understood *à la manière de...* in this Baudelairean context. 'For me there are not several arts but one alone', he would write in 1931: 'music, painting, and literature differ only in their means of expression.'⁷⁵

Michael Puri describes 'À la manière de Borodine' as a 'seamless commixture of the

⁷⁰ The autumn of 1913 also saw the publication of the third volume of Paul Reboux and Charles Müller's literary *À la manière de...* pastiches; Ravel's copy of this volume remains in his library at Montfort-l'Amaury. He was probably also aware of Proust's pastiches of Balzac, Flaubert, Sainte-Beuve, and others, which had appeared in *Le Figaro* early in 1908 (compiled as *Pastiches et mélanges* in 1919): see Puri, 'Memory, pastiche, and aestheticism', 60 and n. 14.

⁷¹ Goldsmith, 'Art and Artifact: Pictorialization in *Gaspard de la Nuit*', *The French Review*, 44 (1971), 129–39 at 131.

⁷² Dana Milstein argued similarly, suggesting that Bertrand adapts Rembrandt's *chiaroscuro*, with its 'ruptures' and 'nervous tension', in his own medium 'to unsettle the reader's perspective': 'Movement and displaced perspective is used primarily to blur the relationship between reader, narrator, and characters; or to erode the barriers between interior and exterior, subject and object, or original and copy.' Milstein, '*Gaspard de la Nuit*: Humor, the Eau-Forte, and the Chiaroscuro Vignette', *College Literature*, 30 (2003), 137–61 at 150.

⁷³ Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, 235 and 229: 'Voici quelques lignes de M. Henri Heine qui expliquent assez bien la méthode de Delacroix'; 'Ainsi le meilleur compte rendu d'un tableau pourra être un sonnet ou une élégie.'

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 513 ('Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris').

⁷⁵ 'Mes souvenirs d'enfant paresseux', Ravel, *L'Intégrale*, 1443: 'Pour moi, il n'y a pas plusieurs arts, mais un seul: musique, peinture et littérature ne diffèrent qu'en tant que moyens d'expressions.'

styles of the two composers’, noting in particular how Ravel’s treatment of his second theme—‘a slow registral descent across its length, coupled with a quick ascent at its end’—lies close to the fourth of *Valses nobles et sentimentales*.⁷⁶ We might read there an echo of Baudelaire’s ‘inevitable translation’, Ravel casting himself as Borodin’s effective interlocutor, *à la manière de* ‘Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris’. ‘*À la manière de Chabrier*’, on the other hand, suggests a more direct line from Bertrand via Huysmans: less concerned with ‘imitating’ Chabrier than with depicting him ‘at work’, Ravel offers a portrait of the composer as he might have improvised on Gounod in the avant-garde salons of the 1860s. No static image of a distant past, his ‘*À la manière d’Emmanuel Chabrier*’ is the re-creation of a living dialogue.

‘I BELIEVE IT HAD TO BE SAID’: RAVEL’S MUSICAL CRITICISM

By the time Ravel’s and Casella’s *À la manière de...* were premiered, in an SMI concert of 10 December 1913, Ravel had seen both *L’Heure espagnole* and *Daphnis et Chloé* staged. Although both works divided the critics (the balance broadly anti-*L’Heure* but pro-*Daphnis*), they collectively served to place his stature essentially beyond doubt. He had also made a decisive venture into Parisian musical politics, through his leadership in the founding and direction of the Société musicale indépendante. In this, together with his related advocacy for Erik Satie (whom his friend Michel-Dmitri Calvocoressi had hailed in a 1911 review as ‘the most important and the most direct precursor to M. Debussy, to M. Ravel’⁷⁷), Ravel had worked to delineate publicly a line of French musical inheritance and contemporary aesthetics, alternative to that promulgated by the Société nationale de musique.

By December 1913, too, Ravel had published ten pieces of musical criticism, mostly in *La Revue musicale SIM* and *Comœdia illustré*. Here, for the first time, he was able to pursue in words the literary dialogues that had underpinned his musical thinking over the past few years. While each of his articles naturally responds to particular concerts and works, Ravel’s reflections on actual performances are often perfunctory, little more than a backdrop to the elaboration of his underlying theses: lineage, imitation, and originality on the one hand, and on the other, a sharp return to the *casus belli* of 1907, and the ethics and aesthetics of writing about art.

⁷⁶ Puri, ‘Memory, pastiche, and aestheticism’, 66.

⁷⁷ Calvocoressi, ‘Aux concerts’, *Comœdia illustré*, 3 (15 Feb. 1911), 305 (‘le plus significatif et le plus direct des précurseurs de M. Debussy, de M. Ravel’). See Barbara Kelly, *Music and Ultra-Modernism in France: A Fragile Consensus, 1913–39* (Woodbridge, 2013), 37–42.

It is in the latter vein that he opens his first piece, with a reflection on why musical criticism is so rarely consigned to practitioners: ‘Doubtless it is believed that they have something better to do . . . Or perhaps it is feared that professionals, however honourable their motives, cannot always judge with perfect objectivity, and that their opinions will be tainted by strong feelings (if not worse).’ This opening gambit concludes forthrightly: ‘the judgements of critics who are not composers are not always exempt from these strong feelings. Often, indeed, the vehemence of their attacks serves to mask an incompetence which might more easily have been discerned beneath a less ardent judgement.’⁷⁸ If Ravel does not name Pierre Lalo, it is because he does not need to.

With that off his chest, Ravel finds himself compelled, ‘by an irony of fate’, to begin his career as a critic by reviewing his own *Pavane pour une Infante défunte*—or at least, that is what he claims. In fact, his brief was to survey four recent Concerts Lamoureux in a single article, a task that entailed the passing over without comment of entire symphonies. Opening with his *Pavane* was thus a very deliberate choice. In acknowledging its ‘too-obvious influence of Chabrier’ and ‘rather poor form’, Ravel sets out as if to prove his good faith to his opponents: Lalo had observed the piece’s *chabriesque* lineaments in 1902.⁷⁹ But in describing the work as ‘old enough that I feel no constraint in speaking of it’, Ravel marks out his distance: circling back to his opening premise, he declares that he can now write as a critic, rather than a creator.⁸⁰

This reflection serves as a teaser for a longer discussion on the complexities of compositional influence, stemming from a performance of Liszt’s *Les Idéals*. Liszt’s shortcomings, Ravel concludes, were the source of Wagner’s ‘overly pompous vehemence’, of ‘the heaviness of [Franck’s] elevation’, the occasional ‘gaudiness’ of the Russians, and

⁷⁸ Ravel, ‘Concerts Lamoureux’, *Revue musicale SIM*, 8 (15 Feb. 1912), 62–3: ‘Sans doute estime-t-on que ceux-ci ont mieux à faire . . . Par ailleurs l’on peut craindre que les professionnels, mus par des sentiments souvent honorables, ne puissent toujours juger avec une parfait indépendance et que leurs opinions soient entachées de passion, pour ne pas dire pis. . . . les jugements des critiques non producteurs ne sont pas toujours exempts de cette passion. Souvent même, une ardeur véhémente dans l’attaque masque habilement l’incompétence qu’un avis plus modeste laisserait soupçonner.’ This review, and those that followed, are all reproduced in Ravel, *L’Intégrale*, 1381–421; see in particular a more inflammatory paragraph, cut from the published review, in which Ravel takes aim directly at Gaston Carraud (p. 1381).

⁷⁹ Lalo, ‘La Musique’, *Le Temps*, 22 Apr. 1902.

⁸⁰ Ravel, ‘Concerts Lamoureux’ (15 Feb. 1912): ‘Par une ironie du hasard, la première dont je dois rendre compte se trouve être ma *Pavane pour une Infante défunte*. Je n’éprouve aucune gêne à en parler : elle est aussi ancienne pour que le recul fasse abandonner du compositeur au critique. Je n’en vois plus les qualités, de si loin. Mais, hélas ! J’en perçois fort bien les défauts : l’influence de Chabrier, trop flagrante, et la forme assez pauvre.’

the extreme ‘coquettishness’ of the French. And yet, he continues, ‘do not these composers, who are so dissimilar, owe the best of their good qualities to the musical generosity, truly prodigious, of this great precursor? Within this form, often clumsy, always effusive, doesn’t one distinguish the embryo of Saint-Saëns’s ingenious, facile, and limpid development?’⁸¹

This first review concludes with a brief response to Pierre de Bréville’s *Éros vainqueur*. The ‘fourth wall’, somewhat belatedly erected after Ravel’s opening strictures on musical criticism, is shattered again when, having found a few technical points on which to critique Bréville, he turns the tables:

<EXT>Must one reproach an artist for an excess of reserve, and for having disdained [certain] facile tricks[?] . . . I am falling into the same error with which I purported to reproach my contemporaries. What good does it do to search for imperfections in a work that delighted me utterly? And also, why must I be such a *professional*?⁸²</EXT>

<no indent>Ravel thus began his career as critic with a theory of influence and inspiration, and a mocking reflection on the limits of criticism. In this, he surely gives an ironic nod to Baudelaire: the ‘professional’ critic, charged with fault-finding, is also the creator for whom writing about art is another manifestation of art itself.

Ravel’s second article picks up where he left off, this time framing his discussion with a riff on the nature and perceived opposition of ‘genius’ and ‘craft’. His constructions of these terms are not those that, aided by interlocutors such as Roland-Manuel, he would expound in the 1920s and 1930s:⁸³ rather, they lie closer to the discourses of originality and imitation he had established a few weeks before. In this accounting, ‘craft’ carries a sardonic charge, entailing an excessive concern for formal process that Ravel saw as characteristic of the Schola Cantorum faction.⁸⁴ Here, he uses it to tee up a reflection on Brahms’s Symphony

⁸¹ Ibid.: ‘C’est en grande partie à ces défauts, il est vrai, que Wagner doit sa véhémence trop déclamatoire ; Strauss, son enthousiasme de colporteur ; Franck, la lourdeur de son élévation ; l’école russe, son pittoresque parfois clinquant ; l’école française actuelle, l’extrême coquetterie de sa grâce harmonique. Mais ces auteurs si dissemblables ne doivent-ils pas le meilleur de leurs qualités à la générosité musicale, vraiment prodigieuse, du grand précurseur ? En cette forme, souvent gauche, toujours abondante, ne distingue-t-on pas l’embryon du développement ingénieux, aisé et limpide de Saint-Saëns ?’

⁸² Ibid: ‘doit-on reprocher à l’artiste un excès de pudeur et mépriser ces *trucs* faciles[?] . . . Je tombe dans l’erreur que je prétendis reprocher à me contemporains. À quoi bon chercher les imperfections d’une œuvre qui m’a profondément charmé? Mais aussi, pourquoi faut-il que je sois du *métier*?’

⁸³ See for example Huebner, ‘Ravel’s Poetics’, 9–18.

⁸⁴ Ravel had previously expounded on this in several private letters, writing of the Société nationale’s obsession with works dominated by ‘the sturdy qualities of incoherence and boredom,

no. 2 and the Symphony of the *scholistes*' patron saint, César Franck. In both works, Ravel considered, 'inspiration'—the great melodic gift possessed by both composers—had been subjugated to a self-conscious responsibility to the burdens of tradition (fused here with 'craft'), a laboriousness that engendered serious failures of musical construction. He lamented Franck's 'abuse' of dated 'academic formulae', and while praising Brahms's orchestration, decried his 'learned, grandiloquent, convoluted, and heavy' developments.⁸⁵

Importantly, in taking aim at the *Pater seraphicus*, Ravel demonstrated his readiness to marry principle with practice: he calls out certain faulty orchestral doublings in the Franck with the acute observation that 'Just when the inspiration is at its peak one is disconcerted by extraneous sonorities.'⁸⁶ The same concern underpins his uncompromising strictures on the pervasive *wagnérisme* of d'Indy's *Fervaal* and Camille Erlanger's *La Sorcière*, in reviews he offered to *Comœdia illustré* in January 1913. Of *Fervaal*, he carefully draws the lines between inspiration and imitation, stressing that a work entirely devoid of analogies with its predecessors could be nothing but a 'monstrous exception. . . . Nevertheless one feels some discomfort in recognizing [those analogies] in such great numbers, all coming from the same source, and reunited in the same work.'⁸⁷ But the crux of his argument lies less in aesthetics than technique, in what he saw as the essential incompatibility of the French language and Germanic musical procedures. D'Indy's text-setting, he wrote, 'cannot but recall, sometimes disagreeably, the style Wagner's French translators felt themselves obliged to adopt. In effect, the tonic accent, which is rather weak in our language, is vigorously marked; this is the more unfortunate because it is frequently misplaced.'⁸⁸ Describing a similarly 'turbulent declamation' in *La Sorcière* he noted, 'The comprehensibility of the text, which is so vital in

which the Schola Cantorum has baptized as structure and profundity' ('ces solides qualités d'incohérence et d'ennui, par la Schola Cantorum baptisées construction et profondeur'); and of 'fugal episodes that replace technique, themes from *Pelléas* that stand in for inspiration' ('Des divertissements de fugue remplacent le métier, des thèmes de *Pelléas* suppléent à l'inspiration'); Ravel, *L'Intégrale*, 206 and 210 (letters of 16 Jan. and 14 Mar. 1909).

⁸⁵ Ravel, 'Concerts Lamoureux', *La Revue musicale SIM*, 8 (15 Mar. 1912), 50–2.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 51: 'Au moment que l'inspiration est la plus élevée, l'on est déconcerté par des sonorités foraines.'

⁸⁷ Ravel, '*Fervaal*', *Comœdia illustré*, 5 (20 Jan. 1913), 361–4 at 363: 'une exception monstrueuse. Mais on éprouve quelque gêne à les observer en aussi grand nombre, provenant toutes de la même source et réunies dans le même ouvrage.'

⁸⁸ Ibid. 362: 'Il n'est pas jusqu'à la prosodie musicale du dialogue qui ne rappelle, assez désagréablement parfois, celle que se crurent obligés d'adopter les traducteurs français de Wagner. En effet, l'accent tonique, assez faible dans notre langue, est ici marqué avec une vigueur d'autant plus pénible qu'elle tombe fréquemment à côté.'

the theatre, cannot help but suffer.’⁸⁹

These practical, *professional* points are central to Ravel’s argument. His columns offered him a long-awaited opportunity to respond to years of polemic and antagonism from the *scholistes*. More subtly, they also allowed him to tease out the Baudelairean problem he had posed in his first column of 1912: the artist responds to the art of others through practice (and the composer of *Histoires naturelles* and *L’Heure espagnole* had certainly applied himself to the aesthetics and the practice of text-setting). The charges of *debussyisme* with which he had long contended had rarely been backed by the focused technical and practical logic he applied to his dissections of *wagnérisme*.

Ravel’s third and last *Revue musicale SIM* article, published in April 1912, draws together these threads of lineage, of professionalism and artistry, and of the failures of musical criticism; its potency is openly indebted to his own unhappy experiences. This time, his ostensible focus was Ernest Fanelli’s *Tableaux symphoniques*. Decrying the sensationalist journalism surrounding the recent ‘rediscovery’ of Fanelli, he argued that this sort of reportage was fair to neither the composer nor the colleagues to whom critics sought to connect him. The heart of the review, however, concerns the positioning of Fanelli as an ‘impressionist’ *avant la lettre*, a procedure Ravel calls out not just on factual grounds, but as a manifestation of an ideology and a critical strategy he considered pernicious:

<EXT>We knew already that the discovery of [Debussy’s] harmonic systems was entirely due to Erik Satie, his theatrical procedures to Musorgsky, his orchestration to Rimsky-Korsakov. Now we know where his impressionism came from. Nothing remains to him than to be, despite this poverty of invention, the most important and most profoundly musical composer today.⁹⁰</EXT>

<no indent>Those who termed Fanelli a ‘precursor’ of Debussy, he argued, were ignoring the latter’s inheritance from Liszt and the Russians, through whom his experiments with ninth chords and whole-tone scales could be traced far more securely. This is both a deliberate turning of the tables—Debussy not just as influence, but as *influenced*—and a

⁸⁹ Ravel, ‘*La Sorcière à l’Opéra-Comique*’, *Comœdia illustré*, 5 (5 Jan. 1913), 320–2 at 321: ‘Cette déclamation mouvementée . . . Appliquée au français, elle devient paradoxale. La compréhensibilité du texte, pourtant nécessaire au théâtre, ne peut manquer d’en souffrir.’

⁹⁰ Ravel, ‘*Les Tableaux symphoniques de M. Fanelli*’, *La Revue musicale SIM*, 8 (15 Apr. 1912), 55–6 at 56: ‘Nous savions déjà que la découverte de son système harmonique était due entièrement à Erik Satie, celle de son théâtre à Moussorgsky, et son orchestration à Rimsky-Korsakov. Maintenant nous savons d’où vient son impressionnisme. Il ne lui reste plus que d’être, malgré cette pauvreté d’invention, le plus considérable, le plus profondément musical des compositeurs d’aujourd’hui.’

strategic reclamation of his own aesthetic ground, likewise strongly marked by Liszt and the Russians. As Jean Marnold had written about Ravel's String Quartet in 1904, surface resemblances between himself and Debussy should be viewed as 'filiation, not pastiche'.⁹¹

In the last of his *Comœdia illustré* articles, published on 5 June 1914, Ravel would reframe the tropes of 'imitation' in the context of professional integrity, with a directness that again reveals how raw the wounds of 1907 remained. Of Stravinsky's *Le Rossignol*, he writes:

<EXT>Stravinsky would certainly have noticed himself that one of his themes resembled not so much Debussy's *Nuages* but a certain song by Musorgsky. I think that he considered it pointless to change one or two notes in his theme in order to conceal this confluence. . . . And if he did not wish to rewrite the music of this first scene, it is because he recognized the difficulty, even impossibility, for 'an artist who is truly an artist' to compose entirely new music on the same text. It would have been easier, but more contemptible, to retouch the original, to rejuvenate it through some tricks of the trade.⁹²</EXT>

<no indent>The references to *Nuages* and 'an artist who is truly an artist' were a witheringly direct response to a review of *Le Rossignol* by Gaston Carraud, who had charged Stravinsky with 'not having noticed that the prologue . . . cites Debussy's admirable *Nuages* with a fidelity that really goes well beyond what may be permissibly be offered as a homage to his *maîtres*'.⁹³ Again, Ravel asserts the essential creative exchange between 'creators' and 'copyists'; again, he makes an argument grounded in artistic practice, and the authority of the composer-critic. *Et l'art? Il existe.*

This final pre-war article also took up the threads of Ravel's single contribution to *Les Cahiers d'aujourd'hui*, published in February 1913. His declared purpose there was to

⁹¹ Marnold, 'Musique: Un *Quatuor* de Maurice Ravel', *Mercure de France*, 50 (Apr. 1904), 249–52 at 250: 'filiation et non pastiche'.

⁹² Ravel, 'Les Nouveaux Spectacles de la saison russe: *Le Rossignol*', *Comœdia illustré*, 6 (5 June 1914), 811–14: 'Certes, Stravinsky a dû s'apercevoir lui-même que l'un de ses thèmes ressemblait, non pas tant aux *Nuages* de Debussy qu'à certaine mélodie de Moussorgsky. Je pense qu'il a jugé inutile de changer une ou deux notes à son thème pour dissimuler cette rencontre. . . . Et s'il n'a pas refait la musique de ce premier tableau, c'est qu'il a vu la difficulté, l'impossibilité même, pour « un artiste qui est vraiment un artiste », de recomposer une musique entièrement nouvelle sur un même texte, et qu'il aurait été plus aisé, mais plus méprisable, de retoucher l'ancienne, de la rajeunir par des artifices de métier.'

⁹³ Carraud, 'Théâtres', *La Liberté*, 28 May 1914: 'il ne se soit pas aperçu que le prologue du *Rossignol* citait les admirables *Nuages* de M. Debussy avec une fidélité qui dépasse vraiment ce qu'il est permis d'offrir en hommage à ses maîtres.'

respond to the negative accounts of Debussy's *Images* recently propounded by both Lalo and Carraud. Once again, however, he was less concerned with the *Images* themselves than with what such responses revealed. Returning again to the terrain of 1907 as well as the Fanelli review, he painted the critiques as the realization of a long-established campaign of 'dirty work'. Lalo and Carraud, he declared, had plotted the 'downfall' of *Pelléas* and its author even as they placed themselves 'at the head' of the opera's early champions. By declaring it 'sublime but exceptional', they cast it immediately as an 'impasse':

<EXT>A great number of young people thereupon decided to test the critics' proclamations and discovered that through the 'impasse' lay a wide-open door to a splendid and an entirely new landscape. There they frolicked merrily . . . M. Lalo recognized that they had grown up, and it was time to employ different tactics against them, if not nobler, than at least more cunning. M. Carraud and his companions hastened enthusiastically to his aid. They attempted to sow division among these young artists. They attempt to set them against a beloved genius, and him against them.⁹⁴</EXT>

<no indent>Six years on from *Histoires naturelles*, Ravel now clearly felt he had the authority to expose the procedures of such critics, and even to ridicule them for their lack of *compositional* authority. It is that distance, too, that allowed him to re-emphasize not just Debussy's unique significance but his generational impact. Crucially, his argument is again grounded in process and transmission, the metaphors of impasses, doors, and landscapes emphasizing progression and development. Here again are echoes of the 'singular difference' Baudelaire claimed for his *Spleen de Paris*, in the wake of a model that, like Bertrand's *Gaspard*, was indeed 'mysterious and brilliant'. Although Ravel would assert his distance from Debussy until the end of his life, this article represents a critical shift in his aesthetic stance, tacitly acknowledging and integrating his own *debussyste* legacy for the first time into a cogent and nuanced compositional philosophy. Sending his article to the journal's editor, Ravel wrote, 'This is, I think, not at all what you asked for. It's more combative—but I believe it's what had to be said.'⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Ravel, 'À propos des *Images* de Claude Debussy', *Les Cahiers d'aujourd'hui* (Feb. 1913), 135–8: 'un grand nombre de jeunes gens s'avisèrent de vérifier les affirmations des critiques et découvrirent au fond de l'impasse une porte largement ouverte sur une campagne splendide, toute neuve. Ils y prirent gaiement leurs ébats . . . Alors, M. Lalo s'aperçut qu'ils avaient grandi et qu'il était temps d'employer contre eux des moyens sinon plus nobles, du moins plus habiles. Appelés à l'aide, M. Carraud et ses confrères s'empressèrent d'accourir. On essaya de semer la division parmi ces jeunes artistes. On tenta de les lancer contre un maître adore, et celui-ci contre eux.'

⁹⁵ Ravel, *L'Intégrale*, 316 (Feb. 1913): 'Ce n'est pas du tout, je crois, ce que vous demandiez. C'est plus combatif; mais j'estime que ça devait être dit.'

AFTERWORD: THE POETIC PRINCIPLE

As Ravel was concocting his *À la manière de...* in the autumn of 1913, Roland-Manuel was conducting a parallel survey, in words, of his teacher's artistic lineage. Threaded through the pages of his *Maurice Ravel et son œuvre* (published early in 1914) are many reminders, some subtle, others blunt, of Ravel's 'originality'. (There are also many explicit critiques of Lalo and Carraud, who are called out half a dozen times, their more foolish or inflammatory remarks quoted only to be dissected, disproved, or—most often—ridiculed.) On the second page, we find a declaration from Ravel's first teacher of harmony and counterpoint, Charles-René, that from childhood his pupil was remarkable for his focussed ambition and 'unified' style. Roland-Manuel then immediately asserts the early presence of a Schumannian *tendresse* ('already revealed to him'), and cites Ravel's discovery of Chabrier's *Trois valse romantiques* and of Satie, in 1893, as seminal moments. When he comes to *Jeux d'eau*, Roland-Manuel echoes Ravel's 1906 letter to Lalo in asserting a 'pianistic writing without precedent'.⁹⁶

Debussy first appears on page 16, when Roland-Manuel arrives at *Miroirs*—the work that sparked Lalo's first sustained demolition of Ravel's aesthetic, and his most strident accusations of *debussysme*. 'Born of the same seed as Debussy's admirable *Images* (1905–7), Ravel's *Miroirs* bear witness to an entirely different sensibility and technique', he writes, the dates there serving to emphasize a conception in *parallel* rather than in sequence (filiation, not pastiche).⁹⁷ 'We will return at length, later on, to this so-called *debussyste* imitation with which Ravel has too often been charged', he notes a few pages later.⁹⁸

The promised discussion arrives on page 36. There, Roland-Manuel painstakingly details the 'profound' difference between Debussy and Ravel: one prefers successions of ninths and the whole-tone scale, the other 'finds new effects by the use of chords of the *seventh*, in particular, notably the piquant and delightful sonority of the major seventh.' Counterpoint, he asserts, is foregrounded more in Ravel than Debussy; the older composer's taste for 'rhythmic incertitude', he sets against the younger's more 'decisive and unexpected' treatment of rhythm. Finally, he underlines Ravel's pursuit of orchestral virtuosity, his

⁹⁶ Roland-Manuel, *Maurice Ravel et son œuvre* (Paris: Durand, 1914), 8 and 11: 'une écriture pianistique sans précédent'.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 16: 'Nés de cette même conception qui nous valut les admirable *Images* de Claude Debussy, qui leur sont contemporaines (1905–7), les *Miroirs* de Maurice Ravel témoignent d'une sensibilité et d'une technique tout à fait différentes.'

⁹⁸ Ibid. 20: 'nous nous étendrons plus loin sur cette prétendue imitation debussyste dont Maurice Ravel fut souvent taxé'.

unexpected instrumental timbres and combinations a marker of his devotion to the Russians (with a touch of Saint-Saëns).⁹⁹

Lines of inheritance; their role in defining an ‘original’ voice distinct from that of Debussy; and the calling out of bad-faith critics: these themes patently amplify and elaborate aspects of Ravel’s own critical writing. Roland-Manuel’s closing discussion also covers some familiar terrain, as it moves through the perils of *wagnérisme* and the tension between inspiration and craft. On the latter topic, he takes aim at the critics who praised Ravel’s *métier* while lamenting a perceived paucity of ‘inspiration’, suggesting a lead taken from the second of Ravel’s *Revue musicale SIM* articles. If Ravel had pursued that dichotomy to launch an attack on the Schola Cantorum, however, Roland-Manuel redirects it towards Carraud and other critics who had asserted that beneath its glittering surfaces, the core of Ravel’s music was emotionally barren. The composer’s detractors, Roland-Manuel wrote, had mistaken an absence of ‘pseudo-profundity’ for a lack of feeling altogether, for they recognized emotional intensity only in a Wagnerian grandiloquence that was ‘utterly removed from the French spirit’.¹⁰⁰

Maurice Ravel et son œuvre is headed with an epigraph from Edgar Allan Poe, drawn from the essay ‘The Poetic Principle’: ‘An elevating excitement of the soul—quite independent of that passion which is the intoxication of the Heart—or of that truth which is the satisfaction of the Reason.’ In the closing paragraphs, the import of those carefully chosen words becomes plain. It is the ‘elevating excitement of the soul’ alone, Poe had written, that constitutes the most profound manifestation of that ‘poetic Principle’, through its translation into practice; the ‘Principle’ itself was ‘strictly and simply the Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty’. Roland-Manuel declared that in reclaiming that aspiration, and redefining it as quintessentially French, Ravel had ‘miraculously’ recovered the ‘lost thread of our purest tradition . . . that once belonged to Couperin and Rameau’.¹⁰¹

This first biography thus articulates the thread of history and homage that runs through Ravel’s output, and weaves it firmly into the tapestry of French musical endeavour. It advances a philosophy of craft grounded not just in literature but in cross-disciplinary ‘translation’, and in the realization of principle as practice. Uniting many of the emergent

⁹⁹ Ibid. 36: ‘Ravel tire des effets neufs d’un emploi très particulier des accords de *septième*, notamment du délicieux et piquant accord de *septième majeure*.’

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 39: ‘éloignées autant qu’il est possible du génie français’.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.: ‘Maurice Ravel renoue miraculeusement le fil perdu de notre plus pure tradition . . . tel jadis celui de Couperin et de Rameau’.

tropes around Ravel as man and musician, it lays the foundation for much of the critical and biographical discussion of the 1920s and subsequent decades.¹⁰² And it achieves this by drawing together and echoing ideas that the composer himself had been setting down, ever more persistently, over the preceding two years, and whose aesthetic basis resides in the piano works composed in the wake of the *affaire Lalo*.

Through the first decade of Ravel's career, it had been friends such as Calvocoressi, Marnold, and Émile Vuillermoz who had essentially spoken for him, defending and explicating his aesthetic to a sceptical press and public. By 1913, he had come to stand firmly at the centre of French musical conversation. It was, at last, from a place of some security that he could watch Alfredo Casella première their collective efforts in pastiche at the Société musicale indépendante: one reviewer would liken the 'ingenuity and wit' of their *À la manière de...* to Schumann's *Carnaval*, and *À la manière de Chabrier* was encored.¹⁰³ It was from this new position, too, that he could afford to take to the progressive musical press, not just to launch entertaining critical rockets but to advance a compositional manifesto of his own. In the literary and philosophical strata of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, *Valses nobles et sentimentales* and *À la manière de...*, and in the cogency of his musical criticism, we may read not just Ravel's increasing professional and artistic confidence, but a conscious jousting with the labels that had dogged him over the past decade: a decision to step into the stream of musical history and turn to meet it head on. And so, around the time Roland-Manuel's biography appeared, Ravel took himself off to Saint-Jean-de-Luz, and set about transcribing a *forlane* by François Couperin.

ABSTRACT

What does it mean to be an 'original' artist? In 1907, battling claims of dishonesty and plagiarism in the musical press, Maurice Ravel found himself uncomfortably preoccupied with that question. Compelled to a reckoning with the nature of 'originality' and 'imitation', Ravel turned to poetry and its discourses. This study contends that with Aloysius Bertrand's *Gaspard de la Nuit*, Ravel's lifelong fascination with the musical past was refocused through a conscious investigation of artistic innovation and exchange. Tracing a line from his own *Gaspard* (1908) through the piano music and critical writings of the pre-war years, it teases out a crucial strand of historical and literary influence that is closely twined with Ravel's lifelong devotion both to Bertrand's near-exact

¹⁰² Kelly traces these relationships in 'Re-presenting Ravel', *passim*.

¹⁰³ Paul Dambly, 'Les Concerts', *Le Petit Journal*, 15 Dec. 1913, 4.

contemporary Edgar Allan Poe, and to Baudelaire. In his negotiation of principle and practice, in words and in music, I explore Ravel's emergent agency in the construction of his public persona.